

Imputative Movement in the Pentateuch

Introduction

...there are those who see the gospel as being justification by faith with the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the cornerstone of justification, therefore making imputation almost synonymous with the gospel.¹

The current discussions of righteousness, justification, and their respective objects are rife with debate over semantic domains and the perlocutionary force of Pauline phraseology. In attempting to understand how the victory of Jesus is efficacious towards his flock, the discussion has centered on language and authorial intent. But while the current dialogue has focused largely on Paul, his corpus, its *sitz im leben*, and his multiply-horizoned first century *weltanschauung*, there appears to be some neglect of 'imputation' as a developing motif in the Tanach.

What we mean by this is that imputation, currently considered, could mean several things. But if it is to mean something specific, like 'the reconsideration of God' or an 'impartation of righteousness', then we expect that movement from unrighteousness to righteousness to be present in the history of redemption. Otherwise we must consider the notion of imputation to be a new and alien form of God's redemptive action revealed in the Messiah and/or Pauline literature. No one in the current debate adheres to imputation as a radical and new form of redemptive action and this is evidence by the near ubiquitous references back to what is meant by 'reckoned' (בִּשְׂוֹה) in Genesis 15:6. The concern then becomes that most will suppose there is an active motif of 'imputation' and yet work linguistically toward the end of a particular version of imputation.

This paper will essay an equally precarious understanding of that motif by searching out a motif of imputation in the Pentateuch. Because the thesis will be premised on an epistemological assumption, that there is a discernable motif of imputation-like actions prior to the Messiah, the linguistic analysis will supervene on the construct of imputation. This, indeed, creates treacherous conditions for carrying our analysis astray, but this paper is only meant to provide

¹ Michael Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47/2 (June 2004), 253-75.

reasons for looking at the issue of imputation from a Pentateuchal purview with the possibility of offering fresh insight. That alone may be too much to promise, but the possibility appears worth pursuing.

Imputative movement will be specifically defined as the *to-from* shift in relationship between two or more parties. This change in relationship is centered on an *imputative action* with the result that both parties undergo an *epistemological adjustment*. This adjustment operates to give the parties involved a new or renewed purview concerning their relationship to each other and external parties.

The method will be to look at *imputative movement* as described explicitly in the Pentateuch with the hopes that some discernible motif will emerge. *Imputative movement* is considered here to be the mysterious *to-from* movement between parties through an *imputative action* with the result of an epistemological adjustment. It is mysterious in that the texts render intentionally vague meaning of *what exactly*, if anything, is moved in the imputative movement. A full metaphysical description is not only exegetically impossible, but even more, the narratives are not concerned to elucidate our understanding of the movement itself beyond some modestly necessary point. Conversely, the narratives do appear intent on rendering very specific epistemological outcomes to those characters involved in the accounts and that concern will inform the development of this particular pattern in the Pentateuch.

It may be objected at the outset that *imputative movement*, per this description, does not mirror what is meant by the *imputation of righteousness* in the Pauline debate. If this objection holds, then such an analysis will not be fruitful beyond its own immediate scope of the Pentateuch. This is a fair objection that will receive a partial rejoinder in the discussion of Levitical sacrifices, but will also delineate what appears to be an impossible understanding of ‘imputation’, which would be something akin to ‘impartation’; the metaphysical movement from one to another. In order to prefigure that discussion, there will need to be an account as to how ‘imputation’ can be delineated from ‘impartation’ given the pattern that does emerge from the Pentateuch.

This examination will produce both a positive and negative version of imputation so that blessing moves from man to man (re Isaac to Jacob), but also curses from man to animal (re Levitical sacrifices and penal sentences) and even authority moves from God to man and man to man (re Moses to Joshua). Again, these all beg the question, “What *exactly* moves from one thing to the other?” The short answer is that it is mysterious. But focusing on the movement or substance of movement itself cumbers what is actually being described by the texts, namely and ultimately the relationship between God and the recipient of the imputation.

A Decidedly Non-Pauline Analysis

“And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Genesis 15:6 is often found to be the mantle piece of imputation with which all Christians must contend. It is the mainstay of Paul’s argument in Romans 4. But this essay questions whether the notion of imputation is most accurately portrayed in Genesis 15:6 and its Pauline echos, more specifically, the ‘reckoning’ of righteousness. At this moment, we will ask the reader to ignore Genesis 15:6 as the starting point toward a compatible view of imputation and agree with N.T. Wright, for now, that this phrase from Genesis is “cryptic and almost unparalleled”.²

For our purposes, we will begin by looking at *to-from* movement as paradigmatic for imputation. *To-from* movement is imputative in that we see the shift of relationship function with the result of a new vista between the parties of *imputative movement*. The reason for this different purview, while not obvious, is that ‘reckon’ (λογίζομαι), as used by the Septuagint and NT quotations, has some breadth in its semantic domain. This has led to gratuitous analysis of its uses.³ However, at the unfolding of redemptive history up to Genesis 15, it is difficult to assess exactly what has changed prior to and after verse six. Paul’s citation of λογίζομαι in Romans chapter four does not necessarily clarify the nature of a new ontological/theological reality; a reality where God’s relationship to Abram fundamentally shifts after verse six. In fact, Paul’s discussion appears to mysteriously gloss verse seven and following in favor of what is happening

² N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 491.

up to verse six; i.e. everything *up to* the new reckoning of righteousness.

This essay seeks a view of *imputative movement* that need not rely on Paul alone for the motif's exegetical basis. Further, we seek a construct that can accommodate *imputative movement* of like kinds in the canon. While some interpreters see their philological analyses as clarifying, this essay will maintain a certain sense of mystery as we seek clarity in the fullness of the Pentateuch.

The point of overshooting Genesis 15, then, is that we only need to admit some basic premises in order to move beyond Genesis 15:6 as a keystone and seek a broader view of imputation. The assumptions that allow us to move beyond Abram's reckoned belief are: 1) that 15:6 is not aimed at explication of 'reckon' (בִּשֵׁה) and its LXX equivalent (λογίζομαι), 2) that 15:6 is focused on the relationship between God and Abram, and 3) the Abram's belief acts as the agent of *YHWH's* new consideration. This is important because a purely lexical analysis of 'imputation' will have to restrict itself to a discussion of all the philologically relevant texts. However, if taken as a motif (i.e. *imputative movement* as a construct behind the narrative), a new horizon opens for describing similar relational patterns between God and man, for that matter, man and man.

Imputative Movement as a Construct

We now need to justify *imputative movement* in terms of 'movement' rather than a particular lexical group. Although we will scrutinize Genesis 15 later, that account leads us to the same mode of interrogation. In looking for a motif, we are simply asking the question begged by Genesis 15:6 itself: What changed between *YHWH* and Abram? Was something transferred, reconsidered, or was divine judgment now under a new dispensation with Abram (i.e. Was Abram now legally righted)? Again, the text of Genesis 15 simply will not render answers to these questions. This either means that, according to the text, these inquiries are irrelevant to what is happening or (judging by Paul's reification of the story into the Messianic narrative) Abram's righteousness-reckoned is part of some grander program. This bifurcation need not be exclusive,

³ See Michael Bird "“Incorporated Righteousness” for an apt discussion of the different analyses.

but at this point, we would like to posit the latter as a working lens within which we might view all imputative actions.

To be clear, *imputative movement* is where some action (re *imputative action*) fundamentally changes the relationship between two or more persons. It creates a triad where the two parties involved occupy two corners and the *imputative action* occupies the third. This will appear quite obvious and intuitive at points in the scriptures, but an undue focus on the *imputative action* will also wrongly direct our questions about the movement as well. If there is a specific motif of this movement in the scriptures, then it would serve us well to delineate *imputative movement* and recognize its component parts as ballast to whatever linguistic arguments may be waged.

In similar fashion, biblical theologians guide us with caution about our lens of scripture. They will rightfully caution us not to assume divine approval in the silence of a amoral narrative, to consider the events of story as seriously as the discourse, and to be aware of unstated or hidden ritual in the actions we do observe.⁴ But surely if *imputative movement* is a part of God's recourse with humankind, then we ought account for it in the current debates of scripture.

How do we look for this 'movement'? First, we are limiting our search to the Pentateuch, which is barely manageable in itself. Second, we are looking for instances where there is something moving in *to-from* relation between persons and the correspondent action that accompanies the movement. Third, we look for the expected epistemology of these movements, which comes with its own set of attendant problems.⁵

But if there is an action that fundamentally changes the relationship between two persons, then we should expect some reformation in their view of reality (re *epistemic adjustment*). Otherwise, we are fighting something like Descartes' theological evil deceiver who consistently tricks us *through our imputative actions* while we believe we are being mindful all the while. This seemed to work out Msr. Descartes' problems, but is wholly unhelpful in the current analysis. So we expect that *imputative movement* requires *epistemic adjustment*.

⁴ See Genesis 15:7f as an example of actions implying ritual, even if the ritual is obfuscated to the reader.

⁵ Most significant is the problem of relating epistemic views based on narrative. However, careful consideration and exegesis can yield, at the very least, modest results.

Instances of Imputative Movement

The first occasion of *imputative movement* begins with the Fall itself. Because of the *imputative action* (re taking the fruit), the relationship between man and himself, his spouse, creation and the creator have fundamentally and metaphysically changed. It should be noted at the fore that the action does not appear to be the actual agent of *imputative movement*. Rather, the action of eating fruit reflected an internal disposition toward their Creator.⁶ This will be important as we look toward sacramental actions in the rest of the Pentateuch.

The elements of the movement, then, are the dispositions that lead to the actions, that in turn made our first parents reckoned differently. The parties involved are God and the couple. The imputation of unrighteousness must be side-barred for this current discussion. Although Paul is vitally interested in developing this theme,⁷ it is not clearly explored by the narrative itself. All we can affirm here is that the new and *Fallen* metaphysic and disposition is moved to the next generation through the act of child bearing.⁸

However, the question begged by the natural reading of the story is exactly this point: Does Adam and Eve's new status move to their children? It is not long before that question is answered and our next instance of *imputative movement* is clarified. In chapter four of Genesis, we see the two sons who are equipped for service to the land and livestock.

Cain & Abel

Both Cain and Abel offer sacrifices to God that would have been fully acceptable under later Levitical code. For Abel it is the choice animal and for Cain it is the first fruits of his labor. But verses four and five simply state that God had regard (שׂה) for Abel and his offering. Yet God had no regard (לֹא שׂה) for Cain and his offering.⁹ The problem for Cain is not his

⁶ At this point, we would love to speak about the fruit as a sacrament, but that is going adrift.

⁷ See Romans 5.

⁸ It is important to establish here that we are agnostic about the epistemic impetus that corresponds to the 'act' of procreation. In other words, did Adam and Eve *know* that they were imputing their sin through the act of procreation? It is impossible to say and we should remain skeptical unless otherwise motivated by the text. The reason for this bizarre caveat is that I'm not quite ready to speak of procreation as an imputative act.

⁹ We should be very careful here not to exegete some extraneous moral lesson like, "Cain chose the wrong

sacramental action, but the *imputative movement* here is directed towards the acceptance or non-acceptance of *YHWH*.¹⁰ Initially, we may be tempted to view the sacrifice itself as the *imputative action* with the goal of ‘acceptance’. However, only when we see *YHWH* having this private conversation with Cain do we understand the *imputative action* begins with the internal struggle between Cain and the sin that is *crouching at his door*. This struggle comes to fruition in Abel’s murder.¹¹

Cain ruling or not over his own sin is the *imputative action* that will fruit in the later *imputative movement*, whatever that may have been.¹² Rightfully noticing the direction of the narrative’s direction toward Cain’s disposition, Eleonore Stump mentions, “Clearly, any *one* of these things [God’s warning, God’s prodding to realization of sin and confession, and miraculous protection from murder] done on Abel’s behalf would have been enough to save him. But God does none of these for Abel, the innocent; the accepted of God.”¹³ The *to-from* movement is given in terms of either ‘doing well’ (בִּיטִית-סָא) or movement toward ‘sin’ (תַּאֲטָה). ‘Doing well’ is connected with acceptance and ‘sin’ is associated to implied rejection. In view of the outcomes for Cain, ‘sin’ and ‘rejection’ then turn out to mean *driven away from God’s presence* and *oppressed by creation and humankind*.¹⁴ But we should also notice that the outcomes of Cain’s sin also mean *divine protection* and *salvation from the life of a fugitive*.¹⁵

In all, the two parties of concern in this story are God and Cain. Cain is looking toward God’s acceptance and the offerings look as if to be the point of *imputative movement*, where acceptance is bestowed. But in the end, it was Cain’s struggle with his own sin that required the *imputative movement*. The *imputative action* turned out to be the ‘Cain as victor over his sin’, not

profession,” or, “Cain should have offered a blood sacrifice.” These are not in view of this narrative in the explanation following. What *is* in view here is what will become the *kind* or *pattern* for the Levitical sacrifices.

¹⁰ “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” Genesis 4:7. Collins notes that contra the various interpretation that focus on the *imputative action* (i.e. The sacrifice offered), “Cain’s heart is indeed the problem.” C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 200.

¹¹ See James 1:13-15 for a vivid depiction of this process of struggle and fruition in the analog of gestation and birth.

¹² It is not hard to imagine a converse scenario where Cain does rule over his own sin and something like Genesis 15:6 is stated in his favor: “And Cain got hold of his anger and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

¹³ Eleonore Stump “The Problem of Evil” *Faith and Philosophy* 2:4 (1985), 237.

¹⁴ Genesis 4:7-16.

¹⁵ Genesis 4:14-15.

the offering of proper sacrifice. We also described *epistemic adjustment* as a fundamental outworking of *imputative movement*. God addresses this matter himself via direct conversation with Cain. In case Cain had inappropriately surmised that his ‘acceptance’ was contingent on the type of offering, God directs him away from the *imputative action* (as it had worked correctly in the acceptable worship of Abel) and directed him toward his own ‘crouching sin’.

Here we have two parallel instances of *imputative movement* where for Abel, the action of offering acted as the *imputative action* that revealed his acceptability. But for Cain, the confusion may have been that he believed the same *imputative action* was merely a synergistic ritual and thus, could be mimicked with equal efficacy for Cain himself. And again, God takes concern to attempt *epistemic adjustment* and redirect Cain back to the *action* he himself must take. And in this exchange, it becomes clear that mere ritual mimicry will not suffice.

For clarity, Cain and *YHWH* were the two parties of this *imputative movement*. The *imputative action* was to be Cain ruling over his ‘crouching sin’. The *epistemic adjustment* would presumably be Cain finding acceptance with God with an offering being the consequence of the *imputative movement* in this context.

Jacob & Esau

Imputative movement appears in an interesting way between Isaac and Jacob as the gift of blessing. Any reader of Isaac’s blessing must wonder what was passed from Isaac to Jacob in that fraudulently received rite?¹⁶ While it looks to be plain that both Cain and Abel sought God’s acceptance, whatever that may mean, the *imputative movement* of Isaac’s blessing appears to be almost transactional.

Here we have Jacob and Isaac, but Isaac is not at the center of the changed relationships through this *imputative movement*. In fact, Isaac is more the *imputative action* than the person with whom the relationship is changed (although the brief relationship before Isaac’s death probably evinced some fundamental change). The second party in this occasion is actually Esau

¹⁶ See Genesis 27.

who appears to be representative of his brothers as well.¹⁷ Jacob does indeed receive the blessing and this is reified by Isaac's belief that he has nothing else to give to Esau. Giving the blessing a seemingly ontological description, Isaac tells Esau, "...he has taken your blessing away,"¹⁸ with the result being, "...I have made him *lord over you* and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him."¹⁹ And Esau's response points back to a view of imputation as ontological where he pleads, "Have you but one blessing, my father?" The implied answer is, "Yes, only one."

Here in Genesis 27, we find some linguistic overlap that presages the *imputative movement* in Levitical sacrifices. In explaining what he has done, Isaac tells Esau, "I have *supported* (כמס) him."²⁰

Again, the constituent elements of *imputative movement* are the persons who will be changed in their relationship due to the *imputative action* that symbolically reflects the inner dispositions. With Isaac and his sons, the *imputative movement* changed the relationship of Jacob and Esau, establishing Jacob as the lord of his family. Further, it moved from Isaac to Jacob through the *imputative action* of a blessing, even through a deceitfully-gained blessing. But that action and Isaac's refusal to dispense further blessings implicates Isaac's commitment to the oath and the lordship over his household. Although the blessing appears to be a metaphysical transfer in its microcosm, the wider view of the story yields the larger narrative at work through the mistaken actions of Isaac and even the evil plotting of Rachel and Jacob.

Something moved between Isaac and Jacob that fundamentally altered Jacob's relationship to his family. Whatever it may have been, it did not hinder Jacob's flight in terror from *his servant* Esau. We can camp on this point for a moment to realize its import. Something moved from Isaac to Jacob and that movement is reflected in the ensuing story of Israel. God's favor (acceptance) goes with Jacob. All the characters involved viewed Isaac's blessing as the crucial to

¹⁷ "But Isaac replied to Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him.'"

¹⁸ Genesis 27:35

¹⁹ Genesis 27: 36f

²⁰ We will simply note here that 'support' or 'lean' (כמס) will turn up over and over again within specific imputative frameworks in the sacrifices of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers with other imputative functions in Deuteronomy.

the unfolding promises of Abraham.

From the perspective of Isaac, Jacob and Esau, the blessing *was the imputative action* that fundamentally changed the relationships of all the persons in the family. However, it did not actually change them in the way intended. Isaac intended that he has now inadvertently *established* (כמס) Jacob as the lord over his brothers. But that clearly has not happened. Jacob immediately flees in fear and when he later meets his brother, he carefully words his servant's greeting in order to reverse the *imputative movement* of the blessing: instructing them, "Thus you shall say to *my lord* Esau: Thus says *your servant* Jacob..."²¹

Moses & Joshua

If Isaac's blessing of Jacob is the attempted abuse of *imputative movement*, then Moses' transfer of leadership acts as a contrary example. Toward the end of Numbers, it is now clear that Moses will not lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan. *YHWH* instructs Moses to 'give' (התתנ) Joshua some authority through *the laying on* (ודי תא כמס) of hands.²² Again, the fundamental change in relationship was not between Moses and Joshua, but rather Joshua and the children of Israel. The *imputative action* is the 'hand-leaning' of Moses onto Joshua. The relationship changes in that Joshua now takes on the leadership of Israel with all the incumbent promises and problems. The efficacy of that *imputative movement* is confirmed in Deuteronomy where it concludes that: "Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom *because* Moses *laid his hands on* (כמס) him," with the result that the children of Israel obeyed.²³

It is here that we can remind ourselves that *imputative movement* is meant as a construct and so acts more as a gathering place of particulars than a schematic process. It could be equally observed in the above instances that *imputative movement* is operative in a mesh rather than triad. For instance, Moses is the *imputative actor* for the *imputative movement* to Joshua. But this both requires a vertical and horizontal movement. In the vertical, *YHWH* has a new relationship

²¹ Genesis 32:4.

²² Numbers 27:23.

²³ Deuteronomy 34:9. We later see Paul picking up this aspect of the motif in his reminders to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6.

with Israel through Joshua. In this sense, Joshua is the *imputative actor* on behalf of the people so that God's desire of righteousness is judged through their obedience to Joshua. Obedience to Joshua becomes like Cain's struggle with his sin and Abel's acceptable sacrifice. Being accepted by God means following the voice of Joshua.

The people's struggle to listen to Moses strikes the reader as symptomatic of their stagnant relationship to God. The horizontal overlap of imputative movement between Joshua and the children of Israel becomes blatant. The people, in relationship to God must act through Joshua. We must take care not to extend beyond what is being portrayed in the texts. However, it is a fair observation that *imputative movement* may take part in a matrix of *imputative movements*. This will become the necessary view as we look at particular encapsulations of imputative movement through the sacrificial rites of Exodus and Leviticus.

Israel & YHWH

The last major use of *imputative movement* we will consider as a Pentateuchal motif is in the Levitical sacrifices and penal prescriptions. Here is where we see the intensification of the motif and the tightening of language around the *imputative actions*; which one would expect to follow from the codification of moral law. Right at the fore of Leviticus, we read a plain prescription of sacrifice that demands a modest explanation. In Leviticus 1:4 we read, "He shall lay his hand (כַּמֵּס) on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted (הִצִּיר) for him to make atonement for him." This describes the elements of *imputative movement* quite plainly. There are the two parties: the offerer and YHWH. There is the *imputative action*, which is the offering of the right rite (not just any animal and it must be handled correctly).

The question for scholars has gone beyond common questions of forensic imputation. Here, the question becomes, "Is something imparted," or, "Does something move from the man to the animal?" The answer has already been anticipated above, but the short answer is that a modicum of mysterious reverence appears intentional. But to repeat what has been said, focusing on the *imputative action* instead of the *epistemic adjustment* concerning the relationship of the parties may miss the point of the *imputative movement*.

Because of the Torah's investment in this particular arrangement of *imputative movement*,

we will have to distinguish two separate possibilities. First, there are instances of *imputative movement* that resemble impartation and those need to be considered with special emphasis on epistemological effect.²⁴ Second, there is a formula that arises in Exodus and repeated in Leviticus that focuses the reader on the relationship between the two parties. So in the former, epistemological intensification appears around the *imputative action*: authority, curses, and the possibility of their transfer. And the latter appears to focus on the relationship between the parties in terms of atonement and purity.

Impartative Movement

In the first, some texts unhesitatingly describe movement from one party to another. We see in this group of *imputative actions* that cannot skirt some specific reader reaction that cannot help but appearing to report impartation, something moving from one to the other. The working examples from the Pentateuch are those where the text appears to focus on the action and the consequence of the action itself. This approach, that views these as accounts of impartation, could suffer from false dichotomy in that all *imputative actions*, per this thesis, should focus on the consequence of the action; i.e. the *epistemic adjustment*. However, we would run roughshod over several instances that fit the construct of *imputative movement* and yet direct our attention toward the result of some particular action. An example would be helpful at this point.

Some of Moses' authority is to be 'given' to Joshua. This draws the reader's attention to a movement of seeming impartation where some *thing* is moved between actors with a specific outcomes intended. Isaac's blessing is also 'given' to Jacob as Moses' authority is 'given'. In case we were skeptical of some transfer, Deuteronomy 34:9 reassures the reader that, "Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom *because* Moses laid his hands on him."

Both instances specifically use 'given' (נתן) in reference to the *imputative movement* נתן.²⁵ The same is true of the sins of Israel being 'given to' the *azaz'el* of *Yom Kippur*.²⁶ The literary

²⁴ E.g. Authority from Moses to Joshua, Israel's iniquity borne on the Scapegoat, a community's blasphemer where something is mysteriously 'given' through the 'laying on of hands'.

²⁵ (to lean or sustain) also corresponds to both instances. Although in Isaac's blessing, the use of נתן indicates 'sustenance' rather than the prescriptive 'hand-leaning' ritual.

²⁶ Leviticus 16:21

intersection that describes *imputative movement* as ‘giving something’ naturally draws the reader’s attention toward the *imputative action* itself, not the relationship at stake. We want to know, “What moved between Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Joshua, or the priest and the Scapegoat?” If *imputative movement* is directly associated with ‘the giving of something’, then what was given and how?

Interestingly, the case of the blasphemer who curses God in Leviticus 24 does not follow this pattern. The people of the congregation who heard the curses are instructed to ‘lay their hands on his head’ (which is formulaic, more to come) and then stone the man to death. However, where we might expect the language of ‘reverse giving’ of the blasphemy *from* the congregation *to* the blasphemer, we do not find it. Again, this supports the thesis that there ערה mildly disparate focal lenses even within the use of this motif in the Pentateuch. In some occurrences, the text focuses on what is given and in some sacrificial uses, the text points us toward the offerer and receiver. So with the blasphemer, the intent does not turn on some metaphysical movement of an ‘overheard blasphemy’ that may possibly remain resident with the congregation, but rather the congregation’s participation in capital punishment. This shift *from* the possible movement of guilt *to* the response of the congregation, again, draws the reader’s attention to the actions of the congregation and, specifically, what they believe they are accomplishing through this use of ‘hand-leaning’.

Why, then, lay hands on the accursed at all? There may be several options here. First, the ‘giving back of blasphemy’ may be in mind here, even without the language of ‘giving’. In exploring this ‘hand-leaning rite’, Jacob Milgrom gives four options that may help here: 1) transference of sin, 2) identification with the offering, 3) declaration of innocence, and 4) ownership of the offering (i.e. ‘This sacrifice is mine’).²⁷ The current question is of transfer, but surely reverse-identification with the accursed and declaration of their discord with his actions could be particular matters of concern here in Leviticus 24. Specifically, the congregation can have transfer, identification, and declaration in mind without an explicit metaphysical process guiding their *imputative actions*. Jay Sklar notes that whatever view of this ritual one prefers, “it

²⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, The Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp 151f.

is generally agreed that the hand-leaning rite may be used to indicate some type of transfer.” But the specific object of transfer is not in view.²⁸ Again, this instance of *imputative movement* adds emphasis that the relationship between parties is the interpretive lens of the *imputative action*, not what is moved.

Hence, even in cases where there is a reader compelled toward discovering the metaphysics of the movement, the resolve of the texts only puts weight on *some* concept of transference while remaining vague as to the exact nature of what is being moved or how. Indeed, there have been concerted attempts at reconciling the prescriptions for two-handed verses one-handed rites and their correspondence to expiation and various sacrifices. However, none of these have yielded explication that is resonant with the totality of occurrences in the relevant texts (i.e. All attempts break down somewhere).²⁹

To sum up, we see that that there are occasions of *imputative movement* where a *thing* appears to be imparted between individuals. While the narratives themselves appear to describe this movement as some kind of ontological impartation, the thrust of each passage centers back onto the *epistemic adjustments* due to the new relationship between parties. Even in the case of the ‘cursed blasphemer’, the parties in relationship are the congregation and God not the blasphemer and congregation. So the *epistemic adjustment* is between those parties concerning their relationship to the blasphemer.

Not wanting to fly over possibly disparate uses of *imputative movement* as if to presume they were univocal, the first use that appears to describe impartation leaves us agnostic concerning what actually moved. Although the language differs slightly from the majority uses (especially from the formulaic use of Leviticus) and the *imputative actions* (that appear to give authority, sin, or blasphemy) make us question *imputative movement* as a monolithic idea, the result is the same. The fundamental concern is between the parties involved, the change in relationship, and their *epistemic adjustment* according to that change. This will act as a signal to the reader that wherever we see the possibility of *imputative movement* described in the texts, we

²⁸ See footnote 92, Jay Sklar, *Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 183.

²⁹ See Sklar for a full treatment of why those attempts have not succeeded, pp. 183f.

should always seek to establish who are the parties between which the movement occurs.

Further, we should be skeptical of our own questions concerning the metaphysics of the actions and movements being described. For instance, we may be concerned with *what moved*, where the text is directing us toward the two parties, their new relationship and *epistemic adjustment*.

Finally, we can modestly say that this thesis can accommodate these appearances of impartation under *imputative movement* without requiring equivocation. Where the narrative description favors impartation (e.g. A ‘blessing’ that is ‘given’), the text may be merely pointed us back to the relationship between imputative parties.

Imputative Movement

The majority of occurrences do not lean as heavily toward an impartative explanation. This leads us to the formula of the Levitical sacrifices. The formula that is begun in Exodus and repeated in Leviticus is: “He shall lay his hand on the head of...”³⁰ We should note up front that the formula, like the *imputative action* it describes, yields no guarantee of acceptance from God. But it can be no clearer in the Pentateuch than this particular use of *imputative movement*. The formula is used in the purification of the priests³¹, with the burnt offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings³², and the goat of *Yom Kippur*.³³ These are the formulaic uses of ‘laying his hand upon the head’ along with the other uses aforementioned in Leviticus 24, Numbers 27 (Moses and Joshua) and its retelling in Deuteronomy 34:9.

What is significant about the stratification of this formula in the Levitical code is that the relationship between the *imputative parties* is made explicit. Sklar observes that most agree on some view of transference, but this just begs the question, “What is transferred?” The lack of consistent answers to that question presses us back to the unity in these instances. In Exodus,

³⁰ Some version of *שֵׂאֵר לֵעַ וּדִיתָא כַּמְסוֹ*..... is used in the following: Exodus 29:10, 29:15, 29:19, Leviticus 1:4, 3:2, 3:8, 3:13, 4:4, 4:15, 4:24, 4:29, 4:33, 8:14, 8:18, 8:22, 16:21, 24:14, Numbers 8:10, 8:12, 27:18, 27:23, and Deuteronomy 34:9.

³¹ Exodus 29:10-19 and Numbers 8 & 27

³² Leviticus 1:4, 3:2, 4:15, even the unintentional sin offering.

³³ Leviticus 16:21.

we only see this formula in the consecration of the Levites (29:10, 15, and 19) in connection with the sin offering of verse 14. But the formula ‘...he shall lay his hand/s upon the head of...’ is broached in Leviticus with the extension that, “it will be accepted (צָרַן) to make atonement for him (רָפַח).”³⁴

This family atonement is rehearsed again in the national atonement of *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 16 even includes the impartative language of ‘giving’ in reference to the sins of Israel and its offering. Specifically, it says: “And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them (רָתַן) on the head of the goat.... The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area...” With the result that: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins.”³⁵

Again, whatever impartative interpretation we may want to gravitate toward because something is ‘given’ to the goat, the context demands that the *imputative action and movement* is solely concerned with cleansing and atonement. Or, the concern of the formulaic use centers on the acceptability of Israel in terms of their relationship to *YHWH*. To insist on a metaphysical explanation of ‘what is given’ to the goat distracts from the perlocutionary force of the code: getting cleansed before *YHWH*. It is not the case that pursuing a metaphysical explanation is wrong-headed, but that it may end in dissatisfaction if the imputative priority of relationship is not previously established and minded. This concentration on the metaphysics of the *imputative act* would be like an unswayable fascination with the ability of a scoreboard to change score. While electric signage may be captivating, its action is only tangential to the actual game being played. The game is antecedent to the changing light display on a scoreboard. It is not erroneous to ask, “I wonder how they change the score.” But it is certainly diversionary.

Classic Imputation: Genesis 15:6

‘Imputation’ has a lengthy theological pedigree. This thesis has not been to engage the

³⁴ Leviticus 1:4.

³⁵ Leviticus 16:30.

current dialogue concerning the imputation of Christ's righteousness.³⁶ However, because of Paul's citations in Romans, Abram's righteousness must be considered in any discussion of imputation in the Pentateuch. The goal of this section will be to assess Genesis 15 in light of the above analysis. Once more, this is precisely why we sidelined a discussion of the historically prior account in Genesis. But now that the motif of *imputative movement* has been fleshed out with its constituent parts, we can assess the fit of Genesis 15 within the above motif.

In light of the discussion thus far, we will have to reject Abram's belief 'reckoned as righteousness' as a clear instance of imputative movement for the following reasons.

First, there is no philological connection to the motif. We began by noting the strength of this analysis in that it was not constrained to lexical analyses. However, there are terms and manners of narrative that have been consistently used to describe *imputative movement*, namely 'laying hands' and 'giving'. It only needs to be some consistent use of language to show an *imputative action*, imply movement, change a relationship, and cause *epistemic adjustment* of the parties in that relationship. There is no literary or lexical support in Genesis 15 that necessitates it be considered in the category of *imputative movement* as described here.

Two broad observations should be made about the language of Genesis 15 that correspond to both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. Regarding the Masoretic Text (MT), the term **בשה** (rendered 'reckoned' or 'considered') has only a weak connection to the motif of *imputative movement*. Although the usage of 'reckoning' is seen throughout the Pentateuch, it is most often used in reference to craftsmanship.³⁷ The second most common employment in counting, accounting, or consideration.³⁸ 'Reckoning' is strangely absent as a modifier of *imputative movement* except in two cases: Leviticus 7:18 and 17:4. In the former, the use of 'reckon' does not modify an *imputative movement* as it speaks to how one's offering should be 'counted' for them. In other words, if they do not bring their offering in the appropriate manner, then it does not 'count'. "If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the

³⁶ See Michael Bird for a summary of the current dialogue, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47/2 (June 2004), 253-75.

³⁷ See Exodus 26:1 for a paradigmatic use.

³⁸ See Leviticus 25:50, Numbers 23:9, and Deuteronomy 2:20.

third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him. It is tainted, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity.”

In the latter, ‘bloodguilt’ is ‘reckoned’ to the one who slaughters offerings outside the camp and fails to bring them to the Tabernacle. Accordingly, they are to be cut off from the congregation. In this occurrence, there are two parties involved (the congregation and the bloodguilty Israelite). There is a negative *imputative action* (the wrongful slaughter of animals). There is a change in the relationship (the bloodguilty Israelite is cut off) and *epistemic adjustment* (the parties acknowledge the change in relationship).

Despite these, ‘reckoning’ does not appear to denote *imputative movement*. The bloodguilt that is ‘reckoned’ (or ‘imputed’ per the *English Standard Version*) functions as a demerit against the guilty; something that must be overcome in order to re-enter the congregation. Further, the bloodguilt is not equally present in the immediately ensuing codes for eating blood.³⁹ In sum, bloodguilt is not described as something that is *imputatively moved* in a *to-from movement*, but rather a negative mark that must be rebalanced in the process of restoration to the congregation.

Regarding the observations of the Septuagint, the translation of *בשה* is *λογιζομαι*. This translation follows the usage described above in the Masoretic Text. The semantic range overlaps quite nicely between the terms, *sans* the connotation of ‘craftsmanship’. *Λογιζομαι* is used far less in the Pentateuch; only eleven times. The point is that the broad use of *בשה* and its translated narrowing to *λογιζομαι* makes current assumptions about ‘imputation’ as a simple function possibly unwarranted. It is easy to conceive of ‘reckoning’ within an accounting scheme and it surely is used under that denotation. However, the example cited from Leviticus above shows that disambiguation of how ‘imputation’ is being employed requires careful attention. Even within a possible case of *imputative movement* (i.e. The sacrifice of Leviticus 17), ‘reckoning’ retains its accountability connotation despite whatever *imputative movement* to which it refers. For these reasons, we cannot conceptually associate ‘reckoning’ and *imputative movement* with confidence, even in the two instances where the terms occasion each other.

Second, even if we allow for literary descriptions that do not require stringent lexical

connections, Genesis 15 does not fit the motif. Although Abram and *YHWH* are clearly the two parties involved, the requisite actions and ensuing epistemic changes are not clear from the narrative.

Abram's belief could be allowed as an *imputative action*, but that weakens the motif. Further, excising Genesis 15 from this imputative pattern helps to explain why the consequences of the action appear absent or weak. We expect a change in relationship subsequent to the action, which is a possible understanding of the narrative. However, if Genesis 15:6 is meant to supply an account of *imputative movement*, then it fails to explain the ensuing lack of *epistemological adjustment*. In other words, if the whole process was meant to show a fundamental change in relationship between God and Abram, then what are we to make of Abram's next question (roughly: "How can I know that you will fulfill your promise?")? We would expect Abram's 'reckoned belief' to be evident in Abram's new view of reality. If his belief about miraculous progeny is 'reckoned as righteousness' and is the *imputative action* that effects the change, then why do we find Abram questioning God's next promise of land? ⁴⁰

Abram's belief could function as an *imputative action* but does not effect a fundamental change in his relationship with God or a new epistemic view of the future. Interestingly, Paul does not intimate this either in Romans 4. Paul focuses his discussion on the chronology of belief and sacrament, not Abram's belief *qua* an action that engendered a fundamental change in his relationship with God. In fact, Abram's *epistemic adjustment* appears to render the reverse of what preceded it. Abram's faith and accreditation is immediately followed by an *epistemic flinch* which require an elaborate sacrificial ceremony in order to begin its resolution.

Following from the above, this thesis will maintain that the language of imputative movement and the functional parts of the motif are not present clearly enough to count Genesis 15 as a member of the category. *Imputative movement* in the hand-leaning rites of Leviticus and authority shifts from Moses to Joshua are operating differently within the relationship between God and humanity in these. If this essay has accurately captured a strong motif with its intended effect, then Abram's belief reckoned as righteousness does not fit the motif from within the

⁴⁰ For whatever reason, Paul also glosses over this very point in his exposition of Abram's belief in Romans 4. Paul chooses Abram's belief and curtails his analysis at Abram's non-belief in 15:8 and following.

Pentateuch.⁴¹

Conclusion

Imputative movement, as it has been explored here, always centers on changes in a relationship. The implications for these findings are that whenever we see this pattern exhibited beyond the Pentateuch, we must be careful to name the constituent parts and generating hermeneutical considerations. This essentially means that identifying the two parties involved is crucial, as well as focusing attention on the outcomes of *imputative movement*. In particular, we will always be tempted to look at the *imputative action* as the lynchpin of interpretation, and certainly it is not trivial.

However, the foci of *imputative movement* holds the three elements (action and two parties) in tension with the specific *epistemic adjustment* as the outcome of the movement. Without these three and the outcome as necessary parts, we lose the motif that is plainly here to some extent in the Pentateuch. These are the core implications for any further application of this motif.

⁴¹ We would obviously want to leave room for a Christological reinterpretation and integration of these narratives and motifs from the Apostles.