

Wisdom as an Immanent Event in Job 28, Not a Transcendent Ideal

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A man plucked a nightingale and,
finding but little to eat, said:
'You are just a voice and nothing more.'

Plutarch, *Moralia: Sayings of the Spartans*

Abstract

Job 28 poses several interpretive difficulties: its reflections about wisdom seem disembodied and misplaced within the dialogue; its content, especially the final verse, seems ill-fit for the issues the book raises. Much interpretive discomfort with the poem stems from the misconception that it presents human inaccessibility to wisdom in opposition to God's accessibility. By reassessing the poem as moving rhetorically from a metonymic (in vv.1-19) to a metaphoric logic (in vv.20-28), this article demonstrates that wisdom is displaced throughout the poem—from humans, God, and creation. Job 28 primarily opposes two different ways of relating to this displaced wisdom: the metonymic search that evokes wisdom as perpetually transcendent, versus the discovery of wisdom in metaphoric effects that appear as displaced from their causes. This reinterpretation enables more nuanced readings of v.28 as an appositive metaphor, and of the poem's displacement in the book as appropriate to its teachings about wisdom.

Keywords

wisdom, Job, metonymy, metaphor, literary theory, rhetorical criticism

Introduction, Structure, and Movement

Initially Job 28 appears to have three sections: vv.1-11, 12-19, and 20-28.¹ The first describes the hidden places of precious and useful metals and the human quest to search them out. But vv.1-11 do not only describe such a quest, they also

¹ For various positions on the structure of the poem, see Lugt, pp. 315-316.

foster in readers the subtle sense that something else lies on the horizon, better than precious metals, yet-to-be-clarified, and soon-to-be-revealed.² The second section (vv.12-19) begins by disambiguating this entity that humans cannot find; it is wisdom. The poem thus instills in readers the same desire—to seek out what is precious—that animates the activities it describes. The second and third sections are nicely parallel thanks to the nearly repeated refrain (vv.12, 20) and the responses to the refrain's questions with respect to living beings (vv.13, 21) and mythic, cosmic beings (vv.14, 22). These parallels highlight the opposition between the content of each subsection: vv.15-19 recount a series of failures of even the most valuable human riches to measure up to wisdom, whereas vv.23-27 report that God understands wisdom's way, knows its place, and encounters it in creation.

On most accounts the poem's movement opposes divine access to wisdom to human inaccessibility. Yet God does not access wisdom directly in vv.23-27. God perceives wisdom only after it appears, surprisingly displaced from God's creative activities. After vv.1-19 depict wisdom as metonymically evoked by but transcendent to the human quest for precious objects, wisdom appears in vv.23-27 like a metaphor's meaning-effects, which are irreducible to the elements out of which they arise. Recognizing this metaphoric logic in the poem's final section leads to a reading of the concluding verse (v.28) as an appositive metaphor that asserts that wisdom is available to humans through the fear of the Lord just as it was available to God at creation. Finally, since wisdom's essential characteristic in the poem is its appearance as displaced, this article turns to view the poem's apparent displacement within the book as evidence that it fulfills what it has led us to expect regarding the presentation of wisdom. In short, this article contends that Job 28's true sage is the fearer who perceives the surprising event of wisdom's immanent appearance, and who resists the futile quest for wisdom as a transcendent ideal.

² The poem creates this sense of lack in various ways. It oddly begins with the particle כִּי. It also proleptically fails to specify the subject of the verb יָשַׁב and the referent of the independent pronoun in v.3. These ambiguities raise difficulties addressed in more detail below. Without resorting to conjectural emendation, the uncertainty can be understood in terms of its dramatic effect. Because the reader must wait until v.13a before the subject is clearly specified, the difference is highlighted between the human who searches for wisdom at every limit, and Elohim who looks to the ends of all the earth and knows its place (vv.23-24).

Mediation and the Hermeneutics of Mining (vv.1-11)

Verses 1-11 divide into five parts that proceed as follows:

vv.1-2	A	Objects hidden and impure
vv.3-4	B	Human ambition
vv.5-6	A'	Objects hidden and impure
vv.7-8	C	The difference with animals
vv.9-11	B'	Human ambition

Figure 1. Job 28:1-11

The exceptional subsection is not the central/third, as one would expect, but the fourth (C). A quasi-scientific, geologic interest guides this parallel alternation between *objects hidden and unrefined* (A) and *human ambition* (B). Conventional readings have been guided by vertical images of a miner descending into shafts to get precious metals. Recently Jones proposed horizontal images of a king traveling to the far-reaches of the world to get precious metals.³ For both, the dominant opposition exploited throughout vv.1-11 is surface to depth, immediate proximity to mediated distance.

References to the hidden places of precious metals frame the first subsection (vv.1-2):

- v.1a: Surely silver has a vein (מוצא)
- v.2b: And rock pours forth⁴ (יצוק) copper

³ Jones, p. 35, contends for the horizontal image by reading this section “against the exploits of Mesopotamian kings out to the borders of the world into treacherous and uninhabited regions full of wealth.”

⁴ This verb could be the Qal passive participle of יצק or the Qal imperfect 3ms of צוק. The two roots are likely byforms, both meaning “to pour out.” The parallel with the passive verb in v.2a makes the passive reading appealing (cf. Habel, p. 389). But then the need arises to gap the corresponding preposition, which is possible, but less appealing than the finite reading, which requires no importation of words. But since “rock” is usually feminine one would not expect the masculine conjugation. However, the latter is attested in a minority of cases (Eccl 10:9; 1 Sam 17:40). יצוק also functions adjectivally to mean “hard” in Job 41:15, 16a, 16b, which would mean that it modifies rock here and that the verb from v.2a is gapped (cf. HALOT, p. 428): “Iron from dirt is taken, and copper [from] hard rock.” Yet this translation suffers from the difficulties of both previous translations: gender disagreement and the need to gap not only the preposition but also the verb from v.2a. To be sure, none of these solutions renders opposed or exclusive meanings.

The parallel terms—“vein” (literally: “a place of exit”) and “pour forth”—both denote outward movement, suggesting the necessity of re-tracing inwards or downwards to find the source. What is manifest on the surface is impure; it requires mediation before its value is realized. Thus the lines framed by these terms read:

- v.1b: And a place where gold is refined
- v.2a: Iron from dirt is taken

Verse 1b speaks of refining—the process of removing mediating materials, and v.2a speaks of iron being taken from dirt, i.e., dross. Even when valuable materials are on the surface, the mediating dross nonetheless places them on the other side of a necessary process of sifting. The two lines in v.2 thus present four materials that are semantically parallel in an inverted, chiasmic pattern (*abba*):⁵

iron	dirt	rock	copper
base metal	material locus	material locus	base metal
a	b	b'	a'

Figure 2. Job 28:2

As Jones rightly notes, this verse “offers contrast of surface and depth. While copper lies deep inside ‘hard rock’ . . . iron ore deposits are found on the surface, that is, in the loose earth here called *עֶפְרָה*.”⁶ Whether on or below the surface, some mediating work is necessary to extract something more valuable from the immediately available but less valuable materials.

Verses 3-4 turn to the work of mediation between surface and depth, work carried out by an apprehending subject.⁷ The initial imagery is specular,

I chose the verbal reading “pour forth” because of its poetic complementarity with the sense of outward movement present in “place of exit” (*מוצא*) in v.1, and the finite conjugation since, if “rock” is here the subject of a masculine verb as it is elsewhere, then one need not hypothesize a gapped term.

⁵ On parallelism and its semantic aspect in particular, see Berlin, pp. 64-102.

⁶ Jones, p. 43.

⁷ Verse 3 is quite difficult. Neither most interpreters nor I follow Duhm’s reading of two cola—although Gordis, 1978, p. 300, provides an especially tempting translation that takes “stone” as lava, a fitting subject for *פִּרְץ*: “Lava, dark and pitch black, cleaves a channel from the crater, never

exploring the possibilities of searching/finding without light: “he puts an end to darkness, and to every limit he searches, for the stone in thick, deep darkness” (v.3).⁸ Verse 4 shifts compellingly from images of darkness to those of loneliness; all of this activity is done apart from settled society, even from nomads.⁹

Verses 5-6 return to the world of objects and the opposition between surface and depth that characterizes them. This time the opposition is exaggerated. Unlike in v.1 where something valuable emerges out of a less-valued material, v.5a evokes the pastoral scene of food sprouting from the earth—a wheat field?—which is followed by and contrasted to the violence that lies just beneath: “but under which is roiling, like fire (v.5b).”¹⁰ The material medium (i.e., “land”) is here a pale, mediating line between fire—roiling, untamed, devouring—and food—verdant, cultivated, nourishing.

Verses 9-11 return to the subject of inquiry. The difficulty of the mediation is again emphasized, but it is clear that much has been accomplished. The hardness of the flint and the mass of the mountains are circumvented by effort; the result: “his eye sees every precious thing . . . and its hidden things he brings to light” (vv.10-11). Thus, before turning to the peculiar reference to animals in vv.7-8, I propose a more formal description of this section’s movement: object (vv.1-2) → subject (vv.3-4) → object (vv.5-6) → subject (vv.9-11).

trodden by human foot, bereft even of wandering men.” I opt instead to follow the masoretic punctuation, reading vv.3 and 4 as tricola. I find that the poetic context makes the awkwardness of v.3’s truncated third line more palatable than two lines *extra metrum*.

⁸ Elsewhere אפל precedes צלמות as if together they signify a single, gloomy, thick darkness. In 10:22 they occur together in a cola adjacent to two different uses of the same words—אפל in v.22b and צלמות in v.21b. Thus I read the two as they occur together here in an adverbial sense, specifying the context of the object sought.

⁹ Numerous emendations have been proposed to deal with v.4’s various problems, but the sense that a (wet or dry) bed breaks through in an uninhabited and untraveled place remains across all proposals. Two issues are relevant here. First, I agree with Habel, p. 390: “the forceful threefold repetition of *min*, ‘from,’ in the sense of ‘away/far from’ argues for retaining the text and rendering ‘*gār*’ as ‘sojourner,’ parallel with ‘human feet’ of travelers in 4b.” Second, while the verb “suspended” (דלו) may have a more specific meaning (e.g., miners who are suspended in a shaft that is located far from society), it should be left unspecified so as not to rule out the figurative meaning of דלל, commonly seen in the consonantly identical noun דל, “to languish” or “to be poor, unimportant, powerless, abject” (see *HALOT*, pp. 221-222).

¹⁰ In the niphāl הפך often has a datival indirect object, marked by the ל preposition, denoting that one thing has “turned into” something else. With other prepositions, however, the niphāl often assumes an intransitive, even reciprocal sense like the hithpael (as in Gen 3:24), designating the grammatical subject’s continuous (over)turning. So, Lam 1:20, “My heart roils within me.”

Verses 7-8 depart from this alternation between object and subject, if only to shed a particular light on it. Each of the four verbs in the two lines is negated by the particle אֵין and has as its subject animals such as birds-of-prey and “proud-beasts,” animals capable of seeing and traveling great lengths. Four times one reads about some relationship one of these masterful animals does not have to that far-away, lonely, dark depth that is the source of valued materials. One is not told anything positive about these animals; they are mere instruments used to instruct readers about what is “not-them.” Whereas these animals cannot know, see, tread, or pass over this path, something or someone else can and does.

The difference with animals established by vv.7-8 stems from the difference between the activities negated of the animals and affirmed of humans. Where the animals do not know, see, tread, or pass over this path, the humans wander far away (v.4), search it out (v.3), overturn mountains (v.9), cleave channels (v.10), and bring to light its hidden things (v.11). The poem does not absurdly assert that humans have better sight than birds of prey, or can get to paths that “proud-beasts” cannot. It rather suggests that such paths must be forged, being nonexistent until created by human effort, which is animated by human desire, a force that pushes humans beyond the (animal) realm of surfaces and light, and into the dark depths of hidden things. There is a realm available to humans that even the most capable animals, though far superior to humans in many ways, cannot access. These verses’ formal movement can then be (re)specified as follows:

vv.1-2	object
vv.3-4	subject
vv.5-6	object
vv.7-8	nonsubject
vv.9-11	subject

Figure 3. Job 28:1-11 (2)

Verses 1-11 not only describe human subjects as capable of mediating an objective world split between surfaces and depths, they also oppose the achievements of *desiring* human subjects to the mere *instinctual* activities of (nonsubjective) animals.

Wisdom's Metonymic Displacement (vv.12-19)

Thus far I have presumed a human subject for the activities in vv.3-11. The subject of the verbs is unspecified, however, and some argue that it is God.¹¹ The empirical evidence unequivocally supports this minority opinion since the activities attributed to the subject of vv.3-11 are typically divine, not human. So, Greenstein writes, "These acts may have pale reflections in certain human activities, but it seems to me highly doubtful that any Biblical author, even the iconoclastic poet of Job, would attribute the prerogatives of the divine creator to mere mortals."¹² So why not read God as the subject of vv.3-11? First, this reading diminishes the poem's aesthetic value and rhetorical effectiveness. If the verbs in vv.3-11 have a divine subject, then the poem celebrates divine achievements with respect to precious metals in vv.3-11, and divine achievements with respect to wisdom in vv.23-27. There is nothing *necessarily* problematic about these celebrations. Yet their co-presence is unfortunate in light of the intervening vv.15-19, which incessantly and completely exclude wisdom from precious metals. One cost of a divine subject in vv.3-11 is a less coherent and less effective poem.

Second, the poem becomes particularly compelling poem when a human subject is read in vv.3-11. On this reading, by attributing to humans typically divine activities and then opposing humans to animals, vv.1-11 initially sound like a hymnic celebration of human achievement. One first expects Job 28 is, like Psalm 8, elevating humans above their animality to a status slightly less than gods. Only this reading permits the rhetorical shock to register when vv.12-14 report that these numerous efforts at mediation and endless quests for what is valuable crash onto the bedrock of a fundamental limit. Readers must gather their thoughts and reevaluate vv.1-11 as, retroactively, one long allusion to a fundamental problem of human *limitation*. What initially reads like exuberant humanism praising humans' nearly divine capabilities, turns unexpectedly toward one divine capability that they do not even approach.

Two conclusions follow. First, while vv.1-11 initially stand on their own, after v.12 they read as introductory material for what follows. Thus what I have called the poem's first two movements (vv.1-11, 12-19) become two parts of one long section from vv.1-19.¹³ Second, while it is possible to read the shift in v.12 as a turn from divine capability to human incapability, this shift is better read as a

¹¹ So, for example, Greenstein, pp. 267-269.

¹² Greenstein, p. 269.

¹³ Several linguistic parallels between vv.1 and 12 further support (re)reading vv.1-19 as one long section; see Newsom, 1996, p. 529. Cf. Balentine, p. 419; and Jones, pp. 87-89.

reversal of human capability into human incapability. Verse 12's question—"But wisdom, where shall it be found?"—is answered by vv.13-14's emphatic "Nowhere!" Wisdom is available neither in the quotidian realm of human beings (v.13), nor in the conventional "beyonds"—the deep and the sea, zones that lie outside human habitation (v.14).

In vv.15-19 the motif of precious metals is carried over from vv.1-11, though the scene shifts from the mineshaft or pilgrimage path to the market, the realm of exchange. Scholars often read the series of failures to grasp or represent wisdom in vv.15-19 as a quest for one signifier that could represent the plenitude of wisdom.¹⁴ The poem first asks, "Can wisdom be represented by gold?"¹⁵ And then replies, "No." "Can wisdom be represented by a weight of silver?" Again, "No." Or, figured visually:

wisdom	=	gold,	no.
wisdom	=	silver,	no.
wisdom	=	gold of Ophir,	no.
wisdom	=	...	no.
wisdom	=	pure gold	no.

Figure 4. The Movement of Job 28:15-19

There are two things to note about this reading. First, according to it the pathos of the poem arises from the elusive, or rather impossible, quality of the one signifier that could convey wisdom. Second, this reading simply presumes wisdom's presence, as if the poet has wisdom in one hand and, with the other, fondles a series of objects, determining each time that none can represent the wisdom that she or he clutches.

First question: Is this presumption of wisdom's presence not at odds with the unequivocal assertion about wisdom's unavailability that the poem

¹⁴ So, for example, Gordis, 1978, p. 298, "The 'Hymn to Wisdom' describes how men mine the earth and face unknown hazards in their search for precious stones in volcanic areas far from human habitation. Yet no such search will avail to find the supernal Wisdom, nor can it be purchased with all the treasures of the world." On p. 308 he adds, "An object may be inaccessible, either because it is difficult to find or because it is costly in price, so that one idea suggests the other to the poet by association."

¹⁵ I follow the common practice of reading *קֶטֶר* as a word for gold—one of five in this chapter—even though it is pointed differently than in its other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible where it is *קֶטֶר*, as in 1 Kings 7:49.

advances in vv.12-14? Second question: Why is gold incapable of representing wisdom? While the tradition maintains wisdom's superiority to silver, gold, and jewels (cf. Prov. 3.14-15), it does not offer defensive false piety—"Of course one cannot buy wisdom with gold, some things just are not for sale!" Instead it unabashedly and on numerous occasions represents and associates wisdom with precious metals, jewels, stones, and other beautiful, material objects (cf. Prov 3:16).¹⁶ Furthermore, as Saussure's structuralism has taught us, language is by definition a linking of two incommensurate elements: the "concept" and the "sound image" or the "signified" and the "signifier."¹⁷ So, it seems best to dismiss as a red herring the temptation to conclude that the poem's strong "no" derives from the incommensurability of one object—spiritual/divine—with another—material/inert.

Perhaps the poem's strong "no" derives from the idea that precious metals are relatively, not absolutely, different than wisdom? If so, it becomes difficult to understand the serial character of vv.15-19. If wisdom's relative difference from gold were so clear, why belabor the point by considering silver, onyx, and, especially, other types of gold? On this account, the verses seem redundant rather than emphatic. However, reading the series as redundant misses the way that the poem's advance from one precious metal to another suggests that something about the comparison of wisdom to precious metals remains unfinished, something about the negative judgments remains incomplete, which is what compels the poet onward to another valuable object. While it is possible to read the series of subsequent materials as redundant, a more satisfying interpretation would account for the series in a meaningful way (and not as meaningless redundancy).

To my mind both the dynamic of the passage and the content of the poem compel one to reject the idea that wisdom is present and each precious metal falls short. Instead of being present, wisdom remains elusive, but it is evoked as displaced by each successive valuable material. Wisdom achieves an absent presence, it is conjured as something that the material at hand is incapable of (re)presenting.¹⁸ Each valuable, and so potentially representative, material is

¹⁶ Compare Prov 8:10, 19; 16:16; 20:15; 31:10, 30 to 1:9; 2:4; 4:9; 20:15; 25:11-12; 31:22, 31.

¹⁷ Cf., Saussure, p. 118.

¹⁸ This reading has the additional benefit of greater conformity to the linguistic operations that produce meaning. In order to grasp my claim that vv.12-14 alter the meaning of vv.1-11, one must grant that meaning neither flows along at the same pace nor in the same direction as the signifiers that promise to bring it. Any reader of German knows as much: the meaning of the signifiers in any sentence remains in flux until one reaches its final term, which could transform its meaning. While Saussure did not account for this retroactive effect of meaning (cf. Saussure, p. 112), Lacan

considered, one after another, but one need not presume wisdom is present and returned to each time. Instead the passage is better read as if each material evokes wisdom as something that is displaced, which explains why one takes flight, in hot pursuit, from gold to the next and the next and the next representative. Thus, in stark contrast to the full stops and successive lines in figure 4, the rhetorical movement of vv.15-19 is better figured as follows:

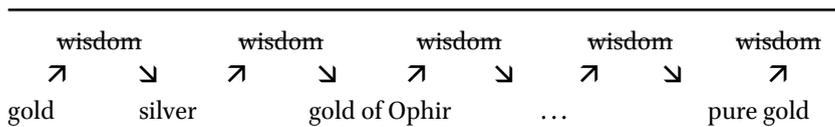


Figure 5. The Movement of Job 28:15-19 Reconsidered

The pathos that emerges on this reading is not only the unfathomability of wisdom but also of each term in the series. Not even the ultimate term—"pure gold"—can stop the sliding pursuit; suspended at the end of the line of metals, it strands the reader with (at least) one metal too few.

On this reading, the poem's movement in vv.1-19 can be considered *metonymic* insofar as wisdom (the signified) keeps being evoked by and yet displaced with each new representative (signifier). By metonymy I mean a signifying relationship in which a manifest term, such as gold or silver, substitutes for another term, in this case wisdom, with which it has a semantic relation—i.e., gold and wisdom are both valued objects.¹⁹ Wilden puts it similarly: metonymy "consists in using for the name of a thing or a relationship, an attribute, a suggested sense, or something closely related, such as effect for cause . . . the imputed relationship being that of contiguity."²⁰ That the substitution is declared a failure—*these things* do not substitute for *that Thing*—simply spurs the metonymic movement onward so that wisdom is continually evoked and/as displaced (i.e., *wisdom*). By carrying out this failure from one material to the next we are, by the end of v.19, in a seemingly endless, metonymic

recognized that the planes of the signifier and signified cannot be parallel and cannot flow along together at the same pace (cf. 1993, pp. 258-70; and 2006, pp. 671-702). In Lacan's correction to Saussure's model, whereas signifiers flow along in a temporal chain, meaning or the signified flows backward over that chain at certain moments. Lacan calls these moments "quilting points" (*point de capiton*) to illustrate the sense in which they pin down (though never finally) what had been a loose slide of signifying materials—like buttons that stop the sliding of a quilt's innards.

¹⁹ Cf. Grigg, p. 155.

²⁰ Wilden, p. 198.

process of deferral. The poem has carried us on a journey via human accomplishments (e.g., bringing things to light) and valued materials (e.g., gold) toward that which they evoke but cannot (re)present (i.e., wisdom).

Displacement Displaced (vv.20-27)

The metonymic drift from one material to the next in vv.1-19 is abruptly halted by the refrain, which shifts the poem's attention squarely back onto the question of wisdom's locus, initially raised in v.12. This sudden redirection of the poem's drift is almost entirely lost on the reading represented by figure 4, which supposes such a return at every moment of the intervening verses. Figure 5's alternative depiction of the poem's movement permits a better reading of the nearly repeated refrain in v.20. The verbal variation from v.12 to v.20—from "But wisdom, where shall it be *found*?" to "Then whence *comes* wisdom?"—becomes particularly apparent and significant after the poem's preceding movement has been read as a metonymic drift.

Up to v.20 the poem only speaks of wisdom negatively, as an absence from the field of all that is known or present—it is something that "cannot be found in the land of the living" (v.13b). But then, suddenly, in v.20 wisdom is something that has come, whose presence has arrived, and yet whose origin is unknown. Despite v.20's mysterious report of wisdom's arrival, nothing changes for the reader: wisdom remains concealed from living beings; it is God who understands its way and knows its place. Such an assertion would be unsurprising if not for the supporting claims in v.24:

For he looks to the ends of the earth,
He sees (הָרָא) beneath all the heavens.

Surely this is not all, for these are the very achievements through which, the poem insists, humans *do not* come to know wisdom. In v.3 humans are the ones who "put an end to darkness and search out (חָקַר) every limit"; in v.10, whose "eye sees (הָרָא) every precious thing"; and, in v.11, who "bring to light hidden things." Given the clear opposition that the poem establishes between human beings' relationship with wisdom in vv.1-22 and God's in vv.23-27, why would the poem not supply attributes that more clearly differentiate God from human beings? Why use such similar language to characterize the capabilities of these two figures?

Verses 25-27 may seem to resolve v.24's failure to distinguish God from human beings:

When he made²¹ a scale for the wind,
 and apportioned the waters with a measure;
 When he made a decree for the rain,
 and a way for the thunderbolt;
 Then he saw (ראה) it [wisdom] and recounted it,
 established it and even fathomed (חקר) it.

Wisdom appears to God not simply on account of God's keen eyesight, but in an act of creation, an act that is presumably unavailable to creatures. Janzen exemplifies this conclusion when he argues that wisdom's appearance to God is particular to the moment being described, that is, to the primeval moment of the world's creation:

Verses 23-28 contain a meditation on the divine creativity and the recognition that only in that divine action can one identify the "place" of wisdom . . . wisdom in its primal reality, as original and originating in God, is inaccessible to earthlings, who therefore are to occupy themselves with such wisdom's earthly and creaturely analogue: piety and uprightness.²²

If Janzen is correct, then the poem ends in a performative self-contradiction: it insists that humans have no access to wisdom, but fails to account for the position from which this judgment could be pronounced. Furthermore, if Janzen is correct then others such as Newsom are not:

[T]he poem is in no sense saying that humans have no access to wisdom. They will not find it if they look for it as an object (even an intellectual object) but only if they also know it through a comparable mode of being, a way of acting. The disposition of piety and the moral habit of turning from evil are the way in which one will know wisdom and understanding.²³

Putting aside the vexing question of whether humans can perform acts comparable to creation, the more fundamental problem with Janzen's position is his idea that wisdom's appearance to God at creation is an epiphenomenal appearance of some substance whose "primal reality" is of God's essence, "original

²¹ Though the infinitive form of the verb stands out against the finite verbs preceding and following it, the infinitive construct sometimes functions as a finite verb in poetry "to represent a situation successive to that represented by a finite verb or participle" (*IBHS*, p. 611). Cf. Job 5:11; Gordis, 1978, 310; and the contrasting opinion of Clines, 2006, p. 904.

²² Janzen, p. 189.

²³ Newsom, 2003, 180.

and originating in God.” Wisdom’s appearance to God may be consequent to God’s creative acts, but it is not clear that wisdom is capable of appearing from these acts alone, and it is clear that wisdom is something other than either a divine attribute or an attribute of the world that God creates.

Verses 25-27 locate wisdom neither with God—as a divine attribute or a principle that guides God’s creative activity—nor with creation—creation supplies the conditions through which wisdom appears to God, but wisdom is not of the order of those things that God’s activity creates, such as the wind, water, rain and thunderbolt. Wisdom may have no existence apart from the created world, wisdom may depend upon the world for its appearance, but it somehow pulls itself away from the world’s grip so as to appear as something irreducible to the world, seen and fathomed by God separately from the world.

Wisdom appears to God in the co-presence of creator and creation, but wisdom is part neither of God nor of creation. Wisdom emerges as a surplus, occupying a disjunctive space “shared” by God and creation. One can depict this space with overlapping circles, a Venn diagram, so long as the space of “overlap” is understood *not* as a space of conjunction, as is typical in such diagrams, but as a space of disjunction.²⁴ To capture this visually I have erased the points of intersection in figure 6 so that the circles appear to turn in on themselves rather than to extend through one another.²⁵

God and creation share wisdom only in the sense that wisdom appears in their encounter as something that escapes both of them. Wisdom belongs neither to God nor to creation, but this lack is something they share. Wisdom is something other than God and other than the world. Wisdom is something “of-but-not-in” the world, a nonobjective surplus generated out of but not reducible to objectively constituted reality.

Universal Displacement, but in Two Different Structures

Contrary to many readings the whole poem depicts wisdom as displaced, *not only* from the materials out of which it arises, *but also* from the subjects related to it. Verses 1-19 clearly present wisdom as endlessly displaced from humans

²⁴ Lacan, 1977, pp. 203-215, advances this notion of two things intersecting at a point that belongs to neither in order to understand the subject’s alienation from itself upon entry into language and culture. Cf. Dolar, to whom I return below.

²⁵ While helpful, this figure should not conjure too static an image of the event narrated in vv.25-27. One should not forget the temporality of wisdom’s emergence in the act of creation.

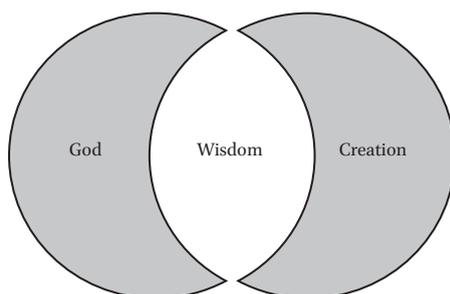


Figure 6. Wisdom at the *Disjunction* of God and Creation

and deferred from what could be represented by valuable materials. Verse 20 then shifts the perspective on wisdom from something absent to something present, though still displaced (vv.21-22), and which appears to God (vv.23-24) in an indirect, unintentional, and surprising event that *happens* during God's creative activities (vv.25-27). Thus, contrary to the scholarly commonplace, the poem does not oppose God's direct relationship to wisdom to humans' indirect relationship to wisdom.²⁶ God's relationship to wisdom is no less indirect, but this indirection does not arise from a metonymic relationship. In vv.23-27 God encounters wisdom in a way that can be called metaphoric.²⁷ In vv.23-27 wisdom appears not as a lack of the sort evoked in metonymy, but as a surplus of the sort created in metaphor. While it may be impossible to delineate definitively metaphor from metonymy, here I can distinguish them so as to illustrate the difference between the relationships of God and of humans with wisdom.

To be sure, certain types of metaphor fit my earlier description of metonymy as a signifying relationship in which a manifest term substitutes for another term with which it has a semantic relation. Metaphors such as "the evening of life" involve substitutions in which a term or meaning (old age) remains latent

²⁶ Cf., for example, Gordis, 1965, p. 101.

²⁷ I depend here in part on Lacan, who refers to metaphor and metonymy as the two "most radical axes of the effects of language" (2006, p. 677). Lacan's extended formulation of the functions of metonymy and metaphor can be found in 2006, pp. 412-441. Lacan depends in part on Jakobson's conception of metaphor and metonymy (see 1990, p. 129). Especially in literary theory metonymy and metaphor have been used to name the two basic operations through which linguistic units can be selected and combined to create meaning. I have nothing so grand in mind. Here I develop these concepts not to account for all metonyms or metaphors, much less for all meaning-making. Instead I use them to structure and differentiate the particular dynamics operative in Job 28:1-19 and 20-28.

“behind” the manifest term(s). Greimas and Courtés offer the following example, “the rose which is substituted for ‘young woman’ is, of course, read as ‘young woman’, yet it also manifests for a moment the virtualities of color, form, scent, etc.”²⁸ Metaphor’s key difference with metonymy is apparent in the transformation that metaphor involves at the level of meaning. In the latter example the substitution does not simply evoke the young woman, it produces virtualities that transform her meaning, endow her with a scent, and so on. Whereas metonymy evokes a meaning by means of a semantic relationship, metaphor assaults, transforms, and produces new meanings. In Job 28, whereas humans relate to wisdom as something lacking from yet evoked by their technical skill, awareness of what is valuable, and so on, God encounters wisdom as a *novum* whose emergence is irreducible to the materials from which it arose. Wisdom surprises God as a surplus that, upon appearing, can be seen, recounted, and fathomed.

Wisdom’s appearance in vv.23-27 also functions like a metaphor by transforming the elements out of which it arises. Apart from wisdom’s appearance, the poem describes what appears to be a classical account of God *qua* master-creator: God makes a scale, apportions with a measure, issues a decree, and makes a way. While the materials involved all enjoy a degree of vitality—the wind, the waters, the rain, the thunderbolt—God’s actions instrumentally constrain these materials through various technologies of control. But then wisdom appears. Actor becomes observer; the accountant begins to recount. Wisdom’s appearance disturbs God’s position in the subject-object binary with creation, and wisdom’s appearance preserves a place for the independent vitality of creation by which something can transcend the ways, decrees, etc., of the material world.

The irreducibility of wisdom’s emergence to any clear causal foundation is another characteristic wisdom shares with the effects produced in language by metaphor, appositive metaphors in particular. As in an apposition, an appositive metaphor juxtaposes two terms, but the terms have no prior semantic relation.²⁹ “Silence is golden” and “love is war” are appositive metaphors. No meaning lies behind or grounds their terms and the metaphor does not work by extending a term’s meaning so that they overlap. Unlike metonymy and

²⁸) Greimas and Courtés, p. 190.

²⁹) I have been greatly aided in my understanding of metonymy and metaphor by Grigg, pp. 151-169. Grigg distinguishes metonymy and three different types of metaphor: substitution, extension, and apposition. As discussed above, metonymy and substitutionary metaphors both have latent semantic relations that are absent in appositive metaphors as well as in, for Grigg, extension metaphors, e.g., “the mouth of the river” (pp. 157, 163, 166).

substitutionary metaphors, there is no semantic link between “love” and “war” by means of which the appositive metaphor is understood. The copula merely juxtaposes the terms rather than implying, for example, that the two are equivalent or interchangeable. An appositive metaphor thus does not really have a meaning; it produces meanings. In “Love is war,” love’s collision with war generates an indefinite series of meanings. In Job 28:23-27, God’s collision with creation generates wisdom. Wisdom appears not as a substitute for some latent meaning—Job 28 provides no predicate for wisdom; rather, wisdom appears as a surplus that both transforms the elements out of which it emerges and drives God toward meaning-making activities like recounting, establishing, fathoming. Wisdom appears as a phenomenon homologous to the effects of appositive metaphors.

28:28: A Resigned Acceptance of Metonymy?

What consequences does this reading of the poem have for understanding its final verse? In v.28 the poet permits God to address humans as follows: “Truly the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn from evil, understanding.” The verse is surprising. After incessantly reporting wisdom’s unavailability to humans, the poem concludes by identifying wisdom with the fear of the Lord, a distinctly human posture. Verse 28 has given rise to a number of divergent readings. Some worry that the apparent equation “the fear of the Lord = wisdom” implies a commutative property or interchangeability between the fear of the Lord and wisdom.³⁰ That is, along the lines of figure 4, some worry that v.28 asserts:

wisdom = the fear of the Lord, yes.

Figure 7. The Movement of Job 28 Concluded

According to Wilson, v.28 seems to be “asserting that the concept of wisdom is exhausted by, or equated with, the idea of the ‘fear of God’. If so,” Wilson continues, “this is an excessive claim, based on a fossilised misunderstanding of the book of Proverbs, and one that is qualified by the final form of the story of

³⁰ So Michaeli, p. 43, “Il y a une sorte d’identification entre la crainte du Seigneur et la sagesse, au point que les deux termes sont pratiquement interchangeables. Parler de la crainte de Dieu, c’est parler de la sagesse, et réciproquement.”

Job.”³¹ Wilson fears that v.28 poses a relation of semantic equivalence between what is properly related by contiguity. He worries that v.28 misses the metonymic sense with which Proverbs relates the fear of God to wisdom when, as in Prov 1:7a, the fear of YHWH is qualified as the beginning, first principle, best part, or essence (תִּשְׂאֵר) of wisdom.³² Does v.28 depart from the rest of the poem, which emphasizes the displacement of wisdom from human beings?

On the contrary, v.28 more directly asserts what grounds but nonetheless gets obfuscated by Proverbs’ formulations of the relation between the fear of the Lord and wisdom. Wilson is correct that the fear of God in Proverbs inscribes an intrinsic distance separating the sage from the Lord and from wisdom.³³ Fear of God is both a humble recognition of the limits of understanding (of God, the world, wisdom, etc.), and a respectful acknowledgment of God’s freedom and ability to disturb even what is understood.³⁴ The fear of the Lord involves an inherent sense of alterity or displacement. The sage’s fear protects him from the folly of being “wise in his own eyes,” and keeps his eyes turned toward YHWH, wisdom’s source. There is no reason to think that the fear of the Lord in v.28 excludes this sense—indeed, in what sense could the fear of God be understood such that it did not include such displacement? Furthermore, the parallel image in v.28 of “turning from evil” literally presents the other side of such *dis*-placement.

How then should one understand the directness of the predication—“the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom”? In the tradition the fear of God is available to human beings whereas wisdom is not. How then do humans know of wisdom? By assuming the posture of the fear of the Lord humans orient themselves with respect to a God and a wisdom that always already exceeds themselves. Thus, in a very real sense, when considered from the perspective of human beings, the fear of the Lord *is* wisdom insofar as wisdom exists because the fear of the Lord guides, steers, and leads the sage by means of the tradition toward it as what always already exceeds the tradition and its indeterminacies.

³¹ Wilson, p. 72. Cf. Clines, 2003, p. 73.

³² See Fox, p. 68 for a brief discussion of the main interpretations of Prov 1:7a. Cf. Knauert, pp. 62-65, for a critique of Fox’s position and an alternative proposal.

³³ For a largely polemical essay that, although deeply at odds with this article, offers numerous examples of this traditional usage in biblical literature, see Gruber, pp. 88-102. Cf. Knauert, part 2, for an illuminating account of the fear of YHWH in the book of Proverbs.

³⁴ Cf. Davis, p. 35, “The willingness to be ignorant in this deepest sense is what the biblical writers call ‘the fear of YHWH.’ It is ‘the beginning of wisdom’ (Prov 1:7), for its essence is the rejection of arrogance and intellectual dishonesty.”

Thus, far from misunderstanding, v.28 more directly asserts the foundational truth of Proverbs' traditional wisdom. On this reading of v.28, the "fear of the Lord" functions like a metonym to circumscribe some Thing—"wisdom"—that otherwise eludes signification.³⁵ The locus of truth, wisdom, and God, is declared external to the phenomenal world of what is available to human beings—such transcendent Things are, as Zophar puts it in 11:8, "higher than heaven, deeper than Sheol"—yet the ideal subject is the sage who nonetheless pursues this transcendent dimension. Here the fear of the Lord is both the sages' acknowledgement that wisdom remains beyond human beings' reach, and the sages' commitment nonetheless to orient themselves toward this transcendent wisdom. Fear of God is wisdom in the sense that it inscribes *within* sages a sense of their separation from the transcendent locus of wisdom. The fear of God inscribes transcendence within the sage, which is what keeps the sages' pursuit of wisdom indefinite.

Problems with the Metonymic Reading of 28:28

Many interpreters read v.28 along the lines just elaborated, that is, contra Wilson, as a statement of traditional sapiential piety or, in the terms of this article, according to the logic of metonymy established in vv.1-19.³⁶ One question all raise is how to understand such a statement of traditional piety after so many chapters relating Job's experience and testimony. After Job's strong critique of the tradition, does v.28 simply reiterate traditional wisdom? Many think so and so judge this verse and/or chapter secondary or misplaced within the book. Whether they find comfort in the verse or despise it as a "pietistic fraud," most conclude that it contradicts, or at least stands in "calculated tension" with the book more broadly, if not the rest of the poem.³⁷

³⁵ For another example of this standard reading, see McKane, p. 715.

³⁶ For an eloquent articulation of such a reading, see Janzen, p. 198.

³⁷ Habel, pp. 392-393, represents many who consider v.28 a fraudulent escape from the difficult issues of theodicy raised throughout the book: "For clearly, 'fear/piety' (*yir'ā*) has not provided Job with the wisdom to understand the crisis he faced . . . For Job to return (in v.28) to the traditional 'fear of the Lord' would therefore mean returning to a posture of pious unquestioning submission which the friends." Childs, pp. 542-543, represents a minority when he reads v.28 positively, a welcome nuance to Job's abyssal protests and to the horrors of some of the "impatient Job's" statements: "The inclusion of the rubric as a summary of the chapter . . . offers an explicit canonical directive on how the critical stance to wisdom found in the book of Job relates to the wider wisdom corpus . . . the effect of ch. 28 is to provide a link between the portrayal of the 'patient Job' of ch. 2 and the 'impatient Job' of the dialogue. The canonical shaping of these

The previous section discussed and opposed one case for thinking that the verse stands in tension with the rest of the poem—namely, the claim that v.28 excludes the sense of displacement that characterizes traditional wisdom and vv.1-19. If such a sense of displacement inheres within v.28, then it does not necessarily contradict vv.1-19 by asserting that wisdom is available to humans in the land of the living. While numerous interpreters agree, the standard way of understanding v.28's continuity with the poem is highly problematic. For many the wisdom that is available to humans through the fear of the Lord in v.28 must be inferior to the wisdom that is available to God through creation.³⁸ On this reading, after depicting God's direct relationship with wisdom in vv.23-27, the poem returns in v.28 to the point established in vv.1-19—humans are indirectly related to wisdom—in order to name the disposition that enables such a metonymic relationship: the fear of the Lord.

There are various reasons why one should reject this conclusion: v.28 does not contradict the poem because it states plainly humans' metonymic relationship to wisdom through the fear of the Lord. First, one could arrive at such a conclusion without reading vv.23-27. Should it not matter to v.28's interpretation that it is v.28 and not v.19 or v.23? How might we understand v.28 in light of what we learn about wisdom from God's experience of it in vv.23-27? Scholars generally account for vv.23-27 only, if at all, by treating them as a point of contrast supporting their belief that the poem aims to differentiate God's direct relationship to wisdom from humans' indirect relationship to wisdom. This belief is mistaken, however, premised as it is on a misreading of vv.23-27. There, as I argued above, God's relationship with wisdom is also indirect. Any difference that one wants to claim exists between human and divine relationships with wisdom cannot be formulated in terms of a degree of (in)directness. In what follows I contend that v.28 is better read as an assertion that wisdom is available to humans in a displaced form through the fear of the Lord just as it is to God through creation.

chapters suggests that these are not two irreconcilable portrayals, but a calculated tension marking the proper limits of wisdom for the community of faith." For Childs v.28 supplies a canonical directive signaling a limit to how far one can approximate to Job's stance in the dialogue and remain within wisdom proper.

³⁸ Cf. Habel, p. 401, for a similar position.

28:28: The Poem's Capstone Metaphor

The first task toward understanding v.28 according to the metaphoric logic that characterizes God's encounter with wisdom is to divest the relation between fear and wisdom of any latent semantic content. When read in the traditional, metonymic sense, the relation between fear and wisdom is one of semantic contiguity since the subject *is* the predicate in the sense that "the crown" *is* "the king" or "the kingdom" in the classic example of metonymy. However, one could and I think should read v.28 as an appositive metaphor that, as I discussed above, juxtaposes two terms with no prior semantic relation. The relation between fear and wisdom is bald juxtaposition. Like "love is war," "the fear of the Lord is wisdom" functions not to change, elaborate, or extend a preexisting meaningful relationship, it rather generates, like God's creative activity, a world of new meanings.

The point of v.28, then, is to say that what is displaced by/from human achievements—i.e., wisdom—is made apparent in a displaced, metaphoric manner by the fear of the Lord. On this reading no special, latent semantic relation binds fear to wisdom. One can propose all kinds of meanings that wisdom may assume for sages through their fear of the Lord, but none of them start from any meaningful basis; every meaning will be a product of the juxtaposition of fear and wisdom.

This reading of v.28 as an appositive metaphor does more than simply take into account God's experience of wisdom in vv.23-27; it also eliminates the tension discussed above between v.28 and Job's character in the dialogue. The debates about this verse almost always assume that it fails to account for Job's experience and testimony. Only rarely has an interpreter considered that this verse's identification of fear and wisdom coincides precisely with Job's discovery of the concurrence of wisdom and terror.³⁹ In other words, the literary character of Job stands ever ready to exemplify one highly important meaning that is generated out of v.28's juxtaposition of fear and wisdom.

Finally, then, how should one understand the poem's depiction of humans' metonymic relationship to wisdom in vv.1-19 in light of v.28? The metonymic logic of vv.1-19 repeatedly suggests that wisdom's displacement from the world indexes its transcendence to the world. Read in light of vv.23-27, however, v.28 suggests that while wisdom may be essentially displaced, humans do not have to relate to it as if it were displaced into a transcendent beyond. The fearer of

³⁹ So, Good, p. 116, suggests, "Perhaps we need even to see 'fear' resuming its literal sense."

the Lord regards wisdom as available to human beings, even if only in a displaced form. Sages resist the lure of seeking wisdom in metonymic relations that evoke it as absent or transcendent. Instead, sages are open to wisdom's appearance in/as what is displaced within the immanent conditions of their lives. In context, one cannot but think of wisdom's appearance in/as Job and other displaced figures who are often foolishly unrecognized, unfathomed, or unaccounted for (cf. 2:12).

Job 28's Acousmatic Character

What are the consequences of this reassessment of the poem for understanding its awkward placement in its literary context?⁴⁰ The relationship of ch. 28 to the rest of the book is highly contested, not only because the poem ill fits the surrounding dialogue, but also because at this point the dialogue ill fits itself. Job 28 is located at the end of the truncated and dissonant final cycle of speeches, and just before the set of longer speeches by Job (29–31), Elihu (32–37), and God (38–41).⁴¹ Many attribute the poem to no speaking subject in particular, seeing it as disembodied speculation about wisdom, perhaps the author's (or a later author's) opinion or an interjection from some figure such as the narrator in a prose tale, or the chorus in Greek tragedy.⁴² Others speak of the poem's independence from the dialogue less in terms of its origin and more in terms of the sense in which it neither responds nor invites response nor addresses any particular addressee.⁴³ Those who read it as Job's own speech have called it a "soliloquy," whereas those who deny that Job is its speaker have called it an "interlude" or a "conclusion."⁴⁴ Here the important point is that Job

⁴⁰ Jones provides helpful and well-documented discussions of the poem's awkward placement and other issues. See also, Newsom, 2003, ch. 6, for a refreshing reframing of this issue.

⁴¹ Cf. Newsom's strong judgment against the "wooden" notions of those who conclude that ch. 28 is secondary to the book (1996, p. 528).

⁴² Newsom, 2003, p. 259, describes the poem's voice as "disembodied."

⁴³ So, Habel, p. 392.

⁴⁴ For "soliloquy," see Janzen, p. 187, and Balentine, p. 415. The language of "interlude" can be found in Gordis, 1978, p. 298, and Newsom, 1996, p. 528. Hartley, p. 373, calls it a "bridge." For Westermann, p. 137, it is an "intermezzo." Even though he argues that ch. 28 concludes Elihu's speech, Clines, 2006, p. 925, admits, "It does not matter a very great deal for the general sense of the chapter whether we regard it as an independent poem without significant links to its context (as is the almost universal view) or as the conclusion to the speeches of Elihu." Cf. Clines, 2004. Greenstein also (and apparently independently) proposes that ch. 28 be read as the conclusion to Elihu's speech.

28 stands apart from the dialogue on account of several, often-noted reasons—not only its differences in form and content from the rest of the book, but also its similarities to other meditations on wisdom in sapiential texts, e.g., Prov 8; Sir 1; 24; Bar 3:9-4:4; perhaps also *1 Enoch* 24 and *4QInstruction*.⁴⁵ In short, the poem's source, speaker, voice, addressee, and purpose are uncertain.

While I think that the poem should be read as part of the book, in part because of this uncertainty I also think that it is best read as abstracted from any voice in particular. My final thesis, which I take up and clarify after the following brief digression, is that the poem only achieves a voice that befits it when its source is acknowledged as unidentifiable, like wisdom. Since a term exists for a voice whose source is unknown or unidentified, I can say that the poem's proper voice is *acousmatic*.

Diogenes Laertius reports that Pythagoras' disciples were required to listen to his speeches for five years before they could see him; during this time they were known as "acousmatics."⁴⁶ The philosophical aim is obvious: novitiates had to focus on his words alone, their meaning and their truth value, apart from any distractions or mesmerizations they might derive from the visual field. The effect, however, was the inverse of rendering Pythagoras unimportant since it contributed to rendering him all-important. It is well known that he gained a cult following that revered him as a divinity. Surely contributing to this was his acousmatic voice, arising from behind a curtain, which was endowed with an aura of mystery and "acquired authority and surplus-meaning by virtue of the fact that its source was concealed; it seemed to become omnipresent and omnipotent."⁴⁷

More recently French film critic Michel Chion makes use of the notion of acousmatic sound. Acousmatic sound is neither onscreen nor nondiegetic, as in the voice of a commentator or voiceover narration, which are also external to the image. Acousmatic sound emanates from a crack, an unknown source, and for that reason achieves a particularly powerful, mysterious, and captivating resonance. Fritz Lang's 1931 film *M* conceals for as long as possible "the physical appearance of the child-murderer, even though we hear his voice and his maniacal whispering from the very beginning. Lang preserves the mystery of the character for as long as he can, before 'de-acousmatizing' him," that is,

⁴⁵ See the argument made in Newsom, 2003, pp. 171-174.

⁴⁶ Laertius, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Dolar, pp. 61-62; on whose analysis I rely here extensively. The relevant resonances of this image with "the great and powerful Oz" were not lost on this article's anonymous reviewer.

before revealing a source to which we can pin the voice.⁴⁸ Chion continues, "It's fairly common in films to see evil, awe-inspiring, or otherwise powerful characters introduced through sound before they are subsequently thrown out to the pasture of visibility, deacousmatized."⁴⁹ Chion takes his insight into the ways that the audible and the visible are not a couple and he shows the extent to which cinema reveals and exploits their separation by having them diverge and converge.

Despite the fact that voices can be mysteriously acousmatic and then deacousmatized, and thus demystified, philosopher Mladen Dolar claims that the acousmatic voice is never really or fully de-acousmatized.⁵⁰ For Dolar the acousmatic voice "always displays something of an effect emancipated from its cause."⁵¹ It persists even beyond the moment of de-acousmatizing and always threatens to reappear. I think Dolar is correct that the acousmatic sound has a mysterious and authoritative body that remains liberated from any identifiable body, and I think that biblical critics should be the first to recognize this. Readers of the Hebrew Bible could not but find the acousmatic voice a helpful interpretive category, familiar as we are with the divide between sight and sound that carries the particularly potent resonance of divine presence:

Then YHWH spoke to you from the midst of the fire.

You heard a voice speaking but you saw no form, a voice alone.

(Deut. 4:12)

Israel's aniconism is rooted in its encounter at Horeb with YHWH's voice and nothing more. Lacking form, it would be wrong to say this voice lacks a body all its own.

Returning to Job 28, the voice that befits the poem is acousmatic, a voice that cannot be de-acousmatized. This thesis is not simply based on scholars' uncertainty regarding its source. On the contrary, it has everything to do with the content of the poem and the wisdom of which it speaks.

⁴⁸) Chion, p. 72.

⁴⁹) Chion, p. 72.

⁵⁰) Dolar, pp. 67, 70, "The real problem with the acousmatic voice is: can we actually ever pin it down to a source? . . . ultimately, there is no such thing as disacousmatization" (emphasis in original). Dolar convincingly supports his claim in part by referring to the common sense that no one's voice matches their appearance, especially not one's own. Cf. Žižek, 2001, p. 58.

⁵¹) Dolar, *A Voice*, 67.

- In vv.1-19 humans search for wisdom as something that is displaced from the activities and materials that evoke its presence.
- In vv.23-27 the creating God encounters wisdom as something displaced or liberated from the created conditions out of which it emerges.
- In v.28 the poem reports that wisdom is available to humans in a displaced form through the fear of the Lord.

Like the wisdom of which it speaks, the poem also lacks an identifiable source. So Job 28 is a poem whose source is displaced, that speaks about a wisdom whose source is displaced. Since wisdom's source is concealed, the concealment of the source of this poem draws it into accord with the wisdom about which it speaks. In short, the fact that we cannot be certain who speaks ch. 28 may not register a failure of scholars, redactors, or other factors external to the poem; our uncertainty may instead register the acousmatic character of wisdom itself. That it is initially and perhaps finally impossible to assign the chapter to any particular voice is precisely what the poem prepared us to expect of any presentation of wisdom. Thus the poem's acousmatic character compels readers to take its message as nothing less than wise.

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