

THE CONCEPT OF “THE LOVE OF WISDOM” IN PROVERBS (8): A COMPARATIVE-PHILOSOPHICAL CLARIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The word “philosophy” can be literally rendered “the love of wisdom”. However, while etymological definitions are not always reliable as to the actual use of words, in some sense it is not an inaccurate notion of what some of the ancient Greek philosophers thought they were up to. The ancient Greek senses of “love” and “wisdom” were, however, not univocal. In addition, though the Hebrew Bible is not as a rule considered philosophy proper in terms of genre, the Book of Proverbs does contain several verbal references to the love of wisdom. In this paper the author seeks to elucidate and compare what the love of wisdom meant in both the Greek and Hebrew contexts and how they might have conceptually overlapped and diverged.

INTRODUCTION

It has become somewhat of a cliché within academia that the genres (e.g., myth, legend, historical narrative, law, psalms, prophecy, wisdom, etc.) encountered in the Hebrew Bible do not include overt *philosophical* content. This view, while based on some valid observations, is not uncontested and more recently has been challenged from a variety of angles by both biblical scholars and philosophers (see Hazony 2012, Gericke 2012). In research on the relationship between the Bible and philosophy, however, one elementary issue that has been overlooked is the way in which the concept of the love of wisdom appears in both early Greek philosophy and in the Hebrew Bible’s Book of Proverbs. In fact, the relationship between wisdom and

philosophy as such has received relatively little attention in the history of the latter discipline, as Kekes (1995:912) noted some time ago:

Although wisdom is supposed to be what philosophy is a love of, little attention has been paid to this component of good lives in post-classical Western philosophy. It is perhaps for this reason that those interested in it turn to the obscurities of oriental religions for enlightenment

In more recent years an interest in the nature of wisdom has been rekindled in philosophical discussions (see Ryan 2013:n.p.). In Hebrew Bible studies, research on Israelite and Jewish wisdom has a long history, as has its relation to Greek philosophy (see Collins 1997:222-233; Crenshaw 2009:41-62). In both philosophy and biblical studies, however, there is little in the way of a comparative analysis of the concept of “the love of wisdom” (*verbatim*) in early Greek meta-philosophical vis-à-vis the appearance of the motif in Hebrew Bible wisdom literature (e.g., Book of Proverbs). One reason for this state of affairs is that while studies on “the love of wisdom” in historical philosophy are well attested, in the study of ancient Israelite wisdom literature several questions still remain unanswered: 1) How exactly was the “love of wisdom” understood in the Hebrew Bible?; and 2) what similarities and differences may be discerned with reference to prototypical Greek meta-philosophical contexts?

In light of this gap in the research just outlined, the objective of this article may now be formulated. In the discussion to follow the aim will be to provide a descriptive overview of some of the meanings of the concept of the love of wisdom in the Greek meta-philosophy and in Hebrew Bible wisdom literature, with special attention to the Book of Proverbs (1-9[8]). The hypothesis of this study is that there is a significant conceptual overlap between the two domains of discourse. As for the preferred methodology, the present inquiry will make use of decompositional conceptual analysis by first seeking to discern how the words “love” and “wisdom” were separately understood in explicit references to “the love of wisdom” in the relevant corpora. Since the term “philosophy” will be used as point of orientation, the inquiry will commence with a look at how its etymology was understood before moving on to verbal parallels in the Hebrew Bible (and LXX translations).

To my mind such an inquiry can be considered relevant to current interdisciplinary research seeking to clarify the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and philosophy. The actuality of the study lies in the new avenues for discussion they may open up in

relation to a neglected dimension of the biblical discourse, thus bridging part of the stereotyped conceptual gap between Greek philosophical rhetoric and Hebrew thought.

THE LOVE OF WISDOM IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

As every first year student in philosophy knows, etymologically the word “philosophy” is said to derive from the original Greek term φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*), which literally translates as the “love of wisdom”. To try to define the nature of philosophy *via* its etymology would, however, involve a semantic fallacy long recognized as potentially misleading as to the actual usage of the concept throughout history. Nevertheless, etymological analysis is not always or of necessity fruitless and can highlight aspects of diachronic semantics. In this regard, the first attested use of the Greek concept “the love of wisdom” is commonly traced to one Pythagoras of Samos (about 582-504 BCE) for whom a “philosopher” was contrasted with a “sophist” (including businessmen and athletes). In this regard, Passmore (1967:216) noted as follows:

According to a tradition deriving from Heraclides Ponticus (a disciple of Plato), Pythagoras was the first to describe himself as a philosopher. Three classes of people, he is alleged to have said, attend the festal games: those who seek fame by taking part in them; those who seek gain by playing their trade; and those (“the best people”) who are content to be spectators (Diogenes Laërtius, *De Vita et Moribus Philosophorum* I, 12). Philosophers resemble the third class: spurning both fame and profit, they seek to arrive at the truth by contemplation. Pythagoras distinguished the *sophia* sought by the philosopher (knowledge based on contemplation) from the practical shrewdness of the businessman and the trained skills of the athlete.

Passmore (1967:216) goes on to suggest that:

whether or not these distinctions date back to the historic Pythagoras, they can certainly be found in Plato, who was much preoccupied with the question of what philosophy is and how it differs from other forms of inquiry. Some of Plato’s contemporaries had thought of his master, Socrates, as a sage, some thought of him as a Sophist, and some thought

of him as a cosmologist. In Plato's eyes, Socrates was none of these; he was a philosopher.

Plato's Socrates was said to have called himself a "lover of wisdom". However, as Blackson (2013:n.p.) rightly observes:

The Greek for this adjective and noun, although not unknown in the day, would have been relatively unfamiliar. These words occur rarely in the extant literature prior to Plato's dialogues. The two most prominent occurrences are in Heraclitus and the historian Herodotus. In these authors, a lover of wisdom is someone who arranges his life around an uncommon intellectual pursuit. Plato, following his teacher, Socrates (and, it is likely, the older tradition of Pythagoras), understands philosophy as *philo-sophia*, or, literally, a friend of Wisdom. This understanding of *philosophia* permeates Plato's dialogues, especially the *Republic*. In that work, the leaders of the proposed utopia are to be philosopher kings: rulers who are friends of sophia or Wisdom. *Sophia* is one of the four cardinal virtues in Plato's *Protagoras*.

It might be of interest to take cognisance of the fact that in renditions of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, φιλία is usually translated as "affectionate regard" or "friendship". Thus,

in Books VIII and IX Aristotle gives examples of *philia* including: "young lovers (1156b2), lifelong friends (1156b12), cities with one another (1157a26), political or business contacts (1158a28), parents and children (1158b20), fellow-voyagers and fellow-soldiers (1159b28), members of the same religious society (1160a19), or of the same tribe (1161b14), a cobbler and the person who buys from him (1163b35)." (Hughes 2001:168)

The problem that arises, however, is that one cannot simply link all possible nuances of *philia* to the concept of philosophy. That would involve the semantic fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer. Thus one has to adopt a contextual approach that looks at how the term "wisdom" (*sophia*) was understood in relation to its being loved (*philia*). In this regard it should be noted that the love of wisdom was never in early Greek philosophy the love of a divinity called Sophia. Mythologically and historically

speaking, this notion is anachronistic. In ancient Greece it was Athena and Metis who were considered to be the Greek patron deities of wisdom and who were hailed as representing its ideals. Only much later, in the era of gnostic Judaism (e.g. as in Philo) and gnostic Christianity, did a goddess by the Greek name Sophia begin to attract devotion in the literature.

On the other hand, with regard to its use as a technical term, *sophia* originally denoted a variety of phenomena, thus having a much wider range of application than the modern English “wisdom.” With reference to this polysemy Passmore (1967:216) suggested that:

Wherever intelligence can be exercised -- in practical affairs, in the mechanical arts, in business -- there is room for *sophia*; Homer used it to refer to the skill of a carpenter (*Iliad* XV, 412). Furthermore, whereas modern English draws a fairly sharp distinction between the search for wisdom and the attempt to satisfy intellectual curiosity, Herodotus used the verb *philosophhein* in a context in which it means nothing more than the desire to find out (*History* I, 30). Briefly, then, *philosophia* etymologically connotes the love of exercising one’s curiosity and intelligence, and in this sense the love of wisdom.

In Book 1 of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle viewed wisdom as an insight into causal relations. That is, wisdom involves knowing *why* things are a certain way (explanation), which is assumed to be more advanced than merely knowing *that* things are a certain way (description). However, Book 6 of the *Ethics* distinguishes between *sophia* (theoretical wisdom) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). This distinction prevailed since then to the middle ages. Practical wisdom is more closely related to the skill many people today associate with wisdom, i.e. knowledge and insight into life and what is of value and how to achieve certain ends. This despite the fact that it is *sophia* or theoretical wisdom that is associated with what philosophy is popularly thought of as being.

THE LOVE OF WISDOM IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

There is no direct singular equivalent for the Greek word “philosophy” in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible. But analogous to the way in which there is no

words like “ethics” or “metaphysics”, although the texts presuppose ethical and metaphysical assumptions, the absence of the verbatim vocabulary does not mean that something similar to the concept as such is absent on the levels of presupposition and worldview. However, one might do better to look to Eastern philosophy for the closest parallels. Thus it is interesting to note that when the Hebrew Bible mentions geographical locations for the love of wisdom it does not refer to Greece or Asia Minor. Instead, it looks to Egypt, Phoenicia and Edom (and the South) (see 1 Kgs 4:30; Is 49:7; Ez 28:1-9).

As for particular references to the concept, there is in the Book of Proverbs a number of texts that explicitly refer to loving wisdom (the rest, of course, presuppose it given sagely interest in the practice). While Proverbs 8 is most prominent (there are references to the love of wisdom in 8:17, 21 and 36) and will be the focal chapter of the remainder of this discussion, it has to be noted that other noteworthy references to the same phenomenon also occurs in the book, e.g. Proverbs 4:6 and 29:3 (with 7:4 being an indirect allusion). In this section we shall very briefly look at each of these texts in turn, with the centre of the analysis being Proverbs 8. In doing so we shall involve not only the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible but also the standard Greek translations of the said verses in the LXX for the sake of detecting conceptual parallels with the earlier Greek philosophical context.

The first reference to the love of wisdom comes from the book of Proverbs 4:6. The Hebrew word for love here is clearly the root *'hb*.

אל-תעזבה ותשמרה Forsake her not, and she will preserve you;
אהבה ותצרה love her, and she will keep you.

It should be noted that the word *'hb* in Hebrew had a semantic range that was very broad, much like is the case with the English word “love”. The Hebrew word for love could denote an affinity for a variety of objects by a variety of subjects, as well as abstract phenomena (see Wallis 1977:99-118). In the text above the third person personal feminine pronoun “her” used as direct object clearly refers to wisdom itself. In this regard it is interesting that the love we read about here was not thought to be the *philia* type by the LXX translators. Rather, as the context clearly shows, it involved the sensual love of a lover, i.e., in the sense of erotic love. Thus Proverbs 4: 6 LXX reads:

μηδὲ ἐγκαταλίπης αὐτήν καὶ ἀνθέξεται σου
ἐράσθητι αὐτῆς καὶ τηρήσει σε

Here the grammar of the word translated as love clearly derives from the root *eros* and refers to a passionate love. Even so, it has to be remembered that in the age of classical Greece the terms *eros*, *philia* and *agape* were far more fluid and overlapping than was the case with the esoteric distinctions they were later treated as representing (see Wallis 1977:105). However, the context of the Hebrew text probably supports interpreting the conceptual metaphor as that involving the personification of romantic love. However, it is also possible that since Lady “wisdom” as such (without explicit reference to the love of her) is already introduced in Proverbs 1 (and seeing that 1-9 is most probably from the same author) the metaphors of affiliation to her might be mostly from the domain of family or courting friendship.

Following the Proverbs 4 example, but before we get to Proverbs 8, there is also what is clearly an implicit reference to the love of wisdom in 7:4

Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,”
 And call understanding your nearest kin

Clearly here we are dealing with love, albeit not of the kind encountered in 4:6. In this case the text refers to the love of a brother for a sister; or the love of one Israelite for another (the latter only if it is justified to understand “sister” in the broad communal sense of the term). In this case, however, there is no explicit use of the word “love” – it is implied. As a result and with reference to this text there is no need to look at what word the Greek of the LXX used to denote the kind of love involved as being. However, the depth and richness in conceptuality all changes when we come to Proverbs 8 with its explicit reference to the love of wisdom (and her reciprocation). In 8:17 we read:

אָהַב (אָהַבִּי) אָהַבֵּיהָ אֶנִּי I love them that love me,
 וְיִמְצְאוּהוּ אֵלַי וְיִמְצְאוּהוּ אֵלַי and those that seek me shall find me.

Here the love is in fact reciprocal since, as will be discussed below, Wisdom is here envisaged not merely as abstract personification but in a semi-divine way. Moreover, whereas the Hebrew has the usual ambiguous *'hb*, it is not clear what kind of love is envisaged here, if we adopt the later Greek tripartite distinction. Seeking and finding the object of love can denote a variety of relational contexts. Perhaps this is why the Greek translators of the LXX retained a sense giving an impression of the complexity of perceived meaning. This is clearly evident when it is discovered that two different Greek terms were employed to distinguish the nature of reciprocity.

Εγω τους εμε φιλοντας αγαπω
Οιδε εμε ζητουντες ευρησουσι

According to this early and perhaps the first philosophically influenced witness to the history of the interpretation of Proverbs 8:17, the translator uses *philia* for the human (subject) love of wisdom (object), similar to the concept of philosophy itself in its etymological sense. However, what is interesting is that the love of wisdom (subject) for humans (object) is thought to involve *agape*, not *philia*, even though the Hebrew has *'hb* for both verbs.

In the second instance, in 8:21, we again encounter the case that the Hebrew has *'hb* for the subject's love of wisdom.

לְהִנְחִיל אֶהְבֵּי יְשׁ That I may cause those that love me to inherit sul
וְאֶצְרְתֵיהֶם אֲמִלָּא and that I may fill their treasures.

Here the context seems to presuppose the kind of love of a father for his son. The reference to inheritance seems to presuppose as much. In the Greek of the LXX, however, this time we find that the love of wisdom involves not *philia* but *agape*:

Ινα μερισω τοις εμε αγαπωσιν υπαρξιν
Και τους_θησαυρους αυτων_εμπλησω αγαθων

The choice of *agape* for the love the human (subject) has for wisdom (object) is interesting and may or may not be significant. It is unclear in what sense this was understood and whether in the translation the metaphor has shifted from a social to a religious context, perhaps motivated by theological agendas. Perhaps, it is possible that, as Cook (1997:216-217) implies, the LXX translator was much more conservative than the author of MT and adapted a translation to avoid any affectionate “love” for wisdom (*Sophia*) which may implied a goddess at the time when the translation was made.

In my view it is impossible to say for sure what was meant since as noted above the Greek terms for love (*philia* and *agape*) were not always that clearly distinguished (or always mutually exclusive) before a later date in the diachrony of the language. The same goes for the final passage in Proverbs 8 where there is an implicit allusion to the love of wisdom via an explicit reference to the opposite state of affairs, i.e. the hatred thereof:

וְחָטְאֵי חַמְסֵי נַפְשׁוֹ But he that misses me wrongs his own soul

כָּל-מִשְׂנְאֵי אֶהְבֵּנִי מוֹת all they that hate me love death.’

Again the Greek text translates not with *philia* but *agape*.

οιδειξουμε αμαρτανοντες ασεβουσιν τας εαυτωνψυχας
και μισουντες με αγαπωσιν ανατον

With this indirect allusion to the love of wisdom, the contextual metaphor might or might not account for the fact that *philia* is not used. If we presuppose the later distinction between types of love it is hard to see why anyone would love death in the *agapaic* sense. Perhaps that is the point for the Greek translator in order to show the madness behind a lack of desire for wisdom.

Yet another and final reference to the love of wisdom in the book is found in Proverbs 29:3. This comes from a section of the book with a different redaction history than Proverbs 1-9 in which the already noted examples of the love of wisdom occurred. The Hebrew reads:

אִישׁ-אֶהֱבֵב חֶכְמָה? שִׂמְחָה Whoever loves wisdom makes glad his father;
אָבִיו but he that keep company with harlots wastes his
וְרַעְיָה זֹנוֹת? אֶבְדֵּד-הוֹן substance.

Clearly the motif or concept of the love of wisdom is quite explicit here, although the second part of the parallelism is not quite what one expects, being a warning against prostitutes for the sake of one’s inheritance. Interestingly, the LXX here has *philia* for the type of love the Greek translator saw as being involved.

ἀνδρὸς φιλοῦντος σοφία νεύφραίν εται πατήρ αὐτοῦ
ὃς δὲ ποιμαίνει πόρνas ἀπολεῖ πλοῦτον

Again whether or not and to what extent this was assumed to be significantly different from *agapaic* love is not clear. What is readily apparent, however is that in all of the above texts from the Book of Proverbs wisdom is something to be loved, although the nature of this love is complex given the ambiguity and polysemy of the Hebrew word *’hb* used, the context of the verses in which they occur, their background and early Greek reception history. As with the discussion of the Greek context of the love of wisdom, in the Hebrew Bible, the possibilities in denotation and connotation are vast.

So much for the “love” in the concept of the love of wisdom in Proverbs (8). As was the case with the Greek context discussed earlier, however, when it comes to the

supposed nature of the phenomenon of wisdom itself in the context of the love thereof, we are in a more complex domain of discourse. In the Hebrew Bible, *chokmah* as a technical secular or religious term could refer to any skill, including craftsmanship, *Torah* obedience, sorcery and magic, divination (especially oneiromancy), insight into the workings of the cosmos, counselling and of course knowledge and understanding of human existence. Interesting though is how in all of the above texts the Hebrew *chokmah* is translated by the LXX as *sophia* and not *phronesis* (see Pr 8:11-12). What is more, in Proverbs 8 especially Wisdom is depicted in ways bordering on the mythological (see already Albright 1920:258).

Wisdom as some sort of a person figures prominently Proverbs 1-9 (and in extra-canonical literature such as the Books of Sirach, Baruch, and Wisdom). Polysemy and a possible link to Greek philosophy (Platonic Ideas) in the later forms of the text have been suggested (see e.g., Fox 1997:116-133). As for the pre-history of the concept of Lady Wisdom, modern interpreters have often treated her as always merely a literary personification, even though it can be argued that what later became a figure of speech started its career as an ancient Israelite goddess who “loved” and was “loved”.

To be sure, not much evidence exists for the existence of a goddess by the name of Wisdom in the ancient Near East in general. Scholars have often referred to the Egyptian goddess, Ma’at, as an equivalent of, if not model for, Hebrew Wisdom. However, the evidence produced by authors like Kayatz (1966) and Winter (1983:511-514) is not convincing (Fox 1995). There is evidence, though, for the Hellenistic Egyptian goddess -Isis to be the post-canonical Book of Wisdom’s model for Sophia and her gnostic offspring (Kloppenborg 1982). According to Lang (1999:900), the only possible evidence is in the Aramaic Ahiqar-story, found on papyrus leaves on the Nile island of Elephantine. From two fifth-century B.C.E. papyrus leaves, the following fragmentary passage can be reconstructed tentatively:

From heaven the peoples are favoured; [Wisdom (hknh) is of) the gods.
Indeed, she is precious to the gods; her kingdom is eternal. She has been
established by Shamayn (?); yes, the Holy Lord has exalted her (Ahiqar
94-95 =Lindenberger 1983:68; OTP 2, 499).

The exaltation of a deity and promotion to a higher rank is also quite characteristic of Mesopotamian mythology. Thus the goddess Inanna boasts in a hymn that she received lordship over heaven, earth, ocean, and war, for the god Enlil has “exalted”

her (ANET 578-579). Elsewhere in the ancient East scribes also had their female patron deity. The Sumerians called her Nisaba, “Mistress of Science” (Sjoberg 1976:174-175), while the Egyptians referred to Seshat as “foremost in the library” or “she who directs the house of books” (RARG 699). Nisaba had a local cult, unlike Seshat.

In the Book of Proverbs the situation is more transparent as the texts provide a fairly complete picture of what has been called “Lady Wisdom”:

She is Yahweh’s daughter and witnessed her father as he created the universe (Prov 8:22-30); she guides kings and their staff of state officials in their rule and administration (8:14-16); she teaches (no doubt, through human teachers) young men wisdom, a wisdom no doubt to be identified with the scribal art (1:20-33; 8:1-11.32-36; 9:1-6.11-12); she serves as the ‘personal deity’ of the student, for whom she acts as lover (4:6; 7:4), In the context of Proverbs the figure of wisdom can alternate between parent (Proverbs 8:32; parent), sibling and friend of the wise (Prov 7:4; sister/friend) (Lang 1999:903)

According to Lang (1999:901) Proverbs 8 is indeed not only the most relevant chapter for the topic of this paper but also one of the most developed mythological texts of the Bible, reminiscent of the kind of discourse characteristic of the Homeric Hymns (Lang 1999:903). Unfortunately, this text, in some of its details, is not as clear as we would like. Problematic remains the precise meaning of Wisdom’s speaking at the city gate (is this an elder, a prophetic voice, a stranger, a leader et al.?) and at the crossroads (Pr 8:2-3). Wisdom seems to be connected with liminal spaces. In Greece, the goddess Hekate presided over the entrances and crossroads where she had shrines; the Romans called her Trivia (see Johnston 1991:28): so perhaps Wisdom may be Hekate’s Hebrew equivalent.

Lang (1999:902) opines that in Proverbs 8:22-31, Lady Wisdom describes origins: she was begotten by Yahweh (v. 22), not “created” as some translations have it. The two verbs used to describe her origin are *qanani*, “he has begotten me” (Pr 8:22), and *nisakkoti* (vocalized as such), “he fashioned me (in the womb)” (8:23). In the absence of a reference to a mother, one might imagine Wisdom born from the head (or mouth, cf. Sir 24:3) of her divine father just as Athena, in Greek mythology, sprang from the head of -Zeus. Whether or not that is the case, suffice it to note that the text goes on to

say that Wisdom witnessed her father's creative activity (vv. 27-30). Seeing how the world was created, Wisdom, as an infant (v. 30; Hebr 'amdn; see Lang 1986:65-66), learned what constitutes the universe. One aspect of the wisdom she acquires is no doubt the 'nature wisdom', i.e., knowledge about sky, earth, and sea, complete with beasts, birds, reptiles, fish (cf. king Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kgs 4:32-33; see also Wis 7:17-20) (Lang 1999:908)

Thus, Lady Wisdom is uniquely qualified and authorized to teach. In the beginning she established her relationship with humans (v 31). However, no precise idea is given about how the contact with the humans was initiated. Some have imagined it to be along the lines of the heavenly ascension of a human person (like Parmenides of Elea) whom the goddess (in Parmenides' myth, the Greek goddess of wisdom, Dike; see Diels & Kranz 1992:227-246) instructs in cosmic knowledge. The text as it stands now, however, refers only to the playful frolicking of wisdom who takes delight in "the sons of men" (v. 31).

SYNTHESIS

It is now time to offer a synthesis of the findings by way of a comparison between the two contexts' use of the concept of the love of wisdom. When it comes to the meaning of the first part of the compound (i.e. love) in the two contexts, we have seen that the Greek philosophical contexts understood the loving of wisdom much like a special friendship with wisdom that is considered durable and not exploitive. The word used is *philia* given the Greek compound term *philosophy*. In the Hebrew Bible context, the semantic range of 'hb and the fact that all three Greek equivalents (*eros*, *philia* and *agape*) are used show us that we are dealing with perhaps much more variety and pluralism in the loving of wisdom. This is also shown by the conceptual metaphors employed in the different contexts in Proverbs, i.e. loving a lover, sister, father and friend.

When it comes to the nature of the wisdom that is loved in the two contexts, we know that in early Greek philosophy we are dealing with speculation and contemplation regarding the nature of reality. In this sense theoretical wisdom appears central. This is especially true of the Pre-Socratics, although with Plato, Socrates and Aristotle one observes an increased concern with ethics, values and the good life also being part of wisdom. In the case of the Hebrew Bible's texts under consideration it

would seem that there is much overlap with the Greek philosophical context. We do find theoretical wisdom in the sense of speculation about first principles and the nature of things, although this is evident more on the level of presuppositions than in what is made explicit. Thus particularly in Proverbs 8 we find the knowledge of causes being assumed within the mythological background, rather than being made rationally overt within the rhetoric. In general however, the wisdom that is in view in Proverbs 1-9 (4, 7) and 29 is almost always practical, i.e., how to relate to and act in accordance with the way the world is. Metaphysics and ethics are therefore not separated as in Aristotle.

The two contexts therefore appear to offer ways of loving wisdom that are both similar and distinct. On the whole, it would appear that in both contexts the love of wisdom included, amongst other things, a friendship or similar metaphorical relationship with wisdom in the sense of metaphysically derived ethics. The difference however is that, as we have shown, the Greek philosophical context is narrower in its understanding of love and more abstract in its understanding of wisdom and more rhetorically based on rational argument. The Hebrew context, also as argued, is more plural in its conception of both love and wisdom. This is simply what is evident here and in no way meant to provide premises for a conclusion about a Greek vs. Hebrew mind. There are many historical, literary, sociological, theological and philosophical variables that can account for the differences in form and content.

Ultimately, for the purposes of providing a synthesis of the analysis – and in contrast to the etymological approach – it has also been implied that it might be more prudent to view the concept of the love of wisdom in ancient Greek philosophy and in the Hebrew Book of Proverbs from a *phenomenological* perspective so as to discern its meaning by means of ascertaining the experience that the Greek and Hebrew sages were describing when they used the concept. One cannot assume that a concept such as the love of wisdom had the same meaning when used by all ancient Greeks and Hebrews. Also, one should not assume that a text does not represent “philosophy” or loving wisdom if it did not use the terms. It is important to note that for both the ancient Greek philosophers and Israelite sages, philosophy or the love of wisdom as knowledge of Reality or Being was believed to affect how a person lived; in other words, it had ethical implications.

CONCLUSION

In this article it was shown that both early Hebrew wisdom literature and early Greek philosophy were familiar with the concept of the love of wisdom. If then philosophy just was a love of wisdom and vice versa – however the individual words of the concept is defined – it follows that the Hebrew Bible’s wisdom literature can indeed be counted as containing (folk-)philosophical motifs. It represents a very rich and colourful understanding of what the love of wisdom is supposed to involve in that a variety of relationships were modelled on mythological interaction with personified wisdom. The genre might not be “philosophy” proper, but the wisdom of Proverbs did presuppose many philosophical ideals. In addition, the retaining of mythological motifs, the presupposing of speculation about the nature of the cosmos and the focus on the ethics supposed to follow from the metaphysics shows us a philosophical spirit with its own unique nature. In this sense the Hebrew and Greek ideas about what the love of wisdom involved are not mutually exclusive.

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