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Article abstract

There is an unidentified literary convention within narratives of the Hebrew Bible, wherein the narrator portrays the thought process of certain characters. In these episodes, which I coin “thought-scenes,” characters express the motivating reasons for a past, current, or upcoming action. That is, they explain “why” an action, decision, or request is being undertaken. These passages constitute distinctive instances of human reasoning and offer insight into how rationality was viewed in the ancient world, as well as how forms of argumentation were fashioned within biblical literature. I examine the reasoning process of Abraham (Gen 12:10-20) and Joseph (Gen 39:7-10) in detail and supply a full, annotated catalogue of thought-scenes in Genesis, along with representative examples from across the Hebrew Bible.

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THE THOUGHT-SCENE: A LITERARY CONVENTION OF HEBREW NARRATIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hebrew narrative is renowned for being economical and action-driven, having relatively little to say about the inner world of its characters or their psychological processing. Amidst that scarcity, however, remains a discernable regularity, wherein the narrator puts the reasoning process of individuals on display. When approaching Egypt (Gen 12:10–20), Abraham presents Sarah with an argument to pose as his "sister": "that it might go well with me," he says, and "that my life might be preserved" (12:13).[1] In a similar scene, Isaac explains why he too called his wife his sister: "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.' " (Gen 26:9–10). Finally, Joseph reasons with Potiphar's wife about why he refuses her sexual invite (Gen 39:7–10): it would break her husband's trust, abuse his generosity, and offend God. In each of these episodes, a character reasons "out loud" by expressing the rationale for an action, decision, or request. I will argue that such occurrences constitute an unidentified literary convention of Hebrew narrative that I coin the "thought-scene."

These displays of reasoning should be distinguished from generic expressions of thought. For characters "think" quite often in Hebrew narrative and arguably do so every time they speak. But a "thought-scene" is more than an expression of thought; it is a disclosure of thinking that presents the reason(s) for an action, decision, or request. Rather than overt displays of reasoning, the majority of narrative sequence in the HB leaves human reasoning to inference. For example, when Abraham is told to leave his kindred and go to another land in Gen 12:1–3, it is said that "Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (12:4). We hear of neither thought nor contemplation, and as for "why" Abraham went, the most we can conclude is that he did so because God commanded him to. Even this, however, must be inferred based upon the narrator's remark. Scenes that do put reasoning on display, as Gen 12:10–20 does with Abraham and Sarah shortly thereafter, create a body of evidence rich with interpretive opportunity. They attest to an unidentified literary convention

[1] All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

of biblical narrative, give insight into how rationality was viewed in the ancient world, and offer one profile of how forms of argumentation were fashioned within biblical literature.

These spectacles of human reasoning have not been appreciated as such by interpreters. In his study *Hebräisches Denken*, Jan Dietrich argues that thinking is rarely extrapolated within Hebrew narrative and must be "inferred from the (speech) actions of the characters as intentional and action-oriented thinking."[2] That is the case with Gen 12:1–3, as noted above, and often elsewhere as Dietrich suggests, but there is something more deliberate and discernible occurring within these narratives as well. Such scenes fueled an interest in moral psychology among late medieval rabbis like David Kimhi (1160–1235) and Joseph Bekhor Shor (ca. 1130–1200), and at times feature in discussions of biblical ethics.[3] There are also several recent studies of deception and strategy in Genesis, reasoning in non-narrative texts, and ancient Near Eastern rhetoric,[4] but aside from Dietrich's study, a recognition of these thought patterns, never mind an analysis and exposition of their mechanics, remains largely lacking.

Philosophers have long discussed "practical reason" as a key feature of moral agency and rhetoric, and it is there that this newly identified narrative convention finds its closest conceptual companion.[5] However, it is not only within a conceptual context that my proposal finds its home. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle considered "thought" (διάνοια) the third most important element of tragedy, which he defined as those portions of speeches, given by characters, that put

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[2] Jan Dietrich, *Hebräisches Denken: Denkgeschichte und Denkweisen des Alten Testaments*, BThSt 191 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 27: "In narrativen Texten wird das Denken der dargestellten Personen in nur wenigen Fällen extrapoliert (z. B. Gen 27,41; Est 6,6) und muss aus den (Sprach-)Handlungen der Figuren als absichtsvolles und handlungsorientiertes Denken erschlossen werden (z. B. Gen 27,6–17.42–46)."

[3] In addition to the literature referenced below, see John Rogerson, ed., *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics*, JSOTSup 405 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 73–74.

[4] See, among others, Kathy Ehrensperger, "Narratives of Belonging: The Role of Paul's Genealogical Reasoning," *Early Christianity* 8.3 (2017): 373–92; Nava Neriya-Cohen, "The Reflective Passages as the Core of Qoheleth: Content and Structural Analysis," *JHS* 15 (2015): 1–21; Edward N. Drodge, "A Cognitive-Embodiment Approach to Emotioning and Rationality, Illustrated in the Story of Job," *IJPsR* 10.3 (2000): 187–99; Adina M. Moshavi, "Two Types of Argumentation Involving Rhetorical Questions in Biblical Hebrew Dialogue," *Bib* 90.1 (2009): 32–46; Jesper Høgenhaven, "Prophecy and Propaganda: Aspects of Political and Religious Reasoning in Israel and the Ancient Near East," *SJOT* 3.1 (1989): 125–41; Cheryl J. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTSup 163 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

[5] See, e.g., Plato, *Republica*, Book 4; Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, Book 3; Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

forward an argument or made universal declarations (§6).[6] While what appears in the HB is nonetheless quite different, Aristotle's observation, more than anyone's, may have the greatest kinship with my own.[7] Otherwise, the claim to coin a convention of biblical narrative situates this study within an influential body of scholarship on the poetics of HB narrative.[8] Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, and Meir Sternberg identified many general techniques in this regard, followed by scholars who have proposed additional conventions, such as the narrator's insertion of songs or "closure conventions."[9] This work has rightly resisted a slavish adherence to formalism that would restrict narrative conventions to specific literary forms and demand that particular criteria were consistently met. Narrative conventions, as Alter states, rather entail "manifold variations upon a pattern" not always reducible to "recurrent regularities."[10] However, conventions are based in some regularity, and I contend that thought-scenes are identifiable, even if not through strict literary criteria.

First, thought-scenes are identifiable within the context of other instances of human reasoning, constituting one form of reasoning among others in biblical narrative. Second, thought-scenes entail a certain type of reasoning and literary context, namely, when characters express the motivating reasons for a past, current, or upcoming action. "Motivating reasons" are those that give rise to a particular action or decision, as determined from the character's perspective.[11] They are not necessarily "good" or justifying reasons, nor are they necessarily the "real" reasons, from the narrator's perspective. They are the grounds upon which characters themselves base

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[6] The full definition reads: διάνοια δὲ ἐν οἷς ἀποδεικνύουσί τι ὡς ἔστιν ἢ ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ καθόλου τι ἀποφαίνονται. Stephen Halliwell (*The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* [London: Duckworth, 1987], 155–56) suggests two examples in Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (583–615) and Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (687–715).

[7] The distinction within narratology between "showing" versus "telling" suggests that the thought-scene may be a form of the narrator showing the reader what a certain character thought rather than telling one about it, though this distinction should not be construed simplistically. See, e.g., Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

[8] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, BLS 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[9] Steven Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative: The History of a Literary Convention in Ancient Israel*. ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Susan Zeelander, *Closure in Biblical Narrative*, BibInt 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[10] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 55–56.

[11] Errol Lord and David Plunkett, "Reasons Internalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, eds. Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett (London: Routledge, 2018), 324.

their actions, decisions, and discourse. Third, thought-scenes are bound to speech acts, being tied to expressions of request, refusal, decision, and explanation.[12] Fourth, thought-scenes are not bound to linguistic cues. While they often employ כי ("for/because") to signal a presentation of reasons, this is not always the case and should not be used as a necessary criterion. The use of אמר should also be noted, as it typically refers to speaking but can denote what someone "thought."[13] My proposed definition is as follows: a thought-scene is the literary presentation of characters who voice a self-justifying account of motivating reasons for past, present, or future action, expressing "why" they have or will act in a certain way, make a certain decision, or want someone else to do so.

In what follows, I first survey other forms of human reasoning in the HB, those that do not qualify as thought-scenes and go on to examine two representative thought-scenes from Genesis (12:10–20; 39:7–10). Second, the reasons put forward by the characters in these scenes expose the grounds upon which they argue, and these grounds take a variety of forms, including empirical evidence, emotion, theological principle, and expected outcomes. Third, these passages bring to the fore several elements of human reason—its accuracy, aims, and effectiveness—generating a profile of rationality. Along with these two representative passages, I incorporate the remaining 22 thought-scenes from Genesis, as well as others from the HB, expanding the range of speech acts and grounds of reasoning while noting interpretive insights on several occasions.[14] This study features narratives from Genesis because they provide a scope of forms and cases that I take to be representative of reasoning within the HB. However, I do incorporate a non-exhaustive set of examples from elsewhere in the HB to suggest the prevalence of this convention and its plausibility for Hebrew narrative as such. Most ambitiously, this article identifies an as yet uncategorized literary convention of biblical narrative, what I call the "thought-scene," which has significance for the study of ethics, narratology, and psychology within the HB.

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[12] These speech acts are more technically "illocutions." See John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[13] See, e.g., Gen 32:9[8]; S. Wagner, "אָמַר *'āmar*," *TDOT* 1:333.

[14] The complete, suggested list includes Gen 3:11–13; 11:3–4; 12:10–20; 14:21–24; 16:1–2; 19:30–38; 20:1–7; 21:9–14; 26:6–11; 26:26–31; 27:5–13; 30:25–30; 31:4–16; 31:25–32; 33:8–11; 39:7–10; 41:37–41; 42:21–22; 42:38; 43:6–7; 44:18–34; 48:17–20; 50:15–21.

2. FORMS OF HUMAN REASONING ACROSS THE HEBREW BIBLE

Defined by characters expressing the motivating reasons for a past, current, or upcoming action, thought-scenes are distinguishable from two other expressions of human reason Hebrew narrative. First, some reasoning is narrated in the third-person. So rather than Eve expressing her reasons for eating from the fruit of the tree, readers are told by the narrator why she did so: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight for the eyes, and the tree was desired to make one wise, so she took of its fruit and ate" (Gen 3:6). Likewise, we are informed of Reuben's intention to help Joseph (Gen 37:22); Onan's reasons for not inseminating his brother's wife (Gen 38:9); what motivated the people of Reuben and Gad to request land east of the Jordan River (Num 32:1–5, esp. v. 1); and why Adoni-zedek summons help for battle (Josh 10:1–4). This reasoning is narrated rather than expressed by the characters themselves.[15]

The second and more elaborate pattern of reasoning occurs within a larger discourse context of plans and negotiations. When Abraham instructs his servant to find a wife for Isaac, the servant replies with a potential obstacle to the plan's success: "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land" (Gen 24:5). We could rightly call this concern "reasonable," and yet instead of disclosing the motivating reasons for action, it forms part of a discourse embedded with elements of human reasoning (see 24:1–14 *passim*). Similarly, with a series of speeches in Gen 34:8–24, characters appeal to many grounds in order to persuade their respective audiences. Moses and the people of Reuben and Gad negotiate about land inheritance (Num 32:1–27), Naomi attempts to convince her daughters-in-law to return to their family home (Ruth 1:8–18), and four lepers deliberate about what to do with respect to the Syrians (2 Kgs 7:3–11). This form of reasoning also occurs within the context of divine reasoning. When God approaches Abraham or Sarah, each of them responds and in so doing discloses a reasoning process, be that about a promised child (Gen 15:1–11), the preservation of Ishmael (17:15–21), or one's response itself (18:9–15). Similarly, Moses formulates arguments to the Lord at length in Exodus 3–4, and again in Num 14:11–35. This category of reasoning occurs within the context of ongoing plans or negotiations and is generally directed toward the action or interests of others, rather than explaining one's own grounds for action through a discrete episode.[16] I draw out the distinction further in the examples below.

Perhaps these additional categories of human reasoning form conventions all their own, but of most interest for this article, and

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[15] In these latter examples, characters do express their reasoning (Num 32:4; Josh 10:4) but that seems to supplement the narrator's comments (Num 32:1; Josh 10:1–2). In this category, see also Gen 45:25–28.

[16] See also 32:1–21 and 37:18–28; cf. 27:5–13; 44:18–34.

most abundant in Genesis, are what I have termed "thought-scenes." They also occur within narrative but are not narrated in the third person; they do not constitute explicit responses to divine discourse, and they are not embedded within the complex of plans or negotiation that takes shape over more substantial lengths of narrative. They occur when characters express "why" they have or will act in a certain way, make a certain decision, or want someone else to do so. It is a self-justifying account, however brief, of reasons. The episodes selected for this article encompass the majority of elements associated with the convention throughout the HB, revealing discourse contexts, the many grounds and aims of reasoning, and their measures of accuracy and effectiveness as evident from the text.

3. REASONING TO PRESERVE LIFE: ABRAHAM (GEN 12:10–20)

3.1 ABRAHAM'S SPEECH ACT AND GROUNDS

In Gen 12:10–20, Abraham and his companions are travelling towards Egypt due to a famine, and upon their approach Abraham makes known his plan to his wife Sarah. He requests that she call herself his sister, and yet he does so with a collage of reasons that result in a monologued argument:

> And just as he was approaching, to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "Behold, I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance and that the Egyptians will see you and say, 'This is his wife.' And so they will kill me but let you live. Say, then, that you are my sister in order that it might go well with me because of you, that my life might be preserved because of you."[17] (Gen 12:11–13)

Interpretation of the passage has queried the moral status of Abraham's "lie" and, relatedly, its connection with the theology of the chapter. Remarks have also been made about Abraham's "intelligent strategy," his (mere) human reasons, autonomous "*List*" (cunning), and the accuracy of his forecasts.[18] This line of interpretation was

[17] Verse 13 uses two different lexemes for "because of you" (בעבורך and בגללך), one of which is sometimes translated "for your sake" (בגללך ESV), which conveys a prospective rather than causative sense (i.e., "it may go well with me for your [Sarah's] advantage"). The use of בגללך in v. 16, however, is causative/retrospective and should be read as such in v. 13; hence I have translated them identically.

[18] See, e.g., Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 288 (*Didymus the Blind: Commentary on Genesis*, trans. R.C. Hill, The Fathers of the Church 132 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 199–202); Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis* 9.3 (*St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, trans. E.G. Mathews, Jr. and J.P. Amar, The Fathers of the Church 91 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 149–150); Lothar Ruppert, *Genesis: Teilband 2. Gen 11,27–25,18: Ein*

present in antiquity and is acknowledged by contemporary interpreters, but none have taken a forensic look at Abraham's reasoning, an analysis that discloses not only the mechanics of his reasoning but has implications for mainstream queries surrounding this passage.

Abraham's request to Sarah that she call herself his sister is based, first, upon what he knows about her—she's beautiful—and, second, upon what he expects regarding the consequences of going to Egypt: that the Egyptians will take her and kill him.[19] His two references to being killed make it clear that that aim of his request and argument is to preserve his life, and possibly her life as well. The speech act, then, is a request or command and is based upon Abraham's empirical knowledge about Sarah's beauty and his expectation of how the Egyptians will respond. In other words, Abraham reasons via knowledge of his wife and of the expectations he has for certain characters. John Van Seters has claimed that, in this scene, "The actions and reactions of all the story participants are lucid and logical."[20] That may be so, but in order to assess the possibility with any satisfaction, we must move beyond a basic presentation of the speech act and grounds of reasoning in Gen 12:10–20. For more can be said about the passage's profile of rationality.

3.2 Abraham's Aims

Even though Abraham justifies his conduct, that does not fully explain why he did what he did. His surface aim was survival, given he moves because of a severe famine and mentions a threat to his life twice, and yet within the context of Genesis 12, an additional, theological explanation for his action seems tenable. Specifically, did Abraham's scheme arise from trust in God or doubt about his promises? Interpreters remain divided over the question. On the one hand, Abraham is thought to be a divinely-endorsed thinker who takes initiative in seeing God's promises fulfilled. The *Genesis Apocryphon* (1Q20) portrays him as a prayer-filled patriarch who received his plans in a dream (19.14–21; §20), while Ina Willi-Plein suggests that "Gott hilft Abrams Klugheit."[21] On the other hand, many point

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kritischer und theologischer Kommentar, FB 98 (Würzburg: Echter, 2002), 138–39; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1972), 168.

[19] While my interpretation is in agreement with John G. Janzen's (*Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50*, ITC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 25), regarding the reasons presented by Abraham, I do not think these are linguistically signaled by the untranslated, dual **נא** particles: "Behold [now], I know" (**הנה נא ידעתי**, 12:11) … "Say [now], you are my sister" (**אמרי נא אחתי את**, 12:13).

[20] John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 170.

[21] Ina Willi-Plein, *Das Buch Genesis: Kapitel 12–50*, NSK.AT 1,2 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2011), 39. See also Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 16.19 (*Saint Augustine: The City of God. Books VIII–XVI*, trans. G.G. Walsh and G. Monahan, The Fathers of the Church 14 [Washington, DC: The Catholic

to Abraham's lack of trust in God, while similarly putting his reason at the center of the argument. According to Lothar Ruppert, it is precisely because of his doubts that Abraham resorts to "cunning" [*List*], determining autonomously what is good and evil.[22] Amidst these clearer remarks, however, the history of interpretation tends to rely upon assumptions about Abraham's reasoning: that it naturally fits into God's plan in Genesis 12 or, more commonly, that it is to be suspected or assumed errant, perhaps even because it is human reason.

Such disparate viewpoints are no surprise given the fact that Abraham articulates the aim to preserve life without mentioning divine promises. Thus his theological expectations can only be inferred. In the narrative so far, we know at least two things: that God commands him to leave his kindred and country (Gen 12:1–3) and that "Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (12:4).[23] For some interpreters, the theological confidence of Abraham's move is compromised when he takes Lot along with him (12:4). Eleonore Stump argues that "Abraham thinks the divine promise will not come true unless, by bringing Lot into his household, he himself provides the offspring necessary to make the promise true. To this extent, Abraham does not believe God's promise that *God* will make him a great nation."[24] Stump's argument for Abraham's doubt, however, depends upon several factors: Lot being a part of the "kindred" that Abraham was directed to leave behind (12:1), that his decision to bring possessions and other people along reflected a similar uncertainty (12:5), and that the narrator's clear assertion of obedience (12:4) is somehow offset by Abraham's less-than-obedient taking of Lot. Instead, it seems most plausible to take the assertion of obedience as categorical—"Abram went, as the Lord had told him" and to—understand the change from "kindred" (12:1) to "your off-

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University of America Press, 1952], 522–23); John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 32.24–25 (*St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 18–45*, trans. R.C. Hill, The Fathers of the Church 82 [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990], 272–75); von Rad, *Genesis*, 168–69.

[22] Ruppert, *Genesis*, 138–39. See also, among others, Nahmanides, in Michael Carasik, ed., trans., and annotated, *The Commentators' Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot,* vol. 1 of *The Commentators' Bible* (Lincoln: JPS, 2018), 114–16; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 129; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1985), 164; James McKeown, *Genesis*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 82.

[23] The promises in 12:2–3 arguably serve as a context for the scene in 12:10–20 (e.g., George Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, FOTL 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 110) and play a significant role for many interpretations of the passage.

[24] Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 267 (emphasis original).

spring" (12:7) as a clarification of how the promises would be realized.[25] Abraham obeyed the Lord, while taking Lot along, and was only later informed that Lot may not be a part of the plan.

The debate has implications for understanding Abraham's rationality in 12:10–20. First, either option (trust or doubt) gauges Abraham's reasoning with Sarah by reference to divine promises rather than bald survival. Perhaps his initial obedience, paired with the taking of provisions and peoples, suggests a form of faith-filled rationality in 12:1–9. That might be used as a lens to read 12:10–20, where a plan that includes an infamous lie ("say you are my sister") becomes an intelligent strategy to preserve life in hopes of seeing the divine promises fulfilled. That is one plausible way to fill in the ethical gaps rather than assuming that Abraham does a moral about-face from 12:1–9 to 12:10–20.[26] Indeed, Luther, citing 12:1–3, claimed that Abraham risks everything in 12:10–20 "on account of the divine promises."[27]

Second, this also raises the question of what qualifies as the appropriate, in this case "faithful," use of human reason. Abraham might surely use his knowledge of empirical evidence and expectations when trying to procreate with Sarah (e.g., having sexual intercourse and doing so at biologically advantageous times), and yet when does cautious, even deceptive, planning express a lack of faith?[28] Interestingly, the Lord fulfills his promise to bless those who bless the family and curse those who curse it by sending plagues on Pharaoh, which affirms a theological framework of interpretation for this passage. Given that these plagues directly result in Sarah's survival, it may be, as J. Gerald Janzen argues, "the first signal [...] that Sarai is integral to the divine agenda."[29] This has the advantage of resembling the pattern of specification noted above: the move from "kindred" to "your offspring." For it is now clear that not any woman but rather Sarah specifically has a definite part to play in the fulfillment of promises. As for the reasoning of Abraham, he, in sum, makes a request in Gen 12:10–20, based upon empirical

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[25] See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, vol. 1 of *The Book of Genesis*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 378. Lot's exclusion from the land in ch. 13 is based on the overabundance of material blessing and yet ultimately his (inordinate) desire for another land. Interestingly, LXX Gen 12:20 and SP add "and Lot with him."

[26] In further support of Abraham's faith, Hamilton notes an instructive foil within Genesis: that while Babel aimed at nation-building via achievement, Abraham builds altars for worship (*Genesis 1–17*, 372). Compare the frequent assumption that Abraham does an ethical U-turn at 12:10 (e.g., Wayne S. Towner, *Genesis* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 142).

[27] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 6–14*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther's Works 2 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), 294.

[28] See Janzen (*Abraham*, 24–25) for several, similar queries.

[29] Janzen, *Abraham*, 26.

knowledge and expected outcomes, that aims to preserve life, perhaps in an attempt to contribute to the fulfillment of the Lord's promises.

3.3 Abraham's Accuracy and Effectiveness

Having identified the speech act, grounds, and aims of Abraham's reasoning, attention can now be directed to the accuracy and effectiveness of it. Abraham's primary expectation regards the behavior of the Egyptians. He believes that they will kill him or let him live, depending on who they believe Sarah to be. The accuracy of his expectation has been variously judged by interpreters. Calvin thought Abraham's fear expressed an "unreasonable anxiety" about the Egyptian threat[30]; Kimhi, in contrast, thought that Abraham underestimated it, while von Rad and others claim his expectation was accurate.[31] It is appropriate to query the accuracy of Abraham's prediction, as these interpreters have done, and yet to measure that accuracy in its totality is impossible. For we only see one version of events, namely, the version executed. The possibility that Abraham will die because he is married is not even a scenario available for testing and rather occurs after the plagues have been sent, which creates additional complexity.[32] As for the two original options foreseen by Abraham, the narrative provides no counterfactuals by which the complete accuracy of his expectations can be measured, a test-run whereby Sarah calls herself his wife rather than sister, for example. All that is known is that Abraham's course of action proved accurate.

While Abraham's expectations prove accurate in the fact that he survives, these expectations are arguably exceeded on two accounts. First, when he says "Say that you are my sister, in order that *it might go well with me* [ייטב לי]" (12:13), he expects to live, and so he does. However, his prosperity turns out to be more than simple survival. For "it went well for Abram [ולאברם היטיב]" (12:16) and he receives all sorts of material wealth from Pharaoh, which arguably exceeds his expectations of mere survival. He not only preserves his life but gains wealth. Abraham may also, secondly, underestimate the extent of Sarah's beauty. She is not only taken into Pharaoh's house but receives collective "praise" from the Egyptians (12:14–15). If it

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[30] See Calvin's Genesis commentary on 20:12 (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. J. King, vol. 1, n.p. Online: https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01/calcom01.xxvi.i.html).

[31] Kimhi on 20:12 (Carasik, *Commentator's Bible: Genesis*, 179); von Rad, *Genesis*, 168; and Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 380–81.

[32] Pharaoh's later question (12:18–19) creates several possibilities about Abraham's prior reasoning. He may have been wrong about the prediction that he would die, since he is spared when Pharaoh knows the truth. However, Pharaoh's response seems driven by the plagues rather than a miscalculation on Abraham's part. In the circumstances, Pharaoh seems to prize honesty from Abraham over endangering his life.

is plausible that Abraham's expectations were accurate and yet exceeded, this leads to a tentative inference about the passage's theology: that the pattern of Abraham's expectations being exceeded extends even to his expectations of God. Perhaps he did concoct his plan out of a trust in God, and yet given the fact that his two other expectations were over-fulfilled, is there evidence of the same for his expectations of God? Perhaps Abraham thought God would do something for the situation. However, cursing the house of Pharaoh and sending him and his company on their way, packed with new possessions, may have been more than he had in mind.[33]

Regardless, and lastly, Abraham's reasoning is effective in that it achieves at least what he set out to accomplish. Sarah heeds his request, and his aims are fulfilled. His illocution, in other words, achieves its perlocution.[34] But this raises the question of how that achievement comes about. Given the intensive coverage of Abraham's argument in this discussion so far, it may seem that his presentation of reasons itself caused Sarah to act as she did, and I think that is partly the case. However, at least one other element may have also contributed: Abraham's status as husband. His societal role may not be the only cause but it pairs well with the argumentation he presents in order to secure Sarah's adherence.

Genesis 12:10–20 puts the reasoning process of Abraham on display. He commands his wife Sarah to call herself his sister and issues the command on several grounds: his empirical knowledge of her beauty and the expected outcome of how the Egyptians will treat them. He is accurate about both his empirical knowledge and consequences but seems to underestimate certain outcomes, including the response to his wife's beauty and the level of Egyptian favor towards himself, an underestimation that may also apply to God's promise-keeping. In addition to accuracy and effectiveness, his reasoning is gauged by the theological point of reference, particularly his aim to preserve life. For it seems that his goals relate to the promises issued by God in Gen 12:1–3, which create a narrative context for interpreting Abraham's rationality, and yet, given the fact that the nature of the relationship is not entirely clear—does he reason with the aim to fulfill the promises or does he neglect them?—that connection appears most contentious for this passage. Therefore, while divine promises, the ethics of Abraham's actions, and status of his (dis)trust have been at the center of scholarship on Gen 12:10–20, the profile of his rationality holds a significant place in the interpretation of the chapter, which also affirms its status as a distinctive narratological element: the thought-scene.

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[33] Forming an additional link between the action of God and Pharaoh, Kenneth A. Mathews (*Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC 1B [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005], 122) notes the repeated command that Abraham "go," first from God (12:1) and then Pharaoh (12:19).

[34] Willi-Plein (*Buch Genesis*, 37) notes this is not an imposition from Abraham but a successful attempt at persuasion.

4. REASONING UPON THE POWER OF PRINCIPLE: JOSEPH (GEN 39:7–10)

4.1 JOSEPH'S SPEECH ACT AND GROUNDS

The consequential and life-preserving rationality of the prior scene is complemented by a set of thought-scenes that feature very different grounds and aims. In Genesis 39, Joseph encounters Potiphar's wife, and it is his obedience to God and resistance to sexual temptation that have been longstanding emphases of interpretation. But amidst his pious resolve he forwards an argument. In fact, along with the wiles of Potiphar's wife and assurance of the Lord's presence, the narrative of Genesis 39 presents Joseph as an actor of reason. For Joseph is introduced as an agent of divine success (39:1–6, 21–23) and the victim of royal accusation (39:11–20), and yet when he speaks for himself he presents nothing but reasons for his action (39:7–10). This is not to detract from the theological backbone of this passage but rather to say that the piety and resolve of Joseph are joined with, and perhaps expressed through, human reason.

Joseph's speech act in 39:8–9 is a response. For Potiphar's wife has invited him—"Lie with me" (39:7)—and Joseph "refused" (*piel* מאן), giving no less than two sets of reasons for his refusal. He first appeals, indirectly, to the consequences. For Potiphar "has put everything he has in my power" and freed himself from thinking about it (v. 8).[35] Having sex with Potiphar's wife will compromise the trust of Joseph's master and the security of the operation. In other words, the act would produce bad consequences. Second, Joseph appeals to principles: "you are his wife," he says to her, and under Joseph's authority like everything else, so finally, "how, then, can I sin against God?" (v. 9). Joseph values his master's trust and generosity; he wishes to refrain from adultery; and he will not sin against God. Joseph reasons based upon consequences and, most of all, upon principle.

Some interpreters have argued that these reasons form a unity, that they are all subsumed under the commitment of trust between Joseph and his master.[36] While not impossible, the outplaying of the story itself distinguishes between Joseph's grounds of argumentation, and does so with significant purpose. For just as Joseph appeals to his sexual ethic, relational commitment, and theological principle,

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[35] The phrasing—אדני לא ידע אתי מה בבית—is difficult to translate, but Joseph seems to indicate that Potiphar "does not know what I have [i.e., what's with me] or what's in the house." It is probably accurate to see Potiphar as "not concerned" with the household goings-on, conveying his full trust in Joseph (so NASB, ESV, NRSV, JPS).

[36] Claus Westermann, *Joseph: Studies of the Joseph Stories in Genesis*, trans. Omar Kaste (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 27; Theo L. Hettema, *Reading for Good: Narrative Theology and Ethics in the Joseph Story from the Perspective of Ricoeur's Hermeneutic*s, Studies in Philosophical Theology 18 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 186.

so there are three corresponding responses: Potiphar's wife reacts to his refusal to commit adultery (39:11–19); the master alters his treatment of Joseph (39:19–20); and God preserves his blessing upon Joseph (39:21–23). These are integrated, as one would expect in Hebrew narrative, but nevertheless constitute separate reasons, delineated in Joseph's argument and across the narrative events.[37] Joseph, therefore, responds to the invitation of sex based upon consequences, both relational and institutional, and upon principles, including those pertaining to Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, and God.

4.2 Joseph's Aims

What does Joseph intend to accomplish with this argument? We could speculate about many aims, as Chrysostom did, arguing that Joseph's own self-interest drove him to preserve his leadership position.[38] Or perhaps, as Theo Hettema claims, Joseph was using a theological argument for manipulation, aiming to secure some tangible success.[39] Further still, obedience may have been an end in and of itself, of the Kantian sort, whereby Joseph presents a set of reasons that undergird his desire to be obedient for obedience's sake. The passage, however, lends itself to more than speculation. Joseph does seem intent upon preserving the current state of the situation, namely, that his master remain at peace (Gen 39:8) and the Lord's favor remain intact (39:9). These aims, furthermore, match up with the subsequent events, since through the plot of Potiphar's wife (39:11–18), Joseph's relationship with Potiphar is compromised (vv. 19–20), while the Lord's favor remains and is reaffirmed (vv. 21–23). There is no explicit connection between Joseph's obedience and the Lord's blessing, but there is some validity to the aim of Joseph obeying for obedience's sake; he wishes to do right by the Lord. Franziska Ede has put it well: "It is not the law *per se*, but rather the relationship with God derived from it that is, according to Gen 39:9, decisive for Joseph's action."[40] One might even see an innerbiblical connection with Gen 50:20, as implied by Joseph Bekhor Shor's comment that Joseph thinks, לשלם לו רעה תחת טובה ("How can I repay him evil for good?").[41] Nonetheless, three plausible aims are discernable: to

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[37] This interpretation also raises doubts about Sarna's idea that the three arguments reflect the "hierarchy of values" adopted by Potiphar's wife (Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation,* JPSTC 1 [Philadelphia: JPS, 1989], 273).

[38] John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 62.17; cf. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 316.

[39] Hettema, *Reading for Good*, 238.

[40] Franziska Ede, *Die Josefsgeschichte: Literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Entstehung von Gen 37–50*, BZAW 485 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 98: "Nicht das Gesetz *per se*, sondern das daraus abgeleitete Gottesverhältnis ist nach Gen 39,9 jedoch ausschlaggebend für das Handeln Josefs."

[41] In this comment on Gen 39:9, Bekhor Shor himself does not explicitly make the connection to 50:20. Joseph ben Isaac Bekhor Shor, *Perush 'al*

preserve his relationship with his master and thus the current state of success in the situation; to maintain the Lord's favor; and to obey as such.

The preceding indicates that Joseph was accurate about his most explicit aim: to preserve a trusting relationship with Potiphar. He refuses the invitation of sex based upon the expectation that adultery would compromise the trust of his master, and this expectation proves accurate. For although Joseph does not commit adultery, Potiphar's wife falsely reports that he assaulted her, and when this story reaches the ears of Potiphar himself, his trust in Joseph is broken, as expected (39:19), thereby showing Joseph's consequential reasoning to be accurate.[42] As for his theological grounds, these are not able to be measured for accuracy, but they do seem validated thanks to the preservation of favor and success granted by the Lord at the narrative's end. Thus, from the narrator's point of view, Joseph was rational to account for sin in his considerations.

Given Joseph's patent thought process and its coherence with the rest of the narrative, it seems unlikely that he takes action "primarily on pragmatic grounds," as Brueggemann suggests.[43] For theology, of an almost purist interest, plays a large role in his reasoning process. Similarly, I cannot agree with Brueggemann that "this story takes a high view of God, so high that human action is declared irrelevant."[44] Human actions are highly relevant in this narrative. Although I would concede that the causal relationship between Joseph's argument and subsequent events is not entirely clear, it does raise the question of what Joseph's argument accomplishes. Calvin and Nahmanides suggested that Joseph mentions the trust and generosity of Potiphar to influence his wife.[45] However strategic though, his reasoning does not stop Potiphar's wife, who moves forward with a plan to get at Joseph somehow, even if spitefully in the end. Perhaps Charlotte Katzoff is right, that rather than awaiting persuasion, Potiphar's wife "could not have avoided doing what she did."[46] If Joseph was not expecting to persuade, did he, rather, present an argument for himself, aiming to bolster his own moral resolve? This is possible, but must contend with several other proposed sources of such resolve, including God's Spirit and blessing.[47] Lastly, the thought-

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ha-torah, ed. Adolph Jellinek (Leipzig: Gerhard, 1856), https://www.sefaria.org/Bekhor_Shor%2C_Genesis.39.9.2?lang=bi (accessed 21.03.2023).

[42] Sternberg (*Poetics*, 427) observes that the reference to "thy slave" in v. 19 shows that anger lands on "*his* special slave" (emphasis original).

[43] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 319.

[44] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 289.

[45] Calvin on 39:7 (*Commentaries*, vol. 2, n.p. Online: https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02/calcom02.xvii.i.html); Nahmanides on v. 9 in Carasik, *Commentators' Bible: Genesis*, 349.

[46] Charlotte Katzoff, *Human Agency and Divine Will: The Book of Genesis* (London: Routledge, 2020), 158.

[47] See, respectively, Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38–44*, ed.

scene might be intended to reveal character, as it seems to do regardless of the more particular, narrative purposes of Joseph's argument.[48] For whether he aims to influence Potiphar's wife or convince himself of right action, he discloses something about his character (so long as we set aside suspicions about Joseph's sincerity), not least his conviction that God had been granting him success (39:2). Aside from efficacy, though, Joseph's prolonged and theological argument aims at three things: to preserve his relationship with his master and thus the current state of success in the situation; to maintain the Lord's favor; and to obey as such.

5. A CATALOGUE OF REMAINING THOUGHT-SCENES

The episodes with Abraham (12:10–20) and Joseph (39:7–10) illustrate the primary elements of the thought-scene in Hebrew narrative. Most basically, these include a character's identifiable expression of motivating reasons for an action, decision, or speech act. It has also entailed a broader profile rationality that includes the aims toward which the reasoning is directed and some measurability of accuracy and effectiveness. With these two episodes, I incorporate eight other thought-scenes from Genesis due to commonalities, particularly their grounds and aims, and survey fourteen other cases within the book as well as additional examples from the HB. What follows, then, amounts to a catalogue of thought scenes that draws out the remaining variations of this convention.

5.1 REASONING TO PRESERVE LIFE: SARAH, LOT'S DAUGHTERS, ISAAC, BALAK, RAHAB AND DAVID

The pattern of issuing requests, based upon one's knowledge and expectations of outcome, in order to preserve or create life, all of which is verbalized by the character, as in Gen 12:10–20, occurs on three other occasions in Genesis and elsewhere in the HB.

Gen 16:1–2/21:9–14—Sarah twice requests that Abraham take action regarding children, based upon the consequences that she foresees. In Gen 16:2, she discloses her thought process: "And Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go, please, into my maid; perhaps I will acquire children through her [אולי אבנה ממנה].' "[49] Sarah commands Abraham to have sex with Hagar and does so on several grounds: her knowledge, namely her theological interpretation of the situation

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Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther's Works 7 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 75–77; Calvin on 39:10 (*Commentaries*, vol. 2, n.p. Online: https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02/calcom02.xvii.i.html); Hettema, *Reading for Good*, 226.

[48] So von Rad, *Genesis*, 103–4; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 232–37.

[49] The lexeme בנה (here *niphal*) can refer figuratively to bearing children, as one "builds" a household (Deut 25:9; Ruth 4:11). In English, the clunky "I will be built by/from her" (אבנה ממנה) is Sarai's way of saying that she might have children by means of her maid Hagar.

(that God has prevented her from conceiving), and the expectation that Abraham sleeping with Hagar will produce a child.[50] Her aim is to create offspring and perhaps, with an ambiguity similar to 12:10–20, fulfill God's promises of being fruitful. Somewhat conversely, but still basing her request on the foreseen consequences of children and life, in 21:9–14 Sarah demands that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael, "for the son of this maid shall not be heir with my son, with Isaac" (21:10).

Gen 19:30–38—A similar pattern occurs with Lot's daughters, who create a plan to have sex with their father in an effort to reproduce (Gen 19:30–38). This scene occurs after the decimation of Sodom, when Lot's two daughters seem to believe, or at least say they believe, that they and their father are the only people left living in the area.[51] With no apparent hope of finding men with which to reproduce, the elder daughter concocts a plan to bear children—she and then her younger sister will sleep with their father, without him knowing—and the plan succeeds.

This passage constitutes a thought-scene, because the elder daughter reasons out loud about why and how she and her sister should reproduce with Lot. The speech act is found within the command she issues to her younger sister—"you go in and lie with him" (19:34)—and yet prior to that, the eldest's reasoning applies to the decision itself: that they get their father drunk, lie with him, and preserve offspring (19:32). The decision and subsequent commands are based upon two pieces of knowledge and aimed at a single articulated goal. First, the daughters know their father is old; second, they believe, or at least say so, that there is no (other) man on earth to procreate with (19:31). The aim of the plan is that they reproduce: "that we might preserve offspring from our father" (19:32). While any deeper motivation behind their action remains debatable,[52] the eldest

[50] It is possible that Sarah also draws on cultural custom, as surrogate motherhood was a documented option within the ancient Near East. See discussion in the Conclusion below.

[51] The sisters may simply be expressing the impossibility of being able to procreate in the current circumstances, rather than claiming that Lot is the only man alive. The nature of the comment in 19:31 has long been debated (e.g., Calvin, *Commentaries*, vol. 1, n.p. Online: https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01/calcom01.xxv.i.html; Matthew J. Korpman, "Can anything good come from Sodom? A feminist and narrative critique of Lot's daughters in Gen. 19.30–38," *JSOT* 43.3 [2019]: 334–42). Abarbanel thought that the daughters believed that all men were homosexual, as in Sodom (Carasik, *Commentator's Bible: Genesis*, 175). The most extensive account of scholarship on Gen 19:30–38 is in Johanna Stiebert's, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 130–44.

[52] Cf. adherence to the "primeval imperative" (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 313), taking revenge on their father (Korpman, "Can anything good?", 340–41), and honoring him (Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 186).

daughter showcases her reasoning by deciding upon a course of action, commanding her sister to participate, based upon her knowledge of the situation and with the aim to preserve offspring.

Gen 26:6–11—Isaac decides to call his wife his sister based upon his fear of death as the expected consequence. While this passage discloses a decision rather than a command from Isaac, Gen 12:10–20, 16:1–2, 19:30–38, and 26:6–11 all constitute thought-scenes and have similar profiles of rationality, especially their grounds and aims which are tied up with fear, the preservation of life, and the fulfillment of divine promises. Additional examples appear elsewhere in the HB.

Num 22:5–6—At the outset of the story of Balaam (Numbers 22–24), Balak requests that Balaam curse the people of Israel, aiming to defeat and expel the Israelites rather than face defeat himself, based upon his awareness of their might and expectation that Balaam is an effective diviner.

Josh 2:8–13—Rahab requests that the Israelite scouts swear to preserve her family's life, since what she has heard about Israel's past convinces her that the Lord is God, leading to the expectation that Israel will therefore conquer the land.

2 Sam 15:14—Amidst a mounting conspiracy, David bids that he and his servants leave Jerusalem, explaining that Absalom will otherwise overtake and kill them. In these cases, Balak, Rahab, and David verbalize their reasons for making a request or coming to a decision, each of which could be unpacked like the Genesis examples.

5.2 Additional Oaths and Principles

Genesis 39:7–10 comprises a thought-scene, whereby Joseph refuses an invitation of sex from his master's wife, on consequential and ideological grounds, with the aim of obeying God and possibly preserving the blessed state of the situation. Similar scenes include the following:

Gen 14:21–24—Elsewhere in Genesis, Abraham also refuses an offer from someone, the king of Sodom, who insists that Abraham keep a share of the war spoils. Abraham, like Joseph, refuses on principled grounds, citing his oath with God.

Gen 21:22–24—During a brief encounter, Abimelech entreats Abraham to swear that he will not deal falsely with Abimelech or his descendants, based upon the principle that "God is with you [Abraham] in all that you do" (v. 22). The type of treatment that Abimelech then requests is grounded upon the kindness with which he has treated Abraham.

Gen 26:26–31—In response to Isaac questioning their visit, Abimelech, Ahuzzath, and Phicol explain that they have come to see Isaac because the Lord is with him and that they want peace rather than conflict.

Gen 50:15–21—At the end of Genesis, Joseph reasons again. He demands that his brothers "do not fear" (50:19), explaining that

he is not "in the place of God" and that, while they meant evil against him, "God meant it for good" (v. 20). Joseph again appeals to theological principle and seems intent to fulfill the intention of God's plans while also being kind and upholding life. This instance of reasoning occurs in response to the crafty plan of Joseph's brothers (50:16–18), as they expect hatred from Joseph and fear his payback (50:15). Joseph himself, though, is clearly a man of principle, responding to those around him on theological grounds.

Josh 24:16–18—At the end of the book of Joshua, the people of Israel respond to Joshua's call to serve the Lord (24:14–15) with a collective decision to do so (24:16) based upon expressed theological beliefs: he is their God who rescued them and preserved them amidst dangerous peoples (24:17–18).

Judg 11:2—In a brief exchange, Jephthah's brothers ban him from an inheritance on the principle that he is "the son of another woman," though there are probably other reasons lingering under the surface.[53]

5.3 A Collage of Reasons

Most of the passages above have been limited to one or two types of motivating reasons upon which characters form their arguments. In other cases, though, a character reasons based upon a collage of grounds.

Gen 20:1–7—Abimelech responds to God's threat of death by justifying his action to take Sarah based upon God's just recognition of innocence, Abraham and Sarah's claim that she is Abraham's sister, and his own integrity. Abraham's later explanation regarding Sarah in 20:12, being "the daughter of my father," however, stands in possible tension with the narrator's description in 11:31, where she is identified as "the wife of Abram [Terah's] son."

Gen 30:25–30—Jacob requests that Laban release him and his family, based upon (1) their agreement (that Laban would let him go after his terms of service), (2) Laban's knowledge of Jacob's faithful service ("for you know of my service with which I have served you," v. 26), and (3) the divine blessing that has come with it (the livestock have fared well and God has blessed Laban, vv. 29–30). Jacob's request enlists no less than three distinctive types of reasons: principle (their agreement), Laban's knowledge of his service (knowledge/empiricism), and divine blessing (theology). He volleys these at Laban in hopes of securing his family and returning home with them.

Genesis 31:4–16—Jacob must ultimately decide to return home without Laban's blessing, and so in Gen 31:4–16, he makes this decision and attempts to persuade Rachel and Leah. His reasons are

[53] For Barry G. Webb (*The Book of Judges*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 310–11), the contrast of Jephthah's might (Judg 11:1) and lack of such among Gilead (10:17–18) "hints that the real motive for his expulsion by his brothers may have been fear of being dominated by him."

again many, including his past loyalty to Laban, Laban's dishonesty and disfavor, God's protection and favor, and God's command.[54]

Josh 14:6–12—In Joshua 14, Caleb requests that Joshua grant him the land that the Lord promised Caleb decades ago (v. 12), appealing to their shared knowledge of what Lord told Moses about them (v. 6), that in his scouting Caleb "followed the Lord" his God (v. 8), and that on that basis Moses promised his family an inheritance (v. 9). Furthermore, God has kept Caleb alive "as he said," and Caleb is still strong enough to fight (vv. 10–11), and there remains a strong possibility that God will be present with him to drive out inhabitants as was promised (v. 12). In his request to take the land of promise, Caleb gives a slew of motivating reasons: knowledge, promises, his character, God's activity, and strategic plausibility.

These four cases reveal a subtle distinction between thought-scenes and other instances of human reasoning in HB narratives. Jacob and Caleb are attempting to persuade other parties, and in so doing they express some of their own motivating reasons for the request; their expressions are self-revealing and not simply other-directed. Compare this with Exod 18:13–27, where Jethro advises Moses about restructured leadership. Jethro claims that it is "not good" (18:17), that Moses cannot do it alone and will tire (v. 18), and that by following this plan God will work among them and the people will be cared for (v. 23). Jethro may very well subscribe to the reasons he gives but they do not evidently reflect his motivating reasons for the speech act. This is a case of persuasion having a rhetorical form more akin to the negotiation and planning contexts of human reason (see §2) than a thought-scene.

5.4 Reasoning and Speech Acts

Multiple speech acts have become apparent in the examples discussed so far, including request (esp. commands), decision, and response (esp. refusal). Several of the remaining thought-scenes disclose that a request of some sort is the majority speech act in Genesis.

Gen 27:5–13/33:8–11/44:18–34—In Gen 27:5–13, Rebekah commands Jacob to bring two goats to her and then deliver food to

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[54] Carol Newsom (*The Spirit Within Me: Self and Agency in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism*, ABRL [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021], 31–32) raises the possibility that when the divine voice intervenes in biblical narrative, especially at moments of decision as it seems to here (31:3), the internal conflict and deliberation of the human characters are of less interest to the author. That, however, should be balanced by a consideration of the thought-scene's prevalence, whereby characters think through a great many decisions and can base their choices on a multiplicity of factors, including, and not necessarily at odds with, God's command. This convention may therefore substantiate a case of what she calls "co-agency."

Isaac in order to gain his blessing.[55] Her request borders on coercion, as Jacob objects (vv. 11–12) and she reiterates that he must obey her voice (vv. 8, 13), because, most simply, she wants him blessed. Similar speech acts occur when Jacob demands that Esau accept his gift (33:8–11), and Judah requests that Joseph let him stay in Egypt in place of his brother Benjamin (44:18–34), both accompanied by motivating reasons.[56] Over one third of the thought-scenes in Genesis (9/24) feature a request of some sort, making it the majority speech act.

Gen 42:38—In Genesis 39, Joseph responded to Potiphar's wife with a refusal of her invitation. In 42:38, Jacob also issues a response, refusing Reuben's request to take Benjamin to Egypt. Jacob bases his refusal on the possibility that harm will come to his son and that he himself would consequently face devastating sorrow.

Gen 11:3–4/41:37–41/48:17–20—Third, and finally, characters express reasons to justify or explain certain decisions. Thus, when blind Jacob begins to bless his younger son with the right hand, a mistake that Joseph makes his father aware of, Jacob stands by his original decision, indicating that the "younger brother shall be greater than [the elder]" (Gen 48:19). He makes and, in this case, stands by a decision. This brings us to the final two thought-scenes of Genesis, both of which entail decisions, or, what John Searle called "commissives," whereby the speaker issues a self-address to do something.[57] The people of the Babel episode decide to build a city and tower, issuing the cohortatives "let us make bricks […] let us build and make a name for ourselves" (11:3–4), based upon the expectation that this would preserve their unity. Second, Pharaoh expresses similar resolve when he decides to install Joseph as his senior deputy—"You shall be over my house" (41:40)—given God's presence with Joseph and his consequent wisdom and exceptionality (41:37–41). These final examples, from Babel and Pharaoh, suggest that although Genesis features the thought processes of those in the Abrahamic line, the book also incorporates the reasoning of other parties. Such expressive decision-making occurs elsewhere in the HB.

Gen 42:21–22—In view of the more common profiles of reasoning in Genesis, one stands apart in terms of its object. Joseph's brothers interpret their own situation, thinking out loud about why distress has come upon them to conclude that it is due to their guilt—they did not show mercy to Joseph and sinned against him.

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[55] Gordon J. Wenham (*Genesis 16–20*, WBC 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 207) notes that 27:7 is the only use of feminine participle צוה in the HB, showing that Rebekah exerts "all the maternal authority she can muster in order to make Jacob carry out her scheme." Using the finite verb with reference to feminine action is rare also (Ruth 3:6; Esth 4:5, 10, 17).

[56] Jacob's reasoning in 33:8–11 is a culmination of his extended discourse of reasons in 32:1–21.

[57] Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 8, 14.

Exod 1:8–10—In Exodus, another king of Egypt reasons aloud, resolving to burden the people of Israel because of his fear that, due to their increasing number, the people will revolt and escape.

1 Sam 14:6—In 1 Samuel, Jonathan rallies his armor bearer, deciding that they should approach the Philistine garrison. He explains that "perhaps the Lord will work for us; for the Lord has no hinderance from saving by many or by few." It is a commission given on theological grounds.

Neh 2:17—Narrating in the first person, Nehemiah recounts how he commissioned the building of Jerusalem's wall, appealing to its dilapidated state and the hope that they will no longer suffer reproach. In the following verse (2:18), he also narrates to the reader that he gave additional reasons: God's hand upon him and the king's favor.

5.5 EXPLANATIONS

The speech act of "explaining" commonly occurs within thought-scenes that focus on the past action of a character. In most cases this occurs in response to a query, as Adam and Eve explain their behavior to God (Gen 3:11–13), Jacob explains that he tricked and fled from Laban because of his fear that his daughters would be taken (31:25–32), and Joseph's brothers explain to their father why they told Joseph about their other brother (43:6–7). Likewise, the people of Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh defend their building of an altar in Josh 22:21–29, and Saul explains to Samuel why he offered a burnt offering (1 Sam 13:11–12).

6. CONCLUSION

"Thought-scenes" comprise one literary form of human reasoning in biblical narratives. They are distinctive in that they showcase the reasoning process of an individual by disclosing the motivating reasons for an action that has occurred, is in process, or will take place. These actions encompass requests, responses, and decisions, and occur when characters verbally explain "why" they have done or will do such things. The thought-scene constitutes a literary convention of biblical narrative and is distinct from other forms of human reasoning, such as narrating a character's reasoning process in the third person or engaging in prolonged discourses of planning and negotiation. There are at least 24 thought-scenes in the book of Genesis, each of which involves a limited set of speech acts, including request, refusal, decision, explanation, and one instance of interpretation, and several grounds upon which these speech acts rest: theological principles (e.g., sin; promises; divine command), relational principles (e.g., trust; favor; oaths), empirical knowledge, expected outcomes, and emotion. The convention, however, is not limited to Genesis and appears throughout narrative literature of the HB.

While this novel categorization has lent exegetical insight into several of the passages above, as well as Genesis as a whole, it has

implications, above all, for the moral analysis of narrative. Several examples indicate that the interpreter's moral evaluation of a narrative depends upon an understanding of the character's rationality, specifically upon the grounds of reasoning that the interpreter selects. In Gen 16:1–2, for example, I argued that Sarah bases her request—that Abraham have sex with Hagar—on several grounds: first, her knowledge, namely her theological interpretation of the situation (i.e., that God has prevented her from conceiving), and, second, the expectation that Abraham sleeping with Hagar will produce a child. There is also a third possibility: that Sarah draws on the cultural custom of surrogate motherhood, a well-documented option within the ancient Near East. Plausibility aside, the enumeration and varied use of these threefold grounds have great significance for the moral evaluation of Sarah's action. For whether one interprets her behavior with approval or disapproval can depend upon which of these grounds that one selects. Consider the argumentation of three interpreters.

Westermann argues that Sarah "must do as she does" because of her "awareness of God's action."[58] While she is driven by some consequential interest (to alleviate the distress of childlessness), the request itself "is based on what God has or has not done" and thus "she must do as she does."[59] By showcasing Sarah's theological grounds of reasoning, Westermann concludes that she is ethically bound to proffer Hagar and that the narrator therefore approves of her action, albeit indirectly. Compare this with what Wenham calls "Hasty action springing from unbelief" which "does not forward the divine purpose."[60] He too takes Sarah's theology as the grounds of her reasoning and yet with opposing ethical results. Lastly, Hamilton takes the grounds of cultural custom as primary, bringing the full import of ancient Near Eastern surrogate practices to bear on Genesis 16. Thus, he writes, "I am inclined to think that Sarai's action was obligatory, and that no ignominy was attached to such a procedure."[61]

This brief example suggests that interpreters of Hebrew narrative may base their moral evaluation of a scene upon different grounds of reasoning used by a character. For example, Westermann and Hamilton select distinct grounds—theology and cultural custom—and yet both conclude that the narrator approves of Sarah's action. Therefore, the selection of different grounds can result in similar ethical judgments. The above also suggests that the same grounds of reasoning can be interpreted oppositely, as Sarah's theological rationale resulted in the conclusion that the narrator approves (Westermann) or disapproves (Wenham) of the act. In short, the delineation of the thought-scene lends insight into the moral analysis

[58] Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 238.
[59] Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 238.
[60] Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 13.
[61] Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 445.

of biblical narrative. Therefore, to the growing number of recognized conventions in biblical narrative, I propose to add the thought-scene and contend that it has wide-ranging implications for biblical narratology, psychology, and theology.