YAHWISM AND PROJECTION:

AN A/THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON POLYMORPHISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT[1]

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And it happened that when the two of them had gone out into the open field, Cain answered and said to Abel, "I see that the world was not created by love and is not led according to the fruit of good works...There is no judgement and there is no Judge and there is no other world..."

Targum Neofiti

Abstract

In this article, an attempt is made to demonstrate the presence projection tendencies in the religious language of Old Testament Yahwism(s) and to discuss the nature and extent thereof. The a/theological thesis of the inquiry is that both YHWH and the divine world as depicted in some of the texts may be seen as being the products of sociomorphic, anthropomorphic and psychomorphic projective operations. This heterodox perspective is held to be valid given the culturally relative and historically contingent nature of the biblical references to the divine and of the constructive nature of its supernaturalism. As a result, it is suggested that the popular theory claiming that all religious language is metaphorical fails to salvage realism as it involves the twin fallacies of anachronism and sweeping generalisation when applied to the Old Testament discourse en bloc.

Key words: Old Testament, Projection, Polymorphism, Yahwism

1. Introduction

In his article entitled *God in the Pentateuch*, Old Testament scholar David Clines (1995:190) made the following observation:

"...God in the Pentateuch is a character in a novel. God in the Pentateuch is not a "person"; he is a character in a book. And there are no people in books, no real people, only fictions; for books are made, not procreated..."

In making this claim, Clines was not merely stating the obvious and what is technically the case. Rather, as can be seen in what follows in the rest of his article, he was also articulating a far more radical ontological claim. It concerns an unspoken consensus among critical scholars that there is no isomorphic relation between text and reality, as the naïve realism of fundamentalism (or the semi-realism of a positivist liberalism) would have it. That the tex-

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tualist ontology of Clines is not an idiosyncrasy but represents what has come to be a fundamental assumption in post-modern literary approaches to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible can be seen in the fact that, over the past twenty years, many similar claims regarding the ontological status of YHWH-as-depicted in the Old Testament texts have been made. Thus we find Robert Carroll (1991:38) who expressed more or less the same idea when he wrote: "The biblical God is a character in Hebrew narrative and therefore is, in a very real sense, a figure of fiction"

David Gunn (1990:61) is another narrative critic who insisted that: "To claim that God-as-character in the Bible is not the creature of the author/narrator is, in my view, perverse."

What makes an idea like this radical, and therefore controversial, is the fact that, common to these narratological-cum-philosophical claims regarding the ontological status of YHWH, is the veiled insistence that the deity depicted in the Old Testament is *only* a literary construct and cannot seriously be considered as having a corresponding extra-textual counterpart. In a way, the textual entity called YHWH has come to be seen as being a "projection"[3] of the religious tradition adhered to by the biblical authors – i.e., he was created in the image of man and, as depicted, exists wholly immanent to the worlds of text and imagination.

Such theological anti-realism[4] or literary constructivism is, however, not only operative as a functional assumption in post-modern literary-critical approaches to the Hebrew Bible. In addition, it has also become commonplace in post-modern Old Testament theology. One needs only to read through Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* to see that, for this author (who speaks for many), YHWH-as-depicted is a god who "exists" *only* in textual rhetoric and *nowhere* else (cf. Brueggemann 1997:53,58,65-69,83,107,118,572-577, 721-725 and passim). What this means in layman's terms is that the god YHWH we read of in the Old Testament doesn't really exist at all except as a character in a book. Hence Brueggemann rages against those he calls "essentialists" who believe that YHWH also exists somewhere else in a realm outside of the textual discourse (cf. Brueggemann 1997:65-66).[5]

Of course, there are many varied and complex reasons why naïve realism in Old Testament theology has become problematic to the point of collapse during the last few centuries. Yet those biblical scholars who sometimes allude to this collapse with their claims and insinuations of fictionalism or textualism tend to avoid providing readers with systematic

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[3]   This usage of the concept of *projection* is adopted in recognition of the profoundly polysemous (and therefore ambiguous) denotative and connotative properties it exhibits in its usage in disciplines like philosophy, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Given the incommensurable nature of the various meanings of the concept in the various theories of projection, the following definition is adopted in this article: projection is defined as the superimposing of certain phenomena in human experience onto an imaginary divine realm. I realise that such a definition is not understood to be universally normative or necessary but it is utilised in this paper based on functional and pragmatic considerations. For a discussion of the various meanings of the term *projection*, see Reber & Reber (2001:570-571).

[4]   In speaking of theological *anti-realism*, I designate the ontological view that YHWH as depicted exists only in the worlds of text and imagination and therefore, in the popular sense of the word 'exist', not at all. Conversely, *realism* in this article refers to the view that there is a God existing independent and outside the worlds of text and imagination and who corresponds exactly to the character of YHWH depicted in the biblical discourse. These meanings of these concepts are therefore contextual to this article and should not be equivocated with their usage in popular philosophy of science, epistemology or metaphysics.

[5]   Ironically, Brueggemann is not only the Old Testament theologian who most frequently makes ontological claims when he repeatedly insists that YHWH has no extra-textual counterpart and therefore does not really 'exist' in the usual sense of the word. He is also the one who most competently deconstructs his own rhetoric (something most post-modernists are prone to do) by simultaneously demanding that the Old Testament theologian should bracket all ontological questions and claims (cf. Brueggemann 1997:53-54; 118).

and sustained arguments with which to justify their ontological claims. In Old Testament theology, it simply is not fashionable to discuss philosophy of religion in general and ontology in particular.

Between the lines of many writings in the discipline, however, it becomes obvious that the collapse of realism in Old Testament theology had been brought about by relatively recent developments in, *inter alia*, scientific cosmology, critical history, comparative religion, biblical criticism, sociology of religion, psychology of religion and philosophy of religion (cf. Cupitt 1984; Tarnas 1991:227-379). The erosion *per se* of realism in biblical interpretation as such is, however, nothing novel. In fact, its origins may be traced right back to the Old Testament itself. It is evidenced in the traces of intra-biblical and inter-textual polemics, *i.e.* in the Hebrew Bible's own polyphonic ideological voices and deconstructive theological pluralism (cf. Friedman 1986:232-236; Brueggemann 1997:177-205).

Additional (repressed) anti-realist tendencies became more manifestly obvious with the first translations (LXX, Targums, etc.), the writers of which grimaced at what they considered as being the crude anthropomorphism in some of the older Yahwistic traditions. This aversion to the all-too-human in the Old Testament is also evidenced in the New Testament, by Marcion, and in early Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretation (especially in Origen, Augustine and others) (cf. Teeple 1992:23-29). Around the beginning of the Common Era, the philosophical background in which the problem of literalism became acute could be found in Middle Platonism (e.g. in Philo) and Neo-Platonism (e.g. in Plotinus). Popular occidental ontological and metaphysical assumptions about the nature of the divine thus inevitably caused acute embarrassment at some of the more uncouth representations of YHWH, who in Christian philosophical theology had by now come to be equated with "the Good" (of Plato), "the One" (of Plotinus), and "the unmoved Mover" (of Aristotle) (cf. Freeman 2003:59-77).

The Renaissance and the revival of interest in classical religion led to the discovery of the mythological nature of pagan faith − which, ironically, would eventually lead to the recognition of the mythological nature of the Bible itself (Grant 1998:22; Cupitt 1984:41). The return to the Scriptures following the Reformation brought its own problems and so did the period of the Enlightenment and the rise of rationalism and deism in biblical scholarship (Armstrong 1993:256). In this chronology, the seventeenth-century Jewish biblical scholar Baruch Spinoza may be seen as being one of the first in a long line of critical readers of the Old Testament texts for whom realism with regard to its theologies began to disintegrate irrevocably (cf. Armstrong 1993:214). Subsequently, eighteenth-century philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant made a mess of popular religious metaphysics (cf. Tarnas 1991:221-243; Wilson 1999:57-62). The enhistorization of epistemology in Hegel didn't exactly help much either: all views of the divine began to look like temporal cultural constructs whose claims were doomed to endless revision even though the truth was beyond verification (Cupitt 1997:44).

However, as Wilson (1999:1) reminds us, it was particularly during the nineteenth century that realism in biblical (and philosophical) theology started to come apart at the seams. Developments in German biblical criticism made realism regarding the deity depicted in the texts seem outdated (Wilson 1999:412). Moreover, several critics of realism in religion, including Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Tylor took their cue from natural scientists like Darwin and early Greek philosophers like Xenophanes and sought to show that the God of biblically derived forms of theism was no more than a projection of the human mind − *i.e.* he did not really exist at all (cf. Cupitt 1984:71-223; 1997:52-64; Guthrie 1993:11-43; Hick 1993:12-15; Wilson 1999).

The twentieth century, in turn, brought its own challenges to realism in biblical theism, not least because of the horrors of the Holocaust (and the actualisation of the age-old Problem of Evil as an argument for atheism and the apparent inadequacy of every available theodicy), continued historical-critical and theological research (the "quests for the historical Israel", the renewed "quests for the historical Jesus"; the "God-is-dead" theologies of the 60's and 70's; and the birth of post-modernism in the West) (Cupitt 1989:56-60; 2002:11-20; Tarnas 1991:342f.). New theories of projection and the refinement of old ones also saw the light during this century (e.g., Durkheim 1912; Freud 1913; 1927; 1930; 1939; Horton 1970; Guthrie 1993; Cupitt 1997).

Yet for all these developments straining to the limit the credibility of realism in biblical theology, anti-metaphysical trends in philosophy following the "linguistic turn" were commonplace.[6] This epistemological intellectual climate (including the popularity of neo-orthodoxy and the so-called Biblical Theology movement) contributed to bringing about a context for research in Old Testament theology in which its practitioners considered themselves justified in shying away from dealing with the philosophical questions generated by the findings of biblical criticism (cf. also Barr 1999:37f; 2001:51f). It is therefore no surprise that, halfway through the first decade of the 21st century, there remains a distinct lack of literature in Old Testament scholarship involving philosophy of religion (in general) and controversial ontological questions (in particular) (cf. Gericke 2003:3-6).

2.   The Research Problem

Popular a/theological[7] theories of projection in religion (in general), and of projection in biblical theism (in particular) have attracted a lot of well-deserved criticism from theologians, psychologists, anthropologists and philosophers alike (cf. Hick 1993:25). Many shortcomings in these theories have been identified, even to the extent that the very same arguments for projection have at times been inverted to become arguments *in favour* of realism (e.g. those of Feuerbach, Freud, etc; cf. Hick 1993:15-28). New developments in philosophy of religion and psychology of religion, as well as in biblical criticism and biblical theology, have rendered much of the detail written during the nineteenth-century apogee of projection theories obsolete. Today, many biblical, systematic and philosophical theologians are therefore no longer bothered by projection: apologetics, so it is alleged, has everything covered (cf. McGrath 2004).

In this article, I wish to reopen the debate on projection in biblical theism in general and with specific attention to Old Testament Yahwism(s) in particular. I do not think one can dismiss the projection charge all that easily. I do agree that much of the detail in earlier projection theories are riddled with fallacies of presumption, anachronism, reductionism, straw men, eisegesis, sweeping generalisations, unwarranted conclusions, positivism, provincialism and the like. Even so, I think that there is still something in these theories of projection that rings true and has never truly been appreciated by realists in biblical theology. I am also quite convinced that, despite the fact that an enormous amount of apologetic literature exists that in one way or another attempted to deal with the charges of projection theories, considering the case closed and realism vindicated may have been premature (contra McGrath 2004).

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[6]   Metaphysics had been in disrepute since Hume and Kant but this aversion reached a climax during the heyday of logical positivism, in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and in linguistic philosophy ever since (including post-modern linguistic philosophy). Heidegger, Levinas and others are exceptions.

[7]   *A/theology* = arguments against the existence of God. According to Abraham (1985:13), the term was popularised by Alvin Platinga although its was already used in the seventeenth century.

Thus I am of the opinion that not only is there still a case to be made for projection in Old Testament Yahwism(s) but also that its ontological implications may be more devastating than those who agree with the premise are willing (or allowed) to admit. Consequently, this article hopes to make an a/theological contribution to the debate concerning the possible presence of projection in the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism(s). In this regard, the research questions of concern in this study are the following:

1. Does the Old Testament contain examples of projection?[8]
2. If so, what is the nature / extent of such projection?
3. Moreover, also assuming the presence of projection, what are the ontological implications of this with regard to the relation between text and reality as far as the supernatural in the Old Testament is concerned?
4. Finally, can the contemporary popular belief that all religious language is metaphorical be justly considered as having the potential to salvage some form of realism in Old Testament theology with regard to those discourses in which YHWH and his world are indeed projections?

It is these questions that this article hopes to provide answers to.

3.   Hypothesis and Objectives

The hypothesis of this article is that there are indeed marked traces of projection[9] in much of the discourse of Yahwism(s) in the Old Testament. In fact, it is hypothesised that its operation is so pervasive and comprehensive that it becomes difficult to conceive of many of the representations of YHWH and his supernatural realm in the Old Testament as anything other than epiphenomena of projection. Moreover, the nature and extent of projection in the Old Testament can be construed as being *polymorphic* in scope, since at least *three* sub-types may be distinguished:

1. *Sociomorphism*: projection involving a belief in the existence of a supernatural realm, which itself is, in fact, no more than an imaginary construct based on the assumption of the supposed universality of a historically contingent and culturally relative social matrix.
2. *Anthromorphism*[10]: projection involving the attribution of a human form and body to what is erroneously believed to be an extra-textual, superhuman and supernatural entity.
3. *Psychomorphism*: projection that involves ascribing a historically contingent and culturally relative cognitive-affective-conative frame of reference and belief system to the imaginary divine being.

I realise that these claims are at once radical, controversial, and not exactly orthodox. Moreover, as implied earlier, the gist of these suggestions is not altogether novel and has been implicit between the lines of critical Old Testament scholarship for some time now.

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[8]   Cf. the remarks regarding the use of terminology in footnote 3 above.

[9]   As defined above (cf. footnote 3).

[10]   Discussions of projection are usually very vague, ambiguous and general with regard to terminology, reference and scope. Thus one sometimes encounters only the term anthropomorphism, by which all types of projection is meant and sociomorphism and psychomorphism is thus included. Alternatively, a distinction is made between anthropomorphism and anthropopathism by which is meant the projection of human form and the projection of human emotions onto the divine, respectively. For the sake of clarity, precision, refinement and elucidation, these distinctions and designations have been discarded and replaced by the tri-type of polymorphism adopted in this study. This tripe distinction is my own adaptation and I am not cognisant of others having utilised it in this way. I suspect that they may well have, although if that is indeed the case, I was not aware of this when I myself adopted the terminological scheme.

The contribution of the present study to the age-old debate on projection in biblical theism, however, may be seen as follows:

1. To provide a comprehensive *text-based* reconstruction of traces of projection in *Old Testament Yahwism(s)*. Moreover, this is done from the perspective of *biblical* studies rather than from the perspective of an already extant theory in philosophy of religion or psychology of religion. It is also done in a way that makes it accessible to:

    a) readers with little or no background in philosophy of religion and psychology of religion;

    b) those readers (usually the naïve[11]-realist "fundamentalists") who have not yet awoken from their dogmatic slumbers and cannot understand what all the fuss is about. These readers will benefit from the straightforward and simple spelling out of the details of the problem, as opposed to a complex, roundabout, jargon-filled presentation that assumes what is taken for granted in critical scholarship;

    c) those readers (typically the semi-realist "critical" scholars) who, whilst considering the idea of projection in the texts commonplace (having reached their second naïveté and all) deny that it has any serious ontological implications for realism in Old Testament theology. These readers need a reminder of just how deep the problem goes and what happens when the ontological implications of projection in the texts are consistently carried to their logical conclusion.

2. This study also hopes to avoid some of the deficiencies of earlier popular theories of projection. Due to their propensity to generalise and their abstract nature, these theories seldom focussed exclusively on the details of the Old Testament texts. As a result, such theories aimed at religion in general are at times out of sync with the specifics of the discourse in Old Testament Yahwism(s). So rather than having a ready-made theory of projection from the perspective of which the Old Testament will be viewed, the discussion below works the other way around. Though working with familiar distinctions and categories through which the material is organised, it begins with the texts themselves and only then ventures to make suggestions regarding the nature of the projection involved.

3. To expose the fallacies of anachronism and sweeping generalisation involved in the contemporary claim by some biblical theologians that *all* religious language in the Old Testament were meant to be understood as being metaphorical.

It should be noted that while it might indeed have been worthwhile to discuss the various theories of projection or those pertaining to the nature of religious language, before evaluating their applicability to the Old Testament discourse, doing so would defeat the immediate purpose of the present writing. The present interest is to show what happens if one brackets to some extent already extant views on projection in religion (not completely, of course, eclectic use of earlier terminology and ideas is inevitable in all theorising) and begins with an analysis of the relevant data in the Old Testament texts themselves.

Cognisance should also be taken of the fact that the theory of projection constructed in this article is, on the one hand, meant to be *comprehensive*. This is implied by the decision to discuss the three types of polymorphism mentioned above rather than focussing in-depth on only one or two of them. Though some readers might not find all three equally interesting or convincing, it was nonetheless decided that the real nature and extent of projection in Old Testament Yahwism(s) may best be demonstrated by the incorporation of all three

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[11]   The label 'naïve realism' is not a pejorative designation but merely denotes the kind of realism that assumes a perfect isomorphic relationship between intra- and extra-textual realities.

types in the discussion.

On the other hand, the theory of projection presented below has a scope that is, though comprehensive, also minimalist and exclusive. Being first and foremost an exercise in Old Testament a/theology and only secondarily utilising the agendas of philosophy of religion (and psychology of religion) in auxiliary fashion, this inquiry makes no claim with regard to projection in religion in general. Nor does it insist on claiming that *all* religious beliefs, either in the Bible or elsewhere are simply the products of projection. The present interest and implications are assumed to cover only the particular texts under consideration.

4.   Traces of Polymorphic Projection in Old Testament Yahwism[12]

4.1   Traces of Sociomorphic Projection in Representations of the Divine Realm

To become aware of sociomorphism in the Old Testament texts' representations of the supernatural realm of YHWH, one needs to stop taking its descriptions of what exists and happens there for granted and open one's eyes to the blindingly obvious. For example, the historically contingent and culturally relative nature of the phenomena alleged to be constitutive of the divine realm as depicted in some texts gives the game away and unmasks it as a construct of the human mind and not something that actually exists extra-textually exactly in the way it is depicted. For it cannot help but seem suspicious that the deity's assumedly *eternal* divine abode and its inhabitants are often found to operate suspiciously like what used to be a terrestrial scenario found in world of mortals living in the ancient Near East during the Iron Age. Consider the following traces of what appears to be *sociomorphic* projection in the representation of YHWH's heavenly realm:

- YHWH's own eternal realm in heaven is politically constituted in the form of an Iron Age *monarchy* (cf. Deut 32:8-9; 1 Sam 8:7; Dan 6:27; etc.).
- YHWH's abode is a *palace* in which the deity himself sits on a *throne* (cf. Ps 11:4; etc.).
- A favourite form of transportation in the heavens is the horse-drawn *chariot* (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11-12, 6:17; Zech 6:1-8; etc.).
- YHWH has a heavenly *army* whose weapon of choice is the *sword* (cf. Gen 3:22f.; 32:1-2; Josh 5:13-15; 2 Sam 24:16, 27; etc.).
- YHWH makes use of *councillors* (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20-23; Is 6:3; Jer 23:18; Ps 82:1, 89:5; Job 1:6; etc.).
- YHWH's court, like those on earth, makes use of intelligence services that spy on the subjects in order to ascertain their loyalty (cf. Job 1-2; Zech 3; 1 Chron 21; etc.)
- The *shofar* is a popular musical instrument in YHWH's abode (cf. Ex 19:16)
- In heaven, the inhabitants (gods) eat *bread* and it is fashionable for the messengers to dress in pure white *linen* (cf. Ps 78:25; Ezek 9:2; Dan 10:5; etc.).
- The aesthetic taste of the divine world is evidenced by the dwelling of its inhabitants in a "garden" (of the gods) (Ezek 28)
- YHWH sometimes engages in *writing* and he does this on *scrolls* (cf. the "book" [of life] in Ex 32:32; Pss 69:29, 139:16; Dan 7:10; 10:21; etc.).
- Even the supernatural realm outside of heaven – i.e. Sheol is a place where kings still sit on thrones, people still dwell in segregation according to national identity and the

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12   The rest of this article features an adaptation of some of the ideas set forth in chapter 4 of my doctoral thesis (cf. Gericke 2003). As such it represents only a part of but one of the seven arguments I constructed against realism in biblical theology.

prophets still wear their mantles (1 Sam 26; Isa 14; Ezek 32).

To appreciate the *sociomorphism* involved here, the reader should take the time to reflect on the historically contingent and culturally relative nature of objects like scrolls, horse-drawn chariots, swords, dresses of linen and shofars. These are *human*, time-period arte-facts. There was once a time in the past when these things did not exist. People wrote on stone and clay, fought with clubs, bows and spears and ran on foot. Then humans themselves designed or invented these objects during different periods of history. The objects themselves evolved through time with regard to variable qualities such as form, material and effectiveness and different cultures in the same vicinity developed different technologies. Some cultures never used these objects and have never even heard of them. As designs developed and the forms of these artefacts changed over time – as modifications for its improvement or for aesthetic purposes were introduced – their use spread across the known world. Eventually, due to cultural and technological development and change, many of these artefacts fell into disuse and are only kept for interest sake as antiques. Few people today write on scrolls, fight battles against enemies with swords, dress in linen, blow on rams' horns or ride in horse-drawn chariots to reach a destination. These days they write on computers, fight with guns and bombs and travel by car or plane, etc.

Now if these Old Testament texts are to be believed, YHWH and his eternal divine set-up in the heavens forever uses of Iron-Age artefacts. In other words, in YHWH's world, things like shofars, swords, scrolls and chariots, have been around forever and will be so ever more. YHWH made use of scrolls, swords, chariots, linen and shofars a hundred thousand years ago when no such things were yet used by humans. By some coincidence, humans then invented and used these artefacts of heaven in the biblical period as well as during a short time before and after that period. Yet these days, when humans have advanced technologically, YHWH and his companions, so it is implied, still write on scrolls, ride chariots, blow shofars, dress in linen and fight with swords. And they will continue to do so indefinitely!

Embarrassment at the culturally constructed nature of what is supposed to be objectively and eternally just TRUE has led apologists for realism to the only obvious way of salvaging realism: *reinterpretation*. Thus already within the Old Testament there is detectable a tendency away from crude literalism towards more symbolic configurations (cf. the Priestly author vs. the Yahwist). By the time of the LXX, the Targums and later on, the New Testament, allegorical (as in Philo and Origen) and other non-literal perspectives concealed the more heterodox aspects of the ancient religious discourse. In mediaeval times, religious language was held to be "analogical" (as in Thomas Aquinas), while in the modern period it became "mythological" (as in DF Strauss and Rudolph Bultmann) or "symbolical" (as in Paul Tillich). In the post-modern period, realists have found a new concept, the utilisation of which once again seems to make the historically contingent and culturally relative nature of the divine world in the Old Testament less problematic and beyond criticism: it is "metaphor" (as in Paul Ricoeur and Sallie McFague).

Many contemporary biblical, dogmatic and philosophical theologians thus go out of their way to insist that *all* religious language referring to the divine and the supernatural world is to be understood as being metaphorical. This theory has at times been uncritically accepted by Old Testament theologians (e.g. Fretheim 1984; Brueggemann 1997 and others) based on the popularisation of this theory by the works of, *inter alia,* McFague (1983). But the theory that *all* religious language is to be understood as being metaphorical becomes a sweeping and indeed anachronistic generalisation when it is thought of as being applicable to *all Old Testament* texts. For while much of the biblical discourse is indeed of

this type, a naïve literalism is also present in many instances (cf. Eichrodt 1961:72).[13]

Thus many of the references to swords, scrolls, the divine council, the heavenly army and sons of god, divine music, the court and the palace of YHWH's realm in the Old Testament appear *not* to have originally been understood as being metaphorical ciphers for something else. Symbolical and figurative aspects there were, to be sure. But did the biblical author meant to say that Elijah ascended to YHWH in a *metaphorical* horse-drawn chariot? Were we meant to think that the music at Sinai was made by a *metaphorical* shofar? Did Moses ask YHWH to erase his name from a *metaphorical* scroll? Was it the "bread" of divine beings that allegedly fell in the desert to feed two million Israelites understood by the biblical authors as being *metaphorical* dough? Did the authors of the Genesis and Joshua texts believe that the armies of angels encountered by Jacob and Joshua were *metaphorical* and that they carried around *metaphorical* swords in their *metaphorical* hands? It seems unlikely.

The phenomenon of *sociomorphic* projection also accounts for two related facts, the ontological implications of which must be repressed by realists. First of all, notwithstanding the belief in YHWH's universal popularity (cf. Gen 4:26; Mal 1:11-12), Yahwism is an all-too-local religion. Not only is his realm typically Semitic but other cultures on other continents have never heard of YHWH (and neither does he seem to have any awareness of *them*). Secondly, on a scale of one year, if the universe began on January 1, humans arrived only just before midnight 31 December and Yahwism in the last second. Despite the fact that the universe is some ten to fifteen billion years old, the earth around four-and-a-half billion years old, living organisms and many forms of animal life millions of years old, *homo sapiens* around a hundred thousand years old (not to mention *homo-erectus* and others, all of whom are much older), and theistic religion nearly thirty thousand years old, Yahwism can be traced no further back than to a period in time somewhere just over three thousand years ago. In other words, Yahwism is a *latecomer* in the history of religion and the god YHWH arrived on the scene only late in the second millennium BC.

Just where *was* YHWH before that? And *why* did Yahwism appear on the scene when it did and then with the insistence that the deity's eternal set-up just happens to correspond in detail to parallels found in the local culture of the particular period? Why were some of the mechanics and specifics of the divine world *modified* when Israel came in contact with new cultures, in a way that just happens to parallel the new cultural realities (e.g. angelology, demonology)? Is it not because YHWH's realm *as represented in many biblical texts* is, in fact, a sociomorphic *projection* of the Old Testament people(s) and not an actual realm in extra-textual reality?

In conclusion: the fact that, according to some texts, the realm of the god YHWH does indeed eternally resemble a state of affairs that just happens to be nearly identical to that of an Iron-Age monarchy[14] in the ancient Near East suggests that it is indeed naught but a sociomorphic projection. It would be absurd to believe that it has a corresponding extra-textual counterpart.

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[13]   I am aware that there are linguists and philosophers of language who insist that all language, not just religious discourse, is thoroughly metaphorical. Whether this is the case or not, or in what sense it is to be understood (and whether this has any bearing on the present discussion) is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this inquiry.

[14]   It is in recognition of this as the contents of sociomorphism that shows the shortcomings in, for example, Freud's theory of projection, at least when it is uncritically applied to the Old Testament's discourse. For by engaging in psycho-analytic eisegesis Freud mistakenly held that what was being projected onto the imaginary divine realm was the Father-figure, whereas, as this section and the rest below suggest, it had actually been the King or Monarch who had been the direct object of projection – an his power and majesty was not always comforting! (cf. also Cupitt 1997:27-34).

4.2   Traces of Anthropomorphic Projection in References to YHWH's Body

A popular joke suggests that, in the beginning, God created man in his own image and that man, in response, promptly returned the favour. In this regard, theologians, both biblical and systematic, have endlessly debated what it could possibly mean when Genesis 1:26-27 speaks of man being created in "the image of God". Many biblical and dogmatic theologians have insisted that the obvious meaning of the words – that God was believed to look like a human because it was thought that God created humans to look like himself (i.e. *theomorphism*, cf. Gen 5:1-3; 9:6) – could not possibly be what was intended. Thus ingenious interpretations follow to avoid the conclusion that the Priestly author was guilty of anthropomorphic projection – a charge which itself goes back at least as far as the Hebrew prophets' criticism of pagan humanoid idols and the early Greek philosophers' disgust with the all-too-human ways of the Homeric gods.

Now of course it is true that when many Old Testament texts speak of YHWH as a "rock", "shepherd", "husband", "father", or "fortress", or sometimes refer the deity's "face", "ear", "mouth", "nose", "heart", "eyes" and "hand", such depictions were obviously intended to be understood as metaphorical expressions of divine attributes, action and relations rather than as literal detail about YHWH's essential being (cf. Caird 1993:115-118) However, *contra* many Old Testament theologians, it would be a gross generalisation to claim that the nature of the Old Testament's religious language depicting YHWH in human form was *always* by the biblical authors actually intended and understood as being metaphorical *in toto* (cf. Barr 1959:31-33; contra Fretheim 1984:2; Carroll 1991:27; Brueggemann 1997:52).

In fact, there are a number of references to the body(parts) of YHWH which, in the context of history-like narratives, seem to have functioned originally as *non-metaphorical* descriptions of what the deity supposedly actually looks like. Thus, in the book of Exodus, we find what appear to be literal references to YHWH's face (cf. Ex 33:20); his backside (cf. Ex 33:23); his hands and fingers (cf. Ex 31:18); his feet (cf. Ex 24:10-11); etc. There are also other texts which appear to contain non-metaphorical references to YHWH's body, such as those implying that YHWH literally has a nose with which to smell the pleasant aromas of sacrifices (cf. Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9,13,17; 26:31).

Thus while I do not deny that the vast majority of Old Testament references to the divine body(parts) may indeed be understood as having been intended as metaphorical representations of divine actions and attributes, I am convinced that one cannot so explain away the more crude references to YHWH's body in the history-like narrative texts. There is no getting around the traces of literalism, whether one does so either by calling attention to the theological pluralism of the text and the predominance of metaphor in the god-talk (a liberal propensity), or by harmonisation and reinterpretation (a conservative obsession). So at least with regard to the above-given examples of passages in the Old Testament referring to YHWH's appearance, no amount of theological doubletalk or any appeal to metaphor or divine accommodation is convincing enough show that the particular authors intended their depictions to be understood as anything other than literal representations of what was thought to be the divine body (cf. Eichrodt 1961:210; contra Fretheim 1984:168).

After all, it would make nonsense of the stories to insist that Moses only desired to see YHWH's *metaphorical* face; that YHWH reminded Moses that his *metaphorical* face would kill all mortals; that YHWH only showed Moses his *metaphorical* backside; that the seventy elders only saw a YHWH's *metaphorical* human form on a *metaphorical* throne with *metaphorical* sapphire beneath his *metaphorical* feet; that YHWH only *metaphorically* smelled Noah and the Israelites' sacrifices with his *metaphorical* nose; etc. The presence of

some literalism in the Old Testament texts is therefore to be acknowledged and the reductionism inherent in pan-metaphorical interpretations of its religious language to be seen for what they are: dogmatic *eisegesis* based on repression and anachronistic generalisations.

One justification for taking seriously the dismissal of the pan-metaphorical theory of the nature of the Old Testament's religious language can be found in the recognition that the non-metaphorical elements tend to spill over into those depictions of YHWH that only make sense if the limitations of human embodiment are assumed to be of constraining effect on him. Thus no appeal to metaphor will ever sufficiently account for the all-too-human conception of YHWH who, unlike the perfect God of philosophical theology, is not always portrayed as being omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, incorporeal, immutable, etc.[15] Thus YHWH has been depicted as, *inter alia*, needing to rest in order to be refreshed (cf. Gen 2:1; Ex 31:17); having to travel to obtain information and to verify reports (cf. Gen 3:8-11, 11:5-7, 18:17); needing to test people to discern their beliefs, intentions and motives (Gen 22; Deut 8:2; 2 Chron 32:31; etc); being forced to act based on a fear of human potential (cf. Gen 3:22; 11:5-7); having to make his people take a detour to the Promised Land because they might decide to turn back if they met the Philistines (Ex 13:17); needing to slow down the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites for the fear that the wild animals might become too many (cf. Deut 7:22); being of insufficient power so that his people could not defeat the enemy because it had iron chariots during the battle (cf. Judg 1:21) desiring assistance in some matters (cf. Judg 5:23; 1 Kgs 22: 20-23; Isa 63:3-5); etc.

These all-too-human limitations on YHWH's part, along with the few literally intended depictions of his all-too-human body, are often repressed in biblical theology (and especially in systematic and philosophical theology). This is clearly evident in the history of Old Testament interpretation. One need only consider the ways in which anthropomorphism in the biblical texts are the cause of major embarrassment to the authors of the LXX and the Targums; how it necessitated Jewish and Christian allegorical exegesis and mediaeval fourfold interpretation; how it led to Moses Maimonides' desperate rationalisations and Calvin's repressive apologetics; etc. As Waugh (2002:300) suggests, such pious reinterpretations of the anthropomorphic discourse are themselves strategies of evasion based on repressing the fact that one no longer believes in that kind of god. And for good reason, for it is highly unlikely that an eternal deity would in himself have the form of a human being (what race? gender? age? body type? evolutionary stage? etc.). Yet such embarrassment with heterodox trajectories in the Old Testament and their reinterpretation also reveals that the literal meaning of the texts is both recognised and repressed in favour of dogmatic eisegesis (cf. also Fretheim 1984; Brueggemann 1997:105-108).

Of course, if one is indeed deeply embarrassed by the all-too-human depictions of YHWH in the text and considers it unlikely that the divine looks anything like a male Iron Age Semitic *homo sapiens*, then there seems to be only one logical conclusion. It concerns the belated recognition that the depiction of the god YHWH in this manner is indeed the outcome of anthropomorphic projection.[16] And this is ironic, for it seems that the same ani-

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[15]   Contra Feuerbach (1957), whose theory of projection holds that theology is just anthropology since the deity is simply the human person in *perfect* and *ideal* form, being thus immortal, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. and without all the shortcomings of the human condition. Of course, it should be noted that Feuerbach, like most other pioneers in (and exponents) of projection theories in religion, assumed as frame of reference the stereotypical profile of the God of Christian philosophical theology rather than taking cognisance of some of the alternative depictions of YHWH in the Old Testament. This is one of the reasons why earlier projection theories become inapplicable in the context of some of the Old Testament's heterodox (from a relative, later perspective) discourse.

[16]   As for the appearance of other supernatural entities in the text, i.e. angels and demons, the same kind of pro-

conic form of Yahwism that so mercilessly ridiculed pagans for creating all-too-human gods (OAV: "*drek*gode") failed to recognise the all-too-human nature of its own. The aniconic Yahwists could not see that a humanoid god imagined by the mind and depicted in a text – though not represented in any *graven* image – is no less of an idol than the gods of wood or stone.

4.3   Traces of Psychomorphic Projection in Representations of the Divine Mind

The people who wrote the Old Testament not only frequently projected their own social and human forms of life onto a supposed transcendent deity but also tended to endow him with a culturally relative and historically contingent *psychological* (cognitive, affective and conative) profile. In this third and final section we take a closer look at three distinct yet equally telling aspects of the discourse of Old Testament god-talk that seem to involve a clear-cut case of what could only be considered as amounting to *psychomorphic* projection.

4.3.1   Traces of Psychomorphic Projection as evidenced by YHWH's all-too-human Knowledge

When YHWH speaks in the first person in the Old Testament, the deity is sometimes depicted as making statements that include references to what are alleged to be actual historical, cosmographical, geographical, biological, and other types of phenomena. What unmasks the presence of psychomorphic projection in such discourse and betrays the all-too-human origin of the divine mind is the simple fact that *the knowledge YHWH exhibits never transcends the culturally relative and historically contingent indigenous knowledge systems of the people who worshipped him*. In other words, it should not be surprising if the facts that YHWH claims to know are the case often contain elements of error and superstition. It would seem that the god YHWH knew about as much about the world as his "speechwriters" *and no more!* (cf. Harwood 1992:31):

- YHWH *himself* believes that the universe was literally created over a period of six days (cf. Gen 1:1-2:4a; Ex 31:17).
- YHWH *himself* believes there is an ocean above the stars behind a firmament from where rainwater falls to the earth (cf. Gen 1:6; Job 38:34).
- YHWH *himself* believes that the landmass of the earth floats on water (cf. Deut 5:8; cf. also Ps 24:2).
- YHWH *himself* believes that there is literally a place underground where the dead live as shades according to their nationalities (cf. Num 16:23-33; Dt 32:22; Jb 38:16-17; Is 7:11; Ezek 26:19-20; 32:18-32; Am 9:2).
- YHWH *himself* believes things that biblical scholarship has demonstrated to be pious fictions: e.g. that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were immediate family of each other, that Jacob sired twelve sons who later became the twelve tribes, that two million Israelites of all twelve tribes left Egypt and after forty years in the desert took possession of the

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jection may be discernable. For example, most angels/sons of God/gods/council members in YHWH's realm also look like human males (cf. Gen 6:1-4, 18:1ff.,32:1-2; Josh 5:13-15; 2 Sam 24:16, 27; Ezek 9:2; Dan 10:5; Zech 6:1-8; etc.). YHWH's court sentinels and servants, however, the seraphim and cherubim, appear to be the product of what is called anthropo-theriomorphic projections, i.e. part human, part animal (lion, eagle, horse, etc.) (cf. Ex 25:18f; Is 6; etc.). As for the demonic, anthropo-theriomorphic projection is once again able to account for the appearance of malevolent spirits. Most references to demons in the biblical text are indeed reminiscent of the personification of animals, especially nocturnal ones, and mostly those whose habitats are in desert regions, deserted fields and, of course, in the watery realms of rivers and seas (cf. Job 40-41; Is 30:6; Lv 17:7; Is 34:14; Am 9:3; etc.).

Promised Land; that the stories involving the characters Noah, Joshua, David, Solomon, Job, Jonah and Daniel are historically factual; etc. (OT passim; cf. Ezek 14:14; Isa 54:9-10; etc.).

- YHWH *himself* believes in the existence of the mythical creatures like the Leviathan, Rahab, Behemoth, sea monsters, flying dragons, demons of the field, malevolent spirits of the night, etc. (cf. Job 40-41; Is 30:6; Lev 17:7; Isa 34:14; Am 9:3; etc.).
- YHWH himself believes that rabbits chew the cud and the misinformed folktales regarding the supposed fickleness of the ostrich (cf. Lev 11:6; Job 39:16-21).
- YHWH himself believes that the force of life is in the blood and that the wind (= spirit = breath) animates human (and divine) bodies (cf. Gen 4:10; Lev 17:14; Ezek 37:9-10; cf. also Gn 2:7; Ex 14:21 vs. 15:10).
- YHWH himself believes that thought issues from the heart and emotions from the kidneys (cf. Jer 17:10, etc.). Etc.

The people who believed in YHWH held certain beliefs and since they considered them (or wanted them to be, or wanted them to be believed to be) factual and true they naturally assumed (or proposed) that the same knowledge must reside in the divine mind itself. Hence YHWH as depicted in these Old Testament texts exhibits a knowledge of astronomy, cosmography, physics, meteorology, zoology, biology and history that is but a replica of the superstitions and misconceptions of the Hebrew people themselves. But such all-too-human beliefs on the part of YHWH destroy realism. For even if we insisted that what we encounter in these texts are simply the errant beliefs of *humans* and not the god's *own*, we thus admit and unwittingly imply that the character of YHWH as thus depicted must be a literary construct, a character of fiction whose mind was created by way of psychomorphic projection.

Of course, in making this claim we are *not* saying that contemporary knowledge systems are infallibly and exhaustively true. Yet while we do not know (and probably will never know) everything that is the case, it would seem that we know that some things are not the case. The earth is not flat; rain does not come from behind the stars; there is no heaven above the clouds and no kingdom of death inside the globe; thought and emotions do not issue from the heart and kidneys; the biblical stories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, Daniel and Job and others are not history, etc.

In other words, though contemporary knowledge is itself a human construct, from the perspective of a Popperian theory of falsification in the philosophy of science[17], we seem to be justified at least in believing that what YHWH believes about the world inside the text does *not* correspond – and have indeed been *falsified* – by observations of whatever is the case in the world outside the text. And if this is the case, the charge of psychomorphic projection with regard to YHWH's cognitive faculties is vindicated.

4.3.2   Traces of Psychomorphic Projection as evidenced by YHWH's all-too-human Needs
When it comes to psychomorphism, it is not just YHWH's *beliefs* about the world that sometimes seem all-too-human. In addition to YHWH's cognitive errancy, it would seem that, YHWH, the eternal creator of heaven and earth, also has some historically contingent and culturally relative all-too-human needs or desires that drive him obsessively in pursuit of their fulfilment:

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[17]   Or, more closely related to the present enquiry, the philosopher of religion Athony Flew's views on the way religious beliefs tend to evade being subject to the possibility of falsification. Dilemmas regarding the role of verification and falsification in the context of religious beliefs have been of central concern in philosophy of religion (cf. Flew 1963).

- YHWH must have a people to rule over (cf. Ex 19:6; Deut 4:19; 32:8-9).
- YHWH is anxious to maintain a formidable reputation based on ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the values of honour and shame (cf. Deut 32:26-27; Mal 1-3).
- YHWH is very concerned about keeping his name secret (cf. Gen 32; Ex 6; Judg 16; etc.)
- YHWH himself prefers to have his real abode far away and high above human society and does not want to be disturbed by mortals (cf. Gen 11,18; Ex 24; etc.).
- YHWH wishes to limit his direct and personal contact with the general population and, for the most part, prefers to act through intermediaries, agents, messengers and armies (cf. OT passim).
- YHWH wants to be and enjoys being feared (cf. Ex 20:19-20, Job 38-41 and passim).
- YHWH is extremely jealous and will not allow others what he wants for himself (cf. Ex 20:5, 34:14).
- YHWH *yearns* to be worshipped, praised, adored and to have constant reminders of how wonderful, powerful and different/other/unique (i.e. holy) he is (cf. Isa 6:2-3; etc.); etc.

Take this last example, i.e. YHWH's desire to be worshipped. Old Testament theologians take this for granted and while they can discuss the details of worship in Yahwism, how many have ever bothered to ask *why* YHWH wants – no, *demands* – to be worshipped? For it is one thing if creatures, in awe of their Creator, erupt spontaneously in praises because of his awesomeness. It is quite another if the Creator should be thought of as having premeditated the creation of beings (seraphim, humans, etc.) who exist solely for the purpose of perpetually reminding him how exalted and powerful and benign he is (cf. Isa 6).

Clines (1995:177) may therefore be justified in asking what kind of God it is who is so obsessed with his own image that he has to prescribe in minute detail exactly how he wants to be worshipped and threatens to destroy anyone diverging in any way from his instructions. Just look at the details in Exodus 25-40 with regard to the furnishings and construction of the tabernacle and the niceties of the rituals. Such seemingly egocentric and controlling obsessiveness, it seems, can however perfectly be accounted for if we postulate behind it all, on the one hand, the human desire for conformity, control and order. Yet in doing so we admit that the entire practise of worship is not the result of actually revealed divine demand but of human desire for social cohesion.

On the other hand, the fact that YHWH's own alleged needs sometimes seem suspiciously similar to the historically and culturally conditioned needs of "the-powers-that-be" known to his worshippers is best accounted for by viewing YHWH's mind as represented in the particular texts as the product of humans projecting the obsessive-compulsive, narcissist and domineering traits of autocrats familiar to them onto an imaginary cosmic monarch (Cupitt 1997:74). Since human rulers displayed these traits, the ancients probably reasoned that, if the cosmos is itself a monarchy with a (super) human-like king at the top, he might just be as vain, despotic, power-hungry, attention seeking – yet with the same amount of savvy to maintain his popularity by occasional acts of charity and good-will – as his terrestrial counterparts (Cupitt 1997:76). And who could afford to take chances – better safe than sorry.

However, since we know – if we know anything – that the universe is not run like an Iron Age monarchy, we can be quite sure that there is no king with the psychological profile of an ideal ancient Near Eastern monarch running the whole business (Cupitt 1989:102). Moreover cultural anthropologists, social psychologists and post-modern phi-

losophers whose ethical theory contain elements of voluntarism, culturalism, post-structuralism, non-realism and/or (neo-) pragmatism will, of course, add to this by reminding us that, with regard to detail, a psychological profile displaying the needs and desires listed above is not only all-too-human but also one which is culturally relative and historically contingent (Cupitt 2002:23). Thus a hermeneutics of suspicion will be curious as to why the god YHWH's psyche just so happens to correspond uncannily to that of someone living in a very specific historical and cultural milieu (Carroll 1991:25).

Note also, that none of these divine psychological characteristics were in their biblical contexts understood as being mere metaphorical depictions or the result of any supposed divine "accommodation" (contra Fretheim 1984:1). Nor can they be rationalised and explained away as the product of deliberate and intentional *anthropopathic* representation as the logical approach to what is in reality supposed to be ineffable. No, according to the biblical people, the god YHWH actually and literally expressed such desires, wants and emotional needs. Once again, therefore, the absurdity of positing an extra-textual counterpart for what appears to be an obvious case of psychomorphic projection should be crystal clear.

4.3.3 Traces of Psychomorphic Projection as evidenced by YHWH's all-too-human Morality

Equally absurd is the third and final element in YHWH's psychological profile: the relative and contingent nature of the meta-ethical ontology and the moral values that the god considers to be eternally and universally normative. Analogous to the disconcerting manner in which YHWH's knowledge about the world never transcends that of his speechwriters, so too his divine ethics seem suspiciously similar to the morality of a historically contingent and culturally relative all-too-human value system. For example:

- YHWH expects people to kill his other creatures in order to achieve reconciliation and remove guilt (cf. Lev 1-7);
- YHWH believes that giving birth to a girl leaves the mother unclean for a period, the duration of which is twice as long as compared to when she gives birth to a boy (cf. Lv 12:4-5);
- In YHWH's system of retribution, the sins of one justify punishing the collective and people should suffer for the sins of their ancestors (cf. Gen 3:14-19; Josh 7:1; 2 Sam 21,24 and passim);
- YHWH considers it morally wrong should garments be made from two different materials and or should fields be sown with two different varieties of seed (cf. Lev 19:19);
- To YHWH, human physiological processes are objectively offensive (yet *he* created them!) (cf. Lev 12 and passim);
- YHWH considers some animals to be horrible abominations (yet *he* created them!) (cf. Lev 11; Deut 14); etc.

What YHWH believes and allegedly revealed as objectively right or wrong appears all-too-similar to what humans from ancient Near Eastern cultures already considered as being the case – long before the religion of YHWH even got started. Yahwism is a latecomer in the history of religions and much of the moral beliefs contained in its value systems can be traced to other pagan religions predating its rise in Israel and Judah (Barr 1984:67). When historians of religion then read the law codes in the Old Testament from a perspective filled with an awareness of historical change and cultural pluralism, the moral metaphysics and the ontology underlying the value system of the Hebrew deity appear at the same time all-too-recent and yet hopelessly odd and outdated (cf. Cupitt 1997:105).

Thus the divine morality as depicted in the discourse of many Old Testament texts seems to be the result of an underlying set of all-too-human superstitions arising from a mistaken hermeneutic of reality (Cupitt 1997:132). Of course, many Old Testament theologians are not too bothered by this and uncritically swallow the apologetic rationalisation that what we should not be too bothered about the whole scenario since all we need to do is to recognise that we are dealing with imperfect, historically contingent and culturally relative human perceptions of divine expectations rather than a true representation of the Real God's mind (cf. Eichrodt 1967:116).

Besides stating the obvious in its recognition of the human provenance of Old Testament morality, such a theory of "progressive revelation" distorts the problematic and is misleading as it evades the central claims of the texts themselves. Thus the real dilemma for realism regarding the ontological status of YHWH as depicted in these texts is that all the moral beliefs in the Old Testament – including those regarding ritual purity, holy days, circumcision, food taboos, slavery, war and other related issues – are *not* presented as being the merely human ideology based on a culturally and historically relative morality. Instead, the details of biblical laws are presented as being based on the rules and regulations operative in the very mind of YHWH himself. They are alleged to be the outcome of actual divine revelation and not of creative ethical contemplation and socio-political legislation.

Unfortunately for realism – and apologetics notwithstanding – however, the last two centuries of critical scholarship have demonstrated beyond a doubt that the biblical authors were repressing the merely human origin of all their morality. No deity literally descended onto a mountain in the Arabian Peninsula three millennia ago and thundered rules from the skies as the Pentateuch suggests was the case (cf. Clines 1995:56). Old Testament scholars generally rightly consider these moral concerns to be the derivative product of Israel's ancient cultural context and based not on some divine revelation. They represent but the Hebrew adoption and adaptation of popular beliefs already prevalent at the time in pagan religions (cf. Barr 1984:118).

That this is the case can be seen not only in the pre-existence of the same laws in older pagan cultures but in the pluralism in Old Testament ethics. In this regard, realism is invalidated by the fact that YHWH's own divine normative, objective and universal rules and regulations that he supposedly revealed himself to Israel were in time modified and altered (sometimes to the contrary of what it once was) as the cultural and political influences on Israel also changed (cf. Deut 23 vs Isa 56). During those times when Israel was dominated by the Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Canaanite, Persian and Greek empires, their moral views, allegedly of divine origin, frequently reflected little more than the popular trends prevalent in the matrix of the contemporary dominant cultural hegemony.

Given these discoveries of the human origin and contingent nature of Old Testament ethics, the possibility that the moral beliefs ascribed to YHWH is itself the result of projection rises substantially. For if no extra-textual and extra-psychical divinity literally commanded the details of biblical ethical discourse, and if the words of the deity doing so are simply dialogue created by imaginative ideological narration, then mind and moral values of YHWH-as-thus-depicted have no corresponding and real counterparts outside the Old Testament texts and the imaginations of the people who themselves held such norms dear. The moral values of YHWH are thus, in these cases at least, psychomorphic projections.

5.   Conclusion

In this article, the presence of projection in Old Testament Yahwism(s) was demonstrated. It was argued that the many depictions of YHWH and his realm in ways that are historically

contingent and culturally relative are indicative of the presence of polymorphism in the discourse. The projective enterprise evidenced in some of the biblical discourse can thus be seen as having been comprehensive, in that it was of such a nature and extent that it included not only anthropomorphism, but also sociomorphism and psychomorphism.

It was also suggested that the presence of polymorphism in the biblical discourse represents a major challenge to the claim that all religious language is metaphorical. As was demonstrated, at least when applied to the discourse of Old Testament Yahwism(s) *en bloc*, the pan-metaphor theory is prone to the fallacies of reductionism, anachronism and sweeping generalisation.

These considerations – the presence of polymorphic projection in the Old Testament and the non-applicability of the theory that all religious language is metaphorical – cumulatively constitute one of the reasons why realism in Old Testament theology has become, and continues to be, immensely problematic.

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