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BOOK REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

Belonging, Identity, and Identification

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Abstract

Reviewed: *Kinship, Law and Politics: An Anatomy of Belonging*. By Joseph E. David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 156. $110.00 (cloth); $88.00 (digital). ISBN: 9781108606967.

Belonging and the sense of belonging are vital factors of human identity, loyalty, and roles, the expectations we have of ourselves and of one another. The boundaries, social and sexual, that all human societies deploy to protect personal privacy and personal and group dignity are modulated by our sense of belonging and often by a complementary sense of difference. The bonds of affinity and the corresponding sense of belonging that modulate our norms and roles are perhaps most visible in the striking colorations they assume in the eyes of outsiders viewing the mores of traditional societies. But the vital necessity of a sense of shared identity is all the more critical when social identities are fragmented by faction, tribalism, or racism, or when anomie and alienation have sapped the sense of commitment that energizes collaborative efforts in any human group. Few dimensions of personal outlook and awareness are more powerful in communal, legal, or political settings than the sense of belonging, that curiously shared identity by which we bind ourselves and one another to shared goals and values in some version of the sense that we are one.

Keywords: ownership; solidarity; incest; legitimation of authority

If I were a linguistic determinist, I'd be inclined to say that the reticence of the Hebrew language about ownership provokes an inhibition about having. I might then move on to find linguistic causes for the biblical ban on permanent ownership of land, the restrictions against permanent slavery, and the prohibitions against returning fugitive slaves to their masters and against land ownership by priests (*kohanim*) and Levites. I might even find linguistic causes for the well-known eclipse of place by time in the Hebraic repertoire of holiness. And I'd note the inhibition about ownership so noticeable in Hebrew, ancient as well as modern, where one says *I have* periphrastically by saying *yesh li*, literally "There is to me." But my inclinations are more Maimonidean than Whorfian, so I'm more inclined to see an Israelite ethos reflected in the Hebrew language than practices molded by the linguistic usages of Hebrew speakers.[1]

[1] Readers familiar with the work and influence of Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941) may be less so with Maimonides, and those at home with Maimonides may be less familiar with the impact of Whorf. Whorf's deep study of languages, beginning with biblical Hebrew but extending to Meso-American languages like Nahuatl, the Uto-Aztecan language family, Mayan hieroglyphics, Hopi, Pima, and Tepecano, led him to propose that languages bear distinct categoreal schemes—a thought championed by exponents of linguistic relativism and linguistic

Almost all the occurrences of the principal parts of the verb *to have* listed in Strong's concordance (*hast*, *hath*, *have*, *having*) are auxiliary verbs.[2] And many of the rest do not refer to ownership. So, *u-v'yado ritzpah* (Isaiah 6:5) is "having a live coal in his hand" in some translations. But the Hebrew uses a circumstantial phrase, literally, "and in his hand, a live coal," suitably rendered in the Jewish Publication Society's translation as "with a live coal." English versions may speak of "having" fins and scales as required in aquatic creatures to be eaten. But the Hebrew uses the familiar periphrastics *yesh lo* and *ein lo* (for example, Deuteronomy 14:10).[3]

Hebrew does have words for ownership and mastery; *ba'al* and *kanah* are prominent among them. But when *ba'al* does not designate a pagan god, it often refers to a husband—and there is a telling repudiation of notions of ownership when God tells Israel, his metaphoric bride, in token of her renewed intimacy with her Creator: "You will call Me 'my husband (*ishi*)' and no longer 'my master (*ba'ali*)'" (Hosea 2:16).[4] When *ba'al* does mean *owner*, responsibility is typically at issue (such as in Exodus 21:34, 36; 22:7). And in Judges (19:22–23), the sacred responsibility of a householder toward his guests shines out against the lurid light of the atrocity recalled. Indeed, the term can bear a sense of caution: "One who loves money never has enough. This, too, is folly! The more wealth the more come to consume it. What good is that to the owners (*l'va'aleiha*) beyond the spectacle?" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). It is not linguistic poverty here, but rather moral rebuke that dims the éclat of having. And, of course, in New (or Modern) Hebrew, *ba'al* often becomes a mere way of forming nouns, like *-er* in English. Thus *ba'al egrof* is a responsible party, *ba'al berit* is an ally, *ba'al mo'ah* is a brainy person, *ba'al ta'am* is a tasteful person, *ba'al yisurim* is a sufferer, *ba'al lev* is a good-hearted person, *ba'al mahashavah* is a thoughtful person, and *ba'al m'lachah* is an artisan.

Kanah means *get*, *acquire*, or *buy*. So, *kinyan* does mean property or goods. In Ezekiel (38:12–13), it's used in parallel with the cognate *mikneh*, cattle (cf. the Latin *pecunia*). The Ugaritic cognate tells us that the verb may once have meant created or produced. But in Hebrew that sense is reserved for God, who is called *koneh shamayim va-aretz*, Creator of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:19, 22; cf. Deuteronomy 32:6).

Belonging is the thread that links the lapidary chapters of my friend Joseph David's *Kinship, Law and Politics: An Anatomy of Belonging.* The book traces the varied senses of belonging from searches for sameness, early and late, to Ibn Khaldūn's trenchant fourteenth-century disquisitions on *'asabiyya*, to the fraught issues of (corporate, ethnic, or

determinism but rejected by defenders of cultural and linguistic universalism. In fairness to Whorf, those implications of his work may have been overstated both by the exponents and the adversaries of such relativism and determinism. In describing my own approach here as "more Maimonidean" I allude to Maimonides's view that languages, although conventional, reflect rather than simply determine the ethos of their users. See Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, trans. Lenn E. Goodman and Phillip Lieberman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming), III 8, 3.14b (The forthcoming translation is based on the critical edition of the original Judaeo-Arabic text, prepared by S. Munk, *Le Guide des Égarés, traité de Théologie et de Philosophie par Moïse ben Maimon, publié pour la première fois dans l'original Arabe, et accompagné d'une traduction Française et de notes critiques, littéraires et explicatives* [Guide to the perplexed, treatise on theology and philosophy by Moses ben Maimon, published for the first time in the original Arabic, and accompanied by a French translation and critical, literary and explanatory notes], ed. S. Munk [Paris, 1850–1866]). As for categoreal schemes, philosophers, poets, rhetoricians, and, yes, advertisers, work freely to devise or remodel such schemes, despite the acknowledged structuring felt in more conventional settings, where common usage rigidifies familiar patterns. See Lenn E. Goodman, *In Defense of Truth: A Pluralistic Approach* (Amherst: Humanity Press, 2001) 107–08; see also the case study I present in Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006) 102–08.

[2] James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Authorized and Revised Versions Including the American Variations; also Brief Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original, with References to the English Words* (1894; repr. Nashville: Nelson, 1977), 441–63.

[3] *Yesh lo* and *ein lo* are idiomatically translated as "he has" and "he has not," as the words (too literally) say "there is to him" and "there is not to him."

[4] All translations of passages from the Bible are mine.

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confessional) identity, whether self-perceived or externally projected, that so drive and disrupt political thought and action globally today. Beyond these themes, David addresses kinship and its underbelly in efforts to wrestle with the idea of incest. He calendars Nahmanides's thirteenth-century attempt to anchor (and confine!) the prescriptivity of biblical law to the land, and then to Cicero's ideal of a universal law, Philo's natural law, and the medieval subsumption of belonging under "a three-dimensional matrix of law, religion, and identity" (80). David's wide-ranging study reaches its climax in reflections on the family as a locus and focus of belonging.

David opens his account etymologically, treating "belong" as embracing "an inner semantic connection between two modalities: a given aspect and an aspirational one." He sees a "delicate ambiguity" in the term, "which simultaneously implies that belonging is about *being* a part of something and about *longing* to be part of something. The concept of belonging thus discloses a restlessness, or persistent motion, inherent to human existence, that is captured between belonging that is and belonging that is wished, or imagined, or ought to be" (4). A delicate exegesis, too. The longing is there, attested by the *OED* and the *American Heritage Dictionary*.[5] But the "being" may be fanciful. The *OED* suggests "be" here is perhaps just an intensifier. Cognates of *belong* include *linger*, *longing*, and *lunge*, but also *longshoreman*, for the core semantic notion is spatial—longitudinal in fact—with roots and tendrils in images of length and lengthening. A good part of the ancient idea of belonging suggested alongsideness, conjuring images of one thing lying beside another. But that does not obviate David's aspirational sense. For physical images of fit line up nicely with today's also aspirational notions of fitting in.

Belonging, as David sees it, began with sameness. He sees that in the biblical narrative of Adam's creation: God had said, "It is not good for a man to be alone. I will make a helpmeet for him" (Genesis 1:18). Adam had named every beast and bird he saw, but among them all he had found no counterpart, no helpmeet (in William Tyndale's brilliant rendering of *'ezer ke-negdo*). Now, in Eve, Adam saw "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). Adam was looking for his like, and here is the sameness David was looking for. Woman and man, as I argue elsewhere,[6] are existential counterparts, Genesis teaches, not alien to one another.

David bypasses the moral the Torah draws from its myth: "Therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife." Blood, the verse declares, is *not* thicker than water! One's first loyalty is to one's spouse. But David's theme is borne out by the words that cap the verse: "and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The complementarity of the sexes is voiced concretely (for the Torah is not fond of abstractions). The solitude and solitary life that might have been is displaced by a duality—not of master and slave, as in Hegel—but of man and wife, the first human solidarity and the elemental community, figured forth anatomically, cooperatively, erotically, and procreatively. The two, however, do not lose or fuse their identities but complement and enrich their individuality in their union with one another.

Giving equal time to pagan myth, David turns to the androgynous globes that Plato played with in the *Symposium*,[7] a burlesque, as I read the story, fathered on Aristophanes, returning the compliment the comic playwright had paid Socrates by caricaturing him as a Sophist in *The Clouds.* The rabbinic Sages[8] cleanse the tale of its homoerotic tailings: The lost other halves here are only of the other sex. But what interests David is the idea of sameness, which he creatively connects with Aristotle's thought that friends are second selves and the

[5] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. "del-," 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000).
[6] See Lenn E. Goodman, *Creation and Evolution* (London: Routledge, 2010), 57.
[7] Plato, *Symposium* 189e–91e.
[8] See, for example, *Babylonian Talmud*, Berakhot 61a.

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Stagirite's account of parental love in terms of parents' identifying with (the interests of?) their offspring. Aristotle's thought that only a god or a beast would live alone, parallels God's value judgment in Genesis that is not good for a man to be alone.

From here David hops to Ibn Khaldūn. *'Asabiyya*, Ibn Khaldūn's term for the spirit that holds together a tribe, family, or dynasty, derives from the Arabic word for nerve or sinew. *'Asabiyya* is a rather more active and aggressive counterpart to *philia*, also construed as a social glue, whether in friendships or *poleis.* Like other forms of belonging that David analyzes, *'asabiyya* has both objective and subjective dimensions: One might see oneself and be seen by others as belonging to a certain group in the nesting hierarchies of groups best known to Ibn Khaldūn from his work among Arab and Berber tribes and the urban dynasties they spawned, groups living in North Africa and the Middle East in often unstable rivalries and symbioses. The operative force of *'asabiyya*, as Ibn Khaldūn stressed, had its rise, ebullience, and strength, decline, decay, and fall, in the expectations of those appraising it or dependent on it, as to the readiness of the members of a group—family, clan, tribe, or regime—to stand by one another, defensively or expansively.

In tribal life, where institutions and professionalization were as sere as the environment that made nomadic pastoralism a way of life, *'asabiyya* was no mere mark of dignity but a vital necessity. The virtues of self-reliance, which in practice meant *group* reliance, called for in desert life, made bedouins, as Ibn Khaldūn put it "closer to being good" than city folk. The efflorescence of practical (and impractical) arts and sciences in urban settings made city populations more refined than the nomads they might see as primitives. But it was from the desert that dynasties arose. For the goal of *'asabiyya*, Ibn Khaldūn argued, was rule: Desert tribes sought wealth and power, comfort and luxury. Their targets were the cities, where the gradual but inevitable slackening of *'asabiyya* let pride subsume its role and led inevitably to a fall.

Guided by his North African experience, Ibn Khaldūn traced the cycle of rise, decline, and fall, confirmed by what he learned from Plato's *Republic* and the Torah of Moses, which his rare learning had opened up to him.[9] The cycles of history rewarded and punished communal virtues and vices in ongoing cycles of judgment, making the laws of social and political nature the vehicles of accountability in an inexorable pattern. For, as he put it, quoting the Qur'ān (33:62, 35:43, 48:23): This is God's way (*sunnah*), and you will never find a change in God's way.[10]

Notionally, the core of *'asabiyya* was a family bond: Common descent demanded loyalty, in prosecuting common goals and defending group credibility. But kinship bonds will stretch only so far before they thin and break. A shared idea, Ibn Khaldūn explains, can reach much further and (in principle, at least) last much longer. Here we encounter what I have called the sublimation of *'asabiyya.* The catalyst, we might say, or the banner, as Ibn Khaldūn had seen it, was typically religious—although ethnic and social grievances and agendas readily fused with religious appeals. Ibn Khaldūn balks at applying the model emergent from his pioneering social theory to the miraculous rise and conquests of imperial Islam. But he is well aware of less global movements that informed the sociopolitical and anthropological model he built from his study of history. The Almoravids and Almohads are prime examples, but Ibn Khaldūn knew many more, often from the inside. For he was, like Machiavelli, not just a theorist but a player and a schemer—and, like Machiavelli, never long able to keep his seat on a winning mount in the politics of his day.

[9] See Lenn E. Goodman, "Ibn Khaldūn and the Immanence of Judgment," *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 3 (2019): 737–58; Lenn E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 201–239.

[10] Ibn Khaldūn quotes this line repeatedly in the *Muqaddimah*: Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 1:173, 2:99, 134, 377.

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Kinship is often the cynosure—or the bugbear—of anthropological and sociological study. The diversity of mating patterns and conceptualizations of incest and consanguinity have fed the claims of cultural relativism at least since the days of the ancient Sophists and Skeptics; and the complexity of their patterns and rationales opens fertile fields of speculation to theorists. The biblical laws regarding incest seem to me meant to safeguard human dignity behind barriers of privacy about personhood, graphically described in terms of nakedness, the biblical emblem of vulnerability. Thus Joseph, calling his brothers spies, says they have come "to see the nakedness of the land" (Genesis 42:9). Another abstraction avoided. The arch-crime of Ham is looking on (and telling of!) his father's nakedness when drunken Noah has passed out exposed. Shem and Japhet dutifully cover up their father, taking care not to gaze at him in his compromised state (Genesis 9:21–23). The biblical laws against incest (Leviticus 18:6–18, 20:11–12, 14, 17, 19–21) are all phrased in terms of exposure, aiming to protect the marital intimacy they construe—and thereby construct.

The ancient rabbis, following the lead of rabbis Eliezer (late first century to early second century) and Akiva (d. 135), anchor the Levitical sexual laws in Genesis 2:24, "therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, and they become one flesh."[11] They take "his father" here to mean his father's wife or sister; "his mother," his mother's sister—if not herself. They read "cleave unto his wife," to anticipate the ban in Leviticus (18:22) against sexual relations between males—since these involve no "cleaving." They gloss "unto his wife" as prefiguring the ban on adultery. In "one flesh," they see foreshadowed the prohibition of bestiality (Leviticus 18:23) since man and beast can produce no offspring. Leviticus itself is clear enough in what it forbids. But the Sages, seeing the incest laws as universal, use their exegetical powers to spread the rules to all humanity, under the Noahide laws.

As David notes, Christian exegetes may read "one flesh" christologically, and some see it as holding the marital bond immutable: "What God hath put together let no man put asunder" (37). But Christians also cite Genesis 2:24 to ground (and explain) the Levitical laws. So, Basil of Caesarea (329–79 CE) argues that man and wife, having become one flesh, have each acquired new kin: "a man who marries a woman, thus becoming one flesh with her, concurrently becomes the brother of his wife's sister" (31). The amalgamation of identities and relations, as David notes, persisted in the "catenary" norms of the Karaite sect, yielding networks of consanguinities so ramified that Karaites were soon hard pressed to find any lawful mate in their communities. The outcome, as Leon Nemoy, the great scholar of Karaism showed, was a unique reform in the generally conservative nexus of Karaite norms.[12]

Notions of "shared selfness," found in the phrase "one flesh," David shows, underlay the expanding web of Karaite incest prohibitions. Where the church read "one flesh" as producing a union "that leaves behind no remnant of the independent individuals," Karaites saw a "far more dynamic and fluid," bond, open to change—but also to "amalgamation" (32–33), a model of kinship subject to conduction, David writes—or, echoing Mary Douglas, "contagion."[13] Divorce, remarriage, and polygamy remained possible. But a stepsister or even a milk sister was notionally one's sister.

The theory that husband and wife become one body or even "one soul," did not literally fuse or confuse discrete identities. The continued possibility of divorce is ample evidence of the metaphoric force (and weakness) of the rule. Issues of coverture remained. But that was

[11] *Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 58a; cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 9:5, where, as David notes, the prohibition is expanded to include one's mother, father's wife, a married woman, a maternal half-sister, another male, and a beast.

[12] See Leon Nemoy, "Two Controversial Points in the Karaite Law of Incest," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 49 (1978), 247–65.

[13] See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1–7.

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true under Rabbanite as well as Karaite rules—and in non-Jewish norms. The notion of shared identities was a rationale for the incest laws. But it did not touch their grounds.

When the catenary concept and practice collapsed among Karaites, deeply criticized as early as the eleventh century by the Karaite authority Yosef ha-Ro'eh, a new rationale swiftly arose. In place of shared selfness, we now hear of shared descent, pictured, as David notes, "in botanical terms, with reference to roots and flowers (50)." So the Karaite scholar Yeshu'a ben Yehudah (ca. 995–ca. 1070) wrote: "mother and son are root and flower, and the mother's husband and his daughter are root and flower" (50). Maimonides, hardly a Karaite, used like language when seeking to lay out the rational grounds of the Torah's incest laws:

> Linking root and branch—by sex with one's mother or daughter—is an outrage. So sex with them is forbidden, root with branch or branch with root, or both with a third party, exposing themselves to that other. That is why it is forbidden to sleep with a woman and her mother, or with one's father's wife, or one's son's: In all these cases the nakedness of root and branch are exposed to one another. But siblings are like root and branch. And since a sister is forbidden, so are a wife's sister and a brother's wife: That would sexually link to a third person two others who are like root and branch.[14]

Maimonides echoes the biblical talk of nakedness here, glossing it in terms of a concern for intimacy (*marā'at al-hayā*). But what is perhaps most striking in this passage is not his use of metaphors like those used by Karaites but his apparent expectation that the imagery of root and branch will suffice in affording the rational warrants of incest laws.

Karaite talk of "one flesh" and then of root and flower does suggest that the incest prohibitions of the holiness code in Leviticus are seen, somehow, as "selfing," as horticulturalists call it. And incestuous relations are widely banned with a vehemence best matched by the anatomical stringency that forestalls self-fertilization in flowers. Abhorrence of incest is widespread and strong enough that even ardent opponents of abortion may voice reservations about cases of rape or incest, pairing the two as monstrous in themselves. Selfing, we now know, annuls much of the benefit of the costly enterprise of sexual reproduction; and it heightens the risks of homozygosity, blunting the benefits of a diploid genome by canceling much of the usefulness of a back-up gene to make good the flaw in a defective chromosome. We cannot say that our ancient forebears knew the risks of homozygosity, although monstrous births and grave congenital illnesses (increasing generationally as the coefficient of inbreeding rises in a population, as animal breeders have long known) may have given our forebears an inkling. We do know that small, isolated societies limit such risks with norms of exogamy even among tribal moieties.

Beyond institutions like ritual royal (or noble) sibling incest, well known in pre-contact Hawaii, ancient Egypt, and elsewhere, where *mana*, wealth, or other appurtenances of lineage are jealously conserved, incest prohibitions are nearly universal. The norms run deep enough that efforts to make sense of them fall out markedly secondary to the norms themselves: Abhorrence of incest is the given, meant to explain the rules. So the "explanations" offered become epiphenomenal: At rock bottom is the felt abhorrence for whatever is seen as incest, leaving the variance in norms still to be explained—and leaving social scientists and others often to throw up their hands and give up on explanations, branding incest rules taboos, as if that label had any meaning beyond suggesting (in the manner of the ancient Skeptics and Sophists) that such rules are arbitrary.

Time and space permit discussion of just two more episodes in David's wide-ranging and engaging saga, which touches on thinkers as diverse as Martin Luther, Baruch Spinoza,

[14] Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, vol. 3, chap. 49, 3.116ab.

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Nietzsche, Moses Mendelssohn, Hermann Cohen, and Leo Strauss. The first of these is Nahmanides (also called the Ramban, 1194–1270), a Catalonian Jew of Gerona, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, to give his name in full. A committed traditionalist, also trained in medicine, and a pioneer of Kabbalah, he sought, without success, to mediate in the controversies that swirled destructively around Maimonides's rationalism, juridical and philosophical.

In 1263, Nahmanides was challenged to defend Judaism at Barcelona before King James of Aragon, the royal court, and numerous churchmen, against charges brought by Pablo Christiani, a Jewish convert, who hoped that defeat of the Jews' eminent intellectual leader would provoke mass conversions among them. Rising to the challenge, provided he be granted free expression, Rabbi Moses seemed on the verge of victory when the Christian populace grew threatening. The Jewish community begged him to desist, but he persisted, unwilling to retreat. When the four-day ordeal had ended, Nahmanides was the clear victor, and the king awarded him three hundred gold pieces, saying he had never seen a man argue so well for a wrong belief.

The victory, tragically, proved pyrrhic. For when the Dominicans claimed victory for the Christian side, Nahmanides published his own detailed transcript of the debates.[15] As a result, he was charged with the capital crime of blasphemy, although urging that he had recorded nothing in his account that he had not stated in the disputation itself. Exiled and then banished permanently, he made his way to Jerusalem, where the synagogue he founded thrives once again the heart of the reunited Old City.

Nahmanides's attachment to the Land of Israel (and loyalty to the land of his birth, where he had left behind his home, the community he had led, and his sons), shines through poignantly in his striking doctrine that "belonging to the law" as David puts it, "is mediated through territory rather than derived from one's religious identity" (60). Nahmanides's premise "is encapsulated in his use of the biblical idiom 'the law of the god of the land,'" drawn from the biblical account of the fate of the peoples brought to Samaria by Sargon II of Assyria (r. 722–705 BCE) to replace the Israelites he had exiled. The new settlers were attacked by lions until they learned to worship "the god of the land"—although they also worshiped other gods, and some even persisted in burning their children as offerings to their gods (2 Kings 17:24–30).

Nahmanides's territorial idea of halakhic authority was unprecedented among the ancient rabbinic sages. His own prooftext reaffirms of the exclusivity of God's covenant (2 Kings 17:34–39). Yet David finds early hints of an alternative model of divine rule. At Deuteronomy 32:8, the Masoretic text reads:

> When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
>
> He partitioned humankind and set the boundaries of peoples
>
> According to the numbers of the children of Israel.

The Septuagint and the Qumran text of this challenging passage has it that the allocation was according to the number of the angels, or the children of God. Those variants would be unknown to Nahmanides. But David sees an undercurrent of "polycratic" theology here. Nahmanides's commentary does see an inner, deeper meaning in the verse, one that he credits to Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089/92–1167), poet, grammarian, exegete, mathematician, astrologer, and ardent defender of astrology: God (on Nahmanides's reading) assigned rule

[15] Readers of English will find the full text in Charles Chavel, trans., *Ramban (Nahmanides): Writings and Discourses*, 2 vols. (New York: Shilo, 1978), 2.653–96.

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over the nations of the earth to his diverse constellations, while he himself, as God of gods, was regnant over all. Critically to Nahmanides, God ruled over Israel directly. Following the astrological idea that discrete terrestrial domains are governed under diverse celestial signs, Nahmanides reads the verse by reference to *the land* of Israel. Hence his comment on it: "For each portion (*helek*) of the world here below there is a corresponding domain (*helek*) on high. The sense of 'according to the numbers of the children of Israel' is that the image of Jacob [that is, Israel] is inscribed on the Throne of Glory. This is a great mystery, as attested by (the words that follow), 'for the Lord's portion (*helek*) is His people' (32:9). This is Israel's great distinction: 'Not so did He for any other nation' (Psalms 147:20)."[16]

David sees Christian overtones in Nahmanides's gloss of the verse since Crusader rhetoric takes up the idea of the Holy Land as God's heritage (65). But astrology is a closer fit, signaled, by Nahmanides's talk of a deeper meaning, a marker characteristic of his Kabbalistic excursions. All the same, the feudal models David cites (64) are clearly in play. Zion, for Nahmanides, is "the axis mundi," God's demesne. Here (and not elsewhere!) all the laws of the Torah apply. We Israelites hold fast to them even in exile—to be ready for the coming of the Messiah, when we shall return to our land and live under God's law and no alien (or secondary!) power (69).

David's analysis of belonging comes to a climax when he traces ideas of the family and their evolution from premodern thoughts of parent-child relations "perceived as a pure and prime reflection of the ideas of authority and subjugation" (108)—and their political counterpart, in Rousseau's calling the family "if you will, the first model of political societies" with the leader as father, and the people "like the children"—all being born free and equal but giving up their freedom "only for their own advantage" (107).[17]

Rousseau's "if you will" betrays his recognition that his model is a bit forced. And the same might be said of David's portrayal of the treatment of family and the state. Leaders, even in pre-modern times did not enjoy "a pure and prime" authority of subjugation, although some doubtless wished for such authority. Nor did the led typically see their rulers as their parents or submit to them in pursuit of subjugation. Perceived interests doubtless played a larger role, as Rousseau suggests.

The analogy of state with family, as David sees it, can be an appeal in behalf of state authority or, at times an appeal for the preservation of the private family as the bastion of political stability writ large—underscored by appeals to the laws of God and those of (human) nature (108–09). David sees such appeals persisting in the West from Robert Filmer, the seventeenth-century defender of the divine right of kings down to (and beyond) American figures like Ronald Reagan, whether the state is meant to draw its authority from the analogy or is called on to protect the family on the grounds that its own stability depends on the integrity of the family.

Plato here becomes a witness for the durability of the analogy. For he "aspired to do away with the private family" because, for him "control of the family and control of the political echelon are essentially identical" (109). But that judgment mingles Plato's abortive political project in Syracuse with his far more enduring intellectual project in the *Republic.* For the notional abolition of private families for the Guardians in *kallipolis* was integral to the abstractions Plato needed in the thought experiment of the *Republic* to bracket conceptually the claims of genealogy (and gender) as criteria of readiness to rule: If the search for justice is the quarry in the *Republic*, seeking to uncover the basis for the legitimation of authority as the rightful locus of decision making (nowadays called the setting of priorities), then such

[16] My translation. See also Charles Chavel, trans. *Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on the Torah*, 5 vols. (New York: Shilo, 1971–1976).

[17] Quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. and trans. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), book 1, chapter 2, at 156.

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all-too-familiar prejudices must be set aside, allowing thoughtful judgment take its proper place, whether in the individual or in society.

David ends his study with a treatment of John Locke's riposte to Filmer, tracing the breakdown of the parent-state analogy and recentering the norms of parenthood: "The view of parenthood as trust is steadily growing, pushing aside the traditional view of parenthood as a kind of ownership" (115). Where communists condemned family values as corrupt, fascists tried to co-opt, appropriate, and exploit the power of the family bond in the (presumed) interest of the nation and the race (116–17). In a liberal context, by contrast, David writes, the family becomes the apolitical locus not of authority but of "family life."

There is fresh air here, welcome not least for the sense of liberation from the stifling corporatism that communism and fascism share. But there are risks as well—salient in the anomie so readily resultant from the neglect (not negligible in John Rawls) of the powerful biological and psychological investment of parents in and responsibility for their children's (and one another's) health and welfare, educationally, morally, and spiritually.

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