



## Chapter 4

# Philosophical Theology and Semitics/Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa

Jaco Gericke 

### Introduction

In South Africa, as elsewhere, research in Semitic Languages (SL) and on the Old Testament (OT) have been closely aligned with the study of Theology in general. Changing times and new methodological developments require biblical and other scholars working in these disciplines to reflect anew on the nature of supervening and emergent interdisciplinary relationships, including those with Philosophical Theology (PT). Historically, this kind of concern has often led to debates about theoretical matters that in hindsight have turned out to be more complicated and nuanced than many of the arising controversies initially suggested.<sup>1</sup> In this contribution, the same question about whether and to what extent the concepts, concerns and categories in

---

1 OT scholars do not always refer to PT, but when they do it tends to carry with it the history of baggage related to hermeneutical fallacies at risk in involving issues of interest in PT in the interpretation of ancient texts in the SL and the OT. On closer inspection, however, it has been demonstrated that the second-order discourses of PT and associated trends and topics still supervene on the theoretical frameworks of scholars, even and perhaps especially on those who oppose any such relations. For an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon in the context of leading international biblical scholarship, see Jaco Gericke, *A Philosophical Theology of the Old Testament. A historical, experimental, comparative and analytic perspective*. (London: Routledge, 2020). For relations with philosophy of religion, see Jaco Gericke, *The Hebrew Bible and philosophy of religion*. RBL 70 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

PT currently overlap with popular presuppositions, problems and perspectives in SL/OT scholarship will be asked. This time, however, the context of the question itself will be constructed around related research in 21<sup>st</sup>-century South African SL/OT scholarship.

Historically and comparatively speaking, PT could be seen as a fuzzy concept.<sup>2</sup> To avoid digressing by engaging in the associated (important) debates, for the sake of the argument only, popular ways in which PT is currently constructed in the writings of philosophers of religion will be used as an experimental frame of reference.<sup>3</sup> One of the practical reasons for doing so is the fact that very few local theologians currently identify themselves as first and foremost philosophical theologians, while even fewer discuss the ways their field overlaps with research in SL/OT. Local scholars in SL/OT tend to reflect on the matter even less, often in piecemeal and polemical ways in the context of research, the primary purpose of which lies elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

---

2 A helpful recent overview that is sufficiently nuanced is that of Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Philosophical theology: the canon and the variability* (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-History, 2018)

3 In full awareness of the conceptual-historical variation and associated methodological developments and distinctions. On these, see e.g., Merold Westphal, "The Emergence of Modern Philosophy of Religion," in Charles Talliaferro, Paul Draper, Philip Quinn et al. (eds.), *A companion to philosophy of religion*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 133–140. Additionally, instead of limiting the idea of PT to a particular theological discipline or way of doing theology, or as the premodern precursor to the modern emergence of philosophy of religion, here it is taken to refer to philosophical perspectives on theological concepts in a particular religious tradition and as including not only a concern with propositional justification but also conceptual clarification.

4 Most related research is focused on hermeneutics and questions derived from the philosophy of science. For the local background during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Jaco Gericke, "The concept of philosophy in post-apartheid Western historical overviews of South African Old Testament scholarship," *Old Testament Essays*, 31.2 (2018): 299–322. For the international context during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with reference to relations between OT theology and philosophy and natural theology during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see James Barr, *The concept of biblical theology. An Old Testament perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 146–171. A more recent overview is provided by Dagfinn Føllesdal, "Basic questions of hermeneutics as part of the cultural and philosophical framework of recent Bible studies," in Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old*

To move beyond the confines of past related research, rather than simply focusing on relations between SL/OT and PT proper in the ways this has been done in the past, the discussion will incorporate additional typological distinctions. These will allow for the inclusion of second-order discourse that for all other purposes would neither qualify as, nor be perceived to overlap with, PT. Examples of operative binaries will be those between implicit and explicit, descriptive and critical, strong and weak, positive and negative, historical and contemporary, popular and professional, correlative and contrastive, intentional and incidental, and other subtypes. Not, perhaps, of PT so much as of the “philosophical theological,” and without implying that biblical, historical or systematic types of theology did not also supervene. Although it is hard to isolate PT from other types in the contexts discussed, the assumption of relevance is that any overlap is still overlap, even if such relations may be more directly influenced by the philosophical concerns in exegetical methods or theological disciplines other than PT. In other words, SL/OT can overlap with PT and be correlated to issues and interests in PT to illustrate this, without implying PT to the only, primary or direct causal conceptual background involved. Such qualifications not only allow for better insight into the complexities involved but also offer more specificity and nuance to what is already known. without begging certain questions or inviting the charge of identifying what is obvious and/or trivial.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding method, random sampling based on correlating second-order religious language (RL) in publications by local SL/OT scholars between 2000 and 2022 were used to identify exemplars featuring overlap. The rationale for the limited number of studies discussed is found in the sufficiency or the limited quantity to prove the hypothesis of the research i.e., that there are indeed likely to be examples of common interests between SL/OT and PT. In terms of research structure, a thematic format

---

*Testament, the history of its interpretation. III/2. The twentieth century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG, 2015), 29–44.

5 For what these binaries involve and for a more extensive typology in general, see Gericke, *A philosophical theology of the Old Testament*, chapter 4.

was adopted to allow for a systematic presentation of the findings without invoking stereotypes/caricatures. Themes in PT used to identify cases of overlap were tradition-specific concerns with RL, the concepts of revelation and religious experience, the nature and attributes of God, divine relations and actions, theodicy, and moral-philosophical foci.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these were correlated with samples of publications in SL/OT, selected based on the inclusion criterion that there was at least some obvious overlap between the contents and the

---

6 Since the start of the new millennium, popular overviews of topics in PT relevant to supervening international trends on the local ones are found in English works, including, inter alia, Charles Talliaferro & Chad Meister, (eds.) *The Cambridge companion to Christian philosophical theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Oliver Crisp, *A reader in contemporary philosophical theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Kevin L Flannery, “Ancient philosophical theology,” in Charles Talliaferro, Paul Draper, Philip Quinn et al. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion*. Part II: philosophical theology and philosophy of religion in Western history. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 81–90; Thomas Flint, and Michael Rea, *The Oxford handbook of philosophical theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Daniel Frank, “Jewish philosophical theology,” in Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (eds.). *The Oxford handbook of philosophical theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 541–553; Geoffrey Gorham, “Early modern philosophical theology in Great Britain,” in Charles Talliaferro, Paul Draper, Philip Quinn et al. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion*. Part II: philosophical theology and philosophy of religion in Western history. 2nd ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 124–132; Derek Pereboom, “Early modern philosophical theology on the continent,” in Charles Talliaferro, Paul Draper, Philip Quinn et al. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion*. Part II: philosophical theology and philosophy of religion in Western history. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 114–123. In SL/OT, internationally, include, whether for clarification, correlation or contrast: classical theistic constructions of the divine attributes (holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, goodness, etc.) as well as divine actions (creation, providence, miracles) and relations (prayer) in the context of specific (mostly Christian) doctrines. Some contributors to edited volumes offer perspectives other than the typical Western Protestant or Catholic Christian views, e.g., Islamic and African types of “philosophical theology.” As for historical developments, related traditions include Theological Realism and Antirealism, Continental Philosophy of Religion, Reformed Epistemology, Feminism, Philosophical Reflection on Revelation and Scripture, Philosophical Reflection on Mysticism, Religious Pluralism, and Comparative Philosophy of Religion.

concepts, concerns, and categories typically associated with PT. The orientation of the overview is descriptive rather than evaluative, i.e., clarifying meta-commentary rather than (also) endorsing or criticising any particular instance of partial overlap identified.<sup>7</sup> Readers with a background in PT will no doubt spot numerous problems with the way SL/OT scholars involve in auxiliary fashion the second-order concepts, concerns and categories from that field. Here I provide only the relevant data for anyone interested in an additional critical assessment of a problem that is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Regarding limitations, an in-depth consideration of the currents, traditions and backgrounds of the PT involved is beyond the scope of this chapter. With reference to the available data in SL/OT scholarship, many similar cases could not be included in the discussion due to a lack of space. In addition, the preliminary research done also encountered many publications by the same and other scholars of SL/OT where either no overlap is obviously present or of a sufficient quantity to warrant inclusion. Though

---

7 The distinction between descriptive and evaluative discussions can and has been rightly considered problematic for a variety of reasons. These include, among others, personal bias blurring the distinction, assumptions in making the distinction in the first place, as well as appearing to privilege description over evaluation and therewith not offering a comprehensive overview. All that may be readily granted, while offering the following reasons for why the distinction is deemed relevant. First, there are practical considerations, the amount of potentially relevant data, the variety of themes involved, limitations of space and the need for a relatively broad overview of overlapping interests simply do not allow for in-depth critical discussion in the sense of evaluative assessments of each sample provided. Second, it is perfectly acceptable to contribute to related research by adding to the data by providing a bird's eye view of related concepts and concerns. Third, most samples of overlapping interests do not themselves count as philosophical theological approaches, so that it would be unfair to evaluate them as such. Fourth, while one can surely still point out potential and problems involved, doing so is beyond the scope of this contribution. Fifth, since identifying overlap is synonymous with identifying interdisciplinary research or limited to a particular type of relation, it suffices as a first attempt to map certain aspects of the territory (an attempt which itself can and should be criticised). Sixth, since most philosophical theologians will not be able to following in-depth discussions featuring SL and SL-scholars philosophical-theological critiques, doing so here would not be of service to the implied reader of this volume.

all local scholars' works were considered, including everyone who has written something related was also not possible; yet none were excluded for personal reasons. As for the implications of the findings, these can neither be used to infer how a particular scholar's list of publications in its entirety happens to be related to PT nor for extrapolating to general conclusions of relations between SL/OT and PT in "South Africa" as a whole.<sup>8</sup> What is highlighted applies only to the context of the particular exemplar, with the synthesis and conclusion at the end allowing for systematising the data only on the level of the thematic.

In terms of relevance and originality, although the idea of partial overlap between SL/OT and PT in a selection of studies might seem to be anything but novel or trivial in its relevance, this is not the case. No-one, if asked about the relations between PT and SL/OT in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be able to respond with the specificity, detail and counterintuitive or applied meta-theoretical inferences of the findings presented here. On the contrary, what might *prima facie* be thought of as the case about the present state of interdisciplinary relations, given their sticky past, is demonstrated to barely scratch the surface thereof in the local present. Herein, then, lie the actuality, relevance and original contribution of the discussion to follow.

A last preliminary remark involves pointing out that the perspective offered on the overlap of interests comes from someone working in SL/OT rather than in PT proper. Consequently, the way the research samples were identified, considered and correlated is not only likely to differ from, but

---

8 The kind of overview presented here cannot be expected to include what would be required in a general or specific history of local biblical interpretation, and PT where everyone should ideally be mentioned or discussed to an extent that is in proportion to their research status, or to rectify past negligence in other contexts (as it should). The same consideration also warrants not discussing my own related research, although most of it would otherwise qualify for inclusion. A more exhaustive and comprehensive future discussion, if such were ever deemed helpful, would be required to obtain the full picture of how SL/OT and PT are related locally, and consequently, no general conclusions extrapolating over contexts not discussed will be drawn.

can also supplement and compliment, any similarly focused interdisciplinary overview from the perspective of PT.<sup>9</sup>

## SL/OT and Partial Overlap With Themes in PT

### Samples featuring overlapping interests in the nature, meaning and reference of RL

Given that the study of SL by default tends to engage in questions regarding the nature, meaning and reference of RL, it should come as no surprise that some SL/OT scholars operate with interests overlapping with those in PT. To be sure, the pathway thereto might come from theories in linguistics or literary criticism or textual criticism. This does not, however, detract from the observation that there is overlap with PT as well. Also, what distinguishes this interest in RL from the one in philosophy of religion – though hardly absolute – is the focus on the first-order discourse in the literature of a particular religious tradition.

In the first example, Philip Nel<sup>10</sup> has argued against certain popular views about the implications of the metaphoric expressions of God's "fatherhood" in the OT supervened on by the male-centredness of the religio-cultural context. In his view, given that the meaning and reference of metaphorical RL in this context "transcends the perception of any biological or physical fatherhood," it does not in fact predicate masculinity as an "essential" property of God. However, in this context, the view that RL is metaphorical (or analogical, rather than univocal or equivocal) should be noted as being more general than the corresponding theory in PT. Within the cognitive approach to

---

9 For a more general overview of SL/OT scholarship in what some call the "third phase" of biblical Hebrew Linguistics in South Africa, or the "third generation of local OT scholarship," see respectively, Jacobus A. Naudé & Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, "The evolution of biblical Hebrew linguistics in South Africa: the last 60 years," *Old Testament Essays* 31.1 (2018): 12–41, and Hulisani Ramantswana, "Past The Glorious Age: Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa—Are We Moving Anywhere Close to Blackening Old Testament Scholarship?" *Scriptura* 119.3 (2020): 1–19.

10 Philip J. Nel, "Does changing the metaphor liberate? On the 'fatherhood' of God," *Old Testament Essays* 15.1 (2002): 131–148.

metaphor Nel operates with, all language is to some extent metaphorical. This would make the observation of the presence of metaphor in RL trivial, were it not necessary in the context of the world of the text ontologies, to be reminded of the ontological status of the imagery used in references to the religious object.

In the next sample, At Lamprecht<sup>11</sup> also operated with the view that RL is metaphorical in nature. Again, this classification is not limited to RL. Moreover, in light of the fact that cognitive linguistics “lacks more cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research and does not account for the entire Biblical Hebrew conceptual background,” it is still insightful to clarify associated conceptual content within the RL, analysed from the perspective of this prototypical approach to conceptual structure, operating with typicality rather than essentiality of properties exemplified. More specifically, the conceptual clarification of RL via the theory of conceptual metaphor shows some overlapping concern with PT in the context of metaphors used for divine action. That is, “the Biblical Hebrew verbs related to descent and ascent that are usually described as ‘bipolar lexical concepts’ are found as potentially able to ‘split into two unipolar lexical concepts in which only one unipolar lexical concept, that is DOWN or UP, respectively, is used for metaphorical conceptual mapping’.”

In a more extensive related discussion in his doctoral dissertation, Nick Schmidt took as his point of departure Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigms in the natural sciences. Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor theory is then adopted and adapted “to explain how the Divine is metaphorically delimited, analysed and portrayed.” A conceptual analysis<sup>12</sup> of metaphorical categories and linguistic extensions of the biblical Hebrew concepts for “heart,” “wisdom” and “God-fearing” are shown to be “expressions which schematically structure the concept of God according to prototypical domains” (i.e., different from the classical theory of concepts and associated notions of essential

---

11 At Lamprecht, “Unipolar Conceptual Metaphors in Biblical Hebrew.” *Journal for Semitics* 30.2 (2021): 1–20.

12 Cf. Scott MacDonald, “What is philosophical theology?,” in Kevin Timpe (ed.). *Arguing about religion*. New York: Routledge, 2009), 17–29.

properties and/or necessary conditions). Reasons are provided for why the Divine is conceptualised metaphorically, which in turn allows for the non-traditional but relevant (for our purposes) conclusion that “the inherent nature of Biblical Hebrew proverbial wisdom boils down to natural theology.”<sup>13</sup>

In an overview of “Philosophical Perspectives in the Septuagint of Jeremiah,” Johann Cook sought to “move beyond the usual text-critical debates in LXX research to ask how recent scholarship has approached the question of whether ancient Greek PT perspectives had an impact on the Septuagint.”<sup>14</sup> With what approximates to an interest overlapping with historical and comparative PT, Cook argued that “whereas some tend to oppose the idea, there are scholars who insist that the LXX was interspersed with Greek philosophical perspectives to a greater or lesser extent.” Some have even “sought to show that Greek (i.e., ‘philosophical’) ‘thought’ had a fundamental impact on the Hebrew Bible,” and Cook seeks to give an insight into the associated meta-philosophical theological questions by discussing how these views have been put forward in the context of the LXX (Old Greek) text of the scroll of Jeremiah.

Taking an interest in “the effect of etymology on the rendering of the divine epithet (El) Shaddai in the Peshitta,”<sup>15</sup> Godwin Mushayabasa argued for a reconsideration of the reasoning behind religious thought in this ancient Syriac translation of the OT. This departed from semantic trends in contemporary biblical Hebrew Linguistics where the “etymological fallacy” is for the most part avoided and ignored as a source of semantic insight into the meaning and reference of first-order biblical RL. In the translation under consideration, the “epithet” for God which “appears 48 times in the Hebrew

---

13 Nicolaas Fryer Schmidt, *God Is A Sage Human Cognition and Metaphorical Conceptualisation In Biblical Hebrew Wisdom*. PhD thesis University of the Free State, 2016.

14 Johann Cook, “Greek Philosophical Perspectives in the Septuagint of Jeremiah?” in: Andreas Michel & Nicole Katrin (eds.) *Jeremia, Deuteronomismus und Priesterschrift* ATSAT 105; FS Hermann-Josef Stipp (Sankt Ottilien: EOS 2019), 265–278.

15 Godwin Mushayabasa, “The effect of etymology on the rendering of the divine epithet (El) Shaddai in the Peshitta.” *Journal for Semitics* 31.1 (2010): 19–35.

Bible” is shown to have been “rendered in at least seven different ways”. By showing how the Peshitta translators used etymology to make sense of the divine epithet, some overlap with the interest in etymology in ancient PT is clearly present and its value for contextual conceptual clarification reappropriated.

In a different kind of comparative PT interest, Jackie Naude and Cynthia Miller-Naude discuss how the concept of alterity in the writings of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas might assist SL/OT scholarship when considering what is “foreign/the Other in the translation of ancient religious texts.”<sup>16</sup> The authors are very much aware of the problems of incommensurability that may arise in attempts to use Levinas’ philosophical views of alterity “for either the foreignization or for domestication of the text.” While such an application would be invalid and defeat the purpose of bracketing intrusive and anachronistic philosophical-theological assumptions of scholarly readers, Levinas’ “emphasis on the face-to-face quality of the text does hold application value for the translation of religious texts as implying the oral presentation of alterity.”

### **Samples featuring overlapping interests in divine revelation and religious experience**

Religious-epistemology, or the epistemology of religion, is currently one of the standard loci found in overview of in analytic philosophy of religion. The latter tradition also tended to overlap in many ways with analytic PT. Epistemological interests in problems and perspectives related to the rationality of religious beliefs have also been discussed under headings not synonymous therewith. These include “religious knowledge”, “the concept of revelation” and ““religious experience.”<sup>17</sup> In other contexts, the

---

16 Jacobus, A. Naudé, & Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, “Alterity, orality and performance in Bible translation,” in Kirsten Malmkjær, Adriana Șerban and Fransiska Louwagie (eds.), *Key Cultural Texts in Translation* (Benjamins Translation Library 140, Leicester 2018,) 299–314.

17 It may be noted that religious epistemology is here not assumed to be synonymous with religious knowledge or the concept of revelation and religious experience. All that is assumed is thematic overlap of concerns in research in SL with reasoning in religious language in ancient conceptions of (religious) knowledge and

latter topics are also found in attempted conceptual clarifications and propositional justifications with special attention to PT themes, the focus of which lay elsewhere aligned (e.g., among others, faith and reason, divine inspiration, Scripture, the relationship between religion and science, to name but a few). If we look at overlapping interest in local research on SL we encounter some associated questions regarding assumptions in ancient texts concerning the sources, justification, criteria and ends of certain beliefs. Typical contexts of discussion can be found in search on OT wisdom and prophetic literature of the HB/OT. This often includes a comparison (contrasting rather than correlating) with later PT notions of inspiration and revelation dominating the underlying anachronistic readerly concerns. Supervening on the discussion are the binaries known from PT and featuring the biblical and the philosophical, faith and reason, and Hebrew and Greek thinking, among others.

In his overview of the recent history of theological approaches to the OT, Fanie Snyman wished to highlight major turning points in the 21st century as well.<sup>18</sup> In the latter context, a particularly obvious overlap with interests in PT is evident in the

---

revelation, both of which also happened to be discussed in religious epistemology. It is not assumed that SL scholars are actually doing PT. To be sure, often the overlap is not so much the result of direct interest in PT but mediated via some knowledge of systematic theological, cognitive linguistic, or other literary critical auxiliary disciplines where philosophy is a primary informant in the theoretical framework. Moreover, what counts as valid PT-related interests will surely vary between those utilising “continental”, “analytic”, “Thomist”, “Jewish”, “African”, “Feminist,” or other traditions, currents or approaches popularly distinguished in many Handbooks and Companions to Christian PT. Granted, the motivation, method and means of those doing research in SL and PT also tend to be quite different. Yet these qualifying remarks are added for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding of what might understandably be regarded as treating second order concepts as synonymous when they are not, thus doing a disservice to epistemology in general and religious epistemology in particular. The author is grateful for the critical feedback and request for nuance and the avoidance or errors in formulation as provided on this point by the reviewers and the editor, Dr Khegan Delpont.

18 Fanie Snyman, “Mapping recent developments in Old Testament theology,” *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 75(3) (2019), a5021.

way in which the recent theology of the OT of the German scholar Jörg Jeremias (2015) is described. Explicit links to PT are evident in the dependence on some of the religious–epistemological concepts of Paul Ricoeur, a popular interlocutor in discussions of OT hermeneutics and the way metaphor functions in biblical literature. Snyman notes that “Jeremias views the literary genres in the OT as (also) being ‘thought patterns’ (Denkformen).” Consequently, “the identification of the basic thought patterns to be detected in the OT forms the basis from which he wrote his OT theology.”

In his reflection on “Augustine and the study of the Psalms,” Jurie Le Roux brought into dialogue another popular philosophical voice in OT hermeneutics, namely that of Hans-Georg Gadamer.<sup>19</sup> In this way Le Roux is able to show how interests from Augustine’s PT supervene on his reading of the Psalter. This legitimised the then popular view that the main task of exegesis of this OT text was “finding the meaning that illuminates the love of God and the love of the neighbour.” From this flows a better understanding of the reasoning behind Augustine’s religious thought and an insightful Gadamerian account of why his PT brought him to the view that the psalms that are themselves not PT could be seen as an answer to a philosophical–theological question.

Izak Spangenberg, for his part, took an interest in the place of doubt in ancient folk–epistemologies of Israelite religion. More specifically, Spangenberg seeks to clarify the way later concepts of revelation and religious experience can and cannot be considered present in two different OT perspectives thereon, namely those of the writers of Ps 73 and the book of Qohelet.<sup>20</sup> These two texts are deemed relevant to present-day discussions of doubt because the speakers of those texts “underwent experiences that did not concur with the traditional wisdom paradigm.” As such, they reflect “how various Jewish thinkers came to terms with contradictions and doubts.” The study concludes that “whereas

---

19 Jurie H. Le Roux, “Augustine, Gadamer and the Psalms,” in Dirk J. Human & Cas J.A. Vos (eds.), *Psalms and liturgy*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 123–130.

20 Izak JJ. Spangenberg, “Psalm 73 and the Book of Qoheleth.” *Old Testament Essays* 29.1 (2016): 151–175.

one abandoned the ‘wisdom paradigm’, the other adjusted the paradigm,” thus representing two different strategies in the logic of belief revision. From this it is inferred that the religious epistemology of wisdom in the OT in fact allows for and was well aware of the problems of religious disagreement, itself a hot topic in philosophy of religion at present.

Christo Lombaard took the road less travelled by returning to the question of the relationship between “Mysticism and/ in the OT.”<sup>21</sup> Mysticism is also a familiar concern in PT and in Lombaard’s case, he proceeded from an acute awareness of the lessons of “African mission history” which “has taught us that the Western interpretative framework, based on ancient Greek philosophical suppositions (most directly the concepts rendered by Plato and Aristotle) is an obstacle to historical understanding.” The associated assumptions imported from anachronistic varieties of PT “transpose” that which it encounters in other cultures into its terms, thus rendering the initial cultural understandings inaccessible. In the context of his research focus on the implications of this for “biblical spirituality,” Lombaard accepts that we always operate in some idiom from PT, but then goes a step further to explore the obvious question of how associated problems of methodological commensurability can be overcome to understand the text on its own terms, even if not in them.

### **Samples featuring overlapping interest in the nature and attributes of divinity (or related)**

In SL/OT the nature and attributes of God are often discussed, if not with these very terms, as the concept, word, image, idea, character, being, person, view, of God/Yhwh/the deity and the characteristics, appellatives, adjectives, qualities, properties, predicates, traits, marks and other of the divine (often relative to a specific form of biblical criticism, e.g., narrative criticism has character and characteristics instead of nature and attributes). Specific elements of the divine nature popular in the study of

---

21 Christo Lombaard, “Mysticism and/in the Old Testament: Methodological orientation and a textual example.” *HTS Theological Studies* 71(1), Art. #2813, (2015), 5 pages.

OT theology are those found in metaphors of divine greatness, while specific attributes of interest include divine presence, power, holiness, incomparability, goodness (in more specifically biblical terms). Although these interests derive from biblical, historical and systematic theology, the interest in the conceptual clarification and epistemic justification implicit in ancient texts, the purposes of which lay elsewhere, makes this topic an example of partial overlap with PT as well.

Looking at the female imagery in the marriage metaphor in chapters 1–2 of the Book of Hosea, for example, Willem Boshoff sought to clarify conceptions of God therein.<sup>22</sup> Noting that the characterisation of the divine is often constructed in the context of polemics against particular traits of divinity in Israelite religion associated with other gods, Boshoff seeks to reconstruct the second-order reasoning for/against a particular view of the divine nature in the colourful and metaphorically rich first-order RL of the poetry in this OT text. The study concludes with the finding that for the biblical writer, God's relation to the world "is presented in terms of three critically important aspects of His being as the only God." More specifically, "these are the divine relations to history, nature and the divine realm" itself.

In an article entitled "I Love Yahweh and I Believe in Him - Therefore I Shall Proclaim His Name: How Psalm 116 Integrated and Reinterpreted Its Constituent Parts," Hendrik Potgieter discussed the ways in which the reasoning, implicit in the theology of divine essence in the name of Yhwh, functions in the RL of Ps 116. Behind the "name" theology lies a certain acritical reflection about the divine nature that has led to the choice of Yahweh as "the preferred name for God." More specifically, to reflect on the nature of divinity, and on what may be believed about divine attributes and relations, must be presupposed as conditions of possibility for the construction of the specific poetic first-order RL and for the associated concept of God to be present in this Psalm. Additional emphasis is placed by the Psalmist on the divine

---

22 Willem Boshoff, "The female imagery in the Book of Hosea. Considering the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1-2 by listening to female voices." *Old Testament Essays* 15/1 (2002): 23–41.

attribute of Yahweh's "righteousness," which in its RL alludes to "one of the appellatives" in the classic OT "Gnadenformel."<sup>23</sup>

In an obvious overlap with the PT interest in the nuances and distinctions associated with talking about the divine attributes, Albert Coetsee sought to clarify the concepts of YHWH's "Greatness," "Mighty hand," "Deeds" and "Mighty Acts" as they appear in the context of the RL of the tradition Deuteronomy 3:24.<sup>24</sup> These are all predications believed to be necessary conditions for the exemplification of "the uniqueness of YHWH," i.e., divine incomparability. Moreover, "Deut. 3:24 suggests that all four words or phrases refer to concepts that were physically perceptible to Moses." Consequently, from this "assessment it may be concluded that further nuance is needed." In second-order discourse of the kind reminiscent of PT, Coetsee concludes that, technically, only "the first two refer to attributes of God, namely his 'greatness' and 'might,' while the last two refer to concrete expressions of these attributes, namely his 'deeds' and 'mighty acts'."

With reference to Malachi 3:8–12, Lekgetho Moretsi<sup>25</sup> considered the relation of the polemical RL with the belief in divine immutability (in the context of priestly disputes about tithing). In his assessment, the concept in context assumed that the nature of God is constant, so that, "despite Israel's sins, she lived because God's love changes not." Hence, the absence of total divine condemnation, rather than representation proof of divine injustice, silence or absence, simply means that "God does not change because divine goodness supervenes and itself is by implication not an accidental property of YHWH." The concern with what an OT perspective on divine immutability involved, and what not, and how to square this with objections to the beliefs

- 
- 23 Hendrik Potgieter, "I Love Yahweh and I Believe in Him – Therefore I Shall Proclaim His Name: How Psalm 116 Integrated and Reinterpreted Its Constituent Parts." *Old Testament Essays* OTE 32.2 (2019): 398–411.
- 24 Albert Coetsee, "YHWH's 'Greatness,' 'Mighty hand,' 'Deeds' and 'Mighty Acts' in Deuteronomy 3:24." *Old Testament Essays* 34.1 (2021): 114–140.
- 25 See Lekgetho Moretsi, H. *An Exegetical Study of Malachi 3:6–12 with special reference to tithing*. MTh Dissertation, North-West University, 2004.

involved, especially in the rhetoric of legal argumentation in Malachi, clearly has some interest in the concepts and concerns associated with discussions of this divine attribute in PT as both conditions of its possibility.

An interest in divine presence as a conceptual problem and reasoning in RL related to clarifying it is found in a discussion of Jeremiah 23:23–24 by Willie Wessels.<sup>26</sup> The study identified a polemic against certain prophets' views on Yahweh's presence. The rhetoric of the context is shown to follow the literary convention of legal dispute to demonstrate that Yahweh is not just a localised god, but an omnipresent God from whom no person can hide. When read as part of the mentioned cycle, it should be regarded as a polemic against a view held by some prophets that Yahweh's nearness guarantees peace and security. Their domesticated view leads to complacency and disregard. It is argued that Jeremiah opposes their view by stating that Yahweh is also a distant God who is aware of their false and deceitful attempts to provide revelatory knowledge to the people. In this regard, chapter 23:23–24 serves as a polemic against so-called false prophets and implies a threat of judgement.

### **Samples featuring overlapping interest in divine relations and action in creation**

To the extent that some contexts in twentieth-century PT have equated it to natural theology, the interest in the latter and the claim of its presence in the OT in eco-theological, environmental-psychological, critical-spatial and related forms of biblical criticism and phenomenological/naturalist histories of Israelite religion, represent a new development in local scholarship, one not possible a few decades ago, and featuring a variety of research interests clearly overlapping with those of PT.

Jo-Mari Schäder's Master's dissertation presupposed an interest in various concerns overlapping with those in PT in general and with reference to the concepts of divine power,

---

26 Wilhelm Wessels, "Jeremiah 23:23–24, as polemic against prophets' views on Yahweh's presence." *HTS Theological Studies* 72.3 (2016): 1–7.

presence and universal relations in particular. The research problem identified in the study is subsequently correlated with some of the questions Psalm 47 begged from the perspective of our own anachronistic philosophical-theological frames of reference, leading to an inability to make sense of the meaning of the RL involved. This is evidenced by the conceptual clarification of divine attributes, relations and actions required in response to exegetical questions like the following: “What does it mean when Yahweh is characterised as fearsome (verse 3)? Why and how does Yahweh subjugate the nations under Israel (verse 4)? How does Yahweh choose Israel’s inheritance and what is this inheritance (verse 5)? Why does Yahweh ascend? From and to where is this ascension (Verse 6)?”<sup>27</sup> Schäder then adopts, adapts and applies the theory of critical spatiality as “allied with a number of moves within postmodern philosophy” in order to determine the extent to which the universalism typically associated with the theology of the Psalm can actually be regarded as such. By clarifying concepts in the RL in this manner, it becomes possible to bracket and see a different view of divine presence and relations than what anachronistic assumptions prevalent in the history of this Psalm’s interpretation would seem to imply.

In Leonard Maré’s discussion of “Creation Theology in Psalm 139,”<sup>28</sup> a clarification of the concept of divine action was pursued to establish how divine relations are related to divine attributes in the text under consideration. In his assessment, “Creation theology plays a decisive role in every aspect of the psalm.” This includes divine attributes also discussed in PT, namely, “God’s omniscience (vv. 1-6), his omnipresence (vv. 7-12), his creation of humankind (vv. 13-18) and the petition for vengeance and transformation (vv. 19-24) should be understood within the framework of creation theology.” The “perfect being” theology in Maré’s reading, and the apologetic interest in showing the rationality implicit therein, with an eye to

27 Jo-Marí Schäder, *Psalm 47 – how universal is its universalism? An intra-, inter- and extratextual analysis of the poem*. Magister Artium in Ancient Languages and -Cultural Studies, University of Pretoria, 2008.

28 Leonard. P Maré, “Creation Theology in Psalm 139.” *Old Testament Essays* 23.3 (2010): 693–707.

countering religious-historical alternative interpretations of the divine in Psalm 139, likewise overlap with the interests of more conservative varieties of Christian PT.

A similar apologetic concern was also present in a publication by Matt Haynes and Paul Kruger entitled: "Creation Rest: Genesis 2:1-3 and the First Creation Account."<sup>29</sup> Since the reference to God having to rest does not make sense on the assumptions of a PT derived from classical theism, an attempt is made at arriving at a more orthodox understanding of "the nature of God's rest" i.e., "by describing what 'rest' entailed for God." The authors conclude that "God's notion of 'rest' has nothing to do with recovering from exertion but is a specific divine relation to the world that emerges from the creational activity of the first six days" and which "continues into the present time," "serving as a counterpoint to the notions of rest presented by other cultures of the ANE."

Hennie Viviers took as his point of departure the wonder that humans have with reference to nature's powers and regularities which, as ancient philosophical theologians have noted in other contexts, led people believe in a divine creator. Viviers finds this implicit in Psalm 19, whose "author allows both nature and law to communicate elatedly about this god, who is believed to exist objectively."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, "this ease with which human beings conceptualize counterintuitive beings ('gods'), has lately been confirmed by Evolutionary Psychology as well. The "Theory of Mind" mental tool, particularly, plays a primary role in this regard and "bringing Darwinian evolution into the conversation, the problem of the 'existence of god' becomes even more critical, as evolution does not need a creator god." In conclusion, Viviers proposes that, seeing how neither the personal "god" of theism

---

29 Matthew Haynes & Paul P Krüger, "Creation rest: Genesis 2:1-3 and the first creation account," *Old Testament Essays*, 30.1 (2017): 663-683.

30 Hennie Viviers. "Who really 'created'? Psalm 19 and Evolutionary Psychology in Dialogue." *Old Testament Essays* 21.2 (2008): 546-563.

nor the no-god of atheism are sufficient and relevant, a third option he called “a-theism” becomes “quite attractive.”<sup>31</sup>

In the context of translating SL for the OT for children’s Bibles, Annette Evans took up an interest found in PT, namely, different perspectives within a particular theological tradition on the relationship between science and religion.<sup>32</sup> Approaching the interdisciplinary challenge where conflicts are likely to arise (i.e., creationism/intelligent design vs. evolution), “epistemological differences between science and religion are considered.” Adopting the view of harmony rather than conflict or complete divergence – on the assumption that both are true in some sense – our translation of and interpretation of OT accounts of divine creation require us to take seriously the belief that “they must cohere.” Given the problems with reading Genesis and the story of two original humans’ ‘fall’ into sin as science and history, as well as attempting to ignore the findings about evolution through natural selection, Evans concludes with suggestions based on the moral-hermeneutical requirement that “we urgently need to find new ways to convey our Bible-based faith to young children.”

Willie van Heerden likewise showed an interest in divine relations in the context of divine action, again with specific reference to the creation. In his overview of “OT Scholarship on

---

31 Since the present discussion involves a history of interpretation and it is not possible to offer evaluative comments on each alleged overlap, it may still be rightfully pointed out that mere description of this not sufficient for it to be termed an overlap with Philosophical Theology. Terms like theism, atheism and a-theism are not part of any SL and are, among others, second-order philosophical theological terms imposed from the outside. One could disagree with the use of these terms or the proposals about their attractiveness. What cannot be disputed is that these terms have been and are still used in international and local studies of SL. As such they are also representative of partial overlap with categories employed discussions of concepts of God in PT. It is therefore neither possible nor necessary to evaluate the proposal by Viviers, in view of the practical considerations outlined in the distinction between descriptive and evaluative overviews mentioned earlier. Granted, ideally doing so would have to be part of any future related comprehensive overview of SL and PT in SA. That is, it would require more in-depth discussion than the present introduction can do justice to.

32 Annette Evans, “Interpreting the Bible for Children.” *Old Testament Essays* 26.2 (2013): 315–333.

Environmental Issues in South Africa,”<sup>33</sup> overlaps with interests in PT enter the picture in the traditionally more acceptable manner, namely, through Paul Ricoeur’s distinction between the “hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval.” In van Heerden’s assessment, and with reference to the late twentieth vs. early twenty-first century trends respectively, “the earlier studies seem to cluster around the ‘retrieval’ element, whereas most of the more recent studies contain a healthy dose of ‘suspicion’ with regard to both the biblical texts and extant interpretation of the texts.” In addition, van Heerden discerned “a threefold typology of eco-theological studies (covenantal, prophetic and mystic) that are frequently combined in local scholarship which is otherwise at times also quite diverse.” In doing so, the study acknowledges a debt to thinkers also familiar to those in PT, namely Rosemary Radford Ruether and David Tracy.

### **Samples featuring overlapping interest in suffering and theodicy and divine goodness in prayer**

Research in SL/OT, despite often being averse to the concerns of PT, has been selectively so. This is perhaps nowhere as clear as in discussions of “theodicy” and the “problem of evil” in the biblical texts. This theme and overlapping interest has moreover been aligned with various interpretative approaches and many different currently relevant topics, including discussions of perspectives in the text on the way the divine goodness is related to concerns with social justice, suffering, trauma, poverty, disability, colonialism, violence, patriarchy, forms of homophobia and just about every socio-political and church-theological debate currently in vogue.

Gert Prinsloo, for example, in identifying similarities between the theological perspectives in the books of Habakkuk and Isaiah, respectively, notes that the former “also shares the theodicy theme with the Psalms, Job and Qohelet.”<sup>34</sup>

---

33 Wilhelm S. Van Heerden, “Taking Stock of Old Testament Scholarship on Environmental Issues in South Africa: The Main Contributions and Challenges.” *Old Testament Essays* 22.3 (2009): 695–718.

34 Gert Prinsloo, “Inner-Biblical Allusion in Habakkuk’s מַשָּׁחַ (Hab 1:1–2:20) and Utterances Concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13–23 (Isa 13:1–14:23; 21:1–10).” *Old Testament Essays* 31.3 (2018): 663–691.

Moreover, both prophetic texts are also read as “concerned with the manifestation of YHWH’s ‘work’, as well as sharing ‘the awareness’ pertaining to questions of divine hiddenness ‘that YHWH uses the great nations as agents of judgement’” (Hab 1:12; Isa 7:20; 10:5-6). The experience of suffering and critical reflection on its implications for how the divine is conceived has led the biblical writers of the time to reflect on the nature of divine providence. The RL of prophetic polemics is understood as presupposing coming to the reasoned conclusion that there must be “a critical role empires play in the divine plan” (Hab 1:12; Isa 10:7-8).

Gerda de Villiers also discussed the problem of suffering, albeit in the context of the Epic of Gilgamesh. In her assessment, “the plot of the narrative is structured by means of relationships and interactions between gods and humans which may be on the one hand mutually rewarding, but on the other hand destructive and damaging.”<sup>35</sup> Though divine goodness is often assumed as a given, “the other side of the coin is when the gods remain silent to human suffering.” Even this non-biblical text presupposes an intellectual wrestling with the question of how to understand the deity’s relation to suffering: “When the humans do everything, they were supposed to do to maintain good relationships between the ‘here’ and ‘there’.” Here, too, overlap with the interests of PT is evidenced when, with reference to the theology of a particular religious tradition, the need for “theodicy” arises. This need not take the form of logical and systematic arguments, since the same second-order reasoning in RL could be conveyed in narrative form, as an extended parable on the problem of suffering (amongst others), clearly visible in the intellectual world that can be postulated as condition of possibility for the meaningfulness of conceptions of the human condition in “the Epic of Gilgamesh.”

Juliana Claassens also gave evidence of recourse to interests overlapping with those of PT in her discussion of the prophetic protest by Jeremiah against YHWH (Jer 20).<sup>36</sup> Claassens also

---

35 Gerda De Villiers, “Suffering in the Epic of Gilgamesh.” *Old Testament Essays* 33.3 (2020): 690–705.

36 Juliana Claassens, “Not Being Content with God: Contestation and Contradiction in Communities under Duress.” *Old Testament*

pointed out that the same “inclination to challenge portrayals of God that are limiting and even harmful to people today is reminiscent of John Caputo’s assertion that it is ‘in the best interest of theology not to be content with God’.” In her reading of the RL of Jeremiah 20, she concludes that bringing the text into dialogue with the weak postmodern Continental PT of Caputo “gives words to God, to what is going on in the name (of) God.” Moreover, it reveals “the theological challenge” inferred from Jeremiah’s lament and the way this text conceptualises, in its own RL, Caputo’s notion of the “weakness of God,” i.e., the “unconditional, undeconstructable tenants of a type of proto-religion rooted in faith, hope, love and justice.”

The language of PT, when concerned with clarifying the concept of divine goodness in relation to suffering, is also present in Dirk Human’s discussion of the incomparability of Yahweh In Psalm 113.<sup>37</sup> In restating what the RL of the psalm implies in the language of Christian PT, Human notes that by conceptualising Yahweh in Psalm 113 as an incomparable God, and through the metaphors of the divine “king, creator and God of justice,” the Psalmist presents a different kind of justification for belief, despite human suffering. In the logic of the Psalm, Yahweh is worthy of praise “because he stoops down as enthroned king to uplift the destitute and downtrodden.” According to Human, this concept of God and the RL used to construct it “greatly enhances Yahweh’s character” and helped the implied audience to find new ways to think of the divine as “simultaneously transcendent and immanent of nature.”

Divine goodness and the questioning thereof is also a familiar topic in research on ethics and various forms of prayer, e.g., lament. In his discussion of trauma perspectives on the poor in the Psalms, Alphonse Groenewald sought to demonstrate how “trauma shatters all interpretative frameworks and therefore poses serious challenges to the theologian who has the

---

*Essays*, 30.3 (2017): 609–629.

37 Dirk Human, “Yahweh, The Israelite High God Bends Down to Uplift The Downtrodden: Perspectives on The Incomparability Of Yahweh In Psalm.” *Journal Of Northwest Semitic Languages* 30.1 (2004): 41–64.

responsibility of interpret human experience and existence.”<sup>38</sup> He noted that “theologians have always been reflecting on the questions of human suffering and have always been struggling with the question how to understand suffering in the world, given the theological claim that God is in a relationship with the world.” Moreover, since “in the Psalms God is portrayed as the saviour of the poor, their hope, their stronghold and liberator,” Groenewald was able to conclude that a kind of second-order thinking about suffering, of the kind one finds in PT, can be postulated as a condition of possibility for the construction of a “theology of the poor” in the post-exilic redaction of the Psalter.

Motivated by the conundrum in PT regarding the purpose of prayer with reference to a certain conception of the divine, June Dickie asked the question of what it was that was assumed to “persuade” God to respond to the psalmist’s cry?<sup>39</sup> Psalms of lament characteristically include affirmations of trust and sometimes a vow to praise God in the future. She questions the motivation behind such vows by looking carefully at whether future praise is conditional on God’s positive response and what other rhetorical devices are linked to the promise God makes. In addition, her focus is specifically on the use of rhetorical devices in the RL of prayer and related to “Vows of Future Praise” in some psalms of lament – with special attention to discern the reasoning in religious thought from the perspective of the nature of praise and lament psalms on the one hand (considering the power dynamic) and foundational principles of Persuasion Theory on the other.

---

38 Alphonso Groenewald, “A Trauma Perspective of the Redaction of the Poor at the end of Book I (Pss 3–41) and Book II (Pss 42–72) of the Psalter,” *Old Testament Essays*, 31/3 (2018), pp. 790–811.

39 June F. Dickie, “What ‘Persuades’ God to Respond to the Psalmist’s Cry? Use of Rhetorical Devices Related to ‘Vows of Future Praise’ in Some Psalms of Lament.” *Old Testament Essays*, 34.1 (2021): 741–767.

### **Samples featuring overlapping moral philosophical–theological interests**

Pieter Venter’s sample study proceeded from the observation that OT Ethics and OT Theology are related to each other.<sup>40</sup> In his assessment, when dealing with the OT, “two questions are traditionally asked: ‘Who is God?’ and ‘Who are we?’” Consequently, Venter suggests that “the type of OT ethics we pursue is also directly linked to the type of OT Theology we cultivate.” Understandably, he rejects “a doctrinal approach to the Bible working with abstract conceptions” which “ipso facto leads to a rigid set of ethical rules and regulations for human behaviour.” It is no longer possible to write an OT ethics that “consists of drawing up and abstracting timeless principles for the life of the faithful.” For this reason, instead of a prescriptive approach, Venter opts for a descriptive method, nevertheless seeking to distinguish it by distinguishing “ethos” in the OT as practical morality, whilst “ethics” is viewed as “the formal reflection on that behaviour identifying permanent values and norms that may become prescriptive.”

Ndiko Mtshiselwa also took an interest in the moral concerns typically present in PT. More specifically, Mtshiselwa engaged in what he termed an “African philosophical analysis of Isaiah 58: a hermeneutic enthused by Ubuntu.”<sup>41</sup> This was done with special attention to theological ideas in African philosophy in general and those of Xhosa perspectives in particular. In both a comparative and revisionary mode, his research looked to neglected aspects of “African philosophy in South Africa with a view to conceptualise a hermeneutic enthused by Ubuntu,” all as part of an attempt to “show the relevance of this in the attempt to re-construct the Sitz-im-Leben of Isaiah 58” from this angle. The study concluded that “the allusion to sins (Is 58:1) and evil (Is 58:9) suggests that Trito-Isaiah was in his own way concerned

---

40 Pieter M Venter, “Congruent ethos in the Second Temple literature of the Old Testament.” *HTS Theological Studies* 67(1), 2011, Art. #965, 13 pages.

41 Bhele Ndikhokele Mtshiselwa, “An African philosophical analysis of Isaiah 58: a hermeneutic enthused by Ubuntu.” *Scriptura* 116 (2017): 1–12.

with similar issues of morality as what moral philosophers have reflected on in some contexts of ‘metaethics’.”

Lerato Mokoena likewise shows interests in the issues of PT when she notes that in research on the book of Qohelet, some scholars have sought to compare aspects of the text with ideas of Nietzsche (amongst others).<sup>42</sup> Proceeding from the assumption that “humanity has an existential need to create meaning and ascribe value,” when these start to “erode, it is our task to re-evaluate them and overcome that state of decadence.” From such a Nietzschean philosophical point of departure, she “explores the various ways in which Qohelet’s use of the concept of ‘vanity’ could be better understood theologically by clarifying it with reference to the concept of ‘active nihilism’.” This allows her to move beyond more purely pessimistic readings, which, she argues, in a sense all presuppose what Nietzsche would call “passive nihilism.” In addition, her study also looks to African philosophy and specifically local existential traditions to provide an added dimension to reflections on the application value of Qohelet’s thinking for the present day.

The final exemplar to be discussed differs from the preceding ones in that the author comes from the side of PT, yet has been involved in sustained interdisciplinary dialogues with scholars working on the SL/OT. From well before the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, Danie Veldsman has collaborated philosophically with with scholars in SL like Ferdinand Deist, and more recently, Jurie Le Roux. In the former context, publications helping the public to appreciate questions about biblical inspiration and authority, in light of historical-critical scholarship, followed.<sup>43</sup> In the latter context, Veldsman has been a familiar face at ProPsalm and ProPent OT Seminars hosted at the University of Pretoria where he is based. Deeply immersed in Continental varieties of PT, examples of his foci include the problem of “speaking about

---

42 Lerato Likopo Dinah Mokoena, *Another meaning is possible: a re-reading of hebel in Qohelet* URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/75266>Date: 2019 Thesis (PhD)--University of Pretoria, 2019.

43 See Eugene Botha, Ferdinand Deist; Danie Veldsman. *Kan God spyt kry? Kaleidoskoop van tergende Bybelvrae* (Halfway House, Orion, 1995).

God,” as seen from the phenomenological traditions in PT, and with reference to both the interpretation of the Psalms and the Pentateuch.<sup>44</sup> In this case, the overlap with issues of interest in PT dominates his contributions, all of which nevertheless manage to demonstrate links with whatever SL/OT scholarship puts forward as the annual theme or topic of choice. Although other local systematic or doctrinal theologians have no doubt achieved similar things in their own ways, Veldsman is clearly one obvious example of the recent overlapping interests of interests in SL/OT, albeit from the opposite side of the disciplinary divide.

## Synthesis and Conclusion

From the brief, hardly exhaustive, and random sampling of exemplars of overlapping interests between SL/OT scholarship and PT, from the side of the former, it may be concluded that, typologically, most of the overlap occurs in ways that are both implicit and explicit, descriptive and critical, strong and weak, positive and negative, historical and contemporary, popular and professional, correlative and contrastive, intentional and incidental. This will facilitate not only better insight into the complexities involved but also offer more specificity and nuance to what is already known and/or would otherwise appear trivial.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of thematic overlap with reference to the nature, meaning and reference of RL in a particular religious tradition, a broad concern with concepts as metaphors were identified. Although usually theorised from the perspective of theories of metaphor in cognitive linguistics or literary criticism, the philosophical background in general and the framework of interests in PT are never far removed, given the focus on the

---

44 Daniël Veldsman, “The iconic significance of the Psalms as a literary genre for speaking about God: A phenomenological perspective.” *HTS Theological Studies* [Online], 67.3 (2011): 6 pages; Daniël Veldsman, “The impossibility of speaking about God: sharing with OT scholars the importance of the phenomenological-theological approach of Jean-Luc Marion.” ProPent Seminaar, 28 Augustus, Bass Lake, Pretoria, 2010.

45 For what these binaries involve and for a more extensive typology in general, see Gericke, *A philosophical theology of the Old Testament*, chapter 4.

concept of God and other related terms and translations (e.g., Nel, Lamprecht, Schmidt). Not only do conceptual analysis and clarification, which are also part of PT in some contexts, occur, but non-trivial extensions of the view of RL as metaphorical also supervene on much of local research in SL/OT. These disciplines are separated from PT for reasons derived from hermeneutic traditions in PT, and have interests, in addition to those found in PT (besides BT, ST), as the reason why they are pursued and the purpose for which they are intended (e.g., ancient and contemporary OT translations, as discussed in Naude and Miller-Naude, Cook and Mushayabasa).

Regarding religious epistemology, research in SL/OT has been shown to include a definite overlap of interest with topics like the concepts of divine inspiration, revelation, and religious experience in specific religious traditions. More specifically, the exemplars included discussions of different perspectives and religious disagreement on what count as justified true beliefs about the sources and modes of religious knowledge (Spangenberg on Ps 73 and Qoheleth). There was also the interest in the epistemological dimensions of OT theology in recent research (Snyman on Jeremias) and on comparative concerns in OT with reference to the concept of mysticism as problematic in conjunction with ancient PT where this is anachronistic (Lombaard).

Much overlap of interdisciplinary interest has been demonstrated with reference to OT concepts of God, and these in ways clearly overlapping with the interest in PT in the nature and attributes of divinity (Boshoff on Hosea, Potgieter on Psalm 116, Coetsee on Deuteronomy 3:24; Moretsi on Malachi 3:8-12). Again, with the focus being on concepts in specific religious traditions of the OT, the link to PT is as applicable as to POR. The need for conceptual clarification and sometimes even identification of folk-philosophical modes of epistemic justification, presupposed by the text, further confirms the alleged overlap.

In the next section, different kinds of interests in the theme in PT of divine relations are demonstrated. Although this interest is also present in BT and ST, this is sometimes due to the overlap

with PT or vice-versa. In the context of local research in SL/OT, the relevant themes include the concepts of divine creation and action (Hayes and Kruger and Mare from conservative apologetic perspectives; van Heerden and Viviers from eco-theological and environmental psychological perspectives; and Evans from the context of the science and religious debates with reference to the creation narratives in Genesis).

An overlap of interest in SL/OT with PT was also detected with reference to the problem of evil or, more specifically, with theodicy. A lot of the research is focused on how divine goodness was assumed to be conceptualised in relation to human suffering. Examples included theodicy in Habakkuk/Isaiah (Prinsloo), the Epic of Gilgamesh (de Villiers), Jeremiah's Lament in chapter 20 of that book (Claassens), Psalm 113 (Human on divine incomparability), Books 2 and 3 of the Psalter on divine relations to the poor (Groenewald), and on the divine will and human agency in prayer (Dickie).

Finally, moral interests in PT were found to overlap in the last set of exemplars. These included OT ethics and theology as descriptive tradition-specific conceptual clarification (Venter), African philosophical perspective on ethics and the concept of Ubuntu with reference to Isaiah 58 (Mtshiselwa), Qohelet's concept of "vanity," Nietzschean "active nihilism," and African existential philosophy. One sample from the side of PT was included, where the overlap of interests included SL/OT themes related to the Psalms/Pentateuch and PT concerns with speaking about the divine as problematic from a phenomenological point of view.

The findings are broadly similar to what has also been discovered to be the case internationally as regards the relationship between SL/OT and PT discussed elsewhere. This includes general opposition to the intrusion of anachronistic or too abstract concepts, categories and concerns of OT, the use of comparative PT to demonstrate distinctions between SL/OT RL and Western varieties, a preference for Continental traditions (phenomenology, hermeneutics, Levinas, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Caputo) over analytic ones (except in contexts of conceptual

analysis/clarification), and certain themes in analytic PT. Although it could hardly be inferred that SL/OT scholars engage in PT in all its tasks, or would wish to apply any theme or perspective from PT uncritically, or wish to add normative or prescriptive observations to PT as rational, natural or critical theology, the second-order concepts, concerns and categories as noted above appear to remain part of the technical terms also in SL/OT.

Ideally more could be said about the reasons for the overlapping interests between SL and PT in SA. Again practical considerations do not allow one to do justice to what is a complex matter which can be viewed from different disciplinary perspectives. Suffice it to say the following may be noted in passing as some of influential factors that appear to be implicit in the related research.

1. The absence of explicit PT reflection in SL.
2. The presence of assumptions in SL nonetheless related to PT problems and perspectives.
3. The need for a holistic understanding of ancient worldviews, that is not possible without attending to metaphysical, epistemological, moral and other assumptions in ancient texts.
4. The indelible presence of philosophical concepts and concerns in the second-order auxiliary discourses of research in SL, i.e. linguistics, literary criticism, social-scientific perspectives, religious-historical and comparative-religious perspectives in the context of working with the HB/OT
5. The history and complexity of interdisciplinary relations between SL and biblical scholarship in SA and elsewhere.
6. New forms of supervening influences on SL from theology in general and systematic/dogmatic theology informed by philosophy in particular.
7. Global trends towards interdisciplinarity in research.
8. The decrease in anti-philosophical sentiment in biblical scholarship and research on the ancient Near East.
9. New developments in SL and PT allowing for new ways of attending to questions that used to be limited to one or the other.

10. Demands to be relevant, and to show the implications of one's research for the broader associated academic discussions.

While such correlation is also no doubt due to overlap between biblical, historical and ST, and the residual vocabulary in the history of the disciplines, the overlap of interests in one way or another in some local research cannot be doubted. Without implying whether this is a good or a bad thing, or whether what was discussed allows for generalisation, it may be concluded that despite the demarcation between the disciplines in the theological encyclopaedia, some overlap of interest on occasion, even if only partial, still constitutes and characterises the current relationship between PT and SL/OT in South Africa.