

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

(Ps 11:3)

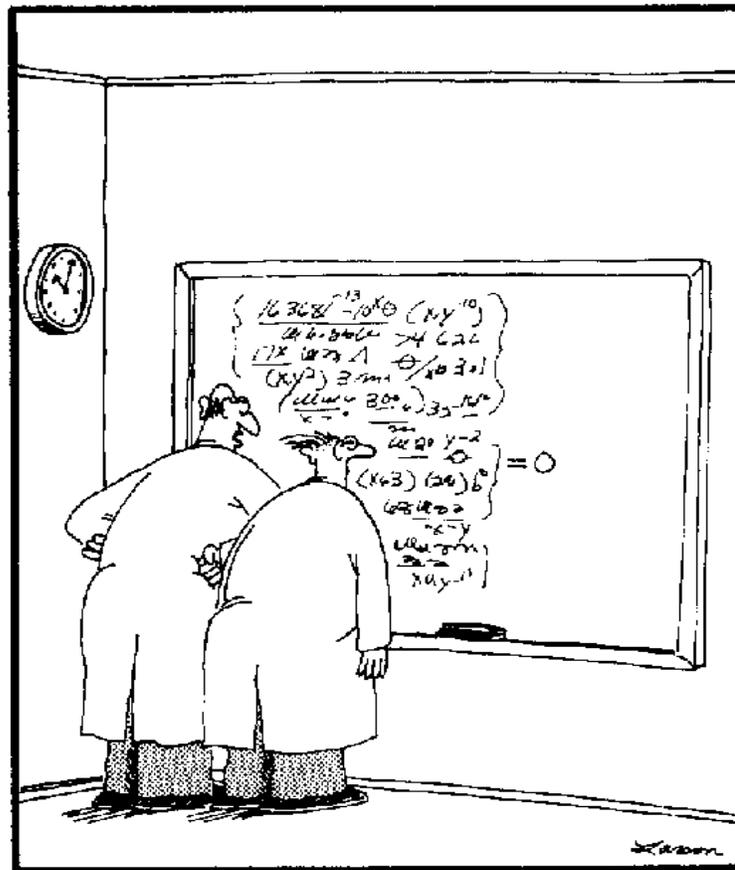
9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the third book of Nietzsche’s *‘The Gay Science’*, a mad man lights a lamp during the day, whereafter he rushes screaming into the market place. All alone he cries out, “I seek God! I seek God!”. The marketplace convulses in ridicule, “Has he got lost?” asked one. “Did he lose his way like a child?” asked another. “Or is he hiding?; Is he afraid of us?”...Thus they yelled and laughed. The difference between the mad man and the market crowds was not that one believed in the reality of God and the other did not. Neither believed and God died in the event of his own incredibility (cf. Nietzsche 1974:181)

But the mad man alone knows what they have done, what they have lost. “I will tell you. We have killed Him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us a sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? ...What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives.” Here the mad man falls silent before the astonished listeners. He throws his lantern on the ground, smashing it into pieces. “I have come too early”, he said then; “my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wondering. It has not reached the ears of human beings...This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves.*” (Nietzsche 1984:111-112)

In this concluding chapter, the implications of the devil’s advocate’s case of realism will be spelled out. It will be claimed that these may be more far-reaching than many

scholars might like to believe or are willing to admit. However, before it comes to that, as it must, it may be appropriate to recapitulate on what has been ascertained up to now.



"No doubt about it, Ellington—we've mathematically expressed the purpose of the universe. Gad, how I love the thrill of scientific discovery!"

9.2 A SUMMARY OF THE CASE AGAINST REALISM

In retrospect, the arguments presented by the devil's advocate in its reconstruction of a **cumulative** case against realism can be summed up as follows:

1. **The argument of theological pluralism** demonstrated that the first element in the construction of Yahweh that is rather suspicious is the fact that, in the Old Testament texts, Yahweh is depicted in contradictory ways with regard to his nature, attributes, will and acts. Both synchronic and diachronic perspectives on

theological pluralism revealed that there is no coherent “Old Testament view” of Yahweh. This deconstructs realism in Old Testament theology and suggests that whenever various depictions contradict each other, Yahweh-as-depicted in at least some of them must be a character of fiction who does not exist.

2. **The argument from unorthodox theology** revealed that Yahweh is often depicted as having attributes that appear to be unorthodox from the point of view of Christian philosophical theology. Yahweh is often depicted in ways that suggest he is not eternal, single, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, precognisant, omnipresent and omnibenevolent. If the discourse of dogmatic Christian theology is assumed to describe the real God then the unorthodox versions of the deity Yahweh in the text must be seen as fictitious. Therefore, Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.
3. **The argument from polymorphic projection** pointed out that Yahweh’s own knowledge about the world, his moral convictions, his divine socio-political set-up and his interventionist methodology seem all-too-human. What Yahweh takes for granted as being eternally and objectively real, valid and normative are no more than the superstitious, historically relative and culturally contingent beliefs of his speechwriters. This gives the game away in that it unmasks Yahweh as an anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection of Iron Age, ancient Near Eastern human mythologians. He is therefore a character of fiction who does not exist outside the texts and the minds of those who created him in their own image.
4. **The argument from mythology and syncretism** demonstrated that Yahweh’s own cult and the texts allegedly witnessing to his supposed revelation contain numerous elements of myth, legend, folklore and superstition not very different from that found in other pagan religions. In fact, in many instances, the Old Testament authors have borrowed extensively from pagan literature and there are marked traces of syncretism and magic in the biblical texts. Since it is on these grounds that the deities of other religions are usually dismissed as being demonstrably fictitious entities, consistency demands that the depictions of Yahweh must share the same fate. Yahweh-as-depicted has the same ontological

status as the other ancient deities and therefore does not exist.

5. **The argument from fictitious cosmography** suggested that it might actually be possible to empirically falsify realism regarding the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts by showing that the world described therein has no extra-textual counterpart. Both the world in the text and Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts are literary constructs and the products of pre-scientific misconceptions of the way the universe is constituted. In other words, the deity Yahweh who created a fictitious world, who himself believes in the reality of that world and who is depicted as having his abode in the sky, is demonstrably a character of fiction. He does not exist in the world outside the text and therefore not at all.
6. **The argument from fictitious history** was itself constituted by numerous minor arguments justifying the claim that the supposed revelation of Yahweh in the history of the Hebrew people never actually occurred as the text wants its readers to believe. Since texts purporting to be history are demonstrably nothing of the sort, realism collapses. The so-called history in which Yahweh supposedly revealed himself is no more than historical fiction and, therefore, Yahweh never really appeared, acted and spoke as depicted in the Old Testament texts. As a result, no sufficient reason remains for us to believe that Yahweh-as-depicted is anything other than a character of fiction and who does not really exist.
7. **The argument from meta-textual history** dealt with the ontological implications of the all-too-human origin, nature and development of both Yahwism as a religion and the Old Testament as an alleged witness to supposed divine revelation in history. The history of Hebrew religion and its derivatives as well as the history of the Old Testament and its interpretation exhibit a marked tendency for repressing the fact that realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh is problematic and has, in fact, collapsed. Given the validity of these observations, the epistemological sources that traditionally seemed to justify realism in Old Testament theology can no longer do so. When Yahwism and the Old Testament stand exposed as all-too-human ideological constructs with no demonstrable link to any extra-textual divinity, it becomes obvious that Yahweh-as-depicted does

not really exist.

As noted throughout the thesis, not all the arguments and perspectives will be seen by everyone as being equally devastating or effective when viewed in isolation. However, as a whole and in the form of a **cumulative argument** against the existence of Yahweh, these arguments constitute a seemingly irrefutable case against realism in Old Testament theology. As such it also provides a formidable justification of atheism regarding the ontological status of the deity Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts.

9.3 THE PAN-ATHEIST IMPLICATIONS OF THE COLLAPSE OF REALISM IN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

With the seven arguments in its case, the devil's advocate is claiming that anti-realism is the only possibility left in Old Testament theology. Moreover, at least according to the devil's advocate, the implications of the collapse of realism with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text may be more far-reaching than many in the know would like others to believe.

To be sure, as was suggested in the formulation of the hypothesis in chapter one, if realism has collapsed with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text, there may be a domino effect. The result of this may be devastating for any other theology somehow related to or dependent on realism in Old Testament theology. In other words, the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology can lead to the justification of full-blown atheism.

Such a claim, controversial and extreme though it may seem, can be justified along the following line of reasoning that refuses to bracket biblical theology with the either the history or philosophy of religion:

9.3.1 Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist

It has been shown via the reconstructed case against realism that Yahweh as he is depicted in many Old Testament texts is demonstrably a character of fiction.

Therefore, one may conclude that Yahweh-as-depicted in these texts does not exist.

9.3.2 Therefore, Yahweh per se does not exist

Some may wonder whether it might not be possible to claim that the god Yahweh as such could still exist because, technically, all that the arguments in the case against realism have proved is that *certain* but not all of the *depictions* of Yahweh in the texts may be fictitious. Moreover, the reader might recall that in chapter 2 it was admitted that this study is technically only able to concern itself with the deconstruction of realism concerning most but not every single one of the depictions of Yahweh in the text. It is just not practically possible to discuss all the issues and invalidate every form of realism with regard to every single verse in the Old Testament.

According to the devil's advocate, however, things are not that simple and realism cannot hope to remain immune on such a technicality. In fact, it was neither necessary nor possible to refute realism with regard to every single verse in the Old Testament before it could be confidently claimed that realism pertaining to the whole has collapsed. With realism deconstructed in so many foundational depictions and in so many ways, whatever texts were not explicitly referred to can hardly be considered as remaining untouched given the collapse of realism with regard to all the surrounding discourse.

In other words, if Yahweh-as-depicted in certain texts does not exist, the deity Yahweh who in other texts – when speaking in the first person – refers to the former texts as if realism was justified is also unmasked as a character of fiction.

Even if some texts never mention Yahweh in certain parts thereof, if certain criteria are met, it cannot be considered to remain untouched by the devil's advocate's case against realism. As long as the author of a text not explicitly referred to in this study was a realist concerning the depiction of Yahweh in those texts that were discussed by the devil's advocate, realism remains impossible.

Yet suppose the author of an Old Testament text not referred to by the devil's advocate may not have been a realist concerning the depictions of Yahweh in those

texts that were deconstructed by the devil's advocate. Even in such a scenario, as long as at least one element of the unmentioned text itself is implied to be problematic from the perspective of one or more of the devil's advocate's arguments, realism is by implication obviously not a valid option.

It should therefore be clear that, incomplete as it may be, the way in which the case against realism was articulated has a domino effect operative in the deconstruction of realism in all Old Testament texts. The Old Testament texts, diverse though they may be, contain a substantial amount of inter-textual allusions. Moreover, later texts assume the validity of realism regarding at least some of the depictions in the former. As a result of this state of affairs, the collapse of realism regarding the whole follows inevitably with the invalidation of realism regarding some of its parts.

Ultimately, since the depictions of Yahweh that were the main interest in this study are from the Old Testament texts, if Yahweh-as-depicted in these texts does not exist and the Old Testament was our only epistemological source, all grounds for believing in the existence of Yahweh *per se* disappears. To continue holding on to such a belief would be both irrational and unethical since the retention of a realist ideology is not only bereft of evidence but actually *against* the evidence (cf. Clifford 1987:11).

9.3.3 Therefore, the god of the Old Testament does not exist

The body of texts that was the object of scrutiny for the devil's advocate's case was the discourse in the biblical literature that Christians refer to as the "Old Testament". This is an ideological designation not derived from the texts themselves and assumes the New Testament juxtaposed to the Old. But if Yahweh-as-depicted and also Yahweh *per se* do not exist then *ipso facto* the god of the Old Testament is obviously a character of fiction. If Yahweh does not exist then the god of the Old Testament cannot be real either.

9.3.4 Therefore, the god of the New Testament does not exist

As was noted in the previous paragraph, the Old Testament forms part of the Christian canon(s) that includes the New Testament. Moreover, a lot of research exists by

which all of the arguments in the case against realism in Old Testament theology can be reconstructed to deconstruct realism in New Testament theology as well:

- Theological pluralism (cf. Dodd 1963; Charlot 1970; Bauer 1972; Dunn 1977; Sanders 1986);
- Unorthodox theology (cf. Harwood 1992; Mckinsey 1995; Raisanen 1990);
- Polymorphic projection (cf. Feuerbach 1957; Martin 1990; Weber 1995; Cupitt 1989; 1996);
- Mythology and syncretism (cf. Caird 1993; Cupitt 1979; Fawcett 1973; Frazer 1963; Gillooly 1992; Haasbroek 1992; Henderson 1956; Hick 1973; Forsyth 1987);
- Fictitious cosmology (cf. Bernstein 1993; Bultmann 1984; Robinson 1963; Borg 1998);
- Fictitious history (cf. Schweitzer 1968; Arnheim 1984; Harwood 1992; Wells 1982, 1986; Hedrickson 1999);
- Meta-textual history (cf. Arnheim 1984; Hofmann 1985; Herrin 1987; Harwood 1992; Armstrong 1993; Grant 1998).

Though possible, such a deconstruction of realism in New Testament theology is not necessary to prove that the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology may have pan-atheist implications. In all their attempts to show that the Jewish scriptures support their interpretation of messianic prophecy and theological argumentation, the New Testament authors frequently quoted or alluded to the Old Testament texts. From the way the Old Testament is utilised in the New, hermeneutically questionable though it may be, it is clear that the god they claimed to believe in was the same god witnessed to in the Hebrew Scriptures and the LXX. It is an indisputable fact that the god of Jesus, Paul and all the other New Testament believers was none other than

Yahweh himself.

The devastating and far-reaching implications of the case against realism in Old Testament theology for realism in the New should therefore be clear. If Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament does not exist and Yahweh per se and therefore the god of the Old Testament is not real, it follows logically that the god of the New Testament, which is presumed to be the same god, must himself be a character of fiction.

9.3.5. Therefore, the god of the Bible does not exist

If the god of the Old Testament – and therefore the god of the New Testament – does not exist, it follows that the “god of the Bible” cannot be real. Even though throughout this study it has been implied that popular concepts like the “god of the Bible” or the “biblical” view of “God” are endlessly problematic, this only confirms the pan-atheist consequences of the case against realism. If Yahweh-as-depicted does not exist and therefore both the god of the Old and New Testaments are fictitious entities, realism in a pan-biblical theology is also invalidated.

9.3.6 Therefore, the god of Christian theology does not exist

Christian theology can hardly be considered as being “Christian” in any meaningful sense if there are no allusions whatsoever to, or dependence on, any of the biblical materials, motifs and imagery. Though there are a myriad of different Christian conceptions of God, few if any of them would deny that the god they worship is none other than the god Yahweh.

Whatever critical theologians may claim about how Christian theology can survive without the veracity of the Bible, it should now be clear that this way of looking at things involves strategies of evasion and repression. If realism in the primary epistemological sources (the Old and New Testaments) collapses, what justification remains for believing that a god identified with the god of the Bible exists at all? Isn’t it a bit like claiming that Homeric mythology does not need Homer’s myths and that one can still believe in the existence of the Homeric Zeus, even if the deity as

depicted in the sacred texts is obviously a human literary construct with no extra-textual counterpart?

Since Christian theology assumes the reality of the god whom the Bible supposedly witness to, if realism in biblical theology collapses so does realism in any other theology in any way rooted in, related to or dependent on it. If realism pertaining to biblical theology collapses and Yahweh does not exist, then all the versions of a god constructed by theologians throughout the history of dogmatic or systematic theology are themselves fictitious and must be considered as being products of creative and (re) constructive mythology.

9.3.7 Therefore the god of Christian philosophy of religion does not exist

As noted above, if Yahweh does not exist, then any sort of theism that is in any way whatsoever linked to, rooted in, derived from and dependent on realism of any part of the Old Testament text whatsoever is repressing its anti-realist status. That is why the collapse of realism in biblical theism leads inevitably to the collapse of realism in philosophical theism since the latter is indubitably in many ways rooted in and related to the depictions of Yahweh in the biblical discourse.

The problem here is twofold. Philosophers of the Christian religion either tend to bracket the history of religion and the problems of biblical theology. Alternatively, even when taking cognisance of the collapse of realism with regard to the Old Testament's depiction of Yahweh, they fail to understand its ontological implications. This allows them to repress the fact that the god they are reconstructing and whose existence they attempt to prove is supposed to be none other than the unreal Yahweh himself.

If Yahweh does not exist, how can any updating of his alleged profile make the deity any more real? Even should philosophers of the Christian religion succeed in proving that some God might exist, what use would this be if the deity couldn't be equated with Yahweh of Old? Is not proving the existence of a deity with a nature and attributes different from that of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text tantamount to an indirect disproof and veiled admission that Yahweh-as-depicted must himself be

unreal? Why bother retaining the concept “God” or the label “Christian” for one’s theology if the new view of ultimate reality is not derived from traditional sources and has little if anything in common with earlier the ideologies of biblical theology?

Whether it concerns the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from design, the teleological argument, the argument from morality, the argument from religious experience, Pascal’s wager, or whatever other theistic argument constructed to prove that God exists, since the profiles of the deity assumed by those who put forward these arguments are usually at odds with many of the depictions of Yahweh in the text, claiming that “God” exists, seems indeed to be tantamount to insinuating that “Yahweh” does not. But if Yahweh does not exist, how can “God” who, from a Christian perspective, is supposed to be none other than Yahweh himself?

All the popular philosophical theistic arguments, if they pertain to the Christian god, must repress the problems noted in the seven arguments reconstructed in the case against realism. The individual arguments in the case against realism undercut all the traditional theistic proofs. Since the devil’s advocate’s arguments deconstruct the foundations, the roots and heart of all biblically based or derived forms of theism, they are much more effective than any other popular contemporary arguments *against* the existence of “God”.

Whether one thinks of sociological arguments, psychological arguments, logico-linguistic arguments, bad design arguments, arguments from evil, etc. – one obvious problem remains. In the context of Old Testament Yahwism, these arguments are all partially invalid as they tend to bracket the history of religion and often succeed only in knocking down a straw man (i.e. the God of the philosophers) with little if any relation to the depictions of Yahweh in the text.

As long as Yahweh-as-depicted in the text remains philosophically untouched there remains a way back for Christian theists whose idea of God ultimately derives from interpretations and reinterpretations of the biblical discourse. However, once realism with regard to the latter has collapsed, the foundations, even of Christian philosophical theism, are destroyed and there is nowhere left to go but out.

As a last ditch attempt, no longer to salvage realism so much as to render anti-realism harmless, some philosophically minded scholars might wish to point to or find comfort in the fact that it is logically impossible to prove a universal negative. Thus, according to this logical philosophical principle, it is technically not possible to absolutely prove a sweeping statement like “There is no god whatsoever”. The reason such a disproof is considered to be impossible is because, in order to be certain one must know the whole of reality and no human can possibly claim to be in such a position. Therefore, it is impossible to provide absolute verification for such a sweeping claim biased towards atheistic metaphysics.

This attempt to immunise the theistic perspective against the devil’s advocate’s case, however, apart from bracketing the history of religion, has its drawbacks:

- The case against realism did not start out as being primarily concerned with the existence of any god per se but with the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the Old Testament;
- In order to prove that *Yahweh-as-depicted* does not exist one need not be able to understand all of reality but only need to show that *the texts depicting Yahweh* are fiction;
- Should one ignore the depictions of Yahweh in the texts and attempt to prove the existence of the deity via natural theology, there are no sufficient resources to prove that this particular divinity rather than any other actually exists;
- Should the profile of the divine in any argument for the existence of God be in any way dependent on, derived from, legitimised by or rooted in any of the depictions of Yahweh in the Old Testament texts, one is confronted with all the ontological problems as discussed in the case against realism;
- The consistent application of the principle regarding the supposed impossibility to prove a universal negative would imply that neither are we able to prove that

fairies, unicorns, pagan gods or any other obviously fictional characters do not really exist.

In other words, an acceptance of both critical theology and a belief in the impossibility to prove a universal negative solves one dilemma at the cost of creating another. Now the (supposedly Christian) apologist is without justification in the belief that Yahweh is any more real than pagan deities like Baal or Zeus who, according to these people, “obviously” do not exist.

But how *do* theists usually justify atheism pertaining to the other deities of pagan mythology?

- If an appeal is made to the belief that other fictional entities are demonstrably human creations with a history as all-too-human ideas, the devil’s advocate will point out that the same can be said of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text;
- If an appeal is made to the fictitious nature of the stories in which other deities feature then the devil’s advocate could claim that the same is true concerning the narratives in which Yahweh is represented;
- If an appeal is made to the mythical cosmology of the pagan beliefs and the possibility of empirical falsification when it comes to the alleged abode of a pagan deity on a mountain or in the sky then the same can be said concerning Yahweh’s abode;
- If an appeal is made to personal religious experience then the desired avoidance of a double standard fallacy must lead the apologist to admit the authenticity of the religious experience in other religions which are usually considered to be based on faith in fictitious entities;
- If any appeal is made to a statement or claim in a religious text, the argument becomes based on fallacies of assumption, circular reasoning and double standards since the claims of other sacred albeit supposedly allegedly mythical

texts are not allowed to function in an equally normative fashion;

- If an appeal is made to the fact that no one believes in pagan entities anymore the question might be asked whether anyone believes in “Yahweh” anymore (as opposed to “The Lord” or “God”);
- If an appeal is made to the projection and elements of superstition prevalent in other religions then the same can be said concerning Old Testament Yahwism;
- If an appeal is made to unacceptable moral beliefs and practices of other religions then the same can be said concerning the morality of the Old Testament.

As noted above, the assumption concerning the impossibility of proving a universal negative combined with an acceptance of critical theology thus lead to the absurd scenario where it is illegitimate to think of anything whatsoever as being fictitious. Of course, some sophisticated philosophers would want to say that it all depends on what one means by concepts such as “proof”, “Yahweh”, “fiction”, “exist”, etc. Once such a discussion ensues and concepts become redefined (and ad hoc clauses and qualifications added) it becomes virtually impossible to say anything sensible on the topic at all.

In a certain sense Yahweh obviously does “exist” (as a character in a text, as a word in rhetoric or as an entity in the imagination). In a certain sense it is impossible to disprove anything regarding the ontological status of this deity if language becomes imprecise and open to a plethora of different possible interpretations. In a sense, even speaking of “Yahweh” can be a problematic issue since it depends on what one assumes the nature and ontological status of the entity to whom the name refers are supposed to be.

However, all such attempts at destabilising meaning also refute the argument of those engaged in it. Though it makes the justification of anti-realism impossible, it also deconstructs realism to the core as there remains no essence in which to put one’s faith in. On these terms, not only would the denial of the existence of Yahweh be

meaningless but also the affirmation of the deity's supposed reality. In the end, those endorsing such a view are not only engaged in self-refuting nonsense (they expect own arguments to have stable meaning, don't they?) but are themselves doomed to a Wittgensteinian silence about things which language has nothing to say about.

9.3.8 Therefore, “God” does not exist

Western culture as such, having derived from European culture, which itself evolved with the Judaeo-Christian religious traditions as part of its cultural baggage, still speak of "God" despite the proliferation of atheism and agnosticism. In our time, though many Western people no longer believe in Yahweh or the God of Christian theology, many believe that it is still possible that there might actually be a “God”.

Such people for whom realism with regard to biblical and Christian philosophical theism has collapsed may therefore still be found as endorsing some or other form of theism, pantheism or panentheism with a minimalist body of dogma attached to it. The more sophisticated academics might endorse a form of scientific theism while the "laity" might seem to prefer one of the many fads of New Age religion. In the more compromising and accommodating varieties, these types of theologies would not write off all religion as merely false *en bloc*. Instead, they consider all forms of religious life as sincere albeit misguided and partial attempts to understand and relate to ultimate reality which, it is believed, we are only now beginning to discovering via science (astronomy, physics, biology, psychology and anthropology).

Thus, one finds many people still use the exclamation, “O my God!” in all seriousness. Many people still feel the need to try and find a concept of God that works for them and that gives meaning and purpose to their lives. Though prayer and Bible study have all but disappeared from the list of spiritual disciplines, meditation, music and communing with nature are still in vogue.

Even so, as was the case elsewhere, there is good reason for viewing the “deity” of scientific or popular post-modern varieties of pseudo-theism as an unwanted offspring of discredited biblical theism. This despite the fact that the original link has now become severely distorted, severed and repressed.

Whatever god this is that people who are otherwise atheist and anti-realist still find plausible in constructing their metaphysical and existential beliefs, the fact is that, without realism in biblical theology, all grounds for the veracity of even this minimalist form of popular theology remain unfounded. It is still no more than anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection, albeit a subtler and more updated version. It is still guilty of holding on to the groundless and tempting assumption that the human mind is supposedly a good analogy for thinking about the way the universe operates (cf. Hume 1957:31).

Whether it concerns the attempts of so-called “critical-realists” desperately trying to remake theism after its collapse by creatively endeavouring to reconcile sciences like physics and biology with Christian theology matters little. Scientific theism and its contemporary derivatives are all a fad and constitute, in a very real sense, a modern or post-modern form of mythology. The meta-narratives derived from cosmology (as popularised by people like Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking) and biology (popularised by, amongst others, Richard Dawkins) are no more than an attempt to create an atheist mythology to fill the gap left by the collapse of realism in biblical theism.

Apart from dabbling with natural science, numerous other attempts have been forthcoming to neutralise theological dilemmas on a higher level of synthesis. One will find many examples of repressing anti-realism via recourse to psychology (often Jungian), philosophy (neo-romanticism, existentialism, hermeneutics, postmodernism, etc.), sociology (e.g., inspired by ideas from Weber, Berger, etc.) or anthropology (e.g. cultural anthropology and harping on about the profound truth to be found in myth).

In many instances, some have even tried to evade the ontological crisis resulting from the collapse of realism in biblical theism by redefining the concept of "God". Thus, one may encounter references to the divine by theologians and philosophers who would like to think of it as “Being” itself (as in Heidegger, Tillich and others), the “Source”, the “One” (in the neo-Platonic sense), the “Force” (e.g. the Star Wars cult), “Mother Nature” (the Gaia hypothesis), “The Absolute” (as in Hegel, James, and others), “The Self” (Jungian), “Somebody up there”, the “Spirit” (Hegelian) or the

“Sublime” (Kantian).

All these attempts at salvaging realism in some form of theism are, according to the devil's advocate, nothing but self-deception. As was suggested in the previous chapter, contemporary Christian and post-Christian Western culture remains anti-realist and atheist in the mundane practice of everyday existence with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the text. However, this fact needs to be repressed to avoid the nihilism that inevitably ensures when denial makes way for acceptance of the death of God and collapse of the meta-narratives built up over the last couple of millennia (cf. Lyotard 1984:117).

Of course, some might think that the devil's advocate is being provincial and narrow-minded since there is still “God” as Allah in Islam or the gods of the East. However, on the one hand, those appealing to this fact should remember the Koran's own view of the relation between Allah and the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. According to the sacred scriptures of Islam, the Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God, although the fullest revelation of him is supposed to be found in the prophet's writings. Though differing in many details, the writings of the descendants of Abraham (via Isaac and Ishmael) are alleged to witness to one and the same deity. Ergo, if Yahweh does not exist, Allah's ontological status can hardly be considered as being any different.

On the other hand, most of the concepts of the divine in Eastern philosophies and religion have very little in common with theism as the West thinks of deities and reality. Whether one thinks of all the varieties of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or most of the other Eastern religious traditions, not only are most of these often pantheistic or, in a sense, atheistic. In addition, those Oriental religions that do believe in deities are all prone to the sort of refutation of realism that the devil's advocate has presented in this thesis. When the discourse of these religious traditions is not bracketed by the history and philosophy of religion, they all share the same fate as the religions of the Book in the West.

In other words, full-blown atheism seems to constitute the inevitable option following the death of Yahweh. Much of contemporary culture still lives in denial of that loss

and the need for repression to facilitate psychological survival (as psychologists like Freud and Jung discovered) is great. Temporarily throwing oneself into one's work or choosing to postpone dealing with the loss by constant social interaction may suppress existential *angst* initially. However, eventually the question of the meaning of life returns to all of us as one begins to wonder if *this* is all there is to it.

True, there are certain parts of secular culture that have progressed to and through the phases of loss – including those of grief, anger, depression and acceptance – following the death of God. Yet those who remain unaffected are few. Regression (together with relapses to earlier phases) continually reoccurs as the disorientation, nihilism and numbing relativism of the post-modern mindset become a stark reality. The whole world seems to have lost its enchantment and to have become a much more boring place now that we know Yahweh is no more around for bed time stories. It is not easy to remain satisfied with agnosticism. People need gods and *ersatz* substitutes will not do their job indefinitely.

There can be little doubt that the collapse of realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in the Old Testament lies at the heart of and may be seen as the ultimate source and repressed origin of the death of "God" as such. Consistency and thoroughness in the deconstruction of realism in Old Testament theology demand that biblically based theology can no longer be bracketed by the history and philosophy of religion. If Yahweh does not exist then neither does any other "God" thus far dreamt up by the West to avoid dealing with the collapse of realism in biblical theism and the death of The-One-Who-Is.

Thus says the devil's advocate.