

Reading Wisdom, Seeking Justice: In Dialogue with John Rawls and Nicholas Wolterstorff

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Introduction

The Wisdom of Solomon is deeply interested in justice. Wisdom is conventionally seen as a Jewish text composed in Alexandria from some time in the first century BCE or first century CE.¹ Each of those conventional designations could be disputed: Wisdom could just as easily be a Jewish-Christian text composed in Rome in the very early second century.

¹ For useful introductions to Wisdom in English, see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 43 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 3–69; Winston, “A Century of Research on the Book of Wisdom,” in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2005 (New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 1–18; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 178–221; Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon* (T&T Clark Study Guides; London: T&T Clark International, 2003 [orig. 1997]); David A. de Silva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 127–52; Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 292–355; James K. Aitken, “Wisdom of Solomon,” in *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: Bloomsbury / T&T Clark, 2015), 401–9; Luca Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019), 17–43.

But nothing in what follows hinges on subscribing to a particular position on Wisdom's circumstances of origin.

The reason there can be such varying positions on the intellectual provenance of Wisdom is, however, directly related to our topic: the author has adopted a Solomonic persona and strives to inhabit the horizon of that perspective, and so obscures much of what historical critics would like to know.² In the long retelling of Israel's history, centered on the events of the exodus in chapters 11–19, the author is careful not to go beyond the time of Solomon and include events that post-date the king. At the same time, the Solomonic guise is worn lightly: the prayer for wisdom in chapter 7 is unmistakably Solomon's, but the retelling of scriptural events is consistently anonymized, the particular names and places effaced in favor of a more generalizing style, with the result that only those who already know the scriptural stories and figures can grasp the antecedents of the exempla Wisdom holds up to its audience.³ This seems to suggest that Wisdom is not interested in detailing and explaining at length the fine-grained particularities of Israel's story (even if it is quite capable of exploiting exegetical detail), but has in some sense de-particularized Israel's history to make it more accessible to a contemporary audience. Wisdom wants to convert the specific and contingent into the general and ongoingly normative.

Wisdom's choice of Solomon as a mouthpiece is notable. In scriptural tradition, Solomon occupies a liminal position: he is the last great king of a united Israel, but as king also faces outward as a representative of Israel to the surrounding nations.⁴ Scriptural tradition and subsequent exegetical *relecture* recalls his correspondence with King Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:1–12; 2 Chr 2:1–16; Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.50–55), as well as the queen of Sheba's visit to test his wisdom (1 Kgs 10:1–13; 2 Chr 9:1–12). The queen's amazed exclamation after this visit is notable in connection with our current topic, here in the Old Greek's rendition: "May the Lord your God be praised, who desired to place you upon the throne of Israel;

² Note Deborah Dimant, "Pseudonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *From Enoch to Tobit: Collected Studies in Ancient Jewish Literature*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 313–23; Leo G. Perdue, "Pseudonymity and Graeco-Roman Rhetoric: Mimesis and the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*, ed. Jörg Frey, Jens Herzer, Martina Janßen, and Clare K. Rothschild, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 246 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 27–59.

³ See Samuel Cheon, "Anonymity in the Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 18 (1998): 111–19.

⁴ This liminality is bolstered by the international and generalizing quality of the wisdom literature that circulated at least sometimes under Solomon's name.

because the Lord loves to establish Israel forever, he also set over them a king to enact judgment in justice and in their judgments [τοῦ ποιεῖν κρίμα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἐν κρίμασιν αὐτῶν]” (3 Kgdms 10:9).⁵ Or in the more direct rendering of 2 Chronicles: God placed Solomon on the throne “to do judgment and justice” (9:8: τοῦ ποιῆσαι κρίμα καὶ δικαιοσύνην). In other words, Israel’s tradition remembers Solomon not only as a wise king over Israel (or sometimes alternatively as an exploiter of Israel’s wealth and women who fell into idolatry), but as a teacher of the surrounding nations and their rulers. The queen of Sheba’s pronouncement declares Solomon an enactor of justice and a teacher of the nations. Wisdom serves as the Solomonic speech that imagines the content of that teaching in concrete form, and opens with a programmatic address to the surrounding nations: “Love justice [δικαιοσύνην], O judges of the earth; ponder the Lord in goodness and in sincerity of heart seek him” (1:1).

What might Wisdom mean to invoke by that notoriously difficult term, δικαιοσύνη? In what follows, I turn to survey Wisdom’s usage of justice- and righteousness-related terminology, and then to try to foster a dialogue among Wisdom, John Rawls, and Nicholas Wolterstorff on the topic of justice. Rawls and Wolterstorff, I freely admit, might not be immediately obvious figures to put in dialogue with Wisdom, but each has offered a major and influential account of justice, and their projects will help us to pose questions to and gain perspective on Wisdom’s configuration of justice as well.

Justice in Wisdom

We can begin by observing some numerical indications of the importance of justice/righteousness: δικ-roots occur almost seventy times in Wisdom. Most often the author uses the terms δίκαιος (“right” or “just”; 27×)⁶ or the adverbial form δικαίως (3×),⁷ or their antonyms, ἄδικος (8×)⁸ and ἀδίκως (4×).⁹ Wisdom does not use the verbal form, δικαιοῦν (“to justify”), but

⁵ In this article, translations of the Wisdom of Solomon follow the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS). Unless otherwise noted, translations of other ancient texts are my own.

⁶ Wis 2:10, 12, 16, 18; 3:1, 10; 4:7, 16; 5:1, 15; 10:4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20; 11:14; 12:9, 15, 19; 14:30; 16:17, 23; 18:7, 20; 19:16, 17.

⁷ Wis 9:12; 12:15; 19:13.

⁸ Wis 1:8; 3:19; 4:16; 10:3; 12:12; 14:31; 16:19, 24.

⁹ Wis 12:13, 23; 14:28, 30.

both the substantives δικαιοσύνη (“justice” or “righteousness”; 10×)¹⁰ and ἀδικία (“wickedness”; 2×)¹¹ appear. But Wisdom also goes beyond these terms and uses a series of other δικ-based words: δίκη, “punishment” or “justice” (5×: 1:8; 11:20; 12:24; 14:31; 18:11); καταδικάζω, “to condemn” (4×: 2:20; 11:10; 12:15; 17:10); δικαστής, “judge” (2×: 6:1; 9:7); and ἐκδίκησις, “vengeance or punishment” (11:15), ἐκδικος, “avenging” (12:12), and προαδικέω, “to be first in wrong-doing,” only here in the LXX (18:2), occur once each. All of this cumulatively suggests an overriding interest in justice or righteousness on the part of the author, and we may be justified in thematizing these concepts in this study.

It is unnecessary to settle the difficulty, peculiar to English and its history of development, of translating δικαιοσύνη and related terms. Should we render it “justice,” as translators of Plato and Aristotle have tended to do, or as “righteousness,” as biblical translations generally, though not universally, treat it? The assumptions a reader brings about each of those terms will color their preferences, but in reading a text like Wisdom that is soaked in both the biblical and philosophical traditions, we do well to remind ourselves that the distinction between them is ours rather than Wisdom’s.

We have already encountered the programmatic opening sentence of Wisdom: “Love justice, O judges of the earth.” This exhortation recalls Isaiah’s description of God as “the one who loves justice and hates spoils from unrighteousness” (61:8: ὁ ἀγαπῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ μισῶν ἀρπάγματα ἐξ ἀδικίας; cf. 1 Chr 29:17). Likewise, the ideal king of Ps 44 in the LXX embodies this way of ruling: “You have loved justice and hated lawlessness [ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν]; therefore, God your God has anointed you with oil of gladness more than your companions” (44:8). In Wisdom, the command to “love justice” is paired with an exhortation to think about the LORD and to seek him with sincerity of heart, suggesting that for the author of Wisdom justice is integrally tied to devotion to the God of Israel. If we consider the *inclusio* with chapter 6, where kings and judges are again directly addressed, we observe the connection between justice and wisdom. Luca Mazzinghi points out:

The invitation to the rulers “to love justice” is transformed into that of “to love wisdom,” and it is precisely the latter, wisdom, which is the protagonist of the central part of the book (Wis 7–10). It is thus

¹⁰ Wis 1:1, 15; 2:11; 5:6, 18; 8:7; 9:3; 12:16; 14:7; 15:3.

¹¹ Wis 1:5; 11:15.

possible to claim that in our book we have a reflection on wisdom which is made concrete as “justice” in the daily life of the wise.¹²

In both cases, the ostensive addressees of the speaker are non-Israelite rulers, suggesting these chapters are something like a programmatic statement on ideals for rulers in general.

But it is interesting to note the concrete way in which the opening speech of Wisdom fills out its initial exhortation: loving justice means not plotting evil (1:4), fleeing deceit (1:5), being ashamed of unrighteousness (1:5)—strikingly practical actions. Wisdom is particularly concerned with the ethics of speech and personal moral action, although it does occasionally rise to the level of broader societal deficiencies in its critique. In 6:1, Solomon’s exhortation to the rulers reads: “Hear therefore you kings, and understand; learn, you judges [δικασταὶ] of the ends of the earth.” Now the tone becomes more accusatory than in the initial address: because these rulers have had their power entrusted to them by God (6:3), he will carefully examine those who, although “servants of his dominion,” did not “judge rightly, or keep the law, or walk according to the counsel of God” (6:4). It is remarkable, once again, that this speech is targeted to those who judge the “ends of the earth” (περάτων γῆς), rather than merely to those within Israel. But it seems clear that, in spite of the frame of chapters 1 and 6 that specifies non-Israelite rulers as the recipients of the exhortation, the practical life that Wisdom urges looks basically like one of a pious Jew adhering to the Torah.

Although the text is generally coy on this point, we may find in chapter 9 an indication of the rationale for Wisdom’s contention that Israel’s specific Torah should inform rulers beyond Israel. There, the author addresses God as the one who “made all things by your word and by your wisdom formed human beings to rule over the creatures that were made by you and to manage the world in holiness and righteousness and to pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul” (9:1–3). In other words, humanity as such was formed as a ruler class to enact the same holiness and righteousness and right judgment that would later find concretion in the Torah. The address of Solomon to these kings, therefore, is not so much a first point of information as it is a recollection of a vocation long forgotten.

The speech of the quasi-Epicurean detractors in chapter 2 maintains the superiority of a life devoted to the pleasures of the body.¹³ This draws a

¹² Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 49.

¹³ An Epicurean designation was urged as long ago as André Dupont-Sommer, “Les

contrast with the “righteous poor man” (2:10), who opposes their lifestyle, criticizes their lack of law observance, and styles himself a child of God. Here we see the beginnings of a basic binary between the righteous and the unrighteous that runs throughout *Wisdom*. In the little retelling of the history of salvation in chapter 10, personified wisdom repeatedly deigns to help a “righteous man,” culminating in her aid of a righteous people (10:4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 20; contrast 10:3). In the conflict between the unrighteous and the righteous, “the world fights on behalf of the righteous” (16:17). In this way, the book does not so much want to offer an abstract theoretical reflection on the just life, as it does attempt to illustrate it in a series of situational settings that demonstrate its components in action: fidelity to the God of Israel even in the face of suffering, the rejection of idolatry and violence, upholding marital fidelity, being content with what is one’s own, and so forth.

In addition to depicting a vision for human righteousness or justice, *Wisdom* also justifies the ways of God to men. One can take the long third part of the book, the retelling of the account of the exodus, as exhibiting the principle of the justice of God’s judgments. As the author says, “neither is there any god beside you, whose care is for all, to whom you must prove that you did not act unjustly” (12:13). Rather, “being righteous, you manage all things righteously, considering it alien to your power to condemn anyone who does not deserve to be punished” (12:15). The recurrent *leitmotiv* is that of a fitting or appropriate return of one’s actions. God punishes the Egyptians by the very means by which they sin. In Greco-Roman imagination, *δίκη* was personified as a retributive enforcer—Solon describes her as the one “who bears silent witness to the present and the past and who in time assuredly comes to exact retribution.”¹⁴ Similarly, *Wisdom* speaks of *δίκη* as the agent of God who punishes those who sin: “Those who utter unrighteous things will not escape detection, and justice [*δίκη*], when it convicts, will not pass them by” (1:8). Justice “pursues” sinners (11:20; 14:31) and exacts retribution without partiality.

‘impies’ du Livre de la Sagesse sont-ils des Epicuriens?,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 111 (1935): 90–109, but certain features of the text do not fit the hypothesis; in critique, see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 114, and more generally, Grayden McCashen, “The Impious and Their Impiety in *Wisdom of Solomon*,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 54 (2023): 187–219, but see esp. the defense of an anti-Epicurean reading in Gabriel Parlin, “The Partisans of Death: Epicureanism and the ‘Impious’ of *Wisdom* 1:16–2:24 Reconsidered,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 55 (2024): 490–517.

¹⁴ Solon, frag. 4, in *Greek Elegiac Poetry*, ed. and trans. Douglas E. Gerber, Loeb Classical Library 258 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 114–15.

Reading Wisdom with Rawls and Wolterstorff

After this rough survey of Wisdom, we turn now to chart the beginnings of a dialogue with two modern theorists of justice: John Rawls and Nicholas Wolterstorff. We should acknowledge the difficulty of this imaginative exercise at the outset. What Wolterstorff says about the authors of the Hebrew Bible is equally true of the Wisdom of Solomon:

These writers speak a great deal about what is just and unjust; every now and then they step back a bit to speak about the role of justice in God's life and ours. What they do not do is step up to the meta-level and talk about how to think about justice. They do not articulate a conception of justice. We ourselves have to extract the underlying pattern of their thought from their testimony.¹⁵

Certain obvious differences in approach are clear, and scarcely worth remarking upon: Rawls is self-consciously attempting to construct a theory of justice appropriate to a liberal democracy, while Wisdom assumes as an ideal something like a theocratic monarchy.¹⁶ It is clear that the Wisdom of Solomon is not a work of political philosophy in the sense that Rawls's body of work is. But one role of political philosophy, among four that Rawls identifies, might in a certain sense fit the project of Wisdom: "Political philosophy may contribute to how a people think of their political and social institutions as a whole, and their basic aims and purposes as a society with a history—a nation—as opposed to their aims and purposes as individuals, or as members of families and associations."¹⁷ Wisdom sketches a vision in which the king/ruler/judge serves as a model of justice for the society, bases their rule on the law of God, and enforces through righteous judgments an equitable society in which the righteous flourish and the wicked are punished.

Rawls, on the other hand, is self-conscious and forthright about the limits of the project he is pursuing. He distinguishes between a "comprehensive doctrine" of justice, and a "political conception" of justice. Rawls explicitly brackets religious and philosophical conceptions of the world that he refers to as comprehensive doctrines that are the products

¹⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 67.

¹⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971); Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001).

¹⁷ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 2.

of particular intellectual, social, and religious communities: "Democratic society is not and cannot be a community, where by a community I mean a body of persons united in affirming the same comprehensive, or partially comprehensive, doctrine."¹⁸ By foregoing the search for a comprehensive doctrine, Rawls hopes "to put aside long-standing religious and philosophical controversies and to avoid relying on any particular comprehensive view. [His project] uses a different idea, that of public justification, and seeks to moderate divisive political conflicts and to specify the conditions of fair social cooperation between citizens"¹⁹ in terms of what he calls a "reasonable overlapping consensus."²⁰ "By this," he writes, "we mean that the political conception is supported by the reasonable though opposing religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines that gain a significant body of adherents and endure over time from one generation to the next."²¹ If we turn to Wisdom and ask whether we can extract from it principles to contribute to a "reasonable overlapping consensus," we might find some general ideas: rulers should be just, oppression should be avoided, or other such broad views. But we will also be struck by the inseparability of Wisdom's theological convictions from its views on justice, not only in the sense that Wisdom's theology funds a certain vision of justice, but more particularly that its theological views define justice with regard to adherence to God's law and chosen people. In his important work *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, John Barclay notably characterized the Wisdom of Solomon, for all its cultured *paideia*, as an example of cultural antagonism.²² This certainly responds to the binary logic of the text and the way in which it frames its audience against a foil of wicked outsiders. In this sense, what we can grasp of Wisdom's comprehensive doctrine suggests that it might be a limited contributor to a project focused on a liberal democratic society.

Wolterstorff, for his part, embraces the theological roots of his vision of justice, and suggests that Rawls's project does not get very far in getting to what Wolterstorff describes as the ontological grounding of justice. In this sense, Wisdom, which says explicitly that "to know [God] is perfect

¹⁸ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 3; cf. 22–23 and throughout. He writes: "Given the fact of reasonable pluralism, a well-ordered society in which all its members accept the same comprehensive doctrine is impossible. But democratic citizens holding different comprehensive doctrines may agree on political conceptions of justice" (9).

¹⁹ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 28–29.

²⁰ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 32.

²¹ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 32.

²² John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 181–91.

justice" (15:3), and Wolterstorff share a common commitment to the importance of justice as grounded in the creation of the world.

Attending to Wolterstorff's concern with the grounding of justice raises an important question for Wisdom. Wolterstorff sketches a fundamental contrast between what he sees as two different conceptions of justice: justice as inherent rights versus justice as right order.²³ By a "right" Wolterstorff has in mind "a normative social relationship; specifically, a right is a legitimate claim to the good of being treated a certain way by persons and by those social entities capable of rational action."²⁴ Or again, he writes: "I think of justice as constituted of rights: a society is just insofar as its members enjoy the goods to which they have a right. And I think of rights as ultimately grounded in what respect for the worth of persons and human beings requires."²⁵ Wolterstorff incidentally suggests that Rawls operates implicitly with an inherent natural-rights theory but does not conceptualize it explicitly.²⁶ Whether or not that is the case is immaterial to our present concern. What is more germane is the genealogy of rights that Wolterstorff traces. Disputing one recently influential narration of the intellectual history of rights that sees rights discourse as the product of fourteenth-century nominalism, he contends that the basic way of thinking long precedes those debates, in early English law but also further back to Ulpian, early Christian theology, and the biblical tradition itself.²⁷ Clearly the Bible does not use the language of rights, but speaks of people as inherently marked by dignity, capable of wronging and being wronged, and having the right to certain goods within the society of Israel.

Wisdom does not theorize inherent rights, of course, but several times stresses the created goodness of life. For example, it suggests in an address to God: "You love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have formed anything if you had hated it. . . . You spare all things, because they are yours, O Sovereign Lord, you who love human beings" (11:24, 26). Or again, in stressing the priority of life over death, Wisdom writes:

²³ Wolterstorff draws a distinction between distributive and commutative justice, on the one hand, and rectifying or corrective justice, on the other, and focuses his discussion on the former, which he also terms "primary justice" (*Justice*, ix).

²⁴ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 385–86.

²⁵ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, xii.

²⁶ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 15–17. Compare Rawls's comments such as: "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override" (*Theory of Justice*, 3).

²⁷ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 44–64.

Do not zealously seek death by the error of your life or bring destruction on yourselves by the deeds of your hands, because God did not make death nor does he delight in the destruction of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, nor is the kingdom of Hades on earth. For righteousness is immortal. (1:12–15)²⁸

It is not a huge leap to move from the affirmation of the originality of the goodness of life to the idea that that life is owed certain goods.

Wolterstorff sees this conception of rights in practice in the Hebrew Bible's concern for what he calls the "quartet of the vulnerable": widows, orphans, resident aliens, and the poor.²⁹ In pondering the preferential option for these groups, he writes:

Israel's writers must have believed that when we look at the actual condition of widows, orphans, resident aliens, and the poor and compare it with the condition of other social classes, we discover that the former are not only disproportionately vulnerable to injustice but usually disproportionately actual victims of injustice. Injustice is not equally distributed. The low ones enjoy those goods to which they have a right—food, clothing, voice, security, whatever—far less than do the high and mighty ones.³⁰

When we turn to Wisdom, we do not find the full quartet, but we do find two of the four, and the addition of the elderly. The wicked muse to themselves: "Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow nor have any regard for the hairs, gray with long years, of the old man. But let our strength be the standard of what righteousness is, for what is weak is proved to be useless" (2:10–11). Presumably Wisdom intends to suggest that the just would do the opposite: attend to the poor, care for the widow, concern themselves with the elderly. Part of the fault of the Egyptians was their lack of hospitality: they "made slaves of guests," perhaps a reflection of another member of the quartet, the resident alien (19:13–16). A just society is not determined by power relations, but by attention to the disempowered. Wisdom also recognizes a

²⁸ Note also the positive traditions about Adam (Wis 9:1–3; 10:1–2), which function to stress the original goodness of creation.

²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 75–79.

³⁰ Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 78–79.

disproportionate judgment for the powerful: “The least may be pardoned in mercy but the mighty will be mightily tested, for the Sovereign LORD of all will not give way to anyone or have regard for greatness, because he himself made small and great and takes thought for all alike, but a strict inquiry awaits the powerful” (6:6–8).

This stands in some contrast to how Rawls spells out the role of inequality in his system. He argues that the most important part of his conception of justice is “the idea of society as a fair system of social cooperation over time from one generation to the next.”³¹ The ideal is a “well-ordered society,” and this requires some acceptance of inequality, since liberty must take precedence: “If we are reasonable, it is one of our considered convictions that the fact that we occupy a particular social position, say, is not a good reason for us to accept, or to expect others to accept, a conception of justice that favors those in that position. If we are wealthy, or poor, we do not expect everyone else to accept a basic structure favoring the wealthy, or the poor, simply for that reason.”³² Ultimately the conception of justice is one of “fair equality of opportunity.”³³ Rawls does have room for a certain principle of reciprocity between the more and the least advantaged in a society (his so-called “principle of difference”), but liberty takes priority, and this stands in contrast, in emphasis though perhaps not in kind, to Wisdom’s insistence that the powerful will be powerfully judged. At the very least, Wisdom, with its comprehensive doctrine in view, offers stronger motivation to work in pursuit of justice for those who subscribe to that doctrine than to the merely political conception of Rawls. At the same time, Rawls’s concern for inequality and for the protection of the weak in society may at some deep level find its roots in his religious upbringing that drew on Israel’s tradition of social justice.³⁴

Equally notable is the relative lack of a “right order” account of justice in Wisdom. Plato had famously suggested that justice/righteousness is a reflection of the proper ordering of society and the soul in the Republic. And Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, had also conceived justice as primarily a matter of what is lawful and what is fair or equal: “The unjust is divided into the lawless and the unfair, and the just into the lawful and the fair” (5.2.8.1130b: διώρισται δὴ τὸ ἄδικον τὸ τε παράνομον καὶ τὸ ἄνισον, τὸ δὲ δίκαιον τὸ τε νόμιμον καὶ τὸ ἴσον). It is true that Wisdom invokes the

³¹ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 5 and throughout.

³² Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 18.

³³ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 47.

³⁴ See David A. Reidy, “Rawls’s Religion and Justice as Fairness,” *History of Political Thought* 31, no. 2 (2010): 309–43.

cardinal virtues as the fruits of loving justice in 8:7 when Wisdom says: “And if anyone loves righteousness, the fruits of her labors are virtues, for she teaches self-control and understanding, justice and courage; nothing is more useful in life than these for human beings” (cf. Plato, *Republic* 4.427d–434c). But this seems to be more of an exception to Wisdom’s normal way of speaking, and at any rate, not connected explicitly with the *topos* of order.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can draw together some of these threads and ask what reading these three treatises on justice together does for our understanding of the Wisdom of Solomon. First, it is clear that Wisdom is operating from a comprehensive doctrine rather than a merely political account of justice. That said, the text in its first six chapters is still addressed universally, to the rulers of the world. Wisdom is therefore recommending the comprehensive doctrine, not departicularizing its claims for the sake of broader acceptance. The comprehensive doctrine involves clearly a large theological claim: God is the one who oversees and guarantees the just functioning of the world. At the same time, we need to be sensitive to the nature of the rhetorical device in play here: although Wisdom is ostensibly addressed outwardly, its actual target readership seems to have been the Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) community, whom Wisdom addresses by means of the fictive speeches, analogously to how early Jewish and Christian apologetic literature addressed to emperors and dignitaries functioned much of the time.

It is also clear that Wisdom sides with the biblical tradition that sees the most vulnerable members of society not only disadvantaged but wronged by their impoverishment. In the economy of God’s justice, they are owed, and its eschatological horizon suggests that they will be repaid, if only in a postmortem sphere of immortality in which remaining wrongs will be righted.

Rawls and Wolterstorff in their accounts of justice both grapple, in a more sustained theoretical fashion, with some of the same basic features of the world as the Wisdom of Solomon does, and reading them together discloses an implicit and ongoing dialogue about justice that is as relevant in the twenty-first century as it would have been two millennia ago.