One-Paragraph Abstract

My dissertation compares “subversive speech”—i.e., speech that challenges and destabilizes otherwise recognized authority—in the Latter Prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the early-to-middle dialogues of Plato. The biblical prophets have long been associated with subversive activity, such as critique of cult and king. Most historical-critical biblical scholarship has treated these issues only as windows onto the development of Israelite institutions or ancient social dynamics. Without denying these connections to historical realities, I argue that more attention ought to be paid to how subversive speech is literarily constructed—how biblical authors and redactors used it to theorize prophecy. I make this case through a sustained comparison to Plato’s presentation of Socrates, which is relevant for two reasons. First, Socrates’s philosophical challenges to Athenian society are perhaps the closest ancient Mediterranean analogue to subversive prophecy. Second, the “literary turn” in recent Plato studies provides a model for studying literary construction within a historical-critical framework. Ultimately, while acknowledging the important cultural, historical, and generic differences between the biblical prophetic literature and Plato’s dialogues, I argue that both use subversive speech to problematize authority in similar ways.