

The Hebrew Bible and philosophy of religion, by Jaco Gericke, Resources for Biblical Study, 70, Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012, US\$59.95 (paperback), xii + 499 pages, ISBN (13) 978-1-58983-707-2

In this interdisciplinary study Jaco Gericke pioneers combining the study of the philosophy of religion and the study of the Hebrew Bible. He demonstrates that certain types of descriptive varieties of philosophy of religion exist that are capable of aiding the clarification of meaning in the Hebrew Bible. In this process a theologically interesting and hermeneutically legitimate nonrealist descriptive perspective on the Hebrew Bible is given. While avenues for more objective theological thinking is opened up, the study enables biblical scholars of different persuasions to access levels

of meaning that lie beyond the scope of linguistic, literary, historical and social-scientific perspectives on the text.

In part one of the study – which consist of eight chapters (3-240) – a theoretical base for Gericke's approach is supplied. The backdrop to, the justification for, and the details of the new methodology are discussed. In part two – with seven chapters (243-452) – ways in which this theory might be fruitfully applied in practice are shown with reference to a number of loci on the agenda of philosophy of religion.

Gericke begins by tracing the need for a legitimate philosophical approach to ancient Israelite religion. By tracing the history of interdisciplinary relations it is shown how descriptive varieties of philosophy of religion can assist in the clarification of the metaphysical, epistemological, and moral assumptions of the Hebrew Bible. Two new interpretative methodologies are then developed and applied to the nature of religious language, the concept of deity, the properties of Yhwh, the existence of gods, religious epistemology, and the relation between religion and morality in ancient Israel. In the end he concludes that there are twelve key assumptions or theses that one needs to come to terms with in order to prevent oneself from reading our own anachronistic philosophical-theological assumptions into and onto the biblical discourse.

The chapter headings (with page numbers in brackets) in Part One are as follows: A philosophical approach to ancient Israelite religion (3-13), Philosophical approaches to the study of religion (15-39), Philosophy of religion and Hebrew Bible interpretation: A brief history of interdisciplinary relations (41-80), The Hebrew Bible in philosophy of religion (81-113), Descriptive currents in philosophy of religion for Hebrew Bible studies (115-153), Possible analogies for a philosophy of ancient Israelite religion (155-197), Philosophical criticism as biblical criticism (199-222) and Toward a descriptive philosophy of ancient Israelite religion (223-240).

In Part Two, where everything thus far discussed is illustrated by way of actual philosophical perspectives on Israelite religion, each of the six chapters deals with a different locus. These chapters, before the Summary and conclusion (447-452), are: The concept of generic godhood in the Hebrew Bible (259-292), YHWH: A philosophical perspective (293-342), Natural a/theologies in ancient Israel (343-370), Epistemologies in ancient Israelite religion (371-404), and Religion and morality in ancient Israel (405-446).

A bibliography (453-486), and indexes with regard to biblical references (487-

488), modern authors (489-496) and subjects (497-499) round off a very well-presented and timeously book.

The target reader, namely the new generation, twenty-first-century biblical scholar with philosophical interests, unhampered by the hermeneutical and ideological baggage of the past, as well as believers and sceptics will find the book more than just an interesting read. I believe that the study – as the author hopes – does have the potential to revolutionise the way we think about ancient Israelite religion. Gericke contributes to the understanding and elucidation of the worlds in the texts. It should be a compulsory read for students in Biblical Studies, as well as those studying Theology.

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