Gericke, Jaco (2012). *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion.* **Atlanta: Society Biblical Literature**
                                                                    Tom Hanks, Buenos Aires, July, 2014

As I prepared to teach a course in Spanish for MCC international on queer hermeneutics with focus on Romans, Gericke's work impressed me as likely to be the most help in updating me (a life-long Bible professor, having just turned 80) to get a better grasp on the relevant philosophy and recent developments in hermeneutics—and I was not disappointed. Gericke's work certainly is one of the most stimulating and helpful books I have read in a long time, and its 50 pp. bibliography, including not only of the cream of biblical scholarship books and philosophy monographs but also countless relevant and high quality Wikepedia articles (internationally accessible free!)—just what the Doctor ordered for those of us who share Gericke's Third World geographical location (with limited funds for Amazon.com's international postage).

As Steven Dunn says in his RBL review: "Gericke's study provides an exhaustive assessment of research and writing in the area of philosophy and the Bible….The book lacks a narrowly argued thesis but rather provides a series of perspectives on the issues to promote the wider goal of integrating Hebrew Bible scholarship and philosophy. The book is like an encyclopedia on the topic of philosophy and the Hebrew Bible in historical research and uniquely combines and merges terminology, concepts and paradigms from the disciplines of philosophy and modern biblical scholarship….Gericke is at his best when working directly with the biblical texts to apply his methods….Though he professes atheism [after many years as a dedicated evangelical in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa], it has in no way hindered his great enthusiasm and interest in the topic, which is evident on almost every page of this study" (Review, RBL 01/2014).

Similarly, Yoram Hazony, a Jerusalem (Jewish?) reviewer in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (138; 2013)9: "This is a wonderful book, brimming with intellectual energy. I cannot help marveling at the love of the Hebrew Bible that G[ericke] continues to exhibit, given the pain and disappointments in his personal spiritual life, which he is trusting enough to mention to his readers in passing [and which may be read in more detail by googling his name and reading his personal testimony].

1 Meaning of Life, Israelite perspectives on, 434-46. "What is the meaning of the phrase 'the meaning of life'? To which of the following does the word 'meaning' refer: (the) origin, source, cause, reason, purpose, nature, significance, value, content, or quality (of life)?....In ordinary language the question regarding the meaning of life tends to revolve around a number of popular, albeit unproven, assumptions:

- That life is something that has meaning;
- That life can have only one meaning;
- That the meaning of life does not change;
- That the meaning of life can be known;
- That the meaning of life has to be given from outside it;
- That the meaning of life make sense;
- That the meaning of life is good news and a cause for happiness;
- That the meaning of life has something to do with humans; and
- That one is obliged to learn what the meaning of life is….

"Answers include supernaturalist theories, which have in common the assumption that the meaning in life is to be constituted by a certain relationship with a spiritual realm….Perspectives are sub-classified as being with god-centered or soul-centered. A second category involves naturalist theories, which hold that meaning can be obtained in a world known solely by empirical and rational probing. Here a distinction is made between subjectivist and objectivist accounts. There is furthermore also a logical space for a nonnaturalist theory that holds that meaning is a function of abstract properties that are neither spiritual nor physical. Finally, an assorted variety of nihilistic perspectives can be found. They have in common that they all deny that life is the sort of thing that has any real meaning….No one has seemed very interested in exploring ancient Israelite assumptions about the meaning life from a philosophical perspective….In the context of Christian philosophy of religion, the meaning of life is typically held to be the glorification of God, as the catechisms and confessions teach…..While the Hebrew Bible is not philosophy, its texts contain a myriad of assumptions about what life's meaning is thought to be….:

- That ancient Israelites assumed that life had meaning;
- That there were many meanings given different authors and characters; and
- That the meanings of life were not necessarily what they are today.
    [cites Don Cupitt, *The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech*. London: SCM, 1999]….

Let us now consider some of the textual evidence related to this topic.

[1] Apparently the author of **Gen 1:26-27** assumes that humans are here as substitute rulers of the earth….
'And <u>let them have dominion</u>' [over animal life]. "As with ancient Egyptian theo-mythology, the human rulers are copies of the deity in representing his role in a particular created space. The meaning of human life according to… Gen 1:26 is therefore not as flattering as it may seem (or is often held to be). The idea is basically that humans are placed on earth to do the work of the deity so that the latter may repose. The implicit worldview is one of a cosmic society in which the divine world represents the upperclass populace who can afford to subcontract ruling the earth and to have humans acting on its behalf. In this view, human life means taking care of divine property." (438).

[2] **Gen 2:5** 'there was no man to <u>till the ground</u>' "This verse assumes that humans are here to till the earth. In this perspective, therefore, it appears that the meaning of life is 'gardening.' The reason why the deity needs humans to protect and till his garden is the same as the theopolitical one that is found in Gen 1—it is beneath the god(s) to bother with such work. Th sociomorphism is readily apparent as the story unfolds. Yhwh checks up on his laborers only when it is cool and more convenient to visit. So Gen 2, like Gen 1, assumes that, contrary to modern Christian ideas, human beings exist as the slaves of a master" (438-39).

Isaac's wife Rebecca is the first in the narratives to explicitly address the question of the meaning of life and she does so twice:

[3] **Gen 25:22**: 'And the children struggled together within her, and she said: "If it be so, <u>why do I live?</u>" And she went to inquire of Yhwh'

[4] **Gen 27:46**, 'And Rebecca said to Isaac: "I am weary of my life….If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth…<u>what means life to me</u>?"'

"The will to live—in Schopenhauer's sense of a blind striving for life for its own sake despite hardship—is clearly operative here….The text assumes that there should be reasons for living and that the deity has an answer to the question" (439).

[5] "In the wisdom of **Proverbs**…the meaning of life seems to be that quest to gain wisdom so as to be able to live better and therewith longer (**Prov 3-4**)….

[6] "However, in the more skeptical wisdom traditions of Job and Qoheleth, here is a return to pessimism and even nihilism as both figures struggle with the nightmare of injustice and futility" (441):

Why is light given to him that is in misery,
And life unto the bitter in soul (**Job 3:20**).

"This text assumes that suffering robs life of its meaning, and that justice and happiness make life fulfilling. However, the discoveries that the deity is beyond good and evil (Nietzsche) and that the meaning of life is not exhausted in human existence were the first steps to Enlightenment (see **Job 38**-**41**).

[7] "The assumptions of Qoheleth about the meaning of life border on nihilism. In this he prefigures Schopenhauer, who thought of life as 'a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness.' Yet a close reading reveals that Qoheleth's nihilism is Nietzschean 'active nihilism.' The persona of **Qoheleth** finds the courage to say 'yes' to life as a gift and his axiology has hedonistic tendencies, as in **8:15:**

So I commend joy,
That a man has no better thing under the sun
Than to eat and to drink, and to be merry
And that this should accompany him in his labor
All the days of his life which God has given him
Under the sun.

[8] "As a popular slogan has it, 'Life's a bitch and then you die.' One example of just this sentiment is found in **Ps 90:10:**

The days of our years are seventy years
And if strong eighty years,

And they are full of toil and injustice
For it is over soon and flies away.

For the greater part of the Psalms, however, the desire to preserve life for its own sake is paramount. The implication is that everyone wants to live, for example in **Ps 34.13:**

Who is the man that desires life
And loves days to see the good?

Ps 63:4 values the experience of Yhwh's care as better than life in itself:

For your loving kindness [*khesed*] is better than life.

[9] "Other sections of **the Writings** that show little theological concern with the deity, such as **Esther, Ruth**, **Lamentation**, and **Song of Songs**, are in some sense all nevertheless united in their attestation of a struggle for a meaningful life. Ruth and Esther focus on the preservation and continuation of life, both individual and communal. Song of Songs is concerned with love that is stronger than death (**Song 8:6**), and that goes along with and ultimately leads to a full life (and therewith sex). Indeed, for many Hebrew Bible texts the meaning of life is to have a passion for what one values (and therewith war)".(442-43).

2 Polytheism → Monotheism (247-50) → Problem of evil (36-37, 425-33).

"The term *theodicy* comes from Leibnitz, while the logical formulation of the problem of evil is found in Hume, according to whom: 'Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" (2012:427).

"***The problem of evil and theodicy***, while sometimes discussed solely as an atheological argument against the existence of the divine, is often considered separately. There are many versions of the problem, and distinctions are made between the logical, epistemological and evidential problems of evil. There are also distinctions between metaphysical, natural, and moral evil. Different conceptions of divinity also come into play, an in theodicy typical responses involve defenses appealing to free will, soul-making, divine limitations, human ignorance, possible worlds, illusion, and so on. Counterresponses include the falsification challenge and charges of trivialization and rationalization" (36-37).

"**9.3 An Error Theory of Selective Diachronic Conceptual Reconfigurations** ….The hypothesis of this section is that the selective transmutation of polytheistic conceptual categories on the way to monotheistic conceptual backgrounds lies at the source of many philosophical problems for the meaningfulness and explanatory power of biblical discourse…. Already in the Hebrew Bible we find that the idea of a single God who is before everything else, self-sufficient and nearly perfect, actually creates as many conceptual dilemmas as it solves.

First, there is the problem of *derivation.* …With only cosmogony and no theogony, the biblical workdviews are able to account for the order in the world but unable to explain either the existence of chaos matter (why would a god create chaos?) or the order represented by the god itself.

Second, there is the problem of *classification*. . In polytheism…gods had families. In monotheistic trajectories within Israelite religion….the idea of a male deity with sons was retained while the idea of a wife was dropped in canonical theologies, thus making the rationale for there being a gendered god and sons of this god conceptually problematic and in need of metaphorization.

Third, one encounters the problem of *limitation*.….In the Hebrew Bible…the deity is supposedly self-sufficient, with nothing being impossible for him, yet he also needs to rest, wants to be served, requires sacrifices, has to meet in council is to be called "good" with reference to a universal standard, is able to move about, and exists in tense relation to chaos and an underworld….

The [historical] genealogy seems to reveal the conceptual origins of virtually all the philosophical problems plaguing contemporary Christian philosophy of religion. It explains the problematic nature of issues such as religious language (given literalism's problems), the act of creation, the attributes of divinity and their logical coherence, the problem of evil, religion and morality and religious pluralism.

In the end, then, the problem of RL [Religious Language] in biblical theology has nothing to do with the anachronistic dilemma of expressing the Infinite in finite terms. Thus, while many philosophical theologians consider ancient polytheism to be conceptually crude and hail monotheism as a more elegant conception of reality, monotheistic metaphysics is actually conceptually more problematic then theogenetic polytheism. The fact is that the Hebrew Bible's record of selective transmutations of polytheistic concepts into monotheistic conceptual metaphors generated more conceptual dilemmas then it solved….There never was a clean break between the two conceptual categories. A historical genealogy of the loci of Christian philosophy of religion will show that the entire field is basically a coming to terms with, and fighting the fires kindled by, the conceptually eclectic monotheistic turn away from polytheism in ancient Israelite religion" (247-49).

Gericke's Purpose, Method. "All I seek to do is to pioneer a new approach within biblical studies aimed at a descriptive philosophical elucidation of the beliefs, concepts, and practices of ancient Israelite religion as represented in the Hebrew Bible" (11). "My interest is not in using the Hebrew Bible for the construction of a contemporary Jewish or Christian philosophy of religion but instead in using issues in philosophy of religion as a lens through which to make sense of what the texts assume on those matters, purely for historical interest….Philosophical criticism of the type envisaged here is a form of textualist hyperdescriptivism. By this I mean that not only do we bracket the question of *truth* in favor of the question of *meaning*, but our concern also lies completely with *clarification* as opposed to *justification or critique* [my emphasis].In addition, we shall be first and foremost concerned with the world *in the text* alone. The world behind it (historical background) and the world in front of it (our world and those of earlier reception history) are of relevance only to the extent that the meaning of folk philosophies in the text can be elucidated thereby.

"The concept of 'the world in the text' [comes] from the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. It refers to that set of assumptions and actions that are conducted in the text itself, without checking to see if these assumptions are possible in the world outside the text….I offer three new related concepts to reveal the locations of the philosophically relevant data:

1. the worlds *under* the worlds in the texts (presuppositions);
2. the worlds *inside* the worlds in the text (concepts); and
3. the worlds *above* the worlds in the text (implications)" (203-04)

Part 1 [Philosophy of Religion] (3-240). "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it" (p.1; Max Planck).

1. A Philosophical Approach to Ancient Israelite Religion 3-13.
    "Most biblical scholars appear to be modernists working on premodern texts in a postmodern world" (13).

2. Philosophical Approaches to the Study of Religion.15-39. "During the premodern period, the main focus of philosophical inquires was on metaphysics; during the modern era it was on epistemology; and during postmodern times there developed an interest in language (the so-called 'linguistic turn')" (16)..

3. Philosophy of Religion and Hebrew Bible Interpretation: A Brief History of Interdisciplinary Relations 41-80, "Most work in biblical theology has tended to ignore philosophy and to depict philosophical work as a rival or enemy" (41, citing James Barr 1999:155). Excellent history but few references to specific Bible texts.

4. The Hebrew Bible in Philosophy of Religion 81-113, David Hume (1711-1776); Immanuel Kant (1724-1804); Georg W.F. Hegel; L Soren Kierkegaard; Arthur Schopenhauer; Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche; Ludwig Wittgenstein; Nicholas Wolterstorff; Charles Patterson; Paul Tillich; Langdon Gilkey; Eleanore Stump; Alvin Plantinga; Don Cupitt...

5. Descriptive Currents in Philosophy of Religion for Hebrew Bible Studies 115-53. Introduction (115)

5.1 Three Descriptive Philosophical Currents

    5.1.1 Analytic Traditions (116-125), concerned with conceptual clarification, allow one to work descriptively with nonphilosophical materials (116). Initially analytic philosophy of religion was closely associated with positivism, a pejorative term in biblical scholarship, involving the realization that *the question of MEANING is epistemologically more fundamental than, and prior to, the question of Truth.* Earlier, Ludwig Wittgenstine wrote: "Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity" (118). Later, he argues that "one should attempt to show the ways in which ideas [even "superstitious" magic rituals] made sense in their sociohistorical context (as part of what he calls 'forms of life' or 'language games' [which became a popular phrase])" (119).

5.1.2 Phenomenological Approaches (125-130). The *phenomenology of religion*, a descriptive approach, seeks to understand religious experience in terms consistent with the worshippers' orientation (125).

5.1.3 Comparative Philosophy (130-134). Ninian Smart "lamented that philosophy of religion…had ignored the history of religion and comparative religion" (131).

5.2 A Parallel Conceptual Clarification in Philosophical Theology (134-138). Philosophical theology is one way of doing philosophy of religion (including clarification) but studies a *specific* religious tradition (HB).

5.3 Doing Philosophy of Religion (evaluative) in the Context of Hebrew Bible Studies (Descriptive; 138)

*5.4 Differences from Thiselton's Philosophical Description (139-141). "The concept of 'philosophical description'…introduced by Anthony Thiselton in his *The Two Horizons*…[1980]….famously suggested employing linguistic and hermeneutic philosophy in understanding the NT [55 Ibid, 3]….Thiselton spells out why he thinks philosophical description is useful:….Philosophy is helpful in describing the nature of, and in appraising, the hermeneutical process (that is, *the fusion of two horizons* [that of the original author/text/readers and our own] articulated by Gadamer" (139). "HB scholar Craig Bartholomew tells us:

> Thiselton has…alerted us to the important relationship between philosophy and biblical interpretation, as this is focused in hermeneutics. In all theoretical work epistemological, ontological and anthropological presuppositions provide…the scaffolding for our theory construction. Such scaffolding is not neutral, and it can only help if we are conscious of the philosophical presuppositions and theories informing and shaping our scholarship. And would this affect our handling of the OT? This is not to suggest that OT scholars should become philosophers and theologians. It is to suggest that OT scholarship requires solid philosophical (and theological) input if it is not to work with hidden philosophies shaping it…..We desperately need scholars like Thiselton who will do the hard philosophical work, and biblical scholars need regular dialogues with such people….(1996:131).

"The postmodern turn has…gone a long way toward exposing hidden scaffolding….But the myth of neutrality in Hebrew Bible scholarship remains widespread….But how does the agenda of the present study [Riecke's] differ from Thiselton's?

- Thiselton is here not so much interested in descriptive philosophy of religion as such. His focus is almost wholly on hermeneutics….
- Given the focus on hermeneutics, Thiselton's primary concern lies with a philosophical description of the *exegetical context* rather than with a philosophical description of the *meaning of the texts themselves*…
- Thiselton's concern is limited to the *New* Testament, where philosophy is less of a problem given the partly Hellenistic historical-cultural context" (140-41; emphasis mine).

5.5 Fallacies in 14 Possible *Objections* to a Philosophical Approach to Ancient Israelite Religion (141-53)
1 The HB contains no philosophy of religion (see. NT, 1 Cor 1:26 and Col 2:8). However, "the HB does contain metaphysical, epistemological and moral assumptions that can be described in philosophical terms…." (143). 2 Philosophical questions are out of place and anachronistic because the biblical author are not concerned with them. However, all our concerns are anachronistic by default (they are ours: historical and literary criticism, sociology or theology). 3 The exegete's possession of philosophical assumptions constitute an obstacle to understanding. 4 Philosophical categories are distortive. However, just because some philosophical categories are distortive, not all are. As Anthony Thiselton pointed out, the problem is not philosophical categories per se but the tendency to opt for poorly chosen ones. 5 The concern that philosophy works with a *metalanguage* imposed on the text's own vocabulary; However, see the metalanguages of other scholarly biblical disciplines. 6 Biblical language is prose and poetry filled with metaphor and myth (God is a character in a narrative, a player in a story—Robert Carroll). But see the diversity of genres and language in philosophy…." [etc., etc., objections 7-14]. "The fourteen objections…now seem so 'twentieth century.' Times change, so perhaps the moment has come to rethink the relations between Athens and Jerusalem" (153).

6. Possible Analogies for a Philosophy of Ancient Israelite Religion 155-97. Folk Philosophy in Ancient Israelite Religion (155-57; citing James Maffie, "Aztec Philosophy" 2010**).** Although concern with traditional Western Philosophical questions is absent from the Hebrew Bible, we do encounter *folk philosophical presuppositions* in the texts, since they contain metaphysical, epistemological and ethical assumptions about the nature of reality, existence, life, knowledge, truth, belief, good and evil, value, etc. Moreover, the biblical texts also contain philosophical presuppositions about the nature of religious language, the concept of revelation and the existence and nature of deity. This chapter uses three analogies to show how we can begin to recognize folk philosophy in the text and thus see the need for a purely descriptive philosophical approach to ancient Israelite religion.

6.1 Historical Introductions to Jewish Philosophy (157-162). Philosophical works try to yield conclusions by means of logical argumentation. The Bible contains little sustained argument of a deductive, inductive or practical nature and attempts to impose the structure of rational argument on the biblical text yields little benefit [Job? cf. NT, Romans, Galatians!]….The Bible…often juxtaposes contradictory ideas, without explanation or apology….In Yahwism, the problem of evil is not related to arguments against the existence of God (158-60).

6.2. Varieties of Ancient Near Eastern Philosophy(162-65). "Philosophy was not an original Greek invention, but actually comes from ancient Near Eastern precursors" (162), as attested in Aristotle's *On Philosophy* and in the writing of his pupils (see Babylonian, Egyptian, Persian and Old Iranian philosophies, intertwined with religion in Zoroastrian texts).

6.3 African Philsophy (165-75, citing especially the pioneer work of Belgian missionary Father Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy,* 1945/1959 English; six works of Odera Oruka on trends in African *philosophical sagacity,* 1981-2010; and papers by Kwasi Wiredu, 1992-93). Biblical scholars can learn much from the methodological and conceptual debates in African philosophy as they seek to address controversy regarding the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and philosophy.

6.4 Philosophy in Literature (175-79). "Refers to how philosophy is presented in [non-philosophical] literary works" (175). Even Western Philosophy "expresses itself in a variety of written forms….Plato's dialogues, Aristotle's treaties, Augustine and Rousseau's Confessions, Descartes and Marcus Aurelius' Meditations, Heraclitus and Nietzsche's aphorisms" (176, see note 60). "Chinese philosophy" is ''wisdom' literature, composed primarily of stories and sayings designed to move the audience to adopt a way of life…." (175.)

6.5 Philosophical Approaches to Myth (179-85). "Plato himself was of the opinion that myth could express philosophical truths" (180). Within biblical interpretation, philosophical approaches to myth "are associated mostly with New Testament scholarship and with the hermeneutics of Bultmann based on Heidegger's philosophy" (180).

6.6 WorldView Research (185-90). Originating in 1820 in studies of Wilhelm von Humboldt (**German, *Weltanschauung***) and currently all the rage in conservative Christian apologetics. "Any worldview has philosophical assumptions on the following topics: 1 Ontology, assumptions about what exists; 2 Metaphysics, assumptions about the fundamental structures of reality; 3 An epistemology, assumptions about knowledge, belief and truth; 4 Anthropology, assumptions about the human condition; 5 An etiology, an account of its own origins and construction; 6 Teleology, assumptions about the meaning and purpose of life; 7 Axiology (values), assumptions about good and evil; 8 a praxeology, a methodology or theory of human action and conduct" (188). Worldview analysis in biblical studies can also be found in research on ancient Israelite wisdom, especially in commentaries on Qoheleth, as well as research on the prophetic literature (Robert Carroll 1979).

6.7 Greek and "Hebrew Thought" compared (190-92). James Barr provided the following (a "stereotype"--Gericke):
> The Greek mind is abstract, contemplative, static or harmonic, impersonal; it is dominated by certain distinctions—matter and form, one and many, individual and collective, time and timelessness, appearance an reality. The Hebrew mind is active, concrete, dynamic, intensely persona, formed upon wholeness and not upon distinctions. Thus it is able to rise above, or to escape, the great distinctions which lie across Greek thought. Greek thought is unhistorical, timeless, based on logic and system. Hebrew thought is historical, centered in time and movement, based in life (1966:34; cited Gericke 191).

6.8 Old Testament Theology and Ethics (192-96). The words "theology," "philosophy" and "ethics" never occur in the Hebrew Bible. "When some biblical theologians called for the purging of Greek Philosophy from biblical theology…they were really calling for the end of the discipline itself" (193; many examples). "If a descriptive ethics of the Hebrew Bible is possible, then so is a descriptive biblical philosophy of religion" (196).

Conclusion (197) The above analogies for imagining the presence of folk philosophy in the Hebrew Bible show that there are definitely philosophically relevant data in the Hebrew Bible; and that objections to coming up with philosophical perspectives on Israelite religion deconstruct themselves.

7. Philosophical Criticism as Biblical Criticism 199-222. "Not only do we bracket the question of truth in favor of the question of meaning, but our concern also lies completely with clarification as opposed to justification or critique. In addition, we shall be first and foremost concerned with the world *in the text* alone. The world *behind* it (historical background) and the world *in front of* it (our world and those of earlier reception history) are of relevance only to the extent that the meaning of folk philosophies in the text can be elucidated thereby. The concept of 'the world in the text' is well known in biblical scholarship, coming a it does from the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur" (203-04).

8. Toward a Descriptive Philosophy of Ancient Israelite Religion 223-240. "The word 'religion' does not occur in the Hebrew Bible" (227 → **James 1:26-27**)….Example: Book of Judges (232)….The task is only to describe in philosophical terms whatever complexity, pluralism, and diversity the texts exhibit. This not to 'solve' or 'harmonize' anything but to 'understand' what we are dealing with, whatever it may be. We leave everything as it is. We only clarify meaning" (232).

Part 2 [the Hebrew Bible; Ancient Israel Religion] "We are all agreed that your theory is crazy. The question that divides us is whether it is crazy enough to have a chance of being correct" (p. 241; quantum physicist Niels Bohr to Wolfgang Pauli, 1958)

9. The Nature of Religious Language in the Hebrew Bible (243-58, esp. 254-56; see 9.3 above). "It has been rightly stated that all language used in the Bible to refer to god is metaphorical" (243, citing Fretheim 1984:5; refuted 250-54).
9.5. Anachronistic Metaphysical Assumptions in Biblical Theology: "A number of oppositions…are constantly being read into biblical god-talk by well-meaning biblical theologians: 1. Religious versus secular; 2. Infinite versus finite; 3. Transcendent versus immanent; 4. Supernatural versus natural….Our philosophical-ecological concept of 'Nature' is not attested in the Hebrew Bible….5 Spiritual versus physical; 6. Reality versus appearance….Inasmuch as biblical theologians have taken these assumptions for granted…they have imported Platonic dualism into ancient Israelite metaphysics" (254-56).

10. The Concept of Generic Godhood in the Hebrew Bible. "The generic sense is an oddity in monotheism, given a class with a singleton" (260). "The subject of the relation between etymology and meaning is immensely controversial ….Usually meaning is not to be derived from the components or the root of a word, and the failure to pay attention to specific literary and historical context in which a given occurrence of the generic term is actually used in the Hebrew Bible itself will lead the reader potentially to commit any number of related semantic fallacies. Examples of such are the lexical fallacy, the root fallacy, the etymological fallacy, the one meaning fallacy, the fallacy of essentialism the fallacy of definition by cognates, the fallacy of semantic anachronism, and the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer. Meaning lies in use and context, not in etymology" (278; note 31 cites James Barr 1961 and Don A. Carson, 1984).

11. Yhwh: A Philosophical Perspective
"11.2 The Anachronism of 'Perfect Being' Theology Ironically, the same biblical theologians who decry the use of philosophical concepts show no end in displaying their own addiction to the distortive anachronism known as 'perfect being' theology**.…**No one can show that a text such as Gen 18 presupposes or implies 'perfect being' theology. In the narrative Yhwh is depicted as moving abut on his way (i.e., as not omnipresent) to verify a report regarding an alleged state of affairs (i..e., as not omniscient); as eating with Abraham (i.e. as not spiritual or incorporeal); and as taken to task by Abraham to ensure that he does the right thing (presupposing moral realism and not divine command ethics). In this text, then, Yhwh's profile simply does not satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for godhood taken for granted by many Christian philosophical theologians" (296-97).

"One of the most interesting and most challenging tasks of clarification is to become aware of what is taken for granted….Deepseated, value-added metatheistic assumptions in the construction of Yhwh's stereotypical profile…include binary oppositions, in which one term is always privileged above another when it comes to biblical representations of divinity:

1. The empirical is better than the ideal.
2. Being alive is better than being dead.
3. Singleness is preferable to plurality.
4. Maleness is more apt than femaleness.
5. Anthropomorphism is superior to theriomorphism [animal likeness].
6. Power is better than weakness.
7. Knowledge is superior to ignorance.
8. Wisdom is better than foolishness.
9. Spiritual substance is better than fleshly substance.
10. Immortality is superior to being mortal.
11. Independence is better than dependence.
12. Seriousness is more fitting than a sense of humor.
13. Height is more appropriate than depth.
14. Mystery is more proper than intelligibility.
15. Obscurity is more worthy than transparency.
16. Extraordinariness is preferable to ordinariness.
17. Glory is more apt than dullness.
18. Light is more suitable than darkness.

19. Ambition is better than resignation.
20. Creativeness is better than unproductiveness.
21. Self-assertion is better than self-negation.
22. Narcissism is more fitting than self-denial.
23. Prescription is more apt than permission.
24. Action is superior to passivity" (299-300).

"11.3   The Doctrine of Divine Complexity…. The doctrine of divine simplicity says that God is without parts….Whereas some texts in the Hebrew Bible may represent Yhwh in ways that by philosophical translation might be commensurable with some of divine simplicity's axioms, a substantial number of passage presuppose exactly the opposite. Recognizing this, a philosophical theology of the Hebrew Bible would therefore do well to…opt for a doctrine that might even be dubbed 'divine complexity.' In the Hebrew Bible:

1. Yhwh is often assumed to have a body (theomorphism in humans).
2. Yhwh is often assumed to be composed of matter and form ('spirit' was believed to be a natural elemental substance such as wind [or breath]).
3. Yhwh's properties are often not assumed to be identical with the divine essence or nature (absolute Godhood ← the extension of generic godhood).
4. Yhwh's essence is often not assumed to be identical to his existence (generic godhood → absolute Godhood).
5. Yhwh is often assumed to be in a genus as a species (generic 'god' is assumed to be something analogous to a natural kind or a folk taxonomic type).
6. Yhwh is often assumed to exhibit accidental properties (presupposed in Hebrew Bible modalities within typologies of divinity).
7. Yhwh is often not assumed to be wholly one (the deity is manifested in mereological parts, e.g., spirit, glory, name, word, etc.)
8. Yhwh's secondary substance is often assumed to be able to combine with something (cf. spirit possession/superlative states)" (300-302).

"12. Natural A/theologies in Ancient Israel….12.1 Introduction. In biblical theology, it is commonplace to suggest that the Hebrew Bible does not attempt to argue for or prove the existence of Yhwh. Scholarly literature…simply points to the biblical dictum that only fools doubt Yhwh's reality and insists that the nature of 'atheism' in ancient Israel was at best practical, not theoretical ()e.g., Ps 10:4; 14:1; 53:1; Zeph 1:12). The following example may be taken as typical:

> The thought of the Old Testament is centered on God. Yet it is nowhere attempted to prove God exists. For the god of the Old Testament is the God of experience and not of x speculation….No man who hears the roar of the lion near him will turn to philosophy to ask whether there is any such objective reality as the lion, and no man who has had an experience of God is concerned to ask whether the philosophy will allow him to believe in God' (H. H. Rowley 1956:48-49).

Ps 94:7-12 One recognized instance of…quasiphilosophical thinking in Hebrew poetry comes from the Psalter. Thus…we stumble upon natural theology in Ps 94:7-12 [citing Andrew B. Davidson, 1904:33]: …

> .The planter of the ear, will he not hear? Or the former of the eye, will he not see?....

Note 21. For a comprehensive evaluative atheology of the Hebrew Bible, see Gericke 'Does Yahweh Exist?' [Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 2004]. This comes from a time in my research where my agenda was what could only be called militantly atheist. I have calmed down somewhat in the meantime

The presence of antagonist atheology in the Psalms is old news….In **Ps 10:4** we read:

> The wicked, in the height of his nose [= pride], will not inquire;
>   'There are no gods,' are all his thoughts..

A similar statement is found in **Ps 14:1:**

> The fool said in his heart: 'There are no gods.' **[// Ps 53:1]…..**

The atheology of the 'wicked' is not a firsthand account but a polemical caricature. What gives the game away is that the psalmist claims to know what the fool says 'in his heart' (in secret)—the text itself implies that the psalmist has no access

to such knowledge. In addition, the fool is depicted as oscillating inconsistently between atheism and antitheism when the existence of the gods is denied, and this denial is followed by rebellion against a specific god (Yhwh)….

Consider also the reference to implicit antagonist natural atheological argument in **Ps 73:10-11**, which reads:

> They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression….
> And they say: 'How does a god know?
> And is there knowledge I the highest?....

Apart from the familiar Pss 58 and 82, where the gods are charged with injustice and their death is proclaimed, several other psalms contain atheological motifs…**Ps 115:4-7:**

> Their idols are silver and gold, / the work of men's hands.
> They have mouths, but they speak not / eyes have they, but they hear not;
> They have ears, but they hear not; / noses have they, but they smell not.
> They have hands, but they handle not; / feet have they, but they walk not;
> Neither speak they with their throat….

This passage assumes rather than denies the corporeality of deity. It simply denies that unreal gods are alive. Similar references to the gods of the nations as nonliving objects are also found in several other psalms with Yahwism's own atheological polemical claims:

> For the gods of the peoples are things of nought / but Yhwh made the heavens. **(Ps 96:5)**
> Ashamed be all that serve graven images, / that boast themselves of things of nought**. (Ps 97:7a)**
> The idols of the nations are silver and gold, / the work of men's hands**. (Ps 135:15).**

These are not just bold assertions. They presuppose a religious epistemology that takes for granted that one can know that other gods are not realy gods….In sum, traces of natural a/theology are not altogether absent from the Hebrew Bible" (343-359)   .

13. Epistemologies in Ancient Israelite Religion (371-404). "Purely descriptive epistemological perspectives on ancient Israelite religion as encountered in the pluralist and dynamic traditions of the Hebrew Bible are rare" (371, citing note 2. "Healy and Parry, *Bible and Epistemology*, ix. The contribution of Ryan O'Dowd ("A Chord of Three Strands: Epistemology in Job, proverbs and Ecclesiastes," 65-82)) is notable for its attempt to be concerned with the Hebrew Bible and epistemology)….Exceptions exist, of course, particularly with references to the study of wisdom literature and with regard to research on he concept of revelation in ancient Israelite religion" (371-72; note 5 cites Michael V. Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistememology" 1987), but see also → Jeremiah on knowing God by practicing liberating justice (22:13) and → Ezekiel's refrain (80x; Appendix 4), "You shall know that I am Yahweh [the liberator God of the Exodus].".

Traces of Soft [moderate] Evidentialism (373-77). "In analytic philosophy of religion, religious epistemology has become very popular since the waning of interest in natural theology….Here by 'evidentialism' we mean the initially plausible position that a belief is justified only if 'it is proportioned to the evidence.'" Classic example: **Isaiah 41:21, 23:**

> "Bring your arguments, says Yhwh; / Come with your reasons, says the king of Jacob….
> Tell the signs of what comes after / that we may know that ye are gods;
> also (do) good, or do evil, / that we may be dismayed, and behold it together….

[Similarly,] In **1 Kgs 18:27** we read:

> And it came to pass at noon / that Elijah mocked them and said:
> "Cry aloud, for he is a god; / either he is musing, or he is gone aside,
> Or he is in a journey / or perhaps he sleeps, and must e awaked."

This text is interesting given what it assumes gods do when not busy with the usual acts. The context of this contest on Mount Carmel also seems to presuppose an evidentialist motif represented in the request for 'proofs' for who is really *Elohim*—Yhwh or Baal….

Traces of soft evidentialist religious epistemology in the Hebrew Bible are everywhere evident, and are closely tied to the concept of divine revelation in ancient Israelite religion. Think of the evidentialist and verificationist assumptions presupposed in blessings and cures, signs and wonders ("so that they may know"), prophetic arguments about divine

providence in history, verification and falsification in divination practices, abductive evidentialism in etiology legends, criteria for determining false prophecy, and so on. Notable specific examples of this kind of evidentialist epistemology include the ten plagues (evident of "the finger of God"), Gideon's fleece (Judg 6), Samuel's predictions of signs to Saul (1 Sam 9), Hezekiah and the sundial (Isa 38, Ahaz being invited to ask for a sign from heaven or the underworld (Isa 7) apocalyptic signs (Joel, Dan), wisdom's natural theology appeal to the cosmic and moral orders (Job 38-41), prophetic dramas (*passim*), symptoms of *ruach* [S/spirit]-possession (miraculous powers), upheavals of nature in theophanies (Hab 3), and so on. All of these presuppose narrow and soft evidentialist motifs. Also important to note is the fact that in the Hebrew Bible evidentialism is often found in association with foundationalist assumptions. Foundationalism is present in those texts that assume knowledge of Yhwh consisted of ….immediate and noninferential beliefs, which were assumed to be foundational or basic beliefs because they provided a basis for other beliefs….Inferential or mediated beliefs…were derived from other [foundationalist] beliefs and ultimately depended on basic beliefs for their justification" (373-76).

14. Religion and Morality in Ancient Israel (405-25). "The word 'ethics' does not appear in biblical Hebrew [nor in the Greek New Testament!]. Of course, this does not mean that there were no assumptions about the nature of morality [the Greek philosophical term 'morality' likewise is absent from the both Testaments; cf. the book of → 'Acts,' Greek 'Praxis' and 'walking in the way' of God]"…..What Is A Biblical Metaethics?....What we wish to discover are not final answers [to specific ethical problems/questions] but rather what the texts of the Hebrew Bible presuppose [philosophically, regarding semantics, epistemology, ontology, etc.; 405-08] …. What nowadays is known in moral philosophy and philosophy of religion as 'Divine Command Theory' (DCT)…[implies] that in ancient Israelite religion the divine will was assumed to be the ultimate foundation of morality (i.e. that human actions were considered morally good if and only if Yhwh willed or commanded them)….Many introductory discussions on DCT…offer as illustration references to texts in the Hebrew Bible in which moral norms are apparently acquired solely via divine commands, for example the giving of the Ten Commandments. Strong arguments fo the presence of DCT in the text include the giving of seemingly nonnecessary commands (as to Adam and Eve, or the rituals of Leviticus) and even seemingly immoral commands (e.g., the command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the order that the Israelites plunder the Egyptians and slaughter the Canaanites, and Hosea being told to marry a prostitute; 408-10).

Socrates' question to Euthyphro in Plato's dialogue [became] what is now called the 'Euthyphro dilemma' (ED)….: Did Yhwh command something because it is moral, or was something moral [/good] because it was commanded by Yhwh?....I wish to challenge the popular consensus by offering a hypothesis…that the classification of the Hebrew Bible's metaethics as *in toto* a form of DCT [Divine Command Theory] involves the fallacies of anachronism and hasty generalization….Many texts in the Hebrew Bible presuppose moral goodness as not in fact something identical to the divine will. Instead, in these texts both the deity and the divine commands were nontautologically predicaed as 'good,' because they instantiated goodness as an accidental property that was ultimately assumed to be located in an *independent and stable transworld moral order* [= "moral realism"; 410-11; my emphasis]….

In **Gen 1**, when God creates the heavens and the earth, he looks at his work and then calls it good. The assumption is that he does not determine the nature of goodness, but judges his own work according to a presupposed universal standard already in existence….We do indeedencounter many examples of nontautological predicaton, as in **Ps 34:9:**

Taste and see that Yhwh is good; / Happy is the man who takes refuge in him.

The above texts assumes that the implied reader already has an idea of what goodness is, quite apart from Yhwh and with reference to which it could be determined whether the deity is in fact good or not….If Yhwh is assumed to be good by definition…the stating of the proposition that Yhwh is good is as superfluous as confessing that water is wet. A second argument for moral realism concerns textual examples of instances where God and the gods are charged with moral wrongdoing…appealing to an objective moral order vis-á-vis deity [**Ps 58:2; 82:1-2; Pss 44 and 89**] in which the psalmists blatantly accuse the God of Israel of betraying the covenant]….So it would seem that there texts in the Hebrew Bible where even divinity can be judged with reference to a supposedly universal moral norm" (412-13). "A third argument for moral realism takes its cur from the second, taking seriously the metaethical presuppositions underlying the Hebrew Bible's mythological motif of divinity as 'judge'….A judge acknowledges the law as it exists independent of him, without him being above the law….A classic example comes from Gen **18:25** where Abraham appeals to the moral order….:: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do justly?"….The text assumes that justice is a good thing and that its goodness is determined by the moral order independent of Yhwh. A similar scenario of corrective chutzpah is attested when Yhwh and Moses deliberate on an appropriate punishment for the 'Golden Calf' incident. First there is the divine command (**Exod 33:10**): Now leave me alone… and I will make of you a great nation….Moses…like Abraham frustrates the divine will and convinces Yhwh qua divine judge what would be the moral thing to do: "And Moses calmed the face of Yhwh his God….And Yhwh repented of the evil which he said he would do to his people (**Exod 33:10-11 ["the result of Moses' disobedience against the divine command to be left alone"]). [As] a fourth argument for moral realism….consider the moral status of the virtues vis á-vis the deity as mentioned in **Ps 15:1-3….**In this text it seems that

Yhwh is assumed to command these acts because they are moral and because Yhwh is assumed to be a moral god....Aside from **Ps 15 (cf. Ps 24)**, the stability of the moral order vis-á-vis the possible vicissitudes of accidental divine moral properties are clearly assumed in the text (**Ps 77:9-10**) that reads: 'Has God forgotten to be gracious? Did he shut up in anger his compassion? And I say, 'This is my illness, the turn of the right hand of the Most High.'....The entire psalm presupposes and depends on the idea of an objective moral order in relation to which Yhwh appears to have changed and with reference to which his nature may be described....A fifth argument for moral realism relates to 'bad' divine commands....Particularly relevant...are those texts depicting Yhwh issuing 'bad' commands....This sometimes involves Yhwh's command to spiritual entities to commit immoral acts, for instance in texts such as **Job 1-2 and 1 Kgs 22:19-22.** On the other hand, on occasion it also involves the divine commands to human beings considered immoral, as in **Ezek 20:25**: 'Therefore I gave them also statues that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live.' [A sixth and final argument comes from the so-called 'Torah Psalms,'] especially **Pss 19 and 119....**Together these arguments cumulatively demonstrate the presence of marked traces of moral realist assumptions in the Hebrew Bible, showing that DCT was not the only metaethical trajectory operative in the history of ancient Israelite religion (412-19).

The Deity/Humanity Relation. [According to the Hebrew Bible,]

1. Why does Yhwh want to be worshiped?
2. Why does Yhwh want to be feared?
3. Why does Yhwh want to give laws?
4. Why does Yhwh want to judge?

The popular apologetic response—which claims that Yhwh does not demand worship and that worship is instead a spontaneous expression of human spirituality—misses the point and distorts the texts' own assumptions....Given that the bulk of the Hebrew Bible concerns prescriptive material regulating the worship of Yhwh, which change over time and which obtain variably in many different actual worlds in the text, the idea that there was no interest in 'why?' seems unwarranted....Why have biblical scholars not asked these questions?....One possible starting point for a philosophical clarification would be to reconstruct the divine needs in relation to three variations in the philosophical concept of the will, that is the will to life (Schopenhauer), the will to power (Nietzsche), and the will to knowledge (Foucault). These variations correspond neatly to what we have learned the primary properties of generic godhood were assumed to be—knowledge, immortality, and power" (420-22) [see pp. 422-23?].

[On the Meaning of Life, 433-45; see pp.1-3 above]

15. Summary and Conclusion (447-52). "I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me" (Michel Focault, quoted in Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (New York: Sage, 2005:9). The foregoing provocative romp through everything hitherto forbidden in the study of ancient Israelite religion barely touched the tip of the iceberg....For a number of historical reasons, the study of ancient Israelite religion has been...utterly lacking in a philosophical approach....As for further research, the sky is the limit" (447-51). The Berlin-type wall that so many philosophers and biblical theologians have constructed and/or allowed to stand and separate them for centuries Gericke has attacked and systematically dismantled brick by brick. Hopefully his feat will allow refugees on both sides of the divide to swarm across to enrich their own perspective as well as make their long over-due contribution to those ensconced on the other side.

Vocabulary/Abbreviations:

RL = Religious Language (243); **Atheological = atheistic** theology; **soft/hard** = moderate / extreme, rigid.
DCT = Divine Command Theory, which assumes 'that human actions were considered morally good if and only if Yhwh willed or commanded them' (408-09)
ED = Euthyphro Dilemma (410): "Did Yhwh command something because it is moral [good] or was something moral [good] because it was commanded by Yhwh?"
"**Abductive**" (p. 10 above): see Wikipedia article.:

Language games = "Wittgenstinian term of art....highlights the fact that language use is a form of human rule-governed activity, integrated into human transactions and social behavior, context-dependent and purpose-relative. Analogies between games and language, playing games and speaking, justify it....Wittgenstein held the cardinal error of modern philosophy to be the focus on forms of expression rather than on their use in the stream of life" (P.M.S.H in OCP 461; see Wikipedia article on "Wittgenstein").