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The Path Metaphor and the Construction of a Schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre in Proverbs 10:1-22:16 --Manuscript Draft--

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The Path Metaphor and the Construction of a *Schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* in**Proverbs 10:1-22:16**

Abstract: Klaus Koch influentially argued that in Proverbs, the world is understood as a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* – a sphere of activity effecting one’s fate. Act and consequence are intrinsically and organically bound together. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on these views. Some of Proverbs’ imagery, however, does seem to suggest such an act-consequence connection. The ‘path’, for example, is at once moral and salvific, or immoral and destructive. I suggest that through imagery of the path, the sage constructs a metaphorical *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*. It is not intended as an explanation of causality, but as a motivational model to affect the student’s behaviour.

Key words: act-consequence connection – path – *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* – pedagogy – imagery – Proverbs 10:1-22:16

Introduction***The schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre***

In 1955, Klaus Koch famously asked ‘*Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?*’ – ‘Is there a doctrine of retribution in the Old Testament?’¹ Arguing particularly from the book of Proverbs, he answered with an emphatic negative: ‘retribution’ is a superimposed Western

¹ K. Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament”, *ZTK* 52 (1955), pp. 1-42; published in English as K. Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament” in J. Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (London, 1972), pp. 57-87.

1 theological category. In Hebrew thought, he suggested, no judicial intervention is needed (or
2 indeed possible) between deed and outcome. The two are not separable, but are internally and
3 necessarily bound together as an ‘act-consequence connection’ (*Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*).
4 The latter grows organically from the former, like a plant from a seed. Accordingly, every
5 deed is *schicksalwirkende* – ‘fate-effecting’. It has its consequence built into it, such that it is
6 almost nonsensical to separate the two. A person’s whole life, their whole ‘sphere of activity’,
7 is characterised by this intrinsic causality. It is, in short, a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*.
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11 Drawing on Scandinavian scholars like J. Pedersen and K. Fahlgren,² Koch argued
12 that such holistic thinking characterised the Hebrew mindset. Israelites had a ‘synthetic view
13 of life’,³ seeing the world as a totality, devoid of the compartmentalizing divisions that
14 characterize the modern Western outlook, such as the division between act and consequence.
15 This, it was argued, is evidenced in the Hebrew language. Many Hebrew roots can be used to
16 describe both an ‘act’ (in our mode of thought), and its ‘consequence’.⁴ So נָסָא can sometimes
17 mean ‘wrongdoing’ (*Missetat*) and sometimes ‘guilt’ or ‘punishment’ (*Schuld/Strafe*).⁵ רָע can
18 mean ‘moral evil’ (*Bosheit*) and ‘misfortune’ (*Unglück*).⁶ The same word describes both,
19 therefore “Ursache und Wirkung sind... für den Israelite ein und dasselbe”.⁷
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45 ² J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, (Copenhagen, 1926). K. Hj. Fahlgren, “Die Gegensätze von Sedaqa im
46 Alten Testament”, in K. Koch (ed.), *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*
47 (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 87-129.
48
49

50 ³ Fahlgren, ‘*synthetische Lebensauffassung*’ pp. 126-129.
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52 ⁴ Fahlgren. Koch, 1972, pp. 75-78, explicitly draws on Fahlgren.
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54 ⁵ Fahlgren, p. 112.
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56 ⁶ Fahlgren, p. 122.
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58 ⁷ Fahlgren, p. 90.
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Koch's theory has been very influential,⁸ but few scholars accept it wholesale, and a number of criticisms may be raised. First, Koch's analysis can only account for a small amount of the biblical data. The *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* is most evident in Proverbs, but even there, some verses do not fit with Koch's analysis. These he conveniently ignores.⁹ In particular, Yahweh and society seem to play a much more active role in enforcing consequences than Koch would allow.¹⁰ Second, the anthropological suppositions behind the theory are dubious. The idea of 'synthetic view of life' was based on notions of the 'primitive' mind, which was always orientated towards grasping the totality.¹¹ Such psychological speculations have largely fallen out of scholarship.

Third, Koch's linguistic arguments for the unity of act and consequence are unsound. Hebrew may have one word (e.g. רָע) where others have two (e.g. 'evil' and 'misfortune'), but this does not mean that the Hebrew speaker understood no distinctions between different meanings. Linguistic structure cannot be directly mapped onto thought structure.¹² In English, we say only 'to know' where French has 'savoir' and 'connaître', German 'wissen' and

⁸ The most positive and sensitive recent appraisal of Koch's views probably comes from J. Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 2014), esp. pp. 211-226.

⁹ Koch makes no mention of the Yahweh cluster in Prov 16:1-9, for example. On the proverbs he omits in chs. 10-13, see P. Hatton, *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel* (SOTS Monograph Series; Hampshire, 2008), pp. 83-116.

¹⁰ The role of Yahweh has been examined by many scholars. See especially L. Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 29; Stockholm, 1990). On the role of society, see B. Janowski, "Die Tat Kehrt Zum Täter Zurück: Offene Fragen im Umkreis des 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang'", *ZTK* 91 (1994), pp. 247-271.

¹¹ E.g. A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (2nd edn.; Cardiff, 1964). For Johnson, totality thinking "is the 'Open Sesame' which unlocks the secrets of the Hebrew language and reveals the riches of the Israelite mind" p. 2.

¹² J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 33-45.

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‘kennen’. Is it therefore impossible for us to understand the distinction between ‘knowing’ a person and ‘knowing’ facts? If I know the native English speaker, I know this is not the case. The linguistic phenomenon cannot in itself tell us about any metaphysical connection.

That said, however, the data Koch described are real enough, and deserve consideration. There are many sayings in Proverbs which do present the connection between act and consequence in apparently automatic terms. Many acts do seem ‘fate-effecting’. This is often the case, for example, in proverbs describing ‘the path’. This metaphor at once depicts the behaviour of an individual, and the consequences that come to him. The moral rectitude of traveller’s course is intrinsically bound together with favourability of his experiences along the way. I suggest that, instead of presupposing a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*, these proverbs actively create one. They construct a metaphorical world where deeds and consequences correspond. Their purpose is not primarily for an explanation of ontology, but for motivation and rhetoric.

Viewing the *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* in this way avoids the three problems highlighted above. (1) It is not the only conceivable framework for the sages, but one model among many, constructed for rhetorical purpose. (2) It is not a presupposition of the ‘primitive mind’, but a skilful creation. (3) It does not seek a worldview in language structure and lexical stocks, but considers how words are deployed in context. As we explore the nuances of the metaphor, its fate-effecting nature will become evident.

The ‘Path’ Metaphor

The metaphor of a ‘path’ to depict life is frequently encountered across the Hebrew Bible; the Psalms, prophets, and Deuteronomy all making extensive use of the imagery.¹³ Proverbs too

¹³ For the most extensive discussion of the metaphor in the HB, see M. P. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament: Eine Semantische Untersuchung der alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Weg-Lexeme mit besonderer*

employs it often, both in the instructions (chs. 1-9), and the sayings collections (chs. 10-29). My specific focus will be on the first sayings collection (10:1-22:16), where it seems to make a distinctive contribution.¹⁴

Proverbs lacks covenantal and salvation-historical themes in general, and these are equally absent from its path imagery. Unlike elsewhere, no link is made with walking with or before God in the Exodus.¹⁵ The path is not explicitly linked with God's *Torah*,¹⁶ and straying does not obviously imply following idols. Indeed, God's explicit role is minimal. Though he is more prevalent in chs. 1-9, the sayings only allude to him three times in connection with the path (10:29; 16:9; 20:24). Scholarly attention has been focussed on the image of the 'two paths' in Proverbs, traversed by diametrically opposed character types.¹⁷ The path of the righteous stands apart from the path of the wicked, the gap between them unbreachable. While this impression is pervasive, there are variations in the imagery,¹⁸ and other themes are sometimes central. In particular, I would like to comment on how Proverbs creates a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* through its path imagery.

Berücksichtigung ihrer metaphorischen Verwendung (BZAW 268; Berlin, 1999). For a historical survey of roads in ancient Israel, see D. A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (The Asor Library of Biblical and Near Eastern Archaeology; Baltimore, 1991).

¹⁴ For discussions of the path metaphor in chs. 1-9, see N. C. Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9", *Interpretation* 26.2 (1972), pp. 131-157; S. Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 73-79; 148-154.

¹⁵ A. Gros, *Je Suis La Route* (Thèmes Bibliques; Paris, 1961); O. Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2.28; Tübingen, 2007).

¹⁶ W. P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, 2002), pp. 31-54. However, Weeks (pp. 148-154) has suggested that these implications would have been evident for the post-exilic Jewish readers of Proverbs 1-9.

¹⁷ Habel; D. P. Bricker, "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in Proverbs", *JETS* 38.4 (1995) pp. 501-517.

¹⁸ Fox distinguishes between two underlying metaphors: 'two paths' and 'many paths'. M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; New York, 2000), pp. 129-131.

The prevalence of the path metaphor in the literature may be because of its distinctive status in thought and language. Linguists have described ‘life is a path’ as a basic conceptual metaphor.¹⁹ Conceptual metaphors are not mere poetic embellishment, but tools for understanding, to help structure thought. We take something difficult to understand, like life itself, and view it through the metaphor of something simpler, like a path. Through frequent use, the metaphor becomes conventionalised in language, comprehensible and accessible to all. This makes it particularly useful for short texts like proverbs, as it does not need lengthy explanation. The metaphor gives a basic conceptual structure, but is not absolutely rigid, allowing for flexibility, inconsistencies, and imaginative reconstructions.²⁰

When we employ the metaphor, features from the ‘source domain’ (the path) are mapped onto the ‘target domain’ (life). Not just one image is relevant here, but a whole ‘image schema’. Thus, ‘conduct in life is motion along a path’; ‘dangerous situations in life are hazards on a path’; ‘advice about life is guidance along a path’.²¹ Furthermore, properties, relations, inferences, and patterns of reasoning may be mapped from one domain to the other. The way we conceptualise life is restructured by our knowledge of paths. Indeed, the mapping allows us “to impart... structure which is not there independent of the metaphor”.²² In particular, as I will show, certain features of the path are fate-effecting. Acts intrinsically

¹⁹ For a classic work on ‘Conceptual Metaphor Theory’ discussing the ‘life is a path’ metaphor, see G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, 1989). For applications of this theory to the ‘path’ in the HB, see A. Basson, “The Path Image Schema as Underlying Structure for the Metaphor ‘Moral Life is Journey’ in Psalm 25”, *OTE* 24.1 (2011) pp.19-29; O. Jäkel, “How Can Moral Man Understand The Road He Travels? Prospects and Problems of the Cognitive Approach to Religious Metaphor”, in K. Feyaerts (ed.), *The Bible Through Metaphor and Translation: A Cognitive Semantics Perspective* (Bern, 2003), pp. 55-86.

²⁰ The flexibility of the metaphor is particularly stressed by J. Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 164-165.

²¹ For a fuller elaboration of the path image schema in HB, see Jäkel.

²² Lakoff and Turner, p. 64.

lead to their consequences. The proverbs take this connection from the source world, and ask their readers to map it onto the target world of their own lives. This is a clever rhetorical strategy, encouraging the readers of the truth and obviousness of the connection, and persuading them to act accordingly.

Scholars often note the act-consequence connection in relation to the path metaphor.²³ The moral path is also salvific, the immoral one also destructive. However, few have explored the nuances of the imagery, nor delineated which particular features are fate-effecting. The rhetorical and motivational value of this connection has not been sufficiently analysed. To do so is my intention here. I hope to rehabilitate the *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* somewhat, not primarily as an ontological explanation of causality, but as a constructed metaphorical world, to fuel the reader's imagination and provide a motivational model.

Fate-Effecting Deeds Along the Path

Many of the sayings in Prov 10:1-22:16 sketch tracks and vistas for their readers to explore imaginatively. The 'path' at once depicts the ethical course of its travellers and the quality of the journey, both acts and consequences. Often, subtle grammatical and semantic ambiguities bind the two still closer. In the world imagined, various different actions prove *schicksalwirkende*, 'fate-effecting'. Here, I will examine a number of these, and the rhetorical effect they have in Proverbs.

²³ e.g. Brown, pp. 36-39; Koch, 1983, pp. 135, 165; Zehnder, pp. 588-593.

Turning from evil

מַסְלַת יִשְׁרִים סוֹר מִרָע שְׁמֵר נִפְשׁוֹ נֹצֵר דֶּרֶכּוֹ: 16:17

The highway of the upright turns from evil; he who watches over his path preserves his life.

The first colon transports us to a highway traversed by upright men. Its course depicts their conduct, turning from evil (סוֹר מִרָע). The use of the infinitive construct, סוֹר, means that the path or the travellers could be ‘turning’. In the latter case, individual agency is stressed. The upright lead sensitive ethical lives, ready to divert their course when it tends towards wrongdoing (cf. Prov 3:7; 4:27; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6). Simultaneously, the path turns from its trajectory to tragedy, for סוֹר מִרָע becomes a fate-effecting deed. The polysemy of רָע is activated, shifting from ‘moral evil’ to ‘disaster’. Elsewhere, travellers turn (סוֹר) from Sheol (15:24), and the ‘snares of death’ (13:14; 14:27). Here, the misfortune is simply an ‘evil’ (רָע). An undisclosed calamity lurks ominously before the readers, motivating them to change their course.

It may be significant that this road is a מַסְלָה ‘highway’. This appears to have been a carefully prepared or constructed road (Isa 40:3; 49:11; 62:10).²⁴ W. Tidwell suggests that it was broad, clearly delimited, and easily passible. Well-kept and possibly surfaced, the traveller stumbles over no rocks nor slips in any mud.²⁵ It is precisely the type of road whose travellers ‘avoid harm’ – סוֹר מִרָע.

²⁴ There has been dispute about the precise designation of this term. Dorsey (pp. 228-233) believes it to be a major public thoroughfare: a main regional road, national highway, or international thoroughfare. This remains the standard explanation of the term. Tidwell disputes this for the biblical period, suggesting instead that it is an approach road to a city. The differences are not essential for the interpretation of this proverb. N. L. Tidwell, “No Highway! The Outline of a Semantic Description of *Mesillā*”, *VT* 45 (1995) pp.251-269.

²⁵ Tidwell, pp. 266, 269

The second colon pleases the ear with its tight internal parallelism, שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ (‘preserves his life’) closely mirroring its partner נָצַר דְּרָכּוֹ (‘watches his way’), phonologically and morphologically.²⁶ As I have translated them, the first refers to a consequence, and the second to an act. It is ambiguous which is subject and which predicate, suggesting the mutual entailment of act and consequence. However, the semantics may be still more complex, each phrase intertwining act and consequence within itself. שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ sometimes means ‘preserving one’s life’ (Prov 13:3; 19:16), but elsewhere refers to ‘watching oneself’, taking care of ethical behaviour (Deut 4:9,15; 23:11). Similarly, נָצַר דְּרָכּוֹ may have a double significance. Elsewhere, the son is commended to ‘watch over’ (נָצַר) his heart (Prov 4:23) and his mouth (13:3). Here he must ‘watch over his way’ to ensure its moral direction. In so doing he will ‘protect’ (נָצַר) it (cf. Prov 2:8; 13:6). Within the world constructed by this imagery, attending to the path is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, impacting both course and condition, conduct and consequence. Ruminating on the acts and consequences interwoven in this proverb, the reader learns to connect them in their own life, that they might turn their own path from evil.

Going astray

14:22 הֲלֹא־יִתְּעוּ חֲרָשֵׁי רָע וְחֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב:

Do they not go astray, those who devise evil? But kindness and loyalty – those who devise good.

This proverb contrasts two polar character types: the ‘devisers of evil’ (חֲרָשֵׁי רָע), and the ‘devisers of good’ (חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב). The former ‘go astray’ (יִתְּעוּ). This may refer to deviating morally, like the Israelites whom Manasseh ‘led astray to do evil’ (לְעִשׂוֹת אֶת־הָרָע) 2

²⁶ Cf. the very similar phrase in Prov 13:3a נָצַר פִּי שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ

Kgs 21:9=2 Chro 33:9). This presupposes an ethical norm; probably not here the covenantal law as elsewhere in HB, but the teacher's commandment, societal values, or an inbuilt moral plumb-line. תעה can also suggest 'to stagger about', as though inebriated.²⁷ These apparent 'artisans' (חרשי) of evil have the intellectual clarity of a drunk.

Furthermore, within the metaphorical framework, 'straying' implies harmful consequences. It depicts aimless wandering, like animals off course (Ex 23:4; Isa 53:6; Ps 119:176), or desolate, directionless nomads (Gen 21:14). The scorching heat of trackless wastes (Ps 107:4; Job 12:24) is the inevitable fate of deviants. Within this metaphorical world, 'straying' is a fate-effecting deed. The connection is deduced by the reader, and motivates them against moral error.

The second colon connects the 'devisers of good' with 'kindness and loyalty' (חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה), but does not make the relationship clear. It may be taken as a predicate – subject arrangement: such men *are* benevolence itself.²⁸ They embody social solidarity in their own communities. Alternatively, they may *meet* kindness and loyalty.²⁹ Just as Righteousness (צִדְקָה) protects the blameless of way (13:6), and Evil (רָעָה) pursues sinners (13:21), these personifications treat the traveller according to their nature. They may be trustworthy guides, preventing him from straying, and bestowing goodness upon him. Elsewhere they are God's heralds on the road (Ps 89:15[14]). A divine sender is not mentioned (though not necessarily excluded) here. The second colon, then, may refer to acts or consequences. The reader might discern both and infer a connection between them: those who are kind and loyal will be shown kindness and loyalty in return.

²⁷ Isa 19:13f, 21:4, 28:7; Jer 50:6; Job 12:25.

²⁸ Some translations add a verb 'show kindness and loyalty' (ESV marg., NIV marg.), or translate adjectivally 'are loyal and faithful' (REB)

²⁹ So many translations; e.g. KJV, RSV, ESV, NIV, NASB, HCSB.

Similar double meanings are evident in Prov 10:17. It begins אֶרֶץ לְחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר ‘A path to life – the one who heeds discipline’. As in 14:22b, the relationship between the two halves is ambiguous. Taken as predicate – subject, the disciplined one becomes a path to guide others (i.e. the colon depicts his acts).³⁰ Or perhaps he walks the path to life himself (consequence).³¹ The proverb continues וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה ‘but the one who rejects reproof leads astray’. Being untrained himself, he proves no guide to others, simultaneously leading them to misconduct and misfortune. In this metaphorical world, advice about behaviour is fate-effecting, not only for others but for yourself, for the guide walks with the travellers.³²

In 21:16a, אָדָם תּוֹעָה מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשְׁכָּל ‘a man strays from the way of insight’, i.e. he errs from wisdom ethics. Again, the deviation proves *schicksalwirkende*, for בָּקָה לְרַפְּאִים יָנוּחַ ‘he will rest in the assembly of the dead’ (21:16b). The path had potential for prosperity (note double meaning of שָׁכַל; e.g. Josh 1:8; Prov 17:8); by blinding wandering from its course he has ensured his own destruction (cf. Prov 5:5-6; 7:25-27; 9:18).

³⁰ So NIV.

³¹ So most translations.

³² It is possible that this is an internal hiphil ‘leads himself astray’. These occur frequently with other verbs of motion. E.g. הִקְרִיב ‘to (cause oneself to) come close’; הִרְחִיק ‘to (cause oneself to) go far away’; הָשִׁיב ‘to (cause oneself to) return’. Though the passage is difficult, an internal hiphil of תָּעָה may also occur in Jer 42:19b-20a: הָעִידְתִּי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי הִתְעַתְּם בְּנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם: (Q; K reads הִתְעַתְּם) ‘I have warned you this day that you have (cause yourselves to have) gone astray at the cost of your lives.’ If this interpretation is valid, there may be another layer in the act-consequence double meaning here: he leads others astray (causative hiphil; acts) and thereby leads himself astray (internal hiphil; consequences).

Straightening the way

11:5a צִדְקַת תְּמִים תִּישֹׁר דְּרָכָו

The righteousness of the blameless straightens his way

Within this metaphorical framework, the direction of the moral path is variously construed. Sometimes it turns from wrongdoing (סוּר מִרָע); here it stays straight. Indeed, by their righteousness, the blameless intentionally ‘straighten’ (יִשֹּׁר, piel) it against any foolish temptations calling them to turn aside (cf. Prov 4:25; 9:15; 15:21). Conduct is יִשָּׁר ‘straight, right’ if it adheres to ethical norms, set externally and not simply by one’s own subjective judgment (Prov 12:15; 14:12=16:25; 21:2). Conversely, wicked paths are ‘crooked’ (עָקַשׁ Prov 2:15; 10:9; 22:5; 28:6,18, הִפְכָּכָה 21:8). Such ideas are so familiar in Hebrew convention that יִשָּׁר and עָקַשׁ have been lexicalised to refer to morally upright and twisted men respectively.

As well as being ‘straight’, a דֶּרֶךְ יִשָּׁר is ‘level’.³³ Piel יִשֹּׁר may refer to levelling a road: removing obstacles and stones, smoothing the surface (e.g. Isa 40:3-4; 45:2).³⁴ Undoubtedly a laborious process, this metaphor suggests the careful, continuous, wearisome work required for the ethical life. But it is worth the effort. The path becomes easily traversable, smooth and gentle, giving no cause for stumbling (Jer 31:9). It is straight and direct, destination in sight (Ps 107:7), and promising a safe passage (Ezra 8:21). In this metaphorical world, levelling/straightening one’s path is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, with implications for both deeds and consequences. The reader is encouraged to deduce this connection, and to map it onto their own world, that they might be motivated to righteousness.

³³ Alonso Schökel, L. יִשָּׁר in G. J. Botterweck *et. al* (eds.), *TDOT vol. 6*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1990) pp. 465-466.

³⁴ Dorsey, p. 3.

Setting traps along the way

11:5 צִדְקַת תָּמִים תִּישֹׁר דְּרָכּוֹ וּבְרָשָׁעָתוֹ יִפֹּל רָשָׁע:

The righteousness of the blameless straightens his way; but in his wickedness the wicked falls.

11:6 צִדְקַת יֹשְׁרִים תַּצִּילֵם וּבְהֹוֶת בְּגִידֵם יִלְכְּדוּ:

The righteousness of the upright saves them; but in the desire of the treacherous they are captured.

The wicked man in 11:5, however, cannot hope for such a safe journey, and he falls ‘in his wickedness’ (בְּרָשָׁעָתוֹ). Wickedness is metaphorically depicted as a hazard, imperiling the way.³⁵ Similarly, elsewhere, one falls ‘into evil’ (נָפַל בְּרָעָה), 13:17; 17:20; cf. 14:32; 24:16). Far from the straight, level path of the blameless, pits (Prov 26:27; 28:10) and snares (13:14; 14:27; 22:5) may lurk around a corner or beneath the uneven surface. Imagining the scene, the traveler-reader might tangle his feet in a net (Prov 1:17; 29:5), for a striking phonological similarity sounds in his ear: בְּרָשָׁעָתוֹ (‘in his wickedness’) – בְּרָשָׁתוֹ (‘in his net’).³⁶ Setting wickedness in his path has become fate-effecting, causing his downfall. Similarly, in the next proverb (its thematic and lexical pair) the treacherous are captured in their הֹוֶת. The meaning of this term is disputed. It may be a by-form of אֶנְיָה ‘desire’ (cf. Prov 10:3; Mic 7:3; Ps 52:9[7]), or an unusual singular form (cf. Job 6:2; 30:13) of הֹוֶת ‘disaster’. Possibly, a wordplay is intended, connecting acts (his wicked desires) and consequences (calamity).

³⁵ Alternatively, בּ may be parsed instrumentally/causally ‘falls because of his wickedness’.

³⁶ J. S. Kselman, “Ambiguity and Wordplay in Proverbs XI”, *VT* 52.4 (2002) pp. 545-548.

12:6 דְּבַרֵּי רָשָׁעִים אַרְב־דָּם וּפִי יֹשְׁרִים יַצִּילֵם:

The words of the wicked are an ambush of blood; but the mouth of the upright will save them.

12:13 בִּפְשַׁע שִׁפְתָּיִם מֹקֵשׁ רָע וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּרָה צַדִּיק:

In the transgression of lips is evil man's snare;³⁷ but the righteous comes out from distress.

These two proverbs present very similar images: a trap is set in the first colon; it is evaded in the second. The wickedness of the men is powerfully captured by the imagery. Like bandits and robbers, they set a bloody ambush (אַרְב־דָּם) for their unsuspecting victims (12:6). Like ruthless hunters, they lay out a snare (מֹקֵשׁ, 12:13).³⁸ Their means are their words, which in Proverbs have potency over life and death (18:21). Perhaps they aim to catch their prey through slander, false charges, malicious plotting, or bad advice. But to no avail: the upright and righteous will escape (12:6b, 13b).

The second colon may trigger a rereading of the first. Antithetical parallelisms are the norm in this part of the book,³⁹ and may be found here. The upright are saved in 6b, so the wicked must be harmed in 6a. The righteous man comes out from distress in 13b, so the evil man must enter it in 13a. Interpreted thus, the wicked set an ambush for themselves; the evil man's snare closes upon his own neck. The genitive is reconstrued: the מֹקֵשׁ רָע is not set *by* the evil man, but *for* him. This motif is well-known in Proverbs. Indeed, "he who digs a pit will fall into it" (26:27a; cf. 28:10; 29:5). The sinners of chapter 1 attempt to entice the naïve son to banditry: "Let us lie in wait for blood" (נֶאֱרָבָה לְדָם; Prov 1:11). Little do they know

³⁷ Or 'an evil snare'.

³⁸ The precise meaning of this term is disputed. It may designate some sort of clapping device, related to the Syriac root *nqš*. See G. Gerleman, "Contributions to the Old Testament Terminology of the Chase" in *Bulletin de la Société Royale des Lettres de Lund 1945-6 (Årsberättelse 1945-46)* (Lund, 1946), pp. 79-90.

³⁹ Antithetical parallelisms are particularly prevalent in Prov 10-15.

that this blood will be their own (1:18). Strewing the way with traps inevitably effects fate, for the huntsman himself stumbles into them.

Clearing thorns from the way

15:19 דֶּרֶךְ עָצֵל כַּמְשַׁכֶּת חֲדָק וְאַרְחַּי יִשְׂרָאֵל סִלְלָהּ

The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway.

This proverb graphically contrasts two paths: one overgrown with thorns, grudgingly trudged by the lazy; the other a highway for the upright. Within this metaphorical world, both characters may have effected their fate. The sluggard (עָצֵל) is caricatured and condemned in Proverbs. Indolent and insolent, his hands refuse to labour (21:25). God forbid he should venture outside (22:13; 26:13) or even leave his bed (6:9; 26:14). Through lack of labour, his vineyard is overrun with thistles and nettles (24:31), and here, his path with thorns.⁴⁰ This has direct implications for the quality of the journey. Passing through a thorn hedge is a laborious and painful process. Your progress is slow, feet get caught, clothing snags; pricks and scratches draw blood.

By contrast, the upright man's path has been carefully constructed, and 'cast up' (סִלַּל) as a highway.⁴¹ סִלְלָהּ is a passive participle, and the agent may be the upright man himself. No effort is too great in ensuring an ethical course. And the path so prepared rewards its

⁴⁰ מְשַׁכֶּה (from שוּךְ, 'to hedge up') is found only here, but related nouns occur: מְסוּכָה (from the by-form מְסוּךְ) in Mic 7:4 and מְשַׁכֶּה (from שָׁכַךְ) in Isa 5:5. These seem to have a basic sense of 'hedge'. אֲרָחַי seems to be a brier, and only occurs here and in Mic 7:4 (parallel to מְסוּכָה).

⁴¹ Dorsey (pp. 229-233) has argued that סִלַּל refers not to 'casting up', but to 'levelling'. Either way it implies laborious construction.

workmen with the promise of peril-free passage (cf. Isa 35:8; 57:14). Attentiveness to your moral course is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, determining your experience of the journey. The reader maps this correspondence onto his own life, motivating him to diligent care of his course.

Similarly, in Prov 22:5, צַנִּים פְּחִים בְּדֶרֶךְ עֶקֶשׁ שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְחֹק מֵהֶם: ‘Thorns, traps, in the crooked path; he who preserves his life keeps far from them.’ This proverb combines a number of fate-effecting features we have already encountered. The man in *a* has acted wrongly: failing to clear thorns;⁴² laying down traps; choosing a crooked course.⁴³ He may suffer accordingly, stumbling into one of his self-set hazards hidden round a corner. By contrast, the man in *b* keeps perils far from his path, demonstrating his uprightness and securing his prosperity. He ‘watches himself’ ethically, and thus ‘preserves his life’ (שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ; cf. Prov 16:17 above).

Conclusion

In this investigation, I have explored the metaphorical world constructed by the proverbs’ ‘path’ imagery. In this world, a number of features are *schicksalwirkende*, ‘fate-effecting’. If you turn from evil (סוּר מֵרָע), or straighten (יִשָּׁר) your way morally, your path will simultaneously turn from disaster or have a direct and easy course. But if your behaviour strays (תִּטְעֶה) from ethical norms, you will also wander into hardship. If you set traps for others, or let thorns

⁴² צַנִּים is a hapax, and its meaning is disputed. A number of scholars (e.g. Waltke) propose emending to צַמִּים ‘traps’, which occurs with פַּח in Job 18:9. This has some Versional support – while LXX apparently supports MT with περιβολοι ‘prickly plants’, Syr (followed by Targ) has *ṣṣb*, ‘net, snare’. For discussion, see B. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 16-31* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich, 2005) p. 194 n. 8.

⁴³ This interprets עֶקֶשׁ as an adjective qualifying בְּדֶרֶךְ. Alternatively it may be a noun in construct: ‘the path of the crooked man’

grow over your path, you imperil yourself by them. Your whole ‘sphere of activity’ is characterised by this act-consequence connection. It is a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*.

However, contra-Koch, this *Tatsphäre* is not simply presupposed by the sages. Rather, it is constructed by them as a metaphor. It is not primarily meant as an ontological reflection of the real world, but it has rhetorical significance. A number of scholars have suggested that the act-consequence connection in Proverbs is largely a motivational tool.⁴⁴ By describing graphic consequences, the sages can persuade their students to good behaviour. Here, they are threatened with disaster, barren wastelands, hazardous journeys imperilled with thorns and traps. Such they might avoid through navigating an ethical course.

The act-consequence connections are obvious in the metaphorical world. The students are encouraged to recognise them, and to map them onto the target world of their own lives, where they may not be quite so evident. By themselves deducing the connection and the mapping, the students actively engage their minds, and may be convinced by their own deductions. The connection is made to seem obvious in the target world too. Elsewhere, Yahweh or society may enforce the consequences, but here no external agent is specified. This stresses the responsibility of the student. If I have suffered after erring morally, it is I who have wandered into destructive wastelands. No external agent can be blamed for somehow causing the connection between ‘straying’ and ‘straying’. Furthermore, the consequence is entirely appropriate for the act, and may not be argued against.⁴⁵ The *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*, then, is a powerful metaphorical construction, that the student might walk the straight and peril-free path ahead.

⁴⁴ E.g. S. L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (JSJSup 125; Leiden, 2008); Boström.

⁴⁵ J. Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament”, *JTS* 30.1 (1979) pp.1-14; P. D. Miller Jr., *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (SBL Monograph Series 27; Chicago, 1982).

The Path Metaphor and the Construction of a *Schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* in**Proverbs 10:1-22:16**

Abstract: Klaus Koch influentially argued that in Proverbs, the world is understood as a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* – a sphere of activity effecting one’s fate. Act and consequence are intrinsically and organically bound together. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on these views. Some of Proverbs’ imagery, however, does seem to suggest such an act-consequence connection. The ‘path’, for example, is at once moral and salvific, or immoral and destructive. I suggest that through imagery of the path, the sage constructs a metaphorical *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*. It is not intended as an explanation of causality, but as a motivational model to affect the student’s behaviour.

Key words: act-consequence connection – path – *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* – pedagogy – imagery – Proverbs 10:1-22:16

Introduction***The schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre***

In 1955, Klaus Koch famously asked ‘*Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?*’ – ‘Is there a doctrine of retribution in the Old Testament?’¹ Arguing particularly from the book of Proverbs, he answered with an emphatic negative: ‘retribution’ is a superimposed Western

¹ K. Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament”, *ZTK* 52 (1955), pp. 1-42; published in English as K. Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament” in J. Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (London, 1972), pp. 57-87.

theological category. In Hebrew thought, he suggested, no judicial intervention is needed (or indeed possible) between deed and outcome. The two are not separable, but are internally and necessarily bound together as an ‘act-consequence connection’ (*Tun-Ergeben Zusammenhang*). The latter grows organically from the former, like a plant from a seed. Accordingly, every deed is *schicksalwirkende* – ‘fate-effecting’. It has its consequence built into it, such that it is almost nonsensical to separate the two. A person’s whole life, their whole ‘sphere of activity’, is characterised by this intrinsic causality. It is, in short, a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*.

Drawing on Scandinavian scholars like J. Pedersen and K. Fahlgren,² Koch argued that such holistic thinking characterised the Hebrew mindset. Israelites had a ‘synthetic view of life’,³ seeing the world as a totality, devoid of the compartmentalizing divisions that characterize the modern Western outlook, such as the division between act and consequence. This, it was argued, is evidenced in the Hebrew language. Many Hebrew roots can be used to describe both an ‘act’ (in our mode of thought), and its ‘consequence’.⁴ So מַעֲשֵׂה can sometimes mean ‘wrongdoing’ (*Missetat*) and sometimes ‘guilt’ or ‘punishment’ (*Schuld/Strafe*).⁵ עָוֶן can mean ‘moral evil’ (*Bosheit*) and ‘misfortune’ (*Unglück*).⁶ The same word describes both, therefore “Ursache und Wirkung sind... für den Israelite ein und dasselbe”.⁷

² J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, (Copenhagen, 1926). K. Hj. Fahlgren, “Die Gegensätze von Sedaqa im Alten Testament”, in K. Koch (ed.), *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 87-129.

³ Fahlgren, ‘*synthetische Lebensauffassung*’ pp. 126-129.

⁴ Fahlgren. Koch, 1972, pp. 75-78, explicitly draws on Fahlgren.

⁵ Fahlgren, p. 112.

⁶ Fahlgren, p. 122.

⁷ Fahlgren, p. 90.

Koch's theory has been very influential,⁸ but few scholars accept it wholesale, and a number of criticisms may be raised. First, Koch's analysis can only account for a small amount of the biblical data. The *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* is most evident in Proverbs, but even there, some verses do not fit with Koch's analysis. These he conveniently ignores.⁹ In particular, Yahweh and society seem to play a much more active role in enforcing consequences than Koch would allow.¹⁰ Second, the anthropological suppositions behind the theory are dubious. The idea of 'synthetic view of life' was based on notions of the 'primitive' mind, which was always orientated towards grasping the totality.¹¹ Such psychological speculations have largely fallen out of scholarship.

Third, Koch's linguistic arguments for the unity of act and consequence are unsound. Hebrew may have one word (e.g. רָע) where others have two (e.g. 'evil' and 'misfortune'), but this does not mean that the Hebrew speaker understood no distinctions between different meanings. Linguistic structure cannot be directly mapped onto thought structure.¹² In English, we say only 'to know' where French has 'savoir' and 'connaître', German 'wissen' and

⁸ The most positive and sensitive recent appraisal of Koch's views probably comes from J. Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 2014), esp. pp. 211-226.

⁹ Koch makes no mention of the Yahweh cluster in Prov 16:1-9, for example. On the proverbs he omits in chs. 10-13, see P. Hatton, *Contradiction in the Book of Proverbs: The Deep Waters of Counsel* (SOTS Monograph Series; Hampshire, 2008), pp. 83-116.

¹⁰ The role of Yahweh has been examined by many scholars. See especially L. Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 29; Stockholm, 1990). On the role of society, see B. Janowski, "Die Tat Kehrt Zum Täter Zurück: Offene Fragen im Umkreis des 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang'", *ZTK* 91 (1994), pp. 247-271.

¹¹ E.g. A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (2nd edn.; Cardiff, 1964). For Johnson, totality thinking "is the 'Open Sesame' which unlocks the secrets of the Hebrew language and reveals the riches of the Israelite mind" p. 2.

¹² J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 33-45.

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‘kennen’. Is it therefore impossible for us to understand the distinction between ‘knowing’ a person and ‘knowing’ facts? If I know the native English speaker, I know this is not the case. The linguistic phenomenon cannot in itself tell us about any metaphysical connection.

That said, however, the data Koch described are real enough, and deserve consideration. There are many sayings in Proverbs which do present the connection between act and consequence in apparently automatic terms. Many acts do seem ‘fate-effecting’. This is often the case, for example, in proverbs describing ‘the path’. This metaphor at once depicts the behaviour of an individual, and the consequences that come to him. The moral rectitude of traveller’s course is intrinsically bound together with favourability of his experiences along the way. I suggest that, instead of presupposing a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*, these proverbs actively create one. They construct a metaphorical world where deeds and consequences correspond. Their purpose is not primarily for an explanation of ontology, but for motivation and rhetoric.

Viewing the *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* in this way avoids the three problems highlighted above. (1) It is not the only conceivable framework for the sages, but one model among many, constructed for rhetorical purpose. (2) It is not a presupposition of the ‘primitive mind’, but a skilful creation. (3) It does not seek a worldview in language structure and lexical stocks, but considers how words are deployed in context. As we explore the nuances of the metaphor, its fate-effecting nature will become evident.

The ‘Path’ Metaphor

The metaphor of a ‘path’ to depict life is frequently encountered across the Hebrew Bible; the Psalms, prophets, and Deuteronomy all making extensive use of the imagery.¹³ Proverbs too

¹³ For the most extensive discussion of the metaphor in the HB, see M. P. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament: Eine Semantische Untersuchung der alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Weg-Lexeme mit besonderer*

employs it often, both in the instructions (chs. 1-9), and the sayings collections (chs. 10-29). My specific focus will be on the first sayings collection (10:1-22:16), where it seems to make a distinctive contribution.¹⁴

Proverbs lacks covenantal and salvation-historical themes in general, and these are equally absent from its path imagery. Unlike elsewhere, no link is made with walking with or before God in the Exodus.¹⁵ The path is not explicitly linked with God's *Torah*,¹⁶ and straying does not obviously imply following idols. Indeed, God's explicit role is minimal. Though he is more prevalent in chs. 1-9, the sayings only allude to him three times in connection with the path (10:29; 16:9; 20:24). Scholarly attention has been focussed on the image of the 'two paths' in Proverbs, traversed by diametrically opposed character types.¹⁷ The path of the righteous stands apart from the path of the wicked, the gap between them unbreachable. While this impression is pervasive, there are variations in the imagery,¹⁸ and other themes are sometimes central. In particular, I would like to comment on how Proverbs creates a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre* through its path imagery.

Berücksichtigung ihrer metaphorischen Verwendung (BZAW 268; Berlin, 1999). For a historical survey of roads in ancient Israel, see D. A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (The Asor Library of Biblical and Near Eastern Archaeology; Baltimore, 1991).

¹⁴ For discussions of the path metaphor in chs. 1-9, see N. C. Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9", *Interpretation* 26.2 (1972), pp. 131-157; S. Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford, 2007), esp. pp. 73-79; 148-154.

¹⁵ A. Gros, *Je Suis La Route* (Thèmes Bibliques; Paris, 1961); O. Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2.28; Tübingen, 2007).

¹⁶ W. P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville, 2002), pp. 31-54. However, Weeks (pp. 148-154) has suggested that these implications would have been evident for the post-exilic Jewish readers of Proverbs 1-9.

¹⁷ Habel; D. P. Bricker, "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in Proverbs", *JETS* 38.4 (1995) pp. 501-517.

¹⁸ Fox distinguishes between two underlying metaphors: 'two paths' and 'many paths'. M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible; New York, 2000), pp. 129-131.

The prevalence of the path metaphor in the literature may be because of its distinctive status in thought and language. Linguists have described ‘life is a path’ as a basic conceptual metaphor.¹⁹ Conceptual metaphors are not mere poetic embellishment, but tools for understanding, to help structure thought. We take something difficult to understand, like life itself, and view it through the metaphor of something simpler, like a path. Through frequent use, the metaphor becomes conventionalised in language, comprehensible and accessible to all. This makes it particularly useful for short texts like proverbs, as it does not need lengthy explanation. The metaphor gives a basic conceptual structure, but is not absolutely rigid, allowing for flexibility, inconsistencies, and imaginative reconstructions.²⁰

When we employ the metaphor, features from the ‘source domain’ (the path) are mapped onto the ‘target domain’ (life). Not just one image is relevant here, but a whole ‘image schema’. Thus, ‘conduct in life is motion along a path’; ‘dangerous situations in life are hazards on a path’; ‘advice about life is guidance along a path’.²¹ Furthermore, properties, relations, inferences, and patterns of reasoning may be mapped from one domain to the other. The way we conceptualise life is restructured by our knowledge of paths. Indeed, the mapping allows us “to impart... structure which is not there independent of the metaphor”.²² In particular, as I will show, certain features of the path are fate-effecting. Acts intrinsically

¹⁹ For a classic work on ‘Conceptual Metaphor Theory’ discussing the ‘life is a path’ metaphor, see G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, 1989). For applications of this theory to the ‘path’ in the HB, see A. Basson, “The Path Image Schema as Underlying Structure for the Metaphor ‘Moral Life is Journey’ in Psalm 25”, *OTE* 24.1 (2011) pp.19-29; O. Jäkel, “How Can Moral Man Understand The Road He Travels? Prospects and Problems of the Cognitive Approach to Religious Metaphor”, in K. Feyaerts (ed.), *The Bible Through Metaphor and Translation: A Cognitive Semantics Perspective* (Bern, 2003), pp. 55-86.

²⁰ The flexibility of the metaphor is particularly stressed by J. Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 164-165.

²¹ For a fuller elaboration of the path image schema in HB, see Jäkel.

²² Lakoff and Turner, p. 64.

1 lead to their consequences. The proverbs take this connection from the source world, and ask
2 their readers to map it onto the target world of their own lives. This is a clever rhetorical
3 strategy, encouraging the readers of the truth and obviousness of the connection, and
4 persuading them to act accordingly.
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9 Scholars often note the act-consequence connection in relation to the path
10 metaphor.²³ The moral path is also salvific, the immoral one also destructive. However, few
11 have explored the nuances of the imagery, nor delineated which particular features are fate-
12 effecting. The rhetorical and motivational value of this connection has not been sufficiently
13 analysed. To do so is my intention here. I hope to rehabilitate the *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*
14 somewhat, not primarily as an ontological explanation of causality, but as a constructed
15 metaphorical world, to fuel the reader's imagination and provide a motivational model.
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33 Fate-Effecting Deeds Along the Path 34 35 36 37

38 Many of the sayings in Prov 10:1-22:16 sketch tracks and vistas for their readers to explore
39 imaginatively. The 'path' at once depicts the ethical course of its travellers and the quality of
40 the journey, both acts and consequences. Often, subtle grammatical and semantic ambiguities
41 bind the two still closer. In the world imagined, various different actions prove
42 *schicksalwirkende*, 'fate-effecting'. Here, I will examine a number of these, and the rhetorical
43 effect they have in Proverbs.
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59 ²³ e.g. Brown, pp. 36-39; Koch, 1983, pp. 135, 165; Zehnder, pp. 588-593.
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Turning from evil

מַסְלַת יִשְׁרִים סוֹר מֵרָע שֶׁמֶר נִפְשׁוֹ נֹצֵר דָּרְכּוֹ: 16:17

The highway of the upright turns from evil; he who watches over his path preserves his life.

The first colon transports us to a highway traversed by upright men. Its course depicts their conduct, turning from evil (סוֹר מֵרָע). The use of the infinitive construct, סוֹר, means that the path or the travellers could be ‘turning’. In the latter case, individual agency is stressed. The upright lead sensitive ethical lives, ready to divert their course when it tends towards wrongdoing (cf. Prov 3:7; 4:27; 13:19; 14:16; 16:6). Simultaneously, the path turns from its trajectory to tragedy, for סוֹר מֵרָע becomes a fate-effecting deed. The polysemy of רָע is activated, shifting from ‘moral evil’ to ‘disaster’. Elsewhere, travellers turn (סוֹר) from Sheol (15:24), and the ‘snares of death’ (13:14; 14:27). Here, the misfortune is simply an ‘evil’ (רָע). An undisclosed calamity lurks ominously before the readers, motivating them to change their course.

It may be significant that this road is a מַסְלָה ‘highway’. This appears to have been a carefully prepared or constructed road (Isa 40:3; 49:11; 62:10).²⁴ W. Tidwell suggests that it was broad, clearly delimited, and easily passible. Well-kept and possibly surfaced, the traveller stumbles over no rocks nor slips in any mud.²⁵ It is precisely the type of road whose travellers ‘avoid harm’ – סוֹר מֵרָע.

²⁴ There has been dispute about the precise designation of this term. Dorsey (pp. 228-233) believes it to be a major public thoroughfare: a main regional road, national highway, or international thoroughfare. This remains the standard explanation of the term. Tidwell disputes this for the biblical period, suggesting instead that it is an approach road to a city. The differences are not essential for the interpretation of this proverb. N. L. Tidwell, “No Highway! The Outline of a Semantic Description of *Mesillā*”, *VT* 45 (1995) pp.251-269.

²⁵ Tidwell, pp. 266, 269

The second colon pleases the ear with its tight internal parallelism, שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ ('preserves his life') closely mirroring its partner נָצַר דְּרָכּוֹ ('watches his way'), phonologically and morphologically.²⁶ As I have translated them, the first refers to a consequence, and the second to an act. It is ambiguous which is subject and which predicate, suggesting the mutual entailment of act and consequence. However, the semantics may be still more complex, each phrase intertwining act and consequence within itself. שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ sometimes means 'preserving one's life' (Prov 13:3; 19:16), but elsewhere refers to 'watching oneself', taking care of ethical behaviour (Deut 4:9,15; 23:11). Similarly, נָצַר דְּרָכּוֹ may have a double significance. Elsewhere, the son is commended to 'watch over' (נָצַר) his heart (Prov 4:23) and his mouth (13:3). Here he must 'watch over his way' to ensure its moral direction. In so doing he will 'protect' (נָצַר) it (cf. Prov 2:8; 13:6). Within the world constructed by this imagery, attending to the path is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, impacting both course and condition, conduct and consequence. Ruminating on the acts and consequences interwoven in this proverb, the reader learns to connect them in their own life, that they might turn their own path from evil.

Going astray

14:22 הֲלוֹא־יִתְעוּ חֲרָשֵׁי רָע וְחֲסִיד וְאֶמֶת חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב:

Do they not go astray, those who devise evil? But kindness and loyalty – those who devise good.

This proverb contrasts two polar character types: the 'devisers of evil' (חֲרָשֵׁי רָע), and the 'devisers of good' (חֲרָשֵׁי טוֹב). The former 'go astray' (יִתְעוּ). This may refer to deviating morally, like the Israelites whom Manasseh 'led astray to do evil' (לְעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הָרָע) 2 Kgs 21:9=2 Chro 33:9). This presupposes an ethical norm; probably not here the covenantal law

²⁶ Cf. the very similar phrase in Prov 13:3a נָצַר כִּי שָׁמַר נַפְשׁוֹ

as elsewhere in HB, but the teacher's commandment, societal values, or an inbuilt moral plumb-line. תעה can also suggest 'to stagger about', as though inebriated.²⁷ These apparent 'artisans' (חֲרָשִׁי) of evil have the intellectual clarity of a drunk.

Furthermore, within the metaphorical framework, 'straying' implies harmful consequences. It depicts aimless wandering, like animals off course (Ex 23:4; Isa 53:6; Ps 119:176), or desolate, directionless nomads (Gen 21:14). The scorching heat of trackless wastes (Ps 107:4; Job 12:24) is the inevitable fate of deviants. Within this metaphorical world, 'straying' is a fate-effecting deed. The connection is deduced by the reader, and motivates them against moral error.

The second colon connects the 'devisers of good' with 'kindness and loyalty' (חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה), but does not make the relationship clear. It may be taken as a predicate – subject arrangement: such men *are* benevolence itself.²⁸ They embody social solidarity in their own communities. Alternatively, they may *meet* kindness and loyalty.²⁹ Just as Righteousness (צִדִּיקָה) protects the blameless of way (13:6), and Evil (רָעָה) pursues sinners (13:21), these personifications treat the traveller according to their nature. They may be trustworthy guides, preventing him from straying, and bestowing goodness upon him. Elsewhere they are God's heralds on the road (Ps 89:15[14]). A divine sender is not mentioned (though not necessarily excluded) here. The second colon, then, may refer to acts or consequences. The reader might discern both and infer a connection between them: those who are kind and loyal will be shown kindness and loyalty in return.

Similar double meanings are evident in Prov 10:17. It begins אֶרֶץ לֵחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר 'A path to life – the one who heeds discipline'. As in 14:22b, the relationship between the two

²⁷ Isa 19:13f, 21:4, 28:7; Jer 50:6; Job 12:25.

²⁸ Some translations add a verb 'show kindness and loyalty' (ESV marg., NIV marg.), or translate adjectivally 'are loyal and faithful' (REB)

²⁹ So many translations; e.g. KJV, RSV, ESV, NIV, NASB, HCSB.

halves is ambiguous. Taken as predicate – subject, the disciplined one becomes a path to guide others (i.e. the colon depicts his acts).³⁰ Or perhaps he walks the path to life himself (consequence).³¹ The proverb continues וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מִתְּעָה ‘but the one who rejects reproof leads astray’. Being untrained himself, he proves no guide to others, simultaneously leading them to misconduct and misfortune. In this metaphorical world, advice about behaviour is fate-effecting, not only for others but for yourself, for the guide walks with the travellers.³²

In 21:16a, אָדָם תּוֹעָה מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׂכָל ‘a man strays from the way of insight’, i.e. he errs from wisdom ethics. Again, the deviation proves *schicksalwirkende*, for בָּקָהּל רַפְּאִים יָנִיחַ ‘he will rest in the assembly of the dead’ (21:16b). The path had potential for prosperity (note double meaning of שָׁכַל; e.g. Josh 1:8; Prov 17:8); by blinding wandering from its course he has ensured his own destruction (cf. Prov 5:5-6; 7:25-27; 9:18).

Straightening the way

11:5a צִדְקַת תְּמִים תִּישָׁר דֶּרֶכּוֹ

³⁰ So NIV.

³¹ So most translations.

³² It is possible that this is an internal hiphil ‘leads himself astray’. These occur frequently with other verbs of motion. E.g. הִקְרִיב ‘to (cause oneself to) come close’; הִרְחִיק ‘to (cause oneself to) go far away’; הָשִׁיב ‘to (cause oneself to) return’. Though the passage is difficult, an internal hiphil of תָּעָה may also occur in Jer 42:19b-20a: הָעִלְתִּי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי הִתְעַתְּם בְּנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם: (Q; K reads הִתְעַתְּם) ‘I have warned you this day that *you have (cause yourselves to have) gone astray* at the cost of your lives.’ If this interpretation is valid, there may be another layer in the act-consequence double meaning here: he leads others astray (causative hiphil; acts) and thereby leads himself astray (internal hiphil; consequences).

The righteousness of the blameless straightens his way

Within this metaphorical framework, the direction of the moral path is variously construed. Sometimes it turns from wrongdoing (סור מרע); here it stays straight. Indeed, by their righteousness, the blameless intentionally ‘straighten’ (ישר, piel) it against any foolish temptations calling them to turn aside (cf. Prov 4:25; 9:15; 15:21). Conduct is ישר ‘straight, right’ if it adheres to ethical norms, set externally and not simply by one’s own subjective judgment (Prov 12:15; 14:12=16:25; 21:2). Conversely, wicked paths are ‘crooked’ (עקש Prov 2:15; 10:9; 22:5; 28:6,18, הַפְּכָפֶה 21:8). Such ideas are so familiar in Hebrew convention that ישר and עקש have been lexicalised to refer to morally upright and twisted men respectively.

As well as being ‘straight’, a ישר דרך is ‘level’.³³ Piel ישר may refer to levelling a road: removing obstacles and stones, smoothing the surface (e.g. Isa 40:3-4; 45:2).³⁴ Undoubtedly a laborious process, this metaphor suggests the careful, continuous, wearisome work required for the ethical life. But it is worth the effort. The path becomes easily traversable, smooth and gentle, giving no cause for stumbling (Jer 31:9). It is straight and direct, destination in sight (Ps 107:7), and promising a safe passage (Ezra 8:21). In this metaphorical world, levelling/straightening one’s path is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, with implications for both deeds and consequences. The reader is encouraged to deduce this connection, and to map it onto their own world, that they might be motivated to righteousness.

Setting traps along the way

צִדְקַת תְּמִים תִּישָׁר דְּרָכּוֹ וּבְרָשָׁעוֹ יִפֹּל רָשָׁע: 11:5

³³ Alonso Schökel, L. ישר in G. J. Botterweck *et. al* (eds.), *TDOT vol. 6*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1990) pp. 465-466.

³⁴ Dorsey, p. 3.

The righteousness of the blameless straightens his way; but in his wickedness the wicked falls.

11:6 צִדְקַת יֹשְׁרִים תְּצִילֵם וּבְהִנֹּחַת בְּגָדִים יִלְכְּדוּ:

The righteousness of the upright saves them; but in the desire of the treacherous they are captured.

The wicked man in 11:5, however, cannot hope for such a safe journey, and he falls ‘in his wickedness’ (בְּרָשָׁעָתוֹ). Wickedness is metaphorically depicted as a hazard, imperiling the way.³⁵ Similarly, elsewhere, one falls ‘into evil’ (נָפַל בְּרָעָה), 13:17; 17:20; cf. 14:32; 24:16). Far from the straight, level path of the blameless, pits (Prov 26:27; 28:10) and snares (13:14; 14:27; 22:5) may lurk around a corner or beneath the uneven surface. Imagining the scene, the traveler-reader might tangle his feet in a net (Prov 1:17; 29:5), for a striking phonological similarity sounds in his ear: בְּרָשָׁעָתוֹ (‘in his net’) – בְּרָשָׁעָתוֹ (‘in his wickedness’).³⁶ Setting wickedness in his path has become fate-effecting, causing his downfall. Similarly, in the next proverb (its thematic and lexical pair) the treacherous are captured in their הִנָּה. The meaning of this term is disputed. It may be a by-form of אָנָה ‘desire’ (cf. Prov 10:3; Mic 7:3; Ps 52:9[7]), or an unusual singular form (cf. Job 6:2; 30:13) of הָוִיָּה ‘disaster’. Possibly, a wordplay is intended, connecting acts (his wicked desires) and consequences (calamity).

12:6 דְּבָרֵי רָשָׁעִים אַרְב־יָדָם וּפִי יֹשְׁרִים יִצִּילֵם:

The words of the wicked are an ambush of blood; but the mouth of the upright will save them.

³⁵ Alternatively, ב may be parsed instrumentally/causally ‘falls because of his wickedness’.

³⁶ J. S. Kselman, “Ambiguity and Wordplay in Proverbs XI”, *V/T* 52.4 (2002) pp. 545-548.

12:13 בְּפִשֵּׁעַ שְׂפָתַיִם מִוְקֵשׁ רָע וַיֵּצֵא מִצָּרָה צַדִּיק:

In the transgression of lips is evil man's snare;³⁷ but the righteous comes out from distress.

These two proverbs present very similar images: a trap is set in the first colon; it is evaded in the second. The wickedness of the men is powerfully captured by the imagery. Like bandits and robbers, they set a bloody ambush (אַרְב־דָּם) for their unsuspecting victims (12:6). Like ruthless hunters, they lay out a snare (מוֹקֵשׁ, 12:13).³⁸ Their means are their words, which in Proverbs have potency over life and death (18:21). Perhaps they aim to catch their prey through slander, false charges, malicious plotting, or bad advice. But to no avail: the upright and righteous will escape (12:6b, 13b).

The second colon may trigger a rereading of the first. Antithetical parallelisms are the norm in this part of the book,³⁹ and may be found here. The upright are saved in 6b, so the wicked must be harmed in 6a. The righteous man comes out from distress in 13b, so the evil man must enter it in 13a. Interpreted thus, the wicked set an ambush for themselves; the evil man's snare closes upon his own neck. The genitive is reconstrued: the מִוְקֵשׁ רָע is not set *by* the evil man, but *for* him. This motif is well-known in Proverbs. Indeed, “he who digs a pit will fall into it” (26:27a; cf. 28:10; 29:5). The sinners of chapter 1 attempt to entice the naïve son to banditry: “Let us lie in wait for blood” (נֶאֱרָבָה לְדָם; Prov 1:11). Little do they know that this blood will be their own (1:18). Strewing the way with traps inevitably effects fate, for the huntsman himself stumbles into them.

³⁷ Or ‘an evil snare’.

³⁸ The precise meaning of this term is disputed. It may designate some sort of clapping device, related to the Syriac root *nqṣ*. See G. Gerleman, “Contributions to the Old Testament Terminology of the Chase” in *Bulletin de la Société Royale des Lettres de Lund 1945-6 (Årsberättelse 1945-46)* (Lund, 1946), pp. 79-90.

³⁹ Antithetical parallelisms are particularly prevalent in Prov 10-15.

Clearing thorns from the way

15:19 דֶּרֶךְ עֲצִיל כַּמְשָׁכֶת חֲדָק וְאֶרֶחַ יִשְׁרִים סִלְלָהּ

The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway.

This proverb graphically contrasts two paths: one overgrown with thorns, grudgingly trudged by the lazy; the other a highway for the upright. Within this metaphorical world, both characters may have effected their fate. The sluggard (עֲצִיל) is caricatured and condemned in Proverbs. Indolent and insolent, his hands refuse to labour (21:25). God forbid he should venture outside (22:13; 26:13) or even leave his bed (6:9; 26:14). Through lack of labour, his vineyard is overrun with thistles and nettles (24:31), and here, his path with thorns.⁴⁰ This has direct implications for the quality of the journey. Passing through a thorn hedge is a laborious and painful process. Your progress is slow, feet get caught, clothing snags; pricks and scratches draw blood.

By contrast, the upright man's path has been carefully constructed, and 'cast up' (סִלֵּל) as a highway.⁴¹ סִלְלָהּ is a passive participle, and the agent may be the upright man himself. No effort is too great in ensuring an ethical course. And the path so prepared rewards its workmen with the promise of peril-free passage (cf. Isa 35:8; 57:14). Attentiveness to your moral course is a *schicksalwirkende Tat*, determining your experience of the journey. The reader maps this correspondence onto his own life, motivating him to diligent care of his course.

⁴⁰ מְשָׁכָה (from שָׁךְ, 'to hedge up') is found only here, but related nouns occur: מְסִיכָה (from the by-form מִסִּיךְ) in Mic 7:4 and מְשָׁכָה (from שָׁךְ) in Isa 5:5. These seem to have a basic sense of 'hedge'. A חֲדָק seems to be a brier, and only occurs here and in Mic 7:4 (parallel to מְסִיכָה).

⁴¹ Dorsey (pp. 229-233) has argued that סִלֵּל refers not to 'casting up', but to 'levelling'. Either way it implies laborious construction.

Similarly, in Prov 22:5, צַנִּים פְּתִים בְּדֶרֶךְ עֲקֹשׁ שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְחֹק מֵהֶם: ‘Thorns, traps, in the crooked path; he who preserves his life keeps far from them.’ This proverb combines a number of fate-effecting features we have already encountered. The man in *a* has acted wrongly: failing to clear thorns;⁴² laying down traps; choosing a crooked course.⁴³ He may suffer accordingly, stumbling into one of his self-set hazards hidden round a corner. By contrast, the man in *b* keeps perils far from his path, demonstrating his uprightness and securing his prosperity. He ‘watches himself’ ethically, and thus ‘preserves his life’ (שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ; cf. Prov 16:17 above).

Conclusion

In this investigation, I have explored the metaphorical world constructed by the proverbs’ ‘path’ imagery. In this world, a number of features are *schicksalwirkende*, ‘fate-effecting’. If you turn from evil (סוּר מֵרָע), or straighten (יִשָּׁר) your way morally, your path will simultaneously turn from disaster or have a direct and easy course. But if your behaviour strays (תִּפְעֶה) from ethical norms, you will also wander into hardship. If you set traps for others, or let thorns grow over your path, you imperil yourself by them. Your whole ‘sphere of activity’ is characterised by this act-consequence connection. It is a *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*.

⁴² צַנִּים is a hapax, and its meaning is disputed. A number of scholars (e.g. Waltke) propose emending to צַמִּים ‘traps’, which occurs with פָּח in Job 18:9. This has some Versional support – while LXX apparently supports MT with ποῖβλοιοι ‘prickly plants’, Syr (followed by Targ) has *nšb*, ‘net, snare’. For discussion, see B. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 16-31* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich, 2005) p. 194 n. 8.

⁴³ This interprets עֲקֹשׁ as an adjective qualifying דֶּרֶךְ. Alternatively it may be a noun in construct: ‘the path of the crooked man’

However, contra-Koch, this *Tatsphäre* is not simply presupposed by the sages. Rather, it is constructed by them as a metaphor. It is not primarily meant as an ontological reflection of the real world, but it has rhetorical significance. A number of scholars have suggested that the act-consequence connection in Proverbs is largely a motivational tool.⁴⁴ By describing graphic consequences, the sages can persuade their students to good behaviour. Here, they are threatened with disaster, barren wastelands, hazardous journeys imperilled with thorns and traps. Such they might avoid through navigating an ethical course.

The act-consequence connections are obvious in the metaphorical world. The students are encouraged to recognise them, and to map them onto the target world of their own lives, where they may not be quite so evident. By themselves deducing the connection and the mapping, the students actively engage their minds, and may be convinced by their own deductions. The connection is made to seem obvious in the target world too. Elsewhere, Yahweh or society may enforce the consequences, but here no external agent is specified. This stresses the responsibility of the student. If I have suffered after erring morally, it is I who have wandered into destructive wastelands. No external agent can be blamed for somehow causing the connection between ‘straying’ and ‘straying’. Furthermore, the consequence is entirely appropriate for the act, and may not be argued against.⁴⁵ The *schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre*, then, is a powerful metaphorical construction, that the student might walk the straight and peril-free path ahead.

⁴⁴ E.g. S. L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (JSJSup 125; Leiden, 2008); Boström.

⁴⁵ J. Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament”, *JTS* 30.1 (1979) pp.1-14; P. D. Miller Jr., *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (SBL Monograph Series 27; Chicago, 1982).