CHAPTER 8

THE ARGUMENT FROM META-TEXTUAL HISTORY

"Tell us the former things, what they are
that we may consider them
that we may know their outcome
or declare to us the things to come
Tell us what is to come hereafter,
That we may know that you are God(s)
Do good, or do harm,
That we may be dismayed and terrified
Behold, you are nothing
And your work is nought."

(Isa 41:22-24)

8.1   INTRODUCTION

Just *what* exactly is the nature of this body of texts called the "Old Testament" that has been the object of the devil's advocate's concern all along? How was it created and what are the origins and processes out of which it came into being? Where did the belief in the god Yahweh come from anyway, and how did it change throughout history? Just *what* exactly *is* Yahweh? What is the relation between Yahweh and "God"? Does anybody living in the post-biblical period really believe in the god Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

Though a substantial amount of research has been done on the formation of the canonical Old Testament and on the origins and development of Yahwism, very few studies have attempted to spell out the implications of such research for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. In this chapter, the devil's

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advocate will present the seventh and final argument against the existence of Yahweh in the case against realism: *the argument from meta-textual history.*

This argument in the devil's advocate's case focuses on the ontological dilemmas for realism as these are implicit in some of the critical reconstructions of the origin, nature and developments of both Yahwism as religion and the texts that would later come to constitute the "Old Testament". It will be argued that rather than Yahwism being *the* one and only true religion and the Old Testament being the inspired "*Word of God"*, a combined historical and philosophical approach to their origins and development shows that this is not the case at all.

Virtually everything we think we know about Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament is based on what we read in the biblical texts. Even alleged extra-textual religious experiences of the deity in contemporary times are interpreted via a frame of reference with its ultimate roots in the Hebrew Scriptures. As such, these experiences are dependent on the veracity of the textual witness for their own authenticity.

However, if it can be shown that both the epistemological source that we call the Old Testament and the histories preceding, encompassing and following it are not what they pretend to be, realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text becomes immensely problematic. If Yahwism is a religion without revelation and the Old Testament a work of fantasy, believing in the existence of Yahweh as depicted in the text cannot be deemed any more rational than believing in the existence of any other deity now lying unlamented in the graveyard of the gods.

8.2   AN ALL-TOO-HUMAN META-TEXTUAL HISTORY

8.2.1   The problematic origin of Yahweh and Yahwism

Over the last two centuries of critical scholarship, many scholars have attempted to construct a credible theory that will answer the many possible questions concerning the supposed and possible origins of Old Testament Yahwism. In an attempt to make sense of the whole quest for the historical Yahweh, it might be prove useful to take

cognisance of the fact that the question of origins may pertain to at least three distinct yet equally relevant issues not always distinguished from each other:

1. The (supposed) origin of *Yahweh* (i.e. "what" was Yahweh?);

2. The (supposed) origin of *Yahwism per se* (i.e. where, how, why and when did the belief in the god Yahweh first develop?);

3. The (supposed) origin of *Yahwism in Israel (*i.e. where, how, why and when did the people of Israel first came to believe in Yahweh?);

4. The (supposed) origin of *YHWH* (i.e. what was the original meaning of the tetragrammaton?).

When it comes to the first of these issues (i.e. the origin of *Yahweh*), numerous proposals exist that attempt to explain the supposed original nature of the deity who, though once only a tribal god of the Hebrew people, eventually became the one and only God of philosophical theism. Here we find the debate concerned with the question of exactly *what* the phenomenon or entity called Yahweh may originally have been as people tried to make sense of and interpret some or other feature of reality that led them to believe in its divinity.

In this regard, the following ideas may be noted as examples of some of the theories concerning the supposed original nature of the god of the Old Testament:

- Yahweh as the personal, perfect and only uncaused cause of everything else (stereotypical orthodox Judaeo-Christian belief, op cit. Cupitt 1989:202);

- Yahweh as a primitive culturally and historically relative representation of what was perceived to be ultimate reality (stereotypical liberal theology, op cit. Cupitt 1989:204);

- Yahweh as relative, temporal and local pictorial representation/manifestation of the "World Spirit" (German: *Weltgeist*) as expressed by Hebrew culture during ancient Near East in the Iron Age (e.g. Hegel, op cit. Armstrong 1993:372-373);

- Yahweh as the wish-fulfilment projection of an oppressed people (e.g. Marx, op cit. Wilson 2000:122);

- Yahweh as a product of repressed anthropology disguised as theology (cf. Feuerbach 1957:33 and passim);

- Yahweh as the product of generalised animism in incarnations of causality (cf. Tylor 1871:17);

- Yahweh as deified and personified volcano (cf. Ex 19-20; and suggested by e.g. Gunkel, Meyer; op cit. Barton 1934:332; cf. also Freud 1939:49);

- Yahweh as divinised ancestor (1 Sam 28:13; and suggested by e.g. Holscher, Achard; op cit. Barton 1934:333);

- Yahweh as personified storm weather (cf. Ex 19; Job 37-38; Ps 29; etc.; suggested by e.g. Wellhausen, Ward; op cit. Barton 1934:332);

- Yahweh as fetish (e.g. the ark; cf. Ex 25:15; Num 4:5,15, 10:35; 1 Sam 4:7,22; 2 Sam 6; Ps 132:8; cf. Bertholet 1926:301);

- Yahweh as sun (god) (cf. Num 6:25; 2 Sam 12:12-14; 1 Kgs 8; Ps 84:12; etc.; cf. Taylor 1993);

- Yahweh as a moon god (cf. Hommel, Winckler, Zimmern and Nielsen; op cit. Barton 1934:332);

- Yahweh as fire demon (cf. Meyer; op cit. Barton 1934:333);

- Yahweh as totem or animal deity (e.g. a snake [cf. 1 Kgs 1:9] or bull [cf. Gen 49:24] cf. Stade, Hitzig; op cit. Eichrodt 1961:188);

- Yahweh as the sea god (cf. Ps 42:7; Hab 3:15; op cit. Harwood 1992:71);

- Yahweh as intra-psychical archetype and symbol of the self (cf. Jung, op cit Campbell 1974:41);

- Yahweh as mythical symbol or sign of the mystery of existence, reality and being (cf. Campbell 1974:22);

- Yahweh as imaginative entity derived from anthropomorphism in the interpretation of natural and cultural processes and phenomena (cf. Guthrie 1993:227-255);

- Yahweh as a personification of the entire scheme of things and an epiphenomenon of stabilised and centred language (cf. Cupitt 1996:35)

- Yahweh as a Hellenistic Jewish literary construct created for didactic purposes and denoting an essentially unknowable and inexpressible transcendent divine reality (cf. Thompson 1998:332);

- Yahweh (and any other gods) as ancient alien astronaut(s) or some or other astrophysical phenomenon that was deified by the ancients (e.g., a planet) (cf. Gen 1, 6, 11, 18, 28; Ex 19 / Deut 4; Ps 18; Ezek 1, 10; etc; cf. Von Daniken 1972; Alford 2000; see also De Bruin 2000);

- Yahweh as a neurological epiphenomenon produced by 1) seizures in – or stimulation of – the brain's right temporal lobe and 2) an overly sensitive limbic system (cf. Jaynes, Penfield, Persinger, Buckman, op cit. Buckman 2002:78-110).

According to those who hold these theories, some of which admittedly seem rather far-fetched, Yahweh was not always considered to be humanoid type of sky god and

uncaused first cause that later Judaeo-Christian traditions claimed had always the case. To be sure, for all we know, maybe initially at least, the deity Yahweh was conceived of as something far less "user-friendly" than most modern biblical theists would like to believe.

If any of these theories have a grain of truth, it follows that though Yahweh (as an extinct volcano, alien/meteorite, ancestor, sun or fetish) might have been tangibly real, Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament may be no more than an updated and reinterpreted version of such an entity. The acts of reinterpretation and reconstruction were made possible by the embarrassment and repression on the part of later ideological communities who simply could not believe in Yahweh as merely a concrete natural phenomenon. Though the physical remains and/or reminders of what Yahweh used to be may still be around, Yahweh-as-depicted in the text has no extra-textual counterpart. In this sense then, the biblical version of the deity is indeed a fictitious reconstruction of an older albeit now unacceptable object of worship.

When it comes to the second and third issues, i.e. those pertaining to the origin of Yahwism as religion (both per se and in Israel) the theories that have been forthcoming are also anti-realist as far as their implications for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts are concerned. Quite a number of theories regarding the alleged extra- and pre-Israelite origin of the worship of Yahweh have seen the light in the relatively recent past.

- Theories of Adamic-Mosaic origin (e.g. popular Judaeo-Christian tradition; cf. Gen 2; Ex 3,6);

- Theories of Babylonian origin (e.g. Delitzsch and others op cit. Eichrodt 1961:188);

- Theories of Egyptian origin (op cit. Meek 1936:202; cf. also Freud 1939:49, Harwood 1992:37);

- Theories of Canaanite (north-Syrian) origin (e.g. Cross, Dalley, De Moor, Miller, op cit. Van der Toorn 1999:909);

- Theories of Midianite origin (e.g. Gilhany, Budde, Weippert, Van der Toorn; op cit. Van der Toorn 1999:909-912);

- Theories of Edomite origin (e.g. Haupt, op cit. Barton 1934:332);

- Theories of Kenite origin (e.g. Tiele, Stade, Rowley, Gunneweg, Weinfeld, Mettinger, op cit. Van der Toorn 1999:909-912);

- Theories of Eblaite origin (e.g. Pettinato, op cit. Garbini 1988:52-56).

Whatever one choose to make of such theories and no matter how far-fetched or preposterous some may *prima facie* appear to be, most imply that the god Yahweh used to be divinity worshipped (maybe under another name) by pagan peoples before he was adopted and adapted by the Hebrew people.

Of course, the second of the four distinct issues of inquiry suggests that one problem with all the aforementioned theories regarding the origin of Yahwism among pagan cultures is the fact that they give rise to the new question of where the non-Israelite cultures supposedly got *their* idea of the god Yahweh. Did one of those cultures adopt the cult of Yahweh, or whoever he (or she) used to be, from *another* earlier culture? And where did *that* culture get *its* cult of Yahweh? Did *they* also adopt and adapt it from elsewhere? Alternatively, could they have pioneered it as the result of a religious experience or in an attempt to make sense of some or other natural, social or psychical phenomena? How can we know? How can we be sure?

Of somewhat less direct relevance for the ontological problematic soon to be discussed is the original nature the tetragrammaton which also evokes much contention among scholars. In this regard, Parke-Taylor (1975:48-52) notes a variety of contradicting claims regarding the supposed original etymology from which the word YHWH probably derives:

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a)   Derivations from the Hebrew, e.g.:

YHWH = from the root *hyh*, "to be" (i.e. "the one who is"; "the one who exists"; "the one who causes to be"; "the one who creates", "the one who will be present", "the one who acts", "the one who comes", etc.) (e.g. MT, LXX, Albright, Eichrodt, Noth, De Vaux, Schild, Vriezen, etc.)

b) Derivations from Arabic, e.g.:

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- YHWH = from the root *hwy*, "to blow" (i.e. the one who blows, a storm-god) (e.g. Wellhausen);

- YHWH = from the root *hww*, "to fall" (in a causative sense, i.e. "the one who destroys) (e.g. Holzinger);

- YHWH = from the root *whwh*, "to roar" (i.e. "the one who roars" = thunder) (e.g. Torczyner);

- YHWH = from the root *hwh*, "to befall" (i.e. "the incident one" and thus a deity who appears when and how he wills) (e.g. Montgomery);

- YHWH = from the root *hwy*, "he who causes to love passionately" (e.g. Barton)

c)   Derivations from Egyptian, e.g.:

- YHWH = composite from the root *I-H*, "Moon" combined with "one" (i.e. "the Moon-One") (e.g. Walker)

d)   Derivations from Babylonian, e.g.:

- YHWH = *ia-u*, "noble, exalted" (i.e. the exalted one) (e.g. Delitzsch)

e)   Derivations from Sumerian, e.g.:

- YHWH = *IA-U*, "spermatozoa" (i.e. "juice of fertility, seed of life") (e.g. Allegro)

f)   Derivations from Ugaritic, e.g.:

- YHWH = *hwy*, "to speak" (i.e. "the Speaker") (e.g. Brown)

g)   Derivations from Hittite, e.g.:

- YHWH = Yahuwah, "vulva" (a feminine volcanic deity in ancient Anatolia) (e.g. Harwoood 1992:25)

Whatever one makes of these assessments, the etymological aspect of the origins question is, as noted, of secondary value to the ontological issue presently under consideration and thus not of any direct concern. As such, it may link up with the first three of the four questions, in that it may (or may not) be indicative of the nature of the deity, his original cultural habitat or his Israelite origins. Of course, the possibility that the tetragrammaton might actually have been a *dia*grammaton (YH - Yah) or a *tria*grammaton (YHW- Yahu) does not make matters any less complicated.

In the end however, the following can be said with regard to all the aforementioned considerations regarding the supposed origins of Yahweh and Yahwism. Though many scholars have rightly questioned the validity of some of the arguments in the many quests for the historical Yahweh, a philosophical-critical perspective can still focus on particular *ontological* dilemmas when it comes to the question of "whence Yahwism?"

In other words, aside from all the controversies with regard to the aforementioned theories pertaining to the origin of Yahweh and Yahwism, there are two far less contentious considerations that appear to reveal a dire dilemma for realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. It is these two

issues that will now be discussed as part of the argument from meta-textual history.

8.2.2   The problem of all-too-recent origins

According to Sagan (1996:11), the earth is about four and a half billion years old. The universe itself may be no younger than seventeen billion years. Moreover, if historians of primitive religion are to be believed, the worship of deities can be dated back tens of thousands of years BC (cf. Harwood 1992:01).

Then, of course, there is Yahwism. According to the Old Testament's chronology of world history, the universe was created circa 4000 BC or roughly six thousand years ago. Taking a cue from Genesis, one might say that the worship of Yahweh began with Adam and Eve (i.e. circa 4000 BC). Then there is the text in Genesis 4:26 which seems to suggest that humans began to "call on the name of Yahweh" during the time when Adam's son Seth begat Enosh. Since Genesis 5:3-6 informs us that Adam was 130 when Seth was born and that Seth was 105 when Enosh was born, it follows that the origin of a formalised cult of Yahweh had its beginnings at around 3765 BC.

However, as is often the case in quests for origins, things may not be as they at first appear. Many scholars, suspicious of using Genesis 1-11 in the reconstructing of actual history, believe that the worship of Yahweh might have begun with the Patriarchs (cf. Deist 1986:20). If this is the case and all the genealogical data provided in Genesis 1-11 is taken into account, the worship of Yahweh began somewhere in the Bronze Age during the first half of the second millennium BC (i.e. 2000-1500 BC).

Of course, once again, things turn out to be even more complicated. For when one reads through the stories of the Patriarchs, one will observe that, despite the references to a deity worshipped under the name Yahweh, it would appear that there are many other designations for him that seem to complicate matters considerably. The deity worshipped by the Patriarchs is often called "El", "El Elyon", "El Saddai", "El of the fathers/of my father", The Fear of Isaac", "The Bull /Mighty one of Jacob", etc. (cf. Deist & Du Plessis 1982:18).

As Deist and Du Plessis (1982:19) write, what makes these designations suspect in as

much as they can be identified with Yahweh is, on the one hand, the striking resemblance this god called El bears to the high god of the Canaanite pantheon, also known as El. Moreover, the worship of this El deity by the Patriarchs differs substantially from the worship of Yahweh-as-depicted from Exodus onwards. The whole cultic set-up, the way the deity relates to his people, and the laws he considers normative differ quite markedly from the formal and stringent supra-personal religion of later varieties of Mosaic Yahwism (cf. Moberly 1992:20).

Then, of course, there is the text of Joshua 24:2 where it is asserted that the forefathers of the people worshipped "other gods". This particular claim, along with the references to household deities (*teraphim*) in Genesis and the fact that the names of the Abraham's immediate family all imply a repressed religious allegiance to lunar cults make for a difficult and complex interpretative scenario. At the very least, these traditions insinuating that the patriarchs were not, in fact, worshippers of Yahweh make any identification of Yahweh with the variety of El deities in the Genesis text immensely problematic (cf. Deist & Du Plessis 1982:25).

Not all scholars, however, would be very optimistic regarding the use of Genesis 12-50 to reconstruct the actual historical origins of the cult of Yahweh. Many would opt for seeing the origin of the worship of the god Yahweh with the figure of Moses (cf. Soggin 1993:39). According to Exodus 6:3 – in direct contradiction to the data in Genesis 4:26 and 12-50 – the first time Yahweh was ever worshipped by that name was after he revealed that name to Moses.

The claim made in Exodus 6:3 also contradicts itself as the result of the redactor combining a text insisting that the name Yahweh was first revealed to the eighty year old Moses with another text telling us that Moses's mother was called *Jo*chebed (cf. Ex 6:20). Since this name was given to the woman before Moses was born and yet appears to contain a Yahwistic theophoric prefix, *somebody* was not telling the truth.

Of course, many other scholars may consider even the traditions featuring Moses as being historically almost worthless and would argue that the worship of Yahweh began only after 1200 BC. Be that as it may, if one takes the Exodus text seriously in its claims regarding the actual origins of Yahwism, it would mean the worship of

Yahweh could have been initiated by Moses no earlier than circa 1500-1200 BC.

Then there are the questions raised pertaining to the references in the Old Testament texts telling of the worship of Yahweh by non-Israelite peoples. Characters like Melchizedek, Abimelech, the Pharaoh, Jethro/Hobab, Balaam, Job and others all seem to be acquainted with Yahweh on a first-name basis. Whether these references to the worship of Yahweh among foreigners are fact or fiction is, however, not presently of concern.

So much, then, for the biblical evidence regarding the supposed time of origin of the worship of Yahweh. Did it begin with Adam (cf. Gen 2), Seth/Enosh (cf. Gen 4:26), Abram (cf. Gen 12:1), Moses (cf. Ex 6:3) or even later (Joshua/David/Josiah)? Scholars cannot seem to agree on this issue. Yet one thing is clear and may be all that is necessary to take note of for the purpose of the present discussion. Even if we grant that the worship of Yahweh began with Adam, Enosh or Moses, it would mean that the worship of Yahweh is no older than few millennia.

However, if one can believe the historians of ancient religion who trace the origins of religion to tens of thousands of years before that, the question arises where Yahweh was, for example, in 5 000, 10 000 or 20 000 BC? Given the fact of Yahweh being somewhat of a late comer on the religious scene, the biblical perspectives on the origins of the cult of this god begin to look suspiciously like ideological constructs based on fiction. The all-too-recent origins of the worship of the god of the Old Testament seem to suggest that, like all the pagan deities he would not touch with a ten-foot pole, Yahweh himself was created by humans rather than vice-versa.

In other words, suppose the following scientific ideas are, in fact, true:

- The universe is over 17 000 000 000 years old;
- The earth is over 4 000 000 000 years old;
- On the scale of one year, humans arrived on December 31 just before midnight;
- Signs of religious beliefs go way back to 100 000 BC to Neanderthal hominids;

- The worship of the mother goddess can be dated to before 30 000 BC;
- Religion in Palestine (e.g. Jericho) can be dated back to at least 8 000 BC;
- Etc.

From this perspective, having a deity arriving on the scene late in the second millennium BC appears very suspicious indeed – especially given the fact that, according to many Old Testament texts, this deity claims to be the first and the last (i.e. the only god who actually really ever existed). Combine this with what has already been pointed out regarding Yahweh's own knowledge, morality and divine socio-political set-up etc. as being identical to that of Iron Age humans and the farce is exposed. Yahweh stands unmasked as a human creation who has no idea of history before the second millennium BC. He is blissfully unaware of just how late an arrival his alleged revelations actually are. As such he is exposed as the belated creation of Iron Age humans who created him in their own image and not vice-versa. He is a character of fiction and therefore does not exist.

8.2.3 The problem of all-too-local origins

It is not only Yahweh's all-too-recent arrival on the religious scene that gives the game away. There is also the matter of Yahwism's all-too-local origins.

When it comes to the supposed geographical location where the worship of Yahweh might have originated, Old Testament scholarship is not bereft of a variety of mutually contradictory hypotheses. As noted earlier, the interested inquirer will encounter theories of the supposed Egyptian, Babylonian, Hittite, Kenite, Midianite, Canaanite or Phoenician origins of Yahwism.

Whatever one may think of the merit of any particular theory or whether any of them are actually correct is, for present purposes at least, irrelevant. What is important is to take cognisance of the fact that all these theories assume a very local and limited region in which the worship of Yahweh might have originated. Moreover, when one reads the Old Testament, it is not only the Old Testament people who believe in a world not much larger than the ancient Near East. To be sure, the god Yahweh depicted in the text, aside from believing in a sky kingdom and a netherworld under a

flat earth also does not seem to be aware that he created other continents like the Americas, Australia, etc. He knows nothing of sub-Saharan Africa, the Far East or the islands of the Pacific.

The people of these far-off places had their own religions long before Yahwism even arrived on the religious scene. None of these people knew anything about the one and only Yahweh of Israel notwithstanding the deity's own delusions of universal recognition (cf. Mal 1:11-12). Even worse, if the Old Testament is anything to go by, neither does Yahweh seem to know anything about them. Surely, this seems to unmask the fact that the all-too-local Yahweh is a creation by the humans of a particular region and not vice-versa.

As argued earlier, one can also point to the insights of ecological anthropology and environmental psychology with regard to the way humans create their deities in the image of the surrounding environs. It was noted that Yahweh's actions and alleged divine interventions in this world are wholly bound up with all-too-natural geographical aspects of Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula. This seems to imply that Yahweh was no more than the people's idea of a supposed human-like entity orchestrating the changes in their natural and social environment. It was their anthropomorphic projection of an alleged superhuman entity behind all the astronomical, meteorological, ecological, oceanographic and geological processes of the region.

Of course, one need not even mention the fact of an almost infinite universe which, according to the Old Testament, seems also to have been unknown to Yahweh. That the Creator of the Universe, if such a being exists, looks and behaves just like a human being living on Earth in the ancient Near East during the Iron Age seems ludicrous. Are we really to believe that, should there happen to be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, such beings also worship the god Yahweh? Why, the mere posing of the question seems to lead to the awareness of the total incredibility of the Old Testament's meta-narrative (cf. Sagan 1996:71).

Like the argument from all-too-recent origins, the argument from all-too-local origins exposes the cult of Yahweh as another demonstrably human creation with no extra-

textual divine reality to back it up. The scandal of particularity is indeed scandalous in as much as it yields another piece of evidence in support of the devil's advocate's main thesis. The ontological status of Yahweh is probably not very different from other local divinities like Baal, Marduk, Zeus, Jupiter, Cis, Quitzalcoatl, Modimo or whoever else one may wish to name (cf. also Nisker 1998:120). In short, like these local deities from pagan mythology, Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts does not really exist.

8.2.4   The problem of the Old Testament as a record of revelation in history

The Old Testament is traditionally perceived to be a record of divine revelation in history. Though one expects fundamentalists to contend for the historicity of biblical stories, the concern for a historical basis of Old Testament narratives was also prevalent in the writings of the so-called critical scholars, particularly those of the "biblical theology movement" (cf. Ramsey 1981:115).

Certain biblical theologians practised critical biblical research and disavowed supernaturalist understandings of Scripture that accepted miracle stories and references to direct divine causation at face value. Nevertheless, they believed that a truly biblical theology has to speak about Yahweh's "acts" in some objective way. While accepting the laws of natural causation and the principle of uniformity in nature, they believed that it was nonetheless imperative to continue to speak of God "acting". The biblical language could not simply be discarded as was done in the older liberalism where there had often been a recasting of theological affirmations in human, natural terms; theology and biblical narrative were reduced to statements about this worldly phenomena (cf. Ramsey 1981:116).

Because of the desire to recapture for theology the transcendent dimension that had virtually been eliminated by the humanistic and naturalistic thinking of the older liberalism, it was frequently asserted that the god of the Bible had an objective reality because he revealed himself in actual events. It was claimed that, among the world's religions, Christianity seems to be the only one that takes history seriously, for it assumed that the knowledge of God is associated with events that really happened in human life (cf. Wright & Fuller 1960:07). They spoke of the objectivity of God's

historical acts in contrast to the subjectivity of inner, emotional, diffuse and mystical experience (cf. Wright 1952:55).

Two concerns were mingled together here which are shared by many believers who do not necessarily share all the aims and assumptions of this movement:

1.   The desire to establish the distinctiveness of the biblical religion over against other religions (cf. Wright 1952:38-46).

2.   The apprehension – though not always explicitly expressed as in the writings of conservatives – that a religion which cannot offer some empirical, objective claims for its claims will be unable to command the allegiance of modern, thinking people (cf. Ramsey 1981:116).

The revelation of the biblical God in historical events was thought to offer both a distinctiveness vis-à-vis the gods of other religions and an objectivity that would appeal to the empirical orientation of modern thinkers. Because it was from actual events that the biblical storytellers inferred the presence of God (which was supposed to be another way of saying that God revealed himself in history; cf. Wright 1952:44), the biblical religions were thought to have an empirical anchor lacking in other religions. The shortcomings in this notion of revelation in history were, however, soon pointed out (cf. Barr 1966:193-205).

To hold that historical events were the essential medium of divine revelation is to invite the criticism that this is not the way the Old Testament actually represents Yahweh's people from gaining knowledge of him. Such knowledge is frequently received, according to the texts, through direct appearances, intervention and verbal communication; it is not depicted as arising from retrospective contemplation of events. If one claims that revelation came through inferences drawn from events, one is describing the process differently than the Bible does (cf. Barr 1966:197).

Another problem with this position which holds that knowledge of Yahweh is imparted though historical events is that it does not adequately account for the knowledge of Yahweh attested in literature such as the wisdom writings or psalms

where there is often no reference to historical happenings. If revelation is through historical events, how does one explain the sense of Yahweh manifested in these "non-historical texts"? (cf. Barr 1966:72-73)

Again, if it is events which mediated revelation, one is confronted with a complex situation in trying to comprehend such diverse "events" as the fall of Jerusalem, the exodus from Egypt and the account of the great flood from which Noah was spared within the same rubric. Here are accounts of Yahweh's acts which most commentators would claim stand at varying distances from historical facts. To speak of God being revealed through history and then to try and embrace such diverse episodes as these within a single framework is more confusing then helpful (cf. Barr 1966:198-199).

Even apart from these deficiencies, the "revelation through history" program really cannot provide either the distinctiveness or the objectivity its supporters hoped for (cf. Ramsey 1981:117). The notion of a deity taking an active part in historical events was not so unusual in the ancient world as the writers in the field of biblical theology were inclined to think. The Hebrews were by no means the only people who conceived of their God as effecting his will in the course of historical happenings.

Albrektson (1967) has conveniently gathered together references ranging from the third millennium BC down to the first, and from peoples like the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, and Moabites in which deities as diverse as Dagan, Ea, Marduk, Chemosh, and the goddess of Arinna exercised an influence on the happenings of history. The Old Testament ideas of historical revelation must be counted among the similarities, not among the distinctive traits: it was part of the common theology of the ancient Near East (cf. Albrektson 1967:114).

Without a verifiable event at the basis of a biblical story, it was apparently feared by many that the biblical witness lacked objectivity and might be suspected of propagating an illusionary faith. But the emphasis on historical events behind the stories does not assure the hoped for objectivity any more than it assures its distinctiveness. The rootage of a theological affirmation in an historical event does not guarantee that the theological affirmation is not illusory. Events are subject to

various interpretations. A diversity of theological inferences can be drawn from a single verified event (cf. Ramsey 1981:118).

The success of Cyrus II ("the Great"), king of Persia, in overthrowing the Babylonian empire in ca. 539 BC would be accepted by any historian as an objective, historical event. The Israelite prophet of the exilic period (Deutero-Isaiah) attributes Cyrus's achievements to the leading of Yahweh, god of Israel (cf. Isa 45:1-6). But in his own description of the events, Cyrus assigns the credit to Marduk, god of Babylon, who was desirous of punishing his own people (cf. Pritchard 1959:315-316). The believer might well point to a verified event and say, "Behold, the work of God!" but there seems to be nothing in the event itself which confirms such an assertion. The perception of the event as an act of God may still be an illusion.

Even if historians succeeded in establishing, beyond a doubt, that certain Old biblical scenarios have some historical counterpart, this proves nothing regarding the ontological status of the god Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. Thus, even if sometime in the late second millennium BC a group of slaves escaped from Egypt under the leadership of a man named Moses and eventually made their way to the land of Canaan, this does not prove that there is a god Yahweh who made this possible.

Claiming that Yahweh does exist given the discovery that certain events referred to in the text actually did take place is a non-sequitur. Such an assertion would be no more convincing to the objective historian than when the factuality of the war mentioned on the Moabite stone can be hailed as automatically validating the existence and intervention of the god Chemosh which is depicted as a causative factor in the process.

The historian can investigate the question of Abraham's historicity and reach conclusions, via historical analysis, about the possibilities of his having actually lived and migrated to Canaan. But the historian cannot apply his tools to the question whether this migration – if it occurred – was actually directed by the god Yahweh (cf. Ramsey 1981:118). Though by invalidating biblical history it is possible to prove that Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist, it is impossible to attempt the opposite. One

cannot validly conclude merely on the basis of the historicity of some biblical character or event referred to in the text that Yahweh himself actually exists.

Moreover, if the historicity of the text and its theological veracity is to be salvaged it is not enough to simply prove that there is an historical kernel to events. What needs to be proven is not that there was a local flood, a migration from Mesopotamia by Semites, a historical Moses, the escape of a few slaves from Egypt, a conquest of Canaan, a King David, an exile, etc.

If realism is to be salvaged it is not to be via a confirmation of a bare minimum or something more or less like that recounted in the Bible. Rather, Yahweh-as-depicted can only be conceived of as real if the details of all the depictions of scenarios in which he was involved are factual. Unless the exact details of the Old Testament's stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. are true, realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh inextricably linked to those details remains problematic and so does the belief regarding supposed revelation in history. Since such confirmation of the detail in the text is not possible, opting for realism remains a choice based on non-rational reasoning.

Moreover, not only does such verification seem impossible (time travelling is science fiction; there are contradictory accounts of the same events; etc.) but any appeal to a historical minimum is actually an implicit claim that the details of the narratives are indeed fictitious. In other words, if there was really an exodus but it was merely a small group of slaves who succeeded in escaping then the biblical text with its reference to the plagues and the exodus of twelve tribes of over two million people is technically fiction. Of course, since Yahweh is a character in the story, as depicted he himself must be a character of fiction as well. In short, no god has been revealed at all in the discourse of the text.

According to Wright (1950:22; 1952:44), the particular advantage of Old Testament religion was supposed to lie in its interest in historical events.

> The Israelite knowledge of God…was not founded in the first instance on the numinous awareness of nature, as was the case of polytheism. It was based on historical events.

> Israel's doctrine of God…was not derived from systematic or speculative thought, but rather, … from the attempt to explain the events which led to the establishment of a nation.

A close scrutiny of the writings of these biblical theologians, however, reveals that they were saying that what was objectively perceptible was not, in fact, divine workings at all. It takes the eye of faith (or credulity?) to "see" God's action "through" the objective perceptible events. Real and merely secular events are interpreted *as if* it was God's activity (cf. also Pannenberg 1968:12; 1977:124).

According to Wright (1952:44), the knowledge of God was an *inference* from what actually happened in human history. Ontologically then, the presence of a god called Yahweh in these historical events can therefore not be considered as being any more certain than the alleged presence of pagan gods in the history of any of the other ancient Near Eastern peoples (cf. Ramsey 1981:119).

8.2.5   The all-too-human history of the Old Testament texts as alleged divine revelation

According to popular traditional orthodox belief, the Old Testament was written by a few individuals who were all inspired by Yahweh to write down his revelation to the people (cf. Hanson & Hanson 1989:09). Yahweh appeared, spoke, acted and guided the people to preserve the memories of such momentous occasions. Privileged and inspired authors wrote down the accounts of Yahweh's acts and thus the very words that the god allegedly spoke to his people. Individuals like Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, the prophets and Ezra were the ones allegedly responsible for the creation of the texts we now call the Old Testament.

Though not unheard-of in earlier times, it was particularly since the nineteenth century that the supposed origins of the individual books of the scriptures became the subject of intense research. Since then, many interpreters of the Old Testament have

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questioned and criticised what they perceive to be an erroneous view of the way in which the Old Testament texts came to have its final form. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, some of the unorthodox results of these scholars' research are particularly relevant to the devil's advocate's present concern with meta-textual history.

8.2.5.1   The Old Testament as pious fraud

Long before the rise of historical-critical analysis, the traditional beliefs regarding the authorship of many Old Testament texts came under suspicion (cf. Teeple 1982:12). Many Jewish, Christian and pagan interpreters noticed oddities, historical errors, anachronisms, doublets, contradictions and other unorthodox elements in the texts that made it impossible to persist in holding fast to beliefs cherished by popular tradition. Subsequently, via source criticism, textual criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism and form criticism, it has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that most of the Old Testament books were composite compilations not written by their purported authors (cf. Coote 1990:01; Barton 1991:05).

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in detail the arguments that have been forthcoming and as they pertain to each book of the Old Testament with regard to the questions of authorship, sources, redaction and all the peculiarities of the whole editing and copying process. However, as is well known, the following general conclusions of critical scholarship were not exactly welcomed by those who subscribed to the traditional beliefs on the question of authorship (cf. Friedman 1987:1-117; Sabourin 1969:25-31; Murphy 1993:11-18; Weiser 1961:153-216):

- Moses did not write the Pentateuch;
- David did not write the Psalms attributed to him;
- Solomon did not write the wisdom literature;
- Prophetic books like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel were not written by their purported authors.

Unless one actually reads the arguments against the traditional views it is all-too-easy

to dismiss it all as, for example, liberal nonsense based on unbiblical secular assumptions, rationalism and anti-supernaturalist ideology (cf. Archer 1992:12,28,29 and passim). Such an explanation and attempted refutation of the findings of critical scholarship is flawed for three reasons:

1. Not all critical scholars who question traditional scholarship fit the "straw man" profile constructed by conservative apologists.

2. Many critical scholars became anti-supernaturalist and subscribed to secular and rationalist assumptions *only after* discovering that the conservative beliefs they once cherished had no basis given the nature of the texts themselves.

3. The validity and merit of the arguments against traditional authorship are not dependent on whether or not the scholar endorses stereotypical liberal ideology but are convincing irrespective of whether or not one shares their theological assumptions.

To illustrate the validity of these claims, one need only take a closer look at some of the actual arguments against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The contents of these arguments suggest that their liberal conclusions are not inextricably bound up with the assumptions and ideology of liberal theology.

As Soggin (1990:81-82) and Harwood (1992:137) note, the following reasons constitute the main thrust of the critical argument against the traditional belief that Moses wrote the Pentateuch:

- The last chapter of Deuteronomy describes the death of Moses and claims that no one has ever succeeded in finding Moses' grave. As such, it implies that the text was not, in fact, written by him; this is generally recognised even by those who maintain the traditional opinion.

- In a variety of contexts, one often encounters the formula, "until this day" (cf. Deut 3:14; 34:6). This formula evidently indicates a later age and marks a contrast

between the later time and the time of Moses.

- There are to references in the text to the "time when the Canaanites still dwelt in the land" (cf. Gen 12:6; 13:7). This presupposes a period many centuries after Moses, when the Canaanites have either been assimilated or driven out and consequently no longer lived there. This was certainly not the situation at the time of Moses' activity.

- In Genesis 40:15 Canaan is "the land of the Hebrews". This is evidently an anachronism going back to a time not much earlier than that of the Philistines. One finds the same phrase elsewhere in this period (1 Sam 13:3): the mention of Hebrews in the traditions of the oppression in Egypt is obviously another matter.

- There are anachronisms pertaining to geographical references (Gen 14:14 mentions Dan, which is thus named only from Judg 18; cf. also Deut 34:1).

- Genesis 36:31 mentions a king in Israel, which implies a period of writing not earlier than that of Saul, in the last decades of the second millennium BC.

- Numbers 21:14 mentions a source that contains material on the exodus and the march across the desert.

- In Genesis 50:10; Numbers 22:1, 32:32, 35:14; Deuteronomy 1:1,5, 3:8, 4:46, etc., the territories east of the Jordan, in which, following the traditional itinerary, Israel arrived before its entry into Canaan, are regularly called territories on the *other* bank of the Jordan. This presupposes the point of view of an author or tradent who is already living in Palestine. Moses, however, as is known, never entered it.

- There are numerous parallel passages or contradictions in the Pentateuch with regard to theology, ethics and supposed historical events. This rules out the probability of a single author and points, rather, to a somewhat complex redaction (cf. the creation accounts of Gen 1:1-2:4a vs. Gen 2:4b-25; the traditions of the

origin of worshipping Yahweh by name in Gen 4:26 vs. 12:1 vs. Ex 3 and 6; etc.)

- Deuteronomy 34:10 claims that, in the subsequent history of the people, there has not been a spokesman for Yahweh comparable to Moses. This implies the presence of a perspective of someone living long after Moses and subsequent to many other spokesmen with whom he can be compared.

- The claim that Moses was the meekest or most modest man on the face of the earth in Numbers 12:3 is self-refuting if Moses had written it of himself and is unlikely to have been a form of self-praise.

- The language in the Pentateuch is not monolithic from a linguistic perspective and suggests that various texts were written during different times, in different dialects and thus by different authors.

- There is no record of a text prior to the fourth century BC that ascribes to the belief that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch.

In other words, as a result of the close reading of the Pentateuchal texts, the composite nature of this body of literature soon became apparent. From the perspective of source-critical analysis, a book such as Genesis could not possibly have been written by Moses. Instead, it became apparent that the first book of the Old Testament was the work of several authors plus a couple of redactors. Consider, for example, the following instance of source-critical delineation of the text in Genesis 1-11 (cf. Harwood 1992:218).

GENESIS 1-11

P 1:1-2:3…R 2:4a…J 2:4b-2:24…R 2:25…J 3:1-3:7a…R 3:7b…J 3:8-10a…R 3:10b…J 3:10c-3:11a…R 3:11b…J 3:11c-4:26…R 5:1-5:28…J 5:29…R 5:30-5:32…J 6:1-6:4a…R 6:4b…J 6:4c-6:8…R 6:9a…P 6:9b-6:22…J 7:1-5…R 7:6…J 7:7-7:8…P 7:9…J 7:10…P 7:11…J 7:12…P 7:13-16a…J 7:16b…P 7:17a…J 7:17b…P 7:17c…J 7:17d…P 7:18-7:21…J 7:22-7:23…P 7:24-8:2a…J 8:2b-8:3a…P

8:3b-8:5…J 8:6-8:7a…P 8:7b…J 8:8-8:12…P 8:13a….J 8:13b…P 8:14-19…J 8:20-22…P 9:1-17…J 9:18a…R 9:18b…J 9:18c…R 9:18d…J 9:18e-9:22a…R 9:22b…J 9:23-9:27…R   9:28-10:1…P   10:2-10:7…J   10:8-10:12a…R   10:12b…J   10:13-10:19…P 10:20…J 10:21…P 10:22-10:23…J 10:24-10:30…P 10:31-10:32…J 11:1-9…R 11:10-11:27a…P 11:27b-11:28…J 11:29-11:30…P 11:31…R 11:32…

P   Priestly writer

J   Yahwist

R   Redactor

Similarly, the rest of the Pentateuch is demonstrably the result of composite authorship (cf. Friedman 1987:194-202). The identification of the sources may vary with regard to the extent of each and their mutual relations as different scholars find different reasons for assigning certain verses or subsections thereof to different hands. This lack of consensus, however, hardly implies, as some conservatives claim, that the identification of sources is a completely arbitrary affair on which no agreement is possible (cf. Archer 1992:19).

Moreover, though the findings of source-critical delineation are not universally accepted and despite the fact of ongoing modification and refinement of the method, no better explanation of the sources underlying the Pentateuch has been forthcoming. Even should the day come when the documentary hypothesis of JEDP + (2)R is totally abandoned, it will change nothing with regard to the objective reality of the subtle tensions, contradictions, anachronisms and historical errors in the text that led to the repudiation of the belief in Mosaic authorship in the first place. Whatever one makes of the innumerable variations in the text with regard to vocabulary, style, genre, details and perspectives, the basic problematic that gave rise to the various source-critical theories is more resistant to disposal than any theory constructed in response to it.

"Fine and well", says the historical-critical scholar. But the philosophical-critical analyst in the person of the devil's advocate who intends to spell out the supposed anti-realist implications of this for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text of the Pentateuch cannot stop here. If Moses did not write the Pentateuch whilst

so much of the material in books such as Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are presented from the perspective of either Moses or someone close to him, realism becomes problematic. Since many of the texts feature either what Yahweh allegedly told Moses to write down (cf. Ex 20-40) or what Moses says in the first person (cf. Leviticus, Deuteronomy), if Moses was not the author, the texts in question might well be products of legend, fiction and retrojective ideological projection.

"Fine and dandy", say the literary- and ideological-critical analysts. However, once again the philosophical critic interested in spelling out the implications of the Pentateuch as "pious fraud" cannot stop here. The devil's advocate is of the opinion that if what we have in the texts are not, as was once believed, the accounts of eyewitnesses, realism even regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted must also collapse.

If the relation between the Pentateuch as text and extra-textual reality is indeed that of legend, fiction and ideological construction then the character Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts of the Pentateuch also has the ontological status of a fictitious entity and literary construct. Whatever God or Yahweh there may be, if the texts are not historically factual then the versions of Yahweh found in those texts are also not historically factual (cf. Cooper 1889:29). In other words, whatever theological, existential, symbolical or metaphorical truth sophisticated modern and post-modern theologians may derive from such fictitious history, the fact remains that Yahweh as thus depicted had no exactly corresponding extra-textual counterpart. In short, he does not exist.

The same scenario recurs in spelling out the ontological implications of the invalidation of other views regarding traditional authorship. Consider, for example, the belief that David wrote the Psalms attributed to him. The references to scenarios that only happened after David's death (e.g. the psalmist alluding to the acts of another king, to the temple or to the exile, etc.); the contrived and late headings of certain Psalms; and the nature of the Late Hebrew vocabulary – all of these unmask the Davidic psalms as the products of later hands.

If this is the case then Yahweh-as-depicted in the Davidic Psalms did not really, in the

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past, act in relation to the historical David as the texts claim. Therefore, whatever Yahweh or God might exist, the character Yahweh-as-depicted in the same texts is a literary construct and a character of fiction. In short, he does not exist.

The same is true for the deity as depicted in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. In most cases only a small part of the books can be reasonably associated with the prophet once believed to have written the lot (cf. Blenkinsopp 1984:02). According to the findings of biblical criticism, in many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, a second, third or even fourth author writing as though he was the original prophet had a hand in the composition of the "original" text. In many cases, post-exilic schools and communities were also responsible for reinterpreting, composing, and editing much of the material (cf. Smith 1971:72).

Source-critical analysis has thus identified a host of interpolations, insertions and subtle modifications of an earlier original text. To illustrate this claim of the composite nature of the prophetic books, the devil's advocate provides the following example of an abstract of the source-critical delineation of the book Micah

MICAH

A 1:1-13a…I 1:13b…A 14-3:8a…I 3:8b…A 3:8c-3:12…B 4:1-4:4…I 4:5…B 4:6-9…I 4:10…B 4:11-5:2a…I 5:2b…B 5:2c…I 5:3-5:4…B 5:5-5:14…I 5:15…C 6:1-6:9a…I 6:9b…C 6:9c-7:7…D7:8-7:17a…I 7:17b…D 7:17c-7:20

A   Micah (700 BC)
B 2nd Micah (after 586 BC)
C 3rd Micah (400BC)
D 4th Micah (300 BC)
I   Undatable Interpolation

Alternatively, take the prophet Isaiah: one only has to read the book in the Hebrew to notice that chapters 1-39 could not possibly have been written by the same person that wrote chapters 40-55 or 56-66. Or what about the book Daniel: as discussed in the previous chapter, this popular book contains numerous historical errors and fiction.

Moreover, its prophecies are vague and become more detailed and historical as the second century approaches. Thereafter, however, the discourse becomes increasingly vague again and stands exposed as errant since the world did not end following the demise of the Greek Empire.

Source-critical delineation of the type demonstrated above exploded the traditional beliefs regarding traditional authorship, the inspiration of individual and original writers, the passive role of copyists, the static and unmodified nature of the original tradition, innocent and careful transmission, etc. However, though historical and literary critics may be satisfied in merely noting that both the prophets Isaiah and Daniel as thus depicted are technically characters of fiction, a philosophical-critical analyst like the devil's advocate wonders what now happens to the ontological status of the deity depicted in those texts.

If the prophets as they are being depicted in the Old Testament texts are technically characters of fiction who did not really do what the texts claim they did, realism regarding the deity worshipped by those prophets also collapses. If there was no Isaiah who wrote chapters 40-66 and no Daniel who did all the wonderful things the texts ascribe to him, then the god Yahweh who spoke and acted in relation to these characters of fiction must himself be a fictitious entity and a literary construct. In other words, if Isaiah and Daniel as thus depicted never existed then obviously neither did the god Yahweh, at least insofar as he was depicted as being a part of the lives of these imaginary people.

Any appeal by liberal theologians to the fact that "pious fraud" was the convention of writing religious literature at the time throughout the ancient world and that it is therefore a mistake to judge the biblical authors is itself a deceptive attempt to salvage realism. It is quite irrelevant what the conventions of the time were. Even if this was the case it changes nothing about the fact that the scenarios that the texts depict are wholly fictitious.

At least from an ontological perspective (as opposed to a theological/mythological one) and contrary to liberal apologetics, the fact that the traditional authors did not write the books ascribed to them makes a world of difference. If the theory of

traditional authorship, along with the theory of mechanical verbal inspiration, is discarded, all justification for the belief that the books contain a record of the acts and words of an extra-textual Yahweh evaporates like mist before the rising sun. That is the very reason why conservatives understandably shy away from the critical reconstruction. They know all-too-well what the implications of pious fraud and literary fiction would be for the ontological status of the deity Yahweh as depicted in the text.

As Spangenberg (1998:57-58) observes, because the biblical authors were traditionally considered to be authentic witnesses to divine revelation and instruments of divine inspiration, it was once possible to believe that the Old Testament was **the Word of God**. Subsequently a paradigm shift occurred as theologians discovered more and more problems pertaining to such a description of the actual nature of the biblical texts. As a result, the confessional statement regarding the nature of the Bible was slightly modified by progressive theologians who suggested that the texts represented not so much the words of God as such but rather **God's words in human speech.**

Eventually, however, since the rise of the post-modern period, another paradigm shift occurred and it became necessary to modify even the latter confession on the nature of the Bible. Claiming that the Bible was still God's word but in human speech appeared to be less than satisfactory given the recent trends in biblical criticism, theology and philosophy. On hermeneutical grounds it was subsequently decided that one should think of the texts as **human words about God** (cf. Spangenberg 1998:58; see also Wheless 1926).

Based on the findings in his research for the case against realism, the devil's advocate himself considers all of the above confessions untenable. Every single one takes the existence of God for granted and assumes that the contents of the biblical texts justify this assumption. In view of all the arguments thus far presented in the case against realism and all those to follow, the devil's advocate thinks it may be time for yet another paradigm shift.

The new confessional formula must take account of the fact that realism pertaining to

the ontological status of Yahweh a.k.a. God has become immensely problematic. In our times – wicked times indeed when silence might be more apt – there is only one satisfactory way of speaking about the Old Testament (and, as we shall see, the New Testament as well). Given the validity of the case against realism, these texts cannot be described as being the "word of God", "God's word in human speech" or even "human words about God". Instead, all that is warranted in the classification of this collection of texts, if one has to limit oneself to the construction of derivations of the original "Word of God" phraseology, would be to think of it as **human words about an allegedly existing god**.

In other words, given the invalidation of the belief in traditional authorship and therefore the collapse of the old theories of inspiration and authority, what was once considered to be a dictated record of divine words can now only be considered as being yet another example of all-too-human ideology based on projection and the will-to-power (cf. Fox 1991:02).

The existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text (a.k.a. the God to whom the human words allegedly witness) can no longer be taken for granted. Whatever actual historical people may have been the prototypes for the characters traditionally believed to be the authors of the Old Testament texts and whatever deity may actually exist is, for the present, irrelevant. If the characters also purported to be the authors of the Old Testament books are literary constructs resulting from legend and constituted by fiction then, technically, the god Yahweh who revealed himself to and inspired these paper people must himself necessarily share their insubstantial ontological status.

8.2.5.2 The problem of the text

Suppose one happens to be a conservative Old Testament theologian who naturally claims to be a realist when it comes to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. One believes that the Old Testament is in all respects inerrant – at least in the original autographs. Alternatively, suppose one is not altogether conservative and do not believe in the traditional beliefs of the authorship of the biblical texts. Yet one is still a realist and also adamant in one's theological research that the focus should be

on the "final form" of the text.

Apart from the immensely problematic issues raised by higher-critical analysis, another devastating blow to realism pertaining to the depiction of Yahweh in the "original autographs" or "final form" of the text can be found within "lower criticism" a.k.a. textual criticism. What is problematic regarding any appeal to the autographs or "final form" of Old Testament texts is that, technically, neither of these things actually exist.

As Teeple (1982:81-85) observes, the following findings of text-critical research shows the ignorance involved in the claim to have access to the original autographs or final form of the texts of the Old Testament (cf. also Deist 1988:10-83):

- None of the original texts have survived.

- The oldest texts of the Old Testament would have originally being written in a different script than that of the quadratic Aramaic alphabet, e.g. paleo-Hebrew, and this would imply an altogether different set of possible copyists' mistakes.

- In the earliest textual witnesses there were no spaces between different words and no vocalisation whatsoever. Alternative vocalisation and division may change the meaning of words and sentences completely. Given the substantial number of instances where such alternative readings are possible and even probably correct, there is no guarantee that the traditional Masoretic renderings present the readers with the original wording and message of any Old Testament text.

- There are over 800 000 variant readings attested in the Hebrew MT textual witnesses alone.

- There are over 6000 variant readings between the MT text of the Pentateuch in BHS and the Hebrew text of SamP.

- There are many thousands of variant readings between the Hebrew and Greek textual witnesses. Sometimes it would appear that the Greek text may be based on a pre-Masoretic Hebrew text and therefore closer to a hypothetical original that frequently contradicts every Hebrew textual witness we have access to. Even so, many of the Greek Old Testament texts (including those often quoted by the New Testament authors and early Christian theologians in order to prove a point) are, in fact, mistranslations from the Hebrew source. The LXX also contains a great number of theologically motivated alterations of the Hebrew texts.

- There are also some serious differences between the actual contents of some of the MT and Greek Old Testament books. A book like Jeremiah is longer in the LXX than in the MT and the more authentic version may actually be the Greek one. At other times, as in the case with the books of Job and Daniel, the length of Greek text is different from that of the MT even though, in this case the latter may be more authentic.

- There are also thousands of variant readings between the MT texts and the oldest Hebrew texts in our possession, i.e. the Qumran texts. On the one hand, these texts, like those of the LXX, often seemed to be based on textual traditions not utilised by or available to the Masoretes and to which we have no access. On the other hand, as was the case with the texts in the LXX, the texts from Qumran show evidence of creative alterations of earlier textual witnesses on the part of copyists with different ideological agendas.

- Many MT textual witnesses themselves contain a substantial number of scribal errors, editing, omissions, theologically motivated modifications and explanatory glosses.

- The (hypothetical) pre-biblical textual sources mentioned in the text (The Book of Yashar, The Book of the Truth, The writings of Samuel the Seer, The writings of Nathan, The Book of the Wars of Yahweh, The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, etc.) from which the Old Testament authors apparently got some of

their information are unavailable for confirmation of what textual tradition may be more original than the others.

- The oldest complete codex dates from the time of the Middle Ages (circa 10th century AD) and even here many obviously errant renderings occur.

The fact that both scholarly reconstruction and all modern and ancient translations/ copies are already interpretations of texts no longer available (which are themselves interpretations of other texts/events and so on) cannot be reassuring for the realist. In other words, talking like some academics and preachers about *the* meaning *of the original Hebrew text* or "*the text* of *the* Old Testament*"* (as if not only the text but also the canon was actually fixed) borders on the mythical.

Of course, not only do we not have any original texts but, as source, tradition and redaction criticism have shown independently of text-critical analysis, even the supposed original texts themselves are dynamic, composite and fluid entities which were modified over the years of their reception. In other words, the historical perspective provided by higher criticism has made even the idea of an original text as such problematic.

All present texts and translations of the Old Testament are therefore definitely *not* a blueprint of a supposed original. Moreover, all present renderings are technically no more than hypothetical reconstructions. They are the creations of textual critics who have to work constructively and creatively with a plethora of variant readings, unoriginal formats and distinctions, and a host of conflicting and incomplete data. These facts about the nature and history of the Old Testament texts reveal that what is now the Old Testament is not a fixed, stable, well definable or perfectly reconstructed entity.

All talk about or appeal to entities such as the supposed "final form" of the text or to the "original autographs" of scripture must therefore be judged as positivistic, idealistic and historically naïve. These notions are perfect examples of the fallacy of essentialism. We have to accept that nothing of what we have (or could have) provide us with any direct access to the supposed original autographs that conservatives

consider to be inspired and supposedly inerrant scripture. Moreover, it is doubtful whether any original text, even if we had access to it, would be any less vulnerable to the devil's advocate's arguments already articulated earlier in the case against realism.

If this is the case and there is technically no such thing as the text of the Old Testament then, at the smallest and most basic level of textual referentiality, certain ontological problems arise. If the text is not fixed, then neither can the characterisation of Yahweh-as-depicted therein be fixed. If "the text of the Old Testament" is itself a scholarly construct, does it not follow that, technically, Yahweh-as-depicted-in-the-text must also be considered to be little more than a "scholarly construct"?

8.2.5.3   The ontological problem posed by the development of religious beliefs

One will often hear someone referring to "the Old Testament view" regarding a certain topic. Whether it concerns God, ethics, creation, death, eschatology, the Spirit or whatever, else, it is not uncommon to hear people claiming that such and so is what the text coherently and systematically has to say about the particular matter. However, at least as far as the devil's advocate is concerned, all this talk about a unified and monolithic Old Testament view of a certain issue is nonsense – there ain't no such animal!

Already in chapter 2 of this study, it was argued that there is no "Old Testament view" of *Yahweh* given the contradictions in the texts regarding his nature, will and actions. Moreover, both tradition and source criticism made the idea of a unified theology impossible.

In the present section, however, the devil's advocate intends to elaborate on the nature and extent of pluralism in the Old Testament. It will insist that not only does the Old Testament contain contradictory views about its paramount god (Yahweh), it also contains contradictions concerning just about any topic one can think about. Whether it concerns the doctrinal loci of protology, thanatology, ethics, eschatology, messiology, cosmology, demonology, angelology, pneumatology or whatever else,

there is no coherent Old Testament perspective on any of these issues (cf. Deist & Du Plessis 1982:19).

As noted earlier, in the Old Testament one encounters the god Yahweh who at one time believes that there are other gods and on another occasion denies the reality of these entities. One finds the belief in creation by theomachy and creation without theomachy. There is the belief that children will be punished for the sins of their forefathers and the belief that such a morality is abhorrent. According to certain texts there is life after death in relation to Yahweh whilst other texts denies that the dead and Yahweh have anything in common.

Some passages suggest that Yahweh is only the god of Israel whilst others are more universal in outlook. There are texts implying that Yahweh cannot be seen, that he knows the future, that he does not cause evil. Then there are those texts implying that all the aforementioned beliefs are wrong. One could go on forever in this fashion showing the contradictions in what the Old Testament supposedly says on just about any topic (cf. Montague.1976:02)

Historians of Israelite religion and Old Testament theologians do not all approach these contradictions in the same way. During the previous two to three centuries it was popular to account for the discrepancies along the lines of a developmentalist conception of the evolution of Israelite beliefs. Nowadays one hears more about pluralism, competing ideologies and theological variety (cf. Brueggemann 1997:38-39).

However one intends to account for the discrepancies between the religious ideas of certain texts vis-à-vis other texts, the fact that the various religious communities throughout Israel's history held mutually exclusive views in relation to each other and/or changed their minds over time is of secondary importance. *What is of primary importance is to take cognisance of the fact that not merely the Hebrew people but also Yahweh himself is depicted in the text as holding mutually exclusive views on many issues and as changing his mind over time.*

The fact that there are paradigmatic developments to be found in the character Yahweh's own religious beliefs pertaining to issues of theology, ethics, thanatology, eschatology and a host of other loci is devastating for realism in Old Testament theology. The people (and their god's) beliefs did not simply *develop* as a result of *supplementary* or *complimentary* progressive revelation. Beliefs *changed* via *paradigm shifts*, *competition* between *mutually exclusive* ideologies and *contradictory* perceptions of what is what.

The change of beliefs – not only among the people but also concerning what Yahweh himself thinks about a given issue – gives the game away. It unmasks Yahweh as a historically and culturally relative human construct. It shows that there is not really a god who believes those things and actually revealed what he knew to the people. Instead, what we have here are the views of people who in every subsequent period of their history created a god called Yahweh in their image.

Of course, conservative theologians deny the existence of this embarrassing problematic. Liberal theologians, on the other hand, though taking cognisance of its reality represses the obvious anti-realist implication of it all. These strategies of evasion can be explained from the fact that there are only two options available to the theologian once the development of religious beliefs in the Old Testament has been acknowledged:

1. The various depictions are all true and Yahweh-as-depicted does change his mind as humans do about religious issues.

2. The various depictions do not reflect actual reality. In each case Yahweh's own supposed beliefs is not really that of the deity but merely what the Old Testament authors projected onto him as a character in their texts.

Since the first option is unthinkable, as Yahweh should know what is what (being a god and all), liberals will probably opt for the second. But how, the devil's advocate asks, is this any different from implying that the versions of Yahweh in the text depicting him as holding mutually exclusive beliefs about certain issues are wholly fictitious? And if the depictions of Yahweh are fictitious, does this not mean Yahweh

depicted as believing contradictory things about various matters does not and cannot exist? Moreover, if Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist, what grounds remain for believing that there is still somehow a real Yahweh behind all the fictitious depictions at all?

8.2.6 There is no Old Testament view of "God"

One reason critical scholars are not bothered by theological pluralism and an all-too-human origin of the depictions of Yahweh in the text is because they consider the discourse to provide a historically and culturally relative view of "God". With such a designation it is insinuated and assumed that there is a God and that the Old Testament merely provides us with some particularly Israelite views of Him. The reality of a divine nature is taken for granted and so is the belief that the Old Testament witnesses to that particular reality (cf. Anderson 1962:417).

However, as Davies (1995:21) notes, the substitution of "God" for "Yahweh" may be presumptuous given the lack of correlation in associative meaning supplied by some of the readers when they read what they believe about "God" into each reference to "Yahweh". When contradictions and unorthodox elements are found in the discourse, this is not taken as indicative that Yahweh does not exist but as being an expected part of historically and culturally relative human conceptions of the ultimate and actual divine reality.

Such a perception of the relation between Yahweh-as-depicted and what is assumed to be the God who actually exists is yet another example of evading the real issue. It represses the fact that the people of the Old Testament are not depicted as living in a world where the divine activity was all that hidden and ambiguous as modern theologians suggest. The texts do not give the indication that, though the reality of the deity can be affirmed, the rest of the God-talk is merely a human interpretation and a metaphoric recasting of authentic religious experiences.

On the contrary, rather than being a matter of fideistic faith, the Old Testament claims that a deity exists who actually spoke, appeared and did miracles. The texts present the deity's theophanies as though it was a case of empirical and supposedly

indisputable facts. Old Testament theologians who speak of the Old Testament "view" or "perspective" of "God" reveal presumptuousness and unfair bias on their part since the authors of the Old Testament never intended to provide such a relative, provisional and qualified theology.

It is not as if the authors of Old Testament texts would agree to the claim that their theological ideology is but their own fallible view of an extra-textual God and that other peoples have their own views to which they have a right. Never do they suggest that other peoples might have their own valid albeit different perspectives on the same divine reality to which all-human religion supposedly allude (cf. Clines 1995:111).

The distortive influence and inconsistency involved in of speaking of "God", rather than of the god "Yahweh", can also be seen in the way Old Testament scholars speak about other deities. For example, these scholars will usually not say that *The Iliad* and *The Oddessy* present the Greek view about "God". Nor will they think of suggesting that the texts from Ugarit give us the Canaanite view of "God". The texts of Babylonia and Assyria are not considered to provide us with the Babylonian and Assyrian views of "God".

To be sure, one suspects that such scholars will, in their treatment of pagan mythologies, not speak of "God" anymore but that they will instead refer to the specific deities in question. Apparently, only the Old Testament speaks of "God"; the other texts speak of mythical entities like Re, Ammon, Marduk, Shamash, El, Baal, Zeus, or Apollo.

If these scholars were a little more consistent and objective, they would not speak of the Old Testament's view of "God". Instead, they would aim to be more precise by assuming that all the Old Testament provides us with is a people's views of its own god called "Yahweh". Like the Greek, Canaanite and other religious texts, the Old Testament discourse is concerned with a specific deity.

Since the texts pretend to express the views of Yahweh himself in actual and normative fashion, it follows that if the deity Yahweh-as-depicted is not real, realism cannot be salvaged by relativising the discourse and seeing Yahweh as a primitive

version of "God". As is the case with pagan mythologies, if the deity a depicted in the ancient discourse is unreal, realism cannot be maintained by relativising the theology of the text and suggesting that the god in question still somehow exists but we have to think about him in new ways.

One might as well try to update Zeus or Baal. One might as well claim that even though such deities are obviously fictitious entities, Baal or Zeus per se still exists. The texts merely present us with the Greek and Canaanite views of "God". Analogously, trying to equate Yahweh with "God" despite the collapse of realism with regard to the depiction of the particular deity in the Old Testament is equally impossible. If Yahweh-as-depicted is not real then the god Yahweh does not exist – not even as "God".

8.2.7   A History of repressed anti-realism

According to the devil's advocate, the entire history of Old Testament interpretation in its various cultural contexts can be reconstructed from an anti-realist perspective. Such a viewpoint reveals that the collapse of realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is not a phenomenon restricted to the post-Enlightenment period. To be sure, throughout the history of interpretation, those who have read the text have experienced some sort of tension between their own views of divinity and the representation of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts.

Reconstructing the entire history of interpretation in detail is beyond the scope of this study. However, as a preview of what such a history might involve and how its broad and general outlines may be constituted, the devil's advocate has decided to overstate its case by reading the history of interpretation as a history of repressed Yahwistic atheism.

8.2.7.1   Repressed anti-realist tendencies in the Old Testament

As noted in the second chapter of this study, already within the Hebrew Bible itself, the collapse of realism becomes apparent. This can be seen in the ways in which the authors and redactors of the texts related to their sources and the received traditions.

Through reinterpretation, modification, censoring, editing, redaction, recasting, recontextualisation and rearticulation, many of the writers tried to present their audience with a contemporary orthodox, relevant and updated depiction of Yahweh. This intra-textual collapse of realism has been amply demonstrated by the disciplines of source, tradition, redaction and ideological criticism as well as through the history of religion and Old Testament theology.

Critical Old Testament theology acknowledges the fact of intra-canonical diversity that is not constituted by mere supplementary and complimentary perspectives on one central element but by extreme tension, deliberate reinterpretation and intentional polemical and apologetical agendas. The dilemma posed for realism by the intra-textual pluralism within the Old Testament cannot be alleviated by recourse to theories of supposed progressive revelation or theological perspectivism.

The Old Testament texts show a marked tendency for intra-religious critique and the deconstruction of established theological dogma. Some authors, redactors and editors apparently did not think too much of the depiction of Yahweh in other sources, traditions, books, etc. Comparisons between texts like Genesis 1–11 vs. Isaiah 40-55, Exodus vs. Jeremiah, Proverbs vs. Ecclesiastes, Deuteronomy/Ezra/Nehemiah vs. Ruth, Nahum vs. Jonah, Samuel-Kings vs. Chronicles, etc. all reveal that, for certain authors, realism pertaining to earlier depictions of Yahweh was no longer tenable.

As a result, when it comes to the issue of whether realism pertaining to the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament as a whole is valid the implied answer must be in the form of a question. Which Yahweh? Which depiction? Which book's ideology? Which source's ideology? Which stage of transmission? In short, the pluralism in the Old Testament texts themselves witnesses to the fact that technically, Yahwistic atheism is already present within the earliest stages of interpretative history.

8.2.7.2   Repressed anti-realist tendencies the textual variants (LXX, T, SamP)

As Deist (1988:90) notes, the translation of the Hebrew in the LXX shows a marked tendency to counter what the translators considered to be unorthodox and

unbelievable elements in the traditional depictions of the Israelite deity. On a substantial number of occasions there is a tendency to recast the discourse in a form that is more orthodox or related to contemporary beliefs.

There are small but marked differences in matters of historical data and frequent attempts at harmonisation occur. Many obviously unfulfilled prophetic predictions were rewritten to lessen cognitive dissonance and salvage realism. The connotative and denotative meanings of words were altered. The depictions of the deity himself in the Greek translations reveal an aversion to anthropomorphism and to monism in the actualisation of evil. In short, many elements of the Hebrew text were unacceptable and an embarrassment to later theological sensibilities (cf. also Hanson & Hanson 1989:144).

Moreover, as Teeple (1982:122) observes, the translators of the LXX held views of history, God, morality, cosmology and other issues that were typically that of a post-exilic form of Judaism. These views have developed to such an extent from pre-exilic ideology that there was an urgent need for the creative and deliberate recasting of much of the discourse. The changing hermeneutics of both reality and scripture can be seen as having been influenced substantially by the larger Hellenistic cultural context.

The Greek world of the time had witnessed the relative atheism of certain philosophical traditions (such as Ionian naturalism) and in the religious scepticism of philosophers like Xenophanes, Protagoras, Socrates and others. The once idolised deities of Homeric mythology were also felt to stretch the bounds of credibility and were no longer all that believable. Not surprisingly therefore, the theological sensibilities of some of the Greek texts of the Old Testament reveals the need to repress the collapse of realism with regard to earlier now unacceptable depictions of Yahweh (cf. Thompson 1998:335).

The discourse of the Aramaic Targums with all its extensions and explanations also manifest a tendency to read later theology into the *textus receptus*. This strategy is also indicative of a repression of the collapse of realism in as much as it was felt that the text needed to be explained whilst at the same creating a different depiction of the divine character altogether. As was the case with the LXX, the targumists often

deliberately altered the discourse of the Hebrew texts.

Thus, there are numerous reinterpretations, modifications and distortions in the targums pertaining to the historical, prophetic, ethical, and theological discourse of its Hebrew sources. The ways in which the targumists altered the received tradition to update its theology and render it more orthodox by contemporary standards reveal the fact that for these authors Yahweh-as-depicted in many an ancient Hebrew text was no longer a believable entity but an embarrassment (cf. Deist 1988:145)

As Deist (1988:177) observes, the many obvious differences between the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch with regard to the depictions of Yahweh also reflect anti-realist tendencies. For the Samaritan community, realism pertaining to the traditional depiction of Yahweh was problematic in as much it contained an ideology that, according to Samaritan orthodoxy, did not represent a true account of the nature and the will of the God they worshipped. No Yahweh gave the law on Sinai and the one depicted as doing so was considered to be a character of fiction.

Since the Samaritan community accepted only the Pentateuch – and one with a very different view of what Yahweh allegedly said and did – they considered all the prophets apart from Moses (their version of him of course) to be sorcerers and liars. As a result, they insinuated that the particular version of the deity Yahweh who appeared to and spoke through the later canonical prophets did not really do so and therefore did not exist.

8.2.7.3   Repressed anti-realist tendencies in the apocrypha and pseudepigraphic literature

In the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts of the Old Testament there are numerous allusions to the books that now constitute the Hebrew canon. These allusions often contain additional information and legendary embellishments to the extent that it creates, in a subtle manner, a rather different theology of the original story (cf. Deist 1988:108). There is also a marked tendency to rewrite history and to qualify and recast many of the less acceptable depictions of the god Yahweh.

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Many attempts were made to remove embarrassing anthropomorphisms in the texts. Repressive reconstructions were necessary to absolve Yahweh of a causative role in the actualisation of evil through the creation of a more complex demonology. Too much divine immanence and direct revelation in the older sources were equally unacceptable. Such ideas were considered to be too crude to be real and had to be done away with by creating a host of intermediary beings (angels) to avoid direct contact between humans and Yahweh. Moreover, since many of the heroes of faith had questionable profiles, there was a need to romanticise and idealise the moral character of many an Old Testament character (cf. Deist 1988:110).

Miscellaneously, as Teeple (1982:78) notes, room was also created for the insertion of additional explanatory details to Old Testament narratives, to prevent the offensive elements from being taken as such and to guide the reader in finding a more congenial ideology in the text. In short, through such strategies of rearticulation, the authors of the apocrypha made it more than apparent that for them too, realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted was problematic and had, in fact, already collapsed.

8.2.7.4   Repressed anti-realist tendencies in the New Testament

According to the "devil's advocate", the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament, whether it pertains to the MT, LXX or some other source, shows that for these authors as well, realism regarding many a depiction of Yahweh in the scriptures were out of the question.

When it comes to the actual details of history, ethics, messianic prophecy, demonology, cosmology, thanatology and eschatology, there are numerous and substantial contradictions between the New Testament texts and that of the Old (cf. Barr 1984:35). Though this can partly be explained by the fact that the authors often utilised the LXX and inter-testamentary traditions, it changes nothing about the reality of the contradictions in question. The way particular New Testament writers handled the texts of the Old Testament shows that these are people for whom the original literal sense of the texts no longer has the power to convince.

As Harwood (1992:208) suggests, the way in which the gospel authors read their own beliefs about God, His messiah, sin, salvation, life after death, morality, etc. back into the Old Testament can be taken as indicative of repressed anti-realism. Though Jewish exegetical conventions of the time made it possible for them to do so, this changes nothing about the fact that the Old Testament texts did not mean what the New Testament writers claimed it did. All their quotations from the Old Testament, whether to show that Jesus fulfilled supposed messianic prophecies, or to settle a moral or theological argument, can be seen as distortive of the plain sense of the Hebrew Old Testament text. One needs only to observe the way in which the Old Testament texts have been reinterpreted, modified and distorted by the New Testament authors to realise that what the Christian writers believed to be the case was demonstrably not "according to the scriptures" (cf. Hanson & Hanson 1989:135).

More specifically, when it comes to certain individuals' handling of the Old Testament traditions, the anti-realist tendencies can hardly be more obvious.

As Armstrong (1993:92) implies, the way the Jesus of the *kerygma* spoke of Yahweh is indicative of a man who can no longer bring himself to believe in the deity as depicted in many an Old Testament text. One needs only to consider how Jesus thought of Yahweh as a loving father who had very little to do with evil and who did not really meant what he said concerning food taboos, Sabbath rest, ritual impurity, attitudes toward enemies, equality in god-forsaken Sheol, the *political* Davidic messiah, etc.

The discrepancies between the "Father" Jesus revealed and "Yahweh-as-depicted in the text" reveal the mind of a man who simply cannot entertain a consistent and subservient realism with regard to most of the Old Testament depictions of Yahweh. In this case, any theory of supposed progressive revelation is useless as a means of salvaging realism and as an attempt to account for discontinuities between the two Testaments.

When we come to John's view of God as "love", always opposed to the evil and the one who has abandoned the "Jews" and "the world", it is clear that the man no longer believes in the reality of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts. That deity,

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unlike John's "Father", was not beyond causing evil and conspiring with evil spirits. Yahweh most certainly had a dark side and equating him with "love" is hopelessly repressive of the actual state of affairs (cf. chapter 3 in this study).

The same repression of Yahwistic atheism can be seen in the ideas of James who claimed that the real God was beyond both change and the need to tempt people. His deluded belief that Yahweh rewarded Job for his "patience" shows someone who actually considered the Old Testament god too unorthodox to be real, hence the need to update him considerably by distorting the plain sense of the "perfect law" (cf. Barr 1984:55; Hanson & Hanson 1989:138).

When it comes to Paul's view of Yahweh as the universal Lord and Father of all mankind who allegedly planned the atoning death of the Messiah since the beginning of time to save even the gentiles, one can only respond by saying "you could have fooled me!" Moreover, Paul's quotation and interpretation of texts from the Old Testament not only involve a distortion of details and economy with the truth but an amount of eisegesis and reinterpretation that is remarkable. It would seem that virtually in each case the texts of the scriptures have outlived their original purpose and usefulness.

Of course, one may grant that Paul's exegetical methodology was part of and legitimised within his Hellenistic Jewish cultural and intellectual tradition. The man may even be acquitted from the charge of a deliberately intended deception of his audience. However, this changes nothing about the fact that the Old Testament texts did not mean what the creator of gentile Christianity claimed they did (cf. Mckinsey 1995:189-190).

Ultimately it is clear that, from an Old Testament perspective, Paul's views regarding, for example, sexuality, circumcision and the question of food taboos reveal the thought of one for whom the depiction of Yahweh issuing his eternal commands no longer holds water (cf. Mckinsey 1995:188). Even the founder of Christianity was, according to the devil's advocate, an atheist in relation to many of the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts.

8.2.7.5 **Repressed anti-realist tendencies in early Judaism and Christianity**

In early post-biblical Judaism, the interpretation of the canonical text in the Mishnah and Gamarah (= the Talmud) and the differences between the various Talmudic traditions also indicate the creative reinterpretation of traditional materials for contemporary purposes. The need to recast and add to tradition is no more than another way of indicating, amongst other things, an embarrassment with realism pertaining to the theologies of Yahweh in the traditional texts (cf. Teeple 1982:22). The amount of *haggadic* embellishments and creative *halakha* in the post-biblical material seems to blur the boundaries between the real and the fictitious to the extent that all become suspect with regard to the possible relation to extra-textual reality.

Of course, it is quite true that the ancient Rabbis were masters at spotting problems and contradictions in the text. Unfortunately, their propensity for harmonisation and illogical rationalisation did little to salvage realism of the biblical texts. Even their fascination with *gematria* (interpreting texts via the eisegesis of esoteric numerical symbolism) can be seen as a covert form of repressed anti-realism among these creative (re) interpreters of the texts of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deist 1986:11).

Another way of perceiving the early traces of the collapse of realism concerns the ways which the early Christians handled the Old Testament. This includes the way the Old Testament was interpreted in the writings of both the Apostolic and Church fathers. The popularity of the allegorical method in the Alexandrine School of interpretation, the Marcionite controversy and the debates between Christian apologists and pagan philosophers (e.g. Celsus, Trypho, Porphyry, etc.) all reveal a repression of the strain realism was taking (cf. Teeple 1982:29-31).

The early Christians' propensity for ransacking of the Old Testament for proof-texts in support of Christian dogma is also indicative of the same dilemma (cf. Teeple 1982:32-35). Though all the parties involved cannot be charged with insincerity, as they were understandably children of their cultural and historical contexts, this makes no difference to the fact that the Old Testament did not say what they claimed to be the case.

As Teeple (1982:35) notes, already in the Early Church certain individuals had some reservations regarding full-blown realism pertaining to the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts. People like Origen, Augustine, and numerous other interpreters of the texts from the opposing Alexandrine and Antiochene schools made cryptic remarks in their own commentaries that show them taking the strain.

Origen got himself into debates with Jews who claimed that Christians misinterpreted the Old Testament texts to make it support Christian dogma. He himself began to show repressed anti-realist tendencies in his synopsis of the Greek translations of the Hebrew texts. It was all-too-clear that the texts themselves lent no support for what the New Testament authors and later the Church would do with them (cf. Gibson 1998:27).

The same dilemmas surfaced in Origen's commentaries on the Old Testament. In his commentary on Exodus, when Origen came to the passage where Yahweh discusses the use of a frying pan with Moses, he simply could not believe that the God of the Universe would bother to elaborate on such a mundane topic as a kitchen utensil. Consequently, he insisted that this and other similar texts should be interpreted allegorically and did not believe in realism regarding the depictions of Yahweh according to the plain sense of the text (cf. Hanson & Hanson 1989:31).

The popular and eminent Saint Augustine also struggled to repress his own Yahwistic atheism. Being familiar with Greek philosophy he initially found the biblical text to be nothing but crude and ridiculous superstitions (cf. Rogerson 1983:29). Ultimately a psychological guilt complex led him to swallow his pride and accept the scriptures as the "Word of God". His anti-realist reservations, however, never left him completely as is clear from the way he deals with certain unbelievable elements in the text in his commentary on Genesis 1-11 in his "*City of God*".

As Barton (1998:28) notes, like fundamentalists before and since, Augustine had to resort to harmonisation, reinterpretation, ad hoc conjectures and rationalisation in order to salvage the credibility of Yahweh's profile and acts in the creation account and the flood narrative. He apologises for the crudeness and fantastical elements in the text by claiming that these were merely part of God's accommodation to the

limited perspectives of the ancient people. Reading between the lines, however, it becomes obvious that here is a man that just cannot simply bring himself to admit that though he could still believe in a philosophically updated divinity, he just was not able to believe that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text actually existed.

As Deist (1988:191-192) observes, what was later to become the normative translation of the Old Testament text for the Roman Catholic Church, i.e. the Vulgate of Jerome, like its predecessors, shows the need for subtle albeit small modifications with regard to the literal sense of the text. This Latin translation contains many words with different connotative and associative meaning than the Hebrew it was supposed to render exactly. Ultimately, this state of affairs can be seen as representative of yet another indication of the repression of the problems pertaining to realism regarding the depiction of Yahweh in the texts.

8.2.7.6   Repressed anti-realist from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment

The way that philosophy became the handmaid of Old Testament theology among Jews and Christian interpreters during the Middle Ages and in the scholastic period could also be taken as indicative of being symptomatic of deep-seated underlying problems with realism in Old Testament theology (cf. Teeple 1982:38). The ways in which Jewish and Christian Old Testament interpretation had developed by the time of the Renaissance and the popularity of philosophical-theological eisegesis and the fourfold interpretation of the texts seem clearly indicative of realism taking the strain.

According to Guillaume (1938:415), it is generally assumed that a modernist critical approach to the Old Testament began with the Deists, Richard Saint-Simon or even later, in the 19th century. Be that as it may, during the eleventh century there lived a critic of the Bible few scholars know about and who was a definite forerunner to the modern interpretation of the Old Testament texts. Though historians of Old Testament interpretation might note the critical elements in Jewish scholars like Abraham Ibn Ezra and Isaac ben Jasos who lived during this time, it was actually an Arabian scholar and Islamic fundamentalist who may well have been one of the first exponent of later higher criticism.

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In his attempt to prove that the Holy Scriptures of all other religions except Islam were rroneous, a Spanish Arabian nobleman named Ibn Hazm made a pioneering contribution to the deconstructing of realism in Old Testament interpretation. Unbeknownst to most modern and contemporary scholars, this Muslim pointed out examples of polytheism, anthropomorphism, historical errors, errors in chronology, numerical absurdities, multiple sources and many other embarrassing elements in the text. His conclusion was that Yahweh-as-depicted cannot be equated with the real God and that the Hebrew Bible was composite and a forgery. In short, this educated and perceptive Old Testament critic was an anti-realist and 800 years ahead of his time (cf. Guillaume 1938:415-420).

In the Jewish interpretation of the period, Moses Maimonides wrote what he called (a) "*Guide for the Perplexed*". In this work he denied that the real God had body parts in manner the texts depicted Yahweh as having. He rationalised his claims by asserting, as so many scholars before and after him would do, that the language of the Old Testament depicting an all-too-human deity was actually all along intended as metaphorical rather than literal descriptions of the actual form of the deity (cf. Rogerson 1983:47).

Since Maimonides did not believe that the real God ever literally appeared to people or spoke with them, he claimed that such stories in the text must all be interpreted as the result of visionary experiences. Moreover, since the real God could not possibly have human emotions, those texts depicting Yahweh himself as perplexed, repenting, unreasonable or throwing a tantrum must *ipso facto* be anthropopathic or symbolic discourse that was not literally true. In other words, for Maimonides, Yahweh-as-depicted did not literally exist (cf. Rogerson 1983:48).

As Armstrong (1993:229-230) notes, this period also saw the "five proofs for the existence of God" constructed by Thomas of Aquino, the famous Catholic philosopher and fan of Aristotle. Yet for all his effort, the god of the philosophers whose existence he attempted to prove has little in common with the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament. The same can also be said for the "perfect" God of the ontological argument articulated by Anselm of Canterbury.

During this period in the history of Christianity, it is all too apparent that even those who would consider themselves biblical theists did not really believe in Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. What they did believe in was a philosophical construct created to repress the fact that the god of the Old Testament was no longer a believable entity (cf. Armstrong 1993:231-232).

During the period of the Renaissance there was a sudden surge of interest in the mythologies of classic Greece and Rome (cf. Grant 1998:20). Of course, this did not unduly bother the Church, as the interest was more of a literary than a religious variety. Theologians and philosophers attempted to show the superiority of the Old Testament religion vis-à-vis pagan mythology. However, the obsession to do so eventually led to quite the contrary of what was initially envisaged.

Later on, by the time the nineteenth century would come around, the study of myth that began here during the renaissance would lead to an unexpected discovery. As Grant (1998:21) observes, "By attempting to show the mythical and mostly fictitious nature of the religion of others we have discovered the mythical and fictitious nature of our own." This realisation was, as suggested, not immediately apparent to everyone.

With the reformation during the sixteenth century and the reformers' creed of "*sola scriptura*" and *"sacra scripture ipsuis interpres"*, the collapse of realism in the preceding period had become manifest. As Deist (1986:12) reminds us, what counted as "scripture" for Martin Luther was not the original meaning of the canonical 66 books of the later Protestant Bible. Rather, the "word of God" was what he, the man Luther, considered to be consistent with his own appropriation of Pauline soteriology.

Luther, so beloved by many a conservative scholar of our own time, had no problem writing off the ideas of both Old and New Testament authors whom he considered to be saying something different than what he believed Paul should be saying. Instead of "scripture alone" and "using scripture to interpret scripture", Luther's "canon in the canon", carried to its logical extreme, is no more than yet another repressed form of Yahwistic atheism.

John Calvin was also someone who had to repress his own Yahwistic atheism and could not admit to himself that he did not believe in Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. In his commentary on Genesis, when dealing with the creation of the waters above the firmament in Genesis 1, Calvin admitted that, according to common sense, it was incredible that there should be such waters above the stars. Yet like conservatives repressing their own anti-realism before and since, Calvin believed he had found a way around the dilemma. He claimed that the idea of waters above the firmament was not incredible if one allowed that what was described was the creation of the world as understood by the primitive Israelite people. He suggested that he who would learn astronomy should go elsewhere…the waters mentioned in the text are such as the "rude and unlearned" may perceive (cf. Gibson 1998:40).

With this suggestion Calvin was blissfully and conveniently ignoring the fact that, according to the text, it was the deity himself who decided to create the world this way and who himself believed that world was constituted this manner. Yet, because of repressing this fact – as liberals still do when they claim that the error and superstition are merely due to *Israel's* limited views – Calvin did not seem to realise what he was actually insinuating. What Calvin needed to repress was that his own god must have been as "rude and unlearned" as his speechwriters.

Moreover, as Gibson (1998:41-42) notes, when the Old Testament texts presented certain depictions of Yahweh where he appeared in a less than orthodox guise, Calvin just could not believe in the reality of the deity as depicted in the text. When the scriptures seemed to imply that Yahweh was not omniscient or omnipresent, or when the deity was depicted as repenting or as the cause of evil, Calvin resorted to the same rationalising apologetics that Christians before and since his time were prone to. Since the real God could not possibly have been such and done so, the plain sense of the text needed to be repressed and reinterpreted to harmonise the obvious discrepancies with orthodox dogma.

With the period of reformed orthodoxy following the reformation, the collapse of realism is yet again repressed in the way the Old Testament was roped in the service of supporting Protestant dogma (cf. Hanson & Hanson 1989:25; Rogerson 1983:44). The self-deluding belief in the simplicity and coherency of scripture along with

manifest tendencies for harmonisation and christological interpretation reveal another generation of people who, though they sincerely believed in their own version of "The Lord", could not quite accept Yahweh on his own terms.

The alleged return to scripture since the Reformation was not, as might be assumed, a return to Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. On the contrary, it was simply a subtler version of dogmatic eisegesis and religious ideology, which, like the Catholic approach it rejected, was incapable of belief in the reality of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century saw the rise of Deism in both Church and scholarship (cf. Scholder 1990:07). This movement had its origin in England and was a philosophical form of religion that accepted reason as its guiding principle. It was also prevalent across the Atlantic in America (cf. Brown 1969). It was a modernised and watered down version of Christianity that was merciless in its criticism of Yahweh and the Old Testament religion. Deists like Thomas Paine (1891) wrote many vicious critiques of Old Testament religion and delighted in debunking realism in biblical theology.

Whilst still believing in "God" as a supposed necessary scientific "hypothesis" (as Voltaire believed), the deists also criticised the Old Testament for its abhorrent moral ideologies and its unorthodox denial of an afterlife. Once again, the anti-realist tendencies of the movement were clear to all who would recognise it. Despite affirming their belief in the Christian God, the deists denied just about everything else in the Bible and certainly did not believe that Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament text was anything other than a character of fiction. English deism, when it subsequently spread to America and Germany, would also play a substantial role in the renewal of the critical approach to the Old Testament (cf. also Ingersoll 1912).

8.2.7.7 Repressed anti-realist tendencies during the Enlightenment and afterwards

During the period of the Enlightenment and with the rise of rationalism and empiricism in philosophical epistemology, realism with regard to the depictions of

Yahweh in the Old Testament soon became very problematic (Drury 1989:04; cf. also Frei 1974:10). In science, the earlier discoveries in astronomy by Galileo (after the Copernican revolution some centuries earlier) destroyed the anthropocentric cosmology of the Old Testament. The pantheistic critique of Old Testament religion by, amongst others, Baruch Spinoza, and the continuation of the Deist controversies all implied that realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh was no longer tenable.

The available options in thinking about what was believed to be divine reality came more and more under pressure during this period (cf. Buckley 1987:3-4). When it came to the nature and existence of God, there were basically two options available to the respectable intellectuals, unless one had already opted for pantheism or atheism – arguably two sides of the same coin. Most religious people were either biblical theists or philosophical deists. Soon, however, it would become clear to those who followed developments in philosophy, science and theology, both views no longer had the power to convince (cf. Armstrong 1993:421).

The Old Testament came to be seen as representative of a very prejudiced religious ideology and, of course, the period of the Enlightenment was characterised by a prejudice against prejudice (cf. Gadamer 1989:241-245). Philosophers such as Kant and Hume showed that the god of deism was dead and indistinguishable from no god at all. All the popular traditional arguments for the deity's existence, the ontological argument, the argument from design and the cosmological argument were shown to be demonstrably invalid. Meanwhile, the biblical god was also on death row and was being dissected in the lecture halls of German biblical criticism (Wilson 2000:414).

It was, however, as Wilson (2000:12) observes, particularly the 19th century that saw realism regarding the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament being attacked from all sides. In the natural sciences, the geological discoveries by Lyell and others, and the biological theories of Lamarck, Darwin and others, exposed the fictitious nature of the history and nature of the world depicted in the Old Testament texts.

The theories of an ancient earth in geology and biology's theory of evolution through natural selection made a mockery of the biblical idea of creation, the anthropocentric view of religion and the arguments of design and teleology that was once believed to

prove the existence of God. Numerous examples of what may be called "bad design" also lent new impetus to the so-called "argument from evil" that would soon be levelled at theism by embittered ex-Christians whose worldview was coming apart at the seams (cf. Tarnas 1991:375).

The theological and scientific debates that followed during the nineteenth century on the relation between evolution and creation were indeed symptomatic of a large-scale collapse of realism (cf. Rogerson 1984:28). The new ideas on the formation of the Pentateuch and the history of Israelite religion presented by scholars such as De Wette at first and later Wellhausen demonstrated that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text was little more than a literary and ideological projection of primitive peoples. The works of other scholars such as Semler, Vatke, Reimarius, Colenso and of the scholars of the German *Religionsgeschictliche Schule* (e.g. Wrede) also contributed to the collapse of realism during this period.

In response to the critical perspective of the above-mentioned scholars, conservatives (Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, etc.) tried desperately to salvage both realism and orthodoxy concerning the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh (cf. Rogerson 1984:29). Their apologetic attacks on the critical reconstructions of Old Testament history and theology were symptomatic of the collapse of realism in German theology.

In a desperate attempt to refute the findings of critical scholars a host of informal logical fallacies were committed. Conservatives objected to the results of higher criticism by appealing to stereotypes such as the supposed vicissitudes of the "Oriental mind", supposed scribal errors, alleged literary strategies of supplementation, "proof texts" allegedly supporting verbal inerrancy, ad hoc conjectures to harmonise contradictions, special pleading to stir up emotions, etc.

As Rogerson (1984:30-35) observes, contributing to the collapse of realism during this period, the influence of philosophy should not go unrecognised. Via the ideas of Van Ranke and Herder (philosophy of history) as well as those of Hume, Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Friesen, Schleiermacher, Hegel and others (epistemology, metaphysics, moral philosophy, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion), the stage was

set for ontological dilemmas.

The new philosophical views to which Old Testament scholars frequently appealed played no small role in providing the hemeneutical assumptions conducive to an anti-realist approach with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the ancient texts.

As Wilson (2000:120-121) recounts, in early sociology, the ideas of Comte, Marx and others proved to be a thorn in the flesh of theistic faith. By the end of the nineteenth century, echoes of the "Death of God" could be heard everywhere in the literature of the day. The atheist philosophers Schopenhauer and Nietzsche foresaw the eventual collapse of realism in biblical theism and initially rejoiced at the prospect.

Otherwise, even they remained rather miserable and embittered individuals. Schopenhauer found himself warming to Hindu philosophy as can be expected from his denial that God "exists" and that everything that is is merely the absurd product of a blind and irrational will-to-live. Nietzsche, however, would eventually become nostalgic for the Old Testament god whose will-to-power he could still admire. Speaking as Zarathustra, Nietzsche would beg Yahweh to return with all his horrors – not long before he finally went mad (cf. Armstrong 1993:371).

Teeple (1982:74) also notes that the latter part of the nineteenth century saw the discovery of the culture and history of Israel's great neighbours, Assyria and Babylonia. The study of ancient Near Eastern comparative mythology got underway as well as the application of this to Old Testament studies. In this manner, the study of the Old Testament had been put into the context of the study of the ancient world and of religion in general to an extent that had never been the case before.

In subsequent archaeology, the discoveries of more ancient Near Eastern texts shattered the illusion of the myth that the Old Testament was in every sense unique and superior in relation to the other cultures of its time. The pan-Babylonian approach to the Old Testament that later followed, though excessive, was symptomatic of the new wave of anti-realism that was to sweep Old Testament interpretation (cf. Hayes & Prussner 1985:255-259). Yahweh, it seemed, had an ontological status no different from older predecessors like Marduk, Enlil, Ea, Shamash, Ashur and a host of other

deities who certainly may have seemed real to those who believed in them but now lie unlamented in the graveyard of the gods.

In this period, numerous and various tensions also emerged in the relation between Old Testament studies and orthodox Church theologies (cf. Brueggemann 1997:57; Wilson 2000:119). This was apparent, one the one hand, in the "modernist crisis" in the Catholic Church where attempts were made to suppress the findings of Catholic scholars after the Pope himself commissioned them to see whether there was anything valid in the findings of critical German scholarship (cf. Harwood 1992:01).

On the other hand, a new breed of fundamentalist apologists in Protestant denominations began to oppose the findings of critical scholarship, which, so they argued, would lead to full-blown scepticism regarding the truth of anything written in the biblical texts (cf. Haley 1992:02). In both cases, those suspected of holding unorthodox viewpoints, be it scholars or clergy, had life made very difficult for them by the ecclesiastical authorities (cf. Wilson 2000:175).

During the 20th century, the collapse of realism gathered pace and was on a roll from the momentum generated during the 19th century (cf. Clements 1983:12). Early in the twentieth century, certain philosophical ideas such as those of Ayer, Russell, Wittgenstein, Sartre, Camus and others seemed to lead straight to atheism. Certain socio-political developments (the two World Wars and the Holocaust) caused great problems for realism in both Judaism and Christianity. So did developments in quantum cosmology and neo-Darwinian biology (cf. Hawking 1988; Sagan 1980; Dawkings 1995; Watson 1995).

Developments in psychology (Freud, Jung, Adler, Ellis, Grof, etc.) added yet more strain to the bruised and battered ideology of realism in Old Testament theology (cf. Tarnas 1991:525). Moreover, the earlier discoveries in archaeology (Ugarit, the Dead Sea scrolls) and the resulting parting of the ways between American and German schools of biblical archaeology amply revealed the problematic relations between the Old Testament texts and extra-textual reality (cf. Teeple 1982:66-68).

Prominent Old Testament scholars of the first half of the twentieth century such as

Herman Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth spoke of Yahweh and the Old Testament texts in ways that made it clear from reading between the lines that Yahweh-as-depicted did not really exist. The generative period of Old Testament theologies (Walter Eichrodt, Gerhard von Rad, etc.) and the rise of tradition, form and redaction criticism as independent forms of higher-critical textual analysis revealed seemingly insurmountable problems in the discipline of Old Testament theology. The ontological implications of the problems were not often spelled out (cf. Brueggemann 1997:35).

The reaction of some theologians to the ensuing crisis with realism in biblical theism was pitiful. Whether one is thinking here of Tillich, Barth, Brunner, Bultmann or whoever else, the discourse of neo-orthodoxy and other forms of pseudo-realist theology was essentially atheistic as far as the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts are concerned. Though many would deny it, reading between the lines of these giants of twentieth century theology, it is clear that they are no more than the new mythologians who have long since discarded a realist believe regarding the ontological status of the Hebrew deity.

Developments in cultural anthropology and the critical study of religion and the new trends in the philosophy of religion revealed also the shaky foundations of on which realism in biblical theism was ultimately based. The rise and fall of the so-called "biblical theology" movement confirmed this suspicion. The obsession to distinguish the Hebrew mind from the Greek worldview and the debates on how one is to understand the concept of an "act of God" (Wright) were little more than an admittance that the discourse of the Old Testament texts were problematic from an ontological point of view. The misguided attempts to prove the superiority of Hebrew culture and language led to the sneaking albeit repressed suspicion that, unless the ideology of the text is made normative, realism regarding the ontological status of its history and theology inevitably collapses (cf. Blaikie 1970:179).

In Britain, during the 1960's, the anti-realism generated by more than a century of biblical criticism would cause a public controversy in the so-called "Honest to God" debates (cf. Robinson 1963). In the United States, as Kolak (1994:71) observes, the "God is dead" theology became so influential that by the end of the sixties one

hundred percent of graduates from Harvard Divinity School classified themselves as "atheist".

Also, during the final quarter of the twentieth century, the epistemological implications of the "Death of God" in the nineteenth century finally hit home. It prompted the emergence of what Nietzsche almost a century earlier had predicted might happen, i.e. the rise of post-modernism. This was and still is a cultural phenomenon where "reality" and "truth" have become meaningless concepts (cf. Cupitt 1989:27).

As a result of the general *zeitgeist*, the popularity of using history as paradigm for interpreting the Old Testament text also came under severe pressure from various quarters (cf. Perdue 1994). A new wave of interpretative methodologies in Old Testament exegesis saw the light and there came a need to focus more on sociological and rhetorical issues. Those who found a refuge in rhetorical criticism, structural analysis, and any of the many other literary and sociological approaches on the market exhibited a general dislike for philosophical and historical issues (cf. Brueggemann 1997:46).

Many of these scholars suppressed their own doubts and theological perplexity by claiming that anyone who wanted to know "what actually happened" or "what was really real" was very naïve. Such questions, it was argued, are the result of a naïve realism, historicism or logical positivism – all pejorative concepts that could settle arguments simply by placing the label (cf. Barr 1999:38).

From the seventies onwards, the popularising of structuralist philosophy in biblical studies led may scholars, especially conservatives, to justify their neglect of the theological problems generated in historical criticism and to focus more on what they believed was the "final form" of the text. The various text-immanent approaches that became popular in many academies during this time provided relief for those who wished to retain scholarly respectability whilst at the same time justifying their avoidance of diachronic dilemmas (cf. Le Roux 1993:23).

As Le Roux (1993:24) notes, what the rhetorical and structuralist scholars did not

realise at first was that, with their ideas of the final text and objective meaning, these approaches were no less positivist and naïve. This realisation, however, did not lead everyone back to a historical approach but resulted in the capitalisation of new developments in philosophy and the rise of post-structuralist and post-modernist hermeneutics and epistemologies (cf. Davies 1995:24).

According to Davies (1995:25), among the new post-modern forms of literary criticism (reader response, deconstruction, etc.), based on a post-modernist philosophy of language as they are, the role and freedom of the reader to generate meaning is highlighted at the expense of the author, the text and the latter's history of reception. Such approaches to the text imply that the texts do not constantly and reliably refer to something objective "out there" – including Yahweh/God – but can only project characters, notions and "narrative worlds". The texts are perceived as unable to represent a reality beyond its own discourse. Hence the possibility to claim that Yahweh is a character in a story, a literary construct and a fictitious entity.

The discourse of another popular post-modern variety of biblical interpretation during this time, i.e. that of the sociological approaches to the interpretation of the Old Testament text, was equally anti-realist. Reading through and between the lines of studies like those of Hanson (1975), Mendendall (1973), Wilson (1980), Gottwald (1986), Overholt (1989) and others, it becomes clear that, as far as these scholars are concerned, Yahweh is just another god like any other mythical ancient Near Eastern divinity. As such he exists only as a sociomorphic projection, an ideological construct and a personification of socio-cultural dynamic. Jargon aside, if the ontological implications of the reductionist sociological approaches are not bracketed but consistently spelled out, it becomes obvious that the deity Yahweh does not really exist at all.

In the disciplines often referred to as "the history of Israel" and "biblical archaeology", the post-modern context has seen the rise of a new quest exhibited in the debate between what has been called "maximalists" and "minimalists" (cf. Barr 2001:57). Yet again, however, what is ultimately at stake is not, as is suggested, whether there really was a patriarchal period, an exodus or a united monarchy. The real problem is not whether the Pentateuch was written by Moses or scribes from the

monarchic period or, as is suggested, by the ruling elite of the Persian period. Though important in the debate, such issues are not intrinsically the need for contention.

The reason why such matters ignite the passion of scholars may very well be what the conclusions on those matters may imply for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts. What is at stake and what the majority of scholars are fighting for is either the salvaging or invalidation of realism in Old Testament theology. It is the implications of the new ideas for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text which make some scholars want to retreat to conservatism to legitimise their hyper-realism theism whilst driving others to liberal or radical viewpoints to justify their own semi-realist or anti-realist ideologies.

Of course, in many instances, in biblical theology and biblical history/archaeology/sociology, the demise of realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh is not made explicit and remains suppressed. Yet for anyone focused on ontology and able to read between the lines, the pervasive anti-realism in Old Testament studies will be all-too-obvious. The continued manifestation of fundamentalism in Old Testament theology on the one hand, and the popularity of feminist, liberationist, African, Black, and other types of radical ideological-critical and deconstructive approaches to the texts are all stark reminders that, when it comes to realism, something has gone horribly wrong.

In other words, from the perspective of the ideological pluralism prevalent in Old Testament theology during the latter half of the 20th century, it is quite clear realism has long ago collapsed. All post-biblical attempts at writing Old Testament theologies can be seen as attempts to cope with this dilemma and involves, in effect, little more than strategies of evasion and repression and the will-to-power.

At the one end of the spectrum, in a form of modernism that is nostalgic for pre-modern naiveté, attempts by conservative Old Testament scholars like Archer (1982), and Kaiser et al. (1996) to salvage the Old Testament for conservative Protestant evangelical theology are pitifully inadequate. The work of these fundamentalists reveals the desperation to maintain a mind-set that has no time for interpretation without the supervision of dogmatic Christian theology. All their attempts to discredit

the caricatures they create of liberal theology convince only those ignorant of the problems with realism identified by the devil's advocate in its case against realism (cf. Barr 1981:22).

The modernist albeit critical approaches of biblical theologians such as Barr and Childs, who in their own ways contributed to the collapse of the biblical theology movement, are no less repressive of the anti-realist implications of their new suggestions for the future of biblical theology (cf. Barr 1966; Childs 1970).

As Brueggemann (1997:91) correctly observes, Child's canonical approach to the text may well be seen as a repressed insinuation that, on their own, what the Old Testament texts have to say about Yahweh are not sufficient as a reference to what the real God is actually supposed to be like. Child's alleged post-critical stance is nothing more than a veiled attempted at reviving a pre-critical reformation approach to the text albeit under the guise of a supposedly respectable form of biblical criticism. The popular idea of acquiring a "second-naiveté" seems no more than a euphemism for living in denial and repression of one's own anti-realist convictions (see Wallace 1990).

The critical approach of Barr with its acceptance of historical-critical perspectives on the text and the frequent need to criticise traditional and popular Christian readings seems equally evasive of the ontological implications being mediated (see Barr 1966, 1973, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2001). Reading between the lines it is clear that Barr is not only interested in showing what the text really means. His desire to show how Church tradition have been mistaken on just about every issue it abstracted from the text, combined with his implicit endorsement of modern Christian theology, reveal a subtle albeit definite anti-realist streak on his part. Despite his desire to elucidate the real meaning of the texts this does not mean he shares its ideologies.

Attempting to attain clarity about what a particular individual Old Testament scholar believes about the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the text is no simple matter, to be sure. While many Old Testament scholars in analysing the text may appear to ascribe to a realist ideology, this is often done merely as a front. As the

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words of James Crenshaw (1995:90) remind us, when it comes to the personal private beliefs of critical scholars, all is not as it seems:

> The accusation of supernaturalism rests on a misunderstanding of descriptive analysis of biblical texts. These may give the impression of supernaturalism, for they accept the imaginary world of the authors, who definitely believed in an interventionalist deity. *By no means does that openness to an alien worldview suggest personal acceptance of it* (emphasis mine).

It should therefore not come as a surprise that even after two or more centuries of reading the Old Testament in ways that implied Yahweh is demonstrably a character of fiction, many scholars still seem to talk about Yahweh as though he had an extra-textual counterpart. Yet one cannot always really be sure by reading the works of descriptive analyses of biblical texts whether the interpreter actually believes Yahweh is real or whether he or she considers the deity to lack any metaphysical substance whatsoever.

Reading between the lines of Barr's "iconoclastic" approach to scholarship, it is clear that realism regarding the world in the text is no longer possible (cf. McKim et al. 1998:426). Christian theology in the modern world, though having its roots in the Bible, is no longer considered as having to be dependent on the Old Testament's ideologies to construct its normative doctrine. Given that what many of the Old Testament texts have to say about Yahweh is not applicable to "God", it follows that, from the perspective of Church theology, if God is real, Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist.

The various problems of contemporary Old Testament theology as noted by Hasel (1982) and Reventlow (1985) also speak volumes for the anti-realist cause. It is admitted that that the Old Testament may have no centre. Furthermore, the relation between Old and New Testaments is extremely problematic and the former no longer seems to endorse the ideology of the latter. A systematic Old Testament theology may be impossible. The questions regarding the role, function and legitimacy of the canon are vexing. The results of historical criticism do not endorse the Church's view of the Old Testament. Moreover, a "history-of-religions" approach appears to make the

ontological claims of biblical theology extremely problematic, etc. etc. (cf. also Clements 1970:20-21).

All this, in one way or another, suggests that realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may be beyond retrieval. Thus, when it comes to post-modern approaches to Old Testament theology (e.g. Brueggemann 1997), there is the explicit insinuation that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text has no metaphysical substance. Though obscured by jargon, euphemism, rhetoric and doubletalk, as is the wont of post-modern discourse, reading between the lines it is clear that something is awry.

Brueggemann (1997:118) may claim to bracket ontology and insist that all talk about what actually happened and what is really real is hopelessly positivistic. Yet more than once, this Old Testament theologian explicitly insists that the god Yahweh has no extra-textual counterpart (cf. Brueggemann 1997:53,58,65-69,83,107,118,572-577, 721-725 and passim). Through his frequent assertions that the reality of Yahweh is dependent on the rhetorical enterprise of the Old Testament text, it is clear that, contrary to anything else Brueggeman might claim, he does not really believe that Yahweh as depicted in the text actually exists in the world outside it.

Moreover, like all post-modern attempts at construing the nature of what is what and what is not, Brueggemann's observations that all critical readings of the text cannot be as objective, innocent or impartial as it allegedly claims to be, apply just as much to his own work (cf. Brueggemann 1997:63). If only consistent, Brueggemann will see that he himself has not, and cannot, discard the Enlightenment project so easily. His magisterial work is itself nothing but his own will-to-power and attempt at establishing a new albeit more subtle form of hegemony in Old Testament interpretation.

Aside from the work of Brueggemann, it would seem that those critical scholars who write in the post-modern idiom have resigned themselves to the fact that Yahweh of Old is a literary and ideological construct. They seem to have accepted the responsibility of the fact that it may be their daunting task and (sad?) duty as the new mythologians to reconstruct and reinterpret the biblical discourse for consumption by

what appears to be a post-theistic culture. The new audience, Christian in name yet anti-realist when it comes to many of the depictions of Yahweh in the text, nevertheless remains hungry for a meta-narrative despite the alleged incredulity towards it.

The self-refuting elements of the post-modern paradigm for Old Testament theology are also quite obvious. On the one hand they claim that there is no privileged reading of the text and no privileged interpretative community. They claim that texts do not have meanings but that readers construct them. They deny the possibility of objective truth and demand that all readings claiming to be correct can be unmasked as a will-to- power, rooted in sexism and result in some or other form of discrimination. They feel that a thousand flowers should be allowed to bloom (cf. Clines 1995:202).

On the other hand, post-modernists feel quite "objectively sure" that the modernist readings are "wrong". Church theology, especially the philosophical variety is thought to be demonstrably untrue. They discriminate against the historical critical approach to the text but do not hesitate to make use of the results of such an approach to endorse their own claims. Moreover, for people who claim that there is no such thing is meaning in texts, post-modernist exegetes seem to know quite a lot about what a particular text (including their own) supposedly does mean.

It might have been better if they had said that there were no facts and leave it at that. But just about every post-modern theologian, after arguing in a very "positivistic" fashion that there is no truth, goes on to tell the reader what is really the case. Moreover, they somehow expect their own texts and its rhetoric to have objective meaning and can become quite disconcerted when other people find a different meaning in what they have to say when it is not what they intended to say. In short, post-modernist approaches end up "deconstructing" themselves, which cannot, in fact, be reassuring to those who buy into a most subtle new sort of hegemony and meta-narrative construal. The claim that there are no facts, only interpretations also refutes itself and therefore cannot be taken seriously (cf. Cupitt 1991:178).

It is therefore understandable why a philosopher like Jurgen Habermas saw post-modernism as a continuation of the modernist project and not as a new phenomenon

that has left the modernist epistemological assumptions behind (as it claims). It is simply modernism becoming conscious of its own assumptions and therefore, in a very real sense, semi-rational *hyper*-modernism. Ultimately, the post-modern hermeneutic of suspicion (via Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) cannot but unmask most so-called post-modern agendas to be just more examples of self-deconstructing ideology and of the will-to-power (cf. Tarnas 1991:411-414).

If it is true that, as post-modernists assert, reality is wholly a human construct and existing wholly within rhetoric, apart from endorsing what can only be classified as a self-refuting form of socio-linguistic solipsism, it follows that Yahweh shares this ontological status. In short, along with just about everything else, though he is "real", technically, he does not exist.

8.2.8   Manifestations of anti-realism in contemporary scholarly ideology

It would be naïve to think that all readers of this study would be blown away and become instant atheists. The history and philosophy of religion provide ample evidence of the uncanny ability people have for dealing with data that contradict what they want to believe.

In this section, the devil's advocate will provide an anticipatory perspective of what can be expected should the case against realism be encountered by scholars with deeply held sincere religious beliefs. The viewpoint to follow is still part of the anti-realist devil's advocate argument and admittedly contains a substantial amount of stereotyping and generalisation. Be that as it may, for present and practical purposes, it aims to provide a useful albeit rough guide to the anti-realist tendencies even in those contemporary scholars who would otherwise profess to be realists.

8.2.8.1   Anti-realist tendencies in conservatism

In referring to "conservatism", the devil's advocate has in mind the type of scholarly communities who believe that:

1. God exists;
2. This God is the God of the Bible;
3. The Bible is inerrant and inspired divine revelation.

Conservatives will generally claim to be realists. Scholarly literature based on this ideology already referred to in this study include the works of Haley (1992), Archer (1992) and Kaiser et al. (1996). Other noteworthy fundamentalist Old Testament scholars include, amongst others, Kitchen, Harrison, and Young. As numerous critical studies have demonstrated, however, the realism these fundamentalists actually fight for has little to do with the biblical texts and everything to do with their theological tradition's dogma about the supposed nature of Scripture (cf. Barr 1981, 1984, Barton 1988:21-29; Carroll 1991:58-72; Hanson & Hanson 1989:27-42; Boone 1990).

As Gibson (1998:25) points out, these are the people who do not read what the Old Testament says but rather what they think it is supposed to be saying. Conservatives exhibit anti-realist tendencies when they:

*   argue for theological unity and coherency of the text by claiming that the only problem is hermeneutical and that any remnants of imperfect discourse about God or morality can be seen as relativised by the supposed progressive nature of revelation;

*   cannot bring themselves to believe in Yahweh-as-depicted in the text but constantly have to mould him into the image of their own theological dogma by endless reinterpretation, selectivity and repression;

*   anachronistically and apologetically attempt to play down, rationalise and reinterpret the anthropomorphisms, psychomorphisms and sociomorphisms in the text;

*   piously attempt to rationalise and explain away the apparent presence of mythological parallels, traces of syncretism and elements of superstition in the texts;

- argue for the scientific inerrancy of the text with an infinite number of creative reinterpretations of both the ancient discourse and that of modern science;

- argue for the historicity of biblical stories with an infinite number of ad hoc rationalisations, conjectures, harmonisations and appeals to authority rather than accepting the text on its own terms;

- bracket ontological problems generated by the history and philosophy of religion by down playing the all-too-human origin, nature and development of Yahwism, the Old Testament as sacred scripture and their own fundamentalist religious ideology.

The devil's advocate reckons that, contrary to both their own claims and popular beliefs, conservatives are therefore, in a very real sense, also Yahwistic atheists in as much as they refuse to believe in most of the versions of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts of the Old Testament. Unacceptable elements are continually repressed, reinterpreted, decontextualised, bracketed or evaded and always harmonised with a view of God derived not from the Old Testament but from their conservative evangelical Christian philosophical theology. Since they believe that the real God is a trinity who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and wholly good, conservatives have to repress the fact that they cannot come to bring themselves to believe in those depictions of Yahweh in the text that contradict these theological reconstructions.

Conservatives will deny that the case against realism as articulated by the devil's advocate should be taken seriously as a proof that Yahweh does not exist. In an attempt to refute the devil's advocate's case they will probably:

- quote a plethora of their favourite carefully selected and dogmatically reinterpreted proof-texts to "prove" the inerrancy and inspiration of scripture whilst asserting that God cannot lie, that Jesus himself believed the Old Testament was the Holy Word of God and that the Holy Spirit assures them of this fact through internal testimony;

- appeal to the work of popular conservative apologists (historians, archaeologists, creation-scientists, theologians, philosophers, self-acclaimed pseudo-intellectuals, etc.) to ensure their followers that all the problems with realism highlighted by the devil's advocate have been dealt with;

- provide examples of what they are desperate to believe were successful attempts at solving particular problems or at providing proof and verification of the historical or scientific veracity of the text, its supernatural inspiration, its unity and coherency and it uniqueness in its cultural context;

- focus entirely on one or two of the more questionable claims made by the devil's advocate, take it out of context, refute it and then generalise that the whole case is unconvincing and hopelessly flawed and need not be taken seriously;

- stereotype the devil's advocate's case as liberal, secular or atheist nonsense and claim that it is nothing novel but merely the product of modernist or post-modernist secular philosophical ideas resulting from biased anti-supernaturalist assumptions;

- claim that the interpretations of the some of the passages quoted in the case against realism are completely incorrect and suggest alternatives to prove inerrancy, orthodoxy and the texts' harmony with conservative dogma;

- attempt to deal with some of the problems presented in the case through certain apologetic strategies involving any of the following fallacies: stereotyping, knocking down a straw man, stigmatisation, psycho- and socio-genetic fallacies, appeals to authority, circular reasoning, begging the question, unwarranted assumptions, economy with the truth, ad hoc hypotheses, imposing jargon, ad hominem critique, changing the subject, appeals to pity, false conclusions, dogmatic eisegesis, apologetic reinterpretation, speculations with no basis in the text, distortion of the issues, etc.

Conservatives will always be more than ready with answers to the problems presented by the devil's advocate. They will not come to the case with the intention of learning the truth whatever that may be. Instead, they have already made up their minds that whatever contradicts what they believe cannot possible be true, even if it is in the Bible itself – hence the need for dogmatic eisegesis, reinterpretation and forced harmonisation.

Moreover, the fundamentalist laity desperate enough to believe anything as long as it salvages conservative dogma will usually accept everything the conservative scholar say no matter how far-fetched (cf. Burke 1984:17). Few lay people of conservative mindset can remain objective enough in reading the literature of their scholars. They have a notorious inability to ask themselves whether the problems their conservative scholars dealt with were really solved or whether one of the informal fallacies noted above may be present in the apologetic discourse.
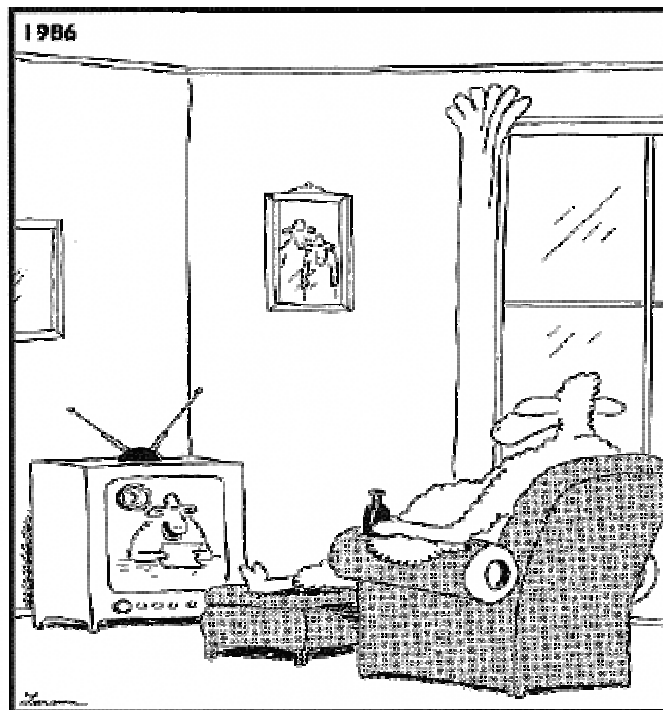
"And this report just in. …. Apparently, the grass is greener on the other side."

In sum then, though conservatives will generally claim to be realists, the realism they actually fight for has little to do with that of the biblical texts and everything to do with their theological tradition's dogma about the supposed nature and expected

contents of Scripture. Conservatives are blind to the fact that the God they believe in is the God of the early Christian philosophers a.k.a. the "Lord", rather than Yahweh-as-depicted in the text.

Conservatives worship an ideal idol that has to be projected onto what would be, from their own perspective, the unorthodox depictions of Yahweh in the Bible. Despite their appeal to hold fast to a "biblical" view of God, apart from not appreciating the problematic nature of such a claim, they are themselves no more "biblical" than the liberals they so like to denounce. The hypocrisy exhibited in their devotion to the Bible coupled with their refusal to let the text speak for itself implies that, technically, even conservatives are anti-realists and Yahwistic atheists.

8.2.8.2   Anti-realist tendencies in critical scholarship

Under the designation "critical scholarship", the devil's advocate refers to the discourse of those who believe the following:

1. God exists (however they may define "God" and "exist");
2. They can call themselves Christian (however they may define "Christian");
3. The Bible contains unorthodox elements, errors, fiction and myth.

Examples of scholarly literature apparently assuming the validity of such a theological perspective that has already been referred to in this study include the works of Eichrodt (1961,1967); von Rad (1962,1965); Childs (1970), Barr (1981,1984,1999), Brueggemann (1997); Fretheim (1984,1998); Gibson (1998); Patrick (1982,1998); etc. According to the devil's advocate, Harwood (1992:274) was succinctly correct when defined liberals as:

> …those Christian mythologians who unhipnotise themselves long enough to realise that their Bible is full of lies but, despite their mythology's total dependence on the Bible's veracity, cannot bring themselves to recognise that without the Bible's alleged revelations, all basis for Christian belief has ceased to exist.

Liberals, though many would deny it (especially post-modern liberals), are in a very real sense onto-theological Platonists. As is the case with Plato's theory of a transcendental world of forms – despite the absence of any perfect form here on earth – so liberals believe in the transcendent reality of a perfect God despite the disjointed, contradictory and admittedly imperfect views people have of him. Liberals have no problem talking about "God" and may even use traditional vocabulary implying that the words "God" and "Yahweh" refer to the same entity. However, getting them to spell out what they mean by words like "God", "exist" and other related concepts can be frustratingly arduous. According to the devil's advocate, it should be clear that though they appear to be realists or semi-realists, liberals are anti-realist in that they:

- admit that the Old Testament contains contradictory perspectives on Yahweh;

- admit that there are unorthodox elements in the depiction of Yahweh which are not true as a description about the nature of the real God;

- insist that the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament are merely Israel's historically and culturally relative human perspective on divine reality;

- admit that there are traces of myth, superstition and syncretism in Old Testament Yahwism;

- admit that the Old Testament cosmology is a fictitious construct;

- insinuate that Yahweh never really appeared, talk and acted precisely as depicted in the texts;

- admit that the history of the formation of Yahwism and the Old Testament can be presented secularly and sociologically as expressive of the all-too-human will-to-power of culturally contingent ideologies.

The devil's advocate, however, finds all liberals' attempts at maintaining a semi-realist approach to Yahweh-as-depicted in the text half-baked. Of course, many

liberals will dismiss the devil's advocate's case against realism as misguided because:

- they will claim that its critique of the Old Testament God-talk is based on a serious misunderstanding about the purpose of the Old Testament as religious discourse;

- they will argue that the kind of philosophical analysis prevalent in the case against realism attempting to prove that Yahweh is not real is based on a misconception of the nature of truth in the symbolic and metaphorical, pre-philosophical and pre-scientific language of the Bible;

- they will dismiss it as resultant from rationalist and positivist assumptions and from a modernistic hermeneutic with a view of history and epistemology that is alien to the culture of the Old Testament peoples and ignorant of the latest developments in philosophy;

- they will convince themselves that one need not pay any attention to this illegitimate enterprise of reading the Old Testament from viewpoint of philosophy of religion which they may feel puts unfair and hermeneutically illegitimate demands on the texts;

- they will rationalise their evasion of ontological problems by claiming that the Old Testament is not intended as a textbook for philosophy, history, science or theology;

- they will agree with some of the devil's advocate's claims but will not be bothered by this as they view the erroneous views pertaining to matters of history, science and theology as simply Israel's limited perceptions thus repressing the fact that Yahweh-as-depicted shared the people's superstitions and that no other Yahweh has thus far revealed himself;

- they will argue that the presence of myth and fiction is no problem and that these genres can equally well serve as a vehicle to communicate profound religious

truth. They will claim that most of the God-talk in the text were in fact, contrary to appearances, never intended literally but always metaphorically and symbolically so that pluralism and anthropomorphism is "no problem";

- they will argue that problems with realism are nothing novel and have been dealt with in the last two centuries of German biblical criticism, dialectical and post-modern theology and philosophy;

- they will claim that it is impossible to prove that Yahweh does not exist and that any attempt to do so is naïve, pointless, ridiculous or theologically immature.

According to the devil's advocate, all such objections are either invalid, irrelevant or both. As such they amount to little more than a masked apologetic attempt to repress the devastating and far-reaching ontological implications of admitting to the all-too-human and all-too-fictitious nature of Old Testament religion and its god. As is the case with conservative apologetics, the liberal varieties are also riddled with fallacies including those of: jargon, doubletalk, repression, appeals to authority, inconsistency, distortion of the issues, selective fundamentalism, begging the question, evasion, irrelevant conclusions, stereotyping, ad hoc arguments, socio-genetic fallacies, half-truths and whole lies.

As Harwood (1992:02) suggests, the sophisticated and dead serious discourse of liberal theologians is nothing more than "faculty-of-mythology" doubletalk that can also be used to "prove" that "The Oddessy", "Guliver's travels" and "Alice in Wonderland" are non-fiction. When confronted in public, liberals say what they know people want to hear. Though they too use words like "God", the "Word", "faith", "truth", etc. they use them ambiguously by equivocating and never being too explicit about what they themselves understand these concepts to denote.

Liberals entertain the self-deluding belief that once you attain a second naiveté, leave fundamentalism and its naïve-realism behind, move up through another stage of faith (Fowler) and come to see how everything is ideological and culturally relative, the problem of realism is no longer worth bothering about. The foundations of their

religious tradition may be destroyed but by harmonisation their cognitive inconsistencies are resolved on a higher level of synthesis facilitated by the ideas of certain theologians, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists. Thus they convince themselves that they can still remain respectable religious believers in a post-modern society. And, despite their claim to believe in God and their praise of the Bible, these people need to hide from themselves the fact that their acceptance of the findings of biblical criticism and modern science implies that they too are anti-realists and Yahwistic atheists.

"Well, thank God we all made it out in time.
... 'Course, now we're equally screwed."

8.3   CONCLUSION

From the devil's advocate's anti-realist perspective, the following conclusions are drawn from the considerations in this chapter pertaining to the implications regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text:

1. All we know about Yahweh we either learn from the Old Testament or, alternatively, from attempting to make sense of nature and psychological experiences from the perspective of scriptural God-talk.

2. It was once thought that the text is nothing less than divine revelation but historical- and ideological-critical types of analysis have shown that both the text and the religion it propagates are all-too-human religious discourse with no more ontological priority than the myths of other peoples.

3. From this it may be concluded that the texts are not accounts of divine revelation at all nor even human words about God; rather they are human fictions about an allegedly existing deity.

4. Since all reason for belief in the existence of Yahweh is thus dependent on the veracity of the Old Testament text and since this supposed veracity has become impossible to maintain, all grounds for realism have ceased to exist.

5. From this and the fact of a history of repressed anti-realism pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text it follows that Yahweh himself must be considered to be a character of fiction.

6. It is therefore concluded that Yahweh is no more real that any other ancient deity and therefore does not exist except inside the text and in the imaginations of those who read it.

The argument from all-too-human meta-textual history is the seventh and final argument in the case against realism. As was noted in each preceding argument, since the case against realism itself constitutes a cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh, the particular argument reconstructed in this chapter should not be appropriated in isolation. Its plausibility and rhetorical strength are enhanced when viewed in relation to all the other arguments in the devil's advocate's justification of Yahwistic atheism.