
The Epistemological Significance of the Pursuit of Wisdom in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 in the Context of Belief in the Existence of God

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Abstract

The paper deals with the profound epistemological significance of the pursuit of wisdom, as articulated in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, within the overarching context of belief in the existence of God. The passages are central in the Judeo-Christian tradition and have long been acknowledged as foundational in shaping believers' intellectual and spiritual landscape. The study examines the textual and historical context of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, elucidating their role in ancient Israel's wisdom literature and their relevance in contemporary religious discourse. It explores the notion that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, which has profound theological implications. Furthermore, the paper investigates the epistemological implications of this pursuit of wisdom within theism, highlighting the interplay between faith and reason. As represented in these verses, the pursuit of wisdom is analysed as a dynamic process that enriches one's understanding of the world, ethics, and the divine. The paper draws comparisons between the perspectives presented in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 and various philosophical and theological traditions, seeking to discern the universality of their insights and relevance in contemporary epistemology and belief discussions. The intersection of faith in God and the pursuit of wisdom is explored to reconcile the tension between religious dogma and intellectual inquiry. The study underscores the enduring

importance of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 in the religious and philosophical landscape, shedding light on their role in shaping a holistic epistemological framework that incorporates both the pursuit of wisdom and the belief in the existence of God. By examining the epistemological significance of these verses, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between faith, reason, and the quest for knowledge within the context of Judeo-Christian belief.

Keywords: Epistemology, Wisdom, Existence of God, Knowledge, Philosophy and Faith.

Introduction

The pursuit of wisdom has been a fundamental and enduring quest for humanity, transcending cultural, religious, and philosophical boundaries. Wisdom is the highest form of knowledge, acquiring information and understanding deeper truths about life, the universe, and the human condition. This quest involves examining presuppositions, foundational beliefs and assumptions that shape a worldview and influence decisions and actions. In religious and philosophical inquiries, presuppositions are particularly significant as they often relate to the fundamental questions of the existence of God and the nature of ultimate reality. This study explores the epistemological significance of presuppositions, specifically the belief in the existence of God, in the context of pursuing wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, two biblical verses from the Hebrew Bible, provide insights into the ancient Israelite understanding of wisdom, knowledge, and the divine. Proverbs 1:7 emphasises the importance of proper reverence for God as the foundation for true knowledge and wisdom, raising questions about the role of faith and religious belief in acquiring wisdom and knowledge.

The study employs an analytical approach, drawing on insights from theological, philosophical, biblical studies, and epistemology. Examining the epistemological significance of

presuppositions, particularly in the context of belief in the existence of God as expressed in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10, aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how faith, knowledge, and wisdom intersect in the pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life. It aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how individuals with differing presuppositions, particularly belief in God, pursue wisdom and shed light on the broader epistemological implications of presuppositions in philosophy, theology, and the study of human knowledge and wisdom.

Epistemology and Wisdom: General Perspectives

Epistemology and wisdom are two interconnected philosophical concepts used in exploring knowledge's nature and how to acquire and apply it in life. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with studying knowledge. John J. Toohey stated that epistemology derives from the Greek words "episteme" knowledge and "logos" science, and means the science of knowledge.⁹¹ As employed in philosophy, the word means the science of the certitude of human knowledge. It seeks to answer fundamental questions about what knowledge is, how it is acquired and justified, and the limits of what can be known. It explores knowledge, how it is acquired, where it comes from, what makes a belief justified or rational, and whether knowledge can be sure.⁹²

Epistemologists also investigate the relationship between belief, truth, and justification, examining how these concepts are interconnected.⁹³ Knowledge often involves having both valid and justified beliefs. Additionally, epistemology questions whether there are inherent limitations to what humans can

⁹¹ John J. Toohey, *Notes on Epistemology* (Washington, D.C.: Anthony Flood, February 2007), 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 110.;

know, such as the limitations of senses or cognitive abilities.⁹⁴ Different philosophers and schools of thought have proposed various epistemological theories, including empiricism, rationalism, foundationalism, coherentism, and reliabilism.⁹⁵ These theories focus on the nature of knowledge, scope, and limits and the processes and methods through which it is acquired, justified, and evaluated. Epistemology also plays a crucial role in shaping discussions in other fields, such as science, ethics, and philosophy of mind, by addressing how knowledge is acquired and applied in those domains.

Epistemology explores what it means for something to be considered knowledge. It distinguishes between belief and knowledge, emphasising that knowledge should be justified, true belief.⁹⁶ It focuses on understanding the distinction between mere belief and genuine knowledge, which goes beyond mere opinion or conjecture. Also, it addresses questions related to the reliability of sources of knowledge and the relationship between truth and knowledge. Robert Audi points out two prominent theories of epistemic justification: foundationalism and coherentism.⁹⁷ Foundationalism posits that there are fundamental, self-justifying beliefs upon which all other beliefs rely. At the same time, coherentism argues that beliefs are justified by their coherence with other beliefs within a web of interconnected beliefs.⁹⁸

Epistemology intersects with the philosophy of language and metaphysics, exploring different theories of truth, such as

⁹⁴ James W. Cunningham and Jill Fitzgerald, "Epistemology and reading," *Reading Research Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 1 (1996): 36-60.

⁹⁵ Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). J. Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 1986).; Nicholas Rescher, *Epistemology An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁹⁶ Audi, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge*, xi.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185-205.

correspondence theory, coherence theory, and pragmatist theories. It plays a fundamental role in addressing fundamental questions about human cognition, perception, and the capacity to understand the world. It examines the various sources or avenues through which knowledge is acquired. According to Robert Audi, these sources include perception (what one learns through the senses), reason (logical deduction), testimony (learning from others), and introspection (self-reflection).⁹⁹

Furthermore, epistemology also addresses skepticism, which questions the reliability of human knowledge and whether they can honestly know anything. It is a philosophical position that challenges the possibility of having specific knowledge or justified belief about a particular domain of inquiry or knowledge in general.¹⁰⁰ Skeptics raise doubts about the reliability of humans' cognitive faculties, their senses' trustworthiness, and their beliefs' justifiability.

Audi has elaborately dealt with concepts and various forms of skepticism, including but not limited to global skeptics, which doubt the possibility of knowledge or justified belief in any area of inquiry.¹⁰¹ In contrast, local skeptics focus on specific domains or types of knowledge. Methodological skeptics question the reliability of specific methods of inquiry or modes of reasoning, while empirical skeptics doubt the reliability of humans' senses and sensory perception. Philosophical skeptics raise fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge and belief, exploring issues such as the criteria for justification, the nature of evidence, and the possibility of absolute certainty. Pyrrhonian skepticism emphasises suspension of judgment (epoché) rather than outright denial of

⁹⁹ Robert Audi, "The Sources of Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 71-91.

¹⁰⁰ Paul K. Moser, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 6-8.

¹⁰¹ Audi, 276-309.

knowledge, leading to mental tranquility or ataraxia. Skepticism has been an influential and enduring position in philosophy, leading to meaningful discussions about the nature of justification, the limits of human knowledge, and the role of doubt and inquiry in the pursuit of truth.¹⁰² Philosophers have developed various responses to skepticism to address these challenges, including foundationalism, coherentism, and externalism.

The second concept under discussion is wisdom, a complex concept beyond mere knowledge, encompassing a deep understanding of life and the ability to apply it for the greater good.¹⁰³ It involves sound judgment, discernment, ethical reasoning, and wise decisions.¹⁰⁴ Wisdom goes beyond intelligence and involves a deep understanding of human nature, the world, and the ability to navigate complex situations with insight and empathy.¹⁰⁵ It involves learning from mistakes and successes, maintaining emotional balance, empathy, and compassion in challenging situations, and considering the long-term consequences of actions. It emerges from reflection and learning from experiences, allowing individuals to recognise patterns, anticipate consequences, and make better-informed decisions.¹⁰⁶ The interplay between knowledge and experience is crucial for wisdom, allowing individuals to navigate complex situations, foresee potential outcomes, and make choices that align with their values and the greater good.¹⁰⁷ Wisdom is a

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Robert J. Sternberg, Howard C. Nusbaum and Judith Glück, eds., *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), v, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Sternberg et al., *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*, vi.

¹⁰⁵ R. J. Sternberg and E. S. Hagen, "Teaching for wisdom," In *Handbook of Wisdom*, R. J. Sternberg, & J. Glueck Eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 372-406.

¹⁰⁶ Judith Glück, "Intelligence and Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Intelligence* (Second Edition), Robert J. Sternberg, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1140-1155.

¹⁰⁷ R. J. Sternberg, "Why people often prefer wise guys to guys who are wise: An augmented balance theory of the production and reception of wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Intelligence* (Second Edition),

lifelong journey of learning, reflection, and growth, often involving a deep appreciation for the complexities of life and human nature.

Lynch and Kaufman assert that wisdom is not just about knowing what is true or right; it also involves making ethical decisions that benefit oneself and others.¹⁰⁸ It often incorporates moral and ethical considerations. It involves making choices and actions guided by moral principles and values. Key aspects of this ethical dimension include having a well-developed moral compass, distinguishing between right and wrong, and consistently choosing to act in ways that align with ethical principles.¹⁰⁹

Wisdom involves ethical decision-making, especially in complex situations, where individuals carefully weigh the consequences of their actions on themselves and others.¹¹⁰ It often involves taking a long-term perspective, considering the potential consequences of one's actions in the context of broader, enduring ethical principles. Ethical reflection is cultivated through self-examination and self-awareness, seeking to improve ethical judgment and behaviour over time. Karolina Rozmarynowska considers the ethical dimension of practical wisdom often involves navigating situations where different ethical principles or values conflict, finding a balance between competing values and making choices that align with core ethical beliefs.¹¹¹ It includes respect for diversity, acknowledging the value of different perspectives and cultures, and being inclusive in their approach to ethical decision-

Robert J. Sternberg, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 162–181.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah F. Lynch and James C. Kaufman, "Creativity, Intelligence, and Wisdom: Could versus Should," 457-459.

¹⁰⁹ Wang et al., 2019, pp. 201–202

¹¹⁰ T. W. Meeks and D. V. Jeste, "Neurobiology of wisdom: A literature overview," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 66, 4 (2009): 355–365.

¹¹¹ Karolina Rozmarynowska, "The Ethical Dimension of Practical Wisdom," *Organon F* 22, 1 (2015): 34-52.

making. It is about making choices and living in a way that reflects a deep understanding and commitment to ethical principles and values.¹¹²

In practical application, wisdom is not passive; it involves applying knowledge and experience to solve complex problems, navigate challenging situations, and make decisions promoting well-being and flourishing. It goes beyond mere intelligence and encompasses a deeper understanding of human nature, ethics, and the consequences of one's actions.¹¹³ It is essential in decision-making, conflict resolution, emotional regulation, relationships, leadership, moral and ethical dilemmas, self-reflection, teaching and mentoring, health and well-being, and community and society.

Wisdom helps individuals make informed and balanced decisions, considering long-term consequences and the well-being of themselves and others. It helps avoid impulsive decisions and aligns choices with values and goals. Wise individuals can listen empathetically to all sides, understand underlying issues, and find mutually beneficial solutions. They also have better emotional regulation skills, managing emotions and staying calm under pressure. Myles Munroe argues that wisdom is vital for building and maintaining meaningful relationships, as it involves empathy, understanding, and effective communication. Wise leaders are more effective in guiding teams and organisations, making decisions that benefit the greater good, inspiring trust and loyalty among team members, and adapting to changing circumstances with grace and resilience.¹¹⁴ It is a valuable trait with practical applications in various aspects of life, from decision-making and conflict resolution to personal growth and societal contributions. By

¹¹² Kaili Zhang, Juan Shi, Fengyan Wang and Michel Ferrari, "Wisdom: Meaning, structure, types, arguments, and future concerns," *Current Psychology* 42 (2023):15030–15051

¹¹³ Rozmarynowska, "The Ethical Dimension of Practical Wisdom."

¹¹⁴ Myles Munroe, *Wisdom from Myles Munroe* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2010).

cultivating wisdom, individuals can lead a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

However, Jason Swartwood and Valerie Tiberius assert that wisdom has a cultural and contextual undertone that influences wisdom. What is considered wise in one culture or context may differ from another, and wisdom often requires understanding these variations. Cultural norms and values play a significant role in shaping the concept of wisdom.¹¹⁵ For example, in some Western cultures, wisdom is often associated with individual autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving,¹¹⁶ while in some Eastern cultures, wisdom may be more closely linked to collectivism, humility, and harmony with nature and society¹¹⁷ and in Africa, is associated with respect for elders and one's parents. Philosophical traditions within a culture can also influence how wisdom is defined and understood. For example, in ancient Greece, philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle explored wisdom as a virtue and the pursuit of knowledge and moral excellence.¹¹⁸ In contrast, Jacobus W. Gericke opines that religion is frequently associated with religious and spiritual contexts, which may be seen as a divine or transcendent quality through their teachings and scriptures that guide wise living. In Christianity, wisdom is

¹¹⁵ Jason Swartwood and Valerie Tiberius, "Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom* Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 16-18.

¹¹⁶ Jason and Tiberius, "Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom," 52-56.

¹¹⁷ Nic M. Weststrate, Susan Bluck, and Judith Glück, "Wisdom of the Crowd Exploring People's Conceptions of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom*, Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 115-117.

¹¹⁸ Ricca Edmondson and Markus H. Woerner, "Sociocultural Foundations of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom* Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 44-51.

considered one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, closely related to discernment and moral virtue.¹¹⁹

In a contextual undertone, it requires knowing when to rely on tradition and established norms, while in others, it may require challenging conventions and seeking innovative solutions. Cross-cultural dialogue is increasingly recognised as essential to understanding wisdom, leading to a more comprehensive and enriched understanding that transcends cultural boundaries. There are other fundamental issues about wisdom, which include but are not limited to:

Wisdom is seen as a lifelong pursuit. According to Susan Day Harmison, wisdom is not something one achieves and then possesses indefinitely; instead, it is a quality that can develop and evolve through learning, reflection, and practice. It is a dynamic and evolving quality that involves lifelong learning, adaptability, self-reflection, emotional intelligence, humility, experience, ethics, and mentorship.¹²⁰ It is not something one attains or acquires in a static form but rather a dynamic and evolving quality that is shaped and refined over time. Lifelong learning involves the willingness to acquire knowledge, insights, and experiences throughout life.¹²¹

Reflection and self-improvement, emotional intelligence and humility are critical aspects of wisdom. Individuals engage in self-reflection and self-improvement, continually assessing their thoughts, actions, and beliefs. Also, it involves understanding and managing one's emotions and those of others, which can be cultivated and deepened over time,

¹¹⁹ Gericke, J.W., 2011, 'The concept of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible – A comparative-philosophical analysis', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(1), 1-6.

¹²⁰ Susan Day Harmison, "A Guidebook to Learning: For a Lifelong Pursuit of Wisdom," *Educational Considerations*, Vol. 14: No. 2 (1987).
<https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1670>

¹²¹ V. Clayton and J. E. Birren, "The Development of Wisdom Across The Lifespan: A Reexamination Of An Ancient Topic," In *Life-Span Development And Behavior*, P. B. Baltes & O. G. Brim Jr. eds. Vol. 3, (1980): 103-135.

contributing to greater wisdom. It encourages seeking input from others, considering different perspectives, and remaining open to new ideas.¹²² Swartwood and Tiberius consider experience and perspective to be essential aspects of wisdom.¹²³ They believe that a broad range of life experiences provides opportunities for learning and growth, allowing individuals to develop a more comprehensive perspective on life's challenges and complexities.¹²⁴ Such perspectives and experiences can be thought of as they contribute to future generations' growth and reinforce the idea of wisdom as a shared resource.

The Relationship Between Epistemology and Wisdom

From the survey thus far, one can correlate the nexus between epistemology and wisdom as interconnected areas of philosophy that study knowledge, belief, and justification. Epistemology examines the nature, limits, and sources of knowledge, while wisdom involves sound judgment, insight, and the ability to make good decisions based on knowledge and experience. Wisdom is a goal of epistemology, argued to be a desirable outcome of the epistemic process, focusing on using knowledge to better oneself and society. Together, they form a framework for understanding how humans come to know, what they do with that knowledge, and how they navigate the complexities of life with discernment and sound judgment. Gericke identifies that epistemic virtues, such as intellectual humility, open-mindedness, and critical thinking, contribute to wisdom by enabling individuals to acquire and evaluate

¹²² Kaylin Ratner and Anthony L. Burrow, "Identity and Purpose in Life As Building Blocks for Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom* Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 519-538.

¹²³ Jason Swartwood and Valerie Tiberius, "Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom* Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 24-34.

¹²⁴ Swartwood and Tiberius, "Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom."

knowledge effectively.¹²⁵ Wisdom has an ethical dimension, involving knowing what is true and applying it morally and ethically soundly, often leading to actions that benefit individuals and society.

Wisdom in Biblical Perspectives

According to Psalm 14:1 and 53:1, wisdom in the Bible is described as skillfully living in light of God’s revelation. It is not primarily about information but how one uses it and impacts judgements. It is the antithesis of foolishness—a deliberate rejection of God’s plans that stems from a heart full of disobedience. In ancient Israel, wisdom was valued highly and imparted at home (Prov. 1:8; 4:1–4; 6–20; 23:22), at schools (Sirach 51:23), and in the royal court (1 Kings 4–19).¹²⁶ The book of Proverbs indicates that fathers, mothers, and other teachers and instructors taught children in the home. There is no direct evidence for formal education in Israel until the first century AD. However, scholars suggest that with the institution of the monarchy, some formal education was carried out within the court.¹²⁷

According to Bradshaw, wisdom in the Ancient Near East evolved from an attribute of high gods Re and Osiris, Maat, to be worshipped independently by the 18th Dynasty.¹²⁸ In Egypt, the Teaching of Amenemope, a papyri document, is significant as it resembles Proverbs 22:17–24:22. The connection between the two works is most substantial between Proverbs 22:20 and Amenemope 27:7, with Amenemope providing ethical advice and Proverbs adding a reason for following it.¹²⁹ The Israelite

¹²⁵ Gericke, “The concept of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible – A comparative-philosophical analysis,” 1–2.

¹²⁶ Robert Bradshaw, “Wisdom,” https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_wisdom2.html

¹²⁷ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 50.

¹²⁸ Bradshaw, “Wisdom,” https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_wisdom2.html

¹²⁹ Ibid.

wisdom literature emphasises people rather than deeds, with men divided into two groups and contrasted as good and evil. The similarities between the two works can be explained by everyday life experiences shared by both Israelites and Egyptians. Bradshaw further asserts that in Babylonia, “wisdom” refers to “skill in cult and magic law” rather than moral living.¹³⁰ Despite the lack of extant Babylonian proverbs, they demonstrate the widespread production and recitation of proverbs in the Ancient Near East.

Wisdom literature in the Old Testament is written in poetry, incorporating parallelism of ideas and features to aid memorisation and emotional response. Bradshaw identifies five units: address, imperative, motive, imperative, and consequence, with the personification of wisdom being a development of this structure.¹³¹ Shorter Proverbs use parallelisms, such as synonymous, antithetical, and step parallelism, to aid memorisation. Acrostic is a literary device used in poetry, with each story beginning with a Hebrew alphabet letter. The personification of wisdom makes the poetic imagery more vivid, with Proverbs beginning and ending with a personification of wisdom as the ideal wife. Though it lacks references to critical events in Israel’s history, much of the subject matter is universal in the Ancient Near East.¹³² The concept of Israelites’ fear of the Lord is the unique starting point for true wisdom, and wisdom is vividly personified as the instrument of God’s world creation, emphasising God’s immanence and involvement with his creatures.

The story of the Book of Job challenges the traditional understanding of God’s dealings with his creation. It features speeches by various characters, including Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu, and God himself. The Narrator introduces and closes the story, assuming the acceptance of a doctrine of

¹³⁰ Bradshaw, 10.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

retribution. Job, innocent yet allowed to endure undeserved woes, is now the victim of the other side of the doctrine (Job 1:1-5). Job's three friends each have different ideas about why Job suffered such a reversal of fortune. Eliphaz, Job's friend, affirms his belief in retribution, while Bildad is the most rigid and dogmatic. Job's speech increasingly demands that God would answer and vindicate him, proving an exception to the doctrine of retribution (7:17-21; 9:14-35-10:2; 13:3, 15-23; 19:7, 25-27; 31:1-40).¹³³ The Lord, speaking to Job out of the storm, does not answer his questions and challenges, pointing out that Job had no part in the creation process and did not understand the ways of animals. Job accepts the Lord's request to tame the chaos monsters Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15-41:34), and the epilogue by the Narrator renews the doctrine of retribution.¹³⁴ Job presents a different view of sickness in the Old Testament, urging the reader to grapple with God's existence and find true wisdom.

Ecclesiastes, the third canonical wisdom book, According to Bradshaw is considered the most enigmatic as it repeatedly emphasises the meaninglessness of everything (Eccl. 1:2, 14; 2:1, 17, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 5:7; 6:2, 9; 7:6; 12:8).¹³⁵ The writer of Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth, systematically examines all areas of life, including wisdom, pleasure, wine, wealth, wives, and toil. He advises readers to enjoy each day as it comes and try to please God, as eventually, God will bring all deeds to judgment. Qoheleth is often critical of the judgements of wisdom but stands within that tradition, stating that wisdom is better than folly and has many benefits, yet ultimately, both end in death.

The number of Wisdom Psalms is subjective, and lists vary from scholar to scholar. Roland Murphy has classified Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, and 128 as wisdom with a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked, advice about conduct

¹³³ Bradshaw, 14.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

that results in either welfare or misfortune, the premise that “the fear (reverence) of Yahweh.” He refers to this as the starting point of wisdom, comparisons and admonitions used to exhort one to good conduct.¹³⁶

Two of the intertestamental literature, the Wisdom of Ecclesiasticus, also known as the Wisdom of Jesus, is a work from 180 BC that follows the style of Proverbs and develops themes such as personification and the “fear of the Lord” (1:9-20).¹³⁷ It emphasises the importance of Law and Salvation History as expressions of wisdom among God’s people in Israel. The Wisdom of Solomon is another, believed to have originated in the Hellenistic era, introducing the concept of the immortality of the righteous, explaining the sufferings of the righteous through God’s testing (Wisdom 3:1-6). Bradshaw states, “The book is notable for the way it fuses Wisdom with Salvation History (10:1-19:22).”¹³⁸

The New Testament is a rich tapestry of wisdom in the life and ministry of Christ. Jesus is often depicted as wise, understanding beyond his years and declaring himself greater than Solomon. He reveals God’s wisdom to those who should have recognised the wisdom. The teaching of Jesus is illustrated through parables, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Jesus promised his disciples would receive unique wisdom to know what to say when put on trial for their faith. Peter’s speech to the Sanhedrin exemplifies this, and Stephen was selected to serve at tables because he was “full of the Spirit and wisdom.” Paul’s writings also highlight the importance of wisdom, arguing that it is the

¹³⁶ Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2nd Edn. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 103.

¹³⁷ Bradshaw, 16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

message of the crucified Messiah and requires a work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart to make it understandable.¹³⁹

Finally, the Epistle of James emphasises the importance of wisdom in the Christian life, advising believers to seek wisdom from God, which trials are not signs of displeasure but rather a means by which God allows his children to be tested and rewards them (1:27; 3:13, 16-17). True wisdom is possible through Jesus Christ, who became wisdom for the world. Biblical wisdom provides a framework for decision-making, but it is not a purely intellectual exercise.

Comparative Analysis of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10

Proverbs 1:7 and Proverbs 9:10 emphasise the importance of the fear of the Lord as the foundation for knowledge and wisdom. Both verses link knowledge and wisdom to a reverent and respectful attitude towards God. However, Proverbs 1:7 places knowledge first and then mentions wisdom, while Proverbs 9:10 starts with wisdom and then talks about understanding. Proverbs 1:7 mentions "fools" who despise wisdom and instruction, highlighting the consequences of not having the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 specifically emphasises "knowledge of the Holy One," underlining the importance of understanding God.

Proverbs 1:7 addresses the rejection of wisdom and instruction by fools, implying that knowledge and wisdom cannot be attained without the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 focuses on the idea that true wisdom and understanding come from knowing the Holy One, suggesting a deeper, more spiritual dimension to wisdom. Both verses underscore the spiritual and moral dimension of knowledge and wisdom in the book of Proverbs. Shared Emphasis on the "Fear of the LORD": Both verses emphasise the importance of the "fear of the LORD" as a foundation for knowledge and wisdom. In biblical terms,

¹³⁹ Ibid., 18.

fearing the LORD does not mean being terrified but acknowledging His authority, reverence, and devotion.

The two verses have two issues, which are analysed here:

First, the Beginning of Knowledge vs. The Beginning of Wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 states that the fear of the LORD is the “beginning of knowledge,” highlighting that a humble acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty is the starting point for acquiring knowledge. In contrast, Proverbs 9:10 elevates this concept by asserting that the fear of the LORD is the “beginning of wisdom.” In this context, wisdom goes beyond mere knowledge; it signifies the application of knowledge in a righteous and godly manner. Thus, Proverbs 9:10 suggests that wisdom is built upon the foundation of knowledge grounded in the fear of the LORD. Both verses emphasise the importance of the fear of the Lord as the foundation for knowledge and wisdom.¹⁴⁰ The first verse emphasises the importance of humility and learning from God.

In contrast, the second verse associates the fear of the Lord with wisdom, emphasising the connection between knowledge and understanding. Knowledge and wisdom are central themes in both verses, with Proverbs 1:7 emphasising the acquisition of knowledge and the rejection of foolishness and Proverbs 9:10 emphasising the connection between wisdom and understanding. Both verses convey that a deep reverence for God is essential for acquiring knowledge and wisdom.

Second, Fools Despise Wisdom vs. Knowledge of the Holy One is Understanding. Proverbs 1:7 points out that “fools despise wisdom and instruction.” It highlights the negative consequences of rejecting wisdom and the lessons God offers. On the other hand, Proverbs 9:10 offers a more positive

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth H. P. Backfish, “Biblical Wisdom as a Model for Christian Liberal Arts Education,” *Christian Higher Education* Vol. 18, 5 (2019): 382–396.

perspective by stating that the “knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” This suggests that understanding, a deeper and more profound aspect of knowledge, comes from knowing and acknowledging God. It implies that those who seek understanding should do so by knowing and revering the Holy One.

Both verses emphasise the importance of reverence and respect for God as the foundation for wisdom and knowledge. They suggest that the fear of the Lord is the starting point for either knowledge or wisdom, emphasising the development of wisdom and understanding through a relationship with God. Luke Emehiele Ijezie also mentions other ways, which include but not limited to “fear of God (Prov 1:7), obedient listening (Prov 8:33; 19:20; 23:19), experience (Sir 39:8-13) and association with the wise (Prov 9:9; 13:20; 21:11).”¹⁴¹ Proverbs 1:7 emphasises the negative aspect of foolishness, despising wisdom and instruction, suggesting that rejecting wisdom and instruction is a characteristic of fools. Proverbs 9:10, on the other hand, emphasises the positive outcomes of wisdom and understanding due to the fear of the Lord and knowledge of the Holy One, suggesting that wisdom and understanding are the rewards of a reverent relationship with God. Therefore, the fear of the Lord is a foundational principle for acquiring wisdom and knowledge, emphasising the need for a deep reverence for God as the pathway to acquiring these virtues.

The Epistemological Significance of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10

These verses hold significant epistemological and philosophical implications, particularly in the context of religious and moral knowledge. Proverbs 1:7 emphasises the foundational role of reverence for God in acquiring knowledge. From an epistemological standpoint, it suggests that one’s worldview and understanding of the world should start with a humble

¹⁴¹ Luke Emehiele Ijezie, “Biblical Wisdom as Foundation for Human Growth and National Greatness: A Paradigm for Post-Centenary Nigeria,” *JORAS*, 4 (2014): 44.

acknowledgement of a higher power or divine source of wisdom. In this perspective, knowledge is seen as a pursuit that should be grounded in a sense of awe and respect for God, which, according to Ijezie, can only be achieved through the knowledge of the word of God.¹⁴² Proverbs 9:10, like Proverbs 1:7, underscores the centrality of a reverent relationship with God in acquiring wisdom and understanding. It implies that true wisdom is not merely the accumulation of facts or intellectual prowess but is intimately connected to a deep and respectful knowledge of God. In this sense, it suggests that one's faith and spiritual beliefs profoundly shape their worldview and understanding of reality.¹⁴³ The epistemological significance of these verses can be understood in several ways:

First, faith or a religious worldview can be foundational to one's epistemological framework.¹⁴⁴ One's beliefs about God and the divine are central to understanding the world, morality, and knowledge. In an epistemological context, these verses suggest that one's faith or relationship with God is foundational in acquiring knowledge and wisdom. Faith provides a framework for understanding the world, one's place, and ethical principles. It also implies recognising moral and ethical standards set by a higher authority, which guide individuals in discerning right from wrong.

The fear of the LORD can also be seen as an attitude of humility and openness to learning, encouraging a receptive mindset in the pursuit of knowledge.¹⁴⁵ However, their interpretation may vary among different faith traditions. Some may view these verses as a call to prioritise religious faith as the basis for all

¹⁴² Ijezie, 42.

¹⁴³ Joseph W. Koterski, *Biblical Wisdom Literature: Course Guidebook* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Great Courses, 2009), 75.

¹⁴⁴ Paul McLaughlin and Mark R. McMinn, "Studying Wisdom: Toward a Christian Integrative Perspective," *Faculty Publications - Grad School of Clinical Psychology Paper 138* (2015): http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/138.

¹⁴⁵ Gericke, 1-2.

knowledge, while others emphasise the importance of a solid moral and ethical foundation. While faith is presented as a foundational element in these verses, it does not negate the value of other forms of knowledge, such as empirical, scientific, or experiential knowledge.¹⁴⁶ It coexists with a broader epistemological framework that includes various knowledge acquisition methods.

Second, the verses link knowledge and wisdom to moral and ethical considerations. They suggest that true knowledge and wisdom are not divorced from one's moral character but are closely tied to a virtuous and reverent life. Daniel J. Estes opines, "Godly wisdom produces good character that reflects God's values."¹⁴⁷ The passages under consideration contrast the pursuit of knowledge with foolishness, implying that knowledge divorced from a moral and reverent attitude is considered foolish. Epistemologically, understanding of wisdom includes moral discernment and a deep understanding of God's ways, underscoring that morality and ethics are intimately tied to knowledge and wisdom. Fearing the Lord implies living a life under God's moral principles, the foundation of true wisdom and serves as a moral compass, guiding individuals in their decision-making processes. Lastly, the verses emphasise humility, implying that true understanding begins with recognising one's limitations and dependence on a higher moral authority.¹⁴⁸

Third, the "fear of the Lord" concept calls for openness in pursuing knowledge, encouraging individuals to approach learning with awe and recognise their limitations in the face of divine wisdom. True knowledge begins with the fear of the Lord, which can be understood by reverence to the face of divine wisdom and understanding. The idea is that knowledge of the

¹⁴⁶ Koterski, 151.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel J. Estes, *The Message of Wisdom: Learning and Living the Way of the Lord* (Causton Street, London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2020), 19.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Holy One leads to understanding. This is because true wisdom and understanding are rooted in a relationship with a divine source and a willingness to be open to the insights and guidance it provides. In the words of Charles Bridges, “Of all knowledge—the knowledge of God is the principal. There is no true knowledge without godliness.”¹⁴⁹ The “fear of the Lord” concept introduces a spiritual dimension to epistemology that knowledge and wisdom are not solely the products of human reason and experience but are also influenced by one’s relationship with a divine source.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the epistemological significance of these verses is primarily within a religious or faith-based context. Different philosophical and religious traditions have their perspectives on the relationship between faith, knowledge, and wisdom, which offer insights into how some believers view the integration of faith and knowledge in their worldview.

Integration of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 for Belief in the Existence of God

The recognition and reverence of God is the foundation upon which knowledge and wisdom are built. This means acknowledging the Divine is the first step towards understanding the profound truths of the universe. Those who deny or reject God’s existence may be seen as lacking the fundamental understanding needed for true wisdom and knowledge. Proverbs 9:10 reinforces that a proper relationship with God is essential for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Belief in God, as the Holy One, leads to a deeper comprehension of the world, including its origins and purpose. It suggests that acknowledging God’s existence and seeking a connection with the Divine is the pathway to true wisdom and a fuller understanding of life’s mysteries. The belief in God’s existence is foundational to gaining knowledge,

¹⁴⁹ Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of the Book of Proverbs* (West Linn, Oregon: Monergism Books, 2021), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

wisdom, and understanding, and the fear of the Lord serves as the starting point for a meaningful exploration of life's profound questions, reinforcing the role of faith in God as a cornerstone of wisdom and knowledge in a Christian worldview.¹⁵¹ As stated elsewhere, "fear" does not refer to dread or terror but signifies reverence, awe, and a deep respect for God. By acknowledging the existence of God and approaching Him with reverence, individuals open themselves to a greater understanding of the world around them, which provides a moral and intellectual compass. The fear of the Lord encourages individuals to live virtuously and pursue wisdom. This aligns with the idea that God is the source of moral truth and that recognising His existence leads to a more virtuous and enlightened life.

Contemporary theologians argue that science can help better understand the natural world, while theology provides insight into existence's metaphysical and ethical dimensions.¹⁵² This suggests that belief in God provides a moral and ethical framework that guides human behaviour and helps individuals discern right from wrong. In this increasingly diverse and interconnected world, it promotes interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogues, reminding that different religious and philosophical traditions may share common threads, such as recognising the importance of a divine presence in acquiring wisdom and understanding.¹⁵³

In the context of belief in God, knowledge is the awareness of His existence, while wisdom involves living a life following His principles. Belief in God is not just an intellectual exercise but a source of profound understanding about the nature of the

¹⁵¹ Woodrow Kroll, *Proverbs: The Pursuit of God's Wisdom* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 10-14.

¹⁵² "Religion and Science," First published Tue Jan 17, 2017; substantive revision Sat Sep 3, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-science>.

¹⁵³ James Ungureanu, *Science, Religion, and the Protestant Tradition: Retracing the Origins of Conflict* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

universe, morality, and the purpose of life. Knowledge can refer to factual information or awareness, while wisdom involves applying that knowledge in a meaningful and righteous way. Proverbs 1:7 warns against rejecting the knowledge and wisdom that come from acknowledging God, as dismissing or denying it may be seen as rejecting an essential source of wisdom and understanding. Therefore, belief in God is the source of profound knowledge and wisdom, enriching one's understanding of life and the world.

These verses also highlight the contrast between those who embrace the fear of the Lord and those who reject it as fools. Skepticism and the denial of God's existence can be seen as a form of folly, according to the wisdom presented in Proverbs. This perspective suggests that belief in God is the path to wisdom and a safeguard against intellectual arrogance and moral decay. Although skepticism is a component of intellectual inquiry, encouraging individuals to question, doubt, and seek evidence, balancing skepticism and faith is crucial, as it prompts questions and critical thinking while remaining open to the possibility of the divine and acknowledging God's existence as the foundation of wisdom and knowledge.¹⁵⁴ Some skeptists acknowledge the role of intellectual exploration but caution against outright rejection without sincere inquiry, as it may lead to folly and a lack of wisdom. Another line of thinking that included skeptical elements was that of the followers of William of Ockham (1285–1347), who explored the logical consequences of the belief that God is the origin of all knowledge. They examined puzzles about whether God could deceive humankind, regardless of the evidence, and about whether he could render all human reasoning open to doubt.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Richard H. Popkin, "Skepticism: Definition, Philosophy, Examples, History, & Criticism," *Britannica* (Sep 30, 2023).
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/skepticism>

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

On a personal level, integrating Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 encourages individuals to deepen their faith and seek a closer relationship with God. Believing in the existence of God and approaching life with reverence leads to a more meaningful and purposeful journey of personal and spiritual growth. To achieve true wisdom, one must first recognise the source of wisdom, a reverent fear of the Lord. This involves identifying God's supreme authority and sovereignty over all things and understanding that worldly knowledge is incomplete without spiritual wisdom rooted in faith. Cultivating a deep reverence for God involves a sense of awe, respect, and submission to His will, which can be nurtured through prayer, meditation, and worship.

Trusting in God's wisdom and understanding is essential for navigating life's challenges and decisions by praying to Him and seeking His guidance in all aspects of life. Embrace a humble and teachable spirit, open to receiving wisdom and instruction from God's Word and others who walk in faith. As one deepens their fear of the Lord and seeks His knowledge, they will grow in understanding God and His ways. This understanding will shape their character, values, and actions, leading to personal transformation and spiritual growth.

Implications and Applications

Several implications and applications can be drawn from this study, but only some are considered here.

First is the foundation of knowledge and wisdom through acknowledging God in pursuing knowledge and understanding. This is because true knowledge and wisdom are not detached from spirituality but are deeply rooted in a relationship with God. This implies that true knowledge starts with a humble and receptive attitude, requiring one to acknowledge one's limitations and seek guidance.

Through moral and spiritual guidance, individuals align their actions and decisions with a higher moral authority (God), which is the foundation of wisdom because true knowledge is rooted in understanding and acknowledging God's ways and principles. It promotes ethical decision-making, encouraging individuals to consider their relationship with a higher power and seek guidance from their faith or moral values. This opens a discussion about the importance of faith and moral values in various religious and philosophical traditions, fostering dialogue and mutual respect among people of different beliefs.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, knowledge and wisdom's foundational role in life is humility, moral values, and reverence for a higher power.

Second, while Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 stress the fear of the LORD, Proverbs 9:10 takes the concept further by associating it with a higher level of understanding. Wisdom involves a deeper and more profound comprehension of life and God's ways, which can be applied in various contexts, including personal development, ethics, leadership, and decision-making. The end product will be personal development, which involves recognising that a humble and respectful attitude towards life, others, and the mysteries of existence can lead to personal growth. This is achieved through decision-making, which involves considering moral and spiritual aspects in ethical dilemmas, with the fear of the Lord serving as a driving force.

Third, Proverbs 1:7 warns against the consequences of rejecting wisdom and instruction, labelling those who do so as "fools." This is a cautionary message about the dangers of pride and arrogance that hinder one from seeking wisdom. Rejecting wisdom here would mean neglecting the spiritual dimension of life and failing to acknowledge the source of ultimate knowledge. Rejecting wisdom can lead to moral decay,

¹⁵⁶ Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books Job, Proverbs, And Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 306.

unethical behaviour, and social chaos. It can also result in spiritual emptiness and a lack of understanding, leading to a sense of disconnectedness from deeper spiritual truths.¹⁵⁷ Closed-mindedness can manifest as a refusal to listen to advice, learn from mistakes, or consider alternative perspectives, hindering personal and collective growth.

Epistemologically, genuine knowledge and wisdom involve moral and spiritual dimensions. Rejecting this holistic understanding may result in an incomplete education. Therefore, fear of the Lord as the foundation for knowledge and insight and rejecting wisdom implies disregarding moral, ethical, and spiritual principles, leading to negative consequences for individuals and society.

Fourth, a holistic approach to knowledge and wisdom that integrates spirituality, morality, and understanding into one's life underscores that genuine wisdom is about acquiring facts and living according to divine principles. True knowledge and wisdom have a spiritual foundation and holistic approach to learning that recognises the spiritual and moral dimensions.

Knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are interconnected. Knowledge alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by wisdom, the ability to apply knowledge morally and ethically. Knowledge and wisdom involve a personal commitment to seek and understand the divine and live in alignment with their beliefs—imparting knowledge and fostering character development and reasoning in educational settings. Schools and institutions should incorporate moral and spiritual education into a well-rounded curriculum.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 reveals their shared emphasis on the “fear of the LORD” as the foundation of

¹⁵⁷ Alter, *The Wisdom Books Job, Proverbs, And Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary*.

knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 9:10 highlights a deeper level of understanding. Both verses offer valuable insights into the role of spirituality in acquiring wisdom and the consequences of rejecting it. They serve as timeless lessons for individuals seeking to live righteous and meaningful lives grounded in the fear and reverence of God. The study highlights the importance of presuppositions in pursuing wisdom, highlighting the need for a theistic presupposition that assumes God's existence as the source of all knowledge and wisdom. This belief is essential for a meaningful epistemological foundation. Theism not only provides a foundation for wisdom but also allows for profound insight and comprehension. The analysis encourages recognising presupposition's epistemological significance and reflecting on how it shapes the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge.

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