

Response to Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*

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Introduction

Once upon a time, when I was in graduate school, I was assigned to write a book review on a book of my choice from an approved list. I chose one by Victor Tcherikover called *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. It was at that time that I learned not to judge a book by its title. What I thought would be a fascinating treatment of Greek and Jewish cultures and their interaction, was nothing of the sort. I was looking forward to learning about what people did, what they ate, what they wore, the art and literature they created, how they raised their children, but I was to be disappointed. I am not saying the book was not an interesting read, but what I actually took away from it was that the Greeks and Jews did nothing but fight one war after another. It only took one hand to count the number of times a non-male human being was mentioned in this book, and it was always in relation to the military or political leader with whom the woman in question happened to be connected. Now, in my heart of hearts, I knew that Greek and Jewish women existed and did things, not least gave birth to and rocked the cradles of those military and political leaders with which the book was exclusively concerned. But one would never guess it from the four-hundred-plus pages that Tcherikover wrote about Hellenistic civilization and the Jews.

I have the feeling that Dr. Hazony's experience upon scouring philosophy textbooks for references to the Hebrew Bible was rather similar (2012, 17-18). In his heart of hearts, he knows that the Hebrew Bible – the first two-thirds of the best-selling book of all time, the book that has been translated into thousands of languages, the book that has been one of the formative influences on Western civilization for twenty centuries – should have some role to play in Western philosophical thought. But one would never guess it from dozens of textbooks, thousands of pages, written on the subject.

The primary reason for this glaring omission, in Dr. Hazony's view, is the sharp dichotomy between reason and revelation that he traces back to early Christianity. Christians took the Bible – all of it, including the Hebrew part – to be divine revelation, and therefore different from, and certainly not the product of, human reason. It thus became a book one picks up to learn about God, not about philosophy. It became a book one picks up to learn about what God thinks, not about what human beings have discovered.

In what follows, I will first offer a brief summary of what I take to be Dr. Hazony's agenda in writing *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*. I will then note two

obstacles that I think need to be addressed if he is to persuade his audience to act on his agenda, as well as some virtues and problems I see in his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible's philosophical position. My agenda in this paper is threefold: first, to persuade him not to give so much attention to what I agree is a false dichotomy between reason and revelation; second, to reexamine the basis of some of his conclusions about the political philosophy in the "History of Israel" that I do not find entirely persuasive; and third, to rethink and perhaps expand his understanding of what it means for a human being to reason.

Summary of the Agenda

Dr. Hazony begins by describing what he takes to be a popularly perceived dichotomy between literary works of reason and literary works of revelation. The former are the product of humans' natural abilities, while the latter report messages from the divine. The early Christians, he says, put the Bible – both its Hebrew and Greek parts – into the latter category to distinguish it from other texts and to exalt its divine authority and trustworthiness. The dichotomy was used to opposite effect when the authority of reason gained ascendancy over divine authority in determining trustworthiness. In any case, Dr. Hazony suggests that this dichotomy has led to radical misunderstandings of the meaning and purpose of the Hebrew Bible that have implications for how it is treated by intellectuals and in the wider culture. In short, it has been largely excluded from philosophical discourse at every level. He hints at wanting to discard this dichotomy altogether in discussion of the Hebrew Bible on the grounds that its creators did not recognize it (5). In this book, however, he takes on the project of reading the Hebrew Bible as if it fell into the category of a work of reason, so as to discover the philosophical ideas its creators were trying to advance.

To this end, Dr. Hazony first describes his view of the structure and purpose of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible consists of a lengthy "History of Israel" (Genesis – Kings), followed by two groups of commentaries on that history, "The Orations of the Prophets" and "The Writings" (33-35).¹ The key issue for the compilers who put it all together was the fate of the Jewish exiles: would they remain a distinctive people, or assimilate into the people groups around them and disappear? Thus, a purpose of the Hebrew Bible was to "build a nation in the midst of exile" (58). Lest his readers limit the purpose to the political aims of Israel, Dr. Hazony makes it clear that since the Hebrew Bible makes the claim that the God of Israel is the God of the whole earth, what it teaches as good and right is not just for Israel but for the whole world. In other words, it is "an investigation into the nature

¹ He is here, naturally enough, following the Masoretic Text, which overlaps entirely with, but follows a different book order than, the Protestant Old Testament, which itself is equivalent to the Catholic Old Testament minus the Apocryphal books. This is not a minor point. Since structure influences meaning so heavily, he is in some ways working with a different text than Christians. In following his agenda, therefore, many Christian readers may have to adopt a biblical text to which they are not accustomed.

of the moral and political order in general” (59). In one word, philosophy. Dr. Hazony emphasizes the point that this order is not hidden such that it needs to be revealed by God, but is discoverable by human reason (62). In addition, the Hebrew Bible is an anthology of works; it is an investigation into what is good and right for human beings from multiple points of view that do not always agree with each other.

It is an investigation, which, however, does not proceed along the lines of the Introduction to Philosophy courses endured by countless college freshmen every year. It is a lot more interesting than that. It proceeds by way of telling stories, which at first glance may seem not to be the best vehicle for communicating general principles of what is good and right. Dr. Hazony argues, though, that stories can set up contrasts between different types of people – for example, the farmer and the shepherd, or different types of leadership styles – and over an extended narrative such as the History of Israel, communicate a great deal about the political and social order. Deliberate repetition of events, as well as key technical phrases, can communicate general principles as well. The result of these techniques is that the “stories become what might be called *instructional narrative* – narrative that seeks to investigate and advance ideas concerning the general natures of things, and to teach us...*not what happened, but what always happens*” (79). It is not only narrative, but also the poetry and metaphor of prophetic discourse that communicate things of a general nature – something we left-brained moderns do not easily comprehend (86).

After this general introduction to how to read the Hebrew Bible for its philosophy, Dr. Hazony gives five examples of how one might do this. In the first, he sets up a contrast between the way the Hebrew Bible treats the life of the farmer and the life of the shepherd, the first examples of which are Cain and Abel. His conclusion is that God prefers the ways of the shepherd over the farmer (108-109). In the second, he extracts a political philosophy from The History of Israel, which he articulates as “the integrity of a single, limited state as preferable both to anarchical order and to the imperial state” (160). In the third, he presents a theory of knowledge from the book of Jeremiah, in which experience of reality teaches knowledge and shatters any humans’ illusions about the world in which they live (186-187). In the fourth, he discusses the nature of truth in the Hebrew Bible, which does not recognize any dualism between a real and an ideal realm, but is a quality of things that have proven themselves reliable (217). In the fifth, he contrasts the blind faith of a Tertullian that waits for a definitive revelation of truth straight from God with the Hebrew Bible’s call to live a “life of independent judgment in search of truth and good” which is in accord with natural human reason (252, 255).

The Obstacles

I see two obstacles that would seem to prevent Dr. Hazony’s audience from reading the Hebrew Bible for the sake of learning its philosophy. One is

surmountable; it is just a matter of getting people to see past it. The other one I am not so sure about; but I am very eager to see how he will overcome it.

First, the surmountable goal: The Hebrew Bible has power. Jews and Christians, naturally, have ideas about the origin and direction of this power, but setting that aside for the time being, I think readers who are not people of faith must also run up against its power, even if the explanation for it is a crazy accident of history. Dr. Hazony maintains that the decisive factor for people reading the Hebrew Bible as revelation rather than reason is the ubiquitous nature of phrases such as “Thus says the Lord” and “The word of the Lord came to so-and-so.” This leads people to believe that God miraculously communicated God’s thoughts to a human being who recorded them for those who do not happen to have a direct line of communication with the divine. He makes the argument that such phrases do not necessarily place a literary work outside the realm of reason, calling as evidence the fact that Parmenides presents his philosophical ideas as having been revealed to him by a goddess, and he is not the only influential philosopher to have done so. His conclusion is that at the time of Parmenides and, for example, the biblical Jeremiah, presenting one’s philosophical ideas as the revelation of a god or goddess was the thing to do if one wanted those ideas to be taken seriously (6-9). Dr. Hazony argues that if we do not omit Parmenides from the philosophical textbooks just for following the trend of his day, we ought not to do that with Jeremiah either.

The question his point raises in my mind, though, is why it is so easy for the average reader not to take Parmenides even the least bit seriously when he claims divine revelation, but to stumble over what may well be the exact same literary convention when it comes to Moses or Jeremiah. And that’s where we run into the power issue. I have a friend who became a Christian as a teenager. The occasion was the assignment – in her public and thoroughly secular high school – to read the book of Job in a World Literature class. I had a seminary professor who became a Christian while serving in the Navy. The occasion was reading the Bible the Gideons had left on his submarine. I cannot think of a single story in which someone was converted to worshipping Parmenides’ goddess as a result of reading what he said that she said about philosophy. I have occasion to run into a lot of people for whom philosophy, or particular philosophical ideas, are something of a religion to which they have had a conversion-like experience, but they do not tend to start worshipping the same deity that their favorite ancient philosopher did. Even for those who think that the Judeo-Christian God is a figment of the imagination, the fact is that those who wrote on behalf of that fictitious God wrote so persuasively that twenty-five hundred years later modern human beings are not only adopting those authors’ beliefs about the world, but are also worshipping their God.

Dr. Hazony seems to think the problem is that the Hebrew Bible is not taken seriously enough in the academy – and it is easy to see why he would say this. I wonder, though, if at some level the opposite is true: it is taken too seriously, and, like a downed live wire, to be avoided at all costs. The fact is, no one puts *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or *The Code of Hammurabi* on submarines for Navy soldiers to read. I do not think the power inherent in the Hebrew Bible – whether one attributes it to divine providence, or the genius of the Hebrew Bible’s authors, or an accident of history – makes for a good reason not to read it for its philosophical ideas; I do think

it is an obstacle Dr. Hazony will have to come to terms with if he is to advance his agenda.

Now, the potentially insurmountable goal: Hebrew is hard. It has a funny-looking alphabet and the verb tenses and the poetry work differently than they do in many Western languages, including English. In his study of the book of Job, Robert Gordis (1965) attends to the ever more obvious reality that communication depends just as much on the audience as on the creator of a symbol, be it a word or visual image or idea or religious ritual. He writes, “[T]he role of the so-called passive partner in all these forms of communication is of fundamental importance. His function is almost as active and creative as that of the initiator of the symbolization. Indeed, if the former is unable or unwilling to play his part, the latter has failed” (193-194). On more than one occasion while I was reading *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* did this quote come to mind. Dr. Hazony argues that narratives in the Hebrew Bible communicate general principles by the repetition of character types and similar stories, and by technical phrases (68-78). Noticing these things, however, requires a very active partner in the communication, and whether we agree with him on every point or not, I think his readers can affirm that Dr. Hazony definitely plays his part. The contrast between shepherd and farmer woven through the Hebrew Bible, for example, or the similarities between Aaron’s golden calf and Gideon’s gold fetish, take a certain amount of effort to see, let alone interpret for their general principles. To fulfill Dr. Hazony’s agenda, it seems, at a bare minimum one must have knowledge of the Hebrew language, the ability to read a pericope carefully for literary details while still holding in view the long, overarching, complicated narrative of which it is a part, and the wherewithal to extrapolate general philosophical principles out of all that to boot. Of course, it takes work to learn one’s Greek vocabulary cards and read Plato, too, but Plato doesn’t require anything like the exegetical maneuvering that the Hebrew Bible apparently does – at least on Dr. Hazony’s reading. He should not be surprised if philosophers – not to mention the rest of us – are hesitant to take up the baton.

The Virtues and the Problems

I have a number of challenges to offer Dr. Hazony in his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and how he approaches his project. But first I want to draw attention to what I see as two overarching virtues that permeate the entire study, beginning to end. They are points that I wish I could communicate as effortlessly as he does to the circles I run in. The first is his emphasis on the diversity of viewpoints one finds in the Hebrew Bible, and the fact that this is a Good Thing. My experience of orthodox Christianity is that the unity of the Bible and its message is emphasized. As the argument goes, God is the promulgator of the Bible; God would not contradict the divine self; therefore the Bible cannot contradict itself and so speaks a consistent message. Readers then expend a great deal of effort to massage various texts into uniformity, invoking the “interpret scripture with scripture” rule and effectively flattening the Bible into a two-dimensional object that sacrifices the

complexity of our human existence and the incomprehensibility of the divine to our human need for order and control. (It is probably clear at this point that I think our efforts are better spent elsewhere.) I can go along with this up to a point; I think there would be far fewer intelligent Jews and Christians around if our sacred texts were an incoherent mess of contradictions.

It is refreshing, however, to read Dr. Hazony's thoughts on this subject. He calls the Hebrew Bible an "artful compendium" (41) whose purpose is not to present a single viewpoint. He quickly points out that this does not mean there is no center or coherence to the tradition, but it is a center that is not laid out point by point, once and for all. It is a center that is incompletely described from a range of vantage points by a variety of people that one suspects might not get along very well if locked in a room together. Dr. Hazony gives various reasons for why the diversity inherent in the Hebrew Bible is a Good Thing, but the most important one, I think, is the Bible's own admission that God's thoughts are beyond the ability of a weak and fallible humanity to understand fully. As he rightly points out, in the Bible, "encounters with God are depicted, time and again, as elusive and fraught with lack of clarity and uncertainty" (42). To the extent we encounter God in the scriptures today, we should expect no less.

The second virtue is Dr. Hazony's emphasis on the human effort that went into creating the Hebrew Bible. Again, my experience of orthodox Christianity is that it puts the emphasis on the divine nature of the biblical text. There are various theories of inspiration, some more receptive to the human element than others, but the theories tend to put our focus on God and what God wants to communicate. Dr. Hazony redirects our attention to the human effort involved in the process. Again speaking to the purpose of the Hebrew Bible, he says the gathering together of diverse and sometimes conflicting texts (65) makes for a Bible that invites readers into a tradition of inquiry that requires much more of them than simply reading and comprehending a message and being done with it. Rather, readers are forced to weigh different perspectives and are drawn into a search for God that will never end because God has no end. Harking back to Robert Gordis' words about the role of the so-called passive partner being almost as active and creative as that of the initiator of the communication, I think we disrespect the Hebrew Bible's authors and editors if we fail to see how active and creative and thoughtful and tenacious they were in their reception of divine revelation. I cannot claim to know God all that well, but I have never experienced God as one who puts the cookies on the bottom shelf. I suspect God will not let us modern people off the hook easily either in our role as recipients of divine revelation, be that revelation "special" or "general." We need to work for it. In the words of one ancient prophet: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Isa 45:15). Dr. Hazony's emphases on the diversity and on the human effort evident in the biblical text can help us go a long way toward understanding it, in my view.

While recognizing and appreciating these virtues, I also see a number of problems in the specific ways that Dr. Hazony has approached his project. The most significant one, in my view, is his acceptance – if only for the purposes of this book – of the reason-revelation dichotomy and his attempt to put the Hebrew Bible into the reason category. At the outset of his book, Dr. Hazony calls into question the

application of the reason-revelation dichotomy as applied to the Hebrew Bible, since it is “alien to the Hebrew Scriptures.” However, his first step in addressing the problem seems to be to accept it, and label the Hebrew Scriptures “reason.” Only after that, in a future work, will he discard the dichotomy in his reading of the Hebrew Bible (4-5). This seems backwards to me, for two reasons. First, the reason-revelation dichotomy is not as universally accepted in the Christian tradition as Dr. Hazony seems to think, and I think here he gives far more attention to it than it deserves. Judging from his bibliography (341, n.1), he is almost exclusively reliant on Tertullian and Leo Strauss, but these hardly represent the Christian tradition,² and the exceptions practically outweigh the rule (271, n. 1). Origen, Augustine, the Cappadocian Fathers, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Alvin Plantinga – these are heavyweights in the Christian intellectual tradition and cannot be swept aside as readily as Dr. Hazony does. It is true that there will always be Billy Sundays proclaiming that scholarship that disagrees with the Bible can go to hell, and it is true that in popular thought reason is often pitted against faith. Just like in a family, there are going to be members who self-identify with us that we really, really wish had a different last name, and outsiders who misunderstand us. However, those who identify with that strand he is not likely to convince, and the rest of us do not need to be convinced. Traditional Christianity does maintain that God and God’s ways are beyond our reason and ability to understand fully, but this is not the same thing as a radical separation between God’s revelation and human reason and seems to be no different from what Dr. Hazony himself says (42) or the line of thought in, for example, Isaiah 55:8-9. I think his effort is far better spent in demolishing the dichotomy than making even temporary concessions to it.

One reason behind my saying this is that if we are going to maintain the reason-revelation dichotomy temporarily to humor the Billy Sundays out there, the Hebrew Bible seems at best to fit only uncomfortably into the reason category. It was Dr. Hazony’s discussion of Jeremiah that led me to this conclusion, whether he intended it or not. Throughout the book, he is at great pains to show that knowledge of what is good and true is not something that comes exclusively by way of revelation, but is available to human beings by way of reason. He addresses this most directly in his sixth chapter on “Jeremiah and the Problem of Knowing.” According to his interpretation of Jeremiah, all people have access to knowledge if they will look for it, but people can also be blind to what is in front of their faces because their minds are deceitful. Jeremiah, he says, believes there is a natural law that governs both the natural and the human world, and the natural law for humans, living in accord with which will lead to what is good and true, is found in the Torah. Whether people see and do what is good for them or not, in the end, God’s words will be proven right in a way that everyone can see. It may not come immediately, but by way of experience over time, and some people are so stubborn that even then they will not see the light. Dr. Hazony describes it thusly (186-187):

² It is not fair to put C. S. Lewis in this camp, in my view. Dr. Hazony’s analysis of the quote in *Mere Christianity* does not take proper account of the context and misses Lewis’ point entirely (see p. 342, n. 20).

True, the mind is deceitful, and when it fixes on a mistaken way of seeing things, even painful consequences will not suffice to shake them loose. But God's word is like a hammer that shatters rock. It enters the world and takes on a reality so overwhelming that false conceptions, no matter how tightly we cling to them, are destroyed before it. Once freed from these false conceptions, a new understanding can arise in the minds of men, one that reflects truth. Knowledge, then, may elude the men of a given time and place. But it is coming. And all men, it would appear, have a chance of attaining it "in the end."

But this does not seem to be a description of experience, but of revelation – or, if it is experience, it is the experience of God's word entering the world as forcefully as a hammer. And the natural law, according to which all people should live if they want to live well, is also – at least, as it is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible – a revelation from God. It may be that when people are made aware of it, for example, by watching the Israelites live by it, they will see its benefits and adopt it. But it was still – again, according to the Hebrew Bible – revealed by God in a decidedly miraculous way. According to Dr. Hazony (2), the reason-revelation dichotomy came after Jeremiah, but it is hard to square that claim with what he says elsewhere (9): he considers Jeremiah part of a tradition "in which the ability to conduct philosophical inquiry was frequently seen as partially or wholly dependent on revelation or some other form of assistance from a god. In this tradition human beings were seen as being unable to attain answers to significant questions on the strength of their own native abilities..." Based on this description, it would seem Jeremiah does buy into a fairly sharp distinction between what he can know on his own and what he can learn from God. And accordingly, Jeremiah claims at the outset of his orations that God would put God's own words in Jeremiah's mouth and Jeremiah would speak whatever God commanded him (Jer 1:4-10). Interpreted in a certain way, perhaps Jeremiah's orations do describe a knowledge that comes from experience, but – ironically – his own knowledge of this epistemology apparently comes straight from God.

Now, it might be that Jeremiah was giving a false presentation of things so as to keep up with the philosophical times, or that he was simply mistaken. I do not see a problem with either option, but I also do not see any problem whatsoever with thinking that God revealed something to Jeremiah by way of Jeremiah's human reason, experience, and observation. Those two things seem perfectly compatible to me. But I am trying to adopt the reason-revelation dichotomy that Dr. Hazony maintains for the purposes of his book, and it is at best difficult to put Jeremiah – not to mention the Torah revealed at Sinai – in the reason category. Jeremiah's own self-presentation makes it so. It would seem far more effective to help his readers see the folly of the false dichotomy rather than make the case that if one did maintain the dichotomy, the Hebrew Bible should be read as a work of reason.

It should be obvious by now that I think the Hebrew Bible can represent both human reason and revelation at the same time. So reading it to learn what some really smart people thought about political or moral philosophy seems a fine idea to

me, if that is what one wants to do. There are aspects of Dr. Hazony's interpretation of those ideas that seem problematic to me, however. I will begin with his contrast between the ethics of farmers and shepherds. Farmers accept the curse of the soil and submit to the divine command to work it anyway; they follow the custom handed down to them. Shepherds, on the other hand, cleverly resist the curse by tending to animals and living a nomadic lifestyle. Farmer Cain's sacrifice is rejected by God, and he becomes a murderer, while Shepherd Abel's sacrifice is accepted by God, and he dies an innocent man whose reputation God defends. Dr. Hazony sees these types interwoven throughout the Hebrew Bible, with God consistently taking the side of the nomadic shepherd. "The vantage point for ethics," says Dr. Hazony (133), "is the life of the nomad," for whom the primary consideration is himself and his household. "The ethics of a shepherd begins by asking what an individual must do *for his own well-being and for that of the members of his household who depend on him*," he writes (133). And again, "The proper foundations for the moral life, from which all else must flow, are the concern for the well-being of oneself and one's household" (134).

I have to admit, I am skeptical. Part of it are all the Hebrew Bible texts that come to mind that speak much more explicitly to the moral life: texts about treating aliens and strangers well because you yourselves were once aliens and strangers, and taking care of widows and orphans, and not keeping a debtor's cloak overnight (Ex 22:21-27), and not withholding help from a neighbor (Deut 22:3), and loving God with all your heart (Deut 6:5) and your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18). But that is only part of it. The rest of it is how uncannily similar Dr. Hazony's conception of a good moral and political life according to the Hebrew Bible resembles life in a twenty-first century Western democracy. He describes Jacob (138) as "a man who refuses the hand he has been dealt, and is willing to take enormous risks to try to improve things for himself and his posterity..." He pulled himself up by his bootstraps, so to speak. When the Israelites demand a king, Dr. Hazony (151) takes God's instruction to Samuel – to "listen to the voice of the people, in everything that they say to you" – as an endorsement of democratic rule. In his discussion of the political order espoused by the "History of Israel," he says, "The Hebrew Bible thus endorses the integrity of a single, limited state as preferable both to anarchical political order and to the imperial state" (160). His descriptions reminded me of something I have read elsewhere, and it goes like this:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness (*The Declaration of Independence*).

It might be that our founding fathers were so immersed in their Hebrew Bibles that they came to this view as a matter of course; it might be that it is such a wonderful way of life that human beings whose mental faculties are working at top capacity will arrive at it independently. For my own part, I am wary of blind spots when any reading of the biblical text supports the dominant values and the status quo in a society rather than challenging them. I myself find it incredible that in thousands of varieties of human culture spanning hundreds of thousands of years, one can claim to be articulating the moral or political philosophy that is for the general good of humanity. I'm not persuaded that that is what the authors of the Hebrew Bible were trying to do with their stories, and I think Dr. Hazony has overreached on their behalf. Here things get a little complicated, because of the "revelation" issue. If Dr. Hazony is claiming only that the authors of the Hebrew Bible thought they were articulating what was good for humanity in general in all times and places, then their limited knowledge of human history and culture might make it possible to believe such audacious presumption on their part. But Dr. Hazony has left the door open to accepting the Hebrew Bible as divine revelation, in which case the claim is much grander: namely, that God thinks a Western-style democracy is the ideal form of government in all times and places. I myself would tend to think that the God depicted in Genesis 1, Psalm 104, and Job 38-41, who is unashamedly enthusiastic about the sheer variety of species of animals in creation, would not abide one form of human government for long; and if we tried to pull something like that, we would end up with another Babel on our hands. I also think that if God's telling Samuel to listen to the voice of the people is an endorsement of democracy, then God's telling Abraham to do whatever Sarah told him to do about Hagar (Gen 21:12) is an endorsement of matriarchy. Thus, I need a little more convincing that Dr. Hazony's reading of "The History of Israel" is indeed the right or only one.

But I actually need convincing of an even more basic point. Throughout his book, Dr. Hazony makes the claim several times that the Hebrew Bible, even though it deals in narrative and poetry, communicates general principles about such things as morality and politics. Indeed, his working definition of reason (272) is "something like *the exercise of those operations of the human mind by which general causes are derived from experience, elaborated as laws and principles that are likewise general in character, and applied to particular cases.*" I found myself utterly perplexed at this emphasis on the general principles supposedly to be found in the Hebrew Bible, because I have a hard time seeing the value in elaborating and applying such principles. Given that I would like to think of myself as a human being who engages in the process of human reason, I would like to challenge Dr. Hazony to rethink his concept of reason, and thus what it looks like to view the Hebrew Bible as the product of (at least on some level) human reason.

His definition of reason brought to mind theories of cognitive and moral development in children, specifically the one espoused by Lawrence Kohlberg, who outlined stages through which children pass as they learn to reason about morality. In the lowest level, obedience to authority is paramount, and reward and punishment are the motivators. In the middle level, as children become less self-centered and begin to understand themselves to be part of a larger society, they take into consideration the rights and feelings of others and are concerned with

maintaining interpersonal relationships. In the most advanced level, older children are able to form internal individual principles that supersede changeable rules and can be applied, more or less objectively and without influence from others' reactions, to particular cases (Bornstein and Lamb 1984).

Kohlberg has been critiqued on a number of fronts; one of them was his sample group (Gilligan 1993, 18-19; Benjamin, et al. 1987, 351). He studied preteen and teenage boys in Western cultures, but then applied his research to children in general. As it turned out, girls did not often reach his most advanced stage of moral development.³ They seemed to get stuck in the middle stage, showing greater concern for the particularities of interpersonal relationships than for the abstract general principles of the most advanced stage. From one point of view, and this was Kohlberg's view, girls are deficient, unable to perform at the highest level of moral reasoning. From another point of view, now a more politically correct and postmodern one, there are gender differences when it comes to moral development, and those differences have their place and value in a healthy, functional society. In light of this, by the way, I found it interesting that in Dr. Hazony's discussion of narrative as a means of instruction about general principles (67-68), he showcased a male scholar who evaluated narrative negatively because it was too particular and could not be precise enough regarding moral principles, and a female scholar who evaluated narrative positively because it could be particular to individual cases. Perhaps that was just coincidence; no one fits neatly into the gender or ethnic or racial box in which we or our society attempt to put us, and it can cause a great deal of pain when we do not conform to our group.

However that may be, and whatever he concludes regarding the interplay between reason and revelation in the Hebrew Bible, I urge Dr. Hazony to rethink, and, I hope, enlarge the tent of reason. At least to include me, who thinks the Hebrew Bible is (among other things) a product of human reason, but who reads the Hebrew Bible rather differently than he does. One of my favorite words in Hebrew is (h)qdc. It is usually translated as "righteous" ("righteousness"). It is not, however, used to describe some objective standard of proper behavior or belief, but is dependent on the relationship of the people involved. As one commentator put it (Achteimeier 1962, 80),

[R]ighteousness is in the OT the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship...The demands may differ from relationship to relationship; righteousness in one situation may be unrighteousness in another. Further, there is no norm of righteousness outside the relationship itself.

So if one asks what it means to behave righteously, the response would have to be, I am not sure; tell me the particularities of the people involved. Lady Righteousness, unlike Lady Justice, is not blind. To me, the stories in the Hebrew Bible are stories of particular people in unique circumstances with whom God deals

³ Neither boys nor girls in communal societies tended to reach the most advanced level (see Myers 1998, 120).

on a very personal, individual level – and this is precisely the appeal and strength of the Hebrew Bible. If some general principles can be derived from them, all well and good, but I have to admit that that does not make much difference to me.

I bring this up not to argue that my way – or Martha Nussbaum's way – of reading the narratives in the Hebrew Bible is preferable to reading them Dr. Hazony's way. In a healthy and functional community of faith, I think we probably need both. I only want to say that to reason – and to read the Hebrew Bible as a text of reason – may not look the same for everyone. There is a great deal of wisdom and fodder for philosophical discourse in the Hebrew Bible, and so I certainly hope that Dr. Hazony's voice is heeded. It would strengthen his position, I believe, to recognize the same diversity of viewpoints on the part of readers of the Hebrew Bible as he does on the part of its authors, especially when it comes to what it looks like to see the Hebrew Bible as a product of human reason.

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