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| Title            | ‘Wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation.’ (Zimmerli) Evaluate the importance of God as creator in the books of Proverbs and Job. |
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## Abstract

This essay argues that God's role as wise creator who establishes and maintains the world in all its unity and diversity is of paramount importance to the theology of Proverbs and Job. The argument begins with a discussion of divine creation in general, where creation is defined and a general overview of what seems to be going on in Genesis 1-2 is summarised. The argument then proceeds to show from Proverbs 8 that wisdom is an eternal quality of God who created world to function according to principles of his divine wisdom. These facts then relate to the logic of God's defence of his divine wisdom and justice in the book of Job, which silences the human challenge and justifies Job's keeping faith with God even in the midst of his own chaotic world. Concluding remarks will then be made concerning the importance of God as wise creator in both Proverbs and Job.

God is represented in both Proverbs and the book of Job as the wise creator God who establishes and maintains the unity and diversity of life through his Word and Spirit in such a way that the whole creation may enjoy divine presence and blessing by living wisely in the fear of the LORD. Proverbs implies that wisdom is an eternal quality of God which was employed by him in the creation of the world which therefore functions in unity and diversity according to wisdom's principles. This helps us to understand creation itself as an expression of divine wisdom. The Job dialogue suggests that this same wisdom is expressed in the creation order which is both established and maintained by God providentially. This justifies Job's faith in God's wisdom and justice in the midst of his own chaotic world as he is assured that he may live in the hope of deliverance. Therefore, understanding God as wise creator who establishes and maintains the world in all its unity and diversity is of paramount importance to the theology of both Proverbs and Job.

In ancient Near Eastern creation traditions, understanding the origin of the world was to know the gods' purposes in the world.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, 'creation' may be defined as that process by which the divine will is superimposed over chaotic disorder in order to bring about an organised human society through the implementation of divine purposes.<sup>2</sup> This concept also shaped the faith of the people of Israel as God's chosen people through whom the blessing and presence of God might be restored to the fallen world through God's promises to Abraham their father (Gen 12:1-3). In Genesis 1:1 and 2:4, Yahweh, the LORD, the God of Moses (Exod 3:13-15), is the principal subject of the creation narratives. Creation proceeds in two groups of three days through which order and blessing is brought out of chaos by God's Word and Spirit (Gen 1:2-3): light/darkness (1:3-5), waters-above/waters-below (the firmament) (1:6-8), sea/land (1:9-10), vegetation (1:11-13), sun/moon/stars (1:14-

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<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, 'Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions', in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins (Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford and Collins, 'Introduction', 9-12.

19), water-creatures/air-creatures (1:20-23), land-creatures/humanity (male/female) (1:24-31) and Sabbath (2:1-3), all exhibiting a union of disparities cooperating to maintain functionality and regularity within diversity in the world.<sup>3</sup> In addition, image-bearing humanity is appointed by Yahweh to complete his creation work for life-giving blessing alongside him as they dwell in his presence (Gen 1:26-28; 2:5-9, 15; 3:8a). Creation results in blessing for living creatures expressed in both fruitfulness and multiplication as divine rule thereover is expressed in divine commandments (Gen 1:22, 28; 2:16-17). Human obedience implies the retainment of the blessing of God's presence and potential growth in knowledge later in God's timing (Gen 2:8-9, 25). Disobedience, however, results in pain, death and expulsion from Eden and the presence of God (Gen 3:8b-13, 16-19, 22-24).

The ancient Israelite wisdom traditions drew from these creation traditions in thinking about living wisely in the fallen world. The term 'instruction' (*torah*) in Proverbs 1:8 denotes a father's appeal to his son to heed wisdom's call to live prudently with knowledge and understanding in a world of folly and indulgent spontaneity. This term is identical to the term for 'law,' which plausibly denotes an association with the Mosaic tradition beginning in Genesis which is intimately bound up with themes of creation, life, death and redemption (Deut 30:11-20).<sup>4</sup> The father-son instruction genre is also common to Egyptian wisdom literature, and some scholars have identified textual and thematic connections on that basis.<sup>5</sup> However, given the role of the Israelite wisdom tradition in responding to the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people Israel in particular, we ought to expect that the wisdom literature is more strongly intertextually linked with Mosaic themes rather

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, 'Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom', in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernshaw W. Anderson (Fortress Press, 1984), 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 435-436; D. A. Garrett, *New American Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Vol. 14) (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 69.

<sup>5</sup> Katherine J. Dell, 'Proverbs 1-9: Issues of Social and Theological Context', *Interpretation* 63/3 (2009): 229-230, 236-240; cf. John A. Wilson, 'Egyptian Instructions', in *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 412-435

than Egyptian ones.<sup>6</sup> Creation is one such theme. For example, Proverbs 14:31; 17:5; 22:2 and 29:13 each cite Yahweh's role as creator and protector of the essential human dignity of the poor, who although socially disadvantaged, nevertheless also share in the image of God by virtue of divine creation.<sup>7</sup> As creator and sustainer of the world, God therefore takes an active role in the reality of wealth and poverty, maintaining economic justice and protecting the integrity of the poor by identifying himself with them as their Maker.<sup>8</sup> These facts shape how righteous people who fear Yahweh should act toward the poor. Hence, wise and righteous living is grounded in divine creation.

Proverbs 8 is therefore most significant in how it unites both wisdom and divine creative activity into one.<sup>9</sup> It is constructed within the series of father-to-son speeches imploring the reader to seek Lady Wisdom and reject Dame Folly (Prov 2:16-19; 5:1-11, 15-23; 6:23-35; 7:14-20).<sup>10</sup> According to Proverbs 8:22, wisdom was 'created' (NRSV), 'brought forth' (NIV) or 'possessed' (NASB, ESV, KJV) by Yahweh at the beginning of his creative works. Some scholars have taken this as an indication that wisdom itself was created by God as the first of his works through which God then created the world.<sup>11</sup> However, this does not seem to be a necessary implication of the relevant term (*qanah*), which denotes more so the acquisition of something that already exists for purposes of present usage.<sup>12</sup> For example, this term is applied in relation to the concept of God's victorious redemption of his people (Exod 15:16), commercial land-exchange (Gen 47:20, 22) and the reception of

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<sup>6</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, 'Wisdom, the "Amen" of Torah', in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52/1 (2009): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Hermisson, 'Observations', 121.

<sup>8</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 101-109.

<sup>9</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 79; Garrett, *New American Commentary*, 105-113.

<sup>10</sup> Gala A. Yee, 'The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22-31', in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins (Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> Dell, 'Proverbs 1-9', 239.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, Driver & Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 888-889.

wisdom itself by righteous human beings (Prov 1:5). In no case does the term seem to denote the bringing-into-existence of something *ex nihilo*.<sup>13</sup>

However, if wisdom was not created in that sense, then wisdom must be eternal. But God alone is eternal. Therefore, wisdom ought to be thought of as an uncreated and essential property of God himself which is personified in Proverbs as a beautiful godly woman who crafts men and women to be of similar noble character to herself (Prov 31:10-31).

Furthermore, understanding the term *qanah* as ‘possession’ rather than ‘acquisition’ seems preferable on the argument that acquisition seems to suggest that God’s wisdom was acquired by himself through the act of creating, giving the act of creation special ontological priority over wisdom. However, given divine omniscience, this seems false. God would not acquire new properties and improve in knowledge and understanding at creation. Rather, creation itself would be an expression of the eternal and everlasting divine nature which is therefore endowed inter alia with wisdom, beauty, goodness, justice and power (Ps 19; Rom 1:20). Wisdom’s role in creation therefore implies that wisdom is a first principle of creation which transforms a lifeless chaos into a unity of life and order.<sup>14</sup> Wisdom now finds the world to be her dwelling place that God has crafted to communicate wisdom through his holy and life-giving *torah* (Gen 2:9; Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11).

If the world has been created wisely in this way, however, how should one then make sense of chaos on the earth? The book of Job grapples with the reality of folly and injustice in a world which has been created by a wise and just God. This is in keeping with both the wisdom-tradition of Israel and with the reflections of a variety of ancient Near Eastern textual precedents for Job which also exhibit such themes; for example, the *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* or

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<sup>13</sup> Ancient Near Eastern ontology is an important cultural issue in the Old Testament which shapes how we understand ‘creating’, ‘making’ or ‘existing’ scripturally. We have no room to discuss this here. One is simply expressing that it does not seem right to conceive of wisdom as having been brought into existence, as if to say that there was a time when wisdom did not exist, and was brought into being a finite time ago.

<sup>14</sup> Garrett, *New American Commentary*, 108.

Babylonian Job.<sup>15</sup> The book of Job has no attributed author but Palaeo-Hebrew manuscript fragments of Job 13:18-20, 23-27 and 14:3 discovered in Qumran 4Q101 suggest that the text may bear some close relation in time to the Mosaic tradition in Israel.<sup>16</sup> This is significant as it reinforces the intertextuality of Job with the creation narratives and their themes in Genesis. This can be carefully discerned. Following his sufferings from God's hand at the instigation of 'the Satan' in Job 1-2, the Job 3 dialogical prologue represents Job lamenting his own birth through curses. Job's attack against the divine creation of himself questions God's purposes and wisdom, thus casting into doubt the unity of the created order which constantly depends on God's wise rule.<sup>17</sup> Chaos creatures are invoked (Job 3:8) and death is desired (Job 3:11) as human 'rest' (*nuah*) replaces divine 'rest' (*shabbat*) expressing a righteous man's anguish in his pain. Furthermore, sixteen jussives and prohibitions with seven curses counteract fifteen jussives and prohibitions with the seven days of creation in the Israelite priestly and liturgical tradition.<sup>18</sup> Notably, Job never curses God himself, but he does strongly bring into question the wisdom and justice of God in allowing the dignified, royal and righteous man to suffer (Job 19:2-12; 29:2-25; 31:35-37).<sup>19</sup> Notably, Job's righteousness, wisdom and dignity is a true assumption in the narrative (Job 1:8; 2:3); Job's friends' theodicean disputations fail primarily due to the fact that they do not uphold the truth of Job's wisdom and righteousness which has already been affirmed by Yahweh in the prologue, on which premise their theology is marred and for which they are later reproved by God (Job 42:7-9).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dell, *Job*, 51-59. Suggested intertextual thematic parallels include *Ludlul* 1:54 and 195 to Job 7:4, 13-14 and 3:24, *Lud*. 2:36-38 to Job 28:23 and *Lud*. 2:102 to Job 7:4. Dell also suggests the following broadly parallel ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts: *The Babylonian Theodicy* (Babylon), *Satirical Letter of the Scribe Hori* (Egypt), *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* (Egypt) and *Man and His God* (Sumer).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (Routledge, 1996), 15-16; Katherine J. Dell, *Job: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 15.

<sup>17</sup> Yee, 'Theology of Creation', 95.

<sup>18</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 133-135; Brown, Driver & Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 628-629.

<sup>19</sup> James L. Crenshaw, 'When Form and Content Clash: The Theology of Job 38:1-40:5', in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins (Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 71.

<sup>20</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 137-161.

Yahweh's terrifying appearance and defence of himself therefore necessarily makes reference to illustrations of the wisdom, justice and power of God which is evident in divine creation.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the divine defence which begins in Job 38 is foreshadowed by Job himself in the dialogical interlude of Job 28. Job 28 is a poem of four strophes which mixes mining metaphors and motifs about both utilitarian and precious metals and stones hidden in the depths of the earth which must be discovered by hard work and refinement, implying the near-inaccessibility and preciousness of wisdom to which only Yahweh knows the way (Job 28:23).<sup>22</sup> The poem concludes that 'the fear of Yahweh' is wisdom and that wisdom is something to which created image-bearing humanity (*adam*) is called to participate in by the wise creator God who made the roots of the mountains and their metals (Job 28:28).<sup>23</sup> This is also in keeping with other wisdom texts in the Old Testament which teach about how humanity seeks and strives after wisdom like treasure in the earth but finds it ultimately only in the reverent fear of Yahweh (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). The wise creatorship of God then serves as the justification for Job's faith in God as the omniscient Maker who establishes and sustains all things. This is exemplified in Job 38:4-7 where divine wisdom, power, goodness, justice, beauty and majesty is expressed in God's defence and in challenge to Job as he daily rules over the created order.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, God's defence exhibits multiple significant intertextual links with the Genesis creation narratives.<sup>25</sup> Yahweh commands the sea and sets its limits by the continents (Job 38:8, 10-11; Gen 1:2, 9-10), he knows the dwelling places of light and darkness (Job 38:19; Gen 1:18), he sets the stars in their constellations and establishes their rule in the sphere of time (Job 38:31-33; Gen 1:16), he rules over the clouds and their rainfall (Job 38:9,

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<sup>21</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 168.

<sup>22</sup> R. L. Alden, *New American Commentary: Job* (Vol. 11) (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 271-273.

<sup>23</sup> Alden, *New American Commentary*, 278.

<sup>24</sup> Bullock, 'Wisdom', 8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 169-174.

34-38; Gen 1:6-8), and he rules over and satisfies the mighty lion and the soaring raven which are paradigmatic of the land-creatures and air-creatures respectively (Job 38:39-41; Gen 1:20-21, 24-25). Each description of the unity of the 'very good' created order bears testimony to God's wisdom and justice as he sustains the natural world (Gen 1:31). In addition, Harrington's exegesis of the Aramaic targum fragment 11QtgJOBxxx1-10 from Qumran, which contains Job 38:3 and 38:7, interestingly implies that the personification of the stars in this section blends both earthly and heavenly realities as the divine council of the angels over whom Yahweh rules as the supreme sovereign indicates that divine rule continues on the earth just as it continues in the heavens (Job 1:6; 2:1).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Yahweh's ability to subdue the Behemoth and Leviathan chaos creatures which Job had previously invoked asserts God's will to implement the divine reign of heaven's wisdom and justice on the earth in God's timing (Job 40:15-41).<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Job can trust God. The divine argument possesses a particular logical quality as a virtual liturgy of theology, cosmogony, cosmology, meteorology and zoology reveals Yahweh's eternal divine wisdom and power to save those who trust in him.<sup>28</sup> This is also illustrated practically in three steps. Firstly, Job responds in shocked silence to the majesty, wisdom and power of God in creation (Job 40:3-5). Secondly, Job responds in repentance to the ability of God to subdue chaos in time (40:6-41:34; 42:1-6). Finally, God restores Job's fortunes with a double-blessing (Job 42:10-17).<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, we have seen that God is represented in both Proverbs and the book of Job as the wise creator God who establishes and maintains the unity and diversity of life through his Word and Spirit. Genesis 1-2 illustrates God's purposes in creation in bringing

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<sup>26</sup> Harrington, *Wisdom Texts*, 20-22.

<sup>27</sup> Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 176-180.

<sup>28</sup> Crenshaw, 'Form and Content', 74.

<sup>29</sup> Alden, *New American Commentary*, 412-414.

order out of chaos for life-giving blessing in his presence expressed in terms of fruitfulness and multiplication as divine rule thereover is expressed in divine commandments. Proverbs 8 implies that wisdom is an eternal quality of God which therefore shapes our understanding of the world as that which has been wisely and purposefully created by a wise God to reflect his wisdom, along with a host of other divine qualities. Finally, the dialogue of Job brings divine wisdom and justice into question by virtue of the chaos and disorder on the earth which provides the occasion for the exhibition of Yahweh's wisdom and justice with reference to his ongoing rule over the whole creation and the heavens. Understanding God as wise creator is therefore of paramount importance to the theology of both Proverbs and Job.

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