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Creation and Virtue in Second Temple Period Wisdom and Liturgical Texts

Hindy Najman and Benjamin G. Wright III

Abstract

Virtue in many Second Temple texts, regardless of language or provenance, gets expressed through a combination of wisdom, creation, and blessing. In this chapter, we examine three texts, the Wisdom of Ben Sira, the Hymn to the Creator, and the Hodayot and how they employ discourses about virtue and perfection to construct what it means to be human. Virtue consists of the various discourses that produce a self that can engage in imitatio Dei, since, even though the human-divine divide cannot be completely overcome, the creation of humans in the image of God endows them with the possibility of imitatio Dei.

Keywords

Creation; imitatio Dei; virtue; perfection; wisdom.

Author

Hindy Najman, Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture, Oriel College, Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom.
Benjamin G. Wright III, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Religion Studies, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA.

1. Introduction

Virtue in many Second Temple texts often gets expressed through a combination of wisdom, creation, and blessing.[1] V/virtue can be thought of in two ways: first, as a component, like Wisdom, that is constitutive of God's creation; or second, as those actions/behaviors necessary to achieve perfection. Moreover, the aspiration toward being virtuous, which relates to the desire to achieve perfection, crosses linguistic and generic boundaries, and this aspiration is expressed in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic Jewish texts from antiquity.[2] In this chapter we also recognize a larger challenge: The scholarly tradition that has separated Semitic-speaking from Greek-speaking Judaism and that has relegated conceptual and philosophical thinking in ancient Judaism to the latter.[3] The continuing division between "Judaism" and "Hellenism," as if these

1 Many thanks to Rebekah Van Sant Clark for her suggestions and editorial assistance.

2 Hindy Najman, "Philosophical Contemplation and Revelatory Inspiration in Ancient Judean Traditions," *SPhilA* 19 (2007): 101–11.

3 Tim Bayne describes cognition as intimately related with conceptual thinking: "Thinking, reasoning, perceiving, imagining, and remembering are cognitive processes to the extent that they involve the use of concepts." See Bayne et al., "What Is Cognition?," *Current Biology* 29 (2019): R608,

were self-contained social and cultural containers, has reinforced the division.[4] So, for example, with respect to the Qumran *Yaḥad*, scholars have identified numerous instances of Hellenistic *influence* on the community, but few studies have been dedicated to the *relationship* between Jews who lived in the *Yaḥad* community and Jews who were more obviously indebted to and participated in Hellenistic culture.[5] It is clear, however, that across the wide spectrum of possible ways that Jews participated in the broader cultural world of the Hellenistic Mediterranean that there is a profound integration of various modes of conceptual and philosophical thinking that cross linguistic boundaries.[6] Philo of Alexandria is perhaps our exemplar for this claim, but to be sure this goes well beyond Philo's writings.

As a consequence of considering Jews across the Hellenistic Mediterranean in more holistic ways, we do not think that it is productive to organize or categorize such conversations about being human, being virtuous, or achieving perfection along any canonical or linguistic divides. And so, in this chapter we do not confine our conversation to pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the canonical, or other such categories. For our own thinking, we want to identify particular *discourses* about virtue, perfection, human nature, and the creation of the world in the larger context of heavenly frameworks and terrestrial imitation, in the present case sapiential and liturgical discourses in Hebrew. Even having set aside the canonical divide as we engage the marginal and the deuterocanonical alongside the canonical and the "sectarian," we also see that different genres, such as the philosophical, the poetic, the historiographical, and the apocalyptic (among other categories) all participate in discourses concerned with what it is to pursue perfection, which aligns closely with what is virtuous. We take our cue on the virtuous from a conception of the quest for perfection that perfection consists not in a final breakthrough to a climactic state

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.05.044. Moreover, he suggests that "The question of whether a particular state or process is cognitive can be understood in terms of whether it involves concepts; and that question can in turn be understood in terms of whether it involves representations that are systematically recombineable and stimulus-independent" (R609).

4 See recently Benjamin G. Wright, "Globalization and the 'Hellenization' of Jews in the Second Temple Period," *JSJ* 53 (2022): 469–88, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-bja10051; and the literature cited there.

5 See Pieter Bärry Hartog, "Contesting *Oikoumenē*: Resistance and Locality in Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*," in *Intolerance, Polemics, and Debate in Antiquity: Politico-Cultural, Philosophical, and Religious Forms of Critical Conversation*, ed. George van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten, TBN 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 205–31, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004411500_009; and Benjamin G. Wright, "Were the Jews of Qumran Hellenistic Jews?" *DSD* 24 (2017): 356–77, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-12341443; and the literature cited there.

6 Hindy Najman, "Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Period: Towards the Study of a Semantic Constellation," in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioată, and Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 459–72, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004344532_026. Brooke Holmes highlights how the conceptualization of the physical body became "a site of inhuman otherness within the self." See Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 275. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls reoccurring images of self-humiliation and references to the lowliness of the "flesh" and limitations of human bodies also participate in this discourse.

but rather in the repeated overcoming of past imperfection through transition to a next self, the journey to become human.[7] As we use the term, V/virtue consists of the various discourses that produce a self that can engage in *imitatio Dei*, since, even though the human-divine divide cannot be completely overcome, the creation of humans in the image of God endows them with the possibility of *imitatio Dei*.[8] In this chapter, we limit our examination to the book of Ben Sira, the Hymn to the Creator in the Great Psalms Scroll from Qumran (11Q5), and the Hodayot because of their shared constellation of concepts of goodness, virtue, perfection, human essence, and the role of creation and the construction of the cosmos.[9]

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7 Spelled out most recently in the work of Stanley Cavell, who understands himself to be giving voice to a tradition beginning in antiquity. See Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004). For more detail on applying Cavell to ancient Jewish texts, see Hindy Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 48–51. Pierre Hadot's account of Hellenistic philosophy and the philosophical life emphasizes the link between philosophical thought and spiritual exercises as transforming the self, a process that does not have a finite end. He argues that philosophy or the philosophical life in antiquity is oriented toward transforming the individual through the use of spiritual exercises, including abstention, meditation, and study. He describes spiritual exercises as processes that enable the "metamorphosis" of the "inner self." See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 83–84. Essentially, spiritual exercises are fundamentally about returning to the self and helping an individual to attain "wisdom." Spiritual exercises would need to be repeated; they are processes (Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 103).

8 Hindy Najman, "*Imitatio Dei* and the Formation of the Subject in Ancient Judaism," *JBL* 140 (2021): 309–23, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1402.2021.5. Studies into cognition might also reflect on this tension between trying to overcome the divide between the self and others but also the necessity of establishing and transforming the self. Research into cognition is relevant for rethinking the development of the self in antiquity. Current research reflects how continuous transformation and autopoiesis may help account for the development of human cognition. E.g., Ezequiel Di Paolo in his discussion of the "enactive conception of life" relates cognition to being "an adaptive autopoietic system—an agent—able to distinguish and regulate flows that contribute to self-production and self-distinction and avoid flows that act against these conditions. The primordial tension is actively regulated over the time domain." Di Paolo, "The Enactive Conception of Life," in *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, ed. Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, and Albert Newen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 85, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.013.4. Moreover, Andreas Roepstorff and Tobias Starzak relate the imitation of another's behavior as another aspect of how cognition developed and was maintained by humans. They argue that humans have a tendency and ability to pay specific attention to processes of action, the "how of doing, and not just the end result, the what of doing." Roepstorff and Starzak, "Critical Note: Evolution of Human Cognition; Temporal Dynamics at Biological and Historical Time Scales," in de Bruin, Gallagher, and Newen, *Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, 796, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.013.42.

9 On the idea of constellations, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: NLB, 1977), 34; as employed in Najman, *Losing the Temple*, 21–22.

2. Ben Sira and the Relation between Creation and Virtue

As a Second Temple wisdom text, perhaps even the quintessential one, Ben Sira's book is replete with instruction to his students about virtuous behavior, and thus, we want to focus on the pedagogical and the exemplary as part of that instruction. For example, Ben Sira repeatedly encourages his students to perform acts of charity or almsgiving.[10] What is the foundation for such virtuous behavior? Do we see in Sirach some concept of Virtue that provides the basis for human beings to act virtuously? That is, whereas Ben Sira is famous for having a concept of Wisdom, with a capital "W," Can we speak of Virtue with a capital "V" in the book? In what ways might Wisdom and Virtue be related for him?

If we begin by asking where Wisdom can be found and whether Virtue is there as well, we have to start with creation, which Ben Sira discusses in several passages, particularly at the outset in chapter 1 in relation to Wisdom. After rhetorically asserting through Job-like questions that humans cannot fathom God's creation, Ben Sira makes two significant claims for our purposes: God created Wisdom before any other thing (1:4), and God "outpoured her [i.e., Wisdom] upon all his works and among all flesh according to his giving" (1:9–10a).[11] Thus, Wisdom is present in all of God's created order. Of course, the background text for these ideas is Prov 8:22: "The Lord created me [i.e., Wisdom] at the beginning of his course, as the first of his works of old." But Ben Sira transforms and explores that presupposition about the role of Wisdom in creation in such a way as to connect Virtue with Wisdom as foundational to the created order.

Ben Sira's most extensive poem on creation comes in Sir 42:15–43:33, a hymn on the works of God in creation.[12] Chapter 1 and other earlier passages (see below) in Ben Sira provide some framing context for understanding the hymn. The opening in 42:15 sets the stage: "Let me now recall the works of God, / and that which I have seen, I will teach;[13] / by the speech of the Lord are his works, / and the performance of his will is his teaching."[14] In the first two *stichoi*, Ben Sira establishes that visual observation of creation is instructive, and it forms a basis for his own teaching.[15] In the third *stichos*, Ben Sira connects these works with God's creative activity through speech, the primary mechanism of sapiential instruction. The meaning of

10 The Hebrew word צדקה occurs seven times in the extant Hebrew portions, each time translated by ἐλεημοσύνη. The Greek term occurs another six times in passages where no Hebrew is extant.

11 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the authors.

12 Here we will not go into all the text-critical issues at stake; we will use primarily the Hebrew texts of MS B and Masada where it is extant along with the Greek translation.

13 For the verb אשננה in the Masada manuscript, we are following the analysis of Eric Reymond, who argues that it is a D-stem first-person cohortative on the root שנן, rather than from the root שנה, from which some scholars derive it. See Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach*, SBLStBL 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 61 n. 7.

14 The translation follows Masada and MS B and B^{mg}, which are almost identical. Greek lacks the fourth *stichos* from the Hebrew.

15 See A. Jordan Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 42 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 164, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110600223.

the fourth *stichos* is not entirely clear. Is the logical referent of "the performance of his will" (פעל רצונו; Mas, MS B) God or God's works? If the former, then the idea is that God's will gets reflected in God's creative activity, that both God's word and teaching accomplish God's will. If the latter, then the idea is that the obedience of the created order to God's will is instructive in itself.[16] In either case, the poem establishes creation as divine instruction and thus as a source of divine teaching for Ben Sira and his students.

An important emphasis of the poem is the way that humans can observe God's glory in creation directly. On several occasions, Ben Sira employs vocabulary that highlights the experiential quality of creation and the ability of human beings to see or experience God's glory in nature (cf. 42:16): the sky itself "beholds its majesty" (43:1; Mas);[17] "heaven itself pours out its majesty" (43:1; Mas); "the sun in its going out illuminates what is hidden" (43:2; Mas); the sky, sun, and moon are "vessels of the host" whose luster "paves the firmament" (43:8; MS B);[18] "look at the rainbow" (43:11); "the eye is dazzled" (43:18); sailors "tell" of the sea's dangers (43:24). The observational quality of nature is paired with the idea that all of nature is ordered and that all things fulfill the tasks that God has assigned to them. So, for example, 42:22–25:

> [22] Are not all his works desirable, even like a spark and a vision of a mirror?
> [23] All live and stand forever, for every need, and everything is preserved.[19]
> [24] All of them are two by two,[20] this opposite this, and he did not make any of them in vain.
> [25] This one over that one, their goodness renews, and who will be satisfied at beholding their splendor? (Mas)[21]

The idea that the works of creation fulfill tasks that God has appointed for them is most explicit in 42:23—all of God's works "live and stand/remain forever, and for every need everything is preserved"—an idea that appears with some frequency in the hymn and elsewhere in the book. So, for example, the sun pursues its course at God's orders (43:5); the moon marks seasons and festivals (43:6); the stars occupy their places at God's orders (43:10); God commands the snow (43:13); the south wind blows at God's will (43:16). Moreover, everything holds together by God's word (43:26).[22] Two other verses are especially significant here. First, 42:21a—"He has set in order the splendors of his wisdom"—connects this hymn back to 1:1–10 where Wisdom was the first of God's creations, which he then "poured out" on all his creation. Wisdom inheres in all creation and is responsible for creation's splendors,

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16 See the analysis in Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus*, 164–65.
17 Following Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 60, who reads ט[בי]מ as the verb.
18 For the translation and discussion of this verse, see Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 65–66, 75.
19 Greek: "obeys."
20 Cf. 33:15 for the same idea.
21 On the Hebrew of the poem, see Reymond, *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry*, 63–64
22 For other expressions of this idea, see also 16:26–27; 39:21, 34.

which humans can observe. Second, 43:33—"for the Lord has made all things and to the godly he has given wisdom"—suggests, as a conclusion to this poem, that God's Wisdom, inherent in creation, is available to the godly, who can perceive it. The idea recapitulates the claim of 1:10 that God "lavished her [i.e., Wisdom] on those who love him."

Fundamental to creation is the idea that all things come in pairs, which in 42:24 consists of a general claim, but elsewhere Ben Sira provides more detail and joins the beauty of creation in pairs with an ethical dimension. So, for example, in 33:14–15: "Good is the opposite of evil, and life is the opposite of death; opposite a good person is a sinner, and light is opposite darkness.[23] Look [הבט] at all the works of God, all of them two by two, one opposite the other" (Ms B, supplemented by Gk). Here Ben Sira alternates moral-ethical pairs with aspects of the material, created order. This passage, then, gives depth to the claim in 42:24 that creation is ordered in pairs of opposites and fills out Ben Sira's conception of creation. On the one hand, the pairs that make up the created order contrast (33:14)—life-death, light-darkness, good-evil, pious-sinner—but on the other hand, they harmonize (42:24). Núria Calduch-Benages observes that the verb for looking/seeing in 33:15, נבט, often has the connotation of observing beauty in Ben Sira, and as she puts it: "The arrangement of the creatures in antithetical pairs is not something disruptive but something that contributes to the order and beauty of the world."[24] Thus, Virtue, as articulated in the language of ethics and morality, makes up part of the fabric of creation.

Yet, despite humans' ability to recognize God's majesty in creation, its beauty and harmony, even its antithetical pairs, both material and ethical, the limitation of being human means that human beings can only achieve a partial understanding of creation. Ben Sira emphasizes this point in several passages. The series of questions that begin chapter 1 establish right away that human understanding of God's works is limited. Again, at the end of the hymn in 43:32, Ben Sira says, "Many things that are hidden are greater than these, for we have seen a few of his works."[25] Only God has complete knowledge. Yet, even the partial knowledge available to human beings should result in praise of God: "Lift up your voice to magnify the Lord, as much as you can" (43:30; cf. 39:35).[26]

If all things in creation have their proper duties and tasks to fulfill, then the question arises as to what role human beings fulfill as part of the created order. In the passages where Ben Sira discusses creation, his imperatives to his students suggest that the proper response for humans is to praise God. At the end of the hymn, in

23 See below on 11Q5, which also employs language of light and darkness.

24 Calduch-Benages, "Polarities in Creation (Sir 33:7–15)," in *Cosmos and Creation: Second Temple Perspectives*, ed. Michael W. Duggan, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Stefan C. Reif, DCLY (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 194–96, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110677041-013.

25 The translation is from the Greek. MS B is very fragmentary in the first *stichos*, and the second says the same as the Greek.

26 It is worth noting that we find other language of opposites in ancient Jewish traditions. E.g., Philo reflects on fear and hope in *De Abrahamo*, the Haggadah reflects on opposites as an expression of God's creation of the world (*Lefikah*, therefore—we are obligated to praise God). Redemption in the Haggadah is about blessing and prayer.

43:29–30, Ben Sira exclaims: "Very awesome is the Lord, and wonderful is his strength; lift up your voice to magnify the Lord, as much as you can, because there is yet more; exalting him, renew strength, and do not grow weary, for you cannot search him out (or: fathom him)" (Mas, MS B). Both at the beginning and at the end of the earlier hymn in 39:12–35, Ben Sira admonishes his students to bless God's name (39:14, 35) and to praise God (39:15, 35). Bracketing this hymn with exhortations to praise God for God's works in creation emphasizes the centrality of praise for human beings. Finally, in Sir 17:1–24, which describes the creation of human beings and their place in the created order, God gave human beings discretion and knowledge from the very beginning (17:6–7)—God "put the fear of him into their hearts to show them the majesty of his works" (17:8)—and as a result, "they will praise his holy name, to proclaim the grandeur of his works" (17:10–9).[27]

Sirach 17:8–10 significantly connect praise of God with fear of God, a central theme in the book. Indeed, if we return to chapter 1, immediately after we read that Wisdom has been lavished on creation, on "all the living," and on "those who love him," the text turns to the fear of God, which is "glory and exultation and gladness and a crown of rejoicing" and is called "the beginning of wisdom" (1:14), "the fullness of wisdom" (1:16), the "crown of wisdom" (1:18), and the "root of wisdom" (1:20). It is hard not to think that at least one of the ways that Ben Sira construes Virtue begins with comprehending as much as a human being can of Wisdom's splendors, which include Virtue, that can be seen in God's orderly creation, which should prompt unremitting praise of God and fear of God, that is, awe at the glory of God and God's majesty. Moreover, it seems that anyone can achieve at least this partial understanding of Wisdom. Yet in chapter 17, after the creation of human beings who fear God and praise him, verses 11–12 move in a different direction. God also gave "them," that is, Israel, a "law of life," presumably the Mosaic law, which formed an "eternal covenant" and divine "decrees." In addition to God's majesty in creation, Israel specifically "saw his glorious majesty" and heard "the glory of his voice" (17:13).

To pull these passages together, then, it seems that human beings have three primary and related purposes in the created order: (1) to perceive the beauty and order of creation, (2) to praise God who can be perceived through God's works, and (3) to live according to Wisdom/Virtue, which has a component that has been given to all human beings (1:10) and a component that has been given to Israel specifically in the law.[28] In this way, all human beings contribute to the orderliness of creation by initially apprehending Wisdom in nature, which prompts praising, and then by living in accordance with the Wisdom that they perceive, whether it be the Wisdom that all humans can acquire or the specific Wisdom that resides in the Torah of Israel as we see in chapter 24. An important subtext underlies these claims: Even though ordered

27 No Hebrew is extant for these verses. All scholars agree that vv. 9 and 10 should be reversed in order.

28 See Greg Schmidt Goering, *Wisdom's Root Revealed: Ben Sira and the Election of Israel*, JSJSup 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For a similar conclusion about the roles of human beings in the cosmos, see Ursel Wicke-Reuter, *Göttliche Providenz und menschliche Verantwortung bei Ben Sira und in der Frühen Stoa*, BZAW 298 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 281–82.

pairs of opposites, both material and moral, make up the fabric of creation, human beings still possess the ability to choose to live according to Wisdom. Indeed, in Sir 18:1–10, Ben Sira explicitly rejects any suggestion that God might be responsible for sin. The moral order is embedded in creation, but God does not create or countenance sin. Determinism is not built into either the cosmos or the human condition.[29]

Moreover, different human beings, like the different parts of creation, have different tasks, and fulfilling these tasks constitutes the virtuous actions that emerge from the foundation of Wisdom in creation. So, for example, Ben Sira argues that all (or at least those whom he is addressing) can/should give alms to those less fortunate. In different passages, Ben Sira distinguishes the tasks of wives, doctors, laborers, sages, priests/priesthood, the high priest, and all those singled out in the Praise of the Ancestors. As these people fulfill their tasks, social order emerges and is maintained.[30] As human beings in their stations praise God whose majesty can be apprehended in creation and in fulfilling their individual, appointed tasks, they contribute to the praise of God and the pursuit of moral perfection, that is, Virtue, in the world, more or less in a recursive manner.

The ultimate foundation for Virtue, then, is the Wisdom that is evident in creation, and the goal of human beings must be to perceive and live in accordance with that Wisdom. In this sense, for Ben Sira, Virtue *is* the Wisdom that humans can acquire to varying degrees, and their acquisition of divine Wisdom results in acts of virtue in the human realm. In an important respect, humans pursue perfection by engaging in *imitatio Dei* as they acquire Wisdom and act virtuously. Key here is Sir 17:3, καὶ κατ᾽ εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς ("and according to his image he created them"), which obviously draws on Gen 1:26.[31] Ben Sira follows the idea of the divine image by attributing divine attributes to human beings as constitutive of what it means to be human. So, at the very beginning, God gave humans dominion over other creatures (17:4), discretion and "a mind for thinking" (17:5), knowledge and understanding, and the awareness of good and evil (17:6). Even if humans cannot fully comprehend God and God's works, they possess god-like qualities, which enable them to fulfill their appointed roles in creation, one of which is to participate in *imitatio Dei*, in essence the pursuit of moral perfection, through virtuous behavior.[32] Indeed, in a short section on repentance toward the end of the long section from 16:24–17:24,

29 See Jeremy Corley, "Creation and Cosmos in Greek Sirach 18:1–10," in Duggan, Egger-Wenzel, and Reif, *Cosmos and Creation*, 223–43, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110677041-015; and Calduch-Benages, "Polarities," 196–97. For a more general overview of Ben Sira's concept of humanity within creation, see Severino Bussino, "Creation and Humanity in the Book of Ben Sira," in *Cosmos and Creation*, 149–78, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110677041-012; and the essays in Bonifatia Gesche, Christian Lustig, and Gabriel Rabo, eds., *Theology and Anthropology in the Book of Sirach*, SCS 73 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020).

30 Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus*, 363.

31 No Hebrew survives for this verse. The Greek εἰκόνα matches the Septuagint of Genesis, which there translates צלם.

32 See Najman, "*Imitatio Dei*." Individual agency is related not to the mere continuing of existence but also to the execution of tasks that are essential to the survival of the agent. See Xabier E. Barandiaran's definition and discussion of agency that highlights the necessity of "individuality, asymmetry, and normativity" for agency. Barandiaran, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and Marieke Rohde, "Defining

Ben Sira emphasizes how giving to the poor endears a person to God: "A person's almsgiving/charity is like a signet ring with him, and a person's kindness he will preserve like the apple of his eye" (17:22). As Bradley Gregory argues for Ben Sira, almsgiving is one of the most important ways that people imitate God.[33]

Ultimately in Ben Sira human beings find or perceive Wisdom in three places. First, as we have seen above, all human beings have access to Wisdom in God's creation, even if only partially, since no one can fully understand God's majesty and the intricacies of God's creation. Second, a smaller subset of people can find it in the teaching/instruction of the sages, who have the opportunity to learn Wisdom from creation, from other cultures (39:9–12), and in Israel from study the law (38:34c, d). Sirach 39:1–11 even claims that the sage who "seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients," travels to learn "the good and evil in the human lot," and prays to God receives divine inspiration/revelation, since God, if willing, will fill the sage with "a spirit of understanding" (39:6) so that he can "pour forth words of wisdom of his own" (39:6) and "show the wisdom he has learned" (39:8).[34] Third, an even smaller but more significant subset, that is, Israel, accesses it in the law of Moses, which was given to Israel alone and grants Israel a special place among God's works, since Wisdom, who was present at creation and infuses it, eventually settled in Jerusalem and became embodied in the Torah (24:8–12, 23). Thus, *all* human beings, who themselves bear the image of God, can apprehend something of Wisdom, the fount of Virtue, through different means and act according to that Wisdom. Ultimately, however, all humans have to fulfill their appointed task(s), the primary one of which is praise of God. Those who perceive Wisdom and praise God actualize the necessary knowledge to become truly human, to be virtuous, and to live according to God's decrees and so engage in *imitatio Dei*, the pursuit of perfection.[35]

Agency: Individuality, Normativity, Asymmetry, and Spatio-Temporality in Action," *Adaptive Behavior* 17 (2009): 368, https://doi.org/10.1177/1059712309343819.

33 See Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), ch. 7, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110223675.

34 For a discussion of the "spirit of understanding" and revelation to the sage, see Benjamin G. Wright, "'With a Spirit of Understanding' (Sir 39:6): Spirit and Inspiration in the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *The Spirit Says: Inspiration and Interpretation in Israelite, Jewish, and Early Christian Texts*, ed. Ronald Herms, John R. Levison, and Archie T. Wright, Ekstasis 8 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 149–65, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110689297-012.

35 Mira Balberg's analysis of purity and impurity discourses in the Mishnah suggests that rabbinic "reconstruction" of biblical purity systems introduces the "self" as an agent of purity and impurity in contrast with biblical and Second Temple concepts of purity. Her description of the "self" in the context of rabbinic discourses on purity need not be formulated in contrast to biblical and Second Temple reflections on the self and what it is to be human; rather this idea is already active in the texts examined in this chapter. Balberg, *Purity, Body and Self in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 4, 8.

3. 11Q5 XXVI, 9–15: Hymn to the Creator

The Hymn to the Creator in the Qumran Cave 11 Psalms Scroll (11Q5 XXVI, 9–15) ties together creation, virtue, and praise of God in a liturgical context.[36] The psalm is short, only about nine verses. Patrick Skehan estimates that there was likely only one additional line in the hymn beyond what is extant, and thus we have almost the entire text.[37] Esther Chazon has noted that little scholarly attention has been paid to the meaning of the hymn in favor of its importance for liturgy.[38] The hymn employs a range of precursor texts, most importantly for our purposes, Pss 89:15; 97:2; and Jer 10:12–13 (identical to Jer 51:15–16 in Hebrew) in verses 3 and 7–9 on which we will focus here. The hymn is short enough to quote the entire text:[39]

1 (line 9): Great and holy (is) the Lord,
the holiest of holy ones from generation to generation.
2 (lines 9–10): Before him goes splendor,
and after him the roar of many waters.
3 (lines 10–11): Mercy and faithfulness/truth [אמת] surround his presence,
Faithfulness/truth [אמת], justice, and righteousness (are) the foundation of his throne.
4 (lines 11–12): (He is) the one who divided light from darkness;
dawn he established with the knowledge of his mind.
5 (line 12): Afterward, all his angels saw and sang out with joy,
for he showed them what they had not known.
6 (line 13): (He is) the one who crowned mountains with produce,
good food for all the living.
7 (lines 13–14): Blessed be the one who made earth by his strength,
the one who established the world by his wisdom.
8 (lines 14–15): In his understanding he stretched the heavens,
and brought forth [the wind] from his st[orehouses.]
9 (line 15) He made [the lightning for the rai]n,
And he made cloud[s] rise [from] the ends of [the earth.]

The poem begins in verse 1 with praise of God's holiness, and in verse 2 the first *stichos* is resonant of Pss 85:14 and 96:6. The second *stichos* of verse 2 introduces

36 For the publication of 11Q5, see James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs^{a})*, DJD IV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965). For a detailed treatment of the poem, see Eric D. Reymond, *New Idioms within Old: Poetry and Parallelism in the Non-Masoretic Poems of 11Q5 (=11QPs^{a})*, EJL 31 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 169–83. We use Sanders's versification in this chapter. See also Esther G. Chazon, "The Use of the Bible as a Key to Meaning in Psalms from Qumran," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul et al., VTSup 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 85–96, esp. 90–94, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004276215_008.

37 Skehan, "A Liturgical Complex in 11QPs^{a}," *CBQ* 35 (1973): 202–3.

38 Chazon, "Use of the Bible," 90.

39 We give a slightly modified version of Reymond's translation in *New Idioms within Old*, 170–71.

an element of creation, "the roar of many waters," perhaps a gesture toward God's taming of chaos.[40] Verse 3 bears close resemblance to Ps 89:15: "Righteousness and justice are the foundations of your throne; steadfast love and truth/faithfulness [אמת] come before your presence"; and 97:2b: "righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." The first *stichos* in verse 4 clearly recalls Gen 1:4. Verses 7–9 allude to Jer 10:12–13 and remain close to the biblical text, despite, as Reymond notes, having reconfigured it in a number of ways.[41]

In a short scope the hymn combines the same themes that we saw in the several passages in Ben Sira on creation, although the connections do not come through as clearly as in the several passages there. First, like Ben Sira, the central theme concerns God's power and majesty in creation. The allusion to Gen 1:4 in verse 4 invokes the entire creation story as the background to the hymn. Second, God created the cosmos through his "strength" (כוח) and by his "wisdom" (חכמה). The invoking of Wisdom as an instrument of creation echoes Ben Sira's idea of Wisdom being poured out on creation in chapter 1 and Wisdom's pervasive presence in creation in 24:3–6.[42] We also see other attributes of God that further emphasize the wisdom by which God made the cosmos: "knowledge of his mind" (דעת לבו) in verse 4 and "understanding" (תבונה) in verse 8. Third, whereas in Ben Sira, Wisdom is the primary source of Virtue, in 11Q5, Virtue (as moral perfection) is constitutive of divinity itself, since Virtue, as denoted by the terms mercy, faithfulness, justice, and righteousness, "surrounds" God's presence (סביב פניו) and forms the "foundation of his throne" (מכון כסאו). Fourth, God's role as creator of the entire cosmos (תבל) contributes to God's holiness that is emphasized in verse 1, and the proper response of human beings is praise, which both opens the hymn in the exclamation of God's holiness and concludes it in the doxology of verses 7–9.

One major difference between Ben Sira and the Hymn to the Creator in 11Q5 is that Ben Sira consistently reminds his students that the proper response to perceiving God's majesty in creation is "to sing praise with your entire heart and voice and bless the name of the Holy One" (Sir 39:35). We see no corresponding encouragement in the hymn. The lack of any explicit instruction to praise God certainly resides in the difference in genre and purpose between Ben Sira and the hymn in 11Q5, between pedagogy and liturgy. Chazon has argued that the thrice repeated root "holy" (קדש) in verse 1 of the hymn recalls the *trishagion* of Isa 6:3 and the note of angelic song in verse 5 points to the liturgical use of the hymn, particularly the idea that human worshipers join with the angels in worship of God.[43] Whether we can be that specific or not in our reconstruction, the text bears the marks of liturgical use, and its

40 Reymond, *New Idioms within Old*, 174.

41 Reymond, *New Idioms within Old*, 177–78; see also Chazon, "Use of the Bible," 91–92.

42 Of course, like Ben Sira, the hymn here also has Prov 8 in the background.

43 Chazon, "Use of the Bible," 94. See Reymond, who is more reluctant to make the connections between a possible echo of Isa 6:3 and joint human and angelic praise in 11Q5 (*New Idioms within Old*, 171–73). Focusing on the idea of continuous study, Bakker demonstrates how in Serek ha-Yahad and Musar Le-Mevin the concepts of wisdom and holiness converge. He argues that both examples "imply that the acquisition of heavenly wisdom involves a transformation by which the sage goes beyond the limitations of fleshly existence." Arjen Bakker, "Sages and Saints: Continuous Study

relative popularity—it seems to have been cited in Jub. 2:2–3, in Admonition on the Flood (4Q370), and perhaps in the Hodayot—might be attributed to its recitation in liturgy.[44] Ben Sira, on the other hand, employs his praises of God and creation in a specifically didactic context, where his discourse on creation serves as instruction to his charges to praise and bless God.

In their respective contexts, then, the differences between the two texts might be attributed to the specific mechanisms through which they construct the self, and thus, the human, through acts of speech.[45] In Ben Sira, the sage gives instruction and sets himself up as an exemplar to be followed. In a variety of ways, the text coerces the student to listen to and to adhere to Ben Sira's teaching, but it also has an aspirational aspect: The student should emulate Ben Sira, who exemplifies the pursuit of human perfection, in order to become like him.[46] So, on the one hand, Ben Sira attributes to creation a pedagogical function, displaying God's majesty and holiness. On the other hand, Ben Sira instructs his students to praise while at the same time he models that praise for them. For example, in 43:27–31, Ben Sira combines his own praise: "We could say more but could never say enough: let the final word be 'He is the All!'… Awesome is the Lord and very great, and marvelous is his power" (43:27, 29), with imperatives for his students to praise: "Lift up your voice to magnify the Lord, as much as you can" (43:30). The student listens, watches, learns, and emulates.

The Hymn to the Creator as a liturgical text works to form the subjectivity of the one who recites and participates in the liturgy by beginning with praise, affirming the place of Virtue as a foundational aspect of divinity, and ending with a doxological praise of God as creator. As part of an embodied liturgical performance, there is no need to instruct or teach the significance of praise and how to perform it, since praise is built into the performance itself as an embodied practice. Thus, those who perform the hymn are fulfilling what we saw in Ben Sira as the primary task of human beings, to praise God. Combining praise, creation, wisdom, and virtue in one liturgical performance powerfully reinforces the connection between creation and V/virtue both for those who perform it and for those who hear it in its liturgical context.

On this point, we return briefly to verses 4–5, which capture the movement between the light and the dark in their invocation of Gen 1:4:

מבדיל אור מאפלה שחר הכין בדעת לבו
אז ראו כול מלאכיו וירננו כי הראם את אשר לוא ידעו

and Transformation in *Musar le-Mevin* and *Serekh ha-Yaḥad*," in *Tracing Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism*, ed. Hindy Najman, Frédérique Michèle (J.-S.) Rey, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, JSJSup 174 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 106–18, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004324688_009.

44 Chazon, "Use of the Bible," 94; and Reymond, *New Idioms within Old*, 174, 176, 182.

45 On the ways that subjectivity is formed through acts of speaking and speech, see Carol Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, STDJ 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), esp. 12–15. See also n. 7 above which introduces Hadot's scholarship, who talks about the dialogic and pedagogical nature of ancient philosophical discourse.

46 Benjamin G. Wright, "Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar," in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira, Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas, and the Septuagint*, JSJSup 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 165–82, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004169081.i-364.36.

We want to build upon the incisive integration of the Hymn to the Creator as an integral part of the יוצר liturgy, which was long ago developed by Moshe Weinfeld, who claimed that traces of קדושת יוצר and פסוקי דזמרא can be found already both in the Qumran literature and in Ben Sira where Isa 45:7 plays an important role in this later liturgy:[47]

יוֹצֵר אוֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא רָע אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה כָּל־אֵלֶּה

> The one who formed light and created darkness, who made health and created sickness, I am Lord who made all these things.

The antithetical pair of light and darkness in 11Q5, certainly drawn from the creation narrative, preserves traces of the idea that that we saw in Ben Sira (42:24; 33:14–15) and that appears later in the יוצר liturgy cited above (with the addition of health and sickness), that God has created an ordered, harmonious cosmos precisely through pairs of opposites. In order to become human, one comes to recognize God as the one who made the cosmos this way and, as a result, blesses God. Furthermore, this recognition and its attendant praise form the foundation both of what it means to be human and to be virtuous in ancient Judaism. It is specifically to the gesture of blessing to which we now turn in the Hodayot.

4. Hodayot

The Hodayot also can be said to be focused on what it is to be virtuous, as the hymns in the collection reflect a systematic integration of concepts of wisdom and creation with a stated goal of overcoming a carnal spirit in order to experience a higher level of understanding God through blessing and recognition of the creation. They set out a poetical framework for what it is to be human, and they exemplify the journey of learning on a path to leading a virtuous life. The Hodayot are a remarkable collection of songs that reflect a theologically coherent, iterative set of themes about wisdom, creation, and nature, across no less than at least twenty-eight discrete poems, a collection that is dynamic and not fixed.

We want to reflect, then, on the Hodayot's sequence of humiliation, repentance, purification, and blessing, which is repeatedly inscribed in the collection and suggests a performative context for prayer.[48] To be sure, these texts engage exegetical practices and shed a great deal of light on how the sapiential and the pedagogical operate

47 Weinfeld, "Traces of Qedushat Yoṣer and Pesukei de-Zimra in the Qumran Literature and in Ben Sira," *Tarbiz* 45 (1975): 15–26 [Hebrew]. See also Arjen Bakker, *The Secret of Time: Reconfiguring Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDJ 143 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 117–31.

48 See George Brooke's important work on these ideas especially in Brooke, "The Performance of Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament," in *Qumran and the New Testament*, ed. Jörg Frey, BETL 340 (Leuven: Peeters, 2024), 181–98. See also Judith Newman who employs frameworks from ritual studies and embodied cognition to explore how the references to the Maskil's prostration in the Hodayot served to "shape a humble self of the Maskil" and discusses how it could

in the Second Temple period. While exegesis and history are very much part of the contribution of the Hodayot, we want to suggest that they can also teach us a great deal about poetics, liturgy, self-transformation, and theology for the crystallization of what will come to be canonical and deuterocanonical.[49]

- The individual themes outlined above repeat themselves across the collection, but their sequence is not fixed. Their lexical range is consistent as well. There is also significant clustering as the collection grows and is curated.[50]
- *Primordial creation—invoking Gen 1 and Gen 2–3* (with an eye also toward texts such as Job, Ps 104, etc.)
- *Humiliation of birth or the lowliness of human beings*, for example, Job and Psalms: "What is man…" (מה אנוש)
- *Overcoming of the humiliation through blessing God/Creator and defining the divine-human relationship* (often through the articulation of virtues or the entry into a kind of liminal space, which is participatory with angelic song)

This sequence of themes characterizes columns VIII, IX, and X of 1QH[a], but it is not at all static, as we can see, for example, in columns XXIII and XXIV where the sequence changes but the central themes are still present.

Essential here are the parts of the whole, as an integrated expression of blessing after overcoming the self, which is at times articulated through a lowly or carnal past self, at others by the language of repentance, transformation, or even purification.[51] At each performance, those who participate are elevated and differentiated from the rest of humanity. This sequence of themes (even in its variegated form) cultivates

affect the cognition of the community witnessing the performed rituals. Newman, "Embodied Techniques: The Communal Formation of the Maskil's Self," *DSD* 22 (2015): 266, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-12341361.

49 Research in the cognitive sciences can help to elucidate the relationship between the performance of texts through liturgy, prayer, song, and exegesis not as static processes of interpretation but as dynamic. These processes of performance instigate the transformation of the individual. E.g., Amy Cook notes that there is a growing consensus among the cognitive sciences that "thinking is not computing in the brain but action with the body in the world." Acts of reading are not oriented to "attain meaning" but "to enact worlds within which to experience anew." Cook, "4E Cognition and the Humanities," in de Bruin, Gallagher, and Newen, *Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, 876, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.013.47.

50 See recent publications from Carol Newsom, "The Maskil, the Teacher of Righteousness, and the Development of the Hodayot," in *(Con)textual Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Esther G. Chazon et al., STDJ (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); and Newsom, "Farewell to the Hodayot of the Community," *DSD* 28 (2021): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-bja10002.

51 See Newsom's discussion of repentance as a concept involving introspective self-examination, "remorse," as well as the resolution to "transform one's behavior" that was important for the development of selfhood for Second Temple Judaism. She suggests that this model of introspection "is associated precisely with a displacement of agency, as YHWH gives the person the gift of knowledge, including knowledge itself." See Carol A. Newsom, "Sin Consciousness, Self-Alienation, and the Origins of the Introspective Self," in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*: *Approaches to Text, Tradition and Social Construction in Biblical and Second Temple Literature*, FAT 130 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 237.

knowledge and understanding, and through understanding a higher level of self, that is, what it is to be human.

These repeated themes are theological in nature. They concern fundamental features of the divine-human relationship. In fact, although the themes are hardly new, the Hodayot constitute the first sustained and exclusive focus on the relationship between God and the human, which makes the Hodayot one of the first works in Hebrew in which we can speak of biblical theology where the hymns build concepts and scriptural traditions that are performing biblical theology. But what does the repetitiveness of the Hodayot mean? How should it guide our approach to them?[52]

The collection is contemporaneous with some of the latest editing and writing that is part of the biblical canon of the Hebrew Bible, but it also forms a sort of bridge with early Jewish and Christian liturgical developments. The Hodayot as collection participate in what we would call *both* the biblical and extrabiblical as they look back toward earlier biblical precedent but also pave the way for new pathways for performative and liturgical expression of deity, human essence, and liturgical imagination. The Hodayot thus vitalize and revitalize biblical traditions through liturgical idiom that is heavily scripturalized. On this point, Judith Newman writes, "In turning to consideration of the renewed covenant in 1QH^a, we should observe their general character as heavily scripturalized, and indeed, given their ongoing use by the community, they can be characterized as scripturalizing. That is to say, they both draw on scriptural language in their composition, but also in their use in ongoing performances, become authoritative scripts themselves."[53]

We want to think, then, about inheritance, transformation, and transmission of these liturgical expressions as theological and philological innovations (instead of focusing on the exegetical).

This is important for our argument because while interpretive dimensions have been noted, many readers of the Hodayot have become distracted by a discourse of intertextuality and exegesis. We think what is essential here is that while the text is replete with biblical language and themes, this collection is not an interpretation, and neither should it be reduced to intertextual allusion. Rather, the Hodayot build up

52 Newsom suggests that religious communities would "restage the crisis of inner moral conflict" in reference to the Community Rule and the Treatise of the Two Spirits (1QS III, 13–IV, 2). Moreover, she suggests that the "'otherness' of the divine spirit" that God places in the speaker of the Hodayot "remains palpable, even after it has been placed in the speaker. Even though the speaker's knowledge and voice are made possible by God's spirit in him, he does not simply identify his subjectivity with this divine spirit. Instead, he observes it acting through him, constituting his very capacity for agency." See Carol A. Newsom, "Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism," *JBL* 131 (2012): 20, 24, https://doi.org/10.2307/23488209. These insights speak to the way in which the transformation of the self in the Hodayot, and perhaps in other texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, is not teleological, but more like the process of overcoming imperfection that Cavell describes or the transformation that Hadot describes was the work of philosophy as a way of life (see n. 7).

53 Newman, "Covenant Renewal and Transformational Scripts in the Performance of the Hodayot and 2 Corinthians," in *Jesus, Paulus, und die Texte von Qumran*, ed. Jörg Frey, Enno Edzard Popkes, and Sophie Tätweiler, WUNT 2/390 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 300.

a new theological framework as an extension and expansion of the biblical. This is what Hindy Najman has elsewhere called the vitality of scripture.[54]

The first decades of scholarship on the Thanksgiving Hymns focused on form-critical identification of particular units of the collection and linked those scholarly units to historical contexts for the formation of the so-called sect of the Essenes or even the sectarians linked to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Assumptions were that these hymns were postbiblical, reducible to a single sect that was apart from the biblical or the rabbinic. Furthermore, scholars claimed that the theological concepts embedded in these hymns were anticipatory of later theological concepts or that the collection ultimately was headed toward a version of θεὸς ἀνήρ.[55] The excerpting of a particular, even fragmentary, line or two of the Hodayot in order to locate the thinking and practice of the so-called sect can compromise our ability to learn what the whole of the text expresses through reading and prayer. These contributions can radically change the way we think about the past and the history of the concept of the "biblical"—both theologically and historically.

Why do some scholars excerpt lines in an attempt to identify the climactic moment in the Hodayot? We suggest that it is because of their philosophical-theological assumption that the movement toward perfection must exhibit such a breakthrough, that the divine-human relationship must ultimately be resolved through a moment in which the human becomes divine or the divine becomes human. We reject this assumption. On an alternative conception of the quest for perfection, which we noted in the introduction derives from Stanley Cavell's work, it is the repeated pattern of overcoming and transitioning to the next self that we find exemplified by the iterative structure of the Hodayot.[56]

To understand the human's place in the world is to strive to understand God, God's creatures, and creations—the differentiation between good and evil—and fundamentally to come to articulate that knowledge in the form of confession and praise. This striving is the very dimension of what it is to praise and to confess within the single root of *yod-dalet-heh:* תודה, הודיות, וידוי, להודות. This idea is not new, but what is new in our argument is that the texts defy the claim of fragmentation through the

54 Najman, "The Vitality of Scripture in Jewish Antiquity," *JSJ* 43 (2012): 497–518, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-12341237.

55 Especially the self-glorification hymn, as most developed by Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Jerusalem: Schocken Press, 2000 [Hebrew]; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000 [English]).

56 Bakker discusses the tension between the inability to attain divine knowledge evident in both the Hodayot and Serek ha-Yahad as well as claims to have attained angelic knowledge in the final hymns of the Serek. He discusses how the language of "self-humiliation" in both collections creates a dynamic where human limitations are both insurmountable but that divine knowledge through meditating on the Torah makes it possible for human beings to grasp aspects of divine knowledge (*Secret of Time*, ch. 4). Steven Fraade highlights that "for the ancients, including Jews, *askēsis* was not simply the *negative* denial of world, body, sense, pleasure, and emotion, but the willful and arduous training and testing, often through abstention from what was generally permitted, of one's creaturely faculties in the *positive* pursuit of moral and spiritual perfection." Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages,* ed. Arthur Green, 2 vols., World Spirituality 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 257 (emphasis original).

poems' own unified thought world. Moreover, this thought world is itself integrated in this iterative and ever-growing collection, which, as a whole, we want to argue, aspires toward being one with V/virtue, that is, to be one with God.

The texts of the Hodayot contribute to the ways in which liturgy is used to express particular concepts that are central to what it is to be human and to be virtuous. For example, a central concept can be derived from Ps 8 and more generally from Job among other texts.

מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו (Ps 8:5)

What are human beings that you take notice of them?

ומה ילוד אשה בכול[ג]ד[ו]ל[י]ך הנוראים
(1QH^a V, 31)[57]

And what is one born of woman among all [Your] awesome [works?]

This central concept also draws on themes of angelic identification with קדושים ("holy ones") and רוחות ("spirits" or "winds"), on the one hand, and Jobian humiliation about not knowing and not being able to see behind or in front of us, on the other. In this element there is no movement toward overcoming this destruction, no dynamic account of time. In column 7, we read:

ומה אף הוא בשר כי ישכיל[באלה
(1QH^a VII, 34)

But what is flesh that it should have insight into [these things]?

Time exists here only in a paralyzed present.

ומבלעדיכה לא יעשה כול ולא יודע בלוא רצונכה ואין זולתך
ואין עמכה בכוח ואין לנגד כבודכה
(1QH^a XVIII, 11–12)

Apart from you nothing is done; nothing is known without your will; and except for you, there is nothing. There is none beside you in strength, none comparable to your glory.

57 All Hebrew quotations and translations of the Hodayot, unless otherwise noted, come from Hartmut Stegemann, Eileen Schuller, and Carol Newsom, eds., *Qumran Cave 1–III: 1QHodayot^a; With Incorporation of 1QHodayot^b and 4QHodayot$^{a\text{-}f}$*, DJD XL (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 76.

The rearticulation of the impasse between heaven and earth is overwhelmingly present throughout the Hodayot. It has many different ways of naming human essence, but ultimately its expression of human essence is about mortality and physical origins, and the rational articulation through speech and the recognition of deity. Humanity is nothing and is worthless. It is precisely the expression of the human limitation as mortal, as lowly, and as incapable of overcoming that condition that is expressed here. And yet, the poet continues to strive to overcome that essential limitation through song, as we see elsewhere, as angelic song. With every advance there is a setback and a realization of human limitation.[58] This is all achieved with the inheritance of past reflections across the biblical corpus within a broader Hellenistic context, which is full of reflection about the struggle to be and to become wise, godlike, perfect, and holy.[59]

It is impossible, it seems, to overcome the impasse between heaven and the earth. There is none like God, and that is precisely what makes this crossing over from earth to heaven inconceivable. In column VII, 25–34, for example, the speaker first notes that God has created the righteous and the wicked but says that understanding comes through God and not through human ability to achieve perfection (VII, 25). "Flesh" cannot fathom God's creative activity. The only possible way to achieve insight is through divine gifting and not through the internalization of divine wisdom and heavenly or angelic knowledge and efficacious prayer. This is not obviously typical of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[60] This impasse will be articulated many times throughout the Hodayot, which brings home again and again the greatness and perfection of God, particularly as creator, and the impossibility of overcoming the lowliness of humanity.

מה אדבר בלא נודע ואשמיעה בלא סופר

(1QH^{a} IX, 25)

What could I say that is not already known, or what could I declare that has not already been told?

58 Najman and Reinhardt have discussed how the Hodayot as a collection emphasizes the limitations and weaknesses of humanity. See Hindy Najman and Tobias Reinhardt, "Exemplarity and Its Discontents: Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom Texts and Greco-Roman Didactic Poetry," *JSJ 50* (2019): 485, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-15051303.

59 In the Hodayot, people are transformed through God gifting them a spirit or spirits, and this spirit becomes internalized. Cf. Sir 39:6. For this point see Newsom's argument that the conceptualization of the self in the Hodayot is informed by the interpretation of scripture, so the references to placing a new spirit in the speaker engage directly with Ezek 11:19 and 36:26–27, where Ezekiel wishes that God would give the people a new spirit. Carol A. Newsom, "Flesh, Spirit, and the Indigenous Psychology of the Hodayot," in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday*, ed. Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, STDJ 98 (Leiden: Brill 2011), 339–54, see esp. 344 and 350, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215016_020.

60 Jacob Licht pointed this out almost seventy years ago in Licht, *Megilat ha-hodayot: Mi-megilot midbar Yehudah* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1957) [Hebrew].

כי מי כמוכה באלים אדוני ומי כאמתכה
(1QH^a XV, 31)

Who is like you among the gods, O Lord? Who has truth like yours?

The incomparability formula and the impossibility of knowing anything without God emphasizes the impossibility of overcoming the human-divine separation. This is a very different narrative of שירה and ברכה from what we encounter, for example, at the end of 1QS or throughout the Shirot 'Olat HaShabbat. In fact, and in stark contrast, the narrative in the Hodayot, at times, blocks off access to the divine, not unlike Lam 3:44:

סכותה בענן לך מעבור תפלה

You have screened Yourself off with a cloud.

We want to suggest, with Gershom Scholem, that we can already see in Lamentations the iterative and paralyzing cycle that we also find in the Hodayot.[61] However, according to our protagonist in the Hodayot, there are moments of insight or of overcoming the loss and isolation, but it is only and always through God.

[ברוך אתה] אדוני הנותן בלב עבדך בינה
להשכיל בכול אלה ולהת[בונן
(1QH^a VI, 19–20)[62]

[19] (vacat) [Blessed are you,] O Lord, who places understanding in the heart of your servant
[20] so that he may have insight into all these things, and under[stand …]°

The insight that is mentioned is nothing less than a gift from God. It is singularly through the gift of divine insight and a revealed pathway that humanity can receive relief from the suffering, humiliation, and disorientation of the existential exile of which the protagonist speaks. The blessing and hope can generate moments of insight, and those moments come to be described as paradise and fertile space, even an eternal planting.[63]

Hope in the Hodayot is the hope of insight and primordial, Eden-like paradise. It is an eternal planting of hope that is divinely gifted, but ultimately it is insufficient to overcome the devastation and suffering of the individual in a sustained manner.

61 Scholem, "On Lament and Lamentation," in *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 317, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110339963.313.

62 Stegemann, Schuller, and Newsom, *Qumran Cave 1*–III, 87–88.

63 Stegemann, Schuller, and Newsom, *Qumran Cave 1*–III, 223–24.

So, while there are moments of redemption across the collection of the Thanksgiving Hymns, there is not a singular or ultimate redemptive moment where suffering and humiliation are overcome. There is a violent and ongoing return to a suffering that is interrupted with glimmers of hope and insight into the divine through the gift of knowledge and the possibility of uttering blessing. This is the highest achievement of humankind: to articulate praise and knowledge of the creator through the breath of the lips:

[ ] אתה בראתה [30] רוח בלשון.ותדע דבריה ותכן פרי שפתים בטרם היותם.ותשם דברים על קו [31] ומבע רוח שפתים במדה.ותוצא קוים לרזיהם ומבעי רוחות לחשבונם להודיע [32] כבודכה ולספר נפלאותיכה בכול מעשי אמתכה ומ[ש]פ[ט]י צדקכה ולהלל שמכה [33] בפה.כול יודעיכה לפי שכלם יברכוכה לעולמי ע[ולמי]ם. ואתה ברחמיכה [34] וגדול חסדיכה [ ] חזקתה רוח אנוש לפני נגע ונ[פ]ש[אביון] טהרתה מרוב עוון [35] לספר נפלאותיכה לנגד כול מעשיכה.

(1QH[a] IX, 29–35)

(vacat) You created [30] breath for the tongue, and You know its words. You determined the fruit of the lips before they came about. You appoint words by a measuring line [31] and the utterance of the breath of the lips by calculation. You bring forth the measuring lines in respect to their mysteries, and the utterances of breath in respect to their reckoning in order to make known [32] Your glory and recount Your wonders in all Your works of truth and Your righteous jud[gments] and to praise Your name [33] openly, so that all who know You might bless You according to their insight forever [and ever.] (vacat) And You, in Your compassion [34] and Your great mercies, have steeled the spirit of man against the agony of [….] You have cleansed it from the abundance of iniquity, [35] that it might recount Your wonders before all Your creatures.

For the Hodayot there is revolution through the movement between these elements of the sequence (without any absolute fixity). But these revolutions are achieved through prayer and the articulation of praise of God, which is also essential for knowledge—for the differentiation between good and evil and ultimately through the knowledge of mystery of being:[64]

[9] בכוח גבורתכה [– יהל]ל שמכה ויתגבר בכבודכה. [10] אל תשב ידכה מ[– ל]היות לו מתחזק בבריתכה [11] ועומד לפניכה ב[תמים.כיא מק]ור פתחתה בפי עבדכה ובלשוני [12] חקקתה על קו מ[שפט למ]שמיע ליצר מבינתו ולמליצ באלה [13] לעפר כמוני.ותפתח מ[קו]ר להוכיח ליצר חמר דרכו ואשמת ילוד [14] אשה כמעשיו ולפתח מ[קו]ר אמתכה ליצר אשר סמכתה בעוזכה. [15] ל[הרי]ם כאמתכה מבשר[ולספ]ר טובכה לבשר ענוים לרוב רחמיכה [16] [ולה]שביע ממקור דעת כול נ[כאי רוח ואבלים לשמחת עולם.

(1QH[a] XXIII, f2 9–16)

[9] by Your mighty power […] for Your name, and he magnified himself by [Your] glor[y.] [10] Do not withdraw Your hand [… in order] that he may become one who holds fast to

64 See Bakker, *Secret of Time*, ch 5.

> Your covenant, [11] and stands before You [. . .] You have opened [a foun]tain in the mouth of Your servant, and on his tongue [12] You engraved with a measuring line [. . . to] declare to the human vessel his lack of understanding, and as an interpreter in these things [13] to dust like myself. And You open a foun[tain] to reprove the vessel of clay of his way, and the guilt of one born [14] of a woman according to his works; that he might open a fo[untain] of Your truth for the vessel whom You have sustained with Your strength, [15] to [raise up] according to Your truth the herald of good news, [to recount] Your goodness, bringing good news to the humble in accordance with the abundance of Your compassion, [16] [to satis]fy from the fountain of kn[owledge all the trou]bled of spirit and those who mourn for eternal rejoicing.

The collection of the Hodayot hymns is consumed and even paralyzed at moments by what we might call skeptical despair, the darkest hour for humanity and the confrontation of human mortality, human limitations, or error in judgment and in the struggle to differentiate between good and evil. But, also, in the overcoming of that darkness through the recognition of God as creator, the poems of the Hodayot use and expand Hebrew idiom and poetics as a means to create a new and vital discourse of the overcoming of one's own mortality. At the same time, the deity is recognized, and at times even approached or imitated.

The Hodayot is a collection that benefits from being read as an organic whole that is intensely iterative in its composition and that reflects ever-growing commentary as a mode of reading. It is important that we are *not emphasizing* that it is a fixed whole, as we can see ongoing reworking, expansion, and new composition included into the collection over time and across different manuscripts. *Even more, this expansion of the collection continues the iterative practice of what we want to call a spiritual exercise through the growth of the collection.*[65]

Textual integration through repeated idiom, thematic repetition across the sequence of spiritual practice(s), and a perfectionist aspiration as primordial creation are reimagined and recontextualized now in the angst of human mortality and the movement from the carnal to the spiritual through prayer. The vocabulary is consistent and circumscribed throughout the collection. We wouldn't speak of a limited vocabulary but rather of a series of expressions.

In the end, What are these texts? That is, How to categorize them? To be sure, they are not fashioned as historicizing expressions of the community's self-definition, but neither are they exegetical exercises in rewriting or in intertextual acrobatics. So, while we can trace the complexity and intricacy of biblical idiom, these texts nevertheless express a new and innovative articulation. To be sure, this poetic innovation needs to be contextualized in a Hellenistic register along with integrated biblical idiom. Our focus then is on the way in which this collection exhibits remarkably creative readings as part of a larger process of reading and blessing, which participates in a trajectory that already has an extensive precedent.[66]

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65 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 83, 103 (see n. 7).

66 We draw here on the argument of George Brooke that reading at Qumran was part of a practice of prayer and liturgy. Brooke, "Reading, Searching and Blessing: A Functional Approach to the Genres

The Hodayot cannot be said to be resolved by salvation from the suffering. Rather the corrective we offer is part of what we want to describe as an intensified struggle with the subject (or the self) as a collective that is humbled, at times even humiliated, by the protagonist's own mortality, earthliness, and remoteness from God.[67] As Jacob Licht already noted in his 1957 edition, the Hodayot are at their essence poetry and a continuation of biblical poetry (what he calls שירה) in form and in spiritual self-reflection about the נפש.[68]

The Hodayot are full of dynamic and creative poetic new readings that betray both the intricate readings of biblical traditions especially from Job, Gen 1–3, and prophetic traditions, but they also exhibit deep philosophical influences. The structure and fluidity, but integrated composition, suggest developed and sophisticated thinking about creation, acquisition of knowledge and virtue, and human essence. The collection points to a philosophically minded and spiritual practice that involves repentance, blessing, and *paideia*.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the ways in which our three texts construct what it is to be virtuous through wisdom, meditation on creation, and the bridging of wisdom and creation through the performative dimension of blessing and praising God. Each of our texts employs this constellation of ideas in the interest of what it means to be human as a part of God's works and to be virtuous, to pursue perfection through *imitatio Dei*, and thus to find a way to bridge the divine-human divide.[69] We find in these texts issues of creation, *paideia*, wisdom, and the recognition of the deity as creator to comprise a way of thinking about the shaping of human beings in Jewish antiquity and the privileging of virtue as a way of aspiring toward the next self in a larger context of fulfilling the task of being human.

With respect to our contemporary situation, the idea that this constellation of ideas not only shapes human beings but also is constitutive of being human can point to the pedagogical character of the natural/created order. We do not necessarily need to be concerned with *imitatio Dei* in the sense that we see in these ancient Jewish texts. In a contemporary world where environmental concerns have become more and more paramount, the idea of bridging wisdom and creation can lead to a concept of the virtuous that takes into account the entirety of the created order and not simply the

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of Scriptural Interpretation in the יחד," in *The Temple in Text and Tradition: A Festschrift in Honour of Robert Hayward*, ed. R. Timothy McLay, LSTS 83 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 140–56.

67 See H. W. Kuhn, *Enderwartung und Gegenwärtiges Heil: Untersuchungen zu den Gemeindeliedern von Qumran*, SUNT 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 27–29; Hermann Lichtenberger, *Studien zum Menschenbild in Texten der Qumrangemeinde*, SUNT 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 73–94, 181–84; Newsom, *Self as Symbolic Space*; Newsom, "Models of the Moral Self," 24.

68 Licht, *Megilat ha-hodayot*, 1–3.

69 See Najman, "*Imitatio Dei*."

human, offering a more expansive notion of V/virtue as an avenue not only for human perfection but for the well-being of the entire natural order.

Across these ancient Jewish texts one feature that binds them together is a shared understanding of law, or Mosaic Torah, as a way of life. This idea is especially evident in two of the texts we examined, Ben Sira and the Hodayot. In Sir 24:23, Wisdom, which suffused all of God's creation, ultimately became embodied in the "book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob." Thus, Wisdom resides with humans in the form of Mosaic Torah. The same idea pervades the Hodayot in the numerous references to those who follow or reject God's covenant, on the positive side, of those "clinging to the truth of your covenant" (col. VIII, 25), "holding fast to your covenant" (col. X, 23–24, 30), and the heart that "rejoices in your covenant" or on the negative side of "those who have deserted your covenant" (col. XII, 20) and of the wicked who "rose against your covenant" (col. XII, 35). Although not explicit in the Hymn to the Creator, it seems implicit in the claim that justice, truth, and righteousness are constitutive of divinity. For Ben Sira and the Hodayot most clearly, human beings implement this way of life through practices of reading, reflection on wisdom, and coming to terms with God as creator through human articulation of blessing and praise. We want to argue that in our texts, the pathway to virtue is inextricably linked to living in accordance with the law, which is a way to live with virtue, to pursue perfection. To be virtuous is thus to be at one with the law, to devote one's life to reflection on the created world, and to honor one's creator.[70]

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70 The examples across ancient Jewish literature could be multiplied. Perhaps the best example from a different geographical and linguistic landscape is Philo of Alexandria.

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