

Restating the Psalter's Perspectives on Divine Justice in Philosophical Terms

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ABSTRACT

Prominent 20th-century Old Testament theologians have offered comparative-philosophical restatements of the Psalter's perspectives on YHWH's justice in descriptive metaphysical terms. A variety of philosophical idioms were used to affirm/deny that justice was an attribute (or similar) of the divine nature (or similar) or instead predicated of or exemplified in divine functions and/or relations. In this article the associated trend in the research is identified and briefly discussed with reference to representative cases. This is followed by an overview of how concepts, concerns and categories in the analytic philosophy of properties can be used to update, refine and expand the explanatory framework for discussing related texts in the Book of Psalms on their own terms, even if not in them.

KEYWORDS: OT theology, Psalms, justice, divine attributes, properties (analytic philosophy), descriptive metaphysics, comparative philosophy

A INTRODUCTION

The concept of divine justice remains a popular research topic in the study of the Old Testament (OT). In the discipline of OT theology, the Hebrew words associated with "justice" (along with "righteousness") is frequently portrayed as a core constituent of the religious language used to characterise YHWH in various contexts.¹ Related discussions on the subject of OT ethics often consider the divine will for justice as the best overarching description for the moral foci of the canonical literature.² Other approaches to constructions of the concept of justice (divine and otherwise) in the worlds behind, of and in front of the texts

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¹ As reflected in, amongst others, the title of the third volume in the trilogy of Otto Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments. Theologie des AT 3: Jahwes Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

² For the concept of divine justice in the context of OT ethics combining theological and historical-religious insights, see Eckart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Theologische Wissenschaft 3/2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 117-142, and more recently, John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94-109.

include those the interests of which are, among others, comparative-linguistic, religious-historical, literary-aesthetic, socio-economical, legal-political and reception-ideological.³

B SPECIFIC BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

Within major and influential theologies of the OT published during the 20th-century, one will sometimes come across sections where the focus shifts to assumptions the nature of divine justice implicit in the Book of Psalms. Included are additional comments specifically aimed at attempting to explain similarities and (mostly) differences between ancient Israelite conceptions of divine justice and assumptions guiding scholarly interpretations thereof based on presuppositions, problems, people and perspectives in the history of Western philosophy.⁴ In this part of the present study, the philosophical idioms operative in some representative cases will be briefly introduced as evidence of the alleged trend.

Walther Eichrodt⁵ followed Johannes Pedersen⁶ in insisting that the Psalter never showed any interest in justice as an "abstract formal concept."⁷ Eichrodt himself still refers to justice as "concept" that can be "predicated" of YHWH, although making it very clear that it divine justice was not something that can be understood through "philosophical attribute-classifications", as a

³ For a helpful overview see John W. Rogerson, "The Old Testament and its Environment," in *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (ed. Matthew J. M. Coombe; London: Routledge, 2016), 147-157. One example of a study with the specific focus on divine justice as opposed to other forms, e.g. social, personal, economic, legal or otherwise would be James L Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 80-95. An example of a more secular approach with a socio-economical focus is that of Norman K. Gottwald, *Social Justice and the Hebrew Bible, Volume 1* (San Francisco: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

⁴ Comments on the nature of divine justice in the Psalter are, of course, also found in major commentaries (aside from those in journal articles, monographs, and other formats). See for example in the classic tradition of German scholarship, various sections in, among others, Manfred Oeming, *Das Buch der Psalmen. Psalm 1-41* (NSKAT 13; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000); Manfred Oeming and Joachim Vette, *Das Buch der Psalmen. Psalm 42-89* (NSKAT 13/2; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010); Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger *Psalmen 51-100*, (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2007); idem., *Psalmen 101-150* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008); idem. *Die Psalmen, Bd. 3: Psalm 101-150* (NEB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2012); Friedhelm Hartenstein and Bernd Janowski, *Psalmen* (BKAT - Neubearbeitungen XV, 1. Lieferg.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 2012).

⁵ Walter. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments. Teil 1: Gott und Volk* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'schen, 1933), 240-242.

⁶ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

⁷ Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 240.

"universal", or as warranting the question of what it was.⁸ The philosophical idioms involved and rejected here, all once popular in theology proper, are those associated with Aristotle's categories of being, Plato's theory of the Forms and Socrates' quest for essential definitions based on properties held in common by all members of the extension of a term.⁹ Again, those specific ancient Greek philosophical problems and perspectives are considered foreign to and distortive of the concept of justice in Hebrew thought, the divine justice in the Psalter is thereafter described in metaphysical terms as a "property" of a "relation" between – or the "agency" of – parties involving the divine person.¹⁰

Gerhard von Rad¹¹ also concurs with Pedersen, though in this case explicitly with reference to the idea that justice in the Psalms (and OT in general) was understood in ways ontologically very different from the "idealist" or "humanist" associative meanings later attached to it.¹² Ringgren's study (*Word and Wisdom*)¹³ is approvingly noted for having shown that ancient Near Eastern conceptions of justice involved what can be (and is) called a "hypostazation" of divine "qualities and functions". The problem, according to von Rad, is that the concept of justice in the OT is still being approached from the perspective of its Latin etymological background and the Greek/Roman philosophy associated therewith as become the norm in subsequent doctrinal theology. Fortunately, all residual anomalies were resolved when instead of continuing to search for the biblical equivalent of an ideal norm with reference to which justice was defined, the very assumption that Hebrew thought operated in this essentialist philosophical manner was shown to be misguided. Credit for this insight is given to Kremer¹⁴ whose conceptual pre-history of the Pauline idea of righteousness showed it as not to be understood as the relation of an object to an idea. Von Rad thinks that justice can still be called one of the divine attributes ("qualities"), even though this perspective is rare in proportion to more obvious and numerous occasions featuring justice as a property of YHWH's acts (here "functions").¹⁵

⁸ Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 240.

⁹ Emil Kautsch, *Abhandlung über die Derivate des Stammes sdq im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauch* (Tübingen: Fues, 1881), 53.

¹⁰ Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 241.

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments Bd. 1. Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Kaiser, 1969), 370.

¹² Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I*, 370.

¹³ See Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East*. (PhD Dissertation; Uppsala: Lund, 1947).

¹⁴ See Hermann Kremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1899).

¹⁵ Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I*, 371. Also, early theological ideas in the OT are noted as not assuming that human subjects are reciprocating of divine

Interestingly, and with the obvious allusions to several related German philosophers, YHWH is constructed as driven by the "will for justice."¹⁶

Rolf Knierim, though still clearly writing in the tradition of contrasting Hebrew and Greek thought¹⁷ did not like his predecessors take this to imply that descriptive-metaphysical restatements should avoid classifying the biblical religious language as un/non-philosophical.¹⁸ For example, Knierim considered the concept of justice in the Psalms as having been part of what he calls a "dynamistic ontology."¹⁹ Irrespective of whether this conceptuality can be called "monistic" or not, Knierim suggests it highlights the worldview according to which justice organically unfolds as the consistent outcome of a person's actions and attitudes, her/his own way of life" and links it to the ancient wisdom tradition and as representing a "distinct understanding of reality as a normal empirically verifiable process through which justice is disclosed and which is itself just."²⁰ According to Knierim then, what he (like other OT theologians) call "Israel" "theologized" the ancient Near Eastern wisdom "ontology" of justice in a manner reflecting the same dynamic process²¹ but adapted to the morality of its separate "types."²² The deity's relation to the "cause and effect" of justice has been enveloped, relativized and even superseded by the principle of the exclusive covenant between YHWH and Israel, without assuming "monotheism" as a unifying theory of distributive and retributive forms of social and other types of justice.²³

Numerous other influential scholars have remarked on the Psalter's perspectives on the relation between YHWH and justice. In these cases, the philosophical commentary is "unofficially" yet clearly concerned with metaphysical assumptions apparently alleged to be implicit within the religious language used to construct the concept of divine justice in the context of particular Psalms. For example, according to Samuel Terrien with reference to

justice, i.e. here doing justice in some way responding to YHWH who somehow benefits therefrom in a personal capacity.

¹⁶ Despite the "for", the allusion here seems to German idealist philosophies involving the same expression, e.g. Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of the "will to live" and Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the "will to power," equally possible to link in some way with parallels to the notion of divine attributes, here specifically related to religious language about YHWH's as emphatically living/eternal and mighty/powerful.

¹⁷ Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 86-122.

¹⁸ Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 95.

¹⁹ Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 89.

²⁰ Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 91.

²¹ Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 93.

²² Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 93.

²³ Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 99.

Psalm 17, "the essential quality ofGod...is justice."²⁴ Walter Brueggemann (2010: n.p.), for his part writes with reference to Psalm 82 that justice is there assumed to be "a non-negotiable mark of godness"[sic].²⁵ Many other similarly brief yet clearly deliberate attempts are attested throughout the associated research involving the use of descriptive metaphysical terms for comparative-philosophical ends. In each case, it is either affirmed or denied, consistently or not so much, that the concept of divine justice in the Psalter can be understood as have referred to some sort of property, attribute, quality, characteristic, or equivalent somehow predicated of or exemplified by divine nature, person, essence, substance or kind. This confirms the assessment suggesting the ever-present desire for "...distilling the Bible's information into a list of 'attributes', a kind of essence of divinity..."²⁶

In most cases, the particular trend hereby identified is itself part of a larger polemical and apologetic approach adopted by both conservative and critical biblical theologians of the day (and still) and is often considered warranted on historical and theological grounds. Two of the hallmarks of the broader trend that are relevant to the discussion to follow were already identified decades ago.²⁷ On the one hand there is a strong anti-philosophical sentiment inconsistently expressed between the lines of comparative-philosophical restatements in covert allegiance to "personalism and existentialism" (as well as process metaphysics) identified with ontological backgrounds of the ancient Near East.²⁸ On the other hand, there is the belief in a biblical "way of thought" or "mental framework" that, once identified, both accounts for the ontological diversity via consistent epistemological principles and shows the right way of reading the texts on their own terms.²⁹

²⁴ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 185.

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010), n.p.

²⁶ In the words of Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), ix.

²⁷ As already clearly pointed out, despite certain shortcomings in doing so and new developments since, by the contemporary publication James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 196.

²⁸ The ancient near Eastern context is always relevant and cannot be excluded. It is well-known that in comparative-religious terms, justice was often associated with (aspects) of solar deities in particular. For a recent specialised contribution to this topic, see Juliane Kutter, *nūr ilī. Die Sonnengottheiten in den nordwestsemitischen Religionen von der Spätbronzezeit bis zur vorrömischen Zeit* (AOAT 346; Münster: Kaiser, 2008).

²⁹ For more detail, see the influential work by Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared to Greek* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952).

C THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This study will assume that the second-order term “justice” is valid as such and that the trend of philosophical restatement identified above, in spite of and also because of its shortcomings, remains a necessary and worthwhile pursuit in the context of the research topic under consideration. Granting this, even if only for the sake of the argument, the research question this article intends to answer is whether the philosophical frameworks operative in the trend can be updated, refined and streamlined. The hypothesis ventured predicts that recourse to the contemporary analytic philosophy of properties represents one possible way of doing just that.³⁰ The objective of this study will be to show how concepts, concerns and categories in that particular discussion in analytic metaphysics can be used for a more coherent, comprehensive and complex type of philosophical restatement than is currently attested in the research.

Concerning method, the article features both theoretical reflection concerned with methodology as well as itself engaging in comparative-philosophy and descriptive metaphysics. The scope of the study will be confined to discussing what the new framework reveals to be some of the semantic, ontological and general metaphysical assumptions implicit in the Psalter’s perspectives on divine justice.³¹ The limits of the study are intertwined with disagreements in the associated research on matters related to Bible translation,³²

³⁰ Respected English introductions to the topic for contemporary OT theologians interested therein, although presupposing some background in analytic philosophy, are classically David M Armstrong, “Properties,” in *Language, Truth and Ontology* (ed. Kevin Mulligan; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 14-27 and more contemporarily, Sophie R. Allen, *A Critical Introduction to Properties* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Other formal introductions can be found in George Bealer and Uwe Mönnich, “Property Theories,” in *Handbook of Philosophical Logic, Vol. IV* (ed. Dov Gabbay and Franz Guenther; Dordrecht: Reidel, 1989), 133-151; Chris Swoyer, “Theories of Properties: From Plenitude to Paucity,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 243-264.

³¹ See similar related views in Konrad Schmid, *Gibt es Theologie im Alten Testament? Zum Theologiebegriff in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft* (ThSt 7; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2013).

³² As elsewhere, at the forefront of research “the facts of the matter” is part of a running debate. Here nothing is a given, and the second-order concept of “justice” is itself not universally recognised as a valid translation of the associated Hebrew words. Aside from the influential if controversial studies by Kautsch, Cremer and Pedersen mentioned earlier, see also Karl H. Fahlgren, *Ṣādākā nahesthende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1932), Klaus Koch, *Sdq im Alten Testament. Eine traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (Heidelberg: Universität Heidelberg, 1953), 3 concluded that, metaphysically speaking, justice was assumed to be an entity or being and not an attribution or a relation. Hans H Schmid. *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung. Hintergrund und Geschichte des*

philosophical perspectives on the OT (here simply part of the same trend of philosophical restatements identified above), comparative philosophy (various fallacies related to presumption),³³ the possibility of metaphysics (here simply assumptions about the nature of the world in the text), the concept of properties,³⁴ and even the idea of justice.³⁵ As for the relevance of this study, to the extent it succeeds or can be considered to do so, it will be able to count as a supplement to the ways in which OT theologians seek to utilising philosophical language to restate the Psalter's metaphysical assumptions about the nature of divine justice and that on its own terms, even if not in them.³⁶

D THE ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY OF PROPERTIES

1 Introduction

In the contemporary analytic philosophical idiom, what is meant by the concept of justice as a "property" is historically related to other philosophical and

alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes (BHT 40; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968) found, more comprehensively, that *sdq* was more strictly related to the concept of order or natural law than to our word "justice." See also Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Gospel of Righteousness: A Study of the Meaning of *sdq* and its Derivatives in the Old Testament* (PhD Dissertation; New York, NY: University of Columbia, 1959); Moshe Weinfeld, *Justice and Righteousness in Ancient Israel in Light of Social Justice in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985); Ahuva Ho, *Ṣedeq and Ṣedeqah in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991); Stefan Fischer, "Der alttestamentliche Begriff der Gerechtigkeit in seinem geschichtlichen und theologischen Wandel," in *Die Königsherrschaft Jahwes, Festschrift zur Emeritierung von Herbert H. Klement* (ed. Harald Seubert and Jacob Thiessen; STB 13; Wien: LIT, 2015), 61-74.

³³ See Ronnie Littlejohn, "Comparative Philosophy," n.p., *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (eds.), cited 11 December 2018, online: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/comparat/>.

³⁴ Or, as one popular analogy goes, the map it is *not* the territory. For the original context of the useful analogy, see Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (Lakeville, MN: Institute of General Semantics, 1994), 58.

³⁵ For an informative introduction to the subtleties related to the various contexts of use in a variety of philosophical disciplines, see David Miller, "Justice," n.p., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), cited 18 January 2019, online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/justice/>.

³⁶ The idea of justice in philosophy is not so much discussed in the context of properties as one of the concepts in philosophical ethics, philosophy of law, social philosophy and political philosophy since (and before) Plato, see Plato, *Complete Works* (ed. John M. Cooper; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), especially the dialogue featuring Philebus where it is constructed as one of the four cardinal virtues. More recently and perhaps famously, with reference to justice as a virtue ideally possessed also by social institutions, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

theological terms like "name", "attribute," "characteristic," "quality," "feature," "type", and so on.³⁷ Though these terms occur in ordinary language and elsewhere, the word "property" here will be used only in its technical (metaphysical) sense. This despite the fact that even in analytic metaphysics it is essentially contested as a concept and on all levels (e.g., what a property is, in what sense it exists and what kinds there are, and so on).³⁸ In other words, as for the Psalter's metaphysical assumptions about "divine justice" as a property, by this is simply meant what a given world of the text presupposes with reference to where, when, how and why "being just" was "instantiated," "exemplified," "bore" or "possessed", either by or in relation to YHWH, divinity as kind, other divine properties, divine functions, divine relations, divine agency and even "states of affairs" or "events" mereologically over/underlapping with the deity.³⁹

2 Some basic research questions

The following are examples of the kind of questions OT theologians can now ask and will have to answer when attempting a comparative-philosophical restatement of the Psalter's perspectives on divine justice in descriptive metaphysical terms.

1. Was justice assumed to exist independent of religious language?
2. Was justice as property of/in relation to YHWH assumed to be ontologically fundamental or determined by the existence of something else?
3. Was justice as property of/in relation to YHWH assumed to be ontologically more or less fundamental than other divine properties (e.g. divine kindness)?

³⁷ For the particular analytic idiom's concepts, concerns and categories, the discussion to follow in this section is indebted to the excellent introduction and overview of the recent discussions provided by Francesco Orilia and Chris Swoyer, "Properties," n.p. in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edward N. Zalta); cited on 20 November 2018, online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/properties>. On attributes, see Jerrold Levinson, "Attributes," in *Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology, Vol. I* (ed. Hans Burkhardt and Barry Smith; Munich: Philosophia, 1991), 65-70.

³⁸ An example of an informative overview is that of Bealer and Mönlich, "Property Theories," 133-151.

³⁹ For the related mereology, see Peter Forrest, "Exemplification and Parthood," *Axiomathes* 23 (2013): 323-341, and for a more general introduction to associated terms and conditions, ontologically and relationally speaking, see Achille Varzi, "Mereology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edward N. Zalta), cited on 21 February 2019, online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/mereology>.

4. What entities were involved YHWH’s instantiation of the property of justice?
5. What was the relationship between justice and causality assumed to be?
6. Was divine justice assumed to limit possible states of affairs?

Clearly these questions are historical in orientation since, as in those OT theologians cited above, the focus is on what, if anything, the Psalter’s own assumptions as translated into the metalanguage of the philosophical idiom being utilised.

3 Samples of related data from the Psalter

The compilation below is arranged thematically based on grammatical and syntactical similarities structuring the concept of justice as a property of/in relation to YHWH.

1. Justice as a property related to the foundation of the divine throne:⁴⁰
 - 1a צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט מְכוֹן כְּסֵאֶךָ תְּסֻד וְאֱמֶת יִקְדָּמוּ פְּנֶיךָ :
Justice and judgment are the foundation of your throne;
grace and truth go before you. (Ps 89:15)
 - 1b עָנָן וְעֲרֵפֶל סְבִיבָיו צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט מְכוֹן כְּסֵאוֹ :
Clouds and darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the
foundation of his throne. (Ps 97:2)
2. Justice as a property more directly related to YHWH (“his” or “your” justice):
 - 2a יְבֹאוּ וַיְגִידוּ צְדָקָתוֹ לְעַם נֹלָד כִּי עָשָׂה :
He will come and will declare his justice to a people born. (Ps 22:32)
 - 2b צְדָקָתְךָ כְּהַרְרֵי־אֵל מִשְׁפָּטְךָ תְּהוֹם רַבָּה :
Your justice is like the divine mountains
and your judgments very deep (Ps 36:6)
 - 2c מִשֶּׁף חֶסֶדְךָ לִידְעֶיךָ וְצְדָקָתְךָ לְיֹשְׁרֵי־לֵב :
Pour out your loving-kindness to your acquaintances
and your justice to the right of heart (Ps 36:11)

⁴⁰ The motif was sufficiently clarified in non-philosophical aspects in Helmut Brunner, “Gerechtigkeit als Fundament des Thrones,” *VT* 8 (1958): 426-428. See also more broadly with reference to the same royal framework, Jorg Jeremias, *Das Königtum Gottes in den Psalmen. Israels Begegnung mit dem kanaanäischen Mythos in den Jahwe-König-Psalmen* (FRLANT 141; Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); Markus Saur, *Die Königspsalmen. Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie* (BZAW 340; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Martin Leuenberger, *Konzeptionen des Königtums Gottes im Psalter. Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Redaktion der theokratischen Bücher IV-V im Psalter* (AthANT 83; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004) among others.

- 2d : צדקתך לא־כִסִּיתִי בְּתוֹךְ לִבִּי אֲמוּנָתְךָ וַתְּשׁוּעָתְךָ אֶמְרָתִי לֹא־כִתַּדְתִּי :
Your justice I have not hidden in my heart and your trustworthiness and salvation I said I would not conceal (Ps 40:11)
- 2e : תִּרְגַּן לְשׁוֹנִי צִדְקָתְךָ
My tongue will sing of your justice (Ps 51:16b)
- 2f : תִּנְהַ־עוֹן עַל־עוֹגֵם וְאֵל־יָבֹאוּ בְּצִדְקָתְךָ :
Add iniquity to the unjust and let them not come in your justice (Ps 69:28)
- 2g : בְּצִדְקָתְךָ תַצִּילֵנִי וְתִפְלֹטֵנִי הִטָּה־אֵלַי אָזְנְךָ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי :
In your justice save me and incline your ear and let me be saved (Ps 71:2)
- 2h : יְהוָה אֶזְכֵּיר צִדְקָתְךָ לְבַדְּךָ :
YHWH I shall remember your justice alone (Ps 71:16)
- 2i : וְצִדְקָתְךָ אֱלֹהִים עַד־מְרוֹם :
Your justice o God is to the heights (Ps 71:19)
- 2j : אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְמֶלֶךְ תֵּן וְצִדְקָתְךָ לְבֶן־מֶלֶךְ יִדְוּ עִמָּךְ בְּצִדְקָתְךָ וְעַנְיֶיךָ בְּמִשְׁפָּט :
God, give your justice to the king and your righteousness to the son of the king, his hand leads your people in righteousness an your poor in justice (Ps 72:1-2)
- 2k : הַיִּנְדַע בְּחֹשֶׁךְ פִּלְאָה וְצִדְקָתְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ נִשְׁיָה :
Will be made known in darkness your wonders and your justice in the land of forgetfulness? (Ps 88:13)
- 2l : הוֹדִיעַ יְהוָה יְשׁוּעָתוֹ לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם גִּלָּה צִדְקָתוֹ :
He makes known his salvation in the eyes of the nations He has shown his justice (Ps 98:2)
- 2m : וְחֶסֶד יְהוָה מִעוֹלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם עַל־יִרְאַיוֹ וְצִדְקָתוֹ לְבָנֵי בָנִים :
The loving-kindness of YHWH forever and ever to those who fear him and his justice for the sons of man (Ps 103:17)
- 2n : הוֹר־וְעֶשֶׂר בְּבֵיתוֹ וְצִדְקָתוֹ עַמְּדַת לְעַד :
Riches and wealth are in his house and his justice stands forever (Ps 112:3)
- 2o : פָּזַר נָתַן לְאֶבְיוֹנִים צִדְקָתוֹ :
He has dispersed, he has given to the poor his justice (Ps 112:9)
- 2p : הִנֵּה תִאֲבָתִי לְפָקֻדֶיךָ בְּצִדְקָתְךָ תִּינֵנִי :
Look I have longed for your precepts in your justice revive me (Ps 119:40)
- 2q : צִדְקָתְךָ צֶדֶק לְעוֹלָם וְתוֹרָתְךָ אֱמֻנָה :
Your justice is just forever and your instruction trustworthy (Ps 119:142)
- 2r : קוֹלִי שְׁמַעַה כְּחִסְדֶּךָ יְהוָה כְּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ תִּינֵנִי :
In your kindness hear my voice; YHWH in your justice let me live (Ps 119:149)
- 2s : רַחֲמֶיךָ רַבִּים יְהוָה כְּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ תִּינֵנִי :
Great is your mercy, O YHWH; give me life as your justice. (Ps 119:156)

- 2t : הַאֲזִינָה אֶל־תְּחִנּוּגֵי בְּאֵמֻנַתְךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּצִדְקָתְךָ
Listen to my praise, in your faithfulness answer me in your justice (Ps 143:1)
- 2u : הֲתִנֶּה תְּחִנּוּגֵי בְּצִדְקָתְךָ | תּוֹצִיאַ מִצָּרָה |
YHWH, have mercy on me in your justice and lead me out of trouble (Ps 143:11)

3. Justice as a property attributed to an object of divine love:

- 3a : אֱהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט תִּסְדֵּךְ יְהוָה מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ
He loves justice and righteousness, YHWH’s kindness fills the earth (Ps 33:5)
- 3b : יְהוָה אֱהֵב מִשְׁפָּט וְלֹא־יַעֲזֹב אֶת־חַסְדֵּיךָ לְעוֹלָם
YHWH loves justice and does not abandon his kindness forever (Ps 37:28)
- 3c : וְעַז מְלֶכֶךְ מִשְׁפָּט אֱהֵב אֶתְּךָ כּוֹנֵן מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה בִּיַעֲקֹב אֵתְּךָ עֲשִׂיתָ
Mighty King, lover of justice, you established equity, justice and righteousness in Jacob. (Ps 99:4)

4. Justice as a property instantiated in divine works:

- 4a. עֲנָנִים וְיֹלָמֵד בַּמִּשְׁפָּט יְדַרְךָ: עֲנָוִים
The humble he teaches in justice; the humble he leads in righteousness (Ps 25:9)
- 4b : מַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיו אֱמֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט אֱמָנִים כָּל־פְּקוּדָיו
The works of his hands are true and just are all his commands (Ps 111:7)
- 4c : עֲשֵׂה צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לְכָל־עֲשׂוּקִים
YHWH works justices and righteousness for all who are oppressed (Ps 103:6)
- 4d : כִּי־יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה דָּו עֲנֵי מִשְׁפָּט אֲבִיּוֹנִים
YHWH will secure justice for the poor, uphold the cause of the needy (Ps 140:13)
- 4e : עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט לְעֲשׂוּקִים נִתֵּן לָחֶם לְרַעֲבִים
He does justice for the oppressed and gives food for the hungry (Ps 146:7)

In addition to these, two Psalms are specifically concerned with justice as property of the effect of divine agency, namely 58 and 82. Here the “gods” are taken to task for, in the jargon of the new idiom, not acting in a manner, the outcome of which is a just word. Of course, there are also many references justice as property of human persons, actions, words and related to divine justice are also present but cannot be listed here (see Pss 37:6, 30; 94:5; 101:1; 106:3; 112:5 and 119:121 to name a few). For the present, however, these samples of the relevant data should suffice for the purpose of giving a decent impression of the complex multiplicity of contexts, co-occurring concepts and configurations that

restating the propositional content implicit in the associated metaphysical assumptions in small bits of text has to reckon with.⁴¹

4 Semantic concepts, concerns and categories

The discussion of the semantic issues related to properties are already attested in Plato and Aristotle.⁴² The distinctions between the thematic categories are somewhat artificial as they are not mutually exclusive; in a sense, they are all assumed to be part of the divine throne, YHWH's justice; a divine function and an object of divine love. The separation has more to do, as noted above, with interesting choice of formulation, since a slight difference in configuration of the form and content of grammar and syntax may equate to complexities in the semantic field.⁴³ The latter in turn may or may not equate to subtle ontological and metaphysical nuance variation leading to significant mereological reconfigurations of conditions of possibility for states of affairs constituted by implied propositional content featuring justice to obtain in possible worlds of the text. For now, aside from the richness of the data in terms of various linguistic and literary aspects present, the following semantic issues related to the property of being just must suffice.

1. In 1a the property of YHWH being just is conjunctively linked to judgment and propositionally linked to supervening divine properties like grace and truth while in 1b it the connection is with the traditionally juxtaposed righteousness and more concrete theophany phenomena associated with storm-god typology, i.e. darkness and clouds.

⁴¹ With regard to a more complete overview of the associated texts in the Psalter concerned with divine justice as constructed from particular non-philosophical and more social, moral and theological approaches, some publications focus on the many theologies represented throughout the entire collection, on which see, amongst others, Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim, CC; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986) and Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Theologies in the Book of Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller; VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 603-625.

⁴² See Max J. Cresswell, *Structured Meanings. The Semantics of Propositional Attitudes* (Boston, MA: MIT, 1985); Gennaro Chierchia and Raymond Turner, "Semantics and Property Theory," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 11 (1998): 261-302; Plato, *Parmenides, Philebus*, n.p., in Cooper and Hutchinson, *Plato: Complete Works*; Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* (trans. Jonathan Barnes; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

⁴³ The situation is actually more complex than this and outside the scope of the present article as it lies at the intersection of Hebrew linguistics and OT hermeneutics. For the applicable puzzles in the context of analytic philosophy, and from a thinker critical of the very idea of properties, see Willard V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1960). This work is well-known for the debates it spawned concerning the inscrutability of reference, holophrastic indeterminacy and the under-determination of scientific theory.

2. In 2a-u, the second (most popular) and third person references to YHWH's being just as property may seem uncomplicated, yet once the surrounding first-order concerns, concepts and categories in the religious language as well as the conjunctive elements of the propositional content implied in varieties of parallelism both presuppose a diversity of intricate ontological relation, linking the property and the deity both to mereological positions as either subject and object from where it overlaps and underlaps with other related yet distinct divine properties, functions, relations, kinds, actions, events, states of affairs, modes and so on.
3. In 3a-c some metaphysical simplicity returns in the semantics despite the varying ontological relations herein configured, the latter including justice as object or property of an object of desire rather than of the divine subject, and as is typical, in variable types of conjunction with predications featuring "righteousness" and "loving-kindness."
4. In 4a-e justice is again presupposed as being a property of sorts, yet once again not explicitly linked to the divine being (even if this is argued to be implied, though not necessary, e.g. acting just without being so essentially) but rather to divine action and related forms of agency.

With these general and cursory comparative-philosophical restatements of semantic aspects of the construction of justice as property of YHWH in descriptive metaphysical terms, the next step involves a closer look at ontological categories seemingly implicit in the world of the text viewed with the same analytical framework.

5 Ontological concepts, concerns and categories

The first focus of this section pertains to any account of identity and individuation of justice as property of/in relation to YHWH incidentally implicit in the religious language of the associated Psalms.⁴⁴ Though the concern may appear utterly anachronistic, consider for example constructions of the property of justice as an object of divine desire in 3a-3c. Were the entities involved assumed to be members of the same ontological category or, if not, what was assumed to make them distinct? Some sort of answer is required in order to make it possible to restate in descriptive metaphysical terms what kind of entity YHWH as a god of justice was assumed to be. Such a clarification of the implicit identity and individuation criteria for divine justice are constitutive rather than epistemic. As a result, it is not ontologically compulsory to determine whether the justice exemplified in one context was assumed to be exactly the same as another. OT theologians who approach the matter via nominalism will prefer to see justice as simply being predicated of YHWH as opposed to reconstructing

⁴⁴ See classically, Peter Achinstein. "The Identity Conditions of Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1974): 257-275.

the world of the text as though the property of being just was assumed to be instantiated only as something existing objectively.⁴⁵

Another question under the same rubric arises from the fact that justice as property of/in relation to YHWH was not assumed to be something that could be identified in terms of spatio-temporal location (as opposed to concrete particulars in the world of the text thus situated). Adding to the intricacy is the fact that the divine justice as constructed in 4a-4e are implied to be somehow co-located in divine, human and even non-personal events. In other words, being just as property of or related to YHWH was not understood as identified within the religious language of a particular Psalm in terms of individuals constructed to instantiate it. Seeing how individuals exemplifying the property might not be of the same class of entities and have other properties in common, there would seem to be no identity criteria presupposed based on overlapping extensions of the associated Hebrew terms the semantic field. Neither does there seem to be any clear intensional distinction, suggesting that our second-order concept of divine justice cannot be precisely individuated based on perceived or assumed causal relations linked to divine agency.⁴⁶ Consequently, divine justice can equally be described as exemplified only in *relations* between distinct individuals. The absence of a nomological criterion of identity governing constructions of the concept of divine justice as property thereby confirms, if with more nuance and specificity, related findings in the comparative-philosophical restatements discussed earlier.

With regard to existence conditions implicit in the examples from 1a-c – 4a-c above, we can rule out the possibility that "presentism" – the view whatever exists in the world of the text in a given Psalm is present – is presupposed.⁴⁷ The obvious reason for this dismissal lies in the fact that the religious language used to construct justice as a property predicated of or exemplified by YHWH located the deity's being just and relation to just states of affairs not only in the here and now but also in past or future entities, events or states of affairs. For example, in Psalm 82 there is the property being such that YHWH judged or will judge in a just manner, which the world of the given text as a whole exemplifies now, despite the fact that the same text assumes that neither YHWH nor the event of his judgment is spatio-temporally present to the speaker.

A related question concerns whether the property of being just predicated of or exemplified by YHWH was assumed to exist in a way more or less

⁴⁵ See David M. Armstrong, "Four Disputes About Properties," *Synthese* 144 (2005): 309-320.

⁴⁶ Sydney Shoemaker, "Causality and Properties," in Mellor and Oliver, *Properties*, 228-254.

⁴⁷ On which, see John Bigelow, "Presentism and Properties," *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 35-52.

fundamental than other properties similarly connected to the deity in the world of the text. Possible responses in the analytic descriptive metaphysical idiom imply that the Psalms will assume a related stance somewhere between maximalist and minimalist views. In this context these terms are used in the sense of either ontological abundance or scarcity with reference to properties presupposed in the Psalter's own religious language. To restate textual assumptions in descriptive metaphysical terms, the first task involves determining with reference to a particular text, the role the property of being just was assumed to play in relation to YHWH. This is not unrelated to the question of identity conditions so that the lack of criteria would once again complicate any attempted comparative-philosophical restatement of what the Psalter assumes made divine justice the same as or different from other divine properties. Perhaps it would be prudent to consider the possibility that most of the sample texts in 1a-c to 4a-c might also incidentally represent an intermediate position between maximalism and minimalism. This would be the logical conclusion wherever it is implied that divine justice is not a property determinative of its own meaning and can be said to exist if and only if it is in fact instantiated to the extent of it having explanatory utility in the world of the text.

6 General metaphysical concepts, concerns and categories (property typology)

Again with reference to constructions of the concepts of divine justice in the religious language of the texts in the Psalms quoted in 1a-c to 4a-c, the following are some of the types of property typically discerned in the analytic metaphysical idiom and potentially clarifying of what type of property YHWH's being just was assumed to be:

1. A structured or compound property⁴⁸ of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for YHWH's justice itself allowing for description in terms of other simpler properties, e.g. righteousness, kindness, love, faithfulness, etc.);
2. A characterizing (or non-sortal) property⁴⁹ of YHWH in being a description of YHWH rather than the nature of his species (the condition of possibility accounting for the idea of a just god; in Psalms 58 and 82

⁴⁸ On which, see Katherine Hawley, "Mereology, Modality, and Magic," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (2010): 117-133 and Wayne A. Davis, "On Occurrence of Types in Types," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92 (2014): 349-363.

⁴⁹ Discussions of characterizing properties are rare and usually a supplement to those on sortal types. See the helpful clarification in Thomas Sattig, *The Double Lives of Objects: An Essay in the Metaphysics of the Ordinary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

the gods are deposed not for lacking an essential attribute, which would be self-contradictory in addressing them as such, but in not fulfilling an expected divine role);

3. A determinate property⁵⁰ among YHWH's moral or determinable properties (the condition of possibility accounting for YHWH's divinity and then involving specificity as to the type, not to be confused with typology);
4. A secondary property⁵¹ of YHWH in not being an objective feature of the world in the text (in question) as it happens to be (the condition of possibility accounting for being praised as just)
5. An accidental property⁵² of YHWH since in situations where YHWH was not just (see below) his identity as either YHWH or deity was not thereby compromised (the condition of possibility accounting for justness to be predicated in a non-trivial non-analytic and non-a priori sense);
6. A tensed property of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for YHWH's justice frequently involving instantiation only in in past or future times);⁵³
7. A dispositional property⁵⁴ of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for the possibility and meaningfulness of questioning the instantiation of divine justice, so for any plea for divine justice, and that the deity or divine beings can be criticized for not being just; also for just states of affairs mereologically obtaining through non-necessary causal relations to the deity in the world of the text);

⁵⁰ See classically and popularly, Arthur N. Prior, "Determinables, Determinates, and Determinants I," *Mind* 58 (229) (1949): 1-20; idem., "Determinables, Determinates, and Determinants II," *Mind* 58 (230): 178-94.

⁵¹ The present discussion still uses the word "quality" based on popularising of the terminology in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Chicago, IL: Gateway, 1956).

⁵² For the distinction between accidental and essential properties and otherwise, see the useful assessment by Michael Gorman, "The Essential and the Accidental," *Ratio* 18 (2005): 276-289.

⁵³ For the distinction of this type, see Berit Brogaard, "Tensed Relations," *Analysis* 66 (2006): 194-202.

⁵⁴ Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

8. An extrinsic property⁵⁵ of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for the fact that every context of its predication presupposes the existence of other entities in relation to which it was/is(to be) exemplified);
9. A supervening property⁵⁶ of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for YHWH having to stay loyal if covenant obligations are fulfilled, although exceptions exist);
10. An emergent property⁵⁷ of YHWH (the condition of possibility accounting for justness as the evaluation of the conclusion of divine judgment, divine actions, divine words, etc.).

These are but some examples of the types of property divine justice appears as having been assumed to be. Alternative descriptions are surely possible, but for the present, those in 1-10 of this subsection should suffice as illustration of the levels of complexity and comprehensiveness in philosophical restatement that new framework's metaphysical idiom provides access to.

E CONCLUSION

Many influential OT theologians have sought to clarify the Psalter's perspectives on the concept of divine justice in descriptive metaphysical terms. The present study identified cases representative of this trend in the second-half of the 20th-century as well as the philosophical idioms operative therein. The primary question and aim of the research concerned whether the existence philosophical framework could be updated, refined and expanded. Given the assumption that divine justice was a property (or related, in the metaphysical sense), it was suggested that the analytic philosophy of properties features concepts, concerns and categories that can be adopted and adapted and applied to as part of a historical inquiry into the Psalter's assumptions about justice seen as something predicated of and exemplified in relation to YHWH. These were then incorporated into comments on a selection of thematically arranged texts featuring constructions of the concept of divine justice in samples of related religious language of the Book of Psalms. After noting the intricacies of meaning (semantics) identity and existence conditions (ontology) as well as types of property divine justice was assumed to be (metaphysical typology), it can be concluded that recourse to the analytic philosophy of properties in this way is indeed able of accessing new levels of complexity and comprehensiveness in

⁵⁵ David Lewis, "Extrinsic properties," *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1983): 197-200; Roger Harris, "How to define extrinsic properties," *Axiomathes* 20 (2010): 461-478.

⁵⁶ Orilia Francesco, "Armstrong's Supervenience and Ontological Dependence," in *Metaphysics and Scientific Realism. Essays in Honour of David Malet Armstrong* (ed. Francesco F. Calemi; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 233-251.

⁵⁷ Timothy O'Connor, "Emergent Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1994): 91-104.

second-order conceptual clarification seeking to restate the Psalter's perspectives on divine justice on its own terms, even if not in them.

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