Amos, Micah and the other classical prophets must not be seen as poor peasants, hermits, or eccentrics outside the mainstream of Israelite life, but as intellectuals competing for the support of the affluent in the sphere of public policy.

Heaton (1968, pp. 12-13) has pointed out that “the influence of educated men in Israel is only just beginning to gain recognition from students of the Old Testament.” But Weber (1952, p. 267), in a work first published in 1917, was able to view the prophets as “above all, political demagogues and, on occasion, pamphleteers.” He went on to add that “In all these motivations for Yahweh’s wrath,” that is, buying and selling, usury, and the like, and “even in the deliberate paradoxes of Amos, may be discerned the impact of an intensive culture of intellectuals.” All this contrasts sharply with traditional Jewish and Christian interpretations. For Robert H. Pfeiffer (1961, pp. 124, 158, 163): “In the Northern Kingdom, the bulk of the nation, the prophets failed to have any influence on its policies; The Prophetic Movement, was apparently a total failure in the days of the great prophets . . . the prophets played no role even in connection with the Deuteronomic reforms” (see part III). Irwin (1959, p. 207) adds that “The weakness of the prophetic program of reform was that, in modern phrase, it
lacked teeth... the prophets met with little success: the majority of their compatriots thought them misguided nuisances. Their reforms did not come about, some only after centuries and then imperfectly.” But let us like modern dentists look inside the patient’s mouth before diagnosing the vigor of his teeth.

When the (nonliterary) prophet Micaiah saw “all Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd” (1 Kings 22:17), King Ahab (874–853) reacted to a death threat: he had Micaiah locked up and wore a disguise. When Jeremiah proclaimed, “Serve the king of Babylon and live!” (27:17) he was opposed by the “false prophet” Hananiah to whom Jeremiah said: “Listen Hananiah! The Lord did not send you, and you have given this people lying assurances. Assuredly, thus said the Lord: I am going to banish you from off the earth. You shall die this year, for you have urged disloyalty to the Lord. And the prophet Hananiah died that year, in the seventh month” (28:15–17). Does this story represent myth, hypnotic suggestion, coincidence, or political assassination? Jeremiah 29:20–21 also has the prophet addressing the Jewish exile community in Babylon as follows: “Thus said the Lord of Hosts, of Maaseiah, who prophesy falsely to you in My name. I am going to deliver them into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and he shall put them to death before your eyes.” Mere bombast? Jeremiah 38:19–22 finds this “toothless” prophet offering to protect King Zedekiah from “the Judeans who have defected to the Chaldeans” in return for his surrender of Jerusalem. The sad fate of Pelatiah the “prince of the people” in Ezekiel 11:13 should also be noted.

Isaiah has disciples (8:16) and is consulted by Kings Ahaz (7:1–9) and Hezekiah (chapters 37, 38). He also authors royal records (2 Chron. 26:22; 32:32) and, apparently, is capable of driving a high government minister, Shebna, from his office (Isa. 22). Beebe (1970, p. 262) suggests that Isaiah 9:2–6 was the accession hymn composed by the prophet for Hezekiah’s coronation. Yeivin (1979, p. 174) thinks it possible that Isaiah was a high royal official (a scribe) under Uzziah and, possibly, Ahaz. (This question will be dealt with in chapter 13). Hoschander (1938, p. 260) calls attention to the rabbinical tradition (Babylonian Talmud) that Isaiah was a member of the royal family—that his father Amoz is a brother of King Amaziah. This possibility, Hoschander notes, cannot be dismissed on linguistic grounds alone. Jeremiah, the “priest” from little Anathoth has supporters among the elders and the priests (19:1–2); is consulted by representatives of King Zedekiah (21:1–2); is protected by officials and principal men of the elders (26:4, 16–17); has his messages to the Babylonian exile community delivered by the king’s own messengers (29:3), and officials (51:59); has a person of substance, Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, as his personal