

CHAPTER 7

THE ARGUMENT FROM FICTITIOUS HISTORY

“The words of Agur the son of Yahke.

A burden:

The man said,

‘There is no god!

There is no god!

And I am wearied.’”

(Prov 30:4) (tr. Scott 1965:110)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

It will be obvious to any reader of the Old Testament texts that they provide a substantial number of accounts of the god Yahweh appearing to people, speaking to them and acting on their behalf or against them. As Harwood (1992:01) notes, and as virtually all religious believers have believed up until about two centuries ago, there can be little doubt that much of the discourse featuring the acts of Yahweh seemed to have been intended as reflective of what actually happened in the past.

Technically, when it comes to the relation between text and past reality, absolute empirical verification or falsification is, of course, impossible (cf. Carr 1970:22; Fischer 1970:47). However, if the texts alleging to reflect historical realities have certain characteristics that unmask them as fiction then even without knowing what, if anything, actually happened, it might still be possible to prove that some event depicted in the text did *not* occur as described.

This is a very important point. In this chapter, the devil’s advocate is not going to attempt to prove in a positivist fashion what supposedly and actually did happen. That cannot be done. However, as will become apparent from the arguments presented in this chapter, even without access to the past it will be possible to prove that some

things could not possibly have happened. Moreover, such proof is not, as conservatives and others claim, the result of biased anti-supernaturalist assumptions or because the devil's advocate might presume the impossibility of divine intervention, supernatural entities, miracles, predictive prophecy or an inerrant scripture. Neither will the denial of historicity be due to a hidden agenda of post-modernism, nihilism, logical positivism or whatever else one might like to label it.

The reason why the devil's advocate feels confident in its ability to prove that the historically intended events depicted in the text never happened is simply due to the nature of the texts themselves. And, if it can be shown that, for some or other good reason (see below) that the events depicted in the text involving the deity Yahweh never actually transpired exactly as described, it follows that the deity as thus depicted must himself be a character of fiction. Moreover, should Yahweh on any subsequent occasion (e.g. later on in plot of the story from Genesis to Nehemiah) be depicted as referring to an event that was already demonstrated to have been fictitious, it follows that such a later representation of the deity also never had any extra-textual counterpart.

In other words, all that is required for present purposes is to demonstrate that some events pretending to be history never really happened. Since the events presented in the Old Testament books are often inextricably linked, deconstructing realism with regard to the depiction of Yahweh in some scenarios must eventually lead to the collapse of realism with regard to the whole.

Of course, the Old Testament is not a textbook of history. Of course, the authors could not be expected to have written about the past from a post-Enlightenment perspective. Of course, writing pure history was not their intention since the texts clearly subordinate historical data to theological and religious agendas. Of course, non-historical discourse can still communicate profound religious truth (cf. Deist 1986:11).

But so what? Since it cannot reasonably be denied that many of the Old Testament texts insist that Yahweh was active in the actual extra-textual past, recourse to any of these popular apologetic responses is simply a subtle means of evading the problem and

demonstrably involves the fallacy known as "shifting the goalposts". In the present context, therefore, an appeal to any of these responses is both invalid and irrelevant.

There is simply no getting around the fact that, if it can be demonstrated that the stories witnessing to such supposed divine acts and guidance are fictitious and the events depicted therein never occurred as presented, all grounds for realism disappear. If the history of Yahweh's acts in the world had no corresponding extra-textual counterparts, it follows that neither does the god Yahweh-as-thus-depicted.

As noted earlier, the devil's advocate therefore cannot agree with the view expressed by Davies (1995:21) who claims that biblical-critical analysis can show whether or not the depiction of Abraham in the text is historically factual but incompetent to answer the question of whether or not Yahweh as depicted actually exists.

Surely, this is inconsistent reasoning. If one is somehow able to show that, whatever historical Abraham may have lived, Abraham-as-depicted is a character of fiction, has one not also succeeded in demonstrating that, whatever Yahweh there may be, the god who spoke to the fictitious Abraham, must *ipso facto* himself be a character of fiction?

Moreover, what about the implications of this for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted elsewhere in the Old Testament texts who can be found referring back to his dealings with Abraham as though these actually happened? Is not the god Yahweh who is subsequently depicted both inside and outside Genesis as speaking in the first person to Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and all the other kings and prophets about his fictitious dealings with Abraham unmasked as a mere literary construct?

Contra the view expressed by Davies (1995:21) therefore, if biblical-critical analysis can demonstrate that a certain historically intended scenario, event or character in the text is fictitious, it is also possible to demonstrate, albeit indirectly, that Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular text must himself be a character of fiction. Any disproof of the historicity of an event or character depicted in the text is tantamount to a deconstruction of realism with regard to the ontological status of the deity Yahweh as

depicted in the same text.

In sum then, by proving that a particular story pretending to be history never actually happened, whatever did happen and whatever God or gods there may be, it will be possible to demonstrate that Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist. In the rest of this chapter, this is exactly what the devil's advocate intends to do. Not to show what actually did happen and what is really real but rather what demonstrably did *not* happen and, as a result of this, what cannot possibly be real.

7.2 ARGUMENTS AGAINST HISTORICITY

There is a general consensus among critical scholars that the actual history of Old Testament times is not the same as what an uncritical surface reading of the biblical texts may impress one with (cf. Thompson 1998:02). In addition, the amount of scholarly literature dealing with the critical reconstruction of the possible historical realities behind the Old Testament texts is staggering.

One could, perhaps, start with the problems noted by early interpreters such as Josephus or Celsus. Alternatively, there is the option of initiating the present discussion with the research of nineteenth century German scholarship, e.g. the studies by Vater (1802-1805), De Wette (1806-1807), Keunen (1865), Stade (1867) or Wellhausen (1894; ET 1957). Then again it might be more practical to begin with the twentieth century and start off with a pioneering study such as the one by Noth (1960).

In the end, however, the devil's advocate has decided to limit the discussion to research with anti-realist tendencies published over the last two or three decades. After all, much of what is relevant for the purposes of this study in the works of earlier scholarship reappears in relatively recent historiography. Moreover, especially since the 1970's, marked anti-realist tendencies began to establish itself in critical reconstructions of the history of Israel by scholars often labelled as "revisionists", "minimalists" or simply "post-modernists" (cf. Barr 2001:02)

In this regard, relatively recent research on the history of Israel by both liberal-critical and radical-revisionist scholars have provided the devil's advocate with a host of implicit arguments against historicity. The following studies, amongst others, certainly qualify: De Vaux (1978); Ramsey (1981); Fohrer (1982); Gottwald (1979); Jagersma (1982); Van Seters (1976, 1983); Donner (1984, 1986); Miller & Hayes (1986); Lemche (1988, 1998); Garbini (1988); Albertz (1992); Davies (1992) Ahlstrom (1993); Soggin (1993); Whitelam (1996); Thompson (1974, 1998), Amit (1999).

From a philosophical-critical perspective, it is noteworthy that most of these studies with their focus on issues of history frequently bracket the obvious anti-realist implications of their findings for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text. As the spelling out of such implications is the devil's advocate's speciality, a host of implicit anti-realist arguments have been abstracted from the research of the aforementioned scholars.

The abstracted arguments were then sorted and reconstructed in the form of anti-realist ontological arguments which, taken together, provide a cumulative case against historicity of much of the so-called historical or historically intended texts in the Old Testament. Ultimately, since problems with historicity necessarily translate into ontological dilemmas, the presentation of arguments against historical realism will allow the devil's advocate to articulate yet another devastating argument against the existence of Yahweh as depicted in the text. This is the argument from fictitious history.

7.2.1 The argument from intra-textual contradictions

If it can be shown that there exist within the discourse of the Old Testament two or more contradictory accounts of an event in which Yahweh was either directly involved or indirectly related to, the following theoretical possibilities arise:

1. One of the accounts is fictitious and therefore Yahweh-as-depicted in (relation to) the particular discourse is a character of fiction and, technically speaking, does not exist

2. Both accounts may be fictitious and though there might have been an extra-textual reality that the texts allude to, Yahweh-as-depicted-in-these-texts does not actually exist.

As most critical Old Testament scholars would know all-too-well, there are hundreds of minor discrepancies in the text of the Old Testament (cf. Deist 1978:06, 1986:26). Here, then, courtesy of the devil's advocate, are but a few (sic) of the many historical contradictions that may have anti-realist implications pertaining to the ontological status of Yahweh as depicted in the text:

Yahweh created plants, then animals, then humans (male and female together) (cf. Gen 1:1-31)

Yahweh created a male human first, then plants, then animals, then the female human (cf. Gen 2:4b-25)

People already worshipped Yahweh by name before the flood (cf. Gen 4:26)

People only started to worship Yahweh by name after he revealed it to Moses (cf. Ex 6:3)

Details of a genealogy (cf. Gen 4:17-26)

A contradicting version of the same lineage (cf. Gen 5:1-32)

Human life span is limited to 120 years (cf. Gen 6:3)

Many humans after that exceed this limit (cf. Gen 12 and passim)

The duration of the flood was 40 days (cf. Gen 7:4,12,17)

The duration of the flood was 150 days (cf. Gen 7:24, 8:3)

The animals on the ark were two of each type (cf. Gen 6:19)

They were only two in terms of the unclean animals but seven pairs were to be taken from the clean animals (cf. Gen 7:2-3)

The people of the earth had their own languages before the tower of Babylon incident (cf. Gen 10:15)

The people all spoke one language until after the tower of Babylon incident when Yahweh confused their speech (cf. Gen 11:1-9)

Abram was 70 years old when his Terah died (cf. Gen 12:4)

Abram was 135 years old when Terah died. (cf. Gen 11:26,32)

Ishmael was an infant when Hagar carried him into the desert (cf. Gen 21:14-18)

Ishmael was already 16 years old at the time (cf. Gen 17:24,25)

When Jacob fled from his home he was 40 years old (cf. Gen 26:34; 28:5)

When Jacob fled from his home he was 77 years old (cf. Gen 41:46,53; 45:6)

Beth El was first named when Jacob was on his way to Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 28:18-19)

Beth El was first named when Jacob returned from Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 35:13-14)

11 of Jacob's son's were born over a period of 13 years (cf. Gen 29:20-21; 31:41)

11 of Jacob's son's were born over a period of 7 years (cf. Gen 29:30-31; 30:25)

Jacob was renamed as "Israel" by God east of the Jordan at Peniel (cf. Gen 32:23)

Jacob was renamed as "Israel" by God west of the Jordan at Beth El (cf. Gen 35:10)

The place Beersheba was named by Isaac (cf. Gen 21:31)

The place Beersheba was named by Jacob (cf. Gen 26:27)

Joseph was sold to Midianites who took him to Egypt (cf. Gen 37:25-27; 39:1)

Joseph was kidnapped by Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt (cf. Gen 37:28a,29,36)

Benjamin was born in Padan-Aram (cf. Gen 35:16-19)

Benjamin was born in Canaan (cf. Gen 35:24-26)

Rebecca died while giving birth to Benjamin (cf. Gen 35)

Rebecca is alive and well years later (cf. Gen 37)

Canaan was the land of the Hebrews (cf. Gen 40:15)

Canaan became the land of the Hebrews only later on (cf. Jos 1:11)

One list of the number and names of the sons of Benjamin (cf. Gen 46:21)

A contradictory list of the number and names of the sons of Benjamin (cf. Num 28:38-40)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Jethro (cf. Ex 3:1)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Reuel (cf. Ex 2:18)

The name of Moses' father-in-law was Hobab (cf. Judg 4:11)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ex 7-11)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ps 78:43-51)

The number and chronology of the plagues (cf. Ps 105:27-36)

The exodus occurred after a stay of 60-120 years in Egypt (cf. Gen 15:16)

The exodus occurred after a stay of 400 to 430 years in Egypt (cf. Gen 15:13; Ex 12:40)

The sea was crossed after Yahweh caused a strong east wind to

blow (cf. Ex 14:21)

The sea was crossed after Moses parted the water to form two walls
(cf. Ex 14:23)

The names and number of the tribes (cf. Gen 49)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Num 1)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Deut 33)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Josh 19)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Judg 1)

A contradictory list of the names/number of the tribes (cf. Judg 5)

The routes taken and the itineraries of the exodus in the Sinai
Peninsula (cf. Ex 13-17)

Alternative and contradictory construals of the desert wanderings
(cf. Num 10-33)

The exact wording of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex 20:1-17)

A contradictory version (cf. Ex 34:10-26)

Another contradictory version (cf. Deut 5:5-21)

Yahweh himself wrote down the law (cf. Ex 34:1)

It was not Yahweh but Moses who wrote it down (cf. Ex 34:27)

The name of the mountain of God where the law was given was Sinai
(cf. Ex 3:1)

The name of the mountain of God where the law was given was
Horeb (cf. Ex 19:1)

During the exodus and the wandering in the wilderness Israel was
commanded to sacrifice to Yahweh (cf. Ex 3:18 and passim)

Yahweh never asked the Israelites to sacrifice to him when they left
Egypt and were living in the desert (cf. Jer 7:22-23)

The time when the Ark of the Covenant was constructed (cf. Deut

10:3-5)

A contradictory account (cf. Ex 25:10; 35:12)

One version of the Sinai theophany (cf. Ex 19; 24)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Deut 4)

One version of the manna and quails incident (cf. Ex 16:1-36)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Num 11:4-35)

One version of the water from the rock incident (cf. Ex 17:1-7)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Num 20:1-21)

One version of the golden calf incident (cf. Ex 32:1-29)

A contradictory version of the same incident (cf. Deut 9:11-29)

Itineraries in the desert (cf. Num 21:10-20)

A contradictory list (cf. Num 33:44-49)

The sacrificial animals were slaughtered at the entrance to the tabernacle (cf. Lev 17:3-4)

The sacrificial animals were slaughtered elsewhere (cf. Deut 12:15-16)

The Levites were first sanctified at Sinai (cf. Num 3:6)

The Levites were first sanctified at a later period (cf. Deut 6:8)

The Edomites refused the Israelites passage and the restocking of provisions (cf. Num 20:19-20; Judg 11:17-18)

The Edomites did not refuse the Israelites passage and the restocking of provisions (cf. Deut 2:4,28-29)

Moses looked at the Promised Land from the mountain Abrarim (cf. Num 27:12)

Moses looked at the Promised Land from the mountain Pishga (cf.

Deut 3:27)

Aaron died at the mountain called Hor (cf. Num 20:27-28)

Aaron died at the mountain called Mosherah (cf. Deut 10:6)

After Aaron's death the Israelites went to Shalmonah and Pinon (cf. Num 33:37-42)

After Aaron's death the Israelites went to Gudgodah and Jothbatah (cf. Deut 10:6-7)

Caleb was the only one who did not rebel against Yahweh (cf. Num 14:24)

Not only Caleb but also Joshua did not rebel against Yahweh (cf. Num 14:30)

Caleb's father was Jephuneh (cf. Josh 14:6)

Caleb's father was Geshron (cf. 1 Chron 2:18)

Caleb's father was Hur (cf. 1 Chron 2:50)

Yahweh expressly commanded the Israelites to restrict their worship in the Promised Land to one centralised cultic place (Deut 12:5ff)

Apparently Yahweh never required this (cf. Ex 20:20-24; Judges; 1-2 Samuel/1-2 Kings)

The first naming of Hebron (cf. Gen 13:18)

A contradictory account (cf. Josh 14:15)

The Canaanites were completely annihilated (cf. Josh 10:40)

They were only oppressed (cf. Judg 1:28)

Yahweh did not destroy all the pagan people of the land because he did not want the wild animals to become too many (sic) (cf. Deut 7:22)

Yahweh did not destroy the pagan people of the land in order to see

whether the Israelites would be faithful (cf. Judg 2:22)

The process of settlement was quick (cf. Josh 10:42)

The process of settlement was slow (cf. Josh 11:18; Judges 1-19)

Israel could not conquer Jebush until the time of David (cf. Josh 15:63)

Israel conquered Jebush and burned it with fire long before the time of king David (cf. Judg 1:8)

The cities of Tanaach and Dor were actually conquered (cf. Josh 12:21-23)

The cities of Tanaach and Dor were not conquered (cf. Judg 1:27)

Joshua attacked the city of Ai with 30 000 warriors (cf. Josh 8:12)

Joshua attacked the city of Ai with only 5 000 warriors (cf. Josh 8:3)

The number of cities taken was 29 (cf. Josh 15:32)

The number of cities taken was 38 (cf. Josh 15:21-32)

Sisera was killed while sleeping (cf. Judg 4:20)

Sisera was killed while standing (cf. Judg 5:25)

The number of Benjaminites who were killed was 26100 (cf. Judg 20:15)

The number of Benjaminites killed was actually 25000 (cf. Judg 20:46-47)

The names of Samuel's sons (cf. 1 Sam 14:49)

A contradictory list (cf. 1 Sam 31:2)

David is in the service of Saul and plays on the harp for him (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23)

Saul has never met David in his life (cf. 1 Sam 17:55-58)

David killed Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17:1, 49)

Elchanan killed Goliath (cf. 2 Sam 2:18-19)

One account of Saul's death (cf. 1 Sam 34:4-5)

A contradictory version (cf. 2 Sam 1:4-10)

Another contradictory version (cf. 2 Sam 21:12)

Saul's family died with him (cf. 1 Chron 10:6)

Apparently they did not (cf. 2 Sam 2:8)

Ishboeth ruled for 2 years (cf. 2 Sam 2:10)

Ishboeth ruled for 7 years (cf. 2 Sam 2:11)

Uzziah was killed by Yahweh at the threshing floor of Nachon (cf. 2 Sam 6)

Uzziah was killed by Yahweh at the threshing floor of Gidon (cf. 1 Chron 13)

The fallible character of David (cf. 1 Sam 16 - 1 Kgs 2)

The idealised David (cf. 1 Chron 10-29)

One account of where the troops were stationed (cf. 2 Kgs 11:5-7)

A contradictory account (cf. 2 Chron 23:4-5)

Yahweh incited David to hold a census (cf. 2 Sam 24:1)

It was Satan who incited David (cf. 1 Chron 21:1)

The number of soldiers in Israel and Judah was 1 100 000 and 470 000 respectively (cf. 1 Chron 21:5-7)

The number of soldiers in Israel was 800 000 and 500 000 respectively (2 Sam 24:4-5)

The proposed famine would last 3 years (cf. 1 Chron 21:12)

The proposed famine would last 7 years (cf. 2 Sam 24:13)

For the threshing floor David had to pay 50 shekels of silver (cf. 2 Sam 24:24)

For the threshing floor David had to pay 600 shekels of gold (cf. 1 Chron 21:25)

David took 1700 horsemen (cf. 2 Sam 8:4)

David took 7000 horsemen (cf. 1 Chron 18:4)

Solomon practised idolatry (cf. 1 Kgs 11:1-13)

Solomon did not practise idolatry (cf. 2 Chron 9; 35:4)

Solomon had 1000 wives (cf. 1 Kgs 11:3)

Solomon only had 140 wives (cf. Songs 6:8)

Solomon subjected the Hebrews to slavery (cf. 1 Kgs 5:13-14)

Solomon subjected none of the Hebrews to slavery (cf. 1 Kgs 9:22)

The nature of Solomon's wisdom (cf. 1 Kgs 3; 2 Chron 1)

A different kind of wisdom (cf. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

Solomon had 4 000 stalls (cf. 2 Chron 9)

Solomon had 40 000 stalls (cf. 1 Kgs 4)

Solomon had 550 overseers (cf. 1 Kgs 9)

Solomon had 250 overseers (cf. 2 Chron 8)

Solomon's temple was 18 cubits high, had 3300 overseers and the sea of bronze adjacent to it comprised a volume of 2 000 baths (cf. 1 Kgs 5-7)

Solomon's temple was 35 cubits high, had 3 600 overseers and the sea of bronze adjacent to it comprised a volume of 3 000 baths (cf. 2 Chron 2-4)

Baasha died in the 26th year of the reign of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16)

Baasha attacked Judah during the 36th year of the reign of Asa (cf. 2 Chron 16)

Asa removed all the high places (cf. 2 Kron 14)

Asa did not remove all the high places (cf. 1 Kgs 5)

Ahab died at Ramoth Gilead (cf. 2 Kon 22:37)

Ahab died at Jezreel (cf. 1 Kgs 21:1,19)

Jotam ruled for 16 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:30)

Jotam ruled for 20 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:33)

Pekah's reign lasted 20 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:27)

Pekah's reign lasted 30 years (cf. 2 Kgs 15:32-33)

Ahasiah began his rule when he was 22 years old (cf. 2 Kgs 8)

Ahasiah began his rule when he was 42 years old (cf. 2 Chron 22)

Azariah's rule began during the 15th year of Jerobeam (cf. 2 Kgs 14:2,7,23)

Azariah's rule began during the 27th year of Jerobeam (cf. 2 Kgs 15:2)

Hoseah began to rule during the 3rd year of Ahaz's reign (cf. 2 Kgs 15:27)

Hoseah began to rule during the 12th year of Ahaz's reign (cf. 2 Kgs 17:1)

Joahaz began to rule in the 19th year of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 10:36)

Joahaz began to rule during the 23rd year of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 13:1)

The furnishings for the temple were not made in the time of Joaz (cf. 2 Kgs 12:13-14)

The furnishings for the temple were made in Joaz's time (cf. 2 Chron 24:14)

Omri began to rule during the 27th year of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16:15)

Omri began to rule during the 31st year of Asa (cf. 1 Kgs 16:23)

Josiah's reformation took place during the 12th year of his reign (cf. 2 Chron 34)

Josiah's reformation took place during the 18th year of his reign (cf. 2 Kgs 22)

Ahaz was defeated by Israel in Syria (cf. 2 Chron 28)

He was not (cf. 2 Kgs 16)

Ahaz was buried with his fathers (cf. 2 Kgs 16:20)

He was not (cf. 2 Chron 28:27)

Josiah died at Megiddo (cf. 2 Kgs 23)

Josiah died at Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron 35)

Nebusaradan came on the 7th day (cf. 2 Kgs 25)

Nebusaradan came on the 10th day (cf. Jer 52)

After Josiah, Joaz became king (cf. 2 Chron 38)

It was not Joaz but Sallum (cf. Jer 22)

One version of Yahweh's sundial miracle for Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kgs 20)

A contradictory version (cf. Isa 38)

Jojachim had no successor (cf. Jer 36:30)

Jojachim was succeeded by his son (cf. 2 Kgs 14:6)

Manasseh was an evil king until his death (cf. 2 Kgs 21)

Manasseh repented before his death (cf. 2 Chron 33)

The amount of captives taken numbered 10 000 (cf. 2 Kgs 24:14-16)

The amount of captives taken numbered 4 600 (cf. Jer 52:28-30)

The number of people returning from exile was 42 360 (cf. Ez 2:1-63)

The number of people returning from exile was 29 818 (cf. Ez 2:64)

The number of people returning from exile was 31 089 (cf. Neh 7)

There were a total of 4 priestly classes (cf. Ez 2:36)

There were a total of 22 priestly classes (cf. Neh 7:1)

Contributions to the temple fund (cf. Ez 2)

A contradictory account (cf. Neh 7)

The details of the census lists (cf. Ez 2)

Contradictory versions of the same lists (cf. Neh 7)

These are only a few of the hundreds if not thousands of minor and major historical discrepancies in the texts of the Old Testament (cf. Carroll 1991:35; Soggin 1993:21). A perusal of critical commentaries such as those in the *ICC* or *OTL* series on the individual biblical books; studies in source-, tradition-, and redaction criticism and critical reconstructions of the history of Israel will demonstrate to the reader the quantity of intra- and inter-textual discrepancies.

As can be seen in the textual references of the contradictions presented above, historical contradictions are present both between different books relating the same incident or scenario as well as within the same book where two (or more) sources with contradictory data have been juxtaposed. They feature throughout Old Testament history and in every major epoch from creation to the post-exilic period. Moreover, the contradictions noted pertain to a great variety of issues. These include genealogical data, names of people, numbers of people, locations of events, names of places, details of scenarios, dialogues, acts, specific times of given events, the role of

Yahweh in some events, Yahweh's perspective on certain issues, etc., etc. (cf. also Haley 1992:04).

From a critical perspective, it would seem that the way in which conservative scholars and fundamentalist apologists deal with the discrepancies involves a mixture of repression and distortion of the problematic. This happens when such interpreters deny that there are any contradictions at all (cf. Barr 1981:25). They use weak analogies such as those of motorcar accidents, paintings and court testimonies to claim that small differences should be expected and distort the issues by asserting that the different versions merely supplement and compliment each other. They also appeal to invalid stereotypes of ancient literature and ancient mindsets or to the supposed corruption of the untouchable original text of scripture that, because it is supposed to be the Word of God, cannot possibly contradict itself.

As McKinsey (1995:10,22,47 and *passim*) notes, through conjectures without basis in the texts themselves, *ad hoc* arguments, reinterpretation, and speculation, conservatives desperately attempt to harmonise each and every little discrepancy noted by critical interpreters. Such an attempt to deal with the contradictions, though apparently sincere seems deeply dishonest as the aim is not so much the acceptance of the text on its own terms (as they claim), but to safeguard fundamentalist dogmas regarding alleged scriptural inerrancy (cf. Barr 1984:51).

Of course, awareness of the many contradictions is hardly novel (cf. Haley 1992:437-442). For centuries now, source criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism and critical histories of Israel have noted the inconsistencies in the texts traditionally believed to give factual accounts of scenarios from the extra-textual past. For many scholars of the history of Israel, such contradictions have led to doubt with regard to the factuality of particular historically intended narratives in the text (cf. Deist 1978:12). In other words, the presence of contradictions in the text is seen to constitute one of the many arguments against the historicity of Old Testament discourse.

A historical critic might ponder the implications of the contradictions for the historicity of the events recounted and the possibility of mutually discrepant

traditions, sources, redactions and translations of the particular texts (cf. Teeple 1982:45). For the purposes of this study, however, with its interest in philosophico-religious issues, the implications of these contradictions regarding matters of history for the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts are what need to be spelled out.

Yahweh could not be involved in two contradictory accounts of the same event if any of those events had any extra-textual historical counterpart. In the case of at least one fictitious account, the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular text is *ipso facto* of the same fictitious nature. It follows that the character Yahweh featured in (or related to) an account without any extra-textual counterpart also has no extra-textual substance.

In conclusion, with regard to at least one of two or more contradictory versions of any scenario directly or indirectly involving Yahweh, the deity as thus depicted did therefore not actually act or relate in the way portrayed and therefore does not exist.

7.2.2 The argument from cosmographical fiction

In the previous chapter, the ontological problems pertaining to fictitious cosmography and its implications for the ontological status of the character Yahweh were discussed in detail. For present purposes, it should suffice to note that certain events depicted in the Old Testament intended as historical accounts about a past event cannot be such based on the fact that they feature spatial locations which never existed in extra-textual reality (cf. also Fawcett 1973:19).

Consider the following examples:

“And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament between the waters and let it separate waters from waters. God then made the firmament and separated the waters beneath the firmament from the waters above it. And it was so. And God called the firmament ‘skies’.” (Gen 1:6-8)

“And he (Yahweh) drove out the man and he put in the east of the Garden of Eden the cherubs and the fiery sword moving about to protect the way (to the) tree of life.” (Gen 3:22-24)

“... if Yahweh creates something new and the ground opens her mouth and eats them with all that belongs to them and they go down alive to Sheol, then you will know that Yahweh abhorred these men. And when he finished speaking, the ground that was underneath them tore open, and the earth opened her mouth and ate them with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah, and all their possession. Thus, they and all that was in their possession went down alive to Sheol...” (Num 16:20-35)

“And while they were walking and talking there came suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire that parted them; and Elijah ascended to the skies in the storm.” (2 Kgs 2:11)

“And Yahweh spoke furthermore with Ahaz and said, ‘Demand a sign from Yahweh your god: descend down to Sheol or climb up to the heights’” (Isa 7:10-11)

“Then Yahweh answered Job from within a storm and said,...Did you come to the sources of the sea? Did you walk inside the flood? Have the portals of death been revealed to you and did you see the gates of the death’s shadow...Did you see the treasuries of the snow and did you see the treasuries of the hail which I have stored for the day of anxiety, for the day of strife and war?” (Job 38:1,16-17, 23-24)

If it is true that the scenarios depicted in the text involve fictitious spatial locations, then *ipso facto* the events occurring therein that are inextricably intertwined with the particular cosmography obviously did not actually happen (cf. Harwood 1992:27,55,111 and passim). Moreover, the god Yahweh, depicted as a character in those stories never really acted and/or spoke in the way described. Therefore,

Yahweh-as-depicted in texts where historical realism is dependent on fictitious cosmography as part of allegedly historical scenarios must be a character of fiction. In short, he does not exist.

7.2.3 The argument from the impossible narrator's perspective

Unless one can validly justify a belief in the mechanical inspiration of the Old Testament texts, it would seem unavoidable to concede that the perspective of the narrator in certain passages must be judged as impossible (cf. Clines 1990:135-152).

In this regard, the following scenarios apply:

- When the narrator gives a very detailed account of the private dialogue of the antagonists featuring in the narrative while the text simultaneously implies that no one who could have had anything to do with the writing of the text could in any way have known what it recounts;
- When a narrator gives a detailed account of what the characters are thinking in secret;
- When an account is given of acts and dialogue while all present are subsequently killed or related in such a manner as to make any direct or indirect contact with the later author impossible.

Consider the following examples of the impossible narrator's perspective:

“And Yahweh the god said, ‘Behold, the human has now become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, in order to prevent him from sending his hand and take from the tree of the life and living forever...’ And Yahweh the god sent him from Eden to toil the ground from which he was taken.” (Gen 3:22-24)

“Then Yahweh said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am going to

do, while Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him? After all, I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him that they must keep the way of Yahweh and do what is just and right so that Yahweh can bring upon Abraham what he spoke to him...” (Gen 18:17-19)

“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the way to the land of the Philistines, even though it was closer, because God said, 'The people may repent if they see war and want to return to Egypt'.” (Ex 13:17)

“Thereupon Balaam said to Balak, ‘Stay with your burnt offering and I will go away, maybe Yahweh will meet me and whatever he lets me see, I will tell you...’ (Num 23:3)

“And they waited until they were embarrassed; but he did not open the doors of the upper room. And when they went to fetch the key and opened the door their lord was lying on the floor. But while they tarried, Ehud had fled...” (Judg 3:25-26)

“And the leaders of the Philistines gathered to bring a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and to be merry; and they said; our god has given our enemy Samson into our hands’. And when the people saw him they praised their god, because they said, ‘Our god delivered our enemy and the destroyer of our land who killed many of us, into our hands’. And when their hearts were merry they said, ‘Call Samson, that he may play for us’. And they called Samson out of prison; and he played before them and they made him stand between two pillars. Then Samson said to the servant who held him by the hand, ‘Allow me to stand and to touch the pillars whereupon the house rests, that I may lean against it’. And the house was full of men and women and all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and on the roof (were) about three thousand men and women who

watched Samson play. Then Samson called to Yahweh and said, ‘Lord Yahweh, think about me and strengthen me just this one time, O God, that I may wreak myself over one of my two eyes on the Philistines. And Samson put his arms around the two central pillars on which the house rested...and Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’ And he bowed himself with all his might so that the house fell in on the rulers and on all the people who were inside. Thus were the dead whom he killed in his death more than those whom he killed during his life.” (Judg 16:23-30)

“And the Philistines heard the sound of the rejoicing and said, ‘What sort of noise like a great war cry is in the camp of the Hebrews? ...and the Philistines became scared and said, ‘God has come into the camp!’ And they said, ‘Woe to us, because such a thing did not happen yesterday or the day before. Woe to us, who will save us from the hand of these awesome gods? It is the same gods who smote the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues in the desert. Have courage and act like men, Philistines, then you will not serve the Hebrews as they have served you; act like men and fight!’” (1 Sam 4:6-9)

“And Saul said to his armour bearer, ‘Draw your sword and kill me with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and kill me and mock me.’ But his armour bearer did not want to (do this), for he was very afraid. Then Saul took the sword and fell into it. When the armour bearer saw that Saul was dead he himself fell into his sword and died.” (1 Sam 31:4-5)

“But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David has slept with his fathers...Hadad said the Pharaoh, ‘Let me go that I may go to my land.’ Then the Pharaoh said to him, ‘But what do you lack with me that suddenly you desire to go back to your land?’ And he answered, ‘Nothing, but please allow me to go.’” (1 Kgs 11:21-22)

“And Jerobeam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingship will return to the house of David. If these people go up to sacrifice in the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem, then the heart of these people will return to their lord, to Rehabeam, the king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehabeam, the king of Judah.’” (1 Kgs 12:26-27)

“Ben Hadad, who also went into the city, fled from room to room. Then his servants said to him, ‘Look, we have heard that the kings from the house of Israel is merciful...’” (1 Kgs 20:30-31)

“While they prepared themselves early in the morning and the sun went up over the waters, the Moabites saw at a distance the water red as blood. And they said, ‘It is blood; the kings must surely have attacked each other and the one defeated the other. Now, to the booty, Moabites! But when they came to the camp of the Israelites, the Israelites prepared themselves and defeated the Moabites...’” (2 Kgs 3:22-24)

“And one day when the sons of God came to set themselves before Yahweh the Satan also came among them. Then Yahweh asked the Satan, ‘Where did you come from?’ And the Satan answered Yahweh and said, ‘From journey across the earth which I have crossed.’ And Yahweh asked the Satan, ‘Did you see my servant Job...?’” (Job 1:6)

“But Hamman restrained himself and when he got home he called his friends and his wife; and Hamman told them of the glory of his riches and the multitude of his sons and of everything in which the king made him great...Furthermore Hamman said, ‘Even queen Esther invited no one else to the meal which she had set-up, except for me; also for tomorrow I have been invited by her with the king. But all this does not profit me as long as I see the Jew Mordechai sitting at the gate of the king.’” (Esth 5:10-13)

These are but some of the more obvious examples of the impossible perspective of the omniscient narrator playing the historian (cf. also Clines 1995:135-152; Cupitt 1991:144-145). To be sure, there are also many other less obvious examples where it seems inconceivable that someone could have been recording what took place in a way that would have allowed the narrator to provide the kind of detail that he has put into writing.

There are so many mundane and in-the-heat-of-the-action scenes in the text where the possibility and likelihood of any record or detailed memory handed down seems to be ruled out by the text itself. Yet the narrator often gives his audience a *very* detailed account. Because of the nature and contents of the texts themselves and not, as commonly claimed, due to nihilism or anti-supernaturalism, many of these details, seem just too artificial and appear to have been constructed for the sake of writing a good or convincing story.

Though often intended to be understood as reflective of actual past events, the discourse presented via the impossible perspective of the omniscient narrator gives the game away and unmask the story as fiction (cf. also Soggin 1993:25). Moreover, if it is true that the narration indeed exhibits an impossible perspective then, no matter whether there was some historical core and reality behind the fanciful tale, the scenarios and people depicted in the particular discourse are still, technically speaking, fictitious (cf. Thompson 1998:52).

From the historian's perspective, much scepticism with regard to the factuality of such detailed scenarios is unavoidable. In addition, since the character Yahweh features in many such texts, or is in some way implied to be related to the events depicted therein, realism with regard to the deity as thus depicted must be considered as being problematic. Yahweh-as-thus-depicted/related – his dialogue, actions and relation being the imaginative and ideological construction of the narrator – must himself be considered as a character of fiction.

7.2.4 The argument from numerical absurdities

Hardly anyone has utilised the argument from numerological absurdities in the text

against realism in Old Testament theology as thoroughly as the nineteenth century bishop of Natal, John Colenso (1862a; 1862b). Colenso (1862a; 1862b) made many astute observations with regard to statistical data in the text and concluded that the obvious absurdities appear to deconstruct realism with regard to the historicity of the events described.

Colenso (1862a) attempted to establish the total number of Israelites. The 603 500 warriors were above twenty years of age (cf. Num 1:3). There were also 600 000 women above twenty and it is probable that there were also 300 000 men and 300 000 women under twenty while 200 000 old people can be added. The total number of Israelites who left Egypt must therefore have amounted to at least two million. This number equalled the total population of the city of London in 1851. It would have been impossible for Moses to address all the people simultaneously as the text suggests to have been the case: No human voice could reach a crowd as large as the whole population of London (cf. Colenso 1862a:37).

Some countered this view by referring to a miracle or to the possibility that only a small number of Israelites attended these meetings. According to Colenso, however, this kind of argument was an impeachment of the literal accuracy of the text. Furthermore, Colenso also replied by referring his critics to numerous other similar numerological absurdities in the text. For example, the Israelites must have occupied an impossibly huge area. If 36 square feet or 4 square yards were allowed for each one the Israelites would have been crowded together in an area of 8 000 000 square yards or 1652 acres. This must have caused insurmountable obstacles: Each day wood and water would have to be obtained from outside the camp. And how was this possible in the wilderness? (cf. Colenso 1862a:38)

Furthermore, all kinds of dirt and filth had to be removed from the camp on a daily basis because the camp “must be holy so that he (Yahweh) will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you” (cf. Deut 23:14). It seems unlikely that this could be accomplished and it is therefore “itself a very convincing proof of the unhistorical character of the whole narrative” (cf. Colenso 1862a:40).

When the Israelites left Egypt they were issued with tents (cf. Ex 16:16; Lev 23:42-

43). If ten people occupied one tent 200 000 were needed for the two million. Where were they obtained from? Furthermore, how were they carried? It was impossible to carry them on their shoulders because these were already laden with other burdens (cf. Ex 12:34) Trained oxen could have been used for this purpose but at least 200 000 were needed. It seems impossible to think that the Israelite slaves possessed so many trained oxen in Egypt (cf. Colenso 1862a:45-47).

According to Exodus 13:18 the Israelites went out of Egypt armed for battle. This sounds impossible: “It is, however, inconceivable that these down trodden and oppressed people should have been allowed by Pharaoh to possess arms, so as to turn out at a moment’s notice 600 000 armed men” (cf. Colenso 1862a:48). Such a mighty armed would have revolted long before Moses and the exodus. Moreover, the warriors formed a distinct class in Egypt and it is unlikely that oppressed slaves would have been allowed to join their ranks or form a distinct army.

The marching of the Israelite soldiers would also have caused immense difficulties: If they had marched out of Egypt five in a rank, allowing one yard between the ranks, the troops would have formed a line of 68 miles. It is further explicitly stated that the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions on that very day (Ex 12:51). The impression is thus created that the 600 000 armed men left Egypt suddenly. This would have been totally impossible. Many days would be needed to set up the different divisions to leave the land of Egypt (cf. Colenso 1862a:48-49).

The biblical rendering of the institution of the Passover also caused insurmountable problems to Colenso. Moses summoned the elders and instructed them to select and slaughter lambs and to prepare for the Passover. They had to inform the whole of Israel to execute the orders for Passover exactly. Since it was a matter of life and death, the notice had to be explained to each separate family carefully. A population as large as the city of London thus had to be instructed in one day. Once again, this seems impossible (cf. Colenso 1862a:52).

A vast piece of land was needed for these flocks. We can form some idea of this by determining the total number of lambs. If ten people consumed one lamb then 200 000 lambs would be required for the two million Israelites; if twenty individuals ate

one lamb, 100 000 lambs would be required; if the mean of these is taken, 150 000 were then needed. And since only year old males without defect had to be chosen (Ex 12:5) we may assume that there were at least as many female lambs. Altogether thus 300 000 lambs and that only for the first year.

But the problem is more complicated. If all the 150 000 male lambs were killed in the first year, no rams or wethers would be left for the increase of the flock. Instead of 150 000 we must assume a total number of 400 000 lambs (200 000 males and 200 000 females) for the first year. If five sheep are allowed for one acre, the Israelites needed 400 000 acres of land. It seems incredible that the Egyptians would have granted the Israelites slaves 400 000 acres or 25 square miles of grazing land (cf. Colenso 1862a:54-57).

Colenso also investigated other aspects of the Pentateuchal narrative and again and again indicated remarkable inconsistencies and contradictory statements (Colenso 1862b). Although of an arithmetic nature, these arguments were deemed sufficient to indicate the utter impossibility of receiving any longer this story of the exodus as literally and historically true (Colenso 1862:162).

Not even an alternation of the warrior numbers can solve the severe problems mentioned above. If, for instance, 60 000 instead of 600 000 must be read there would still be a group of 200 000 or 300 000 people and many problems would still remain. Even if the number is reduced to 6 000 some but not all of the difficulties might be solved. We would still have to imagine a town of 20 000 to 30 000 people. According to Colenso it is highly improbable that the total number of the warriors is wrong because it was repeated accurately each time (cf. Colenso 1862a:163-164).

The exodus narrative is not the only narrative where apparent numerological problems have led scholars to consider the particular story fictitious (cf. Hemmingway 1978; Le Roux 1993:57). From a wholly historical perspective, the interest here includes the question with regard to whether the event occurred as described or not (cf. Deist 1978:11; contra Von Rad 1962:41). But from a philosophical-critical perspective concerned with ontological issues, the interest here lies with what these problems with numbers would imply regarding the ontological status of the character of Yahweh

whose words and actions are inextricably bound up with the details of the narrative.

Technically it follows that if over two million Israelites did not leave Egypt as the text describes and that the specific representation of the exodus is fictitious then neither does the Yahweh-who-led-two-million-Israelites-from-Egypt exist. Even if Yahweh per se actually exists and even if some or other event actually did happen which might be labelled as being an “exodus”, the fact remains that if the event depicted in the text did not occur as described then neither did Yahweh act in the way described. It follows then that whatever actually happened and whatever God may actually have been involved in some way, Yahweh-as-depicted in the fictional text never acted exactly as described and therefore is himself a character of fiction. *Ipsa facto*, Yahweh-as-depicted did not and does not exist.

7.2.5 The argument from chronological schematisation



In the study by Hughes (1990), the author argues that the biblical chronology is not historically factual. Instead, it articulates a mythical scheme apparently constructed for the purpose of showing how history is ordered according to a presupposed divine plan. The author also notes that, one possible reason why modern biblical scholarship has been inclined to overlook the schematic nature of biblical chronology may be that it is, in a way, rather embarrassing (cf. Hughes 1990:02).

Modern biblical scholarship is largely historical in outlook and considerable effort has been devoted to the establishing of a reliable chronological framework for the history of the Israelite and Judean kingdoms. If the chronological data on which this framework is based turn out to be mythical rather than historical, this might be regarded as undermining the basis of modern scholarship. It could be worse than this: if the chronology is mythical rather than historical, the same might also be true of the narrative that contains this chronology (cf. Hughes 1990:03).

By the concept of “myth”, Hughes understands something that is “fiction” but that nevertheless expresses a truth of some sort (cf. Hughes 1990:03). Whatever this “truth” is that Hughes is referring to, the bottom line of his study is that not only did the events described in the Old Testament not happen exactly as depicted; whatever did happen did not even happen *when* it supposedly did. Hughes (1990:03) can therefore validly assert that the so-called “history” constructed in the texts is actually historical “fiction” with the purpose of expressing ideological beliefs.

Hughes (1990:202-206) mentions several problems regarding biblical chronology that apparently destroy realism:

- There are internal contradictions pertaining to issues such as birth dates, life spans, time of ascensions by kings, duration of rule, etc.
- There are contradictions between the time-schemes of the various Old Testament textual traditions, i.e. between MT, LXX and SP, as well as *within* the MT between an original chronology and later priestly and Deuteronomistic revisions and adaptations of that chronology for the purposes of creating aesthetically and

symbolically significant discourse.

- The biblical chronology has very little in common with actual historical chronology and is an ideological, mythical and fictitious construct presented for the purpose of propagating the belief that history is somehow divinely ordered.

Hughes (1990) provides many tables of chronological data to justify these claims. For example, consider the following instances of obviously mythical and contradictory chronology discussed by the author.

1) Obviously artificial mythical chronological constructs:

- Creation (7 days)
- The age of the world (4000 years =100 times 40)
- Pre-Abrahamic period (1600 years)
- Abraham in Mesopotamia (75 years)
- Patriarchs in Canaan (215 years)
- Post-Abrahamic period (2400 years)
- Time in Egypt (430 years)
- Time between exodus and foundation of temple (480 years)
- First temple period (480 years)
- Pre-exilic period (430 years)
- Exilic period (50 years)
- Second temple period (720 years)

In addition, certain other periods seem similarly artificial, schematic and contrived:

- Age of Enoch (365 years)
- Age of Lamech (777 years)
- Jacob flees from his home at age 40
- Moses flees Egypt (40 years old) and comes back (80 years old) and dies (120 years old) (40 + 40 + 40)
- Moses on the mountain (40 days [2 or 3 times])

- Duration of desert wanderings (40 years)
 - Duration of David’s rule (40 Years)
 - Duration of Solomon’s rule (40 years)
 - Age of Job before the crisis (70) and after (140 years = 70 + 70)
- 2) Contradictory chronologies (cf. Hughes 1990:12) (AM = Anno Mundi / diversions in darker print)

	MT	SP	LXX
Adam	1-930 AM	1-930 AM	1-930 AM
Seth	130-1042 AM	130-1042 AM	130-1042 AM
Enosh	235-1140 AM	235-1140 AM	435-1340 AM
Kenan	325-1235 AM	325-1235 AM	625-1535 AM
Mehalalel	395-1290 AM	395-1290 AM	795-1690 AM
Jared	460-1422 AM	460-1307 AM	960-1922 AM
Enoch	622-987 AM	520-887 AM	1122-1487 AM
Methuselah	687-1656 AM	587-1307 AM	287-2256 AM
Lamech	874-1651 AM	654-1307 AM	454-2207 AM
Noach	1056-2006 AM	707-1657 AM	1642-2592 AM
Shem	1556-2156 AM	207-1807 AM	2142-2742 AM
Flood	1656 AM	1307 AM	2242 AM
Arpachshad	1656/8-2094/6 AM	1307/9-1745/7 AM	2242/4-2807/9 AM
Kenan			2377/9-2837/9 AM
Shelah	1691/3-2124/6 AM	1442/4-1875/7 AM	2507/9-2967/9 AM
Eber	21/3-2185/7 AM	1572/4-1976/8 AM	2637/9-3141/3 AM
Peleg	1755/7-1994/6 AM	1706/8-1945/7 AM	2771/3-3110/2 AM
Rehu	1785/7-2204/6 AM	1836/8-2075/7 AM	2901/3-3240/2 AM
Serug	1817/9-2047/9 AM	1968/70-2198/2200 AM	3033/5-3363/5 AM
Nahor	1847/9-1995/7 AM	2098/2100-2246/8 AM	3263/5-3371/3 AM
Terah	1876/8-2081/3 AM	2177/9-2322/4 AM	3342/4-3447/9 AM
Abraham	1946/8 - AM	2247/9- AM	3312/4- AM

From these figures it should be clear that there are contradictions between:

- Dates of birth;
- Time of death;
- Life span;
- *When* prominent individuals lived (e.g. Noah, Abraham, etc.);
- The date of prominent events (e.g. the flood; migration of the Patriarchs; or, counting backwards – the creation of the world).

Other equally serious problems relate to the fact that, according to Hughes (1990:12), not only do most scholars consider the MT to be more removed from the original priestly chronology than LXX and SP but:

- none of the three has stuck with any original chronology;
- all three have incorporated mythical chronology for ideological purposes in order to show that history is ordered by a divine mind.

Hughes (1990:44) also notes mythical schematisation in other chronological data, e.g.:

	MT	LXX	SP
Israel 's time in Egypt	430	215	215
Exodus to temple	480	440	-

This means that the time of the exodus is also not clearly datable. There are also contradictions between MT and LXX with regard to chronological data pertaining to the periods of the Judges and the monarchy, e.g.:

	MT	LXX
Period of tranquillity after the Mesopotamian oppression	40	50
Time of Jephtah's reign	6	60
Time of Eli's leadership	40	20
King Abijam	3	6
King Asa	41	16
King Jehoram	8	10
King Amaziah	1	40

Some less conservative people might wonder about the big fuss regarding the Old Testament authors' attempts to demonstrate how history is divinely ordered by reconstructing and recreating actual or wished for occurrences. These people should ask themselves whether they would find such freedom with facts credible in the modern context. Suppose someone rewrote the history of the twentieth century and placed events on dates other than those when they actually occurred. Suppose further that this person also modified the nature, contents and duration of the events that actually happened and, for good measure, made up a few purely fictitious scenarios.

Supposed, moreover, that purely mundane and secular events were transformed by inserting an allegedly existing deity into the plot who is depicted as orchestrating these events. Who among those who see no harm in the biblical authors' reconstructions would find such a modern-day reconfiguring of twentieth-century history for the same ideological purposes convincing and credible as a way of demonstrating a divine plan with history? Even if this was a legitimate practice in the ancient world, it still does not change the fact that what was written does not reflect extra-textual reality.

Seen from this perspective, what may from one point of view be of merely historical or literary interest can have devastating ontological implications for theological realism. If the chronological scheme of the Old Testament narrative(s) of the creation to the post-exilic period is mythical, and therefore fictitious, then so is the deity Yahweh whose acts are inextricably bound up with and located on that particular time frame. Even if some of the events did actually happen, if these did not happen as

depicted or, in this case, *when* they were alleged to have happened, not only is the historicity of the particular depiction technically not based in actual past reality. To be sure, whatever Yahweh there may be, there is no getting around the fact that Yahweh-as-depicted is a character of fiction who does not really exist.

7.2.6 The argument from mythological motifs

In a previous chapter, the implications of the presence of myth in the texts for the ontological status of Yahweh were discussed. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it is important to note how mythological motifs in supposed historical accounts tend to deconstruct realism with regard to the historicity of those accounts. If a story purporting to be history did not happen as depicted given the presence of a mythological motif, it follows that irrespective of whatever truth the story intends to communicate, Yahweh-as-depicted in such a text is a character of fiction.

In this regard, an increasing knowledge of mythology have contributed to the scepticism regarding the historicity of many stories in the text once believed to be a reliable witness to actual past scenarios. A popular example of how comparative mythology lead to a discovery that the texts presented as history are actually fiction can be found in the familiar story of Samson (cf. Taylor 1993:223; Day 2000:162). Traditionally viewed as an historical figure who actually did what the text of Judges 13-16 depicts him as doing, such a belief became increasingly untenable when the following parallels to solar mythology were discovered:

- The name Samson is derived from the Semitic word for sun (“*shemesh*”);
- Samson came from a region where solar worship was very popular (near “Beth Shemesh”);
- Samson has seven hair-locks in which his strength lies just as the sun god is often depicted with seven rays emanating from his head in which his power is seated;

- As the sun temporarily hides itself behind the clouds and bursts forth to vanquish its enemies, Samson temporarily lives in a cave from which he emerges to vanquish his foes;
- Samson sends three hundred foxes with fire attached to their tails to destroy the harvest, an act that symbolically parallels the destructive effects of the sun;
- Samson is depicted as a vigorous and tireless hero emerging from his chambers in the same way the sun is also often depicted (cf. Ps 19A);
- The sun god is worshipped as a divine judge and as the god of justice and retribution – just as Samson is called a "judge" who pays back the Philistines for their violent crimes;
- Samson is ultimately weakened by a woman named Delilah whose name is reminiscent of the word “night” (*lilah*) which, in solar mythology, is often depicted as weakening the sun and facilitating its captivity in the underworld;
- As the sun goes to the underworld by pulling down the pillars on which the blue sky rests so too Samson dies by pulling down the pillars of a temple.

Many other narratives in the Old Testament are suspected to be fictitious on account that they appear to contain the remains of mythological motifs attested elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern religious discourse (cf. Da Silva 1994:12). Since the historical discourse of Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbours are often considered to be fiction since it contains mythological motifs, it seems invalid to claim that Old Testament texts dependent on similar motifs can somehow be considered as being any less fictional.

In a previous chapter, an extensive presentation of alleged mythological motifs was given by the devil's advocate. In the following table, an additional list is provided based on the index compiled by Gaster (1969:422):

Mythological motif	Number in Standard Motif Index of Folk-Literature (Thompson)
Abandonments and exposures	S 140
Ambrosia	A 153
Angels help in battle	V 232
Angel entertained unawares	Q 45.1
Animal, king of	B 236
Atlas	A 692
Babylon, Tower of	* C 771.1; F 772.1
Bell confounds demons	G 303 16.12
Bloodbath curative	T 82
Branding	P 171
Cain, mark of	Q 556.2
Chariot of the sun	A 724
Circumambulation	* D 1791
Clay, man created out of	A 1241
Confusion of tongues	* A 1333
Crops fail during reign of wicked king	Q 552.3
Culture hero asleep in hill	* A 571
expected to return	A 530 ff.
Cup in sack	H 151.4
Daughters of men and sons of God	F 531.6.1.1
Day magically lengthened	D 2146.1.1
Deluge,	A 1010 ff.
caused by gods in conflict	A 1015.1
Demon's food taboo	C 242
Door , monster guards	* D 1146
Eagle renews youth	B 788
Ever blooming garden	F 162.1.1
Exposed child	R 131 ff.
Food of gods taboo	S 261
Foundation sacrifice	cf. A 2234.2
Fruit forbidden	* C 261

Garden of the gods	A 151.2; * F 111
Griffin guards treasure	N 575
Honey, rivers of	* F 162.2.3
Horns blow down wall	D 1562.3
Hunt, Wild	E 50b
Inexhaustible cruse	* D 1652 ff.
Jonah swallowed by great fish	F 911.4
Ladder to the upper world	K 2111
Lengthening the day by magic	H 151.4
Leviathan	B 61
Lot's wife turned to salt	C 961.1
Maimed king must retire	P 16.2
Mandrake	* D 965.1; B 754.2
Manna	D 1030.1.1
Milk and honey	F 701.1
Moses rescued by princess	R 131.11.1
Mutilations	S 161.1
Navel of the earth	A 875.1
North, abode of demons	G 633
Paradise	
on mountain	F 132.1
four rivers of	* F162.2.1
serpent in	B 176.1
waters of	A 878.1
Password, recognition	H 18 (ad.)
Pillars of heaven	A 665.2
Precious stones, city of	F 761
Raven	2234.1
Serpent, immortality of	A 1355 (ad.)
Seven, formulistic	Z 71.5
Seventy-seven	Z 71.15
Sheba, Queen of, Riddles of	H 540.2.1
Shibboleth	H 18 (ad.)
Solomon, judgement of	J 1171.1-2

Staff	
blossoming	* F 971.2; H 331.3
draws water from stone	D 1549.5
Subterranean castle	F 721.5
Tower of Babylon	F 772.1
to upper world	F 58
not to build too high	* C 771.1
Tree of immortality/life	D 1346.4; * E 90 ff.
Knowledge	J 165
Twelve	Z 71.8; D 1723.1.4
Water	
child cast into	F 321.1.4.1
drawn from rock	D 1549.5; * 1567.6
Waters, magically divided	* D 1551 ff.
Wind, tied in bag	C 322.1

As noted previously, what is of interest for the purposes of this chapter and this particular study with its concern for the philosophical and ontological implications of such parallels is the scepticism they often generate as to whether the scenario in question actually happened.

Complete historical scepticism is, however, not universally condoned since many scholars loathe speaking of "myth-as-fiction" in the Old Testament (cf. Da Silva 1994:17). Apparently, there is the need to distinguish between the *gattung* of myth as opposed to that of legend, folklore, etiology, fable, fiction, history-like narrative, narrative like history, etc., etc. Myth, so they claim, should not in biblical studies as in popular discourse be seen as the opposite of "facts" or "truth".

Thus, even if there are remains of mythological motifs in the text, many scholars make it quite clear that this is "no problem". They also remind us that even myths may have actual historical events as background. In addition, they insist that the genre of myth provides an excellent vehicle for communicating profound religious truth. After all, so it is argued, history is not the only context in which theological convictions can be expressed.

For present purposes, though such distinctions may be important, true and not pedantic, they are, in the context of the present discussion, either invalid, irrelevant or both. Despite the obvious presence of mythological motifs in the Old Testament texts, it is quite clear that the authors or final editors of the texts did not intend them to be read as myth. In many instances (e.g. the Samson narrative), it is clear that the story in its present context was indeed intended to be read as if it recounted scenarios that actually happened in the past.

It is therefore of no use pointing out the presence of mythological motifs in the Judges 13-16 text or the characteristics of legend and folklore observable in Samson "saga" in order to discourage anyone from an attempt to read the text as intended history. It may technically be true that, in terms of genre, the text exhibits a relation to extra-textual reality that is obviously mythical, legendary or parabolic. Even so, it is equally true that the person responsible for the presence of the story in the book of Judges pretended/believed (and wanted others to believe) that the tale recounted historical facts. In other words, though it is therefore true that a text like that of Judges 13-16 is not technically history in any modern sense of the word, it is a subtle distortion of the problematic to insist that it may therefore not be judged from such a viewpoint.

Moreover, the often heard apologetic claim that the ancient writers were less interested in factual and critical history and not so much concerned with what is really real or what actually happened (as opposed to who said what) is not only misleading but also demonstrably wrong (contra Deist 1978:07). Despite the presence of primitive and pre-critical credulity on the part of the biblical authors it is quite clear from the dialogue of characters (especially the sages and prophets) that the people were quite capable of being concerned with issues related to historicity and ontology (cf. also Barr 1993:12).

Biblical theology's idea of a "Semitic mind" vis-à-vis the "Greek mind" still seems to be taken as an indisputable and irrefutable fact by some philosophically shy scholars even though the particular stereotype has been discredited long ago (cf. Barr 1999:138). This subtle attempt to immunise the ideology of the texts from judgement of critical history and philosophical ontology is, according to the devil's advocate, nothing more than a strategy of evasion. It also probably involves a different kind of

what Hume called the "naturalist fallacy" insofar as it attempts to argue from what is the case to what ought to be so or, in this case, ought not to be done in response to it.

In sum then, from the devil's advocate's perspective, the anti-realist implications of the presence of mythological motifs in the text for the historicity of the events depicted therein is clear. If the events depicted in the texts are mythical and therefore did not actually happen, whatever "religious truth" there may be in the story, it changes nothing regarding the ontological status of the deity as depicted in the particular discourse.

If the god Yahweh is a character in mythical discourse, or alternatively, if elsewhere in the text the deity is depicted as alluding to such discourse as though historically factual, it follows that the deity Yahweh is himself a character of myth and/or fiction (cf. Harwood 1992:63). If this is the case, then the possibility that Yahweh-as-depicted does actually exist must be considered as plausible as the likelihood that any other deity of ancient mythology might also have an extra-textual counterpart.

7.2.7 The argument from alleged archaeological falsification

Archaeological research related to Old Testament texts is an extremely complex and controversial subject (cf. Bright 1981:27; Finckelstein 2001:02). The debate between the so-called "maximalists" and "minimalists" in biblical archaeology attests to the fact that there are serious historical problems when it comes to the relation between text and reality. An even older rivalry can be found in the various approaches to the subject as exhibited by the so-called Baltimore and Leipzig schools of biblical archaeology (cf. Ramsey 1982:44-47).

Even those critical scholars who consider themselves as being neither minimalist nor maximalist would agree that many of the scenarios depicted in the Old Testament texts present us not with historically factual data but with fiction or legend not reflective of any actual past reality (cf. Bartlet 1990:65; Dever 2001:306; Sheller 2001:02). Yet it is especially the so-called "minimalists" who insist in their research that realism with regard to the historicity of certain events related in the Old Testament has been falsified by archaeological discovery (cf. Lemche 1988:12;

Thompson 1998:15).

What is relevant for the purpose of this study is the fact that the god Yahweh is depicted as being inextricably involved in many of the events that both tradition critical and radical/revisionist scholars consider to be demonstrably fictitious. According to the devil's advocate, if the details of the scenarios depicted in the text never actually happened, no matter what actually did happen or what God there may actually be, realism with regard to the ontological status of the deity Yahweh as depicted in the text collapses.

On this topic, one need only take cognisance of the reconstructions of Israelite history as those found in the work of critical historians/biblical archaeologists like, amongst others, Ramsey (1981), Van Seters (1976, 1983); Garbini (1988), Soggin (1993), and Thompson (1974, 1998). According to these scholars, via arguments from silence, the nature of the biblical sources, the material culture of the periods in question, comparisons between biblical and extra-biblical historical data, and through other methods of biblical criticism, critical historiography and archaeology, the following textual scenarios, amongst others, are demonstrably fictitious:

- A world-wide flood in the third-millennium BC;
- The life and times of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob;
- Joseph as a Hebrew second in command in Egypt;
- Moses as a son of the Pharaoh;
- The two million strong exodus of Israelites from Egypt;
- The route of the exodus in the Sinai peninsula;
- The conquest of Canaan by Joshua (i.e. Jericho);
- The situation in Palestine during the period of the judges;
- David and Solomon as major role players in the ancient Near East;
- The repentance of Nineveh as a result of a Hebrew prophet named Jonah;
- Daniel as a prophet and advisor to the monarchs in Babylon;
- Esther as a queen of Persia.

Many conservatives have gone out of their way to argue that, despite the apparently

disconfirming evidence by archaeology (and the various other arguments presented in this chapter) the Bible was right after all (cf. Keller 1984:01). It is claimed that the archaeologists who believe that the biblical data is erroneous must be biased and conspiring liberal bigots and that the evidence that actually supports the Bible have been either misinterpreted, tampered with or simply ignored (cf. Young 1957:13-19; Keller 1984:1,3,10 and passim; Archer 1982:21,47,51 and passim; Macdowell 1993:22-58).

The devil's advocate will not, at present, attempt to argue the pros and cons of the various conservative, critical and revisionist approaches to biblical archaeology. Interested readers are referred to the various reference works found throughout this chapter for a variety of mutually exclusive views regarding what is (supposedly) what and what is (allegedly) not.

Suffice to say that, if it is true that the historicity of the scenarios noted above have been falsified by archaeology then, whatever God(s) there may be, the god Yahweh depicted as being involved in those scenarios must himself be a character of fiction and therefore does not really exist.

7.2.8 The argument from anachronisms in the texts

One of the strongest indicators that the events depicted in the Old Testament texts are not historically factual seems to be the presence of a myriad of anachronisms in the discourse. What is supposed to have been eyewitness accounts or at least reliable tradition contains references to people, places, events, beliefs and customs that were demonstrably not part of the historical context in which the biblical authors place them (cf. Van Seters 1983:11; Thompson 1992:05; Garbini 1988:03; Harwood 1992:vi).

Popular examples of such anachronisms include:

- The references in Genesis 2:10-12 to Ashur, Cush and the economic importance of gold allegedly prevalent during the time of Adam in 4000 BC. These references correspond with the scenario in the first millennium BC and not with anything

before the Bronze Age;

- The reference to the name Yahweh in Genesis (cf. Ex 6:3 vs. Gen 4:26 and the theophoric elements of personal names prior to the revelation to Moses);
- The reference to domesticated animals (camels) as well as names of places (Dan, Beersheba, etc.) and peoples (Philistines; Chaldeans; Edomite kings) in the Patriarchal narratives (early 2nd millennium BC) all of which can only be dated to the later part of the second millennium BC, or seem more reflective of scenarios in the first millennium BC during the exile;
- The references to the Philistines, Edomites and Moabites in the story of the desert wanderings (1500 BC?), people whose existence as such are only attested from the twelfth century BC onwards;
- The references to places and religious/cultic rites and ideas in Deuteronomy by Moses which are unknown in Samuel-Kings and / or not attested before the late monarchic period;
- The references to peoples and places in the account of Joshua's conquest that did not exist in the time frame projected for the Israelite invasion of Canaan;
- The reference in the stories of Solomon to the Kingdom of Sheba whose existence is not attested before the seventh century BC;
- The numerous projections in Chronicles regarding certain elements in the cult of Yahweh in the pre-exilic period which in fact only originated in the time after the exile.

These are but some of the anachronisms scholars have claimed exist in the Old Testament texts (cf. also Soggin 1993:61, 122 and passim). If this is true, not only realism pertaining to historicity is at stake but also with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh who is depicted as being a part of the details of those particular

contrived and superficial scenarios. As such, the deity is a character of fiction and therefore does not exist.

7.2.9 The argument from intrusive literary constructs

According to literary-critical analysis, most of the plot in the Old Testament is of such a nature as to discredit its implicit claims of being historically factual. Aesthetic considerations, literary strategies, poetic agendas and many other types of rhetorical manoeuvres suggest that the authors were more concerned with writing an artistic and entertaining story than bothering with what actually happened in empirical past reality.

Consider the following statement by Ramsey (1981:99) on the problem with reading Old Testament stories as history:

Frequently stories in the Old Testament have been utilised in various historical reconstructions without adequate consideration of the nature or intention of the stories. Usually it is assumed that the author was transmitting information about events that actually happened and little consideration is given to the possibility that the narrative is a fiction. The Joseph story (Gen 37, 39-50) is an account that has frequently been mined for historical details; for example, clues have been sought in this tale that can enable us to locate Joseph and his family chronologically. But a literary analysis of this tale reveals that it develops several popular folk motifs – ‘rags to riches’, the wise courtier, the spurned seductress, the success of the younger brother, the Israelite who makes good in a foreign land – seemingly with the intent of entertaining and not with the purpose of writing history.

This is all very well, but from a philosophical-critical perspective concerned with the ontological status of Yahweh, this argument against historicity is also implicitly part of the argument of historical fiction against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted. For if there never really was a Joseph who dreamt and went to Egypt and landed in jail and became second in command to the Pharaoh, what are we to make of all the references to Yahweh in that story?

What is the ontological status of the Yahweh who was with Joseph and who

engineered the whole trip to Egypt to save the people from the coming famine? If there was no Joseph who actually lived and acted in the way the story recounts, it follows that there was no Yahweh who was involved in the same way. If the character of Joseph is fictitious then so is the character Yahweh in that same story. No matter if there is some remote historical kernel that was later embellished with legendary detail. The concern here is with the detail of that story and if the detail is fictitious then, whatever god or gods there may be, so is the character of Yahweh who is part of and immersed in that detail.

The same goes for other stories like that of Abraham, Moses, David or Daniel. No matter if there really were historical persons by those names or not. Even if there were, it remains a fact that if the detail of the Old Testament story is legendary, and therefore fictitious, then if the character Yahweh is depicted as part of the detail of that story he himself must be a character of fiction (cf. Thompson 1998:304-306).

In all such and related instances, an argument against historicity based on literary-critical considerations is *ipso facto* an argument against the existence of Yahweh-as-depicted in the particular narrative (Carroll 1991:45). If this is the case and many of the supposedly historical narratives are actually aesthetically motivated literary constructions with a good deal of creative contrivance, the ontological implications should be clear. It is obvious that, in the context of literary fictions, the ontological status of the character Yahweh-as-depicted in those texts is also suspect with regard to its alleged one to one relation to extra-textual reality

A second peculiar feature of many Old Testament texts that were traditionally read as history is the ways in which certain sections of the discourse appear quite contrived, detailed, poetic or symbolical. Once this feature was brought to consciousness, much scepticism was evoked regard the historicity of such discourse (cf. also Soggin 1993:115).

Examples of seemingly constructive and contrived texts include:

- Songs in the narrative (e.g. Ex 15, Judg 5, 1 Sam 2, 2 Sam 22; Jon 2, etc.). Did actual historical characters actually sing, pray or spoke like this; and who wrote

down the exact words?;

- Long and intricate blessings of a dying leader (e.g. Gen 49; Deut 33; etc.);
- Various types of prophecies that were obviously *vaticinia ex eventu* (e.g. Gen 9:25-27; 15:13-16; 49:1-27; 1 Kgs 13:2; Isa 7:8b; Ezek 26, 29:17-20; etc.);
- Extremely detailed speeches in a context bereft of modern recording facilities (e.g. Ex 20-50; Leviticus; Deuteronomy; Job 3-41; etc.);
- Long prayers of individuals (e.g. 1 Kgs 8; Jon 2; Dan 9; Neh 9; etc.);
- The contrived and fictitious nature of biblical genealogies (e.g. Gen 4,5,10,11, Ex 6; Ruth 4; 1 Chron 1-10; etc.; cf. Wilson 1977);
- The obviously story like nature of the tales of people like Joseph, Jonah, Job, Daniel and Esther;
- Numerical symbolism involving the numbers 3,4,7,10,12,40 and multiples thereof, e.g., 70 nations, 7/ 3 years famine, 3 days cleansing, 7 days creation; 7 years famine, 7 major judges each fighting a different one of the 7 Canaanite nations, 7 times around Jericho, 10 plagues, 12 tribes, 40 years wilderness, 40 years reign of Moses, David and Solomon, 40 days without food, 40 days journey, 70 years in exile, 480 years in slavery, 4000 year history, etc.

Not only some parts of narratives seem contrived. Sometimes there seem to be something suspiciously constructivist about the *names* of the characters (cf. Weiser 1961:303; Harwood 1992:125). Consider the names of people like Abel (Vapour, Breath), Nabal (Fool), Job (Enemy), Machlon (Sickness), Chilion (Vanishing) Orpah (She who turns her back) Ruth (The companion), Esther and Mordechai (Isthar and Marduk), and others.

All of these seem to encompass the essence of the particular character's role in the

particular stories. Abel's life is but a mere breath, Jacob betrays people; Nabal was a fool, Job (or God) was some sort of "enemy", and so on. Are we really to believe that actual people got such names at birth and then inexorably lived out the destiny alluded to therein? Didn't they have any free will? Or could the presence of such names (and therefore characters) all be part of a literary construct that attempts to communicate elements of irony, tragedy and the popular ancient motif of destiny and fate?

Indeed, the correspondence between the names of the characters and their life-stories seems to give away the game and unmask the fact that one is either dealing with magical fate or otherwise with what is apparently not history. If this is the case and the names, and therefore also the stories, are merely literary creations with little relation to any historical extra-textual counterpart then it follows that the character Yahweh who is active in those stories must also be fictitious.

If there were not really an Abel, a Job, or a Ruth, what is the ontological status of the deity Yahweh who, according to the text, interacted with these characters of fiction? Surely, as thus depicted in relation to these non-existent people, Yahweh himself must be a character of fiction as well. As such he, like the people he mingles with, does not really exist.

There is a third important way in which artificiality in the discourse unmask the fictitious nature of alleged historical incidents in the text. The devil's advocate is here thinking about Yahweh speaking in the first person through the mouths of his servants, the prophets. Of course, Old Testament scholars have different opinions on how we are to understand the text when, in prophetic oracles, Yahweh himself is speaking.

- Conservatives may want to see such depictions as faithful and exact accounts of what a real God literally spoke audibly to his human servants who faithfully recorded exactly what Yahweh actually said.
- Less conservative scholars who nonetheless believe that the prophet did hear a voice and wrote down what it said may think of the deity's verbal communication

as a form of schizophrenia that, in ancient times, was interpreted as an inspired state of being.

- Other critical but nonetheless religious scholars might, in turn, believe that no God literally spoke to the prophet. Yet according to these liberal realists the particular man of God was no charlatan. He was convinced, given how he interpreted the political, social and religious scene, what Yahweh's will would be. He felt compelled to present his conviction as the word of the Lord.
- Finally, of course, there might be scholars who do not believe that Yahweh exists and therefore understand all claims of prophets speaking the word of Yahweh as nothing but the prophets' overactive imaginations combined with a repressed will-to-power.

According to the devil's advocate, the latter group may well be correct. Irrespective of what justification such anti-realist scholars might give in support of their views, there are several good reasons for thinking that the verbal communication on the part of Yahweh speaking to the prophets in the first person was nothing of the sort. Though it is true, as Lindblom (1963:17) and Barton (1986:03) remind us, we cannot penetrate behind the text to a supposed original experience of a particular prophet, there are a few things about the texts that give the game away, unmask it as fictitious and lead straight to anti-realism:

1. The first reason why one cannot take the prophetic oracles seriously as being the literal words of Yahweh concerns the history of the text itself. Whatever originally happened that led to the composition of an oracle where Yahweh speaks in the first person, the fact of the matter is that the oracle as it now features in its particular context is a product of the disciples of the prophets from later periods. For this reason, the situation that Yahweh seems to be addressing in a particular text was not the supposed original situation but one in which the later compilers and collectors of the oracles considered the words to be fitting. Thus, even if Yahweh literally spoke the words ascribed to him, as these now stand they feature in a context for which humans decided they were relevant and are therefore, in the

technical sense, indeed fiction. Words taken out of context and applied to a new scenario, whatever their truth-value, are technically not literally the words of Yahweh as the authors or redactors pretend it to be.

2. Second, the currently available words of Yahweh speaking in the first person does not even have the same content as when they were when first written down by the original authors (whoever that may have been). Textual criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism and even source criticism have demonstrated the presence of numerous alterations, adaptations, reinterpretations, emendations, interpolations and various other types of creative rewriting and editing of the particular oracles. Seen from this perspective, what Yahweh says in the first person is technically not the actual word of a deity spoken long ago. Rather it is technically the words put into his mouth by subsequent writers, editors, copyists and other scribes.

3. In the third instance, another indicator of the fictitiousness and artificiality of the prophetic oracles where Yahweh speaks in the first person is, as was noted in chapter 4, the all-too-human knowledge of Yahweh. Where the supposed *ipsissima verba* of Yahweh are found in the prophetic oracles, the deity's knowledge of the world, of history as well as his views on morality and a host of other issues never transcend the superstitions of his speech writers. When Yahweh refers to fictitious entities (e.g. Leviathan), fictitious locations (Sheol) or fictitious history (references to fictitious scenarios from the stories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and others) it gives the game away. The presence of such elements in Yahweh's speeches unmasks the fact that the particular discourse was not uttered by an actual and therefore knowledgeable deity. They are speeches constructed by humans who believed in the reality of these things. Of course, the fact that, as was shown in chapter 4, many things Yahweh predicted would happen did not occur does little to mitigate the artificiality of the divine speech and the deconstruction of realism that must inevitably follow. Moreover, if this is true about some of the prophecies, what guarantee do we have that *anything* whatsoever, even supposedly fulfilled prophecies (prediction or religious criticism) were literally the words of an actual deity?

4. Finally, a quite devastating issue for realism with regard to the texts pretending to give a verbatim report of the words of Yahweh can be found in the results of rhetorical criticism and literary criticism (poetry analysis). Many realists with literary sensitivity may marvel at the poetic quality of the composition of the oracles and point out poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, various sorts of parallelism, wordplay, structural repetitions, *inclusios*, metre and a variety of other poetic structures in the text. Curiously enough, however, they do not realise how the presence of these features is a dead give away of its artificiality (cf. Carroll 1996:43-49). The point is that in many passages in prophetic books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos and the others, we are dealing not with the report of an actual dialogue by the deity himself but with *poetry – i.e. a literary construct* (cf. Peterson 1987:32). *Nobody speaks spontaneously in poetry*. Are we really to believe that Yahweh's actual words to the prophet had all the elements of classical Hebrew poetic diction built in? Did Yahweh actually plan to speak so artificially as in the kind of monologues found only in texts and not in every day speech?

The fact that the words of Yahweh speaking in the first person are poetry, rather than the prosaic type of direct speech, gives the game away. It shows that what the texts present as the words of Yahweh to the people via the prophet were not literally a recording of an actual oracle of the deity. The hallmarks of exquisite Hebrew poetry betray the fact that the text is not a report of a real deity's verbal communication. These features in the text show that what we have here is the end product of someone sitting down and deliberately composing poetry. It is too unnatural, too artificial and too poetically complex to be an account what a real deity would actually have said to and through the prophet. The poetic quality of the text and the host of poetic techniques present within the rhetoric of the oracles thus unmask it as no more than literary constructs and rules out the possibility that it is actually a verbatim report of what Yahweh himself audibly spoke to the prophet.

Based on these four observations of the history, composition and poetic quality of the text, though we did not penetrate to the supposed original experience of the prophet, it was possible to establish that what is presented as the literal words of Yahweh is, in

fact, nothing of the sort.

Moreover, if this assessment by the devil's advocate is correct and the oracles of Yahweh speaking in the first person were, in fact, nothing of the sort but rather a literary construct, it follows that technically, Yahweh did not really say what the texts depict him as saying. If this is the case then anti-realism is vindicated and justified.

Yahweh-as-depicted in the text and his words are literary constructs that have no counterpart in extra-textual reality. They exist only in the text and in the minds of the author and his audience. Consequently, this would imply that Yahweh-as-depicted speaking in the first person in such prophetic oracles does not really exist.

7.2.10 The argument from etiological ideology

In a variety of critical approaches to the texts of the Old Testament, a certain hermeneutic of suspicion has intentionally or unintentionally exposed the all-too-human and all-too-ideological and propagandistic motives of the authors of certain allegedly "historical" texts (cf. Garbini 1988:12). In this regard, Yahweh is said to function as the stereotypical "god of the gaps". This occurs in the so-called *etiological* narratives where explanations are given in story form as to why things are the way they are or why certain things are (or ought) to be done in a certain manner (cf. Long 1968:03).

Consider the following examples:

- Where does the world come from? (cf. Gen 1:1ff)
- Why are there lights in the sky? (cf. Gen 1)
- Where do humans come from? (cf. Gen 1 and 2)
- Why must people rest on the Sabbath? (cf. Gen 2)
- Why must humans till the earth? (cf. Gen 2-3)
- Why must people cover themselves with clothes unlike animals? (cf. Gen 3)
- Where does the institution of marriage come from? (cf. Gen 2)
- Why must women be subjected to man? (cf. Gen 3)

- Why does the snake sail on the ground without legs? (cf. Gen 3)
- Why do women suffer in childbirth? (cf. Gen 3)
- Why do humans not live forever? (cf. Gen 3,6)
- Why is there a rainbow? (cf. Gen 9)
- Why is there seasonal change regulating harvest times? (cf. Gen 9)
- Why should the Canaanites be slaves of the Hebrews (cf. Gen 9)
- Why are there many different races and languages? (cf. Gen 11)
- Where does Israel come from? (cf. Gen 12-50)
- Where does Edom come from? (cf. Gen 16)
- Why is the region around the Dead Sea so barren? (cf. Gen 19)
- Where do Moab and Amon come from? (cf. Gen 19)
- How did sanctuaries like Beth El get their name? (cf. Gen 28)
- Why do the Israelites not eat the sciatic nerve? (cf. Gen 32)
- Why can Yahweh's people lay claim to Palestine? (cf. Gen-Josh)
- Why do the Hebrew people worship the deity called Yahweh? (cf. Ex 3; 6)
- Why do the Hebrew people observe certain laws? (cf. Ex-Deut)
- Why are there certain ruins and remnants of cultic objects scattered throughout the land of Canaan? (cf. Gen; Josh-Judg)
- Why are there natural disasters like famine, disease and drought? (cf. Gen-2 Kgs)
- Why was David considered to have been the greatest king ever? (cf. 1 Sam 16-1 Kgs 1)
- What is the origin of so many of the Hebrew Psalms? (cf. Psalms:passim)
- What is the origin of so many of the Hebrew proverbs? (cf. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)
- Why did Israel and Judah become separate kingdoms? (cf. 1 Kgs 11ff)
- Why were Yahweh's people subjected to foreign domination? (cf. Ex-2 Kgs)
- Why were the people taken into exile? (cf. Deut, Sam-Kgs)
- Why does Israel celebrate certain festivals? (cf. Ex-Deut; Esth)

If these stories are indeed etiological legend, they also involve a certain amount of fiction since the explanations are based on imagination and speculation and not on actual mundane historical facts. In other words, no god Yahweh literally and actually acted and spoke in the ways the etiological texts depict him as doing. The introduction

of the deity's character in these stories was motivated not by a genuine concern to record indisputable historical facts but to provide functional and legitimising ideological explanations of certain scenarios, customs, traditions and perceptions.

If this is the case then the character of Yahweh in etiological tales – whatever the purported truth value of the discourse may be – is necessarily fictitious since no extra-textual deity actually said and did what the Old Testament etiologies depict Yahweh as doing. In short, Yahweh as an "epiphenomenon" of etiological narrative does not really exist.

7.2.11 The argument from typological constructions

In historical-critical research – and especially in tradition criticism – there have been tendencies towards anti-realism pertaining to many scenarios in the text which seem not to present historical data but typological adaptations of earlier motifs, stories or traditions (cf. Fishbane 1989:07). For example, the following recurring themes have led to the belief that the scenarios depicted in the texts are literary constructs rather than historical reportage:

RECURRING MOTIF/SCENARIO/STORY	TEXTUAL REFERENCE
• The matriarch in danger	Gen 12; Gen 20; Gen 26
• The townspeople shows hostility to strangers	Gen 19; Judg 19
• The barren beloved wife motif	Gen 18,25,34; Judg 13; 1 Sam 1
• The younger son is favoured	Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David.
• Water from a rock	Ex 17; Num 20; Judg 16
• The cleaving of waters	Ex 14; Josh 3; 2 Kgs 3
• Dreams of the future	Gen 36-50; Judg 7; Dan 2-11
• The making of a covenant	Gen 9, 15, Ex 14, Josh 24
• A journey to the mountain of Yahweh	Ex 3; Ex 17-19; Kgs 19
• Typological portrayal of characters	Abraham/David; Moses/Elijah
• Israelites at foreign courts	Joseph, Daniel, Esther

It is often assumed or insinuated that these recurring motifs and scenarios hint at the presence of an ideological or theological construct incorporated for aesthetic, didactic, typological, legitimising or propagandistic purposes (cf. Thompson 1998:223). If this is the case, then the fact of recurring typologies or motifs constitutes another argument for historical fiction.

Moreover, since the character Yahweh is often depicted as being directly involved in the scenarios featured in such recurring types, it follows that if those stories are fictitious then so is the character Yahweh depicted as being an inextricable part of the scenarios therein. In other words, if the events in question are literary constructs and not factual accounts of what actually happened, Yahweh-as-depicted therein does not really exist.

7.2.12 The argument from the misinterpretation of natural and social phenomena

It might be thought that this is a very old and very positivistic argument that no longer holds much water even among critical scholars (cf. Barr 1980:131). Be that as it may, the indirect influence of this argument on later anti-realism in historical reconstructions, as well as the fact that it does indeed provide an example of relatively recent anti-realism in Old Testament theology, still justifies its presentation here.

In quite a few critical histories of Israel, one still finds that it is a common practice to rule out the historicity of events, or at least cast some doubt in this regard, if a particular text contains a primitive hermeneutic of natural or social phenomena (cf. Soggin 1993:47). Many studies on the history of Old Testament religion and on the development of Israel's religious ideas still entertain the possibility that much of what later came to be orthodox demythologised Yahwistic ideology actually originated in superstition appropriations of natural and sociological phenomena (cf. Hinson 1986:22).

In response to these claims, many apologists for historical realism often claimed that the Old Testament does not provide the reader with history but rather with "salvation history" (cf. Deist 1978:10-11). Of course, the concept of salvation history can be

variously understood. One way in which this concept is often utilised involves the claim that what the Old Testament provides us with when it comes to the acts of Yahweh is not something that could have been captured on video cameras. Rather, what really happened were straightforward natural events. In other words, Yahweh did not literally, empirically and verifiably appear and talked and acted. Rather, the introduction of Yahweh into the scenario is little more than the eye of faith adding the divine element for theological purposes. It is "*geschichte*" and not "*historie*" and sees secular and natural events as if there was some human like entity behind it all revealing himself and his will through it (cf. Holm & Bowker 1994:56).

Thus scholars like von Rad and Wright who placed great emphasis on the historicity of biblical events were adamant that, while the miraculous events featuring the acts of Yahweh in the Old Testament would not have been empirically verifiable, *something* did happen. A certain paradigmatic event would later lead the Israelites to reinterpret natural events through the "eyes of faith". Consequently, this enabled them to rewrite secular history in a form where Yahweh became a character in the story of what supposedly did happen if one could see things from the divine perspective (cf. Deist 1978:09).

These bold claims are, however, extremely problematic from the anti-realist point of view. How did Israel know, and how can we know, that what is called "salvation history" or a "theological interpretation" of history or the "eye of faith" is not merely an imaginative projection of something that is not really so? Moreover, the stories themselves show no indication that what the text provides us with is the version of history from the eye of faith. When the text tells of Yahweh's acts, it actually does depict these as something that would have been empirically verifiable if only the people had a video camera at their disposal (cf. Clines 1995:95).

From the anti-realist point of view, however, not only is the legitimacy and factuality of "salvation" or "theological" history in doubt. To be sure, the historicity of even the merely secular events and natural occurrences has itself become doubtful for all the various reasons mentioned in this chapter. Nevertheless, let us grant that the Old Testament might not be fiction. Let us accept the claim that something historical did actually happen which was simply natural but that, from a later perspective of faith,

the introduction of Yahweh into the story may have been valid.

One major problem with this theory, and one which has great potential to evoke scepticism regarding the credibility of theological history, is the fact that so many of the so-called “acts of God” appear to be fanciful *misinterpretations* of all-too-mundane realities and all-too-natural phenomena. In most cases, people today will have a hard time believing in the following religious assumptions underlying the Old Testament's "salvation history" (cf. Gillooly 1992:01).

- The cosmos as a realm managed as a divine monarchy from the Iron Age (cf. Gen 1-11 and passim);
- Natural processes as divine manifestations (volcanoes, thunder, lightning, eclipses, comets, meteorites, etc., cf. Exodus 15,19; 1 Kgs 17-19; and passim);
- Natural disasters or abundant harvests as divine providence (droughts, rain, earthquakes, floods, etc., cf. Samuel-Kings; the Prophets and passim);
- Psychological processes as modes of divine communication (prophecy, dreams, etc.);
- Psychological actions as caused by spirit entities (cf. 1 Sam 16ff, Psalms, etc.);
- Socio-political developments as resulting from sovereign divine providence (cf. Ex 1-12; Isa 11; and OT passim);
- Cultural institutions as divinely ordained structures (cf. Exodus-Deuteronomy; Proverbs and passim).

Unless one is willing to interpret the same natural, psychological and socio-political phenomena in the same way today any criticism involving socio-genetic fallacies like ascribing the scepticism to liberal anti-supernaturalism or Enlightenment positivism and socialisation/secularism are hypocritical and simply invalid. Even the distinctions

between theological or salvation history vs. secular history, or the eye of faith vs. spiritual blindness, cannot be evoked here in an attempt to salvage the supposed credibility of the Old Testament's primitive hermeneutics of natural, social and psychic phenomena.

One contemporary scholar who in his theology of the Old Testament expressed the need to bracket all ontological questions related to these issues is Brueggemann (1997:35). Despite this intention, attention to ontological queries pertaining to, amongst other things, the concept of salvation history, did manage to surface as the following quotation reveals:

While the notion that God acts in history made an appealing program, the category of history continued to vex this approach. Since the rise of historical criticism, biblical scholarship has been troubled by the seeming incapacity to leap across Gotthold Lessing's 'ugly ditch' that separates the historical from the theological. Some have attempted to make the connection by speaking of secular history and salvation history, or by contrasting 'historical minimum' and 'theological maximum', but the problem persists. For example, in Exodus 15:21, perhaps one of Israel's oldest poems, Miriam and the other women sing, 'horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.' As a theological articulation, this lyrical statement is clear enough. But what could it mean historically? Does the statement mean that the Israelite women saw Yahweh in the water pushing Egyptian soldiers off their horses? If not, then what?

Alternatively, a similar and related remark, this time pertaining to what supposedly happened when prophets claimed that the word of Yahweh came to them, can be found in Barr (1999:475):

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

Barr (1999:475-476) then goes on to speculate about the way such revelation might be understood:

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

As suggested in many a previous discussion, at least with regard to the present final form of the text, there are good reasons for supposing that what we have with Yahweh speaking in the first person is not literally a report of what the deity himself actually said. Instead, for the reasons given (adaptation, decontextualisation and modification by tradition; Yahweh's all-too-human knowledge; the form being poetry suggesting premeditated literary construction rather than verbatim reportage, etc.), it is obvious the such discourse are merely the words put into the mouth of Yahweh by his speechwriters.

Suppose then that this anti-realist interpretation is correct and that Yahweh did not *really* speak to the prophet in the sense one normally thinks of verbal communication. Instead, the prophet's claim that the word of Yahweh came to him, or his declaration, "Thus says Yahweh..." technically and literally means, "I'm sure that this is what my god Yahweh as I imagine him to be might want the people to know." But if this is the case, what justification is there for the claim that such and so is indeed Yahweh's views on a particular matter? Even worse, how can one be sure that Yahweh actually exists outside the imaginations of the prophets and apart from being a character in the text containing the prophet's words? Surely it makes a huge difference when people are giving their own opinion on the will of a deity and for which there is ultimately little verification as opposed to Yahweh actually and literally speaking to a person (cf. also Jer 23; Ezek 14; cf. also Barr 1966:77-81).

Realists (conservatives) and semi-realists (liberals), of course, have all sorts of ways of avoiding this dilemma. If they do not fideistically hold on to the factuality of some kernel of actual history and maintain that the theological interpretation of it was valid despite the ambiguity, the next favourite tactic is to do all they can to discourage such troubling questions (cf. Barr 1999:124). How often have students heard these theories of historical-critical analysis and the concept of salvation history only to ask:

- What, if anything, did actually happen?
- How do we know that it is true if it is history through the eyes of faith?
- What makes theological history different from legendary embellishments in other primitive cultures, none of whose “theological history” of their deities' acts anyone today will take seriously?
- Why should there be a double standard for evaluating the credibility of Israelite vs. ancient Near Eastern historiography?

In addition, most scholars will be aware of the fact of how many times such questions are dismissed and labelled as the product of unpopular epistemological ideologies such as positivism or naïve-realism (cf. Barr 1999:127). How often are students criticised for asking ontological questions from the perspective of the ideology of scholars who demand that all ontological problems be bracketed? How often has it been suggested that all that is needed to make the problem disappear is a second naiveté?

In the end, anyone who reads the Old Testament texts featuring the so-called "acts of God" cannot help wondering, even if only for a second, whether all these stories are nothing more than imaginative projection. From a modern critical perspective, such scenarios certainly do seem to appear as the product of a people with a primitive hermeneutic of reality and a great propensity for anthropomorphic, sociomorphic and psychomorphic projection in their understanding of ordinary albeit significant natural, social and psychical processes (cf. Eichrodt 1967:20).

Whether or not there was an historical core to the ambiguous acts of Yahweh in the form of natural phenomena (i.e. an earthquake, a thunderstorm, a drought, a wind, etc.), socio-political processes (peace, war, etc.) or psychological experiences (a dream, a vision, a voice, a premonition, intuitive ideas, etc.), one has to wonder how the theological interpretations could ever be justified (cf. also Holladay 1995:6-7). On what criteria does one distinguish between faith and credulity/superstition? How can the modern-day interpreter ever be sure that the god Yahweh actually exists and really did act? What rules out the possibility that Yahweh's acts are, in fact, little more than superstitious misinterpretations of all-too-natural events – no matter how rare, spectacular, determinative, paradigmatic and extraordinary they were?

If the theological maximum is the result of fallacious reasoning from a historical minimum then, for many scholars, it would seem obvious that Yahweh is no more than a figment of the creative human imagination. He seems to be no more real than the other personifications of natural, social and psychical phenomena that one so frequently encounters in the religious discourse of other ancient Near Eastern peoples (cf. Holladay 1995:17). As such, Yahweh did not really act in history for one simple reason – he does not exist.

7.2.13 The argument from retrojective ideological projections

Another aspect of the Old Testament texts that has made scholars suspicious about the historicity of particular stories or discourse is what appears to be the projection of later beliefs onto earlier times for ideological purposes. In other words, history was “created” in order to justify or contextualise later beliefs, rituals and socio-political scenarios (cf. Barr 2000:02).

Examples that one can provide in this regard are virtually infinite if one condones the recent revisionary perspectives of scholars who date most of the books of the Old Testament to the Persian and Greek periods of Jewish history (cf. Van Seters 1993, Thompson 1998). Some of the less controversial examples of alleged ideological retrojection in the Old Testament that many scholars would admit to, even if they do not subscribe to the conclusions of the revisionists, include the following:

- The Patriarchal narratives are mostly legends and filled with fictitious elements. There may have been traditions about the particular individuals but they were not related to each other and did not do what the texts depict them as doing. The stories were created to legitimise later religious and political ideology.
- The sacrifices of Leviticus were not given by God through Moses at mount Sinai but were adopted and adapted from Israel's Canaanite neighbours.
- The majority of the case law ascribed to Moses in Deuteronomy was actually derived from the later monarchical or even post-exilic periods as it contains legislation only of relevance and with reference to actual scenario of the later historical context.
- The whole concept of the "covenant" is absent from the early literature and was first utilised in its popular sense no earlier than the Deuteronomistic ideology of the seventh century BC.
- The Deuteronomistic law of a centralised sanctuary is a late institution as can be ascertained from the fact that the books of Samuel-Kings know nothing about it.
- The stories of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua are actually the product of exilic and post-exilic politico-religious ideology.
- The socio-political and ethnic situation of the Monarchic, Persian and Greek periods are frequently projected retrojectively onto the times of the Patriarchs and pre-deluvian humanity in Genesis.
- The supposed Mosaic origins of liturgical practices and cultic features which the Chronicler projects back unto the Davidic monarchy to legitimise its later incorporation into post-exilic Judaism are all fictitious ideological retrojections.
- Various religious beliefs that were adopted during the exile or in the post-exilic period are presented as though they were part of pre-exilic Yahwism, i.e.

monotheism, belief in angels, beatific afterlife, Satan, etc.

Contrary to what many scholars who do not except these views believe, the claims made here are not simply the result of biased anti-supernaturalism, post-modernism, positivism or nihilism (cf. Soggin 1993:96). They represent the final conclusions of years of painstaking research based on a close reading of the texts themselves. The research did not set out to prove the various scenarios as being fictitious. The anti-realist perspective is a *conclusion* prompted by taking the details of the text seriously and noticing many small problems that the majority of the readers of the texts never even realise exist (cf. Barr 1981:31).

Some scholars at certain times may indeed have had hidden agendas or unspoken assumptions and motivations but, in the end, what determines whether a theory is accepted is whether the arguments are convincing rather than which ideologies the researcher ascribes to. One cannot dismiss or endorse certain results of research merely on the basis of psycho-genetic or socio-genetic stereotyping. Even if the scholar in question subscribes to different epistemological, hermeneutical or theological ideologies than oneself, there is the need to judge arguments on merit rather than on authorship. This should be the case irrespective of whether a scholar happens to be conservative or critical or whatever else he or she can possibly be.

For the purpose of this study and its concern with the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the texts, it will not do to merely take cognisance of the results of critical historical reconstructions regarding alleged ideological retrojections in the biblical discourse. What needs to be done is to ascertain what the implications the collapse of historical realism on these grounds might have for realism regarding the ontological status of the character Yahweh portrayed in such fictitious history.

Take, for example the second issue – that of the origin of the sacrificial system presented in the Old Testament texts. According to Rogerson (1983:71), though all ancient religions featured the rites of sacrifice, what makes the Israelite version unique was the story in the context in which it was set. The whole system is presented in the Old Testament as having been instituted by God on Mount Sinai after the Exodus. Rogerson (1983:71) continues his discussion by suggesting that the fact that

modern scholarship has shown that many elements of sacrifice were probably taken over from Israel's neighbours is not relevant to his present discussion.

Since Rogers was interested in historical and social issues, this latter matter – the fact that the sacrifices were largely adoptions and adaptations of pagan rites – can be conveniently set aside. But the philosophical critic in the form of the devil's advocate considers this small datum to be quite revealing. For let us suppose that the findings of critical scholarship regarding the origin of Israelite sacrificial rites are correct – what does this tell us with regard to the ontological status of Yahweh-as-depicted in the text?

According to the devil's advocate, whether the scholars who discovered the foreign origin of Hebrew sacrifices were aware of it or not, they have indirectly and inadvertently vindicated anti-realism. For if their account of the history of sacrifice is true and the sacrificial rites did not really originate from a supposed theophany at Sinai, the following line of ontological reasoning reveals the anti-realist ontological implications of such findings:

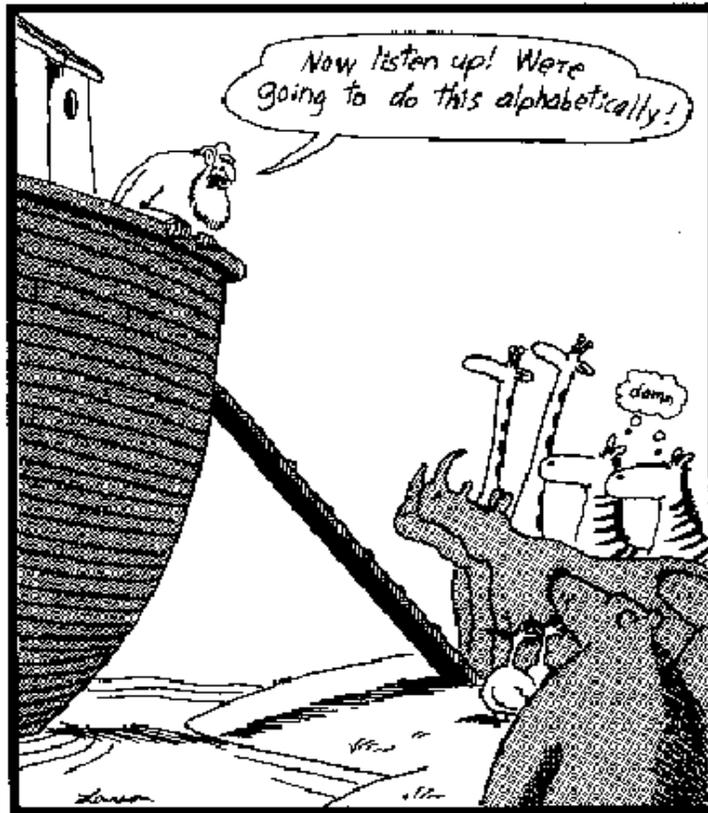
1. The sacrifices were adopted and adapted from pagan religions.
2. Therefore, they were not instituted by Moses after the Exodus.
3. Therefore, they were not provided or revealed by Yahweh at Sinai.
4. Therefore, Yahweh-depicted-as-instituting-the-sacrificial-system is a character of fiction.
5. Therefore Yahweh as thus depicted does not exist.

It is as simple as that. If scholarship in any way insinuates that any element in Israelite law and religion was not derived from Moses or anyone else as the texts depict, they are implying that the textual scenarios that depict such origins are fictitious. Irrespective of whatever was convention at the time and regardless of the fact whether it was right or wrong to pretend that something did actually happen to justify and

contextualise ideology, if what is depicted in the text never happened as described it is technically speaking fictitious, period.

This means that if Yahweh is depicted or implied as being involved in related scenarios in any way, (e.g. in terms of theophany, verbal communication, prophetic mediation of the divine will, etc.), it follows that no god Yahweh really did what the texts imply that he did. If this is the case then Yahweh depicted as doing what the texts depict him as doing is a character of fiction. In short, merely by showing that certain events in the texts are ideological and literary constructs and did not actually happen, if these events involve the deity Yahweh, it is possible to show that Yahweh as thus depicted does not really exist

7.2.14 The argument from scientific absurdities



From an anti-realist point of view, there are many texts – especially those pertaining to divine intervention and miracles – that contain stories that are unacceptable as

history. In such instances, the scenarios depicted contain such fantastic and incredible happenings that it seems to be obvious that such are the products of creative pre-scientific imagination rather than of sober historical reportage (cf. Rogerson 1976:02; Kaye & Rogerson 1978:3-4).

One nineteenth century scholar who meticulously noted many of the scientific absurdities in the text was John Colenso. In parts 1 and 4 of his critical examination of the Pentateuch and the book Joshua, Colenso (1862) and (1863c) pointed out elements in the text that can be considered as totally unbelievable.

In discussing the Flood, Colenso made a devastating attack on realism with regard to the biblical account (cf. Colenso 1863c:176-210). He pictures how the ark was inhabited: with snails and animals as well as insects and birds. He estimates how much meat there must have been to satisfy all the carnivores for over a year, in addition to the animals of prey, which had to be preserved. He imagines the drudgery of the daily routine of Noah and his family feeding all these animals, birds and other creatures, renewing their litter and disposing of their excrement.

Colenso also wondered how some insects got on since many normally do not live in pairs (e.g. bees) whilst some cannot even be classed as male and female. He ponders difficulties of temperature management since what some animals require to live are either fatally hot or cold by the standards of others. Surely it must have been very cold on the 17 700 feet high Ararat on the high seas (Colenso 1863c:177). Colenso also pondered how the animals on leaving the ark somewhere in the Middle East would be able to make their way back home to where they are found today. How did the wingless dodo reach the island of Mauritius or the wingless apteryx New Zealand? Did the kangaroo jump across the oceans to Australia? (cf. Colenso 1863c:178)

The grounding of the ark on Mount Ararat raised the difficulty that Everest and other mountains in the Himalayas are much higher than 17 000 feet; yet the account says (Gen 7:19) that all the high mountains were covered. This raised, in turn, the question whether the flood was a universal deluge or only a partial one. Here Colenso was able to expose the arguments of conservative writers who tried to retain the realist view of the narrative by supposing only a partial inundation. Unfortunately, this was against

the plain sense of the text, which explicitly asserted that the flood was universal. However, arguments from geology also figured, such as the claim by Lyell that there was no evidence for a universal flood (cf. Colenso 1863c:198)

At another point in his study Colenso also dealt with the creation account in Genesis 1 in which he also gave examples of orthodox writers who maintained realism with regard to the narrative only by taking liberties with the text (cf. Colenso 1863c:102). Some assumed the days of creation were long epoch, others that long intervals supervened between the days. There was the problem that the sun, moon and stars were not created until the fourth day, so that the earth must have existed without a solar system and galaxy.

A conservative apologist answer to this, again, according to Colenso, ignoring the obvious and plain meaning of the text, was that on the fourth day God did not create the sun and moon but simply caused them to become visible. Some orthodox supporters of this view even went so far as to claim that, for a long period, the earth and its vegetation were not dependent on the sun for light and heat and that scientific discoveries supposedly proved that, at this time, the earth had enjoyed a uniform temperature over its entire surface (cf. Colenso 1863c:102).

If Colenso demonstrated the absurdities of the attempts to defend the literal authenticity of Genesis 1, as a typical liberal semi-realist he still held the account to be inspired and “true”. According to him and other liberals to this day, the text was never intended to provide a literal account of how the world was created. According to this view, despite 90% of the discourse answering to precisely the question of how God created the world, the text actually only intends to expound the principles that God was the creator, that man was in the image of God and that creation was good.

Thus, like all liberals, Colenso can be sober in invalidating conservative literalism. Nevertheless, his own attempt (and that of others) to salvage realism by claiming that the text was never intended to answer historical or scientific questions is pitiful. The liberal belief that the biblical author merely wanted to communicate a minimalist metaphorical theological profundity ultimately has no more support from the text than the reinterpretation by fundamentalist creationists.

When it comes to scientific absurdities in the Old Testament, not only the creation and the flood accounts qualify to be classified as such. Many Old Testament interpreters have noted several other instances of depictions that stretch beyond the limits of rational credulity:

- A universe no older than 6000 years (cf. 1 Chron 1-10);
- A snake talks to people (cf. Gen 3);
- The ages of the pre-deluvians (e.g. Adam was 930 years old; Methuselah was 969; etc.) and some post-deluvians (Terah was 205; Abraham 175; Sarah 127; Ishmael 137; Isaac 180 years; Jacob was 147 years; Levi 137; Kohath 133; Amram 137; Moses 120; Aaron 123; Job 210; [cf. also the living Mordechai as 118 with Esther as *cousin* who like Sarah of old must have been over 90 when adopted into the king's harem!] vs. more realistically, 70 or 80 (cf. especially 2 Sam 19:35; Ps 90:10);
- The people built a tower that almost reached the stars and gave the deity in heaven quite a fright (cf. Gen 11);
- Jacob is able to change the DNA and gene structure of his cattle by putting different types of branches in their drinking water (cf. Gen 30);
- A family of seventy people multiplies to over two million in the course of only four to six generations (cf. Gen 47-Ex 12);
- The Israelites watch as a wind blows on the sea with such force that it forms two walls of water without the people themselves being blown away whilst walking through the gusts (cf. Ex 14);
- Over two million people with their livestock managed to wander around the Sinai desert and live off the land for forty years (cf. Exodus – Numbers);

- Moses, at age 80, goes without food or water on mount Sinai for 80 (120?) days (cf. Deut 9:9,18);
- Balaam engages in conversation with his donkey (cf. Num 22);
- Joshua commands the and moon sun to stand still (cf. Josh 10);
- Samson, on his own, caught 300 foxes and tied their tails together; killed a 1000 men with the jawbone of an ass in single combat; and carried two city gates up a mountain 64 km away from where he tore them out of the city walls;
- The prophet Elijah feeds himself and a widow with a bottomless jar (cf. 1 Kgs 20);
- The shadow of the sundial of Ahaz moves ten steps backwards (cf. 2 Kgs 20; Isa 38);
- The prophet Jonah is swallowed by a fish, spends some time inside it and is neatly albeit grossly deposited on land (cf. Jon 1-2);
- Three people survive being thrown into a blazing furnace so hot it killed even those who shoved them inside (cf. Dan 3).

These are only a few of the many, many scenarios in the text which some believe go beyond the limits of credibility. If this objection to the historicity of such apparently absurd and incredible scenarios is accepted, it follows that they are fiction. This implies, of course, that Yahweh-as-depicted as a character in such fictions is himself a character of fiction. Ergo, he does not really exist.

7.2.15 The argument from historical errors

Virtually all of the above arguments also imply the presence of historical errors in the text. However, one might present this matter as a separate and additional category in the arguments against historicity in order to focus exclusively on matters of historiographical correctness. In order to avoid repeating the previous arguments here,

the devil's advocate has decided to use the book of Daniel as an example of historical errors in an Old Testament text.

Traditionally the book of Daniel was interpreted as a historically factual account of a prophet called Daniel who lived during the period of the exile at the royal court in Babylon. Many Christian interpreters also claimed that much of the book correctly predicts various events up to, including and after the time of Jesus (cf. Archer 1992:129). However, as Weiser (1961:271-272) notes, since the days of the Early Church there were already suspicions that the book might actually have been written in the second century BC for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- Though the book is prophetic it is also apocalyptic and this genre of writing only emerged within Judaism in the late post-exilic period;
- The prophecies in the book become more detailed and more accurate as they pertain to the second century BC and thereafter become vague and incorrect;
- Despite the fact that the genre of the book is prophecy it became part of the “writings” in the Tanach rather than being incorporated into the prophetic corpus;
- The other post-exilic books such as Ezra and Nehemiah know nothing of a prophet called Daniel;
- In the early apocrypha, e.g. Ben Sirach's list of praiseworthy forefathers, the figure of Daniel is not even mentioned and only turns up in the Sibylline Oracles III 338 (about 140 BC) and in 1 Maccabees 2:59 (about 100 BC);
- The book includes references to angels and to the belief in an eschatological resurrection after death, the sort of which only appeared in Jewish belief in the post-exilic Persian and Hellenistic periods;
- As was common convention in this later period, the name of Yahweh is not mentioned in the book and reference to the divine is usually to the God of Heaven

- A large part of the book is written in Aramaic, the later post-exilic language of the Jews;
- The Hebrew of the book is late and exhibits linguistic influences from the languages of Persia and Greece;
- The figure of Daniel is probably derived from the Canaanite legend of a hero of ancient times called Danel (cf. Ezek 14:14,20; 28:3);
- The book contains numerous historical inaccuracies for the periods other than that part of the second century in which the real author actually lived.

Whether these assessments and justification of a second century date for the book are correct are, for present purposes, of secondary relevance. Of primary concern is the allegation that the book contains historical errors and, for the devil's advocate's case, what these might imply for the ontological status of the deity as depicted in the text of Daniel.

In this regard, the following errors are noted by Weiser (1961:272-273):

- The book dates the siege of Jerusalem to the third year of Jehoachim (cf. Dan 1:1). No such siege took place and this data contradicts the correct data of 2 Kings which places it in the eleventh year of the king's reign;
- From an assessment of the Babylonian court histories, it is clear that there was no Jew called Daniel who advised the Babylonian kings as depicted in the texts of the biblical book;
- Belshazzar was not, as the text claims, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar. He was the son of the last king of Babylon, Nabonides and never even became a king;

- There never was a “Darius the Mede” who was the successor of Belshazzar, son of Xerxes and predecessor of Cyrus. The historical sequence of the Persian kings was instead Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, Xerxes.

It is not only the book of Daniel that contains historical errors of this type. Though historical errors can be found in virtually every book of the Old Testament, another good example of the same problems as encountered with Daniel is to be found with regard to the book Esther. As was the case with Daniel, this book, despite the absence of any reference to Yahweh (though his existence is certainly assumed and taken for granted) is also held to be a work of fiction. According to Weiser (1961:311), this was concluded not only because of e.g.:

- The absurd implied age of Mordechai (who, as part of the exiles with Johaiachin in 597 BC must have been 120; yet Esther, the beauty queen is alleged to be his *cousin* (sic));
- The remains of mythological motifs, e.g. Esther/Mordechai = Ishtar/Marduk;
- The obvious fact that book is an etiological legend for the Purim festival;
- The outrageous amount of casualties among the Persians in the war against the Jews, i.e. 75 000 in one day;
- The omniscient narrator who knows what all the characters, both protagonists (Esther and Mordechai) and the antagonists (Hamman and his family) say, do and think in secret.

In addition, Weiser (1961:312) notes the presence of several other glaring historical errors in the text that contributed to the denial of its historicity, e.g.:

- There never was a Jewish Persian princess called Esther;
- The wife of Xerxes was neither Vashti nor Esther but Amestris;

- Persia was not at that time divided into 127 provinces; only 27.

When it comes to the Old Testament as a whole, the other arguments against historicity presented in this chapter also show indirectly that historical errors are, for various reasons, quite common in the text. When it comes to the question regarding the ontological status of the deity as depicted in texts filled with historical errors, the anti-realist implications should be clear:

- 1 There was no Daniel at the royal court of Babylon as depicted in the text.
- 2 This means that the scenarios in the text did not happen as depicted.
- 3 This means that the dreams, miracles, visions and visitations did not occur as depicted.
- 4 This means that the particular representation of the deity who did the miracles and sent the angels and visions in the way the text depicts is fictitious.
- 5 This means that the deity-as-depicted is a character of fiction.
- 6 Ergo, the deity – as depicted – does not really exist.

7.3 CONCLUSION

If these arguments against historicity are taken as valid and the Old Testament texts do not correctly refer to anything that actually happened in the *past in the way that the texts depict it to have been*, the following argument may be reconstructed with regard to the anti-realist ontological implications of fictitious history:

1. Many Old Testament texts were intended to provide data of what supposedly actually happened in the past in the world outside the text. Nevertheless, there are many good objections against realism with regard to the historicity of the textual depictions.

2. Therefore, the events depicted in the Old Testament texts involving Yahweh directly or indirectly did not actually happen exactly as described.
3. Therefore Yahweh never really appeared, acted and spoke in the way the texts depict Him as doing in the actual extra-textual past.
4. Therefore, the Yahweh who did appear, act and speak is a character of fiction whose intervention only occurred in the world of the text.
5. Therefore, Yahweh-as-thus-depicted in the Old Testament does not really exist.

The argument from fictitious history is the sixth argument against the existence of Yahweh and is thought to justify anti-realism in Old Testament theology. However, since the devil's advocate's case *in toto* constitutes a cumulative argument, the present argument (and its subarguments) should not be viewed in isolation. Its credibility and strength are enhanced by the fact that it stands juxtaposed to the various other arguments in the case against realism.