Yoram Hazony, The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture
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In *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, Yoram Hazony seeks to answer the ambitious question, “Is there something crucial missing in our understanding of what the Hebrew Bible is all about?” (ix). The history of philosophical engagement with Hebrew scripture is a long and venerable one. One already finds echoes of it within the Bible itself in late works such as Ecclesiastes. The formal engagement of Greek philosophical thought with the Bible emerges in antiquity in the works of Philo and others. The tradition of reconciling the Bible with Greek thought continues in the Middle Ages in works by a wide range of Jewish and Christian thinkers including Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, Gersonides, and Isaac Abarbanel. Though Hazony’s book benefits from his extensive and rigorous work in political theory, he does not position this volume within the history of the encounter between Hebrew scripture and Greek philosophy. This absence constitutes a significant loss for the book, in my estimation. Sustained engagement with this history would have not only positioned his work within this rich and well-regarded tradition but also enabled the nonexpert to discern the unique contribution he makes to the history of this discourse.

Instead, Hazony frames his volume around the debate over the relationship of “reason” and “faith” that has occupied the Christian philosophical tradition since antiquity. A full and illuminating discussion of the relationship between these two ideas appears, however, only in chapter 8, “Jerusalem and Carthage: Reason and Faith in Hebrew Scripture,” followed by an appendix after chapter 9 in which he defines what he means by “reason.” The volume would have offered a stronger and more coherent philosophical perspective if this material, as well as chapter 6, “Jeremiah and the Problem of Knowing,” and chapter 7, “Truth and Being in the Hebrew Bible,” had been placed earlier in the book, before his extensive discussion of the political philosophy of Genesis through 2 Kings (in the traditional Jewish arrangement). These chapters are where Hazony’s work is at its strongest. This alternate arrangement would have enabled him to avoid choosing sides in the debate regarding the relationship of “reason” and “faith.” In the wake of various post-modern epistemologies, the debate seems a bit too binary and unhelpful to Hazony’s overall project. Instead, moving chapters 6–8 to the beginning would have enabled him to make the more nuanced point that, like the pre-Socratics Parmenides and Empedocles, whom he discusses in his introduction, the writers of the Hebrew Bible saw a more complex relationship between reason and faith, one to which the reader should be attuned in any philosophical reading of Hebrew scripture (6–12).

Hazony also confronts academic Bible scholars in his quest to understand the true meaning of the Hebrew Bible. As he remarks quite candidly in the introduction: “Even university Bible studies programs often tend to devote little or no attention to the question of the ideas of the Hebrew Scriptures were written to advance” (18). Perhaps the inability of these scholars (myself included) derives from their academic training. Concern over history, philology, linguistics, and other so-called nonphilosophical fields can give the appearance that biblical scholars are unconcerned with the “big ideas” of the Bible. But such a perception is an overstatement. Academic scholars of the Bible traditionally hold that a nuanced understanding of

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history of Israelite and later Jewish thought must be grounded in a careful and judicious appreciation of the history of Israel, material culture, comparative ancient Near Eastern material, the literary history of the text (source and redaction criticism), language, literary method, and, increasingly, the history of interpretation. These concerns can lead to a perception that scholars in this field are unconcerned with the big picture—in Hazony’s words, that we “cut a biblical story out of the context of the events that preceded and followed it, and . . . immediately lose any ability to understand what it’s all about?” (81). But, in reality, one only need survey the history of academic scholarship on the Bible to discern quickly that the field offers scholarship concerned precisely with big ideas.

Evidence of the broader concern of modern scholars of the Hebrew Bible with large philosophical ideas lurks in Hazony’s own volume. In chapter 1, “The Structure of the Hebrew Bible,” he articulates a configuration for the Hebrew Bible loosely based on its classical Jewish ordering: the History of Israel (Genesis through 2 Kings), Orations of the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets), and Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Megillot and Daniel, and minor histories). He spends the remainder of chapters 1–5 exploring how this arrangement and these works construct a particular philosophical meaning. The irony of Hazony’s arrangement of the canon of Hebrew Scripture is that his designation of Genesis through 2 Kings as “The History of Israel” is indebted to the work of academic scholars of the Hebrew Bible, particularly the late David Noel Freedman, a leading student of William Foxwell Albright and longtime editor of the Anchor Bible series. Freedman referred to this corpus as “The Primary History,” a designation that Hazony rightly questions because of our lack of evidence on which to base the primacy of this corpus in the Bible (33). Nevertheless, this point should not distract us from the fact that Freedman exploited the idea since the 1980s, to varying degrees of success, in order to articulate the greater philosophical concepts of the final form of the Bible. His fullest statements on the concept and its utility are found in The Unity of the Hebrew Bible (University of Michigan Press, 1991) and The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible (Anchor Bible, 2000). Freedman’s work is but one example among many that indicates that scholars of the Hebrew Bible are more concerned with the philosophical contribution of the Hebrew Bible than Hazony would lead us to believe.

JONATHAN KAPLAN, University of Texas at Austin.


This monograph is an intriguing study of the character Eve in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (GLAE). The five major sections cover (1) Eve’s sin and its relationship with fallen angel traditions, (2) Eve as a representative of sinful, carnal woman who was responsible for the downfall of humanity, (3) Eve as performer of vital funerary rituals in line with expectations of ancient women generally, (4) Eve as an adept female visionary granted unusual access to the heavenly mysteries, and (5) how the narrative in GLAE weaves these disparate portrayals together. On the last issue, Arbel (10 and 117) favors a reading in line with the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who emphasizes the “independent and unmerged voices” that can coexist dynamically in a narrative (heteroglossia) without being subsumed under a single author’s or narrator’s voice (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], 6).