

Experiencing the Word of God: Reading as Wrestling

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Abstract: Analytic philosophers are generally advised to steer clear of the substantive use of literary tropes whose ‘semantic content outstrips their propositional content’ (Rea, 2009: 6). But this poses a problem for analytic *theologians* whose primary texts are beset by such literary devices. Can such material be usefully marshalled, or should it be left to one side, to remain unemployed by *analytic theologians*? In *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* Yoram Hazony offers what I take to be the most convincing argument to date that the entire biblical narrative (literary tropes and all) ought both to be read as philosophy *and* that the philosophical content contained in the biblical narrative can be marshalled into non-narrative propositional arguments. In this paper I will address three areas of concern for his project, and by extension, what I take to be concerns for other analytic theologians who might follow his lead.¹

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In the introduction to *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* Michael Rea characterises analytic philosophy (and by extension, analytic theology²) as ‘avoiding substantive use of metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content.’ (Rea, 2009: 6) Rea’s idea was not that metaphor and other literary tropes (like typology or analogy) should be avoided completely – to do so would severely limit the primary source material available to the analytic theologian – rather, as Thomas McCall puts it, that analytic ‘theologians are not at liberty to trade loosely in metaphor without ever being able to specify just what is

¹ This is not to say that all analytic theologians are committed to what I take to be Hazony’s position (namely, that the entire Bible can be translated into propositional content). Far from it. Rather, Hazony’s position (or what I take to be Hazony’s position) is a position that *could* be taken by an analytic theologian, but, I argue, should not be. The concerns I raise, then, are perhaps best considered indicative of the limitations of *analytic* theology.

² There are, of course, philosophers working within the analytic tradition that do use literary narrative, for example Eleonore Stump and Martha Nussbaum, but for present purposes I will treat these as non-representative.

meant by those metaphors. They are not, then, free to make claims the meaning of which cannot be specified or spelled out.’ (McCall, 2015: 20) In essence, although they can be identified as such, metaphors (and other literary tropes) should only be utilised by the analytic theologian if they can be rendered in some sense propositionally unambiguous.

Such an expectation certainly seems fitting for work produced by so-called *analytic* theologians, however the question remains: how are analytic *theologians* to deal with the ambiguities of the metaphors, typologies and similar tropes already present in their primary texts? Should Christian or Jewish analytic theologians, for instance, gloss over the parts of the Biblical text that do not lend themselves to straightforward propositional analysis, or are they at liberty to assume that beyond the metaphors and other literary tropes the authors or final editors of the Biblical texts were (at the very least far more often than not) engaging in some coherent work that can be teased out and rendered propositionally unambiguous?³

One analytic theologian who has engaged at length with this question is Yoram Hazony.⁴ Hazony affirms the latter position and in his book *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* he sets out a methodological framework for how this work might be undertaken (at least, in Jewish analytic theology). Hazony argues that the Biblical prophets were engaging in works of reason, works at least comparable to the Greek philosophers, and that their work should be considered authoritative *because* it is reasonable, and not (just) because their work is taken on faith to have been revealed to them by God. Expanding upon this claim, Hazony begins his book’s conclusion with the following words:

“Not too long from now it may be possible to write a comprehensive work on the ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures. [This book suggests] a methodological framework [which] I believe can permit a more rapid advance in the direction of a well-articulated understanding of the philosophical content of the Hebrew Scripture than we’ve seen so far.” (Hazony, 2012: 265)

³ This is not to say that analytic theologians of the former persuasion are unable to say *anything* about such non-propositional content; as I hope to show, they can attempt to articulate *why*, in general terms, such non-propositional content might have been included. Neither indeed am I suggesting that analytic theology acts (or should act) as a replacement for direct engagement with the biblical text. Rather, this paper takes aim at those who take up the latter position and think the entire Bible can be translated into propositional content without left-over (regardless of whether or not this then serves as a supplement to direct-biblical engagement). And whilst it might be the case that such a group of analytic theologians is very small indeed (although if Kierkegaard is right, perhaps not so small! See Kierkegaard, 1990: 25-6) it is hoped this paper will be taken as an attempt to expand upon and exemplify motivations to take up the former position. I thank one anonymous referee for pushing this point.

⁴ Although I am focusing on Hazony’s work (his work is the most substantive attempt to engage with this question that I have come across), I think the concerns I raise would be common to any attempt by an analytic theologian to propositionally analyse the literary tropes in a religious text.

Reason, Hazony says, has traditionally involved ‘deducing propositions from other propositions.’ What he proposes instead is to extend this understanding of reason to include abductively inferring propositions from what he calls ‘non-propositional’ analogy, metaphor, and typology found in the Hebrew bible (272).⁵ In essence, Hazony is proposing to take the very literary tropes at question, reduce them to what he sees as their *approximate* propositional content and then set them to work in analytic arguments in order to articulate what he sees as the philosophy of Hebrew scripture.

The methodological framework that Hazony develops requires his inquirer to first learn how to reliably ‘recognize a given general cause or nature in experience’ as only once this is done ‘is it then possible to begin trying to establish a partial description of it in propositions’ (272). Hazony follows this up by suggesting that as soon as one recognises that

“metaphor, analogy, and typology are in fact means by which the author of a work can establish positions with respect to general causes or natures, it becomes much easier to see that the great majority of the biblical authors, and perhaps all of them, are indeed engaged in reason; and that it is the exercise of reason they hope for, as well, in their readers.” (273)

Now, let me say at the outset that I am in point of fact in sympathetic to Hazony’s position. I find his suggestion that metaphor, analogy, and typology can be used by an author to establish positions with respect to general causes or natures a deeply plausible one.⁶ Like Hazony, I think that not too long from now it *may* be possible to compile a comprehensive work on the ideas of Hebrew Scripture. Nevertheless, I have three concerns that have to do with the attempt to *disseminate* such a comprehensive analytic work, should Hazony’s vision be in fact possible.

Each of my three concerns relates to the *presentation* of such a work if, as Rea and McCall suggest should be the case for the analytic theologian, whatever literary tropes that are present in this work are entirely reducible to propositional content and especially if this comprehensive work is presented in a purely non-narrative propositional form. To that end, this paper should not be read as an indictment against Hazony’s analytic project – far from it; rather, it is best read as an expression of concern as to the direction the project might take if clarity and rigor are placed on too high a pedestal (literary trope intended!) to the exclusion of narrative presentation.⁷ I will briefly outline these concerns before returning to each in turn in sections two, three and four.

Firstly, metaphor, analogy, and typology are all modes of narrative. Following a line of argument developed by Eleonore Stump, I will argue that narratives

⁵ See also Hazony, 2012: 27.

⁶ Although this view is not uncontroversial. See for instance Brinks, 2015: 247.

⁷ As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, analytic theology is only a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, direct biblical engagement.

(including metaphor, analogy, and typology) convey knowledge that cannot be communicated in non-narrative propositional form. As a result, there is a real risk of losing *something* in trying to convey in non-narrative propositional form the ideas of the Hebrew Scripture in some comprehensive work of analytic theology.⁸

Secondly, I will propose one reason why the philosophy in Hebrew Scripture might have been ‘hidden’ in metaphor, analogy, and typology. To do this I am going to discuss a pedagogical strategy used by another author, Thomas Hobbes, who used the paradoxes of Hebrew Scripture to inspire puzzlement, awe and wonder in his readers. I will argue that there may be good *pedagogical* reasons why philosophy might be hidden in metaphor, analogy, and typology, namely, that the experience of puzzlement, awe and wonder allows the reader to enter into a ‘teachable moment’ and that this moment is lost when one spells out in non-narrative propositional form what might have been buried in a seemingly ambiguous narrative.

Finally, I will argue that it is often the case that coming to some sort of an understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures requires (quite deliberately) wrestling with them.⁹ In this wrestling process one gains a certain experiential knowledge of what it is like to wrestle with the text, and behind the text, perhaps with the One who inspired it also. I will argue that the sort of experiential knowledge gained in the wrestling process as one wrestles with the narrative is lost when whatever can be gleaned from the narrative is given to you on a plate, if you will, in easy to digest non-narrative propositional form.

I. Narrative and Two Kinds of Knowledge

So, to the first concern. I see Hazony’s project as having two broad aims:

- i. To encourage people to read the whole Hebrew Bible as a philosophical narrative, and
- ii. To break down metaphors, analogies, and typologies found in Biblical narrative into clear propositional arguments in order to help comprehensively map out philosophical ideas in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰

⁸ Of course, even if this is Yoram Hazony’s position, it is evidently not the case that all analytic theologians are committed to conveying every idea of the Bible in non-narrative prose. Rather, as I will suggest, the analytic theologian needs merely (if needs anything at all) to identify areas irreducible to non-narrative prose and explain why (and perhaps how) such passages are irreducible to non-narrative prose. I thank an anonymous referee for pushing this point.

⁹ This is, of course, not unique to the Bible, however few other books can claim a similar architect.

¹⁰ Much of the remainder of the criticism of Hazony’s position is contingent on whether he is committed to this point in all cases, or only when and where possible, and to the degree that it is possible. If Hazony’s position is in fact the latter, Hazony can escape much of the proceeding criticism, however this would render Hazony’s account (to my mind) less interesting; ‘metaphor, analogy and typology can be broken down into propositional argument only if they can be broken down into propositional argument, and then only to the degree that they can’. How does the analytic theologian determine whether the metaphor, analogy or typology they are looking at can be broken down? If it is

Both these aims require extracting knowledge from (sometimes very complex) narrative, and in both cases there is a long history of people not even knowing to look, let alone how to look. To this end, I think the work Hazony has done in showing that (at least parts of) the Hebrew Scripture can be read as a philosophical narrative is laudable. My concern, however, is that something is lost when these narratives are reduced to non-narrative propositional arguments.¹¹

On page twenty-one of *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* Hazony cites Eleonore Stump's book, *Wandering in Darkness*, as being the first book by a prominent philosopher to argue for the need to incorporate the biblical narrative into the discipline of philosophy.

In *Wandering in Darkness* Stump makes a distinction between two kinds of knowledge (2010: 59), what she calls propositional knowledge (or Dominican knowledge) and what she calls knowledge of persons (or Franciscan knowledge):

- Propositional knowledge is knowledge *that X*, and as such, propositional knowledge can always be reduced to and conveyed by propositions.
- Knowledge of persons, on the other hand, is knowledge irreducible to propositional form. Unlike propositional knowledge, knowledge of persons can only be conveyed through second-personal experience or, and crucially for present purposes, narrative.¹²

This is how Stump describes, or more precisely, does not describe knowledge of persons:

not immediately obvious that what they are looking at can be broken down, when do they move on? At what point do they risk pure speculative eisegesis (something already a problem on what I take to be Hazony's view)? Again, I thank one anonymous referee for pushing this point.

¹¹ Of course, this is not to say that analytic theology is in any sense thought to replace, rather than supplement, direct engagement with the biblical text, rather, that this is one reason *why* analytic theology could not replace direct engagement with the biblical text, and one reason to doubt the possibility of Hazony's vision of a comprehensive non-narrative map of the philosophy of Hebrew scripture.

¹² See Stump, 2010: 77-80 for an explanation for how an *account* can be second-personal. Stump writes: "While we cannot express the distinctive knowledge of such an experience as a matter of knowing that, we can do something to re-present the experience itself in such a way that we can share the second-person experience to some degree with others who were not part of it, so that at least some of the Franciscan knowledge garnered from the experience is also available to them. This is generally what we do when we tell a story. A story takes a real or imagined set of second-person experiences of one sort or another and makes it available to a wider audience to share. It does so by making it possible, to one degree or another, for a person to experience some of what she would have experienced if she had been an onlooker in the second-person experience represented in the story. That is, a story gives a person some of what she would have had if she had had unmediated personal interaction with the characters in the story while they were conscious and interacting with each other, without actually making her part of the story itself. The re-presenting of a second-person experience in a story thus constitutes a second-person account. It is a report of a set of second-person experiences that does not lose (at least does not lose entirely) the distinctively second-person character of the experiences." (78)

“At this point, it is worth considering how this question [what is the nature of knowledge of persons?] could be answered. Here is how it could not be answered. It could not be answered by trying to spell out what exactly is known in the Franciscan knowledge of persons, contrasting it with knowledge that, and considering whether the distinctive elements of that Franciscan knowledge are philosophically significant. The objector's question could not be answered in this way because then the position being defended would be incoherent... I would be trying to describe in the familiar terms of knowing that the Franciscan knowledge which I have claimed cannot be formulated in that way.” (Stump, 2010: 59)¹³

In order to support the distinction between these two types of knowledge Stump reworks Frank Jackson's famous knowledge argument. Stump asks us to imagine some Mary who has been locked in a room since birth. Mary has never experienced a second-personal encounter with her mother, and does not have access to any narrative account of her mother. Nevertheless, in Mary's room Mary has access (through encyclopaedias and computers) to all relevant non-narrative propositional information about the existence of her loving mother, along with all that science can teach about her. Stump writes:

“When Mary is first united with her mother, it seems indisputable that Mary will know things she did not know before, even if she knew everything about her mother that could be made available to her in non-narrative propositional form, including her mother's psychological states. Although Mary knew that her mother loved her before she met her, when she is united with her mother, Mary will learn what it is like to be loved. And this will be new for her, even if in her isolated state she had as complete a scientific description as possible of what a human being feels like when she senses that she is loved by someone else.” (Stump, 2010: 52)

On my reading of her, what Stump is committing to in this account of knowledge is at odds with, for instance, a traditional analysis of Jackson's original thought experiment that suggests Mary merely learns something old in a new way (see, for instance, Churchland, 1985: 67-76).¹⁴ In other words, knowledge of persons (the

¹³ And again a little earlier Stump writes: “I want to claim, however, that there is a kind of knowledge of persons, a Franciscan knowledge, which is non-propositional and which is not reducible to knowledge that. What could that possibly be?, a skeptical objector may ask. But, of course, if I give an answer to the skeptic's question, I will have an incoherent position: in answering the question, I will be presenting in terms of knowledge that what I am claiming could not be presented that way.” (Stump, 2010: 52)

¹⁴ Churchland writes, for instance, “the difference between a person who knows all about the visual cortex but has never enjoyed a sensation of red, and a person who knows no neuroscience but knows well the sensation of red, may reside not in what is respectively known by each (brain states by the former, qualia by the latter), but rather in the different type of knowledge each has of exactly the same thing. The difference is in the manner of the knowing, not in the nature(s) of the thing known.” (Churchland, 1989: 24)

something new) is in some sense captured by what was previously known, namely, pertinent propositional knowledge (the something old). For Stump, on the other hand, what Mary learns is not something old in a new way, but something entirely new altogether.¹⁵

So why might this matter to us? Stump continues in her account of narrative in the following way, arguing in effect that knowledge of persons transmitted in her narrative studies can be used to ‘soften the blow’ or ‘prepare the ground’ for the arguments that follow. Of course, for the reasons she mentioned above, she can’t explain *exactly* how this knowledge of persons does this, nevertheless Stump writes

“I [have] argued that a story, which is a second-person account, can give us something of what we would have had if we ourselves had been participants, even just as bystanders, in the second-person experiences that the story describes. In the same way, ... biblical narratives ...constitute a way of sharing and passing on interpersonal experiences, including interpersonal experiences (whether real or imagined) with God, in all their messy richness. These narratively shared experiences can inform in subtle ways our intuitions and judgments, just as real-life experiences do.

... I cannot explain exactly what way that is, but it is not necessary for me to do so...¹⁶ I think, therefore, that the best way to make use of ... biblical narratives ... is to let ... reflection on them ... serve as the equivalent of experience, not the experience of traveling through a country but rather something like the experience of immersion in a worldview. To experience this worldview is, of course, not the same thing as approving of it or being willing to adopt and accept as one's own the things peculiar to it. But, even if one rejects it, the as-it-were travel experience of it will broaden and enrich one's perceptions and judgments of things, altering them in subtle and not-so-

¹⁵ See Stump, 2010: 52-59 for more details. Stump distinguishes ‘knowledge-of-persons’ from the ‘knowledge-how’ ability hypothesis that Laurence Nemirow (1990), David Lewis (2004) and Paul Churchill (1989) discuss. The knowledge-how ability hypothesis suggests that experience gives us an ability and nothing more; an ability to remember, imagine or recognize what it is like to have that experience. There is no *new* knowledge gained at all in this process. The position that Stump takes up, then, is closer to Earl Conee’s ‘acquaintance’ hypothesis (1994). For Conee, there is no new propositional knowledge gained by experience, but there is something gained beyond mere know-how, namely, acquaintance with the thing known.

¹⁶ Further from Stump on this point: “What an American learns after numerous extended trips to China cannot be reduced to particular claims about the country, the culture, and the people; the experienced traveler will not be able to explain in numbered propositions what his previous trips have taught him. But, nonetheless, what virtually all of us believe is that, on his next trip to China, he will be readily distinguishable from his colleagues who are visiting China for the first time.

He will be able to bridge the gap between American and Chinese cultures by myriad small or large insights hard to summarize or to express at all in any propositional way. Because of his previous experience with China, he will have an understanding of China and its culture and people that his colleagues on their first trip to China will lack; and he will not be able to convey to them in terms of knowledge that what he himself has learned. His inexperienced colleagues will have to learn it for themselves through experience on their own trips to China. Or they might learn some of it in advance through stories, which lets them participate vicariously to some extent in the experiences their colleague, the experienced traveler to China, has had.” (Stump, 2010: 374)

subtle ways, much as travel to a very different culture will do even if one is alienated from that culture.

... I will [therefore] treat the stories as one treats the experience of travel. ... I will let the memory of the preceding readings of the stories inform inchoately or tacitly the reflections in this and subsequent chapters ... In effect, I will count on the stories as a common store of experience shared by readers, in the way one might share with others the experience of having been to China, even if one disagrees with one's fellow travelers about the assessment of what one has seen, even if one disputes what the others take to be the facts with regard to the country and its people." (2010: 374)

Now, it might be the case that Hazony is right, and with sufficient study we can extract all non-narrative propositional knowledge from the analogies, metaphors, and typologies in the Bible (although I'm not altogether clear on how we would judge what qualifies as true typology and what a false typology). In passing this information on to others, however, there is a real risk that analytic theologians will fail to transmit the sort of knowledge of persons that the authors or final editors of the Hebrew Bible were at least in part concerned with passing on.¹⁷ On this view, then, metaphor, analogy, and typology are not mere rhetorical flair, nor are they merely a device for 'softening the blow' of an argument, rather, the knowledge of persons gathered from them is necessary for, or at the very least conducive to, full understanding of the point under consideration.¹⁸

If this knowledge of persons cannot (by necessity) be reduced to non-narrative propositional form, the methodology for engaging in a project to comprehensively and persuasively map out the ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures must be carefully revised, with consideration given, at the very least, for (ambiguous) narrative's role¹⁹ in analytic theology.²⁰ As I will note a little later – the analytic theology project is

¹⁷ This, of course, assumes that there *is* such a thing as propositionally irreducible Franciscan knowledge of persons, and this is by no means an uncontroversial assumption. Even assuming this, though, Hazony (or the putative analytic theologian) could respond to this by suggesting that the propositional content he extracts is merely a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the Biblical text itself ('like a travel guide book is a supplement to, by not a replacement for, the tour itself' - I thank one anonymous referee for pressing this point). However, this move (conceding that second-personal content in the Bible *is* there, but cannot be marshalled for use in argument) demonstrates one limitation of analytic theology, for in making this move the analytic theologian is ignoring something that might otherwise prove pertinent to the topic at hand. Such a concession is of course neither good nor bad for analytic theology (nor should it really come as a surprise), but is, I suggest, usefully illustrative of the fact that analytic theology 'cannot go it alone'.

¹⁸ Like in Stump's earlier attempt to explain Franciscan knowledge of persons, I am unable to show exactly how Franciscan knowledge might do this (for to do so would require setting out what it achieves in propositional form, which, of course, would then render such knowledge propositional rather than knowledge of persons). At best, I can point to the Mary thought experiment and use the intuition that some may have that Mary really does learn something new when she sees her mother to show that knowledge of persons is real, and can be communicated in narrative.

¹⁹ I am here referring to whatever it is about narrative that is in some sense propositionally irreducible.

²⁰ To this end Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* provides an excellent model for how such biblically informed analytic theology might be done, with a full quarter of the book devoted letting the biblical

edifying for those doing it, and edifying for those it inspires to search on their own (both of whom get the benefit of the propositional and non-propositional knowledge that comes with engaging with scripture), but it is perhaps not so good for those who upon reading the finished (non-narrative) article think to themselves ‘that’s neat – I’m glad I don’t have to do that intellectual work!’²¹ (and who are thereby left with propositional knowledge alone).²²

II. Literary Tropes as a Pedagogical Tool

So my first concern was to do with the possibility and plausibility of conveying arguments derived from narrative in a purely non-narrative form. I have a second concern, too. I think there is a sense in which analogy, metaphor, and typology can also be used as pedagogical tools for learning, and by explaining them too clearly too soon, the power of this tool is lost.²³ To illustrate this point I will draw a parallel

narrative speak for itself, if you will (albeit after her propositional framework has been established, so reader comes to the narrative with an informed structure already present).

²¹ As one anonymous referee noted, apart from perhaps Maimonides, there is perhaps no other analytic (or non-analytic) theologian, in either the Jewish or Christian tradition, who has endorsed this kind of response. However, the concern here is not so much that this response is endorsed (or not) by theologians (although it seems to me to be a plausible outcome among other plausible outcomes), rather, the concern is that analytic theology *alone* cannot provide a comprehensive map of the ideas of scripture, and so the analytic theologian must either leave something important out, or alternatively, and contra both Rea and McCall, trade in ‘metaphor and other tropes whose semantic content outstrips their propositional content’ (Rea, 2009: 6) ‘without ever being able to specify just what is meant by those metaphors.’ (McCall, 2015: 20)

²² For a different (and slightly more extreme) take on why this might be problematic see, for instance, the following Chinese proverb by Chuang Tzu: “Duke Huan of Ch’i was reading a book at the upper end of the hall; the wheelwright was making a wheel at the lower end. Putting aside his mallet and chisel, he called to the Duke and asked him what book he was reading. ‘One that records the words of the Sages,’ answered the Duke. ‘Are those Sages alive?’ asked the wheelwright. ‘Oh, no,’ said the Duke, ‘they are dead.’ ‘In that case,’ said the wheelwright, ‘what you are reading can be nothing but the lees and scum of bygone men.’ ‘How dare you, a wheelwright, find fault with the book I am reading. If you can explain your statement, I will let it pass. If not, you shall die.’ ‘Speaking as a wheelwright,’ he replied, ‘I look at the matter in this way; when I am making a wheel, if my stroke is too slow, then it bites deep but is not steady; if my stroke is too fast, then it is steady, but it does not go deep. The right pace, neither slow nor fast, cannot get into the hand unless it comes from the heart. It is a thing that cannot be put into rules; there is an art in it that I cannot explain to my son. That is why it is impossible for me to let him take over my work, and here I am at the age of seventy still making wheels. In my opinion it must have been the same with the men of old. All that was worth handing on, died with them; the rest, they put in their books. That is why I said that what you were reading was the lees and scum of bygone men.” (Oakeshott, 1962: 9)

²³ Talking about the importance of having an attitude of awe for holiness, Samuel Lebens suggests that awe is an easy bubble to burst – you can make any situation seem absurd, he suggests, if you start treating things as mere objects. (Lebens, 2013) Whilst neither Hazony nor any other analytic theologian I am aware of argues that analytic theology should *replace* direct engagement with the Bible, it is evidently the case that work in analytic theology can affect *how* one directly engages with the Bible, especially if one comes to the Bible after engaging with a ‘comprehensive work on the ideas of Hebrew scripture’! If the analytic theologian does (*per impossibile!*) succeed, or purports to succeed,

between the use of the pedagogical power of metaphor, analogy and typology in the British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, and my suggested use of the same pedagogical tools in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The seventeenth Century British Philosophy Thomas Hobbes saw one of his major tasks as being that of public education. His work (he hoped) would educate the public to think in a certain way – and he employed a very specific pedagogical strategy in order to achieve this aim.

Hobbes believed that in the presence of paradox or puzzlement, the reader's attention would be arrested. Their curiosity would be piqued, and this curiosity would lead to wonder and admiration, where the sense of admiration was that of intellectual activity suspended under the influence of emotion. In such a state, the reader would be able develop their knowledge in a way not previously possible. Most people, Hobbes thought, are stuck in a sort of rut of habituated thinking; like a wooden carriage on a well-worn mud track. The wheels of the carriage find themselves in deep and familiar grooves from which it is difficult to turn. In the same way, a person (here the carriage wheel) is not likely to change their engrained of thinking about the world without some mental shock or jolt.²⁴

The employment of a paradox, a riddle or, other puzzlement was designed, on Hobbes account, to shake that person out of their tracks, to shock them, to throw them for a loop, and to cause that person to have to think for themselves – no longer on autopilot, so to speak. And it is in this state that Hobbes believed a person has the capacity to learn something new.

Here's how Hobbes Scholar Jon Parkin puts it:

“The clear connection between paradox and wonder now starts to make sense of Hobbes's interest in paradoxical styles of presentation. Presenting his theory in a deliberately paradoxical form, Hobbes seems to have adopted a writing strategy that was precisely calibrated to generate a sense of admiration and wonder in his reader, which we know from his reception that it did. Far from providing a straightforward elaboration of his arguments in an appeal to the rational faculties, Hobbes appears to have deliberately sought instead to arrest his reader's rational process with *admiration*. The general purpose of this strategy appears linked to Hobbes's theory of knowledge, and the manner in which the disruptive moment of wonder at Hobbes's artificial intellectual novelties might resolve itself into some level of excited curiosity into the possibility of new and beneficial knowledge.” (Parkin, 2016: 635)

Of course, this insight was not unique to Hobbes. Today, too, when we find ourselves reading about a God who demands Abraham sacrifice his son, or for what appears to be genocide, or what might otherwise seem an utterly arbitrary law, the

in reducing narrative, metaphor, and typology to non-narrative propositional form in such a way that they provide a comprehensive ethical explanation for, say, the Akedah, they do so at the risk of losing a teachable moment, or so I suggest.

²⁴ I thank Jon Parkin for this analogy.

correct response, I think, is that of horror (“that can’t be right!”) or surprise (“this is bizarre!”) and a desire to inquire further into the topic at hand.

I suggest that this same pedagogical tool employed by Hobbes to such clear effect might also have been employed by the authors or final editors of the Hebrew Scriptures. The metaphors, analogies, typologies and even paradoxes of the Hebrew Scripture seem geared up to create a ‘teachable moment’. A moment where upon discovery and puzzlement, a person *wants* to inquire further, and is then particularly receptive to any knowledge they find on the way.²⁵

My concern, then, is that in explaining the paradox, or metaphor, or analogy, or type in non-narrative propositional form, the analytic theologian loses a powerful pedagogical tool – in a sense it is like giving away a spoiler in a mystery, or the punchline in a joke. Instead of wonder and admiration, then, the reader is left with something fizzling out like ‘Oh. That’s neat.’ and then their attention is diverted elsewhere.

Now there is a sense in which any attempt at explanatory theology runs the risk of having a similar effect, and I am, of course, by no means suggesting this then ought to be avoided; rather, I am merely suggesting that this initial *unclarity* and subsequent puzzlement is a valuable (and deliberate) tool, and is something not to be jettisoned too lightly.

III. Reading as Wrestling: Experiencing the Word of God

So I have given two concerns about the possibility and plausibility of conveying arguments derived from narrative in non-narrative propositional form, and about the loss of an important pedagogical tool in giving the punch line away, if you will, too soon.

I think, however, that there is a much bigger issue at stake than either of these – but at this juncture my concern becomes less about an ambiguously secular enterprise and more clearly a religious one.

On my reading, the God of the Hebrew Bible takes joy in concealing things and takes joy when these concealed things are searched out. Consider the following verse from Proverbs (25:2): “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” And I think there is an important reason why this might be the case. I suggest that in the very act of searching God out there is untransmittable ‘knowledge of persons’ available – and what is true of searching God out is true also when it comes to uncovering the meaning behind the metaphors, analogies, and typologies of Hebrew Scripture.

In their paper ‘More than Inspired Propositions’ Adam Green and Keith Quan argue that the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures offer a vehicle for what they call

²⁵ For an example of this in the biblical narrative see the interaction between Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 12:1-4.

mediated ‘shared attention’ (either ‘pseudo’ or ‘genuine’²⁶) with God (Green and Quan, 2012). Their point seems to me right, but I think mere shared attention alone does not do the sort of second-personal encounter actually available justice. I think something altogether more dramatic can happen as a person wrestles with the Scriptures.

Speaking from experience, when I read through parts of Deuteronomy (2:34, 3:6, 7:2, 13:15, 20:16-17) or Joshua (6:21, 10:40) and read God’s commandment to kill children, I feel visceral shock and horror.

There are several responses I could have at this juncture. I could devise some clever justification in order to explain my horror away, or I could try and ignore what I have read, chalking it up as a mystery beyond my comprehension. Or I, like many before me, could confront God over why he would do or command such a thing.²⁷ Indeed, the Hebrew Scripture has several exemplar cases of people struggling with God— Abraham and Lot (Genesis 18:16-33), Jacob (Genesis 32:22-33), Moses (Exodus 32:11) – and whilst we also have our own lived experience, I see no reason why we cannot wrestle with God today over that which has been previously recorded.²⁸

So I suggest that this very experience of struggling or wrestling with God while searching for answers is valuable –and I think something significant would be lost if this experience was bypassed by knowledge imparted without any mental struggle. God could have renamed Jacob without the need to wrestle with him. But I think in wrestling with God, Jacob learned something about himself, and about God, that he could not otherwise have learned. In a similar vein, if someone was to give me a completely satisfying answer as to why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, I would have (perhaps) one less issue with God, but I would also have lost an opportunity to engage, passionately, with God.²⁹

²⁶ See Green and Quan, 2012: 423. Green and Quan write: “It is our suggestion that the Christian Scriptures are meant to facilitate acquaintance knowledge of the divine through “as if,” instrumental, and constitutive uses of the religious text.” (426)

²⁷ This motivation to wrestle need not be limited to outlier extremes like moral horrors. The feeling of puzzlement one has when one comes across a literary trope and one really cannot determine why it was included, or what it is trying to convey is just as sufficient a motivation to turn to God in perplexity.

²⁸ Indeed, on one Jewish tradition the flood is attributed to Noah (being called ‘the waters of Noah’, Isaiah 54:9, see Zohar on Genesis, p67b) in virtue of the fact he did not object to God’s threat to destroy the world with water. Likewise, there is a similar tradition that holds Abraham at fault for disintegration of his relationship with Isaac after the Akedah (one tradition believes Abraham went back to Sarah alone, Genesis 22:19, with the two of them either never seeing each other again, or seeing each other just prior to Abraham’s death) in virtue of the fact that he did not fight back, as he had done with Lot and as he was positioning himself to do over Ishmael, when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac.

²⁹ As noted by one anonymous referee, just because Hazony tries to offer a satisfying answer to this question does not mean that all other analytic theologians are bound to the same course. This much is true, of course. An analytic theologian could produce a commentary on the Bible that leaves out difficult passages, explaining (with analytical philosophical justification) that these passages are left

So in the process of discovery itself, there is knowledge of persons of God and oneself to be had. And this experiential knowledge cannot be attained without in some sense *personally* going through this process of discovery.

Perhaps, indeed, actually understanding the Hebrew Scripture is only a happy side effect of a much more significant reason for engagement with the Biblical narratives: namely, the opportunity to come into a passionate conversation, a dramatic second-personal encounter, with God. One where a person can come to a text confused, angry, and upset, and indeed perhaps still leave confused, angry, and upset – but nevertheless having had that second-personal experience of addressing, and in some sense wrestling with God - with this engagement having been motivated and animated by the rich literary complexities and moral ambiguity of the narrative.³⁰

In a review of Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness* David Efird and I noted the following about the way suffering can be used to motivate a person's second-personal encounter with God:

“Think about the last time you took an aeroplane flight and sat next to a stranger. You might have exchanged some pleasantries with the person sitting next to you, but it is not likely you took the conversation much deeper than that. And so you probably ended the flight strangers to one another, just as you were when you began the flight. Now, say that something terrible happens on the aeroplane, a traumatic ordeal that forces you to drop your guard and open up to the other person. Such an occasion is an occasion for your life-story to be interwoven with the life-story of the person who was once a stranger but now no more. For the two of you are then dealing with one another in a second-person way, focusing not merely on yourself (a first-person experience) but

for the reader to wrestle over. However, such a response indicates, perhaps, that at least Hazony's project to comprehensively map out all the ideas of scripture either cannot or, disconcertingly, *should not* be done.

³⁰ This was, I think, what Kierkegaard was getting at in his *For Self-Examination*, when he wrote that theological scholarship can actually militate against direct engagement with 'God's Word': "'God's Word' is indeed the mirror-but, but-oh, how enormously complicated-strictly speaking, how much belongs to 'God's Word'? Which books are authentic? Are they really by the apostles, and are the apostles really trustworthy? Have they personally seen everything, or have they perhaps only heard about various things from others? As for ways of reading, there are thirty thousand different ways. And then this crowd or crush of scholars and opinions, and learned opinions and unlearned opinions about how the particular passage is to be understood is it not true that all this seems to be rather complicated! God's Word is the mirror-in reading it or hearing it, I am supposed to see myself in the mirror-but look, this business of the mirror is so confusing that I very likely never come to see myself reflected-at least not if I go at it this way. One could almost be tempted to assume that the full force of human craftiness has a hand in it (alas, how true, in relation to God and godliness and Godfearing truth we humans are so crafty that we do not mean it at all when we tell each other that we are perfectly willing to do God's will if we only could find out what it is). One could almost be tempted to assume that this is craftiness, that we really do not want to see ourselves in that mirror and therefore we have concocted all this that threatens to make the mirror impossible, all this that we then honor with the laudatory name of scholarly and profound and serious research and pondering." (Kierkegaard, 1990: 25-6)

rather on the other person, and not merely as a 'he' or 'she' but rather as 'you'. Suffering is like this. Suffering provides a context for God to interact with us in a second-person way, where we become open to God in a way that we would not ordinarily open up to him, just like we would not ordinarily open up to strangers, and in the trauma, our life-story becomes interwoven with God's." (Efird & Worsley, 2015: 550)

I suspect being presented with a difficult narrative – a difficult narrative with no easy explanation - can do similar work to the suffering in the airplane thought experiment. There is a sense in which complexity and ambiguity forces a person to critically engage with God; to demand of Him an answer, to question His goodness, or to question His plan. And in as much as this may be true of suffering, I have no reason to doubt that it is also true in the face of an ambiguous or difficult narrative, too.³¹

And it is just this dramatic second-personal engagement that will be lost, I think, if a comprehensive mapping of the philosophy of Scripture, including its ethics, takes place without a full appreciation of the rationale behind why said philosophy was cloaked in literary tropes to begin with. As before, however, this concern is not for those doing the project of understanding and disseminating itself – for as mentioned earlier, to 'search out a matter is the glory of kings'!

Conclusion

My concern, then, has been that assuming its possibility, the *dissemination* of a comprehensive map of the Philosophy of the Hebrew Bible may have at least three drawbacks, one practical, one pedagogical, the other experiential. These are only concerns, however. And I am well aware they may not amount to much in the end.³²

It might be the case that, as Hazony suggests (272), the clarity achieved in completing this project is sufficient to outweigh any pedagogical confusion, or that the clarity offered is enough to draw people to the Biblical narratives who would otherwise be disinterested. And indeed, it likely will still be the case that most people's first encounter with the Scripture will be unaided, so to speak, and so they may still reap the ambiguous narrative's pedagogical reward.

The concerns I have briefly laid out do not entail that Hazony's vision should not be attempted, or that there won't be great benefit from taking it on – I suspect there will be, especially to those undertaking the task – my overall concern is rather that

³¹ Through a discussion of several Biblical characters who challenged God, Hazony, in the fourth chapter of his book, also notes that God wants people to wrestle with Him. (Hazony, 2012: 103-139). Hazony concludes: "Suffice it to say that the God of Israel loves those who disobey for the sake of what is right, and is capable of being pleased when a man has used his freedom to wrestle with him and to prevail, so long as the path on behalf of which he struggles ultimately proves to be the right one in God's eyes." (139)

³² As I see it, each concern serves to reinforce the thought that analytic theology supplements, rather than replaces, direct Biblical engagement, but this is not a particularly profound claim!

whatever analytic methodology is employed in philosophically marshalling the ambiguous literary tropes present in the Biblical narratives, those readers not part of the marshalling process should still be (perhaps fully) exposed to the difficult, complex and often unclear narratives so that they too can experience the propositionally irreducible knowledge of persons available in the narrative, and so that they too can benefit from wrestling with the word of God.³³

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³³ My gratitude is extended to the members of the 2015 Jewish Philosophy Theology Workshop who commented on an early draft of this paper, and also to the anonymous reviewers for this journal, who provided many invaluable insights.

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