



BRILL

Why Groups Matter to Sociocultural Evolution

How Religio-Cultural Entrepreneurship Drove Political and Religious Evolution in Ancient Israel

Seth Abrutyn

Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Memphis, Memphis, USA

seth.abrutyn@memphis.edu

Abstract

Evolutionary concepts have a rich history in sociological theory, from Spencer to Durkheim, Marx to Weber. Recently, a neo-evolutionary revival has occurred in the social sciences, (1) bringing neuroscience into dialogue with age old sociological questions of origins; (2) considering the gene-culture relationship; and (3) constructing sweeping general theories of sociocultural evolution. Generally, the role collective actors play in the evolutionary process is taken for granted, as is the contingent, multi-directional, and multi-linear paths evolution takes when we focus on specific cases. The paper below examines the evolution of the ancient Israelites from the 8th–6th centuries BCE, teasing out a theory that supplements these other important areas. Specifically, it is argued that (a) institutional entrepreneurs are the collectives that *drive* sociocultural selection processes by innovating organizationally, normatively, and symbolically; (b) their cultural assemblages are sources of variation upon which sociocultural forms of selection, like *Spencerian* or *Marxian*, can work; and, (c) institutional spheres evolve and become “survivor machines” for the entrepreneur’s assemblage, imposing it on a significant proportion of the population and reproducing it across time and space.

Keywords

sociocultural evolution – institutions – entrepreneurs – ancient Israel – religion

Introduction

The study of cultural evolution, once at the core of the social sciences, has experienced somewhat of a resurgence in evolutionary and cognitive

psychology, biosciences, and the social sciences (Atran 2002; Richerson and Boyd 2005; Runciman 2009; Turner and Maryanski 2009; Franks and Turner 2013; Machalek and Martin 2016). The vast majority of this work falls along three axes: (1) the search for neurological architecture, be it hard-wired or a byproduct of some other hard-wired component of the brain, to explain the prevalence – and sometimes ubiquity – of a sociocultural phenomenon (Boyer 2001; Pinker 2006) – or, in some cases, the consideration of the relationship between the biogenetics and culture; (2) the effort to explain sociocultural phenomena, whether described as “memes” or otherwise, through (neo-) Darwinian principles (Blute 2010); or, (3) the construction of general theories of macro-level evolution that are descendents, though with notable advantages and advancements, of old stage-models (Nolan and Lenski 2010).

Undoubtedly, the insights offered by scholars in all three areas have been tremendous. Yet, in nearly all cases, these models either ignore or unsatisfactorily handle two facts: some aspects of sociocultural evolution, arguably, are driven by purposeful, active collective efforts (Boyd and Richerson 1992; Boehm 2008; Abrutyn 2015a) and the processes of selection, at some levels of social reality such as the group or, germane to our discussion below, the institutional sphere are driven by non-Darwinian selection forces (Verkamp 1991; Runciman 1998; Richerson and Boyd 2001; Turner and Maryanski 2009; Turner 2010; Turner and Abrutyn 2016). And, while scholars occasionally pay attention to specific historical cases to unpack the general processes from the unique ones (cf. Wilson 2002; Runciman 2009), too often scholars treat the end result of evolution – whether it be an adaptation like “big gods” that can act as an invisible panopticon in heterogeneous societies (Norenzayan 2013) or the evolution of differentiated institutions (Turner 2003) – as inevitable, and the process as unfolding. To supplement these perspectives, this paper proposes analyzing a concrete case to best tease out (a) the role that historical and socio-cultural contingency plays in cultural evolution, (b) how cultural innovations, as much as material innovations, lead to qualitative, meaningful transformations, and (c) the function purposive collective efforts play in driving evolution as well as how collective reactions can alter the course of evolutionary trajectories. To do so, evolution is conceptualized as operating on two levels: the first occurs on the group level, as new collectives seek to expand their influence over their members by creating and sustaining solidarity and, thereby, reproducing their unique group culture – or, what I call a *cultural assemblage* or bundle of (1) collective memory, (2) cosmologies, (3) behavioral repertoires meant to re-enact and re-present that memory, and (4) communicative devices meant to facilitate and constrain exchange and interaction; the second occurs when this group successfully carves out their own institutional space and, subsequently, “imposes” their cultural assemblage on a significant proportion of the

population. Evolution, in both cases, is the process by which groups develop cultural assemblages that create solidarity and, ultimately, lead to their survival and, in some cases, the qualitative transformation of macro-level social reality.

Thus, by emphasizing collectives we term *institutional entrepreneurs* – a concept inspired by Eisenstadt's (1964) cultural theory of evolution and Weber's *charismatic carrier groups*, an empirically useful model of sociocultural evolution may be proposed. A theory that considers the purposeful efforts of entrepreneurs, the reactions by elites and other strata in society, and the occasional success entrepreneurs have in reconfiguring the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space in ways that *qualitatively transform* the lived experiences and affectual, attitudinal, and action-based orientations of a significant proportion of the population satisfactorily explains the multi-linear, contingent, and multi-directional paths that evolution and historical change take. In doing so, we can show how the specifics matter, while also elucidating some of the general aspects of sociocultural evolution (variation, selection, and transmission) at the group-level. As such, the analysis speaks directly to evolutionary sociologists by avoiding the mistakes Boyd and Richerson (1992:183) warn against: ignoring the dimensions of sociocultural evolution that “is much like the guided, nonrandom variation of ‘Lamarckian’ evolution,” shaped by historical and sociocultural contingencies.

Rather than build the theory in the abstract, or with a series of closely related cases, we train our lens on a specific case: the evolution of the Axial Age (c. 800–200 BCE) Israelite religion; particularly the seventh and sixth centuries when there were a confluence of selection pressures (Abrutyn 2014a, b). Though this case may seem arbitrary, it is chosen for several reasons. First, religious evolution and the evolution of religion has been one of the most vibrant areas of research across disciplines (Boyer 2001; Atran 2002; Norenzayan 2013), as scholars try to assess why religion appears universal. The evolution of the Israelite religion challenges these perspectives as any account of how the Judean religion and then post-Exilic Judaism evolved requires attention to geopolitics (Alberty 1992), hermeneutics (Levinson 1997), and Weberian party and status conflicts (Smith 1971 [1987]). Second, the ancient Israelites were essential to Weber's (1917–19 [1952]) sociology of religion, and have thus received serious interest in more contemporary studies of the Axial Age revolutions (Eisenstadt 2004; Bellah 2011). Third, the Axial Age in which this case is embedded can be characterized as a moment of “parallel” evolution, or an historical period in which several (relatively) independent societies evolved in the same direction (Abrutyn 2014a). In this case, Israel, India, China, and Greece were the sites in which several similar qualitative cultural transformations occurred:

the emergence of critical, theoretic thinking (Momigliano 1975), self-reflexive texts (Goody 1986), and transcendental view of the sacred vis-à-vis the secular (Eisenstadt 1982) as well as organizational and normative changes that saw the religious sphere become a discrete physical, temporal, social, and symbolic entity vis-à-vis the polity and kinship (Abrutyn 2014a); it was during and, more accurately, after that the enduring “world” religions (Judaism; Hinduism/Buddhism; Confucianism/Taoism) and Greek proto-science/philosophy took purchase. Thus, the Israelites present several opportunities for developing a more coherent group-level theory of sociocultural evolution. Before considering this theory, we briefly consider some conceptual and methodological issues.

Considering the Bible

Methodological Concerns

We begin by considering the methodological concerns many sociologists might have towards using the Bible as data. Whenever one uses any historical data, there are choices and dilemmas; the Israelite case is especially troublesome. Consider sociology’s typical treatment (Weber 1917–19 [1952]; Eisenstadt 2004; Bellah 2011): the Bible’s historiography is rarely subjected to critical analysis, and the narrative is often taken for granted. To ignore the central debates in biblical scholarship is to invite severe errors into one’s research. At the core of these debates, all of which are touched by ideological, religious, and typical scholarly arguments, is the dating of the Bible; a debate which goes to the heart of the naïve acceptance of the Bible’s given historiography. On one pole, as would be expected, some maintain the veracity of the text’s chronology save for some minor adjustments (Zevit 2001). On the other pole, “minimalists” argue that the Bible was not likely written until either the Persian (550–330 BCE) period, with some pushing it back even further into the Hellenistic era (323–31 BCE) (Davies 1995, 2008; Lipschits and Blenkinsopp 2003). It remains an open question, then, just how useful the Bible is as data to draw sociological inferences.

A third position, and the one adopted herein, exercises caution: older and newer traditions that became core to the Bible likely emerged in the eighth century BCE in the northern kingdom of Israel, were carried to the southern kingdom (Judah) after Assyria (721 BCE) razed the north, and then went through a series of edits, additions, glossing, and redaction (Römer and de Pury 2000; Dever 2001; Na’aman 2002; Schniedewind 2004; Finkelstein 2013). As we shall see, this position finds strong support through biblical exegesis

and archaeology (van der Toorn 2007), and uniquely lends itself to sociological analysis (for other examples of social science using biblical texts, see Gottwald 1979; Tollefson and Williamson 1992; Abrutyn 2015b). Indeed, this position is both exemplary for fleshing out group-level selection, as well as benefits from an evolutionary perspective as we see the biblical entrepreneurs emerge, struggle with competitors, face exogenous and endogenous exigencies that threaten their survival, and are shaped by the conditions.

The analysis below focuses on just over two centuries of history: approximately the mid-eighth century BCE to the early seventh, late sixth century BCE. Several reasons inform this choice. First, little archaeological and extra-Biblical evidence supports the foundational Exodus-Moses story's veracity and, more importantly, supports the claims of a grand Davidic-Solomonic united kingdom in the 10th and 9th centuries BCE (Finkelstein and Silberman 2006). Second, intense empirical scrutiny has centered on both the Davidic/Solomonic period as well as the divided kingdom period that lasted until the Exile (587/6 BCE). As such, this scrutiny has provided enough evidence to sketch much of the historical narrative and, in some cases, posit clear conclusions.¹ Third, while the post-Exilic period would prove interesting, the seventh and sixth centuries are the peak period of the Axial Age and thus has potential comparative implications for future research.

Before we turn to the analytic portion of the study, the briefest of historical accounts is provided to situate the analysis, which will further flesh this account out; the interested reader can find much more detailed accounts in previously published work (Soggin 1999; Liverani 2005).

A Brief Historical Explication

In the mid-eighth century, what is Israel and Palestine today was split into a northern (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah). The north was far more culturally, politically, and economically advanced having been a satellite state within the Assyrian empire's geopolitical and economic sphere (Finkelstein 2013). Conversely, the south was a tiny political backwater, homogenous in culture, characterized by subsistence economies, and only occasionally involved in geopolitical conflicts. In the 720s, extra-biblical sources as well as the Bible

1 The reader should note that biblical scholarship has few consensus issues, and thus some of my arguments are hotly contested by a group of scholars called "minimalists" who contend that the Bible could not have been written and organized earlier than the Persian period and, perhaps, much later (Davies 1995; Noll 2013). Archaeology does not support this assertion, and, regardless, the goal of this paper is not to wade into this debate.

report that Judah agreed to be a vassal to Assyria in return for Israel's destruction; in 721, Sargon razed the north, deported thousands of people, repopulated the land with foreigners, and, literally, ravaged the human-made and natural environment (Smith-Christopher 2002). Within the two decades following this, archaeology reveals that the southern kingdom rapidly grew in size, heterogeneity, and economic and political complexity. Jerusalem alone appears to have doubled or tripled in population size, growing from a tiny hill village to an urban capitol (Liverani 2005). Three generations later, the southern kingdom would suffer the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians who would destroy the countryside of Judah, and then level Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple in 586 BCE. While the poorest Judeans remained in Judah, archaeology confirms the presence of elite Jews deported to Babylon living in relatively autonomous political communities (Pearce 2006). In 539, the Babylonian empire was finished off by Cyrus and the Persians, whose political policies for ethnic and religious integration eschewed deportation in favor of limited self-rule. We are told that the Jews were freed to return to Judah in 536 BCE – though, how many and how fast is in dispute – to reconstitute a Judean state. Finally, by the late fifth century BCE, a Jewish temple-economy (Ezra) and governorship (Nehemiah) emerged around the newly built second Temple (Edelman 2005).

The major actors driving evolution during this period are as such: King Hezekiah (716–687), who became the sole ruler of Judah following Israel's fall, and oversaw its rapid growth as it became a source of olive oil and wine for Assyria. As I will show shortly, the first real wave of religio-cultural entrepreneurship occurred during his reign. When Hezekiah died, he was succeeded by his son, Manasseh (687–642), who purposefully worked to undo much of his father's reforms; actions which unleashed the second great wave of entrepreneurship. This wave gathered true transformative force when it contributed to a coup that replaced Manasseh's son, Amon, with a then-nine year old Josiah (2 Kgs. 23–24). These entrepreneurs, unlike their predecessors, had gained full control over the state apparatus until, at least, Josiah died in battle in 609 BCE. In Exile, a third wave of entrepreneurship occurred that built from the previous two, but under unique structural and cultural conditions, set a new course for the evolution of the Israelite religion; and, eventually, Judaism.

During this period, we can see the role entrepreneurship and cultural assemblages play in shaping how the political and religious institutional spheres changed in ways that affected significant proportions of the population. In addition, these cultural assemblages clearly served as sources of solidarity for the survival of the entrepreneurs as well. We can turn now to the elucidation of key concepts.

Institutional Evolution

Institutions

The abstract. Institutions are defined herein as macro-level structural and cultural spheres constituted by individual, collective, and congeries of collective (e.g., fields; niches) actors that are empirically real in physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space (Abrutyn 2014b). Drawing from history, archaeology, ethnography, and sociology we can delimit the number of institutional spheres: kinship, religion, law, polity, economy, and education (Turner 2003; Nolan and Lenski 2010); in addition, several “secondary” spheres have become prominent in modernity, including science, medicine, art, sport, entertainment, and media. Institutional spheres vary in terms of their level of differentiation (Luhmann 1982) – e.g., number of actors and resources discretely related to the unique functioning of the institution – and autonomy (Abrutyn 2009) – e.g., the degree to which these actors and resources are physically, temporally, socially, and symbolically embedded within the specific institution. Differentiation implies structural differences, whereas autonomy refers to the existence of discrete cultural meanings attributed to the actors and resources associated with an institution; and, thereby, the belief that, say, political goals or motives are (ideally) different from their economic or kinship counterparts. A chief, for instance, is a differentiated political role whose phenomenological and objective existence cannot be detached from the kinship domain (Earle 1991), whereas a king and his court develop goals understood by both them and others as “different from other types of goals or from goals of other spheres or groups in society [in that their] formation, pursuit, and implementation became largely independent of other groups, and [are] governed mostly by political criteria and by consideration of political exigency” (Eisenstadt 1963:19).

One of key evolutionary processes at the macro-level is the concerted effort by entrepreneurs to carve out greater institutional autonomy or contract the autonomy of extant institutional spheres. Hence, as institutional autonomy increases, the broader society cannot help but be transformed as polity or religion become a qualitatively different experience and objective fact for more and more people. Conversely, when autonomy decreases, social reality also changes as boundaries between roles or organizations or goals blur. To be sure, institutions do not have “adaptive” functions, *per se*; biological evolution does have its limitations (Turner and Maryanski 2008). Rather, institutions become the spaces in which collectives can institutionalize their cultural assemblages and ensure that their assemblages will persist over time, be adopted

by greater swaths of the population, and influence the “steering” of a given society. Institutions, then, are “adaptive” first and foremost for the entrepreneurs whose assemblage is “selected” and institutionalized and allows them to reproduce themselves over an indefinite period of time; that is, success is defined in so far as entrepreneurs are able to secure structural and symbolic independence and carve out physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space for the realization of their interests and, within varying degrees, the collective’s interests (Abrutyn 2014a).

This type of sociocultural evolution is not primarily or, for that matter, always driven by competition (Turner and Abrutyn 2016). Rather entrepreneurs are historical contingencies, as Weber noted, capable of taking advantage of structural opportunities to innovate. Sometimes they come about through unintended consequences – e.g., elites “authorize” a secondary elite to resolve a problem and this secondary elite leverages their monopoly over the solution (Eisenstadt 1964); other times, they fill a vacuum left by environmental or ecological change; still other times, a faction breaks off or a new movement emerges to contest existing normative, symbolic, and organizational frames. In either case, institutions do not simply evolve on their own, but are a product of the concerted efforts of collective actors called institutional entrepreneurs.

The concrete. The Axial Age has been characterized as many things, one of which understands this moment as the first era in human history in which the religious sphere was disembedded or made autonomous vis-à-vis the polity and kinship (cf. Taylor 2012; Abrutyn 2014a). The case of the Israelites is no different (Abrutyn 2015a). This was the “big” evolutionary change, not the consequences like monotheism (which came much later than the Biblical narrative tells us). Indeed, the Israelite case during the seventh and sixth centuries throws in sharp relief the linear models general evolutionary theories often tacitly assume.

In the first wave of entrepreneurship, Hezekiah was faced with immense selection pressures to erect an autonomous political sphere to handle the vast array of new logistical and metaphysical problems. Qualitative change is difficult, especially considering the crude communication and transportation technologies of the late eighth/early seventh century BCE, which would delimit just how far reaching a distinct polity could penetrate the local reality of far-flung villages. State-craft was also delimited by the types of political “engineers” he could draw on to help build something basically from scratch. His decisions would shape the trajectory, as he drew from many of the northern scribes and priests who were refugees; they, in turn, leveraged this position of power to reinvent Judean religion. The second wave of entrepreneurs would

redouble these efforts, creating a sacred legal document that linked their claims to authority to the Mt. Sinai hierophany. During Josiah's reign, Judah's polity had become truly autonomous like other Near Eastern states. But, once again, it was founded not on a strong imperial political entrepreneur; it was built instead by an uneasy coalition of priests, prophetic circles, and scribes. Hence, when Judah was destroyed and the elite sent to Babylon in Exile, the institutional project shifted from reconstituting the old state if they ever were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Rather, the religious entrepreneurs in Exile invented the underlying logic behind a new Judah that had a distinct religious institutional sphere and a subservient, less autonomous polity.

Consider, for instance, the way autonomous polities generally looked during the first millennium BCE (Adams 1966; Yoffee 2005). Physically, temples were placed near palaces; temporally, major religious celebrations were rooted in the king's mythos of foundation, victory, and the like; socially, kings were reincarnated gods, high priests, or central to all public and private rituals; and, symbolically, the pantheon came to mirror the hierarchy of political and occupational life. Compare this to Ezekiel's (40–48) Exilic vision of the someday reconstituted Judean polity (Albertz 2003; Abrutyn 2015a): the Temple was to be physically demarcated from the Palace; the king's land was given to him by the priests and not vice versa; the priests' income was provided by the people and not the king; and the king was no longer allowed within the inner sanctuaries of the Temple, thus severing his role from the religious sphere. In short, a blue print for a religious domain from polity and kinship was created in exile.

Entrepreneurs and Cultural Assemblages

The abstract. Though few sociologists would consider Max Weber an evolutionist, he offers a group-level theory of social change which would be modified by Eisenstadt a half-century later. Eisenstadt (1964:384) remarked that evolution was predicated on the “presence or absence . . . of an active group of special “entrepreneurs,” or an elite” capable of innovating organizationally, symbolically, normatively, and technologically in ways that radically alter extant institutional structures or create new ones. Furthermore, in his introduction to Weber's work on charisma, Eisenstadt (in Weber 1968:xv-i) reminds:

Weber emphasizes . . . the charismatic group or band, be it the religious sect or the followers of a new political leader . . . [Hence] the test of any great charismatic leader lies not only in his ability to create a single event or great movement, but also in his ability to leave a continuous impact on an institutional structure.

What Eisenstadt suggests, then, is that institutional entrepreneurs provide the source(s) of variation that group-level selection can work on, and actively shape the process of selection as they act and react to environmental and sociocultural changes. They purposefully deal with real (or perceived) exigencies by trying to resolve them, whether for their own self-interested benefit and/or because they are concerned with a broader collective; their innovations become the structural and cultural changes, once institutionalized, that qualitatively transform human societies, organization, and action. But, they are not just passive sources of variation: collectives act on material and ideal interests, collective and self-serving interests, and with varying levels of power and access to human, material, and symbolic resources.

While some scholars have focused on the meme, or “items or packages of information transmitted from mind to mind by imitation or learning” (Runciman 2009:3) as the unit of evolution, it is at the institutional level that sociocultural evolution is most powerfully divorced from biology or studies in diffusion. Groups purposefully struggle to carve out institutional space from which they can organize how certain institution-specific resources (e.g., salvation) are produced and distributed and, thereby, impose a vision of reality on a significant portion of the population. Evolution is the two-fold process by which these groups create cultural assemblages in reaction to their environment and with the latent or manifest purpose of creating solidarity and sustaining their group; and, secondly, how effective they are at reconfiguring physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space such that their reproduction no longer depends just on solidarity but also on resource flows that favor their privilege (Abrutyn 2014b).

A cultural assemblage consists of (1) collective memory, including the “foundational” myth that legitimizes the group’s claim to authority and its relationship to the ultimate ends associated with the institution (Assmann 2011), (2) a plausible cosmology (Berger 1969), (3) behavioral repertoires that enact and re-present these memories in performance and ritual (Alexander 2004), and (4) communicative devices like *themes of discourse* and self-reflexive texts (Luhmann 2004) and generalized symbolic media (Abrutyn 2015a, b) that supply institutional actors with the linguistic abilities to talk about the institution, its actors, their motives, and, less explicitly, constrain what actual phenomenological encounters are “about.” Each of these elements contribute to the probability of within group solidarity – a key for the group’s survival over time. Unlike blind natural selection, groups can refashion their cultural assemblage to accommodate, absorb, and include non-members or rival factions, bringing members closer together and harnessing greater amounts of social power;

conversely, they can make these assemblages more exclusive and the cost of membership higher as a strategy of solidarity. In other cases, existing elites *elevate* or co-opt cultural assemblages of mobile, upstart entrepreneurs because they see integrative *and* regulative value in the novel normative, symbolic, and organizational frameworks.

The concrete. The ancient Israelites exemplify the idea of entrepreneurs and the process of entrepreneurship. First of all, they were not a unified cohesive bunch, though under the right exogenous and endogenous exigencies several factions would unite, temporarily, to form a relatively singular collective force. Four strata can be discerned: political entrepreneurs trying to stabilize and legitimize their rule in the face of internal heterogeneity and geopolitical pressure (from Egypt and the various imperial states of Mesopotamia) (Abrutyn 2015a, b); prophetic circles that may or may not have been led by the titular heads of the prophetic books, but which were clearly real entities (Blenkinsopp 1995); priests, some carrying traditions from the north and some in the south as rivals trying to co-opt the northern traditions (Na'aman 2002; Fleming 2012); and scribes who both served the religious and political actors, but in many cases were also linked to the prophets or the priests (Schniedewind 2004).

At least two points of continuity can be discerned. First, all three waves of entrepreneurs – and, members of each faction – articulated and legitimated their projects as *cultural projects* rooted in the *ideal interest* of preventing the pollution of the Judean religious center (Smith 1971 [1987]; Lang 1983). This belief was premised on the very real collective trauma experienced when Assyria destroyed Israel, threatened Judah, and later, when this threat was realized by Babylon and Judah was destroyed (Smith-Christopher 2002). The basic interpretive frame, despite contextual changes, remained the same: the polity's apostasy needed cleansing and protecting (Abrutyn 2015b). Second, while factions favored some traditions over others, a normative pattern of editing, glossing, redacting, and manipulating the texts appears to have been adopted by the priests, prophets, and scribes – perhaps the latter being the key occupational link between the three groups (Levinson 1997). This normative innovation allowed flexibility, despite the conservative nature of writing (Goody 1986), while also preserving certain traditions as foundational. Hence, while the outcome, underlying interests, and broader contexts of each project were highly divergent in many respects, the cultural assemblage retained certain continuous features that allow us to consider the Israelites as a singular case of religious evolution: The foundational mythos of the group – e.g., Exodus; Moses; the giving of the written law as more important than the oral law (Halpern 1991); the behavioral repertoires meant to re-enact and represent the foundational story, for instance the elevation of three holidays linked to

this narrative (Assmann 2011): Passover meal and pilgrimage, Simchat Torah, and Sukkot; and, the communicative tools for interpreting and reinterpreting the law and the traditions (Levinson 1997) – *mnemographic hermeneutics* that made the meanings flexible over time and space.

We are now ready to consider the how sociocultural selection processes, at the institutional level, differ from their biological counterparts, allowing us to explore more deeply the connection between environment and entrepreneurial variation, and, of course, the link between agency and selection. After wading through these historical details, a more robust account of the cultural assemblage that gradually evolved over the course of two centuries or more will be presented.

Forces of Selection

Darwinian evolution, of course, works through natural selection of phenotypes and the frequency of genes in a given population; hence, competition between phenotypes emerges as environmental changes makes some more fit than others. Some types of sociocultural evolution are not Darwinian (Runciman 2009). Turner and Abrutyn (2016) have identified three types, naming them after their sociological progenitor: *Spencerian*, *Durkheimian*, and *Marxian*. The former stands out from the others in that evolution is not a product of competition, but rather the purposive efforts to reconfigure structural (and/or cultural) aspects of society that, subsequently, has far-reaching, qualitative consequences. Selection pressures, like population growth or increasing internal heterogeneity, may be real, imagined, or invented by the entrepreneur; what matters is they try to alter the normative, symbolic, and organizational frames that guide everyday life. Durkheimian and Marxian selection, conversely, are driven by competition between groups over scarce resources, but retain a teleological character. Durkheimian selection occurs as groups struggle for human and material resources in a given niche, with niches being capable of only holding a certain number and density of groups (Hannan and Freeman 1977); competition ensues, in which evolution is driven by (a) specialization, (b) diversification, (c) new niche formation, and, in rare cases, (d) extinction and potential niche collapse. Marxian selection is more movement oriented: new collectives seek to usurp a niche and institute a new set of organizational, normative, and symbolic frameworks through conflict and force. Though we cannot explore each process or any one in full detail, with the Israelites, we are in a position to specify how Spencerian and Marxian selection looks on the ground.

Spencerian Cultural Selection: Disruption and Trauma

A recurring theme driving each wave of entrepreneurship was that of a sense of the sacred center being polluted because of continued apostasy (Abrutyn 2015b), the wrath of Yahweh or the supernatural lead to displacement, dislocation, and disruption and, the desire to transmit this shared collective trauma to legitimate projects rooted in creating new organizational, normative, and symbolic frameworks that prevented future apostasy and trauma. Though many evolutionary sociologists dismiss cultural or ideational factors as potential independent variables of evolution, the Israelite case cannot be divorced from the impact the northern kingdom's destruction left on all of the future entrepreneurs as either experienced and motivating or, in later waves of entrepreneurs, as a warning or as an interpretive lens to understand contemporary events (Gottwald 1962; Smith-Christopher 2002). Indeed, research on psychological and collective-cultural trauma underscores the intense cognitive disruptive force it has on individuals, as well as its contagiousness (McCann and Pearlman 1990) – especially when trauma is predicated on a persistent existential threat that leads to actual dislocation. Moreover, collective trauma, like any cultural narrative, can be intensified and made accessible to the masses by intellectuals (Eyerman 2011), is generally about national identities being threatened, destroyed, or in need of radical change (Neal 1998), and can be blocked or “reversed” by re-interpreting the events as calls to positively reconfigure the social world (Smelser 2004).

As noted above, Israel was destroyed by Assyria in 722–1. Assyria had a scorched Earth imperial policy of meant to erase the cultural history and memory of the vanquished and forcibly assimilate them (Jonker 1995). One need only consider the trauma refugees face in the modern world to begin to understand what the northern Israelites who left before, during, or after felt as a collective (and individually) as home, land, and even family were erased. Because the north and south were so close physically and, to some degree culturally, the existential threat Assyria posed would have reverberated throughout Judah and, for those who lived close to sacred sites like Bethel, it have been felt as deeply as their northern counterparts (Schniedewind 2004). In this sense, then, Assyria represented one of the most essential exogenous exigencies driving the evolution of the Israelite religion, as it not only drove a large contingent of refugees – many of which would have been classes of intellectuals carrying human capital to the capital-starved south – but it also became a real potential threat to the south as Judah was suddenly thrust into the Assyrian geopolitical system.

The existential threat and the causal logic assumed by prophets, priests, and other important actors is clear in the prophetic tradition, which, exemplified

by Hosea's "book," warns the people of following political leaders who ally themselves with foreign states instead of with Yahweh and who blame the fall of the north on Yahweh's wrath for apostasy (Blenkinsopp 1995). The reforms Hezekiah supposedly enacted would have been based on the fear of the south repeating the north's mistakes; the texts attributed to Josiah's much more radical reforms are clearly tied to preventing pollution and apostasy; and, finally, the experience of the exiles in Babylon would have easily made sense by drawing on actual events that had occurred not more than three generations prior and which were easily carried on scrolls. Indeed, during the Exile some of the most painful, emotional texts were written reflecting the sorrow some of the Exiles felt for losing their home (Gottwald 1962) and, more importantly, Yahweh's home (the Jerusalem Temple). In either case, each effort to make sense of the trauma led to new symbolic and normative frameworks that would reverberate organizationally and, ultimately, have lasting evolutionary consequences for interpreting the trauma of the future Diaspora, Inquisition, pogroms, and Holocaust, while retaining faith and, therefore, a degree of solidarity.

Spencerian Structural and Cultural Selection: Hezekiah's Reaction

While existential problems were the symbolic-cognitive backdrop throughout, there were pragmatic problems that demanded politically expedient solutions; solutions that archaeology seems to point to as not existing in Judah. Three exigencies faced Hezekiah. First, the influx of refugees presented a major problem on many levels. For instance, between the end of the 8th and the end of the 7th century, the size of Judah continuously grew from 49.9 to 115.2 hectares, while Jerusalem alone expanded from 5 to 60 hectares with estimates of the population exploding from 1,000 to 15,000 inhabitants (Liverani 2005). Estimates of demographic growth indicate that much of the explosion came from northern refugees overwhelming the southern population (Finkelstein 2013). Additionally, the north was more cosmopolitan and diverse, while the south was rural and homogeneous and, thus, alongside the growth in size and density came heterogeneity and more frequent and intense conflicts that local kinship mechanisms would be unable to resolve. Finally, while both populations shared some traditions, the northern refugees very likely brought with them texts that challenged local oral authority and would have to be integrated with southern cultural traditions (Fleming 2012). In particular, a portion of these scribes likely came from Bethel as it was located no more than 15 miles from Jerusalem (Schniedewind 2004) and appears to have been a holy site for northern Judeans (Smith 2004). Scholars believe that the oldest source materials would have been brought from this sanctuary including, among other

things, parts of the Exodus narrative – which decenters the “birth” of Israel and Judah, and the Amos/Hosea traditions (Na’aman 2002).

Second, archaeology points to rapid economic growth which means other key evolutionary forces became present: complex divisions of labor, foreign trade, growth of markets and meta-markets, and the growth of impersonal exchange that required generalized law to regulate and coordinate these transactions. Finally, besides these latter two exigencies putting pressure on an underdeveloped polity and its lack of administrative complexity, the sudden need to deal with diplomacy and foreign entities would have multiplied these other pressure. Hence, in the confluence of economic, political, and demographic pressures – along with the aforementioned metaphysical pressures – a sufficient case can be made that evolution was inevitable.

As an aside on solutions to these problems, what makes Spencerian selection so fascinating is that it is premised on both challenges and opportunities.² Under pressure Hezekiah enacted several cultic reforms meant to centralize governance (2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 36–39; Albertz 1992), and left his mark in the expansion of administrative apparatus – e.g., the number of public buildings went from zero in the 8th century to over 4000 in the 7th (Liverani 2005). In addition, he began the process of legitimizing his claims to authority as found in the works attributed to Solomon which Hezekiah purportedly authorized his “men” to collect and anthologize (Proverbs 25.1); and which were probably invented by these authorized religious entrepreneurs. And while we should keep in mind that these reforms were driven by political entrepreneurs and their interests more so than religious entrepreneurs (Chavel 2015), Hezekiah empowered a group of religiously-oriented actors whose normative and symbolic efforts would eventually become the basis of future entrepreneurship and, unanticipated by Hezekiah, the creation of an autonomous religious sphere shaped by a singular deity (Smith 1971 [1987]; Blenkinsopp 1995; van der Toorn 2007).

2 While viable solutions were generated, an important caveat about evolution must be highlighted. No solution is perfect or guaranteed to work. The fact that Babylon would destroy Judah a few generations ago is often overlooked because the Exilic community emerged with much of the cultural assemblage intact. It is equally plausible, as was the case of many groups deported – like the Philistines – that the cultural assemblage could vanish when physical territory was lost and assimilatory pressures imposed. Hence, the Israelites were “successful” in so far as they continued to survive, which causes us to consider their assemblage, but also reminds us how important chance and contingency are.

From Spencerian to Marxian Selection

Sometimes Spencerian evolution is less about creating new solutions and more about the powerful trying to resolve some of their own dilemmas and, unintentionally, being the purposive selective force by choosing one group's assemblage over another. In the Hezekian example described above, we see a political entrepreneur selecting some actors and their cultural assemblages over others, which presents a different selection mechanism: *elevation* (Verkamp 1991). On the one hand, Hezekiah chose the northern literate refugees over their southern counterparts, allowing him to engage in concerted state craft. On the other hand, because of political dynamics, elevation may set off other selection processes, generally, Marxian, as political power is a reward in itself and choosing winners over losers often accelerates social transformation.

Consider, then, that upon Hezekiah's death his son, Manasseh, rolled back the reforms his father had instituted and returned to a syncretic polytheism. In doing so, he would have ousted the most ardent religious entrepreneurs from his father's court, and like many other kings, chose those loyal to his administration. This act would have the double consequence of threatening the religious entrepreneur's ideal interests (we have no reason to doubt that they feared Yahweh's wrath in the face of apostasy) *and* their material interests: temples during this time acted as banks and not only ritual sites, hence competition in the form of Ba'alist priests and temples would have been a material threat as much as an ideational one (Lang 1983). Furthermore, given his treatment in the Bible (2 Kgs. 21), Manasseh likely used the state's apparatus to suppress Yahwists, and their sympathizers, likely emboldening them and reaffirming their commitment to Yahweh and to each other (Smith 1973 [1989]). Consequently, groups with varying political and religious interests coalesced around their desire to more radically reconfigure Judean society to both prevent the pollution Manasseh had returned to the societal center and to protect their own material interests. It is at this point that political entrepreneurship began to blur with religious entrepreneurship, as the latter were temporarily freed from their political duties and would likely focus on intellectual activities.

Shortly after Manasseh's death, his successor was killed and replaced with Josiah, a nine year old boy. As Marx would predict, group conflict and evolution is very often driven by violence that allows one group to impose its vision of reality on others. On Josiah's 18th birthday, he ordered a cleaning of the Temple upon which the high priest Hilkiah "found" a "lost" scroll (2 Kgs. 22.8), the ink on which was probably not yet dry when it reached the young king (Lang 1983). The scroll contained a set of forgotten laws presumably written by

Yahweh's own finger and given to Moses (Ex. 31.18); most scholars believe it was the core of Deuteronomy (12–26), which calls for centralization of the polity and religious sphere in the Temple through reforms of sacrifice among other things (Dever 2001; van der Toorn 2007). It was likely written during Manasseh's reign or during the earliest years of Josiah's reign, and represented a clear plan to justify the reform of Judah and Jerusalem in the image presented by the three major factions – priests, prophets, and scribes; all of whom were represented in the story in Kings (22:8–20).

A Final Puzzle Piece

Before we turn our attention to the cultural assemblage and why it was successful in ancient Israel and, eventually, as the underlying core of Judaism, it is worth examining one final key piece to sociocultural evolution hinted at above and elsewhere, but which has not received systematic attention: structural and symbolic independence (Abrutyn 2009). Abrutyn argues that institutional autonomy, and therefore institutional evolution, is most likely to happen when entrepreneurs are given some degree of freedom or independence from structural and symbolic constraints. These freedoms afford temporary space to innovate, articulate new frames, work to mobilize and coalition build, and gain a perspective only actors on the margins can acquire. The Israelite case provides clear examples of the various ways independence is created.

In Hezekiah's time, northern refugees were freed from their political and cultic responsibilities. As such, they could choose what they were dogmatic about, and were likely far more open to synthesizing older traditions with newer ones to create more plausible explanations for why Yahweh did what he did, as well as how to claim the south was the true bearer of Yahwism. In elevating these actors to help resolve his political exigencies, Hezekiah *authorized* their institutional projects; while this new position would have constrained their organizational, normative, and symbolic innovation, it would also intensified their claims to carrying special knowledge and skills and would have given them a new type of structural and symbolic freedom to be entrepreneurial (Eisenstadt 1964). A similar independence occurred during Josiah's reign, only this time the entrepreneurs acted boldly, and used Josiah to further their interests. It was also fortuitous that for the first time in Judean history, Assyria was no longer a threat, which meant state building and cultic innovation were totally free from international interference. Finally, though we have not examined it in detail, the exile was perhaps the ultimate example of how independence can be a powerful conditions of sociocultural evolution: in Exile, religious entrepreneurs were freed from political and cultic duties; in Van Seters' (2000:117) words: "*The*

pillars on which the identity of the people rested – king, Temple, land – had been knocked down. It was necessary to invent a new identity.” And thus, in these “open spaces,” some of the most amazing poetry (cf. Lamentations), prophesy (Isaiah 45–55), and reimagining of what a reconstituted Judean society could be (Ez. 40–48) occurred. To create autonomy, it would seem entrepreneurs need to experience “freedom” in order to rethink what may be possible.

The Israelite Sources of Solidarity

The core of each entrepreneur’s project was aimed at reproducing the cultural and structural supports for sustaining the group’s existence, realizing its goals, and, by extension, acting as the caretaker of the whole Israelite society. In considering the analysis above, we can conclude that there are four highly generalizable qualities defining the Israelite project when taken as a whole that may inform other entrepreneurs in other cases: (1) a flexible normative pattern of developing and disseminating culture, (2) a focus on carving out and protecting an institutional center, and (3) efforts to resolve conflicts between members. In addition, one unique feature which proved to be essential to the survival of Judaism and Jewish people for over 2,000 years *sans* political autonomy: (4) portable symbolic and normative mechanisms ensuring reproduction regardless of geographic constraints. All four of these aspects promoted solidarity among current members, presented plausible, appealing reasons for new members to join, and were capable of incorporating some external elements into the system without polluting the center. In turn, these assemblages proved successful by ensuring the continued flow of material and human resources to the entrepreneurial center, while dealing with the existential issues humans drawn to religion or, for that matter, any institutional sphere seek resolutions to.

Symbolic

At the heart of the Israelite innovations was a gradual, but complete and total re-imagination of what the *center* of society could be. All societies have a real, physical center (or set of centers), and a cognitive center (Shils 1975; Abrutyn 2014b); the two often overlap. The center acts like a group’s “‘center of gravity’ [comprised of its] system of authority . . . beliefs about the history and nature of the society, its relationship to certain ideal or transcendent entities or values, its origin and destiny” (Shils 1975:36–7); it fulfills the need symbolic creatures, such as ourselves, have for “an image of their world which gives meaning

to major events of existence and which explain why things happen and why some things are better than other things” (ibid. 38). The center is both a warehouse and repository of cultural and material things, the “home” of entrepreneurs firmly entrenched in their positions, and the nerve center that facilitates and constrains the production and distribution of resources – including people. Thus, building a center was at the heart of the first wave of entrepreneurs under Hezekiah, and with earnest, the second wave during Josiah’s rule; the latter of which sought to make the Jerusalem Temple the only legitimate place to sacrifice, which, for agrarian folks, meant a lot. In Exile, the need for a new center grew ever more pressing: on the one hand, the exiles had to reconcile how to commune with Yahweh *sans* physical center (temples were the literal home of deities), while on the other hand, many remained hopeful of a return and thus had to intellectualize how to reconstitute a new Judean center.

Building a center. All centers require a foundational myth; a story of collective identity. While Exodus is considered an older oral tradition, it became central to the Josian project and, even more so, the exilic community because it had to reconcile the objective fact that the actual center, Jerusalem and Temple, no longer existed. This need for a center appears to have led to the gradual selection and merger of traditions that came to be known as the Deuteronomistic history, which was capable of transporting “the exiled community . . . into a situation of origin” (Van Seters 2000:117), and could be used to “create a unified, centralized, essentially homogeneous cult and to assert the authority of Jerusalem, simultaneously political and religious, over all of Judah and Israel” (Levinson 1997:62).

All foundational stories require rituals that represent the past and which plunge actors into the ongoing, but invisible sacred time (Assmann 2011), allowing the ritualist to come into contact with the center, and therefore the ultimate ground. The center is often the space that is chosen as it was a site of *hierophany*, or where past humans came into contact with the sacred. For the Israelites, this would have been Mt. Sinai where Moses came face-to-face, so to speak, with Yahweh. The Deuteronomists had no misgivings that Jerusalem was Mt. Sinai, but they must have seen the story of Yahweh giving Moses the law (Ex. 24.3) as an opportunity to reconstruct the center and, like gravity, pull all sorts of resources towards them. First, they linked the discovered scrolls to the Exodus story – the term “the book the covenant” appears twice in the entire Hebrew Bible, in Exodus 24.7 when Moses writes down Yahweh’s laws, and in 2 Kgs. 23.2, which is the story of the discovered scroll. Second, they sought to inject pragmatic ritual to disrupt the lived reality of the people, and force them to come to the temple. In Deut. 12, sacrifice is prohibited everywhere *but* the

Jerusalem temple; in Deut. 16.11, 14, the Passover feast – which most scholars believe was a local family ritual – was elevated to a national holiday, synthesized with the Feast of Matzot (a pre-existing, unrelated national festival), and turned into an annual pilgrimage (Smith 1997). In a heterogeneous society held together by supra-kin institutions, the function of pilgrimage, as Turner (1973) noted, is to strip away local ties and identity, thrust the participants into *liminality*, and create a new *communitas*. Inventing new practices that were tied to the need to sacrifice as the principal means of communicating with the supernatural would have had a dual-function: on the one hand, it gave the urban priesthood a monopoly over the most intimate ritual exchange between the (regional) supernatural and the laity. On the other hand, it subtly reconfigured the symbolic landscape of Judah, pushing the local to the margins and elevating the center to a new position.

Meanwhile, the Exodus story, through annual re-enactment, came to be the national foundational story. This would allow the Deuteronomists to further graft new symbolic frameworks onto the cultural assemblage. For one, it appears as if they sought to elevate textual authority, and therefore their expertise, over oral authority. In Exodus 24, Moses strangely ascends Mt. Sinai three times. The first time, he comes down and reads Yahweh's law like a prophet would (24.3); the second time, he reads the words and then writes them down in "the book of the covenant" (24.7); the third time, Moses ascends (24.12–18) and several chapters later, we are told Yahweh writes the law with his own finger (31.18). This document would be placed into an Ark, which becomes a vessel of Yahweh apart from a real Temple or other physical building. The law, the ark, and the actors authorized to interpret and read it become hallowed; a portable sacred center, capable of thrusting one into the sacred temporal waters through weekly (Sabbath) ritual is created; and the idea that every father is responsible for telling the Exodus story annually to his children, makes the father and the child vessels of the sacred. It concomitantly *centers* and *decenters* Yahweh in not only the law and the ark, but the very family and, even, the individual soul itself.

Just how revolutionary this was is sometimes hard for contemporary people to fully grasp, as the phenomenological aspects of pre-capitalist religions seem a quaint relic. In the earliest religions, each tribe, village, and clan was assigned a deity or ancestor tightly linked to the cosmology of the people – or, the origins of the universe. With the rise of the first cities, this pattern was duplicated on a larger scale with city temples serving as the *literal* home of the deity. The sanctuary was his or her home, the priests his or her caretakers, the temple's land the god or goddess' source of subsistence, and sacrifice the act of

feeding and watering the gods. The cynical modern may dismiss this as either foolishness or subterfuge on the part of a priestly class bent on protecting its interests. But, there is no reason to not believe this is how people understood the relationship between the mundane and supramundane.

Normative (Internal) Change

While these symbolic innovations would prove fruitfully advantageous for different groups of Judeans carrying and espousing these traditions at various times in the long, slow evolution of Judaism, there may be no innovation more central to the flexible nature of the ancient Israelite religion than the *hermeneutical* techniques instituted by the Deuteronomic entrepreneur. As Levinson argues:

The concern of the authors of Deuteronomy was not to explicate older texts but to transform them. Neither “interpretation” nor “exegesis” adequately suggests the extent to which Deuteronomy radically transforms literary and legal history in order to forge a new vision of religion and the state

LEVINSON 1997:15

The authors of Deuteronomy employed the Covenant Code . . . not merely as a textual source but as a resource, in order to purchase the legitimacy and authority that their reform agenda otherwise lacked. The reuse of the older material lent their innovations the guise of continuity with the past and consistency with traditional law. The authors of Deuteronomy cast their departure from tradition as its reaffirmation, their transformation and abrogation of conventional religious law as the original intent of that law

LEVINSON 1997:21

The radical nature of this innovation cannot be overestimated. Not only did the aforementioned symbolic efforts *disrupt* the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic reality of the ordinary Judean through the prohibition of non-central sacrifice, imposition of a new calendar of festivals with prescriptions and proscriptions, and creation of a new legal code rooted in *textual* authority and not the older oral authority, but the normative innovations altered the way in which various entrepreneurial factions worked together and understood their roles. To be sure, competitions and rivalries did not subside, as Ezekiel’s efforts to invent a clear division of labor with winners and losers among the Temple

and country priests indicate.³ Yet, it appears that all the factions continued to approach the written traditions in the same manner, even as some became codified while heterodoxies emerged around other scrolls that had not yet found their way to the center.

Moreover, this was one of the first instances in which a religious entrepreneurs tried to “*effect major transformation* of all spheres of life – culturally, politically, theologically, judicially, ethically, and economically” (Levinson 1997:16), not through force, but through a radically new approach to writing, interpreting, and glossing. “Both the technique and the boldness of this hermeneutical transformation are remarkable. Such studied concern with textual authority, not to mention the immense meditation upon the law that it presupposes, is astonishing in seventh-century Israel” (ibid. 46). As scholars of cultural memory note, writing externalizes collective identity, memory, and experience (Assmann 2011). The technical aspects, thus, cannot be denied. But, this transformative effect also shaped the very normative framework that future entrepreneurs in the Exile and far beyond would use: the *sacred texts* – often thought of as immutable – became open to reinterpretation to make sense of changing environmental conditions, and when the “canon” was closed and the Hebrew Bible formalized, the Talmud and other texts continued the tradition of dialectics between the living religious elite as well as between the living and long dead entrepreneurs. Thus, the portability of the sacred and the re-centered/decentered Jerusalem cult and Temple were essential to understanding the evolution of the Israelite and later Judaic religion, but not without understanding the radicality and flexibility of the normative framework that came to facilitate and constrain the further development,

3 Without a doubt, an even more fine grained approach could elucidate Durkheimian processes which, for example, would have been present in the competition between northern and southern Yahwist priests. Eventually, this tension would be resolved by specialization: Ezekiel’s (40–48) Exilic treatise on the “ideal” Judean society gives Zadokites – or southern priests who supposedly trace their inherited office to David’s high priest Zadok – a monopoly over the Jerusalem Temple, sacrifice, and the central cult. Conversely, the country “Levites” or northern priests whose roots go back to the time of syncretic worship are entrusted with local pastoral care and education (Knohl 2005). In this sense, an organizational solution with normative foundations specifies what each group’s specialized functions are. To further illustrate how evolution is not as linear as many presume, one need only look several centuries ahead after Ezekiel’s organizational solution: the Zadokites, who many believe became the Sadducees were wiped out by the Romans in the first century CE while the country Levites, who were the antecedents of the Pharisees, survived and would become the Rabbinate (Neusner 2004).

transmission, and application of said symbolic innovations. In a sense, when the Rabbinate emerged sometime in the early centuries CE, the community could literally segment and disperse around the world, while each Rabbi and his community remained anchored by the annual *re*-presentation of the foundational myth in the Passover, the reading and re-reading of the Pentateuch, and the belief that Yahweh traveled wherever the laws were followed. Despite this, the flexibility of textual authority and its handmaiden, the hermeneutical techniques, lent each specific Rabbi the power to bend much of the religious symbols to the specific environmental conditions his community faced. What could be more evolutionarily advantageous, to a group with no political anchorage, than a religious doctrine capable of being both rigid and centered *and* flexible and decentered?

Discussion

The first thing that becomes clear, in the discussion of conditions and innovation, is that sociocultural evolution – on some levels of social reality – is Lamarckian-like; that is, new cultural variants, symbolic/normative/organizational frameworks, structural compositions, or whatever causes qualitative physical, temporal, social, and symbolic transformation is rooted in the purposive efforts of entrepreneurs. By no means are entrepreneurs in full control over the evolutionary trajectory, and as the case elucidated above implies the initial entrepreneurial project may not even be the final “author” of evolution as it may be adopted, co-opted, or synthesized by future entrepreneurs. In addition, unintentional consequences of early successes as well as the tendency for organizational goals to clash with greater success further muddy the linearity of entrepreneurship. Yet, it is ultimately the efforts of groups, shaped by their motives and interests, their “understanding” of the social and cultural dilemmas pressing against the group, their articulation of frames that both attack extant structural and cultural solutions while promoting their own, and their skill and chance in finding opportunity windows that allow them to gain purchase of necessary resources for mobility. And it is only with this mobility that they gain the ability to reconfigure the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic landscapes in ways that qualitatively transform the phenomenological experience, flow of resources, and mechanisms of integration and regulation for a significant proportion of the population; and, effectively, drive the evolutionary process.

In the face of heterodoxic, heterogeneous competition, the scribes, prophets, and priests could have just as easily broken down into warring factions.

The very fact that the finished product we have today reflects the compromises made between these different groups, even when one loses – such as the prophets whose charismatic authority rested on the power of oral traditions and which was negated in the Deuteronomic period by the elevation of textual authority. At the center of these compromises, to be sure, were sociological forces working to generate solidarity: on the one hand, external forces such as Assyrian/Babylonian threats, the spectacular political and military failure of the north, and the reversal of Hezekian reforms created common enemies in a Simmelian sense, while on the other hand, the growing monolatrous belief in Yahweh – expressed so fervently in Hosea and Isaiah – served as a socio-emotional and moral anchor in the Durkheimian sense. These extrinsic and intrinsic forces assuaged whatever clash of interests, permitting a “politics of responsibility.”

Underlying these conclusions is one simple fact: Yahwism, which would later become the monotheism of Judaism, did *not* evolve to integrate an urban, heterogeneous population as many cognitive psychologists maintain (Norenzayan 2013), as a psychoanalytic father-substitute as evolutionary psychologists argue (Kirkpatrick 2005), or as a byproduct of our neuro-architecture (Atran 2002). In fact, when we look at the specific process, Yahwism evolves as Durkheim would have predicted, and interaction ritual theorists have demonstrated (Collins 2004): Yahweh became the socioemotional and cultural anchorage of a politico-religious movement in its most desperate moment as a way of sustaining its membership, reducing differences between competing factions, and as an intangible reward for drawing non-members into the entrepreneur’s orbit.

One final point might be made: the near-constant disruption of entrepreneurial projects served as both a catalyst for continuous evolution and a safeguard against inertia that may have led to the “extinction” of the Israelite innovations. It was the destruction of Israel that drove the initial response; the loss of power following Hezekiah’s death doubled-down on this motivation; and, if this analysis were to continue temporally, we would find numerous disruptions preventing the full institutionalization of the Israelite religion in a way that would make it a conservative force – e.g., the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, the Exile, the return and the struggle for hegemony, Greek and then Roman imperialism, and the second Diaspora to name a few (Neusner 2004). Indeed, an historical contingency such as this underscores the need for analysis of specific cases to better construct general theories of sociocultural evolution: each religion, regardless of what aspect one believes to be ubiquitous and, therefore, *a priori* adaptational, evolves under different conditions, pressures, and agentic motives and interests and, thus, these adaptations are arrived at from different paths. As such, their cause is *not*

the same as their consequence or contemporary function (or, for that matter, our imposition of contemporary scientific interpretations of their contemporary function).

In short, then, the case of the ancient Israelites demonstrates the advantages of a group-level selection for understanding some historical cases, as well as for making evolutionary theory more accessible and useful for historical sociologists. It was argued that (1) institutional spheres, or the macro-level structural and cultural spaces patterning large swaths of individual, collective, and clusters of collectives goals, actions, emotions, and attitudes, are the unit of evolution – that is, they are the “survivor machines” of cultural assemblages that benefit one or more groups and which allow these groups to reproduce their own cultural patterns; (2) institutional entrepreneurs, or specialized collectives who successfully garner structural and symbolic independence, are the motors of evolution as innovators and as forces that reconfigure the physical, temporal, social, and symbolic space as they pursue their own goals and, often, collectively-oriented interests; (3) cultural assemblages, or the frameworks containing collective memories, plausible cosmologies, behavioral repertoires, and communicative devices created and carried by entrepreneurs and inscribed into institutional centers are the unit of selection. Evolution, at some levels then, is purposive, multi-directional (because of the reactions of other strata to entrepreneurs), and multi-linear (because of historical and sociocultural contingencies). Moreover, it rarely unfolds as a unified, coherent project. The Hezekian entrepreneurs were working with different conditions and contexts, and therefore interests from those in exile.

References

- Abrutyn, Seth. 2009. “Toward a General Theory of Institutional Autonomy.” *Sociological Theory* 27(4):449–65.
- . 2014a. “Religious Autonomy and Religious Entrepreneurship: An Evolutionary-Institutionalist’s Take on the Axial Age.” *Comparative Sociology* 13(2):105–34.
- . 2014b. *Revisiting Institutionalism in Sociology: Putting the “Institution” Back in Institutional Analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2015a. “The Institutional Evolution of Religion: Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Ancient Israel.” *Religion* 45(4):505–31.
- . 2015b. “Pollution-Purification Rituals, Collective Memory, and the Evolution of Religion: How Cultural Trauma Shaped Ancient Israel.” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3(1):123–55.

- Abrutyn, Seth, and Kirk Lawrence. 2010. "From Chiefdoms to States: Toward an Integrative Theory of the Evolution of Polity." *Sociological Perspectives* 53(3):419–42.
- Abrutyn, Seth, and Jonathan H. Turner. 2011. "The Old Institutionalism Meets the New Institutionalism." *Sociological Perspectives* 54(3):283–306.
- Adams, Robert McC. 1966. *The Evolution of Urban Society: Early Mesopotamia and PreHispanic Mexico*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Albertz, Rainer. 1992. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: From the Beginnings to the End of the Exile*. London: SCM Press.
- . 2003. *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2004. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." Pp. 1–30 in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Assmann, Jan. 2011. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Atran, Scott. 2002. *In Gods We Trust: Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bellah, Robert N. 2011. *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Berger, Peter. 1969. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. 1995. *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Blute, Marion. 2010. *Darwinian Sociocultural Evolution: Solutions to Dilemmas in Cultural and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boehm, Christopher. 2008. "Purposive Social Selection and the Evolution of Human Altruism." *Cross-Cultural Research* 42(319–352).
- Boyd, Robert, and Peter Richerson. 1992. "How Microevolutionary Processes Give Rise to History." Pp. 179–208 in *History and Evolution*, edited by M.H. Nitecki and D.V. Nitecki. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Boyer, Pascal. 2001. *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Chavel, Simeon. 2015. "A Kingdom of Priests and its Earthen Altars in Exodus 19–24." *Vetus Testamentum* 65:169–222.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Davies, Philip R. 1995. *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- . 2008. *Memories of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Dever, William G. 2001. *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It?* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.

- Earle, Timothy. 1991. *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eisenstadt, S.N. 1963. *The Political System of Empires: The Rise and Fall of the Historical Bureaucratic Societies*. New York: Free Press.
- . 1964. "Social Change, Differentiation and Evolution." *American Sociological Review* 29(3):375–86.
- . 1982. "The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics." *European Journal of Sociology* 23(2):294–314.
- . 2004. *Explorations in Jewish Historical Experience: The Civilizational Dimension*. Leiden: Brill.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2011. "Intellectuals and Cultural Trauma." *European Journal of Social Theory* 14(4):453–67.
- Finkelstein, Israel. 2013. *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*. Atlanta: The Society of Biblical Literature.
- Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. 2006. "Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30(3):259–85.
- Fleming, Daniel A. 2012. *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and The Reinscribing of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Franks, David D. and Jonathan H. Turner. 2013. *Handbook of Neurosociology*. New York: Springer.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1966. "Religion as a Cultural System." in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Banton. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Goody, Jack. 1986. *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gottwald, Norman K. 1962. *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*. London: SCM Press.
- . 1979. *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Halpern, Baruch. 1991. "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability." Pp. 11–107 in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, edited by B. Halpern and D.W. Hobson. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Hannan, Michael T., and John Freeman. 1977. "The Population Ecology of Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 82(5):929–64.
- Jonker, Gerdien. 1995. *The Topography of Remembrance: The Dead, Tradition, and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kirkpatrick, Lee A. 2005. *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Knohl, Israel. 2005. "Axial Transformation within Ancient Israelite Priesthood." Pp. 201–24 in *Axial Civilizations and World History*, edited by J.P. Arnason, S.N. Eisenstadt, and B. Wittrock. Leiden: Brill.

- Lang, Bernhard. 1983. *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*. Sheffield: The Almond Press.
- Levinson, Bernard M. 1997. *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lipschits, Oded, and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Eds.). 2003. *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Liverani, Mario. 2005. *Israel's History and the History of Israel*. London: Equinox.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1982. *The Differentiation of Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2004. *Law as a Social System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Machalek, Richard and Michael W. Martin. 2016. "Evolutionary Theory." In *The Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory*, edited by S. Abrutyn. New York: Springer.
- McCann, I. Lisa and Laurie Anne Pearlman. 1990. "Vicarious Traumatization: A Framework for Understanding the Psychological Effects of Working with Victims." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 3(1):131–149.
- Michels, Robert. 1911 [1962]. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: Free Press.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo. 1975. "The Fault of the Greeks." *Daedalus* 104(2):9–20.
- Na'aman, Nadav. 2002. *The Past that Shaped the Present: The Creation of Biblical Historiography in the late First Temple Period and after the Downfall*. Jerusalem: Ornah Hes.
- Neal, Arthur G. 1998. *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century*. New York: ME Sharpe.
- Neusner, Jacob. 2004. *Transformations in Ancient Judaism: Textual Evidence for Creative Responses to Crisis*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Nolan, Patrick, and Gerhard Lenski. 2010. *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Noll, K.L. 2013. "Presumptuous Prophets Participating in a Deuteronomic Debate." Pp. 125–42 in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography*, edited by M.J. Boda and L.M. Wray Beal. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Norenzayan, Ara. 2013. *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pearce, Laurie E. 2006. "New Evidence for Judeans in Babylonia." Pp. 399–411 in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period*, edited by O. Lipschits and M. Oeming. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Pinker, Steven. 2006. "The Evolutionary Psychology of Religion." Pp. 1–11 in *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion, volume I*, edited by P. McNamara. Westport: Praeger.
- Richerson, Peter, and Robert Boyd. 2001. "Institutional Evolution in the Holocene: The Rise of Complex Societies." Pp. 197–234 in *The Origin of Human Social Institutions*, edited by W.G. Runciman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- . 2005. *Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.
- Römer, Thomas, and Albert de Pury. 2000. "Deuteronomistic Historiography: History of Research and Debated Issues." Pp. 24–141 in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiographic in Recent Research*, edited by A. de Pury, T. Römer, and J.-D. Macchi. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Runciman, W.G. 1998. "The Selectionist Paradigm and its Implications for Sociology." *Sociology* 32(1):163–88.
- . 2009. *The Theory of Cultural and Social Selection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schniedewind, William M. 2004. *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shils, Edward A. 1975. *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smelser, Neil J. 2004. "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma." Pp. 31–59 in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser, and P. Sztompka. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Smith, Mark S. 1997. *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- . 2004. *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Smith, Morton. 1971 [1987]. *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*. London: SCM Press.
- Smith-Christopher, Daniel L. 2002. *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Soggin, J. Alberto. 1999. *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*. London: SCM Press.
- Stark, Rodney. 1999. "Micro Foundations of Religion: A Revised Theory." *Sociological Theory* 17(3):265–89.
- Taylor, Charles. 2012. "What Was the Axial Revolution?" Pp. 30–46 in *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, edited by R.N. Bellah and H. Joas. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Tollefson, Kenneth D., and H.G.M. Williamson. 1992. "Nehemiah as Cultural Revitalization: An Anthropological Perspective." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 56:41–68.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 2003. *Human Institutions: A Theory of Societal Evolution*. Lanham: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- . 2010. *Theoretical Principles of Sociology, Volume 1: Macrodynamics*. New York: Springer.
- Turner, Jonathan H., and Alexandra Maryanski. 2008. "The Limitations of Evolutionary Theory From Biology." *Sociologica* 3:1–22.
- . 2009. *On the Origins of Societies by Natural Selection*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

- Turner, Jonathan H. and Seth Abrutyn. 2016. "Putting the "Social" Back into Evolutionary Sociology: Reconsidering Spencer, Durkheim, and Marx's Models of "Natural" Selection." *Sociological Perspectives*. DOI: 10.1177/073121416641936.
- Turner, Victor. 1973. "The Center not There: Pilgrim's Goal." *History of Religions* 12(3):191–230.
- van der Toorn, Karel. 2007. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Van Seters, John. 2000. "The Deuteronomist from Joshua to Samuel." Pp. 204–38 in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deteronomistic History*, edited by G.N. Knoppers and J.G. McConville. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Weber, Max. 1917–19 [1952]. *Ancient Judaism*. New York: Free Press.
- . 1968. *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, David Sloan. 2002. *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yoffee, Norman. 2005. *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zevit, Ziony. 2001. *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Sythesis of Parallactic Approaches*. London: Continuum.