

## The Spectral Nature of YHWH (Dtr): Perspectives from Derridean Hauntology

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Si vous êtes pris dans le rêve de l'autre, vous êtes foutu<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*This article brings postmodern Continental philosophy of history to bear on the theologies of the Book of Deuteronomy. It looks at the "hauntological" effects of the character of YHWH (Dtr) as a "spectre" in the reception history of the book's god-talk. The character of YHWH (Dtr) seems to have attained the status of a literary ghost already within the book of Deuteronomy, the theology of which continues to haunt even in the atheological rhetoric of the New Atheism, long after the collapse of realism in Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic philosophies of history.*

### A INTRODUCTION

Hauntology is an idea within the philosophy of history introduced by Jacques Derrida in his 1993 work *Spectres of Marx*. The name of Derrida's book comes from Marx's assertion that the spectre of communism is haunting Europe. Derrida argued that Marx would become even more relevant after the fall of the Berlin Wall and that the West's separation from the ignorance of the suffering still present in the world will "haunt" it and provide impetus for a fresh interest in communism. The present exists only with respect to the past and society after the end of history will orient itself towards ideas and aesthetics that are rustic and bizarre; that is, towards the "ghost" of the past. Derrida concludes that because of this form of intellectual realignment, the end of history will be unsatisfactory.

In this article I hope demonstrate by way of analogy to the metaphor above the nature of "hauntological" aesthetics in the theologies of Deuteronomy by revealing how YHWH (Dtr) operated and still operates as a "spectre" in the Derridean sense.<sup>2</sup> Like the ghost of Marx after the collapse of communism,

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, as quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Picador, 2008), 48. The English is translated as: "If you're trapped in the dream of the other, you're fucked!"

<sup>2</sup> Derrida's work has been applied to the reading of biblical texts, both in deconstruction and in the reading of the text with the aid of Derridean concepts, e.g. Yvonne Sherwood, *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). This represents a change in attitude since David Clines in his *On the Way to the Postmodern: (1967-1998)*

the character of YHWH (Dtr) still "haunts" the history of (Israelite) religion in that elements of its representation have remained foundational in western cultural discourse, long after the collapse of realism in Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic philosophies of history which have indeed ended unsatisfactorily. But to start, allow me to clarify the terminology.

## B HAUNTOLOGY

As is often the case in Derrida's writings, "hauntology" is a concept that's arguably better suited to interpretation than strict definition. It can be linked to the general methodology of deconstruction Derrida pioneered although, more specifically, hauntology is part of the *ethical* turn in deconstruction which has been palpable for the last three decades. During this time Derrida has spawned a minor academic industry of which many biblical theologians are still ignorant.<sup>3</sup>

As for the esoteric jargon, to speak of ghosts in the context of post-modern academic discourse has nothing to do with whether or not one literally believes in the paranormal or supernatural. Spectrality is not about spiritual activity but a metaphor for the way in which the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be and we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. As metaphors, spectres (visible ghosts) challenge basic binary oppositions such as "alive / dead," "present / absent" and "past / present" and in this sense can be said to be "deconstructive" in nature.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the concept of the spectre in Derrida's writings was inspired by the film *Ghost Dance* (1983), the viewing of which made him intrigued in Freud's theory of mourning. In normal mourning, according to Freud, one internalises or *introjects* the dead, that is, one's mind takes the dead into itself and assimilates them. This introjection involves an idealisation of the deceased person. However, in mourning which doesn't develop naturally, that is to say, in mourning that goes wrong according to mainstream psychoanalytic theory, there is no true introjection. There is only what Abraham and Torok called an *incorporation* of the "phantom."

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(Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 200 could still lament the absence of Derrida from conferences while James Barr's *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) noted the increased impact but did not think Derrida's ideas worth our while.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," *French Studies* 59/3 (2005): 373.

<sup>4</sup> See Andy Harper, "The Past Inside the Present" (27 October 2009), *Excessive Aesthetics*, n.p. [cited 21 July 2011]. Online: <http://rougesfoam.blogspot.com/2009/10/hauntology-past-inside-present.html>.

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The phantom is the work in the unconscious of the inadmissible secret of an Other... Its law is the obligation of ignorance. Its manifestation, as anxiety, is the return of the phantom in bizarre words and acts and symptoms (phobic, obsessive, and so on). The phantom's universe can be objectivized in fantastic stories...[that] could be the result of a failed process of mourning ..The phantom of popular belief merely objectivizes a metaphor in the unconscious: the burial in the object of an inadmissible fact.<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see later, something similar might be operative in the source-, tradition- and redaction history of the Book of Deuteronomy. However, in his essay *Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok*, Derrida first posited and later undermined the supposed differences between introjection (as a normal love for the other), and incorporation (which involves retaining the other as a ghost).<sup>6</sup> Derrida in fact reversed the popular hierarchy and highlighted how the supposedly pathological condition of incorporation may be construed as being actually more respectful of the other's *alterity*. After all, incorporation means that one has not totally assimilated the other, as there is still difference and heterogeneity.

Yet Derrida's account is not so simple as to unreservedly valorise the incorporation of the other, even if he emphasises this paradigm in an effort to refute the canonical interpretation of successful mourning. He also acknowledges that the more the self keeps the foreign element inside itself, the more it excludes it.<sup>7</sup> If we refuse to engage with the dead other, we also exclude their foreignness from ourselves and hence prevent any transformative interaction with them. When fetishised in their externality in such a manner, the dead other really is lifeless. Derrida's point is that true mourning of the other, including an absolute Other, *resists both the process of incorporation as well as the process of introjection*.

For Derrida, attending to the ghost of the Other is therefore an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving. In literary critical circles, this take on literary ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved to be extraordinarily fertile, yet it has largely been ignored in OT theology. The question for us at this stage of the discussion

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Golse, s.v. "Phantom," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, n.p. [cited 31 July 2011]. Online: <http://www.answers.com/topic/phantom>.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Vassa. "Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok – The Inner Crypt," *Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 25/2 (2002): 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," trans. from the French by Barbara Johnson, in *The Wolfman's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (ed. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok; trans. Nicholas Rand; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

is what all this has to do with the theologies of Deuteronomy. The argument to follow will seek to show how YHWH (Dtr) attained the status of a spectre in the history of biblical theism and was subsequently partly preserved as a foreign entity and partly introjected within, even in contemporary atheology.

### C YHWH (DTR) AS A SPECTRE

Most research on the theologies of Deuteronomy tells us how we got the book in its present form and is concerned with the historical contexts in which parts of the book came to be and for what ideological purposes. While there are many diversions, the current story mainstream scholarship tells may be construed as follows:

In the late 8th century Judah and Israel were vassals of Assyria. Israel rebelled, and was destroyed c.722 B.C.E. Refugees fleeing to Judah brought with them a number of new traditions (new to Judah, at least). One of these was that the god YHWH, already known and worshiped in Judah, was not merely the most important of the gods, but the only god who should be served. This outlook influenced the Judahite landowning elite, who became extremely powerful in court circles. Soon thereafter Assyrian power rapidly declined and a pro-independence movement gathered strength in the court. This movement expressed itself in a state theology of loyalty to YHWH as the sole god of Israel. With king Josiah's support they launched a reform of worship based on what might have been an early form of Deut 5-26 and which took the form of a covenant (i.e., treaty) between Judah and YHWH to replace that between Judah and Assyria. The covenant was formulated as an address by Moses (see Deut 5:1).<sup>8</sup>

The next stage of the book's formation took place during the Babylonian exile. The destruction of Judah by Babylon in 586 B.C.E. and the end of kingship was the occasion of much reflection and theological speculation among the Deuteronomistic elite, now in exile in Babylon. They explained the disaster as YHWH's punishment of their failure to follow the law, and created a history of Israel (the books of Joshua through Kings) to illustrate this. At the end of the Exile, when the Persians agreed that the Jews could return and rebuild the Temple, chapters 1-4 and 29-30 were added and Deuteronomy was made the introductory book to this history, so that a story about a people about to enter the Promised Land, became a story about a people about to return to the land. The legal sections of chs. 19-25 were expanded to meet new situations that had arisen, and chapters 31-34 were added as a new conclusion.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Deuteronomy was formed by a complex process that reached probably from the 7th century B.C.E. to the early 5th. In addition, Deuteronomy

<sup>8</sup> See John W. Rogerson, "Deuteronomy," *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 153-154.

<sup>9</sup> See Rogerson, "Deuteronomy," 153-154.

omy's concept of the Divine changed over time: the earliest 7th century layer is monolatrous, not denying the reality of other gods but enforcing the worship of YHWH in Jerusalem alone; in the later, exilic layers from the mid-6th century, especially ch. 4, this becomes monotheism, the idea that only one god exists. YHWH is simultaneously present in the Temple and in Heaven – an important and innovative concept called "name theology."<sup>10</sup> Yet there is more to Deuteronomy than this already well-known tale. From the perspective of a Derridean spectral theology, we need more than a learned analysis of the archived experiences of the past.

We must also attend to the ghost of YHWH (Dtr) associated with these processes, not least because also Deuteronomy and its reception history are haunted by a tale of mourning for the Other. When all has been said and done in traditional historical exegesis and theology, one still has to face up to the hauntology of the book and the ghosts of YHWH (Dtr). A hauntological analysis of YHWH (Dtr) as spectre is interested in the layers of white noise that haunt this indirect representation of the divine will to power. The sites of the hauntings are those places in the text where hegemony attempts to assemble and join. Hauntological analysis requires exegetical sensitivity to layers of textures made visible by other forms of historical criticism. These hauntological layers, however, include but are not identical to or exhausted by those reconstructed in source, tradition, redaction and composition criticism. To speak of YHWH (Dtr) as a ghost in the hauntological sense basically means to say that the character's effects exceed any narrative modality, genre or textual manifestation. The spectral nature of YHWH (Dtr) makes possible its lingering persona even as it fragments reception-historical reproduction and ruins the very possibility of the text's guarantee to represent that which is no longer there fully.

With regard to the haunted text, YHWH (Dtr)'s spectrality can be represented by two stages, or layers.<sup>11</sup> The first layer is whatever presents something in YHWH (Dtr)'s profile that is in some way idealised – this is often but not always an image involving the past. A second, "hauntological" layer problematizes, compromises and obfuscates the first layer, undermining or damaging it in some way and introducing irony into the text, and represents the opinionated viewpoint of the present. The first layer is what expresses past hope and confidence for the future while the hauntological layer is whatever contradicts and undoes this by expressing doubt and disillusionment.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas Römer, "The Book of Deuteronomy," in *The History of Israel's Traditions: the Heritage of Martin Noth* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Matt Patrick Graham; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 200-201.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Harper, *The Past Inside the Present*, n.p.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Harper, *The Past Inside the Present*, n.p.

On the one hand, there are the positive memories of YHWH's salvation from Egypt and his educating of the people during the wanderings (Deut 5-9). There are assurances of YHWH's loyalty and commitment to the people. There are also the instructions given to create Utopia and lists of promises of blessings to follow obedience. On the other hand, there is the haunting memory of rebellion against Moses and YHWH during the stay at Sinai and the wanderings. There are also the haunts of the curses and predictions that Israel will act corruptly and slip into idolatry, they will be kicked out of the land, they be scattered the Israelites among the nations, *et cetera* (see Deut 1-4, 9, 17-18, 28-32). The pessimistic hauntological layer in Deuteronomy's hauntology "deconstructs" the first layer of its more idealized theology. The characters of the world in the text are haunted by the future; the characters of the world behind and in front of the text are haunted by the past.

In all this it is impossible to pin down the ghost of YHWH (Dtr) conceptually into a unified theology of Deuteronomy since it is not possible to separate the spectrality of opposing layers in Deuteronomistic hauntology. The ghost of YHWH is both absent and present, appearing as the source of the voice speaking through the character of Moses yet never literally appearing on the scene of the implied audiences. The ghost of YHWH (Dtr) in the first layer is also "inside" the YHWH (Dtr) of the second layer ("the past inside the present"). The YHWH (Dtr) of the first layer ("the past for the implied audience") can only be seen through the medium of the second layer ("the present of the implied audience") so that we can't be entirely sure of the image portrayed by the first layer. The perceived inability of the characterisation of YHWH (Dtr) to adequately express the "truths" expected of it is its "Death," as in the Nietzschean sense of the "Death of God." As hauntological literature, Deuteronomy negotiates this type of "Death."<sup>13</sup>

The hauntological layer featuring YHWH (Dtr) therefore corresponds to reconfigured stories of the past, the *vaticinium ex eventu* postdictions and other texts of anticipation of apostasy. Knowledge of this pointedly reminds us that what we're witnessing is an imperfect, failure-prone and/or all-too-human construction by drawing our attention to the form or medium of the art: we see the unrealism of Deuteronomistic history, and the book's status as a magical window onto the world is denied. Such aesthetic experiences haunt, mock, accuse and open the implied audience to the delicately contingent and circumstantial nature of history. It's like the *Verfremdungseffekt* developed by twentieth-century dramatist and theorist Bertolt Brecht<sup>14</sup> and aimed to disrupt the seductive, seamless and "trance"-like flow of sympathy from the readers to the character of YHWH (Dtr) portrayed in the world of the text by "breaking the fourth wall." This theatrical metaphor is seen in the way the book depicts any situation

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Harper, *The Past Inside the Present*, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Harper, *The Past Inside the Present*, n.p.



where the illusion of transparent artistic surface is broken. In Deuteronomy this often happens in the interplay between the narrated time and the time of narration.<sup>15</sup>

YHWH (Dtr)'s hauntological nature did its job of alienating audiences from the temporal status quo. YHWH (Dtr)'s ghost didn't merely show or recall an image of the Mosaic past, it showed the pre and post-exilic present – or more specifically, it shows the past as it exists and is perceived from inside the present. The spectre of YHWH (Dtr) illustrated the present's problems as it approached the future. The spectre of YHWH (Dtr) figured a state of ontological undecidability or tension, where there is an insistence, a presence of whatever resisted the implied readers, recalcitrant to their ordinary understanding. In Deuteronomistic theologies, time was therefore of central concern and it emphasized traumatic experiences in such a way as to presuppose unresolved mourning (the trauma accompanying the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem). Earlier periods are re-visited and altered in order to work through the traumatic episodes.<sup>16</sup> The stakeholders still suffer collectively from psychological traumas, which cause their perception of and relation to reality to be different.

By reading the hauntological layer in Deuteronomy as trauma text we can properly understand the wounds of time. The repeated scenes of earlier events took on uncanny intensification in the way they were changed into new and better events. No longer was the history of Israelite religion a process of becoming, but one of unbecoming, of ceasing to be.<sup>17</sup> In this way the past haunted the present life of the implied audience, forcing them to go back in time in order to fix the mistakes evidently made. Thus YHWH (Dtr) became a spectre in Deuteronomistic history. The traumatic event of the exile should have properly expelled the ghost of the pre-exilic YHWH (Dtr) but failed to do so. Consequently, YHWH (Dtr) lived on and time became out of joint.

## D YHWH (DTR) AND THE NEW ATHEISM

After the collapse Deuteronomistic philosophies of history as morally guided grand-narratives (the so-called Davidic dynasty ended with the Exile, notwithstanding Jewish and Christian beliefs to the contrary), to invoke the ghost of YHWH (Dtr) today means to show how readers still open up spaces through which the character returns. In OT a/theology, the ghost of YHWH (Dtr) has

<sup>15</sup> For this perspective on the function of narrated time and time of narration in Deuteronomy, see Eckhart Otto, *Gottes Recht als Menschenrecht: Rechts- und literaturhistorische Studien zum Deuteronomium*. (BZABR 2; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis & London: Minnesota UP, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Harper, *The Past Inside the Present*, n.p.

now become both unthinkable and the only thing worth thinking about.<sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy is considered to lie at the heart of OT theologies. Theologies of Deuteronomy *qua* hauntologies are therefore part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary approaches to the history of Israelite religion, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to this Derridean ghost, examine the elusive identities of the living, and attend to disturbances of meaning which engage the interpreter in a restless labour of deciphering.<sup>19</sup>

Coming to terms with the theologies of Deuteronomy is still the mourning of an absolute Other. The fact is that YHWH (Dtr)'s haunting was and remains a constituent element of many real readers' lives in the Western world even today. The ghost is neither only an obvious pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalisable social phenomenon of great import. Traces of YHWH (Dtr)'s spectre in contemporary conceptions of God and morality are the sign that a haunting is taking place. We are dealing with a literary character of a dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. YHWH (Dtr)'s ghost still produces material effects, and it is through these that we may locate the presence of this ghost and analyse the effects of its hauntings.

My suspicion is that post-Nietzschean philosophy of religion has not really successfully mourned the death of God (as the concept has been understood to mean YHWH). The extremes of rabid fundamentalism and militant atheism are the result of an oscillation between introjection and incorporation. Hence the discourse about YHWH (Dtr) being a ghost that is haunting parts of our collective psyche is not simply colourful psycho-babble that has no real substance or contemporary relevance to it. In fact, the most relevant contemporary context where the spectre of YHWH (Dtr) is visible is in the latest varieties of New Atheism. For while many historians of atheism would consider the concept of deity developed in Christian modernity as the one that is rejected by atheists in the West today, as Jack Miles noted, at bottom the atheology has an older more alien source:

When the Western atheist says that he does not believe in God, it is, at the imaginative level, Deuteronomy's God.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, the situation is more complex than reducing all contemporary atheism to Deuteronomic atheology. However, a closer look at the evidence shows that indeed YHWH (Dtr) plays a major role in the polemics of New Atheism. The "New Atheist" label for critics of religion arose from journalistic commentary on the contents and impacts of books, published by, amongst others, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett.

<sup>18</sup> Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," 374.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," 376.

<sup>20</sup> Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1995), 72.



Basically, proponents of the New Atheism argue that recent scientific advancements demand a less accommodating attitude toward religion, superstition, and religious fanaticism than had traditionally been extended by many secularists.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to identify anything philosophically unprecedented in their positions and arguments, but the New Atheists have provoked considerable controversy with their body of work.<sup>22</sup> These lay atheologians have in common an outrage at what they perceive to be the moral deficiencies of the OT. Typically the New Atheists prefer to quote from passages in the OT traditionally labelled the "Law" that they consider barbaric. However, it is the deity behind the laws with which they are obsessed to reject. Thus there is a switch from the God of the Philosophers (when they discuss scientific disproof) to the God of Moses (when they keep harping on the moral objections to the Israelite deity). According to Dawkins, this god is,

...arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.<sup>23</sup>

For Dawkins, who is indeed a naïve-realist and modernist in his hermeneutics, the god of Israel is a moral monster. Dawkins refers to YHWH as "the cruel ogre of the Old Testament."<sup>24</sup> To prove his point, Dawkins quotes passages from, *inter alia*, Deuteronomy. Because Dawkins views the Deuteronomic YHWH as a threat to contemporary secular morality, he propounds a visible form of "militant" atheism. This approach has all the iconoclastic and moral indignation typical of the ghost of the YHWH (Dtr), but is now directed at the god himself. In this haunted state the New Atheism argues both against fundamentalist and liberal forms of biblical theism. Dawkins never tires of questioning whether the OT, taken seriously, really does provide a suitable moral framework, or whether, examined closely, describe a system of morals that any civilised person should find poisonous.

In the writings of Dawkins, we find references to Deuteronomy 13 which instructs believers to kill any friend or family member who favours serving other gods. Indeed, Deuteronomy 13 seems to be the most popular text in the atheological artillery. Thus also Sam Harris, another major spokesperson

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "New Atheism," n.p. [cited 22 August 2011]. Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New\\_Atheism&oldid=443041668](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_Atheism&oldid=443041668).

<sup>22</sup> James E. Taylor, "The New Atheists," *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, n.p. [cited 9 January 2012]. Online: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n-atheis/>.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 51.

<sup>24</sup> Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 25.

for the New Atheism, alludes specifically to this text's version of YHWH (Dtr) as the target of his case against liberalism in Judeo-Christian theology:

In America, religious moderation is further enforced by the fact that most Christians and Jews do not read the Bible in its entirety and consequently have no idea just how vigorously the God of Abraham wants heresy expunged. One look at the book of Deuteronomy reveals that he has something very specific in mind should your son or daughter return from yoga class advocating the worship of Krishna.<sup>25</sup>

Harris likes to allude to Deuteronomy in his claims that YHWH commands believers to have no mercy on apostates; death is the punishment for anyone breaking the Ten Commandments. For Harris, however, almost the whole of Deuteronomy reeks of the sheerest barbarism, yet professes to prescribe a divinely mandated morality. Behind the so-called Golden Rule hides the spectre of YHWH (Dtr) who demands, amongst others, that if a man discovers on his wedding night that his bride is not a virgin, he must stone her to death on her father's doorstep (Deut 22:13-21). In his *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris writes that if a god like YHWH (Dtr) is taken seriously then we should in fact be stoning people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, worshipping graven images, and other of what he considers to be imaginary crimes. In a Deuteronomic Utopia capital punishment for idolatry should be the law for this is God's timeless wisdom [sic].

Christopher Hitchens too quotes from and dismiss the theologies of Deuteronomy at length when he writes about ghostly matters in his book "*God is Not Great*." In a chapter entitled "*The nightmare of the Old Testament*," the character and commands of YHWH (Dtr) are considered causes for major concern. The ethics and theology of Deuteronomy are feared to be dangerous.<sup>26</sup> He points out, for instance, that Moses orders parents to have their children stoned to death for indiscipline (citing Deuteronomy). Yet Hitchens seems to be aware of the fact that the entire Pentateuch is an ill-carpentered fiction, bolted into place well after the non-events that it fails to describe convincingly or even plausibly. So the curious thing about the Deuteronomic laws that Hitchens so deplores, for example, those for widespread genocide, where men, women and children, and all their animals are extinguished in a paroxysm of slaughter, is that he knows they were never commanded.

Lastly, Daniel Dennett in his book "*Breaking the Spell*" is quite concerned about the fact that YHWH (Dtr) considers unbelief a capital offense. He declares that the "Old Testament Jehovah" [sic] is simply a super-man who "could take sides in battles, and be both jealous and wrathful." Dennett adds, "Part of what makes Jehovah [sic] such a fascinating participant in stories of

<sup>25</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 3.

<sup>26</sup> See Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007).

the Old Testament is his kinglike jealousy and pride, and his great appetite for praise and sacrifices. According to Dennett, we have moved beyond this God, Dennett therefore thanks heaven that those thinking blasphemy or adultery deserves capital punishment are a dwindling minority.

Curiously, on some theological level Dennett seems to miss YHWH (Dtr), thus making the deity into a memorable old monster. He talks of the "deformation" of the concept of God with its migration away from concrete anthropomorphism to ever more abstract and depersonalised concepts.<sup>27</sup> He sees nothing of reformation, transformation, or refinement. Dennett's view is that the "original monotheists" thought of God as a being one could literally listen to and sit beside. If so, the "original monotheists" thought of God as a physical being: "The Old Testament and therefore Deuteronomic YHWH was quite definitely a super-man (a He, not a She) who could take sides in battles, and be both jealous and wrathful."<sup>28</sup> The suggestion here is that monotheism in its original form, was anthropomorphic projection.

Clearly, in some sense of Lacanian paranoia, the New Atheists are haunted by YHWH (Dtr) as an Ego Ideal that they cannot stomach yet cannot seem to stop obsessing about. The language they use (nightmare, spell) fits quite nice with the idea that we are dealing with hauntological effects. Some OT scholars may think that their critiques are one sided, ignoring the more user-friendly bits of Deuteronomic god-talk.<sup>29</sup> One can even say they deconstruct their arguments in pointing out the outrageous morality of YHWH (Dtr)'s divine commands, whilst acknowledging the discourse to be fictitious. Be that as it may, perhaps this is because of the atrocities of the reception history more than the world in the text. Yet this does not take anything away from the attractiveness of the idea that we are clearly dealing with a haunting by YHWH (Dtr) who has indeed now exceeded all narrative modality.

It would seem that the New Atheists have not properly mourned the Death of God and that is why they reserve their atheological issues for the spectre of YHWH (Dtr) and the Deuteronomistic philosophies of history. They seem unable to move on to a Ricoeurian "second naivete" or to the kind of atheism without baggage Slavoj Žižek pointed to:

We are never in a position directly to choose between theism and atheism, since the choice as such is already located within the field of belief. 'Atheism' (in the sense of deciding not to believe in God)

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* (London: Viking/Penguin, 2006), 205.

<sup>28</sup> Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 206.

<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, evangelical Christian rebuttals such as those of Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making sense of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011) are equally haunted and apologetical to the point of being distortive of the text.

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is a miserable, pathetic stance of those who long for God but cannot find him (or who 'rebel against God'). A true atheist does not choose atheism: for him the question itself is irrelevant.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly the New-Atheist identity itself is closely bound up with a belief in the ghost of YHWH (Dtr). To this god they are the opposition, and therefore operate within the same system of discourse. Atheism is for them the positive confession of believing that YHWH (Dtr) does not exist yet is evil, as opposed the negative stance of indifference characterized by an absence of belief or interest in this god. In this sense YHWH (Dtr) has become part of the New-Atheist identity – the enemy required to define what unbelief means today. It is a Foucauldian "othering" that can lay claim to normality only through constructing the other as unnatural and abnormal. Who the New Atheists would be and what they would do with their time without the ghost of YHWH (Dtr) to exorcize until kingdom come is an interesting question, the obvious answer to which suggests the presence of a spectre haunting the heart of modern unbelief.

## E CONCLUSION

What can we surmise from the afore-going excursion to the underground of OT theology? For one, we may conclude that as hauntological literature the book of Deuteronomy has left its ancient and (post-)modern audiences asking a critical question: is YHWH (Dtr)'s utopia alive or dead? From the perspective of Derridean hauntology, it would seem that YHWH (Dtr) himself is neither alive nor dead but operates beyond these categories of Being. But since many readers struggle to mourn the loss of a Deuteronomistic philosophy of history sufficiently, they still oscillate between the introjection and incorporation of the spectre of YHWH (Dtr) into their philosophy of religion. That is why the Book of Deuteronomy will continue to require hauntological analysis in OT theology and why YHWH (Dtr) will remain a spectre in contemporary culture.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Žižek, Slavoj, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), 97.

<sup>31</sup> For a local example, see already Ferdinand E. Deist, "The Dangers of Deuteronomy: A Page of the Reception History of the Book," in *Studies in Deuteronomy: in honour of C .J. Labuschagne on the occasion of his 65th birthday* (ed. Florentino Garcia Martinez; VTSup 53; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 13-30.

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