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# LEXICAL VARIATION IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF בָּרָא: HOMONYMY OR POLYSEMY?

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## Introduction

The Hebrew verb בָּרָא, most commonly associated with its gloss in Gen 1:1 as “created,” is attested in various verbal stems that carry separate meanings.<sup>1</sup> Its Qal and Niphal forms are often translated as “to create,” but its five appearances in Piel are variations of “to cut,” while its Hiphil—a hapax legomenon—is given the sense of to “fatten.” This has led to disagreeing interpretations of the data, and the debate has recently been taken up again with the introduction of advances in cognitive linguistics.<sup>2</sup> The question lies in the correlation between the Qal/Niphal and the Piel forms of the root. What is at stake is the very concept of creation as understood by the authors of Genesis, Isaiah, some of the Psalms, and other texts.<sup>3</sup> An ongoing discussion over the

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1. This paper deals primarily with the information provided in the following three lexica: F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891–1906); Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, 12th edition, ed. Frants Buhl (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1895); Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1995); David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2001).

2. For the latest publications dealing with the topic, see the following: E. J. van Wolde, “Why the Verb בָּרָא Does Not Mean ‘To Create’ in Genesis 1.1–2.4a,” *JSTOT* 34.3 (2009): 3–23; Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, “To Create, to Separate or to Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of בָּרָא in Gen 1:1–2:4a,” *JHS* 10.3 (2010): 2–21; E. J. van Wolde and Robert Rezetko, “Semantics and the Semantics of בָּרָא: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel,” *JHS* 11.9 (2011): 2–39; Terrance Randall Wardlaw, “The Meaning of בָּרָא in Genesis 1:1–2:3,” *VT* 64.3 (2014): 502–13.

3. The possibility of overlapping semantic boundaries, or of a shared etymology between Qal “to create” and Piel “to cut” would suggest that the Hebrew concept of the creation of the world is related to a type of cutting, separating, shaping, or similar action.

last five years has provided significant insights, but one important aspect of the argument has continually been overlooked: the role of lexicographical history in the evolving understanding of בָּרָא. This paper will not attempt to provide a solution to the question. Instead, it will summarize the most recent scholarship on the debate, reevaluate the question being asked, and analyze lexicographical history on the subject.

### Current State of the Debate

The difficulty with understanding the relationship between the different meanings of בָּרָא was for the most part thought to have been resolved—or at least satisfactorily understood—during much of the twentieth century. The general consensus was that creation and cutting were two unrelated meanings derived from different etymologies. Occasionally, a commentary or article would suggest otherwise,<sup>4</sup> but these arguments went mostly unheeded. Yet even when asserting the absence of a correlation between the two meanings, scholars remained careful enough to mention in passing the alternate possibility. However, one major challenge brought up in recent years has rekindled the debate.

In the *New Cambridge Bible Commentary for Genesis*, published in 2009, Arnold addresses the issue of the verb's exclusive association with Israel's deity.<sup>5</sup> Though simply a repeat of older arguments, he hints at the possibility of the root's older meaning of "separate by cutting," which was only later expanded to refer to creation when used in a different verb stem. This point would quickly be picked up as an important component of the debate.

Published that same year was an ambitious monograph by van Wolde, which served as the catalyst for the ensuing interest in בָּרָא. Her *Reframing Biblical Studies* brought the literary approaches of cognitive linguistics, which have been picking up considerable traction over the last two decades, to the more traditional field of biblical studies.<sup>6</sup> As part of her attempt to demonstrate the benefits of such an approach, she devoted part of a chapter to a case study of temporal and atemporal relations in Genesis 1, focusing especially on the nature of the verb בָּרָא. She found her conclusions important enough to

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4. For example, see S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 3; Howard E. Hanson, "Num. XVI 30 and the Meaning of bārā," *VT* 22 (1972): 353–59. Driver was a key figure in making this point a long-lasting one, as will be shown below.

5. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36–37.

6. E. J. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

warrant the publication of a separate article that year, devoted entirely to her understanding of this verb.<sup>7</sup>

Van Wolde's approach to the P creation account in Genesis suggests that ברא has been misunderstood all along. Contra the general view that ברא and עשה are at times used in synonymous parallelism, she analyzes these two creation verbs to refer to entirely different processes. By showing that ברא, unlike עשה, always includes either two primary landmarks or one primary and one secondary landmark, she compares it to the English equivalent of "to distinguish between two things" and "to distinguish one thing from another thing."<sup>8</sup> This and other findings led her to conclude that the true meaning of the verb in its Qal stem is "to separate" or "to differentiate." According to van Wolde, Genesis 1 is therefore an account of two distinct processes: creation (עשה) and differentiation (ברא).<sup>9</sup>

The following year, Becking and Korpel co-authored an article which attempted to counter many of van Wolde's points, while simultaneously proposing a more nuanced understanding of ברא than the traditional "to create."<sup>10</sup> By applying van Wolde's interpretation to attestations of ברא outside of Genesis 1, they seek to show that her arguments are no longer tenable and must therefore be discounted. They then briefly describe the traditions of associating ברא Qal "to create" with ברא Piel "to cut," and dismiss them as old notions, long abandoned by etymological considerations. Their own proposal associates ברא with קנה, and traces the former's hypothetical introduction as a theological term in postexilic times. Ultimately, they propose that the Qal form of the verb be identified as having the sense of "to construct," and Yahweh "is imagined as having 'constructed' the cosmos as his temple."<sup>11</sup> The Piel form is, in their opinion, an etymologically unrelated word.<sup>12</sup>

7. Van Wolde, "Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean 'To Create,'" 3–23.

8. Van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies*, 198–99.

9. This conclusion apparently does not take into consideration the possibility that "differentiation" in an ancient context may be semantically equivalent to "creation." For a detailed monograph on this idea of functional ontology, see John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

10. Becking and Korpel, "To Create," 2–21.

11. Becking and Korpel, "To Create," 20.

12. "Because the existence of a Hebrew root  $\text{בר} < \text{brw/y}$ , 'to cut in half,' may be assumed on the basis of the well-known idiom  $\text{כרת ברית}$ , literally 'to cut a covenant,' and the noun  $\text{ברית}$  'covenant, treaty, contract,' it seems likely that a similar confusion [to one found in the Arabic  $\text{brw/bry}$ ] has taken place in the few places where ברא Piel occurs. There are more examples of this type of confusion of the weak consonants  $\text{א}$  and  $\text{ה}$  at the end of verbal forms." (Becking and Korpel, "To Create," 5)

In other words, according to Becking and Korpel, ברא Piel is nothing more than a misspelling of the hypothetical root  $\text{בר} < \text{brw/y}$  with the meaning of "to cut in half." However, there is no evidence that such a root exists in Hebrew, and their single piece of evidence ( $\text{ברית}$ ) is

Van Wolde teamed up with Rezetko and published a response to Becking and Korpel one year later in 2011.<sup>13</sup> They set out to establish the original contribution of van Wolde's thesis. They seek to support it by providing select cases outside of Genesis 1 where her interpretation may fit the context, and also by providing abundant etymological support for a connection between ברא and separating/cutting. The etymological evidence is especially helpful here and primarily consists of Arabic, but also Akkadian and Aramaic cognates.<sup>14</sup> They then go on to critique Becking and Korpel's proposed meaning of "to construct," one point at a time. In the end, they argue that van Wolde's original proposal of "to separate" "remains a viable explanation for the semantics of this verb."<sup>15</sup>

The latest addition to the discussion came in 2014 with the publication of an article in *Vetus Testamentum* by Terrance Wardlaw.<sup>16</sup> By looking at the range of verbs within the semantic domain "to create," Wardlaw succeeds in identifying several flaws in the arguments of both van Wolde and Becking-Korpel. He disagrees with van Wolde that ברא need be interpreted as a form of separation, especially in the Qal. He also finds Becking-Korpel's conclusions to go contrary to the evidence that suggests that ברא Qal and ברא Piel are related. He therefore returns to some of the older arguments that identify ברא as a form of "to create (something new)," and creation is here conceptualized as "to form by shape or cutting."<sup>17</sup> Finally, Wardlaw suggests that the use of traditional cosmological vocabulary in the Pentateuch and the Psalms—such as the verb ברא—was intended to trigger in the mind of the audience an association with Elohim's act of creation in Genesis.

### Remapping the Problem (Identifying the Question)

Ultimately, the core of the question being addressed has remained the same over the last century and a half. Yet the complexity of the arguments, along with the introduction of new ideas and approaches to the problem, has contributed to obscuring the simplicity of the question itself. An understanding of the fundamental linguistic concepts involved is the first essential step in perceiving the question behind the debate. This will in turn allow a study

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weak at best. Considering the Israelite appreciation for the cognate accusative, one would then expect כרת ברית to instead be ברית ברית.

13. Van Wolde and Rezetko, "Semantics and the Semantics," 2–39.

14. Because the focus of this paper is primarily lexicography, I will not attempt to address any potential cognates here. Those will be covered in a forthcoming paper.

15. Van Wolde and Rezetko, "Semantics and the Semantics" 39.

16. Wardlaw, "The Meaning of ברא," 502–13.

17. Wardlaw, "The Meaning of ברא," 511–512.

of the lexicographical corpus to shed light on the discussion as it currently stands.

As Clines has pointed out, “The treatment of homonyms has been perhaps the most variable and inconsistent aspect of Hebrew lexicography.”<sup>18</sup> This concept of homonymy is precisely what the question regarding בָּרָא deals with. And though recent scholarship has involved efforts to understand this specific aspect of בָּרָא, it has failed to clearly identify the problem in terms of homonyms and polysemes.

A true linguistic homonym<sup>19</sup> is simultaneously a homophone and homograph. This means that the two or more words in question sound and look the same, but they vary in meaning. The difference in meaning is caused by the fact that these are etymologically unrelated words, and have normally come to be homophones and homographs only in their latest forms. As an example of a true homonym, the English word *arm* contains two differing meanings: a “defensive and offensive outfit for war,”<sup>20</sup> and “the upper limb of the human body, from the shoulder to the hand.”<sup>21</sup> The etymology of the first can be traced as coming from the French *armes*, originally the Latin *arma* (no plural), meaning “arms, fittings, tackle, gear.” The second comes through Common Germanic—attested in Old Saxon, Old Frisian, and others—and has been traced to the hypothetical Old German *armoz*, which is a cognate of the Latin *armus* “shoulder.” These are two separate words that evolved over time, eventually becoming homonyms in English.

A polyseme, on the other hand, varies from a homonym in that its different meanings have never been separate words from separate etymologies, but rather come from a single word that developed different meanings. These different meanings often include one concrete, older sense, and an expanded metaphorical meaning. Though the connection between the two senses is often clear at first, with time they can grow further apart until their correlation becomes obscure and forgotten. The word *pupil* is a polyseme in English. The two meanings of “a person who is being taught by another”<sup>22</sup> and “the opening

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18. David J. A. Clines, “Towards a Science of Comparative Classical Hebrew Lexicography,” 5. Unpublished paper, read on July 2 2014, at the 14th International Conference of the International Syriac Language Project, held in St. Petersburg under the auspices of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, June 29–July 4, 2014.

19. Common usage varies in that it often includes words that are spelled differently but sound the same. This is not true of homonyms in a linguistic sense.

20. “arm, n.2.” OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press.

21. “arm, n.1.” OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press.

22. “pupil, n.1.” OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press.

in the iris through which light passes into the eye”<sup>23</sup> may seem entirely unrelated, but in reality they share an etymology. The first is traced back through the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *pupille*, to the classical Latin *pūpillus* “an orphan or child.” The second follows the same etymology, and is simply a transferred use of the classical Latin *pūpilla*—the female form of *pūpillus*—“so called on account of the small reflected image seen when looking into someone’s pupil.” Interestingly, an equivalent semantic expansion occurred in Greek, where κόρη came to mean the pupil of the eye and also a girl or maiden.

With these two terms defined, it becomes easy to see that the question regarding ברא is simply a matter of deciding if the Qal/Niphal and the Piel forms of the verb are homonyms or polysemes. If they are homonyms, then “to create” and “to cut” are two senses that do not share an etymology and are therefore unrelated. This is the model taken up by Becking and Korpel and, as will be shown, by the most modern lexica. On the other hand, if these two forms are polysemes, then their etymologies do converge at some point, and the Qal “to create” likely began as a semantic expansion of the more concrete Piel “to cut.”<sup>24</sup> This is the argument made most recently by Wardlaw, and it is essentially—though indirectly and with some important variations—what van Wolde has claimed as well.

Despite the simplicity of the argument, arriving at a solution is no easy task. Even within languages with a far more extensive corpus than Hebrew, it is often very difficult to solve questions of homonymy. This is because the amount of etymological evidence required is hard to come by. The difficulty is therefore much more evident in Classical Hebrew, where cognates and etymological data are often questionable at best. This is why so much of the argument has instead focused on the context surrounding the use of ברא, with etymological evidences providing secondary support. The lexica have traditionally included cognates as a way for scholars to pursue etymological studies, but interpretation varies widely. I will now turn to a study of how ברא has been understood through various generations of Hebrew lexicography.

### ברא in the Lexica

Some of the recent papers summarized above deal briefly with lexicography, but only inasmuch as it serves their respective arguments. In fact, this ongoing discussion serves to illustrate the dangers of the uncritical use of lexica. The scholars involved have generally been careful when using data compiled

23. “pupil, n.2.” OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press.

24. As far as I know, the opposite possibility—that the Piel is an expansion of the Qal—has never been explored.

by lexicographers, yet the different sides of the argument tend to imitate the two major understandings of בָּרָא as found in the lexica. David Clines's words of caution are applicable here: "I will offer an axiom: most dictionaries are copies of other dictionaries. Just as well, you might say, since a dictionary that had only original meanings would be useless. The downside, though, is that the mistakes and myopia of the past tend to be perpetuated, and that means for over 500 years in some cases."<sup>25</sup> If nothing else, a lexicographical study of בָּרָא will shed light on the trends and evolving understanding of the word's meaning. A full overview of the way lexicographers have handled בָּרָא over time will therefore prove to be valuable in understanding the current debate.

The history of Hebrew lexicography goes back further than is often appreciated. The tenth century began to see the Jewish compilation of Hebrew lexica in Arabic and Hebrew,<sup>26</sup> followed in the sixteenth century by Christian lexicographers writing in Latin, which continued to be an important language for lexica well into the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Though many of the early works certainly recognized a difference between the meanings of the Qal and the Piel of בָּרָא, they had no systematic way of identifying homonyms or polysemes. Instead, the various meanings of words were often listed under the same entry.<sup>28</sup> These sometimes included a postulated meaning that could perhaps be understood as the root's original sense from which the diverse connotations were derived.<sup>29</sup>

The first lexicographer to list glosses in a manner that would identify homophones was Johannes Coccius in his 1714 edition of *Lexicon et commentarius sermonis hebraici et chaldaici*.<sup>30</sup> Though he did not do this with his entry for בָּרָא (leaving it instead simply divided by verbal stems), Coccius included

25. Clines, "Towards a Science," 9.

26. Such as David ben Abraham al-Fasi, *Kitab Jami al-Alfaz* (Arabic: *book containing a collection of words*), also known as *Agron*; Abu al-Walid Marwān ibn Janāh (R. Jonah), *Kitab al uṣul, Sefer haShorashim* (*Book of the Roots*); Solomon ibn Parḥon, *Maḥberet he'Arak* (*Notebook of Order*), 1160.

27. Such as Alfonsus Zamorensis, *Vocabularium hebraicum atque chaldaicum totius Veteris Testamenti*, in the Complutensian Polyglot (*Academia complutensis*), vol. 6: A.G. de Brocario, 1514–17; Johannes Simonis, *Dictionarium Veteris Testamenti hebraeo-chaldaicum* (Halle: Bierwirth, 1752); Georg Benedict Winer, *Lexicon manuale hebraicum et chaldaicum* (Leipzig: F. Fleischer, 1828).

28. Though these various glosses sometimes contained small numbers as a form of organization, it is difficult to say how the lexicographers thought of them—whether as being etymologically related or not. It seems likely that this was not considered an important enough concern, as long as translation and understanding could be achieved.

29. For example, see the entry for בָּרַע in Johann Buxtorf the Elder, *Epitome radicum hebraicarum* (Basel: Konrad von Waldkirch, 1600). See also Clines, "Towards a Science," 4–5.

30. Johannes Cocceius, *Lexicon et commentarius sermonis hebraici et chaldaici* (Leipzig: Reyher, 1714).

roman numerals that subdivided ברע into three homonyms: 1. *miscere, confundi*; 2. *in fidem suam recipere, spondere pro aliquo*; 3. *suavem esse*.<sup>31</sup> It would be another century before this technique would be imitated by Gesenius<sup>32</sup> and most lexica thereafter.

German lexicography flooded the Hebrew scholarship of the nineteenth century, aided greatly by Gesenius's ambitious projects. After the third edition of his compendium dictionary for students, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*,<sup>33</sup> he began preparations for a Latin translation designed for international students.<sup>34</sup> However, the advances proposed by Bopp and Grimm in the field of Indo-European philology<sup>35</sup> caused Gesenius to reevaluate the whole project. His highly scholarly *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti*,<sup>36</sup> published in fascicles between 1829 and 1858, was affected by this shift. One of the pertinent changes was the grouping of triliteral roots under "families" of biliteral ones. ברא was grouped under the family of [בר], along with various others. However, all the different glosses of ברא continued to be listed under a single root—subdivided only by verbal stems—and without a sense of homonymy. These changes pushed back the publication of the Latin lexicon to 1833, as it drew heavily from both the *Handwörterbuch* and the *Thesaurus*. Gesenius's grammars underwent similar changes at about this time.

In fact, none of Gesenius's works split ברא into homonyms during his lifetime, but his work would have an influence on the two leading theories for ברא a few decades later. The first of these was the publication in 1891 of the first part of what would become known as the Brown Driver Briggs. After securing the rights to Edward Robinson's English translation of Gesenius's Latin lexicon, these three scholars planned to update the work. The end result was more of a complete rewriting, which included scholarship from the most up-to-date editions of the *Handwörterbuch*, Gesenius's *Thesaurus*, and the most recent advances in Hebrew philology.<sup>37</sup> Though the work in its entirety—*A Hebrew and*

31. Cocceius, *Lexicon et commentarius*, 640–44. See also Clines, "Towards a Science," 5, who identified this as the first lexicographical attempt at depicting homonymy.

32. See entry for ברע, Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch über die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1810–1812), 888–89.

33. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*.

34. Shimeon Brisman, *History and Guide to Judaic Dictionaries and Concordances* (Hoboken, N. J.: Ktav Publishing House, 2000), 65.

35. See preface to Wilhelm Gesenius, trans. Edward Robinson, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Including the Biblical Chaldee*, 3rd edition (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1849).

36. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1829–1858).

37. See the preface to BDB.

*English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*—would not be published until 1906, this first part of 1891 included the entry for ברא with its two identified homonyms. They were distinguished thus: 1. (Qal) “shape, fashion, create,” also (Niphal) “be created,” and (Piel) “cut down, cut out”; 2. (Hiphil) “be fat.”<sup>38</sup> This two-homonym hypothesis has remained in all subsequent editions of the BDB, which continues to be widely used.

The three-homonym model would come only four years later, and it would largely be the work of Frants Buhl, editor of the twelfth through sixteenth editions of Gesenius’s *Handwörterbuch*. Published in 1895, the twelfth edition incorporated the roman numeral system for homonyms to identify three under the trilateral ברא: I. (Kal) “schaffen, hervorbringen” and (Niphal) “geschaffen werden”; II. (Hiphil) “fett machen, mästen”; III. (Piel) “abholzen, den Wald lichten, roden.”<sup>39</sup> This, then, is the origin among the lexica of the tradition that sees the Qal “to create” and the Piel “to cut” as coming from separate etymologies and therefore being unrelated.

Interestingly, it appears that both models were developed independent of each other. Though there is no definitive evidence, Buhl does not seem to have consulted the BDB for his work on the *Handwörterbuch*—instead, this was only one of the many important changes that came about when he became the lexicon’s editor. And though the completed BDB was published only years after Buhl’s work, the first part containing the entry for ברא was published before the twelfth edition of the *Handwörterbuch*.

Subsequent lexica make it clear that both hypotheses picked up adherents, though it is true that Buhl’s model has been preferred. Eduard König’s *Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*<sup>40</sup> followed the BDB’s combination of the Qal/Niphal and Piel under ברא I. Yet Koehler and Baumgartner’s *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*,<sup>41</sup> published in fascicles from 1948 to 1953, instead followed Buhl’s model. This later became the highly influential *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*,<sup>42</sup> or HALAT, as well as its English counterpart, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*

38. BDB, 135.

39. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, 119–20.

40. Eduard König, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Leipzig: Dietrich, 1910).

41. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros: A Dictionary of the Hebrew Old Testament in English and German* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948–1953).

42. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1995).

of the Old Testament,<sup>43</sup> or *HALOT*. These all maintained that the Qal/Niphal of ברא was a homonym of the Piel form, or ברא III.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, the most recent of the lexica—and the first to attempt to include all known words that constitute Classical Hebrew—is David Clines’s *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. For the entry ברא it follows very closely Koehler Baumgartner, grouping it with the lexica that split ברא Qal/Niphal and Piel into separate “roots” or homonyms.

This survey of the lexicographical understanding of the meanings of ברא has identified two different models—created almost simultaneously—that have been picked up and passed down through generations of lexica. The model that lists the glosses “to create” and “to cut” as homonyms has been more prevalent in recent decades, but the longevity of *BDB* continues to push for a polysemous understanding of these two meanings. Again, Clines’s caution, cited above, should be taken into account. Though I am not claiming that lexicographers have been careless in their depictions of ברא, heavy dependence on certain older lexica may have significantly contributed to the specific model borrowed during the preparation of the newer dictionaries, which in turn have affected the arguments of recent contributors to the discussion.

## Conclusion

The current investigation has attempted to shed some light on issues surrounding the ongoing discussion of ברא. Though its aim has not been to resolve the problem, it has provided two important points of consideration for further research: it has redefined the central questions at the core of the argument, and it has illustrated ways in which the lexica have influenced the debate. As the discussion stands now, scholars essentially continue to follow one of the two models developed well over a century ago. The influential lexicographers of that time interpreted the Qal/Niphal and the Piel of ברא to be either homonyms or polysemes, and the debate continues along the same lines to this day. Understanding the discussion in this way is an important step towards a possible resolution to the problem.

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43. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000).

44. Note the addition of a fourth homonym under ברא to the German *HALAT* (1967). This consists of a single occurrence in 2 Sam 12:17 and is considered equivalent to ברא I, *essen*. The English *HALOT* also continued this tradition.