The quest for a philosophical YHWH¹ (Part 1):
Old Testament studies and philosophy of religion²

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ABSTRACT

In Old Testament studies, philosophy of religion is seldom if ever utilised in research on ancient Israelite religion. No independent and officially recognised interpretative approach currently exists that allows biblical scholars to concern themselves solely with a philosophical analysis of the religious beliefs of ancient Yahwism(s). In this article, the first in a series of three, the author acknowledges this gap in the research and seeks to pioneer the utilisation of ‘philosophy of religion’ as an auxiliary discipline in biblical interpretation. Following in-depth discussions on related historical, meta-philosophical, heuristic and hermeneutical issues, the author proposes the establishment of a new approach to the text called ‘philosophical-critical analysis’. This will at last make it possible for biblical scholars to engage in philosophy of religion both on the level of exegesis (via ‘philosophical criticism’) and on a larger scale (via ‘philosophy of Old Testament religion’).³

A INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary research in Old Testament studies is nothing novel. Old Testament specialists can, if they choose, become linguists, historians, theologians, literary

¹ By this fanciful if not controversial and provocative title I simply exploit the popularity of the ‘quest’-phraseology (e.g in The quest for the historical Israel [Ramsey 1982]; The quest of the historical Jesus [Schweitzer 2000]; The quest for the philosophical Jesus [MacCarthy 1986]; etc). Notwithstanding any associative meanings superimposed on this title by the reader, in speaking of ‘the quest for a philosophical YHWH’, all I am referring to is the attempt to utilise philosophy of religion as auxiliary discipline in Old Testament studies. I am not, as might be thought if misunderstood, trying to initiate a ‘quest’ to uncover any supposed real entity called YHWH in a way that is based on essentialist and positivist assumptions. In other words, the title is explained by the subtitle and is merely a colourful reference to the proposed methodological innovations, and not to any attempt on my part to embark on a quest to reconstruct a normative philosophical theology.

² This article was written as part of a post-doctoral fellowship in the Faculty of Theology’s Department of Old Testament Science at the University of Pretoria.

³ Please note that this article (Part 1) is only a general introduction to the methodological innovations I intend to pioneer. More attention to the specifics of the actual practice involved in the new approaches will follow in the next two articles (Parts 2 and 3 in this series). Also note that if the reader finds not enough critical discussion with other scholars working on combining Old Testament studies and philosophy of religion it is because there are none. That is the reason for writing this article in the first place.
critics, archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers. In terms of exegetical approaches alone, the Old Testament scholar can choose to utilise a multitude of approaches to the text, including textual criticism, historical criticism, source criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism, narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, social-scientific criticism, sociological criticism, structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, ideological criticism, feminist criticism, canonical criticism, theological criticism, psychological criticism, postmodern criticism, deconstructionist criticism, et cetera (cf Soulen & Soulen 2001:127-128). As for larger-scale approaches to Old Testament religion, one can opt for, besides others, history of Israel, history of Israelite religion, comparative ancient Near Eastern studies, sociology of Israelite religion, psychological perspectives on the Old Testament, phenomenology of religion, anthropological perspectives on the Old Testament, et cetera. Then, of course, there are also other large-scale and higher-order disciplines that are part of biblical studies, including Old Testament theology, Old Testament ethics, Old Testament hermeneutics, biblical archaeology, canon history, et cetera (cf Soulen & Soulen 2001:129).

From this survey, one would think that Old Testament scholars have made use of just about each and every possible auxiliary discipline of relevance available and have created just about every possible kind of interdisciplinary interpretative approach that can be of any use in the study of the Old Testament. Curiously, however, this is not the case. For there is one discipline, which, given the fact that it concerns itself wholly with the phenomenon of religion, one would think will probably have been incorporated as auxiliary subject in biblical studies. Yet for some reason, Old Testament scholars seem to ignore this discipline and shy away from the perspectives and problems it might bring to bear on reading the Old Testament critically. The discipline I am talking about is, of course, philosophy of religion.4

In this regard we need no reminder that the subject of philosophy (in general), and the discipline that is philosophy of religion (in particular) are seldom a matter of concern when interpretative approaches to the Old Testament texts and the religion of ancient Israel are discussed (cf Barr 1999:36; 2000:27). To realise the plain truth of this claim, all one needs to do is to take cognisance of the fact that no dictionary of biblical interpretation features an exegetical approach called ‘philosophical-criticism’ as an official, independent and universally recognised form of exegesis and a distinguished member of the extended family of biblical criticism. Neither is there operative, among larger scale disciplines (e.g., ‘history of Israelite religion’ and ‘sociology of Israelite religion’), a discipline called ‘philosophy of Israeliite religion’? (cf Gericke 2003:19).

4 This article represents a continuation of some thoughts in my PhD dissertation, ‘Does Yahweh exist? A philosophical-critical reconstruction of the case against realism in Old Testament theology’ (cf Gericke 2003:12-35) and in the subsequent article in OTE 17/1 of 2004 under the same title. It builds on the genre of philosophical-critical perspectives on Old Testament religion also found in subsequent articles (e.g cf Gericke 2005a; 2005b; 2005c).
With these observations I do not mean to imply that Old Testament scholarship ignores philosophy altogether. On the contrary, from time immemorial Old Testament specialists have – wittingly or unwittingly – allowed developments in philosophical disciplines (epistemology, hermeneutics, ethics, philosophy of history, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, etc) to influence the ways in which they go about their business. In addition, it is even arguably the case that, while many who study the history of Old Testament interpretation would have us believe that first history and later sociology and literary studies became our best ally following the Enlightenment, this stereotyped scheme conveniently ignores the fact that the turn first to history and subsequently to the social and literary sciences was itself ultimately motivated by prior developments in philosophy.

After all, was it not hermeneutical and epistemological theories constructed in modernist and post-modernist philosophical contexts that made certain exegetical approaches seem more attractive than others in the first place? Is the legacy of the philosophical origins of our interpretative approaches not visible in the remnants of philosophical jargon that lies scattered throughout the works of biblical scholars? Who, among the well-read Old Testament specialists has not encountered, at some stage, philosophical terminology and words like ‘rationalism’, ‘positivism’, ‘idealism’, ‘historicism’, ‘romanticism’, ‘Marxism’, ‘nihilism’, ‘structuralism’, ‘deconstruction’, ‘feminism’ or ‘post-modernism’? Who, among those who know the history of Old Testament interpretation – and are familiar with recent trends in biblical scholarship – have not stumbled upon the names of philosophers like Spinoza, Descartes, Hegel, Kant, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Kuhn, Foucault or Derrida? (cf also Le Roux 1993:41).

Yet despite this influence and role that philosophy has played (and continues to play) behind the scenes in biblical scholarship, something is awry. For despite the fact that many Old Testament specialists do become philosophical when they have recourse to hermeneutics, post-modern epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, et cetera, it seems rather odd that academics whose first business is the study of religious texts containing religious discourse expressing religious beliefs? And if this is true, then surely the first philosophical discipline that comes to mind as a potential dialogue partner in the study of a particular religion would obviously be philosophy of religion! (Gericke 2003:16).

To be sure, some biblical theologians in particular have been known to concern themselves with issues that also concern philosophers of religion (e.g., the concept of revelation, the nature of God, theodicy, etc). But this is coincidental, given the fact that theology and philosophy of religion have many issues of interest in common. Such overlapping topics have, moreover, only been approached from a theological as opposed to a philosophical perspective. That this is the case can be verified by the simple observation that Old Testament scholars would rather die than discuss – as part
of their research – the kind of questions a philosopher of religion would ask, for example: ‘What arguments can be constructed for or against the existence of YHWH?’; ‘Can the claims of having witnessed actual divine revelation in the Old Testament be verified or falsified?’; ‘Do YHWH’s alleged attributes give rise to any logical problems?’, et cetera (cf Gericke 2003:15).

In other words, it is arguably the case that many Old Testament scholars, while still favourably disposed to the kind of questions philosophical disciplines like hermeneutics, philosophy of science and philosophy of language would generate in the context of biblical studies, will follow just about every strategy of evasion possible to avoid having to deal with the kind of issues that are of concern in philosophy of religion. Some Old Testament scholars might even have convinced themselves that to ask philosophical questions about the religious beliefs of Old Testament Yahwism(s) is actually hermeneutically illegitimate, heuristically absurd and theologically naive (cf Barr 1999:37; Carroll 1991:25). It is therefore no surprise that most Old Testament theologians and the historians of Israelite religion bracket their research with the philosophy of religion (cf Brueggemann 1997:71). Ontological and metaphysical inquiries are just not done. It is not the ‘in’ thing to do (cf Davies 1995:21).

But surely, you may wonder, is the absence of a philosophical approach to Old Testament religion not a done deal – something justified by the excesses of pre-critical biblical interpretation with all its ludicrous attempts to rope the texts in the service of procrustean apologetical-polemical-theological and ontological-metaphysical ideologies? Didn’t we take leave of a philosophical approach to the religion of Israel once and for all with Gabler? Is there not ample justification for bracketing philosophical problems in the analysis of biblical texts? Is there not some good reason why a discipline like philosophy of religion has remained – and should remain – utterly absent from the biblical scholar’s repertoire of auxiliary disciplines and interpretative methodologies?

After all, the Old Testament is not a treatise in systematic or philosophical theology. Moreover, it contains a diversity of literary forms and also many contradictory religious ideologies. Surely such a collection of pre-philosophical, theologi-

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5 Such anti-philosophical sentiment with regard to philosophical-religious problems generated in biblical interpretation has given rise to a somewhat perplexing state of affairs, especially considering the number of implicit and explicit ontological and metaphysical claims many ontologically-challenged Old Testament scholars often make – without backing it up by arguments, of course (cf Brueggemann 1997:55, 111, 627 and passim; Carroll 1991:27). Scholars like Carroll (1991), Davies (1995) and Brueggemann (1997) all suggest in their own subtle ways that biblical theology and philosophy do not mix and that asking ontological questions is a no-no. Yet it is not even necessary to read between the lines of their works to realise that for these scholars realism in Old Testament theology is dead and that it is obvious that YHWH has no extra-textual counterpart. But why deny the legitimacy of ontological analysis while simultaneously making controversial ontological claims with far-reaching implications? Is this consistent or could it be hypocritical?
cally pluralist religious texts is highly unsuitable for philosophical analysis and the latter’s frequent concern with the construction of speculative and systematic metaphysical theories of what is supposed to be the case. Why should biblical scholars even want to bother with such inquiries? Can’t we leave it to the philosophers?

It is these kinds of questions, reservations and anti-philosophical sentiments that this article intends to address. To do so, however, it will be necessary to start at the beginning and trace the history of philosophy itself in order to appreciate when, where, how and why this discipline that is philosophy of religion came into being and eventually developed into an independent form of philosophical inquiry. This will hopefully assist those readers with little philosophical background and/or reservations regarding my proposed innovations not only to accept the hermeneutical legitimacy of utilising philosophy of religion in Old Testament studies, but also to become inspired and join me in the quest for a philosophical YHWH.

**B PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

1 **Introduction**

Philosophy of religion is one of the disciplines within the subject of philosophy (cf Pattison 2001:1). This statement, however, says scarcely little, for both philosophy as such, and philosophy of religion in particular, have changed substantially over the centuries with regard to variables like nature, contents, academic location, methodology and objectives. In the ancient and medieval periods, for example, philosophy itself was primarily regarded as a body of knowledge. Philosophy in general was in effect the systematising of the knowledge of that era. In the ancient period, therefore, there was no distinction between philosophy and what we now call ‘science’ (knowledge based more on reason and experiment, rather than tradition or alleged divine revelation) (cf Tarnas 1991:42). During this period, the philosophical discipline known as metaphysics was central to all inquiry. Philosophy was the science of everything – the science of being (cf Pattison 2001:71).

However, as Pattison (2001:72-73) observes, beginning with the modern period (with Rene Descartes in the early 1600’s), and culminating with the analytical philosophers in the early 1900’s, philosophy came to be regarded primarily as a method (rather than a science). We see in Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1637) a concern to find the right manner of reasoning, by which claims of theology and the new sciences, as well as ethics and political thought, could be evaluated. In the early modern period, the analysis of these bodies of knowledge focused primarily on their methods of reasoning (cf Murphy 1994:129). During this modern period, epistemology rather than metaphysics was the philosophers’ main concern. In other words, philosophers no longer spent all their time wondering about the nature of reality and existence (metaphysics). Rather, they became more and more interested in what, why and how we are able to *know* something (epistemology) (Cupitt 2002:50). Pattison (2001:72) also notes that, as the modern period continued, a few philosophers after Descartes still produced systems of thought, but, by the time of the analytic
philosophers in the first half of the twentieth century (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle), philosophy was almost completely defined by its method.\(^6\)

It was during this period, early in the twentieth century, when yet another paradigm shift occurred in the history of philosophy. For during this time, the task of philosophy came to be seen not so much as thinking about knowledge anymore, but rather as contemplation of the nature and function of language (i.e., the so-called ‘linguistic turn’) (Cupitt 2002:51). By then, metaphysics had nearly disappeared, except for the analysis of linguistic categories needed to describe reality in the most basic terms. And so philosophical analysis became very much an analysis of the concepts (language) used in other bodies of knowledge; it had no special content of its own. As a result, there came into being many additional sub-disciplines of philosophy, including philosophy of science, philosophy of history, philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of law, and, of course, philosophy of religion.

2 The emergence and development of philosophy of religion

The term ‘philosophy of religion’ is therefore a relative newcomer to the philosophical lexicon, even though philosophical speculation of things religious goes back to the very beginning of the history of philosophy (cf. Hick 1983:1; Pattison 2001:2). One of the earliest spurs to philosophical reflection, in both Ancient Greece and elsewhere, was the emergence of doubts concerning the religious traditions (e.g., in Socrates, Protagoras, Xenophanes, Epicurus and Plato) (cf. Tarnas 1991:13). In this sense at least, philosophical thinking about religion is at least as old as the earliest Greek philosophical traditions themselves (Quinn 2001:697).\(^7\)

However, despite this long history of philosophical thought about religious beliefs and religious phenomena, if one surveys the various aspects about religion that have interested philosophers through the ages, it is difficult to find any unifying thread (Quinn 2001:697). For while philosophical thinking about religion has been with us for at least two-and-a-half millennia, the paradigm shifts in the history of philosophy – from metaphysics (pre-modern period), to epistemology (modern period), to philosophy of language (late-modern period) – had a determinative influence on how philosophers approached religion (Pattison 2001:74). Each paradigm made allowance for different emphases and concerns in the ways philosophical thinking about religion during the particular period was manifested.

\(^6\) According to Pattison (2001:72), at the dawn of the 21st century, we may now at last seem to be moving away from this extreme position on the methodological character of philosophy, but it is hard to imagine that philosophy will ever again be seen as a body of knowledge alongside of or in competition with other bodies of knowledge such as the sciences.

\(^7\) This perspective is, of course, typically western and colonialist. For contemporary studies on the origins of philosophy have suggested forerunners to Greek philosophy in India and the commentaries there by sages on the Upanishads and Vedas. In addition, the transition from ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions and mythology to rationalist Greek philosophy may not be as clear-cut as was once held to be the case.
During the ancient and medieval periods (pre-modern period), philosophical thinking about religious beliefs and phenomena featured under the rubric of ‘natural theology’ (Quinn 2001:696). Many Jewish and Christian philosophers before and since have attempted to think about religion from the perspective of prominent philosophical schools of thought. Before medieval times, this simply involved a dialogue between Christian theologians (like Augustine) and Hellenistic philosophers (like the Stoics, Plato, neo-Platonists and others). After the philosophical writings of Aristotle were mediated to the West through Arabian philosophy, Aristotelian thought became dominant in the scholastic philosophical tradition (e.g. in the writings of Abelard, Anselm and Aquinas) (cf Tarnas 1991:27-29; Armstrong 1993:195). Almost all philosophical thinking about religion during this time was therefore inextricably intertwined with theological concerns (Quinn 2001:696).

In other words, prior to the advent of rising historical consciousness and the Enlightenment (Aufklärung) in Europe, most of pre-critical philosophical thinking about religion was completely dominated by an interest in apologetics, polemics, and the construction of elaborate systems of doctrinal theology and metaphysics (Cupitt 2002:52). This legacy, of the time when philosophy was still the handmaid of theology, is also still visible today in the way in which the discipline ‘philosophy of religion’ is taught, not only as a separate subject in philosophy departments, but also as part of courses in metaphysics, systematic theology, philosophical theology, apologetics and/or religious studies (Erricker 1999:91).

The term ‘philosophy of religion’ (German: Religionsphilosophie), indicating a critical philosophical discipline exclusively concerned with the phenomenon of religion as a whole, appeared for the first time in the writings of G W F Hegel (Pattison 2001:79). As an independent form of philosophical inquiry, ‘philosophy of religion’ therefore only really came into its own – and freed from the determinative constraints of dogma – after philosophy as such was alleged to have fallen into disrepute in biblical studies when, late in the eighteenth century, history replaced it as the main auxiliary discipline in biblical interpretation. Moreover, the fact that philosophy of religion in its modern version is a product from the time after biblical theology became distinguished from dogmatic theology (with Gabler in 1787), may be one of the reasons why very few Old Testament scholars are familiar with its subject matter. For when systematic theology was no longer the determinative factor in biblical scholarship, philosophical perspectives on the text also became suspect, especially among biblical theologians (cf Barr 1999:35, 2000:25; cf also Perdue 1994:14).

The first time a subject called ‘philosophy of religion’ was taught in the University was in the nineteenth century when it – together with ‘phenomenology of religion’ and ‘history of religion’ – constituted the curriculum of what was known as ‘science of religion’ (Religionswissenschaft) (Erricker 1999:93). However, it would be only in the latter part of the nineteenth century when philosophy of religion would emerge for the first time as a completely independent philosophical subject in philosophy departments with its own agenda of specialised issues of interest (Erricker
1999:93-94). As a part of the humanities in general, and as sub-discipline of philosophy in particular, philosophy of religion eventually developed into a subject that, like other sub-disciplines in philosophy, now aimed to function free from the constraints of religious ideology and theological agendas (Pattison 2001:77). Ideally, it was to be a subject where no religious beliefs are presupposed as normative and where none can be assumed as determinative in deciding the validity of rational arguments (Pailin 1986:11). As a philosophical discipline, it strove to exhibit a form of discourse that would willy-nilly conform to the standards of rational and critical thinking (Murphy 1994:130).

Of course, as Quinn (2001:698) observes, being concerned with both philosophy and religion – and therefore with philosophical and theological ideas –, philosophy of religion could not avoid becoming a discipline whose agenda and subject matter frequently overlapped with those of a variety of other philosophical and theological disciplines (cf also Pailin 1986:12). Even so, what made philosophy of religion different from, on the one hand, other philosophical disciplines (like metaphysics, logic, epistemology and analytical philosophy) is that it became entirely focused on religious beliefs and religious phenomena (cf Pailin 1986:13). On the other hand, what distinguished it from theological disciplines (like biblical theology, systematic theology, apologetics and philosophical theology) was the fact that, even though it overlapped with these disciplines in that it had shared common issues of interest, philosophy of religion remained much broader in scope and more philosophical in method. There was no longer the luxury of having theological assumptions that could be taken for granted as providing irrefutable answers to the many questions vexing its practitioners (Pailin 1986:15).

As can be expected, during the nineteenth century, philosophy of religion, like all other philosophical disciplines, became inextricably immersed in the climate of the contemporary Zeitgeist and the intellectual matrix of the period (Cupitt 2002:19). Given the intelligentsia’s interest in, on the one hand, questions of epistemology and, on the other hand, critical history, philosophy of religion was soon closely allied with the history of religion until, with the linguistic turn in philosophy in the 1930’s, philosophers of religion – like their colleagues in other philosophical disciplines – found themselves preoccupied less and less with history and more and more with philosophical questions regarding the nature of (religious) language (Pattison 2001:106).

Now, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, there are some ambivalent feelings towards the discipline that is philosophy of religion (cf also Cupitt 2002:15). On the one hand, because of collapse of the kind of rigid intellectual hegemony exerted by rationalist, empiricist, idealist, materialist and positivist epistemologies, during the heydays of modernism, the study of religion as such is no longer dismissed as a waste of time. Though certainly less popular than the sciences when it comes to funding and the University budget, it has been increasingly recognised that the phenomenon of religion plays a major role in human society and cannot be ignored or trivialised – in spite of increased secularisation. There is thus no longer the complete
dismissal of religious belief in the vapid manner that used to be so fashionable among many intellectuals in the natural and social sciences following the contributions to modernist atheism by Hume, Kant, Darwin, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Russell, and logical positivism (cf Tarnas 1991:376; McGrath 2004:142).

On the other hand, the loss of trust in unified theories and meta-narratives, the insistence on human rights and tolerance of religious pluralism, increasing secularisation, as well as the realisation that the human subject is inextricably immersed in a mesh (mess?) of historical, cultural, linguistic, sociological and psychological constraints have made some people lose all interest in philosophical speculation about religious beliefs. For many, the intricacies of philosophy of religion and its endless ever-more complex arguments that, in the end, usually seem of no practical consequence or value, are not worth bothering with. If you are a believer, who wants to embark on a quest of doubt? If you do not believe, why waste your time with fiction? (cf Cupitt 2002:16; Kolakowski 1982:ii).

In this regard, it is interesting to take cognisance of the fact that, from the perspective of the history of philosophical thinking about religion, at least six different views on the relation between philosophy and religion (and therefore of the aim of philosophical thinking about religion) can be distinguished (cf Erricker 1995:95; cf also Charlesworth 1972; Pailin 1986:16). These views are as follows:

a  Philosophy as the distortion of religion (e.g Tertullian, Martin Luther, Karl Barth);

b  Philosophy as religion (e.g Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, Baruch Spinoza, Charles Hartshorne);

c  Philosophy as the handmaid of religion (e.g Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Basil Mitchell and Richard Swinburne);

d  Philosophy as making room for faith (e.g William Ockham, Immanuel Kant, Kierkegaard and Alvin Platinga);

e  Philosophy as an analytic tool of religion (e.g Ludwig Wittgenstein, Anthony Flew, Paul van Buren, R B Braithwaite, D Z Phillips and Don Cupitt);

f  Philosophy as a study of the reasoning used in religious thought (e.g David Pailin, Maurice Wiles, John Hick and Michael Martin).

With this variety of perceptions of the supposed relation between religion and philosophy in contention, it is understandable that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, philosophy of religion seems to be in the same methodological, hermeneutical and heuristic turmoil as all the other disciplines of philosophy (and those in the natural and social sciences) (Cupitt 2002:12). For it is likewise characterised by

8 It should be noted that the proponents of the six views noted here (the names in brackets) and the philosophy of religion they engaged in mostly belong to Christian tradition or to a school of thought writing in response to it. The perspective of this overview is therefore in a sense rather Eurocentric, if not Anglo-Saxon. Also, the original distinction features only five options, whereas I delineated six distinguishable positions.
a lack of consensus regarding the discipline’s right to exist, methodological pluralism, disagreement over the objectives in research, and a stalemate in the state of debate in many of the issues it is concerned with at present (Tarnas 1991:359).

In other words, while most scholars would agree that philosophy of religion is concerned with philosophical thinking about religion, there is no universal consensus regarding the aims, method, scope and contents of discipline (Hick 1983:1; Pattison 2001:2). And, given the diversity of perspectives and approaches in the discipline itself, it should be clear that the assumptions the reader of this article holds regarding the relation between philosophy and religion will no doubt influence to a large extent what he or she thinks about the viability and validity (and sanity) of my suggestion for its incorporation into Old Testament studies.

3 Issues of interest in philosophy of religion

Since its establishment as an independent philosophical discipline late in the nineteenth century, most philosophers of religion have continued to limit their research to the analysis of post-biblical Christian dogma (cf Abraham 1985:2; Pailin 1986:iii). During the twentieth century, however, as the subject began to develop and the world became a smaller place, interest in Jewish, Islamic, Indian, Chinese and African religions also began to grow (Hick 1983:2). And while most scholars concern themselves with the dogma of living religious traditions, some have taken an interest in philosophical perspectives on ancient religions no longer as popular as they once were, for example Homeric polytheism, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, Mithraism, et cetera (cf Pailin 1986:iv). No one, however, as far as I know, has ever decided to engage in philosophy of religion where in the religion in question is Old Testament Yahwism(s).

Because of historical change, individual interests, personal agendas and scholarly ideologies, introductory textbooks on philosophy of religion differ remarkably with regard to the kind of issues that are considered to be an integral part of the discipline’s agenda (cf Abraham 1985:12). Even so, a number of topics frequently recur in recent research. These include issues like, for example, the nature of religious language; the concept of revelation; the nature and attributes of the divine; arguments for and against the existence of the divine; the Problem of Evil (metaphysical, natural, moral); the justification of religious experience; the relation between religion and history; the relation between religion and morality; the relation between religion and science; the relation between religion and culture; religious epistemology and the problem of verification and falsification; religious phenomena (miracles, paranormal phenomena, prayer, etc); religious concepts (sin, sacrifice, truth, etc); life after death/religious anthropology; religious pluralism; et cetera (cf Abraham 1985; Hick 1983; Pailin 1986).

Many of these topics are probably in some way or another familiar to those Old Testament specialists with a broad theological background, for many of these issues are also on the agendas of other theological subjects, for example in systematic
theology, philosophical theology, biblical theology, apologetics, ethics, science of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, history of religion, et cetera. Unfortunately, however, given the spatial limitations applicable to the writing of this article, it is impossible to discuss at present any of these topics in detail or to list all the theories philosophers of religion have proposed under each rubric. Fortunately, such elaboration is actually unnecessary, given the fact that most theories in philosophy of religion on any particular issue were constructed by philosophers studying the dogmas of post-biblical Christian systematic theology – they were not produced by scholars exclusively concerned with the peculiar discourse of Old Testament Yahwism(s).

For the present, suffice it to say that the issues noted above show the types of enquiry philosophers of religion are generally interested in – they are not the concern only of those studying the Christian traditions. However, since all religions (and even schools of thought within a single religion) exhibit numerous small differences with regard to their perceptions and understanding of each of these issues of interest (and the details involved in each case), any attempt to utilise popular work already done in the discipline, for the purpose of studying Old Testament Yahwism(s), will have to be done with extreme caution. For though most of the issues can remain of interest in the study of Old Testament religion, substantial adaptations may have to be made in the construction of theories in response to the particular problems each of these issues gives rise to within the context of ancient Yahwism(s).

4 Philosophy of religion and Old Testament studies

In other words, because the Old Testament is not made up of propositions of dogma and logical arguments, but of literary traditions marked by ideological and theological pluralism and composed in a diversity of genres, any uncritical dialogue with mainstream philosophers of religion (who study the Christian tradition) is therefore out of the question. As biblical scholars and Old Testament specialists, we will have to start almost from scratch. For to transpose the issues and theories subsumed under the kind of philosophy of religion that analyses Christian dogma to the context of a philosophical approach to Old Testament religion would surely lead to hermeneutical and heuristic chaos.

For one, it would result in the creation of pseudo-problems. For example, consider the issue on the agenda of philosophy of religion known as the ‘Problem of Evil’. It is considered to be a dilemma in orthodox Christian theology since philosophers have a hard time squaring the idea of an omnipotent and wholly benevolent God with the

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9 Old Testament specialists who are not acquainted with the subject matter of the philosophy of religion are referred to the variety of viewpoints as articulated by any of the following introductory studies: Caird (1881); Mitchell (1971); Rowe (1978); Wainright (1978); Churchill & Jones (1979); Smart (1979); Cahn & Shatz (1982); Davies (1982); Kolakowski (1982); Nielsen (1982); Hick (1983); Abraham (1985); Pailin (1986); Hubbeling (1987); Geisler & Corduan (1988); Pojman (1988); Tilghman (1992); Quinn & Taliaferro (1997) and Davies (2000).
reality of metaphysical, natural and moral evil. Yet it should be clear that for this philosophical puzzle to exist, one must take it for granted that the deity is in fact omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and that such a thing as evil actually exists. In addition, one must also hold certain assumptions about how we should define concepts like omnipotence, omnibenevolence and evil.

Now, of course, there are many Old Testament texts in which the conceptions of divine attributes and the relation between YHWH and evil is depicted as being of such a nature that one can easily square the discourse with orthodox philosophical theology. But what happens to the ‘Problem of Evil’ when you view it from the perspective of many other equally prominent Old Testament trajectories that are not quite so orthodox by later standards and in which the deity is depicted as being neither omnipotent nor wholly good in the sense classical Christian dogma thinks of these divine attributes? And what happens to the so-called ‘argument from evil’ against the existence of God in the context of those traditions in Yahwism where, not infrequently, the natural and moral evil in the world is not so much taken as a sign of divine non-existence as it is interpreted as proof of divine judgement? And how should the philosopher of religion think about the nature of divine goodness when it comes to the analysis of those Old Testament texts that have no problem juxtaposing confessions of YHWH’s loving-kindness with the tacit insistence that the same deity is also the cause of all natural and moral disorder?

In other words, with regard to the monistic trajectories in the biblical text, can Old Testament scholars engaged in philosophy of religion justifiably even begin to speak of a ‘Problem of Evil’, in the same sense that philosophers of religion studying Christian dogma have formulated its premises? (cf Carroll 1991:37-45; Gericke 2005c:46-73; contra Lindström 1983). There can be no doubt that, from the perspective of post-biblical philosophical theology, much of Old Testament god-talk will indeed appear unorthodox when judged anachronistically by later ideal standards of orthodoxy. But most Christian theologians either ignore or repress the embarrassing biblical data and selectively reconstruct a view of YHWH (a k a God) more amenable to their own religious ideology (cf Clines 1995:passim). That is why virtually no philosopher of religion has dared to ‘solve’ the ‘Problem of Evil’ – as opposed to the ‘problem of evil’ – by suggesting, on biblical grounds(!), that God may, after all, not be wholly omnibenevolent.

Alternatively, consider an issue like ‘the nature of religious language’. According to many philosophers of religion studying the Christian tradition, all religious language (i.e. talk about God) is metaphorical. Now even some Old Testament theologians have jumped uncritically onto this bandwagon, blissfully unconcerned that this theory was constructed with supposedly normative Christian dogma in mind as opposed to being a response to the unashamed crude literalism of many parts of the Old Testament’s god-talk (cf Brueggemann 1997:33; Caird 1993:60-63; Carroll 1991:29).
But the insistence that all – as opposed to some – religious language referring to YHWH was originally understood as being metaphorical represents a gross generalisation. In fact, it may well be nothing more than a subtle post-modern variety of anachronistic dogmatic eisegesis. For it seems to be the result of the same kind of embarrassment that once inspired the deliberate reinterpretations of ‘crude anthropomorphism’ in the biblical imagery, already during the pre-Christian era (in the Targums and LXX). Such a pan-metaphor perspective, uncritically subscribed to by many Old Testament theologians, may well be considered a strategy of evasion involving repression similar to the kind that once necessitated allegorical interpretations of embarrassing Old Testament references to an all-too-human YHWH (cf Eichrodt 1961:67; contra Fretheim 1984:1).

A third and last example may be used to illustrate the pitfalls involved in uncritically adopting topics or theories from mainstream philosophy of religion and transposing these to a philosophical approach to Old Testament Yahwism(s). For just consider the issue of ‘the nature and attributes of the divine’. In philosophy of religion (Christianity), it is almost always taken for granted that God must be the only God, that he (sic!) must be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, et cetera. And even though philosophers of religion differ with regard to their exact definitions of these concepts, in most discussions about God, the orthodox profile of the deity with its ideal and perfect characteristics is maintained intact.

But consider a biblical scholar engaged in philosophy of religion who is uncritically adopting this profile of the divine and utilising it as a model in the context of Old Testament Yahwism(s). Now while there are indeed depictions of YHWH that more or less conform to the orthodox Christian stereotype, there are often subtle differences and, as all non-fundamentalist Old Testament scholars should know, YHWH is often portrayed as not being the only god and as a deity who is not omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent or immutable in the usual sense associated with these words. As a result, the Old Testament specialist discussing the nature and attributes of YHWH will read the orthodox profile into less amiable depictions of the deity and, on top of this, will have a host of pseudo-philosophical problems to address that do not even apply to the text in question.

In this regard, it would be prudent if Old Testament scholars engaged in philosophical analysis would resist the temptation to try and harmonize contradictory profiles of the deity, if these are indeed discrepant. Rather, different views on YHWH’s nature and attributes should not be ignored but juxtaposed, compared, and the philosophical difficulties of each profile should be discussed within the context of that profile itself. In other words, hermeneutical sensitivity and respect for pluralism should not be sacrificed simply to make the text more orthodox or homogenous. And this represents a problematic the philosopher of religion studying Christian dogma will not be familiar with. So also on the topic of the nature of the divine, the Old Testament specialist cannot simply adopt either the topic or the theories constructed in connection with it uncritically.
In sum then, when it comes to adoption and adaptation from the agenda of mainstream philosophy of religion, I hope the point I am trying to make should be crystal clear and that the considerations presented above will alleviate any fears from Old Testament specialists with critical acumen who worry that a philosophical approach to biblical Yahwism(s) is either impossible or that, if practised, will distort, maim or simplify the issues involved in dealing with an unphilosophical, pluralist and diverse body of religious literature. No. Rest assure that I am fully aware of the unique challenges presented by the biblical materials for the philosophically inclined interpreter. It should therefore be accepted that there is no a priori reason why a philosophical approach to Old Testament Yahwism(s) cannot adapt its agenda and theories for the particular challenges presented by the biblical discourse.

C ANTING POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS TO THE UTILISATION OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

Some Old Testament scholars might, after all that has been said, still wonder along with Tertullian ‘what (the hell?) has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’ ‘Nothing at all!’, was the answer he implied. Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal concurred with this anti-philosophical sentiment of the Church Father when he insisted that the ‘God of the Philosophers’ was not the ‘God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’ – a statement too simplistic yet sadly unheeded in subsequent biblical and systematic theology. Then there is the reformer Martin Luther who considered philosophical reason a ‘whore’ and criticised anyone who would dare to think that philosophy had any contribution to make in the understanding of the Bible. In our own time, many Old Testament scholars’ views on the objectives and scope of biblical studies imply that they might very well deny that philosophy (of religion) has any place in biblical scholarship (cf Teeple 1982:23; Carroll 1991:27; Davies 1995:21).

If such criticism stems from personal religious ideology or a fideist approach to the relation between faith and reason, any arguments against it will avail nothing. For fideism, like fundamentalism, has a propensity for the irrational with its combination of foundationalist and anti-foundationalist assumptions (cf Barr 1977). However, if some Old Testament scholars feel that they are rationally justified in sharing such sentiment for hermeneutical or heuristic reasons, it is possible that their reservations may be the result of misunderstanding what is envisioned by the present attempt to pioneer the use of philosophy of religion in biblical interpretation. Alternatively, they try to imagine how it will operate in actual practice and cannot for the life of them see how this could be anything but chaos.

With regard to the latter concern – that regarding the details of a philosophical approach in action – readers will have to wait for the next two articles (Parts 2 and 3 in this series when I deal with exegesis and larger-scale analysis of the texts themselves). In what follows below, however, I shall anticipate, discuss and refute three (out of many more) possible objections, which I regard as invalid attempts to deny philosophy of religion a place in Old Testament interpretation.
Objection 1

‘To ask philosophical questions is hermeneutically illegitimate since the Old Testament is not philosophy and is therefore unsuitable for philosophical analysis.’

This objection was partly anticipated and addressed in the previous section but will demand a bit more elaboration if its invalidity is to be exorcised completely.

Many readers who agree with this suggestion probably have in the back of their minds the way the systematic theologians of the pre-critical period handled the Old Testament texts. In this regard, it should be remembered that philosophy of religion is a discipline of the post-Gabler era. Because of its inception as an independent academic subject after the rise of historical consciousness it happens to be hermeneutically critical and sensitive to temporal and cultural contexts. As such, philosophy of religion as it is practised today is not to be equated with a naïve form of pre-critical systematic metaphysics, natural theology, dogmatic theology, apologetics or philosophical theology. For whereas most of these subjects have the objective of providing normative, unified and systematic facts about what is the case and often demand this from the source materials it utilises, there is no a priori reason why philosophy of religion should make such assumptions and have such requirements.

All that is needed for philosophy of religion to be able to commence is the availability of religious discourse that contains assumptions and claims about the existence of the divine and about the nature of deity, the world and morality. It hardly matters whether the culture or literature is pre-philosophical or whether the religious language is metaphorical or contains diverse genres and contradictory viewpoints on the related issues. For the aim of philosophy of religion is neither to read philosophy into un-philosophical religious texts nor is the aim to harmonise discrepant voices for the purpose of constructing a normative and coherent systems of thought from it.

In other words, even though the discourses of certain religious texts – like the Old Testament – are ideologically pluralist and cannot be said to contain any explicit philosophical rhetoric, the various ways of the reading of those texts still evoke

Interestingly, at least one Old Testament scholar, Thompson (1998), would have us believe otherwise. According to him all we have is a Hellenistic Bible and its contents, though appearing historical and mythical are actually philosophical haggadah. In making this claim, those used to the Anglo-Saxon ways of doing philosophy (i.e. through strictly systematic logical argumentation) will find such an idea absurd. Those familiar with the colourful prose philosophical rhetoric of the continental philosophical traditions and the unstructured, narrative, poetic and aphoristic philosophical ideas of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Camus, Sartre, etc, might not think Thompson’s ideas are as crazy as all that. In contrast to Thompson’s idea that the entire Hebrew Bible has more to do with philosophy than history or theology, Old Testament scholars have generally denied the presence of philosophy in the texts. Some, however, would consider that the book of Qohelet might be an example of early Jewish philosophy. Many scholars have tried to find parallels to Qohelet’s thought in Greek philosophy while some like Fox...
philosophical questions and give rise to philosophical problems. Moreover, though the biblical texts themselves contain no philosophical arguments, they do witness to and provide access to certain implicit theological, moral, ontological and metaphysical assumptions held by the biblical authors/narrators/characters. Like all religious texts, the Old Testament writings carry with them a host of claims about the nature of deity, about worldview, about religious beliefs and religious experience, and about a variety of miscellaneous religious practices and phenomena. And it is the presence of these variables in the discourse and the fact that we are dealing with a religion that makes philosophy of religion a subject suitable for the philosophical analysis of any religious discourse. In fact, such an approach may even be considered desirable as no comprehensive attempt to understand any religion would be complete without it.

Moreover, those unfamiliar with philosophy in general – and philosophy of religion in particular – should keep in mind what is meant by speaking of ‘philosophy of religion’. For the phrase philosophy of religion, though in itself ambiguous, is used in the same way one uses terminology like philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of law, et cetera. In each case, the phrase ‘philosophy of (x)’ should be read as synonymous with ‘a philosophical perspective on (x)’ (where x = religion, science, mind, language, etc). Thus, what biblical scholars engaged in philosophy of religion will be involved in, is not an attempt to discover supposed philosophy in the texts. Nor is the aim to try and reconstruct some systematic, unified, homogenous, and normative philosophical system from biblical discourse. No: there is no philosophy in the Old Testament. But there can be a philosophical perspective on the Old Testament – for there are religious assumptions, beliefs, ideas, and rituals, all of which, give rise to philosophical questions related to issues on the agenda of philosophy of religion.

Thus, utilising philosophy of religion in Old Testament studies in no way involves a return to the hermeneutical follies of the pre-critical period when people read the Old Testament as though it were philosophy or reinterpret its religious discourse for the purpose of harmonising the texts with a particular philosophical system in order to prove that Christianity is true. The literary, metaphorical and

(1989) have compared Qohelet’s ideas with the existentialist philosopher Albert Camus’ idea of the Absurd. Other than this, very little connection between the Old Testament literature and philosophy has been argued for and many Old Testament theologians would be quick to deny any philosophical interest among the biblical authors whatsoever. Popular examples of this trend includes the denial that the tetragrammaton YHWH has anything to do with self-subsistent ontological status that the fool’s claim that ‘There is no God’ (cf Pss 10:4; 14:1; 53:1) has anything to do with theoretical atheism.

In other words, doing philosophy of religion when the religious discourse in question is that of the Old Testament, which is itself not a philosophical treatise, is just as legitimate as approaching the Old Testament from the perspective of the history of religion or sociology of religion, even though it is neither a textbook of history nor one of sociology.
incoherent nature of the religious discourse in the text is therefore no obstacle to the considerations of philosophical questions.¹² There is then no such thing as an unsuitable form of religious discourse in philosophy of religion since the discipline itself with regard to its methodology, its agenda and its objectives are variable and simply adapts to accommodate the nature of the particular religious discourse it hopes to analyse.¹³

Objection 2

‘Philosophical analysis should be left to the philosophers.’

This would be an absurd objection. First of all, why is it then legitimate to perform sociological, historical, linguistic and anthropological analysis, when, according to this line of reasoning, such research should be left in the hands of sociologists, historians, linguists and anthropologists? Second, philosophers of religion usually do not study ancient religions such as Old Testament Yahwism(s). They may study the dogma of post-biblical Judaeo-Christian faith but they usually lack the technical expertise to analyse the Old Testament texts. Just as Old Testament scholars are more equipped to study the history of Old Testament religion, or the sociology of Old Testament religion, than historians or sociologists proper, so – with the necessary background in philosophy, of course, should they be more capable than philosophers proper in studying the philosophy of Old Testament religion.

This does not mean that philosophers of religion may never study Old Testament Yahwism(s). Just as some historians and sociologists may be involved in study of Old Testament religion, so philosophers proper may become so as well. However, at present, neither philosophers nor Old Testament scholars engage in the study of philosophy of religion where the religion in question is Old Testament Yahwism. Besides, even if philosophers did study Old Testament Yahwism(s), this would not cancel the right of the Old Testament specialist to deliver his or her own contribution – just as the possibility that historians or sociologists proper might study Yahwism(s) will not make the Old Testament scholar’s attempts to do the same thing uncalled for. In other words, as long as the Old Testament is the object of analysis and the research is therefore focused on and limited to this body of religious literature – no matter which auxiliary discipline happens to be utilised – the Old Testament scholar has the

¹² If the discourse is unsystematic and pre-critical in its presentation and ideology, such elements are once again only what need to be taken cognisance of in the performing of philosophical analysis. Such issues hardly become a reason for considering philosophical analysis as improper or illegitimate.

¹³ Our present intellectual context is characterised by methodological pluralism and a plethora of approaches in the post-modern world utterly alien to the world in the text. If feminist, African-theological, liberationist and other post-modern ideological critical readings of the text have their place in biblical criticism, despite imposing an alien cognitive frame of reference on the text, I can see no reason how one can justify on hermeneutical grounds the exclusion of a philosophical-religious approach to the Old Testament literature.
prerogative to use whatever form of interdisciplinary research is available.

Ultimately, Old Testament scholars who would deny philosophy of religion an auxiliary role in biblical scholarship should ask themselves whether: (1) they understand what philosophy of religion actually is about as opposed to confusing it with stereotypes of other philosophical or theological subjects (metaphysics, Old Testament theology, systematic theology, apologetics, etc); (2) their anti-philosophical sentiment in the context of Old Testament studies might possibly stem from either (a) an uncritical acceptance of one particular perspective on the supposed relation between religion and philosophy (especially views like those insisting that philosophy distorts religion, must prove religious beliefs or are only about language and cannot evaluate religious truth claims); (b) narrow-mindedness about what philosophers of religion should or should not / may or may not / can or cannot do in their studying of religious beliefs and discourse; or (c) a fear for being confronted with the spelling out of the philosophical problems and questions generated by their readings of the text.  

Objection 3

‘Philosophical questions can be addressed within already extant exegetical methodologies and in Old Testament theology.’

Anyone who follows the latest developments in these fields will know that there is no real place for philosophical-religious questions in these disciplines. Though some Old Testament scholars have touched on issues at home in the philosophy of religion in their research, this was in passing and therefore coincidental, simply of secondary concern. But hitherto in modern and post-modern Old Testament studies, there has not existed any independent and officially recognised form of analysis that concerns itself solely and exclusively with philosophy of religion.

Moreover, the philosophical analysis of Old Testament religion cannot simply be subsumed under any currently extant large-scale discipline (like Old Testament theology). These interpretative approaches to the text have agendas that are large and variable enough as it is. For even in the case of Old Testament theology, a discipline that has some issues and interests in common with philosophy of religion (e.g., the nature of God, revelation, theodicy, etc), the methodology involved is theological rather than philosophical. And even if this distinction should be done away with, to deny a philosophical approach to Old Testament religion because it has some issues of interest in common with Old Testament theology would be just as absurd as denying philosophy of (Christian) religion its place under the sun just because some of the issues it deals with also pop up in systematic and philosophical theology.

Though there may therefore indeed be overlapping issues and interests between Old Testament theology and a philosophical approach to Old Testament religion,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\] After all, since philosophy in general, and philosophy of religion in particular, deal with our most personal and private fundamental beliefs about reality – beliefs that give meaning to our lives and sustain our egos – it is only to be expected that some people would, for the purpose of avoiding cognitive dissonance, have no part of it.
theological enquiry can never hope to answer all the philosophical questions prompted by a close reading of the text. Even where interests overlap, such as pertaining to the nature of God, the Problem of Evil, religion and morality, et cetera, there is still a big difference between the two perspectives through which the texts are analysed. Philosophy of religion, unlike Old Testament theology, is not simply interested in describing or comparing religious ideologies but, as a philosophical approach, must also identify, examine and discuss the fundamental assumptions, basic concepts, the underlying epistemology, and also the rationality of particular truth claims found in the biblical texts. Nothing can be taken for granted and ontological and metaphysical problems cannot not be bracketed, as is the case in biblical theology (cf Brueggemann 1997:70; Barr 1999:36).

The fact remains that many philosophical questions pertaining to Old Testament religion – though sometimes casually noted in Old Testament theology and other disciplines or exegetical approaches (hermeneutics, history of Israelite religion, sociology of Israelite religion, historical criticism, narrative criticism, ideological criticism, etc) – are indeed avoided because it is considered methodologically improper to attempt to deal with the particular issues involved. And maybe the strategy of evasion is justified, for who will argue with the claim that philosophical questions apodictically fall into the scope of – and is best addressed by – philosophical approaches.

D THE VALUE OF UTILISING PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AS AUXILIARY DISCIPLINE IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

As opposed to approaching the innovations proposed here with preconceptions and a negative attitude, consider the following potential benefits that may be derived from utilising philosophy of religion as auxiliary discipline in Old Testament studies:

• It represents the first attempt to engage in philosophy of religion where the religion in question is Old Testament Yahwism(s) as opposed to post-biblical Judaism or Christianity.

• It will be a new type of research that fills the gap left after the use of philosophy in the interpretation of Old Testament texts became problematic with the rise of historical-critical interpretation.

• It provides Old Testament studies with a new approach to the text, that is a form of philosophical analysis that provides a heuristic space for those who are interested in the philosophical questions and problems that various ways of reading the Old Testament may give rise to.

• It supplements and compliments other interpretative approaches in which philosophical questions are out of place and therefore wittingly or unwittingly bracketed, avoided, evaded, unattended or neglected.

• It may provide insightful ideas, which can be used by scholars utilising other
methodologies, and which will focus attention on hitherto unconsidered elements and aspects of Old Testament religion.

- It may close the communication gap so often experienced by Old Testament scholars in their relationships with their colleges in other theological disciplines where philosophy is also utilised for interdisciplinary research.\(^\text{15}\)

These are but some of what I would consider the advantages of the establishment of a philosophical approach to the religious discourse of the Old Testament texts. But what form will such an approach take and how will it be related to and be operative in the context of Old Testament studies as such?

**E PROPOSALS FOR THE UTILISATION OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES**

As is the case when history, sociology, literary science and other auxiliary disciplines were introduced in Old Testament studies, there will be the need for the establishment of specific independent and officially recognised philosophical approaches (plural) within Old Testament science. In order, therefore, to make interdisciplinary research between Old Testament studies and philosophy of religion possible and initiate what I have called ‘The quest for a philosophical YHWH’, I propose the adoption of the following methodological innovations and terminology:

**Philosophical-critical analysis**: an umbrella term for the types of interpretative approaches to the biblical text which philosophy of religion is utilized as the primary auxiliary discipline.

Two types of philosophical-critical analysis may be distinguished:

1. **Philosophical criticism**
   A new member of the extended family of biblical criticism and also called ‘philosophical exegesis’. It is an exegetical method that seeks to identify ontological, metaphysical, theological, moral and other assumptions in the text, and to examine and discuss the questions and problems such assumptions give rise to in relation to one or more of the topics on the agenda in philosophy of religion.

2. **Philosophy of Old Testament religion**
   A large-scale philosophical approach to the religious traditions in the Old Testament, analogous to Old Testament theology, history of Israelite religion, et cetera (also

\(^{15}\) Personally I have found it often to be the case that the Old Testament as problematic for theology is seldom appreciated in systematic theology and in philosophical theology and the Christian philosophy of religion (cf also Spangenberg 2002:183-195). The distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology implies as much but it may be through philosophical analysis that the heart of the tension may best be articulated in a manner that all can relate to.
called ‘philosophy of Israelite religion’). It utilises the insights of philosophical criticism / philosophical exegesis to discuss questions related to issues on the agenda of philosophy of religion generated by a consideration of the religious assumptions, beliefs and discourses of larger trajectories, traditions, or units in the texts, or even from the perspective of the Old Testament as a whole.

Note that, both with regard to the concept ‘philosophical-critical analysis’ and ‘philosophical criticism’, the words ‘philosophical’ and ‘philosophy’ in the two instances are not meant to denote philosophy in general, as might be thought on first sight. Rather, in both cases, the philosophical association is only with philosophy of religion and thus not with metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of history, or any other branch of philosophical thinking. Though at times issues in philosophy of religion do overlap with those in many of these other sub-disciplines, this makes no difference. The choice for the vague/general/ambiguous designation was motivated by the discovery that trying to add the word ‘religion’ into the equation made the phrases sound silly and even more ambiguous.

Given this limitation of the scope of the envisaged interpretative approaches, in both types of philosophical-critical analysis, the issues of interest will therefore be those adopted and adapted from the agenda of philosophy of religion. Included here, besides others, are: the nature of the Old Testament’s religious language(s), revelation in the Old Testament, religious experience(s) in Yahwism, the nature and attributes of the YHWH, arguments for and against the existence of YHWH, the relation between YHWH and evil; the relation between Yahwism and history/culture/morality, Yahwistic religious epistemology, religious pluralism in the ancient Near East as philosophical problem, et cetera. With regard to the details concerning the nature, scope, objectives, assumptions, function and practice of these new interpretative approaches, such will be the concern in the next two articles (Parts 2 and 3) in the series called ‘The quest for a philosophical YHWH’.

F CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to start with my attempt to pioneer the introduction of philosophy of religion into Old Testament studies. In the context of biblical interpretation, it is a much-neglected field of enquiry, the utilisation of which will at last make it possible for Old Testament scholars to engage in a philosophical analysis of the Old Testament’s religious beliefs, ideas and practices. And though there are justified reservations when it comes to mixing the Old Testament with philosophy, critical hermeneutical awareness on our part will make it possible for the agenda of philosophy of religion to be adopted and adapted thus making it suitable for analysing the pre-philosophical biblical discourse. Such a philosophical perspective on Old Testament religion can be of great value to both biblical and theological studies and, once officially recognised and independent, might just be the next best thing in twenty-first century Old Testament scholarship. Whatever happens, the possibilities
and prospects of such an approach are almost infinite. That is, if I can find anyone else willing to join me in the quest for a philosophical YHWH.

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