

POOR, POVERTY. ¹

This entry consists of two articles, one surveying how the subjects of poverty and poor people are treated in the Hebrew Bible, and the other surveying how these subjects are handled in the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT

Poverty in the Hebrew Bible denotes (1) a lack of economic resources and material goods; and (2) political and legal powerlessness and oppression. Neither a social class nor a political party in ancient Israel, the poor constituted a diverse body of social actors: small farmers, day laborers, construction workers, beggars, debt slaves, village dwellers.

Various strands of the biblical text discuss the plight of the poor, offering diverging analyses of their situation. *Legal texts* regulate the treatment of the poor; in particular, the legal codes seek to ensure the social well-being of the poor through the redistribution of goods and food, and through the establishment of restrictions regarding slave ownership (i.e., the system of debt servitude) and the treatment of wage laborers. *Prophetic texts* concern themselves with the poor who are economically exploited by the large landowners and ruling members of ancient Israelite society. The *wisdom tradition* divides over the question of poverty: Proverbs, in a somewhat condescending and possibly censorious tone, promotes the traditional wisdom view that poverty is the undesirable consequence of laziness, whereas Job, and to a lesser extent Ecclesiastes, understand poverty to be the result of political and economic exploitation. The *Psalms* display a rich language for poverty and many texts discuss God's concern for the poor at least in general terms. However, though much scholarly work has been devoted to characterizing the ideas of poverty found in the Psalter, it is difficult to determine to what extent the language has moved away from concrete cases of poverty to a more spiritualized level of worship discourse. Outside of these blocks of literature, the topic of poverty is treated only occasionally. The *narrative literature* of the Pentateuch is unconcerned with the issue; likewise, the Deuteronomistic History does not take up the topic. Ruth (3:10), Esther (9:22), and Daniel (4:24—Eng 27) only touch on poverty in an ancillary way. More significantly, the question of poverty emerges as an issue in the reforms of Nehemiah (5:1–13).

When investigating the meaning of these words, it is important to keep in mind that context and usage, *not* etymology, are decisive in determining the meaning of a word. While this observation may seem obvious, too many of the studies of the Hebrew terms for “poor,” particularly of the vocabulary in the Psalms (e.g., Rahlfs 1892; Birkeland 1932), have mistakenly become enmeshed in a discussion of Hebrew verbal roots or the Semitic cognate background of the term, rather than on a word's actual usage. It is far more important to explicate the semantic field of these words as they actually appear in the biblical text (cf. Wittenberg 1986).

It is also important to note the distribution of the vocabulary throughout the Hebrew Bible: no one biblical writer or text uses all the Hebrew terms for “poor”/“poverty.” In fact, the distribution reveals a selectivity on the part of the biblical authors: *rāš*, for

¹David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 5:402.

example, is a wisdom word and not a prophetic word. This selectivity should also alert us to the fact that even when the various blocks of the biblical text make use of the same Hebrew term, the writers may not mean the same thing by that term: in Proverbs, for example, the *dal* is a lazy person; whereas for the prophets, the *dal* is an object of exploitation. By way of a contemporary illustration, we would say that a future historian investigating religious and political movements of the late 20th century would need to be aware that groups using the word “liberty” and groups using the word “liberation” diverge from one another in terms of their social analysis and often in terms of their sociological background. This is the case, even though the terms “liberty” and “liberation” share a common etymology. The same considerations apply where these political movements make use of the same term, such as “poor,” since they mean radically different things by this word.

There are a number of Hebrew words for “poor”/“poverty”: *ʔebyôn*, *dal*, *dallâ*, *maḥsôr*, *miskēn*, *miskēnūt*, *ʿānî*, *ʿānāwîm*, and *rāš*. (The reader may wish to note that these words are treated in Hebrew alphabetical order, with the exception of *raš*, which has been moved forward to highlight its connection with other wisdom words for “poor.”)

- A. The Beggarly Poor: *ʔebyôn*
- B. The Poor Peasant Farmer: *dal*
- C. The Lazy Poor: *maḥsôr*
- D. Poverty Is Better: *miskēn*
- E. Political and Economic Inferiority: *rāš*
- F. The Injustice of Oppression: *ʿānî*
- G. A Political Movement of the Pious Poor?: *ʿānāwîm*
- H. Conclusion

A. The Beggarly Poor: *ʔebyôn*

The term *ʔebyôn* (“economically or legally distressed; destitute; beggar”) occurs 61 times in the Hebrew Bible.

1. In the Prophetic Corpus. The word appears 17 times in the prophetic literature, where it can connote (1) general physical insecurity and homelessness (Isa 14:30; 25:4; Amos 8:4); (2) hunger and thirst (Isa 32:6–7; 41:7; Ezek 16:49); (3) mistreatment by the rulers of society and other evildoers (Isa 29:19; Jer 2:34; 20:13; Ezek 18:12; 22:29; Amos 4:1); (4) unfair handling of legal cases (Isa 32:7; Jer 5:28; 22:16; Amos 5:12); and (5) economic exploitation (Amos 2:6; 8:6). Humbert characterizes the occurrences of this term in the prophetic literature as “sporadic” (1952: 3). However, it seems more correct to suggest that *ʔebyôn* appears in a particular strain of the prophetic material, and, when used in tandem with *ʿānî* and *dal*, represents a stylized mode of expression for speaking of poverty (cf. van Leeuwen 1955: 16; see further under F.1 below). It is noteworthy that Micah chose not to use *ʔebyôn* or any of the other terms for “poor,” even though his oracles addressed the subject of poverty in stark detail. (The divergence in word choice

may lend additional support to Wolff's thesis that Micah stems from a rural background; 1978; 1981: 17–25).

2. In the Psalms. The word *ʿebyôn* appears 23 times in the Psalms, most often in Psalms of Lament. The situation of the *ʿebyôn* is described rather vaguely by such terms as “robbed” (Ps 35:10; Heb *gzl*) or “suffering” (107:41; Heb *ʿônî*). They are the victims of the “wicked” (Heb *rāšāʿ*), an otherwise undefined group (109:16). Only two psalms give more specific data. In one (Ps 37:14), the poor are depicted as the victims of the swords and bows of the wicked; perhaps the writer intends us to understand this concretely, though it is also possible that it is metaphorical for any kind of suffering. From the other text (Ps 132:15)—with its statement that God gives food to the *ʿebyôn*—we can infer that the poor are those who lack nourishment, a concrete understanding of the term that is consistent with the word's usage in the prophetic (see above) and legal materials (described below). The notion that God assists the poor (*ʿebyôn*) is expressed in a number of psalms: some portray God as the one who rescues the poor (Pss 35:10; 40:18—Eng 17; 69:34—Eng 33; 70:6—Eng 5; 72:12, 13; 109:31; 113:7; 140:13—Eng 12), while others are prayers calling on God to help the *ʿebyôn* (Pss 72:4; 82:4; 86:1; 109:22).

Humbert maintains that since the Psalms were cultic texts, they were infused with royal ideology and governed by foreign influence (1952: 3). However, the high proportion of instances of *ʿebyôn* in the Psalter contrasts markedly with the rarity of the term in Proverbs and the complete absence of *ʿebyôn* in the narrative literature of the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History (DH)—texts that certainly reflect royal literary traditions. The Psalms' diverse vocabulary for poverty requires an explanation other than Humbert's view that they are imbued with royal ideology. The diverging vocabulary distribution between the Psalter and the narrative literature would seem to favor the view that the Psalms embody a variety of cultural influences, not simply royal tradition, and reflect a diverse set of ideas regarding matters of social justice, though with a less sharply defined agenda than the prophets.

3. In Wisdom Texts. The term *ʿebyôn* occurs in the wisdom texts of Proverbs (4 times) and Job (6 times). In Proverbs, the word only occurs once in all of the sentential literature of Proverbs 10–29, and there it is linked with the word *dal*; the text states that helping the *ʿebyôn* is one way to honor God (Prov 14:31). (When discussing poverty, Proverbs 10–29 typically uses *dal*, *maḥsôr*, and *rāš*; see below.) The other three occurrences of the term are found in chaps. 30–31 of Proverbs, and there it is always paired with *ʿānî*. In the words of Agur (Prov 30:1–33), it is said that there are some who devour the poor (Prov 30:14), though the precise meaning of this statement is not specified. In the sayings of Lemuel's mother, the hearer is enjoined to assist the poor (Prov 31:20) and speak out for them in their legal cases (Prov 31:9). The rarity of the term *ʿebyôn* in Proverbs is significant: it was definitely a prophetic (see above) and legal

term (see below) and not the preferred word for Israel's "wise" to describe poverty (for wisdom terms, see *dal*, *maḥsôr*, *miskēn*, and *rāš* below).

In Job, the *ʿebyôn* are victims, whether of economic injustice (Job 24:4) or murder (Job 24:14). The book explores Job's relation to the poor, tracing Job's efforts to assist and defend them: he assisted them as a father would (Job 29:16); he grieved for them in their misfortune (Job 30:25); and he clothed them (Job 31:19). The book emphasizes these concrete deeds as the basis of Job's innocence before his friends (and to God). Job's actions match those of the God who saves the poor (*ʿebyôn*) from the strong (Heb *ḥāzāq*), a theme set out early in the book (5:15) and to which the book inexorably works as it seeks a solution to the problem of the suffering of the innocent.

The term *ʿebyôn* occurs more times in Job than it does in Proverbs, and while it is difficult to know precisely what significance to accord such a small sampling, this slightly larger number of instances in Job does seem to fit a curious distribution pattern for the words for "poor" in the Hebrew Bible: the terms for "poor" in Job (*ʿebyôn*, *dal*, *ʿānî*) are those also found in the prophetic writings, while the most distinctive wisdom words for "poor" (*maḥsôr*, *miskēn*, *rāš*) are conspicuously absent from Job. This gives the book of Job its "prophetic" character. Likewise, the book's defense of the poor and its concrete understanding of their situation mirrors the prophetic analysis of poverty (see Pleins 1987).

4. In Historical Narratives. It is striking that the term *ʿebyôn* is missing from the narrative materials of the DH and of the Pentateuch. Indeed, the overall scarcity of any of the terms for "poor" in these extensive bodies of narrative material is noteworthy, suggesting that ancient Israel's historians were reluctant to take up the topic of poverty (see further E.3 below). For the DH, this means a rejection (or at least an avoidance) of the prophetic contention that both Israel and Judah were destroyed in part because they mistreated the poor. This historian instead attributed the collapse of the kingdoms to the failure of kingship and to cultic abuses.

In the course of the DH, the word *ʿebyôn* occurs only in the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:8), a poetic text inserted into the larger block of narrative materials. This solitary appearance casts in sharp relief the historian's preference to avoid the topic of poverty. Clearly, the radical sentiments regarding poverty expressed in the Song of Hannah have little to do with the overall agenda of the Deuteronomistic Historian, who has selected the poetic text mainly because it enhanced the writer's support of the establishment of the rule of David through the agency of Samuel.

The only other occurrence of *ʿebyôn* in historical narratives is in the later text of Esther (9:22), where the term appears to refer to those to whom alms are given, that is, to beggars (cf. *BLe*, 500; Humbert 1952: 6). This reference lends support to the view that *ʿebyôn* refers to the beggarly poor.

5. In the Legal Materials. When *ʿebyôn* does appear in the Pentateuch, it occurs (9 times) only in restricted sections of the legal materials in Exodus and Deuteronomy (Exodus 23; Deuteronomy 15; 24). In Exodus, one is enjoined not to subvert the legal

judgments made on behalf of the *ʿebyôn* (Exod 23:6); elsewhere they are permitted to eat the food that grows on land that has been left fallow (23:11). Humbert’s observation that the legal material envisions the *ʿebyônîm* (plural) as those who are deprived of a proper diet (1952: 4–5; cf. Exod 23:11) is consistent with other instances of *ʿebyôn* in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 32:6–7, 41:7; Ezek 16:49; Ps 132:15). Deuteronomy 15 picks up on this latter Exodus text and expands on the topic of the fallow year by taking up the knotty issue of lending to the poor as the Sabbatical Year approaches, which is repeatedly encouraged throughout the passage (vv 4, 7, 9, 11). The term occurs only one other time in Deuteronomy, where it is legislated that poor laborers, whether natives or foreigners, must receive their wages (Deut 24:14). From these legal texts we obtain the picture that the *ʿebyôn* are landless wage laborers living on the edge of existence. Certainly this is consistent with the notion that this level of poverty includes begging as a way of life.

6. Meaning, History, and Etymology. There seems to be no evidence for the view that the term *ʿebyôn* has a religious connotation of patient, pious endurance amid misery as some have maintained (Kuschke 1939: 53; *GesB*, 4; van Leeuwen 1955: 16). The term simply points out severe economic deprivation. This condition may evoke the concern of God and the community, but the poverty of the *ʿebyôn* in and of itself is not considered a virtue or a way of life to be pursued for religious reasons.

On the basis of the use of *ʿebyôn* in Exodus 23 and in Amos, Humbert argues that the word came into play during the royal period; he further maintains that it did so under foreign influence, as evidenced by its appearance in such literature as the Psalms and the wisdom writings—texts which have “royal” connections (Humbert 1952: 3–4). However, it is terribly difficult to date the psalmic and wisdom materials; furthermore, the Covenant Code of Exodus 23 doubtless reflects premonarchic (not royal) legal traditions. Likewise, it is very difficult to agree with Humbert that the word *ʿebyôn* held a more important place in the time of the monarchy but fell into disuse in later periods (Humbert 1952: 3). The term is found throughout the Psalms—texts that are difficult to date, but which surely stem from both preexilic and postexilic times. Finally, it is hard to know how to assess the possible effects of foreign influence on Israel’s literature as mediated through monarchic institutions.

As an adjective, the word *ʿebyôn* has been commonly linked with and derived from the verb *ʿābâ*, “be willing, consent” (*BDB*, 2) and its Semitic counterparts (cf. Birkeland 1932: 21; *TDOT* 1: 27–41; *THAT* 1: 20–25; Kuschke 1939: 53; van Leeuwen 1955: 15; von Soden 1969). One problem with the linkage between *ʿebyôn* and *ʿābâ* is that many of the analyses tend to confuse English “want” in the popular and active sense of “to be willing” with “want” in the older and passive sense of “to be lacking something”; *ʿābâ* appears only to mean “to be willing; to desire” and not “to be in need” (von Soden 1969: 324). This interpretation finds support in the Old Aramaic Barrakab inscription from Zinjirli (*THAT* 1: 20; Barrakab line 14; KAI no. 216; cf. *TSSI* 2: 90), which reads: “And my brothers, the kings, desired [*htn̄bw*] all the richness of my house.” Yet, this would argue in favor of linking *ʿebyôn* with the verb *ȳb/ṭb*, “long for,” attested only in Psalm

119 and possibly representing Aramaic influence (Ps 119:40, 131, 174; cf. *THAT* 1: 21; Honeyman 1944: 81). This suggestion finds some support from *Leviticus Rabbah*, which states, “He is called ‘*ebyon*’ because he longs [*mtb*] for everything” (*Lev. Rab.* 34:6, Soncino edition). On the whole, however, the precise relation between *ebyôn* and *ābâ* remains difficult to specify, and in any event does not clarify the meaning of *ebyôn*. The problems associated with the search for a Semitic background for *ebyôn* have led some to postulate an Egyptian origin for the term in the Coptic *EBIHN* “a poor, wretched person” (Crum 1939: 53; cf. *TDOT* 1: 28–29; Lambdin 1953: 146). However, since counterparts to *ebyôn* crop up in Ugaritic (*abynt*; Aqhat I:17) and Amorite (von Soden 1969), there seems to be no need to seek a Coptic derivation for the term. Ward, in fact, suggests that the Coptic was borrowed from a Semitic original (1960: 32).

B. The Poor Peasant Farmer: *dal*

The term *dal* (“poor; weak, inferior; lacking”) is used 48 times in the Hebrew Bible, and half of these occur in prophetic and proverbial texts. In many cases it seems to allude to the plight of the beleaguered peasant farmer.

1. In the Prophetic Corpus. The term *dal* appears 12 times in the prophetic literature, less frequently than the words *ebyôn* or *ānî*. It can connote (1) unfair treatment in legal cases (Isa 10:2; 11:4); (2) unfair grain taxes paid to the large landowners (Amos 5:11); (3) abuses in the debt-slavery system (Amos 8:6); and (4) a lack of grazing land (Isa 14:30). Elsewhere, the term is used of those who suffer exploitation and oppression of an undefined character (Isa 26:6; Amos 2:7; 4:1). On two occasions God is depicted as the protector of the *dal* (Isa 25:4; Zeph 3:12). For Isaiah, God’s liberation of the poor will lead to their trampling those who are in power (Isa 26:5–6). For Jeremiah, the *dal* stand in contrast to society’s political and religious authorities (Jer 5:4–5; Heb *gēdōlîm*). One text in Jeremiah explicitly defines *dal* as one “who has nothing” (Jer 39:10), meaning people who lack vineyards and fields. In the prophetic texts, therefore, the term *dal* depicts the politically and economically marginalized elements of society. The mention of severe grain taxes (Amos 5:11) and lack of sufficient grazing and farmland (Isa 14:30; Jer 39:10) suggests an agricultural background for this word—a background that is confirmed by uses of the word *dal* elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (see below).

2. In Narrative and Legal Texts. The term *dal* appears only 5 times in the Pentateuch. It is found twice in legal contexts where the exhortation is made not to show favoritism toward persons, whether rich or poor, when making legal decisions (Exod 23:3; Lev 19:15). The word appears twice in ritual contexts, once where the *dal* is enjoined to pay the same census tax as the “rich” (Heb *āšîr*), and once where the poor are permitted to bring less costly offerings because of their status as people of lesser means (Exod 30:15; Lev 14:21). It is difficult to know why in the one case the rich and poor are not distinguished, whereas in the other, the poor are treated according to their financial circumstances (cf. Lev 5:11; 12:8). It may be that the principle of not showing favoritism to the poor had its limits, or it may be that the *dal* was not the poorest of the poor, that is, a person entirely without property, but was someone of modest means who stood somewhat above the *ebyôn* on the social ladder (cf. *TDOT* 3: 219; Kennedy 1898:

84–86). Because of the agricultural nature of the passages (*TDOT* 3: 219), the texts may have in mind the “small farmer” (cf. the discussion on *dallâ* below). The only other occurrence of *dal* in the Pentateuch is in a narrative context where the subject is not poverty but a description of the emaciated condition of the cows in Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen 41:19). This most vividly captures something of the image that must have come to mind when an Israelite thought of the condition of the *dal*. Note that the distribution of the word *dal* follows the same pattern as other words for “poor” in the Pentateuch: it occurs almost exclusively in legal texts and is only rarely found in the narrative materials, and when found in the narrative materials, the terms are rarely used to discuss poverty *per se*.

The term appears incidentally three times in the DH, not surprisingly in contexts focusing on issues other than poverty. Twice the word is used to indicate the political weakness of one group in relation to another (Judg 6:15; 2 Sam 3:1), and once it is used to speak of Amnon’s dejected and haggard appearance—the result of his frustrated sexual desires for Tamar (2 Sam 13:4). Thus, though rare in the DH, the use of the word in this narrative material gives us two layers of meaning that illuminate the notion of *dal* elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: (1) political weakness; (2) physically worn out. However, none of the occurrences of the term *dal* in the DH carries with it the notion of “poverty,” which does set its usage apart from usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, we may note that in the course of the DH, the word *dal* also turns up in a poetic context (1 Sam 2:8), the Song of Hannah (see A.4).

Elsewhere in the narrative texts, *dal* appears only in Ruth (3:10), where it stands opposite *ʿāšîr*, “rich,” and means simply “poor”: Boaz praises Ruth for not turning to younger men, whether poor or rich. Considering the agricultural context of the book of Ruth, it is perhaps no coincidence that the narrator chose to use a word for “poor” that applies to poor peasant farmers.

3. In the Psalms. Notably, the word *dal* is quite rare in the Psalter, occurring only 5 times in 4 psalms. Most of the occurrences concern God’s care of the poor (Pss 72:13; 82:3, 4; 113:7), though the situations are largely left undefined. One text alludes to injustices in matters of law, for God calls on the divine assembly to judge the poor justly (Ps 82:3). While most of the texts concern God’s attitude toward the *dal*, only one text deals with a person’s relation to the poor, where a blessing is pronounced on those who are considerate toward them (Ps 41:2). The Psalms are thus even more vague about the *dal* than they are about the *ʿebyôn*, making it difficult to know how explicit these texts intend to be about physical poverty.

4. In Wisdom Texts. In contrast with these rather sporadic occurrences throughout the biblical corpus, the frequent use of *dal* in Proverbs (15 times) and in Job (16 times) suggests at least in part that this was a wisdom term. This is particularly the case for Proverbs: when one considers the statistics for those words for “poor”/“poverty” that Proverbs shares with other blocks of biblical material—namely *ʿebyôn*, *dal*, and *ʿānî*—the word *dal* is definitely the preferred proverbial word for expressing the wisdom tradition’s understanding of poverty. The statistical difference between the frequent use of *dal* in Proverbs and its rare occurrence in the Psalms is thus primarily a synchronic matter of conscious word choice (reflecting diverging ideological perspectives) rather than a diachronic matter of the Psalms being later than Proverbs (when *dal* supposedly

fell into disuse in the postexilic period, as Fabry [*TDOT* 3: 215] suggests; cf. Donald 1964: 29). The fact that *dal* appears 11 times in Sirach confirms the notion that *dal* is a favorite word of wisdom writers, even in very late periods.

In Proverbs, the term *dal*, like *maḥsôṛ* and *rāš* (see C. and E. below), is used only in chaps. 10–29, i.e. the sentential literature (contrast *ʿebyôn* above). This type of poverty is contrasted with wealth: it shatters the poor (10:15); it is a friendless circumstance (19:4); however, it may produce insight that the rich can fail to grasp (28:11). Charity toward the poor is elevated as a virtue of the wise person, though the motivation for such benevolence is to reap the rewards that come from having a reputation for magnanimity (19:17; 22:9; 29:9). Although the life of poverty is certainly no virtue to the proverbial writers, the pursuit of wealth should not involve mistreating the poor. Frequently wisdom warns of the dangers inherent in attempting to profit off the *dal* (14:31; 21:13; 22:16; 28:3, 8, 15).

In Job, the word *dal*, like *ʿebyôn*, becomes the measure of Job’s innocence. However, unlike *ʿebyôn*, which is nearly always on the lips of Job, the word *dal* is almost always used by one of Job’s accusers. This is appropriate if we consider that Job’s friends are caricatures of wisdom teachers—the word *dal* is supposed to be on their lips. In the first instance (5:16), Eliphaz uses the term *dal* (along with *ʿebyôn*) to frame the book’s challenge against Job concerning his treatment of the poor—a theme that is pursued in greater detail after chap. 20. Zophar speaks of the *dal*, and in true proverbial fashion he notes that the wicked who profit off the poor will lose their wealth (Job 20:10, 19). Zophar’s use of the word *dal* is the first use of a term for “poor” since Eliphaz’s challenge in chap. 5; we should see in this a conscious effort on the writer’s part to reassert the accusation against Job regarding his treatment of the poor. In so doing, the writer uses this word to mark a significant turning point in the discussion: from this chapter on, the treatment of the poor becomes a major motif in the book and for Job’s friends it is a central issue in assessing Job’s integrity. Twice Elihu mentions the *dal* and speaks of God’s attitude toward the poor. On the one hand, God is impartial toward both poor and nobles (Heb *šārîm*; 34:19); on the other hand, God is said to strike down the wicked, and thus the cry of the poor comes to God (34:28; the statements of Elihu have notable counterparts in the Pentateuch, see above; cf. the later Sir 35:12–14, also in the wisdom tradition). All of these uses of *dal* in accusatory contexts render Job’s own use of *dal* most poignant: he claims to have met the needs of the poor (31:16). In each occurrence, it is clear that the writer has in mind the very concrete suffering of the poor—suffering that is not experienced by the well-to-do. Unfortunately, the text does not seek to further specify the nature of the deprivation experienced by the *dal*.

5. A Ugaritic Text. The ancient and widespread concern for the *dal* is strikingly confirmed in the Keret Epic (14th century B.C.E.). In one passage, King Keret is denounced by his son Yassib, who accuses his father of failing to execute the duties of the royal office, blaming this failure on his father’s weakness and illness. In the course of his diatribe, Yassib sustains his critique of the king by pointing out how the poor, specifically the *dl*, have been treated: “You do not banish the extortioners of the poor [*dl*]” (Gibson 1977: 102). Interestingly, this passage groups together the mistreatment of the *dl* with the failure to feed the orphan (*ytm*) and the widow (*ʿalmnt*)—a word grouping

that directly parallels the biblical vocabulary concerning the disenfranchised (cf. Isa 10:2; Ps 82:3–4; Job 31:16–17).

6. *dallâ*, pl. *dallôt*. A related term, *dallâ*, occurs twice in 2 Kings and three times in Jeremiah. In all these passages, the term refers to a social grouping or class at the time of the Exile, a group generally thought to represent the lowest orders of society (2 Kgs 24:14; 25:12; Jer 40:7; 52:15, 16). The *dallat ʿam hā-āreṣ*, “poor of the people of the land,” *dallat/dallôt hā-āreṣ*, “poor of the land,” and the *dallôt hā-ām*, “poor of the people,” are those who remained in Judah after the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C.E. They are explicitly depicted as people who were forced to work for the Babylonian conquerors as agricultural laborers, suggesting that this phrase may refer to “poor farm laborers” (cf. CAD 3: 173). Curiously, the narrative in Jeremiah (39:10) diverges significantly from its counterpart in 2 Kings (25:12). Whereas in 2 Kings the Babylonian commander is said to force the *dallâ* to be vineyard workers and field laborers for the conqueror, the reading in Jeremiah is altered to produce a radically different picture: there the *dal* are not forced laborers, but simply people to whom vineyards and fields are given. It would seem that the writer of Jeremiah has toned down the depiction of the Babylonians to cast the conqueror in the best possible light—a view that is consistent with other sections of Jeremiah (e.g., chaps. 27 and 29). In any case, these passages link the terms *dallâ* and *dal* to agricultural vocations, and their usage in 2 Kings and Jeremiah lends support to the view developed in this section that these terms refer to poor peasant farmers.

C. **The Lazy Poor: *maḥsôr***

The word *maḥsôr* (“lack of, or need for, material goods”) occurs 13 times in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in Proverbs. Its rarity throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible would seem to mark off *maḥsôr* as a wisdom term.

1. In Wisdom Texts. Of the 8 occurrences in Proverbs, only one (6:11) is outside chaps. 10–29. Similarly, *dal* and *rāš* only occur in Proverbs 10–29. This vocabulary distribution serves to bind together chaps. 10–29 and isolate them from chaps. 1–9 and 30–31. Proverbs 1–9 is instruction that is largely unconcerned with the topic of poverty; chaps. 30–31 use a different terminology, namely the combination *ʿānî* and *ʿebyôn* (see A.3). In Proverbs, *maḥsôr* connotes (1) poverty that results from laziness (6:11; 14:23; 21:5; 24:34), and (2) poverty that results from excessive living (21:17). Since the ethic of Proverbs is the ethic of the bureaucratic elite (cf. Pleins 1987), the text tends to stress hard work and moderation. As a result, the wise are terribly concerned about the dangers of laziness. And yet, the wisdom teachers do not completely denigrate those who are poor: generosity toward the poor is a virtue in the wisdom tradition, and the wise warn that a lack of generosity can lead one into poverty (11:24; 22:16; 24:34).

Significantly, the word does not appear at all in Job or Ecclesiastes. The absence of this term and several others from Job is one line of argument for separating the social agenda of Job from that of Proverbs.

2. In Legal Texts. The term appears only once in the Pentateuch in the legal materials of Deuteronomy, where the community is enjoined to lend to the poor what

they lack in material goods (*maḥsôr*) as the Sabbatical Year approaches (Deut 15:8). The context implies concrete items, though they are not specified. The rarity of the term in the Pentateuch is one indication that the *maḥsôr* had particular importance in the wisdom sphere.

3. In the Psalms. The word *maḥsôr* appears only once in the Psalter, in a supposed Thanksgiving Hymn (Psalm 34). However, the particular verse in question (v 10) is part of a section that looks more like a Wisdom Psalm (viz. 34:9–15). The text states that those who fear God lack (*maḥsôr*) nothing, and by implication appears to mean they do not lack food (cf. 34:11), though this may be metaphorical.

4. In Historical Narrative. Elsewhere, the word is found only in Judges (3 times). One occurrence is in the story of the Danite spies (Judg 18:1–31), who investigate the town of Laish and find it a prosperous place like Sidon (cf. Judg 18:7), a town where nothing is lacking (*maḥsôr*; Judg 18:10). Clearly, material goods are meant here. Twice the term *maḥsôr* occurs in the story of the Levite’s concubine (Judg 19:1–30). The Levite and his concubine report that they do not lack (*maḥsôr*) any necessary supplies, listing in their possession such items as animal fodder, bread, and wine (Judg 19:19). And in reply the Ephraimite man tells them that “all you need [*maḥsôr*] I will take care of” (Judg 19:20). In both cases, *maḥsôr* denotes a lack of material goods.

D. Poverty Is Better: *miskēn*

The word *miskēn*, “poor,” is a late Hebrew term for “poor,” appearing only in the wisdom text of Ecclesiastes (4 times).

One text in Ecclesiastes (4:13) advises that it is better to be a poor (*miskēn*) youth than an old, foolish king who fails to heed warnings. The youth can rise out of the prison of poverty (Heb *bēt hāsûrîm*), but the king is in danger of collapsing into poverty (*rāš*). Another text (9:14–16), elevates the wisdom of a poor but wise man, who could have saved the town in time of siege if only the people would have heeded the poor man’s advice. Such comparative statements about wisdom amid poverty are also found in Proverbs (19:1, 22; 28:6). While Ecclesiastes reflects the typical wisdom teaching on this point, the writer also acknowledges the systemic nature of poverty (see E.1 below).

A related term denoting scarcity of material goods, *miskēnût*, appears once in Deuteronomy (8:9).

E. Political and Economic Inferiority: *rāš*

The word *rāš* (“economically poor, of modest means; beggar, bum”) occurs 22 times in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in wisdom texts, and should be viewed as a wisdom term (it does not appear at all in the Pentateuch or the prophetic writings); the word *rāš* refers to someone who is politically and economically inferior, frequently referring to someone who is lazy.

1. In Wisdom Texts. The majority of occurrences are in Proverbs (15 times), all restricted to the sentential literature of chaps. 10–29 (cf. the usage of *dal* and *maḥsôr* in

this regard). In Proverbs, this term connotes (1) poverty that results from laziness (10:4); and (2) want that arises from disordered living (13:23). This type of poverty is seen to be a friendless condition (14:20; 19:7; 28:3). The wisdom analysis of the origins of poverty in personal laziness diverges radically from other streams of biblical tradition, such as the prophetic and legal, which see the problem of poverty in terms of social structures and power arrangements. The wisdom analysis is to be explained by the fact that sociologically it finds its home in the educational circles of the social elite of ancient Israel (see Pleins 1987). Thus the term *rāš* often stands in contrast to “rich” (Heb *āšār* in 13:8; 14:20; 18:23; 22:7; 28:6; verb *āšār* in 10:4). In one of these texts (18:23), the word *rāš* would seem to be best translated as “beggar” or “bum,” for the text depicts this person imploring the rich for assistance. Consistent with the proverbial philosophy, this type of poor person is not to be mocked because God creates all people (17:5; 22:2; 28:27; 29:13). The term *rāš* is used on several occasions to teach that there are worse things than poverty, namely perverse speech and stupidity (19:1), lying (19:22), and evil deeds (28:6). Obviously, the use of this teaching device does not mean that the wise cultivated poverty as a virtue; rather, they drew on these proverbs to help their students grasp how one acts if one embodies wisdom. Wisdom is more than knowing how to respect wealth and poverty.

The word *rāš* is used twice in Ecclesiastes. One text (4:14) concerns the contrast between the poor but wise youth and an old, foolish king who does not heed warnings and collapses into poverty (see D. above). In another passage, the word *rāš* is used in the context of structural economic exploitation, a usage that is unusual for *rāš*. The writer says that one must not be surprised by the “exploitation of the poor [*rāš*]” in a province, for society is structured in such a way that those above exploit those who are below them on the social ladder (Eccl 5:7). Though the writer’s sentiment is rather cynical about the situation of the poor, the author turns the meaning of the word *rāš* on its head by suggesting that *rāš* is *not* a poverty that results from laziness as the writers of Proverbs maintained; this inversion of categories moves Ecclesiastes in the direction of Job and the prophets, who also emphasize the structural origins of poverty.

The word *rāš* does not appear at all in Job; this lack is yet another factor that sets Job apart from Proverbs, even though both are generally regarded as wisdom texts (see C.1 above). That the book of Job avoids the term *rāš* strengthens the view we have argued for above that the book of Job is more akin to the prophetic materials in terms of language and social analysis than it is to the wisdom tradition, at least insofar as Proverbs is a typical representative of this tradition (a comparison with Egyptian wisdom materials shows Proverbs to be quite typical of the international wisdom tradition with regard to its understanding of poverty; see Pleins 1987).

2. In the Psalms. The word *rāš* appears only once in the Psalter, in a so-called prophetic oracle, where God calls on the divine assembly to bring about just legal decisions for the poor (Ps 82:3). This passage is rich in its use of terms for the “poor”

(*dal*, *ʿānî*, *rāš*, *ʿebyôn*, and *yātôm* [“fatherless”] all occur in 82:3–4). All are victims of the ill-defined *rēsāʿîm*, “wicked, guilty” (cf. Baudissin 1912: 216–17; Munch 1936: 19).

3. In Historical Narrative. Like the word *dal*, the word *rāš* is unusual among the words for “poor” in that it crops up at least a few times (4 times) in the course of the DH. The first instance concerns the rising figure of David in the court of Saul; David sees himself as an insignificant individual when compared to the importance of the ruling king, Saul (1 Sam 18:23). This use of *rāš* is comparable to DH’s use of the term *dal*: the word is not used to bring up the topic of poverty; rather, it specifies political inferiority. The other uses of *rāš* in 2 Samuel all occur in the context of Nathan’s parable addressed against the adulterous affair and murder perpetrated by King David. In the immediate context of the parable, the *rāš* is depicted as one who owns only one small sheep in contrast to the rich person who owns many flocks and herds (2 Sam 12:1–4). Clearly the term has a strong economic flavor to it, and the text tacitly recognizes the cruelty of the rich when they steal what little the poor possess. However, the purpose of the text is not to critique economic relations in the manner of the prophetic texts or the book of Job (the term *rāš* is not prophetic and is the wrong word to put in the mouth of a prophet); rather, the text seeks to make explicit the political miscalculations of King David. In this way, the Deuteronomistic writers are actually quite consistent in their use of *rāš* and *dal*: these words are used to stress political weakness and are not drawn on to analyze or critique the situation of the poor in their society. The topic of poverty is not on the agenda of DH.

F. The Injustice of Oppression: *ʿānî*

The term *ʿānî* (“economically poor; oppressed, exploited; suffering”) is the most common term in the Hebrew Bible for “poverty,” occurring 80 times in the biblical corpus.

1. In the Prophetic Literature. The word *ʿānî* is the most prominent of the terms for “poor” in the prophetic literature, where it appears 25 times and connotes (1) economic oppression (Isa 3:15; Ezek 18:12; cf. Deut 24:12; Ezek 22:29; Amos 8:4); (2) unjust treatment in legal decisions (Isa 10:2); and (3) victimization through deception (Isa 32:7). Concretely, the society’s leaders are said to have robbed the poor of their possessions (Isa 3:14; cf. Second Isaiah below). In another case, Ezekiel actually transforms the story of the destruction of Sodom by applying an economic interpretation: Sodom was destroyed because it withheld food from the poor (Ezek 16:49; cf. Gen 18:16–19:29). For First Isaiah and Jeremiah, the liberator of the poor is the king (Isa 14:32; Jer 22:16). In other prophetic texts, Yahweh alone is portrayed as the champion of the oppressed (Hab 3:14; Zeph 3:12; cf. Second Isaiah below).

The term *ʿānî* is used in two characteristic ways in the prophetic literature. First, it is frequently paired with *ʿebyôn* (Isa 14:30–32; 32:7; 41:17; Jer 22:16; Ezek 18:12; 22:29; Amos 8:4), a grouping found frequently in the Psalms (15 times), and to a lesser extent in Proverbs 30–31 (3 times), Job (3 times), and Deuteronomy (2 times). The pair represents a somewhat stylized rhetorical device for speaking of poverty, and is the product of either prophetic or cultic influence, though which is difficult to determine. If the pair represents

prophetic influence, this would lend further weight to the thesis that Job is adapting prophetic rhetoric. Secondly, on several occasions in the prophetic literature, the term *ʿānî* is linked with the word “people” (Heb *ʿam*; Isa 3:15; 10:2; 14:32; Zeph 3:12).

Curiously, the only other uses of *ʿānî* with “people” occur in Exodus (22:24) and in two psalms (18; 72). The Exodus text represents premonarchic legal traditions and is probably the precursor to the other uses of *ʿānî* plus “people.” This may put into context Micah’s appeals on behalf of the “my people” (Mic 3:3, et al.), indicating that the prophet is in touch with ancient, possibly village, legal traditions. However, the Psalms use the combination of *ʿānî* and “people” in royal contexts (18:28; 72:12), which indicates a shift from a village to an urban context. It seems, therefore, appropriate that Isaiah, whose teachings are preoccupied with a royal ideology, should use this combination as well.

Perhaps the most significant use of *ʿānî* in the prophets occurs in Isaiah 40–66. The writer(s) of these chapters makes exclusive use of *ʿānî* in all but one passage, and even there *ʿānî* is combined with *ʿebyôn* (41:17). This nearly exclusive emphasis on *ʿānî* represents a deliberate word choice as the writer reshapes the prophetic notion of the “oppressed poor” to apply it to the sufferings of the exiles in Babylon. According to the earlier prophets, Israel and Judah were judged for their exploitation of others, i.e., for making others *ʿānî*. With Second Isaiah, the entire nation has endured divine judgment, and through its captivity in Babylon, Israel as a whole has become *ʿānî*. The prophet seeks to explain the implications of this new phase in the community’s historical experience. To this end, the prophet develops two main themes around the term *ʿānî*. The first theme is that the wrath of God against Jerusalem is temporary (51:21; 54:11; cf. 48:9–10). The community will not remain in captivity forever as if abandoned by God. Judgment will give way to a new exodus and liberation (cf., e.g., 43:16–20; 63:9–13). The prophet’s second theme is that the people should, therefore, continue to hope amid the debilitating circumstances of exile, standing firm in the face of the oppressor, namely Babylon (49:17; cf. 51:12–14, 22–23). Second Isaiah’s view is that God takes note of and will assist the nation that has suffered political and economic oppression at the hands of one of the major political powers of the day. God is particularly concerned about this kind of suffering (66:2); and it would seem that the traditional translation of this text, that God looks to the “humble,” seriously weakens the creative force of Second Isaiah’s understanding of Israel as *ʿānî*, “politically oppressed.”

This prophet’s notion of *ʿānî*, while somewhat more abstract than previous prophetic usage, continues to contain concrete aspects. The *ʿānî* are those who search for water, but have none (41:17), though this may be a somewhat metaphorical statement concerning the general yearnings of the exiles for liberation. The *ʿānî* are also depicted as homeless (58:7), though this passage is more in the spirit of the earlier prophets since it seems to apply to a portion of the people and not the people as a whole. Admittedly, the prophet has expanded the concrete character of the term in most instances; nevertheless, the general and terribly concrete situation of political and economic oppression indelibly

stamps Second Isaiah's concept of poverty. This is not a theology of humility in the more detached or spiritualized sense.

2. In the Psalms. The word *ʿānî* occurs 31 times in the Psalter (30 Kethib; 1 Qere) and represents the preferred term for “poor” among the cultic writers. The term appears most often in Psalms of Lament. As with the Major Prophets and Amos, the Psalms frequently pair up *ʿebyôn* and *ʿānî* (15 times; see A.1 and F.1 above). The poets utilize the term *ʿānî* when characterizing God's relation to the poor: they call on God not to ignore or forget the *ʿānî* (9:13—Eng 12; 9:19; 10:12 [= 9:33]; 70:6—Eng 5; 74:19). In many cases, this is a self-reference to the one who sings the Psalms (25:16; 40:18—Eng 17; 69:30; 86:1; 88:16; 102:1; 109:22). It is God who rescues or provides for the *ʿānî* (12:6—Eng 5; 18:28; 22:25; 34:7; 35:10; 68:11; 82:3; 140:13—Eng 12).

Rarely do the Psalms give specific details about the sufferings of the *ʿānî*. The poor are depicted generally as being hounded and seized by the wicked and strong (10:2, 9; 14:6; 35:10; 37:14; 106:16) or being plundered (12:6—Eng 5). Most concretely, the *ʿānî* are homeless (25:16; Heb *yahîd*); murdered with bows and swords (37:14; unless this is metaphorical); and in physical pain (69:30).

Only one royal psalm expressly depicts the king to be the champion of the poor (Psalm 72). The poet calls on God to give the king the ability to judge justly (72:2), which translates into upholding the legal claims of the poor (72:4, 12). The rarity of the connection between the king and the poor in the Psalms would seem to indicate that the Psalms do not intend to work out a theology detailing the state's responsibilities toward the poor or one that challenges the rulers for their failure to face societal injustices; this contrasts sharply with the social burden of the prophets.

3. In Wisdom Texts. The word *ʿānî* finds frequent usage (16 times) throughout the wisdom literature, appearing 8 times in Proverbs, 7 times in Job, and once in Ecclesiastes.

In Proverbs, the word is scattered through the major blocks of the text. The term appears once in the instructional texts of Proverbs 1–9. This is unusual since none of the other words for poverty except *maḥsôr* (6:11) occur in this part of the book. The passage (3:34) relates the attitude of God who scorns the scoffer but favors the righteous and the *ʿānî*. In the sentential literature of Proverbs 10–22, the term *ʿānî* occurs four times. Three of these occurrences reflect themes that are developed in greater detail through the use of other words for “poor” in Proverbs: (1) showing favor to the *ʿānî* brings fortune to the giver (14:21); (2) the lot of the *ʿānî* is terrible (15:15); and (3) it is better to be among the poor than to share the plunder of the arrogant (16:19). The most unique use of *ʿānî* in the sentential literature occurs in a section that is known as the “Sayings of the Wise” (Prov 22:17–24:34), a text which has clear connections to the Egyptian instruction of Amenemope (Bryce 1979: chaps. 1–3). The writer exhorts the student not to rob the *dal* or “crush the afflicted [*ʿānî*] at the gate” (22:22). While it is true that the wise often oppose the abuse of the poor, this is the only text that speaks of the gate, i.e., the mistreatment of the poor in legal cases. The atypical nature of the text must be taken as a

sign that there is legal or prophetic influence at work here, strongly suggesting that the wise exerted little direct influence on the direction of the legal system in ancient Israel. The only other points where the wisdom, prophetic, and legal traditions really meet concern false weights and measures (Prov 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23) and property lines (Prov 23:10–11). In any case, the Proverbial tradition lacks the comprehensive and rather concrete social justice vision for the *ʿānî* that we find in the legal and prophetic materials (contra Malchow 1982).

Chaps. 30–31 of Proverbs make use of the pair *ʿebyôn* and *ʿānî* (see A.1 and F.1 above)—one fact among several considerations that sets these chapters off from the rest of the text of Proverbs. All three occurrences in these chapters reveal an awareness of the concrete suffering of the *ʿānî* that is unique in Proverbs. The *ʿānî* are devoured by the power-holders of society (30:14). In chapter 31, King Lemuel is exhorted to defend the legal case of the *ʿānî* (31:9). The wise and capable wife shows her compassion by opening her hand to assist the *ʿānî* (31:20). The meaning of *ʿānî* that we gain from these texts is one of concrete suffering and exploitation, though it must be observed that the specific situations of the *ʿānî* are not detailed by the sages.

A comparison of the various terms for “poor” in the Psalms and Proverbs makes it clear that while both use the term *ʿānî*, the difference in the distribution of the terms reflects the differing social visions of the writers. On the one hand, for the psalmists, the term is of distinctive importance in the context of worship and liturgy. By contrast, the divergent social agenda of Proverbs is underscored by the fact that Proverbs proportionately uses the cultic/prophetic term *ʿānî* less and the wisdom-nuanced term *dal* more than the Psalter. To put this another way, the cultic social agenda, however ill-defined it may seem, did not exert great influence on wisdom views about poverty; likewise, whatever wisdom influence there may be in the Psalms (especially the so-called “wisdom” Psalms), that influence did not extend to the shaping of the Psalter’s understanding of the poor.

The book of Job again yields a vocabulary that diverges from Proverbs, a rhetorical feature that also serves to distance Job from the ideology of traditional wisdom thought. In the discussions between Job and his friends, it is only Job that uses the term *ʿānî*. The sufferings of the *ʿānî* are very concrete: they are forced into hiding (24:4); their children are seized as a pledge (24:9; cf. 2 Kgs 4:1–7); and they are murdered (24:14). Once again, the substance of Job’s language is prophetic in character: he speaks quite concretely about the suffering of the *ʿānî*. Job’s wise friends scrupulously avoid the term, as one would expect from the distribution in Proverbs. Job finds the solution to the question of suffering in his posture toward the poor: he rescued those who cried out (29:12). Curiously, the other uses of *ʿānî* in Job are on the lips of Elihu (who twice uses the term *dal*). This is rather anomalous and may lend support to the view that the Elihu chapters are a later addition to the text. In many ways, Elihu speaks like a psalmist, for he stresses God’s action in coming to the aid of the *ʿānî* (34:28; 36:6, 15). Perhaps then we

should see Elihu not as a “wisdom character” but as a representative of the cultic community.

For the writer of Ecclesiastes, the *ʿānî* find no benefit in this world, even when they may acquire the ability to manage their own affairs. Pondering the fact that God gives wealth only to deny its enjoyment (Eccl 6:1–7), the writer asks, “What advantage then has the wise man over the fool, what advantage has the pauper [*ʿānî*] who knows how to get on in life” (Eccl 6:8, *JPS*). The writer focuses on the negative side of the ancient wisdom view that the gods or fate bring both prosperity and misfortune (cf. Ptahhotep #10; Amenemope VII:1–6, XXI:15–16; Anksheshonq 12:3; 22:25; 26:8; 26:14; P. Insinger 7:18; 17:2; 28:4; 30:15).

4. In Legal Texts. The term *ʿānî* finds its way only into restricted sections of the Pentateuch 7 times: 5 times in the legal materials (Exodus 22; Deuteronomy 15; 24) and twice in the priestly writings of Leviticus. The legal texts are keyed to the Covenant Code’s (Exodus 21–23) concern for lending to “my people,” i.e., the *ʿānî* among the people. One cannot exact interest when lending to the poor. Statements concerning the *ʿānî* in Deuteronomy 15 and 24 simply represent a later commentary on the text in Exodus. Both chapters elaborate on lending to the poor. In one passage, provision is made to ensure that the poor continue to receive loans even as the time of loan suspension, the Sabbatical Year, approaches (15:11). In the other passage, lending is likewise the topic, but here the concern is to forbid the lender from keeping and sleeping in the garment a poor person has given in pledge (24:12). The use of the term *ʿānî* in this passage causes the editor to mention another law related to the *ʿānî*, in this case the poor laborer. Such laborers, whether foreigners or nationals, are not to be mistreated; they should receive their wages the same day (24:14–15). The priestly material on the *ʿānî* is likewise very concrete: these poor are reduced to gleaning the edges of harvest fields and vineyards for food (19:9–10; 23:22). The *ʿānî* is someone who has no real estate (cf. Rahlfs 1892: 74–75) and little to eat. All the legal and priestly texts clearly focus on the economic deprivation of the *ʿānî*, as do the prophetic texts. Yet, unlike the prophetic texts, the pentateuchal materials try to spell out the specifics of society’s obligations toward those who are economically deprived.

5. In Historical Narrative. As with other terms for poverty, the word *ʿānî* does not appear in the narrative portions of the Pentateuch or the DH. In fact, the only appearance of the term in the DH is in the poetic text of 2 Samuel 22, which actually represents the transferral of a liturgical text (roughly parallel to Psalm 18) into the narrative material. The contrast between the overwhelming number of occurrences of this word throughout large tracts of the Hebrew Bible and its striking absence from the Pentateuchal narrative and DH shows us how relatively unimportant the issue of poverty was for Israel’s early “historians.” This has direct implications for our understanding of the contrast between the philosophies of history held by the prophets and by the “historians” (see further E.3 and H).

6. Semitic Cognates. Discussion of the word *ʿānî* cannot be entirely separated from a discussion of the related verbal form *ʿānâ*, often defined as “be bowed down, afflicted” (BDB, 776). The *Piel* or transitive form of the verb, which constitutes the bulk of the verb’s occurrences (57 out of 80), has a very concrete sense, namely “to oppress, abuse, rape.” In a major study of the terms for oppression in the Hebrew Bible, Pons (1981: 103) concluded that *ʿānâ* “never has as its object something inanimate, but always persons, and, in particular, the body” (cf. *THAT* 6: 247–70; *TDNT* 6:885–915; contrast Delekat 1964). A vivid cognate example appears in the famous Moabite stele: “Omri, the king of Israel, oppressed [*wyʿnw*] Moab for a long time because Chemosh was angry with his land. Then his [Omri’s] son [Ahab] succeeded him and he also said, ‘I will oppress [*ʿnw*] Moab’” (lines 4–6; cf. *TSSI* 1: 74; *KAI* no. 181). As in biblical Hebrew, the Moabite text confirms that the verb denotes political oppression. A possibly related example occurs in the Baal Cycle (14th century B.C.E.). Tsumura (1982) suggests that the text reads: “Give up Baal, and I will *humble* [*ʿnn*] him/ Dagan’s son, that I may dispossess his gold” (*KTU* 1.2:I:35; cf. *OTA* 1983: 246–47). This interpretation of the passage, while not certain, is possible, and the pairing of *ʿnn* with the rather concrete phrase “dispossess his gold” suggests that “to humble” must also be understood as some sort of concrete suffering or deprivation, not simply as personal humiliation.

The experience of poverty is brought out in a related Aramaic example from the text of Ahiqar (line 105): “I have tasted even the bitter medlar and have eaten *endives* but there is nothing more bitter than poverty [*ʿnwh*]” (Lindenberger 1983: 89). Another cognate occurs in biblical Aramaic, where Daniel (Belteshazzar) calls on Nebuchadnezzar to “do away with your sins through righteousness and [get rid of] your offenses by showing kindness to the poor [*ʿnyn*]” (Dan 4:24—Eng 27).

Some treat *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw* as products of the same root with no differentiation in meaning (Hupfeld 1867; van den Berghe 1962; Aartun 1971). Rahlfs derives them both from the same root meaning, “the lower position that a servant takes toward a master,” but he suggests that *ʿānî* denotes the condition of suffering, whereas *ʿānāw* bears a more religious sense, that of humbling oneself before God (1892: 70, 73–80). Rahlfs’ view has tended to dominate the discussion. Some argue that the two terms have separate origins, but not necessarily distinct meanings: Birkeland (1932: 19–20) held that *ʿānāw* may not have existed in early biblical Hebrew but entered at a later point under the influence of Aramaic, a position advocated by George (*DBSup* 7: 387). Birkeland denied the view that *ʿānāw* is more religious or that *ʿānî* is more secular in tone (1932: 15), though by this he meant that *ʿānî* at times may mean “humble” (Birkeland 1932: 16)—a view that is difficult to sustain in light of its usage throughout the biblical corpus.

G. A Political Movement of the Pious Poor?: *ʿānāwîm*

The term *ʿānāwîm* (“poor; pious, humble[?]”) is a plural form for a supposed singular *ʿānāw* and occurs 24 times in the Hebrew Bible. The word appears in the prophetic

literature, in the Psalms, and in wisdom texts. Although this is not the most common word for “poor” in the Hebrew Bible, it is one of the most frequently discussed among scholars because many see in *ʿānāwîm* a merger between poverty and piety, possibly marking a political movement among the pious poor (see Lohfink 1986). A problematic singular form that appears in Num 12:3 is discussed below.

1. In the Psalms. The word *ʿānāwîm* appears 13 times in the Psalms, where it appears mainly in Psalms of Lament. As with the term *ʿānî*, the poets draw on *ʿānāwîm* to characterize God’s relation to the poor. In the psalmists’ vision, God actively relates to the *ʿānāwîm* by rescuing and guiding them, though precisely what this entails is difficult to determine from the texts (25:9; 34:3—Eng v 2; 69:33—Eng v 32; 76:10—Eng v 9; 147:6; 149:4). The poets observe that God does not forget the poor (9:13, 19—Eng vv 12, 18), and they call on God not to ignore the poor (10:12; 10:17—Eng v 16). As with the term *ʿānî*, few passages allude to the concrete circumstances of the *ʿānāwîm*, but what we do find is quite revealing. They lack food (22:27—Eng v 26); they are landless (37:11); and they are in pain (69:33—Eng v 32; cf. 69:30—Eng v 29). One text makes it clear that the opponents of the *ʿānāwîm* are the wicked (Heb *rěšāʿîm*; 147:6), though again, as with so many of the Psalms texts, the precise sociological setting presupposed by “wicked” is difficult to determine. When we consider the usage of the term *ʿānāwîm* throughout the Psalms, it is striking to notice that this word matches *ʿānî* in its range of meaning and usage. This is one important piece of evidence for the theory pursued below that the term *ʿānāwîm*, is simply a plural form for *ʿānî*, and that the two actually should be treated together.

2. In the Prophetic Corpus. The word *ʿānāwîm* occurs in a few scattered places in the prophetic literature (7 times). The poor are victims of social injustice (Isa 32:7; Amos 2:7; 8:4). Several texts in Isaiah lay emphasis on hope for the poor: they will find a just judge in a future king (11:4); they will rejoice before God when God topples the tyrants (29:19); and they are the exiles to whom the announcement of release is presented (61:1; on Second Isaiah see F.1 above). These texts all have a concrete socioeconomic or political flavor to them. This is less clear for Zephaniah, where the text treats the *ʿānāwîm* as those who follow God’s laws and who seek *ʿānāwâ*, a word that in this context appears to mean “humility” (Zeph 2:3). This is the only passage in the entire Hebrew Bible where the term *ʿānāwîm* seems to have the less concrete meaning of “humble,” although even here this is not altogether certain (see below).

3. In Wisdom Texts. The term *ʿānāwîm* occurs only 3 times in Proverbs and once in Job. The occurrences in Proverbs all represent the spoken form (Qere) for the written (Kethib) plural of *ʿānî* (3:34; 14:21; 16:19); as such, these are all discussed above under F.3. The only occurrence in Job is a Kethib form for the Qere plural for *ʿānî* and is likewise treated above.

4. Semantic Meaning. The word *ʿānāwîm* falls into the same general semantic field as other words for poverty, although there has been tremendous debate over the links between “poverty” and “humility” (another possible meaning of the term *ʿānāwîm*).

For Baudissin, the key issue is how the psalmists’ more positive view of poverty (expressed in the *ʿānāwîm* passages) arose given the negative depiction of poverty in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, where poverty is an evil that has no inherent spiritual value and must be uprooted from the community of God (1912: 202, 209). Baudissin suggests that Israel’s experience of the Exile brought about a reevaluation of the nature and value of poverty, and he credits Second Isaiah as the first to characterize Judah as God’s “poor people” in a positive sense: through repeated invasions by the Babylonians, deportation, and plundered cities, Judah, as a nation, joined the ranks of the poor and came to understand the Exile as an act of humbling by God (1912: 211–12). Poverty and humility eventually dovetail as theological concepts: they are the precondition for experiencing the compassion of God, a more positive assessment of humble poverty that comes to fruition in the Psalms (Baudissin 1912: 213–14, 216).

Baudissin’s view is open to several lines of criticism. His hypothesis rests in part on the probably faulty linguistic analysis that the word *ʿānāwîm*, “humble,” came to color the meaning of *ʿānî*, which originally characterized the socioeconomic plight of one who is poor (Baudissin 1912: 195). Moreover, it is not clear that *ʿānāwîm* means “humble.” Baudissin is correct in suspecting that Second Isaiah shifts prophetic thinking about poverty, but this development occurs along different lines than Baudissin outlines and involves the term *ʿānî* (see F.1 above).

Another issue in the interpretation of *ʿānāwîm* concerns the possible sociological background of the people who are characterized as *ʿānāwîm*. Loeb (1892) and Rahlfs (1892) held that especially in the Psalms they represented a party of the pious in ancient Israel. Munch (1936: 21), under the influence of Lurje’s class analysis (1927), modified the notion of party from a spiritual movement to that of “the class of the oppressed,” although Munch’s analysis is, in part, dependent on a reassessment of the socioeconomic dimension of the term *ʿānî* and not on a reading of *ʿānāwîm* itself (Munch 1936: 26). Kittel (1914), Causse (1922; 1937), and Birkeland (1932) denied the party thesis, preferring instead to characterize the *ʿānāwîm* as a religious movement or tendency within the population (cf. van der Ploeg 1950: 237–40), though Birkeland was forced to revise his ideas in light of a reevaluation of the socioeconomic dimension behind the term *ʿānî* (1933: 317–20). A variant of this position goes back to Renan (1891: 37–50), who saw in the *ʿānāwîm* a religious movement of the preexilic period.

Bruppacher (1924) and van der Ploeg (1950) have sharply criticized the attempted link between “poverty” and “piety.” In the first place, Bruppacher contends that there is no ideal of poverty in the Bible, nor is it the case that poverty is exalted (1924: xi). Secondly, he maintains that the evidence for a religious or political movement built around the pious poor is weak. In particular, he criticizes Loeb’s view (1892: 147) that the poor of the Psalms are the pious Israelites of the postexilic period who had come

together as “the party of the poor” (1924: xii, 89). Bruppacher denies the party thesis, contending that the biblical text provides no clear sociological picture for an organized movement of poor people in ancient Israel; like the “wicked” of the Psalms, it is not certain who the “poor” of the Psalms actually are (1924: 90–91).

Van der Ploeg’s critique (1950) seeks to separate the term *ʿānāwîm*, “religious humility,” from the terms *ʿānî*, *ʿebyôn*, and *dal*, which mean “socioeconomic poverty.” Working from the prophets, van der Ploeg maintains that the descriptions of the poor are so concrete that the poverty the prophets were concerned about was not some spiritual phenomenon; rather, it was social and economic oppression (1950: 244, 250). In the prophets and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, there is no positive evaluation of poverty; the poor are “just” only insofar as they are the innocent victims of injustice, and poverty does not translate automatically into piety, even if God displays a special concern for the situation of the poor (1950: 245–46). Nowhere does the Hebrew Bible romanticize poverty; it is not a voluntary condition but the product of oppressive practices in society. Having disconnected poverty from a religious ideal such as humility, van der Ploeg then suggests that the term *ʿānāwîm* must refer to plain humility (a character trait) and must not be confused with the poverty of the *ʿānî* (a socioeconomic condition). Van der Ploeg understands *ʿānāwîm* as the general attitude of submission before God on the part of believers no matter what their social status or economic condition may be, and poverty does not necessarily predispose one to this virtue (1950: 263–65).

5. *ʿānāw* and *ʿānî*. Since the analyses of van der Ploeg and Baudissin hinge in part on a particular understanding of the relationship between *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw*, it is necessary to sort out the issues behind this linguistic debate.

The word *ʿānāw* occurs in its plural form (*ʿānāwîm*) in all but one (problematic) case (Num 12:3); consequently, there is some question whether or not the word is simply a variant plural form for *ʿānî*. It is difficult to know how to settle this debate: on the one hand, the LXX renders *ʿānāwîm* as *praûs* (Gk “mild, soft, gentle, meek”) in 9 of its 24 occurrences, whereas it renders *ʿānî* as *praûs* in only 4 instances, preferring instead to render it in numerous instances by *ptōchós* (Gk “one who crouches or cringes; a beggar”; cf. Hands 1968: 62–76; Martin-Achard 1965: 355; van den Berghe 1962: 275). On the basis of this evidence, it would seem reasonable to suggest that some sort of differentiation in meaning between *ʿānî* and *ʿānāwîm* is warranted, and hence to maintain that these are indeed two different words (Rahlf’s 1892: 56–60; contrast Birkeland 1932: 20).

However, in no case does the plural form *ʿānāwîm* occur side by side with the plural of *ʿānî* in such a way that would lead us to think that specific authors used these as two different words (cf. Delekat 1964: 45). The only exceptions are in the Psalms (9–10; 22; 25; 34; 37; 69), where *ʿāniyyîm* and *ʿānāwîm* are mixed, though because these texts do represent the exceptions, we must remain open to the possibility of scribal error in these instances (Birkeland 1932: 14–15; cf. Gillingham 1988–89: 17). Furthermore, many of

the plurals represent Kethib (written) and Qere (spoken) variations in the scribal editorial tradition of the Hebrew text (on 5 occasions the term *ʿānāwîm* is used as the Qere for a Kethib *ʿāniyyîm*: Pss 9:13; 10:12; Prov 3:34; 14:21; 16:19; while *ʿāniyyîm* on 4 occasions is the Qere for a Kethib *ʿānāwîm*: Isa 32:7; Amos 8:4; Ps 9:19; Job 24:4; cf. Orlinsky and Weinberg 1983).

Those who argue that *ʿānāwîm* and *ʿānî* are different words would have to see in this state of affairs scribal confusion over the two words. However, it is much more likely (from our knowledge of ancient scribal practices) that the variation simply reflects the differences between historic spellings and spoken dialect. It is preferable to see in *ʿānî* (whether singular or plural) and *ʿānāw* (almost exclusively plural) linguistic variants of the same word. It may be the case that by the time of the LXX, the translators thought that *ʿānāwîm* and *ʿāniyyîm* carried different meanings (a distinction maintained in postbiblical Hebrew), but a comparison of their usage in the Hebrew Bible shows this is not the case. We may finally note that since the plural forms *ʿāniyyîm* and *ʿānāwîm* go back to at least the 8th-century prophets (Isaiah uses *ʿāniyyîm*; Amos uses *ʿānāwîm*), this Hebrew dialectical and spelling variant is quite old and should not be explained as a product of Aramaic influence, as Birkeland seeks to do (1932: 15–16, 19–20).

A problematic singular form *ʿānāw* occurs in Num 12:3. The word is commonly translated “humble,” pointing to Moses as the most humble person in the world. Rashi sustains this interpretation in his commentary on Numbers when he says that *ʿānāw* means “humble” (*šāpāl*) and “patient” (*sabēlān*). If this is true, this would be one case where *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw* clearly diverge from one another as separate words. However, while the Kethib is *ʿānāw*, the Qere is the unusual *anyw*. Gray explains the *yōd* in the Qere as “a *mater lectionis* to indicate that the last syllable is to be pronounced as in *dēbārāw*” (*Numbers* ICC, 124; cf. Rahlfs 1892: 95–100). If this is the case, the Qere is comparable to that for *stw* (Cant 2:11), which has a *yōd* inserted before the *waw* in the Qere to indicate that the word is to be read *sētāw* (cf. Rahlfs 1892: 98–99). This reading for *ʿānāw* is known from Qumran and later rabbinic writings, although curiously it does not appear at all in the Mishnah, which knows only *ʿānî* and *ʿāniyyîm* (Kandler 1957). While this analysis is possible, there are other equally plausible interpretations for this scribal notation (cf. Birkeland 1932: 18–20). The consonantal form of the Qere appears to combine both *ʿānî* and *ʿānāw*, perhaps to indicate scribal uncertainty over this word, or to note dialectical variation, or to indicate that *ʿānāw* is to be read as *ʿānî*. This latter suggestion is supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch, which may read *ʿānî* in Num 12:3 and not *ʿānāw* (cf. *THAT* 6: 259). In light of the ambiguity of this situation, it is quite

possible that the *ʿānāw* in Num 12:3 should be treated as *ʿānî* and translated: “Moses had suffered more/was more oppressed than any other person in the world.”

If *ʿānāwîm*, then, is nothing more than a plural form of *ʿānî*, the meaning of *ʿānāwîm* must be sought in conjunction with all the *ʿānî* texts. Three things will follow from this.

(1) The term *ʿānāwîm* will be understood to denote concrete socioeconomic forms of poverty: it cannot be viewed as a condition that occurs by chance or by not being upright; rather, it is the product of oppression (Kuschke 1939: 48–51). (2) The religious connotation of “humbleness” will be rejected, although it will not be necessary to lay aside the biblical idea that God is concerned for the oppressed, and we can still see that the poor are depicted as those who do call on God in their oppression (cf. *THAT* 2: 345); in other words, the relation between God and the poor is a matter of justice, not based on piety (*THAT* 2: 352–55). (3) The statistics for word distribution will be combined, making *ʿānî/ʿānāwîm* the predominant word for poverty in the Hebrew Bible.

For another noteworthy discussion of the semantic meaning of *ʿānāwîm*, see Kraus 1986: 150–54. Other important discussions on poverty in the Psalms include Bolkestein 1939: 23–32; and Stamm 1955: 55–60.

H. Conclusion

This survey of the various terms for “poor” in the Hebrew Bible vindicates the context-oriented method outlined at the beginning of this article. Close attention to the precise usage and statistical distribution of these terms makes us aware of the diverging notions about poverty that infuse the biblical text. The classic discussions of the etymologies of the terms, while certainly important exercises, are generally unhelpful as guides to the meaning of these terms. Furthermore, the etymological approach fails to grapple with the diverging ideologies that exist in the text, and that are brought to the surface in a contextual analysis of the terms for “poor.”

Some streams of the biblical tradition are clearly concerned about poverty, although their theologies and analyses of poverty differ radically. Nevertheless, the legal, prophetic, wisdom, and liturgical traditions all see poverty as a matter of grave significance to the community. The philosophies that drive these streams of tradition, in part, derive and explain their social visions in light of their confrontation with the realities of poverty in ancient Israelite society. Poverty is a decisive issue in the prophetic and legal traditions. It is in these traditions that we are brought face-to-face with the harsh living conditions of the poor: hunger and thirst, homelessness, economic exploitation, legal injustices, lack of sufficient farmland. All these form the web of poverty in ancient Israel. The prophets protest what they see to be the oppression of the poor at the hands of the society’s rulers, while the legal traditions offer some limited provisions to ease the burdens of those who suffer in this situation. The liturgical tradition, as represented in the Psalms, presents a God who assists the poor in their distress, and the psalmists offer many prayers on their behalf. However, as we have seen, the Psalter’s use of terms for the poor tends to be rather vague with regard to their specific circumstances, causing us to wonder if the text is more metaphorical in its use of the terms and therefore more spiritualized in its approach to the topic. The wisdom tradition offers divergent positions. Proverbs, in part by drawing on a different vocabulary for poverty, develops a markedly different view of poverty: to the wise, poverty is either the result of laziness or represents

the judgment of God. By contrast, the book of Job moves in the direction of the language and analysis of the prophets. In this book, the poor are victims of economic and legal injustices. Furthermore, poverty becomes one of the book's major issues: Job has to defend himself against the charge that he has exploited the poor. One of the arguments for his innocence is built around the fact that he has defended the cause of the poor.

One unexpected conclusion we have arrived at through this study is that the plight of the poor was not a vital issue for ancient Israel's "historians," material that in this article has been termed the "narrative literature." A notable lack of poverty language distances the pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic historical writers from the issues of socioeconomic injustice; one must press the text to have these chroniclers address the topic of oppression. It is true that the narratives about Solomon's use of forced labor (1 Kgs 5:27–32; 9:15–22; 12:1–17), the text of Samuel's critique of kingship (1 Samuel 8), and the story of Ahab's taking of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) are potentially useful for developing sociological perspectives on the treatment of the poor in ancient Israelite society; likewise, one may choose to read the Exodus events as God's intervention on behalf of the poor (cf. Gutiérrez 1973: 155, 157). But in each case, the language of poverty is not present, and it would seem that this is deliberately the case, for in the few cases these "historians" do make use of the words for "poor," these terms either take on different nuances or are used to discuss matters that have nothing to do with the situation of the poor. It would seem, then, that the writers of the pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic narratives are not concerned with a critique of poverty and injustice, even in the case of the Exodus text. An alternative analysis of these texts would argue that the writers of Exodus and Samuel–Kings are concerned with developing a critique of kingship and foreign domination, but not with an analysis of the structures of poverty in their society. This latter conclusion, though somewhat negative, reveals an important insight into the diverse character of social thought in the Hebrew Bible.

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