

## CHAPTER 5

# THE ARGUMENT FROM MYTHOLOGY AND SYNCRETISM

*“My tears are my food  
day and night  
For all day they say to me,  
‘Where is your God?’...  
....With the sting of death in my bones  
my enemies smite me  
When the whole day long  
they say to me  
‘Where is your God?’”*  
(Ps 42:4,11)

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Both in the past and the present, many religious people and even some theologians seemed to believe that things like myth, legend, folklore and superstition are completely absent in the Old Testament (cf. Da Silva 1994:11-12). Such phenomena are believed to be endemic not to the Word of God but only to the scriptures of pagan religions. It is believed that the absence of these unorthodox elements in the Bible and in Yahwism is supposed to be what proves the truth of the biblical religion and what distinguishes it from false forms of religious consciousness and man-made ideologies (cf. Da Silva 1994:13).

Long before the discovery of the ancient Near Eastern texts, interpreters of the Old Testament had already noted some parallels between the biblical discourse and that of other ancient religions (cf. Teeple 1982:77). However, the rise of the specialised study of comparative religion and the history of religions during the nineteenth century occasioned the proliferation of a plethora of theories regarding the Old Testament

authors' dependence on foreign religious discourse. Such comparative analyses revealed that there were far more similarities between Old Testament religion and pagan superstition than what was once thought to be the case when the Bible was still read with little reference to the religious discourse of its ancient Near Eastern neighbours (cf. Otzen et al 1990:3-4).

The study of comparative religion and comparative mythology within the context of the history of religion is therefore nothing novel. And, though some scholars did at times have recourse to the philosophy of religion on these issues, it was, for the most part, without explicit concern for the implications of such parallels for realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. Mostly, the focus was on theorising about the nature of Old Testament religion, its religious language and regarding the implications of the parallels for thinking about the concept of revelation and the validity of religious experience.

Many examples can be given of studies that have been concerned with such issues and have contributed to the overall popularity of comparative mythology. The devil's advocate is here thinking of the research by, amongst others, scholars like Frazer (1918), Smith (1927); Oesterly & Robinson (1930); Pritchard (1959); Childs (1960); Hooke (1963); Gaster (1969); Gray (1969); Cross (1973); Fawcett (1970,1973); Campbell (1962,1974); Rogerson (1974); Otzen et al (1990); Holm & Bowker (1994); Matthews & Benjamin (1997); Keel & Uehlinger (1998); Van der Toorn et al (1999); etc.

In this regard, it should be noted that when the twentieth century's literature on comparative religion in Old Testament studies is surveyed, it becomes apparent that both the connotation and denotation of the word "myth" have frequently changed over the course of time. Not everyone talking about "myth" in the Bible seems to be referring to the same phenomenon.

As Gowan (1990:2-5) observes, in contemporary culture, the word "myth" can be used in a bewildering variety of ways. This polyvalent concept is attested as referring to, amongst other things, a literary genre, a scientific error, historical fiction, stories about the gods, a lie, religious truth, superstition, psychological phenomena or

narratives of social control, etc. (cf. also Segal 1999:7-15).

During the latter half of the twentieth century, due to the influence of paradigm shifts in the theorising about myth in anthropology, many biblical and systematic theologians began to suggest that the mythical elements in the biblical discourse are no embarrassment but should be positively assessed. This form of discourse, so it was claimed, has the unique ability to communicate profound truth in a manner not otherwise possible. It became absolutely taboo to think of myth as synonymous with superstition or primitive science (cf. Fawcett 1970:206-231; Brown 1990:12-19).

Consequently, it was asserted that though the Old Testament texts do not have many examples of pure myth (myth as a literary genre), it would be wrong to judge its “mythicized” history (or is that its historicized myth?) from the perspective of modern science. It was also claimed that it is therefore hermeneutically illegitimate to read texts such as Genesis 1-11 as though it was ever intended to be history or a scientific account of the origins of the universe and life on earth. To be sure, it was soon considered naïve to ask questions such as whether something really exists or whether an event depicted in the text actually happened. Such questions were alleged to stem from a misunderstanding of the nature and intent of the biblical discourse and as resultant from a positivist mindset (cf. Fawcett 1973:10).

The devil’s advocate agrees with the view that there have been developments in anthropology that have changed the way we look at the nature and function of myth. However, the supposed relevance of all this for salvaging realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the Old Testament texts should not be so blithely accepted. The claim that the Old Testament authors were not interested in scientific or philosophical type questions seems, at least to the devil’s advocate, another gross generalisation and on par with claiming that all its God-talk were originally actually metaphorically intended. Frankly, the devil’s advocate believes that all those who jump happily and easily on this new apologetic bandwagon are simply engaging in a strategy of evasion and repression concerning the disconcerting fact that realism may be dead.

In the context of this study, the devil’s advocate refuses to be dragged into the

rhetorical chaos of theological doubletalk and has chosen to retain most of the more pejorative alternatives of the above noted meanings of the concept of myth. Depending on the immediate context, in this chapter, the devil's advocate utilises the word "myth" with nearly all of its aforementioned denotations and connotations in mind as these need not be understood as being mutually exclusive. In other words, this study retains the utilisation of the concept of myth as referring inclusively and pejoratively to a (biblically unorthodox) literary genre and ideological construct that is based on (or contains) fictitious history and/or scientifically errant ideas regarding allegedly existing extra-textual phenomena.

According to the devil's advocate, the Old Testament is crawling with "myth" in the aforementioned sense. One way in which to justify this claim is merely by noting the numerous parallels between the Old Testament discourse and that of pagan mythology. If the depiction of Yahweh in certain texts contains parallels to the mythology of other deities generally considered to be fictitious, the question must be asked whether the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted can justifiably be reckoned as being any different from those deities to whom the parallel mythological motifs allude.

For example, if the Old Testament texts depict Yahweh as having defeated the Leviathan and the latter is a mythical (fictitious) entity then so is the deity "Yahweh-who-defeated-the-Leviathan". In other words, whatever God or Yahweh there may be, Yahweh-as-depicted in texts containing mythological motifs shares the same ontological status as the other mythical entities in those texts. If the other entities of mythological discourse in the Old Testament do not really exist, neither does the character Yahweh who believes in them and is involved with them.

Whenever there are traces of mythological motifs, syncretism and superstition in the Old Testament with parallels to non-biblical religions, additional questions arise that may be of relevance to the devil's advocate's case against realism in Old Testament theology, e.g.:

1. What is the relation between the discourse of the Old Testament and that of the other ancient Near Eastern texts?

2. What are the implications of this relation for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

According to the devil's advocate, if there are indeed traces of mythological parallels, syncretism, and superstition in the Old Testament texts, it can be demonstrated that Yahweh-as-depicted does not really exist as long as the following conditions apply:

1. The parallels from pagan religion existed prior to the creation of the Old Testament texts.
2. The entities and scenarios in the parallels are purely or mostly fictitious.
3. The Old Testament authors adopted and adapted such discourse for their own purposes either via direct dependence on the particular parallels or due to a common cultural stock (or pool of discourse) to which they will have had access to.
4. The deity Yahweh is depicted as a character in the reconstructed scenarios, the discourse of which is grounded in myth or contains substantial traces of syncretism and/or superstition.

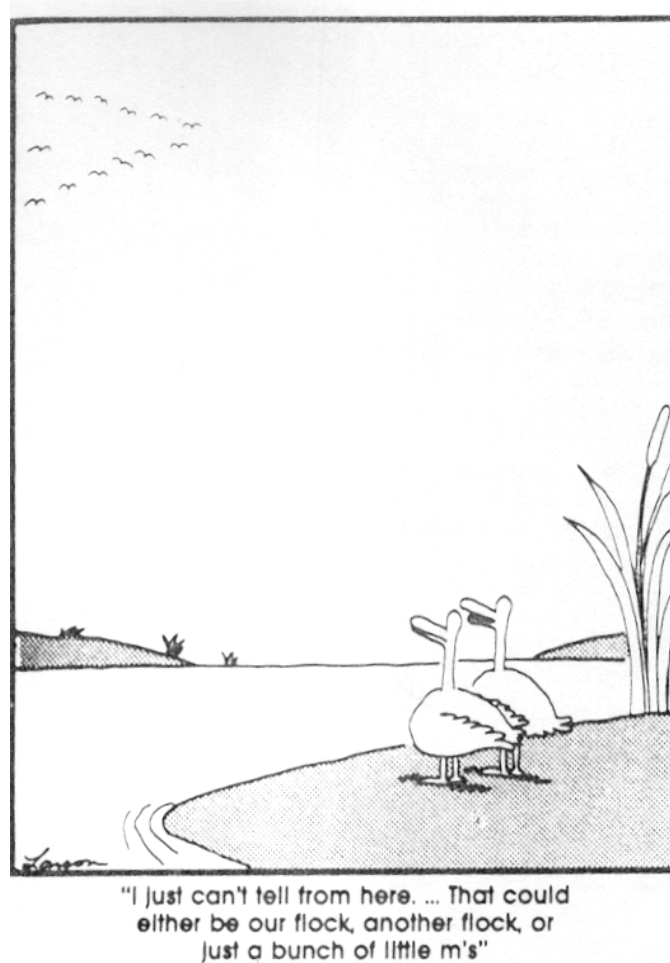
If these criteria are met then, according to the devil's advocate at least, much scepticism is generated as to whether realism in Old Testament theology can be validly maintained. To be sure, if there are enough parallels and traces of marked syncretism and superstition so that the depiction of Yahweh is demonstrably more the result of creative construction as opposed to actual revelation, realism collapses. The chances that Yahweh has an extra-textual counterpart must then be considered to be as slim as the possibility that El, Marduk or Zeus might actually exist.

## **5.2 PARALLELS BETWEEN OLD TESTAMENT YAHWISM AND OTHER RELIGIONS**

To show just how frequent parallels between the Old Testament texts and the discourse of other religions occur, this section will focus on various related issues.

The concern will not only be with parallels in literary motifs between the discourse of the Old Testament and that of the ancient Near East. More comprehensively, the discussions to follow will also include parallels between the Old Testament and folklore form around the world, examples of syncretism in Old Testament God-talk and, last but not least, references to magic, divination and other superstitious elements in the Hebrew Bible.

### 5.2.1 A parallel chart: Old Testament vs. ancient Near East



In its discussion of the first topic on the agenda – i.e. parallels between the literature of the Old Testament and motifs found in the scriptures of its ancient Near Eastern neighbours, the devil's advocate has constructed an adaptation of a list of parallels found in Matthews and Benjamin (1997:221-234). This rather lengthy list features a substantial though not delineation of parallels between the Old Testament and various

ancient Near Eastern texts.

Not all parallels noted here need be considered as being purely “mythological” in the sense of the word as earlier defined by the devil’s advocate. Neither does each and every parallel necessarily imply that the scenario involved is *ipso facto* fictitious. Nevertheless, the mere existence of many of these parallels should make not only the historian (cf. chapter 7 later in this study) but also the philosopher of religion suspicious of realism.

Given the presence of these pagan ancient Near Eastern parallels to motifs found in the Old Testament discourse, it may well be justified to conclude that the particular textual scenarios could be literary constructs rather than facts referring to characters and events that had extra-textual counterparts. Moreover, if a particular scenario featuring the parallel is indeed fictitious, it follows that the ontological status of the deity Yahweh depicted therein may be equally bereft of any counterpart in the world outside the text.

In the table to follow, column 3 (parallel) uses a number and a key word to identify six ways in which the ancient Near Eastern texts identified in column 2 (text), parallel the biblical texts listed in column 1 (citation). The parallels are based on:

- 1 = genre, e.g. creation story, flood story, law, teaching;
- 2 = vocabulary, e.g. direct or similar words or phrases;
- 3 = motif, e.g. barren wife, greed, widows & orphans, divine war;
- 4 = social institution, e.g. anthropomorphism, taboo, propaganda;
- 5 = plot, e.g. similar action in both texts;
- 6 = historical event, e.g. person, place, event.

<b>CITATION</b>	<b>TEXT</b>	<b>PARALLEL</b>
<b>GENESIS</b>		
1:1-2:4a	Story of Aqhat	5 - 7 day ritual
1:1-2	Enuma elish	1 - creation story 2 - Tehom
1:2	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story 5 - chaos
1:3	Memphis Creation Story	2 - naming
1:6-7	Enuma elish	2 - firmament
1:15-16	Enuma elish	2 - moon
1:20-21	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story 2 - living beings 3 - fiat creation
1:22	Ra and The Serpent	2 - multitude
1:26-27	Enuma elish	2 - humans
1:31-2:2	Memphis Creation Story	2 - rest
2:6-7	Ra and The Serpent	1 - creation story 2 - moisture/man
2:7	The Hymn to Aton Athrahasis	2 - breathe 1 - creation story 4 - anthropomorphism
	Story of Aqhat	2 - breath
2:7-15	Enuma elish	5 - humans 4 - anthropomorphism
4:1-26	The Story of Anubis and Bata	3 - sibling rivalry
6:11-21	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - ark
6:14	Athrahasis	2 - pitch
6:14-16	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - pitch
7:2-4,7-9	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - animals
7:11	Story of Aqhat	2 - flood story
7:11-12,17-23	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - darkness
7:13-16	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - hatch



7:24-8:3	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - aftermath
8:4	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - landing
8:5-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - release
8:20	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - sacrifice
8:21	Athrahasis	2 - smell
8:21-22	The Epic of Gilgamesh	3 - remorse
9:1-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	5 - hero's fate
9:12-17	The Epic of Gilgamesh	1 - covenant 5 - rainbow
9:20-23	Story of Aqhat	2 - drunk
10:9	Story of Aqhat	2 - hunter
14:9	Karatepe Inscription	1 - blessing 2 - creator
15:1-4	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
15:11	Story of Aqhat	5 - vultures
16:1-15	Code of Hammurabi	3 - heir 4 - surrogate
17:17	Story of Aqhat	2 - laughter
18:2	Story of Aqhat	1 - formula opening 2 - see in distance
18:6-7	Story of Aqhat	5 - meal 4 - hospitality
18:9-15	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
19:1	Story of Aqhat	2 - gate 3 - testing 4 - place of justice
21:9-21	Code of Hammurabi	3 - heir 4 - surrogate
	Story of Aqhat	1 - heroic epic 3 - contest with god
21:20-21	Story of Aqhat	2 - hunter
25:21	Story of Aqhat	5 - pray for child
25:27	The Sufferer and The Friend	3 - older vs. younger
27:38	Story of Aqhat	1 - blessing

		2 - blessing
28:10-22	Story of Keret	1 - dream theophany 5 - dream
30:1-24	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
31:45-50	Treaty (Ramses II; Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant 2 - "if you" 3 - curse
31:51-53	Treaty (Ramses II; Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant 2 - gods witness
34	Sumerian Code	5 - rape
35:17	Athrahis	2 - midwife 3 - birthing
38	Hittite Code	5 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - law (levir) 3 - heir
38:34	Story of Aqhat	5 - tear robe 4 - mourning ritual
39:7	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - seduction
39:12	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - seduction
39:17-19	The Story of Anubis and Bata	5 - deception
41:34-36,47-49	Karatepe Inscription	5 - planning 4 - propaganda
<b>EXODUS</b>		
1:16	Atrahasis	2 - birthstool
1:22-2:10	Legend of Sargon	5 - reed boat 3 - miracle survival
3:14	Ra and The Serpent	1 - proclamation 2 - "I am"
6:3	Story of Balaam	2 - Shaddai
19:10	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - washing 4 - ritual cleansing
20:12	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - law 2 - honour parents

20:15	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
20:16	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law 2 - false witnesses
21:2-11	Code of Hammurabi	2 - slavery
21:15	Code of Hammurabi	2 - strike parents
21:16	Code of Hammurabi	2 - kidnapping
21:22-23	Code of Hammurabi	2 - miscarriage
21:23-25	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion
21:28-36	Code of Hammurabi	2 - goring ox
22:2-3	Code of Hammurabi	2 - burglary
22:7-8	Code of Hammurabi	2 - stolen goods
22:16	The Sumerian Code	2 - seduce virgin
22:18	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - sorcery
22:26-27	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - law 2 - pledge garment
	Teaching of Ahikar	1 - law 2 - pledge garment
23:1-3	Code of Hammurabi	2 - false witness
30:23-33	Story of Balaam	2 - myrrh 4 - anointing ritual
<b>LEVITICUS</b>		
18:6-18	Code of Hammurabi	2 - incest 1 - decalogue
	Hittite Code	4 - marriage customs
19:11,13	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
20:10-21	Code of Hammurabi	3 - illicit sex
20:13	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - homosexuality
20:27	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - sorcery
24:19-20	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion
<b>NUMBERS</b>		
5:11-31	Code of Hammurabi	2 - adultery 4 - ordeal

22:28-30	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - fable 5 - talking animal
33:52	Karatepe Inscription	2 - molten image
<b>DEUTERONOMY</b>		
5:19	Code of Hammurabi	2 - theft
6:4-8	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition 2 - fill
10:18	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law 3 - widows & orphans
15:12-18	Code of Hammurabi	2 - slavery
19:16-19	Code of Hammurabi	2 - false witness
19:21	Code of Hammurabi	2 - talion
21:1-9	Story of Aqhat	4 - forgiveness ritual 5 - burial
21:18-21	Sumerian Code Teachings of Ahikar	2 - prodigal son 1 - curse 2 - honour parents
22:1-4	Code of Hammurabi	2 - property 4 - social response
22:22	Code of Hammurabi	2 - adultery
22:23-24	Sumerian Code	2 - raped virgin 4 - gate/justice place
22:23-27	Code of Hammurabi	2 - raped virgin 4 - justice of place
24:7	Code of Hammurabi	2 - kidnapping
25:5-10	Hittite Code	1 - law (will) 2 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - law (levir)
25:11-12	Middle Assyrian Code	2 - genitalia 4 - female taboo
27:20,22-23	Code of Hammurabi	2 - incest
32:35	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - law 2 - pledge garment

**JOSHUA**

2:6	The Gezer Almanac	2 - flax
6	The Story of Keret	5 - seven day siege
6:17-21	Mesha Stele	3 - divine war 5 - herem
6:24	Mesha Stele	3 - divine war 5 - herem
6:26	The Story of Aqhat	1 - curse 2 - rebuild
7:20-21	Diary of Wen-Amon	4 - sacred property
8:1-17	Mesha Stele	1 - exhortation 3 - divine war
8:24-27	Mesha Stele	3 - divine 5 - herem
10:1-28	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal 3 - divine war 5 - alliance
10:42	Mesha Stele	2 - king 3 - divine war
11:1-12	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal 3 - divine war 5 - alliance
11:6-9	Annals of Shalmanezer III	1 - annal 5 - foot
19:8	The Arad Ostraca	6 - Ramoth-negeb

**JUDGES**

4:5	Story of Aqhat	2 - tree/justice 4 - justice site
4:17-22	Story of Aqhat	3 - revenge 5 - murder
4:19	Story of Aqhat	4 - hospitality 5 - drink request

5:27	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - victim falls
7:12	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - locusts
9:8-15	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - fable 5 - taunt
11:30-31	Story of Keret	1 - oath
13:2-3	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
16:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - power removed 5 - gate posts
19:22	Karatepe Inscription	2 - trouble makers
21:25	Visions of Neferti	2 - selfishness 3 - anarchy

## **RUTH**

2:2-9	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - law 2 - widows and orphans 5 - widow gleaning
2:23	The Gezer Almanac	2 - harvest
3:3	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - anoint hair
4	Hittite Code	1 - law 5 - levir
	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - levir
4:1	Story of Aqhat	2 - gate 4 - site of justice

## **1 SAMUEL**

1:2-17	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
1:21	Karatepe Inscription	2 - sacrifice
3:3-4	Atrahasis	1 - theophany 5 - dream
4:20	Atrahasis	2 - midwife
6:13	Gezer Almanac	2 - reaping
9:11	Story of Balaam	2 - seer
10:6	The Mari Prophecies	1 - prophecy 2 - possession

12:14-15	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition 2 - king's duty 3 - obedience to god
14:24	Story of Keret	1 - oath
15:1-6	Story of Keret	5 - son revolts
16:14-18	Diary of Wen-Amon	5 - music
17:8-10	Enuma elish	1 - taunt 5 - single combat
18:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - song of praise
21:14	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - insanity 4 - mental taboo
24:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - legal petition 4 - hem = identity
24:5	The Mari Prophecies	2 - hem 4 - identity
26:19	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - scribal address
28:3	Middle Assyrian Code	5 - witch
30:27	The Arad Ostraca	6 - Ramoth-negeb
<b>2 SAMEUL</b>		
1:21	Story of Aqhat	2 - drought
2:18-23	Enuma elish	1 - taunt 5 - single combat
5:6-8	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
5:8	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
7:1-17	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - propaganda 5 - house for god
7:13	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - covenant 4 - divine right rule
8:2	Enuma elish	5 - foot on foe
10:6-8	Annals of Shalmanezar III	1 - annal 5 - alliance
12:15-17	Story of Aqhat	5 - seven day ritual
13:4-6	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - fake illness

14:1-20	The Lament for Ur	1 - law 3 - widows and orphans
15:1-6	The Story of Keret	5 - son's revolt
15:2	The Story of Aqhat	2 - gate 4 - place of justice
15:3-5	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition 4 - king and law
15:4	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law 2 - petitioners
15:14	Story of Keret	5 - king's flight
<b>1 KINGS</b>		
2:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - grey head
3:4-15	Story of Keret	1 - dream theophany
5:3-6	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - house for god
5:10-11	Diary of Wen-Amon	5 - cedars cut 6 - cedars
9:15-20	Karatepe Inscription	1 - annal 4 - propaganda 5 - fortresses
12:4	Cyrus	2 - forced labour 4 - social unrest
13:2	Visions of Neferti	1 - prophecy 5 - southern king
16:23-24	Mesha Stele	6 - Omri / Samaria
17:12-16	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - oil 4 - hospitality
18:36-45	Stories of Baal and Anat	5 - god brings rain
18:42	Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - subjection 5 - face in knees
19:19	The Gezer Calendar	2 - plowing
20:1-2	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
21:1-4	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - idols 4 - use of idols / gain



22:10	Story of Aqhat	2 - threshing floor 4 - place of justice
<b>2 KINGS</b>		
3:15	Diary of Wen-Amon	1 - prophecy 5 - ecstatic
	The Mari Prophecies	1 - prophecy 5 - ecstatic
3:20	The Arad Ostraca	6 - “Way of Edom”
4:8-17	Story of Aqhat	3 - barren wife
4:34-37	Story of Keret	1 - miracle story 5 - cure
5:10-14	Story of Keret	1 - miracle story 5 - cure
9:1-10:33	Black Obelisk (Shalmaneser III)	6 - Jehu
9:16-26	Treaty (Ramses II / Hattusilis III)	1 - covenant 2 - chariots 4 - reciprocity
9:36	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - curse 5 - dog eat corpse
14:9	Teachings of Ahikar	1 - fable 5 - taunt
15:17-22	Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III	6 - tribute
17:3-6	Annals of Sargon II	6 - fall of Samaria
17:24	Karatepe Inscription	5 - deportation
18-19	Annals of Sennacherib	6 - siege
18:13-37	Diary of Wen-Amon	1 - threat
18:39-37	Enuma elish	1 - taunt
20:20	Siloam Inscription	6 - tunnel
24:1-17	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - siege / fall
24:10	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - siege
24:13-16	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - loot
24:17	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - new king

**1 CHRONICLES**

17:1-14                      Stories of Baal and Anat                      5 - house for god

**2 CHRONICLES**

32:30                      Siloam Inscription                      6 - tunnel

**EZRA**

1:1-4                      Cylinder of Cyrus                      6 - temple funds

6:1-15                      Cylinder of Cyrus                      6 - temple

6:3-5                      Cylinder of Cyrus                      6 - temple

6:15                      Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II                      2 - month

**NEHEMIAH**

1:1                      Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II                      2 - month

8:18                      Story of Aqhat                      5 - seven day ritual

**ESTHER**

2:2                      Egyptian Love Songs                      2 - anoint hair

3:7                      Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II                      2 - month

**JOB**

1:13-19                      Story of Keret                      5 - death of family

1:20                      Story of Aqhat                      4 - mourning ritual

5 - tearing robe

3:17-19                      The Sufferer and The Soul                      2 - death's release

5:26                      The Farmer and The Courts                      1 - analogy

3 - stages of life

7:1-10                      The Farmer and The Courts                      1 - analogy

3 - stages of life

7:13-14                      Lament for Ur                      2 - bed's comforts

8:5-7                      The Sufferer and The Friend                      2 - good to come

10:9                      Stories of Baal and Anat                      2 - dust of grave

10:20-22                      The Eloquent Peasant                      2 - afterlife

		4 - concept of death
11:7	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - depths of god
14:7-14	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - afterlife
		4 - concept of death
15:2-4	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - unwise words
15:5	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - lying mouth
18:5-21	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked perish
20:20	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - eyes
21:2-3	The Sufferer and The Friend	1 - address mode
21:7-16	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked prosper
24:12	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - refuse to hear
38:16	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - springs of sea
39:5-8	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - wild ass
42:1-6	Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - submission
		5 - hero surrenders
42:10-15	Story of Keret	5 - new family
 <b>PSALMS</b>		
1	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - teaching
		2 - tree
8:1	Hymn to Aton	1 - hymn of praise
		2 - how majestic
8:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - child
		3 - unexpected wisdom
11:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
16:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - glad heart
22:22-26	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - hymn of praise
24:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - exhortation
		2 - lift up heads
25:17	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - legal petition
29:10	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - source of flood
31:15	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - worry
39:6	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
41:13	Lament for Ur	1 - doxology

42:1	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - spring / deer
49:5	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
49:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - lure of death
52:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - sharp words
52:7	Teachings of Amenemope	3 - greed
62:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - riches
		3 - greed
	Teachings of Ahikar	3 - greed
64:2-7	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
68:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - cloud rider
	Story of Aqhat	2 - cloud rider
72:17	Karatepe Inscription	1 - blessing
		2 - name endures
74:13-14	Enuma elish	2 - dragon
95:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
96:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
97:9	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - god is king
		3 - divine king
101:8	Karatepe Inscription	2 - destroy wicked
		4 - civil order
103:14	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - creation story
		2 - clay shapes
		4 - anthropomorphism
104:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - cloud rider
	Story of Aqhat	2 - cloud rider
104:4-11	Hymn to Aton	2 - birds
104:20-21	Hymn to Aton	2 - darkness
104:22-23	Hymn to Aton	2 - daily schedule
104:24	Hymn to Aton	2 - sole power
104:25-26	Hymn to Aton	2 - sea
104:27	Hymn to Aton	2 - seasons
104:29-30	Hymn to Aton	2 - reliance on god

124:1-5	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - litany 2 - "If not"
125:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - broken sceptre
126:4	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - wadis
129:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - plowing 3 - affliction image
131:1	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - covet
132:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - footstool
132:18	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - shame
139:13	Hymn to Aton	2 - fertility
141:7	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - mouth of death
145:13	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - eternal kingdom

#### PROVERBS

1:8	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	4 - title of teacher
1:12	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - death swallows
1:17	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - saying form
2:1-5	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - address form 2 - seek wisdom
2:4	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good advice
6:1-5	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - pay debt
6:2	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - lies
6:16-19	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - $x / x+1$ 3 - number progression
6:23-26	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
6:24	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - women
6:27-29	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
7:24-27	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - lust
9:1	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - seven pillars
9:17	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
10:1	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
11:21	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - justice
12:4	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good wife
13:24	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - discipline

14:5	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - false witness
15:16	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - “Better” proverb 3 - be satisfied
15:17	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - “Better” proverb 3 - be satisfied
16:8	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - god’s majesty
16:9	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - “Better” proverb 3 - be satisfied
16:27	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - greed
17:1	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - “Better” proverb 2 - eating 3 - be satisfied
17:5	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - laugh / stricken
17:13	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - evil
19-22	Teachings of Amenemope	1 – “Better” proverb 3 - be satisfied
19:18	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - discipline
19:21	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - god’s majesty
20: 4	The Gezer Calendar	2 - planting
20:9	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - hypocrisy
20:20	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - honour parents
21:6	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - admonition
22:17-18	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - riches 2 - heart
22:20	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition 2 - study
22:20-21	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - thirty
22:22	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - rob poor
22:24	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - fool
22:25	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - bad company
22:26-27	Teachings of Amenemope	1 - admonition 2 - forgive debt
22:28	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - landmark 4 - property taboo

22:29	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - skill
23:1	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - table manners
23:1-3	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - table manners
23:4	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - strive / greed
23:5	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - riches / wings
23:6-7	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - false oaths
23:8	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - vomit 3 - waste
23:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - landmark 4 - property taboo
23:11	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - please ruler 4 - property taboo
25:11	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
25:13	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - reliability
25:15b	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - king's tongue
25:21-22	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - feed hungry
26:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - word
26:7	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	1 - analogy
27:1	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - worry
27:3	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - debt
29:13	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - poor and rich 3 - fate
29:14-16	Story of Keret	1 - law 3 - widows and orphans
31:10-11 + 27-31	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - good wife
<b>ECCLESIASTES</b>		
3:1-10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - time 3 - fate
3:3	Enuma elish	2 - power
3:12	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - be content
3:16	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - inconsistencies 3 - anarchy
3:20	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - dust of grave

5:2	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - word
5:10	Teachings of Amenemope	2 - strife / greed
6:2-3	Teachings of Ptah-Hotep	2 - wealth
6:10	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - obey authority
9:7	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - wine
10:9	Teachings of Ahikar	2 - woodcutter
		3 - reversal
11:2	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - x / x+1
		3 - number progression

### CANTICLES

2:5	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - love sick
2:10-13	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - fertile land
4:10	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - love / wine
5:1	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - intoxication
5:2-6	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - door / latch
		3 - double entendre
5:8	Egyptian Love Songs	5 - love sick
7:5	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - hair snare
		3 - trap
7:13	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - mandrake
7:13-14	Egyptian Love Songs	2 - mandrake
		3 - love garden

### ISAIAH

5:6	The Gezer Almanac	2 - pruning vines
5:8-23	Lament for Ur	1 - prophecy
		2 - Woe!
5:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - death's mouth
6:10	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - see / not see
9:3	The Gezer Almanac	2 - harvest
10:2	Story of Keret	1 - law
		3 - widows & orphans
10:6	Story of Aqhat	2 - trample



10:15	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - obey authority
18:5	The Gezer Almanac	2 - pruning vines
22:21	The Karatepe Inscriptions	2 - father
29:16	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story 2 - potter's clay 4 - anthropomorphism
45:1	The Cylinder of Cyrus	4 - propaganda 5 - chosen king
45:6	The Karatepe Inscription	1 - realm formula 2 - rising sun 4 - universal rule
45:9	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story 2 - potter's clay 4 - anthropomorphism
46:4	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - grey hair
51:17-18	The Story of Aqhat	5 - solace a drunk
63:3-6	The Stories of Baal and Anat	3 - divine war 5 - wading in blood
64:9	The Teaching of Amenemope	1 - creation story 2 - potter's clay 4 - anthropomorphism
<b>JEREMIAH</b>		
1:10	Enuma elish	1 - investiture 2 - power
7:2-4	The Story of Anubis and Bata	1 - law 4 - oath before god 5 - argue case
7:33	The Annals of Shalmanezer III	5 - unburied bodies
9:4-5	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - neighbour 3 - anarchy
9:21-22	The Lament of Ur	5 - dead in squares
11:5	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - land / honey
11:6	The Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree

11:19	The Lament of Ur	2 - lamb / slaughter
	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - lamb / slaughter
12:1	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - wicked prosper
13:23	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - professions
		3 - order in life
15:7	The Lament of Ur	2 - gate
		4 - site of justice
	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - winnowing
16:4	The Lament of Ur	5 - unburied bodies
16:6	The Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - destruction ritual
		5 - mourning
17:5-8	The Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree
18:2-6	Atrahasis	1 - creation story
		2 - potter's clay
		4 - anthropomorphism
21:4-5	The Teaching of Ahikar	2 - shoot bow
26:16-19	The Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - immune prophets
		5 - immunity
26:20-22	The Lachish Letters	6 - Elnathan
30:4-5	The Lament of Ur	1 - petition
31:38-40	The Lament of Ur	1 - petition
		2 - restoration
34:1-7	The Cylinder of Cyrus	6 - Jerusalem
34:16-7	The Lachish Letters	6 - Azekah / Lachish
37:1	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	6 - Zedekiah
40:10	The Gezer Almanac	2 - reaping fruit
51:2	The Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - winnowing
		4 - divine justice
51:59	The Arad Ostraca	6 - invasion of Judah

#### LAMENTATIONS

2:10	The Story of Balaam	2 - garment
		3 - reversal
		4 - mourning ritual

3:2	The Story of Balaam	2 - darkness
4:3-4	The Lament of Ur	2 - daughter 3 - anarchy
4:5	The Lament of Ur	5 - dead revellers
<b>EZEKIEL</b>		
8:14	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - mourning ritual
9:4	Visions of Neferti	2 - regret
17:5	Teaching of Amenemope	2 - tree
22:7	The Story of Keret	1 - law 3 - widows and orphans
27:30	Stories of Baal and Anat	4 - destruction ritual 5 - mourning
37	Lament of Ur	1 - prophecy 3 - restoration
37:1-2	Annals of Shalmanezzer III	2 - battlefield
37:9	Story of Aqhat	2 - breath of life
<b>DANIEL</b>		
4:6	Visions of Neferti	5 - wise men
9:16-19	Visions of Neferti	1 - plea 2 - restoration
11:2-4	Visions of Neferti	2 - divided land
11:14	Visions of Neferti	2 - take up arms
11:20-24	Visions of Neferti	2 - weak rulers
12:1	Visions of Neferti	5 - triumphant king
<b>HOSEA</b>		
6:2	Teaching of Ahikar	2 - $x / x+1$ 3 - number progression
6:19	Teaching of Amenemope	2 - landmark
10:4	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - truth
11:1	The Mari Prophecies	2 - "raised you" 3 - father / son

13:14-15	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - drying winds
14:9	Teaching of Amenemope	1 - admonition 2 - guidance
<b>JOEL</b>		
2:10	Story of Balaam	2 - darkness
<b>AMOS</b>		
2:6-7	The Story of Keret	1 - law 2 - hear poor
2:7	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - trample needy
2:8	Yavne Yam Inscription	1 - law 2 - pledge / garment
4:3	Lament for Ur	2 - breached wall
5:10	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - honest quieted
5:10-13	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - criminals 3 - anarchy
5:12	The Farmer and The Courts	1 - law 2 - bribes
	The Story of Keret	2 - failed justice
5:14	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - evil for good
5:14-15	The Sufferer and The Soul	2 - evil & good 3 - anarchy
5:15	The Mari Prophecies	1 - admonition 2 - justice
5:16	Lament for Ur	1 - lament 2 - "Alas!"
5:18-20	Lament for Ur	3 - "Day of lord"
8:1	The Gezer Almanac	2 - summer fruit
8:4-6	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - false scales
<b>MICAH</b>		
4:9	The Epic of Gilgamesh	2 - travail
6:3	The El Amarna Letters	1 - petition

		2 - what done?
6:8	The Farmer and The Courts	3 - humility
	The Sufferer and The Friend	2 - “do justice”
6:11	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - false scales
6:12	The Farmer and The Courts	2 - lying tongue

**HABAKKUK**

3:17	Stories of Baal and Anat	2 - produce dies
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**ZECHARIAH**

1:3	Stories of Baal and Anat	1 - exhortation
		2 - “return”
7:1	Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II	2 - month
12:1-9	Lament for Ur	2 - “In that day”
		3 - Day of the lord

**MALACHI**

1:11	The Karatepe Inscription	1 - realm formula
		2 - rising sun
		4 - universal rule

Not all these parallels are of equal significance for the purposes of the present chapter. Some are more relevant than others when it comes to the reconstruction of the case against realism and the arguments against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament. Parallels like Utnapishtim and Noah or Sargon and Moses are of much more interest then, for example, parallels between Canticles and Egyptian Love songs or between Lamentations and the Lament for Ur.

Nevertheless, all have been included to give the reader an idea of the way the devil’s advocate views the Old Testament: It is not divine revelation referring to extra-textual reality. Rather, it is a variety of all-too-human texts with no more relation to reality than the writings of other religions that long ago went the way of the dinosaurs.

According to the devil’s advocate, Yahweh-as-depicted in texts with parallels to other (older) religions (suggesting creative constructivist practices on the part of the Old

Testament authors) does not have an ontological status substantially different from that of any of the other deities depicted in such parallel scenarios. In short, Yahweh as thus depicted is a character of fiction and does not exist.

### **5.2.2 Other parallels between Old Testament texts and folklore from around the world**

The parallels in the previous section are generally limited to the Near East. There is no reference to possible parallels with other cultures in the vicinity and even the Near Eastern parallels are incomplete. A more detailed discussion of parallels between the Old Testament and various other cultures all over the world and over a larger time span can be found in the works of Frazer (1918) and Gaster (1969).

Gaster (1969:22-319) discusses the possible allusions to no less than 250 parallels between the Old Testament texts and myths, legends and customs of other peoples in both the immediate surroundings and elsewhere. The study of Gaster (1969) indicates not only possible sources of Old Testament folklore but also shows how a knowledge of the folklore and the myths, legends and customs of other peoples can assist in understanding the Old Testament texts. Many Old Testament texts that seem straightforward and orthodox turn out to be far more sinister or alien than the average dogma saturated modern reader could possibly imagine (cf. Gaster 1969:11).

If Gaster's identifications of allusions in the Old Testament texts to mythological motifs, legends and customs of other peoples are correct, then it is clear that 99.9% of people who read the Bible will never be able to appreciate the alien nature and contents of the Old Testament texts. Without the background knowledge of folklore, these sincere and faithful believers will never realise the extent to which their alleged "divine revelation" and "Word of God" is filled with superstition, fiction and everything orthodox theology always believed was only part of pagan religion (cf. also Harwood 1992:90 and passim).

The following are but a few examples of international folkloristic elements in the Old Testament identified by Gaster (1969):

- Creating humans as representatives of the gods (cf. Gen 1:26-27)
- Creating humans as gardeners (cf. Gen 2:5b)
- Creation as a birth process (cf. Gen 2:4b, Ps 90:2)
- Creation as a war (cf. Ps 74:13-14; Job 26:12; Isa 51:9-10)
- The chance at immortality (cf. Gen 3:22-24)
- Extraordinary human life-span before the universal flood (cf. Gen 1-5)
- The loss of the golden age of innocence (cf. Gen 3:6-19)
- The blood crying from the earth (cf. Gen 4:10)
- The divine human offspring (cf. Gen 6:1-4)
- The power of curses (cf. Gen 9:20-25)
- The call of an individual to sire a nation (cf. Gen 12:1-2)
- Stairway to the heavens (cf. Gen 28:12)
- Wrestling with a deity (cf. Gen 32:22-33)
- Demons depart at dawn (cf. Gen 32:26)
- The barren wife motif (cf. Gen 12-35)
- The younger son rising to power (cf. Gen 12-50)
- Living a dream (cf. Gen 36-50)
- The “Bull” of Jacob (cf. Gen 49:24)
- The magical power of names and the need for secrecy (cf. Ex 3:13-14; cf. also Gen 32:27-28; Judg 13:17-18)
- Plagues as a result of divine disfavour (cf. Ex 9-12)
- The divine mountain (cf. Ex 19; 1 Kgs 19)
- The divine origin of the law (cf. Ex 19-20)
- The earth swallowing offenders (cf. Num 16:28-34)
- Bells as warning system (cf. Ex 28:35)
- Desert as demonic wasteland (cf. Lev 16:8-22)
- Food from heaven (cf. Ex 16; Num 11:4-35)
- Water from the rock (cf. Ex 17:1-7)
- Fortune as a result of divine favour (cf. Job 1:1-10; cf. also Gen 39:2-4; 2 Sam 6:11-12)
- The magical manipulation of luminaries (cf. Josh 10:12-14)
- Defeat and victory as signs of divine (dis) favour (cf. Judges:passim)

- Stars as angels/gods/army (cf. Judg 5:21; Isa 14:12)
- The magical power in a hero's hair (cf. Judg 13-16)
- The necromantic consultation (cf. 1 Sam 28:7-21)
- Taboos on touching holy objects (cf. 2 Sam 6:6-9)
- The king's conduct affects the soil (cf. 2 Sam 21:1-9)
- The sin of a census (cf. 2 Sam 24:1-25)
- Asylum at the altar (cf. 1 Kgs 1:50)
- Ravens bringing food (cf. 1 Kgs 17:3-6)
- Divine deception (cf. 1 Kgs 13:11-34, 22:1-40)
- Ascension to heaven in a chariot of fire (cf. 2 Kgs 2:1-12)
- Human animal hybrid divine beings (cf. Isa 6:2)
- The birth of a divine child (cf. Isa 9:5-6)
- Kings and fallen divinities (cf. Isa 14:9-20)
- The divine assembly in the north (cf. Isa 14:12-14)
- The rebel constellations (cf. Isa 24:21)
- The chaos dragon (cf. Isa 27:1)
- Ruins as haunts of demons (cf. Isa 34:14)
- Fiery stones in the garden of the gods (cf. Ezek 28:12)
- The storm and the fish (cf. Jon 1:3-17)
- Pestilence and destruction following in the wake of the god (cf. Hab 3:5)
- Coming from and returning to mother earth (cf. Job 1:21)
- The sons of god (cf. Job 1:6)
- The wager (cf. Job 1-2)
- The shades beneath the waters (cf. Job 26:5)
- Sea as force of chaos (cf. Job 38:10-11)
- The gates of death (cf. Job 38:17)
- The fire-breathing dragon (cf. Job 41:10-11)
- The final judgement through fire (cf. Mal 4:1)
- The winged sun (cf. Mal 4:2)
- The divine adoption of kings (cf. Ps 2:7)
- The rivers of the netherworld (cf. Ps 18:5; Job 33:18, 36:12)
- The god-king (cf. Ps 45:7-8)



- The far reaches of the north and the source of the rivers (cf. Ps 48:3)
- Creation through theomachy (cf. Ps 74:13-17; Isa 51:9-10)
- Food of angels (cf. Ps 78:25)
- The celestial Zion (cf. Ps 87:1-2)
- The council of the gods (cf. Ps 82:1)
- The winged soul (cf. Ps 90:10)
- The coven of demons (cf. Ps 91:5-6)
- The book of fate/life (cf. Ex 32:32; Ps 69:29, 139:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21)
- Heaven as a garment (cf. Ps 104:2)
- Aluqah the vampire (cf. Prov 30:15)
- The tell tale bird (cf. Eccl 10:20)

As is apparent from this list of parallels to myth, legend and folklore from around the world, there is no shortage of these in the Old Testament texts. What is of particular interest for the purpose of this chapter, however, are the possible philosophical implications of such parallels in terms of realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts. As part of an attempt to spell these out, it might be prudent to anticipate possible objections to the devil's advocate's utilisation of these parallels for its own sinister purposes.

It is well known that many scholars, especially if they are conservative, might object to the listing of parallels and would claim that the alleged parallels are not such at all. It might be pointed out that there are substantial differences between the Old Testament and the myths of other religions and that the probability of borrowing or plagiarism cannot always be considered as being verifiable (cf. Eichrodt 1961:219; Archer 1992:33).

This objection is, however, upon closer scrutiny and at least in terms of the present context, irrelevant. It does not matter if the parallels are the result of dependency or because of reference to a common source or even if there is no meaningful relation between the biblical and extra-biblical materials. Whatever the relationship between the biblical and extra-biblical texts with regard to parallel motifs, if the story in the Old Testament features the particular motifs and is, technically speaking, fictitious,

then so is the character Yahweh whose person has become intertwined with the same motifs.

In addition, it should be emphasised that it is of little relevance whether the use of fiction and myth was cultural convention or seemingly justified from within the Semitic mindset. The fact remains that if the story is fictitious and demonstrably so, so is Yahweh depicted as a character therein. No matter what profound theological or religious “truth” is being communicated. No matter whether foreign mythological motifs have been completely reinterpreted, demythologised, modified and reapplied. If Yahweh never actually said or did what the story suggests he did then, as depicted, he has no exact corresponding extra-textual counterpart. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted in a story filled with folklorist motifs does not exist.

Moreover, it does not matter if a “mythical” Yahweh really did do what the text claims in the space of a “symbolic universe” or the “story world”/“world of the text” or in the minds/imaginings of his worshippers. From an ontological point of view, even if the language were meant to be understood as “metaphorical” and even though it might be “true” as a parable can be true, yet fiction, the ontological status of the character as depicted in the particular discourse remains fictitious.

Consequently, pointing out the differences between the mythological motifs in the Old Testament and those in parallel to it changes nothing with regard to the ontological status of the character Yahweh partaking in the mythical and fictional version of whatever real event may have actually happened. Even if some grounds remain for believing in the existence of an extra-textual counterpart for Yahweh, realism with regard to these particular depictions of the deity is as problematic as ever. No matter to what extent a particular mythological motif has been adapted and recontextualised to fit in with what was supposed to be revelation in actual historical events.

Then again, some scholars might believe that the superstitious elements in the text’s depiction of Yahweh are no problem given the fact that little more should be expected from the ancient people within their own cultural limited worldview which differed greatly from that of the modern or post-modern West. Once again, as was emphasised

earlier, objections of this sort, apart from stating the obvious, are irrelevant in the attempt to salvage realism.

The present critique against the biblical authors has nothing to do with whether they knew science or not. Rather, it concerns the possibility regarding whether or not they told stories about Yahweh that never actually happened. The problem here is not merely that such forms of storytelling may have been a common convention. Neither is the dilemma related to whether the stories contain errant and superstitious beliefs about the world merely on the part of its culturally conditioned human characters.

What is problematic is, as pointed out in the previous chapter, the fact that the biblical authors claimed that a supposedly informed and virtually omniscient creator deity called Yahweh revealed himself and his own ideas about the world to someone, when the alleged revelations themselves contain superstitious cultural folklore. In other words, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the cognitive adherence to the reality of myth and superstition is not limited to the fallible human characters depicted in the text. Instead, treating myth and superstition as facts is embarrassingly part and parcel of the deity's own mindset.

As already pointed out, if this is the case then either Yahweh himself must be ignorant and his knowledge culturally and historically determined. This, of course, given his alleged role and status in the great scheme of things, is altogether impossible. Or, alternatively, no real Yahweh ascribes to such beliefs. The depictions in which he actually does appear to do so are but the fictitious constructs of his human speechwriters.

However, if this is the case then, as noted earlier, whatever God there may be, Yahweh as depicted in the text is essentially a literary construct, a human projection and is *ipso facto* a character of fiction with no extra-textual counterpart. In other words, whether we believe that a supposedly existing extra-textual divinity called Yahweh does or does not himself believe in fictitious entities and events, the implication either way seems to be that the deity depicted in the text does not exist.

### **5.2.3 Syncretism in Old Testament Yahwism**

Comparing Yahweh with other mythical deities such as Zeus or Baal may not be as far-fetched as some people with little knowledge of comparative religion may suppose. Even so, the ontological implications of the phenomenon of syncretism in Old Testament religion are seldom made explicit by those who dabble in comparative mythology. In this section, a short introductory overview will be provided to demonstrate why traces of marked syncretism in the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism may be problematic for realism in Old Testament theology.

#### **5.2.3.1 Similarities in the depictions of Yahweh and the gods of the ancient Near East**

Many studies have demonstrated what appears to be marked syncretism in the God-talk of Old Testament religion (cf. Smith 2001:10-12). The works of scholars such as Smith (1990, 2001), De Moor (1997), Van der Toorn (1999), Day (2000) and others, have proven beyond reasonable doubt that the profile of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts appears to be a something of a hybrid construction. The ways in which the nature and attributes of Yahweh are articulated seem indubitably based on motifs from neighbouring Canaanite mythology (cf. also Albright 1968:02; Gibson 1977:passim).

Apparently, in their attempt to depict the god Yahweh, the authors from the Old Testament were not simply describing a unique entity based on what they knew from actual divine revelation or inspiration. Instead, it can be demonstrated that these people reconstructed a chimerical character for the deity that has more in common with the myths of Canaan than both the Old Testament authors and orthodox believers who like to believe.

It is therefore rather ironic that Yahweh was frequently depicted as being unduly obsessed with being recognised as being unique and completely unlike any of the abominable deities of the Canaanites. However, when it comes to his alleged revelation, the way in which Yahweh thinks of himself and the modes of his revelation seldom succeed in providing anything other than what was already believed

regarding the deities of Canaanite myths and legends.

Consider the following ways in which the character of Yahweh appears to be nothing more than a watered down version of his predecessors in the Promised Land (cf. Day 2000:13-41, 68-90).

a) Parallels between Yahweh and El

- There is no explicit and direct polemic in the Old Testament against the god El (cf. also Smith 1990:30).
- The Patriarchs apparently worshipped a Canaanite deity called El (cf. Gen 12-36; Josh 24).
- The divinity referred to in the theophoric suffix in the name Israel is El (cf. Gen 32:33, 35:10).
- Yahweh is often referred to as El (with or without qualification) (cf. Gen 17:1, Deut 6:2, Job 3-31 and passim).
- Yahweh, like El, is called the "Bull" (not "mighty one") (of Jacob) (cf. Gen 49:24; Ps 132:5).
- Like El, Yahweh is described as being a creator, a shepherd and a kind and merciful father (cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 23; Hos 11:8-9).
- Like El, Yahweh is depicted as an aged anthropomorphic deity (cf. Dan 7:13).
- Like El, Yahweh has a divine council that surrounds his throne (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20-23; Isa 6:3; Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:5; Job 1:6).
- Yahweh, like El, is called the father of humanity (cf. Jer 3:19; Mal 2:10).

- Yahweh, like El, lives at the source of the rivers amid the cosmic flood (cf. Ps 47:5; Isa 33:21; Ezek 47:1; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8).
- Yahweh, like El, is often depicted as dwelling in a tent (cf. Ps 15:1; 27:5; etc.).
- In actual historical pre-exilic Israelite religion, Yahweh, like El, was often worshipped as the head of a pantheon with Asherah as his consort (cf. Smith 1990:32).

b) Parallels between the depictions of Yahweh and Baal

- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as a storm deity (cf. Ex 19-20; 1 Kgs 18; Ps 29, Jer 14:22).
- Yahweh like Baal, has thunder as his voice (cf. Ex 19:19, 20:18, 24:12; Deut 5:21, 33:2; Judg 5:4; Ps 18:13; 1 Sam 7:10; Isa 30:27; Am 1:2; Ps 29:3; Job 37:5; 38:34).
- Yahweh, like Baal, hurls the lightning as like a spear or shoots it like an arrow (cf. Ps 29:7; Job 37:12-13; 38:25; etc.).
- Yahweh, like Baal, is designated as a rider of the clouds (cf. Ps 18:13; Isa 19:1).
- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as a son of El (cf. Deut 32:8-9?; Job 1:6?).
- Yahweh, like Baal, defeated the serpent Leviathan (Ug. *Lotan*) (cf. Pss 74:14; 89:11; Job 26:12; Isa 27:1).
- Yahweh, like Baal, had a conflict with Yam (the sea) (cf. Ex 15:1-12; Pss 89:10, 104:7, 136:13; Job 38:10-11).
- Yahweh, like Baal, is sometimes depicted in the form of a bull/calf (cf. Gen 49:24; Ex 32:4; 1 Kgs 12:28).

- Yahweh, like Baal, is often referred to as Elyon, “Most High” (cf. Gen 14:18, Num 24:16).
- Yahweh, like Baal, has a divine cosmic mountain in the far north (Zaphon) (cf. Ps 48:3; Isa 14:13).
- Yahweh, like Baal, is depicted as victorious over Mot (death) and is designated “the living God” (cf. Isa 26:19; Sam-Kgs:passim; Ps 42:3; etc.).
- Yahweh, like Baal, is called "Lord" (Baal/Adon) (cf. 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Chron 8:33,34; 14:7 and OT passim).

These parallels do not exhaust the affinities between Yahweh and the Canaanite deities. The studies by Smith (1990), Keel & Uehlinger (1998), Van der Toorn (1999), Day (2000) and others also contain detailed discussions on allusions in Old Testament God-talk to other Canaanite divinities such as Resheph, the Rephaim, etc.

There also exists a substantial quantity of research demonstrating the existence of numerous other parallels between Old Testament depictions of Yahweh and the gods of the other non-Canaanite nations of ancient Near East e.g. Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, etc. (cf. e.g. Keel 1978, Bostrom 1990; Taylor 1993; Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Smith 1990, 2001; Van der Toorn 1999).

There are several dilemmas for realism given the existence of such marked syncretism:

1. The syncretistic features in the depiction of Yahweh are *older* than Yahwism.
2. These pagan depictions are not believed to be the result of actual divine revelation.
3. The pagan deities to whom the particular features were ascribed are considered to

be non-existent.

4. The character of Yahweh in the Old Testament is often constructed from the building blocks of such mythological discourse.

If this is true, then:

1. Yahweh as thus depicted has the same ontological status of the discourse in which he is depicted.
2. Yahweh as thus depicted is therefore himself a character of mythology.
3. Yahweh-as-depicted has the same ontological status as other mythological gods.
4. Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

In other words, if there is not really and literally a kind old man living at the source of the waters, then El as thus depicted does not really exist. If there is not really an actual rider of the clouds who has a divine abode on a mountain in the north and whose voice is the thunder and who defeated the chaos dragon, then Baal does not exist. And if neither of these deities exist and the descriptions depicting them have no extra-textual counterparts, it follows that Yahweh as similarly described is also, technically, a character of mythology.

If there is no Leviathan, no mountain of the gods in the north, no palace in the skies, how can Yahweh depicted as defeating Leviathan, meeting the gods in the north and living in a sky-kingdom be real? Like Baal and El, he is a mythical entity and no more. Objectively assessed and without resorting to double standards, the possibility that Yahweh as depicted in such mythical discourse could still exist must be considered as being no greater than the possibility that the mythical El or Baal actually exists.



### 5.2.3.2 Miscellaneous syncretistic features in the cult of Yahweh

What often goes unnoticed by many realists – yet seems quite significant and also oddly suspicious – is the fact that, with regard to basic structures and operations, the cult of Yahweh is not at all very different from the cults of any other ancient deity (cf. Clements 1965:05; Gillooly 1992:21).

Think about it. Why would the real and only God, the entity Yahweh so often claims to be, model his worship in almost every way on how all the allegedly non-existent pagan deities that he so abhors were worshipped before his arrival on the religious scene?

Though seemingly related to mundane matters of fact, when one thinks about it, the following parallels between the cult of Yahweh and those of other ancient Near Eastern deities make the devil's advocate very suspicious. It cannot help but wonder if the ontological status of the Old Testament god is any different from the deities whose structures and contents of worship Yahweh seems to have adopted and adapted for the organisation and functioning of his own cult.

- Like other deities, Yahweh demands worship telling him how wonderful he is.
- Like other deities, Yahweh demands the killing of animals for sacrificial purposes.
- Like other deities, Yahweh's earthly abode is a divine mountain.
- Like other deities, Yahweh's urban abode is a temple of the same architectural design as other ancient Near Eastern temples.
- Like other deities, Yahweh has the king as his adopted son.
- Like other deities, Yahweh is worshipped under titles such as "shepherd", "king", "father" and "warrior".
- Like other deities, Yahweh's will and word are mediated by priests and prophets.
- Like other deities, Yahweh sometimes appears in theophany, in human form and in dreams.
- Like other deities, Yahweh seldom appears in person but sends messengers to communicate his will.

- Like other deities, Yahweh rules his people through written divine law.
- Like other deities, Yahweh can be addressed mainly in prayer.
- Like other deities, Yahweh is mainly a national deity despite greater influence.
- Like other deities, Yahweh demands ritualised worship including fasting, etc.
- Like other deities, Yahweh institutes food taboos.
- Etc.

Since modern Christian culture still contains the remnants of ritualised worship and is often ignorant, uncritical and unreflective when it comes to the Old Testament text, these cultic elements are usually taken for granted. They are perceived to be ordinary, matter of fact and natural elements of organised religion.

However, as post-modern ideological criticism, history of religion and comparative religion have demonstrated, such religious practices operate on certain assumptions regarding the nature of the cosmos that is now considered to be outdated. As was argued in the previous chapter, what Yahweh is, does and expects, clearly show that both he and his world are a projection of Iron Age culture in which it seemed unproblematic to envision the entire cosmos as a state (cf. Frankfort 1946a:67-79; 1946b:22).

The fact that these religious practices are found in all ancient Near Eastern religions and *predate* the rise of Yahwism shows that their presence in the religion of Israel is not, as traditionally believed, a product of the aftermath of actual divine revelation commanding such cultic forms of life. Rather, such practises arose out of the various times and phases of the life of the Hebrew people whose religion is what it is because of the way people in general worshipped their gods (cf. Barr 1984:61).

In terms of general and basic cultic rites, the religion of Yahweh did therefore not differ substantially from that of its neighbours. In fact, if critical scholarship is to be believed, most of the rites, feasts, rules, laws and prescriptions were in any way adopted from the religions of other peoples and adapted to create an independent local religious and socio-cultural identity (cf. De Vaux 1961:281).

In other words, the supposed uniqueness of Yahwism lies more in terms of specific

content than with regard to basic structures of the cult. Whether it concerns the priesthood, the prophetic movements or the spirituality of the sages, very little, if anything, in terms of the fundamental orientation and features of Yahweh's religion were actually unique and original. Yet the possible philosophical significance of this observation for the devil's advocate's case against realism can easily be overlooked.

To illustrate how phenomena such as the all-too-common basic structural elements of the cult of Yahweh may have anti-realist implications for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, the devil's advocate intends to make use of a single yet devastating example. Consider, if you will, exhibit A – the Solomonic temple, the construction of which was allegedly commanded by Yahweh himself (cf. 1 Kgs 5-6; 7:15-9:9).

Numerous studies have confirmed the suspicion that the architecture of this temple resembles that of Phoenician temples dedicated to pagan deities (cf. De Vaux 1961:316-317). Many of the furnishings of the temple of Yahweh even appear to allude to mythological motifs in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

For example, the twelve bulls and the sea of bronze are strangely reminiscent of pagan symbolism depicting the deities El, Baal and Yam (cf. 1 Kgs 4:23-26). The *cherubim* resemble the mythical mixomorphs of Syro-Phoenician and Babylonian iconography. The fact that the temple was also called a "palace" or "house" of Yahweh and was situated on a "holy hill" alludes to the myths about the abode of the god(s) on the cosmic mountain at the source of the rivers (cf. Pss 46, 48 and Clifford 1972:212). The division of the sanctuary into three courts (i.e. Ulam, Hekal and Debir) also presumes the factuality of mythical symbolism and was very common in pre-Israelite heathen temples (cf. De Vaux 1961:317).

Given these parallels between Yahweh's temple and that of allegedly non-existing pagan divinities, the question arises as to why Yahweh – if he actually existed and hated pagan religious phenomena as the Old Testament texts insist – would command Solomon to let pagans build his temple according to their mythical conceptions of the cosmos? Surely the fact that the temple of Yahweh was built according to pagan models and furnished with structures alluding to pagan mythology either imply that

Yahweh did not command this or that he is no different from pagan deities (e.g. he does not exist).

Apparently realism on this issue faces a double bind. If Yahweh did command the building of a mythical microcosm modelled on pagan superstitions, then he is no different from any other ancient deity and therefore does not exist. Alternatively, even if there is a real god called Yahweh, if this god did not literally command the building of his mythical abode, then the deity Yahweh depicted as commanding the building of his mythical abode is a character of fiction and does not exist. Whichever of these two options one prefers, unless they constitute a false dichotomy somehow overlooked by the devil's advocate, Yahweh-as-depicted is not real and the devil's advocate rests its case.

### **5.2.3.3 Examples of the belief in magic and superstition in the Old Testament**

Not only are there many parallels between the Old Testament texts' depictions of Yahweh and the "myths" of other peoples. The devil's advocate would also like to discuss the anti-realist implications of the fact that both the people of the Old Testament *and their god* believed in the possibility of magic and a host of related superstitious ideas that were once popularly believed to be only endemic to pagan religions.

Many studies on magic in the Old Testament have already seen the light. Included in the devil's advocate's list of consulted works are the studies of, amongst others, Robertson Smith (1927); Oesterly & Robinson (1930); Guillaume (1938); Frazer (1963), Saggs (1978) and, somewhat more recently, a detailed analysis of the phenomenon by Jeffers (1996).

Limitations of space prohibit the devil's advocate from engaging in an in-depth discussion of this interesting topic as it features in the Old Testament texts. For this the reader is kindly referred to the aforementioned works. For present purposes, however, an overview of the examples of magic in the Old Testament text as identified by Jeffers (1996) should suffice.

As should be apparent from the lists to follow, the Old Testament peoples *and their god* were no less superstitious than the pagans they so loved to polemise against. To substantiate this claim, the devil's advocate provides the following examples of magical practitioners and divining practices in the Old Testament as delineated by Jeffers (1996:1-257).

a) Types of diviners, magicians and oracular practitioners

- Spellbinders (cf. Deut 18:9ff; Isa 47:9,12; Ps 58:6)
- Court seers (cf. 2 Sam 24:11-13; 1 Chron 25:3,5; Isa 30:9-10; Mic 3:7; Am 7:12)
- Mantic sages (cf. Gen 41:8,33; Ex 7:11; Deut 2:4-5; Isa 3:3,19:11-12; Daniel; Esth 1:13)
- Miracle performers or dream interpreters (cf. Gen 41:8,24; Dan 1:20; Ex 7:11,22; 8:3,14,15; 9:11)
- Medicine men (cf. Isa 3:3)
- Priests with oracular functions (cf. Judg 18:5; 1 Sam 2:28, 14:18f; 23:9-12; 30:7f; 22:10,13,15)
- Oracular attendant and healer? (cf. Deut 10:8, 17:8-13, 24:8, 27:9-27, 33:8ff; Judg 17-18)
- Semitic herbalists (cf. Deut 18:10-11; Mic 5:12-13; cf. also Isa 47:9-12; Dan 1:20, 2:2,10,27, 4:4,7; 5:7,11,15)
- Enchanters (cf. Ps 58:6; Eccl 10:11; Jer 8:17; cf. also Ps 41:7; Isa 3:3)
- Omen observers (cf. Gen 44:5,15; cf. also Gen 30:27; 1 Kgs 20:33; Num 24:1)
- Soothsayers (cf. Deut 18:11,14; Jer 27:9; Isa 2:6b; Mic 5:12; Judg 9:37)
- Channels of divine power (cf. Judg 4:4-5, 1 Sam 7:6ff, 9:9; 1 Kgs 14:1-17, 17:17, 22:11; 2 Kgs 1:9-18, 2:14, 4:9-37, 5, 6:5, 7:1-2; Ezek 13:17-19)
- One who obtains oracles by drawing lots (cf. Num 23:23; Mic 3:6; Prov 16:10)
- Seers (cf. Num 24:3; 1 Sam 6:2ff; 2 Chron 16:7-10)
- Evildoers? (cf. Ps 5:5,10; 6:9-10; 28; 41:5-9; 59:4; 64:3,5; 94:4; Isa 59:4)
- Oracle attendants? (cf. Isa 29:1-7, 33:7)
- Astrologers (cf. Jer 51:27; Nah 3:17)
- Diviners (cf. Nah 3:17)
- Sheep-tender or hepatoscopist? (cf. 2 Kgs 3:4; Am 1:1)

- Those who ensnare (cf. Isa 47:15; Ps 91:4)
- Wicked ones (cf. Pss 3,17,91)
- Magician or trader? (cf. Isa 47:15; Neh 3:31-32, 13:20; cf. Nah 3:16; Ezek 17:4)

b) Dreams and visions

- *Mantic dreams*, i.e. simple message dreams (cf. Gen 20:3, 31:11-24, 37:5ff, 41:32); symbolic dreams (cf. Gen 40:9ff, 41; Judg 7:13; Dan 2); and incubation dreams (cf. Gen 28:10ff; 1 Sam 3; 1 Kgs 3; Ps 91)
- *Oracle visions* (cf. Num 12:6; Jer 23:25ff.) e.g. Balaam (cf. Num 24); Michaiah (cf. 1 Kgs 22); Amos (cf. 8:1-2); visions of the slaughter of the guilty (cf. Ezek 9:1-10; Isa 21:1-10); Daniel (cf. Dan 7-8)

c) Divining techniques and devices

Techniques:

- Astrology and hemerology (cf. Judg 5:20; Josh 10:12c-13c; 1 Sam 9:25; Am 5:26; Isa 47:12-15)
- Hepatoscopy (cf. Ezek 21:21; Ex 29:13,22; Lev 3:3-4, 7:4; 8:16,25; 9:10,19; 10:4)
- Hydromancy (cf. Gen 14:7, 44:5-15; 1 Kgs 9; Num 5:11-28; 19:1-10; Deut 21:1-9)
- Necromancy (cf. Deut 18:11; Lev 19:31, 20:6; Isa 8:19-20, 28:7-22; 1 Chron 10:13; cf. 1 Sam 28; Isa 19:3, 65:4)
- Oneiromancy (cf. Gen 37-50; Dan 2-12; Zech 1-6)
- Rhabdomancy (cf. Hos 4:12; Jer 10:3; cf. also Ex 4:2, 7:8-13; Num 17ff, 20:1-3; Gen 30:31-39; Jer 1:11; Josh 8:18-26; Ezek 21:26; 2 Kgs 13:15ff.; Isa 11:4)

Devices:

- The Ark (cf. 1 Sam 14:18; cf. also Judg 20:27-28; 1 Sam 6; 2 Sam 11:11; 15:24f)
- The Ephod (cf. 1 Sam 14:15ff; 23:6,9; 30:7-8; cf. also Judg 8:27; 17-18; Hos 3:4)
- The Urim and Thummim (cf. Ex 28:29-30; Lev 8:8; Deut 33:8; Num 27:21; 1

Sam 28:6; Ezra 2:63 = Neh 7:65; 1 Sam 14:41)

- The Tent of Meeting (cf. Ex 33:7-23; Num 11:16-30, 12:4-10)
- The Teraphim (cf. 2 Kgs 23:24; 1 Sam 15:23; Judg 17:5; Hos 3:4; Zech 10:2; Ezek 21:21; cf. also 1 Sam 19:11-17; Gen 31)

d) Magical elements in the treatment of diseases

Magical transfer (cf. Lev 14:1-8, 49-53; Num 21:4-9; 2 Kgs 4:29-37; 5:10-14:31)

e) Magical elements in warfare

- Preparatory rituals: consultation (cf. Judg 20:27-28; 1 Sam 14:18; 28:6; 30:7; 1 Kgs 22:15; cf. also Judg 7:13; Jer 21:21; 38:14; 2 Chron 20:3; 1 Kgs 22:5; 2 Chron 18:4-5)
- Protection (cf. Josh 3:5; 1 Sam 21:5; cf. also 1 Sam 11:5-11; 2 Sam 1:21; Isa 21:5; Num 21:29, 22:5-6; 1 Sam 17:43f. Mic 5:4-5)
- Practices during wartime (cf. Ezek 21:21; cf. 2 Kgs 13; Josh 6)
- After the battle (cf. Josh 6:26)

f) Magical roots of blessing and curse (cf. Gen 12:1-3; 1 Sam 14; Josh 7)

- The use of the curse in wartime (cf. above)
- The use of the oath in legal matters (cf. Num 5:12ff.; Judg 17:1f.; Zech 5:1-4; cf. also Ex 22:7,10; Deut 28)
- The use of the curse in the cult (cf. Gen 27:1-45; Deut 33; Josh 24; Deut 11:26-32; 27-29)
- Miscellanea (“woe formulas”; cf. Isa 29:1; Jer 13:27; Nah 3:1; Zeph 3:1 cf. also Deut 21; Num 19)
- Protection against curses (cf. Jer 36:23; 2 Sam 16:9; 1 Kgs 2:46; Judg 17: 2; 1 Kgs 2:45; 2 Sam 21:1-3; Ex 12:32)

From the perspective of someone who studies religion anthropologically or historically, these traces of magic and divination in the Old Testament might simply

come across as interesting or useful data. From an anti-realist philosophical-critical perspective, however, one must ask the question whether such magic is possible and regarding the nature of its ontological status.

In most of these references to magic and divination in the Old Testament, the particular magical practices are part of orthodox forms of Yahwism and involve the character Yahweh himself. Even when certain practices were considered taboo and vehemently polemised against (e.g. necromancy), never once is the antagonism motivated by a belief that the practice in question is merely superstition or simply impossible. Even Yahweh's tirades against some of the magical practices introduced into his cult shows that even the deity himself believes in the reality and possibility of magic. It should therefore be no surprise that most of the magical practices listed above were not the objects of criticism but part and parcel of the worship of Yahweh.

Since, according to the devil's advocate, the acts of magic referred to in the Old Testament texts are based on superstitious assumptions about the nature of reality, devastating ontological implications follow. If magic is not real then Yahweh depicted as a deity who believes in and assumes the actual possibility of such magic must himself be a character of fiction. In short, Yahweh depicted as being a part of and believing in the functionality of magical rites does not exist.

To these examples of references to magic in the Old Testament as discussed by Jeffers (1996), many more instances of related types of primitive superstition in the texts can be added (cf. De Vaux 1961:274-288; Cryer 1994:107-131). In the present study, however, there will only be room for a cursive listing of some examples of such beliefs.

In this regard, the studies of Smith (1927) and Oesterly & Robinson (1930) will form the basis of the devil's advocate's next excursion and should be consulted for a more detailed treatment of the particular issues.

According to Oesterly & Robinson (1930:18), the Old Testament contains numerous remains of *animistic* beliefs. The first example noted by the authors concerns the many (often-overlooked) references to *sacred trees* in the biblical texts. These trees



marked sacred locales where theophanies were expected, ancient sanctuaries established, the divine presence intensified and where religious rites were performed.

According to Oesterly & Robinson (1930:18-28), examples of sacred trees in the Old Testament include, the Terebinth of the Teacher (Gen 12:6-8); the Terebinth of Mamre (Gen 13:18, 18:1); the Tamarisk in Beersheba (Gen 21:33); the Terebinth of the Oracle (Gen 35:4; Josh 24:26-27; Judg 9:6); the Oak of Weeping (Gen 35:8); the burning thorn bush (Ex 3:2-5; cf. also Deut 33:16); the Oak of Beza Ananim (Josh 19:33); the Palm Tree of Deborah (Judg 4:4-5; 1 Sam 10:3); the Terebinth of Ophrah (Judg 6:11-24); the Terebinth of the Soothsayers (Judg 9:37); the Palm of Baal (Judg 20:33); the Pomegranate Tree of Judgement (1 Sam 14:2); the Terebinth of the valley (1 Sam 17:2); the Tamarisk of the height (1 Sam 22:6); the Tamarisk of the Burying (1 Sam 31:13; cf. 1 Chron 10:12, "terebinth"); the balsam trees (2 Sam 5:23-24); the Terebinth (of the Oracle?) (1 Kgs 13:14); etc.

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:29-37) also believe that the remains of animism in the Old Testament can be found in the apparent belief in *sacred waters*. At these locations as well, the intensification and manifestation of divine presence in nature were supposedly operative and rites of healing and judgement were enacted. In addition, it is at these locations where various types of divination were practised and where a variety of ritual cleansings were performed.

Examples of such sacred waters allegedly include, the Spring of Decision (Gen 14:7); the Spring of the Sun (Josh 15:7; 18:17); the Spring of the Kid (2 Chron 10:2; cf. Gen 14:7); the Spring of the Two Calves (Gen 14:5); the Spring of the Partridge (1 Sam 21:20); the Spring of the Dragon (Neh 2:13); the Well of Inquiring (1 Kgs 1:9); the Well of Trembling (Judg 7:1); the Living Well (Num 21:17-18); the Well of the Seven (Spirits) (Gen 21:22-23); the Well of (my) Seeing and Living (Gen 32:30); the Mistress of the Well (Josh 19:8); the rivers Kishon and Gihon (Judg 5:21; 1 Kgs 1:33-34; cf. Deut 21:4); etc

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:38-47) also claim to have detected traces of animistic belief in the Old Testament's conceptions of *sacred mountains, rocks and stones*. At these locations, the people believed the divine was present in a unique way. Certain

spectacular natural phenomena often occurred in the vicinity of the mountains (volcanoes, thunderstorms, etc) and these were believed to be indicative of the presence of the deity. Sanctuaries were often located in the immediate vicinity of these locations.

Examples of this particular type of animistic phenomena allegedly include, Mount Sinai / Horeb (The Mountain of Yahweh; Num 10:33); Mount Peor (Num 23:28-30); Mount Pisgah (Num 23:14); Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 19); Mount Tabor (Josh 19:22); The Mount of Olives (2 Sam 2 Sam 15:30-32); the Hill of Gibeah (1 Sam 10:5); High places (1-2 Kings:passim); the Stone / Pillar of Beth El (Gen 28:11-22; cf. also 35:14-15); the Stone of Witness (Gen 31:44-48); the Stone of Witness/Hearing (Josh 24:26-27); the Stones of Memorial (Josh 4:1-14), the Stone of Help (1 Sam 4:1, 5:1, 7:12); the Stone of Covering (Josh 15:6; 18:17); the Serpent Stone (1 Kgs 1:9); the Stone of Direction (1 Sam 6:14); the uncut stones of altars (Deut 27:5,6; Josh 8:31); the 12 gemstones of the breastplate of the high priest (Ex 28:15-21); etc.

Oesterly & Robinson (1930:48-66) also discuss the alleged traces of other superstitious elements in the texts, i.e.

- Remnants of totemism, e.g.:
  - a) the names of tribes based on the names of animals: Simeon (hyena); Leah/Levi (wild cow); Deborah (bee); Rachel (cow); Caleb (dog); Shobal (lion); etc.;
  - b) the worship of animals (cf. Ezek 8:10; Isa 45:17);
  - c) theophoric elements in personal names (Abiyah and Ahiyah [Yahweh is my father/Yahweh is my brother (sic)]);
  - d) the spiritual connection between a god and his people (e.g. people as sons and daughters of a god, e.g. Chemosh; cf. Num 21:29);
  - e) the belief that some humans are born from stones (cf. Jer 2:27).
  
- Taboos, i.e. things that were either holy or unclean, e.g.:

- a) certain animals (cf. Lev 11; Deut 14:7-20);
  - b) certain actions requiring a purification ceremony (i.e. touching the dead, menstruating, wet dreams, touching a leper, coming into contact with dead animals, giving birth, having sex, etc.; cf. Lev 5:27ff, 11:32ff; 1 Sam 21:4ff; 2 Sam 11:4; etc.).
- Ancestor worship, e.g.:
    - a) apparently the original context of mourning customs (cf. Oesterly & Robinson 1930:57);
    - b) caring for and feeding the dead (cf. Oesterly & Robinson 1930:59);
    - c) the names of certain ancestors indicative of divinity (e.g. Gad/Meni = Fortune);
    - d) graves as the locations for sanctuaries (e.g. the graves of Sarah, Deborah, Joseph, Miriam, Rachel, etc.);
    - e) the roles of the *Teraphim* (nourishers / shades / spectres) as household gods (cf. 31:19,30-35; Judg 17:5; 1 Sam 19:13,16) and media of divination (Judg 18:14,17,20; 1 Sam 15:23; 2 Kgs 23:24; Hos 3:4; Ezek 21:26; Zech 10:2).
  - The belief in demons, i.e.
    - a) *Theriomorphic demons, e.g.:*
      - 1) the *Seraphim* – “those who burn” (cf. Num 21:6; Deut 8:15; Isa 14:29, 30:6);
      - 2) the *Se’irim* – “the hairy ones” (cf. Lev 17:7; 2 Kgs 23:8; 2 Chron 11:15; Isa 13:21; 34:14);
      - 3) *Azaz’el* - (etymology uncertain) (cf. Lev 16:7-28);
      - 4) various demons of the waste (cf. Isa 13:21-22);
      - 5) *robets* - “one-that-couch” (at the door) (cf. Gen 4:7).
    - b) *Anthropomorphic demons, e.g.:*
      - 1) *Lillith* - a female night demon (cf. Isa 34:14; cf. also Ps 91:5);

Ruth 3:8-9?);

- 2) *Aluqah* - a female vampire / flesh devouring ghoul (cf. Prov 30:15);
- 3) “night terrors” and “arrows of the day” (cf. Ps 91:5-6, 121:6);
- 4) *Resheph / Deber* - demon of plague and pestilence (cf. Hab 3:5);
- 5) *Qeteb* - a demon of destruction (cf. Deut 32:24; Hos 13:14); cf. also as allusions to demonology in “the valley of demons” (cf. Gen 14:3); the “fringes” (cf. Num 15:38); and other protective amulets (cf. Gen 35:4, 38:18-25; Ex 28:33; Deut 22:12; Judg 8:24; Isa 3:20ff);
- 6) *sedim* - “demons” (cf. Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37);
- 7) *s’ar’bim* - “liers in wait” who cause discord (cf. 2 Chron 20:22);
- 8) *the resha’ah* - the woman of sin (cf. Zech 5:8).

c) Larger chaos entities, e.g.:

- 1) *Leviathan* (cf. Job 41:3-35; Ps 74:14, Isa 27:1);
- 2) *Behemoth* (cf. Job 40:15-32);
- 3) *Rahab* (cf. Job 26:12, Ps 89:11; etc.);
- 4) *Satan* (cf. 1 Chron 21:1, contra Zech 3:1-2; Job 1-2);
- 5) *Yam* (cf. Ex 15; Job 26:12; 38:10-11; Ps 89:10, 93:4, etc.).

Then, of course, there is the belief in the powers in the skies. The presentation to follow is not intended to be a systematic exposition of “who’s who?” in the heavens. Rather, the designations of entities referred to below, instead of constituting a harmonious census of sky-powers, are to be seen as simply an arbitrarily constructed list of celestial beings (whose identities sometimes overlap) encountered in the texts of the Old Testament (cf. Eichrodt 1961:194-209).

- a) gods (cf. Gen 3:22; Ex 18:11, 22:28; Judg 11:36; 1 Sam 26:13; Pss 82:1-6; 89:7, 95:3; 97:7-9; Isa 14:13; Ezek 28:12; Dan 11:39; etc.);
- b) sons of the god (cf. Gen 6:1-4; Deut 32:8; Job 1-2; etc.);
- c) holy ones (cf. Deut 33:2; Ps 89:6,8; Job 5:1, 15:15; etc.);
- d) the army of Yahweh (cf. Gen 32:2f; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18; Ps 148:2; etc.);

- e) angels (messengers) (cf. Zech 1-6 and passim);
- f) a commander of the army (cf. Josh 5:14);
- g) powers of the heights (cf. Isa 24:21);
- h) the council of Yahweh (cf. Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:6-8; etc.);
- i) astral divinities (cf. Isa 14:12, 40:26, 45:12; Jer 33:22; Job 38:7; Neh 9:6; etc.);
- j) the watchers / pages (cf. Dan 4:17);
- k) prominent individually identified angels (i.e. Gabriel, cf. Dan 8:16f; Michael, cf. Dan 10:13);
- l) a heavenly scribe (cf. Ezek 9:2);
- m) a president of the court in heaven (cf. Zech 3:1-8);
- n) princes of the nations (cf. Dan 10:13,20);
- o) the seven “eyes” of God (cf. Ezek 9:2; Zech 3:9, 4:10);
- p) the angel of Yahweh (cf. Gen 16:7, 22:11; Ex 3:2; Judg 6:11,13:3; etc.);
- q) cherubim (cf. Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22, 26:1; Ezek 1, 41:18-19; etc.);
- r) seraphim (cf. Isa 6:1-2);
- s) immortalised ancestors (i.e. Enoch, cf. Gen 5:24; Elijah, cf. 2 Kgs 2:11; Mal 5:4);
- t) the accuser (the satan) (cf. Job 1-2; Zech 3);
- u) the Accuser (Satan) (cf. 1 Chron 21:1);
- v) a son of man (cf. Dan 7:13);
- w) the angel of the covenant (cf. Mal 3:1);
- x) the angel of death (cf. Ex 12:23; 21 Kgs 19:35);
- y) the angel of pestilence (cf. 2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chron 21:25);
- z) death bringers (cf. Prov 16:14; Job 33:22);
- aa) angels of disaster (cf. Ps 78:49);
- bb) angels of the nations (cf. Deut 4:19, 32:8; Ps 89:6);
- cc) intercessors (cf. Job 5:1; 33:19-23);
- dd) the (good) spirit of Yahweh (Gen 1:2[?], 41:38; Ex 31:3; Num 24:2,15; Judg 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6, 11:6; 2 Sam 23:2; 1 Kgs 18:12; 2 Kgs 2:16; 1 Chron 12:18; Isa 11:2, 30:1; 63:11; Ezek 2:2,14; 37:9-14; Dan 4:8-9; Hos 9:7; Mic 3:8; Neh 9:20; Ps 51:13; etc.);

- ee) the (evil) spirit of Yahweh (cf. Num 5:14; Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14, 18:19, 19:9; 1 Kgs 22:21; Hos 4:12, 5:4, Isa 19:14, 29:10; etc.);
- ff) a feminine embodiment of wisdom (cf. Prov 8:22-36);
- gg) the heavenly vizier (cf. Ex 23:20ff; Josh 5:13; Judg 5:23);
- hh) the bronze serpent (Nehushtan) (cf. 2 Kgs 18:4).

Apart from these examples of what many critical scholars (including the devil's advocate) reckon to be no more than phenomena only extant in superstitious beliefs, many more examples of related fantastical elements in the Old Testament texts could be cited. In this category of miscellaneous superstitions, the devil's advocate would include, amongst others, the following:

- the use of mandrakes for securing sexual fertility (cf. Gen 30:14; Song 2:5);
- the ability to keep arms raised as causative in determining the outcome of a battle (cf. Ex 17:8-16);
- the use of ritual fasting to convince Yahweh to act in people's favour (cf. Deut 9:18; 2 Sam 12:22; Neh 9; Esth 4:16);
- the need for a payment during a census to avoid destruction (cf. Ex 30:12)
- the practice of palmistry (cf. Job 37:7; Prov 3:16);
- the possibility of teleportation (cf. Judg 13:3; Ezek 3:14; 2 Kgs 2:16?; etc.);
- the possibility of telepathy (cf. 1 Kgs 14:1-6; Dan 2:29-36; etc.);
- the possibility of trans-temporal visions/premonitions (cf. 1 Kgs 19:17; 2 Kgs 8:11-15; etc.);
- the possibility of psychokinesis / telekinesis (cf. 1 Kgs 13:4; 2 Kgs 6:5; etc.);
- the possibility of astral travel (cf. 2 Kgs 5:25-26; Ezek 3:14; 8:1-4; 37:1; etc.);
- the removing of footwear on holy ground (cf. Ex 3:5);
- the use of music to drive away demons sent by Yahweh or to make contact with the divine possible (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23; 2 Kgs 3:15; etc.);
- the use of ritual dance (sometimes with musical accompaniment) to induce ecstasy in order to speak the divine word (cf. 1 Sam 10:5-6; 2 Sam 6:5; etc.);
- etc.

The presence of all the aforementioned beliefs in magic and superstition in the text

makes the world in the text appear not unlike Tolkien's "*Middle-Earth*" or Steve Jackson and Ian Livingston's world of "*Fighting Fantasy*" (Titan). Unfortunately for realists, the many magical and enchanted phenomena, entities, places, artefacts and incidents referred to in the Old Testament texts seem to have no counterparts in the cruel, crazy, beautiful albeit rather mundane and boring third rock from the sun a.k.a. the "world outside the text".

Limitations of space prevent a more extended discussion of the topic presently under consideration. Though the presentation cannot be exhaustive, it should be more than sufficient to illustrate the point the devil's advocate intends to make. The main concern here is to be consistent and thorough in spelling out what the devil's advocate considers to be the anti-realist implications of the presence of these superstitious elements in the text.

In this regard, those who would consider themselves realists in Old Testament theology are notoriously inconsistent and repressive when it comes to the alleged presence of superstitious beliefs in the Old Testament texts.

On the one hand, for example, those scholars one might classify as conservative will insist that entities like Yahweh, Satan, seraphim and cherubim actually exist. Yet, in spite of claiming to believe every word in the Old Testament, few conservatives would like to claim that the Leviathan, Azazel, Lillith, Rahab, sacred trees, sacred waters, hepatoscopy, rhabdomancy, etc. are actually part of the real world. They might decry the tendency of liberal scholars to claim that angels, demons and the supernatural are all mythical. Yet in doing so they need to repress the fact that they themselves cannot go all the way and bring themselves to believe in the existence of all the gods, demons and other phenomena that the devil's advocate has listed in this section.

On the other hand, liberals or critical scholars who nonetheless fancy themselves as realists are just as inconsistent if not completely reductionistic. They will often insist that God (a.k.a. Yahweh) exists even though many think this cannot be and need not be proved. Yet they refuse to believe that demons, angels, and other magical entities and practices that Yahweh himself apparently believed in have any metaphysical

substance whatsoever. These people are masters of demythologisation, yet they lose their nerve just short of demythologising Yahweh as completely as they inconsistently prefer to do with just about every other supernatural phenomenon in the texts.

But how is this valid? How can one claim that Yahweh is real yet dismiss the rest as fanciful superstitions or metaphorical/symbolical representations? How is it justified to claim to believe that Yahweh-as-depicted is real, when the actual depictions of the deity and his own views of what is the case are written off by these scholars as being the product of primitive human imagination?

Consider, for instance, some of the demons referred to earlier. If these beings do not exist and yet Yahweh himself and all his people believed that they did, does this not imply that Yahweh as thus depicted must himself be a superstitious construct? Alternatively, what about the sacred trees, waters and mountains? If these were supposed locales of Yahweh's presence, whilst actually being mundane places of merely misinterpreted and superstitiously appropriated awe-inspiring natural phenomena, does the deity whose alleged presence was inextricably bound up with these locales not also stand unmasked as an insubstantial product of the animistic mind?

Ultimately, the philosophical implications of these superstitious beliefs held by both the Old Testament people *and their god* should be clear. If these beliefs are counter-factual then Yahweh depicted as sharing them must himself be a character of fiction. He is the creation of humans who themselves believed in such things. In other words, Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

In sum then, the devil's advocate articulates yet another argument in its case against realism in Old Testament theology:

- 1 There are parallels between the Old Testament and the texts of other religions while the latter predates the biblical discourse.



- 2 This means that the biblical discourse is partly derivative, not wholly authentic or purely historical but a reproduction of a story-world with no direct and precise relation to any extra-textual reality.
- 3 The deities in the parallel mythological motifs and/or legends and/or superstitious representations can be dismissed as constructs of pagan fiction.
- 4 Yahweh is depicted as being involved in similarly mythical and magical and therefore fictitious scenarios.
- 5 Therefore, Yahweh has *ipso facto* the same ontological status as the deities featured in the parallel mythologies / superstitious representations.
- 6 Therefore, Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts containing elements of myth and superstition is a character of fiction.
- 7 Therefore Yahweh, like the other mythical deities, does not really exist.

The argument from mythology and superstition is the fourth argument in the case against realism. Since the case against realism itself constitutes a cumulative argument against the existence of Yahweh, the particular argument reconstructed in this chapter should not be appropriated in isolation. Its plausibility and rhetorical strength are enhanced when viewed in relation to all the other arguments part of the devil's advocate's comprehensive philosophical-critical justification of Yahwistic atheism.