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MARK J. BODA, ED.,
IN CONVERSATION WITH STEVEN SCHWEITZER,
READING UTOPIA IN CHRONICLES (LHBOTS, 442;
LONDON: T. & T. CLARK INTERNATIONAL, 2007).

**IN CONVERSATION WITH STEVEN
SCHWEITZER, *READING UTOPIA IN
CHRONICLES* (LHBOTS, 442; LONDON:
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INTRODUCTION

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The following essays represent the fruit of a session sponsored by the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah section of the Society of Biblical Literature and held at its annual meeting in November 2007 in San Diego, California. The first part of this session was focused on the recently published work *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* written by Dr. Steven Schweitzer, Assistant Professor at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. This book was a revised form of a dissertation written at the University of Notre Dame under the supervision of Dr. James Vanderkam. The SBL session was the first time Dr. Schweitzer had heard the reviews and he responded orally within the time constraints of the session. After the session the reviewers created a more formal version of the review in written form and submitted these to Dr. Schweitzer. He has taken time to reflect more deeply over the reviews and provide a fuller written response to the issues raised.

I wish to thank Dr. Christine Mitchell and the rest of the members of the steering committee of the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah section for creating this session and facilitating the review of Dr. Schweitzer's book. Such sessions showcase some of the best of recent scholarship and provide an opportunity for the guild to engage in conversations, both formally and informally, that further the academic project. Special thanks also go to my colleague Matthew Forrest Lowe, a doctoral student at McMaster Divinity College, in Hamilton, Ontario, Dr. Roland Boer, Professor, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia, and, especially, Dr. Steven Schweitzer for this provocative and enlightening contribution to the field of biblical studies.

ENCOUNTERING AN ALTERNATIVE REALITY: SCHWEITZER AND THE UTOPIAN TURN

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1. INTRODUCTION

With his book, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*, Steven Schweitzer now reveals more fully his argument that has been entertained at various venues within the Society of Biblical Literature, most notably in the groups Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and in Prophetic Texts in their Ancient Contexts. This book is a pleasant read, engaging the audience with accessible and clear argument, and remaining fixed on its main thesis. Although a conclusion to chapter 2 and especially to the book as a whole would have been appreciated, the book has a superb introduction as well as conclusions to the two key chapters 3 and 4. There is the awkward typo in the chart on p. 123 which claims that Hezekiah is evaluated negatively and Amon positively by the Chronicler, but in the main it is carefully edited.

Since one of us was mentored by both Raymond Dillard and Hugh Williamson, it is probably not surprising that there were elements in this book that received a positive reception, especially the openness to the fact that the Chronicler offers an alternative vision (possibly with some element of future hope) and is not constrained by only the present and the past. What the book does is highlight the lack of firm historical evidence for what are often considered Second Temple practices reflected in Chronicles and with this the circularity of historiographical method within Chronicles' studies. If nothing else this challenge forces those of us who make such claims to more carefully nuance our connections or seek more definitive evidence.

It is against the backdrop of these affirmations (and many others that could be mentioned) that we offer the following critical review, desirous to continue the conversation prompted by Steven Schweitzer's key contribution.

2. THE WORKING DEFINITION OF UTOPIA

Though he wisely begins with Suvin and others, Schweitzer's shorthand definition of "*better alternative reality*" is perhaps a bit reductionistic: it threatens to make utopias simply positive, and dystopias conversely negative. The two are not necessarily opposite sides of the same coin—they are both legitimate thought-experiments, often with particular, observed social trends amplified or taken to a logical conclusion (see the correspondence between Huxley and Orwell, on which of their visions would more likely come to pass). Dystopia is not inherently worse than the current state of things (for part of the trick is that its residents do not realize they are living in a dystopia), nor is utopia inherently better; both terms are fraught with an ambiguity which Schweitzer mentions but does not make enough of. As he expands upon his worthwhile perspective, perhaps he should devote more attention to Ursula Le Guin, whose *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: Avon, 1974) is but one part of her attempt to disrupt the consensus future-history determined by Isaac Asimov, Arthur Clarke, Robert Heinlein, and their (mostly male) fellows. Paul Fiddes critiques Le Guin in *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), a work which would further nuance Schweitzer's points on the literary utopian ideology, in that Fiddes adapts Derridean methods to speak of utopia as an expression of hope for a fuller (possibly divine) presence, a hope temporally deferred.

3. THE FUNCTION OF THE UTOPIAN PROJECT

While it appears that Utopian literature is concerned with revolutionary social criticism, one wonders about the implications of this critique. Is there not a didactic direction being taken? Adding in some of the tradition of scholarship in utopian *theory* (e.g. Robert Nozick, or the "veil of ignorance" experiment in John Rawls' work) might shed still more light on the way in which Schweitzer reconstructs the Chronicler's intentions. Schweitzer's early discussion of utopias as revolutionary texts, rather than normative blueprints, is helpful, but he would find more opportunities to expand and adapt his framework if he considered recent work on utopian "blueprint" tendencies in Russell Jacoby's *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005). And speaking of blueprints, Schweitzer's thoughts on the spatial aspects of utopia might benefit from recent comments by *New York Times* architectural critic Herbert Muschamp ("Service Not Included," in Edward Rothstein, Herbert Muschamp, and Martin Marty, *Visions of Utopia* [New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities; New York: Oxford UP, 2003], pp. 29-48) and science fiction producer Joss Whedon ("Feature Commentary with Writer/Director Joss Whedon," in *Serenity* [Director Joss Whedon; Universal Studios, 2005]).

3. UTOPIAN LITERARY THEORY AND HERMENEUTICS

In his introduction Schweitzer does note in passing a relationship between utopian literary theory and “a number of contemporary literary theories, especially deconstructionism, sharing many of the same presuppositions regarding the means by which a text generates meaning” (p. 17). This connection, however, on the level of methodology is not filled out beyond this. Schweitzer seems to relate this to one’s experience of utopian literature (citing on p. 17 Franz Dietz: “utopian literature invites readers ‘to reconsider their notions of the normal and familiar’”), rather than to the methodology and hermeneutic which underlies his approach and application of utopian literary theory itself. It appears that Roland Boer is more forthcoming and playful on this point. Boer is more transparent that his approach is imaginative, quickly defending it as no more imaginative than that of Martin Noth’s approach to the Deuteronomistic History, neither approach being flawed in a post-structuralist hermeneutic. That this hermeneutical honesty is not as obvious in Schweitzer’s work may be due to the limits on how much fun one can have in a doctoral dissertation.

5. UTOPIA, UTOPIAN, UTOPIANISM

At the outset Schweitzer distinguishes between Utopia, Utopian and Utopianism, much in line with distinctions used for analyzing apocalyptic literature. For Schweitzer this “precision allows for the reading of ‘utopian’ content in a work that would not typically be classified as a ‘utopia’ proper by generic considerations” (p. 14). While identifying More’s work as the generic template for Utopia, it is not always clear what he is claiming for the status of ancient literature (using the “historical novel”, and then connections to Plato’s *Republic* and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* [p. 19 n.57] as a way to connect with Chronicles), which are called at times “classical utopias” and as possessing “utopian content” (p. 26). Herodotus’ description of the Ethiopians (Hist. 3.22–23) is cited, but we do not think Schweitzer is claiming that Herodotus’ work as a whole is a Utopia. For Chronicles: reference is made to utopianism and the adjective utopian is used in reference to it besides the ubiquitous claim of using utopian literary theory. But yet in a search we could not find him explicitly calling Chronicles a “Utopia”, even though the chapter titles use the word “utopia” (Genealogical, Political, and Cultic Utopia), suggesting that Chronicles is being read not just as containing utopian elements, or reflecting utopianism, but as a Utopia.

6. UTOPIA AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The strength of Schweitzer’s work is its relentless pursuit of its main thesis, so one has to rely on passing comments to discern his view on many subsidiary issues. One of these is the relationship between utopian literary theory and historiography. Throughout

the book Schweitzer uses the quick dismissal by many Chronicler scholars “that the Chronicler reflects accurate sources otherwise lost,” to highlight their “circular logic, selectivity, and inconsistency.” Furthermore, on p. 46 he does say that projects assessing the historical information are being “done with lesser and greater success.” These statements suggest that Schweitzer may have a view on historiography. So if utopian literary theory is adopted for a text such as Chronicles, how does one assess historical information in Chronicles in its wake? Could not a utopian text provide an alternative reality that leverages elements in both past and present for its construction? Is it necessary to assume an either/or relationship between the alternative and present reality? Do Utopias at times affirm some elements within the present social context that can be leveraged for the alternative reality? Must it be all discontinuity?

7. UTOPIAN GENRE IDENTIFICATION

Of course, the question that must be raised and the elephant in the room is whether Schweitzer is justified in applying utopian literary theory to the book of Chronicles at all. Schweitzer creates space for his own work by conversing with and adopting reading strategies developed for Utopian works and then applies such reading strategies for understanding the book of Chronicles. The core argument to which the book returns consistently is that while past scholars have read elements in Chronicles as projecting “Second Temple practice back into the preexilic period for the sake of legitimation...utopian literary theory would suggest that its depiction of society is in tension with historical reality” (pp. 29–30).

He rightly questions the assumptions of much scholarship that Chronicles is seeking to describe and legitimate Second Temple practice on the grounds that there is so little historical evidence to prove this, but then invites his readers to embrace what he calls his “equally plausible” assumption provided by Utopian literary theory that the Chronicler is struggling against a *status quo*. For Schweitzer the impasse of this circularity of “the vast majority of scholars,” will only be overcome with “a new methodological approach to the question” (p. 41). However, the problem is that after Schweitzer has expended so much energy undermining historical evidence for the “status quo” that was presumed to lie behind the Chronicler, one is unsure how Schweitzer can determine that the Chronicler is railing against it. It would appear that key to identifying a Utopia is being able to compare the presentation of the book with the historical realities of the writer. This is actually what Schweitzer tells his readers is the first central concern of recent literary criticism on utopia: “comparison between the present society and the ‘more perfect’ literary presentation” (p. 16). This is no problem with More’s Utopia for in this we can see how More is critiquing his present. But in the case of Chronicles, Schweitzer displays such skepticism towards a historical picture of the Chroni-

cler's community one wonders how he can then justify the presence of utopian perspectives which he thinks are by nature a critique of the author's present. Thus, without historical evidence, why is Schweitzer's presupposition system and methodology any better than that of "the vast majority of scholars"? For this reason, for most of the book Schweitzer cannot advance much beyond possibility whether by using the verb "may" or, more commonly, his relentless lists of questions.

8. A SLIP?

We may be mistaken, but it appeared that in his treatment of Foreign Empire (p. 130), Schweitzer seemed to suggest that Chronicles is legitimating the present. Since the foreign empire is the present reality according to the conclusion of the book of Chronicles, Schweitzer is willing to say that for the Chronicler his "better alternative reality" is actually the present reality. While this seems to be strikingly similar to the faulty methodology of those past "vast majority of scholars," and appears to go against the grain of his utopian reading throughout the volume, we wonder if one can really see in Chronicles such legitimation of the present reality? Evidence for this seems to be provided by the paradigmatic statement to Rehoboam in which YHWH made clear that foreign rule was only there to teach Israel so that they may know the difference between serving YHWH and serving the nations. This suggests that foreign rule did not appear to be a "better alternative reality" at all.

Similar to this is a tension between his treatment of Manasseh, a figure which he (we think rightly) identifies as a model for future Davidic royal renewal, and his portrayal of the future of the Davidic line. If the one certainty of the book of Chronicles is that it was written in a time and to an audience under the hegemony of foreign empires, should not more be made of various political "alternative realities" to this present reality, one of which would seem to be that of a return of the Davidic line in its various forms?

9. CONCLUSION

Schweitzer's careful note 58 on p. 20 ("even if this argument for contemporary generic relatives for Chronicles as utopian literature should be rejected...one can benefit greatly from a cross-temporal, cross-spatial, or cross-generic comparative analysis of ancient documents") was indeed a cunning qualification to ensure the legacy of his work. No matter one's opinion of his argument, Schweitzer (and his forebear Boer) has made an impact, if only as a bull in the peaceful china shop of Chronicles study. Since Schweitzer's project reveals the flexibility of Utopian literary theory for reading various text types, may it be suggested that Schweitzer's work itself displays the character of utopian literature as it challenges the *status quo*, those scholarly assumptions often promoted within that Society of Biblical Literature group, about the character

of Chronicles, by consistently offering an “alternative reality.” Of course, whether it is utopia or dystopia, that is, in his words better or worse, remains for us an open question.

UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA AND UCHRONIA IN CHRONICLES

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Steven Schweitzer's *Reading Utopia in Chronicles* (2007) breathes the excitement of a new insight into that quiet corner of biblical scholarship that is Chronicles' study. Along with work on Chronicles by Christine Mitchell, Julie Kelso's new book, *O Mother, Where Art Thou?* (Equinox 2008), and the edited collection by Ehud Ben Zvi called *Utopia and Dystopia in the Prophetic Literature* (2006), it looks as though Chronicles' scholarship is at the beginning of a shakeup. All of them share the assumption that for all the gains of historical critical study, its agenda is too limited and it leaves too many questions begging about this fascinating literature.

The angle Schweitzer pursues comes from utopian literary criticism, a thriving area that explores the nature, history and possibilities of utopian literature that includes Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) but then also pushes further back. The discussion by Schweitzer of utopian literature, its theory and criticism is as good an introduction of the major issues as you are likely to find. I suspect that a good number of people will end up referring to it when they need a concise, lucid statement of that theory. We find the key critics who have dealt with utopia: the important figure of Ernst Bloch and his utopian project, Darko Suvin's work on utopia and science fiction, the innovations of Louis Marin, Fredric Jameson's lifelong interest in utopian literature and what he calls the utopian project, as well as Lyman Tower Sargent on whom Schweitzer relies quite heavily. There is also a very useful excursus on Thomas More who wrote the first work actually called *Utopia* back in 1516. Here we find the traveller, Raphael Hythloday (meaning 'speaker of nonsense', one of the many wordplays in the book), describing to a certain Peter Giles the social, political, religious and economic structure of an island he claims to have visited called Utopia, which means both (in Greek) *ou-topos*, no place, and *eu-topos*, good place. In Schweitzer's discussion we find the crucial point that utopia is not an imaginary world of dreamers. Rather, as with Thomas More's work, utopia offers as much a critique of existing society as ways to improve it. Or, as Schweitzer puts it, utopia is concerned with a 'better alternative reality'. On this light, any political program

worth its salt is utopian. Indeed, utopian literature might be regarded as a form of public policy. Schweitzer also makes the important point that utopia is not necessarily, as it is often believed, a future reality in an inaccessible place such as an island or another planet (common on the science fiction version). By contrast, it may well be contemporary with the author and the society being criticised – as is the case with Thomas More’s book.

Now Schweitzer makes much of the idea that ‘utopia’ really means a ‘better alternative reality’ (a phrase you will find more than once in the book). This is a workable proposal, especially since it negates the popular pie-in-the-sky version of utopia. However, it seems to me that a better insight into his whole argument is that the Chronicler (we really need to come up with a better name for this unknown author or group of authors) was an innovator and not a legislator (p. 136). This is a crucial move, for unlike the majority of commentators who seek out historical detail, or who see the Chronicler as one who wanted to lock in certain practices of his (or their) time, Schweitzer argues that the Chronicler is far more imaginative than that.

All of this Schweitzer brings to bear on Chronicles. Here he argues that the substantial insights of utopian literature and its theory are able to make sense of many of the problems in Chronicles before which historical criticism is at a loss. So the text turns out to be a series of utopian explorations based on three key features. First, there are the rich genealogies in the first chapters of 1 Chronicles. These genealogies play with time, stretching it out at some points and collapsing it in others. They shift from one type of genealogy to another and they connect characters in unexpected ways. The issue of time is crucial and I will return to it in a moment.

Second, there is a detailed retelling of political history, especially in relation to the narrative in Samuel–Kings. More specifically, the political history of the kings of Judah presents a very different picture from that other account in 1 and 2 Kings. Chronicles tells a more hopeful story than the fatalistic inevitability of the books of Kings. It is an old adage, but one of the ways of opening up a different understanding of the present and thereby new possibilities for the future is to retell the story of how we got here. In this respect historiography – which is really a way of telling a story – is an important feature of a utopian program. I found this section quite persuasive, especially in the way Schweitzer traces the way dystopia and utopia play off against one another. Schweitzer uses the scale of utopia-dystopia to assess the representations of the kings. So what we find is that David and Solomon are utopian kings, while Jehoram, Ahaziah and Athaliah all come through as dystopian rulers. Even more, within the reigns of some of kings there is a shift: Jehoshaphat, for example, moves from utopia to dystopia while Hezekiah shifts from a dystopian beginning to a utopian close.

The final utopian feature of Chronicles is for Schweitzer the re-organisation of the temple and its worship, or, in short, the cult. In many respects, it seems to me that this is the key to Chronicles. In presenting a world in which ritual and its organisation are carefully ordered, Chronicles seeks to present a better world than the present one. At this point I must ask whose utopia this is, although I will hold off answering that question for now.

Inevitably, there are points where more needs to be done. As Robert Culley once said to me, you never finish a book; you just stop working on it for now. To begin with, I was not overly impressed with the discussion of Marxism, especially the argument that Marxism has been opposed to utopias and their plans. At one level, Schweitzer has a point, for one influential group that Marx and Engels battled in the 19th century were the utopian socialists who often drew their inspiration from the Bible and sought to recreate the legendary communist living of the early church. This line of socialism came through from medieval communal movements, but above all the French socialists Fourier and St. Simon, as well as their followers in the rest of Europe. Marx and Engels were often scathing in their treatment of these crude and woolly-headed comrades. Since then there have been a good number of Marxists opposed to any utopian program. However, there are even more who feel that Marx and Engels were too hard on the utopian socialists (in the name of ‘scientific socialism’) and that they did have something valuable to say. So we now find that utopia is often used as a code for socialism itself. Names such as Darko Suvin, Elisa Cevasco, Peter Fitting, Andrew Milner, China Miéville, Karl Kautsky, William Morris and of course Fredric Jameson suggest that socialism and utopia have a lot in common, for all of these are Marxists vitally interested in utopia. In fact, I would suggest that the development of the idea that utopia means ‘pie in the sky’ may in fact be read as a response to socialism’s close connection with utopian social movements: that way you can dismiss socialism as the stuff of hopeless dreamers.

Further, it seems to me that Schweitzer’s study begs the category of uchronia. If utopia is the ‘no place’ that is also the ‘good place’, then uchronia is both ‘no time’ and ‘good time’. Uchronia, then, is an alternative and better way of dealing with time, and the most common way that happens is through rewriting history. Without naming it uchronia and without discussing the category, Schweitzer argues in a uchronian way at major points in his book: in the genealogies we find time stretched and collapsed; in the alternative history of the kings of Judah there is a distinct effort to retell the story in a better light. There are hints that Schweitzer is aware of this, such as the mention of an ‘idealized portrayal set in Israel’s past’ (p. 30). But the better category is in fact uchronia. As I pointed out earlier, rewriting a history actually opens up the chance for a very different and better present.

Another element worth further exploration is the suggestion by Louis Marin in his *Utopiques* that utopias are unstable things; you can't quite lay your hand on one, for as soon as you do, it slips away. Marin shows how even Thomas More's *Utopia* was full of formal contradictions and problems. For example, More's effort to describe the layout of towns on the island of Utopia doesn't work when you try to draw a map according to his guidelines. There are anomalies and confusions in the map. Of course, More may have just been lazy, or perhaps a bad describer of such things, but Marin argues that these anomalies are the stuff of utopia. In fact, utopias begin to emerge in these narrative cracks, in the contradictions and tensions where a new possibility begins. There are some glimpses of this feature of utopia in Schweitzer's book, especially when he explores how the Chronicler plays with time and space, and how the description of the temple and its organisation doesn't quite work. He suggests that what we have are shifting utopias, experiments with different types that then overlay one another, an adaptability in the effort to construct utopia.

There is a further feature of this instability and tendency to contradictions in any effort to depict utopia. And that is what may be called the tension between an open and closed utopia. David Harvey has put this rather well in his *Spaces of Hope*: many utopias feel the need at some point to say 'this is it, we've achieved our ideal'. The catch is that the moment of closure needs someone to make the decision to close things up. When that happens, you get the threat of authoritarianism. Utopia is frozen, as all too many religious communities have found through history. The other possibility is that utopia is perpetually open. As an experiment, as an exploration of different possibilities, open to failure and the need to start again, open utopias do not need to face the authoritarian threat of closure. The plural is important, for if we speak of 'utopia' we get the impression of one model and one program, which inevitably has to exclude others. However, with plural utopias we encourage openness. It seems to me that *Chronicles* hovers between these two options. There are a good many sections where closure is sought for a single utopia, but then there are others where the various experiments and options point towards a plural openness.

All the same, there are two questions that need to be asked. When speaking of utopia we always need to ask: utopia for whom? Dystopia for whom? For Schweitzer, it may well be a series of utopias for the Levites, who come out rather well in the reconstructions of the cult. But then we need to ask for whom this might well be a dystopia. A Levite utopia may not be all that positive for women, for example, or foreigners, or anyone else who is not part of the in-group. One person's utopia is another's dystopia. Utopian literature is full of this play between utopia and dystopia, so much so that some have suggested utopia can emerge only in the tension between them.

Let me finish on a slightly different note. About a decade before the discussion of Steven Schweitzer's book at the SBL meeting in San Diego (2007), I gave a paper at the same section on nothing less than the utopian politics of Chronicles, which eventually became part of my book *Novel Histories* (1997). The Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah group of the mid 1990s gave me that puzzled and pitying look usually reserved for aliens who speak a different language (Australia is a good distance away but we do speak a version of English). They really couldn't figure out what I was on about. I decided never to return to this quiet coterie of traditional historical critics. So it was with some surprise and enjoyment to turn up to the same section some ten years later and find that things are in ferment, not least of which was the discussion of Schweitzer's book.

A RESPONSE

STEVEN SCHWEITZER
ASSOCIATED MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINARY

The prospect of having one's first book be at the center of a Panel Review session at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting can be an intimidating affair. I am grateful for the opportunity afforded me by the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah Section, and for the kind, helpful, and constructive reviews offered by my colleagues. Their careful reading and insightful comments have enabled me to see many things of which I name only a few in this response: I was successful in conveying the main points that I had hoped to make with my analysis, that my exploration of certain issues could be sharpened, and that the work could be taken seriously as pushing the conversation about the nature of Chronicles in particular and utopian literature in general forward in exciting ways.

In my book, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*, I lay out a methodological approach to assessing the nature of the book of Chronicles using utopian literary theory. This criticism finds its home among literary critics who read utopias, dystopias, and the wide range of utopian literature from the ancient world through the present. Thomas More's *Utopia* has been the foundational example, but the taxonomy of utopianism has been developed on the basis of numerous works from various time periods and multiple settings. I must stress, in the view of these scholars, utopian literature does not necessarily seek to impose a rigid authoritarian system or the maintenance of the status quo by the elites of society. Utopias do not *de facto* provide an explanation for why things are way they are (and should therefore not be changed or questioned). In fact, taking More's *Utopia* as the model, it is clear that More's creative construction of a utopian society serves as a form of social critique for his own 16th century England. That is, More constructs a society that rejects certain features, principles, and actualities of the present by depicting an alternative reality that stands in contrast to the current context. Any attempt to reconstruct the historical realities of More's contemporary England must recognize that *Utopia* does not reflect the status quo or current life in the 16th century. Instead,

More's *Utopia* presents an innovative response to what More considered the deficiencies of his contemporary society by suggesting an alternative proposal.¹

I suggest in my book that the author of Chronicles is attempting to do the same thing: to critique the present by creating an alternative reality that stands in contrast (sometimes marked and sometimes subtle) to the contemporary society of Yehud during the late Persian or early Hellenistic period. Therefore, as Roland Boer stresses in his remarks, I understand the Chronicler to be an innovator rather than a legalist, a creative theologian who posits adaptation and change as necessary for the continued life and success of the community centered around Jerusalem. This would be a radical departure from treatments of Chronicles that are typically concerned with what the book reflects in terms of historical realities, whether of Israel's preexilic society or of Israel's postexilic structures projected into the past. Instead, I argue, the Chronicler provides a means for Israel to move forward, to create a new future by drawing upon a different past that emphasizes values and traditions which often stand in tension to the perspective provided in the Deuteronomistic History and even in the Pentateuch.

In their review, Mark Boda and Matthew Lowe provide significant suggestions for clarifying and improving my project. They suggest additional readings in utopian theory that I should consider as I nuance my methodology. I appreciate being pointed in helpful directions that refine the approach to this type of literature. They rightfully observe that I resist calling Chronicles a Utopia throughout the entire narrative of my book, despite using the noun in chapter titles. Perhaps I should have chosen chapter titles that did not use the name of the genre. I struggled with this concern in writing my analysis: is Chronicles a Utopia (a representative within a genre) or is it utopian (containing an ideology but not necessarily a particular literary form)? I would conclude that Chronicles is utopian rather than a Utopia, but that it creates multiple Utopias within its narrative world, all of which manifest themselves and then dissolve only to reappear in other related forms. If we have in mind particular generic categories, then we will not see Chronicles as a Utopia, but if we are looking for ideology, then Chronicles is definitely utopian in its outlook.

¹ The methodology of utopian literary theory is explained separately from Chronicles and subsequently applied to a prophetic text in my two essays ("Utopia and Utopian Literary Theory: Some Preliminary Observations" and "Visions of the Future as Critique of the Present: Utopian and Dystopian Images of the Future in Second Zechariah") contained in the recent volume *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Texts*, edited by Ehud Ben Zvi (PFES, 92; Helsinki/Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society /Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pages 13–26 and 249–67.

Boda and Lowe rightfully ask about evidence for accurate historical information in Chronicles and how to know the difference between reflecting historical realities and critiquing them. I repeatedly question scholars who have asserted that Chronicles contains accurate historical data, whether for the preexilic or postexilic periods. I agree that I have not disproved their position by pointing out some pile of counter-evidence. However, I do believe that I have demonstrated the degree to which Chronicles scholarship has been based on presuppositions and assumptions without actual evidence—scholars asserting something to be true rather than citing evidence. In other words, previous scholarship has been imaginative and creative in its interpretation of Chronicles, but that has been disguised as historical criticism. Others have assumed that Chronicles reflects (a) reality, while my analysis assumes that it reflects (a) possibility. The change in assumption of the starting place for reading the book is significant; it radically shifts the questions and conclusions that one draws from the content, form, and theology of the book. I also agree that I often avoid discussing what the Chronicler is railing against with any precision, *because we do not have evidence*—we only have hypothesis, and often one flimsy hypothesis built upon another set of assumptions without evidence, only one reconstruction dangerously perched on another waiting to fall over, all the while masquerading as the “assured results” of scholarship drawn from “historical” data. I would argue that Chronicles scholarship, and theological readings of Chronicles, have struggled under the weight of historicity and historical reconstruction, pretending to be something that they are not.

To use Boda and Lowe’s imagery, I do hope that my book serves as a “bull in the peaceful china shop of Chronicles study,” to disrupt the presuppositions that have become fact, to force the majority view to bring forth *evidence* and not axiomatic statements in response to my alternative approach. If nothing else, I hope that my criticism of the circularity and presuppositions so manifest (and yet so hidden) in Chronicles scholarship (and biblical studies in general for that matter) causes us to rethink our epistemology, ideology, and process of navigating the biblical text in responsible ways. So, my question would be: even if I am wrong, even if you vehemently disagree with me, then what is your *evidence*? Why are your *assumptions*, *presuppositions*, and *hermeneutical processes* to be favored over mine?

Boda and Lowe suggest that I may have “slipped” in my analysis of the Chronicler’s utopianism when discussing the subjugation of Judah under Rehoboam to the Egyptians, which logically parallels the Chronicler’s present situation of Yehud’s control by a Persian or Hellenistic power. They suggest that here the Chronicler may be supporting the *status quo* instead of creating an alternative. The flip side of this relates to the restoration of the Davidic line. I argue that the Chronicler does not openly desire its restoration, in agreement with many scholars on this point. It seems to me that

Chronicles provides a nuanced view and one that stands in opposition to proto-apocalyptic (or simply revolutionary) models for the future. The Chronicler resists militaristic revolt, attempts to control the prophetic voice in particular ways, and argues for an appropriate response toward foreign authorities that *promotes change without political upheaval*. The Chronicler is not a radical, but a pragmatist. In my opinion, the Chronicler is not seeking to reinforce foreign oppression so much as reject notions that Israel's future must include the removal of foreign powers. Instead, argues Chronicles, Israel's future rests in the hands of God and in the worship of God by those who "seek the LORD." The Chronicler uses utopian visions in the past to denounce potential utopian possibilities for the future (which in the Chronicler's understanding can only produce dystopia). In this way, the acceptance of the Persian or Hellenistic political situation parallels the reappropriation and deflation of the Exile as a traumatic event. Certainly, the Chronicler wishes to avoid another exile, but to that end another positive alternative is presented rather than the (stereotypical) warnings about how to not let this mistake happen again (as can be readily seen as a primary purpose in the final edition of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History). I think our desire to expect the Chronicler to cry out for resistance and revolt says more about us than it does about the Chronicler (in the same way that Jeremiah's advice to submit to the Babylonians does not often make us happy).

I also wish to thank Boda and Lowe for pointing out the "awkward typo" in my chart on page 123. In the paperback edition of the book scheduled to be available sometime in the spring of 2009, it has been corrected.

Roland Boer's affirmations are particularly satisfying to me. It was his own initial insight into the utopian quality of the David, Solomon, and Rehoboam narratives in Chronicles that provided the formative seedbed for my project. I have come to appreciate his ability to provide labels and terminology that capture something significant about the biblical text. His use of "Uchronia" is a case in point. Utopian literature makes extensive use of time manipulation, and Chronicles is no exception. However, I had followed the lead of many scholars (including the important Louis Marin) in subsuming "good time / no time" within the principles of utopianism. And, to some extent, this is true. However, Boer has rightly challenged me to think about this concept independently, as its own phenomenon, in my further reflecting and writing on utopianism.

As for Boer's criticism of my treatment of Marxism, I feel that we essentially agree, although my presentation must not have communicated quite as clearly as I thought. I fully affirm Boer's remarks, especially on the subsequent associations made between utopias and Marxism as a means of dismissing "socialism as the stuff of hopeless dreamers." Without exploring Marxism in detail in my book, I thought I had made sufficient comments and arguments to show my point of view. Apparently, I could be more clear

and perhaps stronger in my assertions, which echo Boer's to a large degree. I hope to return to these connections in future projects.

Boer's final statement that "One person's utopia is another's dystopia" must be addressed not only for the vision presented in Chronicles but also for the many utopian models put forward in the Bible. As I state in the final chapter, I believe that Chronicles is a utopian construct more appealing for Levites than for many others within the community around Jerusalem. Chronicles does not present a "utopia for everyone" (as if something like this could be possible anyway). However, it also creates a utopian model that would be troublesome to others within the Second Temple Period, such as Ezra and Nehemiah or the authors of *1 Enoch*, for example. The question of "whose utopia, whose dystopia?" should be a normal question to ask of specific biblical texts or of the Bible as whole or of those (whether ancient or contemporary interpreters) who use them/it to construct their own utopian models for living in the present. The Chronicler's utopian construct is not necessarily my utopian vision; simply recognizing that may be quite helpful for many readers of the Bible, as we attempt to engage the biblical tradition responsibly in terms of continuity and innovation (concepts my students have come to hear me repeatedly drone on about in class).

Finally, let me conclude by thanking these scholars once again for their helpful criticisms and support for my work. Boda and Lowe comment on my "cunning qualification to ensure the legacy" of my contribution in footnote 58 on page 20. I hope that others may be inspired to pick up utopian literary theory and apply it to other texts in a similar type of "cross-temporal, cross-spatial, or cross-generic comparative analysis." My own utopian vision also includes myself and others returning to Chronicles and to other ancient books in order to explore their utopian ideology and how our thinking about the Bible and theology should be shaped as we continue to adapt into the unknown future that awaits us all.