"Brave New World" — Towards a *Philosophical* Theology of the Old Testament

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"What doesn't kill you, makes you *stranger*."
Heath Ledger (in the film *The Dark Night*)

ABSTRACT

There is currently no philosophical theology of the Old Testament. Biblical scholars appear reluctant to offer philosophical accounts of YHWH and it is popularly believed that philosophical concerns are without fail distortive of the non-philosophical god-talk in the biblical texts. In this paper, however, the author argues that "philosophical analysis" (conceptual clarification) can be purely historical and descriptive and may provide new insights into ancient Israel's own metaphysical assumptions. Other foci of the interest include the anachronism of "perfect-being theology," Aristotelian category theory, the metaphysics of properties and the modelling of theological pluralism with the philosophy of identity over time and across possible worlds.

A INTRODUCTION

About a decade ago, James Barr (1999:146) summarised the relation between biblical theology and philosophy as follows:

> It would be difficult to exaggerate the degree of alienation that the average biblical scholar has felt in relation to the work of disciplines like *philosophical theology* or philosophy of religion. Their modes of discussion and decision seem to him or her remote and unreal. The questions they discuss and the criteria they apply seem to be contrived and artificial, and the world of discourse in which they move seems to be quite a different world from the world of the Bible, to which the biblical scholar feels he has a sort of direct and empirical access. (My emphasis – J. W. G.)

A little later in the same discussion, Barr (1999:147) goes on to note that:

> Most biblical scholars have no time for the philosophical theologian's, 'It depends on what you mean by "God".'

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule. One biblical theologian who apparently made time was R. P. Knierim (1995:490) when he wrote that:

> One of the most self-evident yet startling questions that we may ask … is, 'What does the Bible mean, or what do you mean, when saying "God".'

Both Barr and Knierim's references to the question concerning the meaning of "God" in the Old Testament presupposes an interest with something more than semantic explication. The format of the wording harks back to the analytic tradition in philosophy where, inspired by the ideas of L. Wittgenstein and G. E. Moore, it is argued that a) the question of *meaning* precedes the question of *truth,* and b) the meaning of a word does not lie in a supposed essence or necessary reference but in its *use* within a distinct context of discourse (see Beany 2009:1). Thus rather than arguing whether or not God exists or what God *really* is like, one first has to determine what one is to understand by the concept of "God" given its meaning as reflected in its use within the "ordinary language" or the particular linguistic community of speakers (see Pyysiäinen 2005:1).

Nowadays the analytic tradition, ordinary language philosophy and the concern with conceptual analysis are considered by many (continental-type) philosophers to be thoroughly outdated (cf. Margolis & Laurence 2008 for an overview and Jackson 1998 for a defence of "conceptual analysis"). Even so, any biblical scholar whose concerns are by occupation historical but who would nevertheless like to engage in philosophical analysis might find in philosophical analysis a hermeneutically legitimate and fruitful way of doing so. Of course, most biblical theologians will be unaware of the possibility of descriptive philosophy and many still imagine all philosophy of religion as by nature speculative, normative, synthetic and aimed at the evaluation of truth-claims. Understandably then, many Old Testament theologians would consider any suggestion of a philosophical theology of the Old Testament to involve a methodological category mistake – they simply do not know that there are philosophical approaches that can be utilised to determine "what it meant" as opposed to "what it means" (to use the functional if problematic distinction by Stendahl 1962:418-432). Hence it is not surprising that Knierim (1995:492), prudent as he was, saw the need to anticipate the retort of "please explain" from his implied audience:

> Someone may ask whether the reach into this dimension of the questions does not amount to a biblical philosophy or a philosophy of the biblical truth. Indeed! And what would be wrong with that? Would it not, while focusing on the Bible, be in contact with philosophy of religion and with philosophy in principle, as biblical philosophy's contribution to those fields? Would it not, together with these fields, be

> concerned with the questions of reality, world, facts, meanings, language and truth, including the Bible's own foci and position on these matters in each of the testaments?

Curiously – and as far as I know – Knierim himself never followed up on these insights so that fifteen years down the line no-one has yet ventured a philosophical theology of the Old Testament. What is more, it would seem that even he still tried to introduce philosophical reflection into biblical theology instead of simply aiming for the creation of a completely separate discipline altogether (as philosophical theology proper is separate from systematic theology). Perhaps one of the reasons for the reluctance in this regard lies with the difficulty of imagining what exactly such a philosophical theology of the Old Testament could possibly be concerned with. How does one provide a philosophical account of the biblical deity yet avoid the fallacies of past attempts to reconcile the Bible with some or other philosophical system? Just what is historical-descriptive philosophy of religion and how can it provide any insights into the biblical world that linguistic, literary, historical, social-scientific and theological approaches cannot themselves deliver?

In the remainder of this paper my objective will be to provide possible answers to these relevant questions in order to show exactly how the metaphysical assumptions in the Old Testament itself can be fruitfully accessed by way of philosophical analysis. In doing so my secondary aim involves demonstrating how a philosophical theology of the Old Testament can actually assist us in preventing conceptual distortion via modern anachronistic philosophical-theological concerns, concepts and categories.

B FIRST STEPS

Two preliminary considerations are in order.

On the one hand, the envisaged approach will not be located within biblical theology proper and is not intended as a response and solution to the centuries old debate on whether biblical theology should have recourse to philosophy or not (Oeming 1985; Hayes & Prussner 1985; Muller 1994:342-351; and see Ollenburger 2004 for an in-depth overview). In addition, I have no desire to revive the speculative tradition of 19th century theologies of the Old Testament that sought to locate ancient Israelite beliefs within a philosophical system (e.g. Kantian, Hegelian). Nor is my intention to reconcile the textual data with any supposed contemporary credible philosophical-theological ideas or to construct a normative and unified systematic philosophical theology from the diverse contents of the Old Testament itself. Yet the envisaged approach is openly philosophical and, rather than trying to supplant traditional biblical theology only seeks to supplement it. In this sense the relation between traditional Old Testament theology and my own idea of a philosophical theology of the

Old Testament might be seen as analogous to the way in which systematic theology relates to philosophical theology within the Christian theological encyclopaedia. There may be an overlap in concerns but in the end each is a valid discipline in its own right.

On the other hand, the envisaged approach also differs radically from Christian philosophical theology proper. Whereas the latter is also concerned with propositional justification or critique (the evaluation of truth-claims) and aimed at offering contemporary credible Christian beliefs, my own philosophical inquiry is wholly historical and descriptive and its task is limited to the conceptual clarification of the Old Testament's beliefs in their own context, for their own sake (i.e. whether they are considered credible or not). My philosophical theology of the Old Testament is therefore also phenomenologically reductive and contrary to philosophical theology proper looks to biblical rather than to systematic theology for its issues of interest.

Before I commence with the discussion proper, however, a personal confession is in order. Since 2003 I myself have been suggesting that a philosophical approach to ancient Israelite religion is lacking and should be pursued to the extent that it becomes officially recognised and independent within Old Testament studies (Gericke 2003:12). However, at that time my research interests were overshadowed by a personal crisis of belief and I looked to philosophy of religion only because I wished to provide a critical evaluation of biblical truth-claims (see infamously Gericke 2006a:679). The result was the first *atheology* of the Old Testament (Gericke 2003; 2004:30-57).

Presently (e.g. since Gericke 2009a:20-45), however, my thoughts on the task of philosophical inquiry in the context of biblical scholarship have changed for better or for worse. I now think that descriptive "philosophical analysis" is more apt in the context of Old Testament studies (given its historical interests) than any evaluative philosophical critique can ever be. The question of meaning indeed precedes the question of truth and the upside of opting for conceptual clarification rather than propositional justification/critique is that all the traditional objections to utilising philosophy become irrelevant as they miss the point (cf. Murray & Rea 2008:xii). This has been recognised within comparative and phenomenological philosophy of religion some time ago and is why Ward (1987:81-82) could remark as follows:

> *There is need for a philosophical account of the nature of this God* [i.e. YHWH], which might clarify the way in which other peoples might relate to him, or come to understand what he is. There is no such account in the Bible itself, which confines itself to revelations given to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel. Both the Upanishads and the Buddhist Pali Canon contain sections which may fairly be regarded as philosophical or doctrinal, exploring views of the nature of ultimate re-

> ality in a reflective and meditative way. In the Old Testament there are virtually no passages of that sort. Philosophical reflection on the nature of Jahweh, the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is almost entirely absent (emphasis mine – J. W. G.).

Note that absence of a philosophical account of YHWH in the biblical texts, far from been seen as providing any sort of rationale for avoiding philosophical reflection, is in fact implied to be precisely the reason why it is so sorely needed. One therefore commits the fallacy of *non-sequitur* reasoning by arguing that since the biblical texts are not philosophical in nature, we ourselves may therefore not ask philosophical questions about its contents or describe it via philosophical terms. Morris (1987:31) is therefore quite justified in offering the following corrective:

> The Bible is not a textbook of philosophical theology. Its texts on God are thus neither as complete nor as specific as the philosophical theologian needs in order to be able to answer fully his conceptual, or philosophical questions. Are these questions then illegitimate from a biblical standpoint? I see no reason to think so at all. From the fact that the biblical documents, written as they were to deal with burning practical questions of the greatest personal significance, do not address all the possible philosophical questions, which can also, in their own way, be of the greatest personal significance, *it does not follow at all that these more theoretical questions are illegitimate* (emphasis mine – J. W. G.).

While many philosophers of religion no longer work generically but now consider any religious concept, belief, or practice philosophically interesting, the anti-philosophical sentiment in biblical scholarship has meant that the study of ancient Israelite religion is still one of the few utterly bereft of a philosophical approach (cf. Stump 1995:898). It is therefore not surprising to find biblical theologians using every possible means to bracket philosophical questions and to claim that it is the hermeneutically legitimate thing to do. Consider, for example, what seems to be implicit in the remark by Barton on biblical ethics (1995b:11-22):

> The study of Hebrew Bible ethics has sometimes suffered from an unwillingness on the part of scholars to contemplate 'philosophical' questions at all, on the grounds that people of ancient Israel simply were not interested in, or could not have understood, questions of such a kind. A case could undoubtedly be made in favour of such a belief but it needs to be made: it should not be asserted as though it were obvious.

Barton here points out a glaring negligence – yet many biblical theologians eager to justify their own anti-philosophical sentiments are likely to misunderstand the actually plea being made here. *Prima facie* it seems that Barton

was suggesting that philosophical questions may be bracketed *if it can be shown that the ancient Israelite did not ask them*. But if that is taken to be the implication then we are dealing with the same *non-sequitur* reasoning Morris rightly dismissed as fallacious. So what if the ancient Israelites were not interested in our questions or could not have understood our concerns? Did they, for that matter, show any concern for our linguistic, literary, historical, social-scientific and theological questions? But if not and biblical scholars are allowed to attend to such matters, why bother pointing out the anachronistic nature of philosophical concerns and questions, when in fact all our biblical-critical questions and concerns are *a priori* anachronistic? Surely the problem here is not having anachronistic concerns but rather committing anachronistic distortions.

Perhaps it is said that the real trouble with philosophy lies with the fact that the Old Testament does contain references to linguistic, literary, historical, social and theological phenomena but not to philosophical ideas. But again the objection is based on a fallacy of presumption. For while the Old Testament does indeed not contain any typical philosophical arguments and reflection in the technical sense (although Qohelet gets pretty close to this), its discourse does contain taken-for-granted *presuppositions* about the nature of reality, existence, knowledge, truth, belief, good and evil, and so on. In other words, the non-philosophical language of the Old Testament cannot but witness to *implicit* metaphysical, epistemological, logical and moral *assumptions* that require descriptive philosophical clarification for us to know them (see Gericke 2007:677). Without an analysis of these assumptions – all of which are bracketed in traditional historical approaches to the text – no comprehensive understanding of ancient Israelite religion is possible. What's more, without such philosophical analysis we are actually more rather than less likely to read our own anachronistic philosophical-theological assumptions into the text.

The need for and possibility of a philosophical analysis of the biblical discourse has been recognised by some philosophical theologians proper – at least with reference to the New Testament. In a recent publication, Abraham (2009:149-168) aimed to clarify what he calls the "Epistemology of Jesus". Of current relevance is the basic gist of his arguments in defence of doing philosophy with non-philosophical biblical texts. Working with the Gospel of Mark, Abraham (2009:151) wrote the following insightful piece:

> 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.

Quite so. Now if we substitute "The Old Testament" for "Mark's Gospel" and "philosophy" for "epistemology" it should be readily apparent that a philosophical theology of the Old Testament will not involve anything other than clarifying what the biblical text itself presupposed, even if its aims were not philosophical. The task of a philosophical theology of the Old Testament will therefore be to mine the biblical data for all the philosophically-relevant assumptions implicit therein. In this the challenge Old Testament scholars face is reminiscent of the methodological problems encountered in African philosophy (see Fasiku 2008:1-17). The Old Testament, like African thought, is not philosophical in the technical Western sense of the word. Like African traditions, it is comprised of dynamic, complex and pluralist clusters of myths, legends, stories, laws, proverbs and songs. However, in the debate within African philosophy one attempt to solve the problem was by coining the term "ethnophilosophy" (or "folk-philosophy"). African philosophy was recognised to be something implicit in the metaphysical, epistemological and moral assumptions of African traditions and as such can be described in philosophical terms without the need for a synthesis or critical evaluation.

If African philosophy is possible, even when African thought is not philosophical in nature, why can the Old Testament philosophical theologian not be seen as something analogous to an ordinary-language philosopher studying African "philosophy"? In this the task of the philosophical theologian of the Old Testament will be roughly similar to that of a biblical translator who has to find concepts in the meta-language with which to enable a better understanding of the object-language in order to translate the relevant presuppositions in non-philosophical biblical discourse into non-distortive philosophical language. By doing so one is able to clarify and explicate the metaphysical, epistemological and moral assumptions in biblical god-talk that lie beyond the scope of purely linguistic, literary, historical, social-scientific and theological inquiry. Moreover, if such philosophical analysis ever turns out to be distortive of the biblical texts in their historical context, it says more of the particular biblical scholar's inability to do philosophical analysis properly than in any way implying that philosophical analysis as such is the culprit.

In the remainder of this paper, I shall attempt to further illustrate what a proper philosophical analysis might involve by providing some introductory thoughts on a few matters of interest for a philosophical theology of the Old Testament. This I intend to do in a way that is both descriptive and historical and does not involve the hermeneutical fallacies of the philosophical eisegesis of the pre-critical and pre-Gablerian yesteryear.

C THE ANACHRONISM OF PERFECT-BEING THEOLOGY

Ironically, the same biblical theologians who decry the use of philosophical concepts show no end to displaying their own addiction to the distortive ana-

chronism known as "perfect-being theology" (see Murray & Rea 2008 for an overview). Many an Old Testament theologian have assumed, asserted or implied that YHWH was believed to instantiate what philosophical theologians refer to as "maximal greatness," that is,, that YHWH was believed to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, etcetera. The fact of the matter is that these terms are part of a meta-language that is completely out of place in many of the biblical narratives (cf. Clines 1980:323-330; Carroll 1991:21; Gericke 2006b:677-699). While some texts in the Old Testament may endorse something similar to one or more of these attributes as they are popularly understood to be, there are many textual contexts in which this is not the case.

For example, no one can show that a text like Genesis 18 presupposes or implies perfect-being theology. In the narrative YHWH is depicted as moving about on his way (not omnipresent) to verify a report regarding an alleged state of affairs (not omniscient), eating with Abraham (not spiritual or incorporeal), only to be taken to task by Abraham to make sure that he does the right thing (presupposing moral realism and not divine-command ethics). In this text YHWH's profile simply does not satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for godhood taken for granted by many philosophical theologians (cf. Fretheim 1984, Brueggemann 1997:124).

This fact – the relative absence of perfect being theology in biblical theology – has been pointed out in the past. An excellent example is that of Fretheim (1984) who actually tries to show that many texts depict YHWH in ways that contradict almost every essential property of divinity proposed by perfect-being theologians (or "Church Theology" as Brueggemann 1997:21 calls it). Fretheim's presentation stands over and against conservative Christian readings that tend to be fundamentalist, anachronistically reading into Old Testament god-talk modern ideas of maximal greatness and attempting to produce a "biblical" view of God. In doing so these approaches fail to take cognisance of theological pluralism in ancient Israelite religion and tend to settle arguments to their own satisfaction by quoting and elaborating *ad hoc* on supposed proof-texts that are understood to support classical-theistic readings. This strategy "works" only by reinterpreting discourse that does not comply with preconceived dogmatic expectations. Such people are less interested in taking the Bible on its own terms and more interested in defending their particular theory of inspiration.

However, Fretheim's exposition itself suffers from the drawbacks inherent in the kind of "open-theistic" hermeneutics he seems to endorse. These approaches accept limitations on the part of the deity but tend to overemphasise *cognitive* limitations (reinterpreting ones about presence and power), ignore contrary readings supporting classical theism, anachronistically see *everything* as metaphor (except the word "God", although ironically its etymology is also

metaphorical) and paint the deity in absolutely adorable terms by ignoring *dis-theistic* elements in the discourse that implicates YHWH in the actualisation of natural and moral evil (on which, see Crenshaw 1971:77-88 for an excellent outline)

A more open-minded and in my view – honest – assessment is that of Barton (1995a:28-32) who in his contribution to the responses to Albertz (1992) notes the "ambiguity" between the biblical material and the theological utterances of later times. What we find in many texts of the Old Testament do not fit well with what later counted for monotheism, omnipotence, and omniscience in both Jewish and Christian theologies. Barton (1995a:28-32) offers the example of YHWH choosing Saul only to reject him later. According to Barton, anyone who on philosophical assumptions assume YHWH to be omniscient yet choosing someone he is going to reject anyway misses the point of the biblical author who did not share the assumptions of perfect being theology.

Barton is certainly correct in his observation, but I fear that the anti-philosophical establishment of biblical theologians will make the wrong inferences. Barton did *not* mean to imply that all philosophical questions are invalid simply for being philosophical. What he meant was that philosophical questions miss the point when they are presumptuous and arise from reading anachronistic philosophical-theological conceptions of God into biblical texts where the particular ideas are not present. But if that is the case then as noted above we actually need *more* (not less) philosophical analysis so that we may be able to discern the metaphysical assumptions of the text in its own pre-philosophical context precisely in order to prevent us from philosophical eisegesis! *The danger of philosophical thinking lies in projecting our own philosophical-theological assumptions about the nature of God onto biblical god-talk and not with philosophical analysis and the asking of philosophical questions per se*. Without descriptive philosophical analysis there is no way of preventing such philosophical-theological distortions.

D ARE PHILOSOPHICAL CATEGORIES A-PRIORI DISTORTIVE?

Ever since Eichrodt (1961) it has been popular to imagine that concepts and categories for Old Testament theology should come from the text itself, not from outside (e.g. not from Christian systematic theology). But as Barr (1999:74) pointed out, Eichrodt was himself not consistent in this and resorted to Christian dogmatics when it suited him (the concept of "covenant" as *Mitte* for biblical theology is, after all, typical of "Reformed" *dogmatics*). The fact is that it is not possible to work without outside concept and categories – even the concept of "theology" is already extra-biblical and it is naïve to imagine that this can be avoided (Childs 1992:41; Barr 1999:63-76). The problem therefore

is not that a concept or category comes from the outside; the trouble arises when the particular concept or category is *presumptuous* and *distortive* of the biblical contents. What this means is that a descriptive philosophical theology of the Old Testament is free to use philosophical concepts, yet should make sure that these are informative of what is in the text itself. One way of doing this is by doing philosophical theology that is phenomenologically-reductive in orientation. This means doing what Steinberg (2005:1) suggested in the following words:

> [I]n observing the culture *of* ancient Israel it is first of all necessary to bracket out all (theological) notions of deity that are post-Kantian, or that are derived even indirectly from Neo-Platonism and Neo-Aristotelianism. Ancient Israelite thinking was pre-scholastic and pre-Aquinas and pre-Christian and pre-Jewish. As a consequence, certain distinctions between categories of being and of thought shared by most contemporary scholars, heirs of Western philosophic developments since the thirteenth century CE, distinctions that fill this chapter, cannot be ascribed to Israelite thought.

I agree with Steinberg on this point, and there are many false and anachronistic metaphysical dichotomies in biblical theology. Good examples here are biblical theologians distinguishing between religious and secular language, natural and supernatural substances, immanent and transcendent realms, YHWH as he is and YHWH as he appears (e.g. in human form), literal and metaphorical, finite and infinite, etcetera (see Gericke 2009b). All of these binary oppositions falsely divide biblical metaphysical assumptions in such a way so as to prevent us from seeing what is actually in the text. However, because of the anti-philosophical sentiment endemic in biblical theology, care should be taken to note what exactly the problem here is in relation to philosophical thinking. As above with the ideas of Barton, one should not imagine that philosophical concepts and categories *per se* are the culprits.

Technically, the kind of approach called for by Steinberg – namely. phenomenological reduction – itself already an "anachronistic" form of *philosophical* inquiry (no biblical person ever pursued anything like it). In addition, cognisance should be taken of the fact that while *notions of deity* derived from Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical theology may be distortive and anachronistic in the context of biblical theology, *this does not mean that all concepts derived from Plato or Aristotle are therefore* ipso facto *distortive.* Consider, for example, the following philosophical(!) description of the concept of YHWH as part of a discussion in a history of Israelite religion during the Mosaic period by Fohrer (1972:77):

> According to the only Israelite explanation, that found in Exod. 3:14, the name means that this God is one of whom *hāyâ* can be fully predicated. Since this verb in the Hebrew refers not merely to static exis-

> tence, but to dynamic and effectual presence, the name ascribes dynamic, powerful and effectual being to Yahweh. Yahweh's nature, as expressed by his name, is a union of being, becoming and acting – an effectual existence that is always becoming and yet remains identical with itself.

Note the "anachronistic" philosophical concepts used by Fohrer as he speaks of YHWH being "predicated" and as having a "nature" (Aristotelian notions) or when he talks about YHWH's "existence", "being" and "becoming" (Platonic concepts). These terms are not found in the Old Testament itself, yet there is nothing *a priori* distortive in their use. Though philosophical these terms can be applied purely descriptively – and what is wrong with that? Surely it is wrong to think that historical and philosophical concerns are mutually exclusive. Does such a philosophical description not create the kind of awareness of metaphysical assumptions in the text that other approaches tend to bracket? Of course, we may well deny that Fohrer's philosophical translation is wholly correct but then the problem lies with his particular description and not with the fact that his account of YHWH happens to be philosophical. But if Fohrer can venture even a short philosophical analysis, what would be wrong with extending it too a book's length (whilst pointing out diachronic changes in the conceptual background)? Is Fohrer not already unintentionally actually doing analytical philosophical theology via conceptual clarification? What else besides unwritten philosophical analysis have biblical theologians themselves been doing to be able to know that certain philosophical concepts are in fact not appropriate to begin with?

An interesting albeit conveniently overlooked example of where the use of Aristotelian philosophical-theological notions is indeed utterly distortive concerns the so-called doctrine of "divine simplicity". In his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas applied Aristotelian ideas in trying to explain how God should be understood. According to Pyysiäinen 2005:11), this involved the following metatheistic axioms:

- God is not embodied (*Deum non esse corpus*).
- God is not composed by matter (*materiam*) and form (*forma*).
- God is identical with his essence (*essentia*) and nature (*natura*).
- God is identical to his existence.
- God is not in any genus as a species (*Deus non est in genere sicut species*)
- God exhibits no accidental properties (*accidens*)
- God is wholly one (*Deum omnino esse simplicem*).
- God cannot be combined with anything.

Whether we believe this about God (or consider the description appropriate for Godhood) is not currently relevant. The fact is that whereas some texts in the Old Testament may represent YHWH in ways that by philosophical translation might boil down to be commensurable with some of Aquinas' axioms (he did believe he was describing the God of the Bible), the fact is that virtually all of these propositions are seriously anachronistic and distortive when taken for granted in the analysis of many Old Testament texts. In a substantial number of passages exactly the opposite profile of YHWH is actually what the texts themselves presuppose as going without saying (cf. Ward 1998:58-82; Van der Toorn 1999:911-919; Gericke 2009b). A philosophical theology of the Old Testament would therefore do well to instead opt for a doctrine of "divine complexity":

- YHWH was assumed to have a body (*theomorphism* in humans).
- YHWH was assumed to be composed of matter and form ("ruach" was believed to be an elemental substance like wind).
- YHWH's properties were not assumed to be identical with the divine essence/nature (absolute godhood ≤ the extension of generic godhood).
- YHWH's essence was not assumed to be identical to his existence (generic godhood ≥ absolute godhood).
- YHWH was assumed to be in a genus as a species (generic "god" was assumed to be something analogous to a natural kind or folk-taxonomic type).
- YHWH was assumed to exhibit accidental properties (presupposed in Old Testament modalities within typologies of divinity).
- YHWH was not assumed to be wholly one (the deity was manifested in mereological parts, e.g. spirit, glory, name, word, etc.).
- YHWH was assumed as able to combine with something (cf. spirit possession/superlative states).

To be sure, I cannot say that this is the "biblical" view of YHWH (for there is no such animal as a singular unified conception in the texts). But what I can do is to point to the fact that though I have here used Aristotelian concepts I have done so in a purely descriptive and non-distortive manner that does bring out what certain passages seem to presuppose. And what is wrong with that? How is this philosophical account necessarily distortive? Even if it is erroneous, surely the problem lies with the description and not with its philosophical dimension per se. Of course, many will not like such a description if only because the idea of divine complexity goes against the grain of everything that goes without saying in classical theism. But this is not my problem and such readers are in fact troubled with the biblical text itself and not with philosophical analysis. Moreover, the task of Old Testament scholarship is not the

justification of Christian philosophical dogmas at all costs but rather the provisioning of correct philosophical descriptions of what is implicit in the text, whether we would like to believe it or not. The philosophical terminology in the meta-language used for description may indeed sound alien and evoke negative associations (the philosophical terms are not found in biblical Hebrew). Yet philosophical concepts are no more problematic and anachronistic than any of the other post-biblical concepts scholars have no trouble using in their own non-philosophical descriptions (e.g. when talking about YHWH as "personal" or "transcendent", or when using terms like "religion", "monotheism", "supernatural", "culture", "history", "metaphor", or "theology"; see Smith 2004:2). But if almost all our scholarly terms derive from an anachronistic meta-language, why reserve the charge of anachronism for *philosophical* terms? Surely the problem does not lie with neologisms but with distortive extensions. So we need to judge each individual case of application on its own merits in order to determine whether the philosophical terms utilised are in fact distortive or whether they may in fact actually allow us to become aware of something that is implicit in the text yet which lies beyond the scope of traditional non-philosophical descriptive enterprises to articulate.

Contrary to popular belief, moreover, the Aristotelian notion of the categories of being, rather than being necessarily distortive might actually represent a functional way of providing a useful summation of basic information in the biblical texts. Take for example the following outline as representative of an adaptation of the table of categories provided by Thomasson (2009:1) for the purpose of providing a philosophical account of YHWH:

NAME	**LITERALLY**	**YHWH AS OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE**
Substance	*"this"* *what-it-is*	e.g. YHWH (primary substance) e.g. a god (secondary substance)
Quantity	*how much*	e.g. single; finite and bounded, etc.
Quality	*what sort*	e.g. powerful, wise, immortal, spiritual, etc.
Relation	*related to what*	e.g. greater than; related to creation, etc.
Location	*where*	e.g. heavens, temple, mountain, etc..
Time	*when*	e.g. from the beginning, temporal, eternal, etc.
Position	*being situated*	e.g. sitting, standing, walking, descending, etc.
Habit	*having, possess*	e.g. radiance, robed, etc.
Action	*doing*	e.g. speaking, creating, saving, judging, etc.
Passion	*undergoing*	e.g. served, feared, wearied, exalted, etc.

Now biblical theologians might object, saying that the above schema represents a category mistake since God is not a being. With this objection, however, it is they rather than Aristotle who are anachronistic and at fault. The Old Testament itself most certainly assumed YHWH to be the highest being (i.e. it took for granted what Heidegger called "onto-theology") and not Being itself (as modern systematic theologians recast him to be, e.g. Tillich). Note, however, that the above table is not meant to offer a unifying metaphysical system of the Old Testament's beliefs about YHWH. Nor was my aim to show that Aristotelian category theory is biblical or is true. My concern was merely to show how Aristotle's categories could (not "should") be utilised in a functional and non-distortive manner with reference to what is assumed to be the case in particular biblical texts (in full knowledge that Aristotelian category theory is currently considered to be outdated in philosophical metaphysics and that there are other more recent category theories available, for example. in Kant and Husserl; see Thomasson 2009 for an overview).

The sad fact is that zeal without knowledge leads many biblical theologians to talk nonsense. Those who decry the use of Aristotle sometime suffer from a distinct lack of knowledge about just how much of their own supposedly non-philosophical terminology is nothing of the sort. Thus one will often find someone dismisses the use of Aristotelian logic in attempting to understand the biblical thought (Barr 1999:168). However, the same person will liberally use the concept of "cause" without knowing this term is as Aristotelian as the term "substance" (Eichrodt 1961:187) Or, as is popular nowadays, Aristotle's *Categories* will be dismissed on the grounds of the pervasiveness of "metaphor" in biblical God-talk (see Carroll 1991:59), whilst failing to take cognisance of the fact that it was Aristotle's *Rhetorics* that popularised the concept of metaphor in the first place and that the very notion of metaphor in Aristotle is inextricably linked to assumptions in his *Metaphysics* (Rapp 2008:1)

Moreover, it's all fine and well buying into Herder's stereotype of Hebrew thought and claiming that its logic differs from Aristotelian logic (see Barr 1999:157-168 for a discussion). Thus one will often find biblical theologians suggesting that for the Old Testament A and B could be true as opposed to Aristotelian logic where it is either A or B. Yet in doing so one is talking nonsense and simply betraying one's complete and utter failure to understand what Aristotle and the Old Testament thought in this regard. On the one hand, Aristotle never denied that A and B can both be true – his claim concerns the law of non-contradiction which is not about A and B but about A and not-A. And while it may sound theo-politically correct to claim that for the biblical authors contradiction was not a problem, it is doubtful that any individual biblical author would deny the validity of the law of non-contradiction had they been familiar with it and despite the fact that the Old Testament often contradicts

itself in its depiction of YHWH. Aristotle did not invent logical thinking; he merely described what was already taken for granted in human reasoning.

After all, how do I know that the biblical authors were fine with contradictions? How do I know the author of Genesis 1 or the redactor was aware that this text contradicts Genesis 2? How do I know it is not rather the biblical theologian who, because he or she is not a fundamentalist, admits the presence of the contradictions, yet as a quasi-biblicist still wishes to make the biblical text seem more theologically sophisticated than it appears to be? Such people might wish to claim that contradictions were no problem because it would be nicer to think like this in our own time. Related to this line of reasoning is the hasty generalisation so fashionable nowadays insisting that all biblical god-talk is metaphorical (see Gericke 2009b). On closer inspection, however, this sweeping statement appears to be motivated by the same apologetic concerns that once led interpreters to opt for allegorical interpretation in order to "salvage" realism in terms of the text-reality relation (cf. Barr 's notion of "referentiality" [Barr 1999:162]). If so, it means that, ultimately, it is the anti-philosophical biblical theologian who, in dismissing Aristotelian philosophy as anachronistic, turns out to be the one who is actually operating with conceptually problematic philosophical-theological frames of reference.

E FROM ATTRIBUTES OF GOD TO PROPERTIES OF YHWH

In modern philosophy (metaphysics), a property is typically considered as identical to an attribute of an object (Swoyer 2008:1). Thus a god may be said to have, by definition, the property of *divinity*. Properties therefore include the qualities or features or characteristics of things. According to Swoyer (2008:1), questions about the nature and existence of properties are nearly as old as philosophy itself. Interest in properties has ebbed and flowed over the centuries, but they are now undergoing a resurgence. Just a few decades ago many philosophers concurred with Quine's dismissal of properties as "creatures of darkness", but philosophers now widely invoke them without guilt or shame. Swoyer (2008:1) also notes that the last twenty five years have seen a great deal of interesting work on properties, although when we turn to the recent literature on properties we find a confusing array of terminology, incompatible standards for evaluating theories of properties, and philosophers talking past one another (Swoyer 2008:1).

My own concern here is not the philosophical debate on properties. I bracket the question of which theory is correct and whether the concept of properties is philosophically justified. In my view property theory in philosophy may prove illuminating for a philosophical theology of the Old Testament in as much as traditional biblical theologies of the systematic (Eichrodt) type often contain a section on the "attributes" of YHWH (see Barr 1999:27 and Eichrodt 1961 for a classic example; cf. also Preuss 1996:142-182 for a more

recent example). Here it might be said that YHWH is, *inter alia*, single, personal, spiritual, to which might be added discussions on the attributes of power, presence, knowledge, love, wrath and holiness (and so on). Such a description, at times bordering on an exercise in homiletics, might be considered sufficient for traditional biblical theology, yet a philosophical theology of the Old Testament worthy of its name will wish to determine now what kind of property each of these attributes was assumed to be.

Swoyer (2008) distinguishes the different kinds of properties philosophers have identified. These distinctions may be functional for any philosophical account of the nature of YHWH. To be sure, the Old Testament does not itself actually make these philosophical distinctions in any explicit manner, yet the biblical texts presuppose and imply them all the same. Not wishing to be presumptuous, however, I shall introduce each type of property distinction with a question.

1 Essential *versus* accidental properties

Does the Old Testament assume a distinction between essential and accidental properties in YHWH? The distinction between *essential* versus *accidental properties* has been characterised in various ways, but it is currently most commonly understood in modal terms along these lines: an *essential property* of YHWH would be *a* property that an Old Testament text assumed YHWH must have to be the kind of thing or individual that he was believed to be. By contrast, an *accidental property* of YHWH is one that YHWH was thought to have but also assumed as one he could lack without ceasing to be the kind of entity he was thought to be. While Christian philosophical theology with its notion of divine simplicity dislikes the notion of accidental properties in God, *prima facie* assessments suggest that in the Old Testament YHWH was indeed assumed to exhibit accidents, for example, being merciful. Though texts like Exodus 34:6-7 (and parallels) assume mercy to a property of YHWH it would appear that lacking mercy was not assumed to be something that would disqualify YHWH from being considered a god or even from being YHWH – it would only have implications for the *kind* of god he was assumed to be (cf. Ps 77 where the possibility of change is entertained).

2 Intrinsic *versus* extrinsic properties

Were certain properties of YHWH assumed to be extrinsic and others intrinsic? This question can be answered affirmatively if it can be demonstrated that some properties are instantiated by YHWH because of the relations they bear to other things while others are not. For example, in some texts the property of being a god is assumed to be instantiated by YHWH because he is believed to be the god of Israel. In these texts the property of godhood is relational analogous to the property of fatherhood – it exists only in relation to an object. Such

a property is sometimes called an *extrinsic property* and curiously this means that according to some Old Testament texts, generic godhood is not what YHWH has in himself but something YHWH instantiates in virtue of being somebody's god (as being a father makes no sense without being the father of children).

In this sense YHWH's godhood was not always assumed to be an *intrinsic* or *non-relational property* that YHWH had quite independently of relationships to other things. This explains why the generic term could be applied to other entities, for example the king, messengers, spirits of the dead, abstract objects, lesser heavenly beings, superlative phenomena, etcetera. In this way many properties of YHWH that at first seem intrinsic (from a modern philosophical-theological frame of reference) might turn out to be extrinsic when we examine them carefully. Two interesting questions are whether any Old Testament texts assumed there to be any philosophically-interesting intrinsic properties of YHWH and how the text's own notions of intrinsicness and extrinsicness are to be explicated.

3 Primary *versus* secondary properties

Does the Old Testament assume a distinction between primary and secondary properties of divinity? If so, which properties of YHWH were assumed to be primary and which secondary? The distinction between primary and secondary properties goes back to the Greek atomists. It lay dormant for centuries, but was revived by Galileo, Descartes, Boyle, Locke, and others during the seventeenth century. Locke's influence is so pervasive that such properties still often go under the names that he gave them: *primary* and *secondary qualities*. The intuitive idea is that primary properties are objective features of the world and on many accounts they are also fundamental properties that explain why things have the other properties that they do. By contrast, secondary properties are qualities that somehow depend on the perception and interpretation. The question is what (if anything) the Old Testament took for granted on this matter and the task of the philosophical theologian of the Old Testament is to give a philosophical description of this. Again pluralism in the texts should be left as it is and merely described – there is no need for harmonisation and evaluative assessments.

4 Fixed-degree *versus* multigrade properties

Do we encounter a distinction between so-called fixed-degree and multigrade properties in representations of YHWH in the Old Testament? Many predicates of YHWH can be shown to be multigrade *or* variably polyadic *if it* can be demonstrated that they were assumed to be true of various numbers of things. For example, the predicate "is holy" is not only applied to YHWH but also to Israel, religious artefacts, sacred spaces, cultic functionaries, and so on. In this

sense YHWH's holiness was assumed to be a polyadic property and such multigrade predicates are very common (e.g. YHWH as "personal"). Some of them can be analysed as conjunctions of fixed-degree predicates, but many of them cannot. Standard logic does not accommodate multigrade predicates, but given their commonality due to anthropomorphisms in the god-talk, if the philosophical theologian of the Old Testament intends to use properties as semantic values of Hebrew predicates, then the notion of multigrade properties are needed.

5. Structured *versus* unstructured properties

Is this distinction functional in the context of the Old Testament conception of YHWH? Here biblical scholars might need to ask whether a given Old Testament text assumed a distinction between what may be called simple and compound properties of YHWH. Compound properties of YHWH would be those properties of the divine, the possession of which implies the possession of other properties as part of having that property. In this regard YHWH's divinity might be seen as a compound property with some of his other properties being simple ones that are actually part of his being a god, for example his immortality.

6. First-order *versus* higher-order properties

Does the Old Testament assume a hierarchy of properties arranged according to order? First-order properties and relations would be those that can only be instantiated by YHWH *qua* individual. For example, being spiritual can be instantiated by YHWH and other spiritual entities and phenomena. But the Old Testament does not assume that the property of spirit is itself a spirit, it only exists as a trope (in the metaphysical sense as the-spiritual nature-of-something/somebody). It is natural to suppose, however, that at least many first-order properties and relations can themselves have properties and relations. Here again we might think of YHWH's property of divinity (e.g. generic godhood). Thus the property of YHWH's divinity was thought to exemplify the property of *being a type of entity* And of course, once we think of second-order properties for YHWH, it is natural to wonder whether there are third-order properties (properties of second- or, perhaps in cumulative fashion, of second- *and* first-order properties), and so on up through ever-higher orders.

7 Supervenient *versus* non-supervenient properties

Does the Old Testament presuppose a distinction between supervenient properties of YHWH and its opposite? This can be said to be the case if in a given text a certain set of properties of YHWH supervenes upon a second set in the sense that no two things can differ with respect to the first set of properties without also differing with respect to the second set. In slogan form, "there

cannot be an *A*-difference in YHWH without a *B*-difference". In the Old Testament, again the property of YHWH's generic divinity provides an apt example of a supervenient property in as much as many of his properties are such because he was assumed to be a god and any hypothetical change in the property of generic godhood would imply that some of his other properties would not remain unaffected (e.g. his immorality). Thus the Old Testament assumes a distinction between godhood as a property and the properties of godhood and a change in the former will of necessity involve a change in the latter. In this way the property of divinity was believed to supervene on the properties of divinity.

8 Initial *versus* emergent properties

Because much of the Old Testament knows nothing of the doctrine of divine simplicity and because its variety of theism is often analogous to what might today be classified to be a combination of open- and process versions (albeit in pre-philosophical primitive format), YHWH's own character develops from a relatively simple state into a complex system over time (by analogy). This represents the diachronic counterpart of the synchronic essential-accidental properties distinction. Permanent properties are those durable characteristics that YHWH was assumed to exhibit always and everywhere whereas emergent properties arise over time as a result of interaction, role playing, relations, functions, etcetera. An example of a literary critical perspective on initial and emergent properties is found in Miles (1995) whereas most histories of Israelite religion contain a historical account of what may also be described in philosophical terms.

Even so, most biblical theologies fail to draw the above distinctions and in doing so end up being tempted by the desire for system and closure to paint a static and unified picture far more related to the philosophical distortions they decry than a descriptive application of philosophical property theory will ever be. From this it should again be readily apparent that the distortive element in utilising philosophical theories do not come from their being philosophical but from the habit Old Testament scholars have of looking to the wrong philosophical discussions either for terminology or for a scapegoat on which to blame their own philosophical-eisegetical misreadings. In the end the often dogmatic and oversimplified discussion of the attributes of YHWH in biblical theology would do well to take cognisance of the kinds of property distinctions presupposed by the Old Testament itself, yet which will be discernable to us only via the painstaking philosophical analyses of metatheistic assumptions within individual texts.

F THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM AND YHWH'S IDENTITY

A philosophical theology of the Old Testament should derive much of its con-

cerns from a descriptive biblical theology rather than systematic theology or Christian philosophical theology. For it is often the case that philosophical theology brackets historical theology while philosophy of religion brackets the history of religion. In biblical studies this is unacceptable and, contrary to popular belief, the diachronic and synchronic complexity and diversity of the Old Testament's representations of YHWH need not necessarily be a problem for philosophical theology. In biblical theology, theological pluralism in the Old Testament is a recognised reality (see Fretheim 1984:12; Hasel 1985:20). Now the pluralism itself, rather than making philosophical reflection impossible, actually generates interesting philosophical questions (contra Carroll 1991:47). Pluralism is only a problem if the philosophical approach is synthetic, systematic, normative and evaluative – not if, as is presently the case, it is analytic, historical, phenomenological and descriptive.

In this section I have brought to bear on the issue of pluralism the philosophy of identity with special reference to the problems of identity over time and across possible worlds. These problems are controversial in metaphysics proper but instead of getting involved in the debate regarding their conceptual validity for present philosophical thinking, I simply wish to show how the ideas related to the problems might provide an interesting and functional way of looking at the Old Testament's multiple and often incommensurable representations of YHWH within the "world-in-the-text". The aim is not ultimately harmonisation or removing the discrepancies but concerns the question of how it was assumed to be possible to imagine one was speaking of the same deity throughout, despite the different sets of identity conditions for the god of Israel in different ideological contexts. In this regard cognisance is taken of the fact that the problem of identity can be approached from both a diachronic and synchronic perspective with the former linking up to the philosophical problem of identity over time and the latter with the concept of transworld identity. Let us briefly look at each in turn as a possible way in which a philosophical theology of the Old Testament might go about in modelling the complexities of representation in biblical god-talk.

From a *diachronic* perspective (i.e. via the history of Israelite religion), it is interesting to recall the remark of Gallois (2008:1) who recounts how the famous logician Irving Copi once defined the problem of identity through time by noting that the following two statements both seem true but appear to be inconsistent: If a changing thing really changes, there cannot literally be one and the same thing before and after the change. However, if a changing thing literally remains one and the same thing (i.e., retains its identity) throughout the change, then it cannot really have changed. Traditionally, this puzzle has been solved in various ways. Aristotle, for example, distinguished between "accidental" and "essential" changes. Accidental changes are ones that do not result in a change in an object's identity after the change, such as when a house is painted, or one's hair turns grey, etcetera. Aristotle thought of these as changes

in the accidental properties of a thing. Essential changes, by contrast, are those which do not preserve the identity of the object when it changes, such as when a house burns to the ground and becomes ashes, or when someone dies. Armed with these distinctions, Aristotle would then say that, in the case of accidental changes, (1) and (2) are both false – a changing thing can really change one of its "accidental properties" and yet literally remain one and the same thing before and after the change.

Of course, this solution to the puzzle depends on there being a coherent distinction between accidental and essential changes, and between accidental and essential properties. Some philosophers find this distinction problematic and have developed other solutions that do not require this distinction. The challenge for the philosophical theologian on the level of diachronic representations of YHWH in the Old Testament is to give a philosophical account of the ways in which we as readers are assumed to be dealing with the same deity despite the variation over time in its profile. One possible way is to discuss the history of Israelite religion from the perspective of the logic of belief revision. To my knowledge, no one has yet attempted such a description.

From a *synchronic* perspective (of theological pluralism), we exchange our thoughts on the problem of identity over time for the issue of identity across possible worlds (see Mackie 2008 for a detailed discussion). As Mackie (2008:1 notes), the notion of transworld identity – "identity across possible worlds" – is the notion that the same object exists in more than one possible world (with the actual world treated as one of the possible worlds). It therefore has its home in a "possible-worlds" framework for analysing, or at least paraphrasing, statements about what is possible or necessary. Adapted to the context of literary fictionalism, to say that there is a transworld identity between God in Genesis 1 and YHWH in Genesis 2 is to say that there is some possible world-in-the-text w_1, and some distinct possible world-in-the-text w_2, such that G_{Gen1} exists in w_1, and Y_{Gen2} exists in w_2, and that G_{Gen1} is identical with Y_{Gen2}. In other words, to say that there is a transworld identity is to say that YHWH exists in distinct possible worlds-in-text, or (more simply) that YHWH exists in more than one possible world-in-the-text.

To be sure, the subject of transworld identity has been highly contentious, even among philosophers who accept the legitimacy of talk of possible worlds (see Mackie 2008:1). Yet whether the metaphysics of modality has any real relevance for contemporary philosophy is for present purposes beside the point. Whatever the case may be, some of the stereotyped and adapted version of the theory of transworld identity might still be considered to be useful as a way of modelling the theological pluralism deriving from the many "worlds-in-the-text". There is no unified or coherent "biblical" concept of YHWH in the Old Testament taken as a whole – there are only multiple conceptions of

YHWH. Nevertheless, it is seems to be assumed that the entire Old Testament is concerned with the same deity and an interesting philosophical question is how this was believed to be possible? How can the deity of the multiple worlds-in-the-text have been considered to be the same entity when the properties instantiated by the many representations or *personae* of YHWH differ to the point of incommensurability?

One possible way of looking at the issue would be to view YHWH's transworld identity as "bare". In the philosophical sense of the word this would involve the assumption that his identity consists in the possession of a "haecceity" or "thisness": an unanalysable non-qualitative property that is necessary and sufficient for its being the individual that it is (see Mackie 2008:1 for a discussion of the term). The term "individual essence" can also be used to denote such a haecceity in YHWH but again it should not be confused with the idea of Miles (1995:45) in his literary-critical concern with "What makes God God-like?" In the present philosophical context the term haecceity refers to a non-trivial individual essence, although in discussions of philosophy proper on the subject, it is not obvious that the belief in bare identities requires the acceptance of haecceities. As Mackie (2008:1) remarks, one can apparently hold that transworld identities may be "bare" without holding that they are constituted by any properties at all, even unanalysable haecceities (cf. Lewis 1986:225). Thus Mackie (2008:1) notes that we should distinguish what is commonly known as "haecceitism" (roughly, the view that there may be bare identities across possible worlds in the sense of identities that do not supervene on qualitative properties) from the belief in haecceities (the belief that individuals have non-analysable non-qualitative properties that constitute their being the individuals that they are).

For present purposes it must suffice to remind the reader that the aim of this discussion of theological pluralism in the context of the philosophy of identity is not harmonisation along fundamentalist lines. The concern is not to end up with a unified and coherent account of the properties of YHWH but merely to provide a philosophical description of what we have in the text to see what interesting philosophical problems arise and demand attention for their own sake. What is exciting is that these will be different from those discussed by philosophical theologians proper since their issues were generated from a consideration of ideas about God in systematic theology, not from assumptions about YHWH in biblical theology. Moreover, whereas philosophical theologians proper are interested in making sense of the issues for the purpose of furnishing contemporary credible ideas about God, the philosophical theologian of the Old Testament has an agenda that is purely historical and descriptive and aimed at a phenomenological explication of the Old Testament's own metaphysical assumptions, whether these are credible from a contemporary philosophical perspective or not. Also, if ultimately in the biblical representation of YHWH we are dealing with radical incommensurability over time and across

possible (or actual) worlds-in-the-text this fact can simply be pointed out without any need for subsequent "solutions" to the matter.

G CONCLUSION

In this paper I have provided what I consider to be some preliminary proposals for the writing of a philosophical theology of the Old Testament. Of course, what has been said here has hardly scratched the surface, yet I trust the reader will get the general idea of where such a project may be headed. The limits to the amount of philosophically interesting topics are merely the limits of our own imagination. I know, however, that much of the philosophical jargon used will have seemed so atypical and intimidating to many in the field of biblical studies that they will continue to harbour serious reservations about the involvement of philosophy in the study of ancient Israelite religion. Yet those who cannot bring themselves to like what a philosophical theology implies are perfectly free to ignore it. My plea for such a discipline is not intended in the imperialist sense of wanting to claim that everything before had simply been wrong and should now be replaced by this new mode of inquiry. On the contrary, a philosophical theology of the Old Testament will be dependent on the findings of biblical criticism for establishing the parameters of hermeneutically legitimate linguistic, literary, historical and social contexts for the philosophical clarification of biblical concepts. It is nevertheless hoped that this paper might play some constructive role in facilitating a "philosophical turn" in Old Testament studies in the realisation that philosophy-bashing was, after all – to use an American expression – "so twentieth century".

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