

DUALISM IN THE LXX OF PROV 2:17: A CASE STUDY IN THE LXX AS REVISIONARY TRANSLATION

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That authority is inherent in the LXX is clear from its use by the authors of the NT. The question, rather, is how authoritative the Greek tradition is. This in turn prompts two questions: (1) How authoritative was the LXX for the authors of the NT? (2) How authoritative should the LXX be for modern exegetes? In the present article I will deal with the second question. Discussion about the LXX as a whole is often misleading since the translation technique of one book can differ so radically from the next. I will therefore take one verse and try to argue from the particular instead of the general.

The LXX of Proverbs is of special interest since introductory works on the LXX refer to it as a "loose" or "paraphrastic" translation, often placing it at the extreme end of a spectrum opposite "literal." To do so, however, is very misleading. Though the style of Greek is quite inconsistent, revealing various hands at work in the process of translation, with rare exceptions the LXX of Proverbs carries the sense of the Hebrew quite well. After reading claims of loose translating, students of LXX Greek would be surprised to read through the LXX of Proverbs and discover that over ninety-five percent of the book is virtually as good a translation into Greek as is true of many current translations into English.

The translator of Proverbs¹ was not intent on a radical revision of the book in either a structural sense (deleting or freely composing whole verses) or a conceptual one. He refined what he found, never contradicting but qualifying. When part of a concept important to the translator was already resident within a verse the translator brought it out more specifically, qualified it in some way, or brought in a related concept. He did not change the teachings of the Hebrew text in the sense of departing from them and inserting opposing ones. He did change a few select teachings in the sense of producing a translation that communicated them in a stronger and more detailed manner.

One of the teachings deals with the kind of counsel (*boulē*) that the translator wishes his Jewish readership to follow.² Wisdom, sometimes

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¹ Though I hold that more than one translator was at work, it is easier to speak of "the translator."

² Another teaching that is selected for clarification is in the area of wealth (see R. L. Giese Jr., "Qualifying Wealth in the Septuagint of Proverbs," *JBL* 111/3 [1992] 409-425; "Strength through Wisdom and the Bee in LXX-Prov 6,8^{a-c}," *Bib* 73/3 [1992] 404-411).

called good counsel by the translator, is personified in the MT of Proverbs as a virtuous woman (the personification is kept in the LXX). Similarly the subject of the "strange woman" in Proverbs naturally lends itself to comparisons with the subject of foolishness (in the Hebrew text and again faithfully rendered in the LXX, the latter sometimes referring to folly as bad counsel). Literary similarities in the Hebrew text between the זִשָּׁא זָרָא and Dame Folly have been pointed out by a number of commentators.³

The LXX of Proverbs expands upon the association of the strange woman and bad counsel. The most striking instance that reflects an association of the strange woman with Dame Folly occurs in the second chapter of the LXX of Proverbs, where the translator offers his own interpretation of the Hebrew text.

I. TEXT AND INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Prov 2:11, 16-17

LXX	MT
<p>¹¹ <i>boulē kalē phylaxei se ennoia de hosia tērēsei se</i> ...</p>	<p>¹¹ <i>mzmr tšmr ʿlyk tbwnh tnšrkh</i> ...</p>
<p>¹⁶ <i>tou makran se poiēsai apo hosou eutheias kai allotrion tēs dikaias gnōmēs</i></p>	<p>¹⁶ <i>lhšylk mʿšh zrh lnkryh ʿmryh hhlyqh</i></p>
<p>¹⁷ <i>huie mē se katalabē kakē boulē hē apoleipousai didaskalian neotētos kai diathēkēn theian epilelēsmenē</i></p>	<p>¹⁷ <i>hʿzbt ʿlwp nʿwryh wʿt bryt ʿlhyh škhkh</i></p>
<p>¹¹ Good counsel will guard you, And pious understanding will keep you . . .</p>	<p>¹¹ Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you . . .</p>
<p>¹⁶ To make you far from the straight way, and estranged from right judgment.</p>	<p>¹⁶ To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words;</p>
<p>¹⁷ Son, do not let <i>evil counsel</i> overtake you, which has rejected the instruction of youth, and forgotten the divine covenant.</p>	<p>¹⁷ That leaves the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God.</p>

³ E.g. J. W. Gaspar, *Social Ideas in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1947) 73; G. Boström, "Proverbiastudien: Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr. 1-9," *LUÅ* 30/3 (1935) 156-157; R. Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9," *CBQ* 50 (1988) 60-63.

Whereas the MT in vv. 16–17 speaks of the dangers of a certain kind of (apparently literal) woman,⁴ the LXX speaks of the dangers of evil counsel that rejects inherited instruction and the divine covenant.⁵ Verse 17 does not reflect a differing Hebrew *Vorlage*.⁶ The translator lost precious little through this transformation (warnings against the apparently literal woman of loose morals are repeated later in the book and are accurately rendered by the translator) while gaining a pointed message on the evils of apostasy. Clement of Alexandria would later use the subject of the strange woman for much the same purpose.⁷ After citing several verses about the strange woman of chap. 5, Clement writes: “And when he says, ‘Be not much with a strange woman’ [Prov 5:20], he admonishes us to use indeed, but not to linger and spend time with, secular culture.”⁸ It is interesting that Clement, who used the LXX, allegorized the strange woman elsewhere in Proverbs in exactly the way that the LXX translator altered the strange woman of chap. 2. Further, Clement did so apparently without knowing that the translator of the text he was using had previously transformed one passage of the strange woman (actually eliminating the term) in an attempt to accomplish a similar purpose.⁹

The primary question here is not so much whether the *boulē kalē* and *akē boulē* of vv. 11 and 17 mean good and evil inclinations (something internal) or whether they refer to popular advice or abstract philosophy (something external). The question (posed by Cook, though not answered by him—see below) is why such a change was made in this location only, when there are several other passages that also mention the *ʿiššā zārā*. The answer is simply that the immediate context invites such interpretation. There is no other verse that equates the strange woman with what she learned or inherited earlier in life. In a simple change of subject the

⁴ The expression has a long history of interpretation behind it, understood both allegorically (summarized in P. Humbert, “La ‘Femme Étrangère’ du Livre des Proverbes,” *Revue des Études Semitiques* 2 [1937] 49) and literally (most modern commentators; see most recently J. Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Prov 1–9,” *Bib* 72/4 [1991] 457–473), and within the literal interpretation understood both as a foreigner and as Israelite/Jewish, both with cultic association and without.

⁵ M. Hengel argued that all the Hebrew passages about the foreign woman constitute an apologetic to prevent the assimilation of alien wisdom that endangered traditional belief (*Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974] 1.555). Hengel saw the LXX of Prov 2:17 as a possible indication of this, since the translator interpreted the *ʿiššā zārā* metaphorically as “foreign wisdom,” calling attention to the fact that she has “left the instruction of youth.”

⁶ Though she does not mention the LXX of Proverbs 2 and thus is not out to defend the integrity of the Hebrew text, G. Yee has demonstrated the proper contrast of Wisdom versus the *ʿiššā zārā* in the context of Proverbs 1–9 (“I Have Perfumed My Bed With Myrrh: The Foreign Woman (*ʿiššā zārā*) in Proverbs 1–9,” *JSOT* 43 [1989] 53–68).

⁷ Noted by Hengel, *Judaism* 1.155–156.

⁸ Clement *Strom* 1.5.29.

⁹ The same interpretation occurs in midrash in *b. Avod. Zar.* 17a–b. It is curious that J. Weingreen, whose goal is to locate rabbinic-style interpretation in the LXX of Proverbs, makes note of the “good counsel” in 2:11 but misses the more important variant in 2:17 (J. Weingreen, “Rabbinic-type Commentary in the LXX Version of Proverbs,” *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977] 407–415).

translator now warns against counsel that rejects the instruction of youth and forgets the divine covenant. As stated above, the translator is not interested in wholesale alterations but rather in subtle changes, interpretations of what he saw as figures or symbols (the strange woman here stands for bad counsel). The result in the passage above is that there are two counsels—one that rejects heritage in general and piety in particular, and the other that does not.

The translator worked in a context where dualism was often discussed in popular philosophy. A review of different kinds of dualism in two well-known documents will shed light on the translator's dualism in the LXX of Proverbs 2.

II. DUALISM IN NON-BIBLICAL HELLENISTIC LITERATURE

The dualism of the *boulē kalē* and *kakē boulē* of the LXX of Proverbs 2 could mean either (internal) inclinations or (external) philosophies. Looking at the context reveals that the question is to a large extent unanswerable. Good counsel guards, keeps and delivers its devotee, but we are never told (in Hebrew or Greek) where such counsel comes from, internally or externally. The same can be said of the evil counsel in the LXX of v. 17. This is due to the fluidity between psychological dualism (the internal struggle of an individual soul/mind between two ways) and ethical dualism (the division of men or philosophies into two groups or schools).¹⁰ The presence of such dualism, especially psychological, has been well documented in both the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the *Qumran Manual of Discipline*.

T. 12 Patr. was written in Greek by a Hellenized Jew during the second century BC. What has escaped notice is that *T. Asher* 1:3–6 contains a nearly identical lexical parallel to the *kakē/kalē boulē* of the LXX of Proverbs 2: two *diaboulia*, clearly implied to be *kakē* and *kalē*:

³God has given two ways to the sons of men, two counsels (*diaboulia*), two actions, two opportunities, and two goals. ⁴Because of this, everything is paired, one against the other. ⁵Two ways, good and bad (*kalou kai kakou*); in such there are two counsels (*diaboulia*) in our breasts distinguishing them. ⁶If the soul desires the good (way) (*kalō*), all its deeds are in righteousness, and if it sins, it immediately repents.

From vv. 5–6 it is clear that this is for the most part internal and not external dualism—that is, psychological and not ethical. The passage helps to show how ambiguous the passage in the LXX of Proverbs is.

The spirits of truth and evil in the teaching of the two spirits in 1QS 3:17b–19a, 24–25; 4:1, 23b–24a are conceptually close to the two *diaboulia* of *T. 12 Patr.*:

^{17b}And he created man to rule ¹⁸the world. And he set for him two spirits (*rwḥwt*) to walk in, until the fixed time for his visitation, the spirits ^{19a}of

¹⁰ See J. G. Gammie, "Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom Literature and Apocalyptic Literature," *JBL* 93 (1974) 356–385.

truth and evil (*rwḥwt h²mt wh^cwl*). . . .²⁴All the spirits (*rwḥy*) that are his allotment are to cause the sons of light to stumble, but the God of Israel and his true angel help all of²⁵the sons of light. And he created spirits (*rwḥwt*) of light and darkness, and upon them he founded every work. . . . The one [spirit] God loves for all¹eternity, and in all its deeds he is pleased forever. As for the other, he loathes its counsel (*swdh*) and hates all its ways forever. . . .^{23b}Until now the spirits of truth and evil (*rwḥy ḥ²mt w^cwl*) struggle in the heart of man; ^{24a}they walk in wisdom or vileness.

The debate on the two spirits in 3:18; 4:23 focuses on whether they are external beings or forces (whether personal angelic beings or impersonal cosmic forces) or merely psychological dispositions within each man. The two spirits in the passage clearly give counsel (*swd*). The question of psychological dualism centers on the clause in 4:23b, which appears to bring the two spirits within the same framework as that of the two counsels in *T. 12 Patr.*: Both spirits are dispositions that struggle for control within the heart of each man. Such an interpretation understands the sense of *gbr* ("man") in 4:23b as singular, and many proponents of this view see the same sense in *ḥnwš* ("man") in 3:17b (since *ḥnwš* is the antecedent of *lw* ["for him"] in 3:18).

The interpretation of cosmic dualism, on the other hand, posits the division of mankind into two groups, each respectively influenced by its own spirit: good men by the spirit of truth, evil men by the spirit of perversion. The valuable distinction between 3:18 and 4:23 made by Sekki falls within this interpretation. The feminine gender of *rūaḥ* in 3:18 indicates a spiritual/psychological disposition:

A person falls under the authority of either the good or evil angel not because of his own good or evil "decision" but because he is predestined and created by God with a good or evil spiritual disposition which unchangeably determines the angel under whose personal authority he is to submit.

In 4:23, however, Sekki argues that the masculine gender of *rūaḥ* indicates cosmic spirits, actually a plurality instead of a duality, the intent being that "the pious must deal not only with their own sinful nature but also with the problem of demonic attack."¹¹

In light of the clear creation and deterministic context,¹² however, cosmic dualism should indeed be given priority here. Psychological implications of the cosmic forces include two inclinations at work in each man, but not in equal parts and always with one clearly in control.¹³ The nature and extent of the two inclinations, then, is the point of difference between 1QS and *T. 12 Patr.*: 1QS shows a fluid concept of spirits, an interaction of psychological inclinations and cosmic spirits that divide mankind. Once again, in a different way, the ambiguity of the LXX of Proverbs 2 can be seen by contrast.

¹¹ A. E. Sekki, *The Meaning of Ruah at Qumran* (SBLDS 110; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 200, 211.

¹² H. G. May, "Cosmological Reference in the Qumran Doctrine of the Two Spirits and in Old Testament Imagery," *JBL* 82 (1963) 1-14.

¹³ A. A. Anderson, "The Use of *Ruah* in 1QS, 1QH and 1QM," *JSS* 7 (1962) 293-303; cf. also May, "Cosmological" 3-4.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL DUALISM IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

In none of the modern commentary on the spirits/mindsets of 1QS and *T. 12 Patr.* is the concept of the *boulē kalē* and *kakē boulē* of the LXX of Prov 2:11, 17 brought into the discussion. A comparative analysis has been drawn, however, between the LXX of Proverbs 2 and the concepts of *yēšer hārā^c* and *yēšer tōb* found in later Jewish writings. Johann Cook rejected the idea that the reinterpretation of the *ʿiššā zārā* in the LXX of Prov 2:17 was caused by a moralistic attitude on the part of the translator, basing this on the fact that in chap. 5 and 6:24 the immoral woman is rendered rather literally by the translator.¹⁴ Cook believed that the use of *kakē boulē* for *ʿiššā zārā* reflected a Jewish rather than a Greek Hellenistic concept—namely, that of *yēšer hārā^c* and *yēšer tōb*, the good and evil inclinations that guide each person.

The arguments used to arrive at this conclusion are quite weak, however. Though Cook lists Ps 103:14 as the one instance where the LXX interprets the Jewish concept in the Hebrew term *yšr*, I cannot see how this is so (LXX has *plasma*; the word as well as the context has nothing to do with abstract inclinations or tendencies of the will). Sirach 15:14, also cited by Cook, does not specifically deal with the formulation of the doctrine of the good and evil inclinations but rather simply the doctrine of free will,¹⁵ expressed as a choice between life and death (v. 17), a common doctrine that certainly did not originate with Ben Sira (in either its Jewish or Greek tradition). Though it is a short jog from free will expressed as a choice between the good and the bad and the inclinations that prompt such choices, to discuss one is not necessarily to discuss the other.

The rabbinic concept of *yēšer hārā^c* is an instinctivist approach to human nature that surfaces in various formulations within rabbinic literature. One simply cannot give a blanket definition of *yēšer hārā^c* that will cover all of the rabbinic discussions, whether a bad impulse that leads men to evil or simply an inclination for survival. The idea of even speaking of *yēšer hārā^c* and *yēšer tōb* as part of a true dualism is questionable, since there is rabbinic teaching that one has priority (perhaps in ontics as well as origin).

In short, there is a difference between the choice between good and evil, which is a constant topic of ancient Near Eastern wisdom (as well as legal) literature as far back as written documents can take us, and the internalization of this choice that results in two separate and conflicting desires of human nature. Since there is no evidence that the *kakē boulē* of the LXX of Prov 2:17 is clearly internal, we cannot say anything more than that there are some similarities with *yēšer hārā^c* and *yēšer tōb* in

¹⁴ J. Cook, "Hellenistic Influence in the Book of Proverbs (Septuagint)?", *BIOSCS* 20 (1987) 30–42.

¹⁵ Sirach 15:14: "It was he who, from the beginning, made man and put him under the control of his will (*diabouliou*)."

later Judaism. Such similarities, however, could be located within religions and philosophies completely removed historically from Judaism.

IV. SUMMARY

Close parallels between the LXX of Prov 2:10–20 and roughly contemporaneous literature such as *T. 12 Patr.* or 1QS cannot be drawn, since the other documents expound clearly psychological or cosmic dualism. Nor can any direct relation be drawn with later rabbinic teaching, since dualism is common in both Jewish and Greek Hellenistic writings and the psychological dualism of rabbinic teaching cannot be seen in the LXX of Proverbs 2. The Proverbs passage is (apparently intentionally) ambiguous—that is, both kinds of counsel (internal or external) can be said to be in operation, or perhaps there is an allowance for either or both. The translator of the LXX of Proverbs likely interpreted the ʾiṣṣā zārā of 2:17 not in an attempt to theologize on the essence of human nature but, as Hengel notes, to warn against foreign wisdom that threatens inherited values and piety. The sense is left even more open than Hengel suggests, however. Senses of terms that function as overlapping synonyms to counsel, terms like “righteousness” and “wisdom,” are never clearly defined in the LXX of Proverbs. This was not atypical of diaspora literature, however, which often avoided mention of distinctive Jewish observances in order to allow the social context to determine application. The counsel in the LXX of Prov 2:17 that rejects the instruction of youth and forgets the divine covenant could be redefined to meet the polemic needs of each generation.

Assuming that an LXX passage can be accurately retroverted into Hebrew, some modern scholars hold that such an underlying text is in most cases just as authoritative as the MT. For purposes of textual criticism modern translations will in some instances read with the LXX simply because in that particular verse the LXX reading appears to make more sense. The problem is that before passing judgment on any one verse a whole book in the LXX must be translated and analyzed to gain insight into the translation technique employed. The translator of the LXX of Proverbs exhibits a pattern of qualifying the Hebrew text, and though I believe that in some verses the LXX does represent an alternative Hebrew text, in most cases the alterations are tendentious.

The practice of interpreting or defining an expression in the source language when translating into a target language occurs to some extent in all translations. The example of this in the LXX of Proverbs 2 should promote caution when looking to the LXX for textual authority. In short, reading with the LXX against the MT is indeed possible but should be backed up with strong argumentation.