What is an אֵל?
A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Generic Godhood in the Hebrew Bible

J. W. GERICKE (NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY, VANDERBIJLPARK)

"The question of what a god is is absolutely central."
M. Smith (2001:vi)

ABSTRACT

In the Hebrew Bible words like אֵל אֱלֹהִים and אלוה are often encoun-tered in the generic sense as a classification of the type of entity יהוה and other related beings were assumed to be. But what, according to the Hebrew Bible, was meant by calling something an אֵל? Is it possible to define the phenomenon of generic אֵל-hood? What were assumed to be necessary and/or sufficient conditions for being classified as a member of the אֱלֹהִים? What criteria were used to determine whether an entity should be called an אֵל or not? In this paper the author provides an introduction to the concept of generic אֵל-hood in the Hebrew Bible with reference to perplexing questions involved in its understanding, related research and the gaps therein and the need for philosophical (conceptual) analysis in future inquiries.

A   THE CONCEPT OF GENERIC GODHOOD

In the Hebrew Bible there is a phenomenon which, for the want of a better word, is called a "אֵל." Words like אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה are used not only in the *absolute* sense as proper names for יהוה but also in the *generic* sense as common nouns or appellatives indicating the type of being יהוה and other related entities and phenomena were assumed to be. In a way, one may say that the distinction between the absolute and generic senses presupposes a distinction between *who* and *what* a divine being was assumed to be. This distinction is conveniently overlooked in virtually all English translations of the Hebrew Bible, characterised as they are by the systematic obfuscation of the generic sense in that they render אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה with a capital-G, even on those occasions when the noun is clearly not used as a proper name. Instances of this trend include all of the following (corrected) examples:

- Where אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה are part of *indefinite descriptions*, for example, *a* god who saves; *a* god of great wisdom; (there is) *a* god in Israel, etcetera;

- Where אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה appear with the definite article, for example, *the* god of Israel; *the* god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; etcetera;

- Where אֵל, אֱלֹהִx and אלוה appear extended with a pronominal suffix, for example, *my* god; *your* god; *their* god; etcetera;

- Where אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה appear with a preceding adjective, for example *holy* god; *mighty* god; *jealous* god; etcetera.

The very possibility to use the generic sense with reference to יהוה is in itself conceptually and ideologically contrary to the conceptions of God in contemporary Jewish and Christian philosophy of religion. These days (and notably since Thomas Aquinas) God is not considered to belong to a genus; and yet many texts in the Hebrew Bible assume as much. In much of the Hebrew Bible's generic אֵל-talk, the nature of generic divinity was assumed to be inclusive of – but not exhausted by – the nature of יהוה *qua* "God".

Firstly, יהוה is often referred to (and worshipped as) a specific *kind* of אֵל (merciful, just, jealous, hidden, saving, etc.), implying that other kinds of divinity were at least conceivable (see Deut 32:4; Pss 5:4, 68:20; Isa 30:18, 45:15; Jer 51:56, et. al.). In other words, in theory יהוה could have instantiated a different set of properties without for that reason being considered less of an אֵל (e.g. if he was less or not merciful). The very possibility of (or need for) pointing out that יהוה is an x-kind of אֵל (or "an אֵל of x") implies that ancient Israelite generic אֵל-talk assumed a distinction between essential and accidental properties of divinity. This accounts for the conceptual possibility of theological pluralism in the representations of יהוה himself and suggests the presence of modalities.

Secondly, a host of other entities and phenomena besides יהוה are also called (אֱלֹהִים) in both a realist and nominalist generic sense. These include, inter alia, foreign אֱלֹהִים (e.g. Judg 11:24), sons of the אֱלֹהִים (e.g. Gen 6:1-4), the divine council members (e.g. Ps 82:1(6)) divine messengers (e.g. Zech 12:8), stars (e.g. Judg 5:20), unidentified celestial entities (e.g. Ps. 8:6), household spirits (e.g. Exod 21:20), *"Teraphim"* (e.g. Gen 31:30), theriomorphic idols (e.g. Exod 32:8), anthropomorphic statues (e.g. Isa. 44:17), demons (e.g. Deut 32:17), the king (e.g. Ps 45:7), dead ancestors (e.g. 1 Sam 28:17), human representatives (e.g. Exod 7:1), powerful humans (e.g. Gen 23:6), the phenomenon of power (e.g. Hab 1:11), etcetera. Certain phenomena in a superlative state are also classified as divine (e.g. a mountain (Ps 68:16), a garden (Ezek 28:13), trees (Ps 80:11), a wind (Gen. 1:2), a city (Jon 3:3), the

emotion of fear (1 Sam 14:15), etc.). In sum, the extension(s) of the generic terms אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה in the Hebrew Bible were sometimes characterised by conceptual "theodiversity" (cf. biodiversity).

In this regard it is important for the purposes of this study to note that the claim that יהוה (or another entity) is an אֵל expresses the *proposition* that יהוה (or another entity) "is an אֵל". The proposition in turn expresses the *concept* of *being an* אֵל. In this sense the descriptive predication of אֵל, אֱלֹהִים and אלוה in the generic sense suggests that in the generic אֵל-talk of the Hebrew Bible we encounter the *concept* of generic אֵל-*hood* (i. e. the state or condition of being an אֵל). Several other givens in the data suggest as much:

First of all, the abstract nature of the reference of the generic terms themselves. If we let אַ stand for אֵל, אַ for אֱלֹהִים and אַ for אלוה and the varieties אַ^{A} and אַ^{B} for the absolute and the generic senses of the three terms respectively, consider the denotation of the underlined words below:

- Before me no <u>god</u> was formed (Isa 43:10c)

$$(אַ^B{}_a)\ \text{לְפָנַי לֹא נוֹצַר} \underline{\text{אֵל}}$$

- The fool says in his heart, there is no <u>god</u> (Ps 14:1b)

$$(אַ^B{}_b)\ \text{אָמַר נָבָל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין} \underline{\text{אֱלֹהִים}}$$

- The guilty whose strength is his <u>god</u> (Hab 1:11)

$$(אַ^B{}_c)\ \text{וְאָשֵׁם זוּ כֹחוֹ} \underline{\text{לֵאלֹהוֹ}}$$

In a, b and c the word translated as "אל" does not denote any particular or specific concrete instance of a divine being qua individual. Instead, "אל" here is an undefined *abstract object* (i. e. "אל" as general idea). This is only to be expected since the use of generics itself presupposes a prior process of abstraction from particular individual (and often variable) instances of the phenomenon in question. Different אֱלֹהִים may have little in common but via generalisation they can all be called "אֱלֹהִים." What they have in common is the property of "generic אל-hood."

A second indicator of the presence of the concept of generic אל-hood is the fact that the utilization of the generic terms in the Hebrew Bible appears to meet all the criteria for concept possession. To be sure, there are different views on what it means to possess a concept but on assuming the functionality of the so-called Concepts-as-Abilities Model (see Margolis & Laurence 2008) a relatively clear-cut case can be made that while the notion of generic אל-hood seems somewhat abstract – and while the term "אל-hood" is not attested in the

Hebrew Bible *verbatim* – the concept it signifies is implicitly present nevertheless. For example, according to the particular view of concept possession, the concept of generic אל-hood is verifiably present just in case we can provide evidence in the text regarding the following:

- The presupposed ability to recognise א^B-things;

- The presupposed ability to compare them with non-א^B-things;

- The presupposed ability to be able to think about א^B-things;

- The presupposed ability to be able to talk to others about א^B-things.

Examples of the assumption of the above-mentioned abilities are not difficult to find, particularly when it comes to generic אל-talk in polemical discourse.

They made me jealous <u>with what is no god</u> (Deut 32:21)	קִנְאוּנִי הֵם <u>בְלֹא אֵל</u>
They have cast their gods into the fire; <u>for they were no gods</u> (2 Kgs 19:18)	וְנָתְנוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵיהֶם בָּאֵשׁ: <u>כִּי לֹא אֱלֹהִים הֵמָּה</u>
Has a nation changed its gods <u>even though they are no gods</u>? (Jer 2:11)	הַהֵימִיר גּוֹי אֱלֹהִים <u>וְהֵמָּה לֹא אֱלֹהִים</u>
Can man make for himself gods? <u>Such are no gods!</u> (Jer 16:20)	הֲיַעֲשֶׂה-לּוֹ אָדָם אֱלֹהִים <u>וְהֵמָּה לֹא אֱלֹהִים</u>
A workman made it; <u>it is not a *god*</u> (Hos 8:6)	<u>חָרָשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים</u>

These texts come from a variety of historical, literary and ideological contexts. What they have in common is, *inter alia*, a serious concern with concept application. No one would bother to deny that an entity worshipped as an אל is in fact such unless they had specific and definite ideas about what it meant to call something an אל. The reason why "אל" in the generic sense is never defined or discussed by the biblical authors, however, is clearly not due to a lack of interest (or ideas) on their part with regard to what it meant to call something an אל. Nor is the absence of explanations to be accounted for by an appeal to the supposed ontological mystery involved, or the supposed anti-philosophical mindset of the Hebrew culture (both conceptions are anachronistic). What it meant to call something an אל could be taken for granted (even if the concept's actual-worlds extension was essentially contested).

Because the meaning was assumed to be common knowledge, any elaborate explanations would have seemed superfluous. The realisation of this brings us to the question of what exactly it was about the "divine condition" (cf. the "human condition") that went without saying – a question which cannot be answered, however, via a biblical-theological approach that merely describes the attributes of יהוה. For in the texts above it is clearly assumed that the nature of generic divinity was inclusive of but not exhausted by the nature of יהוה – the entities in question were dismissed as pseudo-members of generic terms' extension, not because they were not more like יהוה but because they were not אֱלֹהִים. In other words, the texts presuppose that the entities in question should have (but did not) instantiate an unspecified list of necessary and essential generic properties required for them to be legitimately classified as אֱלֹהִים (in more than a *nominal* sense). What these properties were – even though they are not equated with the accidental properties of the kind of אל-ness יהוה himself instantiated – we are not told. The texts assume the answer could be taken for granted and as going without saying. Recognition of this requires us to try and look beyond the concept of generic אל-hood itself in order to determine the relevant presuppositions implicit in its use.

B   METATHEISTIC ASSUMPTIONS

Underlying the Hebrew Bible's use of the concept of generic אל-hood we encounter what may be called "metatheistic assumptions" (see Gericke 2006:860). By "metatheistic assumptions" is meant those taken-for-granted presuppositions regarding the reason why something (anything) was called an אל in the first place. After all, the phenomena in question did not have to be called "אֱלֹהִים" (the particular word), so why were these words (and sounds) chosen for designating what it was that they were talking about? In this regard, consider what turns up when we re-transcribe $א^B_a$, $א^B_b$ and $א^B_c$ back into (possible) pictographic form (with pictographs obtained from http://www.ancient-hebrew.org.) :

$א^B_a$ [אל = ox / staff]

$א^B_b$ [אֱלֹהִים = ox / staff / shout / hand / water]

$א^B_c$ [אלוה = ox / staff / hook / shout]

The precise denotations and connotations of each pictograph are a matter of debate. In addition, any associative assessment of the choice of pictographs might well be wishful thinking on the part of the esoteric and semantically

over-creative exegete. And yet it is surely valid to ask the question whether any relation was taken for granted at some point in the earliest history of ancient Israelite religion between the choice of pictographs and the meaning of the generic concept (following a pre-existing North-West Semitic trend of course). Is it merely coincidental that the imagery *prima facie* appears to represent what seems like a coherent micro-narrative expressing pastoral motif (particularly in view of the fact that pastoral metaphors were immensely popular in representing the divine condition)?

Unfortunately, there is little in scholarly research to fall back on, and probably for good reason. The subject of the relation between etymology and meaning is immensely controversial. The belief in a necessary relation is an all-too-familiar fallacy of an all-too-recent past. Usually meaning is not to be derived from the components or root of a word and the failure to pay attention to specific literary and historical contexts in which a given occurrence of the generic term is actually used in the Hebrew Bible itself will surely lead the reader to potentially committing any number of related semantic fallacies, for example, the *Lexical Fallacy, the Root Fallacy, the Etymological Fallacy, The One Meaning Fallacy, The Fallacy of Essentialism, The Fallacy of Definition by Cognates, The Fallacy of Semantic Anachronism, the Fallacy of Illegitimate Totality Transfer*, etcetera. Meaning lies in use and context, not in etymology.

Be that as it may, biblical scholars have not been altogether uninterested in the subject of roots and original meanings. Linguistic approaches often mention that for $א_b$ there are basically two possibilities, also noting a host of alternatives of more or less plausibility (though many have fallen into disuse as functional suggestions).

(i)   אֱלֹהִים ($א_b$) as plural (p) derivative (⊢) of אל ($א_a$) with root ($\sqrt{x}$} and possible (◊) meanings ($=_{df}$) as <x, y, z>

   (a) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢ $\sqrt{}$ איל◊ $=_{df}$ <ram, first, in front>

   (b) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢ $\sqrt{}$ אלה◊ $=_{df}$ <terebinth>

   (c) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢ $\sqrt{}$ אלה◊ $=_{df}$ <to bind, swear, curse>

   (d) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢ $\sqrt{}$ אול◊ $=_{df}$ <strength, might, power>

   (e) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢ $\sqrt{}$ אל◊ $=_{df}$ <to, towards>

   (f) $א_b$ (p) ⊢ $א_a$ ⊢$\sqrt{}$ (x)l◊ $=_{df}$ <other cognate root>

(ii) אֱלֹהִים ($א_b$) as plural (p) derivative (⊢) of אלוה($א_c$) with root ($\sqrt{}$) and possible (◊) meanings ($=_{df}$) as <x, y, z>

(a) א‎ᵇ (p) ⊢ אᶜ ⊢ √ אלה◊ =df <to be fearsome>

(b) אᵇ (p) ⊢ אᶜ ⊢ √ אלה◊ =df <to fear, seek refuge>

In theory there are many more possible root derivations, yet the alternatives given above represent those that have been most commonly proposed. Most scholars appear to consider the options I(a) and I(d) most likely and conclude that the idea of "power" or "leadership" represents the essential or core meaning of the generic concept (Eichrodt 1961:75). Now while from a diachronic perspective it might be interesting to try and determine what might have been the original associative meaning attributed to the terms for generic divinity (as will be shown in Part 4), a less controversial way forward would rather concern a reconstruction of the metatheistic assumptions underlying the actual use of the generic terms in the context of individual texts. Three classic instances of more forthcoming generic אל-talk may be cursively mentioned for illustrative purposes, namely Genesis 3, Isaiah 41 and Ezekiel 28 (with detailed analysis following later in Parts 3 and 4)

The first instance of generic אל-talk in the Hebrew Bible where metatheistic assumptions about what makes an entity divine are indicated is Genesis 3. In the context of the second creation narrative, we encounter the following ambiguous and obscure reference in Genesis 3:5 (if the translation is correct):

You will be <u>like gods</u>:	וִהְיִיתֶם כֵּאלֹהִים
knowers (plural) of good and evil (Gen 3:5):	יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע

Aside from all the possible exegetical issues this verse might involve, what is relevant for present purposes is to consider the fact that if the generic rendering is correct then a prominent metatheistic assumption in this text involves the idea that "knowledge of good and evil" was presupposed as being an individually necessary condition for being divine. Later in the same chapter, the metatheistic assumption is repeated and juxtaposed with another supplementary idea, i. e. being immortal as another individually necessary condition for being classified as divine (Gen 3:22):

And YHWH God said:	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהִים
"Look, the human has become <u>like one of us</u>,	הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ
to know good and evil;	לָדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע
and now, in case he puts forth his hand	וְעַתָּה פֶּן-יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ
and take also of the tree of life,	וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים
and eat, and live for ever."	וְאָכַל וָחַי לְעֹלָם

In Genesis 2-3 then, the two trees in the garden in Eden appear to symbolise what was understood to be two quintessential properties of divine beings, namely knowledge and immortality. Eating from one of the trees was apparently not believed to be sufficient for apotheosis; yet eating from both trees seems to have represented what was understood to be a jointly sufficient condition for becoming a divine being.

A second example of generic אל-talk where the metatheistic assumptions are readily apparent is found in the subsection of Isaiah 41:21-24.

Set forth your case,	רִיבְכֶם קָרְבוּ
says YHWH;	יֹאמַר יְהוָה
bring your proofs,	הַגִּישׁוּ עֲצֻמוֹתֵיכֶם
says the king of Jacob.	יֹאמַר מֶלֶךְ יַעֲקֹב:
Let them bring them,	יַגִּישׁוּ
and tell us	וְיַגִּידוּ לָנוּ
what is to happen.	אֵת אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרֶינָה
Tell us the former things,	הָרִאשֹׁנוֹת מָה הֵנָּה הַגִּידוּ
that we may consider them,	וְנָשִׂימָה לִבֵּנוּ
that we may know their outcome;	וְנֵדְעָה אַחֲרִיתָן
or declare to us the things to come.	אוֹ הַבָּאוֹת הַשְׁמִיעֻנוּ
Tell us what is to come hereafter,	הַגִּידוּ הָאֹתִיּוֹת לְאָחוֹר
<u>that we may know that you are gods;</u>	וְנֵדְעָה כִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם
do good, or do harm,	אַף-תֵּיטִיבוּ וְתָרֵעוּ
that we may be sad and terrified.	וְנִשְׁתָּעָה ונרא יַחְדָּו
Behold, you are nothing,	הֵן-אַתֶּם מֵאַיִן
and your work is nought;	וּפָעָלְכֶם מֵאָפַע
an abomination who chooses you.	תּוֹעֵבָה יִבְחַר בָּכֶם

The metatheistic assumptions in this text also list two allegedly essential properties of a deity. On the one hand there is the presupposition that an entity alleged to be an אל is in fact an אל if and only if it has superior knowledge in the sense of (a) being cognisant of and able to reveal the contents and significance of the first events; and (b) being able to foretell what will happen in the future. On the other hand, the text assumes that an entity is an אל if and only if it is also powerful to the extent of (a) possessing the ability to actualise events and cause modifications in the structure of reality for good or ill; *and* (b) being able to verify possessing this ability by manifesting it. Exhibiting knowledge and power are therefore presupposed in the text to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being classified as a divine being.

In this regard it is interesting to note that different texts in the Hebrew Bible might contain different (and even incommensurable) metatheistic

assumptions. From the examples above it is clear that whereas Genesis 3 assumes knowledge of good and evil and immortality as being the prototypical properties of divine beings, Isaiah 41 by contrast considers knowledge of temporal realities and the power to modify present states as typical. Clearly immortality (Gen 3) and power (Isa 41) are not identical, which means that the dual prototypical properties that the Yahwist and deutero-Isaiah presupposed are not identical. However, whether the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3) is the same kind as, only overlap with, or is radically different from the knowledge of the past and future (Isa 41) might well be a matter that only a detailed analysis can determine. Moreover, our third and final example (for now) – from Ezekiel 28:2-3; 9 adds yet additional ambiguity to the picture:

So says my lord Yhwh	כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהֹוִה
because your heart is high,	יַעַן גָּבַהּ לִבְּךָ
and you have said, "I am a god,	וַתֹּאמֶר אֵל אָנִי
(In) the abode of gods I sit in the seas."	מוֹשַׁב אֱלֹהִים יָשַׁבְתִּי בְּלֵב יַמִּים
But you are but a man, and no god,	וְאַתָּה אָדָם וְלֹא-אֵל
yet you set your heart as that of gods	וַתִּתֵּן לִבְּךָ כְּלֵב אֱלֹהִים
Will you still say, "I am a god," in the presence of those who slay you,	הֶאָמֹר תֹּאמַר אֱלֹהִים אָנִי לִפְנֵי הֹרְגֶךָ
as you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of who will wound you	וְאַתָּה אָדָם וְלֹא-אֵל בְּיַד מְחַלְלֶיךָ

In this text, we again encounter what appear to be explicit assumptions about what seems to have been assumed to be essential properties of generic אֱלֹהִים. However, whereas in Genesis 3:5 and verse 22 the necessary properties mentioned were knowledge of good and evil and immortality, and while Isaiah 41:21-24 referred to knowledge of the past and future and great power, in this text great *wisdom* and immortality appear prototypical. Again we have two properties apparently necessary and essential for divine status; again we are confronted with fuzzy data and no in-depth discussion of the nature and scope of the properties in question. In only one of these texts (Isaiah), the popular view that "power" appears to have been assumed to be a necessary property of generic divinity; only superior cognition appears on all three counts.

Of course, the discussion above barely touches on the intricacies and depths of the three texts in question. Yet for the present it seems warranted to conclude that there are instances of texts in the Hebrew Bible where some of

the metatheistic assumptions of a given trajectory within the traditions of ancient Israelite religion can be discerned – even if not fully appropriated. Together with the use of generic אל-talk and the concept of generic אל-hood the presence of metatheistic assumptions in the discourse constitute the preliminary background for appreciating the validity and relevance of the research problem.

C   THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the past, biblical scholars have concerned themselves with the question of what, according to the Hebrew Bible, יהוה was assumed to be like (i. e. with the kind of אל יהוה was assumed to be). In this study, however, we take a step back to look at what the Hebrew Bible assumed about the nature of divinity *per se* (i. e. about the אֱלֹהִים as kind). Thus the concern lies not with biblical conceptions of God (in the absolute sense) as such, but with אל-*hood* (in the generic sense). However, since the nature of divinity in the generic sense was assumed to be *inclusive* of the nature of divinity in the absolute sense (as demonstrated earlier), the nature and attributes of יהוה are not irrelevant to our discussion. Yet unlike discussions on generic divinity in the Hebrew Bible in the past, the concern in this study is not יהוה but the type of entity he (and others) were assumed to be. In other words, our concern lies with the class, not with individual members; with the type, not the token; with the kind, not the instance, with the universal/trope, not the particular, with the category, not the beings; with the *genus*, not the *differentia*.

In this study then, the nature of generic אל-hood represents the exclusive concern and is not as is hitherto traditional merely a preliminary issue before we get to the real topic of interest – the nature of יהוה himself. Rather, the order is reversed: if the nature of יהוה is to be relevant to our discussion at all that relevancy lies solely in יהוה being a member of the extension of the generic concept. In as much as יהוה was assumed to be an instance of a certain kind of generic אל-hood, his representations are informative about generic אל-hood as such and must be appropriated in that manner. Other than that, the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible encompasses such a variety of entities and phenomena (and its generic אל-talk presupposes so many alternative configurations of the generic properties of divine beings) that we cannot be content solely with what is provided by the typical study in biblical theology. So for us, the question is not what, according to the Hebrew Bible, was God (יהוה) assumed to be like. Instead, the question that drives us involves taking a step back and asking:

>   *What,* according to the Hebrew Bible*, is* an אל*?*

For the purposes of clarification, the same question might be rephrased as:

What, according to the Hebrew Bible, *did it mean* to call something an אל*?*

One can talk about *Biblical Theology* or the *History of Israelite Religion* but that does not mean anything. And while the meaning of "life" may be found in a Hebrew Lexicon, the meaning of the concept of generic אל-hood in ancient Israelite religion is somewhat more elusive. This is the case not only given the theological pluralism in the text or the "theodiversity" in the extensions of the generic terms (i. e. the "divine condition"). Nor is the elusiveness merely a result of the fact that our own metatheistic assumptions do not as a rule involve viewing divinity as a genus. Rather, the difficulty for the biblical scholar concerns the seemingly *philosophical* nature of the query. For the question above may be broken down into several sub-queries, the formulation of which might seem quite abstract:

(a) Is it possible to *define* the Hebrew Bible's concept of generic אל-hood*?*
(b) What, according to the Hebrew Bible, makes an אל *divine*?
(c) What were the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for being an אל?
(d) What were the essential and accidental properties of אֱלֹהִים?
(e) What was the difference(s) between אל-ness and everything else?
(f) What criteria were used to determine whether something is an אל or not?

Now ideally, the answer would have the following logical form:

For any entity x, x is an אל *if and only if* a, b, c….etcetera.

Of course, intending to answer the initial and sub questions might sound presumptuous. Biblical criticism has taught us, if anything, that given the historical variation, theological pluralism, literary diversity and conceptual complexity in the discourse – the Hebrew Bible is not likely to offer us any clear-cut simple single answer. That means that, in as much as there is an answer to be inferred at all, it might be more than one answer, the answers might not cohere, and whatever they are, there is no guarantee that they will seem orthodox by the standards of what is taken for granted in many modern philosophical theologies. As a result of our bracketing of what possibly represents the most fundamental conceptual issue in all biblical interpretation, it might come as a surprise to learn that we actually know very little about יהוה's divine nature (and this not as logical necessity). This is evident when we consider the fact that the following questions are seldom if ever raised in biblical theologies:

- Why, according to the Hebrew Bible, was יהוה called an אל?
- What was it about יהוה that made the classification obvious and justified?
- What was it about the אֱלֹהִים that made it meaningful and appropriate?

- If יהוה is a specific kind of אל, what variation in אל-ness was conceivable?

Again we should reckon with the fact that even if any answer is inferable from the generic אל-talk at all, there might be multiple, contradictory and heterodox notions in the data. Moreover, any biblical scholar attending to these questions should remember that he or she encounters them with a personal conceptual background riddled with taken-for-granted ideas about Godhood which, though appropriate in the contexts of philosophical theology, might nevertheless be anachronistic and distortive in the context of ancient Israelite religion's metatheistic assumptions. That these assumptions might be radically different from what we ourselves take for granted, is easily demonstrated by the fact that most of us would be at a total loss as to what went without saying in the Hebrew Bible in terms of implied answers to some very elementary questions, for example:

(i)   Why does an אל want to create things?
(ii)   Why does an אל want to be worshipped?
(iii)   Why does an אל want to rule?
(iv)   Why does an אל want to be feared?
(v)   Why does an אל want to prescribe human behaviour?
(vi)   Why does an אל appear visibly so seldom?
(vii)   Why does an אל want to speak obscurely (e.g. in dreams)?
(viii) Why does an אל want to inhabit particular locations (e.g. heaven)?
(ix)   Why did it make sense to think that there is such a thing as an אל?
(x)   Why did it make sense to use the word "אל" for the phenomenon?
(xi)   What was it assumed to be like to be an אל?
(xii)   What kind of property was generic אל-hood itself assumed to be?
(xiii) What was assumed to be the meaning of an אל's existence?
(xiv)   What was assumed to be the significance of אל-hood?
(xv)   What was an אל assumed to consist of?

Our philosophical-theological assumptions make many of these questions seem inappropriate or conceptually problematic. In response we might label such concerns a category mistake or themselves anachronistic since the biblical authors do not ask such questions. However, chances are that the defensive response is but the result of our philosophical-theological conceptual background being destabilised and our attempt to bracket questions, the answers to which we fear might seem ridiculous from the perspective of what we ourselves would like to believe. For it might make the Hebrew Bible's conception of אֱלֹהִים seem "all too human".

The fact is, however, that in the Hebrew Bible אל-like beings are associated with the states of affairs presupposed in the questions above. They all pertain to innate or instinctive behaviour of prototypical divinity. Given that

this association is by no means a logical (as opposed to theological) necessity, it follows that there must have been a sufficient reason as to why it was first believed (and subsequently taken for granted) that an entity participating in the divine condition has these particular properties, functions and relations. As a result, though the Hebrew Bible neither explicitly asks nor directly answers any of these questions, it would amount to *non-sequitur* reasoning to conclude that this is because it was of no concern, or because there are no answers (or that therefore we today may not ask such questions). Because the basic ideas went without saying, asking and answering of each of the above questions would have seemed superfluous. Of course, being so far removed from ancient Israel in terms of conceptual backgrounds, readers today cannot simply take it for granted that how we would respond to the questions above (those who do wonder about these matters at all) will be identical to the response(s) implicit in the metatheistic assumptions of the Hebrew Bible itself.

D   PREVIOUS RELATED RESEARCH AND THE GAPS THEREIN

So what have we already discerned about the meaning of the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible? Curiously, the generic אל-talk of the Hebrew Bible and the metatheistic assumptions underlying them have never been the subject of an in-depth descriptive philosophical analysis exclusively devoted to the topic for its own sake. To be sure, there is nothing new under the sun and many studies have been concerned with the Hebrew Bible's generic terms for divinity, their extension and with the attributes of יהוה *qua* divine being. However, the question is whether any of these studies have answered our question of what an אֵל was assumed to be in the sense reconstructed in the previous section.

Firstly, relevant word studies found in typical *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionaries and Lexicons* such as (*inter alia*) Brown, Driver, & Briggs (1970), Föhrer (1973), Gesenius (1954), Holladay (1971), Köhler, Baumgartner, & Stamm (1993) are almost exclusively concerned with interesting issues, none of which provide the information we are looking for. Typical concerns involve root identification, statistical data pertaining to the occurrences of words for generic and absolute godhood, morphological and syntactic intricacies, and so on. Also offered are various translation possibilities that have been utilised in the rendering of the Hebrew into modern languages (with modern-theological ideology not altogether absent). Though interesting in itself as background data for the present inquiry, such lexical-semantic analysis is not sufficient for enabling us to answer our questions concerning the biblical concept of generic אל-hood.

Somewhat more directly related to the present inquiry, yet still not suffi-ciently adequate in terms of its scope are discussions found in *Theological*

Dictionaries of the Old Testament. Representative in this regard are entries under "God" (for some reason again under the discussion of "אֱלֹהִים" rather than "אל") in, *inter alia*, Ringgren (1974); Schmidt (1971), Van der Toorn *et al* (1999). In most of these studies one basically encounters a theological elaboration on the linguistic data. There are a few remarks on theories on the etymology of the generic terms, some attention to the grammatical oddities characterising the use of the words, a few notes on the extension of the generic terms, and a few notes on its use and role in the history of Israelite religion in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern conceptions of divinity (e.g. Mesopotamian *DINGIR*; Egyptian *Netjer*, etc). The type of research data presented by Ringgren (1974) and in Van der Toorn (1999) are most relevant for present purposes as these exhibit an interest overlapping with that implicit in our questions. However, ultimately the interest in these studies tend not to be exclusively concerned with the generic concept for its own sake and, as a result, the inquiries do not answer the questions that constitute our research problem.

The same state of affairs is the case with *Old Testament Theologies*. Only some of these – biblical theologies of the systematic type, *inter alia*, for example those of Eichrodt (1961), Jacob (1958), Köhler (1956), Preuss (1996) and Rowley (1956) deal in any notable manner with אֱלֹהִים *qua* generic concept. However, none of the discussions are in-depth and here too there is no exclusive concern with generics for its own sake as the real concern pertains to the nature of absolute Godhood (with the generic sense as something simply to be noted). Other more philosophically-related studies like those of Föhrer (1972), Kaiser (1993) and Oeming (1985) are no better as they show little interest in providing an in-depth analysis of the generic concept. A noteworthy albeit unfortunately cursive remark is found in Knierim (1995:491) who wants us to ask "*What is 'God'?*" in the sense of considering what the Hebrew Bible meant by the word "God." He briefly suggests that we inquire as to what function the word "God" had in the worldview of ancient Israel and what difference it made to it (given what that view would be without it). Yet ultimately Knierim too is concerned with "God" *qua* יהוה rather than with the Hebrew Bible's metatheistic assumptions about generic divinity as such or for its own sake. Moreover, Knierim never attempts to answer his own question but instead simply mentions the need for the particular inquiry (Knierim 1995:492).

A few papers on related issues published in academic journals also have some bearing (e.g. Krueger 1998) but tend to be equally superficial. Meta-theologies like those of Barr (1999), Hasel (1985), Hayes & Prussner (1985) Reventlow (1985) and Stendahl (1962) show no evidence that the generic concept was ever a major concern in biblical theologies, which again partly

reveal the intrusion of dogmatic concerns upon historical and descriptive reconstructions.

Yet another similar partially related scenario is also attested in a few *sociological perspectives* on the concept of divinity in the Hebrew Bible. Probably the best-known example is the study of Gottwald (1999) who in the latter part of his study attempted to provide a perspective from the sociology of religion on the nature of deity in ancient Israel in its ancient Near Eastern context. Via sociological reductionism Gottwald (1999) managed to construe the divine as a symbol and in doing so offers us an interesting evaluative assessment of what he takes to be the actual referent of the Hebrew Bible's conceptions of absolute Godhood. What he does not offer us is any sort of explanation of the meaning of the concept of generic אל-hood elucidating descriptively the Hebrew Bible's own metatheistic assumptions about the divine condition. Thus we learn what generic divinity is from a modern sociological perspective, but not what it was assumed to be, according to the Hebrew Bible itself.

Literary-critical approaches to יהוה (God) as a character in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible show a similar lack of interest in the generic concept of deity and metatheistic assumptions in the Hebrew Bible. Clines (1995) seems to presuppose that we already know exactly what an אל was assumed to be when he discusses "God in the Pentateuch" (cf. also his 1980 publication "Yahweh and the God of Christian Theology"). Those interested in an answer to our questions will, however, not learn anything from such presumption. The same scenario is found in the publication of Miles (1995) who, in his "biography" of God actually asks the question "*What Makes God Godlike?*" However, though this seems *prima facie* related to the concern of this study (cf. what makes an אֵלdivine?), on closer inspection it turns out to be little more than a discussion of the distinguishing features of יהוה *qua* יהוה and not יהוה as an אל (or an אל *qua* type). As with regard to the study of Clines, this is not in itself a problem but we should take cognizance of the fact that in these and other related inquiries an in-depth presuppositional analysis of the generic concept apparently lies beyond the scope of the method.

Things do not change much as one crosses over from Old Testament theology to studies on deity in the *History of Israelite Religion*. To be sure, the writings of, *inter alia*, Albertz (1992), Föhrer (1973), Keel & Uehlinger (1998), Miller (2000), Oesterly & Robinson 1952), Ringgren (1966), and Schmidt (1983), have much to offer with regard to the historical development of ideas about specific deities and biblical conceptions of הוהי. But none gives even a diachronical account of the metatheistic assumptions underlying the *generic* concept of divinity in the Hebrew Bible. In more specifically *comparative-religious studies,* however, the studies of Saggs (1978) and Mark Smith (2001) are noteworthy. Especially the latter, as Smith notes in his introduction that his

research for the book was inspired by the question "What is an *ilu*?" Smith (2001:6-9) also notes three traditional approaches to the study of generic divinity before suggesting a fourth approach:

- Taking inventory, for example making a list of entities/phenomena classified as divine;
- Explicating etymology, for example noting the root meanings of terms for "god";
- Atomistic comparative description, for example comparing ANE gods with Israel's god;
- Large-scale comparative description, for example venturing a typology of divanity.

Ultimately, Smith's study is both pioneering and not identical to what the present inquiry is looking for. The reason is that Smith's primary interest is the development of monotheism in ancient Israelite religion which means the concept of generic divinity was not his exclusive concern. In fact, the material on generic divinity related to the present study is limited to Part II of the book where he discusses what he calls the traits of deity or divine characteristics. According to Smith, these are the following:

- size and strength
- body and gender,
- holiness
- immortality

Though conceptually useful, there are a number of reasons as to why the particular choice of properties will not suffice as an answer to what an אל was assumed to be and why it cannot be adopted *en bloc* in the present inquiry.

Firstly, Smith purports to discuss the nature of generic divinity but in the end most instances discussed still concerns יהוה, the אל of Israel. This is problematic since the four divine attributes listed above do not apply to all members of the extension of the generic terms (e.g. the deified dead who were also sometimes classified as divine beings yet were not particularly noteworthy for their power ["*Rephaim*"!])

Secondly, given that Smith's list is not applicable to all entities and phenomena in the extension of the generic terms, it follows that he did not adequately make a distinction between essential and accidental properties of generic אל-hood. To be sure, the terms "essence" and "accident" may sound too philosophical for the taste of some biblical theologians because they are not attested *verbatim* in the Hebrew Bible itself. Yet neither are Smith's use of the word "gender" and the biblical theologian's application of cherished terms, for example "personal" or "transcendent". Clearly the use of philosophical

terminology is only conceptually problematic should it be applied in a constructive and speculative sense. When used in a descriptive and analytical sense they might well elucidate what the Hebrew Bible itself assumed yet did not bother to formulate.

Thirdly, yet again the intensional (in the technical semantic sense; not to be confused with "inten̲tional"!) mode of meaning is neglected. Smith's list does not tell us about what the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for being an אל were assumed to be. For example, other entities and phenomena in the Hebrew Bible were also assumed to exhibit some of these attributes without for that reason being considered divine (e.g. humans and animals are also gendered and embodied). In other words, none of these properties were assumed sufficient for being an אל (the Hebrew Bible knows of holy, powerful and immortal substances that were not assumed to be divine). The reason why Smith chose these particular traits or attributes rather than other possible ones is therefore not because his choice is what the ancient Israelites themselves would have pointed out but because these properties happen to link up to, and seem relevant/interesting from the perspective of taken-for-granted metatheistic assumptions in traditional philosophical conceptions of divinity (though Smith's list is surely less anachronistic than the "Perfect-Being" theologies still presented in the writings of biblical theologians).

Ultimately, Smith's choice for providing a typology of divinity as vantage point, though certainly representing an improvement in the discussion of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible is ultimately (as can be expected) more a look at kinds of divine beings rather than at divinity as kind. For this reason, perhaps, the study never really answers the question of what an אל was assumed to be. For this reason, the present study, whose aim is/which aims at answering to answer such questions, must seek to build on, yet ultimately go beyond Smith's pioneering contribution (as a supplemental extension thereto and not as a replacement thereof).

When one turns one's attention away from biblical studies proper to related research in the scientific study of religion proper (i. e. *Religionswissenschaft*) more partially-informative-but-not-quite-adequate discussions are forthcoming. On the one hand, several studies provide us with research on the concept of generic divinity (cf. Ludwig 1987; Owen 1971; Panikkar 1987, Pyysiäinen 2005, Sullivan 1987). Pyysiäinen in particular actually asked the question, "What is it, in fact, that makes an entity a god?" And yet, in this field of research several tendencies complicate the use of the data for answering the question with reference to the metatheistic assumptions of the Hebrew Bible.

Firstly, the historical and conceptual scopes of the above-mentioned inquiries are too big as they are not limited to the concept of generic divinity in

ancient Israelite religion. Secondly, even in this discipline the primary concern lies with the biblical conceptions of divinity in the absolute sense (i. e. God as individual divine being) rather than with the Hebrew Bible's concept of generic divinity for its own sake (i. e. the use of the generic term "אל" to indicate a genus). Thirdly, the discussions that involve the Hebrew Bible tend to depend heavily on what biblical scholars have already discovered, which means that they contain the same gaps as mentioned above in connection with research in biblical studies. Fourthly, because the discussions do not involve in-depth engagements with the textual data, oversimplification, selectivity and generalization are common. Fifthly, in the end those studies which do provide answers to the kinds of questions asked in this study are not sufficiently specific enough and there is uncertainty as to whether they are *en bloc* applicable to the metatheistic assumptions of ancient Israelite religion.

Under this category I would include the study of religions of specific cultures that nevertheless appears to have *prima facie* relevance for our own inquiry. The seminal study of Jacobson (1979) on the concept of divinity in Mesopotamian religion is in a sense closer to what we are looking for but in terms of contents is not always applicable to Israelite religion and does not involve an in-depth analysis of the generic concept. Then there are other studies whose titles seem relevant in the *verbatim* sense but whose contents are either not related, specific or not analytical enough. This includes, for example, "What is God?" by Haught (1986), who deals with divine *whatness* but then not with reference to the Hebrew Bible but in a most general sense in that the author considers possibilities for contemporary credible conceptions of absolute divinity. Then there is the study of Lloyd and Burkert (1997) who asked "What is God?", although the question was put with reference to the nature of Greek divinity. The work of Dunand *et al* (2005) seems directly relevant given the title of the first chapter, namely "What is a god?" Ultimately, however the study is limited to the nature of divinity in Egypt between 3000 B.C.E. – 395 C.E., again meaning that the cultural context is not specific enough. The same may be said of the study by Assmann (1979). In each case, also, there is little concern for an in-depth analysis of the generic concept (and no study is exclusively focused thereon for its own sake).

A final field of research to which this study will be closely connected is *Philosophy of Religion*. Under this rubric I include systematic- and philosophical-theological writings related to our topic. Particularly noteworthy examples include, *inter alia*, the studies by Durrant (1992), Ward (1998) and especially Cupitt (1997). Unfortunately, even the discussions of the concept of God in analytical (not to mention continental philosophy of religion) turn out on closer inspection to be only of relative value for the present inquiry for a number of reasons:

(i)   Philosophers of religion proper tend to focus on concepts in Judaism and Christianity rather than those in ancient Israelite religion.

(ii)   Philosophers of religion proper tend to focus on overt propositions rather than on metatheistic assumptions.

(iii)   Philosophers of religion tend to focus on absolute Godhood (God) rather than on *generic* godhood (divinity *qua* genus)

(iv)   Philosophers of religion tend to work with neat systematic confessional data of the post-biblical traditions rather than with the complex, pluralist, dynamic, diverse and mythical discourse of biblical Yahwism(s).

(v)   Philosophers of religion proper tend to concern themselves with analysis that is evaluative rather than descriptive, i. e. they are usually concerned with truth-claims (what it means) rather than with a historical assessment (what it meant).

To be sure, the above comments are generalisations based on stereotypical tendencies among mainstream philosophers of religion and in as much as there is some interest in the Hebrew Bible at all. Moreover, I do not intend to imply that philosophers of religion should not have been doing what they did do and should have paid more attention to the kind of interests that concern us in the present study. I just wish to point out the fact that one cannot appeal to research in mainstream philosophical approaches to the study of religion to claim that this study is superfluous since we have "been there, done that".

Many more examples of related research could be listed here from a variety of related disciplines but it would not make the point any clearer for the basic issues regarding relevance and problems are the same. The concerns of this study, its issues and its interests have not, to my best knowledge, been dealt with sufficiently anywhere else in the format to be found in the discussion to follow. Of course, noting the gap in the research is one thing. Suggesting an appropriate research methodology with which to close that gap is another thing altogether.

E   A PROPOSED METHODLOGY FOR FUTURE INQUIRIES

Given these gaps in the research and in view of the concerns of this study, what methodology would be most appropriate for further research?

Questions of the form "*What is X"* (where X is a concept, e.g. "What is knowledge?," "What is justice?," "What is a person?," "What is a אל?", etc.) can be approached from a number of different perspectives derived from various auxiliary subjects. However, in view of the particular nature and contents of the research problem as outlined above it seems clear that what is required is a form of philosophical explication that goes beyond mere semantic

analysis. Once this is recognised and the concern remains primarily with the "intension" (as opposed to "extension") of the generic terms for divinity it would seem that the utilisation of analytic philosophy in general and conceptual analysis in particular might prove fruitful. Though philosophical (and therefore by definition being suspect according to many biblical theologians) conceptual analysis has nothing to do with reading philosophy into the text or constructing a systematic philosophical-theology from it. This would be hermeneutically suspect in view of the theological pluralism, historical contingency and literary variety within which generic אל-talk in the Hebrew Bible occurs. Rather, conceptual analysis as will be utilised here will involve purely descriptive and historical philosophical reflection aimed at translating into non-distortive philosophical language what the biblical authors themselves presupposed when they used the concept. No evaluative assessment is required, that is, no apologetics or atheology. It is a phenomenological type of inquiry already well-established in fields other than philosophy proper, for example in linguistics, psychology, etcetera (see Margolis 2008 for a detailed overview).

Not that the approach does not have its drawbacks. In fact, some of the deepest divides in contemporary philosophy concern the status of conceptual analysis (see e.g. Chalmers 1996, Jackson 1998, Block & Stalnaker 1999, DePaul & Ramsey 1998). For many, philosophy is essentially the *a priori* analysis of concepts (Jackson 1998, Chalmers 1996, and Bealer 1998). Others argue that the method of analysis is problematic (e.g. Ramsey 1992). Most of the disagreements concern the question of what exactly concepts are supposed to be (Margolis & Laurence 1999; for example, mental representations, abilities, properties, Fregean sense, etcetera? Philosophers also differ in their views on the ontological status of concepts, which are generally considered to be universals (Realism? Nominalism? Conceptualism?). Another essentially contested area is the epistemology of concepts (with opposite perspectives being nativism and empiricism). Then there are issues pertaining to the question of whether non-conceptual mental content exists and the relation between concepts and natural language (see Murphy 2002). One could also argue about the difference between primitiveness or complexity in concepts or the relative merits of the containment vis-à-vis inferential models of conceptual structure. Not surprisingly, a variety of different theories of concepts are attested, including, *inter alia*, the following:

(i)   *Classical Theories* might see the concept of generic אל-hood to be analysed in terms of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, logical constitution and crisp definition (contemporary defenders of the classical view include Jackson 1998, Peacocke 1992, and Earl 2002).

(ii)   *Neo-Classical Theories* might suggest that the concept of generic אל-hood will probably have necessary conditions

for it's application but deny that it will always have individually necessary conditions that are jointly sufficient (for further discussions, see Laurence and Margolis 1999 and Earl 2002).

(iii)   *Prototype Theories* might view the concept of generic אל-hood as bereft of metaphysically necessary and sufficient conditions but rather try to assess it in terms of lists of typical features or "family resemblances" in paradigm cases (Rosch 1978; Ramsey 1992).

(iv)   *Dual Theories* might tend to involve a combination of the classical and prototype theories (or another theory). According to the typical *Dual Theory*, a concept has two types of structure, one type constitutes the concept's "core" and the second its "identification procedure".

(v)   *Exemplar Theories* might interpret the concept of generic אל-hood as referring to everything in its extension so that the terms are applicable to anything that approximates any of the already known instantiations closely enough (Fodor 1998; and Murphy 2002; this theory is sometimes classed with the prototype view).

(vi)   *Theory Theories* might conceive of generic אל-hood as an entity individuated by and obtaining its meaning from the role its plays in internally represented "mental" theories (where such a theory is immanent in the mind and of some category or other); (Carey 1985, 1999; Murphy and Medin 1999).

(vii)   *Atomistic Theories* might imply that the concept of generic אל-hood would be a primitive unanalysable entity resulting from radical nativism (being innate); (see Fodor 1998).

(viii)   *Proxytype Theories* will suggest that the concept of generic אל-hood arose from empirical experience and would be a copy or a combination of copies of perceptual representations (see Prinz 2002).

(ix)   *Pluralist Theories* might adopt more than one perspective by utilising one of the theories above depending on the aspect of the concept currently under consideration (see Weiskopf 2008).

All of these theories are undergirded by presuppositions about a number of issues related to the nature of concepts. None of them can explain everything on their own regarding all possible types of concepts (primitive, complex, lexical, etc.). In the end, however, these problems are not detrimental for the purposes of this inquiry. For our concern will not be to ask or assume which (if any) of these theories is the best but rather will involve utilising each purely out

of curiosity to see what turns up from the particular perspective the specific theories provides. Some individual instances of the concept of generic divinity in the text may readily lend themselves to a (neo-)classical analysis (as we have seen with regard to Gen 3, Isa 41 and Ezek 28), whereas a pan-biblical perspective might require an approach able to deal with conceptual pluralism and with divinity as an evolving polythetic class (e.g. via a prototype, exemplar, theory, proxytype or pluralist approach). In other words, what is required for the intended research is a comprehensive and in-depth approach able to provide a holistic perspective on the matter, thus providing, *inter alia*, the following:

1. An account of the structure of the concept of generic אל-hood

      (a) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible presupposes to be the satisfying conditions for being in the possible-worlds extension of the concept of generic אל-hood.

      (b) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible implies about the logical constitution(s) for the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible.

      (c) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible assumes about any possible distinction between primitive and complex conceptualisation in the concept of generic אל-hood.

      (d) Specific conditions on correct analyses of the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible.

2. An account of the epistemology of the concept of generic אל-hood

      (a) An account of what a given text presupposes about the origin of the concept of generic אל-hood.

      (b) An account of what a given text implies about the acquisition of the concept of generic אל-hood.

      (c) An account of what a given text presupposes about the possession of the concept of generic אל-hood.

      (d) An account of what a given text assumes with reference to the concept of generic אל-hood in the context of categorisation.

      (e) An account of what a given text presupposes with regard to taken-for-granted epistemological criteria for concept application.

      (f) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible assumes with reference to belief justification in terms of reference for the concept of generic אל-hood.

3. An account of the metaphysics of the concept of generic אל-hood

(a) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible assumes about the concept of generic אל-hood as a universal/trope distinguished from other sorts of universals/tropes.

(b) An account of what a given text in the Hebrew Bible takes to be the identity conditions for the concept of generic אל-hood.

(c) An account of the distinction between simplicity and complexity in the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible.

(d) An account of what a given text assumes about the nature and properties of the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible.

(e) An account of what a given text assumes about the functions and relations of the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible.

With these *loci* of interest, biblical scholars will be able to engage in an in-depth analysis of the concept of generic אל-hood in the Hebrew Bible in a methodologically sound manner that is at once philosophical and purely historical/ descriptive (as opposed being speculative, constructive, systematising and evaluative). This means that there is no longer any reason to avoid philosophical reflection or limit ourselves to semantics. For by way of conceptual analysis we can go beyond merely taking cognisance of the extensional dimension of the concept (or the construction of a typology of divinity) to plunging the intensional depths of the mystery of what it was that was assumed to make an אל divine. And as an example of what exactly this will involve, I myself intend to publish such an analysis within the next year (2009-2010).

F   CONCLUSION

By way of Socratic disillusionment we have discovered that despite our constant concern with deity as generic religious concept in the Hebrew Bible, we actually know very little about the divine condition. At present, hitherto no attempt has been made to account for the theodiversity of the possible-world extension of the generic terms for divinity in ancient Israelite religion by determining its intensional mode of meaning. Consequently, it would seem that the concept of generic אל-hood is probably the most debilitating of blind spots of biblical scholarship in general and in biblical theology in particular. And such it will remain, unless in our historical inquiries we are able to bracket our anachronistic assumptions (e.g. the idea in philosophical theology that God is not part of a *genus*) and get over our methodological hang-ups (i. e. our anti-philosophical sentiment). Otherwise the metatheistic assumptions of ancient Israelite religion will forever elude us, thereby placing beyond our grasp any sufficient reason for what must surely be the most interesting folk-taxonomic classification we have ever had the nerve to imagine.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albertz, R. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (2 volumes). London: SCM Press, 1992.

Assman, J. "Primat und Transendenz: Struktur und Genese der Ägyptischen Vorstellung eines 'Hochsten Wesens.' Pages 117-136 in *Aspekten der spätägyptischen Religion*. Edited by Westendorf, W. Wiesbaden: Brill, 1979.

Barr, J. *The concept of Biblical Theology: an Old Testament perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.

Bealer, G. "Intuition and the Autonomy of Philosophy." Pages 201-239 in *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*. Edited by M. DePaul & W. Ramsey. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

Block, N. & Stalnaker, R. Conceptual Analysis and the Explanatory Gap. *Philosophical Review,* 108/1(1999): 1-46.

Brown, F., Driver, S.R. & Briggs, C. A. *The New Brown-Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1970.

Carey, S. *Conceptual Change in Childhood*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1985.

_____ "Knowledge Acquisition: Enrichment or Conceptual Change." Pages 459-487 in *Concepts: Core Readings*. Edited by E. Margolis & S. Laurence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Chalmers, D. *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Clines, D. J. A. "Yahweh and the God of Christian Theology". *Theology* 83(1980): 323-330.

_____ *Interested Parties: The ideology of Readers and Writers of the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Cupitt, D. *After God: The future of religion*. London: Basic Books, 1997.

DePaul, M. & Ramsey, W. *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

Dunand, D. *et al. Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE.* Translated by David Lorton. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004

Durrant, M. "The meaning of 'God'," in *Religion and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Syndicate, 1992, 71-84.

Earl, D. *The Big Book of Concepts*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2002.

Eichrodt, W. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Translated by J. A. Baker. 2 vols. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, [1961], 1967.

Fodor, J. *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Föhrer, G. A., ed. *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973.

_____ *History of Israelite Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Gericke, J. W. "What's a god? Preliminary thoughts on meta-theistic assumptions in Old Testament Yahwism(s)". *Verbum et Ecclesiae* 27/3(2006): 856-857.

Gesenius, F. H. W. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. Translated by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954.

Gottwald, N. K. *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979.

Hasel, G. F. 1985. *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (3rd ed.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Haught, J. F. *What is God? How to Think about the Divine*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

Hayes, J. H. & Prussner F. *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development*. Atlanta:

John Knox, 1985.

Holladay, W. L. A. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971

Jackson, F. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defense of Conceptual Analysis.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Jacob, E. *Theology of the Old Testament.* Translated by Heathcote, A. W. &. Allcock, P. J. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Jacobson, T. *The treasures of darkness: a history of Mesopotamian religion.* London: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Kaiser, O. *Der Gott des Alten Testaments. Theologie des AT, 1: Grundlegung.* Göttingen:Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993.

Keel, O. & Uehlinger, C. *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Knierim, R. P. *The task of Old Testament theology – method and cases*. Cambridge: William B Eerdmans, 1995.

Köhler, L. *Old Testament Theology*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1956.

Köhler, L., Baumgartner, W. & Stamm, J .J. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: The New Koehler and Baumgartner in English.* Translated by M. E. Richardson. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993.

Krueger, T. "Einheit und Vielfalt des Gottlichen nach dem Alten Testament." No pages. 1998. Online: http://www.theologie.uzh.ch/faecher/altes-testament/thomas-krueger/Krueger_1998_Einheit_und_Vielfalt.pdf, 1998.

Laurence, S. & Margolis, E. "Concepts and Cognitive Science." Pages 3-81 in *Concepts: Core Readings*. Edited by E. Margolis & S. Laurence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Lloyd, A. B. & Burkert, W. *What is a God?: Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity.* London: Duckworth/Classical Press of Wales, 1997.

Ludwig, T. M. "Gods and goddesses". Pages 67-78 in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (vol 6). Edited by Eliade, M. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

Margolis, E. & Laurence, S. "Concepts." No pages in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*. 2008. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Online: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/concepts/, 2008.

Miles, J. *God: A Biography*. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Miller, P. D. *The Religion of Ancient Israel. Library of Ancient Israel.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000

Morris, T. V. *The concept of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Murphy, G. *The Big Book of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Murphy, G. and Medin, D. "The Role of Theories in Conceptual Coherence." Pages 425-458 in *Concepts: Core Readings*. Edited by E. Margolis & S. Laurence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Oeming, M. *Gesamtbiblischen Theologien der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985.

Oesterley, W. O. E. & Robinson T. H. *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development*. London: SPCK, 1952.

Owen, H. P. *Concepts of deity*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

Panikkar, R. "Deity." Pages 274-276 in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (vol 6). Edited by Eliade, M. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

Peacocke, C. *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

Preuss, H. D. *Old Testament Theology.* 2 vols. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996.

Prinz, J. *Furnishing the Mind: Concepts and Their Perceptual Basis*. Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2002.

Pyysiäinen, I. "God: A brief history with a cognitive explanation of the concept." No pages. 2005 Online: http://www.talkreason.org/articles/god.pdf

Ramsey, W. "Prototypes and Conceptual Analysis." *Topoi* 11(1992): 59-70.

Reventlow, H. G. *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Ringgren, H. s.v. "אֱלֹהִים." Pages 435-457 in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (ThWAT) 10 Bde. Edited by Botterweck, G. J. & Ringgren, H. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974.

_____ *Israelite Religion*. Translated by David E. Green. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

Rowley, H. R. *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought*. London: SPCK, 1956.

Rosch, E. "Principles of Categorization." Pages 27-48 in *Cognition and Categorization*. Edited by E. Rosch & B. Lloyd. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1978.

Saggs, H. W. *The encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel*. London: Athlone Press, 1978.

Schmidt, W. H. s.v. "אֱלֹהִים." Pages 331-347 in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (THAT), 2 Bde. Edited by Jenni, E. & Westermann, C. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1994/95.

_____ *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History*. Translated by John Sturdy. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

Smith, M. *The origins of biblical monotheism: Israel's polytheistic background and the Ugaritic texts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Stendahl, K. "Biblical Theology, Contemporary." Pages 418-32 in *Interpereter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Sullivan, L. E. "Supreme beings." Pages 166-181 in *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (vol 6)*. Edited by Eliade, M. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

Van der Toorn, K. *et al,* eds. *Dictionary of deities and demons in the Bible*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

_____ s.v. "God (1)" Pages 911-919 in *Dictionary of deities and demons in the Bible*. Edited by Van der Toorn, K *et al*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Vawter, B. "The God of Hebrew Scriptures." *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 12(1982): 3

Ward, K. *Concepts of God*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998.

Weiskopf, D. A. "The plurality of concepts." Pages 1-57. 2008 Online: http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~weiskopf/papers/conceptual-pluralism.pdf, 2008.

Jaco Gericke, post-doctoral fellow, Faculty of Basic Sciences, Subject Group Theology, North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus), P.O. Box 1174, Vanderbijlpark, 1900. *E-mail:* 21609268@nwu.ac.za