

“Fear (not)!” – Emotion and Ethics in Deuteronomy

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Abstract

Fear is an emotion that is often expressed in a bodily reaction and that frequently leads to a concrete action. It is thus not surprising that the conceptualization of fear in the book of Deuteronomy is strongly linked to the activation and moral formation of both individual and community. On the one hand, and especially in the book’s eve-of-battle rhetoric, fear is something to be avoided and confined so that it does not contaminate the entire community (“fear not!”). On the other hand, when its object is the nation’s deity, fear is something to be learned and taught (“so that they may learn to fear me... and teach their children for ever”). In both capacities, fear in Deuteronomy has an extraordinary potential to shape the social order. It has a key role to play in stabilizing society and promoting both collective and individual flourishing, while also being understood as a destabilizing, destructive force that is to be quarantined as if it were a contagious virus.

“After taking a deep breath, we all need to understand ourselves as well as we can, using that moment of detachment to figure out where fear and related emotions come from and where they are leading us.”¹

1. Emotions and Ethics in the Hebrew Bible

Emotions are increasingly appreciated as an important medium of communication, and as such they now figure prominently in cultural studies.² The long-standing, but misconceived, notion of emotions as irrational and disruptive, and the concomitant assumption that emotions merely *happen* to people, have been challenged in recent years.³ Contemporary theorists now stress the direct and substantial ways in which emotions consistently contribute to the pro-

cess of action generation, execution, and control.⁴ Consequently, emotions are becoming ever more central to philosophical theories of action and ethics.⁵

This paper concentrates on a specific emotion: fear. As an integral part of human existence, fear has often been characterized as one of the primary or basic emotions.⁶ Although universal and foundational to human existence, fear is strongly shaped by a wide range of perceptions that are socially, culturally, historically, politically, and religiously influenced.⁷

¹ NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear*, 4.

² For an overview on the “emotional turn,” see e.g. SCHNELL, *Haben Gefühle eine Geschichte?*, 15–18; HAMMER-TUGENDHAT / LUTTER, “Emotionen im Kontext,” 7–14.

³ ZHU / THAGARD, “Emotion and Action,” 19: “The neglect of emotions’ role in the enterprise of understanding human action is very likely based on some long-standing but misconceived notions of the nature of emotion: (1) emotions are irrational and disruptive; (2) emotions are things that merely happen to people rather than that people do voluntarily; and (3) the impact of emotions on action is at best indirect and insignificant.”

⁴ See ZHU / THAGARD, “Emotion and Action,” 34. For a discussion of past research, see e.g. DÖRING, “Explaining Action by Emotion,” 214–30; FRIJDA, “Emotions and Actions,” 158–73, and TAPPOLET, “Emotion, Motivation, and Action,” 325–48.

⁵ See especially NUSSBAUM, *Upheavals of Thought*, and HAIDT, “The Moral Emotions,” 852–70. This idea however is not „very“ new. Already in 1759 Adam SMITH in his “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” argued that emotions are a better guide to moral action than is reason. For an overview and an introduction to biblical studies, see KAZEN, “Emotional Ethics in Biblical Texts,” 432–40.

⁶ See e.g. EKMAN, “An Argument for Basic Emotions,” 169–200; EKMAN, “Basic Emotion,” 45–60.

⁷ Generally speaking, scholars still debate to what degree the conceptualization of emotions is universal (cross-cultural) and to what extent their conceptualization is influenced by cultural variations. See e.g. SCHNELL, *Haben Gefühle eine Geschichte?*, 124–50.

Biblical Hebrew features a wide array of expressions for this “basic emotion.”⁸ Most of the terms contain a broad range of meaning, and one has to exercise caution when assigning them to modern concepts such as “anxiety,” “fright,” “worry,” “anguish,” “dread,” etc. The most frequently used stem is ירא (435 times); it is followed in frequency by פחד (75 times), which has the basic sense of “trembling,” usually in a context of fear, but occasionally in connection with joy (see Isa 60:5; Jer 33:9), and חתת (74 times), which is mostly but not exclusively used to express fright in a concrete situation of threat. There are four more terms, which occur circa fifty times: חיל, חרד, רגז, and רעש. All are tied to the bodily reaction of trembling. Likewise, the less frequent verbs געש, בוט, מוט, מוג express the bodily reaction of shaking and encompass the “emotion” of “fear” in a more figurative sense. Other terms refer to similar physiological reactions:⁹ חיל is often mentioned in the context of giving birth, תמה means “wondering, be astonished,” but also “being speechless with horror” and “to freeze.” זוע can mean both “to tremble” and “to sweat.” צרר describes the feeling of being tight. בהל and הפז are used to express “to rush away, to hurry” as well as to a state of anxiousness. Similarly, זחל (Aramaic דחל) means not only “to fear” but also “to hide.” Many of these stems thus denote a physiological reaction in the presence of something terrifying.

Biblical Hebrew does not distinguish between transitive and intransitive expressions of fear.¹⁰ While many modern languages tend to differentiate between “to be afraid of something” (German: *etwas fürchten*; French: *craindre*; Italian: *temere*) and the transitive form “to fear something” (German: *Angst haben*; French: *avoir peur/angoisse*; Italian *avere ansia*),¹¹ biblical Hebrew does not do so explicitly.¹² The differentiation between fear of a concrete threat and a more general abstract anxiety is a matter not only of syntax

and semantics but also of socialization.¹³ This distinction, drawn primarily in European-American theory, can be traced back to existential philosophy. Søren Kierkegaard defined anxiety as “not unfounded” (*nicht gegenstandslos*), but as indefinite and vague.¹⁴ Similarly Martin Heidegger regarded anxiousness as a state-of-mind,¹⁵ arguing that what “anxiety is anxious about is Being-in-the world itself.”¹⁶ The general function of anxiety in terms of Heidegger is thus to “individualize Dasein.”¹⁷ This kind of existential solipsism is foreign to the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸ Individuals fear pain (עצבת Job 9:28) as well as shame / reproach (תּוּרָה Ps 119:39) and evil (רע Ps 23:4); in most cases, however, fear is not conceptualized as an inner feeling, but as something highly relational and strongly tied to the environment.

Fear is communicable: it can unintentionally spread from one to another, but it also can be learned, taught, and instilled in others.¹⁹ This might be a reason why the semantic boundaries between anxiety/fear and awe/reverence are fuzzy.²⁰ Aside from rare expressions that are reserved for the fear of Yhwh, there is no specific lexeme to express “reverence” for

¹³ See WAGNER-DURAND, “Beyond texts?,” (in print) and DEHNE, *Soziologie der Angst*, 23–39.

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard closely related anxiety to hereditary sin. See KIERKEGAARD, *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, VIII, Volume 8: *Concept of Anxiety*.

¹⁵ See HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 233 (division 1, chapter 6, 188).

¹⁶ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 232 (division 1, chapter 6, 187).

¹⁷ See HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 233 (division 1, chapter 6, 188). On the distinction between fear and anxiety, see e.g. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 395 (division 2, chapter 4, 344): “Fear is occasioned by entities with which we concern ourselves environmentally. Anxiety, however, springs from Dasein itself. When fear assails us, it does so from what is within-the-world. Anxiety arises out of Being-in-the-world as thrown Being-towards-death.”

¹⁸ Collective groups fear for their lives (נִפְּזֵי Ezek 32:10, Josh 9:24, or alternatively lack this fear, as in Judg 5:18; see also Deut 28:66, “have no assurance of your life” (וְלֹא תִאֶמְרוּ בְּיַדְיָיָהוּ). However, that an individual fears death is declared only in late texts (φόβον θανάτου Sir 9:13).

¹⁹ In Egyptian texts, fear is not described as an affect *sensed by* someone but as an affect *instilled in* someone; see ASSMANN, “Furcht,” 359–60: “Das äg. Wort für F., *snḏ*, gehört in die Gruppe derjenigen Affektbezeichnungen, die gewöhnlich mit dem Genitivus objektivus konstruiert werden (*snḏ.k* = ‚die Furcht vor dir, deine Furchtbarkeit‘ [...]), und die in Verbindung mit *nb* ‚Herr von...‘ einen anderen eingefloßten (*nb snḏ* = ‚Herr/Besitzer einer Furcht einflößenden Furchtbarkeit‘ [...]), nicht selbst empfundenen Affekt [...] bezeichnen.” (359).

²⁰ Already JOÜON, “Crainte et Peur en Hébreu Biblique,” 174–75, in 1925, pointed to certain inconsistency in the word use: “L’emploi du substantive יִרְאָה n’est pas symétrique à l’emploi du verbe. En fait יִרְאָה s’emploie surtout pour la crainte de Dieu, assez rarement pour la crainte humaine.”

⁸ BECKER, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 1–18, lists fifteen synonymous word-stems for “fear.” LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*, 138–139, identifies eighteen words with the primary meaning of “fear” and twenty more roots in the semantic field. DEROUSSEAU, *La crainte de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament*, 73–80, discusses thirteen words. FUHS, “יָרָא ‚järe,‘” 872–74, counts more than thirty lexemes that appear in the context of יָרָא.

⁹ For a detailed analyses of metonyms and behavior of fear, see KIPFER, “Angst, Furcht und Schrecken,” 32–46.

¹⁰ See for the argumentation KIPFER, “Angst, Furcht und Schrecken,” 17, and LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*, 146.

¹¹ This differentiation is however debated in research. See e.g. FABIAN, *Die Angst*, 80.

¹² *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* differentiates in “fear” (יִרְאָה, אִימָה) and “anxiety” (אָנְיָה, אָנְיָה, אָנְיָה) without further explanation.

the deity, and vice versa, there are very few terms from this semantic field reserved for “anxiety” (e.g. *בהל* and *חפז*).²¹ Even words such as *היל* I (Jer 5:22) and *חתת* (Mal 2:5; see Gen 35:5) can be used to express reverence for God.²² Since each term has a range of meanings, only the context can determine whether the sense is anxiety or awe. In the Hebrew Bible, emotions generally (including fear) are occasioned by something. Fear/anxiety is closely tied to an event and produces a certain action,²³ while fear/awe of the deity leads to the service/worship of the deity and as such is strongly tied to moral formation.²⁴

In sum, not only does the conceptualization of fear in the Hebrew Bible differ from our modern understandings, but also the relationship between emotion and action is so complex that the postulation of a simple “Handlungsemotion” proves inadequate.²⁵

Fear in its broadest sense is one of, if not the, most dominant emotion in the Hebrew Bible.²⁶ Instead of covering the

entire biblical corpus, this paper will focus on Deuteronomy, a book throughout which the vocabulary of fear is evenly distributed.²⁷ The point of departure is a set of related questions: How is fear addressed? What triggers it? How does it — and how should it — shape the society imagined in this book? And what about its ethical dimensions? Examining the book’s communication, regulation, and control of fear, we will see how its authors identify fear, on the one hand, as a collective emotion that often determines the behavior of the nation as a whole (social ethics), and, on the other hand, as something that can provoke an uncontrolled bodily reaction or the religious feeling and the behavior of an individual (individual or personal ethics).²⁸

2. The “Politics of Fear” in the Book of Deuteronomy

Perhaps more than any other emotion, fear is now a common theme in sociological diagnoses and public discourse. Today one frequently speaks of the “politics of fear”²⁹ and of the multifarious ways in which fear is manufactured and manipulated within communities.³⁰ Discussing the concept of “collective fear” as a “shared emotion across time and space,” Elisabeth Wagner-Durand notes that we partake in these collective emotions because we form groups that share religious, political, and ideological values *via media of communication*.³¹

As an act of communication, the book of Deuteronomy is especially well-suited to the study of collective fear,³² includ-

²¹ See DEROUSSEAU, *La crainte de Dieu dans l’Ancien Testament*, and CLINES, “The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom,” 67–70.

²² See also *גור* III in Ps 22:24; 33:8; *חרד* in Esra 10:3; *רגו* Hitpaël in Isa 37:28. The same is true for the Akkadian word *palāhu* as well as for *adāru* B, which means “fear” as well as “awe”. See CAD A 1, 108–09. In Sumerian we have a different situation as JAQUES, *Le vocabulaire des sentiments dans les textes sumériens*, 193, pointed out: “Les sumériens distinguaient deux types de peur: la ‘crainte respectueuse’ envers le dieu, le roi, tout supérieur hiérarchique, et qui correspond au terme *ní tuku* (aussi *ní te(ĝ)*, et l’effroi, la terreur’ désignées, avec des nuances propres à chaque terme par *ħu-luħ*, *bu-luħ*, *ul₄* et *su zi*.”

²³ WAGNER, “Emotionen in alttestamentlicher und verwandter Literatur,” 59, concludes: “Eigenartig intensiv ist im A.T. die Verknüpfung der Emotionen mit äußeren Gründen”. See also KRÜGER, “Wer weiß denn, was gut ist für den Menschen,” 253–54.

²⁴ See WAGNER-DURAND, “Beyond texts?,” (in print): “Fear is the Mesopotamian equivalent of faith, which is why we find no emic term for faith in the divine in Mesopotamia. Searching for faith in Mesopotamia is based on a misunderstanding of the Mesopotamian conception of the world. There is no faith in the gods, and no question of believing whether they existed; they just did. They were as obvious as the moon, wind, sun, and rain. In the Mesopotamian realm, fear and piety are closely linked, since it is a human duty to fear the gods. This fear therefore has by no means a negative connotation; it is a sensation that rightly acting humans owe to gods or kings.”

²⁵ ERBELE-KÜSTER, “Zur Anthropologie der Ethik der (Liebes)Gebote,” 352, takes the frequently observed “rationality” in Deut 6:5 as a reason to ask: “Ist die Liebe im Deuteronomium dann keine echte Emotion?” See also ERBELE-KÜSTER, “Gebotene Liebe. Zur Ethik einer Handlungsemotion im Deuteronomium,” 143–56.

²⁶ LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*, 140, counts a total (“Gesamtfrequenz”) of 873 references to “fear” / “anxiety” in the Hebrew Bible. Not only the amount of references but also the abundance of different terms is noteworthy, as noted by LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*,

137: “Wenn man den knappen Wortschatz des alttestamentlichen Korpus bedenkt, überrascht die große Zahl der Wörter und Wendungen für Furcht und Schrecken, die in ihm enthalten ist.”

²⁷ *ירא* occurs 32 times in the book of Deuteronomy. *פחד* is used five times, *גור* three times, *חתת* and *רגו* are used twice, *חרד*, *יגר*, *ערץ*, and *היל* are used only once in the book of Deuteronomy.

²⁸ For the general discussion on “collective emotions” see SCHMID, “Collective Emotions,” 152–60; SCHMID, “Collective Emotions. Phenomenology, Ontology, and Ideology,” 103–19; VON SCHEVE / ISMER, “Towards a Theory of Collective Emotions,” 406–13.

²⁹ See e.g. WODAK, *The Politics of Fear*.

³⁰ See e.g. PLAMPER / LAZIER, *Fear: Across the Disciplines*, 12.

³¹ See WAGNER-DURAND, “Beyond texts?,” (in print). News media in capitalist societies rely heavily on already existing fears, as well as an ability to arouse (new) fears, for their existence. The same can be said for Deuteronomy, as we shall see; the difference is that this work is concerned with the survival of a defeated nation, not the growth of a financial enterprise.

³² Individual fear is found in those cases where a literary figure (e.g. Moses in Deut 9:19) or a class of individuals is the subject (e.g., the king in Deut 17:19). The differentiation of “collective” and “individual fear” goes far beyond the so-called *Numeruswechsel* (alternation between singular and plural) in the book of Deuteronomy. For past research, see HAGEDORN, *Between Moses and Plato*, 114–16. See also WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy 1–11, 15–16*, who points out, that the shift from plural to singular and vice versa can also be

ing its concepts/categories, rhetorical strategies, transmission, and materiality. Deuteronomy is a complex literary work that evolved over time and that refers frequently to its own proliferation via public recitation and re-inscription on physical objects. According to its fictional self-representation, the book preserves addresses that Moses delivered to the nation on the eve of the invasion. Though Moses speaks on behalf of the nation's deity, his words are shaped by the urgency of his impending death. He knows that he will not accompany his people when they pass over to take possession of the land promised to them. His orations and exhortations to "fear not" bracket the promulgation of a lengthy law code (Deut 12–26), which treat a wide range of matters relating to the nation's organization and institutions of government.

3. Fear and the Rhetoric of (Wartime) Persuasion

The moment before battle is emotionally charged, and the authors of Deuteronomy recognized its rhetorical potential. On such occasions, the troops come together to affirm their solidarity and look to their commander for words of encouragement. Addresses to the troops on the eve-of-battle are essential whether the soldiers are professionals or conscripts, yet non-professional troops require more — and a different kind of — morale boosting than seasoned soldiers.

In Deuteronomy and the closely related book of Joshua, the Israelites face large enemy forces consisting of horses and chariots, which constitute the most sophisticated units of professional armies. In contrast, the ideal image of the people-in-arms set forth in Deuteronomy and Joshua features neither a king nor a separate class of warriors. This image corresponds to two sets of laws in Deuteronomy, one governing the monarchy and the other setting forth rules of military engagement (17:14–20 and 20:1–20). In both cases, these laws assign no military role whatsoever to an Israelite king, and in the case of the war laws, an individual is to be selected to command the citizen-soldiers ("the people") immediately before battle.

Deuteronomy, in contrast to the book of Joshua, reports no fighting, and in fact little action other than speaking, expounding, commanding, teaching, and writing. But similar to Yhwh's words to the nation's new leader in the first chapter of Joshua, Moses's words have Israel's impending military

campaign directly in view (Deut 1:6–8) and as such constitute a monumental example of the war-sermon genre.³³

That the *Kriegspredigt* is a distinct, and consciously chosen, genre in Deuteronomy is demonstrated by the war laws in chapter 20. There the priest is commanded to encourage the troops before battle with words that are strikingly similar to the addresses that introduce the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua:³⁴

When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots, an army larger than your own, do not be afraid of them; for Yhwh your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Before you engage in battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the troops, and shall say to them: "Hear, O Israel! Today you are drawing near to do battle against your enemies. Do not lose heart, or be afraid, or panic, or be in dread of them; for it is Yhwh your God who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you victory."

Deut 20:1–4

In Deuteronomy, we can study how biblical scribes created complex memories of war in the process of negotiating Israel's identity and generating strategies for its survival after the loss of statehood. The book identifies the key to Israel's success, on the battlefield and beyond; they are, however, not savvy military tactics, but devotion to, and unceasing meditation on the Torah.

If the book of Deuteronomy continues to be effective, it's due in large part to the efforts of its authors and their readers to imagine and identify with a dramatic moment in the early life of the nation: when its leader was about to die and addressed the nation one final time before leaving them to cross the Jordan and conquer the Promised Land. The speeches from Deuteronomy are meant to be performed in rituals of public, collective reading. The audience should imagine itself standing there "today" with Israel (see Deut 29:9–11).

found in the ancient Near Eastern covenantal documents. The second person singular can be used for Israel as a nation, where we would describe it as "collective fear" (e.g. Deut 2:25 and often). Although half of the references to "fear" use the singular form, collective concerns clearly predominate in the book of Deuteronomy.

³³ VON RAD, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 393, for example considered Deut 20:2–3; 9:1–6; 31:3–6, 7–8; Josh 1:1–9 as "Kriegspredigt." One of the most eminent modern students of Deuteronomy, Moshe Weinfeld, identified four genres of orations in the book: the valedictory, the prophetic, the liturgical, and the military. See WEINFELD, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 10–58. He counts Deut 1:29–33; 2:24–5, 31; 3:21–22; 7:17–24; 9:1–6; 11:22–25; 31:1–6 to the "military oration" (45). One must, however, distinguish between the genres that may inform the language of various passages, on the one hand, and the genre with which the authors consciously shape their material on the other. With respect to the latter, we are arguing here that the best comprehensive genre is a combination of the battle oration and the valedictory address of Moses before his death (although the former genre is more pronounced even in many passages that refer to Moses's death; see e.g. 31:1–6).

³⁴ For the references in Joshua 1–12, see WAZANA, "The Fear Factor," (in print).

In his first address, Moses reviews past history, providing a very different account of the events narrated in Numbers.³⁵ He begins by recalling the divine command to depart from Sinai and to take possession of the land promised to Israel's ancestors (Deut 1:6–8). His first move, according to his review, was to organize the nation according to a conventional military hierarchy of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (Deut 1:9–18). This chain-of-command was to serve primarily a juridical function, in keeping with the identity of Israel as people-in-arms with the Torah in its midst and righteous judges enforcing it. Moses then recalls how he declared to the nation at that time: “See, Yhwh your God has placed the land at your disposal. Go up, take possession, as Yhwh the God of your ancestors, promised you. Fear not and be not dismayed!” (Deut 1:21). The exhortation to “fear not!” is addressed explicitly to all Israel, and the images of a national assembly must be appreciated as products of the scribes' political-theological imagination.

According to Moses's review of past history, the entire assembly (עָמָם) was reluctant to embrace his proposal, insisting that men be sent ahead to reconnoiter the countries that they were about to invade. Approving of the plan, Moses had selected twelve men, representing the entire nation, to spy out the land. Later they brought back a report to the assembly that “the land is good,” displaying a selection of its fruit as physical proof for their assessment. When the people still did not agree launch the campaign, and even after Moses enjoined them to set aside their fear because Yhwh was marching before them, they refused to be persuaded:

But you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of Yhwh your God; you grumbled in your tents and said, “It is because Yhwh hates us that he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us. Where are we headed? Our kindred have made our hearts melt by reporting, ‘The people are stronger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified up to heaven! We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!’”

I said to you, “Have no dread or fear of them. None other than Yhwh your God, who marches in your vanguard will fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw how Yhwh your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place. But in spite of this, you have no trust in Yhwh your God, who goes before you on the way to seek out a place for you to camp, in fire by night, and in the cloud by day, to show you the route you should take.”

Deut 1:26–33

³⁵ Originally this historical review may have consisted of much thinner strand: Deut 1:1–8, 19, 46; 2:1–9, 13, 17–19, 24–37; 3:1–11, 17, 21–22. Various clues suggest that this brief oration was composed, together with modest portions of the didactic historical review and references to Moses' impending death in Deut 29 and 31–32, as a preface to the ancient memorial for Moses in Deut 34:1, 5–8.

The following speeches adopt and develop this double line of argumentation. In so doing, they refer repeatedly (in chaps. 2–3, 29 and 31) to memories of battles in the nation's history, beginning with the vanquishing of the pharaoh at Yam Suf and ending with dispossession of Amorite territory from two kings, Sihon and Og.³⁶ These appeals to the past should convince the nation that it can continue to witness success in its military endeavors after it crosses the Jordan.

Continuing a statement *that* Israel will conquer many strong nations (Deut 7:1–2a), Moses addresses the question of *how* – a typical feature in pre-battle speeches according to Richard F. Miller.³⁷

You may say to yourself, “These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them?” But do not be afraid of them. Just remember what Yhwh your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which Yhwh your God brought you out. Yhwh your God will do the same to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

Deut 7:17–19

Other passages may be compared to this one (see Deut 9:1–3; 31:3–6). The encouragement Moses gives to Joshua (Deut 3:21–22; 31:7–8, 23) speaks indirectly to the people he is being commissioned to lead. Similarly, the descriptions of the deity in chapters 32 and 33 (“The Song of Moses” and “The Blessing of Moses”), with their moving poetic grandeur, stand at the end of these discourses as a final effort to impress upon the reader the power of Israel's deity when he comes to the help of his people in battle. In keeping with this rhetorical situation, Moses describes the land as rich in natural resources and hence worth fighting for (Deut 8:7–10).

Injunctions to “fear not!”³⁸ punctuate the addresses, attesting to their (formal) character as eve-of-battle motivation speeches. The injunction occurs ten times in Deuteronomy using different verbs of “fear” and “anxiety”.³⁹ In contrast to its appearance elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible,⁴⁰ the injunc-

³⁶ See WRIGHT, War, Memory, and National Identity in the Hebrew Bible, 55–56.

³⁷ See MILLER, In Words and Deeds: Battle Speeches in History.

³⁸ The injunction “fear not!” occurs more than 70 times in the Hebrew Bible (אלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל or less often לֹא תִירָא).

LOADER, “‘Trembling, the best of being human’,” 265–66, counts 74 references. Fuhs, “יָרָא järe’,” 875, counts ca. 75 references. STÄHLI, “יָרָא, jr’,” 771–72, differentiates and assumes 15 profane references and around 60 theological uses of the “fear not” injunction.

³⁹ The formula thus cannot be reduced to a simple expression but finds different forms of variations in a row of different order; see KIPFER, “Angst, Furcht und Schrecken,” 31–32.

⁴⁰ In many cases, individuals are told not to fear, often in the context of concrete, everyday experiences: the midwives to the parturient (Gen 35:17; 1Sam 4:20), Joseph to his brothers (Gen

tions are stereotypical inasmuch as they relate to the nation's enemies and their armies.⁴¹ They include:

Deut 1:29 (plur.) לא־תִירָאוּ וְלֹא־תִעַרְצוּן וְלֹא־תִירָאוּן מֵהֶם have no dread or fear of them...

Deut 3:2 (sing.) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי אֲלֵי־תִירָא אֹתוֹ and Yhwh said to me, "Do not fear him..."

Deut 3:22 (plur.) לֹא תִירָאוּם כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא הַנִּלְחֵם לְכֶם do not fear them, for it is Yhwh your God who fights for you.

Deut 7:18 (sing.) לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם do not be afraid of them...

Deut 7:21 (sing.) לֹא תִעַרְצוּן מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּקִרְבְּךָ אֵל גָּדוֹל לֹא תִעַרְצוּן מִפְּנֵיהֶם Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is Yhwh your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God.

Deut 20:1 (sing.) לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם do not be afraid of them...

Deut 20:3 (plur. with אל) אֲלֵי־יָרֵךְ לִבְכֶם אֲלֵי־תִירָאוּ וְאֲלֵי־תִחַפְּזוּ וְאֲלֵי־תִעַרְצוּן do not lose heart, or be afraid, or panic, or be in dread of them

Deut 31:6 (plur. and sing.; with אל) חֲזַקוּ וְאִמְצוּ אֲלֵי־תִירָאוּ וְאֵל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבֶךָ: Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is Yhwh your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.

There are two more references. Formulated in the singular form and without an object, they are the only instances where the word *חִתַּת*, "be dismayed", is used in Deuteronomy, and as such, they frame the "fear-not!" injunctions in Deuteronomy:

Deut 1:21 (sing.) (with אל) אֲלֵי־תִירָא וְאֲלֵי־תַחַת do not fear or be dismayed

Deut 31:8 (sing.) לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תַחַת do not fear or be dismayed

"Fear not!" has a long history in ancient Mesopotamian royal discourse, appearing most frequently in the context of threats to the dynasty and (impending) war efforts.⁴² In Assyrian prophecy, the oracular formula *lā tapallah* ("fear not!") signifies divine acceptance of the king's rule and, more generally, the position of the king as the point of convergence between heaven and earth.⁴³ Likewise, in biblical literature the injunction is addressed to kings in response to military threats (e.g. Isa 7:4 and 37:6), yet what's most remarkable is how biblical authors expanded this quintessentially royal formula and directed it as words of comfort to

communities. This shift from palace to people reflects the solicitude for the welfare of the entire nation rather than for a particular dynasty or state institution, and this shift must be kept in mind when interpreting Moses's exhortations to "fear not" (see Exod 14:13 and compare Josh 10:25; Num 14:9; Neh 4:8 [4:14]; 2 Chr 32:7; 1 Macc 4:9).⁴⁴

The response to national anxieties in Deuteronomy goes beyond the mere demand that one should not fear. Yhwh is described as carrying Israel through the wilderness as a man carries his son (Deut 1:31), and as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum suggests in her recent study of political psychology, only through adult love and care is an infant capable of overcoming its narcissistic fear.⁴⁵ The treatment of fear is thus a relational issue, and the parent's compassion for his/her child is not only emotionally charged but also critical to the child's maturation. One may compare this image to Yhwh's promises to "be with you" (sing. עִמָּךְ Deut 2:7; 20:1; 31:6, 8; see also 31:23; for the plur. עִמָּכֶם see Deut 20:4).

The process of overcoming fear can also be fostered through remembrance of the past. Memories of suffering in Egypt and the miraculous liberation play a key role throughout Deuteronomy (see e.g. Deut 1:27, 30; 4:20, 34, 37; 7:8, 15, 18; 9:7, 12, 26; 11:3, 4, 10; 20:1; 24:9; 26:8). The nation's past experience with its God is the foundation for its future.

Finally, in a last step of argumentation, the nation itself will become terrifying (for the first time in Deut 2:4 יִירָאוּ) "they will be afraid of you, so, be very careful"; 28:10 יִירָאוּ מִמֶּךָ "and they shall be afraid of you"). Indeed, it is Yhwh who puts "dread and fear of you" upon others:

This day I will begin to put the dread and fear (פִּחְדֶּךָ וְיִרְאַתְךָ) of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven; when they hear report of you, they will tremble and be in anguish because of you (וְרָגְזוּ וְחִלּוּ מִפְּנֵיךָ).

Deut 2:25

No one will be able to stand against you; Yhwh your God will put the fear and dread of you (פִּחְדְּכֶם וְיִרְאַתְכֶם) on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

Deut 11:25

The battle orations in Deuteronomy reveal how the nation's dread of contemporary imperial powers (the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians) was sublimated in the "recol-

50:19), Boas to Ruth (Rut 3:11), David to Abjatar (1Sam 22:23), etc. These injunctions are simultaneously demands and promises.

⁴¹ The two possible exceptions to this rule, Deut 1:17 and 18:22, are formulated as (לֹא) תִגְוֹר (fear not).

⁴² See e.g. NISSINEN, "Fear Not: A Study on an Ancient Near Eastern Phrase," 122–61.

⁴³ WAGNER-DURAND demonstrates in her article (Visualizing and Evoking the Emotion of Fear in and through Neo-Assyrian Orthostat Reliefs, 563–76) how fear was used to establish Assyrian authority and to protect Assyrian interests.

⁴⁴ See WRIGHT, "The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible," 449–50.

⁴⁵ NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear*, 35: "Overcoming fear — to the extent that we ever can — is a relational matter." She goes on to explain: "Children cannot achieve emotional maturity on their own. They need stable and loving care, and care of a sort that reassures them that even their fear and aggression do not cancel the parent's love."

lection” of a formative experience imagined at the beginning of its history. Through the construction of this memory, and through an invented speech-act that reflects on it, this collective anxiety was expressed, mastered, managed, and exploited.

4. Fear as a Contagion and Infectious Disease

Deuteronomy not only addresses the nation’s collective anxiety; it also treats the plight of the individual members of the nation. The laws of war in chap. 20 require officials to muster out any anxious citizen-soldier from the nation’s ranks as it prepares to engage its enemies:⁴⁶

Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying, ‘Is there any man who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. And is there any man who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And is there any man who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.’

The officials shall continue to address the troops, saying, “Is anyone afraid or disheartened (הִירָא וְרָךְ הַלֵּב)? He should go back to his house, or he might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own (וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת־לֵבב אֶחָיו כִּלְבָבוֹ).”

Deut 20:5–8

Fear qualifies as one of the four legitimate reasons to discharge a soldier who is otherwise obligated to serve in combat. As elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the heart (לֵב/לִבָּב) is identified here as the organ of fear.⁴⁷ Notice how Deut 20:8a uses a diverse lexicon of fear to construct a psychological theory of the emotion and the reaction it can elicit: What begins with “fear” (יִרָא) and a “weak” (רָךְ) heart in one individual can cause the hearts of others to “melt” (יִמַּס).⁴⁸ Ac-

ording to the rationale provided, fear is contagious. An anxiety-ridden individual “might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own.”⁴⁹ Similarly, the report of the spies melts the hearts of the preceding generation so that they did not take possession of the Promised Land (“our kindred have made our hearts melt by reporting...,” Deut 1:28).

Fear can thus be seen as a threat itself and as such must be taken seriously. The fear that overcomes the individual in Deut 20:8 cannot be “regulated” per se, and the only way to treat it is to contain it through a form of quarantine or social exclusion.

5. Fear of God as a Religious-Moral Value

Referring to recent psychological research, Martha Nussbaum points out that “our assessments of risks are often inaccurate because, instead of soberly calculating costs and benefits, we use a number of heuristics that don’t offer good guidance in today’s complicated world.”⁵⁰ Deuteronomy has much to say about what not to fear as well as what to fear. To what extent, then, was this book intended to serve as a heuristic guide of fear, for both the individual and nation as a whole?

As we have seen, the object of fear in the “fear not” injunctions are the enemies and their armies (ten times; see also Deut 7:19). Other objects of anxiety and fear include Israel itself (Deut 2:4; 28:10), prophets (Deut 18:22), fire (Deut 5:5), and Yhwh’s anger (Deut 9:19). Yet the most frequent object of fear is Yhwh himself. The book contains more than twenty references to the fear of, or reverence for, Israel’s God (with יִרָא).⁵¹

One can both fear, and be frightened by, the deity, with the former frequently understood as the foundation for ethical-religious behavior.⁵² The expression “to fear Yhwh/God” is often synonymous with “keeping his commandments.” It is a

we find לֵב with מַסָּה Hifil “make melting” (הִמְסִיו אֶת־לֵב הָעַם), Josh 14:8.

⁴⁹ In the book of Judges, Gideon is instructed to *begin* by discharging “anyone who is fearful and trembling,” and as a result the size of Gideon’s army is reduced by more than two-thirds (22,000 return home, with 10,000 remaining). See WRIGHT, “The Evolution of the Gideon Narrative,” on the motif of fear 117–21.

⁵⁰ NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear*, 48.

⁵¹ See PLATH, *Furcht Gottes*, 32.

⁵² See e.g. PLATH, *Furcht Gottes*, as well as GILLMOUR, “From anxiety to reverence,” (in print). LOADER, “‘Trembling, the best of being human,’” 268, notes: “That is a pointer that they took fear of and faith in God as one single category that cannot simply be equated with ‘normal’ fear of which humans are the object.” CLINES, “The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom,” 66, argues for just one meaning: “To fear Yahweh, in such contexts, so I am arguing, is to be afraid of him because of the consequences he will visit on those who do not follow his laws, obey him, turn away from evil and that like.” See also STRAWN, “‘The Fear of the Lord,’” 309–10.

⁴⁶ See LOADER, “‘Trembling, the best of being human,’” 263.

⁴⁷ The heart (לֵב/לִבָּב) can be the subject of different verbs of fear alluding to a concrete bodily reaction: for example, פָּחַד Ps 55:5; פָּחַד Deut 28:67; רָגַז Deut 28:65; רָכַךְ Jer 51:46; חָרַד Job 37:1; נֹעַ Isa 7:2; שָׁמַם Ps 143:4 etc. Deut 20:3 speaks about “loosing one’s heart” (אֶל־יִרְךָ לִבְבְּכֶם). More body parts are mentioned in connection with fear in Deuteronomy: for example, in Deut 28:65 Yhwh gives “a trembling heart, failing eyes, and a languishing נֶפֶשׁ.” For more details, see KIPFER, “Angst, Furcht und Schrecken,” 41–42, LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*, 140–45, and KRUGER, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Fear in the Hebrew Bible,” 77–89. For Akkadian examples combining *libbu* as a subject with *parādu*, see CAD P, 142–43 as well as *pirittu* CAD P, 402.

⁴⁸ For the expression elsewhere, see Josh 2:11; 5:1; 7:5; Isa 13:7; 19:1; Ezek 21:12; Nah 2:11; Ps 22:15 and LAUHA, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament*, 149–48. One more time

behavior to be learned and taught to future generations (e.g. לִמְדוּן לְיִרְאַה Deut 4:10; see also Deut 6:1–2; 14:23; 17:19; 31:12–13). Fear of Yhwh in Deuteronomy is closely connected to other emotions and actions, such as “loving” (אהב Deut 10:12),⁵³ “holding fast” (קָבַץ Deut 10:20; 13:5), and “serving” (עָבַד Deut 6:13; 10:12, 20; 13:5).⁵⁴ It is a source of knowledge, and it manifests itself in action.

Now this is the commandment — the statutes and the ordinances — that Yhwh your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear Yhwh your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

Deut 6:1–2

Yhwh your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.

Deut 6:1

Then Yhwh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yhwh our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case.

Deut 6:24

So now, O Israel, what does Yhwh your God require of you? Only to fear Yhwh your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve Yhwh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of Yhwh your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

Deut 10:12–13

You shall fear Yhwh your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.

Deut 10:20–21

In the presence of Yhwh your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear Yhwh your God always.

Deut 14:23

If you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, fearing this glorious and awesome name, Yhwh your God, then Yhwh will overwhelm both you

and your offspring with severe and lasting afflictions and grievous and lasting maladies.

Deut 28:58–59⁵⁵

Notice that in Deut 10:20–21, both aspects – fear of Yhwh and reverence for Yhwh – stand closely together.⁵⁶ The imperative “fear (יִרָא) God” is ultimately followed by the remembrance of Yhwh’s “great” and “awesome” (אָרָא) deeds.⁵⁷ Yhwh himself is described as terrifying (see e.g. Deut 10:17; but also Neh 1:5; 9:32; Ps 68:36; 76:8, 13; 89:8; 96:4; Zeph 2:11). Emotion, thought, belief, and action are inseparable.⁵⁸

From the point of view of religious history, the conceptual propinquity between horror and fear in relation to God continues to be a mystery. Past proposals for an evolutionary development (for example, from primitive horror to ethical forms of worship) have, with good reason, lost purchase in recent scholarship. While *horror* has a paralyzing effect,⁵⁹ and opens a gap between the awe-inspiring appearance of the deity and the frailty of human existence, we find the opposite in *reverence*: In this scenario, human action stands in the foreground, while the deity is a passive object of worship. Fear and faith are thus complementary, two sides of one coin.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See also Deut 8:6; 13:4; 17:9.

⁵⁶ This observation undermines the attempt to extend the meaning from “fear” to “awe” and “beyond, to the ethical,” undertaken by STÄHLI, “פִּחַד, p̄hd,” 768. See also BECKER, *Gottesfurcht im Alten Testament*, 75–84. We agree with STRAWN, “יָרָא jāre,” that יִרָא maintain its different semantic nuances in later periods; see STRAWN, “The Iconography of Fear,” 93–94, as well as STRAWN, “The Fear of the Lord,” 309–11.

⁵⁷ The desert (Deut 1:19; 8:15) as well as God (Deut 7:21; 10:17) and his deeds (Deut 10:17) are described as great and awesome / terrible (אָרָא וְגִדּוֹל [הָ] וְנִרְאָה) and it would be misleading to eliminate the aspect of awe and veneration in that context. See KIPFER, “Angst, Furcht und Schrecken,” 30–31.

⁵⁸ See also LEVINSON, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutic of Legal Innovation*, 150.

⁵⁹ See ASSMANN, “Der Schrecken Gottes im Alten Ägypten,” 161–62: “Der Schrecken Gottes [...] ist Teil einer komplexen Ausstrahlung, die von Gottheiten und vom König ausgeht, und ihren Sitz in den Herrschaftsinsignien hat. Diese Strahlung wird in Begriffen der Lichthaftigkeit und der Affektivität beschrieben. Die Affektivität der herrscherlichen Aura reicht vom panischen Schrecken bis zum hinreissenden Entzücken. Sie schreckt ab und bindet. Durch diese beiden gegenstrebigem Kräfte bindet sie die Guten an den Herrscher und verstößt die Bösen aus den Grenzen des Reiches. Eine in gut und böse gespaltene Welt wird auf diese Weise durch doppelte Ausstrahlung geordnet und regiert. Die Ambivalenz dieser Ausstrahlung hat keine psychologische Basis, wie in den von Rudolf Otto untersuchten Befunden, sondern eine politische.”

⁶⁰ See KIPFER, “Furcht (Erschrecken, Ehrfurcht, Gottesfurcht / Gottesfürchtige).”

⁵³ See e.g. LAPSLEY, “Feeling our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy,” 350–69.

⁵⁴ For a detailed overview see PLATH, *Furcht Gottes*, 33–34, as well as CLINES, “The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom,” 65–66. ARNOLD, “The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5–11,” 551–69, concludes: “Ancient Israel has here learned that ‘love’ and ‘fear’ are not, in fact, mutually exclusive, but complement each other, so that love prevents terror and fear prevents irrelevant familiarity” (567).

This theological posture shapes the way Deuteronomy characterizes the relationship between Yhwh and his people as mutually active and passive at the same time. Fear of God is expected from both the collective and the individual (Deut 6:2,13; 8:6; 10:20; 17:19; 25:18; 28:58). It is also deeply relational: Israel commits to fear God and to observe the divine statutes (Deut 6:24; see also 10:12; 13:5; 14:23; 17:13; 19:20; 21:21; 31:12, 13). In all these capacities, fear functions as a coping mechanism vis-à-vis threats to physical or psychological integrity.⁶¹

6. Fear as a Catalyzer in Legislation Processes

The close connection between fear and law has long been noted. In ancient Greece, Thucydides noted that fear of social disorder serves as a safeguard and “teaches us to obey magistrates and laws” (Thuc. 2.37).⁶² The nexus between public fear and the fundamental motivations for codifying law has been stressed in recent research.⁶³ Nussbaum observes that fear can provoke people to run for cover and seek comfort in the embrace of a homogenous group following a specific law code.⁶⁴

Can we identify a parallel development in Deuteronomy?

In its present context, the Deuteronomic law code (chaps. 12–26) is embedded in the rhetorical context of Moses’s addresses to the nation as it prepares for battle. The literary development – including the composition, compilation, synthesis, unification, standardization and systematization of earlier law – is so complicated that it is difficult to draw easy conclusions, and hence we offer only preliminary observations.⁶⁵

The fears created by the loss of the land, state and security, home, property, social organization, and cultic life (– “the anxieties of the loss of identity – fear for their very survival”⁶⁶) – made it necessary to find new coping strategies. When Israel was divided into separate communities in the diaspora, it was not possible for the nation to express its

solidarity as a unified army fighting a common enemy on an actual battlefield. Yet unity could be achieved in the act of publicly reading, and communally studying, these laws and the eve-of-battle addresses that frame them.

It’s striking that in the ancient Near East, the king is the lawgiver, while in Deuteronomy it is Yhwh. The image of God as lawgiver in the Hebrew Bible is complex, and diverse historical factors shaped it.⁶⁷ This conception is closely tied to Deuteronomy’s program of cult-centralization and the worship of one Yhwh, which arguably represents the hermeneutical key to the book.⁶⁸ Central to the concept of covenant is the relationship of mutual commitment between Yhwh and his holy people (Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21).⁶⁹ This obedience ethic is highly exclusive.⁷⁰ It’s closely related to an out-group derogation and aversion towards mixed marriages (Deut 7:1–4).⁷¹ Indeed, the prohibition of exogamy is justified by appeals to God’s love for his people (Deut 7:8), and punitive repayment is promised for disobedience (Deut 7:10).

The laws of Deuteronomy should be understood not only as “the distillation of various moral insights and the necessary conditions for a peaceful life in society,”⁷² but also as a coping mechanism for a society under threat. Inasmuch as Yhwh is lawgiver and judge (Deut 1:17), the violation of the law is identical with sin against the deity. The connection between fear (or respect/awe) and the nation’s moral behavior is made explicit four times:

Deut 13:12 וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִרְאוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁמְעוּ לְעֹשֵׂי כַדְבָּר הַרְעָה הַזֶּה : Then all Israel shall hear and be afraid, and never again do any such wickedness.

Deut 17:13 כָּל־הָעָם יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִרְאוּ וְלֹא יִזְדוֹנוּ עִוֵּד: All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

⁶¹ ÖHMAN / WIENS, “The Concept of an Evolved Fear Module and Cognitive Theories of Anxiety,” 58: “Thus, it is essentially a coping emotion that is associated with attempts to handle threats to physical or psychological integrity [...]”

⁶² Translation JLW. See CANEVARO, “The Rule of Law,” 211–36.

⁶³ See e.g. SUNSTEIN, *Laws of Fear: Beyond the Precautionary Principle*.

⁶⁴ NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear*, 50: “Fear makes people run for cover, seeking comfort in the embrace of a leader or a homogenous group.”

⁶⁵ The project “How God Became a Lawgiver: The Place of the Torah in Ancient Near Eastern Legal History,” founded by the European Research Council Advanced Grants, and directed by Konrad Schmid, University of Zürich, promises to shed new light on this important issue.

⁶⁶ See e.g. LOADER, “‘Trembling, the best of being human’,” 272.

⁶⁷ See e.g. SCHMID, “Divine Legislation in the Pentateuch in its Late Judean and Neo-Babylonian Context,” esp. 144–46, and ALBERTZ, “Die Theologisierung des Rechts im Alten Israel,” 187–208.

⁶⁸ See e.g. OTTO, “Of Aims and Methods in Hebrew Bible Ethics,” 163.

⁶⁹ BARTON, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 135–36.

⁷⁰ As NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear*, 2, noted fear leads to aggressive “othering” strategies. This aspect can also be found in Deuteronomy. In many cases fearful people stands against the threatening enemy (“them” מֵהֶם Deut 1:29; 7:18; 20:1; מֵפְנֵי הֶם, Deut 7:19, 21; Deut 31:6) or vice versa (מֵהֶם Deut 2:4; מֵמֶנֶךְ Deut 28:10).

⁷¹ On collective emotions and out-group derogation, see e.g. ISMER / BEYER / VON SCHEVE, “Soziale Konsequenzen kollektiver Emotionen.”

⁷² BARTON, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 22. KRÜGER, “Wer weiß denn, was gut ist für den Menschen,” 253: “Moralische Orientierung basiert nicht nur auf Erfahrung und Überlegungen, sondern auch auf Gefühlen und Intuitionen.” and he concludes: “Vielmehr orientiert sich das alltägliche Handeln der Menschen mindestens ebenso sehr an Gefühlen und Intuitionen wie an vernünftigen Überlegungen.” (254).

Deut 19:20 והנשארים ישמעו ויגאו ולא יספו לעשות עוד פדבר הרע הזה בקרבך: The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you.

Deut 21:21b וכל־ישראל ישמעו ויגאו: ...and all Israel will hear and be afraid.

While elsewhere fear is something that must be overcome and avoided (see the “fear not” references above), it is here an essential component of moral behavior.

The close relation between fear and lawful behavior is reflected in the structure of the book. Similar to Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties, the laws or stipulations culminate in a long series of blessings as the reward for faithful adherence to the law code, followed by a long series of curses as the punishment for the nation’s negligence (Deut 28).⁷³ Echoing the anxiety that pervades ancient Near Eastern treaties, fear serves in this covenantally contoured book as one of the primary motivations for obedience. Notably, the experience of fear is one of the curses for the nation’s disobedience:

Yhwh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other; and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. Among those nations you shall find no ease, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There Yhwh will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and a languishing spirit (נָפַת). Your life shall hang in doubt before you; night and day you shall be in dread (פחד), with no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, “If only it were evening!” and at evening you shall say, “If only it were morning!” – because of the dread (פחד) that your heart shall feel and the sights that your eyes shall see.

Deut 28:64–67⁷⁴

7. Conclusion

Our multi-perspectival approach to “fear” in Deuteronomy has explored a paradox: Fear is both something one must avoid and something one must learn and teach to future generations. What determines the difference is the object of the fear: the nation’s foes or the nation’s God. The exhortations “do not fear (them)!” and “fear (Yhwh)!” are two different ways of motivating action.⁷⁵ Fear as it is conceptualized in Deuteronomy is not about being affected by internal feelings but about shaping behavior, and the book delineates multiple

connections between this emotion and conduct, both individual and collective. Fear has thus positive and negative effects: it can lead to exclusivism and out-group derogation, but it’s also an important element of risk prevention.⁷⁶

It would be unhelpful to try to resolve the paradox too neatly or reduce the complexity of this emotion in Deuteronomy to simple formulas. Moreover, questions linger with respect to the book’s diverse lexicon of fear, its rhetorical functions, and its role in the legislation process (and by extension, in text production). But what should be clear is that Deuteronomy does not understand fear as an emotion to be avoided altogether. In some case, fear is to be cultivated and inculcated.

The problem for the book is not fear itself but its source and orientation. What will the audience prioritize: a perceived present threat (the enemy looming on the horizon) or a very real future one (the conditional covenantal curses)? As the implied author, Moses points to a fully warranted fear of Yhwh, which motivates the action of loving and following his laws, as the antidote to an unwarranted fear of the nation’s foes. Indeed, in the covenantal logic of the book, failure to fear Yhwh in the present will inexorably bring the dreadful national defeat that looms large across the horizon of the book.⁷⁷

In sum, fear in this sophisticated legal treatise is a highly relational emotion. In the place of some sort of existential anxiety, the book portrays concrete forms of fear that can be learned and transmitted to others. In some cases, that transmission is desirable, and in others, it necessitates quarantine.

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⁷³ For a detailed analysis of Deut 28:15–44 and the aspect of fear, see KIPFER, “‘You eat, but you never have enough...’” (in print).

⁷⁴ SCHMID, “Monotheismus und politische Ethik,” 163: “Die politische Ethik des Deuteronomium geht einher mit einer Rhetorik der Angst, die es seinerseits aus der politischen Propaganda der Assyrer übernommen hat: Wer den Auflagen und Forderungen des Deuteronomium nicht Folge leistet, wird dem Verderben anheimfallen. Die Schrift geht sogar soweit, Angst vor der Angst zu machen, um die Einhaltung der vorangestellten Gebote anzumahnen.”

⁷⁵ Deut 5:5 would be a rare example of not doing something out of fear.

⁷⁶ Compare Deuteronomy 1 to Deuteronomy 28.

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