

THE HEBREW BIBLE IN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

While many texts discuss Nietzsche's philosophy of religion and his relationship to Judaism there is little research exclusively devoted to his views, use of, and allusions to the Hebrew Bible. In this article concerned with reception history, the author seeks to provide an introduction to the topic by looking at Nietzsche's general assessment of the Hebrew Bible, his understanding of the history of Israelite religion and his allusions to a number of biblical texts. Based on these observations it is argued that though of relatively marginal concern overall, the Hebrew Bible played a definite albeit varied and complex role in Nietzsche's philosophy of religion.

INTRODUCTION

The name of Friedrich Nietzsche evokes many connotations. Trained as a classical philologist at Leipzig after giving up his theological studies at Bonn, Nietzsche eventually became the kind of free-spirited philosopher whose thinking is not something that one can pass over lightly (see Young 2010). Some consider him the greatest philosopher of all time and, not surprisingly, a vast amount of research has been devoted to a discussion of Nietzsche's ideas. His thought touches on virtually all philosophical sub-disciplines, although moral philosophy was his greatest passion. Nietzsche's writings also deal with religion and substantial scholarly interest exists with reference to his philosophy of religion (Santaniello 2001; Groenewald 2004; Young 2006). Here ancient Greek mythology and the moral critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition feature prominently.

Due to an unwarranted association with anti-Semitism and therewith Nazism, a lot has also been written specifically about Nietzsche's relationship to Judaism (see Golomb 1997). Even so, Nietzsche's relations to the Hebrew Bible exclusively have not been described in any sustained manner within the context of reception history in Biblical Studies (but see Eldad 1985:47-68). In the

remainder of this article, the focus will be on exactly that, although due to spatial limitations the aim is to provide only the briefest of introductions to the topic. There is no room for a detailed exegesis of the primary sources (in German) and as a result the quoted texts are provided in the form of generally accepted English translations. In the first few sections, I shall offer only examples of and some remarks on Nietzsche's references to the Hebrew Bible. A critical evaluation follows at the end.

GENERAL REMARKS

Before Nietzsche, continental philosophers did not think too well of the Hebrew Bible. Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer were all biased in favour of Christian supersessionism and all had some severely negative things to say of Israelite religion. To appreciate Nietzsche's own entry into this debate, we need to note the pejorative assessment of Yahwism (then called "Judaism") by his early mentor, Arthur Schopenhauer (1970:190):

The basic character of Judaism is realism and optimism, which are closely related and the preconditions of actual theism, since they consider the material world absolutely real and life as a pleasing gift made expressly for us. The basic character of Brahmanism and Buddhism, on the contrary, is idealism and pessimism, since they allow the world only a dream-like existence and regard life as a consequence of our sins.

For Schopenhauer "realism" and "optimism" are metaphysically erroneous ideas about the world. Understandably therefore, when Nietzsche later came to reject Schopenhauer's attitude of resignation and his accompanying passion for idealism and asceticism, he said "Yes" to life and "No" to what he thought to be the world-denying spirituality of the New Testament. On occasion he would compare the two testaments speaking most favourably of Israelite religion. Thus we find Nietzsche (1966a:39[1886]) writing in praise of the Hebrew Bible in ways that were (and are) unheard of for an atheist:

In the Jewish 'Old Testament,' the book of divine justice, there are men, things, and sayings on such an immense scale, that Greek and Indian literature has nothing to compare with it. One stands with fear and reverence before those stupendous remains of what man was formerly, and one has sad thoughts about old Asia and its little out-pushed peninsula Europe, which would like, by all means, to figure before Asia as the 'Progress of Mankind.' To be sure, he who is himself only a slender, tame house-animal, and knows only the wants of a house-animal (like our cultured people of today, including the Christians of 'cultured' Christianity), need neither be amazed nor even sad amid those ruins – the taste for the Old Testament is a touchstone with respect to 'great' and 'small': perhaps he will find that the New Testament, the book of grace, still appeals more to his heart (there is much of the odour of the genuine, tender, stupid beadsman and petty soul in it). To have bound up this New Testament (a kind of Rococo of taste in every respect) along with the Old Testament into one book, as the 'Bible,' as 'The Book in Itself,' is perhaps the greatest audacity and 'sin against the Spirit' which literary Europe has upon its conscience.

A similar comparison is found at a later stage where Nietzsche (1995:114[1887]) admits to the fact that:

I do not like the 'New Testament,' that should be plain; I find it almost disturbing that my taste in regard to this most highly esteemed and overestimated work should be so singular (I have the taste of two millennia *against* me): but there it is! 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise' – I have the courage of my bad taste. The Old Testament – that is something else again: all honour to the Old Testament! I find in it great human beings, a heroic landscape, and something of the very rarest quality in the world, the incomparable naïveté of the *strong heart*; what is more, I find a people. In the New one, on the other hand, I find nothing but petty sectarianism,

mere rococo of the soul, mere involutions, nooks, queer things, the air of the conventicle, not to forget an occasional whiff of bucolic mawkishness that belongs to the epoch (and to the Roman province) and is not so much Jewish as Hellenistic.

Clearly Nietzsche seems favourably disposed to certain elements in the Hebrew Bible. Yet his remarks are rather general and it is not clear which texts exactly he has in mind. Does he mean only what is opposite to the spirit of the New Testament? Or are there specific traditions he bases these assessments on? Clearly they reflect a time when Nietzsche was fond of contradicting Schopenhauer for whom the New Testament was superior to the Hebrew Bible (and who approved of asceticism vis-à-vis this-worldliness). But was Nietzsche's approval of the Old Testament only the result of his disapproval of Schopenhaurian pessimism and idealism, or was it due to his own reading of the Hebrew Bible for its own sake?

As this article will show, Nietzsche's appropriation of the Hebrew Bible is nuanced. From the above it is not altogether clear what exactly Nietzsche admired in the Hebrew Bible or to what extent it featured in the expression of his own thoughts. In order to better understand Nietzsche's relation to Yahwism we would therefore do well to note the traces of allusions to the Hebrew Bible elsewhere in his major writings. As will become clear, Nietzsche's thinking does not reflect an in-depth acquaintance with the Hebrew Bible, despite his familiarity with ideas in biblical scholarship.

THE HISTORY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION

First off it is important to note that Nietzsche did not think positively about ancient Yahwism *en bloc*. To be precise, Nietzsche (1967:22) admired only older forms of Yahwism.

What an affirmative Semitic religion, the product of the ruling class, looks like: the law-book of Mohammed, the older parts of the Old Testament.

Based on the Apollonian-Dionysian distinction put forward in his *Birth of tragedy* (1966b[1872]), Nietzsche seemed to have been under the impression that pre-exilic Israelite religion exhibited many positive traits that it subsequently lost. Though not personally endorsing the content of ancient Yahwistic religious beliefs, Nietzsche did admire instances where the texts communicate a spirituality that is vital, natural, and built on self-affirmation rather than self-recrimination. In other words, though not himself making the link in any explicit manner, one might say that the early history of Israel was perceived by Nietzsche to instantiate something of the Dionysian traits he so admired, i.e., feeling, passion, irrationality, instinctiveness, chaos, ecstasy, brute realism, wholeness of nature, this-worldliness, etcetera. These characteristics are not ascribed to the entire history of Israelite religion and one encounters the perception of a *devolution* of religious values when Nietzsche (1968a:21[1888]) claims, *inter alia*:

The history of Israel is invaluable as a typical history of an attempt to *denaturize* all natural values.

Nietzsche (1968a:21[1888]) therefore ventured a nuanced moral genealogy of the entire history of biblical Yahwisms, beginning with the most positive of no less than five stages discerned by him:

Originally, and above all in the time of the monarchy, Israel maintained the right attitude of things, which is to say, the natural attitude. Its Jahveh was an expression of its consciousness of power, its joy in itself, its hopes for itself: to him the Jews looked for victory and salvation and through him they expected nature to give them whatever was necessary to their existence – above all, rain. Jahveh is the god of Israel, and *consequently* the god of justice: this is the logic of every race that has power in its hands and a good conscience in the use of it. In the religious ceremonial of the Jews both aspects of this self-approval stand revealed. The nation is grateful for the high destiny that has enabled it to obtain dominion; it is grateful for the benign procession of the seasons,

and for the good fortune attending its herds and its crops.

The above would not satisfy a historian of Israelite religion today. The reality of pre-exilic Yahwism was much more complex than the scheme Nietzsche employs. The naturalist interpretation of the ontological status of Yhwh Nietzsche offers may be correct but it is hardly how ancient Israelites thought of their god. Are we to conclude that Nietzsche condones the deuteronomistic moral interpretation of history by which the monarchy was represented? The answers are far from clear, although what can be said with certainty is that in Nietzsche's philosophy of religion there was an idiosyncratic reverence for the dystheistic tendencies of early Yahwism. Contrary to his peers, Nietzsche believed that the eventual removal of the "demonic" in Yhwh's character was a grave theological error. Apparently, he thought that great-making properties (in the context of maximal greatness) are not those of perfect-being theology. According to Nietzsche (1968a:15[1888]) therefore:

No hint is needed to indicate the moments in history at which the dualistic fiction of a good and an evil god first became possible. The same instinct which prompts the inferior to reduce their own god to 'goodness-in-itself' also prompts them to eliminate all good qualities from the god of their superiors; they make revenge on their masters by making a devil of the latter's god. The good god, and the devil like him – both are abortions of *décadence*. How can we be so tolerant of the naïveté of Christian theologians as to join in their doctrine that the evolution of the concept of god from 'the god of Israel,' the god of a people, to the Christian god, the essence of all goodness, is to be described as progress?

According to Nietzsche then, the decline of monistic Yahwism and the introduction of metaphysical dualism in Israelite religion was a philosophical-theological regression and an intellectual disaster. This did not happen in one day and Nietzsche saw the religious ideal linger for a while in the pre-exilic period, even after it had been robbed of validity by tragic blows: anarchy within and Assyrian enemies without. He condoned the way in which the Israelite

people still retained, as a projection of their highest yearnings, that vision of a king who was at once a gallant warrior and an upright judge – a vision best visualized in the typical prophet (i.e., critic and satirist of the moment), Isaiah (Nietzsche 1968a:21[1888]). So where did it all go wrong?

For Nietzsche the problems started when after the exile the priestly way of evaluating history split off from the warrior-aristocratic approach to life and developed into its opposite (1968a:22[1888]). Such a development is believed to have received a special stimulus every time the priestly caste and the warrior caste confronted each other jealously and were not willing to agree amongst themselves about the winner. The warrior-aristocratic judgments of value had as their basic assumption a powerful physicality, a blooming, rich, even overflowing health, together with those things required to maintain these qualities – war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and, in general, everything which involves strong, free, happy action. By contrast, the priestly-noble method of evaluating had other preconditions and the result was considered to be tainted revelation and the beginning of a downward spiral. As Nietzsche (1968a:22[1888]) opines:

The concept of god falsified; the concept of morality falsified; – but even here Jewish priest-craft did not stop. The whole history of Israel ceased to be of any value: out with it! These priests accomplished that miracle of falsification of which a great part of the Bible is the documentary evidence; with a degree of contempt unparalleled, and in the face of all tradition and all historical reality, they translated the past of their people into religious terms.

So for Nietzsche, the priestly caste was the most evil of enemies because they were the most powerless. From their powerlessness, Nietzsche saw their hate grow among them into something huge and terrifying, to the most spiritual and most poisonous manifestations. From this follows Nietzsche's harsh and merciless attacks on post-exilic Judaism. Here a "slave morality" occurred which, according to Nietzsche (1968a:22[1888]), led to Priestly moralist distortions of history:

Under the hand of the Jewish priesthood the great age of Israel became an age of decline; the Exile, with its long series of misfortunes, was transformed into a punishment for that great age – during which priests had not yet come into existence. Out of the powerful and wholly free heroes of Israel’s history they fashioned, according to their changing needs, either wretched bigots and hypocrites or men entirely ‘godless.’ They reduced every great event to the idiotic formula: ‘obedient or disobedient to God. – They went a step further: the ‘will of God’ (in other words some means necessary for preserving the power of the priests) had to be determined – and to this end they had to have a ‘revelation.’ In plain English, a gigantic literary fraud had to be perpetrated, and ‘holy scriptures’ had to be concocted.

The background to this remark comes from the fact that Nietzsche had acquainted himself with the findings of historical criticism (the Tubingen School). He had read Wellhausen on Arab antiquities and subsequent reflection led to his *The Antichrist* (1968a[1888]). Wellhausen’s influence is also apparent in Nietzsche’s remarks on the internal discrepancies of the Bible. In the jargon of source criticism one might say that Nietzsche believed that the priests and some prophets (Deuteronomists?) spread the spurious ideas of a “moral world order”, sin, guilt punishment, repentance, pity and the love of the neighbour. This may sound harmless, but beneath the doctrine of mercy Nietzsche detected a soul full of malice and *ressentiment*, the rancour of the mentally weak whose will-to-power turns into hostility and revenge against the other. For Nietzsche (1968a:22[1888]) post-exilic theological revision was therefore a dream turned sour:

But every hope remained unfulfilled. The old god no longer *could* do what he used to do. He ought to have been abandoned. But what actually happened? Simply this: the conception of him was *changed* – the conception of him was *denaturized*; this was the price that had to be paid for keeping him. –Jahveh, the god of ‘justice’ – he is in accord with Israel *no more*, he no longer

visualizes the national egoism; he is now a god only conditionally. ... The public notion of this god now becomes merely a weapon in the hands of clerical agitators, who interpret all happiness as a reward and all unhappiness as a punishment for obedience or disobedience to him, for 'sin': that most fraudulent of all imaginable interpretations, whereby a 'moral order of the world' is set up, and the fundamental concepts, 'cause' and 'effect,' are stood on their heads. Once natural causation has been swept out of the world by doctrines of reward and punishment some sort of *unnatural* causation becomes necessary: and all other varieties of the denial of nature follow it. A god who *demand*s – in place of a god who helps, who gives counsel, who is at bottom merely a name for every happy inspiration of courage and self-reliance.

Despite these remarks Nietzsche believed that the Jews were the most remarkable people in the history of the world (1968a:20[1888]). When they were confronted with the question "to be or not to be", they chose, with perfectly unearthly deliberation, to be at any price. Yet according to Nietzsche (1996:66[1881]) it happened by a radical falsification of all nature and reality, of the whole inner world as well as of the outer:

Their prophets fused into one the expressions 'rich,' 'godless,' 'wicked,' 'violent,' 'sensual,' and for the first time coined the word 'world' as a term of reproach. In this inversion of valuations (in which is also included the use of the word 'poor' as synonymous with 'saint' and 'friend') the significance of the Jewish people is to be found; it is with them that the slave-insurrection in morals commences.

For Nietzsche the result of all this was a major de-naturation and a complete reversal of values that in turn led to Christianity. So whereas the anti-Semites of his day accused the Jews of having killed Jesus, Nietzsche accused them of having begotten Jesus. This led Nietzsche (1967:22) to his fateful conclusion:

What a negative Semitic religion, the product of an oppressed

class, looks like: the New Testament (–in Indian-Aryan terms: a chandala religion).

Not surprisingly, Nietzsche (1967:143) expressed the need to destroy popular stereotypes:

A lot is said today about the Semitic spirit of the New Testament: but what is called Semitic is merely priestly – and in the racially purest Aryan law-book, in Manu, this kind of ‘Semitism,’ i.e., the spirit of the priest, is worse than anywhere else. The development of the Jewish priestly state is not original: they learned the pattern in Babylon: the pattern is Aryan.

Contrary to the popular belief then, Christianity could not be said to represent an improvement on the older, cruder Israelite ideas and on many occasions Nietzsche did not hesitate to suggest otherwise – repeatedly (1968a:15[1888]):

When everything necessary to ascending life; when all that is strong, courageous, masterful and proud has been eliminated from the concept of a god; when he has sunk step by step to the level of a staff for the weary, a sheet-anchor for the drowning; when he becomes the poor man’s god, the sinner’s god, the invalid’s god par excellence, and the attribute of ‘saviour’ or ‘redeemer’ remains as the one essential attribute of divinity--just what is the significance of such a metamorphosis? what does such a reduction of the godhead imply?--To be sure, the ‘kingdom of God’ has thus grown larger. Formerly he had only his own people, his ‘chosen’ people. But since then he has gone wandering, like his people themselves, into foreign parts; he has given up settling down quietly anywhere; finally he has come to feel at home everywhere, and is the great cosmopolitan--until now he has the ‘great majority’ on his side, and half the earth.

Nietzsche (1968a:15[1888]) therefore felt justified to express two univocal positions: against modern anti-Semitism and against post-exilic priestly Judaism

which he both linked to the same genealogical root: *ressentiment*. Nietzsche's (1966a:141[1886]) ambivalence towards Yahwism derives from the combination of these two positions, which look contradictory but are not so in effect.

What Europe owes to the Jews? –Many things, good and bad, and above all one thing of the nature both of the best and the worst: the grand style in morality, the fearfulness and majesty of infinite demands, of infinite significations, the whole Romanticism and sublimity of moral questionableness – and consequently just the most attractive, ensnaring, and exquisite element in those iridescences and allurements to life, in the aftersheen of which the sky of our European culture, its evening sky, now glows – perhaps glows out. For this, we artists among the spectators and philosophers, are grateful to the Jews.

That Nietzsche was grateful can be seen to the extent that he involved words, motifs, imagery and myths from the Hebrew Bible in his own philosophy of religion. To discover the scope of this relation to Israelite sources, however, we have to scan his writings for incidental remarks, purposeful quips, imaginative appropriations and biting critiques of the biblical traditions.

OTHER ALLUSIONS TO THE HEBREW BIBLE

In almost all his writings, there are bits and pieces where Nietzsche uses and alludes to motifs from the Hebrew Bible in a number of different ways. Since these allusions are not strictly speaking exegesis, the aim of this section is simply to note the presence of biblical motifs in Nietzschean philosophy of religion (as opposed to criticizing the use of particular texts). In this regard, the most popular texts for allusions to the Hebrew Bible in Nietzsche are Gen 1-3, the Ten Commandments and the Psalms. On many occasions, Nietzsche is not really concerned with serious philosophical engagement with the text: he simply seems to have enjoyed being creative by making humorous (if blasphemous)

comments and observations. For example, Nietzsche (1986:323[1879-1880]) quips that:

The boredom of God on the seventh day of creation would be a great subject for a great poet.

But while employing biblical imagery Nietzsche did not wish to be a theologian. In the autobiographical *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche (1992:73[1908]) addresses his readers in a rare albeit characteristically unorthodox manner:

Theologically speaking – listen closely, for I rarely speak as a theologian – it was God himself who at the end of his day’s work lay down as a serpent under the tree of knowledge. Thus he recuperated from being a god ... He had made everything too beautiful. The devil is merely the leisure of God on that seventh day.

Here we once more see the Priestly creation account being employed in the service of making some philosophical point. Note here the Christian dogmatic as opposed to purely historical-philosophical slant on the text (as is seen with the introduction of the devil). In *Daybreak* (1996:125[1881]) we find another re-appropriation of the same motif with reference to the future:

On the day when the Jews will be able to exhibit to us as their own work such jewels and golden vessels as no European nation, with its shorter and less profound experience, can or could produce, when Israel shall have changed its eternal vengeance into an eternal benediction for Europe: then that seventh day will once more appear when old Jahweh may rejoice in Himself, in His creation, in His chosen people and all, all of us, will rejoice with Him!

Nietzsche’s philosophy of religion here is definitely non-realist as he did not believe in any ancient Israelite eschatologies. Again the Christian influence is readily apparent (the Letter to the Hebrews). Several allusions to the second creation account also appear in the Nietzschean corpus. One comes from his *Twilight of the Idols* where Nietzsche (1968b:23[1889]) notes that:

Man has created woman – out of what? Out of a rib of his god – of his 'ideal.'

This is an interesting reformulation and appropriation of the familiar biblical creation myth and is typical of Nietzschean artistic license with the text. Of course, while Nietzsche can play with the letter of the text, he seems to be imbued by its spirit. Nietzsche's philosophical issues with "idolatry" (in science, ethics and religion) in the aforementioned book may have as plausible background none other than the ancient Israelite polemical spirit against the worship of false gods. Nietzsche can be read as using Hebraic ethics to mock biblical theology. Another allusion to the Eden myth can be found in the *Birth of tragedy* (1966b:219[1872]):

Our art reveals this general distress: in vain people use imitation to lean on all the great productive periods and natures; in vain they gather all 'world literature' around modern man to bring him consolation and place him in the middle of artistic styles and artists of all ages, so that he may, like Adam with the animals, give them a name.

In this manner Nietzsche simply borrowed bits and pieces of mythological motifs from the Hebrew Bible to make a point, but only in passing and in a very eclectic fashion in the service of some or other philosophical analogy. As for the rest of the narrative in Genesis 2-3, Nietzsche (1986:60[1878]) used its symbolic imagery to get his own moral epistemological insights across:

Of the tree of knowledge – probability, but no truth; the semblance of freedom, but no freedom – these are the two fruits by virtue of which the tree of knowledge cannot be confounded with the tree of life.

Here again a biblical motif is subjected to philosophical commentary by way of reapplication. Like Plato, Nietzsche borrows from familiar myth to teach philosophical truth. Much of Nietzsche's use of the Hebrew Bible was motivated by pro-Semitic polemics and in the attempt to distance himself from

the anti-Semitism of his day. He made an effort to illustrate his philosophical ideas with examples from the Yahwist's creation tradition. In *Beyond good and evil*, Nietzsche (1966a:55[1886]) suggests that:

Where there is the tree of knowledge, there is always Paradise: so say the most ancient and the most modern serpents.

In *The Antichrist* (1968a:51[1888]) we find the following lengthier comment in which he attacks a Christian concept of God by reading into the Genesis 2 creation account more than what is there but which may clearly have been part of the popular Christian piety of his day:

Has anyone ever clearly understood the celebrated story at the beginning of the Bible – of God's mortal terror of *science*? ... No one, in fact, has understood it. This priest-book *par excellence* opens, as is fitting, with the great inner difficulty of the priest: *he* faces only one great danger; *ergo*, 'God' faces only one great danger. –The old God, wholly 'spirit,' wholly the high-priest, wholly perfect, is promenading his garden: he is bored and trying to kill time. Against boredom even gods struggle in vain. What does he do? He creates man – man is entertaining ... But then he notices that man is also bored. God's pity for the only form of distress that invades all paradises knows no bounds: so he forthwith creates other animals. God's first mistake: to man these other animals were not entertaining – he sought dominion over them; he did not want to be an 'animal' himself. –So God created woman. In the act he brought boredom to an end –and also many other things! Woman was the *second* mistake of God. 'Woman, at bottom, is a serpent, Heva' – every priest knows that; 'from woman comes every evil in the world' –every priest knows that, too. *Ergo*, she is also to blame for *science* ... It was through woman that man learned to taste of the tree of knowledge. –What happened? The old God was seized by mortal terror. Man himself had been his *greatest* blunder; he had created a rival to himself;

science makes men *godlike* – it is all up with priests and gods when man becomes scientific! –*Moral*: science is the forbidden *per se*; it alone is forbidden. Science is the *first* of sins, the germ of all sins, the *original* sin. *This is all there is of morality.* –'Thou shall *not* know': –the rest follows from that. –God's mortal terror, however, did not hinder him from being shrewd. How is one to *protect* one's self against science? For a long while this was the capital problem. Answer: Out of paradise with man! Happiness, leisure, foster thought – and all thoughts are bad thoughts! – Man *must* not think. –And so the priest invents distress, death, the mortal dangers of childbirth, all sorts of misery, old age, decrepitude, above all, *sickness* – nothing but devices for making war on science! The troubles of man don't *allow* him to think ... Nevertheless – how terrible! – the edifice of knowledge begins to tower aloft, invading heaven, shadowing the gods – what is to be done? –The old God invents *war*; he separates the peoples; he makes men destroy one another (–the priests have always had need of war ...). War – among other things, a great disturber of science! –Incredible! Knowledge, *deliverance from the priests*, prospers in spite of war. –So the old God comes to his final resolution: 'Man has become scientific – *there is no help for it: he must be drowned!*'

This reading, whatever its philosophical merits, might almost be construed as *ressentiment* on Nietzsche's part. Nietzsche himself could be severely critical of science. This piece is again not exegesis but the use of a biblical text to engage in cultural criticism. It involves a spate of anachronisms driven by Nietzsche's contempt for stereotypical Jewish priestly and ascetic Christian spiritualities. Whatever we make of his view on the relationship between religion and science, Nietzsche's use of the Hebrew Bible as part of his philosophy of religion shows how he is still haunted by the Western intellectual tradition that he wants to take apart. On a lighter note, other allusions to popular images of Gen 1-11 pop up here and there, e.g., in his *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1973:190[1885]):

Populace-hodgepodge: therein is everything mixed with everything, saint and swindler, gentleman and Jew, and every beast out of Noah's ark.

Moving on to legal texts, there are also a number of references and allusions to the Mosaic Law as part of the Nietzschean genealogy of moral scruples. Nietzsche (1968:51) asks:

Why did God make a revelation to man? Would God have done anything superfluous? Man *could* not find out for himself what was good and what was evil, so God taught him His will ... Moral: ... the 'law,' the 'will of God,' the 'holy book,' and 'inspiration' – all these things are merely words for the conditions *under* which the priest comes to power and *with* which he maintains his power, – these concepts are to be found at the bottom of all priestly organizations, and of all priestly or priestly-philosophical schemes of governments

Here Nietzsche's discussion of the concept of revelation, like his understanding of creation, is clearly of the non-realist variety. However, again the real concern is not revelation as such but the relationship between religion and morality which Nietzsche subsumes under the concept of the will to power in one of its less desirous forms. Elsewhere, Nietzsche (1986:44[1878]) notes:

Further grades of morality, and accordingly means to the end referred to, are the commandments of a god (as in the Mosaic Law).

Nietzsche's philosophy has no problem with commands as such, although he admires those who can command more than those who obey. His reference to the Mosaic Law is simply part of his more extensive concern with the relationship between religion and morality. Thus according to Nietzsche (1968:48[1878]):

Moral prohibitions, like those of the Decalogue, are suited to ages when reason lies vanquished. Nowadays prohibitions like 'Thou

shalt not kill', 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' laid down without reasons, would have an injurious rather than a beneficial effect.

Clearly Nietzsche's philosophy of religion traces the tension between faith and reason back to the time of ancient Israel. His style of commentary on the text is typically without much justification which, in the above case, seems to deconstruct his own argument. In his *Gay science*, Nietzsche (1974:50[1882]) wonders:

What is the meaning of life? To live means to constantly cast aside everything that wants to die; to live means to be cruel and merciless to what becomes weak and old in us, and not only in us. To live, does it mean, therefore, to be disrespectful to dying, outcast and old? To be an assassin? – But, nevertheless, old Moses said: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

In these texts we again see Nietzsche's engagement with biblical motifs and their afterlife as a pre-text for his moral philosophy. Yet despite such quips, Nietzsche's own prophetic persona is as unthinkable without the character of Moses as inspiration. There are many parallels to the Pentateuch and to the character of Moses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where Nietzsche (1973[1885]) implied Moses to be a great lawgiver and the ancient Hebrews as a strong people. He could therefore model Zarathustra on Moses, depicting him as the new lawgiver. From Nietzsche's perspective, Moses combined action, the old *logos* and the rhetoric of the grand style. He led the people from bondage and composed great songs to his god comparable to the best of the Greek tradition. Parallels between Moses and Zarathustra also include the fact that both teach on a mountain, set boundaries around it, speak about sprinkling blood and flashes of lightning, and both end up giving the people both "Old and New tablets" (Nietzsche 1973:311[1885]). Something about Moses appealed to Nietzsche (1999:301) and at one point he writes:

The dignity of death and a kind of consecration of passion have perhaps never yet been represented more beautifully than....by certain Jews of the Old Testament: to these even the Greeks could

have gone to school.

Nietzsche himself would come to resemble Moses' character in that he, the prophet of postmodernism, would lead others to the Promised Land without crossing over himself. Yet while still philosophizing in the "desert", he often used imagery from the early history of Israel to explain psychological realities. In *The gay science* Nietzsche (1974:293[1882]) writes with regard to the play of thought that:

This is what I mean by the whole of intension in lyrical art, and in arts not lyrical when they rise in the early or lyrical period of a nation's life. The units of existence are intensified and exalted into things of universal existence...the tendency of the mind to see or make these wholes shows itself in many ways, but in art it shows itself chiefly in the love of symbols and types, emblems and heraldic devices. Judah is a lion's whelp, Issachar a strong ass; Dan shall be a serpent along the way, Naphtali a hind let loose.

Elsewhere, Nietzsche (1996:39[1881]) also opposed the Greeks and Hebrews with regard to how life is approached:

The Jews, being a people which, like the Greeks, and even in a greater degree than the Greeks, loved and still love life, had not cultivated that idea to any great extent: the thought of final death as the punishment of the sinner, death without resurrection as an extreme menace: this was sufficient to impress these peculiar men, who did not wish to get rid of their bodies, but hoped, with their refined Egypticism, to preserve them for ever. (A Jewish martyr, about whom we may read in the Second Book of the Maccabees, would not think of giving up his intestines, which had been torn out : he wanted to have them at the resurrection : quite a Jewish characteristic !)

And with regard to emotion Nietzsche (1996:43[1881]) notes:

The Jews, again, took a different view of anger from that held by

us, and sanctified it: hence they have placed the sombre majesty of the wrathful man at an elevation so high that a European cannot conceive it. They moulded their wrathful and holy Jehovah after the images of their wrathful and holy prophets. Compared with them, all the Europeans who have exhibited the greatest wrath are, so to speak, only second-hand creatures.

Finally, we also find references to the *Book of Psalms* in Nietzsche's writings. There is little by way of direct commentary and quotation and the explicit mentioning of the Psalms is rare. We encounter the Psalter's reception in Nietzsche's writings more in terms of motif, style and form. The first specific reference to the Psalter is found in the letters of Nietzsche as a teenager of 14 who after he heard Handel's *Samson* in July 1858 composes a *Fugen* (fragment) containing the words *Missa; Hoch tut euch auf* and composed a sketch for choir and orchestra, which Nietzsche based on Psalm 24: 7 – "Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in" (see Hanshe 2010:4[1858]).

Curiously, references to the Psalter often occur when Nietzsche criticizes Christian hermeneutics. One incidental reference to the Psalms is found in a polemical passage where Nietzsche (1968a:46[1888]) observes,

The way in which a theologian ... is ready to explain, say, a passage of Scripture, or an experience, or a victory by the national army, by turning upon it the high illumination of the Psalms of David, is always so *daring* that it is enough to make a philologist run up a wall.

In the above it seems clear that Nietzsche's hermeneutics is rather modernist if not positivist and as ex-philologist he clearly still endorses a historical-critical mode of biblical exegesis. He is thus against philosophical-theological readings of the text, even though as we saw up to now he was not shy of roping the text in the service of his own philosophy of religion. Yet to his credit it may be said that Nietzsche did not claim to offer a commentary on the text as opposed to a reactualization of its motifs. The bottom line is that Nietzsche (1996:50[18881])

did not think the Hebrew Bible could be understood via Christian hermeneutics:

When all is said and done, however, what can be expected from the effects of a religion which, during the centuries when it was being firmly established, enacted that huge philological farce concerning the Old Testament? I refer to that attempt to tear the Old Testament from the hands of the Jews under the pretext that it contained only Christian doctrines and belonged to the Christians as the true people of Israel, while the Jews had merely arrogated it to themselves without authority. This was followed by a mania of would-be interpretation and falsification, which could not under any circumstances have been allied with a good conscience. However strongly Jewish savants protested, it was everywhere sedulously asserted that the Old Testament alluded everywhere to Christ, and nothing but Christ, more especially His Cross, and thus, wherever reference was made to wood, a rod, a ladder, a twig, a tree, a willow, or a staff, such a reference could not but be a prophecy relating to the wood of the Cross ; even the setting-up of the Unicorn and the Brazen Serpent, even Moses stretching forth his hands in prayer yea, the very spits on which the Easter lambs were roasted : all these were allusions to the Cross, and, as it were, preludes to it ! Did anyone who kept on asserting these things ever believe in them? Let it not be forgotten that the Church did not shrink from putting interpolations in the text of the Septuagint (e.g. Ps. xcvi. i o), in order that she might later on make use of these interpolated passages as Christian prophecies. They were engaged in a struggle, and thought of their foes rather than of honesty.

Note the example from the Psalter in the second last sentence above. As for style and form, there are times when Nietzsche chose to express his own philosophy by way of psalmody. For example, in *The night song* of Zarathustra (Nietzsche 1973:115[1885]) we find Nietzsche's own improvisation of and a clear allusion to Psalm 42 (along with the motifs of the night and of loneliness found in some laments). Here Nietzsche (1973:129[1885]) can be said to have

combined images from the Psalter with the love poetry of the *Song of Songs*. He even considers it to be his best composition.

Ah, there is thirst in me; it panteth after your thirst!
 'Tis night: alas, that I have to be light! And thirst for the nightly!
 And lonesomeness!
 'Tis night: now doth my longing break forth in me as a fountain,-
 for speech do I long.
 'Tis night: now do all gushing fountains speak louder. And my soul
 also is a gushing fountain.
 'Tis night: now do all songs of loving ones awake. And my soul
 also is the song of a loving one.—
 Thus sang Zarathustra.

On another occasion, Nietzsche's Zarathustra jokingly refers to an "after-dinner psalm" (like after dinner nuts or mints) which he wanted to sing for "Oriental maidens" (Nietzsche 1973:315[1885]). "The wanderer" who represents Zarathustra's shadow is depicted as seizing a harp, crossing his legs, looking around and drawing in the air "as one tastes the new air in a foreign land." He then begins to sing with a kind of roar a song that includes the following words.

The desert grows: woe to him in whom deserts hide ...

 Selah.

Much more can be said about the references to the Hebrew Bible quoted from Nietzsche's writings up to this point. There are also other allusions to and influences from the Hebrew Bible in his thoughts. Yet limitations of space forbid us to probe more in-depth. What may be noted in closing are allusions to the aphoristic style of biblical wisdom literature, the philosophical tradition of naming one's opponents "Philistines," his hubris borrowed from the polemical tradition in the Hebrew prophets (aniconism, against idolatry), the notion of the *Overman* as a monomythic future messiah figure (see Psalm 45:7; Isa 9), the use of biblical theriomorphic imagery (e.g., the snake, dragon and lion, and so on), etcetera.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

In honour of the Nietzschean spirit it is only to be expected that an attempted critical evaluation on the use and abuse of the Hebrew Bible in Nietzsche's philosophy of religion is now required. Let us begin by noting that Nietzsche's use of the Hebrew Bible must be understood against the backdrop of the nineteenth century critical Romanticist tradition in philosophy of religion (see Young 2010). His rearing in the Lutheran Protestant tradition made it imperative for him to link his philosophical ideas with the biblical material, either through criticism or mining it for illustrations. However, as was the case with the Christian readings he detested, exegetical engagement with the text is missing and the Hebrew Bible became a pre-text for his own philosophy of religion.

There is clearly some deconstruction at work in Nietzsche's writings referring to the Hebrew Bible. This is evident in his praise of older forms of Yahwism on the one hand and his critique of slave morality and *ressentiment* on the other. Yet a core tradition in ancient Israelite religion told of Yhwh's covenant with a herd of people he led in a slave revolt. Given how Israel (and Judah) had always been the puppet of superpowers, Nietzsche failed to discern the extent to which slave ethics and *ressentiment* also formed a crucial part of many pre-exilic critiques of imperial policies (and therefore was not only operative in the "priestly" literature of post-exilic Judaism or the New Testament).

The fact of the matter is that even in older forms of Yahwism Yhwh was not only a personification of the Nietzschean *Will to Power* but also depicted as a compassionate god who himself embodied *ressentiment* and who took pity on the weak. Much of the Hebrew Bible would be against a revaluing of values (although ironically, this is exactly what actually did happen) and since many of the older Israelite traditions were monolatristic (rather than monotheistic), the underlying metaphysics is impossible to square with Nietzsche's praise of the free-spirited axiology behind Greek polytheism. The way the Hebrew Bible polemizes against nature worship is also a problem in as much as it has much in common with the Dionysian spirit Nietzsche so admired. It is therefore hard to

understand why, if the moral-realism of Deuteronomistic philosophies of history are so at odds with Nietzsche's own metaphysical views, the monarchic period was one which Nietzsche so highly praised. Perhaps Nietzsche's *Volkish* mindset made him feel so at home in pre-exilic Yahwism (cf. Young 2006).

The fact is that Nietzsche's admiration of the Hebrew Bible therefore seems to have suffered from a lack of critical engagement with the metaphysical assumptions in its older political theologies and ethics. His perspective on the history of Israelite religion, though acceptable by nineteenth century canons of critical reconstruction, is itself out-dated. Yet we should remember that the philosophy of religion was not his main concern and the Hebrew Bible not his primary object of philosophical reflection. Still, Nietzsche's passion for perspectivism (or plural realism) hardly harmonizes with the Hebrew Bible's moral realism and its condemnation of everyone doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges) (see Young 2010:113).

Schopenhauer had already showed the metaphysical realism that was part of ancient Israelite ontology yet Nietzsche's philosophy of religion is decidedly non-realist. Perhaps one can here dare to speak of *ressentiment* on Nietzsche's own part to explain why he implicitly blamed certain (Priestly) textual ideologies for his own philosophical frustrations. Nietzsche's affinity for the older parts of the Hebrew Bible therefore may have more to do with him wanting to turn his philosophy of religion into a complete inversion of the pessimism and idealism of Schopenhauer (and Wagner; both favoured the New Testament), than with an in-depth philosophical engagement with the biblical texts themselves.

On the positive side, Nietzsche's praise of the Hebrew Bible provided a much needed corrective to the supersessionist Christian philosophy of religion of his day. Many of Nietzsche's philological and philosophical forerunners were anti-Semitic and his philosophy of religion allowed him to revalue what was otherwise considered too "primitive" in ancient Israelite religion. His positive naturalist assessments of early Yahwism(s) still have the potential to reveal possibilities for Nietzschean Semitic scholars interested in recovering the philosophical relevance of the Hebrew Bible in today's world, much as

Nietzsche did with ancient Greek culture in his own day. Particularly his view that philology should be concerned not just with descriptive knowledge for its own sake but with wisdom in the service of current needs remains something Semitic language scholars would do well to take note of.

CONCLUSION

In this article it was shown that Nietzsche's relation to the Hebrew Bible is complex, intensive and ambivalent. Though actually of marginal concern in his overall philosophy of religion (curious, in view of how highly he praises it), there exists a deep kinship and creative reception history with this biblical corpus in his writings. The intertextual relations cannot adequately be summed up in one sentence but Nietzsche's appropriation of Israelite religion was clearly both historical/descriptive and evaluative/reconstructive. Yet the deconstruction at work in his use of the Hebrew Bible reveals how he too suffered from the hermeneutical prejudices and misconceptions of his day. In the end, however, it can be said that though the Hebrew Bible features only haphazardly in Nietzsche's philosophy of religion, elements of his own critical spirit are quite unthinkable without the spirit of the Hebrew Bible itself making an "eternal recurrence" of sorts.

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