

Redemptionism, Rejectionism, and Historicism as Emerging Approaches in Disability Studies

Hector Avalos

Iowa State University, Ames IA 50011

All scholarly disciplines have a landmark event within their history. For example, evolutionary theory usually marks 1859, the year of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* as its seminal event, and Hermann Samuel Reimarus's *Fragments* (1768) is often credited with initiating Historical Jesus studies. In the study of disabilities within Religious Studies, we may similarly point to Monday, November 20, 1995 as a landmark event. It was on that day that the first session of the "Religion and Disability Studies Consultation" was held at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. The theme of the session was "People with Disabilities and Religious Constructions of Theodicy and Tragedy."

Nine years later, at the 2004 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, we had the debut session of the Biblical Scholarship and Disabilities Consultation within the Society of Biblical Literature. The theme there was "The Blind, the Deaf, and the Lame: Biblical Representations of Disability." I was happy to participate in both of those events, and to see the study of disabilities establish a foothold within both the AAR and SBL.

And as is the case with most nascent fields, it often does not take long to see opposing or complementary approaches emerge. In the case of the study of disabilities by biblical scholars, we can see at least three approaches that represent our modern attitudes toward biblical ideas about disability. Identifying these three approaches does not mean that there are no mixtures, but only that they can be held independently. Yet, in some ways, they are still concerned with the themes of 1995 and 2004 in asking whether religion or the Bible have been positive and/or negative in helping people with disabilities define themselves.

One approach that is emerging is what I would denominate as a "redemptionist" approach because it seeks to redeem the biblical text, despite any negative stance on disabilities, by recontextualizing it for modern application. When the biblical text is not viewed as bearing negative attitudes, a redemptionist approach seeks to rescue the text from the misinterpretations of modern scholars with normative views. Alternatively phrased, a redemptionist approach seeks to "rescue" the Bible from itself or from any modern misperception. As such, it is part of a longer tradition that we have seen in other liberationist approaches to scriptures from marginalized minorities and feminist critics.

An opposing approach may be described as "rejectionist" because it would argue that the Bible has negative portrayals of disability that should be rejected in modern society. The aim of such an approach is not to recontextualize, but to repudiate. A variant of the rejectionist approach is perhaps best termed a "post-scripturalist approach," which argues that we

should not use any ancient text at all, whether it has positive or negative portrayals, to provide normative values today.

A third approach may be called “historicist,” because it undertakes historical examinations of disabilities in the Bible and its subsequent interpretation, sometimes in comparison with neighboring ancient cultures, without any overt interest in the consequences of the conclusions for today.

The contributions in this issue by Rebecca Raphael, Rachel Magdalene, Kerry Wynn, and Nicole Kelly can be viewed in light of these approaches in the study of disability in the Bible. As I hope to show, each of those approaches presents both promises and challenges for the future of Disability Studies within biblical and religious studies. The contributions are an important collection that allows us to see the current state of disability studies.

Redemptionism and Rejectionism

As an example of a redemptionist approach, we may look at “Johannine Healings and the Otherness of Disability,” by Kerry Wynn, who attempts to “redeem” two passages in John (chs. 5 and 9) that have played an important role in the study of disabilities in the Bible. As Wynn phrases it, “Those who would liberate disability from such normate hermeneutics struggle to make sense of the healing passages found in the gospels” (61). Wynn begins by clearly outlining two ideas in “popular theology” that he wishes to dissect: “1) disability is caused by sin, and 2) if one has enough faith one will be healed” (61). The entire article concludes that “[s]in in the Johannine healing narratives is not a cause of disability” and that “faith is not a prerequisite to healing” (74).

Wynn’s conclusions are partly derived from an examination of John 5:1-18. Briefly, in that episode a man with an apparently musculo-skeletal disability was lying amidst “a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed” (John 5:3). He had been there thirty-eight years, but the large crowds had prevented him from reaching the healing waters, and no one would help him do so. So Jesus heals him on a Sabbath day. Towards the end of the story, Jesus tells him “Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you” (5:14; NRSV).^{*} It is this latter statement that has led some scholars to conclude that Jesus did make a link between sin and disability that can be traced back to the Hebrew Bible. Wynn rejects that interpretation, specifically as defended by Colleen Grant, as a case of normate hermeneutics.¹

However, this rejection is premised on some very problematic assumptions, not least of which is Wynn’s claim that “disability is a phenomenon of nature, not punishment throughout the Hebrew Bible” (62). In fact, he says that “we look in vain” for a Hebrew tradition making a link between sin and disability (62). To buttress his point he cites Leviticus 21:17-23 to argue that the passage “applies only to Levites and restricts their priestly service on the basis of purity issues and identifies no cause for disability” (62).

^{*}All biblical citations are from the Revised Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

¹Colleen C. Grant, “Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives,” in *Human Disability and the Service of God* (ed. Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 72-87.

However, this is premised on the idea that “purity issues” do not entail valuations of disability.

Nor is purity a “phenomenon of nature,” but rather a social construct. In fact, “purity” is an expression of power relations that may be used to describe all sorts of conditions not valued by those in power. As such, certain physical conditions may be classified as “impure” if the normative society does not value them. Thus, Leviticus 21:18-21 includes all sorts of physical features (“blind or lame . . . limb too long . . . broken foot or a broken hand . . . hunchback, or dwarf”).² It could also be that they are considered impure precisely because it is assumed that they reflect sin on the part of those priests or on the part of their parents. Otherwise, Wynn’s definition of “purity” leaves unexplained why such physical conditions are considered “impure” in the first place.

Moreover, all this seems to assume that Leviticus 21 is the only or strongest passage used to argue that the Hebrew Bible does link sin with disability. In fact, Wynn does not mention the single most important text, which is Deuteronomy 28. In that passage there is a very clear list of conditions associated with those that keep the covenant, and those that do not keep the covenant. Note the preface to the curses in Deut 28:15: “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to observe all of his commandments . . .”

If sin is defined as any act which violates God’s commandments or moral order, one consequence is that “the Lord will smite you with madness and blindness. . . . you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways; and you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you” (vv. 28-29). This helplessness describes the very situation of the man at Bethesda, who says no one would help him (v. 7). Similarly, sin and illness are associated in Exod 15:26: “If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD, your healer.” Thus, Yahweh does send diseases as punishment.

When one considers the specific Greek word used for the man at Bethesda, one finds that he is described as having an ἀσθένεια. In the Greek version of 1 Samuel 2:10, ἀσθένεια is the very word used to describe how God will afflict his adversaries, although the English translation, such as the RSV, does not show this so well (“The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces”). In short, there is plenty of evidence to show that the Hebrew Bible does make disability a “punishment” for sin, if that means any action that violates God’s commandments or moral order.

All this brings us to John 5:14, which Wynn claims “is not a general statement about sin.” Instead, Wynn links this statement to one uttered by Yahweh in Genesis 4:7 after Cain killed Abel: “If you do well, will you not be

²For similar physical requirements to being a diviner in Mesopotamia, see Wilfred G. Lambert, “The Qualifications of Babylonian Diviners,” in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994* (ed. Stefan M. Maul; Cuneiform Monographs 10; Groningen: Styx, 1998), 141–58.

accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (NRSV). However, the relevance of this passage for interpreting Jesus' words in John 5:14 is not explained very clearly.

More relevant is to study what the Greek word *χείρων* means in John 5:14. It clearly can be used in the sense of becoming sicker, as in Mark 5:26 when it describes the sufferings of the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage who "had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse" (εἰς τὸ χείρον ἔλθοῦσα).

Wynn's redemptionist approach might be contrasted with the "rejectionist" approach one finds in *In the Beginning There was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible*, by John M. Hull, an unsighted scholar of disability.³ For Hull, John 5:14 makes sense if "Jesus shared the belief that they were all there because of some sin."⁴ In fact, Jesus nowhere denies that sin is the cause of the invalid's plight. Rather, Jesus sees the invalid as an opportunity to show his own authority on the Sabbath. Once that was accomplished, he warns the same invalid not to sin again because something worse might come upon him, something consistent with Deuteronomy 28. Thus, Jesus nowhere denies, and rather reaffirms a clear connection between sin and disability.

A similar problem is found in Wynn's exegesis of John 9:2-3. In this episode, the disciples are characterized by Wynn as asking a foolish question. However, Jesus does not call the disciples foolish, something Jesus has not hesitated to do on other occasions (Luke 24:25). Given Deuteronomy 28, there is no reason to characterize the disciples' supposition as foolish at all. Rather, Jesus can be interpreted to mean that this disabled individual is *an exception to the rule*, and then Jesus gives a very specific reason for the exception: he was born blind so "that God's works might be manifested in him" (v. 3).

Wynn's redemptionist approach can again be contrasted with Hull's evaluation, namely, "the man has been born blind in order to provide a sort of photo opportunity for Jesus."⁵ But Hull's rejectionism is most clearly outlined in this statement concerning John: "the symbolism made me feel uneasy and I soon came to realize that this book was not written for people like me, but for sighted people. No other book of the Bible is so dominated by the contrast between light and darkness, and blindness is the symbol of darkness."⁶

Rachel Magdalene ("The ANE Legal Origins of Impairment as Theological Disability and the Book of Job") provides a more complex redemptionist approach to Job that also integrates historical and comparative legal analysis. As she states her purpose:

All I attempt to say is that, as a Christian and a person with disabilities, it seems most appropriate for me to express my concern with the problem in this context. In localizing this text in its historical moment, I hope to

³John M. Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversation with the Bible* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001).

⁴Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness*, 49.

⁵Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness*, 49.

⁶Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness*, 49-50.

undercut the current use of this theology in the contemporary world. I argue that disabilities, diseases, and disasters are neither a test by God nor a trial from God.” (27)

In her conclusion, she remarks, “The book does not mean to instruct that God is prepared to disable and kill on a dare.” (58). As such, she seeks to rescue the book of Job from any modern misunderstanding or theology that would use it to endorse the idea that God uses illness to test human beings.

She finds that Job is permeated with legal language, with parallels in Mesopotamian incantations, prayers, wisdom, and juridical texts. She has a sound grasp of Mesopotamian literature, and her legal training is applied well. In particular, her comparisons of the supplications by Job with the Mesopotamian “Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand” (*nīš qāti* or ŠU.IL.LA), are very instructive, and do show how the divine council was regarded as a court to which human beings could appeal in cases of illness. Overall, I find her study of the legal language of Job to be very useful in showing how prevalent and detrimental such legal views of disability can be for the disabled in ancient or modern times.

However, I have come to different conclusions about whether God is using illness to test Job. As such, I see Job as a more radically subversive book than Magdalene or most exegetes would grant. Although space will not permit a full exposition of my view, I would start by noting that there are two planes on which discussion of Job is occurring: a human plane, and divine plane. On the human plane, there are two explanations being offered for Job’s condition:

1. Illness was caused by sin, a position espoused by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.
2. Illness was not caused by sin, a position espoused by Job.

Although the Mesopotamian legal materials are very useful, I think that it is best to see the book of Job is a direct challenge to the Deuteronomistic moral view, outlined most clearly in Deuteronomy 28. Compare, for example, the description of the infliction of illness upon Job in Job 2:7 (אֶת אִיּוֹב בַּשַּׁחִין רָע) with a description in Deuteronomy 28:35 (יִכְכֹּה יְהוָה בַּשַּׁחִין רָע). The Deuteronomistic moral view makes a very simple equation: Sin = illness and sinlessness = health. Sin means the violation of one of the stipulations of a covenant imposed by the master (Yahweh) upon his vassals (Israelites).

The subversive aspect of Job is in expressing a view not usually considered by most exegetes—namely Yahweh himself admits that he can send illness for no good reason at all. This is clearly expressed in Job 2:3, a text that Magdalene does not really address:

And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

For me, this encapsulates the entire story. For by saying that he has been moved to destroy Job “without cause,” Yahweh has conceded the entire case Job is making. God can send disease for the most capricious reasons, and for reasons

he will never disclose to Job. Those reasons are known only on the divine plane, and the Satan is well aware of them.

Under this interpretation, the contemptuous dismissal of the case argued by three friends in Job 42:7 also becomes understandable:

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eli'phaz the Te'manite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."

Throughout the book, the three friends had been upholding the Deuteronomistic moral universe, in which God sends illness only for just cause and only to the sinful. In Job 42:7, God emphasizes that they are wrong about all of that. Job is right because he has been saying all along that God had inflicted illness for no just reason (which God has admitted back in Job 2:3).

As such, the book of Job offers no comfort to those seeking to use it to endorse any view of a just God. On the contrary, the lesson of the book of Job is that Yahweh is the master who requires absolute loyalty, *regardless of what his reasons are*. Job is rewarded for remaining a loyal vassal and not rebelling or blaspheming against the master, *regardless of how his master treated him* (cf. Exodus 21:20-22; 1 Peter 2:18-19).

At the same time, the book of Job may be placed in the context of the division between idealist and realist conceptions of illness that I have previously discussed.⁷ Briefly, in idealist views, illness is explainable on clear principles (e.g., sin versus sinlessness), while realist conceptions admit that human beings often lack any clear explanations for illness. The book of Job is an example *par excellence* of a realist approach to disability (i.e., we often don't know why God sends illness, and we have no right to know why).

Historicism

By historicism, I do not refer to the approach to history much criticized by Karl Popper, among others.⁸ Instead, I refer to the focus on historical inquiry rather than on theological arguments or on any other overt application (liberationist, rejectionist, etc.) of such conclusions. In our group of contributions, Nicole Kelley's work would exemplify this "historicist" approach. As she phrases it, her purpose is to study a "largely unexplored issue in the history of ancient Christianity: the theological significance of physical deformities and disabilities. In this essay, I propose to deal with a small subset of that history by examining the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, an ancient Christian text that offers

⁷Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia and Israel* (HSM 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 33. I would use the word "idealist" now, while I used "utopian" in that book.

⁸See Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (1993; 2d ed.; New York: Routledge, 2002). We might be more in accord with the "new historicism," for which see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

an unusual explanation for the causes of congenital deformities" (77). I see no overt effort to apply the conclusions she draws for any sort of action today.

Nicole Kelley also deals with John 9:1-3 in her essay "The Theological Significance of Physical Deformity in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*." Kelley undertakes an interesting study of how the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* understood John 9:1-3. A main issue for Kelley is why the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 19:22.7-8 link congenital blindness with "sins of ignorance." Kelley concludes that the ignorance here may be related to prohibitions about sexual intercourse with menstruating women in Leviticus 20:18 (LXX). Men who unknowingly have sexual intercourse with such women may produce children with congenital conditions such as blindness. After reviewing some Greek and Hebrew sources, however, Kelley grants that there is no clear answer as to why blindness, specifically, should be the congenital condition associated with a sin of ignorance.

Although I have no clear answer myself, there may be some avenues that might be explored further. The very word ἄγνοια, "ignorance," used in that Pseudo-Clementine passage is used in Genesis 26:10 (LXX). In that chapter Isaac had lied, having said Sarah was his sister. Some of the Philistine men were apparently already looking at her with sexual intent. When Abimelech finds out about Isaac's lie, he complains that one of the Philistines might have unknowingly slept with her, and brought an ἄγνοια upon them (καὶ ἐπήγαγες ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἄγνοιαν). Such a statement is odd because the Hebrew has "guilt upon us" (עוֹן עָלֵינוּ) instead. So, unless there was a different Hebrew *Vorlage*, we may construe the LXX to mean "guilty of a sin of ignorance."

Larry Hogan has a brief article on how the Septuagint bears ἄγνοια in a number of narratives dealing with non-Hebrews.⁹ In Genesis 20, Abimelech, the king of Gerar, nearly sleeps with Sarah because he is ignorant of the fact that she is Abraham's wife. There Abimelech asks (v. 4), "Lord, wilt thou slay an innocent people?" The LXX, however, has "ignorant people" (ἔθνος ἀγνοοῦν) instead. Despite the fact that Abimelech acted out of ignorance, Yahweh afflicts Abimelech's household with disease, from which Abraham heals him. Such punishment, in spite of ignorance, is consistent with Lev 5:17: "If any one sins, doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity."

Likewise, the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* may reflect the idea that, even if the sin was not willful, one could still suffer punishment. In fact, we can trace concern with sins of ignorance all the way back to Mesopotamian texts of the third millennium B.C.E. (see Magdalene's essay, and examples in my book, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East*). Of course, the ignorance about which the Pseudo-Clementines are speaking deals specifically with sexual intercourse with a wife who might be impure. Thus, one needs to find instances where such cohabitation may result in congenital blindness. Here we might

⁹ Larry Hogan, "A Note on Healing and Ignorance in the Bible," *Koroth* 9 (1985): 107-112.

benefit from new work being done in comparative studies of Greco-Roman and Near Eastern embryology, such as the one by L. Cilliers, who concentrates on the *Gynaecia*, a gynecological and embryological treatise attributed to Helvius Vindicianus, a fourth century physician active around Carthage.¹⁰ Overall, Kelley's paper should encourage more exploration of how early Christian exegetes viewed disability in the Bible.

At the same time, one might recall the fact that perfect eyesight is often the mark of a virtuous life. Thus, Moses, who is mentioned in that same discourse in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, is gifted with great eyesight up until he died (Deut. 34:7). Accordingly, congenital blindness may be a considered a logical condition to impose upon the children of parents who might have broken some purity law, even out of ignorance. In John, after all, the contrast between darkness and light would also be consistent with equating, even if metaphorically, spiritual ignorance with blindness.

As an historical aside, Kelley describes traditions in Genesis Rabbah which speak of sinful people resembling apes. This tradition of portraying "The Other" as apes can be found all the way back to the end of the third millennium B.C.E. in the Curse of Agade, where we find this description: "Gutium, a people who do not recognize limits, with human instincts, but canine intelligence and apes' features."¹¹ The ape tradition, as applied to idolaters, can be traced also through Talmudic literature (e.g., Sanhedrin 109b), the Qur'an, and Nazi literature, something I have outlined in my own book on the origins of religious violence.¹²

Another historicist approach is found in Rebecca Raphael's fascinating study of the interpretation of Saul's madness in G. F. Handel's 1739 oratorio, *Saul*, as adapted by Charles Jennens's libretto. Raphael's treatment of Handel's *Saul* is within the context of the work of Ruth Smith and Alexander H. Shapiro, who view the use of Handel's music in England as part of a conflict about the role of music in worship. On the one side were Puritans who devalued most sacred music; on the other side were Anglicans who argued for the role of music in elevating the soul.

Raphael concludes that, insofar as Saul's madness is concerned, "in the oratorio Saul, not God, is responsible for it" (21). While in the biblical narrative disobedience precedes the madness, in Handel's *Saul*, madness precedes the

¹⁰L. Cilliers, "Vindicianus' *Gynaecia* and Theories on Generation and Embryology from the Babylonians to Graeco-Roman Times," in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine* (ed. H. E. J. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 343-67. For comments on embryological imagery in Psalm 2, see Lourdes García Ureña, "He tejido mi Rey (Sl 2,6). La importancia del contexto," *Estudios Bíblicos* 62 (2004): 171-84.

¹¹My adapted translation of the Sumerian is from Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 56-57.

¹²See also Azad Hamoto, *Der Affe in der altorientalischen Kunst* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995). On the "ape" tradition in Islam, see Sura 2:265 and 7:166, and Michael Cook, "Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 43-74; Ilse Lichtenstadter, "'And become ye accursed apes,'" *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 162-75. For how these traditions were reinterpreted in Nazi literature, see Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 2005), 309-10.

disobedience. Overall, Raphael notes that the origin of Saul's madness remains unexplained in Handel's oratorio. But both the oratorio and the biblical text understand Saul's madness as a disability. As in the case of Kelley's essay, this may be placed within a historicist approach, as Raphael issues no judgments about how to apply the conclusion today.

In any case, I find Raphael's argument very persuasive, and I would add that her work should also encourage the exploration of therapeutic use of music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By 1853, J. P. Trusen had already begun collecting examples of how music was being used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for therapy.¹³ In fact, there were already specialties and debates about which instruments were best for which conditions. For example, Trusen says this about one music therapist: "For the excitement of the nervous system he recommends horns, trombones, and the clarinets; for calming, flutes, harps, guitars, and harmonicas."¹⁴

Raphael's article also might prompt us to explore further some of the comments made by Ruth Smith, on whom Raphael depends for some of her information about Handel and Jennens. Smith notes that Jennens wrote in the midst of debates about the historicity of many biblical narratives, including those of David and Saul. In particular, Smith refers to the work of Patrick Delaney, who published *An Historical Account of the Reign of David, King of Israel* (1740-2).¹⁵ If so, it might be feasible to compare these eighteenth century "biographies" with modern ones of David and Saul (e.g., by Halpern, McKenzie) in order to see how disabilities are addressed and integrated into the respective discussions.¹⁶ In any case, Raphael certainly has provided some interesting avenues to explore in the reinterpretation of biblical attitudes toward disability.

Conclusion

Since 1995, when Disability Studies was inaugurated in the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings, there have developed some clear and discrete approaches to disability. Whether Disability Studies will thrive as a field does depend in large part on how each of those approaches relates to the broader issue of relevance. The redemptionist approaches, such as those of Wynn and Magdalene, are certainly relevant for those that still have an interest in applying the Bible's understanding of life to their own lives. Despite my disagreements with Wynn or Magdalene, their main

¹³J. P. Trusen, *Die Sitten, Gebräuche, und Krankheiten der alten Hebräer nach der heiligen Schrift historisch und kritisch dargestellt* (1853, reprint Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig, 1973).

¹⁴Trusen, *Die Sitten*, 193-94: "Zur Excitation des Nervensystems schlägt er Hörner, Posaunen und Clarinette, zur Beruhigung die Flöte, Harfe, Guitarre und Harmonica vor."

¹⁵Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145 and 390, n. 9.

¹⁶David McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

conclusions also reflect the ethical struggle that results when sacred texts are used to authorize certain views of disability.

I consider myself mainly a rejectionist of the post-scripturalist variety, and so I would say that no ancient text should be used to set any sort of norms today, regardless of whether it has positive or negative views of disability. Liberation to me means liberation from the use of any religious text as an authority. But I myself also do a large amount of historical investigation that has no clear applications today.

And it is the historicist approaches that will have the greatest challenge in terms of relevance. That is to say, historicist approaches may need to explain why anyone should be interested in how the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* interpreted disability or why it is important to know why Handel's music was used in the way it was. Of course, this does not mean that there is no case that can be made, but rather that scholars probably might be encouraged to indicate the sort of applications any historical lessons have for us.

The more purely historical understandings do provide us with pieces of a larger puzzle which help to show how variegated and persistent specific types of attitudes toward disabled people have been. Raphael, in particular, helps to show how musical performance can be used to signal attitudes toward the disabled. Kelley's work helps us begin to understand more fully how early Christian interpreters dealt with disability, which also may help to learn how much has or has not changed in Christianity.

Overall, in Disability Studies we have a vital field that can be more useful and applicable than many other sub-disciplines of biblical and religious studies. Disability Studies, after all, is primarily concerned with the valuation of people rather than objects (e.g., formal features of texts, pots, walls) that are so often the focus of other sub-disciplines in biblical studies. Disability Studies, therefore, has relatively more potential to affect positively the lives of people today. The contributions I have reviewed are a great example of the present vitality of Disability Studies in religious and biblical studies.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.