

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).

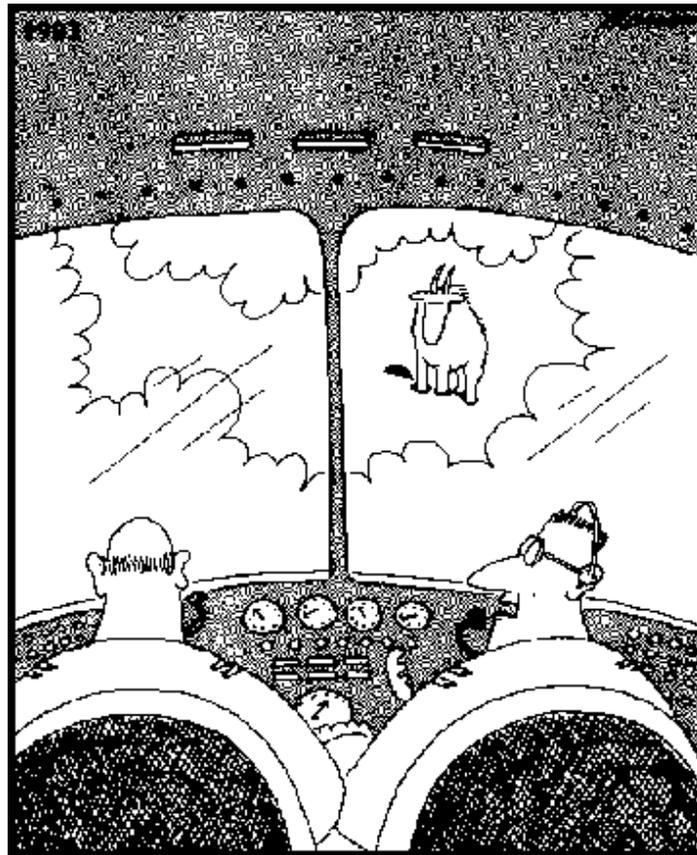
For those who do not subscribe to the orthodox profile of the deity as reconstructed in post-biblical philosophical theology, the present argument may still be relevant albeit in a different manner. It still retains some potency given the fact that even the orthodox stereotyped version of the attributes 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 *cosmogenetic* 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 *theogenetic* 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 be 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 *theogenetic* 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

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.

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 from?

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

(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."

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

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 “monolatry” 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)

“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 monolatry (at best) rather than 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 monolatry 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 monolatry 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 eisegesis, 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 “*EP*” 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

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 too 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)

“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 beautiful 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 foresee 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

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"

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

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. Lindstrom 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)

“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

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 intend 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 it 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.

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 hamstring 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 steal 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 ass 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).

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)

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, Jerobeam, 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 *satan* 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

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 Echlol 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)

“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.

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

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?

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

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.

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

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.