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To Be or to Have a *nephesh*?

Gen 2:7 and the Irresistible Tide of Monism

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1 Introduction

In his 2015 book *Disembodied Souls*, Richard Steiner briefly mentions the Irish biblical scholar Robert Henry Charles, who in a study from 1899 tried to »reconcile the tripartite view of man with the results of critical scholarship«.¹ The tripartite view referred to is the assertion that human beings consist of body, soul, and spirit. Charles' study appeared at a particularly unfortunate time, at least for himself: as Steiner puts it, it was »swept away in an irresistible tide of monism«.² By this is meant the then-emerging consensus among Hebrew Bible scholars that the Bible does not express a tripartite – or, for that matter, dualistic – view on human beings. Instead, these constitute a monistic totality. To speak, for example, of a soul, separated from human corporeality, would be to superimpose Hellenizing conceptions on the biblical material. This is a consensus that, although questioned by some, has continued to prevail in Hebrew Bible scholarship to this date.

A central Biblical Hebrew term in connection with this discussion is נֶפֶשׁ. I am concerned here with the role of נֶפֶשׁ in one verse in the beginning of the Hebrew Bible. That verse is Gen 2:7, often termed a *locus classicus* of Hebrew Bible anthropology: »YHWH God formed the human being (out of) dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils (a) life-breath, and the human being became a נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.«³ In the following, I will argue that the importance ascribed to Gen 2:7 in research on Hebrew Bible anthropology has been crucial for deriving a general interpretation of what נֶפֶשׁ means. This interpretation can be termed monistic, since it perceives נֶפֶשׁ as a term that refers to human beings as such, in

1 Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls. The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, With an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription*, SBL Ancient Near East Monographs 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 87. Reference courtesy of Mark S. Smith.

2 Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 87.

3 All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

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their »totality«. This interpretation has won widespread acceptance, to the extent that it in practice functions as an assumption about the general meaning of נפש. The intention of this paper is thus to demonstrate these assumptions about נפש, the connection between these assumptions and Gen 2:7, and that these assumptions are still commonplace in Hebrew Bible anthropology research. However, considering both biblical and extra-biblical linguistic evidence, there are, as I will argue, good reasons to question the general monistic interpretation of נפש.

I will start this paper with looking into a number of instances in research from Franz Delitzsch up until Bernd Janowski that explicitly promote Gen 2:7 as an anthropological *locus classicus*, discussing the motives of this conception. After this, the connection between Gen 2:7 and monistic »totality« interpretations of נפש is discussed. I will then present linguistic evidence that challenges this interpretation, thus questioning the place that Gen 2:7 occupies in general interpretations of what נפש means. Some concluding remarks will end the paper.

2 Gen 2:7 as a *Locus Classicus* of Hebrew Bible Anthropology

More than 150 years ago, Franz Delitzsch made the following statement in his influential work *A System of Biblical Psychology*: »It is impossible to attain to the profundity of Gen. ii. 7; for this one verse is of such deep significance that interpretation can never exhaust it: it is the foundation of all true anthropology and psychology«. ⁴ This is no small claim when it comes to one single biblical passage. But Delitzsch is actually far from the only one ascribing such an importance to this particular verse. For example, in John Laidlaw's *The Bible Doctrine of Man*, Gen 2:7 is called a »*locus classicus*« of biblical anthropology. ⁵ Some half century later, Edmond Jacob referred in his *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* to Gen 2:7 as »passage capital pour l'anthropologie israélite«. ⁶ Gerhard von Rad's assertion that »v. 7 is a *locus classicus* of Old Testament anthropology« has won widespread acceptance, being quoted in a number of works in different fields of religious studies. ⁷ The expression *locus classicus* of Gen 2:7 has furthermore been used in a

⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, trans. Robert E. Wallis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, ²1867), 90. The German first edition was published in 1855.

⁵ John Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man, Or The Anthropology and Psychology of Scripture* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, ²1895), 55.

⁶ Edmond Jacob, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* (Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1955), 129.

⁷ See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis. A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1972, 3rd rev. ed.), 77. For references to von Rad on this point, see, e.g., Mamy Raharimanantsoa, *Mort et espérance selon la Bible hébraïque*, ConBOT 53 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2006),

number of works without explicit reference to von Rad.⁸ Claus Westermann stated basically the same thing, albeit in more cautious words, saying that Gen 2:7 contains information of »basic importance for the biblical understanding of man«, whereas Ludwig Koehler called it »the starting point« for the biblical reflection on the nature of human beings.⁹

Narrowing this down a bit to more contemporary scholarship, it is easy to see that a notion of Gen 2:7 as *locus classicus* still permeates much of the literature. Bernd Janowski, for example, calls Gen 2:7 an anthropological »guiding principle« (*Leitsatz*) and »anthropological key instance« (*anthropologische Grundsatz*).¹⁰ New Testament scholar Matthew Goff calls it »a *locus classicus* for a base assessment of humankind«, whereas Joseph Titus says that Gen 2:7 can be considered »a summary of the biblical anthropology«. ¹¹ The alleged importance of Gen 2:7 can also be deduced from the way this passage is presented in introductions on Hebrew Bible anthropology. For example, the first biblical quote Hans W. Wolff makes in the first section of his seminal work *Anthropology of the Old Testament* is precisely from Gen 2:7.¹² This way, a special emphasis is put on Gen 2:7. It

11; John Wilkinson, »The Body in the Old Testament,« *EvQ* 63 (1991): 198; Hans Schwarz, *Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 176; and Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image. Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 23.

8 Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. John Baker, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1967), 137; Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 26; Garrett J. DeWeese, *Doing Philosophy as a Christian* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2011), 229.

9 Claus Westermann, *Creation*, trans. John J. Scullion (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 77 f.; and Ludwig Koehler, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), 143.

10 Respectively, Bernd Janowski, »»Anthropologie des Alten Testaments« vor und nach H. W. Wolff. Eine forschungs- und problemgeschichtliche Skizze,« in Hans Walter Wolff *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments. Mit zwei Anhängen neu hrsg. von Bernd Janowski* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010): 401; and idem, »Der Mensch im alten Israel. Grundfragen alttestamentlicher Anthropologie,« *ZTK* 102 (2005): 156.

11 Respectively, Matthew Goff, »Being Fleshly or Spiritual: Anthropological Reflection and Exegesis of Genesis 1–3 in 4QInstruction and First Corinthians,« in *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood*, eds. Clare K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson, WUNT 284 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 47; and P. Joseph Titus, *The Second Story of Creation (Gen 2:4–3:24): A Prologue to the Concept of Enneateuch?*, European University Studies XXIII:912 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 167.

12 Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1974), 10.

is easy to find similar examples of Gen 2:7 being quoted as a general introduction to Hebrew Bible anthropology in a number of recent works.¹³

What, then, is Hebrew Bible *anthropology*? It is often defined as the sum of biblical reflection on different aspects of the life of human beings, starting with the question »What is a human being?« (cf. Ps 8:4 and Job 7:17). A crucially important part of the answer to this question is that human beings are *created by God*. This is thought to be a defining characteristic of Hebrew Bible anthropology.¹⁴ According to Anthony Thiselton, this notion seems to stem out of a »need to place any understanding of what it is to be human within the horizons of how God chose to relate himself to humankind«. ¹⁵ Naturally, then, Gen 2:7, where the creation of human beings is described, would be a central passage for assessing the biblical understanding of human beings. Put differently, this has been a way to argue for Gen 2:7 as a key passage of Hebrew Bible anthropology. The precedence of Gen 2:7 thus seems in these cases to come not out of *philological*, but *theological*, grounds.¹⁶

3 Monism, Dualism and נֶפֶשׁ in Gen 2:7

So, for theologically informed reasons, Gen 2:7 seems to be a very important passage for assessing what Hebrew Bible anthropology is. Furthermore, in Gen 2:7 we have an instance of נֶפֶשׁ – which is supposed to be one of the so called anthropological keywords, perhaps *the* anthropological keyword.¹⁷ The importance

13 E. g. Raharimanantsoa, *Mort et espérance*, 11; Lawson G. Stone, »The Soul: Possession, Part, or Person? The Genesis of Human Nature in Genesis 2:7,« in *What About the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian Anthropology*, ed. Joel B. Green (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004): 48; and Bernd Janowski, »Die lebendige *nəpəš*. Das Alte Testament und die Frage nach der Seele,« in *Biblical Lexicology: Hebrew and Greek. Semantics – Exegesis – Translation*, eds. Eberhard Bons, Jan Joosten and Regine Hunziker-Rodewald, BZAW 443 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015): 134.

14 See, e. g., Bernd Janowski, *Arguing with God. A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms*, trans. A. Siedlecki (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 12.

15 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 200.

16 The notion of Gen 2:7 as a *locus classicus* on the basis of theological presuppositions was questioned already by Aimo Murtonen, *The Living Soul. A Study of the Meaning of the Word *nəpəš* in the Old Testament Hebrew Language*, StOr 23:1 (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1958), 14. Murtonen noted that out of 13 instances in the Hebrew Bible, only in Gen 2:7 is the expression נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה used exclusively to denote human beings. This led Murtonen to conclude that the idea of Gen 2:7 as a specifically anthropological *locus classicus* »is hardly in accordance with the facts«.

17 The idea of a set of anthropological keywords (generally נֶפֶשׁ, בָּשָׂר, רִיחַ, לֵב) is very prominent in Hebrew Bible anthropology research. Wolff's, *Anthropology* (10–58) is only one example of

of נֶפֶשׁ for Hebrew Bible anthropology, coupled with the alleged prominence of Gen 2:7 for the very same anthropology, implies that נֶפֶשׁ in Gen 2:7 occupies a special place when it comes to assessing the meaning of this term. The conclusion that can be drawn from Gen 2:7 is, according to for example Bernd Janowski, that נֶפֶשׁ be defined not as something human beings *have*, but something they *are*.¹⁸ This was famously stated by Hans Walter Wolff: taking Gen 2:7 as evidence, Wolff claimed that »man does not *have* *n[epes]*, he *is* *n.*, he lives as *n.*«.¹⁹ For Wolff, this obviously describes the *general* meaning of נֶפֶשׁ: he says, with reference to Gen 2:7, that »an almost definitory use of the Hebrew word to signify human existence cannot be from the outset denied«.²⁰

The idea that נֶפֶשׁ stands for something human beings *are* can be described as basically monistic, as opposed to a dualistic interpretation. The dualistic idea of a separation between body and »soul« was first, as is well known, articulated by Plato. Dualism later on became commonplace in Christian anthropology mainly because of influences from Augustine. These ideas have been widely debated in modern philosophy, as well. For example, according to Thomas Hobbes, in the Bible words for soul or spirit do not refer to non-corporeal substances, but to persons as such: »The soul in Scripture signifieth always either the life or the living creature; and *the body and soul* jointly, the body alive«.²¹ Baruch Spinoza, in his turn, preferred to speak of a »dual-aspect monism«, where soul and body were »neither entities nor distinct substances but aspects of a deeper unity«.²² Spinoza's and Hobbes' stances can be described as basically monistic.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the monistic view was made famous in biblical scholarship by, among others, Henry Wheeler Robinson. Especially in his paper »The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality« (1936), Robinson advo-

an exposition of Hebrew Bible anthropology with this outset. Out of the four anthropological keywords, נֶפֶשׁ seems often to be regarded as the most prominent one – which is precisely why it is the first keyword Wolff discusses. For a rich survey of נֶפֶשׁ research, see Katrin Müller, *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele. Eine kognitiv-linguistische Studie zur nēfēs des Menschen im Alten Testament*, BWANT 215 (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 2018), 19–99.

¹⁸ Janowski, *Arguing with God*, 191.

¹⁹ Wolff, *Anthropology*, 10. The formulation goes back at least to Johannes Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture* I–II, trans. Aslaug Møller, SFSHJ 28 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991), 99. The first edition of the English translation was published in 1926.

²⁰ Wolff, *Anthropology*, 10.

²¹ Quoted in John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting. Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 17.

²² Cooper, *Body, Soul*, 18.

cated applying the notion »corporate personality« on biblical texts.²³ Very briefly, the idea is that the collective nature of human beings in ancient Israel meant that the group of the family or the tribe was perceived as a »physical unity«, and as such could act as a single body; synecdochically, the individual was thought to be interchangeable with the collective, and vice versa.²⁴ The corporate personality concept soon became widespread in biblical scholarship.²⁵ For example, Aubrey Johnson says in his *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* that Israelite thinking was characterized by »the grasping of totality«,²⁶ which is directly consistent with the idea of a corporate personality: different parts that make up a human being form a unity, these parts existing only as parts of this unity or totality. A human being »is conceived, not in some analytical fashion as ›soul‹ and ›body‹, but synthetically as a physical whole«. ²⁷ This is the explanation as to why a single anthropological term, like נֶפֶשׁ, by way of synecdoche can designate the whole person. In Johnson's work, and in many others', the monistic stance is obvious also when it is not explicitly labelled as such. For example, according to Johnson, ancient Israelite thinking can be described as »synthetic«, ²⁸ in the dialectical sense of the word: a point where the opposites are joined into a unity. This is, to my mind, another way of actually saying that ancient Israelite thinking was *monistic*. The use of the term »synthetic« to describe ancient Israelite thinking is still widespread, particularly in German scholarship.²⁹

Despite severe criticisms of the corporate personality concept from the 1960's and onwards, cognate ideas seem to still linger around in biblical scholarship.³⁰ What appears to be informed by the same kind of hermeneutical outsets is the

²³ I will refer to the reprint in *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, Biblical Series 11 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), 1–39.

²⁴ Robinson, *Corporate Personality*, 7.

²⁵ See Jurrien Mol, *Collective and Individual Responsibility. A Description of Corporate Personality in Ezekiel 18 and 20*, SSN 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 145–186.

²⁶ Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, ²1964), 1.

²⁷ Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, ²1961), 1f.

²⁸ Johnson, *Vitality*, 1f.

²⁹ Cf. Andreas Wagner, »Wider die Reduktion des Lebendigen. Über das Verhältnis der sog. anthropologischen Grundbegriffe und die Unmöglichkeit, mit ihnen die alttestamentliche Menschenvorstellung zu fassen,« in *Anthropologische Aufbrüche. Alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie*, ed. Andreas Wagner, FRLANT 232 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009): 197 with footnotes 34–36.

³⁰ As pointed out, e. g., by Christian Frevel, »Person—Identität—Selbst. Eine Problemanzeige aus alttestamentlicher Perspektive,« in *Anthropologie(n) des Alten Testaments*, eds. Jürgen van Oorschot and Andreas Wagner, VWGTh 42 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015): 78.

notion »stereometry of expression«, developed by Wolff and used extensively by Janowski. According to Wolff, the »stereometry of expression« means that the different anthropological keywords denote different aspects of the human being, viewed together as a totality. The anthropological keywords therefore need to be interpreted together – as a whole – since they stand for »different aspects of the same subject«, thus »circumscribing man as a whole«.³¹ Since they are all part of the same »psychosomatic unity«,³² they are, in many cases, thought to be completely interchangeable.³³ Although having been questioned by some scholars,³⁴ this is still a very common assumption about the anthropological keywords.

This also goes for נפש. The »totality« interpretation of נפש can, as already mentioned, be described as basically monistic – perhaps in the vein of Spinoza, for whom body and soul were »neither entities nor distinct substances but aspects of a deeper unity«. Gen 2:7 emerges, then, as one of the most important instances for deriving such an interpretation. A few concluding examples will elucidate this. So, for example, in a *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* article, Edmond Jacob bluntly states that »[i]sraelite anthropology is monistic«, and that the »unity of human nature is not expressed by the antithetical concepts of body and soul but by the complimentary and inseparable concepts of body and life«.³⁵ He goes on to say that, with reference to Gen 2:7, »נפש is the usual term for a man's total nature, for what he is and not just what he has«.³⁶ Aubrey Johnson suggests with reference to Gen 2:7 that נפש indicates »the complete personality as a unified manifestation of vital power«, which represents »the grasping of totality«.³⁷ And in his *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* article – a standard reference on נפש – Horst Seebass states that »according to Gen. 2:7 a person does not *have* a self but *is* a vital self. It is therefore not a good idea to assume that any of the meanings of *nepeš* involve ›having‹, since such an interpretation would

31 Wolff, *Anthropology*, 7 f.; Cf. Johnson, *Vitality*, 64.

32 Cf. Bernd Janowski, *Die rettende Gerechtigkeit. Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 133: »Die verschiedenen Schichten der menschlichen Persönlichkeit [...] werden als Aspekte einer psychosomatischen Einheit begriffen, die mittels stereometrischer Anordnung zur Darstellung gebracht wird.«

33 See, e. g., Wolff, *Anthropology*, 7; Janowski, *Arguing with God*, 16 f.

34 The prime example is Wagner, »Wider die Reduktion des Lebendigen«: 183–199.

35 Edmond Jacob, et al, »ψυχή κτλ.«, *TDNT*⁹ (1974): 631.

36 Jacob, »ψυχή κτλ.«: 620. Jacob's article was published the same year as the English translation of Wolff's *Anthropology*. Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology, With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, SNTSMS 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 118 f.: »we confront a current understanding of OT anthropology by now so common that its maxims need no quotation marks.«

37 Johnson, *The One and the Many*, 2.

lead to a misunderstanding of the anthropological nature of *nepesh*.³⁸ This is as clear as can be: any interpretation violating the particular understanding of נפש derived from Gen 2:7 means violating what נפש denotes *in general*, as a general Hebrew Bible concept. But, as will be discussed in the next section, there are good reasons to believe that this is not at all times true.

4 Linguistic Evidence Challenging the Monistic Interpretation of נפש

The following discussion of linguistic evidence aims to show that there are several different נפש meanings at play in the Hebrew Bible, which is obscured by the idea that Gen 2:7 be representative for נפש as an overall concept. The linguistic evidence to be discussed represents different genres and strata of the Hebrew Bible. Brief mention will also be made of the eight century BCE. Katumuwa stele, adding evidence challenging the monistic interpretation of נפש.

As far as the monistic totality interpretation goes, נפש is said to designate human beings in their entirety. Thus, נפש can be equated with »life«, understood synecdochically as a designation for a person. There are however reasons to believe that in a number of Hebrew Bible passages, נפש is, to use Richard Steiner's formulation, »an entity that can be located in space«.³⁹ In light of this, the general interpretation of נפש as »life« becomes problematic, precisely since life is *not* »an entity that can be located in space«. For example, in Gen 35:18, when it is said that Rachel's נפש »went out« or »departed« (יָצָא), one plausible interpretation is that after this has occurred, the נפש is, at least to some extent and for some time being, located outside the body.⁴⁰ A similar instance is to be found in 1Kgs 17:22: »YHWH listened to Elijah's voice, and the נפש of the child [נַפְשׁ-הַיֶּלֶד] returned (in)to/upon his inside(s) [עַל-קִרְבוֹ], and he lived.« The reader may compare with the translation of NRSV: »The LORD listened to the voice of

38 Horst Seebass, »נֶפֶשׁ *nepesh*«, *TDOT*⁹ (1998): 511f. Seebass substantiates this claim with a reference to Koehler (*Old Testament Theology*, 142). Note Seebass' expression »vital self«, which almost certainly goes back to Johnson's *Vitality of the Individual in the Life of Ancient Israel*.

39 Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 82. So too, e.g., René Dussaud (»La notion d'âme chez les Israélites et les Phéniciens«, *Syria* 16 [1935]: 270) who with reference to Gen 27:25 says that the נֶפֶשׁ »est localisée dans les entrailles«.

40 Cf. Song 5:6 and what Steiner (*Disembodied Souls*, 71) says about this instance as a case of »temporary departure of the נֶפֶשׁ« vs. Gen 35:18 as a case of »permanent departure of the נֶפֶשׁ« (Steiner's italics). See also Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 71f., for both Ugaritic and Mishnaic parallels to the »going out« of the נֶפֶשׁ. Cf., as well, Murtonen, *The Living Soul*, 52, on נֶפֶשׁ in Gen 35:18 as »an independent being«.

Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.« The preposition על makes for a special problem here. Semantically speaking, there is little meaning in a phrase such as »the נפש returned upon his insides«. However, regardless if על be translated »upon« or »in(to)« (cf. NRSV), both these options still support the interpretation of נפש as an independent entity in relation to the child.⁴¹ Such a translation as NIV, to take but one example, completely obscures this: »and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived«. ⁴² If, for example, it can be said that Rebekah's child struggled *within* her (בְּקֶרְבָּהּ; Gen 25:22), why—as so many scholars have done—automatically assume a much more abstract meaning when it is the נפש that is said to be within a person?

A biblical book with a rich number of נפש instances is Psalms. In Ps 31:10, for example, the psalmist says »From grief, my eye [עֵינִי] is wasted away, (and) my נפש and my belly [בֶּטְנִי] (too)«. Is the eye, the נפש and the belly – anthropological terms seemingly juxtaposed with each other – only different *aspects* of the same totality?⁴³ May it not be that they are in fact different *entities*, perceived as such by the psalmist?⁴⁴ Another instance is Ps 103:1: »Bless YHWH, my נפש, and all (that is) inside (of) me [וְכָל-קִרְבִּי], (bless) his holy name«, implying that the נפש is part of that which is *inside* the person. We find something similar, that is, the נפש being localized in some kind of space or place, in Ps 49:16: »But God will ransom my נפש from the hand (that is, power) of Sheol«. ⁴⁵ In this context, Ps 116:7

⁴¹ Paul Joüon & Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 27 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 460 § 133 f, give two meanings of על worth considering here: »proximity« (thus, in 1Kgs 17:22 it would imply that the נפש was »in proximity« to the child) and »addition« (thus that the נפש was »added« to the child, whereby the child revived). To my mind, both these alternatives imply that the נפש was clearly separated and separable from the child. Cf. also Murtonen (*The Living Soul*, 53), who says that in 1Kgs 17:22, »[t]he boy and his soul are clearly distinguished from one another«. For a similar case, cf., e. g., Ps 42:6: »Why are you downcast, my נפש, (and) in turmoil upon me [עָלַי]?«

⁴² According to Wolff (*Anthropology*, 13), the נפש here (as in Gen 35:18) denotes the »breath«, which Wolff equates with the נְשָׁמָה mentioned earlier on in 1Kgs 17:17. The same connection is made by Müller, *Lobe den Herrn*, 160 f.

⁴³ As argued by, e. g., Janowski, *Arguing with God*, 17.

⁴⁴ These entities may still, of course, in different ways relate to the »totality« of the person. Cf. also the parallel in, e. g., Isa 26:9: »My נפש desires you in the night, and my רוח within me [בְּקֶרְבִּי] seeks you.« Importantly, the רוח is said to reside *within* the psalmist; the context seems to imply that this goes for the נפש, as well.

⁴⁵ Ps 49:16 is mentioned by Christian Frevel (»Struggling with the Vitality of Corpses: Understanding the Rationale of the Ritual in Numbers 19,« in *Les vivants et leurs morts. Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 14–15 avril 2010*, eds. Jean-Marie Durand, Thomas Römer and Jürg Hutzli, OBO 257 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012]: 224 n. 106) as an instance where »roots of dichotomic conceptualization« are to be found. As far as נפש is con-

could also be mentioned: »Return, my נפש, to your resting-place [לְמִנוּחַיָּךְ].⁴⁶ In a similar vein, in Job 12:10 the נפש is physically localized (in the hand of YHWH): »For in his hand [בְּיָדוֹ] (is the) נפש of all that is alive [כָּל-חַיִּי].⁴⁷

To my mind, the context surrounding נפש in different instances, such as the ones discussed above, is of equal importance to the term itself. Thus, it is said that the נפש *comes into/upon* the »insides« of the child (1Kgs 17:22), that the נפש *is in* the hand of YHWH (Job 12:10), and that the psalmist's נפש *is ransomed from* Sheol (Ps 49:16). Furthermore, the נפש *is said to be within* the psalmist (Ps 103:1), it is asked to *return to* its resting-place (Ps 116:7), and it is depicted as having the ability to *depart or go out* (Gen 35:18). What all of these instances imply is that נפש in some respect is a substance or essence that can be spatially oriented. Thus, in these cases the abstract interpretation »life«, »vitality« or »totality« is untenable.⁴⁸



The linguistic evidence from the Hebrew Bible challenging the monistic totality interpretation of נפש gains further weight when compared to the inscription of the Katumuwa stele, discovered in Zincirli (Turkey) in 2008. Dating to the eighth century BCE, the stele, an Aramaic funerary monument over a royal official named Katumuwa, contains an inscription where it says that Katumuwa's נבש (a different spelling for נפש)⁴⁹ will reside in the stele. As depicted in the inscription, the נבש of Katumuwa has the ability to eat and drink. This appears as a clear case when a נפש/נבש is not equated with a human body or a person: it would be the case of a »defunct-soul«, connected to but not identical with the person that it is representing.⁵⁰ According to Seth Sanders, what the Katumuwa inscrip-

cerned, this also goes, according to Frevel, for Lev 17:11; Job 33:20,28,30 and – interestingly – Gen 2:7.

⁴⁶ The meaning »resting-place« for the noun מנוח is given in, e. g., »נָפֶשׁ« *DCH^F* (2001): 347 and »נָפֶשׁ« BDB (1996): 629. It is interesting to note that most major translations (NAB, NRSV, KJV, NIV) render the noun with the more abstract »rest«. On Ps 116, cf. the other psalms where the supplicant addresses his own נפש: Ps 42; 43; 62; 103; 104; and 146.

⁴⁷ Steiner (*Disembodied Souls*, 47) mentions a number of rabbinic sources stating that this passage refers »to the soul of a sleeping person, which is deposited into the hand of the Lord in heaven and returned safe and sound in the morning.«

⁴⁸ These implications thus not only come from different prepositional phrases but also from what verbs are constructed with נפש. Hence, Steiner notes that in the Hebrew Bible, the more general/abstract »life« (חיים) is never constructed with verbs such as *לקח »take« or בקש »seek«—but that this is precisely the case with נפש (see Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 72).

⁴⁹ On the spelling, see Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 137–139.

⁵⁰ Cf. Matthew J. Suriano, »Breaking Bread with the Dead: Katumuwa's Stele, Hosea 9:4, and the Early History of the Soul,« *JAOS* 134 (2014): 395. Frevel (»Struggling with the Vitality of Corpses«: 223) gives a rather different interpretation: he says that »nbš is [...] a term for the dead king, his identity, and body politic«, and that the ritual connected with the stele »does not address the

tion implies is »the *nbs*'s immediate physical presence«. ⁵¹ There is no reason to assume that the meaning of נפש/נבש here differs in any crucial way from what we could find in the Hebrew Bible. On the contrary, it seems to fit perfectly well with the instances discussed above. ⁵²

In connection to the discussion of the deceased Katumuwa's נפש/נבש, mention could also be made of the expression נפש מת, occurring in a number of Hebrew Bible texts. ⁵³ An example is Num 19:13: »All who touch a dead [מת], a נפש, a נִפְשׁ that is dying [יָמוּת] and do not purify themselves, defile the tabernacle of YHWH.« The function of נפש here is somewhat ambiguous: the statement could refer either to a dead נפש (that is, person) or to a dead person's נפש. ⁵⁴ In my view, there are plausible reasons to posit the meaning »a dead person's נפש«. ⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this, when נפש is used in such a context, scholars who opt for the synecdochical meaning »life« or »vitality« for נפש encounter inevitable problems, and any mention of the נפש being even remotely separated from the body must be avoided. Thus, in an article discussing these נפש instances, Christian Frevel consistently uses terminology implying that the נפש is identical with the person in question, without any sort of existence of or on its own. This includes using quotation marks when speaking of the נפש being »present« or of »touching« the נפש. ⁵⁶ To my mind, this is an apt illustration of what happens when scholars encounter instances that do not fit with their overarching interpretive strategy. The monistic

spirit of the dead king as a separate entity, but [...] the king in his vitality, which is connected with the personality of the living king.«

⁵¹ Seth L. Sanders, »Naming the Dead: Funerary Writing and Historical Change in the Iron Age Levant,« *Maarav* 19 (2012): 34.

⁵² A passage much discussed in connection to the Katumuwa stele is Hos 9:4: »for their bread (shall/will be) לֶחֶם נִפְשׁ; it shall not come to the house of YHWH.« What is described here may be the feeding of bread to »defunct-souls«; see Suriano, »Breaking Bread«: 389–393. For a different interpretation, cf. Hans W. Wolff, *Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1974), 150; 155.

⁵³ E. g. Lev 21:11; Num 6:6; 19:11,13.

⁵⁴ Discussing the preceding verse Num 19:11 and the expression לֶחֶם נִפְשׁ אָדָם, Baruch A. Levine (*Numbers 1–20*, AB [New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993], 465) says that »the reference may be to living persons«, translating אָדָם לֶחֶם נִפְשׁ »belonging to any human being«. True as this interpretation may be, Levine's translation obscures the source text since it makes no distinction between אָדָם and נִפְשׁ. Put differently, his translation does not make clear the relation between אָדָם and נִפְשׁ.

⁵⁵ If it were »a dead נפש«, then we would find an expression similar to the נִפְשׁ חַיָּה (Gen 2:7 and other instances), thus נִפְשׁ מֵתָה. However, this is not the case (Müller, *Lobe den Herrn*, 187–188). See also the discussion in Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 112–114.

⁵⁶ Frevel, »Struggling with the Vitality of Corpses«: 208.

»totality« interpretation of נפש is a clear-cut example of such an interpretive strategy, which in fact is not representative for all נפש instances in the Hebrew Bible.

4 Concluding Remarks

In none of the instances discussed above can נפש be equated with the person, to the extent that נפש be simply translated with the abstraction »life« or interpreted as analogous with the person's »vitality« or »totality«. The instances discussed thus challenge the monistic interpretation of נפש. In these cases, we would better speak of the נפש as being in some respect separated from the body, with a capacity to exist as an entity in different kinds of spaces. I do not want to overemphasize any »dualistic« reading of the linguistic evidence – there are obviously a number of נפש instances that confirm the traditional »totality« interpretation. Rather, my intention has been to show that there are a number of actual instances that defy this very interpretation. In other words, an interpretation of נפש both derived from and confirmed by Gen 2:7 cannot be said to represent any overall meaning of נפש. Rather, there are a number of different נפש meanings at play in the Hebrew Bible, and thus to speak of a general נפש concept would be wrong.

Admittedly, Gen 2:7 may be one of all of the נפש instances that is most suitable for the monistic totality interpretation, and conversely one of the least suitable if one would want to search for dualistic or tripartite conceptions in the Hebrew Bible. But this is actually an important part of the argument: Gen 2:7 appears in many cases to have been used by scholars as a confirmation of their own presuppositions as to what constitutes Hebrew Bible anthropology. It just seems that Gen 2:7 is very suitable when it comes to promoting certain interpretations of נפש, and that this stems from a hermeneutical framework that is being imposed on the texts and on the selection of texts.⁵⁷

This is an interpretive strategy that continues to be in use in Hebrew Bible anthropology research. However, the general נפש interpretation derived to a large extent from Gen 2:7 is not necessarily reflected by other נפש instances, but rather reflects a constructed idea about central features of Hebrew Bible anthropology. Thus, I agree with Steiner when he says that »[p]hilological analysis of a text should have primacy; it should precede anthropological analysis, not follow it.«⁵⁸ It may well be that such an »anthropological analysis« in certain cases has given

⁵⁷ Cf. James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 37: »May it not be a mistaken semantic analysis, inspired by admiration for the very »totality thinking« that it is supposed to demonstrate?«

⁵⁸ Steiner, *Disembodied Souls*, 76.

way to a more philologically sound way of interpreting, taking the context of each instance under account. And yet, Gen 2:7 continues to have precedence for deriving a *general* meaning of נפש. Had it not been for the alleged importance of Gen 2:7, then probably the understanding of נפש would have looked different, and various monistic totality interpretations of the kind I have demonstrated would not have been as prominent as has been the case – and still is.

Abstract: In this paper, the connection between Gen 2:7 and the interpretation of the Biblical Hebrew term נפש is examined. It is argued that the notion of Gen 2:7 as an anthropological *locus classicus* has promoted this as a central passage when it comes to assessing what נפש means. In this way, what can be termed a monistic interpretation of נפש has become commonplace. This has turned into an assumption about the meaning of נפש, affecting the interpretation of נפש as a general concept in the Hebrew Bible. There is, however, linguistic evidence defying the monistic interpretation of נפש.

Keywords: נפש, Gen 2:7, anthropology, history of research, monism

Résumé: Cet article examine le lien entre Gn 2,7 et l'interprétation du terme d'hébreu biblique נפש. Il propose que Gn 2,7 en tant que *locus classicus* de l'anthropologie biblique a été promu au rang de passage central pour l'interprétation de נפש. De cette manière, ce que l'on peut appeler une interprétation moniste de נפש est devenue un lieu commun. Ce postulat sur la signification de נפש est ensuite devenu un concept général de la Bible hébraïque affectant l'interprétation du terme. Des éléments linguistiques défient néanmoins cette interprétation moniste.

Mots-clés: נפש, Gn 2,7, anthropologie, histoire de la recherche, monisme

Zusammenfassung: Der Artikel untersucht die Bedeutung von Gen 2,7 für die Deutung des hebräischen Begriffs נפש. Die Auffassung von Gen 2,7 als anthropologischen *locus classicus* hat, so wird argumentiert, dieser Passage den Vorzug eingeräumt, wenn es um die Erfassung der Bedeutung von נפש geht. Dadurch wurde eine »monistische« Deutung von נפש vorherrschend. Dies hat zu einer Annahme über die Bedeutung von נפש geführt, die die Deutung von נפש als übergreifendem Konzept in der Hebräischen Bibel beeinflusst hat. Allerdings gibt es linguistische Belege, die die »monistische« Deutung von נפש in Frage stellen.

Schlagwörter: נפש, Gen 2,7, Anthropologie, Forschungsgeschichte, Monismus