

Thoughts on the Use the (Hebrew) Bible in the Assessment of Current Ethical Issues – Part II: The Question of the “How?”

Markus Zehnder

Internationale Hochschule Liebenzell; ETF Leuven; Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole
markus.zehnder@ihl.eu

Abstract: In this study, the author looks at how biblical texts in general and Old Testament texts in particular can be used to address current ethical issues. The main focus is on the identification of the four main steps in the transfer from biblical text to current ethical issues: exegetical analysis of the biblical text – synthetical view of the biblical material – hermeneutical transfer – pragmatic application. In addition, some of the salient topics related to the ethical use of the (Hebrew) Bible are investigated: the traditional threefold division of the law, the special role of the Decalogue, the importance of creational order, the weight of exodus and Sinaitic covenant, the discussion about the unique position of love, and the lenses provided by the New Testament. Towards the end, guidelines for the assessment of the relative weight of rules and principles are presented.

Keywords: Hebrew Bible – ethics, Bible – ethics

Introduction

As mentioned in the first part of this three-part article, the discussion about the use of the (Hebrew) Bible in the assessment of current ethical issues has various layers. While the first part addressed the question of the authority of the Bible, the second part is concerned with the hermeneutical considerations that need to be made when relating biblical texts to current ethical questions. *How* can texts from the Hebrew Bible, or biblical texts in general, be related to current situations in a responsible way? This is obviously an important question, because without hermeneutical controls, one can find support for almost any position in the Bible (cf. Goldingay 2021, 179).

Before looking at the details, let us begin with an outline of what the main theses of this essay are:

- The (Hebrew) Bible must be considered in all its breadth and complexity.
- Differences between the current circumstances and the situations reflected in the biblical material must be acknowledged, and bridges can only be built in a complex dialogical and sometimes cyclical hermeneutical process.
- An important guide in this process is the analysis of how preceding biblical regulations are dealt with in later texts within the Bible, particularly how legal regulations found in the Pentateuch are taken up in the postexilic period, and how Old Testament prescriptions are taken up in the New Testament.¹
- And last: the previous history of Jewish and Christian responses to ethical questions also needs to be taken into account.

¹ Also observations concerning the updating of the law in Deuteronomy as compared to Exodus through Numbers may be seen as helpful guides.

1. Two Legitimate Approaches

It is legitimate to pursue two approaches when considering the relationship between biblical texts and current ethical questions: Beginning with biblical texts and asking what their relevance for current life situations might be; vs. beginning with current ethical issues and then turning to the Bible to address the question whether there are texts in the Bible that might shed some light on the current issues.

The navigation of these approaches will need to take into consideration the fact that there are biblical ordinances for issues relevant in antiquity, but no longer today; and that there are current issues – like, e.g., specific types of reproductive assistance – for which there is no direct guidance in the Bible (cf. Davies 2021, 164).

2. The Two Major Building-Blocks

To relate a biblical text to current ethical questions, the following two major building-blocks need to be considered: analysis of the biblical material and analysis of the current situation (thus also, e.g., Rabens 2021, 83). For both elements, there is not necessarily only one possible answer.²

An important element that connects the two sides is the careful identification of the differences between “then” and “now” – which does not mean that these differences are of the same weight in all cases. For example, on some levels in the case of migration the differences are much bigger than in the case of murder: Whereas murder both in antiquity and today is about the taking away of another person’s life outside of the realms of the judicial system and war and in an act that cannot be classified as self-defense – though, of course, both the exact definitions of such an act as well as ideas about the right punishment vary greatly not only in comparison between “then” and “now”, but also with a view to different cultures in both periods – the varieties in the forms of migration “then” and “now” are even more accentuated (for the latter see Zehnder 2021, 104–123).

We need to admit that because of the historical-cultural gap, there are no easy, quick, one-to-one transfers in all cases where this gap is actually relevant.

Another reason that prohibits easy transfers is the fact that most of the ethically relevant material in the Hebrew Bible is embedded in the covenant between God and Israel, a situation that is different from our current historic state.

Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible, and the Bible as a whole, obviously contains various voices, in some cases a diversity of voices addressing the same ethical issue, so that a specific text needs to be understood in its broader biblical context and cannot be isolated from this context. Cherry-picking and reductionist approaches are dead ends – but are, unfortunately, all too common.³

² Because there is not only one single “objective” answer for both the analysis of the biblical material and the analysis of the current situation, there are legitimate differences of opinion; it also renders simple one-to-one transfers impossible in many cases (cf. Rabens 2021, 80).

³ As I could observe (for example) in my work on the Bible and immigration. As an example of what I have in mind in this paragraph: There are those who when looking at the question of immigration in the Hebrew Bible only focus on

3. The Four Steps from Biblical Text to Current Ethical Issue

3.1. Overview

The two major building-blocks mentioned above can be dealt with in four steps:⁴

- A. Exegetical description of the biblical text(s) – with all that this entails, like linguistic analysis, cultural-historical context, rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis,⁵ etc. In this step, it is especially important not to narrow the vision to either diachronic or synchronic approaches exclusively.⁶
- B. Synthetical view of the biblical material in the broader literary context, ultimately in the context of the canon as a whole – taking seriously the polyphony (where it exists),⁷ as well as taking seriously the possibility of progressive revelation (without, however, generally *presupposing* this category for specific individual cases).⁸
- C. Hermeneutical transfer, which takes into consideration both the biblical material and the current situation, analogies and differences in the situational context of “then” and “now”, and uses reason and relevant extra-biblical knowledge from various disciplines.⁹
- D. Pragmatic application in real life, which also takes into consideration pastoral questions.

3.2. Amendments

The four-steps-scheme as outlined above is, in my view, in need of four amendments:

texts that speak about the legal regulations that aim at the protection and support of the sojourner, and do not take into consideration texts that point to the responsibilities of sojourners or the exclusion of foreigners from the specific measures of protection and support reserved for sojourner (as it happens, for example, in Beck 2018).

⁴ Thus, e.g., Hays (1996). The first two steps can be related to what is called “descriptive,” the last two to what is called “constructive” or “prescriptive” (see, e.g., Lapsley 2014, 98) – if the transfer is done under the presupposition that the Bible has in fact some authority in the assessment of current ethical issues. Frevel is wrong when he states that the prescriptive method “is not interested in the formation and inner-biblical reception” of a specific biblical regulation (2021, 133); rather, asking such questions belongs to the first part of the four-step analysis. Frevel (2021, 134) rightly mentions connections or overlap between descriptive and prescriptive perspectives in the subsequent paragraphs.

⁵ Through discourse analysis, Chun seeks to “anchor” subjective elements of interpreting narratives in objective linguistic features, “based on which the overall interpretation can become more ‘scientific’” (2014, 89). Cf also Winther-Nielsen (1995).

⁶ Davies points to the debate about the appropriateness of what he labels “historical-critical” vs. “literary-critical” approaches (2021, 156-159).

⁷ There are conflicting views about the character of the polyphony: According to one view, the various voices can be seen as forming an ultimately coherent choir (thus, e.g., Kaiser 1983, 3); according to another view, the difference of the voices cannot be harmonized on a higher level (thus, e.g., Barton 2014, 11). In Frevel’s system, the first position can be labelled “ethics of the Old Testament,” the second “ethics in the Old Testament.” Adherents of the ethics of the Old Testament group follow either a fundamentalist or a canonical approach, the latter allowing for a diversity of voices, the former denying it (see Frevel 2021, 136).

⁸ Goldingay uses the expression “regressive revelation” for cases where he sees the New Testament being less close to the ideal than the Old, as – according to him – in the case of slavery (see Goldingay 2021, 185–186). It does not seem to me, however, that his arguments concerning the evaluation of this specific case are compelling.

⁹ The importance of the recourse to reason and extra-biblical information is stressed also by, e.g., Curran (1972, 53); Gushee (2021, 397).

1. Somewhere between steps A and B, it is necessary to introduce the category of “grand narrative”, with the following main components: creation, exodus (and Sinai) and God’s compassion for the weak in general, and – if also the New Testament is included – the Christ-event (see, e.g., Rabens 2021, 108).¹⁰

This can be related to the proposal to see the Bible as a whole as a kind of “narrative” or “story”, which is based not least on the observation that also non-narratological elements like laws are embedded in an overarching narrative context (cf. Birch 1991, 40, 51; Mays 2001, 24–26). This means that every ethical statement found in the Bible must be related to this “grand narrative” and investigated in the light of the latter.

2. It has to be taken into account that ethics in the Bible cannot be detached from the theology of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (see, e.g., Kaiser 1983, 3; Wright 2004, 18, 23).

There is a common denominator that connects both amendments: A decisive factor for the assessment of ethical issues from a biblical perspective is the spirit of the canon as whole, or, put differently, the key concepts of the canon (cf. Gane 2017, 34).

3. Somewhere between steps C and D, we have to insert an important element that is usually not taken into account or at least not given much weight: How have previous generations of ethicists, especially biblically inspired Christian or Jewish ethicists,¹¹ or how has the church in its general broad shape,¹² answered a specific ethical question? It must give us pause if the result in an investigation of this angle is that their stance was in general different from the answer to a current ethical issue that we come up with – or formulated positively: If we can identify a clear traditional majority or orthodox view on an ethic question, we have to take this into consideration as an important piece of information.

4. When reading biblical texts and asking about their relevance for current ethical issues, it is important to question the simple dichotomy of right and wrong. In many cases, the question is not what is right and wrong in absolute terms, but whether it is the right time to use a specific biblical precedent at a given moment in the present.

Let us now look at the four steps in more detail.

4. The Four Steps in Detail

4.1. Step A, The Biblical Text

There are seven important points to consider:

¹⁰ An alternative delineation of the grand narrative can be found in Winther-Nielsen 2018, 23, 25: creation, judgment and salvation, intended to lead to obedience in faith. Specific biblical ethical regulations (of both Testaments) show how this obedience looks like in particular, changing circumstances (cf. also Winther-Nielsen 2018, 63).

¹¹ See Gushee 2021, 398.

¹² Cf. Laytham 2005, 358–359.

1. It is necessary to take into consideration the variety of domains in which biblical texts may relate to ethical questions: material ethics, ethical reflection, meta-ethics, illustration, etc. (cf. Frevel 2021, 148).
 2. Ethically relevant material is found in all major genres represented in the Hebrew Bible (Kaiser 1983, 41–42) – as well as in all genres found in the New Testament.
 3. In some ways the most challenging genre is *narrative*. In many cases, ethical guidelines, especially in narratives, are implicit rather than explicit, which makes their retrieval more difficult. Also difficult may be the related task of distinguishing between what is only descriptive and what is actually prescriptive (cf., e.g., Rabens 2021, 87).¹³ An additional question is whether it is the specific act or the agent more generally that is intended by the narrator to be an example for the reader.¹⁴ It is clear that only in the case of Jesus in the New Testament can the person as such without any qualifications be taken as exemplary.¹⁵
- Narratives are complex; their richness must not be reduced to simple exempla or abstract principles – rather, they must be allowed to trigger thoughtful, never-ending exploration in many possible directions and on many levels (including inspiration and motivation), and to form character (e.g., Cosgrove 2021, 69–76; Rabens 2021, 109),¹⁶ a process that is directly bound to life within the church.¹⁷
4. When it comes to legal texts, it is important to consider the discussion about the function of the law in ancient Israel. There has emerged agreement that law in the Bible is not statutory law (e.g., Berman 2017, 109–110; Gane 2017, 32).¹⁸
 5. Mainly with respect to legal texts, it is necessary to make a difference between ethical ideal on the one hand and allowance because of the current state of fallenness on the other (e.g., Gane 2017, 23; Goldingay 2021, 175, 182). This means that in each case one has to ask whether a specific regulation represents the original, best plan, or whether it is an accommodation to human weakness, aiming at providing the best option in a fallen world, but not the ideal.

¹³ For ethics in narratives, see especially Wenham (2000), and Chun (2014). Broadly speaking, ethics tends to be dealt with more explicitly or directly in legal and wisdom texts, and more implicitly or indirectly in narrative and prophetic texts (Barton 2024, 36).

¹⁴ See the discussion in Cosgrove (2021, 69).

¹⁵ Therefore, the question “What would Jesus do?” seems to be very adequate and pertinent.

¹⁶ Janzen states that drawing abstract principles from a story “would lose the narrative nature of Old Testament ethics,” so that “what comes to us in vivid stories of people would be reduced to abstract principles” (1994, 20). This observation points to one of the weaknesses of the approach of “principlism” as advocated by, e.g., Mays (see Mays 2001, 30–35).

¹⁷ For the latter see especially Hauerwas (1981, 54); Laytham (2005, 354–355); Wannewetsch (2007, 58–59). Cf. also Hays (1996, 310). According to Birch, Scripture must be interpreted in dialogue with the context of the community of the church, which is “the shaper of moral identity, the bearer of moral tradition, the community of moral deliberation, and the agent of moral action” (1991, 31).

¹⁸ In spite of this agreement, there are still differences when it comes to the determination of the precise function of biblical legal texts.

6. It is of prime importance to identify the function or goal of a specific biblical injunction in the original context.

7. It is also important to assess the contribution of extrabiblical materials to the understanding of the life situation that is addressed in a biblical injunction.

Finally, it is possible to make a distinction between four different types of ethically relevant material in biblical texts (Raedel 2013, 81):¹⁹ Singular regulations; rules; principles; foundational views.

a) *Singular regulations*. Examples: Noah has to build an ark; Timothy is advised to drink wine.

b) *Rules*. Example: Biblical injunctions not to get drunk. Such rules are found in the context of specific situations.

c) *Principles*. Example: Love of neighbor. The number of such principles is limited. Next to love of neighbor, the following items are normally included in the list: Love of God; justice;²⁰ *chesed*; relationship / other-regard; supporting the weak; holiness and purity; in the New Testament *agape*. Perhaps also *shalom* can be included here.

While most of these principles can be found in a majority of treatments of biblical ethics (see, e.g., Kaiser 1983, 55), there is another important item that is normally not included: liberty. Why this is an important principle that should be added to the list of principles or core values will be explained below, and some more items will be added.

Identification of such principles needs to be based on clear criteria which we will look into later. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that it is possible to reach full consensus about their identification, and especially about their respective weight.

d) *Foundational views*. This is about God's character and will and man's participation in them. Example: God's love and justice; man as *imago Dei*. These foundational views are givens that cannot be deduced from anything; they can, however, be related to the "great narrative".

Assigning a text or an injunction to one of these four categories will affect the question of its transferability to current situations, that is, it will be relevant for step C. In the case of the lower levels (singular regulations, rules), the question must be addressed as to how they relate to the higher-level principles, or to which higher-level principles they can be connected (cf. Gane 2017, 203). Also this consideration will be relevant for step C.

¹⁹ Of course, different classifications can be made. Gane (2017, 24–25), e.g., introduces the difference between (more foundational) values/priorities and (less foundational) principles, splitting up Raedel's rubric of principles. With a view to ethical decision making, Zimmerli (1988, 366–367) also proposes a distinction of four layers. These layers are not in accordance with the ones described here. Zimmerli distinguishes between general principles (such as John Stuart Mill's principles of fairness and equality), time-bound principles (such as the principles of futurist perspective, caution, and avoidance of damage), regional principles valid in certain professions (such as informed consent in medicine), and material values and convictions.

²⁰ There is an ongoing debate on what "justice" means in the (Hebrew) Bible (see, e.g., Koch 1984). Also beyond the Bible there are various concepts of justice that are not in agreement with each other (cf., e.g., Irrgang 1998, 24).

4.2. Step B, Synthetical View of the Biblical Material

In this step, the following three points need to be considered:

1. While there is no doubt that “polyphony” exists, it is a matter of debate whether it is possible to see some unity in the diversity of the various voices reflected in the (Hebrew) Bible. The question is answered positively for example by Kaiser (1983, 6, 139–243), who posits that the concept of holiness undergirds the ethics of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.²¹ Others are more skeptical. By way of example we can point to Davies, who claims that when one identifies the “general thrust” of Scripture, it is no more than “a reflection of the values, prejudices, and presuppositions of the individual interpreter” (2021, 161). This assessment is, however, too pessimistic in my view. There are many instruments that help as safeguards against such a subjectivist turn of the interpretation of the relevant biblical texts – even if it is true that at each step every interpreter needs to be on his or her guard not to make the text fit with personal or cultural preferences that are not informed by the Bible itself. It seems commendable to use an “inductive approach” that takes as its starting point the “careful ... reading of individual texts” and then moves on to assessing what the “common ground between them” could be (Davies 2021, 163).²²

2. The assessment done in this step allows to discern possible *trajectories* (see, e.g., Rabens 2021, 99–100). Identification of such trajectories is also important when it comes to making transfers from “then” to “now.” While the concept of trajectories has become broadly accepted, there may not be as many of them as is often assumed. The existence of trajectories has much to do with the beginning of the *eschaton*.²³

In dealing with trajectories, Webb (2001, 37, 58) has proposed that one should go even beyond the requirements explicitly articulated in the Bible itself – like it happened with the abolition of slavery. There are other who would not follow Webb. Gane (2017, 217), for example, makes the case that as far as slavery is concerned, its abolition is not a matter of going beyond the scope of the biblical texts, but lies within the boundaries set in the Bible, because it is in accordance both with the creation ideal and with Paul’s egalitarian direction.

3. In this step the question of the relationship between the two Testaments plays an important role. From a Christian perspective, it is clear that God’s work does not end with the Hebrew Bible but continues in the New Testament where he has spoken a new word. This means that we cannot confine ourselves to the Hebrew Bible when we decide current ethical questions – such a confinement would only be adequate where one is dealing with the purely historical-descriptive investigation of the ethics of the Hebrew Bible.

²¹ Laytham speaks of a “unity inherent in Scripture as God’s story” (2005, 359; cf. also p. 360). For further examples see Davies (2021, 160).

²² There is a certain tension between this part of Davies’ analysis and the one mentioned before. The tension is, however, not as big as it might appear based on the quotations adduced here, because he does not use the formulation “what the common ground could be,” but “whether there is any common ground” (Davies 2021, 163).

²³ The recognition of trajectories leads, of course, to a difficult question: Is it acceptable to assume that in some cases an assumed endpoint of a trajectory can be affirmed as being biblically legitimated even if it is not supported by any of the previous stages attested in the Bible? Cf., e.g., Rabens (2021, 99).

In order to cover the whole “way of God” as reflected in the canon, the following procedure has to be observed: Look at each question in the light of creation – (post-)fall – covenant with Israel – Christ and giving of the Spirit (salvation) – new creation.

4.3. Step C, Hermeneutical Transfer

With regard to step C, there are four points that need to be highlighted:

1. The distinction between the four types of ethically relevant material mentioned above plays out in the following way when it comes to the hermeneutical transfer:

a) *Singular regulations*. They are not supposed to be imitated in other situations. However, analogies to other situations may potentially be found, so that such regulations may become instructive again.

b) *Rules*. They can be applied also to other, similar situations.²⁴ Taking up the example of drunkenness again: Such applications can go beyond the area of drunkenness proper; for example, the limitation to the use of alcoholic beverages can be lifted, which means that the rule is now about the use of drugs of any kind or about behavior that is related to the loss of self-control.

c) *Principles*. They provide orientation for a large number of situations, but do not determine automatically how to act in a specific situation. The principles underlie rules. As such, they help in balancing rules and applying them. They are also formative elements of character-building.

Principles must not be understood in terms of timeless abstract prescriptions that can be transferred just like that; it is not possible to grasp the meaning of principles in the abstract apart from concrete cases (see especially Rabens 2021, 89).²⁵

d) *Foundational views*. What corresponds to them is an ethical basic attitude, like being Christ-minded. As a character-trait, this will help in making wise ethical decisions.

It is crucial that in the work on step C *all* categories just mentioned are in view and none is neglected, including also the great narratives and the trajectories.

2. The consideration of extra-biblical information, or common knowledge, is a crucial part of this step. There are even biblical models for this: See, for example, the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, or Romans 1 in the New Testament. That is, the Bible itself encourages its readers to also use extra-biblical resources. This concept flows naturally from the biblical notion that God is the Creator of everything.

²⁴ Also on this level, and to some degree also on the level of principles, arguments can be based on analogy (cf. Cosgrove 2021, 74–75).

²⁵ For a somewhat different view see Cosgrove (2021, 71, 76). For him, what functions as model are not the specific acts of exemplary figures, but the principles behind these acts and the question, what kind of persons they were, the “*gestalt*” that caused them to do what they did (p. 76).

It goes without saying that no single reader of the Bible can do this job. In assessing current ethical issues, we are always dependent on the expert input of specialists in all fields, from natural science to economy to psychology and so on, and on the input of persons with personal experience of a non-scientific character in a domain touched by a specific ethical question as well.

Of course, problems arise when there seem to be tensions between extra-biblical pieces of information and biblical assertions. The first step will be to investigate carefully whether these tensions are real or perceived only. Should they appear to be real, what is needed, in my view, is a posture of humility, since our “latest scientific discoveries and our current cultural conventions have historically been shown time and again to be not the last word on the matter” (Rabens 2021, 96).²⁶ What is needed is an attitude that allows for self-criticism and critical questioning of the conventions of our own times.

3. It is also important to draw in observations that deal with the question as to how preceding biblical regulations are dealt with in later texts, particularly how legal regulations are taken up in the postexilic period,²⁷ and how prescriptions found in the Hebrew Bible are taken up in the New Testament.

One text of special interest is Acts 15 dealing directly with the question in what ways prescriptions from the Hebrew Bible are relevant for non-Israelite members of the new covenant. Based on this text, one can argue that pre-Sinaitic regulations and in some cases regulations that are also binding for the *ger* (“sojourner”) are likely to have continued validity in the context of the new covenant.²⁸

4. A specific ethical question always needs to be embedded in the wider context of the topic. For example, when dealing with the question of monogamy, the investigation needs to look at the wider vision of marriage. Beyond this, the broader civilizational, philosophical, and historical contexts must be considered.

5. Following Christopher Wright’s seminal work on the relevance of Old Testament ethics for God’s people today, we note that

- a) not single laws, but the whole shape of ancient Israel (in its historical contingency) is the paradigm that shows the will of God;²⁹
- b) the paradigm does not call for imitation, but for application;
- c) the main traits of this shape can be described as follows: central position of family;³⁰ decentralized organization; small hierarchies; small government; limited cult.

²⁶ Rabens (2021, 95–96) – in my view correctly – relates this problem to the fact that biblical authors operate within the framework of cultural assumptions of their own times.

²⁷ An interesting example is the reception of Deut 23:4–6 in Neh 13:1–3 (see Zehnder 2005). This example makes clear that it was not about a literal transfer, but about identifying the goals of the regulation and the principles informing it and adapting these to the new circumstances.

²⁸ For a brief discussion of the issues mentioned here see Zehnder (2021, 98).

²⁹ The biblical foundation for this view is primarily seen in Exod 19:4–6.

³⁰ Family is even more central in Janzen’s work: He establishes the “family paradigm” as the most important of the five paradigms that govern the ethical structure of the Hebrew Bible (Janzen 1994, 3).

d) all of this is inextricably embedded in the relationship with YHWH.³¹

6. It is important to carefully analyze both the continuities and the differences between the cultural particulars of the world of the text and our own world. What we are looking at here are especially socio-cultural and psychological or anthropological continuities and discontinuities. The larger the gap between “then” and “now”, the more complicated and contested possible attempts at a transfer will be, and the more a possible transfer will move up on the scale of abstraction. It is important to check that the abstractions that are involved in this process are biblically controlled. The bigger the overlap between ancient and modern contexts with respect to a specific question, the easier the transfer. As an example, we can point to the question of the use of alcoholic beverages vs. the question of the right attitude towards government. In the first case, there is in general not much difference between ancient and modern contexts, whereas in the second case these differences are far-reaching.³²

4.4. Step D, Pragmatic Application

The following elements are of special importance for this step that deals with the question about *how* it is possible to implement goals and principles that inform biblical prescriptions in a changed context:³³

1. What are the institutional constraints that are relevant when considering practical applications of biblical models?
2. What are the economic constraints?
3. What are the cultural challenges that need to be considered? In this respect, it will be necessary to be content with an accommodating approach, working from the given cultural norms (cf. also Gane 2017, 109).
4. Which are the elements of a biblical model than can and cannot be realized in a given new context? Put differently: How do the given constraints affect the moral obligations that seem to flow from the biblical texts?
5. What are the best available procedures to apply biblical prescriptions?³⁴
6. What are the best options taking into account that the present circumstances are marked by the frame of the less-than-ideal circumstances created by the fall?

³¹ For these points see especially Wright (2004, 63–71).

³² And the complexity is heightened by the fact that especially on the side of the “now”, but to some degree also on the side of the “then”, there is a wide variety of social-institutional contexts. Of course, this is not fully absent when it comes to the use of alcoholic beverages either, in terms of one major culture prohibiting such use in general (Islam), and some sub-cultures outside of Islam following cultural-traditional patterns that deviate from the rest of the societies in which they are embedded. But such complexities appear to be minor in comparison to those related to the attitude towards government.

³³ For this paragraph see especially Irrgang (1998, 26–27).

³⁴ To answer this question, it is necessary to have what Irrgang calls “strategisches Umgangswissen” (Irrgang 1998).

7. What are the consequences of the application of biblical models in a specific current context? (cf. Irrgang 1998, 30).
8. What are pastoral considerations that affect the application of biblical prescription, and in what way do they affect the possible application?

4.5. Steps C and D Together

There are nine points that need to be mentioned that are relevant to consider when looking at steps C (hermeneutical transfer) and D (practical application) together:

1. The concept of “common sense” has to be taken seriously (see, e.g., Irrgang 1998, 17).
 2. A good number of authors, correctly in my view, underline that an important part of the transfer is to analyze the function and objectives of specific regulations found in the (Hebrew) Bible in their original context and then translate them into equivalent goals in possible analogous situations that occur today (see, e.g., Hays 2001, 30–35). In the case of transcultural continuities, the transfer can be more direct, whereas in the case of considerable cultural differences possible transfers may be more restricted and more dependent on or focused on less direct functional equivalents.³⁵
- With a view to Old Testament laws, Gane helpfully proposes the following principle: “If the modern situation falls within the scope of direct application of the law, *and* if modern direct application would accomplish the same goal as in the ancient setting to which the law was originally addressed, the law should be literally observed today” (Gane 2017, 210; italics in the original).³⁶
3. In the case of negatively formulated commands one has to move in the other direction and ask what a possible positive application would look like.³⁷
 4. The location of biblical injunctions in the context of redemption history as a whole has to be considered. Connections to creation, to the Christ event and the giving of the Spirit, and finally to new creation, elevates the weight of an injunction and allows for more direct transfer to new/current situations.
 5. Higher-level injunctions can be transferred more directly to new/current situations, using the principle of analogy. As mentioned above, in the case of the lower-level injunctions (singular regulations, rules), the question must be addressed as to how they relate to the higher-level principles, or to which higher-level principles they can be connected; it then needs to be assessed how these higher-level principles might be transferred to current situations, even if the lower-level injunctions cannot be transferred.
 6. Part of the combined steps C and D is to take seriously the difference between the formulation of general positions on the one hand and pastoral necessities or personal callings on the other. These

³⁵ Rabens uses the expressions “cultural differences” and “transcultural analogies” and speaks of the necessity to investigate “the cultural specifics of a text with a view to the differences and similarities to our own culture” (2021, 90).

³⁶ As an example, Gane points to Deut 22:8, the parapet around a flat roof on which people can walk.

³⁷ An impressive example of this can be found in Martin Luther’s *Eine kurze Erklärung der Zehn Gebote*, written in 1518.

domains must not be conflated – as it unfortunately happens all too often. A related danger is the subversion of ethical principles through the focus on individual extraordinary cases.

7. It needs to be assessed carefully in each individual case whether a regulation found in the (Hebrew) Bible should be applied on the personal level, on the level of the family, on the level of the church, or on the level of the state (to name the most salient categories). It may well be that an application needs to be done on more than one level – which leads to the question how the applications look differently on the different levels.³⁸

8. Special attention has to be given to the question whether attempts should be made to implement biblical regulations in today's legal system, that is, to make biblical injunctions the law of the land. This question cannot be answered in the positive in a general, straightforward way, because no modern state is a direct continuation of ancient Israel.³⁹ Important considerations in answering this question are the aspects of feasibility, verifiability, and benefit for large segments of society.

9. The political realm cannot be excluded in principle as a possible arena of application. The Hebrew Bible in particular and the Bible as a whole make it clear that there is no strict separation of the spiritual, the personal, and the political realms.⁴⁰

Some of the most salient consequences in terms of using the Hebrew Bible to address ethical questions are the following ones (see esp. Wright 2004, 65–73):

- a) First and foremost: single regulations must not be detached from their context, but it must be determined what the function/objective of a specific regulation in the broader context was.
- b) Part of assessing this function is to analyze what the specific weight of regulations and social institutions was.

³⁸ The concern with this point is both about agents and realms of application: Whom does a specific biblical injunction envision as the agent of an action or behavior: an individual? the congregation? the family? the civic community? state agencies? When it comes to individuals: the individual as a private citizen? as the member of a congregation? as the agent of the state? Connected to the distinctions relating to agent are the distinctions related to realm of application: Is a certain action or behavior meant to be implemented on the individual level? the level of the family? the level of the church? the level of the civic community (ranging from village to state)?

³⁹ And, as mentioned earlier, the laws contained in the legal sections of the Hebrew Bible were not statutory law in the modern sense.

⁴⁰ With a view to this question, Laytham points to 1 Pet 2:9, where the author uses the phrase “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness.” Laytham rightly observes that “[w]orship and politics intertwine in the description ‘royal priesthood,’ spirituality and politics are joined in ‘holy nation,’” and concludes that the passage as a whole in which this verse is embedded “shows us that in Christian existence worship, spirituality, politics, community building, mission, and ethics are one interwoven life” (Laytham 2005, 354). The present author observes a widespread attempt to avoid politics among many evangelical Christians, especially in Europe. One of their main lines of thought is that politics belongs to the realm of “opinion”. This is, however, an oversimplification in the sense that many of the aspects that affect political thinking and political decisions are rooted in objective facts and (for Christians) in biblical principles. Therefore, what really happens is that many Christians – probably often unconsciously – want to make the sphere of their political views unassailable and inaccessible for discussion by ignoring the factual and biblical components that should inform the process of political thought and political decision making.

c) For example, *family* is a central constitutional positive element, while slavery is not (see Wright 2004, 339).⁴¹

d) This may help in assessing what elements are more important in cases of conflicting goods.⁴²

5. The Threefold Division of the Law

It has been very common in the history of biblical interpretation and biblical ethics, from rabbinic times onwards, to distinguish between civil, cultic (or ceremonial), and moral laws (see, e.g., Kaiser 1983, 44–45). A frequent corollary of this threefold division has been to assert that both the civil and the ceremonial ordinances are abolished (and not the whole law – which means that the moral laws are still in force).⁴³

This concept has clear and deep problems. The distinction made between three types of laws is not made as such in the Hebrew Bible itself. Moreover, the distinction is in many cases not straightforward in the sense that it is not always clear to which category a specific law should be assigned, and there are a number of commandments that involve all three or two categories, the Shabbat command of the Decalogue being one example (cf. Gane 2017, 175). In addition, all laws are related to God’s salvation history with Israel; the Law as a whole “is part of a story” (Mays 2001, 26), and this story is related to the covenant between YHWH and Israel with its particular geographical and historical setting (see, e.g., Mays 2001, 27). Since the old covenant as such is not functional for believers with a pagan background in the new covenant, no part of the law is binding *as law* (see, e.g., Mays 2001, 28, 30).⁴⁴

However, the distinction can be understood in a helpful way:

a) Civil laws are those laws or aspects of laws that contain features that relate to and depend on the function of the Israelite theocracy. Since this theocracy no longer exists, all that hinges on it cannot be transferred. But the universal principles that inform these laws or the values that are reflected in them are still important to consider. Some of the principles can be transferred to other circumstances, like rejection of behavior that violates “basic standards of decency and justice” (Averbeck 2022, 265).

b) Ceremonial laws are those that pertain to the Israelite ritual system. Since this system no longer exists and, according to Hebrew 7–10 “has been replaced by Christ’s priestly ministry in the heavenly temple” (Gane 2017, 373), it is not possible for Christians under the new covenant to keep these laws. However, as in the case of the civil laws, the universal principles that underlie ritual

⁴¹ Family is even more central in Janzen’s work: He establishes the “family paradigm” as the most important of the five paradigms that govern the ethical structure of the Hebrew Bible (Janzen 1994, 3). Besides family, Wright identifies the following features of the social shape of ancient Israel as especially important: decentralized organization, small hierarchies, small government, limited cult.

⁴² We will come back to the question of the specific weight of regulations below.

⁴³ Cf. Eph 2:15. See, e.g., Kaiser (1983, 310–312). For sweepingly negative comments on the two notions just mentioned see, e.g., Averbeck (2022, 313–316) and Hays (2001, 22–30).

⁴⁴ There are various passages in the New Testament that point in this direction; see, e.g., Gal 3:25 or Heb 8:13.

laws or the values that are reflected in them are still important to consider (see Gane 2017, 367). More specifically, “These laws [i.e., the OT ritual laws] teach people how to ‘love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul’ (Deut. 6:5) Love for God provides perspective that is foundational to biblical morality” (Gane 2017, 373). The ceremonial laws are important also in the sense that “they encapsulate enduring values that inform Christian understanding of the Lord’s presence, sovereignty, and character; worship; salvation from sin through Christ; divine judgment; assurance; sanctification; and ministry” (Gane 2017, 373). Especially the deeper understanding of divine forgiveness (that is provided by the ceremonial laws) functions as a primary incentive to model the moral life according to God’s will (cf. Gane 2017, 387).

c) As for the moral laws: While their specific shape may not be transferable to a new situation, the universal principles informing them are applicable also beyond Israel.

With respect to all three categories, it can be asserted that if a law is related to institutions or cultural circumstances that do no longer exist, one may still “be able to learn from valuable concepts represented in the law” (Gane 2017, 140). This has to do with the fact that every law is an expression of God’s wisdom and authority. The other side of the same coin: All those aspects of laws of any of the three categories that are relatable to creation, to God’s character marked by holiness, to love and to justice can still be seen as directly and eminently relevant in current circumstances, and applicable in some way or another in them.⁴⁵

6. The Special Role of the Decalogue

It has been common in the analysis of ethical material in the Bible to make a distinction between the timeless general commands of the Decalogue – as far as they are related to moral, not cultic, matters – and the specific laws of the Pentateuchal law collections that implement the general principles of the Decalogue in the specific context of ancient Israel.⁴⁶ According to this view, the former can be transferred, whereas the latter cannot.

This distinction has some validity, as a rule of thumb;⁴⁷ but it needs refinement – especially in the sense that the concept of a direct one-to-one transfer is as such misguided in most cases.

There can be no doubt that these commands have special weight: They are spoken directly by God to the people as a whole, they are stored in the ark of the covenant, and they are placed at the beginning of the law collections in Exodus 20, and then again at the beginning of the new covenant with the new generation in Deuteronomy.

⁴⁵ In practical terms, this results in a good number of laws that would usually be labeled “moral” to be more directly applicable than laws of the other two categories, though some of the “ceremonial” laws because of their relationship to God’s holiness might also be open to relatively direct application.

⁴⁶ Cf., e.g., Gane, who mentions the Decalogue right after pointing out that a number of laws are “obviously transcultural and transtemporal” (2017, 137). Without convincing arguments, the notion of a special position of the Decalogue is rejected by Frevel (2021, 146, 148).

⁴⁷ This is connected to the observation that it seems that (many of) the specific commands found in the law collections following the Decalogue, most clearly in the so-called Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic collection, “embody concretely what had been set forth in the general principles of the Decalogue” (Kaiser 1983, 43).

Considering the distinction introduced above between rules and principles, it will be best to locate the moral commands of the Decalogue somewhere in between the two categories. The commandments enshrined in the Decalogue can be seen as “subprinciples” (Gane 2017, 149–151) of love for God (up to the Shabbat command) and love for neighbor (from the command to honor the parents).⁴⁸ Insofar as humans are bearers of the image of God (Gen 1:26–27), loving neighbor also expresses loving God.

7. The Special Case of “Natural Law” and Creational Order

In the Hebrew Bible, creation is an important – though not the dominant⁴⁹ – point of orientation for ethics alongside exodus and Sinai (cf. also, e.g., Gane 2017, 122),⁵⁰ though normally creation and exodus/Sinai are seen as two sides of the same coin, since also creational order is an expression of God’s will and personality.

For an assessment of the role of this aspect, the following ten remarks are in place:

1. As opposed to at least some parts of the covenantal ordinances, norms rooted in creation are perceivable for everyone and automatically binding for everyone, because their scope is creation-wide.
2. In this realm, there is a direct line from “is” to “ought”. For example, no special revelation is needed for a mother to know that she should feed her baby, or no special revelation is needed for anyone to understand that it is wrong to torture a child.
3. In the case of biblical ordinances/paradigms that are directly related to creation (or to what is referred to traditionally as “natural law”), a more or less direct transfer across cultures and ages is possible, because these norms are so evident.
4. If creation is important, this means that its structures have to be studied and taken into account. Thus, studying biology, psychology, etc. is important as a background to assess ethical issues properly. However, there are obvious problems with the collection of “empirical” data: They can be manipulated in almost all relevant areas.⁵¹ There is, unfortunately, no simple way out of this difficulty; context knowledge and background knowledge are important elements to mitigate the difficulty, as is common sense.⁵² The difficulties in obtaining reliable data (both in terms of scientific

⁴⁸ However, both the Shabbat command and the command to honor parents also belong to the other of the two spheres (because granting Shabbat rest also benefits the neighbor, and because the parents in some ways represent God).

⁴⁹ In terms of the amount of space devoted to this aspect, it comes behind exodus and Sinai; however, it is given weight by the highlighted position at the very beginning of the canon.

⁵⁰ Brown understands creation to be the crucial context for every ethical event in history, including acts of redemption: “For every redemptive event there is a creational context, an ethos that informs its wide-reaching moral significance” (Brown 1999, 383). Hiebert has similarly advocated for a paradigm shift in biblical interpretation which would place “the center of biblical faith not in history but in the broad range of biblical experience, for which the arena of creation plays a foundational and essential role” (Hiebert 2007, 3).

⁵¹ As is also the case in the field of historical research.

⁵² An example from the realm of political ethics: For political reasons, statistics published by state authorities on anti-Semitic incidents in Germany have been falsified for a number of years (see Zehnder 2021, 220–221). Background knowledge (provided, i.a., by Jewish congregations) and common sense made it clear to the informed observer that it

knowledge about biology, economy, etc. on the one hand and about current events on the other) means that the diligent search for reliable sources becomes one of the fundamental ethical tasks.

5. The biblical creation account(s) have direct ethical bearing in the following realms:

- a) Infinite value of human life as *imago Dei*.
- b) Environmental ethics.
- c) Relationship between the sexes, including marriage as the most foundational human social relationship and the importance of procreation.
- d) Work ethics.
- e) Shabbat and its implications.

6. They also provide basic principles:

- a) Basic principle I: value of life (with its climax in human life as the image of God).
- b) Basic principle II: order.

7. Since creation comes first, one can argue that the prime ethical value promoted by creation takes precedence in the case of conflict: human life.⁵³ This, in turn, has direct consequences for a variety of ethical questions, such as abortion and euthanasia, migration (precedence of “mere life” vs. improvement of personal or societal material life conditions), religious freedom, etc.

It is also possible to identify an exception to this rule: giving one’s own life (in certain circumstances). Another exception – one which is very clearly articulated in the (Hebrew) Bible – is the taking of life for the protection of life.⁵⁴ God himself destroys life to protect life.⁵⁵

From a canonical perspective, there is one candidate that may claim a similar priority as (human physical) life: eternal (/spiritual) life. This means that the enabling of the spread of God’s words on the practical level has a high ethical weight.

Besides, the following two considerations might claim important positions (besides the personal level, where “love” is primary):

- a) Benefit of the largest possible number of affected people, which can be based on the principles that each person is created in the image of God and that God cares for the whole of humanity. This will directly affect decisions about war, economy, health, etc.

was not right-wing extremists who stood behind the majority of attacks (as claimed by state authorities), but Muslim immigrants or their descendants.

⁵³ There is no doubt that the creation of humankind is the climax of the creation process in Genesis 1 (see, e.g., the preceding deliberation remark “let us make ...”, the concept of *imago Dei*, the threefold use of the verb ברא “make”, the commission given to humankind to rule the rest of creation); in Genesis 2, it is the detailed description of the creation of Adam and his partner, set in the garden, that takes center stage.

⁵⁴ As in wars or in the institution of the death penalty.

⁵⁵ See the remarks in Fischer (2013).

b) Liberty, as a value related to dignity, which again flows from the concept of *imago Dei*. This value is also made clear in Genesis 1 by the fact that humankind is ordained to rule over the rest of creation, but not one human being over another.⁵⁶

8. An aspect that is often overlooked is the harshness of creation, accentuated after the fall.⁵⁷ This forces humankind to collaborate in order to survive and to make progress in the face of the challenging conditions in which they live. This means that collaboration and solidarity are core values that are related to the consideration of creation.

9. On the phraseological level, one way in which the authors of the New Testament seem to refer to the notion of creational order is where the formula *para physin* (“against nature”) is used. It is surprising for (post)modern readers to observe that this formula can be applied exactly to some of the ethical issues that are often seen as particularly difficult in the current discussions: homosexuality and gender identity. An example can be found in Rom 1:26:

Διὰ τοῦτο παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς πράθη ἀτιμίας, αἱ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετέλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν,

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is *unnatural*.

However, things are not as simple, because there are other cases in which this formula is used where it appears to be much more about cultural idiosyncrasies than matters of natural law (see, e.g., 1 Cor 11:14, long hair as dishonorable for a man).

10. While it seems that overall – as mentioned at the beginning of this section – creational/natural order is *not* the dominant model for ethics in the (Hebrew) Bible, it may nevertheless be highly important today, because it is the only direct way to communicate the importance of fundamental ethical norms to people for whom Scripture is not a positive or authoritative entity. However, it is also clear that creational/natural order will not be enough to flesh out the answers for many questions.

8. Exodus and Sinaitic Covenant

We have seen in the previous section on creation that by looking at creation and the biblical creation accounts, the usual lists of guiding ethical principles must be amplified beyond what most biblical ethicists include in them. The same is also true when we consider exodus and the Sinaitic covenant. The following six observations are of special importance in this respect:

1. The primary points of ethical orientation in the Hebrew Bible, in terms of (literary) space – though chronologically after creation – are exodus and Sinaitic covenant. This elevates the following principles to a level of prominence, principles that are relevant also for the assessment of current ethical issues.

⁵⁶ In stark contrast to the ideologies of the ancient Near East where the hierarchical differences between rulers and subjects is seen as part of the creation of the cosmos (see, e.g., Berman 2008, 18–27).

⁵⁷ The accentuation of the harshness is the prominent theme of Gen 3:16–19. It is, however, already hinted at in the command to rule over the animals and the earth in Gen 1:28.

2. Ethically positive behavior is related to obedience to God, as a response to his preceding act of liberation.⁵⁸ Obedience is ultimately to the lawgiver and covenantal partner, God. This is tendentially more important than virtue-building or the question of utility and benefit – though it does not mean that these categories are of no importance at all.

3. Since the core of the exodus event is the liberation of the emerging Israelite nation from unjust slavery, liberty – both on the social and religious level⁵⁹ – and justice are important core values. Compassion and an egalitarian tendency can be added. All of these values are rooted both in the exodus itself and in the Sinaitic covenant and its legal regulations.

4. The egalitarian outlook is related to all levels of social (and religious) life and has consequences on all those levels, in the following way:⁶⁰

- a) Limits to the power of a monarch (who should not be there in the first place).⁶¹
- b) Limits to the power of clans.
- c) Checks and balances.⁶²
- d) Enabling of active participation for everyone in a society with very flat hierarchies, including the economic pre-conditions for such a participation.
- e) Land-ownership as the main foundation for active participation in the case of ancient Israel.⁶³
- f) Right to individual (in this case: family-owned) property,⁶⁴ as a requirement for land-ownership. Property-rights can be undermined, for example through high taxation, or – in the context of modern economic systems – through money-printing, which in turn leads to the devaluation of money (“inflation”).

⁵⁸ The main bulk of the ordinances are given only after the liberation given by God to the emerging people of Israel; see also the sequence of liberation and commands in the Decalogue. In addition, it can be said that the Sinaitic covenant with its laws builds on the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (see, e.g., Averbeck 2022, 59–60).

⁵⁹ Religious liberty in ancient Israel is, of course, not equivalent to the modern Western concept of religious freedom. In the context of exodus and Sinai, religious liberty primarily means the liberty for the Israelites to venerate YHWH. However, there is more to it: Immigrants into Israel, while not able to preserve all of their foreign religious practices, were not forced to convert (for details see Zehnder 2021, 27, 31). The aspect of liberty can also be found in the fact that Israel’s entering into the covenant with YHWH is voluntary and that adherence to YHWH is, in various layers of the Hebrew Bible, described as a matter of the heart, that is, inner conviction.

⁶⁰ For a summary description of the (counter-cultural) egalitarian outlook of biblical Israel and its practical social and ethical consequences see especially Berman (2008).

⁶¹ For the limits of the power of the monarch see Deut 17:14–20; for the institution of monarchy only representing “Plan B” see 1 Samuel 8–12.

⁶² “Checks and balances” are given in ancient Israel through the separation of power and offices: king – judges – elders – head of families – priests – Levites – prophets.

⁶³ Since the quantity of land is limited, much more so than in the case of other resources, it is important to treat real estate differently from other merchandise.

⁶⁴ This also includes that differences in the amount of property that individuals or families own must be accepted and respected.

g) Active participation instead of representation and central bureaucratic administration.⁶⁵

5. As mentioned above, compassion is another important value that flows from exodus and Sinaitic covenant. There is a clear tendency in the Bible as a whole that compassion is exerted in the context of personal involvement/relationship rather than through political activism or delegation to state bureaucracies.⁶⁶

In current discussions in the West, compassion is directed primarily to what is called “marginalized people”. The question needs to be addressed very carefully who the marginalized people are in any given circumstance.

6. As mentioned above, justice is another core value related to both exodus and the Sinaitic covenant.⁶⁷ The following observations are important to note:

a) Justice – both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament – is not strict equality (in economic terms), but rather the principle of *suum cuique* (to each one his own).

b) When it comes to the realm of judicial procedures, however, equality is an important element of justice.⁶⁸ Part of this is the strict prohibition against accepting bribes (Deut 16:18–20), as well as the admonition not to honor persons, neither the big ones nor the poor ones (Lev 19:15).

c) One of the most difficult questions is how justice should be “enforced” and who is responsible for the enforcement. In the case of the Israelites’ unjust slavery in Egypt, it is God who is the initiator of its termination, not a human revolution. This seems to reflect a general trend; overall, the Bible does not seem to support direct attacks on systems/structures. The current trend, especially in the West, is to move into the direction of the following concept: What is seen as “just” needs to be implemented on a global basis. This approach presupposes global governing institutions, or aspires to such institutions being constructed. As opposed to this, responsibility in the Bible is always layered and limited.⁶⁹ An example of this is the fact that while lending money can be done with an international scope (“to many nations,” Deut 15:6), debt release only applies within Israel, and only with respect to fellow Israelites, not foreigners (Deut 15:7–11).

⁶⁵ See, e.g., the right to glean for groups of people that are potentially poor, which requires their own active participation.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., the regulations concerning the handling of the tithe (see Zehnder 2020, 158–162), or the numerous appeals to wealthy people in Proverbs to personally help the poor (see, e.g., Prov 14:21; 19:17; 21:26; 22:9; 28:27). Of course, in current circumstances these tendencies cannot be translated into strict either-or (or black-and-white) alternatives. However, the contrast to the Egyptian centralized bureaucratic model remains striking.

⁶⁷ For a relative recent, thorough discussion of justice in the Hebrew Bible see Houston (2006).

⁶⁸ This principle is infringed upon in various ways in current judicial procedures.

⁶⁹ “Love your neighbor” vs. “fix the whole world.” While the (Hebrew) Bible entertains the idea of *God’s* or the Messiah’s (future) world-wide dominion, it does not offer a blueprint of any kind for *human* global government.

9. The Unique Position of Love

It is obvious, especially in the New Testament, that love plays an important role in biblical ethics. Therefore, we need to look at this topic in some details. The following ten remarks are in place in the present context:⁷⁰

1. Because of the important role that love plays in the New Testament, there are many biblical scholars and ethicists who claim that love is the one category that decides all ethical questions (see, e.g., Fletcher 1966). In some instances, this claim may be directly related to the modern desire for abstract, timeless principles that can be used to decide ethical questions in all circumstances.

2. As already hinted at in the introduction to this section, there are biblical reasons that speak for an elevated position of love when it comes to ethics. The first is the observation that according to 1 John 4:8, 16, “God is love.” Moreover, in Deut 6:15 love for God is placed at a literarily important location; and love for neighbor is mentioned in Lev 19:18, in the middle of chapter 19 of the middle book of the Pentateuch. In the New Testament, love is characterized as the summary and fulfillment of the law (see Matt 22:36; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14; cf. 1 Tim 1:5). Since according to Matt 7:12 it is the “golden rule” that summarizes the Law and the Prophets, it can be said that the love command and the “golden rule” are commutable (see, e.g., Averbek 2022, 279; Zehnder 2019, 46).

3. It is fair to say that the understanding of love as the summary of the law invites to ask the question as to how any given command or any given attempt to follow a command expresses love for God and love for neighbor (see Goldingay 2021, 174). It also opens a window for love giving a perspective for the more specific ordinances and providing a “guiding light of all moral goodness” (Gane 2017, 149).

4. On the other hand, it is obvious that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible or in the New Testament is the category of love used to *replace* or *abolish* the law or specific ethical regulations in general. In the Bible, love is not an empty shell that we could fill with our postmodern, often sentimental and emotion-driven ideas; rather, love derives its character from being rooted in the narrative of God’s acting in the world, in creation and particularly in the history of his people, with specific regulations connected to it. It is such specific regulations that show in exemplary ways how love – and other core ethical concepts – are meant to be understood and applied, flowing out of the love of God for humankind. The specific regulations can also function as warning signs that show where the core concepts are being infringed upon (cf., e.g., Gane 2017, 149). In sum, it can be said that love is not a replacement at the entry, but rather a summary at the exit. A summary does not replace what it summarizes, but “is defined by what it summarizes” (Gane 2017, 404).

If “love” is used as an empty shell that can be filled according to one’s ideas and is no longer connected to specific regulations, we decide ourselves what is ethically acceptable and loose the Bible as a critical corrective. It is, in this case, not clear why, for example, adultery, (some forms of) incest, polygamy etc. should be ethically problematic in general or objectively. Christian ethics would

⁷⁰ For more details about love in the Bible see Zehnder (2019, esp. 45–58).

be devoid of clear contents. We can also see that in many cases it would not be clear at all what the most loving thing is in a specific situation – the love principle itself does not give the answers.

5. From a New Testament perspective, Christ is the embodiment of love, and he is not reduceable to an abstract principle which we can define on our own terms; but this embodiment shares the complexity of his personality and the openness that is characteristic of stories (see Rabens 2021, 113). We also need to keep in mind that Jesus according to John 14:15 says that love manifests itself in the keeping of God's commandments.

6. It can be said that God's love is a crucial point of orientation for human love for neighbor. This is made explicit, e.g., in Deut 10:18–19.⁷¹ Since God's love in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the New Testament includes both mercy *and* justice – and not just mercy (see, e.g., Gane 2017, 281–282, 385) – this also has implications for the definition of human love for neighbor. It is therefore no surprise that biblical love can include reproving for wrongdoing (see Lev 19:16–18).

7. Love in the Bible is restricted: In the Hebrew Bible, love is mentioned only with respect to the co-Israelite and the *ger* (“sojourner”),⁷² not for other types of persons. A similar distinction is also found in the New Testament: It is much more about *philadelphia* than about *philanthropia*. Cf. Gal 6:10: “Let us do good to all, but foremost to those who are of the household of the faith.”

8. We also note that the subjective feeling of love – which in many cases is what those who advance the view that love should decide all matters seem to have in mind when they use this term – does in most cases not play a role in biblical contexts when it comes to the assessment of ethical issues. An example is Leviticus 18 and 20, the list of forbidden sexual relationships: Intercourse with the sister of one's wife, for instance, is wrong regardless of any feelings of love. Or 1 Corinthians 5: Paul does not raise the question and investigate as a good pastor whether in the relationship between a man and his step mother feelings of love are involved, whether they respect each other, whether there is some kind of imbalance of power or not, etc.; rather, regardless of the possibility of the subjective feeling of love, such a relationship is deemed wrong based on natural order and God's laws.

9. Love in the (Hebrew) Bible is more about action, in most cases not about feelings. It goes beyond the realm of the individual and his or her satisfaction or gratification, because its ultimate goal is the enhancement of the flourishing of the community.⁷³

10. The question of love must be dealt with from a different additional angle: Right ethical behavior in the Bible is always response to God's preceding action (cf. also Laytham 2005, 360). This response is ultimately not to a law, but to the lawgiver, the living God. Giving one's life to him in all respects is love in the fullest sense of the word. Other than that, the term love may in most cases not be a helpful “summary” for ethics, because of the problems described in the previous paragraphs of this section.

⁷¹ Which deals with love for the *ger* (“sojourner”).

⁷² See Lev 19:18, 34; Deut 10:19. The *nokhri* (“foreigner”), on the other hand, is never included in the love command.

⁷³ For more details see Zehnder (2019, 28–30 and 45–58).

Related to the elevation of “love” into the position of an omnipotent arbiter of ethical issues is the distinction between kernel, which is timeless, and shell, which is time-bound and can be set aside. As with “love”, whatever is identified as kernel will be filled according to one’s own predilections. The kernel will for most people quasi automatically be what is in line with postmodern thinking, while the dispensable shell is what is not in agreement with this thinking.

From an epistemological point of view the distinction between time-bound shell and timeless kernel presupposes a vantage point that is located above these poles. But such a vantage point does not exist for any human being. What really happens is that in a naïve blindness with respect to the relativity of one’s perspective, the latter is set as an absolute, and in reality the current concepts of our age are assumed to be true and eternal.

10. The Lens Provided by the New Testament

There are four specific lenses that are provided by the New Testament when dealing with ethical issues:

1. The first lens is the one dealt with in the previous section: “Love” as summary and fulfillment of the law. The importance of this principle can be seen from the fact that it is found in all major corpora of the New Testament.
2. The second is Christ as lens. Passages like Matt 5:17 (Christ came to fulfill [*plerosai*] the law) and Rom 10:4 (Christ is the *telos* of the law) are texts that point in this direction. In Christ is realized what the laws and institutions of the Hebrew Bible pointed to (cf., e.g., Mays 2001, 29); Christ, as the Word of God, is/incarnates the Law and all of Scripture. As such, Christ – similar to “love” – becomes the “principle of order;” everything needs to be assessed in terms of the person and work of Christ.

Related to this is the notion that Jesus is our teacher and example (see, e.g., Averbeck 2022, 311).

3. The third is the importance of the “heart.” As with the first lens, also the second is already contained in the Hebrew Bible, and therefore not completely new; however, it is given considerably more prominence in the New Testament as compared to the Hebrew Bible. A salient example is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5): Not only murder is wrong, but already anger, etc.
4. The fourth is the empowering by the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God gives his law directly into our hearts (see Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:26–27). Therefore, higher standards are applicable, as we see in Jesus’ ethical demands, and “compromise orders” can be replaced by creational orders.⁷⁴

11. Assessing the Relative Weight of Rules and Principles

With a view to the transfer of biblical ethical injunctions in general it is necessary to assess the relative weight of rules and principles. This becomes even more necessary in the case of conflicts be-

⁷⁴ And even the latter may be relativized – see, e.g., Matt 19:12 (eunuchs for the sake of heaven). For the transformational power of the Spirit see especially Averbeck (2022, 283–309); Laytham (2005, 362).

tween competing values, a situation that often occurs in ethical deliberations. Balancing/weighting/prioritizing is necessary especially in case of ambiguities or conflict of values. Important aspects can be deduced from what has been said in the previous sections. There are four additional points to be raised:

1. Jesus himself talks in general terms of the distinction between lighter and weightier matters of the law (see Matt 23:23–24).⁷⁵ Specific biblical examples for the necessity to make such distinctions can be found in the story of Tamar in Genesis 38, the story of the midwives in Exod 1:15–21, or in Jesus' reference to David and his companions eating the bread of the tabernacle in Matt 12:3–4. Moreover, such a distinction is also part of Western judicial reasoning, with regulations found in the constitution taking precedence over regulations in subordinated law corpora.

2. Based on what has been discussed in the previous sections, love (which includes compassion and other-centeredness) and creation ordinances/values (particularly the furthering of life) can claim special weight. Also liberty, justice, equality have an elevated position.

3. Apart from these values, the following general diagnostic principles can be applied to assess the relative weight of a specific regulation or principle:⁷⁶

- a) Is it attested in all major parts of the canon (either the canon of the Hebrew Bible, or the canon of both Testaments)?⁷⁷
- b) Is it repeated often, both explicitly and implicitly? (that is: is it highlighted statistically?)
- c) Is it attested in different literary genres?
- d) Is it attested in many different situations, throughout time (diverse cultural, social, and historical situations)?
- e) Is it the foundation of other, important values?
- f) Is it undergirded by important theological principles?
- g) Is it highlighted rhetorically?
- h) Is it a central element of the texts in which it is attested?
- i) Is it formulated conditionally or unconditionally?
- j) Is it protected by the sanction of the *karet*-penalty or a *mot yumat*-sentence?⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See also Paul's insistence on preventing a brother from stumbling as being more important than exercising culinary freedom (Rom 14:15–21; 1 Cor 8:9).

⁷⁶ It seems to me that Frevel ignores or underestimates the importance of the search for such criteria when he sweepingly states that "There is no *given* hierarchy in the scriptural ethical discussion" (Frevel 2021, 137; italics in the original; cf. pp. 146–147). As mentioned above, he replaces hierarchization with a "canonical discourse ... in which meaning is constituted by complementary voices", conceived of as "a never-ending negotiation with different voices" (Frevel 2021, 147; cf. pp. 148–149). While his formulations look adequate, they are too vague to clarify the necessary processes and as such cannot set against the search for criteria proposed here.

⁷⁷ This can be related to the criterion of "canonical centrality" (see Rabens 2021, 102, 108).

⁷⁸ That is, some kind of death penalty, regardless of whether the death is caused by human agents or God. Cf. the comments in Gane (2017, 94–96).

- k) Is it related explicitly to divine blessings or threats?
- l) Is it related explicitly to the concepts of honor or shame?
- m) Are there conflicting texts in the canon? (cf. Rabens 2021, 104)
- n) Is it maintained against the cultural background, which would give it more weight? Or is it rather influenced by the general (common ancient Near Eastern or Greco-Roman) cultural background, which would tend to give it less weight?⁷⁹
- o) Is it relatable to creation and/or new creation, which would give it special weight?
- p) Related to this is the distinction between what was intended at creation and what was allowed as a response to the hardness of the heart past fall.
- q) Can a trajectory be identified, with a special weight to the endpoint of a trajectory?

4. The need for balancing, as well as limits in the possibility of taking into account all involved factors properly, in all steps involved in making ethical assessments, may lead to legitimate differences of opinion in certain cases. As far as I can see, this will primarily affect questions of *means*, as opposed to questions of *goals*. It is important to distinguish between questions where different views are acceptable, and others (“fundamentals”) where this is not the case. Elaborating this distinction should be a matter of primary concern.⁸⁰

Concluding Remarks

Looking at individual biblical texts that deal with ethical questions and asking how they might inform current audiences is one thing. Another thing, which is – as far as I can see – dealt with less often, is to identify the large contours of the biblical texts on creation and God’s covenant with Israel and use these contours as a point of orientation to critically analyze our current societies and point out the direction in which we as readers of the (Hebrew) Bible would encourage our societies to move – not to replicate Israel or to pursue the vain attempt to bring about paradise on earth, but to further life in the best way possible according to God’s intentions as revealed both in creation and in the dealings with his people culminating in the exodus and the Sinaitic covenant. We have tried to outline some of the core elements of this orientation in the sections on creation and exo-

⁷⁹ Though not necessarily in all instances (cf. Rabens 2021, 96). This point is, of course, related to the distinction between what is culturally bound and what is transculturally valid.

⁸⁰ As opposed to celebrating diversity of opinion or modelling polite discussions. Not that these items are not necessary as well, especially the second of the two mentioned here. However, they should take a backseat compared to the more important task of identifying fundamentals. There is no claim here that the previous sections of this article define what the “fundamentals” are, though some of the thoughts presented in these sections may help in finding ways to identify some of them, though obviously only in the realm of ethics.

Childs has approached the question of balancing from a different angle. He makes a distinction between cases in which there are clear biblical imperatives that can be related directly to current issues, other cases in which the biblical texts only delimit the area of adequate ethical decisions, and yet other cases in which the Bible offers a variety of morally acceptable alternatives (see Childs 1970, 132–138).

dus/Sinai. At the same time, we have also amplified the list of foundational ethical principles and anchored some of them in the concrete context of creation and Exodus/Sinai.

The question of the transfer of biblical texts dealing with ethical issues to current circumstances has been answered in two ways:

1) As far as the general notion of biblical authority is concerned, models of indirect inspiration and more direct implementation need to be combined; there are cases where a rather direct transfer is possible, and others where this is not the case.

2) The idea that moral elements of the Hebrew Bible, in contradistinction to civil and ceremonial or cultic elements, can simply be transferred to the current age is deficient; it is always the whole biblical context that needs to be taken into account, which means that from a Christian perspective also the New Testament lens is indispensable. And, of course, extra-biblical information also has to be taken into consideration, as well as the specifics of the current situation and the differences between “then” and “now”.

When dealing with the question as to how to use the Bible to address current ethical issues, it is not only about methods, but about a personal transformation of heart and mind by (the word of) God (see, e.g., Curran 1972, 24–64; Gushee 2021, 397; Laytham 2005, 354–355; cf. also Wright 2012), within the context of a life lived in the church (see Laytham 2005, 354–355). This is a core factor in guiding ethical thinking.⁸¹

The task to make good ethical decisions needs, in biblical terminology, wisdom. This is why wisdom teachers appear besides priests and prophets and elders or other political leaders in the Hebrew Bible’s description of important leadership positions. Wisdom and right handling are also mentioned in the New Testament as necessary requirements in ethical discernment; see, e.g., 2 Tim 2:7, 15; 3:14–17. The necessity for this wisdom is related to the obvious complexity of the Bible, including biblical texts on ethical matters. This complexity is an incentive to question everything. It is an invitation to investigation and dialogue, to constant critical discernment⁸² – as opposed to blindly following any denominational tradition, or current authorities in government, media, or academia.

Finally, the presentation of any argument needs to be done “in love”.⁸³

⁸¹ Cf. the requirement for judges in the Hebrew Bible: It is more important for them to be men of character, than to be trained lawyers.

⁸² Or, to put it differently, to free thinking.

⁸³ That the word “love” concludes this article is done intentionally.

Bibliography

- Averbeck, Richard E. 2022. *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ*. Downers Grove: IVP.
- Barton, John. 2014. *Ethics in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199660438.001.0001>.
- Beck, Chad Thomas. 2018. "Sanctuary for Immigrants and Refugees in Our Legal and Ethical Wilderness". *Interpretation* 72 (2): 132–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964317749541>.
- Berman, Joshua A. 2008. *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195374704.001.0001>.
- Berman, Joshua A. 2017. *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190658809.001.0001>.
- Birch, Bruce C. 1991. *Let Justice Roll Down. The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life*. Louisville: Westminster ; John Knox.
- Brown, William P. 1999. *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Childs, Brevard S. 1970. *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Chun, S. Min. 2014. *Ethics and Biblical Narrative: A Literary and Discourse-Analytical Approach to the Story of Josiah*. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199688968.001.0001>.
- Cosgrove, Charles H. 2021. "Reading Biblical Texts Ethically: A Discussion of Ruben Zimmermann's Method of 'Implicit Ethics' from a New Testament Perspective". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, 65–79. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_005.
- Curran, Charles E. 1972. *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue*. Notre Dame: Fides Pubs.
- Davies, Eryl W. 2021. "The Moral Vision of the Hebrew Bible: An Examination of Some Methodological Issues". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, 154–170. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_008.
- Fischer, Georg. 2013. "Who Is Violent, and Why?" In *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, edited by Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia, 94–107. The Bible in the Modern World 55. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Fletcher, Joseph. 1966. *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Frevel, Christian. 2021. "More Than Worthwhile to Consider? Old Testament Ethics between Description and Prescription". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, 129–153. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_007.
- Gane, Roy E. 2017. *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academics.
- Goldingay, John. 2021. "The Two Testaments". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, 171–194. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_009.

- Gushee, David P. 2021. "The Limits of Biblical Ethics for Christian Ethics Today". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, 392–404. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_018.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. 1981. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj77hg>.
- Hays, J. Daniel. 2001. "Applying the Old Testament Law Today". *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (629): 21–35.
- Hays, Richard. 1996. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Hiebert, Theodore. 2007. "Beyond Heilsgeschichte". In *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture*, edited by M. Daniel Carroll R. and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3–10. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Houston, Walter J. 2006. *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.
- Irrgang, Bernhard. 1998. *Praktische Ethik aus hermeneutischer Sicht*. Uni-Taschenbücher 220. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Janzen, Waldemar. 1994. *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Kaiser, Walter C. 1983. *Toward Old Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Koch, Klaus. 1984. "צדק 'gemeinschaftstreu / heilvoll sein'". In *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. II, edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, 507–530. München: Kaiser ; Zürich: TVZ.
- Lapsley, Jacqueline E. 2014. "Ethics: Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament". In *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 8:99–100.
- Laytham, Brent. 2005. "Scripture and Christian Ethics: Embodying Pentecost". In *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, edited by Michael J. Gorman, 353–364. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Luther, Martin. 1518. *Eine kurze Erklärung der Zehn Gebote*. WA 1, 250–256.
- Rabens, Volker. 2021. "Inspiring Ethics: A Hermeneutical Model for the Dialogue between Biblical Texts and Contemporary Ethics". In *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics*, edited by V. Rabens, J.N. Grey, and M. Kamell Kovalishyn, 80–126. Biblical Interpretation Series 189. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445727_006.
- Raedel, Christoph. 2013. "Die Bibel in der ethischen Urteilsbildung. Konzeption und exemplarische Konkretion". In *Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie* 27, 69–122.
- Wannenwetsch, Bernd. 2007. "Ecclesiology and Ethics". In *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, edited by Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski, 57–73. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199227228.003.0005>.
- Webb, William J. 2001. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Downers Grove: IVP Academics.
- Wenham, Gordon J. 2000. *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

- Winther-Nielsen, Nicolai. 1995. *A Functional Discourse Grammar of the Book of Joshua. A Computer-assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis*. Coniectanea Biblica, OT Series 4; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Winther-Nielsen, Nicolai. 2018. "Mosebøgenes Brug som Vejledning". In *Den Kristne Forkyndelse – Teori og Praksis fra Bibelen, i Historien, til Verden*, edited by Jakob Olsen, 14–67. Fredericia: Kolon.
- Wright, Christopher. 2004. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove ; Leicester: InterVarsity Press.
- Wright, N.T. 2012. *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2005. "Anstösse aus Dtn 23,2–9 zur Frage nach dem Umgang mit Fremden". *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 52, 300–314.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2019. "Love in the Bible, and Law, Justice, and Mercy: Some Observations on the Semantic Profile of the Main Hebrew and Greek Terms Denoting 'Love', with a Special View on the Intersection with Terms Denoting 'Law', 'Justice', and 'Mercy'". In *Biblical Ethics – Tensions Between Justice and Mercy, Law and Love*, edited by Markus Zehnder and Peter Wick, 15–66. Piscataway: Gorgias. <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463239466-002>.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2020. "Government and Economy in the Hebrew Bible: Taxes and Related Matters. An Overview, with Some Conclusions concerning Current Issues". In *The Bible and Money: Economy and Socioeconomic Ethics in the Bible*, edited by Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia, 144–174. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Zehnder, Markus. 2021. *The Bible and Immigration: A Critical and Empirical Reassessment*. Eugene: Pickwick.
- Zimmerli, Walther. 1988. "Krise der Krisenethiken: Moralphilosophische Engpässe im technologischen Zeitalter und das Konzept einer problemorientierten Ethik". In *Tradition und Innovation, XIII. Deutscher Kongress für Philosophie 1984*, edited by Wolfgang Kluxen, 353–370. Hamburg: Meiner.