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**THE LEXICAL CONTEXT OF THE  
TERMINOLOGY FOR 'POOR' IN THE BOOK  
OF PROVERBS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Starting with the contrasting evaluation of poverty in the Book of Proverbs, the author first gives a short review of scholarship (Von Rad, Gese, Kuschke) pointing to weaknesses in previous approaches. A new departure is being sought with the help of linguistics (theory of lexical fields). The paper then sets out to analyse the terminology of "poor" in their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. The author contends that the four major terms for poor - *rāš*, *dal*, *'ebyōn* and *cānī* - do not all belong to the same lexical field. He holds that two different fields can be distinguished, despite a certain degree of overlap, viz the field of poverty and wealth as social states, and the field of justice.

**CONTRASTING EVALUATION OF  
POVERTY: REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP**

Scholars have often drawn attention to a contrast in the evaluation of poverty found in the Book of Proverbs. A large number of sayings depict poverty as a great evil that has to be avoided at all costs. It is caused by laziness and stupidity, while wealth is the well-earned reward of thrift and diligence. There are, however, other sayings which do not

only display a critical attitude towards wealth, but also urge kindness towards the poor and can even claim that to be poor is better than to be rich. Von Rad, in his well-known book on Old Testament wisdom, claims that these contrasting statements are due to the "ambiguity" of poverty and wealth themselves.<sup>1</sup> Hartmut Gese takes a similar line. The basic order of social reality is given in creation and the wisdom teachers try to discern the structures of this order and to communicate them in their sayings and instructions.<sup>2</sup> If they come up with contrasting statements, these do not reflect the fragile nature (Bruechigkeit) of the order as such nor the possibility of its invalidation (Aufhebbarkeit), but only the limitation of human understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Both Von Rad and Gese are concerned with the social order itself, not with the meaning of the terms designating that order.<sup>4</sup> It is a different approach, methodologically, when the analysis starts with the vocabulary of a language and not with objects, properties and relations external to language.<sup>5</sup> This is the approach chosen by Kuschke in an article, in which he analysed the background of the terminology dealing with poverty in wisdom literature and the psalms.<sup>6</sup> Kuschke subdivided the terms used for "poor" into two groups which he believed reflected two opposing mental attitudes. The one group comprising the terms **ruš**, **hasēr**, and **miskēn** designate poverty in socio-economic contexts. They have a derogatory connotation in that poverty is viewed as being the result of ineptitude and sloth. According to Kuschke this is the prevalent view in wisdom literature and reflects a typical upper-class mentality. The rich commonly want to justify the existing property distribution by claiming that the poor are

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- 1 **Von Rad, G** 1972. **Wisdom in Israel**, 126.
  - 2 **Gese, H** 1963. **Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit**, 33ff.
  - 3 39f.
  - 4 For the important distinction in semantics between "designation and meaning" cf **Lyons, John** 1977. **Semantics** Vol I, 251.
  - 5 251.
  - 6 **Kuschke, A** 1939. **Arm und Reich im Alten Testament mit besonderer Beruecksichtigung der nachexilischen Zeit. ZAW** 57, 31-57.

themselves to blame.<sup>7</sup> In the other group we find the more genuine Israelite terms for "poor," 'ebyōn, dal, and 'anī. These contain an implicit call to social responsibility and are generally not used by wisdom writers, but are typical of the language of the psalms. They reflect a different mental attitude characteristic of the poor themselves. The two different types of statements concerning poverty, then, are a reflection of the mentalities of two opposing broad sociological strata which Kuschke identifies with the r<sup>ex</sup>sa<sup>c</sup>im and the ca<sup>n</sup>niyyim in many of the psalms.<sup>8</sup> The wisdom writers, Kuschke claims, are found in the group of r<sup>ex</sup>sa<sup>c</sup>im who oppress the poor, while the psalmists belong to the ca<sup>n</sup>niyyim who place their hope in Yahweh and represent the true Israel.<sup>9</sup>

Kuschke recognizes the difference in the usage of the terms and this is a valuable insight. Otherwise his theory presents serious methodological difficulties. Modern structural semantics has emphasized the distinctions between the diachronic and the synchronic dimension of language.<sup>10</sup> Kuschke has ignored this essential distinction. He not only assigns all of wisdom literature to the post-exilic period, which certainly cannot be accepted with regard to the bulk of the material found in the Book of Proverbs,<sup>11</sup> he also combines it with psalms and treats the language of wisdom and the language of psalms as of the same kind, without due consideration to the difference in genre and setting. This leads to the facile identification of the r<sup>ex</sup>sa<sup>c</sup>im of the psalms with the affluent upper class responsible for wisdom literature. A methodologically sound procedure would be to start with a synchronic analysis of the language used in one body of literature, such as the Book of Proverbs, first, before

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7 47. Cf also Bruppacher, H 1924. Die Beurteilung der Armut im Alten Testament, 97.

8 Kuschke, 53f.

9 55.

10 Cf Lyons, 243ff.

11 Of the seven collections in the Book of Proverbs (I 1-9; II 10-22,61; III 22,17-24,22; IV 24,23-34; V 25-29; VI 30; VII 31), collections II, III, and V are generally thought to be pre-exilic. Cf Kaiser, O 1975. Introduction to the Old Testament, 378f.

attempting a comparison with other Old Testament books, such as Psalms.

A second problem, which flows directly out of Kuschke's failure to respect the distinction of the diachronic and the synchronic in his analysis of the lexemes for "poor," is what John Lyons has called "the etymological fallacy: the common belief that the meaning of words can be determined by investigating their origins."<sup>12</sup> This is especially evident in Kuschke's treatment of the term <sup>c</sup>anī. He follows Birkeland who derives <sup>c</sup>anī from a second root of <sup>c</sup>anāh meaning to be in "a depressed state of strength, ability or worth" often with the connotation "poor, miserable, humbled."<sup>13</sup> Kuschke is interested in the etymology of <sup>c</sup>anī, because he wants to underline his argument that <sup>c</sup>anī designates the poor man insofar as he is oppressed. We shall later be in a position to test this claim, but it should be evident that, as far as the actual meaning of any word is concerned, it is not the etymology which is important, this is synchronically irrelevant,<sup>14</sup> but the context in which it is used.

This brings me to the third weakness of Kuschke's approach: his lexical method. Kuschke does not ignore the contexts of the words he analyses, but these do not really determine their meanings. Instead, he concentrates on individual words, cataloguing all their occurrences, and by this additive process tries to establish the meaning of the words atomistically. But words have no meanings as isolated units - this has been amply demonstrated by linguists - but only within their lexical and situational contexts.<sup>15</sup>

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12 Lyons, 244.

13 Cf Birkeland, H 1933. <sup>c</sup>ANI und <sup>c</sup>ANAW in den Psalmen, 8; Kuschke, 48.

14 Lyons, 244. Cf also the critique by James Barr of the "etymological interest" in modern Old Testament scholarship in his book: 1961. *The semantics of Biblical language*, 107-160.

15 Cf Lyons, J 1981. *Language, meaning and context*; Berger, K 1977. *Exegese des Neuen Testaments*, 137-159.

## LEXICAL CONTEXT

What is meant by context? According to modern linguists context is of fundamental importance for the analysis of meaning. Its investigation can be conducted on two levels.<sup>16</sup> On the level of language, the lexical environment of a certain term can be analysed with regard to the lexical field and the literary forms in which it occurs. Secondly, an attempt can be made to establish the situational context insofar as "any text can be regarded as a constituent of situation."<sup>17</sup> This type of contextualization involves the use of traditional methods of biblical scholarship, the situational context being what Gunkel has called the "Sitz im Leben."<sup>18</sup> Although both of these investigations are necessary for any semantic analysis to have a sound methodological basis, we shall restrict our present investigation to an analysis of the lexical context of the terminology for "poor" in the Book of Proverbs.

Traditionally, contextuality has been defined in terms of the literary context of a sentence or a passage in which a certain concept is used. The investigations of linguists in the field of structural semantics have, however, revealed that, apart from this immediate context, there is another type of contextuality which is semantically organized. This is generally termed a semantic or a lexical field.<sup>19</sup> "A lexical field," according to the definition of Ullmann, "is a closely integrated sector of the vocabulary which corresponds to a particular sphere of experience. The elements of such a field delimit each other and derive their significance from their place in the system."<sup>20</sup> Words have no independent and separate existence. No word can be understood in isolation, but only within the whole system of words that are related to it and delimit its sense. "Looked at from a

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16 Cf **Mettinger**, T 1982. YHWH SABAOTH - The heavenly King on the cherubim throne, in Ishida, T (ed), **Studies in the period of David and Solomon and other essays**, 111.

17 J R Firth quoted by **Lyons** 1981, 195.

18 Cf **Mettinger**, 111.

19 Cf **Berger**, 138.

20 **Ullmann**, S 1973. **Meaning and style**, 26f.

semantic point of view, the lexical structure of a language - the structure of its vocabulary - is best regarded as a large intricate network of sense relations: it is a huge, multi-dimensional spider's web, in which each strand is one such relation and each knot in the web is a different lexeme."<sup>21</sup>

The theory of lexical fields was first formulated by Jost Trier in a work on intellectual terms in medieval German which appeared in 1931.<sup>22</sup> Trier concentrated on substitutional (paradigmatic) sense relations. A lexical field, as he sees it, is constituted by words which are delimited in sense by neighbouring and synonymous lexemes and their oppositions.<sup>23</sup> Walter Porzig expanded the scope of enquiry by including combinatorial (syntagmatic) sense relations in his investigations. He thereby "developed a notion of semantic fields (Bedeutungsfelder) which was founded upon the relations of sense holding between pairs of syntagmatically connected lexemes."<sup>24</sup> His theory was further expanded by E Coseriu according to structuralist principles.<sup>25</sup> A lexical field, then, is determined in its structure by paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations.<sup>26</sup> We will have to take note of both these aspects when we try to determine the lexical fields of the terminology for "poor" in the Book of Proverbs.

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21 Lyons 1981, 75.

22 The introduction of Trier's book "Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes" and other articles connected with the development of the theory of lexical fields has been reprinted in the important collection of essays: *Wortfeldforschung Zur Geschichte und Theorie des Sprachlichen Feldes*, (ed) L Schmidt, 1973, 1-38. See also Lyons 1977, 250-269; Ullmann 1973, 26-33; Ullmann, S 1981. *Semantics: An introduction to the science of meaning*, 243-253.

23 Trier 1973, 6ff.

24 Lyons 1977, 261. Cf Porzig, W 1973. Wesenhafte Bedeutungsbeziehungen, in *Wortfeldforschung*, 78-103.

25 Cf Coseriu, E 1978. Lexikalische Solidaritäten, in Geckeler, H (ed), *Strukturelle Bedeutungslehre*, 239-253.

26 Lyons 1977, 264.

Lexical fields, according to Trier, reflect the ideas, values and outlook of a society and also crystallize and perpetuate them.<sup>27</sup> Because fields are the unique way in which languages order and structure their vocabulary, they differ from language to language and even in sets of successive synchronic language systems.<sup>28</sup> What constitutes a lexical field cannot, therefore, be determined a priori; it has to be established inductively by the careful comparison of texts.<sup>29</sup>

There is another point which needs to be made. Lexical fields often occur in the context of certain literary types or genres.<sup>30</sup> It is, therefore, important also to pay attention to the formal structures which characterize the context in which the main terms for "poor" are used.<sup>31</sup> J Schmidt, in a careful analysis of the stylistic peculiarities of Israelite proverbial literature, has listed the characteristic forms. He has, however, not paid attention to the underlying basic conceptions which they express.<sup>32</sup> Following R Bultmann, he distinguishes between "basic motives" ("konstitutive Motive"), such as statement, admonition and question on the one hand, and "ornamental motives" ("ornamentale Motive"), such as antithesis, paronomasia, parallelismus membrorum etc on the other.<sup>33</sup> The impression one gets is that the forms are really arbitrarily employed and can be changed at will. But Von Rad has rightly stressed "that the forms can never

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27 Trier, 20. Cf also Ullmann 1981, 250.

28 Cf Lyons, 252.

29 Cf Berger, 138.

30 Cf Berger, 147.

31 This is the weakness of Bruppacher's book, *Die Beurteilung der Armut im Alten Testament*. Bruppacher deals with the evaluation of poverty in the Old Testament systematically without paying attention to the separate sections of the Old Testament, let alone to the different forms in which statements concerning poverty occur.

32 Schmidt, J 1936. *Studien zur Stilistik der alttestamentlichen Spruchliteratur*. See also the comments in Hermisson, H-J 1968. *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit*, 139.

33 Schmidt, 53ff.

be separated from the contents."34 The wisdom teachers did not have a certain perception of, say social reality, and then looked for a suitable form to give expression to this perception. "Rather, it exists only in this form, or else it does not exist at all. The process of becoming aware of the perception and of giving expression to it in word and form are one and the same act."35

Because both the lexical fields and the forms in which they occur embody a unique way of seeing the world,36 form-critical analysis must be taken into account as being relevant to the topic. By adopting this approach, we will be able to gain valuable insights into the attitudes of the wise concerning the realities of Israelite social life.

With these methodological considerations we have defined the task of the present study. We shall investigate the lexical context of the major Old Testament terms for "poor", *rās*, *dal*, *ʿānī* and *ebyōn* by analysing their paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations. We shall see that the terminology for "poor" in the Book of Proverbs does not all belong to the same lexical field, but that two different fields can be distinguished which partly overlap, but which otherwise are quite distinct. It will be our task to analyse and describe them, paying also attention to the characteristic forms in which they are used, and thereby, hopefully, come

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34 Von Rad, 25.

35 30.

36 Cf Ullmann 1981, 251. See also Whorf, B L 1956. **Language, thought and reality**, 212f: "The background linguistic system... of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade.... We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages."

to a better explanation of the contrasting sets of statements in Proverbs noted above than has been offered so far.<sup>37</sup>

## 1. THE LEXICAL FIELD OF "POOR" DESIGNATING SOCIAL STATUS

### 1.1. Table of paradigmatic relations

Texts	Synonyms positive value	Oppositions negative value
19:7		rāš
18:11	<sup>c</sup> āšīr//hōn	
15:15		<sup>c</sup> anī
19:4	hōn	dal
13:7	mit <sup>c</sup> āšīr//hōn	mitrōšes//'ayin
14:20	<sup>c</sup> āšīr	rāš
10:15	<sup>c</sup> āšīr//hōn	rēš//dal
13:8	<sup>c</sup> ōser	rāš
22:7	<sup>c</sup> āšīr// <sup>v</sup> malwēh	rāš//lowēh
18:23	<sup>c</sup> āšīr	rāš
22:2	<sup>c</sup> āšīr	rāš
Exceptions to the general pattern:		
28:11	dal	<sup>c</sup> āšīr
29:13	'īš t <sup>e</sup> kākīm (negative)	rāš
(Cf Koh 5:7)	<sup>c</sup> ōšēq	rāš

The contrasting usage of "poor" (negative value) and "rich" (positive value) is restricted almost entirely to the terms rāš and <sup>c</sup>āšīr. The only other term used in opposition to <sup>c</sup>āšīr is dal. 'ebyōn is not used at all. <sup>c</sup>anī, likewise, is never used as an opposite of <sup>c</sup>āšīr. With reference to the general

37 T Donald (1964) in an article on "The Semantic Field of Rich and Poor in the Wisdom Literature of Hebrew and Accadian", *Oriens Antiquus* 3, 27-41, observes that the semantic field of rich and poor has a singularly imperfect system of opposition, but he fails to see that there are in fact two different fields. He furthermore concentrates only on paradigmatic relations and does not adequately evaluate his findings.

situation of poverty, it occurs only once in a borderline case in 15:15. 38 Exceptions to the general pattern are 28:11 and 29:13. In 28:11 the view of poverty is no longer totally negative, while wealth, connected with pride, loses its positive value. The term used for poor is *dal*. Even more remarkable is the view expressed in 29:13, which is a rewording of 22:2. The contrast is no longer *raš* - *cašir* (poor - rich), but *raš* - 'is *t<sup>e</sup>kakim* (poor - man of oppression). A similar opposition is found in Kohelet 5:7. Obviously a significant shift in meaning has taken place which coincides with a shift in the evaluation of poverty and wealth. We shall have to come back to this later.

## 1.2. The lexical field and the genre of "proverb"

What was the purpose of, what we call, wisdom literature? The wisdom teachers sought wisdom, but this "wisdom" was not a speculative or theoretical type of knowledge. Rather, it was concerned with very mundane, practical problems of everyday life.<sup>39</sup> The term *hakam* originally refers to aptitude or expertise in certain skills. A skilled craftsman is called *hakam* (Ex 31:3), as is an astute political adviser (Jr 50:35).<sup>40</sup> Wisdom is the art of living and mastering life in every possible way. "It is concerned with life as a whole and affects all the areas of life, so that it means cleverness and experience devoted to practical ends."<sup>41</sup>

To be able to find their way in the world, the wise men sought some kind of unifying principle that would bring order and regularity into the events.<sup>42</sup> They were of the opinion

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38 See below under 1.2.2 page 52.

39 Von Rad, G 1962. *Old Testament Theology*, vol I, 418.

40 418.

41 Fohrer, G 1970. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 305; cf also Fichtner, J 1933. *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung*, 12; Zimmerli, W, *Ort und Grenze der Weisheit im Rahmen der altorientalischen Theologie*, in *Gottes Offenbarung*, 304.

42 Cf Scott, R B Y 1965. *Proverbs - Ecclesiastes*, xvii.

that all events are subject to an inherent order. Starting with the happenings of everyday life, they came to "formulate recognized and consistently confirmed truths and experiences."<sup>43</sup> These they expressed in the form of simple statements, summing up in short and concise form, what they had gleaned from observation. From this basic rule, certain consequences for action and conduct were able to be drawn. These were formulated in the form of admonitions or instructions. The material in Proverbs, then, falls naturally into two basic categories: first, there were sayings formulated in an impersonal style as statements of fact, and second, there were admonitions or instructions in the form of a personal address.

By far the most common genre in the Book of Proverbs is the saying, rendered in Hebrew by the term *masal*. Scholars do not usually distinguish between different types of sayings, but class them all together as proverbs. Scott defines proverbs as "brief and pointed comments on human behaviour and recurrent situations. They make frequent use of metaphor and comparison."<sup>44</sup> Hermisson is not satisfied with this definition. He proposes a further subdivision in the general category of sayings into genuine proverbs and aphorisms, and uses two criteria for identifying a genuine proverb: a proverb first of all registers a generally valid conclusion based on experience. An analogous experience in the future is used to confirm and validate the previous experience. Secondly, because the proverb records an observation of things as they are, its form is the indicative and not the imperative. Any didactic intention is secondary. The individual is left to draw his own conclusions for his conduct from the statement. Using these two criteria, Hermisson is able to distinguish proverbs without didactic intent, from aphorisms - Hermisson calls them "lehrhafte Sprueche"- with clear didactic intent.<sup>45</sup>

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43 Von Rad 1962, 419.

44 Scott 1965, xxvi.

45 Hermisson 1968, 27ff. Hermisson's definition is taken up by Crenshaw, J L 1974. Wisdom, in Hayes, J H , Old Testament form criticism, 231. Fohrer 1970, 313, also distinguishes between proverbs and aphorisms, but he includes under aphorisms "an account of a personal experience (Prov 24:30-34), an exhortation (Prov 3:9), or a question (Prov 6:27)" thereby blurring the distinction between the basic categories.

### 1.2.1. Synonymous parallelism

Israel's basic form of poetic expression was the parallelismus membrorum. This is also a characteristic feature of the epigrammatic poetry found in Proverbs. There are three forms of parallelism, viz the synonymous, the synthetic and the antithetic parallelism. Each of them offers certain possibilities for poetic thought. In synonymous parallelism, the second stich of a one-line verse repeats the first, broadening its scope. An example of this use is Pr 19:7:

All a poor man's brothers hate him;  
how much more do his friends go far from him.

In this proverb poverty as an evil and dehumanizing social condition is studied, so to speak, in isolation by simply concentrating on the effects it has on human life. In general it would seem, however, that wisdom teachers could not view poverty in this isolated sense. Especially the usage of the term *rās* seemed to demand a consideration of its positive counterfoil, *āsir* in order to become really apparent in its negativity and undesirability. Synonymous parallelism is, therefore, only rarely used by the wisdom teachers when they speak about poverty. Indeed, the one example just quoted is immediately preceded by another proverb using synonymous parallelism on the topic of wealth. Although each proverb stands on its own and has to be considered as a unit by itself, the grouping of these two proverbs together is not without reason. The intention is for them to be read in conjunction with each other so as to be treated almost as though they were a single saying with two lines.

Many seek the favour of a generous man,  
and every one is a friend to a man who gives gifts.  
(19:6)

Both these proverbs present aspects of poverty and wealth respectively. They show what it is like to be poor or rich without pronouncing a direct value judgement, though the negative character of poverty is clear enough. Another proverb using synonymous parallelism expressing the social

advantages of wealth in a more general way is found in Pr 18:11:

A rich man's wealth is his strong city  
and like a high wall protecting him.<sup>46</sup>

### 1.2.2. Synthetic parallelism

In synthetic parallelism the second stich further develops the thought of the first and gives it a new twist or emphasis.<sup>47</sup> However, for the treatment of poverty as a social state, this poetic form did not seem suitable. There is only one proverb which uses synthetic parallelism, viz Pr 15:15. The RSV translates:

All the days of the afflicted (<sup>e</sup>anī) are evil,  
but a cheerful heart has a continuous feast.

McKane's translation, "the life of the poor man is a continuous struggle," seems, however, to be more apposite. The proverb is not concerned with affliction in general, but with the remorseless grind of poverty. The poor needs an inner resilience to be able to deal with his lot, if he does not want to be overcome by his poverty. This is the new thought introduced in the second stich.<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy

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46 The MT would suggest a different translation: "A rich man's wealth is his strong city and like a high wall in his imagination" (<sup>e</sup>maskitō). The sense would then be that wealth does not really give protection. It is a fortress only in the purely subjective opinion of the rich. This reading is followed by Gemser, B 1963. *Sprüche Salomos*, 74, and McKane 1970, *Proverbs*, 516. Toy, C H 1916. *The book of Proverbs*, 360, Scott 1965, 112 and Oesterley, W O E 1929. *The book of Proverbs*, 148, take the reading of LXX <sup>e</sup>sukkātō "his hedge", i e that which gives security and protection. Toy seems to be right when he claims that <sup>e</sup>maskitō is due to the "correction of an editor who took offence at the role ascribed to wealth." Originally the couplet simply states a fact and can thus be classed as a true proverb. The parallelism could perhaps also be defined as synthetic.

47 Von Rad 1972, 29.

48 McKane 1970, 234, 481.

that in this proverb the term for "poor" is not **rāš** but **ʿanī**, **rāš** being delimited in its sense by its opposite **ʿasīr**, and therefore not suitable for synthetic parallelism.

### 1.2.3. Antithetical parallelism

We have seen that the wisdom teachers, when dealing with poverty, mostly treat it in relation to its opposite, wealth. It is in the context of this basic contrast that the real nature of poverty as an evil becomes apparent. This contrast is implied even in proverbs which use synonymous parallelism, in fact the contrast is given in the usage of the paradigmatic oppositions **rāš** and **ʿasīr**. It is, therefore, no wonder that by far the majority of proverbs dealing with poverty as a social state, employ antithetical parallelism.<sup>49</sup> In this form poverty and wealth are contrasted with each other within a single proverb. Synonyms of the most commonly used terms are **dal** and **hōn**, as can be seen in the following two proverbs which are very similar in content:

The poor (**rāš**) is disliked even by his neighbour,  
but the rich (**ʿasīr**) has many friends. (14:20)

Wealth (**hōn**) brings many friends,  
but a poor man (**dal**) is deserted by his friend. (19:4)

Proverbs record the observations of social phenomena. These are usually quite unambiguous. There are poor people and there are rich people. There is only one proverb which takes note of a certain ambiguity in the observed status of people, Pr 13:7:

One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing;  
another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.

The contrast is expressed by the Hithpael of the verbs **rāš** and **ʿasīr**, confirming once more the general impression that the terms **rāš** and **ʿasīr** are paradigmatic oppositions belonging to the same lexical field.

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49 This is characteristic, not only of true proverbs, but of all other sayings as well. Cf the tablets in Skladny, U 1962. Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel, 68.

#### 1.2.4. Chiasmus and nominal clauses

In the examples just quoted, the antithesis is brought out by simply juxtaposing the two contrasting statements. The antithesis can, however, be emphasized in a much more complicated and artistic manner. This is done by arranging the opposites in a chiasmus. In addition, Hermisson has drawn attention to the fact that the vast majority of all sayings, proverbs and aphorisms, have the grammatical form of a nominal clause or a composite nominal clause (compound sentence).<sup>50</sup> In verbal clauses the main stress is on the action. The idea expressed by the verb is, therefore, the emphatic element of the sentence, and the order is predicate - subject.<sup>51</sup> In a nominal clause, however, a statement rotates around the subject, and the order of the words is subject - predicate. According to Michel, the predicate of a nominal clause can be a noun, an adjective (participle), a pronoun, an adverb, or a whole sentence. When a whole sentence forms the predicate, Michel prefers to speak of a composite nominal clause instead of a compound sentence, as is to be found in the traditional terminology of Hebrew grammars.<sup>52</sup> The main subject is invariably placed at the head of the sentence as "casus pendens," giving it a special emphasis.<sup>53</sup> Nominal clauses and composite nominal clauses both express "a constant and enduring condition" of the subject.<sup>54</sup> The juxtaposition of subject and predicate means that both somehow "belong together."<sup>55</sup>

The relevance of these grammatical observations will become clear when texts are arranged according to the Hebrew construction, without supplying the verb "to be" as is usually done in the English translations, because the term "is" can be ambiguous. In Pr 10:15 the formulation of the first stich

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- 50 Hermisson 1968, 141ff. Cf also Michel, D 1960. *Tempora und Satzstellung in den Psalmen*, 178.
- 51 See also Davidson, A B 1942. *Hebrew Syntax*, 146.
- 52 Michel, 178f.
- 53 Kautzsch, E 1895. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 433.
- 54 Davidson, 145. Cf Michel, 177f "Es berichtet eine Handlung, ein Erleiden oder eine Eigenschaft des Subjekts."
- 55 Hermisson, 145.

is the same as in Pr 18:11, but the second stich is formulated antithetically in a chiastic arrangement:

**Wealth (hōn) of the rich (ʿasir) - his mighty city  
ruin of the poor (dallim) - their poverty (rēšam).**

Here a relationship between the poor and the rich is established by simply placing the observed phenomena side by side. It is significant to note that in the grammatical structure of this proverb poverty and wealth are described in terms of states, not in terms of processes or actions. Poverty and wealth are conditions in the basic order of things. The wise recognize this basic structure and by generalizing from experience they fit these observed phenomena together like blocks in a pattern. By ordering and categorizing the phenomena they do not, however, proceed to the construction of a rational system of the world as a unified 'cosmos.' Rather, order has to be recognized ever anew in the phenomena.<sup>56</sup>

In the following two proverbs new aspects in the complex relationship of poverty and wealth are highlighted. The simple predicate is here replaced by a verbal clause. The arrangement is again chiastic.

**Ransom of a man's life - his wealth,  
but a poor man he has found a means of  
redemption.<sup>57</sup>**

Pr 13:8

This proverb records the observation that the rich man always has the possibility of getting himself out of difficult situations, e g by enabling him to buy off his persecutors or oppressors. This option, however, is not open to the poor. Pr 22:7 treats the advantages of wealth over against poverty from yet another angle:

**The rich - over poor men he rules  
but a slave - the borrower to the lender.<sup>58</sup>**

56 140.

57 Following the emendation suggested by BHW as also adopted by Gemser, Ringgren and RSV יו' מאַסָּה g<sup>e</sup>ullāh. The MT means "hears no rebuke."

58 RSV: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender."

The structure of this proverb is particularly intricate. The rich (<sup>60</sup>ʿasir) corresponds to the lender (<sup>61</sup>ʾis malwēh) and the poor (<sup>62</sup>raś) to the borrower (<sup>63</sup>lōwēh). The basic contrast here is servitude and power. Gemser sees in this verse a warning against buying on credit.<sup>59</sup> This, however, overlooks the basic structure of the proverb which does not admonish but simply records the realities of social life. McKane is therefore right when he sees in this proverb "a frank recognition of the power of wealth."<sup>60</sup> The poor in need of money inevitably have to turn to those who possess it. When they borrow they become dependent upon the rich. The ultimate form of dependency is slavery for debt.<sup>61</sup> In Israel the threat of slavery for debt was always a real possibility. There was only a thin demarcation separating the lot of the poor from that of the slave.

### 1.2.5. Verbal clauses

Hermisson notes only one instance where the construction of a proverb is wholly verbal and not nominal.

The poor uses entreaties,  
but the rich answers roughly. (18:23)

A small event is recorded which is typical of two contrasting types of attitudes linked with the poor and the rich respectively. Wisdom starts to tell a story.<sup>62</sup> Something happens in which the superiority of wealth over against poverty is demonstrated. By observing actions a dynamic element is introduced into the seemingly static order of things. But this is an exception. Even when verbal clauses

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59 Gemser, 82.

60 McKane, 566.

61 According to Mendelsohn "the basic supply source for the evermounting number of slaves in the Ancient Near East" was slavery for debt. One of the chief factors leading to the foreclosure of man and property was the exorbitant interest charged on loans. The average interest charged in Babylonia and Assyria was a quarter or a fifth for money loans, and a third for loans in kind. Mendelsohn, I 1949. **Slavery in the Ancient Near East, 23.**

62 Hermisson, 167f.

are used, it is not the verb but usually the noun which carries the emphasis. Wealth and poverty are seen not as historical processes, but as states. This is also evident in Pr 22:2:

The rich and the poor meet together  
Yahweh is the maker of them all.

In this proverb, although an action seems to be involved, viz the meeting of rich and poor, it is the existence of the poor and the rich as such which is here affirmed. They meet together, i.e. life places them side by side, in close proximity to each other.<sup>63</sup> They are both part of social reality, the existing order of things which is ultimately grounded in Yahweh.

### 1.3. Tables of syntagmatic relations (See following page)

Table I shows the syntagmatic relations of the lexical field of "poor" designating social status. Of primary importance in this respect is the act - consequence relationship. The terminology used in this connection is (*rās*) and (*hāsēr*) and their derivatives. These occur usually in conjunction with the terms (*cāsēl*) and (*r<sup>e</sup>miyyāh*), though other expressions can also be used. Oppositions are (*hārūs*) and (*hākām*) used in conjunction with (*cāsīr*), (*hōn*), and (*mōtar*). The main opposition which we noted, between the poor, (*rās*), and the rich, (*cāsīr*), is here linked with the contrasting sets of behaviour, diligence and sloth and wisdom and folly. Table II shows that the terminology changes in the context of statements concerning the righteous and the wicked. (*rās*) is no longer used as the negative value and there is furthermore a different evaluation of poverty and wealth. A certain group of aphorisms introduces the term (*dal*), only used occasionally so far, and the two terms which were not used at all (*cāni*) and (*'ebyōn*), in the context of kindness to the poor and social justice. This is evidence of another lexical field, which will be investigated under section 2. Better-proverbs form a bridge between both lexical fields in that they introduce a more differentiated evaluation of

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63 Cf Bruppacher, 31.

## SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS : TABLE I

P O S I T I V E			N E G A T I V E	
Texts	Act (Attitude)	Consequence	Act (Attitude)	Consequence
14:23	b <sup>e</sup> kol- <sup>c</sup> eṣeb	mōtār	d <sup>e</sup> bar- <sup>s</sup> c-pātayim	l <sup>e</sup> maḥṣōr
20:4			<sup>c</sup> āṣēl	lō'-yaharōš // 'ayin
24:30-34	rā'itī	lāqaḥtī mūsār	'is- <sup>c</sup> āṣēl // 'ādām	rēšēkā // ūmaḥṣōrēkā
6:6-11	r <sup>e</sup> 'ḥwāḥ <sup>a</sup> kām		ḥ <sup>a</sup> sar-lēb // m <sup>e</sup> aṭ ṣēnōt	rēšēkā // ūmaḥṣōr <sup>c</sup> kā
20:13	p <sup>e</sup> qab <sup>c</sup> ḥnōkā	s <sup>e</sup> ba <sup>c</sup> -lāḥem	<sup>c</sup> āṣēl (2x) // m <sup>e</sup> aṭ ṣēnōt	pen-tiwārēš
19:15			'al-te'hab ṣēnāḥ	tappil tardēmah
			caṣlāḥ	// tir <sup>c</sup> āb
10:4	ḥārūšim	ta <sup>ca</sup> sīr	// r <sup>e</sup> miyyāḥ	rā'š
11:16 (am)	ḥārūšim	yitm <sup>e</sup> kū- <sup>c</sup> ōšer	kap <sup>r</sup> e <sup>m</sup> iyyāḥ	hōn yeḥšrū
13:4	ḥārūšim	nepeš t <sup>e</sup> duššān	caṣēlIm	'ayin
12:27	ḥārūš	hōn yāqār	<sup>c</sup> āṣēl	lō'-yah <sup>a</sup> rōk ṣādō
(22:7)	ḥārūš	yimšōl	r <sup>e</sup> miyyāḥ	ḥebed lōwšh) ←
12:24	yad-ḥārūšim	timšōl	rāšIm	tihyēḥ lāmas ←
28:19	<sup>c</sup> ōbēd 'admātō	yisba <sup>c</sup> -lāḥem	r <sup>e</sup> miyyāḥ	
21:17			m <sup>e</sup> raddēp rēqIm	yisba <sup>c</sup> -r <sup>e</sup> š
21:5	maḥš <sup>e</sup> bōt ḥārūš	l <sup>e</sup> mōtār	'ōḥēb šimbāḥ	'Iš maḥṣōr
10:5	'ōgēr baqqāyis	bēn maskil	'ōḥēb yayin-waššemen	lō' ya <sup>a</sup> sīr
18:9			kol-'āš	l <sup>e</sup> maḥṣōr
15:19	'ōraḥ y <sup>e</sup> šārIm	s <sup>e</sup> lulāḥ	nirdām baqqāšīr	bēn meḥiš
12:11	<sup>c</sup> ōbēd 'admātō	yisba <sup>c</sup> -lāḥem	mitrappēḥ bim <sup>e</sup> la'ktō	'āp l <sup>e</sup> ba <sup>c</sup> al mašpīt
23:19-21	s <sup>e</sup> ma <sup>c</sup> wāḥ <sup>a</sup> kām		derek <sup>c</sup> āṣēl	kim <sup>e</sup> šukat ḥādeq
13:18	šōmēr tōkaḥat	y <sup>e</sup> kubbād	m <sup>e</sup> raddēp rēqIm	ḥ <sup>a</sup> sar-lēb
29:3	'Iš-'ōḥēb ḥokmāḥ	y <sup>e</sup> šammaḥ 'ūbīw	sōb <sup>e</sup> 'ē-yāyin //	yiwārēš
21:20	ḥākām	'ōṣār nehmad	zōl <sup>e</sup> lē bāsār	rēš w <sup>e</sup> qālōn
16:20	maskil <sup>c</sup> al dābār	yimṣā'-tōb	pōrēn <sup>c</sup> mūsār	y <sup>e</sup> abbed-hōn
11:29			rōcēḥ zōnōt	y <sup>e</sup> ball <sup>e</sup> ennū
17:2	<sup>c</sup> ebed maskil	yimšol // yah <sup>a</sup> loq nap <sup>a</sup> lāḥ	k <sup>e</sup> sīl	
			'wīl	<sup>c</sup> ebed lah <sup>a</sup> kam-lēl ←

SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS : TABLE II

13:25	šaddīq	'škēl l <sup>e</sup> šōba <sup>c</sup> napšō	beten r <sup>e</sup> šā <sup>c</sup> im	teḥšār
15:6	bēt šaddīq	ḥōsen rāb	rāšā <sup>c</sup>	bit <sup>e</sup> bū'at ne <sup>c</sup> kāret
10:16	šaddīq	p <sup>ec</sup> ullat l <sup>e</sup> ḥayyim	rāšā <sup>c</sup>	l <sup>e</sup> ḥattā't
Exceptions				
11:4	š <sup>e</sup> dāqāh	taššil mimmāwet	hōn	lō'-yō <sup>c</sup> il b <sup>e</sup> yōm <sup>c</sup> ebrāh
10:2	š <sup>e</sup> dāqāh	taššil mimmāwet	'ōs <sup>e</sup> rōt rēšā <sup>c</sup>	lō'-yō <sup>c</sup> ilū
11:28	šaddīqīm	yiprāḥū	bōtēḥ b <sup>ec</sup> ōšrō	yippol (yibbol)
19:17	ḥōnēn (dal)	malwēh yhw		
14:21	m <sup>e</sup> ḥōnēn <sup>ca</sup> niyyim (Q <sup>ca</sup> nāwim)	'ašrāw	boz-l <sup>e</sup> re <sup>c</sup> ḥū	hōtē'
22:9	natan millaḥmō lad(dal)	y <sup>e</sup> borāk		
14:31	hōnēn 'ebyōn	m <sup>e</sup> kabb <sup>e</sup> dō	ōšēq(dal)	ḥerēp <sup>c</sup> ošēḥū
21:13			'ōtēm 'ōznō mizza qat(dal)	yiqrā' w <sup>e</sup> lō' y <sup>e</sup> ḥānēh
17:5			lō <sup>c</sup> ēg lārāš	ḥerēp <sup>c</sup> ošēḥū lō' yinnāqēh

Better - Proverbs

	Better A (negative) plus B (positive) than	C (negative) plus	D (positive)
19:22	tōb-rāš	mē'īs kāzāb	
28:6	tōb-rāš	hōlēk b <sup>e</sup> tummō	w <sup>e</sup> hū' cāsīr
15:17	tōb 'eruhāt yāqār	w <sup>e</sup> 'ah <sup>a</sup> bāh-sām	w <sup>e</sup> šīn'āh-bō
16:19	tōb š <sup>e</sup> pal-rūḥ et- ca niyyim (Q <sup>ca</sup> nāwim)	mēhallēq šālāl et-ge'im	
17:1	tōb pat h <sup>a</sup> rēbāh	w <sup>e</sup> šālwāh-bāh	zibḥē-rīb
15:16	tōb-m <sup>ec</sup> at	b <sup>e</sup> yir'at yhw	un <sup>e</sup> hūmāh bō
16:8	tōb-m <sup>ec</sup> at	bišdāqāh	b <sup>e</sup> lō' mišpāt

poverty and wealth. In the following we shall investigate these relationships in greater detail.

#### 1.4. Act - Consequence

We have seen how the wise ordered phenomena in nominal clauses by simply placing them alongside each other. They exist in the same space. Nominal clauses can also express act - consequence which seems to imply a temporal relationship.<sup>64</sup> A good example is Pr 14:4:

Without oxen - a bare manger,  
but abundant crops - by the strength of the ox.<sup>65</sup>

According to Oesterley this is "an allegorical way of expressing the truth of cause and effect."<sup>66</sup> In a general sense this is correct. But the grammatical construction of the subject with **b<sup>e</sup>** (**b<sup>e</sup> 'ēn 'ālāpīm** lit. "in the non-existence of oxen") shows that the conception is really different from our idea of cause and effect which is basically that of a temporal sequence. According to Hermisson the original spartial meaning of the **b<sup>e</sup>** is retained in the act-consequence sequence.<sup>67</sup> That means, cause and effect are linked in such a way that the effect does not merely follow, but is already contained in the cause. The non-existence of oxen contains a whole series of subsequent effects: there will be no ploughing, no sowing, no reaping and therefore no fodder in the manger.

The significance of this basic connection between act and consequence was first given prominence by Klaus Koch.<sup>68</sup>

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64 **Hermisson**, 152.

65 Following MT with Gemser and Scott against Toy, Oesterley, Ringgren, and RSV. McKane, 231, translates "a crib of grain" which is difficult. Notice the paronomasia of **'ēbūs bār w<sup>e</sup> rāb t<sup>e</sup> bū'ōt**.

66 **Oesterley**, 10.

67 **Hermisson**, 159.

68 **Koch**, K 1955. Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament? **ZThK** 52, 1-42.

He showed that the organic relationship between cause and effect, often expressed in pictures taken from nature such as seedtime and harvest, or root and fruit, is also characteristic of human actions. Every good and evil deed has an inner momentum which sooner or later will have its effects on the author of the deed.<sup>69</sup> Koch called this a "schicksalwirkende Tatsphaere" in which the consequence somehow already belongs to the same realm as the act that caused it.<sup>70</sup>

This insight has important implications for our consideration of poverty. The wisdom teachers, in looking at poverty and wealth, viewed them not as isolated phenomena, existing by mere chance, but as social conditions which were ultimately grounded in human actions.<sup>71</sup> They belong to the "schicksalwirkende Tatsphaere" and man is himself responsible for them. Act and consequence are clearly linked as is emphasised by Pr 14:23:

In all toil there is profit,  
but mere talk - (leads) only to want.

Toil carries its profit already with it (**b<sup>e</sup>kol-c<sup>e</sup>seb**), just as empty talk its opposite - want. Profit is not added to toil as something additional, or as a reward, it is already the organic and natural ingredient of toil. They both belong together.

If human actions are responsible for the two contrasting basic social conditions of man, it is only natural that the wisdom teachers would turn to experience to find out what experience had to teach about the inherent order of the act-consequence relationship. Only on that basis would it be possible to formulate the basic rules which would have to be observed in order to avert the evil of poverty and win coveted wealth.

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69 Cf also Von Rad 1972, 128.

70 Koch, 30ff.

71 Von Rad 1972, 125.

## 1.5. Diligence and sloth

### 1.5.1. Mocking proverbs on the sluggard.

According to experience, the most obvious human behaviour leading to poverty is sloth. This is especially the case in a predominantly agricultural economy typical of early Israelite society.<sup>72</sup> There are quite a number of proverbs dealing with the sluggard, all of which proceed from observations. They characterize the sluggard's unwillingness to work and his selfcomplacency in exaggerated and mocking terms.<sup>73</sup> According to Hermisson, some of them could originally have been popular proverbs.<sup>74</sup> The wisdom teachers made use of them and formed others for the purpose of instruction. They have therefore didactic overtones. Pr 20:4 still starts with experience, but at the same time it can also be taken as expressing a warning:

The sluggard does not plough in autumn;  
he will seek at harvest and have nothing.

### 1.5.2. The sluggard in didactic stories

The element of warning is even stronger in the two following examples of didactic stories. They employ the genre of short story in the context of exhortation.

I passed by the field of a sluggard,  
by the vineyard of a man without sense;  
and lo it was overgrown with thorns,  
the ground was covered with nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken down.  
Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.  
A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,

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72 G Boström has shown that most of the sayings and admonitions in Proverbs display an "agricultural ideal" and that agriculture is the real profession which has been ordained by God. Boström, G 1935. *Proverbiastudien. Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib* in Spr 1-9, 59ff.

73 Hermisson, 62; Skladny, 54.

74 Hermisson, 63.

and poverty will come upon you like a robber  
and want like an armed man. (24:30-34)

The form of the unit is worth noting.<sup>75</sup> The wise man tells a story of a personal experience he purportedly had. This experience is really not the experience of the individual wisdom teacher, but it is the experience of every one. It claims to be generally valid, i.e. it is told for the purpose of inculcating a moral. The story itself does not describe what the sluggard does, but only the effect of his laziness. The emphasis is again on poverty as a state - the unkempt and derelict property is depicted, the vineyard overgrown with thistles and thorns, the stonewall marking the boundary in a state of disrepair <sup>76</sup> - not on an action or a process. The conclusion which the wise draws from his observation is that the lazy man must be without sense, and he accepts from it the instruction (*mūsār*) that laziness is disastrous and will surely lead to impoverishment.

Pr 6:6-11 expresses similar sentiments. The concluding moral, which agrees almost verbatim with 24:34, is exemplified by the allegory of the ant.

Go to the ant, O sluggard;  
consider her ways, and be wise.  
Without having any chief,  
officer or ruler,  
she prepares her food in summer,  
and gathers her sustenance in harvest.  
How long will you lie there, O sluggard?  
When will you arise from your sleep?  
A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond,  
and want like an armed man.<sup>77</sup>

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75 **Hermisson**, 184.

76 **McKane**, 576.

77 There is wide agreement among scholars that Pr 6:6-11 (together with vss 1-5 and 12-19) is an interpolation within the context of the admonitions in chapters 1-9. Formally it resembles more the style of the proverbial and aphoristic material in the collections II and V than the instructions in collection I. Cf McKane, 320; Gemser, 37; Scott, 57.

### 1.5.3. Diligence and sloth in aphorisms

Although wisdom sayings start with experience, the basic intention of the wise is not merely to register observations, but to influence human behaviour. This is most clearly expressed in didactic sayings classed as aphorisms. Keen observation of the phenomena of everyday life leads to the recognition of an underlying order, to which all things are subjected. The wise understand their task as an attentive listening to the voice of this order,<sup>78</sup> to enable them to interpret it for the purpose of living a good and harmonious life. On the basis of this, the wise give advice (<sup>c</sup>esāh) on how to deal with the manifold problems of life. They also give guidance on how to acquire **tahbulōt** (Pr 1:5), the necessary "skills" to steer clear of dangerous possibilities of human action which would only involve unwanted consequences.<sup>79</sup> The bulk of the sayings in the Book of Proverbs have, therefore, a didactic purpose. They want to inculcate principles of action and modes of behaviour.<sup>80</sup> To teach a moral, wisdom teachers have two basic options. The most obvious one is to admonish, i e to use the form of a direct address in the imperative. The other possibility is the use of aphorisms, i e statements emulating proverbs, but with clear didactic intent. The following examples show that, although the formulations are different, the contents of admonitions and aphorisms are really the same.

Admonition:

Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty,  
open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread.  
(20:13.)

Statement:

Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep  
and an idle person will suffer hunger. (19:15)

The wise took a pragmatic approach to life. They therefore believed that, for a successful life, a certain amount of prosperity was necessary.<sup>81</sup> If you want to be accepted by you neighbours and live a relatively carefree and happy life, you must be financially independent. In order to achieve this,

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78 Gese, 35.

79 Murphy, R E 1969. The interpretation of Old Testament wisdom. **Interpretation** 23. 292.

80 Johnson, A R 1955. **masā**. VTS III, 164.

81 Fichtner, 15.

you have to be diligent. It is the firm conviction of the wise that diligence always pays. Conversely, the wise cannot repeat too often the warning against sloth. The general principle, expressed almost like a law of nature, is:

A slack hand causes poverty,  
but the hand of the diligent makes rich. (10:4)

Or, a little differently:

Lazy men lack wealth,  
but diligent men get riches. (11:16b) 82

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing  
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. (13:4)

To be able to achieve something in life, certain efforts are necessary. This is expressed in the following aphorism:

A slothful man will not catch his prey,  
but the diligent man will get precious wealth. (12:27)

One might very well ask whether these statements are really grounded in experience. Obviously, diligence does not always lead to wealth, very often it does not. Yet at the basis of these statements lies the belief that every human action has its consequence. Thus, if a man acts in the right way, beneficial results are bound to follow. These are, in fact, already contained in the act, as we have seen. Because the wise were deeply convinced that there was this basic order to which all human existence was subjected, they could even rephrase proverbs, in which the realities of social life had found expression, in order to underline this moral. Thus the proverb 2:7 83 is rephrased in the following aphorism:

The hand of the diligent will rule,  
while the slothful will be put to forced labour. (12:24)

Sloth is, of course, not the only action, or perhaps one should rather speak of non-action, which can cause poverty.

82 "Accepting the longer text of LXX with Gemser and Ringgren: "A gracious woman will get honour, but a woman who hates uprightness is a throne of dishonour. Lazy men lack wealth, but diligent men (h<sup>a</sup> rūsīm instead of ca<sup>r</sup> rīsīm) get riches."

83 See above page 55.

The following aphorisms mention empty, worthless pursuits, extravagance, and hastiness:

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,  
but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty  
of poverty. (28:19)

He who loves pleasure will be a poor man,  
he who loves wine and oil will not be rich. (21:17)

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance,  
but every one who is hasty comes only to want.  
(21:5)

Nevertheless, as far as the wise are concerned, sloth is by far the most important cause of poverty. This is clearly seen in the frequency with which this topic is raised in the aphorisms.

In all the examples quoted thus far, including those taken from proverbs and didactic stories, the emphasis has been on the action having good or bad consequences. There are, however, some aphorisms where diligence and sloth are not viewed in terms of action, or non-action, as in the case of the sluggard, but are viewed in terms of attitude.<sup>84</sup> This emphasis on attitude instead of action represents a significant shift in the interest of the wise.<sup>85</sup> It can be seen in the following:

A son who gathers in summer is prudent,  
but a son who sleeps in harvest brings shame. (10:5)

He who is slack in his work  
is a brother to him who destroys. (18:9)

The way of the sluggard is overgrown with thorns,  
but the path of the upright is a level highway.  
(15:19)

In the first aphorism the focus is not on the consequences of lazy or diligent actions. To be sure they are implied, the one who gathers in summer will have enough to eat in

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84 **Murphy**, 294f.

85 Cf **Schmid**, H H 1966. **Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit**, 156.

winter, while the lazy will have nothing. But the main intent of the saying is the evaluation of diligence and laziness in terms of qualities. The lazy one brings shame to his family, and this is the source of reproach. Sloth, as a negative moral attitude, is even more clearly expressed in Pr 18:9. The lazy man is a brother of him who destroys, i.e. the wicked. Laziness and wickedness are related. Finally, the identification of the sluggard and the wicked is made explicit through the parallelism in 15:19. The antipode is not the diligent, but the upright. It is no longer the good or the bad action which carries with it a certain result, but the good and bad attitude. The idea that the attitude of a man is determinative for his success or failure in life, will be even more evident in the sections which follow.

### 1.6. Wisdom and folly

As we have seen, **hākām** originally means "cleverness and skill for the purpose of practical action."<sup>86</sup> The verb **hkm** "to be wise," is action-orientated.<sup>87</sup> This is the reason why folly can be linked with laziness. The two didactic stories quoted above show that sloth is the sign of stupidity. The one who is wise (6:6) will not lie in his bed sleeping for long hours in the morning, but will diligently work in his fields to be able to harvest in autumn. Diligence and practical wisdom are complementaries. The sluggard is a "man without sense" (24:30). The same sentiments are expressed in the aphorism Pr 12:11:

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,  
but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense.<sup>88</sup>

Among the worthless pursuits which lead to poverty, the wise include also luxurious living and the excesses of food and drink. Practical wisdom in life is shown, not only by

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86 Fohrer, G 1971. "σοφία . B. The Old Testament." TDNT VII, 476.

87 Saeboe, M 1971, **hkm** wise sein. THAT I, 558.

88 Cf Pr 28:19 quoted on p 64. The variation in the formulation is a clear indication that folly, the following of worthless pursuits, and poverty go together.

diligence, but also by moderation in everything. This is emphasized by the admonition Pr 23:19-21. 89

Hear, my son, and be wise  
and direct your mind in the way.  
Be not among winebibbers,  
or among gluttonous eaters of meat;  
for the drunkard and the glutton will come to  
poverty,  
and drowsiness will clothe a man in rags.

Because practical success in life, for which economic prosperity is central, is regarded by the wisdom teachers as a great good, and poverty as a great evil,<sup>90</sup> it is important to "become wise." This is the whole purpose of wisdom instruction, because without the right instruction (*mūsār* cf 24:32), and the obedient and diligent attention to it, right actions are not possible.<sup>91</sup> The consequences can be anticipated as Pr 13:18 warns:

Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores  
instruction,  
but he who accepts reproof wins honour.

Wisdom, then, is concerned with action. The marked shift in emphasis from action to attitude which we noticed in the aphorisms on diligence and sloth is, however, also evident in those dealing with wisdom and folly. In Pr 29:3 the shift is clearly discernible:

He who loves wisdom makes his father glad,  
but he who keeps company with harlots squanders his  
substance.

The reason why the father is glad about his son's love of wisdom, is that he will be careful with the wealth he has inherited. In this sense wisdom is still directed towards the appropriate actions. But wisdom as a basic attitude of life is also implied.

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89 Cf 21:17 quoted above on page 64. On the instruction Pr 22:17-24:22, see below.

90 Cf Gordis, R 1943/44. The social background of wisdom literature. *HUCA* 18, 97.

91 Saeboe, 559.

Skladny has shown that the majority of aphorisms in collection II, especially in the first section (chaps 10-15), dealing with the topic of wisdom and folly, speak of wisdom in terms of attitude. Wisdom does not describe the sum-total of right actions, but denotes a moral quality. "Wise" is almost a synonym of "righteous."<sup>92</sup> The good and the prosperous life of the wise is an outcome of his inner moral qualities, not so much of what he has done.

Precious treasure remains in a wise man's dwelling,  
but a foolish man devours it.(21:20)

In Pr 16:20 the attitude of the wise is almost that of piety. Here wisdom assumes a distinctively religious colouring.

He who gives heed to the word will prosper,  
and happy is he who trusts in the Lord.

A similar development is to be noticed with regard to the understanding of the concept of folly. The fool, who originally was simply a stupid person, who on account of his dumbness was unable to perform certain tasks, <sup>93</sup> tended to become identified with the wicked. <sup>94</sup> If a foolish man devours the dwelling (21:20), this is not merely foolish but also wicked. Similarly in Pr 11:29:

He who troubles his household will inherit wind,  
and the fool will be the servant of the wise.

A fundamentally evil attitude in life leads to the folly of disrupting family-life and losing property, i. e. of self-destruction. The ultimate result is the loss of freedom. It is in accordance with the basic order of the universe, as conceived by the wise, that the fool should become the slave

92 Skladny, 11.

93 Cf the sayings in ch. 26 which contain warnings against the employment of a fool (26:6.10); the fool and the drunkard are classed together 26:9.10, and the fool is compared with a horse, and ass and a dog 26:3.11. Cf Skladny, 50.

94 Skladny, 12.

of the wise.<sup>95</sup> The truth of this claim is, of course, far from obvious. We have already observed the progression in the series beginning with the proverb 22:7, which sets out from experience, to the aphorism 12:24. The statement 11:29 is even further removed from reality. That the diligent and the wise will rule while the slothful and foolish will be slaves, is a postulate. This is the way things ought to be, because, in the opinion of the wise, the social order corresponds exactly to the moral order of the universe.<sup>96</sup> Reality, however, does not always confirm the equation wise - diligent - wealthy. There are cases where folly is on the side of the rich and wisdom on the side of the poor. There may be cases when it is not the fool who is the slave of the wise and the rich, but it is the wise who is the slave of the rich and the wicked. That this posed a problem for wisdom is shown by the following aphorisms:

A rich man is wise in his own eyes,  
but a poor man who has understanding, will find him  
out.(22:11) 97

A slave who deals wisely will rule over a son who  
acts shamefully,  
and will share the inheritance with one of the  
brothers. (17:2).

Here we detect for the first time what Von Rad has called the "ambiguity" of wealth. <sup>98</sup> The view of poverty is not totally negative any more, while wealth, connected with pride and shameful acts, loses its positive value. This element of ambiguity is even more marked in aphorisms dealing with righteousness and wickedness.

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95 Cf Ploeger, O 1971. "Zur Auslesung der Sentenzen-  
sammlung des Proverbienbuches" in Wolff, H W (ed)  
**Probleme biblischer Theologie** Festschrift G von Rad.  
415.

96 Scott, 24.

97 See table of paradigmatic relations on page 48.

98 Von Rad, 126.

### 1.7 Righteousness and Wickedness

In his investigation of the early collections of Proverbs Skladny has drawn attention to the fact that there is no uniform view of the righteous and the wicked in the different collections.<sup>99</sup> In chapters 16-22, wickedness refers more to concrete evil actions, while the term *saddiq* has in some instances a precise forensic sense referring to the innocent, who in a court case ought to have been acquitted.<sup>100</sup> In contrast, the antithesis between righteousness and wickedness in chapters 10-15 is much more general and the terms are used in a moral or religious sense. They refer to attitudes. The emphasis is on being righteous or being wicked. Fate is being determined by moral character and not so much by good or evil actions.

When we turn to the consequences of righteousness or wickedness, we encounter similar statements to those we have already noted in connection with the contrasting pairs of diligence and sloth, wisdom and folly. The righteous can expect for himself an abundance of good things, security, prosperity, and happiness. On the other hand, the wicked will await poverty, he will find himself troubled and thwarted at every turn.

The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite,  
but the belly of the wicked suffers want. (13:25)

In the house of the righteous there is much treasure  
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. (15:6)

The essence of what the righteous can expect is expressed by the "life".<sup>101</sup> This term must not be spiritualized, but is to be understood quite realistically and this-worldly, indicating long life and earthly happiness.<sup>102</sup> It is life worth living, life finding its fulfilment, life not prematurely destroyed, but brought to fruition and completion.

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99 **Skladny**, 7ff; 229ff; 50ff; 58ff.

100 30. Cf Pr 17:15.26; 18:5.17. See also McKane, 506, 516; Schmid, 160.

101 **Fichtner**, 64. Cf Pr 10:16; 22:4.

102 **Toy**, 209.

The wage of the righteous is life,  
the gain of the wicked is punishment. (10:16) 103

In most of the texts quoted so far, prosperity was considered the highest good. It is the consequence of diligent and wise actions and the reward for righteousness. We have, however, also noted a few instances which showed that riches was not an absolute good, but it too could be of "ambiguous value".<sup>104</sup> The same applies to Pr. 11:4:

Riches does not profit in the day of wrath,  
but righteousness delivers from death.

We see here that the antithesis between poverty and riches, which has so far been the dominating opposition in the material we analysed, is superceded by a more fundamental antithesis, that of righteousness and wickedness.<sup>105</sup> A re-evaluation has taken place, and the antithesis rich - poor can no longer be equated with the antithesis righteous - wicked. Instead, we see a contrast opening up within the area of riches itself which causes the evaluation to become divided.

In Pr 10:2 wickedness is linked with wealth. Wealth as such is no longer a good in itself, but only wealth gained by righteous means:

Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,  
but righteousness delivers from death.

Finally, Pr 11:28 asserts that wealth which offers a basis for trust in itself with a resulting sense of false security, is doomed to perish.

He who trusts in his riches will wither  
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.<sup>106</sup>

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103 **hatta't** in the sense of "sin" (thus RSV, McKane, and Scott) poses exegetical difficulties. Kuhn 1951, Beiträge zur Erklärung des Salomonischen Spruchbuches, 33, takes **hatta't** in the sense of "punishment". "ht' praegnanter Bedeutung: es buessen muessen. Vgl zu 10,16. 19,2. 28,18 ( **ht't** =Strafe) "

104 Von Rad 1972, 125.

105 Ploeger, 407.

106 Reading **yibbol** instead of **yippol**. Cfg BHS.

This does not render possessions worthless, but it shows significant relativizing of wealth. When wealth is not the result of "humility and fear of the Lord" (22:4), then it is not only futile, but ultimately even destructive (11:4). 107

A similar re-evaluation of poverty can be observed in certain aphorisms in which the contrast of the righteous and the wicked is fundamental, though the terms are not used.

He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,  
and he will repay him for his deed. (19:17)

He who despises his neighbour is a sinner,  
but happy is he who is kind to the poor. (14:21)

He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed,  
for he shares his bread with the poor. (22:9)

He who oppresses the poor man insults his Maker,  
but he who is kind to the needy honours him. (14:31)

He who closes his ear to the poor  
will himself cry out and not be heard. (21:13)

He who mocks the poor insults his Maker,  
he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.  
(17:5)

In all these sayings there is no trace of the evaluation of poverty, characteristic of the material we have analysed so far, that poverty is the result of sloth, folly or even wickedness. Righteousness and wickedness are here defined in terms of attitude towards and treatment of the poor. The contrast between the two sets of statements is truly remarkable. It is also evident in the terminology. The term (*rāb*) and its derivatives is not used. Instead we encounter for the first time the terms (*ʿānī* and (*ʿebyōn*). (*dal*), so far only used in rare exceptions, occurs in four cases. 108 How can we account for this change in usage? Is it enough simply to record the fact that in the teaching of the wise both truths could "stand happily side by side", the undisputable truth that man himself is

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107 Skladny, 38f.

108 See table of syntagmatic relations II.

responsible for his station in life, be it good or bad, and the other, that both poverty and wealth are not unambiguous and that "even poverty can, from certain points of view, appear as something of value"? 109 Or can we explain these two conflicting viewpoints simply by referring to the hiddenness of the order of creation which cannot be mastered by man because there are always limits to human understanding? 110 A more natural way of accounting for this difference would be to assume that within the context of statements concerning the righteous and the wicked, we have moved into a different lexical field. We shall be able to test this impression presently.

### 1.8 "Better"-Proverbs.

There is one group of sayings which we have not dealt with so far, classified by Hermisson as proverbs, though he recognizes their peculiar characteristics which set them apart from other true proverbs and aphorisms.<sup>111</sup> In all of them we find a comparison linked with a value judgement using the form "better ...than" (**tōb ...min**). Zimmerli has therefore termed this type of saying a "tōb - Spruch".<sup>112</sup> In the following example the comparison is found only in the second line:

What is desired in a man is loyalty,  
And a poor man is better than a liar. (19:22)

In the fully developed form the comparison is extended to both lines, and the form "is based upon a binary opposition in which a paradox is achieved by the transformation of elements compared through the addition of a set of middle terms."<sup>113</sup> The saying then has the following structure: better is A (negative) plus B (positive) than C (negative) plus

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109 Von Rad 1972, 126.

110 Gese, 38ff.

111 Hermisson, 57.

112 Zimmerli, 308. Cf also Bryce, G E 1972. "'Better'-Proverbs. An Historical and Structural Study", *Society of Biblical Literature Proceedings*, 343.

113 Bryce, 349.

D (positive). The order of the different terms in the sentence is interchangeable.<sup>114</sup>

Apart from these purely formal characteristics, the "better" - proverbs show another striking peculiarity with regard to their content. The topic of the majority of them is poverty and wealth. By means of the binary opposition a re-evaluation of both poverty and wealth takes place. The paradox is stated that poverty, though an evil, is better than wealth, generally held to be a good.

Better a poor man who walks in his integrity  
than a rich man who is perverse in his ways. (28:6)

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,  
than a fatted ox and hatred with it. (15:17)

Better to be of lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud. (16:19)

Better a dry morsel with quiet,  
than a house full of feasting with strife. (17:1)

Scholars have noted that the "better"-proverbs do not agree with the view of poverty and wealth prevalent in the majority of the other sayings. When Von Rad speaks about the ambiguity of wealth and poverty, he expressly quotes some of them. He finds in them "a model example of wisdom thinking" grappling with the problem of the ambivalence of all things.<sup>115</sup> According to Hermisson the "tob-Sprueche" originated when the wise had come to realize the complexity in all reality and could no longer automatically equate prosperity with good conduct.<sup>116</sup> Bryce, in a thorough historical and structural analysis of the "tob-Spruch", has suggested another source. He points to the occurrence of the comparative saying in the wisdom literature of Egypt.<sup>117</sup> Form-critically its origins can be traced back to the wisdom instructions of the Middle

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114 Hermisson, 156.

115 Von Rad 1972, 126.

116 Hermisson, 156.

117 Bryce, 345.

Kingdom.<sup>118</sup> By the time of the New Kingdom, the comparative form had developed into a distinctive type of proverb usually consisting of two lines.<sup>119</sup> Bryce quotes examples from the Egyptian instruction of Amenemope which show striking similarities with Proverbs, not only structurally, but also as regards content. Five of the nine sayings having this form deal with the same subject matter, poverty and wealth. Bryce claims that the "tob-Spruch" developed as an independent proverbial form in the Old Testament under Egyptian influence and points to Pr 15:16 which closely resembles Amen ix:7-8:

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord,  
than great treasure and trouble with it. (Pr 15:16)

Better is bread with a happy heart,  
than wealth with trouble. (Amen ix:7-8) 120

The main difference lies in the phrase "with the fear of the Lord." This does not really parallel the fourth element of the proverb, "trouble with it," so the proverb has been rephrased in 16:8 to fit the canons of Hebrew parallelism; the second phrase now parallels the fourth.

Better is little with righteousness  
than great revenues with injustice.

As we shall see presently, the Egyptian influence is even more marked in the second lexical field which we want to analyse, the lexical field of justice.

## 2. THE "POOR" IN THE LEXICAL FIELD OF JUSTICE

### 2.1 Admonitions - instructions

The two examples of didactic stories quoted above (Pr 24:30-34 and 6:6-11) show an expansion of the same saying by the addition of hortatory material. Scholars have therefore tended

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118 Bryce, 345, sees the earliest form of this type in the Instruction of Kagemni (2600 BC).

119 346.

120 348.

to assume that the other main genre found in Proverbs, admonitions, can be reduced to the single wisdom sentence as their simplest formal unit.<sup>121</sup> This has, however, been denied by McKane with good arguments. He claims that there never existed an independent unit "Mahnspruch" <sup>122</sup> on its own, but that it has its meaning and function only within the context of the genre of wisdom instruction common in Egyptian wisdom literature. "The Instruction is not an agglomeration of wisdom sentences," but a genre sui generis with clearly definable formal characteristics, the most important being the address to the "son," imperatives and supportive arguments in motive and final clauses.<sup>123</sup> McKane's claim is supported by the findings of C Kayatz who made a detailed form-critical analysis of Proverbs 1-9. Her investigations show that also the larger literary units of collection I agree exactly in style and structure with those of the Egyptian instructions.<sup>124</sup> The instruction is, therefore, a distinct literary type which has to be analysed as such, without breaking it down into its component elements.

The Book of Proverbs contains two instructions which, among other things, deal also with the topic of poverty. We shall investigate them in turn.

### 2.1.1. The Instruction of Lemuel

Of all the specimens of instruction genre in the Book of Proverbs 31:1-9 "is the one which is most manifestly vocational wisdom".<sup>125</sup> It is concerned with equipping the ruler for his task of government. Because career wisdom is usually not found in Proverbs, McKane finds it significant "that this exception bears the marks of extra-Israelite

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121 Cf McKane, 373.

122 Gerstenberger, E 1965. *Wesen und Herkunft des 'Apodiktischen Rechts,'* 122f claims that the "Mahnspruch" is the basic unit. A similar view is held by Richter, W 1966. *Recht und Ethos. Versuch einer Ortung des weisheitlichen Mahnspruches,* 71ff.

123 McKane, 373.

124 Bauer-Kayatz, C 1966. *Studien zu Proverben 1-9.*

125 McKane, 407.

provenance." 126 R H Pfeiffer had already claimed that the sayings of Lemuel were Edomite wisdom.<sup>127</sup> Gemser supports this view on the ground that the language displays Aramaisms and the name Massa most probably refers to a north-Arabian tribe (cf Gn 25:14; I Chr 1:30). Moreover, the Edomites were well-known in Israel for their wisdom (I Kings 4:30).<sup>128</sup> In structure and content the nearest parallels are found in Egyptian wisdom literature, especially in the Instruction of Merikare. There are also certain similarities with the Babylonian "Advice to a Prince",<sup>129</sup> although the style there is impersonal and not in the form of direct command and exhortation.<sup>130</sup>

Statements relevant to the general topic of poverty follow after the introduction (vss 1 and 2) and a warning against women (vs 3) in vss 4-9:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel,  
 it is not for kings to drink wine,  
 or for rulers to desire strong drink;  
 lest they drink and forget what has been decreed,  
 and pervert the rights (**dīn**) of all the afflicted.  
 Give strong drink to him who is perishing,  
 and wine to those in better distress;  
 let them drink and forget their poverty, (**rīšō**)  
 and remember their misery no more.  
 Open your mouth for the dumb,  
 for the rights (**dīn**) of all who are left desolate.  
 Open your mouth, judge righteously (**s<sup>e</sup> pot sedeq**)  
 maintain the rights of the poor and needy. (**w<sup>e</sup> dīn**  
**anī w<sup>e</sup>,ebyōn**)

In Pr 31:4-9 the subject of poverty is treated in two different ways. The king is first of all advised to give wine as an opiate to the poor so that they might forget their miserable existence. The view of poverty is that of realism. The poor need something to help bear their otherwise

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126 407.

127 Pfeiffer, R H 1926. Edomite wisdom. ZAW 44, 15.

128 Gemser, 107.

129 Lambert, W G 1960. Babylonian wisdom literature, 113.

130 McKane, 407.

intolerable burden. Poverty here is economic deprivation, the word used is <sup>v</sup>riš, a cognate of <sup>v</sup>raš, the most common term in the lexical field designating social status. Verses 8 and 9 show poverty from a different angle. Here the poor is the one in need of justice. The king as the supreme arbiter of justice is admonished to take special care of the poor and underprivileged.<sup>131</sup> Because they are dependent and lack influence, they can easily be robbed of their rights. It is significant that in this context a different terminology is used. We encounter here the double form <sup>e</sup>ānī w<sup>e</sup>'ebyōn also very common in Psalms.<sup>132</sup> Whereas this double form "is the regular expression in the Psalms for the attitude of him who prays to God",<sup>133</sup> the usage in 31:9 has no religious overtones. The emphasis is rather on the inferiority and dependence of the poor who are in need of help to obtain their legal rights. <sup>d</sup>īn refers to the whole judicial process "and the just verdict which results when it is faithfully carried out."<sup>134</sup> The instruction demands of the king that he should judge righteously, <sup>v</sup>epōt <sup>e</sup>sedeq. This phrase is similar to the often used formula characterizing the task of the king as administering (<sup>e</sup>asāh) "justice and righteousness" (<sup>m</sup>špāt <sup>u</sup>š <sup>e</sup>dāqāh).<sup>135</sup>

In the evaluation of poverty the two types of statements are similar to the two contrasting sets of sayings which we noted above, those treating poverty as an unfortunate and most undesirable condition and those demanding respect and kindness to the poor. Although both sentiments are found in Pr 31:4-9 they have different origins. The one starts from the empirical conditions of poverty and can be linked with the experiential wisdom we have encountered in our

131 McKane, 410.

132 Bammel 1968. "πρωτός", TDNT VI, thinks that the double form <sup>e</sup>ānī w<sup>e</sup>'ebyōn is "apparently pre-Israelite." This view seems to be correct. On the other hand, the opposite opinion expressed by Martin-Achard "nh elend sein." THAT II, 344 ('die wohl junge Doppelformel') seems hardly justified.

133 Gerstenberger, E 1971. 'bh wollen, THAT I, 24.

134 McKane, 411.

135 Cf II Sm 8:15/I Chr 18:14; I Ki 10:9/II Chr 9:8; Jer 22:3, 15; 23:15, 33:15. Cf also Schmid, H H 1968. *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 25.

treatment of proverbs. The other is not derived from experience, but belongs to the larger context of the ideology of kingship. Both sets of statements have a different function and use different terminology. They belong to different lexical fields.

### 2.1.2. The Instruction Proverbs 22,17 - 24,22

The whole collection III contains an instruction which in chapters 22:17 - 23:11 shows a striking similarity to the Egyptian instruction of Amenemope. According to Morenz the main theme of the Egyptian wisdom instructions is Maat.<sup>136</sup> "Maat is right order in nature and society, as established by the act of creation, and hence means, according to the context, what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice and truth."<sup>137</sup> In Egypt, the king, as the successor and son of the creator god, is primarily the guardian of Maat as the order of creation. Within his country his task is to see that Maat is established. He is therefore, above all, the administrator of justice, the father of the widow and orphan, and the defender of the rights of the poor.<sup>138</sup> It is, however, not only the king who participates in Maat, but right order is also the object of individual human activity. The purpose of the wisdom instructions, according to Brunner, is to prepare a way for Maat by transmitting the teachings of the wise which aim at the creation of harmony in state and society.<sup>139</sup> This is also evidenced in the instruction of Amenemope which contains injunctions against the exploitation and oppression of the poor which were taken up, but in part also significantly modified, by Pr 22:17-23:11. <sup>140</sup>

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136 Morenz, S 1973. **Egyptian religion**, 110-136. See also Brunner, H 1952. *Die Weisheitsliteratur. Handbuch der Orientalistik* I/2, 90-110; Frankfurt, H 1948. **Ancient Egyptian religion**, 30-87; Gese 11-21; Schmid, H H 1966. 17-27.

137 Morenz, 113.

138 Engnell, I 1967. **Studies in divine kingship in the Ancient Near East**, 12.

139 Brunner, 94.

140 Texts from Amenemope are translated by J A Wilson, **ANET**, 422ff.

Pr 22:22, 23

Do not rob the poor (**dal**), because he is poor (**kī dal-hū'**),  
 or crush the afflicted (**ʿanī**) at the gate;  
 for the Lord will plead their cause (**yārīb rībām**)  
 and despoil of life those who despoil them.

Amen iv:4-7

Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed  
 and against overbearing the disabled.  
 Stretch not forth thy hand against the approach of  
 the old man,  
 nor steal away the speech of the aged.

There are obvious parallels between Proverbs and Amenemope, but the differences must not be overlooked either. The Amenemope passage contains imperatives forbidding oppressive measures against the poor, old and weak. Proverbs leaves out the aged and the weak, placing all the emphasis on the poor. This is done by introducing the phrase **kī dal-hū'** and by the reference to the judicial process in the gate where the **ʿanī** could easily be robbed of his rights because he lacked wealth and influence. Furthermore, a motivation is added which, according to Gemser, is typically Israelite.<sup>141</sup> The text refers to legal proceedings (**rīb**). As the poor are not in a position to obtain justice by themselves, Yahweh will take up their cause and will even take the lives of those who despoil them.

Pr 22:28:

Remove not the ancient landmark  
 which your fathers have set.

Pr 23:10:

Do not remove an 'ancient' landmark (of a widow)  
 or enter the fields of the fatherless;  
 for their Redeemer is strong,  
 he will plead their cause (**yārīb et rībām**) against you.

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141 Gemser, 84. Cf Ex 22:20-23; 23:6; 24:14f, 17f.

Amen vii:12-15; viii:9-12:

Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of  
the arable land,  
nor disturb the position of the measuring-cord;  
be not greedy after a cubit of land,  
not encroach on the boundaries of a widow.  
Guard against encroaching the boundaries of the  
fields,  
lest a terror carry thee off.  
One satisfies god with the will of the Lord  
who determines the boundaries of the arable land.

The agreement of the two texts in Proverbs with Amenemope is close. In 223:10 some commentators read 'almānāh (widow) which may have been assimilated to <sup>c</sup>olām (ancient) as in 22:28a. This would give a better parallelism membrorum with 23:10b and would render the agreement with Amenemope even more close.<sup>142</sup> The removal of landmarks was considered a crime all over the ancient Near East.<sup>143</sup> Pr 2:28 differs from Amenemope by adding the reference to the fathers. While Amenemope argues metaphysically (it is God "who determines the boundaries of the arable land"), Proverbs argues historically.<sup>144</sup> The fields demarcated by landmarks belong to the nah<sup>a</sup>lāh of the fathers.<sup>145</sup> Under economic pressure widows and orphans could easily become the prey of unscrupulous men pushing aside their ancestral property rights. This was common practice in the eighth century as we learn from the diatribes of the prophets.<sup>146</sup> Both Amenemope and Proverbs warn against this abuse, but Pr 23:10 introduces a different motivation which again has a distinctly Israelite

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142 Cf BHS, Gemser, 86; Oesterley, 202; Scott, 143.

143 Ringgren, H 1962. Sprueche/Prediger, 93; Fichtner, 26.

144 Richter, 31.

145 A remarkably similar injunction is found in Dt 19:14. The question of literary dependence cannot be discussed here. It is relevant for the problem concerning the relationship between Deuteronomy and Wisdom.

146 Cf Is 10:1, 2.

flavour.<sup>147</sup> It describes Yahweh as the *gō'el*, the kinsman redeemer of the widow and fatherless, buying back their property, just as under ordinary circumstances a rich man would redeem the lost property of his poor relative.<sup>148</sup> Again, in comparison with Amenemope, the legal terminology is remarkable (*rib*).<sup>149</sup>

## 2.2. Aphorisms

The two specimens of instruction genre from the Book of Proverbs which we have analysed, show a close affinity to the Egyptian concept of Maat which refers to the order of creation established ever anew and guarded pre-eminently by the king. As a guardian of justice, he is concerned with the rights of those who stand at the fringe of society and cannot help themselves. But justice is not only demanded of the king, but it is ultimately the task of every man. In Israel we also find the conception of a universal world order, but where the Egyptians used the term Maat, Israel spoke of *sedeq* and *sēdāqāh*.<sup>150</sup> In the Jerusalem cult tradition it is the Davidic king as Yahweh's representative who has to watch over that order.<sup>151</sup> At the same time he stands under that order and has to obey.<sup>152</sup> His own actions are judged according to the standards of the universal order of justice. This applies especially to the treatment of the poor, as is shown in the following aphorisms.

By justice a king gives stability to the land,  
but one who exacts gifts ruins it. (29:4)

If a king judges the poor with equity  
his throne shall be established forever. (29:14)

Like a roaring lion or a charging bear

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147 Zimmerli, 303.

148 Cf Daube, D 1969. *Studies in Biblical law*, 46.

149 Pr 23:19-21, the section warning against excessive use of wine has been dealt with above under 1.6, page 65.

150 Schmidt, H H 1968, 67f.

151 Cf esp Ps 72.

152 Gese, 35f.

is a wicked ruler over a poor people. (28:15).

However, just as in Egypt, the doing of Maat is not restricted to the king, but demanded of every man, the concern for the poor being an important element of it. So too in Israel the doing of righteousness is not only thought to be the responsibility of the king, but in a process of democratization is transferred to the individual.

A righteous man knows the rights of the poor,  
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.  
(29:7) 153

### 2.3. Summary and tables of interrelationships of terms in the lexical field of justice

Whereas the lexical field of "poor" designating social status is restricted almost totally to the Book of Proverbs, the lexical field of justice has much wider ramifications. It would go beyond the limits of this paper to investigate these as well. For the sake of comparison, however, four texts in addition to those found in Proverbs have been included in the tables, two from the Psalms and two from the Prophets. These will give some idea of the scope and the importance of this lexical field for the understanding of Old Testament literature.

1. The whole complex of ideas delineated by the lexical field centres on Yahweh (A) or Elohim or Elyon, who is the creator (B) of the universal order. He is pictured as standing (*nissāb*) (C) in the divine council to give judgement (*yispat*, *din*) (D) or to contend (*larib*) (E). He gives his justice (*mišpat*) (F) and his righteousness (*sēdāqāh*) (G) to the king who has to act on his behalf (H). Yahweh protects the poor, who are his people (*am*) (I) and belong to him (J), and pleads their cause (*yārīb rībām*) (K), and redeems (*gā'al*) them (L).

Texts:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Ps 82	x		x	x								
Ps 72:1-14	x	x				x	x	x	x	x		
Is 3:13-15	x		x	x	x	x						
Pr 14:31		x										
Pr 22:23	x											x
Pr 23:10f	x											x x

2. The king (**melek**)(A) if he is a righteous ruler, knows (**yāda<sup>c</sup>**)(B) the rights (**dīn**)(C) of the poor. He judges (**dīn**)(D) the people (**am**)(E) with righteousness (**sedeq, s<sup>e</sup>daqāh**)(F) and the poor with justice (**mišpat**)(G). He gives justice (**šapat**)(H) to the poor and needy and saves (**yāša<sup>c</sup>**)(I), rescues (**pālat**)(J), delivers (**nāsal**)(K), and redeems (**gā'al**)(L) them from (**min**)(M) the wicked. This saving consists in crushing (**dikka<sup>a</sup>**)(N) the oppressor (**oseq**)(O).

The wicked ruler (**mōšēl rāsā<sup>c</sup>**)(P) does not know or understand (**lō' yāda<sup>c</sup> w<sup>e</sup> lō' yābin**)(Q). He judges unjustly (**šapat<sup>a</sup> w<sup>e</sup> awel**)(R) and shows partiality (**nāsā' pānīm**)(S) to the wicked.

Texts:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
Ps 82						x	x		x	x	x						x	x	x
Ps 72:1-14	x			x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				
Jr 22:15f		x	x	x		x	x												
Pr 31:4-9			x	x		x		x											
Pr 28:15					x														x
Pr 29:14	x									x									x

3. The righteous (**saddiq**)(A) also knows (**yāda<sup>c</sup>**)(B) the rights (**dīn**)(C) of the poor, while the wicked (**rāsā<sup>c</sup>**)(D) does not understand such knowledge (**lō' yābīn da<sup>a</sup>at**)(E). He shows kindness (**hānan**)(F) to the poor by sharing his bread with him.(G)

Texts:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Pr 29:7	x	x	x	x	x		
Pr 14:21						x	
Pr 14:31						x	
Pr 19:17						x	
Pr 22:9							x
Pr 28:8						x	
Pr 31:20						(x)	

4. The wicked (<sup>r</sup>ṣā<sup>c</sup>īm)(A) oppress (<sup>c</sup>asāq)(B) the poor. They crush (<sup>d</sup>ikkāh)(C), rob (<sup>g</sup>azal)(D) and eat (<sup>'</sup>akal)(E) them. They seek their blood (<sup>d</sup>ām)(F) through violence (<sup>h</sup>āmās)(G) and oppression (<sup>t</sup>ōk)(H). Even the rich (<sup>'</sup>asīr)(I) can be identified with the wicked insofar as they oppress the poor.<sup>154</sup> An investigation of the individual laments would show the wide usage of this terminology in the Book of Psalms.

Texts	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
P <sup>s</sup> 72:1-14	x	x				x	x	x	
I <sup>s</sup> 3:13-15			x	x					
P <sup>r</sup> 14:31		x							
P <sup>r</sup> 22:16		x							
P <sup>r</sup> 22:22				x					x
P <sup>r</sup> 28:3 155	x	x							
P <sup>r</sup> 30:14					x				

5. The terminology for "poor" in the lexical field of justice is restricted almost totally to the terms <sup>d</sup>al (A), <sup>c</sup>ānī (B), and <sup>'</sup>ebyōn (C), the notable double form <sup>c</sup>ānī w<sup>'</sup>e<sup>'</sup>ebyōn which is common in Psalms, occurring twice in the texts under consideration. (D) The term <sup>r</sup>as̄ (E) is used only once in Ps 82 which employs the whole range of available concepts including <sup>y</sup>ātōm, the orphan. (F) The term <sup>'</sup>almānāh, widow, (G) also belongs to this context. Otherwise Kuschke's observation that the terms <sup>r</sup>as̄, <sup>h</sup>āser, and <sup>m</sup>iskēn are restricted to the socio-economic sphere is correct.<sup>156</sup> They do not belong to the lexical field of justice.

154 This explains the shift in meaning which observed on page 48 above.

156 See above page 41.

Texts:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Ps 82	2x	x	x		x	x	
Ps 72:1-14	x	3x	4x				
Is 3:13-15		2x					
Jer 22:15f				x			
Prov 31:4-9				x			
Prov 14:21		x					
Prov 14:37	x		x				
Prov 19:17	x						
Prov 21:13	x						
Prov 22:9	x						
Prov 22:16	x						
Prov 22:22	2x	x					
Prov 23:10f						x	x
Prov 28:3	x						
Prov 28:8	x						
Prov 28:15	x						
Prov 29:14	x						
Prov 29:7	x						
Prov 31:20		x	x				