A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENERIC אלהים IN THE HEBREW BIBLE IN RELATION TO THE CLASSICAL THEORY OF CONCEPTS

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ABSTRACT
Contemporary analyses of אלהים as generic concept tend to be based on psychological theories of concepts. This article, by contrast, attempts to show what a philosophical analysis of the concept of generic אלהים in the Hebrew Bible is concerned with when approached from the perspective of the classical or definitionist view of conceptual structure. However, rather than offering a conceptual analysis of generic אלהים in any given context, the discussion features a general meta-conceptual overview of the classical theory and the pros and cons of applying it to the concept in question.

INTRODUCTION

One interest that keeps returning in recent research on the Hebrew Bible's concept of deity is the question: what did it mean to call something an אלהים? (cf. Smith 2001:vi; Wardlaw 2008:1; Gericke 2009:20-45; and McClellan 2013:1). By this is not meant a concern with the diverse and changing theologies of Yahwism (אלהים as personal name for Yhwh) but rather puzzlement as to what exactly the biblical texts assumed about the concept of generic godhood (אלהים as as common name for a genus). Scholars have approached the question from various perspectives and have arrived at various answers, often only implicit. Most typical and traditional have been grammatical, comparative-religious and theological perspectives (cf. Ringgren 1974:267-284; Schmidt 1994:331-347; van der Toorn 1999:910-919; and Smith 2001:81-102). More recently, however, cognitive-scientific (also linguistic) approaches have become particularly fashionable (e.g., Wardlaw 2008; McClellan 2013). Focussing on prototypes, categorization and typicality, these latter perspectives tend to lean heavily on psychological views of concepts.

Also philosophical theories of concepts exist and these have hardly featured at all in research on generic אלהים (Gericke 2009:20-45 being a notable exception). However, what is available in this regard hardly scratches the surface, which leads us to the question that constitutes the research problem of this paper: what would a philosophical analysis of the concept of generic אלהים look like? In other words, what philosophical theory of concepts is there with which one may try to answer the question of what it meant to call something an אלהים?

In the philosophy of language and mind, what is commonly known as the "classical" theory of concepts is considered to be the traditional philosophical theory of conceptual structure (see Prinz 2002:57). Besides imagism (a theory of concept deriving from Locke and no longer fashionable), this is the stereotypical philosophical theory of concepts and lies behind the method of decompositional philosophical analysis. Contrary to psychological theories of concepts, which focus mainly on typicality and categorization, the classical theory would suggest that there are metaphysically [sic] necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being in the possible worlds' extension of the concept of generic אלהים. As such, it predicts the existence of satisfying conditions for being called an אלהים so that any entity instantiating the essential properties involved must be an אלהים (see Earl 2005:n.p).

Also known as a definitionist approach, classical conceptual analysis is basically the quest for an intensional definition (see Prinz 2002:57). Due to what many consider fatal flaws, however, the classical theory has fallen into disrepute and has taken a backseat to more probabilistic (and other) psychological theories of concepts, e.g., prototype theories, exemplar theories, theory-theories (but also, atomistic theories, dual theories, proxytype theories, pluralism and eliminativism; see Margolis & Laurence 2012:n.p., but also Smith & Medin 1981, Margolis & Laurence 1999:175 and Murphy 2002:17).

Only a small number of scholars have relatively recently still associated themselves with the classical approach, e.g., Peacocke (1992) and Jackson (1998). Various versions of the theory exist, including neo-classical theories. The theory is also taken up yet covert within many dual-theories of concepts. However, there seems to be a widespread confusion at work here in that there is a failure to appreciate that what philosophers mean by the concept "concept" and the questions they seek to answer in conceptual analysis differ to some extent from what is of interest in psychology and cognitive science (see Machery 2009:32-33). To fault the classical

theory for not solving the epistemological problems that psychological theories are interested in may therefore be somewhat misplaced.

In this article, however, no attempt is made to enter the debates concerning the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic issues in which the study of concepts is forever bogged down (see Fodor 1998; Weiskopf 2009:145-173; Machery 2009; and Margolis & Laurence 2012:n.p). Rather than arguing for the viability of the classical theory (or any other particular theory of concepts), what follows is simply an introduction to definitionism to show what a philosophical analysis of the concept of generic אלהים could involve – this in the knowledge that the classical approach cannot actually deliver what it sets out to do, i.e., come up with necessary truths about an essentially contested and fuzzy concept the meaning of which is contextually quite variable (see Pyysiäinen 2005:1.).

It is also quite beyond the scope of this paper – and not its objective – to actually try and apply the classical theory of concepts to the relevant textual data in the Hebrew Bible itself. What is to be found in the discussion below is therefore simply an introduction to pre-application basics. I thus do not intend to try and answer the question of what it meant to call something an אלהים in the generic sense. One reason for this is the fact that questions of the "What-is-X?" type are nowadays philosophically quite vague and problematic, hence what follows are simply the outlines of a traditional philosophical perspective on the matter. As regards the overview itself, no claim is made to theoretical novelty as the presentation will lean heavily on Earl (2005:n.p) whose summary is taken to be sufficiently representative.

As for earlier related research in Biblical Hebrew linguistics and biblical scholarship, this article will not engage or reiterate already available findings on the grammar, semantics, syntax and pragmatics relating to the generic term אלהים in the Hebrew Bible, not because such analyses are considered wrongheaded but in order to go beyond traditional linguistic, historical, comparative, social-scientific, literary, theological and cognitive-psychological treatments of generic אלהים by offering a classic philosophical perspective on the concept. Not because the latter is assumed to be the only correct approach or even a better approach than the others but simply because it is so rarely pursued and because doing so might be interesting as part of a thought experiment.

THE ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CLASSICAL THEORY

The classical view of conceptual structure is said to come from Plato's dialogues (see Earl 2005:n.p.). For example, by asking "What is X?", Socrates is looking for an essence in particular phenomena, where X denotes, e.g., piety (in the *Euthyphro*), friendship (in the *Lysis*), courage (in the *Laches*), knowledge (in the *Theatetus*), and justice (in the *Republic*) (cf. Plato 1961). Socrates is not merely looking for examples of X (i.e., the extension of X) but for what is necessarily shared by all X's (i.e., the intension of X). In other words, Socrates is trying to determine what it is that makes X's X-like, or alternatively, what essential properties something has to instantiate to be called an X.

In utilizing a dialogic and dialectical method of considering candidate definitions and seeking counterexamples, Plato's Socrates can be said to presuppose a "classical" view of concepts. Other notable figures in the history of philosophical definitionism which have utilized similar methods include Aristotle, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hume, Russell, Frege, Moore, etc. The classical theory may be considered out-dated in psychology and cognitive science (where it is understandably of little use), but it is still presupposed as invaluable in many contexts of discourse concerned with the meaning of fundamental concepts. According to Earl (2005:n.p.)

> One reason the classical view has had such staying power is that it provides the most obvious grounding for the sort of inquiry within philosophy that Socrates began. If one presumes that there are answers to *What is X?*-type questions, where such questions ask for the nature of knowledge, mind, goodness, etc., then that entails that there is such a thing as the nature of knowledge, mind, goodness, etc.

As Earl (2005:n.p.) further observes:

> So the classical view fits neatly with the reasonable presumption that there are legitimate answers to philosophical questions concerning the natures or essences of things. As at least some other views of concepts reject the notion that concepts have metaphysically necessary conditions, accepting such other views is tantamount to rejecting (or at least significantly revising) the legitimacy of an important part of the philosophical enterprise.

In other words, a traditional philosophical analysis of generic אלהים would mean adopting the classical theory (see Prinz 2002:57-59). Moreover, since we are dealing with the אלהים as a religious concept, it might be interesting to take cognisance of the fact that the classical view can also serve as a most basic tool in philosophy of religion. For example, one central feature in the contemporary "God-debates" (particularly since the rise of the so-called Neo-Atheism since 2000) is arguments for and against the existence of deity. Yet it seems pointless to argue whether any gods exist unless one first specifies what is meant by "god", i.e., what makes an entity divine and what the difference between divinity and non-divinity is. This shows the apparent necessity of classical conceptual analysis and definitions since the question of what a god is precedes any question regarding the ontological status of deity (see also Smith 2001:vi).

METAPHYSICS OF THE CONCEPT OF GENERIC אלהים

Of course, (notably since Thomas Aquinas), philosophical monotheism does not consider deity to be part of a genus. Yet classical theism is anachronistic here in that the Hebrew Bible does assume generic אלהים as having been understood as a genus (a variety of entities, including Yhwh, are called אלהים in the generic sense). However, instead of asking what a god is (in a contemporary normative sense), our question relates to what the concept of generic אלהים was assumed to be (in a historical descriptive sense). What is more, in doing so we are interested, not in cognitive (psychological) issues, but in semantic values. For when we read in a text that "X is an אלהים", the meaning of that sentence is the proposition that X is an אלהים. With this, the biblical discourse also expressed the concept of being an אלהים, because the predicate "is an אלהים" expressed that concept. The intension of a sentence featuring generic אלהים is a proposition, and a philosophical approach such as the classical theory is interested mainly in propositional content (Machery 2009:56). As a semantic value the concept אלהים can therefore be seen as "the *intensions* of its predicates, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs" (cf. Earl 2005:n.p., emphasis added).

From a philosophical (here pre-Kantian or neo-analytic "metaphysical") perspective, there are also reasons to think of the concept of generic אלהים as a universal of sorts (see Earl 2005:n.p.) The same concept of generic אלהים has many

biblical instantiations and many different things are nominally designated אלהים in the generic sense (Yhwh, other gods, sons of the gods, the divine council, the king, the dead, idols, demons, etc.). The concept אלהים is also expressible using different verbal expressions. One biblical author's assertion that "X is an אלהים" and another biblical author's assertion "X is an אלהים" are distinct utterances, yet their predicates are distinct expressions of the same concept of generic אלהים. When the Hebrew Bible addresses foreigners and refers to אלהים as an abstract object, it is assumed that everyone possessed the same concept, even if their respective theologies diverged radically.

If it was assumed to be a universal, the concept of generic אלהים may have been viewed in different ways in different biblical contexts. Realism in the texts with regard to generic אלהים will have assumed that the concept was distinct from its instances (either prior to or "in", e.g., as in Platonism). Nominalist assumptions would have held that generic אלהים is nothing other than its instances and will equate the concept with the class of all possible אלהים (all things thus designated in whatever sense, e.g. idols are also called gods). Conceptualism regarding generic אלהים would have construed it as a mental particular, being either an idea or constituent of thought, or somehow dependent on the mind for its existence (as in being possessed by an agent, e.g., imagism, generic אלהים as a sort of mental image).

Another philosophical concern is the issue of whether the concept of generic אלהים was assumed to be a mental particular or not (see Earl 2005:n.p.). If the concept of generic אלהים was assumed to be a mind-independent entity (e.g. platonic views), a lack of available necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the contents of generic אלהים does not damage the classical view, since ideas are not concepts in Platonism. However, if the concept אלהים was held to be identical to an idea present in the mind (as in some forms of conceptualism), then if the content of that idea fails to have necessary and sufficient defining conditions for being an אלהים, then the classical view seems to be in trouble as far as conceptual clarification goes.

GENERIC אלהים AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Philosophical questions of the form "What is X?" (such as "What is an אלהים?") also call for conceptual analyses. Here the classical view holds that "all complex concepts

have classical analyses, where a complex concept is a concept having an analysis in terms of other concepts" (Earl 2005:n.p.). As such, the classical view actually makes no claims as to the status of the concept of אלהים as universal, or as a mental particular. A classical view of generic אלהים is also consistent with the concept אלהים being analysable by means of other theories of concepts (see Earl 2005:n.p.)

According to Earl (2005:n.p), there are two components to an analysis of a concept like אלהים, i.e., the *analysandum*, or the concept אלהים being analysed, and the *analysans*, or the concept that "does the analysing". For a proposition to be a classical analysis, the analysis of generic אלהים must specify a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being in generic אלהים's extension (where the extension is everything in the Hebrew Bible that are and could be called אלהים in the generic sense). Earl (2005:n.p.) also notes that other classical theorists deny that all classical analysis specify jointly sufficient conditions, holding instead that classical analyses merely specify necessary and sufficient conditions. In this regard, the following distinctions may be made:

- A necessary condition for being an אלהים is a condition such that something must satisfy that condition in order for it to be an אלהים. For instance, in some texts of the Hebrew Bible being holy is often considered to be necessary for being called an אלהים (see "holy ones"). Such a characteristic specified as necessary condition is shared by, or had in common with, all things to which the concept אלהים applies in a given context and used in a given sense. Yet it is not sufficient since even though all אלהים are considered holy (by some), phenomena other than אלהים can also be called holy (e.g., holy objects, persons, places).
- A sufficient condition for being an אלהים is a condition such that if something satisfies that condition, then it must be an אלהים. In the Hebrew Bible, usually being a creator of a world is not necessary but is sufficient for being called an אלהים (e.g., Gn 1; Is 45:7, etc.).
- A necessary and sufficient condition for being an אלהים is a condition such that not only must a thing satisfy that condition in order to be called an אלהים, but it is also true that if a thing satisfies that condition, then it must be called an אלהים. For instance, being a an object of worship is both necessary and sufficient for being called an אלהים in many biblical discourses (see polemical literature calling even idols "gods", even when denying that they are and simply because they are worshipped as gods). That is, a thing must be an object of worship in order for it

to be called an אלהים, and if a thing is called an אלהים then it must be an object of worship.

- Finally, necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being an אלהים is a set of necessary conditions such that satisfying all of them is sufficient for being an אלהים. This will differ in various biblical contexts and most are not so forthcoming. However, some texts do specify what is expected, e.g., the conditions of being knowledgeable and being immortal (Gn 3:5, 22), or being pre-cognisant and being powerful (Is 41:21-24) are each necessary conditions for being an אלהים in the respective contexts, for instance, and the conjunction of them is a sufficient condition for being an אלהים.

According to Earl (2005:n.p.), besides these conditions, a classical analysis will also seek to give a so-called "logical constitution" of the concept of generic אלהים. Applied to our own concerns, one must discern concepts in the Hebrew Bible entailed by the concept of generic אלהים so that being in the extension of generic אלהים meant being in the extension of the other concept. A classical conceptual analysis is thus decompositional, i.e., breaking a concept into its components or constituents For example, in some biblical texts the concept of being a holy one is a logical constituent of אלהים, since being a holy one entailed that it is also an אלהים and vice versa.

In other words, the logical constitution of the concept of generic אלהים is thus a collection of concepts, where each member of that collection is entailed by generic אלהים, and where generic אלהים entails all of them taken collectively (see Earl 2005:n.p). The concept of generic אלהים will have more than one logical constitution, given that there are different ways in the Hebrew Bible for analysing the same concept. For instance, "An אלהים is a holy one" in a number of texts expresses an analysis of generic אלהים, but so does "An אלהים is an immortal embodied spirit of great power that is worshipped by and rules over humans". The first analysis gives one logical constitution for generic אלהים, and the second analysis seems to give another, depending on the context.

Another requirement for a classical analysis of generic אלהים is that it must not include the *analysandum* אלהים as either its *analysans* or as part of its *analysans* (see Earl 2005:n.p.). That is, a classical analysis should not be circular. "An אלהים is a divine being" does not express an analysis, and neither does "An אלהים is anything that instantiates the nature of deity". A classical analysis must also not have its *analysandum* אלהים be more complex than its *analysans*. That is, while "An אלהים is a

holy one" expresses an analysis, "A holy one is an אלהים" does not. While the latter sentence is true (extensions match), it does not express an analysis of generic אלהים. The concept "holy one" analyses "אלהים", not the other way around.

The next two conditions concern vagueness. On the one hand, it is quite obvious that a classical analysis of generic אלהים must not include any vague concepts in either its *analysandum* or its *analysans*. The problem here might be that generic אלהים is already a vague concept, although the extent to which the vagueness is epistemological (for us) and not metaphysical (for the biblical authors) is a good question. On the other hand, via intensional definition a classical analysis must be able to predict a precise possible worlds' extension of the concept of generic אלהים. That is, it's specification of necessary and sufficient conditions must be able to include everything called an אלהים in the text so that for any possible particular it is clear whether it is definitely in or definitely not an אלהים in the generic sense.

In addition, a classical a conceptual analysis of generic אלהים will also want to consider some number of so-called candidate analyses (see Earl 2005:n.p.). As suggested above, a correct analysis will not be too broad or too narrow so as to allow for counterexamples. For instance, "An אלהים is a holy one" could at times express a candidate analysis for the concept of being an אלהים. This candidate analysis, however, is too broad for the classical theory, since it would include some things that are holy and nevertheless not אלהים (and vice-versa). Counterexamples include holy persons, places and objects (that are not in fact אלהים).

On the other hand, the candidate analysis expressed by "An אלהים is an omnipotent personal spirit" is too narrow, as it rules out some representations of אלהים where it is at least possible for something to be called an אלהים without being an omnipotent, personal or spiritual entity. Assuming for sake of illustration that אלהים are the sorts of things that can be corporeal at all, an embodied אלהים counts as a counterexample to this candidate analysis, since it fails one of the stated conditions that an אלהים be a spirit.

As Earl (2005:n.p.) suggests, the reason why a correct classical analysis of אלהים should have no possible counterexamples (either in the given textual context or in the Hebrew Bible as a whole), is that it is put forth as a necessary truth (here in a descriptive, not normative sense). A classical analysis of the concept of being an אלהים in the Hebrew Bible, for instance, is supposed to be a specification of essential properties, i.e., what is shared by all things called אלהים in the texts, not just what is in

common among those אלהים that actually happen be considered in a particular context. Similarly, in seeking an analysis of the concept of generic אלהים, what one seeks is not a specification of what is in common among all אלהים that are actual. Instead, what one seeks is the nature of generic אלהים, and that is what is in common among all possible אלהים in the text (e.g., idols worshipped as אלהים too).

SOME PROBLEMS WITH A CLASSICAL ANALYSIS OF GENERIC אלהים

All theories of concepts are problematic to some extent and the classical theory is no exception. Even in biblical scholarship, many interpreters with no philosophical background will harbour at least some scepticism of the thesis that all textual instances of generic אלהים have classical analyses with the character described above. Following the outline by Earl (2005:n.p.) again, a number of objections and their attempted refutations can be mentioned and applied to the context of this study.

First, there is what has come to be known as "Plato's problem". Socratic questions, including "What is an אלהים?", have received a monumental amount of attention by Hebrew linguists and biblical scholars, and despite the progress made with respect to what is involved in the perceived nature of generic אלהים in different parts of the Hebrew Bible, there still is not a consensus view as to an analysis of the concept of being an אלהים. If there are classical analyses for all occurrences of generic אלהים, then one would expect to find such analyses given the effort expended so far.

The counter-argument to this objection would involve calling out a fallacy of non-sequitur. Just because no classical analysis has been forthcoming does not mean it cannot ever be done (or if it is never done that it is impossible in theory). In addition, just because the modern reader is not able to discern necessary and sufficient conditions does not mean that the author and his audience could not on the level of folk-philosophy do so, or that the texts do not contain nascent folk-philosophical assumptions about what was believed to be the essential properties of generic אלהים, whatever the modern philosophical demerits of such a view.

Secondly, critics of the classical view have put forward the argument from categorisation which takes as evidence various data with respect to sorting or categorising things into the category אלהים, and infers that such behaviour shows that the classical view is false (see Rosch 1999). The evidence is thought to show that the

biblical authors would have tended not to use any set of necessary and sufficient conditions to sort things in to the category of generic אלהים, where such sorting behaviour is construed as involving the application of the concept of generic אלהים. Instead, it seems that in many contexts divine phenomena were categorised according to typical features (not essential properties), and the reason for this is that more typical members of the category of generic אלהים were sorted into that category more often than less typical members of that same category (so McClellan 2013). National deities were sorted into the generic אלהים category more quickly than household gods, for instance, and the latter were sorted into the generic אלהים category more quickly than the deified dead. What this suggests is that if the concept of generic אלהים is used for acts of categorisation, and classical analyses are not used in all such categorisation tasks, then the classical view is false.

A possible retort to this objection is that it does not distinguish between popular and precise definitions. Categorisation takes place at the level of popular conceptions which may or may not be correct as to what was also considered to be the actual nature of whatever is being classified. Simply because typicality plays a role in majority sorting does not mean essential properties were not assumed to exist by the scribal minority. A dual theory that distinguishes between conceptual cores as having classical analysis and the rest yielding to more prototypical approaches bears this out.

Thirdly, there is alleged to be the problem of vagueness which has also been seen as detrimental for the classical view. For one might think that in virtue of specifying necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, a classical analysis thus specifies a precise extension for the concept of generic אלהים being analysed. Yet most instances of the concept אלהים in the Hebrew Bible seem not to present such precise extensions. With regard to many texts one simply does not know what else the author might have called אלהים or what something had to be like to be categorised as such. Also, at times it seems that there was not always a precise boundary between the אלהים and the non-אלהים (see McClellan 2013). Since a classical analysis needs to specify such precise boundaries, there cannot be classical analyses for what is expressed in vague terms.

To this objection may be replied that perhaps once again the vagueness is not of an ancient folk-metaphysical nature but of a modern epistemological one, i.e., having more to do with the reader's incomprehension than with the ancient concept's applicability. Moreover, perhaps it would be more appropriate to see the concept of generic אלהים as "fuzzy" as opposed to "vague" (there is a distinct philosophical

difference here), which explains both the apparent vagueness and renders the charge invalid. As for the multiplicity of extensions and the plurality of intensions, a classical analysis breaks down only if one attempts a pan-biblical definition of generic אלהים. On the level of some individual texts it might have been perfectly clear to the ancient author or audience what an entity had to be to be called an אלהים in the generic sense, even if such cases are few (or covert).

Fourthly, there is the problem of analyticity and the analytic/synthetic distinction. According to Quine (1953/1999), there is no philosophically clear account of the distinction. Yet classical analyses would seem to be paradigmatic cases of analytic (for example, an אלהים is X), and if there are no analytic propositions then it seems there are no classical analyses for the concept of generic אלהים in the Hebrew Bible Furthermore, if there is no philosophically defensible distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, then there is no legitimate criterion by which to delineate an analysis of generic אלהים from non-analysis (see already Moore 1966). Also, those who hold that analysis is actually synthetic face the same difficulty given the lack of distinction here.

In response to this objection one may point to criticism of Quine's arguments. As Earl (2005:n.p.) points out, there remains a great deal of murkiness concerning the analytic/synthetic distinction, despite its philosophical usefulness. In relation to the classical view of concepts, the options available to classical theorists are at least threefold as Earl (2005:n.p.) shows:

> Either meet Quine's arguments in a satisfactory way, reject the notion that all analyses are analytic (or that all are synthetic), or characterize classical analysis in a way that is neutral with respect to the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Finally, there is the trouble with scientific essentialism as concerns the out-dated view that the members of natural kinds (like generic אלהים) have essential properties and that identity statements between natural kind terms and descriptions of such properties are "metaphysically" necessary and knowable only *a posteriori* (in the modern analytic-philosophical sense, despite being problematic in continental circles, see Earl 2005:n.p.). But if generic אלהים's being X is known *a posteriori* it runs counter to the usual position that all classical analyses of אלהים are *a priori*. Some versions of scientific essentialism include the thesis that such identity statements are synthetic and

given that what is expressed by "An אלהים is X" is *a posteriori*, this entails that it is synthetic, rather than analytic as the classical view would normally claim.

As Earl (2005:n.p.) notes, "The literature is vast with respect to scientific essentialism, identity statements involving natural kind terms, and the epistemic and modal status of such statements." For the present context (the Hebrew Bible) one might argue that the critique against essentialism is valid only with reference to modern scientific data. The ancient Israelites, like the ancient Greek philosophers, might have believed in some form of essentialism. But if that is the case and the ancient views of אלהים presuppose the category members instantiating essential properties, then wrong as this may be from a diachronic etic perspective, and problematic as a classical analysis nowadays is, the latter is then perfectly suited to clarify concepts historically and psychological views, though more correct in anti-essentialist discourse, are in fact anachronistic for emic descriptive purposes.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to provide a philosophical overview of the classical or definitionist view of conceptual structure in relation to the concept of generic אלהים in the Hebrew Bible. Though problematic in dealing with the Hebrew Bible's data as a whole and understandably out-dated from the perspective of the requirements of contemporary cognitive linguistics and psychology, the classical theory of concepts remains an interesting first step to take in historical and descriptive folk-philosophical analysis. What such an experiment eventually accomplishes, however, is negative in that it leads to the conclusion that the question of what it meant to be called an אלהים cannot satisfactorily be answered along classical definitionist lines if the entire Hebrew Bible is taken into account, even if individual authors did covertly assume the existence of intensions.

A classical conceptual analysis does, however, still aid in uncovering the complexity of the philosophical problematic. This in turn suggests that the concept of generic אלהים might perhaps be more adequately approached philosophically (as opposed to psychologically) along the sort of non-essentialist lines found in identity-as-difference (Deleuze) and post-metaphysical perspectives (Derrida). After all, what an אלהים in the generic sense was assumed to be was also in a sense determined in relation to everything it was not.

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