As a literary critic presuming to write about the book of Hosea as an example of the prophetic Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, I am constrained to begin with a definition of my critical approach. Unfashionably, I do not read the texts under consideration using postmodern literary theories such as deconstruction, reader response, or exploration of cultural determinism. Instead, I find much more useful an approach that is best described in literary terms as a blend of the earlier theories of the New Criticism and structuralism. In fact, the very concept of literary genre rests on elements that the earlier approaches, in contrast to the later, value in texts, elements such as unity, coherence, unique style, and specific modes of thematic expression.

As an amateur in biblical studies, I work convinced that scholars such as Brevard Childs and James Sanders are on target in their insistence that interpretation proceed from a canonical concept of the Old Testament. Such interpretation interacts with a text as it presently exists rather than as a collage of various stages through history of disparate composition. Recognition of a canonical whole does not trivialize a study of the multiple historical processes and stages by which a prophetic text has arrived at its present form, but it does insist that the canonical form is the final Scripture to be interpreted as the record reflecting the “history of encounter between God and Israel.”2

The question of the authorial intentionality of such a view of the prophetic writings cannot be ignored. Who or what is ultimately responsible for the multiple authorial processes resulting in a canonical text? Childs recognizes a “major literary and theological force” in the shaping of the “present form of the Hebrew Bible.”3 From original recorded oral fragments through the revisions of tradents to the emergence of texts as sacred canon, the message of the prophets is a “theocentric word”
proceeding from a "divine source" that has ordered the stages of the composition of the received text.\footnote{4}

Another question that must be addressed in advance of any study such as this one is the existence of the prophetic writings as both the Hebrew Scriptures of Judaism and the Old Testament of Christianity. It is true that the writings differ in regard to text, scope, and order and that numerous complex claims have been put forth for both the continuity and discontinuity of the two versions.\footnote{5} Within the boundaries of my work here, however, we need note only two basic facts that can hardly be disputed. The New Testament writers' use of the Hebrew canon does not demonstrate rejection or alteration but rather a new interpretation of these Scriptures grounded on the New Testament's claims about Jesus Christ. Furthermore, these Christian claims are dependent upon both the Christian and Jewish Scriptures as the sacred canon that is the record of God's revelation of truth to Israel, the church, and the world.\footnote{6}

I. THE PROBLEM OF GENRE

My interest in the genre of the Old Testament books of prophecy emerged in my teaching of university courses on the Bible as literature. As I led students through the variety of genres that make up the Bible and arrived at the Old Testament books of prophecy—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets, Hosea through Malachi—I made the discovery that the students were dissatisfied with both my classroom presentation of these books and with the published critical commentary about them. I have come to understand their discontent. In standard works on the literary genres of the Bible, substantive content on the books of prophecy is scattered and fragmentary. In fact, critics such as Northrop Fyre, Robert Alter, Tremper Longman, and Leland Ryken acknowledge that offered treatments of the prophets are incomplete and less than satisfactory. Consider the following introduction with which Ryken prefaces his application of the stylistic category of satire to the book of Amos:

> The part of the Bible that gives literary critics most difficulty is the prophetic books. The reasons are multiple. . . . prophecy in the biblical sense is not a common genre at large. When judged by classical standards of unity, moreover, prophecy is too miscellaneous in structure and content to seem manageable. Literary critics look in vain for the superstructure that will provide a unifying impression of a prophetic book of the Bible. . . . [A critical suggestion] finally emerges as too amorphous to impose a firm unity on the prophetic book.\footnote{7}

What are some reasons or difficulties that have prevented critics from defining such a superstructure, a particular literary genre that can be applied to this collection of books as a whole? One reason is that we must be careful not to join what Kugel somewhat mockingly calls the "Task Force on Genre." Modern categories of genre are just that, conventional categories that are neither "timeless" nor "ultimate." A responsible critic does not "corrupt" to the givens of the Bible's linguistic/historical origins a generic term that can serve as an umbrella for this group of writings.
An initial difficulty is that the differentiation between prose and poetry—a distinction that is difficult to make in other types of biblical writings—is nowhere more problematic than here. And even when a critic makes a beginning of useful distinctions, he faces the daunting task of accounting for what Alter terms an unexplained and “uneven drift” in the prophetic writings from strong poetry to weakened poetic forms to overt prose. The oracles of the book of Isaiah are in the linguistic shape of Hebrew poetry, but the lines on the Scroll where they occur are in prose form.

A second difficulty is that the presently recognized generic term widely applied to this collection of books—that of “oracle”—is inadequate from a literary approach. This application, initiated by historical form-critical research, assigns the genre of oracle only to separate units in the prophetic books, claiming that the books as total entities are not “systematic compositions” but collections of short speeches from the prophetic activities of Israel during these centuries. To move beyond analysis and classification of these original speech units becomes speculation. More recent form-critical efforts include study of redaction strategies that acknowledge the additions and changes made by editors other than the original author that result in the final form of a book. Such efforts may move closer to the basic premise of Tremper Longman’s literary approach that “genre analysis is synchronic” and thus “concerned to identify the type of literature [as it presently exists], not its prehistory” and yet continue what is essentially analysis of separate segments of a text. Tucker can agree that a “prophetic book itself is an appropriate unit for . . . analysis, representing the final stage in the development of the tradition and a quite distinct genre of literature with certain typical features,” and yet continue to treat a prophetic writing as a collection of “units . . . whether large or small, ‘original’ or late . . . by means of form-critical analysis.”

This complex and often frustrating identifying of types of oracles, although yielding useful information about content, can demonstrate the law of diminishing returns in at least three ways. Marvin Sweeney explains the first problem (read text as book in the following quotation):

Genres [defined as these individual oracular units] can determine the overall form of a distinct prophetic text, but they do not necessarily do so. Typical generic elements frequently function within a text and play a role in its composition or formulation, but they do not necessarily dictate its composition or formulation. . . . Each text is unique even though it employs typical elements of genre. Genres do not always define texts; they function within them as compositional tools.

A content primarily composed of short speech units is a common characteristic of these books, but can we say that this characteristic is the “genre” that identifies the overarching literary structure of these books? As Tremper Longman insists, “The literary approach asks the question of the force of the whole. How many types of oracles are there, where do they differ and where overlap, and how many pages of criticism would it take to squeeze the total content of these fifteen books into these categories? Categories that relentlessly slip and slide into multiplicity and division? Johannes Lindblom, the Swedish theologian who devoted forty years of his life to studying the prophets, agreed with form criticism that . . .
utterance was . . . the oracle." Lindblom describes the "original oracles" as "short, concise, pregnant, and formulated in a peculiar fashion." While acknowledging that some such original oracular forms are still recognizable in the prophetic books, Lindblom clarifies that "the prophets also used the oracle form for utterances which were not oracles in the strict sense." In fact, Lindblom believes that the writings as we now have them offer evidence that "the old oracle form disintegrated and that the utterances of the later prophets are mostly pseudo-oracles" that can be very different in content from the original form. When Ryken mentions eight--"oracle of judgment, oracle of salvation, wisdom saying, 'woe' statement, report of visions, kingdom oracle, hymn, and lament"—he cautiously calls them "subgenres" and points out that they define content but not "superstructure."19

The third problem to this form-critical solution to generic identification of the prophetic books is crucial in implication: Is there a characteristic order, or a variety of orders, that can be determined for the oracles as collected in the different books? And what is the literary justification for and method of achieving this order? The form critic would answer this question by focusing on the formulaic connections or linguistic signs, such as a change in person or verb tense, that signal the beginning or ending of a separate oracle, and would interpret "order" as rudimentary efforts to make the passages easier to read.20 But ease of reading is not literary order, nor can analysis of these formulaic "hinges" that join separate oracles bestow literary unity. This claim holds true even if "each linked oracle is related to a specific event" and "located in its original cultural milieu." As we shall see, the literary unity of a prophetic book must be discerned in the book's total canonical form, a form achieved by continued revision and addition through time.21 Only in this form, the Scripture that subordinates original historical forms to theological, holistic interpretation, can the question of literary unity be addressed.22

II. PARTIAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

Confronting these difficulties, critics have suggested various choices of literary types that might serve as an inclusive term for these books. Can we not say that a prophetic book is a proclamation or sermon? According to Lindblom, "the bulk of the utterances reproduced in the prophetic books were really delivered as public speeches or sermons."23 And these designations hold, even if the eighth through the sixth century prophets do not, for the most part, deliver their messages in the formal context of worship ceremonies or as a recognized religious duty.24 However, both historical knowledge and the texts of the books as we have them urge us toward more precise formulations. We are fairly certain that no prophetic book is an original and exclusive collection of the proclamations of a single prophet. Books such as Isaiah and Zechariah give evidence that later anonymous authors or editors have contributed to the final written form of the book. Two distinct forms of the book of Jeremiah exist, one in the Greek and one in the Masoretic tradition. Research is making increasingly clear that each of these books is a conscious literary creation with its own structure and cumulative authorial intentions.25

Other analyses of prophecy successfully assign a literary mode or style to a particular book. Thus, Ryken analyzes both the book of Amos and that of Jonah as satire,26 and Thomas R. F. Barr has written a book entitled *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets*.27 Obviously, these designations are not intended as efforts to arrive at some common genre for the
prophetic books as a whole but to offer evidence that these writings offer rich possibilities for literary interpretation. In fact, the short book of Hosea can be variously described as the narrative of the marriage of Hosea, the drama of his and Gomer's relationship, the diatribe pronounced against Gomer (and Israel), the irony of a woman immoral in some fashion being selected by God as a prophet's wife, the tragedy of Israel's departure from Jehovah, and the symbol of Hosea's love for Gomer as representing God's enduring love for Israel. But, if all of these designations were assigned, the question remains: How do these specific styles blend together into one unified composition? Or do they?

III. FOCUS ON A PARTICULAR SOLUTION

To my thinking, the richest and most exciting possibility in the search for a definitive literary genre that might encompass and specify the prophetic writings as a group begins with Ryken's term "visionary literature" or "visionary writing." Ryken uses the term as a chapter heading in his handbook published in 1984, How to Read the Bible as Literature, and means by it one of two "types" or general categories including all literature that, rather than being a "replica of existing reality," is "an alternative to known reality." The biblical literature that Ryken includes in this "type" is "represented chiefly in the related genres of prophecy and apocalypse."

In Words of Delight (1992), Ryken lists "visionary writing" as a genre and includes in it prophecy and apocalypse. In the remainder of this article, I want to streamline this term to "visionary prophecy" and to limit its suggested application to the fifteen prophetic books of the Old Testament. I will then develop the term "visionary prophecy" by jumping off from chosen content in Ryken's chapter in How to Read the Bible, comparing other similarly focused critical thinking on this problem, and instancing the book of Hosea, which I have already referred to above, as an example of my application. To pursue this task, I will consider the following elements as they build literary unity in a prophetic book such as Hosea: origin, source, purpose, surface structure, use of figural language, and the relationship of this language to a deeper thematic structure that undergirds the surface of the text. Although my conclusions are of necessity focused here on the book of Hosea, implicit in my argument is the belief that my analyses can work toward the discovery of similar unified structures in the other prophetic books, thus allowing the generic term "visionary prophecy" to encompass them as well.

IV. ORIGIN

While, as we have seen, descriptions of kinds of oracles fall short of arriving at a holistic definition of genre, recourse to the term oracle—which has the primary meaning of "the response of a god to a question asked him by a worshiper"—situates the writings in the origins of their own time and place. Nearly all pagan oracular literature in the ancient world was Greek, although Rome had its smaller national collection. In this tradition, the oracle supposedly comes from persons directly inspired or spoken to by a god, or by assistants who interpret the original message so that the supplicant can understand it. For our purposes, we can note the following about this pagan tradition. (1) The questions asked pertain to the future and have an individual connection. (2) The person of ecstasy, of frenzied or mantic articulation, an utterance that must often be rendered understood by an assistant. (3) The
activity and its written results occur primarily in times of national stress, such as the Greek Peloponnesian War and the Roman Civil Wars. The supplicant is often expected to respond to the delivered oracle by making a sacrifice or founding a religious cult. The god’s response can be symbolic as well as verbal, such as sounds or sights in nature or the actions of uninvolved persons.

Studies, including anthropological research, of prophetic phenomena in ancient Near Eastern regions such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan indicate the activities of persons claiming to be in direct contact with the divine. Such prophets may appear on the edges of a society and advocate change, or they may operate within established religious or social structures. Typically organizing themselves into diverse groups, some prophets undergo ecstatic experiences and some do not. All, however, are expected to exhibit certain stereotypical characteristics that mark them as prophets and insure their acceptance as such by a given social group.

The exact nature of prophecy in early Israel remains more a matter of questions than of clear answers. The two major questions are those of the continuity of the early prophets with the writing prophets and the complexity of coordinating the information on prophets of the early period from the various Old Testament books. Research has, however, established certain general descriptions of such prophetic activity. Samuel, a judge and priest in the established religious orders, also functions as a prophet. He is involved in various prophetic actions in regard to the selection and establishment of Saul and David as kings, thus playing crucial and positive roles in the establishment of the monarchy (I Sam, chapters 9-16 and 28). When Saul exhibits the prophetic trait of ecstatic behavior, however, Old Testament accounts vary in expressing approval (I Sam 10-11) and disapproval (I Sam 19:9-24) of his activities. The two prophets Nathan (II Sam 7:1-17) and Gad (I Sam 22:5) are presented as being in alliance with King David. Nathan does denounce David for his adultery with Bathsheba (II Sam 12:1-14) but helps to arrange the accession of Solomon (I Kngs 1:8-53). Ahijah of Shiloh, as late as the reign of Jeroboam, functions as a prophet in allowing the division of the kingdom and upholding Jeroboam’s rule of the Northern Kingdom (I Kngs 11:29-39). By the period of time described in the Elijah and Elisha stories, such prophetic figures may no longer be allied with royal establishments but instead have become spokesmen against what they conceive to be apostate regimes. Ahijah (I Kngs 14:1-18), Jehu (I Kngs 16:1-4), Micaiah (I Kngs 22), and various bands of prophets deliver messages that are in opposition to the social and religious status quo. Some bands of prophets are disciples or assistants of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kngs 2:3, 5, 7, 15-16) and may have been responsible for preserving the records of the prophetic tradition in Israel.

This complex picture can yield the following conclusions regarding prophecy in early Israel. The prophets’ messages are based on their concepts of Israel’s covenant traditions and their understandings of the people’s response to these traditions. The prophets’ function is to communicate between the people and God. Some are related to a cult and operate as individuals, while others do not. And the prophet’s role includes not only kings and judges of Israel, and then Judah, but also lead their subjects toward conditions that result in captivity by foreign nations.
By the time of Israel's writing prophets of the eighth through the sixth centuries—from Amos to Malachi—ties with particular situations are looser or broken, and the prophet has become the unique spokesman of God's message, addressed not only to apostate kings and false religious leaders but to all the sinful citizens. And the prophets' only prophetic actions are a symbolic acting out of the content of the divine word delivered to them. Furthermore, both the prophetic words and actions become more of a forth-telling than a foretelling. But these prophetic events, like their pagan counterparts, occur during periods of national stress, beginning during the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom, continuing during the fall of Judah, and extending into the periods of exile. What we shall see as we continue to search for a genre for the prophetic writings is that certain preternatural elements of the pagan writings are transformed in the Jewish historical crisis into God's divinatory inspiration of the prophets. Thus Israel's prophetic writings prefigure and move toward the apocalyptic, a type of writing that occurs between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E. and that exhibits even more divinatory traits, such as an increased reliance on trance-like experiences, an emphasis on eschatology, and the use of numerical symbolism and esoteric language.

V. SOURCE

When Ryken states that visionary literature often deals with things "not in empirical reality" but as they exist in the imagination of the writer (VL 165), he situates the definitive source of such writing in the imaginative consciousness of the writer rather than in realistic apprehension of the outward world. To accept the claim of the prophetic writings that the original source of their language is a unique inspiration of God's Spirit does not negate the fact that the imagination of the writer remains the human source. The inspiration occurs, by whatever method of divine impetus, within the human consciousness. And this consciousness is, in a literary sense, Romantic in that perception of reality is forcefully shaped by the imagination of the writer. In fact, it is precisely this imaginative locus that allows the radical shifting in space and time that precludes any attempt at a conventional definition of setting in the writings. Ryken describes these radical shifts as "reversals and transformations" that portray reality other than as presently perceived. Thus the prophet's vision reconstructs ordinary reality, merging the present almost indiscriminately with the future, either near or distant (VL 166-67) and with earthly and cosmic space far beyond the prophet's present experience (VL 167-68).

VI. PURPOSE

By focusing specifically at this point on the book of Hosea as an instance of the prophetic books, we can note that about 760 B.C.E. Hosea begins his ministry to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, during the reign of Jeroboam II (Hos 1:1 and 2 Kgs 15:1). The prophet's imaginative perception of life in Israel is radically different from the view of the ordinary, even religious, citizen. Life at this time seems generally productive and peaceful in the land, but Hosea perceives the nation as morally and spiritually bankrupt and creates language that both reverses and transforms the nation's present condition. In reversal, Israel has already undergone judgment; in transformation, the nation, the nation has moved beyond judgment to restoration. The prophet's descriptions are those of a seer whose vision
moves at will through time and space. The following passages from Hosea reveal this visionary movement as encompassing Israel’s judgment and restoration not only with future historical time but also with eternal, cosmic realms of time and space:

Samaria [the Northern kingdom, Israel] shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. (13:16) Israel . . . shall blossom like the lily. . . . They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden . . . . What more has Ephraim to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you (14:5-8). Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? (13:14)

Within the boundaries of a Jewish reading of this passage, the phrase denoting redemption from death can easily be read metaphorically—since the entire book is replete with figurative language—as a reference to some kind of future historical restoration of Israel as the nation of God. Thus the language could be thought to refer to either of two versions of modern Jewish messianism described by David Novak as “apocalyptic messianism” and “historical messianism.” The first term denotes a Jewish nation forged by a powerful ruler who gathers the exiles back to the land of Israel, establishes a government based on the Torah, and rebuilds the temple. The second term describes a process not brought about by human resources within history but by divine action at the end of history. Present-day adherents to the first version find such processes underway in the establishment of the state of Israel in the twentieth century. Those of the second wait still for the earthly reign of a transcendent Messiah at the end of history. The first version pushes Hosea’s prophecy into twentieth-century history; the second pushes it into eternal, cosmic realms.

But a Christian reading of these Old Testament passages can also function as a foregrounding to substantiate the literary claim that the last passage does indeed stretch the prophet’s imagined conditions of God’s people into eternal, cosmic realms. Paul, in his treatise on the Christian resurrection in the book of First Corinthians, quotes the passage—in a slightly modified form—as referring to the post-historical resurrection of Christians (both Jewish and Gentile) as the people of God (15:55). In this reading, Hosea’s writings become a prophetic rejoicing in God’s counter forces of “plagues” and “destruction” against death.

To make this allowance is not to suggest that the eighth-century Jewish prophet Hosea, who addresses “real people in a given period of history,” has a New Testament theological understanding of the Christian resurrection. But it is to claim that the message of hope in verses such as 14:5-8 and 13:4 exists in a text that has its origin in the visionary imagination of an Old Testament seer/prophet, and that this message is interpreted centuries later by a New Testament Jewish Christian as referring to a post-historical resurrection of God’s people, seeing in the resurrection of Jesus. The question here is what James Sanders technically permissible range of resignification. As texts journey through the Bible from inception through the last books of the New Testament, they become resignified to some extent. The . . . question has to do with the
limits to which the readjustments in meaning canonically may go." Hosea's visionary language is not necessarily limited in its reference to Hosea's era but may become by divine ordering a sacred word that, as Childs insists, continues to "offer judgment and hope to future generations far beyond the temporal confines of Hosea himself."

VII. Surface Structure or Style of the Text

When Ryken claims that biblical visionary literature is a "subversive form," he explains what he intends by the adjective:

Visionary writing attacks our ingrained patterns of deep-level thought ... to convince us ... that there is something drastically wrong with the status quo. Visionary literature is a revolutionary genre. It announces an end to the way things are and opens up alternate possibilities. (VL 169, 175)

Ryken is referring not only to the surrealistic descriptions of apocalypse (VL 169) but also to the jolting style of the prophetic writings, a style that is both compelling and disruptive as it shocks readers into realizing that the language they are reading does not mirror the ordinary world in a familiar way (VL 170). To explore this idea is to realize that the subversive use of language is often visionary in style and is nearly always associated with some degree of incitement to revolution. Thus the British Romantic poets follow the French Rousseau in writing highly imaginative literature (think of William Blake) that not only supports political and social revolution but also advocates a radical upheaval in the established literary theory and practice of the day. Even earlier the Italian Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) describes in his primitive Scienza Nuova humans who use visionary and mythical language as a verbal weapon to seize power from whatever generation has preceded them.

The prophet Hosea is involved in revolution, but it is a counter-revolution. In the "indictment" that the Lord has against Israel (4:1 and 12:2), Hosea is on God's side—the original and rightful ruler of the nation—and thus in active process of undermining its present misguided leadership. The sinful revolution of the people against God's governance and God's choosing of Hosea as his spokesperson push the prophet to use the language of subversion to incite a new revolution against the present order of things. This use of disruptive language is apparent in a passage beginning with verse four of chapter thirteen and continuing through verse eight:

... I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no god but me, and besides me there is no savior (4). It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought (5). When I fed them, they were satisfied ... and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me (6). So I will become like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way (7). I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would mangle them (8).

To attempt to read these verses as a continuum or a unit is to encounter an unexplained dissimilarity that jars both the reader's expected continuity of logic and his literary sensibil-
ity. Herbert Marks likens the “persistence of [such] discordant features” to the “superimposed figures of paleolithic cave art.” Struggling to respond, the reader is forced to an uncomfortable alertness by being dislodged from familiar expectations of what reading language, even poetry, is supposed to be like. Verses four and five seem to be a common recitation of God’s mighty deeds on Israel’s behalf—brought out of Egypt and cared for in the wilderness. But in verse six the state of blessedness and dependency turns abruptly and without explanation into the contrary condition of a satisfaction that has forgotten its source, given way to self sufficiency and pride, and forgotten its need of the wilderness Benefactor. In verses seven and eight that Benefactor turns against the wilderness dwellers and becomes a lion or leopard who tears and devours them. Most absent from the rhetoric of the passage are conjunctive, explanatory aids to cognitive progress through the verses. The writer seems angry and punishes his readers by throwing language at them. The imagery is no help but instead counterproductive to efforts to assimilate the intent of the language. The lion here is a devourer, but several verses earlier, in the eleventh chapter, the Benefactor/God roars like a lion and the people experience a new exodus from enemy territory (Assyria) and are placed safely in their houses (11:10-11). Ryken describes such disturbing language as having a “kaleidoscopic structure” and remarks on the difficulty of any reader following its “shifting” and “diverse” content without being forcibly brought into new ways of thought and response (VL 170).

This cancellation of expected continuity can be described, then, as a deliberate linguistic strategy to carry out the prophet’s subversive purpose of calling the audience away from their revolution against their Benefactor/God and into a counter-revolution of responding with repentance to his offers of mercy and restoration. Furthermore, this jarring surface structure is common rather than exceptional not only in the book of Hosea but also elsewhere in the prophetic writings. Our best response to the writings as literature may be to heed Ryken’s injunction not to look “for the smooth flow of narrative” but to “be prepared for a disjointed series of diverse, self-contained units.” Ryken is surely right when he agrees with numerous other critics that this “disjointed method” is exactly what “makes such literature initially resistant to a literary approach” (VL 170).

Having, in the preceding paragraph, labeled this disjunctive style as a “deliberate linguistic strategy,” I must face the question as to whose strategy it is. Is the prophet Hosea—or his scribes—responsible for the discontinuous juxtaposition of verses of judgment with verses of forgiveness and restoration? If so, is the juxtaposition present from the beginning of the book’s composition or does the prophet add the verses of hope after he thinks the judgment is past, such as the period after the Syro-Ephraimite war in 735-732 when Israel is subjected to Assyria but still continues to exist as a puppet nation? Or is the discontinuity the result of later tradents altering the text to suit it to different historical situations, such as the position of Judah after Israel’s definitive fall in 722 but before that of Judah in 857?

A comparison between two redactional analyses of the first three chapters of Hosea can shed light on this question. Clements and Childs both find evidence in the numerous references here to the Southern Kingdom of Judah that the entire book has been edited by tradents a generation after its original composition. Childs finds particular evidence of such editing in the first three

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chapters but disagree about what this evidence reveals about the original text of Hosea. In these chapters, Israel consistently receives judgment while Judah remains a possible "recipient of promise." This pattern is evident in verse six of chapter one—"I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them"—as contrasted with verse seven—"But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God." Clements reads the verses of judgment as original warnings to Israel but the verses of blessing as redaction additions, added after the fall of Israel, that are based on the false assumption that Judah, unlike Israel, would repent and thus avert the disaster threatened by the verses of judgment. For Clements, then, the majority of the messages of hope are added by tradents who are mistaken in assuming that Judah, unlike Israel, will escape the judgment of God. Childs also reads the verses of judgment as originally written to warn Israel of judgment but as being applicable in the historical moment of the late eighth century to Judah, now in need of a similar repentance. He reads the verses of hope as also originally written and, in any later revision, applicable to Judah as they have been to Israel. Thus he views any later discordant juxtaposition of the verses as variations of a similar original jolting text that had confronted Israel with predictions of judgment or of blessing. Because Childs "subordinates the editorial process" to what he sees as the canon's intrinsic intent, he avoids the problem of mistaken tradents and reads the discordant passages as saying that "judgment and salvation are inextricably joined in the purpose of God for his people," held "together in the one divine plan." In God's prophetic speaking, the warning call of judgment and the merciful offer of forgiveness and restoration are always present.

VIII. USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

A literary approach can take full advantage of the wealth of figurative language that makes Hosea so typical of the other prophetic books. A survey through its fourteen chapters discloses examples of the use of simile (14:5), metaphor (7:8), apostrophe (10:8), metonymy (3:4), synecdoche (12:2), and the pathetic fallacy (3:3). Furthermore, the major tropes of irony and paradox function in the motif of blessing or restoration as it connects with judgment or national doom. The two contrary experiences fuse into a paradoxical whole that resonates with the ironic necessity of blessing or salvation never taking place until judgment has first occurred.

IX. SYMBOL AS PRIMARY FIGURE

Ryken insists that the "basic mode" of any kind of visionary literature, including prophecy, is symbolism. "Above all, visionary literature uses the technique of symbolism. In fact, it is symbolic through and through, a point that cannot be overstated" (VL 171). While few problems surface in accepting this argument as it applies to apocalyptic literature such as the Revelation, questions may arise as to Ryken's claim that symbolism is the "basic mode" that is used through and through. I want to respond to this questioning not only by agreeing with Ryken that symbolism is the dominant literary figure used in the prophetic writings but also by arguing that the symbol becomes the device that uncovers a particular thematic substructure that bestows unity and coherence on the book of Hosea. Exploring the symbol as trope calls first for careful definition. Bullinger names a biblical
symbol as a "material subject substituted for a moral or spiritual truth." But this definition needs refinement. By accepted literary definitions of symbol (those of Coleridge, Baudelaire, Proust), a symbol is a word as image that refers to an entity existing within the boundaries of the literature that, in turn, evokes meaning(s) beyond itself outside the literature. By contrast, a metaphor or simile is a word as image that, instead of referring to an entity within the literature, refers to something outside it for the purpose of comparing that something with an entity that does exist within the literature.

Walter Brueggemann identifies the "offering of symbols" as the subversive means by which the prophets challenge their audience to renounce the sinful and hopeless status quo in favor of a future of righteousness and hope. But Brueggemann, whose interest at this point is in the prophetic task rather than in the specifics of the language effecting the task, allows a symbol to be any language segment bringing to mind some particular and positive event from Israel's past history. Thus he seems to equate "symbol" with any graphic word picture and fails to differentiate between image, metaphor, and symbol. Conversely, Ryken explains that a necessary distinction between the pictorial and the symbolic is the difference between the pictographic and the ideographic, a difference between images that appeal immediately to the senses and objects that trigger multiple ideas represented by the object (VL 173). A symbol is not merely an image that paints a verbal picture but something that suggests or implies meaning beyond itself as an entity. Thus a symbol, which, as noted, must be situated in the literature, functions to embody certain ideas or qualities that the figure gathers up and communicates both within and beyond the boundaries of the text containing the symbol.

This symbolic function relates to the already described visionary movement of prophetic literature into future historical time as well as into extraterrestrial realms. Numerous critics note a poetic quality in the prophetic writings that we can associate with this unlimited range of movement, both into the past and the future. Alter suggests that one effect of poetic figures in the prophets is to "lift the utterances to a second power of signification," giving to particular history "an archetypal horizon." He also sees poetic figures as often functioning to situate "historical subjects" of "here and now in cosmic perspectives." Bullinger emphasizes the linguistic connection of the word mystery to the word symbol. The Scriptural word nearest to the word symbol is the word mystery, with the patristic Fathers using the terms synonymously. Mystery means secret, and comes to mean a "secret sign or symbol," with "secret" referring to the layers of expanding reference beneath the surface of the symbolic language. Brueggemann points out that, in spite of such archetypal movement and multiple layers of meaning, prophetic symbols are always rooted in the history of Israel as a nation. Soulen also emphasizes the situated reference of biblical figural language by describing how the use of any such figure is invariably related to some event in Israel's history. And even when a figure moves into "world time" or into "nature" in general, the matter at hand remains the matter at hand.

In Hosea the cumulative event of Hosea's marriage, alienation from, and restoration to the three children, functions as a prophetic symbol as described above. The early chapters of the book relate an event that can be seen as actually occurring. The prophet obeys God's instructions to marry a woman who is either flawed or vulnerable sexually. He marries Gomer and they live together in a
marriage that results in the births of two sons and one daughter. Gomer breaks her marriage vows by becoming sexually promiscuous. The husband and wife separate from each other. But Hosea's love for Gomer is greater than her sin. He secures her once more, and, after a time of testing, restores her to the former marriage relationship (chaps. 1-3).

My reading of the marriage event is not intended to deny the historical critical problems of the record of the event. Childs describes the critical efforts to relate as history the events of chapters 1-3 as being "consistently frustrated" from ever reaching any kind of consensus as to what actually occurs or what precisely the three chapters record. My claim that the marriage event is the symbolic paradigm that orders the prophetic text is not dependent on some ordered narrative of the historicity of the marriage as recorded in the first three chapters but on its literary function in the book as a canonical whole.

Unpacking the sequence of the marriage event results in the following paradigm: A. What Hosea, directed by God, does for Gomer B. What Hosea expects of Gomer C. How Gomer responds to these expectations D. How Hosea deals with Gomer because of her response, and E. What Hosea does for Gomer in spite of her response. Although my observations at this point are not attempts at any formal structuralist analysis, this paradigm is similar in an elementary way to a pattern or model so described. The paradigm indicates "the inner organization of the . . . thematic content through which the text . . . [the marriage narrative] receives its intelligibility." It describes "the constituent elements . . . and the network of relationships existing between them." Also, a structural arrangement of the elements of the paradigm adequately controls the flow of the narrative.

X. DEEP STRUCTURE OF TEXT INDICATED BY SYMBOL

The symbolic meaning of this paradigm, which is obvious even on the surface of the text, transfers the narrative sequence described from Hosea and Gomer to God and Israel. Thus we can construct the following paradigm of the meaning of the marriage narrative as a symbol of the narrative or history of God and Israel. A. What God, directed by his own purposes, does for Israel B. What God expects of Israel C. How Israel responds to these expectations D. How God deals with Israel because of her response and E. What God is doing—and will do—for Israel in spite of her response.

If we agree, one, that the paradigm of the marriage narrative is competent, that is, that it includes everything that is in the narrative and excludes what is not in the narrative, and, two, that the symbolic meaning of the marriage narrative transfers into the related inclusive paradigm describing God and Israel, then we can say that the narrative of the marriage becomes a prophetic symbol that orders the apparently disjunctive segments of the text of Hosea. Every verse in the book, either as a single entity or in group format, can be outlined under the five headings of the inclusive paradigm derived from the symbolic paradigm of the marriage narrative. In fact, even the verses that relate the marriage event can be subsumed under the inclusive paradigm that structures God's dealings with Israel. The arrangement is neither arbitrary nor forced but seems to account competently for the occurrence of all the verses in the fourteen chapters.

This sequence of five actions, each initiated by God and each enacted in relation to Israel, is, of course, the story or narrative that orders in a profuse generality the content of the entire Old Testament in all its varied literary forms. In a prophetic book, this con-
trolling "story" is condensed and pushed beneath the disruptive surface text, a surface where rearrangement of the verses into the five-point sequence can reveal the book's hidden thematic cohesiveness and unity. Thus, in Hosea, the five-point paradigm of the narrative of the marriage becomes a prophetic symbol, a figural microcosm of the macrocosmic content of the complete book, welding together not only the disjunctive segments of the individual verses but also fusing form and content into a single whole.68

Child's analysis of the marriage narrative as its stylistic mode and thematic functioning may have changed through the stages of the book's composition lends weight to the symbol's structural prominence in the text. Originally, Hosea's sign-acts that constitute the marriage event are an "attack upon Israel's syncretistic religious worship which had transformed the worship of Yahweh into a fertility cult."69 Israel has adopted the Canaanite mythological belief that deity and the land exist in a "symbiotic" relationship with each other. Worship of this deity is enacted by the cultic practice of marriageable virgins temporarily acting as temple prostitutes and offering payments for such acts to the deity of fertility, behavior which Hosea boldly denounces as a betrayal of religious loyalty which is idolatry. The Israelites have subscribed to a cultic myth that has involved them in sexual immorality, and Hosea's actions and words are an accusation within that mythological construct.70

In the later editing of the original text where its message is extended to Judah, Childs sees mythological language becoming purely metaphorical. The people of Judah as a whole are not engaged in idolatrous acts of sacred marriage with the mythological Baal, as their Israelite kinsmen had been earlier in the century. Rather the Southern Kingdom has polluted its worship by a general breaking of the commandments of Yahweh that ignores his covenant with the nation.71 The present shape of the first three chapters gives evidence that the historical sign-acts have been changed into overt metaphor. Chapters one and three cannot be read sequentially as an integrated narrative. These chapters are separated by chapter two, which relates no action but functions only as a metaphorical description of actions referred to in chapters one and two. Childs reads these three chapters as a later redaction than whatever editing had occurred in chapters 4-14. The initial chapters provide an "exegetical key" that unlocks interpretation of the sign-acts as a metaphor that continues to speak as Scripture to generations that follow late eighth-century Judah.72 By my definitions, this metaphor has become in the present text of Hosea an example of the uniquely complex, multi-level symbol that I am suggesting is endemic to the prophetic writings.

The question now arises as to how this prophetic symbol moves beyond the boundaries of Hosea as an isolated text. That is, how does the marriage narrative as symbol possess multiple layers of meaning, depict visionary movement, connect linguistically with whatever the word mystery signifies, and yet remain rooted in Israel's history as a nation? The names of Gomer's three children add these visionary characteristics to the narrative, thus qualifying it fully as a prophetic symbol. Each name, in its initial function within the boundaries of the narrative of the marriage, signifies the unfaithfulness of Gomer to her husband Hosea, to the rejection of his adulterous wife, and, if not all of the children, at least the last two. The Hebrew text of the children belongs to Hosea, but very clearly states he has "played the whore" and "acted shamefully" in going after her "lovers" (Hos 2:5). Also
clear is Hosea's initial rejection at some point in the marriage of Gomer and, in some degree, of the children (Hos 2:3-4).

The meanings of the children's names as assigned by God signify these narrative developments of betrayal, rejection, and judgment, but apply their linguistic weight, not to Hosea's marriage, but to Israel's covenantal history. God's pronouncement of the first son's name, Jezreel, connects with the incomplete obedience of Israel's king Jehu and God's warning that after four generations Jehu's descendants will be cut off. The name Jezreel also links with the unfaithfulness of Israel to God's decrees through many generations, as epitomized in the long history of national violence that has occurred in the geographical site called the Valley of Jezreel. In this valley, Jehu seizes with betrayal and murder the throne from Ahab's descendants and inaugurates the dynasty of Jeroboam II (II Kgs 10), the king to whose rule Hosea is prophesying an end. Thus the name becomes a cumulative symbol of a definitive, imminent onset of judgment on the nation of Israel. The names of the daughter and the last son signify God's rejection of his covenant people. The name Loruhamah means "unpityed" or "no more mercy," and Loammi means "you are not my people." These names indicate the removal of God's love from Israel and the nullification of his covenant relationship with them.

But Hosea and Gomer's marriage story does not end here. Hosea finds Gomer and secures her again as his chastised but restored wife. And the children's names as recorded in the passages relating this final development in the marriage change their signifying. The name Jezreel, previously signifying the bloody valley, appears in a passage describing the sowing of seeds and an earth bearing grain, wine, and oil (Hos 2:22-23). A play on words in a comparison of the two appearances of the name "Jezreel" is that in the initial context, which links the name with the bloody valley, "Jezreel" can be translated as "God scatters." This translation logically implies the act of "scattering" as part of the destruction of judgment. In the second context, which describes a fertile land and its products, the translation becomes "God sows," with the verb "sows" being a Hebrew variant of "scatters" in the word "Jezreel." In further changed signifying, the name Loruhamah, meaning "not pitied," loses its prefix meaning "not" to become "Ruhamah" or "having obtained pity," and the name Loammi, meaning "not my people" is reconstituted as "Ammi" or "my people" (Hos 2:1). The reversal of these two names indicates a restoration of God's covenant relation with Israel.

Functioning as part of the prophetic symbol that is the narrative in which they appear, the children's names escape the particular record of the marriage narrative and expand in symbolic representation to indicate the central message of the text of Hosea as a whole. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness, God rejects her as his covenant people, but, because of his great love and mercy, he is bringing the nation through judgment to a state of restoration with himself. A passage such as the following refers not to Hosea and Gomer but to God and Israel:

And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy . . . On that day I will answer, says the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow
him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Loruhamah, and I will say to Loammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God." (Hos 2:19, 21-23)

Thus restored, Israel becomes faithful in her covenant with God: she says, "... What have I to do with idols?" She has learned that only from her Benefactor/God is blessedness found (Hos 14:8).

Exactly when and how this national fulfillment of the domestic symbol takes place is a matter of much debate among different religious groups as well as among various theological divisions in those groups. But as description of the fulfillment of Hosea's multi-layered symbol, the quoted passage is in exact accord with what we can call other E verses (the passages of promised blessing that are discordantly juxtaposed with passages of judgment) in the double layers of the textual structure of the book. And in the privilege of visionary prophecy, the astonishing "reversal and transformation" (v. L166) simply takes place with no apparent concern to offer definitive historical interpretation for either early or subsequent readers. God's never-ending search for his people that results in their repentance and return to him is described but not historically outlined (Hos 6:1 and 8:2). As Brueggemann insists, the emphasis in what I am categorizing as the E verses is not on how or when Israel is restored but on the "gracious gifts" of the mighty God who is the restorer.78

A Christian reading, then, is not the only way that this symbol can move beyond the boundaries of Hosea as a single book situated in the group of the Old Testament prophetic writings. Jewish readings can find Hosea's promises applicable to God's judgment and subsequent blessings to the Jewish people throughout history. All modern Messianic Jewish writing is, of course, dominated by the twin events of the Holocaust and the establishment of the modern state of Israel. In describing different versions of both the despair (over the Holocaust) and hope (over the established nation), Novak concludes that "the God who saved us (the Jewish people) from Hitler and who gave us the State of Israel is neither a God whose covenant has been falsified nor a God whose final and unique messianic victory has yet come.79

But a Christian reading of this symbol is also longstanding and can offer an alternate description of the symbol's reaching into the future. The New Testament has been the primary interpreter of the Old for the church through two thousand years of history. The apostles Paul, Peter, and John read Hosea's symbol as stretching beyond the repentance and restoration of the Jews as an ethnic people to include the gathering of the church as the new Israel by Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, that is, a gathering of persons from all nations of the earth to Israel's God in repentance and faith. Paul's argument in the ninth chapter of Romans is that God's promises of mercy in the Old Testament are not only for the "children of the flesh," that is, the Jewish people, but also for the "children of the promise," who, in Paul's first century terminology, are the Gentiles. To support his argument, Paul refers to the prophetic symbol in Hosea:

As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved." And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they shall be called children of the living God." (Rom 9:25-26)
In his first epistle, Peter addresses all of God's New Testament people who comprise the church—Jews and Gentiles alike—as God's "chosen race," his "royal priesthood," his "Holy nation." This nation to whom Peter is writing are they which once "were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not received mercy, but now have received mercy (1 Pet 2:9-10). Peter's allusion to Hosea in this passage makes possible an enlarged understanding of a symbol that escapes the boundaries of an Old Testament book to reverberate throughout the biblical canon.

Finally, John offers, in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation a similar expansion of Hosea's visionary language. The people of the new Jerusalem that John sees "coming down out of heaven from God"—a population described in chapter seven of the Revelation as "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples, and languages" (v. 9)—are those described by Hosea's mark of identification: "[T]hey will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them" (Rev 21:2-3). Here the prophetic symbol exhibits its visionary movement into cosmic and eternal realms, and its close connection with the Greek word mystery already referred to as explored by Bullinger. That the chosen people of God are from all nations has remained a secret to past generations, Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians. But that mystery is now disclosed because God has "revealed to his holy apostles" that "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers [with Israel] in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 3:5-6). In its disclosure of mystery, then, Hosea's visionary symbol not only remains firmly rooted, as our definitions have indicated, in the particular history of Israel but also reaches beyond the close of history.

XI. CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

What are the implications of this literary analysis of the book of Hosea? My definitions of the various elements (origin through figural language) derived primarily from Ryken's descriptions of visionary literature and fitted to Hosea as characteristics of a particular genre coined 'visionary prophecy' work well. Furthermore, the reading of the marriage narrative as a symbol for God's covenantal relationship with Israel is, in Child's canonical reading, endemic to the text in each stage of its composition. But to designate visionary prophecy as a genre and to apply it to the fifteen prophetic books of the Old Testament, we must learn whether the patterns that work in the book of Hosea hold in the other books as well. Do similar descriptions of the literary elements apply equally well to other prophetic books? Are these other books dominated by prophetic symbols that can be arranged into doubles of the five-point (A, B, C, D, E) paradigm of God's covenantal behavior with Israel? Can the verses of another such book be contained inclusively within the double layers of such a paradigm? Only with answers to these questions can we move toward claims about a unified literary structure typical of the prophetic books as a group. If further studies do yield support to such claims, we will be able to say that a literary approach has offered something new in Old Testament studies, a generic term that gives stylistic dominance to a symbolic structure—instanced here in Hosea—that appears uniquely in the books of the Hebrew prophets.

NOTES

1. For examples of literary criticism of the Bible using deconstructive theories of interpretation...


6. Ibid., 664 and 671.


15. Ibid., 29.


22. A moving away from a primary dependence on form criticism for interpretation of the prophetic writings is now well established. See, for example, Alexander Rofé, "The Classification of the Prophetical Stories," *JBL* 89 (1970): 427-40. Rofé's concern is with stories of the prophets whenever they are recorded, not narratives in a particular division of books. But he is convinced that no "classification" of these narratives can be made with the criteria set forth by . . . form criticism," 427. Instead a "close reading" of the "content" of the "artistic nature" of a narrative, 428-29. And classification is not an end in itself but an instrument for "broadly detecting the message of a literary work," 440. Rofé's proposed beginnings with "origins," similar to the elements that I am exploring here in the


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32. Ibid., 75.
37. Ibid., 5.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 12.
42. Brown, “Prophet,” 79.
43. Ibid., 79-80.
44. In the remainder of this article, Ryken’s chapter “Visionary Literature” in *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 165-75, will, for purposes of convenience, be referred to within the text by the initials VL.
47. Sanders, 63.
51. Marks (“The Twelve Prophets”) considers as partial cause of this discordant and reader-resistant surface structure the fact that the prophetic books as we have them are the result of “literature as evolving scripture,” 212, a result that is for Marks produced by the chance effects of plural and random revision. But Childs offers specific examples of how later editing to shape a prophetic book into a scriptural canonical whole continues the tradition inherent in the texts received and thus becomes “an integral part of the literary process” (“The Canonical Shape”), 43-47. My claim that the discordant structure of the surface text of Hosea reflects the subversive purpose of a prophet to reclaim an audience to God’s viewpoint of the historical status quo is partially discounted by Marks’ view but not by Childs’. Throughout any of the prophetic writings remain subversive of established orders that God wants to change. Thus the jarring juxtaposition of dissimilar passages continues to serve its original subversive purposes.
52. Even in prophetic books such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, which is in the dominant form of narrative history, threats of judgment alternate inexplicably with promises of hope. See R. E. Clements, “Understanding the Book of Hosea,” *Review and
To claim that the marriage event is a literary symbol does not negate or preclude all other designations of the event. Form criticism defines the passage(s) relating the narrative of the marriage as an oracle in the "accounts of sign acts" category. Recorded "either by the prophet himself or by those who Ihavel recorded the traditions about him," the prophet "interprets his actions, thereby once again proclaiming his message" (Tucker, *Form Criticism*), 66. Sweeney describes a more recent form-critical analysis of the marriage event as the "report of a symbolic action," that is, as a first or third person "narrative that describes the prophet’s performance of an act intended to symbolize YHWH’s intentions or actions toward the people." Typical content of this type of oracle includes three elements: an instruction to perform a symbolic act, “the report that the act was performed,” and "a statement that interprets the significance of the act." Sweeney lists Hosea, chapters one through three, as an example of this form (*Introduction to Prophetic Literature*), 19. Here we have a form-critical description of an oracle linked with the literary concept of symbol. We can notice at this point the critical debate regarding exactly how the marriage event becomes symbolic. Sweeney’s oracular symbol defines a deliberate undertaking by Hosea of actions commanded by God as symbolic. The marriage is an act intended to symbolize, 19. Tucker, from a different perspective, seems to be saying that Hosea interprets his actions as symbolic in recording them (*Form Criticism*), 66. Lindblom denies any intentionality on Hosea’s part. “We must not think that the prophet intentionally married the wanton woman to present a symbol of the relation between Yahweh and His people. Rather this marriage revealed to him Yahweh’s paradoxical love to His apostate people and was used by him as a symbol” (*Prophecy*), 168-69. To make this assertion, however, Lindblom must read the description of the bride in chapter one as “proleptic,” 166. She is not originally a “wife of whoredoms” but a sexually vulnerable woman who becomes an immoral and unfaithful wife. Thus this critic defines the restoring and marital discipline of Gomer recorded in chapters 2 and 3 as having occurred before what he sees as the unfaithfulness that results in the births of the last two children. Accordingly, Lindblom differentiates between the symbolic intent of the name of the first child and the names of the second and third. The name “Jezreel” does not “hint at any matrimonial tragedy,” while the names of the second and third indicate that Hosea refuses to acknowledge them as his own, 165-69. In my reading, the names of all three children symbolize not only the matrimonial tragedy but also the national tragedy of God’s rejection of the people chosen to be his peculiar nation. As for the sequence of the events of the marriage, the fact cannot be precisely decoded from the marriage event as the critics.

These definitions of a structuralist pattern or model are from Soulen (*Handbook*), 184.
Certain characteristics of my paradigm as it functions in the text of Hosea are comparable to Vladimir Propp's structuralist theory of Russian fairy stories. My five categories of A, B, C, D, and E can be compared to Propp's "functions" or "basic units" that refer "to the significant actions which form the narrative." See Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory* (3rd ed.; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 109-10. As such, the categories exhibit an "archetypal simplicity," although they do not, as Propp's units do, consistently occur in a "logical sequence." A parallel in my paradigm with Propp's "spheres of action" or "roles" would be the roles of the Benefactor/God, the People or Nation, the Spokesman or Prophet, and a general class of Attendees or Facilitators, all of whom enable delivery of the Word or Message, a term that can also assume the status of "role" when connected with the Wisdom of the Old Testament or the Logos of the New Testament. But my application of the symbolic paradigm to the book of Hosea is neither as elaborate nor as limited as a formal structuralist analysis would be, as Thiselton's comments on structuralist approaches to biblical narrative make clear. My application is inductive rather than deductive; it is formulated from an analysis of the book of Hosea and applies only in relation to this writing. My application of the paradigm is not to the text as a system but as a "life-world," a literary rendering of particular prophetic events in Israel's history. Thus my formulation and application of the paradigm escape the confines and the complexities of a formal structuralist approach, an approach that Thiselton concludes has become less than useful in biblical interpretation and is not subject to "verification." See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 486-91. The primary purpose of my formulation of the paradigm as the deep structure of the text of Hosea is to increase comprehension in reading the surface text. And verification rests on whether or not the verses in their entirety fit meaningfully and appropriately under the five headings.

68. As a symbol, the marriage narrative is different from or more than an allegory. *A Handbook to Literature* (7 ed.; ed. William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996) distinguishes allegory from symbol by pointing out that allegory "makes a structure of ideas" its "controlling influence," 12. Sweeney, in the Glossary to his form-critical study of the book of Isaiah, (An *Introduction to Prophetic Literature*), makes the same distinction. "... each detail of the allegory recurs in the interpretation," 513. Thus, if the marriage event were allegory, each separate incident of the narrative would have a specific and distinct counterpart to be interpreted in God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Interpretations that slide toward allegory appear in suggestions that Hosea's buying Gomer back from some slave market is a precise correspondence of Christ buying sinners away from Satan's control (Fred M. Wood, *Hosea: Prophet of Reconciliation*, Nashville: Convention Press), 44. But even if we allow a New Testament expansion of the narrative's symbolic meaning to be God's love and mercy embracing all the nations of people who make up the church, this particular correspondence seems forced. Any allegorical interpretation calls for specific counterparts for each detail in the narrative, such as Gomer's giving birth to exactly three children, a number without any particular significance. In his classic study, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, Bullinger allows that a "true history may be allegorized," but, if so, "Allegory is always stated in the past tense, and never in the future. Allegory is thus distinguished from Prophecy," 749. Sweeney, however, offers several passages treating future events from the prophetic writings as examples of allegory, but, as explained above, examples Hosea's marriage narrative as a "symbolic action" (An *Introduction to Prophetic Literature*), 19.

71. Ibid., 381-82.
75. Ibid., 14-15.
76. Ibid., 13-14.
77. Ibid., 15-16.
78. Walter Brueggemann, in his Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea (Richmond: John Knox 1968), 71-73, follows Claus Westermann in "The Way of the Promise through the Old Testament" in Westermann's book The Old Testament and Christian Faith (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 200, by describing the passages that I categorize as E verses as a form consisting of oracles of promise or salvation oracles. Westermann finds the following elements as parts of this form: announcement, portrayal, and assurance. Brueggemann adds to these parts his own description of "covenant formula" as a distinctive element in the oracular form. Lindblom sees the prophet's literary habit of "linking a prophecy of hope to a prophecy of judgement" as simply "an instance of lal principle of which there are many examples in the collections" of the prophetic writings (Prophecy), 243.
80. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 769.
81. I am convinced from my reading so far that such symbols do dominate the other prophetic books. For instance, in Ezekial 4:1-6, Ezekial's lying with the brick representing Yahweh on his right side and then with the brick representing Israel as a nation or the Suffering Servant of Israel on his left is a symbol as related to the message of the book of Ezekial as Hosea's marriage narrative is to that book. A vital difference is that the book of Ezekial employs numerous other such symbols while Hosea's text is structured on the one event. All of the symbolic events found in the Old Testament prophetic writings point unmistakably to the culmination of all prophetic symbols, the mighty acts of the Jewish Messiah/Prophet, Jesus, during Passion week—the entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, the crucifixion outside the city, and the resurrection on the third day. See N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), for elaboration on the multiple symbolic acts of Jesus and their connection with the symbolic acts in the Old Testament books of prophecy.
82. An earlier version of this article was presented in the session "The Bible as Literature" at The Open Book and Scholarship conference held August 16-19, 2000, at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada.
Belief in God is often characterized as antiquated and thoroughly disreputable in the eyes of modern science and post-Enlightenment philosophy. Kai Nielsen considers rational efforts to disprove God's existence mere "mopping up operations in the wake of the philosophical and scientific developments since the Enlightenment." Nielsen flatly states that

There is not the slightest reason to believe that the Christian is living according to "the reality principle" while the non-Christian, and the secularist in particular, is deluded about man's true estate. Christianity is myth-eaten. The very intelligibility of the key concepts of the religion is seriously in question; there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of God; and when we keep an anthropological perspective in mind, we will come to recognize that the revelation and authority of Christianity are but one revelation and one authority among thousands of conflicting revelations and authorities. Given this state of affairs, it is the epitome of self-delusion to believe that Jesus reveals what the true structure of reality is.

In no uncertain terms Nielsen denies the facticity of religious truth claims, most fundamentally the existence of God. It is of course understandable why the theologian has focused so much effort at attacking belief in God, for such belief is the "heart and soul of Christian belief as well of the other theistic religions. This is a sensible strategy: if...this belief is relevantly objectionable, he won't have to deal piece-meal with all those more specific beliefs." He can simply do away with them all in one fell swoop. Nielsen's argument that there is no evidence for God's existence, that religious pluralism poses an intractable difficulty for particular religious truth
claims, and that theism is essentially incoherent and irremediably superstitious is obviously
designed to show that ongoing belief in such a deity is exceedingly irrational.

The typical way for a theist to respond to such atheological accusations is to construct
or at least rehearse arguments, both \textit{a priori} and \textit{a posteriori}, in favor of God's existence.
Teleological, ontological, cosmological, and moral arguments, and more besides those, are
trotted out and presented in the hopes of answering the skeptic, persuading the nearly
convinced, or at least satisfying the believer.

That approach will not be taken here. For one, such a huge task would simply be too
daunting. Each of those arguments for God's existence, not to mention those posed
\textit{against} God's existence, represents a book in itself. Such a venture would simply take us
too far afield. How can a response be offered to Nielsen without the task becoming
unwieldy? What sorts of considerations can be offered to show that religious belief is not
irrational after all? The way it will be done here is by means of an extended comparison
between two American philosophers, one born in 1842 and now gone, the other born in
1932 and still quite alive. One was a pragmatist and radical empiricist, the other a leading
contemporary analytic philosopher and epistemologist. They both loved to climb moun­
tains, attended Harvard, struggled with the problem of evil, and believed in God: William
James and Alvin Plantinga.

A comparison of Plantinga and James is instructive on several counts. Overlaps between
them, especially in the face of their differences of approach and conviction, can prove to
be helpful starting points in an analysis of the epistemic merits of theism. Discussing these
points of contact can also provide a general orientation to some of the prominent terms of
the debate about God's existence. An examination of their views is especially effective in
raising prior questions that often go unasked and unanswered, questions that really ought
not to be neglected given their centrality to religious conviction. This examination will pri­
marily be a comparison, rather than a contrast, though points of difference between their
views clearly exist and will occasionally be mentioned in the context of the comparison,
especially when doing so offers a point of illumination. What is remarkable is the number
of poignant commonalities in their views, the convergence of so many of their conclusions,
often based on quite different sorts of reasons (only occasionally inconsistent ones, though).
What follows is a list of about a dozen or so of these similarities.

Both James and Plantinga were vitally concerned about the intellectual propriety and
philosophical reasonableness of theistic conviction. James counted himself among the
"crass" supernaturalists, and he took seriously the charge by such eminent agnostics of his
day like Clifford and Huxley that theism and religious belief were irresponsible or even
immoral, a flouting of our epistemic duties. Louis Menand writes, "It's not exactly empha­
sized any longer, but one of James's original purposes in promoting pragmatism was not
to get rid of empirically unverifiable beliefs, but to make room, in a scientific world view,
for faith and God. This was explicitly the context for the 1898 lecture." The 1898 lec­
ture to which Menand refers, of course, is "The Will to Believe," which has been
most widely read defense of the rationality of religious faith in the English language. In James's
\textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}, his

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defense of theism. His work on modality in the *Nature of Necessity* culminated in his defense of a modal version of the ontological argument and a dismantling of the deductive version of the problem of evil; his *God and Other Minds* canvassed the traditional arguments for God’s existence and ended with an analogical argument for theism; his *Does God Have a Nature?* discussed the connections between God and various necessary truths; and his trilogy on epistemology had for its goal all along *Warranted Christian Belief*, the final installment of the series and a brilliant defense of both theism generally and robust historical, orthodox Christianity particularly.

Both philosophers can thus be rightly characterized as concerned with religious epistemology, in two senses: epistemology as it is brought to bear on religious hypotheses both broad and narrow. Secondly, they are also concerned with epistemology as it is shaped by a perspective unwilling to stack the deck against theism from the outset, unwilling to presume the falsehood of theism. Plantinga and James were theists, and thus they stand among a crowd of prominent religious believers in the history of western philosophy, including Kant, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, Descartes, Hobbes, Augustine, Aquinas, and Ockham, to whom the religious hypothesis has seemed to be true, and perhaps even, in Plantinga’s words, “the maximally important truth.”

Concerned with the epistemic status of religious belief, both James and Plantinga examined the evidence for its truth and rationality; and when they did so they both concluded that the decision to accept or reject theism was not a question that could be definitively settled on evidential grounds. As a radical empiricist, James insisted on looking at the evidence available both for and against the religious hypothesis—and unlike Hume he didn’t confine such experiential evidence to the bare deliverances of the physical senses. Neither theism nor atheism was presumed to have the upper hand. What James encountered from the perspective of the “purely logical perspective” was that there was not decisive evidence for theism. Evidence and arguments could be cited and adduced for theism, but so could evidence and arguments on the other side. A deductive version of the problem of evil, for instance, was mistakenly believed by James to pose intractable problems for an Anselmian conception of God. But his mistake is reflective of the fact that James refused to ignore the counterevidence for any proposition. When he considered the arguments both for and against theism, he concluded that this is not a question that can be definitively settled on evidential grounds. Important to note is that James was as skeptical of the arguments favoring atheism or agnosticism as he was skeptical of those favoring theism.

Plantinga, likewise, assessing the traditional theistic arguments early in his career, concluded that none of them is successful from a strict evidential perspective. Years later he wrote about his earlier work:

I employed a traditional...standard: I took it that these arguments are successful only if they start from propositions that compel assent from every honest and intelligent person and proceed majestically to their conclusion by way of forms of argument that can be resisted only on pain of insincerity or irrationality. Naturally enough, I joined the contemporary chorus in holding that none of the traditional arguments for theism was successful.

Also paralleling James, Plantinga similarly found the arguments against theism equally
unimpressive. Plantinga’s powerful refutation of the deductive version of the problem of evil has now pretty much shifted that entire discussion to probabilistic versions of the challenge. From the perspective of the early Plantinga’s internalism and classical foundationalism and of what James called the purely logical intellect, evidentialism fails to provide a decisive case for either theism or its rejection. Both philosophers would thus agree that strict evidentialism is likely of only limited efficacy in resolving this issue.

The question of what to do in the face of indecisive evidence with respect to theism constitutes one of the great divides among philosophers. Plantinga and James represent one side of that divide. Confronted with Clifford’s dictum that indecisive evidence for theism means one should suspend judgment and affirm agnosticism, and to do otherwise involves a violation of one’s epistemic duties, James remained unconvinced. His famous “will to believe” doctrine was his elaborate way to argue to the contrary: that a religious believer is well within his rights to retain his convictions. In his lucid and tightly crafted book on James, Hunter Brown battles fideistic and subjectivist interpretations of James by cogently arguing that James’s robust empiricism’s careful attention to all features of experience imposed a number of constraints on belief formation, constraints metaphysical, noetic, evidential, factual, discursive, and theological. Brown persuasively argues that the issue that concerned James, particularly in his will to believe doctrine, is what would constitute intellectually responsible behavior towards certain existing beliefs, including religious ones that, while not entirely conclusive evidentially, are nonetheless generally congruent with those constraints. Although Brown notes that James never developed his views on classical foundationalism so technically as Plantinga, James’s rejection of Clifford’s dictum certainly moves in the direction of rejecting the classical picture so prominent after Descartes and Locke. Plantinga, even more so than James, insists that theistic believers can be deontologically justified in their convictions and thus flouting no epistemic duties in the exercise of their faith. In point of fact, Plantinga thinks that this question of justification is so easy to answer that the real essence of any theory of knowledge certainly must not rest content with an answer to it. Likewise with questions of internal and external rationality. This is of course part and parcel of his wholesale rejection of justification with its deontological connotations, and rationality too, as the basis of warrant, that quality or quantity enough of which, when conjoined with true belief, constitutes knowledge. Not only is such justification rejected as inadequate for a warrant, Plantinga argues persuasively against the whole traditional package involving classical foundationalism, evidentialism, and internalism, opting instead for a conception of warrant involving proper function of our cognitive faculties operating in a congenial environment with its relevant parts aimed at truth. Clifford’s dictum that “it is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” is taken by Plantinga to be a stellar example of the classical package. Plantinga says, “Here we have the combination of deontologism and evidentialism. This passage doesn’t display classical foundationalism as well (it doesn’t say what the evidence must consist in), but no doubt Clifford thought that belief in God requires evidence.”

Plantinga notes, by way of James’s “The Will to Believe” is almost a companion piece to Clifford’s “The Ethics of Belief,” noting that a better title for James’s piece would have been “The Right to Believe.” In this suggestion Plantinga may well be correct, since the
right to believe (more specifically, the right to retain an already existing belief) seemed to be James's main concern. In a book review in 1875 of P.G. Tait's *The Unseen Universe*, James spoke of a "duty" to believe, holding that belief in a transcendent realm was something one may be duty-bound to hold if it would, for the believer, be a source of commendable action or peace of mind. It has been suggested that such duty terminology had its origins in James's contact with the work of Charles Renouvier, to whom James announced his indebtedness at the outset of *The Will to Believe*. The influence of friend and Cambridge philosopher Chauncey Wright seems to have changed James's mind about the propriety of duty terminology. After 1875, James no longer used such language: entitling the essay "The Will to Believe" and writing in 1904 to L.T. Hobhouse that his essay should instead have been called "The Right to Believe" (emphasis added).

The basic idea of the will to believe doctrine is that under certain conditions it is not contrary to duty to retain belief in a proposition that is not certain. The requisite conditions are the proposition's being forced, live, and momentous for the believer. Plantinga characterizes James as endorsing belief in a proposition for which one has no evidence for it, and suggests that in this way James tried to "make room for belief in God (even if not full Christian belief) by inserting it in the gaps of the evidence. The evidentialism and deontologism, again, are evident." Although James had made some movement away from the classical picture, he was still implicitly beholden to it, Plantinga notes. This seems right. I am less confident in Plantinga's claim, though, that James thought no evidence was required for the proposition in question. As will be made clearer, James—perhaps exactly because of vestiges of allegiance to the classical picture—insisted on continuing to speak in the evidentialist terms of his day and certainly believed that a proposition was not a living hypothesis unless it carried a great deal of evidential support.

Plantinga notes that earlier in his own career he was somehow both accepting and questioning what was then axiomatic: that belief in God, if it is to be rationally acceptable, must be such that there is good evidence for it. This evidence, he notes, would be propositional evidence: evidence from other propositions you believe, and it would have to come in the form of arguments. This claim was not itself argued for, he notes. It was just assumed as self-evident and utterly obvious. This view is what has come to be known as evidentialism (with respect to belief in God). Plantinga further notes that he failed to ask why justification is important. Further, why would rational justification require evidence? What is the connection between these? And if evidence is required, why would that evidence have to take the form of arguments? "I didn't raise these questions," he says. He continues:

It wasn't, however, because their answers were well known, so that further inquiry would be carrying coals to Newcastle. On the contrary: no one else asked or answered these questions either; instead, people turned directly to the arguments for and against theistic belief, taking it utterly for granted that this was the way to investigate its rational justification.

But then Plantinga notes out the one exception, the one philosopher who refused the fashionable answer to the meta-question: The exception was William James, whose *The Will to Believe*...was widely anthol-
ogized and took the radical line (as it was then perceived) that if religious belief is a live option for you, and a forced option, then believing even without evidence is excusable."

Recall that James thought that evidential considerations for and against theism were not decisive from the perspective of the purely logical intellect. This is instructive, because it suggests that the perspective of the purely logical intellect is potentially truncated and incomplete, only a partial means of recognizing life’s realities. If so, then James’s admission that there is not decisive evidential support for theism from one angle may be consistent with his also thinking that there remain other kinds of evidence for theism that can distinctly tip the scales in its favor, even if not to the degree satisfactory to the classical foundationalist. That theism is not conclusively demonstrated to be the sober truth by the evidence does not, in other words, remotely suggest that James considered theism and its alternatives to be on an epistemic par. In fact, James did not think they were commensurate in evidential support in the least (nor does Plantinga), and this is part of the significance of what he was getting at in discussing the liveness of the theistic hypothesis.

Hunter Brown has done the philosophical community a service by highlighting some of the heretofore neglected aspects of Jamesean liveness, not the least of which is a strongly noetic element in the believer. A proposition, to be living, must possess for the believer a great deal of persuasive power and intellectual plausibility. Liveness involves a strong inclination to believe a proposition. That this inclination is threatened for lack of conclusive evidential support has usually been interpreted to mean that alternative beliefs make comparable claims on the subject. But for James, there is distinct imbalance between religious options and alternatives, and it is only rationality construed narrowly and evidential considerations construed strictly that make it appear otherwise. Unlike its alternative, live theism involves a tenacious passioned need, engages one’s sympathetic nature in ways not to be found in a purely abstract analysis of theism, and generates an invigorating disposition, intellectual openness, and what James calls the ‘strenuous mood’. Depending on the expansiveness of one’s conception of evidence, such considerations by James may or may not be construed as evidentialist. If all evidence, for instance, needs to be propositional, then some of these Jamesean considerations would fall outside the purview of evidence. But if all evidence need not be propositional in nature, and can be essentially unanalyzable, something more immediately felt and intuitively grasped, then such Jamesean considerations can be incorporated into an evidentialist framework more expansive than Clifford’s classical and strict evidentialism. Such expansive evidentialism seems to accord with Pascal’s notion of the heart having reasons the mind knows not of, Emersonianism’s inner light, and the biblical conception of faith as being the “substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” Live belief, as Brown has demonstrated, arises from a complex interdependence of many influences, the neglect of which intellectual conduct risks creating only a facade of doxastic responsibility behind which subjectivity may continue to exercise a powerful and unregulated influence. Among the intertwining historical, cultural, linguistic, temperamental, neurological, and volitional influences constitutive of the delicate idiosyncrasy and labyrinthine character of the intellectual life include an incalculable number of
ences, rendering irredeemably simplistic those appeals to evidence *per se* or the deliver-
ances of a dispassionately judicial intellect.

One of James’s favored descriptions of moral knowledge was a kind of discernment or
divining power, a bringing to bear of all the resources at our disposal to catch a vision of
reality and truth. James’s expansive evidentialism is undoubtedly pushing in the direction
of nondiscursive, immediately experienced, intuitively grasped insight, which will no
doubt remind readers of Plantinga’s Reformed epistemology. According to Plantinga, the
reason why theistic belief, to be rational, justified, and warranted, need not be evidentially
supported by other propositions is because of the possibility that it is *basic*, and properly
so. Basic beliefs, on a foundationalist picture, are those starting-point beliefs on the basis of
which other propositions are derived and inferred deductively, inductively, or abductively.
They are not believed on the evidential basis of other propositions; one simply sees that
they are true and accepts them. *In Warrant and Proper Function*, Plantinga demonstrates the
way testimony, memory, induction, and a range of other parts of our cognitive systems
function to provide us with basic beliefs. Plantinga’s (and Wolterstorff’s, etc.) huge contri-
bution, of course, is the suggestion that theistic belief itself might be a properly basic belief.
If so, then to be justified it need not be grounded in evidential considerations at all, at
least classically construed. It can be justified, rational, and warranted if it is properly basic.
Plantinga’s story of how theism can be properly basic hearkens back to Aquinas and
Calvin’s notion that God has implanted within the human heart a capacity to know his
reality. If this faculty—the *sensus divinitatus*—is functioning properly, in accord with
Plantinga’s theory of warrant and proper function, then someone can come to believe
(and, if God really does exist, know) that God exists, and can do so nondiscursively,
onevidentially, and basically.

Plantinga’s account of the basicity of religious belief is quite different from James’s
account of the intuitive, nondiscursive belief in God’s existence. However, to grasp some
of the similarities here, recall that James presupposed that to be a living proposition a
belief has to be plausible and compelling for someone. There has to be a strong inclina-
tion to believe it, even after all the evidence both for and against it has been considered; a
“pre-existing tendency to believe,” as James put it. What he defended was the intellectual
right of those *already with* such pre-existing tendencies to believe a proposition to retain
such a belief, so long as there are no compelling arguments against it. Induction, the deliv-
erances of memory, testimony, etc. are all such that none of them can be noncircularly
established as reliable. Yet they are all also such that we possess a strong tendency to
believe them. This would seem to make the deliverances of such cognitive faculties con-
form to Jamesean liveness in this regard. Those examples are strategically selected:
Properly basic beliefs bear a striking resemblance to those propositions that conform to
Jamesean liveness. If a foundationalist theory of knowledge like Plantinga’s is found com-
to evidentially support the deliverances

to properly support the deliverances

of induction, testimony, etc. by emphasizing proper

when conjoined with the *sensus divinitatus*, can make

properly basic beliefs.

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in the company of contemporary epistemologists such as Plantinga, Brown insists:

James bears a closer family resemblance to a number of contemporary non-fideistic philosophers of religion than to the prudential fideists with whom he is more often associated. There is a significant resemblance, for example, between James’s position and the positions held by some contemporary philosophers regarding epistemically ‘basic’ beliefs. Discussion of what constitutes a properly basic belief is extensive. One common theme, however, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has put it, is that ‘the proper way to arrive at...a criterion of basicity is, broadly speaking, inductive’. This way requires looking to certain existing beliefs in the process of producing a criterion of proper basicity, rather than beginning with the criteria of classical foundationalism, for example, which Plantinga, Sosa and others have shown to have serious shortcomings. Norms of basicity should be developed from ‘below’, as it were, avoiding what William Alston has deplored as the ‘epistemic imperialism’ involved in the indiscriminate application of certain abstract standards of basicity. Such standards, he and many others argue, prematurely exclude claims to the reasonableness of certain widely existing beliefs, including theism, and dismiss prematurely the possibility of the proper basicity of such beliefs.  

It might be suggested that theistic belief thus construed does not involve basicity at all, but just quick inferences based on the evidence. The suggestion goes like this: Rather than nondiscursively, knee-jerkedly coming to believe in God’s existence when appeared to in certain ways, one is actually making an inference—an inference from, say, the profound sense of the deeply rooted moral nature of the universe to the conclusion of an omnibenevolent Creator as, say, the most plausible account of such moral phenomenology. However, both James and Plantinga wished to emphasize that the degree of assurance and conviction that this world is theistic far surpasses the level of belief characterizing the deliverances of natural theology. Bringing the notion of insight to the fore, James wrote about the distinctly noetic characteristics of religious experience in Varieties. Many putative religious experiences reported there are “as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experience can be,” and such experiences are reported in terms not just of personal edification or subjective feelings but of “genuine perceptions of truth.” A widespread claim among such reports is that the noetic element involved in such instances more closely resembles an increased breadth and depth of insight than forms of comprehension garnered through scientific inquiry, and that belief in the factuality of theism is related closely to these “states of religious insight into depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.” As an empiricist, James considered it his bounden duty not to neglect reports of such accounts in any thoroughly empirical study of the phenomenon of religious experience.

Plantinga, similarly, contrasts the confidence and sense of certitude characteristic of religious phenomena with the tentative, probabilistic inferences of arguments for religious truth. Plantinga has dubbed the sense of congruity or certainty, of rightness and truth, that accompanies religious phenomenology (as well as other basic-belief providers like memory, like evidence’ or ‘impulsional evidence’, showing his openness to a more expansive evidentialism potentially in line with that of James’s. Such evidence carries...
Comparison of Plantinga and James

with it an assurance of conviction that exceeds what propositional evidence can provide. Even supposing that a case can be made for, say, the historicity of Christ’s resurrection that renders such a contingency more likely than not to have occurred (a case that I believe can be made), that is not necessarily enough to generate belief (even in one who finds the argument convincing!), and certainly not belief of sufficient strength to satisfy the requirements of knowledge. Suppose that from a tub of 1,000 balls, of which 499 are white and 501 are black, I reach in and randomly select a ball. It is more likely, of course, that I grabbed a black one, but that is hardly any basis for a belief to that effect of any significant strength. Or put it this way: If the Bayesians are right that degree of belief can be measured by a willingness to bet, it would not be very rational of me to wager very much on that ball being black. Though the proposition in question (“A black ball was selected”) is more likely than not to be true, my conviction that it is true is nowhere near the conviction characteristic of religious phenomenology: a depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. Besides, it makes perfect sense that God, if he exists, would not structure our cognitive systems in such a way that only the most tutored evidentialists and skilled reasoners would believe in his existence on the basis of often complex philosophical argumentation. A sense of God’s reality universally implanted within the human heart, making knowledge of God available to king and peasant, educated and uneducated alike, certainly resonates more deeply with the message of God’s universal love as revealed in the Christian gospel. This account also, incidentally, makes considerable sense of the widespread belief in God’s existence throughout the world and human history.

A few additional points of similarity between James and Plantinga deserve emphasis. The epistemic theory being sketched here, with points of commonality between James and Plantinga, can be characterized as a version of naturalistic epistemology. In Warrant and Proper Function, Plantinga talks about three senses of such epistemology, the most stringent of which involves Quine’s “transmogrification of epistemology into descriptive psychology.” Whenever epistemology accords great weight in determining normative constraints on intellectual behavior on the basis of widespread psychological phenomena, the reminder invariably manifests: “We’re supposed to be doing epistemology, not psychology!” James was one of the first leading psychologists of course and the author of the magnum opus Principles of Psychology. He only naturally allowed his psychological interests, it can be argued, to dictate the form of his epistemological musings. The bulk of “The Will to Believe” can be thought of as an elaborate parenthetical exploration of the actual psychology of human opinion and an exploration of the relations among the many influences that really do produce our creeds. The picture that emerges is one of considerable complexity. But epistemology, contra Wittgenstein, is not the science of psychology. Fortunately, there are weaker versions of naturalistic epistemology that do not commit one to equating or reducing epistemology to descriptive psychology.

Both James and Plantinga expressed strong reservations about treating the religious hypothesis like a scientific postulate. In James this took the form of his denying that the function or purpose of religion is to solve our intellectual problems. James did not think the purpose of religion was to close questions, but to fire our imaginations and sustain questions as definitively closed. He did not consider scientific reasoning to be the most
pristine form of reasoning to which all other forms should aspire; to the contrary, he thought scientific reasoning was one kind among many others, and that the considerably more fundamental method of rationality than scientific reasoning was the creative imposition of form that was as much within the artist's purview than the scientist's. James was not a divine command theorist, for instance; most of James's moral concerns were bottom-up, less interested in moral metaphysics than moral epistemology. An ineliminable aspect of his moral epistemology, consistent with his radical empiricism, were the actual concrete historical processes by which we hopefully come ever closer to that maximally inclusive moral order in which James believed. He had little patience for any top-down, single-principled moral theory of any kind, theistic or otherwise, especially one that claimed to give the definitive explanation of something so rich as morality. He thought that the moral life necessarily requires not just theory but a dialectic between thought and history, the theoretical and concrete. In speaking of a transcendent moral order, and heaven as symbolic of our deepest moral ideals, he occasionally sounded a bit like a divine command theorist, but he was not. A large reason for this was his aversion to treating religion as a hypothetical postulate rather than a living experiential reality.

In Plantinga the analogous aversion takes the form of rejecting the practice of making theism's epistemic status dependent on how well it functions as the best explanation of various phenomena, that is, treating the religious hypothesis as a mere scientific-like postulate. He thinks that theism may well be a good or even the best explanation of various phenomena, morality included, but that even if it were explanatorily idle it would be no less warranted in the contingency that God exists. For again, religious belief for Plantinga is not warranted on the basis of abductive inferences. Such a foundation is neither necessary nor sufficient for the degree of belief religious knowledge requires. Robert Adams, too, in his latest book on theistic ethics, also echoes scepticism concerning science-inspired epistemologies as applied to either religion or ethics, epistemologies that outside the realm of an empirical analysis of the physical world have not yielded nearly so much fruit as science herself.

In Warranted Christian Belief, Plantinga distinguishes the question of the truth of the theistic hypothesis from the rationality or epistemic status of theistic belief. He calls the former the de facto question, and the latter the de jure question. One of his recurring theses is that answering the de jure question in the negative is difficult to do without presupposing a negative answer to the de facto question. Without assuming the falsehood of theism one is hard-pressed to argue for the irrationality, unjustifiability, or unwarranted nature of religious belief. In contrast to his former classical foundationalist self, he has now rejected internalism, taking the salient lesson from Gettier problems to be the inadequacy of an internalist model of justification as constitutive of warrant (even with the benefit of various contenders for fourth conditions). His theory of knowledge is now distinctly externalist, recognizing the connections between ontological assumptions about the way the world is and what strikes one as rational. If God does not exist, Plantinga admits that warrant is probably not enjoyed by religious believers, as there would be no sensus divinitatus the status of proper basicity, no functioning internal instigation of the Holy Spirit to seal knowledge of the distinctively Christian God on our hearts. But he also admits, in consonance with his rejection of classical foundationalism, that a story like his about justified, rational, and warranted de jure belief in God's
existence will by no means prove universally compelling to all rational persons. There is thus no logical guarantee to which we can be privy given our epistemological limitations that there is the requisite commensurateness between our *de jure* and *de facto* beliefs, between persons and world. It is just such absence of a guarantee of commensurateness that impels a classical evidentialist like Clifford to insist that the possibility of being wrong—even in the face of the most personally compelling phenomenological features of religious conviction—makes agnosticism the proper course. Better lose truth than risk error. Of course James wished to ask why this Cliffordian passional decision under the guise of a purely judicial intellect is any less a risk of error. In fact, James insisted that, if it should turn out to be the case that it is only by an experience of the world that accords epistemological significance to distinctive experiential states that a particular commensurateness between persons and world can be discovered, then the *a priori* discounting of those states would permanently preclude its discovery. As Brown makes clear, James found entirely dubious the propensity to beg such questions by automatically privileging conventional canons of evidentially responsible behavior without due regard for the challenge posed to those very canons by such a recalcitrant phenomenon as live theism. For James, whether religious phenomenology functions as evidence depends on whether there is this commensurateness between person and world. However, the potential evidence, *to be* evidence, does not require our knowing in advance that it is. To require that it did would be to say that knowledge requires knowledge that we have knowledge, and James explicitly rejected such a formula as reflective of the sort of rationalism and absolutism against which he valiantly labored. So for both Plantinga and James, if the world turns out to be a certain way, something like religious phenomenology can function evidentially for us, in a broad sense. This would raise the possibility that we can have a firm knowledge of aspects of divine reality without our knowing that we possess such knowledge.

Supposing that one is wrong about what he thinks to be divine reality, though, is it the case that there is nothing that could possibly undermine his conviction here and now? This question has been posed to both James and Plantinga in different ways. Cannot James's will to believe doctrine be used for all sorts of beliefs, without anything holding such liberal applications of his method in check? Similarly with Plantinga; does not his view entail that all sorts of eccentric views can be held to be properly basic? Are there no constraints in place to preclude such wishful thinking? Here James and Plantinga each has an effective answer, it seems to me, though their answers somewhat diverge, owing to differences in their conception of God and, to some degree, differences in what it is they are trying to defend. But each answer is worth mentioning. First, what was James's response to such accusations of his view lending itself to unchecked willful wishful thinking? In James's account subjective influences do not enjoy the degree of autonomy imputed to wishful thinking. James depicted subjective states as framed and limited in their influence by their interrelations within the unity of the many elements that together constitute immediate experience, and also by the many different kinds of consequences which flow from particular beliefs. Brown attacks the long-standing propensity to ignore this complex unity of immediate experience, and within such a position, subjective influences are integrally involved in an immediate, multi-
dimensional concrete relationship with the world which issues in results and consequences that cannot be responsibly ignored. The related prudential complaint that James gave primacy to personally desirable consequences in defending theistic belief fails to grapple with what consequences were in fact held by James to flow from live theism. The major consequence of theistic belief as James construed it is the strenuous mood, which suffuses the moral life with the note of infinitude and mystery. Living in the strenuous mood is to reject self-interest, identify with the disenfranchised, elevate the fervor with which the pursuit of moral discernment is undertaken, and heighten participation in the historical dialectic of theory and demand. The often trying, counter-cultural, and costly features of the strenuous mood bear little resemblance to easy conformism, personal advantage, or wishful thinking.

Plantinga in the past has had to contend with the “Great Pumpkin Objection”: If belief in God can be properly basic, then so can any other belief, no matter how bizarre, including belief in the Great Pumpkin. To which Plantinga’s answer is simply that just by recognizing that some kinds of beliefs are basic does not for a moment commit one to saying that all other kinds of belief are. Michael Martin recognizes that that objection is a non-starter, but still thinks that Plantinga’s view is radically relativistic. Plantinga dubs Martin’s criticism “Son of Great Pumpkin”: Take any possible community and any beliefs accepted as basic in that community. The epistemologists of that community could legitimately claim that these beliefs are rationally accepted in the basic way, on Plantinga’s view, according to Martin. But Plantinga replies by showing that the only respectable objection requires taking both “rationally” and “legitimately” as “warrantedly.” Now, does it follow that for any proposition p, if there were a community who endorsed p, these people would be warranted in believing that p is properly basic with respect to warrant for those in that community? No, for suppose that Plantinga’s model is true and the central claims of Christianity are true, there really is the sensus divinitatus, and the deliverance of such a process meets the conditions for warrant. It by no means follows that, say, the voodoo epistemologist is also warranted in claiming that voodoo belief is properly basic with respect to warrant. For such belief could be false or the product of all kinds of cognitive malfunction or could lack warrant for yet some other reason. Martin’s argument fails.

Plantinga applies the notion of defeaters to warrant, though, in raising a way in which a properly basic belief can be called into question. Suppose the following scenario: I see a person from a distance at a party whom I think is Brian, but later discover from a totally reliable source that he was elsewhere at the time. The belief I had earlier that Brian was at the party was a basic one, based in immediate sense perception. I did not infer that Brian was there on the basis of having seen someone whom I thought was him. Seeing that person was just the occasion in which I automatically formed the properly basic belief that Brian was there. The additional information I discover later serves as a defeater for my warranted belief that Brian was at the party. A defeater makes it the case that the belief that Brian was at the party can no longer be believed rationally. Plantinga admits that basic belief in theory is believed that in the past, hypothesis could in principle confront some intractable experi­

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Comparison of Plantinga and James

Before applying this set of epistemic insights and perspectives to Nielsen's challenge to theistic belief, a brief summary is in order. Classical foundationalism, Cliffordian evidentialism, and the notion of deontological justification pose no difficulties for theistic faith: Classical foundationalism is self-referentially refuting; Cliffordian evidentialism is as motivated by its own passionate subjective commitments that involve no less a risk of error as do Jamesean rights to believe; and countless religious believers, having weighed the evidence both for and against his religious hypothesis, have persisted in their intuitive sense that theism is the sober truth of the matter. As Plantinga has argued, they are thus subjectively justified, and if there is some objective duty that such believers are flouting, it remains unclear what it is. The question of rationality really comes down to the question of warrant, and something like Plantinga's account of warrant and proper function may well constitute at least the approximately right view of the matter. Such a theory of knowledge, on the assumption that God is real and has given us a faculty to recognize that, not only makes religious belief possible and permissible, but knowledge of God intended and normative. On such a picture, belief in God is properly basic, and this can be construed as consonant with evidentialism broadly construed, where religious phenomenology can be taken to be a kind of nonpropositional evidence. Such evidence is not assumed to be able to meet the standards imposed by classical foundationalism, however. But for those for whom the religious hypothesis seems to be true, even after all the evidence against it has been carefully weighed, such ongoing religious belief retains positive epistemic status. In fact, belief produced according at least roughly to Plantinga's story would be considerably stronger than belief produced by the deliverances of the discursive intellect applied to natural theology. The broadly empirical theory of knowledge adhered to here can be described as markedly externalist, which has for one of its entailments that if God does not exist, the religious believer is radically wrong. But if God does exist, then the religious believers who allow such belief to shape their view of rationality and the nature of the world—including morality—are likely radically right. Theism is not, however, to be treated by believers as a tentative scientific hypothesis that commands only as much conviction in its adherents as what can be generated by abductive inferences to the effect that theism best explains various phenomena. The account can also be seen as a mild species of naturalistic epistemology, but one that avoids the reductionism of stronger versions of it, and one that by according such weight to insight and the nondiscursive intellect carves out as much epistemic space for intuitions to satisfy practically the most ardent intuitionist. Although by this account the religious believer can be said to have knowledge that God exists if God exists, it remains the duty of at least a critical mass within such communities, given our current epistemic limitations (such as our inability to know that we know God exists), to critically examine religious believers to examine carefully and honestly the consequences produced by their conviction.

As to Nielsen's claim, recall his bold assertion that there is simply no evidence for Christianity in particular or theism generally. Most of what needs to be said has already been covered. For simplicity's sake, let us confine our attention to the latter claim, that...
there is no evidence at all to suggest that God exists. Nielsen insists that this is the case, repeatedly in fact. But it should be obvious by now that the mere assertion of such a bold claim does nothing to make it true, and next to nothing by way of dissuading thoughtful, committed theists from retaining their faith. What does Nielsen mean by evidence? Does he automatically preclude the potential nonpropositional evidence provided by Plantinga's impulsive beliefs or James's nondiscursive deliverances? If so, why? More specifically, why should a committed theist concur? Nielsen reminds me of those who claim that no right-thinking persons can possibly believe in God anymore, when it certainly seems like there are a great number of them! What could motivate such bold claims? Does Nielsen really think that every effort to show that God exists, every person for whom the existence of God seems as clear as anything, every piece of religious phenomenology, every deliverance of an expansively empirical study of religious experience, cumulatively add up to absolutely no evidence at all for the truth of theism? If he does, that strikes me as monumentally unlikely, so much so in fact that further discussion with him on the issue would probably prove pointless. For it would seem altogether probable that his atheological bias is radically skewing his capacity for fair-minded examination of the evidence. And if God does exist, and something like Plantinga's model is essentially right, then it is not the theist who is cognitively at fault, but rather it is one like Nielsen who is suffering from a sort of cognitive dysfunction. Though I point that out, it is not my goal to engage in a contentious epistemic tit-for-tat here. I would rather counsel that we proceed in the spirit of this passage from James:

We ought...delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live in speculative as well as in practical things.¹⁶

NOTES
5. Plantinga, more so than James, is interested in asking what sort of picture is the right view of epistemology on the assumption that theism generally and Christianity particularly is true. He is actually attempting to do more than just not give the presumptive benefit of doubt to atheism, but to give it to Christianity instead: at least to see what might follow from that. He can be understood as following his own advice that we give to Christian philosophers, namely, to allow their convictions to shape their doing of philosophy, and to do so unapologetically. Even if this was his motive, however, his arguments for his theory of knowledge were developed independently of those theistic considerations.
7. Ibid., p. 89.
8. Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁶For fascinating biographical details about Chauncey Wright's life (along with James and


11. Ibid., p. 70.


13. Ibid., pp. 144-145.

14. Consensus certainly does not establish truth, but widespread belief in a particular phenomenon may have for its explanation that there is something utterly right or obvious about the belief in question. Bertrand Russell once remarked, no doubt somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that a widespread belief is probably false given the general silliness of the masses: something of an inverted *ad populum* argument! The suggestion here has been quite the opposite: given the possibility of the *sensus divinitatus*, widespread religious phenomenology involving a natural conviction in God's existence may well be reliably indicative of the nature of reality after all.

15. Richard Swinburne is probably the most prominent example of a theistic evidentialist who seems committed to the classical model of justifying religious belief. Swinburne's work is worthy of much attention, of course, and it goes to show that abductive inferences can potentially be enlisted to the cause of according theism positive epistemic status. Swinburne's efforts at cumulative case-building are especially worthy of mention and accolades, for from the more narrowly circumscribed perspective of evidentialism a cumulative case argument for God's existence seems to hold the best hope for success. However, I will subscribe to an epistemic model much closer to Plantinga's than to Swinburne's, as it seems to resonate more closely, in my estimation, to the biblical revelation and to what philosophy can reasonably hope to accomplish.


17. Plantinga, op. cit., p. 357.

18. Plantinga actually extends his epistemic model to allow for the possibility of the entire panoply of distinctively Christian beliefs to be warranted as well. Most of that material was not included here, but mention of it is made now just to suggest that much more could be said to defend the positive epistemic status of Christian truth claims in particular.
