DOES YAHWEH EXIST?

A PHILOSOPHICAL-CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CASE AGAINST REALISM IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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A PHILOSOPHICAL-CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CASE AGAINST REALISM IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

BY

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Hierdie studie word opgedra aan:

swerwers sonder rigting,

soekers wat nooit vind,

want eindelik is almal

maar net kinders

van die wind.

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In much wisdom there is much grief.

The one who increases knowledge increases pain.

(Eccl 1:18)

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FOREWORD

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

(Ps 11:3)

There can hardly be any doubt about the substantial part that biblical scholarship played in initiating the collapse of realism in Christian theism since nineteenth century. Even so, the ontological problems generated within Old Testament studies in particular seem to be something that the average religious individual of our time is completely ignorant of.

In the South African context, one need only observe how debates pertaining to God and the Bible continue to reappear in the popular media and within the Church. A deep-seated repression or ignorance must be present for, on such occasions, the theological problems of a century or more ago become "unheard of" yet again. From the ways in which both fundamentalist and critical viewpoints vie for supremacy on so many moot points of concern, one thing seems clear. Very few people really seem to have an adequate perception of just why realism in biblical theism has become immensely problematic.

On the one hand, fundamentalists and other conservative scholars show little understanding of just how and why certain popular and traditional views about the nature of the Bible have become impossible to maintain. All their calls for a return to *the* "biblical" perspective on any particular issue and the idiosyncratic manner in which favourite biblical texts are quoted to justify theological and ethical arguments betray the debilitating hermeneutical naïveté of contemporary conservatism. These are the people who, through no fault of their own, are largely ignorant of the nature and implications of the myriad of theological problems generated over the last three centuries of biblical scholarship.

On the other hand, critical scholars, many of whom still claim to believe in the God of the Bible, seem to exhibit a general blindness with regard to the ontological problems generated by their research. The bracketing of ontology in biblical theology and the

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frequent tendency to avoid spelling out the ontological implications of critical research in an explicit and unequivocal manner represent a subtle albeit obvious form of repression. Liberals are constantly engaged in ever more sophisticated strategies of evasion when it comes to dealing with the collapse of realism in biblical theism.

Given this scenario, reaction to the title of this thesis and its reconstruction of a "case against realism" might be quite diverse.

The four basic personality types

On the one hand, there might be conservative scholars who will surely wonder what kind of person would have the audacity and presumption to ask whether Yahweh exists and dare occupy himself with trying to prove that He does not. Surely, such a person cannot be a *real* Christian. What *true* believer would want to do such a thing? Can one imagine any of the biblical authors or role models reconstructing arguments for atheism? Can anyone who has experienced the reality of God, the salvation of Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit waste time on such nonsense?

Some critical scholars, on the other hand, might not know whether to laugh or cry at such an enterprise. After all, philosophy cannot "prove" the existence or non-existence of God. Besides, the Old Testament is not the type of literature to be mixed with philosophical thinking. Anyone who bothers with arguing about the ontological status of Yahweh has probably misunderstood the nature of religious language and has not yet reached his or her "second naiveté".

Then there might be the more radical scholars who would consider any exercise in ontological philosophy mixed with biblical criticism as being utterly futile. Of course, "Yahweh" does not really exist. He is, ontologically speaking, not any different from any other ancient deity or textually constructed entity. The hermeneutical assumptions of post-modern literary theory indeed take it for granted that the god of the Old Testament is technically a character of fiction, as are all people in books. Theology does not need the Bible and an attempted marriage between biblical literature and philosophy of religion is surely indicative of flawed hermeneutical assumptions. Besides, it is so obvious that Yahweh does not really exist that one need not waste time on proving the point.

Such and other similar possible reactions to this study are perfectly understandable. Of course, people do not just bother with reconstructing arguments against the existence of Yahweh within the context of Old Testament studies unless there is some story of their life that drove them to do so. Moreover, anyone attempting to mix philosophy of religion with the essentially unphilosophical discourse of Old Testament Yahwism has a lot of explaining and justification to do. All this is true.

With regard to the issues of explanation and justification, these will be addressed in the section on methodology in the introductory chapter of this study. As regards my own personal motive for walking where not only angels but especially Old Testament scholars fear to tread – i.e. talking about the ontological status of Yahweh – this matter will also be thoroughly dealt with.

During the course of the last three centuries, not a few students of theology from conservative backgrounds have dabbled with biblical criticism expecting spiritual growth only to experience spiritual suicide. Many, initially quite happy with their

fundamentalist ideology and expecting to learn more about the inerrant and inspired "Word of God" encountered in the worlds inside, behind and outside the text a reality very different from what they had come to believe was the case.

Of course, cognitive dissonance is one of the nastier occupational hazards of being a deeply religious biblical scholar. Even so, few things in the life of the believer can be as psychologically traumatic as losing one's faith. In order to understand the ideological background of this thesis, even if it ultimately damages my case, I feel the need to provide the reader with a psychological perspective on my own spiritual journey. Like many others, I have travelled a path that has brought me to a place where I never ever thought I would end up.

An autobiographical abstract can be found in **APPENDIX A** at the end of the thesis. It will be appreciated if the reader takes cognisance of what is written there so as to be able to understand the ultimate motive and intentions behind what is surely an unconventional and, in some respects, very unorthodox study. It should also assist in explaining why this thesis takes the form of a devil's advocate argument. Contrary to what some readers may think, this study is not intended as a downright deliberate attempt on the part of its author to promote a personal atheistic agenda.

Notwithstanding what might be erroneously deduced regarding my own attitude towards the devil's advocate's acerbic atheism, I genuinely hope and pray that someone might take up the challenge to refute its case against realism. As of yet, I have no idea whether this is possible and, in fact, fear that there might be no way back. Whatever the case may be, the abstract from *the diary of a "died-again" Christian* in **APPENDIX A** should explain the ideological concerns underlying the author's comprehensive albeit imperfect articulation of an immensely complex problematic.

In **APPENDIX B**, the well-known social psychologist Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance will be discussed for its possible relevance to the anticipated reception of the case against realism. There can be little doubt that the devil's advocate's arguments will be rejected by many on other grounds than the purely rational, simply to alleviate the cognitive dissonance experienced in reading through

the seven arguments against the existence of Yahweh. The theory of Festinger, though not infallible, might be heuristically functional in providing an interesting perspective on why the case against realism will not be popular among scholars who are in favour of realism in Old Testament theology.

APPENDIX B concludes with a delineation of the diagnostic profile of someone unfortunate enough to suffer from the dreaded "died-again" Christian syndrome. For too long, students and scholars experiencing a crisis of belief have had to suffer in silence and it is high time that the whole ugly matter is brought out into the open. It can be a very, very lonely world if one has to face the ordeal of losing one's faith by oneself. The sheer amount of psycho-pathological stress one has to endure cannot be repressed indefinitely without paying a very heavy price as far as mental health is concerned.

In **APPENDIX C,** I shall attempt to locate the present thesis within a larger interpretative methodological context. Whatever the reader's response what is written in this thesis, it is hoped that the research might contribute in some way to the establishment of what I would like to call a "philosophical-critical" approach to the text. I personally believe that there is ample room for an independent approach within Old Testament scholarship where the issues on the agenda of the discipline known as the philosophy of religion can be addressed as they pertain to the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism. In this third and final appendix (supplementing the section on methodology in the first chapter), proposals will be forthcoming for the initiation of "philosophical-critical analysis" and what I would like to call "the quest for a philosophical Yahweh".

Both a new exegetical methodology (philosophical criticism) and philosophical-critical analysis on a larger scale (philosophy of Old Testament religion) will be pioneered as the "tools of the trade" for those embarking on this quest. Scholars impressed with the idea of a philosophico-religious approach to the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism are invited to take up the challenge and join the quest for a philosophical Yahweh.

On a lighter note, I should also probably say something about the cartoons and the

quotes to be encountered throughout the thesis.

All **CARTOONS** are from the comic strip known as *The Far Side* (cf. Bibliography). Sketched by cartoonist *Gary Larson,* these mono-frame funnies always cracked me up during those times when I failed to find the humour in anything else and when I was already cracked up in another sense of the word. Both the cartoons and the quotes have been inserted to make the reading of the thesis a less daunting, boring and all-too-serious undertaking.

I wanted to communicate something of the tragic comedy out of which this study was born. Of course, those readers who understand and can identify with the experience(s) articulated in **APPENDIX A** and with the arguments of the devil's advocate's case against realism should be capable of finding more than just comic relief. There is indeed a deeper allegorical meaning and a darker, somewhat melancholic and bitterer type of humour latent in these cartoons in their present context.

Testing whether laughter *is* the best medicine

As a disclaimer I would just like to add that, in using these illustrations, I never meant to insult or mock anyone but myself. Nothing personal or offensive is directed against any scholar taken to task by the devil's advocate in the thesis.

All the **QUOTATIONS** from biblical and post-biblical texts at the beginning of each chapter (beneath the heading) have roughly the same purpose as the pictures. These passages have deliberately been taken out of their original context to express a short albeit meaningful thought in some or other way related to the theme of this study and the unpleasant religious experiences of its author.

To those (almost) innocent readers (e.g. fellow students) who accidentally or on purpose happen to get their hands on this thesis, I also apologise profusely for any crisis of belief anyone might experience on account of reading the document. To be sure, any genuine effort to take cognisance of what the devil's advocate is trying to say may well be likened to an attempt at playing hop-scotch in a minefield. You will never know which hop (argument) will be the one that blows you (and your faith) to smithereens. Moreover, if you do manage to make it through alive, you may very well be scarred for life, even if only on a subconscious level. Anyone with religious beliefs who reads the devil's advocate's case and is not shocked by it has not understood it. To anyone who is reading the present section and who still has an untroubled conservative Christian faith and subscribes to the belief in biblical inerrancy, I would say only this: For the sake of sanity, please stop reading right NOW!

Finally, I wish to express genuine condolence to everyone for whom it may be compulsory to read through this lengthy document (I am, of course, referring to those people often politely referred to as eternal examiners). I hope that you, whoever you happen to be, will find the study interesting, captivating and stimulating enough to make up for the toil of reading through it all. All I can say in consolation is to assure you that the only thing more arduous than having to read through 500 pages of complex theological and ontological analysis is the hassle of having to *write* it. In the end, if worse comes to worse, should any of you not feel up to the daunting task of reading the monster, kindly consider the unorthodox option of weighing the beast and assigning a mark accordingly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I fear something horrible, it happens;
What I was afraid of has come for me.

(Job 3:25)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people who have all contributed in their own particular and appreciated manner to the successful completion of this study:

My parents, George and Ezette Gericke, whose love, support and care have made all 28 years of my life possible and meaningful. I love you both dearly and am thankful for having had the privilege of being the son of the two most wonderful human beings I have ever known.

Professor Dirk Human, my supervisor whose friendly manner and enthusiasm for whatever I hoped to accomplish never failed to inspire me. Thank you for always being there for me, for insightful discussions and for everything you have done to make my doctoral studies in Old Testament science a most pleasurable engagement. I shall always cherish fond memories of our times together.

Professor Jurie Le Roux, co-supervisor of this thesis, whose profound awareness of the mystery and complexity of existence and whose sceptical and critical perspective on everything under the sun has taught me the wonderful truth that we humans are not as dumb as we think. Rather, we are infinitely more so.

Mrs. Edna Aucamp and her son Iwan, whose generous assistance in dealing with all the hassles resulting from trying to work on a computer with a mind of its own has saved me from losing whatever little sanity I still have left…I think.

Last and least, myself. Self, thank you for…well….um….let's see…ah, yes. Please turn the page to find out what I have to say to YOU.
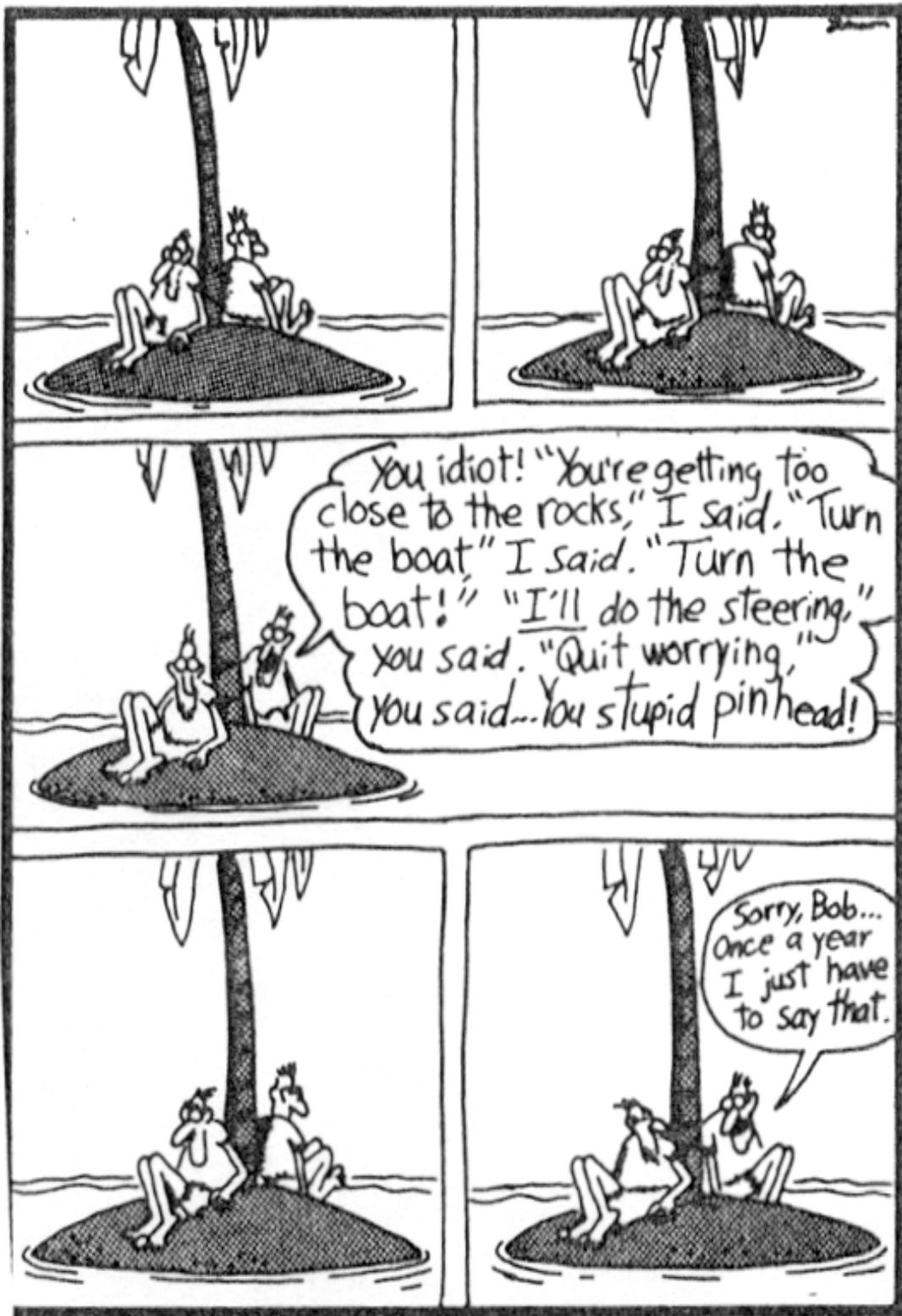
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD   *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

AJP   *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*

APQ   *American Philosophical Quarterly*

ANET   *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*

BA   *Biblical Archaeologist*

BAR   *Biblical Archaeology Review*

BHS   *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

BTB   *Biblical Theology Bulletin*

BZAW   *Beihefte zur ZAW*

CJP   *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

DDD   *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*

ET   *Explorations in Theology*

HSM   *Harvard Semitic Monographs*

HSS   *Harvard Semitic Studies*

HTR   *Harvard Theological Review*

ICC   *International Critical Commentary*

IDB   *International Dictionary of the Bible*

IJPR   *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*

IPQ   *International Philosophical Quarterly*

IRS   *Issues in Religious Studies*

JAOS   *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

JBL   *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JP   *Journal of Philosophy*

JSOT   *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup   *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament - Supplements*

JTS   *Journal of Theological Studies*

LXX   *Septuagint*

MT   *Masoretic Text*

OBT   *Overtures to Biblical Theology*

OTE   *Old Testament Essays*

OTL   *Old Testament Library*

PQ	*The Philosophical Quarterly*
PR	*The Philosophical Review*
PS	*Philosophical Studies*
PT	*Philosophy Today*
SamP	*Samaritan Pentateuch*
SBT	*Studies in Biblical Theology*
SP	*Syriac Peshitta*
T	*Targum*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum – Supplements*
WBC	*World Biblical Commentary*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift fur die altestamentliche Wissenschaft*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This study contains vocabulary about which there may be questions and/or misunderstanding. Certain seemingly familiar concepts and other neologisms are present and ambiguity may exist with regard to the denotative or connotative references of these words. All readers are advised to browse through this glossary to avoid unnecessary confusion in this regard.

Anti-realism - In this study, the view that the Old Testament and Old Testament theology are concerned with entities and scenarios that are purely fictitious. It includes the belief that both the scenarios and the characters *as they are depicted* in the Old Testament texts do not have and never had any corresponding extra-textual counterparts.

Atheism - 1.   In most cases, the explicit or implicit view that the character Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts is a character of fiction who has no extra-textual counterpart and therefore does not exist.

……….. - 2. The view that the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition does not exist.

……….. - 3. In some contexts, the view that no God whatsoever exists.

Conservative - The ideological contingency prevalent among Old Testament scholars claiming that the Old Testament is a theologically unified body of texts and in all respects inerrant with regard to matters of science and history. The discourse of these scholars is often characterised by alleged theological realism, dogmatic eisegesis and apologetics for a conservative evangelical view of the nature of the text. The term "conservative" is utilised in this study in a way that is synonymous with what Barr (1981,1984) calls "fundamentalism".

Critical - 1. Another ideological contingency among Old Testament scholars. Here the adopted ontological viewpoint can be designated as being semi-realist. Though these scholars do not believe that the Old Testament texts are inerrant in matters of history, science and theology they also refrain from considering it to be altogether

fictitious. For them, the truth in the text concerns its function as metaphorical and symbolical religious discourse about allegedly amythological and ineffable transcendental reality.

……… - 2. An approach to the text that takes nothing for granted and attempts to read the text on its own terms rather than through the filters of dogma pertaining to what should be the case.

Deconstruction - In this study, the term seldom refers to the kind of approach to texts as popularised by the post-modernist philosopher Jacques Derrida. For the most part, it simply means, as was originally the case, the taking apart or coming apart of something that was constructed and used to be whole before structural weaknesses were exposed.

Devil's advocate - A literary construct and instrument of informal logic that will be the "implied author" of the case against realism in this study. This character is not to be equated with the real author who has adopted the guise to articulate what would otherwise be too out-of-character and psychologically painful to express. A formal and official definition of this literary and rhetorical technique will be provided in the section articulating the hypothesis of this study.

Exist - A state of being that is independent of the worlds of text and imagination. In other words, not existence in the weak sense of the word so as to include entities that are only subsistent in the worlds of rhetoric and mind. The choice for this qualification has little to do with a presupposed modernist (positivist / empiricist) ontological ideology that may or may not be operative in the discourse. Rather, the implied binary opposition between what is real and what is not has been utilised for the purpose of avoiding the kind of misunderstanding that can often result when ontological discourse contains elements of ambiguity and doubletalk.

Fiction - In the context of this study, this concept is used with reference to a type of discourse in which the scenarios described in the texts never actually happened as they are depicted. The specific characterisation of entities in the text also has no exact extra-textual counterpart and both the scenarios and the characters "exist" only in the

world of the text and in the imaginations of its readers.

God - In most cases, not any supposed divine reality per se but rather, the deity as depicted in popular Judaeo-Christian philosophical theology. In other words, the particular concept is mostly used to denote the so-called God of the philosophers (of religion) rather than so-called God of the Bible (Yahweh-as-depicted in the text). Even so, it is assumed that in Judaeo-Christian theology, the entity God is believed to be synonymous with the deity Yahweh.

Ideology - This polyvalent concept has no pejorative meaning in this study but merely denotes a particular culturally relative and socially constructed worldview.

Liberal - Cf. the definition of the term "critical". In this thesis, these two designations are often used interchangeably unless otherwise specified or further qualified.

Macro-level analysis - That type of Old Testament interpretation that concerns itself with the Old Testament as a whole. It is to be distinguished from micro-level analysis. Examples of macro-level analysis include Old Testament theology, history of Old Testament religion and, in this study, philosophy of Old Testament religion. The philosophical-critical format of this study also features a macro-analytical perspective since it deals with the Old Testament as a whole rather than being limited to a particular section, book or passage of the Old Testament.

Micro-level analysis - A type of Old Testament interpretation that deals with the understanding of certain elements featured in selected pericopes and sections of the texts of the individual books in the Old Testament. It is to be distinguished from macro-level analysis. Examples of microanalysis include all forms of biblical criticism e.g. historical criticism, narrative criticism, social-scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism, form-criticism, redaction-criticism and, in the context of this study, philosophical criticism.

Mythology - In correspondence with the variety of connotations and denotations this concept exhibits in contemporary discourse, when employed in this study, the word "mythology" ("myth" / "mythical") may refer to several different phenomena.

Depending on context, mythology may denote fantasy or fiction, a literary genre, a symbolic representation, a lie, an ideology, a superstitious and mistaken view of reality, or even the discipline of "theology". Despite this variety, contextual appropriation should reveal what particular denotation or connotation is assumed to be operative in the discourse.

Old Testament theology - 1. The academic discipline of biblical theology.

…………………………. - 2. The Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh.

Ontological analysis - In the context of this study, a designation for the particular approach in the philosophy of religion that concerns itself with the ontological status of particular phenomena.

Ontological status - The state of being or the manner in which a specific entity is related to the real world as opposed to the worlds of text and imagination

Philosophical-critical analysis - A new approach to the reading of Old Testament text pioneered in this thesis. The specific designation is an umbrella term under which both "philosophical criticism" and "philosophy of Old Testament religion" are subsumed. In can be seen as being analogous to concepts such as "historical-critical analysis" or "literary-critical analysis" under which various types of related methodologies also feature. The distinguishing characteristic of philosophical-critical analysis is that the auxiliary discipline utilised in this case is the philosophy of religion (and not philosophy per se or any other branch of philosophical methodology). The term philosophical-critical analysis does not denote a specific form of micro-level or macro-level analysis per se. It is a collective designation for both types of inquiry aimed at reading the text from the perspective of one or more of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion.

Philosophical criticism - A newly proposed form of biblical criticism to be understood as being on par with other interpretative methodologies like tradition criticism, narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, social-scientific criticism, etc. In this micro-level variety of "philosophical-critical" analysis, specific texts or sections

thereof are exegetically analysed to abstract the relevant data that the particular discourse might contain for inquiries related to one or more of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion.

Philosophy of Old Testament religion - A form of enquiry *within* Old Testament studies rather than in philosophy of religion or philosophical theology. It is simply philosophy of religion where the religion analysed philosophically happens to be Old Testament Yahwism. It is to be distinguished from philosophical criticism. Whereas the latter is an exegetical methodology dealing with specific textual units, philosophy of Old Testament religion involves macro-level philosophical-critical analysis and therefore concerns itself with the Old Testament as a whole. In this regard, its scale and scope are similar to that of the history of Israel, Old Testament theology or the sociology of Israelite religion. Along with philosophical criticism, philosophy of Old Testament religion constitutes the second of the two types of philosophical-critical analysis.

Philosophy of religion - A subdiscipline of philosophy and sometimes of systematic theology or science of religion. It is concerned with philosophical questions pertaining to issues such as the nature of religion, religious language, the concept of revelation, the nature and existence of divine reality, the problem of evil, religious experience, the relation between religion and culture / history / morality / science and life after death. Though most philosophers of religion study the Judaeo-Christian tradition as encapsulated in the dogma of philosophical and systematic theology, the discourse of any religion is suitable for such analysis irrespective of whether or not it contains philosophical modes of expression.

Realism - In the context of this study, the view that the world of the text corresponds exactly to the past of the world outside the text. It is believed that the scenarios and characters depicted in the Old Testament text had exact extra-textual counterparts. Events occurred as described and the characters involved actually existed independent of the stories and imaginations of the authors and audiences of the texts.

Reality - That which exists. In the reconstruction of the case against realism, however, the concept of extra-textual reality does not always refer to reality as such,

whatever that may be. Rather, it denotes the way in which reality is perceived and mediated by the cultural and ideological constructs that contemporary Western culture accepts and takes for granted on the authority of certain paradigms in popular science**.**

Semi-realism - The view that, though the Old Testament texts contain errors and fiction with regard to matters of history, science and theology, one can still affirm that those texts communicate some sort of "religious truth". Despite an admittance of the Bible's fallibility, a realist belief in the actual existence of God is still considered to be justified given the supposed metaphorical nature of all religious language.

Text - Unless context dictates otherwise, when this study refers to "the text" it designates the reconstructed and translated texts of the thirty-nine books that constitute the Protestant Christian Old Testament Canon.

Yahweh - Unless otherwise qualified, the divine name refers to the character and deity who is depicted in the Old Testament texts. Asking whether Yahweh exists is therefore primarily concerned with ascertaining whether or not realism is justified with regard to this character's depiction in the Old Testament texts and therefore whether or not the textual representations of the deity have any extra-textual counterparts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God!'"

(Psalm 14:1; 53:1)

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND ACTUALITY

Does God exist? Is the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition a real, personal Being "out there" or is He merely a figment in the imagination of those who believe in Him? Is the God of biblically based forms of theism simply a character in a story or does He also exist in the extra-textual world? Is the God of the humanity's largest religion ever really the "living" God or does He have an ontological status no different from that of all the other deities of ancient mythology who nobody really believes in any more?

The question concerning the existence of God has been neither irrelevant nor marginal in the theological and philosophical discourse of the relatively recent past. About four decades ago, theologian Schubert Ogden (1966:01) insisted that:

> "…the reality of God has now become the central theological problem."

In the years that followed, many other prominent theologians like Gordon Kaufmann (1972:02) and Hans Kung (1980:01) would reiterate Ogden's claim. Then, as the last decade of the twentieth century dawned upon the world, quite a number of philosophers of religion joined the theologians in the belief that the question of God's existence is as pressing as ever (cf. Hick 1993:01; Pailin 1993:01).

Of course, as Wilson (2000:01) observes, the "God-question" does not go away. No sooner have the intelligentsia of one generation confined the Almighty to the history books when popular opinion rises against them. This continues, despite what the

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unbelievers may make of what appears to be a wholly irrational worldview. Ultimately, it has become clear that, whatever the truth regarding this controversial issue may be, every religious believer must, if honest, confront problems in relation to faith that were not necessarily present for earlier generations (cf. also James 1987:479; Armstrong 1993:02).

It is therefore to be expected that, at the dawn of the third millennium, many problematic issues pertaining to the existence of God have not been resolved to everyone's satisfaction. In fact, as Kolak (1994:11) points out, by the end of the twentieth century it has become doubtful whether consensus on such a personal, controversial, important and complex issue will ever be reached. Even after over two thousand years of mind-burning disputes, philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians still appear as addicted as ever to debating the pros and cons of realism in theistic metaphysics (cf. also Cupitt 2002:24-25).
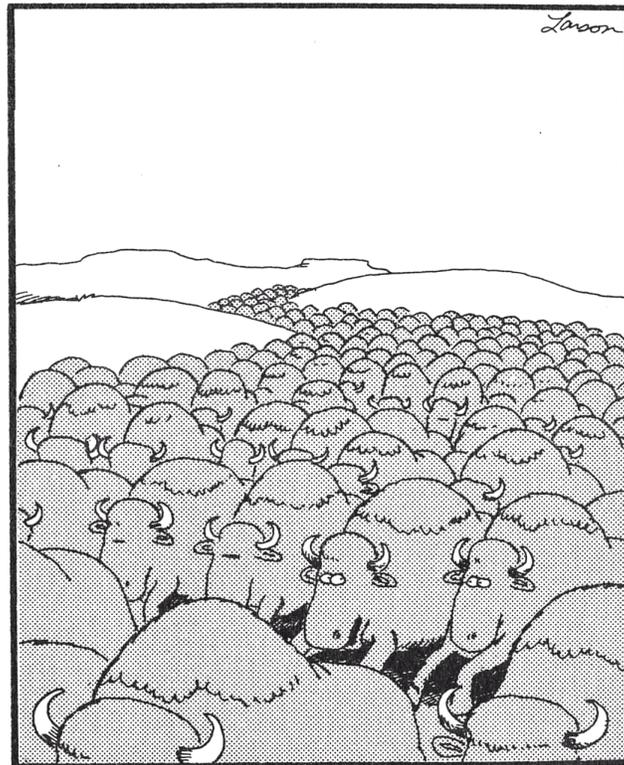
"As if we all knew where we're going."

From the perspective of Old Testament scholarship, however, the actuality of the God question lies not merely in its perennial significance. What makes it particularly

relevant to the concerns of this study is the fact that, in the minds of most people, the deity in question – i.e. God – is supposed to be none other than Yahweh himself (cf. Carroll 1991:37; Fretheim 1984:02).

Since the biblical texts are generally considered to be the primary and foundational epistemological source for ascertaining the nature of the Judaeo-Christian God, the interrogative concerning the ontological status of the deity can be articulated in a very specific and qualified manner. Instead of speculating about the possible existence or non-existence of any divine reality per se, would it not be more useful to inquire about the validity of realism pertaining to the ontological status of the god Yahweh-as-depicted in the biblical texts?

There can be little doubt that, in mainstream orthodox Judaeo-Christian belief, the veracity of the biblical witness is presumed to constitute the fundamental epistemological ground for believing in the existence of God. In other words, should there be any reason to doubt the ontological claims and assumptions of the biblical texts, the credibility of any text-based dogma obviously becomes suspect as well. To be sure, the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may well be indicative of the ontological status of any subsequent conception of "God" somehow rooted in, dependent on or derived from the biblical witness (cf. Harwood 1992:257).

1.2   THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Does *Yahweh* exist? Is the god of the Old Testament only an entity within the world of the text and inside the imaginations of millions of people or is he also a real being in the real world outside the text? Was there ever an entity who actually said and did what the Old Testament texts depict the god Yahweh as doing? Alternatively, could it be that the biblical god is but another deity of ancient mythology with the same ontological status as other gods such as Marduk, Re, El, or Zeus? Stated differently, is realism in Old Testament theology justified?

In truth, there can be little doubt that most Old Testament scholars have already made up their minds with regard to this complex and controversial issue. Many, of course, will claim to be unwavering realists. A substantial number of Old Testament scholars

believe that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is not just a character of fiction and that he does have an extra-textual counterpart (cf. Archer 1992:02; Kaiser et al. 1996:01). Allegedly, the god Yahweh is not simply a literary construct and should be equated with an actual extra-textual divinity who exists independent of the realms of text and imagination (cf. Clines 1995:38).

Others, irrespective of whether they would consider themselves to be theists or atheists, may be convinced that certainty on this issue is impossible and that no one can *prove* the case either way (cf. Davies 1995:21). Then, of course, there are those scholars who explicitly assert that realism concerning the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is immensely problematic if not absurd.

Thus, according to Robert Carroll (1997:38):

> "The biblical God is a character in Hebrew narrative and therefore is, in a very real sense, a figure of fiction."

David Clines (1995:190) would agree:

> "Let us next recognise that the God in the Pentateuch is a character in a novel. God in the Pentateuch is not a 'person'; he is a character in a book. And there are no people in books, no real people, only fictions; for books are made, not procreated.... For if we were to imagine that the God of whom it speaks is identical to the 'true God' – the God who is worshipped and theologised about, we might have some serious theological problems on our hands..."

So would Walter Brueggemann (1997:33):

> "Thus even with reference to God, the imaginative generative power of rhetoric offers to the hearer of this text a God who is not otherwise known or available or even - dare one say - not otherwise 'there'."

Moreover, according to Thomas Thompson (1998:304):

> "It is not a good idea to believe in a god when he is a character in story! Don't think for a moment that the narrator…or his audience ever believed in…that kind

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of god. This is the world that the teller has created for his representation of Old Israel…”

David Gunn (1990:61) also believes that:

> “To claim that God-as-character in the Bible is not the creature of the author/narrator is, in my view, perverse. For the reader for whom this narrative is Scripture, the question then is, what is the relation between God-as-character and the God of faith?”

Even Dale Patrick (1998:96), otherwise known to go so far as to argue for “the reality of the biblical God” (cf. Patrick 1982:212ff), can also be found taking up the strain.

> “Can God be regarded as a speaker of genuine performative utterances? One could grant that the original participants believed that they were encountering this being and that ‘Israel’ is constituted by the sole recognition of YHWH as its God and sovereign, yet question whether there was/is a ‘real being’ with whom to transact. *Israelite identity may well be based on a fiction* (italics mine)”

Examples of concurring statements could be multiplied indefinitely. Doing so, however, would be plethoric. No more proof is needed to show that, as far as these scholars are concerned – whatever God or gods there may be – the god Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts has no extra-textual counterpart. Euphemisms and jargon aside, the bottom line appears to be that the god Yahweh does not really exist at all.

Whatever one happens to believe with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, it is somewhat surprising that *Old Testament scholars in general do not appear to be interested in arguing and justifying their viewpoints* on this contentious issue. In fact, it would seem that Old Testament scholars can debate just about every conceivable topic pertaining to Old Testament religion *except* whether or not Yahweh actually exists.

Despite the seemingly obvious relevance of the question pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, there is at present no bulk of scholarly

research pertaining to it. There is no discipline in Old Testament studies that allows its practitioners to be concerned with determining whether or not Yahweh actually exists. Who has ever heard of an article, a book, a monograph or a thesis entirely devoted to constructing arguments for or against the existence of Yahweh? Who has encountered a type of philosophy of religion where the religion in question is neither Judaism nor Christianity but Old Testament Yahwism?

Of course, some scholars would claim that the virtual absence of ontological analysis in Old Testament studies is hermeneutically and heuristically justified:

1. Most interpreters, if they do touch on the issue of Yahweh's ontological status, limit themselves to noting ever so casually that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do we find formal ontological arguments. There is no attempt on the part of its authors to prove that Yahweh really exists – the deity's reality is simply and always taken for granted (cf. Chestnut 1968:09; Mettinger 1988:xi). Given that the ontological status of Yahweh is supposedly never disputed in the texts, Old Testament scholars do not consider it necessary or valid to bother with the question of whether or not Yahweh actually exists (cf. also. Von Rad 1980:108-127; Patrick 1982:212-238).

2. As Barr (1999:38) pointed out, the absence of philosophical rhetoric in the Old Testament seems to be the motivation behind the lack of interest in philosophical questions generated by the reading of Old Testament texts. The fact that the Old Testament God-talk is itself not systematic and philosophical but pluralist, diverse, incoherent and in literary mode is not exactly a catalyst in encouraging an alteration in the anti-philosophical tendencies currently prevalent in Old Testament theology (cf. Carroll 1991:44). Consequently, some Old Testament theologians would even consider the question regarding whether or not Yahweh actually exists as being hermeneutically illegitimate and even indicative of theological naïveté (cf. Davies 1995:21; Brueggemann 1997:70).

3. Constructing arguments for or against the existence of a deity is the speciality of the discipline known as the philosophy of religion. As a result, Old Testament scholars may consider themselves justified to bracket ontological questions, which

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they might suggest are (fortunately?/unfortunately?) none of their business (cf. Cupitt 1989:44). They might insist that philosophers of religion and not biblical scholars should be concerned with detailed attempts at analysing and justifying ontological viewpoints. Old Testament scholars are by profession more interested in linguistic, historical, literary and sociological issues pertaining to the discourse of the Old Testament texts (cf. Barr 1999:56).

4. Personal theological and philosophical convictions may play a role in the bracketing of the question whether or not Yahweh exists. Apart from the fact that most scholars may consider the question to be naïve or the answer in response to it as being obvious, other individual differences may be noted. Some conservatives might consider the question as being improper or even blasphemous and profane. Others might think of any attempt to answer it as an exercise in futility and based on outdated epistemological and metaphysical assumptions. Attempting to do so might cause one to be stigmatised as a positivist, a rationalist, a modernist, etc. – all of which, we should know, are Very Bad.

It is on grounds such as these that many Old Testament scholars might wish to justify being professionally (as opposed to privately) unconcerned with the question of whether or not Yahweh actually exists. Upon closer scrutiny, however, all of these possible objections to Old Testament scholars bothering with the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the text may well be invalid. As will be argued in the section on methodology to follow, such objections are based on a number of untenable fallacies and should not go unchallenged.

In sum then: against the grain, the primary focus of this thesis will be a concern with the neglected ontological dimensions of Old Testament theology. Throughout the rest of this study, the reader will encounter nothing less than an immensely controversial attempt to provide a comprehensive, reasoned, text-based, philosophically orientated, in-depth, unequivocal, clear and unambiguous systematic answer to the question – *does Yahweh exist?*

1.3   HYPOTHESIS

In response to the almost unheard-of research question pertaining to the ontological status of the deity Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts, the following *devil's advocate's* hypothesis was formulated:

> *Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts of the Old Testament does not exist.*
> *The deity is demonstrably a character of fiction with no extra-textual*
> *counterpart. Consequently, realism becomes problematic not only in*
> *Old Testament theology but also in every form of theism that is in any*
> *way derived from, dependent on, rooted in or related to the discourse*
> *of the Old Testament texts.*

In the words of Warburton (1996:42-43), the "devil's advocate" is someone who puts the strongest possible case against a position for the sake of argument rather than because of real disagreement with the position. *The devil's advocate intends to test its own beliefs to the limit* through the presentation of a case against those beliefs it cherishes (or wants to cherish; or once cherished) most sincerely. According to Warburton (1996:43), people who play the devil's advocate are sometimes accused of hypocrisy. This happens when they either appear to make a case for what they do not sincerely endorse or if it seems as though they are already thoroughly convinced that the belief they are attacking is false. However, this accusation of hypocrisy misses the point and perhaps stems in part from the negative associations with the word "devil" in the title at the expense of the connotations of the word "advocate".

The point of utilising this rhetorical strategy is to get people to give good reasons in support of conclusions to which the devil's advocate may well be favourably disposed. The devil's advocate's scepticism and antagonism are therefore not to be confused with what may seem like a personal hostility to the beliefs it attacks. Rather, the apparently ruthless attempts to refute a particular viewpoint should be seen as simply no more than a necessary part of the role-playing involved in the utilisation of this rhetorical strategy. The entire rhetorical enterprise of this study is merely indicative of a temporary front being put up in the perpetual quest for the truth.

In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding regarding the author's ultimate motive for utilising this rhetorical strategy, the reader is kindly requested to take cognisance of what is written in **APPENDIX A** at the end of this study. Therein appears additional illuminating information pertaining to the author's own spiritual journey and theological/ideological context. An awareness of what is written in that autobiographical abstract will explain why both the hypothesis of this study and the forthcoming Old Testament perspective on the justification of atheism were considered to be part and parcel of the devil's advocate's compulsory repertoire.

1.4 OBJECTIVE

In this study, the devil's advocate has a singular objective and that is to *prove* (sic) that Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts of the Old Testament does *not* exist. This aim can also be articulated in a variety of complimentary ways:

- To utilise the format and methodology of the philosophy of religion in order to deal with the problem of realism in Old Testament theology;

- To supplement historical-, literary-, and ideological-critical perspectives on the problem of realism with a comprehensive and almost exhaustive "philosophical-critical" view on the same issue (on which, see below);

- To pioneer philosophical-critical analysis (philosophical criticism / philosophy of Old Testament religion, cf. below) as a novel yet functional interpretative approach to be utilised in the reading of Old Testament texts;

- To spell out in detail why realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh should be considered as being immensely problematic;

- To explain in-depth why scholars may be justified in their claim that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart;

- To provide a justification of atheism from the perspective of Old Testament

studies;

- To show how a critical reading of the Old Testament has contributed to the religio-cultural phenomenon known as the "death of God";

- To justify the claim that, if Yahweh does not exist, neither does "God".

1.5   METHODOLOGY

As was noted in the articulation of the research problem, there are several reasons why Old Testament scholars consider themselves justified in not bothering to argue for or against the existence of Yahweh. Consequently, it should hardly come as a surprise that in contemporary Old Testament scholarship, there is no independent and officially recognised interpretative methodology in which philosophy of religion is utilised as the primary auxiliary discipline.

No hermeneutical matrix currently operative in Old Testament interpretation, whether historical-critical, literary-critical or theological, seem to be particularly keen on dealing with ontological questions. To be sure, most approaches seem to make every effort to *bracket* or *suppress* the ontological issues generated by their particular perspectives on the biblical texts. As a result, it is beyond the scope of most heuristic domains to encourage as part of its repertoire the construction of arguments for or against the existence of Yahweh as philosophers of religion would argue for or against the existence of God. Given this state of affairs, the devil's advocate has decided to pioneer a new approach *within* Old Testament studies. If neither Old Testament theology nor the many types of biblical criticism have room for ontological analysis, then the need arises for the creation of yet another interpretative methodology. This seems to be a compulsory and necessary preliminary matter that must be dealt with before *the case against realism* can be constructed.

The concern of the present study with the philosophy of religion – where the religion in question is neither Judaism nor Christianity but *Old Testament Yahwism* – is rather unheard-of. The construction of arguments for or against the existence of Yahweh is

presently not a recognised part of either philosophy of religion or Old Testament scholarship. It might therefore be apt to provide a prolegomena to the case against realism in which an attempt is made to locate the interpretative approach utilised in the present study within a hermeneutically legitimate and heuristically functional methodological context.

Of course, any attempt to pioneer such an approach should take cognisance of the reservations with regard to its viability as noted earlier in the articulation of the research problem. After all, the novel approach envisaged will involve utilising philosophy of religion as an auxiliary discipline *within* biblical studies. Such an alternative approach must, one the one hand, allow the Old Testament specialist to deal with the kind of issues that philosophers of religion concern themselves with as these may be generated by the reading of the biblical texts. On the other hand, the particular type of analysis should not be based on hermeneutically illegitimate and methodologically flawed foundations. The pre-philosophical, pre-scientific, pluralist and religious nature of the text's religious discourse should definitely be reckoned with.

From the book *Guide to Western Stuff*
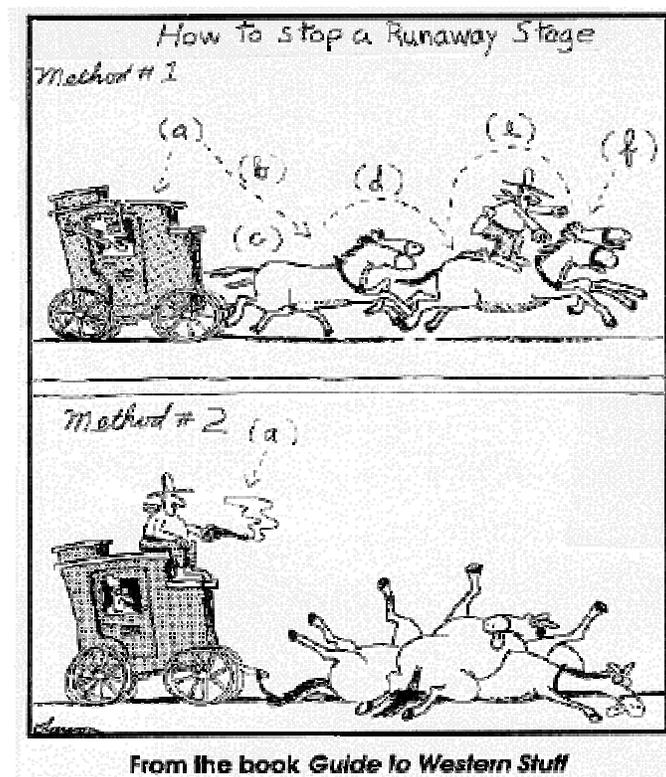
The pioneering of such a "philosophical-critical" approach is aimed at filling the gap in Old Testament studies where, at least since the time of Gabler, there has been little "official" room for dealing with philosophical questions generated in textual interpretation. After philosophy as handmaid to Old Testament theology was allegedly replaced by history (and, in contemporary times, sociology and literary criticism), the formative role and perennial relevance of philosophy in both the modernist and post-modernist period have been greatly repressed.

It may be a truism that the practice of constructing metaphysical systems from Old Testament discourse, as is the wont of pre-critical and conservative approaches to the text, fell into disrepute after the rise of critical historical consciousness. Nevertheless, contrary to popular belief, philosophy never lost its influence in Old Testament studies to the extent that some scholars of the history of interpretation would have us believe.

The history of the primary auxiliary disciplines acting as handmaids in Old Testament interpretation is not as simplistic as the popular developmentalist stereotype of philosophy > history > literary criticism/sociology might suggest (contra Brueggemann 1997:6-56). What few of those endorsing this hermeneutical evolution realise is the fact that it was developments in *philosophy* that made it possible for the (modernist) historical and the (post-modernist) literary/sociological approaches to come into vogue in the first place! (cf. Le Roux 1993:32)

This state of affairs has led to the idiosyncratic scenario that philosophy in general, and *philosophy of religion* in particular, have not featured significantly in interdisciplinary research within Old Testament scholarship. Inquiring about the types of interdisciplinary research currently operative within Old Testament scholarship, one will encounter just about everything *except a philosophical approach* to Old Testament Yahwism:

- Though vast amounts of scholarly research in Old Testament studies focus on matters derived from the history of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion and whatnot, not much will be found that have some bearing on *the philosophy of religion*.

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- Apparently there is ample room in Old Testament scholarship for historical-critical analysis, sociological-critical analysis, etc. But who has ever heard of *"philosophical-critical analysis"*?

- Old Testament scholars consider it important to do research on the history of Old Testament religion, the sociology of Old Testament religion, etc. Yet few, if any, seem to be concerned with "*the philosophy of Old Testament religion*".

- The extended family of biblical criticism includes historical criticism, sociological criticism, literary criticism, psychological criticism, etc. Surprisingly, however, nobody seems to be interested in adding an approach one might call "*philosophical criticism*".

In other words, very few scholars have bothered to utilise *philosophy of religion* in the same way they have made use of the history or sociology of religion. To be sure, for some or other reason, Old Testament scholars, on those rare occasions when they do utilise philosophy, often seem to be interested in anything but the *philosophy of religion.* Prima facie, the relevance of *philosophy of religion* for the study of *religious* texts seems obvious. Nevertheless, philosophically minded interpreters of the Old Testament appear not to be as interested in this branch of philosophy as they are in, for example, philosophy of science, hermeneutics, philosophy of history, epistemology, logic, ethics, etc. Moreover, the utilisation of philosophy usually only occurs in the context of higher-order hermeneutical discussions and meta-criticism, and not as part of a first (or second) order interpretative approach to the text.

Of course, there always *appear* to be exceptions to the rule. A few scholars seemed to have made an effort to concern themselves with one or more of the issues that feature on the agenda of the philosophy of religion (on which, see below). Especially in Old Testament theology, a substantial amount of research exists pertaining to seemingly philosophico-religious issues such as the nature of the Old Testament's religious language, the concept of revelation, the problem of evil, the nature of God, the nature of religious experience in Yahwism, the relation between Old Testament religion and history, etc.

Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that for the most part the concern was never really philosophical but wholly *theological*. For this reason, any possible insistence that a philosophical approach to Old Testament would be superfluous since Old Testament theology already deals with most of the issues on philosophy of religion's agenda implies a failure to appreciate the differences between the perspectives, interests and domain assumptions of the two subjects.

Even if Old Testament theologians had dealt with some of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion in a way that is indistinguishable from that of the philosophers themselves, this does not render a philosophical approach to Old Testament religion any less functional. Philosophy of (Christian) religion is still an officially recognised subject despite the presence of overlapping concerns with systematic theology, philosophical theology and science of religion. In a similar manner, a philosophy of (Old Testament) religion would not be irrelevant even if such an approach to the biblical texts exhibited some overlapping concerns with issues on the agenda of Old Testament theology. To be sure, the currently popular tendency among Old Testament theology's practitioners to bracket ontology may in itself justify the establishment of a specialised philosophical approach to the text to rectify the negligence.

The devil's advocate, therefore, begs to differ from Davies (1995:21) who claims that biblical scholarship is not competent when it comes to drawing conclusions with regard to the implications of research for the existence of Yahweh.

First of all, even non-philosophical methodologies such as historical- and literary-critical methodologies are generally considered to be competent for determining the ontological status of characters like Adam, Noah, Abraham and Jacob. Critical historical scholarship is believed to have demonstrated on various grounds that these people, at least as they are depicted in the Old Testament texts, may well be characters of fiction. As depicted, they never really existed and realism regarding their ontological status seems unfounded.

If this is true, what prevents even such non-philosophical approaches from spelling out the implications of their findings about the relation between text and reality for the

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ontological status of the character of Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts? If Adam, Noah and Abraham never existed, does this not imply that – whatever God there may be – the god Yahweh depicted as interacting with these fictitious characters shares their ontological status? If Noah, for example, never existed, how can the character Yahweh depicted as speaking and dealing with Noah be considered to have an extra-textual counterpart?

Secondly, even if historical- and literary-critical approaches intend to bracket the ontological implications of their findings or refuse to argue their claims philosophically, what prevents Old Testament scholarship from making room for a philosophical approach to the text that can and should concern itself with, amongst other things, ontological issues? What *a priori* justification could possibly be forthcoming so as to rule out the possibility and viability of an approach to the text that analyses the bearing its discourse might have on one or more of the issues on the agenda of the *philosophy of religion*? And if this is possible, what would prevent scholars from attempting to determine the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

After having argued that the case for biblical scholarship as being ontologically incompetent and that the view of Old Testament theology as being an *ersatz* substitute for a philosophical-critical approach to the text are flawed, the four possible objections anticipated earlier in the articulation of the research problem can now be refuted. All these arguments seemingly justifying the negligence on the part of Old Testament specialists to utilise the *philosophy of religion* as an auxiliary discipline and to assess the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts are demonstrably invalid:

1. It would be a fallacy to argue that just because the Old Testament assumes the reality and existence of Yahweh and never attempts to argue its case that Old Testament scholars may not get involved in such a form of inquiry. So the Old Testament does not contain an attempt to prove that Yahweh exists – so what? Neither does the Old Testament seek to prove the existence of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and other characters. Yet this fact is not considered to render the inquiries of historians with regard to the ontological status of these

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figures to be *ipso facto* illegitimate. If scholars are allowed to debate the issue whether or not any of these characters ever existed, why can the same questions not be put concerning the ontological status of the character Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

2. The problem with leaving philosophical questions regarding the existence of Yahweh for the philosophers of religion is that these scholars do not limit their inquiries to the Old Testament discourse. The "religion" most philosophers of religion are interested in is not Old Testament Yahwism. Instead, the majority of philosophers and philosophical theologians are concerned with the religion of post-biblical Judaism or Christianity. When these scholars argue for or against the existence of God, their epistemological sources for constructing a conception of the deity are not limited to the Old Testament. Instead, in their ontological analyses they base their claims on the systematic and normative discourse of post-biblical doctrinal theology.

Consequently, one cannot expect philosophers of religion to limit their ontological analysis to whether or not realism is justified with regard to Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. These scholars are concerned with the God of the philosophers and not merely with the God of the Old Testament. A sole concern with the latter is probably a luxury that only Old Testament specialists can afford. Moreover, it makes sense that all issues related to the *Old Testament* texts should be dealt with by those whose field of expertise is the *Old Testament* – even if the issues in question are of the philosophico-religious variety. Unless *Old Testament* scholars deal with the issue of whether or not Yahweh-as-depicted in the text actually exists, nobody is going to bother about this particular problematic.

In fact, any suggestion that Old Testament scholarship should bracket philosophical issues altogether seems to amount to deplorably inconsistent reasoning. Do Old Testament scholars leave historical, sociological or literary analysis of Old Testament texts to historians, sociologists or literary critics? Surely not. Instead, interdisciplinary interpretative methodologies such as historical-, sociological- and literary-critical methods are created in order to allow the Old Testament specialists to perform their own readings of the Old Testament

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texts via the issues on the agendas of those disciplines. By analogy, Old Testament scholars need not leave matters pertaining to the issues on the agenda of the *philosophy of religion* that were generated in the reading of Old Testament texts to philosophers or theologians proper.

Even if some historians and sociologists should decide to do research on Old Testament religion, this would not make a historical or sociological approach within Old Testament scholarship *ipso facto* illegitimate. By analogy, even if philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians someday decided to study Old Testament Yahwism, this would not render a philosophical approach within Old Testament studies itself superfluous. Philosophy of (Christian) religion, after all, is a subject on the agenda of more than one academic discipline. It is taught not only in departments of philosophy but also in systematic theology, philosophical theology and science of religion. Theoretically then, there would still be room for a philosophy of (Old Testament) religion even if some philosophers of religion or philosophical theologians happened to take an interest Old Testament Yahwism.

3. Any critique of the utilisation of the philosophy of religion as an auxiliary discipline within Old Testament studies based on observations of the literary and unsystematic nature of the Old Testament discourse is similarly misplaced. On the one hand, engaging in philosophy of religion does not require the source material to be in the format of coherent systematic metaphysical statements before ontological analysis can commence. If the religious discourse is literary and pluralist this is simply something to take cognisance of and does not prevent philosophical analysis from taking place.

On the other hand, it would also be a misconception to believe that the philosophy of religion always aims at constructing unified and coherent systems of normative metaphysical thought. This is, in fact, not the case. Such a view may stem from stereotyping the discipline or subscribing dogmatically to one particular school of thought within it (i.e. Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy). It may also be the result of equivocation in the sense of confusing philosophy of religion with systematic or philosophical theology. To be sure, philosophy of religion is able to

adapt its agenda to the specific nature of the religious discourse of the religion that it analyses.

In other words, there need not be any danger of illegitimately roping the Old Testament in the service of constructing orthodox, unified and credible systems of thought. The concept of a "philosophy of Old Testament religion" is therefore not to be understood in the sense of referring to ancient Israel's supposed philosophical thought. The genitive is subjective and not objective. The "philosophy" in question is not that of the Old Testament itself. The wording merely *denotes a philosophical perspective on the Old Testament's religious discourse* and not, as before the rise of historical criticism, *a philosophical system derived from it*.

Just because the Old Testament does not itself feature a philosophy of religion does not render such a perspective on the texts illegitimate and superfluous. To justify this claim one need only to consider the way in which disciplines such as the history of religion or the sociology of religion have been utilised in an auxiliary fashion by Old Testament scholars. Such utilisation is not considered to be invalid merely because the Old Testament is not a textbook of history or sociology. Simply because the Old Testament came into being long before the rise of modern historiography and sociology does not make the utilisation of such disciplines in auxiliary fashion illegitimate. In short, the pre-critical nature of the Old Testament therefore in no way undermines the possibility of utilising the history and sociology of religion in an auxiliary capacity within Old Testament scholarship.

By way of analogy, the same is true with regard to the philosophy of religion despite the fact that the Old Testament does not itself contain an explicit and systematically articulated expression of this form of inquiry. Such a state of affairs does not mean that the utilisation of the philosophy of religion within Old Testament scholarship is *ipso facto* hermeneutically illegitimate. Though it is correct to say that the Old Testament is in a sense pre-philosophical and even unphilosophical it is equally true that analysing the religious discourse of the texts via non-philosophical approaches generates philosophical questions. Since already

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extant interpretative methodologies continue to bracket the philosophico-religious questions they generate, the need for an independent approach to the text that utilises the philosophy of religion as auxiliary discipline becomes all the more obvious.

4. Finally, if some scholars for personal reasons consider asking philosophical questions improper, illegitimate or a waste of time, that is their good right. They are entitled to their opinions whatever these may be. However, mere personal distaste or a lack of interest in a particular approach to the text does not imply that such an approach is not possible. After all, many scholars do not like or even consider hemeneutically valid some of the already extant mainstream approaches to the text (e.g. historical criticism, literary criticism, social-scientific criticism, etc.). To be sure, one can point to many shortcomings and problematic assumptions present in all available interpretative approaches to the text.

    Be that as it may, few scholars would argue that just because they themselves are not interested in certain approaches to the text and because of the way some people abuse them this would imply that such methodologies are inherently sinful, dysfunctional or illegitimate. In the same vein, if some scholars consider philosophy of religion to be boring, irrelevant or too controversial they can rest assure that no one will force them to make a living out of it. But there is no need for hegemony in Old Testament scholarship where, theoretically, the number of possible ways in which one can approach the text seems infinite but where, in practice, any scholar interested in philosophy of religion is ridiculed and marginalized.

In sum then, if disciplines such as the history and sociology of Old Testament religion can be conceived of as being legitimate heuristic enterprises – despite the fact that the Old Testament is not a textbook for any of these subjects – the implications for the present controversy should be clear. It is difficult to fathom why exactly the suggestion of utilising the philosophy of religion in the form of independent and officially recognised interpretative methodologies needs to be considered as being hermeneutically illegitimate or heuristically dysfunctional.

With the hermeneutical justification for the utilisation of the philosophy of religion within Old Testament studies taken care of, it is now time to move on to more constructive matters. According to Pailin (1986:03) several issues of concern feature on the agenda in the philosophy of religion, e.g.:

1. The nature of religion
2. The nature of religious language
3. The concept of revelation
4. The nature of God
5. The existence of God
6. The problem of evil
7. Religious experience
8. The relation between religion and history
9. The relation between religion and science
10. The relation between religion and culture
11. The relation between religion and morality
12. Supernatural and parapsychological phenomena (miracles, telepathy, etc.)
13. Life after death
14. Etc.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss all the various topics in detail. Readers of this thesis who are not acquainted with the subject matter of the philosophy of religion are referred to the variety of viewpoints as articulated by any of the following introductory studies: Flew (1966); Mitchell (1971); Charlesworth (1972); Rowe (1978); Wainright (1978); Churchill & Jones (1979); Smart (1979); Swinburne (1977,1979); Cahn & Shatz (1982); Davies (1982); Kolakowski (1982); Nielsen (1982); Hick (1983); Abraham 1985; Pailin (1986); Hubbeling (1987); Geisler & Corduan (1988); Pojman (1988); Tilghman (1992); Kolak (1994) and Quinn & Taliaferro (1997) and Davies (2000).

In addition, the interested reader can also browse through academic journals (e.g. *APQ; AJP; CJ; IJPR; IP; JP; PQ; PR; PS; PT* [cf. "List of Abbreviations"]) to get a feel for the dynamic of the philosophical rhetorical enterprise.

Of the aforementioned issues on the agenda of philosophy of religion, it is no. 5 – the existence of God – that will constitute the particular issue of concern in this study. Moreover, whilst under this rubric philosophers of religion include both arguments for and against the existence of God, it is the latter domain of inquiry that will be encountered in the pages to follow.

This being said, however, concern for most of the other issues on the agenda (e.g. the nature of religious language, the nature of God, the problem of evil, the relation between religion and culture/history/science, etc.) will not be altogether absent from this study. Even though this thesis has as its primary focus the reconstruction of ontological arguments, given the scope of the problematic, either direct or indirect consideration of most of the other issues on the agenda will also feature in the case against realism (see below under "outline of contents").

This state of affairs is unavoidable as one can hardly argue for or against the existence of a deity without some reference to the presumed nature of the particular religious language, the supposed nature of the deity, the relation between the particular religious discourse and history or science, etc. Still, these issues are of secondary importance and attention to them will be limited. Such concern will be directly proportionate to the possible bearing these secondary issues might have on the primary ontological issues forming the basis of the particular arguments against the existence of Yahweh.

Since the present study is done in the context of Old Testament science, there is an additional problematic that needs to be mentioned as far as methodology is concerned. As the initial concern of the thesis pertains to the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the text and not (initially) to that of God as depicted in Christian philosophical theology, the popular atheist arguments against the existence of God cannot be reproduced to argue the hypothesis. Any attempted recourse to atheist arguments against the existence of God already articulated in the philosophy of (Christian) religion may well be either irrelevant or invalid in the context of Old Testament Yahwism.

Most contemporary atheist arguments that are based on the views of people like Hegel, Comte, Hume, Kant, Holbach, Feuerbach, Darwin, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Ayer, Russell, Camus, Sartre, and others are mainly constructed with the God of the post-biblical Christian philosophical theology in mind. As such, these atheist arguments are not always directly applicable to the context of Old Testament God-talk. If one were to argue against the existence of Yahweh by uncritically adopting any one of the arguments against the existence of God, whilst simultaneously failing to compensate via adaptation for the possible differences between the profiles of the two deities, the entire case against realism might well be invalid.

In many instances, the various popular atheist arguments against the existence of the Judaeo-Christian God (e.g. the argument from evil; logical problems with omnipotence and omniscience, etc.) would, in the context of some of the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh, not even apply. Left unmodified and utilised in the context of Old Testament Yahwism, such arguments are based on "pseudo-problems" with little basis in the discourse about Yahweh in the Old Testament texts.

Of course, it may be useful to take cognisance of the atheist arguments articulated by e.g. Sartre (1948); Madden (1968); Springfield (1968); Phillips (1970); Monod (1972); Angeles (1976,1980); Cupitt (1980); Dawkins (1978,1986,1995); Smith (1979); Gauvin (1981); Mackie (1982); Nielsen (1985); Kurtz (1986); Russell (1986:55-72); Barker (1987, 1993:41-62); Steiner (1989); Martin (1990); Stein (1980,1985,1987,1990); Sagan (1997:22-27); etc.

However, since the profile of the deity that these arguments presume to deconstruct is often at odds with that of Yahweh as depicted in the text, they cannot be of primary relevance in the present context. For example, the problem of evil may indeed constitute an argument against realism pertaining to the ontological status of certain conceptions of "God". However, this popular atheist argument cannot be used to argue against the existence of Yahweh if the Old Testament texts sometimes explicitly acknowledge Yahweh's causative role in the actualisation of natural and moral evil. Neither can the illogical nature of certain conceptions of omnipotence and omniscience be used to argue against the existence of Yahweh if the deity is not

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always depicted as being all-powerful and all-knowing.

In other words, the devil's advocate's arguments against the existence of Yahweh must be constructed with reference to the particular depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts rather than presupposing a conception of the deity as defined by Christian philosophical theology. Moreover, the devil's advocate must reckon with the fact that the Old Testament texts are not systematic, coherent and philosophical but pluralist, diverse and exhibit prosaic and poetic as opposed to propositional discourse.

In order to facilitate a hermeneutically legitimate and heuristically functional context for attempting the reconstruction of arguments against the existence of Yahweh, the following methodological innovations have been pioneered:

1   With reference to the context of Old Testament interpretative methodologies, the approach adopted in this thesis may be designated as **"philosophical-critical analysis"**.

2   **"Philosophical-critical analysis"** can be defined as that type of interpretative approach to the text that concerns itself with those problems generated in the reading of the Old Testament texts that relate to the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion. The latter discipline is utilised in an auxiliary fashion analogous to the ways in which Old Testament scholars already utilise other disciplines such as the history and sociology of religion.

3   The concept of **"philosophical-critical analysis"** is an "umbrella" term:

3.1   On the level of exegesis (micro-analysis), philosophical-critical analysis operates in the form of "philosophical criticism". **"Philosophical criticism"** may be defined as that form of biblical criticism where individual texts are read from the perspective of what relevance they might have for one or more of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion.

3.2   On a larger scale, philosophical-critical analysis features in the format of a "philosophy of Old Testament religion". **"Philosophy of Old Testament**

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religion" involves a form of macro-analysis on the same scale as Old Testament theology, i.e. where the Old Testament in its entirety is under consideration. In this case, the concern is what the discourse of that collection of religious texts as a whole (and despite its incoherent and diverse nature) might yield with regard to its possible bearing on and relevance for any of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion.

Since this study is concerned with the ontological issues regarding the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament *as a whole*, the type of philosophical-critical analysis that will be encountered in the chapters to follow can be classified as macro-analysis. In other words, the case against realism can be seen as an example of a "philosophy of Old Testament religion". Because of its broad scope and the fact that the concerns are not limited to a single passage in the text, the case against realism as a whole cannot be classified as philosophical criticism (i.e. micro-analysis). The latter form of biblical criticism will, however, not be wholly absent from the thesis as there are many individual texts that will be read from a philosophical-critical perspective. Yet even here the micro-analysis will feature only as a preliminary step on the way to macro-analysis.

In sum then, a "philosophical-critical" approach to the particular problematic that will be of concern in this thesis should be adequate in order to facilitate an attempt to deal with the question whether or not Yahweh exists in a manner that is hermeneutically legitimate, methodologically contextualised and heuristically functional. Moreover, a philosophical-critical approach to the problematic should be able to do justice to the complexity and comprehensiveness of the ontological issues so often bracketed in other approaches but which will provide the focal point of the present research.

Given this hermeneutic and heuristic background regarding the type of interpretative methodology selected for the justification of the hypothesis, the following method or process was actualised in an attempt to meet the stated objective:

1. **The discourse of the entire Old Testament** was scrutinised from a philosophical-critical perspective for elements that make realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh problematic.

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2. **The discourse of Old Testament scholarship** was assessed for perspectives on the texts that might have atheist ontological implications.

3. The relevant data from both sources were then **abstracted, sorted** and finally **reconstructed** in the form of a variety of systematic arguments against the existence of Yahweh.

The end result of this methodology is, as the title of this study suggests, a philosophical-critical perspective on the case against realism in Old Testament theology.

1.6   OUTLINE OF CONTENTS

Philosophers of religion who attempt to argue for or against the existence of God utilise a variety of different arguments to prove their case. Those arguing that God exists have come forward with ontological arguments, arguments from design, cosmological arguments, arguments from religious experience, arguments from teleology, existential arguments, arguments from revelation, etc. In turn, those denying that God exists have replied with arguments from psychology, arguments from sociology, the argument from evil, the argument from logical positivism, and a host of inversions of the popular theistic arguments e.g. the argument from bad design, etc. (cf. Pailin 1986:126-141).

As noted earlier, this study is not an example of the philosophy of *Christian* religion but rather an attempt to engage in a philosophy of *Old Testament* religion. Consequently, the arguments featured in the case against realism in Old Testament theology cannot be watered down copies of the arguments utilised in the philosophy of Christian religion. Instead, the devil's advocate's arguments must be based on categories and topics more directly related to the nature and contents of the biblical discourse and that of Old Testament studies.

The attempt to argue the case against realism in Old Testament theology will be based on seven arguments specifically tailored to deal with the ontological problems generated by the variety of biblical-critical readings of Old Testament texts. The

devil's advocate's arguments against the existence of Yahweh are the following:

1. The argument from theological pluralism
2. The argument from unorthodox theology
3. The argument from polymorphic projection
4. The argument from mythology and syncretism
5. The argument from fictitious cosmography
6. The argument from fictitious history
7. The argument from meta-textual history

Each of the chapters to follow will feature one of the aforementioned arguments. For practical purposes, the contents of these chapters will all be constituted along the following lines:

1. The chapter begins with an introduction to the particular argument to be reconstructed.

2. The introduction is followed by the main section in each chapter involving a comprehensive and systematic presentation of the issues that make realism pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text problematic.

3. Finally, each chapter concludes with a summary of the perceived anti-realist ontological implications of the particular problematic and a reminder of the particular argument's location and function in relation to all the other arguments and, therefore, of the cumulative nature of the case against realism.

A cursive overview of the contents of each chapter can be ascertained from the following description:

*   In **Chapter 2, the argument from intra-textual theological pluralism** in the Old Testament will be reconstructed from a philosophical-critical perspective. First of all, it will be demonstrated that there exist within the Old Testament's depiction of Yahweh serious and irreconcilable contradictions regarding the nature and attributes of Yahweh; the acts of Yahweh in history and the morality the deity

considers normative. Secondly, diachronic perspectives from both tradition and source criticism will also reveal serious ontological dilemmas for realism. Given the reality of mutually exclusive representations of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts, the implication appears to be that, if Yahweh does exist at all, at least some of the depictions have no extra-textual counterparts. This means that realism based on a supposed "Old Testament view" of Yahweh is impossible. There is no one coherent Old Testament view of Yahweh. All we have is a host of mutually exclusive ideologies relating to each other in deconstructive fashion.

- In **Chapter 3, the argument from unorthodox theology** is presented. Here the focus will be on how realism in the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh is apparently deconstructed by orthodox Christian philosophical theology. The argument of this chapter is that, if there is only one God and this God conforms to the profile constructed by stereotypical Christian philosophical theology, Yahweh as depicted in the text must be a character of fiction. As long as the real God is conceived of as being eternal, single, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnibenevolent, the deity Yahweh who is often depicted as not exhibiting any of these attributes obviously has no extra-textual counterpart. The bottom line is that, if "God" exists, Yahweh doesn't.

- The third argument against the existence of Yahweh – **the argument from polymorphic projection** – will be discussed in **Chapter 4**. With the same basic format as the previous chapters, this chapter intends to demonstrate why the presence of anthropomorphism, sociomorphism and psychomorphism in the discourse depicting Yahweh is immensely problematic for realism in Old Testament theology. It will be argued that the main dilemma is not, as some scholars suggest, that it was merely a case of Israel's views of the world, history and morality being imperfect and limited. Rather, the essence of the dilemma for realism in biblical theism is shown to be the fact that the god Yahweh himself subscribes to a world-view demonstrably based on all-too-human projection. By demonstrating that the deity's own relation to and beliefs about the world, the events of history and normative morality never transcend the culturally and historically relative superstitions of his speechwriters, it is possible to expose the

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deity Yahweh as a creation of humans, rather than vice-versa.

- **Chapter 5** features a reconstruction of **the argument from mythology and syncretism.** Here the ontological implications of embarrassing elements in the Old Testament texts such as parallels with other ancient mythologies, ample evidence of syncretism, the belief in magic and traces of superstition will be spelled out. It will be argued that the presence of these elements in Old Testament God-talk makes realism in Old Testament theology problematic as it suggests that the ontological status of the deity is demonstrably not much different from any other god featured in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

- **Chapter 6 – the argument from fictitious cosmography –** deals with the ontological implications of the fictitious elements in Old Testament cosmology. It will be demonstrated that there are numerous locations in the world in the text with no counterparts in extra-textual reality. The problem, once again, concerns not merely the fact of Israel's primitive conceptions of the world but the embarrassing truth that the god Yahweh himself shared its erroneous beliefs and that his alleged revelation and acts even presuppose the empirical veracity of such conceptions. The main concern of the chapter, however, deals with the question of Yahweh's supposed whereabouts in actual reality. As Yahweh is often depicted as literally dwelling "up there" in the skies and this is demonstrably not the case in the world outside the text, realism regarding the ontological status of the deity can actually be falsified by empirical means.

- In **Chapter 7** the focus will be on what may be called **the argument from fictitious history**. This argument against the existence of Yahweh can be seen as consisting, on the one hand, of various sub-arguments demonstrating why it has become problematic to believe that the scenarios depicted in the biblical narratives actually happened as depicted. On the other hand, an attempt is made to explain why the presence of fiction in the texts depicting the acts of Yahweh leads to the radical albeit often repressed conclusion that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is himself a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart. Since the nature of the texts allows one to demonstrate that the god Yahweh never really appeared,

spoke and acted in the ways depicted, it follows that no sufficient grounds remain to justify realism regarding the ontological status of the deity.

- **Chapter 8** discusses the seventh and last argument against the existence of Yahweh in the case against realism: **The argument from meta-textual history**. Here the analysis will be concerned with the philosophical dilemmas for realism as these are implicit in the critical reconstructions of the origin, nature and developments of both Yahwistic religion and the texts that later became the Old Testament. It will be argued that rather than Yahwism being *the* true religion and the Old Testament being the inerrant, infallible and inspired "Word of God", a combined historical and philosophical approach to the origin and development of both Yahwism and the Old Testament implies otherwise. The history of Old Testament interpretations may even be construed as a history of repressed anti-realism. Finally, the devil's advocate even goes so far as to suggest that both contemporary conservative and critical attempts to salvage realism are half-baked and hypocritical. All the anticipated possible objections to the devil's advocate's case against realism are demonstrably riddled with informal fallacies.

- In **Chapter 9**, the final chapter in this thesis, a summary will first be presented to recapitulate on the essence of what has been argued in the case against realism. This will be followed by an attempt to spell out what the devil's advocate believes to be the pan-atheist (sic) implications of the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology. It will be argued that when theology is no longer bracketed with the history and philosophy of religion, it becomes clear that the end of realism in Old Testament theology has a domino effect. It spells the end of realism in any form of theism in any way related to, dependent on or derived from the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism. The bottom line is that, if Yahweh as depicted in the text does not exist, neither does "God".

Though probably somewhat of an artificial distinction, it might be useful to take cognisance of the fact that, apart from the general ontological concern, the chapters of this study can be classified along the following lines of interest. Chapters 2-3 can be seen as being concerned with matters pertaining to *theology*, chapters 4-6 with what

some would call *mythology,* and chapters 7-8 with issues of *history.*

Alternatively, from the perspective of the philosophy of religion – though once again somewhat of an oversimplification – the themes on the subject's agenda feature in the following manner in the thesis:

TOPIC OF INQUIRY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION	LOCATION IN THE CASE AGAINST REALISM (CHAP. NO.)
The nature of religion	**4**,5,8
The nature of religious language	**2**,3,4,**5,6**,7,8,9
The concept of revelation	**2**,3,4,5,6,7,**8,9**
The nature of divinity	**2,3**,4,8,9
The existence of divinity	**2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9**
The problem of evil	**3**,4,9
Religious experience	3,**4**,7,8
Religion and morality	**2,3**,5
Religion and history	2,3,4,5,6,**7,8**
Religion and science	4,5,**6**,7,8,9
Religion and culture	3,**4,5**,8
Parapsychology/supernatural	4,**5**,7,8
Life after death	2,4,**6**,8

Readers wading through the devil's advocate's case should therefore not be concerned if any additional arguments that they might consider to be potentially relevant to the aim of this study do not immediately feature where they expect it to. Nor should they consider it a hindrance if all popular objections to particular claims made at some points in the thesis are not immediately addressed.

In every chapter there will be found assertions and conclusions that might prompt the reader to think, "this is not necessarily so". On many occasions, readers may very well consider the devil's advocate to be presumptuous, naïve, outrageous, pedantic, positivistic or overzealous in presenting its case. It may be felt that the devil's advocate did not take account of this or that theory, idea or development in Old

Testament studies, theology, philosophy or some other related discipline.

Be that as it may, it is of course not practically possible to furnish an exhaustive rebuttal of each and every conceivable objection that could possibly be made in reply to what the devil's advocate has to say. Some readers might very well come to the end of the thesis finding that certain possible objections were not explicitly taken cognisance of. If this happens to be the case, such readers should ask themselves whether or not some or other statement found in the arguments constituting the case against realism might not contain *implicit* clues as to how the devil's advocate would have responded.

Finally, it should be noted that since the case against realism constitutes *a cumulative argument* against the existence of Yahweh, the functionality of the details should ultimately be judged from the perspective of the whole. *Readers are therefore advised not to dismiss or write of the ideas presented by the devil's advocate prematurely or until they have taken cognisance of the case against realism in its entirety.*

1.7   ASSUMPTION

One of the first issues that needs to be addressed concerns the assumption implicit in the devil's advocate's hypothesis and consequently underlying its proposed methodology. I am, of course, referring here to the question of whether it is really possible to "prove" the ontological status of a deity one way or another. In light of the fact that over two millennia of philosophers could not prove or disprove the existence of divine reality to everybody's satisfaction, the present attempt to do so might seem quite presumptuous.

To be sure, many readers will no doubt find the devil advocate's approach to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts simply smacking of rationalism, positivism and modernism in general. In the present academic cultural milieu, which some would call post-modernist, anything remotely associated with these epistemological approaches is not exactly popular. There can be no doubt that the devil's advocate's use of words such as "exist" and "prove" will leave many theologically and philosophically sophisticated people exasperated.

Readers sharing the opinions of the so-called analytical approaches to the philosophy of religion (based on the ideas of Wittgenstein and the paradigm shift supposedly initiated after the linguistic turn in the philosophy of language) will no doubt consider all the ontological judgements of the devil's advocate as being methodologically improper. The analytical school denies that it is the task of the philosopher of religion to pronounce judgement on whether a certain belief system is true or false and whether or not it corresponds with what is otherwise believed about reality. According to this view, everything should be left as it is and merely clarified. No ontological critique is allowed.

In this regard, the devil's advocate would like to concur, at least in a Popperian sense, on the impossibility of constructing a positive proof *in favour of realism*. To do so would require a certain amount of clarity, definition and verification that is just not possible this side of heaven. However, according to the devil's advocate, whilst proving that Yahweh does exist may be problematic, proving that he does *not* (i.e. via a Popperian form of falsification) may not to be as difficult as might *prima facie* appear to be the case.

As an Old Testament specialist, the devil's advocate does not need to comb every nook and cranny of the universe before it can justify its atheist conclusions. All that is required in the present context, according to the devil's advocate, is to prove that the depiction of Yahweh in certain Old Testament texts is demonstrably fictitious. Once this has been done, the collapse of realism regarding such parts of the Old Testament discourse soon leads to the deconstruction of realism with regard to all the other texts somehow dependent on or inter-textually related to it. Moreover, once it has been determined that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text does not exist, it follows that realism is also unjustified in any form of theism in any way rooted in, related to or derived from the Old Testament God-talk.

Whether or not one agrees with this perspective on such a controversial issue, the reader should not be too quick to dismiss the assumption of the devil's advocate regarding the alleged possibility of proving that Yahweh (a.k.a. God) does not exist. Neither should one be too quick to write it off simply by stigmatising it as positivist, rationalist, theologically naïve, satanic, nihilist, impossible, invalid or whatever else.

In fact, the devil's advocate is convinced that, by the time the reader has managed to read through its entire case – hopefully with an open mind – present reservations, confusion or disagreements concerning the possibility of proving that Yahweh does not exist may very well no longer be such a contentious issue.

Of course, it is not expected that there will be universal agreement as regards to the success of the attempted proof that Yahweh (and therefore God) does not exist. Nevertheless, only by reading what the devil's advocate has to say can the reader be sure whether the scepticism about the possibility of proving that Yahweh/God does not exist was, in fact, justified or, alternatively, presumptuous.

1.8   NOVELTY

As noted earlier, problems with realism in Old Testament theology are hardly novel. Hitherto, many studies exist that, from perspectives of critical history, sociology, literary criticism, ideological criticism and comparative religion have attempted to demonstrate that realism in Old Testament theology is problematic.

Thus one finds that many historical and sociological approaches seem to have little room for divine causation and supernatural intervention in their narration of the history and sociology of Israel. Narrative critics speak of Yahweh as a character of fiction whilst ideological critics often appear to consider the deity to be a mythological projection and an objectification of particular individuals' and communities' will-to-power. Even reading between the lines of many an Old Testament theology, it seems obvious that the particular scholar believes that the god Yahweh as depicted in many an Old Testament text only exists in the worlds of text and imagination.

The novelty of the present approach, therefore, lies not so much in the specific problematic it deals with, i.e. with the collapse of realism. Rather, what distinguishes this study from previous deconstructions of realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh is the particular way in which it attempts to spell out, via the philosophy of religion, exactly why such anti-realism may be justified. Its novelty lies in the way in which it articulates the same age-old issues from a "philosophical-

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critical" perspective and the fact that the reconstruction of arguments against the existence of Yahweh is the sole concern of the entire study.

It might very well be the case that the devil's advocate's arguments have been implicit within the discourse of critical scholarship all along. However, the heuristic objectives of the non-philosophical methodologies that have generated them ensured that the implications of the findings of critical scholarship with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh were seldom made explicit. By utilising the format of the ontological arguments in the philosophy of religion, this study refuses to bracket ontology and intends to spell out clearly and explicitly the possible anti-realist ontological implications of earlier research. In this sense then, through abstraction and reconstruction via philosophical-critical analysis, the thesis provides an *alternative* and, in that sense, novel perspective on why realism is problematic in Old Testament theology.

THE CASE AGAINST REALISM

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF YAHWEH
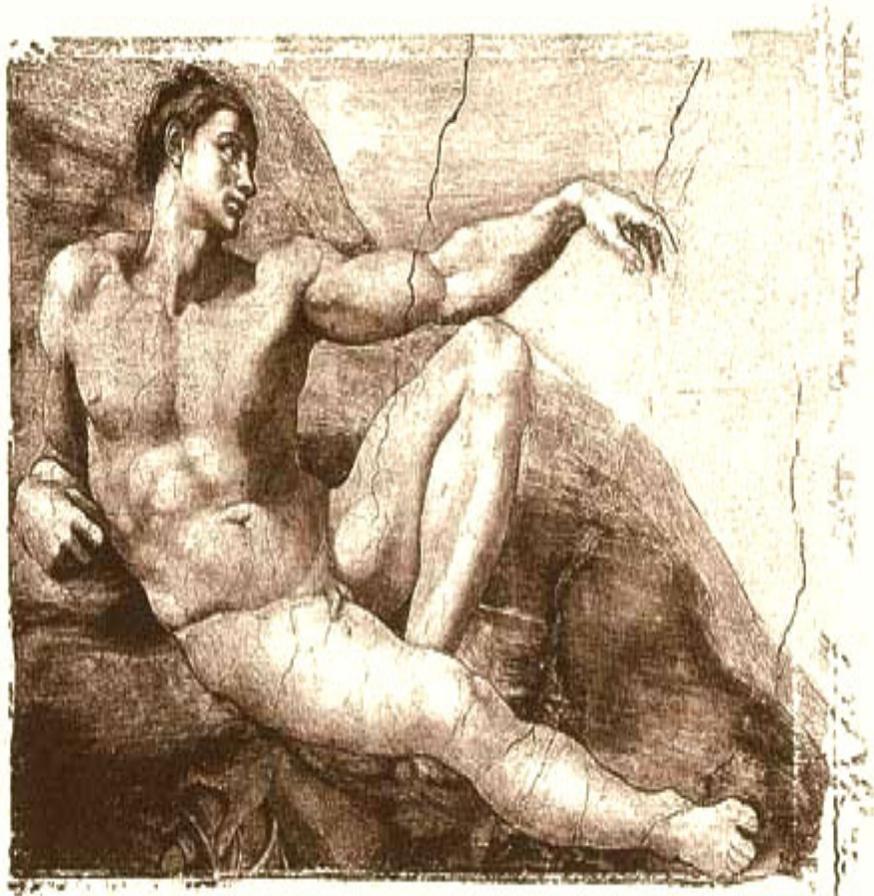
CHAPTER 2

THE ARGUMENT FROM THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

"I tried to understand it, but it was toil in my eyes."

(Ps 73:16)

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Suppose one wanted to prove that Yahweh does, in fact, exist. In order to do this, one must first construct a general profile of the nature and attributes of the deity. It is not sufficient to affirm or deny the existence of a god without first stating what kind of god one is talking about (cf. also Fretheim 1984:01). Virtually all arguments for or against the existence of a particular divine reality are of relative value, as a quite specific divine nature must be presupposed. Change the profile, and a particular proof that the deity does or does not exist becomes obsolete.

Yet it is already here – in what should merely be the preliminary stage of ontological reconstruction – where realism starts to come apart at the seams. The reason for the consternation is, according to the devil's advocate, the plethora of contradictory representations of Yahweh in the Old Testament (cf. Carroll 1991:44).

Even conservatives acknowledge that the fact that there appear to be mutually exclusive characterisations of the deity, differing in terms of his nature, attributes, acts and will (cf. Haley 1992:55-90). If this is the case, the first problem for any realist position regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament can be said to pertain to the phenomenon of *theological contradictions* in the text. In other words, if someone would set out to prove that Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament actually exists, the anti-realist might respond with the sceptical question, "Which version?"

Most Old Testament scholars, however, have taken cognisance of the particular dilemma. It is not uncommon to encounter discussions within Old Testament theology featuring concepts like "pluralism" (cf. Fretheim 1984:04; Brueggemann 1997:61), "diversity" (cf. Goldingay 1982:01, Hanson 1982:01), "contradictions" (cf. Carroll 1991:44), "discrepancies" (cf. Haley 1992:01), differences (cf. Coote & Coote 1996:21) and "inconsistencies" (cf. Patrick 1981:22) when referring to the incoherent characterisation of Yahweh in the text. Whatever one's choice of designation, there seems to be a general consensus among critical scholars that the Old Testament is filled depictions of Yahweh that cannot be harmonised with each other.

In this chapter, attention will be paid to the possible anti-realist ontological implications of the alleged contradictory depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts. If there are contradictory versions of Yahweh then, obviously, not all can correspond to the same supposedly existing extra-textual phenomenon. While it is logically and theoretically possible that all versions of mutually exclusive sets of claims could be fictitious, it is also true that, if one of the depictions happens to be factual, those that contradict it are necessarily fictitious.

2.2   THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2.2.1   Examples of theological contradictions pertaining to Yahweh's nature

What is Yahweh like? What are the essential attributes of the divine being the texts are supposed to witness to? In answer to these questions, one only need to engage in a comparative analysis of the various profiles of the deity constructed in the different books of the Old Testament. As the following examples from a synchronic approach to the Old Testament show, the texts are not consistent on this topic and contradictory claims regarding the nature and attributes of Yahweh abound:

A Yahweh who is the only God (cf. 2 Kgs 5:15, Isa 45:5, etc.)
A Yahweh who is not the only God (cf. Gen 3:22; Judg 11:24, Ps 82:1, 97:7, etc.)

A Yahweh who is practically omniscient (cf. Ps 139; Isa 40-55; Prov 15:11, etc.)
A Yahweh who is not omniscient (cf. Gen 18:21, 22:12; Deut 8:2, 13:8; etc.)

A Yahweh who knows the future (cf. Gen 15; Isa 40-55; Ps 139; Dan 1-12; etc.)

A Yahweh who does not know the future (cf. Gen 1-11, 18; Job 1-2; Jon 3; etc.)

A Yahweh who changes his mind and repents (cf. Gen 6; Ex 32; Num 14; Am 7; etc.)

A Yahweh who does not change his mind and repent (cf. Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29, etc.)

A Yahweh who is responsible for all evil (cf. Isa 45:7; Lam 3:17; Am 3:8; etc.)

A Yahweh who is not responsible for all evil (cf. Gen 6,18; Ps 82; Mal 1-3; etc.)

A Yahweh who frequently appears to people (cf. Gen 2-36, Ex 1-40; etc.)

A Yahweh who seldom or never appears to people (cf. Eccl 1-12; Esther; etc.)

A Yahweh who has human form (cf. Gen 1:26; 18; 32; Dan 7:9; etc.)

A Yahweh who is nothing like humans (cf. Deut 4:12; Job 10:4; etc.)

A Yahweh who needs to sleep or rest (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Ex 31:17; cf. also Ps 44:24; etc.)

A Yahweh who never sleeps or rests (cf. Ps 121:4; Isa 40:28; etc.)

A Yahweh who is merely a national deity (cf. Deut 4:19; Judg 11:24; Ps 147:20, etc.)

A Yahweh who is a universal deity (cf. Amos 9:17; Dan 1-12; Job 1; Mal 1:11; etc.)

A Yahweh who is not omnipresent (cf. Gen 4:16, 11:5, 18:21; 1 Kgs 19:11-12, etc.)

A Yahweh who is omnipresent (cf. Ps 139:7-10; Jer 23:23-24; etc.)

A Yahweh who is sovereign, in control and fearless (cf. Isa 40-55; etc.)

A Yahweh who is unsure of himself and afraid (cf. Gen 11:6, 18:17; etc.)

In each case, not all of the differing depictions can be harmonised (cf. Carroll 1991:38,47). Contrary to prima facie assessments, the devil's advocate's juxtaposing of such contradictory claims is not the result of the sort of biblicism among laity where passages of the Bible have been decontextualised by ignoring their temporal and rhetorical context in scripture. Rather, as listed here, the contradictions bear

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witness either to deconstructive intra-biblical polemics or, alternatively, to the failure of the formative religious communities to discern the mutually exclusive representations of Yahweh in the sacred texts they canonised (or both).

The devil's advocate's decision to juxtapose the discrepancies in this fashion was therefore merely an economical way of saying what is often said in much longer and more complex exegetical discussions. It would certainly have been impractical to provide a detailed commentary on every passage. Readers are more than welcome to ascertain for themselves whether the particular contexts in which the listed passages feature had been ignored or not. Of course, it is to be expected that both conservative and critical readers will find their own ways of harmonising the contradictions or downplaying their significance.

If the devil's advocate's interpretation of the texts in question is correct, the ontological implications of the contradictions should be spelled out. The same Yahweh cannot be both wholly omniscient yet need to obtain information he lacks. The same Yahweh cannot be both omnipresent and at the same time need to literally descend and ascend in order to travel to certain localities. The same Yahweh cannot be both invisible to human eyes and at times speak with people face to face. The same Yahweh cannot be, in the same sense, both the only god and one amongst many others.

The reality of such basic contradictions regarding Yahweh's nature inevitably leads the consistent philosophical-critical interpreter to one of either three possible conclusions:

1. Yahweh who is x exists and the Yahweh who is not x does not.
2. Yahweh who is not x exists while the Yahweh who is x does not.
3. No Yahweh exists at all.

Whichever of the alternatives one opts for, realism with regard at least some of the depictions of Yahweh in the text collapses. For the purposes of this chapter, it is not yet necessary to choose between the mutually exclusive depictions. The reader simply needs to take cognisance of the fact that, given the presence of contradictions

regarding the nature and attributes of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, one or more of the two mutually exclusive representations of the deity have no basis in extra-textual reality.

2.2.2   Examples of theological contradictions pertaining to Yahweh's actions

The problem of contradictory depictions of Yahweh can also be seen when one attempts to reconstruct a record of the deity's alleged actions in the world (cf. Friedman 1987:222). The following are examples of mutually exclusive views pertaining to exactly what it is that Yahweh had done in the past:

- Contradictory creation accounts (e.g. Gen 1 vs. Gen 2 vs. Ps 74 / Job 26; Job 38-40; Isa 43 vs. Jer 51 vs. Prov 8 vs. Ps 90)

- Contradictory accounts of the first revelation of the divine name (e.g. Gen 4:26 vs. Ex 6:3 vs. Josh 24)

- Contradictory claims regarding the deity's causal relation and exact actions in certain scenarios (e.g. 2 Sam 24:1 vs. 1 Chron 21:1)

- Contradictory claims regarding the ways in which Yahweh relate to and intervene in the human world (e.g. Gen 1-35; Jon 1-4 vs. Eccl 1-12)

- Contradictory views of Yahweh regarding the establishment of the cult during the desert wanderings (e.g. Ex 12-40; Lev 1-27 vs. Jer 7:22)

- Contradictory relations between Yahweh and the forces of chaos (.e.g. Leviathan) (cf. Ps 74:14 vs. Ps 104:26 vs. Isa 27:1)

- Contradictory *ipsissima verba* of the dialogues that Yahweh allegedly engaged in (e.g. the so-called "Ten Commandments" in Ex 20 vs. Ex 34 vs. Deut 5)

- Contradictory envisioned future actions of Yahweh (e.g. Isa 65-66; vs. Eccl 1:4-9,

3:15; vs. Dan 11-12)

- Contradictory relations between Yahweh and the dead (e.g. Genesis, Deuteronomy; Pss 6:4-5, 88:10-12; Isa 38:18-19 vs. 1 Sam 28 vs. Pss 49, 73, Isa 14, 26; vs. Dan 12 vs. Eccl 9:10)

These are but a few examples of the discrepant views in the texts pertaining to the supposed actions of Yahweh in the world and in the lives of people. Numerous additional examples of contradictions pertaining to historical issues will be discussed in the argument from fictitious history (cf. chapter 8).

Once again, not all the depictions can be factual. If Yahweh exists at all, he either made animals and plants before humans (cf. Gen 1:11-27) or he made a human before he made the plants and animals (cf. Gen 2:7-25). Yahweh either destroyed the Leviathan long ago (cf. Ps 74:14) or he simply created it as a playmate (cf. Ps 104:26) or he will kill it in the future (cf. Isa 27:1). He either made an underworld of conscious denizens (cf. Isa 14:9-10) or he made one where the dead know nothing (cf. Eccl 9:5-6). Yahweh either commanded that the Sabbath should be kept in remembrance of creation (cf. Ex 20:10-11), to call to mind the redemptive act of the exodus (cf. Deut 5:13-15), or merely for regeneration (cf. Ex 34:21) – but not all at the same time.

It is as simple as that. Though some might think such an emphasis on technicalities is pedantic, the law of non-contradiction applies here too. Even if this is denied because it is claimed that literary fiction does not always strictly adhere to the need for logical consistency, realism has not being salvaged. To be sure, realism is destroyed by the acknowledgement that what we are dealing with is fiction rather than history (as it was supposedly originally intended).

If the Old Testament deity does have an extra-textual counterpart then either the Yahweh who did x exists, and the version of Yahweh who did not do x does not, or vice-versa. Alternatively, Yahweh does not exist at all. Whichever of the depictions one opts for, it spells the end of realism concerning all the other depictions that stand in a mutually exclusive relation to the preferred version of the deity's acts.

As was the case in the previous section, such a deconstruction of realism pertaining to at least some of the representations of Yahweh, is not enough in itself to invalidate realism completely. Yet the implied invalidation of realism regarding the depictions of Yahweh in some texts can be reckoned as being yet one more additional and significant element in the devil's advocate's cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text.

2.2.3   Examples of theological contradictions pertaining to Yahweh's will

Another variety of theological contradictions pertains to the ethical dimension of the Old Testament's depictions of the deity whose existence it takes for granted. But what exactly is the will of Yahweh? What does he consider to be right and wrong? In an attempt to supply an answer to these questions, the astute reader not blinded by dogma will encounter a host of contradictory views that defy harmonisation (contra Haley 1992:219-311).

The following examples of some of the many ethical contradictions should suffice to prove the point:

Yahweh considers it right that children should be punished for the sins of parents (cf. Gen 3:16-19; 9:22; Ex 20:5; 2 Sam 21:1; etc.)
Yahweh considers it wrong that children should be punished for the sins of parents (cf. Deut 24:16: Ezek 18:4, etc.)

Yahweh demands that worship be centralised and limited to one particular place (cf. Deut 12:5ff)
Yahweh does not demand centralised worship confined to one particular place (cf. Ex 20:20-24; Judges; Samuel-Kings)

Yahweh will never allow Moabites into his congregation (cf. Deut 23:3; Neh 13:24)
Yahweh will allow Moabites into the congregation (cf. Ruth 1-4)

Yahweh approves of Jehu's killings (cf. 2 Kgs 10)
Yahweh denounces Jehu's kilings (cf. Hos 1:4)

Yahweh commanded the burning of children (cf. Ezek 20:20-27)

Yahweh did not command the burning of children (cf. Jer 7:31)

Yahweh wanted the people to have a king (cf. Deut 17:14-15)

Yahweh did not want the people to have a king (cf. 1 Sam 8:5-8)

Yahweh does not want the king of his people to be rich (cf. Deut 17:16-17)

Yahweh wants his chosen king to be rich (cf. 1 Sam 8:17; 1 Kgs 3:13)

Yahweh forbids eunuchs to ever enter into his congregation (cf. Deut 23:1)

Yahweh does not forbid eunuchs to ever enter into his congregation (cf. Isa 56:3)

It is forbidden to marry a sister or brother who had a different mother (cf. Lev 18:9)

It is not forbidden to marry a sister or brother who had a different mother (cf. Gen 20:12; 2 Sam 13:13)

Yahweh specifically tells Moses he wants a bullock to be offered for the sins of the congregation (cf. Lev 4:14)

Yahweh specifically tells Moses it is a he-goat that must be offered for the sins of the congregation (cf. Lev 9:3; Num 15:24)

Yahweh specifies that Levites can begin to serve in the temple at age 25 (cf. Num 8:24)

Yahweh specifies that Levites can begin to serve in the temple at age 30 (cf. Num 4:23)

Yahweh is extremely concerned with moral virtue and piety (cf. Prov 1-9)

Yahweh is not extremely concerned with moral virtue and piety (cf. Eccl 5-9)

Given the reality of these discrepancies, the devil's advocate considers realism in Old Testament theology to be unjustified and its ontological perspective deconstructed. Either Yahweh considers it appropriate to punish children for the sins of their fathers (cf. Gen 3:16-19; 9:22; etc.) or he does not (cf. Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:4; etc.). Yahweh either condoned Jehu's blood bath (cf. 2 Kgs 10) or he did not (cf. Hos 1:4). The deity

either accepts Moabites in his congregation (cf. Ruth 1-4) or he does not (cf. Deut 23:1). Alternatively, maybe there is no Yahweh and neither of the opposing viewpoints bears any relation to extra-textual reality whatsoever.

"C'mon, c'mon—it's either one or the other."
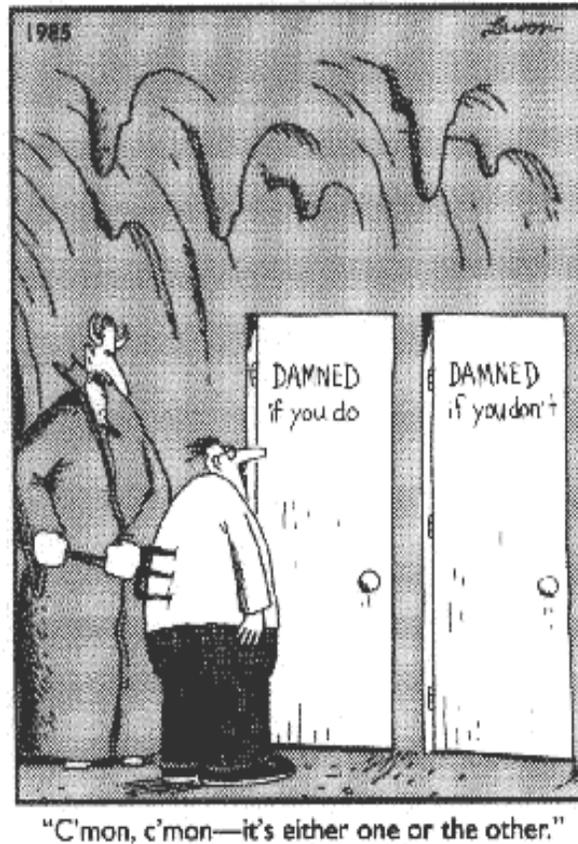
Either Yahweh who is for x is real or Yahweh who is against x is real. Both cannot be true, but both can be false if Yahweh himself does not exist. For the present, however, if one does not wish to accept the latter conclusion then the only option is to pick and choose between the mutually exclusive views. Whichever of these depictions of Yahweh one opts for, if consistency means anything, one must conclude that the opposing depiction is not true and therefore Yahweh-as-depicted therein is not real.

2.2.4 The deconstruction of realism via theological pluralism from the perspective of tradition criticism

Another way to provide a perspective on the deconstruction of realism via theological contradictions involves something other than synchronically pitting selected texts

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against each other. In order to deconstruct realism one may also approach the issue *diachronically* and consider the ontological implications of the way the traditions about the nature, acts and will of the deity Yahweh developed in the history of the Hebrew people. In other words, one may be able do demonstrate that realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh is problematic by spelling out the ontological implications of what the interpretative approach known as tradition criticism has discovered concerning the development of Old Testament traditions.

Many of the stories constituting the tradition were at first (or later on) transmitted orally, and during other stages, scripturally (cf. Knight 1977:5-20). The process of transmission did not simply involve a mindless copying and reproduction of what was perceived to be unalterable details of inerrant discourse concerning Yahweh. To be sure, the traditions were handed down in dynamic fashion marked by interactive and creative reinterpretation, recontextualisation, recasting and reconstruction (cf. Fishbane 1985:02).

The depiction of the deity Yahweh appears to have been continually reshaped and reinterpreted to meet contemporary theological and psychological needs and to bring it into conformity with present social and political matrices (cf. Fishbane 1985:383-391). Whether one is thinking of the stories about creation, the patriarchs, the exodus, the wanderings in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the period of the monarchy, the exile or the post-exilic period, etc., matters little. Tradition criticism has demonstrated that what we have in the Old Testament are not the unmodified and original versions of these stories (cf. Knight 1977:05; Fishbane 1985:01).

In other words, old scenarios featuring Yahweh were often reinterpreted and reconstructed, the outcome of which has Yahweh being a different sort of deity, saying different things and doing different deeds (cf. Nelson 1981:40). Consequently, when a depiction of Yahweh in any of the traditions is compared with earlier or later versions of itself, the result is not a coherent and harmonisable account of the nature, words and acts of the deity (cf. Alt 1929:04; Cross 1962:11; Moberly 1992:02).

The end result of this transmission process was therefore not one static and monolithic tradition but a plethora of often mutually exclusive traditions resulting from different

adaptations and alterations within the different religious communities (cf. Deist and Du Plessis 1982:66). Whatever the earliest traditions' relation to reality, the amount of adaptation these underwent implies that, whatever the "truth" of the discourse, the scenarios featuring Yahweh never actually happened according to the details to be found in the "final form(s)" of contemporary canonical Old Testament texts (cf. Brueggemann 1997:117).

For those whole fail to appreciate the ontological ramifications of these discoveries, the devil's advocate would like to spell out what it translates to in layman's terms. When the text depicts Yahweh as speaking to and interacting with people like Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, David, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others, it is not providing us with a factual report of actual events. What we encounter in the Old Testament concerning the details of the speeches and acts of Yahweh are, technically speaking, no more than fictitious literary constructs. As such, it represents the ideology of particular religious traditions at a particular point in time. The biblical discourse therefore do not feature what was known to be true but rather what some people considered to be true and what they would like others to believe to be true (cf. also Friedman 1987:192).

Now if one were then to insist that Yahweh as depicted in the text actually does exist, the philosophically minded tradition critic might once again respond with the question "which version?". Even should one make the choice for only a single depiction of Yahweh in the text and ignore all others that contradict it, the problems with realism do not go away. Because the depictions of Yahweh currently featured in the texts are often at odds with themselves as they were articulated during an earlier phase of the transmission process, realism remains problematic. When the history of religion is no longer bracketed by the philosophy of religion, anti-realism seems to be the inevitable result.

The bottom line is therefore that, technically, Yahweh-as-depicted in the details of the particular scenarios in the final form(s) of the traditions is, like the traditions themselves, little more than a literary construct. Since the reinterpreted, reconstructed and reinvented traditions are technically indeed fictitious, it necessarily follows that Yahweh as depicted therein must himself be a character of fiction.

Whatever Yahweh there may be or whatever the supposed extra-textual or intra-psychical referent is that the traditions supposedly bear witness to, this is, for the present at least, beside the point. If the earlier versions of the traditions are in any sense factual then Yahweh-as-depicted in the adapted, modified, recontextualised, reconstructed and reinterpreted current versions of the Old Testament traditions has no corresponding extra-textual counterpart and therefore does not really exist.

2.2.5   The deconstruction of realism via theological pluralism from the perspective of source criticism

A second means of deconstructing realism from a diachronic point of view involves spelling out the ontological implications of a source-critical explanation for the theological pluralism in the Old Testament. In fact, source-critical analysis has not only uncovered a plethora of sources in the text but has also demonstrated that the various sources often contain conflicting if not contradictory views about Yahweh (cf. Friedman 1987:12; Harwood 1992:02).

According to Friedman (1987:122), many mutually exclusive religious depictions of Yahweh can be abstracted from the various sources in the Pentateuch. For example, in J, E and D, the deity is pictured in very personal ways: moving around on the earth, taking visible forms, engaging in discussion and even debating with humans. In J's account of creation and the flood, the deity personally walks in the garden when it is not too hot, makes clothes for the humans, becomes afraid that they might eat from the tree of life, personally closes the door of the ark, smells Noah's sacrifice and becomes terrified of human potential when the tower of Babylon is built thereafter.

In P, however, we find a more cosmic and transcendent deity. In P's creation and flood stories, for example, Yahweh remains above and beyond, commanding and controlling humans and nature. When later on, Moses strikes the rock at Meribah, Yahweh remains distant in P's story while in E he personally stands on the rock. In J's story of mount Sinai, Yahweh himself descends in fire and speaks face to face with Moses while in P he does not. In J and E Yahweh is actually seen by Moses whilst in P it is impossible to look at Yahweh (cf. Friedman 1987:113).

In J, Abraham can plead with Yahweh over the fate of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Moses can plead with the deity over the fate of the people in the spy story. In E as well, Moses pleads over the people's fate in the golden calf story and later pleads passionately and eloquently with the deity he has come to know by talking to him as a man with his friend. He can even say to the deity that if he continues to mistreat him as he is doing he might as well kill him. In D, Moses can also plead with Yahweh to let him arrive in the Promised Land but Yahweh refuses. In contrast to such intimate scenarios, P never has humans speaking with the deity in such a manner. In P, Yahweh is transcendent and distant. He simply gives commands and his will is done (cf. Friedman 1987:114-115).

Not to overstate the case, Yahweh is sometimes pictured as personal in P and sometimes as transcendent in J, E and D. But the difference overall is still blatant and profound (cf. Friedman 1987:238). When the redactor combined the sources, he mixed two different and often incompatible views of Yahweh. It involved a juxtaposing of the deity as both universal and distant as well as intensely anthropomorphic and personal. Yahweh was now not only the creator of the universe but also "the god of my father". This fusion was artistically dramatic and theologically profound but involved a balance that none of the sources independently intended (cf. Harwood 1992:143).

There was another even more paradoxical result of such a union of sources. This involved the creation of theological contradictions between Yahweh's justice and his mercy. On the one hand, one finds that P not only depicts Yahweh as distant but also never speaks of Yahweh's mercy. He also never uses words for grace or repentance. Moreover, he never speaks of the faithfulness of Yahweh. Yahweh, according to this depiction, was an unsentimental judge before whom there is no room to beg for mercy.

On the other hand, as Harwood (1992:91) concludes, the deity in J and E is virtually the opposite of his "alter ego" in P. In these latter sources, there is much emphasis on divine mercy and the belief that transgression can be forgiven through repentance. Yahweh is depicted as not only immanent and humanlike but also extremely gracious.

The words that P never mentions occur about seventy times in J, E and D. It is not just a matter of vocabulary. J, E, and D also develop the idea, in contradiction to P, of a merciful deity in all the stories they tell. In these sources, Yahweh often repents of the vengeful acts he intended.

The author of P rejected this view of Yahweh. Stated differently, if Yahweh-as-depicted in J, E and D exists, P might be classified an atheist with regard to that particular deity. The inverse is also true. If the deity of P is real and is the only God, it follows that, since the authors of J, E and D do not believe in that kind of God, with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh (P), they would be anti-realists. Again, though it would be a mistake to draw the line too absolutely between the sources, on the whole, the distinction between Yahweh-as-depicted in the various sources remains apparent and dramatic (cf. Friedman 1987:239).

Moreover, the theological discrepancies are not merely between J, E and D on the one hand and P on the other. Even when, for example, J and E are compared, several theological and ontological dilemmas arise. For instance, the E source appears to be more concerned with the religious ideologies of the Northern Kingdom whilst the J source attempts to legitimise Judean religious beliefs. In an attempt to do so, history-like narratives have been created for theological and ideological purposes (cf. Harwood 1992:75-76). But if this is the case, what shall one think regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in these stories?

Historians and source critics do not spell this out. Yet such analysis often implies that Yahweh's dialogues with Moses (or Noah/Jacob/David) in E (or J for that matter) are fictitious in that they never actually happened as depicted in the text. In other words, Yahweh did not literally appear and spoke and act as the sources depict him as doing. The deity is simply a literary and ideological construct piously injected into otherwise mundane history or fiction to propagate certain religious ideas and to validate later cultic institutions.

The justification for such an anti-realist perspective on the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the source materials can be found by comparing the theologies of J and E. As Friedman (1987:214) observes, when the deities of J and E are

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compared, the god of J and the god of E believed different things regarding what happened in the past. J's Yahweh has a different "biography" than Yahweh in E. Moreover, the god of J relates differently to the world and people than the god of E. There are also serious and substantial discrepancies between the nature of the two deities. They even have different ideas regarding what constitutes normative morality and cultic laws.

Logically then, the deity depicted in J cannot have the same supposed extra-textual counterpart as the deity depicted in E. In fact, it has been suggested that the reason later redactors combined J and E the way they did was because, were the two sources left independent of each other yet side by side, the discrepancies would become too apparent (cf. Friedman 1987:215). This would be intolerable since having texts that contradict each other pertaining to the nature, acts and will of Yahweh would surely discredit the whole business of legitimising later social, political and religious institutions.

Ultimately, however, as Friedman (1987:217) recognises, the combination of P with J, E and D was even more deconstructive of realism than the combination of J and E with each other because P was intentionally *polemical*. Whereas Yahweh-as-depicted in JE would denigrate Aaron and favour Moses, Yahweh-as-depicted in P denigrated Moses and favoured Aaron. While Yahweh in JE held that anyone could be a priest, P's Yahweh insisted that only descendants of Aaron could hold that office. Whereas the Yahweh in JE had angels, made animals talk, had human habits and could be seen by humans, Yahweh-as-depicted in P would have none of that.

D, meanwhile, came from a circle of people who were as hostile to P as the P circle were to JE. These two priestly groups had struggled, over centuries, for priestly prerogatives, authority, income, and legitimacy. Although suspicious, it is therefore hardly surprising that, when the depictions of Yahweh in D and P are compared with each other, one gets the feeling that whatever extra-textual god there may be, these two sources cannot be talking about the same deity. The Yahweh of D endorses the Deuteronomistic beliefs whilst the Yahweh of P favours those of the priestly circle. This is problematic for realism for it suggests that there never was any real Yahweh who did what either P or D claims he did. Rather, the contradicting depictions of the

deity suggest that both the Yahweh of D and the Yahweh of P are fictitious literary constructs created by humans for ideological purposes. Now, someone has put all of these sources together. Henceforth, one finds that realism is deconstructed by the fact that the Yahweh of J is not the Yahweh of E, both of whom cannot be the Yahweh of D who is certainly not the same deity as the Yahweh of P.

The combining of Yahweh's JEDP in R resulted not only in an Old Testament depiction of Yahweh which deconstructs itself because of irreconcilable internal contradictions. As Friedman (1987:222) realises, another outcome of the JEDP hybrid deity of R is that, as a whole, the depiction of Yahweh is now one that neither J nor E nor D nor P ever intended. In addition, it is doubtful that R was cognisant of the chimerical nature of the deity he constructed. The final product is therefore a god who was created by all the authors but who would be unreal to all of them. In other words, when it comes to R's version of the "God-of-the-Old-Testament", J, E, D and P are all, technically speaking, atheists and anti-realists.

When R combined mutually incompatible sources, the authors of which would view each other's theology as unorthodox, the result is thus the deconstruction of realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the final form of the text (R). Given the contradictions regarding the nature and attributes of Yahweh as well as his relation to the world between the various sources, it follows that Yahweh-as-depicted by R with his hybrid deity does not correspond to any extra-textual referent. Yahweh-as-depicted by R does therefore not exist.

From this perspective provided by source-critical analysis, it seems that the claim that atheism did not exist during the time and in the culture of the Old Testament people is only partially true. For the greater part of history, people were accused of being atheists not so much for denying the existence of any god whatsoever but in their refusal to believe in a certain conception of supposed divine reality (cf. Armstrong 1993:02). Thus we find that the early Christians were called atheists as they did not believe in the gods of Roman and Greek mythology. In this sense, some Old Testament authors were also "atheist" in the sense of not believing in the existence of the gods represented by the pagan idols.

If the existence of the pagan deities can be denied, there seems to be good reason to suspect that some people in ancient Israel could have felt the same way about Yahweh-as-depicted in orthodox religious ideology. The same charges Deutero-Isaiah levels at the supposedly insubstantial ontological status of idols are just as conceivable on the lips of those who did not worship Yahweh.

Of course, one should not expect to find many examples of Yahwistic atheism in the Old Testament since the common ideology of all its contributors assumed the reality of Yahweh. Texts in the Psalms where the enemies are depicted as saying that "there is no god" or asking the protagonist "where is your god?" can justifiably be seen as a form of atheism (cf. Pss 14:1 [53:1], 42:4,11). Despite the fact that such denials often appear to be more of a practical sort where not the existence but the activity of the deity is called into question, an interpretation of the particular texts as theoretical atheism is not ruled out all together.

The fact that those denying that there is a god subsequently refer to the deity's incompetence need not be understood as meaning that such people actually did believe in the existence of the divine but not in its power and influence. Even today, atheists who do not believe any god exists still find the time to use sarcasm and to mock the supposed actions of a particular deity if it were to be assumed that he was real. Seen from this perspective, the claim that there is no god on the lips of the fool may well be seen as expressive of more than practical atheism.

In conclusion, however, the point of this section is not to argue for the existence of absolute atheism in the Old Testament world. Nevertheless, when the sources are delineated, another type of atheism is quite apparent. This is not an absolute atheism but more that of a relative sort. The author of P did not really believe that the god of J was real. Neither did the author of E and D. On the other hand, J would have found Yahweh-as-depicted in P unreal and the same can be said for the relationship between D and E. In this relative sense then, mutually exclusive beliefs about the nature of Yahweh imply a definite atheism on the part of certain sources with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in others.

2.2.6   The problem with the idea of an "Old Testament view" of Yahweh

According to devil's advocate then, given the reality of theological pluralism in the Old Testament (i.e. theological *contradictions as* opposed to mere supplementary and complimentary theological "diversity"), not only is a realist position problematic, thoroughgoing realism is impossible. As a result of contradictions in the text with regard to the nature, will and acts of Yahweh, one cannot be a thoroughgoing and consistent realist even if one wanted to be so (cf. Carroll 1991:85).

In other words, even if one tried and was committed to be a realist pertaining to the entire Old Testament, this would be impossible for the simple fact that pluralism has been canonised (cf. Gunn and Fewell 1993:187). If you opt for certain views of Yahweh in the text, you implicitly deny the validity and veracity of others. This means that even the most conservative of scholars and readers are themselves anti-realists and therefore Yahwistic atheists when it comes to depictions of Yahweh in the text that do not cohere with their orthodox stereotypes (cf. Harwood 1992:157).

Claiming that there is an "Old Testament view" of a certain event, of Yahweh or regarding the will of the deity is as nonsensical and naïve as claiming that there is a New Testament view of Jesus (see Dunn 1977). In the same way New Testament Christianity is pluralist and dispersed with mutually contradicting ideologies, so too the diversity and pluralism of the Old Testament are beyond unification. One can only be a realist by way of repression, ahistorical appropriation, reinterpretation, forced harmonisation and unwarranted selectivity (cf. Cupitt 1991:61).

All attempts at writing a coherent Old Testament theology will always involve generalisation and reductionism of an infinitely complex variety of beliefs and ideological and religious viewpoints that can only make sense to someone without knowledge of the history of religion that underlies such ideas. Without a centre and with a host of different and mutually exclusive beliefs, realism with regard to the ontological status of the character Yahweh-as-depicted in the text becomes endlessly problematic (cf. Brueggemann 1997:38).

Not only is Yahweh's extra-textual existence suspect, the very concept of "Yahweh" is itself problematic. Which version of Yahweh are we talking about? Which depiction of him is assumed to be normative? Which tradition provides us with the facts? Which stage in the history of transmission is provides us with the best access to what is actually the case? Which source material corresponds the most with a supposed extra-textual state of affairs? How is the choice for certain depictions and the bracketing of others justified? How can Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament exist when there is no Old Testament view of Yahweh as such but only many more or less mutually exclusive representations of the deity?

Of course, some conservative theologians will insist that there are not really contradictions at all (cf. Archer 1982:1-5; Arndt 1982:02). It will be claimed that the discrepancies exist only in the mind of the devil's advocate. A close reading should adequately take cognisance of the context of each text and remember that God and, therefore, the Bible cannot contradict itself (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:3-4). According to this view, all alleged contradictions are only apparent but not real – harmonisation is always possible, if not compulsory.

As Hanson & Hanson (1989:39) recognise, the conservative apologists have numerous rhetorical strategies in place in order to deal with the contradictions. Through ad hoc theories, speculation and conjecture. They will no doubt attempt to harmonise all the contradictions provided by the devil's advocate. Of course, these people do have a right to their opinion. However, as far as the devil's advocate is concerned, the arguments of conservatives are riddled with fallacies (cf. also Barr 1981:72; Cameron 1987:143; Hanson 1989:39).

Typical examples of informal fallacies in conservative apologetical literature include circular reasoning, begging the question, unwarranted assumptions, groundless conjectures, dogmatic eisegesis, economy with the truth, *ad hoc* rationalisation and *ad hominem* reasoning (cf. Mckinsey 1995:22-37; Engel 1986:83-231).

Moreover, as Barr (1981, 1984) has convincingly argued, it would seem that these people are more interested in preserving a particular dogma regarding the supposed nature and inspiration of the text than they are in ascertaining what the contents of the

texts actually consist of. Contra Archer (1982:14), conservatives seldom attempt to appropriate the nature of the Old Testament by ascertaining the meaning of the discourse on its own terms and in its original context. The devil's advocate, therefore, does not consider the fundamentalist response to the problem of theological contradictions to be a satisfactory solution to the ontological dilemmas facing realism.

Another possible objection to the atheist implications as spelled out by the devil's advocate can be seen in the claim that contradictions in the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh are to be expected when fallible humans talk about transcendent divine mysteries (cf. Carroll 1991:32; Clines 1995:35). It might even be suggested that a concern with contradictions is symptomatic of pedantry or involves a failure to appreciate the supposed "metaphorical" nature of the Old Testament's religious language (cf. Caird 1993:1-3).

This view has been particularly influential in contemporary Old Testament scholarship, especially along the lines popularised by the work of MacFague (1983). In the context of the Old Testament discourse, however, the claim that *everything* is metaphor involves both repression and sweeping generalisation. Contra Fretheim (1984:2-5), Brueggemann (1997:47-49) and Gibson (1998:22ff), on reading the Old Testament critically, it is far from obvious that all its religious language about Yahweh was originally intended to function metaphorically.

It is true that many of the references to Yahweh in the *poetic* sections which refer to the deity a "rock", a "shepherd", a "fortress" or "hiding his face", stretching out his "hand", etc. have been intended to be understood as involving metaphorical discourse. Be that as it may, the same cannot be said of the God-talk in much of the *narrative* discourse (cf. Balentine 1983:107).

When, in the Yahwist's stories of the Pentateuch, the deity is said to have human form and to exhibit human emotions it is clear from the immediate context that the author(s) intended this to be understood quite literally. Examples of such apparently literally intended God-talk include such scenarios as where Yahweh is depicted as speaking with Adam and Even in the Garden (cf. Gen 3). Also included are the depictions of the deity partaking in a meal before engaging Abraham in a theodicy

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debate (cf. Gen 18). And what about the incident in which Yahweh wrote down the law with his "finger" before some tense moments of heated interchange with Moses? (cf. Ex 31-32). Reading these stories without the need to make them acceptable for modern theological sensibilities it should be obvious that such types of discourse were initially intended to be read as literal account of actual events.

Are we really to suppose that the author of Genesis 1, as opposed to modern and post-modern theologians, believed that the world was created metaphorically by a metaphorical god? Was it metaphorically flooded via metaphorical divine anger (cf. Gen 6-9)? If the text says Yahweh went down to look at the tower of Babylon in Genesis 11, how was this initially intended as metaphor? Were we supposed to think that Jacob wrestled metaphorically all night with a metaphorical man (cf. Gen 32:22-33)? Did the author of Genesis 18 believe that Abraham was metaphorically bartering about the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah with a metaphorical entity?

When the text depicts Moses and the elders eating a meal and looking at Yahweh and his feet on a sapphire pavement, in what sense would the first audience have read this as metaphorical discourse (cf. Ex 24)? Are we actually supposed to think that Moses was almost killed on the way back to Egypt by a metaphorical avenging deity (cf. Ex 4:23-26)? Did the author of the Job story want us to think that Job's family was metaphorically killed by the command of a metaphorical god (cf. Job 1-2; 42)? Did Jonah flee to Tarsus to escape the metaphorical presence of a metaphorical deity who stopped him by metaphorically sending a fish to swallow him (cf. Jon 1-2)?

As Hebblethwaite (1988:18) asks, "If *all* God-talk is metaphorical, what are these metaphors supposed to refer to?" What is that phenomenon (metaphorically called "God") that can only be spoken of in metaphors? What is the difference between a god about whom we cannot really say anything literal and no god at all? How could a metaphorical entity be considered to be personal as well? If everything to the last word is metaphorically rather than literally true, does that mean Yahweh also only "exists" metaphorically but not literally?

Contemporary philosophers of religion have come up with many theories regarding the nature of religious language (cf. Hick 1993:11-29). On the one hand, it should be

noted that the idea of religious language being metaphorical is but one of many competing theories. One will also encounter views claiming that religious language is not metaphorical but symbolical (Tillich), analogical (Aquinas), non-cognitive (Randall, Braithwaite, Phillips), meaningless (Ayer), models of transcendence (Ramsey), mythical (Bultmann), anti-realist (Cupitt), etc. (cf. Hick 1993:19-29).

On the other hand, it should never be forgotten – as many Old Testament scholars seem to be prone to do – these theories, including the idea of religious language as being metaphorical, were devised with the discourse of Christian philosophical theology in mind. Such philosophical theology did indeed contain references and allusions to biblical imagery but these had already underwent a long period of reinterpretation and decontextualisation following early Hellenistic Christian allegorical interpretation and the rise of sophisticated philosophical theology since Augustine. Such theorising was for the most part an attempt to make sense of the discourse of post-biblical religious creeds and not based on an in-depth analysis of the discourse of Old Testament texts (cf. Nineham 1976:44-59).

The devil's advocate, therefore, cannot help but wonder whether what motivates the belief among Old Testament scholars that all God-talk in the text is metaphorical is, in fact, nothing more than the same repressed aversion to the literal meaning that once popularised the allegorical approach to the text. In both cases, the theory assists in facilitating readings more acceptable to contemporary cultural and theological sensibilities.

The devil's advocate thus feels justified to consider the appeal to the supposed metaphorical nature of all Old Testament God-talk as being the liberal theologian's counterpart to the dogmatic and apologetical eisegesis of conservatives. In the same way conservative theologians read into the text their orthodox theological doctrines to salvage theological realism as they see it, the belief in the metaphorical nature of religious language allows critical scholars a similar liberty.

While critical scholars in general have no problem with being explicit about the problems, fiction, absurdities and contradictions in biblical texts, their belief that the discourse were intended to be metaphorical allows them to circumvent the anti-realist

implications of admitting the flaws of what is supposed to be Holy Writ. Thus they repress the atheistic implications of accepting the all-too-human nature of the text and evade its consequences by inserting the fine print about its supposed metaphorical base which, they belief, lessens and deconstructive effects of intra- and inter-textual discrepancies.

In sum, the theory of the supposed metaphorical nature of all God-talk, in terms of its bearing on the present issue of concern (i.e. theological pluralism) is not only presumptuous but also misleading. As such it fails miserably as part of the desperate attempt of realists to deal with the dilemma presented by the crude and often literally intended pluralist discourse of the Old Testament in a valid manner.

A related albeit slightly different way of dealing with theological pluralism involves the claim that that there is nothing to worry about since the discrepancies are merely the result of fallible human perspectives on ineffable divine reality (cf. Carroll 1991:39).

Once again, the devil's advocate considers this view to be yet another subtle evasion of the actual problematic. Though it is technically true that humans wrote the text, this masked apologetic strategy distorts the issue currently under consideration. What is conveniently ignored is the fact that the texts containing the words and acts of Yahweh never present themselves as fallible human perspectives to which alternatives may very well exist. What we are faced with are actually contradictory accounts of Yahweh's words and acts as these are recounted even when the deity himself is depicted as speaking in the first person (cf. Harwood 1992:88).

Of course, one can snigger at the naiveté of this observation. However, should one insist that even in such cases the *ipsissima verba* of Yahweh are actually the words put into the divine character's mouth by human speechwriters, what is this but a tacit admittance that the discourse is technically fictitious anyway? If Yahweh never actually said what the texts depict him as saying, does this not mean that, whatever God there may be, technically, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction?

Then again, some apologists for realism might appeal to the concept of "progressive

revelation" in an attempt to make sense of the discrepancies (cf. Haley 1992:10,12,27 and passim). Once again, however, the devil's advocate considers this appeal to be unsatisfactory as an attempt to salvage realism.

First of all, as was the case in the previous attempt to salvage realism, the appeal to the concept of progressive revelation distorts the problematic by pretending that the texts intended to present us with fallible human perspectives of the divine which would obviously need to be modified over time. Those who accept the idea of progressive revelation therefore need to repress the fact that, from the beginning, what the texts presents about Yahweh is implied to be the normative perspective of the deity himself and not the imperfect perspective of mortals (cf. Harwood 1992:117).

A popular example where the apologetic of progressive revelation has been frequently applied can be found in theologians' attempts to explain and justify the Old Testament's ideas on the concept of "holy war" (cf. Deist 1986:22). Not a few believers with post-biblical cultural sensibilities have cringed at the commands of Yahweh in the Old Testament to destroy the cities of other peoples and to kill everyone therein, including women and children.

However, because there seems to be a development in the Old Testament itself regarding what was involved in such warfare, many scholars have gladly pointed to this fact to claim that holy war is indeed reprehensible. It is alleged that Israel, as a product of its socio-cultural and historical context at first believed that the holy war was what Yahweh expected of them. Eventually, by the time of the New Testament, Yahweh's true nature was revealed in Jesus who showed that Yahweh is actually a god of perfect love who does not like violence (cf. Deist 1986:34-36).

Such a view, though theologically satisfying, is also problematic. The Old Testament never presents its views regarding the holy war as merely Israel's ideas about what Yahweh supposedly commands. From the beginning, what is said about the issue comes directly from the mouth of Yahweh himself. And this is the main dilemma for the theory of progressive revelation: the contradictions are not merely present in the human ideas about Yahweh but, if we take the text seriously, in the views of the deity himself. Theologians who argue that the contradictions are not problematic must

overlook the fact that, according to the text it is the deity and not the humans who speaks with a forked tongue (cf. Harwood 1992:75-76).

Once again, those who do endorse the idea of progressive revelation might think that the way this objection to the idea has been articulated implies a certain naiveté on the part of the devil's advocate. After all, even when the text presents something as the word of Yahweh it is still humans who put those words in his mouth (cf. Carroll 1991:37; Clines 1995:155). Be that as it may, it is somewhat strange that this fact makes the matter any less problematic from an ontological point of view.

Does the fact that the words of Yahweh are actually the words humans attribute to him implicative of a belief that Yahweh thus did not really utter those words? If this is the case then the dilemma is as great as ever since it implies that the Yahweh depicted as uttering such commands is indeed a character of fiction and does not exist. However, if it is not the case and Yahweh did command it, then either the deity himself softened as time passed or later representations must be fictitious. Since those who believe in progressive revelation usually believe that Yahweh was always loving and that the later views of him are closer to reality than the former it is unlikely that this alternative will be accepted either (cf. Haley 1992:171).

In sum then, the first dilemma for those who adhere to the theory of progressive revelation is the fact that, from the beginning, what is abhorrent and obscene is never presented as being merely a human interpretation of a partially revealed divine will. What the texts pretend to be are often nothing less than the views of Yahweh himself speaking in the first person. If it is claimed that technically it was not really Yahweh who said such and so but a dialogue created for him by a human author, what is this but a tacit admittance that Yahweh-as-depicted – i.e. voicing unorthodox ideas – is a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart?

The second objection to the idea of progressive revelation is that the concept is distortive of the way religious beliefs of different periods in Old Testament history relate to each other. This relation is often presented as one in which later views merely supplement the partial truths of earlier revelation. The whole process is therefore perceived to be cumulative as Yahweh reveals ever more about himself, his

nature and his will.

The problem with this construct is that it is simply incorrect. The fact of the matter, as was demonstrated previously in this chapter, is that much of earlier alleged divine revelation is not *supplemented* but *contradicted* by later alleged revelation. The image of linear and cumulative progression is less appropriate than what may be seen as "paradigm shifts" in the history of the religious beliefs of Old Testament times. This is true concerning all the traditional theological loci, e.g. protology, theology proper, ethics, eschatology, thanatology, demonology, etc. (cf. Harwood 1992:72).

In other words, contrary to what the idea of *progressive* revelation prima facie implies, the various religious beliefs/revelations were not merely supplemented as time went on. Instead, alleged divine revelation was often discarded, reinterpreted, deconstructed and contradicted by what was later also alleged to be divine revelation.

Finally, contra Hanson & Hanson (1989:22), any objection to the way in which the contradictions in the biblical texts were utilised in this chapter, based on the view that the Old Testament is not a textbook of theology, is equally inadequate as an attempt to salvage realism. Thought it is true that the discourse of the Old Testament texts is not presented in the format of prepositional systematic theological discourse and is not constituted by sophisticated philosophical argumentation, this fact regarding the nature of the text's rhetoric is irrelevant (cf. also Barr 1999:137).

To be sure, if the untheological nature of the discourse is actually taken to imply the presence of fiction, contradiction and unorthodox views in the text, then this apologetic position, instead of salvaging realism, actually provides yet another argument in favour of anti-realism.

2.3   CONCLUSION

It is important from a philosophical-critical perspective not merely to note the problematic of theological pluralism and then to bracket possible ontological implications. In this regard, the following line of reasoning indicates what the ontological implications may be given the reality of contradictory depictions of

Yahweh in the Old Testament.

1. When the texts, traditions and sources of the Old Testament are analysed comparatively, it is clear that there are contradictory depictions of Yahweh in the text pertaining to his nature, acts and will.

2. Logically, if this is the case then not all the depictions can possibly refer to the same allegedly real entity.

3. Even if realism could somehow be justified with regard to at least one of the depictions then all those depictions that contradict it must be fictitious.

4. If that is the case then Yahweh-as-depicted in such representations must himself be a character of fiction.

5. If this is the case then Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

The argument from deconstructive theological pluralism is the first argument in the case against realism. Since the case itself constitutes a cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh, the particular argument reconstructed in this chapter should not be appropriated in isolation. Taken by itself, it does not yet justify thoroughgoing anti-realism. All that has thus far been established is that, given the presence of contradictions in the depictions of Yahweh in the text, at least some of the representations have no bearing on supposed extra-textual reality.

CHAPTER 3

THE ARGUMENT FROM UNORTHODOX THEOLOGY

> *"And it happened that when the two of them had gone out into the open field, Cain answered and said to Abel, 'I see that the world was not created by love and is not led according to the fruit of good works…There is no judgement and there is no Judge and there is no other world…'"*

> *T. Neofiti 1*

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Popular Christian orthodoxy has always insisted that the only God in existence is the God of the Bible (cf. Archer 1982:11). It is insinuated that, only by constructing a profile of God from the biblical texts will one be able to provide a normative and true view of God as He really is. Moreover, as Kolak (1994:22) notes, according to the traditional Christian view of God, the biblical deity supposedly exhibits the following attributes:

1. He has existed from eternity past (eternal)
2. He is the only God (one)
3. He cannot be seen (invisible)
4. He can do anything (omnipotence)
5. He knows everything (omniscience)
6. He is everywhere (omnipresence)
7. He is wholly good, loving and not responsible for evil (omnibenevolence)

According to the devil's advocate, however, within the discourse of the Old Testament, numerous examples of insinuations to the contrary can be found. There are many texts where Yahweh is depicted in ways that contradict the popular orthodox view of the deity (cf. also Fretheim 1984:22-109; Barr 1984:44-56; Carroll 1991:33-51; Clines 1980:323-330; Wifall 1979:05; Schmidt 1983:03; Terrien 1978:25-27; Tillich 1955:12; Blumenthal 1998:46).

From an ontological perspective, if it is true that Yahweh is depicted in ways contradicting the profile of the entity supposed to be the real and only God, it follows that, if God exists, Yahweh-as-thus-depicted must be a character of fiction. In other words, if it can be shown that the profile of Yahweh is not identical to that of the true God, it follows that, if one believes that God is real, one must conclude that Yahweh does not really exist.

With regard to the reconstruction of what the devil's advocate designates as being the "unorthodox" elements in the Old Testament's depictions of Yahweh, it should be noted that the presentation to follow will be very one sided. This is not because the devil's advocate denies the existence of depictions of Yahweh that are more congenial to popular orthodoxy. Rather, these "unorthodox elements" have been abstracted and reconstructed because it is such discourse that is often ignored, repressed, bracketed and reinterpreted. This is often done in unwitting attempts to rope the Old Testament in the service of constructing supposedly biblical – yet orthodox – systematic theologies (cf. Clines 1995:15).

What follows is therefore not intended as if it were meant to be a reconstruction of *the Old Testament's view* of Yahweh. As argued in the previous chapter, the devil's advocate considers such a concept to be meaningless given the plethora of theological contradictions in the texts. Rather, what will be presented here will merely be a selective abstraction of those texts which, standing as they do alongside more orthodox discourse, make not only the orthodox elements less convincing but deconstructs realism in any biblically based version of theism (cf. Carroll 1991:49).

As the argument from unorthodox theology is probably the most presumptuous of the seven arguments in that it needs to assume the truth of an orthodox stereotype, the

present chapter is somewhat out of sync with the rest of the case against realism. This is the result of the fact that it features what may very well be one of the logically less valid arguments in devil's advocate's arsenal. Strictly speaking, one cannot argue that Yahweh does not exist simply because he does not measure up to what some people expect him to be. However, given the fact that the orthodox God of the philosophers is by far the most popular version of the deity in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, the argument from unorthodox theology, despite its indirect relevance, is nonetheless quite devastating in its own way (cf. Garrison 1940:02).

For those who do not subscribe to the orthodox profile of the deity as reconstructed in post-biblical philosophical theology, the present argument may still be relevant albeit in a different manner. It still retains some potency given the fact that even the orthodox stereotyped version of the attributes of God, though a product of post-biblical philosophical theology, has its roots in some of the more user-friendly Old Testament texts themselves (cf. Barr 1984:77).

In other words, the devil's advocate is happy to acknowledge that there are several passages in the Old Testament that, if selected whilst repressing the alternative trajectories in the texts, do seem to endorse the orthodox profile of Yahweh, a.k.a God. Those who do not believe in the orthodox stereotype of God will therefore find the deconstructive value of this chapter in something analogous to what was accomplished in the previous chapter. The deconstruction of realism in this case can once again be seen as resulting from theological pluralism/contradictions in the Old Testament itself. One will therefore have no problem in finding some support in the text for the orthodox view of God but only by repressing the presence of all the heterodox versions of the deity and implying that Yahweh as depicted in heterodox albeit biblical discourse does not really exist.

To sum up the introduction to the present argument, the following formulation may be taken as articulating its essential thrust. Biblical theists claim that the God of the Bible is the only God and yet simultaneously construct a profile of that deity in ways that have little in common with many of the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament. As a result, an ontological dilemma arises. If the God of popular orthodoxy exists, by their own unwitting insinuation, Yahweh, at least as represented in the more

unorthodox depictions, does not.

3.2   UNORTHODOX ELEMENTS IN OLD TESTAMENT YAHWISM
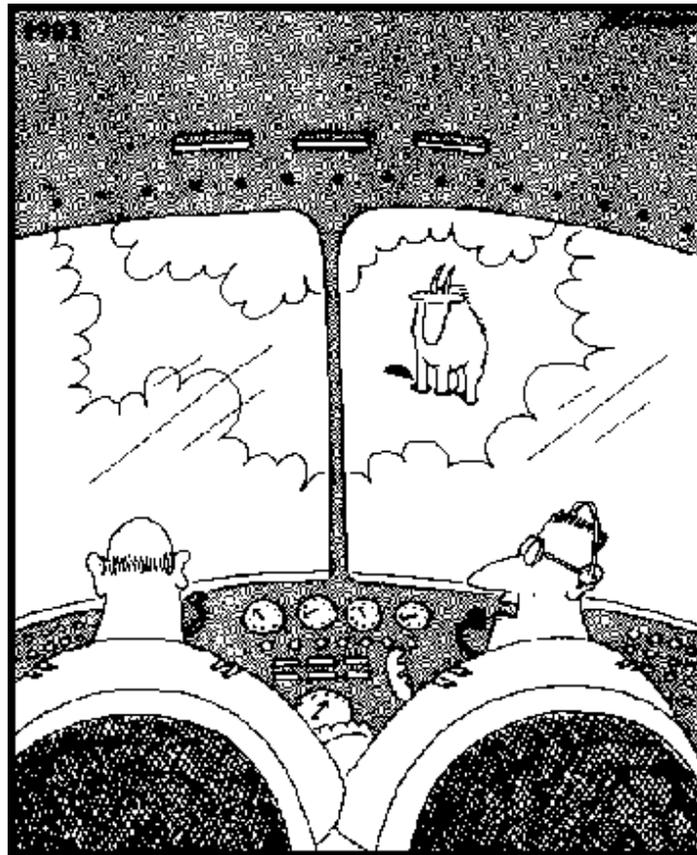
"Say ... what's a mountain goat doing
way up here in a cloud bank?"

The following section contains numerous quotations from the Old Testament text. The motive for such a presentation was not to take up space but concerns the effect that various ways of articulating the issues can have on a reader. If the devil's advocate merely made a lot of apparently heretical claims whilst simply adding a few textual references in brackets afterwards, the reader is apt to take cognisance of the particular ideas without really internalising the contents of the particular problematic.

In order to show exactly just how "unorthodox" the Old Testament can be, the devil's advocate decided that it was necessary – and will certainly be far more effective – to

provide the reader with direct and explicit evidence from the text itself. In doing so, it will be possible to show how, what might otherwise be considered to be far-fetched assertions are, in fact, the view expressed in the texts themselves. It is these contents that religious traditions have conveniently repressed, ignored and/or reinterpreted when it was decided what the God of the Bible was supposed to be like.

Another important point to take note of is that the devil's advocate will not, for the most part, provide a running commentary on each and every text it includes in its arguments. Doing so is beyond the scope of this chapter and will be impractical. This does not, however, imply that the various texts cannot possibly be interpreted to say something other than what the devil's advocate's reading insinuates. Rather, as is the style of devil's advocate argumentation, the whole perspective on the matter is to be understood as one of, "What if…?" or "Could it be?"

This conditional approach to the making of claims is not the result of relativism or a lack of nerve on the part of the devil's advocate. On the contrary, the devil's advocate think its interpretations may very well be closer to what the original authors may have intended to say than what subsequent traditions have claimed they did. Just what exactly the devil's advocate understands concerning the meaning of each and every quotation will not be spelled out for each individual text. Rather, the meaning constructed by the devil's advocate is hinted at in the perspective provided by the heading, introduction and conclusion of the particular section in which the specific quotations appear.

3.2.1   Texts implying that Yahweh is not eternal

The Old Testament speaks of Yahweh as a specific type of being – he is a god. But *what* is a god? What, according to the Old Testament, is the nature of Yahweh's being?

Stereotypically, at least from a general, modern and orthodox perspective, a god is a being who, amongst other things, is uncreated and has therefore existed from eternity past. The god is supposed to be the first cause of everything else (cf. Hick 1983:26). In contrast to this theo-politically correct profile of the relation between divinity and

eternity, it may come as somewhat of a surprise for many to learn that such a prerequisite for godhood was almost unheard-of in the ancient world. In fact, there was a virtually universal belief that a god was a *created* entity in the sense of having itself emerged from the primordial chaos material that was perceived to be the only pre-existent and eternal phenomenon (cf. Armstrong 1993:02).

In most ancient Near Eastern cultures, the chaos matter that constituted primal cosmic reality preceded the gods, many of whom were either born out of the cosmic womb or who were themselves secondary creations of the first gods (cf. Thrower 1980:27). Even so, the majority of Old Testament scholars would consider such a view of deity abhorrent and have therefore understandably denied the possible presence of allusions to theogenetic myth within the Old Testament texts (cf. Da Silva 1994:17).

Though the remains of *cosmo*genetic mythological motifs may be present in, for example, Psalm 90:2, which refers to the "birth" of the mountains (cf. also the Hebrew *"toledot"* of Gen 2:4a), there appears to be a general consensus regarding the absence of *theo*genetic motifs in the Old Testament texts. Be that as it may, the devil's advocate will at least try to challenge the majority view.

Though there will be many texts that the devil's advocate will use to deconstruct ideas regarding the other supposed attributes of Yahweh (i.e. omniscience, omnipresence, omnibenevolence, etc.), this is not the case with regard to Yahweh's relation to eternity past. To be sure, *in toto*, there may less than a handful of isolated and overlooked marginal instances in Old Testament text that may *possibly* and only indirectly be validly considered as alluding to an underlying *theo*genetic mythological motif.

Of course, *prima facie,* such a suggestion might seem absurd to most Old Testament scholars given what they think they know (or want to know) about Old Testament God-talk. Even so, according to the devil's advocate, there appears to be an obscure and ambiguous allusion to the remains of a mythological motif of Yahweh's own theogenesis in at least one Old Testament text. This unheard-of possibility can be found in a text where one would hardly expect it, i.e. Deutero-Isaiah. In Isaiah 43:10, the reader will encounter the following reportage of the words of the deity Yahweh

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himself:

> "You are my witnesses, says Yahweh, my servant
> whom I have chosen, so that you may know and may
> believe me and see that it is I - *before me no god was*
> *formed* and after me there will be no one." (Italics mine)

Consider the statement here:

> "...before me no god was formed..."

This statement is interesting for several reasons. First of all, it seems to be a polemical allusion to the ancient Near Eastern mythological motif of the primordial formation of divine beings (cf. Westermann 1969:113). Secondly, the Hebrew is ambiguous and, theoretically the rendering can be understood in at least two ways.

On the one hand, the claim on the part of Yahweh that, "Before me, no god was formed", can be taken to imply that there never was a theogenesis of any deity whatsoever. This is the interpretation understandably favoured by most commentators (cf. Westermann 1969:113). On the other hand, if there is no desperate desire to deny the possibility of unorthodox elements in the text, the ambiguity of the statement allows Yahweh's claim, "Before me, no god was formed", to be understood as implying something quite unacceptable. What few if any have dared to suggest is that the claim on the part of Yahweh can equally well be understood as expressing the deity's belief that he was the first (and only) god *who was formed (sic)*.

This unorthodox reading of the text is certainly theoretically plausible. In fact, the immediate context does nothing to rule out this possibility:

1. The word "*before"* (me) implies that there was indeed a time of existence or being prior to the existence of Yahweh. Even though Yahweh denies the existence of other divine beings during this time, the reference is still to a temporal period of reality prior to Yahweh himself. Otherwise the phrase "before me" would not have been employed at all since Yahweh could simply have said that no other gods

existed. But since he explicitly refers to a time prior to his own existence ("*before me*"), it only makes sense if we interpret this temporal indicator to denote a time prior to the existence of Yahweh himself. After all, the phrase "before me" is paralleled antithetically by another interesting phrase: "after me" (on which, see below). This antithesis indicates that the preposition is temporal and not spatial. In other words, "*before me*" cannot mean "in my presence" and its opposition to "*after me*" confirms the view that the preposition functions to indicate temporality. What else can the phrase "*before me*" mean than "before I was/existed"?. So Yahweh is saying, *before* he was/existed, no other gods were around at the time/came into being. This rules out pre-Yahwistic primordial polytheistic theogenesis but - and this has not been recognised - it actually implies that, according to the author of this text, Yahweh himself believes that he did not, in fact, always exist. The deity himself refers to a time *before* he was (there). This is the plain sense of the passage, and seems to lead logically to the conclusion that Yahweh must have been formed.

2. Though Yahweh is otherwise depicted in Deutero-Isaiah as being the creator of heaven and earth, such a conception does not preclude the motif of theogenesis. Most creator deities of the ancient Near East were themselves born within the primordial formless substances, which unlike the deity were conceived of as being the only type of eternal phenomena in reality. Creation, even by the first gods, was not *ex nihilo* but creation out of already present formless chaos matter out of which the first creator gods themselves were formed (e.g. in *Enuma elish*).

3. The book of Isaiah, as a whole and in general, contains a substantial number of allusions to ancient Near Eastern mythological entities and motifs (e.g. the basilisk [cf. Isa 11:8]; demons of the field [cf. Isa 13:21]; the Leviathan [cf. Isa 27:1], the talking dead [cf. Isa 29:4] flying dragons [cf. Isa 30:6], the fallen astral divinity [cf. Isa 14:12-15], demons of the night [cf. Isa 34:14]; etc.). This would make a single occurrence of the mythological motif of theogenesis not as surprising and unexpected as might otherwise seem to be the case.

In other words, though the first interpretative possibility aligns itself with orthodox theogenetic theology, there is no compulsive evidence in the grammar or both in the

immediate and larger textual and cultural context that rules out the unheard-of possibility suggested by the devil's advocate's interpretation.

Some concerned scholars might object to this reading and claim that such an idea is utterly alien to the Old Testament. To this the devil's advocate replies that one should remember that such a statement contains several fallacies. First of all, it appears to imply that there is something like an "Old Testament" view of Yahweh. In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that this idea is untenable and thus need not concern us here. Secondly, the claim begs the question as to whether the motif of theogenesis is really alien to the Old Testament as it simply assumes that the Isaiah text cannot possibly be interpreted to mean what the devil's advocate believes it could.

Third, the argument is a perfect example of a *non sequitur*. Even if there were no other allusions to Yahweh's theogenesis in the Old Testament, it does not follow that this fact automatically rules out the possibility that such an allusion may have been present albeit hitherto undetected in the discourse of Isaiah. After all, there are numerous instances of singular allusions to particular mythological motifs throughout the Old Testament.

This being said, presumption, unwitting dogmatic prejudice and stereotypical and inconsistent thinking may well have prevented scholars from detecting allusions to the motif of theogenesis, which may only be implicitly present or part of a subtle and indirect allusion. Unless one looks for it with sufficient background knowledge of Near Eastern mythology and an open mind, the detection of such a motif might well be impossible.

For example, take the all-too-familiar creation account in Genesis 1 to which Deutero-Isaiah so often polemically alludes to (cf. Westermann 1969:114). In this regard, the fact that, according to most interpreters, the imagery in Genesis 1:1 does not depict a creation *ex nihilo* may be very significant. In fact, as will soon become clear, if God's creation was indeed not considered by the priestly author to be "creation out of nothing", the presence of an implicit allusion to the deity's theogenesis is almost a forgone conclusion.

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According to Barr (1998:55-65) there are at least three possible ways of rendering the first verse of the Bible concerning what happened in the beginning. The third option, which, by the way, Barr considers most plausible, suggests that creation was indeed not a creation *ex nihilo*. Instead, the imagery is one of a God who brings an order out of already extant and uncreated chaos matter. In other words, the text is understood to mean that, in the beginning when God created the heavens and earth, this did not involve conjuring up what is now there *en bloc* but involved making the most of what was already there, i.e. darkness, waters, etc. (cf. Barr 1998:57-59).

If this interpretation is correct, it raises not merely the question of where the waters or darkness came from. It would also imply that these substances (darkness, waters, etc.) were believed to be, as was believed by the authors of *Enuma elish*, the eternal givens of primordial reality. In other words, chaos and even evil were conceived of as being inextricably part of reality *before* the creation of the heavens and the earth. The creator gods of the ancient Near East are depicted as creating only order and form out of formless chaos. In other words, they were themselves neither uncreated nor wholly responsible for reality *in toto.*

The fact that "God" is depicted as creating the heavens and earth in Genesis 1, therefore, need not be interpreted to mean that the priestly author believed, like Aristotle, that the deity was the "first uncaused cause" of everything in existence. The fact that the theogenetic and cosmogenetic myth known as *Enuma elish* with its explicit references to the formation of the gods in the primordial womb of chaos was the source material for the priestly author's own myth is of no small relevance. Since the creation account in Genesis 1 is, like its Babylonian counterpart, not an account of a creation *ex nihilo,* it leaves the question open as to whether the priestly author might also have believed in the theogenesis of the divine being.

The silence of the priestly author on this issue does not rule out the possibility that he did in fact believe in such an unorthodox idea. The concept of theogenesis in the ancient Near East, though crude to modern orthodox sensibilities, nevertheless has at least one advantage over the idea of a God who existed from all eternity past. To be sure, the latter idea raises several seemingly unanswerable questions. What did God do before He created the heavens and the earth? Why did He create the heavens and

the earth instead of something else? Why did He create the heavens and the earth when he did and not sooner or later in eternity? Why did He create anything at all? Where did the waters and darkness come form?

The concept of theogenesis with its idea of the formation of deities within the darkness and chaos (which were considered to be the only eternal phenomena), though raising perplexing questions on its own, *does* suggest answers to these exact same dilemmas. What God did before He created heaven and earth was coming into being himself. He created *what* He did for that was the only option given the nature of the materials he had to work with. He created *when* He did and not sooner as his own formation from within the primordial chaos matter had just come about. He created something because, as a being exhibiting some order, He desired more of the same.

Of course, the theogenetic motif does not answer the question of how the eternal chaos matter could exhibit the property of giving birth to gods. In fact the same questions that can be asked regarding God can be asked pertaining to the chaos matter. Why is there something rather than nothing? Why did it give birth to gods and not to something else? Why did it do so when it did and not sooner or later? How can the chaos matter given rise to order anyway, and what drives it?

As is the case with most protological myths, the fact that the belief in theogenesis raises as many questions as it answers does not render the present argument of the devil's advocate invalid. People are often satisfied with answering certain questions without ever bothering to keep on questioning? Humans can be quite inconsistent and are often easily satisfied with minimalist albeit functional explanations of phenomena.

The orthodox view of a God who is self-sufficient, perfect, immutable and eternal may sound formidable and a worthy description of ultimate reality but it makes any doctrine of creation seem absurd. Such a Being, being eternal, perfect and unchangeable would have no desire to create anything since He lacks nothing and can hardly find it necessary to interrupt His eternal stasis with a excursion somewhere along the timeline to create something. Is it any wonder that some theologians have come to the conclusion that the God of the philosophers is "Nothing" or "Being" itself

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(cf. Armstrong 1993:411)? Ultimately, many people may reject the devil's advocate's unconventional reading of the Isaiah and Genesis texts simply for the strange and alien ideas such a reading may yield rather than because they can refute it on unbiased exegetical grounds.

Much more could be said on the topic of Yahweh's relation to *time*. As Fretheim (1984:56-58) notes, most Old Testament texts seem to imply that, contra to the God of philosophical theology who is said to be beyond time, Yahweh is bound to temporality and takes time to think and to act (cf. Gen 1-11; 15; 18; 1 Kgs 22; Job 1-2; Eccl. 3:9-15; etc.). The god of the Bible needs time to make up his mind and to give vent to his emotions. His frequent lack of precognitive abilities in some representations also implies the presence of limitations imposed by temporality (see below).

Of course, the depiction of Yahweh as an aged deity with white hair in Daniel 7:9-14 should, according to the devil's advocate, be considered as rather peculiar (if not unsettling) by anyone who denies that Yahweh, like the gods of Egypt and elsewhere, was not only born but also grows old and eventually dies. Think about it: the Yahweh of the Yahwist in Genesis 2 does seem very much like a child at play, discovering what works and what happens by trial and error. However, some 4000 years later, by the time we get to Daniel 7 (and the "Ancient of Days" with his white hair), Yahweh certainly seems to resemble a very old monarch at the end of his tether (cf. also Davies 1995:82-91).

Surely, Daniel's depiction of an aged divinity, the apocalyptic genre notwithstanding, is at odds with the profile of a being that is beyond time and the temporal world. Though old age may represent positive characteristics such as wisdom and authority, does it not also imply a prior period of growth, gradual ageing, irrevocable change, eventual decline and ultimately death?

In addition, remember Yahweh's own words in Isaiah 43:10:

> *"*...before me no god was formed
> …*after me* there will be no one."

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Earlier it was argued that, with this assertion, Yahweh implies that there was a time when he did not exist: a time "before" him. But look again at the second part of the verse. As was the case with the first clause, interpreters focus completely on that fact that the text refers to Yahweh's supremacy in the divine world in that he will be the first and the last god around. Virtually all commentators fail to observe this (unorthodox?) reference to the time "after" Yahweh. Polemical theology notwithstanding, this assertion by the deity (unwittingly?/unintentionally?) indubitably refers explicitly to a time when Yahweh will no longer be around: a time "after" him.

Strange as this may seem to us given our tradition of philosophical theology, gods who are born and die were nothing out of the ordinary in the theology of the Near East. Moreover, the remains of other unorthodox mythological motifs regarding divine temporality vs. eternity might still linger at the margins of the biblical traditions. For example, consider the mythological motif of the "tree of life" in the garden of the gods (cf. Gen 2-3; Ezek 28). Did Yahweh have to eat from it to ensure his own immortality? And what about the ritual practice of sacrifice? Were these not in earlier times seen as the food of God and sustenance for the divine who likes to smell its flavour, prefers the best and desires the fat for himself (with some bread to go with it) (cf. Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9,13,17; 26:31)? And what is food primarily for if not to perpetuate health and life? (cf. Eichrodt 1961:127; De Vaux 1978:178).

Ultimately, if these rather dubious, somewhat speculative, rather unheard-of, yet not completely wayward interpretations of the devil's advocate regarding Yahweh and time are considered to constitute a plausible reading of the ancient texts, the ontological implications of a consistent and stereotypically orthodox view on the matter should be clear. According to popular philosophical theology, the real God created the real world *ex nihilo* and is himself the uncreated first cause of everything, existing from eternity past. He is not subjected to the ravages of time and cannot die since he is immortal. If this theology represents the actual state of affairs and is applicable to a really extant deity it would imply that Yahweh who, in some texts (others agree with orthodoxy), is depicted as a deity who does not conform to this profile must be a character of fiction. If Yahweh did not exist from eternity past, did not create the world *ex nihilo,* and was already in the time of Daniel (the literary

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character) an old man with white hair (almost 4000 years old), then, as thus depicted, he does not exist.

3.2.2   Texts implying that Yahweh is not the only God

According to popular orthodoxy, the Old Testament supposedly and consistently proclaims a monotheistic faith. There is only one god, Yahweh, and all the other deities are mere fabrications of sinful human imagination. In contrast to this view, however, Old Testament theologians have noted the existence of several texts that seem to complicate the perspective of pure and unambiguous philosophical monotheism. Many Old Testament theologians would consider concepts such as "monolatrism" or "henotheism" as providing a more appropriate frame of reference for the many instances where the existence of another god or other deities may actually be taken for granted in the Old Testament's discourse (cf. Eichrodt 1961:185).

In presenting its case for the heterodoxy of the Old Testament on this issue, the devil's advocate has assembled the following exhibit of Old Testament passages that allegedly contains the remains of polytheistic or henotheistic mythological motifs. The texts in question seem to allude to an underlying form of theism that cannot be equated with philosophical monotheism:

"Let us make man according to our image…" (Gen 1:26)

"You will be like gods, they who know good and evil" (Gen 3:4)

"They have now become like one of *us*…" (Gen 3:22)

"…the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful" (Gen 6:2)

"Let *us* go down…" (Gen 11:7)

"And he must speak to the people on behalf of you and then he will be a

mouth to you and you will be *a god* to him." (Ex 4:16)

"And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Look, I am appointing you as *a god* for the Pharaoh and your brother Aaron will be your prophet'." (Ex 7:1)

"…I shall go through Egypt in this night and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt of humans as well as of the animals. And I shall enact punishment over all the gods of Egypt." (Ex 12:12)

"Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods" (Ex 18:11)

"You may serve no other gods." (Ex 20:2)

"You may not curse the gods." (Ex 22:28)

"When Elyon gave an inheritance to the nations, when he parted the sons of humans from one another, he determined the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of El. But Yahweh's portion is his people; Jacob is his measured out inheritance." (Deut 32:8)

"But the olive tree said to them, 'Would I give up my fatness that gods and humans praise in me...?' But the vine said to them, 'Should I give up my moss that makes gods and humans happy...?'" (Judg 9:9,13)

"Thus Yahweh, the god of Israel, drove away the Amorites before his people Israel, and you want to take it in possession. Will you not take into possession what your god Chemosh gave you as possession while we take into possession all that Yahweh our god drives out before us?" (Judg 11:23-24)

"And David said, '…they have driven me out so that I may not join the inheritance of Yahweh when they say, 'Go away, serve other gods!' Now let my blood not fall onto the earth far away from the face of Yahweh'" (1 Sam 26:17-20)

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"And the king answered her, 'Do not fear; …what do you see?' And the woman said to Saul, 'I see a god rising up from the earth.'" (1 Sam 28:13)

"And when the king of Moab saw that the battle got too intense…he took his first-born son…and sacrificed him as burnt offering on the wall. Then a great wrath came down upon Israel so that they left him and went back to their land." (2 Kgs 3:27)

"And the house that I shall build will be great, for Yahweh is greater than all the gods." (2 Chron 2:5)

"You have made him a little less than (the) gods." (Ps 8:6)

"Your throne, o god, is forever and always…therefore o god, your God has anointed you…" (Ps 45:7-8)

"The god of the gods is Yahweh." (Ps 50:1)

"God stands up in the assembly of the gods; He judges in the midst of the gods…I have said myself, 'you are all gods, and you are all sons of the most high.'" (Ps 82:1,6)

"For who is…like Yahweh among the sons of the gods." (Ps 89:7)

"For Yahweh is a great god and a great king over all the gods." (Ps 95:3)

"…all the gods bow down before him…You are exalted over all the gods." (Ps 97:7,9)

"And one day when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh, the accuser (Satan) also came among them." (Job 1:6)

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa 6:8)

"Now if the people say to you, 'Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living?'" (Isa 8:19)

"You said, 'I want to climb up to the heavens…and sit on the mountain of meeting in the far reaches of the north." (Isa 14:13)

"I dwell in the dwelling of gods in the heart of the sea." (Ezek 28:2)

"In Eden, the garden of the gods." (Ezek 28:13)

"…and the house of David (will be) like gods before them." (Zech 12:8)

"Thus he will act…with the help of a foreign god…" (Dan 11:39)

It is easy to "prove" that the religion of the Old Testament is strictly and uniquely monotheistic if one limits oneself to a certain selection of "proof-texts" to settle the issue. However, as the texts quoted above demonstrate, the remains of polytheistic and henotheistic mythological motifs may still be encountered in many texts. In such instances, the underlying ideology is one of monolatrism (at best) rather an unadulterated philosophical monotheism (cf. also Harwood 1992:97; Hooke 1963:77-81; Preuss 1991:135-138).

Once again, however, the texts quoted above are not meant to be taken as proof that the entire Old Testament is monolastristic or polytheistic. Nor even is it assumed that all the texts have been interpreted correctly. Rather, they are but examples of texts that some interpreters have suggested may contain traces of monolatrism or polytheism. In other words, the devil's advocate does not deny that there may be other texts characterised by a more orthodox monotheistic ideology (cf. Eichrodt 1961:220).

Given the possible presence of both monotheistic and henotheistic trajectories in the Old Testament texts, the problem for realism is therefore, as it is with regard to each section of this chapter, not merely the deconstruction of realism via unorthodox theology. In addition, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the co-existence of

mutually exclusive forms of theism (even on the part of Yahweh himself) leads to the intra-textual deconstruction of realism via ideological pluralism.

Moreover, the devil's advocate wishes to point out that many additional possible instances of henotheism or polytheism could be added to the list of texts already presented. For example, consider the suspicious, mysterious and frequent use of the plural in verbs with "*Elohim*" (cf. Gen 1:26; 20:13; 35:7; Ex 32:4, 8; 2 Sam 7:23; etc.). Alternatively, what about the challenge issued by both Yahweh and his council (of gods?) in what used to be believed to be the corpus of monotheism *par excellence* (i.e. Deutero-Isaiah)?:

> "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 gods" (Isa 41:22-23)

The challenge here is issued by Yahweh and not, as some would think, by Israel. Yet from the use of the plural it is clear that he is not alone. The request, "tell *us*" with its plural pronouns implies a meeting of the heavenly council to which these "gods" have to report and justify themselves (cf. Gibson 1998:30). The presumed scenario is one not unlike that encountered in Psalm 82:1 where Yahweh is depicted as judging the other gods amidst the council of deities (cf. Mullen 1980:81).

There is no escaping the fact that, according to the prophet and his exiled audience in Isaiah 41:22ff, other gods do very much exist. Moreover, since what we have here is Yahweh speaking in the first person, if we take the text seriously, it is therefore justified to conclude that Yahweh himself, as depicted in this text (amongst others), believes in the existence of other gods (his council). Then, of course, one may also point out the substantial amount of archaeological data demonstrating the prevalence of polytheism in ancient Israel and Judah, especially in the pre-exilic period (cf. Smith 1990:20-24).

Finally, the devil's advocate would also like to call attention to the fact that, even the most familiar bulwark of supposed Hebrew monotheism – the "*Shema*" – may very well, in fact, be nothing of the sort. The translation of the text in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." is a rendering from the Hebrew which is itself rather ambiguous at this point. To be sure, as Gibson (1998:27-28) notes, the possibility that this favourite text of monotheistic Jewish confessions might actually mean the opposite of what tradition has made of it, is quite substantial.

First of all, note that the word "Lord" is the traditional translation of what the text has as "Yahweh". Second, remember that the Hebrew have no word "is" as in English and this is supplied by the translator based on an interpretation he sees fit. If, based on this perspective, one substitutes "Yahweh" for "Lord" and leave out the copula, we are left with "…Yahweh our God, one (only) Yahweh". Since the word "one" (only) refers to Yahweh rather than to the generic term "God", it is important to note that the text therefore does not say that Yahweh is one God or the only God.

The reference to "one Yahweh" seems more like a corrective of having different Yahwehs for each town or sanctuary where he might be worshipped. After all, the Canaanites were all-too-familiar with different the different and often competing Baals, Els, Anats and Asherahs, of the different city-states. From this perspective, the claim that "Yahweh (is) one" might therefore be seen, not as a confession of monotheism, but as an attempt to ensure conformity and centralisation in worship and theology. Such a notion would make perfect sense in the context of Deuteronomy's cultic ideology with its demand for a single sanctuary (cf. Deut 12:5ff)

Moreover, saying that Yahweh is one and singular says nothing about other gods or about their existence. *In fact, the subsequent prohibition of the worshipping of other deities along with the fact that Yahweh considers himself a "jealous" god only makes sense on the assumption that the speaker of the commandment and the people did believe in the existence of other gods.* It would indeed be meaningless to consider non-existent deities a threat or entities to be jealous about. The demand that no other gods may be worshipped is therefore more presumptive of an underlying henotheism than of the kind of philosophical monotheism later readers would like it to be.

Seen from this perspective, a more correct, albeit less orthodox, rendering of the text of Deuteronomy 6:4 would be something along the lines of a claim that Yahweh is (merely) the only one (who should be worshipped). However, as such, instead of it being a proof-text with which to justify philosophical monotheism, the text actually assumes the validity of a polytheistic metaphysics to which the people have to relate via a henotheistic theological ideology.

In as much as these observations are correct, it would appear that the Old Testament is not always orthodox from a certain Christian perspective (cf. also Brueggemann 1997:629-631; Carroll 1991:38-55; Barr 1984:32-44).

In conclusion, the ontological implications of traces of unorthodox beliefs in the texts regarding the existence of other deities, and the repressed fact that even Yahweh himself believes that there are other gods, should by now be crystal clear. From the perspective of popular orthodoxy, there are no other gods. From this it follows that the depiction of the deity Yahweh who believes in other gods and operates in relation to their actions must be fictitious. Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts, at least according to a consistent "orthodox" perspective, does not exist.

3.2.3   Texts implying that Yahweh was seen by humans

It is popularly believed among orthodox Christians that no mortal can see God (cf. Archer 1982:41). Several texts in the Old Testament, for example Exodus 33:20 (where it is said that no one can see God and live to talk about it) seem to confirm that belief. There are also numerous New Testament examples where it is denied that the real and only God has ever been seen (e.g. 1 Tim 1:17; 1 Joh 1:4).

Be that as it may, the devil's advocate would like to point out that, according to quite a few Old Testament texts, the god Yahweh *has* been seen by human eyes:

> "Then Yahweh appeared to him at the trees of Mamreh while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. When he lifted his eyes he saw three men standing before him." (Gen 18:1-2)

"And he dreamed and there was a ladder placed on the earth of which the top reached to the heavens while the angels of God ascended and descended on it. And look, Yahweh stood at its top..." (Gen 28:12-13)

"Then Jacob called the place Peniel because he said, 'I have seen God face to face and yet my life has been spared.'" (Gen 32:32)

"Then Moses climbed up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel. And they saw the god of Israel and under his feet a pavement of sapphire stones, as clear as the heavens themselves. But he did not extend his hand to the chosen of the children of Israel and they saw God and then they ate and drank." (Ex 24:9-11)

"I saw Yahweh sit on his throne while all the host of heaven was standing beside him." (1 Kgs 22:19)

"Only from hearsay I have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you…" (Job 42:5)

"In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw Yahweh on a high and exalted throne." (Isa 6:1)

"I was still looking…until thrones were placed and one who was ancient of days took a seat…And I saw…one like the son of man come to one ancient of days and they brought him before him." (Dan 7:9,13)

"…look, Yahweh was standing on a perpendicular wall." (Am 7:7)

"I saw Yahweh standing at the altar…" (Am 9:2)

According to these texts then, no matter how reserved the description regarding the details of what Yahweh actually looks like may appear, no matter whether the context was that of daily life, a dream or a vision, some people did, in fact, see the god Yahweh. In this regard, contra Archer (1982:27), Haley (1992:39) and Kaiser et al.

(1996:73), distinguishing between the "essence" of Yahweh and his "revelatory glory" constitutes an invalid attempt to reconcile these texts with the orthodox trajectories elsewhere. Such a reading seems to be an overzealous apologetical evasion of the problematic by scholars who feel the need to harmonise biblical texts at all costs. The passages in question, read unbiased without resorting to dogmatic esisegesis, appear to provide no justification for such a view.

In conclusion, if popular orthodoxy claims that the true God cannot be seen, the implication is clear. Since Yahweh can be seen and has been seen, he must be a character of fiction. Therefore, at least from the orthodox perspective, Yahweh-as-depicted in this manner, does not exist.

3.2.4   Texts implying that Yahweh is not omnipotent

According to orthodox Christian philosophical theology, one essential belief concerning the true God is that He is extremely powerful. The idea that the divine exhibits this quality has a long history as can be seen from the fact that the words "*Elohim"* and "*El*" can be translated as "the powers" and "mighty one" respectively (cf. Eichrodt 1961:56). It is therefore no surprise that most "orthodox" theists would claim that an essential prerequisite for deityhood is that the entity in question must be omnipotent (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:133).

This kind of power, however, is and was not generally conceived of as involving *absolute* omnipotence. Such a state of affairs appears to deconstruct itself with all sorts of mind-blowing contradictory possibilities (cf. Kolak 1994:51-54). It is therefore claimed that the true God is *logically* omnipotent. By this it is meant that the nature of divine omnipotence is determined or limited by His essential nature as a wise and omnibenevolent deity-in-relation to creatures with an independent and free will of their own (cf. Haley 1992:28).

Now according to the Old Testament in general, Yahweh is indeed an extremely powerful character. In fact, his power and competence are way beyond that of any of the other entities depicted in the texts. However, there are many scenarios where it appears to be implicitly insinuated that Yahweh is not nearly as omnipotent as

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orthodox theology would admit or like to be the case (cf. also Walton et al. 2000:557; van der Toorn 1999a:912).

Consider the following scenarios, all of which can be interpreted as alluding to a kind of power in no way indicative of divine omnipotence:

- Yahweh does not create *ex nihilo* or all at once but has to work with pre-existing chaos materials over an extended period of time (cf. Gen 1:1-27).

- Yahweh needs to rest (cf. Gen 2:1).

- Yahweh needs people to till the soil (cf. Gen 2:5).

- Yahweh needs to travel to obtain information (cf. Gen 3:8-11, 11:5-7, 18:7).

- Yahweh is afraid of human potential and shows fear (cf. Gen 3:22; 11:5-7).

- There are some inevitable future destinies of peoples that even Yahweh seems powerless to change (cf. Gen 15:13; 16:12; 18:17-18).

- Yahweh, after barely overcoming Jacob in a wrestling match, cannot reveal his name and needs to depart from the scene before the light of dawn (cf. Gen 32:22-33).

- Yahweh cannot lead the people by way of the Philistines as he fears they will want to turn back (cf. Ex 13:17).

- Yahweh cannot allow Israel to drive out the Canaanites to quickly for the fear that the wild animals might become too many (cf. Deut 7:22).

- Yahweh did not completely destroy all forces of chaos (Leviathan, Yam).

- Yahweh's people cannot defeat their enemies because they have iron chariots,

despite the fact that he was with them (cf. Judg 1:21).

- Yahweh is said to need help in some matters and cursed the people who did not come to his aid (cf. Judg 5:23).

- Yahweh looks around for assistance (cf. 1 Kgs 22: 20-23; Isa 63:3-5).

- The dead are beyond Yahweh's sphere of control (cf. Ps 6:4-5; 88:10-12; Isa 38:18-10).

A closer look at each of these statements shows that, though it is not explicitly and unequivocally noted, there are definite limits to Yahweh's capabilities. The all-too-human ways in which Yahweh acts in these and many other scenarios in the Old Testament suggest that there are things that even Yahweh cannot do. Such texts can therefore, upon closer scrutiny and without the need for dogmatic rationalisations, be understood as implying that the deity is not omnipotent in the sense of being able to do everything logically possible (cf. also Fretheim 1984:22; Brueggemann 1997:371).

In addition, as will become clear in the discussions to follow, the fact that Yahweh is often depicted as less than omniscient implies *ipso facto* that he cannot be omnipotent.

However, as Harwood (1992:38) argues, it might actually be fortunate for those who endorse realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text that the deity is *not* construed as being omnipotent. The reason for this is, as was noted earlier, the fact that the concept of omnipotence seems to be meaningless when one considers all the philosophical dilemmas it generates.

Suppose we define omnipotence as the ability to *anything*. Thus an omnipotent god could create a triangle with four sides; a number that is less than ten but more than nine; a rock so heavy that he could not lift it; and an effect that preceded its cause. Since none of the foregoing can exist it follows that omnipotence cannot exist, and therefore a deity possessed of such a trait cannot exist (cf. Harwood 1992:38).

According to Harwood (1992:38), most modern god-worshippers, shown that absolute omnipotence cannot exist, would be willing to credit their paramount god with limited omnipotence. Anything a *Disney* animator could accomplish in a cartoon, their god could accomplish in reality. Thus a four-sided triangle would remain impossible, even to their god; but a mouse could give birth to a brontosaurus; a living human could be created out of clay, even though clay does not contain organic molecules; and a seventeen-billion-year-old universe could be created retroactively six thousand years ago.

Unfortunately, even limited omnipotence is incompatible with another supposed divine attribute, i.e. omniscience. If a god *knows* what will happen in the future, and knows that it *will* happen and that he will not change it, then he, in fact, cannot change it and is therefore not omnipotent. And if he can, when the time comes, change the future from what he knows it must be to something else, then he did not in fact know what would be and is therefore not omniscient. If he did know that he would change it, then he was incapable of not changing it, and is therefore not omnipotent. And if he…. Ultimately, a god cannot be simultaneously omnipotent and omniscient, and a god that is both cannot exist (Harwood 1992:38).

In conclusion, should one assume that the real God is actually omnipotent – or at least more powerful than Yahweh-as-depicted in some of the scenarios in the Old Testament – the ontological implications are, once again, all too clear. If the true God is omnipotent then Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts implying the opposite must be a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart. In short, from an orthodox philosophical theological perspective, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

3.2.5   Texts implying that Yahweh is not omniscient

Orthodox theology also conceives of the true God as being omniscient (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:77). By this designation it is meant that God knows everything, past, present and future. Yahweh however, as sometimes depicted in the Old Testament, though very knowledgeable, does not quite seem to measure up to the profile constructed for him by post-biblical theology.

Consider, the following examples from the texts implying that Yahweh is less cognisant than popular orthodox conceptions would have us believe:

"And Yahweh the god called to the human and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'Your voice I heard in the garden and I saw that I feared because I was naked and I hid.' And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree, which I told you not to eat from?' And the man said, 'The woman you gave me, she gave to me from the tree and I ate'. And Yahweh said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done? And the woman said, 'The snake misled me and I ate.'" (Gen 3:9- 13)

"Then Yahweh said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am going to do, while Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him?'…Furthermore Yahweh said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is truly great and their sin is very heavy. I want to go down in order to see whether they have actually acted according to the outcry over them which has come to me; and if not, I want to know it.'" (Gen 18:17)

"But the angel of Yahweh called to him from the heavens and said... 'Do not lift your hand against the boy...because now I know that you fear God and did not hold back your only son from me.'" (Gen 22: 12)

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not let them travel along the road which led to the land of the Philistines, even though it would have been shorter, for God said, 'What if the people become fearful when they see war and decide to go back to Egypt?'" (Ex 13:17)

"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron and said, 'How long will this evil congregation murmur against me?'" (Num 14:27)

"And God came to Balaam and said, 'Who are these men with you?'" (Num 22:9)

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"And you must think about the entire way along which Yahweh your god has led you for forty years in the desert to humble you and to test you in order to know what is in your heart, whether you will listen to his commands or not." (Deut 8:2)

"Yahweh your god is testing you in order to know if you really love Yahweh your god with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deut 13:1-3)

"And these are the nations Yahweh allowed to remain...They were there to put Israel to the test, in order to know if they would listen to the commands, which Yahweh commanded their fathers through Moses." (Judg 2:20-3:4)

"I have seen Yahweh sitting on his throne while all the hosts of heaven stood next to him…And Yahweh said, 'Who will convince Ahab that he can go up and fall in Ramoth in Gilead?' And the one said this and the other one that. Then the spirit came forward and went to stand before the face of Yahweh and said, 'I shall convince him.' And Yahweh asked him, 'With what?' And he said, 'I shall go out and become a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You will convince, yes, you will win over; go out and do so.'" (1 Kgs 22:19-22)

"...and God left him in order to test him, in order to discover everything that was in his heart." (2 Chron 32:31)

"And one day when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh the Satan also came among them. Then Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Where did you come from?' And the Satan answered Yahweh and said, 'From a journey over the earth, which I have crossed.' And Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Did you see my servant Job?'" (Job 1:6)

"Yahweh looked down from the heavens upon the sons of man in order to

see if there were any who understand and seek God." (Ps 14:2)

"Thus says Yahweh, 'Stand in the court of Yahweh's house, and speak …Maybe they will listen, and everyone will return of his evil way that I may repent of the evil I might commit." (Jer 26:2-3; cf. 36:3,7; 51:8; Isa 47:12)

"And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me'; but she did not return. …I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beauteous of all nations. And I thought you would call me, 'my father', and would not turn from following me. Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel.'" (Jer 3:7,19)

The plain sense of these texts featuring questions, perplexity, uncertainty and the need for information on the part of Yahweh clearly implies that Yahweh does not know everything about either the present or the future (cf. also Fretheim 1984:45-59). All apologetic attempts to salvage the belief in Yahweh's omniscience via analogies, reinterpretation, comparative proof-texting and other types of rationalisation are considered by the devil's advocate as being symptomatic of an addiction to dogma rather than the result of a genuine attempt to take the text seriously on its own terms.

In addition, the devil's advocate would also like to point out the fact that limits to precognition are also assumed in all those instances where Yahweh – hardly the immutable unmoved mover of philosophical theology – is depicted as changing his mind in light of new information. The deity often repents of actualising the "evil" he had planned after a human mediator convinced him that the particular course of action would not be a wise move (cf. Gen 6:6, 8:21; Ex 32:10-14, Num 22:20-22 [contra 23:19!]; 1 Sam 2:30, 15:11 [contra 15:29!]; Am 7:3,6; Jon 3:10, etc.).

The particular modes of divine repentance as depicted in these and other Old Testament texts cannot be harmonised with the dogma of divine immutability. As Fretheim (1984:113-117) therefore correctly observes, many Old Testament texts clearly depict a deity who had to modify his agenda as the result of something

happening which he did not foresaw when he initially established particular relationships.

Claiming that Yahweh actually knew all along what was what makes nonsense of both the particular plot in the text and the integrity of the deity's character and his dialogue. All apologetic claims that Yahweh did not really change his mind, it was merely the people who changed and therefore their relation to the unchanging deity was modified, is another type of ad hoc rationalisation that conveniently ignores the plain sense of the texts involved (see Kaiser et al. 1996:215-216).

Ironically, however, as was the case with the issue of omnipotence, it might even be considered fortunate and philosophically less problematic that Yahweh does not seem to know everything. Those texts suggesting that Yahweh does, in fact, know *everything*, including the future (e.g. Isa 41:21-24; 44:7,24-26; 45:21; 46:9,10; 48:3-8; cf. 55:10,11), lead to vexing and seemingly insoluble philosophical problems.

For example, on the assumption that the deity is omniscient and precognisant, the question of free will arises. On the one hand, there is the familiar debate as to whether humans can have free will if the future is already a fixed reality. With regard to the Old Testament, one need only think of people like Ishmael, Josiah and others whose destiny were determined even before they were born (cf. Gen 16; 1 Kgs 13:2). Then there are also those prophecies predicting that certain heathen armies would plunder Jerusalem and commit heinous crimes. Did the people committing moral evil after Yahweh "stirred" them into action have free will (see later in this chapter)?

The whole idea that each act in the lives of people was determined before they were born blew the minds of many theologians as well as others like the author of Psalm 139. It is therefore ironic that those biblical Christian philosophers of religion who argue their theodicy based on the supposed free will of all creaturely agents should so often appeal to the Old Testament. To be sure, it is in this body of texts, more than anywhere else, quite apparent that Yahweh has no problem determining people's actions with little concern for their conative autonomy and independence. One needs only to read the story in Exodus 6-12 of Yahweh hardening the Pharaoh's heart to see that the so-called "free will defence", whatever its merits, does not enjoy pan-biblical

support.

Moreover, as Kolak (1994:272) notes, should Yahweh be seen as being omniscient, the greatest philosophical dilemma does not merely concern the issue of *human* free will. In fact, the question that arises and is most vexing pertains to how, if Yahweh knows the future*, Yahweh himself* can have free will!

If Yahweh knows every detail of what will happen in the future including every single act he himself will engage in, how can he be seen as having any choice in the matter? If Yahweh knows what Yahweh will do on any given future occasion it follows that, whatever the human predicament, Yahweh cannot but do what he himself knew he would do. In this sense then, it follows that, unless Yahweh is indeed immutable, he cannot know the future. Divine free will is incompatible with divine precognition.

In conclusion, however, what, from the perspective of orthodox philosophical theology, are the ontological implications given the presence of trajectories in the text suggesting that Yahweh is neither omniscient nor precognisant? If one believes that there is a God and that this true God knows all there is to know - even what the future holds - and that the deity is immutable, anti-realism in Old Testament theology is definitely on the cards. At least from an orthodox philosophical theological perspective, the god Yahweh who is neither omniscient/precognisant nor immutable must be a character of fiction and therefore does not exist.

3.2.6   Texts implying that Yahweh is not omnipresent

In traditional orthodox philosophical theology it is also commonly believed that the true God is omnipresent (cf. Kolak 1994:121). Even some non-fundamentalist Old Testament scholars consider this to be the case and try to show that, despite appearances to the contrary, Yahweh is indeed believed to be present, in some sense, everywhere in heaven and on earth (cf. Fretheim 1984:60-78).

According to the devil's advocate, however, the belief that Yahweh is omnipresent seems once again to be based on half-truths and whole lies. To be sure, there are many texts in the Old Testament that, taken in their plain sense and in their immediate

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context, makes a mockery of this belief of popular orthodoxy about how Yahweh is supposed to be related to the world. Consider the following passages, all of which seem to imply that Yahweh is not omnipresent:

"And they heard the voice of Yahweh the god while he was walking in the garden during the wind of the day. And Yahweh the god called to the human and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Gen 3:9)

"And Cain went away from the face of Yahweh and went to live in the land of Nod east of Eden." (Gen 4:16)

"Then Yahweh went down to look at the city and the tower that the sons of man had built. And Yahweh said, …Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that the one does not understand the other..." (Gen 11:4-9)

"And after he had finished speaking with him, God went upwards from Abraham." (Gen 17:22)

"Furthermore Yahweh said, 'The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is truly great and their sin is very heavy. I want to go down in order to see whether they have actually acted according to the outcry over them which has come to me; and if not, I want to know it.'" (Gen 18:17)

"And he dreamed and there was a ladder placed on the earth of which the top reached to the heavens while the angels of God went up and came down from it. And behold, Yahweh stood at its top..." (Gen 28:11-12)

"While Yahweh descended on to the mountain Sinai, from its top Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses climbed up. And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Climb down and warn the people that they must not attempt to break through to Yahweh to see…'" (Ex 19:20-21)

"And Yahweh came down in a cloud and went to and stood by the

entrance to the tent. Then he called Aaron and Miriam and they came out." (Num 12:5)

"And David said…they have driven me out so that I may not join the inheritance of Yahweh when they say, 'Go away, serve other gods!' Now let my blood not fall onto the earth far away from the face of Yahweh.'" (1 Sam 26:17-20)

"And he said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the face of Yahweh. And look, Yahweh went passed while a strong wind tore the mountains and broke the rocks from before Yahweh, but in the wind Yahweh was not. And after the wind there was an earthquake, but in the earthquake Yahweh was not. And after the earthquake there was a fire but in the fire Yahweh was not…'" (1 Kgs 19:11)

"And one day, when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh, the Satan also came among them. Then Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Where did you come from?'" (Job 1:6)

'Oh, if only I knew where to find him, could come to his dwelling…Look, I go to the east and he is not there and to the west and I do not see him. If he is working in the north, I do not behold him and if he bows down to the south, I do not see him." (Job 23:3,8-9)

"…for God is in heaven and you are on earth…" (Eccl 5:1)

"O, if only you would tear the heavens and come down." (Isa 64:1)

"For there is a God in the heavens who reveals secrets." (Dan 2:28)

"And Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish away from the face of Yahweh…and he went…to Tarshish away from the face of Yahweh." (Jon 1:3)

"Behold, Yahweh comes out of his dwelling; he comes down and treads on the heights of the earth." (Mic 1:3)

These are but a few examples of texts that would be meaningless on the assumption that Yahweh is present everywhere. Rather than trying to harmonise such texts with more orthodox and user-friendly depictions of Yahweh's presence all over space-time, the devil's advocate merely wants to bring to attention the existence of such presumably "unorthodox" notions (cf. also Mckinsey 1995:47-52).

In conclusion, if, as orthodoxy insists, there is only one God and He is indeed omnipresent, the only logical conclusion would be that the deity Yahweh not so depicted must be a character of fiction. Therefore, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

3.2.7   Unorthodox elements in the relation between Yahweh and evil in the Old Testament

According to Carroll (1997:45), the relation between Yahweh and evil in the Old Testament may well be the greatest problem for biblical Christian theology. To be sure, in contemporary philosophy of religion, the relation between God and evil is said to constitute the so-called "problem of evil" (cf. Whitney 1992:01; Hick 1993:21). There is even the so-called "argument from evil" against the existence of God (cf. Madden 1968:01; Mackie 1982:78-99; Dawkins 1995:22-25; Watson 1995:02 and passim). In addition, the popularity of 'process theism' in some quarters suggests that many theists would rather have a God that is wholly good albeit not omnipotent than an omnipotent deity who is responsible for evil (cf. Whitehead 1978:02; Pailin 1986:60).

Popular Christian theology also goes to great lengths to absolve Yahweh from a causative relation to any form of evil. Numerous texts may be quoted from both Old and New Testaments which, taken in isolation, might indeed suggest the biblical God to be wholly benevolent. Both conservative and critical Old Testament scholars often go out of their way to prove that, contrary to the plain sense of many a passage,

Yahweh is not the cause of evil after all (cf. Kaiser et al 1996:18-24; Lindstrom 1984).

According to the devil's advocate, however, an in-depth analysis of the Old Testament discourse with no need for immunising cherished dogmas will come across something that popular theology has been repressing since the beginning. What popular orthodoxy does not want to know is that, from the perspective of many Old Testament texts, there is no "problem" of evil in the sense that Christian philosophical theology had envisaged it. To be sure, for many an Old Testament author there is no other cause of evil but Yahweh himself (cf. Carroll 1991:45).

If there is any "problem of evil", in the context of the Old Testament, it is not so much a question of *who* caused the evil – Yahweh is nearly always implicated. Instead, the dilemma pertains to questions of divine motives and methodology (cf. Crenshaw 1980:22). It is for this reason that an "argument from evil" against the existence of the divine would be useless in the context of Old Testament Yahwism.

When evil befalls the community it is never a cause to doubt the existence of Yahweh (cf. Carroll 1991:47) Calamities raise questions of theology rather than ontology. In fact, when evil comes, it is considered to affirm Yahweh's active intervention in the lives of people rather than being a falsification of realism regarding God's ontological status as it has come to be in philosophical theology.

However, the so-called "argument from evil" can still be useful in the present context. Since the concern is the deconstruction of realism from an "orthodox" perspective, if it can be shown that Yahweh is indeed responsible for evil, an ontological dilemma arises. For if we were to assume, as the majority of Old Testament scholars probably do, that there is a God and that this God is the omnibenevolent deity of Christian philosophical theology, what shall we make of the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

According to the devil's advocate, if it is true that Yahweh is depicted as being the cause of evil, while the real and only "God" is not so implicated, then, if God exists, Yahweh must be a character of fiction. Ergo, according to a consistent "orthodox"

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perspective, Yahweh depicted as the cause of evil does not exist.

3.2.7.1   General monistic viewpoints

Consider the following texts, all of which seem wittingly or unwittingly to implicate Yahweh in the actualisation of evil in a most general sense

> "And Yahweh answered him, 'Who makes the mouth for the man, or who makes dumb or deaf and seeing or blind? Is it not me, Yahweh?" (Ex 4:11)

> "How will I curse him whom God has not cursed? And how will I wish away one whom Yahweh has not wished away?" (Num 23:8)

> "Behold, it is I, and there is no other god apart from me; I kill and I make alive; I destroy and I heal, and there is no one who can save from my hand." (Deut 32:39)

> "Yahweh kills and Yahweh makes alive, He causes (people) to descend to Sheol and he makes (people) rise from it. Yahweh makes poor and (Yahweh) makes rich." (1 Sam 2:6-7)

> "But he answered her, ... 'The good we would accept from God, and not the evil?'" (Job 2:10)

> "It is all the same – therefore I say, the righteous and the wicked he destroys. If the mob suddenly kills, he mocks the doubting of the innocent. The earth is given over into the hands of the wicked, the face of the judges he binds shut. Is it not he? Who else?" (Job 9:23-24)

> "In your book they have all been written down: days where all has been determined, whilst none of them were actually there yet." (Ps 139:16)

> "Look at the work of God; who can straighten what he has made

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crooked?" (Eccl 7:13)

"Be happy on the good day; and on the days of evil, think as follows: Also this day God has made just like the other…" (Eccl 7:14)

"I am Yahweh, … apart from me there is no other…I form the light and create the darkness; I actualise salvation and create evil. It is I, Yahweh, who does all these things." (Isa 45:5-7)

"Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire and brings forth a weapon according to his trade; also, I have created the destroyer for the purpose of mauling." (Isa 54:16)

"Who speaks and causes it to happen? Did Yahweh not command it? Does not both evil and good proceed from the mouth of the Most High?" (Lam 3:37-38)

"Will evil befall a city unless Yahweh has done it?" (Amos 3:6b)

"Behold, does it not come from Yahweh of Hosts that people toil for fire and that nations tire themselves out for nothing?" (Hab 2:13)

Whether we agree with the devil's advocate's implied interpretation of these texts or have other ideas about what such discourse might imply regarding the relation between Yahweh and metaphysical evil are, for the present, irrelevant. The fact remains that Old Testament scholars have quoted these texts to argue in favour of an alleged monistic theology (cf. Lindstom 1984:01). If one then believes that the real God is not in such a manner responsible for evil in general, there is only one consistent conclusion possible: Yahweh as thus depicted must be a character of fiction and does not exist.

Unlike as is the case with most discussions of alleged monistic tendencies in the Old Testament, the devil's advocate will not stop here. The relation between Yahweh and evil is much more intricate, pervasive and comprehensive than the impression some

might gain from the aforementioned textual witnesses. In order to demonstrate just how inextricably Yahweh could be involved in the actualisation of all sorts of evil, the devil's advocate will now concern itself with a more extended survey of witnesses to the more demonical elements prevalent within Old Testament God-talk.

3.2.7.2   Yahweh's causative role in the actualisation of natural evil

In this section, Yahweh's role in the actualisation of what is often designated "natural evil" will be the issue of concern. In philosophy of religion, "natural evil" refers to suffering caused by, and pertaining to, the phenomena of the natural world (cf. Pailin 1986:95). For present purposes, it should be noted that the issue here is not whether the causation of such evil is somehow justified but pertains to the identity of the agent that many of the Old Testament texts consider to be the ultimate necessary cause behind such evil.

Consider, if you will, the following examples of passages that, according to the devil's advocate, implicate Yahweh himself in the actualisation and maintenance of natural evil in the world.

> "And Yahweh said to the snake, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the beasts and out of all the living creatures of the field. On your belly you will go and dust you will eat all the days of your life. Enmity I shall place between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall crush your head and you will crush his heal. To the woman Yahweh said, 'Much shall I multiply your pain during pregnancy…in pain you will bear sons...'. To the man Yahweh said, 'Because you listened to the voice of your wife and because you ate from the tree I told you not to eat from, cursed is the ground because of you. In suffering you shall eat all the days of your life...until you return to the dust from which you were created. Dust you are and to dust you will return.'" (Gen 3:14-20)

> "And he called him Noah because he said, 'It is he who will comfort us in our toiling…of the ground cursed by Yahweh.'" (Gen 5:29)

"And Yahweh said, 'My spirit will not judge inside the human forever since he is flesh. His days shall be (limited to) one hundred and twenty years'" (Gen 6:1)

"The fear for you will be on all the animals of the earth and on all the birds of the heavens: everything that moves on the earth and all the fish of the sea, they are given in your hands. Everything that moves shall be your food." (Gen 9:2-4)

"Then Jacob became angry with Rachel and asked, 'Am I in the position of God who has kept the fruit of the womb from you?'" (Gen 30:1-2)

"And Yahweh spoke with Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'Speak with the children of Israel and say, 'These are the animals that you may eat...'" (Lev 11:1-2)

"Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, 'When you come to the land of Canaan which I give you as a possession and I let leprosy come into a house…he whose house it is must go to the priest and say, 'it looks as if there is a plague in my house'." (Ex 14:33-35)

"If you... take a city, you must not destroy its trees...because, the trees in the field are not people that you should fight them. Only the trees that you know are not fruit trees, these you may destroy..." (Deut 20:19-20)

"They all wait on you to give food at the right time…you open your hand, they are satisfied with what is good; you hide your face and they are frightened; you take away their breath; they die and return to dust." (Ps 104:28-29)

"He throws ice in chunks; who is able to withstand the cold he sends?" (Ps 147:17)

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"All flesh is like grass…the spirit of Yahweh blows over it and it withers." (Isa 40:4)

"…if I stretch out my hand… and send a famine and destroy people and animals…If I let the wild animals roam the land so that they make it childless,…or if I bring the sword over the land…and I destroy man and beast in it…or if I send pestilence in that land and thus wipe out man and beast…" (Ezek 14:12-20)

"Before Him (i.e. Yahweh) goes pestilence and in His wake follows the plague." (Hab 3:5)

From these texts, amongst many others, it should be clear that Yahweh is ultimately behind all the natural evil in the world. It is Yahweh who has the power to control all natural phenomena, including meteorological, geological, biological and psychological processes. In case of any dysfunction or malfunction in the operation of any of these systems, no one but the deity is implicated as being the necessary cause of the suffering that inevitably results.

Of course, it is true that, in many instances, the evil in question is depicted as being the just consequence of human transgressions of the deity's moral order. However, given the infinity of alternative ways open to Yahweh with which to enact his judgement on any given sin, Yahweh remains culpable for whatever natural evil follows. Moreover, in many instances, basic forms of suffering (i.e. hunger, cold, disease, natural disasters, etc.) are not said to be the result of mortals' infringements on the divinely ordained order in nature and society. As will be demonstrated subsequently in this section, even when the latter was the case, innocent parties are often unfortunate enough to share in a generous dose of the punishment Yahweh has a propensity for meting out rather indiscriminately.

Unless the orthodox believer is willing claim that the God of the Bible is behind all forms of natural evil, they must repress the fact that they do not believe in Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. For should you believe that there is a God and that this God is not in these particular ways to be implicated in the actualisation of suffering and all

sorts of natural evil, you are insinuating that Yahweh as thus depicted must be a character of fiction. From the perspective of orthodox philosophical theology then, Yahweh depicted in the Old Testament texts as being the cause of natural evil does not really exist.

3.2.7.3   Yahweh's causative role in the actualisation of moral evil

Many theologians might still allow that God could be seen as being ultimately responsible for natural evil. However, few, if any, would consider it orthodox to hold the deity accountable for what is known as "moral evil" as well. "Moral evil", in philosophy of religion, designates those types of evil that are committed by humans who, as a result of their actions, transgress the laws of God and/or society and, as a result, cause suffering to nature or other people (cf. Hick 1983:103).

According to the devil's advocate, however, when it comes to the Old Testament, it is not difficult at all to find texts implying that, even with regard to this form of evil, no one but Yahweh is often considered to be the one ultimately behind its actualisation. Consider the following texts that, in one way or another, appear to imply that, without Yahweh's role in both the greater and lesser scheme of things, the particular instance of moral evil would not have come about.

> "And Yahweh the god made all manner of trees sprung from the ground that were pleasant to look at and nice to eat from; also the tree of life in the centre of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." (Gen 2:9)

> "Do not be sad…that you sold me, for in order to save lives; it was God who sent me before you." (Gen 45:5-9)

> "And Joseph answered, 'Do not be afraid; am I in the position of God? You may have thought (to do) evil against me, but God has considered it good to do so, so that things would be as they are today…'" (Gen 50:20)

> "And I shall harden the heart of the Pharaoh…so that the Pharaoh will not

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listen to you." (Ex 7:2-3)

"Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, 'Tell the children of Israel that they must turn around and make camp...then the Pharaoh will say of Israel, 'They got themselves lost in the land; the desert has enclosed them.' And I shall harden the heart of the Pharaoh and he will pursue you…I want to glorify myself to Pharaoh and his entire army so that the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.'" (Ex 14:1-4)

"He who hits a person so that he dies must surely be killed. But if he did not intended it, but God made his hand meet it, then I shall show you a place to where he can flee." (Ex 21:13)

"And Moses called all of Israel and said, 'You have seen for yourselves everything which Yahweh did in Egypt before your eyes...but Yahweh has not given you a heart with which to understand and eyes with which to see and ears with which to hear even until today...'" (Deut 29:4)

"But his father and mother said to him, 'Is there among the daughters of your brothers and among all my people no woman, that you want to go hence to take a wife from the Philistines – the uncircumcised?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me because I like her.' And his father and his mother did not know that it came from Yahweh who sought a way to act against the Philistines.'" (Judg 14:3-4)

"But they did not listen to their father because Yahweh had decided to kill them." (1 Sam 2:25)

"The king did not listen to the people because it was ordained by Yahweh so that he (i.e. the king) would fulfil the word spoken by Yahweh...." (1 Kgs 12:15)

"He changed their hearts so that they would hate his people and act cunningly against them." (Ps 105:25)

"The heart of man thinks about his way, but Yahweh directs his footsteps." (Prov 16:9)

"Many plans are in the hearts of men but the council of Yahweh will prevail." (Prov 19:21)

"The king's heart is in the hands of Yahweh like channels of water; He directs it wherever He wants to." (Prov 21:1)

"Yahweh has made everything for a purpose; yes, even the wicked for the day of evil." (Prov 16:4)

"Yahweh, why have you caused us to depart from your ways? Why do you harden our hearts so that we do not fear you?" (Isa 63:17a)

In these texts it is clear that the moral evil involved would not have come about without the causative role being played by Yahweh in its actualisation. Since many people would deny that the true God actually causes people to sin and commit evil acts, consistency in this regard would demand that such depictions of Yahweh must be considered as being fictitious. From the perspective of popular orthodoxy then, it follows that Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

3.2.7.4   Examples of Yahweh commanding and/or rewarding evil acts

In the philosophy of religion there is a vexing ethical issue called "Eutyphro's dilemma", after the Greek philosopher whom tradition credits for being the first to put a rather interesting question. Eutyphro allegedly asked whether the gods commanded something because is right or whether something is right merely because the gods commanded it? This question pertains to another implied question concerning whether there is some intrinsic order of good even God(s) must acknowledge and are subject to, or whether there is no such order and it is up to the divine to determine what is right and what is wrong.

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Eutyphro's question is rightly called a dilemma, for whichever answer one opts for, certain problems arise as a result. If one were to say that the order of intrinsic good comes before the gods, it follows that the gods cannot be the highest determining reality in the cosmos and that there is an order to which they themselves must be subject to. For most god worshippers who would consider the divine to be ultimate reality, this option is intolerable.

But so is the alternative. After all, if no act is good or right in itself, it follows that everything is relative. One cannot say that murder and adultery are objectively sinful - only if the deity considers it as such. Alternatively, neither can one claim that love is inherently a praiseworthy virtue. It all depends on whether the deity reckons it to be so. Should he command hatred and violence, at least from this perspective, the resulting acts might still be deemed good and fair.

When it comes to the Old Testament, it seems rather interesting to find that, apparently, *both* viewpoints are present.

A good example of the idea that there is an intrinsic order of what is good that precedes the divine can be found in the scene where Abraham asks Yahweh whether the Judge of all the earth would not do what is right (cf. Gen 18:23-25). The same idea also underlies Yahweh's own objection in the book of Malachi to the view of some people who claimed that, when it came to matters of morality, everything was relative (cf. Mal 2:17). In these and other related scenarios, the ideology implicit in the text with regard to Eutyphro's question assumes that there is indeed an objective, universal and intrinsic order of good and evil that even Yahweh is subject to.

Other texts, as we shall see below, however, appear to suggest the contrary, i.e. that all is relative. Whatever Yahweh commands is right no matter how heinous the act or how unfair the scenario in which it is enacted. On several occasions, the texts actually depict the deity as issuing commands to commit evil acts. In such instances, Yahweh sees nothing indecent in having his own servants committing evil and enjoying the fruit of their criminal activities. Consider the following examples of such apparently unorthodox depictions of Yahweh's role as instigator of – and co-conspirator in – his own people's morally questionable actions.

- Yahweh lets Abraham receive the Pharaoh's possessions after he deceived the king. Meanwhile, Yahweh wants to punish the Pharaoh while knowing very well that he is innocent in the particular matter (cf. Gen 12:12-18).

- Yahweh allows the same thing to happen again, this time involving Abraham with an innocent and even pious king Abimelech (cf. Gen 20:1-18).

- Yahweh commands Abraham to sacrifice his son (cf. Gen 22:2).

- Yahweh allows Isaac to bless Jacob who will only receive the blessing after he succeeded in deceiving his father (cf. Gen 27:1-40).

- Yahweh blesses the midwives of the Hebrews because they lied to the Pharaoh about their activities (cf. Ex 1:16-21).

- Based on Yahweh's own suggestion, Moses lies to the Pharaoh about the reason for, and nature and duration of, their intended departure from Egypt (cf. Ex 5:1-3).

- Yahweh tells the people to rob their Egyptian neighbours of all their prized possessions (cf. Ex 11:2-3).

- Yahweh tells the people to kill all the men-folk of the city and to take (literally "rob") all the women and children and their possessions for themselves as "spoils of war" (cf. Deut 20:13-18)

- Yahweh favours a whore who lies to her own people about the whereabouts of the Israelites (cf. Josh 2:1-24).

- Yahweh tells Joshua to hamstrung all the enemy's horses (cf. Josh 11:6,9).

- Yahweh tells Samuel to lie to Saul about the reason for his visit under the pretence of wanting to perform a sacrifice (cf. 1 Sam 16:1-3).

- David deceives, murders and robs people whilst Yahweh does nothing to stop him. Later on, and in retrospect of David's career of violence and bloodshed, Yahweh never mentions this but claims that, in everything he has done, David was always a man after his own heart (cf. 1 Sam 27:1-12 vs. 1 Kgs 9:4).

- In spite of otherwise being dead set against such a practice, Yahweh commands Hosea to marry a whore and to have sexual relations with her (cf. Hos 1:2).

- Yahweh tells Isaiah to have intercourse with a prophetess who was not his wife and to walk about naked for three years, despite usually raging on vehemently about the scandalous nature of indecent exposure (cf. Isa 8:1-3; 20:1-3; cf. Gen 3:21; Ex 28:41).

- Yahweh claims to have given the people commands so that they would kill their children and defile themselves (cf. Ezek 20:20-27).

On this issue, the devil's advocate cannot help but take cognisance of the fact that so-called "biblical Christians" are not as "biblical" as they would like others to believe. How many stories of Abraham, Moses, David, Elisha and others have not been censored from all the unethical bits before they were incorporated into children's story Bibles and Sunday school literature? Can one actually imagine the Christian media adding the Song of Songs with its explicit and pornographic descriptions of extramarital sex acts to the *Visual Bible Library*?

Many religious people grow up idolising the Old Testament characters as "saints", blissfully ignorant of the fact that many of them are far more immoral (by today's Christian culture's standards) than their fans could ever have imagined. These sincere people will in all seriousness reckon characters such as Noah, Jacob, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and others to be excellent role models with sound theological convictions. Along with the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, not a few would like to think of Gideon, Jephtah, Samson, Elijah and Elisha as heroes of a righteous cause.

Many sincere religious people favourably disposed to the Bible are either ignorant of, or choose to repress the fact that, from the perspective of their own modern Christian morality, these "heroes of faith" must be considered to be xenophobic and narrow minded bigots, murderers, deceivers, thieves, and animal abusers. Even critical Old Testament scholars, who should know better, can be found constructing the profiles of biblical characters in ways that are no less economical with the truth than Yahweh's hopelessly idealistic assessments of the life and times of his main man David.

If one does not believe that the real God would command and/or reward such less-than-virtuous acts one is forced to conclude that God, if He exists, never really acted in the ways the texts depict Yahweh as doing. In other words, from an orthodox perspective, the repressed implication is that Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and does not exist.

3.2.7.5   Yahweh's inconsistent and passive approach to the proliferation of evil

Many Old Testament texts depict Yahweh as not acting consistently or faithfully to the promises he had given with his covenant. These passages imply a perplexity on the part of the characters and/or the author at the fact that righteous people have to suffer while the wicked ones prosper. This seems to provoke doubt on the part of the believer who cannot understand how Yahweh can allow such an unfair cosmic order to exist.

> "Why does the almighty not establish times of reckoning and do those who know him not see his days of judgement? They remove borderlines and steel herds of cattle…The ass of the orphan they drive away; the ox of the widow they take as a token. They push the needy off the road; the miserable ones in the land hide together. Look, like wild assess they…search for food…naked they spend the night…With no cover against the cold…the lack of shelter makes them press against the rocks. They pull the orphan from the breast and what the poor wears they sell. Naked they go without clothes; while they are hungry…they die of thirst. Out of the city, the men call and the souls of the wounded scream for help; yet God pays no attention to the injustice of it all." (Job 24:1-12)

"You have pushed us away and made us a shame…our haters plunder as they please. You give us over like animals for the slaughter…you sell your people for nothing…all this have come over us even though we have not forgotten you or acted in betrayal of your covenant...awake, O Yahweh, why do you sleep?" (Ps 44:10-24)

"He gave his people over to the sword…the fire consumed their young men and their daughters were not praised. The priests fell by the sword and the widows did not mourn. Then Yahweh woke up as one who had been asleep; like a hero who was drunk from wine. Then He attacked his enemies from behind…" (Ps 78:65)

"For all this I have given my heart to understand it; that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hands of God. Whether love or hate, humans do not know what lies before them. For everyone there is the same fate. It is the same for the righteous and the wicked; for the good and the bad; the clean and the unclean; for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice. As it is with the virtuous, so with the sinners; the one who swears an oath and the one who is afraid to swear. This is the evil that is done under the sun: the same fate comes to all." (Eccl 9:1-3)

"Son of man, what kind of proverb do you have in the land of Israel when you claim, 'The days go on but nothing whatsoever comes from all the visions?'" (Ezek 12:2)

"What is it with you that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten green grapes but the children's teeth are set on edge?" (Ezek 18:2)

"Just you are, Yahweh, should I want to argue with you. Still, I want to speak with you concerning matters of law: Why is the way of the wicked prosperous? Why do they live in peace – all those who practice unfaithfulness. You have planted them and they take root; they grow and also do they carry fruit…" (Jer 12:1-2)

"How long, O Yahweh, shall I call for help but you do not listen; I shout to you, 'violence!' but you do not help." (Hab 1:2)

"You who are too pure to look upon evil…why do you look upon the godless and do you remain silent while the wicked consume those more righteous than them. You treat people as if they were fish of the sea; like insects with no leader." (Hab 1:13)

The number of questions that one could ask Yahweh based on expectations supplied by his profile according to orthodox philosophical theology is infinite. Consider also the following examples of such questions concerning Yahweh's apparently inefficient, negligent and passive-reactive approach to dealing with human evil:

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent Eve from taking the first bite from the forbidden fruit? (cf. Gen 3)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent the murder of Abel? (cf. Gen 4)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent his sons from having intercourse with women from earth? (cf. Gen 5)

- Why does Yahweh not protect all his people like he protected Sarah even though Abraham was in the wrong? (cf. Gen 12, 20)

- Why does Yahweh not feed all his people like he fed the Israelites, Elijah at the brook and the widow for whom he created a bottomless jar of meal? (cf. Ex 16, 1 Kgs 17, 20)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent the violent gang rape of the maidservant (cf. Judg 19)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent the rape of Bathsheba? (cf. 2 Sam 11)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent the murder of Naboth? (cf. 1 Kgs 21)

- Why did Yahweh not intervene and prevent Jehu's massacre? (cf. Hos 1)

Why, O why, asks the devil's advocate, does Yahweh denounce all these and many other atrocities and heinous crimes *after* they were committed instead of preventing them from occurring at all? After all, Yahweh has no problem taking preventative measures when he considers the occasion to warrant it (cf. Gen 12, 20). If Yahweh can sometimes prevent evil even when those plagued by it do not deserve it, he can do so always, if he really wanted.

Moreover, contrary to popular belief, it is not a case of making room for the free will of human agents in a relationship since the Old Testament is full of Yahweh overriding people's will and intentions. The inconsistency of Yahweh in this regard speaks volumes for his relation to, and his role in, the actualisation of all sorts of evil. Like many modern constitutions, the "free will theodicy" ends up protecting the rights of the agents committing the evil but with such allowances blissfully ignores the fact that this is only possible at the cost of the "free will" of the criminals' innocent victims!

The fact that so many atrocities (rape, murder, torture, starvation, violence, etc.) are committed in the world of the text (and outside it) without Yahweh intervening cannot but leave the impression that Yahweh may know about the suffering but he just does not care enough to do anything. Or maybe, as is the case in Genesis 18 and elsewhere, he is not omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient and therefore such fair, efficient, and proactive intervention cannot be expected of him.

But what should one then make of those instances in which Yahweh *does* seem able to intervene? Surely it cannot be the case that Yahweh is altogether powerless to act since he does act preventatively when it suits him, when he wants to make a name for himself, or when he desires for certain privileged people to tell him how wonderful he is (cf. Ex 1-12).

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The inconsistency on Yahweh's part in dealing with evil can also be seen in the deity's partisan treatment of individuals. The leeway he allows for his favourites like Abraham, Jacob and David can be quite absurd. These characters can be depicted as being thieves, liars, deceivers, murderers, rapists, polytheists, etc. Yet, come what may, they remain chosen by Yahweh and with the basic divine-human relation in tact wherever they go and whatever they do.

Yet when it comes to people like Esau, the Pharaohs of Genesis and Exodus, Moses, Eli, Saul, Uzzah and others, one little misstep and Yahweh wants to end everything. The inconsistency, partiality and bigotry on the part of Yahweh reveals that he is far from the fair and loving deity popular Christian tradition would like him to be.

So then, if one believes that the real God would not allow such unfair scenarios and is not involved in the kind of inconsistent and passive-reactive approach in dealing with evil, the ontological implications are all-too-clear. From such a perspective, Yahweh-as-depicted must be reckoned a character of fiction who does not exist outside the discourse of such unorthodox texts.

3.2.7.6   Indiscriminate and unfair punishment involving innocent parties

In response to charging Yahweh with evil, many apologists for the deity may still insist that God is completely fair and just and only allows evil to punish evildoers themselves. Moreover, many of those who make these claims would consider themselves "biblical theists" who believe that God and Yahweh are one and the same being.

These people must either repress the knowledge, or not be cognisant of texts in the Old Testament where Yahweh goes about punishing not only evildoers but also innocent relations and bystanders who happen to be in the way of his divine wrath. Consider, if you will, the following texts courtesy of the devil's advocate and take note of who is included in sharing the punishment of the ones who committed the sinful acts.

"And Abraham came closer and said, 'Will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Maybe there are fifty righteous in the city; will you also destroy them and not save the place on the behalf of the fifty righteous within it? Let it be far from you to do something like that: to destroy the righteous with the wicked so that the righteous is just like the wicked. Let it be far from you! Will not the judge of the whole earth do what is right?" (Gen 18:23-25)

"But Yahweh came in the night to Abimelech and said to him in a dream, 'Look, you will die because of the wife whom you had fetched as she is a married women'. But Abimelech had not come near her and therefore he asked, 'Yahweh, will you also destroy a righteous nation? Did not he himself say to me, 'She is my sister...' In the innocence of my heart and in the cleanness of my hands I had done this. Then God answered him…, 'I also know that you did it in the innocence of your heart and I myself have prevented you from sinning against me. Therefore, I have not allowed you to touch her. Now return the man's wife to him because he is a prophet and he will pray for you that you may live. But if you do not return her know that you will surely die, you *and everyone who belong to you'*…And Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maidens as Yahweh had locked tight all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of the thing with Sarah, the wife of Abraham" (Gen 20:3-7)

"Thus says Yahweh, the god of the Hebrews, Let my people go that they may serve me, because, if you refuse...then the hand of Yahweh will be against your cattle in the field..." (Ex 9:1-3)

"Thus said Yahweh, 'At midnight I shall go through Egypt. Then all the firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the Pharaoh's firstborn...to the firstborn of the slave girl...and all the firstborn of the animals...'" (Ex 11:4-5)

"Then Pineas...took a spear...and speared them...Then the plague among

the children of Israel ceased. And those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand." (Num 25: 9)

"Kill all the males among the children and kill all the women who have had sex with a man." (Num 31:17)

"But now Yahweh says …In your house there will be no one who grows old throughout eternity…everyone who has remained in your house shall come before him (i.e. the priest) for a piece of money and a piece of bread. They shall say to him, 'Put me in one of the orders of priests that I may be able to eat a piece of bread.'" (1 Sam 2:27-36)

"Thus says Yahweh of Hosts, 'I have seen what Amalek has done to Israel, that he stood in his way when he came up from Egypt. Go now and defeat Amalek! You must smite with the curse of the ban all that he owns and you may not pardon him. You must kill men as well as women, children and infants, oxen and cattle, camels and asses.'" (1 Sam 15:1-3)

"And when they came to the threshing floor of Nagon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark and held it fast because the oxen faltered. Then the wrath of Yahweh burned against Uzzah and God smote him there because of the sin, so that he died there at the ark of God." (1 Sam 6:19-20)

"And when there was a famine in the days of David, for three years, year after year, David sought the face of Yahweh (to ascertain the cause). Yahweh said, 'Because of Saul and because of his house on which blood guilt rests; because he killed the Gibeonites.' Then the king (i.e. David) …said to the Gibeonites, 'What must I do for you and how can I make restitution that you may bless the inheritance of Yahweh?' Then the Gibeonites said..., 'the man who destroyed us...let seven of his sons be given to us that we can hang them before the face of Yahweh...' And David went…and Yahweh once again began to care about the land (2 Sam 21:1-14)

"When David saw how the angel killed among the people, he spoke to Yahweh and said, 'Look, *I* have sinned and it was *me* who acted wrongly, but what have these sheep done? Let your hand be against my family and me. Then Gad came to David on the same day and said to him, 'Go and build an altar for Yahweh...'...Then David built the altar...and Yahweh took pity on the land and the plague was averted.'" (2 Sam 24:10-15)

"And in these days Hiel of Bethel build Jericho. At the cost of Abiram, his first-born, he laid its foundation and at the cost of Segub, his youngest, he put up its gates, according to the word of Yahweh which he spoke through the service of Joshua, the son of Nun." (1 Kgs 16:34)

"Because he humbled himself before my face, I shall not bring the evil in his days; in the days of his son I shall bring the evil over his house." (1 Kgs 21:29)

"And from there he went to Bethel; and while he went up with the road little boys came out of the city and mocked him and said to him, 'Go up, baldhead! Go up, baldhead!' Then he looked behind him and saw them and cursed them in the name of Yahweh and two bears came out of the bush and killed forty-two of the children." (2 Kgs 2:24)

"Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman will cleave to you and your descendants forever." (2 Kgs 5:27)

"And Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of Yahweh!' Look, there will come days when everything in your house...will be taken to Babylon...And your sons who will come from you, they will be servants of the court in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of Yahweh which you have spoken is good.' He also said, 'Why not, as long as there is peace and stability during my days!'" (2 Kgs 20:19)

"Behold, Yahweh will send a large plague among your people and among your sons and among your wives and among all your things and you yourself will suffer many illnesses..." (2 Chron 21:12)

"Thus He (i.e. Yahweh) made the king of the Chaldeans go up against them and he killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and did not pardon any young man or girl, old one or grey one. He (i.e. Yahweh) gave everything into his hands." (2 Chron 36:15-17)

"Behold, the day of Yahweh comes…everyone who is found will be pierced; all who are grabbed fall by the sword; and their children are smashed before their eyes, their houses are plundered and their wives are shamed (i.e. raped). Behold I awake the Medians against them …" (Isa 13:14-17)

"Our fathers have sinned; they are no longer there and we have to carry their punishments." (Lam 5:7)

"Thus says Yahweh, '…I shall draw my sword from its sheath and wipe out in you both the righteous and the wicked.'" (Ezek 21:3-4)

"Yes, even if they raise children, I shall make them childless…I shall kill the children of their wombs." (Hos 14:12,16)

"'Is Esau not the brother of Jacob?' says Yahweh. Still, I loved Jacob and hated Esau and made his mountains a wilderness…and if Edom says, '…we shall rebuild.' – then Yahweh of Hosts says this, 'Let them build, I shall break it down…'" (Mal 1:2-4)

"All his brothers and sisters and his acquaintances of earlier times came to him and ate bread with him in his house; and they sympathised with him and consoled him over all the evil that Yahweh had brought upon him." (Job 42:11)

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Given the methodology of the god they worship, it is understandable that people like psalmists could revel in contemplating the suffering of innocents related to their personal enemies and take pleasure in cursing them to kingdom come. The wish of the author of Psalm 137 who blessed those that would dash out the brains of the enemy's babies (sic) provides an all-too-familiar example (cf. Ps 137:9).

Of course, scholars have their ways of mitigating the appearance of completely unacceptable violence in texts where suffering is envisaged for innocent relations. On the one hand, conservatives will try to demonstrate that the texts do not really mean what they appear to mean. The particular passage is either part of uninspired utterance (sic) or no matter how gross, the violence is somehow justified because God sanctioned it.

Liberal scholars, on the other hand, might denounce the injustice but claim that one should not be too unduly concerned about the matter since it was all merely part of the cultural baggage of a people who believed in corporate identity and communal solidarity. They might also refer to the fact that revelation was progressive and that these people represent humanity before the full revelation of God came in Christ.

The devil's advocate considers both these apologetic attempts invalid and unconvincing. Conservatives, because of their idealist view of the supposed nature of Scripture, cannot help themselves or stop engaging in rationalisations stretching the limits of credulity. Liberals, on the other hand, conveniently and blissfully ignore the fact that many Old Testament passages show that the people could realise the injustice involved in punishing innocent bystanders (cf. Gen 18:23-33, Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:1-20, 2 Sam 24:17).

On the other hand, they also ignore the fact that the deity's own moral views never transcended the primitive and now abhorrent views of his speechwriters. The cursing and condemnation of innocents are therefore easily dismissed as being simply an inextricable part of the mentality of a people who worshipped a god whose own point of view seemed to be apparently none the wiser. Fortunately, if the devil's advocate is correct, there was no Yahweh and thus not really any god who would have punished people so indiscriminately. Unfortunately, the innocent sufferers (e.g. the

babies, descendants, wives and other relations) – and their pain – were definitely substantial.

From the perspective of orthodox Christian philosophical theology, however, surely the most outstanding and repressed example of Yahweh implicating innocents for the sins of others occurred when he doomed all descendants of Adam and Eve to a lifetime (eternity?) of suffering and misery. People not yet born were destined for living amidst great natural evil. Moreover, according to the Christian reading of the so-called fall of mankind, the acts of the two first humans also destined the entire human race to an eternity in hell.

In this regard, it stands to reason that the greater proportion of moral evil have come about as a direct result of unfulfilled human needs brought on by the reality of natural evil. Without the need to fight for food, without pain and without enmity and strife between humans and nature, many ills of later society would not have materialised.

How much of fighting and war are not the direct result of wanting to obtain a better life in relation to the available natural resources and comfort in the face of toil and pain? Is the whole reason why an economy via either money or the trading of goods is needed in the first place not because of the factors of supply and demand and the limits or unavailability of certain natural resources? If the curse of Genesis 3 is taken seriously, how much of the ills in the world and society can be seen as a direct result of Yahweh's actualisation of such natural evil based on trans-generational retribution?

Those Christian Old Testament scholars who deny that Yahweh punishes children for the sins of their fathers must therefore repress the fact that the entire Pauline-Augustinian soteriology, to which most of them subscribe, is actually based on the concept of inherited guilt. The only need for the messiah in the first place, according to popular evangelical Christianity, was to save us from the wrath of God as a result of what Adam and Eve did long ago. Everyone is damnable to hell because of the original sin. If there ever was needed an example of children being held responsible for the sins of their parents, this is it!

The same kind of unfair trans-generational retribution can be found when Yahweh actualises the curses of people like Noah, Jacob, Samuel and other "men of God". In each case the protagonist dooms all descendants of a certain perpetrator to lifetimes of suffering as a result not of what they did, but because of what one forefather (Ham, Esau, Eli, Saul, David, Jeroboam, Hezekiah and others) did even before they were born.

Of course, many "biblical" Christians with a propensity for selective proof-texting will no doubt be able to quote examples of texts where Yahweh claims that his punishments are fair and that innocents or relations may not be punished for the sins of others (cf. Archer 1982:71-73). Once again, as argued in the previous chapter, the presence of such texts in the Old Testament, instead of vindicating the conservative viewpoint merely points to the reality of theological pluralism in the Old Testament. The use of such texts to refute the kind of claims made by the devil's advocate also attests to the selectivity and dogmatic eisegesis for which conservative evangelical theology is so notorious.

In sum then, it is quite irrelevant that some Old Testament texts (e.g. Deuteronomy 24 and Ezekiel 12 appear to deny that Yahweh punishes innocents such as descendants and other relations. The existence of this more orthodox trajectory in the text does not make the more unorthodox ideologies simply disappear. The fact remains that, in quite a few texts, the kind of unjust suffering that orthodox theology would not ascribe to God is exactly and explicitly what Yahweh causes to materialise.

If one then considers the real God to be above such collective and indiscriminate retribution, one is forced to conclude that Yahweh as thus depicted must be a character of fiction. In other words, he does not exist.

3.2.7.7   Yahweh's co-operation with the forces of evil

Quite often one reads the claim among conservative Christian Old Testament scholars that Yahweh is in no way whatsoever responsible for any form of evil (cf. Kaiser et al.

1996:10-12). It is alleged that monism is a blasphemous concept and one that liberals invoke as a result of failing to take cognisance of the fact that the evil spirits and humans are the ones responsible for all the evil in the world (cf. Haley 1992:60-61). Yahweh, so the argument goes, is not the cause of evil; he only permits it (cf. Archer 1982:35).

According to the devil's advocate, however, this line of reasoning is wholly unconvincing. It appears to be motivated more by the need to defend comforting dogmas than by the duty to take the Old Testament seriously on its own terms. Moreover, even if Yahweh cannot always be linked directly to the actualisation of all evil, this state of affairs in no way lessens the deity's crucial and necessary role in its ultimate actualisation.

Since Yahweh has the final say about what evil spirits are permitted to do, he remains the necessary link in the materialisation of evil. This role of the deity is probably the most apparent and disconcerting when the texts depict Yahweh as either the creator and/or manager of the forces of evil.

> "And the snake was more prudent than all the beasts of the field *that Yahweh had made."* (Gen 3:1)

> "When Abimelech had ruled for three years over Israel, God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the children of and the people of Shechem. And the people of Shechem acted disloyal against Abimelech so that the injustice against the seventy sons of Jerubaal would come out and that their blood would lie on their brother Abimelech who murdered them and also on the people of Shechem who strengthened his hands to murder his brothers. Thus, the people of Shechem put up snares against him on the mountains and robbed everyone who passed them one the road." (Judg 9: 22-25)

> "But the spirit of Yahweh had departed from Saul and an evil spirit sent by Yahweh frightened him. Then the servants of Saul said to him, 'Look, an evil spirit from God frightens you. Let our master just say the word and

your servants who stand before you will seek a man who can play on the harp. If the evil spirit from God is over you, he must play with his hands and then it will be better for you.'" (1 Sam 16:14-16)

"The following day the evil spirit from God came upon Saul so that he was making a lot of noise within the house..." (1 Sam 18:10)

"But an evil spirit from Yahweh came over Saul while he sat in his house with his spear in his hand..." (1 Sam 19:9)

"And the wrath of Yahweh (Satan?) burned against Israel and he incited David against them and said, 'Go and count Israel.'" (2 Sam 24:1/1 Chron 21:1)

"I have seen Yahweh sitting on his throne while all the hosts of heaven stood next to him...And Yahweh said, 'Who will convince Ahab so that he can go up and fall at Ramoth in Gilead?' And the one said this and the other one that. Then the spirit came forward and went to stand before the face of Yahweh and said, 'I shall convince him.' And Yahweh asked him, 'With what?' And he said, 'I shall go out and become a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You will convince (him), yes, you will win (him) over, go out and do so! And now, look, Yahweh gave a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets and Yahweh spoke evil against you.'" (1 Kgs 22:19-23)

"'Did you not yourself protect him and his house and everything that he owns? The work of his hands you have blessed and his animals have multiplied greatly in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all he possesses – truly, he will curse you in your face.' Then Yahweh said to the Satan, 'Look, everything which he owns is in your hands; just he himself you may not lay a hand on.' And the Satan went away from the face of Yahweh." (Job 1:10-12)

"And one day when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh, the Satan came among them to set himself before Yahweh. Then Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Where did you come from?' And the Satan answered Yahweh and said, 'From a journey on the earth, which I have crossed'. And Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Did you take note of my servant Job...he continues in his piety even though you have enticed me to destroy him without reason.'" (Job 2:1-3)

"Then the Satan answered Yahweh and said, ... 'but stretch out your hand and touch his bones and flesh...' And Yahweh said to the Satan, 'Look he is in your hand...' And the Satan went away from Yahweh and smite him with evil sores…'" (Job 2:4-7)

"…there is the Leviathan that Yahweh made to play with." (Ps 104:26)

"And all the people on earth are considered as naught; according to his will he deals with the army of heaven and the people of the earth. There is no one who can restrain His hand and ask Him, 'What are you doing?'" (Dan 4:35)

Related to these texts depicting Yahweh as co-operating with and managing the forces of evil is the way the word "*satan"* is used in the Old Testament. In nominal form, the root "*stn"* occurs in several passages (i.e. Num 22:22,32; 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:22; 1 Kgs 5:4, 11:14,23,25; 1 Chron 21:1; Job 1:6-9,12, 2:1-4; 6-7; Ps 109:6; Zech 3:1-2). The root *stn* also features in verbal form (cf. Zech 3:1; Ps 38:20, 71:13, 109:4,20,29). Though usually denoting an adversary rather than the "devil" of later Jewish and Christian mythology, the way the word is used in relation to Yahweh or his servant's actions is not exactly comforting*:*

- In Numbers 22:22, the angel of Yahweh, so often identified with the deity himself, is said to have set himself up as a s*atan* against Balaam.

- According to 2 Samuel 24:1, Yahweh incited David to take a census; yet according to 1 Chronicles 21:1, the one who incited David was the *satan*.

- According to 1 Kings 11:14, 23 and 25, Yahweh punished Solomon for his apostasy by stirring up adversaries (satan)(s) for him.

- According to Job 1-2, the *satan* destroyed everything Job had and took his health. Yet according to the text of Job 42:7, all the evil Job experienced was that done by Yahweh himself.

- In Psalm 109:6, Yahweh is petitioned to appoint an enemy and let an adversary (satan) stand at the right hand of the accursed.

Combined with knowledge of the depictions of Yahweh responsible for metaphysical, natural, moral and a host of other types of evil as demonstrated in this section of the present chapter, one may very well wonder, "with Yahweh around, who needs a devil?" To be sure, some historians of Israelite religion argue that the very reason the figure of "Satan" became part of Judaic mythology was via influence of Persian dualistic ideology and the embarrassment of Jewish thinkers in the post-exilic period with the monism of pre-exilic times (cf. Harwood 1992:167).

Given what now became the repressed unorthodox monism of the pre-exilic times, there was an urgent need to bring the character of the Satan and a host of other demons (Mastemah, Azazel, Asmodeus, Samael, Lillith, etc.) into the discourse of Jewish mythology. This occurred as a parallel to the metaphysical mythology of Persian Zoroastrianism in order to absolve Yahweh from bearing the obvious responsibility for causing the evil the ancient texts ascribe to him (cf. Eichrodt 1961:77-79).

Since many pious Jews in the post-exilic period could not bring themselves to believe that the demonic versions of Yahweh from their traditions actually existed, there was a need to repress their own atheism. And the way to best alleviate the cognitive dissonance was by reconstructing their view of the divine, by reinterpreting the texts featuring Yahweh engaging in actualising evil and by developing an extensive

demonology as a form of theodicy (cf. Eichrodt 1961:80).

The tensions in the perceived relation between Yahweh and evil were never really resolved, as the belief in Yahweh's omnipotence would not be relinquished to conform to a complete dualism as in Zoroastrianism. This created new dilemmas for monotheism such as the so-called "problem of evil" which have never been (and cannot possibly be) solved satisfactorily.

Philosophical theologians either redefine the nature of the deity to such an extent that it has no resemblance to Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. The repressed implication is that, if the god of the philosophers exists, then Yahweh does not. Alternatively, it is admitted that evil is a necessary part of Yahweh's plan, but this is either rationalised through arguments such as those from "free will", "soul-making", "the best of all possible worlds", "incomprehensibility", etc. – all of which are contradicted by many an Old Testament text.

The astute Old Testament theologian will know all too well that Yahweh-as-depicted in some of the Old Testament does not, as a rule, care much about free will, maximum benefits or suffering for any higher purpose. Moreover, Yahweh's demonic actions are not so much incomprehensible as they are obviously and depressingly unorthodox from a Christian point of view. Maybe this is why, eventually, even some of the early Christian theologians held that, while God ruled the world with Christ at his right hand, he nevertheless also did so with Satan at his left.

Related to the issue of Yahweh managing evil spirits is the question regarding the nature of Yahweh's own "Spirit". According to the devil's advocate, cannot help but compare the so-called "fruit of the Spirit" as depicted in the Old Testament with its counterpart in the New.

In this regard, the apostle Paul claimed, in Galatians 5:22, that the fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, self-control, etc. Yet the observant and unapologetic reader of Old Testament scenarios featuring the "fruit of the Spirit" may well wonder what is going on. To be sure, when the Spirit of Yahweh takes hold of people, they act in the exact opposite way as what one would expect from the Pauline

perspective.

Consider the following examples of apparently unorthodox manifestations and symptoms of being filled with the divine spirit:

- Gideon is filled with the Spirit and immediately goes to war. Afterwards he appears vengeful and decides to torture those who refused to join in the violence and bloodshed usually part of the quest for liberation (cf. Judg 6-9).

- Jephtah, having just being filled with the Spirit, promises Yahweh that he would sacrifice the first person he meets on his return from killing his political opponents. Yahweh surprises him in Homeric fashion by allowing his own daughter to be the first to come and greet him as he comes back from a victorious campaign (cf. Judg 11:29).

- Samson is filled with the Spirit and is subsequently, amongst other things, disobedient to his parents, insatiable during killing sprees, determined to marry a pagan wife, seen visiting a prostitute and totally bereft of wisdom and common sense (cf. Judg 13-16).

- King Saul is filled with the spirit and immediately cuts two animals to pieces, prepares for war. Later on, as a result of being filled with the Spirit again (against his will and despite a severed relationship with Yahweh), he exposes himself indecently by lying naked on the ground for a whole day seemingly without any control over his actions (cf. 1 Sam 11:6-7; 19:23-24).

- Ezekiel, being filled with the spirit becomes embittered and depressed (cf. Ezek 3:14).

From an Old Testament perspective, therefore, the "fruit" of the Spirit seems more like what Paul would consider to be the evil and abhorrent "fruit of the flesh", i.e. killing, destruction, hateful actions, disobedience, revenge, lying, hurting living creatures, depression, war and strife, loss of self-control, etc. If the God whose Spirit causes the

positive manifestations mentioned by Paul is real, what is the ontological status of Yahweh whose Spirit produces fruit more in common with what the New Testament would consider to be demonic?

Some conservatives have suggested that the reason for the apparent monistic tendencies in the Old Testament should be attributed to the people's faith in the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh. As a result, so the argument goes, the texts do not make explicit distinctions between Yahweh and (alleged) secondary (demonic) causes (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:17, 78, 121, and passim).

Whether this is true or not, it does little to alter the fact that in all the aforementioned and other texts, Yahweh's compliance with the forces of darkness, in a context where they can do nothing without his consent, indeed seems to implicate him in their activities. In fact, once it is alleged that Yahweh is the sovereign creator and manager of everything that exists, the deity will always remain responsible for the evil the malignant forces commit.

Unless one opts for dualism or polytheism, the concept of absolute monotheism, coupled with a doctrine of omnibenevolence and the reality of evil in the world, always deconstructs itself and collapses into monism. If, then, one believes that the real God is in no way responsible for evil in the sense of being so closely allied with the demonic as the Old Testament texts seem to suggest, the anti-realist implications are clear. From such a perspective one has to conclude that Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction. In other words, an unorthodox monistic type of Yahweh does not exist.

3.2.7.8 Yahweh's methodology of causing evil to punish evil

On numerous occasions in the Old Testament texts, Yahweh raises up enemies for his people in order to punish them. These enemies kill, torture, starve, rape, rob and destroy everything in sight. Despite some believing this to be the actualisation of divine justice for people's apostasy, the devil's advocate has a sneaking suspicion that such retribution is somewhat of an overkill. Punishing evil with more of the same can hardly be the work of an omnibenevolent and supposedly omnipotent deity who could

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surely find other ways of executing divine justice.

Consider the following examples of what the devil's advocate considers to be an ineffective and abhorrent divine methodology in dealing with evil.

"You will be engaged with a woman and another man will shame her....your sons and daughters will be given to another people..." (Deut 28:28-32)

"...your enemy which Yahweh has sent against you, (him) you will serve in hunger and thirst...Yahweh will bring against you a nation from afar... a nation hard of face who does not pardon an old man and shows no mercy to a boy...and you will eat the fruit of your body, the flesh of your sons and daughters whom Yahweh has given you..." (Deut 28:49-53)

"Therefore, the wrath of Yahweh burned and he sold them into the hand of Cushan Reshataim, the king of Mesopotamia. And the children of Israel served Cushan Reshataim for eight years." (Judg 3:8)

"And the children of Israel once again did what was wrong in the eyes of Yahweh. Then Yahweh made Echlon the king of Moab strong against Israel, because they did what was wrong in the eyes of Yahweh." (Judg 3:12)

"But after the death of Ehud, the children of Israel again did what was wrong in the eyes of Yahweh. Therefore, Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan...and the children of Israel called to Yahweh because the other king had iron chariots and oppressed them heavily for twenty years." (Judg 4: 1-3)

"And Yahweh raised Hadad the Edomite as enemy for Solomon..." (1 Kgs 11:14)

"Yahweh also raised as enemy for him Reshon..." (1 Kgs 11:23)

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"Then there came a man of God from Judah through the word of Yahweh to Bethel while Jeroboam was standing on the altar...and he called out against the altar...and said, 'Altar, altar, so says Yahweh, 'Look, a son will be born for the house of David with the name Josiah and he shall slaughter on you the priests of the heights...and on the bones of men will be burned on you...'" (1 Kgs 13:1-2)

"Thus, Simri destroyed the whole house of Basa according to the word of Yahweh that he spoke concerning Basa through the prophet Jehu..." (1 Kgs 16:12)

"...thus says the great king, the king of Assyria...'Did I come up without Yahweh to destroy this place? Yahweh (himself) said to me, ''Go up against this land and destroy it.'" (2 Kgs 18:19,25)

 "Then Yahweh sent the gangs of the Chaldeans against him and the gangs of the Arameans and the gangs of the Moabites and the gangs of the children of Ammon. He sent them against Judah in order to destroy it according to the word of Yahweh that he spoke through the service of his servants, the prophets." (2 Kgs 24:2)

"Therefore, the god of Israel awakened the spirit of Pul, the king of Assyria, in other words, the spirit of Tiglath Pilezer, the king of Assyria, who took them, the Rubenites and the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh, into exile..." (1 Chron 5:26)

"And they took great booty and overpowered all the cities around Gerar; because the fear for Yahweh was on them. And they plundered all the cities for there was great booty inside." (2 Chron 14:14)

"Woe to Ashur! The rod of my wrath and a stick is he – in their hand is my grimness. I shall send him against a reckless nation and I shall give him command against the people of my grimness; to collect booty and to

rob and to step on them like mud in the streets. But he does not intend it that way…to destroy is in his heart and to wipe out nations." (Isa 10:5-7)

"I shall incite Egypt against Egypt so that they will fight, everyone against his brother and everyone against his neighbour, city against city and kingdom against kingdom…and I shall give Egypt into the hand of a hard task master, a stringent king will rule over them." (Isa 19:2,4)

"Thus says Yahweh...'Behold, I send and call for my servant king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and I shall put down his throne on these stones that I have buried…and he shall come and conquer Egypt; those who are destined for pestilence, to pestilence; and those for captivity, to captivity; and those for the sword, to the sword.'" (Jer 43:10-11)

"For look, I will stir up and cause to rise against Babylon a multitude of nations from the north…and Chaldea will become a spoil of war and those who rob him will be satisfied says Yahweh." (Jer 50:10)

"Thus says Yahweh, 'Behold, I awaken against Babylon …the spirit of the destroyer.'" (Jer 51:1)

"You are for me a hammer and a weapon of war; and with you I destroy nations and kingdoms. I destroy the horse and his rider, the chariot and the one who rides in it. With you I destroy man and woman…grey head and boy…young man and young girl…the shepherd and his herd…the farmer and his two oxen…governors and overlords. But I shall pay back Babylon and Chaldea before your eyes for all the evil they have done in Zion." (Jer 51:20-24)

"Samaria will pay for her rebellion against God; they shall fall by the sword; their children will be dashed and their pregnant woman will be cut open." (Hos 14:1)

"I shall raise up a shepherd in the land; he will not care…Woe to the evil

shepherd who does not care for the sheep…" (Zech 11:16-17)

"For I shall gather the nations to fight war against Jerusalem; and the city will be taken, the houses plundered and the women raped…" (Zech 14:2)

"And the king will do anything he wants to and ... will blaspheme against the God of the gods; and he will be prosperous; until the wrath is at an end; for what has been surely determined will be executed." (Dan 11:36)

"Behold, I shall awaken a shepherd for the land who will not look around for what is lost; who will not seek what is strewn about; who will not heal what is broken and who will not care for what has remained standing. But the flesh of the fat he will eat and tear off their claws." (Zech 11:16)

Yahweh wants to punish people in a most violent and explicit manner and in order to do so he has to get other people to do it for him. They, in turn, must then commit murder, rape, torture and other evil acts so that Yahweh's retribution can be enacted and his wrath sated. But then, later on, for some inexplicable reason, Yahweh gets angry with *these* agents of divine wrath for *their* evil acts. This certainly seems rather odd since it was none other than Yahweh *himself* who caused them to do the evil they did.

Yahweh could have prevented the evil from transpiring in the first place or he could have decided on another cause of action. Yet the supposedly omnibenevolent deity chose to cause evil to punish evil. Once again, the popular "free will defence" (cf. Platinga 1974) is irrelevant to this issue in the Old Testament since Yahweh frequently overrides the free will of people he wishes to manipulate. He cares nothing for the free will and moral autonomy of the agents he stirs up to do his dirty work for him. Neither does he care about the free will of the innocent parties suffering as a result of his all too cultural belief in corporate solidarity and collective retribution.

In punishing evil by causing more of the same (and creating the need for yet more retribution) Yahweh initiates a seemingly endless cycle of obscene, abhorrent and unjust tit for tat.

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Yahweh could have punished the people in other ways than having the pagans commit heinous acts over which, since Yahweh caused them to do it, these people seem to have little control. Why could Yahweh not merely let evil people keel over and die? Why could the earth not just swallow them, as was the case with Korah and his ilk? As almighty creator, why not just say, "Let evil ones disappear!"… and it was so? Why stir up people to hurt, kill and destroy – especially since these people themselves are overdue for punishment (according to Yahweh)?

Two wrongs do not make a right. The argument that the "evil" caused by Yahweh was simply the justified punishment for Israel's evil is, according to the devil's advocate, totally unconvincing as Yahweh could have punished his people without the multiplication of moral evil.

If one believes that the real God does not or would not act in such a way, or engage in a methodology of causing evil to punish evil one is pressed to conclude that Yahweh who is depicted in acting in just such a manner must be a character of unorthodox fiction. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

3.2.7.9 Yahweh and structural evil

In many Old Testament texts, much of the evil in the world of international politics and ethnic relations is presented as being predetermined by Yahweh himself. It would seem as though the divine plan for human history demands friction between the sons of Adam. Consider the following examples of the way in which Yahweh is implicated as being the preliminary cause of all structural evil in the socio-political realm.

> "Then Yahweh said, 'There they are now, one people and one language. And this is just the beginning of their undertaking; now nothing that they plan will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that the one does not understand the other. Thus, Yahweh dispersed them from there over the whole earth and they stopped building the city.'" (Gen 11:4-9)

"Then he said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be aliens in a country that will not belong to them. There they will serve and will be oppressed for four hundred years. But I shall also judge the nation whom they must serve and afterwards they shall depart with many things. But you will go to your fathers in peace, you will be buried in a good old age. Only in the fourth generation will (your descendants) return here, because the unrighteousness of the Amorites is, until now, not yet full.'" (Gen 15:13-16)

"And the angel of Yahweh said to her, 'Behold, you are pregnant and will conceive a son and you must call him Ishmael because Yahweh has heard you in your misery. And he shall be a wild ass of a man; his hand against everybody and everyone's hand against his. And he shall live against all his brothers.'" (Gen 16:11-12)

"And Yahweh answered her, 'Two nations are in your womb and two peoples shall go out from your body. The one nation will be stronger than the other and the eldest will serve the youngest.'" (Gen 25:22-23)

"Yahweh spoke to Moses, 'Go to the Pharaoh, because I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants so that I could do these signs among them and so that you can tell your children what I did to Egypt... that you may know that I am Yahweh.'" (Ex 9:34 -10:2)

"Also the Horites lived in Seir before, but the children of Esau drove them out of their possession...and went to live in their place just as Israel had done with the land of their possession that Yahweh gave them." (Deut 2:12)

"But Sihon the king of Heshbon did not want us to go through his land because Yahweh your god had hardened his spirit and stifled his heart that he may give him into your hand as it is today." (Deut 2:30)

"…the poor will not be absent from the land..." (Deut 15:11)

"But Yahweh has determined to confuse the council of Achitophel so that Yahweh could bring evil on Abshalom." (2 Sam 17:14)

"But the word of Yahweh came to Semayah, the man of God, and said...You may not go to war against your brothers, the children of Israel...because this matter came from me." (1 Kgs 12:22-24)

"Then there came a man of God from Judah through the word of Yahweh to Bethel while Jeroboam was standing on the altar...and he called out against the altar...and said, 'Altar, altar, so says Yahweh, 'Look, a son will be born for the house of David with the name Josiah and he shall slaughter on you the priests of the heights...and the bones of men will be burned on you...'" (1 Kgs 13:1-2)

"In these days, Yahweh began to decrease Israel and Hazael defeated them in the area of Israel." (2 Kgs 10:29-32)

"Did you not hear it? Since long ago, I have prepared it, and predestined it from olden times. Now I caused it to come, that you could destroy the fortified cities to ruins...." (2 Kgs 19:25-27)

"In these days there were no peace for those who went out or in, but great commotion was upon all the inhabitants of the land. Nation was against nation and city clashed with city because God brought them into confusion through all sorts of trouble." (2 Chron 15:1-7)

"Look, he breaks down and no one rebuilds…he holds the waters back and they dry up…he releases them and they turn the earth upside down. With him is the power…His is the one who is lost and the one who causes to become lost. He carries away counsellors after they have been plundered; judges he makes into fools. He loosens the tie with which kings bind…He carries away priests after they have been plundered, and, whoever stands firm he causes to fall. He takes away the speech of the

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trustworthy people and robs the elderly people of their discernment. He pours scorn on the regal and makes the girdle of the mighty limp…He makes nations big and makes them perish. He makes nations spread out and takes them into exile. He takes away the mind of the leaders of the people of the land and makes them dwell in a wilderness without pathways. They grope in darkness and he lets them wander like drunken men." (Job 12:13-25)

"Who has stirred him from the east for whom victory comes to meet him with every footstep? Who gives nations over to him and lets him step on kings, whose sword makes them like dust, whose bow makes them like tumbleweed…? Who did this and caused it to be? He who calls the generations from the beginning: I, Yahweh, the first, and at the last I am the same." (Isa 41:2-4)

"'Are you not like the children of Cush to me, O children of Israel?' says Yahweh. 'Did I not cause Israel to depart from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?'" (Am 9:7)

"Behold, does it not come from Yahweh of Hosts that nations toil for fire and people tire themselves for nothing." (Hab 2:13)

"Before these days people did not get any recompense, and also for the animals there were no recompense. For those who went in and out there was no safety on account of the enemy…I have let loose all the people, the one against the other." (Zech 8:10)

Arguably one of the most cherished examples of Yahweh's "salvation" and "goodness" is supposed to be the deliverance from Egypt. The book of Deuteronomy repeatedly claims how Yahweh took Israel from Egypt because of supposed divine "love" for the people. Liberation theology uses the exodus motif as a supposed proof that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed.

However, as Clines (1995:71) notes, the deliverance from Egypt as a glorious and

saving act of Yahweh is seen in an altogether different light when, upon reading

Exodus 1-12, one remembers the background to these events in Genesis. After all, Yahweh conveniently neglects to mention that it was he himself who, through the "good" evil done to Joseph, caused the people to come to Egypt in the first place! Was he trying to undo a plan that went awry? Were the 400+ years of suffering in Egypt something he had planned to happen all along? (cf. Gen 15:13-16)

The fourth or sixth generation of Israelites in Egypt may be able to witness to Yahweh's act of salvation. But what about the myriad of people of the second and third generations who lived during the time of oppression? Whatever the case may be, the history of Yahweh's relation to the world is as much a history of the deity's oppression, negligence and engineering of structural evil to soothe his own ego as it is a history of salvation, mercy and deliverance (cf. Crenshaw 1984:02; 1995:193)

In the contemporary context of international strife and the ever present threat of terrorism, it is surprising to find so many biblical Christians debating the role of God in it all whilst assuming that he is not the cause of the chaos. If one takes these texts and their implicit ideology seriously with regard to what is insinuated about Yahweh's role in international social processes, one has to conclude that Yahweh is ultimately behind all international and local political conflict. He actualises all acts of terrorism and violent crime as part of his retribution and his maintenance of a specific social order. However, due to repression, ignorance, double standards and inconsistency on the part of biblical Christians, few people today who claim to believe in Yahweh would quote the Old Testament texts in support of the belief that Yahweh is ultimately responsible for all the structural evil in the world. It is felt that God – supposedly perfectly loving – cannot possibly be the cause of such extensive violence and crime.

If this is the case, then the god Yahweh who is depicted as being behind every sort of international political tension in the Old Testament world must be a character of fiction. From an orthodox perspective, one would have to conclude that Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist. But how can one deny that the God of the bible exists and remain orthodox at the same time?

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3.2.7.10   Divine deception

Some scholars not constrained by dogma have made an effort to point out that, within the Old Testament texts, one sometimes encounters scenarios where Yahweh is depicted as being involved in the deception of people (cf. Carroll 1979:212-216). The following examples of this so-called "dark side" of Yahweh may be listed:

"If a prophet or one who acts as a dreamer, stands by you and tells you of a sign or a wonder and the sign or wonder which he predicted comes to pass and he says, 'Let us walk after other gods…then you must not listen to the words of the prophet…Yahweh, your god, is merely testing you to find out if you really love Yahweh, your god, with all your heart and with all your soul...'" (Deut 13:1-3)

"But Yahweh has determined to confuse the counsel of Achitophel so that Yahweh could bring evil on Abshalom." (2 Sam 17:14)

"I have seen Yahweh sitting on his throne while all the hosts of heaven stood next to him…And Yahweh said, 'Who will convince Ahab so that he can go up and fall at Ramoth in Gilead?' And the one said this and the other one that. Then the spirit came forward and went to stand before the face of Yahweh and said, 'I shall convince him.' And Yahweh asked him, 'With what?' And he said, 'I shall go out and become a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You will convince (him), yes, you will win (him) over, go out and do so! And now, look, Yahweh gave a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets and Yahweh spoke evil against you.'" (1 Kgs 22:19-23)

"Then I said, 'O Yahweh, you have greatly deceived this people with the words, 'You shall have peace' – whilst all the time the sword touches the soul.'" (Jer 4:10)

"And, if the prophet lets himself be deceived to speak, it is I, Yahweh,

who have deceived the prophet…" (Ezek 14:9)

Under the same rubric of divine deception, the devil's advocate also feels the need to mention one of the most obvious yet repressed forms of deception by Yahweh in the history of Old Testament interpretation. The case in point concerns what some scholars have come to regard as Yahweh's "deception" when he lied to the first humans in Genesis 2-3 (cf. Barr 1993:30-31; Gibson 1998:23).

In Genesis 2:16-17, Yahweh tells Adam and Eve that on the day they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will surely die. However, later on in the story – and contradicting the words of Yahweh – the serpent tells the couple that, should they eat from the tree, they will *not* die. Instead, according to the serpent, their eyes will be opened and they will become like one of the gods (cf. Gen 3:4-5).

When Adam and Eve eventually do eat from the tree, the text appears to confirm the truth of the serpent's prediction. The couple do not die. Moreover, the text tells us that their eyes were opened (cf. Gen 3:7). Later on, Yahweh himself, apparently rather afraid of what may happen, tells his "companions" that now the humans have become like one of them (cf. Gen 3:22).

Most people, so used to the ideological version of the garden scene as "the fall of man" ("man" in the generic sense) can read Genesis 2-3 a hundred times over without realising that, according to the text, Yahweh lied and the serpent told the truth. The plain sense of the text is distorted and the snake is believed to be the one who lied. It is also asserted that the snake is none other than Satan himself, despite the clear evidence of Genesis 3:1,14-15 that the snake is just an animal. To this day, most people read the story as the most disastardly deception the devil ever perpetrated upon humans and sincerely believe that God (supposedly equated with Yahweh) was the one who spoke the truth.

Of course, there are many questions regarding the relation between Yahweh and evil generated by a critical reading of the Genesis 2-3 text. These include the inquiry as to why Yahweh would even bother to place the trees in the garden if he did not want the humans to eat from them. Alternatively, the astute reader may also wonder why

Yahweh made the snake and allowed it in the garden where it could tempt the couple. Then, as noted earlier, one may also wonder why Yahweh did not intervene and prevent the couple eating from the forbidden fruit.

Some apologists will claim that the trees and snake had to be there if the humans were to have free will and in order to make a genuine relationship with God possible (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:63). In addition, they point to New Testament passages to "prove" that the snake was Satan (cf. Archer 1982:26). They also insist that it was not God who lied but the snake a.k.a. Satan (enter a few proof-texts). Some suggest that God's use of the expression "in that day" allows a great lapse of time. Others, however, insist that the humans did die, in the "spiritual sense" of the word (cf. Haley 1992:72).

As Carroll (1997:52) notes, conservative interpreters subscribing to popular Christian ideology are blinded by the Pauline-Augustinian reinterpretation of the story and therefore feel compelled to claim that Genesis 2-3 depicts the "fall of man" (cf. Carroll 1991:52). Now one can understand that these sincere apologists would try to preserve the honour of God, the veracity of Christian soteriology and the orthodoxy of the Bible. After all, admitting that Yahweh lied and that the snake (supposedly Satan) spoke the truth would amount to absolute blasphemy.

Even worse, classifying the text as myth and/or fiction would pull out the foundations from under the Christian meta-narrative. If the fall is mythical/fictitious, so is the redemption. If there was not really an Adam and Eve who died "spiritually" after listening to a snake about 6000 years ago somewhere in the Persian gulf, from *what* was Jesus supposed to save us from? If there is no such thing as original sin, what was the point of the cross? If the Reformed doctrine of inherited human depravity is based on a fiction, what are the implications for the ontological status of stereotypical Christian soteriology *in toto*?

According to the devil's advocate, appeals to pity, arguments from authority, ad hoc conjectures, reinterpretations and other fallacies in Christian apologetics concerning the plain sense of the story in Genesis 2-3 are all unconvincing. There is no way to get around the worst case scenario: the snake told the truth and Yahweh lied. Ultimately, numerous additional and more lengthy examples of divine deception can be added

here (e.g. the perplexing divine methodology in the story of the "man of god" in 1 Kings 13:11-34; cf. Davidson 1983:114-118).

However, the provisioning of further instances of divine deception by Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is not required to establish what should be crystal clear by now. When all is said and done, the devil's advocate can come to only one conclusion. If one believes that there is a God and that this God did not really commit these deceptive acts, one is obliged to conclude that Yahweh as thus depicted must be seen as a character of fiction. Therefore, Yahweh – the god who deceives – does not exist.

3.2.7.11   Bizarre acts

Many scholars have often noted that, on some occasions in the biblical stories, Yahweh seems to act quite contrary to what they, being modern Christians and all, would expect from the Father of Jesus. After all, the true God is supposed to be different from the cruel and capricious deities of the pagans. As a result of such presumption, much ink has been spilt to explain certain acts of Yahweh and to justify or soften their seemingly unorthodox details (cf. Davidson 1997:224). In this regard, several examples of such texts where Yahweh apparently acts "out of character" may be noted.

- Yahweh wants Abraham to sacrifice his only son (cf. Gen 22:1-2).

- Yahweh wrestles with Jacob in the night and demands to be released since the day is breaking (cf. Gen 32:22-33).

- Yahweh attacks Moses without warning and with an intent to kill him shortly after giving him a mission to complete (cf. Ex 4:23-26).

- Yahweh needs to be forewarned of the coming and going of his priests via the sound of tingling bells or else he will kill them (cf. Ex 28:35).

- Yahweh commands the people to send a goat to a desert demon called

Azazel (cf. Lev 16:1-34).

- Though Yahweh revealed himself to Israel, he gave the sun, moon and stars as solar, lunar and astral deities for the other nations to worship (cf. Deut 4:19).

- Yahweh cares for and blesses a servant whose unorthodox ways are totally immoral (cf. Judg 13-16).

- Yahweh allows a man of God to be fatally deceived (cf. 1 Kgs 13:11-34).

- Yahweh allows a court servant to wreak havoc in the life of the world's most god-fearing man who is made to lose everything he holds dear merely so that Yahweh can secure a bet (cf. Job 1-2).

- God capriciously gives someone riches but prevents him from enjoying the fruit of his toil (cf. Eccl 6:1-2).

- Yahweh admits to having given his people laws that were not good and which made them sacrifice their own offspring (cf. Ezek 20:20-27).

As Crenshaw (1988:11) and Fox (1989:245) have pointed out, however one may wish to explain or justify these bizarre acts of the biblical god, the fact remains that not a few scholars have considered these texts as depicting something the real God would not stoop to doing. If this is true and there is a God who would not engage in such bizarre behaviour, it is implied that there never was a Yahweh who did such things either. Yahweh-as-depicted here is a character of fiction. He does not exist.

3.2.7.12 Repression, ideology and the meaninglessness of "love" as divine attribute

It is often asserted that the God of the Bible is perfectly loving. Yet the astute observer not blinded by dogma need not be Marcion or a gnostic to be troubled by the

almost demonic elements in the characterisation of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts. Given the role Yahweh plays in the actualisation of all sorts of evil, the devil's advocate cannot help but wonder what is meant by the concept "love" in the religious discourse of biblical Christianity.

Surely in this case, not even the anachronistic and fallacious view that all God-talk is metaphorical (anthropomorphic and anthropopathic) can make the present issue any less problematic. Neither can any theodicy philosophers of religion have thus far produced to vindicate the god of the philosophers. In the words of Harwood (1992:221) if Yahweh is love, one cannot help but wonder what Yahweh would do to people if he did not love them.

The fact that so many of Yahweh's closest servants (Abraham, Rebecca, Jacob, Moses, Naomi, Elijah, Jonah, Job, Jeremiah and others) all reached a point where they no longer wished to live, where they accused the deity of maltreatment and begged him to end their lives is not exactly comforting. Such scenarios do not give the impression that Yahweh loves his people in the way popular Christian theology has come to regard the nature of divine love.

In fact, all Yahweh's talk and promises of loving, caring and providing for his people seems as empty as those of most kings and politicians throughout human history. All praise of Yahweh for his loving kindness and his acts of salvation must involve the same kind of insincere pragmatic flattery and understandable repression that are involved when people praise their leaders despite their own miserable quality of life. It is merely words to soothe the ego of the King; mere etiquette in the presence of one who wields absolute power and whom one must flatter if one wishes to live and obtain favour.

No doubt there were some individuals who sincerely believed that Yahweh was kind, good and loving. Yet these people, as believers today, could only think this way by repressing the fact, and deliberately refusing to take cognisance of, all the evil and suffering in the present and past of both the world inside and outside the text. As is the case with all followers of dictators and oppressors, genuine belief in the goodness of the lord exists side by side with a perpetual blindness to the nature of social and

natural reality and a negligence to learn anything whatsoever of the ruler's track-record.

These are the kind of people to whom Sigmund Freud and Carl Marx's critiques of religion apply. They have invented a deity to alleviate all their greatest existential anxieties and to help them cope with the harsh realities that are part of human existence in a world that is wholly indifferent to humans needs, desires, ambitions and aspirations (cf. Freud 1964:52). It is therefore hardly surprising that the biblical stories themselves witness to a deep-seated repression concerning "goodness" of Yahweh:

- On his deathbed, Jacob tells his sons how Yahweh had been his shepherd all his life and saved him from every sort of danger (cf. Gen 48:5-6). Yet Jacob conveniently fails to remember how Yahweh did not prevent Laban from tricking him into many years of hard work. He forgets how Yahweh "locked" the womb of Rachel and how his patron deity was nowhere to be found when Jacob burned by day and froze by night tending the sheep of Laban. He fails to note how Yahweh allowed him to suffer agony to the extent of losing his will to live by having him believe that his favourite son was killed when, in fact, he wasn't (cf. Gen 28-48).

- Joseph claims that Yahweh had done what was good despite of the bad intention of some people (cf. Gen 50:20). Yet, surely a creative deity like Yahweh could have thought of another way to prevent the disastrous effects of a coming famine without allowing Joseph to suffer in the ways he did. Yahweh's "good" was only actualised by having Joseph assaulted and thrown into a pit; kidnapped by slave traders; unjustly accused of rape in the house of Potiphar, etc. Joseph also had to sit in jail where, the narrator's comments about Yahweh's "kindness" and "favour" notwithstanding, he was utterly miserable and wanted to get out as soon as possible. Yahweh also took his time in getting Joseph out of prison. Giving Joseph two children seems a meagre consolation for everything the man had to endure as Yahweh's pawn of prophecy (cf. Gen 36-50; see also Gen 15:13-16).

- The same repression can be seen in the depiction of Moses and company. They can praise Yahweh for his miracles in Egypt and in the desert whilst conveniently repressing the fact that it was Yahweh who made the people go down to Egypt in the first place. Then the people have to be on the point of starvation and have to cry out and complain before Yahweh will feed them and vanquish their thirst. And where was Yahweh for the four-hundred years of oppression in Egypt where the Israelites suffered and after which Yahweh only delivered them by deliberately delaying their departure by hardening heart of a king often more than willing to let the people go? (cf. Ex 1-13)

- Another example of the kind of repression evident in "godworshipthink" is found in the stories of David. David can worship Yahweh for the salvation he brings but also represses the fact about how Yahweh did precious little to save him from Saul and was even the one ultimately behind Saul's anger. We read that it was the deity himself who sent the evil spirits (cf. 1 Sam 16-19). Moreover, David himself allowed the possibility that it may have been Yahweh who instigated Saul against him (cf. 1 Sam 22). David should also remember the incident with Uzzah and the ark after which the story tells us that David was scared witless of Yahweh (cf. 1 Sam 6). Then, there was the nasty little episode with the census where, after Yahweh himself poked David into acting sinfully, David had the dubious privilege of watching Yahweh wipe out myriads of people who were completely innocent in the particular matter (cf. 2 Sam 24). Yet the repression is obvious when the character David, in the singing of his psalms, needs to point out how he had to endure great suffering, yet goes on to engage in a desperate flattery of Yahweh so that the deity will aid him. David can worship Yahweh for allowing him to make it alive through horrible experiences whilst failing to consider that a deity who could save him could just as well have prevented the calamities from occurring in the first place (cf. 1 Sam 16 - 2 Sam 24).

All such repression is still going on today in the minds of people who claim to believe in Yahweh. Sometimes horrible things happen to them such as having a brush with death during a plane flight, a car trip, a violent crime incident, etc. The often battered, bruised and barely surviving believer then praises God and claims that, if it were not

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for His supposed intervention, they would not have come out of the crisis alive. Yet, like their biblical counterparts they repress the fact that the deity who supposedly saved them could have saved everyone and even better, prevented the killings, torturing, accidents, rape, abuse, and other heinous crimes from transpiring in the first place.

All this being said, this account of repression in the face of evil is not an attempt by the devil's advocate to debase repression as survival mechanism or criticise those who make use of it during their hour of need. However, the particular critique is levelled at the inconsistency and meaninglessness of, on the one hand, claiming that a deity can be considered as perfectly loving and caring but, on the other hand, failing to take note of the fact that reality contradicts the confession.

The particular form repression with which the devil's advocate is concerned here is also evident in the theological assessments of the Old Testament by prominent theologians. They speak of the depiction of Yahweh in the text as if the main representation was that of the deity as a "saving", "blessing" and "revealing" god.

Strangely enough, these theologians conveniently fail to notice that these flattering themes are hopelessly reductionist as supposed overarching motifs since a greater proportion of the discourse features a passive, negligent, apathetic and silent deity. One might as well have construed the theme of the Pentateuch as "the cursing God" who constantly decides to intervene in human affairs to curse people and their descendants whenever he feels the need to. One could also label the deity as "the hiding God" since Yahweh certainly hides his face far more than he shows it. He may "care" now and then for some of the needs of a favoured few but, in general, most of the people live amidst great natural and moral evil and are engaged in a day-to-day struggle for survival – all of which do not seem to bother Yahweh unduly. The things he allows to happen in their lives and the ways in which ordinary men and women are but the backdrop for what happens in the lives of some privileged individuals show that, if Yahweh does exist, describing him as "blessing" and "saving" amounts to severe economy with the truth.

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Any apologetic reference to the cultural assumptions related to what the concept of "love" entails not only fails to solve the dilemma but also confirms the suspicion that to talk of Yahweh as "loving" and "caring" is as meaningless as ascribing such virtues to Mother Nature. The obsession with showing that Yahweh is loving and caring in the sense popular culture expects him to be can only be considered as repressive. By any contemporary and ancient understanding of what the concept of "love" involves in practice (i.e. caring and protection, if willing and able), speaking of Yahweh as a god of love is yet another perfect example of theological doubletalk. One can therefore appreciate why, after Jonah ends his prayer with a reference to Yahweh's salvation and deliverance, the fish throws up (cf. Jon 2:10-11).

In other words, all the nice and fuzzy references to Yahweh caring for the widow, the stranger and the poor are as naïve and unrealistic as the ideological will-to-power of the comfortable elite in biblical times could ever hope to be. Even when such confessions in the text are depicted as coming from those who suffer, it is usually the result of repression and the hope that flattering the deity with a new image of supposed kindness will change their lot. The view of Karl Marx that religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature and opium for the masses is clearly confirmed by the wishful thinking found in many Old Testament texts (e.g. in many of the psalms).

According to the orthodox Christian perspective at least, divine love is supposed to be even better than ideal human love that, in ideal circumstances, cares, provides, guides and protects. Based on these expectations combined with an in-depth analysis of just exactly how divine "love" is manifested in the Old Testament, the devil's advocate cannot help but to conclude that talking of Yahweh as "loving" is meaningless and indicative of repression following years of brainwashing and indoctrination. To the astute reader who has left far behind his (or her) propensity for apologetic dogmatic eisegesis, reinterpretation and harmonisation, it will be quite clear that Yahweh is ultimately, without a doubt, the source of all evil in the world of the text.

The relation between Yahweh and evil in the Old Testament may indeed be one of the most problematic issues for those who wish to construct a theology that is orthodox and Christian whilst at the same time doing justice to the monistic tendencies in many Old Testament texts. How many religious people today genuinely believe in the

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monistic ideology of Yahweh's causative role in the actualisation of all evil? Surely, such people are few for, if that ideology had been a part of the theological mindset, the following claims would be accepted without problem:

- The present and past political unrest and violence in the Middle East is the result of Yahweh stirring up people to punish the present communities for the sins of the forefathers.

- The Holocaust was an actualisation of the curses of Leviticus 27 and Deuteronomy 28 and, as Deuteronomistic history would have it, punishment for the sins of many generations that have finally filled the cup of divine wrath to the top (cf. also Gen 15:16).

- The meteorological phenomenon called El Nino that causes droughts in some places and floods in others should be renamed to El Shaddai.

- The famines and starvation in Africa and elsewhere are the result of Yahweh's anger for not being worshipped correctly or some or other unwitting accumulation of blood-guilt.

- The growing crisis of the AIDS epidemic is the work of Yahweh himself who is smiting people for not living up to his Iron Age moral standards.

- All psychological illnesses such as depression, retardation, and all sorts of addictions are the result of Yahweh's sending of evil spirits to torment people.

- All forms of violent crime, e.g. family violence, brutal murders, child abuse, rape, torture, etc. is the result of Yahweh's stirring up of evil doers, his collective punishment and trans-generational retribution, his sending evil spirits, his hardening of people's hearts, his hiding his face, etc.

- The secularisation and godlessness of the post-modern Western (and Eastern) world is the result of Yahweh hardening the hearts of people and hiding his face.

- The concept of globalisation and the building of skyscrapers are evil and represent the same sort of hubris as was manifested by the builders of the tower of Babylon.

- All the atrocities committed during the twentieth centuries against humanity and nature, including the two World Wars and the destruction and pollution of the earth are the result of Yahweh's divine wrath and incitement (probably to punish people for the sins committed by scientists, philosophers and theologians since the Enlightenment).

- The pointless and horrendous suffering and death of many otherwise virtuous religious individuals are the result of the sins of their forefathers.

- The corrupt politicians and their oppressive and apathetic governments are merely the rods of Yahweh he uses to punish people, etc.

People who cannot accept these statements as true and who deny that Yahweh is behind all such forms of natural, structural and moral evil are simply implying that they can no longer believe in the reality of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. They may claim to believe in the God of the Bible or in the God of the philosophers but technically, when it comes to Yahweh-as-depicted, they have to repress the fact that they are indeed atheists.

Like all the other themes discussed in this chapter, the dilemma presented by Yahweh's unorthodox relation to evil cannot be vanquished by quoting a plethora of proof-texts apparently more supportive of orthodox sentiments. The devil's advocate's claim was never that what is presented in this chapter should be seen as the "Old Testament" perspective on Yahweh. To be sure, the fundamental dilemma this chapter intends to expose is the deconstructive effect of the co-existence of both unorthodox and more orthodox sentiments in the text. It is thus not denied that there are more "acceptable" types of discourse in the text.

The whole point was the creation of an awareness of those texts that stand in tension

with the orthodox trajectories. The tendency of both liberal and (especially) conservative theologians to bracket or reinterpret the embarrassing texts and to select certain passages as proof-texts supposedly endorsing an acceptable reconstruction of the deity's profile is but symptomatic of a repression of the anti-realist implications of unorthodox elements in the text. So is the invalid attempt to refute the sort of claims made in this chapter by quoting from a pool of favourite confessional *dicta probanta* to the contrary.

Another invalid attempt to salvage realism would be to appeal to the obvious fact that the Old Testament is not a textbook for theology. Aside from the fact that this is quite a novel idea that would never have occurred to anyone before the eighteenth century, it is an irrelevant notion. In fact, if taken to mean that, among other things, the text do contain unorthodox elements, this apologetic response actually turns out to be an endorsement of the arguments in this chapter rather than a refutation of it.

Alternatively, the popular apologetic strategy to neutralise unorthodox elements in the texts by appealing to the supposed "progressive" nature of revelation is also unconvincing as an attempt to salvage realism. As suggested in the previous chapter the claim that revelation is "progressive" ignores the fact that the revelation contains self-contradictory elements and not merely supplementary ones. It also represses the fact that, according to the text, most of the unorthodox views are endorsed by the deity himself and not merely by humans speculating about a mysterious and unknown divinity.

Therefore, also with regard to the relation between Yahweh and evil in the Old Testament, it will be invalid to point out the fact, as liberal scholars so like to do, that what we have in the texts are merely human perspectives about the divine. Aside from begging the question about the supposed existence of divine reality, this apology, like the theory of progressive revelation, blissfully ignores the fact that, throughout the Old Testament, the text never presents itself as communicating merely limited human perspectives on ambiguous matters.

Rather, according to the authors of many a biblical passage, it is the deity Yahweh himself who, in the first person, proclaims unorthodox theological viewpoints as his

own view on particular issues. He can also be found acting in an all-too-unorthodox fashion. Seen from this perspective, any claim that the texts are merely fallible and provisional human perspectives of (an allegedly existing) God not only represses the actual presentation in the texts but also, contrary to its purposes, actually confirms the suspicion that Yahweh-as-depicted is a character of fiction and does not exist.

3.3   CONCLUSION

The argument from deconstruction by orthodoxy reconstructed in this chapter is ambiguous with regard to its value for the case against realism. If one believes in the existence of God as defined by popular philosophical theology, the argument is devastating to realism pertaining to unorthodox depictions of Yahweh:

1.   Suppose there is only one God in existence.

2.   Suppose further that this God is the deity whose nature and attributes are only correctly depicted in traditional Christian dogmatic and philosophical theology (i.e. the real God is one, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent).

3.   Suppose, moreover, that many of the Old Testament texts depict Yahweh in ways that contradict the orthodox and supposedly true depictions of the real God.

4.   From this it follows that those texts depicting Yahweh in a manner contradicting the depictions of the real God cannot be taken seriously.

5.   From this it follows that the unorthodox depictions of Yahweh never had any relation to extra-textual reality.

6.   From this it follows that the unorthodox representations of Yahweh are fictitious.

7.   From this we may conclude that Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts is himself

a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart.

8.   From this it follows that Yahweh-as-depicted does not really exist.

If, however, one is open to whatever reality may be, or do not subscribe to the orthodox stereotype of God, the argument has a different sort of deconstructive value. Since the orthodox construction of God has its roots in a selection of Old Testament texts that allegedly support it, even if one does not subscribe to the orthodox stereotype of God, there is still the problem of theological pluralism in the Old Testament itself.

The argument from deconstruction by orthodoxy reconstructed in this chapter is the second argument in the case against realism. Since the case itself constitutes a cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh, the particular argument reconstructed in this chapter should, however, 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.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARGUMENT FROM POLYMORPHIC PROJECTION

> *Our rabbis taught: Four entered an orchard and these are they: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them, 'When you reach the stones of pure marble, do not say, 'Water! Water!' For it is said, 'He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes'. Ben Azzai gazed and died. Of him, Scripture says, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.' Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken. Of him Scripture says, 'Has thou found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.' Aher cut the roots (that is, he became an heretic). Rabbi Akiva departed in peace.*
>
> *Hagigah 14b*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

During the latter half of the twentieth century in particular, disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, psychology and the sociology of knowledge have demonstrated that all societies tend to mystify and repress the human origins of their own local and historically relative cultural ideologies (cf. Eliade 1979:09). The worldview of a particular group of likeminded people is viewed as something objective and somehow independent of human thought and language. Local conceptions of politics, morality and nature are often generalised and projected unto the cosmos as a whole (cf. Cupitt 1991:47).

At least since the rise of modernist (and especially post-modernist) historical consciousness, it has become apparent, however, that no act, no belief, no thought and no socio-political set-up can any longer be considered as corresponding to a universal

and objective state of affairs. Philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Foucault have pointed out that everything we think, know and do can be classified as the contingent products of particular historical periods. All beliefs, views, morals, social conventions and values have histories; they are datable and relative human cultural constructs (cf. Tarmas 1991:339; Cupitt 1996:37).

According to the devil's advocate, the rise of an ultra-radical historical consciousness in the post-modern period presents a dilemma for anyone who wishes to be a realist pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts of the Old Testament. In fact, of all the arguments constructed in this study, it is the argument of this chapter, the so-called argument from "polymorphic projection", that seems to be the most devastating in its ability to expose the all-too-human nature of the Old Testament god. As soon as one's eyes open to the mechanisms underlying the anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic elements in the discourse about the god Yahweh, realism seems to collapse under the sheer weight of its own incredibility.

In this regard, the devil's advocate cannot help but be suspicious of the fact that the god of the Old Testament believes the same superstitious things about the world as the people who worship him. He shares their misconceptions and primitive understanding of nature. His own ideas of what happened in history and what will happen in the future are as limited, misguided and informed by myth and legend as that of his human speechwriters. His predictions about what would happen in the future often go unfulfilled. The bottom line seems to be that, whether acting or speaking in the first person, Yahweh is no more clued up about the extra-textual world than his devotees.

Whenever the texts depict Yahweh as speaking in the first person, his monologues and dialogues also reveal him to possess culturally relative moral beliefs and values that never transcend the ideologies of the Old Testament people themselves. His views regarding what is right or wrong appear to be informed by the views of humans living in the Iron Age. The way in which his divine socio-cultural set-up in the heavens is constituted seems suspiciously and disconcertingly similar to that found in the monarchies and tribal governments of the ancient Near East.

These all-too-human elements in the deity's own perception of and relation to the world usually go unnoticed. In conservative scholarship, it is an embarrassing fact that has, one the one hand, been suppressed by rationalising apologetics or constructive theories of supposed divine accommodation and phenomenological discourse. Alternatively, critical scholars, their appeals to the supposed metaphorical nature of all religious discourse notwithstanding, seem to be equally oblivious to ontological implications of their acknowledgement that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is indeed a literary construct created by humans for ideological purposes.

According to the devil's advocate, however, it is impossible to overstate its case on this matter. It cannot be overemphasised that Yahweh's own knowledge, perceptions and values – i.e. his own ideology or worldview – never transcend that of his ignorant and culturally conditioned human speechwriters. Because of this, the devil's advocate concludes that, Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament is no more than the anthropomorphic, psychomorphic and sociomorphic projection of human authors. As a product of polymorphic projection, Yahweh exists only in the world of the text and in the minds of people but has no extra-textual and extra-psychical counterpart. Ergo, he does not really exist at all.

4.2   THE ALL-TOO-HUMAN GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this section, the devil's advocate has reconstructed several arguments to justify the claim that Yahweh is indeed a product of polymorphic projection. These arguments probably constitute the heart of the case against realism and their effects and implications spill over to all the other chapters of this study. The basis of all the arguments to follow in this chapter is that Old Testament was written during the time when everyone, including its paramount god, held beliefs about the world, history and morality that presently no longer seem to be reflective of the way extra-textual reality is constituted.

We may not know everything about the world and yet, if anything, we have discovered some things that are demonstrably *not* the case. As a result, the deity Yahweh with his own humanly informed, culturally conditioned and historically determined beliefs stands exposed as a character of fiction and with realism pertaining

to his ontological status thoroughly deconstructed.

4.2.1   Yahweh's errant beliefs about extra-textual reality

When Yahweh speaks in the first person in the Old Testament, he often makes statements that include references to alleged actual historical, cosmographical, geographical, biological, and other types of phenomena. However, according to the devil's advocate, the knowledge Yahweh exhibits about these phenomena often contain elements of error and superstition. It would seem that the god Yahweh knew about as much about the world as the people who worshipped him *and no more!*

Consider the following examples of a presumably informed Yahweh's all-too-human and apparently errant beliefs about the extra-textual world:

- Yahweh himself believes that the universe was created over a period of six days (cf. Gen 1:1-2:4a; Ex 31:17)

- Yahweh himself believes there is an ocean above stars in the skies from where rainwater falls to the earth (cf. Gen 1:6; Job 38:34).

- Yahweh himself believes that the landmass of the earth floats on water (cf. Deut 5:8; cf. also Ps 24:2).

- Yahweh himself believes that he lives in the sky just above the earth (cf. Gen 11:5-7, 18:21; Isa 14:12-14; 18:4, 40:22).

- Yahweh himself believes that the sun is a small disk traversing the skies by day and can be halted on command without any adverse effects (cf. Josh 10:12-14; Isa 38:8).

- Yahweh himself believes that the stars were created as an afterthought to the sun and moon and that they are relatively small sentient beings that constitute a divine army also existing as objective constellations with astrological potency (cf. Gen

11:14-17; Judg 5:21; Isa 14:12, 24:21; Dan 8:10; Job 38:7,31-33).

- Yahweh himself believes that the moon is a source of light rather than a reflector of light (cf. Gen 1:14-16; Isa 30:26).

- Yahweh himself believes that the earth is flat and that he could look down onto its entire surface area (cf. Dan 4:35; Isa 40:22).

- Yahweh himself believes that thunder is literally his own voice (cf. Ex 19:19, 20:18, 24:12; Deut 5:21, 33:2; Judg 5:4; Ps 18:13; 1 Sam 7:10; Isa 30:27; Am 1:2; Ps 29:3; Job 37:5; 38:34).

- Yahweh himself believes that the clouds were forms of transport for deities in the sky (cf. Pss 18:11, 104:3; Isa 19:1, 66:15).

- Yahweh himself believes that the wind is literally his breath (cf. Ex 15:8; cf. 14:21).

- Yahweh himself believes that the rainbow is literally his bow with which he could shoot arrows (cf. Gen 9:12-15; Hab 3:9a).

- Yahweh himself believes that lightning is literally his arrow (cf. Ps 18:15, 77:18; Hab 3:9, 14; Zech 9:14).

- Yahweh himself believes that hail is literally his artillery (cf. Josh 10:11; Job 38:22-23).

- Yahweh himself believes that there is literally a place underground where the dead live as shades (cf. Num 16:23-33; Deut 32:22; Job 38:16-17; Isa 7:11; Ezek 26:19-20; 32:18-32; Am 9:2).

- Yahweh himself believes that the dead continued their earthly vocation, must be buried to avoid problems in the afterlife, that they need food and that they could

even possess human bodies and speak to the living (cf. 1 Sam 28:11-19; Isa 14:10-16; Ezek 32:19-32; Lev 20:27; Deut 26:14; 2 Kgs 9:10; Isa 8:19, 29:4; Jer 8:1, 16:4).

- Yahweh himself believes in the existence of other gods and the existence of fictitious locations like the mountain of the gods in the north and the garden of the gods (cf. Ex 12:12; Ps 82; Isa 14:13; Ezek 28:13, 16; Isa 51:3).

- Yahweh himself believes in the historicity of characters like Noah, Job and Daniel (not the biblical character) (cf. Ezek 14:14; Isa 54:9-10).

- Yahweh himself believes in the existence of the mythical creatures like the Leviathan, Rahab, Behemoth, sea monsters, flying dragons, demons of the field, malevolent spirits of the night, etc. (cf. Job 40-41; Isa 30:6; Lev 17:7; Isa 34:14; Am 9:3; etc.).

- Yahweh himself believes in the existence of giants (cf. Gen 6:1-4, 14:5, 15:20; Deut 2:11, 20, 3:11; Josh 12:4, 17:15).

- Yahweh himself believes in the existence of mixomorphs (cf. Gen 3:24; Isa 6:2; Ezek 1).

- Yahweh himself believes that rabbits chew the cud and the misinformed folktales regarding the supposed fickleness of the ostrich (cf. Lev 11:6; Job 39:16-21).

- Yahweh himself believes that humans are made from dust and/or clay (cf. Gen 2-3; Ps 103:14, etc.).

- Yahweh himself believes that the force of life is in the blood and that the wind (= spirit = breath) animates human (and divine) bodies (cf. Gen 4:10; Lev 17:14; Ezek 37:9-10; cf. also Gen 2:7; Ex 14:21 vs. 15:10).

- Yahweh himself believes that thought issues from the heart and emotions from the

kidneys (cf. Jer 17:10, etc.).

- Yahweh himself actually believes that, apart from the wayward people of Israel, all the peoples of the earth worship Him and burn incense in his honour (cf. Mal 1:11-12).

- Yahweh himself believes that all droughts necessarily signified divine displeasure and is the result of some or other sin (cf. Lev 25:3-4; Deut 28:23-24; 1 Kgs 17-18).

- Yahweh himself believes that dreams are messages from the divine (cf. Gen 36-50; Dan 1-12; Job 33; Zech 1-6).

- Yahweh himself believes that curses and blessings are effectual means of bringing about a hoped for scenario (cf. Gen 49; Deut 33).

- Yahweh himself believes that knowledge of a person's name allows one control over him or her (cf. Gen 32:26-27; Ex 3:14; Judg 13:17-18).

- Yahweh himself believes that the pagan peoples worshipped idols and does not know that the idol merely symbolised a supposed transcendent reality (cf. Isa 44:9-20 and passim).

- Yahweh himself believes that social norms were dropped from heaven (cf. Ex 20-34; Deut 4-5; Ezek 20:20-25; etc.).

- Yahweh himself believes that certain metals (e.g. gold) are objectively more worth than others, rather than because humans consider it as such (cf. Gen 2:12; Ex 24:10, 25:11 and passim; Ezek 28:13; Hag 2:7; etc.).

- Etc., etc.

Negatively,

- Yahweh knows nothing about a universe consisting of galaxies where the earth is not the centre;

- Yahweh knows nothing about the nature of the natural world before the time of *Homo sapiens;*

- Yahweh knows nothing of the nature of religion before the Bronze Age;

- Yahweh knows nothing of human history from before the second millennium BC;

- Yahweh knows nothing about the Hebrew's history before the exile as reconstructed by critical scholarship;

- Yahweh does not understand basic meteorological processes;

- Yahweh does not know about human physiology (e.g. the regulative function of the brain);

- Yahweh does not know about the cause of certain medical conditions (e.g. viruses, bacteria and germs);

- Yahweh does not know what is inside the earth or about the world's continents and peoples beyond the ancient Near East;

- Etc.

In other words, Yahweh's *own* knowledge of astronomy, cosmography, physics, meteorology, zoology, biology and history is but a replica of the primitive historically and culturally relative superstitions held by the Old Testament peoples themselves. From an ontological point of view, it certainly seems suspicious that Yahweh's knowledge of the world is as imperfect as that of the primitive people who claimed to

have witnessed the actual revelation of a knowledgeable god. This problem, i.e. Yahweh's errant knowledge, is considered by the devil's advocate as irrefutable proof that the deity as depicted in the biblical texts is no more than an anthropomorphic projection of human imagination (cf. Harwood 1992:72; Cupitt 1996:37).

In response to the dilemma of Yahweh's all-too-human knowledge, there are only three options available in accounting for Yahweh's ignorance:

1. Yahweh does not really believe such things, it is the people who did and subsequently claimed that Yahweh did so too.

2. Yahweh does actually believe such things.

3. Yahweh does not exist.

All these options lead to anti-realism. First of all, contrary to what the first option claims, the texts do not present itself as being admittedly no more than fallible human perspectives projected onto the deity himself. The way the Old Testament authors present the materials shows that they intended it to be a record of what Yahweh himself considered to be the case. The errant beliefs articulated in the texts are expressed or assumed to be true by the deity himself when acting or speaking in the first person.

In other words, the first option therefore distorts what is presented in the text and represses the fact that what we know to be superstition is presented as the views of Yahweh himself. If one then denies, as the first option does, that Yahweh really expressed such views, the devil's advocate rests his case and anti-realism is vindicated. The admittance that Yahweh did not really express such views is an indirect admission that the deity depicted as expressing such views is a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart. Whatever God there may be, Yahweh-as-depicted with all-too-human knowledge is therefore insinuated to be non-existent.

As another version or interpretation of the first option, some might attempt to salvage realism by appealing to a theory of supposed divine "accommodation". According to

this view, it was necessary for Yahweh to speak to humans in their own primitive discourse, i.e. in ways they would understand (cf. Archer 1992:29). It is suggested that Yahweh had to speak of the world, its nature and its history according to the popular perceptions of the Iron Age in order to be able to communicate with people at all. What point, it may be asked, would there be in speaking to the people in the discourse of modern science when they would have no idea what Yahweh was talking about?

Prima facie, this explanation seems reasonable. On closer scrutiny however, it turns out to be a pseudo-solution based on a false dichotomy. For example, Yahweh's choice did not lie in communicating with the people either in their own primitive mythological discourse or speaking to them via the vocabulary of modern science. For realism to have a chance, all that is required was that Yahweh would not refer to non-existing entities, spaces and historical events as if they were, in fact, real. There is no good reason why Yahweh himself cannot have spoken of a round earth, the solar system, dinosaurs, and bacteria to educate the people. Why would they not be able to understand these things if he explained it to them? How did people then came to understand these phenomena when *humans* later discovered and explained it to them?

When Yahweh spoke of the Leviathan, Sheol, Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the events at Mount Sinai, etc., i.e. of entities, places and scenarios that never existed, how did his *modus operandi* make things any less difficult to understand? To be sure, when one reads Yahweh's words to Job in chapters 38-41 of the book, it seems quite obvious that the very reason Yahweh spoke of certain entities, spaces, phenomena and events was precisely because he did *not* expect Job to understand (them). It is all-too-clear that when Yahweh as thus depicted spoke of these things it was *not* for the purpose of accommodation in any sense but to baffle Job and because the deity himself actually believed in their reality and wanted to show off the extent and depth of his own knowledge.

In other words, in texts like Job 38-41 and others (i.e. the oracles of Isaiah, etc.) where Yahweh's is speaking in the first person, the deity usually wants to make a point regarding his supposed actual relation to such complex and mysterious phenomena. The fact that the phenomena Yahweh refers to often do not exist or are

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either misconstrued along of pre-scientific conceptions of the world reveal that Yahweh as thus depicted was not a real god accommodating himself to limited human minds. To be sure, these scenarios in the text betrays the fact that the deity is demonstrably no more than a projection of human minds of people who themselves believed in such superstitious ideas about the world.

For the same reason, the claim that Yahweh cannot have utilised the vocabulary of modern scientific discourse, since even this modern discourse itself also represents a culturally and historically relative mindset, also misses the point. What the devil's advocate expects of Yahweh is not, as this attempt to salvage realism assumes, that he should speak in a particularly modern form of discourse or language game. Rather, the only requirement for realism to remain a possibility is that he should have referred to what was actually real and abstained from talking about fictitious people, things, places and scenarios as if these actually existed.

It did not have to be complicated. Even if it could not have been otherwise, there is no need for in-depth explanation. There is ample room left for mystery and incomprehension as long as these states of mind pertain to actual phenomena. To be sure, neither Sheol nor Leviathan, despite been part of the cultural baggage of the time seem any more comprehensible simply for being so culturally contingent. In sum, the divine accommodation theory is thus invalid in as much as it is based on a false dichotomy (and probably a few straw men as well). This apologetic response cannot lessen the devastation wreaked upon realism by the realisation that Yahweh-as-depicted is as ignorant about extra-textual history and the extra-textual universe as his speechwriters were.

The same problem arises if the first option was chosen because of the presumed metaphorical nature of the biblical discourse. As have been suggested in the previous chapters, the claim that fiction and/or contradiction are no problem because it is all metaphor anyway, stems from post-biblical embarrassment with the anthropomorphic and obviously fictitious elements in the text. It is a gross generalisation and no more than sweeping statement utilised in order to extrapolate from the frequent use of metaphor in the text to claim that all God-talk and, in this case, all God's talk was originally intended to be understood metaphorically.

It is one thing to read all biblical God-talk as metaphorical so that it may still seem credible to modern and post-modern Western minds. It is quite another thing to suggest that this is done because it was thus intended by the biblical authors themselves. It was not. The pan-metaphorisation of biblical discourse about the divine by Old Testament theologians cannot but appear as a form of repressed admittance than realism regarding the plain sense of the text is no longer possible.

The view that all discourse about Yahweh and, in this case, Yahweh's own discourse is metaphorical (or symbolical / mythical / analogical / non-cognitive, etc. – take your pick) is, according to the devil's advocate then, no more than theological doubletalk. It involves convenient strategies of evasion and repression and results from bracketing biblical theology with both the history and philosophy of religion.

If, however, one claims that, as the second options suggests, Yahweh did actually believe in primitive superstitious ideas about the nature of the world and its history, the same atheist consequences follow. Since a real god would know what his own creation consists of, the fact that Yahweh does not know any more about extra-textual reality than his speechwriters implies that the ignorant deity is obviously a projection of the human imagination with no metaphysical substance.

The third and final option then, according to the devil's advocate, represents the only consistent and valid conclusion possible. This last option is simply indicative of the belated realisation of how the fact of Yahweh's own all-too-historically relative and all-too-culturally-conditioned errant beliefs unmask him as a human projection. As such he is a character of fiction and does not exist.

4.2.2   Yahweh's falsified predictions about the future

The prophets of the Old Testament were occasionally confronted with sceptical responses claiming that their words do not come to pass. In Isaiah 5:18 and 19 we read, "Woe to those…who say: "Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the purpose of the holy one of Israel draw near, and let it come that we may know it."

In similar vein, Jeremiah complains to Yahweh, "Behold, they say to me, 'Where is the word of Yahweh? Let it come!'" (Jer 17:5) In Ezekiel 12:21, Yahweh asks the prophet, "Son of man, what kind of a proverb is this you have in the land of Israel namely, 'The days go by and from all the visions nothing comes'?" An issue related to the non-fulfilment of the prophetic words can also be observed in the dilemma posed by Yahweh's methodological inconsistency and the temporary cessation of revelation (cf. Judg 6:13; 1 Sam 3:1; Pss 74:9; 77:7-11; etc.)

Then, of course, there are the prophets themselves who accuse each other of imagining the words of Yahweh. Some of these accusations appear almost modern for all their critical distinctions. It is insinuated that when some of the prophets claimed that Yahweh spoke to them, it was, in fact, merely their own imaginations concocting up illusions of divine revelation (cf. Jer 23:9-40; Ezek 13:1-23; contra Deut 13:1-5; 1 Kgs 22:19-24).

Scepticism regarding the prophets' authenticity when they claimed that Yahweh spoke to them may well be legitimate as far as the devil's advocate is concerned. The validity of this claim will become apparent in the problematic that will now be discussed concerning the embarrassing fallibility of Yahweh's own precognitive or predictive abilities (cf. Carroll 1979:37-40; Mckinsey 1995:217). Consider the following examples provided by the devil's advocate of what critical scholarship has alleged as being clear examples of unfulfilled prophecies and predictions by Yahweh-as-depicted in the text:

- Yahweh said that the Promised Land would extend all the way to the Euphrates river but it never did (cf. Gen 13,17).

- In Leviticus 27 and Deuteronomy 28, Yahweh promised prosperity if Israel was to be faithful to the covenant but there were times of trouble despite their obedience (cf. Pss 44; 89).

- In Joshua 8:28 Yahweh said Ai would be destroyed and would never be rebuilt,

yet this city was still occupied after the exile (cf. Neh 7:32).

- Yahweh believed that the Davidic monarchy's dynasty would never end (cf. 2 Sam 7; Jer 33; Ps 89), but that prophecy was nullified by the exile after which there never again was a Davidic monarchy.

- According to Yahweh in 2 Kings 22, Josiah would die in peace but according to 2 Kings 23 he died in battle.

- Yahweh believed that the Israelites taken by the Assyrians into exile would return led by a descendent of David's father Jesse but this never happened (cf. Isa 11:10-11).

- In Isaiah 17, Yahweh claims that Damascus would soon be destroyed forever long ago yet it remains inhabited even today.

- According to Yahweh in Isaiah 19:24-25, also the nations of Egypt and Assyria will become his people as was the case with Israel. This never happened and can no longer happen since the nation called Assyria no longer exists.

- According to Yahweh in Isaiah 34:17, the region of Edom would forever remain desolate but this never happened and it is still inhabited.

- Yahweh believed in an eschatological scenario, the details of which can no longer be realised because of historical and cultural change (cf. Isa 65-66).

- According to the text in Jeremiah 22:18-19 and 36:29-31, Yahweh predicted that king Jehoiachim will be given the burial of an ass but according to 2 Kings 24:6 the death of this king involved no such event.

- According to Yahweh in Jeremiah 29:10 and Daniel 9:2, the exile would last/lasted 70 years when, in fact, it lasted only 48 (cf. Jer 29:10).

- Yahweh predicted that, after the exile, Assyria would make a comeback and overthrow the Babylonian empire but, once again, he was wrong (cf. Jer 50:3).

- According to Yahweh in Jeremiah 50, the end of the Babylonian empire would spell the end for the city of Babylon. However, when the empire fell, Babylon continued to be inhabited by many peoples (including the Jews) for a long time.

- According to Yahweh in Ezekiel 26, Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, but, according to Ezekiel 32, this did not happen.

- According to Yahweh in Ezekiel 29, Egypt would lie desolate for 40 years but throughout history this has never happened.

- According to Yahweh a new temple would be built within a new united and enlarged Israelite state with waters flowing to the dead sea causing it to diminish its salt content and harbour many species of fish. This never happened. (cf. Ezek 47).

- Yahweh believed that Zerubbabel would re-establish the Davidic monarchy but, once again, this did not happen (cf. Hag 2:2-9; Zech 4:4-16).

- The eschatological scenarios in Zechariah 12-14 can no longer be realised. This is so not only because it has not yet come to pass but also due to the fact that many of the particular role players involved (i.e. House of David, Canaanites) and particular landmarks/locations referred to in the text no longer exist.

- Yahweh believed that the world would end after the Greek Empire's domination, but it did not (Dan 8,11-12).

These are but a few of the many examples of what was alleged to be *Yahweh's own* predictions but which never materialised. Given the existence of these errant predictions by the deity himself, there are only two options available in contemporary scholarship if one intends to salvage realism.

1. Conservatives will claim that the predictions should still be seen as the literal words of Yahweh. They will insist, via reinterpretation, economy with the truth, question begging, special pleading, ad hoc conjectures and a host of other fallacies that the prophecies are true after all. The devil's advocate will not be able to convince people who are not open to change their minds in the light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

2. Liberal scholars may think the devil's advocate to be quite naïve. They will agree with the claim that the predictions are wrong. However, they are not unduly bothered by this fact. The "word" of Yahweh was, after all, not literally the "words of Yahweh". The prophets' words are not based on an actual encounter with the deity that involved verbal communication between the parties involved. To be sure, the claim that Yahweh said x is merely another way of saying what the prophet sincerely thought was the will of the god. Apparently, these prophets also had their own agendas and perceptions of the socio-cultural scene and this influenced their ideas about what Yahweh expected to happen. Moreover, the words of Yahweh relayed by the prophetic oracles were not even literally the words of an historical prophet. Rather, when Yahweh speaks in the first person in the text, what we have here are literary constructs derived from adaptations, editing and reworking of possible oral traditions in the light of changing social circumstances. In sum, Yahweh did not really say such and so, the prophets (or rather, the biblical authors (the prophets' and the deity's speechwriters) merely pretends that he did.

If the second (i.e. the critical) view is correct – and the devil's advocate thinks it might very well be – then it rests its case. There is no need to say anything further. For, pray tell, what is the difference between claiming that Yahweh did not really say such and so and insinuating that the deity depicted as speaking these things is a character of fiction? Whatever Yahweh there may be, if a real god did not really made these erroneous predictions, then surely the god who spoke in the first person in the text is a literary and ideological construct and therefore without extra-textual counterpart.

According to the devil's advocate, then, since it is unthinkable that a real god would be so ignorant, the falsification of divine predictions constitutes irrefutable proof that there was no Yahweh who made those predictions. The deity who wrongly believed certain future scenarios would come to pass is but the product of fanciful human imagination, theo-political ideology and the Old Testament authors' (communities', interpolators', redactors', etc.) will-to-power. The admittance that these predictions were never literally those of a real extra-psychical god called Yahweh, is a tacit admittance of the fact that the deity who is depicted as making such predictions is a character of fiction. In short, Yahweh, depicted as making errant predictions, does not exist.

4.2.3   Yahweh's all-too-human needs

In the Old Testament Yahweh is depicted as the powerful creator of heaven and earth. Yet it would seem that this Master of the Universe has some strange and all-too-human needs that drive him obsessively in pursuit of their fulfilment.

On this issue, the devil's advocate agrees with the assessment of Bloom (1991) regarding the psychological profile of the Old Testament god. According to Bloom (1991:45), from the perspective of psychoanalysis,

> …the god of the Hebrew Bible is like a powerful and uncanny male child, a sublime mischief-maker, impish and difficult. He resembles Lear and the Freudian Superego in being a demonic and persecuting father, entirely lacking in self-knowledge and very reluctant ever to learn anything. Like the human characters he interacts with, he has a continually changing consciousness. He manifests the pure energy and force of Becoming. He is Nietzschian will-to-power, abrupt and uncontrollable, subject to nothing and nobody.

In other words, the god Yahweh's own psychological needs seem to parallel that of an earthly monarch who has an obsession to dominate, has little self-critical analytic abilities and exhibits a desperate need to be told how wonderful he is. Hence, for the devil's advocate, realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in

the text is out of the question. The deity's psychological constitution appears just a little too similar to that of a dysfunctional Iron Age autocrat with dreams of world domination.

For example, consider the following "needs" of Yahweh which, from a perspective brainwashed with the ideology of the text, appear quite authentic. However, change the perspective slightly by becoming more aware of the all-too-culturally and historically relative nature of such needs and, presto, the jig is up.

- Yahweh *needs* to be without equals (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 3:22; 11:6; Isa 14:12-14).

- Yahweh *needs* people to rule over (cf. Ex 19:6; Deut 4:19; 32:8-9).

- Yahweh *needs* to maintain a formidable reputation based on the ancient Near Eastern conception of the values of honour and shame (cf. Deut 32:26-27; Mal 1-3).

- Yahweh *needs* to live far away and high above human society and does not want to be disturbed by mortals in his private penthouse in the skies (cf. Gen 11,18).

- Yahweh *needs* to limit his direct and personal contact with the general population and, for the most part, prefers to act through intermediaries, agents, messengers and armies (cf. Dan 9-11).

- Yahweh *needs* to show off and make dramatic entrances (cf. Ex 19; Ps 29; Hab 3).

- Yahweh *needs* to maintain proper protocol when establishing his cultic rites (cf. Ex 20-40; Lev 1-26; and passim).

- Yahweh *needs* to remain anonymous (cf. Gen 32:33; Ex 3:14).

- Yahweh *needs* to be feared (cf. Ex 20:19-20, Prov 1:7, Job 38-41 and passim).

- Yahweh *needs* to throw tantrums and express his anger in devastating ways (cf. Ex 32:10; Num 16; 2 Sam 21, 24).

- Yahweh *needs* to be jealous and will not allow others what he wants for himself (cf. Ex 20:5; Ex 34:14).

- Yahweh *needs* to keep secrets and not tell people what he is up to or how reality operates (cf. Deut 29:29; Job 28-42; Eccl 3:11; 8:16-17; 11:5; Prov 25:2).

- Yahweh *needs* to have sacrifices and smell pleasant aromas (cf. Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9,13,17).

- Yahweh needs a house where he can rest and manage his people (cf. Ps 132:13-14).

- Yahweh *needs* to be worshipped, praised, adored and have constant reminders of how wonderful, powerful and different/other/unique (i.e. holy) he is (cf. Isa 6:2-3).

- Yahweh *needs* to control people and tell them what to do (cf. Ex 20-40 and passim).

- Yahweh *needs* people to whom he can delegate some authority and who can do the menial labour he himself does not want to engage in (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 2:5).

- Yahweh *needs* to rest and take a break from his hectic and demanding work schedule (cf. Gen 2:1-3).

- Yahweh *needs* to take frequent surveys of whether his subjects still support him and must constantly test them to ascertain the extent of their loyalty (cf. Deut 2,6,13 and passim).

On discovering these all-too-human needs exhibited by the god Yahweh, a modern

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atheist would probably, upon reading the Old Testament, blasphemously consider the character Yahweh to be a control freak prone to mood swings and suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder. The deity's passive reactive way of dealing with evil, his insatiable narcissism and latent irritability that usually gives way to chronic nagging and pointless destructive behaviour will seem petty to many secularised westerners. Moreover, Yahweh's perpetual negligence of 98% of the biblical world's population makes it clear that if he is not dead, he is either going through a midlife crisis, taking his symbolic monogamous marriage to Israel too seriously or, like many upper class people, just doesn't want to get involved.

The fact that Yahweh's divine needs seem suspiciously similar to the historically and culturally conditioned needs of "the powers that be" known to his worshippers leads to serious doubts regarding the validity of realism in Old Testament theology. That Yahweh's psychological profile just happens to resemble that of a nearly inaccessible Iron Age Semite ruler obsessed with honour, shame, power and glory is indeed mighty suspicious.

In fact, according to the devil's advocate, this state of affairs gives the game away and unmasks Yahweh as a psychomorphic projection of the people who imagined a King of the cosmos not very different from their own royalty. The deity is a character of fiction without a counterpart outside the minds of those who created him in their own image. In other words, he does not really exist.

4.2.4   Yahweh's all-too-human appearance

According to the devil's advocate, in the beginning, humans created Yahweh in their own image. In this it concurs with the assessments of some of the ancient Greek philosophers who had their doubts about the all-too-human appearance of some of the gods of the ancient world.

As Robertson (1957:99) notes, Xenophanes allegedly claimed that if animals could draw they would depict the gods in animal form. Protagoras noted that the Thracians had gods who are blond and blue eyed whilst the gods of the Nubians are dark skinned and snub nosed. Even theistic philosophers like Plato and Socrates considered

the gods of the Homeric pantheon rather crude. To the astute cultural critic, the immortals not only acted but also looked a little too much like the humans who worshipped them (cf. Thrower 1980:85-86).

ancient Israelite discourse about Yahweh is no exception. Though much of the text can at times appear reserved and figurative in its depictions of the deity, several passages leave no doubt that the authors (and Yahweh himself) believed that THE LORD had human form (cf. Barr 1959:32). The popular idea of the creation of humanity in the deity's image seems initially to have been understood in a very literal sense. Consider the following examples, provided courtesy of the devil's advocate:

- Yahweh has human form (cf. Gen 1:26-27 vs. 5:1-3, 9:6; Ex 24:10-11; Isa 6:2; Ezek 1:26; Dan 7:9; Zech 14:4; etc.).
- Yahweh looks like an aged man (cf. Dan 7:9).
- Yahweh has eyes (cf. Ps 11:4; 2 Kgs 19:16).
- Yahweh has ears (cf. Num 11:1; 2 Kgs 19:16).
- Yahweh has a mouth (cf. Ps 18:9).
- Yahweh has lips (cf. Isa 30:26-27)
- Yahweh has a tongue (cf. Isa 30:26-27)
- Yahweh has a face (cf. Gen 32:31; Ex 33:20; Judg 13:16).
- Yahweh has a backside (cf. Ex 33:23).
- Yahweh has a heart (cf. Isa 15:5; 16:9; 63:15; Jer 31:20; 48:35-36; Ezek 28:2).
- Yahweh has hands and fingers (cf. Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10; Ps 8:4; Jer 1:9).
- Yahweh has arms (cf. Isa 52:10).
- Yahweh has a nose (cf. Ex 15; Ps 18:9,15).
- Yahweh has feet (cf. Ex 24:10-11; Zech 14:4).
- Yahweh sits like a man (cf. Isa 6:1; Ezek 1:26; Dan 7:9).
- Yahweh stands like a man (cf. Gen 28:13; Ps 82:1; Amos 7:7; 9:1).
- Yahweh walks like a man (cf. Gen 3:8).
- Yahweh talks like a man (cf. Gen 1:1-27; 3:9-23; 11:5; 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1-2; etc.).
- Yahweh thinks like a man (cf. Gen 18:17-19; Ex 13:17; Isa 63:5; Jer 3:17-19; and Old Testament passim).

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- Yahweh screams (cf. Isa 42:14).

- Yahweh whistles (cf. Isa 7:18).

- Yahweh laughs (cf. Pss 2:4; 37:13; Job 12).

- Yahweh cries (cf. Isa 15:5, 16:9,11; Jer 9:10, 12:7, 48:30-32, 35-36).

- Yahweh has hair (cf. Dan 7:9).

- Yahweh smells pleasant aromas (cf. Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9,13,17; 26:31).

- Yahweh cries (cf. Isa 16:9: Jer 48:30-32; 35-36).

- Yahweh tires (cf. Gen 2; Isa 7:13).

- Yahweh sleeps (cf. Ps 44:23; Jer 7:25; 25:3; Isa 51:9).

- Yahweh wears clothes (cf. Isa 6:1; 63:1-2).

Many Old Testament scholars, apparently deeply embarrassed by such all-too-human depictions of Yahweh, distort the problematic by claiming that all God-talk in the Old Testament is actually metaphorical and use concepts like anthropomorphism and anthropopathism as euphemisms to reinterpret the meaning and reference of discourse (cf. Griffin 1997:244-245; Wolff 1974:26). As noted in the previous chapters, a closer look at the discourse of the Old Testament text itself reveals that these claims are little more than desperate half-baked apologetic strategies of people for whom realism regarding the plain sense of the texts no longer has the power to convince.

Of course, the devil's advocate is quite cognisant of the fact that some of the God-talk depicting the deity's appearance was intended to be understood as being metaphorical. When the texts speak of Yahweh as a rock, shepherd, husband or fortress or, in *some* of the references to his "face" and "hand", it is obvious that such depictions were intended to be understood as figurative and symbolic rather than as literal detail about the appearance of the deity. However, it would be a gross generalisation to claim that the nature of the Old Testament's religious language depicting Yahweh in human form was originally intended to be understood as metaphorical *en bloc*.

With regard to the passages referred to in the list of human attributes of Yahweh presented above, it is quite clear that the particular authors intended their depictions to be taken literally and not metaphorically (cf. Eichrodt 1961:210; contra Fretheim 1984:168). Even when the nature of the surrounding discourse can be seen as

symbolic (e.g. Daniel), the reference to Yahweh in human form seems to have been intended quite literally (e.g. Dan 7:9).

As was also noted in the previous chapters, the claim that all references to the human form of Yahweh are metaphorical is simply a revival of the age-old dilemma with anthropomorphic depictions that already embarrassed early translators of the texts and resulted in the rise of allegorical interpretation. The devil's advocate cannot help but wonder whether modern theology with its claim that none of the discourse was ever intended literally might actually be a repressed form of neo-allegorism.

If one is indeed deeply embarrassed by the all-too-human depictions of Yahweh in the text and considers it unlikely that the Master of the Universe, if he exists, looks like an Iron Age Semitic *Homo sapiens,* then there seems to be only one logical conclusion. Yahweh as thus depicted is a product of anthropomorphic projection. He is an entity with no counterpart outside text and imagination. In short, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and does not exist.

4.2.5 Yahweh's all-too-human morality

Another problem with realism concerns the contents of Yahweh's own moral ideology. Analogous to the disconcerting manner in which his knowledge about the world never transcends that of his speechwriters, so too his divine ethics seems suspiciously similar to the morality of a historically contingent and culturally relative terrestrial counterpart. What Yahweh believes about right and wrong appears all-too-similar to what humans from pre-Israelite cultures worshipping non-existent deities have already declared to be normative.

In addition, it certainly seems suspicious when Yahweh's eternal moral laws are modified and altered (sometimes to the contrary of what it once was) whenever the cultural and political influences on Israel also changed. During those times when Israel was dominated by the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Canaanite, Persian and Greek empires, their moral views, allegedly of divine origin, seem curiously reflective of the contemporary dominant cultural hegemony.

Yahweh's moral laws correspond to those found among pagan cultures. Despite minor deviations, similarities between, for instance Exodus 21-23 and the Laws of Hammurabi, or Proverbs 16-22 and the Instruction of Amen-em-ope, seem to falsify the ideology of the biblical texts according to which Israelite morality was based on the eternal objective moral norms of Yahweh himself. It must indeed be somewhat of an embarrassment for realists that Yahweh's own divine morality includes assumptions and beliefs that are based on all-too-human superstitions, ideology, taboos and other culturally contingent primitive beliefs.

The dilemma for realism is that all those Old Testament laws that appear odd from a modern perspective – including those regarding ritual purity, holy days, circumcision, food taboos, slavery, war and other related issues – are never presented as being based merely on a culturally and historically relative morality. Instead, biblical laws are presented as if being based on the rules and regulations operative in the heavens themselves. As above, so below and all that there. Yet Yahweh's own divine normative, objective and universal rules and regulations all have their parallels in other cultures of Israel's neighbouring environment that were on the scene long before the god Yahweh himself appeared on the list of popular human deities (cf. Barr 1984:62-66).

These facts about Old Testament morality have led many Old Testament scholars to recognise the problematic but to distort it by claiming that it is naïve to think that Israelite law was literally revealed by Yahweh through verbal communication. Instead, according to the critical view, the supposed intrusions in the text of "Yahweh says…" was never meant to be understood as anything more than a rhetorical strategy or Hebrew idiom of legitimisation that need not be taken too seriously. In other words, these scholars claim that it should be obvious to all that moral law in Israelite society came about not as a result of divine revelation but through social processes in which the laws of the surrounding cultures were adopted and adapted for local purposes (cf. Barr 1999:412-419).

In connection with the aforementioned issues – and from a modern Western perspective – the following list features some of the more obvious culturally and historically relative idiosyncrasies of Old Testament morality. Yet though these laws

are clearly the products of historically relative and culturally conditioned human minds, the Old Testament authors deceive their readers regarding the question of origins. According to the texts, the following laws were verbally endorsed by Yahweh himself. The deity is depicted as presenting them as being reflective of universal, objective and eternal normative codes built into the cosmos since time immemorial:

- The killing of animals for sacrificial purposes is the will of the deity (cf. Lev 1-7).

- Giving birth to a girl leaves the mother unclean for a period the duration which is twice as long as compared to when she gives birth to a boy (cf. Lev 12:4-5).

- Beating a slave to his or her immediate death is unacceptable, but there is nothing wrong with beating a slave so severely that he or she dies a day or two after the beating since the slave is "property" (cf. Ex 21:21).

- There is the need for purification via the ashes of a red heifer for coming into contact with the dead (cf. Num 19:1-22).

- A judicial trial to determine the possible unfaithfulness of a wife can be settled by having her drink poison (cf. Num 5:23-27).

- The sins of one justifies punishing the collective and people should suffer for the sins of their ancestors (cf. Gen 3:14-19; Josh 7:1; 2 Sam 21,24 and passim).

- During war, women and children should be killed as well, but sometimes the virgins may be taken as booty by the soldiers (cf. Num 31:17-18, 27; Josh 6:21-24).

- Garments may not be made of two different materials and fields should not be sown with two different varieties of seed (cf. Lev 19:19).

- It is forbidden to cook a kid in its mother's milk (cf. Ex 23:19; 34:26).

- It is sinful to eat pork (cf. Lev 11:7).

- Etc.

Most Old Testament scholars consider these moral concerns as the product of Israel's ancient cultural context and based on popular beliefs prevalent at the time. The text, however, presents such historically and culturally relative views as the eternal objective moral beliefs of the Creator of the Universe himself. In other words, according to the text, these commands are not presented as Israel's temporary speculation of what divine reality expects from the people – it is Yahweh's own ideas about how things are supposed to be done.

Being the culturally and historically relative ideas that these laws obviously are, the devil's advocate suggests that this fact has anti-realist implications for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. If no extra-textual and extra-psychical god literally commanded the aforementioned laws and if the words of the deity doing so were merely put in the mouth of the character Yahweh by the writers of the text because they believed such and so to be his will, realism collapses.

If Yahweh did not really supply these moral regulations from the skies as the texts claim he did, it follows that Yahweh-as-depicted as doing so must be a character of fiction and therefore does not exist.

4.2.6   Yahweh's all-too-human divine socio-political set-up

Another disconcerting element in the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament concerns the way the deity's heavenly socio-political set-up is constructed. According to the devil's advocate, it certainly seems suspicious that the deity's eternal and timeless divine socio-political milieu is not literally "out of this world" but appears to be all-too-similar to the scenarios found in world of mortals living in the ancient Near East during the Iron Age.

In other words, as Cupitt (1996:17) observes, the way things are constituted and run in

the divine realm is a sociomorphic projection by humans who conceived of the entire cosmos as some sort of kingdom or state. They ascribed their own historically contingent and culturally relative way of social and political interaction to a supposed supernatural world in the skies (cf. also Frankfort 1946a:31-56).

To verify this claim, the devil's advocate has composed a list of all-too-historically and culturally relative phenomena found in Yahweh's extra-terrestrial domain. Consider the following example of what the devil's advocate considers as amounting to obvious examples of sociomorphic projection, as opposed to intentionally metaphorical depictions of a supposed transcendental reality or factual representations of an actual state of affairs.

- Yahweh has a kingdom whose political constitution resembles an Iron Age monarchy (cf. Deut 32:8-9; 1 Sam 8:7; Dan 6:27; etc.).

- Yahweh's abode is a palace where he sits on a throne (cf. Isa 6:1; Ps 11:4; Dan 7:13; etc.).

- A favourite form of transportation in the heavens is horse-drawn chariots (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11-12; Zech 6:1-8; etc.).

- Yahweh has an army of sword-bearing warriors (cf. Gen 32:1-2; Josh 5:13-15; 2 Sam 24:16, 27; etc.).

- Yahweh makes use of counsellors (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20-23; Isa 6:3; Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:5; Job 1:6; etc.).

- Yahweh's court features mixomorphic sentinels (cf. Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22, 26:1; Isa 6:2-3; Ezek 1, 41:18-19; etc.).

- Yahweh's abode has Iron Age music (cf. Job 38:6; Ps 150:1-6; etc.).

- Yahweh has sons who, amongst other things, marry, have intercourse, eat bread,

sing together and dress in linen (cf. Gen 6:1-4; Ps 78:25; Job 1-2, 38:4-7; Ezek 9:2; Dan 10:5; etc.).

- Yahweh writes on scrolls (cf. the "book" [of life] in Ex 32:32; Pss 69:29, 139:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21; etc.).

- Etc.

Consider, for example, the motif of Yahweh "hiding his face". As Carroll (1997:55) observes, apart from the implication that Yahweh may have a face and eyes, the motif also alludes to social mores reflecting the gesture of an ancient Near Eastern monarch averting or turning the face to the petitioner. The god's face needs to be mollified in appeasement, which is itself a practice alluding to ancient sacrificial rituals. It also has to be sought in petition and, therefore, even the act of prayer is a phenomenon assuming an all-too-historically and all-too-culturally relative set-up for its practicality, functionality and validity (cf. also Cupitt 1989:47).

Since contemporary cultures still contain the remnants of ritualised worship and because religious people in general are not very reflective when it comes to the Old Testament text, these all-too-historically and culturally relative phenomena in the divine domain are taken for granted. We look at them as ordinary, matter-of-fact and natural elements of organised religion. However, when the philosophy of religion is not bracketed by the history of religion, the sociomorphism involved in the description of the operations of heaven becomes obvious.

In other words, according to the devil's advocate, the biblical depictions of Yahweh's sky-kingdom are not the result of factual reportage or merely due to the supposed metaphorical nature about all discourse about alleged transcendent realities. The fact that Yahweh's heavenly socio-political scene (and even Sheol) just happens to correspond in detail to an all-too-particular, all-too-contingent and all-too-human historical and cultural set-up gives the game away. Yahweh and his domain with its Iron Age ancient Near Eastern operations are unmasked as the product of superstition giving rise to projection characterised by sociomorphism.

Of course, it may be understandable why humans would objectify and project their own beliefs, feelings and socio-political set-up onto the cosmos as a whole. Doing so in sincerity and naïveté provide meaning and purpose in life. Sociomorphic projections make people feel that they are somehow significant in the great scheme of things and that they can relate their lives positively to it. By explaining everything that is and that happens as the result of a humanlike mind and will, people are able to feel more at home in a universe that would otherwise be perceived as wholly impersonal and indifferent to human needs, hopes, dreams and fears. But what justification is there for believing that the billions of years old universe has always been and will always be set up and run exactly according to the likes of an ancient Near Eastern monarchy from the Iron Age? (cf. Williams 1985:76)

The fact that Yahweh's own realm seems to change its nature and operations over the course of time must be disconcerting for realists. The fact that the people of Yahweh just happen to change their minds about the way heaven is constituted during those times when Egyptian, Canaanite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and Hellenistic politics intrude on their religious lives seems to give the game away. The very possibility of the culturally induced evolution of Yahweh's own domain seems to unmask the entire divine set-up as indubitably the product of sociomorphic projection.

To further illustrate the sheer incredibility of such a state of affairs, the devil's advocate will resort to sarcasm along the lines of Socratic questioning intended to sting people out of their naiveté.

If Yahweh does exist, in today's world, what would his divine socio-political set-up look like? Maybe today he will no longer be a king but a President. His underlying political philosophy will not be that of autocracy but of democracy. His messengers and armies (angels) will no longer be dressed in white robes, which, after all, reflect a very historically and culturally relative mode of dress. Instead, as befit beings living at the beginning of the third millennium AD, the angels will be wearing the latest creations in business and military fashion.

Moreover, these angels will no longer employ historically and culturally outdated

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weapons such as swords and spears but will instead carry the latest guns. They will no longer ride horses and chariots, as these have also become somewhat outdated. Instead, Yahweh's army will have access to all contemporary forms of super-fast and ultra-efficient transport. Instead of horse-drawn chariots (even iron chariots), angels will be seen riding cars, tanks or planes.

Of course, Yahweh will possibly no longer bother too often with sending angels to deliver urgent messages to privileged humans. Rather, he will probably have a secretary who will communicate via telephone, e-mail and SMS voicemail. Yahweh will no longer write everything he predestines on scrolls but will have everything stored safely on his state of the art lap top computer. He will not have to descend on a mountain to make his will known but can simply fax the information through to his head office in Jerusalem. Alternatively he may desire to make use of the media and advertise his commands on television and radio.

Yahweh will no longer be an isolated deity presiding merely over such a small territory and with little concern for international politics outside the ancient Near East. Instead, maybe for the first time in eternity, he will be a member of a polytheistic "United Nations" and will have interests in previously undreamt of locations like the Americas, Australia and the Far East. He may no longer want to limit himself to converse in Classic Hebrew but will probably become fluent in contemporary dialects of English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

The music to be found in Yahweh's abode in heaven will no longer be that of shofars, or any other ancient culturally outdated instrument. Instead, since he is quite concerned to be fashionable in relation to whatever happens to dominate the world of contemporary culture, Yahweh and his court musicians will probably opt for the use of synthesisers and other modern-day instruments for a combination of classic, rock rap, metal and techno-pop.

Of course, Yahweh will also have to bite the bullet and allow women and non-Semitic angels into his cabinet. As part of a program of affirmative action, the proportion of male and female (who were never before represented in the divine abode) will have to be drastically modified. As if this is not enough stress for a male chauvinist deity,

Yahweh will also have to resign himself to the reality of short-term governance and, horror of horrors, be content to continue his rule only if re-elected.

Should he be so lucky, Yahweh will no longer need to make a covenant but could settle everything through contracts drafted up by his (probably overpaid) lawyers. Of course, he will not be so concerned with the collective or with corporate solidarity as with the rights of individuals and criminals (more than their victims). Nor will he be unduly bothered with keeping his name secret, which, after all, is a concern based on social values that are no longer as prominent today as they were during Old Testament times. Unfortunately, his theophanies will probably be restricted to his pre-election campaigning. Finally, the city in Sheol will no longer have gates or resemble an outdated pit or dungeon but will be refurbished along the lines of modern prisons.

Then again, one might inquire about the nature of Yahweh's supposed socio-political set-up before the Bronze Age? Did Yahweh, during the time of the Neanderthal people, have a cave in heaven rather than a tent or a palace? Did his angels use clubs instead of swords? Did he walk about rather than ride in a chariot? Who invented the wheel first – mortals or angels? Or is this question as mind-blowing as the "chicken or the egg" debate?

Did Yahweh, in prehistoric times, dress in animal skins instead of robes or, perish the thought, go about naked? And what language did he speak then other than the neat period Hebrew that he used in the Old Testament? Would his moral values have reflected the conventions of people who considered human sacrifice, cannibalism and sex without marriage a way of life? Was the music in heaven limited to beating the drums?

Since the city-state did not yet exist, what was the manner of his governance with regard to people and territory? Was he a tribal chief? And since Israel did not exist and most of the world worshipped a mother goddess, could Yahweh (or is that Yehuwah?) have been female?

Sarcastic rhetorical questions such as these assist in exposing the all-too-human and all-too-historically and culturally relative nature of Yahweh's own divine socio-

political set-up. The contingent nature of this set-up gives the game away and it stands unmasked as the creation of human imagination rather than the eternal unchangeable nature of ultimate reality. It shows the devastating effect on realism of the discovery that everything has a history and that all cultural phenomena are contingent and created by humans. It demonstrates that, in the beginning, even the Hebrew culture's Yahweh was created in the image of humans and not vice-versa.

In short, both Yahweh and his kingdom are products of polymorphic projection. He has no independent existence outside the texts and the minds of those who believe in him.

4.2.7   Ecological anthropology, environmental psychology and the ontological status of the nature and acts of Yahweh

In the ancient Near East during Old Testament times and before, there were many awe-inspiring natural phenomena that must have made some impression on the pre-scientific mind of the people. In fact, research done by ecological anthropologists and environmental psychologists has demonstrated that the nature of a particular people's deities often bears an uncanny resemblance to their immediate environment. Many mythologies of the ancient world seem to imply the functionality of a kind of natural theology where the people made sense of their environmental conditions by interpreting local natural processes as the result of superhuman (i.e. divine) activity (cf. Guthrie 1993:11)

When deities were associated with animals, the animals in question are always those known from the immediate vicinity and/or based on extensions or hybrids from those species. In addition, when it came to the supposed "acts" of the gods, these always appear to be connected with – and modelled on – the various processes witnessed in the local micro-climatology, geomorphology and indigenous fauna and flora.

In other words, much of ancient "theology" was based on what may be called an "anthropomorphic hermeneutic of reality" (cf. Guthrie 1993:124). It is quite obvious that there were definite attempts to make sense of environmental variables as though there was a (super) *human* mind behind it all. Even on the level of social and cultural

processes, developments were often interpreted as the actualising of a divine plan or of the will of various deities (cf. Frankfort 1946a:77).

It is therefore no surprise to find that, in Canaanite mythology, the seasonal variations in temperature and rainfall were explained as a result of the dying and rising of Baal and his containment in the domain of Mot during the summer drought (cf. Gibson 1978:19). Because thunderstorm activity occurs during the rainy season, the awe-inspiring phenomena related to it were also explained along the same lines. Thunder was said to be the voice of Baal who lived on the high mountain peak of Zaphon. The lightning was seen as his arrows and the clouds as his mode of transport (cf. Gray 1969:122).

From a certain post-Enlightenment perspective, it seems obvious that the Canaanite deities are the projections of humans who lived in a particular natural environment characterised by certain meteorological and geographical phenomena. These phenomena inspired the creation of superstitions that were quite instrumental in the provisioning of meaning and enchantment. Had the Canaanites subsequently migrated to live in a desert, in an equatorial rainforest or on polar ice wastes where the landscape is completely flat and bereft of drought, sea, earthquakes and thunderstorms, one wonders whether the gods Baal, Yam, Shapash, Mot, etc. would still seem to be "real" or relevant.

Probably not. It is no secret that different peoples living in different natural environments have different type of gods who act and reveal themselves in different ways. Can the gods of Egypt be divorced from the Nile, the desert, the local climate and the region's indigenous fauna? Can the deities of Mesopotamia and the myths of the people there pertaining to the nature of the gods, their abode and the underworld be seen as independent of the local geography, geology, fauna, flora and socio-political scenario? Probably not.

The gods of people who live in the ice wastes of the Polar Regions are different from the gods of the people living in rainforests near the equator. In turn, both of these are different from the gods of subtropical locales or the deities of people living on the grassland planes. In short, the nature, attributes, acts and the particular modes of

revelation and intervention of a region's deities are almost always inextricably bound up with the features and processes of the immediate environment (cf. Bertholet 1926:222).

This relation between the content of local theology and the local micro-ecological set-up suggests that the "gods" might well be projections of the people living in a particular place. The ancients postulated the existence of human-like minds behind the environmental phenomena in order to relate, regulate and synchronise their survival with the local natural order. The need to see a human face behind the alien powers in nature leads to the animation of the non-human environment (cf. Tylor 1871; Guthrie 1993).

In the past, many Christians believed that, at least with regard to this example of superstitious interpretations of natural phenomena, the religion of Yahweh was different. What is known about Yahweh was "revealed" instead of originating from primitive deductions made via natural theology. Yahweh was considered to be the creator of the world and in no way to be equated with anything in the created world of nature. No image of him could be made and all idols or superstitious beliefs about what causes fertility were supposed to be taboo (cf. Eichrodt 1967:78).

However, this account of the nature of Yahweh and his religion may be based on a reinterpreted stereotype. In fact, according to the devil's advocate, quite the opposite is true; selective textual claims to the contrary notwithstanding. When one appropriates the nature of natural theology in the Old Testament, it soon becomes obvious to the unapologetic mind that even Yahweh may be no more than a construct of a primitive hermeneutic of nature.

How this claim might be substantiated can be ascertained from the ways in which the person, nature, acts, interventions, attributes, divine abode, divine servants, etc. of Yahweh are all bound up and dependent on all-too-local environmental phenomena:

- Thunderstorms occur in Palestine and thunder is the voice of Yahweh, lightning and hail his weapons and the clouds a means of transport for the deity (cf. Ex 19:19, 20:18, 24:12; Deut 5:21, 33:2; Judg 5:4; Ps 18:13; 1 Sam 7:10; Isa 30:27;

Am 1:2; Ps 29:3; Job 37:5; 38:34; etc.).

- Volcanoes occur in the region and the appearance of Yahweh on many occasions has volcanic activity as part of the theophany (cf. Ex 19, Deut 4; Dan 7; Mic 1:3-4; Hab 3; etc.).

- Earthquakes occur in the region and were often perceived to be part of Yahweh's theophany or a mode of wrath when he was angered and ready to judge the people (cf. Num 16; Pss 68:8-9; 106:17; Isa 24:19-20; Am 1:1-2; Zech 14:4-5; etc.).

- Droughts occur in the region and these are interpreted as being a result of the sins of the people while good harvests resulting from sufficient rainfall are associated with Yahweh's blessing (cf. Lev 26:19-20; Deut 28:22-24; 1 Kgs 17-18; etc.).

- The country is flanked by the sea in the west and so there are stories about the way Yahweh keeps this force of chaos within its preordained limits (cf. Gen 1:9; Job 38:8-11; Pss 89:10, 93:4; 106:9; etc.).

- To the south and east there are the desert regions where howling winds blow and wild animals sojourn. Not surprisingly, both the people and Yahweh thinks of these locales as the haunts of demons (cf. Lev 17:17; Isa 13:12, 34:14, etc.).

- In the far south of the Arabian Peninsula, to the east in Midian, and to the north in Syria, there are high mountains, many of which were once volcanically active and often the locales for dazzling snow capped peaks and awe-inspiring thunderstorm activities. Curiously, these are the "mountains of Yahweh" from where he is said to come to the people (cf. Ex 3:1;17-24; Deut 4:10-12; Judg 5:4; 1 Kgs 19:8-13; Hab 3:3-4).

- Much of the area is dry land and oases in the deserts are conceived of as being "gardens of the gods" (cf. Gen 13:10; cf. Ezek 28:13-16; Isa 51:3).

- Certain types of animals live in the region and the *cherubim* and *seraphim* of

Yahweh bear a striking resemblance to these animals or hybrid versions/ mixomorphs derived from them (cf. Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22, 26:1; Isa 6:2-3; Ezek 1, 41:18-19; etc.).

- The region is at the centre of international economical and political developments and therefore most of the time merely a vassal to one of the superpowers in the south-west (Egypt) or north-east (Babylonia and Assyria) The socio-political developments of the region are interpreted as being a result of divine judgements on either Israel and Judah or on its enemies (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28; Judg-2 Kgs:passim; Isa-Mal:passim).

- The main religion of the region was Canaanite polytheism and, not surprisingly, depictions of Yahweh have a lot in common with those of Canaanite deities such as Baal, El and Shemesh (cf. next chapter).

- The people of the region lived in tents, houses and, if royalty, in a palace. It is therefore not too surprising that Yahweh too is depicted as living in a tent, a house or a palace (cf. Ps 132 and OT passim).

- Iron and Bronze Age ancient Near Eastern cities have gates, were often located near rivers and the prisons were dark and damp places. Is it really a coincidence that Sheol, the netherworld where the deceased went to since the beginning of time just happened to contain these very same structural elements and geographical features? (cf. Job 38:17; cf. also Tromp 1969:117-119).

From this perspective, one might indeed begin to wonder whether Yahweh, like Baal or any other ancient Near Eastern deity, is not merely the projection of primitive superstitious people. It is as if the Hebrew people, just like all others, attempted to make sense of and animate nature as found in their local environment and tried to relate to it by postulating a human-type mind behind it all and directing the whole scene.

In the same way one might wonder if Baal could have been conceived of by people

living in the Polar Regions or in the Amazon, one might also wonder whether Yahweh can "exist" outside his natural habitat in Palestine. For instance, if the Israelites were suddenly transported to a certain polar region where there were no mountains, no thunderstorms or earthquakes, no rough seas, and very different fauna, flora and other meteorological and geographical phenomena, what would happen to Yahweh, his acts and his world?

- Would he spell out, in detail, how his "igloo" (instead of his tent) is to be furnished?

- Would he be served not by hybrid beings that are part lion, part eagle and part bull (i.e. cherubim and seraphim) but maybe by sentinels that are a combination of polar bear, seal and penguin?

- If there are no seasonal droughts and no other hostile enemy people wanting control of their territory, how can Yahweh judge his people and become active in their socio-political life?

- What would happen to the sacrifices to Yahweh in a place where the specific animals and ingredients for the particular offerings are not available?

- Would Yahweh's promise to Noah and his covenant with day and night (and the seasons) be applicable in a place where sowing time and harvest time is not an issue and where day and night can last for months on end, depending on whether it is summer or winter?

Alternatively, suppose the Israelites lived on a tropical island in the South Pacific where there are no mountains, droughts, lack of food, wild animals, thunderstorm activity or hostile neighbours:

- The cursing of the earth in Genesis 3 would seem to be not applicable to such a "garden of the gods" if the place has no thorns and thistles and where there might not even be any snakes.

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- Now there are no other nations to act as "rods" of Yahweh's anger.

- Now there are no wild animals or famine or drought as modes of Yahweh's judgement.

- Now Yahweh no longer speaks and appears since there is no thunder and the sky is often overcast.

- Now Yahweh has no place to live since there is no mountain available.

- What form would Yahweh's sentinels and court servants take here (maybe a mixture of lizard, mosquito, and monkey)?

These observations in the form of rhetorical questions are inserted to show the all-too-local, all-too-regional, all-too-particular, all-too-animistic, all-too-historically, culturally and environmentally conditioned nature of not only the Israelite beliefs about the world but also of their construction of Yahweh. From this perspective, it hardly seems plausible that Yahweh could be the God of onto-theology who is an eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omnipotent, transcendent, superhuman and universal creator of all, existing independently of human perceptions of him.

Instead, the Hebrew deity appears to be, amongst other things, a creation/projection of humans who, in their attempt to control, understand, make sense of and relate to their local natural, social and cultural environment made a deity to fit all the specifications supplied by the local and regional natural and social phenomena. They see the processes of nature, culture and politics as the outcome of a superhuman will-to-power and its apparent need to be served and worshipped. If they had lived in another region with different meteorological, geological, social, political and cultural phenomena, Yahweh – in the way he acts, reveals himself and relates to humans – would become obsolete and a non-entity.

4.2.8   Devastating questions regarding the divine methodology

Another element of the Old Testament discourse about Yahweh that might lead to a sneaking suspicion that it is all nothing more than all-too-human myth and superstition concerns what may be called Yahweh's suspicious methodology. Once one stands back and begins to ask those tormenting "why?"-questions, the whole meta-narrative presented in the Old Testament suddenly seems just too peculiar to be real.

Contemplating the actions of Yahweh, his motives, his method and alternative possibilities open to him during his intervention in the created world, leads the devil's advocate to suspect that all is not as it seems. There is something "fishy", something suspicious and indeed something "mighty peculiar" about the ways in which Yahweh goes about being a god and doing stuff. When the divine methodology of Yahweh is closely scrutinised, it seems that, in several instances, Yahweh appears as the stereotypical "god of the gaps". He seems to have been invoked in an all-too-human albeit unconvincing attempt by the biblical authors to explain reality and make animistic sense of the historical process.

If it can be shown that the divine methodology is indeed suspect in terms of it being too incredible, particular, peculiar, human, unlikely and resulting in more questions than it answers, then realism regarding the deity's ontological status also becomes problematic. If it can be demonstrated that Yahweh's supposed relation to the world is constituted by an erroneous hermeneutics of historical, natural, social and psychological reality on the part of the Old Testament authors, one begins to suspect that Yahweh-as-depicted is little more than a fictitious construct.

Below are some "readerly questions" as part of the devil's advocate's hermeneutics of suspicion. In order to appreciate the deconstructive rhetorical effect of these questions, it is very important not to rush through them. According to the devil's advocate, the devastating potential of the questions can only be appreciated if the reader meditates on and ponders each one for its weirdness, the possibly anti-realist implications, and how the all-too-fantastical and incredible nature of the whole Old Testament meta-narrative is exposed.

1. Why did Yahweh create anything at all?

2. What did Yahweh do before he created the heavens and the earth?

3. Why did he create the heavens and the earth at this point in eternity and not sooner or later?

4. Why did Yahweh create *these* particular creatures, features and types of phenomena rather than something else?

5. Why does Yahweh create weak, feeble, ignorant, imperfect, contingent and fallible beings instead of some more perfect and omnibenevolent immortals?

6. Why does Yahweh punish people for their sins via collective ambiguous phenomena such as natural disasters, biological dysfunction and chaotic social processes (all of which happen anyway)?

7. Why does Yahweh appear to a few select people and mostly in "dreams" and "visions" rather than being directly accessible and visible to everyone, everywhere, and all the time?

8. Why does Yahweh not want images of himself, especially since he has been seen more than once and therefore cannot be thinking of supposed inconceivability?

9. Why would Yahweh create animals he considers abominations?

10. Why would Yahweh endow humans with physiological processes he finds offensive or unclean?

11. Why does Yahweh appear in natural phenomena (earthquakes, volcanoes, thunder storms) which can be interpreted in wholly natural ways without postulating a divinity behind it?

12. Why would Yahweh as creator of the universe concern himself mostly with a

single small nation and why does he know nothing of other ancient peoples outside the Levant and they nothing of him?

13. Why are ambiguous and tedious ways of divination (lots, the Ephod, the Urim and Thummim, dream incubation, etc.) needed when Yahweh could just tell people directly, plainly and quickly what is the case in any given situation?

14. Why does Yahweh give so many laws for how to punish the guilty instead of always preventing any evil act from occurring in the first place like he sometimes does?

15. Why is Yahweh so inconsistent and arbitrary in the way he treats individuals and deal with their sin and in what he allows them with regard to access to him, prosperity in life, forgiveness of their sins, etc.?

16. Why are both Yahweh and his heavenly court all of the *male* gender?

17. Why does Yahweh so often merely denounce atrocities *after* they happen and then through human spokesmen (i.e. prophetic judgement) rather than intervening proactively to prevent the evil in from occurring in the first place (as he sometimes does) or coming down himself to tell everyone what is what?

18. Why does Yahweh so often promise remote future bliss, peace and prosperity rather than having actualised it all long ago?

19. Why is it usually the case that when the people mix with foreigners they begin to serve the other gods and forsake Yahweh? Why does the reverse never happen, i.e. that the foreigners forsake their gods and convert to Yahwism?

20. Why does Yahweh not appear today and end atheism?

Many far more specific questions like these could be asked regarding certain details in the Old Testament text. For example:

1. Why does Yahweh speak a particular dialect of period Hebrew when he creates the universe especially since this language and the particular dialect in which he spoke would only develop in a particular religious community during the first millennium BC? (cf. Gen 1)

2. Why did Yahweh make Adam from dust and create Eve from his rib, rather than in another fashion (i.e. creation by word, thought, etc.)? (cf. Gen 2:7,22)

3. Why did Yahweh destroy the people via *a flood* rather than by some other means (i.e. make them all disappear, cause the earth to swallow them, etc.)? (cf. Gen 6-9)

4. Why did Yahweh go to all the trouble to get Joseph to become the prince of Egypt to save people from the famine when he could just have prevented the famine in the first place? (cf. Gen 38-50)

5. Why did Moses want Jethro to show them where all the good camping places in the desert were located if the pillar of cloud and fire already indicated this to them? (cf. Num 10:29-34)

6. Why did Yahweh want Moses to count the people when surely he could just tell him how many there were? (cf. Num 1; 2 Sam 24:1; etc.)

7. Why would a god feel the need to specify such precise, elaborate and peculiar prescriptions for the service in his sanctuary? (cf. Ex 25-30)

8. Why should the leaders of a city have to vow that they did not kill someone found mysteriously murdered in a nearby field when Yahweh could simply show them who committed the crime? (cf. Deut 21:1-9)

9. Why should a woman accused of adultery need to engage in a trial by ordeal to determine her innocence when Yahweh could just tell the judges what the facts are? (cf. Num 5:11-31)

10. Why is Yahweh so insistent that the people tell their children about his acts in

olden times rather making the effort to reveal himself to them directly, personally and one on one? (cf. Ex 12:26; Deut 6:6-7; etc.)

11. Why should lots be drawn to reveal a guilty or chosen individual when, once again, Yahweh could simply tell everyone what's what? (cf. Josh 7:10-19; 1 Sam 10:19-24; 14:37-43)

12. Why does Yahweh consider the possible proliferation of wild animals a good reason for not vanquishing the enemies of his people sooner? (cf. Deut 7:22)

13. Why does Yahweh fear that if the people take the root of the Philistines they will be too scared to fight and want to go back to Egypt – especially since this happens anyway on the route Yahweh himself had chosen (cf. Ex 13:17 vs. Num 14:1-4)

14. Why did the people need to send spies to scout Canaan instead of Yahweh simply telling them how it looks there? (cf. Num 13:1-33)

15. Why did the people in the desert need to buy food from the population of Seir if Yahweh was already feeding them with bread and meat from the skies? (cf. Deut 2:1-29 vs. Ex 16-17; Ps 78:23-25)

16. How could an evil spirit sent by Yahweh to plague Saul be exorcised merely by having the depressed king listen to pleasant music? (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23)

17. Why did Yahweh not prevent David from adultery with Bathsheba like he prevented the Pharaoh and Abimelech from performing the same sins with the matriarchs? (cf. Gen 12,20,26 vs. 2 Sam 11)

18. If Yahweh knows the future in detail, how can *the deity himself* be considered as having free will? (cf. Gen 15:16,18:17-19; Isa 40-55; Ps 139; Dan 2-12)

19. Why should Yahweh want to write up everything that happens, and should happen, on scrolls? (cf. Ex 32:32; Ps 69:29, 139:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21)

20. Why does Yahweh himself believe that certain fictitious characters really existed and that certain fictitious scenarios actually happened (cf. Isa 54:9; Jer 34:13-14; Ezek 14:14,20; Mal 4:5; etc.)

As Augustine realised long ago, one cannot merely dismiss a question such as the one pertaining to what God did before he created the heavens and the earth, with the retort, "Preparing hell for pryers into mysteries". The author of Psalm 131 may have confessed that he did not bother with things that were too high for his mind and Deuteronomy 29:29 may insist that the things that have not been revealed belong to Yahweh. Apologists have a plethora of rationalisations, conjectures, speculation and even hermeneutical and theological objections to the asking of such questions. In stark contrast, however, the devil's advocate's answer to all such questions is bluntly, "because Yahweh is a character of fiction and does not really exist".

These and many other similar possible questions leave one with a sneaking suspicion that the whole cult of Yahweh is based on little more than projection, pretence and make-belief in the face of life's mysteries, dangers and hassles. Of course, it might be claimed that the texts were never meant to satisfy such blasphemous and philosophically minded curiosity. However, simply because the Old Testament authors did not ask or answer the questions does not mean it is illegitimate to ask them.

If consistently applied, such an objection would prohibit any linguistic, literary, historical, sociological and various other types of questions being put to the text since these issues were not also not catered for. Just because the Old Testament did not intend to answer all the linguistic, historical, sociological, etc. type questions does not prevent scholars from asking them. What valid and unbiased a priory objection can there then possibly be against asking *philosophical* questions? Is it not the fear of what the obvious answers (or lack of them) might imply for the validity and veracity of realism in all biblically based forms of theism?

To be sure, when someone like the devil's advocate approaches the text with a certain objectivity and disinterestedness and begins to contemplate these "why?"-questions pertaining to Yahweh's methodology, a soul-shattering possibility is born within the

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sceptic imagination. Could it be that the whole grand meta-narrative roughly discernible from the texts is pure fantasy? Might the entire worldview of the Old Testament discourse be no more reflective of actual reality than the overarching mythologies of other ancient pagan cultures whose beliefs no longer command anyone's allegiance?

According to the devil's advocate, therefore, when asking "why?"-questions like those presented above, an "answer" is not really expected from the text. This is the case because it may very well be that no satisfactory way of salvaging realism can be forthcoming. The devil's advocate concurs with Gertrude Stein who, in another context, insisted that apart from the atheist response noted above, "there ain't no answer; there has never been an answer; there ain't going to be any answer – that's the answer!"
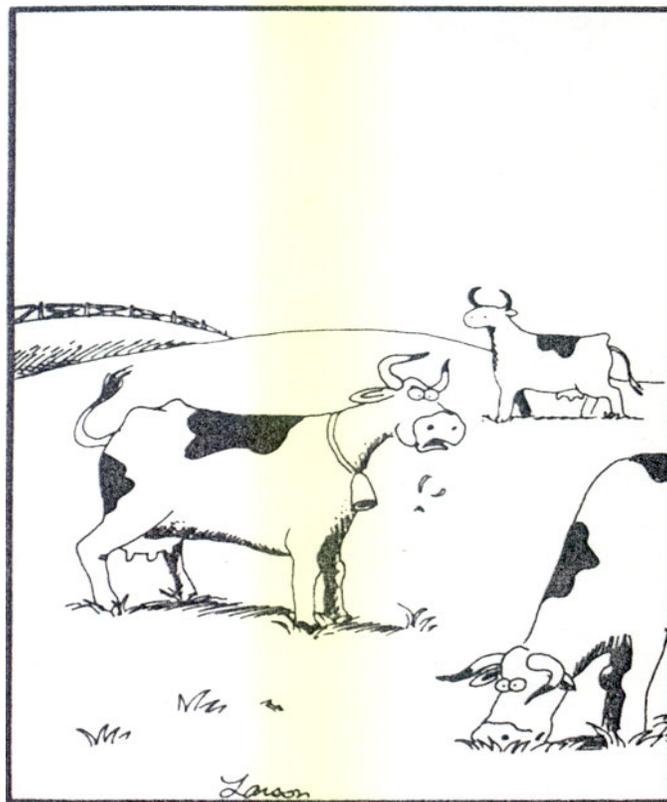
"Hey, wait a minute! This is grass! We've been eating grass!"

Of course, some people just don't get it. Most probably never will. But for those who had the scales fell from their eyes, asking "why?"-questions can reveal that the whole

set-up depicted in the world of the text is simply too peculiar, incredible, extraordinary, superficial, contrived and unrealistic. The perspective provided by these questions makes the uninhibited critical reader realise that there are simply too many more meaningful alternative possible plots that could have been actualised. Asking "why" questions suggests the possibility that the obvious answer to such interrogatives may indeed be what not everyone may want to hear – that Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts does not exist.

4.3   CONCLUSION

According to the devil's advocate, the implications of the creation of Yahweh in the image of humans, rather than vice-versa, are as follows:

1. What Yahweh knows, believes and does seem suspiciously similar to the views and ways of humans from the ancient Near East during the first millennium BC.

2. It seems clear that this gives the game away and unmasks Yahweh as the product of Iron Age ancient Near Eastern anthropomorphic, psychomorphic and sociomorphic projection.

3. It would thus appear that Yahweh-as-depicted is a construct of polymorphic projection and has no counterpart outside the texts and imaginations of the people who worship him.

4. If this is the case then Yahweh-as-depicted is a character of fiction.

5. Ergo, Yahweh-as-depicted does not really exist.

The argument from anthropomorphic projection is the third argument in the case against realism. Since, however, 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 credibility and rhetorical strength are enhanced when viewed in relation to all the other arguments in the devil's advocate's justification of Yahwistic atheism.

CHAPTER 5

THE ARGUMENT FROM MYTHOLOGY AND SYNCRETISM

"My tears are my food
day and night
For all day they say to me,
'Where is your God?'...
....With the sting of death in my bones
my enemies smite me
When the whole day long
they say to me
'Where is your God?'"

(Ps 42:4,11)

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Both in the past and the present, many religious people and even some theologians seemed to believe that things like myth, legend, folklore and superstition are completely absent in the Old Testament (cf. Da Silva 1994:11-12). Such phenomena are believed to be endemic not to the Word of God but only to the scriptures of pagan religions. It is believed that the absence of these unorthodox elements in the Bible and in Yahwism is supposed to be what proves the truth of the biblical religion and what distinguishes it from false forms of religious consciousness and man-made ideologies (cf. Da Silva 1994:13).

Long before the discovery of the ancient Near Eastern texts, interpreters of the Old Testament had already noted some parallels between the biblical discourse and that of other ancient religions (cf. Teeple 1982:77). However, the rise of the specialised study of comparative religion and the history of religions during the nineteenth century occasioned the proliferation of a plethora of theories regarding the Old Testament

authors' dependence on foreign religious discourse. Such comparative analyses revealed that there were far more similarities between Old Testament religion and pagan superstition than what was once thought to be the case when the Bible was still read with little reference to the religious discourse of its ancient Near Eastern neighbours (cf. Otzen et al 1990:3-4).

The study of comparative religion and comparative mythology within the context of the history of religion is therefore nothing novel. And, though some scholars did at times have recourse to the philosophy of religion on these issues, it was, for the most part, without explicit concern for the implications of such parallels for realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. Mostly, the focus was on theorising about the nature of Old Testament religion, its religious language and regarding the implications of the parallels for thinking about the concept of revelation and the validity of religious experience.

Many examples can be given of studies that have been concerned with such issues and have contributed to the overall popularity of comparative mythology. The devil's advocate is here thinking of the research by, amongst others, scholars like Frazer (1918), Smith (1927); Oesterly & Robinson (1930); Pritchard (1959); Childs (1960); Hooke (1963); Gaster (1969); Gray (1969); Cross (1973); Fawcett (1970,1973); Campbell (1962,1974); Rogerson (1974); Otzen et al (1990); Holm & Bowker *(*1994); Matthews & Benjamin (1997); Keel & Uehlinger (1998); Van der Toorn et al (1999); etc.

In this regard, it should be noted that when the twentieth century's literature on comparative religion in Old Testament studies is surveyed, it becomes apparent that both the connotation and denotation of the word "myth" have frequently changed over the course of time. Not everyone talking about "myth" in the Bible seems to be referring to the same phenomenon.

As Gowan (1990:2-5) observes, in contemporary culture, the word "myth" can be used in a bewildering variety of ways. This polyvalent concept is attested as referring to, amongst other things, a literary genre, a scientific error, historical fiction, stories about the gods, a lie, religious truth, superstition, psychological phenomena or

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narratives of social control, etc. (cf. also Segal 1999:7-15).

During the latter half of the twentieth century, due to the influence of paradigm shifts in the theorising about myth in anthropology, many biblical and systematic theologians began to suggest that the mythical elements in the biblical discourse are no embarrassment but should be positively assessed. This form of discourse, so it was claimed, has the unique ability to communicate profound truth in a manner not otherwise possible. It became absolutely taboo to think of myth as synonymous with superstition or primitive science (cf. Fawcett 1970:206-231; Brown 1990:12-19).

Consequently, it was asserted that though the Old Testament texts do not have many examples of pure myth (myth as a literary genre), it would be wrong to judge its "mythicized" history (or is that its historicized myth?) from the perspective of modern science. It was also claimed that it is therefore hermeneutically illegitimate to read texts such as Genesis 1-11 as though it was ever intended to be history or a scientific account of the origins of the universe and life on earth. To be sure, it was soon considered naïve to ask questions such as whether something really exists or whether an event depicted in the text actually happened. Such questions were alleged to stem from a misunderstanding of the nature and intent of the biblical discourse and as resultant from a positivist mindset (cf. Fawcett 1973:10).

The devil's advocate agrees with the view that there have been developments in anthropology that have changed the way we look at the nature and function of myth. However, the supposed relevance of all this for salvaging realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the Old Testament texts should not be so blithely accepted. The claim that the Old Testament authors were not interested in scientific or philosophical type questions seems, at least to the devil's advocate, another gross generalisation and on par with claiming that all its God-talk were originally actually metaphorically intended. Frankly, the devil's advocate believes that all those who jump happily and easily on this new apologetic bandwagon are simply engaging in a strategy of evasion and repression concerning the disconcerting fact that realism may be dead.

In the context of this study, the devil's advocate refuses to be dragged into the

rhetorical chaos of theological doubletalk and has chosen to retain most of the more pejorative alternatives of the above noted meanings of the concept of myth. Depending on the immediate context, in this chapter, the devil's advocate utilises the word "myth" with nearly all of its aforementioned denotations and connotations in mind as these need not be understood as being mutually exclusive. In other words, this study retains the utilisation of the concept of myth as referring inclusively and pejoratively to a (biblically unorthodox) literary genre and ideological construct that is based on (or contains) fictitious history and/or scientifically errant ideas regarding allegedly existing extra-textual phenomena.

According to the devil's advocate, the Old Testament is crawling with "myth" in the aforementioned sense. One way in which to justify this claim is merely by noting the numerous parallels between the Old Testament discourse and that of pagan mythology. If the depiction of Yahweh in certain texts contains parallels to the mythology of other deities generally considered to be fictitious, the question must be asked whether the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted can justifiably be reckoned as being any different from those deities to whom the parallel mythological motifs allude.

For example, if the Old Testament texts depict Yahweh as having defeated the Leviathan and the latter is a mythical (fictitious) entity then so is the deity "Yahweh-who-defeated-the-Leviathan". In other words, whatever God or Yahweh there may be, Yahweh-as-depicted in texts containing mythological motifs shares the same ontological status as the other mythical entities in those texts. If the other entities of mythological discourse in the Old Testament do not really exist, neither does the character Yahweh who believes in them and is involved with them.

Whenever there are traces of mythological motifs, syncretism and superstition in the Old Testament with parallels to non-biblical religions, additional questions arise that may be of relevance to the devil's advocate's case against realism in Old Testament theology, e.g.:

1. What is the relation between the discourse of the Old Testament and that of the other ancient Near Eastern texts?

2. What are the implications of this relation for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

According to the devil's advocate, if there are indeed traces of mythological parallels, syncretism, and superstition in the Old Testament texts, it can be demonstrated that Yahweh-as-depicted does not really exist as long as the following conditions apply:

1. The parallels from pagan religion existed prior to the creation of the Old Testament texts.

2. The entities and scenarios in the parallels are purely or mostly fictitious.

3. The Old Testament authors adopted and adapted such discourse for their own purposes either via direct dependence on the particular parallels or due to a common cultural stock (or pool of discourse) to which they will have had access to.

4. The deity Yahweh is depicted as a character in the reconstructed scenarios, the discourse of which is grounded in myth or contains substantial traces of syncretism and/or superstition.

If these criteria are met then, according to the devil's advocate at least, much scepticism is generated as to whether realism in Old Testament theology can be validly maintained. To be sure, if there are enough parallels and traces of marked syncretism and superstition so that the depiction of Yahweh is demonstrably more the result of creative construction as opposed to actual revelation, realism collapses. The chances that Yahweh has an extra-textual counterpart must then be considered to be as slim as the possibility that El, Marduk or Zeus might actually exist.

5.2   PARALLELS BETWEEN OLD TESTAMENT YAHWISM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

To show just how frequent parallels between the Old Testament texts and the discourse of other religions occur, this section will focus on various related issues.

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The concern will not only be with parallels in literary motifs between the discourse of the Old Testament and that of the ancient Near East. More comprehensively, the discussions to follows will also include parallels between the Old Testament and folklore form around the world, examples of syncretism in Old Testament God-talk and, last but not least, references to magic, divination and other superstitious elements in the Hebrew Bible.

5.2.1   A parallel chart: Old Testament vs. ancient Near East
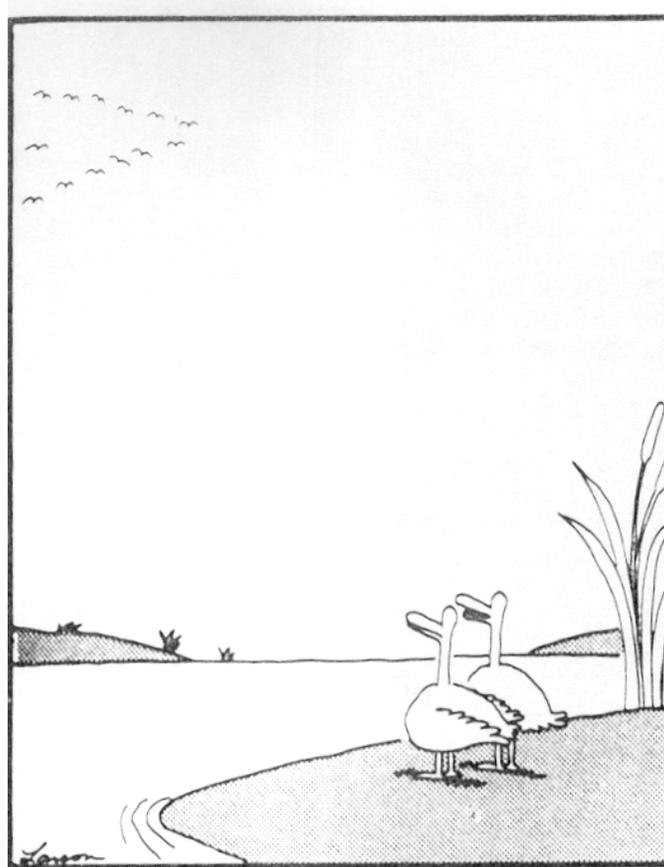
"I just can't tell from here. ... That could
either be our flock, another flock, or
just a bunch of little m's"

In its discussion of the first topic on the agenda – i.e. parallels between the literature of the Old Testament and motifs found in the scriptures of its ancient Near Eastern neighbours, the devil's advocate has constructed an adaptation of a list of parallels found in Matthews and Benjamin (1997:221-234). This rather lengthy list features a substantial though not delineation of parallels between the Old Testament and various

ancient Near Eastern texts.

Not all parallels noted here need be considered as being purely "mythological" in the sense of the word as earlier defined by the devil's advocate. Neither does each and every parallel necessarily imply that the scenario involved is *ipso facto* fictitious. Nevertheless, the mere existence of many of these parallels should make not only the historian (cf. chapter 7 later in this study) but also the philosopher of religion suspicious of realism.

Given the presence of these pagan ancient Near Eastern parallels to motifs found in the Old Testament discourse, it may well be justified to conclude that the particular textual scenarios could be literary constructs rather than facts referring to characters and events that had extra-textual counterparts. Moreover, if a particular scenario featuring the parallel is indeed fictitious, it follows that the ontological status of the deity Yahweh depicted therein may be equally bereft of any counterpart in the world outside the text.

In the table to follow, column 3 (parallel) uses a number and a key word to identify six ways in which the ancient Near Eastern texts identified in column 2 (text), parallel the biblical texts listed in column 1 (citation). The parallels are based on:

1   =   genre, e.g. creation story, flood story, law, teaching;

2   =   vocabulary, e.g. direct or similar words or phrases;

3   =   motif, e.g. barren wife, greed, widows & orphans, divine war;

4   =   social institution, e.g. anthropomorphism, taboo, propaganda;

5   =   plot, e.g. similar action in both texts;

6   =   historical event, e.g. person, place, event.

CITATION	TEXT	PARALLEL
GENESIS		
1:1-2:4a	Story of Aqhat	5 - 7 day ritual
1:1-2	Enuma elish	1 - creation story
		2 - Tehom
1:2	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story
		5 - chaos
1:3	Memphis Creation Story	2 - naming
1:6-7	Enuma elish	2 - firmament
1:15-16	Enuma elish	2 - moon
1:20-21	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story
		2 - living beings
		3 - fiat creation
1:22	Ra and The Serpent	2 - multitude
1:26-27	Enuma elish	2 - humans
1:31-2:2	Memphis Creation Story	2 - rest
2:6-7	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story
		2 - moisture/man
2:7	The Hymn to Aton	2 - breathe
	Athrahasis	1 - creation story
		4 - anthropomorphism
	Story of Aqhat	2 - breath
2:7-15	Enuma elish	5 - humans
		4 - anthropomorphism
4:1-26	The Story of Anubis and Bata	3 - sibling rivalry
6:11-21	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - ark
6:14	Athrahasis	2 - pitch
6:14-16	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - pitch
7:2-4,7-9	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - animals
7:11	Story of Aqhat	2 - flood story
7:11-12,17-23	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - darkness
7:13-16	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - hatch

7:24-8:3	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - aftermath
8:4	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - landing
8:5-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - release
8:20	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - sacrifice
8:21	Athrahasis	2 - smell
8:21-22	The Epic of Gilgamesh	3 - remorse
9:1-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - hero's fate
9:12-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	1 - covenant
		5 - rainbow
9:20-23	Story of Aqhat	2 - drunk
10:9	Story of Aqhat	2 - hunter
14:9	Karatepe Inscription	1 - blessing
		2 - creator
15:1-4	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
15:11	Story of Aqhat	5 - vultures
16:1-15	Code of Hammurabi	3 - heir
		4 - surrogate
17:17	Story of Aqhat	2 - laughter
18:2	Story of Aqhat	1 - formula opening
		2 - see in distance
18:6-7	Story of Aqhat	5 - meal
		4 - hospitality
18:9-15	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
19:1	Story of Aqhat	2 - gate
		3 - testing
		4 - place of justice
21:9-21	Code of Hammurabi	3 - heir
		4 - surrogate
	Story of Aqhat	1 - heroic epic
		3 - contest with god
21:20-21	Story of Aqhat	2 - hunter
25:21	Story of Aqhat	5 - pray for child
25:27	The Sufferer and The Friend	3 - older vs. younger
27:38	Story of Aqhat	1 - blessing

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		2 - blessing
28:10-22	Story of Keret	1 - dream theophany
		5 - dream
30:1-24	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
31:45-50	Treaty (Ramses II; Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant
		2 - "if you"
		3 - curse
31:51-53	Treaty (Ramses II; Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant
		2 - gods witness
34	Sumerian Code	5 - rape
35:17	Athrasis	2 - midwife
		3 - birthing
38	Hittite Code	5 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - law (levir)
		3 - heir
38:34	Story of Aqhat	5 - tear robe
		4 - mourning ritual
39:7	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - seduction
39:12	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - seduction
39:17-19	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - deception
41:34-36,47-49	Karatepe Inscription	5 - planning
		4 - propaganda

EXODUS

1:16	Atrahasis	2 - birthstool
1:22-2:10	Legend of Sargon	5 - reed boat
		3 - miracle survival
3:14	Ra and The Serpent	1 - proclamation
		2 - "I am"
6:3	Story of Balaam	2 - Shaddai
19:10	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - washing
		4 - ritual cleansing
20:12	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - law
		2 - honour parents

20:15	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
20:16	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law
		2 - false witnesses
21:2-11	Code of Hammurabi	2 - slavery
21:15	Code of Hammurabi	2 - strike parents
21:16	Code of Hammurabi	2 - kidnapping
21:22-23	Code of Hammurabi	2 - miscarriage
21:23-25	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion
21:28-36	Code of Hammurabi	2 - goring ox
22:2-3	Code of Hammurabi	2 - burglary
22:7-8	Code of Hammurabi	2 - stolen goods
22:16	The Sumerian Code	2 - seduce virgin
22:18	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - sorcery
22:26-27	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - law
		2 - pledge garment
	Teaching of Ahikar	1 - law
		2 - pledge garment
23:1-3	Code of Hammurabi	2 - false witness
30:23-33	Story of Balaam	2 - myrrh
		4 - anointing ritual

LEVITICUS

18:6-18	Code of Hammurabi	2 - incest
		1 - decalogue
	Hittite Code	4 - marriage customs
19:11,13	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
20:10-21	Code of Hammurabi	3 - illicit sex
20:13	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - homosexuality
20:27	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - sorcery
24:19-20	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion

NUMBERS

5:11-31	Code of Hammurabi	2 - adultery
		4 - ordeal

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22:28-30	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - fable
		5 - talking animal
33:52	Karatepe Inscription	2 - molten image

DEUTERONOMY

5:19	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
6:4-8	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition
		2 - fill
10:18	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law
		3 - widows & orphans
15:12-18	Code of Hammurabi	2 - slavery
19:16-19	Code of Hammurabi	2 - false witness
19:21	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion
21:1-9	Story of Aqhat	4 - forgiveness ritual
		5 - burial
21:18-21	Sumerian Code	2 - prodigal son
	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - curse
		2 - honour parents
22:1-4	Code of Hammurabi	2 - property
		4 - social response
22:22	Code of Hammurabi	2 - adultery
22:23-24	Sumerian Code	2 - raped virgin
		4 - gate/justice place
22:23-27	Code of Hammurabi	2 - raped virgin
		4 - justice of place
24:7	Code of Hammurabi	2 - kidnapping
25:5-10	Hittite Code	1 - law (will)
		2 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - law (levir)
25:11-12	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - genitalia
		4 - female taboo
27:20,22-23	Code of Hammurabi	2 - incest
32:35	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - law
		2 - pledge garment

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JOSHUA

2:6	The Gezer Almanac	2 - flax
6	The Story of Keret	5 - seven day siege
6:17-21	Mesha Stele	3 - divine war
		5 - herem
6:24	Mesha Stele	3 - divine war
		5 - herem
6:26	The Story of Aqhat	1 - curse
		2 - rebuild
7:20-21	Diary of Wen-Amon	4 - sacred property
8:1-17	Mesha Stele	1 - exhortation
		3 - divine war
8:24-27	Mesha Stele	3 - divine
		5 - herem
10:1-28	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal
		3 - divine war
		5 - alliance
10:42	Mesha Stele	2 - king
		3 - divine war
11:1-12	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal
		3 - divine war
		5 - alliance
11:6-9	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal
		5 - foot
19:8	The Arad Ostraca	6 - Ramoth-negeb

JUDGES

4:5	Story of Aqhat	2 - tree/justice
		4 - justice site
4:17-22	Story of Aqhat	3 - revenge
		5 - murder
4:19	Story of Aqhat	4 - hospitality
		5 - drink request

5:27	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - victim falls
7:12	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - locusts
9:8-15	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - fable
		5 - taunt
11:30-31	Story of Keret	1 - oath
13:2-3	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
16:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - power removed
		5 - gate posts
19:22	Karatepe Inscription	2 - trouble makers
21:25	Visions of Neferti	2 - selfishness
		3 - anarchy

RUTH

2:2-9	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - law
		2 - widows and orphans
		5 - widow gleaning
2:23	The Gezer Almanac	2 - harvest
3:3	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - anoint hair
4	Hittite Code	1 - law
		5 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - levir
4:1	Story of Aqhat	2 - gate
		4 - site of justice

1 SAMUEL

1:2-17	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
1:21	Karatepe Inscription	2 - sacrifice
3:3-4	Atrahasis	1 - theophany
		5 - dream
4:20	Atrahasis	2 - midwife
6:13	Gezer Almanac	2 - reaping
9:11	Story of Balaam	2 - seer
10:6	The Mari Prophecies	1 - prophecy
		2 - possession

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12:14-15	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition
		2 - king's duty
		3 - obedience to god
14:24	Story of Keret	1 - oath
15:1-6	Story of Keret	5 - son revolts
16:14-18	Diary of Wen-Amon	5 - music
17:8-10	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
		5 - single combat
18:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - song of praise
21:14	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - insanity
		4 - mental taboo
24:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - legal petition
		4 - hem = identity
24:5	The Mari Prophecies	2 - hem
		4 - identity
26:19	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - scribal address
28:3	Middle Assyrian Code	5 - witch
30:27	The Arad Ostraca	6 - Ramoth-negeb

2 SAMEUL

1:21	Story of Aqhat	2 - drought
2:18-23	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
		5 - single combat
5:6-8	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
5:8	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
7:1-17	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - propaganda
		5 - house for god
7:13	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - covenant
		4 - divine right rule
8:2	Enuma elish	5 - foot on foe
10:6-8	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal
		5 - alliance
12:15-17	Story of Aqhat	5 - seven day ritual
13:4-6	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - fake illness

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14:1-20	The Lament for Ur	1 - law
		3 - widows and orphans
15:1-6	The Story of Keret	5 - son's revolt
15:2	The Story of Aqhat	2 - gate
		4 - place of justice
15:3-5	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition
		4 - king and law
15:4	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law
		2 - petitioners
15:14	Story of Keret	5 - king's flight

1 KINGS

2:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - grey head
3:4-15	Story of Keret	1 - dream theophany
5:3-6	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - house for god
5:10-11	Diary of Wen-Amon	5 - cedars cut
		6 - cedars
9:15-20	Karatepe Inscription	1 - annal
		4 - propaganda
		5 - fortresses
12:4	Cyrus	2 - forced labour
		4 - social unrest
13:2	Visions of Neferti	1 - prophecy
		5 - southern king
16:23-24	Mesha Stele	6 - Omri / Samaria
17:12-16	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - oil
		4 - hospitality
18:36-45	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - god brings rain
18:42	Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - subjection
		5 - face in knees
19:19	The Gezer Calendar	2 - plowing
20:1-2	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
21:1-4	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - idols
		4 - use of idols / gain

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22:10	Story of Aqhat	2 - threshing floor
		4 - place of justice

2 KINGS

3:15	Diary of Wen-Amon	1 - prophecy
		5 - ecstatic
	The Mari Prophecies	1 - prophecy
		5 - ecstatic
3:20	The Arad Ostraca	6 - "Way of Edom"
4:8-17	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
4:34-37	Story of Keret	1 - miracle story
		5 - cure
5:10-14	Story of Keret	1 - miracle story
		5 - cure
9:1-10:33	Black Obelisk (Shalmaneser III)	6 - Jehu
9:16-26	Treaty (Ramses II / Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant
		2 - chariots
		4 - reciprocity
9:36	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - curse
		5 - dog eat corpse
14:9	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - fable
		5 - taunt
15:17-22	Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III	6 - tribute
17:3-6	Annals of Sargon II	6 - fall of Samaria
17:24	Karatepe Inscription	5 - deportation
18-19	Annals of Sennacherib	6 - siege
18:13-37	Diary of Wen-Amon	1 - threat
18:39-37	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
20:20	Siloam Inscription	6 - tunnel
24:1-17	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - siege / fall
24:10	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - siege
24:13-16	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - loot
24:17	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - new king

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1 CHRONICLES

17:1-14	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - house for god

2 CHRONICLES

32:30	Siloam Inscription	6 - tunnel

EZRA

1:1-4	Cylinder of Cyrus	6 - temple funds
6:1-15	Cylinder of Cyrus	6 - temple
6:3-5	Cylinder of Cyrus	6 - temple
6:15	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	2 - month

NEHEMIAH

1:1	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	2 - month
8:18	Story of Aqhat	5 - seven day ritual

ESTHER

2:2	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - anoint hair
3:7	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	2 - month

JOB

1:13-19	Story of Keret	5 - death of family
1:20	Story of Aqhat	4 - mourning ritual
		5 - tearing robe
3:17-19	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - death's release
5:26	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - analogy
		3 - stages of life
7:1-10	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - analogy
		3 - stages of life
7:13-14	Lament for Ur	2 - bed's comforts
8:5-7	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - good to come
10:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - dust of grave
10:20-22	The Eloquent Peasant	2 - afterlife

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		4 - concept of death
11:7	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - depths of god
14:7-14	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - afterlife
		4 - concept of death
15:2-4	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - unwise words
15:5	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - lying mouth
18:5-21	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked perish
20:20	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - eyes
21:2-3	The Sufferer and The Friend	1 - address mode
21:7-16	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked prosper
24:12	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - refuse to hear
38:16	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - springs of sea
39:5-8	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - wild ass
42:1-6	Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - submission
		5 - hero surrenders
42:10-15	Story of Keret	5 - new family

PSALMS

1	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - teaching
		2 - tree
8:1	Hymn to Aton	1 - hymn of praise
		2 - how majestic
8:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - child
		3 - unexpected wisdom
11:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
16:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - glad heart
22:22-26	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - hymn of praise
24:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - exhortation
		2 - lift up heads
25:17	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - legal petition
29:10	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - source of flood
31:15	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - worry
39:6	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
41:13	Lament for Ur	1 - doxology

42:1	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - spring / deer
49:5	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
49:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - lure of death
52:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - sharp words
52:7	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
62:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - riches
		3 - greed
	Teachings of Ahikar	3 - greed
64:2-7	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
68:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - cloud rider
	Story of Aqhat	2 - cloud rider
72:17	Karatepe Inscription	1 - blessing
		2 - name endures
74:13-14	Enuma elish	2 - dragon
95:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
96:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
97:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
101:8	Karatepe Inscription	2 - destroy wicked
		4 - civil order
103:14	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - creation story
		2 - clay shapes
		4 - anthropomorphism
104:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - cloud rider
	Story of Aqhat	2 - cloud rider
104:4-11	Hymn to Aton	2 - birds
104:20-21	Hymn to Aton	2 - darkness
104:22-23	Hymn to Aton	2 - daily schedule
104:24	Hymn to Aton	2 - sole power
104:25-26	Hymn to Aton	2 - sea
104:27	Hymn to Aton	2 - seasons
104:29-30	Hymn to Aton	2 - reliance on god

124:1-5	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - litany
		2 - "If not"
125:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - broken sceptre
126:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - wadis
129:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - plowing
		3 - affliction image
131:1	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - covet
132:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - footstool
132:18	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - shame
139:13	Hymn to Aton	2 - fertility
141:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - mouth of death
145:13	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - eternal kingdom

PROVERBS

1:8	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	4 - title of teacher
1:12	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - death swallows
1:17	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - saying form
2:1-5	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - address form
		2 - seek wisdom
2:4	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good advice
6:1-5	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - pay debt
6:2	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - lies
6:16-19	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - x / x+1
		3 - number progression
6:23-26	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
6:24	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - women
6:27-29	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
7:24-27	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
9:1	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - seven pillars
9:17	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
10:1	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
11:21	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - justice
12:4	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good wife
13:24	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - discipline

14:5	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - false witness
15:16	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - "Better" proverb
		3 - be satisfied
15:17	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - "Better" proverb
		3 - be satisfied
16:8	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - god's majesty
16:9	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - "Better" proverb
		3 - be satisfied
16:27	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - greed
17:1	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - "Better" proverb
		2 - eating
		3 - be satisfied
17:5	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - laugh / stricken
17:13	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - evil
19-22	Teachings of Amenemope	1 – "Better" proverb
		3 - be satisfied
19:18	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - discipline
19:21	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - god's majesty
20: 4	The Gezer Calendar	2 - planting
20:9	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - hypocrisy
20:20	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - honour parents
21:6	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - admonition
22:17-18	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - riches
		2 - heart
22:20	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition
		2 - study
22:20-21	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - thirty
22:22	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - rob poor
22:24	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - fool
22:25	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - bad company
22:26-27	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition
		2 - forgive debt
22:28	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - landmark
		4 - property taboo

22:29	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - skill
23:1	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - table manners
23:1-3	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - table manners
23:4	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - strive / greed
23:5	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - riches / wings
23:6-7	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - false oaths
23:8	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - vomit
		3 - waste
23:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - landmark
		4 - property taboo
23:11	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - please ruler
		4 - property taboo
25:11	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
25:13	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - reliability
25:15b	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - king's tongue
25:21-22	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - feed hungry
26:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - word
26:7	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
27:1	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - worry
27:3	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - debt
29:13	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - poor and rich
		3 - fate
29:14-16	Story of Keret	1 - law
		3 - widows and orphans
31:10-11 + 27-31	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good wife

ECCLESIASTES

3:1-10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - time
		3 - fate
3:3	Enuma elish	2 - power
3:12	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - be content
3:16	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - inconsistencies
		3 - anarchy
3:20	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - dust of grave

5:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - word
5:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - strife / greed
6:2-3	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - wealth
6:10	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - obey authority
9:7	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - wine
10:9	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - woodcutter
		3 - reversal
11:2	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - x / x+1
		3 - number progression

CANTICLES

2:5	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - love sick
2:10-13	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - fertile land
4:10	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - love / wine
5:1	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - intoxication
5:2-6	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - door / latch
		3 - double entendre
5:8	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - love sick
7:5	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - hair snare
		3 - trap
7:13	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - mandrake
7:13-14	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - mandrake
		3 - love garden

ISAIAH

5:6	The Gezer Almanac	2 - pruning vines
5:8-23	Lament for Ur	1 - prophecy
		2 - Woe!
5:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - death's mouth
6:10	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - see / not see
9:3	The Gezer Almanac	2 - harvest
10:2	Story of Keret	1 - law
		3 - widows & orphans
10:6	Story of Aqhat	2 - trample

10:15	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - obey authority
18:5	The Gezer Almanac	2 - pruning vines
22:21	The Karatepe Inscriptions	2 - father
29:16	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story
		2 - potter's clay
		4 - anthropomorphism
45:1	The Cylinder of Cyrus	4 - propaganda
		5 - chosen king
45:6	The Karatepe Inscription	1 - realm formula
		2 - rising sun
		4 - universal rule
45:9	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story
		2 - potter's clay
		4 - anthropomorphism
46:4	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - grey hair
51:17-18	The Story of Aqhat	5 - solace a drunk
63:3-6	The Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - divine war
		5 - wading in blood
64:9	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story
		2 - potter's clay
		4 - anthropomorphism

JEREMIAH

1:10	Enuma elish	1 - investiture
		2 - power
7:2-4	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - law
		4 - oath before god
		5 - argue case
7:33	The Annals of Shalmanezer III	5 - unburied bodies
9:4-5	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - neighbour
		3 - anarchy
9:21-22	The Lament of Ur	5 - dead in squares
11:5	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - land / honey
11:6	The Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree

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11:19	The Lament of Ur	2 - lamb / slaughter
	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - lamb / slaughter
12:1	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked prosper
13:23	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - professions
		3 - order in life
15:7	The Lament of Ur	2 - gate
		4 - site of justice
	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - winnowing
16:4	The Lament of Ur	5 - unburied bodies
16:6	The Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - destruction ritual
		5 - mourning
17:5-8	The Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree
18:2-6	Atrahasis	1 - creation story
		2 - potter's clay
		4 - anthropomorphism
21:4-5	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
26:16-19	The Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - immune prophets
		5 - immunity
26:20-22	The Lachish Letters	6 - Elnathan
30:4-5	The Lament of Ur	1 - petition
31:38-40	The Lament of Ur	1 - petition
		2 - restoration
34:1-7	The Cylinder of Cyrus	6 - Jerusalem
34:16-7	The Lachish Letters	6 - Azekah / Lachish
37:1	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - Zedekiah
40:10	The Gezer Almanac	2 - reaping fruit
51:2	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - winnowing
		4 - divine justice
51:59	The Arad Ostraca	6 - invasion of Judah

LAMENTATIONS

2:10	The Story of Balaam	2 - garment
		3 - reversal
		4 - mourning ritual

3:2	The Story of Balaam	2 - darkness
4:3-4	The Lament of Ur	2 - daughter
		3 - anarchy
4:5	The Lament of Ur	5 - dead revellers

EZEKIEL

8:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - mourning ritual
9:4	Visions of Neferti	2 - regret
17:5	Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree
22:7	The Story of Keret	1 - law
		3 - widows and orphans
27:30	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - destruction ritual
		5 - mourning
37	Lament of Ur	1 - prophecy
		3 - restoration
37:1-2	Annals of Shalmanezer III	2 - battlefield
37:9	Story of Aqhat	2 - breath of life

DANIEL

4:6	Visions of Neferti	5 - wise men
9:16-19	Visions of Neferti	1 - plea
		2 - restoration
11:2-4	Visions of Neferti	2 - divided land
11:14	Visions of Neferti	2 - take up arms
11:20-24	Visions of Neferti	2 - weak rulers
12:1	Visions of Neferti	5 - triumphant king

HOSEA

6:2	Teaching of Ahikar	2 - x / x+1
		3 - number progression
6:19	Teaching of Amenemope	2 - landmark
10:4	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - truth
11:1	The Mari Prophecies	2 - "raised you"
		3 - father / son

13:14-15	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - drying winds
14:9	Teaching of Amenemope	1 - admonition
		2 - guidance

JOEL

2:10	Story of Balaam	2 - darkness

AMOS

2:6-7	The Story of Keret	1 - law
		2 - hear poor
2:7	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - trample needy
2:8	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - law
		2 - pledge / garment
4:3	Lament for Ur	2 - breached wall
5:10	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - honest quieted
5:10-13	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - criminals
		3 - anarchy
5:12	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law
		2 - bribes
	The Story of Keret	2 - failed justice
5:14	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - evil for good
5:14-15	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - evil & good
		3 - anarchy
5:15	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition
		2 - justice
5:16	Lament for Ur	1 - lament
		2 - "Alas!"
5:18-20	Lament for Ur	3 - "Day of lord"
8:1	The Gezer Almanac	2 - summer fruit
8:4-6	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - false scales

MICAH

4:9	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - travail
6:3	The El Amarna Letters	1 - petition

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		2 - what done?
6:8	The Farmer and The Courts	3 - humility
	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - "do justice"
6:11	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - false scales
6:12	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - lying tongue

HABAKKUK

3:17	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - produce dies

ZECHARIAH

1:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - exhortation
		2 - "return"
7:1	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	2 - month
12:1-9	Lament for Ur	2 - "In that day"
		3 - Day of the lord

MALACHI

1:11	The Karatepe Inscription	1 - realm formula
		2 - rising sun
		4 - universal rule

Not all these parallels are of equal significance for the purposes of the present chapter. Some are more relevant than others when it comes to the reconstruction of the case against realism and the arguments against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament. Parallels like Utnapishtim and Noah or Sargon and Moses are of much more interest then, for example, parallels between Canticles and Egyptian Love songs or between Lamentations and the Lament for Ur.

Nevertheless, all have been included to give the reader an idea of the way the devil's advocate views the Old Testament: It is not divine revelation referring to extra-textual reality. Rather, it is a variety of all-too-human texts with no more relation to reality than the writings of other religions that long ago went the way of the dinosaurs.

According to the devil's advocate, Yahweh-as-depicted in texts with parallels to other (older) religions (suggesting creative constructivist practices on the part of the Old

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Testament authors) does not have an ontological status substantially different from that of any of the other deities depicted in such parallel scenarios. In short, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and does not exist.

5.2.2   Other parallels between Old Testament texts and folklore from around the world

The parallels in the previous section are generally limited to the Near East. There is no reference to possible parallels with other cultures in the vicinity and even the Near Eastern parallels are incomplete. A more detailed discussion of parallels between the Old Testament and various other cultures all over the world and over a larger time span can be found in the works of Frazer (1918) and Gaster (1969).

Gaster (1969:22-319) discusses the possible allusions to no less than 250 parallels between the Old Testament texts and myths, legends and customs of other peoples in both the immediate surroundings and elsewhere. The study of Gaster (1969) indicates not only possible sources of Old Testament folklore but also shows how a knowledge of the folklore and the myths, legends and customs of other peoples can assists in understanding the Old Testament texts. Many Old Testament texts that seem straightforward and orthodox turn out to be far more sinister or alien than the average dogma saturated modern reader could possibly imagine (cf. Gaster 1969:11).

If Gaster's identifications of allusions in the Old Testament texts to mythological motifs, legends and customs of other peoples are correct, then it is clear that 99.9% of people who read the Bible will never be able to appreciate the alien nature and contents of the Old Testament texts. Without the background knowledge of folklore, these sincere and faithful believers will never realise the extent to which their alleged "divine revelation" and "Word of God" is filled with superstition, fiction and everything orthodox theology always believed was only part of pagan religion (cf. also Harwood 1992:90 and passim).

The following are but a few examples of international folkloristic elements in the Old Testament identified by Gaster (1969):

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- Creating humans as representatives of the gods (cf. Gen 1:26-27)

- Creating humans as gardeners (cf. Gen 2:5b)

- Creation as a birth process (cf. Gen 2:4b, Ps 90:2)

- Creation as a war (cf. Ps 74:13-14; Job 26:12; Isa 51:9-10)

- The chance at immortality (cf. Gen 3:22-24)

- Extraordinary human life-span before the universal flood (cf. Gen 1-5)

- The loss of the golden age of innocence (cf. Gen 3:6-19)

- The blood crying from the earth (cf. Gen 4:10)

- The divine human offspring (cf. Gen 6:1-4)

- The power of curses (cf. Gen 9:20-25)

- The call of an individual to sire a nation (cf. Gen 12:1-2)

- Stairway to the heavens (cf. Gen 28:12)

- Wrestling with a deity (cf. Gen 32:22-33)

- Demons depart at dawn (cf. Gen 32:26)

- The barren wife motif (cf. Gen 12-35)

- The younger son rising to power (cf. Gen 12-50)

- Living a dream (cf. Gen 36-50)

- The "Bull" of Jacob (cf. Gen 49:24)

- The magical power of names and the need for secrecy (cf. Ex 3:13-14; cf. also Gen 32:27-28; Judg 13:17-18)

- Plagues as a result of divine disfavour (cf. Ex 9-12)

- The divine mountain (cf. Ex 19; 1 Kgs 19)

- The divine origin of the law (cf. Ex 19-20)

- The earth swallowing offenders (cf. Num 16:28-34)

- Bells as warning system (cf. Ex 28:35)

- Desert as demonic wasteland (cf. Lev 16:8-22)

- Food from heaven (cf. Ex 16; Num 11:4-35)

- Water from the rock (cf. Ex 17:1-7)

- Fortune as a result of divine favour (cf. Job 1:1-10; cf. also Gen 39:2-4; 2 Sam 6:11-12)

- The magical manipulation of luminaries (cf. Josh 10:12-14)

- Defeat and victory as signs of divine (dis) favour (cf. Judges:passim)

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- Stars as angels/gods/army (cf. Judg 5:21; Isa 14:12)

- The magical power in a hero's hair (cf. Judg 13-16)

- The necromantic consultation (cf. 1 Sam 28:7-21)

- Taboos on touching holy objects (cf. 2 Sam 6:6-9)

- The kings conduct affects the soil (cf. 2 Sam 21:1-9)

- The sin of a census (cf. 2 Sam 24:1-25)

- Asylum at the altar (cf. 1 Kgs 1:50)

- Ravens bringing food (cf. 1 Kgs 17:3-6)

- Divine deception (cf. 1 Kgs 13:11-34, 22:1-40)

- Ascension to heaven in a chariot of fire (cf. 2 Kgs 2:1-12)

- Human animal hybrid divine beings (cf. Isa 6:2)

- The birth of a divine child (cf. Isa 9:5-6)

- Kings and fallen divinities (cf. Isa 14:9-20)

- The divine assembly in the north (cf. Isa 14:12-14)

- The rebel constellations (cf. Isa 24:21)

- The chaos dragon (cf. Isa 27:1)

- Ruins as haunts of demons (cf. Isa 34:14)

- Fiery stones in the garden of the gods (cf. Ezek 28:12)

- The storm and the fish (cf. Jon 1:3-17)

- Pestilence and destruction following in the wake of the god (cf. Hab 3:5)

- Coming from and returning to mother earth (cf. Job 1:21)

- The sons of god (cf. Job 1:6)

- The wager (cf. Job 1-2)

- The shades beneath the waters (cf. Job 26:5)

- Sea as force of chaos (cf. Job 38:10-11)

- The gates of death (cf. Job 38:17)

- The fire-breathing dragon (cf. Job 41:10-11)

- The final judgement through fire (cf. Mal 4:1)

- The winged sun (cf. Mal 4:2)

- The divine adoption of kings (cf. Ps 2:7)

- The rivers of the netherworld (cf. Ps 18:5; Job 33:18, 36:12)

- The god-king (cf. Ps 45:7-8)

- The far reaches of the north and the source of the rivers (cf. Ps 48:3)

- Creation through theomachy (cf. Ps 74:13-17; Isa 51:9-10)

- Food of angels (cf. Ps 78:25)

- The celestial Zion (cf. Ps 87:1-2)

- The council of the gods (cf. Ps 82:1)

- The winged soul (cf. Ps 90:10)

- The coven of demons (cf. Ps 91:5-6)

- The book of fate/life (cf. Ex 32:32; Ps 69:29, 139:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21)

- Heaven as a garment (cf. Ps 104:2)

- Aluqah the vampire (cf. Prov 30:15)

- The tell tale bird (cf. Eccl 10:20)

As is apparent from this list of parallels to myth, legend and folklore from around the world, there is no shortage of these in the Old Testament texts. What is of particular interest for the purpose of this chapter, however, are the possible philosophical implications of such parallels in terms of realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts. As part of an attempt to spell these out, it might be prudent to anticipate possible objections to the devil's advocate's utilisation of these parallels for its own sinister purposes.

It is well known that many scholars, especially if they are conservative, might object to the listing of parallels and would claim that the alleged parallels are not such at all. It might be pointed out that there are substantial differences between the Old Testament and the myths of other religions and that the probability of borrowing or plagiarism cannot always be considered as being verifiable (cf. Eichrodt 1961:219; Archer 1992:33).

This objection is, however, upon closer scrutiny and at least in terms of the present context, irrelevant. It does not matter if the parallels are the result of dependency or because of reference to a common source or even if there is no meaningful relation between the biblical and extra-biblical materials. Whatever the relationship between the biblical and extra-biblical texts with regard to parallel motifs, if the story in the Old Testament features the particular motifs and is, technically speaking, fictitious,

then so is the character Yahweh whose person has become intertwined with the same motifs.

In addition, it should be emphasised that it is of little relevance whether the use of fiction and myth was cultural convention or seemingly justified from within the Semitic mindset. The fact remains that if the story is fictitious and demonstrably so, so is Yahweh depicted as a character therein. No matter what profound theological or religious "truth" is being communicated. No matter whether foreign mythological motifs have been completely reinterpreted, demythologised, modified and reapplied. If Yahweh never actually said or did what the story suggests he did then, as depicted, he has no exact corresponding extra-textual counterpart. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted in a story filled with folklorist motifs does not exist.

Moreover, it does not matter if a "mythical" Yahweh really did do what the text claims in the space of a "symbolic universe" or the "story world"/"world of the text" or in the minds/imaginations of his worshippers. From an ontological point of view, even if the language were meant to be understood as "metaphorical" and even though it might be "true" as a parable can be true, yet fiction, the ontological status of the character as depicted in the particular discourse remains fictitious.

Consequently, pointing out the differences between the mythological motifs in the Old Testament and those in parallel to it changes nothing with regard to the ontological status of the character Yahweh partaking in the mythical and fictional version of whatever real event may have actually happened. Even if some grounds remain for believing in the existence of an extra-textual counterpart for Yahweh, realism with regard to these particular depictions of the deity is as problematic as ever. No matter to what extent a particular mythological motif has been adapted and recontextualised to fit in with what was supposed to be revelation in actual historical events.

Then again, some scholars might believe that the superstitious elements in the text's depiction of Yahweh are no problem given the fact that little more should be expected from the ancient people within their own cultural limited worldview which differed greatly from that of the modern or post-modern West. Once again, as was emphasised

earlier, objections of this sort, apart from stating the obvious, are irrelevant in the attempt to salvage realism.

The present critique against the biblical authors has nothing to do with whether they knew science or not. Rather, it concerns the possibility regarding whether or not they told stories about Yahweh that never actually happened. The problem here is not merely that such forms of storytelling may have been a common convention. Neither is the dilemma related to whether the stories contain errant and superstitious beliefs about the world merely on the part of its culturally conditioned human characters.

What is problematic is, as pointed out in the previous chapter, the fact that the biblical authors claimed that a supposedly informed and virtually omniscient creator deity called Yahweh revealed himself and his own ideas about the world to someone, when the alleged revelations themselves contain superstitious cultural folklore. In other words, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the cognitive adherence to the reality of myth and superstition is not limited to the fallible human characters depicted in the text. Instead, treating myth and superstition as facts is embarrassingly part and parcel of the deity's own mindset.

As already pointed out, if this is the case then either Yahweh himself must be ignorant and his knowledge culturally and historically determined. This, of course, given his alleged role and status in the great scheme of things, is altogether impossible. Or, alternatively, no real Yahweh ascribes to such beliefs. The depictions in which he actually does appear to do so are but the fictitious constructs of his human speechwriters.

However, if this is the case then, as noted earlier, whatever God there may be, Yahweh as depicted in the text is essentially a literary construct, a human projection and is *ipso facto* a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart. In other words, whether we believe that a supposedly existing extra-textual divinity called Yahweh does or does not himself believe in fictitious entities and events, the implication either way seems to be that the deity depicted in the text does not exist.

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5.2.3   Syncretism in Old Testament Yahwism

Comparing Yahweh with other mythical deities such as Zeus or Baal may not be as far-fetched as some people with little knowledge of comparative religion may suppose. Even so, the ontological implications of the phenomenon of syncretism in Old Testament religion are seldom made explicit by those who dabble in comparative mythology. In this section, a short introductory overview will be provided to demonstrate why traces of marked syncretism in the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism may be problematic for realism in Old Testament theology.

5.2.3.1   Similarities in the depictions of Yahweh and the gods of the ancient Near East

Many studies have demonstrated what appears to be marked syncretism in the God-talk of Old Testament religion (cf. Smith 2001:10-12). The works of scholars such as Smith (1990, 2001), De Moor (1997), Van der Toorn (1999), Day (2000) and others, have proven beyond reasonable doubt that the profile of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts appears to be a something of a hybrid construction. They ways in which the nature and attributes of Yahweh are articulated seem indubitably based on motifs from neighbouring Canaanite mythology (cf. also Albright 1968:02; Gibson 1977:passim).

Apparently, in their attempt to depict the god Yahweh, the authors from the Old Testament were not simply describing a unique entity based on what they knew from actual divine revelation or inspiration. Instead, it can be demonstrated that these people reconstructed a chimerical character for the deity that has more in common with the myths of Canaan than both the Old Testament authors and orthodox believers who like to believe.

It is therefore rather ironic that Yahweh was frequently depicted as being unduly obsessed with being recognised as being unique and completely unlike any of the abominable deities of the Canaanites. However, when it comes to his alleged revelation, the way in which Yahweh thinks of himself and the modes of his revelation seldom succeed in providing anything other than what was already believed

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regarding the deities of Canaanite myths and legends.

Consider the following ways in which the character of Yahweh appears to be nothing more than a watered down version of his predecessors in the Promised Land (cf. Day 2000:13-41, 68-90).

a)   Parallels between Yahweh and El

- There is no explicit and direct polemic in the Old Testament against the god El (cf. also Smith 1990:30).

- The Patriarchs apparently worshipped a Canaanite deity called El (cf. Gen 12-36; Josh 24).

- The divinity referred to in the theophoric suffix in the name Israel is El (cf. Gen 32:33, 35:10).

- Yahweh is often referred to as El (with or without qualification) (cf. Gen 17:1, Deut 6:2, Job 3-31 and passim).

- Yahweh, like El, is called the "Bull" (not "mighty one") (of Jacob) (cf. Gen 49:24; Ps 132:5).

- Like El, Yahweh is described as being a creator, a shepherd and a kind and merciful father (cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 23; Hos 11:8-9).

- Like El, Yahweh is depicted as an aged anthropomorphic deity (cf. Dan 7:13).

- Like El, Yahweh has a divine council that surrounds his throne (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20-23; Isa 6:3; Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:5; Job 1:6).

- Yahweh, like El, is called the father of humanity (cf. Jer 3:19; Mal 2:10).

- Yahweh, like El, lives at the source of the rivers amid the cosmic flood (cf. Ps 47:5; Isa 33:21; Ezek 47:1; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8).

- Yahweh, like El, is often depicted as dwelling in a tent (cf. Ps 15:1; 27:5; etc.).

- In actual historical pre-exilic Israelite religion, Yahweh, like El, was often worshipped as the head of a pantheon with Asherah as his consort (cf. Smith 1990:32).

b)   Parallels between the depictions of Yahweh and Baal

- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as a storm deity (cf.. Ex 19-20; 1 Kgs 18; Ps 29, Jer 14:22).

- Yahweh like Baal, has thunder as his voice (cf. Ex 19:19, 20:18, 24:12; Deut 5:21, 33:2; Judg 5:4; Ps 18:13; 1 Sam 7:10; Isa 30:27; Am 1:2; Ps 29:3; Job 37:5; 38:34).

- Yahweh, like Baal, hurls the lightning as like a spear or shoots it like an arrow (cf. Ps 29:7; Job 37:12-13; 38:25; etc.).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is designated as a rider of the clouds (cf. Ps 18:13; Isa 19:1).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as a son of El (cf. Deut 32:8-9?; Job 1:6?).

- Yahweh, like Baal, defeated the serpent Leviathan (Ug. *Lotan*) (cf. Pss 74:14; 89:11; Job 26:12; Isa 27:1).

- Yahweh, like Baal, had a conflict with Yam (the sea) (cf. Ex 15:1-12; Pss 89:10, 104:7, 136:13; Job 38:10-11).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is sometimes depicted in the form of a bull/calf (cf. Gen 49:24; Ex 32:4; 1 Kgs 12:28).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is often referred to as Elyon, "Most High" (cf. Gen 14:18, Num 24:16).

- Yahweh, like Baal, has a divine cosmic mountain in the far north (Zaphon) (cf. Ps 48:3; Isa 14:13).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as victorious over Mot (death) and is designated "the living God" (cf. Isa 26:19; Sam-Kgs:passim; Ps 42:3; etc.).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is called "Lord" (Baal/Adon) (cf. 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Chron 8:33,34; 14:7 and OT passim).

These parallels do not exhaust the affinities between Yahweh and the Canaanite deities. The studies by Smith (1990), Keel & Uehlinger (1998), Van der Toorn (1999), Day (2000) and others also contain detailed discussions on allusions in Old Testament God-talk to other Canaanite divinities such as Resheph, the Rephaim, etc.

There also exists a substantial quantity of research demonstrating the existence of numerous other parallels between Old Testament depictions of Yahweh and the gods of the other non-Canaanite nations of ancient Near East e.g. Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, etc. (cf. e.g. Keel 1978, Bostrom 1990; Taylor 1993; Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Smith 1990, 2001; Van der Toorn 1999).

There are several dilemmas for realism given the existence of such marked syncretism:

1. The syncretistic features in the depiction of Yahweh are *older* than Yahwism.

2. These pagan depictions are not believed to be the result of actual divine revelation.

3. The pagan deities to whom the particular features were ascribed are considered to

be non-existent.

4. The character of Yahweh in the Old Testament is often constructed from the building blocks of such mythological discourse.

If this is true, then:

1. Yahweh as thus depicted has the same ontological status of the discourse in which he is depicted.

2. Yahweh as thus depicted is therefore himself a character of mythology.

3. Yahweh-as-depicted has the same ontological status as other mythological gods.

4. Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

In other words, if there is not really and literally a kind old man living at the source of the waters, then El as thus depicted does not really exist. If there is not really an actual rider of the clouds who has a divine abode on a mountain in the north and whose voice is the thunder and who defeated the chaos dragon, then Baal does not exist. And if neither of these deities exist and the descriptions depicting them have no extra-textual counterparts, it follows that Yahweh as similarly described is also, technically, a character of mythology.

If there is no Leviathan, no mountain of the gods in the north, no palace in the skies, how can Yahweh depicted as defeating Leviathan, meeting the gods in the north and living in a sky-kingdom be real? Like Baal and El, he is a mythical entity and no more. Objectively assessed and without resorting to double standards, the possibility that Yahweh as depicted in such mythical discourse could still exist must be considered as being no greater than the possibility that the mythical El or Baal actually exists.

5.2.3.2   Miscellaneous syncretistic features in the cult of Yahweh

What often goes unnoticed by many realists – yet seems quite significant and also oddly suspicious – is the fact that, with regard to basic structures and operations, the cult of Yahweh is not at all very different from the cults of any other ancient deity (cf. Clements 1965:05; Gillooly 1992:21).

Think about it. Why would the real and only God, the entity Yahweh so often claims to be, model his worship in almost every way on how all the allegedly non-existent pagan deities that he so abhors were worshipped before his arrival on the religious scene?

Though seemingly related to mundane matters of fact, when one thinks about it, the following parallels between the cult of Yahweh and those of other ancient Near Eastern deities make the devil's advocate very suspicious. It cannot help but wonder if the ontological status of the Old Testament god is any different from the deities whose structures and contents of worship Yahweh seems to have adopted and adapted for the organisation and functioning of his own cult.

- Like other deities, Yahweh demands worship telling him how wonderful he is.
- Like other deities, Yahweh demands the killing of animals for sacrificial purposes.
- Like other deities, Yahweh's earthly abode is a divine mountain.
- Like other deities, Yahweh's urban abode is a temple of the same architectural design as other ancient Near Eastern temples.
- Like other deities, Yahweh has the king as his adopted son.
- Like other deities, Yahweh is worshipped under titles such as "shepherd", "king", "father" and "warrior".
- Like other deities, Yahweh's will and word are mediated by priests and prophets.
- Like other deities, Yahweh sometimes appears in theophany, in human form and in dreams.
- Like other deities, Yahweh seldom appears in person but sends messengers to communicate his will.

- ▪ Like other deities, Yahweh rules his people through written divine law.
- ▪ Like other deities, Yahweh can be addressed mainly in prayer.
- ▪ Like other deities, Yahweh is mainly a national deity despite greater influence.
- ▪ Like other deities, Yahweh demands ritualised worship including fasting, etc.
- ▪ Like other deities, Yahweh institutes food taboos.
- • Etc.

Since modern Christian culture still contains the remnants of ritualised worship and is often ignorant, uncritical and unreflective when it comes to the Old Testament text, these cultic elements are usually taken for granted. They are perceived to be ordinary, matter of fact and natural elements of organised religion.

However, as post-modern ideological criticism, history of religion and comparative religion have demonstrated, such religious practices operate on certain assumptions regarding the nature of the cosmos that is now considered to be outdated. As was argued in the previous chapter, what Yahweh is, does and expects, clearly show that both he and his world are a projection of Iron Age culture in which it seemed unproblematic to envision the entire cosmos as a state (cf. Frankfort 1946a:67-79; 1946b:22).

The fact that these religious practices are found in all ancient Near Eastern religions and *predate* the rise of Yahwism shows that their presence in the religion of Israel is not, as traditionally believed, a product of the aftermath of actual divine revelation commanding such cultic forms of life. Rather, such practises arose out of the various times and phases of the life of the Hebrew people whose religion is what it is because of the way people in general worshipped their gods (cf. Barr 1984:61).

In terms of general and basic cultic rites, the religion of Yahweh did therefore not differ substantially from that of its neighbours. In fact, if critical scholarship is to be believed, most of the rites, feasts, rules, laws and prescriptions were in any way adopted from the religions of other peoples and adapted to create an independent local religious and socio-cultural identity (cf. De Vaux 1961:281).

In other words, the supposed uniqueness of Yahwism lies more in terms of specific

content than with regard to basic structures of the cult. Whether it concerns the priesthood, the prophetic movements or the spirituality of the sages, very little, if anything, in terms of the fundamental orientation and features of Yahweh's religion were actually unique and original. Yet the possible philosophical significance of this observation for the devil's advocate's case against realism can easily be overlooked.

To illustrate how phenomena such as the all-too-common basic structural elements of the cult of Yahweh may have anti-realist implications for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, the devil's advocate intends to make use of a single yet devastating example. Consider, if you will, exhibit A – the Solomonic temple, the construction of which was allegedly commanded by Yahweh himself (cf. 1 Kgs 5-6; 7:15-9:9).

Numerous studies have confirmed the suspicion that the architecture of this temple resembles that of Phoenician temples dedicated to pagan deities (cf. De Vaux 1961:316-317). Many of the furnishings of the temple of Yahweh even appear to allude to mythological motifs in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

For example, the twelve bulls and the sea of bronze are strangely reminiscent of pagan symbolism depicting the deities El, Baal and Yam (cf. 1 Kgs 4:23-26). The *cherubim* resemble the mythical mixomorphs of Syro-Phoenician and Babylonian iconography. The fact that the temple was also called a "palace" or "house" of Yahweh and was situated on a "holy hill" alludes to the myths about the abode of the god(s) on the cosmic mountain at the source of the rivers (cf. Pss 46, 48 and Clifford 1972:212). The division of the sanctuary into three courts (i.e. Ulam, Hekal and Debir) also presumes the factuality of mythical symbolism and was very common in pre-Israelite heathen temples (cf. De Vaux 1961:317).

Given these parallels between Yahweh's temple and that of allegedly non-existing pagan divinities, the question arises as to why Yahweh – if he actually existed and hated pagan religious phenomena as the Old Testament texts insist – would command Solomon to let pagans build his temple according to their mythical conceptions of the cosmos? Surely the fact that the temple of Yahweh was built according to pagan models and furnished with structures alluding to pagan mythology either imply that

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Yahweh did not command this or that he is no different from pagan deities (e.g. he does not exist).

Apparently realism on this issue faces a double bind. If Yahweh did command the building of a mythical microcosm modelled on pagan superstitions, then he is no different from any other ancient deity and therefore does not exist. Alternatively, even if there is a real god called Yahweh, if this god did not literally command the building of his mythical abode, then the deity Yahweh depicted as commanding the building of his mythical abode is a character of fiction and does not exist. Whichever of these two options one prefers, unless they constitute a false dichotomy somehow overlooked by the devil's advocate, Yahweh-as-depicted is not real and the devil's advocate rests its case.

5.2.3.3   Examples of the belief in magic and superstition in the Old Testament

Not only are there many parallels between the Old Testament texts' depictions of Yahweh and the "myths" of other peoples. The devil's advocate would also like to discuss the anti-realist implications of the fact that both the people of the Old Testament *and their god* believed in the possibility of magic and a host of related superstitious ideas that were once popularly believed to be only endemic to pagan religions.

Many studies on magic in the Old Testament have already seen the light. Included in the devil's advocate's list of consulted works are the studies of, amongst others, Robertson Smith (1927); Oesterly & Robinson (1930); Guillaume (1938); Frazer (1963), Saggs (1978) and, somewhat more recently, a detailed analysis of the phenomenon by Jeffers (1996).

Limitations of space prohibit the devil's advocate from engaging in an in-depth discussion of this interesting topic as it features in the Old Testament texts. For this the reader is kindly referred to the aforementioned works. For present purposes, however, an overview of the examples of magic in the Old Testament text as identified by Jeffers (1996) should suffice.

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As should be apparent from the lists to follow, the Old Testament peoples *and their god* were no less superstitious than the pagans they so loved to polemise against. To substantiate this claim, the devil's advocate provides the following examples of magical practitioners and divining practices in the Old Testament as delineated by Jeffers (1996:1-257).

a)   Types of diviners, magicians and oracular practitioners

- Spellbinders (cf. Deut 18:9ff; Isa 47:9,12; Ps 58:6)
- Court seers (cf. 2 Sam 24:11-13; 1 Chron 25:3,5; Isa 30:9-10; Mic 3:7; Am 7:12)
- Mantic sages (cf. Gen 41:8,33; Ex 7:11; Deut 2:4-5; Isa 3:3,19:11-12; Daniel; Esth 1:13)
- Miracle performers or dream interpreters (cf. Gen 41:8,24; Dan 1:20; Ex 7:11,22; 8:3,14,15; 9:11)
- Medicine men (cf. Isa 3:3)
- Priests with oracular functions (cf. Judg 18:5; 1 Sam 2:28, 14:18f; 23:9-12; 30:7f; 22:10,13,15)
- Oracular attendant and healer? (cf. Deut 10:8, 17:8-13, 24:8, 27:9-27, 33:8ff; Judg 17-18)
- Semitic herbalists (cf. Deut 18:10-11; Mic 5:12-13; cf. also Isa 47:9-12; Dan 1:20, 2:2,10,27, 4:4,7; 5:7,11,15)
- Enchanters (cf. Ps 58:6; Eccl 10:11; Jer 8:17; cf. also Ps 41:7; Isa 3:3)
- Omen observers (cf. Gen 44:5,15; cf. also Gen 30:27; 1 Kgs 20:33; Num 24:1)
- Soothsayers (cf. Deut 18:11,14; Jer 27:9; Isa 2:6b; Mic 5:12; Judg 9:37)
- Channels of divine power (cf. Judg 4:4-5, 1 Sam 7:6ff, 9:9; 1 Kgs 14:1-17, 17:17, 22:11; 2 Kgs 1:9-18, 2:14, 4:9-37, 5, 6:5, 7:1-2; Ezek 13:17-19)
- One who obtains oracles by drawing lots (cf. Num 23:23; Mic 3:6; Prov 16:10)
- Seers (cf. Num 24:3; 1 Sam 6:2ff; 2 Chron 16:7-10)
- Evildoers? (cf. Ps 5:5,10; 6:9-10; 28; 41:5-9; 59:4; 64:3,5; 94:4; Isa 59:4)
- Oracle attendants? (cf. Isa 29:1-7, 33:7)
- Astrologers (cf. Jer 51:27; Nah 3:17)
- Diviners (cf. Nah 3:17)
- Sheep-tender or hepatoscopist? (cf. 2 Kgs 3:4; Am 1:1)

- Those who ensnare (cf. Isa 47:15; Ps 91:4)
- Wicked ones (cf. Pss 3,17,91)
- Magician or trader? (cf. Isa 47:15; Neh 3:31-32, 13:20; cf. Nah 3:16; Ezek 17:4)

b)   Dreams and visions

- *Mantic dreams*, i.e. simple message dreams (cf. Gen 20:3, 31:11-24, 37:5ff, 41:32); symbolic dreams (cf. Gen 40:9ff, 41; Judg 7:13; Dan 2); and incubation dreams (cf. Gen 28:10ff; 1 Sam 3; 1 Kgs 3; Ps 91)

- *Oracle visions* (cf. Num 12:6; Jer 23:25ff.) e.g. Balaam (cf. Num 24); Michaiah (cf. 1 Kgs 22); Amos (cf. 8:1-2); visions of the slaughter of the guilty (cf. Ezek 9:1-10; Isa 21:1-10); Daniel (cf. Dan 7-8)

c)   Divining techniques and devices

Techniques:

- Astrology and hemerology (cf. Judg 5:20; Josh 10:12c-13c; 1 Sam 9:25; Am 5:26; Isa 47:12-15)
- Hepatoscopy (cf. Ezek 21:21; Ex 29:13,22; Lev 3:3-4, 7:4; 8:16,25; 9:10,19; 10:4)
- Hydromancy (cf. Gen 14:7, 44:5-15; 1 Kgs 9; Num 5:11-28; 19:1-10; Deut 21:1-9)
- Necromancy (cf. Deut 18:11; Lev 19:31, 20:6; Isa 8:19-20, 28:7-22; 1 Chron 10:13; cf. 1 Sam 28; Isa 19:3, 65:4)
- Oneiromancy (cf. Gen 37-50; Dan 2-12; Zech 1-6)
- Rhabdomancy (cf. Hos 4:12; Jer 10:3; cf. also Ex 4:2, 7:8-13; Num 17ff, 20:1-3; Gen 30:31-39; Jer 1:11; Josh 8:18-26; Ezek 21:26; 2 Kgs 13:15ff.; Isa 11:4)

Devices:

- The Ark (cf. 1 Sam 14:18; cf. also Judg 20:27-28; 1 Sam 6; 2 Sam 11:11; 15:24f)
- The Ephod (cf. 1 Sam 14:15ff; 23:6,9; 30:7-8; cf. also Judg 8:27; 17-18; Hos 3:4)
- The Urim and Thummim (cf. Ex 28:29-30; Lev 8:8; Deut 33:8; Num 27:21; 1

Sam 28:6; Ezra 2:63 = Neh 7:65; 1 Sam 14:41)

- The Tent of Meeting (cf. Ex 33:7-23; Num 11:16-30, 12:4-10)
- The Teraphim (cf. 2 Kgs 23:24; 1 Sam 15:23; Judg 17:5; Hos 3:4; Zech 10:2; Ezek 21:21; cf. also 1 Sam 19:11-17; Gen 31)

d)   Magical elements in the treatment of diseases

Magical transfer (cf. Lev 14:1-8, 49-53; Num 21:4-9; 2 Kgs 4:29-37; 5:10-14:31)

e)   Magical elements in warfare

- Preparatory rituals: consultation (cf. Judg 20:27-28; 1 Sam 14:18; 28:6; 30:7; 1 Kgs 22:15; cf. also Judg 7:13; Jer 21:21; 38:14; 2 Chron 20:3; 1 Kgs 22:5; 2 Chron 18:4-5)
- Protection (cf. Josh 3:5; 1 Sam 21:5; cf. also 1 Sam 11:5-11; 2 Sam 1:21; Isa 21:5; Num 21:29, 22:5-6; 1 Sam 17:43f. Mic 5:4-5)
- Practices during wartime (cf. Ezek 21:21; cf. 2 Kgs 13; Josh 6)
- After the battle (cf. Josh 6:26)

f)   Magical roots of blessing and curse (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 1 Sam 14; Josh 7)

- The use of the curse in wartime (cf. above)
- The use of the oath in legal matters (cf. Num 5:12ff.; Judg 17:1f.; Zech 5:1-4; cf. also Ex 22:7,10; Deut 28)
- The use of the curse in the cult (cf. Gen 27:1-45; Deut 33; Josh 24; Deut 11:26-32; 27-29)
- Miscellanea ("woe formulas"; cf. Isa 29:1; Jer 13:27; Nah 3:1; Zeph 3:1 cf. also Deut 21; Num 19)
- Protection against curses (cf. Jer 36:23; 2 Sam 16:9; 1 Kgs 2:46; Judg 17: 2; 1 Kgs 2:45; 2 Sam 21:1-3; Ex 12:32)

From the perspective of someone who studies religion anthropologically or historically, these traces of magic and divination in the Old Testament might simply

come across as interesting or useful data. From an anti-realist philosophical-critical perspective, however, one must ask the question whether such magic is possible and regarding the nature of its ontological status.

In most of these references to magic and divination in the Old Testament, the particular magical practices are part of orthodox forms of Yahwism and involve the character Yahweh himself. Even when certain practices were considered taboo and vehemently polemised against (e.g. necromancy), never once is the antagonism motivated by a belief that the practice in question is merely superstition or simply impossible. Even Yahweh's tirades against some of the magical practices introduced into his cult shows that even the deity himself believes in the reality and possibility of magic. It should therefore be no surprise that most of the magical practices listed above were not the objects of criticism but part and parcel of the worship of Yahweh.

Since, according to the devil's advocate, the acts of magic referred to in the Old Testament texts are based on superstitious assumptions about the nature of reality, devastating ontological implications follow. If magic is not real then Yahweh depicted as a deity who believes in and assumes the actual possibility of such magic must himself be a character of fiction. In short, Yahweh depicted as being a part of and believing in the functionality of magical rites does not exist.

To these examples of references to magic in the Old Testament as discussed by Jeffers (1996), many more instances of related types of primitive superstition in the texts can be added (cf. De Vaux 1961:274-288; Cryer 1994:107-131). In the present study, however, there will only be room for a cursive listing of some examples of such beliefs.

In this regard, the studies of Smith (1927) and Oesterly & Robinson (1930) will form the basis of the devil's advocate's next excursion and should be consulted for a more detailed treatment of the particular issues.

According to Oesterly & Robinson (1930:18), the Old Testament contains numerous remains of *animistic* beliefs. The first example noted by the authors concerns the many (often-overlooked) references to *sacred trees* in the biblical texts. These trees

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marked sacred locales where theophanies were expected, ancient sanctuaries established, the divine presence intensified and where religious rites were performed.

According to Oesterly & Robinson (1930:18-28), examples of sacred trees in the Old Testament include, the Terebinth of the Teacher (Gen 12:6-8); the Terebinth of Mamre (Gen 13:18, 18:1); the Tamarisk in Beersheba (Gen 21:33); the Terebinth of the Oracle (Gen 35:4; Josh 24:26-27; Judg 9:6); the Oak of Weeping (Gen 35:8); the burning thorn bush (Ex 3:2-5; cf. also Deut 33:16); the Oak of Beza Anannim (Josh 19:33); the Palm Tree of Deborah (Judg 4:4-5; 1 Sam 10:3); the Terebinth of Ophrah (Judg 6:11-24); the Terebinth of the Soothsayers (Judg 9:37); the Palm of Baal (Judg 20:33); the Pomegranate Tree of Judgement (1 Sam 14:2); the Terebinth of the valley (1 Sam 17:2); the Tamarisk of the height (1 Sam 22:6); the Tamarisk of the Burying (1 Sam 31:13; cf. 1 Chron 10:12, "terebinth"); the balsam trees (2 Sam 5:23-24); the Terebinth (of the Oracle?) (1 Kgs 13:14); etc.

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:29-37) also believe that the remains of animism in the Old Testament can be found in the apparent belief in *sacred waters*. At these locations as well, the intensification and manifestation of divine presence in nature were supposedly operative and rites of healing and judgement were enacted. In addition, it is at these locations where various types of divination were practised and where a variety of ritual cleansings were performed.

Examples of such sacred waters allegedly include, the Spring of Decision (Gen 14:7); the Spring of the Sun (Josh 15:7; 18:17); the Spring of the Kid (2 Chron 10:2; cf. Gen 14:7); the Spring of the Two Calves (Gen 14:5); the Spring of the Partridge (1 Sam 21:20); the Spring of the Dragon (Neh 2:13); the Well of Inquiring (1 Kgs 1:9); the Well of Trembling (Judg 7:1); the Living Well (Num 21:17-18); the Well of the Seven (Spirits) (Gen 21:22-23); the Well of (my) Seeing and Living (Gen 32:30); the Mistress of the Well (Josh 19:8); the rivers Kishon and Gihon (Judg 5:21; 1 Kgs 1:33-34; cf. Deut 21:4); etc

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:38-47) also claim to have detected traces of animistic belief in the Old Testament's conceptions of *sacred mountains, rocks and stones*. At these locations, the people believed the divine was present in a unique way. Certain

spectacular natural phenomena often occurred in the vicinity of the mountains (volcanoes, thunderstorms, etc) and these were believed to be indicative of the presence of the deity. Sanctuaries were often located in the immediate vicinity of these locations.

Examples of this particular type of animistic phenomena allegedly include, Mount Sinai / Horeb (The Mountain of Yahweh; Num 10:33); Mount Peor (Num 23:28-30); Mount Pisgah (Num 23:14); Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 19); Mount Tabor (Josh 19:22); The Mount of Olives (2 Sam 2 Sam 15:30-32); the Hill of Gibeah (1 Sam 10:5); High places (1-2 Kings:passim); the Stone / Pillar of Beth El (Gen 28:11-22; cf. also 35:14-15); the Stone of Witness (Gen 31:44-48); the Stone of Witness/Hearing (Josh 24:26-27); the Stones of Memorial (Josh 4:1-14), the Stone of Help (1 Sam 4:1, 5:1, 7:12); the Stone of Covering (Josh 15:6; 18:17); the Serpent Stone (1 Kgs 1:9); the Stone of Direction (1 Sam 6:14); the uncut stones of altars (Deut 27:5,6; Josh 8:31); the 12 gemstones of the breastplate of the high priest (Ex 28:15-21); etc.

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:48-66) also discuss the alleged traces of other superstitious elements in the texts, i.e.

- Remnants of totemism, e.g.:

   a) the names of tribes based on the names of animals: Simeon (hyena); Leah/Levi (wild cow); Deborah (bee); Rachel (cow); Caleb (dog); Shobal (lion); etc.;

   b) the worship of animals (cf. Ezek 8:10; Isa 45:17);

   c) theophoric elements in personal names (Abiyah and Ahiyah [Yahweh is my father/Yahweh is my brother (sic)];

   d) the spiritual connection between a god and his people (e.g. people as sons and daughters of a god, e.g. Chemosh; cf. Num 21:29);

   e) the belief that some humans are born from stones (cf. Jer 2:27).

- Taboos, i.e. things that were either holy or unclean, e.g.:

a) certain animals (cf. Lev 11; Deut 14:7-20);

b) certain actions requiring a purification ceremony (i.e. touching the dead, menstruating, wet dreams, touching a leper, coming into contact with dead animals, giving birth, having sex, etc.; cf. Lev 5:27ff, 11:32ff; 1 Sam 21:4ff; 2 Sam 11:4; etc.).

- Ancestor worship, e.g.:

    a) apparently the original context of mourning customs (cf. Oesterly & Robinson 1930:57);

    b) caring for and feeding the dead (cf. Oesterly & Robinson 1930:59);

    c) the names of certain ancestors indicative of divinity (e.g. Gad/Meni = Fortune);

    d) graves as the locations for sanctuaries (e.g. the graves of Sarah, Deborah, Joseph, Miriam, Rachel, etc.);

    e) the roles of the *Teraphim* (nourishers / shades / spectres) as household gods (cf. 31:19,30-35; Judg 17:5; 1 Sam 19:13,16) and media of divination (Judg 18:14,17,20; 1 Sam 15:23; 2 Kgs 23:24; Hos 3:4; Ezek 21:26; Zech 10:2).

- The belief in demons, i.e.

    a) *Theriomorphic demons, e.g.*:

        1) the *Seraphim* – "those who burn" (cf. Num 21:6; Deut 8:15; Isa 14:29, 30:6);

        2) the *Se'irim* – "the hairy ones" (cf. Lev 17:7; 2 Kgs 23:8; 2 Chron 11:15; Isa 13:21; 34:14);

        3) *Azaz'el* - (etymology uncertain) (cf. Lev 16:7-28);

        4) various demons of the waste (cf. Isa 13:21-22);

        5) *robets* - "one-that-couch" (at the door) (cf. Gen 4:7).

    b) *Anthropomorphic demons, e.g.:*

        1) *Lillith* - a female night demon (cf. Isa 34:14; cf. also Ps 91:5;

Ruth 3:8-9?);

2) *Aluqah* - a female vampire / flesh devouring ghoul (cf. Prov 30:15);

3) "night terrors" and "arrows of the day" (cf. Ps 91:5-6, 121:6);

4) *Resheph / Deber* - demon of plague and pestilence (cf. Hab 3:5);

5) *Qeteb* - a demon of destruction (cf. Deut 32:24; Hos 13:14); cf. also as allusions to demonology in "the valley of demons" (cf. Gen 14:3); the "fringes" (cf. Num 15:38); and other protective amulets (cf. Gen 35:4, 38:18-25; Ex 28:33; Deut 22:12; Judg 8:24; Isa 3:20ff);

6) *sedim* - "demons" (cf. Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37);

7) *s'ar'bim* - "liers in wait" who cause discord (cf. 2 Chron 20:22);

8) *the resha'ah* - the woman of sin (cf. Zech 5:8).

c) Larger chaos entities, e.g.:

1) *Leviathan* (cf. Job 41:3-35; Ps 74:14, Isa 27:1);

2) *Behemoth* (cf. Job 40:15-32);

3) *Rahab* (cf. Job 26:12, Ps 89:11; etc.);

4) *Satan* (cf. 1 Chron 21:1, contra Zech 3:1-2; Job 1-2);

5) *Yam* (cf. Ex 15; Job 26:12; 38:10-11; Ps 89:10, 93:4, etc.).

Then, of course, there is the belief in the powers in the skies. The presentation to follow is not intended to be a systematic exposition of "who's who?" in the heavens. Rather, the designations of entities referred to below, instead of constituting a harmonious census of sky-powers, are to be seen as simply an arbitrarily constructed list of celestial beings (whose identities sometimes overlap) encountered in the texts of the Old Testament (cf. Eichrodt 1961:194-209).

a) gods (cf. Gen 3:22; Ex 18:11, 22:28; Judg 11:36; 1 Sam 26:13; Pss 82:1-6; 89:7, 95:3; 97:7-9; Isa 14:13; Ezek 28:12; Dan 11:39; etc.);

b) sons of the god (cf. Gen 6:1-4; Deut 32:8; Job 1-2; etc.);

c) holy ones (cf. Deut 33:2; Ps 89:6,8; Job 5:1, 15:15; etc.);

d) the army of Yahweh (cf. Gen 32:2f; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18; Ps 148:2; etc.);

e)   angels (messengers) (cf. Zech 1-6 and passim);

f)   a commander of the army (cf. Josh 5:14);

g)   powers of the heights (cf. Isa 24:21);

h)   the council of Yahweh (cf. Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:6-8; etc.);

i)   astral divinities (cf. Isa 14:12, 40:26, 45:12; Jer 33:22; Job 38:7; Neh
      9:6; etc.);

j)   the watchers / pages (cf. Dan 4:17);

k)   prominent individually identified angels (i.e. Gabriel, cf. Dan 8:16f;
      Michael, cf. Dan 10:13);

l)   a heavenly scribe (cf. Ezek 9:2);

m)   a president of the court in heaven (cf. Zech 3:1-8);

n)   princes of the nations (cf. Dan 10:13,20);

o)   the seven "eyes" of God (cf. Ezek 9:2; Zech 3:9, 4:10);

p)   the angel of Yahweh (cf. Gen 16:7, 22:11; Ex 3:2; Judg 6:11,13:3;
      etc.);

q)   cherubim (cf. Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22, 26:1; Ezek 1, 41:18-19; etc.);

r)   seraphim (cf. Isa 6:1-2);

s)   immortalised ancestors (i.e. Enoch, cf. Gen 5:24; Elijah, cf. 2 Kgs
      2:11; Mal 5:4);

t)   the accuser (the satan) (cf. Job 1-2; Zech 3);

u)   the Accuser (Satan) (cf. 1 Chron 21:1);

v)   a son of man (cf. Dan 7:13);

w)   the angel of the covenant (cf. Mal 3:1);

x)   the angel of death (cf. Ex 12:23; 21 Kgs 19:35);

y)   the angel of pestilence (cf. 2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chron 21:25);

z)   death bringers (cf. Prov 16:14; Job 33:22);

aa)   angels of disaster (cf. Ps 78:49);

bb)   angels of the nations (cf. Deut 4:19, 32:8; Ps 89:6);

cc)   intercessors (cf. Job 5:1; 33:19-23);

dd)   the (good) spirit of Yahweh (Gen 1:2[?], 41:38; Ex 31:3; Num
      24:2,15; Judg 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6, 11:6; 2
      Sam 23:2; 1 Kgs 18:12; 2 Kgs 2:16; 1 Chron 12:18; Isa 11:2, 30:1;
      63:11; Ezek 2:2,14; 37:9-14; Dan 4:8-9; Hos 9:7; Mic 3:8; Neh 9:20;
      Ps 51:13; etc.);

    ee)   the (evil) spirit of Yahweh (cf. Num 5:14; Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14, 18:19, 19:9; 1 Kgs 22:21; Hos 4:12, 5:4, Isa 19:14, 29:10; etc.);

    ff)   a feminine embodiment of wisdom (cf. Prov 8:22-36);

    gg)   the heavenly vizier (cf. Ex 23:20ff; Josh 5:13; Judg 5:23);

    hh)   the bronze serpent (Nehushtan) (cf. 2 Kgs 18:4).

Apart from these examples of what many critical scholars (including the devil's advocate) reckon to be no more than phenomena only extant in superstitious beliefs, many more examples of related fantastical elements in the Old Testament texts could be cited. In this category of miscellaneous superstitions, the devil's advocate would include, amongst others, the following:

- the use of mandrakes for securing sexual fertility (cf. Gen 30:14; Song 2:5);
- the ability to keep arms raised as causative in determining the outcome of a battle (cf. Ex 17:8-16);
- the use of ritual fasting to convince Yahweh to act in people's favour (cf. Deut 9:18; 2 Sam 12:22; Neh 9; Esth 4:16);
- the need for a payment during a census to avoid destruction (cf. Ex 30:12)
- the practice of palmistry (cf. Job 37:7; Prov 3:16);
- the possibility of teleportation (cf. Judg 13:3; Ezek 3:14; 2 Kgs 2:16?; etc);
- the possibility of telepathy (cf. 1 Kgs 14:1-6; Dan 2:29-36; etc.);
- the possibility of trans-temporal visions/premonitions (cf. 1 Kgs 19:17; 2 Kgs 8:11-15; etc.);
- the possibility of psychokinesis / telekinesis (cf. 1 Kgs 13:4; 2 Kgs 6:5; etc.);
- the possibility of astral travel (cf. 2 Kgs 5:25-26; Ezek 3:14; 8:1-4; 37:1; etc.);
- the removing of footwear on holy ground (cf. Ex 3:5);
- the use of music to drive away demons sent by Yahweh or to make contact with the divine possible (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23; 2 Kgs 3:15; etc.);
- the use of ritual dance (sometimes with musical accompaniment) to induce ecstasy in order to speak the divine word (cf. 1 Sam 10:5-6; 2 Sam 6:5; etc.);
- etc.

The presence of all the aforementioned beliefs in magic and superstition in the text

makes the world in the text appear not unlike Tolkien's "*Middle-Earth*" or Steve Jackson and Ian Livingston's world of "*Fighting Fantasy*" (Titan). Unfortunately for realists, the many magical and enchanted phenomena, entities, places, artefacts and incidents referred to in the Old Testament texts seem to have no counterparts in the cruel, crazy, beautiful albeit rather mundane and boring third rock from the sun a.k.a. the "world outside the text".

Limitations of space prevent a more extended discussion of the topic presently under consideration. Though the presentation cannot be exhaustive, it should be more than sufficient to illustrate the point the devil's advocate intends to make. The main concern here is to be consistent and thorough in spelling out what the devil's advocate considers to be the anti-realist implications of the presence of these superstitious elements in the text.

In this regard, those who would consider themselves realists in Old Testament theology are notoriously inconsistent and repressive when it comes to the alleged presence of superstitious beliefs in the Old Testament texts.

On the one hand, for example, those scholars one might classify as conservative will insist that entities like Yahweh, Satan, seraphim and cherubim actually exist. Yet, in spite of claiming to believe every word in the Old Testament, few conservatives would like to claim that the Leviathan, Azazel, Lillith, Rahab, sacred trees, sacred waters, hepatoscopy, rhabdomancy, etc. are actually part of the real world. They might decry the tendency of liberal scholars to claim that angels, demons and the supernatural are all mythical. Yet in doing so they need to repress the fact that they themselves cannot go all the way and bring themselves to believe in the existence of all the gods, demons and other phenomena that the devil's advocate has listed in this section.

On the other hand, liberals or critical scholars who nonetheless fancy themselves as realists are just as inconsistent if not completely reductionistic. They will often insist that God (a.k.a. Yahweh) exists even though many think this cannot be and need not be proved. Yet they refuse to believe that demons, angels, and other magical entities and practices that Yahweh himself apparently believed in have any metaphysical

substance whatsoever. These people are masters of demythologisation, yet they lose their nerve just short of demythologising Yahweh as completely as they inconsistently prefer to do with just about every other supernatural phenomenon in the texts.

But how is this valid? How can one claim that Yahweh is real yet dismiss the rest as fanciful superstitions or metaphorical/symbolical representations? How is it justified to claim to believe that Yahweh-as-depicted is real, when the actual depictions of the deity and his own views of what is the case are written off by these scholars as being the product of primitive human imagination?

Consider, for instance, some of the demons referred to earlier. If these beings do not exist and yet Yahweh himself and all his people believed that they did, does this not imply that Yahweh as thus depicted must himself be a superstitious construct? Alternatively, what about the sacred trees, waters and mountains? If these were supposed locales of Yahweh's presence, whilst actually being mundane places of merely misinterpreted and superstitiously appropriated awe-inspiring natural phenomena, does the deity whose alleged presence was inextricably bound up with these locales not also stands unmasked as an insubstantial product of the animistic mind?

Ultimately, the philosophical implications of these superstitious beliefs held by both the Old Testament people *and their god* should be clear. If these beliefs are counter-factual then Yahweh depicted as sharing them must himself be a character of fiction. He is the creation of humans who themselves believed in such things. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

5.3   CONCLUSION

In sum then, the devil's advocate articulates yet another argument in its case against realism in Old Testament theology:

1   There are parallels between the Old Testament and the texts of other religions while the latter predates the biblical discourse.

2   This means that the biblical discourse is partly derivative, not wholly authentic or purely historical but a reproduction of a story-world with no direct and precise relation to any extra-textual reality.

3   The deities in the parallel mythological motifs and/or legends and/or superstitious representations can be dismissed as constructs of pagan fiction.

4   Yahweh is depicted as being involved in similarly mythical and magical and therefore fictitious scenarios.

5   Therefore, Yahweh has *ipso facto* the same ontological status as the deities featured in the parallel mythologies / superstitious representations.

6   Therefore, Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts containing elements of myth and superstition is a character of fiction.

7   Therefore Yahweh, like the other mythical deities, does not really exist.

The argument from mythology and superstition is the fourth argument in the case against realism. 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 part of the devil's advocate's comprehensive philosophical-critical justification of Yahwistic atheism.

CHAPTER 6

THE ARGUMENT FROM FICTITIOUS COSMOGRAPHY

"Oh, if only I knew where to find him,
(if I) could come to his dwelling…
Look, I go to the east and he is not there
and to the west and I do not see him.
If he is working in the north I do not behold him
and if he bows down to the south, I do not see him."

(Job 23:3,8-9)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

When, a few centuries ago, European astronomers looked through their telescopes and proclaimed that they could not see God anywhere "up there", it caused a major controversy in the Church. The Church initially refused to believe the findings of the scientists whose views appeared to be at odds with the infallible revelation of the Holy Scriptures according to which the earth was flat, stationary and at the centre of the universe (cf. Tarnas 1991:215).

Eventually, however, the church changed her tunes. Over the course of several centuries after first Copernicus and later Galileo had shaken the foundations of Judaeo-Christian cosmology, biblical localities like Heaven and Hell were no longer seen as being in the sky above or under the earth beneath. These locations now became thought of as belonging to a different dimension of reality altogether (cf. Cupitt 1996:44).

Subsequently, whenever the problems pertaining to the relation between the Bible and scientific cosmology would become unheard-of yet again, concerned devotees would

be assured that nothing has changed and that modern cosmography did not falsify holy writ. It was therefore no surprise that, when only a few decades ago, atheist Russian cosmonauts also heralded the news that God was demonstrably not "up there", many theologians sneered at what they considered to be hopelessly naïve perceptions of obviously "spiritual" realities.

Yet some theologians, at least according to the conservative religious public, went too far. In Europe, when German New Testament theologian Rudolf Bultmann claimed that the Bible's theology, Christology, soteriology and eschatology were not literally true because the cosmology was mythical, it unleashed a torrent of conservative and critical protest (cf. Bultmann 1957). Also, when the English bishop J.A.T. Robinson confessed that he could no longer believe in a God "out there", his confession caused a national debate on the plausibility and nature of biblical theism (cf. Robinson 1963).

Then, of course, far across the Atlantic in the United States, there were the so-called "Death of God" controversies. The radical theologians behind it made it crystal clear that realism in biblical cosmology was a non-option for contemporary normative theological discourse (cf. Kolak 1994:117). During the heyday of the so-called "God is dead" theology at Harvard Divinity School, the majority of graduates studying to become clergy in the Christian Church described their own worldview as "atheist" (cf. Kolak 1994:118).

In the years that followed, both conservative and critical theologians everywhere would mock the atheists who asserted that, since God is demonstrably not "up there", biblical theism has been falsified empirically. In general, it would not be wholly mistaken to say that these theologians all jumped on either one of two bandwagons.

If you believed in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, there was the need for harmonising the biblical texts with modern science (i.e. scientific creationism, cf. Morris 1974). Many conservatives would claim that, what appeared to be mistaken primitive beliefs about the nature of the cosmos in the Bible were actually examples of phenomenological discourse that was scientifically factual after all. Numerous Old Testament texts could be quoted and reinterpreted to show what was praised as being the amazingly infallible and even modern nature of the biblical discourse about the

nature of the universe.

Alternatively, less fundamentalist and more critical scholars could often be found claiming that the biblical language was, contrary to popular tradition, never intended to be understood as literal descriptions of reality. The Bible is, so they keep on saying, not a scientific textbook. It was never intended to furnish the people of God with a perfect description of the cosmos. The people who wrote the Bible knew nothing about modern science and it would be best to take all depictions of the cosmos as secondary and peripheral to the main concern of the writings, i.e. the religious message. Even references to Heaven and Hell are, it was alleged, wholly metaphorical or symbolical. Though quite obviously mythical, this did not mean that the texts were not "true". Because the cosmology may be scientifically incorrect does not mean that the whole Bible is now theologically worthless.

So they say. But apparently both conservative and liberal scholars forgot to mention that even the god of the Bible – i.e. Yahweh himself – knew no more about the world outside the text than his ignorant speechwriters. To be sure, there may be no "pie in the sky", but the pernicious ability of theologians to bracket biblical and systematic theology with both the history and philosophy of religion when it comes to issues of ontology have made any serious discussion bereft of doubletalk and gobbledegook impossible.

Of course, anyone today who complains about the fact that Yahweh is not in the sky would be laughed off and will be considered as being theologically extremely naïve. Yet the devil's advocate cannot help but wonder whether someone like the character Elijah who allegedly ascended to the skies in a chariot of fire would have find the modern cosmographical critiques of religion quite so humorous. And what about the disciples of Jesus who allegedly saw him go up into the skies with a cloud? Would they have laughed at the discovery that God did not live "up there" in the skies?

Alternatively, might the ancients not, upon encountering incontrovertible evidence that there is no heaven in the skies, no glorious old monarch above the clouds looking out for us and no netherworld underneath our feet, experience profound reality shock, severe disorientation, and extreme cognitive dissonance? Even worse, would the god

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Yahweh himself not be embarrassed to learn from the offspring of the same humans who ate from the tree of knowledge, built the tower of Babylon and now frequently construct towers piercing the skies that there is, literally, no place like home (pun intended)?

In this chapter, the devil's advocate will attempt to spell out what it considers to be the devastating and indeed atheist implications of the collapse of realism with regard to the plain sense of the Old Testament's cosmographical discourse. It will be argued that the cosmography of the Old Testament is demonstrably fictitious notwithstanding conservatives' claims to the contrary. Moreover, it will be explained why liberals have to repress the fact that not only the people of the Old Testament but also their god believed in the reality of the fictitious locations featured in the biblical texts.

It will also be demonstrated that, according to the Old Testament texts (and the god Yahweh), the divine abode was indeed conceived of as being literally located in the sky above the clouds. Consequently, the devil's advocate will insist that all attempts of both conservative and liberal apologetics to circumvent the problems with realism in biblical cosmography are no more than the usual popular theological doubletalk and clearly involve strategies of evasion and repression.

In the end, the devil's advocate concludes that, since Yahweh is demonstrably not "up there" in the sky as both the Old Testament and its paramount god believe is the case, it follows that Yahweh as thus depicted has no extra-textual counterpart. He is demonstrably a character of fiction and therefore does not really exist.

6.2   OLD TESTAMENT COSMOGRAPHY

A substantial quantity of research on Old Testament cosmology is currently available. The studies by Gilkey (1961:194-205) Eichrodt (1967:186-194), Von Rad (1968:144-165), Knierim (1981:74-91), Zimmerli (1976), Stadelmann (1970), Fretheim (1984:37-44), Keel (1978:12-88), Seely (1989:20-24) and others come to mind. Yet despite this volume of research related to the particular topic, reading through the material reveals that the implications of the biblical cosmology for realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts is seldom an issue

of concern for scholars. In the present chapter, however, this very same issue will constitute the focal point of the discussion. After the introductory discussion of some obviously fictitious elements of Old Testament cosmography, the devil's advocate will attempt to address the issue of the god Yahweh's alleged and actual whereabouts in the world both within and outside the text.

6.2.1   Some examples of obviously fictitious elements Old Testament cosmography

6.2.1.1   The solid firmament

> And God said, "Let there be a firmament between the waters and let it
> separate waters from waters." God then made the firmament and separated
> the waters beneath the firmament from the waters above it. And it was so.
> And God called the firmament "heavens". (Gen 1:6-8)

According to Skinner (1908:17), the word rendered "firmament" appears in the Old
Testament a grand total of seventeen times. In each instance of its occurrence, the
word represents a rendering of the Hebrew word *raqiya and* usually refers to the
visible vault of the sky. The word *raqiya* comes from the verbal root *riqqua*, "beaten
out".

This word was often utilised in ancient times to denote the scenario in which brass
objects were either cast in the form required or beaten into shape on an anvil. A good
craftsman would beat a lump of cast brass into a thin bowl. In this manner, Yahweh
was believed to have beaten out the solid dome of the sky to hold back the waters
allegedly above it. The dome was also useful for fixing the stars into it in order to
prevent them from falling onto the earth (cf. also Stadelman 1970:56).

This picture of the cosmos is reinforced by Ezekiel's vision (cf. Hooke 1963:33). The
Hebrew word *raqiya* appears five times in Ezekiel (four times in Ezekiel 1:22-26 and
once in Ezekiel 10:1). In each case, the context makes it clear that what is being
referred to is literally a solid vault or dome (cf. Skinner 1908:18). In the vision of the
prophet, the vault appears above the "living creatures" and glitters "like a sheet of
ice" (cf. Ezek 1:22ff).

Above the vault is a throne of sapphire (or lapis lazuli). Seated on the throne is "a
form in human likeness", which is radiant and "like the appearance of the glory of
Yahweh" (cf. Ezek 1:22ff). In short, Ezekiel saw a vision of Yahweh sitting
enthroned on the vault of heaven, not unlike as is the case in the scenario described in
Isaiah 40:22:

"He sits above the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are like locusts. He stretches the heavens like a thin cloth and he spreads it out like a tent to dwell in." (Isa 40:22)

The description of the firmament in Ezekiel 1:22 also appears to allude to the scenario depicted in Exodus 24:10. In the latter text, Moses and the elders are depicted as dining face to face with their god Yahweh. They also see a pavement of sapphire underneath his feet. As Exodus 24:10 definitely describes a solid firmament, one may conclude that it is the same in Ezekiel's vision (cf. Hooke 1963:34).

This observation regarding the solidity of the firmament in the Exodus and Ezekiel texts adds presumptive evidence to the idea that the firmament in a text such as Genesis 1:7 was also presumed to be solid. To be sure, there is yet another text in the Old Testament that confirms this view. In Job 37:18, the question put to Job by Elihu reads,

"Can you spread out (*raqa'*) the sky and make it as strong (or hard) as a molten (cast metal) mirror?"

The point of comparison between the sky and the mirror in this text is, specifically, the *hardness* of the metal (cf. Gray 1969:328). Furthermore, additional evidence for the supposed solidity of the firmament comes from the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew Texts already referred to above. The LXX accordingly render "*raqia*" as "*stereoma*" (solid body) while the Vulgate translates it as "*firmamentum*" (cf. Skinner 1908:18).

The ontological problem for realism here is that, in the real world, this solid firmament in the skies does not exist. Moreover, and perhaps more important, not only the people of the Old Testament but also their god Yahweh believed in and acted as if there really is a solid dome in the sky. But if the firmament does not exist, how can the character Yahweh depicted as one who dwells above it, who himself created it and who genuinely believes in its existence be considered as anything other than a character of fiction? The devil's advocate therefore concludes that Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

6.2.1.2   The ocean of rainwater on the other side of the stars above the firmament

Parenthetically, it would be prudent to add a few words about the water that the Old Testament and Yahweh claimed could be found *above the firmament*. Surely, this is one of the issues often distorted or evaded by realists (and creationist fundamentalists in particular). In the first place, there is no evidence that the water is a mist or fog (contra Archer 1982:22-23). In the Old Testament texts, this body of water was conceived of as being the same as the sea, i.e. it is an *ocean* (cf. Gen 1:6,7).

The deep (*tehom*) of Genesis 1:2 is divided in Genesis 1:6,7 into two bodies of water. The body of water below forms the earthly sea (cf. Gen 1:9). The water above, since it is the other half of the "*tehom*", forms an ocean in the skies *on the other side of the stars* (cf. also Psalm 148:4). The presence of the ocean in the skies can be ascertained from the fact that the sky above is blue (by day) and black (by night) - like the sea itself. Moreover, when it rains, the opening of the windows in the solid firmament allows a great deal of water to be poured out onto the earth below (cf. Gen 7:11; cf. also Stadelman 1970:46-47, 114).

It is *extremely* important to take cognisance of the fact that, according to the Old Testament (and Yahweh), this body of water is depicted as being *above* the firmament (cf. Gen 1:7; Ps 148:4). From the ancient point of view, this is a logical deduction from the fact that the blue and black heaven appears to be *behind* the sun, moon and stars. Moreover, the sun moon and stars are depicted as being part of and *inside* the solid firmament in which they are fixed so as not to fall to the earth.

This presents a severe dilemma for creationists who seem to ignore this unambiguous datum in the text and who are always arguing as if this body of water was located beneath the firmament (cf. Harwood 1992:22). It was not. This body of water, *from whence the rains come*, as far as the Old Testament texts (and Yahweh) are concerned, is on the *other* side of the solid firmament. In the world of the text, it is *further* from the earth than the sun, moon and stars. The latter is inside the firmament whilst the waters are behind it! Apparently, our rainwater comes from the other side of the known universe!

Such an extra-textual scenario does not exist. But what is its implication for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament?

Either Yahweh believes in this fictitious phenomenon or he does not. If he does, as the Old Testament texts suggest, then he is ignorant. Since this is inconceivable on the part of the creator of the universe, an ignorant Yahweh cannot exist. If, however, Yahweh does not believe in the waters above the firmament it follows that the deity by the same name depicted in the Old Testament texts as having created this non-existent state of affairs and as believing in its reality obviously has no extra-textual counterpart. And since we are presently concerned with the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the text, there is only one possible conclusion: Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and does not really exist.

6.2.1.3 Sheol - The subterranean land of the dead

The "lower story" of the Old Testament's "three-storied-universe" is depicted in the texts as being the abode of the dead (cf. Tromp 1969:01; Stadelman 1970:165-176; Sponk 1986:02). However, the idea that the Old Testament itself locates this realm (called Sheol) literally *beneath* the surface of the earth is disputed by some conservatives (cf. Archer 1982:117-119). They refuse to recognise that the Old Testament and its paramount god believed in the existence of a literal netherworld underground. It is thus claimed that Sheol is just a *metaphor* for the grave (cf. Kaiser et al. 1996:106). Allegedly, the concept of an underworld merely designates the state of the dead and not their location (cf. Haley 1992:55).

According to the devil's advocate, however, these claims are untenable and simply incorrect. As such, they witness to a desperate strategy of evasion and repression by scholars who realise all-too-well the problematic implications for realism should the textual data prove to be fictitious.

To justify the devil's advocate's claim that the Old Testament's authors and their god Yahweh believed that there was literally a land of the dead underground and that, therefore, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction, it refers the reader to the text of Numbers 16:20-35. If analysed via philosophical criticism, the interpreter

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concerned with matters of ontology will ask the question what the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may be given the ontological status of what was clearly intended to be understood as a literal account of an actual historical event.

> "And Yahweh spoke with Moses and said, 'Speak with the congregation and say, 'Be sure that you get away from the dwellings of Korah, Datan and Abiram...But Korah, Datan and Abiram came out and stood by the door of their tents with their wives and sons and little children. Then Moses said, 'In this you will know that Yahweh has sent me to do all these works; that they are not from my own heart. If these people die like all people and are visited with the visitation common to all people, then Yahweh did not send me. But if Yahweh creates something new and the ground opens her mouth and eats them with all that belongs to them and they go down alive into Sheol, then you will know that Yahweh abhorred these men. And when Moses finished speaking, the ground that was underneath them was torn and the earth opened her mouth and ate them with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah, including all their possessions. In this manner, with all that was in their possession, these people went down alive to Sheol. The earth then covered them and they perished from the congregation. All the people of Israel that were present then fled from their cries because they said, 'Maybe the earth will eat us too!' (Num 16:20-35)

In this passage, the literal earth literally opens up and Korah and his ilk literally go down alive into a very literal underworld called Sheol. Not just the men but their goods as well dropped down into the subterranean place. Obviously, this story was most certainly not intended to be understood as a figurative depiction. Men do not enter alive into a "state of death" and the material goods certainly did not enter a "spiritual dimension".

It is therefore completely incorrect to claim that, as far as the Old Testament (and Yahweh) is concerned, Sheol is merely a figurative concept used to denote the state of the dead or simply "the grave". The historically intended scenario depicted in the text

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of Numbers 16:20-35 clearly does not depict this as being the case. Moreover, according to the devil's advocate in one of its more sarcastic moods, there may be at least some consolation for those who persist in their insistence on the historicity of the scenario depicted in the text. Such readers may appreciate then the possibility that, contrary to the view of the author of Psalm 49 and many a preacher, apparently you *can* take it with you. If it isn't one thing, its another.

The scenario depicted in Numbers 16:20-35 is not an isolated instance of a depiction of the literal subterranean location of Sheol. In Isaiah 14:9, Yahweh speaks to the king of Babylon saying, "Sheol beneath is moved to meet you when you come; it stirs up the shades for you, even all the chief ones of the earth". The text paints the picture, once again, of a subterranean realm of the dead. Along the same line, in Amos 9:2, Yahweh himself contrasts "*digging* down into Sheol" with "climbing up into the skies". As the sky is literally "up there", the only reasonable opposition is that its antipode – Sheol – was conceived of as being literally "down under".

Of course, the fact that in all three of the texts noted above, it is Yahweh himself speaking and acting as though Sheol is literally underground is, as far as the devil's advocate is concerned, devastating for realism pertaining to the ontological status of the deity as thus depicted. Since there is no Sheol inside or under the earth (which is, of course, in all these texts presumed to be flat), it follows that the god who believes in the reality of this state of affairs must himself be a creation of the people who held such beliefs. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and, along with his subterranean netherworld, does not really exist.

### 6.2.1.4   Examples of other fictitious cosmographical features

Apart from the aforementioned fictitious phenomena and locations, the following list, once again courtesy of the devil's advocate, gives an indication of some additional non-existent alleged realities. Contrary to the claims of the Old Testament authors and the god they worshipped, these places and spaces have no extra-textual counterparts.

- The young earth (cf. Gen 1-11 and 1 Chron 1-10 that, when scrutinised with regard to the dating of creation, leaves us with a 6000 year old universe);

- The order of creation (cf. Gen 1 with the creation of the sun and moon *after* the creation of the earth and its vegetation and Gen 2 with the creation of plants and animals *after* the creation of the male human);

- The duration of creation (cf. Gen 1 for six 24-hour days and Ex 31:17 for an endorsement of this belief by Yahweh himself; cf. also Gen 2 for a total duration of *one* whole day for the creation of "earth and heavens");

- The eternal earth (cf. Pss 78:69, 93:1, 104:5, 148:6; Eccl 1:4; Jer 31:35-36; however, this contradicts the view of Isa 34:4, 51:6);

- The corners of the earth (cf. Zech 6:1-4);

- The pillars of the earth and the mountains supporting the vault of the skies (cf. Job 9:5; 18:4; 26:10-11; Ps 75:4);

- The flat earth (cf. Dan 4:10-11,20);

- The ocean on which the land floats (cf. Gen 7:11; Ex 20:4; Ps 24:1);

- The storehouses and chambers in the sky for the hail, rain, snow, etc. (cf. Job 38:22; Jer 10:13; Am 9:6; etc.);

- The low starry heavens (cf. Gen 11,18; 2 Kgs 2:11; Isa 14:12-14; etc.);

- The objective reality of constellations in the sky (cf. Job 38:31-32);

- The moving celestial bodies (cf. Josh 10:12-14; Judg 5:21; Isa 38:8; Eccl 1:5; etc.);

- The unmoving earth (cf. Pss 93:1, 104:5; etc.);

- The subterranean chamber of the sun (cf. Ps 19A; Job 3:8; etc.);

- The personified sea with its dragons (cf. Job 38:8,10; Ps 104:26; Ezek 32:2; Am 9:3; etc.);

- The stars as living entities (cf. Judg 5:21; Job 38:7; Isa 14:12; Dan 8:10; etc.);

- The desert wastes that are the haunts of demons (cf. Lev 16; Isa 34:14);

- The ends of the earth just beyond Armenia (north); Iran (east); Spain (west) and Ethiopia (south) (cf. Gen 2:8-15; Jon 1:2-3; etc.);

- The sun, moon and stars as small lights beneath the waters above the firmament (cf. Gen 1:14-16; Josh 10:12-14; Isa 38:8);

- The centre or navel of the world at Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 5:5);

- Jerusalem in the far north at the source of the waters (cf. Ps 48:3);

- The Garden of Eden at the source of four rivers (cf. Gen 2-11);

- The mountain of the gods in the north (cf. Isa 14:13);

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- The garden of the gods (cf. Ezek 28:12; Isa 51:3);
- The multiple levels of the underworld (cf. Isa 14:9-20; Ezek 32:19-32);
- The mountains at the entrance to the underworld (cf. Job 17:2; Ps 42:7);
- The river of the underworld (cf. Job 33:18, 36:12).

The devil's advocate would like to point out that these features "exist" only in the world of the text and inside the minds of those who read it (cf. also Brueggemann 1997:57). Once these locations and scenarios are evaluated for verification or falsification in the extra-textual realm, modern astronomy, geography, meteorology and geology have long since demonstrated that what appears on the devil's advocate's list have no counterpart in the world outside the text.
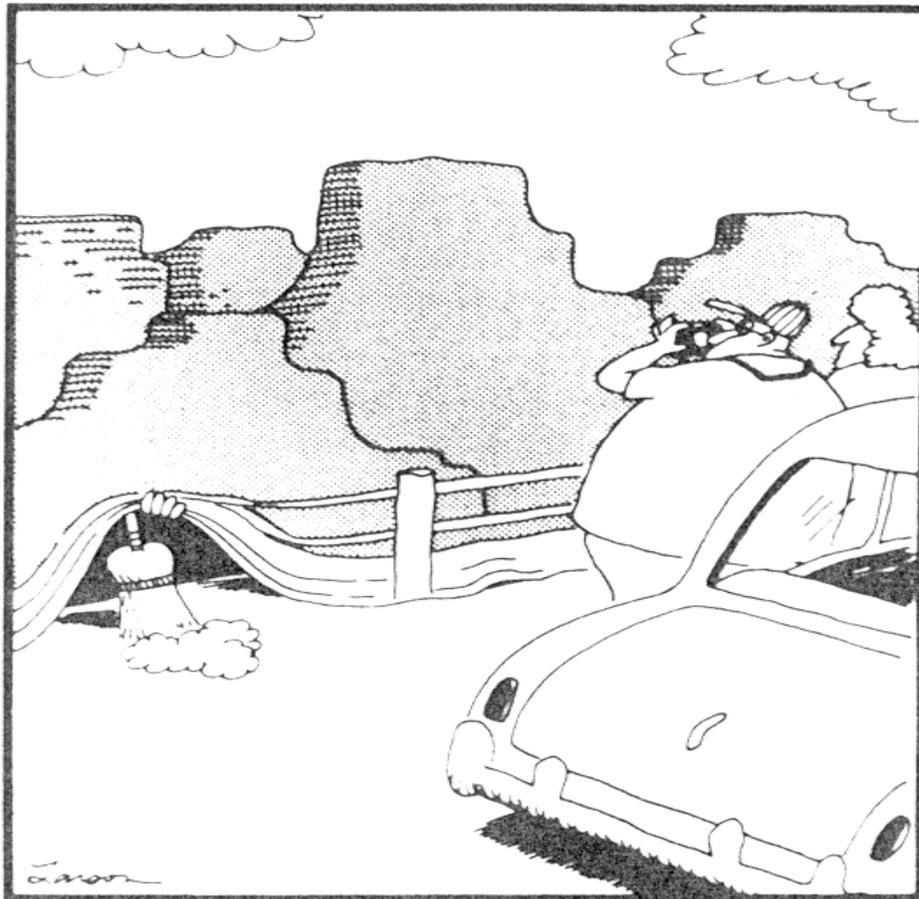
Given these fictitious elements of Old Testament cosmology, the problem for realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may be articulated in the following manner:

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1. The cosmography is often inextricably linked to the supposed historical narratives or words of the deity Yahweh so that it cannot be bracketed or demythologised without realism pertaining to the whole collapsing.

2. Contrary to what most theologians would want others to believe, the fact is that the unrealistic beliefs are not simply presented as being merely the views of the Old Testament authors of whom no more could have been expected given their cultural and historical location.

3. The real problem that is constantly being repressed is that, according to the texts, even Yahweh himself believes in the factuality of these erroneous conceptions of what is supposed to be his own creation.

Consequently, the only logical deduction to be made is that the deity who created and believed and acted in the fictitious world depicted in the texts must himself be a character of fiction. In other words, like his creation, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

6.2.2   Where is Yahweh?

Suppose Yahweh does exist, *where* would he be? More specifically, where, *according to the text of the Old Testament*, does Yahweh himself locate his own abode in the world also alleged to exist outside the text? In response to this question, and according to the devil's advocate, several Old Testament texts seem to suggest that both the people of the Old Testament world and their god Yahweh believed that the divine abode was literally located "up there" in the sky just above the clouds.

Consider, if you will, the following examples of texts that the devil's advocate believes are enough to actually allow for the possibility of an empirical disproof of the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text.

> "And they said, 'Let us build for ourselves a city and a tower with a top
> that reaches into the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves so that we
> do not spread across the earth'. Then Yahweh went down to look at the

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city and the tower that the sons of man had built. Then Yahweh said, 'There they are now, one people and one language. And this is just the beginning of their undertaking. Now nothing that they plan will be impossible for them. Come, let us **go down** and confuse their language so that the one does not understand the other. Thus Yahweh scattered them from there over the whole earth and they stopped building the city." (Gen 11: 4-9)

"And after he had finished speaking with him, God **went upwards** from Abraham." (Gen 17:22)

"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is truly great and their sin is very heavy. I want to **go down** in order to see whether they have actually acted according to the outcry that has come to me and, if not, I want to know it." (Gen 18:20-21)

"And he dreamed and there was a ladder placed **on the earth** of which **the top reached to the** heavens while the angels of God **went up** and **came down** from it. And look, **Yahweh** stood at its **top**...Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know it'. And he became frightened and said, 'How fearsome is this place,…it is nothing less than a portal to the heavens!'" (Gen 28:12-17)

"Then **God ascended from the place** where he spoke to him." (Gen 35:9-13)

"And Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, 'Look I shall come to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak to you and so that they will always believe in you...Furthermore, Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and let them wash their clothes and keep themselves ready by the third day. On the third day Yahweh will **come down** on the mountain of Sinai before the eyes of all the people." (Ex 19:9-13)

"And the whole of the mountain Sinai smoked because Yahweh **came down** to it in a fire and the smoke went up like the smoke of an oven and the whole mountain shook. When the sound of the horn became stronger, Moses spoke and Yahweh answered him loudly. While Yahweh **descended** onto the mountain of Sinai, onto the top of the mountain, Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses climbed up." (Ex 19:16-22)

"Look **down** from your holy dwelling **in the heavens**…" (Deut 26:15)

"Please, look **down** from your holy dwelling, **from the heavens**, and bless your people Israel…" (Deut 27:15)

"There is nobody like your god, O Jeshurun, who rides **in the skies** as your help, and **over the clouds** in his loftiness." (Deut 30:26)

"...Yahweh threw great big hailstones **from the heavens** on them..." (Josh 10:10-11)

"…when the flame of the altar rose upwards**,** the angel of Yahweh **went up** in the flame; and Manoah and his wife saw it and they fell with their faces to the ground." (Judg 13:15)

"Cords of Sheol surrounded me and the cords of death came upon me. When I was anxious, I called to Yahweh. I called out to my god. Out of his palace he heard me; my cries were in his ears. Then the earth trembled and shook and the foundations of the heavens shook and trembled, for he was angry. Smoke went up in his nose and a fire proceeded from his mouth; coals from within him burned. And he bent the heavens and **came down** and dark clouds were underneath his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; yes, he appeared on the wings of the wind. He put darkness around him as huts, the collection of waters, thickness of clouds. Out of the shining before him coals burned. **Out of the skies**, Yahweh thundered; and the Most High made his voice heard. He sent out arrows and scattered

them; lightning and confused them. The bottom of the oceans became visible; the foundations of the world were revealed by the threat of Yahweh and by the blow of his nose. **Out of the heights** he stretched out his hand, he grabbed me, pulled me out of the great waters." (2 Sam 22:5-17; cf. also Ps 18:5-18)

"Then Solomon went to stand before the altar of Yahweh...and spread his hands **toward the heavens** and said, 'Yahweh, God of Israel, in the heavens above or on the earth beneath there is no god like you...But would God really live on earth? Look, the heavens, yes, the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this house I have built...may you hear every prayer **to your dwelling, to the heavens**...will you then listen **in the heavens**...If **the heavens** are locked up and there is no rain...will you listen **in the heavens**...**your permanent dwelling**..." (1 Kgs 8:22ff)

"And while they were walking and talking there suddenly came a chariot of fire with horses of fire that parted them. And Elijah **ascended to the heavens** in the storm." (2 Kgs 2:11)

"Answer me, Yahweh. Answer me, so that these people can know that you are the god and so that you can let their hearts return to you. Then fire **fell from Yahweh**...and when the people saw it they fell on their faces and said, 'Yahweh, he is god! Yahweh, he is god!'" (1 Sam 18:38-39)

"…would you then listen from **the heavens, your perpetual abode**…?" (2 Chron 6:33)

"…are you not the God **in the heavens**…?" (2 Chron 20:6)

"The **fire of God fell from the heavens** and burned among the cattle and among the servants and it consumed them..." (Job 1:16)

Is God not high in the heavens? And look how high the highest stars are. But you say, 'What does God know? Can he judge through the darkness?

The clouds are a cover for Him, so that he does not see…" Yet **on the firmament of heaven** he walks…" (Job 22:12-14)

"Listen! Listen to the thundering of his voice and the thundering that goes forth from his mouth. **Under the heavens**, he releases it and sends his lights to the ends of the earth…his voice roars, he thunders wonderfully with his voice…" (Job 37:2-5)

"Yahweh is in his holy palace; the throne of Yahweh is **in the heavens**…" (Ps 11:4)

"Yahweh looked **down from the heavens** onto the sons of man to see if there was one with insight…" (Ps 14:2)

"He bent the heavens and **came down**…" (Ps 18:10)

"The voice of Yahweh **is on the waters**, the God of honour thunders. Yahweh is on the great waters…Yahweh sits enthroned **on the flood**; yes Yahweh sits as king forever." (Ps 29:3,10)

"…they will praise Yahweh because he looked **down from his holy heights.** Yahweh looked down from **the heavens** onto the earth…" (Ps 102:19-20)

"Yahweh has established his kingdom **in the heavens**." (Ps 103:19)

"You…who have stretched out the heavens like a tent, who have laid the beams of thy chambers **on the waters**." (Ps 104:1-3)

"Bend the heavens and **come down**. Touch the mountaintops that they may smoke." (Ps 144:5)

"And you said in your heart, 'I want to climb **up to the heavens,** lift my throne **above the stars** of God and sit on the mountain of meeting in the

far reaches of the north. I want to climb **up above the heights of the clouds**, make myself equal with the Most High.'" (Isa 14:13:14)

"He sits **above the circle of the earth** and the inhabitants thereof are like locusts. He stretches **the heavens** like a thin cloth and he spreads it out like a tent to dwell in." (Isa 40:22)

"If only you would tear **the heavens** and **come down**…(Isa 64:1)

"Yahweh will roar **from the heights** and lift up his voice **from the heavens**." (Jer 25:30)

"When he lets his voice be heard there is the thundering of the waters **in the heavens**." (Jer 51:16)

"…**the heavens** were opened and I saw visions of God." (Ezek 1:1)

"…with **the clouds of heaven** came someone like the son of man and he came to the one, ancient of days…" (Dan 7:13)

"Look, Yahweh goes **out of his holy dwelling** and he **comes down** and steps **on the heights** of the earth." (Mic 1:3)

"It is he who has built his chambers **in the heavens** and established his **heavens above the earth**." (Am 9:6)

From these passages, the following facts might be seen as demonstrating beyond a doubt that Yahweh is supposed to be "up there" in the sky:

- Yahweh and his angels are often depicted as literally going "up" to the divine abode;

- Yahweh literally has to come "down" to speak with people and to intervene in

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human affairs;

- During prayer, people look "upwards" or lift their hands "up" to the skies;

- Yahweh is often depicted as literally looking "down" on people;

- Thunder is considered to be literally the voice of Yahweh;

- Yahweh is depicted as being enthroned on the flood/waters (i.e. rainwater);

- The firmament, i.e. the blue skies are part of Yahweh's abode (e.g. its pavement);

- Even though Yahweh is depicted as dwelling higher than the stars this does not make realism any less problematic since even the storehouses to the rain and hail were also believed to be above the stars;

- Yahweh's habit of riding on clouds also implies the alleged existence of his abode "up there" in the *skies.*

Only by assuming that Yahweh was supposed to live up in the *sky* not much higher than the clouds can one make sense of these passages. Moreover, only on such an assumption can one explain why this god can become horrified at the prospect of the possibility that mortals might build a tower that can reach the heavens (cf. Gen 11:5-7). Any modern god who knew the enormous distance even to the nearest stars would have laughed at the naïveté of the builders.

Of course, the Old Testament authors cannot be faulted for believing the same superstitions as their contemporaries. Yet this changes nothing about the fact that they lied about the acts and beliefs of the one who is supposed to be a nearly omniscient god. That Yahweh himself could believe that he lived in the skies and act as if this was the case give the game away and unmask him as a product of the imagination of humans who themselves believed in such a fictitious state of affairs.

Moreover, with this data in mind, it would seem that any apologetic attempt to salvage realism must be flawed from the outset. Popular arguments based on claims that heaven was never really understood as being literally "up there", that heaven is a spiritual dimension outside space and time, or that the language is merely metaphorical or phenomenological are all unconvincing and invalid.

The idea of God dwelling in a spiritual dimension, in the fourth dimension or even in infinite dimensional space is indeed popular among sophisticated modern believers. The belief in a fourth dimension originated at the end of the nineteenth during a time that also saw a new interest among the general population of Europe in spiritualism and the paranormal (cf. Hinton 1904:15; Abbot 1952:01; Rucker 1986:02). Somehow this led many theologians to speculate anew concerning exactly where the spiritual world was supposed to be located as scientists from the sixteenth century onwards demonstrated clearly that it was certainly not, as traditionally believed, in the sky above the earth (cf. also Reichenbach 1957:13-17).

Many scientifically embarrassed clergy capitalised on these ideas and repressed the fact that the Bible depicted Yahweh as literally dwelling in the skies. Now it was claimed that God dwelled somewhere in higher space. Based on analogies derived from higher analytical geometry, the collapse of the old cosmology of Heaven above and Hell below was repressed and the texts were reinterpreted to show that their discourse was true after all, albeit in a very different sense from what was hitherto believed to be the case (cf. Rucker 1977:105-107).

By now it should be clear that such an idea is utterly alien to the Old Testament texts (contra Ross 1993:40). Yahweh-as-depicted in the text seems to be ignorant regarding the existence of any spiritual or fourth dimension. The biblical texts were written during a time when everyone, including the god of Israel, believed that the divine abode was located somewhere high in the sky above a flat earth on which the deity could look down. The reinterpretation of obviously fictitious cosmology via the fantasy of higher dimensional space as the actual locality of the deity's abode is therefore unconvincing as an attempt to salvage realism.

In other words, the texts of the Old Testament show quite clearly that the claims of

both the early astronomers and later Russian cosmonauts that God was nowhere "up there" should indeed have been a cause for concern. Their failure to find Yahweh's abode in the skies is nothing less that an empirical falsification of realism in Old Testament theology. It thoroughly deconstructs realism regarding the ontological status of the god Yahweh who himself endorsed those very same fictitious cosmological beliefs.

Another unconvincing attempt to salvage realism, or at least to render it immune, can be found in the apologetic claim that the Old Testament is not a scientific textbook. As is the case with an argument claiming that the Bible is not a textbook of history or theology, this argument – whatever its merits – does nothing at all to eliminate the *ontological* problem. It merely states the obvious when it points out that the format and intention of the Old Testament and its discourse is different from that of modern day scientific (historical/theological) discourse. It can also be understood as a euphemistic way of acknowledging the presence of science fiction and scientific *errors* in the text.

In conservative apologetics, of course, the claim that the Bible is not a scientific textbook is not understood in the aforementioned manner. In that context, the claim is taken to imply that one should not expect scientific formulae and rhetorical strategies in the text – a superfluous and redundant argument since nobody actually expects this anyway. When scholars who are more critical utilise this argument, they too state the obvious but their argument contains a veiled admittance that the text contains elements of fiction. It is irrelevant that the authors of the biblical text never intended to write scientific papers. If they speak about things that do not exist, nothing changes the fact that their claims contain fiction.

In other words, any attempt by anyone to salvage realism by claiming that the Old Testament is not a scientific treatise but, through metaphorical, mythical, symbolic or phenomenological discourse, has the intention of conveying "religious" or "theological" varieties of "truth" actually distorts the issue under consideration. It is based on a misconception and a failure to appreciate the dilemma that is involved in the devil's advocate's concern with the ontological implications of the Old Testament's fictitious cosmography. One is therefore forced to conclude that all such

attempts to salvage realism are useless and merely more of the same typical theological doubletalk that realists engage in when pushed into a corner.

In sum then, according to the Old Testament texts, Yahweh literally dwells in the sky just above the earth. Since, in the world outside the text, this is demonstrably not the case, realism collapses. Yahweh as thus depicted has no extra-textual counterpart and is therefore a character of fiction. In short, Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist

6.3   CONCLUSION

The argument from fictitious cosmography as discussed in this chapter can be summed up along the following lines with regard to its implications for realism pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text.

1. The revelation of the acts of Yahweh (creation, abidance, and intervention) assumes the reality of particular cosmographical features.

2. These features encountered in Old Testament cosmography are fictitious since they refer to localities and phenomena that do not exist and because they depict Yahweh as literally dwelling in the sky whilst this is demonstrably not the case in the world outside the text.

3. Since the cosmography of the Old Testament that even Yahweh himself believes in is fictitious, it follows that the abode, acts and person of Yahweh depicted in relation to those features must all likewise be fictitious.

4. Therefore, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

The argument from cosmographical fiction is the fifth argument in the case against realism. As the case against realism constitutes a cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh, this particular argument 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 case for Yahwistic atheism.

CHAPTER 7

THE ARGUMENT FROM FICTITIOUS HISTORY

"The words of Agur the son of Yahke.

A burden:

The man said,

'There is no god!

There is no god!

And I am wearied.'"

<div align="right">(Prov 30:4) (tr. Scott 1965:110)</div>

7.1   INTRODUCTION

It will be obvious to any reader of the Old Testament texts that they provide a substantial number of accounts of the god Yahweh appearing to people, speaking to them and acting on their behalf or against them. As Harwood (1992:01) notes, and as virtually all religious believers have believed up until about two centuries ago, there can be little doubt that much of the discourse featuring the acts of Yahweh seemed to have been intended as reflective of what actually happened in the past.

Technically, when it comes to the relation between text and past reality, absolute empirical verification or falsification is, of course, impossible (cf. Carr 1970:22; Fischer 1970:47). However, if the texts alleging to reflect historical realities have certain characteristics that unmask them as fiction then even without knowing what, if anything, actually happened, it might still be possible to prove that some event depicted in the text did *not* occur as described.

This is a very important point. In this chapter, the devil's advocate is not going to attempt to prove in a positivist fashion what supposedly and actually did happen. That cannot be done. However, as will become apparent from the arguments presented in this chapter, even without access to the past it will be possible to prove that some

things could not possibly have happened. Moreover, such proof is not, as conservatives and others claim, the result of biased anti-supernaturalist assumptions or because the devil's advocate might presume the impossibility of divine intervention, supernatural entities, miracles, predictive prophecy or an inerrant scripture. Neither will the denial of historicity be due to a hidden agenda of post-modernism, nihilism, logical positivism or whatever else one might like to label it.

The reason why the devil's advocate feels confident in its ability to prove that the historically intended events depicted in the text never happened is simply due to the nature of the texts themselves. And, if it can be shown that, for some or other good reason (see below) that the events depicted in the text involving the deity Yahweh never actually transpired exactly as described, it follows that the deity as thus depicted must himself be a character of fiction. Moreover, should Yahweh on any subsequent occasion (e.g. later on in plot of the story from Genesis to Nehemiah) be depicted as referring to an event that was already demonstrated to have been fictitious, it follows that such a later representation of the deity also never had any extra-textual counterpart.

In other words, all that is required for present purposes is to demonstrate that some events pretending to be history never really happened. Since the events presented in the Old Testament books are often inextricably linked, deconstructing realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in some scenarios must eventually lead to the collapse of realism with regard to the whole.

Of course, the Old Testament is not a textbook of history. Of course, the authors could not be expected to have written about the past from a post-Enlightenment perspective. Of course, writing pure history was not their intention since the texts clearly subordinate historical data to theological and religious agendas. Of course, non-historical discourse can still communicate profound religious truth (cf. Deist 1986:11).

But so what? Since it cannot reasonably denied that many of the Old Testament texts insist that Yahweh was active in the actual extra-textual past, recourse to any of these popular apologetic responses is simply a subtle means of evading the problem and

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demonstrably involves the fallacy known as "shifting the goalposts". In the present context, therefore, an appeal to any of these responses is both invalid and irrelevant.

There is simply no getting around the fact that, if it can be demonstrated that the stories witnessing to such supposed divine acts and guidance are fictitious and the events depicted therein never occurred as presented, all grounds for realism disappear. If the history of Yahweh's acts in the world had no corresponding extra-textual counterparts, it follows that neither does the god Yahweh-as-thus-depicted.

As noted earlier, the devil's advocate therefore cannot agree with the view expressed by Davies (1995:21) who claims that biblical-critical analysis can show whether or not the depiction of Abraham in the text is historically factual but incompetent to answer the question of whether or not Yahweh as depicted actually exists.

Surely, this is inconsistent reasoning. If one is somehow able to show that, whatever historical Abraham may have lived, Abraham-as-depicted is a character of fiction, has one not also succeeded in demonstrating that, whatever Yahweh there may be, the god who spoke to the fictitious Abraham, must *ipso facto* himself be a character of fiction?

Moreover, what about the implications of this for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted elsewhere in the Old Testament texts who can be found referring back to his dealings with Abraham as though these actually happened? Is not the god Yahweh who is subsequently depicted both inside and outside Genesis as speaking in the first person to Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and all the other kings and prophets about his fictitious dealings with Abraham unmasked as a mere literary construct?

Contra the view expressed by Davies (1995:21) therefore, if biblical-critical analysis can demonstrate that a certain historically intended scenario, event or character in the text is fictitious, it is also possible to demonstrate, albeit indirectly, that Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular text must himself be a character of fiction. Any disproof of the historicity of an event or character depicted in the text is tantamount to a deconstruction of realism with regard to the ontological status of the deity Yahweh as

depicted in the same text.

In sum then, by proving that a particular story pretending to be history never actually happened, whatever did happen and whatever God or gods there may be, it will be possible to demonstrate that Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist. In the rest of this chapter, this is exactly what the devil's advocate intends to do. Not to show what actually did happen and what is really real but rather what demonstrably did *not* happen and, as a result of this, what cannot possibly be real.

7.2   ARGUMENTS AGAINST HISTORICITY

There is a general consensus among critical scholars that the actual history of Old Testament times is not the same as what an uncritical surface reading of the biblical texts may impress one with (cf. Thompson 1998:02). In addition, the amount of scholarly literature dealing with the critical reconstruction of the possible historical realities behind the Old Testament texts is staggering.

One could, perhaps, start with the problems noted by early interpreters such as Josephus or Celsus. Alternatively, there is the option of initiating the present discussion with the research of nineteenth century German scholarship, e.g. the studies by Vater (1802-1805), De Wette (1806-1807), Keunen (1865), Stade (1867) or Wellhausen (1894; ET 1957). Then again it might be more practical to begin with the twentieth century and start off with a pioneering study such as the one by Noth (1960).

In the end, however, the devil's advocate has decided to limit the discussion to research with anti-realist tendencies published over the last two or three decades. After all, much of what is relevant for the purposes of this study in the works of earlier scholarship reappears in relatively recent historiography. Moreover, especially since the 1970's, marked anti-realist tendencies began to establish itself in critical reconstructions of the history of Israel by scholars often labelled as "revisionists", "minimalists" or simply "post-modernists" (cf. Barr 2001:02)

In this regard, relatively recent research on the history of Israel by both liberal-critical and radical-revisionist scholars have provided the devil's advocate with a host of implicit arguments against historicity. The following studies, amongst others, certainly qualify: De Vaux (1978); Ramsey (1981); Fohrer (1982); Gottwald (1979); Jagersma (1982); Van Seters (1976, 1983); Donner (1984, 1986); Miller & Hayes (1986); Lemche (1988, 1998); Garbini (1988); Albertz (1992); Davies (1992) Ahlstrom (1993); Soggin (1993); Whitelam (1996); Thompson (1974, 1998), Amit (1999).

From a philosophical-critical perspective, it is noteworthy that most of these studies with their focus on issues of history frequently bracket the obvious anti-realist implications of their findings for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. As the spelling out of such implications is the devil's advocate's speciality, a host of implicit anti-realist arguments have been abstracted from the research of the aforementioned scholars.

The abstracted arguments were then sorted and reconstructed in the form of anti-realist ontological arguments which, taken together, provide a cumulative case against historicity of much of the so-called historical or historically intended texts in the Old Testament. Ultimately, since problems with historicity necessarily translate into ontological dilemmas, the presentation of arguments against historical realism will allow the devil's advocate to articulate yet another devastating argument against the existence of Yahweh as depicted in the text. This is the argument from fictitious history.

7.2.1 The argument from intra-textual contradictions

If it can be shown that there exist within the discourse of the Old Testament two or more contradictory accounts of an event in which Yahweh was either directly involved or indirectly related to, the following theoretical possibilities arise:

1. One of the accounts is fictitious and therefore Yahweh-as-depicted in (relation to) the particular discourse is a character of fiction and, technically speaking, does not exist

2. Both accounts may be fictitious and though there might have been an extra-textual
    reality that the texts allude to, Yahweh-as-depicted-in-these-texts does not actually
    exist.

As most critical Old Testament scholars would know all-too-well, there are hundreds
of minor discrepancies in the text of the Old Testament (cf. Deist 1978:06, 1986:26).
Here, then, courtesy of the devil's advocate, are but a few (sic) of the many historical
contradictions that may have anti-realist implications pertaining to the ontological
status of Yahweh as depicted in the text:

> Yahweh created plants, then animals, then humans (male and female
> together) (cf. Gen 1:1-31)
> Yahweh created a male human first, then plants, then animals, then
> the female human (cf. Gen 2:4b-25)
>
> People already worshipped Yahweh by name before the flood (cf.
> Gen 4:26)
> People only started to worship Yahweh by name after he revealed it
> to Moses (cf. Ex 6:3)
>
> Details of a genealogy (cf. Gen 4:17-26)
> A contradicting version of the same lineage (cf. Gen 5:1-32)
>
> Human life span is limited to 120 years (cf. Gen 6:3)
> Many humans after that exceed this limit (cf. Gen 12 and passim)
>
> The duration of the flood was 40 days (cf. Gen 7:4,12,17)
> The duration of the flood was 150 days (cf. Gen 7:24, 8:3)
>
> The animals on the ark were two of each type (cf. Gen 6:19)
> They were only two in terms of the unclean animals but seven pairs
> were to be taken from the clean animals (cf. Gen 7:2-3)

The people of the earth had their own languages before the tower of Babylon incident (cf. Gen 10:15)

The people all spoke one language until after the tower of Babylon incident when Yahweh confused their speech (cf. Gen 11:1-9)

Abram was 70 years old when his Terah died (cf. Gen 12:4)

Abram was 135 years old when Terah died. (cf. Gen 11:26,32)

Ishmael was an infant when Hagar carried him into the desert (cf. Gen 21:14-18)

Ishmael was already 16 years old at the time (cf. Gen 17:24,25)

When Jacob fled from his home he was 40 years old (cf. Gen 26:34; 28:5)

When Jacob fled from his home he was 77 years old (cf. Gen 41:46,53; 45:6)

Beth El was first named when Jacob was on his way to Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 28:18-19)

Beth El was first named when Jacob returned from Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 35:13-14)

11 of Jacob's son's were born over a period of 13 years (cf. Gen 29:20-21; 31:41)

11 of Jacob's son's were born over a period of 7 years (cf. Gen 29:30-31; 30:25)

Jacob was renamed as "Israel" by God east of the Jordan at Peniel (cf. Gen 32:23)

Jacob was renamed as "Israel" by God west of the Jordan at Beth El (cf. Gen 35:10)

The place Beersheba was named by Isaac (cf. Gen 21:31)

The place Beersheba was named by Jacob (cf. Gen 26:27)

Joseph was sold to Midianites who took him to Egypt (cf. Gen 37:25-27; 39:1)

Joseph was kidnapped by Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt (cf. Gen 37:28a,29,36)

Benjamin was born in Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 35:16-19)

Benjamin was born in Canaan (cf. Gen 35:24-26)

Rebecca died while giving birth to Benjamin (cf. Gen 35)

Rebecca is alive and well years later (cf. Gen 37)

Canaan was the land of the Hebrews (cf. Gen 40:15)

Canaan became the land of the Hebrews only later on (cf. Jos 1:11)

One list of the number and names of the sons of Benjamin (cf. Gen 46:21)

A contradictory list of the number and names of the sons of Benjamin (cf. Num 28:38-40)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Jethro (cf. Ex 3:1)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Reuel (cf. Ex 2:18)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Hobab (cf. Judg 4:11)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ex 7-11)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ps 78:43-51)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ps 105:27-36)

The exodus occurred after a stay of 60-120 years in Egypt (cf. Gen 15:16)

The exodus occurred after a stay of 400 to 430 years in Egypt (cf. Gen 15:13; Ex 12:40)

The sea was crossed after Yahweh caused a strong east wind to

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blow (cf. Ex 14:21)

The sea was crossed after Moses parted the water to form two walls (cf. Ex 14:23)

The names and number of the tribes (cf. Gen 49)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Num 1)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Deut 33)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Josh 19)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Judg 1)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Judg 5)

The routes taken and the itineraries of the exodus in the Sinai Peninsula (cf. Ex 13-17)

Alternative and contradictory construals of the desert wanderings (cf. Num 10-33)

The exact wording of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex 20:1-17)

A contradictory version (cf. Ex 34:10-26)

Another contradictory version (cf. Deut 5:5-21)

Yahweh himself wrote down the law (cf. Ex 34:1)

It was not Yahweh but Moses who wrote it down (cf. Ex 34:27)

The name of the mountain of God were the law was given was Sinai (cf. Ex 3:1)

The name of the mountain of God where the law was given was Horeb (cf. Ex 19:1)

During the exodus and the wandering in the wilderness Israel was commanded to sacrifice to Yahweh (cf. Ex 3:18 and passim)

Yahweh never asked the Israelites to sacrifice to him when they left Egypt and were living in the desert (cf. Jer 7:22-23)

The time when the Ark of the Covenant was constructed (cf. Deut

10:3-5)

A contradictory account (cf. Ex 25:10; 35:12)

One version of the Sinai theophany (cf. Ex 19; 24)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Deut 4)

One version of the manna and quails incident (cf. Ex 16:1-36)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Num 11:4-35)

One version of the water from the rock incident (cf. Ex 17:1-7)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Num 20:1-21)

One version of the golden calf incident (cf. Ex 32:1-29)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Deut 9:11-29)

Itineraries in the desert (cf. Num 21:10-20)

A contradictory list (cf. Num 33:44-49)

The sacrificial animals were slaughtered at the entrance to the tabernacle (cf. Lev 17:3-4)

The sacrificial animals were slaughtered elsewhere (cf. Deut 12:15-16)

The Levites were first sanctified at Sinai (cf. Num 3:6)

The Levites were first sanctified at a later period (cf. Deut 6:8)

The Edomites refused the Israelites passage and the restocking of provisions (cf. Num 20:19-20; Judg 11:17-18)

The Edomites did not refuse the Israelites passage and the restocking of provisions (cf. Deut 2:4,28-29)

Moses looked at the Promised Land from the mountain Abrarim (cf. Num 27:12)

Moses looked at the Promised Land from the mountain Pishga (cf.

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Deut 3:27)

Aaron died at the mountain called Hor (cf. Num 20:27-28)
Aaron died at the mountain called Mosherah (cf. Deut 10:6)

After Aaron's death the Israelites went to Shalmonah and Pinon (cf. Num 33:37-42)
After Aaron's death the Israelites went to Gudgodah and Jothbatah (cf. Deut 10:6-7)

Caleb was the only one who did not rebel against Yahweh (cf. Num 14:24)
Not only Caleb but also Joshua did not rebel against Yahweh (cf. Num 14:30)

Caleb's father was Jephuneh (cf. Josh 14:6)
Caleb's father was Geshron (cf. 1 Chron 2:18)
Caleb's father was Hur (cf. 1 Chron 2:50)

Yahweh expressly commanded the Israelites to restrict their worship in the Promised Land to one centralised cultic place (Deut 12:5ff)
Apparently Yahweh never required this (cf. Ex 20:20-24; Judges; 1-2 Samuel/1-2 Kings)

The first naming of Hebron (cf. Gen 13:18)
A contradictory account (cf. Josh 14:15)

The Canaanites were completely annihilated (cf. Josh 10:40)
They were only oppressed (cf. Judg 1:28)

Yahweh did not destroy all the pagan people of the land because he did not want the wild animals to become too many (sic) (cf. Deut 7:22)
Yahweh did not destroy the pagan people of the land in order to see

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whether the Israelites would be faithful (cf. Judg 2:22)

The process of settlement was quick (cf. Josh 10:42)
The process of settlement was slow (cf. Josh 11:18; Judges 1-19)

Israel could not conquer Jebush until the time of David (cf. Josh 15:63)
Israel conquered Jebush and burned it with fire long before the time of king David (cf. Judg 1:8)

The cities of Tanaach and Dor were actually conquered (cf. Josh 12:21-23)
The cities of Tanaach and Dor were not conquered (cf. Judg 1:27)

Joshua attacked the city of Ai with 30 000 warriors (cf. Josh 8:12)
Joshua attacked the city of Ai with only 5 000 warriors (cf. Josh 8:3)

The number of cities taken was 29 (cf. Josh 15:32)
The number of cities taken was 38 (cf. Josh 15:21-32)

Siserah was killed while sleeping (cf. Judg 4:20)
Siserah was killed while standing (cf. Judg 5:25)

The number of Benjaminites who were killed was 26100 (cf. Judg 20:15)
The number of Benjaminites killed was actually 25000 (cf. Judg 20:46-47)

The names of Samuel's sons (cf. 1 Sam 14:49)
A contradictory list (cf. 1 Sam 31:2)

David is in the service of Saul and plays on the harp for him (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23)
Saul has never met David in his life (cf. 1 Sam 17:55-58)

David killed Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17:1, 49)

Elchanan killed Goliath (cf. 2 Sam 2:18-19)

One account of Saul's death (cf. 1 Sam 34:4-5)

A contradictory version (cf. 2 Sam 1:4-10)

Another contradictory version (cf. 2 Sam 21:12)

Saul's family died with him (cf. 1 Chron 10:6)

Apparently they did not (cf. 2 Sam 2:8)

Ishboseth ruled for 2 years (cf. 2 Sam 2:10)

Ishboseth ruled for 7 years (cf. 2 Sam 2:11)

Uzziah was killed by Yahweh at the threshing floor of Nachon (cf. 2 Sam 6)

Uzziah was killed by Yahweh at the threshing floor of Gidon (cf. 1 Chron 13)

The fallible character of David (cf. 1 Sam 16 - 1 Kgs 2)

The idealised David (cf. 1 Chron 10-29)

One account of where the troops were stationed (cf. 2 Kgs 11:5-7)

A contradictory account (cf. 2 Chron 23:4-5)

Yahweh incited David to hold a census (cf. 2 Sam 24:1)

It was Satan who incited David (cf. 1 Chron 21:1)

The number of soldiers in Israel and Judah was 1 100 000 and 470 000 respectively (cf. 1 Chron 21:5-7)

The number of soldiers in Israel was 800 000 and 500 000 respectively (2 Sam 24:4-5)

The proposed famine would last 3 years (cf. 1 Chron 21:12)

The proposed famine would last 7 years (cf. 2 Sam 24:13)

For the threshing floor David had to pay 50 shekels of silver (cf. 2 Sam 24:24)

For the threshing floor David had to pay 600 shekels of gold (cf. 1 Chron 21:25)

David took 1700 horsemen (cf. 2 Sam 8:4)

David took 7000 horsemen (cf. 1 Chron 18:4)

Solomon practised idolatry (cf. 1 Kgs 11:1-13)

Solomon did not practise idolatry (cf. 2 Chron 9; 35:4)

Solomon had 1000 wives (cf. 1 Kgs 11:3)

Solomon only had 140 wives (cf. Songs 6:8)

Solomon subjected the Hebrews to slavery (cf. 1 Kgs 5:13-14)

Solomon subjected none of the Hebrews to slavery (cf. 1 Kgs 9:22)

The nature of Solomon's wisdom (cf. 1 Kgs 3; 2 Chron 1)

A different kind of wisdom (cf. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

Solomon had 4 000 stalls (cf. 2 Chron 9)

Solomon had 40 000 stalls (cf. 1 Kgs 4)

Solomon had 550 overseers (cf. 1 Kgs 9)

Solomon had 250 overseers (cf. 2 Chron 8)

Solomon's temple was 18 cubits high, had 3300 overseers and the sea of bronze adjacent to it comprised a volume of 2 000 baths (cf. 1 Kgs 5-7)

Solomon's temple was 35 cubits high, had 3 600 overseers and the sea of bronze adjacent to it comprised a volume of 3 000 baths (cf. 2 Chron 2-4)

Baasha died in the 26th year of the reign of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16)

Baasha attacked Judah during the 36th year of the reign of Asa (cf. 2 Chron 16)

Asa removed all the high places (cf. 2 Kron 14)

Asa did not remove all the high places (cf. 1 Kgs 5)

Ahab died at Ramoth Gilead (cf. 2 Kon 22:37)

Ahab died at Jezreel (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1,19)

Jotam ruled for 16 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:30)

Jotam ruled for 20 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:33)

Pekah's reign lasted 20 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:27)

Pekah's reign lasted 30 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:32-33)

Ahasiah began his rule when he was 22 years old (cf. 2 Kgs 8)

Ahasiah began his rule when he was 42 years old (cf. 2 Chron 22)

Azariah's rule began during the 15th year of Jerobeam (cf. 2 Kgs 14:2,7,23)

Azariah's rule began during the 27th year of Jerobeam (cf. 2 Kgs 15:2)

Hoseah began to rule during the 3rd year of Ahaz's reign (cf. 2 Kgs 15:27)

Hoseah began to rule during the 12th year of Ahaz's reign (cf. 2 Kgs 17:1)

Joahaz began to rule in the 19th year of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 10:36)

Joahaz began to rule during the 23rd year of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 13:1)

The furnishings for the temple were not made in the time of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 12:13-14)

The furnishings for the temple were made in Joaz's time (cf. 2 Chron 24:14)

Omri began to rule during the 27th year of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16:15)
Omri began to rule during the 31st year of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16:23)

Josiah's reformation took place during the 12th year of his reign (cf. 2 Chron 34)
Josiah's reformation took place during the 18th year of his reign (cf. 2 Kgs 22)

Ahaz was defeated by Israel in Syria (cf. 2 Chron 28)
He was not (cf. 2 Kgs 16)

Ahaz was buried with his fathers (cf. 2 Kgs 16:20)
He was not (cf. 2 Chron 28:27)

Josiah died at Megiddo (cf. 2 Kgs 23)
Josiah died at Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron 35)

Nebusaradan came on the 7th day (cf. 2 Kgs 25)
Nebusaradan came on the 10th day (cf. Jer 52)

After Josiah, Joaz became king (cf. 2 Chron 38)
It was not Joaz but Sallum (cf. Jer 22)

One version of Yahweh's sundial miracle for Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kgs 20)
A contradictory version (cf. Isa 38)

Jojachim had no successor (cf. Jer 36:30)
Jojachim was succeeded by his son (cf. 2 Kgs 14:6)

Manasseh was an evil king until his death (cf. 2 Kgs 21)

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Manasseh repented before his death (cf. 2 Chron 33)

The amount of captives taken numbered 10 000 (cf. 2 Kgs 24:14-16)
The amount of captives taken numbered 4 600 (cf. Jer 52:28-30)

The number of people returning from exile was 42 360 (cf. Ez 2:1-63)
The number of people returning from exile was 29 818 (cf. Ez 2:64)
The number of people returning form exile was 31 089 (cf. Neh 7)

There were a total of 4 priestly classes (cf. Ez 2:36)
There were a total of 22 priestly classes (cf. Neh 7:1)

Contributions to the temple fund (cf. Ez 2)
A contradictory account (cf. Neh 7)

The details of the census lists (cf. Ez 2)
Contradictory versions of the same lists (cf. Neh 7)

These are only a few of the hundreds if not thousands of minor and major historical discrepancies in the texts of the Old Testament (cf. Carroll 1991:35; Soggin 1993:21). A perusal of critical commentaries such as those in the *ICC* or *OTL* series on the individual biblical books; studies in source-, tradition-, and redaction criticism and critical reconstructions of the history of Israel will demonstrate to the reader the quantity of intra- and inter-textual discrepancies.

As can be seen in the textual references of the contradictions presented above, historical contradictions are present both between different books relating the same incident or scenario as well as within the same book where two (or more) sources with contradictory data have been juxtaposed. They feature throughout Old Testament history and in every major epoch from creation to the post-exilic period. Moreover, the contradictions noted pertain to a great variety of issues. These include genealogical data, names of people, numbers of people, locations of events, names of places, details of scenarios, dialogues, acts, specific times of given events, the role of

Yahweh in some events, Yahweh's perspective on certain issues, etc., etc. (cf. also Haley 1992:04).

From a critical perspective, it would seem that the way in which conservative scholars and fundamentalist apologists deal with the discrepancies involves a mixture of repression and distortion of the problematic. This happens when such interpreters deny that there are any contradictions at all (cf. Barr 1981:25). They use weak analogies such as those of motorcar accidents, paintings and court testimonies to claim that small differences should be expected and distort the issues by asserting that the different versions merely supplement and compliment each other. They also appeal to invalid stereotypes of ancient literature and ancient mindsets or to the supposed corruption of the untouchable original text of scripture that, because it is supposed to the Word of God, cannot possibly contradict itself.

As Mckinsey (1995:10,22,47 and passim) notes, through conjectures without basis in the texts themselves, ad hoc arguments, reinterpretation, and speculation, conservatives desperately attempt to harmonise each and every little discrepancy noted by critical interpreters. Such an attempt to deal with the contradictions, though apparently sincere seems deeply dishonest as the aim is not so much the acceptance of the text on its own terms (as they claim), but to safeguard fundamentalist dogmas regarding alleged scriptural inerrancy (cf. Barr 1984:51).

Of course, awareness of the many contradictions is hardly novel (cf. Haley 1992:437-442). For centuries now, source criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism and critical histories of Israel have noted the inconsistencies in the texts traditionally believed to give factual accounts of scenarios from the extra-textual past. For many scholars of the history of Israel, such contradictions have led to doubt with regard to the factuality of particular historically intended narratives in the text (cf. Deist 1978:12). In other words, the presence of contradictions in the text is seen to constitute one of the many arguments against the historicity of Old Testament discourse.

A historical critic might ponder the implications of the contradictions for the historicity of the events recounted and the possibility of mutually discrepant

traditions, sources, redactions and translations of the particular texts (cf. Teeple 1982:45). For the purposes of this study, however, with its interest in philosophico-religious issues, the implications of these contradictions regarding matters of history for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts are what need to be spelled out.

Yahweh could not be involved in two contradictory accounts of the same event if any of those events had any extra-textual historical counterpart. In the case of at least one fictitious account, the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular text is *ipso facto* of the same fictitious nature. It follows that the character Yahweh featured in (or related to) an account without any extra-textual counterpart also has no extra-textual substance.

In conclusion, with regard to at least one of two or more contradictory versions of any scenario directly or indirectly involving Yahweh, the deity as thus depicted did therefore not actually act or relate in the way portrayed and therefore does not exist.

7.2.2   The argument from cosmographical fiction

In the previous chapter, the ontological problems pertaining to fictitious cosmography and its implications for the ontological status of the character Yahweh were discussed in detail. For present purposes, it should suffice to note that certain events depicted in the Old Testament intended as historical accounts about a past event cannot be such based on the fact that they feature spatial locations which never existed in extra-textual reality (cf. also Fawcett 1973:19).

Consider the following examples:

> "And God said, 'Let there be a firmament between the waters and let it separate waters from waters. God then made the firmament and separated the waters beneath the firmament from the waters above it. And it was so. And God called the firmament 'skies'." (Gen 1:6-8)

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"And he (Yahweh) drove out the man and he put in the east of the Garden of Eden the cherubs and the fiery sword moving about to protect the way (to the) tree of life." (Gen 3:22-24)

"… if Yahweh creates something new and the ground opens her mouth and eats them with all that belongs to them and they go down alive to Sheol, then you will know that Yahweh abhorred these men. And when he finished speaking, the ground that was underneath them tore open, and the earth opened her mouth and ate them with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah, and all their possession. Thus, they and all that was in their possession went down alive to Sheol…" (Num 16:20-35)

"And while they were walking and talking there came suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire that parted them; and Elijah ascended to the skies in the storm." (2 Kgs 2:11)

"And Yahweh spoke furthermore with Ahaz and said, 'Demand a sign from Yahweh your god: descend down to Sheol or climb up to the heights'" (Isa 7:10-11)

"Then Yahweh answered Job from within a storm and said,…Did you come to the sources of the sea? Did you walk inside the flood? Have the portals of death been revealed to you and did you see the gates of the death's shadow…Did you see the treasuries of the snow and did you see the treasuries of the hail which I have stored for the day of anxiety, for the day of strife and war?" (Job 38:1,16-17, 23-24)

If it is true that the scenarios depicted in the text involve fictitious spatial locations, then *ipso facto* the events occurring therein that are inextricably intertwined with the particular cosmography obviously did not actually happen (cf. Harwood 1992:27,55,111 and passim). Moreover, the god Yahweh, depicted as a character in those stories never really acted and/or spoke in the way described. Therefore,

Yahweh-as-depicted in texts where historical realism is dependent on fictitious cosmography as part of allegedly historical scenarios must be a character of fiction. In short, he does not exist.

7.2.3   The argument from the impossible narrator's perspective

Unless one can validly justify a belief in the mechanical inspiration of the Old Testament texts, it would seem unavoidable to concede that the perspective of the narrator in certain passages must be judged as impossible (cf. Clines 1990:135-152).

In this regard, the following scenarios apply:

- When the narrator gives a very detailed account of the private dialogue of the antagonists featuring in the narrative while the text simultaneously implies that no one who could have had anything to do with the writing of the text could in any way have known what it recounts;

- When a narrator gives a detailed account of what the characters are thinking in secret;

- When an account is given of acts and dialogue while all present are subsequently killed or related in such as manner as to make any direct or indirect contact with the later author impossible.

Consider the following examples of the impossible narrator's perspective:

> "And Yahweh the god said, 'Behold, the human has now become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, in order to prevent him from sending his hand and take from the tree of the life and living forever…' And Yahweh the god sent him from Eden to toil the ground from which he was taken." (Gen 3:22-24)

> "Then Yahweh said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am going to

do, while Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him? After all, I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him that they must keep the way of Yahweh and do what is just and right so that Yahweh can bring upon Abraham what he spoke to him…" (Gen 18:17-19)

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the way to the land of the Philistines, even though it was closer, because God said, 'The people may repent if they see war and want to return to Egypt'." (Ex 13:17)

"Thereupon Balaam said to Balak, 'Stay with your burnt offering and I will go away, maybe Yahweh will meet me and whatever he lets me see, I will tell you...'" (Num 23:3)

"And they waited until they were embarrassed; but he did not open the doors of the upper room. And when they went to fetch the key and opened the door their lord was lying on the floor. But while they tarried, Ehud had fled..." (Judg 3:25-26)

"And the leaders of the Philistines gathered to bring a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to be merry; and they said; our god has given our enemy Samson into our hands'. And when the people saw him they praised their god, because they said, 'Our god delivered our enemy and the destroyer of our land who killed many of us, into our hands'. And when their hearts were merry they said, 'Call Samson, that he may play for us'. And they called Samson out of prison; and he played before them and they made him stand between two pillars. Then Samson said to the servant who held him by the hand, 'Allow me to stand and to touch the pillars whereupon the house rests, that I may lean against it'. And the house was full of men and women and all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and on the roof (were) about three thousand men and women who

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watched Samson play. Then Samson called to Yahweh and said, 'Lord Yahweh, think about me and strengthen me just this one time, O God, that I may wreak myself over one of my two eyes on the Philistines. And Samson put his arms around the two central pillars on which the house rested...and Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he bowed himself with all his might so that the house fell in on the rulers and on all the people who were inside. Thus were the dead whom he killed in his death more than those whom he killed during his life." (Judg 16:23-30)

"And the Philistines heard the sound of the rejoicing and said, 'What sort of noise like a great war cry is in the camp of the Hebrews? ...and the Philistines became scared and said, 'God has come into the camp!' And they said, 'Woe to us, because such a thing did not happen yesterday or the day before. Woe to us, who will save us from the hand of these awesome gods? It is the same gods who smote the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues in the desert. Have courage and act like men, Philistines, then you will not serve the Hebrews as they have served you; act like men and fight!'" (1 Sam 4:6-9)

"And Saul said to his armour bearer, 'Draw your sword and kill me with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and kill me and mock me.' But his armour bearer did not want to (do this), for he was very afraid. Then Saul took the sword and fell into it. When the armour bearer saw that Saul was dead he himself fell into his sword and died." (1 Sam 31:4-5)

"But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David has slept with his fathers...Hadad said the Pharaoh, 'Let me go that I may go to my land.' Then the Pharaoh said to him, 'But what do you lack with me that suddenly you desire to go back to your land?' And he answered, 'Nothing, but please allow me to go.'" (1 Kgs 11:21-22)

"And Jerobeam said in his heart, 'Now the kingship will return to the house of David. If these people go up to sacrifice in the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem, then the heart of these people will return to their lord, to Rehabeam, the king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehabeam, the king of Judah.'" (1 Kgs 12:26-27)

"Ben Hadad, who also went into the city, fled from room to room. Then his servants said to him, 'Look, we have heard that the kings from the house of Israel is merciful...'" (1 Kgs 20:30-31)

"While they prepared themselves early in the morning and the sun went up over the waters, the Moabites saw at a distance the water red as blood. And they said, 'It is blood; the kings must surely have attacked each other and the one defeated the other. Now, to the booty, Moabites! But when they came to the camp of the Israelites, the Israelites prepared themselves and defeated the Moabites...'" (2 Kgs 3:22-24)

"And one day when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh the Satan also came among them. Then Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Where did you come from?' And the Satan answered Yahweh and said, 'From journey across the earth which I have crossed.' And Yahweh asked the Satan, 'Did you see my servant Job... ?'" (Job 1:6)

"But Hamman restrained himself and when he got home he called his friends and his wife; and Hamman told them of the glory of his riches and the multitude of his sons and of everything in which the king made him great…Furthermore Hamman said, 'Even queen Esther invited no one else to the meal which she had set-up, except for me; also for tomorrow I have been invited by her with the king. But all this does not profit me as long as I see the Jew Mordechai sitting at the gate of the king.'" (Esth 5:10-13)

These are but some of the more obvious examples of the impossible perspective of the omniscient narrator playing the historian (cf. also Clines 1995:135-152; Cupitt 1991:144-145). To be sure, there are also many other less obvious examples where it seems inconceivable that someone could have been recording what took place in a way that would have allowed the narrator to provide the kind of detail that he has put into writing.

There are so many mundane and in-the-heat-of-the-action scenes in the text where the possibility and likelihood of any record or detailed memory handed down seems to be ruled out by the text itself. Yet the narrator often gives his audience a *very* detailed account. Because of the nature and contents of the texts themselves and not, as commonly claimed, due to nihilism or anti-supernaturalism, many of these details, seem just too artificial and appear to have been constructed for the sake of writing a good or convincing story.

Though often intended to be understood as reflective of actual past events, the discourse presented via the impossible perspective of the omniscient narrator gives the game away and unmasks the story as fiction (cf. also Soggin 1993:25). Moreover, if it is true that the narration indeed exhibits an impossible perspective then, no matter whether there was some historical core and reality behind the fanciful tale, the scenarios and people depicted in the particular discourse are still, technically speaking, fictitious (cf. Thompson 1998:52).

From the historian's perspective, much scepticism with regard to the factuality of such detailed scenarios is unavoidable. In addition, since the character Yahweh features in many such texts, or is in some way implied to be related to the events depicted therein, realism with regard to the deity as thus depicted must be considered as being problematic. Yahweh-as-thus-depicted/related – his dialogue, actions and relation being the imaginative and ideological construction of the narrator – must himself be considered as a character of fiction.

7.2.4   The argument from numerical absurdities

Hardly anyone has utilised the argument from numerological absurdities in the text

against realism in Old Testament theology as thoroughly as the nineteenth century bishop of Natal, John Colenso (1862a; 1862b). Colenso (1862a; 1862b) made many astute observations with regard to statistical data in the text and concluded that the obvious absurdities appear to deconstruct realism with regard to the historicity of the events described.

Colenso (1862a) attempted to establish the total number of Israelites. The 603 500 warriors were above twenty years of age (cf. Num 1:3). There were also 600 000 women above twenty and it is probable that there were also 300 000 men and 300 000 women under twenty while 200 000 old people can be added. The total number of Israelites who left Egypt must therefore have amounted to at least two million. This number equalled the total population of the city of London in 1851. It would have been impossible for Moses to address all the people simultaneously as the text suggests to have been the case: No human voice could reach a crowd as large as the whole population of London (cf. Colenso 1862a:37).

Some countered this view by referring to a miracle or to the possibility that only a small number of Israelites attended these meetings. According to Colenso, however, this kind of argument was an impeachment of the literal accuracy of the text. Furthermore, Colenso also replied by referring his critics to numerous other similar numerological absurdities in the text. For example, the Israelites must have occupied an impossibly huge area. If 36 square feet or 4 square yards were allowed for each one the Israelites would have been crowded together in an area of 8 000 000 square yards or 1652 acres. This must have caused insurmountable obstacles: Each day wood and water would have to be obtained from outside the camp. And how was this possible in the wilderness? (cf. Colenso 1862a:38)

Furthermore, all kinds of dirt and filth had to be removed from the camp on a daily basis because the camp "must be holy so that he (Yahweh) will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you" (cf. Deut 23:14). It seems unlikely that this could be accomplished and it is therefore "itself a very convincing proof of the unhistorical character of the whole narrative" (cf. Colenso 1862a:40).

When the Israelites left Egypt they were issued with tents (cf. Ex 16:16; Lev 23:42-

43). If ten people occupied one tent 200 000 were needed for the two million. Where were they obtained from? Furthermore, how were they carried? It was impossible to carry them on their shoulders because these were already laden with other burdens (cf. Ex 12:34) Trained oxen could have been used for this purpose but at least 200 000 were needed. It seems impossible to think that the Israelite slaves possessed so many trained oxen in Egypt (cf. Colenso 1862a:45-47).

According to Exodus 13:18 the Israelites went out of Egypt armed for battle. This sounds impossible: "It is, however, inconceivable that these down trodden and oppressed people should have been allowed by Pharaoh to possess arms, so as to turn out at a moment's notice 600 000 armed men" (cf. Colenso 1862a:48). Such a mighty armed would have revolted long before Moses and the exodus. Moreover, the warriors formed a distinct class in Egypt and it is unlikely that oppressed slaves would have been allowed to join their ranks or form a distinct army.

The marching of the Israelite soldiers would also have caused immense difficulties: If they had marched out of Egypt five in a rank, allowing one yard between the ranks, the troops would have formed a line of 68 miles. It is further explicitly stated that the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions on that very day (Ex 12:51). The impression is thus created that the 600 000 armed men left Egypt suddenly. This would have been totally impossible. Many days would be needed to set up the different divisions to leave the land of Egypt (cf. Colenso 1862a:48-49).

The biblical rendering of the institution of the Passover also caused insurmountable problems to Colenso. Moses summoned the elders and instructed them to select and slaughter lambs and to prepare for the Passover. They had to inform the whole of Israel to execute the orders for Passover exactly. Since it was a matter of life and death, the notice had to be explained to each separate family carefully. A population as large as the city of London thus had to be instructed in one day. Once again, this seems impossible (cf. Colenso 1862a:52).

A vast piece of land was needed for these flocks. We can form some idea of this by determining the total number of lambs. If ten people consumed one lamb then 200 000 lambs would be required for the two million Israelites; if twenty individuals ate

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one lamb, 100 000 lambs would be required; if the mean of these is taken, 150 000 were then needed. And since only year old males without defect had to be chosen (Ex 12:5) we may assume that there were at least as many female lambs. Altogether thus 300 000 lambs and that only for the first year.

But the problem is more complicated. If all the 150 000 male lambs were killed in the first year, no rams or wethers would be left for the increase of the flock. Instead of 150 000 we must assume a total number of 400 000 lambs (200 000 males and 200 000 females) for the first year. If five sheep are allowed for one acre, the Israelites needed 400 000 acres of land. It seems incredible that the Egyptians would have granted the Israelites slaves 400 000 acres or 25 square miles of grazing land (cf. Colenso 1862a:54-57).

Colenso also investigated other aspects of the Pentateuchal narrative and again and again indicated remarkable inconsistencies and contradictory statements (Colenso 1862b). Although of an arithmetic nature, these arguments were deemed sufficient to indicate the utter impossibility of receiving any longer this story of the exodus as literally and historically true (Colenso 1862:162).

Not even an alternation of the warrior numbers can solve the severe problems mentioned above. If, for instance, 60 000 instead of 600 000 must be read there would still be a group of 200 000 or 300 000 people and many problems would still remain. Even if the number is reduced to 6 000 some but not all of the difficulties might be solved. We would still have to imagine a town of 20 000 to 30 000 people. According to Colenso it is highly improbable that the total number of the warriors is wrong because it was repeated accurately each time (cf. Colenso 1862a:163-164).

The exodus narrative is not the only narrative where apparent numerological problems have led scholars to consider the particular story fictitious (cf. Hemmingway 1978; Le Roux 1993:57). From a wholly historical perspective, the interest here includes the question with regard to whether the event occurred as described or not (cf. Deist 1978:11; contra Von Rad 1962:41). But from a philosophical-critical perspective concerned with ontological issues, the interest here lies with what these problems with numbers would imply regarding the ontological status of the character of Yahweh

whose words and actions are inextricably bound up with the details of the narrative.

Technically it follows that if over two million Israelites did not leave Egypt as the text describes and that the specific representation of the exodus is fictitious then neither does the Yahweh-who-led-two-million-Israelites-from-Egypt exist. Even if Yahweh per se actually exists and even if some or other event actually did happen which might be labelled as being an "exodus", the fact remains that if the event depicted in the text did not occur as described then neither did Yahweh act in the way described. It follows then that whatever actually happened and whatever God may actually have been involved in some way, Yahweh-as-depicted in the fictional text never acted exactly as described and therefore is himself a character of fiction. *Ipso facto*, Yahweh-as-depicted did not and does not exist.

7.2.5 The argument from chronological schematisation

In the study by Hughes (1990), the author argues that the biblical chronology is not historically factual. Instead, it articulates a mythical scheme apparently constructed for the purpose of showing how history is ordered according to a presupposed divine plan. The author also notes that, one possible reason why modern biblical scholarship has been inclined to overlook the schematic nature of biblical chronology may be that it is, in a way, rather embarrassing (cf. Hughes 1990:02).

Modern biblical scholarship is largely historical in outlook and considerable effort has been devoted to the establishing of a reliable chronological framework for the history of the Israelite and Judean kingdoms. If the chronological data on which this framework is based turn out to be mythical rather than historical, this might be regarded as undermining the basis of modern scholarship. It could be worse than this: if the chronology is mythical rather than historical, the same might also be true of the narrative that contains this chronology (cf. Hughes 1990:03).

By the concept of "myth", Hughes understands something that is "fiction" but that nevertheless expresses a truth of some sort (cf. Hughes 1990:03). Whatever this "truth" is that Hughes is referring to, the bottom line of his study is that not only did the events described in the Old Testament not happen exactly as depicted; whatever did happen did not even happen *when* it supposedly did. Hughes (1990:03) can therefore validly assert that the so-called "history" constructed in the texts is actually historical "fiction" with the purpose of expressing ideological beliefs.

Hughes (1990:202-206) mentions several problems regarding biblical chronology that apparently destroy realism:

• There are internal contradictions pertaining to issues such as birth dates, life spans, time of ascensions by kings, duration of rule, etc.

• There are contradictions between the time-schemes of the various Old Testament textual traditions, i.e. between MT, LXX and SP, as well as *within* the MT between an original chronology and later priestly and Deuteronomistic revisions and adaptations of that chronology for the purposes of creating aesthetically and

symbolically significant discourse.

- The biblical chronology has very little in common with actual historical chronology and is an ideological, mythical and fictitious construct presented for the purpose of propagating the belief that history is somehow divinely ordered.

Hughes (1990) provides many tables of chronological data to justify these claims. For example, consider the following instances of obviously mythical and contradictory chronology discussed by the author.

1) Obviously artificial mythical chronological constructs:

- Creation (7 days)
- The age of the world (4000 years =100 times 40)
- Pre-Abrahamic period (1600 years)
- Abraham in Mesopotamia (75 years)
- Patriarchs in Canaan (215 years)
- Post-Abrahamic period (2400 years)
- Time in Egypt (430 years)
- Time between exodus and foundation of temple (480 years)
- First temple period (480 years)
- Pre-exilic period (430 years)
- Exilic period (50 years)
- Second temple period (720 years)

In addition, certain other periods seem similarly artificial, schematic and contrived:

- Age of Enoch (365 years)
- Age of Lamech (777 years)
- Jacob flees from his home at age 40
- Moses flees Egypt (40 years old) and comes back (80 years old) and dies (120 years old) (40 + 40 + 40)
- Moses on the mountain (40 days [2 or 3 times])

- Duration of desert wanderings (40 years)

- Duration of David's rule (40 Years)

- Duration of Solomon's rule (40 years)

- Age of Job before the crisis (70) and after (140 years = 70 + 70)

2) Contradictory chronologies (cf. Hughes 1990:12) (AM = Anno Mundi / diversions in darker print)

	MT	SP	LXX
Adam	1-930 AM	1-930 AM	1-930 AM
Seth	130-1042 AM	130-1042 AM	130-1042 AM
Enosh	235-1140 AM	235-1140 AM	**435-1340 AM**
Kenan	325-1235 AM	325-1235 AM	**625-1535 AM**
Mehalalel	395-1290 AM	395-1290 AM	**795-1690 AM**
Jared	460-1422 AM	**460-1307 AM**	**960-1922 AM**
Enoch	622-987 AM	**520-887 AM**	**1122-1487 AM**
Methuselah	687-1656 AM	**587-1307 AM**	**287-2256 AM**
Lamech	874-1651 AM	**654-1307 AM**	**454-2207 AM**
Noach	1056-2006 AM	**707-1657 AM**	**1642-2592 AM**
Shem	1556-2156 AM	**207-1807 AM**	**2142-2742 AM**
Flood	1656 AM	**1307 AM**	**2242 AM**
Arpachshad	1656/8-2094/6 AM	**1307/9-1745/7 AM**	**2242/4-2807/9 AM**
Kenan			**2377/9-2837/9 AM**
Shelah	1691/3-2124/6 AM	**1442/4-1875/7 AM**	**2507/9-2967/9 AM**
Eber	21/3-2185/7 AM	**1572/4-1976/8 AM**	**2637/9-3141/3 AM**
Peleg	1755/7-1994/6 AM	**1706/8-1945/7 AM**	**2771/3-3110/2 AM**
Rehu	1785/7-2204/6 AM	**1836/8-2075/7 AM**	**2901/3-3240/2 AM**
Serug	1817/9-2047/9 AM	**1968/70-2198/2200 AM**	**3033/5-3363/5 AM**
Nahor	1847/9-1995/7 AM	**2098/2100-2246/8 AM**	**3263/5-3371/3 AM**
Terah	1876/8-2081/3 AM	**2177/9-2322/4 AM**	**3342/4-3447/9 AM**
Abraham	1946/8 - AM	**2247/9- AM**	**3312/4- AM**

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From these figures it should be clear that there are contradictions between:

- Dates of birth;
- Time of death;
- Life span;
- *When* prominent individuals lived (e.g. Noah, Abraham, etc.);
- The date of prominent events (e.g. the flood; migration of the Patriarchs; or, counting backwards – the creation of the world).

Other equally serious problems relate to the fact that, according to Hughes (1990:12), not only do most scholars consider the MT to be more removed from the original priestly chronology than LXX and SP but:

- none of the three has stuck with any original chronology;

- all three have incorporated mythical chronology for ideological purposes in order to show that history is ordered by a divine mind.

Hughes (1990:44) also notes mythical schematisation in other chronological data, e.g.:

	MT	LXX	SP
Israel 's time in Egypt	430	215	215
Exodus to temple	480	440	-

This means that the time of the exodus is also not clearly datable. There are also contradictions between MT and LXX with regard to chronological data pertaining to the periods of the Judges and the monarchy, e.g.:

	MT	LXX
Period of tranquillity after the Mesopotamian oppression	40	50
Time of Jephtah's reign	6	60
Time of Eli's leadership	40	20
King Abijam	3	6
King Asa	41	16
King Jehoram	8	10
King Amaziah	1	40

Some less conservative people might wonder about the big fuss regarding the Old Testament authors' attempts to demonstrate how history is divinely ordered by reconstructing and recreating actual or wished for occurrences. These people should ask themselves whether they would find such freedom with facts credible in the modern context. Suppose someone rewrote the history of the twentieth century and placed events on dates other than those when they actually occurred. Suppose further that this person also modified the nature, contents and duration of the events that actually happened and, for good measure, made up a few purely fictitious scenarios.

Supposed, moreover, that purely mundane and secular events were transformed by inserting an allegedly existing deity into the plot who is depicted as orchestrating these events. Who among those who see no harm in the biblical authors' reconstructions would find such a modern-day reconfiguring of twentieth-century history for the same ideological purposes convincing and credible as a way of demonstrating a divine plan with history? Even if this was a legitimate practice in the ancient world, it still does not change the fact that what was written does not reflect extra-textual reality.

Seen form this perspective, what may from one point of view be of merely historical or literary interest can have devastating ontological implications for theological realism. If the chronological scheme of the Old Testament narrative(s) of the creation to the post-exilic period is mythical, and therefore fictitious, then so is the deity Yahweh whose acts are inextricably bound up with and located on that particular time frame. Even if some of the events did actually happen, if these did not happen as

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depicted or, in this case, *when* they were alleged to have happened, not only is the historicity of the particular depiction technically not based in actual past reality. To be sure, whatever Yahweh there may be, there is no getting around the fact that Yahweh-as-depicted is a character of fiction who does not really exist.

7.2.6   The argument from mythological motifs

In a previous chapter, the implications of the presence of myth in the texts for the ontological status of Yahweh were discussed. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it is important to note how mythological motifs in supposed historical accounts tend to deconstruct realism with regard to the historicity of those accounts. If a story purporting to be history did not happen as depicted given the presence of a mythological motif, it follows that irrespective of whatever truth the story intends to communicate, Yahweh-as-depicted in such a text is a character fiction.

In this regard, an increasing knowledge of mythology have contributed to the scepticism regarding the historicity of many stories in the text once believed to be a reliable witness to actual past scenarios. A popular example of how comparative mythology lead to a discovery that the texts presented as history are actually fiction can be found in the familiar story of Samson (cf. Taylor 1993:223; Day 2000:162). Traditionally viewed as an historical figure who actually did what the text of Judges 13-16 depicts him as doing, such a belief became increasingly untenable when the following parallels to solar mythology were discovered:

- The name Samson is derived from the Semitic word for sun (*"shemesh"*);

- Samson came from a region where solar worship was very popular (near "Beth Shemesh");

- Samson has seven hair-locks in which his strength lies just as the sun god is often depicted with seven rays emanating from his head in which his power is seated;

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- As the sun temporarily hides itself behind the clouds and bursts forth to vanquish its enemies, Samson temporarily lives in a cave from which he emerges to vanquish his foes;

- Samson sends three hundred foxes with fire attached to their tails to destroy the harvest, an act that symbolically parallels the destructive effects of the sun;

- Samson is depicted as a vigorous and tireless hero emerging from his chambers in the same way the sun is also often depicted (cf. Ps 19A);

- The sun god is worshipped as a divine judge and as the god of justice and retribution – just as Samson is called a "judge" who pays back the Philistines for their violent crimes;

- Samson is ultimately weakened by a woman named Delilah whose name is reminiscent of the word "night" (*lilah*) which, in solar mythology, is often depicted as weakening the sun and facilitating its captivity in the underworld;

- As the sun goes to the underworld by pulling down the pillars on which the blue sky rests so too Samson dies by pulling down the pillars of a temple.

Many other narratives in the Old Testament are suspected to be fictitious on account that they appear to contain the remains of mythological motifs attested elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern religious discourse (cf. Da Silva 1994:12). Since the historical discourse of Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbours are often considered to be fiction since it contains mythological motifs, it seems invalid to claim that Old Testament texts dependent on similar motifs can somehow be considered as being any less fictional.

In a previous chapter, an extensive presentation of alleged mythological motifs was given by the devil's advocate. In the following table, an additional list is provided based on the index compiled by Gaster (1969:422):

Mythological motif	Number in Standard Motif Index of Folk-Literature (Thompson)
Abandonments and exposures	S 140
Ambrosia	A 153
Angels help in battle	V 232
Angel entertained unawares	Q 45.1
Animal, king of	B 236
Atlas	A 692
Babylon, Tower of	* C 771.1; F 772.1
Bell confounds demons	G 303 16.12
Bloodbath curative	T 82
Branding	P 171
Cain, mark of	Q 556.2
Chariot of the sun	A 724
Circumambulation	* D 1791
Clay, man created out of	A 1241
Confusion of tongues	* A 1333
Crops fail during reign of wicked king	Q 552.3
Culture hero asleep in hill	* A 571
expected to return	A 530 ff.
Cup in sack	H 151.4
Daughters of men and sons of God	F 531.6.1.1
Day magically lengthened	D 2146.1.1
Deluge,	A 1010 ff.
caused by gods in conflict	A 1015.1
Demon's food taboo	C 242
Door , monster guards	* D 1146
Eagle renews youth	B 788
Ever blooming garden	F 162.1.1
Exposed child	R 131 ff.
Food of gods taboo	S 261
Foundation sacrifice	cf. A 2234.2
Fruit forbidden	* C 261

Garden of the gods	A 151.2; * F 111
Griffin guards treasure	N 575
Honey, rivers of	* F 162.2.3
Horns blow down wall	D 1562.3
Hunt, Wild	E 50b
Inexhaustible cruse	* D 1652 ff.
Jonah swallowed by great fish	F 911.4
Ladder to the upper world	K 2111
Lengthening the day by magic	H 151.4
Leviathan	B 61
Lot's wife turned to salt	C 961.1
Maimed king must retire	P 16.2
Mandrake	* D 965.1; B 754.2
Manna	D 1030.1.1
Milk and honey	F 701.1
Moses rescued by princess	R 131.11.1
Mutilations	S 161.1
Navel of the earth	A 875.1
North, abode of demons	G 633
Paradise	
on mountain	F 132.1
four rivers of	* F162.2.1
serpent in	B 176.1
waters of	A 878.1
Password, recognition	H 18 (ad.)
Pillars of heaven	A 665.2
Precious stones, city of	F 761
Raven	2234.1
Serpent, immortality of	A 1355 (ad.)
Seven, formulistic	Z 71.5
Seventy-seven	Z 71.15
Sheba, Queen of, Riddles of	H 540.2.1
Shibboleth	H 18 (ad.)
Solomon, judgement of	J 1171.1-2

Staff

blossoming	* F 971.2; H 331.3
draws water from stone	D 1549.5

Subterranean castle	F 721.5
Tower of Babylon	F 772.1
to upper world	F 58
not to build too high	* C 771.1
Tree of immortality/life	D 1346.4; * E 90 ff.
Knowledge	J 165
Twelve	Z 71.8; D 1723.1.4
Water	
child cast into	F 321.1.4.1
drawn from rock	D 1549.5; * 1567.6
Waters, magically divided	* D 1551 ff.
Wind, tied in bag	C 322.1

As noted previously, what is of interest for the purposes of this chapter and this particular study with its concern for the philosophical and ontological implications of such parallels is the scepticism they often generate as to whether the scenario in question actually happened.

Complete historical scepticism is, however, not universally condoned since many scholars loathe speaking of "myth-as-fiction" in the Old Testament (cf. Da Silva 1994:17). Apparently, there is the need to distinguish between the *gattung* of myth as opposed to that of legend, folklore, etiology, fable, fiction, history-like narrative, narrative like history, etc., etc. Myth, so they claim, should not in biblical studies as in popular discourse be seen as the opposite of "facts" or "truth".

Thus, even if there are remains of mythological motifs in the text, many scholars make it quite clear that this is "no problem". They also remind us that even myths may have actual historical events as background. In addition, they insist that the genre of myth provides an excellent vehicle for communicating profound religious truth. After all, so it is argued, history is not the only context in which theological convictions can be expressed.

For present purposes, though such distinctions may be important, true and not pedantic, they are, in the context of the present discussion, either invalid, irrelevant or both. Despite the obvious presence of mythological motifs in the Old Testament texts, it is quite clear that the authors or final editors of the texts did not intend them to be read as myth. In many instances (e.g. the Samson narrative), it is clear that the story in its present context was indeed intended to be read as if it recounted scenarios that actually happened in the past.

It is therefore of no use pointing out the presence of mythological motifs in the Judges 13-16 text or the characteristics of legend and folklore observable in Samson "saga" in order to discourage anyone from an attempt to read the text as intended history. It may technically be true that, in terms of genre, the text exhibits a relation to extra-textual reality that is obviously mythical, legendary or parabolic. Even so, it is equally true that the person responsible for the presence of the story in the book of Judges pretended/believed (and wanted others to believe) that the tale recounted historical facts. In other words, though it is therefore true that a text like that of Judges 13-16 is not technically history in any modern sense of the word, it is a subtle distortion of the problematic to insist that it may therefore not be judged from such a viewpoint.

Moreover, the often heard apologetic claim that the ancient writers were less interested in factual and critical history and not so much concerned with what is really real or what actually happened (as opposed to who said what) is not only misleading but also demonstrably wrong (contra Deist 1978:07). Despite the presence of primitive and pre-critical credulity on the part of the biblical authors it is quite clear from the dialogue of characters (especially the sages and prophets) that the people were quite capable of being concerned with issues related to historicity and ontology (cf. also Barr 1993:12).

Biblical theology's idea of a "Semitic mind" vis-à-vis the "Greek mind" still seems to be taken as an indisputable and irrefutable fact by some philosophically shy scholars even though the particular stereotype has been discredited long ago (cf. Barr 1999:138). This subtle attempt to immunise the ideology of the texts from judgement of critical history and philosophical ontology is, according to the devil's advocate, nothing more than a strategy of evasion. It also probably involves a different kind of

what Hume called the "naturalist fallacy" insofar as it attempts to argue from what is the case to what ought to be so or, in this case, ought not to be done in response to it.

In sum then, from the devil's advocate's perspective, the anti-realist implications of the presence of mythological motifs in the text for the historicity of the events depicted therein is clear. If the events depicted in the texts are mythical and therefore did not actually happen, whatever "religious truth" there may be in the story, it changes nothing regarding the ontological status of the deity as depicted in the particular discourse.

If the god Yahweh is a character in mythical discourse, or alternatively, if elsewhere in the text the deity is depicted as alluding to such discourse as though historically factual, it follows that the deity Yahweh is himself a character of myth and/or fiction (cf. Harwood 1992:63). If this is the case, then the possibility that Yahweh-as-depicted does actually exist must be considered as plausible as the likelihood that any other deity of ancient mythology might also have an extra-textual counterpart.

7.2.7   The argument from alleged archaeological falsification

Archaeological research related to Old Testament texts is an extremely complex and controversial subject (cf. Bright 1981:27; Finckelstein 2001:02). The debate between the so-called "maximalists" and "minimalists" in biblical archaeology attests to the fact that there are serious historical problems when it comes to the relation between text and reality. An even older rivalry can be found in the various approaches to the subject as exhibited by the so-called Baltimore and Leipzig schools of biblical archaeology (cf. Ramsey 1982:44-47).

Even those critical scholars who consider themselves as being neither minimalist nor maximalist would agree that many of the scenarios depicted in the Old Testament texts present us not with historically factual data but with fiction or legend not reflective of any actual past reality (cf. Bartlet 1990:65; Dever 2001:306; Sheller 2001:02). Yet it is especially the so-called "minimalists" who insist in their research that realism with regard to the historicity of certain events related in the Old Testament has been falsified by archaeological discovery (cf. Lemche 1988:12;

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Thompson 1998:15).

What is relevant for the purpose of this study is the fact that the god Yahweh is depicted as being inextricably involved in many of the events that both tradition critical and radical/revisionist scholars consider to be demonstrably fictitious. According to the devil's advocate, if the details of the scenarios depicted in the text never actually happened, no matter what actually did happen or what God there may actually be, realism with regard to the ontological status of the deity Yahweh as depicted in the text collapses.

On this topic, one need only take cognisance of the reconstructions of Israelite history as those found in the work of critical historians/biblical archaeologists like, amongst others, Ramsey (1981), Van Seters (1976, 1983); Garbini (1988), Soggin (1993), and Thompson (1974, 1998). According to these scholars, via arguments from silence, the nature of the biblical sources, the material culture of the periods in question, comparisons between biblical and extra-biblical historical data, and through other methods of biblical criticism, critical historiography and archaeology, the following textual scenarios, amongst others, are demonstrably fictitious:

- A world-wide flood in the third-millennium BC;
- The life and times of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;
- Joseph as a Hebrew second in command in Egypt;
- Moses as a son of the Pharaoh;
- The two million strong exodus of Israelites from Egypt;
- The route of the exodus in the Sinai peninsula;
- The conquest of Canaan by Joshua (i.e. Jericho);
- The situation in Palestine during the period of the judges;
- David and Solomon as major role players in the ancient Near East;
- The repentance of Nineveh as a result of a Hebrew prophet named Jonah;
- Daniel as a prophet and advisor to the monarchs in Babylon;
- Esther as a queen of Persia.

Many conservatives have gone out of their way to argue that, despite the apparently

disconfirming evidence by archaeology (and the various other arguments presented in this chapter) the Bible was right after all (cf. Keller 1984:01). It is claimed that the archaeologists who believe that the biblical data is erroneous must be biased and conspiring liberal bigots and that the evidence that actually supports the Bible have been either misinterpreted, tampered with or simply ignored (cf. Young 1957:13-19; Keller 1984:1,3,10 and passim; Archer 1982:21,47,51 and passim; Macdowell 1993:22-58).

The devil's advocate will not, at present, attempt to argue the pros and cons of the various conservative, critical and revisionist approaches to biblical archaeology. Interested readers are referred to the various reference works found throughout this chapter for a variety of mutually exclusive views regarding what is (supposedly) what and what is (allegedly) not.

Suffice to say that, if it is true that the historicity of the scenarios noted above have been falsified by archaeology then, whatever God(s) there may be, the god Yahweh depicted as being involved in those scenarios must himself be a character of fiction and therefore does not really exist.

7.2.8   The argument from anachronisms in the texts

One of the strongest indicators that the events depicted in the Old Testament texts are not historically factual seems to be the presence of a myriad of anachronisms in the discourse. What is supposed to have been eyewitness accounts or at least reliable tradition contains references to people, places, events, beliefs and customs that were demonstrably not part of the historical context in which the biblical authors place them (cf. Van Seters 1983:11; Thompson 1992:05; Garbini 1988:03; Harwood 1992:vi).

Popular examples of such anachronisms include:

- The references in Genesis 2:10-12 to Ashur, Cush and the economic importance of gold allegedly prevalent during the time of Adam in 4000 BC. These references correspond with the scenario in the first millennium BC and not with anything

before the Bronze Age;

- The reference to the name Yahweh in Genesis (cf. Ex 6:3 vs. Gen 4:26 and the theophoric elements of personal names prior to the revelation to Moses);

- The reference to domesticated animals (camels) as well as names of places (Dan, Beersheba, etc.) and peoples (Philistines; Chaldeans; Edomite kings) in the Patriarchal narratives (early 2nd millennium BC) all of which can only be dated to the later part of the second millennium BC, or seem more reflective of scenarios in the first millennium BC during the exile;

- The references to the Philistines, Edomites and Moabites in the story of the desert wanderings (1500 BC?), people whose existence as such are only attested from the twelfth century BC onwards;

- The references to places and religious/cultic rites and ideas in Deuteronomy by Moses which are unknown in Samuel-Kings and / or not attested before the late monarchic period;

- The references to peoples and places in the account of Joshua's conquest that did not exist in the time frame projected for the Israelite invasion of Canaan;

- The reference in the stories of Solomon to the Kingdom of Sheba whose existence is not attested before the seventh century BC;

- The numerous projections in Chronicles regarding certain elements in the cult of Yahweh in the pre-exilic period which in fact only originated in the time after the exile.

These are but some of the anachronisms scholars have claimed exist in the Old Testament texts (cf. also Soggin 1993:61, 122 and passim). If this is true, not only realism pertaining to historicity is at stake but also with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh who is depicted as being a part of the details of those particular

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contrived and superficial scenarios. As such, the deity is a character of fiction and therefore does not exist.

7.2.9   The argument from intrusive literary constructs

According to literary-critical analysis, most of the plot in the Old Testament is of such a nature as to discredit its implicit claims of being historically factual. Aesthetic considerations, literary strategies, poetic agendas and many other types of rhetorical manoeuvres suggest that the authors were more concerned with writing an artistic and entertaining story than bothering with what actually happened in empirical past reality.

Consider the following statement by Ramsey (1981:99) on the problem with reading Old Testament stories as history:

> Frequently stories in the Old Testament have been utilised in various historical reconstructions without adequate consideration of the nature or intention of the stories. Usually it is assumed that the author was transmitting information about events that actually happened and little consideration is given to the possibility that the narrative is a fiction. The Joseph story (Gen 37, 39-50) is an account that has frequently been mined for historical details; for example, clues have been sought in this tale that can enable us to locate Joseph and his family chronologically. But a literary analysis of this tale reveals that it develops several popular folk motifs – 'rags to riches', the wise courtier, the spurned seductress, the success of the younger brother, the Israelite who makes good in a foreign land – seemingly with the intent of entertaining and not with the purpose of writing history.

This is all very well, but from a philosophical-critical perspective concerned with the ontological status of Yahweh, this argument against historicity is also implicitly part of the argument of historical fiction against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted. For if there never really was a Joseph who dreamt and went to Egypt and landed in jail and became second in command to the Pharaoh, what are we to make of all the references to Yahweh in that story?

What is the ontological status of the Yahweh who was with Joseph and who

engineered the whole trip to Egypt to save the people from the coming famine? If there was no Joseph who actually lived and acted in the way the story recounts, it follows that there was no Yahweh who was involved in the same way. If the character of Joseph is fictitious then so is the character Yahweh in that same story. No matter if there is some remote historical kernel that was later embellished with legendary detail. The concern here is with the detail of that story and if the detail is fictitious then, whatever god or gods there may be, so is the character of Yahweh who is part of and immersed in that detail.

The same goes for other stories like that of Abraham, Moses, David or Daniel. No matter if there really were historical persons by those names or not. Even if there were, it remains a fact that if the detail of the Old Testament story is legendary, and therefore fictitious, then if the character Yahweh is depicted as part of the detail of that story he himself must be a character of fiction (cf. Thompson 1998:304-306).

In all such and related instances, an argument against historicity based on literary-critical considerations is *ipso facto* an argument against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular narrative (Carroll 1991:45). If this is the case and many of the supposedly historical narratives are actually aesthetically motivated literary constructions with a good deal of creative contrivance, the ontological implications should be clear. It is obvious that, in the context of literary fictions, the ontological status of the character Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts is also suspect with regard to its alleged one to one relation to extra-textual reality

A second peculiar feature of many Old Testament texts that were traditionally read as history is the ways in which certain sections of the discourse appear quite contrived, detailed, poetic or symbolical. Once this feature was brought to consciousness, much scepticism was evoked regard the historicity of such discourse (cf. also Soggin 1993:115).

Examples of seemingly constructive and contrived texts include:

- Songs in the narrative (e.g. Ex 15, Judg 5, 1 Sam 2, 2 Sam 22; Jon 2, etc.). Did actual historical characters actually sing, pray or spoke like this; and who wrote

down the exact words?;

- Long and intricate blessings of a dying leader (e.g. Gen 49; Deut 33; etc.);

- Various types of prophecies that were obviously *vaticinia ex eventu* (e.g. Gen 9:25-27; 15:13-16; 49:1-27; 1 Kgs 13:2; Isa 7:8b; Ezek 26, 29:17-20; etc.);

- Extremely detailed speeches in a context bereft of modern recording facilities (e.g. Ex 20-50; Leviticus; Deuteronomy; Job 3-41; etc.);

- Long prayers of individuals (e.g. 1 Kgs 8; Jon 2; Dan 9; Neh 9; etc.);

- The contrived and fictitious nature of biblical genealogies (e.g. Gen 4,5,10,11, Ex 6; Ruth 4; 1 Chron 1-10; etc.; cf. Wilson 1977);

- The obviously story like nature of the tales of people like Joseph, Jonah, Job, Daniel and Esther;

- Numerical symbolism involving the numbers 3,4,7,10,12,40 and multiples thereof, e.g., 70 nations, 7/ 3 years famine, 3 days cleansing, 7 days creation; 7 years famine, 7 major judges each fighting a different one of the 7 Canaanite nations, 7 times around Jericho, 10 plagues, 12 tribes, 40 years wilderness, 40 years reign of Moses, David and Solomon, 40 days without food, 40 days journey, 70 years in exile, 480 years in slavery, 4000 year history, etc.

Not only some parts of narratives seem contrived. Sometimes there seem to be something suspiciously constructivist about the *names* of the characters (cf. Weiser 1961:303; Harwood 1992:125). Consider the names of people like Abel (Vapour, Breath), Nabal (Fool), Job (Enemy), Machlon (Sickness), Chilion (Vanishing) Orpah (She who turns her back) Ruth (The companion), Esther and Mordechai (Isthar and Marduk), and others.

All of these seem to encompass the essence of the particular character's role in the

particular stories. Abel's life is but a mere breath, Jacob betrays people; Nabal was a fool, Job (or God) was some sort of "enemy", and so on. Are we really to believe that actual people got such names at birth and then inexorably lived out the destiny alluded to therein? Didn't they have any free will? Or could the presence of such names (and therefore characters) all be part of a literary construct that attempts to communicate elements of irony, tragedy and the popular ancient motif of destiny and fate?

Indeed, the correspondence between the names of the characters and their life-stories seems to give away the game and unmasks the fact that one is either dealing with magical fate or otherwise with what is apparently not history. If this is the case and the names, and therefore also the stories, are merely literary creations with little relation to any historical extra-textual counterpart then it follows that the character Yahweh who is active in those stories must also be fictitious.

If there were not really an Abel, a Job, or a Ruth, what is the ontological status of the deity Yahweh who, according to the text, interacted with these characters of fiction? Surely, as thus depicted in relation to these non-existent people, Yahweh himself must be a character of fiction as well. As such he, like the people he mingles with, does not really exist.

There is a third important way in which artificiality in the discourse unmasks the fictitious nature of alleged historical incidents in the text. The devil's advocate is here thinking about Yahweh speaking in the first person through the mouths of his servants, the prophets. Of course, Old Testament scholars have different opinions on how we are to understand the text when, in prophetic oracles, Yahweh himself is speaking.

- Conservatives may want to see such depictions as faithful and exact accounts of what a real God literally spoke audibly to his human servants who faithfully recorded exactly what Yahweh actually said.

- Less conservative scholars who nonetheless believe that the prophet did hear a voice and wrote down what it said may think of the deity's verbal communication

as a form of schizophrenia that, in ancient times, was interpreted as an inspired state of being.

- Other critical but nonetheless religious scholars might, in turn, believe that no God literally spoke to the prophet. Yet according to these liberal realists the particular man of God was no charlatan. He was convinced, given how he interpreted the political, social and religious scene, what Yahweh's will would be. He felt compelled to present his conviction as the word of the Lord.

- Finally, of course, there might be scholars who do not believe that Yahweh exists and therefore understand all claims of prophets speaking the word of Yahweh as nothing but the prophets' overactive imaginations combined with a repressed will-to-power.

According to the devil's advocate, the latter group may well be correct. Irrespective of what justification such anti-realist scholars might give in support of their views, there are several good reasons for thinking that the verbal communication on the part of Yahweh speaking to the prophets in the first person was nothing of the sort. Though it is true, as Lindblom (1963:17) and Barton (1986:03) remind us, we cannot penetrate behind the text to a supposed original experience of a particular prophet, there are a few things about the texts that give the game away, unmask it as fictitious and lead straight to anti-realism:

1. The first reason why one cannot take the prophetic oracles seriously as being the literal words of Yahweh concerns the history of the text itself. Whatever originally happened that led to the composition of an oracle where Yahweh speaks in the first person, the fact of the matter is that the oracle as it now features in its particular context is a product of the disciples of the prophets from later periods. For this reason, the situation that Yahweh seems to be addressing in a particular text was not the supposed original situation but one in which the later compilers and collectors of the oracles considered the words to be fitting. Thus, even if Yahweh literally spoke the words ascribed to him, as these now stand they feature in a context for which humans decided they were relevant and are therefore, in the

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technical sense, indeed fiction. Words taken out of context and applied to a new scenario, whatever their truth-value, are technically not literally the words of Yahweh as the authors or redactors pretend it to be.

2. Second, the currently available words of Yahweh speaking in the first person does not even have the same content as when they were when first written down by the original authors (whoever that may have been). Textual criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism and even source criticism have demonstrated the presence of numerous alterations, adaptations, reinterpretations, emendations, interpolations and various other types of creative rewriting and editing of the particular oracles. Seen from this perspective, what Yahweh says in the first person is technically not the actual word of a deity spoken long ago. Rather it is technically the words put into his mouth by subsequent writers, editors, copyists and other scribes.

3. In the third instance, another indicator of the fictitiousness and artificiality of the prophetic oracles where Yahweh speaks in the first person is, as was noted in chapter 4, the all-too-human knowledge of Yahweh. Where the supposed *ipsissima verba* of Yahweh are found in the prophetic oracles, the deity's knowledge of the world, of history as well as his views on morality and a host of other issues never transcend the superstitions of his speech writers. When Yahweh refers to fictitious entities (e.g. Leviathan), fictitious locations (Sheol) or fictitious history (references to fictitious scenarios from the stories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and others) it gives the game away. The presence of such elements in Yahweh's speeches unmasks the fact that the particular discourse was not uttered by an actual and therefore knowledgeable deity. They are speeches constructed by humans who believed in the reality of these things. Of course, the fact that, as was shown in chapter 4, many things Yahweh predicted would happen did not occur does little to mitigate the artificiality of the divine speech and the deconstruction of realism that must inevitably follow. Moreover, if this is true about some of the prophecies, what guarantee do we have that *anything* whatsoever, even supposedly fulfilled prophecies (prediction or religious criticism) were literally the words of an actual deity?

4. Finally, a quite devastating issue for realism with regard to the texts pretending to give a verbatim report of the words of Yahweh can be found in the results of rhetorical criticism and literary criticism (poetry analysis). Many realists with literary sensitivity may marvel at the poetic quality of the composition of the oracles and point out poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, various sorts of parallelism, wordplay, structural repetitions, *inclusios*, metre and a variety of other poetic structures in the text. Curiously enough, however, they do not realise how the presence of these features is a dead give away of its artificiality (cf. Carroll 1996:43-49). The point is that in many passages in prophetic books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos and the others, we are dealing not with the report of an actual dialogue by the deity himself but with *poetry – i.e. a literary construct* (cf. Peterson 1987:32). *Nobody speaks spontaneously in poetry.* Are we really to believe that Yahweh's actual words to the prophet had all the elements of classical Hebrew poetic diction built in? Did Yahweh actually plan to speak so artificially as in the kind of monologues found only in texts and not in every day speech?

> The fact that the words of Yahweh speaking in the first person are poetry, rather than the prosaic type of direct speech, gives the game away. It shows that what the texts present as the words of Yahweh to the people via the prophet were not literally a recording of an actual oracle of the deity. The hallmarks of exquisite Hebrew poetry betray the fact that the text is not a report of a real deity's verbal communication. These features in the text show that what we have here is the end product of someone sitting down and deliberately composing poetry. It is too unnatural, too artificial and too poetically complex to be an account what a real deity would actually have said to and through the prophet. The poetic quality of the text and the host of poetic techniques present within the rhetoric of the oracles thus unmask it as no more than literary constructs and rules out the possibility that it is actually a verbatim report of what Yahweh himself audibly spoke to the prophet.

Based on these four observations of the history, composition and poetic quality of the text, though we did not penetrate to the supposed original experience of the prophet, it was possible to establish that what is presented as the literal words of Yahweh is, in

fact, nothing of the sort.

Moreover, if this assessment by the devil's advocate is correct and the oracles of Yahweh speaking in the first person were, in fact, nothing of the sort but rather a literary construct, it follows that technically, Yahweh did not really say what the texts depict him as saying. If this is the case then anti-realism is vindicated and justified.

Yahweh-as-depicted in the text and his words are literary constructs that have no counterpart in extra-textual reality. They exist only in the text and in the minds of the author and his audience. Consequently, this would imply that Yahweh-as-depicted speaking in the first person in such prophetic oracles does not really exist.

7.2.10   The argument from etiological ideology

In a variety of critical approaches to the texts of the Old Testament, a certain hermeneutic of suspicion has intentionally or unintentionally exposed the all-too-human and all-too-ideological and propagandistic motives of the authors of certain allegedly "historical" texts (cf. Garbini 1988:12). In this regard, Yahweh is said to function as the stereotypical "god of the gaps". This occurs in the so-called *etiological* narratives where explanations are given in story form as to why things are the way they are or why certain things are (or ought) to be done in a certain manner (cf. Long 1968:03).

Consider the following examples:

- Where does the world come from? (cf. Gen 1:1ff)
- Why are there lights in the sky? (cf. Gen 1)
- Where do humans come from? (cf. Gen 1 and 2)
- Why must people rest on the Sabbath? (cf. Gen 2)
- Why must humans till the earth? (cf. Gen 2-3)
- Why must people cover themselves with clothes unlike animals? (cf. Gen 3)
- Where does the institution of marriage come from? (cf. Gen 2)
- Why must women be subjected to man? (cf. Gen 3)

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- Why does the snake sail on the ground without legs? (cf. Gen 3)

- Why do women suffer in childbirth? (cf. Gen 3)

- Why do humans not live forever? (cf. Gen 3,6)

- Why is there a rainbow? (cf. Gen 9)

- Why is there seasonal change regulating harvest times? (cf. Gen 9)

- Why should the Canaanites be slaves of the Hebrews (cf. Gen 9)

- Why are there many different races and languages? (cf. Gen 11)

- Where does Israel come from? (cf. Gen 12-50)

- Where does Edom come from? (cf. Gen 16)

- Why is the region around the Dead Sea so barren? (cf. Gen 19)

- Where do Moab and Amon come from? (cf. Gen 19)

- How did sanctuaries like Beth El get their name? (cf. Gen 28)

- Why do the Israelites not eat the sciatic nerve? (cf. Gen 32)

- Why can Yahweh's people lay claim to Palestine? (cf. Gen-Josh)

- Why do the Hebrew people worship the deity called Yahweh? (cf. Ex 3; 6)

- Why do the Hebrew people observe certain laws? (cf. Ex-Deut)

- Why are there certain ruins and remnants of cultic objects scattered throughout the land of Canaan? (cf. Gen; Josh-Judg)

- Why are there natural disasters like famine, disease and drought? (cf. Gen-2 Kgs)

- Why was David considered to have been the greatest king ever? (cf. 1 Sam 16-1 Kgs 1)

- What is the origin of so many of the Hebrew Psalms? (cf. Psalms:passim)

- What is the origin of so many of the Hebrew proverbs? (cf. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

- Why did Israel and Judah became separate kingdoms? (cf. 1 Kgs 11ff)

- Why were Yahweh's people subjected to foreign domination? (cf. Ex-2 Kgs)

- Why were the people taken into exile? (cf. Deut, Sam-Kgs)

- Why does Israel celebrate certain festivals? (cf. Ex-Deut; Esth)

If these stories are indeed etiological legend, they also involve a certain amount of fiction since the explanations are based on imagination and speculation and not on actual mundane historical facts. In other words, no god Yahweh literally and actually acted and spoke in the ways the etiological texts depict him as doing. The introduction

of the deity's character in these stories was motivated not by a genuine concern to record indisputable historical facts but to provide functional and legitimising ideological explanations of certain scenarios, customs, traditions and perceptions.

If this is the case then the character of Yahweh in etiological tales – whatever the purported truth value of the discourse may be – is necessarily fictitious since no extra-textual deity actually said and did what the Old Testament etiologies depict Yahweh as doing. In short, Yahweh as an "epiphenomenon" of etiological narrative does not really exist.

7.2.11   The argument from typological constructions

In historical-critical research – and especially in tradition criticism – there have been tendencies towards anti-realism pertaining to many scenarios in the text which seem not to present historical data but typological adaptations of earlier motifs, stories or traditions (cf. Fishbane 1989:07). For example, the following recurring themes have led to the belief that the scenarios depicted in the texts are literary constructs rather than historical reportage:

RECURRING MOTIF/SCENARIO/STORY	TEXTUAL REFERENCE
• The matriarch in danger	Gen 12; Gen 20; Gen 26
• The townspeople shows hostility to strangers	Gen 19; Judg 19
• The barren beloved wife motif	Gen 18,25,34; Judg 13; 1 Sam 1
• The younger son is favoured	Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David.
• Water from a rock	Ex 17; Num 20; Judg 16
• The cleaving of waters	Ex 14; Josh 3; 2 Kgs 3
• Dreams of the future	Gen 36-50; Judg 7; Dan 2-11
• The making of a covenant	Gen 9, 15, Ex 14, Josh 24
• A journey to the mountain of Yahweh	Ex 3; Ex 17-19; Kgs 19
• Typological portrayal of characters	Abraham/David; Moses/Elijah
• Israelites at foreign courts	Joseph, Daniel, Esther

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It is often assumed or insinuated that these recurring motifs and scenarios hint at the presence of an ideological or theological construct incorporated for aesthetic, didactic, typological, legitimising or propagandistic purposes (cf. Thompson 1998:223). If this is the case, then the fact of recurring typologies or motifs constitutes another argument for historical fiction.

Moreover, since the character Yahweh is often depicted as being directly involved in the scenarios featured in such recurring types, it follows that if those stories are fictitious then so is the character Yahweh depicted as being an inextricable part of the scenarios therein. In other words, if the events in question are literary constructs and not factual accounts of what actually happened, Yahweh-as-depicted therein does not really exist.

7.2.12   The argument from the misinterpretation of natural and social phenomena

It might be thought that this is a very old and very positivistic argument that no longer holds much water even among critical scholars (cf. Barr 1980:131). Be that as it may, the indirect influence of this argument on later anti-realism in historical reconstructions, as well as the fact that it does indeed provide an example of relatively recent anti-realism in Old Testament theology, still justifies its presentation here.

In quite a few critical histories of Israel, one still finds that it is a common practice to rule out the historicity of events, or at least cast some doubt in this regard, if a particular text contains a primitive hermeneutic of natural or social phenomena (cf. Soggin 1993:47). Many studies on the history of Old Testament religion and on the development of Israel's religious ideas still entertain the possibility that much of what later came to be orthodox demythologised Yahwistic ideology actually originated in superstition appropriations of natural and sociological phenomena (cf. Hinson 1986:22).

In response to these claims, many apologists for historical realism often claimed that the Old Testament does not provide the reader with history but rather with "salvation history" (cf. Deist 1978:10-11). Of course, the concept of salvation history can be

variously understood. One way in which this concept is often utilised involves the claim that what the Old Testament provides us with when it comes to the acts of Yahweh is not something that could have been captured on video cameras. Rather, what really happened were straightforward natural events. In other words, Yahweh did not literally, empirically and verifiably appear and talked and acted. Rather, the introduction of Yahweh into the scenario is little more than the eye of faith adding the divine element for theological purposes. It is "*geschichte*" and not "*historie*" and sees secular and natural events as if there was some human like entity behind it all revealing himself and his will through it (cf. Holm & Bowker 1994:56).

Thus scholars like von Rad and Wright who placed great emphasis on the historicity of biblical events were adamant that, while the miraculous events featuring the acts of Yahweh in the Old Testament would not have been empirically verifiable, *something* did happen. A certain paradigmatic event would later lead the Israelites to reinterpret natural events through the "eyes of faith". Consequently, this enabled them to rewrite secular history in a form where Yahweh became a character in the story of what supposedly did happen if one could see things from the divine perspective (cf. Deist 1978:09).

These bold claims are, however, extremely problematic from the anti-realist point of view. How did Israel know, and how can we know, that what is called "salvation history" or a "theological interpretation" of history or the "eye of faith" is not merely an imaginative projection of something that is not really so? Moreover, the stories themselves show no indication that what the text provides us with is the version of history from the eye of faith. When the text tells of Yahweh's acts, it actually does depict these as something that would have been empirically verifiable if only the people had a video camera at their disposal (cf. Clines 1995:95).

From the anti-realist point of view, however, not only is the legitimacy and factuality of "salvation" or "theological" history in doubt. To be sure, the historicity of even the merely secular events and natural occurrences has itself become doubtful for all the various reasons mentioned in this chapter. Nevertheless, let us grant that the Old Testament might not be fiction. Let us accept the claim that something historical did actually happen which was simply natural but that, from a later perspective of faith,

the introduction of Yahweh into the story may have been valid.

One major problem with this theory, and one which has great potential to evoke scepticism regarding the credibility of theological history, is the fact that so many of the so-called "acts of God" appear to be fanciful *misinterpretations* of all-too-mundane realities and all-too-natural phenomena. In most cases, people today will have a hard time believing in the following religious assumptions underlying the Old Testament's "salvation history" (cf. Gillooly 1992:01).

- The cosmos as a realm managed as a divine monarchy from the Iron Age (cf. Gen 1-11 and passim);

- Natural processes as divine manifestations (volcanoes, thunder, lightning, eclipses, comets, meteorites, etc., cf. Exodus 15,19; 1 Kgs 17-19; and passim);

- Natural disasters or abundant harvests as divine providence (droughts, rain, earthquakes, floods, etc., cf. Samuel-Kings; the Prophets and passim);

- Psychological processes as modes of divine communication (prophecy, dreams, etc.);

- Psychological actions as caused by spirit entities (cf. 1 Sam 16ff, Psalms, etc.);

- Socio-political developments as resulting from sovereign divine providence (cf. Ex 1-12; Isa 11; and OT passim);

- Cultural institutions as divinely ordained structures (cf. Exodus-Deuteronomy; Proverbs and passim).

Unless one is willing to interpret the same natural, psychological and socio-political phenomena in the same way today any criticism involving socio-genetic fallacies like ascribing the scepticism to liberal anti-supernaturalism or Enlightenment positivism and socialisation/secularism are hypocritical and simply invalid. Even the distinctions

between theological or salvation history vs. secular history, or the eye of faith vs. spiritual blindness, cannot be evoked here in an attempt to salvage the supposed credibility of the Old Testament's primitive hermeneutics of natural, social and psychic phenomena.

One contemporary scholar who in his theology of the Old Testament expressed the need to bracket all ontological questions related to these issues is Brueggemann (1997:35). Despite this intention, attention to ontological queries pertaining to, amongst other things, the concept of salvation history, did manage to surface as the following quotation reveals:

> While the notion that God acts in history made an appealing program, the category of history continued to vex this approach. Since the rise of historical criticism, biblical scholarship has been troubled by the seeming incapacity to leap across Gotthold Lessing's 'ugly ditch' that separates the historical from the theological. Some have attempted to make the connection by speaking of secular history and salvation history, or by contrasting 'historical minimum' and 'theological maximum', but the problem persists. For example, in Exodus 15:21, perhaps one of Israel's oldest poems, Miriam and the other women sing, 'horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.' As a theological articulation, this lyrical statement is clear enough. But what could it mean historically? Does the statement mean that the Israelite women saw Yahweh in the water pushing Egyptian soldiers off their horses? If not, then what?

Alternatively, a similar and related remark, this time pertaining to what supposedly happened when prophets claimed that the word of Yahweh came to them, can be found in Barr (1999:475):

> Central to the question, however, must be the way in which the divine word received by the prophet is supposed to have worked in relation to his (or her) own psyche and personality. It is difficult to obtain a clear idea of what most biblical theologians think about this…None of them, as far as one can see, takes the term quite literally, as if to say that in communicating with prophets God enunciated the precise sentences, in Hebrew and with correct grammar, vocabulary and phonetics necessary for intelligibility (and these would of course have to be synchronically correct!) and that the prophet merely repeated what he had audibly heard. But if not this, then what?

Barr (1999:475-476) then goes on to speculate about the way such revelation might be understood:

> Perhaps many think that the deity made some sort of non-auditory or sub-sonic communication, which the prophet 'heard' and then passed on. The question then is how far the prophet's own mind, experience and perception of the contemporary situation entered into his rendering of the (originally non-articulate) message. Or the possibility is that the message came from the prophet's experience and his perception about the situation in the first place, that he or she perhaps piled up a strong heap of violent reactions and sentiments and let them burst forth with the deep certainty that the resultant message was the Word of God. *I suspect that most theologians hold this latter view but do not like to say so outright*. (italics mine)

As suggested in many a previous discussion, at least with regard to the present final form of the text, there are good reasons for supposing that what we have with Yahweh speaking in the first person is not literally a report of what the deity himself actually said. Instead, for the reasons given (adaptation, decontextualisation and modification by tradition; Yahweh's all-too-human knowledge; the form being poetry suggesting premeditated literary construction rather than verbatim reportage, etc.), it is obvious the such discourse are merely the words put into the mouth of Yahweh by his speechwriters.

Suppose then that this anti-realist interpretation is correct and that Yahweh did not *really* speak to the prophet in the sense one normally thinks of verbal communication. Instead, the prophet's claim that the word of Yahweh came to him, or his declaration, "Thus says Yahweh…" technically and literally means, "I'm sure that this is what my god Yahweh as I imagine him to be might want the people to know." But if this is the case, what justification is there for the claim that such and so is indeed Yahweh's views on a particular matter? Even worse, how can one be sure that Yahweh actually exists outside the imaginations of the prophets and apart from being a character in the text containing the prophet's words? Surely it makes a huge difference when people are giving their own opinion on the will of a deity and for which there is ultimately little verification as opposed to Yahweh actually and literally speaking to a person (cf. also Jer 23; Ezek 14; cf. also Barr 1966:77-81).

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Realists (conservatives) and semi-realists (liberals), of course, have all sorts of ways of avoiding this dilemma. If they do not fideistically hold on to the factuality of some kernel of actual history and maintain that the theological interpretation of it was valid despite the ambiguity, the next favourite tactic is to do all they can to discourage such troubling questions (cf. Barr 1999:124). How often have students heard these theories of historical-critical analysis and the concept of salvation history only to ask:

- What, if anything, did actually happen?

- How do we know that it is true if it is history through the eyes of faith?

- What makes theological history different from legendary embellishments in other primitive cultures, none of whose "theological history" of their deities' acts anyone today will take seriously?

- Why should there be a double standard for evaluating the credibility of Israelite vs. ancient Near Eastern historiography?

In addition, most scholars will be aware of the fact of how many times such questions are dismissed and labelled as the product of unpopular epistemological ideologies such as positivism or naïve-realism (cf. Barr 1999:127). How often are students criticised for asking ontological questions from the perspective of the ideology of scholars who demand that all ontological problems be bracketed? How often has it been suggested that all that is needed to make the problem disappear is a second naiveté?

In the end, anyone who reads the Old Testament texts featuring the so-called "acts of God" cannot help wondering, even if only for a second, whether all these stories are nothing more than imaginative projection. From a modern critical perspective, such scenarios certainly do seem to appear as the product of a people with a primitive hermeneutic of reality and a great propensity for anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection in their understanding of ordinary albeit significant natural, social and psychical processes (cf. Eichrodt 1967:20).

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Whether or not there was an historical core to the ambiguous acts of Yahweh in the form of natural phenomena (i.e. an earthquake, a thunderstorm, a drought, a wind, etc.), socio-political processes (peace, war, etc.) or psychological experiences (a dream, a vision, a voice, a premonition, intuitive ideas, etc.), one has to wonder how the theological interpretations could ever be justified (cf. also Holladay 1995:6-7). On what criteria does one distinguish between faith and credulity/superstition? How can the modern-day interpreter ever be sure that the god Yahweh actually exists and really did act? What rules out the possibility that Yahweh's acts are, in fact, little more than superstitious misinterpretations of all-too-natural events – no matter how rare, spectacular, determinative, paradigmatic and extraordinary they were?

If the theological maximum is the result of fallacious reasoning from a historical minimum then, for many scholars, it would seem obvious that Yahweh is no more than a figment of the creative human imagination. He seems to be no more real than the other personifications of natural, social and psychical phenomena that one so frequently encounters in the religious discourse of other ancient Near Eastern peoples (cf. Holladay 1995:17). As such, Yahweh did not really act in history for one simple reason – he does not exist.

7.2.13   The argument from retrojective ideological projections

Another aspect of the Old Testament texts that has made scholars suspicious about the historicity of particular stories or discourse is what appears to be the projection of later beliefs onto earlier times for ideological purposes. In other words, history was "created" in order to justify or contextualise later beliefs, rituals and socio-political scenarios (cf. Barr 2000:02).

Examples that one can provide in this regard are virtually infinite if one condones the recent revisionary perspectives of scholars who date most of the books of the Old Testament to the Persian and Greek periods of Jewish history (cf. Van Seters 1993, Thompson 1998). Some of the less controversial examples of alleged ideological retrojection in the Old Testament that many scholars would admit to, even if they do not subscribe to the conclusions of the revisionists, include the following:

- The Patriarchal narratives are mostly legends and filled with fictitious elements. There may have been traditions about the particular individuals but they were not related to each other and did not do what the texts depict them as doing. The stories were created to legitimise later religious and political ideology.

- The sacrifices of Leviticus were not given by God through Moses at mount Sinai but were adopted and adapted from Israel's Canaanite neighbours.

- The majority of the case law ascribed to Moses in Deuteronomy was actually derived from the later monarchical or even post-exilic periods as it contains legislation only of relevance and with reference to actual scenario of the later historical context.

- The whole concept of the "covenant" is absent from the early literature and was first utilised in its popular sense no earlier than the Deuteronomistic ideology of the seventh century BC.

- The Deuteronomistic law of a centralised sanctuary is a late institution as can be ascertained from the fact that the books of Samuel-Kings know nothing about it.

- The stories of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua are actually the product of exilic and post-exilic politico-religious ideology.

- The socio-political and ethnic situation of the Monarchic, Persian and Greek periods are frequently projected retrojectively onto the times of the Patriarchs and pre-deluvian humanity in Genesis.

- The supposed Mosaic origins of liturgical practices and cultic features which the Chronicler projects back unto the Davidic monarchy to legitimise its later incorporation into post-exilic Judaism are all fictitious ideological retrojections.

- Various religious beliefs that were adopted during the exile or in the post-exilic period are presented as though they were part of pre-exilic Yahwism, i.e.

monotheism, belief in angels, beatific afterlife, Satan, etc.

Contrary to what many scholars who do not except these views believe, the claims made here are not simply the result of biased anti-supernaturalism, post-modernism, positivism or nihilism (cf. Soggin 1993:96). They represent the final conclusions of years of painstaking research based on a close reading of the texts themselves. The research did not set out to prove the various scenarios as being fictitious. The anti-realist perspective is a *conclusion* prompted by taking the details of the text seriously and noticing many small problems that the majority of the readers of the texts never even realise exist (cf. Barr 1981:31).

Some scholars at certain times may indeed have had hidden agendas or unspoken assumptions and motivations but, in the end, what determines whether a theory is accepted is whether the arguments are convincing rather than which ideologies the researcher ascribes to. One cannot dismiss or endorse certain results of research merely on the basis of psycho-genetic or socio-genetic stereotyping. Even if the scholar in question subscribes to different epistemological, hermeneutical or theological ideologies than oneself, there is the need to judge arguments on merit rather than on authorship. This should be the case irrespective of whether a scholar happens to be conservative or critical or whatever else he or she can possibly be.

For the purpose of this study and its concern with the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts, it will not do to merely take cognisance of the results of critical historical reconstructions regarding alleged ideological retrojections in the biblical discourse. What needs to be done is to ascertain what the implications the collapse of historical realism on these grounds might have for realism regarding the ontological status of the character Yahweh portrayed in such fictitious history.

Take, for example the second issue – that of the origin of the sacrificial system presented in the Old Testament texts. According to Rogerson (1983:71), though all ancient religions featured the rites of sacrifice, what makes the Israelite version unique was the story in the context in which it was set. The whole system is presented in the Old Testament as having been instituted by God on Mount Sinai after the Exodus. Rogerson (1983:71) continues his discussion by suggesting that the fact that

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modern scholarship has shown that many elements of sacrifice were probably taken over from Israel's neighbours is not relevant to his present discussion.

Since Rogers was interested in historical and social issues, this latter matter – the fact that the sacrifices were largely adoptions and adaptations of pagan rites – can be conveniently set aside. But the philosophical critic in the form of the devil's advocate considers this small datum to be quite revealing. For let us suppose that the findings of critical scholarship regarding the origin of Israelite sacrificial rites are correct – what does this tell us with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

According to the devil's advocate, whether the scholars who discovered the foreign origin of Hebrew sacrifices were aware of it or not, they have indirectly and inadvertently vindicated anti-realism. For if their account of the history of sacrifice is true and the sacrificial rites did not really originate from a supposed theophany at Sinai, the following line of ontological reasoning reveals the anti-realist ontological implications of such findings:

1. The sacrifices were adopted and adapted from pagan religions.

2. Therefore, they were not instituted by Moses after the Exodus.

3. Therefore, they were not provided or revealed by Yahweh at Sinai.

4. Therefore, Yahweh-depicted-as-instituting-the-sacrificial-system is a character of fiction.

5. Therefore Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

It is as simple as that. If scholarship in any way insinuates that any element in Israelite law and religion was not derived from Moses or anyone else as the texts depict, they are implying that the textual scenarios that depict such origins are fictitious. Irrespective of whatever was convention at the time and regardless of the fact whether it was right or wrong to pretend that something did actually happen to justify and

contextualise ideology, if what is depicted in the text never happened as described it is technically speaking fictitious, period.

This means that if Yahweh is depicted or implied as being involved in related scenarios in any way, (e.g. in terms of theophany, verbal communication, prophetic mediation of the divine will, etc.), it follows that no god Yahweh really did what the texts imply that he did. If this is the case then Yahweh depicted as doing what the texts depict him as doing is a character of fiction. In short, merely by showing that certain events in the texts are ideological and literary constructs and did not actually happen, if these events involve the deity Yahweh, it is possible to show that Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist

7.2.14   The argument from scientific absurdities
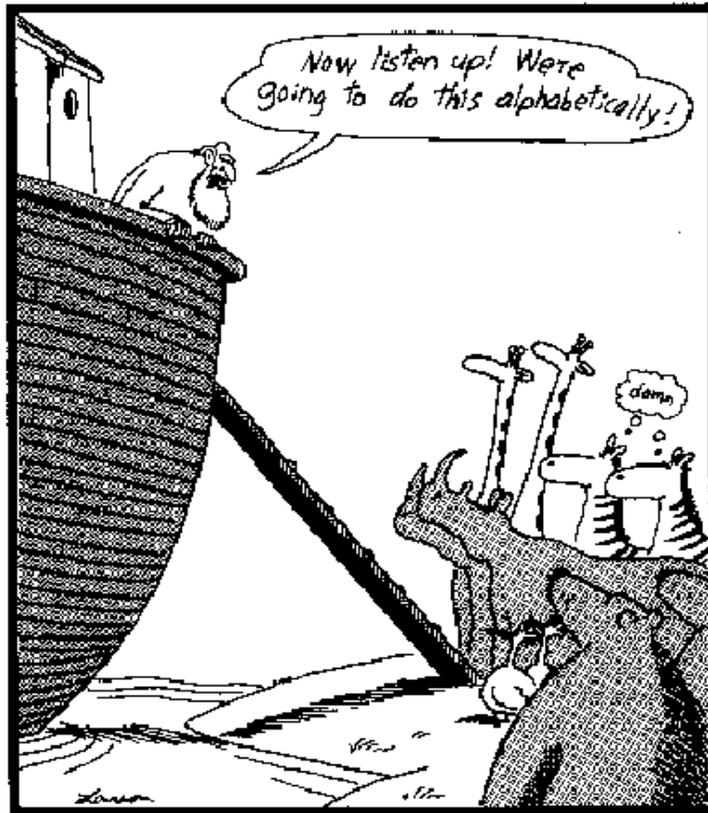
From an anti-realist point of view, there are many texts – especially those pertaining to divine intervention and miracles – that contain stories that are unacceptable as

history. In such instances, the scenarios depicted contain such fantastic and incredible happenings that it seems to be obvious that such are the products of creative pre-scientific imagination rather than of sober historical reportage (cf. Rogerson 1976:02; Kaye & Rogerson 1978:3-4).

One nineteenth century scholar who meticulously noted many of the scientific absurdities in the text was John Colenso. In parts 1 and 4 of his critical examination of the Pentateuch and the book Joshua, Colenso (1862) and (1863c) pointed out elements in the text that can be considered as totally unbelievable.

In discussing the Flood, Colenso made a devastating attack on realism with regard to the biblical account (cf. Colenso 1863c:176-210). He pictures how the ark was inhabited: with snails and animals as well as insects and birds. He estimates how much meat there must have been to satisfy all the carnivores for over a year, in addition to the animals of prey, which had to be preserved. He imagines the drudgery of the daily routine of Noah and his family feeding all these animals, birds and other creatures, renewing their litter and disposing of their excrement.

Colenso also wondered how some insects got on since many normally do not live in pairs (e.g. bees) whilst some cannot even be classed as male and female. He ponders difficulties of temperature management since what some animals require to live are either fatally hot or cold by the standards of others. Surely it must have been very cold on the 17 700 feet high Ararat on the high seas (Colenso 1863c:177). Colenso also pondered how the animals on leaving the ark somewhere in the Middle East would be able to make their way back home to where they are found today. How did the wingless dodo reach the island of Mauritius or the wingless apteryx New Zealand? Did the kangaroo jump across the oceans to Australia? (cf. Colenso 1863c:178)

The grounding of the ark on Mount Ararat raised the difficulty that Everest and other mountains in the Himalayas are much higher than 17 000 feet; yet the account says (Gen 7:19) that all the high mountains were covered. This raised, in turn, the question whether the flood was a universal deluge or only a partial one. Here Colenso was able to expose the arguments of conservative writers who tried to retain the realist view of the narrative by supposing only a partial inundation. Unfortunately, this was against

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the plain sense of the text, which explicitly asserted that the flood was universal. However, arguments from geology also figured, such as the claim by Lyell that there was no evidence for a universal flood (cf. Colenso 1863c:198)

At another point in his study Colenso also dealt with the creation account in Genesis 1 in which he also gave examples of orthodox writers who maintained realism with regard to the narrative only by taking liberties with the text (cf. Colenso 1863c:102). Some assumed the days of creation were long epoch, others that long intervals supervened between the days. There was the problem that the sun, moon and stars were not created until the fourth day, so that the earth must have existed without a solar system and galaxy.

A conservative apologist answer to this, again, according to Colenso, ignoring the obvious and plain meaning of the text, was that on the fourth day God did not create the sun and moon but simply caused them to become visible. Some orthodox supporters of this view even went so far as to claim that, for a long period, the earth and its vegetation were not dependent on the sun for light and heat and that scientific discoveries supposedly proved that, at this time, the earth had enjoyed a uniform temperature over its entire surface (cf. Colenso 1863c:102).

If Colenso demonstrated the absurdities of the attempts to defend the literal authenticity of Genesis 1, as a typical liberal semi-realist he still held the account to be inspired and "true". According to him and other liberals to this day, the text was never intended to provide a literal account of how the world was created. According to this view, despite 90% of the discourse answering to precisely the question of how God created the world, the text actually only intends to expound the principles that God was the creator, that man was in the image of God and that creation was good.

Thus, like all liberals, Colenso can be sober in invalidating conservative literalism. Nevertheless, his own attempt (and that of others) to salvage realism by claiming that the text was never intended to answer historical or scientific questions is pitiful. The liberal belief that the biblical author merely wanted to communicate a minimalist metaphorical theological profundity ultimately has no more support from the text than the reinterpretation by fundamentalist creationists.

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When it comes to scientific absurdities in the Old Testament, not only the creation and the flood accounts qualify to be classified as such. Many Old Testament interpreters have noted several other instances of depictions that stretch beyond the limits of rational credulity:

- A universe no older than 6000 years (cf. 1 Chron 1-10);

- A snake talks to people (cf. Gen 3);

- The ages of the pre-deluvians (e.g. Adam was 930 years old; Methuselah was 969; etc.) and some post-deluvians (Terah was 205; Abraham 175; Sarah 127; Ishmael 137; Isaac 180 years; Jacob was 147 years; Levi 137; Kohath 133; Amram 137; Moses 120; Aaron 123; Job 210; [cf. also the living Mordechai as 118 with Esther as *cousin* who like Sarah of old must have been over 90 when adopted into the king's harem!] vs. more realistically, 70 or 80 (cf. especially 2 Sam 19:35; Ps 90:10);

- The people built a tower that almost reached the stars and gave the deity in heaven quite a fright (cf. Gen 11);

- Jacob is able to change the DNA and gene structure of his cattle by putting different types of branches in their drinking water (cf. Gen 30);

- A family of seventy people multiplies to over two million in the course of only four to six generations (cf. Gen 47-Ex 12);

- The Israelites watch as a wind blows on the sea with such force that it forms two walls of water without the people themselves being blown away whilst walking through the gusts (cf. Ex 14);

- Over two million people with their livestock managed to wander around the Sinai desert and live off the land for forty years (cf. Exodus – Numbers);

- Moses, at age 80, goes without food or water on mount Sinai for 80 (120?) days (cf. Deut 9:9,18);

- Balaam engages in conversion with his donkey (cf. Num 22);

- Joshua commands the and moon sun to stand still (cf. Josh 10);

- Samson, on his own, caught 300 foxes and tied their tales together; killed a 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass in single combat; and carried two city gates up a mountain 64 km away from where he tore them out of the city walls;

- The prophet Elijah feeds himself and a widow with a bottomless jar (cf. 1 Kgs 20);

- The shadow of the sundial of Ahaz moves ten steps backwards (cf. 2 Kgs 20; Isa 38);

- The prophet Jonah is swallowed by a fish, spends some time inside it and is neatly albeit grossly deposited on land (cf. Jon 1-2);

- Three people survive being thrown into a blazing furnace so hot it killed even those who shoved them inside (cf. Dan 3).

These are only a few of the many, many scenarios in the text which some believe go beyond the limits of credibility. If this objection to the historicity of such apparently absurd and incredible scenarios is accepted, it follows that they are fiction. This implies, of course, that Yahweh-as-depicted as a character in such fictions is himself a character of fiction. Ergo, he does not really exist.

7.2.15   The argument from historical errors

Virtually all of the above arguments also imply the presence of historical errors in the text. However, one might present this matter as a separate and additional category in the arguments against historicity in order to focus exclusively on matters of historiographical correctness. In order to avoid repeating the previous arguments here,

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the devil's advocate has decided to use the book of Daniel as an example of historical errors in an Old Testament text.

Traditionally the book of Daniel was interpreted as a historically factual account of a prophet called Daniel who lived during the period of the exile at the royal court in Babylon. Many Christian interpreters also claimed that much of the book correctly predicts various events up to, including and after the time of Jesus (cf. Archer 1992:129). However, as Weiser (1961:271-272) notes, since the days of the Early Church there were already suspicions that the book might actually have been written in the second century BC for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- Though the book is prophetic it is also apocalyptic and this genre of writing only emerged within Judaism in the late post-exilic period;

- The prophecies in the book become more detailed and more accurate as they pertain to the second century BC and thereafter become vague and incorrect;

- Despite the fact that the genre of the book is prophecy it became part of the "writings" in the Tanach rather than being incorporated into the prophetic corpus;

- The other post-exilic books such as Ezra and Nehemiah knows nothing of a prophet called Daniel;

- In the early apocrypha, e.g. Ben Sirach's list of praiseworthy forefathers, the figure of Daniel is not even mentioned and only turns up in the Sibylline Oracles III 338 (about 140 BC) and in 1 Maccabees 2:59 (about 100 BC);

- The book includes references to angels and to the belief in an eschatological resurrection after death, the sort of which only appeared in Jewish belief in the post-exilic Persian and Hellenistic periods;

- As was common convention in this later period, the name of Yahweh is not mentioned in the book and reference to the divine is usually to the God of Heaven

- A large part of the book is written in Aramaic, the later post-exilic language of the Jews;

- The Hebrew of the book is late and exhibits linguistic influences from the languages of Persia and Greece;

- The figure of Daniel is probably derived from the Canaanite legend of a hero of ancient times called Danel (cf. Ezek 14:14,20; 28:3);

- The book contains numerous historical inaccuracies for the periods other than that part of the second century in which the real author actually lived.

Whether these assessments and justification of a second century date for the book are correct are, for present purposes, of secondary relevance. Of primary concern is the allegation that the book contains historical errors and, for the devil's advocate's case, what these might imply for the ontological status of the deity as depicted in the text of Daniel.

In this regard, the following errors are noted by Weiser (1961:272-273):

- The book dates the siege of Jerusalem to the third year of Jehoachim (cf. Dan 1:1). No such siege took place and this data contradicts the correct data of 2 Kings which places it in the eleventh year of the king's reign;

- From an assessment of the Babylonian court histories, it is clear that there was no Jew called Daniel who advised the Babylonian kings as depicted in the texts of the biblical book;

- Belshazzar was not, as the text claims, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the son of the last king of Babylon, Nabonides and never even became a king;

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- There never was a "Darius the Mede" who was the successor of Belshazzar, son of Xerxes and predecessor of Cyrus. The historical sequence of the Persian kings was instead Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, Xerxes.

It is not only the book of Daniel that contains historical errors of this type. Though historical errors can be found in virtually every book of the Old Testament, another good example of the same problems as encountered with Daniel is to be found with regard to the book Esther. As was the case with Daniel, this book, despite the absence of any reference to Yahweh (though his existence is certainly assumed and taken for granted) is also held to be a work of fiction. According to Weiser (1961:311), this was concluded not only because of e.g.:

- The absurd implied age of Mordechai (who, as part of the exiles with Johaiachin in 597 BC must have been 120; yet Esther, the beauty queen is alleged to be his *cousin* (sic));

- The remains of mythological motifs, e.g. Esther/Mordechai = Ishtar/Marduk;

- The obvious fact that book is an etiological legend for the Purim festival;

- The outrageous amount of casualties among the Persians in the war against the Jews, i.e. 75 000 in one day;

- The omniscient narrator who knows what all the characters, both protagonists (Esther and Mordechai) and the antagonists (Hamman and his family) say, do and think in secret.

In addition, Weiser (1961:312) notes the presence of several other glaring historical errors in the text that contributed to the denial of its historicity, e.g.:

- There never was a Jewish Persian princess called Esther;

- The wife of Xerxes was neither Vashti nor Esther but Amestris;

- Persia was not at that time divided into 127 provinces; only 27.

When it comes to the Old Testament as a whole, the other arguments against historicity presented in this chapter also show indirectly that historical errors are, for various reasons, quite common in the text. When it comes to the question regarding the ontological status of the deity as depicted in texts filled with historical errors, the anti-realist implications should be clear:

1   There was no Daniel at the royal court of Babylon as depicted in the text.

2   This means that the scenarios in the text did not happen as depicted.

3   This means that the dreams, miracles, visions and visitations did not occur as depicted.

4   This means that the particular representation of the deity who did the miracles and sent the angels and visions in the way the text depicts is fictitious.

5   This means that the deity-as-depicted is a character of fiction.

6   Ergo, the deity – as depicted – does not really exist.

7.3   CONCLUSION

If these arguments against historicity are taken as valid and the Old Testament texts do not correctly refer to anything that actually happened in the *past in the way that the texts depict it to have been,* the following argument may be reconstructed with regard to the anti-realist ontological implications of fictitious history:

1. Many Old Testament texts were intended to provide data of what supposedly actually happened in the past in the world outside the text. Nevertheless, there are many good objections against realism with regard to the historicity of the textual depictions.

2. Therefore, the events depicted in the Old Testament texts involving Yahweh directly or indirectly did not actually happen exactly as described.

3. Therefore Yahweh never really appeared, acted and spoke in the way the texts depict Him as doing in the actual extra-textual past.

4. Therefore, the Yahweh who did appear, act and speak is a character of fiction whose intervention only occurred in the world of the text.

5. Therefore, Yahweh-as-thus-depicted in the Old Testament does not really exist.

The argument from fictitious history is the sixth argument against the existence of Yahweh and is thought to justify anti-realism in Old Testament theology. However, since the devil's advocate's case *in toto* constitutes a cumulative argument, the present argument (and its subarguments) should not be viewed in isolation. Its credibility and strength are enhanced by the fact that it stands juxtaposed to the various other arguments in the case against realism.

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

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.:
:

- 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)

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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

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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

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

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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

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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

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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,

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.

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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.

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

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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

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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.
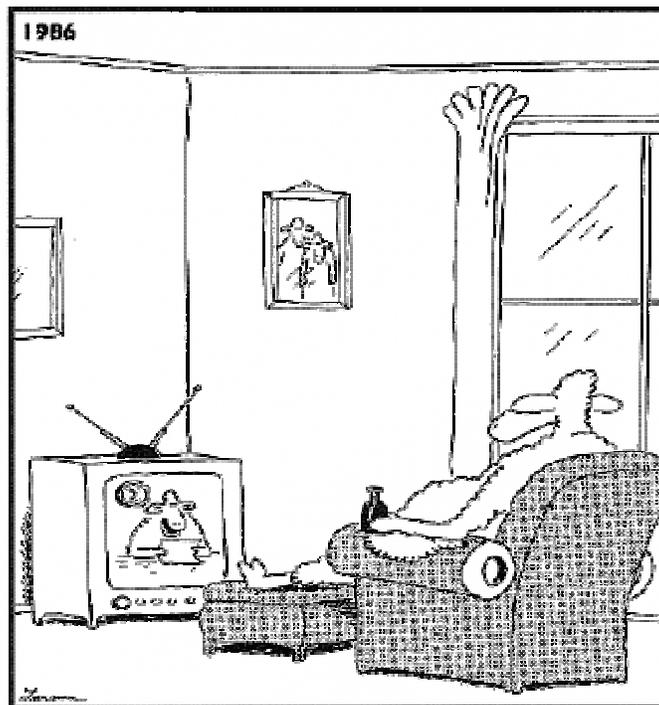
"And this report just in. …. Apparently, the grass is greener on the other side."

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

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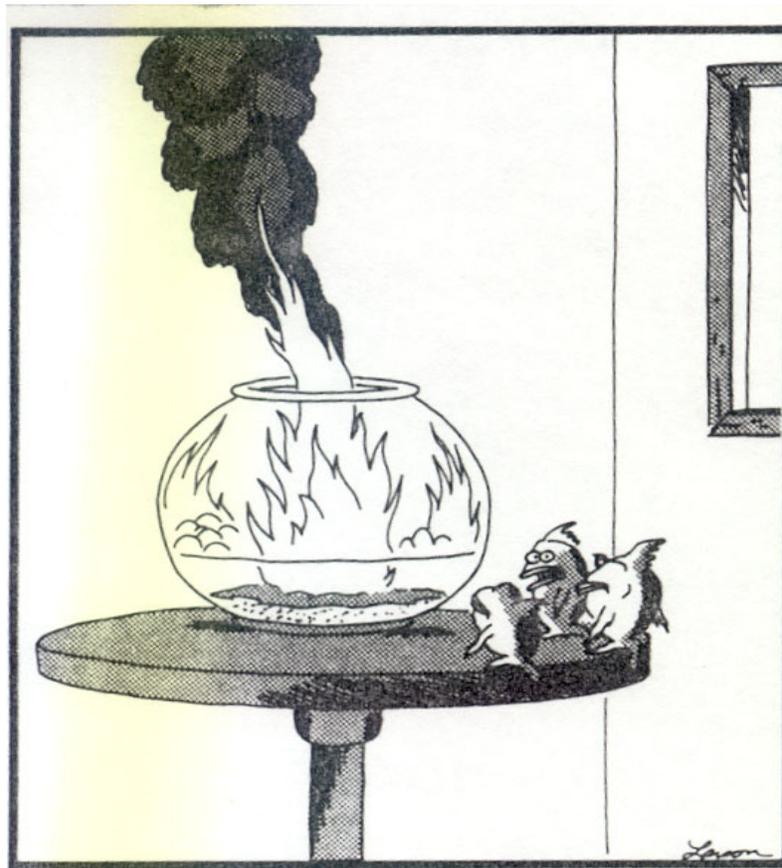
"Well, thank God we all made it out in time.
... 'Course, now we're equally screwed."

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.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

*"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"*

(Ps 11:3)

9.1   INTRODUCTION

In the third book of Nietzsche's '*The Gay Science'*, a mad man lights a lamp during the day, whereafter he rushes screaming into the market place. All alone he cries out, "I seek God! I seek God!". The marketplace convulses in ridicule, "Has he got lost?" asked one. "Did he lose his way like a child?" asked another. "Or is he hiding?; Is he afraid of us?"…Thus they yelled and laughed. The difference between the mad man and the market crowds was not that one believed in the reality of God and the other did not. Neither believed and God died in the event of his own incredibility (cf. Nietzsche 1974:181)

But the mad man alone knows what they have done, what they have lost. "I will tell you. We have killed Him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave as a sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? …What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives." Here the mad man falls silent before the astonished listeners. He throws his lantern on the ground, smashing it into pieces. "I have come too early", he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wondering. It has not reached the ears of human beings…This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves*." (Nietzsche 1984:111-112)

In this concluding chapter, the implications of the devil's advocate's case of realism will be spelled out. It will be claimed that these may be more far-reaching than many

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scholars might like to believe or are willing to admit. However, before it comes to that, as it must, it may be appropriate to recapitulate on what has been ascertained up to now.
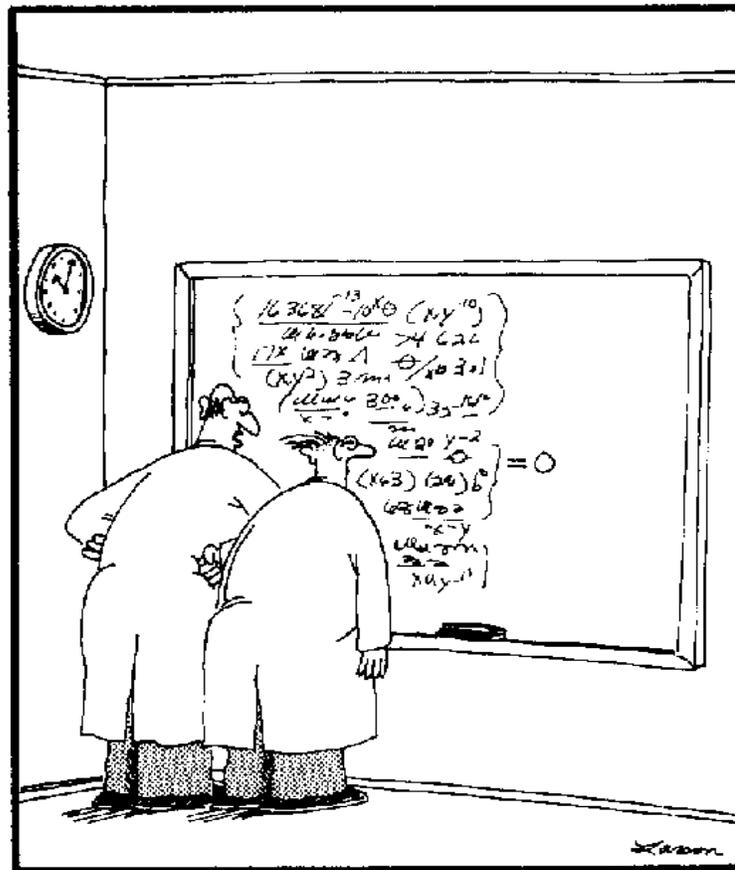
"No doubt about it, Ellington—we've mathematically expressed the purpose of the universe. God, how I love the thrill of scientific discovery!"

9.2 A SUMMARY OF THE CASE AGAINST REALISM

In retrospect, the arguments presented by the devil's advocate in its reconstruction of a **cumulative** case against realism can be summed up as follows:

1. **The argument of theological pluralism** demonstrated that the first element in the construction of Yahweh that is rather suspicious is the fact that, in the Old Testament texts, Yahweh is depicted in contradictory ways with regard to his nature, attributes, will and acts. Both synchronic and diachronic perspectives on

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theological pluralism revealed that there is no coherent "Old Testament view" of Yahweh. This deconstructs realism in Old Testament theology and suggests that whenever various depictions contradict each other, Yahweh-as-depicted in at least some of them must be a character of fiction who does not exist.

2. **The argument from unorthodox theology** revealed that Yahweh is often depicted as having attributes that appear to be unorthodox from the point of view of Christian philosophical theology. Yahweh is often depicted in ways that suggest he is not eternal, single, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, precognisant, omnipresent and omnibenevolent. If the discourse of dogmatic Christian theology is assumed to describe the real God then the unorthodox versions of the deity Yahweh in the text must be seen as fictitious. Therefore, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

3. **The argument from polymorphic projection** pointed out that Yahweh's own knowledge about the world, his moral convictions, his divine socio-political set-up and his interventionist methodology seem all-too-human. What Yahweh takes for granted as being eternally and objectively real, valid and normative are no more than the superstitious, historically relative and culturally contingent beliefs of his speechwriters. This gives the game away in that it unmasks Yahweh as an anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection of Iron Age, ancient Near Eastern human mythologians. He is therefore a character of fiction who does not exist outside the texts and the minds of those who created him in their own image.

4. **The argument from mythology and syncretism** demonstrated that Yahweh's own cult and the texts allegedly witnessing to his supposed revelation contain numerous elements of myth, legend, folklore and superstition not very different from that found in other pagan religions. In fact, in many instances, the Old Testament authors have borrowed extensively from pagan literature and there are marked traces of syncretism and magic in the biblical texts. Since it is on these grounds that the deities of other religions are usually dismissed as being demonstrably fictitious entities, consistency demands that the depictions of Yahweh must share the same fate. Yahweh-as-depicted has the same ontological

status as the other ancient deities and therefore does not exist.

5. **The argument from fictitious cosmography** suggested that it might actually be possible to empirically falsify realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts by showing that the world described therein has no extra-textual counterpart. Both the world in the text and Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts are literary constructs and the products of pre-scientific misconceptions of the way the universe is constituted. In other words, the deity Yahweh who created a fictitious world, who himself believes in the reality of that world and who is depicted as having his abode in the sky, is demonstrably a character of fiction. He does not exist in the world outside the text and therefore not at all.

6. **The argument from fictitious history** was itself constituted by numerous minor arguments justifying the claim that the supposed revelation of Yahweh in the history of the Hebrew people never actually occurred as the text wants its readers to believe. Since texts purporting to be history are demonstrably nothing of the sort, realism collapses. The so-called history in which Yahweh supposedly revealed himself is no more than historical fiction and, therefore, Yahweh never really appeared, acted and spoke as depicted in the Old Testament texts. As a result, no sufficient reason remains for us to believe that Yahweh-as-depicted is anything other than a character of fiction and who does not really exist.

7. **The argument from meta-textual history** dealt with the ontological implications of the all-too-human origin, nature and development of both Yahwism as a religion and the Old Testament as an alleged witness to supposed divine revelation in history. The history of Hebrew religion and its derivatives as well as the history of the Old Testament and its interpretation exhibit a marked tendency for repressing the fact that realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh is problematic and has, in fact, collapsed. Given the validity of these observations, the epistemological sources that traditionally seemed to justify realism in Old Testament theology can no longer do so. When Yahwism and the Old Testament stand exposed as all-too-human ideological constructs with no demonstrable link to any extra-textual divinity, it becomes obvious that Yahweh-as-depicted does

not really exist.

As noted throughout the thesis, not all the arguments and perspectives will be seen by everyone as being equally devastating or effective when viewed in isolation. However, as a whole and in the form of **a cumulative argument** against the existence of Yahweh, these arguments constitute a seemingly irrefutable case against realism in Old Testament theology. As such it also provides a formidable justification of atheism regarding the ontological status of the deity Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts.

9.3   THE PAN-ATHEIST IMPLICATIONS OF THE COLLAPSE OF REALISM IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

With the seven arguments in its case, the devil's advocate is claiming that anti-realism is the only possibility left in Old Testament theology. Moreover, at least according to the devil's advocate, the implications of the collapse of realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may be more far-reaching than many in the know would like others to believe.

To be sure, as was suggested in the formulation of the hypothesis in chapter one, if realism has collapsed with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, there may be a domino effect. The result of this may be devastating for any other theology somehow related to or dependent on realism in Old Testament theology. In other words, the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology can lead to the justification of full-blown atheism.

Such a claim, controversial and extreme though it may seem, can be justified along the following line of reasoning that refuses to bracket biblical theology with the either the history or philosophy of religion:

9.3.1   Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist

It has been shown via the reconstructed case against realism that Yahweh as he is depicted in many Old Testament texts is demonstrably a character of fiction.

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Therefore, one may conclude that Yahweh-as-depicted in these texts does not exist.

9.3.2   Therefore, Yahweh per se does not exist

Some may wonder whether it might not be possible to claim that the god Yahweh as such could still exist because, technically, all that the arguments in the case against realism have proved is that *certain* but not all of the *depictions* of Yahweh in the texts may be fictitious. Moreover, the reader might recall that in chapter 2 it was admitted that this study is technically only able to concern itself with the deconstruction of realism concerning most but not every single one of the depictions of Yahweh in the text. It is just not practically possible to discuss all the issues and invalidate every form of realism with regard to every single verse in the Old Testament.

According to the devil's advocate, however, things are not that simple and realism cannot hope to remain immune on such a technicality. In fact, it was neither necessary nor possible to refute realism with regard to every single verse in the Old Testament before it could be confidently claimed that realism pertaining to the whole has collapsed. With realism deconstructed in so many foundational depictions and in so many ways, whatever texts were not explicitly referred to can hardly be considered as remaining untouched given the collapse of realism with regard to all the surrounding discourse.

In other words, if Yahweh-as-depicted in certain texts does not exist, the deity Yahweh who in other texts – when speaking in the first person – refers to the former texts as if realism was justified is also unmasked as a character of fiction.

Even if some texts never mention Yahweh in certain parts thereof, if certain criteria are met, it cannot be considered to remain untouched by the devil's advocate's case against realism. As long as the author of a text not explicitly referred to in this study was a realist concerning the depiction of Yahweh in those texts that were discussed by the devil's advocate, realism remains impossible.

Yet suppose the author of an Old Testament text not referred to by the devil's advocate may not have been a realist concerning the depictions of Yahweh in those

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texts that were deconstructed by the devil's advocate. Even in such a scenario, as long as at least one element of the unmentioned text itself is implied to be problematic from the perspective of one or more of the devil's advocate's arguments, realism is by implication obviously not a valid option.

It should therefore be clear that, incomplete as it may be, the way in which the case against realism was articulated has a domino effect operative in the deconstruction of realism in all Old Testament texts. The Old Testament texts, diverse though they may be, contain a substantial amount of inter-textual allusions. Moreover, later texts assume the validity of realism regarding at least some of the depictions in the former. As a result of this state of affairs, the collapse of realism regarding the whole follows inevitably with the invalidation of realism regarding some of its parts.

Ultimately, since the depictions of Yahweh that were the main interest in this study are from the Old Testament texts, if Yahweh-as-depicted in these texts does not exist and the Old Testament was our only epistemological source, all grounds for believing in the existence of Yahweh *per se* disappears. To continue holding on to such a belief would be both irrational and unethical since the retention of a realist ideology is not only bereft of evidence but actually *against* the evidence (cf. Clifford 1987:11).

9.3.3   Therefore, the god of the Old Testament does not exist

The body of texts that was the object of scrutiny for the devil's advocate's case was the discourse in the biblical literature that Christians refer to as the "Old Testament". This is an ideological designation not derived from the texts themselves and assumes the New Testament juxtaposed to the Old. But if Yahweh-as-depicted and also Yahweh per se do not exist then *ipso facto* the god of the Old Testament is obviously a character of fiction. If Yahweh does not exist then the god of the Old Testament cannot be real either.

9.3.4   Therefore, the god of the New Testament does not exist

As was noted in the previous paragraph, the Old Testament forms part of the Christian canon(s) that includes the New Testament. Moreover, a lot of research exists by

which all of the arguments in the case against realism in Old Testament theology can be reconstructed to deconstruct realism in New Testament theology as well:

- Theological pluralism (cf. Dodd 1963; Charlot 1970; Bauer 1972; Dunn 1977; Sanders 1986);

- Unorthodox theology (cf. Harwood 1992; Mckinsey 1995; Raisanen 1990);

- Polymorphic projection (cf. Feuerbach 1957; Martin 1990; Weber 1995; Cupitt 1989; 1996);

- Mythology and syncretism (cf. Caird 1993; Cupitt 1979; Fawcett 1973; Frazer 1963; Gillooly 1992; Haasbroek 1992; Henderson 1956; Hick 1973; Forsyth 1987);

- Fictitious cosmology (cf. Bernstein 1993; Bultmann 1984; Robinson 1963; Borg 1998);

- Fictitious history (cf. Schweitzer 1968; Arnheim 1984; Harwood 1992; Wells 1982, 1986; Hedrickson 1999);

- Meta-textual history (cf. Arnheim 1984; Hofmann 1985; Herrin 1987; Harwood 1992; Armstrong 1993; Grant 1998).

Though possible, such a deconstruction of realism in New Testament theology is not necessary to prove that the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology may have pan-atheist implications. In all their attempts to show that the Jewish scriptures support their interpretation of messianic prophecy and theological argumentation, the New Testament authors frequently quoted or alluded to the Old Testament texts. From the way the Old Testament is utilised in the New, hermeneutically questionable though it may be, it is clear that the god they claimed to believe in was the same god witnessed to in the Hebrew Scriptures and the LXX. It is an indisputable fact that the god of Jesus, Paul and all the other New Testament believers was none other than

Yahweh himself.

The devastating and far-reaching implications of the case against realism in Old Testament theology for realism in the New should therefore be clear. If Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament does not exist and Yahweh per se and therefore the god of the Old Testament is not real, it follows logically that the god of the New Testament, which is presumed to be the same god, must himself be a character of fiction.

9.3.5.   Therefore, the god of the Bible does not exist

If the god of the Old Testament – and therefore the god of the New Testament – does not exist, it follows that the "god of the Bible" cannot be real. Even though throughout this study it has been implied that popular concepts like the "god of the Bible" or the "biblical" view of "God" are endlessly problematic, this only confirms the pan-atheist consequences of the case against realism. If Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist and therefore both the god of the Old and New Testaments are fictitious entities, realism in a pan-biblical theology is also invalidated.

9.3.6   Therefore, the god of Christian theology does not exist

Christian theology can hardly be considered as being "Christian" in any meaningful sense if there are no allusions whatsoever to, or dependence on, any of the biblical materials, motifs and imagery. Though there are a myriad of different Christian conceptions of God, few if any of them would deny that the god they worship is none other than the god Yahweh.

Whatever critical theologians may claim about how Christian theology can survive without the veracity of the Bible, it should now be clear that this way of looking at things involves strategies of evasion and repression. If realism in the primary epistemological sources (the Old and New Testaments) collapses, what justification remains for believing that a god identified with the god of the Bible exists at all? Isn't it a bit like claiming that Homeric mythology does not need Homer's myths and that one can still believe in the existence of the Homeric Zeus, even if the deity as

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depicted in the sacred texts is obviously a human literary construct with no extra-textual counterpart?

Since Christian theology assumes the reality of the god whom the Bible supposedly witness to, if realism in biblical theology collapses so does realism in any other theology in any way rooted in, related to or dependent on it. If realism pertaining to biblical theology collapses and Yahweh does not exist, then all the versions of a god constructed by theologians throughout the history of dogmatic or systematic theology are themselves fictitious and must be considered as being products of creative and (re) constructive mythology.

9.3.7   Therefore the god of Christian philosophy of religion does not exist

As noted above, if Yahweh does not exist, then any sort of theism that is in any way whatsoever linked to, rooted in, derived from and dependent on realism of any part of the Old Testament text whatsoever is repressing its anti-realist status. That is why the collapse of realism in biblical theism leads inevitably to the collapse of realism in philosophical theism since the latter is indubitably in many ways rooted in and related to the depictions of Yahweh in the biblical discourse.

The problem here is twofold. Philosophers of the Christian religion either tend to bracket the history of religion and the problems of biblical theology. Alternatively, even when taking cognisance of the collapse of realism with regard to the Old Testament's depiction of Yahweh, they fail to understand its ontological implications. This allows them to repress the fact that the god they are reconstructing and whose existence they attempt to prove is supposed to be none other than the unreal Yahweh himself.

If Yahweh does not exist, how can any updating of his alleged profile make the deity any more real? Even should philosophers of the Christian religion succeed in proving that some God might exist, what use would this be if the deity couldn't be equated with Yahweh of Old? Is not proving the existence of a deity with a nature and attributes different from that of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text tantamount to an indirect disproof and veiled admission that Yahweh-as-depicted must himself be

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unreal? Why bother retaining the concept "God" or the label "Christian" for one's theology if the new view of ultimate reality is not derived from traditional sources and has little if anything in common with earlier the ideologies of biblical theology?

Whether it concerns the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from design, the teleological argument, the argument from morality, the argument from religious experience, Pascal's wager, or whatever other theistic argument constructed to prove that God exists, since the profiles of the deity assumed by those who put forward these arguments are usually at odds with many of the depictions of Yahweh in the text, claiming that "God" exists, seems indeed to be tantamount to insinuating that "Yahweh" does not. But if Yahweh does not exist, how can "God" who, from a Christian perspective, is supposed to be none other than Yahweh himself?

All the popular philosophical theistic arguments, if they pertain to the Christian god, must repress the problems noted in the seven arguments reconstructed in the case against realism. The individual arguments in the case against realism undercut all the traditional theistic proofs. Since the devil's advocate's arguments deconstruct the foundations, the roots and heart of all biblically based or derived forms of theism, they are much more effective than any other popular contemporary arguments *against* the existence of "God".

Whether one thinks of sociological arguments, psychological arguments, logico-linguistic arguments, bad design arguments, arguments from evil, etc. – one obvious problem remains. In the context of Old Testament Yahwism, these arguments are all partially invalid as they tend to bracket the history of religion and often succeed only in knocking down a straw man (i.e. the God of the philosophers) with little if any relation to the depictions of Yahweh in the text.

As long as Yahweh-as-depicted in the text remains philosophically untouched there remains a way back for Christian theists whose idea of God ultimately derives from interpretations and reinterpretations of the biblical discourse. However, once realism with regard to the latter has collapsed, the foundations, even of Christian philosophical theism, are destroyed and there is nowhere left to go but out.

As a last ditch attempt, no longer to salvage realism so much as to render anti-realism harmless, some philosophically minded scholars might wish to point to or find comfort in the fact that it is logically impossible to prove a universal negative. Thus, according to this logical philosophical principle, it is technically not possible to absolutely prove a sweeping statement like "There is no god whatsoever". The reason such a disproof is considered to be impossible is because, in order to be certain one must know the whole of reality and no human can possibly claim to be in such a position. Therefore, it is impossible to provide absolute verification for such a sweeping claim biased towards atheistic metaphysics.

This attempt to immunise the theistic perspective against the devil's advocate's case, however, apart from bracketing the history of religion, has its drawbacks:

- The case against realism did not start out as being primarily concerned with the existence of any god per se but with the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament;

- In order to prove that *Yahweh-as-depicted* does not exist one need not be able to understand all of reality but only need to show that *the texts depicting Yahweh* are fiction;

- Should one ignore the depictions of Yahweh in the texts and attempt to prove the existence of the deity via natural theology, there are no sufficient resources to prove that this particular divinity rather than any other actually exists;

- Should the profile of the divine in any argument for the existence of God be in any way dependent on, derived from, legitimised by or rooted in any of the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts, one is confronted with all the ontological problems as discussed in the case against realism;

- The consistent application of the principle regarding the supposed impossibility to prove a universal negative would imply that neither are we able to prove that

fairies, unicorns, pagan gods or any other obviously fictional characters do not really exist.

In other words, an acceptance of both critical theology and a belief in the impossibility to prove a universal negative solves one dilemma at the cost of creating another. Now the (supposedly Christian) apologist is without justification in the belief that Yahweh is any more real than pagan deities like Baal or Zeus who, according to these people, "obviously" do not exist.

But how *do* theists usually justify atheism pertaining to the other deities of pagan mythology?

- If an appeal is made to the belief that other fictional entities are demonstrably human creations with a history as all-too-human ideas, the devil's advocate will point out that the same can be said of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text;

- If an appeal is made to the fictitious nature of the stories in which other deities feature then the devil's advocate could claim that the same is true concerning the narratives in which Yahweh is represented;

- If an appeal is made to the mythical cosmology of the pagan beliefs and the possibility of empirical falsification when it comes to the alleged abode of a pagan deity on a mountain or in the sky then the same can be said concerning Yahweh's abode;

- If an appeal is made to personal religious experience then the desired avoidance of a double standard fallacy must lead the apologist to admit the authenticity of the religious experience in other religions which are usually considered to be based on faith in fictitious entities;

- If any appeal is made to a statement or claim in a religious text, the argument becomes based on fallacies of assumption, circular reasoning and double standards since the claims of other sacred albeit supposedly allegedly mythical

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texts are not allowed to function in an equally normative fashion;

- If an appeal is made to the fact that no one believes in pagan entities anymore the question might be asked whether anyone believes in "Yahweh" anymore (as opposed to "The Lord" or "God");

- If an appeal is made to the projection and elements of superstition prevalent in other religions then the same can be said concerning Old Testament Yahwism;

- If an appeal is made to unacceptable moral beliefs and practices of other religions then the same can be said concerning the morality of the Old Testament.

As noted above, the assumption concerning the impossibility of proving a universal negative combined with an acceptance of critical theology thus lead to the absurd scenario where it is illegitimate to think of anything whatsoever as being fictitious. Of course, some sophisticated philosophers would want to say that it all depends on what one means by concepts such as "proof", "Yahweh", "fiction", "exist", etc. Once such a discussion ensues and concepts become redefined (and ad hoc clauses and qualifications added) it becomes virtually impossible to say anything sensible on the topic at all.

In a certain sense Yahweh obviously does "exist" (as a character in a text, as a word in rhetoric or as an entity in the imagination). In a certain sense it is impossible to disprove anything regarding the ontological status of this deity if language becomes imprecise and open to a plethora of different possible interpretations. In a sense, even speaking of "Yahweh" can be a problematic issue since it depends on what one assumes the nature and ontological status of the entity to whom the name refers are supposed to be.

However, all such attempts at destabilising meaning also refute the argument of those engaged in it. Though it makes the justification of anti-realism impossible, it also deconstructs realism to the core as there remains no essence in which to put one's faith in. On these terms, not only would the denial of the existence of Yahweh be

meaningless but also the affirmation of the deity's supposed reality. In the end, those endorsing such a view are not only engaged in self-refuting nonsense (they expect own arguments to have stable meaning, don't they?) but are themselves doomed to a Wittgensteinian silence about things which language has nothing to say about.

9.3.8   Therefore, "God" does not exist

Western culture as such, having derived from European culture, which itself evolved with the Judaeo-Christian religious traditions as part of its cultural baggage, still speak of "God" despite the proliferation of atheism and agnosticism. In our time, though many Western people no longer believe in Yahweh or the God of Christian theology, many believe that it is still possible that there might actually be a "God".

Such people for whom realism with regard to biblical and Christian philosophical theism has collapsed may therefore still be found as endorsing some or other form of theism, pantheism or panentheism with a minimalist body of dogma attached to it. The more sophisticated academics might endorse a form of scientific theism while the "laity" might seem to prefer one of the many fads of New Age religion. In the more compromising and accommodating varieties, these types of theologies would not write off all religion as merely false *en bloc*. Instead, they consider all forms of religious life as sincere albeit misguided and partial attempts to understand and relate to ultimate reality which, it is believed, we are only now beginning to discovering via science (astronomy, physics, biology, psychology and anthropology).

Thus, one finds many people still use the exclamation, "O my God!" in all seriousness. Many people still feel the need to try and find a concept of God that works for them and that gives meaning and purpose to their lives. Though prayer and Bible study have all but disappeared from the list of spiritual disciplines, meditation, music and communing with nature are still in vogue.

Even so, as was the case elsewhere, there is good reason for viewing the "deity" of scientific or popular post-modern varieties of pseudo-theism as an unwanted offspring of discredited biblical theism. This despite the fact that the original link has now become severely distorted, severed and repressed.

Whatever god this is that people who are otherwise atheist and anti-realist still find plausible in constructing their metaphysical and existential beliefs, the fact is that, without realism in biblical theology, all grounds for the veracity of even this minimalist form of popular theology remain unfounded. It is still no more than anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection, albeit a subtler and more updated version. It is still guilty of holding on to the groundless and tempting assumption that the human mind is supposedly a good analogy for thinking about the way the universe operates (cf. Hume 1957:31).

Whether it concerns the attempts of so-called "critical-realists" desperately trying to remake theism after its collapse by creatively endeavouring to reconcile sciences like physics and biology with Christian theology matters little. Scientific theism and its contemporary derivatives are all a fad and constitute, in a very real sense, a modern or post-modern form of mythology. The meta-narratives derived from cosmology (as popularised by people like Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking) and biology (popularised by, amongst others, Richard Dawkins) are no more than an attempt to create an atheist mythology to fill the gap left by the collapse of realism in biblical theism.

Apart from dabbling with natural science, numerous other attempts have been forthcoming to neutralise theological dilemmas on a higher level of synthesis. One will find many examples of repressing anti-realism via recourse to psychology (often Jungian), philosophy (neo-romanticism, existentialism, hermeneutics, postmodernism, etc.), sociology (e.g., inspired by ideas from Weber, Berger, etc.) or anthropology (e.g. cultural anthropology and harping on about the profound truth to be found in myth).

In many instances, some have even tried to evade the ontological crisis resulting from the collapse of realism in biblical theism by redefining the concept of "God". Thus, one may encounter references to the divine by theologians and philosophers who would like to think of it as "Being" itself (as in Heidegger, Tillich and others), the "Source", the "One" (in the neo-Platonic sense), the "Force" (e.g. the Star Wars cult), "Mother Nature" (the Gaia hypothesis), "The Absolute" (as in Hegel, James, and others), "The Self" (Jungian), "Somebody up there", the "Spirit" (Hegelian) or the

"Sublime" (Kantian).

All these attempts at salvaging realism in some form of theism are, according to the devil's advocate, nothing but self-deception. As was suggested in the previous chapter, contemporary Christian and post-Christian Western culture remains anti-realist and atheist in the mundane practice of everyday existence with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the text. However, this fact needs to be repressed to avoid the nihilism that inevitably ensures when denial makes way for acceptance of the death of God and collapse of the meta-narratives built up over the last couple of millennia (cf. Lyotard 1984:117).

Of course, some might think that the devil's advocate is being provincial and narrow-minded since there is still "God" as Allah in Islam or the gods of the East. However, on the one hand, those appealing to this fact should remember the Koran's own view of the relation between Allah and the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. According to the sacred scriptures of Islam, the Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God, although the fullest revelation of him is supposed to be found in the prophet's writings. Though differing in many details, the writings of the descendants of Abraham (via Isaac and Ishmael) are alleged to witness to one and the same deity. Ergo, if Yahweh does not exist, Allah's ontological status can hardly be considered as being any different.

On the other hand, most of the concepts of the divine in Eastern philosophies and religion have very little in common with theism as the West thinks of deities and reality. Whether one thinks of all the varieties of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or most of the other Eastern religious traditions, not only are most of these often pantheistic or, in a sense, atheistic. In addition, those Oriental religions that do believe in deities are all prone to the sort of refutation of realism that the devil's advocate has presented in this thesis. When the discourse of these religious traditions is not bracketed by the history and philosophy of religion, they all share the same fate as the religions of the Book in the West.

In other words, full-blown atheism seems to constitute the inevitable option following the death of Yahweh. Much of contemporary culture still lives in denial of that loss

and the need for repression to facilitate psychological survival (as psychologists like Freud and Jung discovered) is great. Temporarily throwing oneself into one's work or choosing to postpone dealing with the loss by constant social interaction may suppress existential *angst* initially. However, eventually the question of the meaning of life returns to all of us as one begins to wonder if *this* is all there is to it.

True, there are certain parts of secular culture that have progressed to and through the phases of loss – including those of grief, anger, depression and acceptance – following the death of God. Yet those who remain unaffected are few. Regression (together with relapses to earlier phases) continually reoccurs as the disorientation, nihilism and numbing relativism of the post-modern mindset become a stark reality. The whole world seems to have lost its enchantment and to have become a much more boring place now that we know Yahweh is no more around for bed time stories. It is not easy to remain satisfied with agnosticism. People need gods and *ersatz* substitutes will not do their job indefinitely.

There can be little doubt that the collapse of realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament lies at the heart of and may be seen as the ultimate source and repressed origin of the death of "God" as such. Consistency and thoroughness in the deconstruction of realism in Old Testament theology demand that biblically based theology can no longer be bracketed by the history and philosophy of religion. If Yahweh does not exist then neither does any other "God" thus far dreamt up by the West to avoid dealing with the collapse of realism in biblical theism and the death of The-One-Who-Is.

Thus says the devil's advocate.

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And furthermore, my son, beware!
Of the making of many books,
there is no end
and much reading
wearies the body.
(Eccl 12:12)

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For the wise man as of the fool
there is no enduring remembrance,
seeing that, in the days to come
all will have been long forgotten,
How the wise man dies just like the fool…
For all is vanity and a striving after wind.

(Eccl 1:16-17)

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APPENDIX A

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A "DIED-AGAIN" CHRISTIAN

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"Jesus said, 'The kingdom of the Father is like a certain woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking on a road, still some distance from home, the handle of the jar broke and the meal emptied out behind her on the road. She did not realise it; she noticed no accident. When she reached her house, she set the jar down and found it empty."

The Gospel of Thomas
Logia 97

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Are you a Christian? Do you consider yourself to be a *true* Christian who sincerely believes in God in such a way that He is what matters most to you in this life? Do you truly believe that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God? Are you completely convinced that the credibility of Christian faith depends on its veracity in all matters?

If so, what would you consider as the pinnacle of disillusionment? Something that could not possibly happen but, if it did, it would shatter your reality completely. How would you feel if everything that ever mattered to you; everything that gave happiness, meaning and purpose to your existence should somehow prove to be an illusion? How would you feel if you discovered that you were nowhere closer to understanding and relating to ultimate reality that some savage who lived and died with a mind saturated by myth and superstition? How would you feel if you were a happy born-again Christian who, by some sick twist of fate, happen to discover that the God you believed in does not really exist? Do you have any idea what it feels like to be a "died-again" Christian?

Once, I did not. I was born into a Christian family. From the beginning, I participated in organised Church religion. Like many others, I went to Sunday school and, at home, I listened to stories from the Bible. For the first twelve years of my life, I practised my faith without any real problems. Yet there was not anything magical about it; it was cultural baggage and simply one more compartment of my life. Like most children, I was often more interested in playing and talking with my friends than listening to the minister or to the Sunday school teacher. To be honest, some sermons and prayers seemed real boring and many of the hymns too sentimental and dreary.

However, all this changed when I was about twelve-and-a-half years old. One day I was reading my Bible when I came across the Book of Revelation. For some hitherto inexplicable reason, I was totally gripped and enthralled with the vivid imagery and story line of the book. I did not understand much of the alien symbolism but somehow reading that book triggered something deep inside of me. I was so moved by the text that I experienced something I can only describe as a spiritual rebirth.

For the first time in my life, I felt an utter willingness and obsession to believe in God

and to love Him with every fibre of my being. He became an undeniable and totally overwhelming presence in my life and I was flooded with a perpetual euphoria and a deep sense of inner peace and purpose. I had an unquenchable desire to devote my entire existence to the service of Christ.

Everything was different. The Bible became something that I could not get enough of and nothing about it seemed boring anymore. The highlight of my weeks was no longer playing with friends but going to Church, listening to long sermons, singing sentimental old fashioned hymns, going to Sunday school and cultivating my spirituality.

Everybody who knew me could testify that I literally had a personality transformation. Almost everything about me changed. I no longer delighted in my old ways of living. All I wanted to do was to live my life to the glory of God and commit myself to following Christ wherever he might lead me. I could literally feel the Holy Spirit working in me, making me sensitive to sin and giving me a holy aversion to all things that were not honouring to God. I could see the fruit of the Spirit in my daily life and each day I seemed like today might be the day that Christ would return on the clouds and we would live happily ever after. I longed for that return and had no fear of judgement or death as I felt completely at ease in my relationship with God. Never before was my life so meaningful and so filled with joy and purpose.

I soon decided that I would like everyone to experience what God has graciously given me. I wanted to become a missionary.

As the years went on and I passed through high school I was spared things like peer pressure and the typical teenage identity crisis. I knew exactly who I was and where I was going and what I wanted to do with my life. I had no desire whatsoever to indulge in anything that might damage my relation with God. I loved Him so much that the lack of friends and unpopularity resulting from a godly lifestyle was hardly even noticed by me. I was completely enraptured by God's guiding and loving presence and I wanted to share it with everyone.

One day, when I was seventeen, a missionary came to visit our school during a prayer

meeting. After the meeting I talked with him and asked him regarding the options open to someone like myself who was about to finish school and wanted to become a fulltime missionary. He listened to everything I said and told me that the best thing for me might be to study theology. I could specialise in missiology and become a minister sent to the mission field by a local Church or an international missionary agency.

After that encounter, I decided that following matric I *would* like to study theology. After all, what could be more pleasant than having to study the Bible and learning more about the things of God and his Church? I really looked forward to my studies as even back then I had an insatiable and unquenchable desire to spend ever more time with the Word of God and share my experiences and thoughts with fellow believers. Everything was going to be perfect and my whole meaningful life ahead of me flashed constantly before my eyes. What a way to go!

After school I enrolled at the local university to study theology. During the first few years I came to discover that the Bible was a much more complex book than I could ever imagine despite all the times I had previously spent reading through it. Of course, I was not a little upset when some of the professors seemed to say things that were at odds with what I had learned at Sunday school and from all the devotional books I had collected over the years.

All the talk about historical critical issues, hermeneutical problems and the beliefs of other ancient Near Eastern religions were somewhat offensive to my naïve conservative evangelical sensibilities. Maybe that is why, in those days, my favourite subject was dogmatic theology. This subject, taught as it was by conservative yet respectable and intellectually gifted scholars, provided me with the kind of interesting and relevant knowledge that I liked and which confirmed and supplemented what I had learned in Sunday school.

During the first three years at varsity, my studies in dogmatics and philosophy led me to decide that, if I could not get a job as a missionary, I would certainly not mind becoming a professional systematic theologian. As I strove to discern my exact theological identity I became certain that, whatever the stigmas pertaining to the label, I want to be known as a conservative evangelical theologian. Being a fundamentalist

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was what I wanted to be and I clung to that identity with pride as it seemed to be the option most loyal to God and the one that seemed to enrich my spirituality the most.

I started to read and internalise many books written by conservative evangelical scholars. Back then I became very distraught and saddened by liberal theology which I believed to be a satanic delusion. I decided to do something about the matter as I had also developed an interest in apologetics.

I was always the first one to enter into heated debate with any professor or student whose views of God or the Bible did not live up to what I considered to be orthodox. Especially Old Testament studies were somewhat offensive to me since so much of the prescribed material was of the historical-critical variety and that was utterly incompatible with my belief in the verbal inerrancy of scripture. It irritated me no end that so much of critical scholarship talked about Yahweh and Yahwism as if God and the Bible were merely part of just another outdated mythology.

At that point in time, I used to think that anyone who did not believe that the Bible is the complete and inerrant work of God could not possibly be a *true* Christian. I became depressed by the liberal tendencies of people at the university and in the Church. I often considered the prospect of quitting my studies and going overseas to study at a conservative evangelical seminary. I've had it with inquiries that seemed to be detrimental to my fundamentalist faith.

For many years my favourite theologian was a fundamentalist New Testament scholar from the United States called John Macarthur. I read all his works and identified myself completely with his theology and spirituality. Moreover, I was happy with such a theology and the related evangelical spirituality. It seemed to me the only authentic kind of Christianity there could be.

Meanwhile my interest in apologetics led me to read further in philosophy and theology and, unlike many of my fellow students, my reading was not limited to what was prescribed by the course. Even during holidays, I spent my time in the library reading everything that seemed interesting. I read all the popular conservative apologists who defended the belief that the Bible was inerrant in matters of theology,

history and science.

At the time, I was also pursuing post-graduate studies in Semitic languages and developed an absolute passion for biblical studies – albeit only via conservative evangelical hermeneutical approaches to the text. It would become my mission in life to expose critical scholarship for being the fraudulent instrument of Satan that I truly believed it to be. I soon thought that I had explanations for all the pseudo-problems generated by critical theology about God and the Bible. There was only one truth and I had it.

During my fifth year, while I was looking for more conservative apologetic literature in the university library, I came upon two books with the word "fundamentalism" in the title. However, little did I know when I checked out these books that their contents were anything but fundamentalist. Both books were actually written by a well-known Old Testament theologian who actually intended to criticise the fundamentalist ideology. However, since I felt so sure about the veracity of my own convictions on the matter, I decided to read the books anyway to see what someone could possibly argue against my own unshakeable viewpoint.

Looking back today, I can point to many shortcomings in those books. Yet at that time, though they did not provide me with satisfactory answers to my subsequent theological questions, these writings of James Barr initiated within me a process that eventually led me to recognise what was wrong with conservative theology. Completely against my own desire I had to admit that, on some points, the anti-fundamentalist critiques were valid. What shook me up the most was the dreadful realisation that the Bible that I thought I new may not be the perfect Word of God that my fundamentalist ideology made it out to be. Moreover, as every fundamentalist knows, if the Bible becomes suspect, *everything* becomes in doubt...

Frantically I became obsessed with reading all I could about critical books on the Bible. I also started reading critical philosophy of religion as well as critical works on the history of religion and comparative religion. Even psychology of religion eventually also became a subject of interest.

This spree with critical theology and philosophy was not because I could yet identify myself with anything other than the conservative evangelical theology I was accustomed to. Rather, I was searching to see for myself from first hand accounts whether the conservative criticisms of critical theology were correct or not and vice-versa. I desperately wanted to remain conservative but was willing to reluctantly follow the truth wherever it might lead me. Surely, since God is truth, the quest for it could never lead me away from God, could it? I dared not think about the prospect; *nothing* would make me lose faith completely.
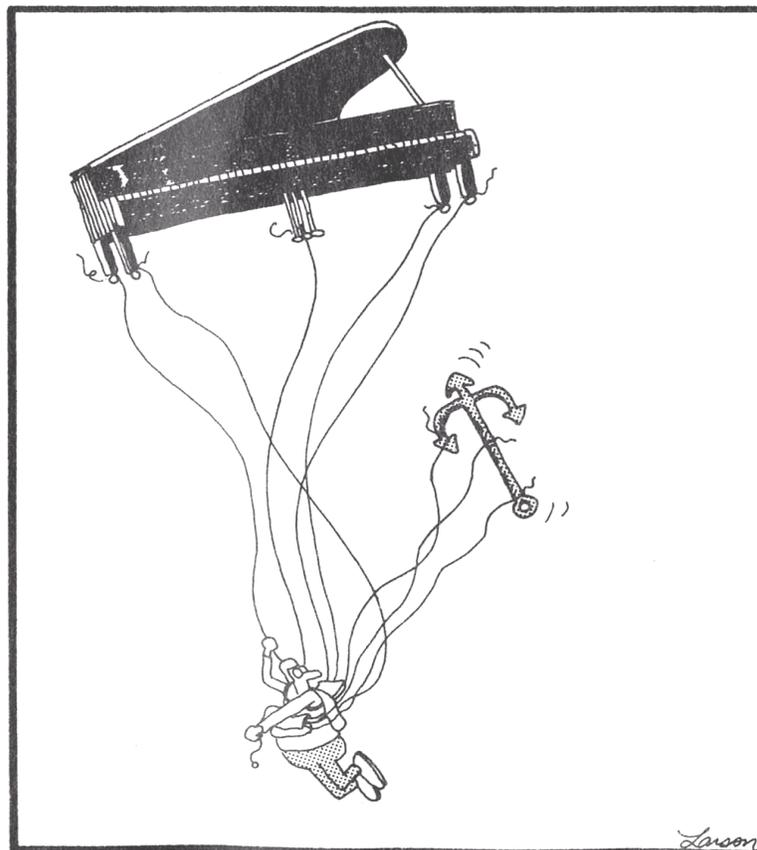
Murray didn't feel the first pangs of real panic until he pulled the emergency cord.

I read everything that dealt with the problems of theology and philosophy. Whether it pertained to the synoptic problem, the historical Jesus, the nature, origins and diversity of earliest Christianity, the history of Israelite religion, pentateuchal criticism, contradictions in the Bible concerning history / theology / eschatology / thanatology / ethics, unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament, the use of the Old

testament in the New, the history and development of biblical interpretation and Christian dogma, myth in the Bible, biblical archaeology, parallels with other religions, the relation between religion and science, arguments for and against the existence of God, stories of people having lost their faith and people who claimed that scholarship does not destroy faith, theories about the origin of religion, the history of philosophy (especially modern European philosophy and post-modernism), psychology of religion, sociology of religion, Old Testament theology, New Testament theology, etc. etc. – been there, read that.

Of course, as Robert Carroll (1991:124) noted:

> Reading is a dangerous thing. It can harm your psychic life. It can certainly change your life. Of course, whether it does or not depends on your situation and how you read…A chance remark, a glimpsed graffito on a wall, a sentence on a page or in a book, a half-remembered line from an old song, or something much more substantial such as an argument in a book understood for the first time, a story, a novel, a biography, even a critical study of something (dare I say, a commentary on a classic text?) – any such encounter could be the means of changing one's life in ways impossible to predict before the experience.

No kidding!

I really tried to get to the truth of the matter and kept on reading everything from the most fideistic and conservative apologetics to the most critical and heretical radical theology, including the liberal and moderate varieties in between these extremes. Deep down I kept hoping to find solutions to my problems and a way back to where and what I used to be – the more conservative the better.

I never did find the truth in any school or theory in theology or philosophy. What I did find there, however, was legitimate criticism and good reasons why my own stereotypical conservative evangelical theology was demonstrably not as perfect and biblical as it pretended to be. I also found that, while so much of critical theology is more like fashion than science and could not give me certainty regarding what was really what, at least it showed me what could not possibly be the case. It also made me aware of some problems that no one is likely to solve until the oceans froze over.

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To many lay people looking in from the outside, it may look as though theologians know what they are talking about; that the subject of theology is a body of objective knowledge. To eager and naïve undergraduate students like I myself use to be, books, dictionaries, articles and encyclopaedias all appear to convey nothing but the facts. Sooner or later, however, most interested people will come to realise that, at the forefront of scholarship and in the fray of cutting edge research, there are no certain truths. Everything is a game; a running debate where ultimate truth is beyond retrieval. There is nothing else to do but to stumble forward regardless and blunder on relentlessly.

In the academic world, what is held to be true is merely the theory on top. What is thought of as being correct is merely the story on top. The truth about any issue under the sun comes and goes like shares on the stock market. Everything should be taken with a pinch of salt. Yet the uninitiated may well be deluded by the apparent objectivity and factuality of it all. Serious scholarship demands that the spelling out of personal assumptions, agendas and beliefs is a no-no for the sake of conveying the sense of an objective and scientific rhetoric of cold, hard facts. As time passes and one learns more about the nature of the enterprise, it becomes clear that at a certain level and in a certain sense, theology (like all other sciences) is indeed no more than a game. There is no perfect method or ideology in scholarship and nothing has escaped some or other legitimate criticism.

Though I have dabbled in conservative, liberal and radical theologies, none completely satisfied me and, the more I read, the more questions came home to roost. I found out that, in general, Old Testament scholars seemed to be more aware of the theological problems related to the Bible than their colleges in other theological disciplines. The systematic theologians seemed unaware of the nature and scope of the problems in biblical theology and the history of religion yet they were the ones responsible for arguing the issues in the philosophy of religion. However, the Old Testament scholars who were in the perfect position to deal with the philosophical problems generated by biblical criticism often seemed to be philosophically inept. Many appeared reluctant to address the philosophical, and particularly the ontological, implications of their research.

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Having a background where my faith was linked to the Bible (or so I thought), I yearned for a domain of research *within* biblical scholarship where one could ask the questions philosophers of religion asked. These inquiries should pertain to biblical and not dogmatic theology. Only if this happened could I somehow gain perspective on my dilemma.

It was a little late in the day, however, when I realised that studying theology can be a downright dangerous business for any believer. You go into it full of romanticised and naïve ideas of what it is all about. You enter thinking you know quite a bit about the Bible, only to discover that you were grossly overestimating yourself on this matter. You expect to be spiritually fed, only to discover that all is not as it seems.

The problem with studying theology, as I suppose it is with most occupations, is the reality shock that follows as the magic of the initial encounter begins to fade. You arrive having a magical view of God, the Bible and religion but, as you begin to study the history of ideas, traditions, institutions, texts and practices, you sooner or later begin to feel like someone has robbed you. It's all a bit like finding out for the first time where food comes from; all the magic is gone. One goes on eating – one has to – yet things will probably never be the same again.

Curiosity and research pertaining to the origins and nature of the Bible, one's religion, one's tradition, one's own beliefs and one's personal view of reality can be a sobering if not devastating experience. It is a reality shock of the worst sort. There are times when I wished I had never been born. How would life have turned out had one not decided to study theology? Would I not have been happy in my ignorance? One keeps on wishing that it is all merely a bad dream and that, in no time, mom or dad will come to wake you up so that you will not be late for Sunday school. Where did it all go wrong? Why, oh why, this cruel fate? Surely, this cannot be…

Maybe I should have expected all of this. After all, the religio-cultural context certainly stacked the odds against a peaceful transition from Sunday school layperson to scientific biblical theologian to minister of a congregation.

During the eleven years of Sunday school in the Dutch Reformed Church, one is

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largely exposed to the Bible in the form of paraphrased Bible stories, censored and reinterpreted to be amenable to conservative reformed sensibilities. In the sermons, the underlying message about the nature and contents of the biblical text is wholly fundamentalist. As children, no one ever taught us about the findings and contents of critical scholarship.

This negligence may, however, be understandable. Communicating the latest results of biblical critical research would surely upset many people who could make life very difficult for anyone not living as thought this were seventeenth century Europe. It may be downright dangerous for those who know more than they should to rock the boat and come out as ex-fundamentalists.

As noted above, the view of the Bible with which one is indoctrinated in Sunday school materials can only be classified as "fundamentalist". In addition, if like me, one also reads a lot of the spiritual literature found in public bookshops, one also gets a generous dose of conservative evangelical theology from America and Britain. In short, along this route and by the time you enter the faculty of theology at the university, your beliefs about God, the Bible and reality is totally fundamentalist.

Then, at varsity, the student eager to learn more about the Bible is exposed to biblical criticism. He learns about the discoveries of the historical-critical approach and that of comparative religion. For the average student of theology, being exposed to these perspectives after a lifetime of fundamentalism can be very disorientating.

Most students, of course, prefer to either ignore the critical approach, as it appears to be detrimental to their spirituality. Those who do try to make sense of it and internalise what they read – as opposed to merely memorising it for short-term memory to pass the test the next day – may be in for a hard time. Of course, if all one reads is conservative evangelical apologetics against higher criticism, one will come to believe that there are no serious problems about the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. However, neither will one really understand what is actually involved. If, however, one does delve into the details of the critical research itself rather than merely noting its findings, one soon discovers that the Bible is not exactly the inerrant, infallible and dogma supporting book the Church proclaims it to be.

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Now what is one to do? You want to keep the faith but you also want to accept the Bible on its own terms. After all, is not this exactly what the tradition always suggested should be done – *sola scriptura*? Yet now the problem is that reading the Bible on its own terms seems to lead *away* from the dogmas of tradition about the Bible!

Consider the following scenario: One's life begins with eighteen years of being indoctrinated with fundamentalist theological dogma. This is followed by six years of exposure to the critical approach to the text. After having to deal with the kind of intense personal anguish resulting from changing from a pre-critical layperson to a critical theologian, the student expecting to become a minister in the Church has to be prepared to become a hypocrite. He must sign in acceptance of the claims made by seventeenth century Reformed confessions thus implying that those texts have correctly interpreted the Bible. This after six years of being told that the ways in which texts like the confessions have read the Bible are no longer acceptable. One cannot be blamed for feeling that those responsible for the present structuring of theological education goofed big time.

Of course, many soothe their consciences by deliberately reinterpreting and relativising the contents of the confessions with its outrageous application of proof texts to support its ideology. Yet the fact remains that no one who has a sense of integrity and has read both the confessions and biblical criticism will have total peace of mind on the matter. In any case, all this is a sure recipe for theological "schizophrenia". If one does not decide to abandon the idea of ministering to a congregation then the only option is a life of repression. That is, repression until the demands of ministry and the company of fundamentalists allows one to think that the critical approach to the text is of no value at all and might just as well be forgotten. In many cases, time heals all wounds.

But let's get back to the story of my untimely demise. In the end, I do not know if I will find out what the truth is; and I may be sorry if I ever do. Truth has become a 5-letter word, full of fury and signifying nothing. It hurts and I can't handle it. It feels as if the whole history since the reformation has a micro-counterpart in my own spiritual psychological experience.

I started out as a reformer, without too much dogma and overwhelmed by my experience of grace. Soon it all crystallised into orthodoxy but at least I knew the divine truth and had an identity. Then came the critical phase characterised by a modernist mindset starting with deism and, after developing through nineteenth century historicism and positivism, culminates in the twentieth century post-theistic and post-modern form of anti-realist Christian theology. The mutation from pre-modern through modern to post-modern in a matter of years may be too much for any normal psyche to bear unscathed.

A once unshakeable perception that GOD IS NOW HERE blurred into an ambiguous and confusing understanding that GODISNOWHERE only to result in a horrible suspicion that GOD IS NOWHERE. My situation was no longer one of "faith seeking understanding" but rather "understanding seeking faith". How disconcerting it was to discover that many cherished readings of biblical texts and subsequent periods of spiritual highs were based on gross misinterpretations and illusion. It is not easy coming to terms with the fact that the discourse of favourite biblical passages actually meant something quite different than what I thought the "Holy Spirit" revealed to me.

How soul wrenching it is to hear others speak of how the text totally changed their lives when it was obvious that they too had completely misunderstood the actual meaning the author intended to convey. Alas, I did not have the cheek to point out that the emperor had no clothes and that it was all a farce kept in tact by a socially constructed illusion based on years of systematic and unwitting socialisation, indoctrination and well meant brainwashing.

At times, one is gripped by an extreme and fearful sense of nihilism, historical change and epistemological relativism. Carried on the wings of time and change, against your own choice, one feels powerless to do anything about it.

I used to hear stories of people who started their studies as Christians and left it as atheists. I used to laugh at those impossible fictions. After all, as a sound and orthodox reformed theologian, I genuinely believed in the endurance of the saints and the impossibility of a true Christian losing faith. Becoming an atheist was the last thing that could happen to me, a true Christian, especially from studying the Bible. It

was simply a preposterous and inconceivable notion.

But somewhere along the way something happened. Something went horribly and frighteningly wrong. Today I no longer laugh at those stories. To be sure, I have become a character in my own impossible horror story. I would like to cry but there is no more tears left to do so. Now I am not even post-modern. I am nothing. I cannot be labelled. I have no mentors. I have no heroes. All scholarship seems like a game without any capital T Truths, any real progress or *telos*.

Even God seemed to have become a three-letter word. Reality has become a white empty canvas messed up by running watercolours. My world has melted. I have graduated from the faculty of mythology.

What is truth? I thought that the truth would make me free but not *that* free. Coming from a background where I was completely happy with conservative evangelical theology and spirituality, the discovery of the problems generated by biblical criticism and the philosophy of religion was like dying all over again. I sure wish there was a local chapter of *Fundamentalists Anonymous* or something like "The Fellowship of Died-Again Christians". Trying to find one's way through the half-life that was now my fate can be terrifying…absolutely, bloody terrifying. I am confused and do not know what to believe about anything anymore.

I had lost reality. It was not merely the death of someone or something within the greater scheme of things. The entire scheme of things of things itself seemed awry and was slipping away like water through my clutching fingers. The experience of being a born again conservative evangelical biblical Christian who can no longer believe in an inerrant Bible or in any of those cherished theological dogmas he once held dear can only be described as a daymare. You do not know if you are dreaming or not and keep hoping that it might all just be a nightmare and that you might wake up – late for class but with faith in tact.

Alas, you do not wake up. As expressed in the vulgar lyrics of a song I once heard, reality seemed to have mutated into a "fu****d-up dream". It is a reality that has become frighteningly *strange*. The sky shines with a different kind of blue. The

neighbour's dog doesn't bark like he used to. The world suddenly seems a very lonely and very scary place to be in. It can be extremely anxiety provoking to contemplate the idea that your life does not have the kind of cosmic back-up from a personal and favourable Source that you once thought it did. In the absence of this comforting belief you must now live with the knowledge that you must fend for yourself in a wholly indifferent universe where, in nature, there is no place for sentiment.

"Go back to sleep, Chuck. You're just havin'
a nightmare — of course, we are still in hell."

The thought that the world at large is a vast impersonal, unanimated environment with no concern for one's hopes, fears, dreams, expectation, needs, desires, ambition and expectations can be immensely disconcerting. The realisation that one is a wholly contingent microbe fighting for survival in a hostile world where no built in meta-narrative exists is frightening. Coming to terms with a reality where there is no God and where, if other *people* do not give a damn, nothing and nobody will – now that is scary! With a realisation of the death of God, an existential crisis of the worst sort of angst mixed with generous doses of ennui, ahedonia, depression and multiple phobias

ensue with a vengeance.

The "world" out there seemed to be constituted by nothing more than the essential elements. It appears as a mundane world, now bereft of its former enchantment and consisting of nothing more than earth, water, fire and air (and bullsh***?). There was nothing to be happy or excited about; everyday became just "one damn thing after another". In the words of every song about lost hopes, nostalgia, missing a loved one, broken relationships or faded dreams, I could find an allegory of my own tragic experience with a God no longer there. On many occasions, I wondered whether I could survive psychologically or whether something would snap and that I would go completely insane.

In fact, there were times when I wished I *would* lose it so I would no longer be so obsessively aware of the sheer horror I experienced at having my consciousness transformed. What has happened is a most inexpressible calamity. It is a brutal form of tragic irony when studying theology does not help you to grow spiritually but leads to spiritual suicide. But, alas, you are not so fortunate as to die and finish the farce.

You know something is wrong when your life begins to resemble scenes from movies like "The Matrix (Part I)", "Groundhog Day", "The Truman Show", or even some episodes of television stories like "The Twilight Zone", "The X-files" or "Ripley's Believe it or Not". The truth hurts and you can't handle it. Reality bites and the poison of its venom is slowly but surely divesting you of everything that once gave meaning and purpose to your existence. Who would have thought it? If only I was never born. If only I never studied theology. Who would have thought that one so certain – a born again Christian – could discover the impossible – that, despite whatever divine reality there may be, the God he always believed in does not exist?

From this perspective, the myth of Eden gains new meaning. You have eaten from the tree of knowledge. Your eyes were opened. You saw that…that you were *naked*. Something has died inside of you. You are banished from Eden. You no longer have any access to the tree of life. Life east of Eden is thoroughly miserable. You feel as though the rest of your days will be spent as an outcast wandering aimlessly, like Cain.

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If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? Vanity of vanities, it is all vanity. You are hanging on a cross of the mind, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" No one can see God and live…

You feel as confused as a chameleon on a box of "Smarties". I used to worry about my looks but now I am complaining about my intellectual ability, i.e. the lack thereof. Damn my feeble brain! Why can I not finally be absolutely sure about what is what in the world I have constructed in my mind and in which I am now an exile in what was once my God's kingdom?

There are so many mysteries, so many unanswerable questions; yet we all keep trying like fools. We try to capture the truth but, in doing so, we are, on the one hand, like a man trying to reach the horizon only to find it forever receding beyond our grasp. On the other hand, we are like dogs who chase after cars trying to bite their tires without thinking what we would do should we ever succeed in catching the vehicles.

Everyday now, when I look in the mirror I ask myself, " Am I… a *fool*?" Whatever possessed me to make my life come to this? Was it all just a mistake? Surely, for a mistake, this is too big. What would I say to myself if I could speak to my younger self from ten years ago? Surely, he would not possibly recognise or understand what I have devolved and mutated into. Of all the outcomes I envisaged for my theological education, atheism was not on the list of possible destinies.

To be sure, few in this world could appreciate my predicament. Those who still have the faith cannot understand the problem and trying to explain everything in detail only lead to judgements and sermons of repentance. And who could blame them. Surely only a year or so ago I myself would have had little sympathy with the sort of apostasy that I have blundered into.

Neither can all critical scholars understand the predicament. At least one can talk to them – but they fail to grasp the nature of the catastrophe. All they can do is to talk about reaching a second naiveté and about how liberating it was for them to leave their conservative background behind and become more critical. Liberating? That is the last concept that I would use to describe my experience. I was *happy* in my

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conservative fundamentalism. The only liberation I feel is from reality and it is anything but pleasant. To be sure, if hell is separation from the presence of God…well this is it. I really *am* in hell!

Sometimes, as is human inclination, l feel the need to blame someone for what has happened. But *who* can I blame? My parents? Surely not, they did nothing wrong. My Church? No, she witnessed to what she believed. My Sunday school teachers or the local minister? No, they were all sincere and just doing their job. My professors? No, what else could they do but teach me what they know? Myself? No, how could I have known what was what and how things would turn out? God? No, for it is meaningless, irrational and unsatisfying to blame something that one no longer believes actually exists. So whom shall I blame? How shall I vent my pent up frustration? I do not know, I am not that kind of person. Suppression is the only option left.

Of course, the fact that what I believed in was wrong, that what I felt to be the most real was not – this definitely *needs* to be repressed for the sake of sanity. It is almost as if my eyes have opened to a lifetime of brainwashing by an eccentric religious cult. After all, there is little difference between churches and cults. Christianity started as a cult and only social statistics turned it into an acceptable and respectable institute. The brainwashing and pressure to conform in the church may be less cohersive and more subtle, but it's all nonetheless still very real.

In the same way I was both oddly amused and horrified at beholding the mechanics of other cults from the outside, so too, I have now come to see the Church in the same light. The leaders in the church may be sincere and believe they are communicating God's will but it is very difficult from a outsider's point of view not to perceive everything as brainwashing and indoctrination based on superstitious and discriminating ideologies.

Focussing on, or seriously contemplating just what exactly happened to me, what the implications are and how I now relate to the world out there drives me crazy. Repression is definitely compulsory if I am to survive. Maybe I should taper off. Going cold turkey after years of being a god-addict is unthinkable. I will never make it. I still have trouble admitting my problem. I still have trouble talking about the

experience. After all this time I cannot bring myself to say it out loud, to admit that I am an athei…

Could my religious beliefs really all have been built on an illusion? Am I really chaff in the wind and no more closer to the truth about ultimate reality than the myth saturated pagans of far away and long ago? Could so many millions of people, so many sincere individuals, all be hopelessly deceived? Are Yahweh and Jesus really mythology's last gods? Am I an anonymous character in a Hegelian history of religion that will become a cipher and an object of pity and ridicule for future generations?

When Job, Qohelet and Psalm 88 become your canon in the canon, you know you are in trouble. Where am I? Who am I? Why am I here? Why are things the way they are and why are they at all? Once I had the answers. Now all I know is that I don't know. I cannot be certain about anything anymore. I can never commit to a point of view for fear of being disillusioned once again. Not even about my own unbelief. That is why I cannot commit even to atheism.

If life can spring upon me the most nasty of all surprises – that of finding out that what you believed to be the truth about everything was just another all-too-human story with no relation to reality (whatever that is) – who knows what else may happen?

Maybe being an atheist would not be as unbearable as I fear it might be. After all, as a new born baby I used to be an atheist. If nobody told me about God, would I even have known or cared whether He existed or not? And was I not always an atheist in the relative sense of not believing in the deities of other religions or the versions of God as constructed by other denominations of my own religion? Would it really be impossible to go on with life if I were to add only one more God to what was already a long list of unbelievable deities?

These days, all I own are questions. Where others see answers, I see problems. All advice given to me leaves me with more questions than the answers it purports to supply. Though I now know more than ever about all the answers to the perennial

questions that people have in all sincerity preached throughout history, I am sadly none the wiser. Sure, I can tell you what this or that person thought, but with regard to what is really what – I haven't the foggiest. That unacceptable reply – I don't know – now constitutes the sum total of my sagely vocabulary.

When you see how everyone seems to be hopelessly a product of their historical and cultural context and how they project their psycho-social imagination onto the whole cosmos you can no longer do it for yourself. Yet neither can you believe that whatever you *do* engage in will allow you any more privileged access to what is really going on. I do not know what is what. All I do seem to know are some of the things that are demonstrably *not* the case.

All I know is that I do not know and that is the highest flight of my reason. History has become "his-story" and that is how I feel: The world is not made up of facts but of stories. It is all a game without any purpose other than what people make of it. Any awareness of the history of ideas, morals and whatever else shows the need to repress the fact that it has always been we ourselves who made up the rules as we go along. And for me the game is over. I have run out of credits. I have run out of lives. I am in the middle of nowhere. Once adrift, I am now drowning in the grossly polluted ocean of truth. I feel as though I am running my heart out on a treadmill to oblivion. I am seriously contemplating the option of emigrating to never-never land.

God is dead and I am not feeling so good myself.

They say losing a spouse is the most stressful experience most people will have. They say its like living in a reality with a part of oneself gone, or with a hole in the fabric of one's existence. Well let me tell you, the death of one's God is no picnic either. In fact, what you lose is not simply a *part* of reality – it is nothing short of what used to be reality itself.

You will not be left with merely an absence of someone but rather with a collapse of the entire scheme of things. At least when you lose a spouse you can see things in perspective against the background of a larger reality and eventually the gap can be filled. But what do you do when you lose not merely a part of yourself but everything

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you once considered to constitute The Real and that which gave meaning and purpose, hope and inspiration to your existence?

According some psychologists, when informed that one is about to die the patient goes through five stages: shock, denial, anger, depression, and finally, acceptance. These phases are not to be seen as rigid and immutable nor does everyone experience every stage equally intensely. Some individuals may even skip some stages. Others may get stuck in one of them. Then there are the possibilities of regression and the re-experiencing of phases one already went through.

Now this scenario conveys something of experiencing the death of one's God, which by the way, also inevitably seems to lead to the death of the Self (in a psychological sense). I too went through stages of shock, denial, anger, depression and acceptance. I too do not experience all stages in equal proportions. I too go to bed one night filled with acceptance only to wake up the next morning in shock, denial or repression. The fact that this is not the death of one's physical self (although that part certainly does not remain unaffected) allows for an endless reliving of the entire cycle of coming to terms with the subjective reality of the death of God.

One may eventually think that the loss has been accepted but this is an illusion. Hearing a familiar melody, reading a text that alludes to biblical discourse, eating certain foods associated with religious occasions, smelling certain flowers, watching a sunset, having a dream, etc., -- all these can trigger a wave of nostalgia. Anything at any time has the potential to plunge one right back into the cycle of shock, denial, etc…all over again.

There is nothing more to say except to finally acknowledge that "sh** *happens*". My heart and my mind can find no rest. I cannot rest in peace. I rest in pieces. Reality has shattered.

_____The end???????_____
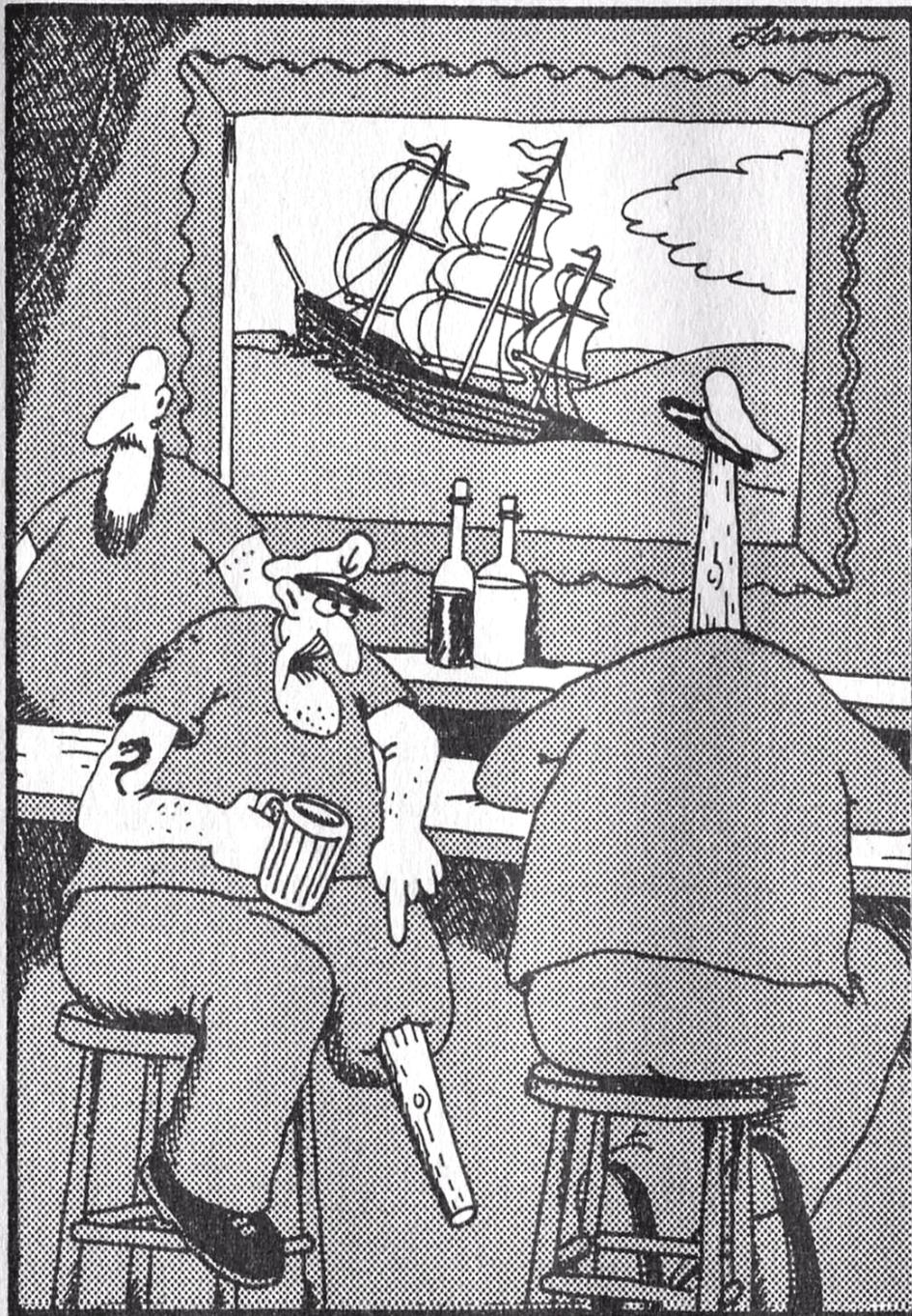
"Well, I guess that ain't a bad story—but let me tell you about the time I lost *this!*"

The fact that this abstract adapted from my hypothetical diary reads almost like a horror story is precisely why this study represents more than just a piece of research completed for the purposes of obtaining a PhD degree in theology. It is at once an expression, an imperfect articulation and a desperate attempt to make sense of what has been an all-consuming obsession for last five years since the Big Death. Personally, I would like to believe that this thesis represents not the vehement heresy of a hostile infidel but rather a cry for help from someone who painfully discovered that the more he tries to understand what is what the more reality seems to recede beyond his grasp. It is not easy being a born again believer who feels as though he died again.

There have been countless times during the writing of this thesis when I became nostalgic of my earlier untroubled and happy faith experiences. On many occasions the realisation of my identity mutation from believer to doubter dawned on me with a vengeance. Thinking back on who I was when I started out in theology, how my religious beliefs totally defined who I used to be and also enchanted the world I considered reality, how something went horribly wrong and everything changed – these things bring about an mindset of infinite sadness.

These are the times when I cannot believe how my views and identity have devolved – times when I do not want to believe it. I just cannot believe that I – a genuine Christian with once unwavering faith in God now spend my time reconstructing devil's advocate arguments against His existence. When I remember who I was – the same person who I still wish to be but am no more – I cannot help but wondering what the hell am I doing writing this trash.

Then again, maybe I'm just living in denial. Maybe there is no way back. Whatever the case may be, I am after all this time still too weak and confused to be dogmatic about anything. It would seem, therefore, that the only way forward is to continue struggling with the issues that haunt me without cessation. This study is therefore a type of catharsis – an experiment of articulating worst case scenarios so that they can be faced for what they are instead of leaving them inside where they eat away like cancer.

I would thus prefer to think of this study not as the ranting of an embittered and hardened atheist but as a modern version or *typos* of Job 3-31. Like Job I cannot understand my plight and I utter what many would consider heresy and blasphemy. Like Job, though I know what my friends know, I find all traditional apologetic as absolutely worthless in accounting for the particular problematic addressed in this thesis. I remain sceptic and perplexed as long as all I know about God remains based on hearsay. Like Job I may need a theophany to recant. Like the book of Job, I doubt whether even a theophany can solve all the problems my alter ego, the devil's advocate, has reconstructed.

Of course, the sad thing is that very few people will ever learn of my plight. If the side effects of the information explosion of our time remain true to form, after this study has been evaluated by a handful of scholars, few others and no one from the public will ever know of its existence. If a thesis falls in the library and there is nobody who reads it, does it make a sound?

Then again maybe it is better that this study is doomed to oblivion. I fear the response of those who have an untroubled faith. I fear for misunderstanding, broken relationships, locked doors and burned bridges. I know that if all this had not happened to me, I myself would have little patience or sympathy with anyone inside the church vomiting the kind of verbal diarrhoea that I have regurgitated in the case against realism.

That is also the reason why I did not write a book for public consumption. I do not want to be responsible for destroying the faith of others. I could never live with myself knowing I caused many sincere and good people to fall into major depression or, as I have contemplated on more than one occasion, to commit suicide.

From the point of view of a believer open to follow truth wherever it may lead, the contents of this thesis may indeed seem to articulate a secret so terrible that it would destroy most religious people learn. This "secret", i.e. the collapse of realism and the repression of anti-realism in all forms of biblical theism, is something not even Old Testament theologians can often talk about openly.

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In many respects, Old Testament theology is a farce. Most scholars will present themselves as realists to everyone who does not bother to read between the lines. In whatever heated academic and public debates will follow in the years to come that somehow pertain to the issues in the case against realism, one can be sure that only a minority of the people involved will ever really know the extent and nature of the problematic.

Given my own background as articulated in the biography, critique against the devil's advocate's arguments will be much appreciated. I also want to apologise to any reader whose faith may have been shaken as a result of reading this document

On a brighter side, if the relativity of what counts as facts as illustrated in the history of research counts for anything, no one should make a fetish out of the case as it was reconstructed here. Besides considering it to be a devil's advocate argument rather than an a inerrant and infallible "recipe" for atheism, I myself have no idea what my own views on the matter will be in the years to come. Though at present, I fear that the devil's advocate's arguments might very well be irrefutable on some points, I have no intention of clinging dogmatically and stubbornly to the point of view reconstructed in this thesis.

To be sure, I consider myself open to new ideas, perspectives and legitimate objections to the devil's advocate's arguments. This may indeed be prudent as being an Old Testament scholar in today's world where theories and the truth they purport to sell come and go like fashion sets many like myself up for a lifetime of recantations. This is therefore not the kind of thesis that, after being read, should be lightly tossed aside. It may be thrown, with force.

APPENDIX B

THE COLLAPSE OF REALISM, COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AND THE "DIED-AGAIN" CHRISTIAN SYNDROME

Yes, if I think about it I am speechless and fear grips my flesh…

(Job 21:6)
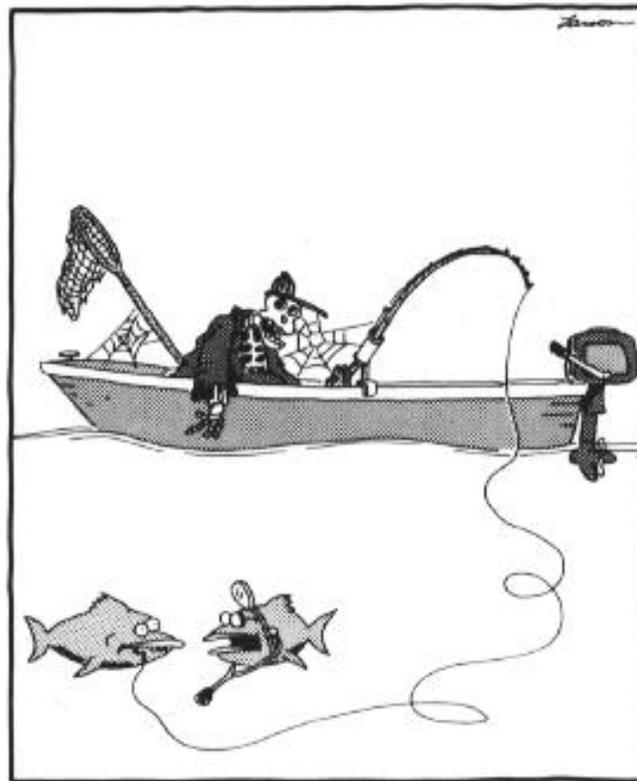
"Well, first the bad news —
you're definitely hooked."

Since most Old Testament scholars are also Christians it is to be expected that they think of themselves as realists or at least semi-realists when it comes to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. As a result, when confronted with the case against realism they will encounter arguments that might seem to run

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counter to all that they believe regarding the nature of reality.

When it comes to the reaction of people when they are confronted with rational discourse that seems to disprove their most sincere and cherished beliefs, a lot would depend on how convincing the counter arguments are. Or so one would think.

In the 1950's, social and cognitive psychologist Leon Festinger did extensive research on scenarios where people are forced to react on being confronted with what appears to be incontrovertible proof that their beliefs about certain issues were mistaken. To the surprise of many, it was discovered that, in most cases, the more irrefutable the proof, the more stubbornly the subjects clinged to their initial cognitions (cf. Festinger 1956, 1957).

The end result of the research by Festinger was his theory of "cognitive dissonance". This theory predicts that people who are confronted with evidence contrary to what they believe and want to believe will not only refuse to revise their beliefs, they will actually irrationally seek to promote them more zealously that ever before (cf. also Batson 1982:50; Carroll 1979:86-109).

The theory of cognitive dissonance shows that people in general have a strong need to maintain cognitive consistency. When it comes to the deepest and most meaningful beliefs people have regarding the nature of reality there exists an aversion for discrepancies in the framework of cognitions. In order to ensure the survival of their own constructs of reality there must be sufficient harmony between the various beliefs one holds pertaining to what is perceived to be the facts.

Cognitive dissonance ensues when a person entertains two equally convincing cognitions/beliefs/facts that nevertheless seem to contradict each other. In order to decrease the psychic tension produced by the discrepant beliefs dissonance needs to be lessened. This can happen in one of two ways:

1. One of the cognitions must be rejected and considered to be false.

2. Additional cognitions (ad hoc hypotheses/rationalisations) must be added to the

cognitive matrix so that the discrepancy is harmonised on another level or its maintenance temporarily justified to a satisfactory extent.

Opting for the latter strategy may lessen the dissonance but cannot ultimately banish it from the psyche altogether. This strategy is one of psychological survival where the additional cognitions allow the subject to relativise the problem and to dampen the effect of the dissonance. According to Festinger, human creativity and the need for psychological survival override the need for a rational justification of beliefs in the face of cognitive challenges.

Consider the following scenario in which a person:

- believes something with his whole heart;

- made a public commitment to that belief;

- made crucial choices dependent on the veracity of that belief, which in turn decided the course of his life;

- construed personal identity and self-image on the assumption that the belief is true;

- created a personal and satisfying worldview and understanding of reality as a whole in such a way that the particular belief constitutes an essential and foundational element therein;

- answers his existential questions from a frame of reference provided by that belief to the extent that holding on to the belief provides meaning and purpose to life;

- could cope with severe personal crisis and suffering because the particular belief was assumed to be true.

If this person is confronted with seemingly irrefutable proof that his most cherished

belief is erroneous, chances are that not only will he emerge from the encounter unscathed but that he will appear to hold more zealously to his belief than ever before. Despite the inability to refute the counter evidence he will be convinced that somehow, in ways presently unknown to him, he is right after all. He may even seek to engage in special pleading or ad hominem rhetoric in order to convince the other party of the veracity and merits of believing in what he does.

The way in which possible cognitive dissonance is lessened in such scenarios is thus not via an in-depth analysis of the counter arguments and an honest unbiased willingness to be open to change opinions in the interest of what may be true. Instead, the discourse containing the apparent refutation of the cherished belief will be approached with brewing conspiracy theories.

The need for creating a straw man for the purposes of refutation, suspicions about the other person's intentions, and constant fideistic rationalisation of why personal beliefs are in reality not really problematic at all will be great. Yet the person experiencing the dissonance may not even realise how irrational his strategies of evasion may be. Introspection is only allowed insofar as faltering personal loyalty to the cherished beliefs can be detected. This is also only done in order to postulate possible personal intellectual shortcomings to justify the discontinuation of considering the counterarguments with an open mind (cf. also James 1902:27; Berger 1967:93).

Festinger demonstrates that deep-seated convictions and cherished beliefs, especially religious beliefs, prove to be extremely resistant to revision and reformulation or rejection for several possible reasons:

1. Holding on to the particular belief carries personal benefits, e.g.:

    - it answers the existential and other deep questions of life;

    - it provides a feeling of self-worth and also gives a sense of personal identity;

    - it provides cognitive security and harmony in aid of psychological survival.

2. It exists in relation to a public commitment, e.g.:

- it is presupposed in family relations;

- friendships originated because of it;

- social standing and status are possible because of it;

- social identity and image are construed by it;

- satisfaction in one's profession and in life in general depends on it.

3. The belief does not exist in isolation, e.g.:

- society or peer groups condones it, expects it and rewards it;

- the survival of the group sharing the particular belief is dependent on it;

- the group in which the belief is maintained provides support, identity, security and the perception of self-worth since it caters for the need to belong;

- others who share the same beliefs provide company, motivation, legitimisation and friendship.

Consider, for example, the case of a conservative believer like myself who was exposed to the findings of critical scholarship. At first I ignored it and dismissed it as satanic heresy. As dissonance theory predicted, I refused to accept the results of research not because I could point to clear-cut fallacies in the particular arguments but merely because I did not like what it implied for the credibility of the beliefs I had come to cherish.

Of course, the findings of Festinger have not escaped criticism (cf. Oates 1973:70-75; Abelson 1988:27-34). To be sure, the theory fails to account for many alternative

possible strategies in dealing with cognitive dissonance. Festinger has subsequently modified his views to some extent and social and cognitive psychology have in the meantime witnessed the proliferation of more theories pertaining to the way people deal with challenges to their belief systems (cf. Ellis 1967:30-53).

Festinger, however, was not dogmatic and admitted that some people do indeed change their belief system when confronted with incontrovertible evidence that against the truth of their ideologies (cf. Festinger 1957:11). In my own case, this took quite some time and eventually only happened because I discovered fatal flaws in my own ideology and not because alien critical theories seemed attractive or convincing.

Only *after* I realised that my own views were untenable could I even begin to try and take other views seriously. As long as I still believed my own ideas to be true and irrefutable I took cognisance only of the unacceptable conclusions of other views (instead of acquainting myself with the details of the arguments that led to those conclusions). As long as I knew the views of critical scholars and atheists only from stereotypes, straw men and secondary sources, there was no way I could even begin to consider modifying my own point of view.

It is arguably the case that, like me, most people who begin the critical study of the Old Testament do so as part of their general studies in theology. Like me, the vast majority of people who are interested in biblical theology are so because they are Christians committed to realism with regard to the ontological status of the God of the Bible.

Like me, the majority of students who have a background in Church theology will approach to the problems of realism in Old Testament scholarship with suspicion and concern. Like me, most will come from a background that can be classified epistemologically as naïve realism and theologically as fundamentalism. Like me, due to expectations generated in the context of the Church where the Old Testament is often neglected yet idealised as a fetish and as part of the precious "Word of God", most prospective theologians probably expect the study of the Old Testament to strengthen and enrich their faith.

Unfortunately, it is often the case that those who take their studies in biblical criticism seriously and come from a background in conservative or fundamentalist religion are given a rather rude wake up call from their dogmatic slumbers. A most extreme crisis of belief can be encountered by conservative students of Old Testament theology who, like me, conform to the following diagnostic profile.

A   The initial profile and belief system of the subject

- The subject comes from a religious tradition where the Bible is believed to be the inerrant or infallible word of God.

- The subject views the ideal belief system as one that can be designated as 'biblical'.

- The subject believes that only "biblical" Christians are true Christians.

- The subject believes that the Bible is unique, special and quite different from the mythologies and superstitions of other pagan religions.

- The subject believes that the Bible is historically and scientifically inerrant.

- The subject believes that the Bible is essentially coherent and contains all the dogma that the church believes.

- The subject believes that the Bible is theologically and morally perfect and complete.

- The subject believes that the Old Testament is a Christian document pointing to Jesus Christ in the way the New Testament authors claimed.

- The subject believes that Bible study is essential for spiritual growth.

- The subject believes that his own religious tradition's dogma is the only accurate

and complete version of what the Bible actually says.

- The subject's knowledge of the Bible is based not so much on serious study of the text but on occasional selective readings thereof in the company of devotional books distributed by the popular media.

- The subject believes that his beliefs about God and the Bible are based on and supported by the Bible.

- The subject believes that the veracity of his faith is dependent on the supposed inerrancy, truth, uniqueness and infallibility of the biblical texts.

- The subject is happy in his conservatism and proud of his fundamentalist identity.

B   Types of subjects involved

- The undergraduate student in a seminary, faculty of theology or divinity school where critical views are promoted.

- The post-graduate student who, for the purpose of doing research, has to read from a wider selection of viewpoints than those supporting his own or has to go abroad to study in a different ideological and cultural academic environment.

- The minister or priest who reads widely and consistently ponders the implications of critical research for his faith.

- The scholar who has to familiarise himself with all the viewpoints in his discipline in order to be able to engage meaningfully in academic debates.

C   Variables that prevent the occurrence of cognitive dissonance or a crisis of belief

- The subject has an overcrowded social life that leaves little time for reading or

serious contemplation.

- The subject pursues a way of life in a context where challenges to his faith are avoided as these may put his career, personal happiness, finances and relationships in jeopardy.

- The subject has access to only conservative points of view and/or confines his reading to those materials which are considered spiritually uplifting or sound/orthodox.

- The subject deliberately avoids certain types of scholarly literature and is biased against other viewpoints which he knows only as stereotypes and without ever having made a genuine effort to understand why such views are considered to be convincing.

- The subject reads critical scholarship without actually becoming introspective or considering the possibility that personal views might need any revision whatsoever.

- The subject is unable to be critical of himself and has never analysed or relativised his own religious self from the viewpoint of critical theories of philosophy, theology, history, anthropology, psychology and sociology.

- The person takes pride and pleasure in his conservative ideologies and is non-negotiably committed to fundamentalist views of biblical inspiration.

- The subject is naïve when it comes to the dynamics of his own hermeneutical processes and approaches the text with an idealistic positivism.

- The subject is, for the most part, unaware of the epistemological and logical problems pertaining to his particular ideology as a reader of the biblical text and a realist in theistic metaphysics.

D   **Variables conducive to the initiating of a crisis of belief**

- The subject is exposed to the methodologies and findings of critical scholarship.

- The subject is introspective and open to change.

- The subject reads often, widely and contemplates what he reads.

- The subject contemplates the possible ontological implications of the results of critical biblical research.

- The subject is able to transcend himself and view his self as a construct relative to a particular historical context, theological tradition and socio-cultural matrix.

- The subject is aware of philosophical problems pertaining to matters of epistemology and hermeneutics.

- The subject is aware of his own psychological strategies of evasion when it comes to the acceptance of new beliefs and when dealing with cognitive dissonance.

- The subject is acutely aware of the tension between church theology and critical scholarship.

- The subject can be self-critical and does not believe everything he reads.

- The subject does not limit his reading to what is spiritually uplifting and merely those views that support his belief system or simply reiterates what he already believes to be the case but seeks to understand the viewpoints of others.

E   **Types of literature initiating the crisis of belief**

- Critical theology (e.g. critical commentaries, history of religion, comparative religion, non-fundamentalist biblical theology, the problem of diversity in the

texts, the problematic relation between Old and New Testaments, the history of Israel, the quest for the historical Jesus, the Synoptic problem, comparative mythology and myth in the bible, critical perspectives on the development of beliefs and history of dogma, ideological critique of biblical writings, problems in biblical ethics, critical perspectives on the origin, formation and history of the biblical books and canon, critical perspectives on one's own tradition, the bible and science, biblical archaeology, alien cultural phenomena, Bible contradictions, the history of interpretation (especially the nineteenth century), etc.)

Also:

- Philosophy (e.g. philosophy of religion (especially atheist perspectives), European philosophy since Descartes, post-modernism, logic (informal fallacies), etc.)

- Psychology (atheist theories in the psychology of religion, e.g. Freud, Ellis, etc.)

- Sociology (critical theories in the sociology of religion, e.g. Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, Durkheim, etc.)

- Other (anthropology, archaeology, astronomy, biology, etc.)

F   Variables that determine the extent of the crisis

- The status of cherished religious beliefs in the construction of personal identity.

- The possible effects and implications of the problem on personal spirituality.

- The amount of cognitive restructuring necessary to deal with the problem.

- The impact of the problem on social relations and social identity.

- The extent to which the problem affects the subject's ability to deal with life's existential questions.

- The extent to which the meaning and plot of the life story of the individual is thrown out of sync.

G   Typical strategies for relief from cognitive dissonance

- Ignoring and repressing the problem whilst deliberately or unconsciously refusing to entertain related thoughts so that the passage of time will eventually dull any awareness of cognitive dissonance.

- Quitting the study of theology and becoming more fideistic in order to limit exposure to critical theology and to move about in contexts where the problem does not surface.

- Becoming more conservative/fundamentalist and seek insight from conservative/fundamentalist scholarship and ideology on the matter.

- Becoming more liberal, semi-realist and siding oneself with critical theology.

- Becoming more radical, anti-realist and consider theology a game pursued for antiquarian purposes.

- Becoming agnostic and refusing to commit to any belief in particular whilst continuing in theological research yet living in denial that there is really anything to become unduly concerned about.

- Becoming atheist and practise theology simply for professional reasons as it is too late and too impractical to start all over again in life.

- Relativising the problem and the contradictory cognitions by viewing it from a synthesising perspective derived via meta-theological theory or a school of thought in philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, art, etc.

- Developing a schizophrenic personality or becoming prone to multiple personality disorders, reactive depression or insanity.

- Committing suicide.

H   Symptoms and diagnostic criteria of the crisis of belief

- **General symptoms**

    Cognitive dissonance, crisis of faith, identity crisis, reactive depression, post-traumatic stress, neuroticism, paranoia, anxiety, etc.

- **Specific psychological symptoms**

    An experience of profound existential anxiety (angst), temporary feelings of being strangely liberated, a deep sadness at irretrievable loss, disorientation and confusion, unexplainable loneliness, feelings of guilt, feelings of nostalgia, episodes of repression and forgetfulness, doubt, loss of self-confidence, endless deconstruction and reconstruction of the self-image, irremovable psychic tension, lack of mental vitality, nihilism, relativism, shock, indecisiveness, obsessive compulsive thought patterns, pessimistic self-talk, tiredness, unmotivated, apathy, self-loathing, anti-social behaviour, introversion, ahedonia, indecisiveness, etc.

- **Possible psychosomatic symptoms**

    Passiveness or hyperactivity, restlessness, changes in appetite, chronic fatigue, insomnia, daydreaming, nightmares, a depressed immunity system, self-destructive behaviour, etc.

- **Popular self-talk strategies for survival and lessening of cognitive dissonance**

    Repression,   denial,   ad   hoc   reasoning,   irrational   fideism,   fantasising,

speculation, wishful thinking, self-hypnosis, mental role playing, circular reasoning, ad hominem reasoning, scapegoating, conspiracy theorising, etc.

Once again, the diagnostic profile given above is merely a rough guide and should not be understood as a blueprint for the way *all* Old Testament students from conservative backgrounds will *always* respond when confronted with the issues presented in the case against realism. Nevertheless, the profile constructed above as a supplementation to the perspective provided by dissonance theory on the possible reaction to the devil's advocate's case remains functional as a valid and personal perspective on what is no doubt a complex issue.

APPENDIX C

TOWARDS THE QUEST FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL YAHWEH

……if this is the way things are, what am I living for?

(Gen 25:22; cf. 27:46)

Is this it then? Is the devil's advocate's assessment of the ontological status of Yahweh the last word on the particular issue? Can we all go home now and forget about the whole business of philosophical-critical analysis? Fortunately, it is not that simple.

In biblical studies, there has been many so-called "quests"; the most infamous of which must certainly be the quest for the historical Jesus. Other examples include the quests for the historical Israel, the historical Moses and the historical Paul. Not much in the way of resolving the problematic issues pertaining to the particular characters and phenomena have come about as a result of these quests, some of which are in their third or fourth phase of re-engagement. However, in each instance, the controversial research has contributed much in the sense that it has opened the eyes of the scholarly community to the problems related to the various issues and the complexity of the latter.

In this study, in an attempt to reconstruct a case against realism via the philosophy of religion, I hope to pioneer and initiate a new quest – the quest for a philosophical Yahweh.

Though philosophers of religion have been analysing and arguing about God for many centuries, few if any have done so in the context of Old Testament studies and pertaining to the character of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. Through the utilisation of the philosophy of religion as an auxiliary discipline and the establishment of

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philosophical-critical analysis as methodological approach within the field of Old Testament studies, the quest for the philosophical Yahweh can begin in earnest.

Old Testament scholars can and should take note of what philosophers of religion have already written with regard to theories pertaining to each of the issues on their subject's agenda. However, eventually the Old Testament itself will have to determine the nature and contents of the issues and theories constructed in the context of biblical scholarship. As this study has demonstrated with its focus on the Old Testament itself, the point is that philosophical-critical analysis of the Old Testament cannot simply involve an uncritical repeat of the philosophy of (Christian) religion.

As an interpretative methodology within Old Testament studies, philosophical-critical analysis must concern itself with the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism rather than with that of post-biblical faith. Moreover, though some of the issues on its agenda might seem to overlap with other issues already addressed in Old Testament theology and various forms of biblical-critical analysis, the similarities are superficial. As should be clear from the reconstruction of the case against realism in this study, a philosophical approach to the shared concerns will ultimately be substantially different from any other presently operative methodology.

As suggested in chapter one, philosophical-critical analysis might commence by way of two new interpretative methodologies:

1. **Philosophical criticism** as a form of biblical criticism where philosophical-critical analysis features on the level of exegesis. As noted in chapter 1, this will involve a reading of individual texts for what the nature and contents of the particular discourse might yield that may be of relevance from the perspective of one or more of the issues on the agenda of the philosophy of religion.

2. **Philosophy of Old Testament religion** as a comprehensive higher order discipline where philosophical-critical analysis commences on a level pertaining to the Old Testament as a whole (analogous to the study of the history of Israel or Old Testament theology).

These two types of philosophical-critical analysis could become the tools to be employed in the project I have designated the quest for a philosophical Yahweh.

It is hoped that the devil's advocate's reconstruction of the case against realism in Old Testament theology will urge more scholars to engage in philosophical-critical analysis. If more Old Testament scholars began to utilise the philosophy of religion in the context of biblical interpretation it will assist in the facilitation of achieving official recognition for the new methodology. As such, it may one day become an independent approach within Old Testament studies that is legitimate in its own right and one that stands in both supplementary and complimentary relation to already extant interpretative approaches to the text.

The new interpretative methodology of philosophical-critical analysis should, however, not limit itself to ontological issues (e.g. arguing for or against the existence of Yahweh). To be sure, participants in the quest for the philosophical Yahweh can

and should concern themselves with *all* the issues on the general agenda of the philosophy of religion. There is an enormous amount of specialised philosophical-critical work waiting to be done on the following issues:

1. The meaning and nature of religion in the Old Testament
2. The nature of religious language in the Old Testament
3. The concept of revelation in Old Testament religion
4. The nature and attributes of Yahweh
5. Arguments for and against the existence of Yahweh
6. The relation between Yahweh and evil
7. The nature of religious experience in the Old Testament
8. The relation between religion and morality in the Old Testament
9. The relation between religion and history in the Old Testament
10. The relation between religion and culture in the Old Testament
11. Old Testament religion and science
12. Etc.

Despite appearances, such topics of analysis need not assume that there is one single monolithic and coherent answer to each of issues to be addressed. Moreover, despite the fact that some of the issues on this agenda are already hot topics in other disciplines (e.g., Old Testament theology), this by no means renders a more specialised philosophical-critical inquiry superfluous or redundant. To be sure, a philosophical-critical perspective on these issues may well provide additional interesting research results not otherwise attainable yet of great interest for other interpretative methodologies. Such an approach may also be able to do sufficient justice to these issues which are often only of marginal interest in other disciplines.

In addition, the issues noted above can and should be approached from the perspectives of both micro- and macro-level analysis. On the one hand, there is ample room for exegetical work on individual passages in the text via philosophical criticism. On the other hand, equally many opportunities exist with regard to the philosophical critical assessment of the biblical discourse on a larger scale (a book, a couple of books, the Old Testament as a whole, etc.) via philosophy of Old Testament religion.

With regard to the present study, scholars are therefore also invited to come with hypothetical arguments not only against but also for the existence of Yahweh. There is also room for a case against anti-realism. Whatever the case may be and despite the pros and cons of such inquiries, this new form of analysis poses great potential for the enrichment of the discipline that is Old Testament studies. It is hoped that this study can play a pioneering role in the initiation of philosophical-critical analysis and, as such, also in the commencement of the quest for a philosophical Yahweh.

SUMMARY

Title: *Does Yahweh Exist? A Philosophical-Critical Reconstruction of the Case against Realism in Old Testament Theology*

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Does Yahweh exist? What is the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts? Is the deity merely a character of fiction or does He also exist in extra-textual reality?

According to the viewpoint of the devil's advocate whose perspective on the issue is articulated in this thesis, the answer to the question is simply, no – Yahweh does not exist. He may seem real to those who believe in him and in the world of the text but he has no extra-textual and extra-psychical counterpart.

To prove such a controversial claim, the **philosophy of religion** has been utilised as auxiliary discipline within Old Testament studies in the form of **philosophical-critical analysis** (philosophical criticism / philosophy of Old Testament religion). A devil's advocate's **case against realism in Old Testament theology** has been reconstructed in the form of **seven arguments against the existence of Yahweh.**

According **to the argument from theological pluralism,** one element of the depiction of Yahweh in the text that is rather suspicious is the fact that Yahweh is characterised in ways that blatantly contradict each other. Both synchronic and diachronic perspectives on the theological contradictions suggest that there is no coherent biblical view of what Yahweh is actually like, what his will is and what he supposedly did. This deconstructs realism since the same actually existing entity cannot have discrepant attributes, hold mutually exclusive moral beliefs and have a history of both doing something and not doing the same thing at the same time.

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From the perspective of **the argument from unorthodox theology**, it is apparent that Yahweh is often depicted in ways most unorthodox from the point of view of Christian philosophical theology. Some texts appear to suggest he may not be eternal, single, omnipotent, omniscient, precognisant, immutable, omnipresent or wholly uninvolved in the actualisation of evil. If there is a God and if this God has all the attributes assigned to him by popular classical Christian philosophical theology, it follows that unorthodox depictions of Yahweh must be fictitious.

In the view of **the argument from polymorphic projection,** everything about the god Yahweh appears suspiciously all-too-human. What Yahweh believes about the world, his self-talk, what he considers morally right and wrong and the way in which his own abode is run are all uncannily similar to the worldview and superstitions of the Iron Age Levant. The divine variables never transcend this all-too-local and all-too-cultural matrix and even change along with it. This unmasks Yahweh as an anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection – a character of fiction who does not exist outside the minds of those who created him in their image.

The argument from mythology and syncretism demonstrates that the discourse of Yahweh's religion and the sacred stories and poems in which he features contain numerous parallels to the myths, legends, folklore and superstitions found in other pagan religions. There are also marked traces of syncretism between the cult and theology of Yahweh and the ideologies of the Israelites' neighbours which, in each case, predates Yahwism. This suggests that Yahweh's ontological status may very well not be all that different from that of El, Baal, Zeus or Maduk.

From the perspective of **the argument from fictitious cosmography**, the world in the text where Yahweh is depicted as existing, acting and in which his abode is located and of which he is the creator, does not exist. Yahweh's world and his worldview are demonstrably fictitious. Since the Old Testament depicts Yahweh as being "up there" in the sky and since we know that he is demonstrably not there, Yahweh-as-depicted stands unmasked as a character of fiction.

The argument from fictitious history asserts that the Old Testament is filled with historical fiction. For a variety of reasons, it can be demonstrated that many of the

depictions of supposed historical scenarios are completely fictitious in that they never happened in the way the details of the accounts imply were the case. Since what was intended as history is actually fiction and no god literally appeared, acted and spoke as Yahweh is depicted as doing, it follows that Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction. He does not exist.

Finally, **the argument from meta-textual history** shows that, on the one hand, the all-too-recent and all-too-local origins of the worship of Yahweh on a historical and cosmic scale unmask it as a wholly human enterprise. On the other hand, the Old Testament texts themselves have all-too-human origins rather than being the result of actual divine revelation. The Old Testament appears not to be the Word of God but human words about an allegedly existing deity. The development of Yahwism and its derivatives (Judaism and Christianity) seems not to have been determined by progressive revelation but by socio-cultural paradigm shifts and a history of repressed anti-realist tendencies. From such a meta-textual historical perspective it becomes obvious that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text is indeed no more than a product of human ideological imagination. In other words, he does not really exist.

Though not all seven of **these devil's advocate's arguments** may be equally devastating when viewed in isolation, in the form of **a cumulative argument** against realism, they constitute seemingly irrefutable proof that Yahweh-as-depicted in the text does not exist. Consequently, realism collapses not only in Old Testament theology but also in any form of theism somehow related to, rooted in and/or dependent on realism in its discourse.

KEYWORDS

God

Yahweh

Atheism

Arguments against the existence of Yahweh

Old Testament Theology

Philosophy of religion

Philosophical-critical analysis

Ontology

Realism

Devil's Advocate

OPSOMMING

Titel: *Bestaan Jahwe Werklik? 'n Filosofies-Kritiese Rekonstruksie van die Saak teen Realisme in Ou Testamentiese Teologie*

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Departement: Ou Testamentiese Wetenskap

Degree: Philosophiae Doctor

Bestaan Jahwe werklik? Wat is die ontologiese status van die god Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks van die Ou Testament? Is hy maar net 'n fiktiewe karakter of bestaan Hy ook in die wêreld buite die teks?

Volgens die siening van **die duiwels advokaat** wie se perspektief in hierdie tesis geartikuleer word is die antwoord op die eerste vraag bloot, nee – **Jahwe bestaan nie**. Hy mag dalk as werklik ervaar word deur diegene wie in hom geglo het en in die wêreld binne die teks maar Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks het geen ekstra-tekstuele en ekstra-psigiese ewebeeld nie.

Om hierdie stelling te regverdig word die **godsdiensfilosofie** ingespan as hulpdissipline binne die Ou Testamentiese wetenskap in die vorm van **filosofies-kritiese analiese** (filosofiese kritiek / godsdiensfilosofie van Ou Testamentiese religie). 'n Duiwel's advokaat **saak teen realisme in Ou Testamentiese teologie** is gerekonstrueer in die vorm van **sewe argumente teen die bestaan van Jahwe.**

Volgens **die argument van teologiese pluralisme** is een element van die voorstelling van Jahwe wat nogal as suspisieus voorkom die feit dat Jahwe gekarakteriseer word op wyses wat mekaar liederlik weerspreek. Beide sinkroniese en diakroniese perspektiewe op die teologiese teenstrydighede toon aan dat daar geen koherente bybelse siening bestaan van Jahwe se eienskappe, wil en dade nie. Hierdie stand van sake dekonstrueer realisme aangesien dieselfde veronderstelde werklike entiteit nie

teenstrydige eienskappe, weersprekende morele oortuigings of by dieselfde geleentheid dieselfde ding beide gedoen en nie gedoen het nie.

Vanuit die perspektief van **die argument van onortodokse teologie** wil dit voorkom dat Jahwe dikwels uitgebeeld word op wyses wat uiters onortodoks is vanuit n Christelike filosofies teologiese oogpunt. In sommige tekste word daar skynbaar geimpliseer dat Jahwe nie ewig, enig, almagtig, alwetend, onveranderlik, alomteenwoordig en geheel en al onskuldig in die realisering van die bose is nie. As God bestaan en die eieskappe het wat klassieke Christelike filosofiese teologie aan Hom toedig beteken dit dat die onortodokse uitbeeldings van Jahwe in die teks as fiktief beskou moet word.

Volgens **die argument van polimorfiese projeksie** is feitlik alles omtrent die karakter Jahwe in die teks al te menslik. Wat Jahwe glo aangaande die wêreld, die wyse waarop hy redeneer, wat hy as moreel normatief beskou en die wyse waarop sy eie hemelse milleu gekonstitueer is reflekteer die bygelowe van die Ou Nabye Ooste in die Ystertydperk, transendeer dit nooit nie en verander daarmee saam. Hierdie elemente in die voorstelling van Jahwe ontmasker hom as n antropomorfiese, sosiomorfiese en psigomorfiese projeksie – 'n fiktiewe karakter wat nie bestaan buite die verbeelding van diegene wat hom na hulle eie beeld geskep het nie.

Die argument van mitologie en sinkretisme toon aan dat die diskoers van Jahwe se godsdiens en die gewyde stories en gedigte waarin hy figureer 'n groot hoeveelheid paralelle met die mites, legendes, volksverhale en bygelowe van ander godsdienste bevat. Daar is ook vele tekens van sinketisme tussen die kultus en teologie van Jahwe enersyds en die ouer ideologie van Israel se bure andersyds. Hierdie stand van sake impliseer dat Jahwe se ontologiese status waarskynlik nie veel verskil van die van El, Baal, Zeus of Marduk nie.

Vanuit die perspektief van **die argument van fiktiewe kosmografie** is die wêreld binne die teks waarbinne Jahweh bestaan, optree, waarbinne sy tuiste gelokaliseer is en wat hyself geskep het 'n fiktiewe konstruk. Jahwe se skepping en sy eie wêreldbeeld is verifieerbaar fiktief. Aangesien die Ou Testament Jahwe voorstel as synde tuis in die lug daarbo, terwyl ons vandag weet dat hy nie daar is nie, staan

Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks ontmasker as 'n fiktiewe karakter met geen ewebeeld in die wêreld buite die teks nie.

Die argument van fiktiewe geskiedenis beweer dat die Ou Testament gevul is met historiese fiksie. Om verskeie redes is dit duidelik dat baie van die verhale in die teks wat as histories feitlik voorgehou word heeltemal fiktief is in die sin dat die details van die gebeure deur die teks geskets nooit plaasgevind het nie. Skynbaar het geen god werklik verskyn, opgetree en gespreek soos wat die teks beweer Jahwe gedoen het nie. Dit impliseer dit dat die karakter Jahwe wat op dié wyse uitgebeeld word self 'n fiktiewe is en nie werklik bestaan nie.

Laastens wys **die argument van metatekstuele geskiedenis** enersyds daarop dat die oorsprong van die Jahwisme in die godsdiensgeskiedenis al te resent en plaaslike was en dus ontmasker staan as die produk van 'n bepaalde historiese en kulturele menslike ideologie. Andersyds blyk dit dat die Ou Testamentiese tekste self 'n al te menslike oorsprong en geskiedenis het en nie werklik die resultaat of rekord van egte goddelike openbaring was nie. Die Ou Testament kan dus nie as die Woord van God gesien word nie maar eerder as die woorde van mense aangaande 'n veronderstelde godheid. Die ontwikkeling van die Jahwisme en sy afgeleide gelowe (Judaïsme en Christendom) blyk self gekenmerk te word nie deur progressiewe openbaring soos gemeen word nie maar deur paradigma skuiwe en 'n repressie van anti-realisme in eie geledere. Vanuit so 'n metatekstuele perspektief blyk dit weereens duidelik te wees dat Jahwe soos hy voorgestel word in die teks weinig meer is as 'n produk is van menslike ideologiese verbeelding.

Alhoewel nie al sewe van die duiwels advokaat se argumente ewe bepalend is as dit in isolasie beskou word nie is **die saak teen realisme as kumulatiewe argument** skynbaar 'n onbetwisbare bewys dat Jahwe soos uitgebeeld in die teks nie werklik bestaan nie. As gevolg hiervan beteken dit nie net die einde van realisme in Ou Testamentiese teologie nie maar ook in enige ander vorm van teïsme wat op enige wyse hoegenaamd verwant, afhanklik en gewortel is in daardie betrokke diskoers.

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SLEUTELTERME

God

Jahwe

Ateïsme

Argumente teen die bestaan van Jahwe

Teologie van die Ou Testament

Godsdiensfilosofie

Filosofies-kritiese analiese

Ontologie

Realisme

Duiwels Advokaat
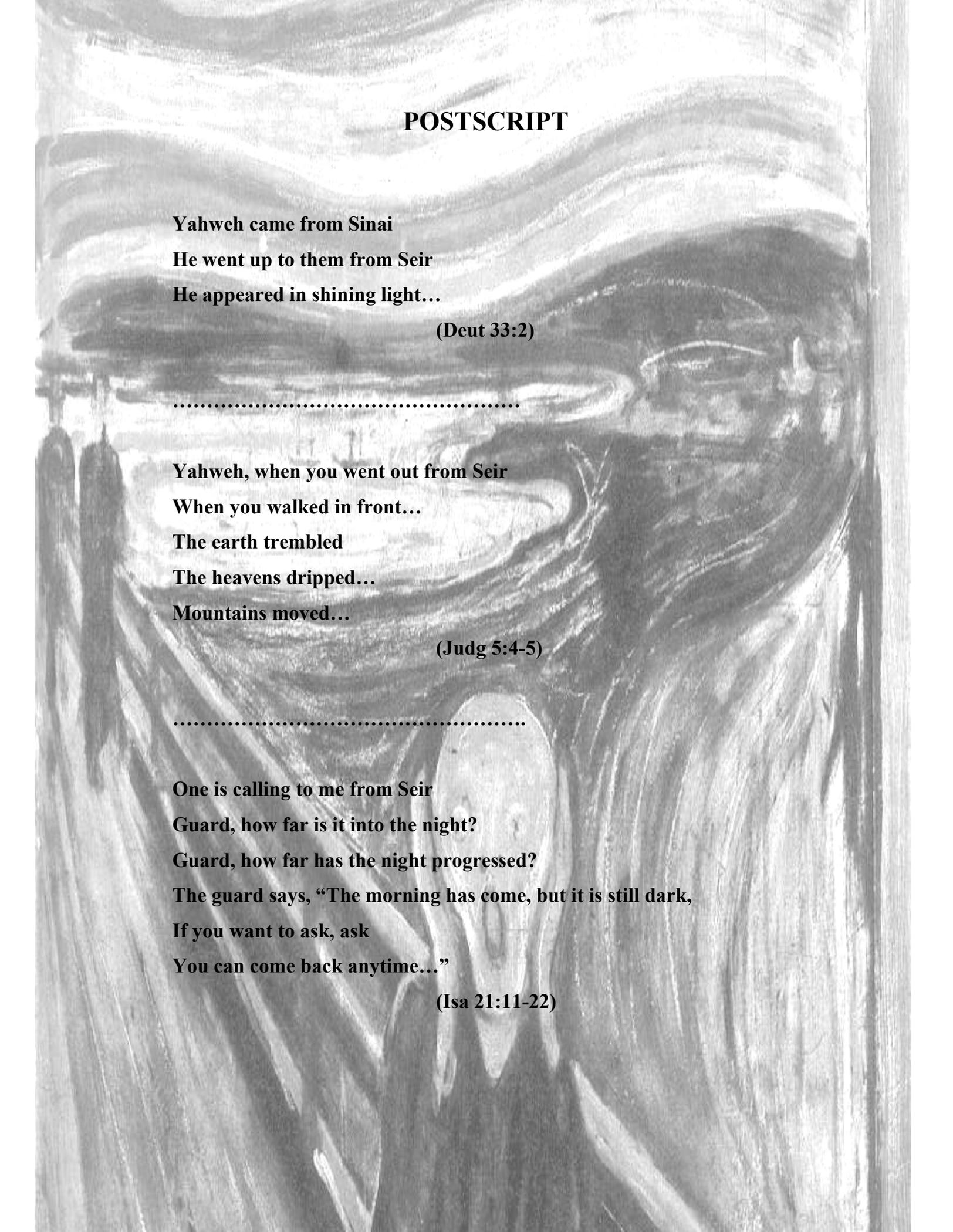
POSTSCRIPT

Yahweh came from Sinai

He went up to them from Seir

He appeared in shining light…

> (Deut 33:2)

………………………………………

Yahweh, when you went out from Seir

When you walked in front…

The earth trembled

The heavens dripped…

Mountains moved…

> (Judg 5:4-5)

………………………………………..

One is calling to me from Seir

Guard, how far is it into the night?

Guard, how far has the night progressed?

The guard says, "The morning has come, but it is still dark,

If you want to ask, ask

You can come back anytime…"

> (Isa 21:11-22)