Is the "Wisdom Tradition" a Tradition?

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FEW COMMENTATORS have any problem referring to the Hebrew wisdom literature as a distinctive literary tradition; however, scholars usually mean much more than this by the term. The premier expert on Hebrew wisdom literature in the United States, James L. Crenshaw, is an especially illuminating example. He believes that a professional group of sages produced the Hebrew wisdom literature, a view with which I concur, though my identification is more nuanced.[1] For him, Hebrew wisdom literature is the distinctive literature of the sages. Citing Jer 18:18, which refers to the intellectual leaders of Israel (prophet, priest, and sage), Crenshaw argues that the sages and their tradition are to be clearly distinguished from the traditionists and traditions of the other two.[2] He believes that this group and its literature reflect a "unified world view" or "particular attitude toward reality" different from those of priest and prophet.[3] These sages' truths are based on human

[1] James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981; 3rd ed., 2010 [references are to the 1981 ed.]) 28-29; R. N. Whybray (*The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* [BZAW 135; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1974]) does not believe any such group existed; rather, the wisdom tradition spawned from noninstitutionalized upper-class intellectuals. But few have followed him in this radical position.

[2] Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 27-29.

[3] Ibid., 17, 28-29; similarly, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 14: "In the tradition represented by Israel's sages, ethical and practical concerns are much in evidence, but we shall argue that they presuppose a more or less coherent, if seldom articulated, worldview"; Katherine J. Dell, "'I Will Solve My Riddle to the Music of the Lyre' (Psalm XLIX

experience as such, not on divine revelation.[4] Crenshaw notes the distinctive character of this corpus:

> Within Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes one looks in vain for the dominant themes of Yahwistic thought: the exodus from Egypt, election of Israel, the Davidic covenant, the Mosaic legislation, the patriarchal narratives, the divine control of history and movement toward a glorious moment when right will triumph. Instead, the reader encounters in these three books *a different thought world,* one that stands apart so impressively that scholars have described that literary corpus as an alien body within the Bible.[5]

4 [5]): A Cultic Setting for Wisdom Psalms?" *VT* 54 (2004) 445-58, here 455: "Wisdom is increasingly being regarded as an alternative world view"; John L. McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom," *JBL* 86 (1967) 1-9, here 2: "a way of thought . . . an approach to reality"; Roland Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (FOTL 13; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 3: "an approach to reality," but he then adds "that was shared by all Israelites in varying degree." This approach I call the democratization of wisdom; see Kathleen A. Farmer, "The Wisdom Books," in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 129-51, here 144-46; John F. Priest, "Where Is Wisdom to Be Placed?" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Library of Biblical Studies; New York: Ktav, 1976) 275-82, here 281; Alexandra R. Brown, "Wisdom Literature: Theoretical Perspectives," *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; 16 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1987) 15:409-12, here 409; Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). Although this democratization of wisdom is a healthy counter to the particularistic view, it fails to recognize the professional character of the wisdom literature.

⁴ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 18-21; Paul D. Hanson, "Israelite Religion in the Early Postexilic Period," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 485-508, here 487: "distinctively empirical orientation"; cf. John J. Collins, "Wisdom Reconsidered, in Light of the Scrolls," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 4 (1997) 265-81, here 266; idem, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 165-85, here 169.

⁵ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 29 (emphasis in original); Crenshaw's reference to a "foreign body" is a translation of Harmut Gese's *Fremdkörper* in *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958) 2; Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972; repr., Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) 316-17: "Dissociating itself sharply from a sacral understanding of the world, this way of thinking placed man and his created environment in a measure of secularity with which Israel had never before been thus confronted." Concerning its soteriology, he states, "Salvation is not brought about by Yahweh descending into history nor by any kind of human agency such as Moses or David or one of the patriarchs, but by specific factors inherent in creation itself. This seems to set up a theological tension with traditional Yahwism: a harsher one could hardly be imagined" (p. 314). In discussing the Book of Job, Blenkinsopp (*Sage, Priest, Prophet,* 52) notes how Job's disputants, including God, never make reference "to such sacrosanct Israelite traditions as the wandering of the ancestors, the sojourn in Egypt, exodus, the giving of the law, and the occupation of the land." Walther Zimmerli ("The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 [1964] 146-58, here 147) asserts that "Wisdom has no relation to the history between God and Israel."

He even describes Hebrew wisdom as "an alternative to Yahwism."[6] It constitutes a movement.[7] The corpus, at one point, included Proverbs, Job (hesitantly), Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, and a few wisdom psalms.[8] Recently Crenshaw has rejected the notion of wisdom psalms.[9] He has strongly resisted any attempts to find Hebrew wisdom influence in the rest of the Hebrew Bible beyond this corpus of five books, as in Amos, Genesis 2–3, the Joseph story, 1 Kings 1–2, and so on. He explains the wisdom phenomenon as due to "common cultural stock."[10] He is very concerned to counter the "scholarly trend to blur distinctions between different genres of literature."[11] From this corpus of five books, Crenshaw defines Hebrew wisdom as "the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator."[12] He posits three sequential *Sitze im Leben* for Hebrew wisdom: family/clan, royal court, and scribal group.[13]

Many of Crenshaw's assumptions actually go back to Hermann Gunkel and his form-critical methodology. Gunkel maintained that often a particular genre is associated with a specific social group and that this kept the genre pure.[14] Kenton L. Sparks explains, "Gunkel presumed that each piece of literature belonged to only one genre, that each genre stemmed from one unique *Sitz im Leben,* and that the relationship between form and context was essentially inflexible."[15] Concerning the Hebrew wisdom literature, Gunkel quotes Jer 18:18 and says that the wise men

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[6] Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom,* 190; cf. Kurt Rudolph, "Wisdom," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Eliade), 15:393-401, here 396: "It is not opposed to faith in Yahveh but on the other hand has only peripheral contacts with it." It is interesting that, although von Rad (*Wisdom in Israel,* 60, 64, 307) views Hebrew wisdom as a separate tradition, he believes that it is compatible with Yahwism; see Dell, "'Solve My Riddle,'" 456 n. 33. Blenkinsopp (*Sage, Priest, Prophet,* 33-34) believes that the Solomonic collections were originally secular but have been modified to embrace a Yahwistic perspective. John J. Collins ("Proverbial Wisdom and the Yahwist Vision," *Semeia* 17 [1980] 1-18) shows how proverbs and Yahwism are compatible; see also Roland Murphy, "Wisdom in the OT," *ABD* 6:920-31, here 922.

[7] James L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88 (1969) 129-42, here 130 n. 4.

[8] James L. Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. Crenshaw), 1-60, here 5.

[9] James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?" *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 8 (2000) 9-17.

[10] Crenshaw, "Wisdom Influence," 132.

[11] James L. Crenshaw, "Gold Dust or Nuggets? A Brief Response to J. Kenneth Kuntz," *Currents in Biblical Research* 1 (2003) 155-58, here 156.

[12] Crenshaw, "Wisdom Influence," 132.

[13] Ibid., 130.

[14] Hermann Gunkel, "The Literature of Ancient Israel," in *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form-Critical Insights on the Bible* (ed. Timothy J. Sandoval, Carleen Mandolfo, and Martin J. Buss; JSOTSup 384; London/New York: Clark, 2003) 26-83, here 30-31.

[15] Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005) 6.

were "long-bearded men who sat together in open squares or in the gates . . . exchanging the sayings they learned in their youth, while the young were to listen and to learn wisdom."[16] Gunkel believed that the Hebrew wisdom literature was originally secular in character—rejecting the cult[17]—and that its origins may go back to the Egyptians. He contrasts the Hebrew wisdom writers with the prophets. The sages emphasize the individual, whereas the prophets appeal to the nation. The sober advice of the wisdom writers contrasts with the words of the fiery prophets.

Before Gunkel, German scholars held to what I call the complementary approach to the Hebrew wisdom literature. This is the view that this corpus complements and supplements the other types of literature in the Hebrew Bible and that it should not be isolated from them. Hermann Schultz viewed Hebrew wisdom as "the only philosophy which ever found expression among this people." What distinguishes it from prophecy is that it worked "up the ground thoughts of the Hebrew religion into a complete theory of life." Though not prophets, the sages were "simply pious men in possession of a consistent theory of moral and religious life." He maintained that Israelite wisdom "is based on the revelation of God, especially on that wonderful law which distinguishes Israel above all the nations."[18]

Bernhard Duhm argued that unlike the Hebrew wisdom literature, the prophetic works have no developed sense of mundane ethics.[19] In the view of Bruce K. Waltke, Hebrew wisdom represents "a more theoretical system" and is of the same spirit as the prophets.[20] The prophets often had a low view of human moral capacity and believed that God would have to reform humanity inwardly and in the future, before humans could be ethical.

It is a return to the kind of perspective represented by these early German interpreters that this paper will champion. Thus, what I object to is not the word "tradition" but the approach that usually goes along with it: the view that Hebrew wisdom literature represents a worldview, tradition, and movement distinct from those of the priests and prophets and that it provides an alternative to Yahwism,

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[16] Gunkel, "Literature of Ancient Israel," 69-70.

[17] However, Leo G. Purdue (*Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East* [SBLDS 30; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977]), Crenshaw's student, effectively countered this notion.

[18] Hermann Schultz, *Old Testament Theology: The Religion of Revelation in Its Pre-Christian Stage of Development* (trans. J. A. Paterson; 2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1898) 2:83-84.

[19] Bernhard Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1875) 244-45.

[20] Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology," *BSac* 136 (1979) 302-17, here 304: "The sages and the prophets were true spiritual yokefellows sharing the same Lord, cultus, faith, hope, anthropology, and epistemology, speaking with the same authority, making similar religious and ethical demands on their hearers. In short, they drank from the same spiritual well."

that it is anti-revelatory. On the contrary, I will argue that the same authors who composed the wisdom literature are also responsible for the composition and/or preservation of the other types of literature. These literary sages, who were not primarily courtiers, represent Israelite scholarship, and, as such, they were concerned with all the differing traditions and lore of Israelite culture and were involved in their preservation, including priestly and prophetic traditions. Thus, even if material in the biblical writings does not originally come from them, they were the means of its preservation. These individuals also shaped this material, put it in good literary form. Thus, they were intricately involved also in its production. This means that these scholars were not particularistic. As teachers, they studied and taught all the traditions, types of literature, and genres to their students. The wisdom literature, then, needs to be viewed as complementary, not inimical, to the other types of literature found in the Hebrew Bible.

In this article, I see my primary role as "muddying the water" or blurring the lines between the roles and worldviews of the Israelite professional groups (priests, prophets, and sages) and between generic boundaries. The current consensus on this issue is incredibly simplistic and rigidly stereotypical. My position is supported by ancient Near Eastern comparisons, genre criticism, and common sense.

I. Generic Production of Meaning

A brief sketch of how genres produce meaning is in order.[21] Technically speaking, genres are not in texts or speeches, but one can say that texts/speeches share in them. It is best to speak of genres existing in authors/speakers and readers/hearers. Genres are necessary for the production of meaning. In fact, without genres, communication would come to a sudden halt. In all our acts of communication, we are constantly using genres, largely unaware. They provide clues/cues to the hearer/reader as to what to expect in the subsequent communication. We can use and comprehend them so easily because since our births, a major part of our socialization has been the inculcation of them. Schools represent a significant contribution to genre assimilation, especially literary genres.

Genres partake in an inherent tension between the universal and the particular.

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[21] For introductions to genre criticism, see John Frow, *Genre* (New Critical Idiom; London: Routledge, 2005); Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 68-126; Garin Dowd, Lesley Stevenson, and Jeremy Strong, eds., *Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2006). For genre criticism applied to OT texts, see Sparks, *Ancient Texts,* 6-21; D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, Jr., eds., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); Carol A. Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (ed. Roland Boer; SBLSS 63; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007) 19-30.

Genres are basically the universal, and this is what builds expectations in the reader, which are known as conventions. This is done by consciously or unconsciously categorizing a text or speech as like other texts/speeches. But the particular also has a part to play in this process. Every text/speech, while it draws on a genre (or genres), in some way departs from it and forms the particular or the unique. Otherwise, all communication would be the same and would be quite boring. But if this departure is too great, then there is a risk of no communication occurring. So this tension is necessary and desirable. This is why the older style of genre theory, which concentrated on taxonomy, and thus on the universal with little regard for the particular, is outdated and insufficient. Biblical scholars like Crenshaw are stuck in this mode. The most important point here is that it takes both the universal (genres) and the particular for communication to take place.

Genres produce worlds, though these are never complete.[22] Each genre reflects built-in assumptions, values, and expectations—in other words, a distinctive world. (A better designation might be a conventional world.) As an example, the genre of horror films creates its own dark and scary world, where things "go bump in the night" and where special effects can be quite gruesome. Often the supernatural plays a significant role in such films, unless it is a sci-fi horror flick. The mixing of genres, as in the macabre films *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *Beetle Juice,* shows how horror and humor can be combined with interesting effects. Such mixing creates its own world. But a generic world is not the same thing as a worldview that a particular social group holds. Genres simply are not capable of carrying that much information; they are not comprehensive enough for that.

Genres are also intricately associated with social settings.[23] Genres have work to do, and they do it in certain kinds of settings, in recurring types of contexts and situations. They were created to provide strategic responses to these situations. But one cannot necessarily read a setting off from a genre. There is no simplistic one-to-one correspondence between setting and genre. Thus, the relation between settings and genres needs to be viewed as quite flexible. Settings might be physical and concrete, as in the newspaper at a newsstand that needs a headline in a large, bold font and a truncated message to attract potential buyers/readers as they walk past. At other times, genres may be more abstract and less tied to the physical, as with complex literary genres such as novels and biographies. Further, a particular genre might be used in more than one setting. Consider the newspaper headline;

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[22] Frow, *Genre,* 75-77, 85-87. Bakhtin scholars refer to literary genres conveying worldviews, but even they admit that these are not complete (Newsom, "Spying Out the Land," 30; Christine Mitchell, "Power, *Eros,* and Biblical Genres," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory* [ed. Boer], 31-42, here 34). And this is not the same thing as Crenshaw's notion of the way a particular social group views the world.

[23] See esp. Frow, *Genre,* 12-17.

in suburban areas, papers are often detached from their newsstand context and delivered directly to the home! And what about the new electronic versions of newspapers? Will this eventually alter this genre? Again, the pronouncement of marriage might be performed in a judge's chamber or in a church building. In addition, one setting can often produce more than one genre. A court setting produces and utilizes not only the pronouncement of sentence but also the oath taking, the deposition, the cross examination, and the summing up.

Not recognizing a genre can lead to misinterpretation. The hearer/reader has to be attentive and sensitive to generic clues or risk failure to understand completely. This is especially true with complex genres. A tricky modern example would be a comedic docudrama. This is a combination of documentary and drama genres. What could be more impossible? Documentaries connote the aura of factuality and truthfulness. Nothing is scripted. They purport to demonstrate how things really are concerning a particular subject. Dramas, on the other hand, are by definition fictive, but they present themselves in the form of a story. This is what the documentary lacks, which may often make it less interesting to a viewer. Add to this mixture the category of comedy, which also seems to be in contradiction to a documentary—are they not always serious? Comedy docudrama is the genre of the recent film *Kenny.* The story is about the often comedic work and life experiences of a manager of a "porta-potty" company in Australia. Without closely attending to generic clues, I mistakenly assumed that this was solely a documentary. It was only toward the end of the movie that I began to realize that the movie was scripted and was actually fictive. The documentary feel of the movie, however, seemed to make it funnier than if it had been simply fictive and dramatic. At any rate, my point is that viewer or reader or hearer must beware! Failure to attend to generic cues and clues will result in some degree of misinterpretation.

Understanding ancient genres requires even more work. Obviously, as moderns, we are not socialized to comprehend these ancient genres automatically. That is why it is so important to compare the works included in the Israelite wisdom literature and flesh out its conventions. Next the relationship between wisdom literature and other types of literature (prophetic, legal, historical, and so on) needs to be determined. In addition, it is important to compare Israelite wisdom literature with similar literature of the ancient Near East. This will help further draw out its conventions. Then it is also important to compare this ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature with the other types of literature that were available (love songs, prayers, chronicles, and so on). This will help determine the function of a particular work in that society and shed light on the role of Israelite wisdom literature. Crenshaw essentially stymies this process. Yet comparing the Hebrew wisdom literature with the other types of literature and with its ancient Near Eastern counterparts is essential for a full understanding of its character and function in Israelite society.

Hebrew wisdom literature should be described as a mode of literature and not strictly a genre.[24] Mode is a broader category than genre, a higher level of abstraction. It is usually recognized in an adjectival form as, for example, in *comic* play or *heroic* epic. Other modes in the Hebrew Bible include legal material, historical books, prophetic literature, and so on. (In contrast, the so-called apocalyptic literature is probably more a genre than a mode.) Biblical scholars coined the term "wisdom literature," but it has been used by Egyptologists and Mesopotamian scholars to designate a similar body of literature.[25] It thus represents, in many ways, an arbitrary collection of only loosely connected works. This higher level of abstraction makes it perhaps inappropriate to speak of settings and worlds of modes of literature. Proper genres of Hebrew wisdom literature would include sentences, instructions, didactic or investigatory dialogue, and so on. One can also speak of subgenres.[26] For example, the sentence or proverb is subdivided into the admonition and saying.

II. Jeremiah 18:18

I will now examine more closely Jer 18:18, which has been widely used (including by Gunkel and Crenshaw) to support the notion of distinctive traditions and traditionalists in the Hebrew Bible:

> Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him, and let us not heed any of his words."[27]

Ironically, a close reading of this passage serves to deconstruct this dominant paradigm, not support it. These professional groups represent the knowledge experts or intellectuals of ancient Israelite society. In the context of this verse, divine

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[24] See ibid., 63-67; Fowler, *Kinds of Literature,* 106-11.

[25] Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–80) 1:ix-x; eadem, "Didactic Literature," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (ed. Antonio Loprieno; Probleme der Ägyptologie 10; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 243-62, here 243; and eadem, *Moral Values in Ancient Egypt* (OBO 155; Fribourg: University Press, 1997) 1-8; she has used the label "wisdom literature" herself, however, in *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: A Study of Demotic Instructions* (OBO 52; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1983). As an Egyptologist, she prefers the term "didactic literature" to "wisdom literature" for the designation of a similar type of literature in spite of its adoption from biblical studies by many. The Mesopotamian expert W. G. Lambert (*Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996] 1) also borrows the term "wisdom literature" to designate Babylonian works that have a formal and thematic affinity with this type of writing.

[26] Fowler, *Kinds of Literature,* 11-18.

[27] Scriptural citations are from the *NRSV.*

knowledge is the issue. These intellectual leaders of Judah are denigrating the prophecy of Jeremiah that divine revelation would cease in Judah.[28] All three professional groups are united in their roles as mediums of divine knowledge or knowledge about the future for political leaders. The תורה from the priests should not be anachronistically understood as the Torah of later Judaism. Neither is it "teaching" in general. It seems to have the sense here of "direction" obtained from the casting of lots.[29] Of course, the "word" of the prophets must refer to the divine word received from God, either in a vision or in a trance. Both of these involve the supernatural.

And the counsel of the sages must refer to the political advice given by royal courtiers or viziers through divine aid. In context, something supernatural or revelatory seems to be suggested. Joseph is cast in the role of sage and is able to counsel the Pharaoh wisely because of his supernatural ability to interpret dreams. Daniel also is trained as a wise man and is able to interpret dreams supernaturally and reveal God's will. And let us not forget that the paragon of wisdom and the preeminent political sage of ancient Israel, Solomon, receives his wisdom supernaturally and in a revelatory way in a dream by the altar at Gibeon (1 Kings 3). Solomon's wisdom was seen as divinely given (4:29-34). And so, ironically, instead of supporting the claims of most scholars concerning distinctive traditions and worldviews, a close reading of this passage begins to reveal a role of sages that overlaps with what these scholars have restricted to prophets and priests. The emphasis in this passage is not on how these intellectual groups differ from each other but on how they are united. They are united as conduits of divine revelation, as we have just seen, and they are also united in their condemnation of Jeremiah. This shows that alignment of these groups can cut across professional lines.[30]

As already intimated, a further complication is that the social roles of these groups largely overlap. In other words, they may differ in technique for divining God's will and in areas of expertise, but they perform many of the same roles. Moses is called a prophet but performs priestly roles as well. There is the prophet (and judge) Samuel, who acts more like a priest than a prophet. Nathan, the prophet, assumes the role of a sage or vizier vis-à-vis David. And what about the possibility of cultic prophets? Ezra is a priest but functions more like a prophet to the people. And sometimes members of one group simultaneously hold membership in another. Daniel is both wise man and prophet or diviner (and is included as

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[28] John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 124 n. 18.

[29] BDB, 435, s.v. תורה.

[30] Patricia Dutcher-Walls ("The Social Location of the Deuteronomists: A Sociological Study of Factional Politics in Late Pre-Exilic Judah," *JSOT* 52 [1991] 77-94) argues that a factional alignment of this sort involving several professional groups underlies in the writing of the Deuteronomistic History.

a prophet in the Christian Bible). Ezekiel and Jeremiah are both prophets and priests. And surely we cannot restrict the interests of priests to only cultic and ritualistic matters, or the prophets to only political matters or view them as solely covenantal in perspective. Again, I think that the reality concerning this issue is far more complex than we scholars have admitted.

III. Generic Worlds, Not Worldviews

Even if we grant that the various groups held significantly distinctive worldviews, could their respective genres (Jer 18:18) be used to indicate this? The answer is, only if genres create worldviews defined as the particular ways particular social groups view the world. This is not the case. Genres produce conventional worlds, not worldviews. This distinction is important. When I attend to various genres throughout the day, my worldview remains the same. For instance, when I read a business letter, does my worldview change when I next read a newspaper article? No. The closest genre that implies a shift in worldview is apocalyptic literature. In many ways, it presents a more fully complete world than does the wisdom literature. However, even it is incomplete. This lack is indicated by the incorporation of wisdom elements into it as time progressed. In fact, there is a Society of Biblical Literature section entitled "Wisdom and Apocalypticism" that explores the combinations of wisdom and apocalyptic genres, which was typical in early Judaism.[31] It is appropriate to ask whether this means that these mixed texts contain two different worldviews simultaneously. Furthermore, what about modes of literature? Do they convey worldviews? If genres do not convey worldviews, then it seems that a mode's chances of doing so are even slimmer. A mode's high level of abstraction seems to discredit this notion. Thus, it seems better not to connect worldview with either genres or modes.

We might again consider the genre of horror. Now, certainly, some persons more than others might be attracted to this genre and reflect on it often. But this does not mean that it is the primary way in which they view the real world, that the world it depicts is complete. If so, how could they function? And I bet that they watch a comedy now and then. Certainly there are experts of this genre (special-effects experts, directors like John Carpenter, horror actors like Robert Englund, etc.). But these experts do not view their daily lives through the lens of this genre. Further, take modern lawyers, who are experts with legal genres—does this mean that they have a legalistic worldview? Do they see the world only through the lens of their profession and related genres? I think not.

In the same way, the cultic genres that Israelite priests used were no doubt

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[31] The group produced the collection entitled *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (ed. Benjamin G. Wright III and Lawrence M. Wills; SBLSymS 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2005).

important to them and necessary for their profession, but that does not necessarily mean that their worldview was any more sacerdotal than that of the rest of the Israelites. In other words, they "had lives." They had families to care for, personal business to attend to, and various noncultic activities that filled their lives. Their worldview was broader than their profession and its related genres.

Similarly, and assuming that modes convey worlds, wisdom literature conjures up a world of cognitive and moral enhancement. The Book of Proverbs presents a poetic and didactic world in which young elite male students respect the authority of their teachers, are accustomed to second-person commands, and expect to learn deep insights about human nature and how to live successfully as governmental officials (e.g., 25:6, 15). It is a world that thrives on subtleties and wit. It is the world of the mundane, morality, mores, and mysteries (cf. Sir 39:7). And it is a world that is filled with elementary dichotomies: wise and fool, righteous and wicked, industrious and lazy, rich and poor. But again, this world is not complete. It is not meant to be a lens through which all of life is to be viewed. Lacking are various other facets of Israelite life and culture.

IV. Jeremiah 18:18, Literacy, the "Wise," and Scribes

Getting back to Jer 18:18, there is another facet about this verse that serves to deconstruct its use to bolster the separate worldview theory. Technically, it says nothing about wisdom literature! The "counsel" here is oral political advice, not literary proverbs that instruct youths how they should conduct themselves, as found in the sentence collections in Proverbs (10:1–22:16 and chaps. 25–29). In other words, oral and literary genres need to be distinguished. The word from the prophet, the direction from the priest, and the counsel of the courtier are all oral genres used in interaction between the ruler and the intelligentsia. Thus, it is inappropriate to use Jer 18:18 to suggest that these three professional groups are the primary authors of the Hebrew Bible. Their role as authors of literary compositions is not indicated in this verse. This group of "wise men," thus, consisted of viziers and courtiers that the king or ruler consulted. They might also have served as literary scholars, but this role is not actuated in this passage.[32] Thus, the "wise men" of Jer 18:18 are not necessarily the same wise men as in Prov 22:17 ("the words of the *wise*") and 24:23 ("these also are sayings of the *wise*").

The wise ones of Proverbs have a different kind of wisdom. Their wisdom consists in literary artistry and a concern for profundity. Thus, the sages of Proverbs are literary sages, teachers, and scholars. Their teaching, of course, would help a courtier be successful, but their wisdom is literary and scholarly, not primarily

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[32] Sometimes wisdom writers are simultaneously courtiers or viziers. The author of *The Instruction of Ptahhotep* claims to be a vizier, and the author of *The Words of Ahiqar* is claimed to be a courtier under the Assyrian king Esarhaddon in the seventh century.

political. As wisdom teachers, their domain is in the classroom, not the court. This aesthetic style of wisdom accords with the purposes of the Book of Proverbs as stated in its prologue: "to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles" (1:6). This is similar to the "wise" Qohelet, who is described as "weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly" (12:9-10).

The interesting question is, How might we further identify these elusive "wise men" of Proverbs? We get a hint from Ben Sira and the way he uses the adjective "wise." Ben Sira's work is usually classified as wisdom literature; it is poetic and filled with instruction and aphorisms. And to what professional role does Ben Sira belong? It is the scribe! But there is more. Like the author of the Egyptian *Satire of the Trades,* Ben Sira praises the scribal profession as being far superior to other trades. Though he applauds the necessity of farmers and craftspersons, he states, "The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; only the one who has little business can become wise" (38:24). Wisdom here is defined not as a way of living but as intellectual prowess and love of literature. In comparison to the manual laborer, Ben Sira states,

> How different the one who devotes himself
>   to the study of the law of the Most High!
> He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients,
>   and is concerned with prophecies;
> he preserves the saying of the famous
>   and penetrates the subtleties of parables;
> he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs
>   and is at home with the obscurities of parables. (38:34–39:3)

The scribes also saw themselves as wisely or cognitively skilled in interpreting the law. Jeremiah condemns these skills:

> How can you say, "We are *wise*
>   and the law of the LORD is with us,"
> when, in fact, the false pen of the *scribes*
>   has made it into a lie?
> The *wise* shall be put to shame,
>   they shall be dismayed and taken;
> since they have rejected the word of the LORD,
>   what *wisdom* is in them? (8:8-9)

V. Scribes and Their Generic Training

So who were these scribes? In Hebrew, the word for scribe, ספר, means "one who writes," and the English word means the same thing. In the ancient Near East, the term "scribe" "refers to roles from that of a typist to a cabinet officer at the

highest level of government."[33] The home base of the scribes was the royal court or temple. "Their duties included administrating and keeping records of tax collection, forced labor, military activities, commodities, and building projects." In Egypt, they "supervised land measurement after the annual Nile flood; drafted correspondence, contracts, and treaties; and at the highest level kept the royal annals, collected laws, preserved sacred traditions, and were experts in astronomy, omens, and other religious rites and activities." In ancient Mesopotamia, scribes were the glue that kept the empire together.[34] Thus, their training was considered to be paramount.

In ancient Israel, scribes assumed various roles. Along with priests, they taught the people the law (Ezra 7:6, 10; Nehemiah 8). Middle-level, Levitical scribes stood as liaisons between the urban elite and the rural villagers and helped produce the laws in Deuteronomy, which do not simply reflect the interests of the upper class.[35] Some scribes, like the chief scribe, were high-level officials under a king (2 Kings 22; Jer 36:10). In 2 Sam 8:15-18, the scribe Seraiah is listed along with David, his commander, main priests, and David's sons. Some scribes did serve as royal courtiers, for example, Jonathan, David's uncle, who gave him advice (1 Chr 27:32). The famous scribe Ahiqar held a similar position in the seventh century under King Esarhaddon of Assyria. There were different types of scribes: royal and, later, temple scribes (Josephus, *A.J.* 12.2.2 §142), priestly and/or Levitical scribes, and prophetic scribes.[36] During the exile, when literary expression was the only form of power for Israelite elites, "priesthood and scribalism became inextricably linked."[37]

So what type of scribes were the wisdom writers? Surely all scribes could not be categorized correctly as sages? Upper-level scribes who functioned as scholars and teachers fit this category. They might have served as courtiers or advisors at times (Sir 39:4), but their primary role seems to have been as teachers and scholars. Ben Sira, for example, was a teacher of a school (51:23).

But what modern scholars often fail to realize is that these same Israelite wisdom writers or scribal scholars, in addition to producing the wisdom literature,

[33] Anthony J. Saldarini, "Scribes," *ABD* 5:1012-16, here 1012.

[34] David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 33.

[35] Mark A. Christian, "Priestly Power that Empowers: Michel Foucault, Middle-Tier Levites, and the Sociology of 'Popular Religious Groups' in Israel," *Journal of Hebrew Studies* (online journal) 9, article 1 (2009) 1-81 (http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_103.pdf [accessed March 18, 2009]).

[36] For a discussion of the different types of Mesopotamian scribes, see A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Intellectual in Mesopotamian Society," *Daedalus* 104/2 (1975) 37-46.

[37] Mark Leuchter, "Zadokites, Deuteromomists, and the Exilic Debate over Scribal Authority," in *Scribes before and after 587 BCE: A Conversation,* ed. Mark Leuchter, *Journal of Hebrew Studies* (online journal) 7, article 10 (2007) 5-18, here 17 (http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_71.pdf [accessed March 18, 2009]).

were involved in the preservation, composition, utilization, and instruction of the other literary genres of our Hebrew Bible. The scribal scholar who could coin a proverb could also compose prayers, hymns, chronicles, erotica, or even legal material. Again, Solomon, the premier "wise man," is said to have composed more than just wisdom genres: a thousand and five *songs* (1 Kgs 4:32a); some *psalms* are even attributed to him (72 and 127). Further, the students these scholars taught also had to master basic genres. Miriam Lichtheim says of the ancient Egyptian method of scribal enculturation, "Writing was taught by making the pupils copy a variety of compositions: literary works that were highly esteemed, and basic genres such as letters, hymns, prayers, and, of course, instructions in wisdom."[38] Of course, Daniel, the sage, was trained as a scribe in all the Babylonian literature (1:4, 17).

Another complication of this issue is that often these scholars or sages would simultaneously occupy other roles or areas of expertise. Ezra was both a priest and a scribe. He was an expert in the law and a scholar, and he and the Levites taught the people the law. His compositions demonstrate his scholarly ability as a writer, and if Ezra had not been a scribe, how would we have his works today? Again, a scribe, specifically a scribal scholar, would have been needed to preserve his message and put it in good literary form. Thus, scribal scholars were unquestionably necessary in the production of biblical materials even if messages or content did not directly or completely come from them. Baruch is a prime example. The biblical text observes that Jeremiah needed Baruch's literary skills to have his message preserved. If Jeremiah was lacking in writing skills, what of the other prophets? Did they not also need the assistance of such scribal scholars?

So, on a different note, if Ezra was a scribal scholar, then why can we not fathom him, say, composing wisdom literature? Does being a priest preclude one from such an activity or competency? In fact, the Egyptian scribe who identifies himself as the author of the *Instruction of Amenemope* was simultaneously a lector priest. The *Complaints of Khakheperre-sonb,* a didactic Egyptian text, is supposedly written by a priest of On, and the author of the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq* was a priest of Re in Heliopolis, of the late period, who composed an instruction for his son while in prison. Most scholars of Israelite wisdom literature would be reluctant to say that a priest composed wisdom literature, but in Egypt, it apparently was no problem.

Of course, the writing of some biblical books required skills beyond just literary ones. A book such as Leviticus would obviously have to have been written by a scribal scholar who was simultaneously a priest or closely associated with priests and their rituals. No doubt, this book would have been required reading of anyone trained as a scribe!

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[38] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 2:167.

Other scholars have made similar arguments. Moshe Weinfeld has argued that wisdom scribes authored Deuteronomy. John L. McKenzie concludes that the Hebrew wisdom writers were also the authors of the historical material. Sparks explains that the apparent influence of wisdom on non-wisdom OT books means that "*all* ancient literary texts were written by scribal scholars." Similarly, Richard Clifford notes, "Rather than wisdom books influencing other biblical books, however, it is more likely that wisdom thinking was in the main stream of biblical literary production from whence its style and ideas radiated throughout biblical writings. . . . The authors of the biblical books came from the ranks of professional scribes and sages." David M. Carr believes that this influence can be explained by the fact that all biblical authors started their training with the Hebrew wisdom literature. In addition, recently and brilliantly Karel van der Toorn has argued that the present Hebrew Bible is the product of a scribal culture, though he reverts to the particularistic view when he depicts the differing "perspectives" of the scribes who edited Deuteronomy.[39]

Thus, all of the biblical books are the products of scribal scholars. No matter what other social locations they held (priest, prophet, sage, and so on), all the biblical authors were united in their role as scribes and in their common scribal training. In terms of the worldview of biblical authors, therefore, their role as scribes should be given more weight than whether they were also simultaneously priests, prophets, or sages. The biblical materials' common scribal matrix and the exposure of scribes to a multitude of genres and traditions are what discredit the notion of distinctive worldviews represented in the Hebrew Bible. Even such characteristically priestly works as Leviticus involved the work of scribal scholars, whether they were priests themselves or not. This, of course, is not to imply that all the Israelite scribal scholars were one homogenous whole, that they never disagreed; but it is to suggest that their worldview was largely the same, especially in light of their common academic heritage and common goals in teaching.

VI. The Generic Setting of the Sentences in the Book of Proverbs

Carr has recently argued that the Hebrew Bible originally functioned in the enculturation of young scribes to serve efficiently in governmental positions.[40] He

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[39] Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry," *JBL* 86 (1967) 249-62; McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom," 4-9; Sparks, *Ancient Texts,* 56; Richard Clifford, "Introduction to the Wisdom Literature," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (rev. ed.; 5 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–10) 5:1-16, here 1, 7; David M. Carr, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism: Different Types of Educational/Enculturational Literature" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Antonio, Texas, November 21, 2004); Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 75-108, 143-72.

[40] Carr, *Tablet of the Heart.*

argues that there was a pattern shared by the classical culture and the ancient Near Eastern world, whereby wisdom literature was studied first before students proceeded to more complicated genres. Thus, the Hebrew wisdom literature, especially the Book of Proverbs, was never intended to be isolated from the other genres but served as a primer for providing basic knowledge for young scribes, who would eventually learn to read and compose other genres. The isolation of the wisdom literature from the rest of the Hebrew Bible is an artificial and distorting move that goes back to Gunkel, yet it is still often assumed today. The popular notion that there were distinctive and separated scribal schools for priests, prophets, and sages is not supported by the ancient Near Eastern evidence.[41] Even if there were such separate schools, surely the scribes of each school would have had the same basic training and exposure to differing genres and modes of literature.

The proverb or sentence is the most fundamental and, thus, the primary genre of the wisdom literature. Archaeological and literary evidence demonstrates that in addition to serving as primers, proverb collections taught scribal students core societal values. Round Sumerian school tablets have been found, with lexical lists on one side and matching proverbs on the other.[42] The collections also functioned as a source for rhetorical phrases used in debates.[43] In the Old Babylonian period, young scribes at Nippur were trained in two phases.[44] In the first phase, students copied lexical texts; this activity imparted the writing system and introduced Sumerian vocabulary. At the end of the first phase, tablets with proverbs were used, and their contents prepared students for studying Sumerian in the second phase, which was the actual reading of texts.

It makes sense that biblical proverbs would have functioned in the same way in ancient Israel. As the shortest genre in the Hebrew Bible, they would have served as an early educational tool for learning literary Hebrew and, simultaneously, the assimilation of core Israelite values. But even if the wisdom literature (here represented by Proverbs) did not function as a primer before students moved on to more complicated genres, it still would have served to train scribes.

Thus, if these proverbs were literary products used in the training of scribes, the setting is not bearded men quoting proverbs to youth at the city gate, à la Gunkel. Moreover, the usage of literary proverbs is relatively indifferent to a physical or face-to-face setting: scrolls were portable and so, theoretically, reading scrolls containing these proverbs could be done anywhere, even without a teacher

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[41] Contra Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 78-79.

[42] Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections* (2 vols.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1997) 1:xviii.

[43] Ibid., xix.

[44] Niek Veldhuis, "Sumerian Proverbs in their Curricular Context," *JAOS* 120 (2000) 383-87 (review of Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections* [see n. 42 above]).

(though classroom usage was probably the norm). Because the proverbs were literary products, the often-proposed family/clan setting is problematic. The collections of proverbs in the biblical Book of Proverbs are inherently scribal. They might echo the familial didactic setting, but, as they stand, they are literary products meant to be read and studied, not used orally. A court setting also becomes problematic. There is no evidence that the biblical proverbs were used conversationally, so their only function in a court setting might have been the advice they offer that could be beneficial in court behavior. Further, many scribes were not courtiers; they worked in villages or in the temple or even in private homes. Thus, a didactic setting in scribal schools seems reasonable for these proverbs, and perhaps this could be extended to the wisdom literature as a whole. Recall, however, that in this same setting, the other genres and traditions were also taught and studied.

VII. Generic Realism versus Nominalism

Both Gunkel and Crenshaw assume the position known as *generic realism.* "Generic realism posits that texts are uniquely and intrinsically related to the generic categories in which we place them."[45] Crenshaw and Gunkel mistakenly view genres as ontological categories. As Sparks notes, the assumption is "that wisdom literature is a thing that already exists, that the task of scholarship is merely to correctly identify it by isolating its salient features from the wisdom texts."[46] With this approach, genres are rigidly defined, with clear boundaries between them. They are considered stable and static. The main goal of genre criticism is taxonomic, splitting hairs over what specific features constitute a particular genre.

Today, genre critics instead espouse the notion of *generic nominalism.* Generic nominalism assumes that "there is a flexible and partially arbitrary character to all classifications . . . generic categories are essentially taxonomic inventions."[47] The boundaries between genres, thus, are viewed as fuzzy and shifting. A genre is considered an unstable entity, constantly changing and dynamic. The goal of genre criticism is better to understand the role of genre in the production and organization of meaning. Sparks specifically criticizes the ongoing debate about what constitutes Hebrew wisdom literature.[48] He believes that there is more than one way to define it and that we need to move beyond this issue to more important matters.

Thus, the decision to include certain books as Hebrew wisdom literature cannot be simply categorical. There may be more than one way to categorize Hebrew

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[45] Sparks, *Ancient Texts,* 6.
[46] Ibid., 6-7.
[47] Ibid., 6.
[48] Ibid., 6-7.

wisdom literature, in which, say, Daniel might be included or Job excluded. For example, the ancient Israelites preferred a corpus of Solomonic works instead of what we call "wisdom literature." These are works that have been traditionally ascribed to Solomon: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Wisdom of Solomon. Note that Job is missing. And why would the ancient Israelites have included Song of Songs, of the genre erotica? We modern scholars might disagree with the ancients here, but somehow the Israelites were quite comfortable with including erotica among their "wisdom" texts. Crenshaw includes Job in the Hebrew wisdom corpus, though it embarrassingly contains instances of divine revelation, which is considered incongruous to wisdom literature's supposed empiricism, with its definitive dependence on experience in formulating its truths.[49] He includes it because it so closely resembles Mesopotamian works that deal with the issue of theodicy.

When it comes to wisdom psalms (Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133), however, Crenshaw becomes very rigid and rejects the possibility of their existence; they are merely instances of psalms that reflect some of the themes in the Hebrew wisdom literature.[50] But why not categorize them as wisdom psalms? Heuristically, this helps in understanding them. These psalms are more geared toward instruction than toward the catharsis of a lament, perhaps more apt to be studied than sung, and more directed toward humanity than toward God.[51]

Crenshaw is here revealing his position as generic realist. He believes that genres have rigid boundaries. Wisdom psalms represent a mixed type of genre for Crenshaw, something he finds disturbing. Crenshaw fails to realize how genres work and how they constantly change. But the point here is that the classification of genres is not etched in stone but is a heuristic device that aids in understanding literatures that resemble each other. There are no hard and fast rules. There is no way to be entirely objective about genre classification, and there is often more than one way to classify a text. A text might be the combination of several genre types. Genre criticism today is not primarily a classificatory or taxonomic enterprise, like organizing a mineral collection. Rather, it emphasizes the dynamism of genres and explains how they are an intricate part of the production of meaning.

[49] Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," 5.

[50] Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?" 9-17; in the same journal, J. Kenneth Kuntz ("Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom Psalms: A Response to Crenshaw," *Currents in Biblical Research* 1 [2003] 145-54) responded negatively to Crenshaw's argument, to which then Crenshaw himself responded ("Gold Dust," 155-58).

[51] Interestingly, on similar grounds, Nili Shupak ("Egyptian 'Prophetic' Writings and Biblical Wisdom," *BN* 54 [1990] 81-102) argues that the so-called Egyptian prophetic writings should be classified as wisdom literature; the discussion is quite illuminating.

VIII. Generic Economy and Complementariness

Biblical scholars often assume that the wisdom literature depicts a total world, but this is a misunderstanding. This effect is created by artificially separating this literature from the other types of literature in the Hebrew Bible. Genres are systemic. What makes a genre a genre is not just what it is but also what it is not.[52] Genres define themselves and have an identity only in relation to other existing genres. This could also be applied to modes. In other words, Hebrew wisdom literature is what it is not just because of what it is but also because of what it is not. It is not historical; it is not apocalyptic (except for hybrid examples in early Judaism); it is not prophetic, and so on. Much of the distinctiveness of Hebrew wisdom literature can be explained by such a recognition. The lack of references to *Heilsgeschichte,* to covenants, or to the exodus is exactly what one would expect in a literature that is focused on other matters.

Hebrew wisdom literature occupies a niche in the context of all the other modes.[53] Two broad characteristics define this niche: didacticism and moralizing.[54] The primary function of Hebrew wisdom literature is to teach young scribes how to be successful and not failures in life and to instill in them Israelite values; that is, its primary function is the enculturation of elite youth. Josephus refers to Hebrew wisdom literature as containing "precepts for the conduct of human life" (*Ap.* 1.8 §40 [Thackeray, LCL]). Concerning this niche, Derek Kidner puts it well:

> There are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadsides of the prophets, and yet decisive in personal dealings. Proverbs moves in this realm, asking what a person is like to live with, or to employ; how he manages his affairs, his time and himself.[55]

John Goldingay puts it nicely, also: "It concentrates more on everyday life than history, more on the regular than the unique, more on the individual (though not outside of his social relationships) than the nation, more on personal experience than sacred tradition." Further, Richard Clifford points out concerning modern wisdom literature (the so-called self-help genre): "Missing from them are politics, economics, and history as well as national and international affairs, for these are not (for the most part) subject to *personal* decision and reflection. Wisdom litera-

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[52] Frow, *Genre,* 125.

[53] Similarly, Martin J. Buss ("Dialogue in and among Genres," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory* [ed. Boer], 9-18, here 13) writes, "*The Hebrew Bible is largely arranged according to what appear to be culturally significant genres, which each represent a dimension of life and which engage metaphorically in a dialogue with each other*" (emphasis in original).

[54] Lichtheim, "Didactic Literature," 243.

[55] Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1964) 13.

ture is personal and familial."[56] Thus, Hebrew wisdom literature is not interested in conveying history to its audience or advising it concerning laws; it leaves that to the historical narratives and legal material. Although didacticism and moralizing occur in the other modes, they are more overt and distilled in the Hebrew wisdom literature.

Often, wisdom literature is described as a kind of philosophical literature, especially ethics. Origen refers to the Hebrew wisdom literature as the "basic principles of true philosophy" (*Comm. Cant.* prologue), by which he means the practical part of philosophy.[57] W. G. Lambert describes ancient Mesopotamian wisdom literature in a similar way, "The sphere of these texts is what has been called philosophy since Greek times."[58] As already mentioned, Schultz viewed Israelite wisdom as an Israelite type of practical philosophy.[59]

The absence of the notion of covenant in the wisdom literature is explained by scholars as an indication that this idea was not important to the wisdom writers. This, however, is classically an argument from silence, a very weak form of argumentation. Moreover, this argument can cut both ways. One could argue that the covenantal perspective is assumed by the wisdom literature, without noting it. As we have seen, the wisdom literature concentrates on the inculcation of folkways and mores, not on laws, which are more directly connected to the notion of covenant. But wisdom writings certainly reinforce the norms and values contained in the legal material. In other words, one could argue that the wisdom literature assumes covenantal notions without directly expressing them. For instance, Waltke points out that the use of the name Yhwh in Proverbs points to a covenantal perspective.[60]

This interconnection between genres is nicely illustrated in ancient Egyptian literature. In the *Instruction of Merikare,* an Egyptian didactic work directed to

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[56] John Goldingay, "The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology," *EvQ* 51 (1979) 194-207, here 194; Richard Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 19.

[57] Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe; trans. R. P. Lawson; ACW 26; New York: Newman, n.d.) 41.

[58] Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature,* 1.

[59] Schultz, *Old Testament Theology,* 2:83-84; see also Peter Machinist ("Fate, *miqreh,* and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* [ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995] 159-75, here 174), who describes Qohelet as containing "second-order thinking" (similar to philosophy). For ancient Mesopotamian wisdom, see Giorgio Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia," *JAOS* 101 (1981) 35-47, here 44; McKenzie, "Reflections on Wisdom," 2: "I come close to calling it a philosophy."

[60] Waltke, "Book of Proverbs," 305; cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006) 75: "The sages of Israel were not founders of an eccentric sect. They were truly men and women of the covenant."

King Merikare by his father, we find: "Do Maat, then you will last on earth, Calm the weeper, oppress not the widow" (46).[61] Maat was the moral principle and was personified as the goddess of justice, order, and wisdom. This principle is applied practically in the Egyptian instructions.

Lichtheim points out that the tomb autobiographies contain moral values that are expressed in the instructions.[62] This is from the tomb of an official:

> I am son to the aged, father to the child, protector of the poor in every place. I have fed the hungry, anointed the unkempt, I have given clothing to the naked. . . . I am also one who buries the departed. I judged a case by its rightness and made the trial partners leave contented. I have spread goodness throughout my nome.[63]

In the *Instruction of Ptahhotep,* one finds the moral prohibition that a worthy man is always to help, and never harm, a poor man. Concerning this didactic work, Lichtheim says that it "stands for the expounded moral guidelines of the Old and Middle Kingdoms." She states further, "All literary genres, Instructions, Autobiographies, Laments, Tales, and Mortuary texts, taught and exemplified the virtues and warned against the vices. And the single unchanging measuring rod was Maat, the Rightness that the gods upheld."[64]

Instead of emphasizing how the Israelite "traditions" clash, this Egyptian example should cause us to reevaluate wisdom's relation to the other modes. We should concentrate on how they complement one another and how they all were intended to instill cultural values in their audience. Abstract words such as "righteous" and "wisdom," which occur often in the wisdom literature, remain largely vacuous in meaning without the assumption of the other modes. Knowing the story of David and Abigail helps one better understand the difference between wisdom and folly (Nabal, the name of Abigail's husband, means "folly"). Similarly, the stories of Joseph and Potiphar's wife and Tamar and Judah provide excellent examples of the difference between "wisdom" and "folly," which are so frequently cited in the wisdom literature. Goliath comes off looking like a fool when he relies on his own might and weaponry. The covenantal connotation of the word "righteousness," as used especially by the prophets, also informs our understanding of the term when it is found in the wisdom literature. The genres complement one another; they are not antagonistic.

In closing, another way to explain the lack of historical and ethnic identifiers in wisdom literature is that the truth and knowledge that this literature promotes were never intended to be perceived as parochial or local. Its "truth" is universal, not sectarian, and is applicable to all peoples, not just the Israelites. Thus, the so-

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[61] Lichtheim, *Moral Values,* 25.
[62] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature,* 1:7.
[63] Lichtheim, *Moral Values,* 20-21.
[64] Ibid., 23, 87.

called international character of Israelite wisdom is due less to foreign influence than to the need to universalize truth claims. This is a common ideological strategy.[65] For example, as scholars have often noted, Job's name is not Israelite, and Uz was probably located in Edom (Gen 36:28; Jer 25:20; Lam 4:21; 1 Chr 2:42), a land noted for its sages (Jer 49:7). That Job is not Israelite serves to legitimize the book's message as expressing universal truth. Wisdom's emphasis on the individual rather than the nation also serves to convey this sense of universalism. What the wisdom literature says is true for the individual should be true for anyone, no matter what one's ethnicity. A combination of the particular/ethnic and the universal is also found in the Decalogue. The first four commands concern Israel's historical and ethnic distinction from the other nations; the last six are universal: how any person, not just the Israelite, should treat his/her fellow human.[66]

IX. Conclusion

The Hebrew wisdom tradition, as defined by most scholars of Hebrew wisdom, is not a tradition or movement, and it does not reflect a worldview. It is a mode of literature that is only loosely homogeneous. Its main function, if we can speak of modal settings, was to train young scribes. Its primary genre, the sentence, functioned to teach young scribes literary Hebrew and concomitantly to instill in them norms and values of ancient Israelite culture. It also sharpened their wits. The Hebrew wisdom literature, especially the Book of Proverbs, may have been used early on in the education process before students progressed to more difficult genres and types. The professional group responsible for this corpus is the scribal scholars or literary sages, not primarily courtiers. But scribes are responsible also for the preservation and production of the other genres and modes of literature in the Hebrew Bible, study of which was also a component of scribal training. Thus, the wisdom literature is a mode of literature that complements the other modes in the Hebrew Bible. It is not an alternative to Yahwism; it is not anti-revelatory. Members of the scribal group might have simultaneously been priests, been closely related to prophets, or might have served as sages or courtiers. What united them was their common training as scribes and their role as teachers/scholars, thus, as literary sages. This commonality mitigated the differences in worldview of the biblical authors, though they might differ on other matters, like politics. At any rate, the view that the Hebrew Bible is the product of the priests, prophets, and sages (Jer 18:18), who held largely differing views of the world reflected in their respective genres and traditions, is largely inaccurate and overly simplistic.

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[65] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 56-58.
[66] See Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 314; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 201-2.