

Intrinsic Ethical Foundations in Biblical Proverbs

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POVZETEK

NOTRANJE ETIČNE OSNOVE SVETOPISEMSKIH PREGOVOROV

Modrostno slovstvo igra posebno mesto znotraj hebrejske Biblije. Predstavniki modrostnega izročila se v glavnem zanimajo za delovanje zakonov sveta v najširšem obsegu in za način človekovega delovanja v njem. Modreci imajo nenačuden umski in praktičen uvid v bistvo univerzalnega moralnega reda. Ne samo daljše modrostne refleksije, temveč tudi kratki izreki zrcalijo sintetično vizijo vesoljne stvarnosti in izkušnjo o posledicah človekovega pametnega ali nespametnega početja. Njihovo refleksijo končno usmerja uvid v globine vesoljne harmonije in raznovrstnih antinomij, ki določajo tok dogodkov onkraj človekovih zaslug in zablod.

V staroizraelskem modrostnem izročilu zavzemajo posebno mesto pregovori. Posamezne primere pregovorov najdemo v domala vseh knjigah hebrejske Biblije. Knjiga Pregovorov torej pomeni posebno zbirko pregovorov, ki so nastajali skozi tisočletja starodavne staroorientalske kulture. Pregovori v pravem pomenu besede so zbrani v pogl. 10,1-22,16 in 25,1-29,27. Drugod imamo v glavnem zbirko poučnih besedil. Za zbirko pregovorov so posebno značilne izjave, ki se tičejo povračila. Njihova posebnost se kaže v tem, da blagoslov, nagrado in uspeh na eni in prekletstvo, kazen in neuspeh na drugi strani ne prikazujejo v neposrednem vertikalnem razmerju. Vse izjave zrcalijo trdno prepričanje, da zvestoba do postave, ki jo je mogoče dojeti razumsko, izkustveno in na temelju čuta vesti, jamči blagoslov in uspeh; dejanja, ki so v nasprotju z univerzalnim moralnim zakonom, pa vodijo v propad.

Najbolj dramatični so primeri samodejne sodbe t.i. poetične pravičnosti: hudodelca zadene njegovo lastno orožje. Kar je v nasprotju z zasnovo vesoljstva in človekovega bitja, je samouničujoče. Hudodelce preganja njihova lastna senca in jih vodi v pogubo, medtem ko pravični lahko stojijo trdno in dostojanstveno. Antitetični paralelizem je najbolj ustrezna oblika za izražanje različnih učinkov pozitivnega in negativnega vedenja. Pri tem velja posebej poudariti, da pregovori ne določajo niti časa, niti načina povračila. Osnovno spoznanje je, da je odločilen končni izid takšnega ali drugačnega človekovega mišljenja in delovanja. Gotovost, da ravnanje v nasprotju z resničnostjo rodi polom, skladnost z njo pa uspeh, je absolutna.

Almost the whole of the book of Proverbs consists of collections of sayings in two different genres: the "instructional" part argumentative, descriptive, and pedagogic (chs. 1-9, 22:17-24:34, and 31:1-9); and the couplets of the "wisdom" passages (chs. 10:1-22:16 and 25:1-29:27). The separate collection of sayings (ch. 30) and the evocation of the wife of many parts (31:10-31) differ markedly from the rest of the book.¹ The most obvious distinction in form between the "instruction" and the "wisdom" sections is that the former is imperative or jussive and the latter indicative or affirmative; the one takes the form of an intimate address to a pupil, inculcating certain cardinal social virtues and warning against the corresponding vices, while the other is in the impersonal form of a statement that assumes the acceptance of certain facts and truths.²

This important distinction results in a considerable difference in attitude to expectations and to the law. In the instruction passages rewards are used as promises and punishments as threats, while in the wisdom couplets the results of good or bad conduct are merely stated.³ It is striking that men are always judged according to their conformity to commonsense or to the commands of God, rather than according to any possible regret for aberrations and subsequent reform. Consequently, the themes of mercy and forgiveness are *rarae aves* in the book of Proverbs.

1. Instruction Passages

The instruction passages are based on the concept of wisdom as the guiding principle of life. They exhibit a clear syntactical structure, combining commands, exhortations, and warnings with reasons for them in subordinate, final, and consecutive clauses. Among these reasons are the themes of punishment or curse, and reward or blessing. The most conspicuous stylistic feature of the instruction in the book of Proverbs is the vocative "my son." There are both structural and thematic reasons for discussing the instruction passages in four distinct sections: chs. 1-4, 5-7, 8-9 and 22:17-24:34.

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- 1 The theme of recompense is virtually absent from chs. 30 and 31; the only notable exception is the saying in 30:10.
 - 2 For treatment of the book of Proverbs see especially F. Delitzsch, *Das Salomonische Spruchbuch* (BC; Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1873); C.H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 1899, 1970); C.T. Fritsch and R.W. Schloerb, *The Book of Proverbs* (IntB 4; Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1955) 767-957; H. Ringgren, *Sprüche* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) 1-122; B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT 16; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1963); M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963); A. Barucq, *Le livre des Proverbes* (SBI; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1964); R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs / Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965); W. McKane, *Proverbs. A New Approach* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970); R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* (BK XVII; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); L. Alonso Schökel and J. Vilchez, *Proverbios* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1984); D.A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (CC 15A; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989). Mention may be made also of J.A. Gladson, *Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1991), which deals with the issue of retribution in a rather general way.
 - 3 The giving of motives or reasons for threats and promises in instruction passages, and statements about the good or bad results of human behaviour in single wisdom sentences often express general or universal facts and truths. Therefore it is not surprising that similar threats, promises, wishes, and statements are found elsewhere in the Bible and in other literatures.

a) Chapters 1-4

The passage 1:8-19 exhibits a formal structure of imperatives, the conditional (*im*) and the motive (*kf*) clauses using the analogy of hunting to express figuratively a precisely measured correspondence between a crime and its punishment. The sustained conditional clause in vv. 11-14 reports the tempters' invitation to robbery and murder, the twin imperatives in v. 15 warn against them, with a twofold supporting argument in vv. 16-18, followed by the sober conclusion of v. 19. There is measure-for-measure correspondence between the enticing words of vv. 11-12 and the recoil upon the criminals' heads in vv. 17-18:

- 11 If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood,
 let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
 12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole,
 like those who go down to the Pit ...
 17 For in vain is a net spread
 in the sight of any bird;
 18 but these men lie in wait for their own blood,
 they set an ambush for their own lives.

There is an obvious correspondence between vv. 11 and 18, but what are the role and meaning of v. 17? Taken by itself, it could refer either to the fate of the victim or to that of the robbers themselves. In the former case it would imply the futility of laying a net "in the sight of any bird": when a bird sees the net it avoids it. It seems much more likely, however, that the phrase is a metaphor illustrative of v. 18. This view is supported by the Septuagint's "for not in vain are nets spread for birds." By converting the positive into a negative (omitting "the sight of"), the Greek version emphasises the certainty that the criminals will be brought to justice. The original statement reflects, however, a profounder insight into the mystery of their blindness and the necessary connection between act and consequence. Just as the birds in their blindness may fall into a net, though it is laid in their sight, so the criminal falls into the net of his desire for gain, which brings destruction upon him.⁴ The basic imagery of the statement is reminiscent of the same or similar motive elements in Prov 7:23; 23:28; Ps 64:5; and Lam 4:19b; but even more striking is the thematic correspondence with Ps 37:14-15, which depicts exact retribution by employing the imagery of the recoiling weapon: "The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows, to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those who walk uprightly⁵; their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken."

Prov 1:8-19 is followed by an independent section 1:20-33 employing prophetic forms of address. According to the formal structure of the passage, personified Wisdom stands "everywhere"⁶ in the town's public places (vv. 20-21; cf. 8:2-3) like a

4 See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 271: "The bird has been given every reason to exercise prudence and caution; its suspicions should have been awakened, but it is so much the slave of its appetite that it follows a compulsive desire to eat the grain. So it is with the highwaymen who cannot control their appetite for wealth and who are incapable of benefiting from the warnings which would deter reasonable and disciplined men from courses of action which must inevitably destroy them."

5 For this image see also Ps 11:2: "... the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart."

6 It is most likely that the pairs "streets / squares" and "top of the walls / entrances of the city gates" are used as a concrete meristic mode of expressing the abstract term "everywhere."

teacher demanding, in hortatory tones, attentiveness to her words (vv. 22-23). The invitation and admonition turn abruptly into denunciation of disobedience, which results in condign punishment. The denunciation of disregard for Wisdom's teaching and an affirmation of the result are divided into three parts: vv. 24-28, 29-31, and 32-33. The sub-sections vv. 24-28 and 29-31 each consist of a causal and a consequential clause, while vv. 32-33 close the section.

It may be noted that both causal clauses, each introduced by a causal particle (*ya'an, taḥat*), make it plain that the refusal of Wisdom's invitation is a definite fact: they rejected her, neglected "all" her advice, and would have none of her reproof (vv. 24-25); they hated knowledge and chose not the fear of the Lord, they would have none of her advice, they despised "all" her reproof (vv. 29-30). The nature of their punishment corresponds exactly to their conduct:

- 26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
 I will mock when panic strikes you,
 27 when panic strikes you like a storm,
 and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
 when distress and anguish come upon you.
 28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
 they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
- 31 ... therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
 and be sated with their own devices.

The concluding resumptive antithetical parallelism (vv. 32-33), introduced by the particle *kī* "for," states the general rule about the treatment of those who reject and those who heed wisdom.

Even though the passage adopts prophetic modes of address, its thematic scope remains that of wisdom teaching. It does not reflect a passionate struggle for Israel's reform, but rather the general considerations of God's call for repentance in a corrective discipline and the fact of an unreceptive audience that stiffens into stubbornness. This explains the reason for the abrupt transition from the admonition (vv. 22-23) to the recital of disobedience resulting in punishment (vv. 24-33).

Chapter 2 exemplifies the process of formal development from a distinctly authoritative instruction that communicates its directives by imperatives to the more diffuse religious and moral preaching of the sages. Instead of commands and exhortations followed by subordinate clauses, the structure employed in this chapter consists of a protasis (vv. 1-4) and a long apodosis (vv. 5-22), each containing subdivisions and being linked to what goes before by a connective particle. Introduced by the vocative "My son," the protasis contains three conditional (*'im*) clauses directing attention to the teaching of wisdom as a principle of religious and moral knowledge. The apodosis is divided into a series of consequential (*'āz*) clauses (vv. 5, 9), motive (*kī*) clauses (vv. 6, 10, 18, 21), and a final (*lēma'an*) clause (v. 20). Their purpose is to make clear that the pursuit of wisdom is necessary because, being God-given (v. 6), it encompasses the fear of the Lord or knowledge of God, comprehension of probity, moral protection, and various blessings. The closing motivation (vv. 21-22) is arranged antithetically to set forth the immediate outlook for the upright and the wicked with regard to the possession of the land:

For the upright will inhabit the land,
 and men of integrity will remain in it;
 but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
 and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

Chapter 3 consists of three independent discourses, each introduced by "My son": vv. 1-10, 11-20, and 21-35. These sections contain subdivisions, some of them being apparently editorial insertions. The common feature of the chapter is an exhortation to follow the teaching of the sage and God's wisdom in order to secure the benefits that naturally flow from trusting God and doing right. Only after the last exhortation (v. 31) is there an extended motivation comprising statements of punishment and reward in a series of antithetical parallelisms (vv. 32-35). In the first section the exhortations in imperatives or jussives (vv. 1, 3, 5-6a, 7, 9) alternate with motivations assuring the reward by a motive (*kî*) clause (v. 2) and by a number of consequential clauses introduced by *waw* (vv. 4, 6b, 10) or in one instance without *waw* (v. 8). In each case benefits are conceived in terms of material prosperity, in keeping with the traditional view of the chief blessings of the righteous: a long and peaceful life (v. 2); favour and good success in the eyes of God and man (v. 4); guidance through life (v. 6b); a healthy and happy physical condition (v. 8); and abundant crops, corn, and wine (v. 10).

The second section comprises three distinct sub-sections: vv. 11-12, 13-18, and 19-20. In the first of these two imperatives appear (v. 11), followed by a motive (*kî*) clause affirming, in contrast to the old view, that suffering should be regarded as punishment for sin, that God's chastening can be motivated by love. The second sub-section is introduced by the exalted hymnic exclamation "Happy is the man who finds wisdom ..." (v. 13) and is followed by a succession of motive clauses setting forth various benefits conferred by wisdom (vv. 14-18). Verse 14 reads:

for the gain (*saḥar*) from it is better than gain from silver
 and its profit (*tēbū'ah*) better than gold.

The third sub-section (vv. 19-20) honours God's wisdom as displayed by the creation.

The formal structure of the third section is similar to that of the first one: partly extended exhortations in imperatives and jussives (vv. 21, 25, 27-31) are supported by predominantly extended reward or retribution argument in consequential (*waw* and *'az*) clauses (vv. 22-23) and motive (*'im* and *kî*) clauses (vv. 24, 26, 31-35). The double motivation in v. 24 takes the form of protasis and apodosis. The extended and antithetically arranged motivation in vv. 32-35 is different from all preceding recompense arguments in the chapter because it does not see the beneficial consequences of a righteous life as flowing naturally from a positive attitude but sets up retribution as a generally valid principle (cf. Ps 18:25-26), thus supporting all the preceding exhortations and motivations:

for the perverse man is an abomination to the Lord,
 but the upright are in his confidence.
 The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked,
 but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
 Toward the scorners he is scornful,

but to the humble he shows favour.

The wise will inherit honour,

but fools get disgrace.⁷

Chapter 4 is similar in form to its two predecessors, and consists of three exhortations: vv. 1-9, 10-19, and 20-27. In the first section the sage gives reasons why his teaching should be followed by referring to what he learned from his father. The teacher communicates his ideas to a class of young men in imperatives sustained by final, motive and consequential clauses. The motivation of reward is first encountered in v. 1b: "... that you may gain insight." In v. 4c the sage cites his heritage from his father: "... keep my commandments, and live."⁸ Verse 6 reads: "Do not forsake (wisdom), and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you." In vv. 8-9 there is an extended motivation based on the benefits that flow from loving wisdom. The second section also contains a few cases of reward motivation dependent on imperatives. In v. 10 the sage adjures: "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many." Verses 12-13 read: "When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction, do not let go; guard her, for she is your life." In vv. 14-17 the teacher warns against association with the wicked, reinforcing his admonition by the general principle of retribution stated antithetically in vv. 18-19:

The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.

In the third section the succession of imperatives is sustained by assurance of reward in two motive clauses and one consequential clause: "For they are life to him who finds them, and healing to all his flesh" (v. 22); "... for from it flow the springs of life" (v. 23b); "... then all your ways will be sure" (v. 26b).

b) Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 differ from their three predecessors in two ways. First, their exhortations and advice are less general in nature and concentrate on the dangers of the seductions of a "strange woman" (*iššāh zārāh*) or a "foreigner" (*nokriyyāh*), previously mentioned in 2:16-19. Secondly, the motivation of exhortations, warnings, and advice refers more often to the seductive charms of this woman than to the fatal consequences of the path followed by her and her associates. All the more striking, therefore, is the sharp contrast between the present delights promised by the temptress and the ultimate consequences of relations with her, which are depicted as the natural outcome of sin. The motivation of the first section of ch. 5 (vv. 1-6) reads: "For the lips of a loose

7 For the interpretation of the principle see C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 81: "A curse in the mouth of God is a sentence or pronouncement of evil; in the mouth of man it is an imprecation, an invocation of divine punishment. Similarly God *blesses* by pronouncing good, man by invoking good from God ... The representation of God as acting toward men as they act toward him rests on an ancient anthropomorphism, which in Pr. is probably purified by the conviction that God, as just, must be hostile to evildoers; but the thought never rises to the point of conceiving of him as merciful to fools and sinners."

8 The Septuagint omits "and live."

woman drip honey, and her speech⁹ is smoother than oil; but in the end (*wē'ahārītāh*) she is bitter as wormwood (*la'ānāh*),¹⁰ sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not take heed to the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it" (vv. 3-6; cf. 2:18-19; 9:18 and the contrast to v. 6 in 4:26).

The imperatives of repeated warning against the seductive woman in the second section of ch. 5 (vv. 7-14) are based on the negative final clause introduced by the particle *pen* "lest" rejecting a consequence that might follow: "Lest you give your honour to others and your years to the merciless; lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labours go to the house of an alien; and at the end of your life you groan (*wē-nāhamtā bē'ahārītekā*), when your flesh and body are consumed,¹¹ and you say, >How I hated discipline (*māsār*), and my heart despised reproof (*tōkaḥat*)! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation<" (vv. 9-14). This warning reflects general experience: a man's association with loose women is ultimately punished by exhaustion and ruin.¹² One may argue whether the phrase *bē'ahārītekā* "at your end" refers to the end of the victim's life or to the point at which the deadly consequences of his conduct show themselves. But in either case common sense suggests that the failure of a man's life after he has broken the covenant and displayed his aversion to discipline and his contempt for reproof is so complete that there is for him no going back; in such cases sorrow or regret "at the end" comes too late.¹³ Severe punishment in the form of loss of social position and wealth may of course move the fool to undertake a gradual reform of his soul; but that is beyond the horizons of the present sage.

The next section of ch. 5 opens with a figurative exhortation to conjugal fidelity (vv. 15-17), followed by a literal interpretation (vv. 18-20), and ends with general theological and moralistic reflections on the fate of the wicked (vv. 21-23). The conclusion is reminiscent of its counterparts in chs. 1-3, but the earlier ones are antitheti-

9 Literally *palate*.

10 The word *la'ānāh* appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as a symbol for the result of man's unfaithfulness and injustice, in most cases in parallelism with the word *rō'š* "poison": in Deut 29:17 Moses warns his people not to turn away from the Lord "lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit"; in Jer 9:14 and 23:15 the threat of God's punishment reads: "Behold, I will feed this people (them) with wormwood, and give them poisonous water to drink"; in Amos 5:7 the prophet exclaims: "O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth!" and in 6:12 he reproaches his hearers: "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood"; in Lam 3:15 the poet complains about God's punishment: "He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood" to beg in v. 19: "Remember my affliction and my bitterness, the wormwood and the gall!"

11 The Septuagint differs slightly in v. 11 assuming the verb *nāham* "to repent": "and thou repent (*kai metamelēthēsē*) at last when the flesh of thy body is consumed."

12 See the statement of C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 109: "This is the sting of his doom, that his toil goes to build up not his own house but another's, and his life thus becomes a failure. The point of view is external - there is no reference to corruption of soul; that is no doubt assumed, but the moralist uses what he thinks the most effective deterrent argument, the social destructiveness of the vice in question."

13 The groan produced by the unhappy man in v. 14 "I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation" reflect the involvement of the community in the verdict. In the book of Sirach there is a passage which points to such a practice. The writer declares of the man or the woman who breaks his or her marriage vows: "This man will be punished in the streets of the city, and where he least suspects it, he will be seized. So it is with a woman who leaves her husband and provides an heir by a stranger. For first of all, she has disobeyed the law of the Most High; second, she has committed an offence against her husband; and third, she has committed adultery through harlotry and brought forth children by another man. She herself will be brought before the assembly, and punishment will fall on her children. Her children will not take root, and her branches will not bear fruit. She will leave her memory for a curse, and her disgrace will not be blotted out. Those who survive her will recognize that nothing is better than the fear of the Lord, and nothing sweeter than to heed the commandments of the Lord."

cal in form, whereas this one speaks only of punishment of the wicked: "For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he watches all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost." Even though in v. 22 the figure of a net in which an animal is trapped is used to illustrate how the wicked become entangled in the cords of their own wrongdoings, the interpretation nevertheless suggests that the punishment is ordained by the judgment of God.

Chapter 6 is clearly divided into five discourses: against standing surety (vv. 1-5), against sluggardliness (vv. 6-11), against mischief-making (vv. 12-15), against seven specified sins (vv. 16-19), and against adultery (vv. 20-35). The theme of retribution appears in the third and fifth sections. The vignette of a man whose gestures and speech indicate a malicious spirit and deep-seated moral perverseness ends with an abrupt declaration of punishment: "Therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing" (v. 15).

The characteristic exhortation against association with the evil adulteress in vv. 20-35 is motivated by the verdict that follows: "None who touches her will go unpunished (*lô' yinnâqeh¹⁴ kol-hannôgê'a bâh*). Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry? And if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold (*šib'âtâyim*); he will give all the goods of his house. He who commits adultery has no sense, he who does it destroys himself. Wounds and dishonour will he get and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge (*wêlô'-yahmôl bêyôm nâqâm*). He will accept no compensation, nor be appeased though you multiply gifts" (vv. 29b-35). It seems unlikely that the statement about sevenfold penalty in v. 31 refers to the legal rules governing restitution (cf. Exod 21:37-22:8), but rather that it is a metaphorical expression for restitution on a large scale thus accentuating the contrast between the fate of the thief (vv. 30-31) and that of the adulterer (vv. 32-35): "a thief suffers disgrace, but escapes with loss of money; an adulterer gets disgrace and blows, and no money-payment atones for his offence."¹⁵

The warning against the adulteress in ch. 7 contains three sections: vv. 1-5, 6-23, 24-27. The first follows a succession of imperatives (vv. 1-4) with a final clause "to preserve you from the loose woman, from the adventuress with her smooth words" (v. 5). The second is an imaginative description of a young man wandering through the streets at night (vv. 6-9) who meets a woman dressed as a harlot, and her devices of seduction (vv. 10-20); the youth responds to her blandishments and his destruction ensues (vv. 21-23): "All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its entrails; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life" (vv. 22-23). The concluding warning (vv. 24-25) seems all the more appropriate and is followed by the motivation pointing to her destructive potential: "for many a victim has she laid low; yea, all her slain are a mighty host. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death" (vv. 26-27; cf. 2:18-19; 5:5; 9:18). At that point there is no possibility of correction, mercy, and forgiveness.¹⁶

14 *The verb nâqâh* in Niph'al signifies "be free from punishment, be held innocent or guiltless." An overview of the passages concerned shows that this form and meaning of the word appears most often in the book of Proverbs: 1 Sam 26:9; Jer 2:35; 25:29; 49:12; Zech 5:3; Ps 19:14; Prov 6:29; 11:21; 16:5; 17:5; 19:5,9; 28:20.

15 See C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 140.

16 See the comment by W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 341: "To be led away by desire for her is to take the road to Sheol and to arrive at the point of no return. This is a deviation from the way of life which does not admit

c) Chapters 8-9 and 22:17-24:34¹⁷

Chapter 8 consists of four sections: Wisdom personified issues her summons to people in public places and proclaims her moral excellence and incomparable value (vv. 1-11),¹⁸ her prominence and her noblest fruit (vv. 12-21), and the precedence of Wisdom and her presence at the creation of the universe in close relationship with God (vv. 22-31). This is followed by a concluding exhortation and admonition (vv. 32-36). The second section ends with a description of material rewards: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit (*piryî*) is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield (*âtêbû'âtî*) than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries" (vv. 17-21). In the concluding exhortation Wisdom demands that men should heed her instruction and gives her reasons in antithetically arranged motive clauses, setting forth the general rule of compensation: "For he who finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death" (vv. 35-36). Contrasting the wages of virtue and vice at the end of a discourse is characteristic of the instruction genre (cf. 1:32-33; 2:21-22; 3:32-35; 4:18-19).

Chapter 9 falls into three sections: the invitation of Wisdom (vv. 1-6) with the enticements of the Foolish Woman as its antithetical parallel (vv. 13-18); the gap is filled by six couplets (vv. 7-12). It is obvious that the "Foolish Woman" represents the adulteress who emerged in 2:16-19 and became a central figure in chs. 5, 6, and 7 (cf. 23:27-28).¹⁹ These passages show that "Folly" is primarily used as a moral term symbolising unlawful pleasures. Both Wisdom and Folly address "whoever is simple (*mî-petî*)" and "lacks sense (*hûsar-lêb*)" (vv. 4,16), but Wisdom does so openly and in public places, whereas Folly prefers the privacy of her house. The content of the invitations and therefore their consequences are diametrically opposed: the question, indeed, is one of life or death. Wisdom's invitation runs: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness and live (*wîhyû*), and walk in the way of insight" (v. 6). Folly's offer is: "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (v. 17), followed by the comment: "But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (v. 18; cf. 2:18-19; 5:5; 7:27).²⁰ The last of the six sentences in vv. 7-12 states the principle of recompense in conditional form: "If you are wise, you are wise for yourself (*lûk*); if you scoff, you alone (*lê-baddêkâ*) will bear it" (v. 12). Here the principle of individual responsibility is "expressed under the form of moral isolation."²¹ Such a form does not, however, nece-

of subsequent correction; it is a commitment to death and there is no way back to a safe road."

17 The form and content of individual sections in these chapters are in general less unified than in chs. 1-7. In 31:1-9 the theme of recompense does not appear.

18 For the figurative meaning of public places mentioned in 1:20-21 and 8:2-3 see the note to 1:20-21.

19 It may be noted, however, that the word *kešillûl* "insolence, folly, stupidity" occurs only in Prov 9:13.

20 The Septuagint adds here a hortatory complement (for the translation see C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 192):

But turn away, linger not in the place,
Nor set thine eye on her;
Nor thus wilt thou go through alien water,
And pass over an alien stream.
But abstain from alien water,
Drink not of an alien fountain,
That thou mayst live long,
That years of life may be added to thee.

21 See C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 195.

sarily imply that man's conduct has good or bad consequences only for himself and does not affect his fellows.²² The clear emphasis here is simply that it must be above all else in the pupil's interest to be wise.

The collection of sentences in 22:17-24:34 differs from those that precede and follow it in that its instruction form is framed in imperatives or jussives, with motive (*kl*) clauses (22:18,23; 23:5,7, 9,11,21,27; 24:2,13,16,20,22), final clauses (22:19,21), and negative final (*pen* "lest") clauses (22:25; 24:18). The theme of recompense appears, in various forms, in the following passages: 22:23; 23:11,18; 24:12d, 14bc, 16,18,20,22,24-25,29.²³ Two imperatives in 22:22, warning against oppression of the poor,²⁴ are commended by the double motive clause: "for the Lord will plead their cause (*yārīb rībām*) and despoil of life those who despoil them (*wēqāba' 'et-qob'ēhem nāpeš*)." The word *qāba'* occurs elsewhere only in Mal 3:8-9 in a context that suggests the meaning of the semantic field: "cheat, despoil, rob."²⁵ By using the same verb for an oppressor's dealings with the poor and God's dealings with the oppressor, the writer in fact employs the principle of the *lex talionis*. The saying in 23:10-11 (for v. 10 cf. 22:28) also concerns the weak and defenceless: "Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless;²⁶ for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you (*hū'-yārīb 'et-rībām 'ittāk*)." The saying 23:17-18 reads: "Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely²⁷ there is a future (*'ahārīt*), and your hope will not be cut off." The motivation "there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off" is repeated in 24:14bc to reinforce the advice to eat honey, which is here a metaphor for wisdom. The argument promises the reward to the righteous, but says nothing of future punishment for sinners who prosper and seem to be immune from it; the punishment of the wicked goes without saying. It is made explicit, however, in 24:19-20: "Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked; for the evil man has no future (*'ahārīt*); the lamp of the wicked will be put out (*nēr rēšā'im yid'āk*)." The use of this particular metaphor echoes 13:9; 20:20; and Job 18:5-6; 21:17.²⁸

The retribution saying in 24:12d is theological in nature and refers to the obligation to help the innocent who are going to their deaths, a duty enjoined by imperatives in v. 11, and to possibly feigned ignorance of the situation (v. 12a). The sage reinforces his attribution of responsibility by asking: "... Does not he who keeps watch

22 See the Septuagint version (translation by C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 195): "If thou be wise, for thyself thou shalt be wise and for thy neighbors, but if thou prove evil, thou alone shalt bear the evil."

23 See also the statement about the self-destructive effects of drunkards' and gluttons' behaviour in 23:21.

24 The opening lines of ch. 2 of the Egyptian instruction text *Amenemope* contain a similar exhortation, but without any motivation like that of Prov 22:23. See *ANET*, p. 422, IV:4-7:

Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed
And against overbearing the disabled.
Stretch not forth thy hand against the approach of an old man,
Nor steal away the speech of the aged.

25 *A Hebrew & Chaldean Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Leipzig / London: B. Tauchnitz / Williams & Norgate, 1871) by J. Fuerst (transl. by S. Davidson) assumes the same meaning as for *'aqab*: "to intertwine, to plait into each other, to bind together, to spin"; hence "to plan a cunning device, to deceive, to defraud, to overreach." Some recent dictionaries assume an intended metathesis of *'aqab* into *qāba'*.

26 Chapter 6 of *Amenemope* contains a similar warning, but again without motivation; see *ANET*, p. 422: Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of the arable land,
Nor disturb the position of the measuring-cord ...

27 In Hebrew there are two particles here: *kl 'im* "for if." The Septuagint adds ... *īērēsēs auta* "for if you have regard to it."

28 In contrast to these passages, in 2 Sam 21:17; 1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4; Ps 132:17 the metaphor of the lamp has a marked positive significance in reference to David.

over your soul know it, and will he not requite man according to his work (*wēhēšib lē-'ādām kēpo'olō*)?" (v. 12b). The saying of vv. 15-16 is a warning against assailing a righteous man, motivated by an antithetically arranged recompense statement: "for a righteous man falls seven times (*šeba'*), and rises again;²⁹ but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." The contrast in the fates of the righteous and the wicked is reinforced by the disparity of numbers: "seven times" is obviously a term used symbolically for an unlimited number of times, in contrast to "calamity," which involves a single and decisive instance.

Chapter 24:17-18 warns against rejoicing in the misfortunes of an enemy, the reason being given in the negative final clause: "lest the Lord see it, and be displeased, and turn away (*wēhēšib*) his anger from him." The essence of the warning is that such rejoicing is morally bad (cf. v. 29). The negative final clause implies, then, that not only may God's anger "turn away from" the defeated enemy but that it may "turn to" upon him who gloats.³⁰ Such a change in God's attitude is understandable only in the light of punishment producing some sign of penitence in one party and guilty gloating in the other. The saying of 24:21-22 reflects the belief that the authority of the king is supported both by God's authority and by historical experience which demonstrates that disobedience to them both may result in sudden ruin.

The appendix (24:23-34) begins with an antithetical statement about judicial partiality, employing the principle of retribution: "He who says to the wicked, >You are innocent, < will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations; but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will be upon them" (vv. 24-25). This reflects the common Hebrew belief that invocation of cursing or blessing brings bad or good fortune to those concerned.

The other appearance of the recompense theme in the appendix is in the context of revenge: "Do not say, >I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done<" (v. 29; cf. Matt 5:38-39). This advice does not necessarily contradict the old law of retaliation (cf. Exod 21:23-25; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21),³¹ but rather reflects the sage's experience of the effects of revenge in personal relationships. Obviously it is also based on observation of the self-destructing effects of wickedness and on the certainty that God will ultimately repay evil (cf. 20:22), for the sage is a sage just because he can hold realities and truths in balance. So it is not surprising that similar thinking is found in the Babylonian *Precepts and Admonitions*: "Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer, maintain justice to your enemy, smile on your adversary."³²

2. Wisdom Sentences

In contrast to the instruction passages, the wisdom sentences form complete and independent entities, rarely combining to create larger compositions. Nor do they provide clear criteria for determining coherence of theme in particular collections.³³ It is

29 Cf. Mic 7:8: "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise ..."

30 See C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 448-49. W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 404, represents another view that is untenable: "... the conclusion which is drawn from this is not that mercy should be shown to a defeated enemy, but that one should refrain from gloating over him so that Yahweh's anger may not relent and his ruin may be final."

31 It is important to bear in mind that the old law of retaliation was not suggested as a right of private revenge, but as a legal regulation.

32 See W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960) p. 100-101, ll. 41-44.

33 U. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) iden-

noteworthy that the collections of chs. 10-15 and 28-29 are predominantly in antithetic parallelism a phenomenon that, on such a scale at least, is unique in the Hebrew Bible. This explains why in these chapters more is said about reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked than in chs. 16:1-22:16 and 25-27, where synonymous parallelism prevails. Antithetic parallelism is the most convenient form for expressing the different effects of positive and negative ways of life. In studying individual antithetical couplets, therefore, the principle of antithesis is an important key to resolving problems of textual criticism and to establishing the proper meaning of their constituent parts.

a) Chapters 10:1-22:16

In ch. 10 the theme of recompense appears in vv. 6, 7, 8, 9, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30. Most couplets contain general statements of reward and punishment that do not involve the characters, attitudes, or deeds of those concerned. Verse 6 (v. 6b reappears in v. 11b) reads: "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." In contrast to this unnatural antithesis, the Septuagint version implies a slightly different Hebrew text: "The blessings of the Lord are on the head of the righteous man, but untimely grief shall cover the face of the wicked." The antithesis of v. 7 is complete: "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot (*yirqāb*)." Some exegetes propose the emendation of *yirqāb* to *yūqāb* "will be cursed" in order to introduce the natural antithesis to "blessing." But the contrast between the durability of the righteous and the impermanence of the wicked in the received text needs no emendation, and the thesis is generally accepted as valid. Job, however, for instance, expresses the opposite point of view in 21:7-34.³⁴ In vv. 8 and 9 punishment is not explicitly mentioned but is implied: "The wise of heart will heed commandments, but a prating fool will come to ruin. He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out (*yiwwāde'a*)." The expression "will be found out," literally "will be known," implies that the guilt of him who walks in tortuous ways will be unmasked and punished accordingly. The contrast between the fate of the righteous and the wicked in vv. 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30 is exact and the meaning always obvious.

In ch. 11 most sentences enunciate the doctrine of recompense: vv. 3-8, 17-21, 23-31. The text is usually clear and its purport obvious, but some couplets deserve individual mention. Verse 7 is not antithetical in form and is concerned only with the fate of the wicked: "When a wicked man dies, expectation perishes, and hope set in riches is cut off."³⁵ The Septuagint, however, translates antithetically: "When a righteous man dies his hope does not perish, but the boast of the wicked perishes." This rendering clearly insinuates a belief in immortality. Verse 8 foretells a reversing of positions in the long term: the righteous man who suffers will ultimately be rescued, and

tifies with limited persuasiveness marks of thematic coherence: the righteousness // wickedness antithesis (chs. 10-15), God and the king (chs. 16:1-22:16), nature in general and agriculture (chs. 25-27), the king and the instruction of young men (chs. 28-29). See also the principles of classification of the sentences outlined by W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 11, 415: Class A - old wisdom concerned with the education of the individual; class B - predominantly negative statements concerning the community; class C - God-language expressive of a moralism reflecting Yahwistic piety.

34 See also *Julius Caesar* 3.2:

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.

35 The translation by W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 227.

the evildoer who seemingly prospers will sooner or later take his place in affliction. Verse 17 reads literally: "A man who is kind does good to his soul, but a cruel man brings into trouble his flesh." The anthropological terms "soul" // "flesh" are in Hebrew the usual means of expressing the idea of "self." The sentence points, therefore, to the recoil upon the self of one's attitude to others. Verse 21 emphasises the certainty of retribution: the popular asseverative phrase of asseveration *yād lēyād* "hand to hand" means "be assured, assuredly": "Be assured, an evil man will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will be delivered." The Targum offers a different rendering of 21a: "He who stretches out the hand against his neighbour will not be acquitted of evil."³⁶

The chapter ends (v. 31) with a progressive parallelism that reads literally: "Behold, the righteous in the land will be repaid, how much more the wicked and the sinner!" The Septuagint renders it as follows: "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" (quoted in 1 Pet 4:18). The obvious underlying idea is that even the righteous, who are capable of falling into sin, will not escape punishment for evildoing: all the more must this be true of the wicked.

In ch. 12 the following sentences suggest some kind of recompense: vv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 19, 21, 28. Verses 13-14 (for v. 13 cf. 11:9; 18:7; 29:6, and for v. 14 see 13:2a; 14:14; 18:20) in particular deserve attention: "An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,³⁷ but the righteous escapes from trouble. From the fruit of his words a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand (*ūgēmūl yēdē-'ādām*) comes back (*yāšūb*)³⁸ to him." The Septuagint has a more elaborate rendering of v. 13: "By the sin of his lips the sinner falls into snares, but the righteous escapes out of them. He whose looks are gentle will be pitied, but he who encounters (men) in the gates will afflict souls."

In ch. 13 recompense plays its part in vv. 2, 6, 9, 13, 21, 22. The interpretation of v. 13 is controversial. In view of its antithetical form the RSV translation is to be preferred: "He who despises the word brings destruction on himself (*yēhābel lō*), but he who respects the commandment will be rewarded (*yēšullām*)." This use of the verb *hābal* is consonant with its Akkadian and Old-South-Arabian meaning.³⁹ The Targum has a slightly different rendering: "He who shows contempt for the word will be damaged by it, but he who fears the command will be repaid with good." The Septuagint adds the triplet: "A crafty son will have no good thing, but the affairs of a wise servant will be prosperous, and his path will be directed aright."

In ch. 14 the recompense theme sounds unmistakably in vv. 1, 3, 11, 12 (=16:25), 14, 22, 26, 27, 32, 34. Of these, vv. 14 and 32 present substantial textual and interpretative difficulties. As the text stands, v. 14 must be rendered: "From his ways the backsliding in his heart (*sūg lēb*) is sated, and from himself (*mē'alāw*) the good man." The commentaries' usual suggestion is that *mē'alāw* must be emended to *mimma'lāw* "from his deeds." Such an emendation is, however, unnecessary, for poetry has its own prerogatives. The underlying idea is explicit in Gal 6:7: "... for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Isa 3:10 applies this only to the righteous:

36 For translation of this and other passages see J.F. Healey, *The Targum of Proverbs Bible* (Abram B 15; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991). Rashi thinks that "hand to hand" signifies the retribution coming from the hand of God to the hand of the wicked.

37 Literally: "In the transgression of the lips is a snare to the evil man."

38 So Ketib, but Qere has *yāšūwb*."

39 L. Koehler and L. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958) suggest, however, the meaning under II: "seize a thing as a pledge."

"Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds." The Targum renders 14:14: "He who is haughty of heart gets satisfaction from his own ways, but a good man gets satisfaction from *his good*." The Septuagint differs considerably: "From his ways is sated the bold of heart, but from his thoughts the good man."

Verse 32 reads: "The wicked is overthrown by his calamity (*b'ērā'atō*), but the righteous finds refuge [even] in his death."⁴⁰ The Targum has: "Through his wickedness the wicked man is ruined, but he who has trust who dies is righteous." It is surprising that most translations and interpreters prefer the Septuagint rendering which reads: "The wicked is overthrown because of his evil-doing, but the righteous may trust to his integrity." It is true that the word *rā'ah* itself can equally well be rendered "calamity" and "evil-doing, wickedness." But *māwet* "death" in v. 32b suggests "calamity" rather than "evil-doing" in the parallel v. 32a. The emendation of "death" to "integrity" in order to avoid the implication of a doctrine of immortality allegedly missing in the book of Proverbs is questionable: there are similar statements elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:1-14; Ps 49; 73).

Chapter 15 mentions recompense in vv. 6, 10, 24, 25, 27; the first two require comment. Verse 6 reads literally: "The house of the righteous is a great store, but in the revenue of the wicked is a thing troubled (*ne'kāret*)"⁴¹. The Targum has: "In the house of the righteous man is great wealth, but the harvest of the wicked will be spoiled." The Septuagint offers two renderings: "In amassing righteousness is much strength, but the impious will be destroyed with the entire root from the land. In the house of righteous men there is much strength, but the fruits of impious men will be destroyed." Verse 10 introduces the concepts of mercy and forgiveness by threatening: "There is severe discipline (*mūsār*) for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof (*tōkaḥat*) will die." The instruction contains a similar threat in its larger context (cf. 1:20-33). The principle behind this sentence refers to those who are not amenable to correction of various kinds, including corrective punishments. The incorrigible are denied mercy since they travel the road of self-will that must ultimately lead to a death that is the child of their own decisions and deeds. The sentence is reminiscent of the advice in 3:7: "Be not wise in your own eyes ..." and of the statement in 14:12 and 16:25: "There is a way that seems right to a man (*yāšār lipnê-'iš*), but its end (*wē'ahā-rītāh*) are the ways of death" (cf. 5:4-6,22-23; 7:26-27; 9:17-18; Matt 7:13-14). The Targum renders the plural "ways" in v. 10b with the singular: "The correction of a wicked man makes his way wander and whoever hates chastisement will die." The Septuagint deals with v. 10b as follows: "... the end of it goes into the depths of Hades." The basis of the sentence's most general theme is obviously the illusive character of human plans and affairs, but there is no need to argue that the root of human illusions is man's "lack of discipline" (cf. 5:23) or his "craving" (cf. 10:3), stepping-stones leading to blind self-will. The opposite way is the way of wisdom: "The wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath" (15:24). The idea of final judgment implicit in the words "end," "death," and "Sheol" does not necessarily refer to punishment in the other world; it probably designates the inevitable final outcome

40 C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 300, expresses very well the essence of the sentence in Hebrew: "... the contrast is between the absoluteness of the fall of a wicked man, and the confidence or trust which the good man has even in the greatest of calamities."

41 For the meaning of the verb *'akar* in the same sense cf. 11:29; Judg 11:35; 1 Sam 14:29; 1 Kgs 18:17. J. Fuerst, *A Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, 1047, states, however: "*ne'keret* Prov. 15,6 is probably a noun meaning *trouble, disturbance*."

of man's aberrations.

In ch. 16 vv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25(=14:12) reflect the doctrine of recompense; the content of vv. 4 and 6 is of special interest. Verse 4 reads: "The Lord has made everything in relation to its counterpart (*lamma'ânêhû*),⁴² even the wicked for the day of trouble (*l'eyôm râ'âh*)." This statement is sometimes interpreted as implying predestination to evil.⁴³ It is, however, more likely that the emphasis is intended to lie on the correspondence between the wickedness of the wicked and their punishment; "the day of trouble" is the day of judgment or punishment.⁴⁴ The word *ma'âneh* means etymologically "answer" which does not support the translation "purpose" or "design." Verse 6 reads: "By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for (*yêkuppâr*), and by the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil (*sâr mērâ*)." Since the word *kpr* in various forms appears most frequently in priestly texts designating atonement by offerings the statement points to the two fundamental ways of atonement that result in the averting of punishment: disposition of mind and ethical integrity. The word "evil" in v. 6b obviously designates misfortune in the sense of punishment.

In chapters until 17-22 the theme of recompense rarely surfaces, nor, when it does, are there any great difficulties of text or sense. These passages are: 17:5,13,15, 20; 18:7,10,12,20,21; 19:5,9,16,17,23,29; 20:7,20,22,28; 21:5,12,16,21,28; 22:3,4, 8,9,14.

b) Chapters 25-29

In ch. 25 there is only one clear mention of recompense: 25:21-22; it counsels kindness and magnanimity to an enemy, followed by a double motivation: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you (*yešallem-lâk*)" (cf. 20:22; 24:17-18, 29; Matt 5:44-45; Rom 12:20-21). The first motivation, "for you will heap coals of fire on his head," obviously signifies the pain of contrition which is a self-inflicted punishment resulting in penitence. The advice and the motivation point to the fact that undeserved kindness awakens feelings of remorse in a guilty man and is therefore the most constructive way of taking vengeance on him a paradoxical vengeance that can convert an enemy into a friend.⁴⁵

Chapter 26 contains two remarkable statements: vv. 2 and 27. Verse 2 reads literally: "Like a sparrow in wandering, like a swallow in flight, so is a groundless (*hinnâm*) curse, it does not come (*lô' tâbô*)." The Targum renders the passage: "Like a sparrow flying quickly and like a bird flying away, so a curse which has no cause will have no effect." The Septuagint has: "Like birds fly and sparrows, so an empty curse will not come to anybody." The Hebrew margin suggests "comes to him (*lô*)" in the

42 Normally the phrase is to be read *l'ma'ânêhû*. The translation of v. 4a follows W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 235; commentary 497.

43 See C.H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 321: "... since the wicked are punished, it is Yahweh who has created them to that end ..."

44 W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 497, explains the meaning thus: "The sentence >Yahweh has made everything in relation to its counterpart< suggests a self-contained, self-regulating order rather than theodicy in the strict sense, i.e., a government which is enforced by repeated forensic interventions made by Yahweh either to >justify< or >condemn<."

45 This general experience explains why similar advice is found in the Babylonian *Precepts and Admonitions* (see W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, p. 100, ll. 41-44): "Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer, maintain justice to your enemy, smile on your adversary."

second line. If *lô* "to him" refers to the cursed this indicates, echoing the old belief, certainty that a curse uttered will alight upon him against whom it is directed. The word *hinnâm* "groundless," however, and various statements about the recoil that follows evil intent may indicate that *lô* refers to the curser rather than the cursed. According to Gen 12:3 God promises Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse ..."

The most striking example of malice rebounding on its perpetrator is found in Prov 26:27: "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling" (cf. 1:17-18; 5:22; 14:32; 22:8; 28:10; 29:5; see also Isa 33:1; Hos 8:7; 10:13; Ps 7:15-17; 9:16; 37:14-15; 57:7; Job 4:8; 15:35; Qoh 10:8-9; Esth 7:10; 9:1; Dan 6:24; Wis 11:16; 12:23; Sir 27:25-27; Tob 14:10).⁴⁶ This idea is most clearly expressed in Sir 27:25-27: "Whoever throws a stone straight up throws it on his own head; and a treacherous blow opens up wounds. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who sets a snare will be caught in it. If a man does evil, it will roll back upon him, and he will not know where it came from." But why should the negative particle *lô* be changed into the pronoun *lô*? The imagery of the bird's motion in the first line indicates that the bird never reaches any definite place and, since the first line is an illustration of the second, it obviously expresses the belief, supported by common sense, that a groundless curse fails to reach its target (cf. the broader perspective in Num 22:24). Only such an interpretation is truly in line with the principle of strict justice observed throughout the book of Proverbs.

Chapter 27 is not relevant to the theme of this study, but ch. 28 contains a number of pertinent and noteworthy statements: vv. 1, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27. Verse 1 reads: "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."⁴⁷ The writer was possibly thinking of bad and good consciences in opposing types of men, which gave rise to feelings of insecurity or security. These contrary feelings are not, however, confined to the emotions; they correspond to inward and outward actualities. Since acts of wickedness contradict the very nature of human beings and of the universe, they are in essence self-destructive, while acts of right-

46 See also *Ahiqar* IX:126: "[Do not draw] your bow and shoot your arrow at the righteous man, lest the gods come to his aid and turn it back against you"; *Jubilees* 4:31-32: "At the end of that jubilee Cain was killed one year after him. And his house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by righteous judgment. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets: >With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed just as he wounded him, thus shall they do to him<"; *The Testament of Gad* 5:10-11: "For by whatever human capacity anyone transgresses, by that he is also chastised. Since my anger was merciless in opposition to Joseph, through this anger of mine I suffered mercilessly, and was brought under judgment for eleven months, as long as I had it in for Joseph, until he was sold" - for translation of all three passages see J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I-II* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983 and 1985); the thanksgiving hymn II:29 from Qumran: "But as for them, the net they have spread for me, shall catch their own feet; and (in) the snares which they have hid for my life, they themselves fell therein. But my foot standeth in uprightness" - for the translation see M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (STDJ 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961); in Egyptian *The Instructions of Onchsheshonqy* 22:5: "He who shakes a stone - it will fall on his foot"; W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Scene 17 (4.7) 2826-29 (speaks King): "... conuert his Guilts to graces, so that my arrowes too slightly tybered for so loude a wind, would haue reuerted to my bowe againe, and not where I had aym'd them"; the same, *Hamlet*, Scene 19 (5.2) 3528-29 (speaks Laertes): "Why as a woodcock to mine owne sprindge Ostrick, I am iustly kild with mine owne treachery"; the same, *Iulius Caesar*, Scene 15 (5.3) 2322-24 (speaks Brutus): "O Iulius Caesar, thou art mighty yet, thy Spirit walkes abroad, and turnes our Swords in our owne proper Entrailles" - see *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition* (ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

47 The Hebrew text has in 1a plural verb with singular noun, in 1b plural noun with singular verb, but the Septuagint regularises the grammar. The Targum gives: "The wicked flee when there is nobody pursuing them, but the righteous are like a lion which looks out for its food, hoping for wisdom."

cousness are edifying. Consequently, at least the end results of such contrasting deeds inevitably show that man's inmost feelings reflect the inward as well as the outward processes of recompense. The wicked are pursued by their own shadows, which hound them to destruction, whereas the righteous are secure in their positions. The meaning of v. 17 on the one hand and vv. 13 and 14 on the other can be properly evaluated in light of the intrinsic effects of vice and virtue. Verse 17 reads: "If a man is burdened with the blood of another, let him be a fugitive until death; let no one help him."⁴⁸ Murder is so extreme an example of transgression that there is no way in which a murderer can escape the death sentence.⁴⁹ This extreme case must all the more persuade us that the self-destructive results of wickedness cannot be concealed; to try to do so would merely worsen the situation. If the wicked man persists in his wickedness he denies the truth about himself and, by hardening his heart (cf. v. 14b and 29:1), accelerates the process of self-destruction. The only way out is the recognition of transgressions and submission to the discipline of penitence. The antithesis in v. 13 declares: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses (*môdeh*) and forsakes them will obtain mercy (*yěruḥām*)" (cf. Isa 1:16-18; Hos 14:2-4; Ps 32:3-5; Job 31:33-34).

In ch. 29 the theme of recompense recurs in vv. 1, 5, 6, 14, 16, 18, 23, 24, 25. Only v. 1 needs comment: "He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck (*makšeh-ōrep*) will suddenly be broken beyond healing." This means primarily that the aim of reproof is salutary correction, and its repetition indicates perseverance in good intent on the part of the reprover. There is, however, a limit to patience; stubborn incorrigibility blocks all the roads of reform and leads inevitably to destruction.

Conclusion

Throughout the book of Proverbs men are judged by their attitude to the law of right, which covers all aspects of ethical life. The sages insist repeatedly that happiness follows obedience and misfortune disobedience to that law, which is not viewed in relation to divine inspiration or formal authority, but to man's conscience, reason, and experience. By their attitude to the law of right men are sharply divided into good and bad.

Many of the book's statements seem ethically defective in at least two points: first, they do not suggest that virtue should be pursued and vice avoided for their own sake; secondly, rewards and punishments are not delineated from the inward but from the outward perspective (material prosperity, long life, peace, honour, etc., or their opposites). None the less, it is impossible to deny the basic thesis of the book of Proverbs: good thoughts and actions produce healthy fruits, while intrigues and evil deeds lead to (self-) destruction. The most paradoxical instances given are examples of poetic justice in which the wrongdoer is hoist with his own petard. We must not, of course, overlook the fact that the sages specify neither the time nor the manner of recompense, and sometimes explicitly assert that such consequences appear only in the long term. In some circumstances this final outcome is needed to confirm the consciousness of the natural necessity of punishment.

48 The Septuagint differs considerably from the Hebrew: "He who goes surety for a man on a charge of murder will be obliged to flee and will not find security." The Targum has: "A man who is guilty of the blood of a person, even to the pit he may flee, but they will not capture him."

49 See W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 626: "The murderer will be a fugitive until he dies, but however hard he may endeavour to run away from death, he is being borne irresistibly towards the place where life will be swallowed up in death."

In general, it is not possible to determine whether recompense is a function of natural law or a result of divine intervention.⁵⁰ Explicitly theological statements are rarely encountered in Proverbs. It is evident, however, that monotheism and the associated principle of divine providence are assumed throughout. The sages believe that nothing happens unless by the explicit or implicit will, i.e., order or permission of God. The boundary between the natural processes of recompense and God's *ad hoc* intervention, and the manner in which inner life affects outward happenings (and *vice versa*) always remain a mystery. The book of Proverbs is a special genre of literature, and concerns itself mainly with the facts of outward experience: it attempts no analysis of man's inner life in relation to himself, to God, and to his fellow-men.

50 See K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?", *ZThK* 52 (1955) 1-42 = *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (WdF 125; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972) 130-81 - English translation "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?", *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J.L. Crenshaw; IRTb 4; Philadelphia, PA / London: Fortress Press / SPCK, 1983) 57-87, who finds in the book of Proverbs welcome support for his claim that the Old Testament does not point to "retribution" but to built-in and inherent connection between an action and its consequences. Cf. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology. Volume One* (London: SCM Press, 1975) 265; W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 271.