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## Speaking about Biblical Wisdom

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## SPEAKING ABOUT BIBLICAL WISDOM

When we speak about biblical wisdom literature we refer to the following books: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes (in the Hebrew Bible) and Sirach,<sup>1</sup> Wisdom of Solomon (in the LXX). A decent presentation of the ideas in each of these books would require a separate study.<sup>2</sup> We are rather interested in drawing a general picture of the ideas typical to the wisdom milieu.

There is not a commonly accepted definition of the phenomenon of wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is so, because the word „wisdom” is only a „blanket term” (*Deckwort*) of a scholarly origin and biblical-theological character.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the contemporary English term „wisdom” can be misleading, since it is often understood in terms of only prudence or intelligence. The issue is much more complex, and the word wisdom is taken only as a general term, which covers a very large semantic field.<sup>5</sup> Wisdom traditions originated in various ancient, pre-biblical cultures of the Near East.<sup>6</sup> On the other

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<sup>1</sup> In the prologue we read that the book of Sirach was originally composed in Hebrew by Jesus, son of Sirach, and than translated into Greek by his grandson, Simeon son of Jesus son of Eleazar ben Sira. This book does not appear in the Hebrew Bible but is present in the LXX. It is placed among the Apocrypha in Protestant versions of the Bible but it is included in the Roman Catholic (and orthodox) canon of the Old Testament.

<sup>2</sup> For one of the most recent studies in this matter cf. e. g. M. Gilbert, *Les cinq livres des sages: Proverbes – Job – Qohélet – Ben Sira – Sagesse*, Paris 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e. g. J. L. Crenshaw, *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, New York 1976, p. 3, stated: „Since the year 1908 when Hans Meinhold first recognized her separate existence, she has stood largely as a mirror image of the scholar painting her portrait”. He also provides a survey of the debate over the issue (cf. *ibidem*, p. 1-3). This topic is also dealt with in *ibid*: *Old Testament Wisdom. An Introduction*, Louisville-Kentucky 1998, p. 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e. g. M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York 2000, p. 28-38.

<sup>6</sup> Most probably biblical wisdom got in touch with the Near East sapiential thought already in Mesopotamia (during the Sumerian domination in the 3-rd millennium BC) and in

hand, it would be wrong to consider biblical wisdom a totally „alien body” imported and planted within Hebrew thought.<sup>7</sup> Although there are to be presumed some points of contact, familiarity with foreign wisdom traditions and even making use of them,<sup>8</sup> biblical wisdom actually developed in different directions and took on different flavors, operating within the unique milieu of Israel’s religion.<sup>9</sup>

On a very basic level, the meaning of wisdom is very neutral and can denote a skill or smartness.<sup>10</sup> It, however, denotes principally the idea of an approach to life containing two dimensions, as von Rad argues: 1) practical (a „know-how”) based on experience and observation of the world and transmitted to ethical and prudent dealing with people and things; and 2) intellectual – conceived as theological reflection producing knowledge about principles governing human life in the world created by Yahweh, as well as the

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Egypt (during the pyramid age, i. e., long before the integration of the Israeli tribes); cf. J. Gray, *The Book of Job in the Context of Near Eastern Literature*, ZAW 82/1970, p. 251-269; M. L. Barré, *Fear of God and the World View of Wisdom*, BFB 11/1981, p. 41-43; J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, p. 6; M. J. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> As H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit. Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob*, Tübingen 1958, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> The clearest example in Proverbs is perhaps the passage Prov 22: 17-24: 22, which draws on the Egyptian text of Amenemope; cf. E. A. W. Budge, *The Precepts of Life by Amenem-Apt, the Son of Ka-nekht* in: *Recueil d’études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion*, Paris 1922, pp. 431-446; R. B. Y. Scott, *The Study of Wisdom Literature*, Int 24/1970, pp. 20-45. J. Ruffle, *The Teaching of Amenope and its connection with the Book of Proverbs*, TynB 28/1977, pp. 29-68, expressed some reservations about a direct connection between the two documents and summed it up as „not proven”. Notwithstanding this claim the points of contact between the two literary units are rather undeniable, which has been recently demonstrated by H. C. Washington, *Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs*, SBLDS 142, Atlanta 1995. The author first provided paleographical data speaking for the anteriority of Amenope and indicating that the document was already „in circulation as early as the twenty-first dynasty, 1069-945 BCE” (*ibidem*, 14). Then, Washington listed twenty-one literary parallels between Proverbs and Amenemope (cf. *ibidem*, 136). This fact can hardly be a coincidence. Washington demonstrated also that „the subcollection of Prov 22: 17-24: 22 has close affinities with a number of literary antecedents other than Amenemope. Amenemope is, however, the principal source for sayings about wealth and poverty in Prov 22: 17-24: 22” (*ibidem*, 144).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. L. McKenzie, *Reflections on Wisdom*, JBL 86/1967, pp. 1-9; J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, pp. 205, 223.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e. g. G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e. g. R. E. Clements, *Wisdom and Old Testament Theology*, in: J. A. Emerton, J. Day, R. P. Gordon, H. G. M. Williamson (ed.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*. Festschrift Cambridge 1995, pp. 269-286; J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, p. 15.

method of searching for it.<sup>11</sup> Of course this division is somewhat artificial. In practice, there is no need to distinguish between ethical (profane) and theological (sacral) dimensions of wisdom, because it was certainly not the way of perceiving the reality by the biblical authors.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there are differences in depicting wisdom in the first (chapters 1-9) and the second part of the book of Proverbs. Whereas in the first part the theological features are emphasized (cf. e. g. Prov 1: 7; 2: 6; 3: 19; 9: 10), in the second part its practical usage in every day life is highlighted (cf. e. g. Prov 11: 2; 16: 16; 24: 3; 28: 26).<sup>13</sup> But this cannot be taken for an indication that there were two different and opposed kinds of wisdom (theological and secular). It is simply the context that dictates that the emphasis be put on one or another side of the same reality named wisdom.

Our picture of wisdom would not be complete without a reflection on the basic assumptions upon which the sages built up their beliefs. It seems that there are two issues of crucial importance here: retribution and primordial order. Although their understanding is far from undisputed among scholars it is still worthwhile to shed some light on them.

In short, „retribution” can be comprehended as a proportional repayment from the side of God for human conduct (to the individual as well as to collective subjects) in terms of reward or punishment. Up until the 1950’s, this principle had been one of the firmest axioms of the Old Testament theology.<sup>14</sup> In 1955 K. Koch contested this opinion and instead of retribution (so juridical and external in meaning), started to speak of the „act-consequence” pattern. According to him, every act would have a „built-in” conse-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Gilbert, *Qu'en est-il de la Sagesse?* in: J. Trublet (ed.), *La sagesse biblique de l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament*, LD 160, Paris 1995, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, one might note some exceptions from this rule. For example in Prov 4: 5-6, 4: 7-9 and 4: 10-12 is barely a remark found on the theological character of wisdom; on the other hand in Prov 15: 33 wisdom has a clearly theological dimension.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H. Gunkel, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Handwörterbuch in gemeinverständlicher Darstellung*, V, Tübingen 1913, p. 1529; B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, Tübingen 1963, p. 6; M. J. Gruenthaner, *The Old Testament and Retribution in this life*, CBQ 4/1942, pp. 101-110.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. K. Koch, *Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?* ZTK 52/1955, pp. 1-42; En. tr.: *Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament*, in: J. L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, IRT 4, Philadelphia-London 1983, pp. 57-87.

quence, which by itself brings forth respective effects.<sup>15</sup> Thus Yahweh must not be viewed as the Supreme Judge executing justice, but simply as a „«mid-wife» that assists at the birth by facilitating the completion of something, which previous human action has already set in motion”.<sup>16</sup> This statement was quite earthshaking, and as such it was put to a severe critique.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it gave an impulse for further research; and any later serious study in this field would not lack a reference to Koch’s article.

H. Gese took another step forward. While defending the idea of retribution, he acknowledged the idea of an inner deed-consequence relationship in Proverbs. He, however, saw it in a broader perspective of an „order immanent in the world” (*der Welt inne-wohnende Ordnung*).<sup>18</sup> This would be the criterion for respective consequences that come upon those who act. At the same time he argued that one should bear in mind that the Lord is independent of this order.<sup>19</sup>

W. Zimmerli took up the motif of the world order in biblical wisdom, pointing out its affinities with Egyptian *Maat* – goddess

<sup>16</sup> K. Koch, *Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament*, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> E. W. Pax, *Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen*, SBFLA 11, Jerusalem 1960/61, pp. 61-62, provided a list of methodological objections, undermining the validity of Koch’s work mainly pointing to the selective treatment of the biblical texts and misunderstanding of the definition of retribution. Secondly, Pax says, that the value of Koch’s conclusions is limited in that that the term „dogma” carries with its connotations, which are not really appropriate to the OT. Among them, Pax enumerated for instance the superficial choice and usage of biblical texts, risking of mixing up the Gattungs and the biblical concepts. Moreover, although, Koch claims that the issue is going to be examined with a strong awareness of the Sitz im Leben, according to Pax, he practically does the opposite. For instance, when he defines the key word „Vergeltung” (Reward), he takes it as a strictly juridical term i. e. in fact, as having its roots more in the Greek than in the Biblical tradition; cf. also J. Barton, *Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament*, JTS 30/1979, pp. 1-14. P. D. Miller, *Sin and Judgement in the Prophets*, Chico 1982, studied the *device/pattern/motif of correspondence* between sin and judgment, crime and punishment in the Prophets, which basically undermines Koch’s claim that there is no juridical sense in bringing forth the effects of people acting. After having analyzed a number of (mainly prophetic) texts, he concluded that „while there is always a causal effect in the relationship between someone or some people’s actions and the judgment they receive, that relationship is not necessarily internal but is perceived as resting in the divine decision and not happening apart from that decision or decree” (*ibidem*, p. 134).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit*, 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 45-50.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ort und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, in: *Les sagesses du Proche-Orient Ancien*, Paris 1963, pp. 121-137.

of truth, justice, harmony, and world order.<sup>20</sup> The world order in the Bible has been established by Yahweh, and is the basic principle that man's life should be oriented to. Zimmerli placed it within 'creation theology'.<sup>21</sup> Retribution, in which God plays an active role, has to do with creation (man's respecting/disrespecting the world order).<sup>22</sup> But in any human calculation there must be taken into account the fact that God is not a slave of this order but acts freely according to His own will, which is unpredictable for humans.<sup>23</sup> In fact, it was already J. Fichtner to argue for a relationship between retribution and creation. He held that God can exercise retribution, as far as he is the Creator and Ruler of the world: „Vergeltung kann Gott üben, sofern er Schöpfer und Weltregent ist”.<sup>24</sup>

H. Schmid defined creation theology as follows: „the doctrine of creation, namely, the belief that God has created and is sustaining the order of the world in all its complexities”.<sup>25</sup> Schmid argued also that world order is a common and basic factor of the thought characteristic for the great ancient Near East cultures, and as such is mirrored in the Hebrew Bible (under the root קִדַּשׁ).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 123, 130, 133, 136; cf. also *idem*, *Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom*, in: J. L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 175-207.

For a survey of opinions rejecting the creation theology see: R. B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs*, in: R. B. Zuck (ed.), *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, Chicago 1991, pp. 211-213.

<sup>22</sup> W. Zimmerli, *Ort und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, pp. 130-131, observed: „in der Sprache konkreter חִיָּה – Weisung des Kultes wird hier in der Weisheit festgestellt was gut ist und darum auch Segen erwarten darf. Im Hören auf diese Ordnungen weiss der Weise zu sagen, wo Jahwe lohnen (Prov 12: 2), wo er strafen (Prov 15: 25; 16: 4), wo er erhören (Prov 15: 29), wo er, der Allsichtige (Prov 15: 3,11) als der Herr, der die schicksalwirkende Tat voll macht (עָשָׂה) (Prov 19: 17; 25: 22) eingreifen wird”.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 130, 135.

<sup>24</sup> J. Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung. Eine Studie zur Nationalisierung der Weisheit in Israel*, BZAW 62, Giessen 1933, p. 111. Moreover, the belief in the *Schöpfergott* is in double relation with the belief in God who exercises retribution: „Einmal erkennt man dem Schöpfer die absolute Macht über seine Geschöpfe zu, womit die Voraussetzung für sein vergeltendes Eingreifen gegeben ist. (...) Daneben steht (...) Gedanke, daß Gott, indem er die Welt und die Menschheit setzte, sie zugleich bestimmten Ordnungen unterwarf, auf deren Innehaltung er bedacht ist” (*ibidem*, p. 111-112).

<sup>25</sup> H. H. Schmid, *Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation*, in: B. W. Anderson (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament*, Philadelphia 1984, pp. 102-117.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *idem*, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, Tübingen 1968, pp. 65-66; 166-173.

Similarly von Rad acknowledged the underlying world order<sup>27</sup> within which human actions lead to appropriate consequences (act-consequence relationship).<sup>28</sup> However, it is up to Yahweh, the creator of the order, whether the consequence would be brought forth.<sup>29</sup> At any rate „kommen wir zu Ergebnis, dass es angesichts des Existentialzusammenhangs von Tat und Folge unangebracht ist, von einem «Vergeltungsdogma» zu reden, denn der Gedanke der Vergeltung unterstellt indem er die «Strafe» als einen zusätzlichen forensischen Akt versteht, ein Rechtsdenken, das dem ganzen Vorstellungskreis weithin fern liegt”.<sup>30</sup> P. J. Nel held that „order-oriented thinking is the pulse of wisdom”.<sup>31</sup> It is a created order, „comprehensible within the frame of the *יְהוָה יִרְאֶת*”,<sup>32</sup> that man is supposed to live in harmony with.<sup>33</sup> The act-consequence is present in the ethos of wisdom, but it is not to be taken in terms of a strict dogma. As such it would be irreconcilable with Jahwistic belief, because it would mean that God is bound by the inevitable.<sup>34</sup>

R. E. Murphy spoke against the *ma'atizing* of wisdom, i. e., overestimating the influence of the Egyptian concept of world order on Israel's wisdom.<sup>35</sup> In this context he denied also the claim that the sages „were in quest of an order «out there», the knowledge of which would make the task of living easier and more profitable”.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This order can hardly be compared with the Egyptian concept of Maat.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testament*, I, München 1962<sup>4</sup>, pp. 396-397.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 398.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> P. J. Nel, *The Structure and Ethos of the Wisdom Admonitions in Proverbs*, BZAW 158, Berlin-New York 1982, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 113-115.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. E. Murphy, *Religious Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom*, in: P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, S. D. McBride (ed.), *Ancient Israelite Religion*. Festschrift, F. M. Cross, Philadelphia 1987, pp. 449-458.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, *The Tree of Life. An Explanation of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, Grand Rapids 1996<sup>2</sup>, p. 116. In a recent article *Wisdom and Yahwism Revisited*, in: D. Penchansky, P. L. Redditt (ed.), *Shall not Judge of All the Earth Do What is Right. Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw*, Winona Lake 2000, pp. 191-200, he once again addresses the topic: „perhaps it is not too bold to say that some props have been knocked out from under those who considered wisdom a foreign body within the Bible. These props I would characterize as the tunnel vision of biblical wisdom provided by the Egyptian «window», the «ma'atizing» of wisdom”.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, *The Tree of Life*, p. 116.

He argued that it is „experience, which teaches certain lessons” as for example that „certain actions lead to good or bad results”.<sup>37</sup> He acknowledged the existence of retribution and the „mechanical correspondence between act and consequence formed” as being „operative in Israel’s experience”.<sup>38</sup>

H. D. Preuss’s view on the „Maat factor” in biblical wisdom seems to be affected by his view of biblical wisdom, which he considers an „alien body”.<sup>39</sup> He sees Maat (Weltordnung) as a mechanical principle according to which the world of gods and humans is patterned. As such it would have been transmitted to biblical wisdom literature.<sup>40</sup> According to Preuss, it stands also as a principle for the relationship of dependence between act and its inevitable consequence: „Tat wie Tatfolge stehen in der Maat und daher in innerem wie äußerem Zusammenhang”.<sup>41</sup> The difference is that it is JHWH here: „der Tat zu ihrer Folge verhilft, der diesen Zusammenhang garantiert wie den von Saat und Ernte oder von Pflanze und Frucht”.<sup>42</sup>

L. Boström makes a point on overemphasizing the function of Maat as a counterpart for the biblical view of the world order. He observed that some leading Egyptologists agreed nowadays that the concept of Maat has undergone several stages of evolution. Hence, the concept was far from static.<sup>43</sup> As for creation theology,

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<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, *Religious Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom*, p. 450; see also *idem*, *The Tree of Life*, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. C. Brekelmans, *Questions disputées d’Ancient Testament. Méthode et théologie*, BETL 33, Leuven 1974, p. 173; H. D. Preuss, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*, Stuttgart 1987, p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20-23.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. e. g. H. Brunner, *Der freie Wille Gottes in der ägyptischen Weisheit*, in: *Les sagesses du Proche-Orient Ancien*, Paris 1963, pp. 103-120; E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen: Ägyptisches Gottesvorstellungen*, Darmstadt 1973; J. Assmann, *Ma’at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, München 1995; M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120, Freiburg 1992; *idem*, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt*, OBO 155, Göttingen 1997. J. Assmann, *Ma’at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, p. 33, argues that Maat should be looked upon not as „Weltordnung”, but rather as „Gerechtigkeit”. Moreover, he makes an interesting point on the basic differences among the Egyptian model of world in which Ma’at operated and the biblical one. The Egyptian view of the world is dynamic and literally consists of gods, who continuously make it exist. Here enters Ma’at, who „sorgt für den Einklang des Zusammenwirkens, der aus dem Widerspiel der Kräfte und der Überwindung gegenstrebigener Energien den Kosmos reultieren läßt” (*ibidem*, p. 35).

he observes that scholars have individuated a variety of traditions related to creation in the Old Testament.<sup>44</sup> In Proverbs the references to creation occur within the context of two main traditions: „the creation of the world and creation of man”.<sup>45</sup> Although the term „order” is appropriate as a designation of the world-view of the sages, one should not take it for an impersonal principle, but rather consider it a theological factor signifying „the order which the Lord has established and upholds in the world”.<sup>46</sup> Thus the view of the sages on how the outcome of attitudes and behavior can be materialized may not be restricted to only one rule or principle. Consequently, retribution, act-consequence principle, perceiving good and evil as per se having an influence on its environment etc., are all possibilities that the wise certainly took into consideration.<sup>47</sup>

There are still scholars who support the claims about the seeking of the world order pattern, retribution, act-consequence relationship and creation theology (which nowadays took on the form of „natural theology”<sup>48</sup>) playing dominant role in the biblical wisdom.<sup>49</sup> Actually, we may say after R. Murphy, that „the discussion is far from over”.<sup>50</sup> We think that it would be too simplistic to ascribe to biblical wisdom a sort of blind dogmatism and acceptance of

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. L. Boström, *The God of the Sages. The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs*, ConB 29, Stockholm 1990, p. 68. Cf. also B. W. Anderson, *Introduction. Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions of Biblical Creation Faith*, in: B. W. Anderson (ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament*, pp. 1-24.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. L. Boström, *The God of the Sages*, pp. 83, 87.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 134-135.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. J. Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, Oxford 1993; J. Barton, *The Basis of Ethics in the Hebrew Bible*, Semeia 66/1994, pp. 11-22. Against this view cf. e. g. P. J. Nel, *The Structure and Ethos*, p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> J. L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 55: „Israel’s sages seem to have discerned a fundamental order hidden within the universe; this ruling principle applied both to nature and to humans. Discovery of this «rational rule» enabled the wise to secure their existence by acting in harmony with the universal order that sustained the cosmos. Conduct, it follows, either strengthened the existing order or contributed to the forces of chaos that continually threatened survival itself”. Cf. also C. R. Fontaine, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, in: L. G. Perdue, B. B. Scott, W. J. Wiseman (ed.), *In Search of Wisdom. Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, Louisville 1993, pp. 99-115; L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation. The Theology of Wisdom Literature*, Nashville 1994, p. 35; H.-J. Hermisson, *Studien zu Prophetie und Weisheit*, FAT 23, Tübingen 1998, pp. 267-285. On the deed-consequence nexus see J. Hausmann, *Studien zum Menschenbild der älteren Weisheit*, FAT 7, Tübingen 1995, pp. 237-243.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. R. E. Murphy, *Wisdom and Yahwism Revisited*, p. 192.

only one possible solution to the problem of materializing the effects of human acting. The sages were certainly more aware of the complexity of the issue and a plurality of factors. In Proverbs there are testimonies of such awareness: 1) God repays for good and evil (= retribution; Prov 2: 6-8; 3: 9-10,33; 15: 25; 19: 17; 20: 22; 21: 12; 22: 12,22-23; 23: 10-11; 24: 11-12; 25: 21-22; 29: 26), 2) experience teaches some lessons about consequences („common sense statements” = act-consequence relationship; Prov 1: 19,31; 6: 10-11; 10: 4-5; 12: 14; 15: 19; 19: 3,15; 20: 4; 21: 17; 23: 20-21; 24: 30-34; 28: 19; 30: 33), 3) the consequences have no absolute value, because it is God, who in one way or another is active in the process of bringing out consequences, and He is sovereign in His decisions (= unpredictability of the outcomes; Prov 16: 9,33; 19: 21; 21: 30-31). Besides, there are also present some common sense statements on human interaction and its consequences (Prov 6: 34; 20: 19; 27: 17; 28: 4; 29: 2; 29: 12; 29: 21). The order of the world as an abstract or almost a material principle cannot be deduced from these texts. The term ‘order’ is a modern term which does not have its exact counterpart in Hebrew, and as such must be used (if ever) with caution.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, it is far from wrong to think about a certain design (patterns and relationships) in the created world. For example, the narrations on the creation of the world (Gen 1–2) can serve as an excellent point of reference. But even every day experience makes us aware of many factors operating in the world – for example a stone thrown up to the sky must finally fall down (nowadays we would call it gravity). L. Boström, while talking about ‘order’ carefully clarified its meaning as signifying the world-view of Israelite wisdom, and qualified theologically „as the order which the Lord has established and upholds in the world”.<sup>52</sup>

In this context one should also note that the book of Proverbs makes extensive use of another term designating pattern, namely:

<sup>51</sup> Cf. L. Boström, *The God of the Sages*, p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137. Cf. also P. J. Nel, *The Structure and Ethos of the Wisdom Admonitions in Proverbs*, pp. 111-112; A. W. Jenkins, *Theological Presuppositions of Israel's Wisdom Literature*, HBT 7/1985, pp. 43-75.

<sup>53</sup> There are also other terms denoting „road”, „path”: נַעֲמָל (Prov 2: 9; 4: 26; 5: 6), אֶרֶץ (Prov 5: 6; 10: 17; 15: 10), נְתִיבָה (Prov 12: 28; pl. 8: 2,20). For further study on their meaning cf. e. g. M. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament*, Berlin-New York 1999 (cf. especially ch. IV).

דָרֶךְ „way, road”.<sup>53</sup> Although this image is not exclusive to Proverbs, its „Schwerpunkt” is to be found only in this book.<sup>54</sup> The „way, road” is to be taken here in terms of a lifestyle (Lebensweise), conduct (Lebenswandel), which brings concrete „fruit” (Prov 1: 31). Every road leads somewhere. However, where some lead to a desired destination (=life; Prov 2: 19; 5: 6a; 6: 23; 10: 17; 12: 28; 15: 24) others may bring one to a cliff or dead end (Prov 1: 19; 1: 31; 2: 15; 4: 19; 5: 6b; 7: 25,27; 9: 6; 10: 9; 12: 26; 14: 12; 16: 25; 21: 16). How to recognize the right way, path? Wisdom enables man to do so (Prov 3: 13,17; 8: 34-36; 9: 6,11). Yahweh grants wisdom (Prov 2: 6), although not without human effort and cooperation (Prov 4: 5-7). Wisdom is presented as the pattern according to which Yahweh created the world (Prov 3: 19). Later on it appears as Lady Wisdom who calls upon people to receive her instructions (e. g. Prov 8: 1-10). Every person who listens to her and follows her paths is promised to find life and favor from the Lord (Prov 8: 32-34). She remains in a very intimate relationship with Yahweh (Prov 8: 27-31), which makes her the best guide of life for man.

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. idem, *Zentrale Aspekte der Semantik der hebräischen Weg-Lexeme*, in: A. Wagner (ed.), *Studien zur hebräischen Grammatik*, OBO 156, Göttingen 1997, pp. 154-169; M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 128, calls it „the ground metaphor of Prov 1-9”.