

We Are Family:

Deuteronomy 14 and the Boundaries of an Israelite Identity

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Through an engagement with the dietary prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14, this article seeks to provide a corrective to the dominance of constructivist perspectives within recent reconstructions of Israelite ethnic identity. Drawing upon research in the field of cognitive psychology and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, it argues that the Priestly vision of ascribed membership in the entity Israel is framed by an essentialist mode of ethnic cognition which was widely diffused within Israelite society. The identification and isolation of this particular brand of classificatory logic accounts not only for the persuasive potential of the dietary prohibitions themselves, but in the process challenges the theoretical status quo on ethnicity amongst biblical scholars.

I

As a recent review paper has confirmed (Miller 2008), it is the constructivist or instrumentalist perspective that has come to dominate discussion of ethnicity and identity within Biblical scholarship.¹ Highlighting the situationally malleable and context dependant nature of ethnic identification, its emphasis upon the beliefs, perceptions and understandings of ethnic actors is widely heralded as reflecting a newfound sense of maturity within our discipline. Yet while social construction of this type has proven a very fertile metaphor in recent years, inspiring a large body of work that has transformed our understanding of the mechanics of cultural heterogeneity, the efforts of biblical scholars to translate the anti-essentialist critiques of Anderson's "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) or Hobsbawm's "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) into the lexicon of our discipline serves only to expose an explanatory flaw at the heart of the constructivist project.

While the self-consciously *emic* orientation of constructivist theorising has provided a welcome antidote to the positivist epistemology that has distracted much recent biblical scholarship, it has simultaneously conditioned a generation of scholars to spurn essentialist descriptions of ethnic groups as objects of analytical study. Although in many ways this is entirely consistent with the emphasis upon the constructed, the contingent and indeed conditional nature of ethnic identification originally championed by Barth (Barth 1969), such posturing would appear to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater (Gil-White 2001: 515). For while scholars working within the constructivist tradition have certainly forged an intellectually and politically liberating style of analysis (Fischer 1999: 473) which emphasises the dynamic and provisional contours of social reality, recent events would appear to contradict the essentialist critique that anchors their project. Rather than embracing the fashionable and politically correct terminology of contemporary social scientific thought, a host of ethnic and national movements across the globe appeal to precisely those elements of their culture which they perceive as being the most natural, the most enduring, and consequently, the most authentic.² For the participants *in*, as opposed to the observers *of* this trend towards refragmentation and retribalization, what matters is *not* the instrumental manipulation of symbols and forms in the pursuit of material interest, but rather those primordial attachments that stem from the "givens of social existence" (Geertz 1963: 108-9); speech, custom and most significantly, blood. In what Gil-White has referred to as an "embarrassment to the rigours of

constructivist theorising” (Gil-White 2001: 515), the belief that membership in a particular ethnic group is based upon non-negotiable, necessary and sufficient conditions of membership would appear to be a self-evident world-view for many.

It is the enduring vitality of such *Gemeinschaft*-like sentiments then, the recognition that ethnicity is *not* exclusively to be understood as something which is negotiable and/or ambiguous but something which, in equal measure, must be understood as fixed and immutable, which provides the analytical lens through which this paper engages with the dietary prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14. Taking as its initial point of departure Douglas’ illumination of the ritual and symbolic function of the dietary laws, this study seeks to problematize the exclusive correlation she drew between types of social organization and the types of religious and cosmological systems they support (Hendel 2008a: 8). Central to this task is an explication of a concept wholly central to, yet largely implicit within, Durkheim’s sociology; that of classification. Drawing on recent research in the field of cognitive psychology it is argued that a resort to the appealing simplicity of singular affiliation (Sen 2007), the most visual and at times pernicious effect of classificatory logic, stems not from some false or exaggerated belief, but the peculiar mechanics of our cognitive architecture. This notion is further developed through the lens of Bourdieu’s reflections on the concept of *doxa*. As that realm of implicit and unstated beliefs which emerges from the dialectical correspondence between social and mental structures, *doxa* allows us to extend Douglas’ thesis on the relationship between symbolic systems and modes of social organization in a number of profitable directions. In helping to connect analysis of what goes on in people’s heads, that *emic* dimension highlighted by constructivist theorists, with an analysis of what goes on in public, namely *how* those subjective perceptions are communicated and understood, it is *doxa* which provides both an important corrective to the conventional wisdom of recent Biblical scholarship on ethnicity, and an innovative resource for addressing the meaning and significance of the dietary prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14.

II

Though it constitutes more of a sophisticated refinement of the critical intellectual tradition within which Biblical studies initially arose than any revolutionary novel enterprise, the explanatory scope of Mary Douglas’ anthropological vision has furnished our discipline with a legacy that few can ignore (Hendel 2008a: 5).³ Within the context of a largely “modernist” tradition (Hendel 2008b), Douglas’ rejection of the grand narratives of cultural ascent in favour a synthesis gained through the full exploitation of an everyday occurrence sought not only to collapse the distinction between “modern” and “primitive” modes of thought, but to sensitize scholars of biblical ritual to the contaminating influence of their own inherited intellectual dispositions. The methodological advantage of such prescriptions is clearly evident in her earlier treatment of the “abominable pig” wherein she sought to expose the partial, if not altogether specious understanding provided by previous commentators (Douglas 1966). Over and against the decidedly ad-hoc quality of earlier “interpretations”, Douglas’ focus upon the seemingly mundane specifics of the pig taboo sought to unfold them within the context of the larger conceptual worldview they necessarily imply. Within this horizon, the compromised ontology of the pig (Deut 14: 8) is no longer to be understood as indicative of an irrational superstition, a pre-scientific prophylactic, or a moral allegory (Hendel 2008a: 9), but rather as demarcating the taxonomic boundaries which delimit those species considered to be “clean” or “unclean” and hence fit for consumption and ultimately, sacrifice. While the distinctive, if anomalous qualities of the pig may well relate to the categories of creation established in Genesis 1,⁴ and as such can perhaps be understood as functioning to inspire “mediation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God” (Douglas 1966: 71), much of Douglas’ later work is motivated by the anthropological imperative to unpack the structural correspondences between such essentialist modes of symbolic classification and specific modes of social organization.

Drawing inspiration from the seminal idea propounded by Durkheim and Mauss, that the cognitive systems operative in primitive societies are derivations of their social system (Durkheim & Mauss 1903), Douglas set out to explore how the 'thought-style' with which the "Priestly source constructed its ritual and narrative texts cohered with the social form of the priestly hierarchy" (Hendel 2008a: 8). While such a task is informed by a principle of reflexivity which aims to address Durkheim's failure to "push his thoughts on the social determination of knowledge to their full extent" (Douglas 1975: xi), in many ways, Douglas' analysis serves to reinforce the initial thesis of Durkheim and his nephew that temporal, spatial and other classifications used by humans are *always* social in origin and therefore closely reflect, indeed *mirror* the social organization of particular groups. Though a reversal of Kant's earlier view of conceptual categories as eternally given and fixed properties of the human mind, the clear appeal of Durkheim's thesis can be seen to lie principally in his desire to advance the claims of "sociology" as a science in its own right; one whose fundamental principle was to be the *objective* reality of social facts. That is, those phenomena which exist outside of human *consciences* and which can be ascertained only by empirical observation (Lukes 1975).⁵

Such potential strengths notwithstanding however, Durkheim's project has been subject to a number of devastating critiques, not least by the very man responsible for popularising what was, until the mid 1960s an essay virtually unknown outside of French academic circles (Needham 1963).⁶ For Needham, it is not any particular aspect of Durkheim's approach that requires revision but rather the overall thrust of the entire thesis that must be rejected, namely that the categories of the human mind are rooted in the arrangements of the society of which they are a part. For while Needham might have little difficulty in accepting "that the individual would ever construct, without education in the categories of his society, a complex classification of collective representation" this should in no way imply that "the individual mind lacks the innate faculty of classification" (Needham 1963: xxxviii). Citing the earlier work of Gehlke as an authority (Gehlke 1915), Needham posits that the "category" mistake of Durkheim was to assume that the modes of classification they documented amongst groups such as the Aboriginal peoples of Australia constituted a "*content* of the mind rather than a *capacity* of the mind" (Needham 1963: xxvi). It was on this basis that he felt compelled to dismiss the entire venture as "logically fallacious" (Needham 1963: xxix). Despite such an overwhelmingly negative judgement however, Needham is adamant that the work possesses a singular merit which far outweighs any fault. For in drawing attention to previously neglected aspects of the relationship between cognition and culture, it raises for the first time a topic of "fundamental importance in understanding human thought and social life ... the notion of *classification*" (Needham 1963: xxxiv).

While such prescience is indeed rare, it was nevertheless entirely accurate as in recent years classification and/or categorization has emerged as a major focus of research in the study of ethnicity. Widely acknowledged as a consequence of what Brubaker has identified as the "cognitive turn" (Brubaker et. al. 2004),⁷ empirical work influenced by the analytical centrality of classification has tended to focus on categorization as either a political project (Horowitz 1985, Jackson 1999) or, as an everyday social practice (Kunstadter 1979, Baumann 1996). While such fields of endeavour have served to signify the importance, the pervasiveness and the occasionally insidious nature of both formal and informal processes of classification, they have also contributed to an appreciation of classification as a fundamental and ubiquitous mental process.

As George Lakoff has argued, "there is nothing more basic than categorization to our thought, perception, action and speech." We employ categories whenever we "see something as a *kind* of thing ... [or] reason about kinds of things ... without the ability to categorize we could not function at all, either in the physical world or in our social and political lives" (Lakoff 1987: 5-6). That categories are central to our way of seeing and thinking, that they structure and order the world for us by parsing the flow of experience into discriminable, and interpretable objects, attributes and events

was a central feature of Gordon Allport's dissection of the prejudiced personality (Allport 1954). This landmark work, which redefined theoretical approaches to intergroup conflict, brought the subject of ethnic stereotyping into the mainstream of behavioural science by treating it as a special case of ordinary cognitive functioning. The positive relationship that Allport established between categorical thinking and ethnic and racial stereotyping was considerably expanded through Medin's introduction of the concept of "psychological essentialism" (Medin & Ortony 1989). As Medin's initial presentation makes clear, the point about psychological essentialism is *not* that it postulates metaphysical essentialism, but that human cognition and human behaviour may be affected by the fact that people *believe* that things have particular essences, or underlying natures, that make them what they are (Medin & Ortony 1989: 183). Thus, when people apply psychologically essentialist modes of thought they come up with the conclusion that things that look alike, or even are superficially different are to be placed in the same category because they are believed to share this same constitutive and inalienable hidden *essence*. Early research in this field by Hirschfeld and Gellman revealed that even young children, traditionally understood to attend primarily to the external, visible features of things are cognitively equipped, if not predisposed, to construe the world in terms of embodied, *essential* and categorical differences (Hirschfeld & Gellman 1994: 1997). Rather than simply seeing and learning about racial divisions through naive inductive observation and/or socialization into prevailing classificatory practices, children, indeed *all* humans Hirschfeld argues, are equipped with a "special purpose cognitive device" for partitioning the world into "intrinsic kinds" based on a *belief* in the existence of shared essences (Hirschfeld 1996). In the past decade such work has extended to adults' understandings of social categories and in the process has documented a similar "naturalizing logic" about a host of perceived differences ranging from ethnicity (Gil-White 1999: 2001) and religion (Boyer 1994), to mental disorder (Haslam & Ernst 2002, Haslam 2007) and sexual orientation (Haslam & Levy 2006). While such a diversity of approaches has at times left the meaning of essentialist beliefs somewhat obscure, there is nevertheless, substantial agreement that one of the defining features of psychological essentialism is the belief that categories are stable entities and that category membership is immutable.

For example, in a seminal contribution Rothbart and Taylor advance the view that essentialist thinking about social categories, while amounting to a fundamental misapprehension of socially constructed groups as "natural kinds", contains two primary and necessarily linked components (Rothbart & Taylor 1992). On the one hand, essentialising a category involves attributing to it "inductive potential". That is, just as knowing a creature's biological species affords many inferences about its behaviour, internal structure and ecological niche, a person's membership in a particular social category is taken to be equally informative about them. On the other hand, and as a direct consequence of a belief in the existence of some intrinsic essence, when a particular social category is essentialized, it is seen to be inalterable with membership within it understood as fixed and impermeable (Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron 1997). While as a vehicle for what has variously been defined as "participant's primordialism" (Smith 1998: 158), or "folk sociology" (Hirschfeld 1996: 115), such partitive logic may well make for bad metaphysics, as Brubaker notes, it may in many circumstances serve as a "good epistemology" (Brubaker 2004: 83). For in exposing the various processes of classification as a "natural and common ... [capacity] of the human mind" (Allport 1954: 17), it defies many of the consensus views that have come to dominate current anthropological discussions of ethnicity. Rather than some false, exaggerated and unwarranted belief then it is classification and categorization that would appear to stand at the heart of the social order and social organization. Without it there would be neither pattern nor shape to our world; only that blooming, buzzing confusion which William James once suggested greets the newly arrived infant.

As an illustration of the universal obligation, and necessity, to translate the world in an intelligible, interpretable and communicable manner, the concept of psychological essentialism provides a far more powerful validation for the prohibition against pork recounted in Deuteronomy 14 than any speculative appeal to the Israelite understanding of creation (Douglas 1966).⁸ Given the

projected extent of this particular brand of classificatory logic however, one is forced to ask whether the belief in the genetic, locomotive and dietary distinctiveness of the natural realm documented by Douglas in respect of Deuteronomy 14 also informs the dynamics of group perception and evaluation in the social realm. That is, is the demand to keep distinct the categories of creation, to avoid not only hybrids but such animals as the pig and the camel whose associated ‘imperfections’ excludes them from membership in any particular class (Douglas 1966: 48) explicable within a context of social relations? Does the concept of holiness and perfection⁹ that applies to the separation of that which should be separated reveal something of the internal self-understanding of those who both announce and accept such principles of division?

Though based almost exclusively on an in-depth analysis of Leviticus, Douglas’ description of the Priestly style of discourse as “analogical”, “correlative” and “aesthetic” (Douglas 1994: 16-8) is equally applicable to the prohibitions recounted in Deuteronomy 14.¹⁰ Yet while the economy of style which characterizes both sets of prohibitions, one which resists the need for explicit argument or elaborate explanation, may well be accounted for in terms of the workings of a formal, aristocratic or in this case, theocratic society, to imagine that the equation of “analogical” with “hierarchal” exhausts the possibilities of explanation constitutes a surface reading of Douglas’ thesis which potentially misrepresents the basis and nature of Priestly authority.

It is certainly true that the paradigm sense of Douglas’ extended thesis is that the “philosophical doctrines” (Douglas 1994: 39) which constitute the dietary prohibitions have a theocratic provenance. She simultaneously cautions however that it “would be a mistake always to take formality of style for a sign of belonging to a superior social class” (Douglas 1994: 36). Drawing on the sociolinguistic theory of “language codes” as articulated by Basil Bernstein (Bernstein 1973),¹¹ and particularly his concept of “restricted code” Douglas appears to problematize the very equation between *thought styles* and forms of social organization which her thesis seeks to establish. For as Bernstein’s empirical research was to illustrate, the particularistic nature of restricted language code finds its most resonant correspondence among the working classes, *not* the hypothesized elite of Douglas’ thesis (Bernstein 1962, 1963). While Douglas *never* takes this correlation as suggestive of alternative authorship, the simple logic of Bernstein’s code excludes the very possibility which Douglas seeks to establish: namely, that the rich vocabulary deployed in the prohibitions is the exclusive preserve of any *one* social “class”; much less one living in the “separate, closed world” hypothesized by Douglas (Douglas 1994: 29). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it underscores the fact that, rather than being indicative of any *one* hypothesized social group or class, the terse style of the prohibitions is more profitably and perhaps more accurately understood as delimiting the nature of a *social relationship*; one based upon a common, extensive set of closely shared or unchallenged assumptions, identifications and expectations. Over and against Douglas’ seemingly iron clad aetiological classifications then which seem to perpetuate the scholarly vice of *petitio principii* identified in Durkheim (Lukes 1975: 310), an appreciation of the essentially relational qualities suggested by Bernstein’s ‘language codes’ opens up the possibility of extending her thesis in several richly suggestive directions.

III

Society, declared Marx, “does not consist of individuals, it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves” (Marx 1977: 71). This fundamentally relational configuration of the subject matter proper to all social inquiry has often been regarded as presenting the greatest difficulty in translating Marx (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2002: 16, n. 30). It is however, a challenge which has been pursued with a relentless zeal by Pierre Bourdieu; perhaps the most influential and original French social scientist since Durkheim. Before his death in 2002, Bourdieu unveiled a steady stream of publications on a variety of topics ranging from education, kinship and

law to labour, religion and science that sought to transcend our linguistic proclivity to favour substance at the expense of relations (Elias 1978) and to bring into analytical focus what he defined as the anthropological truth of human practice.

Of all the relational concepts that have come to define Bourdieu's combative sociology¹² it is perhaps that of *habitus* for which he is best known. Most simply put, *habitus* is an internalized structure or set of structures that determine how an individual acts in and reacts to the world, serving as Thompson argues, to "generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are regular without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any rule" (Thompson 1992: 12). As an open-ended system of dispositions then, constantly "subjected to experiences and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133), it is *habitus* that allows Bourdieu to connect realms of social life that had normally been treated by separate sciences, with separate methodologies. Over and against normative, structural and objectivist theories of culture which, following Durkheim, treat society in the manner of a social physics, as something to be grasped and understood externally from and independently of the representations of those who live it, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* reaffirms the notion of agency while simultaneously avoiding the error of asserting its methodological priority. Following the programme suggested by Marx (Bourdieu 1977: vi), the concept of *habitus* allows Bourdieu to engineer a dual escape; from "the philosophy of the subject, without doing away with the agent, and from the philosophy of structure, without forgetting to account for the effects it wields upon and through the agent" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 212). As the dynamic intersection of structural necessity and individual agency then, endlessly engendering thoughts, perceptions and actions within the limits imposed by the historically and socially situated conditions of its own production, *habitus* enables Bourdieu to capture that practical mastery people have of their social situation whilst at the same time, grounding that mastery socially.¹³

As the form through which is mediated the internalization of objective possibility as subjective expectation, *habitus* certainly facilitates an articulation of that fuzzy logic of social interweaving alluded to by Marx (Bourdieu 1990). As Bourdieu has remarked however, one of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of *habitus* is the production of a common sense world; one endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus amongst and between participating agents as to the meaning of the rules, regulations and forms of authority peculiar to it. This undisputed, pre-reflexive brand of compliance with the presuppositions, rules and regularities that govern any particular field of action is what Bourdieu has labelled *doxa*; "the preverbal, taking for granted of the world that flows from practical sense" (Bourdieu 1990: 68). While somewhat analogous to the notion of "natural attitude" originally introduced by Husserl (Husserl 1929: 1948), *doxa* may certainly appear to be the "way things are", for Bourdieu, the formation and perpetuation of the taken for granted nature of the objective world which results from the correspondence between social and mental structures leads individuals to *mistake* objective structures as natural. This is no simple error however, but rather what Bourdieu characterises as a *misrecognition*¹⁴ that stems from and is a necessary condition of our practical engagement with, and specific location within, the world. It is this placid ignorance (Mesney 2002) of the ever-present dialectical reconstitution between the objective structures of the socio-political world and the internalization of those same structures within *habitus* that allows Bourdieu to characterize *doxa* as "that which goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977: 167).

Over and against any naïve relationship between the "individual" and "society" then, such as that articulated by Durkheim and Mauss in which the "organised, artful practices of everyday life" (Garfinkel 1984: 11) are nothing but a derivation of the social system of which individuals are a part, Bourdieu substitutes the concept of *habitus* which articulates a homologous, if not genetic link between social and mental structures. It is precisely because the structures of *habitus* are understood as the embodied version of the *objective* structures of the social world that any analysis

of objective structures logically, and necessarily, carries over into an analysis of *subjective* dispositions (Bourdieu & de Saint Martin 1982). It is in this way that Bourdieu can transcend the false antinomy between sociology and social psychology originally codified by Durkheim.¹⁵ Rather than simply mirroring social relations, the symbolic system that Douglas has decoded with respect to the dietary prohibitions must be understood as actively seeking to evoke them, to call them into being. The principles of classification, of categorization and of identification that organise the representation of groups *cannot* be understood as patterned after the social structure of that group but as always and continually subordinate to practical functions and the production of social effects (Bourdieu 1992: 220).

While this articulation of the performative function of classificatory systems may well echo the constructivist emphasis upon the fluidity and pliability of ethnic status, the idea of a clear strategy in the rational choice sense is simply *not* present. On the contrary, the primary effort of *doxa* is to elicit the expression of silences from individuals, and thus, in the absence of any direct acts of intimidation and/or censorship to privilege certain forms of knowledge, of language and indeed politics over others (Weber 1992: 262). That such a task can be accomplished, that the conditions whereby the “right” opinion simply “falls right” without positing it explicitly as a goal, is dependant not upon any nakedly imposed prerogatives but rather on what Bourdieu has defined as a concordance between the “dispositions of the mobilizing agents and the dispositions of those whose aspirations and worldviews they announce” (Bourdieu 1977: 81). Not to be confused with the somewhat gnostic utterance that “the prophet always preaches to the converted” (Jenkins 2002: 106), an appreciation of the performative quality of social classifications and categorizations, their ability to produce that which they describe, depends less on one’s social status, than the ease with which the systems of classification that are announced slot into, resonate with, or indeed activate the unchallenged, undiscussed and largely unconscious dispositions that they encounter. It is here then, in the peculiar mechanics of that *immanent law* by which each agent, though following his own law nonetheless agrees with the other (Bourdieu 1977: 80), that the principles of classification which define the symbolic system espoused by Douglas’ Priestly authors are experienced and understood; not simply as a possible way of living, but rather, as the *only* way of living. It is this institutionally organized sense of misrecognition then, in which agents “think they are doing something other than what they are doing, because they are doing something other than what they think they are doing, and because they *believe* in what they think they are doing”,¹⁶ that Bourdieu characterises as symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1988, 1991, 2000). While such a theory may well call into question Bourdieu’s original delimitation of the *field* specific qualities of *doxic* knowledge (Bourdieu 1977), it does open up the possibility of exploring that discord and dissension which he has long argued constitutes the ubiquitous feature of collective social life.

IV

Within the context of Deuteronomy 14, the prohibition against the consumption of pork, indeed any animal that does not meet the specific ontological status deemed appropriate to membership in a specific category, can no longer be translated simply as a Priestly aversion to anomalies or indeed mixed marriage (Douglas 1975: 307).¹⁷ Rather, it is to be understood as an explicit verbalization of a *widely held, common sense belief* that the status of those so excluded is based upon their abject failure to display that inalienable *essence* which defines the *natural* kinds of people that exist in the world. As Mayes has argued, this represents not just a radical challenge to the essentially confessional understanding of achieved membership which defines the Deuteronomic vision of the “people of God”, but one which at the same time confirms the redactional quality of the prohibitions contained in chapter 14 (Mayes 1994: 181). For while the Deuteronomic law code may well foster the idea of a people set apart for a special relationship with God by virtue of some subjective goal-

oriented response to “the law of Yahweh”, the dietary prohibitions go much further. Though clearly aspirational in that, like Deuteronomy, their aim is to forge a community congruent with the prescriptions of a particular brand of classificatory logic,¹⁸ for the Priestly authors of Deuteronomy 14, membership in the true Israel is determined by qualities which are understood as impervious to circumstantial modification. Within the context of this essentially primordialist psychology, purity, if not holiness, are understood as objective, inalienable, and immutable properties of both individuals and things; the absence or imbalance of which no amount of confession can compensate for. Within the symbolic universe of the authors of Deuteronomy 14 then, and indeed amongst those who recognise and endorse the legitimacy of the world view they announce, it is *blood*, reproductively passed down from generation to generation, *not* belief, which constitutes the defining criteria for membership.

This may well be, as Mayes argues, a much more “rigidly clear understanding of the nature of Israel than the Deuteronomic law had envisaged” (Mayes 1994: 181). However, the Priestly appeal to what Geertz once labelled “the givens of social existence” (Geertz 1963: 108) is one that is simultaneously to be understood as an effort to contain, indeed deny the validity of any competing vision of the world. For while the Deuteronomic conception of covenant as the exclusive category by which Israel’s relationship with Yahweh is to be understood may well be framed within the context of a self-understanding that has a long and distinguished pedigree within Israelite tradition (Perlitt 1969, Nicholson 1996, Murray 2007), the conditions for the empirical verification of the Priestly defence of common biological ancestry are provided for by a far more diffuse, readily accessible, if not entirely *natural* classificatory logic. That is, it is precisely those common-sense representations and classifications through which ordinary people imagine the divisions of the natural and social world which serve to contribute to the reality of the divisions which the Priestly authors sought to secure. Within the context of that endless and pitiless competition then where individuals strive to endow their lives with a sense of collectively avowed justification (Bourdieu 2000: 237), the practical categories and symbolic systems that constitute the “post exilic priestly insertion” (Mayes 1994: 181) of Deuteronomy 14 are not simply instruments of knowledge imposed upon and determinative of individual thought and practice, but of power (Bourdieu 1984: 477).

The submission that the Priestly vision of the divisions of the social world is predicated upon an essentialist brand of classificatory logic may well provide one with a novel and coherent, if not entirely *natural* explanation for the genesis and persuasive appeal of the dietary prohibitions in Deuteronomy 14. In the process however, it restores to significance a dimension of ethnicity either ignored or ridiculed in much recent scholarship. As Gil-White has illustrated, with the ascent of the social constructivist paradigm post-Barth, serious engagement with primordialist positions gave way to dismissive caricature (Gil-White 1999). Given the essentially descriptive nature of many “primordialist” accounts and their tendency to posit ethnic sentiments as primitive, largely atavistic attributes, such criticisms are well founded (Stack 1986). Primordialism however, is a more subtle construct than such straw man fabrications would suggest. As the oft-cited, yet seldom fully analysed formulation of Geertz argued, primordial attachments “stem from the ‘givens’ of social existence - *or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens of social existence’*” (Geertz 1963: 109). In virtually every subsequent discussion this crucial distinction articulated by Geertz between *perceived* and *actual* givens has been ignored with the result that ethnicity became situated as an abstract, natural phenomenon; one which can be explained on the basis of some vaguely conceived, seemingly irrational conception of ‘human nature’ with little, if any analysis of the particular social and/or historical contexts within which ethnic groups might be formulated (Eller & Coughlan 1993).

Yet while the various theoretical perspectives accommodated within what is broadly defined as the constructivist perspective¹⁹ have demonstrated time and again that neither ethnic, racial nor national groups *are* natural and eternal entities, their near universal assumption that human

behaviour is essentially rational and directed towards maximizing self-interest serves only to perpetuate what Bourdieu has termed the *scholastic fallacy* (Bourdieu 1990b). Analogous to Marx and Engels' critique of the intellectual trends then dominant within German philosophy, Bourdieu takes to task *all* critical perspectives which ignore the specific conditions under which knowledge, and particularly *common sense* knowledge is produced. As his powerful refutation of the mythical conception of Algerian society fostered by Fanon was to reveal (Bourdieu 1963),²⁰ *common sense knowledge*, which is the basis of ordinary experience of the social world, is defined by a dialectical relationship between subjective outlook and objective possibility such that "the trials of lived experience" (Sartre 1963: 97) impose themselves with a necessity so total as to allow no glimpse of a reasonable, or indeed radical alternative. Lacking regular employment and forced to live from hand-to-mouth, the economic and cultural insecurity of the peasantry rendered them incapable of "imagining their present in terms of a yet to be realized future" (Lane 2000: 20). Yet while such inability to adapt to the project of "rational forecasting" may well be explicable in terms of such immediate constraints as subsistence, for Bourdieu, it is symptomatic of that correspondence which ensues from the genetic relationship between subjective outlook and objective possibility (Bourdieu 1964b: 55-7). Within this sphere of perceptual immediacy, where any discernment as to what might come about yields itself to a series of conventions so self-evident as to be beyond question, the Algerian peasantry experience their plight as inevitable and natural; something about which they can do nothing (Jenkins 2002: 28).

While this account of the revolutionary inertia of the Algerian peasantry may well translate as a negative theory when contrasted with the aspirations of contemporary political Marxism, Bourdieu's exposure of the way in which an individual's instinctive sense of what *might* be achieved is conditioned by the *perceived* impossibility of enacting that possibility, casts a sobering shadow over the somewhat narcissistic claims of recent constructivist theories.

In suggesting that identities are activated depending upon an actor's subjective perception of the situation in which they find themselves, as well as the salience they attribute to ethnicity as a factor in that situation, Brubaker has identified constructivist theories as implicitly cognitive in their orientation (Brubaker et. al. 2004). He also asserts however that since Barth constructivist theorists have rarely, if ever considered precisely *what* it is that governs such subjective interpretations. Content to rehearse the familiar formulae that ethnicity is a contingent, ongoing accomplishment by competent social actors, advocates of the constructivist perspective have limited explanation to the essentially rational, deliberate and calculated pursuit of economic and/or political interests. While such an approach has been characterized by Hechter as a "necessary consequence of the [unelaborated and unassisted] premise of individually self-interested action" (Hechter 1986: 270), the ultimate implication is that ethnicity becomes abstracted as a peripheral loyalty, readily amenable to modification, manipulation, and exploitation. Actors are free, if you will, to choose *any* hat from the ethnic rack (Gil-White 1999: 807).

In this sense constructivist interpretations may well constitute a further example of that conceit which recasts the world in terms that are familiar or advantageous to us (Joffe 2003: 83).²¹ The fact that individuals do not, either primarily or exclusively, view the acquisition and/or transmission of ethnic status as a matter of choice, much less a rational one, should however condition us to revise current views of just how instrumental and manipulable ethnic status is. For if it is the case, as a host of studies have shown, that ordinary people remain stubbornly oblivious to the polysemic realities articulated by constructivist theory, then we must at least acknowledge that a "primordial" view of the world may well constrain the space in which actors feel it is legitimate, indeed possible to pursue their "self-interested" goals.

V

Much of recent biblical scholarship can be characterized by an aversion to the “still burning passions” of Biblical testimony. The desire to conform to the prevailing constructivist discourse on ethnicity however, has conditioned a generation of scholars to reaffirm that “tyranny of the text” (Small 1999) from which they have so long sought to engineer an escape. For in striving to access that subjectivist perspective which, post-Barth, has constituted the Holy Grail of ethnicity studies, Biblical scholars have cultivated the erroneous assumption that what we encounter in the biblical texts are in fact *deliberate* constructions of ethnicity; ones that consciously articulate a conception of the world predicated upon an accurate accounting of the interests of their respective authors (Berlinerblau 1999: 195). While this voluntaristic conception of ideology, itself a variant of the phenomenologist thesis, may well have inspired a growing appreciation for the Bible as “literature” it invokes a degree of intentionality which is difficult to reconcile with the *doxic* nature of ordinary experience of the social world outlined previously. As a product of an “acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (Bourdieu 1977: 95) the *belief* in the genetic distinctiveness of the entity Israel that characterizes the Priestly worldview is precisely that which is *not* transparent to consciousness. Analogous to Jameson’s articulation of the “political unconscious” (Jameson 1981) or indeed Althusser’s critical dissection of the Marxist conception of ideology and consciousness (Althusser 1971: 1993), the essentialist classificatory logic which defines the dietary prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14 is something which its authors can be said to think *in*, rather than *of* (Althusser 1993: 69). Rather than simply acquiescing to the constructivist emphasis on individual consciousness then, one which presents the Priestly vision of ascribed membership as “craftily smuggled into the text” (Berlinerblau 1999: 194) so as to conceal it from an unsuspecting readership, the approach outlined here argues that this very agenda was concealed from the authors themselves. As a product of that realm of implicit and unstated beliefs which is the possessor of *all* agents within a social body irrespective of class, *belief* in the essential immutability of Israel is something which is taken not as beyond any challenge, but rather as *before* any possible challenge.

In providing the theoretical space necessary for the pursuit of a radically different philosophy then, one in which agents are “neither aiming consciously towards things nor mistakenly guided by false representations” (Bourdieu & Eagleton 1992: 113), Bourdieu’s remarks on *doxa* force us to reckon with the possibility that the particular categories of person encoded within the dietary prohibitions, and indeed the entire social system they presuppose, were *not* a matter of choice but rather, that they chose themselves. Not, as Marx would claim, irrespective of their consciousness and will, but because *common sense* dictated that this was the *natural*, indeed the *only* way to think.

Although the projected extent of such essentialist representations of the social world, the fact that they are “easy to think”, may go some way towards accounting for the potential persuasiveness of *any* appeal to the “givens of social existence” as determinative of full membership in the norm group “Israel”, treating such practical categories as categories of social analysis constitutes precisely the sort of methodological naiveté which Bourdieu has cautioned against. For while participant’s accounts of the nature of their world, and particularly their place within it are certainly a valuable resource, particularly given the imperative within the discipline to use all the available evidence, in taking as a statement of reality that “felt reality” which is the very definition of ordinary experience of the world, one’s research is led towards illusory explanations; ones which perpetuate, indeed legitimate the very classifications one’s “scientific discourse” should submit to criticism (Bourdieu 1992: 225). Thus while Hall’s dictum that “in order to understand the ethnic group one must learn how the ethnic group understood itself” (Hall 1997: 185) may well remain axiomatic for *all* explorations of identity, one must preface it with the cautionary note that *ethnic common sense* such as that revealed in the dietary prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14, is precisely that which requires an explanation, *not* what we want to explain things with (Brubaker 2004: 4).

ENDNOTES

¹ While each of these theoretical positions may well emphasise different factors in the construction of ethnic groups, as Miller makes clear, “Key to the point here, however, is that from either viewpoint, *ethnicity is socially constructed*.” Miller (2008: 173; emphasis added). For an accessible discussion of the particular focus of each perspective, see Connell & Hartmann (2007).

² For a detailed and critical examination of such geo-political trends, see Sadowski (1998).

³ On the issue of Douglas’ intellectual inheritance, see Fardon (1999) and Milgrom (1991).

⁴ On the relationship between the dietary prohibitions and Genesis see also Soler (1979).

⁵ For an assessment of Durkheim’s influence on the discipline of Biblical Studies see Mayes (1989, 78-118).

⁶ See also Schwartz (1981) and Lukes (1972).

⁷ See also Gardner (1987).

⁸ On this issue see Mayes (1994: 178).

⁹ On the concepts of holiness and wholeness in Douglas’ writings see most recently Olyan (2008).

¹⁰ On the relationship between the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 14 and Leviticus see Milgrom (1991), Eilberg-Schwartz (1990), Otto (2000) and Venter (2002).

¹¹ On Bernstein’s sociology in general see Sadnovik (1995), Atkinson (1985).

¹² Though it cast him in the rather embarrassing role of “celebrity intellectual”, Pierre Carles’ documentary, *Sociology as a Martial Art*, provides a key insight into the political nature of Bourdieu’s work. See also the various contributions in Bourdieu & Sapiro (2010).

¹³ Although Bourdieu’s challenge to all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure or agency may well be echoed in the work of Giddens (1984), or even Sahlins (1981), his own philosophy of the social is paradoxically “monist” in the sense that it singularly asserts the primacy of relations. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992: 19).

¹⁴ Though he has described it as epitomizing the “translator’s quandary” Richard Nice is adamant that *méconnaissance* remains central to any approximation of the workings of the doxic order. See Nice in Bourdieu (1977: vii-viii). For other definitions of *doxa* in Bourdieu’s writings see Bourdieu (1984: 471), (2000: 130-31), and Myles (2004: 91-4).

¹⁵ While Lukes does point out that for Durkheim collective and individual factors are closely related, and that the latter may even facilitate an explanation of the former, Durkheim always insisted that “the two sciences are... as clearly distinct as two sciences can be, whatever relations there may be otherwise between them.” (1972: 19).

¹⁶ As Bourdieu concludes, “as fools fooled, they are the primary victims of their own actions.” Bourdieu (1996: 39).

¹⁷ As Mayes has pointed out, Douglas is here explicitly following Durkheim’s view that classificatory systems derive *from* and are properties *of* the social system in which they are used. Mayes (1994: 179).

¹⁸ *Pace* Mayes who does not ascribe such a role to the dietary prohibitions. See Mayes (1994: 177).

¹⁹ Examples of this range include the Neo-Marxism of Hechter (1976) through the cultural ecology of Barth (1969) and the social interactionism of Eidhem (1969).

²⁰ See also, Fanon (1968).

²¹ See also, Bourdieu, (1990b: 384), where he describes the scholastic fallacy as “picturing all social agents in the image of the scientist...”

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