Jaco Gericke. *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion*. Society of Biblical Literature resources for biblical study; no. 70. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2013. 499 pp. $59.95 (paper).

Seizo Sekine (trans. J. Randall Short). *Philosophical Interpretations of the Old Testament*. Translated by J. Randall Short. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlich Wissenschaft, vol. 458. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014. 255 pp. $98.00 (hbk).

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What is the relationship between the Bible and philosophy? Several recent scholarly ventures pursue this question to various ends. The Society of Biblical Literature has a new program unit dedicated to Hebrew Bible and philosophy, which Jaco Gericke and I co-chair. Recent works on the intersection of philosophy and the Bible have prompted a wide response from philosophers and theologians (less so from biblical scholars). Eleonore Stump's work on theodicy has consistently featured biblical exegesis, including her most recent text *Wandering in Darkness.* Yoram Hazony's *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* received in-depth attention in this journal with four separately authored responses ("Symposium," vol. 2, 2014). In December 2015, a conference was dedicated solely to reconciling theological conceptions of God with Scripture ("The Question of God's Perfection," hosted by the Herzl Institute in Jerusalem through John Templeton funding). In line with the recent spate of work at this intersection of Bible and philosophy, this review considers two recent monographs on the topic, emphasizing the methodological distance between them.

At the outset, I would like to note three points of affinity between the authors. First, Sekine and Gericke want to systematically purge Christian theological precommitments from biblical studies. Both scholars aim at putting our theology in abeyance for the sake of a disciplined understanding. Of course, scholars cannot be naïve about the lenses we bring to the task, but tabling our theological presuppositions for the sake of listening anew to the texts is a worthy exercise. Akin to the call for a more rigorous method from analytic theologians, this sort of exegetical discipline mitigates the natural tendency to over-determine biblical meaning according to one's own tradition. Second, Sekine and Gericke agree that the history of

philosophy serves as a worthy conversation partner for thinking about what the biblical texts are doing. Finally, both scholars work within the tradition of biblical criticism. Apart from these similarities, the methodologies of these two works diverge significantly. The reasons for this split merit consideration for the field of analytic theology and its relationship to the Bible.

We begin with Seizo Sekine's *Philosophical Interpretations of the Old Testament*. This book, which was translated from Japanese, collects together lectures and essays of Sekine that explore the manifold ways in which philosophers have historically engaged difficult biblical passages. As an anthology of his work, Sekine is not exploring a particular thread of thought across the biblical texts, but offering perspectives on various topics. Though he calls his method "philosophical interpretation," it most often reads as a reception history of philosophers interpreting biblical texts.

Outside of the necessary hermeneutical introductions and ground clearing, Sekine has little to say about epistemology or metaphysics that is not ultimately connected to his primary concern with ethics. For instance, when discussing the states of mind of biblical characters, the focus shifts quickly away from epistemological aspects, even when it is a glaring feature of the text (e.g., Gen 22:12–14), and returns to the character's ethical disposition, which moves his interpretation along.

Part I both introduces and demonstrates his method of philosophical interpretation with examinations of the *Akedah* (Chapter 1), suffering (Chapter 2), and monotheism (Chapter 3). Sekine opens his formal demonstration of the method with an appraisal of the interpretations of Kant, Buber, Levinas, Derrida, and Miyamoto regarding Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac, also known as the *Akedah* (Gen 22). In the following chapter, he compares Isaiah's existential understanding of suffering against Socrates' rationalist understanding. Rounding out Part I, Chapter 3 critiques the "objective-logical" view of God found in Western Christianity, seeking to separate us from theologically driven views of God that might naively presume God's ethical rightness.

Of methodological interest, Sekine claims to find the ontological view that funds the biblical text, even when the biblical vocabulary is deficient in making ontological claims. For instance, he suggests that the prophets of Israel actually want to espouse that God is absolute and self-negating, but their mythological language hinders them from doing so. Sekine comes closest to constructing a philosophy native to the biblical texts here. Rather than import suggestions from the history of philosophical reactions to the Bible, he considers the philosophical position of the prophets themselves, even if they could not yet clearly articulate it.

Within Part II (which is comprised of Chapters 4-5), Sekine examines how the ethical nature of God in the Old Testament might inform human ethics. In Chapter 4, Sekine contends that the view of God found throughout Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), as opposed to the rest of the Old Testament, closely resembles the thought of psychologist Carl Jung who claimed that the biblical God engages in morally questionable behavior. Sekine sees Qohelet as the lone voice of doubt about the goodness of God in the Old Testament.

Chapter 5 turns exclusively to human ethics. Here Sekine argues for two aspects, *ktisiological* (i.e., creational) and *soteriological* (i.e., redemptive), to shape our

approach to ethics. Using murder as an example, Sekine claims that because we are created ("life itself has been given us in advance by something that absolutely transcends us," 141) and we will be redeemed by love ("the invisible magnetic force," 143), the joy of wonder and gratitude imbued by these two realities makes murder unethical.

Part III (Chapters 6-7) focuses attention on the problems inherent to theological interpretation and textual redaction. Here, Sekine reveals layers to his method that allow him to separate out portions of text that he considers distracting redactions (e.g., the editors and redactors of Deuteronomistic History) and explain why they do not fit his exegesis. For Sekine, theology imports foreign ideas into the text, *including the theology of the ancient editors and redactors of the Hebrew Bible*. Employing the tools of source criticism, he looks for the authentic message of the original prophetic oracles. According to him, this authentic prophetic voice has been spackled over by centuries of textual redaction and interpreted through various theologies. In his words, he wants to "open up a way to hear the subtle pulse and breathing of the spirit of this prophet who transcended ossified dogma" (208).

Part IV then introduces us to the field of Old Testament studies in Japan. This reviewer is not qualified to condense or assess the report found there, but it was intriguing reading nonetheless.

Overall, Sekine's work is nothing short of a methodological indictment of theological fundamentalists—i.e., those who allow their theological commitments to inform their reading of Scripture. However, Sekine is not afraid to allow philosophy to inform his reading of Scripture. "It is philosophy, after all, that opens the way for general consideration of objective values" (71). He proposes philosophical interpretation as a way of wrestling with the text free of theological bias and bound to current philosophical constructs. Sekine shows deep sensitivity to the role of the interpreter (á la Gadamer and Ricoeur), but he slips into a mode of representing the thought-life of the prophets to the reader more than a few times. In doing so, he appears to believe there are philosophical notions native to the *authentic*—i.e., pre-redaction—biblical texts. However, he does not provide a methodology that ensures his exegesis can reliably render such native notions from the text. For Sekine, understanding the author happens only after the redactors and editors have been scraped away from the biblical texts.

Most basically, Sekine seems to think that biblical scholars cannot look at the texts without Western formalized concepts of a God already in place, and that these presumptions blind us to the ethics actually found in the texts. Once freed from Judeo-Christian presumptions of God, historical, philological, and philosophical tools can work together to understand the ethics taught by the texts.

Although Sekine takes care to listen to the biblical texts on their own terms, which is commendable, this can create a separate set of difficulties for the interpreter. It is unclear whether Sekine and his example philosophers are as unbiased as he presumes. Sekine prescribes a methodology for philosophical interpretation as something external to the thought-world of the text, something we bring to the texts. Additionally, he moves very easily to assert the internal thought-world of hypothetical biblical authors that he has discovered in the texts. However, Sekine does not offer a method for how to discern what is and what is not part of the thought-world of ancient

Semites. Moreover, his reasons behind the choice of biblical texts reviewed for this task are not always obvious to the reader.

For example, Sekine opens the book with philosophical reaction to Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22). Like many interpreters who grappled with this ethically tricky passage in order to understand its sacrificial blood, the presumptions that Sekine brings to the text yield to him a God of self-negation. Sekine does not entertain the notion that the passage itself might not be concerned to answer questions regarding God's self-negation. Rather, he presumes that his chosen philosophers who have wrestled with the *Akedah* create a supplementary conversation by which he objectively views the actual text. Indeed, Sekine espouses *our questions* as fundamental to philosophical interpretation, "We must confront the text with our candid questions on its portrayal of God and then listen to the text's response" (22). Because our questions derive from the philosophical tools and discussions *du jour*, we only need to carefully employ the tools of historical criticism. "Hence Old Testament scholarship and philosophy supplement one another, each making up for the other's deficiencies, and it is essential to construct a complementary relationship between them" (72).

When we turn to Jaco Gericke's *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion*, we find similar concerns about theologically driven biblical scholarship. However, Gericke's concern causes him to approach philosophical thought in the Hebrew Bible from the opposite direction as Sekine. He espouses a rigorous method to analyze how the biblical authors used concepts and language to build both logically fuzzy[1] and coherent philosophical ideas about metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

In Chapters 1-4, Gericke assesses the history of philosophical approaches to the Hebrew Bible, which has traditionally fallen into the domains of biblical studies and some Jewish and Christian philosophy. He then addresses the well-known twentieth century critiques against biblical theology that cuts at the heart of his project. Namely, the critique questioned whether coherent streams of thought across the biblical texts could be discerned without violating the dignity of each biblical text. The critique also calls into question scholarship from biblical text, which is actually a redacted compilation of texts, as if that text has one authorial mind behind it. Gericke gives preliminary reasons as to how his method will navigate those concerns. He ends this section with summaries of recent movements in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. As an introduction to the subfield of Hebrew Bible and philosophy, these chapters are well written, expansive, and thorough.

In Chapters 6-8, Gericke constructs a case for philosophical criticism as a form of biblical criticism. Though Gericke openly affirms that the Hebrew Bible is not a "textbook in the philosophy of religion," he finds the anti-philosophical bent in much of biblical studies unhelpful (9). Gericke contends instead that ancient Hebrews did have some sort of folk metaphysics, folk epistemologies, etc. Because they had beliefs about philosophical topics, they must be expressed in the Hebrew Bible. His methodology then adopts a conceptual analysis that explores the texts through the

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[1] Gericke cites Peter Hajek's use of the term "fuzzy logic" in Hajek's, "Fuzzy Logic," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/logic-fuzzy/>.

tools of biblical criticism.

Chapters 9-14 examine the relationship between biblical language and underlying concepts. Here, Gericke provides examples of philosophical criticism on the topics of divine being, natural theology, epistemology, and ethics by analyzing the relationship between the biblical terms and associated concepts throughout in the Hebrew Bible. Gericke provides an extended example of this language-concept relation analysis in Chapter 10 (see below).

In arguing for philosophical criticism, Gericke must make the case that the Hebrew Bible is capable of making philosophical arguments. He reasons that just as Plato selected prose in book 1 of *The Republic* to depict a philosophically principled city-state, so too can the Hebrew Bible use narrative to argue (176). Hence, it is not a matter of whether narrative and poetry contain philosophy; rather, how do we grasp the philosophy of ancient Semites through their texts without merely importing all of our notions, folk or otherwise?

Gericke's new interpretive methodology aims to be both philosophical and historical, providing a hermeneutically legitimate way of involving the philosophy of religion in the reading of ancient texts without distorting their contents (199). Because Gericke has the clarification of textual meaning as his focus, he does not need to make historical claims about the texts or religious prescriptions for the faithful.

Yet there are still various ways of practicing Gericke's method. Two constraints guide his task to discern concepts through their linguistic description: 1) staying within the meaning found in the "world of the text" and 2) limiting his purview to Israel's Yahwistic texts as found within an historical-critical view of the Hebrew Bible.

As an example, Chapter 10, "The Concept of Generic Godhood in the Hebrew Bible," puts philosophical criticism to work by asking the most basic question: what is an אל (*el*)? In other words, when an author denotes something as an *el* or *elohim*, what kinds of qualities or attributes form a class within which that thing belongs? Surprising to some, *el* or *elohim* is used to denote YHWH, gods writ large, specific gods, stars, household spirits, kings, demons, and more.

His approach is more philological than literary. He follows every single instance of the term אל (*el*) and its referent in the Hebrew Bible, attempting to reconcile how all these diverse objects can reasonably be called an *el*. In other words, Israel's God, an earthly ruler, and Canaan's *Ba'al* could all be feasibly termed *elohim* without violating the class—the conceptually generic grouping of attributes or objects that can unify all three things. Even so, could town elders be considered *elohim*? How about a particular king, like King David himself? In his analysis, Gericke decides that a generic concept he calls אל-hood (*el*-hood), used throughout the Yahwistic texts of the Hebrew Bible, is a first-order generic property with seventeen attributes in total. He concludes that אל-hood is a fuzzy concept, not entailing all its attributes in any one instance and giving evidence for "pluralistic traditions of the Hebrew Bible" (288). So, to speak of rulers as אלהים (*elohim*) does not entail that *elohim* exhibit both a *relational property*, like parenting or kingship, and a property that emerges from the act of ruling, for instance. Rather, a human ruler qua אל (*el*) is a justified use of אל (*el*) because the ruler fits some set of properties and relationships found by Gericke's exhaustive analysis of usage in the Hebrew Bible. By this analysis,

he can explain every instance of the concept invoked in the world of the text.

This type of analysis highlights the difference between Sekine and Gericke. Citing Roland Boer, Gericke speaks about two types of philosophical commentary he attempts to avoid. For Sekine, inspecting biblical concepts within the world of the text is secondary to the voice of his chosen interlocutors. For Gericke, the language-concept relationship is primary, inspected by expositing texts, "while sometimes visiting with philosophers for a 'smoke and a chat'" (203). In the end, Gericke works his analysis in three parts: examining the Hebrew Bible's folk philosophy (i.e., analyzing how terms relate to concepts), parsing folk philosophical concepts into their simplest terms, and translating these concepts into their "'correct' logical form" (202).

The names Sekine and Gericke give their methods reveal their respective emphases: philosophical interpretation versus philosophical criticism. Sekine's "interpretation" brings the interpreter and her world to the fore, while Gericke's "criticism" seeks to understand native and folk concepts evinced by the texts. Neither wants to be naïve about the task. However, is the best way forward a kind of *via media* between the two? Or, ought one to take priority for the task of analytic theology? Of the two works considered here, I suggest that Gericke's proposal be given more weight and considered as one of several tools to get at philosophical content in Scripture.

Gericke possesses an expert understanding of philosophy, biblical theology, and Hebrew Bible—more than anyone else of whom I am aware. This large volume acts as the culmination of his broad-reaching grasp. In some ways, the comparison to Sekine is unfair. Unlike Sekine, who sketches out his own method without any grand aims, Gericke's volume has a decade of focused research behind his method and seeks to justify "philosophical criticism" as a new field within biblical criticism.

Similar to practitioners of analytic theology, Gericke argues systematically, writing in formal argument, with numbered points that are easy to follow. Though it is a wide-ranging tome, both the style of writing and analysis will be comfortable to analytic thinkers. By contrast, Sekine comes squarely from the world of biblical studies and finds intellectual compatriots in philosophers from the Continent. Sekine's text is briefer, containing several disconnected essays demonstrating his ideas with mixed success. However, the method Sekine espouses would not appear entirely alien to many theologians today.

In taking the biblical texts and biblical criticism seriously, both authors challenge the priorities of theologians who want to connect their theology to Scripture by more than accidental means. Both scholars pose theologians this question: can theology stem from the native philosophy and theology of the biblical texts? Or, is our theology a matter of a philosophical conversation in which we bring the biblical authors over for "a smoke and a chat"?

Overtly or not, both Sekine and Gericke believe that the Hebrew Bible presents native philosophical concepts. For those who still think associating theology with the teaching of Scripture is a relevant task, this burgeoning discussion of method—the process that delivers biblical concepts and rationale to theologians—cannot be ignored.