

**Ancient Wisdom: Faith & Doubt in
Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs & the Psalms**

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**Unchanging truth and the God of history:
Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in a mutable world.**

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of English and Comparative Literature, *Emeritus*

This is the Uhlman Jewish Studies seminar. They chose to ask us to put on this seminar each year. They are sponsoring as well by the General Alumni and Carolina Center for Jewish Studies. Carol Meyer is teaching and will be here at lunch time.

Our first speaker is Tom Stumpf, English professor Emeritus, Harvard PhD. I was one of his students in the Survey of English Lit in 17th century which he taught to new grad students for many years. He has won many teaching awards. Alexander Pope and Henry Fielding are his specialities.

Note: No handout available. These notes are highly incomplete. He read his presentation and there's no way that I could keep up with all his citations.

If you read my bio we no longer do weddings, we lost 2 sopranos and the bass is moving to Copenhagen. A part is meaningless unless we see it as part of the whole. A fixed meaning of a word comes to life in a sentence. It can twist and turn. The sentence needs to be interpreted through the paragraph...chapter...book. The Bible has suffered by interpreting out of context. A mine for proof texts relentlessly quarried and butchered. I used to say to religious students God could have given us a catechism with a list of what to do, but instead he gave us this unwieldy work of many genre's, rich enough to challenge our best efforts. Whether we want to ascribe to God or collective skills of editors or genius of a people, no one part can be understood without reference to the other parts. This is my assumption.

Especially true for the Wisdom books. Two were ascribed to Solomon. He answered hard questions. I King, something of a natural philosopher. He had largeness of mind, his wisdom surpassed all the people of the east and of Egypt. He uttered 3,000 proverbs. He spoke of trees, hyssop, beasts, birds, reptiles, and

all people came to hear him and all the kings have heard of his wisdom. David is charming, wayward, passionate, Solomon is remote. David is up and down, bitter repentance, strong personalities and attachments, Jonathan, etc. Solomon has no story, a long tenor of success. A thousand wives. David's very personal lyrics and Solomon more abstract.

One can't imagine wise men of east coming to see a man turbulent in his relationship with Yahweh. Proverb as a form has currency in many cultures. The validity of this wisdom. Comparing wisdom of Solomon and east is comparing apples and apples. In Egyptian instruction, remember Solomonic proverbs, or in Aramaic. This sort of wisdom transcends cultural content and form.

The nature of form survives today, practical. We don't have time and patience for long discursive reasoning. Aquinas is not portable. Look before you leap or discretion is the better part of valor. Portable wisdom has to be memorable. In English we use rhyme or metaphor or alliteration. Proverbs in all language have in common repetition and parallelism. Parallelism a basic device in Hebrew poetry. In Proverbs they are pithy. They make it portable, easy to remember. Proverbs are the wisdom of an oral culture intended originally for the illiterate or semi-literate, based on common experience. Use of metaphor helps us remember not the wisdom of the engineer or numbers, the moral world exists in analogies.

Careful use of body parts and adjectives. The reprover has to be wise, and the ear has to be obedient. Proverbs is far more sophisticated than its Egyptian analogue. Wisdom in the first chapter cries out in the street. Chapter 2 her counterpart, the stranger woman ('loose woman'). If Wisdom sounds like a prophet, the stranger's lips drop as a honeycomb, she flatters. Contrast with the prophet who never flatters and tells the truth to an annoying degree. All of chapter 8 includes her in the creation of the world. Her house is an analogue for the world. To gain understanding come eat his bread and drink his wine. The house of folly is secret and deceptive. Her banquet is private, bread eaten in secret. Both noisy and secretive. She makes a brave show and persuasive invitation, but the dead are there at her party.

The punitive solomonic is analogous to building a house. Prudence, foresight, the essence of wisdom. The charismatic David, passionate lover and penitent is not wise, but Solomon succeeded in building the Temple. The God whose world holds together with antitheses, light and dark, sea and dry land. Personification introduces characters and plot. Impersonality at the heart of wisdom but when she is made a person disturbs wisdom. When there was no foundations, before the mountains were settled, I was brought forth. When he prepared the heavens, I was there. Divine attribute is personified? It is justified to interpret in this way.

A personified wisdom is wisdom that goes beyond propositions. A wisdom can take the light and play complicates the neatness the cut and dried character of proverbs. Proverbs despite its warnings a profoundly optimistic book. A world ordered by wisdom, not a dead principle but alive, child and teacher, lover and wife. The book ends with the virtuous woman in chapter 31. Portrait of a woman at her various tasks is appropriate in this work bound to earth. Not a vision or hope, but it is accessible, live with it day in and day out, unlike Gnostic and hermetic wisdom it can inform us daily, spinning, loving, living.

But the Bible is a Concordia dischord, a harmony of opposite things. The other solomonic work, Ecclesiastes, is a contrast. Wisdom is a cynic. Wisdom is as good as an inheritance (Anchor Bible translation). She is the cause of riches in those who possess her. A living dog better than a dead lion. Proverb form in Ecclesiastes introduced to turn it upside down. 7:1. Proverbs has 'better than' form. Second half of the statement is something else.

Ecclesiastes does not allow us to feel that God's justice is similar to our own. One fate comes to all, the righteous and the sinful all have the same demise. 2:17, 11:9, 12:3 God judging our conduct but this is not persuasive. Preacher begins with melancholic repetition of how the world never changes. All things are full of weariness. What has been is what will be, what has been done will be done and nothing new under the sun. Circularity and cyclical, nothing is completed because nothing happens.

A little boy at a piano concert could not remember how his piece exhibited. Can we even begin to understand how profoundly pessimistic the prophet is. The past is the present is the future. Nature operates in cycles while we as individuals do not. We will not walk the earth again. We are in the center of and imprisoned by – we want to move forward, but a straight line birth to death. No comfort from Koheleth, all is vanity, vexation. 'Under the sun' is interesting. A favorite one occurring 29 times, unique among the biblical writers, the only one who uses it. Preferred over "under the heavens.' Why choose one rather than the other? Under the sun is temporal, under the heavens is spatial. The latter means the cosmos, whereas under the sun is the living, temporal, because he is concerned with how time and history work, in circles or cycles. If you read Ecclesiastes in the context of the bible, 'salvation history,' a narrative of events, intrusion of a personal deity into history, a linear narrative. In Ecclesiastes there is no linear narrative. What is done shall be done, nothing new under the sun. That history of single events has no meaning or importance for the individual. Narrative are full of individual personalities, even the prophets mouthpieces of God have individual voices, but Wisdom looking for universal propositions has trouble with singularity of history or personality. Generic sages or father/son, loss of all individual personality. Job is an exception, but Ecclesiastes despite several allusions to personal experience never gets beyond generic wiseman. I've

seen it all vs. I saw a burning bush and a voice came out of it. This distinction emphasizes uses Elohim instead of the more personal Yahwah. No order in the world of Ecclesiastes – moral order – an uncommunicative God.

3:1-8, for every thing there is a season.... Many a flower child in the 60's sang an edited version but in reality it is as disturbing as melancholy...all the world is a stage, all players entrance and exit...

Ages or stages analogous to seasons as to when things will occur. Spatial patterns are more comforting than temporal pattern, seem less a threat of our personal freedom. No one wants to live a scripted life. If the temporal pattern is cyclical, what is the point? As Qoheleth says naked you shall return and none of your labor taken with you. Circularity in the natural world is lyrical, changes of colors in the trees but in human life dispiriting. It is impersonal and individualistic, each person following every person's fate.

Isaiah is most contrasting with Ecclesiastes. Isaiah do not remember the former things, behold I will do a new thing. Qoheleth nothing new under the sun. World is a steady state, moving in circles, and the wise man creates an image of steadfast security. In Isaiah he is bringing about something new. Woman gives birth. Pain is leavened with hope. Visionary. Suffering servant vs prosperous sage. But both find a place in the Bible. It is not mere incoherence, the nature of biblical unity is the union of opposites, giving it a life it would never have if considered on its own. We can't see how radical Isaiah is until we read Ecclesiastes. They don't cancel each other out. Yin and yang, a truth balanced against its opposite truth, wisdom is a powerful polar force.

What is the origin as wisdom as a female? Where in the history does the bible fall? I'd like to be able to answer that question. Plenty of analogous figures, Isis is one. Personification of wisdom as female continued throughout western civilization. It started with Ishtar but in babylonian texts a destructive element, not wisdom at all. I think she gains her character from isis, where she began I do not know. **Does Isis precede the bible?** Yes, but whether part of mystery cult and wisdom I am not sure. I think the passages we have about Isis as a figure of wisdom are fairly late. If you are looking for cause I do not know. I prefer to think of them as parallel. Why would we want to personify ..

Boyarin: One creative figure as male, a partner who is wisdom that may provide a clue. I am a modernist, maybe a clue as to figurative wisdom.

What do we know about the time that proverbs and Ecclesiastes were collected? The latest thing I have read, Persian loan words, in the Persian period. The proverbs many antedate and go back a long ways.

How Jesus quotes proverbs and Ecclesiastes? I do not recall that he quotes them? When he quotes more likely the prophets. I would not want to say categorically, but I do not know.

We are driven to love, things we are driven to. Constant encounter of our finiteness with ultimate reality. The big difference with Ecclesiastes and Job...Job calls out and God shows up. Not what Job said but the fact that God showed up makes it a completely different world as Ecclesiastes cannot imagine God showing up.

God has more things on his mind that damning.

I am interested in cultural social world, in Ecclesiastes saying nothing new, I do not know how it would be said by a preacher after the Alexander conflict, yet the linearity with the Good Samaritan. Scholars think Ecclesiastes ... [I cannot hear him]

The question was he was curious if I could pin down the date because he thought it would be impossible to adopt this notion of nothing new before the Alexander conflict. My colleague from Duke Divinity... [still can't hear]

Is Ecclesiastes the first existential? Yes but they would say existence takes effort, and I'm not sure he would agree with that.

Was there any concept of resurrection or another life or just how to live your life, nothing to do with hope for the future. I would agree with Proverbs but Ecclesiastes keeps bring up the question. If you are content with here and now, he wouldn't keep raising the question. You can see as hopelessness or invest in the history giving a hopefulness beyond the individual.

We take comfort from spatial and less from temporal. **She wanted me to clarify about spatial vs. temporal.** We like the idea for obvious reasons. That song everything has a season.

Is Ecclesiastes a part of modern Jewish experience?

Boyarin: Ecclesiastes is recited in orthodox congregations on the intermediate Sabbath of festival of ???. I am not sure anyone has a real good understanding why. The standard answer it comes toward end of a cycle of holidays, too much levity or lightheadedness may have crept in, and therefore a sobering experience. At that time it is read out loud to the congregation similar to prophets being read every week. I say this is a really weird book!

The search for wisdom: What were they looking for?

Anathea Portier-Young, Assistant Professor of OT,
Duke University Divinity School

She studied at Yale and at Jesuit School in Berkeley and PhD at Duke.
Theological themes of God's mercy and justice. L

I will tell you a bit about my translation of Job 28

I 'Get Wisdom' (2:4-5)

- a. Hidden treasure:**
 - i. knowledge of God**

The sages say it is a precious riddle, she is also the promise of wealth. She is buried beneath the surface, hiding behind and within mundane everyday surroundings. She did not come to be buried by accident. Someone, guess who, has hidden her within creation. Within the workings of the world, the rhythm and pattern of everyday life, relationships, human nature, ordering of cosmos. To find that hidden treasure is to find knowledge of God, the creator who has given wisdom 2:6 out of God's own mouth and into creation and also into human ears. 2:10. 3:13 happy is the one who finds wisdom. A few verses later

- b. Tree of life:**
 - i. sustaining gift**
- c. Worth any cost**

She is a tree of life, taking us back to Eden, the source of all that live. The vital and abundant fruitfulness, she sustains, grants life to whoever manages to hold on to it. Proverbs 4:7 Get wisdom or acquire her at the cost of all you have, get understanding, whatever it costs. 16:15 better to acquire wisdom than gold. To get wisdom is to love one's self. 23:23 get or buy or acquire truth and do not sell it. Wisdom instruction understanding get them and do not sell them. You can hear clearly that Israel sages spoke of wisdom as something to search for and find, to grasp, hold on to, to get or buy and never sell, never let go. Wisdom this tree of life more precious than gems or gold, better than rare commodities, trade everything else away. Proverbs speak of her as an object.

II Wisdom speaks and invites

- a. personified Wisdom**
 - i. Public space: Wisdom does not hide**
 - ii. Proclaims her role in creation**

iii. Offers her feast

Wisdom is a speaking subject, speaks invites, teachers, is able to say to humankind the one who finds me finds life. Chapter 1 the first personified wisdom, she inhabits public spaces, speaks to a bustling humanity 20:21, cries out in the street, open square raising her voice calling out at the city gate. She speaks to all passerby in these open spaces. She knows people are looking for her and does not hide, shouts out her invitation and her rebukes, at the crossroad spaces, at the gates. Where people conduct their business, coming in and go out, make their choices and pass their judgment. Wisdom does not hide but stands in the streets, high on a hill, where anyone can see her. She does not whisper but raises her voice loud enough for anyone to hear her. She holds out her hands so everyone can see, long life in right hand riches and honor in the left. Chapter 8 in the public square. She invites the simple and the fool to hear and receive her counsel, her advice and her strength. She wisdom is the governing principle of society and justice, the source of wealth, honor and prosperity. She takes us back in time in that passage before creation, she is the beginning of God's way. Poured forth brought forth before creation, attending and animating God's work of creation, playing on the surface of the earth, God's artisan, architect, builder, because God founded the earth 3:19 so by wisdom the depth break open and the clouds drip down. The water of insight and understanding permeate and sustain the earth.

Just as these waters sustain creation Wisdom offers her peace, summons, invites, spreads her table. They only have to listen to her words to receive the gift of life. This offer of life, salvation, security is not an abstract promise. It is about this life, not the afterlife. Not abstract but a concrete dimension, wealth, honor, long life, all signs of God's blessing within the pages. It is offered as a gift.

III Human response

a. Ongoing search

- i. **Observe, attend, investigate, reason, question, test**

b. Life in Wisdom

- i. **Moral focus**

1. **Justice, virtue, truth**

2. **Praxis as creation**

- a. *qanah* = 'get' or 'create'

- b. **human life of Wisdom mirrors God's creativity**

Wisdom issues a summons and offers humans to respond into an active committed and longterm relationship, active committed and long-term. I want to

suggest two parts to her summons. First the one who would get wisdom and so have this life she offers must be forever engaged in the search. Second this one must be committed to the life of justice and honesty that wisdom teaches. The search for wisdom and the life in wisdom these are relational and moral. This search is at its core a search for and living into relationship with God, with humanity and with creation.

First the search, then the moral dimension. Who would get wisdom must look around and look closely. The sage will watch daily at her gate, for new insight to emerge. The sage does not wait passively. She is looking, investigating, thinking, and as she investigates she exercises her mind, develops her common sense, attends to experience, trains her virtues, learns to think analogically, infer from visible to invisible, from created to mind of creator. She asks questions and hard questions, tugs at them, moves through them to deeper understand or to more fundamental and more difficult questions.

The sages receives the tradition of her elders and reveres it, tests it, investigates the words. She challenges those words, perceives contradictions, seeks to discern the conditions in which each testing can be true and also testing to learn in what ways and under what conditions they are false. As she continues to shape and reshape her thinking she participates in the handing on of this tradition she has inherited.

Moral dimension: If it sounds like a scientist, or surprisingly like a university professor, she is engaged with the theoretical and practical, discernment for a life of just practice. Emphasis on virtue, justice and the moral law permeates Proverbs. Righteous sadeek...occurs 66 times in the book of Proverbs vs. 206 in the entire Hebrew Bible 32% of total biblical talk about what it means to be just or righteous. Used in parallel with adjective 'good' and contrasted with wicked or guilty. Sadakah 11%. Twelve references to truth, 11 to loyalty, the necessity of honest testimony, gentle speech, against the dangers of anger and resentment. Three times condemns false weights. Above all, laying out clear and persuasive guidance for the moral life.

IV Inspired Creativity

a. Exodus

i. Priestly vestments (ephod)

- 1. God gives gift of wisdom**
- 2. Wisdom is creative skill**
- 3. Empowers humans for relationship with God**

ii. Tabernacle and furnishings: Cultic Space

- 1. Mirrors cosmos**
- 2. Mediates God's presence**
- 3. Wisdom as bridge**

So as the sage speaks wisdom, as she shapes her virtues, hands on, the very wisdom tradition that will lead others on the path of virtue, a life of moral creation. I borrow from Carol Newsom. If Wisdom is the founding principle and the animating force of God's initial work, and if wisdom continues to govern and animate all that God has made, then the sage who patterns her life according to wisdom participates in God's creative practice. Human practice of wisdom becomes a mirror of God's own creativity. A place with double meaning in Hebrew underscores this connection, pun, play on sound and meaning and also Wisdom was at play in creation, playing along side with God from the beginning. This double meaning the word for getting buying that I opened the lecture with.

In Hebrew to get, *qanah* occurs 14 times in Proverbs, once to go buy something at the market the other 13 the object of the verb is wisdom, knowledge, insight, understanding.

The plain meaning in the verses is to get, not create. One entails the fool with money in hand to buy wisdom, figure out where he can get some.

Proverbs 8:22: God is the subject, in the translation Tom recited, God possessed Wisdom. Contemporary translation, God created meaning, but the same verse. We might want to distinguish God from human action. Hebrew suggests affinity of God's work of creation and human work of getting acquiring wisdom. Book of Job exploits that ambiguity in chapter 28.

The way the wisdom is used in a different biblical book, the term wisdom used to identify human skill and artistry, where humans create. Book of Exodus. Key differences in conception of time, particularity vbs universality, a different world view. How does wisdom work there? Occurs 8 times and no where else in the Torah. No mention in the other 4 books. All in Exodus between chapter 31-36.

First reference to wisdom at 28:3. A reference to those who the Lord has endowed with wisdom. We could translate it as exceptional skill. To make priestly vestments, jeweled that Aaron wore, a stone for each of the 12 tribes, very detailed craftsmanship in order to consecrate him for the priesthood.

God gives the gift of wisdom. Wisdom is created skill. Wisdom is required to clothe and consecrate the high priest who will serve as intermediary between Israel and the Lord. Enables humans to approach God to serve and offer gifts and receive guidance from God. In this text, God's gift of wisdom empowers humans for relationship with God. This theme is continued in the remaining seven references 31, 35, 36, describing the exceptional gifts of artisans creating the wilderness tabernacle, the site of worship during their sojourn.

Babal, filled with divine spirit and every kind of craft, he can conceive of design to make or do. Word to make or do, sometimes used to describe God's creative activity. What this word signifies is inspired creativity. Team of craftsman, receive wisdom or exceptional skill to create temple of meaning, the ark, sign of God's presence and housing for the law, the mercy seat, the lamp stand for illumination, altar of incense and altar of burnt offering, the oil of anointing. What is noteworthy, God not only empowers creation of vestments but the space itself that mirrors god's cosmos and mediates god's presence to the people.

The hearts of the artisans are stirred to carry out this work according to God's command. Wise or skilled women in chapter 31, weaving cloth for the tabernacle as offering for service of the cult. I call attention advisedly, Exodus not part of Wisdom literature, used in a different way than in Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastic

A yahwistic heightening of a revealed way, largely absent from biblical wisdom literature, but the use of it in Exodus helps us see from a different angle certain dimensions of wisdom, and we see developed in Proverbs and Job. God is the source, the originator, both proverbs and exodus the practical and creative component. Exodus religion worship life and Proverbs ethical. Wisdom is the bridge that mediates divine presence to human kind.

V What is Wisdom?

- a. Faculty**
- b. Object of knowing**
- c. Praxis**
- d. Bridge between humans and God**

In the search for wisdom, what exactly were the sages looking for? Is it enough to say they sought understanding and insight? Scholars have answered in a variety of ways. Wisdom is many things and one thing. I will highlight four ways.

First wisdom is a faculty of discernment, that sages seek to cultivate, the cognitive dimension, habits of the mind. In some sense the search itself is wisdom. That habit of examining investigating, plumbing the depth, testing, handing on. The faculty of discerning, choosing what is right. My teacher James Creshoff introduction to OT wisdom, wisdom is the reasoned search for specific ways to assure wellbeing in every day life, to make sense of extreme adversity and anomaly and to transmit this hard-earned knowledge. Walter Himmerly, practice is mental mastery fulfills Genesis to exercise dominion, not ruling but mastery of understanding. Roland Murphy, the tree of life, the search for wisdom is characterized by openness to the world. The dynamic nature of lived reality, the autonomy of creation itself (Murphy??)

Second an object of knowing. The principles of creation, of human living, the nature of things. As an object of knowing the guiding principle of creation, the order of the cosmos. Norman Habell - the wisdom of design, mystery behind all the ways of creation. Clyde Cook, act and consequence, is one principle. Respond to sin with punishment and to righteousness with reward. Same principle in the natural world, cause and effect. Hans Schmidt one principle that melded causal, social, political in one order. Each had a certain merit, but I caution from reducing it to a system or a principle or even a set of principles. Throughout the wisdom traditional, wisdom's playfulness and dynamism comes to the fore, hardly fixed or frozen. It is living and organic. Remember tree of life. It is artistic, a chef, a mixer of wine. Jobe 11: 6, Zophar invites us to think of wisdom as many sided, but better to describe as two sided. Wisdom is available and inaccessible. Obvious and mysterious. Transparent and opaque. Deep things of god we cannot know, to know the extent of earthly terrain, chart topography but helpless to set a limit to god's ways. There will always be much that we fail to comprehend. Search and activity of wisdom, ka-kar, to search but better translated as investigate, determine its limits and content, finding out the land, its strengths, weaknesses and boundaries. This kind of investigation necessarily fails when applied directly to God.

Psalm 45:3 God's greatness is unsearchable. A now form, unsearchable, its limits can't be determined Job 5:9, 9:10 no searching god's great deeds. Human can't discern the limits because without number, measure. Humans can't count, weight, quantify or fix them in any way. Job 34:24: God's shattering of the mighty that is unsearchable. Unaccountable. The frustrated search for understanding in book of Job relates explicitly to Job's own experience of God. God has shattered Job done so without cause by God's own admission. Will God be held accountable? Can a reason be fixed for that? Will God abide by the rules of his own creation? Have the sages correctly discerned these rules at all?

VI Two-sided Wisdom: Inviting and elusive

a. Job 28

i. Destructive search

ii. God as model for Sage

iii. Fear of the Lord

If human experience is experience of god's way and will, how will humans interpret the experience of injustice? How will humans respond when it seems unjust, and god is absent?

Paradox in the public space and like a hidden treasure: She is all around to see and grasp but also elusive and mysterious. Job 28 offers a powerful meditation on human inability to ...

The human can't locate her source in creation, even though humans have cunningly managed to find silver, gems, bronze. They don't measure up to wisdom at all. The poem begins by affirming even silver has its place. Coming forth like a vein of ore a source humans can seek out and exploit by their skill and craft, the processes of purifying gold, cast copper.

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In pursuit, humans have searched to the farthest limits deep into stone. I have thought during Tom's talk, folly inhabiting those dark spaces. There humans have been able to fix a limit and put it into that subterranean darkness of the mine shaft. A torrent of wisdom's waters pouring forth resisting human efforts to tame.

An image of minors lowly and forgotten hanging low and trembling as they work far from habitation and from travelers' path.

Image of turmoil within the earth, earth can sustain human life with gift of bread underneath her surface, churned up.

Recalling destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of greed exploiting others for personal pleasure The human search for wealth has damaged the earth, this technological feat has destroyed, and no wisdom to be found. Humans have discerned places that eye of evil have not found, they have not aimed for justice but only for destruction and exploitation, deriving profit, overturning God's order. Only violence where flinty channels have been torn, destroying the foundation, to gain unhampered access to gems. What was hidden comes to life but it is not wisdom. For all this technology of the deep places, where is wisdom to be found?

No human knows its measures comes the response. She can't be bought, concealed from humans, not deep below or in the sky above. God the poet tells us discerns her way, the one who knows her place, God takes the trouble to look. God's gaze encompasses all that is purposeful, beneath all of the heavens, God sees.

In this poem God is the observant sage who attends to what God has made. God sets weight and measure and decree and in his creating we are told at that time, God saw her and he took her measure. He established her, and he searched her. God sought to know the full measure and extent of wisdom. In God's work of creation comes to know wisdom in her fullness of measure. God models a path not through destruction but through artistry and attention. The fundamental starting point, it must be fear of God.

V 28, fear of the Lord he said this is wisdom, turning aside from evil is understanding. Humans arrive at fear of God through awareness of human

limitation. This is what psychologist Maria Torrance, the wisdom of unknowing, the recognition of and response to human limitations. Humans discern their place, not at the center. She is the way of all the earth. That moment of awareness God invites humans into free, artistic, attentive and moral creation with what God has created. Sage finds wisdom and will find god.

Read to you from another wisdom book, Wisdom of Solomon: In a Christian bible in the apocrypha, by Jewish author around 100 BCE, in the tradition of Aisraelo but living with Hellenistic culture:

An extended prayer and meditation. May god grant me to speak of judgment...god is the guide...corrector of the wise...God gave me unerring knowledge...beginning and middle of time...changes of season, constellations of the stars, tempers of wild animals...both what is secret and what is manifest, wisdom the fashioner of all things taught me. Intelligent, holy, unique, mobile, clear, unpolluted, invulnerable keen, irresistible...pure free from anxiety. All powerful, overseeing all, penetrating through all spirits that are pure, more mobile than any motion because of her pureness she penetrates all things, breath of the power of god. Nothing defiled gains entrance, a spotless mirror...passes into holy soul makes the friends of god.

So many elements come together you can see how Greek philosophy has permeated this world view. The wisdom tradition and we saw in Tom's presentation on proverbs and the opposite voice of Ecclesiastes, a dynamic tradition, at any moment in time in one person or one community, multiple different viewpoints concerning wisdom.

Wisdom 7:15-28

Magnify the bridge of creativity, a metaphysical purchase. Prominence of creating in Platonism. Christianity is down the road. Is there an arena for a theological metaphysical principle?

Let me capsule what he said. What settings gave rise? Your final question relates to later text Wisdom of Solomon, which I didn't discuss in its own right.

Start by talking about what John Hadley asked. He inquired about the historical settings, wanted to know what we heard in the last passage greek platonic and where does that go in terms of metaphysics?

Israel wisdom tradition, what setting might have originated? Book of Proverbs Persian period in its final form, but many date much earlier.

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An analysis of Proverbs 3 settings that are believed to be operative. First household and the village. You hear repeatedly the words of your father and mother, injunction. An accurate reflection that much teaching happened within the household, pithy saying in proverbs that help guide me in life. They can be passed on, transmitted nuggets of wisdom within the culture from one generation to the next.

Dr. Meyers will talk about mothers were teachers of their children, an important role in the wisdom tradition.

Second setting is the royal settings, in proverbs instruction to kings, if not at kings how not to antagonize the king or act in court setting. A fair amount of wisdom material originated in that setting, jurisprudence and recognizing that kings can abuse power, as in Deuteronomy king must read and write out torah every day, so the king will not abuse those he rules.

The wisdom can teach king how to be just, the stories of David and Absalom people want his advice because it is as good as gold. Wise counselors were key figures in the court.

Scribal school, a centralized administration under David and Solomon, Judah in south Israel in north, other Persian rule, centralized government means bureaucracy and wisdom was taught. The sociological matrix the 3 settings that are identified.

Proverbs began before the Monarchy, before 1000 BCE in village setting being shaped, a reference within Proverbs men of Hezekiah in southern kingdom late 8th century at least one part in that collection. Other things added, maybe a final product in 5th century.

Book of Job post exilic written after Babylonian exile, Jews in southern kingdom of Judah maybe 10% went into exile, the literate educated scribes, 597 – 587 until first wave of returnees around 538 BCE. At that time Jews could return to their home land, the Persian period Cyrus of Persia defeated and all under Babylonian control came under Persian control. The shaping of apocalyptic. Post exilic means afterward. Job the crisis of exile, unjust punishment, abandonment of God, the prophet saying it was earned but others saying how can this be earned? That experience of absence of God or call God out, answer me for what you have done. It is possible we can't prove it, but no historical references in Job, but it seems to reflect a kind of crisis, beginning to ask questions of a different order that were not being asked earlier in the tradition. So before the Hellenistic period. Wisdom of Solomon some centuries later in Hellenistic period, around 300 BCE.

A lot of influence of platonic neoplatonic philosophy. Where I want to go, go back to an earlier question the figure of wisdom personified. Possibly Dr. Meyers can pick up on this. Partner figure for creature god, a mediator, the role that Jc would come to play in Christian tradition a crucial mediator role. Logos linked in late Hellenistic texts with Sophia. As we move into later period, different mediator periods with late biblical traditions, apocalyptic 3rd century BCE, very prominent are angels as mediators who give revelation. In Wisdom literature

Is there a line of development between Wisdom and the Holy Spirit?

Elizabeth Johnson wrote She Who Is.

Sophia in relation to *logos* and Tom distinguished between creative spirit, a difference between spirit and wisdom each have this similar function.

Third a praxis, an art of living.

Fourth a bridge a path bridging the gulf between human and god. That is to say in their search for wisdom the sages sought nothing less than God, and the possibility of God's presence within creation, with creation, for creation.

Let me come back to that.

Women and wisdom: Images lofty and lowly
Carol Myers, Mary Grace Wilson Professor of Religion,
Duke University

Carol Meyer was teaching this morning, a professor at Duke since 1976. PhD from Brandeis in near east and Judaic studies. Discovering Eve, Women in Scripture. A frequent speaker here.

Most of what we will do is looking at biblical text, so if you have not brought your own bible with you, the material is in your packet. You know that the basic word is *Hosma*, a feminine word meaning skill and ability but used more broadly, referring to technological, artistic, and intellectual dealing with existential problems as a human being. Facets of it, the word is feminine, whether something inherently feminine about the concept of wisdom. I am not sure I can answer it but we might get a better take on that, whether something intrinsic. We need to look at images and text.

Technological wisdom: Some images on the first 2 pages of the handout. One of the things we see the textile industry in Asia minor, Egypt, ancient Israel – women had a leading role. Wool, cotton made into usable materials, some used in royal garments and others in homely every-day use almost exclusively by women. The iconographic material shows a woman spinning, probably a royal women – women of all classes had some role. One taken from number two, on an ancient greek vase in Metropolitan Museum of Art. I have been looking at photos for a long time, we are walking along – ‘there it is!’ If you get there, scene after scene of women working together. At the bottom women at a vertical loom with weights at the bottom used throughout Greece. This is a drawing of the loom with the loom weights. One really interesting one shows an owl the symbol of Athena God of weaving and also goddess of wisdom. I think that is not an accident. Wisdom more generally.

1. Exodus 35:25-26: Preparing textiles for the Tabernacle: People constructed the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Most translations do not show the connection, NSRV is what I use in teaching. Every woman with wisdom of heart spun with their hands...[wisdom = *hokhma*]. Wisdom and knowledge associated with the heart, it is embedded in the language of this text.

***Gor Nisht: Listening to Yiddish radio with
Job, Koheleth and the Rebbe of Kotsk***

Jonathan Boyarin, Kaplan Professor of Modern Jewish Thought,
Department of Religious Studies

3. **Proverbs 31:** among the things the good woman with wisdom does, she opens her mouth with wisdom. She seeks wood and flax, willing hands (v. 13, v. 19)
4. **Wise women in biblical narratives:** There are no comparable passages of wise men, no vignettes about them. The figure of a wise person, the authority, but if you are interested in gender roles, the conventional notion of women subordinate to men but does not hold water. Women did have some authoritative position readily acknowledged in the community.

1. 2 Samuel 14: the wise woman of Tekoa: he summons this woman instructs her to act out of a clever scenario will allow David to see Absalom. She is called a wise woman. It does not look very good if you want to recognize human authority. He puts words in her mouth. That is what it leads us to believe but does not go the way Joab might have planned. She is on her own, she takes it from there. Pretend to be a mourner, they could be recognized, and don't make yourself look good. Go to the king and what you should say. He tells her to say to concoct a story about her life, 2 children, 2 sons, one has killed the other. If David doesn't catch on then, he is dumb. She is concerned because one son a murderer, he himself will be caught – blood avenge – and she will be left with nothing. She recites the speech. OK, I will give orders concerning you. Don't worry, I'll take care of it. Will that work? She is not confident. She will not have time to go running if something happens. She is trying to get him to make an absolute statement. In verse 11, 'as the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.' What psychologists did you watch a film like your own situation, or read a story. The good therapist, that is you, take care of it. She is kind of a psychologist, perhaps they functioned with life experience to see things that we don't see, maybe like social service people today. At one point, verse 14, we all die, water spilled on the ground. It is hard to say how it applies, but she knows this kitzy saying. Wise people not only helped settle disputes, but the ones who kept these wisdom proverbs – their currency – memorized them, scrolls passed from one wise person to the next. The king gets it, sends to Joab, bring Absalom back. David doesn't have such an easy time, more crises. By 2 Samuel 20, needs intervention, again a woman.

2. 2 Samuel 20: The wise woman of Abel of Beth-maacah: Joab enters the city. Someone has taken refuge, there with his army about to destroy the city because they are harboring a fugitive. Verse 16 a wise woman calls. Tell Joab come here I wanna come speak to you. He has to leave his forces go up to the wall where he will be vulnerable. He has to trust she has the authority to keep people in her city quiet and not fire on him, that she will have something to say that will resolve the problem. He is in a very dangerous position. He approaches her, are you Joab, listen to the words of your handmaid. OK, I am listening. In old time, people used to say, 'Let them inquire at Abel.' We know a few verses later that city Abel a mother city, very unusual term no where else seen in the bible. Presumably this is a city kind of renowned for wisdom and settling disputes. It may have been a way of saying go to somebody who can help you solve your problem. A little firther she says to Joab, here I do not think the NSRV works. Head shall be thrown, but in Hebrew it is in passive voice. She has the authority to have something done. Joab goes home, disaster has been averted. They disperse and go home. Joab returns to Jerusalem and the king. She is functioning as a diplomat, negotiating and finding a solution that will cause the least problem, most will survive.

II. Women in biblical 'wisdom' books

A number of female figures but not very many and they do not have very large but some have important parts.

A. Job: Job's mother, sister, servant girls

Job's daughters

The two I want to look at are his daughters and wife. In chapter 1, he had 7 sons and 3 daughters. He is well to do, exaggerated numbers of property but the top of the SES scale. Seven sons and 3 women did eat and drink together, not separate as people believe. The father is controlling, rise up and offer burnt offering for his children. Maybe when they were carousing they cursed God so he offers offering. At the end of story, Job is restored with 7 new sons, 3 new daughters. Then we learned he named the daughters and we learn their names – unique in all the bible. Only time when a mother did not name, but a father. They have names associated with beauty. But that is not all. In all the lands, their father gave them inheritance along with their brothers. Not patrilinearity, family land was passed through the males, only if no sons would women

inherit. The ending of 3 daughters inheriting goes against our assumptions of the secondary place of women.

Job's wife

Now his wife, beginning of chapter 2, the Adversary afflicting Job. He is in a pile of ashes. He is suffering. Very first person to speak with him in this state is his wife. 'do you still persist in your integrity' in claiming you are perfectly righteous? 'Curse God and die.' She anticipates what his 3 friends will say in long discourse in the rest of the book. She makes the same point they make over and over, raises the possibility that you can argue or oppose God. You don't have to take it all lying down. She opens the way for his spiritual journey. He will start talking after that. Eventually he does not curse God but what happens, at beginning of chapter 3 when the poetry began, 'after this he opened his mouth,' he curses the day of his birth.

Since God the creator is implicated in children's birth, indirectly he is cursing God. What does he say to his wife? Right there he claims to have been without sin, very disrespectfully puts her down, you speak as foolish (not shameless) woman. A rhetorical question so you think there is some truth to it. She has a voice, no name, only one line attributed to her but she sets the tenor for everything. She does not die like the kids, suffering along with Job, no house or wherewithal to live. We don't hear anything about her at the end. We assume she is in the background, because 10 more children.

Two other verses about wife do not pertain to the story line but just contribute to the imagery, talking about how unhealthy he is. My breath is repulsive to my wife. If I have done something bad, one of the worst things, let my wife grind for another; grinding was a female task, but it infers she is having an affair, the intimacy/sexuality aspect. It goes against all the social mores, adultery is the worst. I can even wish that would happen if I have sinned.

B. Ecclesiastes (Koheleth; the Preacher): An upper class male with a lot of possessions. I have not reproduced it all, but some of the text in which females are mentioned. Indirectly there is a glance at women's roles. Women were servants as were men. Some of the most vitriolic images. Professional female and male musicians, wife, concubines. Biblical scholarship has not come to grips with concubine, some kind of 2ndary wife had a legal status. He can have sex with a lot of people and entertainment.

Chapter 7 one of the most vitriolic statements. This is quoted in an Inquisitors' 16th century Manual to sanction women's torture. They go to this biblical verse to do that. He was looking around the world for a righteous man. I found one human being in a thousand, and of course never found a woman. In chapter 9 an opposite view, happiness is conjugal bliss. It is the human relationship. It is not original to Qoheleth but in Mesopotamian literature going back a long time.

A few other fairly neutral images. You know there's trouble again when the women guards the house, looking through the windows, and all the daughters of song are brought low. (chapter 12) Women looking through the windows you will see that in proverbs, Judges, when women are waiting for husbands to come home, or looking into street below, several times in the bible. An iconographic in ivory a stock in neareastern Israelite culture. The preacher is wealthy, this is an urban setting. You look at the images in Proverbs, lofty and lowly. The opportunity for temptation especially sexual is larger in urban culture, rich people who have time on their hands vs. villagers.

Proverbs: It is assumed that this is a male voice, royal court or schools, for well to do young man. Teachers of the males. There have been more recent objections. Can't a mother be instructing her son? First 9 chapters of Proverbs full of female imagery, wisdom talking about wisdom. The last chapter 31 two parts, 2 parts of a mother of a king giving advice about getting along and being successful.

Second part of Proverbs 31 is all about a woman who is a household manager. Women as well as men can give this advice, can't glibly assume it was only men. One article I gave you by a woman teaching at Howard, she suggests this too.

A lot of images of women in Proverbs, girls, widows. Major images are mother, wife, generic woman, wayward women, prostitutes, strange women. Hard to know if this is a loose woman or prostitute.

Two ends of conceptualization. We have mother the first set of texts, set up as gender pairs.

Don't reject mother's torah.

Mother – gender pairs:

Women in general:

In HER household, not the family household (chapter 14). A couple of places in Hebrew bible, once in Ruth, once in Genesis in 24 (Rebecca) 4 other verses from woman's perspective the family dwelling/enterprise seen as her house, the management was in a woman's hands in the Iron Age in ancient Israel.

Chapter 31 in Proverbs: A job description which no one can fulfill. All those technical wisdom skills. Notice she is more precious than jewels. Keep that language in mind when we look at the personification. Archeological evidence that she runs the house and the business.

Wife

Same word for woman is not interspersed in the poem. Sometimes wife used as imagery both positive and negative. Chapter 5. This is teaching a son so that he is speaking about a contentious woman. We should have students rewrite it as a woman talking about a contentious man.

Prostitute/evil woman/ loose (strange) woman/adulteress

A lot of sexual image gets personified into good and evil. Prostitution was not forbidden but it was not encouraged. But adultery is serious because the paternity of children and honor is at stake. It is much more serious than prostitution. In chapter 6, wisdom will keep you from loose women. Chapter 7: from the window of my house I looked out through my lattice – it is a woman speaking!

Woman Folly and Woman Wisdom

Personification of 2 ends of the spectrum. In chapter 9, woman folly at her house, loud, calls everyone who passes by. Goes into Sheol, not hell, but a netherworld after death. Woman Wisdom. She calls out in the square a public presence by both folly and wisdom. Street walker and the wise woman of Abel perhaps who can call out and help resolve things.

Chapter 3: Finding Wisdom, her revenue better than gold. You should be attracted to her, not to Folly, a sexual imagery to communicate the intensity that you can be pulled in either direction.

Hug her to you 4:8 and she will honor you if you embrace her. Again, you are my sister, my bride, as in the Song of Songs, a language of intimacy. Chapter 8, women speaking in the first person. Verse 14: wisdom is better than jewels, the

wife in chapter 31, good human females wise in their own right. They raise up good children, not succumbing to things, the personification of wisdom, her fruit.

Woman Wisdom goes back before creation, some think of her as a god figure. In Genesis 1, creation begins with water already there – not created – this takes us back even further. Ages ago at the beginning of the earth, verse 24, I was brought forth, no springs abounding with water. I, Wisdom, was there. Is this a consort to God the creator? What I think is important to consider, when a person thinks about creation, something brought out of nothing, one of the most powerful images is birth of a child. A woman with flat tummy but 9 months later especially if you don't know biology to the primitive mind miraculous and mysterious, the intrinsic female nature of creativity, some aspect of female creativity a way of describing divine creativity of the world. Verse 34 listen to me, the teaching aspect, happy is the one who listens to me, waiting beside my doors.

Wisdom chapter 9 building HER house. Heavenly image of her, doing things that a household manager does when throwing a banquet. She slaughters the animals, mixed the wine, sets her table, sends out female messengers and asks them to come to her for wisdom, a wonderful banquet, not material riches but understanding. Listen to the mother's teaching, personified

The seven pillars? When it talks about in the last text we had, she has built her house seven pillars, a way of saying she has done the whole thing, totality or completeness. That is a concept in hermetic literature.

Who do we turn to? A community role.

Age and life experience, older people tend to be the sages. In a smaller society but maybe even today in a community, you know there is someone that can figure things out. Not just hard knocks, but we try our best to teach children how to be wise, to have good goals, but they do not always listen to what we tell them. Wisdom is a combination of how much experience and how much is taught. Some don't learn until they go out and

Attendee: I think it is difficult to know why different concepts are male or female in different languages. Is it because the word is female that this description is female? My argument against would be anthropological, in preliterate no formal education, hypothetical court schools but there is no word for school in Hebrew scripture. Not a regular part of society. Kids got married at puberty. How did people learn? From their parents. From both parents. Women probably have a somewhat prior and more important influence because more time with young children. Teaching children is somewhat larger job for a woman than a man, and I think that is the underlying intrinsic social connection between socially

constructed wisdom as female, and the actual social role. I don't think it is just an accident.

History of monogamy? Monogamy was the main way of marriage. The life span less than for men in antiquity, died younger, average span was 5-10 years less, from analyzing skeletal remains, less women to go around. Polygamy was not illegal. It was usually found to represent important people, certainly true in Genesis the progenitors. Part of the etiology of family story of all Israelites being related. Not literally you had 12 sons but a construct but everyone calling self an Israelite is a brother. Hannah ...Samuel's mother a co-wife would not be a good story otherwise. The more wives a king had, part of diplomatic relations, solidifying relations. It was not common, in average family only if the wife was barren. Genesis gives us the sense everyone did it but not the case.

Although Job and Ecclesiastes seem modern and they do have relevance for modern Jewish thought. Job was read in the 2nd 24 hour fast of the Jewish calendar commemorating the destruction of the Temple. In chapter 2:2, I said of laughter, it is mad, and of mirth, what does it accomplish? This is not a humorous talk but laughter can make something out of nothing. In weekly radio Yiddish radio shortly after the Holocaust, Kotsker spoke. He plays the tape. 'Today friends we speak of nothing, yes, yes, the theme today is nothing, yes, NOTHING. Nada!' Remember we used to say nada, zilch, zip. Suddenly nothing is the subject. We are speaking about nothing, tonight! Lest you think it is just me connecting this to the ancient text. That is what the philosopher said, you remember how he taught us in Hebrew school, repeat after me, child. Nothing. He goes on and on. It is a tour de force by the grand master echoes in Qoheleth, all things toil to weariness. Although the verses the four of us are hitting on, not the most current in our culture today, there is something compelling. The eye not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing.

What I draw is an illustration of the astonishing paradox of language and meaninglessness of our striving. I will be somewhat randomly alluding back to Qoheleth and Job. In Job 15, 1-3, the speech an echo of his repeated talk about the vanity of language. Should a wise man reason with unprofitable talk, speeches with which he can do no good? I think we should discard seminars! Job 6:26 again more questions of the emptiness of language, the whole words could be an argument, the speeches of one desperate to be wind.

Professor Heschel the greatest mediator of Jewish and 20th century giving meaning to the world, toward end of his life he shared thoughts about Rebbe of Kotsk, a modern master given title sa-dik, justice and righteousness. Rebbe of Kotsk sought to face the emptiness of human language. He was steeped in tradition and comparable to Kierkegaard.

The midrash late antique early medieval rabbinic parables, when god wanted to create the first man a dispute broke out in heaven among the angels....

This is why we try to have an odd number of judges, it is 2 against 2. If anyone waffling, what did God do? Truth cast into the ground. Truth shall sprout from the earth a proof text from Psalms, that truth has been discarded, now 2 against one in favor of creation and the whole story starts. A slippage in reality. We have creation, here is our world but truth is banished from it. Heschel goes on. Midrash revealed an open secret, humanity at the grave of truth. ...Only one reality, goodness. Evil is an optical illusion. As long as man is a liar, his goodness an illusion. Truth wants to be resurrected but man doesn't allow it.

Kotsker Rebbe's insights...In the process from language of scriptureal verses to other terminology the terms are dangerously distorted. Perhaps Ecclesiastes was the first existentialists. I knew many of Kierkegaard from Kotsker. Problems of taking oral literature and fixing it in a book.

Tension between ideal and real, what one wants and what one is. K and K both hated compromise, for both it was the individual's internal nature.

Only one therapy, separate one's self from society, stop being a person, become superhuman, to live in constant tension with one's self. To understand God. Abraham Heschel delineates Kotsker and his scope. Kotsker's problem is the individual, not the collective. In 9:3, the afterlife is denied. Madness in their heart while they live then they are dead. Contrast in Job: Job is a family man at the beginning and end. Seemed like they all got along and he atoned for their sins. But like Qoheleth denies the afterlife. Go to the grave and come up no more.

In Qoheleth man and beast both die. Humans have language but it is not considered. Chapter 12 remember thy creator in the days of their youth before you say I have no pleasure in the days.

Relation between individual death and experience of cycle of losing children as Job does and this general decline.

Chapter 4:4 – nothing to be praised in the desire for excellence, only because of our vanity. Between ancient wisdom writers and 20th century I bring you from my translation, the

Was Job a parable? Was it a lie, written in Yiddish, after all his suffering he had been comforted. If true, Job would not have let himself be comforted. Plenty of mothers besieged by ragged hungry children and mourning for children lost years ago. Was it his first wife? No she was already an old lady. I dunno if she

could convince herself to become pregnant again? Job probably took a younger wife and the first one divorced or died. How could she be comforted. So I admit Job was only a parable. No, she answered Job is a foolish parable. Why didn't his friends argue with his wife. She would have clawed their eyes out if they suggested they died because of sin. This was written after World War II. There are layers and layers of loss.

Nothing in the world does not contain a spark of holiness otherwise nothing can exist.

I think we could say more about the modern literature and Yiddish literature. One of 3 classic writers of Yiddish canon. He hangs the world upon nothing. That upon which our possibilities depend, the human capacity to think of concepts such as nothing. Remember you were taught in math in 7th grade, when the arab scholar came up with the idea of 'zero.' What it makes possible, this building, this gathering would be impossible without the concept of nothing, regardless of the language. Language is material too. Language as substance and nourishment. Sketch of 2 jewish mystics – nothing remained except the head master of the school. As part of ascetic discipline fall into silence avoiding emission of breath that contaminates speech with materiality. Lips through which they pass, the sound is material. Materiality of the voice is precious to me, as it was to him. It is a parody of exaggerated pietism but an acknowledgement of the fact that the traditional Hasidic thinkers were working on the the gap between truth and overcoming the bridge of our concepts of spirit and matter with a god not part of the world. The tomb has to be in the marrow of your bones, the highest praise of the holy one, part of the melody. The holy jew of blessed memory sang, with nothing.

Much ado about nothing is a similar concept. Some of the scholarship, a good deal of scholarship about Seinfeld at this point. One insightful John Stratton, is Seinfeld a jewish comic? In many episodes, the explicit references are silent about jewishness. I happen to think that the family with an Italian last name but so much jewish in them...they trap themselves through language, catching themselves in little webs of deception. Moral fables in which he is the victim and the goat, trying to get yourself out of a situation by avoiding the truth.

What seems to us striking in the Bible giving full range to this aspect of wondering and articulated eloquent despair about ultimate meaning whether we have been provided through our stories, purification rites, with sufficient armature against the weight of knowledge again mortality that threatens to crush us. If there is a certain adolescence about this obsession with nothingness perhaps a time when youth are really wrestling with their own mortality. Maybe attaining wisdom is realizing we are gonna pass on and it is not the worst thing

that can happen. Ancient books had a lot of room for questioning God, along with conventional piety in proverbs, we wonder why in parts of our world they don't seem to be in the same room. I don't want to suggest that the world that these books came out of was a world of simple piety, God in his heaven, and that questioning took place safely because everyone ultimately agreed. But it does seem to me questioning become anathema where smaller social world religious world cultural world trying to maintain their own standard and keep firmer walls around themselves. Become more brittle on the inside.

In the beginning is the Word, the beginning of reality? These writers would roll in their grave if they were echoing the Gospel. What she was suggesting was a thematic continuity between the passages from Hasidic and Yiddish writings and John 1. But 2 senses in which ...one is that whether a religious tradition's understanding of language and world says words, logos becomes first and becomes material. That kind of logic is not only in Christology but various mystical understandings of how something comes out of nothing. Or whether it starts with creation as primordial and a human is a body first then animated by a soul. Western tradition seems to struggle with this question of which came first. I am smiling because in the last year NYorker, egg and chicken let's stop arguing about it, we are both here now, right? I would add also with caveat I am not a scholar of late antiquity. I am interested in modern framework and dilemma gets articulated in late antiquity. John is very much a Jewish book, Logos theology is not Hellenistic import, but part of the cultural repertoire of late antiquity Judaism, speaks to existential difficulty living with little moral ups and great big god and no mediation. Logos explains how something comes out of nothing and how little finiteness can communicate with greatness, might well find echoes in Jewish thinking.

It is useful not to assume this is what there is and we will just bump along. It is worthwhile to marvel that there is something rather than nothing.

In focusing on Yiddish literature, what I know best, a powerful example we keep thinking of a world destroyed that you can't go back to, but in fact tremendous substance was rescued from that world. And it is creative, not something we have as a memory.

I cannot follow him very well because the talk does not follow the handout.

Discussion: Ancient wisdom: Then and now.

Professors Stumpf (S), Portier-Young (P), Meyers (M), and Boyarin (B)

Let them say whatever they wish they had said earlier. Then we open the floor to your questions.

Stumpf: What I wish, wish I had read that passage in Exodus before. I wish I could have heard Carol say more about the woman in the window which is fascinating. I wish I knew Yiddish.

Boyarin: That was my goal!

Portier-Younger: I don't have anything else to add.

\ **Meyers:** I'd also rather not go on, rather respond to what is out of your head.

Boyarin: I feel like if I say anything of substance now, but I do. Each of my colleagues intrigues me. I want to point back to you. Stumpf: You opened with a general statement about context, which is very useful, giving a broad map. In rabbinic procedure all about taking bricks out of the bible, knock down the castle and build ships and moats and bridges with it. There are interpretive worlds not necessarily rigidly closed or fundamentalist, taking things out of context. I want people to know the passage from Proverbs 31 the woman of valor the singing of that passage at Friday night dinner table part of Jewish literature for a long time. My mother found this idea one time a week you had to point out women were pretty good too. It does live in the Jewish world.

Thea: On the verb *kanat*, to acquire giving birth to. Another story in that volume I was reading from Hassidic stories a parable mock parable explains a puzzling verse in Rosh Shashana in a prayer to God, *El Elohim*, God the ultimate judge, it refers to God as *kona* servant, a whole story explaining that.

In response to Carol, I was very appreciative knowing where this phrase mother city in Israel. Clearly is the source for a phrase that occurs repeatedly in memorial books for polish Jews and cities, such and such towns, a mother city in Israel, the sense of the community itself.

Wisdom and joy preexisted: *Shikinah* a feminine part of God? Wisdom is separate from rather than part of? *Shikinah* a feminine part of God. If you look at the text, I was with God at creation, not that I'm a part of god. Interpretation may say what it means, but simple meaning, a different kind of entity. Don't get too hung up on monotheism. If God is omnipotent...not inherent in iron age Israelite notions of God. That is late.

Identifying with god a quality of God's activity, something that God appears to possess but also something humans can get, we don't see language of getting god, acquiring god. It has a different category. In what ways do we participate in

the kind of activity that God does, what mirrors divine being or activity but not the same thing as identity.

As someone who struggled to find any kind of female identity...whatever wisdom was, a bit omnipresent, she was certainly there before Yahweh became a person. The Lord created me, not the Lord appropriated me.

Carol: I think in a way that is what is saying, the Lord created and appropriated me. I would not have a problem with that.

Thea: It could be acquire, get into one's possession, does not have to be created.

They were all written under patriarchal, not as much ...scriptures talk in male voice not surprising at all. We have to reinterpret it and get over it.

I will start with the easy part, always been a male voice, proverbs is not particularly a male voice. Other female voices, Song of Songs, Deborah, Miriam, Rebecca, to assume all that is unlabeled – forget about prophets with men's names. Why should we assume?: The story telling went into the formation of narratives in Genesis, book of J, J was a woman, no evidence to say that is not the case. Give up the notion that it was all written by men.

Patriarchy is too black and white. Pre-roman 3rd century, in the iron age, when Israel begins 1200 – 600. We have traditional culture in which there were different hierarchies, female and male, performers and singers and drummers, not men who played them. Hierarchies experts in mourning taught to women. Extrafamilial hierarchies controlled by women, too simple to say all male dominated. Anthropologies say cross hierarchies, may be easier to talk about it after Roman. Patrilinearity property passed along do not confuse that with male control of everything. I have worked very hard to get rid of looking through the Hebrew Bible through ...

Stumpf: Interesting gender politics obscuring issues, relationship between skill and wisdom. I hadn't thought of as ...contrast Athena and Apollo, transcendent sexuality and Apollo as a male pig, in many ancient texts. I think worth exploring without falling into one side or the other of a gender battle.

Notion of marriage arranged in the ancient world? Your first notion, they were arranged not religious they were legal, no real biblical word for marriage. Man taking a wife from natal family to his. The advice was going after other women. Because that complicates lineage.

I do not think all those maxims are necessarily advice, just reflection that circulates in a social world, things guys say while on the couch watching the game so they feel less lonely.

Talmud beginning of wisdom is the fear of god. Whatever you believe that you hold sacred the wisdom we are all talking about. Messianic ...distinguish between understanding and knowledge. Wisdom comprises understanding and fact, if you understand your own ...at contains the wisdom so beginning of wisdom

Boyarin: Why are these books called wisdom books? Not just because they use the words.

Thea: what distinguishes wisdom literature proverbs jobs Ecclesiastes and later books in the apochrypha is a different take on how one comes to know God and what God wants. What you have an emphasis in Serach given to a people a story with a plot, in a linear direction. In wisdom universal, Egyptian arrives at same conclusion, because we all observe the same reality. One can arrive at wisdom through them, investigating the universal human experience, not a particular revelation. Putting them together within one canon to affirm multiple ways of arriving at God and knowledge.

Is there a similar tradition such as wisdom literature in Islam that stands in contrast with the larger body? I do not know much about this but the Koran is didactic, and much of the wisdom literature in Proverbs is frequently didactic, you see parallels between Genesis then told in the Koran but differently. A little vignette and obvious moral.

Boyarin: This points to a gap in today's discussion but I can't imagine that much of the sentiment of proverbs in particular has not been written in the Arabic tradition and continue to circulate in that world.

Stumpf: The value of contrasting opposite views in the scripture. This is one way in which we grasp, Ecclesiastes to Isaiah as opposites, but I do think an orchestration. I think that is how the Bible works and how our own minds work, immediate and practical vs philosophical, we balance them off.

Evil words of adversary ...

Thea: The evil figure satan reason called satan because of tatatan, prosecutor. The prosecutor is part of God's order, he works for God. Encounter with Persian religion and culture very influential as Judaism and Christianity developed. Within Persian zoroastrian dualistic, equally powerful or almost forces of evil and good at battle with predetermined ascendancy very influential in apocalyptic literature fallen angels over centuries a book, a collection of within a stream of Judaism

BCE 300, angelic figures introduced with evil, Genesis 6 angels mate with humans, a race of giants, origins of evil being attributed to semi-divine figures opposed to God, get out from under his thumb but burden on the writers to show that God still has the upper hand. Empires that Jewish people are subjected to. Qumran writings more like we see Satan in the NT. That figure the tempter and deceiver develops in John's gospel, opposed to God's will.

Stumpf: Satan and Job, you have an official devil's advocate to dig up all the dirt you can get, very close to what the Satan does in Job.

Thea: When you look back to Daniel, Michael is gonna fight the prince of other nations on behalf of Israel, these are thought to be real persons fighting a real battle. Not typically perceivable to have an apocalypse to

It is possible to me don't know in certain Jewish traditionalists, moral education for children might reference why you shouldn't be out late at night, thoughts should not go in this direction. No way to assume that they are structurally different than in evangelical Christian community. You see it in like high holidays, the process of divine judgment depicted almost as a dramatic script.

Carol: Why evil gets personified as masculine? There are female evil spirits, part of folklore in Jewish tradition well into the 20th if not 21st century, childbirth folklore, snatching children away from their mothers.

Tom: Was Christianity corrupted or enriched by philosophy?

His brother Daniel Boyarin shows how Eve was portrayed in early Jewish literature. Interpretive developments over time. **Carol:** Jean Higgins, Myth of Eve the temptress in J of American Academy of Religion, she traces it through ...temptation does not occur, how it gets misused, she becomes an evil figure when it is quite neutral in the garden of Eden, and she is not cursed in the garden

Different Eves, in a book called *Carnal Israel*.

Life was so much shorter, life for women was average age 20. A lot of infant mortality. In general, not the lifespan to contemplate. We are talking about ideas and questions that probably were not part of the daily life of peasant laborers. Worked hard all day, more urban issues with people who had a bit more leisure, hard to know if that kind of wisdom we can appreciate. We all hear our mother's voice when we talk to our own children. Hard to know if Israelites in biblical period if it would come to that. We can only speculate.

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