**Wisdom and the Will of God [put with GM 4 Additional Study; Slide 24ff.]**

A major task for a decision-making model is to unpack how biblical wisdom relates to epistemology and the process of decision-making.

1. The diverse nature and use of “wisdom.”

E. J. Schnabel, “Wisdom,” in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 967-973.

Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom in the OT,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6.920-931.

1a. The basic Hebrew term *hokma* in its various forms appears 318 times in the OT. 183 of these are in the “official” wisdom books Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes. Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon use the term about 100 times.

2a. “Wisdom” is a body of literature. Israel’s “wisdom literature” is represented by Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, although wisdom language and motif may be found in various ways in other texts (e.g. Psalm 119).

3a. “Wise men” is a category of counselors, diviners, and magicians (Gen 41:8; Exod 7:11; Dan 2:27; 1Kings 5:9-14/Eng=4:29-34) in both pagan and Israel categories.

4a. The term “wisdom” may apply to

1b. “Skill” of persons trained to perform a task (e.g. trades)

Exod 36:2, 8; 35:35

1 Chron 22:15-16

Psalm 107:27/literal to Prov 1:5; 17:27-28/figurative

In this usage wisdom is “practical, not theoretical” (ABD, 6.920). This is transferred to commands “filled with value judgments that urge a given course of action” (6.920). The moral life is also a life of skill. Cf. James 1 and 3.

2b. To be “clever” “cunning” (good or bad”

Prov 30:24-28

2 Sam 13:3; 14:2

2. To what extent was wisdom viewed with “law”?

1a. Fox argues that Deut 4:6 asserts that wisdom is Torah. But, no biblical wisdom literature makes this equation, until Ben Sirach. He does note that Psalm 119, a clear Torah oriented Psalm, uses the “characteristic vocabulary of Wisdom” (Fox, *Proverbs*, 2.954).

Deut 4:6-8; 30:11-14; 33:14

Psalms 1, 19, 119

Sirach 15:1; 17:11; 19:20; 21:11; **24:23**

Christ is referred to as “the wisdom of God” in 1 Cor 1:24, 30. What does this mean? Schnabel observes (971),

Paul never describes Christ in terms of Law…. Rather, Paul describes and defines the Law in terms of Christ:…. Christ has fulfilled the Torah in his death and resurrection “for us,”….

2a.  **The body of formal wisdom literature provides no model of moving from encoded “law” to wisdom** (that is, Wisdom is not quoting “Law” as a prooftext for its base of knowledge)**.** Wisdom, however, does reflect our dependence upon the presence and knowledge of God (implicational)? Note the presence of “creation” and “nature”” in wisdom...God’s world).

Prov 3:5; 26:12; 16:1-2, 9

Job 11:7-8; 36:22-26

Since “wisdom literature” does not reflect a dependence upon encoded “law” for its formulations, what is the origin of wisdom’s knowledge?

**See** Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-*31, Vol. 2. Anchor Bible. Essay 8 on “Knowledge,” 2.963-976\*\*

3. The theology of wisdom (*ABD*, 6.925ff.)

1a. Creation—a theology of order

2a. Life—a theology of observation

The observation of life

Guided by a “fear of the Lord”

Prov 1:7; 9:10

Ecc 3:14; 5:6

3a. Encounter—a theology of “the fear of Yahweh” (O’Dowd, “Epistemology in Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes” in Healy and Parry)

The phrase “fear of Yahweh” appears 14 times throughout Proverbs. O’Dowd sees its repetition as significant in light of the three-fold structure of Proverbs.

**I. Proverbs 1-9**

Prov. 1:7 The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; But the foolish despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov. 1:28 Then will they call upon me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me: 29 For that they hated knowledge, And did not choose the fear of Jehovah: 30 They would none of my counsel; They despised all my reproof.

Prov. 2:1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, And lay up my commandments with thee; 2 So as to incline thine ear unto wisdom, And apply thy heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou cry after discernment, And lift up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou seek her as silver, And search for her as for hid treasures: 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of Jehovah, And find the knowledge of God. 6 For Jehovah giveth wisdom; Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding:

Prov. 8:13 The fear of Jehovah is to hate evil: Pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, And the perverse mouth, do I hate.

Prov. 9:9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. 10 The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom; And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

**II. Proverbs 10-29**

Prov. 10:27 The fear of Jehovah prolongeth days; But the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

Prov. 14:26 In the fear of Jehovah is strong confidence; And his children shall have a place of refuge. 27 The fear of Jehovah is a fountain of life, That one may depart from the snares of death.

Prov. 15:16 Better is little, with the fear of Jehovah, Than great treasure and trouble therewith. … 33 The fear of Jehovah is the instruction of wisdom; And before honor goeth humility.

Prov. 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for; And by the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil. 7 When a man’s ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. 8 Better is a little, with righteousness, Than great revenues with injustice. 9 A man’s heart deviseth his way; But Jehovah directeth his steps.

Prov. 19:21 There are many devices in a man’s heart; But the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand. 22 That which maketh a man to be desired is his kindness; And a poor man is better than a liar. 23 The fear of Jehovah tendeth to life; And he that hath it shall abide satisfied; He shall not be visited with evil.

Prov. 22:4 The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah Is riches, and honor, and life.

Prov. 23:17 Let not thy heart envy sinners; But be thou in the fear of Jehovah all the day long: 18 For surely there is a reward; And thy hope shall not be cut off. 19 Hear thou, my son, and be wise, And guide thy heart in the way.

**III. Proverbs 30-31**

Prov. 31:30 Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; And let her works praise her in the gates.

4a. Ethics—a theology of “a [moral] way of life”

1b. Conduct that reflects values, forms character. “The approach of wisdom to morality is much broader than that of the Decalogue in that it aims at character formation.” (*ABD*, 6.925)

Prov 2:19; 5:6; 6:23; 15:24

honesty, diligence (Prov 10:4; 26:14)

self-control (14:17; 15:1)

a sense of responsibility (10:26; 27:23-27)

negatively, seduction in Prov 7

The wise person is identified as a righteous person.

Cf. Prov 10-15 (10:2, 27)

“Morality and wisdom cannot be separated, although biblical wisdom is not to be reduced to a moral code.” (*ABD*, 6.926)

2b. NT “codes” provide an “ethic” of wisdom (Schnabel, 972)

Household codes (virtue and vice lists, *Haustafeln*)

cf. Prov 6:17-18

Sirach 7:18-28

Wis of Sol 14:23-26

Hardship catalogs (show the suffering sage side)

**Exercises**

Read Deut 4

Read Ps 119 and note how law/wisdom is integrated

Read Prov 1-9 for “method” of deliberation

Read Sirach 24 (Fox 2.958)

Scenario our kinds of issues/questions and discuss how “wisdom” can relate to them. Use one of the case studies from Dean’s office.

\*\* Quotations from Fox’s Essay 8 on “Knowledge”

“Although knowledge [synomymous with wisdom and understanding in Proverbs] is at the center of Proverbs’ concern, little is said about how knowledge is created, where it comes from, and how truth-claims are verified. Still, there must have been an implicit epistemology—ideas about what knowledge is and what its sources are.” (2.963)

Wisdom epistemology “is not empiricism, the philosophical principle that all knowledge ultimately derives from sensory experience. …the sages never invoke divine revelation or a tradition claiming to derive from it,…” (2.963) Experience is certainly involved in wisdom, but empiricism is not its epistemological foundation.

Quoting von Rad, “But experiences without presuppositions do not exist.” Wisdom is the Sage’s belief, “statements of faith, not abstractions from experiential data.” (2.964).

“The sages filtered their experiences and perceptions through expectations of what diligence and skill *should* bring.” (2.965)

Fox promotes “coherence” as the test of reason that produced wisdom (coherence is the test for “reason” epistemology). Quoting Young, fox notes that “A coherence theory of truth holds that the truth of an (true) proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions.” (2.968)

“The propositions, stated and assumed, of the sayings and epigrams in Proverbs receive their validation by virtue of consistency with the integrated system of assumptions that inform the book.” (2.968)

Wisdom “does not catalogue the axioms that constitute the truth-grid into which new knowledge must be fit; the system is too vast and complex for that. …But, I suggest, an ideal of harmony is central to the system, and a sense for what is harmonious—the moral equivalent of a musical ear—is important in both the formation of a wise man and the validation of new wisdom.” (2.970)

HARMONY, a metaphor of balance, is a criteria to judge if something is true in God’s world. See 2.970ff.

* husbands and wifes
* humans and nature
* good and evil
* industrious or lazy
* arrogant or humble

Harmony seeks “moral balance,” the way of wisdom is righteous. What is good is also beautiful.

The principle of balance…Prov 16:11… “No promises to the forefathers, no covenantal ties, demands, or rewards, not even divine laws, come into the picture. They are not rejected; they are simply *unnecessary* in Proverbs’ truth system.” (2.974)

“In fact, wisdom *is* an art, not a science, and the sages of Wisdom are artists—hakamim, as artists are called in Exod 36:4.” (2.976)

“Proverbs pays virtually no attention to these media [visions, dreams, prophecies]. Rather, it treats the powers of the human mind as adequate to the attainment of all sorts of knowledge.” (2.947)

4. Some tentative conclusions

1a. Some popular decision-making models claim “wisdom” as the mode of operation for decisions, i.e. “do the wise thing.” One of my questions is, “Should wisdom be viewed as a method or a product?” Does it operate as a verb or a noun?

How does “do what is spiritually expedient” fit wisdom?

2a. While hokmah is used in diverse ways, it seems to me that as I survey “wisdom” in the OT period in regard to making judgments about life, wisdom literature provides the collected, approved judgments of the traditions (biblical and 2nd temple). That is, “wisdom” describes the resulting value judgments that are a product of correlating a view of truth with the challenges of life. The analogy of “skill” from texts best translated as an ability to perform a task is often cited, but I wonder if it implies too much about method (i.e. ability to do a physical task) rather than product (of a mental endeavor). The analogy, however, can be “skill in moral judgment.”

3a. How do we relate to Fox’s observations that

* “Wisdom offers itself as a complete and self-contained moral system” (2.946)
* “Proverbs shows no interest in Yahweh’s revealed Torah. …affirmation of Torah is not part of its message.” (2.946)

He is technically correct but is he allowing the unity of Scripture a place? Fox is committed to the JEDP paradigm and therefore compartmentalizes material.

See his discussion of how scholars have related to this challenge (2.947ff.).

4a. How can/does O’Dowd’s analysis move us forward?