# GERHARD VON RAD AND
# THE STUDY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

# ANCIENT ISRAEL AND ITS LITERATURE

Thomas C. Römer, General Editor

*Editorial Board:*
Susan Ackerman
Thomas B. Dozeman
Alphonso Groenewald
Shuichi Hasegawa
Annette Schellenberg
Naomi A. Steinberg

Number 46

# GERHARD VON RAD AND
# THE STUDY OF WISDOM LITERATURE

*Edited by*

Edited by Timothy J. Sandoval and Bernd U. Schipper

SBL PRESS

**SBL PRESS**

**Atlanta**

Copyright © 2022 by SBL Press

# Contents

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 En. | 1 Enoch |
| 1Q27 | Mysteries |
| 1QHᵃ | Hodayotᵃ or Thanksgiving Hymnsᵃ |
| 1QIsaᵃ | Isaiahᵃ |
| 1QS | Serek Hayaḥad *or* Rule of the Community |
| 2 En. | 2 Enoch |
| 4Q109 | Qoheletᵃ |
| 4Q110 | Qoheletᵇ |
| 4Q184 | Wiles of the Wicked Woman |
| 4Q185 | Sapiential Work |
| 4Q200 | Tobitᵉ |
| 4Q299 | Mysteriesᵃ |
| 4Q300 | Mysteriesᵇ |
| 4Q301 | Mysteriesᶜ? |
| 4Q416 | Instructionᵇ |
| 4Q417 | Instructionᶜ |
| 4Q418 | Instructionᵈ |
| 4Q424 | Instruction-like Work |
| 4Q525 | Beatitudes |
| 11Q5 | Psalmsᵃ |
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ABS | Archaeology and Biblical Studies |
| *AEL* | Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971–1980. |
| *AFK* | *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* |
| AfO | Archiv für Orientforschung |
| AIL | Ancient Israel and Its Literature |
| AJEC | Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity |
| AnBib | Analecta Biblica |

| | |
|---|---|
| ATANT | Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| ATM | Altes Testament und Moderne |
| *AUSS* | *Andrews University Seminary Studies* |
| Avod. Zar. | Avodah Zarah |
| AYBRL | Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library |
| b. | Babylonian Talmud |
| B. Bat. | Baba Batra |
| *BAR* | *Biblical Archaeology Review* |
| *BASOR* | *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* |
| BBB | Bonner biblische Beiträge |
| BBC | Blackwell Bible Commentaries |
| BBM | Between Bible and Mishnah |
| *BBR* | *Bulletin for Biblical Research* |
| BEL | Biblical Encyclopedia Library |
| *BerMon* | *Berlinische Monatsschrift* |
| BETL | Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium |
| BHQ | Biblia Hebraica Quinta |
| BHT | Beiträge zur historischen Theologie |
| *Bib* | *Biblica* |
| *BibInt* | *Biblical Interpretation* |
| *BIFAO* | *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| BKAT | Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament |
| BM | Budge, E. A. Wallis. *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum, with Descriptions, Summaries of Contents, etc.* 2nd series. London: British Museum Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 1923. |
| BMes | Bibliotheca Mesopotamica |
| *BO* | *Bibliotheca Orientalis* |
| BW | Bible and Women |
| BWA(N)T | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| *C. Ap.* | Josephus, *Contra Apionem* |
| CahRB | Cahiers de la Revue biblique |
| CBET | Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology |

| | |
|---|---|
| *CBQ* | *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* |
| CBQMS | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series |
| CEJL | Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature |
| CH | Code of Hammurabi |
| CHANE | Culture and History of the Ancient Near East |
| CM | Cuneiform Monographs |
| *COS* | Hallo, William W, eds. *The Context of Scripture*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002. |
| CRINT | Compendia Rerum Iudicarum ad Novum Testamentum |
| *CT* | *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* |
| *CurBR* | *Currents in Biblical Research* |
| *DBI* | Hayes, John, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. 2 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999. |
| DBW | Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works |
| DJD | Discoveries in the Judaean Desert |
| *DSD* | *Dead Sea Discoveries* |
| EB | L'écriture de la Bible |
| *EBR* | Klauck, Hans-Josef, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–. |
| ECDSS | Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls |
| Ed. | Eduyyot |
| *EDSS* | Schiffman, Lawrence H., and James C. VanderKam, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. |
| EF | Erlanger Forschungen |
| EJL | Early Judaism and Its Literature |
| EQÄ | Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie |
| ET | English translation |
| *Eth. Nic.* | Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* |
| *EvT* | *Evangelische Theologie* |
| EWWSRP | Epistemata—Würzburger wissenschaftliche Schriften. Reihe Philosophie |
| *Existenz* | *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics and the Arts* |
| FAT | Forschungen zum Alten Testament |
| FCB | Feminist Companion to the Bible |
| FOTL | Forms of the Old Testament Literature |

| | |
|---|---|
| FRLANT | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| Gen. Rab. | Genesis Rabbah |
| Gk. | Greek |
| GL | Gifford Lectures |
| *GR* | *Georgia Review* |
| *HALOT* | Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stramm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999. |
| HBM | Hebrew Bible Monographs |
| *HBT* | *Horizons in Biblical Theology* |
| Heb. | Hebrew |
| *Hen* | *Henoch* |
| *Hexam.* | Basil, *Hexameron* |
| HKAT | Handkommentar zum Alten Testament |
| HL | Hannig Lexica |
| *HS* | *Hebrew Studies* |
| HSS | Harvard Semitic Studies |
| *HTh* | *Ho Theológos* |
| *HTR* | *Harvard Theological Review* |
| HTS | Harvard Theological Studies |
| IBC | Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching |
| IBT | Interpreting Biblical Texts |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| *IDBSup* | Crim, Keith, ed. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962. |
| IJPS | Idra Jewish Philosophy Series |
| *Int* | *Interpretation* |
| *JAAR* | *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* |
| JAJSup | Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements |
| *JAOS* | *Journal of the American Oriental Society* |
| *JBL* | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |
| *JBR* | *Journal of Bible and Religion* |
| *JBT* | *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* |
| *JCS* | *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* |
| *JHebS* | *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *JHS* | *Journal of Hellenic Studies* |
| JPSBC | JPS Bible Commentary |
| *JSJ* | *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods* |
| JSJSup | Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series |
| *JSOT* | *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| *JSP* | *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* |
| *JSS* | *Journal of Semitic Studies* |
| JTISup | Journal for Theological Interpretation Supplements |
| *JTS* | *Journal of Theological Studies* |
| Jub. | Jubilees |
| JWV | Julius Wellhausen Vorlesung |
| l(l). | line(s) |
| LAOS | Leipziger Altorientalische Studien |
| LBS | The Library of Biblical Studies |
| LCL | Loeb Classical Library |
| LDSS | Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls |
| LHBOTS | The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies |
| LSTS | The Library of Second Temple Studies |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| m. | Mishnah |
| MB | Le Monde de la Bible |
| MBS | Message of Biblical Spirituality |
| MC | Mesopotamian Civilizations |
| MMTM | Makers of the Modern Theological Mind |
| MSH | Michigan Studies in the Humanities |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| *NABU* | *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* |
| NCB | New Century Bible |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| OBO | Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis |
| ORA | Orientalische Religionen in der Antike |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| OTM | Oxford Theological Monographs |
| *OTP* | Charlesworth, James H., ed. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985. |

| OTS | Old Testament Studies |
| PAe | Probleme der Ägyptologie |
| par(r). | parallel(s) |
| P.Anast. | Papyrus Anastasi |
| P.Ins. | Papyrus Insinger |
| pl(s). | plate(s) |
| *PMLA* | *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* |
| *PSB* | *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* |
| Pss. Sol. | Psalms of Solomon |
| *QC* | *Qumran Chronicle* |
| *RB* | *Revue biblique* |
| *RBA* | *Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism* |
| *RelSRev* | *Religious Studies Review* |
| *RevQ* | *Revue de Qumran* |
| *RGG* | Betz, Hans Dieter, ed. *Religion in Geschichte und* Gegen-wart. 3rd ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959. |
| RIME | The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods |
| RINAP | Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period |
| RINBE | Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire |
| *RlA* | *Reallexicon der Assyriologie* |
| ROT | Reading the Old Testament |
| RP | Religious Perspectives |
| *RSPT* | *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| *RTL* | *Revue théologique de Louvain* |
| SAA | State Archives of Assyria |
| SAACT | State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts |
| SAAS | State Archives of Assyria Studies |
| SAOC | Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| SBS | Stuttgarter Bibelstudien |
| SBT | Studies in Biblical Theology |
| SCS | Septuagint and Cognate Studies |
| SDAIK | Sonderschriften des Deutschen Archäologischen Insti-tuts, Abt. Kairo |
| SERAPHMIE | Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs |
| SFSHJ | South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism |
| SGVS | Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften |

| | |
|---|---|
| *SJOT* | *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* |
| *SJT* | *Scottish Journal of Theology* |
| *SMEA* | *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* |
| SNTSMS | Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series |
| *SR* | *Studies in Religion* |
| STDJ | Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah |
| StOr | Studies in Oriental Religions |
| StPohl | Studia Pohl |
| SVTG | Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum |
| SymS | Symposium Series |
| t. | Tosefta |
| T. Ash. | Testament of Asher |
| T. Job | Testament of Job |
| T. Naph. | Testament of Naphtali |
| TA | Theologische Arbeiten |
| TB | Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert |
| *TBl* | *Theologische Blätter* |
| TCABS | T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies |
| TCS | Texts from Cuneiform Sources |
| *Text* | *Textus* |
| *ThTo* | *Theology Today* |
| *TLZ* | *Theologische Literaturzeitung* |
| *TS* | *Theological Studies* |
| *TynBul* | *Tyndale Bulletin* |
| *TZ* | *Theologische Zeitschrift* |
| *UCC* | *Unio Cum Christo* |
| v(v). | verse(s) |
| VAB | Vorderasiatische Bibliothek |
| *VT* | *Vetus Testamentum* |
| VTSup | Supplements to Vetus Testamentum |
| WAW | Writings from the Ancient World |
| WisC | Wisdom Commentary |
| WLAW | Wisdom Literature from the Ancient World |
| WMANT | Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament |
| *WTJ* | *Westminster Theological Journal* |
| Yad. | Yadayim |
| *ZA* | *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *ZAC* | *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity* |
| *ZAlW* | *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie* |
| *ZÄS* | *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* |
| *ZAW* | *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* |
| *ZTK* | *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* |

# Introduction

Timothy J. Sandoval and Bernd U. Schipper

In 1970 Gerhard von Rad of the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität in Heidelberg, Germany, published a book titled *Weisheit in Israel*.[1] It has proved remarkably influential. Once the work appeared, it was quickly translated into English (1972) and other languages. For a generation of scholars who sought to explore ancient Israelite and Jewish wisdom texts and traditions after *Weisheit*, von Rad's voice was arguably the most significant one they encountered. Indeed, it was almost obligatory for exegetes and commentators to situate their work to some extent in relation to von Rad's hypotheses as elaborated in *Weisheit*. Today, fifty years later, though *Weisheit* is still often alluded to by many scholars working on Israel's ancient wisdom traditions, mention of von Rad's work tends to be briefer and sometimes offered in pro forma fashion. Yet this itself reveals something of the book's influence: although robust engagement with von Rad's actual arguments and conclusions in *Weisheit* may have declined somewhat in recent decades, his work nonetheless remains a part of the rhetoric of wisdom studies.

Although the publication of von Rad's book forms the temporal starting point of the present volume, which seeks to reflect on wisdom studies since 1970, his study does not always or necessarily stand at its center. *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* is not intended to be a kind of a hagiographic, or even semihagiographic, celebration of the Heidelberg Old Testament biblical theologian. Different contributors, though all appreciative of the intellectual depth and ambition of von Rad's work, engage *Weisheit* and evaluate its ongoing worth differently.

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970).

If *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* is not a kind of belated Festschrift in von Rad's honor, it is also not a textbook that offers general introductions or overviews to the study of wisdom texts and topics, say, primarily for students and nonspecialists, as other recent publications so admirably do.[2] Neither does *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* represent, precisely, a kind of state-of-the-question volume on wisdom studies for scholars and advanced students. Instead, using von Rad's work as a jumping-off point, contributors—each in different ways, to different extents, and in relation to different texts or topics—take stock of von Rad's own work and reckon with what has happened (or not) in the last fifty years of the study of those texts and topics, while also considering some of the most significant and interesting trajectories of wisdom studies today. In its considerations of wisdom studies in light of von Rad's work and where scholarship has moved since 1970, *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* thus also to some extent replicates the feel of *Weisheit* itself, a book that offered a rich picture of wisdom in Israel by interpreting wisdom books and issues through significant grappling with both the wisdom scholarship of its day and important intellectual trends of the mid-twentieth century.

The volume itself is divided into four sections. The first and shortest section consists of two essays that situate von Rad's interest in, and work on, wisdom in Israel in terms of its place within a broader intellectual milieu of the mid-twentieth century (Van Leeuwen) as well as its status as biblical theology and its contributions to that endeavor (Spieckermann). The next three sections of the volume focus on the ways in which von Rad engaged and interpreted biblical wisdom books and topics and how scholarship has subsequently built on or moved away from von Rad's insights and suggestions.

Hence, section 2 is oriented toward critical understanding of von Rad's particular work on the Bible's wisdom books—Proverbs (Keefer), Job (Kynes), Sirach (Wright), and Ecclesiastes (Weeks)—and the important ways contemporary scholarship on these texts has developed since *Weisheit*. Section 3 focuses attention specifically on formulating potential, ongoing contributions of von Rad's work on wisdom as well as identifying and constructively engaging the inevitable but not to be ignored limita-

---

2. Will Kynes, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2020).

tions of the work of a scholar of an earlier generation. Hence, von Rad's sensitivity to the poetic imagination of wisdom texts, and the intellectual work such imagination accomplishes, is considered in this section (Stewart), as is the important question of the place of gender in wisdom works (and their interpretation), which since at least the mid-1980s has constituted one of the central foci of wisdom studies (Maier). Von Rad's reliance on the highly debated conception of a wisdom tradition (which he himself acknowledged) is also explored (Sneed), while the central place von Rad—like others before and after him—affords creation theology in wisdom works is augmented and redirected toward posthuman ethical ends (Koosed).

Finally, section 4 turns to broader contexts of wisdom that von Rad engaged sometimes with great impact and sometimes less consequentially. Because von Rad so forthrightly set out to understand wisdom in Israel on its own terms, he was less concerned than some scholars have been to situate Israel's wisdom in relation to broader ancient Near Eastern intellectual traditions. However, both his starting point and conclusions about Israelite wisdom were hardly uninfluenced by the study of Mesopotamian (Greenstein) or Egyptian (Schipper) scribal cultures and literatures, analysis of which continues to inform the study of books such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Likewise, although von Rad's evaluation of wisdom in Israel extended to a consideration of texts from the late Second Temple period, of the texts from this epoch he was most interested in Ben Sira. He did not much treat works of the Qumran community and, of course, had limited access to a whole host of nonsectarian texts discovered near the Dead Sea (Brooke). However, the Ptolemaic epoch book of Qoheleth was quite important for his larger argument regarding wisdom in Israel. For von Rad, Qoheleth was a work that evidenced the abandonment of the theological and epistemological confidence of earlier wisdom texts, while Ecclesiastes' supposed theologizing of earlier wisdom's conception of "the times" served his famous argument that wisdom thought, and not prophecy, gave birth to early Judaism's apocalyptic speculation (Sandoval). However, as with most other Old Testament scholarship in Germany in the mid-twentieth century, von Rad's critical gaze was not primarily trained toward other nonbiblical texts of the late Second Temple period, works that could engage traditions and perspectives emerging from wisdom books such as Ecclesiastes (Feldman). Of course, today study of wisdom in the Second Temple period, including the question of the relation of wisdom and apocalyp-

tic, can scarcely be undertaken without attention to a full range of early Jewish texts, especially those from the Judean Desert that became widely available in the early 1990s.

There have in the past been other attempts to reckon with the legacy of von Rad's work, including his work on wisdom. James Crenshaw, for example, in 1978 published an introduction to von Rad's thought in the Makers of the Modern Theological Mind series.[3] A further important evaluation of von Rad's thought took place at a conference commemorating his one hundredth birthday twenty years ago at Heidelberg University, which some contributors of this volume attended. Following this 2001 gathering, a number of edited volumes of the proceedings were published. Among these, one volume was explicitly concerned with *Weisheit*.[4] Though full of valuable and insightful articles, only a few of the essays in that volume engaged fully with von Rad's *Weisheit* or attempted to present something of the current state of research on wisdom texts and themes.

Similar to the Heidelberg conference, one aim of this volume is to bring together different perspectives on wisdom studies and von Rad offered by scholars from different countries and academic traditions. Von Rad himself was interested in this broader scholarly world. In 1960 he enjoyed a research stay at Princeton Theological Seminary, and over the years at Heidelberg University he hosted many international scholars, among them Paul Hanson, George Coats, and Bernhard Anderson, while Rolf Knierim, one of his research assistants, made a career in the United States.

Still, despite the range of contributors and the breadth of texts and topics addressed in *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature*—and again like *Weisheit* itself—some unfortunate lacunae are to be discovered in the volume. For example, *Weisheit* was largely, if not essentially, a work of biblical theology. Given this reality, and the influence of Jon Levenson's article "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," as well as the renewed interest of other Jewish scholars in appropriately revised conceptions of biblical theology, a Jewish biblical-theological response to von Rad's work on wisdom would have enhanced the volume.[5]

---

3. James L. Crenshaw, *Gerhard Von Rad*, MMTM (Waco, TX: Word, 1978).

4. David J. A. Clines, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Hans-Peter Müller, eds., *Weisheit in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971), Heidelberg, 18–21. Oktober 2001* (Münster: LIT, 2003).

5. Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *The*

Likewise, some readers may notice that a chapter on the well-known, if also disputed, category of wisdom psalms is not included. What is more, though a portion of the diverse hermeneutic positions, methods, and scholarly identities that characterize biblical studies today is represented in the volume, ideally more would have been included. However, at some point efforts at recruiting authors had to come to an end, and at other points some potential contributors understandably had to withdraw from the project once it was underway.

The origins of *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* is to be found with a Wisdom Work Group held at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University on 17 November 2016.[6] Eight scholars, most of whom are also contributors to this volume, were invited to reread *Weisheit* and present a paper on an open topic in relation to von Rad's work—any matter that interested them or corresponded to one of their own research interests. The Wisdom Work Group was essentially a small experiment to discern whether that sampling of scholars thought it might be worthwhile to revisit and take stock of a half-century of wisdom studies, including current and emerging perspectives, using von Rad's *Weisheit* as a kind of historical marker and jumping-off point. The group affirmed the notion, and plans for *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* were slowly set in motion. Although at one point it was hoped that the volume would appear in 2020 or early 2021—that is, in the fiftieth year after *Weisheit in Israel*'s publication or very soon thereafter—the Covid-19 crisis soon made that impossible. The global pandemic significantly slowed the work of nearly all the contributors. Most of us had to scramble to convert the face-to-face courses we had long taught into new online formats, and many of us were unable to access research materials for significant stretches of time because of quarantine measures. Given these circumstances, we are pleased that this book is published in the fiftieth anniversary year of the English edition of von Rad's *Weisheit in Israel*, which in 1972 appeared as *Wisdom in Israel*.[7]

---

*Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 33–61; see also Isaac Kalimi, ed., *Jewish Bible Theology: Perspectives and Case Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

6. The Wisdom Work Group was made possible through the support of the Jewish Studies Programs of Brite Divinity School and Texas Christian University.

7. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1972).

No author or editor is able to bring a volume to publication on their own. We are thus grateful for the collaborative efforts of many others. Thanks is due first to each of our research assistants, Yannik Ehmer of the Humboldt University, Berlin and Marcus Hayes of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, who provided invaluable editorial and other services. A word of appreciation is likewise due each of the contributors to the volume who not only produced the erudite essays to be discovered in the following pages but patiently and collegially bore with us as plans and timelines for the completion of *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* shifted. Finally, we wish to express deep gratitude to Thomas Römer and the other editors of SBL Press's Ancient Israel and Its Literature series for receiving the volume in that prestigious series, and to Bob Buller and others at SBL Press who shepherded the project through press.

## Bibliography

Adams, Samuel L., and Matthew Goff, eds. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2020.

Clines, David J. A., Hermann Lichtenberger, and Hans-Peter Müller, eds. *Weisheit in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne" anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901–1971), Heidelberg, 18–21. Oktober 2001*. Münster: LIT, 2003.

Crenshaw, James L. *Gerhard von Rad*. MMTM. Waco, TX: Word, 1978.

Kalimi, Isaac, ed. *Jewish Bible Theology: Perspectives and Case Studies*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012.

Kynes, Will, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Levenson, Jon D. "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology." Pages 33–61 in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. London: SCM, 1972.

Part 1
Gerhard von Rad and *Weisheit in Israel*

# *Weisheit* in the Intellectual Context of Its Day

Raymond C. Van Leeuwen

## Introduction

When *Weisheit in Israel* appeared, it was universally praised, though the praise of two prominent Anglo-American reviewers was overshadowed by petulant grumblings concerning its approach, argument, prose, and conclusions. From the German side, Walter Zimmerli's superb overview concluded with penetrating questions concerning Job and Ecclesiastes.[1] One German critic pointed to *Weisheit*'s failure to exploit modern studies on proverbs among so-called primitive peoples. However, few scholars of that day understood the depth of its *Fragestellung* and achievement.

Without exception, the reception of *Weisheit* in Germanic lands and in the Anglo-American orbit was necessarily different. First, most Anglo-American readers encountered *Weisheit* only in James Martin's deeply flawed English version.[2] These flaws ranged from dictionary mistakes to the obliteration of fundamental concepts. Decades later, the general use of this translation continues, where it still impedes understanding.[3]

---

This essay required me to venture well beyond my area of specialization, in spite of the well-known risks this entails. I hope that the effort will nonetheless be fruitful for further research.

1. Walther Zimmerli, "Die Weisheit Israels: Zu einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad," *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95.

2. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), translated as *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1972).

3. E.g., John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Seth L. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); James L. Crenshaw, *Sipping from the Cup of Wisdom*, 2 vols. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2017).

Second, most Old Testament scholars in the 1970s were unaware of currents of German philosophy, hermeneutics, and theology that *Weisheit* used to frame its problematics and argument. Without such knowledge, basic aspects of *Weisheit* seemed obscure. Finally, most Anglo-American readers inhabited one side of our bifurcated modern worldview, which surfaced as objective empiricism and positivism, in contrast to *Weisheit*'s Continental philosophical heritage. These factors were interrelated since Martin's translation effectively erased most signs of its tradition, thus creating the obscurity of which Martin accused von Rad. We begin with this crucial matter of language.

<p style="text-align:center">*Weisheit* as *Vorlage* and (Mis)translation</p>

An important argument in *Weisheit* was that the same utterance could have a different meaning when transplanted into a different horizon. Its English rendering, coming from an empiricist *Verstehenshorizont*, failed to recognize the Continental horizon within which *Weisheit*'s utterances signified. Consequently, too much of *Wisdom in Israel* made no coherent sense. Fortunately, like an inscription defaced by time and wanton hands, enough of *Weisheit*'s insight survived translation to be rewarding.

Apart from Roland Murphy and Walter Brueggemann,[4] Anglo-American readers of *Weisheit* reviewed the English version, which provided a "Translator's Note" complaining about its German: "The language of this book is in some passages not as lucid as it might be and there are places where interpretation is a problem. I trust, however, that I have not seriously misrepresented the author in any respect."[5] Actually, Martin's translation was rife with errors and "seriously misrepresented" *Weisheit* in many respects, basic concepts included.

Among Martin's lapses was his failure to correctly render a word group that von Rad himself had designated as essential to his entire argument: *Eigengesetz/lich/keit*, literally, the German equivalent of Greek *auto-nomos/autonomia*, a "law unto itself," a pattern in reality that follows its own inherent rule. At times, Martin rendered the concept nearly adequately: "In what follows … frequent use will be made … *of an 'inner law'*

---

4. Roland E. Murphy, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad, *CBQ* 35 (1973): 549–53; Walter Brueggemann, "The Mystery of God's Order," *Int* 25 (1971): 247–49.

5. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, xi.

*of creation*" ("von einer 'Eigengesetzlichkeit' der Schöpfung").[6] But most often this word group was rendered by some form of determinism, which eviscerated its meaning. In von Rad's view, the wise discern relative autonomy or lawfulness in various events and processes. Such autonomy is only relative because of Yahweh's wisdom and freedom in governing reality. The act-consequence nexus was thus not deterministic—as the prospering of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous demonstrated.

Mistranslation undermined key points in *Weisheit*'s argument. The structure of this argument arose from hermeneutical issues in Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*.[7] From Heidegger and his pupil Gadamer, von Rad employed ontological concepts such as *Dasein*, *Umwelt*, *Die Weltlichkeit der Welt*,[8] and *Horizont* or *Verstehenshorizont*. Von Rad noted his debt to Gadamer in discussing art as "cultural play" (*Spiel*),[9] which conveys *Wahrheit* about *Wirklichkeit*. All art, including proverbial sentences, presented the interpreter with a *Wahrheitsanspruch* within its own cultural terms. Thus, gaining emic insight into another society's hidden presuppositions or *Weltanschauung* was indispensable for understanding its utterances. It also constituted the interpreter's most difficult task, one that empiricist presuppositions obscured. Hence the frequent use of *Wirklichkeitsverständnis*, *weltanschaulich*, *Verstehenshorizont*, *Voraussetzungen*—interpretive realities that generally remained hidden beneath the surface of Proverbs' sayings.

Against this background, the inadequacies of *Wisdom*'s English are plain:

1. Martin: "Experiences *without preparation* do not exist." Sadly, humans often experience things "without preparation." Read: "*Presuppositionless* experiences do not exist" (*voraussetzunglose Erfahrungen*), a point developed at length in Gadamer's *Wahrheit* and central to *Weisheit* from its very first page.[10]

---

6. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 18; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 6, emphases added here and below.

7. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960).

8. Note also von Rad's variant, *Verweltlichung der Welt* (*Weisheit in Israel*, 378), which did not mean "secularization of the world" (*Wisdom in Israel*, 298).

9. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 39 n. 1, 73 n. 40; citing Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 77–96, 97–127, respectively.

10. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 4; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 13.

2.  Martin: "alongside periods *of disclosure* and movement, periods of *resistance and preservation*." Read: "alongside phases of [cultural] *openness* and movement, phases of *stability and preservation*" ("neben Phasen des *Sichöffnens und der Bewegung … des Beharrens und Bewahrens*").[11] Martin misunderstood von Rad's description of historical periods.

3.  Martin: "A man misses possible experiences … because he is incapable of fitting them *into the limits of his understanding*." Read: "because he is not positioned to integrate them into his own [cultural] *horizon of understanding*" ("weil er auserstande ist, sie seinem *Verstehenshorizonte* einzuordnen").[12] A *Verstehenshorizont* is not simply individual (though every individual has one); it concerns the limits beyond which a society fails to see or understand. The problem concerns the gap between an ancient horizon and a modern one, not the limitations of one human.

4.  Martin: "Here, then, human behavior *is determined*, not by general ethical norms, but by the experience *of inherent natural laws*." Read: "Here, then, human conduct *is regulated*, not by universal ethical norms, but by the experience of *entirely* immanent *law-congruent patterns*" ("Hier wird also das menschliche Verhalten nicht von allgemeinen sittlichen Normen, sondern von der Erfahrung *ganz* immanenter *Gesetzmässigkeiten geregelt*").[13] Here, as often, Martin reads a determinism into human agency that contradicts *Weisheit*'s argument. Von Rad here spoke not of laws of nature—which cannot be disobeyed, and contrast paradigmatically with culture and freedom—nor of natural law as in Catholic moral theology. As noted, von Rad considered divine freedom able to disrupt the act-consequence nexus, while human freedom meant that cosmic laws and norms could be violated, sometimes without evident consequences.[14]

5.  Martin: "Of course, the insight into the act-consequence relationship was *certainly* [*auch?*] not a *general conclusion, at any rate*

---

11. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 4; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 14.
12. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 13.
13. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 90; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 122.
14. See Jerry A. Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10–29" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1978); Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs," *HS* 33 (1992): 25–36.

not for the smaller adversities of life." Here, Martin misconstrued an idiom and a German word found in any dictionary. Read: "Admittedly, insight into the act-consequence nexus was *also no master key*, *least of all* for the lesser adversities of life" ("Freilich, die Einsicht in den Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang war *auch* kein *Generalschlüssel, am wenigsten* für die kleineren Widrigkeiten des Lebens"). *Generalschlüssel* is a "master key," which Martin confused with *Schluss*, "conclusion."[15] Ironically, von Rad had just stated that insight into the act-consequence nexus "belonged among the most fundamental things [Israel] knew" ("gehörte zu den fundamentalsten Erkenntnissen").[16]

6. Martin: "The Solomon of I Kings 3 could—regarded *objectively*—have said that he *would yield to* Yahweh so that the world might not remain dumb for him but that it might be understood by him." Read: "Solomon … could just as well [*auch*] … have said—*with regard to the object* [*of his request*]—that he *prayed to* Yahweh so that he would no longer perceive reality as voiceless, but that he would be able to 'hear' and understand it [i.e., reality's 'voice']." Here, Martin appears simply to have guessed at the meaning of an irregular reflexive verb, the subjunctive of *erbitten*, "to pray": "Der Salomo von 1 Kön 3 hätte auch—auf die *Objektseite* gesehen—sagen können: er *erbäte sich* von Jahwe, dass ihm die Welt nicht stumm bleibe, sondern ihm vernehmbar werde."[17] Von Rad had rephrased Solomon's prayer for a "listening heart" (1 Kgs 3:9; cf. 3:11) with respect to the object of his request ("auf die *Objektseite* gesehen"), thereby showing what Solomon's request entailed.

7. Martin: "This existential relationship, this turning of the *world* towards man, first had to be made known *by means of special considerations; as a fact, as a reality, it was subjected to all kinds of thought-processes*." Von Rad wrote, "Dieser Existenzialbezug, diese Zukehr der *Umwelt* zum Menschen hin musste *nicht* erst durch besondere Überlegungen bewusst gemacht werden; *er war*

---

15. Martin repeats the error when he renders *Deuteschlüsseln* (von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 256) with "conclusions" (von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 198) and also mistranslates *unvollziehbar* as "possible."

16. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 196; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 252–53.

17. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 297; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 377; see also 211, 300, 306.

*als ein Faktum, als eine Wirklichkeit aller Reflexion vorgegeben.*"[18] Martin overlooked a *nicht*, producing the opposite of *Weisheit*'s meaning, and missed *Umwelt* in von Rad's Heideggerian context, finally descending into conceptual chaos. Read: "This existential relation, this turning of the '*ambient-world*' towards humans, did *not* first have to be brought to consciousness *by some extraordinary train of thought; as fact, as reality, it was already given, prior to all reflection.*" Here, *Weisheit* used Heideggerian insights to articulate the *Verstehenshorizont* of Prov 8.

8.  Martin: "relationship to other '*ideological*' literature." Read: "relationship to other '*worldviewish*' literature" ("Verhältnis zu anderen 'weltanschaulichen' Literaturwerken").[19] Von Rad's *weltanschaulich* is not "ideological" but "worldviewish." *Weltanschauung* and *Ideologie* had very different connotations. *Ideologie* was negative, used by Marx to describe religion's false consciousness in service of capital and power. *Weltanschauung*, also of nineteenth-century coinage, was more ambiguous. It referred generally to culturally fundamental, tacit presuppositions and commitments comprising a society's communal point of view. A society's experiences were inescapably preconditioned by its taken-for-granted worldview.[20]

These examples were not evidence for *Weisheit*'s obscurity. They were failures to understand German. In example 3, a key technical term, repeatedly used in *Weisheit*, went unrecognized, even though its source, Gadamer's *Wahrheit*, was cited twice.[21] Gadamer's term *Verstehenshorizont* entailed that each culture, including our own, possesses a worldview with limited understanding. By uncovering an ancient worldview to understand its art, an interpreter brought her (modern) horizon into contact with the ancient one in a *Horizontverschmelzung*. Such a dialectical understanding of the past requires awareness of one's own cultural presuppositions and limitations, which was von Rad's point, obscured in examples 1 and 3 above.

Additional problems arose from Martin's ignorance of von Rad's intellectual world. Even when *Weisheit* cited Gadamer's extensive treatment of "play … [as] the mode of being of the work of art itself" ("Spiel … [als]

---

18. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 303; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 384.
19. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 15.
20. David Naugle, *Worldview: History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).
21. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 39, 73.

die Seinsweise des Kunstwerkes selbst"), Martin misconstrued *Spiel*, as "a game," so that "*eines geistigen Spieles*" became "*an intellectual game*," rather than "cultural play."[22] Von Rad regularly used *Geist* and *geistig* to refer to the entirety of human cultural life in a way congruent with *Geist* in *Zeitgeist* or *Geisteswissenschaften*. By rendering *geistig* as "intellectual," Martin produced an unfortunate narrowing of von Rad's views on humanity, culture, and wisdom.[23] Martin's bafflement concerning *Spiel* was not isolated. When von Rad spoke of how the play-character of art disclosed and revealed truth, he recapitulated Gadamer's long argument in a sentence: "Das *spielerische* Element, das jeder Art von poetischer Wahrheitsfindung eignet, drängt sich hier noch starker als sonst in den Vordergrund." Martin destroyed *Weisheit's* Gadamerian meaning: "The *figurative* element which characterizes every type of poetic discovery of truth …"[24] Read: "The *play-element*, which inheres in every type of poetic truth-finding.…"

Ignorance of *Weisheit's* tradition led to further mistakes. Von Rad did not always provide citations for his allusions. Thus, when he put "die 'Weltlichkeit der Welt'" in quotation marks, his source was a major section of *Sein und Zeit*, with that very title.[25] Martin's translation, "the '*secularity* of the world,'" destroyed not only von Rad's quotation of a typical Heideggerian tautology but its meaning as well.[26] In Heidegger, the phrase had nothing to do with secularity but with an ontological analysis of *Dasein's* world, qua world.[27] Von Rad, like Dietrich Bonhoef-

---

22. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 43; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 50; see *Wisdom in Israel*, 76; *Weisheit in Israel*, 53–54. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1975), 101; Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 97. Pages 97–127 treat "Spiel als Leitfaden der ontologischen Explikation" [des Kunstwerkes].

23. A similar tendency to reduce wisdom to intellect marred Roger N. Whybray's *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*, BZAW 135 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974).

24. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 163; see also 402.

25. Weisheit, 89; see also 85. See Heidegger, "Die Weltlichkeit der Welt," in *Sein und Zeit*, 63–113.

26. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 63.

27. See the standard English translation, "the worldliness of the world," in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 59–102. The first English translation was by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperPerennial, 1962). The latter translated the phrase "the worldhood of the world." For a concise exposition of the phrase, see Seu-Kyou Lee, *Existenz und Ereignis: Eine Untersuchung*

fer before him, reframed Heidegger's "worldliness of the world" within a *Verstehenshorizont* based on the Old Testament: a godly life is not just morality and worship but an everyday, everywhere, full-orbed life in the world, wisely serving God, creation, and others. Thereby, *Weisheit* implicitly continued Bonhoeffer's opposition to a two-realms German Christianity, which, in a sacred-secular split, had handed most of secular life over to the Nazi regime, which soon swallowed up the sacred, churchly realm as well.

Several reviews actually praised the English translation. Zev Garber wrote that *Weisheit* is "now admirably and felicitously translated into English."[28] In Britain, William McKane wrote that von Rad "has been well served by his English translator, Dr J. D. Martin, who was set a difficult task and has produced a readable translation which gives good access to the subtle and sometimes obscure circumlocutions which are part of … [von Rad's] style."[29] In essence, McKane endorsed Martin's complaint. Murphy, who reviewed both the German and English, asked, "Did the translator do a good job? After several probes, the reviewer is satisfied that the English dress of *Weisheit in Israel* is exact and becoming."[30] James Crenshaw wrote, "I have worked through *Wisdom in Israel* a dozen times, both in German and in translation." In spite of "numerous exquisite passages," he found "*Weisheit in Israel* aesthetically less pleasing than most of his works," a finding that would have surprised Zimmerli![31] In light of these claims, and in contrast to Maurice Gilbert, who warned about failings in the French translation,[32] the failure of these three prominent wisdom scholars to point out the severe problems with Martin's translation was a most unfortunate, consequential event.

---

*zur Entwicklung der Philosophie Martin Heideggers*, EWWSRP (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 114.

28. Zev Garber, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad, *AUSS* 13 (1975): 294–95.

29. William McKane, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad, *Theology* 76 (1973): 98–99.

30. Murphy, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, 549–53.

31. James L. Crenshaw, "*Wisdom in Israel* (Gerhard von Rad): A Review," in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 304.

32. Maurice Gilbert, review of *Israël et la Sagesse,* by Gerhard von Rad, *RTL* 3 (1972): 345–49, esp. 345.

## Cultural Context for *Weisheit*

In many respects, *Weisheit* was a postwar book. During von Rad's first university post at Jena (1934–1945), he survived as a marginalized professor with hardly any students—due no doubt to his dangerous insistence that the Hebrew Bible remained an indispensable part of the *Christian* Bible.[33] Moreover, scholars who resisted Nazi ideology avoided *Schöpfungstheologie* and *Ordnungen*, because German-Christian theologians abused them to justify Hitler.[34] Postwar, culminating in *Weisheit*, von Rad increasingly reflected on Israel's *Weltlichkeit*, her *Wirklichkeitsverständnis*, wisdom, and orders in a way that seemed unthinkable under Hitler—except for a German theologian who was murdered at Hitler's command just as the war was ending.

### 1945–1971 and the Development of von Rad's Mature Approach

Though he had a formidable knowledge of wisdom research in his day, von Rad did not consider it modern, nor were current methods suited to the didactic books.[35] Instead, he adapted intellectual developments from outside the biblical guild to devise a suitable problematics.[36] Contributors to this complex stream included Wilhelm Dilthey and Heidegger, but two figures more immediately aided *Weisheit*'s project. Most important was Gadamer, von Rad's colleague at Heidelberg.[37] The second, theologian and martyr Bonhoeffer, knew von Rad from childhood. They later

---

33. James Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, MMTM (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 20–21; Konrad von Rabenau, "Als Student bei Gerhard von Rad in Jena 1943–45," in *Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne*, ed. Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Michael Welker, ATM 8 (Münster: LIT, 2004), 7–12; Bernard M. Levinson, "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church," *Int* 62 (2008): 238–54.

34. Against the two-realms theory, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, DBW 6 (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1992), 41–48.

35. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 1 (*Vorwort*).

36. Von Rad's spiritual and intellectual influences outside the biblical guild remain a research desideratum.

37. Another Heidegger student, philosophical historian Karl Löwith, was also von Rad's colleague at Heidelberg.

became spiritual-intellectual colleagues in the church struggle against Hitler's regime.[38]

## Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*

At least two years before *Wahrheit* appeared, von Rad was teaching graduate students about Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte*.[39] Only later, in the expanded *Vorwort* to the fourth edition of *Theologie des alten Testaments* in a paragraph absent from the English, did von Rad note his debt to Gadamer and the closeness of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to his own tradition-historical method.[40] In January 1971, philosopher Pierre Fruchon published an essay, to my knowledge the first account of Gadamer's influence on von Rad's hermeneutics.[41] Only in the mid-1980s did an *Altestamentler* write about von Rad and Gadamer—but not about Gadamer and *Weisheit*![42]

In *Weisheit*, von Rad's hermeneutics became more explicit, partly because wisdom was less amenable to the methods used in *Theologie des alten Testaments*[43] and partly to give readers clarity about his new approach. Beginning with his *Vorwort* and *Fragestellung*, von Rad used Gadamerian concepts[44] and questions to shape his book's argument. The

---

38. Gerhard von Rad, "Meetings in Early and Late Years," in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1973), 176–78.

39. Magne Sæbø, "Gerhard von Rads exegetisches 'Fingerspitzengefühl': Eine Reminiszenz an Gerhard von Rad," in Oeming, Schmid, and Welker, *Alte Testament*, 1–2.

40. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Munich: Kaiser, 1962).

41. Pierre Fruchon, "Sur l'Hermeneutique de Gerhard von Rad," *RSPT* 55 (1971): 4–32.

42. Manfred Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985). See the enthusiastic account of Oeming's book in James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 497–512. Oeming's critique of Gadamer failed to understand Gadamer's Heideggerian distinction between *ontic* knowledge (i.e., the various *Wissenschaften* with their *delimited* provinces) and *ontological* knowledge of *Sein*, concerning the *meaning* of life and reality as a whole, which is a necessary *precondition* for science (*Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart*, 45–57). The special sciences by their very nature cannot answer worldview questions of meaning. Oeming also missed the role of Hegelian dialectic in Gadamer's thought.

43. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 7–8 (*Vorwort*), 13–27 (*Fragestellung*).

44. E.g., *Wahrheitsanspruch,* nonexistence of *voraussetzungslose Erfahrungen*, *Umwelt* (technical term from Heidegger), *Verstehenshorizont*.

*Fragestellung* broke new ground. As noted, one clue to von Rad's debt to Gadamer was his use of play to articulate wisdom's artistry and truth.[45] All art possesses a *Wahrheitsanspruch* about reality that it lays on all who enter an artwork's world in its integral wholeness.[46] Without recognizing a *Kunstwerk*'s truth, one has not actually experienced it, nor heard the voice of the other in it.[47] Art was a form of *Erkenntnis*, in which reality became conscious and articulate.[48]

Von Rad considered the book of Proverbs to be the definitive entrance to Israel's wisdom. He devoted more than half of *Weisheit* to its sayings and

---

45. The classic study on play remains Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1971).

46. Gadamer argued that historical-critical analysis of a work's sources or traditions prevents a unitary *experience* of the artwork. Thus, for example, von Rad found himself unable to experience Job in its final form (dialogues plus prose tale) as a unity, because of their contradictions (*Weisheit*, 292). But this conclusion evades the question of Job's meaning in its final form and of the artistic intention of its final redactor. In effect, this analysis cut short his account of the book's internal *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Von Rad also failed to consider that his *etic* modern analysis of the work's *genetic* disunity (which I consider valid) cannot explain the evident *emic* reality, that the ancient redactor, who *united* the prose and poetry and made of them one new *Kunstwerk*, did not consider such genetic and logical contradictions to be obstacles to the unity of his new artwork. Such ancient *bricolage* (Levi Strauss) was common, both in visual art and literary works; it entails that modern *logical* or narrative standards for artistic unity are not necessarily those of the ancient artists who created this "art of juxtaposition." It is instructive to compare the internally contradictory cosmic portrait found in Egyptian "Nut and Geb" pictures with the world structure that emerges from Gen 1 with its רקיע. See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 7–11, and the figures of Nut and Geb, 31–39, esp. fig. 32. From a historical-critical, *etic* perspective, it is impossible to "read" Nut and Geb or the Pentateuch as a "unity," yet they are. See Joel S. Baden, "Why Is the Pentateuch Unreadable?—Or, Why Are We Doing This Anyway?," in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 243–51.

47. For both Gadamer and von Rad, *Erfahrung* of an artwork provides a window on reality, an experience by which *reality* conveys truth about itself, dialectically uniting the world of the artwork and that of the experiencer.

48. Thus, Gadamer shows himself heir to a line of thought that extends backwards from Heidegger to Georg W. F. Hegel and Neoplatonism. In variants within this Western tradition, reality—designated for example as *Sein* (Being) in Heidegger or *Geist* (Spirit) in Hegel—reveals the *truth* (*die Wahrheit*) about reality to *human* "being" or "spirit" in the flow of history and its cultural products, such as art and philosophy.

to its *Darstellung* of wisdom's worldview in chapters 1–9.[49] Historically, he viewed the Solomonic Enlightenment as the original *Sitz im Leben* (see Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1) in which Proverbs' "old wisdom" sayings were compiled and given literary form. Moreover, his *Schlussbetrachtung* concerned mainly Proverbs.

The first page of *Weisheit*'s *Fragestellung* laid out the Gadamerian nature of its quest.[50] Heidegger and Gadamer had shown that data and details only make sense in terms of a pregiven cultural world. Human life requires the support of socially mediated *Erfahrungswissen*, of which humans are hardly aware (*bewusst*). Since humans think and act within a preformed web of communal meaning,[51] *Erfahrung* arises only in terms of *Voraussetzungen*—unlike empiricism with its perceptual tabula rasa and objectivity. Such a web—call it worldview or tradition—comprises the unconscious point of view of a society's *Weltverständnis*. A point of view defines a *Verstehenshorizont*, beyond which *Erfahrung* ceases. Thus, readers must discover wisdom's *Weltanschauung*, lest they misconstrue the sayings in terms of some other presuppositional world.

In Gadamer's line, *worldview* referred to a society's usually hidden, self-evident, unstated assumptions and commitments about reality—to its communal point of view. "What we find in those periods when the same world picture is held by almost all is that repeated reference to it is considered superfluous. This explains why it is not always practicable to show with the help of explicit texts and quotations that a particular author sets out from certain cosmological premises."[52] Worldviews can be articulated but mostly function unconsciously, as the colored lens through which we perceive and organize reality. That is, humans experience the world in terms of pregiven cultural categories that we ourselves did not devise. These categories are all the more powerful for being generally unconscious, "tacit knowledge," *with which* we think, rather than "focal

---

49. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 13–228; see also "Weisheit und Kultus," 240–44; "Schlussbetrachtung," 364–405. The biblical index devotes roughly five pages to Proverbs, nearly three to von Rad's beloved Ben Sira, two pages to Job, and less than a page to Ecclesiastes. On worldview, see below. See also Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9," *Semeia* 50 (1990): 111–44.

50. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 13; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3.

51. See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

52. N. Max Wildiers, *The Theologian and His Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 60.

awareness" of that *about which* we think.[53] Thus, Gadamer noted that all thought begins in prejudice, which is not so much a negative as it is an inescapable precondition of thought and action. The Enlightenment tradition foisted on the West the strange idea that we can think objectively, untrammeled by tradition or prejudice.

Readers, even sophisticated ones, readily misconstrue the past in terms of their own worldview.[54] Alternately, scholars may hypothesize some worldview or *Sitz im Leben* as the explanatory context for ancient utterances, easily falling into a vicious circle, wherein the text explains the *Sitz*, and the *Sitz* explains the text. If the *Weltanschauung* of Israel's wisdom texts is not carefully unearthed, one will not hear Israel's sayings in their otherness. Outside their own *Weltverständnis*, many sayings mean something different, probably something merely modern,[55] thus destroying the fruitful dialectic of past and present in nuce. In spite of its difficulty, wrote von Rad, "darf der Versuch einer Rekonstruktion des geistig-religiösen Horizonts, dem die Sentenzen entstammen, unter keinen Umständen aufgegeben werden."[56]

Proverbs 1–9 answered von Rad's question concerning wisdom's "tiefsinnig religiös-weltanschaulich" dimension by providing an immediate hermeneutical foundation for wisdom's house.[57] Second, he argued that the wisdom literature, with its "*Furcht Jahwes*," presupposed some form of Yahwism as found in the cult, laws, covenants, and narratives known from Israel's historical traditions. Eventually, von Rad's double answer would entail rethinking the place of wisdom in Israel,[58] but several scholars in his day objected vociferously.

---

53. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy*, Gifford Lectures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

54. Albert Schweitzer's *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, 9th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), is a classic demonstration of this phenomenon.

55. For critique of a typical example from the empiricist horizon, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs 30:21–23 and the Biblical World Upside Down," *JBL* 105 (1986): 599–610.

56. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 51.

57. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 51.

58. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 39–73. See Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Mark Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

One reviewer declared that *Weisheit*'s formal analysis in *Erkenntnis-bindende Formen* "breaks no new ground."[59] In a strictly form-critical sense, this was valid, but in overlooking von Rad's references to Gadamer, it missed what was new. Gadamer argued that art conveyed *Erkenntnis* about reality, knowledge that the *Naturwissenschaften* could not provide. Science concerned abstract aspects of reality, such as energy, and biotic functioning.[60] Art provided knowledge of reality's meaning. Art communicated meaning that discrete facts could not—an echo of Aristotle's insight that poetry was truer than history. Thus, *Weisheit* understood the art of wisdom in terms of form-critical genres, especially the *Kunstspruch*. And while Heidegger pursued meaning via *Dasein*'s ambiguous, everyday existence *zum Tode*, von Rad saw Israel's poetic knowledge of practical life as something positive, open toward God and pressing *zum Leben*.

Further, one cannot know *Dasein* without knowing *Dasein*'s temporal world. This was perhaps the deepest insight *Weisheit* owed to Heidegger and Gadamer. It pushed him beyond Western theology, which focused on knowledge of "God and the soul" (Augustine). However, *Weisheit*'s radical *Weltlichkeit* went beyond Gadamer's by developing Bonhoeffer's biblical insight, that knowing reality required knowing God—and vice versa. Contrary to modern views, Israel's experience of God, world, and humans was *one Erfahrung*, not *three*.[61] For Israel, experience without all three aspects collapsed, like a two-legged stool. This unified threefold knowledge was the basis for Israel's life and wisdom.

For von Rad—though still under the sway of form criticism, with its too simplistic understanding of *Sitz* and literary art—this all meant that each wisdom form embodied truth about life in the world. Accordingly, he titled his chapter on wisdom's art *Erkentnissbindende Formen*. He did not, however, adequately clarify the question as to how each individual saying as a *Kunstwerk* could be true or how each related to the *Kunst* of Proverbs as a composite literary whole, as a repertoire of sayings from which a wise, artful choice of the one most fitting saying had to be made, so as to activate its potential *Wahrheitsanspruch* about reality (see Prov 26:1–12 and Job's friends).

---

59. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel," 301.

60. See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 18.

61. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 16–17, 86–89, 256.

Von Rad's use of others was creative. Dilthey had brought *Weltan-schauung* to the fore.[62] Von Rad's late work joined *Weltanschauung* and *Verstehenshorizont* as correlate aspects of the same phenomenon. These correlates shaped the question engaging *Weisheit* from beginning to end: what was the *Weltanschauung* cum *Verstehenshorizont*[63] within which Israel's wisdom (especially its basic genre, the *Weisheitsspruch*) properly functioned for Israel and potentially for us today?

## Bonhoeffer's Late Writings: *Ethik* and *Widerstand und Ergebung*

While Heidegger and Gadamer were essential for *Weisheit*'s *Fragestellung*, Bonhoeffer provided modern formulations of biblical viewpoints that deepened von Rad's insight into wisdom's *Denkweise*, which in turn he used to question modern viewpoints. This precedent enabled von Rad to reframe Heidegger in terms of a biblical-Christian worldview that offered deeper insight into the Old Testament's otherness, thereby fostering a truer, mutually critical dialogue between past and present.[64] Writing his *Ethik* before prison, Bonhoeffer saw that the German-Christian church, with its dualistic, two-realms, sacred-secular worldview, had in effect abandoned the godly worldliness and unity of life essential to Israel's mature Yahwism. By splitting reality, the German Christians had surrendered to the state their human responsibility for worldly life. Bonhoeffer's youthful *Akt und Sein* had been largely a Christian response to Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. His late *Ethik* implicitly continued this conversation by providing a formidable alternative: a unified, biblical-Christian worldview that took Heidegger's ontological questions and insights seriously. Similar deep-level worldview dialectic between the Hebrew Bible and modern forms of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on are a desideratum, if interreligious dialogue is to be anything other than superficial talking past one another.

---

62. Today, *Weltanschauung*, or worldview, in a variety of senses is widespread in casual use and also in biblical studies. For its technical and philosophical use to which von Rad is heir, see especially Naugle, *Worldview*.

63. Henceforth I will be using *worldview* or *Weltanschauung* as shorthand for the culture-defining correlates "worldview" and "horizon of understanding" operative in any coherent society.

64. It is fitting that the series commemorating von Rad's one hundredth birth-day reflected this hermeneutical reality in its title, *Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne*.

*Wirklichkeit*,[65] *Welt/lich/keit*, and *Leben* were central themes from Bonhoeffer's *Ethik* and *Widerstand* that von Rad used throughout to articulate Israel's wisdom. For both, the words concerned the ontological nature of life in the world. Thus, to exclude any theological misreading of *Weltlich* as the supposedly godless, secular realm in the traditional two-realm worldview, both authors quoted a chapter title from *Sein und Zeit*, "Die Weltlichkeit der Welt," to make their ontological intention clear.[66] Positively, for both, this entailed an insistence on the unity of reality and the unity of Israel's experience thereof.[67] Conversely, both employed this ancient worldview of cosmic unity to question modernity's bifurcated experience of reality.[68]

In effect, Bonhoeffer and von Rad reframed in biblical-Christian terms Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* as inherently world-embedded.[69] For instance, Bonhoeffer quoted with emphasis a section title from *Sein und Zeit:* "Die Geschichtlichkeit des menschlichen Daseins."[70] Von Rad even used *Dasein* in his translation of Job 9:21b—"Ich verachte mein Dasein"

---

65. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, especially the chapter "Christus, die Wirklichkeit, und das Gute," where the term is ubiquitous. For Bonhoeffer, the reality of Christ and the reality of the world are not the same, yet they are inseparable since the one cannot be had without the other (*Ethik*, 41–48).

66. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 223, 404–5; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 89. Here von Rad puts the phrase *in quotation marks*, in opposition to the "Säkularismus" of Heidegger's worldview—but without mentioning Heidigger's name. See the variants, "'*Weltlichkeit*' *seiner* [Israel's] *Welt*," "*Verweltlichung der Welt*," *Welthaftigkeit der Welt*" (*Weisheit in Israel*, 85, 132–33, 142). This last usage is especially significant in that it avoids the ambiguity of *Weltlichkeit*, which might be taken by some religious in the *negative* sense of "godless" and sinful, and by others today as *positive*, i.e., also as "godless," but freed by reason from the superstitious fantasies of religion. Von Rad carefully distinguishes Israel's *godly* secularism and worldliness from Christian two-realm thinking and from modernity's quest for an entirely naturalistic world not needing the god hypothesis. *Weisheit*'s clearest engagement with Heidegger's ontology appears on page 400, again without mentioning his name.

67. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 38 43, 48; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 16–17, 86–89, 251.

68. On this hermeneutical move, see Pannenberg below; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 85, 251.

69. Note von Rad's reference to "eine Phänomenologie des in seine Umwelt eingebundenen Menschen.… Ohne diese Umwelt, der er zugekehrt ist, und die ihm zugekehrt ist, war in Israel ein Menschenverständnis überhaupt nicht möglich" (*Weisheit in Israel*, 400).

70. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik,* 219 n. 7.

(אמאס חיי).[71] For Heidegger, *Dasein* was the only temporal-historical (*geschichtlich*) being who could articulate the self-revelation of Being (*Sein*).[72] Von Rad went further, in that Israel received divine revelation not only in history, law, cult, and covenant but also, with all humans, from cosmic Wisdom, "die Selbstoffenbarung der Schöpfung"—a biblical counterpart to revelatory "Being" in Heidegger.[73] On this point, Zimmerli raised questions concerning the relationship of the first (creation) and second (*Heilsgeschichte*) articles of the creed to each other.[74] Similarly, following Zimmerli, Crenshaw asked whether von Rad equated general and special revelation.[75]

Though *Weisheit* never cited *Ethik* (as *Ethik* never cited Heidegger),[76] the two books were profoundly congruent in their shared worldview and its articulation. Two of von Rad's most important formulations were virtual paraphrases from *Ethik*. In prison Bonhoeffer had increasingly turned to the Old Testament with its realistic *Weltlichkeit* as his guide for living in resistance to Nazism.[77] Contrary to the modern bifurcated worldview around him, Old Testament study led Bonhoeffer to a worldview formulation expressed in near-poetic parallelism: "so dass ich die Wirklichkeit Gottes nie ohne die Wirklichkeit der Welt und die Wirklichkeit der Welt nie ohne die Wirklichkeit Gottes erfahre."[78] With a shock of recognition, one encounters von Rad's paraphrase of this in his description of Israel's experience: "Die Erfahrungen von der Welt waren [Israel] immer auch Gotteserfahrungen, und die Erfahrungen von Gott waren ihm Welterfahrungen."[79] As von Rad stated Israel's united experience of *Gotteswirklichkeit* and *die Wirklichkeit der Welt*, Bonhoeffer had earlier stated the oneness of *die Wirklichkeit Gottes* (or *Christuswirklichkeit*) and *die Wirklichkeit der Welt*.

---

71. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 276; see 252, 394, 399–400.

72. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 219 (with n. 7 on Heidegger), 227, 233, 245–47.

73. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 189–228.

74. Zimmerli, "Die Weisheit Israels," 693–94.

75. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel," 306.

76. The editors of the *Ethik*, however, make six references to Heidegger (510, *Register*). Exploration of Heidegger's impact on the *Ethik* remains a desideratum for Bonhoeffer scholarship, which has focused mostly on *Akt und Sein*.

77. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, DBW 8 (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1998), 188, 226–27, 415, 499–501.

78. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 31–61, 40–44, and especially 235–38.

79. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 87.

Later, von Rad elaborated: "Immer ist der Mensch *ganz in der Welt*, und immer hat er es *ganz* mit Jahwe zu tun."[80] Martin distorted von Rad's elegant parallelism by adding *must* and *only*: "Man is always *wholly* in the world [secular], and he *must* always deal *only* with Yahweh [sacred].[81]" By pitting *is* versus *ought*, and implicit secular versus sacred, his translation implied exactly the sort of bifurcated worldview Israel rejected according to von Rad. Here again, von Rad's thought had its predecessor in Bonhoeffer's Christian formulation: "Seine [der Christ als *Ganzer*] Weltlichkeit trennt ihn nicht von Christus, und seine Christlichkeit trennt ihn nicht von der Welt. *Ganz* Christus angehörend steht er zugleich *ganz in der Welt*."[82] Contrary to modern usage, *Welt* and *Weltlich* did not refer to a secular or neutral segment of reality, free from god, religious ideology, and subjective beliefs. Rather, *Weisheit* echoed Bonhoeffer's usage, where *Weltlichkeit* included all of reality, as the positive, God-created *Lebenswelt*. All of life was de facto *weltlich* and yet, knowingly or unknowingly, entirely involved with God.

Biblically, for Bonhoeffer and von Rad, responsible human action (*Verantwortung*) was *Wirklichkeitsgemäss*, it "corresponded to reality,"[83] where reality included God, the world with its *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, and others. To talk of reality without God was an unreal abstraction. Moreover, responsible human action is *weltlich*, taking place in the world and for the world, especially others.[84] All these elements played their role in von Rad's description of wise action in Israel—not as a dogmatic (Christian) imposition on the Hebrew Bible but as a discovery aided by the Bible's own *Wirkungsgeschichte* via Bonhoeffer. In Israel, good action led to good outcomes and evil to bad—the well-known *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*: "Das Gute wurde von [Israel] einfach als eine Macht erfahren, als etwas schlechthin Lebensbestimmendes, also als etwas Vorhandenes, etwas täglich Erfahrenes und auch Wirksames, über das so wenig zu diskutieren war, wie über Licht und Finsternis.… Gut is das, was gut tut; böse das, was Schaden verursacht."[85] Similar views were common also in other ancient cultures such as Greece.[86]

---

80. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 129.
81. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 95, emphasis added.
82. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 48.
83. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, 226; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, *passim*.
84. Bonhoeffer's notion of *Verantwortung* as *Stellvertretung* (*Ethik*, 256–58) has its predecessor in Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 122.
85. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 106; see 110–11, 119.
86. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 108–10, 148.

Bonhoeffer's positive use of *Ordnungen* and *Weltlichkeit* in his late works may have helped von Rad to employ these concepts in *Weisheit* and to recover a richer view of creation. There was a change in horizons between von Rad's *Theologie des alten Testaments* and *Weisheit* with regard to creation and wisdom. The former saw creation as historically late and subordinate to salvation (see Karl Barth); the later book's *Weltlichkeit* and "Selbstoffenbarung der Schöpfung" left those ideas far behind.[87]

To Bonhoeffer may be ascribed also von Rad's rejection of abstract principles for human conduct and his emphasis on *Leben* as the goal of wisdom, rather than ethics or morality per se.[88] Wisdom, of course, presupposed that one cannot be wise without godliness (*Gottesfurcht*) and goodness (צדקה). Thus, the pervasive oppositions of wise versus foolish and good (צדק) versus wicked (רשע). Thus, the sayings, wrote von Rad, rarely correspond to the Ten Commandments or Sermon on the Mount.[89] Rather, they range through every area of life, from the trivial to the weightiest and most difficult, and their goal was the flourishing of *life* in all its aspects. For wisdom, good fostered good, but the bad did harm.[90] Wisdom's scope was much broader than mere moral right and wrong.

What von Rad Set Out to Accomplish and What He Achieved in *Weisheit*

One of the profoundest expositions of von Rad's interpretative goals and achievements was a commemorative lecture, given in Heidelberg a year after von Rad's death.[91] Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg wrote that Von Rad "knew—as still few today do—how to communicate an awareness [*Bewusstsein*] that through engaging the words and stories of the Bible, *we were also equally engaged with our own reality* [*Wirklichkeit*]." By exposing the differences in Israel's thought and experience, he managed, indirectly, to bring this thought near to his hearers and readers. "Entscheidend dafür

---

87. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/1* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1945), passim.

88. Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*, "Register," s.v. *Prinzip(ien)* and *Leben* for extensive references; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 102–3, 119, 128.

89. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 102–3; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 74–75.

90. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 106; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 77.

91. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit im Denken Gerhard von Rads," in *Gerhard von Rad. Seine Bedeutung für die Theologie: Drei Reden von H. W. Wolff, R. Rendtorff, W. Pannenberg*, ed. Hans W. Wolff, Rolf Rendtorff, and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Munich: Kaiser, 1973), 37–54, 57–58.

war, dass die Hervorhebung des Abstandes altisraelitischer Gedanken und Auffassungsweisen gegenüber unseren modernen Denkgewohnheiten immer mit einer skeptischen Infragestellung der letzteren verbunden war."[92] In particular, Pannenberg viewed von Rad's demonstration of "the unity of faith, reason, and experience [*Erfahrung*]" in Israel as a fundamental challenge to modern philosophy and theology, which it needed to take seriously.

Von Rad—without becoming a naive or uncritical biblical scholar—set the *Wirklichkeitsverständnis* in his texts into a dialogue of ancient and modern worldviews, where each queried the other's perspective on reality. In contrast to Rudolf Bultmann, wrote Pannenberg, in von Rad's work "werden die biblischen Texte in ihrer vollen historischen Andersartigkeit zur Frage an die Gegenwart, weil *dieselbe* Wirklichkeit—die des Menschen, der Welt und der Geschichte—von ihren Verfassern ganz anders erfahren wurde als in der Moderne."[93] Pannenberg also saw that in the later works, especially *Weisheit*, von Rad's hermeneutical approach became increasingly explicit and self-aware. The point was not to substitute a biblical worldview for our modern one but that through exegetical-hermeneutical confrontation with the Bible, our own understanding of reality might undergo a "a broadening and deepening" ("Erweiterung und Vertiefung heutiger Wirklichkeitserfahrung und heutigen Wirklichkeitsverständnisses").[94] Among the critical questions that the Bible implicitly put to modernity via von Rad's work was that raised by Israel's experience and knowledge of one world, in contrast to modern experience of that same world, fractured by assumed ontic and epistemic dichotomies such as nature versus culture, fact versus value, sacred versus secular, and (subjective) faith versus (objective) reason.[95]

Pannenberg also saw that von Rad's reflections on the relation between *Heilsgeschichte* and wisdom literature left an unsolved problem for future scholarship.[96] In brief, wisdom literature was virtually devoid of refer-

---

92. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 38–39; see also 41.

93. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 40.

94. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 43.

95. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 38, 44–46; especially 45, concerning the possibility that modernity's separation of faith and reason was fostered by a "perverted understanding of faith" and an equally truncated notion of reason.

96. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 50–51.

ences to Israel's history, cult, covenant, or law,[97] so that scholars had cut off Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes from the rest of the Bible. Von Rad, however, with the deeper insight of a master, pursued not only the differences between wisdom literature and Israel's historical traditions but also the similarities that bound them together.[98] Pannenberg notes that, in his late work, von Rad increasingly turned to the question of Israel's *Wirklichkeitsverständnis*, a term parallel to *Weltanschauung* and *Verstehenshorizont*.[99] Von Rad came to the conclusion that the same implicit worldview was presupposed in Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*, prophets, and wisdom. In Pannenberg's words,

> Die Offenheit der Wirklichkeit noch in ihren relativ eigengesetzlichen Ordnungen und Regelmässigkeiten auf das Geheimnis Gottes und seines Wirkens hin, wie Gerhard von Rad sie als spezifisch für das Weltverständnis der israelitischen Weisheit herausgearbeitet hat, ist nicht nur als Folge des Jahweglaubens zu verstehen, sondern zugleich auch als Voraussetzung des Glaubens an ein göttliches Geschichtshandeln…. Ohne die verborgene Präzenz Gottes in der Geheimnistiefe der Wirklichkeit, die wir erfahren, bliebe das Reden von einem Handeln Gottes in der Geschichte unverständlich.[100]

---

97. Most recently Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"*; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Theology: Creation, Wisdom, and Covenant," in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, ed. Will Kynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

98. Critical biblical scholarship has long emphasized *differences* among surface features of texts to posit discrete sources, traditions, and the hypothetical social groups that created them. Too often such procedures stultify themselves through circular reasoning and through the severe limits imposed on historians by the paucity of texts and historical sources at our disposal. Von Rad, however, acknowledged also the *similarities* among biblical texts that bound them together, whether on the surface or on the deep level of tacit presuppositions and worldview. On the limits of the evidence and "facts" with which historians must work, see the classic statement of Edward F. Carr, *What Is History?* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1964), 7–30. On the logic of analyzing and synthesizing *differences* and *similarities* in the humanities, see Ernst Cassirer's astute use of Kant to clarify this problem and its pitfalls in Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 1–17.

99. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 51.

100. Pannenberg, "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," 51. See the important essay by von Rad's last Heidelberg assistant, Rolf P. Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," in *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 171–224.

## Von Rad's Quest to Understand the Nature of Old Testament Wisdom and the Implicit *Weltanschauung* Underlying Israel's Sayings and Admonitions

More than half of *Weisheit* is occupied with two mutually related questions posed by the book of Proverbs. The first arises from the individual sayings and admonitions in Prov 10–29: What was the *Verstehenshorizont* in ancient Israel within which these sayings communicated? Following Gadamer, von Rad recognized that understanding a human utterance required not only a concrete situation but also its broader, unstated cultural context: history, language, religion, material culture, symbol systems, social hierarchy, and more. Such tacit knowledge, as *Weltanschauung*, was presupposed in any utterance's communicative use. This problem occupied *Weisheit* throughout, especially in regard to Proverbs. What unstated assumptions and experience of God, world, and humans were operative in the short sayings?

On the one hand, worldviews constitute a society's common point of view—the largely unconscious beliefs and commitments about the world and things that unify a society and are the lenses through which things are seen and understood.[101] On the other hand, a worldview also entails a *Verstehenshorizont*, which constitutes the boundary of every personal and societal point of view. Beyond this horizon, the meaning of things, events, and actions is opaque. So, argued Gadamer, unless one possesses a self-aware knowledge of one's own limited horizon, one inevitably misreads things in a society with a different worldview.[102] We humans cannot escape our own worldview, for we cannot cease to be ourselves. Consequently, understanding the past requires that we extend our horizon by entering and inhabiting an ancient one. We do so via immersion in its arts, literature, and material culture. The meaning and truth of texts is found in *Horizontverschmelzung*.

--------

101. In the last decades there has been much discussion of multiculturalism, as if this means there are many operative worldviews, say, in American society. On the surface this appears true, but on the deeper levels of assumptions, American society has been monolithically united in its overwhelming *commitment* to an individualistic, consumerist worldview. See sociologist Robert Bellah, "Is America a Multicultural Society?," *JAAR* 66 (1998): 613–25.

102. See Edward E. Evans-Pritchard's account of the "if I were a horse" fallacy in his *Primitive Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 24, 43.

Given a different society and horizon of understanding, the identical words and texts can mean something different.[103] Von Rad argued this with regard to the Israelite worldview within which the sayings functioned—in contrast to what they might mean within a modern horizon. In this way, von Rad sought to let the sayings speak their ancient wisdom to modernity, especially Jews and Christians committed to the Bible.

This worldview problem was especially acute with regard to the secular sayings, which made no mention of god or YHWH. For modern interpreters it was all too easy to read Proverbs in terms of the various splits between sacred faith and secular reason in their various post-Kantian forms. Thus, many interpreters of von Rad's day assumed a modern *Verstehenshorizont* for the worldly sayings, which removed them from their native religious worldview. Modern scholars, like McKane—whose Proverbs commentary appeared the same year as *Weisheit* and whose views von Rad explicitly rejected—separated secular sayings, from religious or theological sayings that mentioned YHWH.[104] On the basis of a modern separation of secular and sacred, McKane then read this difference diachronically, so that originally secular sayings were separated from later Yahwistic saying. Similar unconscious modern worldview assumptions led McKane to create a radical separation and conflict between secular-rational, *real-Politik*, wise men, and the sacred-irrational Yahwistic prophets, who condemned them.[105] Von Rad made similar worldview objections to Hans Heinrich Schmid's 1965 *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*.[106]

Von Rad pursued the question of wisdom's often hidden worldview and *Verstehenshorizont* in two ways. He sought, first of all, to analyze the *Denkweise* implicit in the sayings. Second, he argued that Prov 1–9—especially 1:7; 9:10 and the self-revelation of Wisdom in Prov 8—functioned

---

103. Even in the micro-context of an immediate situation a single proverb can mean entirely different things. Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblet, "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning," in *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, ed. Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes (New York: Garland, 1981), 111–21; Peter Seitel, "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor," *Genre* 2 (1969): 143–61. Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson demonstrate the dependence of all linguistic meaning on (nonlinguistic) context. See Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

104. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 95 n. 12.

105. William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men*, SBT 44 (London: SCM, 1965).

106. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 381–2 n. 16.

hermeneutically to make explicit the unitary worldview behind *all* the say-
ings in Proverbs. This argument was basic to the entire book: "Es wird der
Überlegungen dieses ganzen Buches bedürfen, um einigen der Folgerun-
gen nachzudenken, die dieser Satz [Prov 1:7; 9:10] umschloss.… Alles, was
für oder gegen die Weisheit Israels gesagt werden kann, ist in diesem Satz
ausgesprochen."[107] In other respects, of course, Israel's wisdom was much
like that of the ancient Near East. Von Rad, however, wished to focus on
Israel's literary wisdom per se, because cross-cultural comparisons were
premature until a fuller understanding of Israel's wisdom as a whole was
achieved.[108] Where he did use the ancient Near East, he turned mostly to
Greece and Egypt (Maat via Christa Kayatz, and the *onomastica*) rather
than to Mesopotamia (a tendency that has remained in wisdom studies),
though he did reckon with texts such as von Soden's *Listenwissenschaft*
and the "Dialogue of Pessimism."

Throughout *Weisheit*, then, von Rad sought to articulate the presup-
positions and implicit *Weltanschauung* that provided the intellectual and
spiritual *Verstehenshorizont* for Israel's wisdom, especially the sayings
and admonitions in Proverbs. So, von Rad pursued the nature, context,
and hermeneutics of wisdom in Israel and not simply the nature of the
wisdom literature—though perhaps the distinction was not entirely clear
to him, since fifty years later, it is still not clear. For example, most studies
of wisdom at Qumran still focus on genres while ignoring the ubiqui-
tous wisdom vocabulary in nonwisdom texts. In Second Temple Judaism,
Israel's literature was pervaded by what the late Gerald Sheppard called
"wisdom as a hermeneutical construct" or, more simply, "scribal wisdom."[109]

In his final chapter, *Schlussbetrachtung*, von Rad draws a sharp line
between Israel's wisdom sentences, as general "rules" (*Regeln*) for life, and
historical narrative, which deals with Yahweh's contingent and irreversible
*Geschichtssetzungen*, which cannot be captured in rules because they are
"unique" (*einmalig*).[110] Here, von Rad may have erred, for he also claims
that wisdom was an attempt at "Bewältigung des 'Kontingenten.'"[111] Both

---

107. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 95–96.

108. See von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 21–22.

109. Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as Hermeneutical Construct*, BZAW 151 (Berlin:
de Gruyter, 1980). Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and a Biblical Proverb
at Qumran," *DSD* 4 (1997): 255–64.

110. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 336–37, 367.

111. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 165, 318; see also 395–96.

narrative and wisdom deal with the contingent, albeit in different ways. History writing narrates what God and humans have done, what happens. Each act is unique, because things happen here and now, with this or that person or group and not another. Nevertheless, history is necessarily composed of the intersection of contingent individuality with the general: Socrates is a unique individual, but Socrates is also a human. Thus, von Rad qualifies his point, saying on the one hand that rules, along with their validity and evidence, are not absolute and can change over time as new experiences arise. On the other hand, he recognizes, as noted, that historical events are not absolutely unique, so that here too patterns can be discerned and rules formulated, as is done in biblical typology.

This conceptual weakness, on the wisdom side, came from von Rad's failure to fully explore, as paremiologists have done,[112] the synchronic, self-contradictory nature of any proverb set (i.e., the active proverb repertoire of a culturally competent person), and that proverb use is a form of performance art in which the user needs wisdom to activate a saying's truth as a comment on a concrete reality topic. He clearly recognized proverbial contradictions, as his chapter "Grenzen der Weisheit" makes clear, but he offered mainly a diachronic explanation for the phenomenon, leading to a great dialogue of "Wahres gegen Wahres,"[113] which was a Gadamerian move.

Two critics attacked von Rad's failure to exploit paremiology. In 1971, Claus Westermann criticized von Rad's approach to proverbial wisdom in volume 1 of *Theologie des alten Testaments*. He argues, counter to von Rad's setting wisdom in the royal court and in schools, that the *Sitz im Leben* of proverbs was oral and preliterary.[114] Westermann's argument was taken up in a strident attack on *Weisheit* by Friedemann Golka, whose title "exposed" von Rad as wearing "the emperor's new clothes."[115]

---

112. A pioneering study was Carole R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982). See Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 1, 134. For the vast field of paremiology, see now Hrisztalina Hirisztova-Gotthardt and Melita Aleska Varga, eds., *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverbs Studies* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

113. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 394–97.

114. Claus Westermann, "Weisheit in Sprichwort," in *Schalom: Studien zu Glaube und Geschichte Israels*, ed. Karl-Heinz Bernhardt (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1971), 73–85. Westermann developed his views more fully in *Wurzeln der Weisheit: Die ältesten Sprüche Israels und anderer Völker* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

115. Friedemann Golka, "Die israelitische Weisheitschule oder 'des Kaisers neue Kleider,'" *VT* 33 (1983): 257–70.

In spite of weaknesses in their arguments, Westermann and Golka's point stands: paremiological studies are necessary because proverbs, like language, are primarily oral and only secondarily literary. In addition, Westermann and Golka raised questions that continue to be debated: What was the relationship, in form and function, of literary proverbs (*Kunstsprüche*) to oral proverbs in everyday use? Was there a significant difference in origin and function between the use of "sayings" (*Aussagesprüche*) and "admonitions" (*Mahnwörter*)? In what ways was a proverb in a literary collection different from a proverb in oral tradition and use? In raising this last question, Westerman and Golka failed to ask a further necessary question: Is there a significant difference between emic or native collections of proverbs (as in the ancient Near East) and the etic, non-native collections of proverbs from so-called primitive peoples made by missionaries and anthropologists in modern times?

Yet the issue lies deeper. It is the function of sayings and admonitions to comment on a reality topic such as a courtship: Will it be "Marry in haste and repent at leisure," or perhaps "Happy the wooing that's not long in doing!"?[116] As noted above, marriages, like all things, are intersections of the general (marriage and mating) and the unique (this couple here and now in their particular *Umwelt*). Sayings, including biblical ones, deal with this phenomenon by freely contradicting one another, thus requiring wisdom to use the correct proverb to fit the situation: "If the shoe fits, wear it." Thus, both Israel's history writing and its proverbial wisdom deal with the universal intersection of general patterns and the unique and contingent, each in its own way. Proverbs are often narratives in a nutshell as well as rules that can contradict one another so as to fit the unique, since reality and life can be complex and contradictory, in part because God ultimately, and humans relatively, are free in their choices and actions. We may even suggest that contradictory proverbs appear in majority (what is most often the case) and minority forms (what is less often or rarely the case). It is in this sense that von Rad's dictum remains valid, that sayings attempt to find order and master even the contingent. On the other hand, Israel's stories and history writing re-present (Gadamer's *darstellen*) not only unique events and stories but also general patterns of human life with YHWH. This is evident from the cyclical summaries in Judg 2–3 and the repeated

---

116. I use *comment* and *topic* as technical terms adapted from the Prague school of linguistics. See my discussion in Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25–27*, SBLDS 96 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1988), 47–52.

cyclical patterns thereafter, as well as from the repeated proverb-like utterance, "There was no king in the land; everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 18:1a; 19:1a; 21:25), and from the repeated judgments on monarchs in Kings—matters that von Rad himself recognized.[117] But the most profound presentation of general patterns in history is typology, which connects the Old and New Testaments of Christians and which exists within the Hebrew Bible itself.[118]

<div align="center">

Praise and Critique: Early Reviews of *Weisheit*[119]

</div>

Among *Alttestamentler*, Zimmerli offered a meticulous, deeply considered review, which, like Pannenberg's essay, remains a helpful guide to *Weisheit* and a stimulus to further research.[120] After his careful account of the book's main arguments and content, in contrast to Crenshaw, Zimmerli apologizes for not having space to adequately praise the artistry of *Weisheit*'s prose: "Vor Allem vermag er [the reviewer] auch von der Kunst der Sprache des Buches, die … immer wieder einmal eine innere Beschwingtheit gewinnt, nur einen unvollkommenen Eindruck zu geben."[121]

In concluding, Zimmerli raises two questions for further research and discussion, questions that remain unresolved decades later.[122] The first concerns *Weisheit*'s exegesis of the Job book and the role of Job's friends within it. Had they failed only Job—by their lack of empathetic listening and solidarity—or had they actually also spoken wrongly about God, as the epilogue states?

---

117. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 366–70.

118. I use *typology* to designate not a *method* of theological interpretation but rather a biblical phenomenon, in which one event is represented as an instance of a pattern found in an earlier event, such as Second Isaiah's use of the exodus theme to represent return from exile. The classic essay remains Erich Auerbach's "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–76.

119. Because my space is limited, I have selected several of the most significant reviews. Of reviews known to me in Dutch, German, French, and English, I have been unable to consult only two.

120. Zimmerli, "Weisheit Israels," 680–95.

121. Zimmerli, "Weisheit Israels," 691.

122. See Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 271–306; Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"*; Van Leeuwen, "Theology: Creation, Wisdom, and Covenant."

> Hat Hiob nicht nach der Aussage des Hiobbuches in all seinem Rebellie-
> ren dem im Geheimnishandelnden Gott in ganz anderer Weise die Ehre
> gegegben als die Freunde mit den Erfahrungen, die sie ausbreiteten und
> die bei ihnen schliesslich zu dem harten, wirklichkeitsfremden Postulat
> führten, dass Hiob ein besonderer Sünder gewesen sein müsse?[123]

If so, said Zimmerli, then the Job book was much closer to Ecclesiastes
than would appear from von Rad's quasi-rejection of the latter from Isra-
el's sacred canon.

Admittedly, like Job, Qoheleth's experience of "die Rätsel der
*Weltwirklichkeit*" kept him from trusting in God's world order of acts and
consequences in the way that traditional wisdom seemed to do. But the
issue for Zimmerli, contra von Rad, was not so much a failure of trust but
rather that both Job and Ecclesiastes, each with its own agenda and focus,
developed issues already present in Israel's wisdom and thus gave honor
to Israel's Creator God. "In einer ganz einseitigen Weise ehrt aber auch er
[Qohelet] gleich Hiob in seiner ganz anders artikulierten Mahnung Gott
zu fürchten, die undurchdringliche Majestät dessen, der Zeit und Stunde
in seinen Händen hält.… [Diese] Anerkenntnis [der Majestät Gottes] rät
zur fröhlichen Annahme des je im Tage von Gott Gegebenen und ehrt
Gott in dieser indirekten Weise."[124]

Second, Zimmerli raises again the question, noted by a number of
reviewers, of how Israel's wisdom, rooted in creation theology, was to be
related to her narrative traditions of cult, covenant, law, and God's saving
acts in history. Could the voice of Wisdom in creation save? Could it even
be properly heard and understood without the Law and Prophets of sal-
vation history? Here Zimmerli raises again perennial issues concerning
natural theology versus revelation and the relation of the first and second
articles of the creed.

### Token Praise and Major Complaints: Anglo-American Responses

McKane's response to *Wisdom* indulged in ad hominem pronouncements
somewhat like a crow calling a cardinal black. "Von Rad," he writes, "is
uncompromising in his attachment to his own insights," and with his
"outstanding originality … goes a natural tendency not to pay very much

---

123. Zimmerli, "Weisheit Israels," 692.
124. Zimmerli, "Weisheit Israels," 693.

attention to opinions which conflict with his own."[125] This is simply false. Von Rad's citations show that he was masterfully au courant with wisdom studies, including McKane, with whose opinions he disagreed, meticulously.[126] McKane accuses von Rad of building a "theological system" predefined by his reading of Proverbs' sayings, in terms of which he then understood Prov 8 and parallels, as well as Job, Ecclesiastes, and Sirach. "Has not Von Rad imposed on the sentence literature a theological profundity which is his own rather than one which is found in it? At any rate there are … insurmountable difficulties in this view that all the wisdom sentences in the book of Proverbs can be incorporated into a single theological system."[127] Unfortunately, McKane confuses "system" with *Weltanschauung* and ignores *Weisheit*'s final page, which explicitly rejects *Systembildung* in Israel.[128] By their very nature, worldviews *cannot* be reduced to a system, because that would entail the impossibility of standing entirely *outside* one's own point of view and *Verstehenshorizont*. Gadamer had shown, contrary to empiricist approaches, that the task of exegeting the visible surface of literary texts entailed the equally necessary *historical* task of uncovering and articulating the *unstated* local and worldview *Voraussetzungung* undergirding the texts—coupled with awareness of one's own limited *Verstehenshorizont*.[129] As Pannenberg notes, worldviews can be "extended and deepened" via reading, rereading, and "re-search"— what Polanyi calls *indwelling*.[130]

John Barton was exceptional among Anglo-American respondents in seeing the significance of worldview for von Rad and in contrasting English and German points of view.[131] Barton focuses on von Rad's argument for a historical development from a pan-sacral worldview to that of

125. McKane, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, 98.

126. See von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 86–87, 213–14, where von Rad counters McKane without citation, and 95 n. 12, where he explicitly rejects McKane's thesis in *Prophets and Wise Men*.

127. McKane, review of *Wisdom in Israel*, 99.

128. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 404; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 318.

129. For two very different forms of this sort of approach, note Rolf P. Knierim, *Text and Concept in Leviticus 1:1–9*, FAT 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

130. Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 17–18.

131. John Barton, "Gerhard von Rad on the World-View of Early Israel," *JTS* 35 (1984): 301–23, esp. 304, with nn. 21 and 22 citing *Weisheit in Israel*, 87 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 63), 86 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 61) respectively. It is important to note that von

an early wisdom arising with the Solomonic Enlightenment. He was not concerned whether von Rad was correct in strictly historical terms. Barton seeks rather to show that von Rad's account of the two worldviews was confused. Unfortunately, a simple error led to chaos in Barton's argument. When Barton excerpts two quotations from *Weisheit* to describe early wisdom, he mistakenly presents them as examples of the earlier *pan-sacral* worldview instead: "Experiences of Yahweh were, for Israel, experiences of the world and *vice versa*."[132] Thus, when Barton declares that in early wisdom, "No longer is every perception of the world also and at the same time a perception of Yahweh," he has it exactly wrong.[133]

Like McKane and Martin, Barton's account appears rooted in the previously mentioned empiricist point of view in contrast to *Weisheit*'s Continental viewpoint. Barton himself was aware of this problem, referring to "an idea not always easy to grasp for readers whose religious orientation is different from [von Rad's], especially if they are English."[134] Astutely, Barton recognizes the limits of his own *Verstehenshorizont*, which, with its modern sacred-secular split, rendered understanding the *unified* religious-rational world of von Rad's early wisdom difficult. Ironically, von Rad used the religious worldliness of early wisdom to criticize modern ontological and epistemological dualisms in both their Continental and Anglo-American forms.[135]

Crenshaw devotes two substantial responses to *Wisdom in Israel*, entirely ignoring *Weisheit* except for its prose.[136] Much of his review is difficult to evaluate, for his translation-based claims almost entirely lack citations. He praises von Rad's magisterial skill and poetic sensitivity as an exegete, but his language does little to disguise his puzzlement and negativity. Crenshaw rightly notes that von Rad's idea that a Solomonic

---

Rad's frequent use of *Wirklichkeitsverständnis* functions as a synonym for worldview or *Horizontverschmelzung*, e.g., *Weisheit in Israel*, 59.

132. Barton, "Gerhard von Rad," 304. For the German, see above (*Weisheit in Israel*, 86–87).

133. Barton, "Gerhard von Rad," 305.

134. Barton, "Gerhard von Rad," 313–14.

135. *Weisheit in Israel* refers explicitly to William McKane's *Prophets and Wise Men* (*Weisheit in Israel*, 95 [*Wisdom in Israel*, 68], n. 12). See *Weisheit in Israel*, 86 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 61), where von Rad rejects the tensions between "Glauben und Denken, zwischen Vernunft und Offenbarung," which moderns often "read into" ancient texts.

136. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel"; Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, 97–103, 169.

Enlightenment replaced pan-sacralism is not cogent, since sacral thinking continued long after Solomon, though his appeal to secular legends concerning *Samson* as evidence is puzzling, given their clearly sacral aspects. His main complaint is that von Rad has "baptized" wisdom into the Yahwist faith and "turned sages into worshippers."[137] This objection aims directly at von Rad's main *conclusion* but—as with most readers of the English—fails entirely to understand the nature of his *Fragestellung* and argument or what he means by *weltanschaulich* and *Verstehenshorizont.*

Crenshaw takes up Zimmerli's question about "die Selbstoffenbarung der Schöpfung" and suggests that von Rad equated general and special revelation, with too much weight on the former. But he confusingly describes special revelation as "contemporaneous and mediated by humans," while general is "separated by a long space of time [i.e., ברשית] and mediated by creation"—as if cosmic wisdom were not also contemporaneous and mediated by humans, as *Weisheit* argues throughout.[138] A *consensus* on the relation of creation and *Heilsgeschichte* remains a major desideratum in biblical and theological studies.[139]

Crenshaw writes, "Von Rad calls attention to a prominent missing feature: Israel's sages never put together a consistent world view. Instead they speak of an unfinished and unfinishable dialogue about man and the world on the basis of ambivalence."[140] Crenshaw's quotation here (as usual, without citation) addresses *Wisdom*'s penultimate page, which he misunderstands. Von Rad wrote, "Keine Bemühung um ein theoretisch in sich geschlossenes Weltbild."[141] A *Weltbild* is a theoretical or scientific "world-picture," not a *Weltanschauung*-cum-*Verstehenshorizont*—though as Max Wildiers's usage indicates, worldview and world picture often overlap. Von Rad's point is that Israel had no interest in a closed system or theoretical picture of reality. Crenshaw, however, confuses the *surface* level of (contradictory and conflicting) dialogue concerning ambivalent phenomena with the unified *depth* dimension of wisdom's tacit, mostly unspoken worldview.[142] Von Rad's argument is that there was basically one, Yahwistic

---

137. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel," 301, 304, 305, 308.

138. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel," 306.

139. Important here is Knierim's "Cosmos and History in Israel."

140. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in Israel," 304.

141. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 404.

142. See Wildiers, who demonstrates that vigorous medieval theological argu-

worldview, which was diversely articulated by priests, prophets, and sages. To this Crenshaw strenuously objects.

## Matters Unresolved

Like any great book, *Weisheit* left certain issues unresolved and gifted future generations with problems both perennial and new. Von Rad clearly saw the contradictory and partial character of the *Erkenntnissen* recorded in Israel's sayings.[143] His resolution of this problem is not entirely satisfactory, for he attributes it to diachronic developments where old insights had to be modified or replaced by newer ones. This diachronic solution, however, did not solve the problem of the *synchronic* juxtaposition of contradictory proverbs by authors or editors of subcollections within Proverbs (famously 26:4–5; but note 17:17–18 [Hebrew!], 27–28; and 3:9–10 versus 3:11–12). As von Rad focuses on proverbs as an ancient literary phenomenon, he neglects to deal adequately with sayings and admonitions as an oral feature of communicative life. Native proverb collections have a curious literary-oral ambiguity that von Rad does not exploit. We do have ancient Near Eastern examples of proverbs used in letters, and in the Bible, we have proverbs used by characters within narratives. It remained for Carole Fontaine to provide a groundbreaking study of this phenomenon, based on paremiological studies of ethnic groups.[144] With few exceptions, wisdom studies have neglected this important resource for insight into biblical proverbs. Among the insights of paremiology are two that might have aided von Rad and biblical studies to this day. (1) Synchronically, an expert user of proverbs has a repertoire of sayings that include contradictions that are used according to the situation at hand. A proverb is not inherently "wise" (Prov 26:7, 11). (2) Thus, the *Erkenntnissen* embodied in sayings and admonitions are inherently ambiguous: they require relevant wisdom in the midst of life, and without that personal wisdom (the fool!), they are useless or damaging. Without proverbs, one lacks the tools for wisdom; without wisdom and skill, the tools do harm, and their user is a fool.

Lacking the paremiological knowledge just noted, von Rad followed Gadamer in pursuing the "truth-claim" (*Wahrheitsanspruch*) embodied in

---

ments and disagreements were only possible because the disputants shared a common world picture (*Theologian and His Universe*, 36, 41).

143. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 366–70.

144. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament*.

every artwork. But von Rad failed to realize that while a proverb is an artistic form, his attempt to label them *Erkenntnisbindende Formen* was in several respects misconstrued. On the one hand, literarily, the ancient *Kunstwerk* at hand—put together by the final redactors, Masoretic or Septuagintal—was the book of Proverbs as a *whole*, of which the various subcollections, prologue, lectures, prayer, poems, admonitions, and sayings were *parts* to be interpreted in light of the *whole*. On the other hand, orally, proverbs are used singly as a sort of performance art designed to illuminate a *Lebenswelt* problem. In this regard, Golka and Westermann's critique of von Rad is valid.

## Concluding Reflections

Gerhard von Rad's *Weisheit in Israel* is the deepest book we possess on Israel's wisdom. After fifty years, it remains indispensable for scholars and students—a book that rewards repeated readings as only a classic can. Much of this depth and wealth of insight, as argued above, has been obscured for English language readers by Martin's deeply flawed translation. After half a century, this great work still lacks a translation in English that does it justice, one that can communicate what von Rad wrote and means.

*Weisheit* comes from the increasingly foreign world of mid-twentieth-century German society and culture. Perhaps more than any other of von Rad's works, *Weisheit* requires commentary and discussion to be fully understood, for its depths and intellectual wealth did not, and do not, readily reveal themselves, as our survey above has shown. Knowledge of von Rad's intellectual world is needed to fully understand the significance of his radical turn from (as it were) *sola Heilsgeschichte* to creation and the devout worldliness signaled by *Weisheit*. Von Rad did not here abandon *Heilsgeschichte* but sought emically to articulate the ancient *cosmic* context without which Israel's salvation history and wisdom alike lose their power to speak in their *otherness*. Any other procedure or method is liable, etically, to impose an unconsciously held worldview that misreads the ancient evidence and unwittingly silences its *difference*. In von Rad's late work, uncovering and delineating this *difference* was meant to waken both conservative and liberal modernity from its dogmatic slumbers.

Finally, scholars, especially of ancient texts, need humbly to undertake the difficult, mutually implicated tasks of becoming self-aware of their own limited *Verstehenshorizont* and of uncovering the hidden

*Verstehenshorizont* of their ancient texts. *Weisheit* itself provides us and future scholars an extraordinary example and roadmap for precisely such an ongoing hermeneutical journey. It is a gift, not for yesterday but for generations.

## Bibliography

Auerbach, Erich. "Figura." Pages 11–76 in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Baden, Joel S. "Why Is the Pentateuch Unreadable?—Or, Why Are We Doing This Anyway?" Pages 243–51 in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*. Edited by Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016.

Barr, James. *The Concept of Biblical Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.

Barton, John. "Gerhard von Rad on the World-View of Early Israel." *JTS* 35 (1984): 301–23.

Bellah, Robert. "Is America a Multicultural Society?" *JAAR* 66 (1998): 613–25.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Ethik*. DBW 6. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1992.

———. *Widerstand und Ergebung*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge. DBW 8. Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1998.

Carr, Edward F. *What Is History*? Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1964.

Cassirer, Ernst. *The Myth of the State*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955.

Collins, John J. *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*. OTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

Crenshaw, James. *Gerhard von Rad*. MMTM. Waco, TX: Word, 1978.

———. *Sipping from the Cup of Wisdom*. 2 vols. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2017.

———. "Wisdom in Israel (Gerhard von Rad): A Review." Pages 300–311 in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995.

Douglas, Mary. *Leviticus as Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. *Primitive Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Fontaine, Carole R. *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study*. Sheffield: Almond, 1982.

Fruchon, Pierre. "Sur l'Hermeneutique de Gerhard von Rad." *RSPT* 55 (1971): 4–32.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 1975.

———. *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960.

Garber, Zev. Review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad. *AUSS* 13 (1975): 294–95.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pages 3–30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gilbert, Maurice. Review of *Israël et la Sagesse*, by Gerhard von Rad. *RTL* 3 (1972): 345–49.

Gladson, Jerry A. "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10–29." PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1978.

Golka, Friedemann. "Die israelitische Weisheitschule oder 'des Kaisers neue Kleider.'" *VT* 33 (1983): 257–70.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: HarperPerennial, 1962.

———. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

———. *Sein und Zeit*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1927.

Hirisztova-Gotthardt, Hrisztalina, and Melita Aleska Varga, eds. *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverbs Studies*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015.

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1971.

Keel, Othmar. *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. New York: Seabury, 1978.

Kirschenblatt-Gimblet, Barbara. "Toward a Theory of Proverb Meaning." Pages 111–21 in *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*. Edited by Wolfgang Mieder and Alan Dundes. New York: Garland, 1981.

Knierim, Rolf P. "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology." Pages 171–224 in *The Task of Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

———. *Text and Concept in Leviticus 1:1–9*. FAT 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lee, Seu-Kyou. *Existenz und Ereignis: Eine Untersuchung zur Entwicklung der Philosophie Martin Heideggers*. EWWSRP. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000.

Levinson, Bernard M. "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church." *Int* 62 (2008): 238–54.

McKane, William. *Prophets and Wise Men*. SBT 44. London: SCM, 1965.

———. Review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad. *Theology* 76 (1973): 98–99.

Mieder, Wolfgang. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004.

Murphy, Roland E. Review of *Wisdom in Israel*, by Gerhard von Rad. *CBQ* 35 (1973): 549–53.

Naugle, David. *Worldview: History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Oeming, Manfred. *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Glaube und Wirklichkeit im Denken Gerhard von Rads." Pages 37–54, 57–58 in *Gerhard von Rad: Seine Bedeutung für die Theologie: Drei Reden von H. W. Wolff, R. Rendtorff, W. Pannenberg*. Edited by Hans W. Wolff, Rolf Rendtorff, and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Munich: Kaiser, 1973.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy*. GL. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

———. *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Rabenau, Konrad von. "Als Student bei Gerhard von Rad in Jena 1943–45." Pages 7–12 in *Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne*. Edited by Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Michael Welker. ATM 8. Münster: LIT, 2004.

Rad, Gerhard von. "Meetings in Early and Late Years." Pages 176–78 in *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Gregor Smith. London: Collins, 1973.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 4th ed. Vol. 1. Munich: Kaiser, 1962.

———. *Weisheit in Israel*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. London: SCM, 1972.

Sæbø, Magne. "Gerhard von Rads exegetisches 'Fingerspitzengefühl': Eine Reminiszenz an Gerhard von Rad." Pages 1–2 in *Das Alte Testament*

*und die Kultur der Moderne*. Edited by Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Michael Welker. ATM 8. Münster: LIT, 2004.

Sanders, Seth L. *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

Schultz, Richard L. "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective." *TynBul* 48 (1997): 271–306.

Schweitzer, Albert. *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. 9th ed. Tübingen: Mohr, 1984.

Seitel, Peter. "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor." *Genre* 2 (1969): 143–61.

Sheppard, Gerald T. *Wisdom as Hermeneutical Construct*. BZAW 151. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980.

Sneed, Mark, ed. *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Sperber, Dan, and Dierdre Wilson. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25–27*. SBLDS 96. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1988.

———. "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9." *Semeia* 50 (1990): 111–44.

———. "Proverbs 30:21–23 and the Biblical World Upside Down." *JBL* 105 (1986): 599–610.

———. "Scribal Wisdom and a Biblical Proverb at Qumran." *DSD* 4 (1997): 255–64.

———. "Theology: Creation, Wisdom, and Covenant." Pages 65–82 in *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*. Edited by Will Kynes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

———. "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs." *HS* 33 (1992): 25–36.

Westermann, Claus. "Weisheit in Sprichwort." Pages 73–85 in *Schalom: Studien zu Glaube und Geschichte Israels*. Edited by Karl-Heinz Bernhardt. Stuttgart: Calwer, 1971.

———. *Wurzeln der Weisheit: Die ältesten Sprüche Israels und anderer Völker*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990.

Whybray, Roger N. *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*. BZAW 135. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974.

Wildiers, N. Max. *The Theologian and His Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*. New York: Seabury, 1982.

Zimmerli, Walther. "Die Weisheit Israels: Zu einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad." *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95.

# *Weisheit* and Biblical Theology

Hermann Spieckermann

Gerhard von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* and his *Weisheit in Israel* have both exerted such an enormous influence on Old Testament scholarship internationally that today a synoptic survey is difficult. Nonetheless, *Weisheit*'s reception is much better known than the path von Rad himself took en route to the book. Thus, the following remarks focus on von Rad's way with wisdom. For some forty years, wisdom accompanied, challenged, and increasingly shaped his theological existence.

## 1. Wisdom in von Rad's Scholarship 1930–1940

Von Rad (1901–1971) was an eyewitness of the catastrophes Germany brought on Europe in the last century. Thereafter, he experienced the founding and consolidation of West Germany (1949). Among post-1945 theologians, he was one of the most prominent representatives in his Old Testament discipline. His exegesis was not only scientific but simultaneously a theological witness as well. What Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) meant in New Testament studies, the name von Rad meant in Old Testament studies. To acquire an impression of the diversity and quality of his work, one need only consider the list of contributors to the Festschrift presented to him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (21 October 1971).[1]

---

1. Hans Walter Wolff, ed., *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag* (Munich: Kaiser, 1971); Konrad von Rabenau, "Bibliographie Gerhard von Rad," in Wolff, *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, 665–81.

Ten days later, on Reformation Day, he died. On the first anniversary of his death, an academic memorial celebration was held, with the then-president of West Germany, Gustav Heinemann, in attendance. The three addresses given there demonstrate how difficult it would be to overestimate the influence of the man and his work.[2] Though world famous as a scholar and teacher, he spoke gently and shunned the limelight. No one articulated this so well as his Heidelberg neighbor and colleague, Hans-Georg Gadamer. At the great Heidelberg symposium held on the occasion of von Rad's one hundredth birthday, almost exactly thirty years after his death (18 October 2001), Gadamer—now himself 101 years old—recalled, "There was a stillness about him, that emanated from a listening deep within."[3] One cannot find a finer articulation of this biblical exegete's singular character than this. All his life, with great self-awareness, this scholar considered it his task to listen intensively and deeply to his texts, always with the intention of hearing the message each text spoke.

For this scion of a Nuremberg physician to enter theological studies was quite unexpected.[4] Of decisive influence in this regard from 1916 on were the sermons of his hometown pastor, Wilhelm Stählin (1883–1975), such that after his qualifying exams he enrolled in theological studies at Erlangen and continued them at Tübingen. In all this, the Old Testament played no special role. But it came to the forefront after his first theological exams, when from 1925 on, the young vicar was confronted with the Covenant for Germany (Bund für Deutschland), an anti-Jewish group within the Lutheran Church (Evangelische Kirche) that wanted to get rid of the Old Testament. Von Rad considered himself ill-prepared to confront the anti-Semitism now rearing its head also within the church. He therefore requested a leave of absence to write a dissertation on the Old Testament in order to acquire a solid foundation for the impending confrontation. The

---

2. Hans W. Wolff, Rolf Rendtorff, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds., *Gerhard von Rad. Seine Bedeutung für die Theologie*: *Drei Reden von H. W. Wolff, R. Rendtorff, W. Pannenberg* (Munich: Kaiser, 1973).

3. Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Michael Welker, eds., *Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne*, ATM 8 (Münster: LIT, 2004). The motto appears over the foreword.

4. See Hans W. Wolff, "Gespräch mit Gerhard von Rad," in Wolff, *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, 648–58; Rudolf Smend, *From Astruc to Zimmerli: Old Testament Scholarship in Three Centuries* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 170–97; Smend, *Kritiker und Exegeten: Porträtskizzen zu vier Jahrhunderten alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 794–824.

*Landeskirche* granted his request. Otto Procksch in Erlangen became his *Doktorvater* and set the topic "The People of God in Deuteronomy" (*Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*), without in the least realizing that he was directing his doctoral candidate to the biblical book that would become a doorway to the development of his scholarly career. By the time of his promotion, however, it was not Procksch but Albrecht Alt in Leipzig who served as his primary adviser. By 1927, the dissertation was submitted, and von Rad promoted to licentiate in the theological faculty of Erlangen.

Thereupon, Procksch immediately proposed "The Concept of History in Chronicles" as the topic for von Rad's *Habilitationsschrift*. It was successfully defended in 1929.[5] After a short time as a lecturer at Erlangen, Alt offered the *Privatdozent* the lectureship that had just become free in Leipzig (1930), as its holder, Martin Noth, had accepted a position in Königsberg. The *Privatdozent* of twenty-nine was torn; he had also received a call to be a pastor in Traunstein (Bavaria). Previously, the return to university was intended merely as an intermezzo. Alt wrote the indecisive von Rad a letter on 31 January 1930 that is still worth reading.[6] Ultimately, this letter contributed to von Rad's decision to accept Alt's offer.

The Leipzig years 1930–1934 became for von Rad an intensive period of teaching and of broadening his scientific horizons. They included two trips, each several months long, to Palestine with Alt. Concurrently, the debate about the status of the Old Testament intensified. In Leipzig's great hall in 1934, a lecture series took place titled "Führungen zum Christentum" ("Guide Paths to Christianity"). Before the "Weg durch das Alte Testament" was treated, other lectures addressed, for example, the "Weg der Germanen" ("The German Path"). Alt, Joachim Begrich, and von Rad concluded the lecture series with their presentations. They published them under the title *Führung zum Christentum durch das Alte Testament* (*The Old Testament Path to Christianity*).[7] If one compares the original Leipzig lecture series title with that of their publication, the point becomes

---

5. Gerhard von Rad, *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*, BWA(N)T 47 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929); von Rad, *Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes*, BWA(N)T 54 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).

6. Wolff, "Gespräch mit Gerhard von Rad," 650–51.

7. Albrecht Alt, Joachim Begrich, and Gerhard von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum durch das Alte Testament: Drei Vorträge* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1934). For further publications by von Rad belonging to this context see von Rabenau, "Bibliographie Gerhard von Rad," numbers 4, 26, 32–37.

immediately obvious. There are not many guide paths (*Führungen*) to Christianity, but only *one* guide path, which is the Old Testament. In his preface, Alt takes the bull by the horns, directly confronting long-term anti-Semitic activist Theodor Fritsch, whose book was titled *Der falsche Gott: Beweismaterial gegen Jahwe* (10th ed., 1933). Alt set out to demonstrate "to what degree the current literature attacking the Old Testament lacks the objective knowledge that anyone wishing to debate the subject must possess."[8] To that end, Alt presented in nontechnical language the content and significance of the narrative books. Begrich did the same for the prophetic books.

The concluding essay, by von Rad, bears the lapidary title "Conclusion." In concert with his two cocombatants, he addresses his historical context directly and plainly, somewhat with a nod to the polemic against idols in Second Isaiah: "When we look at the church struggle in the last decades, we can say this: In the best case scenario, we are right in the middle of a hard battle against the deification of *Eros* or the State, or some other created thing; these temptations hit far too close to home also for us, as if we could claim for ourselves [Isaiah's] utterly confident mockery."[9] Second Isaiah's mockery against the idols entails von Rad's critique of the ideological idols of the present. Among these for von Rad was the polemic against the Old Testament and the drive to eliminate it from Christianity. "Let us be clear about this: to the extent that we are offended by the Old Testament, we are also offended by Christ. One can neither divide them nor bypass them." Von Rad takes Exod 33:18–34:7 as the hermeneutical key to the Old Testament in Christianity.

> Moses is speaking with God about Israel's journey onward from Mt. Sinai; when entirely unexpectedly a request bursts forth from the mighty man of God: Let me see your glory! But God refuses him. No one living can see my glory; whoever sees me must die. Yet, I will pass by you and call, that I am merciful and gracious; then you can see my back. But no human can see my face!—Here we find the entire Old Testament in a nutshell![10]

The New Testament witness to Christ is unthinkable without Yahweh's self-revelation as merciful and gracious and the Old Testament dynamic of

---

8. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 9.

9. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 52–53.

10. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 70–71.

seeing God's back. At the same time, von Rad decisively distances himself from a christological appropriation of the Old Testament, as is clear from his review of Wilhelm Vischer's *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*.[11]

Preceding the above remarks on biblical theology, the thirty-three-year-old professor gives a much fuller account of his conception of Old Testament theology. To this end, he brings Chronicles, Ecclesiastes, and Job into mutual conversation. He does not at all speculate whether these three postexilic books, as a matter of literary history, existed in dialogue with one another. Nonetheless, he views the three documents synoptically, as concerning diaspora Jews in their relationship with God during a time of desperate theological need. From the nineteenth century, von Rad inherits the view that historiography presupposes the national existence of a people. But for the postexilic people of God, this was not the case. In this situation, Chronicles writes the history of God's people anew, in a way that, through an endless, unbroken genealogical chain of names connecting creation to the Israelite monarchy, restores the people of God to the historical position of being a nation-state under Davidic rule. The history of the Davidic dynasty stands under the sign of God's promises. Though it was indeed endangered by the manifold guilt of Davidic kings, and of God's people themselves, the validity of God's promises was never lost— neither by that guilt, nor even by the catastrophe of 587–586 BCE and the ensuing exile. Chronicles concludes with Cyrus's command for the people to return and rebuild the temple (2 Chr 36:22–23). In Chronicles, "history is not so much written as it is formed and shaped on its own authority; indeed, history is postulated on the basis of faith alone. The author pictures events of the distant past in such a way as faith alone can imagine them." Here the threat arises that "an account of God's relation to history may become mere theological dogmatism."[12]

In utter opposition to Chronicles, according to von Rad, Ecclesiastes is characterized by its deep skepticism. This sage does not doubt God's universal action but, in contrast to Chronicles, he stands "in awe of factuality,"[13] which promotes neither the struggle to understand God's government of the world nor an intellectual nihilism. Von Rad concretizes this with citations from Qoheleth that provide a window on the interpreter's own

---

11. Gerhard von Rad, "Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Wilhelm Vischers gleichnamigem Buch," *TBl* 14 (1935): 249–54.

12. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 61–62.

13. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 62.

political context: servants ride on horses and lords go on foot (Eccl 10:7); there is no comforter for those who suffer injustice (4:1). Though Ecclesiastes appears "on the periphery of the Old Testament witness to faith," it is not merely an extreme antipode to Chronicles. Rather, it conclusively brings to final form "something that is in one way or another maintained by virtually every Old Testament declaration of faith…: that God is a hidden God." This faith can never become "a handy tool that easily frees us from the care-laden dissonances of life. In a word: this book is a warning for all time, that faith may never presume to lord it over God."[14] The theological grasp of Qoheleth, which von Rad here displays in just a few sentences, is of rarely achieved theological depth and demonstrates that the young exegete—certainly considering the political demands of his time—sought already then to explore the biblical-theological value of this wisdom book.

The same holds true for Job. Here also von Rad is not content to characterize the "Job problem" in current terms such as the question of suffering and God's justice. Instead, he ties the book to faith convictions that had long been developing in Israel, beliefs that tumble hard one after another within the book of Job. On the one hand is the "unconditional recognition of the concrete providential disposition of life as an act of God alone." On the other is "a simple inability to give up on, to let go of God's promise." The collision of these two religious convictions condense into the question "whether God is truly God, whether God is *our* God." Admittedly, at the end of the book, beyond all comprehension, God maintains his justice. "But that is no solution, and for this reason, Job necessarily points beyond itself."[15] The pressing questions, not only in this book, do not come to rest but take the reader and listener along on the path of ongoing disputation in Jewish circles—ultimately also among those who understand their Jewish heritage in the light of their experience of Christ.

Already in this outline, we catch a glimpse of the author of the *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, though he would require a long process of ripening.[16] This confrontation of Chronicles's portrait of history with the God-world-humanity constellation of relations in Ecclesiastes and Job testifies to the theological penetration, complexity, and depth with which von Rad viewed these postexilic works, each of which, with its particular

---

14. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 63.

15. Alt, Begrich, and von Rad, *Führung zum Christentum*, 65.

16. It is clear, however, how seriously this theme engaged him already during his labors at Jena.

intent, sought to comprehend the relation of diaspora Jews to their God. For the recently habilitated von Rad already in the 1930s, the wisdom books Job and Qoheleth stand without question at the center of theological wrestling with God in the Old Testament, and without them Christian wrestling with the same God would be theologically unthinkable. The Leipzig *Privatdozent*, who received and accepted the call to a professorship at the University of Jena in the same year *Führung zum Christentum durch das Alte Testament* was published, could well use this foundation in a faculty that was dominated by German Christians and where theology students posted on the blackboard that their German blood fought against the Hebrew language.[17]

## 2. Wisdom in von Rad's Work: 1943 and After

Von Rad's own conception of how an Old Testament theology should proceed acquired definite contours relatively early on. An essay from 1943 makes this clear.[18] In the first place, it shows how intensely contemporary political and ecclesiastical experiences led von Rad to become a resolute exponent of renewed theological reflection on the Old Testament within scientific theology. This entailed a clear rejection of dominant historical trends in religion and piety of the previous decades.[19] Second, von Rad set himself apart from several recent Old Testament theology projects from the 1930s. In varying degrees, these projects had already contributed to a theological renaissance in the discipline. Generally, however, they offered only a systematically arranged presentation of Old Testament content. This would occur with categories derived from dogmatic theology or from key concepts with a biblical-theological provenance. The first option was chosen by Ernst Sellin and Ludwig Köhler,[20] the second by Walther Eichrodt in his highly influential work, which made the concept of covenant

---

17. See Wolff, "Gespräch mit Gerhard von Rad," 652.

18. Gerhard von Rad, "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie des Alten Testaments," *TLZ* 68 (1943): 225–34.

19. Prominent examples include Rudolf Smend, Bernhard Stade, Alfred Bertholet, and Gustav Hölscher.

20. Ernst Sellin, *Alttestamentliche Theologie auf religionsgeschichtlicher Grundlage* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1933); Ludwig Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936). Köhler's *Theologie*'s content remains eminently worthwhile.

his theological key.[21] For all these works von Rad has praise but also fundamental critique. In his view, all these works try to comprehend the Old Testament too much from perspectives based on an *external* hermeneutic. Over against this, already in 1943, von Rad formulates his own approach, using language that in nuce prefigures what his own *Theologie des Alten Testaments* would accomplish in the late 1950s.

> In the OT, we stand before expressions of faith that continually focus on the acts of God in history.… The OT category of history is thoroughly theological, and no theology of the OT can avoid this fact. Should one dissolve this close correspondence with history, much of substance would certainly remain, but the heart of the OT theological *Urdatum* would be lost. The OT witnesses not just to divine speech, but also to divine action. And this representation witnesses sequentially to each event of divine speech and action within history.… Beginnings and endings of God's ways are marked, and above all particulars, there is a manifold rhythm of promise and fulfillment that is determinative for understanding God's ways.… A salvation-historical theology of the OT will have the task of representing this correspondence of divine word and history in its manifold forms.[22]

Since the Old Testament as a whole is "a witness to God's ongoing historical action," von Rad's conception here does not easily accommodate wisdom: "the books that lack such a historical witness must be interpreted on precisely this foundation. Job and Ecclesiastes stand on ahistorical ground. As history fails, community is lost, and in this twofold void, faith collapses."[23]

If we compare these statements on Job and Ecclesiastes with the pointed theological affirmation of these same books in his 1934 essay, the suspicion arises that von Rad's main concentration now is so directed toward conceiving a dynamic, salvation-historical Old Testament theology that the two wisdom books—because of their *diagnostic* "lack of history"—are set aside theologically, and Proverbs is not even mentioned.[24] Central rather

---

21. Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933–1939).

22. Von Rad, "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie," 227.

23. Von Rad, "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie," 228.

24. Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Klotz, 1957), 2:38–45, 48–56. Wisdom accrued to Israel's faith from its surrounding ancient Near Eastern world, especially Egypt. "Knowledge of nature and of character formation (*Lebensgestaltung*) created a bridge between Israel and paganism"—a bridge

is the debate with Old Testament theologies having systematic intentions, over against those projects that raised salvation-historical claims to follow the historical line laid down by the Old Testament itself for God's speaking and acting. For von Rad, the weightiest counterproposal in this debate belonged to Eichrodt. Eichrodt's Old Testament theology provided only a marginal place for wisdom, and it treated wisdom in such a way that the author's distaste for the subject is patent. We can, however, dismiss the idea that Eichrodt's take on wisdom influenced von Rad. Of course, in his later *Theologie*, von Rad repeatedly argues with Eichrodt. But the reason for this lay simply in the fact that Echrodt's *Theologie* was already complete by 1939 and for the next two decades clearly set the terms of the debate. Perhaps the course of research would have gone differently, if only the crucial treatment of Old Testament theology—one that influenced not only Eichrodt but also von Rad—had been published earlier.

### 3. Wisdom in Procksch's Theology of the Old Testament

The work in question was Procksch's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*.[25] At age thirty-two Procksch was called to the Old Testament chair at Greifswald (1906–1924) and in 1925 to the chair at Erlangen, which he held until his emeritation in 1939. His close friendship with Alt of Leipzig proved its worth also in their mutual support of von Rad, whose *Doktorvater* was Procksch.[26] Over his decades of academic activity, Procksch always considered his lectures on Old Testament theology to be the high point of his teaching, and he gladly devoted himself to the lengthy process of ripening them conceptually. He planned to undertake their final preparation for publication in his retirement, and he fulfilled this intention to the extent

---

that Echrodt considered laden with danger, because it demanded from Israel an intensive wrestling to preserve what was essential to its faith (*Theologie des Alten Testaments* 2:53). Thus, Eichrodt's primary interest is in the theologizing of wisdom in the sense that "general revelation" is accommodated to "special revelation" (2:56). For this process, Eichrodt refers to the then-recent work of Johannes Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung: Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel*, BZAW 62 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933).

25. On Procksch, see, among others, Renate Wittern et al., eds., *Die Professoren und Dozenten der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen, 1743–1960*, EF 5.13 (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen; Nürnberg: Auslieferung, Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen, 1993), 61–62.

26. See Smend, *Kritiker und Exegeten*, 543.

that the war and his illness permitted. Procksch submitted the manuscript of his theology to the printer for publication in 1942. Constrained by the war and by the broad governmental prohibition of publishing theological works, the book's publication was delayed until 1949, nearly two years after Procksch's death, on 7 April 1947.[27] An erudite Irish colleague, well-known for his unconventional but always thought-provoking judgments, Robert P. Carroll (1941–2000), considered Procksch's theology one of those works whose lack of an English translation was especially to be regretted.[28]

Eichrodt himself says that he owes the idea of a systematic approach to Old Testament theology to Procksch.[29] But his key concept of covenant does not derive from Procksch. Eichrodt must have cherished covenant early, certainly before he came to Basel in 1922. Already in part 1 of his *Theologie* (1933), the concept of covenant stands as the formative center of his project; thus, earlier than Karl Barth, professor at Basel from 1935, who likewise emphasized the covenant concept in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.[30] At the very latest, Eichrodt came to know the writings of prominent Erlangen professor Johann C. K. von Hofmann during his time at Erlangen.[31] In his *Weissagung und Erfüllung* as in his *Schriftbeweis*, von Hofmann's goal was to make the Old Testament and New Testament biblical witness plausible as one coherent sequence of divine word and deed. This sequence continued to work in Christianity up to the present, willing to include all humanity. The scriptural argument conducted in the Bible itself did not arise from the combination of individual passages but rather from Scripture as a whole, which was itself the basis for working out doctrine as a whole. This again was not to be identified simply with confessions of faith or with confessional documents. Rather, the harmony of Scripture as a

27. Otto Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1949). In the first edition, directly following the title page, Bertelsmann, on behalf of Procksch's widow, thanks Professors Alt, von Rad, and Oskar Grether for their "labor-intensive work of correcting errors." In 1950, the book added a foreword by von Rad and the missing table of contents. For correction of widespread errors concerning Procksch and his work, see Smend, *Kritiker und Exegeten*, 556–58.

28. Smend, *Kritiker und Exegeten*, 543.

29. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* 1:7–8 n. 19 (4th ed.).

30. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 3.1 (Zürich: EVZ, 1945), §41, 44–377; Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 4.1 (Zürich: EVZ, 1953), §57.1–83.

31. Johann C. K. von Hofmann (1810–1877). See Wittern et al., *Professoren und Dozenten*, 34–35.

whole and doctrine as a whole was something to be achieved ever anew, as the "current state of affairs in the ongoing fellowship of God and humans, mediated in Jesus Christ."[32]

In Leipzig Procksch gained a first-class philological training from Frants Buhl and Heinrich Zimmern. There too, he earned his PhD as the final *doctorandus* of the great Orientalist Albert Socin, and later, in his fifties, wrote an autobiography in which he gave his perspective on church and theology, on the function of the canon, and on the task of biblical scholarship—all presented in superlative fashion.[33] It is no surprise that he viewed his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* as the pinnacle of his life's work. Also, in Procksch, von Hofmann's theological influence is clear, not least in Procksch's adaptation of Scripture as a whole and doctrine as a whole in the two-part division of his *Theologie* into "Historical World" and "Thought-World" of the Old Testament. Moreover, Procksch intentionally conceives his Old Testament *Theologie* as a subsection of an entire *biblical* theology. He emphatically makes this point at the very start: "All theology is Christology. Jesus Christ is the only gestalt within our world of experience in which God is fully revealed. God is in Christ and Christ in God. This relationship between God and man is historically unique; it is repeated in no other form."[34] But this in no way invalidates the Old Testament theologically. Rather, Jesus and the Old Testament belong inseparably together.

> The portrait of [Jesus] develops out of this background.… He breathes OT air. It is simply impossible to think of this form, as portrayed in the Gospels, arising from a background such as the Areopagus in Athens or the Forum in Rome. There, his preaching would not have found the slightest pre-existing point of contact. There, they would first have had to create a *protoevangelium* for him. This *protoevangelium*, however, has been already given in the OT.[35]

Old Testament theology can receive an adequate presentation only as a historical theology, and that in both a vertical and a horizontal direction:

---

32. Johann C. K. Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis: Ein theologischer Versuch* (Beck: Nördlingen, 1852–1855), 1:6.

33. Otto Procksch, "Otto Procksch," in *Die Religionswissenschaft der Gegenwart in Selbsdarstellungen*, ed. Erich Stange (Leipzig: von Felix Meiner, 1926), 161–94.

34. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1.

35. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 7.

This means, on the one hand, to grasp, set in order, and present divine revelation from its beginning onward in the historical forms of their OT development, so that the reader sees before them the historical world of OT faith laid out in its historical course. On the other hand, its thought-world must be investigated, its center and horizon, which in the course of history has been broadened and deepened. For, within this horizon lie the concepts that are of foundational significance for all theology, and from out of which theology's language is developed. Setting the OT thought-world in order thus presupposes knowledge of the historical world, and needs to be determined after it. Yet, insofar as the governing center of the OT thought-world is the relation of history to God, three great spheres of thought may be constituted, each possessing in God the same center, and from that center each projecting outward in the same way. In the thought-world of faith we can distinguish the relation of God and world, God and people, God and individual.[36]

It is clear that Procksch intends to fit his presentation of the thought-world as closely as possible to the historical world, so that the identity of content under both aspects is made entirely clear. This plainly contrasts with Köhler, who explicitly borrows his "very simple outline: Theology, Anthropology, Soteriology" from outside, since the Old Testament itself presents no particular order.[37]

Procksch is an important inspiration for the projects undertaken by his two younger colleagues from the Erlangen circle, Eichrodt and von Rad, albeit in quite different ways. Eichrodt modifies Procksch's order of the thought-world and posits a new sequence instead: God and people, God and world, God and individual. All this is now under the overarching idea of covenant, which, however—if taken naturally on the basis of the textual data—has a central hermeneutical function as a comprehensive theological category only in the Bible's first part. In Eichrodt, the Scripture-as-a-whole principle is subverted by a relatively clear principle of selection. Along with Köhler's *Theologie*, Eichrodt's was the work that, for many, provided a theological orientation to the Old Testament during the difficult years under National Socialism and after the war.[38]

In contrast to Eichrodt, and with knowledge of Eichrodt's completed theology (1939), von Rad in his 1943 essay decisively prioritized the task of

---

36. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 18–19.
37. Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, v.
38. See Fritz Maass, "Köhler, Ludwig," *RGG*, 1690.

Old Testament theology as the representation of the relationship of word and history, in all its attested, dynamic variety. In rejecting a systematic arrangement, he was well aware of the dilemma that, in many traditions, a piling up of materials and voices had taken place that made communicating a clear theological profile difficult or even impossible. This dilemma, however, does not leave von Rad at a loss: "Here too, the OT theology must show the way.… The old Erlangen principle of 'Scripture as a whole' clarifies the matter."[39] To solve this problem, one does not need a filter derived from some prior arrangement but only von Hofmann's simultaneously flexible and objectively based view of Scripture as a whole. The many voices of the biblical witnesses are not antiquarian stuff but an energy source that—also for every exegete with their own gifts—first makes the task of bearing witness possible.

How close Procksch and von Rad remained to one another, in spite of all the differences in their Old Testament theology outlines, may be seen in the handling of Psalms and wisdom by each scholar. Recall that von Rad's 1934 essay brought together Chronicles, Qoheleth, and Job as a major component in his argument for the significance of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. Over against this, in the 1943 essay, the diagnostic absence of history in Job and Qoheleth evoked in von Rad the rather untypical judgment that these two books were to be judged in light of the dominant dynamic of word and history in Scripture as a whole. But over against *that* judgment, the treatment allotted to Psalms and wisdom in his *Theologie* reverts back to the positive valuation these books received in 1934. The *Theologie* broadens and deepens that valuation. In all likelihood, the *Theologie* of Procksch contributed to that change, which von Rad will have studied especially in the 1950s. One must say that before and after Procksch and von Rad no Old Testament theology has appeared that penetrates Psalms and wisdom with such theological depth as do these two. Both pursue their own way, indeed, in such a way that von Rad clearly sharpens his approach to Psalms and wisdom in interaction with Procksch. This implicit discussion merits a closer look.

Procksch's *Theologie* locates the treatment of wisdom, Psalms, and apocalyptic in the final subsection of the "Historical World," namely, in his presentation of Old Testament literary history.[40] That these particular

---

39. Von Rad, "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie," 230.

40. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 371–407; on apocalyptic, 407–19, 700–712. Procksch anticipates von Rad's association of wisdom and apocalyptic.

books all share a postexilic origin is for Procksch an established result of exegetical research, needing no further justification. For that very reason, they belong together. Of course, all these books contain preexilic traditions, which, together with their newer parts and texts, have all been melded into a new, no longer dissolvable unity. A distinguishing feature of Procksch's presentation is that it *begins* with Job, since he considers this work—which undoubtedly developed over time—to be a compositional unit by "the greatest of all OT poets." Yet, Job is bipolar in nature, because it centers on two closely related, mutually dependent questions, one concerning the basis of Job's Godfearing, the other concerning God's righteousness.[41] Job shows that he is pious not for sake of his own good fortune but for God's sake. This fact destroys any sort of doctrine of retribution, no matter how conceived. Job expects from God some saving insight, through theophany, beyond his earthly life. In the theophany, however, which God finally grants him, God puts Job's desire in its place but surpasses it in the glorious portraits of his

> creation as the revelation of his omnipotence, which utterly surpasses human comprehension.… God's being is wondrous … impenetrable to human insight.… It is not *Justitia distributiva* according to some human standard, so that it can be discerned in retribution, but rather *Justitia originalis* as moral world-order. It can be experienced only inasmuch as it justifies a man. With Job's submission to God he simultaneously experiences his justification before God.[42]

This interpretation of Job, which is here sketched only in its main lines, serves Procksch as the foundation for his approach to Psalms. Not on account of their form but rather of their thought content, they stand as the "postexilic Summa of faith's logic." Inspired by Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy, hymns reflect God's work as Creator of the world (Pss 8; 19; 104), but also awe in the presence of God's omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience (Ps 139), and still more, melancholy in the face of the contrast between divine eternity and human temporality, which has its origin in human guilt and divine anger (Ps 90). God's kingship—surely a heritage from Babylon—is reshaped into an entirely new gestalt as a "Yahwistic religion of universal salvation," in which the gentiles also par-

---

41. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 372–83, n. 373.
42. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 381, 383.

ticipate, provided they acknowledge the true Lord. Though David and his dynasty are also essential for understanding the relation of God to his people in the Psalms, this is so primarily from the perspective of calamity, which leads to grief-laden complaints but also adherence to the still unfulfilled promises. The cult, with its varied approaches to sacrifice, is also present in the Psalms, as is praise of Torah, and a personal piety that in the Middle Ages found emphatic expression in the penitential psalms of the church (Pss 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). In reference to the Psalms, Procksch concludes, "Without parallel in the OT is the belief that heaven and earth can pass away … and that humanity's entire earthly existence can be undone, but that the eternal fellowship between God and humans will not be undone." In the splendid climax of Ps 73 (73:23–28) Procksch perceives a theological affinity to Job 19:25–26, and with this insight finds yet another confirmation of the close connection he perceives between the Psalms and Job.[43]

In contrast to this, the sayings of Proverbs are characterized by an energetic drive to explore the world. They seek to set in order and understand observations regarding human behaviors and interactions. Here, theology is not dominant, but rather the fullness of experience that wills to become knowledge. "The wise are those with experience of the world, who have themselves found equipoise in the issues and events of this world, and thereby become capable of judging worldly matters rightly. True wisdom … helps towards a moral grasp of life." Thus, this wisdom intersects significantly with comparable literature, especially from Egypt, so its international character also dominates in the sayings from Proverbs. Regarding this observation, however, it does not concern Procksch that the number of sayings that take Yahweh's primeval foundation of the known orders as entirely self-understood is quite high. Proverbial sayings remain wisdom for living. They know God as the creator and founder of good order in public life and the family, but also know disorder and arbitrariness, treachery and folly—things one can unmask with the help of sayings. "All in all, [the sayings give us] a healthy sense of life, without great heights, but well suited to making a wide range of social strata economically and socially fortunate, and to enabling them to live an honorable and unassuming life." With Ecclesiastes, things are entirely otherwise, so that Procksch sets this book over against Proverbs. A human who strives to grasp God's creation

---

43. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 383–95; citations from 383, 387, 395.

entire inevitably collides with limits to the human drive to know. Qoheleth cannot refrain from relating the limits he suffers to God, who is as silent about human injustice as he is about fundamental questions as to whether life or death is an advantage. "All in all, [Qoheleth offers] a wearisome view of life in a wearisome world."[44]

Procksch's cross-referencing Wisdom and Psalms theologically is very probably entirely his own endeavor, because there were no earlier models by which he could orient himself. Its strength lies in his decidedly theological choice—with the literary-historical contemporaneity of Job and Psalms definitely in view—not to pursue form-critical questions of underlying, repetitive event sequences to discover their *Sitze im Leben* but instead to pursue existential issues arising from the relationship between God and individuals and between God and his people. Procksch wrote this distinctive interpretation at a time when form-critical zeal to reconstruct ideal-typical life situations as the workshops of these texts had long been in full swing. He quite ignores Hermann Gunkel's problematic interpretive framework that argued for a development in Psalms from cultic to spiritual poetry. For good reason Procksch considers the second temple, with its varied cultic activities, as the gravitational center of this literature, which nevertheless is itself able to take a critical stance toward the world of the temple. The question arises nonetheless whether Procksch has taken his theologically fruitful contrast of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes far enough or whether, in this respect, his readings are still too much determined by traditional perceptions and models of the books. One thing, however, is indisputable: all in all, Procksch has taken the neglected child, Wisdom, set her in the light theologically, and shown her close kinship with the Psalms.[45] The two types of literature illuminate each other and are taken up and reactualized in apocalyptic, which Procksch treats in his section on Old Testament literary history that concludes his *Theologie*.

### 4. Wisdom in von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments*

Since his 1943 essay discussed earlier, von Rad had in mind how to conceptualize an Old Testament theology. His two-volume project appeared

---

44. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 395–407, citations from 396, 404, 407.

45. The most significant work on wisdom at the time is Helmer Ringgren's *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* (Lund: Håkan Ohlssons, 1947).

in the late 1950s and dominated the field for at least two decades.[46] The narrative and prophetic books follow the model of a continual dynamic interplay of promise and fulfillment, including guilt, catastrophe, and judgment. Thus, the two volumes rightly have the respective subtitles "Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions" and "Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions." Turning to the table of contents, it comes as a surprise to find the first main section, of some one hundred pages, titled "Outline of a History of Yahwistic Faith and Sacral Institutions in Israel." Only then does the second main section follow, one that gave the first volume its title. The second volume offers right off its theology of prophetic traditions and concludes with a final main section, which, given the conception of the whole, is entirely expected: a complex discussion of how the dynamic of promise and fulfillment proceeds from the Old Testament into the New.

Von Rad's project does not make it exactly clear where Psalms and wisdom best belong. He puts them at the end of his first volume, under the title "Israel's Answer."[47] This section appears at the same level as "Theology of the Hexateuch" and "Israel's Anointed." These latter two sections treat the decisive salvation-historical periods of Israel's foundation and the monarchy. The abovementioned title to the concluding section on Psalms and wisdom suggests uncertainty about how best to characterize these books. For the usually secure stylist, von Rad, this is unusual, but in the light of the problem presented quite understandable. A project fully devoted to salvation history provides neither a congenial home for Psalms and the wisdom books nor for a compelling title. Von Rad's outline sets these books in the place they have occupied since the LXX: after the Pentateuch and historical books, and before the prophetic books, which conclude with Daniel and apocalyptic. Yet, it was not the LXX—hardly relevant for von Rad's project—that determined the placement of Psalms and wisdom but most likely—*sit venia verbo*—a moment of rest between the two volumes. Von Rad could quite naturally have ended the first volume with "Israel's Anointed" and continued directly with the second volume's "Prophetic Traditions." Basically, "Israel's Answer" could just as well have been attached to the prophetic traditions as to the historical traditions. But actually, in von Rad's framework, there is no place for Psalms and wisdom

---

46. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1957–1960); von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962–1965).

47. Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1:366–473.

after prophets, but only for apocalyptic and the dynamic continuation of promise and fulfillment in the New Testament.

Consequently, von Rad places Psalms and wisdom where they hardly affect his project's grand trajectory. To suppose that behind this move lies the view that Psalms and wisdom are of little value does not do justice to von Rad's discussion of some one hundred pages. They are evidence that he has continued and deepened his theological penetration of these texts since the 1930s. By no means least, Procksch's handling of these texts in his *Theologie* will have had an influence here. Von Rad's treatment is best understood against the background of Procksch. Both treat Psalms and Job closely together under varied aspects of content. Yet, in contrast to Procksch, von Rad gives the lead to Psalms, which records the entire spectrum of the divine-human relationship from hymnic praise to bitter complaint and keeps "Israel's Answer" in readiness, from thanks to comfort in time of trial. The varied literary units in Job, from the frame narratives through the dialogues to the divine speeches, may be paired with themes, questions, and answers in Israel's prayer book. Looming threateningly throughout both is the ever-present question of God's justice. As with the critical question of one's own death, von Rad recognizes here the implicit theological problem, which disturbs conventional salvation-historical traditions and fosters the individualizing of faith.

Without question, von Rad's impressive presentation of these parallel aspects in Psalms and Job achieves significant insights. All the same, it is likewise clear that, considering the problems mentioned, the two books only partially disclose themselves. The Psalter contains many individual prayers, from complaints to thanks and praise, that call on Yahweh but do so without alluding to salvation history, either positively or critically. The psalms that do are clearly in the minority. Also, the somewhat plausible cross-correlation of Psalms and Job does not forestall the perception that the number of texts in the Psalter that might be called Job psalms—say, Ps 39—is miniscule, and it is difficult to imagine any Job texts that, with minor revisions, would fit into the Psalter. Here the limits of von Rad's project, which focuses on historical and prophetic traditions, become visible; it fails to grant fitting place to hymnic and wisdom traditions.

A glance at Proverbs and Ecclesiastes may make this problem even clearer. Von Rad titles their treatments "Experiential Wisdom," "Theological Wisdom," and "Skepticism," respectively. Once again, the similarity to Procksch's arrangement of the books is striking. He too judges Ecclesiastes's skepticism as a critical debate with the experiential optimism of the

saying collections in Proverbs. Naturally, a connection between the two books does exist, in that sayings also play a role in the middle section of Ecclesiastes. This connection is, however, not particularly strong, because in Qoheleth's thought, not only is his epistemological skepticism—verging on agnosticism—opposed to Proverbs's epistemological optimism, but he also sees the human drive for knowledge as empty, because God *withholds* knowledge from humans. Manifest here is a uniquely fundamental crisis in the God-relation, clearly different from Job's yet, in view of the abyss, also uniquely comparable to Job. This, however, is not the main thing for von Rad, but rather the distance separating them from Old Testament salvation-historical traditions and the associated traditions of judgment and disaster. This distance appears more clearly in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—of course also in Job—than it does in Psalms.

It bears mentioning once more that von Rad's treatment of the three wisdom books reveals an intensive wrestling with their content. The result here is actually what it always is with von Rad. He becomes fascinated with the content of each and every biblical tradition, and—to the extent that it opens up to him—becomes an exponent of its intent. This is also the case with wisdom, whose content, however, brings him into conflict with his own salvation-historical project with respect to disaster and guilt in Israel and the world. This is nowhere so evident as in the problematic title "Israel before Yahweh (Israel's Answer)." The title hardly does justice to Job and Ecclesiastes, possibly to the Psalms—though to them also only in a limited sense, since Israel as Yahweh's vis-à-vis is not that strongly emphasized there.

This tension compels the sensible exegete, von Rad, to make incoherent arguments that straightaway document clearly the tension into which wisdom has thrust him:

> In wisdom, an already intensely "worldly" and emancipated piety comes to expression. To a certain extent, we have here to do with an already seriously defective peripheral phenomenon, and theologically speaking, with a product of Israel's decline. For a time, this optimistic, rational faith might have held on, but the incursion of skepticism, indeed, of despair about an empty piety, was only a question of time. But to see wisdom this way completely distorts its nature. In general, one should not interrogate wisdom from the vantage point of the main content of Israel's faith and cult, because to discuss and comment on them was outside wisdom's proper brief. The function in Israel's life, which wisdom claimed for itself, was relatively limited. Wisdom concerned the determining and testing

of the external and internal orders by which human life is sustained and which humans must heed. Thus, the more pertinent question is: is it not the sign of a still cult-related and self-confident piety, that this wisdom, given its proper thematic scope, only made … very limited theological pronouncements.… Questions of faith appear only on the periphery of its field of vision. Wisdom uses understanding in its simplest form, as healthy common sense.… Though this tracing of orders… was actually an entirely "worldly" matter, it should still not be denied that for Israel, naturally, immediately behind these orders stood Yahweh. To this extent, even the entirely "worldly" sayings have a theological background—one should not, however, confuse them with salvation-historical revelations of divine judgment.[48]

The vacillation documented in these sentences speaks for itself: vacillation concerning the extent to which wisdom possesses a theological character, and vacillation concerning wisdom's relation to "salvation-historical revelations of divine judgment" in the Torah. This vacillation also speaks positively for von Rad, that even in a work defined by a salvation-historical approach he refused to put Psalms and wisdom into a straitjacket.

It was this old master of listening, who in the 1960s stimulated two groundbreaking works on the book of Proverbs, that, on the one hand, confirmed Old Testament wisdom's placement within the ancient Near East and, on the other, emphasized its own particular theological significance and shape.[49] About the same time, Hans Heinrich Schmid published two important books on wisdom and righteousness.[50] While Schmid fundamentally challenges von Rad's salvation-historical conception of theology in his dissertation as an unsuitable basis for treating wisdom, in his *Habilitation* he presents righteousness as a conception that includes all the biblical writings and is regarded as the appropriate hermeneutical key for a biblical theology. With this, he presents an alternative to von

---

48. Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1:448, 450.

49. Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966); Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit*, WMANT 28 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968). For the label "Old Master of Listening," see the Gadamer citation above.

50. Hans H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit. Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur*, BZAW 101 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966); Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung. Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes*, BHT 40 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968).

Rad's dynamic salvation-historical model of promise and fulfillment. Von Rad did respond to Schmid's wisdom book,[51] but on the basis of Christa Kayatz's and Hans-Jürgen Hermisson's books one gets the impression that already from the early 1960s he was searching for a new way, one that would more adequately do justice to wisdom than he was able to achieve in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments*.[52] Nor should one forget that in the 1950s, though he was primarily engaged in writing his *Theologie*, he also pursued religion-historical studies, among them one on the first divine speech in Job, which is still worth reading today.[53]

### 5. *Weisheit in Israel* and Biblical Theology

Von Rad's scientific sovereignty was once more on extraordinary display in his late work, *Weisheit in Israel*.[54] Neither depending on his treatment thereof in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* nor distancing himself from it, he takes hold of his wisdom theme as if he had never before expressed himself on the topic.[55] The chapter titles of *Weisheit* mention the names of biblical wisdom books only by way of exception. They do not determine the disposition of von Rad's treatment—a significant difference from his arrangement in *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. Rather, it is the content of wisdom's teaching that determines the order of his book. Therewith it is immediately clear that Proverbs stands in the center, precisely the book that, because of its experiential wisdom and apparent lack of theological power, had previously lain hidden. Now the sayings of Proverbs stand at the center. Much attention is devoted to the knowledge-potential of the *māšāl*, "gnome,

---

51. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 383–82; Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit*, 190–91 n. 2.

52. Another significant stimulus was Harmut Gese's Habilitationschrift, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit. Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958).

53. Gerhard von Rad, "Hiob XXXVIII und die altägyptische Weisheit," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vetus Testamentum in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 24 March 1955*, ed. Martin Noth and Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 293–301.

54. On the English translation of *Weisheit*, see the discussion by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen in this volume.

55. In the entire *Weisheit in Israel* book, in a footnote (345 n. 11), von Rad briefly mentions only his treatment of word theology in *Theologie des Alten Testaments*.

saying." The point is to understand "this great spiritual endeavor of Israel, that … so remarkably moves on the razor's edge between knowing and believing.… This study takes on the task of grasping something of ancient Israel's knowledge of the world and of life, and not least, of her understanding of reality in its most basic tendencies."[56] Von Rad warns against current terminological categorizations derived from already existing hermeneutical and scholarly interpretations. He warns off the category of wisdom texts, since it too does not arise from the self-perception of the texts themselves. Von Rad knows very well that the business of exegesis also entails illumination of the texts from a conceptuality not deriving from the text. But he never tires of setting up warning signs against narrowing down or subsuming the presuppositional world of the text and its peculiar train of thought through the inappropriate imposition of external hermeneutical categories.

Von Rad stays true to his foreword and so enters intensively into the rich saying material of Proverbs. Yet he does not limit himself to Proverbs but brings its sayings together with others from Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. He goes beyond this, as far as Second Temple apocalyptic literature, to revive the thesis—already adumbrated in his *Theologie*—that the mother of apocalyptic was not prophecy but wisdom. Finally, influenced by Kayatz, Schmid, and Hermisson, he strongly relativizes the current distinction between early (Prov 10–29) and late wisdom (Prov 1–9). Rather, he organizes his treatment under broadly open categories. One might initially object to the title of the second chapter, "The Liberation of Reason and Its Problems,"[57] which implies that—following old custom—theology and wisdom should keep their distance. The opposite is the case, for its first subsection is titled "Knowledge and the Fear of God." There is no wise knowledge without an active and reflective life connected to God.

That this approach leads to problems becomes the theme of the next chapter, with the nonspecific title "Individual Topics of Instruction."[58] This giant chapter takes up half the book. One should not suppose that von Rad, an experienced author and expert stylist, was unaware of this section's disproportion and its title's vagueness. Instead, one is obliged to proceed on the assumption that von Rad wished, as much as possible, to prevent this central section of his book from being predetermined by an *external*

---

56. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 16–17.

57. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 75–148. In the English version, this chapter is called part 2, and its subsections are called chapters.

58. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 149–363.

structure. At the same time, he intends to retrace wisdom's quest—how sentences arise from the observation of day-to-day life and mundane matters—and how through this quest reality is understood and so becomes a stimulus for thought and a help for living. In this, the initiative does not rest only with humans pursuing knowledge but also with Wisdom herself, who, personalized as child or woman, is already underway in the world and seeks to woo humans over to her agenda. The passages to which von Rad refers stem from Prov 1–9, especially chapter 8, but also other wisdom texts: Job 28; Sir 24; Wis 6–9. In this mutual interaction of seeking and finding, *love* is in play. Thoughtful humans are wooed by the primal order of creation, in the form of personified Wisdom, who above all makes a worthwhile life possible.

> If anywhere in Israel humans were granted an experience of the splendor of Being verging on the mystical, it is in these texts which speak of so sublime a bond of love between humans and the divine creation-mystery. Here one flings himself with delight towards a meaning that itself presses upon him; he discovers a mystery that was already on its way to him, to give herself to him.[59]

This life-affirming, beneficent order is a salvific experience, not primarily in the form of personified Wisdom but already in the many sayings of Proverbs, which uncover life-affirming order on every side but also disclose life-threatening disorder and thereby help to avoid or limit it. "Such a human sense of being at home in the world! That which comes to him from the side of creation simply awakens trust, grants order, and gives well-being."[60] It is a revelatory event not of a specific, irreversible demonstration of salvation in history but as a discovery of the world's human-friendly, beneficent order, ordained by God and Wisdom.

Naturally, the wisdom writings are well aware, as is von Rad, that this beneficent order is not the experience of all humans, nor of the lifetime of each individual. Von Rad devotes an extensive subsection of his main chapter to this theme, under the rubric "Trust and Attack.[61]" This title

---

59. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 220. [Translator's note: The gendered language of male-female love is retained in keeping with Prov 8 and parallels.]

60. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 228.

61. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 245–308. Originally in German "Vertrauen und Anfechtung." [Translator's note: In the English translation, this is part 3, chapter 12,

makes immediately clear how fundamentally von Rad sees Israel's individual and collective life experience—brought to light through an abundance of sayings—as grounded in the obviously beneficent divine ordering of the world, which, without its being reflected in the existence of each individual, would be worthless. Ultimately, this knowledge is not a construct of speculative thought but the existentially grounded experience of countless humans given poetic expression. By the same token, however, it is susceptible to doubt, because suffering calls it into question and seems to elude the options of understanding and acceptance. For von Rad, this is the place where Job and Ecclesiastes—unlike in his *Theologie*—stand side by side as witnesses to "attack" in a manner not previously articulated in Israel. For Job, "in his deep suffering," the question confronts him,

> Yahweh *pro me?* It is not, as is so often claimed, suffering that has become utterly problematic, but God himself.… Faced with the horrific God he experiences, Job appeals to the God he has always prayed to, the rescuer of the poor and hurting, and the advocate of the unjustly wronged. He can live and breathe only if *this* Yahweh presents himself on Job's behalf.[62]

In light of the dangerous tension in Job's experience of God, von Rad understands the divine speeches and Job's reply, on the one hand, as a rejection of Job's demands. The creator owes no creature an account. Yet, on the other hand, the creator allows the creation to bear witness to himself. It is "an overwhelming witness to God's turning happily towards a world which laughs at every measure of human rationality and economy.… And isn't there also a divine invitation here to share in this joy? In just this way, God has turned towards Job, and Job has understood him, straightwith."[63]

Such an understanding, between God and Job at the end of the book, which von Rad believes he discerns, cannot be the case with Qoheleth.[64] Like the book of Job, Ecclesiastes is the sign of a crisis that threatens wisdom thought. And like Job, Qoheleth's crisis is difficult to give a precise location in literature and history. Both books describe deeply experienced and considered, potentially recurring crises and options for wisdom thought,

---

pp. 190–239. In addition to "challenge" or "attack," *Anfechtung* also means "temptation" or "trial."]

62. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 285–86.
63. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 291–92.
64. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 292–308.

which in comparable situations can be an aid, so that, in suffering, these penetrating God questions need not be left unvoiced.

In contrast to Job, Ecclesiastes is a quiet book. Thoroughly searching through all reality, while keeping wisdom's ethos absolutely central, Qoheleth's critical illumination of life nowhere achieves a meaningful, enlightening viewpoint. Instead, all things considered, only nothingness remains. Given that experience of reality takes place in a world that is God's creation, the conclusion is inevitable, that God never permits searching humans fully to find their goal. It is consequent that Qoheleth only talks *about* God and never *to* God, and that this God—otherwise than in Job—does *not* talk, not in the form of a traditional divine speech and certainly not directly to Qoheleth. Between God and humans, only an oppressive and threatening silence reigns. Qoheleth's advice? A person should enjoy whatever unpredictable luck happens to come their way. That is one's fate. About its determination through God's will, nothing can be said.

As with Job, von Rad certainly appreciated Ecclesiastes. But his judgment that considered Qoheleth "a solitary figure quite removed from the tradition" is not compelling, perhaps not even obvious. The implicit but clear criticism of Ecclesiastes by Jesus Sirach testifies against it—which von Rad somewhat too quickly considers mere speculation.[65] The strongest argument against it, however, is the ultimate acceptance of the book into the authoritative collection of Writings, even if after a relatively long, hard-fought debate. It follows that Ecclesiastes was studied by the leading circles and was also considered worthy of belonging to those particular Writings.

Von Rad might have gone directly from his interpretation of Job and Ecclesiastes to his "Final Considerations."[66] This chapter once again makes the point that Old Testament wisdom, in its widely documented drive for knowledge, never strives to create a *system* encompassing God, world, and humans. The insights achieved and given polished linguistic formulation are, in general, situation-bound and, even when they make fundamental statements, never lose sight of their limitations. Instead of a world picture and humanity picture, wisdom offers an unfinished and actually an unfinalizable dialogue about God and humans, under the aegis of a confi-

---

65. For Sirach's debate with Job and Ecclesiastes, see Hermann Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel: Anregungen aus Psalter und Weisheit für die Theologie*, FAT 91 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 116–40.

66. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 364–405.

dence that God's ways in the world can be made known. Again, this is only possible because God, as the beneficent order of his creation makes clear, is worthy of trust. Doubt, even profound temptation, is never denied. It stands, nonetheless, in a significant asymmetry to evidence of the beneficent order of creation, which reflects God's goodwill and wisdom. It is this view that von Rad lays out in masterful fashion in his late work.

As mentioned, von Rad in *Weisheit* does not explicitly discuss his other great work, his *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, even though the tensions between a dynamic, revelation-centered theology of salvation history and the knowledge-hungry investigations into God's created world by the wise lie ready to hand. Von Rad does not address this explicitly. But one can hardly let go of the impression that he lets another address the question on his behalf: Jesus Sirach. Von Rad undeniably holds him in high regard. At the end of his comprehensive main chapter, which might well have ended with Job and Ecclesiastes, he adds a section on Sirach, whose size is only slightly less than the treatment of Job and Ecclesiastes combined.[67] There was no pressing need to devote a separate section to Sirach, for Sirach had already been richly brought to bear in previous sections of *Weisheit*. It is nevertheless good to recognize why von Rad wished to give Sirach the last word in his book.[68] This sage centrally integrates salvation history in his thought, a move that presents him no conceptual difficulties—in contrast to von Rad. God's wisdom manifests itself in his creation (Sir 42:15–43:33) as it does in the particular history of God's people (Sir 44–49). Both are reflected on and hymned in praising God, and both are continually present in the Second Temple cultic practice of the Aaronides, as Sirach testifies regarding his contemporary, the high priest Simon II (Sir 50:1–24). Von Rad could have designated this the definitive union of his two greatest works. This thought, however, lies close at hand only from the *Weisheit* book, for, from the vantage of *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, it appears only as if from a far distant watchtower. A sage, such as von Rad was, has given Sirach the last word and given his successors—no doubt with a chuckle—the task of rethinking all the problems his fascinating work of a lifetime has left behind.[69]

---

67. [Translator's note: In the English translation, this is part 2, chapter 13.]

68. The short excursus that follows the chapter on Sirach is not central to the book but repeats von Rad's one-sided thesis on the origins of apocalyptic from his *Theologie des Alten Testaments*.

69. Walther Zimmerli, who was personally and professionally close to von Rad, published an extensive review essay of *Weisheit in Israel*: "Die Weisheit Israels: Zu

## Bibliography

Alt, Albrecht, Joachim Begrich, and Gerhard von Rad. *Führung zum Christentum durch das Alte Testament: Drei Vorträge*. Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1934.

Barth, Karl. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 3.1. Zürich: EVZ, 1945.

———. *Kirchliche Dogmatik* 4.1. Zürich: EVZ, 1953.

Eichrodt, Walther. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 3 vols. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933–1939.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 4th ed. 3 vols. Stuttgart: Klotz, 1957.

Fichtner, Johannes. *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitischjüdischen Ausprägung: Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel*. BZAW 62. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933.

Gese, Harmut. *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit. Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958.

Hermisson, Hans-Jürgen. *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit*. WMANT 28. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968.

Hofmann, Johann C. K. *Der Schriftbeweis: Ein theologischer Versuch*. Vol. 1. Beck: Nördlingen, 1852–1855.

Kayatz, Christa. *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*. WMANT 22. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966.

Köhler, Ludwig. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936.

Maass, Fritz. "Köhler, Ludwig." *RGG*, 1690.

Oeming, Manfred, Konrad Schmid, and Michael Welker, eds. *Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne*. ATM 8. Münster: LIT, 2004.

Procksch, Otto. "Otto Procksch." Pages 161–94 in *Die Religionswissenschaft der Gegenwart in Selbsdarstellungen*. Edited by Erich Stange. Leipzig: von Felix Meiner, 1926.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1949.

---

einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad," *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95. Sadly, it appeared only after von Rad's death. In the last semester before his emeritation, Zimmerli offered a seminar titled Die alttestamentliche "Weisheit," in which discussion of von Rad's *Weisheit* was of central importance. The author of the present essay, then a student in his sixth semester, was a participant.

Rabenau, Konrad von. "Bibliographie Gerhard von Rad." Pages 665–81 in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag.* Edited by Hans Walter Wolff. Munich: Kaiser, 1971.

Rad, Gerhard von. "Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Wilhelm Vischers gleichnamigen Buch." *ThBl* 14 (1935): 249–54.

———. *Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes.* BWA(N)T 54. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930.

———. *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium.* BWA(N)T 47. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929.

———. "Grundprobleme einer biblischen Theologie des Alten Testaments." *TLZ* 68 (1943): 225–34.

———. "Hiob XXXVIII und die altägyptischen Weisheit." Pages 293–301 in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vetus Testamentum in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 24 March 1955.* Edited by Martin Noth and Winton Thomas. VTSup 3. Leiden: Brill, 1955.

———. *Old Testament Theology.* Translated by David M. G. Stalker. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962–1965.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments.* 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser, 1957–1960.

———. *Weisheit in Israel.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

Ringgren, Helmer. *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East.* Lund: Håkan Ohlssons, 1947.

Schmid, Hans H. *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung. Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes.* BHT 40. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968.

———. *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit. Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur.* BZAW 101. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966.

Sellin, Ernst. *Alttestamentliche Theologie auf religionsgeschichtlicher Grundlage.* Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1933.

Smend, Rudolf. *From Astruc to Zimmerli: Old Testament Scholarship in Three Centuries.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

———. *Kritiker und Exegeten: Porträtskizzen zu vier Jahrhunderten alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

Spieckermann, Hermann. *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel: Anregungen aus Psalter und Weisheit für die Theologie*. FAT 91. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Wittern, Renate, Eva Wedel-Schaper, Christoph Hafner, and Astrid Ley, eds. *Die Professoren und Dozenten der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen, 1743–1960*. EF 5.13. Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen; Nürnberg: Auslieferung, Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen, 1993.

Wolff, Hans W. "Gespräch mit Gerhard von Rad." Pages 648–58 in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag*. Edited by Hans Walter Wolff and Gerhard von Rad. Munich: Kaiser, 1971.

Wolff, Hans Walter, ed. *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag*. Munich: Kaiser, 1971.

Wolff, Hans W., Rolf Rendtorff, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds. *Gerhard von Rad. Seine Bedeutung für die Theologie*: *Drei Reden von H. W. Wolff, R. Rendtorff, W. Pannenberg*. Munich: Kaiser, 1973.

Zimmerli, Walther. "Die Weisheit Israels: Zu einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad." *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95.

Part 2
*Weisheit in Israel* and Biblical Wisdom Books

# *Weisheit* and Proverbs

Arthur Jan Keefer

An essay on Proverbs and *Weisheit in Israel* might as well be an essay on *Weisheit* itself, for Gerhard von Rad seems to invoke the book of Proverbs at almost every turn. Yet, while a favorite and persistent source of reference, the book seems to have preoccupied von Rad in certain ways, being a sort of benchmark for Israelite wisdom and therefore undeniably significant for identifying the most important contributions of *Weisheit*. Such contributions—what is important, creative, or ongoing about *Weisheit*—could be measured in several ways: by enumerating later citations of the book and the reasons for which those citations were made, by accounting for the topics of interest surrounding those citations, by being well-versed in biblical scholarship on wisdom and Proverbs and simply having a feel for what is most important, or by invoking one of many other criteria that might direct us to the most important and ongoing contributions of the work, such as identifying points of critical reception or ideas that had gone relatively unstated prior to its publication. If a real, argued determination of what von Rad contributed most to the study of Proverbs were the aim of this essay, then the complexity and mutually conflicting results of such a task would become immediately evident. That, then, is not my task. Rather, I offer what I think has been to some degree significant since its publication, and I expect some of those insights will be considered significant to the greatest degree.

Two features that capture the full arc of *Weisheit* strike me as two of its most significant contributions. The first is that von Rad stayed his interest on the thought of biblical wisdom. Literary forms, social and historical backgrounds, textual difficulties, and ancient Near Eastern comparisons are given attention, but none of them dominate discussion. It is the matter of how ancient Israel thought about wisdom that forms the core of his book, namely, the ideas, expressions, and structures of wisdom, in accord

with the biblical texts. It is these that have perhaps made the most sub-
stantial contribution to biblical scholarship. If that was indeed von Rad's
aim—to present what ancient Israel thought about wisdom—then his
second contribution has to do with the context within which Israel under-
stood it. What is the most plausible context for biblical wisdom? Its biblical
and literary framework? Its ancient Near Eastern locale? Its theological
setting? Each of these was contested by scholars as a way of explaining
wisdom, especially Proverbs, and were particularly current, if not con-
flicting, as von Rad put his book together. Therefore, we could say that
*Weisheit* is a book about the thought world of wisdom, that is, about what
biblical wisdom is and means, and also a book about the contexts within
which that meaning can and should be understood. Both contributions
apply to the book of Proverbs just as much as they do to wisdom more
broadly and from them emerge what I plan to consider here: the lines of
development in Proverbs scholarship since 1970 and the more significant,
recurring, and current questions associated with the book since then. The
former includes the search for context and the role of schools and educa-
tion; the latter, torah and ethics in Proverbs.

## 1. The Search for Context

Whether deliberate or accidental, the search for Proverbs' context has
been a long-standing feature of Proverbs scholarship, especially during
the last hundred years. Since the publication of the Instruction of Amen-
emope (1922–1924), scholars have reminded each other that Proverbs
is not particularly Hebrew but rather international in scope, which, for
many, made its context less biblical or Israelite.[1] In 1970, for instance, R.
B. Y. Scott characterized the study of wisdom literature with three main
theses: (1) "Hebrew wisdom is a part of the wider context of older and
contemporary Near Eastern cultures.… (2) The category 'Wisdom Lit-
erature' extends beyond the principal works of the Hebrew canon.… (3)
Hebrew wisdom had features in common with its counterparts in Egypt

---

1. Consider Johannes Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-
jüdischen Ausprägung: Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel*, BZAW
62 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933); Horst D. Preuss, "Erwägungen zum theologischen
Ort alttestamentlicher Weisheitsliteratur," *EvT* 30 (1970): 393–417; William McKane,
*Proverbs*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). In some cases, the view depended
on theories of Proverbs' development.

and Mesopotamia."[2] While Scott makes three valid observations, they can all be subsumed under a single thesis: wisdom literature does not belong only to the Bible. Scott also struggled to find wisdom material within more comprehensive Old Testament publications, meaning that while articles, monographs, and commentaries expressed interest in wisdom literature, works of Old Testament theology and religion kept books such as Proverbs at arm's length.

It is unsurprising, then, that in the same year (1970), von Rad introduces *Weisheit* as follows:

> The opinion is current today that Israelite Yahwism, with its strong religious stamp, penetrated only very hesitantly the didactic wisdom material. Wisdom teaching has even been described as a foreign element in the Old Testament world. It appears as if the process of comparison with the wisdom of neighboring cultures has today petered out a little. Not until the details of Israel's striving after knowledge have been more clearly recognized, can a methodically exact comparison be carried out. But the foundations of such a process of comparison must be laid considerably deeper and more solidly.
>
> What we lack today is a work about wisdom in Israel which is much more decisive than has hitherto been the case, which thinks from those things specific to its subject, which, to a greater extent than has been the case until now, allows the themes to be given and the questions asked by the didactic texts themselves; in a word, a work which attempts to put itself into the specific world of thought and values and into the tensions within which the teachings of the wise men moved.[3]

We get the sense that von Rad was satisfied neither with the current relationship of Proverbs and its ancient Near Eastern counterparts nor with the relationship of Proverbs and other Old Testament literature. Hence we must allow "the didactic texts themselves" to announce the themes and to ask the questions. So he does, especially in his chapters on Proverbs.[4] For what strikes one when reading those chapters is von Rad's commitment to

---

2. R. B. Y. Scott, "The Study of the Wisdom Literature," *Int* 24 (1970): 25–29.

3. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel: Mit einem Anhang neu herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013), 10.

4. I have chs. 4–6 in mind. In James D. Martin's translation, these are (4) "Knowledge and the Fear of God," (5) "The Significance of Orders for Correct Social Behavior," (6) "Limits of Wisdom." See Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

delimiting his sources of evidence. He not only refrains from appealing to ideas such as covenant and other synthetic concepts from the Old Testament; he also refrains, largely, from appealing to anything but the book of Proverbs itself. Though he does draw on other Old Testament texts, he in all cases keeps his pledge to conduct a study that "allows the themes to be given and the questions asked by the didactic texts themselves."

One of the principal motivations for this methodological commitment was, probably, the consensus stated above: that the "didactic wisdom material" had little to do with "Israelite Yahwism" and was even a "foreign element" in the Old Testament. If such assertions were to be countered, perhaps von Rad had to commit himself to a form of argument that would be received as most persuasive, namely, by drawing his conclusions, not least his theological conclusions, from the didactic texts themselves, without inviting the results of biblical theology or external categories of interpretation or even ancient Near Eastern analogues and intertextual connections. These wider interests do, of course, come into play over the course of *Weisheit*, but chapters 4–6 read like a set of queries addressed to the text of Proverbs and are from that text alone, mostly, answered.

With this concern for context, von Rad's attention was stayed, as mentioned, on the thought of wisdom itself. The magnitude of his concentration can be seen in light of a publication contemporaneous with *Weisheit*: Norman Whybray's *The Intellectual Tradition of the Old Testament* (1974). It seems that definitions of *wisdom* and *wisdom tradition* were being floated in that decade, not least by James Crenshaw, Whybray, and von Rad himself. According to Whybray, these definitions depended on lexical assumptions about "wisdom vocabulary," which resulted in an overgeneralized and paltry understanding of wisdom.[5] His *Intellectual Tradition* was, then, a drive to clarify this terminology (i.e., חכם and its derivatives), as it assessed where and to what extent those terms influenced other portions of the Old Testament. Although such wisdom terminology has its foundation in Proverbs, Whybray's discussion of the book centers on its *Sitz im Leben* and the possibilities of Solomonic authorship. He also makes sweeping remarks about the book's function, which is undoubtedly didactic.[6] Yet for the apparent importance of wisdom as a concept or tradition, little is said about that tradition's thought itself. Wisdom as

---

5. For von Rad's awareness of this problem, see *Weisheit in Israel*, 7–8.

6. Roger N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*, BZAW 135 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 62.

lexeme overshadows the substance and subject of wisdom as literature or a way of thought.

Whybray's work is lexically driven, aimed at clarity, precise and exclusive in its conclusions about the influence of a wisdom tradition, and terse in its treatment of Proverbs. Von Rad's *Weisheit* is a work of another kind. It is captivated by the thought world of the wisdom tradition, comfortable with a Continental style of argumentation and expression, and dependent on Proverbs more than any other body of textual evidence. Amid this difference, though, von Rad and Whybray share a starting point, that the wisdom tradition was a "native Israelite phenomenon."[7] Consequently, both of them were reckoning with wisdom in Israel as such and as something differentiated from its foreign counterparts, and yet, at the same time, as something unsatisfactorily, perhaps too hastily, related to other portions of the Old Testament. Amid all the peer pressure from various forms of context, they were trying to get Israelite wisdom through its adolescence by describing it on its own terms.

## 2. Schools and Education

The question of context continues to press against scholarship on Proverbs, but a consensus has settled on an Israelite backdrop for the book and more so enlivened debate about Proverbs's *Sitz im Buch*, not least about the structure of its proverb collections, the coherence of the whole, and the place of the book's apparent misfits, such as Agur. The study of one particular type of context has continued, though, and made significant developments since *Weisheit* and Whybray's work, namely, Israelite schools and education. In 1968, just two years prior to the release of *Weisheit*, Hans-Jürgen Hermisson published *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit*, in which he argues that Proverbs was composed by a professional class of wise men within school settings that were connected to the royal court. Having a clear point of reference, Hermisson's concerns—the court, schools, and wise men—are dealt with by von Rad in a brief chapter titled "Places and Bearers of the Didactic Tradition" ("Orte und Träger der Lehrüberlieferung"). For him, court-related material is unquestionably evident in Proverbs (i.e., 25:1) and presupposed by some of its content (e.g., 16:10–15; 20:18; 24:6–7; 25:1–7), but the book otherwise originates within the context of the middle classes

---

7. Whybray, *Intellectual Tradition*, 2.

and landowners of Israel. So while the content of Proverbs gives little indication of schools or scribal culture, the literary achievement of the text itself entails a scribal culture, and the very existence of writing in Israel made teaching material a necessity. Consequently, von Rad reasons, there were schools of various types in ancient Israel. The most important question along these lines, however, was who transmitted such literary achievements. Who, in other words, were the wise men of Proverbs? The wise are often ideal literary portraits, like the fool, and yet some references, says von Rad, suggest that they were professionals, such as "the words of *the wise*" (22:17) and "the wise" folk to whom the scoffer will not go (15:12).[8] Ultimately, the office and activity of such teachers comes clear in Ben Sira, where the teacher-scribe identity is amalgamated and presented with a clarity unseen in Proverbs. All said, von Rad uses Proverbs to make some serious inferences about schools and educational professions in ancient Israel.

The decades of debate about this question reached a high point in 1994 with Stuart Weeks's *Early Israelite Wisdom*, which put to question the view that Proverbs was composed as pedagogical material, designed for the training of court professionals. Accounting also for the contributions of Whybray and Davies, the state of the question at that point is well-summarized by Knut Heim:

> There is no strong evidence for the existence of schools in early Israel (Weeks). Arguments for the existence of schools remain inferential (Whybray), and the existence of schools is likely (but not certain) based on analogies from Israel's neighbours (Davies). Widespread implications should not be drawn from arguments based on the existence of schools in ancient Israel.[9]

Since the mid-1990s, scholars have swapped the historical for a more literary starting point to assess the question of schools and education in Israel, namely, intertextuality. The diachronic relationships between Proverbs and other parts of the Old Testament, especially Deuteronomy, have influenced views about the composition of Proverbs and its place

---

8. Von Rad also lists 24:23 and 13:14 (*Weisheit in Israel*, 21 n. 61; *Wisdom in Israel*, 20). All biblical translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

9. Knut Heim, "The Phenomenon and Literature of Wisdom in Its Near Eastern Context and in the Biblical Wisdom Books," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø, 5 parts in 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2015), 3.2:580.

within ancient Israel's literary production. David Carr has done most in this regard, delineating criteria for intertextual influence and drawing on patterns of composition elsewhere in the ancient Near East to conclude that Proverbs may represent an early stage of Israelite literature, that it was used for general education, and that a particularly educated group of people may have been identifiable in Israel.[10] For Carr, the possibility of schools and a professional group remains tentative, but the antiquity of Proverbs and its role in education are voiced with confidence.

These developments, which are inseparable from their intertextual cradle, have advanced even further due to the recent priority given to literary traditions within the Bible. This goes by several names—inner-biblical discourse, scribal exegesis, literary traditions of ancient Israel, and so on—and links up with much of the work on memory in biblical studies, which has distanced itself from the text's historical proximities and has preserved historical referents as textualized memories. A recent article by Jaqueline Vaytrub exemplifies this. In her words, "literature refracts values and practices through its aesthetic, engaging traditions and reshaping them. This study therefore aims to disentangle the literary self-presentation of the Book of Proverbs from its use in scholarly reconstruction of ancient Israelite and Judean educational practices or institutions."[11] In short, Proverbs informs not our understanding of an educational *Sitz im Leben* but rather the modes of literary production and transmission, and in that sense reveals the educational activities of ancient Israel.

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that this edging away from on-the-ground historical plausibility toward textualized discourse, including discourse about education, has also prompted developments of Proverbs's *Sitz im Buch*, which I mentioned earlier. The guidance of textuality and intertextuality on schools and education, whatever these may have to do with *Sitz im Leben*, is just as strong for a matter barely mentioned by von Rad.

## 3. Proverbs and Torah

One connection relatively scarce in *Weisheit* is that of wisdom and torah. Von Rad shows a faint concern for the revealed law of God, and the rela-

---

10. David Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 403–31.

11. Jacqueline Vayntrub, "The Book of Proverbs and the Idea of Ancient Israelite Education," *ZAW* 128 (2016): 98.

tive disinterest has even less to do with Proverbs. For it is Ben Sira that elaborates on the harmony of torah wisdom, cohering the primeval order with divine revelation in the tabernacle (Sir 24:7–11), using torah to define and interpret the fear of the Lord, and employing wisdom to interpret and legitimate torah.[12] If torah meets wisdom anywhere, it is in the Apocrypha, but that is not to say it has nothing to do with Proverbs.

Torah is most evident in von Rad's discussion of Prov 1 and 8 and Wisdom's call.[13] Her prophetic overtones especially prompt the question of how she relates to other bearers of revelation. The summons from Lady Wisdom "bears all the marks of divine address," ushering a choice between life and death, and heralding an "I" that is not Yahweh's, which seems impossible to evade and means disobedience for all who deny.[14] We have here an intermediary between God and Israel, one unprecedented amid the priests and prophets of Israelite history and therefore evoking a response as to her place amid them. The question, though—how does Wisdom relate to other bearers of revelation?—was not raised by the sages; they did not investigate the phenomenon. They rather hallowed her and thus made their own contribution with the self-revelation of creation. Neither pushing nor pulling on the tradition of Israel's history, Proverbs speaks on its own terms, without a care for, or perhaps even an awareness of, the condemnation and hope of the prophets, the daunting demands of Sinai, or the guild of priestly holiness.[15] Whether in dialogue or debate, Proverbs contains little to nothing about wisdom and/as torah.

That wisdom and torah did little to capture von Rad's attention—he at least thought that Proverbs gave little reason to query the subject—stands in marked contrast with the fact that a wisdom-torah nexus has emerged as an important and current issue associated with Proverbs. Germane to the topic are several works, by the likes of Joseph Blenkinsopp, Stuart Weeks, Bernd Schipper, and David Carr, representative of both the able

---

12. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 174–75, 256–58 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 165–66, 245–47).

13. He also dedicates a short appendix to the relationship of the self-illuming good that is wisdom and the terrifying revelation of God at Sinai. The latter commandments, being "a direct, and therefore terrifying address by Yahweh to Israel," contrast dramatically with the self-illuming invitation of Proverbs' wisdom, a difference that von Rad attributes to independent traditio-historical movements (*Weisheit in Israel*, 101–2).

14. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 172 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 163).

15. See especially von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 174 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 165).

and international bearing on the question.[16] To make sense of von Rad's approach to the issue and of its developments since then, we need to look pretty far afield—to a brief history of commentary on Proverbs since the seventeenth century, from which we can appreciate why so little may have been said by some about the topic and why so much, recently, has been said by others.

For many, the comments of Franz Delitzsch supply a starting point for measuring the confluence of Proverbs and torah, and for Delitzsch, that confluence occurred with Prov 1–9 and Deuteronomy.

> Generally, the poetry of this writer has its hidden roots in the older writings. Who does not hear, to mention only one thing, in i. 7–ix. an echo of the old שמע (hear), Deut. vi. 4–9, cf. xi. 18–21? The whole poetry of this writer savours of the Book of Deuteronomy. The admonitory addresses i. 7–ix. are to the Book of Proverbs what Deuteronomy is to the Pentateuch. As Deuteronomy seeks to bring home and seal upon the heart of the people the תּוֹרָה of the Mosaic law, so do they the תּוֹרָה of the Solomonic proverbs.[17]

We get the sense that this is only a sampling for Delitzsch and that, to the parallels marked by שמע and תורה, many could be added. While recent scholarship has played up the Deuteronomic presence in Proverbs, it is worth asking whether Delitzsch's remarks were as unprecedented as we could be led to believe and whether he is therefore the most suitable starting point.

Among Delitzsch's nineteenth-century predecessors, we are hard pressed to find any significant connections made between Proverbs and torah. Moses Stuart most plainly says, "*Historical* allusions are scarcely found in [the book of Proverbs]," a premise he consistently applies to passages that later generated so much Deuteronomistic intrigue.[18] In Prov 1:8,

---

16. See the references below and, for a good overview of literature and some of the issues, William P. Brown, "The Law and the Sages: A Reexamination of *Tôrâ* in Proverbs," in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean Mcbride, Jr.*, ed. John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 251–80.

17. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. Matthew G. Easton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 34.

18. Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Dodd, 1852), 54, emphasis original.

for example, *torah* designates parental instruction, which has in it merely "something of the nature of law."[19] Heinrich Ewald, too, gives little indication that torah plays any role in Proverbs, though he makes a telling change in the second edition of his *Die poetischen Bücher des Alten Bundes*. Having mentioned no other Old Testament passages in his comments on Prov 1:8 within the first edition (1837), by his second (1867) Ewald remarks that 1:8 uses the words of the Decalogue's fifth commandment, a suggestive but hardly revolutionary remark.[20]

A final example from the nineteenth century indicates an alternative interpretation of a text that has recently been a keyhole for torah insertions: the מצות of the father in Prov 2:1, which are paired with his "sayings" (אמרי) and for which the son should strive. "My son, if you receive my *sayings* and treasure up my *commandments* within you." For Ernst Bertheau, the poet's shift from sayings to commandments marks an increase in intensity.[21] The latter is stronger than the former and corresponds to the buildup of the verses themselves, in which the father bids his son to "receive" (v. 1), "incline his heart" (v. 2), "call out" for insight (v. 3), and seek for wisdom "like silver" (v. 4). This poetic escalation is, by all means, plausible, and yet from Bertheau we hear of no *torah* in Prov 2:1–4; מצות are simply more forceful than אמרי, an explainable choice of lexemes on the grounds of poetry alone.

The 1826 commentary of Friedrich W. C. Umbreit contains many, at times elaborate, explanations for terms and texts in Proverbs that have been the center of torah attention. The לקח of Prov 4:2 ("*Lehre*/teaching"), for instance, refers to "that which the student takes," as it does in Deut 32:2, but that should not be confused with any conceptual link to Deuteronomy.[22] Likewise, the "binding" mentioned in Prov 3:3 uses an image from the ancient Near East that elsewhere involved mystical practices—talismans of a sort—an interpretation applied to the stone tablets, which Umbreit understands to be worn on the chest.[23] These texts evoke explanation but no broader connection to Old Testament torah. For sev-

---

19. Stuart, *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, 144.

20. See Heinrich Ewald, *Die poetischen Bücher des Alten Bundes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1839–1840), 52, 77, respectively.

21. Ernst Bertheau, *Die Sprüche Salomo's* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1847), 8–9.

22. Friedrich W. C. Umbreit, *Commentar über die Sprüche Salomo's* (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1826), 45.

23. Umbreit, *Commentar über die Sprüche Salomo's*, 23–24.

eral of the most prominent commentators writing on Proverbs in the nineteenth century prior to Delitzsch, intertextual references served lexical questions but not, it seems, substantive links between Proverbs and torah.

Moving back a bit further, commentary of the eighteenth century consisted largely of annotations, that is, brief notes on most verses of Proverbs with a special interest in lexical markup (e.g., Henry Dimock, David Durell, Albert Schultens). Lengthy interpretation informed by literary and historical context was not the norm, and, as with the seventeenth century, while longer, expository comments were in fashion, the context was principally theological. Arthur Jackson, a nonconformist English clergyman, published his *Annotations* on several Old Testament books in 1658, and his work on Proverbs gives a good indication of what interpretations were perhaps standard or up for grabs in his day. Aside from some remarkable parallels with nineteenth-century commentators, such as what Jackson calls the "acknowledged interpretation" of the reference to talismans in Prov 3:3, so mentioned by Umbreit above, Jackson clocks few deliberate allusions to torah or the Pentateuch within Prov 1–9.[24] But what he does observe—perhaps by assumption, perhaps because it was self-evident—is a torah-dressed definition of wisdom. It is no less than "obedience and conformity to the word and law of God."[25] The definition crops up within his remarks on passages such as Prov 1:8; 4:11; 8:2, 14, and the references to "commandments," "law," and "teaching" found therein. While parental—Jackson does not deny that—such admonitions also entail divine law, and such legal tones begin to thunder by the time we reach Prov 30:1–6. Agur underscores his simplicity and relies on "every word of God" (30:5) as, says Jackson, the "revelation of God in Christ." While some may write this off as puritanical gloss, tipped past the edge of plausibility by its Christology, we might also acknowledge that Jackson nevertheless saw something of Proverbs and torah that Delitzsch noticed too and that has, in the last couple of decades, generated an interest previously unprecedented. So is Delitzsch our best

---

24. See Arthur Jackson, *Annotations upon the Five Books Immediately Following the Historicall Part of the Old Testament (Commonly Called the Five Doctrinall or Poeticall Books) to Wit, the Book of Iob, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon* (London: Daniel, 1658), 741–42.

25. Jackson, *Annotations upon the Five Books*, 744.

starting point? Perhaps. But are we groping in the dark by searching his predecessors? Not at all.

Von Rad is remarkably dismissive of taking the Decalogue as the basis of Proverbs' instruction, suggesting this as a starting point that was taken for granted by interpreters of the nineteenth century.[26] But as we have seen, the story may not be so simple, especially having considered the discrete passages that have occupied so much attention in recent wisdom-torah debate (those in Prov 1–9 and 30). Despite von Rad's dismissal of torah in Proverbs, he argues tirelessly for a conception of wisdom that has only helped to accommodate torah. For von Rad, Wisdom is the *Offenbarungsträger* (the revelation-bearer) and in voice the very *Selbstoffenbarung der Schöpfung* (the self-revelation of creation) that "intervenes in the dialogue between Yahweh and Israel."[27] A great deal of von Rad's thesis turns on this point—Wisdom as mediator—and although the conclusions rest on evidence from both Job and Proverbs, we see herein an opportunity to discover torah's emergence in Proverbs studies, which, as I have said, has been downplayed, if not denied, by some and yet for others not taken far enough.

Many scholars are not only comfortable with calling Wisdom a mediator between God and humanity but would actually argue that she has a great deal to do with other forms of revelation, especially torah, making the question of wisdom's relation to other bearers of revelation a live one.[28] As we have seen, hints at such a relationship between Proverbs and torah were made by Delitzsch and perhaps others, but this inquest certainly dimmed once other ancient Near Eastern worlds came to light in the early twentieth century. Proverbs studies was occupied with Amenemope, Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature more broadly, and to an extent biblical prophetic literature.[29] But after von Rad—I cannot necessarily say because of him—Proverbs found a new playmate in the tradition of torah. A notable mound of articles and chapters on the subject accumulated in the 1970s, and Moshe Weinfeld made an apt contribution in 1972. How-

---

26. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 93 n. 21 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 87).

27. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 172–73 (*Wisdom in Israel*, 163); "in das Gespräch zwischen Jahwe und Israel einschaltet."

28. This view is not without dissent. See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 946–47.

29. See above, especially Scott, "Study of the Wisdom Literature," 33.

ever, Proverbs-and-torah or Wisdom-and-torah still made no appearance in overviews of the subject area, and in the commentaries of the decade, torah presence seems to be a matter of what certain terms in Proverbs do or do not refer to or, if it is present, has less clout than the communication of priests or words of the prophets.[30]

The next major stride is taken by Joseph Blenkinsopp, whose *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, first published in 1983 and revised in 1995, begins to look at Proverbs as part of a tradition that relates to the tradition of biblical law. The Deuteronomistic cloth of Old Testament torah takes shape, and, for Blenkinsopp, the fit is right in several respects: wisdom and law sport a shared form, they were later integrated (e.g., Apocrypha), and the law is presented not just as a code but as reflective, motivated, and generalized teaching. Although Blenkinsopp retains an interest in tradition history, most evident in schools of scribal composition, he evinces a move toward the literary features that bind wisdom and law and increasingly identifies the hothouse of torah tradition with Deuteronomy. This has led to several agreed-upon characteristics of the Wisdom-torah relation, sketched nicely by Bernd Schipper in a volume on Wisdom and torah: "Deuteronomy was increasingly regarded as a standard of theological reference for post-exilic Judaism" (i.e., the torah tradition is Deuteronomy-centric); terminology is not a sufficient ground of comparison; the relation between Proverbs and torah is complex, and it might be best described under several related labels: "rewritten scripture," "inner-biblical exegesis," or "scribal exegesis."[31]

With this research profile in hand, two scholars in particular have made their case about the place and point of torah in the book of Proverbs—Schipper and Stuart Weeks—and it is through their work that a common body of evidence has emerged.[32] Of most consequence are the following:

---

30. See, respectively, e.g., Richard Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 5, 51–52, 243–44; Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)*, BKAT 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), xxxvii. Also Roland E. Murphy, "Hebrew Wisdom," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 21–34; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 558; Erhard Gerstenberger, *Wesen und Herkunft des "Apodiktischen Rechts,"* WMANT 20 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965).

31. Bernd Schipper, "Wisdom and Torah: Insights and Perspectives," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 315.

32. See Bernd Schipper, *Hermeneutik der Tora: Studien zur Traditionsgeschichte*

- ◆ Occurrences of תורה and מצות in Prov 1–9 (Prov 1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:2, 4; 6:20, 23; 7:1–2)
- ◆ Encouraging posterity to commit to the teaching (Prov 3:1–5; 6:20–24; 7:1–5; Deut 6:6–8; 11:18–21)
- ◆ References to "tablet" (לוח) and engraving (Prov 3:3; 7:3; Deut 9:9 et al.)
- ◆ Likening God to a father (Prov 3:12; Deut 8:5)
- ◆ Use of the phrase מוסר יהוה ("discipline of the Lord"; Prov 3:11; Deut 11:2)
- ◆ The fulfillment of *torah* as being Israel's wisdom in the sight of the nations (Deut 4:6)
- ◆ Allusions to the Decalogue and Shema in Prov 6:20–35; 30:1–14
- ◆ References to the words of God (Prov 2:6; 30:5–6)
- ◆ Covenantal warnings (Prov 30:6; Deut 4:2)
- ◆ Questions about the proximity of God's instruction (Prov 30:4; Deut 30:11–14)

Neither the lexical parallels nor the thematic affinities are disputed. A Deuteronomistic torah indeed harbors within Proverbs. Disputation, rather, runs along two lines: what Proverbs intends to do with these allusions, and how we judge the unity and discord between various parts of Proverbs that contain Deuteronomistic allusions. Thus, while many might consent to all ten of the above points, argument erupts when it comes to how these connections should be interpreted and what sort of continuity can be found along the grain of Proverbs as a whole.

Proverbs, on the one hand, gives voice to contrasting, even competing, accounts of torah.[33] Throughout Prov 1–9; 10–22; and 30, Schipper traces a patchwork of torah interpretations that do not, in every case, fit together neatly. The decided difference, for him, turns on how wisdom is achieved. On the one hand, wisdom is gained through sapiential instruction, sometimes

---

*von Prov 2 und zur Komposition von Prov 1–9*, BZAW 432 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012); Schipper, "'Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!': The Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy," in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 629 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), 21–34; Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*, trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019); Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 96–119.

33. See, most recently, Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 36–39, 53–54.

of a discursive sort that stokes the mind by juxtaposing different conceptions of wisdom (chs. 3–5, 10–22). Herein, however, the experiential basis of wisdom moves toward a theological foundation, already evident in Prov 15 and unmistakable in 1:1–7, where "the fear of Yhwh is the beginning of all sapiential learning and teaching."[34] Contrast that with the human capability to attain knowledge of God through sapiential education in Prov 2, a contrast that comes full circle in Prov 30, which repudiates the idea that human insight can lead to a deeper understanding of God's will and commandments. For "what was regarded as a result of instruction according to sapiential *torah* (cf. Deut 6) is regarded here as a quality that cannot be learned by can only be requested from God."[35] Across Proverbs, then, Schipper discerns a subtle discourse about what wisdom is and how it can be attained, involving definitions of *torah* and wisdom, even "*torah*-oriented wisdom," that are never far from Deuteronomy.[36]

With complexity and cacophony, Proverbs conducts a dynamic discussion about the place of wisdom among other bearers of revelation, exemplifying a "scribal exegesis" of the Deuteronomic tradition, and in that "a theological discourse about the relationship between Wisdom and Torah in the post-exilic period."[37] Neither have the Yahwistic traditions faded into the background, as von Rad concluded, nor was the question of wisdom's relation to other bearers of revelation left dormant only to be recovered by Ben Sira. Wisdom involved itself fully with torah and, for Schipper, exhibits a multifaceted contest about the tradition across the book of Proverbs.

On the other hand of this debate, much of the same textual evidence can be found; what changes is the interpretation of it. According to Weeks, for instance, Prov 2 and 30 play fundamental roles in the Wisdom-torah dialogue; the instruction of Proverbs resembles the will of God, and at stake are differing viewpoints about how wisdom is acquired. But instead of discord, competition, and cacophony, Proverbs is splayed as a coherent whole, not without tension but without a tension that compromises its unified testament to wisdom and torah. Again, in Prov 2:1–10, where

---

34. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 37.
35. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 39.
36. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 37.
37. Bernd Schipper, "When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs," in Schipper and Teeter, *Wisdom and Torah*, 57.

Schipper finds humans able to attain wisdom by their own powers, others find humans no more able to acquire wisdom than they are to be open to it and to receive it if the Lord so wills. According to Weeks, wisdom enables one to know God's will, and yet the acquisition of it comes only from the hand of God, not on the heels of human effort. God grants wisdom, which then "enters one's heart" (2:10). "Essentially," in other words, "the internalization of instruction grants possession of wisdom, which itself grants such benefits as the fear of YHWH."[38] Attuned to both human and divine action, Weeks seems comfortable with leaving these relationships less specified. While the father's instruction makes one open to wisdom, which God then actually gives, the distinction between human learning and divine bestowal determines less for Weeks than it does for Schipper.

The context of Proverbs is, for Weeks, Jewish, which makes the bigger question not one of how the book reconciles various traditions but of how this tradition—especially Deuteronomy—makes peace with its poetry. Von Rad may have been more comfortable with that approach than with a fine-tooth diachronic analysis of torah in Proverbs, given his high regard for poetry and Continental sentiments about the inseparability of human and divine agency in the book, and of the content and form of its poetry. But what has been worked out since *Weisheit* are several possibilities of how torah presents itself in Proverbs and how Proverbs makes use of it as a biblical tradition. That Proverbs contains some echo of torah is conclusive. Less decisive is why such allusions were made and how they were intended to function. In other words, what is meant by rewriting Scripture, in Proverbs' case? In my estimation, biblical scholarship remains far from a consensus on inner-biblical methodology that could assess such a question for Proverbs and torah. For now, some measure of simplicity and coherence would seem to make one case more plausible than the other.

## 4. Proverbs and Ethics

We cannot speak of current and emerging issues in Proverbs and fail to mention ethics. It is nearly incumbent on scholars of the book to consider the topic, and von Rad is no exception. The chapter of *Weisheit* most dedicated to the ethics of wisdom, "Die Bedeutung der Ordnungen für das rechte soziale Verhalten," begins with a consensus that Proverbs holds the

---

38. Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 119.

premier place in Israelite moral thought. "The book of Proverbs has always been regarded as containing the concentrated deposit of ancient Israelite morality."[39] The claim has held true for centuries, and I have no intent to cast doubt on it now; nor does von Rad. But he does have something specific in mind for the ethics of Proverbs. When he calls it the "concentrated deposit" of Israelite morality he wishes not to unpack its contents, even if the book is full of instruction. For he gives very little time to the moral demands or ethical content of Proverbs as such, and when he does, he seems to draw out very specific aspects. Von Rad rather takes an interest in the ethics of Proverbs insofar as it discloses a context for Israel's ethical thought, and the bases of one's knowledge and justification of it. This, on the one hand, has to do with the notion of good and the promotion of life, while, on the other hand, putting cosmic order and one's experience of it at the forefront.

In the first place, von Rad rightly cautions us from calling Proverbs a book of morality in the modern sense. Ideas of universal demand, imperative form, and timeless moral norms rush to mind, but in Proverbs we struggle to find a reducible principle for morality or a definition of good and evil and instead get the sense that it prizes one's mastery of life and that any resolution about good and evil must account for social conditions and one's place in a community. Proverbs uses a set of standard concepts that aim to uphold the social order, where good contributes to such conditions and evil destroys them. "Good and bad create social conditions," says von Rad.[40] The good person knows this, and the book aims to inculcate a knowledge of it, along with the ability to discern between the two. Due to life's great variability and one's own struggle to act in accord with one's knowledge (Prov 14:12; 29:15), the teachers relied on an immense experience of life. In this, the first train of thought, namely, an ethical epistemology of Proverbs, comes through: experience of life produces a knowledge of good and evil that is then conveyed in the teaching of Proverbs.

Von Rad does draw up some of this teaching, including instructions about honor, caution, pride, and patience. As mentioned, though, he seems uninterested to catalog the teaching of Proverbs or to organize its topics. He drives instead toward a question of basis: To what "common

---

39. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 79. This is Martin's translation (*Wisdom in Israel*, 74).

40. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 82.

basic norm" (*gemeinsamen Grundnorm*) can the many rules of conduct be traced?[41] The possibility that the Decalogue sets the norm for Proverbs' instruction is dismissed, nearly as soon as it is entertained, being "flatly denied" as a basic norm, which is unsurprising given von Rad's views about torah in Proverbs, as spelled out above. Instead, von Rad favors the motivational clauses of Prov 22:17–24:34 and 25–27, contending that their basis lies in experience. "Common to all of these motivations is that they are, without fail, based on experiences."[42] These experiences are, more specifically, experiences of orders, or "regularities" (*Gesetzmäßigkeiten*), accumulated over many generations. "Here, then, human behavior is regulated not by common [or: universal] ethical norms but by the experience of entirely immanent regularities."[43] So, from Proverbs alone, the notion of moral order emerges, and while it is in a sense difficult to demonstrate, it is also difficult to refute. It simply seems to make good sense of much of the material in Proverbs. However, commendable about von Rad's take on the topic is that he does not give a facile interpretation of this order but rather understands it as a dialectic that is integral to Proverbs, namely, one's experience of the Lord. The tutors of Proverbs experience life, and in that they experience the Lord, and yet the order to which they attest is ever and always upheld by him. In other words, we can speak of, "on the one hand, valid rules, and on the other of *ad hoc* divine actions."[44] To trust the world's order is to trust the one who upholds it. This becomes a refrain throughout *Weisheit*, and as a dialectic it marks the bedrock of Proverbs' ethical basis. When reaching for an answer to what common basic norm forms the basis of its teaching, we go neither deeper nor farther than this, not at least within Proverbs itself.[45]

Von Rad combed through Prov 10–29 to find that its principles emanate from experiences of life's order, bolstered by the blessings of goodness and good behavior, and connected to a stable social structure, all of which is backed by the Lord, who acts not in a strictly predictable or retributive manner but rather in ways that ensure the reliability of order and lead one to him through an experience of it.[46] Proverbs 1–9 signals not so much a

---

41. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 93.
42. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 95.
43. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 95.
44. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 113.
45. See also von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 67–68, 100–101, 112–13.
46. See also von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 199–204.

change in this ethical system but an amplification of it. Key is the call of personified Wisdom, who heralds an *Ordnungswille*. She "speaks out of what has been created" and in that constitutes "the basis and source of ethical behavior."[47] In her a sort of will-to-order makes its public proclamation, leaving pupils with no ambiguous sentences, no experience that could be evaluated as one thing rather than the other, and no groping in the dark for a source of ethical authority. While those possibilities may be true for much of Proverbs, they are not the case in Prov 1 and 8. For von Rad, the Wisdom of Prov 1–9 brings a clarity and authority that ties up the normative elements of Prov 10–29.

Were we to follow up on von Rad's train of thought, we might seek to explain how Proverbs conceives of the good, how the book envisions its pupils coming to know good and evil, and how its form and content are significant for other aspects of ethics in Proverbs and the ancient Near East more broadly. Since *Weisheit*, each of these lines of inquiry has been pursued, even if the ethics of Proverbs remains an auxiliary field of study for the book (the same is true of the wisdom literature in general). Moral inquest has held the attention of only a few scholars, and since von Rad the posts have been moved in two directions: from a fixation on order to poetry, and from traditio-historical connections to heuristic resources.

The first begins with the remarkable amount of attention given to moral order in Proverbs over twenty years after the publication of *Weisheit*. Holger Delkurt's *Ethische Einsichten in der alttestamentlichen Spruchweisheit* (1993) and Eckart Otto's *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (1994) pursue questions of order without mercy. Otto's chapter on wisdom literature is most similar to *Weisheit*. It gives priority to order, especially in Prov 10–30, and asserts its knowability, its epistemological limits, and the centrality of trust in the Lord, introduced by chapters 1–9. But amid this remarkable overlap, Otto drives a harder line between Prov 1–9 and 10–30, where he finds a contrast between deduction and induction. The latter reveals a bona fide empiricism with the possibility of a moral order that is more objective than von Rad would have been comfortable with. That order might succumb to divine action and contradiction—both marks of its limitations in Prov 10–30—and yet certain admonitions find no justification in experience, namely, caring for the

---

47. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 167.

weak and renouncing retaliation.[48] Thus, an experienced, empirical moral order spreads its wings only so wide and flies only so straight until it is interrupted by God, variability, and the value-laden moral priorities of Israel's social structure. Proverbs 1–9 confirms this order but most of all stands in opposition to it, highlighting, as it does, the divine source of wisdom and one's trust in God rather than order. Therefore experience and trust in the Lord seem less complementary in Otto's interpretation than in von Rad's: "Because wisdom has its origin in God, it cannot be derived from experience."[49]

In short, Otto follows a path through Proverbs, well-trodden by von Rad, but he leaves several different impressions: a firm divide between moral induction (chs. 10–30) and deduction (chs. 1–9), a confidence in objective knowledge had by experience, and more opposition than agreement between one's experience of patterns in life and trust in God. The counterpoint to these conclusions appears in Delkurt's work on Prov 10–22 and 25–29. He questions the priority of eudaimonistic success as the standard for action and instead champions God's will as its norm. Likewise, the sayings of Proverbs record not general life experience or simply what is the case, according to deed and consequence, but rather display what should be, according to the sages' ethical standards. Neither Otto's point nor Delkurt's counterpoint does full justice to *Weisheit*, and neither captures the nuance of von Rad's argument about moral order in Proverbs. But perhaps dichotomy should be expected in the wake of a work so comfortable with fuzzy lines and so content with dialectic. Interestingly, such sophistication still goes largely unheeded.[50]

While interest in the moral order of Proverbs has not gone silent, it has given way to another aspect of the book that was incredibly important to von Rad: poetry. The space he gives to Proverbs' poetry—not least its significance for ethics—is minimal in comparison to the chapters on order. Yet, however minimal these comments may be, their gravity cannot be

---

48. Ekhart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 156, 158.

49. Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*, 163; see 162–64.

50. For instance, one of the more recent works on Old Testament ethics by one of the most influential scholars in the field reserves Proverbs principally for a discussion of moral order, making a classic statement about the cosmic structure that is upheld by God in a book (Proverbs) apparently bereft of Israelite distinctives. See John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111–16.

dismissed. In Proverbs, "the forms are never separated from the contents."[51] In other words, the meaning of Proverbs stems in part, and inseparably, from its presentation. As ardent as von Rad seems about this premise, he does not apply it to Proverbs' ethics in the way he does for other topics in *Weisheit*, and poetry plays second, perhaps even third or fourth, fiddle to moral order. The role he accredits to poetry, though, has been validated by recent work on the ethics of Proverbs. As her title betrays, *Poetic Ethics in the Book of Proverbs*, Anne Stewart has brought the form-and-meaning premise to maturity.[52] Intolerable for her is the assumption that the simplicity of Proverbs' literary form corresponds to a simplicity of its moral worldview.[53] Rather, "the didactic poetry of Proverbs is intimately connected to its pedagogical function," so that in Prov 1–9, for example, the poems "do not merely describe the content of a lesson or a set of moral axioms, but they unfold as the lesson itself." As for the proverbs proper, their "parallelism, sound play, terseness, parataxis and figurative language—are integral to Proverbs' pedagogical ends."[54] Sound play, for instance, not only adorns a proverb but impresses it on the memory and draws certain elements to one's attention. Parallelism also serves more than proverbial economy; it can force the pupil to think through a pair of statements that may have otherwise been spelled out for her. Stewart builds her thesis through an exposition of *musar* in Proverbs: what she understands as rebuke, motivation, desire, and imagination. This all unfolds as a consequence of a theory about poetry that was cherished by von Rad—that form and meaning go together—and in so doing shifts the ethical discussion of Proverbs away from order toward poetry.

The move mirrors a shift away from Israelite morality as metaphysics to Israelite ethics as moral formation. Instead of cosmic order, metaphysical presuppositions, and discernable interruptions or necessities of divine action come poetic function and malleable moral agents. This transition suggests that our study of Old Testament ethics can only get so far, so

---

51. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 26.

52. Anne Stewart acknowledges von Rad at the start (p. 3), but her actual starting point lies elsewhere, namely, with William Brown's idea of character formation. See Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 35. So while I would say that von Rad's premise underlies much of Stewart's work on poetry, it does so in no explicit manner.

53. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 71–78.

54. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 2, 43, 59 (see 41–61).

long as we aim to describe what appears in the text; for example, that the proverbs disclose a world ordered by certain principles. Once that text is considered didactic—and I mean not just what the text contains (i.e., locution) but what it contains for its readers (illocution and perlocution)—then new horizons open up.

The first transition (from order to poetry) is paralleled by a second: from traditio-historical connections to heuristic resources. Von Rad does not obsess about source criticism, and while he recognized a tradition history in Proverbs, he treats it with a light touch. He assesses what the text means rather than where it has been, seeing Proverbs as an amalgam, not a sedimentary deposit. But Proverbs is nonetheless a tradition to be understood within its ancient Israelite context and with reference to other ancient traditions. Comparison of these texts is sporadic in *Weisheit*, albeit serious, and principally an outcome that he hopes for in the wake of the publication.[55] In his work as a whole—and the same is true for his ethics—the use of other traditions or theoretical models for heuristic ends, such as Enlightenment moral thought or modern sociological frameworks, does not really occur: no theoretical exchange, no heuristic method. Instead, comparisons must reckon with historical viability and textual or conceptual influence.

There is at least one exception to this, and it occurs in his setup for ethics in Proverbs. When expounding "good conduct" in Israel, he says, "It is helpful to see how closely here early Greek ideas come to those of Israel."[56] The consideration is brisk, as von Rad asserts that $\alpha\rho\epsilon\tau\dot{\eta}$ in classical Greece meant not "virtue" but "goodness" or "merit" and hence was inseparable from one's welfare. The observation is correct, yet the comparison—if we can call it that—ends there. Ancient Greece clarified goodness as an ethical cynosure, and that is all. I mean no criticism of von Rad at this point. I rather need us to see how limited his heuristic use of non-Israelite ethical frameworks was. Historically plausible connections and, at best, the influence of ancient Near Eastern ideas remained the preferable mode of comparison in *Weisheit*.

After thirty years this method has not slowed, but it has had to make room for alternative approaches of comparison, what I would broadly call heuristic methods: feminist interpretation, philosophical criticism,

---

55. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 3–14.
56. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 84.

metaphor theory, to name a few.[57] Most of these exploit extrabiblical resources in order to excavate concepts and points of view that are otherwise latent in the Bible, and a clear attempt has been made at the ethics of Proverbs.

Michael Fox argues, "Socratic ethics is a useful heuristic model for understanding the ethical presuppositions behind the variegated advice and observations in the book of Proverbs."[58] In response, Christopher Ansberry makes a similar case for Aristotelian ethics and Proverbs, using conceptions of virtue from the *Nicomachean Ethics* to explain how Proverbs conceives—often implicitly—of ethics.[59] I find the approach helpful and the Aristotelian argument more plausible, and have therefore followed up this line of inquiry at length.[60] In *The Book of Proverbs and Virtue Ethics*, I argue that Aristotle's criteria for moral virtue are met by many of the moral concepts in Proverbs, so its instructions about work, discipline, wealth, honor, mercy, appetite, dispute, cheer, anger, fear, self-regard, and several aspects of speech can all be described not merely in terms of right-wrong actions but as actions and emotions performed "at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner" (*Eth. Nic.* 2.6.11 [Rackham]). One errs by excess—talking too much, for example—or deficiency—remaining silent too often—and is praised for hitting the mean: speaking at the right time, to the right people, and with the right aims. "When words are many, transgression does not cease, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent" (Prov 10:19).

In short, emerging work on the ethics of Proverbs uses extrabiblical heuristic models to explain what is occurring in the book. This is something von Rad does not really entertain and, perhaps for that reason, only gets so far in his analysis of good in Proverbs and of its likeness to Greek ἀρετή and may be why he halts his discussion when said topics were not addressed by the teachers of Proverbs themselves. Heuristic methods have their own setbacks, of course, not least the risk of overidentifying nonnative

---

57. See Philip R. Davies, "Biblical Studies: Fifty Years of a Multi-discipline," *CurBR* 13 (2014): 34–66.

58. Michael V. Fox, "Ethics and Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs," *HS* 48 (2007): 75.

59. Christopher B. Ansberry, "What Does Jerusalem Have to Do with Athens? The Moral Vision of the Book of Proverbs and Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics," *HS* 51 (2010): 157–73.

60. Arthur Jan Keefer, *The Book of Proverbs and Virtue Ethics: Integrating the Biblical and Philosophical Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

ideas within biblical literature and contorting the text. While these dangers are not intrinsic to such methodology, caution and safeguards should be heeded. This is one of two main developments in the study of Proverbs since von Rad's *Weisheit*, both of which have especially advanced our understanding of the book's ethics. No longer content with describing the moral metaphysic behind the sentence literature and proclamations of Wisdom, summed up by notions of moral order, some scholars have given increased attention to the poetry of Proverbs and its organic connection to moral formation. Historical connections and traces of ancient Near Eastern influence, too, while not abandoned, have been joined by heuristic models of research, as extrabiblical resources enrich the world of Proverbs. Such advances ought not to mislead us, for they are not so much corrections of *Weisheit* as they are indebted maturations of it. In what has been a brief consideration of Proverbs and fifty years of *Weisheit*, I am struck not only by the antiquity of von Rad's 1970 publication but also by its ongoing boon to the field.

## Bibliography

Ansberry, Christopher B. "What Does Jerusalem Have to Do with Athens? The Moral Vision of the Book of Proverbs and Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics." *HS* 51 (2010): 157–73.

Barton, John. *Ethics in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Bertheau, Ernst. *Die Sprüche Salomo's*. Leipzig: Weidmann, 1847.

Brown, William P. "The Law and the Sages: A Reexamination of *Tôrâ* in Proverbs." Pages 251–80 in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean Mcbride, Jr.* Edited by John T. Strong and Steven S. Tuell. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

Carr, David. *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. London: SCM, 1979.

Clifford, Richard. *Proverbs: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

Davies, Philip R. "Biblical Studies: Fifty Years of a Multi-discipline." *CurBR* 13 (2014): 34–66.

Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*. Translated by Matthew G. Easton. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874.

Ewald, Heinrich. *Die poetischen Bücher des Alten Bundes*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1839–1840.

Fichtner, Johannes. *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung: Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel*. BZAW 62. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933.

Fox, Michael V. "Ethics and Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs." *HS* 48 (2007): 75–88.

———. *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB 18B. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Gerstenberger, Erhard. *Wesen und Herkunft des "Apodiktischen Rechts."* WMANT 20. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965.

Heim, Knut. "The Phenomenon and Literature of Wisdom in Its Near Eastern Context and in the Biblical Wisdom Books." Pages 559–93 in vol. 3.2 of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*. 5 parts in 3 vols. Edited by Magne Sæbø. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2015.

Jackson, Arthur. *Annotations upon the Five Books Immediately Following the Historicall Part of the Old Testament (Commonly Called the Five Doctrinall or Poeticall books) to Wit, the Book of Iob, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon*. London: Daniel, 1658.

Keefer, Arthur Jan. *The Book of Proverbs and Virtue Ethics: Integrating the Biblical and Philosophical Traditions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

McKane, William. *Proverbs*. OTL. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970.

Murphy, Roland E. "Hebrew Wisdom." *JAOS* 101 (1981): 21–34.

Otto, Ekhart. *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994.

Plöger, Otto. *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)*. BKAT 17. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984.

Preuss, Horst D. "Erwägungen zum theologischen Ort alttestamentlicher Weisheitsliteratur." *EvT* 30 (1970): 393–417.

Rackham, Harris, trans. *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. LCL. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel: Mit Einem Anhang Neu Herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*. 4th ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Nashville: Abingdon, 1972.

Schipper, Bernd. *Hermeneutik der Tora: Studien zur Traditionsgeschichte von Prov 2 und zur Komposition von Prov 1–9*. BZAW 432. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.

———. *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*. Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

———. "'Teach Them Diligently to Your Son!': The Book of Proverbs and Deuteronomy." Pages 21–34 in *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 629. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019.

———. "When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs." Pages 55–79 in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

———. "Wisdom and Torah: Insights and Perspectives." Pages 307–19 in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Scott, R. B. Y. "The Study of the Wisdom Literature." *Int* 24 (1970): 25–29.

Stewart, Anne W. *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Stuart, Moses. *A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*. New York: Dodd, 1852.

Umbreit, Friedrich W. C. *Commentar über die Sprüche Salomo's*. Heidelberg: Mohr, 1826.

Vayntrub, Jacqueline. "The Book of Proverbs and the Idea of Ancient Israelite Education." *ZAW* 128 (2016): 96–114.

Weeks, Stuart. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Whybray, Roger N. *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*. BZAW 135. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974.

# *Weisheit* and Job

Will Kynes

According to Gerhard von Rad, the book of Job provides examples of both how the wise took the offensive against God when individual suffering attacked the trust that they put in Yahweh's ordering of the world and how they resolved their doubts by trusting in Yahweh's mysterious and inexplicable ways. Though von Rad's interpretation of Job is rarely acknowledged in current anglophone scholarship, it anticipates a number of recent developments, as it places Job in a broader dialogue with Israel's traditions beyond wisdom literature and creates a framework for reconciling Job's defiance with his faith.

## Von Rad on Job

Von Rad's discussion of Job appears along with his reading of Ecclesiastes in the twelfth chapter of *Weisheit in Israel*, titled "Vertrauen und Anfechtung" ("Trust and Attack"). He begins by distinguishing ancient Israel's search for knowledge from modern epistemology. As opposed to the modern "objective spectator's role" (*neutrale Betrachterrolle*), von Rad claims that for the Israelites, objects (*Gegenstände*) "compelled commitment, they demanded … complete trust" ("Sie nötigen zu einer Stellungnahme, ja sie beanspruchten … das volle Vertrauen").[1] Von Rad claims that the teach-

---

1. Raymond Van Leeuwen makes a compelling case in his contribution to this volume that James Martin's English translation of *Weisheit in Israel* frequently distorts von Rad's intended meaning, so I have included the German for any direct quotations from the book. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972), 190; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel: Mit Einem Anhang Neu Herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013), 199.

ers employed various techniques to convince their pupils to embrace this trust, such as lauding its benefits, including happiness (Prov 16:20), satisfaction (28:25), and protection (29:25), or describing the evidence passed down across generations of an act-consequence order upheld by Yahweh that controls life (e.g., Job 20:4–5).[2]

The question driving Job was how to respond to the apparent violation of that trust in the suffering of the faithful. Von Rad observes that the book's author was hardly the first to raise this question, as if the teachers had previously simply been either too naively optimistic or blindly ignorant to notice it. He chastises exegetes who have taken "the easy road" (*zu leicht gemacht*) of attributing the "crudest rationalism" (*billigsten Rationalismus*) to these teachers in a "doctrine of retribution" (*Vergeltungsdogma*), which forsook old Israel's happy resolution of life's anguish by means of faith in God for a doctrinaire system destined for catastrophe.[3] Such a view cannot even survive a basic diachronic analysis, for every age encountered threats to life.[4] The same can be said for an awareness of some relationship between act and consequence, particularly for great misdeeds, which would bring eventual disaster (*Unheil*) on those who committed them. This view is evident within the prophetic proclamation of doom, as well as in cultic responses to national disasters or individual illnesses, such as the confession of sin in the "judgment doxology" (*Gerichtsdoxologie*).[5]

Thus, when Job's friends attempt to reason back from his suffering to the guilt that may have caused it, they are not applying "the doctrinaire reflections of committed theologians" ("den doktinären Reflexionen engagierter Theologen") but the same logic that drives Joshua to seek out the sin in the Israelite camp after the defeat at Ai (Josh 7) or many of the individual laments (e.g., Pss 38:4–5; 41:5).[6] Thus, von Rad concludes that the wisdom teachers' theological efforts stemmed not from their idiosyncratic thought world but from the "Yahwistic tradition" (*Jahweglauben*) in which they too lived. What distinguished them was their pursuit of universally valid rules, which forced them to generalize, to distance themselves from individual adversities, which they related to "more as observers" (*mehr als*

---

2. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 190–91; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 199–200.
3. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 195; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 204–5.
4. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 195; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 205.
5. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 196; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 205.
6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 196; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 206.

*Betrachtende*).[7] Yet, even in the older sentence-wisdom, von Rad senses an acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding as it encounters "the ambiguity of phenomena" ("der Mehrdeutigkeit der Phänomene").[8]

As a result, even in later wisdom, the teachers stopped short of offering a comprehensive understanding of the world, though, von Rad claims, Israel's distinct beliefs in a Creator God and the oneness of creation would seem to furnish them with that opportunity. Though Israel might have "a faith which encompassed the world" ("Glaubens, der die Welt umgriff"), she was "at the mercy of the adversities of life as if she were engaged in defensive warfare rather than provided with the weapon of a comprehensive idea of the world" ("auf diesem Gebiet den Widerfahrnissen des Lebens mehr wie in einem Stellungskrieg ausgeliefert, als mit der Waffe einer umfassenden Weltvorstellung ausgestattet").[9]

This attack was most vicious when the Israelites attempted to comprehend individual suffering.[10] Von Rad places Job in the midst of an increasing struggle with individual suffering starting from the end of the monarchy, evident also in the prophets, which corresponded with a growing sense of individual independence combined with a "transition on man's part to the offensive against God" ("Übergang des Menschen zur Offensive gegen Gott").[11] The attack in the chapter's title is therefore multivalent: the attack of individual suffering leads to attack against God. Though von Rad claims this uneasiness is broadly evident, he argues that it cannot be considered a generalized "crisis" (*Krise*) since, particularly in later Yahwism, the religion was not uniform and the texts that struggle with these questions, including Job, involve merely individuals, standing on their own outside any teaching tradition.[12] One may wonder whether so many individuals standing outside the tradition and struggling with its implications in similar ways may constitute a tradition in themselves, and von Rad himself appears to revise significantly his view on Job's disconnection from other traditions later in the chapter.

---

7. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 197; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 207. In this description, the teachers sound much more like the modern thinkers as von Rad describes them at the beginning of this chapter, as they take on the "objective spectator's role."

8. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 198; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 207.

9. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 198–99; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 208.

10. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 199; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 209.

11. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 207; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 217.

12. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 207; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 217.

The Prose Narrative (Job 1–2; 42:7–17)

In Job's prose narrative von Rad claims that Job's two "confessions of faith" (*Bekenntnissen*; 1:21; 2:10) express, not "reflective, possibly mysterious truths" ("ergrübelten, womöglich geheimnisvollen Wahrheiten"), but "the quite simple, self-illuminating logic of a faith in which he was unassailably secure" ("die ganz einfache und selbsteinleuchtende Logik eines Glaubens aussprechen, in dem er anfechtungslos geborgen war").[13] These statements are uttered in response to the attempt of "the accuser" (*der Verkläger*) to reveal Job as an egoist in his piety.[14] Reading the prose narrative as a distinct entity, von Rad claims that once Job has demonstrated his genuine piety with these responses, "the case has been sufficiently clarified" ("der Fall ausreichend geklärt"), and his blessed state can be restored in the epilogue.[15] Affirming that selfless piety exists, this didactic narrative portrays Job as "a fitting witness to God" ("eines rechten Zeugen für Gott"), though it lacks the inner struggle and theological tension that emerge when the teachers attempt to fight through the attack of suffering to faith in Yahweh.[16]

The Dialogue (Job 3–37)

Von Rad then moves to the poetic section of the book, which he attempts to interpret independently from the narrative, since he claims they can never be satisfactorily linked together.[17] Warning that the poet refuses to guide the reader through the thicket of theological opinions that he

---

13. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 207; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 217.

14. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 207–8; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 217–18.

15. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 208; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 218. For the diachronic development of the book, von Rad follows Georg Fohrer, *Studien zum Buche Hiob* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1963).

16. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 208; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 218–19.

17. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 226; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237. To support this view, von Rad appeals to (1) the contrast between the submissive and rebellious attitudes of Job (see von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 312; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 324–25); (2) the conflict between Job's complaints and attacks, which God rejects in the divine speeches, and God's praise of Job's words (42:7); and (3) the forced interpretations that would result from understanding Job's suffering as a divine test, since Job rejects such a positive interpretation in the dialogues (von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 226; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237).

allows the characters to unfold,[18] von Rad attempts to identify the dialogue's answer to the question of justice. Though Job echoes the ancient and universal lament over the brevity of life (7:1–4; 14:1) and recognizes like others before him that his suffering is from God, his belief in his righteousness leads him to add to these laments a unique depiction of God as a bloodthirsty enemy (Job 16:9–17).[19] This "new experience of the reality of God" ("neu[e] Erfahrung der Wirklichkeit Gottes") was known to ancient Israel and some of the prophets (see "Prophecy" below) but was completely unfamiliar to Job's friends, wisdom in general, or even the whole age.[20] Job presents a radical vision of God who enters into suffering and becomes personally involved with it.[21]

Von Rad questions the modern tendency to uphold Job's protests as exemplary and depict the friends as joyless traditionalists.[22] Questioning whether we can "presuppose in an ancient reader such unmitigated pleasure in a religious rebel" ("bei einem antiken Leser eine so ungeteilte Freude an einem religiösen Rebellen voraussetzen"), von Rad rejects a clear, black-and-white interpretation of the dialogues and instead claims that the author presents the limits and doubts of both the friends' dominant position and Job's revolutionary response.[23]

The primary distinction between the two views regards different conceptions of human righteousness before God. The friends argue that no one is sinless and pure before God (Job 15:16), that God punishes sinners to uphold the correspondence between act and consequence, and, consequently, that Job's suffering must be the effect of God's judgment (e.g., 8:3; 34:10, 12). Therefore, they exhort Job to repent, to "agree with God, and be at peace" and "return to the Almighty" (22:21–30; see also 5:8; 8:20–21; 11:13–15; 36:8–11).[24] Thus, the friends provide a ritual solution to Job's problem, a "sacral confession" (*sakral Beichte*) as exemplified in Solomon's prayer in 1 Kgs 8, in which the sufferer acknowledges the

---

18. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 215–16; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 226–27.

19. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 216–17; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 227.

20. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 217; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 228.

21. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 217; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 228.

22. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 217; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 228; see also *Wisdom in Israel*, 210; *Weisheit in Israel*, 221.

23. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 217–18; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 228.

24. Unless otherwise noted, biblical translations follow the NRSV.

justice of the suffering God has imposed in order to halt his affliction and return to God's blessing.[25]

Job, however, holds fast to his integrity (Job 27:5) and refuses this solution. Because he is innocent, he objects that he does not deserve the divine judgment he has received (9:21; 23:10–12; 27:2, 4–6). Therefore, he demands to take up his case with God (13:3, 14–15, 18; 23:3–5). Job expresses complete confidence in the legal protection God offers to all sufferers, even if that means God has to appear as a witness against himself in Job's defense (16:19). Yet, Job cannot maintain this hope and concludes that it is "impossible to expect justice from this God" ("unmöglich ist, von diesem Gott Recht zu erwarten"; 9:22–23, 30–31).[26] No arbitrator, in fact, exists to mediate between God and humans (9:33) and restrain God's free and arbitrary action (9:11–12). A peaceful relationship with God is dependent on God's will, but, in Job's case, God clearly appears to be unwilling.[27]

Job claims that the rift in their relationship is God's doing, not his. Though he does not deny that he has committed some sin, he does not believe he has committed one that would merit the suffering God has inflicted on him. Betraying, perhaps, the Lutheran influence on his interpretation, von Rad claims Job does not put his confidence in "a counting up of moral achievements" ("ein[e] Verrechnung sittlicher Leistungen"), but "on the justificatory verdict of God" ("auf dem rechtfertigenden Spruch Gottes"), which explains the lengths to which he goes to force God to speak.[28] Thus, "Job here is still living among specifically cultic ideas, perhaps to an even greater extent than his friends" ("Hiob in dieser Sache noch in spezifisch kultischen Vorstellungen lebt, vielleicht sogar mehr als seine Freunde").[29] His cry, "Who is there that will contend with me?" (13:19), is remarkably similar to Isaiah's suffering servant, who asks, "Who will contend with me?" while claiming, "He who vindicates me is near" (Isa 50:8).

However, the God whom Job is experiencing must be radically transformed if that God is to vindicate Job. Job attempts this transformation by piling up the expression "God must" in his speeches in order to force

---

25. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 212; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 222.

26. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 215; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 226.

27. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 215; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 226.

28. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 218–19; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 229–30.

29. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 219; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 230.

God to reveal himself in a recognizable form.[30] By thus drawing God down into and involving God in suffering, Job "revealed an aspect of God's reality which was hidden from his friends and probably from all his contemporaries" ("einen Horizont der Wirklichkeit Gottes aufriß, der seinen Freunden und wahrscheinlich allen seinen Zeitgenossen verborgen war").[31] Yet, in his accusations against God for unjust cruelty, he "refuses to see in this God his own God" ("weigert sich, in diesem Gott seinen Gott zu sehen").[32]

God's credibility was at stake, which, von Rad argues, is the real problem at the heart of the book, not suffering. The friends' assumption of rules that govern humans in their relationship with God, in which act corresponds with consequence, cannot answer the question that Job's unmerited suffering forces him to ask, "Yahweh *pro me*?"[33] Grasping at a solution, Job starts from his "quite personal relationship with God" (*ganz persönlichen Gottesverhältnis*). This drives him "to the limits of piety and blasphemy" ("bietet er in Frömmigkeit und Lästerung alles auf") in order to force his God out of an "ambiguity" (*Zweideutigkeit*) in which God acts in ways that Job regards unworthy of God. In so doing, Job breaks the bonds of wisdom to introduce theological views not based on the experience of order but from Israel's centuries-long cultic dialogue with its God.[34]

Job's faith in the midst of this test "can be explained only from the fact that Job, too, lives and thinks and struggles against a broad background of old Yahwistic traditions" ("erklärt sich nur daraus, daß auch Hiob aus einem breiten Fundus älterer Jahwetraditionen heraus lebt, denkt und kämpft").[35] He may even be more connected to these old traditions than the friends as he appeals "to the God who, from of old, had offered himself as saviour of the poor and the sick and the defending counsel of those who had been deprived of justice" ("an den Gott, der sich seit je als Retter der Armen und Kranken und als Rechtshelfer der Entrechteten angeboten

---

30. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 219–20; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 230–31.

31. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 220; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 231.

32. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 220; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 231.

33. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 221; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 232.

34. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 221; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 231–32. Crenshaw finds von Rad's argument here "surprising," which, of course, it is for those who have adopted a wisdom/cult binary. See James L. Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, MMTM (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 152.

35. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 222; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 232–33.

hatte"), against the "terrible God of his experience" ("entsetzlichen Gott der Erfahrung").[36]

The friends fail, then, not because their views are illegitimate or overly rigid but because they are simply unable to understand this experience, leaving them incapable of comprehending and responding to it. In their defense, the ancient dialogue form, designed to develop opposing positions, limited the poet's ability to show any reconciliation between the parties.[37] Indeed, the book's two irreconcilable pictures of Job, and its unresolved dialogue, conform to the sapiential recognition of the ambivalence of phenomena evident in the juxtaposition of contradictory teachings within Proverbs.[38]

The Divine Speeches (Job 38:1–42:6)

This insight about the book's dialogue form has implications for Yahweh's contribution to the book, as even Yahweh refrains from resolving the debate. Though Yahweh condescends to respond to this "rebel" (*den Ungebärdigen*), the deity makes no reference to the justificatory verdict Job so desires and is silent regarding the broader theological debate in the dialogue.[39] Though von Rad acknowledges the range of potential interpretations the divine speeches could bear, he claims, primarily due to Job's repentant response, that Yahweh's speech contains a clear rejection of Job.[40] However, he cannot identify where precisely Yahweh blames Job of wrongdoing beyond the charges of questioning divine "counsel" (akin to Yahweh's "providence" [*Providenz*]; Job 38:2) and divine "right" (akin to Yahweh's "freedom" [*Freiheit*]; 40:8). These charges together amount to the indictment that "Job has improperly and 'without understanding' interfered in God's affairs" ("Hiob hat 'ohne Verstand' und ungehörig in die Dinge Gottes hineingeredet").[41]

The flimsy evidence Yahweh presents against Job leaves room for von Rad to ask whether the speeches may have had a more positive pur-

---

36. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 222; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 233.

37. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 222–23; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 233–34; see also *Wisdom in Israel*, 40–41; *Weisheit in Israel*, 42–43.

38. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 311–12; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 323–24.

39. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 223; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 234.

40. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 223; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 234.

41. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 224; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 235.

pose than simply judging Job's presumption. They cannot be interpreted simply as advocating resigned submission to God's incomprehensible ways because they repeat arguments made by Elihu and the other friends, thereby acknowledging the possibility of at least partial human understanding of God.[42] Citing Karl Barth's view that God allows creation to speak for him, von Rad argues that, instead of explaining his decrees directly, "God makes creation bear witness to himself" ("die Schöpfung, läßt Gott für sich Zeugnis ablegen").[43] This is not quite what occurs, however. To the degree that creation speaks to Job, it does so through God's speech.[44] God initiates creation's communicative potential, inviting Job to hear it speak of God's character (see Job 12:7–9) and, perhaps, even share in God's joy in his works (see Ps 104:31). The rebel, therefore, withdraws his complaint, finding security in the realization that, like the whole of creation, "his destiny, too, is well protected by this mysterious God" ("sein Geschick im Geheimnis dieses Gottes gut aufgehoben").[45] God's speech is not intended simply to accuse Job but also to testify to God's concern for a "world which despises all standards of human rationality and economy" ("Welt, die allen Maßstäben einer menschlichen Rationalität und Ökonomie spottet").[46] By understanding this message, Job vindicates God's faith in him.

## Job since von Rad

In 1978, James Crenshaw claimed, "In some ways, von Rad's penetrating analysis of man on the attack against God represents one of the most cogent interpretations of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Ecclesiasticus that has appeared to this date."[47] However, if index entries are an indicator of influence, then

---

42. Paradoxically, the human knowledge of God that von Rad sees confirmed by the divine speeches is that of "the incomprehensibility of the divine activity in creation," which is knowledge of ignorance (see Job 11:7–9; 36:22–30; 37:2–16).

43. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 225; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 236; see also *Wisdom in Israel*, 303; *Weisheit in Israel*, 315. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/3.1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 420.

44. James L. Crenshaw, review of Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, *RelSRev* 2 (1976): 9.

45. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 225; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237; see also *Wisdom in Israel*, 307; *Weisheit in Israel*, 319.

46. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 225–26; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237.

47. Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, 151.

von Rad's interpretation of Job does not appear to have greatly affected subsequent anglophone Job scholarship. Carol Newsom's *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, which has been influential, only mentions von Rad once and in reference to his article on onomastica in Job 38.[48] In his recent commentary on Job 1–21, Choon-Leong Seow also only cites von Rad once, in regard to his comparison of the prologue as a didactic tale to the Joseph narrative.[49] Even in a book-length treatment of creation theology in Job, one of von Rad's primary emphases, Kathryn Schifferdecker omits any mention of von Rad after her introduction.[50] Further, Crenshaw himself does not reference *Wisdom in Israel* in his most recent book on Job.[51]

Interpreters rarely explain why they did not interact with certain works, so the reasons behind von Rad's absence from recent Job scholarship can only be inferred. Two features appear to be at play. First, recent anglophone scholarship on Job has been particularly interested in the book's final form (as the popularity of Newsom's book, which wrestles with precisely that question, suggests), but that is a question that von Rad explicitly avoids. Second, von Rad's interpretation of Job is focused primarily on the book's theological significance. However, the so-called wisdom literature, likely due to presuppositions about its separation from Israelite theology, has largely been overlooked during the recent upswing in interest in theological interpretation in biblical studies.[52] In other words, the question von

---

48. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 224.

49. Choon-Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 50.

50. Kathryn Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*, HTS 61 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–2, 7. On von Rad's emphasis on creation theology in Job, see Walther Zimmerli, "Die Weisheit Israels: zu einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad," *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95.

51. James L. Crenshaw, *Reading Job: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, ROT (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011). In Crenshaw's influential *Old Testament Wisdom*, now in its third edition, he mentions von Rad's work three times in his chapter on Job, though once in disagreement. See Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010).

52. Zoltán Schwáb's recent book on the theological interpretation of Proverbs is the exception that proves this rule, since it is devoted largely to justifying a theological reading of the book. See Schwáb, *Toward an Interpretation of the Book of Proverbs: Selfishness and Secularity Reconsidered*, JTISup 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013). Scholars have not avoided theological issues entirely when interpreting Job, which its

Rad was not interested in (the book's final form) has been of great interest in recent scholarship, while his greatest interest (the book's theology) has not been a primary concern in recent scholarship.

## Enduring and Emerging Questions

Though von Rad's reading of Job in *Weisheit in Israel* is in some ways unsuited for our time, in other ways it was ahead of its time. He saw aspects of the book half a century ago to which scholars are just now returning for further exploration. In some cases, these interpreters appear to have arrived at those insights independently, while in others new developments in the field have created new appreciation for von Rad's insight.

### Job beyond Wisdom

First, von Rad shows discomfort in *Weisheit* in Job's categorization as wisdom literature. He writes, for example, that, though Job is involved in "'wisdom' questions," the book introduces theological perspectives "of a quite different type" ("von völlig anderer Art") into the debate, and that Job and Ecclesiastes are "comparable … only in their opposition to the didactic tradition" ("vergleichbar sind … nur in ihrem Widerspruch gegen die Lehrtradition").[53] Recent Job research has increasingly challenged the book's wisdom classification.[54]

These interpreters level a number of valid criticisms against Job's classification as wisdom. In particular, they all agree that *wisdom literature* fails to capture its meaning accurately, since it excludes significant connections that the book has with texts in other genre categories. As wisdom literature, they argue, Job's interpretation has been "hedged in" and "unduly restricted," as the wisdom classification "imposes an estoppal on particular

subject matter would make impossible, but few make explicitly theological readings their focus.

53. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 248–49; see also *Wisdom in Israel*, 220; *Weisheit in Israel*, 231.

54. E.g., Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, BZAW 197 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 63–88; David Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job, Essays and a New Translation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 47–51; Timothy Jay Johnson, *Now My Eye Sees You: Unveiling an Apocalyptic Job*, HBM 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 15–23; James Edward Harding, "The Book of Job as Metaprophecy," *SR* 39 (2010): 523–47.

lines of thought."[55] This hermeneutical limitation and canonical separa-
tion leads to theological abstraction, such that the book is increasingly
read as the philosophical treatment of a "problem."[56] Those who chal-
lenge Job's wisdom classification disagree, however, over which alternative
genre best describes the book, whether parody (Katharine Dell), history
(David Wolfers), apocalyptic (Timothy Jay Johnson), or prophecy (James
Edward Harding). In so doing, they make arguments similar to those of
von Rad's German contemporaries, Hans Richter and Claus Westermann.
Richter argued that the wisdom category obscured the significance of legal
language in the book, which led him to characterize it as a lawsuit.[57] Wes-
termann, however, proposed reading the book as a "dramatized lament,"
akin to that in the Mesopotamian text *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*.[58] Each of these
interpreters provides valuable perspectives on the meaning of the book,
and I will return to several of them below. However, it is what these studies
suggest collectively that has the real potential to transform the interpreta-
tion of Job, allowing it to grasp what von Rad began reaching toward fifty
years ago.

Each of these interpreters argues in different ways that the wisdom
literature category is inadequate to encapsulate some feature of Job. How-
ever, by proceeding to argue that an alternative genre or blending of
genres is a more fitting lens through which to perceive the book's mean-
ing, they only replace one limiting perspective on the book's meaning for
another. Considering several arguments like this together, then, a number
of interpreters conclude that the book is best understood as *sui generis*.
For example, in light of the various genres proposed for the book, Harold
Rowley claims, "It is wiser to recognize the uniqueness of this book and to
consider it without relation to any of these literary categories."[59] If Job is

---

55. Quotations from Johnson, *Now My Eye Sees You*, 77; Harding, "Book of Job
as Metaprophecy," 525; and Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 48–49, respectively.

56. Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*,
trans. Charles A. Muenchow (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 1–2. For more on this, see
Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual
Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 152–59.

57. Hans Richter, *Studien zu Hiob: Der Aufbau des Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den
Gattungen des Rechtslebens*, TA 11 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959).

58. Westermann, *Structure of the Book of Job*, 8. See also Aage Bentzen, *Introduc-
tion to the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Gad, 1948), 182.

59. Harold Henry Rowley, *Job*, rev. ed., NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976),
5. See also, e.g., Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, 3rd ed., AB 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,

*sui generis*, however, this results not from the book's isolation from other texts but from its connections with so many of them—its uniqueness is better recognized in its relations with multiple categories. As Crenshaw writes, "Like all great literary works, this one rewards readers who come to it from vastly different starting points."[60] Along these lines, Brevard Childs argues that the book's "proper interpretation depends on seeing Job in the perspective, not only of wisdom traditions, but also of Israel's liturgy and historical traditions."[61] Both von Rad's interpretation and the alternative genres discussed above suggest that incorporating even more perspectives would illuminate the book even further.[62] The wisdom classification obscures the contribution of the book's "bewildering diversity of literary genres" to its meaning, which include "wisdom, prophecy, psalm, drama, contest, lament, theodicy, history, and allegory."[63]

However, most of the interpreters who are willing to acknowledge Job's links with other genres of literature simply subsume them under the umbrella of wisdom literature. Von Rad, similarly, includes his interpretation of Job in a book titled *Weisheit in Israel*. Yet, he asks a series of important questions about the wisdom category that point to a more radical solution.

Modern Bias in Job's Interpretation

Throughout *Weisheit*, von Rad repeatedly warns against reading biblical texts, Job included, according to modern presuppositions.[64] Early in the book, he applies this concern to the concept of the wisdom literature

---

1973), xxx; Seow, *Job 1–21*, 61. For the eighteenth-century origins of this view in the work of Robert Lowth, see Markus Witte, "Die literarische Gattung des Buches Hiob: Robert Lowth und seine Erben," in *Sacred Conjectures: The Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc*, ed. John Jarick, LHBOTS 457 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 107.

60. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 115.

61. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 544.

62. Though Childs does not credit von Rad's work for this insight, he does cite *Weisheit in Israel* in his bibliography for Job (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 528).

63. Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, RP 26 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 361; Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness*, 50–51. For examples, see Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 159–78.

64. E.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 98, 124, 188, 190, 210, 217, 225, 232, 300–302.

classification as a whole.[65] He observes that "this whole term 'wisdom' as a total phenomenon … is by no means directly rooted in the sources" ("überhaupt dieser ganze Begriff von 'Weisheit' als eines Gesamtphänomens ist ja in den Quellen keineswegs unmittelbar verankert"). Instead, it "first emerged in the scholarly world" ("erst in der Forschung aufgekommen"). Therefore, he claims, the possibility exists that it suggests "something which never existed" ("die es so gar nicht gab"), which could be "dangerously prejudicing the interpretation of varied material" ("die Deutung der Einzelstufe damit nicht ungefärlich präjudiziert"). He complains that the rise of scholarly interest in wisdom had only succeeded in making the concept increasingly unclear, and thus he declares, "The question is therefore justified whether the attractive codename 'wisdom' is nowadays not more of a hindrance than a help, in so far as it disguises what stands behind it rather than depicts it properly" ("Die Frage ist also berechtigt, ob uns heute die schillernde Chiffre 'Weisheit' nicht mehr im Wege steht, als daß sie uns hilft, insofern sie das, was hinter ihr steht, eher verstellt als sachgemäß bezeichnet"). Though von Rad repeatedly criticizes interpretations that rely too heavily on modern conceptions of wisdom, he never rejects the category itself. However, recent research on the wisdom category indicates just how modern it is and the degree to which it disguises the meaning of Job, along with the other so-called wisdom books, rather than depicting them properly.

Though scholars appeal to purported early vestiges of the wisdom category in the order and structure of various canon lists, the Solomonic collection, the recognition of common traits between books, and the title *wisdom* applied to several texts, no ancient collection of texts is quantitively (including the same texts) or qualitatively (defined by the same criteria) the same as the modern wisdom category.[66] Job was not grouped in a separate collection with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as wisdom literature until the mid-nineteenth century. When Job then replaced Song of Songs, a collection connected to Solomon's authority was exchanged for

---

65. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7–8; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 7–8.

66. See Markus Witte, "'Weisheit' in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft: Ausgewählte literatur- und theologiegeschichtliche Fragestellungen und Entwicklungen," *TLZ* 137 (2012): 1160; Katharine J. Dell, "Studies of the Didactical Books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø, 5 parts in 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2015), 3.1:605–6 n. 2; Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 60–81.

something new based on "various historical, comparative, and form-critical criteria."[67]

Johann Bruch was the first to draw together earlier suggestions along these lines in preceding decades into a comprehensive and systematic presentation of a distinct group of texts affiliated with the wise in Israel and to describe the distinct ideas that characterize these texts and the tradition behind them.[68] The date of this discovery would not in itself be problematic (many of the axiomatic principles of biblical scholarship were developed during this time) if it were not for the suspicious correspondence between Bruch's characterization of the wise and their literature and the philosophical ideas prominent at his time. He speaks, for example, of the "non-theocratic spirit" of the wise, which "found no satisfaction in the religious institutions of their nation" and thus sought "the way of free thinking to answer life's questions."[69] Though Bruch was eventually all but forgotten in biblical scholarship, his work's widespread influence in the latter nineteenth century created a trajectory for the interpretation of the concept of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible and the texts primarily associated with it. Over time, this conception of wisdom has acted both as a "mirror," reflecting the "image of the scholar painting her portrait,"[70] and an echo chamber, magnifying the type of post-Enlightenment concerns, such as humanism, individualism, universalism, secularism, and empiricism, that led Bruch initially to associate the wisdom texts together while muffling their connections with the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the "most striking characteristic" uniting the wisdom literature still remains "the absence of what one normally considers as typically Israelite and Jewish."[71]

The invention of wisdom literature, then, is a prime example of how, as von Rad says, "by and large man creates the experiences which he expects and for which, on the basis of the idea which he has formed

---

67. Gerald T. Sheppard, "Biblical Wisdom Literature and the End of the Modern Age," in *Congress Volume: Oslo, 1998*, ed. André Lemaire and Magne Sæbø, VTSup 80 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 372, 378.

68. Johann Friedrich Bruch, *Weisheits-Lehre der Hebräer: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie* (Strasbourg: Treuttel & Würtz, 1851). For the origins of the "wisdom literature" category, see Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 82–104.

69. Bruch, *Weisheits-Lehre der Hebräer*, ix–x.

70. James L. Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, LBS (New York: Ktav, 1976), 3.

71. Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

of the world around him, he is ready" ("Der Mensch macht weithin die Erfahrungen, die er erwartet und auf die er auf Grund der Vorstellungen, die er sich von seiner Umwelt gemacht hat, gerüstet ist"). This, as he observes, can lead an interpreter to miss experiences "because he is incapable of fitting them into the limits of his understanding" ("weil er außerstande ist, sie seinem Verstehenshorizonte einzuordnen").[72] Again anticipating features that have only recently become more prominent in biblical scholarship, von Rad emphasizes the influence of the interpreter's location, such that what one believes to serve a didactic purpose "is dependent on a basic position which the observer has previously taken up" ("ist abhängig von einer Grundposition, die der Betrachter vorher bezogen hat").[73] Nearly a generation later, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza would say nearly the same thing: "what we see depends on where we stand."[74]

Throughout history, interpreters have tended to define the concept of wisdom in line with the traits most valued in their context.[75] Jews have associated wisdom with the torah, Christians with Christ, nineteenth-century biblical scholars with post-Enlightenment philosophy, and, even today, biblical interpreters tend to apply the wisdom label to "any form of knowledge that is recognized as good."[76] Though he does not take into account the intellectual context in which the wisdom category first emerged, von Rad is sensitive to this issue and complains that "the uncritical absolutism of our modern, popular conception of reality is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of a proper understanding of our texts" ("gehört die unkritische Absolutsetzung unseres modernen populären Wirklichkeitsbegriffes zu den ganz großen Hindernissen, die einem rechten Verständnis unserer Texte im Wege stehen").[77] He criticizes this mindset for imposing an external scheme on Israelite thought, in which the theological aspects

---

72. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 3. Gadamer's influence here is obvious. See Van Leeuwen's chapter in this volume.

73. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 236; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 248.

74. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 107 (1988): 5.

75. See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 29–30; Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 81.

76. John J. Collins, "Response to George Nickelsburg" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, 1994), 2.

77. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 301; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 313.

of wisdom texts reflect a secondary, dogmatic "theologization" of wisdom that abandons reason.[78]

Therefore, though the affinities between the three so-called wisdom books cannot be denied, and the gains the category has provided for understanding Job are worth acknowledging, it cannot be applied to the book uncritically. Genre designations (*Gattungszuweisungen*) are also reading instructions (*Leseanweisungen*) that restrict a reader's interpretive horizon.[79] The texts that various genre designations draw into comparison with Job depict its essence and cultural profile differently; a drama reads differently from a philosophical dialogue, a lament differently from a sapiential disputation. Therefore, Markus Witte argues, and von Rad would agree, interpreters must take into account not merely questions of *Sitz im Leben* ("setting in life") and *Sitz im Buch* ("setting in the book") when evaluating Job's genre, but *Sitz in der Welt des Lesers* ("setting in the world of the reader") as well.[80] In this regard, classifying Job as wisdom literature imposes modern restrictions on its meaning.

## Reading Job Intertextually

Once Job is freed from the confines of the wisdom category, the book's similarities with texts and concepts across the canon become easier to recognize. Beyond the category's constraints, far more intertextual insight waits to be incorporated into the interpretation of Job. Here again, von Rad was ahead of his time. According to Crenshaw, von Rad considered his opposition to the "evil" of "the excessive atomization of Old Testament scholarship" as one of the distinguishing concerns of his career.[81] Von Rad argues that Job's author "lets Job and the friends voice their concerns entirely in the forms of expression of their time" ("läßt Hiob und die Freunde ganz in den literarischen Ausdrucksformen ihrer Zeit ihre Anliegen aussprechen").[82] Indeed, like the friends, "even Job is deeply rooted in the thought-forms of his day" ("auch Hiob ist in die Denkform

---

78. See, e.g., Hans H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966).

79. Witte, "Die literarische Gattung des Buches Hiob," 123.

80. Witte, "Die literarische Gattung des Buches Hiob," 122.

81. Crenshaw, *Gerhard Von Rad*, 27.

82. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 209; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 220.

seiner Zeit tief eingebunden").[83] Von Rad, therefore, incorporated lament, hymn, prophecy, and history into his interpretation of Job. However, von Rad was also a child of his time, and, thus, rather than being intertextual, his response, as the previous quotations indicate, was tradition historical, and thus continued to atomize the text.[84] We can only imagine what his work would have looked like if it continued beyond the intertextual turn in biblical studies that followed the publication of Michael Fishbane's *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*.[85] Perhaps, though, in the recent flurry of studies on intertextuality in Job, we get a glimpse of what might have been, particularly as such studies develop aspects of von Rad's interpretation of Job in *Weisheit*.[86] In Edward Greenstein's new translation of Job, for example, he demonstrates throughout the degree to which the book's author shows "his deep and wide familiarity with earlier works of Hebrew literature," as the author engages with texts across the classical Hebrew corpus, "not only the so-called wisdom texts … but works of narrative and prophecy as well."[87]

## *Ritual*

Traditionally, wisdom and ritual are considered separately. However, von Rad argues that Job's debate with his friends is focused on a ritual question, whether Job must perform a "sacral confession" (see "The Dialogue" above). Recently, without citing von Rad, David Lambert has returned to ritual aspects of the book.[88] As he does so, he challenges the common assumption of modern wisdom interpretation that Job stands in opposition to Israelite religion, including its ceremonial practices. Like von Rad, he sees a modern bias in this interpretation, which sets over against the book's endorsement of ritual conformity the "modern impulse to canonize

---

83. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 210; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 220.

84. Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, 32.

85. Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms*, BZAW 437 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 13.

86. See, for example, Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Job Intertextually*, LHBOTS 574 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). For a survey of intertextual work on Job, see Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 159–78.

87. Edward L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), xxviii, xxii.

88. David A. Lambert, "The Book of Job in Ritual Perspective," *JBL* 134 (2015): 557–75.

revolution, to embed a certain myth of individual innovation and defiance within Scripture itself."[89] Lambert argues that by tearing his robe, shaving his head, scraping or cutting himself, and sitting in ashes (Job 1:20; 2:8), Job is signaling his entrance into a ritual state of mourning.[90] His friends, then, take on the ritual responsibility to "comfort and console him" (2:11) and move Job on from his mourning ritual into a ritual reentrance into community and a normal state of being, signified by feasting and gift giving, as eventually occurs in the epilogue (42:11–12). However, the dialogue recounts Job's refusal of his friends' efforts at consolation, even charging them with being "miserable comforters" (מנחמי עמל, 16:2; see 21:34). The friends' ritual failure is rectified by Yahweh, whose speeches lead Job to declare that he has "been comforted" (נחמתי, 42:6).[91] Putting Lambert's ritual interpretation into dialogue with the traditional wisdom reading comprehends the complexity of the book better than either would alone, highlighting its tensive presentation of Job as both an internally conflicted individual sufferer and a performer of external, communal ritual.[92]

### Prophecy

Lambert's reading links Job with prophecy through the parallels between Job's complaints and Jeremiah's, for which the prophet similarly does not repent, and the divine consolation proclaimed by Second Isaiah (Isa 40:1; 51:12).[93] Von Rad also notes prophetic resonances in Job. He claims that both Eliphaz (4:12–17) and Elihu (Job 32–37) speak of receiving divine revelation, which recalls and even exceeds language used of prophetic inspiration, and which points to the integration of reason and religion

---

89. Lambert, "Book of Job," 575.

90. Lambert, "Book of Job," 559–60. For a similar ritual reading of the book, see Heath A. Thomas, "Job's Rejection and Liminal Traverse: A Close (Re)reading of Job 42:6," in *The Unfolding of Your Words Gives Light: Studies on Biblical Hebrew in Honor of George L. Klein*, ed. Ethan C. Jones (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 155–74.

91. Lambert, "Book of Job," 563, 566. Lambert is somewhat evasive on how he would translate the interpretive crux in 42:6. Thomas, however, provides a thorough analysis of the interpretive options and the Hebrew semantics involved to make a compelling case for the translation "Therefore, I reject and am comforted regarding dust and ashes" ("Job's Rejection," 173).

92. Lambert, "Book of Job," 573.

93. Lambert, "Book of Job," 563, 569.

in the Israelite perception of reality.[94] Further, by applying the act-conse-
quence relationship to Job's case, he claims, the friends were following the
lead of the prophets, who similarly used this principle to proclaim disaster
on both individuals and nations.[95] Job's grappling with this principle also
appears among the prophets (Jer 12; Ezek 18; Mal 3), as some of them
shared his experience of the "incalculable and fearful" (*Unberechenbarkeit
und Furchtbarkeit*) reality of God.[96] Though von Rad concludes that the
prophets differed from the wise men, in that God spoke to humanity
through the prophets, while the wise sought the truth about humanity
without recourse to a divine commission,[97] this generalization about the
traditions does not negate these specific similarities between them.

Early interpreters similarly highlighted connections between Job and
the Prophets. Job was grouped together with them in Ben Sira's Praise
of the Fathers (49:8–10), James's praise of their shared "endurance" (Jas
5:10–11), Josephus's canon list (*C. Ap.* 1.8), and the rabbinic debate over
Job's prophetic status (b. B. Bat. 15b–16a). This underscores common
traits extending from the heavenly council in the book's prologue to the
divine speeches at its end.[98] Thus, in light of the stylistic and theologi-
cal influence of prophecy on the book, "the continuity between Job and
prophecy cannot be denied."[99] Susannah Ticciati, for example, notices sev-
eral indications of the book's "indebtedness" to the prophets, including
Job's legal dispute (ריב) with God, his desire for a prophetic מוכיח to inter-
cede between God and humanity (Job 9:33), and the foundational role of
the Deuteronomic covenant in his arguments.[100] James Harding, however,
argues that, like Jonah, Job is a "metaprophecy," which wrestles with the

---

94. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 56, 61, 292; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 60,
65–66, 304.

95. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 196, 220; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 205, 231.

96. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 206, 217; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 217, 228. Von
Rad does not mention specific prophets here, but, like Lambert, he likely has Jeremiah
in mind, at least.

97. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 309; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 321.

98. Hans Bardtke, "Profetische Zuge im Buche Hiob," in *Das Ferne und Nahe
Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost*, ed. Fritz Maass, BZAW 105 (Berlin: Töpelmann,
1967), 1–10; J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 217–25.

99. James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion*, BZAW
124 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 108.

100. Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading beyond Barth*
(London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 58–59, 120–37, 156–57.

assumptions underlying the prophetic books, such as the "nexus between divine revelation and theodicy" that grounds the prophetic confidence in entering the divine council and hearing the word of God.[101] Others have joined in drawing prophetic parallels into their interpretation of Job, such as those with Isa 40–55, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, and Habakkuk.[102]

*Lament*

Von Rad also observes that, in the dialogue, Job adopts both the style and subject matter of the lament psalms down to the details, though, by shifting their emphasis to fit his experience, he radicalizes them into "something completely new and unique" ("etwas völlig Neues und Einzigatiges").[103] Lambert, too, notes the similarity between Job's protests and the lament tradition in the Psalms, which he calls "mourning verbalized."[104] Though Lambert does not argue that Job is explicitly alluding to that tradition, he notes the shared language in Job 7:11 and Ps 77:3–4, where both sufferers cry, "I complain [אשיחה]" in the bitterness of their affliction.

Once again, early interpreters, such as those who grouped Job with the Psalms in the *Sifrei Emet* collection, anticipated this interpretation.[105] In addition to a range of significant allusions to the Psalms in Job (e.g., Ps 8:5[ET 4] in Job 7:17; Ps 107:40 in Job 12:21, 24),[106] interpreters have noted that Job appears to dramatize the lament genre so prominent in the Psalter (see "Beyond Wisdom" above). This intertextual comparison highlights the "numerous formal, thematic, and lexical affinities between parts

---

101. Harding, "Metaprophecy," 528. See also Konrad Schmid, "Innerbiblische Schriftdiskussion im Hiobbuch," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. Thomas Krüger et al., ATANT 88 (Zurich: Theologisher Verlag, 2007), 253–58.

102. See the chapters on Isaiah (Kynes), Jeremiah (Dell), Ezekiel (Joyce), Joel (Nogalski), and Amos (Marlow) in Dell and Kynes, *Reading Job Intertextually*. For Habakkuk, see Donald E. Gowan, "God's Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?," *HBT* 8 (1986): 85–102; see also Greenstein, *Job*, xxiii.

103. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 209; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 219.

104. Lambert, "Book of Job," 563.

105. See Will Kynes, "Reading Job Following the Psalms," in *The Shape of the Ketuvim: History, Contoured Intertextuality, and Canon*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Tim Stone, Siphrut 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 131–45.

106. See Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping*.

of the book of Job and the laments of the Psalter and Lamentations."[107] It therefore provides new exegetical insight into the book, such as the way the lament is "subverted" to make God not the deliverer from enemies but the enemy himself (e.g., Job 13:24; 16:9; 19:11).[108] Job's resonances with the Psalms may also inspire its interpretation within groups of texts that share similar traits, such as with the lament psalms and Ecclesiastes, which are characterized by *Unglück* or "misfortune," or with Lamentations, the Confessions of Jeremiah, and Pss 73 and 88, which all wrestle with the failure of divine justice.[109]

## Job and Theology

While advocating for his ritual reading, Lambert asks, "Is it possible to read Job outside of a modern framework of individual subjectivity, the 'single mind' thinking or feeling—even if it is one radically open to the diversity of positions—to move away from seeing Job as a theological tract, even while not denying its theological implications?"[110] To think of theology as individual subjectivity is itself to apply a modern understanding to the term. As Lambert seems to indicate by the final words of his question, ritual acts are thoroughly theological, as they both reflect and shape beliefs about God. The ritual readings of Job that both Lambert and von Rad have proposed demonstrate this. Lambert's reading hinges on Job finding the consolation necessary to set aside his mourning ritual in a direct encounter with God, while von Rad's brings to the fore the pressing question of divine justice—whether Job is obligated to undertake a sacral confession ritual—that drives Job's debate with his friends and God.

Ultimately, whether excluding this ritual insight, or that of the prophetic or psalmic interpretations discussed above, the wisdom category constricts the theological significance of the book. However, as von Rad observes, this reticence to wrestle with the theology of Job is hardly unique to biblical scholarship, since "neither Job's questions nor his theology were really taken up and used by the church" ("weder Hiobs Fragestellungen

---

107. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 57.

108. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 58.

109. Wilhelm M. L. de Wette, "Beytrag zur Charakteristik des Hebraismus," in *Studien*, ed. Carl Daub and Friedrich Creuzer (Heidelberg: Mohr & Zimmer, 1807), 241–312; Crenshaw, *Reading Job*, 22–23.

110. Lambert, "Book of Job," 573.

noch seine Theologie von der Kirche wirklich aufgenommen und verarbeitet wurden").[111] The history of Christian interpretation, even before the wisdom category was developed, supports von Rad's conclusion. Christian interpreters have consistently struggled to reconcile the protesting Job of the dialogue both with the piously submissive Job of the prologue and with Christian faith. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere,[112] some attempt to ignore or deny Job's protests against God, such as Ambrose, who refuses to consider Job's most vigorous complaints actual challenges to God's behavior, or Gregory the Great, who reads Job's accusations of God as self-accusations or humble enquiries. Others mitigate the force of Job's attacks, such as Aquinas, who argues that Job is actually directing his questions rhetorically at his friends, or John Calvin, who claims Job is merely improperly carrying out a "good case." Still others acknowledge Job's defiance of God but claim this wrong is not beyond God's graceful absolution, such as Martin Luther and Karl Barth, who both saw in God's acceptance of Job despite his complaints evidence of the *simul iustus, simul peccator* relationship humans may have with God, and Søren Kierkegaard, who claimed Job was proved to be in the right "by being proved to be in the wrong *before* God."

On the other hand, modern readers, as von Rad notes, have a tendency to valorize Job's protests (see "The Dialogue" above). Job is said to have the "courage to doubt" (Robert Davidson), to respond, "as he must," with cynicism to Yahweh's bullying (John Briggs Curtis), to have "made a valiant effort to speak his mind honestly," and responded to God with "defiance, not capitulation … parodying God, not showing him respect" (Greenstein), such that in Job's speeches "a great man has taken advantage of a chink in the armor of the orthodox doctrine of retribution in order to drive a wedge into it" (Harold Ginsberg).[113] Though they favor the dialogue's protests

---

111. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 239; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 250.

112. Will Kynes, "The Trials of Job: Relitigating Job's 'Good Case' in Christian Interpretation," *SJT* 66 (2013): 174–91. See this article for citations for the interpretations briefly described in this paragraph.

113. Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme* (London: SCM, 1983); John Briggs Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *JBL* 98 (1979): 508; Edward L. Greenstein, "Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job," *PSB* 27 (2006): 258; Greenstein, *Job*, xx–xxi; Harold L. Ginsberg, "Job the Patient and Job the Impatient," in *Congress Volume: Rome, 1968*, VTSup 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 94.

rather than the prose's submission, these readers similarly resist the unified form in which the book presents its protagonist.

## Defiant Faith

Von Rad himself is unable to integrate the book's two depictions of Job.[114] Even so, his interpretation includes elements that could be repositioned to form the foundation for a theological reading that holds Job's pious submission and defiant protest together. Von Rad quotes Roland de Pury's observation that Job does not appeal to another God, the God of his friends or another higher authority, "but to the very God who is crushing him" ("sondern bei diesem Gott selbst, der ihn zu Boden drückt").[115] Later, he observes that the book's rejection of dualism prevents Job from explaining his suffering as the effect of some evil power outside God. This leads to an insight on which von Rad claims all who have sought to understand how to restore order in the face of "life's great misfortune" ("der großen Störungen des Lebens") agree: "Only God is competent to deal with it. The world has no contribution of its own to make. The world is not a battlefield between God and any of the evils found in it" ("Ist immer nur Gott zuständig. Die Welt kann dazu von sich aus keinen Beitrag leisten. Sie ist ja nicht das Kampffeld Gottes mit einem ihr einwohnenden Bösen").[116] Whether or not that sentiment is truly universal, the perplexing appeal to God against God, the practice of a type of pious protest or defiant faith, is more common both in the Hebrew Bible and in the historical communities shaped by it than those who would opt either for piety or protest may realize.

Job joins the heroes of Israelite faith, Abraham (Gen 18:17–33), Jacob (Gen 32:6–12, 22–31), and Moses (Exod 32:1–14), the psalmists who dare to cry "Why?" and "How long?" and prophets such as Amos (e.g., 7:1–9), Jeremiah (e.g., 20:7–18), and Habakkuk (e.g., 1:2–4, 12–17) in confronting God and demanding that the deity make things right.[117] Beyond the

---

114. See note 17 above.

115. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 221 n. 39; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 232 n. 38.

116. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 306; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 318. Michael Fox similarly claims that Job's bitter complaint is "founded on trust" like that of the psalmists. See Fox, "The Meanings of the Book of Job," *JBL* 137 (2018): 11.

117. See Michael V. Fox, "Reading the Tale of Job," in *A Critical Engagement: Readings on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde, HBM 38 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 152; Seow, *Job 1–21*, 88.

Bible, this tradition appears, for example, in the spirituals sung by enslaved African Americans, which demonstrate "a dialectic of doubt and trust in the search for meaning."[118] For example, the spiritual "Wrestle On, Jacob" presents "a paean of hopeful strife," as W. E. B. Du Bois puts it, in which enslaved people sang "I will not let you go, my Lord" and explicitly associated their spiritual struggles with the Israelite patriarch in the moment he earned the name "wrestles with God" for his people.[119] Their cries are echoed in those of Jews who have faced suffering, including the horror of the Holocaust, with "faithful defiance" and "pious irreverence."[120] Some in both of these communities undoubtedly stifled their protests with piety, and others defiantly discarded their faith. But, for those who saw protest as an expression of faith, their defiant faith reflected the comfort they found in a God good and great enough to make things right and therefore to deserve complaint when they were not.

*Trust*

Defiant faith is a ship on a stormy sea. The trust that motivates protest may suddenly be capsized by doubt. In Job 40:8, God warns Job that his use of the legal metaphor is drawing him into a dichotomous, win-lose understanding of his relationship with God,[121] which undercuts the trust necessary to cope with his suffering. A way exists in which Job can be in

---

118. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 125; see also Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 13–19, 32.

119. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 208. For further examples, see Will Kynes, "Wrestle On, Jacob: Antebellum Spirituals and the Defiant Faith of the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 140 (2021): 291–307.

120. Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1990), 221–22; Dov Weiss, *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). For the use of the book of Job in this Jewish tradition, see Gabrielle Oberhänsli, "Job in Modern and Contemporary Literature on the Background of Tradition: Sidelights of a Jewish Reading," in Dell and Kynes, *Reading Job Intertextually*, 272–84.

121. See David Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest That Suffering Is Not a Problem?," in *Weisheit in Israel: Beiträge des Symposions, "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne," anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads [1901–1971], Heidelberg, 18.–21. Oktober 2001*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Hans-Peter Müller, ATM 12 (Münster: LIT, 2003), 102.

the right without God being in the wrong, but it will involve Job acknowl-edging the mysterious freedom of God. He will have to trust without understanding. As von Rad puts it, "the presupposition for coping with life was trust in Yahweh and in the orders put into operation by him" ("Voraussetzung für ein Bestehen des Lebens war das Vertrauen auf Jahwe und in die von ihm in Kraft gesetzten Ordnungen").[122]

That solution may be unsatisfying for the modern reader. But von Rad levels a similar warning at those readers. Whereas biblical wisdom involves a receptivity to "the feeling for the truth which emanates from the world and addresses man" ("ein Gespür für die Wahrheit, die von der Welt herk-ommend den Menschen anspricht"), the modern approach bases truth on reason.[123] This, he claims, is "an experience of power" (*ein Machterlebnis*), which "produces an ability to control" ("ermächtigt zu einem Verfügen") and "is in opposition to the receptivity of wisdom and equally hostile to any attainment of trust" ("entgegengesetzt der Rezeptivität der Weisheit und geradezu feindlich gegen jede Vorleistung des Vertrauens"). For the wise, von Rad argues, reason "is surrounded by the insurmountable wall of the inexplicable" ("ist umstellt von den unübersteiglichen Mauern des Undeutbaren"), as they describe both what can be known and what can-not.[124] In words attributed to Job, "These are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14; see 35:5, 14–19, 23; 36:26–29; 42:2–4; Sir 43:32).

The divine speeches, then, coax Job to run headlong into that wall of mystery.[125] His response, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, is adora-tion (42:2–5). He joins the teachers as "hymnists of the divine mysteries" ("Hymniker der göttlichen Geheimnisse") and declares, "Therefore I have uttered what I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I do not know" (42:3).[126] Appealing to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, von Rad claims this acknowledgment of human limitations in the face of divine

---

122. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 307; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 320.

123. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 296–97; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 309.

124. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 293; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 305.

125. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 108; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 114.

126. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 293; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 305. Translation of Job 42:3 is mine. Though the NRSV translates אבין ("I understand") and אדע ("I know") in the past tense, their imperfect forms more frequently indicate a continuing or future sense, such that Job acknowledges a persisting ignorance of these mysteries.

freedom is "a comforting doctrine" (*eine tröstliche Lehre*).[127] Whether or not modern readers would agree, this correlates with Job finding "consolation" (נחם) in it (42:6). Recently, without citing von Rad, Michael Fox has come to a similar conclusion: "God's first teaching to Job, and the author's message to the readers, is faith: to trust in God's goodness, even when knowledge fails and goodness is not visible."[128]

Though it may be difficult for modern readers (including von Rad) to comprehend, the book of Job need not be read as an incoherent amalgam of two Jobs, one piously submissive, the other rebelliously defiant. Rather, this mixture of trust and protest consistently appears throughout those Yahwistic and cultic traditions on which von Rad claims Job relies. The laments, with which von Rad, following Westermann, sees close similarities in Job, demonstrate a similar sequence from affirmation of trust to complaint to restoration and praise as appears in the book of Job as a whole.[129] Though these radical, often abrupt transitions from one response to the next led modern scholars to divide the lament psalms into originally separate poems, the fact that the Israelites repeatedly joined them together (whether in the psalms' original composition or later redaction) suggests that this progression made sense to them. For the Israelites, faith appears to motivate protest, and Yahweh's repeated positive responses to those protests reinforce faith.

The similarity between Job and the psalmic laments solves another problem in the book that von Rad's interpretation reaches for but fails to grasp in light of his failure to read the book as a whole. Von Rad observes that Job sharpens the language of lament to force God to vindicate him, because that is what he believes his innocence and God's justice requires.[130] Yet, von Rad overlooks the significance of the vindication that God finally provides Job, when he declares that Job, unlike the friends, has spoken of him what is right (42:7–8). Von Rad claims that God is referring here to Job's confessions of faith in the prologue,[131] but the friends do not speak in the prologue, so the contrast between Job's speech and theirs must include

---

127. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 106; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 112.

128. Fox, "Meanings of the Book of Job," 17.

129. For a comparison of the book of Job with the "plot" of Ps 22, see Will Kynes, "Lament Personified: Job in the Bedeutungsnetz of Psalm 22," in *Spiritual Complaint*, ed. Miriam J. Bier and Tim Bulkeley (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 34–48.

130. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 219–20; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 230–31.

131. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 226; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237.

the dialogue. Like the psalmist in the psalms of innocence, Job's complaint has won him a divine justificatory verdict, and, with Job, the lament tradition itself is vindicated.[132]

The prologue presents the book as a test of Job's credibility. Whether or not that concept continues into the dialogue (von Rad demurs), the book becomes, in fact, primarily concerned with the credibility of God, as von Rad observes.[133] Job, experiencing an attack on his trust in God and the order of the world, attacks back at the object of his trust. But his purpose all along is not to defeat or reject God. He longs for the vindication that he knows only God can provide and the restoration that he believes Yahweh, the God of Israel, will supply, if, like the psalmists, he can only convince this God to pay attention to him.[134] Von Rad is unable to see how the vindication (42:7–8) and restoration (42:10–17) Job does receive actually fit his complaints when viewed in this broader perspective.

The author (or editor) of Job has set for himself a daunting challenge. For God to win the wager with the Satan, Job must express his faith חנם, "for nothing" (1:9); receiving a reward for faithful suffering would seem to invalidate that. However, a God who would allow such unjust suffering to go unrequited is hardly worthy of faith. Arguing, like von Rad, that the book hinges on the question of God's credibility, David Clines remarks, "It is quite a problem, naturally, to believe in a God who you think is at fault."[135] The solution the author provides is to have Job, first, express his faith explicitly in his initial confessions, then express it through calling God to act according to God's just character in his protests, and, finally, through setting aside his mourning after encountering God in the divine speeches but before his restoration (42:6). This vindicates the faith God put in Job and allows God to restore Job, thereby vindicating the faith Job put in God's justice, without invalidating the wager. This is why God cannot explicitly address Job's situation in the divine speeches. Not because God is implicitly asserting "that he has not undertaken to act justly, that the world

---

132. Seow, *Job 1–21*, 92. Von Rad notes the similarity between Job's cultic commitment to earning God's approval and the psalms of innocence but fails to connect that to the verdict Job eventually receives (*Wisdom in Israel*, 219 n. 38; *Weisheit in Israel*, 230 n. 37).

133. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 221, 226; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 232, 237.

134. See von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 220–21; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 231–32.

135. Clines, "Does the Book of Job Suggest," 99–100.

is not ordered according to principles of justice," as Clines argues,[136] but because either to explain the wager or to promise to restore Job if he will remain faithful would be to make Job's faith contingent on God's reward and invalidate the wager altogether.[137] All God can communicate to Job within the constraints of the wager is that God is worthy of Job's trust. Job may stop questioning God's justice, not because he has given up expecting God to be just (*pace* Clines), but because, trusting God, he has given up expecting to understand the justice of God's actions. Whether the book's author ultimately succeeds, he has sought to vindicate both Job's credibility and God's, rather than forcing the reader or the characters themselves to side with one over the other.

## Conclusion

Though hardly as ambitious a goal, this chapter has attempted something similar: to vindicate the credibility of von Rad's interpretation of Job, which has faded in current scholarship, while highlighting some of the credible developments on his views in recent research. Von Rad recognized that Job exceeded the boundaries of the modern wisdom literature category and explored the book's connections with other biblical traditions and genres, including ritual, prophecy, and lament. As interpreters follow early readers in appreciating Job's intertextual engagement with texts across the Hebrew Bible and beyond, they open up new possibilities for understanding its meaning, including its theological significance. This, one of the strengths of von Rad's reading, could be strengthened further by reading the book and its complex presentation of Job's pious and yet protesting faith as a unity. This draws Job into a tradition of defiant faith that stretches across the canon and through history, as the afflicted trust God enough to complain to the deity about the injustice they face.

## Bibliography

Bardtke, Hans. "Profetische Zuge im Buche Hiob." Pages 1–10 in *Das Ferne und Nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost*. Edited by Fritz Maass. BZAW 105. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967.

---

136. Clines, "Does Book of Job Suggest," 104–5.
137. See, similarly, Fox, "Meanings of the Book of Job," 17.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics* 4/3.1. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.

Bentzen, Aage. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Copenhagen: Gad, 1948.

Bruch, Johann Friedrich. *Weisheits-Lehre der Hebräer: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie*. Strasbourg: Treuttel & Würtz, 1851.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979.

Clines, David J. A. "Does the Book of Job Suggest That Suffering Is Not a Problem?" Pages 93–110 in *Weisheit in Israel: Beiträge des Symposiums, "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne," anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads [1901–1971], Heidelberg, 18.–21. Oktober 2001*. Edited by David J. A. Clines, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Hans-Peter Müller. ATM 12. Münster: LIT, 2003.

Collins, John J. "Response to George Nickelsburg." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, 1994.

Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

———. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: Seabury, 1972.

Crenshaw, James L. *Gerhard von Rad*. MMTM. Waco, TX: Word, 1978.

———. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

———. "Prolegomenon." Pages 1–36 in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. Edited by James L. Crenshaw. LBS. New York: Ktav, 1976.

———. *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion*. BZAW 124. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971.

———. *Reading Job: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. ROT. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011.

———. Review of Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel. RelSRev* 2 (1976): 9.

Curtis, John Briggs. "On Job's Response to Yahweh." *JBL* 98 (1979): 497–511.

Davidson, Robert. *The Courage to Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme*. London: SCM, 1983.

Dell, Katharine J. *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*. BZAW 197. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991.

———. "Studies of the Didactical Books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament." Pages 603–24 in vol. 3.1 of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*. Edited by Magne Sæbø. 5 parts in 3 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2015.

Dell, Katharine, and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Job Intertextually*. LHBOTS 574. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin, 1989.

Fohrer, Georg. *Studien zum Buche Hiob*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1963.

Fox, Michael V. "The Meanings of the Book of Job." *JBL* 137 (2018): 7–18.

———. *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB 18A. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

———. "Reading the Tale of Job." Pages 145–62 in *A Critical Engagement: Readings on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*. Edited by David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde. HBM 38. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011.

Ginsberg, Harold L. "Job the Patient and Job the Impatient." Pages 88–111 in *Congress Volume: Rome, 1968*. VTSup 17. Leiden: Brill, 1969.

Gowan, Donald E. "God's Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?" *HBT* 8 (1986): 85–102.

Greenstein, Edward L. *Job: A New Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

———. "Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job." *PSB* 27 (2006): 238–58.

Harding, James Edward. "The Book of Job as Metaprophecy." *SR* 39 (2010): 523–47.

Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job*. Int. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.

Johnson, Timothy Jay. *Now My Eye Sees You: Unveiling an Apocalyptic Job*. HBM 24. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009.

Kynes, Will. "Lament Personified: Job in the Bedeutungsnetz of Psalm 22." Pages 34–48 in *Spiritual Complaint*. Edited by Miriam J. Bier and Tim Bulkeley. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.

———. *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms*. BZAW 437. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.

———. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

———. "Reading Job Following the Psalms." Pages 131–45 in *The Shape of the Ketuvim: History, Contoured Intertextuality, and Canon*. Edited by Julius Steinberg and Tim Stone. Siphrut 16. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

———. "The Trials of Job: Relitigating Job's 'Good Case' in Christian Interpretation." *SJT* 66 (2013): 174–91.

———. "Wrestle On, Jacob: Antebellum Spirituals and the Defiant Faith of the Hebrew Bible." *JBL* 140 (2021): 291–307.

Lambert, David A. "The Book of Job in Ritual Perspective." *JBL* 134 (2015): 557–75.

Laytner, Anson. *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1990.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Newsom, Carol A. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Oberhänsli, Gabrielle. "Job in Modern and Contemporary Literature on the Background of Tradition: Sidelights of a Jewish Reading." Pages 272–84 in *Reading Job Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 574. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.

Pope, Marvin H. *Job*. 3rd ed. AB 15. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel: Mit Einem Anhang Neu Herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*. 4th ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972.

Richter, Heinz. *Studien zu Hiob: Der Aufbau des Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den Gattungen des Rechtslebens*. TA 11. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959.

Rowley, Harold Henry. *Job*. Rev. ed. NCB. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

Schifferdecker, Kathryn. *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job*. HTS 61. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Schmid, Hans H. *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur*. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966.

Schmid, Konrad. "Innerbiblische Schriftdiskussion im Hiobbuch." Pages 253–58 in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*. Edited by Thomas Krüger, Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Christoph Uehlinger. ATANT 88. Zurich: Theologisher Verlag, 2007.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship." *JBL* 107 (1988): 3–17.

Schwáb, Zoltán. *Toward an Interpretation of the Book of Proverbs: Selfishness and Secularity Reconsidered*. JTISup 7. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013.

Seow, Choon-Leong. *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*. Illuminations. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

Sheppard, Gerald T. "Biblical Wisdom Literature and the End of the Modern Age." Pages 369–98 in *Congress Volume: Oslo, 1998*. Edited by André Lemaire and Magne Sæbø. VTSup 80. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Terrien, Samuel L. *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*. RP 26. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.

Thomas, Heath A. "Job's Rejection and Liminal Traverse: A Close (Re)reading of Job 42:6." Pages 155–74 in *The Unfolding of Your Words Gives Light: Studies on Biblical Hebrew in Honor of George L. Klein*. Edited by Ethan C. Jones. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018.

Ticciati, Susannah. *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading beyond Barth*. London: T&T Clark International, 2005.

Weiss, Dov. *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

Westermann, Claus. *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*. Translated by Charles A. Muenchow. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981.

Wette, Wilhelm M. L. de. "Beytrag zur Charakteristik des Hebraismus." Pages 241–312 in *Studien*. Edited by Carl Daub and Friedrich Creuzer. Heidelberg: Mohr & Zimmer, 1807.

Witte, Markus. "Die literarische Gattung des Buches Hiob: Robert Lowth und seine Erben." Pages 93–123 in *Sacred Conjectures: The Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc*. Edited by John Jarick. LHBOTS 457. London: T&T Clark, 2007.

———. "'Weisheit' in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft: Ausgewählte literatur- und theologiegeschichtliche Fragestellungen und Entwicklungen." *TLZ* 137 (2012): 1159–76.

Wolfers, David. *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job, Essays and a New Translation*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995.

Zimmerli, Walther. "Die Weisheit Israels: Zu einem Buch von Gerhard von Rad." *EvT* 31 (1971): 680–95.

# *Weisheit* and Sirach

Benjamin G. Wright III

Published in 1970, a year before his death, Gerhard von Rad's *Weisheit in Israel* could not be further away chronologically from his 1929 dissertation on Deuteronomy, *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*. Yet in some ways *Weisheit* is a kindred spirit to *Das Gottesvolk*. Bernard Levinson and Douglas Dance observe that Deuteronomy's significance remained a "preoccupation" throughout von Rad's career.[1] They argue that his readings of Deuteronomy, which often seem not to fit the text of the book, emerged from his attempts early in his career while at the University of Jena to maintain the relevance of the Old Testament as Christian scripture in the face of a National Socialist ideology that jettisoned the Old Testament as "Jewish," particularly via the claim that Deuteronomy was law and thereby not Christian.[2] For von Rad, "Deuteronomy became not a law

1. Bernard M. Levinson and Douglas Dance, "The Metamorphosis of Law into Gospel: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church," in *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament*, ed. Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto, ATM 13 (Münster: LIT, 2004), 83.

2. Levinson and Dance, "Metamorphosis of Law," 86–87. See also Bernard M. Levinson, "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church," *Int* 62 (2008): 238–54. Von Rad was a member of the Faculty of Theology at Jena from 1934–1945. For a broader overview of this period at Jena, see Susannah Heschel, "The Theological Faculty at the University of Jena as 'a Stronghold of National Socialism,'" in *Kämpferische Wissenschaft: Studien zur Universität Jena im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Uwe Hoßfeld, Jürgen John, and Rüdiger Stutz (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 452–70. For an analysis of these issues in Nazi Germany,

book demanding obedience, but rather a collection of sermons pervaded with a spiritual, even a '"protestantische" Atmosphäre.'"[3] As a member of the Bekennende Kirche (Confessing Church), von Rad was also steeped in the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel and, in particular, as with many researchers in this period, the theology of Karl Barth, who distinguished between revealed religion and natural religion.[4]

In the chapter on Ben Sira in *Weisheit*, we see some of the same emphases that von Rad attributed to Deuteronomy, particularly in his discussion of the relation between wisdom, Torah, and fear of God in Sirach. Von Rad's arguments about Sirach in *Weisheit* run along several different lines, some of which I will not treat here. For this analysis, I am especially interested in two particular aspects of his treatment of Sirach: the relationship between wisdom, fear of God, and Torah; and the way that von Rad characterizes Ben Sira's goals for his students.

## Part 1. Wisdom, Fear of God, Torah

For von Rad, wisdom is the key to Ben Sira's teaching: "Thereby Sirach has presented the subject to which he devoted his teaching: Wisdom."[5] Wisdom bookends the entire work (Sir 1:1–10 and 50:27–29), and the concept has different valences in different places. Von Rad contrasts wisdom as Sirach's major theme with fear of God and later with Torah. Wisdom is "unfathomable" (*unerforschlich*), but von Rad points to 1:1–10 as evidence that wisdom in Sirach is at the same time multifaceted, having both a divine, primordial sense (1:1–4) and a practical, human sense (1:10).[6] Yet, this "remarkably ambivalent phenomenon" (*merkwürdig ambiva-*

---

see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

3. Levinson, "Reading the Bible," 240.

4. On von Rad and the Confessing Church, see Levinson, "Reading the Bible." On the influence of Karl Barth, see Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 116.

5. Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 311: "Damit hat Sirach den Gegenstand vorgestellt, dem sich seine Lehre zuwendet: die Weisheit."

6. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 310–11. It should be noted that von Rad does not cite the text of Ben Sira in its native languages, and it is sometimes difficult to tell whether he is quoting the Hebrew text, the Greek text, or some combination of the two.

*lenten Phänomen*) leads to fear of God, although von Rad argues that Sirach reconfigures the important idea that fear of God was the beginning of wisdom, which he inherited from earlier wisdom teachers.[7]

This claim points to an important distinction for von Rad. In his view, the older notion of fear of God ultimately distilled down to obedience: "Under fear of God, we understand that for older wisdom, knowledge of human beings concerns their dependence on God, particularly their obligation to obedience with respect to the divine will."[8] By contrast, for Ben Sira, fear of God accords with "experience" (*erlebnismäßig*), which moves in the direction of "consciousness" (*Bewußtseinsinhalte*), "feelings" (*Empfindungen*), and "inclinations" (*Wollungen*).[9] As was the case with his work on Deuteronomy, for passages that do not fit his view of the text von Rad offers alternative explanations that frequently amount to special pleading.[10] So, for example, in cases such as 1:16 and 27, where the text equates wisdom with fear of God and with education, von Rad attributes these passages to Ben Sira's enthusiasm: "In the enthusiasm of exhortation, he occasionally directly identifies fear of God with wisdom and education."[11] With this distinction, which pits obedience and experience against each other, von Rad establishes the foundation for a larger argument that throws into relief the contrast between law, represented by Torah, and faith or piety, represented in Ben Sira's teaching.

Yet, von Rad cannot escape the fact that Ben Sira brings into relationship these three major ideas. We have just seen two—wisdom and fear of God—but now we have to add the third, and in some ways the most problematic: Torah. For von Rad, fear of God has to appear in Sirach in a way that is also different from older conceptions, because, as Ben Sira

---

7. For his view of fear of God, von Rad relies frequently on Josef Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach: Ihre religiose Struktur und ihre literarische und doktrinäre Bedeutung*, AnBib 30 (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1967).

8. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 313: "Unter Gottesfurcht verstand man in der älteren Weisheit das Wissen des Menschen um seine Gebundenheit an Gott, insonderheit seine Verpflichtung zum Gehorsam gegenüber dem göttlichen Willen."

9. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 313. Von Rad argues that such reinterpretation was necessary because of the times in which Ben Sira lived.

10. On von Rad's claims about passages in Deuteronomy that did not comport with his understanding, see Levinson, "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany," 240.

11. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 313: "Im Eifer der Ermahnung wird die Gottesfurcht gelegentlich sogar mit der Weisheit und der Bildung geradewegs identifiziert." See also 315.

makes clear, fear of God is consistent with Torah—"Above all, however, fear of God is consistent/keeps/complies with the Torah"[12]—and Torah, at least as von Rad understands it, poses difficulties for the distinction that he sees in Sirach between law and piety or obedience and experience. He admits that Torah plays a large role in Sirach, particularly in the form of written legal material that has been set down ("eines schriftlich niedergelegten Gesetzes"), but he rejects what he sees as a scholarly consensus that something significant has changed between older wisdom and Ben Sira, that is, that in Ben Sira's day behavior was no longer guided by the advice or experience of sages but by the legal framework of the Torah.[13] He remarks that the scholarly contention that torah had become the guide to behavior *ist nicht richtig*. Moreover, von Rad insists that it is obvious ("wie jeder sehen kann") that Sirach draws his instructional material from the sapiential teaching tradition and not from Torah. Against those who argue that the relationship between nomism (*Nomismus*) and wisdom was "closely established" (*scheint festgeschlossen*), von Rad maintains that they simply do not go together. He decisively separates wisdom from Torah, the sapiential from the legal, and thus the onus now falls on him to explain the importance of Torah to Ben Sira and to wrestle with a question that scholars of Ben Sira continue to debate.[14]

Von Rad observes that Ben Sira pays much more attention to wisdom than to Torah. In fact, he calls Torah sui generis in that Ben Sira simply refers

---

12. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 314: "Vor allem aber: Gottesfurcht hält sich an die Tora."

13. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 314. See n. 8, in which he gives a long list of passages where Torah appears in Sirach. In n. 9, he specifically cites Johannes Fichtner, *Die altorientische Weisheit in ihrer isr.-jüd. Ausprägung*, who used the phrase "nomistischen Weisheit."

14. Jack T. Sanders essentially takes up von Rad's position, employing the idea of "sacred canopies" to argue that for Ben Sira (and other contemporary wisdom texts) wisdom and Torah were competing categories that collided, and the sapiential tradition ended up both neutralizing its competitor and accommodating it at the same time. See Sanders, "When Sacred Canopies Collide: The Reception of the Torah of Moses in the Wisdom Literature of the Second-Temple Period," *JSJ* 32 (2001): 121–36. For a critique of Sanders's position and a general review of the basic positions regarding Torah and Wisdom, see Benjamin G. Wright III, "Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 157–86.

to "torah" or "commandments" without offering any further detail. Von Rad understands a clear hierarchy in Ben Sira, one that positions wisdom at the head, followed by fear of God, then Torah. For von Rad, Ben Sira needs Torah to define and interpret the concept of fear of God in more detail.[15] That is its function. So, in some ways, Ben Sira preserves the older view of the sages that fear of God is obedience to the divine will, but what differentiates Ben Sira from older sages is that he gives a new interpretation for a time in which "the will of God spoke from the written Torah."[16] Two passages make this point for him: 1:26, "If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord will furnish her abundantly to you," and 6:37, "Reflect always on the fear of the Most High, and occupy yourself at all times with his commandments, and he will make your heart understand, and, as you desire, he will make you wise."[17] Torah, as a written text, defines fear of God.

So what is the link between wisdom and fear of God? Here von Rad turns to the famous chapter 24, Wisdom's self-praise. According to his reading, for Ben Sira, Torah resides in the shadow of Wisdom—Ben Sira defines and interprets Torah through his own socially limited "horizon of understanding" (*Verstehenshorizont*) of Wisdom—and her speech in chapter 24 clinches that relationship. There "primeval order" (*Urordnung*) comes into existence before every other created work, and God grants it to Israel (24:8). For von Rad, the question of wisdom's residence in Israel, then, is not "Where does Torah come from?" but "To what extent is Torah a source of wisdom?" In his view, the answer is clear: "Because Torah is a

---

15. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 315. "Er bedarf nämlich ihrer, um den Begriff der Goffesfurcht näher zu bestimmen und zu verdeutlichen."

16. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 315. "Der Wille Gottes aus der geschriebenen Tora heraus ansprach."

17. Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the Greek Sirach come from Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). No Hebrew survives for 1:26. I have translated 6:37 on the basis of von Rad's German translation. It is a combination of the Greek and the Hebrew of manuscript A, accommodating the Hebrew to the syntax of the Greek in the first two cola. The Greek reads: "Exercise your thought in the Lord's ordinances, and meditate continually on his commandments, and he will make your heart firm, and the desire for wisdom will be given to you." Manuscript A gives the verse a slightly different cast as a continuation of the previous verse: "And you will understand the fear of the Most High and his commandments, and meditate always, and he will instruct your heart, and what you desire, he will make you wise."

self-description of primeval order, it thereby assists human beings toward Wisdom."[18] Wisdom "takes root in an honored people" (24:12); she speaks, describing herself in metaphorical language. Chapter 24, then, becomes diagnostic for von Rad. In his own flight of rhetorical enthusiasm, he writes, "Notice, here Wisdom speaks, not the Torah, and here beats the heart of Sirach. So, primeval Wisdom is seen here as a fascinating, aesthetic phenomenon."[19] Torah is important because it reveals "the primeval order of the entire world coming in a new form."[20] Ben Sira values Torah only inasmuch as it witnesses to the aesthetically pleasing primeval order that Wisdom represents and as it connects with the larger complex of wisdom teachings, which produces fear of God.

## Part 2. Ben Sira's Educational Program

In a kind of sleight-of-hand move, then, having concluded that wisdom is an aesthetic phenomenon that predominates over fear of God and Torah, von Rad now abandons the latter two ideas and turns to wisdom teaching with the primary goal of demonstrating that Ben Sira, on the one hand, stands in the larger stream of Israelite wisdom, but, on the other hand, he has transformed it for a new time. Here he subtly contrasts Ben Sira's teaching with Torah. According to von Rad, Ben Sira is concerned with the problem of contingency (*Kontingenten*) with which older teachers were also occupied, that is "from the question of how a person should act with respect to events that cannot be understood on the basis of a clearly discernible law, and the even more difficult question of whether there is not a hidden order working behind them."[21]

---

18. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 316: "Weil die Tora eine Selbstdarstellung der Urordnung ist, darum verhilft sie dem Menschen zur Weisheit."

19. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 317: "Wohlgemerkt, hier spricht die Weisheit, nicht die Tora, und hier schlägt Sirachs Herz. Wie ist hier Urweisheit als sein faszinierendes ästhetisches Phänomen gesehen!" I wonder at this point whether Barth's theology, especially his ideas about divine beauty, has influenced von Rad. On Barth, God, and beauty, see William Barnett, "Actualism and Beauty: Karl Barth's Insistence on the *Auch* in His Account of Divine Beauty," *SJT* 66 (2013): 299–318; Kurtis Kyle Helmich, "Karl Barth and the Beauty of God" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2017).

20. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 316. "Sie ist die in eine neue Gestalt getretene Urordnung aller Welt."

21. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 318: "auf die Frage, wie man sich Widerfahrnissen gegenüber zu verhalten hat, die von keiner deutlich erkennbaren Gesetzmäßigkeit her

In this sentence we come to something of the crux of von Rad's problem and thus his reading of Sirach. If life presents a series of contingent events for which no clear law can apply, the written law must not be the answer, even if Torah as written commandments must be part of Ben Sira's view of the divine will.[22] The ambiguity of life overruns written law. So, for example, in cases of going surety or consulting physicians or trusting counselors, Ben Sira understands that "things and events in the environment of human beings" ("die Dinge und Widerfahrnisse in der Umwelt des Menschen") are value laden, but their value is rarely clear to people. What is more, God has created this "ambivalence of appearances" ("in dieser Ambivalenz der Erscheinungen") as part of the fabric of the universe, as can be seen in his doctrine of the syzygies (33:13–15), and human beings are positioned right in the midst of it.[23] Things can be either good or bad, either beneficial or harmful, and the key is to figure out which is which and to act accordingly.

Yet, when making decisions in this environment, there are right and wrong choices. One should loan money to a neighbor in need, but that neighbor might not repay a loan. A good counselor is a boon, but counselors can give bad advice or betray a secret. This, for von Rad, is Ben Sira's pedagogical task, to enable the student to make the right decision in the midst of life's messiness: "He teaches the difficult art in the midst of ambiguous phenomena and occurrences of finding at any time the right perspective and of doing right before God."[24] Rather than a written or clear law, Ben Sira relies on his confidence (*Vertrauen*) in wisdom, what von Rad calls "a properly established and properly practiced cognitive capacity in human beings."[25] As a wisdom teacher, it is Ben Sira's task to produce

---

verstanden werden können, und auf die noch schwierigere Frage, ob sich nicht doch auch hinter ihnen eine verborgene Ordnung auswirkt."

22. On the issue of Ben Sira's explicit use of Torah, see Maurice Gilbert, SJ, "The Explicit Precepts Referred to by Ben Sira," in *Theology and Anthropology in the Book of Ben Sira*, ed. Bonifatia Gesche, Christian Lustig, and Gabriel Rabo, SCS 73 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 119–35. There he cites von Rad on Ben Sira's lack of interest in Torah (in Martin's English translation).

23. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 320.

24. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 322: "Er lehrt die schwere Kunst, in den vieldeutigen Phänomenen und Widerfahrnissen den jeweils rechten Aspekt zu finden und das vor Gott Richtige zu tun."

25. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 322: "ein recht fundiertes und recht praktiziertes Erkenntnisvermögen" of the human being.

students who have this capacity and who can thus sort through the ambiguity to the correct decision or behavior.

One important way that Ben Sira understands how humans deal with such fundamental ambiguity and the anxiety that it produces focuses on the idea of the right time, *kairos*.[26] Von Rad emphasizes the frequency with which this idea occurs in Sirach. While the times to speak and times not to speak might not always be easily discernible, Ben Sira argues that there is an *appropriate time* to speak and not to speak. Thus, the student should "observe the opportune or appropriate time" (Sir 4:20). A critical text in this regard is 39:16–35, which begins with the claim that all of God's deeds or works are good (39:16) and ends with: "One cannot say, 'This is worse than that,' because everything is excellent [*vortrefflich*] in its time" (39:34; based on von Rad's translation). The concept of the proper time, then, makes the idea of *kairos*, which older wisdom traditions also employed, "theologically fruitful" (*theologisch fruchtbar*) in that divine rule can only be understood with respect to everything in its appropriate time and not by means of any general system of value ("nicht von einem allgemeinen Wert- oder Deutesystem"). The idea that even those elements of creation that are viewed as negative, that is, fire, hail, plagues, and so on, have a proper time and place further reinforces the orderliness of God's creation and the idea that all things were created for their proper moment. For von Rad, Ben Sira has attempted to tackle the problem of theodicy in a new way by employing the idea of *kairos*, which offers something to the human need for understanding ("dem menschlichen Denkbedürfnis Verstehenshilfen") of the world, even as it contrasts with the approach of Job's friends, who try to interpret the world in a comprehensive manner.[27]

For von Rad, then, all of these ideas coalesce to provide a sense of Ben Sira's goals or intentions (*Absichten*) for his teaching. First, in continuity with the older wisdom teachers, Ben Sira's teaching is "human instruction": "His teaching is human teaching; that is, it does not come from a command of God. It does not claim for itself the authority of direct, divine address. It is not 'proclamation' but person to person address."[28] Moreover, Ben Sira's teaching is thoroughly dialogical and dialectical.

---

26. Von Rad transliterates the term *kairos* (in the Greek of Sirach, καιρός). In the extant Hebrew texts the Greek term generally corresponds to עת.

27. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 326.

28. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 326: "seine Belehrung ist Menschenlehre, d. h. sie ergeht nicht im Auftrage Gottes. Sie beansprucht für sich nicht die Autorität einer

The key question, for von Rad, becomes, "how, then, does Sirach see the person who is so dialogically talented/skilled/inclined and how does he, in the opinion of Sirach, come to himself and to his destiny?"[29]

Von Rad begins with Sirach 16:24–30 and 17:1–12. He points out that Ben Sira's claims about creation contrast with the "stony immobility" (*steinernen Unbewegtheit*) of the language of Genesis and have an emotional quality to them, "a subjectivity moved by a pathos of wonder" ("eine vom Pathos der Bewunderung bewegte Subjektivität"). Ben Sira elicits awe (*Staunen*) at the spiritual provisioning (*die geistige Ausstattung*) that God has provided for human beings.[30] In the human ability to see, hear, think, and distinguish good from evil, Ben Sira makes an important statement about the spiritual relationship between God and humanity ("von dem geistigen Verhältnis des Menschen zu Gott zu sprechen"). In a short discussion of 40:1–11, von Rad points to Sir 40:2 to conclude that for Ben Sira the toil and struggles of life for a person reside primarily "in his heart, in his spirit/inner person, also in his anxieties and emotions."[31]

For von Rad, the best illustration of this way of understanding humanity and its relationship with God is the Praise of the Ancestors in Sir 44–50. Here, he writes, "It is not a matter of obvious or hidden directives of God, nor his judgments or decrees of salvation, nor the tension between promise and fulfillment," but rather these chapters highlight the "great men" (*die großen Männer*) whom God has brought to such high honor.[32] In von

---

unmittelbaren göttlichen Anrede. Sie ist nicht 'Verkündigung' sondern Rede von Mensch zu Mensch."

29. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 326: "Wie aber sieht Sirach den derart dialogisch veranlagten Menschen, und wie kommt er nach Sirach Meinung zu sich selbst und zu seiner Bestimmung?"

30. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 327–28. The adjective *geistig* can refer to the spiritual or intellectual in human beings. James Martin in his translation of *Weisheit* opts for the intellectual, but as Raymond van Leeuwen demonstrates in his article in this volume, the intellectual does not really get at what von Rad is arguing. I think that is certainly the case with Ben Sira, where von Rad distinguishes Torah or law from the spiritual (*geistig*), which von Rad thinks is the ultimate goal for Ben Sira.

31. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 329: "in seinem Herzen im Geistigen, also in seinen Ängsten und Affekten."

32. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 330. "Hier geht es nicht um die offenbaren oder verborgenen Führungen Gottes, seine Gerichte oder Heilssetzungen, nicht um das Spannungsverhältnis von Verheißung und Erfüllung." For von Rad's relationship to Johann Gottfried Herder and the importance of great men or great personalities, see Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 119–20.

Rad's view, this idea represents something new: "The person empowered by God to political or spiritual/mental achievements is an object of wonderment and occasionally also of horror. The person in a bond with God is an aesthetic phenomenon with which Sirach is fascinated."[33] As Sirach understands these great men via the bond they have with God, so also, then, does he view all human beings—and, for von Rad, this is the central feature of Ben Sira's teaching. On the one hand, he says that Ben Sira has not allowed his teaching as a traditional sage to be constrained by Torah, but, on the other hand, a great deal was different in Ben Sira's time. The aim or goal of Ben Sira's training is exemplified in the "pious person" (*der fromme Mensch*). In von Rad's understanding, this piety connects with the way humans were created and with the new perspectives that Ben Sira brings to traditional wisdom teaching: "In any case, it is a very internalized ideal of education; indeed, if one recalls the importance that Sirach attaches to fear of God and particularly to humility, one can speak of a tendency to pietism. For his attitude toward God has something of a strong emotional quality."[34]

Von Rad emphasizes the newness of Sirach's approach at the same time that he also maintains continuity with older sapiential sources. Sirach presents his students with a cosmos that remains "secure in a beneficial divine order" ("in einer heilsamen Gottesordnung geborgen").[35] Whereas previous teachers recognized that fear of God was the beginning of wisdom (see Prov 1:7; Sir 1:14), von Rad claims that the content of their teaching did not have the "religious components" (*die religiöse Komponente*) that Ben Sira's teaching contains. In Sirach the religious, which von Rad seems to equate with piety or faith, is brought to the center of education. With piety as the central feature of education, von Rad returns to the notion of fear of God, which he equates with pursuing piety. For Sirach, he says, those who give their heart to God are those who are truly

---

33. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 331: "Der von Gott zu politischen oder geistigen Leistungen ermächtigte Mensch wird zum Gegenstand der Bewunderung und gelegentlich wohl auch des Schauderns. Der Mensch im Bund mit Gott ist ein ästhetisches Phänomen, von dem Sirach fasziniert ist." Of course, this language recalls von Rad's assessment of Wisdom in chapter 24 as an "aesthetic phenomenon" (317).

34. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 332: "Auf jeden Fall ist es ein sehr verinnerlichtes Bildungsideal, ja wenn man an die Wichtigkeit denkt, die Sirach der Gottesfurcht und vor allem der Demut beimißt, könnte man geradezu von einem Zug ins Pietistische sprechen. Denn seine Einstellung zu Gott hat etwas stark Gefühlsmäßiges."

35. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 333.

human.[36] Von Rad's assessment of piety as primarily an interior state, then, leads him to a succinct statement about Ben Sira's teaching: "It is also Sirach's strong conviction that faith is also a factor in education."[37] This interior piety, which von Rad characterizes as both faith and fear of God—these are all quite close concepts for Sirach, in his estimation—allows God to improve a person both with respect to knowledge of the world and behavior toward other people. Ben Sira's students, then, stand in a kind of continuity with those great men of Israel's history whose fear of God/faith/piety allowed God to make something of them.

At this point, however, von Rad recognizes that Ben Sira's program of education is more exclusive than that of earlier teachers. It is not as much a quest for knowledge, as in earlier times, but rather it is "more and more a breadth of education and literary erudition."[38] Yet this training is religious through and through, as we see "in the beautiful portrait" ("in dem schönen Porträt") that Sirach paints of the scholar/teacher in 38:34–39:11, who is engaged in the literary activity of studying Torah and the Prophets.[39]

Von Rad concludes his discussion of Sirach by claiming that we should understand Ben Sira's teaching as more than "a confession of his faith" ("ein Bekenntnis seines Glaubens"). The idea of wisdom had changed by Sirach's time from older conceptions, and he had certainly engaged personally with questions of faith.[40] In order to accomplish the specific purpose of his book, he undoubtedly left out much that he knew; von Rad gives sin and mortality as coming from Eve, the evil *yetser*, and hints of eschatology, as examples. Von Rad ends with two questions that, I confess, confused rather than clarified his understanding of Sirach: "Was it literary sensitivity if he viewed himself only as 'the gleaner who lingers after the harvesters' (Sir 33:16)? Or did he sense that the main work had already been done before him?"[41]

---

36. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 333. "Der nach Frömmigkeit strebende Mensch, der Gotterfürchtige, d. h. der sein Herz an Gott hingibt, ist der Mensch, wie Gott ihn will."

37. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334: "Das also ist Sirachs feste Überzeugung, daß … der Glaube auch ein Bildungsfaktor ist."

38. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334. "An seine Stelle tritt mehr und mehr eine Breite der Bildung und eine literarische Gelehrsamkeit."

39. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334.

40. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 335.

41. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 336: "War es eine literarische Delikatesse, wenn er sich nur als den betrachtet, 'der Nachlese hält hinter den Schnittern' (Sir 33 16)? Oder hat er gespürt, daß die Hauptarbeit wirklich schon vor ihm getan war?"

## Part 3. Von Rad as Reader of Sirach

Already in his introduction, von Rad speaks of wisdom in Israel as walking along "a razor's edge between knowledge and faith" ("auf Messers Schneide zwischen Wissen und Glaube").[42] We certainly see that fundamental distinction and tension in his assessment of Sirach. It seems to me that von Rad, at least in the case of Ben Sira, then, roughly equates knowledge that looks for certainty in responding to the world, what might be termed a kind of legalism, with Torah, which as we saw constitutes written law for von Rad.[43] Thus, when he argues that Ben Sira's exemplar of education is the pious man, he shifts Torah and that type of knowledge dramatically into the background in favor of the knowledge/wisdom—and these seem to me roughly synonymous—that can respond to ambiguity. Certainly the increased importance of Torah piety in the Second Temple period had an impact on Ben Sira's teaching. Von Rad does not deny that—see, for example, his comments on Sir 39 and Torah study—but he strains, in my view, to minimize the importance of Torah so that Ben Sira's emphasis on faith and piety can take center stage. Just as in Deuteronomy, where he could detect a *protestantische Atmosphäre*, so he implicitly attributes one to Ben Sira, and he effectively ignores the importance of Torah for Ben Sira by claiming that any identification with wisdom or any importance of Torah that we see in Sirach must come from an overexuberant manner of expression. That is, Ben Sira did not really mean what he said.

The best piece of evidence that von Rad has for subsuming Torah under wisdom is the lack of explicit citation of any legal material in the book. To what extent should we accept von Rad's narrow definition of Torah as written law, though? Ben Sira certainly alludes to or interprets different legal

---

42. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 16.

43. This type of knowledge would seem to be equated with certainty that is based on law. Another type of knowledge, that of the world, would be associated with wisdom. For the idea that older knowledge is different from Ben Sira's knowledge, see the text in von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334 n. 38. By contrast, on 326, von Rad refers to Ben Sira's desire to teach *Weisheit*, *Erkenntnis*, *Lebensmächtigung*, and *Bildung*. Martin often translates *Erkenntnis* as "perception," although this seems to me to miss the mark of what I understand von Rad to be saying. Some knowledge is problematic, that is, connected with law and a way of looking at the world that seeks clear answers founded in that knowledge base. For von Rad, Ben Sira teaches knowledge or insight, perhaps, of a different sort, one closer to wisdom that allows the student to understand how to cope with life's ambiguities.

strictures, but he also is aware of the narrative sections of torah, which he exploits in his teaching.[44] Von Rad has it partially correct, I think, when he says that Ben Sira tailors Torah to his own pedagogical agenda. So, for example, in 17:1–10, the Greek translation employs language that comes from the creation stories in Gen 1–2, but these narratives are also adapted so that wisdom does not come through an act of transgression but was a gift from God already at creation.[45]

Such interpretive moves do not necessarily demonstrate that for Ben Sira Torah is subsumed under wisdom, however. In my view, it more likely speaks to the issue of what kind of authority Torah, both in its legal and narrative forms, would have had for Ben Sira. Without getting caught up in arguments about canon development, it seems to me that von Rad supposes that a written Torah would have had an inviolable status for Ben Sira; it could not be changed or adapted. If we do not accept that supposition, then Ben Sira's acts of interpretation are consistent with accepting the Torah as a source of wisdom, which he had to reckon with at some level, without necessarily subsuming it as a minor category under an all-consuming Wisdom. Indeed, Ben Sira's approach is consistent with what we see elsewhere in ancient Judaism when it comes to interpreting these texts, and in some cases, as at Qumran, there is no question of subordinating Torah.[46] Moreover, Greg Schmidt Goering has argued that in the critical verse 24:23, where Ben Sira brings Wisdom and Torah into relationship, that the "all these things" and "the book of the covenant of the Most High" are related by asyndeton, and so rather than an identification of the two, Wisdom and Torah should thought of as correlated, which allows each of these concepts to maintain their individual identities. Thus Israel's special wisdom, which God granted, is embodied in the Torah. Von Rad comes close when he says that torah is a "self-description of primeval order" ("eine Selbstdarstellung der Urordnung"). He also asks the right question,

---

44. For discussions of the issues, see Gilbert, "Explicit Precepts"; James L. Kugel, "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage," in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, ed. James L. Kugel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1–26; Wright, "Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy."

45. See Wright, "Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy," 176–77. No Hebrew survives for this section, and so we need to be somewhat circumspect about how confident we are that the Hebrew would have reflected the language of Genesis. At any rate, it seems clear that the Hebrew was in some relationship to Gen 1 and 2.

46. For examples, see the essays in Matthias Henze, ed., *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

I think: "To what extent is Torah a source of wisdom?" As I see it, however, although his answer generally moves in the right direction, in that Torah brings people to wisdom, for Ben Sira Torah is much more significant than von Rad admits for precisely the reason that it comprises one major source that enables people to become wise, understand the world, and fulfill the divine will.

Von Rad, then, works to create something of polar opposites, in a sense comporting with Ben Sira's doctrine of the syzygies that are built into creation: Torah and legal knowledge on the one side, and wisdom, experience, piety, and faith on the other. Each has its place in Ben Sira's spiritual economy, but in von Rad's reading of Sirach, they are not truly equal. Jean-Louis Ska argues that for von Rad, from the very start, the religion of Israel "was structured around an affirmation of faith—'a creed'—and this implies the revelation of God in history."[47] His assessment of Ben Sira as well seems to be grounded in his consistent attempts to distinguish between kerygma and law in Old Testament texts, especially in the Pentateuch.

One major issue, as I see it, in von Rad's assessment of Sirach concerns Ben Sira's social location as a scribe or sage in the second century BCE. Von Rad recognizes that Ben Sira lived in times that differed from those of older wisdom teachers, but he never really spells out what those differences are, except perhaps for the emergence of Torah. Since 1970, however, a good deal of work has been done (1) to situate scribes, and particularly Ben Sira, in the Second Temple period, socially, culturally, and politically and (2) to understand better Ben Sira's view of the sage, and thus of himself, as an elite member of Judean society.[48] As a learned scribe or sage,

---

47. Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 119. Ska also shows that for von Rad, the figure of Joseph loomed large, because, as a wise person, he had to discern God's will without any supernatural help.

48. Among many possible studies that examine the world in which Ben Sira lived, see, e.g., Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014); Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). See also the work that has been done on the scribe, e.g., Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period*, JSOTSup 291 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Benjamin G. Wright, "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. Benjamin G. Wright and Lawrence M. Wills, SymS 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 89–112; Samuel L. Adams, "The Social Location of the Scribe in the Second Temple Period," in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at*

Ben Sira occupied a position below the priestly elite but well above most of the rest of Judean society, and his social position affects his relationship to Torah. In this period, as Richard Horsley and Patrick Tiller argue, the "scribe/sage" inherited some of the functions that traditionally belonged to the priests, especially the teaching of the law.[49] James Kugel makes a similar assessment when he argues that in the Second Temple period "the job description of the Jewish sage has changed."[50] Kugel notes, as does von Rad, that in many respects, Ben Sira is a traditional Jewish sage. "But along with this traditional sort of wisdom writing, Ben Sira also explains laws and stories from the Bible; indeed, his book concludes with a six-chapter review of biblical heroes and the lessons their stories are designed to impart. This is because, for him, it is Torah that is the great repository of wisdom."[51] Not only has Torah become a critical source of wisdom—and chapter 24 lays the groundwork for such a claim—but the "figured world" that Ben Sira creates for his students is filled with language drawn from Torah, and Ben Sira adopts and adapts those laws and stories into his wisdom teaching.[52] Moreover, von Rad does not take full enough account of the Praise of the Ancestors in chapters 44–50, where Ben Sira's debt to texts that became part of the Hebrew Bible clearly emerges, as Kugel has noted. Torah and wisdom thus intersect for Ben Sira in such a way that von Rad's minimization of Torah in its relation to wisdom does not reflect Ben

*Seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert Tigchelaar, JSJSup 175 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 22–37.

49. Richard A. Horsley and Patrick Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class and Material Culture*, ed. Philip R. Davies and John M. Halligan, JSOTSup 340 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 74–107.

50. James L. Kugel, "Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation," in *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 174.

51. Kugel, "Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation," 174. While I think that Kugel is essentially right about Ben Sira, the use of "Bible" as a category becomes problematic when thinking about how Ben Sira interprets texts that he inherited. See Benjamin G. Wright III, "Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira," in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 363–88.

52. I have taken the phrase "figured world" from Carol A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, STDJ 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 21. See also, on this idea in Ben Sira, Wright, "Biblical Interpretation," 367.

Sira's social and cultural embeddedness; rather, it emerges primarily from von Rad's own contemporary theological interests.

Von Rad is correct when he states that Ben Sira's teaching is more exclusivist, and he cites 39:1–11 as evidence that Ben Sira's teaching is "religious through and through" ("durch und durch religiös").[53] He recognizes that in Ben Sira's time literary learning had become more important, but he diminishes the significance of that development when he writes, "the impetus of the genuine desire for knowledge with all its risks has slackened off with respect to older Wisdom. In its place, a breadth of education/ training and a literary erudition entered more and more."[54] In his own social world, though, Ben Sira is training young men for careers as scribes and scholars of the law, and 39:1–11 emphasizes the effort and commitment necessary to achieve the learning and wisdom necessary for Ben Sira's students to fulfill their roles in society. In order to take their places within their own social worlds, they not only have to acquire wisdom and become sages but also require training in the law that they will be responsible for teaching.

At the other pole from law sits faith as is it exhibited in Ben Sira's ideal pious person, who "must listen especially attentively to conscience, to the heart enlightened by God."[55] Rather than a person guided by the hard-and-fast rules of Torah, Ben Sira's ideal person has a spiritual (*geistig*) relationship with God that is based in the heart and that has an emotional and aesthetic quality. This "internalized ideal of education" (*verinnerlichtes Bildungsideal*) that moves toward pietism establishes a stark contrast between those who might expect the law to govern their relationship to God and the exigencies of life, and those whose interior and spiritual life creates a bond (*Bund*) with God. Thus, this person of faith has the potential to become one of the "great men" whom Ben Sira highlights in the Praise of the Ancestors section, someone who can become part of the "hall of fame" (*Ruhmeshalle*) of the famous that Ben Sira praises. This idea, it seems to me, further reflects the "Protestant atmosphere" that von

---

53. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334.

54. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 334: "Der Impetus des eigentlichen Erkenntniswillens mit all seinen Risiken hat gegenüber der älteren Weisheit wohl nachgelassen. An seine Stelle tritt mehr und mehr eine Breite der Bildung und eine literarische Gelehrsamkeit."

55. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 319. "Auf Gewissen muß man besonders aufmerksam hören, auf das von Gott erleuchtete Herz."

Rad attributed to Deuteronomy, and it dresses the Protestant distinction between law and gospel in a slightly different guise.

We see von Rad working out a similar idea in his remarks about Ben Sira's teaching. As we saw above, he contrasts what he terms "proclamation" (*Verkündigung*), which for him connotes divine command and direct divine address, with the dialogical and dialectical character of Ben Sira's teaching, which he characterizes as "human instruction" (*Menschenlehre*). Ben Sira's teaching is always "advice" (*Beratung*), admonition (*Mahnung*), or warning (*Warnung*). It is dialogical inasmuch as Ben Sira limits himself to "two or more aspects of any case" ("zwei oder mehr Aspekte einer Sache").[56] The right answer can only be found in the moment of decision, which is guided by the enlightened heart.

As with his arguments about Torah and piety, a Protestant distinction seems to undergird the difference between human teaching and proclamation. Proclamation, defined as divine command, resides at the level of law, which cannot suffice to offer insight into or answers to life's ambiguities. Human teaching—Ben Sira's advice, exhortation, and warning—prepares the student's heart to be enlightened by God. Von Rad emphasizes this contrast in his analysis of 16:24–30; 17:1–12; and 44:1–15. He interprets the first two passages in which Ben Sira riffs on Gen 1 to refer to humanity's "spiritual relationship" (*geistiges Verhältnis*) with God as opposed to the "stony immobility" (*steinerne Unbewegtheit*) of the language of Genesis.[57] Sirach 44:1–15 in a similar way shows the difference between the great men whose actions Ben Sira praises and "judgments and decrees of salvation" (*Gerichte und Heilssetzungen*), which are absent from this section of the book. Here again law in the form of proclamation and gospel in the guise of spiritual relationship with God stand in the background of von Rad's analysis.

Even though to a certain degree Ben Sira indeed does portray his teaching as human, in that he appeals to his students' status as his sons and he as their father in order to coerce their obedience, what von Rad misses, as I see it, is the way that Ben Sira also builds a case that his teaching is divine teaching, that it comes through revelation, and this claim works to confer on his instruction the highest authority.[58] He takes two

---

56. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 326.

57. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 237–28.

58. On Ben Sira's construction of himself as a father and his students as sons, see Benjamin G. Wright III, "From Generation to Generation: The Sage as Father in Early

main tacks, both of which bear on how he understands wisdom. First, in the famous passage in 24:30–34, he links his own teaching with Wisdom herself. His "canal" flows directly from the sea of Wisdom. He has a direct link to her; he channels Wisdom. Second, in verse 33 he compares his teaching to prophecy, which, in keeping with the water metaphor, he will pour out.[59] With this claim, Ben Sira positions himself as a recipient of divine revelation in the manner of the prophets. Divine Wisdom, who speaks in the heavenly council, who has taken up residence in Israel, and who has been embodied in Torah, becomes the mediatrix of revelation as the speech of God. Elsewhere, in 4:11–19 and 38:34c–39:11, Ben Sira also frames his activity as the result of revelation.[60] Ben Sira frames his own teaching, then, as prophetic revelation, and it does bear some of the character of von Rad's "proclamation."[61]

I am not sure what to make of von Rad's equivocating questions at the end of his chapter on Sirach. As I noted above, they confuse me as to the point of this chapter. In so many ways, von Rad emphasizes the newness of Ben Sira's education program: his ideal of the wise person as having piety, his relocation of the religious to the center from the periphery, the new way he tackles theodicy, the way he makes the idea of *kairos* "theologi-

---

Jewish Literature," in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael Knibb*, ed. Charlotte Hempel and Judith M. Lieu, JSJSup 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 309–32.

59. Unfortunately, no Hebrew survives for this passage, so we have to rely on the Greek. Since we are dealing with a translation, we need to keep in mind how translations can reshape their source texts, and thus we need to be cautious about how much detail we can ascribe to Ben Sira himself. In this case, it seems to me that we can accept the general idea that Ben Sira understood his own teaching as akin to prophecy.

60. On Ben Sira's relation to the prophets and his teaching as revelation, see Leo G. Perdue, "Ben Sira and the Prophets," in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp, CBQMS 38 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 132–54; Benjamin G. Wright III, "Conflicted Boundaries: Ben Sira, Sage and Seer," in *Congress Volume: Helsinki, 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen, VTSup 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 229–53; Martti Nissinen, "Wisdom as Mediatrix in Sirach 24: Ben Sira, Love Lyrics, and Prophecy," in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. Mikko Luuko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, StOr 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009), 377–90.

61. The medium of revelation differs between the two. Textual study, careful observation of creation, and attention to the sage rather than visionary experience prepare the ground for revelation. See 39:1–6.

cally fruitful," his realignment of the idea of fear of God. Yet, at the same time, his goals align with those of older teachers. For von Rad, Ben Sira has not altered the traditional forms of wisdom, knowledge, and teaching because of the presence of Torah, but much had changed that required a new approach on Ben Sira's part. So, von Rad asks whether Ben Sira was disingenuous in his claim to be the last in a line or whether was he taking the final step on ground prepared for him well beforehand. My sense is that the latter represents von Rad's own position. And what is that final step? As I read von Rad reading Sirach, I think it has everything to do with his conviction that Ben Sira's ideal person is the pious person, the one "who gives his heart to God" ("der sein Herz an Gott hingibt"), the one to whom "alone are the sources of wisdom and knowledge open," the one for whom faith is part of the process of training.[62] I wonder—and I freely admit to speculation here—whether for von Rad, Ben Sira might himself well have taken something of a final step on ground prepared by older wisdom teachers, but in his emphasis on faith, on an interiorized piety that emphasizes the heart, he prepares the ground for a wisdom teacher who would emerge in Galilee a couple of centuries later.

## Bibliography

Adams, Samuel L. *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.

———. "The Social Location of the Scribe in the Second Temple Period." Pages 22–37 in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*. Edited by Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert Tigchelaar. JSJSup 175. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Barnett, William. "Actualism and Beauty: Karl Barth's Insistence on the *Auch* in His Account of Divine Beauty." *SJT* 66 (2013): 299–318.

Gilbert, Maurice, SJ. "The Explicit Precepts Referred to by Ben Sira." Pages 119–35 in *Theology and Anthropology in the Book of Ben Sira*. Edited by Bonifatia Gesche, Christian Lustig, and Gabriel Rabo. SCS 73. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020.

---

62. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 333–34. "Ihm nur öffnen sich die Quellen der Weisheit und der Erkenntnis. Das also ist Sirachs feste Überzeugung, daß … der Glaube auch ein Bildungsfaktor ist."

Haspecker, Josef. *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach: Ihre religiose Struktur und ihre literarische und doktrinäre Bedeutung*. AnBib 30. Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1967.

Helmich, Kurtis Kyle. "Karl Barth and the Beauty of God." PhD diss., Duke University, 2017.

Henze, Matthias, ed. *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Heschel, Susannah. *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

———. "The Theological Faculty at the University of Jena as 'a Stronghold of National Socialism.'" Pages 452–70 in *Kämpferische Wissenschaft: Studien zur Universität Jena im Nationalsozialismus*. Edited by Uwe Hoßfeld, Jürgen John, and Rüdiger Stutz. Cologne: Böhlau, 2003.

Horsley, Richard A. *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Horsley, Richard A., and Patrick Tiller. "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple." Pages 74–107 in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class and Material Culture*. Edited by Philip R. Davies and John M. Halligan. JSOTSup 340. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002.

Kugel, James L. "Ancient Biblical Interpretation and the Biblical Sage." Pages 1–26 in *Studies in Ancient Midrash*. Edited by James L. Kugel. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

———. "Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation." Pages 151–78 in *Early Judaism: A Comprehensive Overview*. Edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Levinson, Bernard M. "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church." *Int* 62 (2008): 238–54.

Levinson, Bernard M., and Douglas Dance. "The Metamorphosis of Law into Gospel: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church." Pages 83–110 in *Recht und Ethik im Alten Testament*. Edited by Bernard M. Levinson and Eckart Otto. ATM 13. Münster: LIT, 2004.

Newsom, Carol A. *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*. STDJ 52. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Nissinen, Martti. "Wisdom as Mediatrix in Sirach 24: Ben Sira, Love Lyrics, and Prophecy." Pages 377–90 in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*. Edited

by Mikko Luuko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila. StOr 106. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009.

Perdue, Leo G. "Ben Sira and the Prophets." Pages 132–54 in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit*. Edited by Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp. CBQMS 38. Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005.

Pietersma, Albert, and Benjamin G. Wright. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

Sanders, Jack T. "When Sacred Canopies Collide: The Reception of the Torah of Moses in the Wisdom Literature of the Second-Temple Period." *JSJ* 32 (2001): 121–36.

Schams, Christine. *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period*. JSOTSup 291. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998.

Ska, Jean-Louis. *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*. Translated by Sr. Pascale Dominique. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Wright, Benjamin G., III. "Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira." Pages 363–88 in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*. Edited by Matthias Henze. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

———. "Conflicted Boundaries: Ben Sira, Sage and Seer." Pages 229–53 in *Congress Volume: Helsinki, 2010*. Edited by Martti Nissinen. VTSup 148. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

———. "From Generation to Generation: The Sage as Father in Early Jewish Literature." Pages 309–22 in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael Knibb*. Edited by Charlotte Hempel and Judith M. Lieu. JSJSup 111. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

———. "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira." Pages 89–112 in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* Edited by Benjamin G. Wright and Lawrence M. Wills. SymS 35. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

———. "Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira." Pages 157–86 in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

# *Weisheit* and Ecclesiastes

## Stuart Weeks

In the 237 pages of *Weisheit* that precede his specific discussion of Eccle-
siastes, Gerhard von Rad mentions the book by name only ten times and
cites the text only nine.[1] Furthermore, although the compact, ten-page
discussion itself is followed by several more pages reflecting on Job and
Ecclesiastes together, there are few additional references after that.[2] To be
sure, this is a smaller book than Proverbs, Job, or Ben Sira, but its size barely
begins to explain why Ecclesiastes receives so much less coverage than any
of those, and while it would be too much to say that the book comes close
to being squeezed out altogether, it is clear that von Rad has found little
opportunity to integrate it into his broader discussions. In fact, when he
is not discussing Ecclesiastes directly, it contributes little to those discus-
sions beyond some examples of particular forms and support for his ideas
about time. The passage cited most often, moreover, and at most length, is
the list of times in Eccl 3:1–8, which von Rad understands to be an expres-
sion of old ideas, embedded in the book[3]—an understanding that enables
him to justify a recontextualization of the passage among those old ideas,
without the awkward, idiosyncratic reinterpretation of it that he attributes
to Qoheleth. Otherwise, for the most part, von Rad depicts Ecclesiastes
not as a representative of the intellectual ideas and traditions that he finds
elsewhere in Israel's wisdom thinking, but as an awkward dead end: it is
a text that contests the most fundamental presuppositions behind those
ideas, and so places itself outside his own consideration of them.

---

1. I have used Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel: Mit Einem Anhang Neu Her-
ausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag,
2013).

2. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 238–48, 248–50.

3. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 147.

Although the more general impact of *Weisheit* was surely tempered by other factors, it is perhaps partly as a consequence of this rather slight treatment that von Rad himself has correspondingly received relatively little attention in subsequent scholarship on Ecclesiastes. That is a shame, because what he does say is not uninteresting. Rejecting almost immediately any idea that the book is an anthology, despite the formal variety within it, von Rad notes its distinctive consistency in terms of expression and thought, and isolates three key, interconnected ideas: that no satisfactory meaning can be found in life, that God determines everything that happens, and that humans are unable to discern what God is doing in the world. For Qoheleth, there is an order behind everything, expressed in the concept that everything has a time, but this order is divinely determined and unalterable by humans, who are unable to comprehend it through their experience of it, so that any search for knowledge is blocked. God beneficently grants humans the ability to enjoy life, but there is no scope for humans to master life. Von Rad notably does not engage with (or generally even acknowledge) the many philological and other problems in the text that potentially undermine his claims about particular passages, and not every detail of his claims can stand up to close scrutiny. In general, though, this is an intelligent summary of key points, which would find much support among more recent scholars (although, of course, the intervening years have seen no greater unanimity among scholarly readings of Ecclesiastes).

It is when he comes to explain why the book holds these positions that von Rad's account becomes both more obviously the product of his own theological ideas and more open to objection. The attempt itself is curious, perhaps, insofar as von Rad recognizes that Ecclesiastes has points of contact with a wide range of existing literature[4] but feels constrained nevertheless to understand it in terms of a personal, almost psychological engagement with the world, which merely drives the author into agreement with other, long-standing protests about the vanity of the world. At the heart of the problem, as von Rad sees it, is a lack of faith or trust. Unlike those earlier wisdom writers who held their investigations of the world in a dialogue with their religious faith and saw their teachings as promoting that faith,[5] von Rad's Qoheleth describes a world that has been

---

4. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 250.
5. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 246.

wholly surrendered to a God who acts in pursuit of his own purposes. He also ties questions about the salvation of humans to questions about the meaning of life and what humans can find in life while applying presuppositions that are bereft of any trust in life, and so in essence takes limitations that were already acknowledged and uses them to challenge the very validity of asking such questions.

As we might expect of von Rad, issues of faith and salvation are prominent in this explanation, and some of his vocabulary is drawn more obviously from the concerns of modern Christian theology than from anything in the text or its likely historical context: the very notion of a *Heilsfrage*, for instance,[6] rests on a set of assumptions about humanity that are unlikely even to have been familiar to the author of Ecclesiastes, let alone shared by him. That is not necessarily to say that von Rad is being anachronistic or eisegetical, but it does indicate the extent to which, as a Christian theologian himself, he is contextualizing the ideas of the book within a framework that is largely alien to it, in order to address it from a particular perspective. We need not go into the hermeneutical issues raised by that, which have been well rehearsed by many scholars over the years, but it is reasonable to ask whether von Rad's explanation of the book is accurate even in his own terms.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of his portrayal lies in the perception that Ecclesiastes is in some sense destructive. The book's conviction that God's activities are beyond human comprehension is "alarming" and its consequences "catastrophic," and the earlier quest to master life is "broken."[7] Up to this point in *Weisheit*, von Rad has understood the literature and the ideas that he has been addressing to constitute something like a balancing act: on one side the wise are concerned to comprehend, and to some extent systematize, the world on the basis of human experience; on the other, they recognize a God who sets limits on human comprehension but who does not altogether obstruct it, and with whom it is possible to maintain a relationship of some sort. The wise navigate a cautious path, trying to hold on to each of these, but Qoheleth, on von Rad's reckoning, loads so much weight on to divine power and human incomprehension that the balance is not just tilted but destroyed. Human experience now reveals nothing but human limitation, and divine beneficence is reduced

---

6. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 246–47.
7. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 243–44.

to permitting humans a little pleasure in the tasks he sets for them.[8] Ecclesiastes, correspondingly, is a book that breaks the whole enterprise by failing to recognize the very need for balance, and in doing so it disqualifies itself from consideration as a true part of this enterprise. There are many significant questions to be raised about von Rad's portrayal of that enterprise itself, and I shall turn to some of them below, but if we let that pass for the moment, is it really fair to say that Ecclesiastes is dramatically different or that it is so skewed to a particular understanding of the world?

To begin with, I doubt it is accurate to say that Qoheleth's statements preclude any notion of a human relationship with God, and if Proverbs is to be seen as a sort of balancing act, then it is difficult to see Ecclesiastes entirely differently. Von Rad is surely right to highlight the book's strong determinism and its emphasis on how little humans can affect or effect anything in the world, but there are also tensions around this, and he makes little of, for instance, Qoheleth's optimism about the fate of the Godfearing (7:18; 8:12–13), or, for that matter, his strong and repeated belief that humans will face judgment (3:17; 11:9; see also 8:6, 11–13). It is true that these themselves stand in tension with Qoheleth's determinism—and the book makes no clear effort to reconcile them—but this is arguably not so very different from the situation in Proverbs. The Qoheleth who warns against feeling pressured to babble in the temple, because God is so distant (5:1; ET 5:2), is the same Qoheleth who will almost immediately afterwards warn that there will be bad consequences for breaking a vow to God (5:3–5; ET 5:4–6); even if every human action is indeed good in its time (3:1–8), or preapproved by God (9:7), this Qoheleth believes that there are still, somehow, good and bad people who may ultimately face good and bad outcomes. Perhaps more than any other book in the Hebrew Bible, indeed, Ecclesiastes insists that there is a relationship between individual humans and God, which may be influenced by the attitudes and actions of both, *despite* the overwhelming evidence of human experience to the contrary. The book is shaped, we might say, not by a lack of trust in God, which results in a rejection of human attempts to understand the world, but by an assumption that such attempts will commonly mislead humans into believing that wrong is right (8:11), and acting in ways that will be condemned by God. In von Rad's terms, Ecclesiastes is a book in which faith not only *can* prevail without the possibility

---

8. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 242.

of physical evidence to support it but *must* ignore that evidence in order to do so.

To be sure, all that needs some qualification, and I shall return shortly to what Qoheleth actually claims, but it is important, I think, to register first that von Rad associates trust and faith with the experiential side of attempts to master the world through wisdom and with the intellectual embrace of divine involvement. For him, Qoheleth misses the bigger picture when he puts all his eggs in one basket and identifies human good with a "meaning of life" that is impossible to find. I think what he himself misses here, however, is that the quest in this book is never really about meaning, that its critique of wisdom is highly nuanced, and that what he would call religious faith is central to its ideas.

To generalize a little more, for a moment, Qoheleth's depiction of the world involves two intersecting realities. In one, God pursues his own ends, exercising a tight control over the world, which ensures that no action or event is in contradiction to those objectives. In this reality, humans simply act out the roles assigned to them, and those assignments are not clearly made on the basis of any individual worth.[9] The reality perceived by humans, on the other hand, is characterized by ignorance and by efforts to overcome that ignorance in order to improve their lives, which stem from their own sense of the larger reality but which were probably not imbued in them by God (3:11; 7:29). Human lives are not chaotic or utterly unpredictable, but there seem to be no hard-and-fast rules around success or failure in any sphere, and any material gain that humans achieve is only temporary. Partly because of their own limitations and partly through divine design, they have no insight into the course of the world and no ability to shape it. All they can do against this background is take pleasure from the activities in which they are engaged or the situations in which they find themselves, and even that pleasure may be denied to them as a consequence of divine purpose (6:1–2).

That much is effectively acknowledged by von Rad. Crucially, however, these two realities are not wholly distinct. Qoheleth insists that God judges humans, implying that there are ways to attain divine favor or disfavor, and states that there may be good or bad ways to engage with God (even if humans struggle to identify them). There is no explicit attempt to reconcile

---

9. I take Qoheleth to be rejecting such an idea in 2:26. See Stuart Weeks, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 2 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 1:468–69.

these assertions with the determinism espoused elsewhere in the book, or with the idea that every action is inherently good, but I think it is helpful in this respect to retain the image of two realities and to understand what Qoheleth is saying in terms of the two different contexts they represent. A crime or sin in the human reality is no less a crime or a sin just because it is fine in its time, that is, precisely what is required by the outworking of some divine plan. It is interesting to observe, correspondingly, that Qoheleth displays no reluctance to talk about people doing "good" or "bad" (3:12; 7:20; 8:12), or being righteous and wicked (3:17; 7:15; 8:8, 10, 13–14; 9:1–2), even if their actions have all been approved by God. Culpability for crimes, or responsibility for any action, indeed, is naturally a more complicated issue, but if God is not simply pulling strings, then responsibility may be assigned within the human reality, where a choice has been made, even if, objectively, no other choice was ever going to have been possible. I do not want to go further down the philosophical rabbit hole or to speculate how the author of Ecclesiastes would have explained the issue himself, but it is at least not difficult to see that Qoheleth's monologue itself finds no direct contradiction between determinism and judgment and is content to suppose that God, in his interaction with humans, is willing to judge them for actions he has preapproved in his role as controller of the world. The effect, in any case, is that Qoheleth's attitudes to divine judgment seem rather conventional. The problems, for him, lie not in the facts of human guilt and divine justice but in the timing of judgment and, more importantly for our present concerns, that humans may not be clear about what they should or should not be doing.

This fact leads Qoheleth to his brief statements about the benefits of fearing God, which have to be understood in context, I think, not as references just to some more general piety but as a recollection of divine judgment. The Talmud, in b. B. Bat. 78b, talks about "the accounting of temporal matters" (חשבונו של עולם) as something that the righteous are supposed to do, and this calculation involves the balancing of immediate gains and losses against the ultimate reward or punishment for particular courses of action. This certainly seems to be very much what Qoheleth has in mind in Eccl 7:18 when, after noting the potential dangers of both righteousness and wickedness, he says that "someone who fears God will get away with both."[10] In 8:12–13 Qoheleth is insistent again that those

---

10. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical translations are mine.

who fear God will prevail, after worrying that the continued prosperity of the wicked inspires imitation, and in 5:6 [5:7], fearing God is something that one must do when bombarded by dreams and words: in both places, this seems to be about protecting oneself by bearing God in mind. The ideas seem similar to those of 11:8–12:1, where taking pleasure in one's life is to be combined with recollections of death, judgment, and createdness. Qoheleth does not believe that humans always can or should (for their own sake) do what is right, but he does believe that they can protect themselves, at least to some extent, from the illusions and misleading encouragements that they will encounter in the world by holding fast to the knowledge that they will answer for their actions to God, whose anger may not be visible or predictable at any given time. To the extent that the epilogue of Ecclesiastes epitomizes the book at all, it is in its statement that, alongside fearing God and obeying him, all humans really need is the knowledge that he is going to judge them (12:13–14).[11]

Obviously, a recollection of coming judgment will not offer much protection if one does not know what it is that God will approve or disapprove, and Qoheleth addresses several times the problem that experience is an unreliable guide in such matters, even as he fails to supply any explicit, alternative source of knowledge. It is hard to say whether we should deduce from this silence that humans are supposed to know the source already or whether Qoheleth expects them to fall back on some natural, inherent consciousness of right and wrong. Either way, it is possible that he is silent simply because any specification would diminish the universalism that seems to be a deliberate aspect of the book's design.

It would be wrong, though, to presume that this failure to define a source means that no such source is implicit in what Qoheleth says. Of course, references to fearing God and to the advantage of those who do so have often been identified as secondary corrections to the text, and it may be some such assumption that lies behind von Rad's neglect of this important strand in Ecclesiastes. Their exclusion, though, has generally arisen from a presupposition that such ideas are incompatible with Qohe-

---

11. "Fear of God" in the book has been understood very variously: at one extreme, Tremper Longman III argues that in all but 8:10–15 Qoheleth is talking about being actively afraid of God, so that one may "minimize one's exposure to him," while at the other, Bertrand Pinçon sees it in terms of accepting the good things in life and attributing them to God. See Longman, "The 'Fear of God' in the Book of Ecclesiastes," *BBR* 25 (2015): 21; Pinçon, "Le Dieu de Qohélet," *RevScRel* 85.3 (2011): 423–24.

leth's broader declarations about human ignorance, and those declarations are not so broad as to contradict them. Humans cannot know God's plans or the future of the world beyond them, and they are bad at learning lessons from a past that they tend to forget or ignore (1:11; 9:3–5). They are also readily misled by what they do and do not see in the world, and it is, without doubt, a serious issue for Qoheleth that the lack of a visible divine response to particular behaviors, and even to particular religious practices,[12] can make it impossible for humans to tell whose example they should be following. It is never suggested, though, that humans have no capacity at all to distinguish between right and wrong or no responsibility for their own intentions.

It is important to appreciate, then, that Ecclesiastes understands there to be a relationship between individual humans and God, expressed principally in terms of fear and judgment, and that the book places importance on the human fulfillment of expectations arising from that relationship. However, it is also true, as von Rad does emphasize, that Qoheleth shows no enthusiasm for any idea that humans can gain a greater understanding of those expectations through their own observations and examinations of the world—and it is this that, in von Rad's view, marks a departure from previous evaluations of wisdom. If he has perhaps neglected the more positive aspects of the book's religious outlook, is he at least right that in this respect it is fundamentally different from other works that have traditionally worn the label of wisdom literature?

In fact, at least in Prov 1–9 and in Job, the situation presented for humans is arguably not very different from that assumed in Ecclesiastes. It is an important premise of both those works that human observation and experience can be dangerously misleading, whether individuals are weighing up the rival attractions of symbolic women[13] or simply trying to explain the suffering of a friend. It is possible in Prov 1–9 to get around that problem by internalizing a wisdom that offers access, in some way, to

---

12. I take the "loving" and "hating" in 9:1 to be a reference to the sort of ethical and religious preferences listed in 9:2, so that Qoheleth's point in 9:3 is that humans cannot distinguish these by their effect and emulate them accordingly. A similar point is made in 8:10–12, with reference more specifically to the absence of explicit condemnation for wickedness.

13. See Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jean-Noël Aletti, "Séduction et Parole En Proverbes I IX," *VT* 27 (1977): 129–44.

the will of God. Importantly, though, that wisdom is acquired by willing it and by heeding instruction: its origins are supernatural, if not actually divine, and it is explicitly *not* the product simply of human initiatives. Job 28 seems to portray wisdom likewise as something external to both humans and God, although it seems that there God has made it accessible to humans only through fearing God. Elsewhere in Job, except according to the friends, of course, the divine will is not merely inaccessible to humans but incomprehensible, so although the work is not principally interested in wisdom per se, it poses obstacles to human understanding that seem hardly less serious than those described by Qoheleth. The deceptiveness of the world and concealment of divine purposes are, broadly speaking, common ground across these different works, which all, correspondingly, impose constraints on the ways in which humans can use their own experience and discernment to comprehend and better their lot.

If we set aside those more coherent works, it might be possible in principle to derive from other parts of Proverbs, in particular, a portrait of a human wisdom that is not so constrained, and von Rad himself finds in Prov 10–29 an old wisdom that predates such concerns.[14] This is where matters start to become more complicated. Clearly, there are problems of method involved in his doing that. Setting aside the difficulty of demonstrating that those collections or their contents actually are any earlier, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they might embody ideas and assumptions from a variety of different periods and contexts, not all in agreement with each other. It is obvious also that the use of mainly very short sayings in these chapters does not lend itself to the expression of complicated ideas, and there is a grave risk of overextrapolation. I think the greater problem in von Rad's analysis, however, lies in the assumptions he brings to these texts, which influence his evaluation of them with respect to others, and we need to spend a little time on those assumptions before returning to the broader question of any coherence between this old wisdom and Ecclesiastes.

It should be said right away, of course, that *Weisheit* is much more cautious than many other works of its time, which were inclined to present very specific and detailed accounts of a wisdom tradition rooted in specific sociopolitical contexts and of particular ideas associated with that tradition. Von Rad commendably distances himself from many of

---

14. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, e.g., 61.

the ideas about wisdom literature that had come to be treated in some quarters almost as facts rather than theories. Among the assumptions he retains, however, is the idea that texts expressing intellectual curiosity or affirming the ability of humans to exert control within the world emerged against the background of a pan-sacralism that had little place for human reason. Of course, this idea of pan-sacralism had informed much of his own, earlier work, but it leads him in this context to present wisdom as a form of enlightenment or disenchantment. In *Weisheit*, von Rad does not dwell on the broader aspects of the Solomonic *Aufklärung* that was likewise important in some of his earlier work (and was derived in part from nineteenth-century German scholarship), but he turns specifically instead to the famous Kantian definition of enlightenment, which he paraphrases as "the emergence of humans from their immaturity" ("das Heraustreten des Menschen aus seiner Unmündigkeit").[15] The original, in fact, has "the emergence of humans from their self-imposed immaturity" ("der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit"), and it was significant to Kant that the state of immaturity from which humans emerge is self-imposed: that definition, and the essay in which it appeared in 1784, were inspired particularly by the consequences of religious freedom in Frederick the Great's Prussia, and this was the area in which Kant himself felt that humans had been held back by their rulers.[16]

Von Rad's portrayal of Israelite emergence from pan-sacralism is clearly a little different, insofar as it envisages not the removal but the creation of a centralized religious authority, but he shares the Kantian enthusiasm for an unleashing of human intellectual enquiry previously constrained by religion. More importantly, his understanding of wisdom in these terms is what most clearly differentiates his model from more conventional ideas about a coherent wisdom tradition, the arguments against which have been well-rehearsed in recent years but which dominated biblical scholarship at the time he was writing.[17] Von Rad does not focus on

---

15. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 103. See especially Gerhard von Rad, "Der Anfang Der Geschichtsschreibung Im Alten Israel," *AFK* 32 (1944): 1–42. Similar ideas had previously been espoused by Heinrich Ewald, in particular.

16. The essay was originally published as Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?," *BerMon* 4.12 (December 1784): 481–94.

17. So, e.g., Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Mark Sneed, "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?," *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71.

a particular group or party within Israel but associates the wisdom texts with a cultural and scientific transformation broadly equivalent to the European Enlightenment.

One consequence of this is that he considers the project, his old wisdom, to be Israelite. That language is not unusual for its time, but for other writers, it was the very notion of Israelite thought and theology, with a corresponding requirement for consistency, that drove a belief in the alien character and origin of a wisdom that seemed out of step with other biblical positions. Von Rad rejects that idea in favor of discerning a fundamental alteration in the "Israelite understanding of reality," and as he talks about the need not to divide the religious from the secular in this new viewpoint, he insists even that "for Israel there was definitely only one world of experience."[18] This seems however, to replace one problem with another, because although the cuckoo-in-the-nest portrayal of wisdom is deeply flawed, framing it as Israelite introduces a new sort of requirement for consistency: if there is a normative, Israelite perspective or way of doing things, works that do not conform have to be understood as dissident. It is here that von Rad's enlightenment most obviously parts company with Kant's, because the enterprise that he describes appears to involve the release of some essentially singular worldview, not of multiple, perhaps contradictory perspectives.

Of course, there are some broader questions that could be asked of any historical claims about an Israelite view on almost any topic. Are such claims actually suggesting that every Israelite held the same opinions on that topic, and, if they are not, to whom are they assigning the authority to establish what is normatively Israelite? In some other contexts, it is clear that the label really means something quite different, as when it is applied to beliefs or practices that the general population is condemned in biblical sources for disregarding. Here, however, we do not have even the dubious luxury of declaring some prophet or writer more authentically Israelite than the great mass of Israelites with whom he apparently disagreed. Von Rad is not holding up a particular text and declaring it normative but extrapolating the norms of an intellectual revolution from his holistic consideration of the several, ragtag anthologies in Proverbs that he deems representative of that revolution. That would be asking a lot of those texts,

---

18. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 65–66: "für Israel gab es durchaus nur eine Erfahrungswelt."

even if we had any better knowledge of the ways in which they emerged and developed. As things stand, we are really in no position to say whether, for instance, the breadth of sayings within them is indicative of some intellectual breadth or a sign merely that narrow consistency was of no concern to the collectors or to subsequent redactors. Without excluding the possibility that some sayings might be old or traditional, moreover, it is also very difficult to say anything about the date of the collections or the extent to which they might be considered representative of any broader tradition, let alone of ideas that would have been universally accepted.

To be quite clear, it does not seem to me that much of what von Rad claims about the content of his old wisdom is untrue or unreasonable. There is no good reason to suppose, for instance, that sayings about God must necessarily be late in our texts—although their nature makes it hard to produce strong evidence either way.[19] The difficulties lie more particularly in the demand that it be normative and in the agglomeration and systematization he applies to the material in an effort to find some basic consistency. It might be fair to say, in respect to both, that this attempt repeats in microcosm and less visibly the same sort of mistakes that were made when scholars, including von Rad, sought to extrapolate single biblical (or Israelite) theologies from a larger and more varied corpus.

Accounts of the European Enlightenment can involve a certain amount of myth making, sometimes fueling deeply misleading portrayals of the Middle Ages or of the historical relationship between science and religion, so we should do well to be wary of any broad-brush analogies with that phenomenon. If we do choose to highlight similarities, moreover, then it seems important to be clear both that the imposition of some single viewpoint, however broadly conceived, was not its defining characteristic, and that enlightenment ideas (if that expression has any real meaning) did not simply displace existing beliefs across every society that was affected. Obviously, our information about ancient cultures is more limited in many respects, but the evidence we do have points quite strongly to the coexistence of multiple perspectives in the sort of areas on which our texts touch. It would probably even be wrong to suggest, much of the time, that these could usefully be called competing perspectives, if that is taken to imply that there was actually competition between them.

---

19. I examined this question in Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, OTM (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 57–73.

It is reasonable to suppose both that different people, even within the confines of the same scribal elites and religious traditions, sometimes believed different things in the same times and places, and also that individuals were capable of adopting different, even seemingly contradictory perspectives. In the modern West, we are ourselves hardly unfamiliar with quite different takes on reality in the same community, or with individuals who might, say, believe their every act is predetermined by a deity but still pray to that deity for help and intervention. It is sometimes clear, indeed, that these sorts of contradictions were recognized by ancient writers, and the instruction on Papyrus Insinger, most famously, is built not just around contradictory pieces of advice but on the fundamental issue that the God will do just as he pleases, whatever advice we follow.[20] It is deeply unhelpful, I think, to conceive of intellectual endeavors anywhere in the ancient world as manifestations of or reactions against some single, coherent, national project.

Returning to Ecclesiastes, then, and having seen earlier that there are significant points of contact with Prov 1–9 and Job, it seems important not to characterize any relationships with the other parts of Proverbs simply in terms of the relationship between Ecclesiastes and some broader, more widely accepted perspective. We should neither presume that Prov 10–29 reflects such a perspective, informed by the ideas of a sudden, coherent change in national attitudes to the place of humans in the world, nor, consequently, that those chapters have some claim to represent a normative, baseline approach, against which other works can be measured. When we find within them some sayings that match the determinism and caution about wisdom espoused by Qoheleth (e.g., in various ways, Prov 16:1, 4, 9; 20:24; 21:1) and others that seem much more confident about the ability of humans to exert control (e.g., 10:4), then it is true, to be sure, that this coexistence reflects a breadth of opinion and tolerance (even if only at an editorial level) of concepts that may be in tension when considered together. What it does not demonstrate is that balancing different perspectives in this way was a central, almost definitional concern for some particular, widely held approach, or even for some writers. It involves significantly fewer leaps of imagination to suppose that the literature we possess reflects not the emergent ideas of a national enlightenment, followed by individual

---

20. The fullest translation of the work, under the title "Das große demotische Weisheitsbuch," is to be found in Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim Friedrich Quack, *Anthologie der Demotischen Literatur*, EQÄ 4 (Berlin: LIT, 2007), 239–73.

reactions to or rejections of those ideas, but the persistence of different ideas and emphases that had probably existed alongside each other since long before there was any nation.[21]

Such pluralism should likely not be understood as the coexistence of different movements or parties any more than diversity of ideas should be attributed to the constant questioning of orthodoxy in the light of crisis (a way in which Ecclesiastes itself has often been characterized). It is not clear even that our texts were composed with the intention of changing or consolidating particular opinions rather than exploring particular questions. In Job, for example, it becomes clear that the central issue is not the justice of God so much as the competence or right of humans to hold God to their own standard of justice—and while it is not impossible that the author intended to counteract casually contractual understandings of divine judgment, it seems unlikely that anybody held such understandings to be central tenets of their theology without such qualification. When Ecclesiastes contradicts the notion that prosperity must be a mark of divine favor, this may again be an attack on common assumptions, but we need not see it as a shot fired in some war of ideas so much as a way of getting people to think about their assumptions.

Indeed, it is striking that some of the questions raised in the book by Qoheleth are questions unlikely to have been raised by anybody else in the same way. His initial search is not for meaning in life but for a profit, and this becomes more closely identified, quite quickly, as something he can claim to have gained for himself that will not be wiped out by death. The conditions he sets make this search impossible from the outset—and surely nobody else was looking for just that—but the search enables him to question whether wealth, progeny, reputation, or any of the other things on which humans place value as achievements of their lives are actually of any genuine value to them themselves. This is not even partisan bickering, let alone a statement of some great principle, and it seems unlikely that the audience was expected either to accept Qoheleth's presuppositions or specifically to modify their beliefs in the light of what he says. The point is rather to interrogate the meaning of value, when value is considered

---

21. The portrayal of Ecclesiastes as a product of some intellectual or historical crisis, which was quite common until about twenty years ago, was forced either to overlook the existence of similar ideas in the literature of other countries or to presume that those other countries had each undergone some similar crisis, sometimes more than once.

in entirely material terms, and when Qoheleth comes to find value for himself in the nonmaterial experience of pleasure, he is merely catching up with the rest of humanity. In this respect, the book functions not to change minds but at most to remind people that there should be more to life than that pursuit of material gain that Qoheleth himself comes to find so unfulfilling.

The determinism that von Rad finds troubling in Ecclesiastes is probably to be viewed in much the same light, even if we allow that the issue was coming to the forefront in other types of literature as well. As we saw earlier, Qoheleth is not portrayed as using determinist ideas to negate the need for human responsibility or to deny the possibility of individual human relationships with God, and Qoheleth devotes little effort to resolving the tensions that seem so apparent to us between those different perspectives on divine control. From that lack of effort, we might reasonably deduce that it is not an intention of the book either to sell or to deny the determinism itself, which seems rather to be taken for granted. Equally, Qoheleth does not advocate some simple submission to destiny. When the issue first occupies the center stage, in Eccl 3, the question he poses is probably not about what humans can gain from a world where everything has its time (although it is often translated that way), and hence how we should modify our behavior or expectations in the light of divine determinism, but about the value to be gained from using people at all (3:9).[22] That question is rhetorical, and no direct answer is supplied, but the implication is that God does not actually need humans, to whom he has merely granted a sense of the bigger picture, without any insight into his own activities (3:11). Later, in the difficult 7:29, Qoheleth comes to understand that the search for ways to live life is something that humans have imposed on themselves, not something that is required of them by God,[23] and much of his monologue might be characterized as suggesting

---

22. See Weeks, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 1:503–4, 508. I see no reason to suppose that the question here has the same sense as the expressions in 1:3; 2:22; 5:15; 6:11, which all use ־ל.

23. I would translate Qoheleth's discovery there as "God made each person uncomplicated, and it is they themselves that have sought a lot of plans." Following so swiftly his declaration in 7:27 that he had sought a plan himself (see 7:25), without success, it seems unlikely that חשבון is supposed to have a different sense in 7:29 (despite the Masoretic differentiation in the pointing), and this sense probably lies in the sphere of plans and calculations for the conduct of life (as with uses of the cognate verb at, e.g., Prov 16:9).

that people make their lives difficult and unfulfilling as a result of greed, regret, or anxiety, and in doing so fail to find the pleasure that is the only real thing of value available to them. Determinism in all this is not a dogma to be preached but something to be remembered: if our lives run on rails laid by God, then there is nothing to be gained by worrying about our own predetermined actions (9:7).

Although it picks up fear of God rather than pleasure, the epilogue of Ecclesiastes is in its own way no less concerned to make the point that human life is supposed to be simple and that humans have overthought it and overcomplicated it in a way never intended by God. As with the issues around value and prosperity, the focus of the book's statements about divine power is not on telling people what to believe but on pointing out the consequences of ideas that they probably took for granted anyway, at least in some superficial form. As a part of this, wisdom is not really attacked, but it is contextualized and its usefulness constrained. From quite early in the monologue, Qoheleth comes to view wisdom as being potentially among the unnecessary complexities, and he wonders in 2:15 why he had bothered to invest so much energy into accumulating wisdom when it will make no ultimate difference to his fate. In the very difficult 10:10–11, the principle he proclaims is that wisdom has a place only when it has a point, and in the following verses this is exemplified in the realm of speaking.[24] The best-known statement of the issue, though, is in 8:17, where Qoheleth observes both that humans will work hard to discover whatever has been done in the world and that such a discovery will prove to be beyond even any wise man who claims the ability to make it.

Von Rad denies that such a claim would have been made by anyone typical of the wise,[25] and he is right to doubt that anything in the biblical materials could be understood in those terms. Rather than see an attack on some otherwise unattested extremism, however, it seems simpler to suppose, again, that Qoheleth is simply stating an opinion with which

---

24. The Masoretic division of the text at 10:10–11 is in favour of an old interpretation of the preceding verses in terms of a need for preemptive preparation, which is very difficult to sustain. I take ויתרון הכשיר חכמה to begin a new saying, where an analogy is drawn with the biting of a snake: "if a snake may bite without hissing, then there is no profit in having a tongue"—likewise, wisdom is appropriate for any particular undertaking or occasion only if there is a profit to be gained from using it, and is otherwise as redundant a possession as the snake's tongue when it bites.

25. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 245.

few might have disagreed. The wise man in this verse merely states his intention to discover the secret, driven to do so, like other humans, by his nature or circumstances, and Qoheleth, in turn, merely declares that even he will be unsuccessful (the tense throughout is future, and there is no suggestion that he is claiming, falsely, to have made the discovery already). The issues around this have long been clouded by assertions that Qoheleth himself makes such an attempt in chapter 7, but there are really no good reasons to introduce some polemical edge to the discussion or to suppose anything other than that Qoheleth accepts, rather than asserts, limits on the human knowledge of divine action and hence on human wisdom. Humans, and perhaps especially the wise among them, will always try to find more, because that is who they are, but this is just another way in which they waste effort. What the wise *can* discern, as spelled out a little earlier in 8:5–8, is a series of facts that should influence the living of life: there will be a judgment for everything, what will happen is both unknowable and inexplicable, and there will ultimately be no escape from death—a list that once again seems close to the epilogue's summary in 12:13–14, with its own emphasis on the reality of coming judgment as the most important or even the only thing that a human needs to know.

Ultimately, Ecclesiastes accepts that humans can improve aspects of their lives through wisdom and presumes that they will also be able to improve their outlook by conforming to certain standards of behavior if they fear God and keep in mind the knowledge that he will judge them. Wisdom can be both painful and futile for humans, however, while their attempts to discern God's will for themselves, so that they can behave accordingly, may be stymied by the limitations of the visible evidence and may even mislead humans into doing the wrong thing. The book expresses considerable caution, then, but divine control of the world is not considered to render human wisdom pointless any more than it absolves humans of responsibility for their actions. Qoheleth would surely not consent to some of the blithest statements of assurance that we find in parts of Proverbs, such as the many that contrast the purported experiences of the righteous and the wicked in Prov 11 (contrast his own claims in Eccl 7:15; 8:14), but, equally, he does not portray the world as entirely random and unpredictable. Good behavior and an investment in wisdom cannot offer guarantees in a world where God's plans may override everything, and humans will never discover some formula that changes this situation, but Qoheleth does not draw from that any conclusion that humans should not

therefore try to be righteous or wise, so long as they remain conscious of the limitations.

It is fair to ask, I think, whether this is really so radical as von Rad supposes. Indeed, one might go so far as to wonder whether the enlightenment understanding that he attributes to his old wisdom—a sort of natural theology that discerned communication from God in the order of the world and in the visible consequence of actions—ever really existed in a form that was not heavily qualified and against which Ecclesiastes might be measured as reflecting anything more than a shift of emphasis. The belief that Job and Ecclesiastes were written in reaction to some earlier, more optimistic orthodoxy may be firmly planted in our own scholarly tradition, but the existence of such an orthodoxy seems to be a product more of that belief than of any substantial evidence. Our major texts, and the views expressed within them, offer different opinions, but none directly affirms an idea that human discernment can be used that way to master a world that functions according to predictable rules of cause and effect. Whether or not such an idea can properly be extrapolated at all from the more miscellaneous sayings in Proverbs, it is far from clear that it ever constituted a coherent doctrine or that it was ever more than one note in a whole gamut of ancient views.

Von Rad's approach to wisdom literature is more sophisticated than that of many other scholars at the time *Weisheit* was written (not least in its treatment of cause and effect), but it is no less influenced by a desire to construct tradition out of bits and pieces and is greatly complicated by his attempts to link this tradition with a national enlightenment and with a quasi-scientific, antisacral perspective. Ecclesiastes is inevitably marginalized by that approach, and von Rad has little option but to declare it radical, without opening up the possibility that Hebrew literature and thought may have been more pluriform than mid-twentieth-century scholarship was commonly prepared to allow. For all that it occupies little space in his discussion. Consequently, Ecclesiastes is a book that casts a deep shadow over *Weisheit* as a whole.

As I mentioned at the beginning, von Rad's study has had relatively little impact on subsequent studies of Ecclesiastes, but it seems worth finishing with a few remarks on how it stands in relation to the field at the moment. As has always been true, scholarship on the book rarely speaks with one voice, and it conforms to no single paradigm, but there has arguably been quite a strong shift away from perceptions of Ecclesiastes simply as rejecting some previous orthodoxy. This is in line, perhaps, with

a broader loss of confidence in our ability to link biblical texts closely to specific historical moments or movements and to reconstruct the contexts within which each emerged. To be sure, many commentators still seek to find historical references in Ecclesiastes, or to contextualize the book within the history and thought of the Persian or Ptolemaic period, arguing variously that it attempts to confront contemporary apocalypticism, that it betrays the influence of Greek philosophy, or that it elaborates on other biblical texts (often the early chapters of Genesis).[26] Much of this work, in fact, has the effect of drawing Ecclesiastes closer to other early Jewish literature, and in a discipline that accepts much greater variety within that literature, it is rarely now characterized as marginal or alien. While von Rad's elaboration of its ideas could probably still be regarded as mainstream, therefore, there is little place now for the broader significance that he attaches to those ideas or for the wider canvas on which he sketches

---

26. For those who seek to find historical references in Ecclesiastes, see, most notably, Jennie Barbour, *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*, OTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); but see also, e.g., Michael V. Fox, "What Happens in Qohelet 4:13–16?," *JHebS* 1 (1997): 7–21. Mark R. Sneed's *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes* is the most thorough recent account in terms of contextualizing the book within the history and thought of the Persian or Ptolemaic period, but it is worth noting also a significant liberation-theological literature on Ecclesiastes, which emphasizes the oppressiveness of Ptolemaic rule, of which Elsa Támez is the best known example. See Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective*, AIL 12 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012); Támez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000). On Ecclesiastes as an attempt to confront contemporary apocalypticism, see, e.g., Luca Mazzinghi, "Qohelet and Enochism: A Critical Relationship," *Hen* 24 (2002): 157–67. Rainer Braun's book appeared shortly after *Weisheit in Israel*, but the most plausible connections of Ecclesiastes to Greek philosophy have been examined more recently, and more cautiously, in Paul-Marie Fidèle Chango, *L'Ecclesiaste à la confluence du judaïsme et de l'hellénisme: Deux siècles d'histoire des études comparées du Qohelet et des vestiges littéraires et philosophiques Grecs*, Cahiers de La Revue Biblique 93 (Leuven: Peeters, 2019). See Braun, *Kohelet und die Frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie*, BZAW 130 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973). There was some interest in Ecclesiastes as elaborating on other biblical texts before *Weisheit in Israel*. See especially Charles C. Forman, "Koheleth's Use of Genesis," *JSS* 5 (1960): 256–63. Much of the subsequent literature is reviewed by Matthew Seufert, but see also the more cautious assessment by Katharine J. Dell. See Seufert, "The Presence of Genesis in Ecclesiastes." *WTJ* 78 (2016): 75–92;. Dell, "Exploring Intertextual Links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 587 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 3–14.

them, and in this respect it feels as though *Weisheit* is trying to answer questions that most scholars are no longer asking.

## Bibliography

Aletti, Jean-Noël. "Séduction et Parole En Proverbes I IX." *VT* 27 (1977): 129–44.

Barbour, Jennie. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. OTM. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Braun, Rainer. *Kohelet und die Frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie*. BZAW 130. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973.

Chango, Paul-Marie Fidèle. *L'Ecclesiaste à la confluence du judaïsme et de l'hellénisme: Deux siècles d'histoire des études comparées du Qohelet et des vestiges littéraires et philosophiques Grecs*. CahRB 93. Leuven: Peeters, 2019.

"Das große demotische Weisheitsbuch." Pages 239–73 in *Anthologie der Demotischen Literatur*, by Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim Friedrich Quack. EQÄ 4. Berlin: LIT, 2007.

Dell, Katharine J. "Exploring Intertextual Links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11." Pages 3–14 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014.

Forman, Charles C. "Koheleth's Use of Genesis." *JSS* 5 (1960): 256–63.

Fox, Michael V. "What Happens in Qohelet 4:13–16?" *JHebS* 1 (1997): 7–21.

Kant, Immanuel. "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?," *BerMon* 4.12 (December 1784): 481–94.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Longman, Tremper, III. "The 'Fear of God' in the Book of Ecclesiastes." *BBR* 25 (2015): 13–21.

Mazzinghi, Luca. "Qohelet and Enochism: A Critical Relationship." *Hen* 24 (2002): 157–67.

Pinçon, Bertram. "Le Dieu de Qohélet." *RevScRel* 85.3 (2011): 411–25.

Rad, Gerhard von. "Der Anfang Der Geschichtsschreibung Im Alten Israel." *AFK* 32 (1944): 1–42.

———. *Weisheit in Israel: Mit Einem Anhang Neu Herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*. 4th ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013.

Seufert, Matthew. "The Presence of Genesis in Ecclesiastes." *WTJ* 78 (2016): 75–92.

Sneed, Mark. "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?" *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71.

———. *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective*. AIL 12. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012.

Támez, Elsa. *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.

Weeks, Stuart. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. 2 vols. ICC. London: T&T Clark, 2020.

———. *Early Israelite Wisdom*. OTM. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.

———. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Part 3
Wisdom from and beyond *Weisheit in Israel*

# The Poetry of Wisdom and Imagination:
## Intellectual Contributions of *Wisdom in Israel*

Anne W. Stewart

> The human mind has, in the course of its history, found and cultivated many different ways of assimilating and recording intellectual perceptions. When we approach the teachings of Israel's wise men, one peculiarity must strike us at once, a peculiarity which unites them above and beyond their great differences in form and content; they are all composed in poetic form, they are poetry. And in no circumstances can that be considered to be an insignificant, external feature. Indeed, this peculiarity cannot be separated from the intellectual process as if it were something added later; rather, perception takes place precisely in and with the poetic composition.[1]

More than fifty years ago, Gerhard von Rad articulated a central insight that has been profoundly underappreciated in the years since. He observed that one of the unifying features of wisdom texts in the Old Testament is that "they are all composed in poetic form, they are poetry." Moreover, he argued that this literary form is not an incidental feature but instead is itself a significant part of the intellectual contribution of the texts. He insisted, "Even in this poetic form a very discriminating power of intellectual distinction is at work."[2]

Noting the intellectual contributions of poetry is one of von Rad's most intriguing and astute insights in *Wisdom in Israel*, yet it has generated hardly passing glance, perhaps because the rest of the tome is full of rich and provocative insights that have sparked decades of vibrant schol-

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1972), 24.

2. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 24–25.

arly conversation. Particularly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the volume, it is fitting to heed von Rad's call to attend to the poetic thinking in these texts as one means of assessing wisdom in Israel.

One of the primary motivations of von Rad's project was to recover the unique intellectual contributions of Israelite wisdom. The book notes at the outset: "The attempt will be made to work out some of the specific trends of thought and theological contexts in which this Israelite wisdom functioned and from the point of view of which this wisdom could be interpreted still more appropriately."[3] He begins with a conviction that this is sensitive, sophisticated work:

> Many of these [texts], by their often remarkably profound content but also by their literary form, invite the reader to pause at length over them; others appear trivial to us, and we are no longer able to see what was once important in them. This latter fact should, however, make us stop short, for in it we should be able to realize that we no longer understand correctly the decisive intellectual achievement lying behind these experiential statements. They are, in fact, concerned with the achieving of a certain distance from that which is near and everyday, from that which everyone knows and yet no one knows or understands. Indeed, it requires an art to see objectively things which have always been there and to give them expression. Is it not they which produce the greatest puzzles?[4]

Thus von Rad begins his treatment with a premise that these texts are inherently complex and make sophisticated literary, artistic, and intellectual contributions. This in itself is an important observation, cutting against much contemporary scholarship that treats wisdom—and the book of Proverbs specifically—as relatively simple and simplistic.[5] By contrast, von Rad offers an important caution that the brevity of the literary form by no means equates to simplicity of intellectual achievement. Quite the contrary, he notes that the trivial proverb, for example, can, "like a precious stone among trinkets, outshine a poem of the highest

---

3. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5.

4. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5.

5. For a discussion of this trend in the treatment of Proverbs, see Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 71–78.

quality," for it must satisfy the demands of brevity, vividness, memorability, and intelligibility.[6]

For von Rad, this project was ultimately connected to discovering the spiritual and religious context that animated Israelite wisdom, as a means of evaluating whether one can identify a coherent wisdom tradition within these texts at all. He asks, "Was there wisdom in Israel in the sense of an 'intellectual movement'? And if there were such a thing, would it not then be more essential to formulate the phenomena, the questions and the thought processes as clearly as possible than to apply them the label 'wisdom' which has become so vague?"[7] This is a question that has generated ample conversation ever since, including in recent years by Will Kynes in *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* which expounds at length a point made here by von Rad, who wonders whether the concept of wisdom has become overextended. Von Rad muses, "It could even be that scholarship has gone too far in an uncritical use of this collective term; it could even be that by the use of this blanket term it is suggesting the existence of something which never existed and that is in this way dangerously prejudicing the interpretation of varied material."[8]

In this way, von Rad situates his project as an inquiry and recovery of an intellectual tradition rather than a study of select books in their literary, historical, or canonical context per se. This, then, is the larger framework for von Rad's astute observation about the significance of poetry. That the wisdom books are comprised of didactic poetry of various kinds is the starting point for his pursuit of their intellectual activity.

Fifty years after von Rad's initial project, the relationship between intellectual activity and poetic form in wisdom literature deserves to be explored further. In fact, it may hold an interpretive key to the question about the relationship between the wisdom books—and the degree to which one can speak of coherence among this corpus at all. Inspired by von Rad's project, this paper will explore the relationship between poetic form and ethical function in Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes to suggest a way to conceive of the coherence of the books as a wisdom corpus.

---

6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5.

7. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7.

8. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7. See Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

## Wisdom, Poetry, and Imagination

As von Rad suggests, poetry is one of the defining features of Israelite wisdom and, moreover, the means of its intellectual contributions. Von Rad begins his study by noting that all of the wisdom books are composed in poetry, and he devotes an entire chapter of *Wisdom in Israel* to an examination of various forms of didactic poetry across Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. As von Rad so aptly notes, the poetic form has everything to do with how the text makes meaning. In this sense, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes might all be considered didactic poetry, broadly construed, for their poetic form has a pedagogical purpose to offer instruction and to engage vexed ethical questions. At the same time, these books as a sampling of didactic poetry also press the definition of the genre, for they take up these aims in different ways and forms, from pithy proverbial sayings with vivid images to extended poems layered with metaphors to tightly constructed lines with clear and balanced cadence (e.g., Eccl 3:1–8). Yet the divergence in appearance should not obscure a similarity in function to teach and reflect on the often-contradictory realities of the world.[9] In each case, von Rad connects the literary form to a process of thought, for "all of these forms, together with their contents, are to be designated poetic, as products of the poetic aspect of the human intellect."[10]

In this sense, the poetic form and function of wisdom literature may provide a helpful interpretive key to the coherence of the corpus as a whole. This has been a hotly contested issue in biblical scholarship. Wisdom literature in the Old Testament has always eluded easy description or classification. Most works of Old Testament theology either ignore the wisdom books or put them at the end of their discussion, as if they are misfit in the canon. Even von Rad's own *Old Testament Theology* gives relatively brief treatment to wisdom literature within the scope of the two-volume opus. Likewise, the links between these books—with Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as prime representatives—have generated wide-rang-

---

9. For a discussion of Proverbs as didactic poetry, see Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs*, 41–61. See also Robert Lowth's classification of Proverbs as didactic poetry and Samuel R. Driver's discussion of didactic poetry as a form of lyric poetry with a parenetical tone. See Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. George Gregory (London: Ogles, Duncan, & Cochran, 1816), 2:164; Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1920), 360.

10. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 49.

ing discussion. What gives them coherence, if indeed one can speak of a corpus of wisdom literature at all?

Wisdom has been studied in myriad ways in an attempt to seek such coherence, which is often elusive. As William P. Brown quips, "If the wisdom corpus were a choir, melodious harmony would not be its forte. Dissonance would resound at almost every chord."[11] In fact, such approaches often embrace a form of *via negativa* in which the texts are united by what they do *not* include, such as historical narrative, law, or prophecy, thus distinguishing them from the rest of the biblical canon. Accordingly, some approaches to wisdom emphasize the common anthropological perspective, rooted in the human quest for understanding of the world.[12] Others point to creation theology as a defining center of the wisdom tradition.[13] Still others have proposed that character and a concern with ethics are the defining features of Israelite wisdom.[14] In his most recent book on the subject, Brown highlights both creation and character as a primary point of orientation for wisdom literature, suggesting that

---

11. William P. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 2.

12. For example, see von Rad's comment in his *Old Testament Theology* that while Israel's wisdom is a complex phenomenon, "the characteristic of practically all that it says about life is this starting point in basic experience." See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:418. See also John F. Priest, "Where Is Wisdom to Be Placed?," *JBR* 31.4 (1963): 275–82; Priest, "Humanism, Skepticism, and Pessimism in Israel," *JAAR* 36.4 (1968): 311–26. James L. Crenshaw also begins with human observation, as well as features of form, to arrive at a definition of wisdom literature as "a marriage between form and content." He observes, "Formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentences or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection; thematically, wisdom comprises self-evident intuitions about mastering life for human betterment, gropings after life's secrets with regard to innocent suffering, grappling with finitude, and quest for truth concealed in the created order and manifested in a feminine persona. When a marriage between form and content exists, there is wisdom literature." See Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 11.

13. For example, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Peter Doll, *Menschenschöpfung und Weltschöpfung in der alttestamentlichen Weisheit*, SBS 177 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985); Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. John G. Gammie et al. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 43–57.

14. Most notably, Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder*.

"attention to creation provides a generative *context* for sapiential insight, whereas character formation captures much of the rhetorical *aim* of the wisdom corpus."[15]

Yet in recent years there has been a growing clamor among scholars who dismiss, or at least hold in significant suspicion, the usefulness of wisdom literature as a meaningful category.[16] Kynes and Stuart Weeks, among others, have noted that *wisdom literature* is itself a scholarly convention, which arose only in the nineteenth century. Kynes thus questions the utility of wisdom literature as a singular defining category of these texts. He explains, "This grouping must be considered only one of many in which the texts could be read, no different than collections of texts which share an interest in other concepts, such as righteousness, justice, or holiness."[17] Similarly, Weeks observes that even noting the texts' common interest in wisdom is of limited value, for they each understand wisdom in different ways. Consequently, he argues, "If we are obliged to ask just what it is that both unites all these books and makes them different from others, then it is difficult to supply an answer more precise than that they all have an interest in the human capacity for survival and self-improvement in a world that serves the purposes of its creator."[18]

Yet for all of the caution and uncertainty about the notion of wisdom literature, one should not be too quick to dismiss the concept, for it has a useful heuristic purpose in identifying distinctive aspects of these texts, including their pedagogical function and literary form. As Michael V. Fox argues, "It is not the label wisdom that makes it valuable to think about Job in terms of Proverbs, or about Proverbs in terms of certain psalms, but rather the affinity among these works in ideas (including repudiated ideas), form, and style (in the friends' frequent proverb-style couplets)

---

15. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder*, 5. See also Ellen F. Davis, "Preserving Virtues: Renewing the Tradition of the Sages," in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 183–201.

16. For a range of perspectives on this question, see the essays in Mark Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

17. Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 9–10.

18. Stuart Weeks, "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 13.

that makes defining them as a set useful."[19] While the particular ideas, form, and style of wisdom texts have themselves been subject to dispute, a renewed look at von Rad's claims in *Wisdom in Israel* may provide a helpful point of orientation that attends to the pedagogical form and function of these texts.

Although von Rad himself did not put it quite this way, his insistence that the poetry of wisdom matters not only to the literary form of these texts but also to their intellectual contributions may crack open another way to conceptualize the coherence of wisdom literature. The thinking process of the poetry in the wisdom books appeals to the imagination in its pedagogical function. These books—precisely in and with their poetic composition—share a profoundly *imaginative* view of the world and of the task of ethical reasoning. In fact, the idea of the imagination can provide a fresh way to examine the pedagogy and theology of the wisdom books—that is, *how* they teach, *what* they teach, and *why* they teach. These books are concerned with ethical evaluation, and the way that they approach these moral questions is through the imagination. That is, it does not operate by proposition or by rigid doctrine but instead in images that appeal to the eyes and the ears and the senses and the emotions. Fully utilizing the medium of poetry, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes think in subtle and sophisticated ways, letting their ethical and pedagogical ends unfold through metaphor and imagery and allusion. In so doing, they offer distinctly imaginative perspectives on the questions of wisdom.

## Imagination: The History of an Idea

What exactly is the imagination? This is not as simple a question as it may seem. The definition and significance of imagination has been contested throughout history. Even within biblical texts, which do not philosophize about the imagination per se, we can infer differing conceptions of imaginative activity. Imagination has proven difficult to categorize and define—like wisdom literature itself, in fact.

Before we turn to the Bible and wisdom literature, first a very short history of the idea of imagination. At its most basic level, imagination is simply the capacity to create mental images. In fact, this capacity to picture

---

19. Michael V. Fox, "Three Theses on Wisdom," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 83.

that which is not really there has caused many thinkers, especially in the Western philosophical tradition, to view imagination with great suspicion. Plato's *Republic* views imagination as trafficking in the world of the shadows. In Plato's conception, imagination points to that which is not real. It is a tool of the poet's deception, and it cannot be relied on for accurate perception or understanding of the world. In this sense, it is opposed to truth. Similarly, Scottish philosopher David Hume insists that poets are "liars by profession" and all of us are amateur liars for our everyday use of the imagination.[20] So also, Jean-Paul Sartre describes imagination as a kind of "magical thinking" that creates a "world of unrealities."[21]

But the imagination is also a creative activity. Immanuel Kant observes that the imagination can spark ideas that cannot be expressed in any other form—ideas of infinite space, endless numbers, eternal duration—and these notions can fill us with wonder. Although Kant moved away from these ideas in his later writing, his view of the imagination was influential for later thinkers who accorded the imagination a more prominent role in human reasoning.[22] The Romantic poets similarly embraced the idea of imagination as a marker of creative activity. Thus Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines imagination as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[23] In other words, through imagination humans can participate in the creative work of God. The imagination, in this sense, never simply copies the world as it is but is an active faculty that shapes the world we perceive. In so doing, imagination draws together reason and emotion; it is itself a way of thinking. Thus another Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, says that imagination is "reason in her most exalted mood."[24] In the Romantic period, there was an enlarged understanding of the imagination and its role in the mind. The Romantics

---

20. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* B1.3.10; see discussion in Chris Higgins, "Modest Beginnings of a Radical Revision of the Concept of Imagination," in *The Imagination in Education: Extending the Boundaries of Theory and Practice*, ed. Sean Blenkinsop (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), 3.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 177.

22. However, Kant seems to move away from grand ideas of the reasoning power of the imagination in his later work; it is not mentioned at all in the revised version of *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781.

23. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 13.

24. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* 14.1.192.

insisted that the imaginative artist could perceive truth and reality just as much as the scientist.

Imagination is, in its own right, a way of thinking. Sartre understood the imagination to be an intentional act of consciousness, part of the mind's capacity not just to perceive and observe but to make its own meaning. Similarly, contemporary philosopher Alan White speaks of the imagination as way of thinking and making hypotheses. He states that to "imagine something is to think of it as possibly being so." The imaginative person is "one with the ability to think of lots of possibilities, usually with some richness of detail." Accordingly, imagination is "linked to discovery, invention, and originality because it is thought of the possible rather than the actual."[25]

But not only is imagination a way of thinking; it is a way of thinking *ethically*. Imagination is vital to moral reasoning. Within moral reasoning, imagination has a crucial evaluative function because it allows one to project and explore various possible outcomes of a given situation. A critically important imaginative activity is "the mental exploration of what it would be like to realize particular possibilities."[26] In this sense, the imagination can become *moral* imagination, that is, the capacity to utilize the faculty of perception to consider various possible outcomes of a particular situation and to evaluate their moral worth. In this respect, imagination is vital to moral reasoning because it allows one to foresee the potential consequences of certain actions without bringing them to full fruition. John Dewey argues that this kind of imaginative deliberation

> is an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like. It is an experiment in making various combinations of selected elements of habits and impulses, to see what the resultant action would be like if it were entered upon…. Thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes, and thereby avoids having to await the instruction of actual failure and disaster. An act overtly tried out is irrevocable, its consequences cannot be blotted out. An act tried out in imagination is not final or fatal. It is retrievable.[27]

---

25. Alan White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 184, 186.

26. John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 101.

27. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1922), 190. For a discussion of imaginative deliberation in

With the imagination, deliberation is *retrievable*—a point that illumines one of the central pedagogical values of the imagination for Proverbs. In this respect, the variety of actions, situations, and characters portrayed within the book constitute a tutorial for the student's imagination, exploring various possible outcomes and supplying their implications, all the while removing the threat of actual failure and disaster.

All of these understandings of imagination talk about it as a thing or an activity, but it can also be a mode of ethics. Chris Higgins advances the interesting thesis that imagination is a virtue term. That is, not only does it relate to a way of thinking and perceiving, but it describes an excellence in this pursuit. It is a virtue that can be acquired and developed, a capacity of character that one can be formed (or malformed) through education. That is, he argues that imagination is best understood not as a *thing* or an *activity* but as a quality of a person. He suggests that imagination is not just something one has or does, but it is a faculty that can shaped. In this sense, "Imagination is acquired skill in one or more of the major modes of relating self and world; to be imaginative is to skilled at making greater intellectual, emotional and/or perceptual contact with the real."[28]

While this survey is not exhaustive, even this brief history can provide a general typology of ways to think about the imagination. In sum, there are at least five different ways to define imagination: (1) imagination as the making of images; (2) imagination as creative activity; (3) imagination as way of thinking; (4) imagination as a way of ethical thinking, a kind of moral reasoning; and (5) imagination as a virtue, a capacity of character. These concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive; however, there are fundamentally different convictions about the imagination at work in the history of the idea. Some of them are quite negative and view the imagination as consigned to the realm of make-believe, and others see a more robust role for the imagination as a vital part of human experience and the thinking process.

## Imagination in the Old Testament

Turning to the Bible, we can also see a similar range of ideas about the imagination. These texts of course are not philosophical works that always

---

Dewey's thought, see Steven Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 69–91.

28. Higgins, "Modest Beginnings of a Radical Revision," 14.

spell out explicitly their understanding of human nature, human reasoning, and the creative process. Rather, we have to intuit the assumptions behind these texts, keeping in mind that they give us limited access to the world of the authors. But, in the spirit of von Rad's own project, we can examine the language, vocabulary, metaphors, and images to draw conclusions about the concept of imaginative activity in the biblical world.

Is there a concept of the imagination in the Old Testament? There was certainly a concept of making images and creating literal objects designed to represent animals or cult objects or gods. The image (צלם) can denote a picture or likeness, as in Ezek 23:14, where Oholiab sees "men carved on the wall, images [צלם] of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermillion."[29] The term can refer to a material object that is designed to represent something else, especially gods, kings, or animals (e.g., Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5, 11; Ezek 7:20; Amos 5:26).

There is a particularly negative conception about this kind of imagining in Deuteronomy and among the prophets.[30] Deuteronomy 4 warns the people not to make images in the likeness of humans or beasts: "Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness [תבנית] of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth" (Deut 4:15–18 NRSV). Making images is a kind of make-believe, for it attributes agency to false gods and inanimate objects. This kind of imagination reflects a profound *lack* of thinking. There is no wisdom in it. Isaiah condemns this at length:

> Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good?… The carpenter stretches a line, marks it out with a stylus, fashions it with planes, and marks it with a compass; he makes it in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine. He cuts down cedars or chooses a

---

29. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical translations are mine.

30. For an overview discussion, see Tryggve Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995); Yitzhaq Peder, "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity," *JBL* 132 (2013): 251–74; cf. Terje Stordalen, "Imagining Solomon's Temple: Aesthetics of the Non-representable," in *Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Contested Desires*, ed. Terje Stordalen and Birgit Meyer (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 21–36.

holm tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it can be used as fuel. Part of it he takes and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it, makes it a carved image and bows down before it. Half of it he burns the fire; over this half he roasts meat, eats it and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire!" The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bows down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, "Save me, for you are my god!"

They do not know, nor do they comprehend; for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and have eaten. Now shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?" (Isa 44:10, 13–20 NRSV)

But creating images, one thing in the likeness of another, is not always a negative activity. On a more positive note, the creation of humanity occurs through an act of imagination. In the Priestly account of creation in Genesis, the deity creates humankind "in our image, according to our likeness" (בצלמנו כדמותנו; Gen 1:26; see also 1:27). This language appears throughout the Genesis narrative to refer to the creation of other humans, such as Seth, who is created in the likeness of Adam according to his image (בדמותו כצלמו, Gen 5:3) and as justification for retribution upon the taking of life (9:6). In this sense, the creation of humanity is an imaginative act, forming one thing in the image of another.

A second conception of the imagination is a kind of creative activity. The verb חשב (meaning "to think, devise, invent") can refer to artistic acts. Thus this terminology is used to describe the skilled work of Bezalel and Oholiab in designing decorations for the tabernacle, a faculty that God implanted within their minds. Exodus states that God endowed Bezalel with wisdom and understanding in order to "make designs" (ולחשב מחשבת) to work in gold, silver, and bronze (Exod 35:32). Likewise, God filled the two artisans with "a wise mind [חכמת־לב] to do every kind of work by an engraver and designer [חשב] and embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns and in fine linen, and the weaver, and those who do any work or skilled design [וחשבי מחשבת]" (Exod 35:35). Creativity is an imaginative capacity that involves the mental and material design of images, and even here it is a capacity that is connected to wisdom.

While there is not a particular term for "imagination" in Hebrew, the language of thinking, planning, forming objects, and creating images indicates a concept of imaginative activity. The verb חשב, for example, and its nominal form מחשבה frequently refer to a manner of perception or reasoning that is imaginative in the sense that it involves either the mental projection of yet-to-be-realized events or a kind of figurative reasoning of seeing one person or object in terms of another. The thinking of thoughts is in essence an imaginative activity, for it requires the formation of images in the mind that are either constructions of the past or have not yet come to be.

The activity of scheming or plotting is frequently described as an act of forming images or designs. Thus in an oracle of Jeremiah, God proclaims, "I am forming [יוצר] evil against you, and I am plotting a scheme ['thinking a thought'] against you [וחשב עליכם מחשבה], turn back each from his evil way and make right your ways and your acts" (Jer 18:11). The oracle uses imagery of a potter shaping clay to speak of God's intent toward Israel. In this sense, the creative activity of forming and re-forming an object on the potter's wheel is a metaphorical expression of the divine ability to reimagine Israel's future.

This imaginative activity is a frequent motif in prophetic oracles that project an imagined outcome. For example, in the prophetic vision in Ezek 38, God informs the prophet, "On that day, thoughts will come into your mind and you will conceive a wicked scheme. You will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled villages; I will fall upon the quiet people who live in safety, all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates'; to seize spoil and carry off plunder; to assail the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who are acquiring cattle and goods, who live at the center of the earth" (Ezek 38:10–12). In effect, crafting the scheme is an activity of imaginative vision, conceiving in the mind what has not yet come to pass.

The term חשב also frequently refers to a mode of reasoning that involves conceptualizing something in figurative terms, that is, seeing it as something else. Job 41:24, for example, states that Leviathan leaves behind him such a wake in the sea that "one would think the deep to be white-haired" (יחשב תהום לשיבה, NRSV). In other words, the image of Leviathan's wake conjures another image, namely, a mane of wild white hair. One image is understood in terms of another. Similarly, in Ps 44:23 the psalmist proclaims: "we are imagined as sheep for the slaughter" (נחשבנו כצאן טבחה). In the eyes of the psalmist's enemies, the community

is understood figuratively as helpless sheep. In the same way, Job explains that his household understands him falsely, holding an image of him as a stranger: "the guests in my house and my maidservants imagine me as a stranger [לזר תחשבני]; I am a foreigner in their eyes" (Job 19:15). Implicit within each of these texts is a metaphorical mode of reasoning that relies on an imaginative impulse. The event or person is understood by means of the image, whether white hair, sheep, or stranger.[31]

Finally, the imagination is also an ethical capacity. It marks the ability to plan for good or for evil. The book of Proverbs, for example, speaks of a mental capacity to perceive the world in ways that accord with wisdom (e.g., Prov 1:2–6). Yet the imagination can also be malformed, and in fact several texts treat the imagination with great suspicion because of its propensity to form evil. The rationale for the great flood is God's disdain for humanity's evil imagination, for "YHWH saw the great wickedness of humans on earth—all of the form of the thoughts of his heart [וכל־יצר מחשבת לבו] was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5; see also 8:21). Similarly, Jeremiah speaks of a flawed imagination as a fundamental problem with the human condition. Despite calls for repentance, Israel will resist because of its evil imagination: "But they will say, no use! For we will go after our imagination [מחשבותינו] each of us will act in the stubbornness of his evil heart" (Jer 18:12).

In sum, the concept of the imagination has at least four different senses in biblical texts—it is a *representational* activity, including the making of images; a *creative* activity, including the making of art; a *mental* capacity, which includes both the ability to conceptualize the future and a figurative mode of reasoning, and an *ethical* capacity, an evaluative capability of the heart. It is this fourth capacity—imagination as ethical activity—that is most relevant to the wisdom books.

## Imagination and Wisdom

Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes evidence imaginative modes of ethical reasoning and appeal to the imagination in their literary form and pedagogical function. By and large they do not operate by propositional logic or clear point-counterpoint argumentation. Instead, their reasoning unfolds

---

31. For discussion of metaphorical modes of reasoning, see Nicole L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors*, AIL 31 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

in much more subtle and image-laden ways, through appeal to emotion, sophisticated use of prototypes, dialogical discernment, and layers of metaphor. In this sense, the poetic form is vital to the pedagogical, intellectual, and ethical ends of these texts.

The appeal to the imagination is closely connected to the function of this literature in moral instruction and ethical evaluation. Leo Perdue argues that imagination was central to the educational enterprise, for "the sages used their creative imagination in the shaping of a world view that provided the context of wise living and being."[32] He notes that this capacity was deeply connected to the rhetorical form of these books and their purpose: "The rhetoric of the wise, combined with the content of their teachings to shape an esthesis of beauty and order that stimulated the imagination, led to understanding, and offered a compelling invitation to enter the world of sapiential making."[33] Moreover, he insists, the literary form of the texts is a central means of the construction of moral imagination:

> The teachings of the sages combined elegance of form with moral content to shape a world of imagination for human dwelling. Subsequently, to understand the sages is to appreciate the esthetic dimension of their teachings. To cast aside and then ignore the rhetoric in the effort to discover the content often leaves the interpreter with little more than a list of moralisms and pious platitudes. An important key to understanding the writings of the sages is to allow, at least in the moment of interpretation, entrance into their sapiential world of beauty and order.[34]

Perdue's admonition resonates with von Rad's insistence that the literary form and pedagogical function of wisdom literature are deeply related. Indeed, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes use the resources of their literary forms to shape the moral imagination.

## Proverbs and the Poetry of Discernment

The book of Proverbs enacts an imaginative mode of moral reasoning through its poetry. The book begins with an explanation of its purpose:

---

32. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 52.
33. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 57.
34. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 63–64.

> For learning about wisdom and instruction,
>     for understanding words of insight,
> for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
>     righteousness, justice, and equity;
> to teach shrewdness to the simple,
>     knowledge and prudence to the young—
> let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
>     and the discerning acquire skill,
> to understand a proverb and a figure,
>     the words of the wise and their riddles. (Prov 1:2–6 NRSV)

It delivers this instruction not merely through the content of its sayings but rather through the thinking process that the poems and sayings spark. For example, throughout the book discernment requires the evaluation of competing possibilities and perspectives. Proverbs privileges the moral discernment that changing contexts constantly require. Accordingly, it schools the student in imaginative structures, preparing him for a similar complexity in the moral world. As Kathleen O'Connor writes, Proverbial wisdom implies that "life is ambiguous and multivalent. No predetermined recipe, blueprint or teaching can prepare one for all the turns and permutations of life."[35]

The pursuit of wisdom requires not a rulebook but a well-schooled imagination, and the purpose of the book is fulfilled through the education of the student's imagination.[36] Throughout the poems of Prov 1–9, for example, multiple voices reverberate, from the invitation of the sinners (1:1–11) to the call of woman Wisdom (1:20–33; 8:1–21; 9:1–6) to the appeals of the strange woman (7:10–20), all confronting the student with competing offers and thus conjuring the bewildering array of choices one may meet in the real world. Through the guiding voice of the parent, whose commentary on these voices shapes their imaginative construal, the student is offered a key to discerning between them. Yet the voices are permitted to make their appeal through direct address. In effect, they stand as a lyric sequence of wise and foolish voices within this collection

---

35. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature*, MBS 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 40.

36. See discussion in Anne W. Stewart, "Teaching Complex Ethical Thinking with Proverbs," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*, ed. Carly L. Crouch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 241–56.

of poems and offering, as Robert Alter notes, "an imaginative plunge into the experiential enactment of moral alternatives."[37]

Proverbs also schools the student in multivalent moral imagination through extensive use of metaphors, which are used to complex effect, for multiple metaphors are often layered on top of one another, often in contradictory ways. This too is part of moral discernment. In fact, the particular metaphorical lens through which one views a specific situation may result in dramatically different conclusions. For example, some sayings advise restraint in speech, figuring the tongue as a powerful and potentially destructive force. Proverbs 25:15 speaks of the power of even a restrained tongue, "with patience a ruler is persuaded, for a soft tongue breaks bone." However, other sayings emphasize the healing nature of right speech; for example, Prov 15:4a, "the tongue's balm [מרפא לשון] is a tree of life."[38] By the logic of this metaphor, withholding such speech may be detrimental to the patient. What, then, is a person to do? Is the tongue destructive or healing? Of course, it can be both. Yet in any given situation, such differences cannot be entirely reconciled; one must privilege one metaphor over the other. In this respect, Proverbs seeks to form not moral automatons but those who have the moral acuity to discern the proper course of action—and the proper metaphors to privilege—for a given situation.[39]

## Job and the Play of Imagery

The poetry of Job has a similarly complex and imaginative mode of reasoning, allowing multiple perspectives to stand in tension and requiring the reader to discern between competing voices. Of course, in many respects Job is quite different from the book of Proverbs. Rather than a collection of sayings, it is a series of poetic dialogues with a narrative prologue and

---

37. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 184. For a discussion of multivalent poetic voices in lyric sequence, see Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

38. The second half of the line employs the metaphor of the tongue's destructive potential, "but deviousness in it breaks the spirit."

39. For a discussion of the pedagogy of metaphor in Prov 5, see Anne W. Stewart, "Poetry as Pedagogy in Proverbs 5," in *Close Readings: Biblical Poetry and the Task of Interpretation*, ed. Elaine T. James and J. Blake Couey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 80–92.

epilogue. However, its departure from Proverbs—and the wisdom Proverbs represents—has perhaps been overemphasized. In fact, the poetic dialogues in the book are similarly a mode of its ethical evaluation, and the vibrant conversation among the competing voices of Job, his friends, and God across the poems is a central part of the book's moral evaluation of the world. As Carol Newsom has persuasively demonstrated, the book reflects a "contest of moral imaginations." The perspectives offered by the voices of Job, his friends, and God present a vibrant conversation that is not propositional, but rather "a dialogic sense of truth exists at the point of intersection of a plurality of unmerged voices." Newsom observes that in this way "truth resists summation, for it is expressed in the way in which the opposed observations shade and shadow one another."[40]

This contest of moral imaginations is presented through the medium of poetry. As Alter insists, "the exploration of the problem of theodicy in the Book of Job and the 'answer' it proposes cannot be separated from the poetic vehicle of the book." Moreover, "one misses the real intent by reading the text, as has too often been done, as a paraphrasable philosophic argument merely embellished or made more arresting by poetic devices."[41] Alter demonstrates, for example, the interplay between Job's curse in chapter 3 and God's reply in chapter 38, noting that God's response constitutes "a brilliantly pointed reversal, in structure, image, and theme, of that initial poem of Job's."[42] Job's poem frames his suffering through a plea for cosmic darkness, with an intensifying set of images of light introduced only to be turned to darkness, as Job pleads for the day to perish, "Let gloom and deep darkness claim it, let clouds settle up on it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.… Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none" (Job 3:4, 9). By contrast, God's poem moves through creation with an expansive vision, situating the human plea for darkness— "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2 NRSV)—in a larger framework of cosmic beauty and divine sovereignty. While Job calls for even the stars to remain dark, the image is reversed in God's response, recalling "when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy" (Job 38:7 NRSV). Similarly, the birth imagery in Job's poem, in which he laments the dawn "because it did not

---

40. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 86, 87.

41. Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 76.

42. Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 96.

shut the doors of my mother's womb, and hide trouble from my eyes" (Job 3:10 NRSV), is overturned in God's cosmic litany, asking, "From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?" (Job 38:29 NRSV).

Alter observes that the function of this imagery is not merely to reverse Job's plea but to expand and explode the limits of human imagination. By introducing this intensifying imagery, "the poet's language forces us to imagine the unimaginable, great hunks of ice coming out of the womb. Figurative language is used here to show the limits of figuration itself, which, in the argumentative thrust of the poem, means the limits of the human imagination."[43] In other words, the point that God's cosmic vision exceeds Job's limited human understanding is made through the play of imagery between and throughout the poems. Alter thus points to "the essential role poetry plays in the imaginative realization of revelation."[44]

Like Proverbs, the book of Job also offers moral evaluation of the tradition through a range of metaphors across the book[45] and also in the way that the poems employ sophisticated literary allusions as a means of evaluating the moral framework of the tradition. In this way, the text is doing even more than evident at face value. While the book itself is a dialogue between Job, his friends, and God, there is also another dialogue beneath the surface, bridging different parts of the book and tradition. This too is a kind of imaginative moral reasoning, for it poses ethical questions of the tradition not in a propositional way but in a subtle manner with great literary artistry. For example, in chapter 7 Job alludes to language found in Ps 8.[46] Job says to God, "What is man that you make much of him [מה־אנוש כי תגדלנו], that you fix your attention upon him?" (Job 7:17). This is nearly identical to the psalmist's words: "What is man that you have been mindful of him [מה־אנוש כי־תזכרנו], mortal man that you have taken note of him?" (Ps 8:4). But here is where the similarity ends. For the psalmist, this ques-

---

43. Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 101.

44. Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry*, 87.

45. For example, see the discussion of metaphors of illness in Edward L. Greenstein, "Metaphors of Illness and Wellness in Job," in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong-Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder, BZAW 500 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 39–50.

46. See Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Psalm 8:5 and Job 7:17–18: A Mistaken Scholarly Commonplace?," in *The World of the Arameans: Studies in Honor of Paul-Eugene Dion*, ed. P. M. Michele Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl, JSOTSup 324 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 1:205–15.

tion is part of the hymn of praise that God has blessed humans by paying attention to them. The psalm continues, "What is man that you are mindful of him?… You have made him a little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty; you have made him master over your Handiwork, laying the world at his feet." Job, on the other hand, finds God's gaze oppressive. His words accuse God: "What is man that you make much of him?… You inspect him every morning, examine him every minute. Will you not look away from me for awhile, let me be, till I swallow my spittle?" (Job 7:18–19). Job lifts up a facet of the tradition only to call it into question, providing another way to interpret God's engagement with humanity. Within the poems of Job, allusion is more than just a literary embellishment but is part of the way in which the book engages in moral reasoning and evaluates experience and tradition.

<div style="text-align:center">Emotion and Ethical Reflection in Ecclesiastes</div>

Ecclesiastes likewise evaluates experience and tradition in an imaginative manner through poetic means. The book's contradictions have often caused interpreters to tie themselves in knots to account for its complexities and discern the nature of its literary form. Yet its form permits the very contradictions it observes and in fact schools the student in their moral evaluation. The poem in Eccl 3:1–8, for example, presents an evocative expression of the cadence of seasons in tightly constructed, evenly balanced lines, and yet the sense of order to which the poem points quickly unravels with the stirring question that follows, "What gain have the workers from their toil?" (Eccl 3:9 NRSV). Simeon Chavel argues, "The poem's aura of seasonality and timeliness implies a formula for success, but the discourse framing it denies all form of guarantee," thus representing a wisdom that Qoheleth rejects, a feature that Chavel identifies throughout the book. He observes, "Qohelet cites proverbs to undercut them, wields proverbs against each other, and composes his own proverbial poems to parodic effect."[47] Again, the literary form is itself a means of ethical reflection.

Ecclesiastes also engages the imagination as a prominent element of ethical reflection throughout the book. This is perhaps most vividly on

---

47. Simeon Chavel, "The Utility and Futility of Poetry in *Qohelet*," in James and Couey, *Close Readings*, 109, 110.

display through the fact that so much of the teacher's analysis of the world is bound to the emotions. Philosopher Adam Morton insists that feeling emotions is essentially an imaginative act. He explains:

> all emotion involves imagination. This is true of the basic emotions we share with mice, as well as the sophisticated and finely differentiated emotions that test the limits of our capacities to express ourselves in words and to relate to one another in complicated social projects.… This claim may seem strange, since we think of emotion as common to animals of many kinds, while we may think of imagination as depending on human intellect and social sense. No—a fearful mouse imagines the dangers facing her, and people can imagine in ways that need little refined capacity.[48]

The emotions often involve a projection of possibility, which is an act of imagination. In this sense, the emotions are a manner of interpreting experience; they are part of reasoning and making sense of the world. Accordingly, in Ecclesiastes, the emotions are often figured as an essential component of human nature and a byproduct of human activity. As Eccl 9:5–6 states, "the dead know nothing.… Their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun." In the teacher's estimation, these emotions—love, hate, jealousy—are connected to the human activity of knowing. The emotions are part of what it means to know, to be human.

The emotions are more than simply incidental features of human life; for Ecclesiastes they are key data in reasoning about the world. In fact, the particular emotions that human activity rouses within a person are of direct relevance to how the teacher assesses the cosmos. Much of what the teacher finds problematic with the workings of the world and the human condition is the *frustration* that comes from human work. As the teacher asks in 2:22–23, "What does a person get from all of his toil and his worry [ובריון לבו] with which he toils under the sun? For all of his days are pain and his work is frustration. Even at night, his mind [לבו] does not rest. This also is futile [חבל]." In the teacher's estimation, frustration is one of the primary marks of the futility of life and labor. For this reason, frustration is often tied to the teacher's moral evaluation of life as "futile" (חבל) and

---

48. Adam Morton, *Emotion and Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3–4.

a "great evil." Thus, in chapter 5 the teacher explains: "This also is a great evil: just as they came, so shall they go; and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind? Besides, all their days they eat in darkness, in much frustration and sickness and anger" (Eccl 5:15–16; ET 16–17). The emotion of frustration is a significant aspect of what leads to moral evaluation.

Yet frustration is not the only emotion to figure in the book's evaluation. Joy and enjoyment also are key measures of the human condition and the teacher's assessment of the purpose and workings of the cosmos. In chapter 2 (and elsewhere), Qoheleth concludes his diatribe of the frustration of toil with the statement that "there is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil [והראה את־נפשו טוב בעמלו]. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" (2:24–25 NRSV). In *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qoheleth's Theological Rhetoric*, Eunny Lee draws attention to the profound link between Qoheleth's language of enjoyment and its ethical imperative. Lee writes: "Qohelet intimates that the enjoyment of life is indeed a matter of ethical duty. Enjoyment *is* doing good; it is being 'good before God' (7:26; 2:26)."[49]

In this sense, the exercise of this emotion is consonant with moral agency. This is not a feature unique to Ecclesiastes. Proverbs and Job feature assessment of the emotions as central to their evaluation of the moral world, though each book privileges different emotions: in Proverbs, love and hatred are the dominant emotions that are indicative of character;[50]

---

49. Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric*, BZAW 353 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 41. Lee speaks of Qoheleth's "ethic of joy" as an "ethic of the moment." She suggests that for Qoheleth, enjoyment "is a disciplined yet joyous concentration on the present, recognizing that the present moment is endowed with a moral significance all its own and therefore merits the full attention of the moral being. Indeed, the present is the only realm in which human beings may assert and fulfill their moral agency" (53–54).

50. As Michael V. Fox observes, "For Proverbs, love and hate are not two emotions among many. They are the polar mind-sets that define the basic shape of a person's character. The wise are typified by love of wisdom and hate of deceit, fools by their perverse loves and hatreds." See Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 275. See also Christine Roy Yoder, "The Objects of Our Affections: Emotions and the Moral Life in Proverbs 1–9," in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar*, ed. Christine Roy Yoder et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 73–88.

in Job, anger and dismay reverberate throughout the book and provide a window into the debate among Job, the friends, and God, all of whom acknowledge that anger may be the appropriate moral response, even as they disagree about the situation in which such moral indignation is appropriate. What each book implicitly assumes is that the emotions are central to what it means to be human and part of how one evaluates the world.

In each of these three books, the manner of wisdom, the way of evaluation, is highly imaginative. Furthermore, this is connected to their pedagogical function to shape the student's imagination. This is perhaps most apparent in the book of Proverbs, which explicitly sets as its goal the cultivation of wisdom and discernment. The book's opening words make this clear: "Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles" (Prov 1:5–6 NRSV). By imbibing the wisdom of the book, the student comes to see the world in a certain way. In other words, his imagination is shaped after that of the wise parent whose voice dominates the book. Also in Job and Ecclesiastes, the books function to expand the moral imagination of the student, for they prompt the student to evaluate the world through a particular set of lenses. In fact, the student is often required to try on multiple pairs of lenses throughout the course of the book, as multiple voices interact. In Job, this is of course through the dialogues between Job and his friends and, eventually, the voice of God. In Ecclesiastes, this occurs through the contradictions that the teacher teases out across the book.

Through their literary form and imaginative appeal, these wisdom books make an important contribution to the complexity of moral reasoning. They do not treat humans as moral automatons, and they do not evaluate the world solely by means of rational argumentation. Rather, they appeal to the range of senses, emotions, motivations, and desires of the student. In so doing, they engage the imagination in a variety of ways. The aim of the wisdom tradition is to shape the moral imagination.

In this respect, this essay ends in a different place than von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel* suggests, though it seeks to answer a similar question about the intellectual contribution and coherence of Israelite wisdom. Fifty years later, von Rad still offers a clarion call in urging us to appreciate the sophisticated intellectual contours of wisdom. His insistence that the poetic medium is a central part of these texts' way of thinking and articulation of reality remains an interpretive key to the wisdom literature. It highlights the contribution that Israelite wisdom literature, which has

often been relegated to obscurity within the biblical canon, might make to the larger intellectual tradition precisely in its capacity for imaginative modes of ethical reasoning. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, and—most of all—*wisdom* in Israel still have much to offer us.

## Bibliography

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Brown, William P. *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Chavel, Simeon. "The Utility and Futility of Poetry in *Qohelet*." Pages 93–110 in *Close Readings: Biblical Poetry and the Task of Interpretation*. Edited by Elaine T. James and J. Blake Couey. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Crenshaw, James L. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Rev. ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Davis, Ellen F. "Preserving Virtues: Renewing the Tradition of the Sages." Pages 183–201 in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by William P. Brown. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Dewey, John. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. New York: Henry Holt, 1922.

Doll, Peter. *Menschenschöpfung und Weltschöpfung in der alttestamentlichen Weisheit*. SBS 177. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985.

Driver, Samuel R. *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. Rev. ed. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1920.

Fesmire, Steven. *John Dewey and Moral Imagination: Pragmatism in Ethics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB 18A. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

———. "Three Theses on Wisdom." Pages 69–86 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Greenstein, Edward L. "Metaphors of Illness and Wellness in Job." Pages 39–50 in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong-Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Edited by Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder. BZAW 500. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018.

Heffelfinger, Katie M. *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Hermisson, Hans-Jürgen. "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom." Pages 43–57 in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*. Edited by John G. Gammie, Walter A. Brueggemann, W. Lee Humphreys, and James M. Ward. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978.

Higgins, Chris. "Modest Beginnings of a Radical Revision of the Concept of Imagination." Pages 2–18 in *The Imagination in Education: Extending the Boundaries of Theory and Practice*. Edited by Sean Blenkinsop. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2017.

Kekes, John. *The Morality of Pluralism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lee, Eunny P. *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric*. BZAW 353. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005.

Lowth, Robert. *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. Translated by George Gregory. London: Ogles, Duncan, & Cochran, 1816.

Mettinger, Tryggve. *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995.

Morton, Adam. *Emotion and Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Newsom, Carol A. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. *The Wisdom Literature*. MBS 5. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988.

Peder, Yitzhaq. "The Aniconic Tradition, Deuteronomy 4, and the Politics of Israelite Identity." *JBL* 132 (2013): 251–74.

Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.

Priest, John F. "Humanism, Skepticism, and Pessimism in Israel." *JAAR* 36.4 (1968): 311–26.

———. "Where Is Wisdom to Be Placed?" *JBR* 31.4 (1963): 275–82.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. London: SCM, 1972.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Psychology of the Imagination*. Translated by anonymous. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948.

Sneed, Mark, ed. *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Stewart, Anne W. *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

———. "Poetry as Pedagogy in Proverbs 5." Pages 80–92 in *Close Readings: Biblical Poetry and the Task of Interpretation*. Edited by Elaine T. James and J. Blake Couey. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

———. "Teaching Complex Ethical Thinking with Proverbs." Pages 241–56 in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*. Edited by Carly L. Crouch. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Stordalen, Terje. "Imagining Solomon's Temple: Aesthetics of the Nonrepresentable." Pages 21–36 in *Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Contested Desires*. Edited by Terje Stordalen and Birgit Meyer. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

Tilford, Nicole L. *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors*. AIL 31. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.

Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. "Psalm 8:5 and Job 7:17–18: A Mistaken Scholarly Commonplace?" Pages 205–15 in *The World of the Arameans: Studies in Honor of Paul-Eugene Dion*. Edited by P. M. Michele Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl. Vol. 2. JSOTSup 324. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001.

Weeks, Stuart. "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?" Pages 3–23 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

White, Alan. *The Language of Imagination*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Yoder, Christine Roy. "The Objects of Our Affections: Emotions and the Moral Life in Proverbs 1–9." Pages 73–88 in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar*. Edited by Christine Roy Yoder, Kathleen M. O'Connor, E. Elizabeth Johnson, and Stanley P. Saunders. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

# Wisdom and Women—Wisdom of Women

### Christl M. Maier

> What we lack today is a work about wisdom in Israel … which attempts to put itself into the specific world of thought and values and into the tensions within which the teachings of the wise men operated. For this, a decided effort is needed to see "the reality" of life … as Israel saw it, and at the same time … a readiness to take quite seriously the basic experiences which Israel claimed to have had in this very "reality" down through the centuries.[1]

This quote from the introduction of Gerhard von Rad's magisterial study on wisdom in Israel outlines the task he wished to fulfill. He aimed at understanding the specific worldview of Israel's wise, whom he considered to be men only.[2] He was aware that these men tried to carve out the tensions of daily life as well as the contradictions between personal experience

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 10. Due to Raymond C. Van Leeuwen's persuasive critique of Martin's English translation in this volume, I also provide the German original of the citations in this essay. See Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 22–23: "Was uns heute fehlt, ist eine Arbeit über Israels Weisheit, … die versucht, sich in die spezifische Denkwelt und Wertwelt und in die Spannungen hineinzustellen, in denen sich die Lehren der Weisen bewegten. Es bedarf dazu einer gewissen Bemühung, die 'Wirklichkeit' des Lebens … so zu sehen, wie Israel sie sah, und zugleich … einer Bereitschaft, die fundamentalen Erfahrungen zunächst einmal ernst zu nehmen, die Israel in eben dieser 'Wirklichkeit' immerhin viele Jahrhunderte hindurch gemacht zu haben behauptet."

2. As this and further citations demonstrate, Martin translates the German term *Mensch* with "man." Thus, he makes explicit what in von Rad's work is only implicit, namely, that his reasoning about the individual has a male person in mind and his idea of "the wise" refers to "male teachers" (see, e.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 38, 55; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 58, 78).

a worldview that would be valid for all humans. In his study, he describes the specifics of Israelite wisdom, its forms and subjects, its centers and transmitters, as well as its traditions, which, despite being influenced by Egypt and Mesopotamia, retained their particular Hebrew worldview. As fundamental traits of this worldview von Rad identified the belief in YHWH, the perception of the world as YHWH's creation and of the individual as bound to its environment, that is, the earth, fellow humans, and God.[3] For instance, von Rad sharply distinguishes Israelite wisdom from Greek philosophy, its method of theoretical deduction, its binary concept of body and soul, and its goal of human self-improvement.[4] In his concluding remarks, von Rad summarizes what he calls "negative" features of Israelite wisdom: "There is no attempt to achieve a theoretical, self-contained picture of the world, no ideal picture of man to which man was to be led out of himself.… In contrast to this, there is an unfinished and even unfinishable dialogue about man and world on the basis of an awareness of the ambivalence of recorded phenomena."[5]

In the end, however, von Rad characterizes these features positively, as an acknowledgment of the boundaries of human wisdom in a divinely embraced world. What he sees unfolding within the different Israelite writings is a dialogue of voices and opinions, a dialogue "which could never be brought to an end" and "in later wisdom, was carried on with great poetic feeling."[6] Following von Rad, one could argue that the behavior of men and women described in Israelite wisdom texts is not meant to be timeless and systematic in the sense of theoretical knowledge or basic ethical norms but rather offers pragmatic knowledge for a variety of different situations.[7] Yet, due to their concise and artful form, many of these

---

3. See von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 298–99, 307, 314; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 379, 390, 400.

4. See von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 313; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 398.

5. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 318; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 404: "Keine Bemühung um ein theoretisch in sich geschlossenes Weltbild, kein ideales Menschenbild, auf das hin der Mensch über sich selbst hinaus geführt werden soll.… Demgegenüber ein unabgeschlossener und auch unabschließbarer Dialog über Welt und Menschen auf Grund eines Wissens um die Ambivalenz der wahrgenommenen Phänomene."

6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 316; *Weisheit in Israel*, 401: "Beendet konnte dieser Dialog nie werden. Sonderlich in der späteren Weisheit wurde er mit einem ungeheuren dichterischen Pathos geführt."

7. See his caveat relating to the intricacies of the maxims in the book of Proverbs (von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 74–75; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 102–3).

proverbs or maxims (משל)[8] and admonitions have been treated as time-less truth within reception history. In what follows I will discuss the basic critique of feminist interpreters on such evaluation and demonstrate in what way sapiential instruction also shapes modern readers' perception of the world and ethos. While such critique does not target von Rad's work specifically, it points to blanks and gaps in his general assumptions as well as to shortcomings in the assessment of Israelite wisdom of von Rad and his contemporaries.

## New Insights from Feminist Interpretations

Starting in the 1970s, feminist biblical interpretation emerged as a critical hermeneutics that aims at liberating and empowering women and thus evaluates female biblical characters, gender hierarchies, and implicit assumptions about men and women both in the biblical texts and their interpretations.[9] While there were forerunners of feminist theologians who criticized the androcentrism of the Bible, it was within the feminist movement of mostly white middle-class female scholars in North America and Western Europe that the "systemic androcentrism" of the Bible and its reception history was targeted.[10] Most of them followed an egalitarian, liberationist paradigm, which in the following decades was broadened by womanist, postcolonial, and queer perspectives of feminist scholars from other countries, ethnicities, and religious affiliations.[11] Since wisdom literature includes several

---

8. In distinction from the folk proverb, von Rad names these artful sayings *Sinnspruch* or *Kunstspruch* (*Weisheit in Israel*, 41), translated by Martin with "literary proverb" and "maxim" (*Wisdom in Israel*, 28).

9. For an overview, see Marie-Theres Wacker, "Feminist Criticism and Related Aspects," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. John W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 634–54.

10. A paragon of this movement is New Testament scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, whose hermeneutics was also adopted by feminist exegetes of the Hebrew Bible. Later, Schüssler Fiorenza linked her analytical methodical steps to the figure of Lady Wisdom. See her book *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). Forerunners include Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), who in 1895 and 1898 edited *The Woman's Bible*. See Carol Newsom, "Women as Biblical Interpreters before the Twentieth Century," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated*, ed. Carol Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 11–24.

11. The different social and regional perspectives of feminist biblical interpretation are treated in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the*

portrayals of women, feminist exegetes often focused on these female figures, as will be demonstrated in the following. It is remarkable that these interpretations not only criticize the patriarchal gender relations and erroneous characterization of women's experience but also praise figures such as Lady Wisdom or the woman of strength in Prov 31 as role models. While there is not only one feminist method but many, and a multitude of perspectives brought to the biblical text, it is obvious that scholars such as von Rad were not aware of their own androcentrism, nor willing to address feminist concerns in their work. As this volume also traces the development of research on Israelite wisdom since 1970, the following sections will focus on feminist interpretations of female figures in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible and compare them to von Rad's insights.

### Stereotypes in the Portrayal of Women in Proverbs and Sirach

A significant feature of the maxims in proverbial wisdom is their stereotyped portraits of human types, both male—the sage, the righteous, and the fool—and female—the good and the bad wife. While von Rad points to the culture-specific rendering of good behavior and blissful life in the wisdom tradition, he does not question this stereotyping, as the following citation demonstrates:

> In the picture of man which is expressed in these didactic statements, there is certainly also much that is of a timeless validity, applicable to all men. In making this judgment, one must, of course, consider that our Western ideas of man have, through a centuries-long course of education, become assimilated to Old Testament ones, with the result that we are more readily tempted to absolutize them.[12]

In this passage, von Rad acknowledges that the concept of the good in Israelite wisdom has influenced modern-day assumptions about human

---

*Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, BW 9.1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). See also Susanne Scholz, ed., *Social Locations*, vol. 2 of *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014).

12. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 81–82; von Rad *Weisheit in Israel*, 112: "Sicher ist auch vieles in dem Menschenbild, das sich in diesen Lehrsätzen ausspricht, einfach von zeitloser, allgemein menschlicher Gültigkeit. Bei diesem Urteil muß man allerdings bedenken, daß sich das abendländische Menschenbild durch eine jahrhundertelange Erziehung dem alttestamentlichen angeglichen hat, so daß wir deshalb leichter der Versuchung erliegen, es zu verabsolutieren."

character. In addition, such stereotyping is a problematic concept that has been rightly challenged since, especially by feminist scholars. As the following paragraphs will demonstrate, von Rad has even underestimated Israelite wisdom's influence on modern assumptions and normative claims about sex and gender.

The term *stereotype* was introduced into the discourse on social life by journalist Walter Lippmann (1898–1974), who defined it as "an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves."[13] Lippmann further argues that in order to cope with their complex world, people need stereotypes. From a psychological point of view, building stereotypes seems to be a coping strategy, with the help of which, in light of conflicting perceptions and complex anxieties, humans are able to orient themselves in their world. While stereotypes may help to quickly assess one's daily experience, the problem arises that stereotyping individuals or groups always runs the risk of othering, that is, distinguishing individuals or a group from oneself through negative assessments.[14] If a stereotype becomes permanent, a standard image in a certain culture, its othering potential comes into full force. Thus, especially negative stereotypes about the fool, the unjust, or the seductive woman in wisdom literature may influence modern readers in their perception of other people—and this problematic potential was targeted by feminist interpretation.

## The Good and the Bad Wife

Especially with regard to women, the books of Proverbs and Sirach present certain feminine stereotypes and immediately evaluate them as good or bad. The diligent wife and the counselor are positive female roles, whereas the seductive woman and the troublesome wife are portrayed negatively.[15] The maxims in proverbial wisdom constantly speak *about* women, not from their own perspective, and when they mention women,

---

13. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 95.

14. See Johnny Miles, *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 30–33.

15. For a fuller treatment, see Christl M. Maier, "Good and Evil Women in Proverbs and Job: The Emergence of Cultural Stereotypes," in *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages, BW 1.3 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 77–92.

they primarily name problems in their relations to men. The married woman is viewed with regard to her usefulness for her husband: "A strong wife is the crown of her husband, but like rottenness in his bones is the one who brings shame" (Prov 12:4).[16] The crown as a visible symbol of royal power (see 2 Sam 12:30) is here used metaphorically for the high value of a diligent woman as companion in life. While a woman's beauty is praiseworthy (Job 42:15), beauty is not sufficient for a marriage partner if it is not paired with discretion, as stated in Prov 11:22: "A gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without good sense." The good wife is thus beautiful, bright, diligent, and subjects herself to the paterfamilias, the male head of the family.

Most of the maxims of proverbial wisdom articulate common knowledge of an agricultural clan culture with households that are largely oriented toward producing their own food and basic handicraft, which were widespread in Israel from premonarchic times to the sixth century BCE. Within this culture, the many sayings address the situation of free farmers with extended households including close relatives, slaves, and day laborers, which von Rad names "a relatively well-placed middle class."[17] From a strict sociological standpoint, this labeling is somewhat misleading since between the eighth and the sixth centuries BCE ancient Israel developed from an early state with a small ruling class and a mass of families with self-sufficient agrarian production to an ancient class society, in which a few elite families became landowners of huge estates and most free farmers lost their land due to wars, crop failure, and debt slavery, and thus joined the huge lower class.[18] Moreover, slaves in ancient societies form a distinct group, yet individual slaves could attain a good standing in a household depending on their skills and the treatment they received from their owners. Therefore, while the life of self-dependent farmer families of early monarchic times is often in focus, the people who wrote and collected the maxims certainly belonged to the educated upper class.[19]

---

16. All translations of biblical passages are mine unless otherwise noted.

17. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 82; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 112. Nevertheless, von Rad considers these maxims as "in principle, valid for all men" (*Wisdom in Israel*, 82).

18. See Rainer Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 108–17.

19. Von Rad assumes a school setting for the production of literary proverbs (see *Wisdom in Israel*, 26; *Weisheit in Israel*, 42).

Mark Sneed defines these scribes as retainers, a group of men with close relationship to the governing class, serving as public or private administrators, not among the wealthiest but affluent enough to afford a life as intellectuals.[20] Annette Schellenberg poignantly states: "The question of the *scribal* milieu in which ancient texts were produced is only one facet of the question of the *social* milieu of the people who shared the views reflected in these texts."[21]

In ancient Israelite society, marriage was based not on love but on household economy. Therefore, a predominant theme is the potential failure of such domestic partnership. Five proverbs mention a belligerent spouse who aggravates the life of her husband:

> A persistent dripping on a day of continual rain and a contentious wife are alike. (Prov 27:15)

> Better dwelling in a corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious wife. (Prov 21:9; see also 19:13; 25:24)

> Better dwelling in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful wife. (Prov 21:19)

These literary proverbs are culture-specific renderings because they presuppose a house with a flat, accessible roof of beaten clay, a relatively small space without any privacy for family members. In sum, they describe typical situations in a common Israelite town in the first millennium BCE. The counterimage of such a crowded urban dwelling is the arid steppe known from the regions in the southern Jordan Valley and the Negev. Besides this highly particular imagery, to blame the woman for any conflict in a marriage is hardly timeless truth but rather irritating for most modern readers,

---

20. See Mark R. Sneed, *The Social World of the Sages: An Introduction to Israelite and Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 286–90.

21. Annette Schellenberg, "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, ed. Mark R. Sneed, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 119, emphasis original. In her essay, Schellenberg argues that the wisdom books share an understanding of the world that is distinct from the ideas reflected in other books of the Hebrew Bible. Within the wisdom books, however, she still recognizes some differences in detail with regard to their worldview.

since they have a different view on marriage, household, and male-female relationship due to a different idea of women's status and rights.

Such stereotypes, however, are reiterated and even expanded in later wisdom writings, especially in the book of Sirach, from the second century BCE, written by a male sage who most probably was headmaster of a scribal school in Jerusalem.[22] Ben Sira repeats and deepens the distinction between the good (Sir 26:1–4, 13–18) and the bad wife (25:15–26; 26:7–12, 22–27) and calls daughters a source of constant anxiety for a man (7:24–25; 42:9–10). As Nuria Calduch-Benages argues, "All the advice reflects the mentality and perspective of a husband—everything in the book suggests that Ben Sira was married—who wants to instruct the future husbands about the virtues they should look for in a wife and about the dangers they must avoid."[23]

Ben Sira praises the good wife in high tones, especially her beauty (26:15–18), which is paired with chastity ("a chaste soul" or "capable of self-control," 26:15), and her speech of kindness and humility (36:23). He describes her as "sensible" (25:8), "wise" (7:19), and "blameless" (40:19).

In Proverbs and Sirach, the good wife is seen as a divine gift to a pious man, as the following maxims demonstrate:

> House and estate are an inheritance from parents,
>     but a prudent woman is from the LORD. (Prov 19:14)

> A good wife is a good portion among the portions granted to the man who fears the Lord. (Sir 26:3)

In contrast, Ben Sira describes the bad wife as talkative (Sir 25:20), jealous of other women (26:6), a drunkard (26:8), an adulteress (26:9), stubborn (26:10), and shameless (26:11). He directly advises his disciples: "Allow water no outlet, and do not trust an evil woman" (25:25). He even uses the strongest rhetorical means, his personal advice in first-person singular: "With a dragon or a lion, I would rather dwell than live with an evil woman" (25:16). The motif of dwelling in the same house reminds one of the maxims about the contentious wife in Proverbs. Both Qoheleth and

---

22. See Nuria Calduch-Benages, "Good and Bad Wives in the Book of Ben Sira: A Harmless Classification?," in Maier and Calduch-Benages, *Writings and Later Wisdom Books*, 109–25.

23. Calduch-Benages, "Good and Bad Wives," 112.

Ben Sira even discuss whether the woman is the cause of all evil (Qoh 7:26; Sir 25:24).[24]

Interestingly, von Rad discusses the obvious contradiction between all efforts of the wise to teach the young men and the idea that, finally, it is God's choice or decision whether a man has a suitable wife, under the rubric "limits of wisdom." The ancient sages, he argues, were aware of an utterly incalculable factor that would possibly intrude between the preparation of a project and its realization, namely, the hand of God. Without formulating this as a doctrine, they would underline the necessity to practice human wisdom while being open to God's interference that escapes all human calculation.[25] This discussion demonstrates that von Rad was not interested in the details of these proverbs and their specific interpretation. Instead, he tries to reveal the worldview and faith tradition that he assumes as common ground of all Israelite wisdom literature.

### The Woman of Strength (Prov 31:10–31)

As a counterexample to the maxims about the good and bad wife, one may consider the laudatory portrait of the אשת־חיל, the "woman of valor" or "woman of strength," in the acrostic poem Prov 31:10–31, which by all standards of Hebrew poetry is a piece of art. This woman is portrayed as a diligent matriarch who, like Lady Wisdom, builds her house and feeds and educates the members of her household (31:15, 26–27), and thus is "more precious than jewels" (31:10; see 3:15; 8:11). Her daily life is characterized as never-ending work, strong stewardship of all household activities, successful production and selling of textiles, teaching her children, and even social work to the benefit of the poor. Therefore, she is blessed by her sons and highly praised by her husband (31:28). His honor is established by her work: he sits in the city gate, where the town's elders would decide communal issues and hold court proceedings (31:23).

From a feminist perspective, the portrait of this woman is ambivalent at best.[26] As Christine Yoder has demonstrated, the strong woman's activities are documented in extrabiblical sources as activities and even

---

24. It is controversial whether Sir 25:24 refers to Eve's sin (Gen 3:16) or is a personal statement of Ben Sira (see Calduch-Benages, "Good and Bad Wives," 115).

25. See von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 100–101; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 135–36.

26. See the different assessments collected in Alice Ogden Bellis, *Proverbs*, WisC 23 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 259–68.

professions of women in the Persian period.[27] For instance, the poem's terminology of trading and merchandise mirrors international trade relations. The flax (31:13) and linen (31:22) that the woman of strength uses in her household are products imported from Egypt.[28] The dye of her fine clothing is Phoenician red purple (31:21). She engages in textile production (31:13, 18–19, 22) and sells her goods to a merchant (31:24). She buys a field and converts it into a vineyard (31:16), which may hint at the well-documented production of Palestinian wine in the Persian period.[29] Due to these references, Yoder, Karin Brockmöller, and Irmtraud Fischer read the poem as a condensed portrayal of women's authority and self-reliance in the Persian period.[30]

Jutta Hausmann, however, argues that the poem's initial question, "who can find a woman of valor?," is rhetorical, implying a negative answer, and thus the strong woman is unattainable, like Lady Wisdom, with whom she shares several features and whom every man seeks but never reaches.[31] Even if this were correct,[32] the poem mirrors a female role model whom people seek to emulate and an ideal woman against which they would measure every woman. Therefore, I concur with Yoder's conclusion that the portrayal of the strong woman, despite its highly positive diction, "reinforces the values and customs of a context that is patriarchal in structure and androcentric in bias."[33]

---

27. See Christine R. Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31*, BZAW 304 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), esp. 75–91.

28. See Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman*, 81.

29. See Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman*, 87.

30. See Karin Brockmöller, *"Eine Frau der Stärke—wer findet sie?": Exegetische Analysen und intertextuelle Lektüren zu Spr 31,10–31*, BBB 147 (Berlin: Philo, 2004), 232–35; Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteslehrerinnen: Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 169–72.

31. See Jutta Hausmann, "Beobachtungen zu Spr 31,10–31," in *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und biblische Theologie: Festschrift für H.D. Preuß zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jutta Hausmann and Hans Jürgen Zobel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), 261–66.

32. I follow Yoder, who argues that the question does not imply impossibility (as in Prov 20:6; Qoh 7:24) but scarcity (see Prov 12:4; Ruth 3:11), since the parallel stichos mentions her high purchase price and thus deems her an expensive bride (see Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman*, 77–78).

33. Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman*, 109.

## The Foreign Woman

Even more problematic from a critical-feminist point of view is the ste-
reotype of the seductive woman, which in the admonitions in Prov 1–9
is named אשה זרה, "strange woman," and נכריה, "foreign woman." She is
characterized as unfaithful to both her husband and her God (2:17; 7:19);
she wanders the streets under the protection of the dusk to ensnare her
victim (7:9, 12). She persuades a spineless man with flattery and deceptive
words (5:3; 7:14–20) and entices him into her house and onto her bed.
The young male addressee is warned that following her will lead to dis-
honor and even legal proceedings (6:20–35)—in short, he will face social
degradation and lose his reputation. The warning is reinforced by drastic
metaphors, representing the strange woman's house as an antechamber
to the underworld and the woman as a murderous warrior (7:26–27; see
2:18–19; 5:4–6; 9:18).

The naming of the woman as "foreign" or "strange" carries different
connotations and probably alludes to the rejection of marriages with "for-
eign women" (נשים נכריות) mentioned in Ezra 9–10 and Neh 13:23–31.
Claudia Camp detects implicit connotations to the veneration of foreign
deities extant in the prophetic metaphor of adultery (Jer 3:3–5; 13:21, 25;
Isa 57:7–8; Zech 5:5–11). [34] The overt focus on her sexual behavior and
its assessment as illegitimate is based on the stereotype of the dangerous
prostitute in the older wisdom tradition (see Prov 23:27): "A man who
loves wisdom makes his father glad, but he who keeps company with pros-
titutes squanders wealth" (Prov 29:3). Thus, I concur with Camp that in
the figure of the strange woman, connotations of ethnic, cultic, and ethi-
cal deviation are condensed into a rhetorical construct that renders all
strangeness feminine. The portrayal of the seductive woman, named for-
eign or strange in Prov 1–9, thus offers a clear case of othering that merges
physical, behavioral, ethnic, and social aspects into a cultural stereotype.

In my dissertation, I analyzed the portrait of the foreign woman against
its Persian-period sociohistorical background.[35] In my view, it conveys an
ideological message to young men not to seek a marriage partner on their

---

34. See Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the
Making of the Bible*, JSOTSup 320 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 42–53.

35. See Christl M. Maier, *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1–9: Eine exegetische
und sozialgeschichtliche Studie*, OBO 144 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen:
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 25–68, 264–69.

own but to rely on their parents' and teacher's insight and counsel to find a good wife. Although the speaker of the instructions is generally assumed to be male, a father and/or a male teacher, the references to the teaching of the mother (Prov 1:8; 6:20; see 31:1) suggest that also women were involved in this education. Although the warnings explicitly address only a son, the negative stereotype of the strange woman offers a role model also for daughters, albeit in reverse, that is, in the sense that daughters are seriously warned not to become such a woman. For a society challenged by economic and political constraints such as the one in the Persian province Yehud, educating the next generation in conservative ethics, that is, an ethics that retains the values of the community, may seem appropriate. Modern interpreters, however, should be aware of harmful effects that such texts may exert on readers today, if taken at face value. In my view, the denigrating characterization of the seductive woman as foreign is both androcentric and xenophobic as well as injurious to the common perception of women.

In wording similar to the characterization of the foreign woman in Prov 1–9, the text called Wiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184) found in Qumran describes a seductive woman who brings about destruction.[36] In the reception history of female characters, this binary stereotyping eventually led to the polarization of the whore and the holy one, the sexually promiscuous seductress and the faithful, almost asexual mother—stereotypes that exert some influence even today.

## Lady Wisdom

The most positive female figure in Proverbs is certainly Lady Wisdom, a personification of wisdom that each man is called to seek all his life. She combines diverse, positively valued female roles with features of ancient Near Eastern goddesses. In Prov 9:1–6 she is presented as an industrious homeowner and woman of high social standing who invites guests to a feast she has prepared; by teaching the inexperienced (9:6), she turns her house into a "house of instruction," a school of wisdom. Precursors of Lady Wisdom in the function of a wise woman and counselor (8:6–

---

36. See Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, *The "Foreignness" of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and the Development of a Biblical Motif*, BZAW 381 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 112–21. However, it is not clear whether 4Q184 typifies real women or personifies apostasy in a female figure.

12) are the Israelite wives who advise their husbands, such as Sarah (Gen 16), Rebekah (Gen 24), Michal (1 Sam 19), and Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1).[37] In her appearance at the city gates (Prov 1:20–21; 8:1–3) she reminds readers of the wise woman of Abel of Beth-maacah (2 Sam 20) who saves the city from destruction by her persuasive speech.[38] Like the prophets, Lady Wisdom advocates for righteousness and justice (Prov 8:6–9) and rebukes those who do not follow her instruction (1:20–33).

Goddess imagery is used in Lady Wisdom's portrayal in Prov 3:13–18, where she is praised as "a tree of life" reminiscent of the life-giving tree goddess. In 1:20–33 and 8:1–36 she praises herself like the goddess Isis in songs of praise.[39] In 8:30–31, Lady Wisdom presents herself as a young woman acting playfully before the Creator God, a role also played by the Egyptian goddess Maat before the sun god Re, which includes an erotic element.[40] Whereas Maat in Egypt represents the social and cosmic order, Lady Wisdom in Prov 8 is an "expert in world order"[41] without being identical with it, because she was present when YHWH created the cosmos (8:22–31). Yet, Lady Wisdom is neither a goddess nor a divine hypostasis but God's first creation and thus a part of the world. In the role of a frolicking young daughter, Wisdom represents God's intimacy with and care for human beings.[42] Thus through her speech, she mediates this order to those who seek wisdom and fear God. While acquiring wisdom seems possible

---

37. See Silvia Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney and William McDonough (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 52–68.

38. See Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 18–20.

39. See Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 86–92. Von Rad refers to Kayatz's study, especially her argument that the Egyptian goddess Maat served as a model for Lady Wisdom (see von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 153; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 199).

40. See Othmar Keel, *Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott: Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Deutung des meṣaḥäqät in Spr 8,30f.* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 63–70.

41. See Gerlinde Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9: Traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien*, FAT 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 151: *Weltordnungsexpertin*. For images of Maat, see Schroer, *Wisdom Has Built Her House*, 3–6 and fig. 1–14.

42. See Gale A. Yee, "The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22–31," in *Creation in Biblical Tradition*, ed. Richard L. Clifford and John J. Collins, CBQMS 24 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Society of America, 1992), 95.

and even recommendable for humans in Proverbs, the poem in Job 28 argues that despite all their technical skills and diverse efforts humans will never find wisdom in the world, because only God knows her. Yet, Ben Sira advances the female personification of Wisdom and in chapter 24 praises her as leading the way to YHWH. In the end, he even identifies her with the Torah that Moses commanded (Sir 24:23).[43]

In his treatment of personified Wisdom, von Rad starts with wisdom's inaccessibility in Job 28, and then presents Prov 8 as a counterexample influenced by Egyptian divine speeches. Beyond the idea of a sapiential worldview, here he also finds the idea of a world order, in the new concept of personified creation. Wisdom, he argues, is "not an attribute of God, but an attribute of the world, namely that mysterious attribute, by virtue of which she turns towards men to give order to their lives."[44] In the female Wisdom figure, von Rad sees a novel and groundbreaking aspect in the wisdom tradition, and he interprets the imagery of love between the wise and Wisdom as a genuine expression of this novelty: "The existence in the world of the man who seeks knowledge is in a relationship of love to the mysterious order. It is in a state of tension through being wooed, through seeking and being sought, through having to wait for and, at the same time, anticipating precious intellectual fulfilment."[45]

Although von Rad also sees in the Egyptian goddess Maat a model for Lady Wisdom, he argues further that the latter is a specific Israelite concept: "The idea of a testimony emanating from creation is attested only in Israel. The doctrine of the primeval revelation with its distinctive element—namely the address to men—stands, therefore, on a genuinely Israelite basis."[46] Thus, von Rad interprets Lady Wisdom as a figure

---

43. Schellenberg plausibly argues that for Ben Sira Wisdom goes beyond the Torah and can be acquired without a mediator such as Moses ("Don't Throw the Baby Out," 129).

44. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 165; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 204: "Verobjektiviert ist hier also nicht eine Eigenschaft Gottes, sondern eine Eigenschaft der Welt, nämlich jenes geheimnisvolle Akzidens, kraft dessen sie sich ordnend dem Leben der Menschen zuwendet."

45. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 173; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 225: "Die Existenz des erkennenden Menschen in der Welt steht im Zeichen eines Liebesverhältnisses zu dem Ordnungsgeheimnis. Sie steht im Spannungsfeld eines Umworbenseins, eines Suchens und eines Gesuchtwerdens, eines Wartenmüssens und in der Ausschau auf köstliche geistige Erfüllungen."

46. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 175; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 227: "Die Vorstellung von einem von der Schöpfung ausgehenden Zeugnis ist nur in Israel zu belegen.

invented by Israelite scribes as an incentive for male students of wisdom and as a means to add an erotic flavor to the pursuit of wisdom. This androcentric perspective is totally different from feminist interpretations that seek to examine the worldview of the wisdom tradition with a focus on gender hierarchies and perception of women, which are ideas that von Rad was not interested in. That such interest in female figures is not only a modern phenomenon but part of the reception history of these writings is attested, for instance, in the expansions of portrayals of Job's wife and daughters.

## Job's Wife and Daughters

While the admonitions and poems in Proverbs and Sirach instruct men how to live a successful life, the book of Job narrates the loss of such a life and the breakdown of the male protagonist's relations with his wife, children, friends, and neighbors. In the narrative prologue, Job is portrayed as a most righteous man, "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). He is a responsible paterfamilias who cares for his children and does not denounce God when he suddenly loses them. Only after falling seriously ill and in the presence of three male friends does he suddenly start mourning and accusing God of treating him unduly. In his laments, Job looks back to his former life—he cared for his household, fed the poor, and never cast an eye on his neighbor's wife (29:12–16; 31:9–10)—and again demonstrates that he fulfilled the ideal of a righteous man. Besides a brief and ambivalent appearance of Job's wife, the book of Job focuses so much on the male protagonist and his dispute with his male friends that it appears as a world almost without women.[47] Yet, in the reception history of this book, Job's wife and daughters get more attention, and their viewpoint is foregrounded.

Job's wife has no name in the prologue and is not mentioned in the epilogue, although she may be the mother of another ten children (42:13). She enters the story when her critically ill husband is already sitting in the ashes and utters only two sentences: "You hold on to your integrity. Curse/

---

Die Lehre von der Uroffenbarung stand also gerade mit ihrem Spezifikum—und das ist doch ihre Anrede an den Menschen!—auf genuin altisraelitischen Vorstellungen."

47. See Christl Maier and Silvia Schroer, "What about Job? Questioning the Book of the 'Righteous Sufferer,'" in *Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, FCB 2.2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 175–204.

Bless [ברך] God and die!" (2:9). Whether this is a comment or a question is open in Hebrew. Traditionally, her words have been interpreted as an expression of incomprehension and mockery. Augustine, for instance, called her *diaboli adiutrix*, Satan's helper who was to tempt Job.[48] Yet, Job's wife only reiterates God's words that Job will hold on to his integrity (2:3) and also Satan's prediction that Job will bless/curse God to the face (2:5). In the book of Job, the verb ברך is consistently used in its ambivalent meaning of blessing and cursing.[49] The text deliberately leaves the meaning undecided: as a curse in the sense of fending off disaster or a blessing in the sense of praising what is worthy of praise before he dies. Thus, one may argue that Job's wife suggests Job bless God once more as long as Job is able to hold on to his integrity and then die at peace with God after his farewell.[50] Another possible reading is that, pointing out the absurdity of Job's holding on to God, she proposes that he curse God, who has forsaken him, and die, seeing that blasphemy always carries the death penalty (see Lev 24:16).[51]

Both cases could involve compassion or, at any rate, common sense instead of mockery or sarcasm. But Job rejects her as "one of the foolish women" (Job 2:10) and together with his wife—as is suggested by the use of the plural—wants to accept evil from God as much as good. This is the only time in the Hebrew Bible when a husband does not listen to his wife advising him, as was expected of Israelite wives.[52] As Ellen van Wolde observes, Job, who in 1:20–22 is still loyal to his God and simply mourns his loss, begins to question his fate only through her, and he reaches a point where he even considers the possibility of not accepting evil from God.[53]

---

48. The Christian reception from medieval times is elaborated by Katherine Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, LHBOTS 586 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

49. See Ellen van Wolde, "The Development of Job: Mrs. Job as Catalyst," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 203–4; Tod Linafelt, "The Undecidability of ברך in the Prologue of Job and Beyond," *BibInt* 4 (1996): 154–72.

50. This is the suggestion of the midrash on Job 2:9 in Solomon A. Wertheimer, *Battei Midrashot: Twenty-Five Midrashim Published for the First Time from Manuscripts Discovered in the Genizoth of Jerusalem and Egypt, with Introductions and Annotations*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Quq, 1968), 2:165.

51. See Jürgen Ebach, *Hiob 1–20*, vol. 1 of *Streiten mit Gott: Hiob* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 37.

52. The latter is suggested by the midrash Gen. Rab. 19 (on Gen 3:12).

53. See van Wolde, "Development of Job," 205.

This brief confrontation between Job and his wife is ambiguous and leaves readers dissatisfied. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Greek text tradition has preserved a much longer version of the wife's speech, in an interpretation that has been later added to the first Greek translation in the LXX:

> After much time had passed his wife said to him, "How long will you endure, saying, 'Behold, I shall wait a little longer, expecting the hope of my salvation.' Behold, your memory is already plotted out from the earth, the sons and daughters, the travail and pangs of my womb, whom I reared with toil in vain. And you sit in decay caused by worms, spending the nights outside, and I am a wanderer and a servant, going from place to place and from house to house, looking for the sun to set, in order that I might rest from my toils and pains which now oppress me. But say some word against the Lord and die."[54]

In this expanded passage, Job's wife speaks of herself as one involved in Job's suffering. It is her children who were snatched from her, and her toil had been in vain. Trying to stay alive, she roams about restlessly, fleeing from pain.

The Testament of Job, written in the first century BCE or CE, probably bases its description of Job's wife on this Greek tradition.[55] Here, at last, Job's wife has a name: Sitis. It either refers to Ausitis, the Greek translation of Job's homeland, Uz, or to Sitidos, an allusion to the Greek σιτίζειν, "to give bread."[56] Sitis, full of compassion, cares for her husband and feeds him with the little bread that she earns as a water-carrying slave (T. Job 23.8–10). Although Sitidos is characterized sympathetically as a loving wife who even sells her hair to feed her suffering husband, she is, in contrast to Job,

---

54. Translation by John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 83.

55. While the Testament of Job uses the LXX version of Job, which is 15 to 20 percent shorter than the MT, it completely rewrites the story, including some drastic changes. For instance, 107 out of 388 verses in Testament of Job deal with women. See Pieter W. van der Horst, "Images of Women in the Testament of Job," in *Studies on the Testament of Job*, ed. Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst, SNTSMS 66 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 94–95.

56. See Luzia Sutter Rehmann, "Testament of Job: Job, Dinah, and Their Daughters," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 590; van der Horst, "Images of Women," 96–97.

not aware of Satan's actions. Whereas most commentators interpret T. Job 40.6 as a statement of Sitidos's death, Luzia Sutter Rehmann interprets this verse as the transformation of Sitidos to Dinah, who in T. Job 40.4 has announced her resurrection after her passion.[57]

In the book of Job, his three daughters are mentioned briefly in the book's prologue with their brothers (Job 1:2). After Job's restoration, another three daughters are born to him and, in contrast to their seven brothers, mentioned by name. Their beauty is praised all over the country; their names are drawn from the domain of aesthetics and cosmetics, and thus sound cute: Jemimah (turtledove), Keziah (cassia), and Keren-happuch (horn of mascara; see Job 42:14–15). Despite this androcentric view of the daughters as beautiful objects, their status is enhanced significantly as Job gives them a portion of the family estate along with their brothers. Thus, they inherit like the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27; 36), yet without any restriction for potential marriage partners. According to extrabiblical sources from exilic and postexilic times, only some women of the upper class could actually establish inheritance rights through marriage contracts that preserved their individual property and rendered them economically autonomous.[58]

The Testament of Job devotes a whole chapter to Job's daughters, emphasizing their status as subjects (T. Job 46).[59] It also changes their share in their father's inheritance into a spiritual gift: they receive girdles or sashes that sparkle like stars, and when they wear them over their breasts they are given new hearts and speak in the language of the angels and cherubim, thus joining the heavenly world (T. Job 48.3; 49.2; 50.2).[60] When Job is buried, they are the only ones who see the fatherly God taking Job in his arms (52.9).

In his treatment of Job, von Rad mentions neither Job's wife nor his daughters. He focuses instead on Job's questioning of the theology of retribution and his accusation of a wicked God (רשע, Job 9:24). For a

---

57. See Sutter Rehmann, "Testament of Job," 592–93. Van der Horst is among those who read T. Job 40.6 as an statement of Sitidos's death ("Images of Women," 98).

58. As can be seen in marriage contracts of the Judean community at Elephantine and in Neo-Babylonian legal texts (see Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman*, 49–58).

59. See Sutter Rehmann, "Testament of Job," 593–94.

60. See van der Horst, "Images of Women," 104–5. He further argues that T. Job 46–53 may be an early Jewish piece of haggadah that "originated in ecstatic-mystical circles … very probably also in a group in which women played a leading role" (113).

feminist reading of Job, it is especially through his wife that the patriarchal character of the book is dramatically revealed. Even though she is afflicted by the same disasters as Job, apart from the disease, her suffering is not mentioned. Contrary to all biblical role conventions, her advice is not accepted by Job: she is called a foolish woman, that is, one without honor, and is excluded from the rest of the story. The later narrative traditions, however, show that this gap had a stimulating effect on the sages' imagination and called for more details. A Job devoid of relations and the derogatory portrayal of his wife later seemed to be unbearable. As the Greek tradition and the Testament of Job demonstrate, the sparse verses about Job's wife and daughters in the book of Job call for interpretations that increase their significance.

## Wisdom of Women

This comparison of von Rad's work with feminist interpretations raises the fundamental question of how one should appropriately assess this tradition of the wisdom of women. On the one hand, the feminine stereotypes and their binary evaluations as good or bad, seductive, foreign in wisdom tradition demonstrate that the texts' authors acknowledged the significance of women for the functioning of family and household, the latter forming the basic unit of society. With the figure of Lady Wisdom, who shares many features with the good wife and the woman of strength, they even carved out a mediating figure to show God's hospitable and relational aspects. On the other hand, however, these portrayals did not mean that the patriarchal structure of the family and the androcentric worldview of the sages were shattered. As the figure of the mother as teacher underlines (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 31:1), women were involved in the production of these cultural stereotypes and thus probably shared this androcentric perspective. Although these stereotypes were no concern of von Rad, their impact on modern readers cannot be dismissed. With other feminist scholars, I aim at revealing the detrimental effect such stereotyping may have on the contemporary evaluation of women (and men) and their role in society.

By analyzing these portrayals of women against their sociohistorical background, we can put ourselves, as von Rad advised, "into the tensions within which the teachings of the wise men operated."[61] If we acknowledge

---

61. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 23.

the time-related and culture-specific essence of this particular wisdom, we should dismiss such binary and androcentric arguments. Such deconstruction is easy. It is much harder to formulate new maxims and generate gender-sensitive portrayals of women and men that could teach our democratic and humanistic values.

In my view, the negative portrayals of the bad wife and the foreign woman cannot be healed by the positive counterimages—the diligent wife, the woman of strength, or Lady Wisdom—because all these female figures are embedded in a patriarchal and androcentric cultural context and thus foster traditional role models for women. While we may start from interpreting these female figures, our task as teachers of the biblical tradition is to continue this "unfinished and even unfinishable dialogue"[62] about humans and their world that von Rad found in the Israelite wisdom tradition.

## Bibliography

Baumann, Gerlinde. *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9: Traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien*. FAT 16. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996.

Bellis, Alice Ogden. *Proverbs*. WisC 23. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018.

Brockmöller, Karin. *"Eine Frau der Stärke—wer findet sie?": Exegetische Analysen und intertextuelle Lektüren zu Spr 31,10–31*. BBB 147. Berlin: Philo, 2004.

Calduch-Benages, Nuria. "Good and Bad Wives in the Book of Ben Sira: A Harmless Classification?" Pages 109–25 in *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*. Edited by Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages. BW 1.3. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

Camp, Claudia V. *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible*. JSOTSup 320. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000.

Ebach, Jürgen. *Hiob 1–20*. Vol. 1 of *Streiten mit Gott: Hiob*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996.

Fischer, Irmtraud. *Gotteslehrerinnen: Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006.

---

62. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 318; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 404: "ein unabgeschlossener und auch unabschließbarer Dialog."

Hartley, John E. *The Book of Job*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Hausmann, Jutta. "Beobachtungen zu Spr 31,10–31." Pages 261–66 in *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und biblische Theologie: Festschrift für H.D. Preuß zum 65. Geburtstag*. Edited by Jutta Hausmann and Hans Jürgen Zobel. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992.

Horst, Pieter W. van der. "Images of Women in the Testament of Job." Pages 93–116 in *Studies on the Testament of Job*. Edited by Michael A. Knibb and Pieter W. van der Horst. SNTSMS 66. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Kayatz, Christa. *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*. WMANT 22. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966.

Keel, Othmar. *Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott: Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Deutung des meṣaḥäqät in Spr 8,30f*. Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974.

Kessler, Rainer. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.

Linafelt, Tod. "The Undecidability of ברך in the Prologue of Job and Beyond." *BibInt* 4 (1996): 154–72.

Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. New York: Macmillan, 1922.

Low, Katherine. *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*. LHBOTS 586. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Maier, Christl M. *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1–9: Eine exegetische und sozialgeschichtliche Studie*. OBO 144. Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995.

———. "Good and Evil Women in Proverbs and Job: The Emergence of Cultural Stereotypes." Pages 77–92 in *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*. Edited by Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages. BW 1.3. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

Maier, Christl, and Silvia Schroer. "What about Job? Questioning the Book of the 'Righteous Sufferer.'" Pages 175–204 in *Wisdom and Psalms*, Edited by Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine. FCB 2.2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998.

Miles, Johnny. *Constructing the Other in Ancient Israel and the USA*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011.

Newsom, Carol. "Women as Biblical Interpreters before the Twentieth Century." Pages 11–24 in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated*. Edited by Carol Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel*. 3rd ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Nashville: Abingdon, 1972.

Schellenberg, Annette. "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World." Pages 115–43 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark R. Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Scholz, Susanne, ed. *Social Locations*. Vol. 2 of *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014.

Schroer, Silvia. *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney and William McDonough. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, ed. *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*. BW 9.1. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

———. *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Sneed, Mark R. *The Social World of the Sages: An Introduction to Israelite and Jewish Wisdom Literature*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.

Sutter Rehmann, Luzia. "Testament of Job: Job, Dinah, and Their Daughters." Pages 586–95 in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*. Edited by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

Tan, Nancy Nam Hoon. *The "Foreignness" of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and the Development of a Biblical Motif*. BZAW 381. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008.

Wacker, Marie-Theres. "Feminist Criticism and Related Aspects." Pages 634–54 in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*. Edited by John W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Wertheimer, Solomon A. *Battei Midrashot: Twenty-Five Midrashim Published for the First Time from Manuscripts Discovered in the Genizoth of Jerusalem and Egypt, with Introductions and Annotations*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Quq, 1968.

Wolde, Ellen van. "The Development of Job: Mrs. Job as Catalyst." Pages 201–21 in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature*. Edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995.

Yee, Gale A. "The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22–31." Pages 85–96 in *Creation in Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Richard L. Clifford and John J. Collins. CBQMS 24. Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Society of America, 1992.

Yoder, Christine R. *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31*. BZAW 304. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001.

# Gerhard von Rad and the Notion of a Wisdom Tradition

Mark Sneed

Gerhard von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel*, translated by James D. Martin, was one of the texts I read while in graduate school, as my interest in the biblical wisdom literature was being piqued. It was a seminal text for me early on. I liked its style, and I could follow his arguments easily. They were very logical and reasonable. However, what I failed to realize at the time is that the entire basis for von Rad's reasoning about the nature of biblical wisdom literature depended on artificially cutting off the wisdom literature from the rest of the Hebrew Bible and viewing its tradents as distinct from those of the rest of Scripture. Citing Hans Heinrich Schmid's 1966 study *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*, von Rad states: "The opinion is current today that Israelite Yahwism, with its strong religious stamp, penetrated only very hesitantly the didactic wisdom material."[1] Subsequently, alluding to Harmut Gese's *Fremdkörper in Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weishet: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buch Hiob*, he notes, "Wisdom has even been described as a foreign element in the Old Testament world."

As one progresses through the book, one sees that von Rad is largely reacting to these two positions: that wisdom literature is largely irreligious and that it seems to represent an alien corpus within the Old Testament. Essentially, von Rad will argue that the wisdom literature is certainly religious while retaining a secular, empiricist character, and that while it is distinct within the Hebrew Bible, it is not incompatible with Yahwism. Several of von Rad's conclusions indicate this. For example, in discussing the orders of creation, which von Rad suggests Israel's wisdom teachers

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (London: SCM, 1972), 10.

believed "are benevolently turned towards" those who "take refuge in them," he says:

> If one speaks here of soteriology, then it would be a soteriology which, in this particular form, could appear to be almost heretical from the point of view of the traditional ideas of the cult and of the historical salvation-decrees. For here, salvation is not brought about by Yahweh descending into history nor by any kind of human agency such as Moses or David or one of the patriarchs, but by specific factors inherent in creation itself.[2]

And subsequently:

> Dissociating itself sharply from a sacral understanding of the world, this [wisdom] way of thinking placed man and his created environment in a measure of secularity with which Israel had never before been thus confronted.… More specialized, theological questions had arisen, and later wisdom saw itself faced with the task, without sacrificing to the secularity of creation the knowledge that had been acquired, the task of bringing the world and man back once again into the centre of God's sphere of activity.[3]

To summarize, then: von Rad attempts to counter the charge that wisdom is irreligious in comparison to other biblical traditions. But, at the same time, he argues that it is not so alien that it does not also represent a form of Yahwism. It is simply that the Yahwism of wisdom differs from the others in being grounded in creation, more empirical, secular or nonsacral, nonhistorical (even nonrevelatory), and that it undergoes a process of increased theologization that connects it with the more revelatory elements of other biblical traditions.

This broadly positions von Rad concerning a wisdom tradition. His position certainly works within the parameters of what can be called the consensus position today. What I want to do next is further flesh out von Rad's position regarding this topic, then summarize a recent defense of the consensus position, and finally critique it from my own particular position as a representative of a group of scholars who have recently challenged the consensus.

---

2. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 314.
3. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 316–17.

## Von Rad's Methodology

In the first chapter of *Wisdom in Israel*, "The Problem," von Rad lays out his methodology for better discerning the nature and goals of biblical wisdom literature. He notes the problem of delimiting what exactly the notion of Israelite wisdom is, especially in comparison with certain ancient Near Eastern texts that seem to engage a similar notion, and he questions whether the word *wisdom* (most likely thinking of חכמה and its synonyms here) is adequate to categorize its nature " as a total phenomenon," because of its vagueness. He acknowledges that the term "wisdom literature" is a scholarly invention or construct.[4] He writes, "The question is therefore justified whether the attractive code-name 'wisdom' is nowadays not more of a hindrance than a help, in so far as it disguises what stands behind it rather than depicts it properly."[5] He plans to rectify this by examining the phenomenon anew and from different points of view. He continues,

---

4. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7. Of course, the problem with the term *wisdom literature* has been a perennial topic since von Rad. Most recently, Will Kynes has traced the first usage of wisdom literature for this corpus to nineteenth-century Germany, specifically, Johann Bruch. See Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4–5. Not only biblical wisdom experts but also ancient Near Eastern ones have resisted this nomenclature for parallel categories of literature. Giorgio Buccellati argues that there is no Mesopotamian wisdom corpus per se, because wisdom themes are too diffused throughout a variety of Mesopotamian genres. Rather, he sees a sapiential cultural phenomenon reflected by the literature, but distinct from it. See Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 35–47. Paul-Alain Beaulieu also sees no concept or category of wisdom literature for Babylonia, yet this does not prevent him from employing the term "Babylonian wisdom literature." See Beaulieu, "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford, SymS 36 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 3. Similarly, among Egyptologists, Miriam Lichtheim prefers the term *didactic* to *wisdom* literature because the corollary Egyptian literature rarely makes the terms or concept of wisdom its focus. See Lichtheim, "Didactic Literature," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno, PAe 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 243–62.

Most scholars today would probably adhere to the general perspective of Wilfred G. Lambert, who was fine with using the term to describe a corpus of Babylonian literature, while recognizing its liabilities. See *BWL*, 1.

5. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 8.

We are thus perhaps doing a service in approaching the subject first of all in a more general way and with fewer presuppositions, in enquiring more closely after Israel's search for knowledge, that is, in what particular way and by what means Israel sought to prove herself. As far as I can see, this question has not yet been put in this way because older scholarship was not aware of the intensity and the flexibility of the Israelite search for knowledge, or of the specific area within which this search operated.[6]

He adds:

What we lack today is a work about wisdom in Israel which is much more decisive than has hitherto been the case, which starts with what is specific in its subject of study, which, to a greater extent than has been the case till now, allows the themes to be announced and the questions asked by the didactic texts themselves; in short, a work which attempts to put itself into the specific world of thought and values and into the tensions within which the teachings of the wise man operated.[7]

While drawing on some ancient Near Eastern material, von Rad's method is to essentially separate the wisdom literature from the rest of the Hebrew Bible and then phenomenologically describe what he sees as its nature vis-à-vis the other modes of literature in the Hebrew Bible.[8]

### Wisdom's Empiricist Epistemology

Von Rad first identifies wisdom in Israel (wisdom as a phenomenon) with Israel's "experiential knowledge."[9] He seems to suggest that the didactic books of the Old Testament represent an intellectual movement.[10] Later, referring to the sentences in the collections in Proverbs (10:1–22:16; 25–29), he qualifies this: "It has often been said that these observations are

---

6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 8.

7. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10.

8. A mode of literature is at a higher level of abstraction than a genre. It is usually in adjectival form. Examples include *heroic* epic, *epic* poetry, *historical* narrative, and, of course, *wisdom* literature.

9. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3, 5.

10. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7. Roger N. Whybray argued that the sages were simply a loose confederation of upper-class intellectuals, but this position has not been generally accepted. See Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*, BZAW 135 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974).

derived exclusively from experience.… But experience alone would not be sufficient."[11] In addition to seeing wisdom's epistemology as largely empirical, von Rad sees a gradual shift in this emphasis on empirical perspective over time. He essentially argues for a gradual theologizing of wisdom literature, starting with the sentence collections and ending with Job and later wisdom books.[12] He refers to older wisdom as being secular, but not in the modern sense. It is thoroughly religious:

> We hold fast to the fact that in the case of the wise man's search for knowledge, even when they expressed their results in a completely secular form, there was never any question of what we would call absolute knowledge functioning independently of their faith in Yahweh. This is inconceivable for the very reason that the teachers were completely unaware of any reality not controlled by Yahweh.[13]

He certainly does not go as far as William McKane, who views the earliest wisdom represented in the sentence collections in Proverbs as composed by empiricists who "could not permit themselves the luxury of religious or ethical presuppositions."[14] Concerning the later wisdom teachers, von Rad says:

> Later teachers, then, are no different from the earlier ones, who already derived perceptions from experiences of Yahweh. We see them continuing along precisely the same road as the one trodden by their predecessors, except that in the examination of human reality they confine themselves to specific themes, though here intensifying their theological endeavors.[15]

Thus, from von Rad's standpoint, wisdom is empiricist and secular, though not in the modern sense—it was thoroughly religious from the outset—but becomes increasingly theologized over time.[16]

---

11. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 31.

12. Von Rad finds Sirach to represent a change in wisdom to "different thought-forms" and a break in tradition (*Wisdom in Israel*, 12).

13. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 64.

14. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 68, cites "47f." in William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men*, SBT 44 (London: SCM, 1965).

15. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 70.

16. Von Rad's position is not far from that of Michael V. Fox. See Fox, "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs," *JBL* 126 (2007): 669–84.

## Wisdom as an International Diffusion

Like other scholars, von Rad connects Israelite wisdom with a similar international phenomenon in the ancient Near East that is reflected in the parallel literature. But then he asks,

> What was the relationship of this wisdom, which was partly imported into Israel, to the Yahwistic faith, which was otherwise regarded as entirely exclusive? Was this perhaps an intellectual activity which was more or less neutral from a religious point of view and which could, therefore, happily settle in the vicinity of quite different cults?[17]

He refers to the comparison of Israelite wisdom works with ancient Near Eastern texts as having recently petered out.[18] In a footnote he speculates how international wisdom represented by Babylonian and Ugaritic texts may have migrated to ancient Israel and speaks of "traveling wisdom teachers" bringing these materials back with them to Israel.[19]

## Identification of the Sapiential Tradents

Von Rad explores various candidates for the social location of the wisdom writers before finally settling on the notion of a wisdom teacher or scholar. He first proposes the courtier, especially for the book of Proverbs.[20] He refers to Ahiqar, who allegedly composed a number of proverbs but also served as vizier for Sennacherib and then Esarhaddon. As an Israelite example, he names Ahithophel, David's vizier (2 Sam 16:23), as well as Joseph and Daniel.[21] While von Rad admits that advising kings might have been a function of some of the intended audience of Proverbs (20:18 and 24:6), which connects with Proverbs' insistence on "well-chosen words," [22] he ends up rejecting this social location:

---

17. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10.
18. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10.
19. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10 n. 8. Interestingly, Bernd U. Schipper refers to the "wisdom student" as the audience of Proverbs, as well as the "wisdom teacher." See Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*, trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 27–28, 133.
20. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 12.
21. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 15–16.
22. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 16.

But the matter is more complicated from another aspect also. In spite of our first definition of the *Sitz im Leben*, it is simply not possible to regard the book of Proverbs merely as a product of courtly knowledge and serving for the training of high officials. The social context from which the individual sentences,[23] and indeed whole groups of sentences emerge, but also the range of problems within which they move, the subjects with which they deal, can be more or less precisely defined, with the result that the world in which they exist is certainly not that of the court. On the contrary, sentences from the fairly narrow world of court and high officials are, on the whole, only scantily represented. Thus, the supposition emerges that the wise men of the court, "the men of Hezekiah" for example, also functioned as collectors of non-courtly teaching material and that wisdom was not by any means located at court. Obviously, it must have found at an early stage centres where it was concerned more with the kind of questions asked about life by the middle classes and the landowners.[24]

Von Rad then considers scribes as a possible fit, noting that literacy implies schools, which he believes existed in ancient Israel, in spite of the lack

---

23. Von Rad does not view the sentences as folk proverbs: "It should be stated here, as a matter of principle, that in this context we do not see it as our task to go behind the didactic poems in the book of Proverbs to enquire whether perhaps here and there of a much older wisdom may be discerned. We accept the material as it is presented by the collectors, and we are justified in understanding it, in that form, as school wisdom.… These proverbs are constructed in parallel form, that is, they are, precisely in their pregnant character, products of an explicit literary intention. Popular proverbs do not occur in this form" (*Wisdom in Israel*, 12, 25).

24. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 17. Interestingly, Miriam Lichtheim points out that the *Instruction of Ptahhotep* ostensibly was written for a young vizier but contains no advice that relates to such a position (*AEL* 1:7). Rather, it was written for scribes. On classes in Israel, See Roger N. Whybray, who argues that Prov 1–9; 22:17–24:22 reflect an urban, educated, upper class, whereas Prov 10:1–22:16 and chapters 25–29 reflect a more moderate group, a "petit people." See Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, JSOTSup 99 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 60–61, 68, 92–93, 100, 103, 114–17. James Crenshaw tautologically speaks of a professional class of sages (חכמים) for all the wisdom literature, to be located in neither the upper nor lower classes. See Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 23–26. Michael Fox sees the wise as "the king's men," to be distinguished from courtiers, and who held high positions. Yet he rejects regarding them as scribes, which he views as lowly copyists—a rather bizarre perspective! See Fox, "The Social Location of the Book of Proverbs," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menaham Haran*, ed. Michael Fox et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 234–39.

of evidence.[25] He speculates on the possibility of differing scribal schools existing in ancient Israel:

> It follows from this that there must have been schools of different types in Israel. Questions of ritual and the complex distinctions between clean and unclean will have been taught in priestly schools. The temple scribes of Jer. 8.8 were certainly educated differently from the young state officials at court. The Levites must have been instructed differently again, in that they were brought up to interpret and preach on old traditions. Finally, a quite different training must have been necessary for those who wished to work in Ezra's chancellery where the decrees of the great king were dealt with.[26]

Von Rad finally comes to his conclusion concerning the identity of the wise men. They were "wisdom teachers" or "scholarly teacher(s)," though he cautiously admits the lack of certainty involved with such an identification.[27] He attempts to trace the various meanings of חכמים from Proverbs to prophetic texts (e.g., Jer 18:18; 50:35; Ezek 7:26), with the meaning becoming clearer and clearer until the position becomes most fully defined with Ben Sira, who had a school for scribes and was a scholar and teacher. He views Sir 39:1–11 as "an ideal portrait of a scholar and teacher of the time of Sirach."[28] Von Rad maintains that the early wisdom teachers, though, were certainly not scribes. He speculates that Ben Sira, in addition to being a wisdom teacher, has also become a legal (torah) expert, an innovation to the profession, according to von Rad.[29] He surmises that the proverb collections were probably used in Israel, as in Egypt, "in the schools for officials in Israel, as material to be copied out or learned by the pupils."[30] But that these "were put together specifically for the purposes of the school, that is as school text-books, is not, however, likely."[31]

---

25. See James Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*, AYBRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 112.

26. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 17–18.

27. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 17–23.

28. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 22.

29. See Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 29, 192, 225.

30. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 20–21.

31. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 21. Stuart Weeks argues this for Prov 1–9. See Weeks, *Imagination and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

## Wisdom Literature as an Unusual Form of Yahwism

I conclude my sketch of von Rad's understanding of wisdom's relation to Yahwism by citing a precis of von Rad's own main conclusion:

> we can begin with the assertion that the wisdom practiced in Israel was a response made by a Yahwism confronted with specific experiences of the world. In her wisdom Israel created an intellectual sphere in which it was possible to discuss both the multiplicity of trivial, daily occurrences and basic theological principles. This wisdom is, therefore, at all events to be regarded as a form of Yahwism, although—as a result of the unusual nature of the tasks involved—an unusual form and, in the theological structure of its statements, very different from the other ways in which Yahwism reveals itself.[32]

Von Rad considers the biblical wisdom literature to reflect a form of Yahwism, though an unusual one, distinct from other forms.[33]

## A Recent Defense of the Consensus Position

Von Rad's position in many ways has been dominant. This is demonstrated by a recent representative of this perspective. Annette Schellenberg, in an edited volume focused on challenging the consensus on the question of a wisdom tradition in the Hebrew Bible, attempts to support the traditional approach to wisdom literature.[34] Like von Rad, she seems to assume that the wisdom writers were thoroughly religious and that their views shared many characteristics with other biblical writers. However, she sees four distinctive characteristics of the wisdom literature that she suggests indicate a distinctive group of scribes, different from those that composed the other sections of the Hebrew Bible, were responsible for composing wisdom texts.

She argues that this distinctiveness may suggest the authors' relations to power or social location, which she never clearly defines. The four areas

---

32. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 307.

33. Crenshaw goes further and views it as "an alternative to Yahwism" (*Old Testament Wisdom*, 243).

34. Annette Schellenberg, "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, ed. Mark R. Sneed, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 115–43.

of distinction are cosmology (the authors view the cosmos as stable and basically unchanging), epistemology (they are largely empirical, not needing divine revelation), ethics (they focus on individual behavior and are less socially conscious), and theology (they focus on God as creator, not deliverer). She admits that her arguments are not generally new, but she does at least soften the boundaries between this group and its literature and the rest of the Hebrew Bible by discussing much that they have in common.

## The New Perspective

As mentioned earlier, recently there have been challenges to the consensus position.[35] What holds this group together is their common attempt to show how the wisdom literature shares many intertextual links with the other modes of literature in the Hebrew Bible. This has the tendency to mitigate the alien character of this literature that is argued for by the consensus position. Of course, this move comes originally from von Rad himself. How the various modes of literature are linked and what social groups underlay the respective modes is explained in different ways by this movement. There is no uniformity on this issue.

I want to briefly describe a couple of scholars involved in this new challenge to provide a feel for this perspective before pursing my own approach. Will Kynes's research leads him to abandon the term *wisdom literature*.[36] Drawing on the theory of intertextuality, Kynes essentially downplays the role of genre and looks for other ways to reconfigure wisdom much more broadly.[37] Job's deep resonance with Jeremiah, for example, suggests that a text that scholarly convention reckons as a wisdom work might well be grouped literarily with a prophetic text.[38] The term wisdom literature stays in scare quotes, as he prefers to speak of wisdom as a phenomenon, much in the way von Rad does. Kynes's

---

35. E.g., Mark Sneed, "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?," *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71; Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*; cf. Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, OTM (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*, TCABS (London: T&T Clark, 2010). More particularly, see Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, eds., *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

36. See my review of his book in Mark Sneed, review of *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* by Will Kynes, *JTS* 71 (2020): 303–6.

37. Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature."*

38. Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* 165.

teacher, Katharine Dell, has resorted to even questioning whether Job should be considered wisdom literature because it is so different from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.[39] She sees Job as perhaps a close cousin of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.[40] By deconstructing the sapiential canon from within, Dell is inherently considering other ways of reconstructing the wisdom corpus. Significantly, both Dell and Kynes have spawned a whole series on intertextuality within the wisdom literature.[41]

### Wisdom Literature's Distinctiveness as Modal Conventions

My own particular perspective involves explaining the distinctive features of wisdom literature as simply the distinguishing literary conventions of a particular mode of literature, that is, the wisdom literature. This means I see the tradents as scribes and scribal teachers, though not in the sense that von Rad and the consensus understands this. Instead of seeing the distinctive features as evidence for rival posturing among groups, I view them as part of an economy of genres and modes of literature that serve differing functions in the training of scribes. This does not mean I do not see conflict and conflicting theologies in the Hebrew Bible. But it does mean that I do not see those conflicts aligning primarily along modal or generic lines. To provide support for this position, I need to briefly discuss ancient Near Eastern scribalism and scribal curricula, which include similar modes of literature to the Hebrew Bible. I will also briefly discuss genre theory after this.

### Ancient Near Eastern and Scribalism and Curricula

Because papyrus and vellum have long disintegrated in Israel, we have little direct evidence of the ancient Israelite scribal curriculum. However,

---

39. See Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*, BZAW 197 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991); Dell, "Deciding the Boundaries of 'Wisdom': Applying the Concept of Family Resemblance," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 145–60.

40. Dell, "Deciding the Boundaries," 156.

41. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Job Intertextually*, LHBOTS 574 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013); Dell and Kynes, eds., *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, LHBOTS 629 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); Dell and Kynes, eds., *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, LHBOTS 587 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

we have plenty of evidence of scribes and scribalism not only from Egypt and Mesopotamia but, more significantly, the western periphery (of Mesopotamia), which includes Ugarit, Israel's close neighbor.

In Egypt, during the New Kingdom (1550–1080 BCE), a boy started scribal school at age ten.[42] The student would study the Book of Kemit, which included the phraseology of letters and tomb biographies. Then students would learn to write hieratic by copying works such as "Satire on the Trades," which is an apology for the trade of scribalism, and the "Instruction of Khety," obviously a wisdom text. The scribal teacher would provide a sample text, which the students copied on ostraca or pieces of pottery. As students progressed, the teacher would simply recite the text orally, and the students would record it. The students then memorized the text and copied it from memory.

Their elementary education lasted for four years, and instructors focused on their students learning the classics of the Middle Kingdom. After this, the student had to decide on a specialization, such as administration, priesthood, or the military. This stage lasted twelve years. They had to learn Late Egyptian and studied mathematics, accounting, geometry, surveying, and engineering. Students had to copy model texts from their masters, including miscellanies that contained a diversity of genres. Word lists (a taxonomy of related terms) were memorized and represent the birth of encyclopedic knowledge. Those students who chose to become priests studied at the House of Life at a temple where they copied old religious and magical texts. At the House of Life, future physicians, astronomers, magicians, and oneiromancers were also trained. During the New Kingdom, because priests had to manage large temple estates, they had to be trained as administrators and ritualists.

In Mesopotamia, the situation was similar. Two stages are indicated for the Mesopotamian scribal curriculum.[43] The most basic level was training as copyists. The scribes acquired basic literacy and numeracy. The second level was reserved for more talented students, who became proficient in advanced bodies of knowledge such as science, literature, and religion. These became true scholars and were responsible for preserving

---

42. For the following see Edward F. Wente, "The Scribes of Ancient Egypt," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack Sasson, 4 vols. (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1995), 4:2215–16.

43. For the following see Laurie Pearce, "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia," in Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4:2265–78.

the cultural heritage of Mesopotamia. Four major areas of study formed the curriculum: language (including vocabulary and grammar), literature, mathematics (and surveying), and music. Students also became proficient in writing letters and business contracts by copying models.

As for the curricular usage of wisdom literature in particular, in the Old Babylonian period (2000–1600 BCE), young scribes at Nippur were trained in two phases.[44] In the first, students copied lexical texts; this activity imparted the writing system and introduced Sumerian vocabulary. At the end of the first phase, tablets with proverbs were used, and their contents prepared students for studying Sumerian in the second phase, which involved the reading of texts. The importance of what scholars now regard as wisdom literature for scribal training is exemplified by the discovery of Sumerian tablets containing lexical lists on one side and matching proverbs on the other.[45]

As for Canaan (Syria), in the western periphery, the curriculum was essentially Mesopotamian.[46] Students first became familiar with cuneiform and the tablets. Next, students learned lexical lists that introduced them to different domains of their world (names of gods, objects, professions, etc.). Memorization and the copying of phrases and sentences further reinforced their learning of cuneiform but also introduced them to literary texts that would help enculturate them. Next, literature was studied and parts of it memorized, such as liturgical texts (hymns), mythical narratives, wisdom texts, and scientific texts (omen texts). Also, more practical texts such as model letters, inscriptions, and business contracts were copied. Finally, apprentice scribes specialized in training for divination, medicine, or becoming a priest.

From this brief survey, it is clear that throughout the ancient Near East wisdom literature was important in the early training of scribes. However, there is no indication that scribes ever only studied/copied wisdom literature. Rather, they studied various modes of literature and genres, both literary and practical. Miriam Lichtheim emphasizes that the scribes of

---

44. For the following, see Nick Veldhuis, "Sumerian Proverbs in Their Curricular Context," *JAOS* 210 (2000): 383–87.

45. Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections* (Bethesda, MD: Capital Decisions, 1997), 1:xviii.

46. See Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, WAW 29 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); Cohen, *The Scribes and Scholars of the City of Emar in the Late Bronze Age*, HSS 59 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

the New Kingdom copied what was considered classic literature, as well as "basic genres such as letters, hymns, prayers, and of course, instructions in wisdom."[47] She also notes that the didactic texts "would help to form the characters of the young scribes." The evidence thus points to at least two important functions that wisdom literature had for ancient Near Eastern scribal training: for training in linguistic proficiency, since proverbs were short and easy to copy/study, and for the reinforcement of morality. Apparently, a moral scribe was considered a good scribe.

## Israelite Scribalism and Curricula

Surely, the Israelite form of scribal training looked something like its neighbors. If so, wisdom literature would have been an important component of it, but not the only mode of literature studied. Fortunately, two scholars have speculated about possible evidence for Israelite scribal curricula indicated by our current canon.

David Carr has recently argued that part of or at least a large segment of the Hebrew Bible represents a scribal curriculum. Carr compares the scribal curricula of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and ancient Israel and finds striking similarities in terms of curriculum and sequence of educational stages. He believes the scribal curriculum was primarily intended to enculturate young scribes and the elite to prepare for governmental service and leadership roles.[48] He argues that the very first corpus of school texts may have been the wisdom literature, specifically the book of Proverbs, with other genres studied as well.[49] Later came the Deuteronomistic History, which he describes as an alternative curriculum.[50] The prophetic corpus, in turn, became even a countercurriculum. He believes the Hebrew Bible canon was largely set during the days of the Hasmonean dynasty, which had its own library and was influenced by the Greek model.[51] Carr also argues that apprentice Israelite scribes recited many of their written texts and memorized them as part of their training.

---

47. *AEL* 2:167.

48. David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119, 126.

49. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 126–34.

50. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 134–42.

51. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 253–72.

Similarly, Karel van der Toorn argues that the Hebrew Bible was originally scribal literature, written by scribes, for scribes, but he does not believe it formed a scribal curriculum for training scribes.[52] Rather, it represents general scribal literature.[53] For him this is because so many of the genres in the Hebrew Bible are not paralleled in the Mesopotamian curricular, particularly the technical divinatory (e.g., omen texts) and exorcism texts.[54] But this is simply semantics. Both types of literature, in Mesopotamia and Israel, should be categorized as divinatory literature, one deductive, the other inspired divination. So, the significant question is, Why would apprentice Israelite scribes not have benefited from studying prophetic literature, especially after the exile, when times were difficult and God's ways seemed perplexing?

Scribal study of prophetic texts would fit with a growing a growing awareness among scholars (e.g., Van der Toorn, Carr) of the importance of scribes in the composition of the Old Testament (Dead Sea Scrolls and New Testament as well).[55] Even prophetic literature is now recognized as ultimately the product of scribes, such as Baruch, even if prophetic oracles could be traced back to actual prophets who were once important intellectual figures in their respective societies.[56] Even if scribes were not the originators of the prophetic messages, that they have put them in literary form and preserved them means that they valued their contents, even if this was at the instigation of their governing employers. What is important is that scribes have produced the prophetic *literature* that we have now in the Hebrew Bible.

It is important to emphasize at this point that I believe that the Hebrew Bible as a whole formed originally a scribal curricula of classical Israelite

---

52. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2, 247.

53. See Stuart Weeks's view of Prov 1–9 in *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

54. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 247.

55. See also William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

56. See Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Rannfrid Thelle, "Reflections of Ancient Israelite Divination in the Former Prophets," in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of History*, ed. Mignon R. Jacobs and Raymond F. Person Jr., AIL 14 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 7–33.

literature. This does not mean it had no other functions. But, if we follow Carr and to an extent Van der Toorn, the Bible's nature as originally scribal curricular literature cannot be ignored when considering the nature of the wisdom tradition.

### Schools in Ancient Israel and the Social Location of the Scribe

Instead of von Rad's "school wisdom,"[57] I would simply refer to scribal schools, where wisdom texts, but not only wisdom texts, were studied. Or, because *school* is technically anachronistic, one could use Chris Rollston's terminology: "formal, standardized education."[58] Perhaps better still is the qur'anic word *madrasa*, which refers to an educational institution and practice that requires no designated physical place.[59] One should also think of education in ancient Israel as following an apprentice model, with a father training his own sons and perhaps those of friends or neighbors. The early monarchy would be an appropriate date to start an investigation into Israelite education because the evidence points to the ninth century as a time when Hebrew began to be standardized, a fact that aligns with the emergence of specific dates for regnal years, starting with Rehoboam.[60] As opposed to von Rad's notion of differing scribal schools, especially in such a small nation as Israel, apprentice scribes would have been generally all trained together in a common school or institution and learned various genres and modes of literature that would prepare them for later special-ization. There is no evidence that a temple scribe would have received a different education from a royal scribe or a prophetic scribe, at least in the earliest stages.[61] The scribe Baruch accompanied Jeremiah and put his oracles in good literary form, but he was also apparently quite conversant

---

57. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 11.

58. Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*, ABS 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 95.

59. See André Lemaire, "Sagesse et ecoles," *VT* 34 (1984): 279.

60. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 44; Edward Lipiński, "Royal and State Scribes in Ancient Jerusalem," in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*, VTSup 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 157–58.

61. Lester Grabbe sees no reason why temple scribes could not have composed wisdom literature. See Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 170.

with the royal scribes, as his and Jeremiah's association with the family of Shaphan indicates (Jer 26:24; 36:10).

The Israelite scribes were part of the retainer class (there was no true middle class),[62] which put itself at the behest of the governing class (royal family, court, chief priests, and administrative officers) but also above the peasants, who could be very poor or wealthy enough to become noblemen. Because social class cultures often overlap in terms of values and mores, it is difficult to demonstrate any specific class location definitively just by examining the literature.[63] The best one can do is look for hints of class location that are at least compatible with a particular class's perspective, here retainers. The book of Proverbs contains such hints. There are several warnings about keeping a distance from the king's anger and use of power (e.g., Prov 16:14; see 25:1–7; Eccl 10:20), which would at least point to a lack of substantial power among the scribes. There are also maxims that depict the sorry lot of the poor, as if the authors were neither rich nor poor (e.g., Prov 10:15; 13:12; see Eccl 4:1) and some that are sympathetic to the plight of the poor (e.g., Prov 22:9).

## Genre Theory

So, from this ancient Near Eastern scribal perspective and in conjunction with genre theory,[64] the differences between wisdom literature and the other types of literature are explained via the inherent differences that constitute genres and modes of literature. Genres (and modes) form economies, where the differences between one mode and another is expected

---

62. See Mark Sneed, "A Middle Class in Ancient Israel?," in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel*, ed. Mark Sneed, SFSHJ (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 53–69. On the nature of retainers, see Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 243–48.

63. See Mark Sneed, "The Class Culture of Proverbs: Eliminating Stereotypes," *SJOT* 10 (1996): 296–308. As Richard Clifford notes, "One cannot argue from Proverb's topics such as harvesting or the importance of a good name in favor of a village milieu. The topics are sufficiently general to apply to many groups, and can be metaphorical. One can speak of 'cabbages and kings' without being a cook or courtier." See Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, IBT (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 49. On how the duality between Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly reflects an elitist perspective, see Mark Sneed, "'White Trash' Wisdom: Proverbs 9 Deconstructed," *JHebS* 7 (2007), https://tinyurl.com/SBL2649a.

64. On the literature in genre theory, see Sneed, "Wisdom Tradition," 54–57.

and even necessary. Genres (and modes) have certain jobs to do, and this necessitates that they differ with one another. What one genre (or mode) is means another genre (or mode) cannot be. A genre's (and a mode's) identity is constructed in opposition to all the other genres (and modes) in the economy. Genres (and modes) are created by conventions or characteristics that are the basis for constructing them as distinctive genres (and modes). For example, wisdom literature treats a niche of concerns that focus primarily on the individual's ethics and success, while Job and Ecclesiastes treat the perennial problem of evil, all concerns of what can be called folk philosophy. Its focus on creation, its tendency to be empirical regarding epistemology, its focus on the individual, its universal appeal, and so on—all of these are simply conventions that form the mode.

In turn, the other modes of literature treat other niches of scribal enculturation, such as the legal material, perhaps preparing scribes for careers as judges or serving as administrators. Genres (or modes) create literary worlds, not worldviews. This world would not represent any group's or any person's worldview. It is only a literary or conventional world and represents only a slice of reality, a small portion of a total worldview, for the group or individual. Scribes were taught to engage the mode of wisdom literature when they wanted to write about morality or treat the problem of theodicy, but they were also taught to engage and compose in other modes, such as prophetic literature, legal material, and so on. The same scribe who could compose in the mode of wisdom literature could compose, say, erotica or historical narrative or any of the other modes found in the Hebrew Bible. All combined, the differing types of literature in the Hebrew Bible served to broaden the scribe's proficiency to serve in various roles in Israelite and Judean society. A broadly enculturated scribe was apparently viewed as a good scribe. In this last section I want to briefly respond to some of the issues von Rad raises and to several of Schellenberg's criticisms of the new perspective.

## Issues Explained from an Alternative Perspective

It is certainly possible that the wisdom corpus has undergone a process of increased theologization over time. However, its significance would be muted by the fact that, with my perspective, the same scribes who were composing mundane proverbs would also have been likely responsible for collecting/composing more overtly theological material, such as the legal or prophetic corpuses, or studying it as a novice scribe.

Relatedly, concerning Sirach's modification of wisdom in that the Torah and Israelite history is assimilated into the book, I would maintain that Ben Sira represents the typical, not anomalous, Israelite/Jewish scribe of the late first millennium, one who happened to compose within the sapiential mode of literature. His interest in the prophetic literature, the Torah (or some version of it), and Israel's history would all have been part of any scribe's training throughout the history of ancient Israel and later Jewish periods. The focus on the Torah simply reflects the increased importance of this tradition for the Jews in postexilic times, when they had no king but were a vassal of other nations, and is what one would expect from a scribal literary tradition. There is evidence that the wisdom writers were not only interested in the Torah before Sirach but also in revelatory material. The composer of Prov 1–9 imitated the language of Deuteronomy long before the days of Ben Sira (see Prov. 3:3; 7:3; 6:20–23 with Deut. 6:6–9).[65]

Though wisdom literature is less likely to appeal to supernatural revelation, this is not missing from its corpus. There are two sapiential oracles in Prov 30–31, one from Agur and the other from King Lemuel's mother. The word משא in each case should not be translated as "Massa," an Arab territory, but as an "oracle," from נשא, "to lift up (a request for a divine response)."[66] Apparently the last testimony of someone about to die, here Agur, was viewed as oracular.[67] Also, Eliphaz receives a frightening vision during the night in Job 4. The divine speeches in the book of Job are certainly by definition revelation. In fact, this is what troubles James Crenshaw concerning the identification of Job as wisdom literature.[68] And Qoheleth alludes to Deut 23:21–22 as authoritative in Eccl 5:3–4 (Heb.), concerning the making and keeping of vows. Though Qohe-

---

65. See Bernd U. Schipper, "When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs," in Schipper and Teeter, *Wisdom and Torah*, 55–79.

66. See Mark Sneed, "Inspired Sages: *Massa'* and the Confluence of Wisdom and Prophecy," in *Scribes as Sages and Prophets*, ed. Jutta Krispenz, BZAW 496 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 15–32; see also Markus Saur, "Prophetie, Weisheit und Gebet: Überlegungen zu den Worten Agurs in Prov 30, 1–9," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 570–83.

67. Duane F. Watson, *NIB* 12:327.

68. James L. Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, LBS (New York: Ktav, 1976), 5. Similarly, Katharine Dell also rejects the book as wisdom literature, not because it contains prophetic elements but because the book is parasitical regarding genres (Dell, *Book of Job as Sceptical*, 147).

leth does not advocate zealous keeping of the torah, he certainly does not advise ignoring it.

Von Rad's notion of foreign wisdom diffusing to Israel is unnecessary with my perspective. Wisdom literature simply represents one of the standard modes of ancient Near Eastern, scribal, curricular literature, and Israel's wisdom corpus simply represents their particular version of it. One could say that Israel's wisdom literature is certainly cut from the same cloth.

Instead of accepting von Rad's conclusion that Israelite wisdom was an alternative form of Yahwism, I would characterize it as literature that reflects a component of what Israelite scribes would have viewed as their complete Yahwistic worldview, since Israelite scribes would have studied and inculcated all the scribal modes of literature, not just the wisdom literature.

Considering the social location of scribes would help in responding to a couple of arguments Schellenberg makes for the distinctiveness of the wisdom tradition reflecting rival group politics. She argues that the wisdom literature appears to be less socially conscious than other corpuses of the Hebrew Bible, such as the prophetic literature.[69] However, if the same scribes who composed this corpus had a hand in composing or collecting materials for the other corpuses, would not this mean reconsidering this assessment? The wisdom literature is only tangentially concerned about the plight of the poor, not because its readers/composers were necessarily less concerned about this social category but rather because this is not the primary concern of this mode of literature (its conventions), which is personal success and flourishment (for scribes).

Schellenberg also argues that the wisdom literature reflects a belief in a stable cosmos, unlike, say, apocalyptic literature, which seeks the overturning of the status quo and radical modification of the cosmos.[70] However, the scribes who composed a book such as Daniel, especially chapters 7–12, in which the authors are identified as the *maskilim* or wise ones, would have been retainers as well, but the political and social situation of the Jewish people would have differed greatly from that of the period when the biblical wisdom literature was produced. They would have been retainers, but retainers whose nation was under severe

---

69. Schellenberg, "Don't Throw the Baby Out," 132; cf. J. David Pleins, "Poverty in the Social World of the Wise," *JSOT* 37 (1987): 61–78.

70. Schellenberg, "Don't Throw the Baby Out," 121–26.

persecution. So, the literature had to change. Apocalyptic literature is the literature of the oppressed. The scribes who composed chapters 7–12 would have been retainers as much as the authors of Proverbs, but their overall national social situation would have been drastically different. This explains the differences in mode and not that the *maskilim* and the *hakamim* of Proverbs represent distinctive antagonistic groups whose ideologies are fundamentally different.

## Conclusion

Von Rad's perspective on the notion of a wisdom tradition largely represents the consensus view today, in many ways serving as its foundation. He sees the wisdom tradition as neither a completely foreign element within the canon nor as an alternative to Yahwism. He does not view Proverbs and early wisdom as representing a secular phenomenon, in the modern sense. He also sees an increasingly theologization of wisdom over time and Sirach representing wisdom merging with Torah. He views the wisdom writers as wisdom teachers, who taught wisdom to their students, and their books represent a distinctive tradition that offers an alternative form of Yahwism, over against the other forms found in the Hebrew Bible, represented by the other modes.

This is one way to interpret the data. I have presented another possibility that is representative of the new perspective on the nature of wisdom literature. Instead of the distinctive features of the wisdom literature pointing to a distinctive worldview or ideological perspective, they constitute instead literary conventions for a mode of literature found not only in ancient Israel but throughout the ancient Near East. Its niche is that of morality and personal success, as well as the problem of evil. But this mode was only one of several modes that Israelite scribes had to study, so that they might be enculturated and their behavior might be moral and wise. The sociological and ideological significance of this literature is not evidence for rival scribal groups in ancient Israel but rather for an elite group of scribes who studied a vast array of modes and genres of literature, which were used to promote the interests of their patron, the governing class, and simultaneously themselves. There certainly were groups who differed ideologically in ancient Israel, and this is reflected in the Hebrew Bible. But I am arguing that they did not argue those differences via or through modal/generic lines. This is where wisdom experts get sidetracked.

## Bibliography

Alster, Bendt. *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections*. 2 vols. Bethesda, MD: Capital Decisions, 1997.

Beaulieu, Paul-Alain. "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature." Pages 3–20 in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*. Edited by Richard J. Clifford. SymS 36. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Buccellati, Giorgio. "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia." *JAOS* 101 (1981): 35–47.

Carr, David M. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Clifford, Richard. *The Wisdom Literature*. IBT. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Cohen, Yoram. *The Scribes and Scholars of the City of Emar in the Late Bronze Age*. HSS 59. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009.

———. *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*. WAW 29. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Crenshaw, James. *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*. AYBRL. New York: Doubleday, 1998.

———. *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.

———. "Prolegomenon." Pages 1–36 in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. Edited by James L. Crenshaw. LBS. New York: Ktav, 1976.

Dell, Katharine J. *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*. BZAW 197. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991.

———. "Deciding the Boundaries of 'Wisdom': Applying the Concept of Family Resemblance." Pages 145–60 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark R. Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Dell, Katharine, and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. LHBOTS 587. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014.

———, eds. *Reading Job Intertextually*. LHBOTS 574. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013.

———, eds. *Reading Proverbs Intertextually*, LHBOTS 629. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018.

Fox, Michael V. "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs." *JBL* 126 (2007): 669–84.

———. "The Social Location of the Book of Proverbs." Pages 234–39 in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*. Edited

by Michael Fox, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Avi M. Hurvitz, Michael L. Klein, Baruch J. Schwartz, and Nili Shupak. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996.

Grabbe, Lester. *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lemaire, André. "Sagesse et ecoles." *VT* 34 (1984): 270–81.

Lenski, Gerhard. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Lichtheim, Miriam. "Didactic Literature." Pages 243–62 in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*. Edited by Antonio Loprieno. PAe 10. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Lipiński, Edward. "Royal and State Scribes in Ancient Jerusalem." Pages 157–64 in *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986*. VTSup 40. Leiden: Brill, 1988.

McKane, William. *Prophets and Wise Men*. SBT 44. London: SCM, 1965.

Nissinen, Martti. *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Pearce, Laurie. "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia." Pages 2265–78 in vol. 4 of *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Jack Sasson. 4 vols. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1995.

Pleins, J. David. "Poverty in the Social World of the Wise." *JSOT* 37 (1987): 61–78.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. London: SCM, 1972.

Rollston, Christopher A. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*. ABS 11. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Saur, Markus. "Prophetie, Weisheit und Gebet: Überlegungen zu den Worten Agurs in Prov 30, 1–9." *ZAW* 126 (2014): 570–83.

Schellenberg, Annette. "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World." Pages 115–43 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark R. Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Schipper, Bernd U. *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*. Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

———. "When Wisdom Is Not Enough! The Discourse on Wisdom and Torah and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs." Pages 55–79 in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Edited by Bernd Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Schipper, Bernd, and D. Andrew Teeter, eds. *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Schniedewind, William M. *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Sneed, Mark. "The Class Culture of Proverbs: Eliminating Stereotypes." *SJOT* 10 (1996): 296–308.

———. "Inspired Sages: *Massa'* and the Confluence of Wisdom and Prophecy." Pages 15–32 in *Scribes as Sages and Prophets*. Edited by Jutta Krispenz. BZAW 496. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020.

———. "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?" *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71.

———. "A Middle Class in Ancient Israel?" Pages 53–69 in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Mark Sneed. SFSHJ. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

———. Review of *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature,"* by Will Kynes. *JTS* 71 (2020): 303–6.

———. "'White Trash' Wisdom: Proverbs 9 Deconstructed." *JHebS* 7 (2007). https://tinyurl.com/SBL2649a.

Thelle, Rannfrid. "Reflections of Ancient Israelite Divination in the Former Prophets." Pages 7–33 in *Israelite Prophecy and the Deuteronomistic History: Portrait, Reality, and the Formation of History*. Edited by Mignon R. Jacobs and Raymond F. Person Jr. AIL 14. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Toorn, Karel van der. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Veldhuis, Nick. "Sumerian Proverbs in Their Curricular Context." *JAOS* 210 (2000): 383–87.

Weeks, Stuart. *Early Israelite Wisdom*. OTM. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.

———. *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

———. *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature*. TCABS. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Wente, Edward F. "The Scribes of Ancient Egypt." Pages 2215–16 in vol. 4 of *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Jack Sasson. 4 vols. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1995.

Whybray, Roger N. *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*. BZAW 135. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974.

———. *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*. JSOTSup 99. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

# Troubling Wisdom:
# Posthumanism and the Animal Pedagogue

Jennifer L. Koosed

One of the most enduring legacies of Gerhard von Rad's study of wisdom literature is his exploration of wisdom's creation theology. His work on wisdom culminated in his landmark *Wisdom in Israel*, which illuminates the creation theology present in the wisdom corpus as well as demonstrates how closely this creation theology is tied to the understanding of wisdom presented in these texts.[1] All of nature witnesses to the grandeur of God, and animals play a special role in creation's revelation. Wisdom literature is replete with animal imagery. Animals are used figuratively in a wide range of proverbs, play a pivotal role in Qohelet's worldview, and are employed in the arguments between Job, his friends, and God. Many of these functions can be discerned across the biblical text, but one unique feature of the animal in wisdom literature is the animal's role as exemplar or pedagogue.[2] Animals teach, and in so doing, wisdom literature challenges

---

1. For Gerhard von Rad's writing on wisdom literature, see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:418–59; von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 131–43; von Rad, "Some Aspects of the Old Testament World View," in *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 144–65; and von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972).

2. The *animal pedagogue* is a term I have borrowed from Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

anthropocentrism by placing these animals (from the great Leviathan to the lowly worm) at the center of the moral universe, with humans among the few creatures deficient and in need of special instruction.

Wisdom literature's approach to, and incorporation of, animals is part of its overarching theology of creation. As Walther Zimmerli declares in his groundbreaking work on wisdom, "wisdom theology is creation theology."[3] Working in the same milieu and writing at the same time as Zimmerli, von Rad also makes complex connections between wisdom and creation that develop across his corpus.[4] However, Zimmerli and, more germane to this essay, von Rad had concerns other than mine. Zimmerli is addressing the question of how wisdom literature, so different in so many ways, coheres with the rest of the biblical corpus. He found his answer by rooting wisdom literature in Gen 1:28, thus bringing wisdom into alignment with more dominant trends in biblical theology.[5] Von Rad is also concerned with how wisdom connects to the rest of the Hebrew Bible's theological witness, which he identifies as salvation history. To account for wisdom's difference (i.e., it makes no obvious reference to such foundational events as the exodus, Sinai, or the Davidic dynasty besides passing mention of Solomon), von Rad makes several arguments, including positing a two-stage developmental process for wisdom.[6] In the first stage, wisdom is derived from observation and experience.[7] In the second stage, wisdom is subjected to theological reflection and becomes

---

3. Walther Zimmerli, "The Place and the Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (New York: Ktav, 1976), 316.

4. For a concise overview of von Rad's approach to wisdom and creation theology, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 22–25, 41–42. See also Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Creation," *JBL* 104 (1985): 3–11.

5. Even when Zimmerli's understanding of wisdom as an outgrowth of Genesis is challenged, his key observation about the close association between wisdom and creation still obtains, and other scholars build on it. For example, see Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 118. Perdue dedicates his *Wisdom and Creation* to Zimmerli.

6. In addition, von Rad connects wisdom to other parts of the Bible by finding creation theology in the prohibition against idolatry, locating Gen 1–11 as the beginning of salvation history, and noting the connection between creation and redemption in Second Isaiah.

7. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:418.

"the mediator of revelation … the divine principle bestowed upon the world at Creation."[8] Von Rad will later bring creation and revelation into dynamic relationship: "The experiences of the world were for her [Israel] always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world."[9]

Albeit in different ways, both Zimmerli and von Rad highlight creation theology, in part as a way to integrate wisdom literature into the larger theological witness of the biblical corpus. However, when I say that Zimmerli and von Rad had concerns other than mine, I mean something more than a concern for understanding wisdom's theology and its relationship to the rest of the Bible, or understanding wisdom's historical context and development. Living in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, both scholars also had to grapple with the great evils of war, Nazism, anti-Semitism, and genocide.[10] Certainly, these evils still abide. Yet, now, other existential threats take center stage. Environmental degradation through pollution and land use by a rapidly growing human population threatens many other species who share our planet. Even more, climate change threatens to accelerate this habitat destruction and species extinction in ways that cannot be undone. Climate change will make large swaths of the earth uninhabitable, pandemics more frequent and deadly, hurricanes and wildfires more ferocious, potable water in short supply, and food more

---

8. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:441. For von Rad, wisdom will further widen to fuse with apocalyptic thinking, as demonstrated in the book of Daniel (*Old Testament Theology*, 1:451). As Zimmerli's argument has been critiqued, so has von Rad's. The idea of a Solomonic enlightenment where wisdom flourished at court, theological reflection as a separate and later development, and wisdom's connection to apocalyptic have all been critiqued by scholars. For an early analysis, see James L. Crenshaw, "*Wisdom in Israel*: A Review," in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writing on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 300–311.

9. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 62.

10. Even as these works on wisdom were written after World War II, the events of the 1930s and 1940s cast a long shadow and may be discerned in von Rad's respect for and admiration of Israel's integrated worldview. See Charles Kelly Telfer, "Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971): A Reluctant Modernist's Approach to Wisdom Literature," *UCC* 5 (2019): 191–205. Von Rad's life work—demonstrating the spiritual and religious importance of the Hebrew Bible—can also be understood as a countertestimony to Nazi Germany. See Bernard M. Levinson, "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church," *BibInt* 62 (2008): 238–54.

difficult to produce. Whereas von Rad's concerns may be broadly understood as humanistic ones, which come together with humanistic impulses in the wisdom corpus's approach to experience,[11] attention to the environmental crisis demands thinking that pushes beyond humanism.

Creation theology serves to animate the entire world (animal, vegetable, and mineral alike) with divine wisdom. Human beings are simply one part of this lush menagerie. Creation theology speaks to a bond between God and creation that does not depend on, sometimes does not even include, human beings. As such, wisdom may, at first glance, appear to provide a rich resource for confronting the evils of the Anthropocene. Roland Murphy notes this potential when he states that the "reverential attitude" that wisdom's creation theology engenders "does not speak directly to the ecological concerns that have agitated recent discussions. But it does contribute to forming a basic human attitude that can have an ecological 'fallout,' so to speak."[12] Other scholars of wisdom literature and especially those who engage in ecological hermeneutics have highlighted this aspect of wisdom.[13] However, any appeal to wisdom for such resources must also attend to the fact that, so far, wisdom has failed to persuade. If wisdom literature does counsel people to attend to and value the rest of the created world, then why has this counsel been ignored, in policy and practice, by those who hold these texts to be sacred—especially considering that Western countries in general (and the United States in particular), all places with majority Christian populations, have been at the forefront of environment-damaging behaviors?

---

11. John F. Priest, "Humanism, Skepticism, and Pessimism in Israel," *JAAR* 36 (1968): 311–26. Priest identifies humanism as a "primary framework" (325) in wisdom literature, even in its concern for nature. Priest further explicates the connections between wisdom and humanism, with attention to von Rad's work, in "Wisdom and Humanism," in *The Answers Lie Below: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Edmund Toombs*, ed. Henry O. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 263–79.

12. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 121.

13. Katharine J. Dell reviews important scholarship on wisdom from an ecological perspective, and also provides an overview of the value of wisdom literature for ecological hermeneutics. See Dell, "The Significance of the Wisdom Tradition in the Ecological Debate," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 56–69. See also Ananda Geyser-Fouche and Bernice Serfontein, "Creation Order in Sapiential Theology: An Ecological-Evolutionary Perspective on Cosmological Responsibility," *TS* 75 (2019): 1–10.

Reading wisdom's creation theology through the theories of posthumanism and animal studies, with particular attention to Donna Haraway's work, provides another way to understand these biblical texts, to find their power and to mark their failure. While decentering the human animal, these texts also, somewhat paradoxically, construct an anthropology that places people outside the created order—or at least, people constitute an unruly element in what is otherwise an orderly creation, an unruly element that must be disciplined by other animals. Yet, concurrently, the figure of the animal pedagogue fails to orient human beings in a way that leads us to confront the environmental destruction we have wrought. In creation theology, the animal pedagogue is important because it teaches us something about God, about morals, about ethics. In other words, the animal pedagogue has a *use value*, one that obscures the animal's reality and points beyond material concerns. As long as the human animal stands in some way outside the created order, and as long as nonhuman animals are valued because they are of use in some way, then creation theology cannot provide the necessary ethic that will save creation.

## The Words We Use to Think Thoughts

*Posthumanism* is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of different theoretical orientations.[14] Broadly, it simply means "after" or "beyond humanism" and thus contains within it a critique of the humanist endeavor. More specifically, it calls certain boundaries between human and nonhuman animals, as well as between people and technologies, into question.[15] Destabilizing boundaries also decenters the human animal in order to regard it (to regard us) as simply one species among many that inhabit this earth. In this later manifestation, it intersects (although is not coterminous) with animal studies. Animal studies, or the animal turn, can emerge

---

14. The word *posthumanism* first appears in Ihab Hassan, "Prometheus as a Performer: Toward a Post-humanist Culture?," *GR* 31 (1977): 830–50. For an overview of the variety of paths posthumanism has taken since, see Francesca Ferrando "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations," *Existenz* 8 (2013): 26–32.

15. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–81; Carey Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

in almost any field of study, from the natural sciences to the humanities. It is often interdisciplinary, challenging academic boundaries as it desta-bilizes our anthropocentric worldview. Animal studies begins simply by looking at animals, but it is often accompanied by a critique of speciesism that suggests a strong ethical component.[16] Some understand animal stud-ies to be a part of the ever-broadening reach of justice and inclusion. As Francesca Ferrando writes, "If post-modernity can be seen as the pluralis-tic symphony of the human voices who had been silenced in the historical developments of the notion of 'humanity', the post-human era adds to this concert the non-human voices, or better, their silencing in what is currently defined as the sixth mass extinction, which is caused, directly or indirectly, by human actions."[17] Ever-growing concern over the state of the world in the Anthropocene has brought many of these trends together into particularly urgent configurations. Ferrando calls for a paradigm shift that would bring together posthumanism, postanthropomorphism, and environmentalism in order to provide new frameworks for addressing the current environmental and climate crises.

Scientists have documented five great extinction events before our era, and as Ferrando alludes, many believe that we are currently living in the sixth. The term *Anthropocene* was first introduced by ecologist Eugene

---

16. Speciesism is identified by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1975). Jacques Derrida sub-jects the philosophical tradition to critique in terms of its treatment of other animals and is foundational for the animal turn in philosophy and other disciplines. See Der-rida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). For recent biblical scholarship on animals studies, both of which begin by tracing some of these genealogies, see Hannah M. Strommen, *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). For an introduction to post-humanism and biblical studies, see Jennifer L. Koosed, ed. *The Bible and Posthuman-ism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), especially the introduction, "Humanity at Its Limits," 3–12. For an introduction to posthumanism and animal studies in religious studies and theology more broadly, see Stephen D. Moore, ed., *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). For animal studies and religion, see Aaron S. Gross, *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

17. Francesca Ferrando, "The Party of the Anthropocene: Post-humanism, Envi-ronmentalism and the Post-anthropocentric Paradigm Shift," *RBA* 4 (2016): 160.

Stoermer and then explicated by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen. Crutzen suggests that the changes wrought by the industrial revolution, starting in the late eighteenth century, are monumental enough to signal a transition into a new geological era—a move from the Holocene (which began about twelve thousand years ago) to the Anthropocene,[18] a name that draws attention to the unprecedented ways in which human beings are altering the climate and accelerating the extinction of other species.

However, the Anthropocene is a contested category because, as the name suggests, it puts humanity at the center. Haraway, for example, is critical of the term in part because of the way it continues to privilege the human and partake in the ideology of human exceptionalism, an ideology that is responsible for the problem itself.[19] Everything in this world is a multispecies event, even if human action (or inaction) plays a significant part.[20] In addition, the broad sweep of the term *anthropos* seems to cast blame on all human beings equally. Since it is only a segment of the world's population that is really driving the change, others have chosen the term *Capitalocene* to emphasize the oversized role of capitalist economies in propelling climate change and other forms of environmental destruction.[21] Perhaps even more importantly, given the ethical mandates attached to these discussions both implicit and explicit, Haraway worries that the story of the Anthropocene is one that has already been written and whose

---

18. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 44; see also Ferrando, "Party of the Anthropocene," 162.

19. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 49; see also Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible*, 165–68. Ferrando comfortably uses these terms but also emphasizes that the Anthropocene is the symptom of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is what must be addressed, and the words we use to do so are essential (Ferrando, "Party of the Anthropocene, 170–71).

20. Haraway's point here connects to her critique of the word *posthumanism* and her preference for using terms that instead acknowledge the interrelationship between all species. For example, Haraway speaks of "companion species" and "naturecultures" in order to move beyond humanism and anthropocentrism. See Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Haraway is even cautious about the event we call the Sixth Great Extinction, pointing out that life on earth is not threatened at all. Whenever computer-generated simulations take us to the end, microbes always adapt and endure. Life will continue; it just won't be our life (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 43).

21. The term *Capitalocene* seems to have been coined simultaneously by several people, including Haraway (see *Staying with the Trouble*, 184–85 n. 50).

ending we already know. This is the way the world ends. Anthropocene becomes eschatology.[22] Since Haraway emphasizes the importance of the stories with which we think, a story whose ending is already known cannot inspire hope and motivate behavioral change. When the story is already written, all we can do is keep turning the pages as the inevitable unfolds.

Instead of an ending, Haraway invites us to imagine a beginning: "What if the doleful doings of the Anthropocene and the unworldings of the Capitalocene are the last gasps of the sky gods, not guarantors of the finished future, game over? It matters which thoughts think thoughts. We must think!"[23] For Haraway, we must not think about our current crises in ways that still focus on the human and occlude the multispecies realities of living in this world; nor can we approach the problems with hopelessness and despair. Part of this rethinking is a reckoning with religions and the destructive role of certain theologies. Turning our attention back to wisdom literature, Haraway calls us to ask: What thoughts do the stories in wisdom help us think; what stories does wisdom help us tell? What thoughts can we carry with us; what stories do we need to leave behind?

## Wisdom Belongs to Earth

When the pandemic lockdown began in March 2020, I ordered a pound of red wigglers. The species (*Eisenia fetida*) is not native to Pennsylvania, where I live. I did not buy the worms to release into my neglected gardens. I bought them to begin composting; I bought them so they would eat my garbage. Then, I found myself largely confined to my home with a man, a child, and my companion species: sundry houseplants, two bird dogs (a Brittany Spaniel and a Red Setter), various crickets and spiders that inhabit the netherworlds of the basement, bats who have taken up residence in the eaves and whose dark and sharp smell fills the crawlspaces in the attic every morning as they settle in for sleep, and roughly one thousand worms.

The Bible only occasionally turns its attention to the little worm, but a noteworthy collection of those times occurs in the book of Job. In an early speech where Job describes his profound suffering, he gives his readers this stunning image: "My flesh is clothed with worms and clumps of dirt" (Job

---

22. Haraway enumerates eight reasons for rejecting the term *Anthropocene*, and this is number eight (*Staying with the Trouble*, 49).

23. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 57.

7:5).[24] The Testament of Job will later present Job as actually covered in worms, crawling over his body, feeding on the pus from his open wounds. But in the biblical book, the image may be literal in a different way. Not some kind of living vermi-cloak but a reference to the final place where all people go, the grave. As the verse continues: "My days are swifter than a loom, and come to an end without hope" (7:6). All bodies will die and will be buried in the soil, to be consumed by worms. The association between the worm and the grave obtains through most of Job's references to the worm (17:14, 21:26, 24:20). Another related image is also spoken by Bildad, where the worm is a symbol of human insignificance in the eyes of God. People are equated twice to worms: "How righteous can a man be before God? … how much less a man, who is a worm [רמה], and a mortal, who is a worm [תולעה]!" (Job 25:4a, 6).[25] Although figurative here (the person is a worm, metaphorically speaking), there is an underlying reality that is clear in the context of mortality. Certainly the worm will, through consumption in the grave, turn human flesh into worm flesh. Perhaps not now, but all of humanity will be worm. The worm in Job is a stark lesson in human transience and insignificance.

These passages where the worm crawls into the book of Job, in its reality and in its symbolism, are part of the poetry of wisdom and underscore one of the core components of wisdom theology: "wisdom belongs to earth."[26] As an extension of his exploration of the personification of wisdom as a woman, especially in but not limited to Proverbs, von Rad explores what he calls the "self-revelation of creation."[27] Throughout the wisdom corpus, wisdom is figured as both a part of creation and that through which the rest of creation emerges. Whereas some may argue that the primary purpose of poetry is aesthetic and emotive, von Rad cautions against dismissing the ideas contained in these passages as merely figurative. For von Rad, such passages describe "a real, cosmological process, namely as the bestowal of something special on creation."[28] The world,

---

24. Bible translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

25. Job 25:6, in synonymous parallelism, uses two different Hebrew words for "worm." English translations often attempt to preserve the flavor of the poetry by translating the words differently. The NRSV, for example, translates the first "worm" (*rimah*) as "maggots"; it translates the same word as "worm" in Job 7:6.

26. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 160.

27. See especially chapter 9, which is titled "The Self-Revelation of Creation," in von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 144–76.

28. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 156.

then, speaks in wisdom and can instruct. In Job, not just worms but plants and other animals are pedagogues:

> But indeed ask the animals,[29] and they will teach you;
>     the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
> ask the earth, and it will teach you;
>     and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
> Who among all of these do not know
>     that the hand of the Lord has made this? (Job 12:7–9)

As von Rad notes (specifically about Ps 148, but he then likens the psalm to Job 12), this is "not simply poetic exuberance, but the idea of a real witness emanating from the world."[30]

Divine wisdom emanating from the world, present in every bird and blade of grass, witnessed by every fish and worm, can serve to reconfigure creation theology as presented in the myths of Gen 1–3. In the creation accounts, God is responsible for the creation of human and nonhuman alike but also sets up a hierarchy where humans rank above all of the other elements of the created world. In wisdom's creation theology, the hierarchy is at least called into question, since only human beings are called on to learn from the rest of the world (the worm apparently needs no such lesson). In Job especially, the order between animals and people is reversed. In Gen 2, God brings the animals to Adam to be named; in Job 38–41, God brings Job to the animals to be schooled.[31]

As James Crenshaw notes, "One of the nicest features of von Rad's discussion of Israel's wisdom is the section on creation's self-revelation."[32] Such sentiment has been repeated in the decades that have followed, as

---

29. The word here is actually *behemoth* and may be a foreshadowing of the monster pedagogue employed by God in God's speech from the whirlwind. Although animals clearly have lessons to teach, what exactly those lessons are is not always so clear. See Samuel E. Ballentine, *"Look at Me and Be Appalled": Essays on Job, Theology, and Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 139–40; Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible*, 132–39.

30. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 162.

31. Von Rad argues that creation itself answers Job's questions in God's speech from the whirlwind (*Wisdom in Israel*, 163). The inversion between Gen 2 and Job 38–41 is noted by Ballentine, *"Look at Me and Be Appalled,"* 143.

32. Crenshaw, "*Wisdom in Israel*: A Review," 305. However, Crenshaw cautions that von Rad's own "enthusiasm runs unchecked" here; he has a good insight but undermines it by pushing it to the extreme. Specifically, he disagrees with von Rad in his assertion that creation itself will answer Job.

many scholars acknowledge their debt to von Rad in his identification and articulation of this dimension of wisdom literature. Similarly, Roland Murphy identifies the "dynamic relationship between humans and their environment"[33] as one of the most important contributions to the understanding of wisdom literature in von Rad's work. "In a sense, this is a 'worldly' understanding, an appreciation of the autonomy, the independence, of created things.… The autonomy of creation is recognized for what it can teach humans about themselves, about God's creation, and even about God's own self."[34] More recently, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel notes that von Rad "opened up a theological and religious dimension of Israel's history that had barely been considered up to that point in time," which, for her, constitutes a revolution in theological thinking.[35]

A wisdom that belongs to earth, a divine experienced in the dirt, human beings as just one creature among a vast array: these aspects of wisdom literature would seem to answer the call of posthumanist theorists such as Haraway to think (and therefore act) in ways that cultivate "response-ability." Wisdom literature has increasingly been brought into ecological theology and ethics, especially as focalized by von Rad's astute observations about how these texts reflect a worldview grounded in the role of experience of the world, the dynamic relationship between all of the elements in the world, and the self-revelation of wisdom in material creation.[36] As von Rad observes,

> the most characteristic feature of her [Israel's] understanding of reality lay, in the first instance, in the fact that she believed man to stand in a quite specific, highly dynamic, existential relationship with his environment. Man—and it was always the individual—regarded himself as bound in a circle of the most varied, outward-looking relationships, in which he was sometimes a subject and sometimes an object.[37]

---

33. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 113.

34. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 113.

35. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, "The Return of Wisdom," *ThTo* 69 (2012): 157.

36. For representative examples, see Celia Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Norman Habel, "The Implications of God Discovering Wisdom in Earth," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 281–97. Habel expands further in *Finding Wisdom in Nature: An Eco-theological Reading of the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014). Elizabeth A. Johnson grounds her entire work in Job 12. See Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the Love of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

37. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 301.

After their survey of the literature, Ananda Geyser-Fouche and Bernice Serfontein conclude, "One could ask if we can take any practical guidelines form the rich images that the wisdom literature offers. Indeed we can, and the sense of interaction with nature and with God is central in such a perspective."[38]

This dynamic interaction does not only speak of the harmony between humanity and the rest of earth's inhabitants. This harmony can and does break down. For example, for von Rad, Qohelet has stepped outside the dialogue between human and world; the world can no longer speak to him about its organizing principles, and he can no longer listen to its wisdom. Consequently, "The world, like a monster, presses in on him and challenges him."[39] Proverbs also warns of catastrophe in the form of a whirlwind for failing to heed God's wisdom (Prov 1:24–27). Von Rad notes, "The loss of this organizing voice will have catastrophic consequences. Horror, terror, distress will come upon men. They will be thrown back upon themselves and will have to live by their own initiative, that is, they will destroy themselves."[40] This warning is heard not just in Qohelet's despair or in Proverbs' address. According to von Rad, this message is also forcibly evident in the book of Job, where the created order is also a moral order. Creation's self-revelation speaks and "resounds everywhere; it is impossible to escape it; and the way in which it presents man with the decision between life and death is something like an outright ultimatum."[41] To turn from von Rad's observations to posthumanist questions, if "wisdom belongs to earth," what happens when we destroy earth? Trouble comes, and the world like a monster will press upon us.

## Compost and Other Bibles

Worms are agents of transformation. They consume organic material and change it into vermicompost, an addition to soil that is nutrient rich and microbially active.[42] In short, the digestive process of the worm does not

---

38. Geyser-Fouche and Serfontein, "Creation Order in Sapiential Theology," 4.

39. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 236.

40. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 161.

41. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 163.

42. Rhonda Sherman, *The Worm Farmer's Handbook: Mid- to Large-Scale Vermicomposting for Farms, Businesses, Municipalities, Schools, and Institutions* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2018), 8.

produce noxious waste but instead an essential component of soil, contributing to its health and boosting its ability to support plant life. In the world, worms aid decomposition and create the topsoil. In my bin, I feed my worms kitchen scraps, including eggshells and coffee grounds, potato peels and apple cores. I wrap these scraps in newspaper, the fiber of felled trees. I drain the bin of worm tea, with which I water my plants. I harvest castings, which now ring my houseplants and nurture my herb garden. I read in my worms lessons about the cycles of nature, attuning me to patterns of consumption and waste.

In communities that hold the Bible to be sacred, interpreting the worm has continued to shape religiosity. For example, writing about miracle stories, exegetical works, apocryphal acts, theological treatises, and ethical writings that emerge in the first few centuries of Christianity, Patricia Cox Miller identifies an approach to theological and ethical reflection so intermeshed with animal figuration that she calls it "the zoological imagination." While acknowledging the "rhetoric of domination and superiority" in these early Christian texts, Miller demonstrates how this zoological imagination serves as a "countercurrent of images and stories that implicitly questioned the animal-human binary."[43] Early Christian writers used animals to think with in their contemplation of God and their evaluation of ethical behavior, thus mirroring the wisdom texts in the construction of the animal pedagogue. As Basil of Caesarea says in the *Hexaemeron*, "all things bear traces of the wisdom of the Creator."[44] Consequently, all things but especially animals, act as "natural pedagogues." In their teaching, these stories are "designed to entice human beings into a shared moral economy"[45] with other animals. Since the world was created according to an ordered design, infused with divine wisdom, this wise design then can be detected even in the least of creatures.

Augustine lauds the worm. In a passage that begins with a brief assertion of human superiority, he then proceeds to speak at length of the beautifully formed body of the worm and to discuss how the worm's soul is perfectly in concert with its body. In this way, the worm becomes the vehicle of God's presence in the world, revealing the beauty and order of divine creation,

---

43. Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 4.

44. As quoted in Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 104. The reference is to Basil's *Hexam.* 9.3.4, where Basil is discussing animals' natural instincts, which display several important virtues.

45. Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 104–5.

teaching an important theological lesson about the relationship between spiritual and material reality. In other texts in Augustine's corpus, as well as in the exegesis of Origen, the worm serves in discussions of the virgin birth, the incarnation, and angelology.[46] For example, both Origen and Augustine consider Jesus's quotation of the first verse of Ps 22 to be an invocation of the entire psalm, including verse 6 [Heb. v. 7]: "But I am a worm, and not a man." Whereas this verse is an expression of the profound suffering of the speaker, a suffering that includes humiliation and shame, understanding these words as spoken by Jesus transforms their meaning for the church fathers. The identification with the worm is not a statement of insignificance or even degradation for Augustine and Origen, but actually gestures to Jesus's divinity. By naming himself "worm," Jesus calls himself "God." The worm's biblical signification is transmuted and transformed, becoming a site not just for thinking of mortality but for immortality as well.

For the early church fathers, the worm lives in dynamic, supernatural relationship with spiritual realties. In my bin, my worms live in other kinds of dynamic multispecies environments. I do not just keep worms. Somehow, other critters have found their way to my worm bin: enchytraeids (white worms), springtails, sowbugs, mites, vinegar and fruit flies. Not to mention the microbes, too diverse and numerous to name. It is, in fact, this microbial population that makes vermicompost different from and more valuable than regular compost.[47] Invisible beings do animate and enrich the world. Haraway, ever attuned to the multispecies systems in which we are all enmeshed, turns time and again to the compost pile, the place of "unexpected collaborations and combinations,"[48] where assorted substances and innumerable bodies mix and mingle and heat up to transform into something new. Worms are essential players in the mix. "I compost my soul in this hot pile. The worms are not human; their undulating bodies ingest and reach, and their feces fertilize worlds. Their tentacles make string figures."[49] In her work *Staying with the Trouble*, the word *com-post* replaces the word *posthuman*; *com-post* is rich not only in nutrients and microorganisms but also in multispecies stories.[50] Instead of posthuman, we are all compost: the human from the humus, the אדם

---

46. Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 156–61.
47. Sherman, *Worm Farmer's Handbook*, 30.
48. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.
49. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 34–35.
50. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 11.

from the אדמה.[51] The one who will, in the end, return to the worm. Here, wisdom remains wise.

However, in other ways, wisdom literature's animal pedagogue (whether worm or locust or ostrich) fails to generate the kind of stories necessary for "multispecies response-ability inside on-going trouble,"[52] fails to meet the challenge of living together on a damaged planet. The site of failure is evident as soon as one examines the animals in these texts using Haraway's hermeneutic of curiosity and ethic of visiting.[53] She writes,

> Visiting is not an easy practice; it demands the ability to find others actively interesting, even or especially others most people already claim to know all too completely, to ask questions that one's interlocutors truly find interesting, to cultivate the wild virtue of curiosity, to retune one's ability to sense and respond—and to do all this politely! What is this sort of politeness? It sounds more than a little risky. Curiosity always leads its practitioners a bit too far off the path, and that way lie stories.[54]

To stay with the trouble, one must be present and cultivate an epistemology of situated knowledge. What do we learn when we go visiting the animals of wisdom literature, first in their biblical habitat and then in their earthly home?

In her extensive analysis of animal figures in the book of Proverbs, Tova Forti notes that the animals held out as models of proper behavior to be emulated by people do not always act, either in other biblical texts or in reality, in exemplary ways.[55] The lessons these various creatures teach depend on highlighting one aspect of their complex lives, ignoring the rest. For example, in Prov 6, lazy people are sent to the ant "to see its ways, and become wise" (Prov 6:6). The word *ant* (נמלה) connects to Prov 30:25, the only other use of the word in the Hebrew Scriptures.[56] Proverbs 30 is replete with animals in

---

51. Haraway notes that many languages make this connection. See *Staying with the Trouble*, 11, 169–70 n. 3.

52. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 16.

53. Haraway is drawing on the work of Vinciane Despret, who in turn is building on the work of ethologist Thelma Rowell.

54. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 127.

55. Tova L. Forti, "Animal Images in the Didactic Rhetoric of the Book of Proverbs," *Bib* 77 (1996): 52; see also Forti, *Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), especially ch. 4.

56. Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*, trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 224–30.

addition to the ant: leeches, ravens, eagles, snakes, badgers, locusts, lizards, lions, roosters, goats. In both passages, the ant is weak and without a leader but industrious nevertheless (Prov 6:6–11; 30:25). Yet, this observation is rooted in stereotype, with the negative features of the animal unremarked. Notably, ants can be destructive pests, particularly dangerous to the Israelites' granaries. In addition, as Forti points, the writer of the proverb has missed what any nature observer would know: ants are not without a "highly regimented social order," which includes a clear division of labor between the queen, the males, and the females. The teacher "considers the human need for hierarchical order to be in some fashion inferior to what he perceives as the ant's autonomy and institutive wisdom."[57] Yet, the teacher is simply wrong. Even more, behavioral scientists have demonstrated that ants are not all that industrious, since only a small percentage work continuously, and about a quarter never contribute to the work of the colony at all.[58] Adding to the work of Forti, Bernd Schipper notes that the author of this proverb "was not concerned to describe the animal kingdom accurately but instead to give an example of the important concept of intrinsic motivation."[59] So, the text may be positioning animals as the center of the moral universe, but it does so by relying on stereotypes of animal figures that bear only partial resemblance to the real animals themselves. Reading through an animal-studies lens demands that we pay attention to the animal—not the figure of the animal but the actual creature. Wisdom literature fails here.

Such failure can be found in the works of the early church fathers as well. To return to the worm: The early church fathers, who trace out lofty theological truths on its undulating body, only find such truths because of gross misunderstandings of the biology of worms. For example, Augustine and Origen see within the worm a sign of the virgin birth and the incarnation because they do not think that worms have sex in order to reproduce.[60] Augustine also employs the worm to demonstrate "that the soul does not have spatial extension, and cannot be confined to place or body."[61] In his

---

57. Forti, *Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs*, 104.

58. Schipper cites the research of Daniel Charbonneau and Anna Dornhaus on ant activity (Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 226).

59. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 226.

60. Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 161–63. This misperception was common in antiquity. Worms are hermaphroditic, but they do not self-generate. Instead, they lock together in pairs to exchange sperm (see Sherman, *Worm Farmer's Handbook*, 47).

61. Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 160.

argument, he recounts an afternoon when he and his students cut a worm
to pieces and observed that each piece remained animated and crawled
away.[62] Although Augustine uses an anecdote of observation, he could not
have watched the worm for very long before he was swept away in spiri-
tual speculation; otherwise, he would have seen the worm die. These early
church fathers fail in simple natural knowledge; even though they are using
the figure of the worm to reflect both theologically and ethically, they do
not see the real worm at all.[63] No matter how much attention Augustine
or Origen pays to the body of the worm, it is always at the service of their
metaphysical perspective. The worm is never valued simply for being a
worm. Like with wisdom literature, the decentering of the human being
at work in these texts remains important. However, at what point does the
metaphysical thrust serve to erase the animal bodies and therefore under-
cut the decentering otherwise at work?

The question is not just a simple one of a mistaken understanding of
an animal behavior; rather, it cuts to the heart of wisdom's epistemology.
Wisdom literature is, supposedly, rooted in empirical observation. Cer-
tainly, there is much about the social world that is reflected in these texts.
However, the sages' ideas about the animal seem to precede any actual
observation of the animal, so much so that it is reasonable to suggest that
their proverbs are not based on observation. Von Rad provides a crucial
intervention here. He opens *Wisdom in Israel* with reflections on both the
necessity and complexity of "experience." Specifically, he contends that
experience is not individual and unmediated; rather, it is communal, gen-
erational, presupposing prior knowledge. He writes, "Indeed it can become
experience only if I can fit it into the existing context of my understanding
of myself and of the world."[64] Experience is crucial to the wisdom corpus,
but presupposition precedes, even creates, this experience. The animal
pedagogue demonstrates this point: even if the sages did watch worms
and ants and leeches, the results of these observations were predetermined

---

62. Augustine, *De quantitate animae*, in Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 159–60.
If the worm is cut below its clitellum (the raised band that encircles its body), the tail
will die, but the rest of the worm will survive; however, if the worm is cut above the
clitellum or otherwise cut to pieces, all of the parts of the worm will die.

63. These are but two examples of wide-ranging misunderstandings of and out-
right fantasies about animal biology used in theological and ethical reflection in the
period of the early church.

64. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3.

by previously held ideologies.[65] Perhaps wisdom does not really enshrine an empirical epistemology after all.[66]

Jacques Derrida warns against the animal as sign and symbol, famously focusing attention on his little cat, the one who startles him and shames him by observing him naked. "I must immediately make it clear, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn't the *figure* of a cat."[67] Other animal theorists, such as Aaron Gross, reiterate the warning.[68] From her dog Cayenne to northern hairy-nosed wombats, from racing pigeons to the mares whose urine provides the estrogens for hormone replacement therapies, Haraway's entire oeuvre is about exploring the lives of other creatures, understanding their ways of knowing and being in the world, untangling the knots of interdependence with other creatures, and tracing their complex histories.[69] The zoological imagination of the teachers of wisdom and the later writers of Christian theology remains caught in the figure, rooted in stereotype and fantasy.[70] Rather than buttressing ecological arguments, then, such figuration can erase the reality of the animal, making the use of animal imagery a dangerous partner in perpetrating violence. These kinds of animal stories proliferate, while actual animals die, slaughtered and driven into extinction. It matters what words we use to think thoughts; it matters how we attend to other bodies.

---

65. Aaron Gross makes a similar argument about the use of animals in the construction of theories of religion. For one example, see Gross's analysis of Durkheim's use of animals. Much like Proverbs' ants lack social organization, so do Durkheim's animals, despite all evidence to the contrary (Gross, *Question of the Animal and Religion*, 72).

66. Other scholars have questioned wisdom's empiricism on other grounds. For a recent example, Michael Fox emphatically avers, "Contrary to scholarly consensus, it [wisdom's epistemology] is not empiricism," since many proverbs are based in faith and not observation. Qohelet is a possible exception, since the writer genuinely seems to be building knowledge on the foundation of examination. See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 963, 967.

67. Derrida, *Animal That Therefore I Am*, 6.

68. Gross, *Question of the Animal and Religion*.

69. Haraway even critiques Derrida for not being curious enough about the life of his own little black cat (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 20).

70. While acknowledging the problem, Miller argues for another way in which animal imagery, even allegory, can be viewed. She argues that these animal figures can be read relationally rather than hierarchically, highlighting rather than occluding the animal (Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal*, 18).

We live in troubled times. Neither retreats into metaphysical flights of fancy, nor nostalgia for edenic pasts, nor despair at apocalyptic futures will provide the narratives we need. Instead, Haraway recommends "staying with the trouble," by which she means remaining present "as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings."[71] Such staying present requires both love and knowledge, joy and mourning, art and stories and science. As discussed above, Haraway rejects the term *Anthropocene* to name our current moment, as it is a word that tells the wrong kind of stories. Instead, she suggests the *Chthulucene* as the name of the "timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth."[72] Her wordplay brings two Greek words together: χθών and καινός. Καινός holds us in the present moment; χθών digs our toes into the dark and loamy soil. "Chthonic ones are beings of the earth.… Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one, they write and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. They are who are."[73] In her appropriation of God's name (Exod 3:14), Haraway opens up the Scripture to composting transformations. If wisdom truly belongs to earth, is this not more fully what such a statement means? Is this not what we need it to mean?

Von Rad is not a posthumanist thinker; neither are the writers of biblical wisdom. Yet, there are elements in wisdom and in von Rad's analysis of wisdom that can be productively brought into a posthumanist understanding. At the same time, there are aspects of wisdom and of von Rad's analysis of wisdom that fail from a posthumanist perspective. The sage's use of the animal pedagogue fails the crucial challenge sounded by Derrida and even more forcibly by Haraway. When we consider creation theology in wisdom literature, we are following the lead of the wisdom writers and still thinking of creation in terms of its use value. Wisdom only calls attention to the animals, and then only imperfectly and incorrectly, to immediately point away from them and point to something else—a lesson about God, about ethics, about mores. There is something here that could be activated to change the human relationship to the nonhuman world. But in none of these texts is the animal allowed simply to be. Wisdom

---

71. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.
72. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.
73. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

based in experiential knowledge can in fact become, as von Rad warns us, "one enormous deception" if we use experience as an excuse to disregard other experiences, both our own and other people's.[74]

Von Rad does not extend this counsel to other animals, but posthumanism insists that we do. The challenge is to allow the worm its own experience. The worm is not valuable because it teaches a lesson about mortality, or because it points to a perfect creator, or because it teaches me my place in the world. The worm is not even valuable because it consumes my organic kitchen waste and produces rich additions for my soil. The worm is valuable because it is a worm. This particular worm is valuable because in this vast and ancient universe, it has never existed before and it will never exist again. It holds eternity in its quivering body, as importantly, and as uniquely, as I hold it in mine. Yes, there is value in wisdom; but unless we move beyond it to recognize the animal stripped of its use value, stripped even of its divine creation, if we cannot see the worm and know that it is enough, then really we cannot see the worm at all. We are not looking at it but through it. Posthuman, postdivine, post–all of the posts that can possibly be imagined. Beyond all thought and theology, there is a red wiggler, here, alive in my hand.

## Bibliography

Ballentine, Samuel E. *"Look at Me and Be Appalled": Essays on Job, Theology, and Ethics*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Crenshaw, James L. "*Wisdom in Israel* (Gerhard von Rad): A Review." Pages 300–311 in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writing on Old Testament Wisdom*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995.

Deane-Drummond, Celia. *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

Dell, Katharine J. "The Significance of the Wisdom Tradition in the Ecological Debate." Pages 56–69 in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*. Edited by David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoutou. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

---

74. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 4.

Ferrando, Francesca. "The Party of the Anthropocene: Post-humanism, Environmentalism and the Post-anthropocentric Paradigm Shift." *RBA* 4 (2016): 159–73.

———. "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations." *Existenz* 8 (2013): 26–32.

Forti, Tova L. *Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

———. "Animal Images in the Didactic Rhetoric of the Book of Proverbs." *Bib* 77 (1996): 48–63.

Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB 18B. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Geyser-Fouche, Ananda, and Bernice Serfontein. "Creation Order in Sapiential Theology: An Ecological-Evolutionary Perspective on Cosmological Responsibility." *TS* 75 (2019): 1–10.

Gross, Aaron S. *The Question of the Animal and Religion: Theoretical Stakes, Practical Implications*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Habel, Norman. *Finding Wisdom in Nature: An Eco-theological Reading of the Book of Job*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014.

———. "The Implications of God Discovering Wisdom in Earth." Pages 281–97 in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*. Edited by Ellen van Wolde. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." Pages 149–81 in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

———. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

———. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hassan, Ihab. "Prometheus as a Performer: Toward a Post-humanist Culture?" *GR* 31 (1977): 830–50.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the Love of God*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Koosed, Jennifer L., ed. *The Bible and Posthumanism*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.

Levinson, Bernard M. "Reading the Bible in Nazi Germany: Gerhard von Rad's Attempt to Reclaim the Old Testament for the Church." *Int* 62 (2008): 238–54.

Miller, Patricia Cox. *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth. "The Return of Wisdom." *ThTo* 69 (2012): 156–65.

Moore, Stephen D., ed. *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

———. "Wisdom and Creation." *JBL* 104 (1985): 3–11.

Perdue, Leo G. *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.

Priest, John F. "Humanism, Skepticism, and Pessimism in Israel." *JAAR* 36 (1968): 311–26.

———. "Wisdom and Humanism." Pages 263–79 in *The Answers Lie Below: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Edmund Toombs*. Edited by Henry O. Thompson. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

———. "Some Aspects of the Old Testament World View." Pages 144–65 in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

———. "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation." Pages 131–43 in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972.

Schaefer, Donovan O. *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

Schipper, Bernd U. *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*. Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

Sherman, Rhonda. *The Worm Farmer's Handbook: Mid- to Large-Scale Vermicomposting for Farms, Businesses, Municipalities, Schools, and Institutions*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2018.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1975.

Stone, Ken. *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018.

Strommen, Hannah M. *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida*. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018.

Telfer, Charles Kelly. "Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971): A Reluctant Modernist's Approach to Wisdom Literature." *UCC* 5 (2019): 191–205.

Wolfe, Carey. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Zimmerli, Walther. "The Place and the Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology." Pages 314–26 in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. Edited by James L. Crenshaw. New York: Ktav, 1976.

Part 4

*Weisheit in Israel* in Broader Contexts

# Wisdom in Mesopotamia in
# Relation to von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel*

## Edward L. Greenstein

The world goes as it is wont to go [עולם כמנהגו נוהג].
—b. Avod. Zar. 54b

As it is set, so humanity goes [*kīma šaknamma illik*(*am*) *tēnešētum*].
—"Dialogue between a Fellow and His Friend" (*CT* 46.44, ii.5′–6′)[1]

## Introduction

"A whole unique world of experiences was opened up by the wise men of Israel. It would certainly be interesting to reappraise, from this standpoint, the characteristics of other forms of ancient Near Eastern wisdom, especially those of Egypt and Babylonia."[2] This brief statement, presented near the end of Gerhard von Rad's classic study of wisdom in ancient Israel, embeds a number of theses or assumptions:[3] (1) that wisdom reflects a distinctive way of looking at the world; (2) that such a *Weltanschauung* draws on personal experience; (3) that wisdom was promulgated in Israel by a class of sages; (4) that wisdom was a cultural and/or literary phenomenon elsewhere in the ancient Near East, especially in Egypt and Babylonia; and (5) that there would be some value in reappraising ancient Near Eastern representations of wisdom in the light of Israelite expressions of wisdom.

---

I thank Dr. Takayoshi Oshima for his helpful comments.

1. Michael P. Streck and Nathan Wasserman, "Dialogues and Riddles: Three Old Babylonian Wisdom Texts," *Iraq* 73 (2011): 121.

2. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 318.

3. Compare Raymond C. Van Leeuwen's contribution to this volume.

Von Rad's suggestion, to reexamine ancient Near Eastern wisdom through the prism of what has been gathered concerning Israelite wisdom, seems, on the surface, like a commendable project. Nevertheless, based on von Rad's own positions, articulated elsewhere in his book, one might do better to turn the comparison around and reappraise Israelite wisdom in the light of ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Although he barely delves into wisdom outside Israel, von Rad acknowledges substantial borrowing of wisdom "from neighboring cultures," going so far as to suggest that Israel was prompted to consider "the real importance of many of the basic human questions" under the stimulus of "foreign wisdom."[4] Israel, von Rad claims, saw the world similarly to "other ancient peoples."[5] But Israel, as reflected in the Hebrew Bible, of course, adapted and transformed the broadly humanistic notions it encountered according to its own spiritual experiences and understandings.[6] Most of von Rad's book is devoted to spelling out the elements of Israelite wisdom in the context of what he portrays as Israel's distinctive worldview, as it evolved from a more pan-sacral perspective in the premonarchic and early monarchic periods to a more "secular" outlook in the Solomonic and post-Solomonic age.[7] The implication is that influence from outside Israel was responsible for the more secular and worldly aspects of biblical wisdom.

If, however, wisdom in Israel is derived to a significant degree from wisdom from elsewhere, it would seem that the prior project ought to be a study of ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Perhaps, as Morton Smith suggested (with some justice) in 1952, Israel's theological worldview was not very different from the one that was current in its wider milieu.[8] Only by delineating the features of wisdom in the ancient Near East can the adaptations and contributions of Israel be discerned through compari-

---

4. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 317.

5. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5.

6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 317.

7. E.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 58–59; see also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:37–38; John Barton, "Gerhard von Rad on the World-View of Early Israel," *JTS* 35 (1984): 301–23.

8. Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135–47. See in relation to wisdom literature, e.g., Christoph Uehlinger, "Das Hiob-Buch im Kontext der orientalischen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*, ed. Thomas Krüger et al. (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2007), 97–163.

son and contrast. Such a study needs to consider a bundle of overlapping questions. Most fundamentally, is there such a phenomenon as wisdom? And if so, what were its forms and characteristics? What were its concepts and values? In what ways does wisdom represent the general outlook of a culture? Was there a wisdom tradition, and if so, who were its tradents? Ancient Near Eastern wisdom has been studied in great depth in recent decades. In the present essay, I shall focus on Mesopotamian wisdom and try to answer some of the questions that engage a scholar of ancient Israelite wisdom. In the end, I shall suggest that the presentation of Israelite wisdom by von Rad should be reevaluated in view of what we have learned about what I believe can be usefully regarded as Mesopotamian wisdom.

Wisdom became a category in Assyriological studies about a century ago under the influence of biblical studies.[9] In the still standard compendium *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960), Wilfred Lambert asserts, "'Wisdom' is strictly a misnomer as applied to Babylonian literature. As used for a literary genre, the term belongs to Hebraic studies and is applied to Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes."[10] Von Rad had characterized wisdom as a real though somewhat inchoate phenomenon, both in Israel and in the ancient Near East, and indeed, some biblical scholars have questioned its distinctiveness altogether.[11] For the diverse biblical corpus, however, there are recognizable "family resemblances" among the specimens, embracing some common vocabulary, a set of literary forms, and a panoply of themes, all oriented toward the attainment of a successful life.[12] One can place

---

9. Nathan Wasserman, "Weisheitsliteratur (Wisdom Literature). A. In Mesopotamien," *RlA* 15 (2016): 51.

10. *BWL*, 1.

11. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 7. E.g., Mark Sneed, "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?," *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71; Sneed, "'Grasping after the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, ed. Mark Sneed, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 39–67; Will Kynes, "The Modern Scholarly Wisdom Tradition and the Threat of Pan-sapientialism: A Case Report," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 11–38; Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Stuart Weeks, "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–23.

12. Jennie Grillo, "The Wisdom Literature," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*, ed. John Barton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 182–83.

more emphasis on form than on topic, or on rhetoric than on values—or vice versa—but there is at least a heuristic advantage to treating certain texts—and themes—as belonging to wisdom.[13]

Accordingly, Lambert compiled a corpus of Mesopotamian literature that until today is regarded as core. It comprises a slightly expanding set of genres, most of them dealing in one way or another with a set of recurrent ideas. A common purpose has been summarized by Paul-Alain Beaulieu: "The general tenor of wisdom texts is to teach the art of leading a successful life, in harmony with society and the divine will."[14] Although scholars tend to segregate wisdom into two types, didactic/practical and reflective/speculative,[15] the distinction fails to acknowledge their shared impetus. As James Crenshaw, for example, explains: "What could be more practical than learning how to deal with life's injustices?"[16] That is, deliberation on life's questions and coping with them (the reflective type) shares the goal of imparting practical advice about living (the didactic type).[17]

For the most part, the category of wisdom will include a diverse group of literary genres, such as proverbs, didactic instructions and advice, riddles, fables, disputations, topical dialogues, reflections on ideas and values,[18] but also such hymns, prayers, and narratives (from folktales to

---

13. See, e.g., Michael V. Fox, "Three Theses on Wisdom," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 69–86; Douglas B. Miller, "Wisdom in the Canon: Discerning the Early Intuition," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 87–113; Annette Schellenberg, "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctiveness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 115–43. For wisdom as having mainly heuristic value in the study of Mesopotamian literature, see recently Nili Samet, "Mesopotamian Wisdom," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, ed. Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020), 328–48, esp. 328–29.

14. Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford, SymS 36 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 3.

15. See recently Samet, "Mespotamian Wisdom."

16. James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom Traditions and the Writings," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 92.

17. See Sara Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue* (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1992), 31–32.

18. For the enumeration of genres, see *BWL*; Edmund I. Gordon, "A New Look at the Wisdom of Sumer and Akkad," *BO* 7 (1960): 122–52; Bendt Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 22–23; Samet, "Mesopotamian Wisdom."

epics) that are preoccupied with the sorts of ideas and values that engage the more typical wisdom forms. The wisdom genres tend to share what Nathan Wasserman describes as "a distinct conversational mode"[19]— fathers or teachers instructing sons or disciples; animals, plants, or sages in dialogue or contestation with each other; or proverbs, which sound like shared advice from one neighbor to another. But narratives that engage in social satire, such as "The Poor Man of Nippur," or dwell on fate and the human condition, such as the myth of Adapa the sage, or come to grips with the fact of our mortality, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh,[20] though excluded from Lambert's corpus, clearly partake of what we shall see can be legitimately termed as the wisdom tradition.

---

19. Wasserman, "Weisheitsliteratur," 51; see also Denninig-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 187.

20. For "The Poor Man of Nippur," see Baruch Ottervanger, *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, SAACT 12 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2016). The author of this version of the narrative was apparently acquainted with the Standard Babylonian version of Gilgamesh tablet X but seems also to satirize the early first-millennium wisdom text "Advice to a Prince" (*The Tale of the Poor Man*, x). Such satire is a clear mark of wisdom. For the myth of Adapa the sage, see Shlomo Izre'el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death*, MC 10 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001). For Adapa's reputation as a sage (*apkallu*), see *Adapa and the South Wind*, 1–4. For the Epic of Gilgamesh, see Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Lambert himself came to identify the advice given by Siduri to Gilgamesh in tablet X, with its *carpe diem* theme, shared by Qoh 9:7–9 and some other wisdom compositions, as wisdom. See Wilfred G. Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31–32; see also Bruce William Jones, "From Gilgamesh to Qoheleth," in *Scripture in Context III: The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*, ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990), 349–79; Nili Samet, "The Gilgamesh Epic and the Book of Qohelet: A New Look," *Bib* 96 (2015): 375–90. Samet argues for the influence of an unknown Aramaic version of Gilgamesh on Qoheleth. For the theme of growth in knowledge in Gilgamesh, see Benjamin R. Foster, "Gilgamesh: Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987), 21–42. For the theme of revealing esoteric knowledge to humankind, see Edward L. Greenstein, "The Retelling of the Flood Story in the Gilgamesh Epic," in *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin, BJS 320 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 197–204.

Recognizing a Wisdom Text

Certain literary genres, as stated, are understood to belong to the category of wisdom. The premier example is proverbs and the kindred genre of counsels or instructions. By no means a latecomer to Mesopotamian literature, wisdom in the form of the "Instructions of Šuruppak," which incorporates some proverbial expressions, dates from the twenty-sixth century BCE.[21] There is usually a nexus between a wisdom form and a wisdom theme.[22] Take, for example, a recently published Old Babylonian text.[23]

The composition is inscribed on a prism; it is not therefore a school exercise, which would have been written on a tablet. The partly broken text, which seems to have comprised about five hundred lines when complete, presents a dialogue between a father, identified toward the end as Atraḫasis ("Exceedingly Wise")—the flood hero, a sage (ummānu)—and his cynical son. Most instructional texts, more plentiful in Egypt than in Mesopotamia, are monologues. But this Old Babylonian dialogue, a hybrid combining instruction and dialogue—both typical wisdom genres—recalls another one, "The Instructions of Šūpē-awēli" or Šimā milka ("Heed the Counsel"), which is attested in the Middle Babylonian period at Emar, Ugarit, and Hattusha.[24] There the aging, perhaps dying, father proffers conventional advice to his son; and the son, in a manner reminiscent of Qoheleth's cynicism, berates the worth of his father's achievements, the advantage of his wealth, and the value of a brief life that ends in eternal death, saying, for example:

> Few are the days in which we eat (our) bread, but many will be the days
> in which our teeth will be idle.

---

21. Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, 2 vols. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1997), xvi–xvii.

22. See Giorgio Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 35–47.

23. Benjamin R. Foster and Andrew R. George, "An Old Babylonian Dialogue between a Father and His Son," *ZA* 110 (2020): 37–61. For a fragment see Michael P. Streck and Nathan Wasserman, "Mankind's Bitter Fate: The Wisdom Dialog BM 79111+," *JCS* 66 (2014): 39–47.

24. Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, WAW 29 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 81–128. The Old Babylonian origins of the composition are known from a catalogue of literary works from that period (*Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 82). The paternal protagonist may possibly be identified with Šuruppak or his son, the Sumerian flood hero, Ziusudra (see 115–16).

Few are the days in which we look at the Sun, but many will be the days in which we will sit in the shadows.[25]

In the Old Babylonian dialogue involving Atraḥasis, by contrast, the dialogue runs back and forth, as in the "Babylonian Theodicy" (see below and the book of Job). The father, who will at times adduce proverbs (§§3, 9), begins with what appears to be banal advice, but the son responds that more valuable than sage wisdom is the protection of a god (§2). The father affirms the principle of just retribution (§17), while the son raises issues of life's unfairness (e.g., §§14, 16), expressing a fatalistic outlook (e.g., §§4, 10, 18).[26] The two acknowledge that their dispute reflects a conflict of the generations (§§11–12). Yet both father and son display a high level of literacy, characteristic of Mesopotamian wisdom, as they differently assess the fate of the legendary character Etana, whose ride heavenward on an eagle partakes not a little of the fable genre.[27] In the end, out of frustration, the father levies a long series of curses on his recalcitrant son.

Considering both the form and content of this composition, it is no surprise that the text's distinguished editors classify it as "an important addition to the genre of wisdom literature."[28] As we shall see, wisdom is typically expressed in a diversified set of genres of Mesopotamian literature, although it shares much with other learned genres.

## Wisdom as a Concept

There are many terms to denominate wisdom and the wise in Mesopotamia. The Akkadian terms have been enumerated by Sweet.[29] The most general Akkadian term for wisdom is *nēmequ*, derived from *emēqu*, "to

---

25. Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 99, ll. 140′–141′.

26. For both of these as wisdom themes, see below.

27. Jamie R. Novotny, *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*, SAACT 2 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001). There is an Old Babylonian, as well as a Middle Assyrian, recension of this epic (*Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*, x). The entire narrative is fabulous, involving snakes and birds and plants, as well as humans and gods.

28. Foster and George, "Old Babylonian Dialogue," 38a; see also Streck and Wasserman, "Mankind's Bitter Fate."

29. Ronald F. G. Sweet, "The Sage in Akkadian Literature: A Philological Study," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 45–65.

be deep" (cf. Heb. עמק).[30] In Mesopotamian as well as in biblical thought, esoteric wisdom is located outside ordinary human reach, either high in the heavens or deep in the earth or sea.[31] This notion is epitomized in the following Sumerian proverb: "Like the remote heavens, has my hand ever reached them? Like the deep underworld, no one knows them."[32] This proverb appears in similar form in Sumerian proverb collections, in the Sumerian wisdom text on the vanity of life "Nothing Is of Value," in the Babylonian Dialogue between a Master and His Servant, and in several biblical passages (e.g., Job 11:7–9) and Ben Sira (1:3).[33] The most pertinent Mesopotamian passage relating the remoteness of the divine mind from human apprehension appears in the "Babylonian Theodicy": "The divine mind is as remote as the center of the heavens; comprehending it is very difficult; people cannot understand."[34]

Wisdom is a divine endowment, mostly said to be bestowed on kings.[35] Hammurabi, for example, attributes his success in governing the people

---

30. I have raised the possibility that the root חכ"ם in Hebrew, which is phonologically similar to עמ"ק, is etymologically related. See Edward L. Greenstein, "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen van Wolde, BibInt 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 261 n. 20. If so, Akkadian would have two related stems as well, *emēqu* and *ḫakāmu*. The stem *\*ḫ-k-m* would then have taken on the restricted sense of "be or grow wise" on the basis of the metaphor WISDOM IS DEPTH.

31. Greenstein, "Poem on Wisdom in Job 28."

32. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 303, ll. 16–17 of "The Ballad of Early Rulers." For the Akkadian parallel, see Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 134–35, ll. 10′, 12′.

33. Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 270, ll. 5–6 (see further below); *BWL*, 148–49, ll. 82–83; in addition to Greenstein, "Poem on Wisdom in Job 28," see esp. Frederick E. Greenspahn, "A Mesopotamian Proverb and Its Biblical Reverberations," *JAOS* 114 (1994): 33–38; Nili Samet, "'The Tallest Man Cannot Reach Heaven; the Broadest Man Cannot Cover Earth': Reconsidering the Proverb and Its Biblical Parallels," *JHS* 10.18 (2010): 1–13.

34. Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul bēl nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy*, ORA 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 164–65, ll. 256–57.

35. E.g., Sweet, "Sage in Akkadian Literature," 51–57; Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Sage in Sumerian Literature: A Composite Portrait," in Gammie and Perdue, *Sage in Israel*, 41–42; Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Tales of Two Sages—Towards an Image of the 'Wise Man' in Akkadian Writings," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, FRLANT 219 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 64–94, esp. 65–66. Perdue, in the introduction to *Scribes, Sages,*

of Sumer and Akkad to the wisdom (*nēmequm*) he has been granted (CH xxiv.57).[36] In the curses accompanying the law collection, in converse form, he invokes Ea, god of wisdom, to deprive anyone who would efface his inscription of wisdom (*nēmequm*) (CH xxvi.96–xxvii.4).[37] Hammurabi's son Samsuiluna cites the power that he received from the great gods and the wisdom (*nēmequm*) with which Ea had endowed him.[38] Over a millennium later, Nabonidus would style himself wise (*emqu*) and learned (*mūdū*), claiming to possess all manner of wisdom (*kal nēmequ*).[39]

Lambert maintains that *nēmequ* rarely refers to wisdom as an abstract concept, like Hebrew חכמה.[40] He claims that only in the epithet of Šiduri, "goddess of wisdom," in an incantation series,[41] does *nēmequ* denote wisdom in a general sense. Šiduri is of course the alewife who proffers sage advice to Gilgamesh in tablet 10 of the epic. Marduk's widespread epithet *bēl nēmeqi*, "lord of wisdom," best known from the title of the pious sufferer composition Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, "Let Me Praise the Lord of Wisdom," is taken by Lambert to refer specifically to Marduk's magical skills.[42] Considering the broad nature of Marduk's capabilities in the first tablet of Enuma Elish as the son of Ea, god of wisdom, and the paramount function of Marduk in Ludlul as an enforcer of justice, I am inclined to adopt a more sweeping understanding, following Takayoshi Oshima: "Because the main theme of this composition [Ludlul] is Marduk's power of punishment and salvation, … I suggest that by 'wisdom' (Akk. *nēmequ*), the narrator here is actually referring to Marduk's knowledge of moral

---

*and Seers*, 29, enumerates the following Mesopotamian monarchs who claimed to be "wise": Šulgi, Kudur-Mabuk, Hammurapi, Sargon II, Merodach-Baladan II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Aššurbanipal. There are others.

36. See Godfrey R. Driver and John C. Miles, *Babylonian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952–1955), 1:96–97. For the endowment of wisdom, using the phrase *mūdī igigallim*, "learned in wisdom," see CH iii 17 (Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 1:8–9).

37. Driver and Miles, *Babylonian Laws*, 1:102–3.

38. Douglas R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)*, RIME 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 373–74, ll. 20–22.

39. The passage is cited in Akkadian and translation in Sweet, "Sage in Akkadian Literature," 57 with n. 51.

40. *BWL*, 1; Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 31.

41. Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*, AfO 11 (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1958), 18, l. 173.

42. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*; see Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 19.

principles and to his power to judge things."[43] When kings style themselves as possessors of wisdom (*āḫiz nēmeqi*) and attribute this wisdom to the gods Ea and Marduk,[44] a broad concept of wisdom would seem to be indicated. This conclusion finds strong support in "The Scholars of Uruk," an Old Babylonian text published by Andrew George in 2009, which asserts that Ea "bestowed wisdom [*uznum*] upon my city, in the midst of my land he established eternal wisdom [*nēmequm dāri'um*]." Afterwards, it was the sages who transmitted wisdom and the scribal arts.[45]

Moreover, the wisdom (*nēmequ*) with which the god Ea endowed Adapa in the myth transformed him into a sage, an *apkallu*.[46] This wisdom is clearly native human intelligence, "a divine faculty," analogous to the "knowledge of good and evil" that the first humans acquired in the garden story of Genesis, whether or not there is a literary historical connection to the story of Adapa—the Mesopotamian symbol of humanity who gained wisdom and lost immortality.[47] The sages of Mesopotamia, the *apkallu* and

---

43. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems*, 169. Marduk is in the first tablet of Enuma Elish called *apkal ilāni*, "the sage among the gods." See Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, MC 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 54–55, l. 80. For references to Ea and Marduk as wise, see Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 39–43.

44. E.g., Stephen Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Koenigsinschriften*, VAB 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 62 (Nabopolassar no. 1, l. 41); Frauke Weierhäuser and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk (561 BC), Neriglissar (559–556 BC), and Nabonidus (555–539 BC), Kings of Babylon*, RINBE 2 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 39 (Neriglissar 2, l. 23). Compare this characterization of Ea in an inscription of Esarhaddon: "the god Ea, the wise [*eršu*], lord of wisdom [*bēl nēmeqi*], creator of [all] creatures, the one who fashions everything, whatever its name." See Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, RINAP 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 104, l. 4. Note the nexus between divine wisdom and creation, as we find in Enuma Elish and elsewhere—and compare such biblical passages as Prov 8:22–31. For kings styling themselves as possessors of wisdom, see, e.g., Maximilian Streck, *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh's*, VAB 7 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916), 32 (Assurbanipal, l. 123 variant; see n. l there); Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Koenigsinschriften*, 112 (Nebuchadnezzar no. 14, l. 4).

45. Yoram Cohen, "Why 'Wisdom'?: Copying, Studying, and Collecting Wisdom Literature in the Cuneiform World," in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity: Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images*, ed. Takayoshi M. Oshima with Susanne Kohlhaas, ORA 29 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 46.

46. Izre'el, *Adapa*, 9–10, ll. 4', 7'.

47. Izre'el, *Adapa*, 120; cf. 121, 124. For a judicious discussion and bibliography

the *ummānu*, were the heirs of Adapa, privileged with divinely revealed knowledge.[48] Wisdom, therefore, is the extent of divine knowledge that can be imparted to and known by people. The term for wisdom in Sumerian is accordingly *nam.kù.zu*, "pure/sacred knowledge," and it is an abstract term, formed with the prefix *nam*. As a Sumerian saying expresses it: "man's intelligence is from god."[49]

As such, wisdom is far from restricted to general knowledge and those works that one identifies as the wisdom genres. Many people with specialized knowledge are also in possession of wisdom. This includes technical know-how in engineering, astronomy, medicine, cultic functions, incantations and magic, and omens.[50] A Neo-Assyrian scholar enumerates such a wide range of skills in a letter which Victor Avigdor Hurowitz labels his "curriculum vitae."[51] It is especially in the areas of omen reading—whether in the heavens, in the entrails of animals, or in other worldly phenomena—that human access to divine knowledge is manifested. The underlying belief or idea is that the gods inscribe revealed knowledge in nature for humans to decipher and interpret, the way that one scribe inscribes and another reads cuneiform.[52] Accordingly, astrological omens are called "writing in the sky" (*šiṭir šamē*), and liver omens are figured as

---

on this question, see Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 317–19.

48. See, e.g., Jean-Jacques Glassner, "The Use of Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson, 4 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1995), 3:1815–16.

49. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* 1:310.

50. See Jan Dietrich, "Wisdom in the Cultures of the Ancient World: A General Introduction and Comparison," in Oshima, *Teaching Morality in Antiquity*, 6–7.

51. Hurowitz, "Tales of Two Sages," 68–71. For the expert in divination as a scholar, see, e.g., Elyze Zomer, *Corpus of Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian Incantations*, LAOS 9 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 70–72.

52. Eckart Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 21; Marc Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 9–11. E.g., Ashurbanipal credits the "wisdom" (*nēmequ*) of the gods Šamaš and Adad for his expertise in extispicy. See, e.g., the colophon to a liver omen text adduced in Ulla Koch-Westenholtz, *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Manzāzu, Padānu, and Pān Tākalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series Mainly from Aššurbanipal's Library* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2000), 29. It is primarily Šamaš who inscribes the sheep liver with omens.

"the writing-tablet of the gods" (*ṭuppi ilāni*).[53] The specialist reading an omen (*bārû*, "examiner"), for example, appeals to the oracular deities in prayer, asks them to inscribe a message on the entrails of an animal being sacrificed, then examines the organ and interprets the anticipated signs, following a traditional procedure and using the accumulated lore.[54]

It is therefore no wonder that the legendary sage Adapa becomes the paradigmatic exorcist (*āšipu*), that the complaint of the pious sufferer, Ludlul, was apparently written by a scholar (*ummānu*) who was an exorcist (*āšipu*), and that the quintessential wisdom composition, the "Babylonian Theodicy," was authored by an incantation priest (*mašmašu*) and a scholar (*ummānu*).[55] What becomes apparent is that the ancient scribe-scholars projected their understanding of their own position vis-à-vis society on to the relationship between the divine and mundane spheres. Compare this analogy made in a Neo-Assyrian astrological text: "The appearance of the great gods is a secret of heaven and earth; reading commentary [on it] is the secret of the scholar."[56] But we should not overstate it because the thought and behavior of the gods are, according to a prominent wisdom theme, beyond human comprehension (see further below). Scribes, too, are aware of their limitations.

### Wisdom as a Trans-generic Category

The diverse compositions that are identified as wisdom do not, as said above, belong to a single genre. Proverbs and instructions are character-istically wisdom—although not all the items in proverb collections are actually proverbs.[57] In studies of biblical wisdom, apart from proverbial

---

53. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries*, 21.

54. A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 212.

55. Amar Annus, *The Overturned Boat: Intertextuality of the Adapa Myth and the Exorcist Literature*, SAAS 24 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2016); Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 19, 121–24; Alan Lenzi, "The Language of Akkadian Prayers in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* and Its Significance within and beyond Mesopotamia," in *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels*, ed. Robert Rollinger and Erik Van Dongen (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 67.

56. For the text and its translation, see Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries*, 47.

57. The Sumerian proverb collections may include "phrases used in incanta-tions, prayers, cult, and curse formulae" (Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, xvi). See

literature and instructions, the most prominent type of Mesopotamian wisdom considered is the class of pious sufferer compositions.[58] These include the Sumerian "Man and His God," the Old Babylonian "Man and His God," the Middle Babylonian Ludlul bēl nēmeqi and its brief Syrian precursor, and the "Babylonian Theodicy" (from about 1000 BCE).[59] Whereas the theodicy is a dialogue on a manifestly sapiential theme, and therefore, as said above, quintessentially wisdom, the lengthy poem Ludlul is not as straightforwardly classifiable.

The speaker in Ludlul, once known as "the Babylonian Job,"[60] who is first named more than halfway through (tablet 3, l. 44), comes to understand that the vicissitudes he endures—social, physical, and moral—are the consequence of his offenses against the god Marduk. At first, the complainant expresses frustration that he cannot, through divination or other means, discover the causes of his affliction (tablet 2, ll. 4–8):

---

also Jacob Klein, "Mesopotamian Literature: Genesis Traditions, Wisdom Literature, and Lamentations" [Hebrew], in *The Literature of the Hebrew Bible: Introductions and Studies*, ed. Zipora Talshir (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2011), 2:554. That is in keeping with the purpose of the collections, which were not simply to assemble items belonging to the proverb genre but to serve as training resources for scribes. See Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, xix–xx; Bendt Alster, "Literary Aspects of Sumerian and Akkadian Proverbs," in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, CM 6 (Groningen: Styx, 1996), 1. Accordingly, on some school tablets proverbs are written on one side and lexical lists on the other (Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, xviii). See also Niek Veldhuis, "Sumerian Proverbs in Their Curricular Context," *JAOS* 120 (2000): 383–99.

58. See, e.g., Gerald L. Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamia's Traditional Theodicy and Job's Counselors," in Hallo, Jones, and Mattingly, *Scripture in Context III*, 305–48; Karel van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 57–89.

59. For an annotated translation with introduction and bibliography of the Sumerian "Man and His God," see Jacob Klein, "Man and His God," *COS* 1:573–75. For a translation and bibliography of the Old Babylonian "Man and His God, see Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 148–50. For the Middle Babylonian Ludlul bēl nēmeqi and its brief Syrian precursor, see Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 165–75. For Ludlul and the theodicy, see Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*.

60. See, e.g., Christopher B. Hays, *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 332–36.

> I invoked my god, but he did not raise his face towards me;
> I prayed to my goddess, but she did not raise her head.
> The diviner could not determine the condition by means of extispicy,
> The dream-interpreter could not reveal my verdict through his *maš-šakku*-powder.
> I prayed to the *Zāqīqu-demon*, but it did not hear me,
> The incantation-priest could not release the divine wrath.[61]

But a series of dreams, in which figures, whom the sufferer identifies as agents of Marduk, allude to his having fallen down in the proper worship of the god (tablet 3), lead him to realize he has neglected the cult of Marduk in the Esagila temple (tablet 4). By making a penitential pilgrimage to that temple, the sufferer repairs his relationship with the god, who heals him and restores his status (tablet 5). His sorrow turns to joy, as he praises Marduk for his salvation. People witnessing the complainant's recovery join in praise of Marduk and his consort Ṣarpanītu.[62]

Accordingly, although Ludlul is in every respect a pious sufferer poem, it is also, and primarily, a praise prayer to Marduk, a psalm of thanksgiving (compare, for example, Ps 30).[63] The coda at the end of tablet 5 designates the composition as a song of praise, a psalm (*zamāru*, *dalīlu*, *tanittu*).[64] Moreover, because the speaker's experience prompts others to praise Marduk, it is also a kind of instruction.[65]

A similar pattern obtains in the Sumerian "Man and His God."[66] The sufferer praises the deity in an effort to assuage the divine wrath, asserts that he has been reverent, lays out his complaints, appeals to his personal

---

61. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 86–87.

62. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 110–13.

63. See Lenzi, "Language of Akkadian Prayers." See also, e.g., van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," 76; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 9, 18.

64. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 112–13, ll. 119–120.

65. Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 130.

66. Samuel Noah Kramer, "'Man and His God': A Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley*, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 170–82; see the analysis in Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 19–22. Lambert declares that this poem does not belong to wisdom because "the sufferer confesses his sin while asking for release from his sufferings" ("Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 30). The poem is, however, of a piece with other pious sufferer compositions, including Ludlul, one of the centerpieces of Lambert's wisdom corpus.

god to pardon whatever sins he may have committed, receives forgiveness, and again praises his god. The anonymity of the worshiper suggests that the text functioned as a cultic prayer.[67] A colophon labels it a "lamentation to a personal god."[68]

This genre of the pious sufferer's supplication remains a fixture of Mesopotamian religion.[69] It is nicely exemplified in the Neo-Assyrian "Righteous Sufferer's Prayer to Nabû."[70] A formerly prosperous scholar has become bedridden in old age. "I have become finished through pain, as if I did not fear your godhead" (l. 13). Although he had (like Job) extended himself to the needy, he became (again like Job) "cut off from [his] city," beset by enemies as well as by illness (ll. 19–20). Forlorn, he appeals to the "distant gods" (*ilāni rūqūti*; l. 30) for succor, and then to Nabû, patron god of scribes: "O Nabû, where is your forgiveness? O son of Bel, where are your directions?" (i.e., instructions; *tērātūka*; reverse l. 4). "Do not abandon me!"[71] The penitent goes on to declare that he has been a guardian of truth and on the basis of his merit calls again on Nabū for salvation (reverse ll. 14–19). Mattingly, crediting the work of Harmut Gese (1958), avers that most Mesopotamian texts dealing with theodicy are, like Ludlul, "answered complaints."[72]

## Wisdom Themes

If wisdom cannot be confined to particular genres, it can be identified thematically.[73] The theme of theodicy has been treated in part in the preceding section. It should be observed in that regard that gods who afflict are considered to be within their rights because, as the complainant asserts

---

67. Klein, "Mesopotamian Literature," 560.

68. Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 309; Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 18, citing the work of Jacob Klein (1982).

69. See William W. Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 71–89.

70. Alisdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 30–32.

71. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, 32. Or "don't let go of me!" (*lā tuwaššaranni*).

72. Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 328; see also Harmut Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958).

73. See Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not."

in the Sumerian "Man and His God": "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother, A mortal (?) has never been perfect (?), a sinless man has never existed from of old."[74] Pious sufferers are not righteous like Job. They acknowledge that they have transgressed and are deserving of punishment.[75] They just do not know, at least not at first, what wrong they have committed.

Compare, for example, this incantation-prayer from around 700 BCE.[76] The suppliant opens by asking the gods Ea, Šamaš, and Marduk to reveal to him his sins, for "My iniquities are many: I know not what I did" (l. 29). "I have continually committed iniquities, known and unknown.… Enough, my god! Let your (angry) heart rest" (ll. 148–150). He repeatedly acknowledges his need to do atonement, but he does not know where to find his god (ll. 44–46).[77] In addition to his appeals for release from the punishing god's wrath,[78] he performs rituals to secure this relief. And, like the speaker in Ludlul, he seeks restoration so that he can "sing your praises [to] the numerous [peoples]" (l. 175). We find similar sentiments in the incantations (and in such biblical passages as Ps 19:13).[79]

Several theological presuppositions underlie such supplications as these. Much of the theological literature of Mesopotamia posits that doing wrong is endemic to humanity—that people are flawed from birth, possibly because, according to the well-known tradition incorporated into the creation epic Enuma Elish, the human was animated by the blood of a rebellious god.[80] In any event, the ultimate blame

---

74. Klein, "Man and His God," 574, ll. 104–105; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 59 (includes the Sumerian as read by Klein). For a newer suggestion, see Pascal Attinger, "ALSTER 1997: 324, UET 6, 368:2–5," *NABU* 2 (2017): 64–67.

75. Kramer, "Man and His God," 170–71; Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 307, 310–11; van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," 62–64.

76. For the text see Margaret Jacques, *Mon dieu qu'ai-je fait? Les diĝir-šà-dab(5)-ba et la piété privée en Mésopotamie*, OBO 273 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 60–108. For a translation see Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 339–42.

77. On this theme, see Joel S. Burnett, *Where Is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

78. For assuaging divine wrath as a major factor in ancient religion see Patrick Considine, "The Theme of Divine Wrath in Ancient Mediterranean Literature," *SMEA* 8 (1969): 85–159.

79. See, e.g., Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 57–59, 120–23, with examples.

80. So Klein, "Mesopotamian Literature," 563. On people being flawed from birth, see Kramer, "Man and His God," 171; Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 327.

for people's depravity is divine, for it was the great gods who created humanity, "gave twisted speech to mankind" and "bestowed upon them lies and falsehood for all time," as the friend tells the sufferer in the "Babylonian Theodicy."[81] Yet, people cannot know any better because, "Falsely all the bad things were taught to (the sufferer) because he has no guidance."[82]

Accordingly, another premise of Mesopotamian wisdom is that the mind of the gods is inscrutable. For example, the sufferer in Ludlul complains:

> What seems good for oneself is a crime for the deity.
> What seems bad in one's mind is good for his god.
> What person could know the plan of the gods in the heavens?
> Who could comprehend the counsel of the gods of the Deep-Water?
> How could humanity know the way of the deity? (tablet 2, ll. 34–38)[83]

The complainant in the "Babylonian Theodicy" describes apparent examples of injustice all around and in his frustration concludes that people cannot fathom divine intent (see above).[84] Sennacherib echoes this very sentiment when, in trying to explain the fate of his father, Sargon, he asks: "Who [can comprehend] any of the deeds [of the gods?]" ("The Sin of Sargon," l. 4′).[85] Although it may seem that divine inscrutability is a fault of the gods, as it seems to Job, in Mesopotamia it is understood not as a sign of divine injustice but rather as an index of human limitations.[86] As a bilingual (Sumerian and Akkadian) proverb puts it: "People do not by themselves know what they are doing."[87]

---

81. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 164–65, ll. 279–280; see also Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 35.

82. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 166–67, l. 285.

83. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 88–89. I have slightly adapted Oshima's translation.

84. See Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 164–65, ll. 256–57, quoted above. See also, e.g., van der Toorn, "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature," 72–73.

85. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, 77. Employing extispicy, Sennacherib concludes that his father was punished for breaking a treaty that was warranted by the gods.

86. So, e.g., Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 327; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 56–58. See also Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 163.

87. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 325. I have slightly adapted Alster's translation.

It is generally assumed that the gods are just in their own way. This is particularly true of the sun god Šamaš, who is widely designated as "judge" (*dayyānu*), evidently by virtue of the illumination he brings to phenomena and the cosmic scope of his reach—his omniscience—as he encircles the world.[88] The solar deity's special concern for promoting fairness and social justice finds expression in a hymn to Šamaš that probably dates back to the Old Babylonian period.[89] The deity is addressed and praised in the second-person, and his virtues are enumerated.[90] King Hammurapi receives his mandate to ensure that justice prevails in his realm from Šamaš, and the embodiment of justice in royal laws and edicts are akin to the generically sapiential "Advice to a Prince," as Pamela Barmash indicates.[91] Scribes, the premier purveyors of wisdom in the ancient Near East (see further below), were versed in a hymn to the king Lipit-Ištar, which "extols the link between the scribal arts and justice."[92] Although the genre of the poem to Šamaš is clearly hymnic, the theme of promoting justice is associated with wisdom, which is the reason that Lambert includes it in his corpus.

The divine function of fair adjudication is incorporated into the disputations between rival animals or plants that seem to reflect debates in school and in forensic settings.[93] In this distinctive genre of wisdom, each

---

88. So, e.g., Erica Reiner, "A Hymn to the Sun," in *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria*, MSH 5 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 68. See Knut Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938), 456–57.

89. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 121–38; for the dating, 122.

90. For the didactic function of delineating a deity's qualities see Edward L. Greenstein, "The Enumeration of Divine Attributes and Their Parody in the Discourses of Job," in *Theopoetics: Collected Essays*, ed. Avi Elkayam and Shlomi Mualem, IJPS (Tel Aviv: IDRA, 2020), 225–33 (in Hebrew).

91. *BWL*, 110–15; Pamela Barmash, *The Laws of Hammurabi: At the Confluence of Royal and Scribal Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 34–41, 54 n. 14. Note that the guidance in "Advice to a Prince" is formulated like omens and like most Mesopotamian laws in casuistic form; so, e.g., *BWL*, 110; Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 125; cf. Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks*, 99; Barmash, *Laws of Hammurabi*, 156–59, 199. For example, "(If) a king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos, and his land will be devastated" (*BWL*, 112–13, l. 1).

92. Barmash, *Laws of Hammurabi*, 208.

93. For the texts, see *BWL*, 150–212; Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 342–67; cf. Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 104–15; Jean Bottéro, "La 'tenson'

side presents its case for being worthier than the other, and (where the ending is preserved) a god decides the winner.

The gods, though sometimes obscure, are often perceived enacting just retribution, in accord with the traditional theology: the reverent man will be rewarded with a good and long life; the impious will not.[94] This wisdom theme is nicely conveyed in the following passage from the annals of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria in the seventh century BCE.[95] The people of Babylon "were stealing from [the po]or (and) giving to the mighty; there was oppression (and) the taking of bribes in the city. Every day, without ceasing, they stole goods from each other, a son cursed his father in the street, a slave […] to his owner." Marduk, supreme god of Babylonia, determined to punish them: "to level the land and to destroy its people. A bitter curse was set in his mouth.… He brought about [the destruction] of the city"—it became overgrown with trees and wild animals.[96] The significance of this episode is that Marduk responds not to cultic infractions but to moral corruption. We shall return to this feature of wisdom below.

But before moving on from enumerating some characteristic themes of Mesopotamian wisdom, there are two interrelated themes that should be cited. One, as adumbrated above, is that human destiny is determined by the gods. The other is that such a predetermined life can seem meaningless. This may sound like Qoheleth,[97] but it features in several

---

et la réflexion sur les choses en Mésopotamie," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout (Leuven: Department Oriëntalistik/Peeters, 1991), 7–22; Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, "Lore, Learning, and Levity in the Sumerian Disputations: A Matter of Form or Substance?," in Reinink and Vanstiphout, *Dispute Poems and Dialogues*, 23–46; Marianna E. Vogelzang, "Some Questions about the Akkadian Disputes," in Reinink and Vanstiphout, *Dispute Poems and Dialogues*, 47–57; Karel van der Toorn, "The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Dialogue as a Vehicle of Critical Reflection," in Reinink and Vanstiphout, *Dispute Poems and Dialogues*, 59–75. Vogelzang contends that these disputations were "intended for public performance," and Bottéro, Vanstiphout, and van der Toorn underscore the ludic element in this genre (Vogelzang, "Some Questions about the Akkadian Disputes," 54; Bottéro, "La 'tenson' et la réflexion," 18; Vanstiphout, "Lore, Learning, and Levity," 41; Van Der Toorn, "Ancient Near Eastern Literary Dialogue," 63).

94. See, e.g., the "Instructions of Ur-Ninurta," a Sumerian work of didactic wisdom; Alster, *Wisdom*, 228–31, ll. 19–37.

95. See *BWL*, 5.

96. Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, 220.

97. E.g., Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 291, 296–97; Augustus Gianto,

classical works of Mesopotamian wisdom. Thinking of Qohelet, scholars sometimes refer to this conception as the "vanity theme."[98] A Sumerian composition expressing this theme has been found in four versions.[99] It opens: "Nothing is of value, but life itself should be sweet-tasting." Versions A and D incorporate the widespread proverb, cited above, according to which people cannot reach the sky or the netherworld, indicating its clear wisdom character. Version C asserts that "Death is the share of man. The consequences of his destiny, no man can escape them"—an expression of fatalism.[100] From this follows a typical carpe diem message, conveyed in Versions A and D: "The good life, let it be defiled in joy!" The carpe diem conclusion is already drawn in the "Instructions of Šuruppak" (see above), in words that provide the first line of "Nothing Is of Value."[101]

In Late Bronze Age Syria we find this theme elaborated in the "Ballad of the Early Rulers"—as well as in other Syro-Mesopotamian wisdom texts: the didactic dialogue Šimā milka (see above) and the learned folktale "Enlil and Namzitarra."[102] Although the most complete version of the ballad is the copy found in Emar, the composition derives from a Babylonian forerunner.[103] A fatalist outlook is asserted: "The fates are determined by Ea. The lots are drawn according to the will of the god."[104] The heroes of the past are no more.[105] Life is only worthwhile if it is good ("Life without light—how can it be better than death?"), and life is short. Thus, one should banish grief and embrace joy. Because the beer goddess Siraš is

---

"Human Destiny in Emar and Qohelet," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1998), 473–79.

98. E.g., Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 265–341; Samet, "Mesopotamian Wisdom," 333–36.

99. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 266–87, crediting the work of Jeremy Black.

100. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 273, ll. 3–4.

101. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, l. 252.

102. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 288–332, 327–28; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 129–50, 151–63.

103. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 288–89.

104. The translations here are taken from Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*.

105. Two apparently Syrian heroes, Bazi and Zizi, once thought to attest to the Syrian origins of the composition, are known from the Tel Leilan version of the "Sumerian King List" and therefore belong to the Mesopotamian literary tradition. Cohen very plausibly suggests that they are included in the Emar Version on account of the connection between Gilgamesh, who is also recalled in the "Ballad," and the Cedar Forest (Lebanon), the site of one of his adventures (Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 147–48).

invoked, it has been proposed that this composition functioned as a drink-ing song.[106] At any rate, the similarities to the Egyptian harper songs, the advice of Siduri to Gilgamesh, and the philosophy of Qoheleth have been well noted.[107]

To summarize: we find in Mesopotamian literature strong generic and thematic parallels to Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, as well as to various psalms of supplication, contests such as Jotham's fable (Judg 9), riddles such as Samson's (Judg 14), and wisdom embedded in narrative and law.[108]

## Was There a Wisdom Tradition?

Although, as said above, there is no wisdom genre in Mesopotamia, one gets the distinct impression that the scribes regarded what we classify as wisdom texts as belonging in the same category—that there was a wisdom tradition. Scribes assembled many collections of proverbs, often overlap-ping.[109] This category remains written almost exclusively in Sumerian, even as the proverbs are transmitted over centuries. Instructions, as well as other wisdom compositions, tend to incorporate proverbs, although they are conveyed in Akkadian in Akkadian works (see above for exam-ples). There are, in fact, many corresponding particulars among diverse wisdom texts; for example, Šimā milka echoes or parallels the "Instruc-tions of Šuruppak," the Sumerian proverbs, the bilingual proverbs, and the "Counsels of Wisdom," and it alludes to the fable-like "Legend of Etana."[110] Indeed, Šimā milka may have been inspired by the "Instruc-tions of Šuruppak," and the "Counsels of Wisdom" may have inspired the Aramaic version of the "Wisdom of Aḥīqar" centuries later.[111] The

---

106. Alster, "Literary Aspects," 13 n. 89; Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* , 290.

107. E.g., *AEL* 1:193–97; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 143–45, 149–50; see also Jones, "From Gilgamesh to Qohelet."

108. See, e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). There are no wisdom texts per se written in Ugaritic. For wisdom passages, themes, and motifs embedded within Ugaritic epic, see Edward L. Greenstein, "Wisdom in Ugaritic," in *Language and Nature: Papers Presented to John Huehnergard on the Occa-sion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Rebecca Hasselbach and Na'ama Pat-El, SAOC 67 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 69–89.

109. See Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*.

110. See Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 86–87, 103–15, 121–23.

111. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 41–42.

disputation poems quote from the "Theodicy," and a Neo-Assyrian scholar's appeal for justice from the sun god Šamaš alludes to the "Advice to a Prince," Ludlul, the "Theodicy," and the "Poor Man of Nippur."[112]

Scribes sensed a kinship among diverse wisdom compositions. "Vanity theme" texts or excerpts from them are sometimes written together on the same tablet.[113] At Ugarit, a series of bilingual (Sumerian-Akkadian) proverbs was appended to the "Ballad of Early Rulers."[114] Two manuscripts of Šimā milka were found in a master-scribe's house at Ugarit together with fragments of the Gilgamesh Epic, the "Fable of the Fox," some omen literature, and some school exercises.[115] Of course, this phenomenon cannot be attributed only to the scribes' disposition toward genres but also to the demands of the relatively standard scribal curriculum.[116] Virtually all the proverb collections we have—in multiple copies—are the product of the scribal schools, where they served as literary resources for the scribes.[117] A catalogue of thirty-five literary works from Nineveh are nearly all proverb compilations and other wisdom texts.[118] The author to whom the catalogue is ascribed, Sidu, is identified elsewhere as a scholar (*ummānu*) from the late third millennium.[119] The continuity of a wisdom tradition can be exemplified by the fact that a two-line sequence from

---

112. Enrique Jimenez, "An Almost Irresistible Target: Parodying the Theodicy in Babylonian Literature," in Oshima, *Teaching Morality in Antiquity*, 128–29; Hurowitz, "Tales of Two Sages," 79–81. For the "Theodicy" citation, see Jimenez, "New Fragments of Gilgamesh and Other Literary Texts from Kuyunjik," *Iraq* 76 (2014): 103–4.

113. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 265; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 60. See esp. Cohen, "Why 'Wisdom.'"

114. Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 323–26; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 131, 156–60.

115. Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 50.

116. Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 37–54.

117. Veldhuis, "Sumerian Proverbs," 383; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 57–58; see n. 57 above.

118. Irving Finkel, "On the Series of Sidu," *ZA* 76 (1986): 250–53; see also William W. Hallo, "The Syrian Contribution to Cuneiform Literature and Learning," in *New Horizons in the Study of Ancient Syria*, ed. Mark W. Chavalas and John L. Hayes, BMes 25 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1992), 85; Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 75; Cohen, "Why 'Wisdom,'" 47 (see also 48–55).

119. Wilfred G. Lambert, "A Catalogue of Texts and Authors," *JCS* 16 (1962): 59–77; Eckart Frahm, "The Latest Sumerian Proverbs," in *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*, ed. Sarah Melville and Alice Slotsky, CHANE 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 155–84.

the mid-second millennium Šimā milka resurfaces in the Wisdom of Ben Sira in the late first millennium.[120]

As Paul Garelli has aptly stated it, the scribes "reflected on the human condition," but they could not be overly critical because their task "was not to speculate.… It was to insure the continuity of Tradition."[121] For that reason, many of the more critical wisdom texts, such as Ludlul and the "Theodicy," were given their classical literary form in the late second millennium, while in the first millennium the scholar-scribes sought to explicate them in commentary form.[122] As Ben Sira (39:2–3) explains in the postbiblical period, it is the role of the scribe to preserve and ponder the meaning of proverbs and parables.

## Concluding Remarks

Readers who are familiar with von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel* will have found strong parallels between the genres and themes of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible and in the vast Mesopotamian literature. In concluding this essay, I shall make some selective observations that might shape the reconsideration of biblical wisdom in the light of Mesopotamian wisdom.

There are some significant differences between the two corpora. As we have seen, several Mesopotamian gods are known as wise and named as wise. I find it highly interesting that although wisdom (חכמה) is sometimes said to derive from and be applied by the deity, in the Hebrew Bible neither the substantive חכם (wise) nor נבון (understanding) is predicated of God. Once, in Job 9:4, the deity is called חכם לב, "wise of heart/mind." On the other hand, wisdom is hypostatized and personified in the Bible, for example, in Prov 8–9. I am not aware of any Mesopotamian text in which wisdom as such is so hypostatized.

It is clear, as we have seen, that Mesopotamian wisdom was produced and transmitted for the most part among the scribes, who collected and

---

120. Noga Ayali-Darshan, "The Sequence of Sir 4:26–27 in Light of Akkadian and Aramaic Texts from the Levant and Later Writings," *ZAW* 130 (2018): 436–49.

121. Paul Garelli, "The Changing Facets of Conservative Mesopotamian Thought," *Daedalus* (Spring 1975): 50.

122. See, e.g., Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*, 63–64; Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries*, 19 and passim. For the texts of the commentaries on Ludlul and the "Theodicy," see Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 376–464.

studied it in schools. The widespread intertextual uses of proverbs and other wisdom expressions and themes in Mesopotamian literature result from their currency within scribal circles.[123] Biblical wisdom, writes von Rad, reflects "the atmosphere of the school."[124] The comparative evidence, from Syria as well as Mesopotamia proper, strongly suggests that von Rad's impression is correct.[125] The standardization that is evident in ancient Hebrew epigraphy demonstrates that scribes were schooled in ancient Israel.[126] There is both biblical evidence (e.g., Jer 8:8–10) and epigraphic evidence to document the existence of a scribal class.[127] A book such as Proverbs surely served as a vehicle of scribal schooling.[128] Since in Mesopotamia both proverbial wisdom and so-called folk literature, such as the "Poor Man of Nippur," were generated by highly literate scribes, we should not overstate the popular origins of wisdom texts, even though there are said to have been wisdom sayings in oral circulation.[129]

A reiterated claim by von Rad is that biblical wisdom is fundamentally empirical.[130] This perspective dovetails with his thesis holding that Israel's theology emerges out of its experiences.[131] Recent work on Mesopotamian

---

123. For a fine survey see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–61.

124. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 310; see also 311.

125. See, e.g., Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 70–80.

126. Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*, ABS 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 91–113.

127. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 34–35; Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 127–35. See further Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 75–108. Alan Millard rightly criticizes van der Toorn for restricting scribal activity to priestly and royal institutions. See Millard, review of *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, by Karel van der Toorn, *BAR* 36.1 (2010): 72, 74.

128. See, e.g., Aaron Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel*, BEL 28 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012), 207–11 (Hebrew). See also Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*, trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 39–40.

129. Von Rad suggests there were both folk and scribal sources of wisdom (*Wisdom in Israel*, 26). See also Carole R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982).

130. See, more recently, e.g., Miller, "Wisdom in the Canon: Discerning the Early Intuition," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 87–113.

131. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 5 and passim.

scholarship, however, suggests that much of the proverbial literature, the instructions, the omens, the laws, and more were generated by analogical thinking and not by empirical observation.[132] Considering how much of biblical wisdom is counterevidential, best epitomized in the suffering of the innocent, the empirical basis for wisdom's origins should be strongly reconsidered.[133]

Another of von Rad's principal claims is that wisdom in Israel began in a more theological or pan-sacral manner and became more worldly in the early monarchic period.[134] Bendt Alster repeatedly underscores the secularity of early Mesopotamian wisdom, pointing to the practical reasoning given for many of the instructions and proverbs.[135] For example, "Don't place a well in your own field; the people will do harm to you."[136] However, taking a broader perspective, one can hardly separate theologically and humanistically warranted wisdom in Mesopotamia. The concept of "abomination" (Sumerian *níĝ-gig*; Akkaddian *ikkibu*) earlier refers mainly to ritual and moral norms, while it later refers primarily to ritual infractions.[137] However, unlike the book of Proverbs, where moral concerns abound and ritual ones barely appear, the texts intermix ritual and moral subjects, making any attempt to sharpen the distinction futile. Similarly, the Sumerian proverbs interweave more mundane abominations and those that are explicitly offensive to the gods.[138]

Wisdom embraces the practical and the speculative, the theological and the secular, the high and the low. A comparative examination of Mesopotamian and biblical wisdom confirms the most basic of all von

---

132. See esp. Van De Mieroop, *Philosophy before the Greeks*; see also Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries*, 20; Barmash, *Laws of Hammurabi*, 199, with reference to the work of Abraham Winitzer.

133. See, e.g., Michael V. Fox, "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs," *JBL* 126 (2007): 670–71.

134. E.g., von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 58–59.

135. E.g., Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 31; Alster, *Proverbs in Ancient Sumer*, xviii.

136. Instructions of Šuruppak, l. 17; Alster, *Wisdom*, 59.

137. Jacob Klein and Yitschak Sefati, "The Concept of 'Abomination' in Mesopotamian Literature and the Bible," *Beer-sheva* 3 (1988): 131–48 (Hebrew).

138. Jacob Klein and Nili Samet, "Religion and Ethics in Sumerian Proverb Literature," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yona et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 295–321.

Rad's theses: that wisdom is part of the larger worldview of a culture and reflects it in its diverse aspects.

## Bibliography

Alster, Bendt. "Literary Aspects of Sumerian and Akkadian Proverbs." Pages 1–21 in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*. Edited by Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout. CM 6. Groningen: Styx, 1996.

———. *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*. 2 vols. Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1997.

———. *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*. Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005.

Annus, Amar. *The Overturned Boat: Intertextuality of the Adapa Myth and the Exorcist Literature*. SAAS 24. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2016.

Attinger, Pascal. "ALSTER 1997: 324, UET 6, 368:2–5." *NABU* 2 (2017): 64–67.

Ayali-Darshan, Noga. "The Sequence of Sir 4:26–27 in Light of Akkadian and Aramaic Texts from the Levant and Later Writings." *ZAW* 130 (2018): 436–49.

Barmash, Pamela. *The Laws of Hammurabi: At the Confluence of Royal and Scribal Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Barton, John. "Gerhard von Rad on the World-View of Early Israel." *JTS* 35 (1984): 301–23.

Beaulieu, Paul-Alain. "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature." Pages 3–19 in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*. Edited by Richard. J. Clifford. SymS 36. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Bottéro, Jean. "La 'tenson' et la réflexion sur les choses en Mésopotamie." Pages 7–22 in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East*. Edited by Gerrit J. Reinink and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout. Leuven: Department Oriëntalistik/Peeters, 1991.

Buccellati, Giorgio. "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia." *JAOS* 101 (1981): 35–47.

Burnett, Joel S. *Where Is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.

Carr, David M. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Cohen, Yoram. "Why 'Wisdom'? Copying, Studying, and Collecting Wisdom Literature in the Cuneiform World." Pages 41–59 in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity: Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images* Edited by Takayoshi M. Oshima with Susanne Kohlhaas. ORA 29. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

———. *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*. WAW 29. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Considine, Patrick. "The Theme of Divine Wrath in Ancient Mediterranean Literature." *SMEA* 8 (1969): 85–159.

Crenshaw, James L. "Wisdom Traditions and the Writings." Pages 84–98 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*. Edited by Donn F. Morgan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Demsky, Aaron. *Literacy in Ancient Israel* [Hebrew]. BEL 28. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012.

Denning-Bolle, Sara. *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue*. Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1992.

Dietrich, Jan. "Wisdom in the Cultures of the Ancient World: A General Introduction and Comparison." Pages 3–18 in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity: Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images* Edited by Takayoshi M. Oshima with Susanne Kohlhaas. ORA 29. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

Driver, Godfrey R., and John C. Miles. *Babylonian Laws*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1952–1955.

Finkel, Irving. "On the Series of Sidu." *ZA* 76 (1986): 250–53.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985.

Fontaine, Carole R. *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study*. Sheffield: Almond, 1982.

Foster, Benjamin R. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. 3rd ed. Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005.

———. "Gilgamesh: Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge." Pages 21–42 in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*. Edited by John H. Marks and Robert M. Good. Guilford, CT: Four Quarters, 1987.

Foster, Benjamin R., and Andrew R. George. "An Old Babylonian Dialogue between a Father and His Son." *ZA* 110 (2020): 37–61.

Fox, Michael V. "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs." *JBL* 126 (2007): 669–84.

———. "Three Theses on Wisdom." Pages 69–86 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Frahm, Eckart. *Babylonian and Assyrian Textual Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation*. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011.

———. "The Latest Sumerian Proverbs." Pages 155–84 in *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R. Foster*. Edited by Sarah Melville and Alice Slotsky. CHANE 42. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Frayne, Douglas R. *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)*. RIME 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Garelli, Paul. "The Changing Facets of Conservative Mesopotamian Thought." *Daedalus* (Spring 1975): 47–56.

George, Andrew R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Gese, Harmut. *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958.

Gianto, Augustus. "Human Destiny in Emar and Qohelet." Pages 473–79 in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*. Edited by Antoon Schoors. BETL 136. Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1998.

Glassner, Jean-Jacques. "The Use of Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia." Pages 1815–16 in vol. 3 of *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Jack M. Sasson. 4 vols. New York: Scribner's, 1995.

Gordon, Edmund I. "A New Look at the Wisdom of Sumer and Akkad." *BO* 7 (1960): 122–52.

Greenspahn, Frederick E. "A Mesopotamian Proverb and Its Biblical Reverberations." *JAOS* 114 (1994): 33–38.

Greenstein, Edward L. "The Enumeration of Divine Attributes and Their Parody in the Discourses of Job" [Hebrew]. Pages 225–33 in *Theopoetics: Collected Essays*. Edited by Avi Elkayam and Shlomi Mualem. IJPS. Tel Aviv: IDRA, 2020.

———. "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts." Pages 253–80 in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*. Edited by Ellen van Wolde. BibInt 68. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

———. "The Retelling of the Flood Story in the Gilgamesh Epic." Pages 197–204 in *Hesed ve-Emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*.

Edited by Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin. BJS 320. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

———. "Wisdom in Ugaritic." Pages 69–89 in *Language and Nature: Papers Presented to John Huehnergard on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*. Edited by Rebecca Hasselbach and Na'ama Pat-El. SAOC 67. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012.

Grillo, Jennie. "The Wisdom Literature." Pages 182–205 in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*. Edited by John Barton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Hallo, William W. "Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition." *JAOS* 88 (1968): 71–89.

———. "The Syrian Contribution to Cuneiform Literature and Learning." Pages 69–88 in *New Horizons in the Study of Ancient Syria*. Edited by Mark W. Chavalas and John L. Hayes. BMes 25. Malibu, CA: Undena, 1992.

Hays, Christopher B. *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014.

Hurowitz, Victor Avigdor. "Tales of Two Sages—Towards an Image of the 'Wise Man' in Akkadian Writings." Pages 64–94 in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*. Edited by Leo G. Perdue. FRLANT 219. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008.

Izre'el, Shlomo. *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death*. MC 10. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001.

Jacobsen, Thorkild. *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

Jacques, Margaret. *Mon dieu qu'ai-je fait? Les diĝir-šà-dab(5)-ba et la piété privée en Mésopotamie*. OBO 273. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015.

Jimenez, Enrique. "An Almost Irresistible Target: Parodying the Theodicy in Babylonian Literature." Pages 124–33 in *Teaching Morality in Antiquity: Wisdom Texts, Oral Traditions, and Images* Edited by Takayoshi M. Oshima with Susanne Kohlhaas. ORA 29. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.

———. "New Fragments of Gilgamesh and Other Literary Texts from Kuyunjik." *Iraq* 76 (2014): 99–121.

Jones, Bruce William. "From Gilgamesh to Qoheleth." Pages 349–79 in *Scripture in Context III: The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*.

Edited by William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990.

Klein, Jacob. "Man and His God." *COS* 1:573–75.

Klein, Jacob. "Mesopotamian Literature: Genesis Traditions, Wisdom Literature, and Lamentations" [Hebrew]. Pages 523–79 in *The Literature of the Hebrew Bible: Introductions and Studies*. Edited by Zipora Talshir. Vol. 2. Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2011.

Klein, Jacob, and Nili Samet. "Religion and Ethics in Sumerian Proverb Literature." Pages 295–321 in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*. Edited by Shamir Yona, Edward L. Greenstein, Mayer I. Gruber, Peter Machinist, and Shalom M. Paul. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

Klein, Jacob, and Yitschak Sefati. "The Concept of 'Abomination' in Mesopotamian Literature and the Bible" [Hebrew]. *Beer-sheva* 3 (1988): 131–48.

Koch-Westenholtz, Ulla. *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Manzāzu, Padānu, and Pān Tākalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series Mainly from Aššurbanipal's Library*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2000.

Kramer, Samuel Noah. "'Man and His God': A Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif." Pages 170–82 in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley*. Edited by Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas. VTSup 3. Leiden: Brill, 1969.

———. "The Sage in Sumerian Literature: A Composite Portrait." Pages 41–42 in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Kynes, Will. "The Modern Scholarly Wisdom Tradition and the Threat of Pan-sapientialism: A Case Report." Pages 11–38 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

———. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lambert, Wilfred G. *Babylonian Creation Myths*. MC 16. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

———. "A Catalogue of Texts and Authors." *JCS* 16 (1962): 59–77.

———. "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature." Pages 30–42 in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton*. Edited

by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Langdon, Stephen. *Die neubabylonischen Koenigsinschriften*. VAB 4. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912.

Leichty, Erle. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*. RINAP 4. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Lenzi, Alan. "The Language of Akkadian Prayers in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* and Its Significance within and beyond Mesopotamia." Pages 67–104 in *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels*. Edited by Robert Rollinger and Erik Van Dongen. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015.

Livingstone, Alisdair. *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. SAA 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989.

Mattingly, Gerald L. "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamia's Traditional Theodicy and Job's Counselors." Pages 305–48 in *Scripture in Context III: The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*. Edited by William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990.

Millard, Alan. Review of *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, by Karel van der Toorn. *BAR* 36.1 (2010): 72, 74.

Miller, Douglas B. "Wisdom in the Canon: Discerning the Early Intuition." Pages 87–113 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Novotny, Jamie R. *The Standard Babylonian Etana Epic*. SAACT 2. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001.

Oppenheim, A. Leo. *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Oshima, Takayoshi. *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul bēl nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy*. ORA 14. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.

Ottervanger, Baruch. *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*. SAACT 12. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2016.

Perdue, Leo G. *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. Vol. 1. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Nashville: Abingdon, 1972.

Reiner, Erica. "A Hymn to the Sun." Pages 64–84 in *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria*. MSH 5. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985.

———. *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*. AfO 11. Osnabrück: Biblio, 1958.

Rollston, Christopher A. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*. ABS 11. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Samet, Nili. "The Gilgamesh Epic and the Book of Qohelet: A New Look." *Bib* 96 (2015): 375–90.

———. "Mesopotamian Wisdom." Pages 328–48 in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*. Edited by Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020.

———. "'The Tallest Man Cannot Reach Heaven; the Broadest Man Cannot Cover Earth': Reconsidering the Proverb and Its Biblical Parallels." *JHS* 10.18 (2010): 1–13.

Schellenberg, Annette. "Don't Throw the Baby out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctiveness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World." Pages 115–43 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Schipper, Bernd U. *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*. Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

Smith, Morton. "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East." *JBL* 71 (1952): 135–47.

Sneed, Mark. "'Grasping after the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom." Pages 39–67 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

———. "Is the 'Wisdom Tradition' a Tradition?" *CBQ* 73 (2011): 50–71.

Sparks, Kenton L. *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005.

Streck, Maximilian. *Assurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh's*. VAB 7. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916.

Streck, Michael P., and Nathan Wasserman. "Dialogues and Riddles: Three Old Babylonian Wisdom Texts." *Iraq* 73 (2011): 117–25.

———. "Mankind's Bitter Fate: The Wisdom Dialog BM 79111+." *JCS* 66 (2014): 39–47.

Sweet, Ronald F. G. "The Sage in Akkadian Literature: A Philological Study." Pages 45–65 in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Tallqvist, Knut. *Akkadische Götterepitheta*. Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938.

Toorn, Karel van der. "The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Dialogue as a Vehicle of Critical Reflection." Pages 59–75 in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East*. Edited by Gerrit J. Reinink and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout. Leuven: Department Oriëntalistik/Peeters, 1991.

———. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

———. "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature." Pages 57–89 in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*. Edited by Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Uehlinger, Christoph. "Das Hiob-Buch im Kontext der orientalischen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte." Pages 97–163 in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen*. Edited by Thomas Krüger, Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Christoph Uehlinger. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2007.

Van De Mieroop, Marc. *Philosophy before the Greeks: The Pursuit of Truth in Ancient Babylonia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Vanstiphout, Herman L. J. "Lore, Learning, and Levity in the Sumerian Disputations: A Matter of Form or Substance?" Pages 47–57 in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East*. Edited by Gerrit J. Reinink and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout. Leuven: Department Oriëntalistik/Peeters, 1991.

Veldhuis, Niek. "Sumerian Proverbs in Their Curricular Context." *JAOS* 120 (2000): 383–99.

Wasserman, Nathan. "Weisheitsliteratur (Wisdom Literature). A. In Mesopotamien." *RlA* 15 (2016): 51–52.

Weeks, Stuart. "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?" Pages 3–23 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Weierhäuser, Frauke, and Jamie Novotny. *The Royal Inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk (561 BC), Neriglissar (559–556 BC), and Nabonidus (555–539*

*BC), Kings of Babylon*. RINBE 2. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020.

Zomer, Elyze. *Corpus of Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian Incantations*. LAOS 9. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018.

# Gerhard von Rad and Egyptian Wisdom: Job 38 and Cosmotheistic Knowledge

Bernd U. Schipper

While Gerhard von Rad's primary interest was in Old Testament theology, one of his most influential publications dealt with ancient Egyptian wisdom and the Hebrew Bible. In an article on Job 38 and Egyptian wisdom, published in 1955, von Rad argued that a form of *Listenweisheit* can be found in Job 38 that has its closest parallels in the Egyptian Onomasticon of Amenope. Encouraged by his colleague Hans Walter Wolff, von Rad published the article only three years later, in 1958, in a collection of *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* that was published in English in 1966. Ten years later, James Crenshaw reprinted the article in an anthology on studies on Israelite wisdom, where he placed von Rad's study alongside contributions of Albrecht Alt, Robert Pfeiffer, Roland Murphy, Roger Whybray, and others.[1] Over the years, von Rad's position became very influential. In 1986, however, Michael Fox challenged the thesis, arguing that the Egyptian parallels were not as obvious as von Rad had claimed. In his opinion there is simply no *Listenweisheit* in the Old Testament.[2]

In the following, I will build on von Rad's 1955 publication for reassessment of ancient Egyptian wisdom and the Hebrew Bible. I will

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, TB 8 (Munich: Kaiser, 1958), 1:262–71; von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. Eric W. Trueman Dicken (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 281–91; James L. Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: Ktav, 1976), 267–77.

2. Michael V. Fox, "Egyptian Onomastica and Biblical Wisdom," *VT* 36 (1986): 302–10.

begin with a brief overview of the history of research until 1955 (part 1), before reexamining von Rad's article on Job 38 (part 2). This reevaluation is followed by a section on recent perspectives on the study of ancient Egyptian wisdom and the Hebrew Bible (part 3) and a short summary (part 4).

<div align="center">

1. Egyptian Wisdom and the
Hebrew Bible in Scholarship before von Rad

</div>

When Gerhard von Rad was a student at the Universities of Erlangen and Tübingen (1921–1925), he witnessed one of the most crucial paradigm shifts in the study of ancient Israelite wisdom. In 1924 Hugo Greßmann, professor of Old Testament at Berlin University, published an article titled "Die neugefundene Lehre des Amenemope und die vorexilische Spruchdichtung Israels."[3] Being well connected among the scholarly guild of his time, Greßmann was inspired by a lecture given to the Prussian Academy of Science by Adolf Erman, his colleague in Egyptology at Berlin's Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität. In this lecture on 1 May 1924, Erman spoke about an Egyptian source for Proverbs.[4] In this lecture Erman compared a newly published Egyptian wisdom text, the Instruction of Amenemope, with the book of Proverbs. Greßmann followed Erman's approach and paved the way for a new understanding of Israelite wisdom. While previous research had interpreted the books of Job, Proverbs, and Qoheleth mainly within the context of *biblical* literature, the similarities to ancient Near Eastern literature came into focus now.

The older approach is nicely illustrated by Wilhelm Frankenberg's commentary on the book of Proverbs (1898), in which he situates the book's theology in the context of canonical and deuterocanonical wisdom literature:

> The literature of *hokmah* belongs squarely in the postexilic period, since it was only then that the historical conditions for its development existed.

---

3. Hugo Greßmann, "Die neugefundene Lehre des Amenemope und die vorexilische Spruchdichtung Israels," *ZAW* 42 (1924): 272–96.

4. The lecture title was "Eine ägyptische Quelle der 'Sprüche Salomos.'" Reprinted in Adolf Erman, *Akademieschriften (1880–1928)*, Opuscula 13.2 (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1986), 339–46.

> It presupposes the law with its teaching—established as an unshakable truth through the experience of the exile—that decreed life for those who heed his commandments and death for those who transgress them.[5]

Frankenberg's position was no exception in the nineteenth century, as influential commentaries by Ferdinand Hitzig (1858) and Franz Delitzsch (1873) illustrate. Both scholars address the connections between the book of Proverbs and other biblical texts, for example Deuteronomy. Delitzsch emphasizes that "the poetry of this writer [i.e., the author of Prov 1–9] has its hidden roots in the older writings" and continues, "the whole poetry of this writer savours of the Book of Deuteronomy."[6] This contextualization of the book of Proverbs within biblical literature suggests a dating of the book to the Persian period, as was paradigmatically emphasized by Frankenberg.[7]

Both the context of biblical wisdom and its dating to the postexilic period changed significantly with the discovery of the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. Although in the nineteenth century Egyptologists such as François Chabas, François Lenormant, and Eugène Revilout had pointed out similarities between Egyptian wisdom literature and the Hebrew Bible, only the articles of Erman and Greßmann led to a fundamentally new perspective. While previous research merely found similar motifs and themes in biblical and Egyptian wisdom literature, such as the Instruction of Ptahhotep or the Instructions of Any and biblical wisdom, the Instruction of Amenemope and Prov 22:17–23:11 offered the first example of a direct literary connection.[8]

This insight was nothing less than groundbreaking. Between 1924 and 1930 numerous articles and books were published that discussed the new evidence.[9] Four possible interpretations for the connection between

---

5. Wilhelm Frankenberg, *Die Sprüche*, HKAT 2/3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898), 6 (ET, Stephen Germany).

6. Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, trans. Matthew G. Easton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 34–35.

7. See, for example, André Robert, "Les attaches littéraires bibliques de Prov I–IX," *RB* 43 (1934): 42–68, 172–204, 374–84.

8. See the overview in Bernd U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*, trans. Stephen Germany, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 1–2.

9. See the overview in Bernd U. Schipper, "Die Lehre des Amenemope und Prov 22,17–24,22: Eine Neubestimmung des literarischen Verhältnisses (Teil 1)," *ZAW* 117 (2005): 55–57; and for Hugo Greßmann see Sascha Gebauer, *Hugo Greßmann und sein Programm der Religionsgeschichte*, BZAW 523 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 192–94.

the Instruction of Amenemope and Prov 22:17–23:11 were already developed during these early years: (1) the passages from Proverbs depend on the Egyptian Instruction (Erman, Greßmann, 1924), (2) the Egyptian Instruction depends on Prov 22:17–23:11 (R. O. Kevin, 1930), (3) both texts depend on an older source that influenced the passage from the book of Proverbs as well as the Instruction of Amenemope (W. O. E. Oesterley, 1927), and (4) there is no dependence at all because the similarities between both texts should be interpreted as general motifs typical of wisdom in the ancient world (D. Herzog, 1929).

For understanding von Rad's position in particular and research on Israelite wisdom in general, it is important to be aware of the main consequence of this new discovery. Scholars during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had interpreted the books of Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth as genuine parts of biblical literature. With the new discovery of extrabiblical parallels from the ancient Near East, wisdom literature was now considered to be foreign to the Bible. Paradigmatic for this position is Hartmut Gese, who wrote in 1958 with reference to a study of Walter Baumgartner from 1933: "It is widely acknowledged that the wisdom instruction is an alien element in the world of the Old Testament."[10]

A near identical position can be found in von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel* from 1970:

> Wisdom teaching has even been described as a foreign element in the Old Testament world. There is every appearance that the process of comparison with the wisdom of neighbouring cultures has more or less petered out. Only when the details of Israel's striving after knowledge have been more clearly recognized, can a methodically exact comparison be carried out. But the foundations of such a process of comparison must be laid considerably deeper and more solidly.[11]

---

10. Hartmut Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit. Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958), 2; see also Walter Baumgartner, *Israelitische und altorientalische Weisheit*, SGVS 166 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933).

11. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (repr., Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 10; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel: Mit einem Anhang neu herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013), 10: "Ja, man hat die Lehre der Weisheit geradezu als Fremdkörper in der Welt des Alten Testaments bezeichnet. Es hat den Anschein, daß sich das Vergleichsverfahren mit der Weisheit der benachbarten Kulturvölker heute ein wenig totgelaufen hat. Erst wenn

By taking up the paradigm shift, von Rad used the Instruction of Amenemope for two important arguments. First, it proved that ancient Israelite wisdom is close to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, especially to Egyptian texts, and second, it led him to a new dating:

> A somewhat revolutionary effect was produced by the discovery that a whole passage from the wisdom book of Amenemope had been taken over almost word for word into the biblical book of Proverbs (Prov. 22.17–23.1 I). The assumption that wisdom was a religious phenomenon of post-exilic Israel proved to be completely wrong.… At the same time, the suspicion against its early dating in the period of the monarchy was seen to be unjustified.[12]

In brief, von Rad applied the new insights to argue (1) that the wisdom tradition is old and connected to ancient Near Eastern wisdom, in particular Egyptian wisdom literature, and (2) due to the close relationship between Prov 22:17–23:11 and an Egyptian instruction from the New Kingdom, ancient Israelite wisdom should now be seen as something old, providing a window into the earliest days of ancient Israel.

This position gained importance for von Rad when he developed his idea of a so-called Solomonic enlightenment.[13] Following an approach to the history of ancient Israel where the biblical account in 1 Kgs 3–11 is taken as mostly historically correct,[14] von Rad considers the Solomonic period, the tenth century, to be a first golden age (*Blütezeit*) of Israelite wisdom. With this dating of ancient Israelite wisdom, the question arose of how this tradition could be described from its beginnings to its end in postexilic books such as Job or Qoheleth: "What we lack today is a work about wisdom in Israel which is much more decisive than has hitherto been

---

die Besonderheiten der Erkenntnisbemühungen Israels deutlicher erkannt sind, kann ein Vergleich methodisch sauber durchgeführt werden."

12. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 9; see von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 9: "Einigermaßen revolutionierend wirkte die Feststellung, daß eine ganze Passage des Weisheitsbuches des Amenemope fast wörtlich ins biblische Spruchbuch aufgenommen wurde (Prov 22,17-23,11). Die Annahme, die Weisheit sei ein religiöses Phänomen des nachexilischen Israel, erwies sich als völlig irrig.… Somit erwies sich auch das Mißtrauen gegen ihre Frühdatierung in die Königszeit als unbegründet."

13. See Gerhard von Rad, "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel," in *Gesammelte Studien*, 187.

14. For such an approach see, for example, John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 217–20 ("Israel's Golden Age").

the case, which starts with what is specific in its subject of study, which, to a greater extent than has been the case till now, allows the themes to be announced and the questions asked by the didactic texts themselves."[15]

For von Rad, the foreign nature of ancient Israelite wisdom and its dating to the earliest days of ancient Israel were the driving forces to write *Wisdom in Israel*. The location of ancient Israelite wisdom within its ancient Near Eastern context led, as von Rad put it, to "disturbing questions": "What was the relationship of this wisdom, which was partly imported into Israel, to the Yahwistic faith, which was otherwise regarded as entirely exclusive?"[16] For von Rad, this question could only be answered by a careful description of what is characteristic for this distinct tradition of ancient Israelite wisdom. In other words, what was needed was a work that attempted to put itself into the specific world of thought and values and into the tensions within which the teachings of the wise men moved.[17]

This interest in a distinct tradition, separate from other theological traditions of the Old Testament, was the reason why von Rad toward the end of his life assessed wisdom differently than he had done two decades earlier. In *Wisdom in Israel* ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature does not play any significant role. One exception is his chapter on personified Wisdom in Prov 8, where he follows his student Christa Bauer-Kayatz and argues that Lady Wisdom in Prov 8 was inspired by the Egyptian goddess Maat.[18]

Twenty years earlier, von Rad's positions were quite different. As he regarded the so-called proverbial wisdom in Prov 10:1–22:16; 25–29 and 22:17–24:22 to be old, he connected these texts with the Solomonic enlightenment of the tenth century BCE and also with the Joseph story. Based on a definition of wisdom as "practical knowledge of the laws of

---

15. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 10; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 10: "Was uns heute fehlt, ist eine Arbeit über Israels Weisheit, die viel entschiedener, als das bisher geschehen ist, von dem Spezifischen ihres Gegenstandes her denkt, die sich mehr, als das bisher geschehen ist, von den didaktischen Texten selbst die Themen geben und die Fragen stellen läßt."

16. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 9–10: "beunruhigende Fragen"; "Wie verhielt sich denn diese in Israel z.T. importierte Weisheit zu dem sonst als so exklusiv bekannten Jahweglauben?"

17. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 10.

18. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 161–62; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 153, with reference to Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 76–93.

life and of the world, based on experience,"[19] von Rad drew a direct line between the older wisdom and Gen 37–50. In "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," published in 1953, von Rad presents Joseph as a model sage who follows the main parameters of proverbial wisdom. Interestingly, in this article von Rad uses not only Prov 10–22 and 25–29 but also the Instruction of Amenemope and concludes: "We must be prepared to reassess the Joseph story in the light of the possibility that it is closely related to contemporary Egyptian literature."[20] In the educational ideal of the Instruction of Amenemope, von Rad finds qualities such as "discretion, modesty, self-control and deliberation," which are also "displayed by Joseph." Furthermore, he points to similarities with the Lamentation of the Peasant or the Tale of the Two Brothers and concludes, "The Joseph narrative is a didactic wisdom-story which leans heavily upon influences emanating from Egypt, not only with regard to its conception of an educational ideal, but also in its fundamental theological ideas."[21]

## 2. Gerhard von Rad, Job 38, and Ancient Egyptian *Listenweisheit*

Only two years after the publication of "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Israelite Wisdom," von Rad published "Hiob XXXXVIII und die altägyptische Weisheit." In this article von Rad argues that the first half of God's speech to Job in chapters 38–39 draws on a form of *Listenweisheit* that can be found in the Egyptian Onomasticon of Amenope. In a tabular overview von Rad points to a similar structure in the Onomasticon of Amenope, Job 38–39, Ben Sira 43, Ps 148, and in the Song of the Three Young Men (Dan 3:52–90 LXX). In each of these texts, lists of cosmological phenomena such as heaven, sea, light, moon, or wind can be found. For von Rad the lists of cosmological items in the first part of the Onomasticon of Amenope and in Job 38–39 display such striking parallels that there has to be a sort of connection. Even though there are no "precise parallelisms" between both texts, and Job 38–39 does not show "literary dependence

---

19. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), 1:418, 428. This definition is quoted in Crenshaw's introduction to his *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 3.

20. Gerhard von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," in Crenshaw, *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 446. German: Gerhard von Rad, "Josefsgeschichte und ältere Chokma," in *Gesammelte Studien*, 272–80.

21. Von Rad, "Joseph Narrative," 447.

of Amenope," it is beyond dispute, for von Rad, that the passage from Job "follows an established pattern, which derives ultimately from Egyptian wisdom-literature as exemplified in the Onomastica."[22] As an additional argument, von Rad points to the rhetorical questions in God's speech that "correspond very closely with the ironical questions of Papyrus Anastasi I."[23] In short, von Rad found two main patterns in the divine speech in Job 38–39 that in his view resemble formal elements from Egyptian literature: the onomastic list and the rhetorical questions.

If one contextualizes von Rad's arguments within a broader framework, one cannot but notice that the eight-page article is more an essay, delineating an intuitive idea, than an elaborate scholarly contribution. Von Rad had never learned Middle Egyptian and had to rely on specialists for philological questions. In a footnote he mentions Gerhard Fecht, who later became professor of Egyptology at the Freie Universität Berlin.[24] In another footnote, he refers to his research assistant Klaus Baltzer, who found a similar list in 4 Ezra 7.39–45 and mentioned briefly Gen 1 as a text that needed further analysis as a possible case of *Listenweisheit*.[25] Similar to his article on the Joseph story and ancient Israelite wisdom, von Rad is rather brief in his argument and does not provide an elaborate discussion of the evidence. The main reason for this is that von Rad was on unfamiliar ground. He was from his early days on more interested in the theology and literary history of the Old Testament than its ancient Near Eastern background.

It would be a subject for another article to reconstruct the main turns in von Rad's approach to the Old Testament, but three aspects should briefly be mentioned:[26]

---

22. Gerhard von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," in *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 284, 289.

23. Von Rad, " Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 287–88.

24. Gerhard von Rad, "Hiob XXXVIII und die Altägyptische Weisheit," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vetus Testamentum in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 24 March 1955*, ed. Martin Noth and Winton Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 262 n. 2. The English version of the article lacks this information.

25. See von Rad, "Hiob XXXVIII," 267 n. 7. This was taken up by Siegfried Hermann, "Die Naturlehre des Schöpfungsberichtes," *TLZ* 86 (1961): 413–24. Hermann argues that the author of Gen 1 used a sort of onomasticon.

26. For the following paragraphs see Rudolf Smend, *Kritiker und Exegeten: Porträtskizzen zu vier Jahrhunderten alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 794–804.

1. Even before he started to study theology, von Rad was influenced by Karl Barth and the so-called *Wort-Gottes-Theologie*. As a young man, von Rad joined a church group, reading Barth's commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans (1919). Von Rad later called himself a member of the *Römerbriefgeneration*.

2. As a consequence of his main interest in theology, von Rad studied in Erlangen with Otto Procksch, who influenced both von Rad's work on the book of Genesis and his idea of Old Testament salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). In Erlangen, von Rad wrote his dissertation, "Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium" (1929), and began to work on his *Habilitationsschrift*, *Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes* (1930).[27]

3. It was rather by accident than by a genuine interest that von Rad came in contact with Alt in Leipzig. As Procksch and Alt were old friends, the former encouraged von Rad to visit Alt in Leipzig. When Alt's research assistant Martin Noth was offered a position as professor in Königsberg, Alt asked von Rad whether he could imagine stepping in to take over as research assistant. As a result, von Rad became Alt's assistant from 1930 to 1934 and submitted his *Habilitationsschrift* in Leipzig.

We can infer that von Rad's interest in the ancient Near Eastern background of the Old Testament in general and ancient Egyptian literature in particular was influenced, if not caused, by Alt. During his four years in Leipzig, Alt helped von Rad to expand his horizon both in terms of ancient Near Eastern literature and in regard to the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Von Rad traveled to the Holy Land with his teacher Alt twice and later spoke about his years with Alt as some of the best of his life: "I consider it one of the most fortunate events of my life that this unparalleled scholar and teacher tolerated me for four years as his assistant and private lecturer and promoted me ceaselessly, and that I was able to remain academically and personally connected to him until his death."[28]

---

27. Gerhard von Rad, *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*, BWA(N)T 47 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929); von Rad, *Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes*, BWA(N)T 54 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).

28. Gerhard von Rad, "Antrittsrede als Mitglied der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften," in *Gottes Wirken in Israel: Vorträge zum Alten Testament*, ed. Odil Hannes Steck (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 318: "Daß dieser

If one takes into account that this quote is from von Rad's inaugural address (*Antrittsrede*) at the Heidelberg Academy of Science in 1955, it becomes clear how important Alt was for von Rad. In his inaugural address, published in the very same year as his article on Job 38, Alt is the only Old Testament scholar mentioned by name. This is remarkable since Alt was not interested in the theology of the Old Testament but in its ancient Near Eastern context and the history of ancient Israel. As a consequence of Alt's influence, von Rad encouraged his research assistants at Heidelberg University to learn Middle Egyptian, starting with Klaus Baltzer, Klaus Koch, and Rolf Rendtorff in the early 1950s and ending with Hans-Jürgen Hermisson and Jörg Jeremias almost twenty years later.[29] Von Rad's interest in ancient Egypt, provoked by Alt, was fostered by Egyptologist Eberhard Otto in Heidelberg.[30] Von Rad and Otto had met at the Heidelberg Academy of Science and shared common interests. Otto was one of the very few Egyptologists of his time who was interested not only in philology but also in questions of religion, literature, and culture. His book on the so-called "Accusation of God" (*Vorwurf an Gott*) in Egyptian literature, published in 1951, relates directly to the subject of the book of Job and kindled the interest of von Rad.[31]

In sum, von Rad's article on Job 38–39 and Egyptian literature grew out of a strong interest in the connection between Egyptian literature and the Hebrew Bible that emerged primarily through contact with his academic teacher in Leipzig, Alt. Against this backdrop it does not come as a

---

Gelehrte und Lehrer ohnegleichen mich vier Jahre neben sich als seinen Assistenten und Privatdozenten geduldet und unablässig gefördert hat, daß ich ihm wissenschaftlich und menschlich bis zu seinem Tod verbunden bleiben durfte, das rechne ich zu den glücklichsten Fügungen meines Lebens" (trans. Yannik Ehmer).

29. See Rolf Rendtorff, "Gerhard von Rad und die Religionsgeschichte," in *Theologie in Israel und in den Nachbarkulturen*, ed. Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Andreas Schüle, ATM 9 (Münster: LIT, 2004), 21. Klaus Koch devoted much of his scholarly life to ancient Egypt and wrote, among others, a book on the history of Egyptian religion from its beginnings to the Greco-Roman period. See Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion: Von den Pyramiden bis zu den Mysterien der Isis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993). I am grateful to Professor H.-J. Hermisson in Tübingen for the possibility to speak about his time in Heidelberg as one of Gerhard von Rad's last research assistants.

30. I am grateful to Professor Jan Assmann for this information.

31. Eberhard Otto, *Der Vorwurf an Gott: Zur Entstehung der ägyptischen Auseinandersetzungsliteratur* (Hildesheim: Gebr. Gerstenberg, 1951).

surprise that it was Alt who, in the early 1950s, brought a newly published Egyptian text to the attention of his former assistant that could be connected, in Alt's view, to ancient Israelite wisdom.

In 1947, British Egyptologist Alan Gardiner published the Onomasticon of Amenope, a list of 610 terms found on a papyrus from the late Twentieth or early Twenty-First Dynasty (ca. 1076–944 BCE).[32] In a section of this onomasticon a sequence of toponyms from the southern Levant can be found, which was used by Alt for a new interpretation of the early history of the Sea People ("Syrien und Palästina im Onomastikon des Amenope," 1950).[33] One year later, in 1951, Alt followed up with "Die Weisheit Salomos," in which he presents the idea von Rad built on a few years later.[34] According to Alt, the wisdom of Solomon, praised in 1 Kgs 5:10–14 as a wisdom concerning plants and animals, could be connected to a form of *Naturweisheit*, which is known from word lists from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Alt describes this type of wisdom as *Listenwissenschaft* ("science of lists") with an encyclopedic purpose. In particular, he points to the Onomasticon of Amenope, which presents an *Enzyklopädie allen Wissens* ("encyclopaedia of all knowledge") and which could, according to Alt, be compared with ancient Babylonian lists.[35]

In "Job 38 and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom," von Rad follows the path paved by his teacher Alt. He starts with the Onomasticon of Amenope and calls it an "encyclopaedic scientific work" that lists "objects, persons, offices, professions, tribes, Egyptian cities, and so on, simply listing a series of nouns or short phrases in each case."[36] Von Rad finds a "series of phenomena" in both Amenope and Job 38:12–32 that do not display "any precise parallelism" but similar constellations such as "meteorological

---

32. Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1947).

33. Albrecht Alt, "Syrien und Palästina im Onomastikon des Amenope," in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 1959), 1:231–45.

34. Albrecht Alt, "Die Weisheit Salomos," *TLZ* 57 (1951): 139–44. ET: Albrecht Alt, "Solomonic Wisdom," trans. Douglas A. Knight, in Crenshaw, *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 102–12.

35. See Alt "Die Weisheit Salomos," 141 ("Solomonic Wisdom," 105); Alt, "Syrien und Palästina," 231 n. 2 with reference to Wolfram von Soden. This perspective was taken up by Markus Hilgert, "Von 'Listenwissenschaft' und 'epistemischen Dingen': Konzeptuelle Annäherungen an altorientalische Wissenspraktiken," *ZAlW* 40 (2009): 277–309.

36. Von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 281.

phenomena: snow, hail, wind."[37] In his careful approach, von Rad concludes that, if there is not a literary dependence, there must "undoubtedly [be] some connection between the two texts." For this reason he refers to other onomastica published by Gardiner, such as the Rameses Onomasticon, with a list of plants, minerals, birds, fish, and animals.[38] He explains the differences as a function of the "poetic work" of the author of Job 38, who reworked the original material "stylistically." Following his teacher Alt, von Rad proposes that "such encyclopaedic works found their way into Israel," as can be seen in similar lists in Ben Sira 43 and Ps 148. Especially the latter, Ps 148, displays a list of human beings in verses 3–12 that shows a "striking affinity" to a section in the Onomasticon of Amenope, labeled by Gardiner as "types of human being" (nos. 295–304).

Returning to Job 38, von Rad points to another similarity with Egyptian literature: the rhetorical questions in Job 38:4–5, 12, 16–19, 22, 24. According to him, the strongest parallels can be found in dispute between two scribes, Hori and Amenemope, in the Egyptian P.Anast. 1.[39] Thus, von Rad discovered two Egyptian parallels for the divine speech of Job 38: "an established pattern which derives ultimately from Egyptian wisdom-literature as exemplified in the Onomastica" and a "catena of questions" in P.Anast. 1, "which itself goes back to the catechetical mode of instruction in ancient Egyptian scribal schools."[40] According to von Rad, both Egyptian texts could be connected to Egyptian scribal schools, where different types of knowledge, geographical but also cosmological and meteorological, were transmitted from one generation to the other.

Interestingly, in the last footnote of his article, von Rad mentions another possible perspective. He refers to Erman's *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, which understands the onomastica as simple "spelling-books."[41] This is precisely the perspective taken up by Fox in a general critique of Alt's and von Rad's approach. In his 1986 article "Egyptian Onomastica and Biblical Wisdom," Fox argues that the Egyptian onomastica "are not attempts to organize natural phenomena in systematic encyclopaedias.… Far more likely, the primary purpose of the onomastica was

---

37. Von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 284 ("Hiob XXXVIII," 263).

38. See Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1:7–8.

39. Von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 287–88.

40. Von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 289–90.

41. Adolf Erman, *Die Literatur der Ägypter* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1923), 240–41; see von Rad, "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom," 291 with n. 14.

the teaching of writing." In what followed, Fox pointed to orthographic variants in the Egyptian text and highlighted that some lists simply "served as aids in instruction about realia." Even though some lists seek to "teach about orders in the world by means of schemata," Fox questions that these lists point to "the existence of a 'science of lists.'" On the contrary, according to Fox, there is "no evidence for a 'science of lists' in ancient Israel," and "there is no science of lists in Egypt in any significant sense."[42]

The following paragraphs will show that this statement should be revised. There are many examples of ancient Egyptian onomastica that relate to a distinct form of wisdom: cosmotheistic knowledge.

### 3. Cosmotheistic Knowledge in Egypt and Israel: P.Ins. 24 and Job 38

Wisdom in the ancient Near East contains not only knowledge in the form of individual sayings connected to life experience but also knowledge concerning the cosmos.[43] In his studies on the idea of *maʿat* in ancient Egypt, Jan Assmann shows that the Egyptian word *mꜣ ͗.t* encompasses two different concepts of wisdom: educative knowledge and cosmotheistic knowledge.[44] The two concepts are connected by the different meanings of *maʿat* in Egypt, "righteousness" and "world order." Whereas the educative knowledge refers to instructions for life passed down from one generation to the next, comostheistic knowledge is related to the cosmos itself. It is a sort of magical knowledge, a "knowledge of creation," as Assmann puts it.[45]

Egyptian instructions such as the ones of Cheti, Ptahhotep, and Amenemope reflect the educative knowledge (Egyptian *rḫ*) that was transmitted through the Egyptian school system. This type of knowledge relates to everyday life and to the human being in its social contexts. The instruction of Ptahhotep, for example, describes such knowledge in classic terms: "as profit for him who will hear, as woe to him who would neglect them."[46] Thus, educative knowledge contains "the sum of all human knowledge

---

42. Fox, "Egyptian Onomastica and Biblical Wisdom," 303–6, 308.

43. See Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 12–14.

44. Jan Assmann, "Magische Weisheit: Wissensformen im ägyptischen Kosmotheismus," in *Weisheit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, ed. Aleida Assmann (Munich: Fink, 1991), 3:241–57.

45. Assmann, "Magische Weisheit," 242.

46. *AEL* 1:63.

necessary for a life in society."[47] This knowledge is based on life experience and is conveyed with a view to life as a whole. The educative knowledge can be found in the so-called instructions for life (*Lebenslehren*), which are introduced by the Egyptian term *sbȝj.t*.

Cosmotheistic knowledge, by contrast, is the knowledge of creation and includes rituals and magic. This type of knowledge is often connected with the divine world.[48] It is interesting to see that the Egyptian literature that visualizes the dimension of cosmotheistic knowledge became important when traditional educative knowledge was put into question. An important example for the latter is the Instructions of Any from the New Kingdom. Following classic phraseology, a father's instruction to his son begins with the statement: "Behold, I give you these useful counsels, for you to ponder in your heart; do it and you will be happy, all evils will be far away from you" (5.4). Interestingly, at the end of the instruction the son raises objections to the father's instruction. He states that the instruction of the father is too long and too difficult for him. Furthermore, the son states that "each man is led by his nature" and that a "youth" is not yet able to grasp the instruction. The dispute between the son and his father ends with the insight that humans are "companions of the god" and that it is ultimately the deity who ensures that humans remain on the right path.[49]

The limitations of educative knowledge are also emphasized in the Instruction of Amenemope from the Ramesside period. Among other places, Instruction of Amenemope 19.16–17 states: "On one side are the words that people say; on the other is what the god does."[50] Similar thoughts can be found in Instruction of Amenemope 20.5–6; 22.5–6; 24.10–11, 20.

It does not come as a surprise that, in the historical period when classical educative knowledge was gradually challenged, literature was written that visualizes the cosmotheistic knowledge of creation. From the New Kingdom onward, a number of Egyptian onomastica are known, among them the aforementioned Onomasticon of Amenope. Interestingly enough, this onomasticon dates to the exact historical period of the

---

47. See Jan Assmann, "Weisheit, Schrift und Literatur im alten Ägypten," in Assmann, *Weisheit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, 480: "die Summe des für ein Leben in der Gesellschaft notwendigen Wissens vom Menschen."

48. Assmann, "Magische Weisheit," 244.

49. Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 17.

50. Translation according to Vincent Pierre-Michel Laisney, *L'Enseignement d'Aménémopé*, StPohl 19 (Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 2007), 177.

most important textual witness, Cairo Papyrus CG 58042, of the Instructions of Any: the transition period from the Twentieth to the Twenty-First Dynasty, at the end of the Ramesside period.[51] If one looks at the introduction of the Onomasticon of Amenope, it becomes clear that this piece of literature is intended to present a form of wisdom:[52]

> Beginning of the instruction for clearing the mind (heart), for the teaching of the unknowing person and for learning all things that exist. What Ptah created, what Thot wrote down, the sky and his things, the earth and what belongs to her, what the mountains belch forth, what is watered by the flood, all things upon which the sun has shone, all that is grown on the back of the earth, excogitated by the scribe of the sacred books in the house of life, Amenope, son of Amenope.[53]

The text presents itself as a *sbꜣj.t*, an instruction, and starts with the classic formula of an Egyptian instruction of life ("beginning of the instruction," *ḥꜣt-ꜥ m sbꜣj.t*). Similar to traditional wording, the instruction of the unknowing person (the "ignorant," *eg. ḫm-jḫ.t*)[54] is important, but in contrast to the Instruction of Any, Amenemope, or Ptahhotep, this instruction focuses on "learning of all things that exist." The meaning of this phrase is illustrated by the "Memphite Theology" (*Denkmal memphitischer Theologie*). In this theological text from the Egyptian Late Period (Twenty-Fifth Dynasty), every element of the world is connected to the creator god, who brought it into life by his divine word:[55]

---

51. For the textual witnesses of the Instructions of Any see Günter Burkard and Heinz-Josef Thissen, *Neues Reich*, vol. 2 of *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd ed., EQÄ 6 (Münster: LIT, 2009), 99.

52. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1:1*; see also Bernd U. Schipper, "Kosmotheistisches Wissen: Prov 3,19f. und die Weisheit Israels," in *Bilder als Quellen / Images as Sources*, ed. Susanne Bickel, OBO (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 496.

53. Translation according to the Hieroglyphic text in Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1:1*–2*.

54. In many Egyptian dictionaries, the Egyptian term *ḫm-jḫ.t* is translated with "ignorant." See, e.g., Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1988), 191, "ignorant man." Slightly different: Rainer Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch*, 3rd ed., HL 1 (Mainz: von Zabern, 2001), 599: "Nichtwisser, Ignorant."

55. See Amr El Hawary, *Wortschöpfung: Die Memphitische Theologie und die Siegesstele des Pije*, OBO 243 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 134–37.

For every word of the god came about through what the heart devised
and the tongue commanded.
Thus all the faculties were made and all the qualities determined, they
that make all foods and all provisions, through this word.
It is the sky with all his things, and the earth with all that belongs to it.
…
He gave birth to the gods,
He made the towns,
The established the nomes.[56]

In light of both the passage from the Memphite Theology and the intro-
duction of the Onomasticon of Amenope, it becomes clear that the list of
610 terms in this onomasticon relates to the idea of cosmotheistic knowl-
edge.[57] It presents the knowledge of the creator who called all things into
being. Following Gardiner, the Onomasticon of Amenope can be divided
into nine subdivisions:

1.  Introductory heading
2.  Sky, water, earth (nos. 1–62)
3.  Persons, court, offices, occupations (nos. 63–229)
4.  Classes, tribes, and types of human being (nos. 230–312)
5.  The towns of Egypt (nos. 313–419)
6.  Buildings, their parts, and types of land (nos. 420–473)
7.  Agricultural land, cereals, and their products (nos. 474–555)
8.  Beverages (nos. 556–578)
9.  Parts of an ox and kinds of meat (nos. 579–610)[58]

Given the wide range of subjects, from terms for sky, water, and earth to
kinds of meat, the onomasticon has the character of an encyclopedic pre-
sentation. Part 3, for example, gives important insights into the structure
of Egyptian society at the end of the New Kingdom.[59]

---

56. The translation follows *AEL* 1:54–55.

57. See also Assmann, "Magische Weisheit," 253; Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer,
*Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen* (Göttingen:
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 2002), 171, with a critique of
the position of Michael V. Fox.

58. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 1:37.

59. See Pierre Grandet, "The 'Chapter of Hierarchy' in Amenope's Onomasticon
(# 67–127)," in *The Ramesside Period in Egypt*, ed. Sabine Kubisch and Ute Rummel,
SDAIK 41 (Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 2018), 134.

The *sbꜣ.jt* ("instruction") of the onomasticon contains a systematization of the world for didactic purposes. Its role as a didactic text is illustrated by the copies of the text, two of which are written on ostraca and one on a writing board.[60] Both ostraca and writing boards were used in ancient Egypt for writing exercises. Furthermore, nine copies of the manuscript of the Onomasticon of Amenope exist, among them two papyri (Papyrus Golénischeff and BM 10474) where red ink is used to highlight a part of the text, as was common in writing schools.[61] This material evidence points to the fact that the Onomasticon of Amenope was used as a didactic text for both writing exercises and for teaching the deeper dimensions of knowledge. Whether or not one wants to call this type of knowledge *Listenwissenschaft*,[62] the general idea is to give the student of the "instruction" (*sbꜣj.t*) an overview of "the knowledge of all things that exist," as the introduction of the onomasticon puts it. Therefore, the general approach is not to present an encyclopedic order of the world in its narrow sense but to illustrate its deeper dimensions, given that classical educative knowledge is limited. Hence, it is not surprising that a number of onomastica are known from the Egyptian Late Period.[63] It was during this period that the traditional educative knowledge as it could be found in the instructions of life was increasingly put into question.

An important example of this tendency is the so-called Great Demotic Wisdom Book of Papyrus Insinger.[64] The instruction, titled "The Way of Knowing Knowledge," consists of twenty-five thematic units that present a masterful connection between a thematic pattern and individual proverbs. The whole composition is characterized by a fundamental challenge of traditional sapiential thought. Whereas the classic instructions of life

---

60. See Kate Liszka, "Medjay," no. 188 in the "Onomasticon of Amenope," in *Millions of Jubilees: Studies in Honor of David P. Silverman*, ed. Zahi Hawass and Jennifer Houser Wegner (Cairo: Conseil Supreme Des Antiquites De L'egyptie, 2010), 1:316.

61. Eight of these copies were published by Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, 24–26. The ninth, BM 10474 verso, was published by François-René Herbin: "Une Version inachevée de L'onomasticon d'Aménemopé (P.BM 10474 vso)," *BIFAO* (1986): 187–98.

62. See Hilgert, "Von 'Listenwissenschaft' und 'epistemischen Dingen,'" 279–83; Keel and Schoer, *Schöpfung*, 171.

63. See, e.g., Alexandra von Lieven, "Das Göttliche in der Natur erkennen: Tiere, Pflanzen und Phänomene der unbelebten Natur als Manifestationen des Göttlichen: Mit einer Edition der Baumliste p.Berlin 29027," *ZÄS* 131 (2004): 156–72, pls. XX–XXI.

64. For the following paragraph, see Schipper, *Proverbs 1–15*, 19.

emphasize that the one who follows the instruction will benefit from it, the tenth instruction of Papyrus Insinger states (9.16–19):[65]

> There is one who has not been taught, yet he knows how to instruct another. There is one who knows the instruction, yet he does not know how to live by it.
> It is not necessarily a true son who accepts instructions so as to be taught. It is the god who gives the heart, gives the son, and gives the good character.

The limits of sapiential knowledge are expressed in a characteristic way. The formulae "there is" (*wn*) and "there is not" (*mn*) introduce ideas that oppose or negate what comes beforehand. As Joachim Friedrich Quack notes, this serves "to reflect the inscrutability of the world in which the deity can decide a person's fate."[66]

A similar thought is found at the end of the seventh instruction (P.Ins. 5.3–6):

> There is one wise in heart, but his life is hard.
> There is one who is satisfied by his fate, there is he who is satisfied by his wisdom.
> It is not (necessarily) the wise in character who lives by it.
> It is not (necessarily) the fool as such whose life is hard.[67]

The abovementioned passage is a critical reflection on the foundations of sapiential thought, which is life experience. This critique of an educative knowledge that is based on experience is connected to a religious perspective (5.11): "The fate and the fortune that come—it is the god who sends them." Interestingly, in Papyrus Insinger this train of thought leads to a passage in which the divine dimension is connected with elements of ancient Egyptian onomastica.[68] After the critical discussion of classi-

---

65. For the translation see Joachim F. Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte III: Die demotische und gräko-ägyptische Literatur*, 2nd ed., EQÄ 6 (Münster: LIT, 2009), 115; *AEL* 3:192.

66. See Quack, *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, 115 ("die Unerforschlichkeit der Welt darzustellen, in der Gott über das Schicksal schalten kann").

67. The English translation follows Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim F. Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*, 2nd ed., EQÄ 4 (Berlin: LIT, 2018), 280–81.

68. A first attempt to compare Job 38 and Demotic wisdom can be found in Thomas Schneider, "Hiob 38 und die demotische Weisheit," *TZ* 47 (1991): 108–24.

cal forms of knowledge in chapters 1–23, the penultimate chapter of the instruction starts with the statement, "The teaching of knowing the greatness of the God" (30.19). Chapter 24 emphasizes the power of the deity who sees both the ungodly and the man of God (see 31.3–4). A chapter with rhetorical questions is introduced by the phrase "He who says 'it cannot happen' should look at what is hidden" (31.19):

> What for go and come the sun and moon in the sky?
> Whence go and come water, fire, and wind?
> For whom do amulet and spell become remedies?
> The hidden work of the god, he makes it known daily. (31.20–23)[69]

What follows is a passage on God's creation (31.24; 32.2–9):

> He created light and darkness in which is every creature.
> He created day, month, and year through the commands of the lord of commands.
> He created summer and winter with the rising and setting of Sirius.
> He created food before those who are alive, the wonder of the field.
> He created the constellation of the luminaries, so that those on earth know them.
> He created sweet water in it [the sky] which all lands desire.
> He created the breath in the egg though there is no access to it.
> He created birth in every womb from the semen which one gives them.
> He created sinews and bones out of this semen.

This description of creation leads to a passage where a contrafactual statement is made. Similar to other statements at the end of the individual chapters within the Great Demotic Wisdom Book, classical educative knowledge, as expressed, for example, in the deed-consequence nexus, is put into question:

> It is not [necessarily] the one who kills who falls on the way.
> Fate and retaliation go around and bring about what he [the god] commands.
> Fate does not look ahead, retaliation does not come and go wrongfully.
> The way of the council of the god is to put one thing after another.
> The fate and the fortune that come, it is the god who sends them. (33.15)

---

69. See *AEL* 3:210.

Chapter 24 of the Great Demotic Wisdom book is a paradigmatic example of cosmotheistic knowledge as part of an instruction of life. Based on a fundamental critique of traditional educative knowledge that is centered on the deed-consequence nexus, it underlines the knowledge of the creator, which is not accessible for humans. Fate and retaliation come from a god whose ways are unfathomable for humans. If one compares this passage from the Great Demotic Wisdom book with the part of the divine speech in Job 38–39 that von Rad drew attention to nearly seventy years ago, three main similarities can be found:

1. Similar to the divine speech in Job 38–39, the Great Demotic Wisdom book contains a passage with rhetorical questions (31.20–22).
2. As in Job 38–39, the subject of creation is developed by stressing the following aspects:
   a. God as creator of the earth, the sea, the wind, and the clouds (Job 38:4; 8–9; P.Ins. 31.20–21; 32.5)
   b. It is God who grants to give birth to the animals (Job 39:1–4; P.Ins. 32.7)
3. In a way similar to Job 38–39, the cosmotheistic knowledge is used to describe the main difference between the creator god and the human being.

The Great Demotic Wisdom Book stands in the tradition of an Egyptian idea of creation, in the context of which the life spending power of the deity is mentioned (e.g., the Great Hymn to Aton or the Memphite Theology).[70] God's guiding and protecting power can be found in three life-giving elements: wind, water, and light.[71] All of these cosmic elements illustrate the hidden work of God. It is precisely this aspect, the hidden work of God found in creation and cosmos, that is central for Job 38–39. In sum, both texts, Job 38–39 and P.Ins. 24, use cosmotheistic knowledge to describe the power of the deity against the backdrop of a human being who appears to be rather powerless.

---

70. For the Great Hymn to Aton, see Assmann, "Magische Weisheit," 250–52.
71. Schneider, "Hiob 38 und die demotische Weisheit," 120.

## Summary

When summarizing von Rad's work on ancient Israelite and Egyptian wisdom, his article on Job 38 and Egyptian *Listenweisheit* from 1955 in fact turns out to be as groundbreaking as it was considered for decades. Even though von Rad benefited a great deal from his teacher Alt, who pointed him toward the subject, he developed an approach that today is as relevant as it was almost seventy years ago. Von Rad pointed to a type of wisdom that is beyond wisdom's classical form of educative knowledge. This new, cosmotheistic wisdom relates to the cosmos and to the deeper dimension of the world. Therefore, ancient Egyptian onomastica should not mainly be seen as examples of *Listenwissenschaft* or merely as encyclopedic, but rather as a visualization of the knowledge of the creator. The introduction of the Onomasticon of Amenope gets right to the point when it mentions the creator god Ptah and the wisdom god Thot, and calls what follows a *sbꜣj.t:* a "wisdom instruction."

The way paved by von Rad in 1955 ultimately leads to Demotic wisdom literature. The Great Demotic Wisdom Book (Papyrus Insinger) shows remarkable similarities with the divine speeches in Job, as demonstrated in this article. If one wants to take this thesis even further, one could also claim that the general structure of the book of Job and the Great Demotic Wisdom Book show similarities. Both wisdom books present a lengthy literary discourse on the limitations of sapiential knowledge that is based on human experience and the deed-consequence nexus. Whereas in the book of Job this discourse is displayed in a set of dialogues between Job and his friends, Papyrus Insinger presents it by combining different perspectives, often introduced by the phrase "there is" or "there is not." The crucial point is that in both compositions, the book of Job and the Great Demotic Wisdom Book, the literary discourse on the limitations of educative knowledge culminates in a passage that uses cosmotheistic knowledge to express the fundamental difference between god and human. In a style similar to Job 38–39, chapter 24 of the Great Demotic Wisdom Book uses motifs from creation theology to illustrate the "hidden work" and the power of a deity who has the freedom to decide on the fate of the human being. In sum, what can be found in both Demotic wisdom and the book of Job is a train of thought in which cosmotheistic knowledge, like that found in the Onomasticon of Amenope, is used for a theological purpose. Therefore, the final sentence of chapter 24 of the Great Demotic Wisdom Book also articulates a central idea of the book of Job (P.Ins. 33.5–6): "The

way of the council of the god is to put one thing after another. The fate and the fortune that come, it is the god who sends them."

# Bibliography

Alt, Albrecht. "Solomonic Wisdom." Translated by Douglas A. Knight. Pages 102–12 in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. Edited by James L. Crenshaw. New York: Ktav, 1976.

———. "Syrien und Palästina im Onomastikon des Amenope." Pages 231–45 in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Munich: Beck, 1959.

———. "Die Weisheit Salomos." *TLZ* 57 (1951): 139–44.

Assmann, Jan. "Magische Weisheit: Wissensformen im ägyptischen Kosmotheismus." Pages 241–57 in *Weisheit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*. Edited by Aleida Assmann. Vol. 3. Munich: Fink, 1991.

———. "Weisheit, Schrift und Literatur im alten Ägypten." Pages 475–500 in  vol. 3 of *Weisheit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*. Edited by Aleida Assmann. Munich: Fink, 1991.

Baumgartner, Walter. *Israelitische und altorientalische Weisheit*. SGVS 166. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933.

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. 4th ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

Burkard, Günter, and Heinz-Josef Thissen. *Neues Reich*. Vol. 2 of *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*. 2nd ed. EQÄ 6. Münster: LIT, 2009.

Crenshaw, James L., ed. *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. New York: Ktav, 1976.

Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*. Translated by Matthew G. Easton. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874.

El Hawary, Amr. *Wortschöpfung: Die Memphitische Theologie und die Siegesstele des Pije*. OBO 243. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010.

Erman, Adolf. *Akademieschriften (1880–1928)*. Opuscula 13.2. Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1986.

———. *Die Literatur der Ägypter*. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1923.

Faulkner, Raymond O. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1988.

Fox, Michael V. "Egyptian Onomastica and Biblical Wisdom." *VT* 36 (1986): 302–10.

Frankenberg, Wilhelm. *Die Sprüche*. HKAT 2/3.1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898.

Gardiner, Alan H. *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Gebauer, Sascha. *Hugo Greßmann und sein Programm der Religionsgeschichte*. BZAW 523. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020.

Gese, Hartmut. *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit. Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und dem Buche Hiob*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958.

Grandet, Pierre. "The 'Chapter of Hierarchy' in Amenope's Onomasticon (# 67–127)." Pages 127–37 in *The Ramesside Period in Egypt*. Edited by Sabine Kubisch and Ute Rummel. SDAIK 41. Cairo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 2018.

Greßmann, Hugo. "Die neugefundene Lehre des Amenemope und die vorexilische Spruchdichtung Israels." *ZAW* 42 (1924): 272–96.

Hannig, Rainer. *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch*. 3rd ed. HL 1. Mainz: von Zabern, 2001.

Herbin, François-René. "Une Version inachevée de L'onomasticon d'Aménemopé (P.BM 10474 vso)." *BIFAO* (1986): 187–98.

Hermann, Siegfried. "Die Naturlehre des Schöpfungsberichtes." *TLZ* 86 (1961): 413–24.

Hilgert, Markus. "Von 'Listenwissenschaft' und 'epistemischen Dingen': Konzeptuelle Annäherungen an altorientalische Wissenspraktiken." *ZAlW* 40 (2009): 277–309.

Hoffmann, Friedhelm, and Joachim F. Quack. *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*. 2nd ed. EQÄ 4. Berlin: LIT, 2018.

Kayatz, Christa. *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9: Eine form- und motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials*. WMANT 22. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966.

Keel, Othmar, and Silvia Schroer. *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 2002.

Koch, Klaus. *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion: Von den Pyramiden bis zu den Mysterien der Isis*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993.

Laisney, Vincent Pierre-Michel. *L'Enseignement d'Aménémopé*. StPohl 19. Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 2007.

Lieven, Alexandra von. "Das Göttliche in der Natur erkennen: Tiere, Pflanzen und Phänomene der unbelebten Natur als Manifestationen des Göttlichen: Mit einer Edition der Baumliste p.Berlin 29027." *ZÄS* 131 (2004): 156–72.

Liszka, Kate. "Medjay." Pages 315–31 in *Millions of Jubilees: Studies in Honor of David P. Silverman*. Edited by Zahi Hawass and Jennifer Houser Wegner. Vol. 1. Cairo: Conseil Supreme Des Antiquites De L'egyptie, 2010.

Otto, Eberhard. *Der Vorwurf an Gott: Zur Entstehung der ägyptischen Auseinandersetzungsliteratur*. Hildesheim: Gebr. Gerstenberg, 1951.

Quack, Joachim F. *Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte III: Die demotische und gräko-ägyptische Literatur*. 2nd ed. EQÄ 6. Münster: LIT, 2009.

Rad, Gerhard von. "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel." Pages 148–88 in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*. TB 8. Munich: Kaiser, 1958.

———. "Antrittsrede als Mitglied der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften." Pages 317–23 in *Gottes Wirken in Israel: Vorträge zum Alten Testament*. Edited by Odil Hannes Steck. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974.

———. *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*. TB 8. Munich: Kaiser, 1958.

———. *Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes*. BWA(N)T 54. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930.

———. *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium*. BWA(N)T 47. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929.

———. "Hiob XXXVIII und die Altägyptische Weisheit." Pages 292–301 in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vetus Testamentum in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 24 March 1955*. Edited by Martin Noth and Winton Thomas. VTSup 3. Leiden: Brill, 1955.

———. "Job 38 and Egyptian Wisdom." Pages 281–91 in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. Translated by Eric W. Trueman Dicken. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966.

———. "Josefsgeschichte und ältere Chokma." Pages 272–80 in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*. TB 8. Munich: Kaiser, 1958.

———. "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom." Pages 439–47 in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*. Edited by James L. Crenshaw. New York: Ktav, 1976.

———. *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. 2 vols. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962.

———. *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. Translated by Eric W. Trueman Dicken. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966.

———. *Weisheit in Israel: Mit einem Anhang neu herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski*. 4th ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Repr., Nashville: Abingdon, 1988.

Rendtorff, Rolf. "Gerhard von Rad und die Religionsgeschichte." Pages 17–24 in *Theologie in Israel und in den Nachbarkulturen*. Edited by Manfred Oeming, Konrad Schmid, and Andreas Schüle. ATM 9. Münster: LIT, 2004.

Robert, André. "Les attaches littéraires bibliques de Prov I–IX." *RB* 43 (1934): 42–68, 172–204, 374–84.

Schipper, Bernd U. "Kosmotheistisches Wissen: Prov 3,19f. und die Weisheit Israels." Pages 487–510 in *Bilder als Quellen / Images as Sources*. Edited by Susanne Bickel. OBO. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.

———. "Die Lehre des Amenemope und Prov 22,17–24,22: Eine Neu-bestimmung des literarischen Verhältnisses (Teil 1)." *ZAW* 117 (2005): 53–72.

———. *Proverbs 1–15: A Commentary*. Translated by Stephen Germany. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

Schneider, Thomas. "Hiob 38 und die demotische Weisheit." *TZ* 47 (1991): 108–24.

Smend, Rudolf. *Kritiker und Exegeten: Porträtskizzen zu vier Jahrhun-derten alttestamentlicher Wissenschaft*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

# Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom in Texts from the Qumran Caves

George J. Brooke

## 1. Setting the Scene

There are but three references to the so-called sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls in Gerhard von Rad's *Weisheit in Israel*.[1] Two of those concern the Cave 1 version of the Rule of the Community, and the third is a reference to the Hodayot. Those three passages will be discussed in more detail below. There are, of course, many more references to nonscriptural literary works that have been preserved in the Qumran caves but that either seem to reflect the thoughts of the precursors of the community or movement, part of which came to reside at Qumran at some time in the first half of the first century BCE, or which belonged to other Jews with whom the movement had ideological sympathies. Chief among those literary works are some of the Enochic writings, the book of Jubilees, and the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira. Although it is worth keeping such works in mind, my brief in this chapter is more narrowly confined to works associated most directly with the Qumran community and the wider movement of which it was a part.

---

It is a privilege to make this short contribution to the evaluation of wisdom literature, scholarship, and topics in light of Gerhard von Rad's *Weisheit in Israel*. When in graduate school at Claremont as a group of enthusiastic doctoral students, we sometimes mused about our academic pedigrees. As students of Rolf Knierim, we considered ourselves to be grandchildren of his *Doktorvater*, none other than von Rad himself! References in this article are to the English translation.

1. James L. Crenshaw makes but one mention of the Scrolls from the Qumran caves in relation to von Rad's thinking: that concerns his views on Yahweh's righteousness, for which he brings into consideration three passages from 1QH[a]. See Crenshaw, *Gerhard von Rad*, MMTM (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 160.

By the time von Rad was engaged in the 1960s in the writing of his last major work, there had been some considerable interest in the new compositions coming from the Qumran caves, and yet the newly known texts from the late Second Temple period impinged little on von Rad's thematically organized project. This can be explained in part by four factors.[2] First, the general approach to the Old Testament in German Protestant faculties of theology had been determined by a long-standing set of theological and historical assumptions about the canonical status of the texts. Those assumptions tended toward treatment of the Old Testament as a collection of compositions with an overall religious coherence and integrity. Such a viewpoint is best represented by the two landmarks of the middle of the twentieth century, the Old Testament theologies by Walter Eichrodt and by von Rad himself, the one more directed toward speaking of the theological coherence of the interrelationship of God, humanity, and the world, and the other more directed at a salvation-historical perspective.[3] Von Rad's *Weisheit* was just that, a book concerned primarily with the wisdom books of the Old Testament, with defining the scope and limits of empirical knowledge as featured in those books. In such a context Rudolf Smend neatly summarizes the overall theological purpose of *Weisheit*: "The fundamental problem that stood behind the rich and vital presentation of this [wisdom] thought-world was the one that had motivated R. in his work on the historical biblical witnesses and that imprinted his entire theological existence: the relationship of faith to reality."[4] In the light of this point von Rad's work was notable for including a whole chapter on Sirach, but it was never intended as a complete survey of wisdom texts and traditions beyond the Old Testament.

Second, it has been generally the case that, overwhelmingly in the German academic tradition, the noncanonical Jewish literature of the Second Temple period has been principally viewed as providing informa-

---

2. On these and other aspects of Qumran scholarship in Germany see Jörg Frey, "Qumran Research and Biblical Scholarship in Germany," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Scholarly Perspective: A History of Research*, ed. Devorah Dimant, STDJ 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 529–64; also, George J. Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and German Scholarship: Thoughts of an Englishman Abroad*, JWV 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

3. Published in their first editions: Walter Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1933–1939); Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1957–1961).

4. Rudolf Smend, "Rad, Gerhard von (1901–71)," *DBI* 2:365.

tion mostly for the appropriate construction of the *Umwelt* of Jesus and his early followers. Von Rad's *Weisheit* can be commended for including discussion of Sirach and of some other late Second Temple period compositions in his consideration of "The Divine Determination of Times."[5] However, until quite recently few German Old Testament scholars have been concerned with the *Nachleben* of Old Testament texts, the earliest layers of the reception of the compositions that eventually came to make up the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.[6] As such, it has been German New Testament scholars rather than their Old Testament counterparts who have engaged most fully with the new information coming from the Dead Sea region. This is attested in multiple ways in the work of many New Testament experts; most especially it can be seen in the endeavors of the scholars—contemporaries of von Rad at Heidelberg—whose works were published in the series tellingly titled Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments (SUNT), but it can also be noted in the broader contextual work of Martin Hengel at Tübingen and then the multiple more specific studies of his student Jörg Frey.[7] It is intriguing to note too that one of the most explicit uses of the community Scrolls by von Rad is to be found in his essay on the homiletic and didactic form of 1 Cor 13:4–7; there he cites extensively the passage on virtues and vices from 1QS IV, 9–11 and the list of right actions imported into the closing hymn at 1QS X, 17–25.[8]

---

5. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin: (London: SCM, 1972), 240–83.

6. Exceptions include Heinz-Josef Fabry, at the University of Bonn, and Reinhard Kratz at Georg-August University in Göttingen. The former has written extensively on the Scrolls and coedited the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zu den Qumrantexten*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011–2016). Most recently, with some concern for wisdom, see Heinz-Josef Fabry, "'… in der Gemeinschaft der Wahrheit, gütiger Demut, huldvoller Liebe und gerechten Denkens …': 'Liebe' und 'Lieben' in Qumran," *JBT* 29 (2014): 189–214. The latter has also written many studies on the Scrolls, though not much on wisdom texts and traditions. However, see, e.g., Kratz, "Laws of Wisdom: Sapiential Traits in the *Rule of the Community (1QS 5–7)*," in *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg, Moshe Bar-Asher, and Ruth A. Clements, STDJ 108 (Leiden: Brill 2013), 133–45.

7. Frey's most recent work on the Scrolls is collected in *Qumran, Early Judaism, and New Testament Interpretation: Kleine Schriften III*, WUNT 424 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

8. Gerhard von Rad, "The Early History of the Form-Category of 1 Corinthians XIII.4–7," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 301–17.

A third factor in limiting the significance of the discoveries from the Qumran caves and related sites has been the way in which, in the first phase of research on the compositions, they were treated as representative of what might be taking place on the margins of Jewish religious life and practice. The manuscripts from the Qumran caves were read chiefly as sectarian compositions representing a minority disenfranchised view. This marginalization was further compounded by the ways in which only a limited number of the Cave 4 and Cave 11 documents were published, even in preliminary editions, before the general release of the Scrolls in 1991. Since then the full availability of the Qumran corpus has resulted in the energetic reconsideration of many things, not least the character of Jewish sapiential traditions of the second half of the Second Temple period. The publication of the several fragmentary manuscripts of Instruction (Muśar le-Mevin) has been instrumental in a redirection of the scholarly discourse, a redirection that has also involved a significant realization that the sapiential compositions from the Qumran caves not only represent a more widespread set of views than those that are narrowly sectarian but also are best read as continuous with earlier traditions, such as those held within the latest layers of the Writings (the Ketuvim). In a limited manner in anticipation of the current view, von Rad early on recognized greater complexity and noted that of all Jewish sects the Dead Sea community was the "least tainted with Hellenism, yet even their teaching [1QS IV, 9–11] shows an admixture of elements which were foreign to earlier Judaism."[9]

There is also a fourth but less significant factor in limiting what might have been said about wisdom by the first generation of scholars after the discovery of the Scrolls from 1947 onward. Apart from multiple manuscripts containing both canonical and noncanonical psalms, amongst the scriptural scrolls found in the Qumran caves the number of copies of the books that now form the Ketuvim is rather limited, not only in the number of copies but also in the extent of what survives and in the influence of such books on the sectarian compositions.[10] As such, the evidence has seemed to suggest, not inappropriately in some respects, that the scriptural priorities of the community who deposited the manuscripts

---

9. Von Rad, "Early History of the Form-Category," 309.

10. A sound survey of the evidence can be found in Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Donn F. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 325–41.

in the caves at and near Qumran lay elsewhere, especially with Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah.

But in *Weisheit* von Rad does indeed mention three passages from the so-called sectarian scrolls. In the third part of his introductory section he outlines the forms in which knowledge is expressed. In considering the "literary proverb," he notes that such ancient sentences could be subject to change in the course of their transmission. To illustrate the point, he notes that "the wisdom sentence which states that man does not have the power to determine his way (Jer. 10.23) is taken up in the Qumran writings, that is in a vastly different religious atmosphere (1QS XI, 10; 1QH XV, 12f.)."[11] The sapiential elements of the Hodayot and the Community Rule have increasingly come to be acknowledged, though here it is actually the use of a proverb embedded in a prophetic context that is being recognized. As for the third reference by von Rad to the sectarian compositions, that is to the description of the God of knowledge of 1QS III, 15–16; that is a text he puts alongside several others to indicate how Sirach applies the doctrine of the divine determination of times, especially in relation to the "question of salvation, the question of life or death."[12] It is intriguing to note that Armin Lange suitably juxtaposes the same passage of 1QS III, 15 with 1QH[a] VII, 26;[13] from that it is possible to see that all three of von Rad's references to the sectarian compositions are concerned with the same deterministic subject matter, and perhaps that was his overall view of the Qumran community and the movement of which it was a part.

The rest of this essay considers *Weisheit* in relation to a review of much of the post-1991 scholarship on the wisdom compositions from the Qumran caves to see how influential the ideas of von Rad have been. There is then a section of concluding reflections mentioning some of the recent developments in the scholarly understanding of those sapiential compositions and the richness of the Jewish wisdom traditions as discernible in the

---

11. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 33. The reordering of the principal sheets of 1QH[a] converts the reference to 1QH[a] VII, 25–26: "And as for me, I know, by the understanding that comes from you, that it is not through the power of flesh [that] an individual may perfect] his way, nor is a person able to direct his steps." Translated by Carol A. Newsom in *Qumran Cave 1.III: 1QHodayot[a] with Incorporation of 1QHodayot[a] and 4QHodayot[a–f]*, by Hartmut Stegemann and Eileen Schuller, DJD 40 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 106.

12. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 268.

13. Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran*, STDJ 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 214.

community manuscripts and those closely related to them as found in the eleven caves at and near Qumran.

## 2. Scholarship on the Wisdom Compositions from the Qumran Caves

It is about thirty years since all the Cave 4 and Cave 11 scrolls became generally available. The landscape for the scholarly discussion of early Jewish wisdom literature has shifted considerably, though some things remain similar. It can be readily argued that several of the most significant shifts in the scholarly discourse have indeed resulted from the availability and consideration of the previously unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls. Among those changes in perspective has been the rethinking of the very category of wisdom itself: what does *sapiential* mean or refer to? Although there is widespread and long-standing recognition that an overarching category such as wisdom could have many generic subcategories, there is acknowledgment that the strict use of the label has outlived its purpose if compositions are defined somewhat simplistically as either in or out of the category as it might be defined by the contents and purposes of the major wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible.[14] As a major factor in the debate, the range of wisdom compositions among the Scrolls from the Qumran caves has been something of a surprise, and that range and diversity has contributed to the sense that inherited definitions from earlier generations no longer hold. In addition, the whole scholarly discourse on the role and usefulness of genre labels has also developed and changed.[15]

---

14. Will Kynes, "The 'Wisdom Literature' Category: An Obituary," *JTS* 69 (2018): 1–24; Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Mark Sneed, "'Grasping after the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom," in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, ed. Mark Sneed, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 39–67; or, with more nuance, Stuart Weeks, "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–23. See the subgenres described by von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 24–50; and those listed from "Account" to "Woe Oracle," in Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, FOTL 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 172–85.

15. For wisdom literature in particular see, e.g., Hindy Najman, "Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the Study of a Semantic Constellation," in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George*

Beyond such general considerations, this second and major section of this chapter engages with the place of von Rad's work in the history of scholarship on the wisdom compositions from the Qumran caves under four subheadings: (1) the scholarship presented in brief but significant surveys of the new wisdom texts, (2) the scholarly discourse of three major works on the Qumran wisdom corpus as a whole, (3) the ideas of a few of the several monographs on one or more of the sapiential compositions, and (4) the debates held at international conferences devoted in part or completely to the wisdom texts.

## 2.1. Significant Brief Surveys

After the general release of the unpublished Cave 4 and Cave 11 scrolls in 1991, several studies offered some preliminary listing and assessment of the surviving corpus of sapiential literature.[16] It is not necessary here to rehearse their contributions by describing all the recently available compositions from the Qumran caves that might be considered as part of a wisdom corpus or to contribute to the debate about the character of wisdom in the second half of the Second Temple period. Rather, this section will draw attention to a few key surveys and engage with their treatment of some of the fresh perspectives and, where applicable, their discussion of von Rad's views on wisdom literature, especially as articulated in *Weisheit*.[17]

Among the first to expound the compositions newly available from the early 1990s was Lawrence Schiffman. He not only noted the diversity of the new texts but also characterized the changing emphasis within the

---

*J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 459–72.

16. A standard list of so-called sapiential compositions can be found in Armin Lange with Ursula Mittmann-Richert, "Annotated List of the Texts from the Judaean Desert Classified by Content and Genre," in *The Texts from the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, ed. Emanuel Tov, DJD 39 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 115–64, esp. 140. The precise content of that list is debated.

17. For easy access to the titles of all kinds of scholarly literature on the Scrolls and related literature subject, searches can be made in the bibliography on the website of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/resources/bib/orionBibliography.shtml.

corpus in the focus in some texts on the "mystery that is coming to be" (*rz nhyh*).[18] This attention to mystery has been a significant factor in changing the emphasis in the scholarly discourse in ways that resonate indirectly with some of the insights of von Rad, though Schiffman does not refer to his work. Another of the early post-1991 surveys was offered by Adam van der Woude.[19] Van der Woude provides translations and basic descriptions of 4Q184 (Wiles of the Wicked Woman), 4Q185, which he puts under the heading "Wisdom as universal gift"; 4Q424 1, which he understands as "wisdom as a practical course of life gained by experience"; 4Q525 3 II, which he categorizes as "Torah as Wisdom"; 11QPs[a] (11Q5) Ps 154, which he considers to be describing the purpose of the gift of wisdom; and 11QPs[a] XXI, 11–17, viewed as "passionate devotion to Wisdom." Perhaps because close attention is given to a few compositions, the essay contains no thoroughgoing synthesis and no mention of the work of von Rad.

By the end of the decade others had offered their views on the corpus. In the two principal sections of a valuable survey, John Kampen gives attention first to the history of scholarship and second to the range of new nonscriptural wisdom compositions.[20] Kampen works on the history of research under two perspectives: on the one hand he notes the new impetus given to topics such as Gnosticism, apocalypticism, dualism, and the question of Hellenistic influence, and on the other he notes how certain compositions such as the Damascus Document and the Hodayot seem to reflect a sapiential milieu. For apocalypticism, Kampen comments favorably on the relevance of von Rad's general thesis that apocalypticism with its concomitant dualism and its concerns with "time" and "the times" arose from wisdom, as might be seen in Qoheleth and Sirach rather than from prophetic traditions. While von Rad does not discuss the evidence from the caves, Kampen points to a significant study by Benedkit Otzen that evaluates von Rad's proposal through discerning similar dualistic con-

---

18. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 197–210.

19. Adam S. van der Woude, "Wisdom at Qumran," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244–56.

20. John Kampen, "The Diverse Aspects of Wisdom in the Qumran Texts," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years*, ed. James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1:211–43.

cerns in the Rule of the Community and in wisdom texts, not least Prov 1–9.[21] Kampen's work is not itself a rigorous evaluation of von Rad's contribution but signals to it as a key reference point.

In the landmark *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Daniel Harrington draws attention to the way that the dominant form of wisdom instruction in the Scrolls corpus brought the figure of the sage into prominence. As one of the editors of the manuscripts of Instruction, Harrington neatly summarizes the way in which the sapiential material is encased in cosmological and eschatological concerns.[22] He also notes the extensive presence of sapiential motifs in some hymns and poems found among the Scrolls. Harrington's overview makes no mention of the work of von Rad.[23] By contrast, a decade later, in 2010, Lange's survey begins with reference to *Weisheit* by way of highlighting how von Rad "refrained from giving a clear definition of what is wisdom.… Instead of giving a definition of wisdom, von Rad used his book to describe various Jewish wisdom texts and traditions."[24] Apart from Instruction, Lange himself presents the distinctive wisdom compositions as mostly rather distant both from the collections of proverbs in the biblical texts and from those scriptural works that reflect more intensely on the problem of theodicy. For Lange, even the contemporary alignment of wisdom and torah is not characteristic of the Qumran collection, of which the hallmark is much more that the order of the universe is best recognized as a mystery, accessible only to the specially trained sage.

Most recently, Matthew Goff has offered a short overview that does not mention von Rad explicitly but is clearly aware of his contribution. For Goff the two key elements to be differentiated are what wisdom denotes

---

21. Benedikt Otzen, "Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Dualistic Thinking in Late Judaism," in *Congress Volume: Edinburgh, 1974*, VTSup 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 146–57.

22. Daniel J. Harrington, "Wisdom Texts," *EDSS* 2:976–80. See also Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, LDSS (London: Routledge, 1996). The dominant influence of Instruction can be observed in an article that was completed before the publication of the principal edition: John Strugnell, Daniel Harrington, and Torleif Elgvin, *Qumran Cave 4.XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2*, DJD 34 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

23. Daniel Harrington also published a survey, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, which makes no mention of von Rad.

24. Armin Lange, "Wisdom Literature and Thought in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 455–78.

as a signifier of a text's content and what wisdom might imply as a label in the categorization of literary genres.[25] For the former Goff's analysis of wisdom is concerned with two matters. On the one hand, wisdom is about the knowledge a pupil might acquire and the ability to perceive the world accurately. Such matters in early Judaism are in direct continuity with scriptural precedents. On the other hand, in several compositions, wisdom is an attribute of God and so accessible only through revelation, not least as that might be mediated through praise and piety. As for the literary genre of wisdom, Goff stresses that agreement about its constituent texts in the Hebrew Bible cannot now be matched for the texts of early Judaism, whose diversity prompts a reexamination of generic categories. Such reassessment then gives a place to torah and other Israelite traditions, to the intertwining of sapiential and apocalyptic ingredients, and to eschatological judgment. As also in his earlier work, Goff also introduces "noetic" as a category: such texts are designed to instill a desire to strive for understanding.[26]

In those brief surveys since 1991 as just described, some authors have noted the general, even seminal, contribution made by von Rad and his *Weisheit*. Other authors have made no mention of his work. Why might that be? Perhaps it was because of lack of space, or because they were chiefly concerned to describe the new wisdom compositions available from the Qumran caves, or because they recognized implicitly or explicitly that something much broader than the evidence considered by von Rad now needed to be accounted for in the second half of the Second Temple period. The character of revealed wisdom has to be set alongside the extensive inheritance of empirical knowledge.

## 2.2. Three Major Works

In addition to the surveys mentioned above, it is worth drawing attention to the more extensive introductory treatments of the sapiential literature from the Qumran caves in the work of John Collins, Goff, and Kampen.

Among the more extensive single-author volumes that survey the wisdom compositions from the Qumran caves, the first to be considered is

---

25. Matthew J. Goff, "Wisdom," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 449–66.

26. See also Matthew J. Goff, "Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre," *DSD* 17 (2010): 315–35.

by Collins.[27] Collins's work is significant because, as part of the Old Testament Library series, it was the first overall attempt at setting the sapiential compositions among the Scrolls in the broad contexts of both Hebrew wisdom and wisdom in the Hellenistic diaspora. As to be expected, Collins refers to von Rad's work in several places. For Proverbs, it is commended for its inventory of literary forms, its comments on divine freedom, its recognition of Egyptian influence, and its description of the "expression of the actual."[28] It is appreciated for its discussion of the polemic against idolatry.[29] It is a point of reference for the notion of the divine determination of times and that the appointed time is common to sapiential and apocalyptic writings.[30] However, more precisely, Collins also argues, against some other scholars, that Instruction "does not … throw any light on the origins of apocalypticism in Judaism."[31] Thus von Rad's work remains significant for its understanding of the wisdom works now found in the Hebrew Bible as well as Sirach, but the texts from the Qumran caves are understood as making it difficult to draw straight-line trajectories from wisdom literature to apocalypticism in the Second Temple period; and the Scrolls stand somewhat apart from the developments envisaged by von Rad.

Goff's 2007 monograph is suitably published in the series Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, making the information of the Dead Sea Scrolls directly available to scholars of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and implicitly suggesting that those interested in the biblical wisdom corpus should take a long and broad view of sapiential traditions; Goff's work is not an arcane volume to be tucked away in a niche series of publications on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Goff's book has ten chapters, in which all the principal and less well-known compositions are set out. Goff's opening chapter on

---

27. John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

28. Inventory of literary forms: von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 24–50; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 2. Comments on divine freedom: von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 96–110; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 4. Recognition of Egyptian influence: von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 153; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 11. Description of the "expression of the actual": von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 115; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 222.

29. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 177–85; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 209.

30. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 138–43, 251–56, 263–83; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 86, 104.

31. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 227.

Instruction has a different emphasis from that of Collins. For Goff, Instruction is a wisdom text with an apocalyptic worldview, and it is von Rad who has provided a label for that worldview as the "self-revelation of creation."[32]

However, whereas von Rad's designation belongs to texts that ask all their hearers to discern the universal nature of the empirical world, for Goff Instruction asserts that "creation is itself a revealed truth available only to the elect."[33] Goff has seen both continuity in outlook and something new: "Traditional wisdom and apocalypticism should be understood as complementary influences in 4QInstruction."[34] Continuities with earlier sapiential traditions can also be seen in the "intellectual love" that is urged in the wisdom poem in 11QPs[a] XXI, 11–17 (cf. Sir 51:13–30) and in 4Q185, as well as in the overall description of such poems as sapiential.[35]

In addition, in noting that Job and Qoheleth are barely engaged in the wisdom or other community texts coming from the Qumran caves, Goff also agrees with von Rad that those biblical books are not the mainstream in sapiential tradition and so not a cause of an intellectual crisis of confidence, which was then managed through the development of apocalypticism.[36] Goff's own version of the view that apocalyptic develops from wisdom is to argue that the dependence might be clearly discernible in the first generations of Jewish apocalyptic writing, as evident in the early Enoch writings, but that in a later composition such as Instruction many other motifs and tendencies are also involved.[37]

The third substantial introductory volume is by Kampen.[38] Most of the book presents English translations with accompanying annotations of the ten major wisdom compositions found in the Qumran caves, including Ben

---

32. Matthew J. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, VTSup 116 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 17; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 144–76 (on the poems of Prov 8; Sir 24; and Job 28).

33. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 20.

34. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 21.

35. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 256, 261. "Intellectual love" is borrowed from von Rad (*Wisdom in Israel*, 166–76), and the view that some psalms are sapiential based on their "common language and motif" depends on von Rad (*Wisdom in Israel*, 47–48). Goff also cites approvingly von Rad's insistence that form and content cannot be separated from each other (*Discerning Wisdom*, 295).

36. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 289–90; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237.

37. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 295–96; engaging with von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 263–83, and refining the argument of Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 301–6.

38. John Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, ECDSS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Sira (also with notes on the Masada Ben Sira manuscript). In the introduction to his commentaries Kampen engages twice with von Rad's thesis on the sapiential origins of apocalyptic. First, in reviewing the early history of scholarship especially on Cave 1, he cites the perceptive doctoral dissertation of Sarah Tanzer, in which she argues that, in the light of von Rad's thesis that apocalyptic conceptions of time and history depended on sapiential circles, it was not possible to argue that the Qumran dualistic texts should be considered simply as either sapiential or as apocalyptic.[39]

Second, he uses von Rad's proposals to argue that even without knowledge of all the sapiential compositions from the Qumran caves, it was entirely feasible that apocalyptic and wisdom had to be related somehow. For Kampen, although since von Rad's *Weisheit* the scholarly discourse has given some priority to discussing the character of apocalyptic, the availability of all the sapiential works from the Qumran caves has brought that corpus overtly into the discussion. Kampen draws attention in particular to the Society of Biblical Literature working group on Wisdom and Apocalyptic, begun in 1994, and its concern to show that wisdom and apocalyptic cannot be clearly distinguished from one another because "both are the products of wisdom circles that are becoming increasingly diverse in the Greco-Roman period."[40] Thus, Kampen, with others, is happy to note that von Rad's broad thesis on the origins of apocalypticism has been vindicated but that from the third century BCE onward the interrelationships of empirical knowledge and revealed truth are indeed much more complicated than von Rad could have anticipated.

## 2.3. Specialist Monographs

The third set of publications to be described briefly are some specialist monographs. Not all such monographs mention von Rad's work, but several do. There is no need to review them all in detail, but I mention briefly the role that von Rad's work has played in each.

---

39. Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, 4, citing Sarah Tanzer, "The Sages at Qumran: Wisdom in the Hodayot" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1987), 12–14.

40. George W. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills, SymS 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 20; cited favorably by Kampen, *Wisdom Literature*, 12–13.

Of all the monographs on the sapiential literature from the Qumran caves, Lange's work is the most extensive and sympathetic engagement with von Rad's insights and proposals.[41] Three matters come to the fore. First, in the *Einleitung* to his book Lange enters the discussion of determinism in sapiential sources, citing approvingly those texts used by von Rad.[42] If there should be any doubt about the way things should be read, especially in relation to the best understanding of Instruction, in his conclusion Lange sums up the debate about the relationship of wisdom and apocalypticism with particular reference to von Rad's thesis: "The result of the present work thus suitably confirms von Rad's thesis that apocalyptic has developed from wisdom by taking up prophetic traditions."[43] Second, Lange proposes that Job and Qoheleth do indeed challenge the views on reward and punishment of the didactic traditions of earlier wisdom texts, as von Rad declared;[44] the concerns of Instruction, with its particular echoes of some of the social mores of Proverbs, are to be understood as a move away from any intellectual crisis by returning to many traditional views on how social interactions should be managed. Third, Lange provides an assessment of wisdom and predestination in a wide selection of texts from the Qumran caves, both those readily identified as from the *yaḥad* and others. References to von Rad's views are closely restricted to just the discussion of Instruction. Here Lange argues that *rz nhyh* is shorthand for the "preexistent order of being" ("präexistente Ordnung des Seins") and is continuous with the inherent structural ordering of the world also discernible in Proverbs.[45] His sensitivity to von Rad's views on the dependence of apocalyptic ideas, especially cosmological ones, on those of wisdom encourages him to propose a date for Instruction at the end of the third century or the beginning of the second century BCE, earlier than most other interpreters of the composition.

---

41. Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*. 31–92. A brief summary in English of his monograph can be found in Lange, "Wisdom and Predestination in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *DSD* 2 (1995): 340–54. That summary makes no mention of von Rad.

42. Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 31; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 261–83.

43. Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 306: "Das Ergebnis der vorliegenden Arbeit is somit geeignet, von Rads These, daß die Apokalyptik sich unter Aufnahme prophetischer Traditionen aus der Weisheit entwickelt hat, zu bestätigen."

44. Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 34; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237.

45. Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 62.

In his unpublished dissertation Torleif Elgvin provides detailed pro-
posals for reconstructing, reading, and understanding Instruction.[46] As
part of the description of the ongoing transformation of wisdom in the
Second Temple period, Elgvin develops von Rad's view that the early
apocalyptic writings represent an *Eschatologisierung der Weisheit*, as the
revealed tradition of divine wisdom is restricted to the elect.[47] For Elgvin
that is a suitable backdrop for appreciating at least one strand of thought
in Instruction. There is little explicit use of von Rad's work elsewhere,
but there is frequent discussion of Lange's *Weisheit und Prädestination*,
through which von Rad's presence can be felt in Elgvin's analysis.

The starting point of Grant Macaskill's revised thesis is von Rad's
theory on the origins of apocalyptic.[48] Macaskill points out that the newly
available compositions from the Qumran caves cannot be simply mapped
on to von Rad's proposal, because they represent a complex blend of
diverse apocalyptic and sapiential elements, including strands of mantic
wisdom. In his subsequent discussion of the form and ethics of some of
the paraenetical material in Instruction, he points to von Rad's valuable
comments on similar passages in Proverbs.[49] In his monograph focused
on Instruction, wisdom, and eschatology, Jean-Sébastien Rey refers to von
Rad but twice.[50] Neither reference is to *Weisheit* but to small details of the
interpretation of particular biblical words and phrases as found in von
Rad's other publications. In Valérie Triplet-Hitoto's monograph on secret
and revealed things in literature found in the Qumran caves, there are also
two references to von Rad.[51] In the introductory chapter she addresses the
issue of revelation and its supposed location in the interaction of wisdom
and apocalyptic; she suggests that the several difficulties that scholars have
found in relating von Rad's view on the origins of apocalyptic to the whole
corpus of compositions from the Qumran caves is indicative of the need

---

46. Torleif Elgvin, "An Analysis of 4QInstruction" (PhD diss., Hebrew University
of Jerusalem, 1997).

47. Elgvin, "Analysis of 4QInstruction," 62.

48. Grant Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient
Judaism and Early Christianity*, JSJSup 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1, 17, with n. 71.

49. Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom*, 92; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 88–91.

50. Jean-Sébastien Rey, *4QInstruction: Sagesse et eschatologie*, STDJ 81 (Leiden:
Brill, 2009), 160, 172.

51. Valérie Triplet-Hitoto, *Mystères et connaissances cachées à Qumrân*, EB 1
(Paris: Cerf, 2011), 15–16, 152, citing Gerhard von Rad, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testa-
ment*, 5th ed. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1965), 265–66, 274.

for a different approach, perhaps one that views the Qumran wisdom corpus in terms of emerging mysticism, which for Instruction might be epitomized in a reconsideration of the term *rz nhyh*. In his most recent monograph on Instruction Goff refers to von Rad just once, in some introductory remarks where he has summarized the contribution of Lange on Instruction and has noted his sympathy for von Rad's view on the origins of apocalyptic as a key to understanding the text.[52] Goff argues instead that for Instruction wisdom and apocalyptic traits need setting side by side in a more complex fashion.

Those monographs described briefly here indicate that since the general release of all the Cave 4 and Cave 11 manuscripts, those who have engaged with the cosmological and eschatological features of the wisdom compositions found in the Qumran caves have all rightly interacted with von Rad's ideas. Some scholars have rehearsed favorably several of the details of von Rad's work as well his more general theses; others have been especially concerned to propose how von Rad's understandings of wisdom need extensive revision if they are to contribute to the suitable interpretation of the diversity of the new data.

## 2.4. Wisdom Conference Volumes

It is valuable for the purposes of this essay to note how the sapiential literature from the Scrolls has been handled in a series of four international conferences and their publications; those publications have become touchstones in the ongoing discussion of the wisdom texts and traditions coming from the Qumran caves.

The first of these was based on two symposia held at Tübingen in 1998. The published proceedings include several contributions covering topics that had not been included in the symposia.[53] Altogether nineteen essays are organized under six headings: introductory and linguistic questions, contributions to specific texts, the wisdom texts from Qumran and the ancient Near East, the wisdom texts from Qumran and the Hebrew Bible, the wisdom texts from Qumran and ancient Juda-

---

52. Matthew Goff, *4QInstruction*, WLAW 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 19–20.

53. Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger, eds., *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought*, BETL 159 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

ism, and the wisdom texts from Qumran and the New Testament. The first essay, by Lange, contains a full survey of the wisdom texts from Qumran, as understood at that time. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the essays generally take the Scrolls from the Qumran caves as their starting point, only one essay in the whole collection refers to the work of von Rad. In discussing the use of the label *Niedrigkeitsdoxologie*, Frey mentions how it was coined as a parallel to *Gerichtsdoxologie* as used by von Rad, among others.[54] The overall absence of reference to von Rad's work on wisdom can be attributed largely to the fact that scholars were still trying to understand the fragmentary manuscripts and some of their specific implications, rather than taking a slightly more systematic, longer, diachronic view of things.

A second conference was devoted to a range of wisdom and liturgical compositions found in the compositions coming from the Qumran caves.[55] Seven essays are devoted to wisdom texts and traditions; of those, four are on wisdom texts from Qumran and their implications, and three are on "Qumran Wisdom and the New Testament." The sole reference to von Rad in all of the essays is by Frey in a similar but slightly adjusted comment on *Gerichtsdoxologie* as in his 2002 essay. Of note for the purposes of the present essay is an extensive article by Elgvin that might be taken as indicative of how the discussion on wisdom and apocalyptic had moved forward.[56] The reference point for Elgvin's consideration of apocalyptic and wisdom is the 1979 *Semeia* volume that explores apocalypse as a genre;[57] he makes no explicit mention of the insights or proposals of von Rad. Such has now commonly come to be the case, though a key starting point reference for contemporary work on apocalyptic in its

---

54. Jörg Frey, "Flesh and Spirit in the Palestinian Jewish Sapiential Tradition and in the Qumran Texts," in Hempel, Lange, and Lichtenberger, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, 379; citing Gerhard von Rad, "Gerichstdoxologie," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, TB 48 (Munich: Kaiser, 1973), 2:245–54.

55. Daniel Falk, Florentino García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller, eds., *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo 1998, Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet*, STDJ 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

56. Torleif Elgvin, "Wisdom with and without Apocalyptic," in Falk, Martínez, and Schuller, *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts*, 15–38.

57. John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). Collins has subsequently been the author or editor of many books and articles on apocalypses and apocalypticism.

many dimensions is also the volume of proceedings from the Uppsala conference.[58]

The third conference was organized by the Orion Center in Jerusalem in 2001.[59] Two of the essays provide significant critiques of von Rad's leading ideas concerning wisdom, its interest in time, and its relationship with history and apocalyptic. Menahem Kister addresses several of von Rad's ideas directly, and his study forms one of the most detailed interactions with von Rad that is now available; it provides a very worthwhile perspective on the ongoing value of von Rad's work.[60] Kister begins with Ben Sira's prayers (36:1–22; 51:1–12) and the Praise of the Fathers section (44:1–50:24), which, he argues, against von Rad, contain no distinctive sapiential vocabulary and should not be considered even as sharing a sapiential mentality.[61] Partly on that basis, Kister continues by arguing that "for Ben Sira wisdom is overshadowed by the power of the Torah, not vice versa"; that opinion directly and deliberately contradicts von Rad's statement that "it is not that wisdom is overshadowed by the superior power of the Torah."[62] With examples across a range of texts from Ps 119 onward, Kister further insists that the chief characteristic of late Second Temple Jewish writings was the use of the revealed torah as a hermeneutical construct to interpret wisdom, all within a cultural eclecticism that has made it impossible for scholars at present to trace trajectories of influence from wisdom to apocalypticism.[63] Despite disagreeing with von Rad on some fundamental elements of his approach, Kister nevertheless also indicates how von Rad's insights, such as on rhetorical questions as a feature of wisdom literature, can help scholars to understand what is going on in some of the new sapiential texts coming from the Qumran caves, such as Mysteries (1Q27, 4Q299, 4Q300, ?4Q301).[64]

---

58. David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Ancient Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989).

59. John J. Collins, Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth A. Clements, eds., *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*, STDJ 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

60. Menahem Kister, "Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres: From Ben Sira to *Mysteries*," in Collins, Sterling, and Clements, *Sapiential Perspectives*, 13–47.

61. Kister, "Wisdom Literature," 13–14, esp. n. 4.

62. Kister, "Wisdom Literature," 16; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 245.

63. Kister, "Wisdom Literature," 19–20, 21.

64. Kister, "Wisdom Literature," 23–24; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 18–19.

The second essay in the conference proceedings to engage with von Rad's work is by Collins.[65] Collins bases the title of his essay on von Rad's phrase "the eschatologization of wisdom" ("die Eschatologisierung der Weisheit"), as that is part of his thesis that the roots of apocalyptic are to be found in wisdom rather than in prophecy.[66] Collins then proceeds to indicate in summary fashion some of the standard reservations about von Rad's thesis, but only so as to set the scene for his own thesis about Instruction, namely, that it is "a bona fide example of a wisdom text of the traditional type in which eschatological expectations play a significant part."[67] After examining several passages in Instruction, Collins returns at the end of his study to attempt an answer to the question, "How are we to account for the development of a new, eschatologically oriented, perspective, in a wisdom text of the second century BCE?"[68] For Collins the answer reflects his own earlier proposal mentioned above, namely, that it is not possible to insist "that there were pure streams of tradition and that a text must draw from either wisdom or prophecy but not from both. All of this literature was an exercise in bricolage, piecing together a new view of the world that drew motifs and ideas from many sources."[69] Here Collins comes to agree with the cultural eclecticism highlighted by Kister. Instruction is a kind of traditional wisdom but with apocalyptic traits, but those same traits cannot be woven into a straightforward narrative that takes all the features of the composition back to biblical wisdom traditions alone.

The fourth meeting to be mentioned is the fifty-first Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense held at Leuven in 2002.[70] The theme of the meeting was Wisdom and Apocalypticism. The theme naturally encouraged several contributors to refer to von Rad's work. Klaus Koch contributes an essay on "Das Geheimnis der Zeit" and cites approvingly von Rad's specific definition of ʿet, his view of its centrality in Near Eastern wisdom traditions, and his understanding of the role of time in Ben Sira, in particular how

---

65. John J. Collins, "The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Collins, Sterling, and Clements, *Sapiential Perspectives*, 49–65.

66. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1965), 2:315–30.

67. Collins, "Eschatologizing of Wisdom," 49–50.

68. Collins, "Eschatologizing of Wisdom," 61.

69. Collins, "Eschatologizing of Wisdom," 63.

70. Florentino García Martínez, ed., *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*, BETL 168 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

Ben Sira's thinking reflects ideas of contingency.[71] Émile Puech, Géza Xeravits, and Michael Knibb all begin their own studies with references to von Rad's view that wisdom is the mother of apocalyptic: Puech then argues that the eschatology of many of the texts from the Qumran caves is equally dependent on prophetic forbears, Xeravits proposes that the figure of the eschatological prophet is akin to that of the *maskil* with sapiential concerns, and Knibb outlines the shared thought world of the books of Enoch, mantic apocalyptic, and the Qumran wisdom compositions.[72] Von Rad's overall theory of the sapiential roots of apocalyptic also features briefly in the essays by Leo Perdue and Jeremy Corley, both of which are concerned to map the more extensive range of intertwined influences now discernible in works such as Qoheleth or Ben Sira.[73] Of note is the way in which all the studies just mentioned cite von Rad's work but imply its limitations by arguing that by the time of the late Second Temple period in various wisdom and apocalyptic compositions several strands of earlier and contemporary traditions are interwoven; in general, there is no single line of dependency, literary or social, as von Rad's work might imply.

A fifth set of papers derives from a 2014 symposium in Metz.[74] Several of the papers were wide ranging and provided a much larger context for appreciating Jewish sapiential traditions than consideration of all the compositions from the Qumran caves. Writing on the Joseph narrative, James Kugel resists terminology of determinism while acknowledging

---

71. Klaus Koch, "Das Geheimnis der Zeit in Weisheit und Apokalyptik um die Zeitenwende," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 35–68.

72. Émile Puech, "Apports des textes apocalayptiques et sapientiels de Qumrân à la eschatologie du Judaïsme ancien," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 134–70; Géza Xeravits, "Wisdom Traits in the Qumranic Presentation of the Eschatological Prophet," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 183–92; Michael A. Knibb, "The Book of Enoch in the Light of the Qumran Wisdom Literature," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 193–210. All three essays cite von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments* rather than *Weisheit in Israel*.

73. Leo G. Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 231–58; Jeremy Corley, "Wisdom versus Apocalyptic and Science in Sirach 1,1–10," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 269–85.

74. Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

such an outlook in later Jewish texts.[75] Samuel Adams finds plausible von Rad's view that Sirach considered prophets primarily as wonder-workers.[76] Goff notes how von Rad's portrayal of sages as insatiably curious goes part of the way to explain the diversity of wisdom compositions.[77] Maurice Gilbert cites approvingly von Rad's opinion that sages of many different generations are concerned with world order.[78] Ishay Rozen-Zvi notes von Rad's arguments against seeing Israelite wisdom literature as entirely secular, while arguing that for most Jews wisdom traditions remained open and public.[79] In multiple ways von Rad's descriptive and analytical insights and his overall approach to wisdom in the Hebrew Bible and Ben Sira still provide resonant themes for scholars to engage. Nevertheless, for appreciating the diversity of all the new data from Qumran, von Rad's *Weisheit* has largely dropped behind the horizon.

## 3. Concluding Reflections

In the previous most substantial section of this essay, I have noted variously the several kinds of scholarly response to von Rad's *Weisheit*. For some he has been the touchstone for their thinking. For others some of his ideas have been significant but in the background. For yet others, for one reason or another, he is not mentioned as they give pride of place to the richness and complexity of all the new information.

In the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 2009 Goff provided a survey of recent trends in the study of early Jewish wisdom literature under six

---

75. James Kugel, "The Theme of Long-Range Planning in the Joseph Narrative and Some Second Temple Period Writings," in Najman, Rey, and Tigchelaar, *Tracing Sapiential Traditions*, 32; citing von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 263–83.

76. Samuel Adams, "Sage as Prophet? Allusion and Reconfiguration in Ben Sira and Other Second Temple Wisdom Texts," in Najman, Rey, and Tigchelaar, *Tracing Sapiential Traditions*, 94; citing von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 258 n. 25.

77. Matthew Goff, "Searching for Wisdom in and beyond *4QInstruction*," in Najman, Rey, and Tigchelaar, *Tracing Sapiential Traditions*, 132–33 and 133 n. 44; referring to von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, in general.

78. Maurice Gilbert, "*Pirqé Avot* and Wisdom Tradition," in Najman, Rey, and Tigchelaar, *Tracing Sapiential Traditions*, 170; citing von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 144–76.

79. Ishay Rozen-Zvi, "The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature and Mishnah *Avot*," in Najman, Rey, and Tigchelaar, *Tracing Sapiential Traditions*, 180–81; referring to von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, in general.

headings: (1) revelation, creation, and determinism (including astrological knowledge and the Vision of Hagu); (2) wisdom and apocalypticism; (3) eschatology and life after death; (4) the status of the Torah and the interpretation of biblical texts; (5) the milieu of Instruction and Mysteries; and (6) the Qumran wisdom literature and the issue of genre.[80] The introduction to Goff's essay uses two works as key moments in the history of scholarship that stimulated new perspectives: James Crenshaw's *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* and before that, and fully acknowledged by Crenshaw, von Rad's *Weisheit*.[81]

To Goff's list can be added several further topics and issues. Perhaps in pride of place should be the ongoing need for improved editions of the sapiential and other compositions from the Qumran caves; many experts on the wisdom materials from the late Second Temple period are engaged in such work. But there are other matters too. Given the significance of the role that von Rad has played concerning the origins of apocalypticism in wisdom rather than prophecy, it is important to note that in relation to revealed knowledge as reflected in the texts from the Qumran caves, there has been an ongoing discussion of the contribution of prophecy and prophetic interpretation, especially as those might be reflected in the community compositions, including the sapiential ones.[82] For several facets of revelation in early Jewish texts it is not a matter of echoes of either wisdom

---

80. On the status of the Torah, see also Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter, eds., *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*, JSJSup 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Elisa Uusimäki, *Turning Proverbs towards Torah: An Analysis of 4Q525*, STDJ 117 (Leiden: Brill, 2016); John Kampen, "*Tôrah* and Wisdom in the Rules Texts from Qumran," in *Sacred Texts and Disparate Interpretations: Qumran Manuscripts Seventy Years Later*, ed. Henryk Drawnel, STDJ 133 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 316–40. On the interpretation of biblical texts, see George J. Brooke, "Biblical Interpretation in the Wisdom Texts from Qumran," in Hempel, Lange, and Lichtenberger, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, 201–20. On Qumran wisdom literature and the issue of genre, see Matthew Goff, "Recent Trends in the Study of Early Jewish Wisdom Literature: The Contribution of 4QInstruction and Other Qumran Texts," *CurBR* 7 (2009): 376–416.

81. James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

82. See, e.g., Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism*, STDJ 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); George J. Brooke, "La Prophétie de Qumrân," in *Les recueils prophétiques de la Bible: Origines, milieux et contexte proche-oriental*, ed. Jean-Daniel Macchi et al., MB 64 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012), 480–510. See also, particularly for the link with wisdom, Martti

or prophecy but a combination of both. In relation to the presence of varied wisdom compositions in the Qumran caves, much discussion has arisen concerning what they might mean for the history of the community and its leadership.[83] Of note are studies suggesting that there is still much to be learned about the duties of the *maskil*, the place of education in the various sections of the movement, the significance of hierarchies of knowledge, and the role of esoteric wisdom and heavenly knowledge in a movement bound in some way to secrecy.[84] Some of those issues have been considered narrowly, but several have also stimulated debates about the broader intellectual activity of Judaism in the late Second Temple period, especially in relation to the various roles of sages and scribes, the role of orality in the transmission of didactic texts, and the cultural milieu of a multifaceted Hellenism and the practices of pedagogy within it.[85]

---

Nissinen, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, BZAW 494 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 631–80.

83. See, e.g., George J. Brooke, "The Place of Wisdom in the Formation of the Movement behind the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Goochem in Mokum—Wisdom in Amsterdam: Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012*, ed. George J. Brooke and Pierre Van Hecke, OTS 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 20–33.

84. On the duties of the *maskil*, see, e.g., Judith H. Newman, "The Communal Formation of the Maskil's Self," *DSD* 22 (2015): 249–66; Benjamin Wold, "Maśkîl and Mēvîn," in *4QInstruction: Divisions and Hierarchies*, STDJ 123 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 12–94. On the place of education in the various sections of the movement, see George J. Brooke, "Some Aspects of Education in the Sectarian Scrolls from Qumran," in *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*, ed. George J. Brooke and Renate Smithuis, AJEC 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 11–42. The absence of discussion of education as reflected in some of the Scrolls might be the result of the consensus on the scriptural wisdom literature that has generally concurred with von Rad: "It would be a great help if we could deduce from the Old Testament something about education in Israel. But several careful examinations have produced rather negative results. The first direct reference is to be found in the late book Sirach" (*Wisdom in Israel*, 17). On the significance of hierarchies of knowledge, see Charlotte Hempel, "Bildung und Wissenswirtschaft im Judentum zur Zeit des Zweiten Tempels," in *Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne?*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, SERAPHMIE 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 229–44. On the role of esoteric wisdom and heavenly knowledge, see George J. Brooke, "Esoteric Wisdom in the Scrolls from Qumran," *JSP* 30.2 (2020): 104–14.

85. See Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, eds., *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, EJL 41 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

The publication of all the sapiential compositions found in the Qumran caves has radically changed the information available to scholars as they consider the place and function of wisdom texts and traditions in Judaism of the late Second Temple period. For some things, such as the discussion of determined time or particular insights into the forms of wisdom sayings, von Rad's *Weisheit* remains a highly significant contribution; in other respects, such as concerns his views on the origins of apocalypticism, his work remains in need of scholarly acknowledgment, but in many ways, because of the Qumran discoveries, the discussion of early Jewish wisdom and its wisdom compositions has moved on from von Rad's time.

## Bibliography

Adams, Samuel. "Sage as Prophet? Allusion and Reconfiguration in Ben Sira and Other Second Temple Wisdom Texts." Pages 89–105 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Brooke, George J. "Biblical Interpretation in the Wisdom Texts from Qumran." Pages 201–20 in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought*. Edited by Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger. BETL 159. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

———. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and German Scholarship: Thoughts of an Englishman Abroad*. JWV 6. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018.

———. "Esoteric Wisdom in the Scrolls from Qumran." *JSP* 30.2 (2020): 104–14.

———. "The Place of Wisdom in the Formation of the Movement behind the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 20–33 in *Goochem in Mokum—Wisdom in Amsterdam: Papers on Biblical and Related Wisdom Read at the Fifteenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Amsterdam, July 2012*. Edited by George J. Brooke and Pierre Van Hecke. OTS 68. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

———. "La Prophétie de Qumrân." Pages 480–510 in *Les recueils prophétiques de la Bible: Origines, milieux et contexte proche-oriental*. Edited by Jean-Daniel Macchi, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, and Jan Rückl. MB 64. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012.

———. "Some Aspects of Education in the Sectarian Scrolls from Qumran." Pages 11–42 in *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages:*

*Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*. Edited by George J. Brooke and Renate Smithuis. AJEC 100. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Collins, John J., ed. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. *Semeia* 14. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979.

———. "The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 49–65 in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls; Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*. Edited by John J. Collins, Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth A. Clements. STDJ 51. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*. OTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

Collins, John J., Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth A. Clements, eds. *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*. STDJ 51. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Corley, Jeremy. "Wisdom versus Apocalyptic and Science in Sirach 1,1–10." Pages 269–85 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Crenshaw, James L. *Gerhard von Rad*. MMTM. Waco, TX: Word, 1978.

———. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.

Eichrodt, Walter. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 3 vols. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1933–1939.

Elgvin, Torleif. "An Analysis of 4QInstruction." PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997.

———. "Wisdom with and without Apocalyptic." Pages 15–38 in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo 1998, Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet*. Edited by Daniel Falk, Florentino García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller. STDJ 35. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Fabry, Heinz-Josef. "'… in der Gemeinschaft der Wahrheit, gütiger Demut, huldvoller Liebe und gerechten Denkens …': 'Liebe' und 'Lieben' in Qumran." *JBT* 29 (2014): 189–214.

———. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zu den Qumrantexten*. 3 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011–2016.

Falk, Daniel, Florentino García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller, eds. *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran*

*Studies, Oslo 1998, Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet*. STDJ 35. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Frey, Jörg. "Flesh and Spirit in the Palestinian Jewish Sapiential Tradition and in the Qumran Texts." Pages 379 in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought*. Edited by Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger. BETL 159. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

———. *Qumran, Early Judaism, and New Testament Interpretation: Kleine Schriften III*. WUNT 424. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

———. "Qumran Research and Biblical Scholarship in Germany." Pages 529–64 in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Scholarly Perspective: A History of Research*. Edited by Devorah Dimant. STDJ 99. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

García Martínez, Florentino, ed. *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Gilbert, Maurice. "*Pirqé Avot* and Wisdom Tradition." Pages 155–71 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Goff, Matthew. *4QInstruction*. WLAW 2. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

———. *Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. VTSup 116. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

———. "Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre." *DSD* 17 (2010): 315–35.

———. "Recent Trends in the Study of Early Jewish Wisdom Literature: The Contribution of 4QInstruction and Other Qumran Texts." *CurBR* 7 (2009): 376–416.

———. "Searching for Wisdom in and beyond *4QInstruction*." Pages 119–37 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

———. "Wisdom." Pages 449–66 in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Edited by George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Harrington, Daniel J. "Wisdom Texts." *EDSS* 2:976–80.

———. *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*. LDSS. London: Routledge, 1996.

Hellholm, David, ed. *Apocalypticism in the Ancient Mediterranean World and the Near East*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989.

Hempel, Charlotte. "Bildung und Wissenswirtschaft im Judentum zur Zeit des Zweiten Tempels." Pages 229–44 in *Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne?* Edited by Peter Gemeinhardt. SERAPHMIE 4. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

Hempel, Charlotte, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger, eds. *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought*. BETL 159. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

Hogan, Karina Martin, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, eds. *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. EJL 41. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.

Jassen, Alex P. *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism*. STDJ 68. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Kampen, John. "The Diverse Aspects of Wisdom in the Qumran Texts." Pages 211–43 in vol. 1 of *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years*. Edited by James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

———. "*Tôrah* and Wisdom in the Rules Texts from Qumran." Pages 316–40 in *Sacred Texts and Disparate Interpretations: Qumran Manuscripts Seventy Years Later*. Edited by Henryk Drawnel. STDJ 133. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

———. *Wisdom Literature*. ECDSS. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Kister, Menahem. "Wisdom Literature and Its Relation to Other Genres: From Ben Sira to *Mysteries*." Pages 13–47 in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*. Edited by John J. Collins, Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth A. Clements. STDJ 51. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Knibb, Michael A. "The Book of Enoch in the Light of the Qumran Wisdom Literature." Pages 193–210 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Koch, Klaus. "Das Geheimnis der Zeit in Weisheit und Apokalyptik um die Zeitenwende." Pages 35–68 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Kratz, Reinhard. "Laws of Wisdom: Sapiential Traits in the *Rule of the Community (1QS 5–7)*." Pages 133–45 in *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources*. Edited by Steven E. Fassberg, Moshe Bar-Asher, and Ruth A. Clements. STDJ 108. Leiden: Brill 2013.

Kugel, James. "The Theme of Long-Range Planning in the Joseph Narra-
    tive and Some Second Temple Period Writings." Pages 24–42 in *Trac-
    ing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman,
    Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden:
    Brill, 2016.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and
    Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford Univer-
    sity Press, 2019.

———. "The 'Wisdom Literature' Category: An Obituary." *JTS* 69 (2018):
    1–24.

Lange, Armin. *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und
    Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran*. STDJ 18. Leiden: Brill,
    1995.

———. "Wisdom and Predestination in the Dead Sea Scrolls." *DSD* 2
    (1995): 340–54.

———. "Wisdom Literature and Thought in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages
    455–78 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Edited by
    John J. Collins and Timothy H. Lim. Oxford: Oxford University Press,
    2010.

Lange, Armin, with Ursula Mittmann-Richert. "Annotated List of the
    Texts from the Judaean Desert Classified by Content and Genre."
    Pages 115–64 in *The Texts from the Judaean Desert: Indices and an
    Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*. Edited by
    Emanuel Tov. DJD 39. Oxford: Clarendon, 2002.

Macaskill, Grant. *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient
    Judaism and Early Christianity*. JSJSup 115. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Murphy, Roland E. *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Eccle-
    siastes, and Esther*. FOTL 13. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.

Najman, Hindy. "Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the
    Study of a Semantic Constellation." Pages 459–72 in *Is There a Text in
    This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour
    of George J. Brooke*. Edited by Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Char-
    lotte Hempel. STDJ 119. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Najman, Hindy, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds. *Trac-
    ing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill,
    2016.

Newman, Judith H. "The Communal Formation of the Maskil's Self." *DSD*
    22 (2015): 249–66.

Nickelsburg, George W. "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion." Pages 17–37 in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*. Edited by Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills. SymS 35. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Nissinen, Martti. *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*. BZAW 494. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019.

Otzen, Benedikt. "Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Dualistic Thinking in Late Judaism." Pages 146–57 in *Congress Volume: Edinburgh, 1974*. VTSup 28. Leiden: Brill, 1975.

Perdue, Leo G. "Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth." Pages 231–58 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Puech, Émile. "Apports des textes apocalayptiques et sapientiels de Qumrân à la eschatologie du Judaïsme ancien." Pages 134–70 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

Rad, Gerhard von. "The Early History of the Form-Category of 1 Corinthians XIII.4–7." Pages 301–17 in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966.

———. "Gerichstdoxologie." Pages 245–54 in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*. Vol. 2. TB 48. Munich: Kaiser, 1973.

———. *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*. 5th ed. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1965.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser, 1957–1961.

———. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 4th ed. Vol. 2. Munich: Kaiser, 1965.

———. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. London: SCM, 1972.

Rey, Jean-Sébastien. *4QInstruction: Sagesse et eschatologie*. STDJ 81. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Rozen-Zvi, Ishay. "The Wisdom Tradition in Rabbinic Literature and Mishnah *Avot*." Pages 172–90 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Schiffman, Lawrence H. *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994.

———. "Writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 325–41 in *The Oxford Handbook of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible*. Edited by Donn F. Morgan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Schipper, Bernd U., and D. Andrew Teeter, eds. *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of "Torah" in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. JSJSup 163. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Smend, Rudolf. "Rad, Gerhard von (1901–71)." *DBI* 2:364–65.

Sneed, Mark. "'Grasping after the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom." Pages 39–67 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Stegemann, Hartmut, and Eileen Schuller. *Qumran Cave 1.III: 1QHodayot^a with Incorporation of 1QHodayot^a and 4QHodayot^{a–f}*. DJD 40. Oxford: Clarendon, 2009.

Strugnell, John, Daniel Harrington, and Torleif Elgvin. *Qumran Cave 4.XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2*. DJD 34. Oxford: Clarendon, 1999.

Tanzer, Sarah. "The Sages at Qumran: Wisdom in the Hodayot." PhD diss., Harvard University, 1987.

Triplet-Hitoto, Valérie. *Mystères et connaissances cachées à Qumrân*. EB 1. Paris: Cerf, 2011.

Uusimäki, Elisa. *Turning Proverbs towards Torah: An Analysis of 4Q525*. STDJ 117. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Weeks, Stuart. "Is 'Wisdom Literature' a Useful Category?" Pages 3–23 in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*. Edited by Hindy Najman, Jean-Sébastien Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. JSJSup 174. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Wold, Benjamin. "Maśkîl and Mēvîn." Pages 12–94 in *4QInstruction: Divisions and Hierarchies*. STDJ 123. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Woude, Adam S. van der. "Wisdom at Qumran." Pages 244–56 in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*. Edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Xeravits, Géza. "Wisdom Traits in the Qumranic Presentation of the Eschatological Prophet." Pages 183–92 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition*. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. BETL 168. Leuven: Peeters, 2003.

# The Relationship of Wisdom and
# Apocalyptic in von Rad and Beyond

Timothy J. Sandoval

## Introduction

One of the best-known features of Gerhard von Rad's work on ancient Israel's conceptions of wisdom, as this emerges initially in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* and subsequently in *Weisheit in Israel*, is the claim that biblical wisdom thought, and not prophetic discourse, gave birth to Jewish apocalyptic literature.[1] Although, as Matthew Goff has put it, "most scholars have rejected von Rad's thesis," ironically, "The reception of von Rad's views demonstrates that a thesis can have a substantive and positive impact on scholarship, even when there is a solid consensus that it is wrong."[2]

Although von Rad's particular thesis about the relationship of wisdom to apocalyptic never generated widespread assent, it did pro-

---

Leo G. Perdue was a prolific scholar of Israelite wisdom literature and an avid student of biblical theology—the two strands of biblical studies von Rad brings together in *Weisheit in Israel*. Before his retirement, and subsequent passing in 2016, Dr. Perdue taught generations of theology students at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, where the idea for *Gerhard von Rad and the Study of Wisdom Literature* first came to fruition. It is to his memory that this essay is dedicated.

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Munich: Kaiser, 1960), esp. 2:314–28; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970).

2. Matthew Goff, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59. As Goff notes, one scholar who generally accepted von Rad's thesis is Armin Lange. See Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran*, STDJ 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

voke some significant responses, especially in the initial years after the publication of *Theologie des Alten Testaments* and *Weisheit*. Peter von der Osten Sacken, for instance, reasserts the widespread view, questioned by von Rad, that apocalyptic works emerged as a development of Israelite prophecy. He acknowledges some wisdom elements were surely to be discerned in apocalyptic works but insisted that these were secondary accretions. Hans-Peter Müller likewise concedes that apocalyptic texts have to do with wisdom but identifies the wisdom in question as mantic wisdom, not the wisdom of the biblical books von Rad highlights.[3]

Decades after the initial responses to von Rad's work, his thesis continues to be reiterated (often perfunctorily) in books and commentaries, only to be (often just as perfunctorily) dispensed with. Yet, like others before and after him, von Rad was right to discern affinities between apocalyptic texts and works that are still commonly regarded as wisdom literature; and he offered a serious attempt to account for such affinities. It may be that the sheer weight of von Rad's scholarly status and reputation in the mid-twentieth century, as much as the strength of his arguments themselves, contributed to a renewed scholarly interest in discerning wisdom literature's relationship to apocalyptic works. But whatever the case, after *Weisheit*'s appearance in 1970 (and the English translation in 1972), whenever questions about wisdom and apocalyptic in the Bible and early Judaism were taken up, von Rad's views almost inevitably formed some part of the conversation. Once the full range of texts from the Judean desert became widely available at the end of the twentieth century, some of which robustly combine wisdom themes and forms with apocalyptic motifs and imagery, scholarly efforts to reckon with wisdom's relationship to apocalyptic, which von Rad's ideas in part jump-started, were infused with still newer energy.[4]

---

3. Peter von der Osten Sacken, *Die Apokalyptik in ihrem Verhältnis zu Prophetie und Weisheit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1969); Hans-Peter Müller, "Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptik," in *Congress Volume: Uppsala, 1971*, VTSup 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 268–93. See also Klaus Koch's discussion of von Rad's views in *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik* (Gütersloh: Güttersloher Verlagshaus, 1970), 40–45. For other responses see Goff, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," 58–60.

4. See the essays in Florentino García Martínez, ed., *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Biblical Tradition*, BETL 168. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003).

Revisiting von Rad's particular thesis about how wisdom and apocalyptic thought are related, recalling his broader approach and orientation to ancient texts, and attending to more recent efforts to reckon with relations between wisdom and apocalyptic works can contribute to a further sharpening of the ways that relationship might be well understood.

## Von Rad's Thesis

The main threads of von Rad's argument about how apocalyptic discourse emerges from wisdom thinking are easy enough to trace. Von Rad was unconvinced that apocalyptic traditions could be accounted for in terms of their emergence from the prophetic eschatological tradition, as others believed. For him, the prophetic view of history is simply too distinct from the subsequent deterministic understanding of history in the apocalypses for the one to give birth to the other. Consequently, von Rad surmises that the origins of apocalyptic thought had to be found not among the prophets but in a different conceptual milieu. For him, Israel's wisdom tradition is a better candidate for progenitor of apocalyptic thought, since he believes developments in wisdom's conceptions of time can be identified as the forerunner of apocalyptic historical determinism. The older wisdom teachers, von Rad thinks, reckoned that every action had its appropriate time and the wise person would strive to discern those times. However, with Qoheleth in the Hellenistic period, knowledge of the right time was no longer generally available to humans. Instead, for Ecclesiastes, "the doctrine of the right time already appears to be bound up with a theological determinism."[5] Ben Sira continues in this line: "Sirach, who is not very far from the Preacher in time, speaks more clearly of a determination of all destinies which has long since been completed by God."[6] Finally, apocalyptic voices further developed wisdom's concern for the times not merely by insisting on the divinely determined nature of distinct moments and seasons but by placing this

---

5. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 143; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 188: "scheint die Lehre von der Zeit schon mit einem theologischen Determinismus verbunden zu sein."

6. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 265; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 339: "Deutlicher spricht der dem Prediger zeitlich wohl nicht allzu ferne Sirach von einer Determination aller Schicksale, die von Gott vorlängst vollzogen ist."

determinism into a framework of historical progression toward a cosmic eschaton, a radically new age.[7]

Yet biblical wisdom works share a further feature with apocalyptic works that appears also to have suggested to von Rad a relationship between the two traditions—a concern with wisdom or knowledge. According to von Rad, wisdom for the older sages had to do primarily with knowledge gained from experience, garnered and deployed to the end of mastering life (*Lebensbewältigung*). Although Sirach's later interest in wisdom was complex, in acknowledging the divine determination of times he, by contrast, was primarily concerned with saving knowledge, "the question of salvation, the question of life or death."[8] Saving knowledge was likewise key for the apocalpyticists, though this now centrally involved knowledge of the divinely determined course of history and the approaching eschaton.[9] As Michael Knibb aptly summarizes, for von Rad, "One of the essential characteristics of the apocalyptic view of history is that it is predetermined and therefore capable of being known in advance, and this is held to provide a contrast with prophecy and a link with wisdom."[10]

The broad scholarly disagreement with von Rad's particular thesis about apocalypticism's origins with the wisdom tradition, however, is significant not merely as a moment in the history of interpretation of the Bible, revealing that von Rad's influential views on this matter did not carry the day. It is important, too, because it exposes the methodological limits of von Rad's traditional-historical orientation, and indeed the limits of a broader biblical studies of von Rad's day, which intellectually was able to reckon with the relationship between texts essentially in only one way—in terms of influence. On this view authors and texts are thought sometimes to affect one another in ways that the precise source for one author's words can be identified in another author's text; or, less sharply, *influence* might describe the way one text alludes to or echoes another.[11] The chief debates in this way of understanding relations

---

7. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 182–88, 337–63, esp. 361–62.

8. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 268; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 343: "die Frage nach dem Heil, nach Leben oder Tod."

9. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 348–50.

10. Michael A. Knibb, "Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra," *JSJ* 13 (1982): 59.

11. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Jay Clayton

between authors/texts are, as Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein explain, methodological. Quarrels surrounding the possible influence of one text on another regularly have to do with "how to discriminate genuine influences from commonplace images, techniques, or ideas that could be found in almost any writer of a given period."[12] Unless one text or author explicitly acknowledges the influence of another text or author, or a critic finds something close to a verbatim citation of one text in a second text, disputes over influence are inevitable and inevitably interminable. Where one critic of a work claims to hear allusion to, or echo of, a second text, another critic will insist that any similarity between the two works is due not to the influence of that particular author/text but to the impact of a common context or shared world of ideas. This is very close to how the debate regarding the relationship of apocalyptic and wisdom discourses that von Rad's thesis generated has been articulated.

In an essay exploring the intertextual relationship of Ecclesiastes to 4QInstruction, Goff points out that "the publication of the Aramaic manuscripts from Qumran of texts that comprise 1 Enoch," which are dated to the third century BCE, have "pushed back the apocalyptic tradition earlier than had been previously realized." As Goff explains, "this narrows substantially the gap between Ecclesiastes" (regularly dated to the third century) and "the rise of apocalypticism" so that von Rad's contention that the wisdom text of Qoheleth "contains ideas that are worked out in a later period and develop into the apocalyptic tradition" is harder to maintain.[13] On the diachronic-historical terms of influence with which von Rad and others worked, the wisdom tradition could not have given birth to apocalypticism, at least not in the way von Rad tells the story. Yet Goff importantly recognizes that the relationship between wisdom and apocalyptic texts, such as Ecclesiastes and 4QInstruction, might be reckoned in other ways too. For example, one might consider the matter via

and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3–36; see also Gregory Machacek, "Allusion," *PMLA* 122 (2007): 522–36; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 19–21.

12. Clayton and Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus," 5.

13. Matthew J. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 587 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 222.

the conception of sociolect developed by Michael Riffaterre. For Riffa-terre—one of the most significant theorists of intertextuality of the last quarter of the twentieth century—relations between texts are not limited to "citation and allusion." Rather, "there is a wide range of texts" that shape any given piece of literature; and any particular work "not only appropriates but also inverts and transforms elements from its intertextual matrix." Goff does not develop these ideas much in his essay, but he does conclude that von Rad's views on wisdom and apocalyptic thought "can be given new legitimization with an intertextual approach."[14] Riffa-terre's reflections on intertextuality resonate with the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on genres and their dialogical encounters we will briefly develop below precisely in order to consider further the question of wisdom's relation to apocalyptic.

## Wisdom and Apocalyptic: More Recent Study

An enormous amount of scholarly work on the question of wisdom's rela-tion to apocalyptic has been carried out since the publication of von Rad's *Weisheit* fifty years ago.[15] Today, most scholars would agree not only that apocalypses and apocalyptic works are religiously and intellectually remi-niscent of *both* the prophetic and sapiential corpora of the Hebrew Bible; they would also concur with John Collins's evaluation that the range of sources affecting the emergence of apocalypses is quite broad, encom-passing Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic religious discourses.[16] If von Rad's suggestion that apocalypticism was born not of prophetic traditions but from wisdom thought has not carried the day, it is also important to remember that investigation into the origins of apocalyptic thought need not be imagined only in terms of the linear model of influence with which he appears to have worked; nor need the question of the relationship of wisdom to apocalyptic be constrained to questions about apocalypticism's origins. Indeed, in light of the more recent publication of apocalyptically

---

14. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 223.

15. In this short essay, I make no effort to cover all developments in the study of wisdom and apocalypticism in biblical and Jewish antiquity, a story that stretches into the common era. Instead, I point to issues I regard as representative of significant advances in the study of texts primarily from the third and second century BCE, the epoch with which von Rad was most concerned.

16. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 26–37.

charged wisdom works from the Judean desert, it is now clearer than ever, as Benjamin Wright and Lawrence Wills state, "that wisdom and apocalypticism *are indeed* related both in many of their literary aspects and in their social contexts."[17] The relations between the two discourses, however, are quite complex and hence analyzable in various ways.

Besides intensive study of individual biblical and early Jewish texts in which wisdom and apocalyptic motifs, forms, and rhetoric coexist, scholarly strivings to more broadly understand wisdom's relation to apocalyptic since *Weisheit*'s appearance have been most helpfully carried out in two directions: on the one hand, there have been significant efforts to describe the social location and status of the authors or composers of early Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic works (as well as texts that combine features of each); on the other hand, important endeavors have been launched to more adequately conceptualize literary genres, to imagine how such genres might develop and relate to one another, and to apply the fruit of this work to understanding wisdom's relation to apocalyptic discourse.

## The Social and Ideological Location of Early Jewish Scribes

Recent decades have seen the publication of important scholarly works on scribes, scribal practices, and scribal culture in ancient West Asia and Egypt that relate this material to the study of the Hebrew Bible. David Carr, for example, forcefully reiterates that ancient scribes were not merely trained to read, write, and copy texts. Rather by memorizing and reciting (or performing) significant stretches of long-duration compositions, students were also formed socially and morally by the ethical vision of the texts they studied; such works could thus be said to be written "on the tablet of the heart" (Prov 3:3; 7:3).[18] In early Judaism, the scribal roles of earlier periods likely developed in complex ways. As Christine Schams suggests, "scribes will have functioned as officials and professional writers during the entire" Second Temple period; "but some scribes will also have been known as scholars, intellectuals, sages, and expert interpreters

17. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills, "Introduction," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*, ed. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills, SymS 35 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 3 (emphasis original).

18. David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 403–31.

of the Scriptures and law."[19] Put otherwise, by the time early Jewish texts started to robustly exhibit features of both wisdom and apocalyptic discourse, ancient literary experts would have fulfilled an increasingly diverse set of social roles and potentially engaged in serious fashion with a wide range of intellectual traditions. As Leo Perdue avers, "apocalyptic and sapiential texts" in this epoch—and texts in which features of each discourse are evident—surely resulted "from the merging of a variety of streams of tradition from different sources: Canaanite myth, Persian dualism, ancient Near Eastern wisdom and divination, Israelite and Jewish prophecy, and Israelite and Jewish wisdom texts."[20]

It is likely the case, then, that the efforts of a scribal social strata are responsible for the merging, blending, confluence (choose your term) of wisdom and apocalyptic traditions that scholars regularly recognize in many Jewish texts of the Hellenistic epoch. Whether a text might unproblematically be labeled a wisdom work, or is clearly an apocalypse, or exhibits traits of both discourses, a scribe—or a group of affiliated scribes—was responsible for its production. George Nickelsburg, for example, contends that "the entities usually defined as sapiential and apocalyptic often cannot be cleanly separated from one another because both are the products of wisdom circles that are becoming increasingly diverse in the Greco-Roman period." Interest in eschatology, "claims to revelation, inspiration, or divine enlightenment can be found in both 'sets' of texts."[21] Wisdom and apocalyptic works thus "appear to be different species of the same genus," though this common ancestry ensures no uniform perspective in the texts; "as is often the case, one argues most heatedly with those most similar to oneself, or those using different methods to draw divergent and sometimes conflicting conclusions from a common starting point."[22] Ben Sira's (and probably Qoheleth's) apparent rejection of apocalyptic views no doubt constitutes evidence of this scribal diversity that Nickelsburg identifies.[23]

---

19. Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 327.

20. Leo G. Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 244.

21. George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion," in Wright and Wills, *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom*, 20.

22. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism," 35.

23. See Pancratius C. Beentjes, "What about Apocalypticism in the Book of Ben Sira?," in *Congress Volume: Helsinki, 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen, VTSup 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 207–27; Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," 252–57.

Others who have explored the role of scribes in constructing wisdom's relation to apocalyptic discourse in early Judaism have done so with a more materialist accent. Richard Horsley and Patrick Tiller, for example, suggest that when reckoning with the phenomenon of early Jewish scribalism and the sorts of literature it may have produced, it is "best to proceed dialectically back and forth between textual, archaeological, and other evidence, on the one hand, and a critical appropriation of concepts and models of traditional agrarian societies developed on the basis of comparative historical sociological studies, on the other."[24] Elsewhere Horsley highlights the important role competing factions among the priestly aristocracy of Jerusalem played in the Second Temple period as well as the implications of such factionalism for the various groups of scribal retainers who worked for, and were economically dependent on, such rulers. In such a context, "Rival scribal circles would understandably have been attached to rival aristocratic factions and critical of the opposing aristocratic faction."[25] If, for example, Ben Sira's wisdom and the Enochic or Danielic apocalyptic literature were produced by and for circles of scribes and sages, the types of wisdom that they used from the scribal repertoire, and the manner in which they deployed and accented it, likely depended on their respective attitudes toward the temple-state and its leading officials, as well as their stance toward the contemporaneous imperial regime—whether Ptolemaic or Seleucid—that exercised hegemony over Judea.[26] As Horsley and Tiller succinctly put it, "That the writers of 1 Enoch and Ben Sira both belonged to the same socio-economic class does not mean that they would agree on ideology."[27]

Yet even though scribes constituted a retainer class that had no economic base of its own and so were in some sense beholden to the various

---

24. Richard A. Horsley and Patrick A. Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class, and Material Culture*, ed. Philip R. Davies and John M. Halligan, JSOTSup 340 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 76.

25. Richard A. Horsley, "The Politics of Cultural Production," in Wright and Wills, *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom*, 133.

26. On apocalypse as a literature of resistance to empire, see Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

27. Richard A. Horsley and Patrick A. Tiller, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom: Rethinking Texts in Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006), 96.

elite political and economic factions among whom they primarily served, they were not necessarily mere ideological dupes of the ruling classes. As the custodians of Israel's religious and literary heritage, the scribal voices who produced early Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic texts might have deployed the resources of Israel's traditions to their own ideological ends as well. Even a profoundly conservative supporter of the priesthood and status quo such as Ben Sira could utter significant, if sometimes subtle, critiques of "rulers" (Sir 10:14; 11:6; 36:12) and "the rich" (13:19; see 8:2; 13:18–23). As Horsley suggests, the diverse structure of early Jewish scribalism "allowed for considerable conflict" not only between "rival groups of sages." It also could produce discord between "scribal-sapiential retainers" and the "priestly rulers" whom they served.[28] Even if the precise contours of scribal and political conflict in Hellenistic-era Judea cannot be traced from the texts, in the third century BCE, when wisdom forms and rhetoric significantly begin to appear alongside apocalyptic discourses in a single work (starting with the new genre of apocalypse itself), it was surely a member of a diverse community of scribes who was responsible for such intermingling.

## Genre

Besides investigation of the social context of the scribes who produced early Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic works (and works that combine elements of both discourses), a good bit of scholarly attention since the publication of von Rad's *Weisheit* has focused on questions of wisdom and apocalypse as genre identifications. If there is one point of consensus in the study of wisdom and apocalypticism, it is that the categories of wisdom and apocalypse (and apocalyptic literature) are modern scholarly constructs; they are designations applied to a range of texts that in antiquity were not categorized as such. Will Kynes, for instance, traces the origin of the concept of wisdom literature as a category or genre description for texts such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes to the 1851 work of Johann Bruch: *Weisheits-Lehre der Hebräer*. As Kynes contends, Bruch's designation of certain biblical books as wisdom literature was wrapped up with certain nineteenth-century, liberal, European intellectual concerns; it constituted an effort "to carve out Wisdom as the universal philosophy

---

28. Horsley and Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology," 104.

of the Israelites."[29] In regard to apocalyptic literature, Collins similarly traces the origins of this category to Gottfried Lücke's use of the German *Apokalyptik* in 1832 to describe "such works as 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra and the Sibylline Oracles" that could be said to constitute a "literacy context" for the Apocalypse of John. As Collins says plainly, "'Apocalypse' and 'apocalyptic' are modern analytical categories that coincide only partially with ancient generic labels."[30]

Scholarly efforts to describe and define the genre of apocalypses (and words such as *apocalyptic* and *apocalypticism*) have perhaps fared better than strivings to come to terms with wisdom as a genre designation. In 1970, the same year von Rad's *Weisheit* appeared, Klaus Koch dedicated a chapter of his book *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik* to exploring contested understandings of the genre of apocalypse and "apocalyptic as a historical trend" in order to answer the question "What is apocalyptic?"[31] Yet by the end of the decade a clear critical consensus was emerging. Even if discussion and nuancing of the 1979 proposal offered by the Society of Biblical Literature's Apocalypse Group has been ongoing, most today would still broadly accept the claim that "apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."[32] Likewise, the distinctions articulated in the 1970s between an apocalypse as a literary genre, apocalyptic eschatology as a religious perspective, and apocalypticism connoting the ideology of apocalypses (or of apocalyptic texts and communities) are still regularly invoked, explicitly or implicitly.[33]

---

29. Will Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 85, 100.

30. John J. Collins, "What Is Apocalyptic Literature?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

31. Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik*, 15–33: "Apokalyptik als historischer Strömung" and "Was heißt Apokalyptik."

32. John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 9.

33. Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypse, Genre, and Apocalypticism," *IDBSup* 1:27–34; see also Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 2–14. See, more recently, Adela Yarbro Collins, "Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century," *HTR* 104.4 (2011): 447–57.

On the wisdom side of things, however, the scholarly dis-ease with wisdom as a genre category or suitable sobriquet for books such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes—a discomfort that von Rad himself registered fifty years ago[34]—has in recent years bubbled up a bit. Mark Sneed's edited volume asks plainly, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, while Kynes has forcefully proclaimed that it is high time to lay the category of wisdom literature to rest, at least in the problematic, shorthand way the designation has normally been deployed.[35] Not all concur, of course, at least not fully. Michael Fox, for instance, while denying the existence of a wisdom school or a distinct faction of wisdom scribes, contends that "there was a wisdom literature."[36] Kynes, however, it seems, is ultimately not arguing that one cannot, or must not, read books such as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes together as wisdom literature. Rather, by underscoring the readerly activity of sorting different texts into provisional categories, he warns against the reification of the particular modern, scholarly genre grouping of certain biblical books as wisdom literature over all other ways readers have (and might) conceptually organize those texts in relation to others. There is hardly reason to dispute such a position. As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson similarly note, "Critics need to specify questions and purposes of inquiry carefully before choosing among generic characterizations."[37] Kynes's apt concerns about the modern scholarly invention and reification of wisdom literature, however, can also serve as a reminder of the importance of likewise considering the historical nature and sociological functions of genres when thinking about wisdom and apocalypticism (see below).

When it comes specifically to the study of the relationship of "wisdom *and* apocalyptic" discourse within early Jewish works in terms of genre, the lines of the debate are similar to those drawn in wisdom studies. Some, such as Nickelsburg, are skeptical that the modern and "flawed categories" of wisdom and apocalyptic remain useful for understanding those texts

---

34. Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 18.

35. Mark Sneed, ed., *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Studies*, AIL 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015); Kynes, *Obituary for "Wisdom Literature."*

36. Michael V. Fox, "Three Theses on Wisdom," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 69.

37. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 302.

in which (what many still call) wisdom and apocalyptic forms and motifs are evident.[38] Collins and Goff, by contrast, highlight the continued value of the modern designations. For Collins, wisdom and apocalyptic can describe distinct sorts of texts, but there is no "generic incompatibility" between the two.[39] For Goff, the categories likewise remain "helpful." "It is reasonable," he avers, "to posit that there was in ancient Israel a pedagogical tradition we call sapiential," though he concedes that the "precise sense of how ancient readers and writers understood the category" remains unknown.[40] For both Goff and Collins, an apocalyptic worldview can be expressed through genres that are not formally apocalypses.

Despite the above sorts of scholarly debates regarding the value of modern genre categories applied to ancient texts, a (re)turn to genre theory nonetheless has been (and perhaps remains) the most interesting and productive avenue for exploring the relationship between the wisdom and apocalyptic discourses that readers identify in various early Jewish texts. Carol Newsom's "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology" is a key contribution in this regard.[41] Newsom discerns how the influential work on the genre of apocalypse undertaken by the Apocalypse Group, unsurprisingly, drew on conceptions of genre dominant decades ago when the group's efforts were carried out. At that time, the task of studying genre was regarded "primarily as one of definition and classification"; it was largely concerned to demarcate genres "by means of lists of features."[42] Newsom makes clear, however, that genology has seen significant advances since the Apocalypse Group's conclusions were published; she subsequently describes the approaches of a number of more recent theories of genre that might inform the work of biblical scholars. Most

---

38. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism," 36.

39. John J. Collins, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 165–85.

40. Goff, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," 66.

41. Carol A. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald Troxel, Kelvin Friebel, and Dennis Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 437–50. John J. Collins calls Newsom's essay "the most intelligent and helpful critique" of the Apocalypse Group's work. See Collins, "The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered," *ZAC* 20 (2016): 25.

42. Newsom "Spying Out the Land," 438.

important and influential among the approaches to genre that she surveys are the family resemblance and prototype theory models.

The family resemblance theory of genre grew out of Ludwig Wittgenstein's work on different sorts of games in his *Philosophical Investigations*. When one considers the broad range of activities that can be labeled games—"board games, card games, ball games" and so forth—one discovers that what these different practices share is not features "common to *all*" but an "overlapping and crisscrossing network of similarities and relationships."[43] As Newsom explains, this notion of family resemblances among games was "adapted and popularized" by Alastair Fowler in his work on genres. In Fowler's hands, Wittgenstein's family resemblance concept ends up suggesting critics interested in genre ought not to focus on defining genres and classifying shared features of texts. Instead, the "blurred edges" of genres are, as Newsom says, "of the essence."[44]

In contrast to the family resemblance approach, the prototype theory of genre, emerging from advances in cognitive science, suggests that "conceptual categories," of which genres are one example, "are not best thought of as defined by distinctive features possessed by every member of the group but rather by a recognition of prototypical examples which serve as templates against which other possible instances" of the category are understood. As Newsom again explains, citing the work of Eleanor Rosch, "robins and sparrows" for many will constitute the typical exemplars of the conceptual category "bird." Based on these prototypical birds, "the category can be extended" to include other sorts of birds that do not conform precisely to, and might even diverge fairly significantly from, the prototypical category—whether ostriches, penguins, or some other bird-creature. Different conceptual categories, including genre categories, on this model, can be "structured with central and peripheral members."[45]

Both prior to and after Newsom's seminal essay, scholars have sometimes sought to address ongoing questions about the genres of wisdom and apocalyptic literature—and the relationship between them—in terms of the work in genre studies she sketches. As Newsom recognizes in her

---

43. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 31–32; Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 440–41.

44. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 441.

45. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 442–43.

essay, even if it was fundamentally an effort at classification and defini-
tion of genre features, aspects of the Apocalypse Group's work already
"intuitively worked with the something like a prototype model" in their
identification of central exemplars of the genre of apocalypse.[46] Fox
and Katharine Dell—among others—have wrestled with the concept of
wisdom as a genre category by appeal to family resemblances.[47] When it
comes to the relationship of "wisdom *and* apocalypticism" in early Jewish
compositions, Wright contends that the prototype theory of genre is most
promising for studying early Jewish texts, enabling "us to look at the
entire range of Second Temple Jewish literature, including the texts from
Qumran, in more holistic and comprehensive ways."[48] Robert Williamson
similarly revisits the pesher texts of Qumran in terms of prototype theory,
pointing also to the "fuzzy boundaries" between the pesharim and related
genres that the family resemblance model underscores.[49] Newsom herself
has considered how adopting different views of genre might provide dif-
ferent insights into texts such as the Qumran Hodayot.[50]

The conclusion articulated by Wright and Wills cited above thus seems
solid: wisdom and apocalyptic discourses do in fact share affinities, a fact
von Rad strives to explain through his claim that ancient Israel's wisdom
tradition gave birth to apocalypticism. More recent criticism, by contrast,
insists that somehow the two streams of discourse flow together; there is
a fusion between the two. This interpenetration of discourses can in part
be accounted for in specific ways—for example, by the fact that there is a

---

46. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 443.

47. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A Commentary*, AB 18A (New York: Double-
day, 2000), 17; Katharine J. Dell, "Deciding the Boundaries of Wisdom: Applying the
Concept of Family Resemblance," in Sneed, *Was There a Wisdom Tradition?*, 145–60.

48. Benjamin G. Wright III, "Joining the Club: A Suggestion about Genre in Early
Jewish Texts," *DSD* 17 (2010): 313.

49. Robert Williamson Jr., "Pesher: A Cognitive Model of the Genre," *DSD* 17
(2010): 336–60.

50. Carol A. Newsom, "Pairing Research Questions and Theories of Genre: A
Case Study of the Hodayot," *DSD* 17 (2010): 288–70. Like Wright and Williamson,
Matthew Goff refers directly to Newsom's "report from genology." His contention that
"there were several types of sapiential discourses in the late Second Temple period"
and that "Wisdom texts from this era did not necessarily participate in all of them"
suggests an operative conception of genre related to both the family resemblance and
prototype theory models. See Goff, "Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of
Genre," *DSD* 17 (2010): 334.

generic compatibility between the two discourses so that nonapocalypses can express an apocalyptic worldview; or by the fact that wisdom and apocalyptic works (and texts that demonstrate features of both) are the product of a diverse social strata of scribes in the Hellenistic epoch.

All this scholarly work since von Rad's *Weisheit* constitutes a considerable advance in the study of wisdom and apocalypticism in the Bible and early Judaism. Yet, one wonders at the end of this all too brief and abridged story of scholarly investigations into the relations between wisdom and apocalypticism whether we can come to understand still better, or more fully, how and why there is nothing preventing wisdom and apocalyptic discourse from mutual influence and interaction. If so, a further (re)turn to genre theory might be helpful. But it will require the resources of theoretical reflection that does not consider genre only as an always contestable, readerly effort at classification in which works might easily be described and grouped together differently—true as that might be. It will require theoretical reflection, such as that which characterizes Bakhtin's work, that also takes seriously the historicity of genres and their sociological and ideological functions. Indeed, Newsom concludes her report from genology by divining that productive future work on genres may well take place at the intersection of developments in cognitive science and renewed consideration of the work on genre initiated by Bakhtin.

## Wisdom and Apocalyptic in Bakhtinian View

Biblical scholars for more than two decades now have somewhat regularly turned to Bakhtin and Bakhtinian concepts to assist in their study of the Bible—Bakhtin's peculiar contribution to genre theory included.[51] Bakhtin underscored both the historical nature of different genres and the social-rhetorical work they perform in unique utterances. For Bakhtin, the "chronotope" or "particular configurations of space and time" in genres is what "defines and distinguishes different genres."[52] Michael Vines, for example, attempts to describe the chronotope of the apocalypse by noting

---

51. See Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*, SemeiaSt 38 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Roland Boer, ed., *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

52. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 449.

that its "temporal boundaries" are not limited to "quotidian concerns" or "the biological extent" of a character's human life. Instead, the genre encompasses primordial and future epochs. Similarly, "the spatial dimension of apocalypse is permeable and unbounded," extending to the ends of the earth and heaven.[53]

Ultimately, the sorts of observations Vines's Bakhtinian analysis of the apocalypse genre offers may not sound all that different from the verdicts of other critics, including those who trace the emergence of the apocalypse genre and apocalypticism from prophecy (and/or other discourses) and who regard it as a response to the stresses of Ptolemaic political and economic domination of Judea. And in one sense they are not. For both, real social-historical conditions contribute to the appearance of the new genre. But what is different is the precise manner in which the new genre, with its particular forms of thought, is understood to emerge.

For scholars such as von Rad, the appearance of apocalyptic discourse from wisdom (or prophecy) reflects a linear, chronological conception of historical relations between different sorts of genres where an earlier text or tradition is thought to influence, or is regarded as the source of, a subsequent work. A Bakhtinian conception of genres, by contrast, while not rejecting historical relations, does not look for influences in the way biblical scholars have often conceived of them; instead, it conceptualizes relations in terms of "generic contacts between works or utterances."[54] The language more contemporary scholars have used to speak of wisdom's relationship to apocalyptic—confluence, flowing together—is thus more apt than any conception of influence. But even so, one suspects that sometimes lying behind these metaphors is that older view of genre that focuses on formulating definitions and classifying features that works of a particular genre share. Even if in a particular text wisdom and apocalyptic forms and motifs flow together, the assumption may be that one can still discern and pluck out the features that belong to each—just as when one places a lemon slice in a glass of iced tea one can still separate out the lemon peel, pulp, and seeds that have mixed with the iced tea.

Of course, for analytical reasons it may always in part be necessary to describe the relations of textual features in this way. But in a Bakhtinian

---

53. Michael E. Vines, "The Apocalyptic Chronotope," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 112–13.

54. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 295.

sense, the contact genres make with other genres, and the new and unique utterances that are generated by this dialogic encounter, may be more like what happens when milk is combined with coffee. One can taste the coffee and the milk (and sugar, too, if that were added) and describe these separately. But one would in vain strive to spoon out the milk from the coffee (or extract the sugar from either). As Bakhtin would put it, when genres come into dialogic contact with other genres, they "inosculate," or grow together.[55] Though the difference may be subtle, we have to do here not with an older conception of linear influence where one earlier genre or tradition—say, prophecy or wisdom—gives birth to a subsequent one, as von Rad's work suggests. Instead, a new genre such as apocalypse emerges from contact between, and inosculation of, already existing genres.

Another key insight of Bakhtin's view of genre, emerging from Pavel Medvedev's study *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, is that genres provide a way of seeing the world; they prioritize particular values and modes of perception.[56] Genres imply ways of thinking or forms of cognition for understanding existence. As one learns a genre one learns to see, as Medvedev says, "with the eyes of the genre."[57] Of course, when one sees with the eyes of a particular genre, one cannot perceive everything; in particular, one may not be able to view those matters that other genres focalize particularly well. Genres thus constitute "combinations of specific blindnesses and insights."[58] "Each genre is only able to control certain definite aspects of reality. Each genre possesses definite principles of selection … and a definite scope and depth of penetration."[59] Subsequently, as one's human experience expands—as social and historical realities shift—the need to learn to see the world through the lenses of other genres arises. If the emergence of new genres with their distinct chronotopes reflects changes in real social and historical existence, this is not because some

55. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 141, 293. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–102.

56. On Bakhtin's relationship to Medvedev (and to Valentin Voloshinov), see Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 102–9.

57. Pavel Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 134; cited in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 276.

58. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 276.

59. Medvedev, *Formal Method*, 131; cited in Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 276.

literary devices wear out. It is because people create new ways to understand their changing lives.[60] For Medvedev and Bakhtin, as Morson and Emerson again say, a "real theory of literary history would discuss the interaction of historically shaped human experiences with ways of conceptualizing reality in genres."[61]

For Bakhtin, then, genres not only have to do with literary forms; they also represent a kind of "old content," a particular way of conceptualizing the world that functions as "a necessary bridge to new, still unknown content."[62] New utterances work with the resources of already existing genres—each one's way of seeing the world—to accomplish new social-rhetorical and ideological purposes in new, unrepeatable historical moments. "Beginning with the given" (already existing genres), "something different must be created" (in a new utterance).[63] As Morson and Emerson explain, for Bakhtin, when a genre comes into contact with other genres, it is forced to contend with those other genres and the way those genres see the world. The dialogical nature of such an encounter may result in one voice's agreement with another perspective, or rejection of it; it may entail the revision of another genre's point of view, or affirmation of only parts of it. Genres in dialogic contact must, in a sense, fight over the best way to comprehend aspects of life and experience. Out of the dialogical contact or inosculation of existing genres, a new genre can be born. There is thus no reason to be surprised when one tastes or discerns aspects of wisdom and prophetic (or other already existing) discourses in apocalypse texts that began to emerge clearly in the third century BCE. What is more, a new genre (such as apocalypse) for some social actors (e.g., certain groups of scribes) may well become a privileged mode of discourse, a preferred way of viewing the world that usurps the place of earlier genres with their ways of perceiving reality.

Yet one should not conclude analysis of the relation of wisdom and apocalyptic literature in terms of genre at this point, with an answer to the question about apocalypse origins. What is perhaps even more important is that once apocalypses emerged fully as a distinct (and for some, a privileged) genre, this genre itself came into dialogic contact with other already established genres including, again, works of prophecy and

---

60. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 277.
61. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 278.
62. Bakhtin, *Speech Genre*, 165.
63. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 291.

wisdom literature, as well as other sorts of discourse (e.g., torah). Early Jewish communities and authors in new and unrepeatable social-historical circumstances would have, again, made use of the full range of formal and conceptual resources of already existing genres—now augmented by apocalypses— to meet their social and ideological needs. To the genre resources provided by the way traditional wisdom works and prophetic genres conceptualize the world was added the unique way apocalypses see the world. But, again, when distinct genres come into dialogic contact in a new utterance, the privileged ways of speaking and perceiving the world that these particular genres once held can be lost or modified.[64] As we shall see, recognizing the full range of possible dialogic contact between genres can well contribute to understanding what is happing with a text such as 4QInstruction—a parade example of the interaction of Jewish wisdom and apocalypticism in the Hellenistic epoch. Musar leMebin, however, represents not merely the comingling, confluence, or generic compatibility of wisdom and apocalypticism. It is a text that draws on the way each of these two (and other) discourses see the world in order to accomplish its particular social-ideological work in the unrepeatable historical moment and unique circumstances of the humans who produced it, a time and context that could never correspond precisely to those out of which wisdom works (such as Proverbs) or early apocalypses (associated with names such as Enoch and Daniel) emerged.

## Seeing the World: Knowledge, Desire, Authority

Before turning to a brief consideration of how apocalypses and wisdom genres come into contact in Musar leMebin, it will be helpful to offer a few words about how each sees the world. Since in a short essay such as this it is impossible to be exhaustive in this regard, I focus—in necessarily brief, provisional, and contestable fashion—only on the way each genre conceptualizes the relationship between knowledge, desire, and authority and how this complex of relations starts to reveal how each discourse perceives reality.[65] The point, in other words, is not to be definitive or exhaustive in my descriptions of knowledge, desire, and authority in apocalypses and

---

64. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 299.

65. I borrow this triad of concerns from Carol A. Newsom, who explores biblical and early Jewish conceptions of the moral self in these terms. See Newsom, "Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism," *JBL* 131 (2012): 5–25.

wisdom works. It is simply to illustrate how conceiving of genres as ways of perceiving the world, when they come into contact with one another in unique utterances, can be said to serve the social and ideological needs of particular communities in distinct historical moments.[66]

For Proverbs, knowledge takes primarily the form of wisdom—knowing and living out a range of virtues that are necessary for human well-being. Desire in Proverbs may be well or ill disciplined, but it is primarily directed toward natural goods (e.g., wealth, sex, social recognition) that regularly contribute to human happiness in this world. Yet for Proverbs, longing for such goods should ultimately be transformed to include desire for the virtues of wisdom's way that enable one both to rightly understand the place of natural goods in human well-being and to pursue those goods appropriately—even as virtue is by itself no guarantee for attaining such goods.[67] Desire for Proverbs is, subsequently, fundamentally a yearning for well-being in the time and place of this world. Unsurprisingly, then, authority for Proverbs is located with real parents or teachers (Prov 1–9) and in communal traditions (Prov 10–29). Given that Proverbs is also ultimately the work of ancient scribes, the book's chronotope is thus best reckoned as one focused on historical existence within a relatively small-scale urban community.

When turning to the way apocalypses such as those of the Enoch tradition and Dan 7–12 conceptualize and articulate the relationship between knowledge, desire, and authority, one must again, in a short essay such as

---

66. The suggestion in the following that "desire" in each of the works discussed is "for" human happiness, even if not wrong, is an example of an obviously limited formulation of a matter that could easily be complexified (e.g., in terms of a yearning for mastery of contingent events, etc.), especially for texts such as Qoheleth and the apocalypses.

67. As most Proverbs specialists acknowledge, whether rewards and punishments for deeds are regarded as consequences inherent in acts (Koch) or as retribution meted out by the deity—the force of the book's ethical cause-and-effect rhetoric should not be overstated. See Klaus Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1–42. I understand Proverbs' moral discourse less in terms of any retributive logic and more as a premodern virtue-oriented discourse where virtue is necessary but by itself not sufficient for flourishing. See William P. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

this, speak schematically and provisionally for heuristic purposes. Knowledge in these texts is esoteric and revealed, focused on heavenly realities and beings, the preordained course of history, and the ultimate judgment and destiny of different sorts of humans. Desire is, again broadly speaking, a yearning for human happiness, but the chronotope of the apocalypse—otherworldly and future oriented as it is—is not what it is in the wisdom works just described. Consequently, desire for the apocalypses is not directed toward a this-worldly well-being, but one that will be experienced in an eschatologically renewed earth or after death. Authority for apocalypses, subsequently, lies with a seer who has been granted knowledge of a range of mysteries concerning heaven and the trajectories of history.

But what happens when the way of seeing the world in a wisdom work such as Proverbs comes into dialogic contact with the view of reality in the apocalypses? Well, not precisely one thing, since different authors and utterances will mediate the dialogic encounter of different genres and their ways of seeing the world differently. Qoheleth, for example, engages positively the way a traditional instruction such as Proverbs grasps reality when it takes up a clear wisdom moral rhetoric and queries as to what is "good" (Eccl 2:3; see 6:12) for humans in this world; but it has much less place for the virtues that Proverbs prizes. Ecclesiastes also responds to an encounter with apocalyptic discourse. However, the book does not positively adopt much of the way apocalypses view the world, rejecting, as Perdue says, "the stress" that discourse "placed on a final judgment …, the immortality of the righteous, the knowledge of God and divine action and the holistic structure of time and events" (see Eccl 3:10–16, 18–21; 7:1–10).[68] But what of Musar leMebin, a text that can be said to evidence a particularly strong confluence or generic compatibility of wisdom and apocalyptic discourse?

## 4QInstruction

Bakhtin contends that with any new utterance humans articulate, we take words from "other utterances, and mainly from utterances that are somehow kindred to ours in genre."[69] On the one hand, 4QInstruction is

---

68. Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," 252–57. As noted, Ben Sira's dialogic encounter with apocalyptic voices likely constitutes a similar rejection. Sirach's dialogical response to Torah (e.g., Sir 24) is famously much more positive.

69. Bakhtin, *Speech Genre*, 87–88.

quite obviously concerned with the fates of different sorts of persons in the eschatological future, heavenly beings, and esoteric knowledge (the *raz nihyeh*; see 4Q416 1; 4Q417 1 I, 8; 4Q418 81 + 81A 1 [Instruction[b–d]]). All this evokes the genre of apocalypse and the way that genre perceives reality since, as Bakhtin insists, generic wholes can echo in discrete pieces of discourse, even in single words; their stylistic aura gestures toward those other contexts where they have been most at home. On the other hand, Musar leMebin takes the form of an instruction, deploys a significant wisdom vocabulary, and quite effectively for some commentators, offers "teachings about practical topics that pertain to ordinary life, such as marriage or the payment of debts" in a way reminiscent of a traditional wisdom work such as Proverbs.[70]

Bakhtin and Medvedev, we saw, underscore the fact that genres are ways of seeing the world; as one learns new genres one learns to see the world in a different way, with the eyes of the genre. Subsequently, as Medvedev says, distinct generic parts of a work may be imagined as having meaning only "by imaging these parts to be separate and finished [whole] utterances independently oriented in reality."[71] The wisdom elements of 4QInstruction thus can be imagined as seeing the world differently from those features of the work reminiscent of apocalypses. Yet because both discourses form part of a single utterance, "they do not mean in that way, but rather contribute to the whole utterance's meaning."[72] The generic contact of the two discourses, which 4QInstruction mediates, suggests that this utterance constructs a creative way to understand the experience of reality distinct from the way both wisdom instructions and apocalypses do. Description of such a text thus ought not be limited to calling it a wisdom work that takes up the worldview of apocalyptic texts, or vice versa.

One of the reasons understanding the relationship between wisdom and apocalyptic discourse in texts like 4QInstruction is so difficult is that, as Bakhtin suggested, genres are compromises; they are never designed for the purpose they currently serve. Instead, they are adapted for that

---

70. Matthew J. Goff, *4QInstruction*, WLAW 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 12. Goff reviews the range of possible dates for 4QInstruction, from the late Ptolemaic period to sometime in the second century BCE (*4QInstruction*, 28).

71. Medvedev, *Formal Method*, 132; cited by Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 274.

72. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 274.

purpose from forms previously serving other ends.[73] In the generic fight 4QInstruction stages, the publicly available wisdom of a community such as that which Proverbs foregrounds, and which is productive of and pre-requisite for this-worldly human well-being, does not completely cede the field to the new (and for some Jewish scribes of the Hellenistic era, the likely privileged) way the apocalypse genre sees the world, where only otherworldly, future well-being is possible via access to revealed knowl-edge from a visionary seer or source. Yet what is most important for my purposes is to inquire about the social-rhetorical and ideological work Musar leMebin accomplishes via its inosculation of wisdom and apoca-lyptic generic resources. To what end does 4QInstruction bring wisdom and apocalyptic discourse into dialogic contact?

To answer this question one might recall the scholarly conclusion, noted above, that essentially all the wisdom and apocalyptic literature of early Judaism would have been composed by socially and economically well-placed (though not necessarily elite) scribes. Scribes (and those being socially and morally enculturated into their ranks), one might assume, also primarily consumed (read) such texts. This is so even if scribal authors surely imagined the views they promoted to be universally valid—worthy to be adopted by all—and hoped their ethical visions might affect social realities and influence politically and economically powerful persons.[74]

But when it comes to the author(s) and audience(s) of 4QInstruc-tion, the matter is more complicated. On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine anyone other than (an) intellectually elite scribe(s) to be respon-sible for the *production* of this relatively long and sophisticated work that draws on not only apocalyptic and wisdom discourses but other biblical traditions too. 4QInstruction's *audience*, however, appears quite unique among wisdom and apocalyptic works in early Judaism. As nearly all who have studied the text note, Musar leMebin instructs not only the oft-mentioned "understanding person" (מבין). This *mēbîn* is also sometimes reckoned as a poor person (e.g., 4Q416 2 II, 20), and the text at points further addresses women (4Q415 2 II), craftspersons who engage in the "wisdom of hands" (4Q418 81 15–20), and perhaps small-scale agricul-turalists (4Q423 5 5–6).[75] This range of addressees is unique not only for

---

73. Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 292–93.

74. See Horsley and Tiller, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom*, 130.

75. The text's allusions to the poor addressee suggest the agriculturalists of 4QIn-struction were not elite landholders but something closer to subsistence farmers.

Jewish works of the Hellenistic age such as Daniel, Enoch, and Sirach, but also for a traditional wisdom text such as Proverbs. All these compositions may sometimes speak *of* the poor, women, craftspersons, and so forth, but not often directly *to* them.[76]

The chronotope of apocalypses suggests that this genre sees the world in a deeply pessimistic way; only divine intervention at the eschaton ("salvation," as von Rad notes) can set things right and make human flourishing on a new earth, or in an afterlife, possible. This is an idealist conception of, and hope for, social-historical change. By *idealist* I mean that the imaginative intellectual response to negative aspects of social reality correlates to the sort of utopian view that believes all will be set right rather miraculously by a force external to the real, material world. For those well-placed urban scribes who authored apocalypses, one might surmise that that genre's particular way of seeing the world constituted their privileged mode of understanding reality; and these individuals simply were (or could afford to be?) more idealist in their utopian desires than were others, such as those scribes aligned with the community—the poor, craftspersons, agriculturalists, women—that 4QInstruction addresses. Indeed, if an idealist utopian desire for change can well be discerned in and from early apocalypses—composed by and for socially and economically well-placed groups of scribes—this is not precisely the case for 4QInstruction. For that text, which addresses those whose real material existence was surely more precarious than that of the Jerusalem literati, movement toward a future of human flourishing is not imagined as only possible outside present human social and historical experience.

In the context of the social and economic forces that dominated Hellenistic Palestine, aspects of 4QInstruction's teaching—for example, caution in financial matters—might well be said to constitute apocalyptic strategies of survival for the text's addressees: as he awaits the divine inauguration of otherworldly existence beyond history that the apocalypse genre promises, it is not wise for 4QInstruction's "poor" *mēbîn* to get entangled with powerful social and economic actors. But the living out of such counsel also constitutes a step toward achieving well-being in the social and historical present;

---

76. Sirach 38:24–39:11 most strikingly constructs differences between scribes and others involved in a range of agricultural and artisanal pursuits. Proverbs, of course, regularly deploys agricultural images, and its teachings at points appears directed toward those who would at least administer agricultural lands (e.g., 11:26; 24:27; 31:16), if not actually work them.

the teaching also evokes, and dialogically relates to, the social-moral vision of traditional wisdom works (e.g., Prov 6:1–5; 23:1–8; see Sir 13:4–7) that, unlike the apocalypses, insist on the possibility of individual and communal thriving in the here and now. In the face of the apocalypse genre's new, privileged way of seeing the world, where the possibility of flourishing is certain but displaced on to a salvation in the time and place of the eschaton, traditional wisdom forms and modes of perceiving existence provide precisely the generic resources necessary for a work such as 4QInstruction to (en)counter apocalyptic forecasts with a this-worldly program for well-being.[77]

4QInstruction's ethical vision is thus constituted not merely, as Goff productively suggests, by the "humble, simple and reverent" attitudes that real materially poor people were forced to adopt in the face of the social-economic hierarchies of Hellenistic Palestine.[78] It is instead more intimately related to the way in which a work such as Proverbs sees the world and understands this-worldly human well-being as possible through the moral practices, habits, and virtues that the book prioritizes. 4QInstruction's ethical vision might thus also be reckoned as akin to some materialist philosophical reflection on utopia. But if apocalypticism's way of viewing the world might be rewritten as an idealist, compensatory utopia that "rests upon no specifiable historical forces potentially capable of actualizing it," Musar leMebin's vision is different.[79] Because of the sorts of virtues, values, and practices—reminiscent of Proverbs—that the instruction form conjures, 4QInstruction's way of seeing reality might be rewritten as a kind of anticipatory utopia, which is "heralded in texts that point the way, however hesitantly, toward the real possibility of a better world."[80]

In this sense, the utopian vision that 4QInstruction imagines via the dialogic contact of wisdom and apocalyptic discourse might further be

---

77. The relationship between the heavenly and earthly wisdom of 4QInstruction, or the interplay of practical wisdom instruction and knowledge derived from the *raz nihyeh* in Musar leMebin, is thus ambiguously and complexly related. Goff tends analytically to isolate the worldly wisdom of the text from the esoteric knowledge derived from the *raz nihyeh*, while Martinez insists the practical teaching of 4QInstruction is of a piece with the heavenly wisdom of the "mystery of existence." See Matthew J. Goff, *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Florentino García Martínez, "Wisdom at Qumran: Worldly or Heavenly?," in García Martínez, *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1–15.

78. Goff, *4QInstruction*, 26.

79. Barbara Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today* (London: Pluto, 2019), 155.

80. Foley, *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*, 155.

imagined in terms akin to Walter Benjamin's "nostalgic utopianism." As Fredric Jameson explains, although nostalgic yearnings are often disparaged as wistful longings for past, personal happiness, and "nostalgia as a political motivation is most frequently associated with Fascism, there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other: the example of Benjamin is there to prove it."[81] For Benjamin, as Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles explain, "the present is defined as a time of crisis and transition, and philosophical experience (truth) is associated with the glimpse within the present, via the past, of a utopian political future that would bring history to an end. More immediately, the crisis is given political meaning by two possible resolutions: the one destructive; the other constructive/emancipatory." For Benjamin, these possible resolutions in the first half of the twentieth century were "fascism and communism, respectively."[82]

The utopian resolution of history in 4QInstruction, however, takes the form, one might say, of a dialogic interplay between a future of well-being that the apocalypse genre boldly imagines as coming through the destruction of the present wicked realm, and the this-worldly, constructive, individual and communal well-being envisioned by traditional wisdom. As with idealist, compensatory conceptions of utopia among the apocalypticists, Musar leMebin confidently envisions a future where all will be definitively set right—where God (and God's justice) reigns, wisdom is complete, and genuine well-being is therefore possible. But importantly, and unlike apocalypses, 4QInstruction's assured utopia is imagined not only in terms of the divine's eschatological efforts but in relation to the concrete practices of a human community—the sometimes impoverished farmers, artisans, and women whom the text addresses. This vision of a future but this-worldly flourishing emerges from the wisdom genre's memory of how well-being in the material here and now of real human existence can be constituted.[83]

---

81. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 82.

82. Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, "Walter Benjamin," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2019 ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://tinyurl.com/SBL2649b.

83. This scenario may remind some of what earlier generations of scholars called early Christianity's "interim ethic." Yet as John J. Collins says, 4QInstruction offers

Proverbs', or traditional wisdom's, way of seeing the world may well have been largely adequate in making possible the flourishing of well-placed males embedded in the small urban communities of earlier epochs in Israel's and Judah's history. Von Rad certainly acknowledges how early sages might have experienced well-being through *Lebensbewältigung*. However, with the rise of an intense foreign tributary model of extraction under the Ptolemies, traditional wisdom's way of seeing the world was no longer sufficient for the social-historical experiences of some subsequent persons. It was not adequate for the Judean scribes who produced idealist utopian apocalypses, nor for a diverse community such as that for which 4QInstruction was composed. Consequently, intellectually elite and well-off scribes of the third century BCE first produced that new genre of apocalypse, which sees the world in a particular way, via the dialogic encounter of the wisdom, prophetic, and other discourses already at hand in their context; and this genre's way of perceiving reality was adequate (though surely never completely so) to meet the social and rhetorical needs of their unrepeatable historical moments. The utterance that Musar leMebin constitutes subsequently exploited both the new genre resources of apocalypse and the older content of wisdom forms—how wisdom sees the world and what it remembers as to where and how human flourishing is possible—in order to do new moral-intellectual work in the unique social context and historical circumstances of the women, poor, farmers, and craftspersons whom that work addresses.

In the end, one can (and for analysis's sake perhaps must) always pull apart and describe those aspects of wisdom and apocalyptic (and other) discourse that have created something new in 4QInstruction, just as one can identify and speak of the coffee and the milk (and the sugar) in *café con leche*. But to focus too much on the analytical distinctions can result in missing somewhat how, in Bakhtinian terms, the dialogic contact of wisdom and apocalyptic discourse—the inosculation of the distinct ways each speaks and sees the world—serves the unique social-rhetorical and ideological needs of the community behind 4QInstruction. Bakhtinian

---

not "the kind of, 'interim ethic' that one often associates with apocalyptic literature, where the time is supposed to be short." See Collins, "The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls; Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*, ed. John J. Collins, Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 60.

analysis of the wisdom and apocalyptic discourses in 4QInstruction also provides a way of thinking about the myriad of ways other biblical and early Jewish utterances may have uniquely drawn on the generic resources of apocalypses *and* wisdom works (*and* other genres) to respond to the particular, unrepeatable historical moments and experiences of the humans who composed them. Finally, Bakhtinian insights explain how and why a unique utterance such as Musar leMebin might be variously, and ambiguously, classified in terms of genre. Just as the mixing of milk and coffee that creates *café con leche* means that beverage can be generically sorted into the set called "coffee drinks," taking its place alongside espressos and macchiatos, so too it can be sorted into the set of "milk drinks," taking its place next to chocolate milk and coconut milk. (And, of course, it might be sorted in still other ways, included alongside green tea and orange juice, for example, in a set of "breakfast drinks.") Likewise, depending on who is offering the taxonomy and to what interpretive ends, the inosculation of wisdom and apocalyptic genres in Musar leMebin results in a situation where that text can be classified as a wisdom work taking its place alongside Proverbs, Qoheleth, and Sirach, or grouped with apocalyptic works such as the Enochic literature; or it may be categorized in some other fashion.

## Conclusion

In the end, von Rad was right to discern affinities between wisdom and apocalyptic discourses. His own intellectual tendencies and the scholarly apparatus available to him, however, constrained the way he was able to imagine that relationship. Advances in understanding the social roles and contexts of scribes in early Judaism and work on genre since *Weisheit*'s publication have resulted in new, complex understandings of wisdom's relation to apocalypticism. My brief Bakhtinian analysis of wisdom and apocalyptic discourse in a work von Rad never had the chance to study—4QInstruction—hopefully adds nuance to the already important, clarifying work of others while perhaps also paralleling, in some small fashion, von Rad's own willingness to creatively engage a range of thinkers and intellectual sources in his efforts to come to an understanding of ancient Israel's literary and religious legacy.[84]

---

84. On the range of von Rad's scholarly interlocutors and influences, and the depth of his interaction with these, see the first two essays in this volume.

Bibliography

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *Speech Genre and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Beentjes, Pancratius C. "What about Apocalypticism in the Book of Ben Sira?" Pages 207–27 in *Congress Volume: Helsinki, 2010*. Edited by Martti Nissinen. VTSup 148. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Boer, Roland, ed. *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*. SemeiaSt 63. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Brown, William P. *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

Carr, David M. *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Clayton, Jay, and Eric Rothstein. "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality." Pages 3–36 in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*. Edited by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

Collins, John J., ed. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. Semeia 14. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979.

———. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

———. "The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 49–65 in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls; Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May, 2001*. Edited by John J. Collins, Gregory E. Sterling, and Ruth Clements. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

———. "The Genre Apocalypse Reconsidered." *ZAC* 20 (2016): 21–40.

———. "What Is Apocalyptic Literature?" Pages 1–16 in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. Edited by John J. Collins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility." Pages 165–85 in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*. Edited by Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993.

Dell, Katharine J. "Deciding the Boundaries of Wisdom: Applying the Concept of Family Resemblance." Pages 145–60 in *Was There a Wisdom*

*Tradition? New Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Foley, Barbara. *Marxist Literary Criticism Today*. London: Pluto, 2019.

Fowler, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 1–9: A Commentary*. AB 18A. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

———. "Three Theses on Wisdom." Pages 69–86 in *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Edited by Mark Sneed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

García Martínez, Florentino, ed. *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Biblical Tradition*. BETL 168. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003.

———. "Wisdom at Qumran: Worldly or Heavenly?" Pages 1–15 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Biblical Tradition*. BETL 168. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003.

Goff, Matthew J. *4QInstruction*. WLAW 2. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

———. "Qumran Wisdom Literature and the Problem of Genre." *DSD* 17 (2010): 315–35.

———. "Wisdom and Apocalypticism." Pages 52–68 in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. Edited by John J. Collins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 214–25 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.

———. *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Green, Barbara. *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction*. SemeiaSt 38. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.

Hanson, Paul D. "Apocalypse, Genre, and Apocalypticism." *IDBSup* 1:27–34.

Horsley, Richard A. "The Politics of Cultural Production." Pages 123–45 in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*. Edited by Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills. SymS 35. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Horsley, Richard A., and Patrick A. Tiller. *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom: Rethinking Texts in Context*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006.

———. "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple." Pages 74–107 in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class, and Material Culture*. Edited by Philip R. Davies and John M. Halligan. JSOTSup 340. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002.

Jameson, Fredric. *Marxism and Form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Knibb, Michael A. "Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra." *JSJ* 13 (1982): 56–74.

Koch, Klaus. "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1–42.

———. *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik*. Gütersloh: Güttersloher Verlagshaus, 1970.

Kynes, Will. *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Lange, Armin. *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran*. STDJ 18. Leiden: Brill, 1995.

Machacek, Gregory. "Allusion." *PMLA* 122 (2007): 522–36.

Medvedev, Pavel. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Morson, Gary Saul, and Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Müller, Hans-Peter. "Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptik." Pages 268–93 in *Congress Volume: Uppsala, 1971*. VTSup 22. Leiden: Brill, 1972.

Newsom, Carol A. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. "Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism." *JBL* 131 (2012): 5–25.

———. "Pairing Research Questions and Theories of Genre: A Case Study of the Hodayot." *DSD* 17 (2010): 288–70.

———. "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology." Pages 437–50 in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Edited by Ronald Troxel, Kelvin Friebel, and Dennis Magary. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

Nickelsburg, George W. E. "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion." Pages 17–37 in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*. Edited by Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills. SymS 35. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Osborne, Peter, and Matthew Charles. "Walter Benjamin." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Winter 2019 ed. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. https://tinyurl.com/SBL2649b.

Osten Sacken, Peter von der. *Die Apokalyptik in ihrem Verhältnis zu Prophetie und Weisheit*. Munich: Kaiser, 1969.

Perdue, Leo G. "Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth." Pages 231–58 in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Biblical Tradition*. BETL 168. Edited by Florentino García Martínez. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003.

Portier-Young, Anathea E. *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. 2 vols. Munich: Kaiser, 1960.

———. *Weisheit in Israel*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.

Schams, Christine. *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998.

Sneed, Mark, ed. *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Studies*. AIL 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

Vines, Michael E. "The Apocalyptic Chronotope." Pages 109–17 in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*. Edited by Roland Boer. SemeiaSt 63. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Williamson, Robert, Jr. "Pesher: A Cognitive Model of the Genre." *DSD* 17 (2010): 336–60.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.

Wright, Benjamin G., III. "Joining the Club: A Suggestion about Genre in Early Jewish Texts." *DSD* 17 (2010): 289–314.

Wright, Benjamin G., III, and Lawrence M. Wills. "Introduction." Pages 1–14 in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism*. Edited by Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills. SymS 35. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Yarbro Collins, Adela. "Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century." *HTR* 104.4 (2011): 447–57.

# Beyond von Rad's Determination of Times: The Reception of Ecclesiastes in the Literature of Early Judaism

Ariel Feldman

## 1. Introduction

In his book *Wisdom in Israel*, Gerhard von Rad describes Ecclesiastes and Job as "isolated peaks in the literary production of ancient Israel" and wonders about the extent of "their direct effect on the thinking and teachings of their time." Have they "caused a powerful sensation" and "terrified all thinking men?" He concludes:

> But we know very little about the opportunities for effect open to such works in the ancient Near East. How many copies of Job would have been in circulation? The book can surely not have been accepted among the literature used in the schools. From the outset, therefore, one would have to reckon its diffused effect as very slight.… In the case of Koheleth matters are scarcely any different.[1]

This rather negative evaluation of Qoheleth's impact should be read along with von Rad's comments on Ecclesiastes in the last chapter of his book, "The Divine Determination of Times," famously arguing that the roots of the apocalyptic thought are to be found in the wisdom tradition. There he suggests that Ecclesiastes' notion of divinely appointed times was a forerunner of the deterministic worldview characteristic of apocalyptic

---

1. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, translated by James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 237–38.

literature.[2] While von Rad's latter claim has been challenged in subsequent scholarship, his assessment of Ecclesiastes' early history has received little scholarly attention. Yet, the fifty years since the publication of *Wisdom in Israel* have witnessed a surge of interest in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, including Qoheleth.[3] Numerous studies in this period explore the early reception of Ecclesiastes.[4] Some do so as a part of a systematic review of this book's long history.[5] Others focus on the impact of Qoheleth (or lack thereof) on such texts as 1 Enoch, Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, the New Testament, and 2 Baruch.[6] Several studies explore the reception of Qoheleth in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[7] Hence it seems only appropriate

--------

2. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 263–65.

3. In this essay the titles Qoheleth and Ecclesiastes are used interchangeably.

4. For an overview, see Douglas B. Miller, "Qoheleth," in *T&T Clark Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Daniel Gurtner and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 1:455–57.

5. Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, BBC (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007); Christianson, "Ecclesiastes, Book of," *EBR* 7:278–80.

6. Luca Mazzinghi, "Qohelet and Enochism: A Critical Relationship," *Hen* 24 (2002): 157–67; Bradley C. Gregory, "A Reassessment of Sirach's Relationship to Qoheleth: A Case Study of Qoheleth 3:15 and Sirach 5:3," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, LHBOTS 587 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 189–200; Lester L. Grabbe, "Intertextual Connections between the Wisdom of Solomon and Qoheleth," in Dell and Kynes, *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, 201–13; Dale C. Allison Jr., "Ecclesiastes, Book of, New Testament," *EBR* 7:278–79; Craig G. Bartholomew, "The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament," in Dell and Kynes, in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, 226–39; Matthias Henze, "Qoheleth and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," *VT* 58 (2008): 28–43.

7. For the literature on the two manuscripts of Ecclesiastes from Qumran, see James Muilenburg, "A Qoheleth Scroll from Qumran," *BASOR* 135 (1954): 20–28; Eugene Ulrich, "Ezra and Qoheleth Manuscripts from Qumran (4QEzra, 4QQoh[a,b])," in *Priests, Prophets and Scribes*, ed. Eugene Ulrich et al., JSOTSup 149 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 139–57; Ulrich, "109. 4QQoh[a]," in *Qumran Cave 4*, ed. Eugene Ulrich, DJD 16 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 221–26; Ulrich, "109. 4QQoh[b]," in *Qumran Cave 4*, 227; Émile Puech, "Le livre de Qohélet à Qumrân," *HTh* 18 (2000): 109–14; Puech, "Un nouveau fragment du manuscript[b] de l'Ecclésiaste (4QQohélet[b] ou 4Q110)," *RevQ* 19 (2000): 617–21; Puech, "Qohelet a Qumran," in *Il Libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, Redazione, Teologia*, ed. Giuseppe Bellia and Angelo Passaro (Milan: Paoline, 2001), 144–70; Noam Mizrahi, "Qoheleth 6:5b in Light of 4QQoh[a] ii 2 and Rabbinic Literature," *Text* 21 (2002): 159–74. For studies exploring the impact of Qoheleth on new texts found among the Scrolls, see, among others, Armin Lange, "In Diskussion mit dem Tempel: Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kohelet und weisheitlichen Kreisen am Jerusalemer Tempel," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon

to ask whether fifty years of intense interrogation of both old and new texts lead to a different evaluation of Qoheleth's impact on the literature of early Judaism. Since a full treatment of this topic exceeds the limits of this short contribution, this essay offers a selective overview of the textual data and recent scholarship.[8] Foregrounding the contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it takes a close look at the Qumran copies of Ecclesiastes vis-à-vis other textual witnesses. Next, it reviews the uses of Qoheleth in early Jewish writings, first in the texts known prior to the Qumran discoveries and then in the new writings that the Scrolls brought to light.

## 2. LXX Qoheleth and Qumran Fragments of Ecclesiastes

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the primary resource for the study of Qoheleth's pre-Masoretic history was its LXX translation.[9] Initially thought to be a work of Aquila, LXX Qoheleth is now considered to be a "developed form of the *kaige*-Theodotion tradition."[10] As such, it is dated somewhere "between the appearance of *kaige* in the first century B.C.E. and Aquila in the second century C.E."[11] Thus, it may be one of the

---

Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 125–26; Lange, "Eschatological Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 817–25; Dominic Rudman, "4QInstruction and Ecclesiastes: A Comparative Study," *QC* 9 (2000): 153–63; Martin A. Shields, "What Has Qohelet to Do with Qumran," in *Keter Shem Tov: Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Alan Crown*, ed. Shani Tzoref and Ian Young (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013), 185–201; Matthew Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Dell and Kynes, *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, 214–25.

8. For fuller discussion of possible points of contact between Ecclesiastes and other early Jewish works, the reader is referred to the more specialized works alluded to in the footnotes.

9. See Peter J. Gentry, *Ecclesiastes*, SVTG 11.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

10. James K. Aitken, "Ecclesiastes," in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 357. See further Peter J. Gentry, "1.3.1.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Translations, Hexapla, Post-Hexaplaric Translations," in *Textual History of the Bible*, ed. Armin Lange, https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b1.

11. Aitken, "Ecclesiastes," 357. For a first-century CE dating, see Cécile Dogniez, "13–17.1.1.3 Qohelet," in Lange, *Textual History of the Bible*, https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b3.

latest, if not *the* latest, of LXX books to be translated.[12] Overall, as James Aitken observes, LXX Qoheleth features "a high degree of quantitative and lexical equivalence" vis-à-vis the medieval MT.[13] Indeed, in a detailed study, Yun Yi demonstrates that this translation yields only a handful of cases suggesting a Hebrew text diverging from the MT.[14] Still, Yohanan Goldman argues that several LXX variants are theologically driven emendations enhancing the value of wisdom.[15]

More data on the pre-Masoretic text of Ecclesiastes emerges from the two manuscripts of Qoheleth discovered at Qumran. The better preserved 4QQoheleth[a] (4Q109) is one of the oldest Dead Sea Scrolls to be found. Its "archaic semi-formal hand" is dated to 175–150 BCE.[16] The fragments of 4QQoheleth[a], assigned to three consecutive columns, preserve Eccl 5:13–17; 6:1(?), 3–8, 12; 7:1–10, 19–20.[17] The second manuscript, 4QQoheleth[b] (4Q110), is dated to the middle of the first century BCE.[18] Its extant fragments contain Eccl 1:10–16.[19]

Both manuscripts, especially the larger 4QQoheleth[a], feature an impressive array of variant readings. In fact, Michael Fox compares 4QQoheleth[a] to 1QIsaiah[a], a treasure trove of variants:

> Among the readable ninety-five words in this manuscript [4QQoh[a]], thirteen are substantive variants, or 13.6 percent of the total, and seventeen are orthographical variants, or 17.8 percent of the total, together 31.57 percent. It is suggestive to compare 1QIsa[a], in which Ulrich and

---

12. Aitken, "Ecclesiastes," 357.

13. Aitken, "Ecclesiastes," 356.

14. Yun Yeong Yi, "Translation Technique in the Greek Ecclesiastes" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 414.

15. Yohanan A. P. Goldman, "Le texte masorétique de Qohélet, témoin d'un compromise théologique entre les 'Disciples des Sages' (Qoh 7,23–24; 8,1; 7,19)," in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker*, ed. Yohanan A. P. Goldman, Arie van der Kooij, and Richard D. Weis, VTSup 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 80–91. See also Goldman, "Qoheleth," in *Megilloth*, BHQ 18 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), 15. There he argues that LXX Qoheleth "clearly attests a Vorlage different from that of the Masoretic Text."

16. Ulrich, "109. 4QQoh[a]," 221.

17. For a recent attempt at reconstruction see Puech, "Qohelet a Qumran," 144–70.

18. Ulrich, "109. 4QQoh[b]," 227.

19. An additional fragment of this scroll was identified by Émile Puech ("Une nouveau fragment," 619).

Flint count "well over 2600" textual variants. This is 15 percent of the 17,000 words in MT-Isa, in a manuscript characterized by frequent modifications of spelling and wording, mostly for the sake of easier study and understanding.[20]

While 4QQoheleth[a]'s *plene* orthography can be too easily discarded as having little exegetical value, Noam Mizrahi demonstrates that in at least one case a spelling/morphological variation may mask a significant variant reading. In Eccl 6:5, "moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he" (NRSV; נחת לזה מזה), 4QQoheleth[a] reads נוחת instead of the difficult MT's נחת. Mizrahi suggests that a participle of an Aramaic נחת, "to go down," yields here a far better reading, describing the stillborn as "descending from this to this," that is, from vanity to darkness, than נחת, commonly derived from the Hebrew נוח, "to rest."[21]

The many nonorthographic or morphological variants found in 4QQoheleth[a] have been variously classified and assessed. Armin Lange suggests that with an exception of a few original readings (Eccl 5:14; 6:4; 7:5, 7), the rest reflect "scribal corruption, harmonization, and linguistic editing."[22] Fox likewise views the majority of the variants in both scrolls (with an exception of Eccl 7:5, 7, 19 in 4QQoh[a]) as secondary, a result of "scribal modifications in the direction of simplification and updating in the first century of the book's existence."[23] Thus both scholars affirm the importance of the two scrolls as a window into Qoheleth's early reception. Indeed, of the many variants in 4QQoheleth[a] illuminating various aspects of scribal work, such as a rare instance of using signs reminiscent of the Greek sigma and antisigma to introduce a correction in the margin, several shed light on the early exegesis of Qoheleth.[24] Thus Goldman argues that the readings הֹ[חכמה] תעזר לֹהֹ[כם ("w[isdom ]will help a wi[se man"), supported by the LXX

20. Michael V. Fox, "15.1 Textual History of Qohelet," in Lange, *Textual History of the Bible*, https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b2.

21. Mizrahi, "Qoheleth 6:5b in Light of 4QQoh[a] ii 2."

22. Armin Lange, "15.2.3 Other Texts," in Lange, *Textual History of the Bible*, https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b4.

23. Fox, "15.1 Textual History of Qohelet."

24. On the use of sigma and antisigma in a scribal correction to Eccl 6:4 in 4QQoh[a] and in the Dead Sea Scrolls in general, see Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*, STDJ 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 201–3.

against the MT's החכמה תעז לחכם ("wisdom is more of a stronghold to a wise man," Eccl 7:19), and כמה יותר לחכם מן] הכסיל ("how much advantage has the wise man have over[ the fool") versus the MT's כי מה יותר ("what advantage," Eccl 6:8), reflect an attempt to elevate the value of wisdom and "a tendency to soften Qoheleth's criticism of professional sages."[25]

Furthermore, in Eccl 7:2, while the MT reads באשר הוא סוף כל האדם ("for that is the end of every man"), 4QQoheleth[a] features a different word order: האדם] / באשר ה[וא]ה כל סוף ("for that i[s all the end] of humankind"). For Fox, this is an inferior reading, while Lange takes it to be a correction explaining the meaning of הוא in the preceding clause.[26] However, one wonders whether such a reversal of the word order might serve to emphasize the finality of death, a topic of an importance to Qoheleth (see Eccl 9:5–6, 10). Moreover, in Eccl 7:7, instead of the MT's ויאבד את לב מתנה ("a gift ruins the heart"),[27] the scroll reads ויעוה] את לב מתנה ("and [a gift] twists [the heart"). Both Lange and Fox suggest that this might be the original reading: the MT substituted the rare עוה, "to twist," with a more common אבד.[28] Yet, it is significant that the expression אבד את לב is otherwise unattested in Biblical Hebrew, whereas a phrase נעוה לב, "of a confused heart or disturbed mind," occurs in Prov 12:8.[29] Perhaps the scroll's wording reflects a reading of Eccl 7:7 in light of the saying found in (or akin to) Prov 12:8.

For von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel*, which is first and foremost a work of biblical theology, such textual matters would be of little consequence as far as Qoheleth's reception in contemporary writings is concerned.[30] Still, though neither LXX Qoheleth nor Qumran copies of Ecclesiastes warrant any strong revision of his sense that this book made no major impact on the contemporary literature, they do suggest that at least some scribes engaged Qoheleth on an exegetical level.

---

25. Goldman, "Qoheleth," 14.

26. Fox, "15.1 Textual History of Qohelet"; Lange, "15.2.3 Other Texts."

27. Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, JPSBC (Philadelphia: JPS, 2004), 45.

28. *HALOT*, 796; Lange, "15.2.3 Other Texts"; Fox, "15.1 Textual History of Qohelet."

29. *HALOT*, 796.

30. In fact, he makes no mention of the Qumran fragments of Qoheleth that had been published already in 1954 by Muilenburg, "Qoheleth Scroll from Qumran," 20–28.

## 3. Uses of Ecclesiastes in the Literature of Early Judaism

4QQoheleth[a–b] and the LXX translation of Ecclesiastes are not the only sources illuminating the early reception of this book. The following section reviews some of the attempts to identify uses of Qoheleth in early Jewish literature.[31] Two observations are due before one can proceed. First, the contours of the literary corpus known as early Jewish literature are loosely defined. This study casts its net rather broadly. While it excludes texts of rabbinic Judaism, it includes several writings dated after 70 CE, such as 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and Apocalypse of Abraham, with an assumption that they may reflect earlier traditions. Second, there is no universally agreed-on typology of intertextuality among biblical scholars. In fact, the very notion of what constitutes an influence of one literary work on another is a matter of an ongoing scholarly conversation.[32] While the following survey will gesture towards the many expressions of intertextuality assuming no verbal parallels between two texts, it will foreground categories cataloguing a spectrum of verbal affinities as proposed by Devorah Dimant.[33] These sorts of intertextual relations, as opposed to more theoretical conceptions of intertextuality, appear to be closer to what von Rad might have had in mind when he raised the question about Qoheleth's direct effect on contemporary thought.

Dimant divides the uses of scripture in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha into expositional and compositional. One example of an expositional use is an explicit quotation. These can be of two kinds. Thus there are instances where an antecedent text is quoted along with interpretative terminology, as in commentary. It should be noted right away that there appear to be no such uses of Ecclesiastes in our corpus. However, there are

---

31. This overview does not aim at being exhaustive. For an attempt to catalogue quotations and allusions to Qoheleth, see Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*, JAJSup 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &Ruprecht, 2011), 184–85. Some of the instances they include in their list fail to convince (e.g., Pss. Sol. 4.13 // Eccl 6:3 and Bar 3.31 // Eccl 11:5).

32. See an overview in John Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 1–16.

33. Devorah Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *Mikra*, ed. Martin J. Mulder, CRINT 2.1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 379–419. For alternative ways of classification based on verbal parallels see, for instance, Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions*, 25–29.

also explicit quotations that do not include a formal exposition. One such example is noted below. Her second broad rubric, compositional, includes a variety of uses bearing no exegetical markers. Of these, implicit quotation, allusion, motif, and literary model seem to be relevant for the present study. To highlight the contribution of the previously unknown texts that have emerged from the Dead Sea Scrolls, this overview first takes a look at the texts that were available prior to Qumran discoveries.

## 3.1. Texts Available Prior to Qumran Discoveries

### 3.1.1. Expositional Uses

Dimant defines explicit quotations as "biblical phrases of at least three words, more or less accurately reproduced, and introduced by special terms and explicit references to the source."[34] One instance of such a quotation from Qoheleth seems to be found in Rom 3:10:

> Eccl 7:20: "For there is not one righteous man [כי אדם אין צדיק; LXX: οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος] on earth who does what is best and doesn't err."

> Rom 3:10: "as it is written: 'There is no one who is righteous'" (NRSV; καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι δίκαιος).

While a similar sentiment is expressed in 1 Kgs 8:46 (// 2 Chr 6:36) and Ps 14:3 (echoed in Rom 3:10b–12),[35] the reference to δίκαιος ("righteous") seems to point to Eccl 7:20.[36]

### 3.1.2. Compositional Uses

Dimant differentiates between several types of implicit uses of scripture: (1) implicit quotations, (2) allusions, and (3) motifs and models.[37] She observes that the "two first types involve textual elements, while the last

---

34. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 385.

35. For another text expressing a similar sentiment, see 4 Ezra 7.46.

36. Allison observes that this is "the only NT quotation" from Qoheleth ("Ecclesiastes, Book of, New Testament," 278–79). See further Bartholomew, "Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes," 229–31.

37. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 400.

involves thematic elements."[38] For her, an implicit quotation is defined by "at least three words, which stem from a specific recognizable biblical context."[39]

Whether the texts under discussion yield examples of implicit quotations from Qoheleth is unclear. One passage that may match Dimant's criteria is Sir 5:3:

Eccl 3:15: "What is occurring occurred long since, and what is to occur occurred long since: and God seeks the pursued" (והאלהים יבקש את נרדף).

Sir 5:3 (Manuscript A): "Do not say, 'Who can prevail against him [Gk. "me"]?' For the Lord is seeking the pursued/persecuted ones." (כי ייי מבקש נרדפים)[40]

Overall, scholarly views on Ben Sira's use of Qoheleth range from enthusiastic acknowledgment to doubt to utter denial.[41] As to Sir 5:3, those arguing in favor of Sirach's borrowing from Qoheleth evoke it as the most certain example of such dependence, highlighting the verbal affinities between the two passages. Those who disagree point out that the verse may reflect a later editing with Qoheleth's text in mind or/and an allusion to a familiar saying.[42]

The next kind of implicit use is an allusion, which is notoriously difficult to define. For Dimant, allusions consist of "interweaving into a new composition motifs, key terms and small phrases from a specific and recognizable biblical passage."[43] Just how long these "small phrases" should be is not made clear, and for a good reason—allusions resist clear-cut parameters. No less

---

38. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 400.

39. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 401.

40. Translation follows Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 179, with alterations reflecting the Hebrew.

41. Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ktav, 1968), 46; Maurice Gilbert, "Qohelet et Ben Sira," in Schoors, *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, 161–79; Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 122–31. Lange and Weigold list Sir 22:13 // Eccl 10:14; 27:26 // Eccl 10:8 (*Biblical Quotations and Allusions*, 184–85).

42. Gregory, "Reassessment of Sirach's Relationship," 192–98.

43. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 410.

challenging is the task of delineating between an allusion and Dimant's next category, a motif. In her sliding scale of verbal dependence, the latter implies a thematic rather than a verbal affinity between two texts, which may still be expressed using a particular phraseology.[44] Some of the possible allusions to Qoheleth adduced below may as well be classified as motifs or literary topoi.

## 1. What profit is there?

Eccl 1:3: What real value is there for a man in all the gains he makes beneath the sun? (see also 3:9; 5:15).

2 Bar 14.3, 5: For what profit is there in this, or what greater evil than these [things] which we have seen befall us can we expect to see?… What profit did those have who had knowledge before you and did not walk in emptiness like the rest of the nations?[45]

4 Ezra 7.67–69: For what does it profit us that we shall be preserved alive but cruelly tormented?

Apocalypse of Abraham 3.1–2: What is the profit of the labor which my father is doing?[46]

## 2. There is time for everything.

Eccl 3:1–8: A season is set for everything.… A time for…, and a time for…

T. Naph. 8.8: There is a time for having intercourse with one's wife, and a time to abstain for the purpose of prayer.[47]

---

44. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 400, 417.

45. The English translation of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch in this chapter are from Michael E. Stone and Matthias Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis; Fortress, 2013).

46. Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, TCS 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 11. Kulik offers the following retroversion into Hebrew: מה יתרון בעמלו שיעמל אבי (*Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 11, 81–82).

47. Unless stated otherwise, the English translation of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs cited here is from Howard C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *OTP* 1:775–828.

Eccl 3:11: He brings everything to pass precisely at its time.

T. Naph. 2.8: For God made everything good in an order.[48]

## 3. Examining all things.

Eccl 1:13: I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun (see also 7:23).

T. Ash. 5.4: I have tested all these things in my life … and I searched …

## 4. It is better not to be born.

Eccl 4:3: and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun.

The language akin to that of Qoheleth occurs in several writings dealing with human suffering in this world:

2 Bar 10.6: Blessed is he who was not born, or he who was born and had died (see also 2 Bar 11.4; 28.3).

4 Ezra 4.11–12: When I heard this, I fell on my face and said to him, "It would be better for us not to be here than to come here and live in ungodliness, and to suffer and not to understand why we suffer."

Elsewhere a similar language is employed to describe the punishment of the sinners:

1 En. 38.2: Where [will be] the dwelling of the sinners, and where [will be] the resting place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits? It would have been better for them if they had not been born.[49]

Mark 14:21 (and parr.): For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born. (NRSV)

---

48. James L. Kugel, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2013), 2:1797.

49. The English translation of 1 Enoch in this study follows that of George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress: 2004).

2 En. 41.2 (short text): And I said in my heart, "How blessed is he who has not been born, or who, having been born, has not sinned before the face of the Lord, so that he will not come into this place nor carry the yoke of this place."[50]

5. Returning to one's eternal home.

Eccl 12:5: But man sets out for his eternal abode.

Jub. 36.1: My children, I am going the way of my fathers, to the eternal home where my fathers are.[51]

Tob 3:6 (GII): Command, O Lord, that I be loosed from this distress; release me to go to my everlasting home.[52] (This same verse reads earlier on [GII]: "Command that my spirit be taken away from me, that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust." The language here resembles Eccl 12:7, "And the dust returns to the ground as it was, and the lifebreath [or 'spirit,' והרוח] returns to God who bestowed it," which may lend further support to a possibility that Tobit echoes here Ecc 12.[53])

All of the aforementioned passages bear a degree of a verbal resemblance to Qoheleth, thus meeting the first half of Dimant's criterion for an allusion: the presence of the shared "key-terms and small phrases." However, one wonders whether all of them meet the criterion's second half, that is, that the shared language points to "a specific and recognizable biblical passage." Thus a sentiment akin to Qoheleth's "it is better not to be born" is found not only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Jer 20:14, 17–18; Job 3:11; 10:18) but also in non-Jewish sources.[54] The language of returning to one's eternal home may be unique to Eccl 12:5, as far as Biblical Hebrew is concerned, yet it is attested in nonscriptural sources in several Semitic

---

50. Francis I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse) of Enoch," *OTP* 1:166–67.

51. James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees 2: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees Chapters 22–50*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 953.

52. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 129. 4Q200 1 I, 4–5 (Tobit[e]) preserves some of the relevant Aramaic text: עו[ל]מ[ים וא]ל תסתר.

53. For another possible allusion to Eccl 12:7, see 4 Ezra 7.78.

54. See Epraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 252, on the non-Jewish variations of this motif.

languages.[55] Indeed, as befitting wisdom literature, the general nature of some of the expressed sentiments, reflecting common experiences and discourses, makes their direct relation to Qoheleth somewhat uncertain.

Three further texts contain what can be described as clusters of allusions and motifs pointing to Ecclesiastes. The first is from the Epistle of Enoch, 1 En. 102.6–11. The passage occurs in a discourse addressing the righteous ones who have died. First, it quotes the deceased sinners' claim that in death there is no difference between the righteous and sinners. Next, it assures the righteous that this is only an appearance of things, as both groups will receive their retribution after death (Ethiopic text):

> And when you die, the sinners will say about you: "Just as we have died, so also the righteous have died; and what gain did they have from their works? Behold they have died as we have, in sadness and darkness; and what advantage is theirs? From now on we will be equal. And how will they arise, and what will they see forever? And behold, they have died, and from now on until eternity they will not see the light." I say to you, you sinners, you are content to eat and to drink and to rob and to sin and to make people naked and to add to wealth and to see good day. You have seen the righteous ones, how their end came about; indeed, there was no wrongdoing found in them until their death, but they were destroyed and became as if they had never existed, and their spirits have descended into Sheol in agony.[56]

Evoking Qoheleth's familiar formula "what advantage," this text echoes multiple passages from Ecclesiastes:[57]

> Eccl 2:16: Alas, the wise man dies, just like the fool!

> Eccl 9:2: For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked.

> Eccl 3:19–20: For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both

---

55. See Avi Hurvitz, "*Byt-'wlm* and *Byt-qbrwt*: Two Funerary Terms in Biblical Literature and Their Linguistic Background," *Maarav* 8 (1992): 59–68.

56. Loren Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 500.

57. For allusions to Ecclesiastes in this passage, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 511; Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, 506–7.

have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust (see also 9:5–6).

Eccl 2:24: There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat and drink and afford himself enjoyment with his means (see also 3:12; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7).[58]

The second text featuring a cluster of motifs reminiscent of Qoheleth is Wis 1:16–2:24. Like 1 En. 102, it quotes the words of godless people:[59]

"By mere chance did we come to be, and thereafter we shall be as though we have never been, for the breath of our nostrils is but a puff of smoke; our reason is a mere spark within our throbbing heart, and when that is extinguished, our body will turn to ashes, and our life breath will be scattered like thin air. Our name will be forgotten with the passage of time, and none will recall our deeds; our life will be gone like the traces of a cloud and dispersed as mist, pursued by the sun's rays and overborne by its heat. For our time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no reversal of our end; it has been sealed, and none overturns it. Come then, let us enjoy the good things at hand, and make use of creation with youthful zest. Let is take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no spring blossom pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let no meadow fail to share in our revelry, let us everywhere leave tokens of our merriment, for this is our portion and our birthright.… Let us entrap the just man.… He pronounces the final lot of the just happy.… Let us see if his statements are true, and make trial of what will happen to him in the end.…" So they argued and were misled; blinded by their malice, they were ignorant of Gods mysteries … but God created man for immortality.

As in 1 En. 102, the author condemns the views of the sinners and advocates for an afterlife retribution, and like 1 En. 102, this passage uses a rhetoric of enjoyment familiar from Qoheleth—"let us enjoy the good things at hand" (see Eccl 3:22)—as well as themes such as the transiency of life (compare "puff of smoke" and "mist" with Qoheleth's הבל) and the finality of death.

---

58. As is often noted, the Enochic "you sinners, you are content to eat and to drink" utilizes a motif or a literary topos well attested not only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 22:13) but also in much contemporary epigraphic and literary evidence, both Jewish and gentile (see further Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108*, 510 n. 877).

59. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 111–12.

Scholarly opinions on the relationship between this passage from Wisdom and Ecclesiastes oscillate between two poles. Thus, long ago Christian David Ginsburg observed that "the Wisdom of Solomon may, in certain sense, be regarded as the first comment upon Coheleth."[60] Von Rad, however, offers a significantly different perspective, warning against the temptation to associate the notions of "the transitoriness and vanity of life, and the summons to enjoy what is possible" specifically with Qoheleth, since "the subject of these statements is a long-standing one in the ancient Near East, and as such it is not Koheleth's private literary property."[61] Von Rad's point is certainly well taken. In fact, it echoes concerns raised above with reference to some of the presumed allusions to Qoheleth. Still, when Wis 1–2 is read alongside 1 En. 102 (of which von Rad makes no mention), the possibility that these two speeches by lawless men embedded in Jewish writings that postdate Qoheleth directly engage Ecclesiastes, even polemicize with it, seems rather likely.[62]

The third cluster of allusions to Ecclesiastes occurs in 2 Baruch, a book that has already proved to be particularly rich with echoes of Qoheleth. Second Baruch 85.8–11 appears to take up the concluding poem from Eccl 11:9–12:8:

> Therefore, before his judgement will claim its own and truth what is rightfully due, let us prepare ourselves.… For the youth of the world [or: age] has passed and the strength of creation is already consumed. The advent of the times is very near, and they have passed. The pitcher is near to the cistern, the boat to the harbor, the journey of the road to the city, and the life to [its] consummation. Again, then, prepare yourselves, so that, when you have traveled and ascend from the boat, you will have rest and not be condemned when you depart.

For von Rad, Eccl 12:2–6 is "the great allegory" in which Qoheleth "mercilessly reveals how the manifestations of human life diminish with age,

---

60. Christian David Ginsburg, *Coheleth* (London: Longman, 1861), 28–29. He, however, does not think that Wisdom polemicizes against Qoheleth but rather combats the same errors.

61. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 238; similarly, Grabbe, "Intertextual Connections," 201–13.

62. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 238. For von Rad, who considers such a possibility, it would imply that Qoheleth's arguments "have been distorted" by the Wisdom of Solomon.

how it grows darker and darker around a man until 'the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl breaks.'"[63] For 2 Baruch, however, as Matthias Henze demonstrates, old age is "not the old age of the individual but the weariness of the cosmos."[64] Such an eschatological interpretation of Eccl 11:9–12:6—both evoking von Rad's reading of Qoheleth as a forerunner of apocalyptic and championed by modern scholarship—is probably suggested by the poem's language that is reminiscent of features in the biblical (as well as postbiblical) day of the Lord tradition, for example, sun, stars, and moon growing dark, shaking, and breaking/smashing.[65] The verbal links between 2 Baruch and Ecclesiastes are admittedly limited: the reference to "youth" (Eccl 11:9; 12:1) and "the pitcher" that is said to be "near to the cistern" (Eccl 12:6). Still, when the shared motif of an imminent end is foregrounded, the possibility of 2 Baruch's dependence on Qoheleth remains a viable option. In fact, all these features may fit rather well Dimant's subcategory of an implicit use of Scripture, a "literary model," marked by a cluster of shared motifs and allusions.[66]

## 3.2. Ecclesiastes in the Nonbiblical Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls revealed a plethora of previously unknown Second Temple Jewish writings. Do any of these new texts use Ecclesiastes? Scholarly opinions on the matter vary. On the one hand, Sidnie White Crawford states, "Ecclesiastes is not cited or alluded to in other literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls."[67] On the other hand, several studies suggest that at least two newly found wisdom texts from Qumran allude to Ecclesiastes.

---

63. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 228.

64. Henze, "Qohelet and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," 42.

65. See Choon-Leong Seow, "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem," *JBL* 118 (1999): 209–34.

66. Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra," 417–19.

67. Sidnie White Crawford, "Five Scrolls," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Lawrence Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:296. In a similar fashion, Shields concludes that "although copies of Qohelet existed at Qumran, the book was not accorded the same authority as were other biblical texts" ("What Has Qohelet to Do," 201).

Two of these allusions appear to be rather doubtful.[68] The first one comes from 1Q27 (Mysteries) 6 2, read by Józef T. Milik as: [י] שׁ֗יהֻמֹּ[ ] כפר על שגג‎○○○○ל [ ].[69] Lange reads here שגגה, "a (inadvertent) sin," and suggests that the text alludes to Eccl 5:5: "and don't plead before the messenger that it was an error" (כי שגגה היא; see also 10:5).[70] However, since the noun שגגה is not unique to Ecclesiastes (see, e.g., Lev 4:2, 22, 27), and the immediate context of 1Q27 6 2 indicates no other verbal affinities with Eccl 5, this suggestion is unlikely.[71] That the Qumran line does not deal with Qoheleth's passage is further supported by the new readings of Elisha Qimron, עו[ ] שׁיהֻמֹה [י]כפר על שגגותֻמֹה] ("their [ma]ker [will] atone for their errors") and Émile Puech, מע[שיהמה [י]כפר על שגגותמה ל ("their [de]eds [he will] atone for their errors").[72]

The second dubious allusion to Qoheleth in the Scrolls is found in 4QInstruction. The passage in question, 4Q418 69 II, 4–6, reads:[73]

---

68. Puech notes and discards several additional cases where earlier scholarship suggested an allusion to Qoheleth ("Qohelet a Qumran," 163–64).

69. Dominique Barthélemy and Józef Tadeusz Milik, eds., *Qumran Cave 1*, DJD 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 106.

70. Lange, "In Diskussion mit dem Tempel," 125–26; Lange, "Eschatological Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet," 824–25. Lange, who accepts von Rad's thesis that apocalyptic thought and literature emerged from wisdom circles, uses this dubious allusion to Eccl 6 in 1Q27 to suggest that the second redactor of Qoheleth responsible for Eccl 11:9c belonged to the same circle as the author of 1Q27 (and similar texts). For a critique of von Rad and Lange, see Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 221–22; Matthew Goff, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57–61. For the definition of שגגה as "a (inadvertent) sin," see *HALOT*, 1413.

71. Thus also Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 216; Puech, "Qohelet a Qumran," 165.

72. Elisha Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings*, BBM (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2013), 2:132 (Hebrew); Puech, "Qohelet a Qumran," 165.

73. Translation by Menahem Kister, "Divorce, Reproof and Other Sayings in of the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus Traditions in the Context of 'Qumranic' and Other Texts," in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity*, ed. Ruth A. Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz STDJ 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 198. The underlying Hebrew text is that of Qimron, *Dead Sea Scrolls* 2:151. The numbering of the lines follows *editio princeps*: John Strugnell, Daniel J. Harrington, and Torleif Elgvin, *Qumran Cave 4: 4QInstruction (Sapiential Texts), Part 2*, DJD 34 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 281.

4. And now, foolish of heart, what wellbeing (can there be) to those who have not

5. been created[, and what] rest (can there be) for those who have not come into being, and what (righteous) judgement for those who have not been established, and what (can) the dead groan over their own d[ea]th?

6. You are from nothing and to eternal destruction you return.

Matthew Goff suggests that the last question posed in these lines, which are a part of a judgement scene, indicates "that the foolish of heart complain about life and thus have a despondent view of human existence that accords with Ecclesiastes."[74] Menahem Kister, who makes no reference to Qoheleth, by contrast argues that this passage speaks of the wicked as "spiritually" dead—they are nothing, as if they have not been created at all (see Matt 8:21–22; Luke 9:59–60).[75] In either case, the text hardly meets Dimant's criteria for an allusion, as it lacks any verbal affinities with Qoheleth.

Two further instances of possible literary dependence of a Qumran text on Ecclesiastes come from the same two works. First, 1Q27 1 II, 3, as Lange and Weigold observe, borrows Qoheleth's phrase מה י(ו)תר לחכם ("what advantage then has the wise man," Eccl 6:8, 11):[76]

.מנכ ○  [ ]○נֹו מה הוא היותר לֹ] Józef Milik[77]

מֹחֹשֹב[ות רע]תֹו מה הוא היותֹר לֹ[אדם בחייו ("though[ts] of his [wicked]ness. What is the advantage for[ a man in his life"):[78] Elisha Qimron

While Goff argues that the parallel is too general to qualify for an allusion, it might belong with similar formulations (either as an allusion or a motif) adduced above ("What profit is there?").[79]

---

74. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 223–24 n. 5.

75. Kister, "Divorce, Reproof and Other Sayings," 198.

76. Lange and Weigold, *Biblical Quotations and Allusions*, 185. See also Lange, "In Diskussion mit dem Tempel," 125; Lange, "Eschatological Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet," 824; Puech, "Qohelet a Qumran," 165.

77. Barthélemy and Milik, *Qumran Cave 1*, 105.

78. Qimron, *Dead Sea Scrolls* 2:131. Puech reads מנכס[יהמה [מנו מה הוא היותר ל]אדם ("Qohelet a Qumran," 165).

79. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 216.

Second, Jonathan Ben-Dov suggests that the aforementioned column from 4QInstruction, 4Q418 69 10–14, alludes to Eccl 12:12b: "The making of many books is without limit [קץ] and much study [ולהג] is a wearying [יגעת] of the flesh."[80] The passage in question reads: [81]

> 10. And you, those who choose[82] truth and pursue[ righteousness], and search[ for understanding, and ] keep watch
> 11. for all knowledge. How can you say, "We grew weary [יגענו] with understanding and vigilantly pursued knowledge"? [He consider]ed (הג[ה) [these] all the t[ime]
> 12. and did not become tired in all years of eternity. Is it not in truth that he takes delight forever and knowledge[ always ]serves him? And the son[s]
> 13. of heaven, whose inheritance is eternal life, would they say, "We have grown weary in the acts of truth and became tir[ed]
> 14. during all time periods [קציׁם]? Are they not wal[king] in eternal light?

To support his proposal, Ben-Dov points to the use of the verbs יגע and הגה and the noun קץ.[83] If correct, these lines, warning against growing weary in pursuit of understanding and knowledge, could be read as an implicit critique of Qoheleth's admonition.[84]

To be sure, the quest for the impact of Qoheleth on the previously unknown texts from Qumran is not limited to a search for verbal parallels. Thus, Daniel Harrington suggests that the newly discovered sapiential

---

80. Jonathan Ben-Dov, "The Book of HGY and Ancient Reading Practices," in *Is There a Text in This Cave?*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 431–32.

81. The translation is from Ben Dov, "Book of HGY," 431–32. The underlying Hebrew text is by Qimron, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2:151. The numbering of the lines follows Strugnell, Harrington, and Elgvin, *Qumran Cave 4*, 281.

82. Reading with Qimron, *Dead Sea Scrolls* 2:151 (footnote): בחורי = בוחרי.

83. The reading of הג[ה in line 11 is uncertain. The new reading and reconstruction proposed by Qimron eliminate הג[ה altogether and suggest ושקדנו יגענו בבינה לרדוף דעת כ[י אל ש[ק]ׁק בכול מ[ודו]. I am grateful to Professor Qimron for sharing with me an electronic version of this second and revised edition of *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings*, 2:151.

84. For a different perspective on this passage from 4QInstruction, see Timothy J. Sandoval, "Agur's Words to God in Proverbs 30 and Prayerful Study in the Second Temple Period," in *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets: On Prayer and Praying in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Ariel Feldman and Timothy J. Sandoval, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 83–114.

texts may share a few aspects of form and content with Ecclesiastes, though for him the differences between them are far more important. At Qumran, he asserts, there is nothing like the individual (as well as provocative and entertaining) voice that one hears in Qoheleth.[85] For Dominic Rudman, the largest new wisdom text to be found among the Scrolls, 4QInstruction, and Qoheleth share forms and modes of argumentation, as well as several themes, such as the search for wisdom, concerns with monetary activity, afterlife, and the knowledge of the future.[86] Yet unlike 4QInstruction, Qoheleth protests against apocalyptic views by denying an afterlife and a possibility of knowing the future, and remains skeptical about divine justice.[87] Rudman concludes that the relationships between the two texts "cannot be said to be direct," but "it is clear that they do, in many respects, take a common point of departure."[88]

Goff offers a different perspective. He notes that the core sectarian texts found at Qumran exhibit a different worldview from Qoheleth.[89] The pessimism and skepticism of Ecclesiastes, he argues, were simply unattractive for the sectarians, with their belief in retribution at the final judgment and a claim to special revelation, including revelation of heavenly wisdom. At the same time, for Goff, Qoheleth's skepticism and emphasis on death as humanity's ultimate end "may have helped spark the production of literature in which hope for a blessed afterlife rests not on empirical evidence that can be critiqued but on a claim of heavenly revelation," such as 4QInstruction.[90] Viewing the relationships between the new sapiential texts and Ecclesiastes through the lens of theoretical studies on intertextuality, assuming that any text's negotiation of prior discourses "goes beyond phenomena such as allusion or explicit citation," he concludes that Qoheleth was a part of Qumran wisdom's "sociolect."[91] While such nonverbal kinds of intertextual relations may not necessarily fit von Rad's criteria for Qohe-

---

85. Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

86. Rudman, "4QInstruction and Ecclesiastes," 153–63.

87. Rudman, "4QInstruction and Ecclesiastes," 157–58.

88. Rudman, "4QInstruction and Ecclesiastes," 163.

89. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 218–19.

90. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 224.

91. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 224. Goff borrows the term *sociolect* from literary theorist Michael Riffaterre, for whom, according to Goff, "A literary work not only appropriates but also inverts and transforms elements from its intertextual matrix" ("Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality," 223).

leth's direct effect on the literature of its time, they have been anticipated by his own attempt to link Ecclesiastes' concept of appointed times to the determinism of apocalyptic texts, citing, among other exemplars thereof, the sectarian Community Rule (1QS III, 15–16).[92]

## 4. Conclusion

The foregoing attempt to map some of the evidence pertaining to Qoheleth's early reception yields modest results. On the one hand, it indicates that von Rad's assessment of the book's direct effect on contemporary writings, particularly on wisdom literature, as minimal is not far off the mark.[93] On the other hand, it suggests the last fifty years of intensive study of early Jewish texts, both old and new, allow for a far more nuanced and detailed picture of early responses to this book. From a masterfully executed Qumran manuscript of Ecclesiastes revealing some of the earliest attempts to negotiate the nuances of this text (4QQoh[a]), to clusters of motifs that may reflect a critique of some of the views that early readers might have attributed to Qoheleth (1 Enoch, Wisdom of Solomon, and 4QInstruction), to a creative engagement by a post-70 apocalyptic text (2 Baruch), to a presumed indirect negotiation in 4QInstruction—all these are precious snapshots of Qoheleth's impact on the literature of early Judaism.

Still, this overview begs the question: Why are there so few of them? The paucity of data on early Jewish texts' engagement with Qoheleth comes to the fore when contrasted with the early reception of the other wisdom book that von Rad describes as a "peak in the literary production of ancient Israel," the book of Job.[94] Thinking in Dimant's categories, the book of Job appears to be used as a literary model (e.g., the book of Tobit and Jub. 17–18), the figure of Job is listed in the catalogues of exemplary figures (e.g., Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers), his story is summarized or rewritten (Aristeas the Exegete), and it serves as a point of departure for a pseudepigraphic work (Testament of Job). There is also a significant number of allusions to Job in our corpus, including the Dead Sea Scrolls.[95]

---

92. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 268.

93. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237–38.

94. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237.

95. For an overview of Job's reception in Second Temple literature, see Choon Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 110–20. On the use of Job in Tobit, see Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of

To explain what may appear as a neglect of Ecclesiastes in Second Temple sources, one could suggest that it simply took a longer time for Qoheleth to acquire some kind of authoritative status. The foregoing survey of uses of Ecclesiastes, modest as they are, seems to indicate that writings that are dated to the first century CE and later more fully engage Qoheleth than earlier works. For example, the postdestruction 2 Baruch, we saw, seems to repeatedly employ Ecclesiastes, and without any polemical stance. This is not to say that post-70 CE Jewish readers unanimously embraced Qoheleth. Early rabbinic texts voicing questions regarding the divine inspiration of this book seem to suggest otherwise.[96]

Moreover, an argument can be made that a collection of sayings such as the one found in Ecclesiastes does not easily yield itself as a literary model or a subject of rewriting. Still, the figure of a wise king searching for (and finding, at the end of the book) answers for some of the most important questions of human existence could potentially serve as a useful tool for a variety of literary projects. To be sure, Solomon the Wise and Solomon the Ruler over the Demons make appearances in several Second Temple works, but none of these Solomons, including the pseudepigraphic Solomon of the Wisdom of Solomon, has the flavor of Qoheleth's king.[97] One wonders whether this, at least partially, has to do with the negative biblical portrayal of elderly Solomon, who has been traditionally assumed to be the author of Qoheleth.[98] Thus, Ben Sira, who applauds young Solomon in his Praise of the Fathers, is very critical of the king's later days (Sir 47:12–23a).[99]

---

Mikra," 417–19. On the Testament of Job, see Maria Haralambakis, *The Testament of Job: Text, Narrative and Reception*, LSTS (London: T&T Clark, 2012). On the reception of Job in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Carol A. Newsom, "The Reception of Job in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 99–114.

96. See m. Ed. 5:3; m. Yad. 2:14; 3:5; t. Yad. 2:14 (ed. Zuckermandel, 683). See further Reuven Kipperwasser, "Ecclesiastes, Book of, III. Judaism, A. Rabbinic Judaism," *EBR* 7:279–80; Goldman, "Le texte masorétique de Qohélet," 69–80.

97. On Solomon's persona in Wisdom of Solomon see, for instance, Devorah Dimant, "Pseudonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *La Septuaginta en la Investigacion Contemporanea*, ed. Natalio Fernández-Marcos (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1985), 243–55; Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus; Development of a Tradition*, JSJSup 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 93–95.

98. See, for instance, t. Yad. 2:14 (Zuckermandel, 683).

99. On Ben Sira's depiction of Solomon, see Pancratius C. Beentjes, "'The Coun-

Finally, one might posit that the very ideas espoused by Qoheleth could have presented a problem for some of the circles responsible for the texts surveyed above. For instance, multiple writings of that period, including writings associated with the community(ies) behind the Dead Sea Scrolls, testify to the growing importance of various conceptions of afterlife and continued revelation, notions that would hardly agree with Qoheleth's outlook. In light of this argument, it is of no surprise that many of the aforementioned allusions to Ecclesiastes point to the less problematic passages in this book. At the same time, the two clusters of Qoheleth-like language found in 1 En. 102 and Wis 1–2 suggest a polemical stance toward the Qoheleth-like views (if not toward Ecclesiastes itself) that these texts ascribe to sinners.

However one explains the limited examples of engaging Qoheleth in the literature of early Judaism, one aspect of it appears certain: though it may not have "caused a powerful sensation" and "terrified all thinking men," it was not ignored.[100]

## Bibliography

Aitken, James K. "Ecclesiastes." Pages 356–69 in *T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*. Edited by James K. Aitken. London: T&T Clark, 2015.

Allison, Dale C., Jr. "Ecclesiastes, Book of, New Testament." *EBR* 7:278–79.

Andersen, Francis I. "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse) of Enoch." *OTP* 1:166–67.

Barthélemy, Dominique, and Józef Tadeusz Milik, eds. *Qumran Cave 1*. DJD 1. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

Bartholomew, Craig G. "The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament." Pages 226–39 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Barton, John. "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" Pages 1–16 in *Reading Job Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine Dell and Will Kynes. New York: T&T Clark, 2013.

---

tries Marveled at You': King Solomon in Ben Sira 47:12–22," in *"Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14,20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*, CBET 43 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 135–44; Claudia Camp, *Ben Sira and the Men Who Handle Books: Gender and the Rise of Canon-Consciousness*, HBM 50 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 168–72.

100. Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 237.

Beentjes, Pancratius C. "'The Countries Marveled at You': King Solomon in Ben Sira 47:12–22." Pages 135–44 in *"Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom" (Sir. 14,20): Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira*. CBET 43. Leuven: Peeters, 2006.

Ben-Dov, Jonathan. "The Book of HGY and Ancient Reading Practices." Pages 423–37 in *Is There a Text in This Cave?* Edited by Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel. STDJ 119. Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Camp, Claudia. *Ben Sira and the Men Who Handle Books: Gender and the Rise of Canon-Consciousness*. HBM 50. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013.

Christianson, Eric S. "Ecclesiastes, Book of." *EBR* 7:278–80.

———. *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*. BBC. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.

Crawford, Sidnie White. "Five Scrolls." *EDSS* 1:295–97.

Dimant, Devorah. "Pseudonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon." Pages 243–55 in *La Septuaginta en la Investigacion Contemporanea*. Edited by Natalio Fernández-Marcos. Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1985.

———. "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha." Pages 379–419 in *Mikra*. Edited by Martin J. Mulder. CRINT 2.1. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990.

Dogniez, Cécile. "13–17.1.1.3 Qohelet." In *Textual History of the Bible*. Edited by Armin Lange. https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b3.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Tobit*. CEJL. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003.

Fox, Michael V. "15.1 Textual History of Qohelet." In *Textual History of the Bible*. Edited by Armin Lange. https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b2.

———. *Ecclesiastes*. JPSBC. Philadelphia: JPS, 2004.

Gentry, Peter J. "1.3.1.2 Pre-Hexaplaric Translations, Hexapla, Post-Hexaplaric Translations." In *Textual History of the Bible*. Edited by Armin Lange. https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b1.

———. *Ecclesiastes*. SVTG 11.3. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.

Gilbert, Maurice. "Qohelet et Ben Sira." Pages 161–79 in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*. Edited by Antoon Schoors. BETL 136. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998.

Ginsburg, Christian David. *Coheleth*. London: Longman, 1861.

Goff, Matthew. "Wisdom and Apocalypticism." Pages 52–68 in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. Edited by John J. Collins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 214–25 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Goldman, Yohanan A. P. "Le texte masorétique de Qohélet, témoin d'un compromis théologique entre les 'Disciples des Sages' (Qoh 7,23–24; 8,1; 7,19)." Pages 69–93 in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker*. Edited by Yohanan A. P. Goldman, Arie van der Kooij, and Richard D. Weis. VTSup 110. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

———. "Qoheleth." Pages 25–53 in *Megilloth*. BHQ 18. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004.

Gordis, Robert. *Koheleth: The Man and His World*. 2nd ed. New York: Ktav, 1968.

Grabbe, Lester L. "Intertextual Connections between the Wisdom of Solomon and Qoheleth." Pages 201–13 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Gregory, Bradley C. "A Reassessment of Sirach's Relationship to Qoheleth: A Case Study of Qoheleth 3:15 and Sirach 5:3." Pages 189–200 in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes. LHBOTS 587. London: T&T Clark, 2014.

Haralambakis, Maria. *The Testament of Job: Text, Narrative and Reception*. LSTS. London: T&T Clark, 2012.

Harrington, Daniel J. *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Henze, Matthias. "Qoheleth and the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch." *VT* 58 (2008): 28–43.

Hurvitz, Avi. "*Byt-'wlm* and *Byt-qbrwt*: Two Funerary Terms in Biblical Literature and Their Linguistic Background." *Maarav* 8 (1992): 59–68.

Kee, Howard C. "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs." *OTP* 1:775–828.

Kipperwasser, Reuven. "Ecclesiastes, Book of, III. Judaism, A. Rabbinic Judaism." *EBR* 7:279–80.

Kister, Menahem. "Divorce, Reproof and Other Sayings in of the Synoptic Gospels: Jesus Traditions in the Context of 'Qumranic' and Other Texts." Pages 195–230 in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity*. Edited by Ruth A. Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz. STDJ 84. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Kugel, James L. "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs." Pages 1697–1855 in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*. Vol. 2. Philadelphia: JPS, 2013.

Kulik, Alexander. *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*. TCS 3. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

Lange, Armin. "15.2.3 Other Texts." In *Textual History of the Bible*. Edited by Armin Lange. https://tinyurl.com/SBLPress2649b4.

———. "Eschatological Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet and the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 817–25 in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery*. Edited by Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000.

———. "In Diskussion mit dem Tempel: Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kohelet und weisheitlichen Kreisen am Jerusalemer Tempel." Pages 113–59 in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*. Edited by Antoon Schoors. BETL 136. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998.

Lange, Armin, and Matthias Weigold. *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*. JAJSup 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &Ruprecht, 2011.

Mazzinghi, Luca. "Qohelet and Enochism: A Critical Relationship." *Hen* 24 (2002): 157–67.

Miller, Douglas B. "Qoheleth." Pages 455–57 in vol. 1 of *T&T Clark Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*. Edited by Daniel Gurtner and Loren T. Stuckenbruck. 2 vols. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Mizrahi, Noam. "Qoheleth 6:5b in Light of 4QQoh[a] ii 2 and Rabbinic Literature." *Text* 21 (2002): 159–74.

Muilenburg, James. "A Qoheleth Scroll from Qumran." *BASOR* 135 (1954): 20–28.

Newsom, Carol A. "The Reception of Job in the Dead Sea Scrolls." Pages 99–114 in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Edited by Scott C. Jones and Christine Roy Yoder. BZAW. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018.

Nickelsburg, George W. E. *1 Enoch 1*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

———. *1 Enoch: A New Translation*. Minneapolis: Fortress: 2004.

Puech, Émile. "Le livre de Qohélet à Qumrân." *HTh* 18 (2000): 109–14.

———. "Un nouveau fragment du manuscript[b] de l'Ecclésiaste (4QQohélet[b] ou 4Q110)." *RevQ* 19 (2000): 617–21.

———. "Qohelet a Qumran." Pages 144–70 in *Il Libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, Redazione, Teologia*. Edited by Giuseppe Bellia and Angelo Passaro. Milan: Paoline, 2001.

Qimron, Elisha. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew Writings* [Hebrew]. Vol. 2. BBM. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2013.

Rad, Gerhard von. *Wisdom in Israel*. Translated by James D. Martin. Nashville: Abingdon, 1972.

Rudman, Dominic. "4QInstruction and Ecclesiastes: A Comparative Study." *QC* 9 (2000): 153–63.

Sandoval, Timothy J. "Agur's Words to God in Proverbs 30 and Prayerful Study in the Second Temple Period." Pages 83–114 in *Petitioners, Penitents, and Poets: On Prayer and Praying in Second Temple Judaism*. Edited by Ariel Feldman and Timothy J. Sandoval. BZAW. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.

Seow, Choon Leong. *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*. Illuminations. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

———. "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem." *JBL* 118 (1999): 209–34.

Shields, Martin A. "What Has Qohelet to Do with Qumran." Pages 185–201 in *Keter Shem Tov: Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Alan Crown*. Edited by Shani Tzoref and Ian Young. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013.

Skehan, Patrick W., and Alexander A. Di Lella. *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*. AB 39. New York: Doubleday, 1987.

Stone, Michael E., and Matthias Henze. *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes*. Minneapolis; Fortress, 2013.

Strugnell, John, Daniel J. Harrington, and Torleif Elgvin. *Qumran Cave 4: 4QInstruction (Sapiential Texts), Part 2*. DJD 34. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000.

Stuckenbruck, Loren. *1 Enoch 91–108*. CEJL. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007.

Torijano, Pablo A. *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus; Development of a Tradition*. JSJSup 73. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Tov, Emanuel. *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*. STDJ 54. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Ulrich, Eugene. "109. 4QQoh[a]." Pages 221–26 in *Qumran Cave 4: Textes en Araméen, deuxième partie*. Edited by Eugene Ulrich. DJD 16. Oxford: Clarendon, 2001.

———. "109. 4QQoh[b]." Page 227 in *Qumran Cave 4: Textes en Araméen, deuxième partie*. Edited by Eugene Ulrich. DJD 16. Oxford: Clarendon, 2001.

———. "Ezra and Qoheleth Manuscripts from Qumran (4QEzra, 4QQoh[a,b])." Pages 139–57 in *Priests, Prophets and Scribes*. Edited by Eugene Ulrich, John W. Wright, Robert P. Carroll, and Philip R. Davies. JSOTSup 149. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.

Urbach, Epraim E. *The Sages*: *Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982.

VanderKam, James C. *Jubilees 2: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees Chapters 22–50*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018.

Whitley, Charles F. *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979.

Winston, David. *The Wisdom of Solomon*. AB. New York: Doubleday, 1979.

Yi, Yun Yeong. "Translation Technique in the Greek Ecclesiastes." PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005.

Zuckermandel, Moses Samuel. *Tosefta*. Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1970.

# Contributors

**George J. Brooke** is Rylands Professor Emeritus of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester. He has written widely on the Dead Sea Scrolls and was the coeditor of the *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

**Ariel Feldman** is Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. His research and writing have focused on the literature of early Judaism, particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls. His most recent monograph explores tefillin and mezuzot from Qumran.

**Edward L. Greenstein** is Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. Editor of *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* from 1974 to 2021, he is the author of *Job: A New Translation* (Yale University Press, 2019).

**Arthur Jan Keefer** is schoolmaster and chaplain in the Divinity Department of Eton College, UK. His research has focused on the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, while his broader interests include ethics and the ongoing relationship of biblical studies and philosophy.

**Jennifer L. Koosed** is professor of religious studies at Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania. Her research and writing interests include the books of the Ketuvim, gender and feminist theory, animal studies, and posthumanism. Her most recent publication is *Judith* in the Wisdom Commentary Series (with Robert Paul Seesengood).

**Will Kynes** is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Samford University. He has authored and edited multiple books on Job and "wisdom literature" and is currently writing *The Theology of Job* in the Old Testament Theology series published by Cambridge University Press.

**Christl M. Maier** is Professor of Old Testament at Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany. Her research on wisdom literature and prophecy in the Hebrew Bible includes feminist hermeneutics and trauma studies. Her latest book is an IEKAT commentary on Jer 1–25 (Kohlhammer, 2022).

**Timothy J. Sandoval** is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. His research and writing has focused on the book of Proverbs and Latinx biblical interpretation. He is the author of *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (Brill, 2006) and is currently preparing a manuscript on the book of Tobit.

**Bernd U. Schipper** is Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Religion at Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. He has written widely on Egypt, Israel, and the Hebrew Bible. His most recent publications are a commentary on *Proverbs 1–15* in the Hermeneia commentary series (2019), *A Concise History of Ancient Israel* (Eisenbrauns, 2019), and a volume on *The Hermeneutics of Torah: Proverbs 2, Deuteronomy, and the Composition of Proverbs 1–9* (SBL Press, 2021).

**Mark Sneed** is Professor of Bible at Lubbock Christian University in Texas. His research and writing has focused on the conjunction of biblical wisdom literature and social theory and recently on reception-historical approaches to this corpus and on critiquing the notion of a wisdom tradition. He is currently working on a proposal for the new Oxford Bible Commentary series (Ecclesiastes).

**Hermann Spieckermann** is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Bible at Georg-August-University, Göttingen, Germany. His research and writing has focused on the book of Psalms and on biblical theology. He is currently preparing a commentary on the Psalms. The first volume on Pss 1–49, including an introduction on the whole Psalter, will be published in autumn 2022.

**Anne W. Stewart** is Executive Vice President at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is the author of *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Her writing and research focus on wisdom literature and biblical poetry.

**Raymond C. Van Leeuwen** is Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University. His scholarly interests are mainly focused on creation/cosmos and wisdom in Israel and the ancient Near East. He is presently writing an essay on the glory of God (Isa 6:3) and one on the cosmic meaning of "righteousness, צדק."

**Stuart Weeks** is Professor of Bible and Hebrew at Durham University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Israelite wisdom literature, including *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (2 vols.; T&T Clark, 2020).

**Benjamin G. Wright III** is University Distinguished Professor in the Religion Studies Department at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His areas of research include Jewish wisdom literature and ancient translation practices. His most recent book is *The Letter of Aristeas: 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'On the Translation of the Law of the Jews'* (De Gruyter, 2015).

# Ancient Sources Index

# Modern Authors Index