

# The Epistemology of Israelite Religion: Introductory Proposals for a Descriptive Approach

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article I offer a venturesome introduction to the possibility of an analytic epistemology of Israelite religion. The aim is to propose some descriptive concerns for the biblical scholar interested in what the Hebrew Bible assumed about the justification of religious knowledge and belief in the world of the text. Topics touched on are evidentialism, divine testimony, the problem of allotheism, the concept of divine revelation and the logic of belief revision.*

## A INTRODUCTION

Purely historical epistemological perspectives on ancient Israelite religion as encountered in the pluralist and dynamic traditions of the Hebrew Bible are rare.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that epistemology is a concern in biblical scholarship, the focus is on hermeneutics and meta-commentary.<sup>2</sup> The interest typically lies with the epistemological assumptions of the readers of the Hebrew Bible, rather than with those implicit in the worlds in the texts themselves.<sup>3</sup> Exceptions exist, of course, particularly with reference to the study of biblical wisdom literature<sup>4</sup> and with regard to studies on the concept of revelation in ancient Israelite religion. Curiously, many biblical theologians interested in epistemology tend to be more attracted to Continental philosophy than to the concerns and concepts of the analytic traditions. In a relatively recent publication on biblical epistemology, one author says:

When I began working with epistemology in the Bible several years ago, I started with the Anglo-American tradition (justification, foundationalism, reliabilism, internalism, externalism, evidentialism and coherentism) and slowly lost confidence that I could connect

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Healy & Robin Parry, eds., *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster Press, 2007), ix. The contribution of Ryan O'Dowd is notable for an attempt to be concerned with the Hebrew Bible and epistemology.

<sup>2</sup> James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 146-171.

<sup>3</sup> See Ferdinand E. Deist, *Ervaring, Rede en Metode in Skrifuitleg: 'n Wetenskapshistoriese Ondersoek na Skrifuitleg in die Ned. Geref. Kerk 1840-1990* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Michael V. Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistemology," *HVCA* 58 (1987): 137-155; on the problem of knowledge in biblical literature from a philosophical perspective, see Annette Schellenberg, *Erkenntnis als Problem: Qohelet und die alttestamentlichen Diskussion um das menschliche Erkennen* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 2002).

these ideas with what I found in the Biblical text. Instead, I found the most profitable ideas among Continental philosophers like Hamman, Jacobi, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Levinas, Ricoeur and Gadamer whose attention to religion, ethics and ontology in their epistemological discussions provided concepts and vocabulary suitable to biblical and theological description. To my knowledge, these two traditions have very little interaction in the academy today. Consequently, most biblical scholars who attend to epistemology do so through the Continental tradition. I hope that these facts, implicit in the material here, will provoke philosophers-by-trade to help biblical scholars understand why this is so.<sup>5</sup>

If biblical scholars' concern is descriptive religious epistemology, I beg to differ from this view. Continental philosophy of religion and its constructive concerns are not really suitable to the historical-descriptive task. Its interests are hermeneutical, not exegetical. So while a Continental approach might offer hermeneutical possibilities for a philosophical re-appropriation of biblical motifs, their concerns do not offer a framework for accessing the Hebrew Bible's epistemological assumptions for their own sake. On the other hand, if analytic concerns are put into the service of descriptive historical inquiry, frameworks in analytic epistemology of religion can be used to clarify ancient Israelite ethno- or folk-epistemologies. In other words, terms and categories of analytic epistemology can be used in order to describe the Hebrew Bible's assumptions about the nature and justification of knowledge, truth and belief. This has already begun with reference to the New Testament. One example is that of William Abraham who, in analysing the Gospel of Mark, wrote the following:

Mark's Gospel is not, of course, an essay in epistemology. It is first and foremost an exercise in narration and proclamation...Thus we must work indirectly by exploring the epistemological assumptions, insights, suggestions and proposals that show up *en route* to ends that are not directly epistemological.<sup>6</sup>

Now substitute "Hebrew Bible" for "Mark's Gospel" and the hermeneutical legitimacy of an analytic epistemology of Israelite religion becomes perfectly obvious. As a study of knowledge, an epistemology of ancient Israelite religion in the context of biblical scholarship with its descriptive agenda will be interested in discerning what were assumed to be the necessary and sufficient conditions of religious knowledge, what were assumed to be its sources and what was taken for granted about its structure and its limits. As the study of justified belief, a descriptive epistemology of Israelite religion can aim to determine how we are to understand the Hebrew Bible's concepts of belief justification, what conditions were assumed to make justified beliefs justified,

<sup>5</sup> Healy & Parry, *The Bible and Epistemology*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> William J. Abraham, "The Epistemology of Jesus," in *Jesus and Philosophy* (ed. Paul K. Moser; Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151-168.

whether justification was assumed to be internal or external to one's own mind and what the reasoning used in the religious thought of different epistemological perspectives in the text involved.<sup>7</sup>

## **B POSSIBLE CONCERNS FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION**

### **1 Traces of soft evidentialism**

In analytic philosophy of religion, religious epistemology has become very popular since the waning of the interest in natural theology.<sup>8</sup> The central obsession here has been the nature of justified true belief:

Contemporary epistemology of religion may conveniently be treated as a debate over whether *evidentialism* applies to the belief-component of religious faith, or whether we should instead adopt a more permissive epistemology. Here by "evidentialism" we mean the initially plausible position that a belief is justified only if "it is proportioned to the evidence".... Evidentialism implies that full religious belief is justified only if there is conclusive evidence for it. It follows that if the arguments for there being a God, including any arguments from religious experience, are at best probable ones, no one would be justified in having a full belief that there is a God.<sup>9</sup>

What kind of evidence is supposed to count?

Here several sorts of evidence are allowed. One consists of beliefs in that which is "evident to the senses," that is, beliefs directly due to sense-experience. Another sort of evidence is that which is "self-evident," that is, obvious once you think about it. Evidence may also include the beliefs directly due to memory and introspection.<sup>10</sup>

This may sound very modern, yet in ancient Israelite epistemologies the same demand is readily apparent. As pre-modern folk-epistemologies of religion, however, we are dealing with traces of "soft" evidentialism as a sort of default setting in many polemical discourses within the Hebrew Bible. When it does concern ontology it is all about what counts as an instantiation of the property of divinity in an allegedly divine agent and not about broad atheism. A classic example is Isaiah 41:21, 23.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthias Steup, "Epistemology," *SEP*, n.p. [cited: 10 Aug. 2010]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/epistemology>.

<sup>8</sup> Phillip L. Quinn and Christian B. Miller, *Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 191.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Forrest, "The Epistemology of Religion," *SEP*, n.p. [cited: 2 Apr. 2010]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/religion-epistemology>.

<sup>10</sup> Forrest, "The Epistemology of Religion."

קְרָבוּ רִיבְכֶם יֹאמֶר יְהוָה; Bring your arguments says YHWH;  
 הָגַשׁוּ עֲצָמוֹתיכֶם יֹאמֶר מֶלֶךְ Come with your reasons says the king  
 יְהוָה. of Jacob

הַגִּידוּ חֲתִיחוֹת לְאַחֲרָיו Tell the signs of what comes after  
 וְנִדְעָה כִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם; that we may know that ye are gods;  
 אַף-תִּתְיִטְבּוּ וְתִרְעֻוּ וְנִשְׁתַּחַעַ also (do) good, or do evil, that we may be  
 וְנִרְאָה (וְנִרְאָה) יְחִידָה. dismayed and behold it together.

The entire passage only makes sense if there were some or other epistemological criteria for the justification of the belief in the instantiation of the property of generic *al*-hood, that is, any person *p* is justified in believing that any entity *x* is a *al* if there is evidence for it. Other texts with similar evidentialist assumptions exist, and one famous example involving Baal must suffice. In 1 Kings 18:27 we read:

וַיְהִי בַּצְהָרִים וַיַּחֲלֹל בָּהָם אֱלֹהִים, And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked  
 וַיֹּאמֶר קְרָאוּ בְּקֹלָל גָּדוֹל כִּי-אֱלֹהִים them, and said: “Cry aloud; for he is a god; either  
 הַוָּא-כִּי שִׁיחַ וּכְיִשְׁגַּל וּכְיִדְרֹךְ he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a  
 לֹא; אָוְלִי יִשְׁן הַוָּא וַיָּקֹץ. journey, or perhaps he sleeps, and must be  
 awaked.”

This text is interesting given what it assumes gods do when not busy with the usual acts. The context of this contest on Carmel also seems to presuppose an evidentialist motif represented in the request for “proofs” for who is really *YHWH* or Baal? Empirical evidence is demanded so that epistemic agents may know what state of affairs obtains in the actual world in the text. The evidentialist presuppositions taken for granted by the characters in the narrative allow for both verificationist and falsificationist criteria of meaningfulness in religious language and may be formulated as follows:

- i) Belief in *x* as not *אֱלֹהִים* is rational given the absence of empirical verification
- ii) Belief in *x* as *אֱלֹהִים* is rational given empirical verification.
- iii) There is not any empirical verification for Ba'al as *אֱלֹהִים*.
- iv) There is empirical verification for YHWH as *אֱלֹהִים*.
- v) Therefore, a belief that Ba'al is *אֱלֹהִים* is falsified.
- vi) Therefore, a belief that YHWH is *אֱלֹהִים* is verified.

Though soft-evidentialism is clearly visible, there is also a difference in scope from contemporary evidentialist epistemology. In no way was the evidentialist objection assumed by the implied speaker to be a disproof of the existence of אלהים *per se*. That is, the conclusion following the disproof was not broad atheism, that is, that no אלהים exist whatsoever. The implicit religious epistemology is also very different from that of Christian philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and William Alston ("Reformed Epistemologists"), none of whom would agree to such a test to test their own truth claims about God. The Carmel incident presupposes the possibility of verification and falsification and also does not take perceiving divine reality as belonging to a different doxastic practice than any other form of empirical experimentation.<sup>11</sup>

Traces of soft-evidentialist religious epistemology in the Hebrew Bible are everywhere evident and are closely tied to the concept of divine revelation in ancient Israelite religion. Think of the evidentialist and verificationist assumptions of blessings and curses, signs and wonders ("so that they may know"), prophetic arguments about divine providence in history, verification and falsification in divination practices, abductive evidentialism in aetiological legends, criteria for determining false prophecy, *et cetera..* Notable examples of this kind of evidentialist epistemology include the ten plagues (evidence of "the finger of God"), Gideon's fleece (Judg 6), Samuel's predictions of signs to Saul (1 Sam 9), Hezekiah and the sundial (Isa 38), Ahaz being invited to ask a sign from heaven or underworld (Isa 7), apocalyptic signs (Joel, Daniel), wisdom's natural theology's appeal to the cosmic and moral orders (Job 38-41), prophetic dramas (passim); symptoms of *תְּהִלָּה*—possession (miraculous powers), upheavals of nature in theophanies (Hab 3), etc. All of these presuppose narrow and soft evidentialist motifs.

Also important to note is the fact that in the Hebrew Bible evidentialism is often found in association with foundationalist assumptions. Foundationalism is present in those texts that assume that knowledge of YHWH consisted of two levels of belief.<sup>12</sup> First there were immediate and non-inferential beliefs which were assumed to be foundational or basic beliefs because they provide a basis for other beliefs. Second, there were inferential or mediated beliefs which were derived from other beliefs, and ultimately depended on basic beliefs for their justification.<sup>13</sup> Thus while Walter Brueggemann may suggest that scholars of the Hebrew Bible are not drawn to foundationalist ideas of securing knowledge,<sup>14</sup> many texts in the Hebrew Bible have foundationalist assumptions in as much as religious knowledge was assumed to ultimately rest on a foundation of

<sup>11</sup> Eugene T. Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 392-397.

<sup>12</sup> Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion*, 391.

<sup>13</sup> Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion*, 391.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997), 84.

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non-inferential knowledge. The foundation, however, was not belief in YHWH who time and again had to reveal and prove himself to be the living god.

Of course, there might also be texts in the Hebrew Bible that are anti-foundationalist and anti-evidentialist. I do not mean to claim that evidentialism and foundationalism are the default religious epistemologies in *all* folk epistemological assumptions in ancient Israelite religion. Because the biblical authors were not philosophers we can expect that incommensurable religious epistemologies might well be found side by side, even juxtaposed in the same author.<sup>15</sup>

## 2 Religious experience and the epistemological problem of divine testimony

What kind of religious experiences were assumed to occur in the world in the text and how did they differ from other experiences? Was a particular experience assumed to be ontic (internal) or noetic (external)? What so-called principles of credulity or incredulity were in place to establish that for any given experience of YHWH as x by P, P could know that he was in fact experiencing YHWH? Does a given text assume a descriptive or causal (or other) notion of reference for determining the identity of the entity experienced? (Was YHWH positively identified by a set of essential properties or due to a historical connection?)<sup>16</sup> These questions can be answered and are typical of the type of issues discussed when analytic philosophers of religion discuss “God” and the justification of religious experience.<sup>17</sup> However, in philosophy the Hebrew Bible has for the most part been used only for illustrative purposes as the following example shows.

It does not seem that any rational subject S could ever be in an epistemic position to be confident of an internal justification of claiming to be appeared to by God. Suppose, for example, Yahweh appears to Moses as x and parts the Red Sea, and Moses then identifies his seeming appeared to by some x that parts the Red Sea as being appeared to by Yahweh. Parting the Red Sea is not an act that requires maximal power. It does not, for example, require as much power as creating or destroying a universe; therefore some lesser being might have parted the Red Sea – a being that is less than omnipotent. Moses has managed a successful identification of x as Yahweh, but completely unbeknownst to himself, and if Moses does not have the internal justification relative to his own epistemic situation to be confident that x is Yahweh, then no audience A would be justified using POC, in attributing veracity to Moses' claim

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<sup>15</sup> Jaco Gericke, “Fundamentalism on Stilts,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30/2 (2009): 1-5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. James F. Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 148-150.

<sup>17</sup> Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 141-192.

that Yahweh appeared to him as x. Indeed, it seems that any audience A should be suspicious of any such claim and remain incredulous.<sup>18</sup>

While there are interesting bits and pieces here that might account for some elements in the text, the concept of deity assumed by the author is anachronistic as it presupposes classic theism's perfect-being theology. The biblical scholar would wish to ask, not whether the audience or Moses was ultimately justified, but how the characters in the world in the text might have assumed their belief or doubt was justified, whether their reasons are now considered epistemologically sound or not. Perhaps the justification most widely offered for religious belief concerns the occurrence of religious experience or the cumulative weight of testimony of those claiming to have had religious experiences. Putting the latter case in theistic terms, the argument appeals to the fact that many characters in the biblical narrative testify that they have experienced YHWH's presence. Was such testimony assumed to provide evidence that YHWH exists as the living god? That depends on whether we can discern externalist or internalist assumptions operative in the religious discourse. In contemporary religious epistemology, there is great interest in the internalism-externalism debate:

The internalism-externalism (I-E) debate lies near the center of contemporary discussion about epistemology. The basic idea of internalism is that justification is solely determined by factors that are *internal* to a person. Externalists deny this, asserting that justification depends on additional factors that are *external* to a person. A significant aspect of the I-E debate involves setting out exactly what counts as *internal* to a person.<sup>19</sup>

The simple conception of the I-E debate as a dispute over whether the facts that determine justification are all internal to a person is complicated by several factors. First, some epistemologists understand externalism as a view that knowledge does not require justification while others think it should be understood as an externalist view of justification. Second, there is an important distinction between having good reasons for one's belief (that is, propositional justification) and basing one's belief on the good reasons one possesses (that is, doxastic justification). In the context of philosophy of religion and the justification of belief, internalism is best understood as the thesis that propositional justification, not doxastic justification, is completely determined by one's internal states. These include one's bodily states, one's state of mind, or one's reflectively accessible states. Externalism by contrast in this context is the view that there are environmental factors other than those which are internal to the believer which can affect the justificatory status of a belief.

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<sup>18</sup> Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Ted Poston, "Internalism and Externalism in epistemology," *IEP*, n.p. [cited: 11 Nov.2010]. Online: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/int-ext/>.

If a text in the Hebrew Bible assumes an externalist view in its epistemological assumptions it might take it for granted that testimony is a source of knowledge if and only if it comes from a reliable source. Internalist motifs will not assume such an answer to be satisfactory in as much as the reliability of a spokesman for the deity is unknown to others. On this latter view, someone's saying “Thus says YHWH” would not put one in a position to know that YHWH actually said it. Both types seem to be present in the Hebrew Bible since both implicit arguments from authority and personal confirmation are attested.

The epistemological problem of divine testimony, however, cannot be divorced from the question of meaning regarding what exactly is being said when the biblical text holds that “YHWH *said...*” or “The word of YHWH came to x”? One might think the question out of place, yet it is not so. Consider, for example, the perplexity of James Barr concerning YHWH's alleged verbal communication:

Central to the question, however, must be the way in which the divine word received by the prophet is supposed to have worked in relation to his (or her) own psyche and personality. It is difficult to obtain a clear idea of what most biblical theologians think about this...None of them, as far as one can see, takes the term quite literally, as if to say that in communicating with prophets God enunciated the precise sentences, in Hebrew and with correct grammar, vocabulary and phonetics necessary for intelligibility (and these would of course have to be synchronically correct!) and that the prophet merely repeated what he had audibly heard. But if not this, then what?<sup>20</sup>

Such questions, though rare in biblical scholarship given their association with positivism, are not unheard-of. Barr then goes on to speculate about the way such revelation might be understood and indeed has been understood by biblical scholars:

Perhaps many think that the deity made some sort of non-auditory or sub-sonic communication, which the prophet ‘heard’ and then passed on. The question then is how far the prophet's own mind, experience and perception of the contemporary situation entered into his rendering of the (originally non-articulate) message. Or the possibility is that the message came from the prophet's experience and his perception about the situation in the first place, that he or she perhaps piled up a strong heap of violent reactions and sentiments and let them burst forth with the deep certainty that the resultant message was the Word of God. I suspect that most theologians hold this latter view but do not like to say so outright.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 475.

<sup>21</sup> Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 475.

Quite so; and the fact that very few scholars have been willing to say what they think about the ontological status of the divine *ipsissima verba* in the Hebrew Bible means that there is a great gap in the research on some philosophical aspects of YHWH 's verbal communication in the biblical texts. Many have thought that the question is only worth asking in the context of the world outside the text and since the text is not history we need not try and understand it at all. But this is too extreme and while my concern is not "what actually happened" in the world outside the text one can still inquire as to the epistemological assumptions in the text itself.

How did one, according to the text, know that YHWH spoke? What epistemological criteria governed justified belief in the supposed authenticity of religious experience? Of course, normally one might well imagine the idea of a disembodied or embodied voice, but is this what the text itself assumes or might it be what we anachronistically read into it because of the modern philosophical theological assumption that deity is supposed to be incorporeal? Moreover, do all texts assume the word of YHWH involved a voice at all? Consider for example an interesting text often overlooked in the discussion on divine revelation and which clearly illustrates an epistemological dilemma. One might even call the scenario "David's Cave" (alluding to Plato's) where in 1 Samuel 24:2-7 we read:

וַיַּקְרֵב שָׁאָל שְׁלֹשָׁת אֶלְפִים  
אִישׁ בָּחוֹר—מִפְּלִי-יִשְׂרָאֵל;  
וַיַּלְךְ לְבָקֵשׁ אֶת־דָּוֹד וְאֶנְשָׁיו,  
עַל־פְּנֵי צְוָרֵי הַיְּעָלִים.

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.

וַיָּבֹא אֶל־גִּדְרוֹת הַצָּאן עַל־  
הַדֶּרֶךְ וְשָׁם מִעָרָה וַיָּבֹא שָׁאָל  
לְהַסְךְ אֶת־רְגָלָיו; וְדָוֹד,  
וְאֶנְשָׁיו בִּרְפָּתִי הַמִּעָרָה  
שְׁבִים.

And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶנְשָׁי דָוֹד אֶלְיוֹ הַנָּה  
הַיּוֹם אָשֶׁר־אָמַר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם  
הַנָּה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן אֶת־אִיבִּיךְ  
(אִיבָּךְ) בְּיַדְךָ, וְעַשֵּׂית לְךָ  
כַּאֲשֶׁר יְתִבְכַּל בְּעִינֶיךָ; וַיֹּאמֶם  
דָוֹד, וַיִּכְרֹת אֶת־כְּנָפָ-הַמְּעִיל  
אֲשֶׁר־לְשָׁאָל—בָּלֶט.

And the men of David said unto him: "Behold the day in which YHWH had said to you: Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you." Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe.

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי־כֵן וַיַּךְ לְבָדָד,  
אַתָּה—עַל אֲשֶׁר בָּרָת אֶת־בָּנָךְ  
אֲשֶׁר לְשָׁאוֹל.

And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֶנְשָׁיו חֲלִילָה לִי  
מִיְתֻּה אֶמְ-אַעֲשָׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר  
הַזֶּה לְאַדְנִי לְמַשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה—  
לְשָׁלַח יָדִי בָּו: בַּיּוֹם  
הַוָּא.

And he said unto his men: “YHWH forbid it me, that I should do this thing unto my lord, YHWH's anointed, to put forth my hand against him, seeing he is the YHWH's anointed.”

וַיִּשְׁפַּע דָּוד אֶת־אֶנְשָׁיו  
בְּדָבָרִים וְלֹא נִתְּנָם לִקְוּם אֶל־  
שָׁאוֹל; וּשְׁאֹל קָם מִהַּמְּעָרָה,  
וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּדָרֶךְ.

So David checked his men with these words, and did not let them rise against Saul. And Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way

Note “what happened” here in the world in the text when YHWH “said” something quite particular to David. From the perspective of the narrator it is a mistake to imagine that “Thus says YHWH” meant YHWH spoke audible words. Here “Thus says YHWH” is no more than a colorful way of saying that from a set of fortuitous circumstances can be inferred that the deity acted causally and thereby implicitly condones a certain line of action taking advantage of the state of affairs. The testimony is at first believed by David suggesting his character assumed that this is the way one discerns a word of YHWH and that circumstances conducive to certain actions meet the epistemological criteria for knowledge of the divine will. David's reliance on his heart (the concept of which here overlaps with our notion of conscience) to settle the question of whether it was the word of YHWH presupposes an internalist epistemology of belief justification. His subsequent change of mind implies that an appeal to theological tradition later epistemologically overrode an appeal to empirical experiences. Another good example of critical thinking comes from Jeremiah 23:31-33

הִנֵּנִי עַל־הַנּוּבִיאִים נָאָמָ—  
יְהָה הַלְּקָחִים לְשׁוֹנוֹם  
וַיִּנְאָמֹן נָאָמָ.

Behold, I am against the prophets, says YHWH, that use their tongues and say: “He said.”

הִנֵּנִי עַל־נְבָאִי חֶלְמוֹת  
שְׁכַר נָאָמָ—יְהָה וַיְסִפְרוּם  
וַיִּתְּהַרְּשָׁו אֶת־עַמִּי,  
בְּשַׁקְרִירָהֶם וּבְפַחַזּוֹתָם;

Behold, I am against them that prophesy lying dreams, says YHWH, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their

וְאָנֹכִי לֹא-שְׁלַחֲתִים וְלֹא-  
צְיוּנִים וְהוֹעֵל לֹא-יֹעֵל  
לְעַם-הָזֶה--גַּנְאָמִן-זֶה.

lies, and by their wantonness; yet  
I sent them not, nor commanded  
them; neither can they profit this  
people at all, says YHWH.

What was of interest was not so much the question of what is real but an epistemological concern about sources and meaning. The epistemology of dreaming proved problematic for the ancient Israelites and a text like the above show that the epistemology of the ontological status of the word of YHWH could be contested. Our concern with what actually happened in the story or with what is really real is, however, not vulnerable to the anti-positivist and anti-ontological critiques of biblical theologians since here the biblical scholar asks the questions with reference to the world in the text only. Moreover, our analysis is minimalist in that its findings pertain to the text in question only. We are not making any hasty generalisations in claiming that this is the “biblical” view on the phenomenology of divine auditions. Pluralism in the texts makes all such claims obviously dogmatic distortions of what is there. Pluralism in theological language about divine revelation may well be shown to be underlain by further pluralism in the folk-epistemologies implicit in the discourse.

### 3 The justification of religious knowledge and allotheism

Religious disagreement is a long-standing problem in philosophy of religion, but this century there has been great interest in disagreements between theists and atheists as well as the disagreements between followers of various religions.<sup>22</sup> Our concern here is *public epistemic parity*. In this regard, the epistemological legitimacy of double standards in religious reasoning in the ancient Near East is well-known and the epistemology of ancient Israelite religion was no exception. That is, popular epistemological criteria of falsification for justifying a/theological notions with reference to foreign gods were not consistently applied to YHWH. Still, if the other gods did not exist or were worthless (according to some texts), there is the need to discern error theories implicit in the text to account for allotheism, the belief in foreign gods. If YHWH is the only god, how, according to the Hebrew Bible, was idolatry possible at all?

One of the major issues that developed from a renewed interest in religious experience in philosophy of religion proper is the degree to which such

<sup>22</sup> For examples of philosophical discussions on religious disagreement in epistemological contexts, see Thomas Kelly, “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement,” in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (ed. Tamar Szabo; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) 167–195; Richard Feldman “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement,” in *Epistemology Futures* (ed. Stephen Hetherington; New York: Oxford Press, 2006).

an experience can be said to have epistemic value.<sup>23</sup> One fundamental matter in this regard concerns determining what was assumed to be the reference for referring expressions used to describe the objects of religious experience. If religious experience in the world in the text in the Hebrew Bible was held by the characters to have cognitive import, there must have been implicit unformulated theoretical frameworks within which it was assumed one could explain how it is possible to identify those objects.

One of the most important issues to be determined in the worlds in the text was to determine which ones were veridical and which ones were not. So whatever we can say about the veridical ones, when a divine being said, did, or appeared, it seemed crucial to be able to know that it was YHWH, and not something else (Gen 17:1; 32; Exod 3; Judg 6; 1 Sam 3). Here we find the intersection between protagonist and antagonist error theories for allotheism in a culture where monotheism was a real live option. How does the text assume to account folk-epistemologically for the worship of other gods if they are supposed to be weak or non-existent? A classic example here is Jeremiah 44:18-23. The people have one explanation for their problems.

וְמִן-אֹז חִדְלָנוּ לְקַטֵּר  
לִמְלָכַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהַסָּדָה-  
לְהַנְּסָכִים-חִסְרָנוּ  
לִזְבוֹחָרָב וּבְרִעָב תְּמִינָנוּ.

... since we let off to offer to the queen of heaven,  
and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have  
wanted all things, and have been consumed by the  
sword and by the famine.

Pragmatic arguments have often been employed in support of theistic belief. Theistic pragmatic arguments were not arguments for the proposition that YHWH exists; they were arguments for believing that divine providence is present. Here the reasoning used in religious thought clearly presupposes a counterfactual view of causation in that the meaning of causal claims was explained in terms of counterfactual conditionals of the form "If A had not occurred, C would not have occurred." If the people had not stopped their religious practices, misfortune would not have struck them. Jeremiah, however, was not convinced, and offers his own counterfactual theory for the justification of his own religious beliefs and experiences. Because the people did not obey YHWH, disaster followed (44:21-23).

מִפְנֵי אֲשֶׁר קָטְרָתֶם וְאֲשֶׁר  
חִטְאָתֶם לִיהְוָה וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם  
בְּקוֹל יְהָוָה וּבְתְּרָתוֹ וּבְחִקְרָתוֹ  
וּבְעִזּוֹתָיו לֹא הָלַכְתֶּם; עַל-כֵּן  
קְרָאת אֲתֶכְם הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת--

Because you have offered, and because  
you have sinned against YHWH, and  
have not listened to the voice of YHWH,  
nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes,  
nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 423.

כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה has happened unto you, as at this day

In the Jeremiah text we see that though rational, the worshippers of other gods were not functioning properly as epistemic agents. The ones who have left YHWH, though using the same form of arguments as a worshipper of YHWH, could not produce reliable arguments. They were colored for the worse by inappropriate background beliefs, interests, desires, anxieties and expectations.<sup>24</sup> The epistemic map that best makes sense of this particular instance of the phenomenon of allotheism is therefore clearly externalism. It's not that the people did not reason validly—their logical strategy is the same as that of Jeremiah; they are malfunctioning as cognitive agents as their reasoning is affected by their alleged spiritual and moral vices. Hence they cannot see the hand and will of YHWH in what happens to them.

This creates an epistemic dilemma—if good and bad times during the worship of a god can no longer indicate whether the god is pleased or not, additional revelation is required to settle the question of what to infer from events. This presents problems for any counterfactual empirical verification or falsification as the blessings and curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy assume. This in turn complicates the metaphysics underlying the religious epistemology since particular divine causality can no longer validly inferred from a posteriori states knowledge. A prophetic hermeneutic of reality is thus required, but with the potential for false prophecy and the attributing of this also to YHWH. Hence the Nietzschean abyss the people are facing is staring right back at them (e.g., the horror story in 1 Kgs 13).

In the Hebrew Bible, giving divine honor to self-created objects of the mind were seen as products of a cognitive mistake. One of the tasks for philosophical clarification of this locus is therefore to reconstruct the error-theories for allotheism implicit in worlds in the text of the Hebrew Bible. This is no anachronistic concern as in the worlds in the text YHWH himself wonders why the people have strayed from the way and followed other gods. However, one should also seek to understand the error-theories and justification procedures of the antagonists. The philosopher of Israelite religion must try to understand the other side because the biblical authors knew their ideas yet did not communicate them for a variety of rhetorical reasons. So the folk-philosophical assumptions that are taken for granted in the justification of idol worship have to be clarified. Only in this way will the full meaning of polemics in the text become clear.

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<sup>24</sup> Abraham, *The Epistemology of Jesus*, 151.

#### 4 Divine revelation and the principle of sufficient reason

The epistemology of divine revelation cannot be divorced from the metaphysical assumptions of the testimony and questions related to the principle of sufficient reason. In philosophy proper, the principle has a variety of expressions, all of which are perhaps best summarised as, for every event *e*, if *e* occurs, then there is a sufficient explanation why *e* occurs. A philosophical analysis of the principle of sufficient reasons as operative in the metaphysical assumptions of ancient Israelite religious epistemology will need to attend to the question of whether there were assumed to be sufficient reasons for a particular methodology in YHWH's ways of revealing himself. There remains the need to discover implicit assumptions about the rationale for the acts of YHWH. Divine motivations can be subsumed under the rubrics found in the philosophy of action.

How little we know is readily apparent by asking a few simple yet profound questions about sufficient reasons for the divine methodology in terms of the particulars of divine communication. For example, why, according to the text, was knowledge via divine revelation needed at all (and not, say, innate)? Why, according to the text, was knowledge via divine revelation given directly only to some people rather than all (why mediation)? Why, according to the text, was divine revelation of religious knowledge offered so rarely rather than all the time? Why, according to the text, did knowledge disclosed in divine revelation often come across as obscure (lots, dreams, visions, etc.) rather as straightforward?

Lest these questions be considered too abstract, speculative and anachronistic, it should be noted that they are prompted by states of affairs and divine methodology in possible and actual worlds in the text itself. With regard to alternative possibilities, one text assumes as much, e.g. Numbers 12:5-8:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה פֶּתַח אֶל-  
מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-  
מִרְיָם צָאו שְׁלֹשָׁתֶךָם אֶל-  
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד; וַיֵּצְאוּ  
שְׁלֹשָׁתֶם.

And YHWH spoke to Moses, and unto Aaron, and Miriam: "Come out you three to the tent of meeting." And the three came out.

וַיִּירֶד בְּתַחַת בְּעֵמֶד עַנְזָן,  
וַיַּעֲמֹד פָּתַח הַאָהֶל; וַיָּקֹרְא  
אַהֲרֹן וּמִרְיָם וַיֵּצְאוּ  
שְׁנֵיהֶם.

And YHWH came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth.

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמַעו-נָא דָבָר;  
אָם-יְהִי נָבִיא כָּم-יְהִי תְּהִלָּה  
בְּמִרְאָה אֲלֹיו אַתְּדַע,

And He said: "Hear now my words: if there be a prophet among you, I YHWH do make myself known unto him in a

**בְּחִלּוֹם אֲדָבָר-בוֹ.** vision, I do speak with him in a dream.

**לֹא-כִּי עָבָדִי מֹשֶׁה: בְּכָל-  
בֵּיתִי נָאָמֵן הוּא.** My servant Moses is not so; he is  
trusted in all my house;

**פֶּה אֶל-פֶּה אֲדָבָר-בוֹ  
וּמְרֹאָה וְלֹא בְּחִידָּת  
וְתְּמִנָּת יְהֹוָה, יְבִיט; וּמְדוּעָ  
לֹא יַרְאָתֶם, לְדָבָר בְּעָבָדִי  
בְּמֹשֶׁה.** with him do I speak mouth to mouth,  
even visible, and not in riddles; and the  
similitude of YHWH does he behold;  
why then were you not afraid to speak  
against my servant, against Moses?”

Here it is evident that the deity does not have to use obscurities but can speak directly and in person—so why not to everyone all the time? Of course, one could explain “what it means” with reference to the world outside the text via the history of religion and the psychology of religion but this is not what is of interest at present. The present concern, however, is with “what it meant” in the worlds inside the text and why, according to what is implicit in the world in the text, could the deity not be permanently visible, present and speaking to all people one on one? Answers such as “sin,” divine holiness, that ever-present divinity would make faith redundant or compromise free will or force a relationship seems at times too apologetic and anachronistic, as if to explain why no god presently appears. What is necessary is presupposition reconstruction in combination with the history of Israelite religion's folk-philosophy of religion.

Answers to the “why?” questions are present in the text. They are not overt, not because the questions were of no concern to ancient Israelites but because the answers were taken for granted. That some things went without saying can be demonstrated with reference to texts that do show an interest in explaining the rationale for the particular divine strategies. Thus with reference to obscurity in revelation Proverbs 25:1 offers the proposition according to which the honour of the deity resides in concealment. Here then is one possible answer then we have one possible answer that might have sufficed. Ideally however, one should not use one text to clarify another since this is a pre-critical interpretative strategy that has fallen into disrepute since the rise of historical consciousness. Instead, one should analyse the specific text to discern what can be ascertained from its own assumptions on the matter, whatever they are. So whether the answer is all-too-human or presupposing of honour-and-shame conventions that are now outdated is irrelevant since our concern is not whether this is really so but what was taken for granted in the worlds in the text whether it is “true” (in whatever sense of the word) or not.

## 5 The history of Israelite religion and the logic of belief revision

Biblical criticism has demonstrated beyond a doubt the reality of "revision," "editing," "emendation," "reinterpretation," "redaction," "rethinking," "re-writing," "reconstruction" in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, belief revision has taken place and the supporting data can be found in the findings of source, tradition, redaction, canonical, composition, ideological and other types of biblical criticism. On a larger scale, historical, literary, sociological, theological and psychological descriptions of the way belief revision has occurred in Israelite religion are also available. The catalysts were several major events in the histories of Israel and Judah which brought about crises of belief and new ways of making sense of old ideas. From a phenomenological perspective, Steinberg<sup>25</sup> offers the following list:

Crisis	Impact
<i>Philistine invasion (twelfth to eleventh centuries B.C.E.)</i>	Development of Israelite consciousness and possibly formation of a league of El and YHWH worshipers identifying the two gods.
<i>Imposition by Ahab of Tyrian Baal (mid-ninth century B.C.E.)</i>	The prophetic movement demanded the rejection of the native weather deity Baal-Hadad (likely with his consort the native Ashtart/Ashtoreth) as un-Israelite and disloyal to YHWH. Baal's characteristics are appropriated by YHWH (see Elijah on Carmel).
<i>Assyrian Pressure (eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.)</i>	Crisis of confidence in YHWH – was He weaker than the gods of Assyria? This may have led to the widespread worship of Astarte-Ishtar-Queen of Heaven and perhaps astral deities.
<i>Decline of Assyria (seventh century B.C.E.)</i>	The Deuteronomistic reformers demanded the exclusive worship of YHWH—all other deities were rejected as un-Israelite. To ensure uniformity of practice and concentration of resources all sacrifice was to be centralized in Jerusalem. Outside of Jerusalem, prayer starts to replace sacrifice in popular worship.
<i>Babylonian exile (sixth century B.C.E.)</i>	YHWH could not be said to have been defeated by

<sup>25</sup> David Steinberg, *Israelite Religion to Judaism: The Evolution of Israelite Religion*, n.p. [cited: 10 Nov. 2010]. Online: [http://www.adath-shalom.ca/israelite\\_religion.htm](http://www.adath-shalom.ca/israelite_religion.htm).

<p>century B.C.E.)</p>	<p>the gods of Babylon. Instead, it was claimed that He was lord of the world and the author of the just destruction of Jerusalem. Prayer replaces sacrifice in popular worship.</p>
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What is lacking is a descriptive philosophical clarification of the logic behind the cognitive processes involved here. What makes such an exercise non-trivial is that different groups opted for different ways of coming to terms with the same historical events and theological developments. Some continued in holding on to traditional faith, others ventured to think of YHWH in different ways, still others left faith in YHWH behind all together. Even today it is unclear exactly how exactly belief revision manifested itself and why. Since most Biblical scholars are not familiar with the logic of belief revision, I shall give a short and utterly basic introducing to it in order to provide a foretaste of the clarifying possibilities this type of philosophical analysis may hold. The concern here is not to show that the reasoning was valid or invalid or that belief revisions were justified and true or not. My concern is merely to describe the logic behind the revisions in the Hebrew Bible and our logical criticism is simply a formalisation of the findings of biblical criticism. In this regard I may begin by noting the following assumptions of belief revision logics:

- i) *Quantity*: Beliefs were valuable, and traditions did not change and texts were not edited without good reasons. So it may be safe to assume that in the process of belief change, the loss of existing beliefs was "minimised."
- ii) *Quality*: The redactors edited the Hebrew Bible because of what they believed to be true. Beliefs were not "adopted" capriciously – there were assumed to be grounds for any information gain.
- iii) *Categorial matching*: The result of the change was always going to be another belief state, whatever that involved.
- iv) *Success*: A change was successfully effected, which is why we still have an Hebrew Bible to begin with.

Two kinds of changes are usually distinguished:

- a) *Update*: the new information is about the situation at present, while the old beliefs refer to the past; update is the operation of changing the old beliefs to take into account the change;
- b) *Revision*: both the old beliefs and the new information refer to the same situation; an inconsistency between the new and old information is explained by the possibility of old information being less reliable than the new one; revision is the process of inserting

the new information into the set of old beliefs without generating an inconsistency.

Various operations that can be performed:

- i) *contraction* - removal of a belief; *expansion* - addition of a belief without checking consistency;
- ii) *revision* - addition of a belief while maintaining consistency; *consolidation* - restoring consistency of a set of beliefs;
- iii) *merging* - fusion of two (+) sets of beliefs while maintaining consistency.

In belief revision logic, there are also several so-called "rationality principles" (quantity, quality, etc.). These are codified via rationality postulates. The list below are the ones for revision (K = knowledge; \* = revision; x = old belief; y = new belief; Cn = consequences):

1.  $K * x$  is closed under  $Cn$
2.  $x \in K * x$
3.  $K * x \subseteq K + x$
4.  $K + x \subseteq K * x$ , if x is consistent with K
5.  $K * x$  is inconsistent iff x is (ie. iff  $\neg x$  is a theorem)
6. If  $Cn(x) = Cn(y)$ , then  $K * x = K * y$
7.  $(K * x) + y \subseteq K * (x \wedge y)$
8.  $K * (x \wedge y) \subseteq (K * x) + y$ , if y is consistent with  $K * x$

To show how these basic ideas in the field might be of use to the history of religion, consider the event that shook the faith of the people *in extremis*: the exile. Though the event is indeed sometimes overrated as a catastrophe, it remains the greatest of all crises in Israelite religion and provided an impetus for the revision of history by the Deuteronomists, Priestly and other redactors. Core beliefs destroyed concerned those about the temple, the city, the land, the monarchy, prophecy, *et cetera*. Histories of Israelite religion speak of "loss of faith" and "crisis of belief." According to Rainer Albertz, for example, as a result of the Babylonian captivity:

The feeling of having been dragged off against their will kept high their hope of a return and of a *revision* of the facts of history.<sup>26</sup>

Albertz also speaks of a struggle for a theological interpretation of a failed history:

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<sup>26</sup> Rainer Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 373.

It says much for the high value which history acquired in the religion of Israel from its beginning as the medium of divine action that in the crisis of the exile there was a large-scale theological revision of the previous history.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the Pentateuch he notes that:

In addition to the brief references to the patriarchs in exilic prophecy of salvation, another large scale literary revision of the patriarchal tradition was undertaken during the exile.<sup>28</sup>

Also again:

The vital interests of the priest theologians in the temple cult also led at another point to a marked expansion and revision of the lay-theological Pentateuch composition: in the creation stories and therefore in the question of the foundation of the Israelite relationship with God.<sup>29</sup>

As for post-exilic Chronistic revision:

The evaluation of the time of David and Solomon as the goal and climax of the Israelite foundation history with which the authors of Chronicles reacted to the challenge from Samaria amounted to no less than a revision of the canon. In their view, the decision taken in the Persian period, in the interest of opposition to domination and enthusiasm with a view to the emancipation of the priesthood, to end the foundation history of Israel with the death of Moses and thus largely exclude the old theology of kingship and the state cult from official Yahweh religion, needed revision. They felt that the canon should be urgently enlarged, that the historical tradition of DtrG which had been cut out and also the prophetic writings which brought out the special Jerusalem traditions of salvation should be accorded their due place in official theology.<sup>30</sup>

Revision is everywhere. With regard to the prophetic writings:

Though groups of prophets are known to have existed in older times, one may assume that in the course of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. a non-conformist but literary elite gathered around these prophets and became responsible for the collection, *revision*, and transmission of their words.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 373.

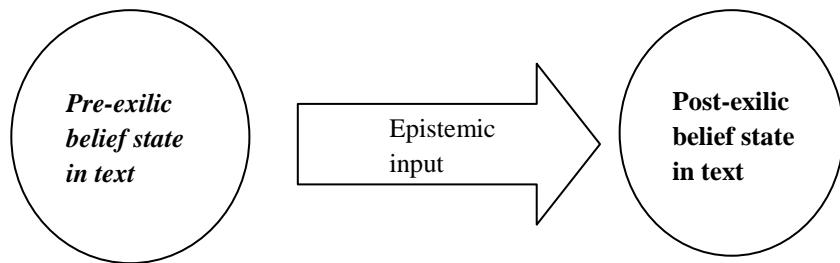
<sup>28</sup> Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 406.

<sup>29</sup> Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 489.

<sup>30</sup> Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 547

<sup>31</sup> Meindert Dijkstra, "The Law of Moses: The Memory of Mosaic Religion in and After the Exile," in *Yahwism After the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (eds. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 96

From the perspective of the logic of belief revision, all of the above references to "revision" in various sections of the Hebrew Bible are very interesting. With the aid of the logic of belief revision, the findings of the history of Israelite religion and of source, tradition and redaction criticism regarding belief change can be described in formal philosophical terms to clarify the exact roads the faith took (and did not take). One possible way of doing so is via the so-called AGM model (named after its developers) of the theory. It assumes a static environment like a text, which in our case would involve a belief state in the form of a set of pre-exilic sentences in the text. It must be largely consistent and closed under a (classical) consequence operation  $C_n$  and the input is any (self-consistent?) redacted sentence.



On the AGM model a belief state would be a set of sentences in the text, largely consistent, and closed under a (classical) consequence operation  $C_n$ . The kind of epistemic input would involve redaction with a presumably self-consistent sentence. The nature of the state of the transformation of belief would be either contraction, expansion or revision.

In *contraction*, a specified sentence  $x$  from pre-exilic belief set is *removed* by a Deuteronomistic or priestly or other redactor, that is a specific text's pre-exilic belief set  $\aleph$  is superseded by a post-exilic redacted belief set  $\aleph(-x)$  that is a subset of  $\aleph$  not containing  $x$ . When  $\aleph - x$  is the result of contracting  $\aleph$  by  $x$  there is also belief suspension; so  $x \notin \aleph - x$  if possible. Belief in  $x$  is lost; but this does not mean that belief in  $\neg x$  is gained so that in terms of quality there is no capricious gain in information and ensured that  $\aleph - x \subseteq \aleph$ . With regard to Categorial Matching it is ensured that  $\aleph - x$  is closed under  $C_n$  and in terms of quantity, information loss was minimised which is never easy. The question that remains is what should be  $C_n(a, a \rightarrow b) - b$ ?  $C_n(a)? C_n(a \rightarrow b)?$  or  $C_n(a \vee b)?$  Hence a choice problem and an extra-logical mechanism is necessary.

In *expansion* a redactional sentence  $x$  is *added* by a Deuteronomistic or priestly redactor to the pre-exilic belief set  $\aleph$  *without checking for consistency*, i.e. nothing is removed so that  $\aleph$  is replaced by a post-exilic redacted set  $\aleph(+x)$  that is the smallest logically closed set that contains both  $\aleph$  and  $x$ . The construction or expansion may be formalised as  $\aleph + x = C_n(\aleph \cup \{x\})$  and the redaction is appropriate if  $x$  is consistent with  $\aleph$  and in terms of quantity – no information

is lost so that  $\mathbf{x} \subseteq \mathbf{x} + x$ . In terms of quality there is no capricious gain in information as  $\mathbf{x} + x \subseteq Cn(\mathbf{x} \cup \{x\})$  while with regard to categorial matching  $\mathbf{x} + x$  is closed under  $Cn$  and  $\mathbf{x} + x$  is the smallest (closed) set that contains the old knowledge and the new.

In *revision*, a redactional sentence  $x$  is *added* by the Deuteronomistic or priestly redactor to the pre-exilic belief set  $\mathbf{x}$ , and at the same time other sentences are removed by him if this is needed to ensure that the resulting post-exilic belief set  $\mathbf{x}(*x)$  is *consistent*.  $\mathbf{x}(*x)$  is the result of accommodating  $x$  into  $\mathbf{x}$ , even if  $x$  is not consistent with  $\mathbf{x}$  and it models belief accommodation, so  $x \in \mathbf{x}(*x)$ .  $\mathbf{x}(*x)$  must be consistent if possible and again in terms of quality there is no capricious gain in information. It is ensured that  $\mathbf{x}(*x) \subseteq \mathbf{x} + x$ . While it does not say much if  $x$  is inconsistent with  $\mathbf{x}$ . With regard to Categorial Matching it must be ensured that  $\mathbf{x}(*x)$  is closed under  $Cn$  while the quantity should again mean information loss should be minimised. Questions remaining are what should be  $Cn(a, a \rightarrow b) * \neg b$ ?  $Cn(a, \neg b)$ ?  $Cn(\neg a, \neg b)$ ? Or  $Cn(\neg b)$ ?

A different perspective on the matter is available from the KM model where one assumes a dynamic environment. Here one works not with a belief set of sentences but simply on the level of a single sentence. In the dominant belief revision theory, the so-called AGM model, the set representing the belief state is assumed to be a logically closed set of sentences (a *belief set*). In the alternative approach, the corresponding set is not logically closed (a *belief base*). In KM, one speaks not of revision but of *updating*, that is, information is about *different situations*. The new information is concerned with the present, while the old beliefs refer to the past; update is the operation of changing the old beliefs to take into account the change in the present. Thus in contrast to the AGM model, in the KM model a belief state would be a sentence with the input being another sentence. The transformation involves erasure and updating and the motive for belief change concerns the outdated nature of the beliefs within a dynamic environment.<sup>32</sup>

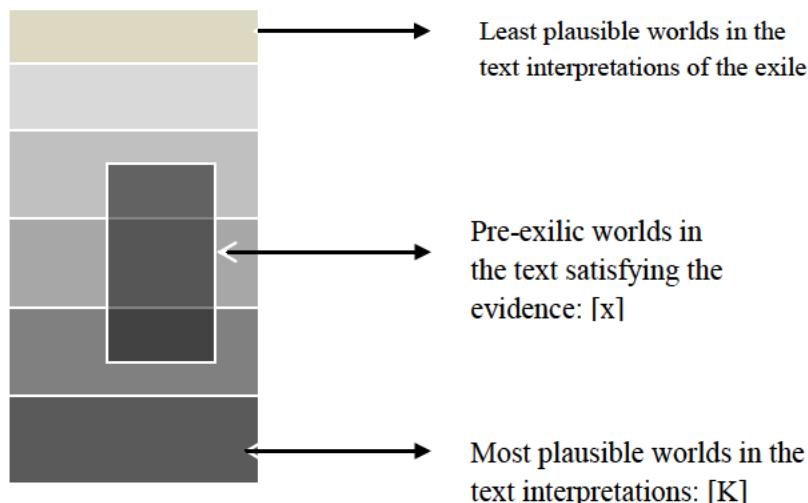
Of specific relevance for the discussion of the impact of the exile is the fact that one of the most interesting topics in belief revision theory is the recovery postulate. According to this postulate, all original beliefs can be regained if a specific belief with a major role in the system is first removed and then reinserted. The recovery postulate holds in the AGM model but not in closely related models employing belief bases. The relevance of both models to represent synchronic and diachronic complexity in the Hebrew Bible becomes evident. Another much discussed topic is how repeated changes can be adequately represented. How were the choices by different groups and text concerning what beliefs to retract made? How does one revise beliefs with redaction? Two cases

<sup>32</sup> Sven O. Hansson, "Logic of Belief Revision", *SEP*, n.p. [cited: 10 Jan 2010]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/logic-belief-revision/>.

can be distinguished: One: if the new belief  $x$  is consistent with already extant beliefs in the text, it seems reasonable for the redactor to add to the existing belief set. Two: if the redactional addition of  $x$  causes an inconsistency in the belief set (for e.g. is  $\neg x$ ), what should the agent do? Reject  $x$  in order to accept  $\neg x$ ? Rejecting  $x$  may not be enough: suppose that  $x$  necessarily implies  $y$  and  $z$ . Rejecting  $x$  and adding  $\neg x$  to the agent's belief set would not remove the inconsistency and  $y$  or  $z$  must be rejected as well. Was this so in the post-exilic redaction of the text?

Logic alone is not sufficient to decide between which beliefs to give up and which to retain when performing a belief revision. What are the extra-logical factors that determine the choices? One idea is that the information lost when giving up beliefs should be kept minimal. Another idea is that some beliefs are considered more important or entrenched than others and the beliefs that should be retracted are the least important ones. [...] Again, the methodological rules chosen here are dependent on the application area.<sup>33</sup>

One can even involve modal logical representation working with "possible worlds in the text." This would mean describing how the logic of belief revision played out against the backdrop of epistemic and hermeneutic plausibility conditions.



A sentence  $x$  is represented by the set  $[x]$  of worlds in the text that satisfy it. theory  $K$ : by the set  $[K]$  of worlds in the text that satisfy every sentence in  $K$ . Total pre-order over Set of all worlds-in-the-text  $\Omega$ ,  $[K]$  Together with the type of logical description mentioned earlier, there are a number of reasons why this perspective on belief change in the history of Israelite religion might prove fruitful, also from a historical perspective. It is that formal philosophical analysis will allow for a better understanding of the belief revision logics behind the redaction process. In this manner the logic of belief revision, properly

<sup>33</sup> Peter Gardenfors, ed. *Belief Revision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

applied and notwithstanding limitations of the approach both philosophically and hermeneutically, can contribute to our understanding of the nature of the beliefs and of the reasoning used in religious thought both in pre- intra- and post-revision contexts. Formal description is required if only for the clarity it is able to provide.

The above consideration suggests that it might someday be worth the while to write a history of Israelite religion from the perspective of the logic of belief revision that pays more attention to the diachronic dimension of justification in ancient Israelite religious epistemology.<sup>34</sup> The justification of new beliefs was as much diachronic as it was synchronic. It's not just a matter of the evidence currently available but also one of coming to see things differently over time. Hence studies on beliefs in ancient Israelite religion should not focus narrowly on synchronic forms of justification and once we bring externalist considerations into play then we can understand the mechanism behind belief change presupposed by the different redactors and historians of the ancient world. There is a necessary diachronic dimension, which fits naturally with an externalist reading of epistemology of and belief revision as a result of the exile. It appears that in Yahwism(s) there was not the mere working out of abstract logic via sound reasoning but also a change of minds as to how to read the relevant data, as to what counted as data and how best to think of relevant warrants for beliefs and belief change. In this way the logic of belief revision holds great promise for a formal clarification of the epistemology behind the history of Israelite religion.

## C CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing brief excursions to a few of the many possible topics a descriptive epistemology of Israelite religion might wish to attend to, it should be readily apparent that a whole new field of inquiry lies dormant within biblical scholarship. The dual commonality and variability of the subject matter have shown that the possibilities of looking at the biblical texts from the perspective of loci in analytic epistemology of religion are limited only by a lack of creativity. By way of an adoption and adaptation of issues within the particular sub-discipline in philosophy of religion an epistemological approach to Israelite religion can therefore offer us a better understanding of ancient Yahwistic assumptions about the nature of religious knowledge and belief. Finally, the hermeneutical validity and conceptual translatability of this historical and descriptive mode of philosophical analysis make the interpretative methodology less prone to committing the exegetical fallacies typical of so many of the popular albeit anachronistic Christian philosophical-theological readings of yesteryear.

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<sup>34</sup> For a related earlier assessment with reference to the New Testament to which the assessment in this paragraph is much indebted to, see Abraham, *The Epistemology of Jesus*, 153.

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