

# A COMPARATIVE-PHILOSOPHICAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF PART-WHOLE RELATIONS BETWEEN רוח-TYPE ENTITIES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

---

**Jaco Gericke**

North-West University (Vaal Campus)

Faculty of Humanities

P.O. Box 1174

Vanderbijlpark 1900

E-mail: 21609268@nwu.ac.za

(Received 16/01/2017; accepted 05/02/2017)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25159/1013-8471/3107>

---

## **ABSTRACT**

What has been called “the pneumatology” of the Hebrew Bible is generally held to be an unsolved problem. To this day, available research operates on the assumption of a “missing link” between theological, cosmological, and anthropological domains distinguished within the meta-language. This is indeed evident from a comparative-philosophical perspective in that the conceptual background for רוח-type entities as encountered in scholarly discourse comes across as ontologically disjointed and metaphysically fragmented. In the present article, the author argues that the riddle of “The One and the Many” is a pseudo-problem generated by anachronistic Platonic dualism supervening on inquiries into the assumed nature of רוח as “Ursubstanz” and the mereology of רוח-type entities in the world of the text. In addition, a unified theory is put forward with reference to the problem of part-whole relations as can be reconstructed from the perspective of more monistic conceptions of spirit in the associated history and philosophy of religion.

## **INTRODUCTION**

On the concept of רוח in the Hebrew Bible (HB), there exists a large quantity of high quality linguistic, literary, historical, and theological research. Included are the associated contents in, inter alia, Hebrew lexicons (see, e.g., Brown, Driver and Briggs 1951:924–926; Ludwig and Baumgartner 2001:1197–1201; Schüngel-Straumann 2009:n.p.), theological/Bible dictionaries (see, e.g., Baumgärtel 1968:359–367; Albertz and Westermann 1984:726–753; Cazelles 1986:126–172; Horn 1992:260–280; Tengström 1993:385–425; van Pelt 1997:1073–1078), monographs (see, e.g., Volz 1910; Montague 1976; Koch 1991), sections in Old Testament theologies (see,

e.g., Kohler 2002 [1957]:111–118; Jacob 1958:37–42; von Rad 1962:94–104; van Imschoot 1965:172–188; Eichrodt 1967:46–68; Knierim 1995:269–308; Preuss 1996:160–163) and journal articles (see, e.g., Briggs 1900:132–145; van Imschoot 1934: 553–587; 1935:481–501; 1936:201–209; 1938:23–49; 1939:457–67; Westerman 1981:223–230).

Of course, technically, one cannot speak of “the” pneumatology of the HB. In fact, one cannot even speak of “pneumatology” anywhere in the HB since the texts contain no systematic conception of רוח. The Greek theological jargon and interest arise only in second-order scholarly meta-language. Nevertheless, for practical purposes the concept of pneumatology shall be adopted in its etymological sense as referring to all of the HB’s assumptions about the metaphysical nature of רוח-type entities. This is done in full recognition of the complex semantic, historical and theological diversity present in BH’s use of רוח. That is, this article assumes as background the current state of research where there appears to be a consensus about the extension of the word רוח as involving three rather distinct mereological domains:

- 1) A theological context, where רוח is taken to refer to a divine mereological relation, e.g., the spirit of the deity, the “constitutive” material of the divine world, etc.
- 2) A cosmological context, where רוח is understood as referring to a mereological phenomenon, e.g., wind, storm, air, etc.
- 3) An anthropological context, where רוח is seen as referring to an immaterial part of the human being, e.g., breath, the human spirit, certain physiological and psychological states, etc.

Not all discussions of רוח use this particular tri-partheid division borrowed from systematic theology. Even so, as popular scholarly construct, these theoretical distinctions have led to the claim that “the pneumatology of the Old Testament is essentially an insoluble problem” (Kohler 2002[1957]:111). What is meant by this is that there appears to be a missing link between the different domains in 1) to 3) above given the mereological “underlapping” seemingly operative among רוח-type entities who are not seen as being constituted by the same “metaphysical substance” (i.e., [divine] spirit vs. wind vs. [human] spirit/breath). Consequently, there remains a

number of residual ontological anomalies plaguing mainstream theories' narrations of the *Begriffsgeschichte* (see already Hehn 1925:218–219).

## AN OVERVIEW OF SECOND-ORDER METAPHYSICAL ASSUMPTIONS

According to the popular consensus, the word רוּחַ in cosmological and (some) anthropological contexts refers to something purely “natural”, whereas in theological contexts רוּחַ involves what is in fact “supernatural” (i.e., transcendent) (see Arichea 1983:208–213). On this view, the divine “(S)pirit” is not of the same “stuff” as the air element, both of which are accepted as things that the word רוּחַ (constructed as polysemous in BH) refers to. The question is why and how this is (would be) so. In answer thereto, we encounter two widely diverging theoretical (even ideological) perspectives.

The first approach can be stereotyped as a “conservative” Christian reading (with many variations among those who hold it; see Hildebrandt 1995; Wright 2006). In this scholarly sub-culture, one would simply multiply hypotheses to justify the belief that רוּחַ “obviously” refers to two completely unrelated metaphysical substances. On the one hand, there is the supposedly literal sense. Here רוּחַ is translated as referring to wind/breath and as referring to an assortment of other anthropological states/modes. On the other hand, a supposed analogical turn in the HB’s religious (pneumatological) language is believed to account for רוּחַ acquiring a theological sense, as (divine) Spirit proper. The diachronic variation in conceptualisation is thus harmonised via notions of progressive revelation and the anomalies of the paradigm resolved through presuppositional apologetic warrant.

A second view (again diversely explicated) is that held by many critical scholars whose work does not exhibit any signs of an overtly intrusive religious agenda, be it Jewish or Christian. This view has in common with the first the polysemy hypothesis it offers in order to account for an inability to identify any unity in the metaphysical assumptions implicit in the HB’s uses of רוּחַ. However, it differs from the conservative

reading in that it does not seek to deny the reality of theological pluralism and the evolution of religious concepts. Consequently, polysemantic variation and polytypy in the extension of רוּחַ are accounted for by appeals to the diachronic branching of etymological features in the comparative linguistic history of the word.

Of course, other idiosyncratic perspectives are attested, but noting these two should suffice for present purposes, as will be demonstrated in the proposed error-theory presented later on.

## **A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF THE META-LANGUAGE**

On a closer inspection of the available research data, it would appear that both the conservative and the more critical perspectives on the relevant pneumatological presuppositions in the HB are constituted by anachronistic philosophical assumptions. That is, they appear to operate with an anamorphically disguised dualistic metaphysics of the Platonic variety. Deconstructively speaking, some of the more obvious examples of unstable Platonic binary oppositions supervening on the scholarly meta-language include the following:

spiritual > physical

supernatural > natural

transcendent > immanent

These categories are inherently present in what remains of the Trinitarian Christian theological framework still determining and limiting how one may conceive alternative possible understandings of nature of and part-whole relations between רוּחַ-type entities as metaphysical substances. The effect of this is a two-world hypothesis presupposed in the construction of the ontological status of רוּחַ in each of the three contexts (and their sub-sections) distinguished for locating pneumatological assumptions in the HB metaphysically:

<b>PNEUMATOLOGICAL CONTEXT</b>	<b>METAPHYSICAL DOMAIN PRIVILEGED</b>
Theological רוּחַ (Spirit)	supernatural/transcendent/spiritual
Anthropological רוּחַ I (spirit)	supernatural/immanent/spiritual
Anthropological רוּחַ II (breath)	natural/immanent/physical
Anthropological רוּחַ III (psychological)	natural/immanent/spiritual
Cosmological רוּחַ (wind)	natural/immanent/physical

While these distinctions (along with the related philosophical assumptions) are still present in the ordinary language of many readers, the contemporary associative meanings of “spirit” are quite different from what we find in the context of the metaphysical assumptions of the HB itself. Yet as long as they are operative in research on רוּחַ in the HB – and therewith projected onto the textual data – anomalies will continue to arise in the currently interpretative paradigm dependent on them. Consequently, the discussion remains at an impasse, obstructed by a missing link between the various senses and references of the word רוּחַ.

## **AN ALTERNATIVE COMPARATIVE-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH**

In the discussion to follow, most of the generally accepted linguistic, literary, historical, theological, and other perspectives will be presupposed and taken for granted as being invaluable and correct. All that is offered is a supplementary philosophical perspective that might be able to add a relatively less anachronistic and more historical metaphysical framework for future attempts at a synthesis of the data.

In order to make a novel contribution to the available research, both in terms of the particular approach to the problem and the hypothesis challenging a consensus view thereon, a comparative-philosophical perspective is opted for. This is done in full awareness of the distortive potential of reading the HB from a modern philosophical perspective. In this case, however, the ancient philosophical data brought to bear on the discussion is considered potentially informative for a better historical understanding of the HB’s own metaphysical assumptions pertaining to רוּחַ-type entities. In the recourse to ancient Greek philosophy, however, this is not done

because of some assumed intertextual dependence or influence (or because it is always considered helpful to do so). Rather, the particular choice of comparative contexts was decided on because, despite local idiosyncracies and conceptual diversity, many folk-metaphysical assumptions about the fundamental nature of “spirit” were held in common in ancient Near Eastern (including HB) and Greek (philosophical) perspectives (see Cupitt 1996:11–21).

This being the case, looking to ancient philosophical perspectives on ancient religious concepts such as “spirit” may actually assist contemporary interpreters to avoid projecting their own anachronistic philosophical assumptions onto the world of the text. This often happens precisely because avoiding all philosophical reflection might actually make one more rather than less prone to unwittingly looking at the data through one’s own philosophical concepts, concerns and categories. The HB is not a textbook of philosophy but its ideas about “spirit” do contain metaphysical assumptions, whether the authors were aware of this or not. Ancient comparative philosophy of religion might be able to translate into second-order language what the older mythological concepts mean in terms where the actual reference is more readily apparent to modern readers.

Dealing with the HB as a whole (without assuming it to be some sort of conceptually unified whole), the focus of the comparative-philosophical approach of this article will not be on any specific HB (con)text (i.e., good examples of relevant data, e.g., Ezekiel 37), historical period (e.g., the Persian era), or social-geographical location (e.g., the diaspora Jewish communities). It is also not concerned with linguistic ontologies having to deal with the various senses in which רוח have been used (e.g., literal, metaphorical, etc.). Rather, the inquiry joins the generic scholarly discussion where it has (often only indirectly) aimed at answering of the question of the part-whole relations with reference to the sort of thing רוח as substance was metaphysically assumed to be.

The relevance of the research lies in the way it flies in the face of nearly two millennia of what is suggested to be philosophically anachronistic interpretations of רוח in the HB. In this way a comparative-philosophical perspective allows for the same

revolutionary retrieval of more authentic possibilities of meaning as historical-critical approaches did in the last three centuries. In addition, the resultant theory not only exhibits an explanatory scope exceeding that of other currently available perspectives, it is also characterised by an explanatory scope that appears to succeed in removing some of the pernicious metaphysical anomalies in the second-order metalanguage about the missing link between the cosmological, theological and anthropological contexts distinguished for the concept of רוח in the HB.

As regards the very idea of a “quest” for a “unified theory”, cognisance should be taken that the choice of words was not motivated by some aesthetic (psychological or methodological) need for achieving elegance, simplicity, and closure in systematic theoretical modelling. The new perspective simply seeks to offer a more authentic, plausible metaphysical conceptual background for רוח than the one presented in the Platonist perspective presupposed by the prevailing pluralist hypothesis. This theory is called “unified”, not because it set out to be such (or even because it is interested in solving the so-called problem of “Old Testament pneumatology” from a theological perspective). It is seen as a unified theory solely following from the fact that a monistic metaphysics is available in an authentic historical and philosophical format able to fill the scholarly constructed mereological gaps in the world of the text. Needless to say, at the very least it should not be attributed guilt by association if it somehow reminds the reader of the metaphysically suspect notion of a “unified theory” in physics or the misguided quest for a unified biblical perspective on theological topics in fundamentalist readings of the text.

### **The conceptual background of רוח in a pre-biblical context**

The concept of “spirit” appears to have been one of the most durable, complex, and protean in the history of ideas. In fact, one of the theories of the origin of religion argues that it began as a worship of spirits, long before the emergence of any form of theism (the worship of divine powers). Though this view, particularly as formulated by Tylor (1871), is now obsolete in terms of its explanatory scope, it cannot be denied

that 1) the phenomenon of spirit was concretely seen as air in various forms, as is hinted at in the etymology of the word in many languages; and 2) given the association of air/breath (life) and cosmic movement (causality and change), the construction of concepts of deities in later theistic phases of religious history were also linked to the older world of air/spirit (for a more recent assessment of animism, see Bird-David 1999:67–92).

As regards making the ideas more concrete, the question is how “spirit” was assumed to be related to the world of ordinary, everyday life. In this regard, the following brief outline can be given (cf. Cupitt 1996:5–12).

In terms of biology, spirit was associated with life. It was observed how, at birth, breathing or the taking in of air commences (i.e., the spirit enters). Conversely, at the end of life there is a last breath (the spirit finally departs from the body). Since the body is now no longer animated, the air inside it was seen as the source of its life. In short, the human spirit was literally seen as cosmic/divine air within bodily confines.

On the level of psychology, emotion and even moral disposition were also brought in connection with the idea of spirit (i.e., the movement of air or breath). This is perhaps partly due to the anthropomorphic projection involved in thinking of nature as benevolent and malevolent in relation to life, e.g., when the wind starts “raging” or “calms down” (metaphorically). In this way the various emotions were all linked to their accompanying breathing patterns (a spirit of anger or a spirit of joy could be detected in the associated ways in which these affective states were expressed in the particular inhaling and exhaling of air involved). Since particularly intense and non-normal emotional states were anthropomorphically projected onto alien bodies of air (i.e., divine and demonic), the language employed here was metaphorical, and described spirits as being “poured”, “filling”, “clothing” and “possessing” the human body.

In the broadest sense then, originally and historically, what we call spirit was not seen as it is today as being something otherworldly (transcendent) or “supernatural”. In other words, technically and using our language to approximate the associated metaphysical assumptions as much as possible, a spirit was assumed to be a



concentration of tangible air, yet invisible and immaterial. Reified and naturalised it becomes the wind. Personfied and universalized it becomes cosmic breath or world-soul. Deified and sanctified it becomes the divine spirit. Quantified and qualified it becomes everything involved in the experiences that were associated with being alive as a particular entity. All of the above comprise the empirical reality that spirit was experienced as being.

### **Spirit as primal element in ancient philosophical frameworks**

The question now is how everything that was already believed in ordinary philosophy of religion as outlined above was adopted and adapted in early philosophical language contemporaneous with the HB. Here we find, once again, that the question of the nature of the spirit was indeed a central theme in metaphysics since pre-Socratic times (see Verbeke 1974:154–166; Benso 2008:13). The best example here is, of course, the Miletian philosopher Anaximenes who claimed that the original Being was in fact Air (Greek: *aer*) (see Wöhrle 1993). Anaximenes also conceived of this original substance as an extension of breath. The cosmological and anthropological domains were linked with the idea that the human spirit is the air that holds the human body together and controls it, just like the wind is the air that encloses the cosmos itself (Diels and Kranz 1985:13B2). This was hardly a form of atheism or even pure naturalism. What we see here is only partly a desacralization of already available ancient Near Eastern mythological conceptions of the same idea (Moiso 1999:434).

In both the HB use of the concept of רוּחַ and in Anaximenes' philosophical translation of the ancient Near Eastern conceptual heritage, it was believed that "spirit" was divine and imperishable, yet also the dynamic source of all becoming. In addition, the very same air was also seen as the stuff constituting divine reality. In this way Anaximenes could explain why gods were both assumed to live in a spirit world (airy realm in the skies) and also have a spirit (breath). In Anaximenes' cosmological use of the concept of spirit in particular, the same metaphysical frame of reference was also thought to account for the particular elemental forms that the gods took during

theophanies. Since the underlying nature of everything (including the gods) is one and infinite air (*pneuma*), it would vary in its substantial nature by rarity and density. When air (spirit) is refined, it becomes fire. In more density it turns into wind, then cloud, then (when thickened and resting more), into storm and water. Earth and stones and all the rest come into being from a synthesis of these prior airy (spiritual) states.

In an anthropological context, air or spirit was also made to account philosophically for physical and psychological states in humans. Again we see an attempted refinement of older mythological ideas (cf. van der Eijk 2005:131–132). More concretely, the cosmological spirit (air of the world and ultimately refined from the divine source), was thought to enter the body when a newborn infant took its first breath. The bodily movements and thoughts of the particular person were thought to be caused by the soul or self (i.e., the individualised embodied concentration of *pneuma* or air) (see also Sedley 2005:382–411).

The Anaximenean *pneuma*-term was subsequently re-applied in Diogenes of Apollonia's philosophical anthropology (medical theory) in the fifth century B.C.E. One idea of relevance was the distinction between three types of spirit arising from the interaction of inhaled air with warmth generated by the heart. The first was air that functioned as spirit (*pneuma*) enabling vegetative functions. Secondly, there was air operating as spirit (*pneuma*) enabling vital and locomotive functions. Finally, there was air acting as spirit (*pneuma*) enabling psychological functions.

Clearly the human spirit or *pneuma* was thus not seen as something otherworldly, supernatural, or non-empirical. It was simply the air inside, necessary in the body for the systemic functioning of a person as a vital self. Not located in a specific part of the body, the human spirit was air dispersed via the veins by way of the breathing and circulation processes. Yet, as a result, it was no longer wholly identical to air external to the body, i.e., wind. New properties were thought to emerge as a result of how the internalised air interacted with the heat of the human vessel.

## The metaphysics behind the concept of generic spirit in the HB

With the foregoing discussion as conceptual background, the metaphysical assumptions in the use of רוּחַ in the HB can now be re-contextualised in an empirically tangible and historically plausible *Sitz im Leben*. Stripped of all the anachronistic associative meanings of the two-worlds of Platonic dualism typical of the type of Trinitarian systematic theological frameworks frequently operative for interpreting רוּחַ in the HB, the reader is now in a position to look at the same data in a new way.

The first point to be observed is that it is common knowledge among scholars that the word רוּחַ is probably onomatopaeic and was thus vocalised to simulate the sound of moving air. Less familiar is the fact that רוּחַ is closely related to רוּחַ (i.e., *ræwa*.) “open air” or “space”. It is usually used when something expands or someone inhales (cf. Tengström 1993:389). The connection between רוּחַ *rûah* and רוּחַ *ræwah* has been argued for, especially in French perspectives (cf. Lys 1962; Cazelles 1982:75–90; and also Dreytza 1990:70–75). Cazelles (1982) in particular has suggested that רוּחַ (i.e., *rûah*) must somehow be referring to “space” (“espace“, cf. “Raum”), that is, air that creates room. If we accept this, there now appears to be definite and demonstrable continuity between the concept of spirit in the HB and what was reconstructed above on the same subject in the early history and philosophy of religion.

If we now bracket the anachronistic metaphysically dualist binary oppositions listed earlier, the scholarly distinction between the רוּחַ in theological, cosmological, and anthropological contexts clearly appears as something that is merely convenient for shifting focus in conceptualisation. In the unified theory of the part-whole relations of the metaphysical substance identified with רוּחַ in the HB, it could plausibly be interpreted as having referred to air in all three contexts. To avoid misunderstanding, however, this metaphysical equation should not be mistaken for the theological attempt to demythologise or secularise it by reducing it to a completely “natural” phenomenon. The hypothesis defended here proposes neither a pan-naturalism nor a pan-supernaturalism in making sense of רוּחַ. Doing so would simply reintroduce the same anachronistic Platonic dualist binary oppositions that we are trying to bracket.

Consequently, working phenomenologically one must first become aware of and try not to involve the mutually exclusive popular modern associative meanings of the English words “spirit” and “wind”. We are dealing with a language (BH) bereft of the concept of “nature” as something over and against what we (popularly) call “supernature” (irrespective of what one believes about the latter’s ontological status). In other words, there is no intention to claim that the HB assumed the divine and human forms of רוח and impersonal wind to be identical in every sense, with everything being reduced to the “lowest” common denominator. It is readily admitted that the metaphysics of the HB ascribes divine properties to רוח in superhuman forms.

It would also be ludicrous to deny that רוח in human beings was nothing more than wind. But unlike what was and is the case in Platonic dualist metaphysics, it does not postulate the existence of an otherworldly ethereal substance as reference to the theological and anthropological, over and against the cosmological contexts of the HB’s pneumatological assumptions. This follows logically if we accept that the HB presupposes a three-tiered mythical cosmology. If the deity was literally assumed to live “up there” (i.e., in the “air”), then the “spirit world” was not assumed to be located in a “spiritual dimension” or transcendent location outside the universe. Moreover, if the spirit of life that departs when humans die was thought of literally as the exiting of air, then it makes sense to assume that it was constituted by the same substance as the element that bears its name. Thus while רוח was assumed to be invisible and immaterial, being equated with air, it was also seen as physical and empirical, like wind/breath itself was.

The implication of this is that, contrary to the impression created in English translations and dictionaries of BH and OT theology, ultimately and fundamentally members of the extension of the word רוח do not denote different metaphysical substances. There are no mereological gaps in the world of the text and the cosmological, anthropological, and theological manifestations of רוח were assumed to be derived from the same empirical reality – air in all its manifestations. If the reader can manage to leave the agendas of apologetical theology and modern science behind and, for phenomenological purposes, look to comparative philosophy and the history

of religion, it should be obvious that the possibility of the metaphysical assumptions behind the HB's ideas of part-whole relations between רוּחַ-type entities being *sui generis* is almost nil.

## A FEW TEXTUAL EXAMPLES FROM THE HB

In this section, some samples from the textual data itself will be provided that demonstrate the kind of metaphysical mereological overlap between the theological, cosmological, and anthropological conceptual domains as predicted by the hypothesis.

With the newly reconstructed philosophical conceptual background in mind, it would seem that certain classical controversies can be easily resolved, as they are shown to have been the result of anachronistic philosophical assumptions on the part of readers. For example, consider the popular question as to whether רוּחַ in Genesis 1:2 should be translated as referring to the “wind” or “Spirit” of God.

The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the רוּחַ (NRSV: “wind”; traditionally “Spirit”) from God swept over the face of the waters.

If we accept the possibility that רוּחַ was assumed to refer to the air element throughout, and that the divine רוּחַ is substantially the same as the air in the form of wind, the seemingly insoluble problem shows itself as the product of the invocation of a false dichotomy. In other words, in the unified theory regarding the part-whole relations between רוּחַ-type entities in the HB, the divine spirit and the wind are metaphysically one and the same, albeit in different forms and locations. This accounts for the overlapping mereological relations between the theological and cosmological contexts in texts like the following:

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; You blew with your רוּחַ (NRSV: “wind”) the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters (Exod 15:8–10).

Then a רוּחַ (NRSV: “wind”) went out from Yhwh, and it brought quails from the sea and let them fall beside the camp. (Num 11:31)

It was also assumed to be the same divine breath that formed the human spirit. Here anthropology links up with theology and cosmology, with no gaps in the world of the text. The human spirit can be seen as a particular concentration of the same moving air inhaled from in the sky, i.e., the wind:

Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says Yhwh God: Come from the four רוּחוֹת (NRSV: “winds”) O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live’ (Ezek 37:9).

To be sure, many (Christian) readers will consider the idea that the divine spirit was assumed to be the divine breath, and that this in turn was assumed to be the same substance as the air in the sky, which in turn became the human breath (or spirit), somewhat crude. Yet this is exactly what some texts seem to suggest.

Then Yhwh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Gen 2:7).

Here we see clearly that the divine breath and the human breath were assumed to be one and the same. In other texts, these are assumed to derive from what was called the divine spirit.

As long as my breath is in me, and the רוּחַ (NRSV: “spirit”) of God is in my nostrils ... (Job 27:3).

The רוּחַ (NRSV: “spirit”) of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4).

If he should take back his רוּחַ (NRSV: “spirit”) to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust (Job 34:14).

This divine breath that is the human spirit was also assumed to be the source of the various special qualities popularly associated with it. In the following text, cognitive ability in particular is noted, although many other “skills” (later “gifts” or “charismata”) are attested elsewhere.

But truly it is the רוּחַ (NRSV: “spirit”) in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding (Job 32:8).

The distribution of the divine air in humans is also what was assumed to make the deity knowledgeable of the inner life of humans.

The human רוּחַ (NRSV: “spirit”) is the lamp of Yhwh, searching every inmost part (Prov 20:27).

The parallels with the ancient religious and Greek philosophical ideas of the spirit as air (discussed in the previous sections) should be readily apparent. Yet while surely there is more to the pneumatological part-whole relations implicit in the metaphysical assumptions associated with רוּחַ in the HB than what the handful of texts quoted above imply, it is unfortunately impossible to test the hypothesis against all the biblical data in the space of an article. However, what is needed for the hypothesis to be demonstrably functional is not an exhaustive study bereft of finding exceptions to the rule. All that is required is to positively identify the presence of mereological overlapping between the theological, anthropological, and cosmological contexts of רוּחַ in the HB, thereby destroying the foundations of the consensus views, i.e., philosophical assumptions postulating the kind of metaphysical dualism typical of the Platonism inherent in the Trinitarian Christian systematic theological framework which to this day functions as a grid for the meta-language of HB “pneumatology”.

## AN ERROR THEORY

If רוּחַ was just air, how would one account for the almost universal departure from the original monistic and empirical understanding over time? Surely, as Ludwig

Wittgenstein joked in another context: for a mistake, that's too big (Wittgenstein 1987:61–62). Yet from the foregoing discussion two possible shifts in popular philosophical frameworks could be seen as probable causes:

- 1) The two-world hypothesis of Platonic dualism becoming part of the taken-for-granted metaphysical assumptions of readers, thereby relocating the divine “spirit” to an ideal realm of Being instead of the imperfect world of becoming.
- 2) Scientific cosmology partly adopted by religious worldviews, requiring that the God of Western theism no longer be thought of as being literally “up there” in the air/sky/heavens but instead as utterly “transcendent”, i.e., wholly outside of this universe and its empirical reality.

The result of this was that when רוּחַ in the HB obviously referred to the moving air or wind, it could still without much awkwardness be rendered as such. However, as soon as it was understood to designate the divine or human “(S)pirit”, anachronistic philosophical assumptions and the related associative meanings were triggered. In this way it seemed to make sense to postulate polysemy and for a Platonic metaphysics to be projected back into the text, thereby creating a mereological gap between theological contexts for רוּחַ on the one hand, and anthropological and cosmological ones on the other. As can be expected then, the new unified theory of the part-whole relations implicit in the metaphysical assumptions underlying the use of רוּחַ in the HB proposed here will no doubt strike the ordinary modern religious reader as being unnecessarily crude.

## CONCLUSION

If it is correct that we are dealing with an anachronistic metaphysical dualism inherent in the scholarly binary opposition between spirit and matter in the meta-language, the problem of the one and the many in the HB's metaphysical assumptions about a basic elemental substance potentially constitutive of all רוּחַ-type entities shows itself to be a pseudo-issue. A pre-Platonic perspective on רוּחַ not dependent on popular Christian systematic theological concerns, concepts and categories suggests that in BH רוּחַ



originally and everywhere in the texts basically suggests a connection with the element we would call “air” (even if the latter English rendering no longer has the same associative meanings of the Hebrew term it is supposed to translate). Consequently, even though the phenomena referred to by the word רוּחַ were variable and believed to instantiate variable properties, relations and kinds in theological, cosmological and anthropological contexts respectively, on a mereological level the metaphysics may not have been as fragmented as it is popularly made to seem. If this is accepted, it follows that a unified theory of so-called “HB pneumatology”, at least with regard to the constitutive substance and part-whole relations among רוּחַ-type entities, may be possible after all.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albertz, R and Westermann, C 1976. רוּחַ, in Jenni & Westermann 1976:726–753.
- Alkier, St, Bauks, M, Koenen, K (eds) 2007-2017. Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet, Available: <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wiblex>.
- Arichea, D C 1983. Translating breath and spirit, *Biblische Theologie* 34:209–213.
- Baumgärtel, F 1968. Spirit in the OT, in Kittel and Friedrich 1968:359–367.
- Benso, S 2008. The breathing of the air: presocratic echoes in Levinas, in Benso and Schroeder 2008:9–23.
- Benso, S and Schroeder, B 2008. *Levinas and the ancients*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Bird-David, N 1999. ‘Animism’ revisited: personhood, environment, and relational epistemology, *Current Anthropology* 40 Supplement 1999:67–92.
- Briggs, C 1900. The use of רוּחַ in the Old Testament, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 19:132–145.
- Brown F, Driver, S R and Briggs, C A 1951. *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cazelles, H 1982. Prolégomènes à une étude de l’Esprit dans la Bible in Delsman et al. 1982:75–90.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1986. Saint Esprit I AT et Judaïsme, in Robert and Cazelles 1986:126–172.
- Cupitt, D 1996. *After God: the future of religion*. London: Basic Books.
- Delsman, W C. et al. (eds) 1982. *Von Kanaan Bis Kerala: Festschrift Fur Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J.P.M. Van Der Ploeg*. AOAT 211. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Diels, H and Kranz, W 1985. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Zurich: Weidmann.
- Dreytza, M 1990. *Der theologische Gebrauch von Ruah im Alten Testament. Eine wort- und satzsemantische Studie*. Gießen & Basel: Brunnen.
- Eichrodt, W 1967. *Theology of the Old Testament*. 2nd volume. Translated by Baker, J A. London: SCM.
- Freedman, D N 1992. *The anchor Bible dictionary*. Vol. 3. New York: Doubleday.

- Hehn, J 1925. Zum Problem des Geistes im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 43:218–219.
- Hildebrandt, W 1995. *An Old Testament theology of the Spirit of God*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Horn, F W 1992. Holy Spirit, in Freedman 1992/3:260–280.
- Jacob, E 1958. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Translated by Heathcote, A & Allcock, P. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Jenni, E and Westermann, C (eds) 1976. *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. 2 vols. Zurich: Chr. Kaiser; Zurich Theologischer Verlag. (THAT)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1993. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Vol. VII. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Kittel, G & Friedrich, G 1968. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Volume VI. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Knierim, R P 1995. *The task of Old Testament theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Koch, R 1991. *Der Geist Gottes im Alten Testament*. Frankfurt: Bernard Lang.
- Kohler, L 2002 [1957]. *Old Testament theology*. Translated by Todd, A S. Cambridge: James Clark Co.
- Ludwig K and Baumgartner, W 2001. *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lys, D 1962 *Ruach. Le souffle dans l'Ancien Testament*. Etudes d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 56. Paris: Universitaires de France.
- Moiso, F 1999. *Geist. 2. Begriffsgeschichte. 2.1 'Pneuma' und die anderen griechischen Wörter*, in Sandkühler 1999:434.
- Montague, G T 1976. *Holy Spirit: growth of a biblical tradition*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Preuss, H D 1996. *Old Testament theology*. Volume 1. Translated by Perdue, L G. London: T & T Clark.
- Ritter, J (ed.) 1974. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 3. Basel: Schwabe.
- Robert, A and Cazelles, H (eds) 1986. *Dictionnaire de la Bible*. Supplement. (12 vols). Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale.
- Schüngel-Straumann, H. 2009. Geist (AT), in Alkier, Bauks, Koenen 2007-2017:no pages.
- Sandkühler, H-J 1999. *Enzyklopädie Philosophie*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner.
- Sedley, D 2005. Stoic physics and metaphysics, in Algra, Barnes, Mansfield and Schofield 2005:382–411.
- Tengström, S 1993. רוח, in Jenni 1993:385–425.
- Tylor, E B 1871. *Primitive culture*. 2 volumes. London: John Murray.
- Van der Eijk, P J 2005. *Medicine and philosophy in classical antiquity: doctors and philosophers on nature, soul, health and disease*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VanGemeren, W A 1997. *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology and exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Van Imschoot, P 1934. L'action de l'esprit de Jahvé dans l'Ancien Testament, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques Et Théologiques* 23:553–587.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1935. L'Esprit de Jahvé, source de vie dans l'Ancien Testament, *Revue Biblique* 44:481–501.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1936. L'esprit de Jahvé et l'alliance nouvelle dans l'Ancien Testament, *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 13:201–209.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1938. Sagesse et esprit dans l'Ancien Testament, *Revue Biblique* 47:23– 49.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1939. L'esprit de Jahvé, principe de vie morale dans l'Ancien Testament, *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 16:457–67.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1965. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Translated by Sullivan, K and Buck, F. Tournai: Desclée.
- Van Pelt, M V 1997. רוח, in VanGemeren 1997:1073–1078.
- Verbeke, G 1974. Geist. II. Pneuma, in Ritter 1974:154–166.
- Volz, P 1910. *Der Geist Gottes und die verwandten Erscheinungen im Alten Testament und im anschließenden Judentum*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck.
- Von Rad, G 1962. *Old Testament theology*. Volume 1. Translated by Stalker, D M G. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.
- Westermann, C 1981. Geist im Alten Testament, *Evangelische Theologie* 41:223–230.
- Wittgenstein, L 1987. *Lectures and conversations on aesthetics, psychology and religious belief*. Ed. Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wöhrle, G 1993. *Anaximenes aus Milet*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Wolf, H W 1974. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. Translated by Kohl, M. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Wright, C J H 2006. *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.