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God and Evil in the Wisdom of Solomon*

1 *Sapientia Salomonis* as a Discourse on Overcoming Evil

A fundamental concept in the sapiential theology of the Old Testament is that, as a just creator, God has ordered the world in such a way that those who align themselves with God's created order are granted life to the full. Accompanying this idea is the constant reflection in the Wisdom Literature on the relationship between God and evil. On the one hand, God is the source of life; on the other hand, evil destroys life. From a long view, the history of wisdom in the Old Testament can be read as a history of the question of God and evil, of life and the forces which threaten to undo it.

As the latest sapiential text of the Old Testament, the Wisdom of Solomon contains reflection about God and evil that adopts the characteristics of a philosophical treatise. Written between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. in Alexandria, the Wisdom of Solomon participates in Greek philosophical discourse about the nature and origin of evil, which had been discussed intensively since the time of Plato, especially by the Stoics. It also addresses the relationship of evil both to God and to "the good," as well as the meaning of overcoming evil and the possibilities for succeeding in doing so.¹ The linguistic shift between the appeal in Wis 1:1 and the address in Wis 7:25 confer a dialogical character on the book. On the one hand, Wis 1:1 appeals to the rulers of the world to love justice and seek wisdom. On the other hand, Wis 7:25 (cf. 11:23) addresses the one sovereign ruler—the God of Israel to whom the ideal king, Pseudo-Solomon, prays (8:21). The prayer of Solomon demonstrates the correct answer to the appeal in Wis 1:1 and gives readers a model of an appropriate dialogue with God.

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¹ Cf. also recently Ulrike Mittmann, "Das Bild des Menschen im Wandel – Die Rezeption von Genesis 1–3 in *Sapientia Salomonis* 1 und 2," in *Evil and Death: Conceptions of the Human in Biblical, Early Jewish, Greco Roman and Egyptian Literature* (ed. Beate Ego and Ulrike Mittmann; DCLS 18; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 97–126.

In this essay, I argue that the Wisdom of Solomon shows a way out of evil and, therefore, a way into life.² In what follows, I trace four steps along this path out of evil and into life in selected passages. I then conclude with thematic consideration of evil in the Wisdom of Solomon.

2 “Think about the Lord in goodness” (Wis 1:1b) – The Good One

The prologue of the book (1:1–5) already reflects on essential theological and anthropological aspects in the discourse on evil. With the call “ἀγαπήσατε δικαιοσύνην” (1:1), two fundamental ethical, religious, and legal opponents of evil are mentioned: “love” and “justice.” They run through the whole book as keywords.³ As in the *SHEMA ISRAEL* (Deut 6:4–5), which stands behind Wis 1:1, the term “love” (here ἀγαπάω) describes an alignment of the whole person toward God. This love can be achieved by orienting oneself to the Torah and by a life lived according to it. In addition to ἀγαπάω, Wis 1:1 uses δικαιοσύνη as a synonym for Torah (νόμος). Rather than exhorting his audience to love νόμος, the author emphatically employs the term δικαιοσύνη, since this is an appeal to the pagan “judges” or “rulers of the world,” and since the entire book, in fact, might (at least theoretically) be read as a philosophical treatise by erudite pagans who are familiar with the discourse on justice. In the Israelite-Jewish tradition, however, “justice” (δικαιοσύνη) describes not so much a legal entity as a social relation, namely the salvific communion between God and humanity. This can be granted only by God as the righteous one, the universal giver and guarantor of justice (12:15).

Furthermore, in the book of Wisdom δικαιοσύνη receives the special predicate “immortality” (ἀθανασία): “For righteousness is immortal (ἀθάνατος)” (1:15; cf. 15:3). In *Sapientia Salomonis*, then, “justice” is the decisive intermediary between a fulfilled life in this world and in the world to come. For this to work, however, the book must redefine divine justice by means of an eschatological, post-mortem outlook. More traditional conceptions of justice are called into question by the persecution of righteous, Torah-observant Jews in Alexandria (2:12–13; cf. Isa 52:13–53:12), whose premature deaths would have served as a parade example of injustice in the world. Thus the book of Wisdom envisions

² Cf. Prov 6:23; 15:24; Ps 15:11^{1xx}.

³ Cf. Wis 4:10; 6:12; 7:10, 12, 28; 8:3, 7; 11:24; 16:26; respectively, 1:15; 2:11; 5:6, 18; 8:7; 9:3; 12:16; 14:7; 15:3.

justice beyond this life, when the righteous enter into an even more intensive communion with God (see esp. 3:4). As the author states in 1:3, “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them” (NRSV; cf. Ps 49:15–16; Dan 12:1–3; 2 Macc 7:9; Wis 4:7; 5:15; 1 En. 102:4–103:3).

The goodness (ἀγαθότης) of God appears in 1:1b (cf. 7:26) as an equivalent to God’s justice (δικαιοσύνη).⁴ As in the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics, evil is thereby excluded from the nature of God from the very beginning of the book.⁵ As in other early Jewish scriptures, God is characterized as goodness itself (בּוֹרֵן, ὁ χρηστός / ὁ ἀγαθός, 1:1b).⁶ At the same time, the aim of reflection and the destination of human existence are specified with the expression ἐν ἀγαθότητι, as the continuation of the third stichos with the phrase ἐν ἀπλότητι καρδίας (“with sincerity of heart”) shows (1:1c).⁷ The communion with God pictured here is a life in and with goodness, a life founded in the knowledge of God and in the divine gift of wisdom (1:3–5). At the same time the prologue emphasizes that, as a mediator of communion with God, the divine σοφία only inhabits those who avoid evil (1:4, cf. 7:27). Verse 5 goes on to refer to this σοφία as a ἅγιον πνεῦμα, with which wisdom is closely connected throughout the book (Wis 7:22; 9:17). The one whom wisdom inhabits then becomes a “friend of God” (φίλος θεοῦ)—an ideal that early Jewish Scriptures share with Greek philosophy.⁸ However in the Wisdom of Solomon, this designation is supplemented by the epithet “prophet” (προφήτης, 7:27; cf. 11:1; Sir 46:13), as is typical for the Old Testament. The sage is thus cast as a true successor of Moses, the exemplary friend of God and the great prophet.⁹

4 On such an inclusive understanding of the formulation ἐν ἀγαθότητι, referring not only to the correctness of human reflection about God but also to the content of this reflection, see Helmut Engel, “Sophia Salomonos,” in *Septuaginta Deutsch: Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (2d ed.; ed. Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), 1058.

5 Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 29e; 69c; *Resp.* 379b; Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 391; *SVF* 2, 1164; *SVF* 2, 1186.

6 Cf. Jer 33:11 (Heb. 40:11); Nah 1:7; Ps 34:9 (Heb. 33:9); 100:5; 118:1, 29 (Heb. 117:1, 29; 119:68 (Heb. 118:68); 135:3 (Heb. 134:3); 136:1 (Heb. 135:1); 145:9 (Heb. 144:9); Lam 3:25; 2 Chr 30:18; Sir 45:25 (MS^B); 4Q403 1 I, 5; Mk 10:18 // Matt 19:17; Lk 18:19.

7 Cf. 1 Chr 29:17.

8 Cf. for Abraham (Isa 41:8; 2 Chr 20:7; CD-A III, 2; 4Q252 1 II, 8; *T. Ab.* A 8:4; 9:7; 16:9; B 13:1; Jas 2:23), for Isaac (CD-A III, 3), for Jacob (CD-A III, 3; 4Q372 1 21), for Moses (Sir 45:1; Philo, *Cher.* 49) and for Samuel (Sir 46:13), generally: 4Q525 5 12; Philo, *Her.* 21:3. Also in a pagan context, the term “friend of god/gods” designates a pious person, cf. Plato, *Leg.* 716c–d; *Tim.* 53d; *Symp.* 193b; *Resp.* 621c; Arrian, *Epict. diss.* 4.3.9.

9 Cf. Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10; and to this Philo, *Mos.* 1.156.

In Wis 1:4, evil and sin (ἁμαρτία) are synonymous, and the human being is understood to consist of both body (σῶμα) and soul (ψυχή). The *parallelismus membrorum* in this verse suggests a conception that corresponds to the traditional Israelite-Jewish anthropology. In other passages, however, the book of Wisdom speaks of the (pre-existent) soul in opposition to the human body, which is presented in a rather pejorative fashion (8:19–20; 9:15).¹⁰ It is possible that the passages which reflect this second, dichotomous viewpoint are secondary.

With respect to evil, the opening sequence in 1:1–5 attests *theologically* that God is essentially good, *anthropologically* that humans are capable of knowledge of God and can therefore know goodness and communion with God, and *hamartologically* that a lack of knowledge of God and ignorance (ἄφρων; λογισμοὶ ἄσυνετοί)¹¹ are sin and self-deception (δόλος).¹² These exclude a person from the wisdom which communion with God makes possible.

3 “Through the envy of the devil death came into the world” (Wis 2:24)—The Evil One

In an anthropological and hamartological declaration of principle (*Grundsatzklärung*), the book of Wisdom contrasts the characterization of God as the Good One, who created everything for life (1:13–14) and who is a “friend of life” (11:26),¹³ with the Evil One (ὁ διάβολος), who by envy brought death into the world (2:21–24). This passage in Wis 2:1–24 is a commentary on fictitious speech by godless persecutors, and it is modelled both on the fourth servant song of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 52:13–53:12) and on the Hellenistic pattern of the mistreatment of philosophers.¹⁴ By misjudging life’s true purpose, these persecutors violate the fundamental commandments of the community and indulge in unrestrained hedonism (Wis 2:1–20).

Wisdom 2:21–24 is based on the literary traditions in Gen 1–4,¹⁵ and it also repeats motifs prominent in the midrash of the paradise story in the pseudepi-

¹⁰ See Dieter Georgi, *Weisheit Salomos* (JSRZ 3/4; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1980), 433, 436; Otto Kaiser, *Die Weisheit Salomos: Übersetzt, eingeleitet und durch biblische und außerbiblische Parallelen erläutert* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2010), 22, 24.

¹¹ Cf. Wis 1:3; respectively, 1:5; cf. Wis 10:8; 12:23; respectively, 11:15.

¹² Cf. Wis 4:11; 14:25, 30.

¹³ Cf. Ezek 18:23, 32.

¹⁴ Following George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 56; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 62.

¹⁵ Not only in Gen 1–3, as Mittmann (“Bild,” 99–107) has recently claimed.

graphical *Life of Adam and Eve* (henceforth *L.A.E.*). In the Wisdom of Solomon the intertwining of the motifs “image of God” (Gen 1:26–27), “fall of humanity” (Gen 3–4), and “knowledge of God” is noteworthy and essential for its portrayal of evil. Following Gen 1:26–27^{LXX}, Isa 44:7^{LXX}, and 54:16^{LXX}, the creation of humans in the “image”¹⁶ of God confers the basic potential for immortality (ἀφθαρσία, 2:23; cf. 6:18–19). As an image of the Living One, a human has the potential to participate in the life of God and thus gain eternal life. On the other hand, turning away from God means turning away from life. One turns away from God both by disregarding the life of those who search for God and by denying the afterlife (2:22).

As already indicated in the prologue, evil and its hostility towards life arise from the lack of knowledge of God (2:22; cf. 13:1). They are founded upon human choice, specifically in the God-given freedom to differentiate between good and evil.¹⁷ Evil is both *deed*—doing acts of evil—and *suffering*—bearing the consequences of such acts in the form of sickness and punishment. In both cases, evil is self-inflicted. But given its blinding force (ἀποτυφλώω, 2:21) and its universal effects (5:23), evil is also portrayed in the book as an independent, personified force that exists outside of the individual. Beside evil stands the Evil One.

There are several occasions in *Sapientia Salomonis* in which evil is spoken of in mythological language as a force which acts upon humans. In addition to mentioning *Thanatos* in 1:12–13, 16 and *Hades* in 1:14, the important passage in 2:24 traces the origins of death in the world back to the envy (φθόνος) of the devil: “Through the envy of the devil death came into the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.” The book of Wisdom here alludes to the motif of the devil’s envy of Adam, depending not only on the interpretation of Gen 3 in *L.A.E.* 11–12, but also on other early Jewish and rabbinic texts.¹⁸

And the devil sighed and said: “O Adam, all my enmity and envy and sorrow concern you, since because of you I am expelled and deprived of my glory which I had in the heavens in the midst of angels, and because of you I was cast out onto the earth.” (*L.A.E.* 12:1)¹⁹

As in the case of Job, the life-destroying misfortune which falls upon Adam and thus upon humankind in Wis 2:24 is traced back to the resentment of the διάβο-

¹⁶ On Gen 1:26–27, see also Wis 9:2–3 and Wis 10:2, where the dominion of the earth is attributed to humans only after the Fall.

¹⁷ Cf. Gen 3:1–7; Deut 30:15–20; 1 Kgs 3:9; Sir 15:16–17; 17:7–11.

¹⁸ Cf. 2 En. 31 (J); 3 Bar. 4:8; Apoc. Sedr. 5; Apoc. Ab. 13; t. Soṭah 4:17; b. Soṭah 9b; b. Sanh. 59b; Gen. Rab. 18:6; 'Abot R. Nat. 1.

¹⁹ Translation from M. D. Johnson, “Life of Adam and Eve,” in *OTP* 2:249–95, here 262.

λος (cf. Job^{LXX} 1:9). Although the Wisdom of Solomon does not elaborate on it further, destruction of life belongs to the very nature of the διάβολος: for “he was a murderer (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) from the beginning” (John 8:44). In addition to the tradition in *L.A.E.* 12 and the mythological motif of the envy of gods both in the ancient Near East and in classical antiquity, one should also note the interpretation of Gen 4 in Wis 2:24.²⁰ According to Gen 4, it is ultimately Cain’s envy of Abel’s success that brings about the realization of the threat of death announced to Adam at the end of the paradise narrative (Gen 4:8–10; cf. Gen 3:19). The aretalogy of σοφία in Wisdom 10 again mentions this fratricide and regards it as the real reason for the flood (10:3–4), suppressing the passage about the “angel-marriages” in Gen 6:1–4 which other Hellenistic Jewish authors highlighted as the root cause for the deluge.²¹ For the author of *Sapientia Salomonis*, Cain’s fratricide of Abel stems from a lack of knowledge of God and radical injustice (ἀδικία, 10:3), and it results in a permanent exclusion from communion with God (cf. Gen 4:11–14). *1 Clem.* 3:4 quotes Wis 2:24 in precisely this sense—as evidence of the disastrous consequences of “unjust and godless jealousy” (cf. *1 Clem.* 4:7).²² An educated pagan reader of Wis 2:24 who was unaware of the Jewish tradition of the envy of the devil might alternatively have thought of the platonic idea of the incompatibility of envy with the just creator god (see *Timaeus* 29e; *Phaedrus* 247a).²³ While Philo (*De opificio mundi* 21) shows that Plato’s *Timaeus* was known in Jewish circles during the first century B.C.E.,²⁴ it is unclear whether this platonic motif influenced Wis 2:24 in any direct way.²⁵

With a view to an “otherworldly reward” for the righteous, the Wisdom of Solomon contrasts the protology of death with the eschatology of life (2:22).

20 Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.32; 3.40–41; 7.10; Pindar, *Pyth.* 10.20; cf. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 68–70; Miriam von Nordheim-Diehl, “Der Neid Gottes, des Teufels und der Menschen—eine motivgeschichtliche Skizze,” in *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook: Emotions from Ben Sira to Paul* (ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 431–50.

21 Wis 14:6, however, juxtaposes the fate of the “arrogant giants” with the “hope of the world” which “took refuge on a raft,” suggesting an interpretation more along the lines of those in Ben Sira et al. (cf. Sir 16:7; Bar 3:26–28; 3 Macc 2:4; *1 En.* 6–9; 4Q370 I 6).

22 Cf. Angela Y. Kim, “Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1–16,” *JSP* 12 (2001): 65–84, here 70–71.

23 Cf. Seneca, *Lucil.* 65.10.

24 Concerning the knowledge of Plato’s *Timaeus* by Hellenistic Jewish authors, see Martin Rösel, *Übersetzung als Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Genesis-Septuaginta* (BZAW 223; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Philosophia Antiqua 44; Leiden: Brill, 1986).

25 So M.W. Dickie, “Envy,” *ABD* 2:528–32, here 530.

While goodness is characterized by God, life, wisdom, and justice, evil is represented by the διάβολος, death, irrationality, and injustice.

4 “He was caught up in order that wickedness should not affect his understanding” (Wis 4:11a)—Evil in the World

For the book of Wisdom, evil is a reality which is effective in the world created by God. As a supra-individual power, evil can also become dangerous for the righteous; it has the potential to infect a righteous person and hence to isolate the righteous from the surrounding community. The Wisdom of Solomon illustrates this by the example of Enoch (though he is not referred to by name), who is beloved by God and raptured from the midst of sinners, “that wickedness (τὰ κακία) should not affect his understanding or guile (δόλος) deceive his soul” (4:10–11; cf. Sir 44:16). Drawing upon Gen 5:22–24 and the early Jewish Enoch tradition,²⁶ the just Enoch becomes a paradigm for God’s justice. Thus an early death in the case of the righteous (4:7) is not a sign of divine punishment,²⁷ but a means of admission into eternal communion with God, where the righteous will participate in the divine judgment of the godless (4:16; cf. 3:8).

Also key to the preservation of the righteous in the face of the evil is the divine σοφία. Insofar as σοφία is indwelt by a spirit which “loves the good” (7:22), is not overcome by evil (7:30), and governs the universe “well” (χρηστῶς, 8:1), σοφία can act on behalf of God without any mediation.²⁸ Thus wisdom works against evil in the past and the present, and it is integrated into Yahwistic religion as a hypostasis of YHWH—a kind of Jewish Isis.²⁹ Σοφία saves those who

²⁶ Cf. besides *1 Enoch*: Sir 44:16; *Jub.* 4:23; Heb 11:5.

²⁷ Cf. Job 8:14; 15:32; 22:16; 36:14. On the idea that the quality of life is more important than the length of life, see also Seneca, *De brev. vit.* I; *Lucil.* 78.28; 93.2; Plutarch, *Mor.* 111d; Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.45; 5.9; Philo, *Abr.* 271, 274.

²⁸ On the transfer of divine functions to σοφία, see 8:1 versus 15:1 and 10:9, 15 versus 2:18, 15:8, 19:9.

²⁹ Scholars have long believed that the portrayal of σοφία in the Wisdom of Solomon (and also in Sir 24) is literarily dependent upon the Isis traditions. This is evident primarily by comparing hymns to Isis. See Maria Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Subsidia Epigraphica 12; Hildesheim: Olms, 1985); Burton L. Mack, *Logos und Sophia* (SUNT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 63–107; and John S. Kloppenborg, “Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom,” *HTR* 75 (1982): 57–84.

serve her—and thereby serve God—from all forms of hardship (πόνος, 10:9; 19:16).

To illustrate wisdom's salvific activity in the world, the author turns in the second part of the book to recount σοφία's work among major figures of Israel's pre-history and the exodus (10:1–11:1). As in the case of Enoch in 4:10–11, these characters (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, the Israelites, and Moses) are not mentioned by name. The motifs and the specific terminology associated with these figures, however, allow them to be identified easily by a reader who is familiar with the Jewish tradition and its sacred literature. Since these admonitions are simultaneously addressed to gentiles, a pagan reader likely would have associated these figures whom σοφία preserves with heroes of the pagan tradition, such as Deucalion, Heracles, or Bellerophon. Whether Jewish or pagan, a crucial function of σοφία is to save (σώζω, 9:18) the righteous (δίκαιος) from evil.³⁰ That being said, however, the book avoids the title σώτεια for wisdom, a term used in the pagan world for various goddesses, including Isis.³¹ In line with Jewish monotheism, only ἸΗΩΗ is σωτήρ in the Wisdom of Solomon (16:7; cf. Sir 51:1).

The πρωτόπλαστος “Adam” appears in 10:1 as a primeval exemplar of one whom σοφία delivered from evil, and thus also as a paradigm for a salvation of the righteous in every era.³² They, too, can be delivered from their transgressions (παράπτωμα), just as he was. Again going beyond Gen 2–3, Wis 10:1 arguably reaches back to the tradition of Adam and Eve's repentance after their expulsion from paradise, which is referenced in *L.A.E.* 4–6, 32.³³ Repentance (μετάνοια) itself becomes a means of overcoming evil (cf. Wis 11:23; 12:10, 19).

“Abraham” appears in 10:5 as another righteous person whom σοφία saved from evil. In a peculiar combination of Gen 11:1–12:3 and Gen 22:1–15, the Wisdom of Solomon portrays σοφία as effective in preserving the righteous in two ways. On the one hand, σοφία discovers the righteous among the people of a world united by πονηρία. Like a midrash, the book of Wisdom combines the narrative of the building of Babel and the construction of its tower (as presented in Gen 11:1–9^{LXX}) with Abraham's call (Gen 12:1–3). The early Jewish tradition found in *Jub.* 12:1–14 about the election of Abraham for the worship of the one true God and the destruction of idols may also lie behind this formulation. On the other

³⁰ Cf. Wis 10:4; 14:4; 16:7; 18:5.

³¹ Cf. the first Isis hymn of Isidor (*SEG* 548; Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte*, nr. 21, line 26).

³² On the term πρωτόπλαστος cf. Wis 7:1; *Sib. Or.* 1, 285; *Jub.* (Gk.) 3:28; 4:2; Philo, *QG* 1.32.2; *QE* 2.46.8; *T. Ab.* 11:9–11; 13:2, 5; *Gk. Apc. Ezra* 2:10; *Apoc. Sedr.* 4:4; 3 *Bar.* 4:9; *Apoc. Mos.* 1:0.

³³ Cf. Helmut Engel, *Das Buch der Weisheit* (NSKAT 16; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), 168–69.

hand, σοφία is presented as the foundation of Abraham's fear of God and his blamelessness (cf. Gen 17:1), proven by his obedience to the commandment to sacrifice Isaac (cf. Gen 22:2). The example of Abraham teaches that the righteous individual can resist falling away from the true God by means of σοφία. Both the masses at Babel who thought wrongly about God and the paternal love Abraham had for his own child had the potential to seduce him to fall away. Thereby two extremes in which the righteous may encounter evil are revealed: as a collective, social force, characterized as πονηρία; and as individual emotion, here called "compassion" (σπλαγγνον). Insofar as the righteous person is characterized by his or her control of the passions, the book of Wisdom shares the ancient Egyptian and stoical ideal of the self-control—and more precisely the ἀταραξία—of the wise (cf. 4 Macc. 8:26).

The chain of righteous figures saved from evil by σοφία continues with the example of "Lot" and the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah (10:6–8; cf. Gen 19:23–25; Deut 29:22). As in both the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, both cities serve as ciphers for utterly godless (ἀσεβής) behavior. God's justice becomes evident in the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, while God's loyalty to his followers is revealed through σοφία's saving activity. Immediately after alluding to the mega-city Babel in 10:5, the author focuses on the cities Sodom and Gomorrah and the Pentapolis in 10:6.³⁴ This urban focus reflects his roots in the metropolis of Alexandria. This large city, characterized by countless cults, temples, and idols,³⁵ naturally poses a particular danger to faith in the one true God of Israel. Accordingly, in Wis 19:13–17, the author correlates Sodom with Egypt, specifically with Alexandria.³⁶

When the book then turns to portray "Jacob" as fleeing from the wrath (ὀργή) of his brother (10:10), it continues the association of anger with evil that began in the previous narrative on Cain (cf. 10:3: ὀργή // θυμός). As a remedy, σοφία teaches piety (εὐσέβεια, 10:12). Like σοφία itself, εὐσέβεια can do "everything," and thus it can overcome evil as well (cf. 7:30; *T. Job* 27:5–7).

Finally, it was σοφία that saved the just "Joseph" from sin (ἁμαρτία, 10:13). The report alludes to the story of the failed seduction by Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:7–10). In the book of Wisdom, adultery belongs to moral evil (cf. 3:16; 4:6; 14:24, 26), just as in the *Testament of Joseph*, which is dedicated to the theme

³⁴ Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, Zebojim, Bel/Zoar (cf. Gen 14:2). The term "pentapolis" is familiar to Greek authors (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.*, 1.144; Strabo, *Geogr.* 6.2.4; Aristides Milesius, *fr.* 23.2) for a compound of five cities.

³⁵ On Alexandria see Tobias Georges, Felix Albrecht, and Reinhard Feldmeier, eds., *Alexandria* (Civitatium Orbis Mediterranei Studiae 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013).

³⁶ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.194 (= 1.9.1); Sir 16:8; 3 Macc 2:5; *Jub.* 16:5–6; *T. Naph.* 3.

of σωφροσύνη in the sense of chastity.³⁷ But while the *Testament of Joseph* names the “God of the fathers” as the one who saves chaste God-fearers from the “wickedness (κακία) of the godless” (*T. Jos.* 6:7; 10:3), in *Wis 10* it is σοφία that undertakes this divine task.

5 “For the worship of idols that may not be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil” (*Wis 14:27*)—The Origin of Evil

Wisdom 13:1–16:14 offers fundamental reflections on true and false worship and therein concisely formulates the origin and nature of all evil: The lack of the knowledge of the one true God is both the beginning (ἀρχή) and the cause (αἰτία) of all evil. This ignorance expresses itself in the worship of idols and manifests itself in fundamental social offenses like theft, murder, fraud, corruption, infidelity, perjury, and adultery (14:22–31; cf. *Sib. Or.* 3.584–600). Xenophobia (μισοξενία) is added as a further example of wickedness in 19:13, more than likely on account of the contemporary experiences of Jews in Egypt. This section also reprises the essential connection between God and life, which is foundational for the book’s discussion about evil. God is distinguished by his own vitality and as the foundation of life.

As in other passages, the book of Wisdom here shows itself to be an exegesis of Deutero-Isaiah and of other sapientially-shaped criticism in the prophetic books (e.g., *Jer 10*).³⁸ The Wisdom of Solomon incorporates Deutero-Isaiah’s mockery of idols and carries its arguments even further.³⁹ The book of Wisdom undertakes a fundamental defense of the Jewish belief in the one true God (12:13–14) over against the manifold idols present throughout the Hellenistic metropolis of Alexandria and in opposition to the flourishing Roman ruler-cult. The argumentation proceeds in three steps: (1) The worship of cosmic elements or meteorological phenomena as gods is indeed understandable in the light of their beauty, but unreasonable because it confuses creation and creator (13:1–9). (2) Even more unreasonable is the veneration of the deceased or rulers whereby people are declared to be gods, thereby overlooking the difference between God and humanity (14:15–16). (3) The height of stupidity is the worship of

³⁷ *T. Jos.* 0:1 (=superscription); 4:1; 10:2; *Jos. Asen.* 4:9, cf. 1 *Tim* 2:9, 15; *Tit* 2:2, 5.

³⁸ Cf. Engel, *Buch der Weisheit*, 70–76; Sonja Ammann, *Götter für die Tore: Die Verbindung von Götterpolemik und Weisheit im Alten Testament* (BZAW 466; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 192–253.

³⁹ Cf. Dan Bel; *Ep Jer*; *Apoc. Ab.*; *Let. Aris.* 135–139; *Jub.* 11:4–7; *Sib. Or.* 3.547, 723.

images as gods, particularly in images of animals as in contemporary Egypt. After all, humans can only form inanimate objects, not gods (15:17).

Livingness, benevolence, truthfulness, patience, mercy, and universal sovereignty are the criteria of divinity and thus the antitheses of evil per se (15:1). Wisdom 14:12–13 picks up on and expands the late deuteronomic prohibition against images found in Deut 4:15–16, and this passage supports its aniconic position historically, anthropologically, and hamartiologically. Historically speaking, idols are a human invention that “did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever” (14:13). From an anthropological and hamartiological perspective, idols are enemies of life because they lead one away from the true God of life who, in his livingness, is intangible (14:12). The same cannot be said of graven images.

The question of whether the book of Wisdom does justice to the religious practice of its environment notwithstanding, this theology emphasizes the critical role of human rationality (νοῦς, 4:12). Alongside its dependence upon the Deuteronomic tradition, the roots of this perspective in *Sapientia Salomonis* can be traced to the religious-philosophical tradition of Xenophanes of Colophon (ca. 570–470 B.C.E.) and Euhemerism, as well as to Stoicism.⁴⁰ But as in the *Letter of Aristeas* (131–33, 140), Philo of Alexandria, or Paul, the book of Wisdom reflects the rational and ethical potential of faith in the one true God. Thus the monotheism of the book of Wisdom, enriched by the figure of the σοφία, is a power (δύναμις, 1:3b) against any form of intellectual and moral evil.

This monotheistic viewpoint includes within it a judgment upon evil and thereby an answer to the question of theodicy. So the passage in 14:31 which reflects on the origin of evil closes with the view that the justice (δίκη) of God is realized in the punishment of sinners.⁴¹ Insofar as the book of Wisdom has God using creation to punish evildoers by way of natural disasters (16:24; cf. 5:27), the book represents the traditional Jewish theology of creation. According to this theology, God stands apart from the world as its sovereign creator, rules over it mercifully, and uses creation as a means of interacting with and acting on behalf of human beings.

⁴⁰ Cf. Plutarch, *Superst.* 6b (=Mor. 167D); *Is. Os.* 76 (=Mor. 382B–C). To the Jewish Euhemerism see Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh.s v. Chr.* (3d ed.; WUNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 164, 484.

⁴¹ Cf. Wis 1:8; 11:20; 12:24.

6 The Intellectual Context of the Discourse About Evil in the Book of Wisdom

Pseudo-Solomon's answer to the question of the origin and character of evil is simple. God—the one true God—is good. This is evident especially in the holy scriptures of Israel, particularly in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, which the book of Wisdom repeatedly alludes to, cites, and interprets. God's goodness finds its expression in God's love for life and determination that creation—and humans in particular—shall be everlasting. The image of God given to humans at creation is found especially in the knowledge of God. This knowledge is gained through divine wisdom and experienced as an intense communion with God. Synonyms for such knowledge in the Wisdom of Solomon are “justice” and “immortality.” On the other hand, anything which hinders God-given eternal life or hinders communion with God—who is life itself—is evil.

While evil is not willed by God, it is nevertheless efficacious. It originates from a lack of knowledge of God. Human beings are fundamentally able to recognize God, and, accordingly, they are capable of good moral action. Herein the book of Wisdom proves itself to be a faithful heir of Deut 30:15–19 and its basic definition of good and evil.⁴² The terms “good” and “life” find their contrastive counterparts in “evil” and “death” respectively.⁴³ Love of justice is love of God (Deut 30:16, Wis 1:1). Turning to other gods, and hence the failing to recognize the one true God, is the starting point of evil per se and the true source of death (Deut 30:17–18; Wis 14:27). Here, for the first time within early Jewish literature, the book of Wisdom uses the term *συνείδησις* (17:11) in the narrow sense of a bad conscience,⁴⁴ something which plagues even wickedness (*πονηρία*).

When a person consciously abuses their God-given freedom to do evil, this is a consequence of disregard for God as the creator of the world and Lord of history. For the book of Wisdom, the cause of evil is a lack of knowledge of God, the primeval sin *par excellence*. Thus Martin Luther's characterization of the Wisdom of Solomon as a “rechte Auslegung des ersten Gebots” in his preface to the Ger-

42 Cf. Patrick D. Miller, “Böse, das, II. Altes Testament,” *RGG*⁶ 1:1704–1805.

43 Deut 30:15, 19–20; Wis 1:12–13; 2:23–24; 14:12; 15:1–6; 16:13–14.

44 See also Job 27:6^{LXX} (cf. 1 Cor 4:4); Eccl 10:20^{LXX}; and *T. Reub.* 4:3; and more frequently (as τὸ *συνείδω*) in Philo (*Det.* 23; *Deus* 128; *Fug.* 159 et passim), thematically in *T. Jud.* 20:5; *T. Gad* 5:3; *T. Ash.* 1; on this see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 43; New York: Doubleday 1979), 307–8; Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa. Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* (2 vols.; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, 1972), 1:317 and 2:184.

man Bible (1545) is apt.⁴⁵ The true God is “the One who is” (ὁ ὢν, Exod 3:14^{LXX})—one who loves life and created all things that they might be (1:14). A misapprehension of this God results in a contempt for life which produces evil deeds. These deeds evoke God’s punishment in the form of malady, death, and separation from God, often presented as supra-individual in nature.

The book of Wisdom underlines the justice of God by interpreting the suffering of the pious as a temporary trial by God, which concludes with their ascension to heaven, and by emphasizing the punishment of God that will eventually address all evil. In accordance with the biblical asymmetry of God’s mercy and wrath (for which the “mercy-formula” is exemplary),⁴⁶ the Wisdom of Solomon emphasizes that divine mercy (ἔλεος) always exceeds divine wrath (ὀργή; 9:1; 15:1). Therefore God’s punishment is ultimately aimed at producing knowledge (γνώσις, 2:13; 7:17; 10:10; 14:22), conversion, and faith (11:16; 12:2). The book of Wisdom thus gives an eschatological solution to the problem of theodicy.

Among the various typologies of the origins of evil, the Wisdom of Solomon predominantly follows the model that views human beings as being inherently disposed towards evil.⁴⁷ In contrast to Ben Sira, however, the book of Wisdom does not speak of fundamental inclinations (רצוֹן, διαβουλίον) to evil.⁴⁸ The use of the “envy of the devil” (Wis 2:24) to explain the origin of death shows that the book of Wisdom is also aware of the idea of external, mythological derivation of evil. Such ideas dominated various early Jewish demonologies in *1 En.* 6–11 and *Jubilees*, as well as apotropaic prayers and thematizations of Belial in various Qumran texts.⁴⁹

The book of Wisdom assigns σοφία a major role in protecting humans from evil. Σοφία appears in places not only as an instrument of God, but also as a force which acts independently. Σοφία is “advisor to the good” (8:9) and “saves from evil” (10:9). Wisdom thereby fulfils the function that many other sa-

45 Martin Luther, *Die gantze heilige Schrifft Deudsch Wittenberg 1545: Letzte zu Luthers Lebzeiten erschienene Ausgabe* (ed. Hans Volz; München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1972), 2:1702.

46 Cf. Exod 34:6; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17; Sir 2:11; CD-A II.4; 1QH^a VIII, 24; 4Q511 52, 54–55, 57–59, 1 [col. III, 1].

47 See the analysis of Miryam T. Brand, with various modifications for Ben Sira, Philo, *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch* and diverse Qumran texts like 1QH^a; 1QS V; X,9–XI,22; 4QBarNaf; 4Q393; 4Q504–506; 11QPs^a XXIV (Brand, *Evil Within and Without: The Source of Sin and its Nature as Portrayed in Second Temple Literature* [JASup 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013], 35–146).

48 *T. Reub.* 4:9; *T. Jud.* 11:1; 13:8; 18:3; *T. Dan* 4:2, 7; *T. Gad* 5:3, 7; 7:3; *T. Ass.* 1:8–9; *T. Jos.* 2:6; *T. Ben* 6:1, 4.

49 Cf. in 4Q444; 4Q510–511; 11QPs^a XIX; ALD respectively in CD; 4QapocJer; 1QM; 4Q174; 4Q280; 4Q286–290; 1QS III–IV; Brand, *Evil*, 147–274.

piential books of early Judaism had assigned to Torah (νόμος).⁵⁰ The book of Wisdom also speaks of the νόμος, however, as having been revealed to Israel at Sinai as “an eternal light”⁵¹ and written in the Pentateuch according to God’s will. In *Sapientia Salomonis*, νόμος has a saving efficacy for all human beings (Wis 18:4).⁵² Conversely, in the book of Wisdom the term ἀνομία can stand for “sin,” “injustice,” or “evil” (5:7, 23), in the sense of a transgression of the Torah. Yet the book does not go so far as to identify the νόμος with the divine σοφία, as is the case in Ben Sira or Baruch (cf. Sir 24:23, Bar 4:1).⁵³ Nor does νόμος play a particularly important role in its theology, thematization of evil, or ethics. Where the book of Wisdom does talk about a particular concrete commandment (ἐντολή) of the νόμος, such as in the interpretation of Num 21:4–9 (Wis 16:5–13), it characteristically turns to the commandment that ὙΗΩΗ alone should be venerated as God and savior (16:6–7; cf. Exod 20:2–6; Deut 5:6–10).

For the book of Wisdom, prayer is an essential means to achieve wisdom and to participate in communion with God. This is shown by the example of the Solomon at prayer,⁵⁴ by the paraphrases of the prayers of the exodus generation,⁵⁵ and by the doxologies running through the third part of the book.⁵⁶ From a literary-historical perspective, *Sapientia Salomonis* shares the high estimation of prayer with early Jewish literature as a whole. With respect to reception history, the book of Wisdom provides biblical evidence for the thesis formulated by Eberhard Jüngel that “Prayer is faith’s decisive act of resistance (namely, against evil).”⁵⁷

7 Conclusions

For the book of Wisdom, evil derives from a lack of insight into the true nature of God as the God who loves life and who, as the living God, cannot be worshipped

⁵⁰ Note especially the function of Torah in Ben Sira, the Hebrew version of which preceded the book of Wisdom by ca. 150 years.

⁵¹ Cf. Wis 5:6; respectively, Prov 6:23; Pss 19:9 (Heb. 18:9); 119:105 (Heb. 118:105).

⁵² Cf. Isa 42:6; 51:4.

⁵³ Cf. Sir 1:26; 4Q185 1–2 III; 4Q525 2 II + 3 3–4; and as precursor Pss 1; 19; 119.

⁵⁴ Cf. Wis 7:7; 7:15–22a; 8:21–9:17/18.

⁵⁵ Wis 10:20–21 (cf. Exod 15); 11:4; 16:25, 28; 18:9, 20–25; 19:8–10 (11–12, cf. Exod 15).

⁵⁶ Wis 11:20–12:2; 12:15–18; 15:1–3(4–6); 16:13; 17:1a; 19:22.

⁵⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, “Das Böse V. Dogmatisch,” *RGG*⁴ 1:1707: “Entscheidender Widerstandsakt des Glaubens (sc. gegen das Böse) ist das *Gebet*.”

through idols. The evil deeds and negative experiences associated with evil are thus derived from the irrationality (ἄνοια, 15:18; 19:3) of humans, who are endowed with free will. With such a conception of evil the book of Wisdom moves literarily and with respect to the history of religions in a three-fold frame of reference.

The first and most important frame of reference is the Israelite-Jewish tradition. This tradition always sees evil in relation to God, and it is founded—at least predominantly—on the basic assumption that humans have the potential to know God and to decide freely between good and evil.⁵⁸ In this context, Deuteronomy is the essential text of reference for the book of Wisdom. In the shadow of Deuteronomy, *Sapientia Salomonis* describes the avoidance of evil as the imageless veneration of the one true creator and Lord of history. Conversely, the source of goodness is love for God and justice.

A second frame of reference is Hellenistic Isis-theology. This theology (alongside the various Jewish conceptions of wisdom in Prov 8, Job 28, Sir 24, Bar 3–4 or 4Q525) influences the stylization of σοφία in the book of Wisdom as a mediator of essential knowledge of God and savior from all evil. Despite its convergence with the Egyptian goddess Isis (especially with regard to the foundation of law and justice to curb evil),⁵⁹ the Jewish σοφία is not a goddess, even where it acts like God or is sought by the pious as a lover. Instead, it is a quality associated with the one true God.

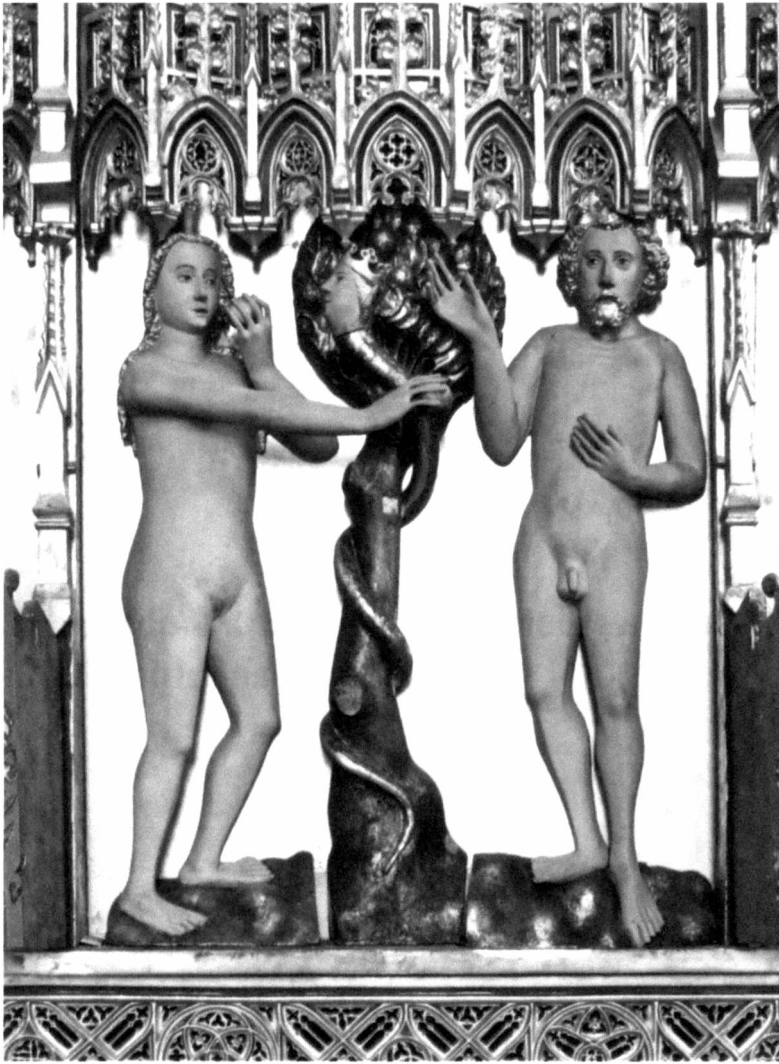
The third frame of reference is Stoicism, together with its slightly younger contemporary, Philo. The book of Wisdom differs from Philo *inter alia* in its assessment of σοφία, particularly in connection with anthropology and eschatology. Like Stoicism, the Wisdom of Solomon is convinced of the fundamental goodness of creation and human free will. In concert with the Stoics, the book of Wisdom perceives human rationality as an important means of avoiding evil, though it concentrates this rationality on the knowledge of the one true God. The book of Wisdom equally aligns with Stoicism in its interpretation of the evil suffered of humans, especially the suffering of wise and virtuous people, as a temporary trial. In precisely the same vein as Seneca, *Sapientia Salomonis* stresses the exemplary character of the suffering of the virtuous and wise, who is mostly called the δίκαιος (צַדִּיק) according to the Jewish tradition. However, the book of Wisdom does diminish suffering to some extent, much like the Sto-

58 On the late Old Testament texts that postulate the fundamental sinfulness of human being (1 Kgs 8:46; Prov 20:9; Ps 143:2; Eccl 7:20; Job 4:17–19; 15:14–16; 25:4–6), see Markus Witte, *Vom Leiden zur Lehre: Der dritte Redegang (Hiob 21–27) und die Redaktionsgeschichte des Hiobbuches* (BZAW 230; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 106–13, 194–205.

59 Cf. Kloppenburg, “Isis and Sophia,” 57–84.

ics, for whom suffering does not ultimately affect the inner life of the virtuous. A central difference between the Wisdom of Solomon and Stoicism is the book's fundamental focus on the personality of and communion with the one true God of Solomon (though the Stoic Cleanthes prays to the "all-bountiful father Zeus" and confesses that Zeus can turn human evil into good).⁶⁰ But Seneca's advice to pass from life voluntarily and thus escape from evil (*De providentia*, ch. 6) is completely foreign to the Wisdom of Solomon. On this issue the book of Wisdom is in accord with traditional Jewish theology when it teaches a high estimation of life as a gift from the one God, who alone is the master of life and death. In fact, the Jewish author of *Sapientia Salomonis* ends the book by praising God: "For everything, O Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people, and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places" (Wis 19:22, NRSV).

⁶⁰ Cf. *Hymn to Zeus* 32, 34, respectively 18 (see Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, Commentary* [STAC 33, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 99–107, 142–56; Johan C. Thom, "Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*," in *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa* [ed. Johann Cook; VTSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 195–207).



The Fall of Man (Gen 3)
(Münster Bad Doberan, Germany,
cross altar, Christus side, ca. 1368,
photo: © Martin Heider, Bad Doberan,
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