

Wisdom, Fate & Agency in the Pursuit of Home

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Introduction

Through the pursuit of wisdom, may mortals overcome the trials of fate in order to return Home? If so, how? This paper seeks to answer this question through a typological comparative analysis of the Homeric and Judeo-Christian construction and conceptualization of the role of wisdom, fate, and agency in the journey Home. *The Odyssey*, composed by Greek epic poet Homer in about 800 B.C., is commonly regarded as one of the most fundamental surviving works of literature from Ancient Western civilization.¹ The *Wisdom of Solomon* was composed in Koine² Greek by a Jewish scholar writing in Alexandria, Egypt to local Jews in the first century before the common era.³ It is part of the Septuagint,⁴ which was integral in not only the disbursement of Jewish texts across the Roman Empire, but also to the development of early Christianity.

While the *Odyssey* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* are not cultural nor literary contemporaries, both works—in conversation with one another and on their own—offer an intriguing conversation about Wisdom as a pursuit, embodiment, mediator and virtue. These two texts should certainly be compared—despite their differences—because humans across time and space experience the tensions between fate, agency, mortality, and omnipotent power. Furthermore, the narrative ancient epic and the instructional Septuagint text share a focal point on the pursuit of Home. I designate Home as a capitalized noun because in both texts, it is the

¹ Stewart, 2020, pp. 77-109.

² Koine Greek refers to the dialect of Greek spoken and written in the Mediterranean region during the Hellenistic and Roman Period. It is considered the *lingua franca* or ‘business’ Greek that was used for communication across the Roman empire.

³ Fiddes, 2014, p. 152.

⁴ The Septuagint is the official collection of Greek translations of traditional Jewish texts that were translated to reach a larger audience across the Hellenized Roman empire. Note, however, that the *Wisdom of Solomon* was composed in Koine Greek. It is not a translated text.

purpose, pinnacle, and prize of the entire journey. Home is both a physical and symbolic destination that seals the mortal's fate through their demonstration of virtue and the mentorship from an incarnation of Wisdom. Odysseus' Home is his island and kingdom of Ithaca. The Home discussed in the *Wisdom of Solomon* is the Kingdom of Heaven, where mortals may return to their Creator and restore the divine will of God.

Both protagonist figures are explicitly aware of their mortality. Their favored relationship with their God(s) depend on their acknowledgement that they, as mortals, are dually agentive in the physical world, yet subjected under the cosmic conditions that are directed by the will of the God(s). Odysseus is an "ill-fated" (δύσμορος), estranged king.⁵ The mortal in the *Wisdom of Solomon* is a steward of God's earth who navigates the world after the infamous sin of Adam and Eve, known as the "Fall."⁶ In both texts, mortals must navigate the fateful trials that are beyond their mortal knowledge and control. The mortal man of the *Wisdom of Solomon* lives in a corrupted world fated to death due to Adam and Eve's pursuit of divine knowledge.⁷ Odysseus' journey Home is hindered by the gods, specifically Poseidon, who punish him across his decade-long journey back to Ithaca after his victory in the Trojan War.

Each text discusses the tension of mortal agency in navigating the trials that are fated upon them by the God(s). Further, both texts emphasize that the return Home, or *nostos* in Greek, requires Wisdom. The conceptualization of Wisdom differs⁸ distinctly between the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Odyssey*. Nevertheless, the discernment of and distinction between knowledge, wisdom, agency, and fate are essential principles to mortal navigation through the trials of their

⁵ Hom. *Od.* 1.48-49.

⁶ *Wisdom of Solomon* (Wsd.) 2:23-24; Genesis ch. 3, especially verses 4-5: temptation from the wicked serpent; 17-19: the resulting curse, divine wrath, and punishment for abandoning the will of God in pursuit of becoming "like" God; 22: humans "know" good and evil and thus experience it.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The difference will be discussed in depth in the following section.

physical and experiential world. In order to determine if and how mortals overcome the trials of fate and return Home, the following inquiries must be critically examined and addressed: (1) Why do the God(s) create fated trials for mortals to overcome? And (2) Is wisdom the primary virtue necessary for a successful return Home?

In the upcoming section, I will critically examine the following fundamental terms—knowledge, wisdom, fate, agency, hero, and immortality—within their respective literary scope so that I may establish the assertions necessary to answering these aforementioned questions.

Defining Key Terms within Their Cultural and Literary Scope

Knowledge

Homer and the unnamed author of the *Wisdom of Solomon* assert that knowledge is experiential. Both texts utilize the word οἶδα to express the act of knowledge. Grammatically, this word is the first person singular perfect tense, active voice, and indicative mood, of the Greek verb εἶδον which means “to see.” Thus, οἶδα, literally expresses “I have seen.” The cultural-linguistic attributes of οἶδα explicitly showcase that in order to know, one must have experienced⁹ a phenomena in the physical world. Michael C. Legaspi, author of *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition*, explains that: “Human knowledge is ultimately a knowledge of limits. To know one’s portion in life (μοῖρα or μέρος), one’s share (αἶσα), is essential to leading a good life.”¹⁰

Because knowledge is experiential, mortals are incapable of omniscience. Humans are limited to their mortal experiences and are inherently ignorant to their fate and the divine factors that determine it. They are confined to the limitations of time, for temporality is the foundation

⁹ Experienced as expressing full completion in the perfect tense.

¹⁰ Legaspi, 2018, p. 44.

of their mortality. “Human beings,” Fiddes explains, “are unable to grasp the vast scope of heaven and earth with their bewildering variety of contents, so [they] need the aid of Wisdom who can.”¹¹

In both texts the personified feminine figure, Wisdom, is an instructor and guide to mortals whom she shares a common virtue with. However, a key difference between Odysseus and the mortal human in the *Wisdom of Solomon* is that humans in the latter text are given knowledge from God and can directly access Him through an intimate relationship referred to as *agapē* (ἀγάπη).¹² Odysseus, in the former text, seems to inherently have knowledge on his own and is favored by Athena for his *metis* (μῆτις). She is the ultimate mediator between the mortal’s inherent foolishness and the supreme god’s omnipotence.

Wisdom

In the *Odyssey*, the word *metis*¹³ expresses the concept of wisdom. Translated and understood in English as the word wisdom, *metis* is particularly associated with cunning, deceit, and cleverness. The clever Homeric wordplay is famously embodied, exemplified, and embedded in Book 9, lines 405-414 when Odysseus attempts to trick Polyphemus by disguising himself as *Outis* (no one).¹⁴ Odysseus’ interaction with Polyphemus is central to this conversation about fate, agency, wisdom and trial and will certainly present itself again in the following sections. In the words of Emily Wilson, *metis* describes “cunning plots and deception employed in the service of self-interest” and that it “is not necessarily seen as a bad thing; *metis* is a very useful quality for a person who hopes to survive in a dangerous environment.”¹⁵

¹¹ Fiddes, 2014, 153. See also, Wisd. 9:16-18.

¹² Wisd. 9:4, 9-12.

¹³ μῆτις is an attribute personified Titan goddess, Μητις, who is Athena’s mother and Zeus’ first spouse.

¹⁴ Williams, 2018, p. 6-7.

¹⁵ Wilson, 2018, p. 36.

Metis is Odysseus' primary virtue. Homer characterizes him with the epithet *polymetis*, or exhibiting much cunning or cleverness.¹⁶ His defining virtue is the cornerstone of his favored relationship with Athena,¹⁷ and ultimately his successful *nostos*. Athena, who is literally and symbolically the Homeric goddess of wisdom, expresses deep sympathy and sincere concern for Odysseus' fateful plight and pleads to her omnipotent father, Zeus, for mercy upon the ill-fated king.¹⁸

Comparatively, the *Wisdom of Solomon* describes Wisdom (σοφία or *Sophia*) as the reward for the pursuit of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη or *dikaiousounē*). Righteousness is the primary virtue necessary to attain the guidance of *Sophia*. In the text, Wisdom is referred to as spirit (πνεῦμα or *pneuma*) personified as a woman, named *Sophia*, who descends from God and travels around (περιέρχεται) the mortal world seeking (ζητοῦσα) humans whom she deems as worthy (τοὺς ἀξίους) to receive her.¹⁹ Fiddes asserts that the *Wisdom of Solomon* utilizes an "imagery of Spirit" to "invite its hearers to communion with Wisdom."²⁰ He suggests that there is great benefit in overlaying the concepts of wisdom as a spirit and wisdom as an imagery of a divine communion between the Creator and his created.²¹ He describes wisdom as being dual in nature. He explains that *Sophia* is:

"transcendent and immanent—over against the world as its supreme observer, and within the world as its means of coherence and community. Wisdom in this second aspect participates in the world and invites participation in her life, and so in the life of God whose wisdom she personifies."

¹⁶ Williams, 2018, p. 1.

¹⁷ Athena is Odysseus' patron goddess and the goddess of Μῆτις (*Metis*), literally and symbolically.

¹⁸ Hom. *Od.* 1.47-60.

¹⁹ Wsd. 1:6 is the first instance that she is referred to as a spirit; 6:16 describes her purpose of seeking people who are worthy of receiving her aid.

²⁰ Fiddes, 2014, 154.

²¹ Fiddes, 2014, 152.

In discussing and referring to Wisdom within the context of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, I adopt Fiddes' assertion that the Wisdom discussed in the instructional text²² is the personification of Spirit who reveals herself under the circumstances of an existing intimate and communal relationship between God and humans. This aforementioned relationship is known as *agapē* (ἀγάπη).²³ I will refer to wisdom as the personification of God's divine wisdom. In the context of the text, Wisdom is a guiding spirit (*ruach* in Hebrew)²⁴ that is from God himself. It is a way in which mortals and God can communicate under the circumstances of their respective ignorance and omniscience.

The definition of *dikaiousounē*, understood in English as righteousness, is central to the Judeo-Christian cultural and religious construction of Wisdom. *Dikaiousounē* means the fulfillment of the law.²⁵ The 'law' refers to the divine truth of what is inherently *right*, according to God's original intent for a world free of wickedness. To fulfill that law, as a completed action, is to have pursued and demonstrated righteousness throughout one's mortal life. Righteousness is a lifelong process. Because humans were born into wickedness,²⁶ they must pursue righteousness by the aid of Wisdom throughout their life on earth in order to return Home.

The reward for the pursuit of what is divinely 'right' and in line with God's will is eternal life.²⁷ The text explicitly emphasizes the immortality of righteousness in the following verse:²⁸

²² Sun utilizes the phrase "instructional text" to describe the intent of the Wisdom of Solomon's author in writing about the reward of pursuing righteousness.

²³ Agape refers to the highest form of love that is only shared between God and humans. Its use is very prevalent in Koine Greek texts, including the Septuagint.

²⁴ Fiddes, 2014, p. 155-156: Ruach is the Ancient Hebrew term for breath or wind, which influenced the term "spirit" in English, "pneuma" in Greek, and "spiritus" in Latin.

²⁵ See the University of Chicago's *Logeion*.

²⁶ Wsd. 5:13

²⁷ Wsd. 1:15

²⁸ All translations throughout this paper have been composed by me, Psalm Delaney.

Wsd. 5:15

δίκαιοι δὲ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζῶσιν καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ ὁ
μισθὸς αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ φροντίς αὐτῶν παρὰ
ὑψίστῳ

The righteous live into eternity and their
reward is in the Lord and the regard for them
is from the most High.

The reward for becoming righteous is immortality. Conversely, the pursuit of the opposite of righteousness is wickedness, which results in eternal death.²⁹ The wicked “reject and abuse” wisdom.³⁰ Thus, by agentively following the will of God for his original kingdom that was free from death, humans may overcome the fated eternal death and destruction that is the result of sin entering the world.

Fate and the Concept of Agency

In both the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Odyssey*, a feminine descendent from the omnipotent God reveals herself to mortals who she deems as worthy of her. Furthermore, in both cases the omnipotent God granted his blessing for the mortal to achieve *nostos*. Both Athena and Sophia assess the fitness of mortals to receive her. In order to be divinely ordained to receive the mentorship of wisdom, mortals themselves must (1) demonstrate righteousness or *metis* as a virtue, (2) exercise their agency to choose for themselves whether they will accept her, and (3) commit to abiding by the virtuous requisites necessary to return Home.

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, humans are chosen by God when they demonstrate and embody righteous qualities that are well-pleasing to God. Wisdom is by, of, and from God and she assesses mortal fitness to be a candidate for the immortal Kingdom. Thus, the mortal must choose—by their own free will—to pursue righteousness despite the temptation of wickedness in

²⁹ Sun, 2021, p. 109: Sun offers an intriguing discussion about the grammatical and conceptual stratification of wickedness as demonstrated as a group of mortals and righteousness as demonstrated by a singular person. She explains that such construction is crucial to understanding the requisites for obtaining Wisdom.

³⁰ Ibid.

a fallen world fated to death.³¹ Should they commit themselves to pursuing righteousness and “align themselves” with Wisdom, they are promised divine protection and pardoned from the curse of eternal death in mortal life. Ultimately, they are promised *nostos*.³²

Athena, as an immortal goddess born of Zeus, favors Odysseus for his *metis*—a quality that they both embody. She supports him in a personal relationship while exercising her immortal power to seek direct council from her father. For nearly the first half of Odysseus’ journey home from Troy, Athena watches, assesses, and guides her favored mortal without his knowledge.³³ It is not until Book 13 that Athena reveals herself to Odysseus,³⁴ expressing her favor for him,³⁵ explaining her aid thus far:

Hom. *Od.* 13.296-303

296. ἀλλ' ἄγε, μηκέτι ταῦτα λεγόμεθα, εἰδότες ἄμφω
 297. κέρδε', ἐπεὶ σὺ μὲν ἐσσι βροτῶν ὄχ' ἄριστος ἀπάντων
 298. βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ' ἐν πᾶσι θεοῖσι
 299. μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν: οὐδὲ σύ γ' ἔγνωσ
 300. Παλλάδ' Ἀθηναίην, κούρην Διός, ἣ τέ τοι αἰεὶ
 301. ἐν πάντεσσι πόνοισι παρίσταμαι ἠδὲ φυλάσσω,
 302. καὶ δέ σε Φαιήκεσσι φίλον πάντεσσιν ἔθηκα,
 303. νῦν αὖ δεῦρ' ἰκόμην, ἵνα τοι σὺν μῆτιν ὑφίηνω

296. But come, let us not talk about these things any longer, both of us know
 297. Cunning, while you are indeed the best amongst all the mortals by far
 298. In speeches and in council, I am acclaimed across all the gods
 299. for cunning and wisdom: Yet you did not recognize
 300. Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus, who stands with you always
 301. who keeps watch over you in all your works,

³¹ Sun, 2021, pp. 111-114 leverages contagion theory (hypnotic order), convergence theory, and emergent norm theory to construct how the external force of the “wicked crowd” interacts with righteous mortals and how the crowd attempts to deviate the mortal from their righteous path. Further, Fiddes 2014, p. 155 asserts that “the wise seek to align themselves” to the described Spirit of Wisdom known as Sophia.

³² Wsd. 5:15.

³³ Again, because knowledge is experiential and mortals lack omniscience, Odysseus is unable, at this point, to recognize Athena’s presence in his journey thus far.

³⁴ Hom. *Od.* 13. 301-303.

³⁵ Hom. *Od.* 13. 303-306.

302. And made you a friend to all the Phaeacians,
 303. Now, here I have come so that I may weave a plot with you

She determines that Odysseus is indeed worthy of her presence due to his masterful trickery. She chose him based on his choices to masterfully trick others for his own self-preservation and interest.³⁶ Yet, by his mortal ignorance, he could not recognize her.³⁷ Similar to *Wisdom of Solomon*, Odysseus impressed the divine Wisdom figure by exhibiting *metis* as an embodied mortal virtue and agentively accepted the aid of Athena so that he may achieve *nostos*.

The *Odyssey* and *Wisdom of Solomon* both discuss the reciprocal process of mortal choice and chosenness within the will of the omnipotent God. Both Sophia and Athena are products of the omnipotent power in the cosmic order. Just as Sophia descends from God in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Zeus is the grantor of Wisdom to mortals. Ultimately, Athena and Sophia are the mediators of fate between the omnipotent god and their mortal beneficiary.³⁸

In order to gain the sympathy of Athena, Odysseus had to exude and embody *metis*. In order for mortals in the *Wisdom of Solomon* to obtain Sophia, they must demonstrate and embody righteousness. It is by their choice that they become chosen. Furthermore, there are external forces competing beyond the experiential knowledge of the mortal that strive to sabotage the mortal, the mediator, and the will of the omnipotent God.

Agency Amid Cosmic Conflict

³⁶This example affirms Emily Wilson's definition of *metis*.

³⁷ Hom. *Od.* 13.312-13.

³⁸ It is important to reemphasize here that because Sophia is doubly a spirit and a personification of God's divine wisdom, humans in this context directly access the omnipotent God's wisdom. Odysseus accesses Athena as a divine embodiment of wisdom. Athena is her own manifestation of divine wisdom.

Judeo-Christian and Homeric traditions share a central theme of cosmic conflict in the fate of mortals and their journeys toward *nostos*.³⁹ The perspectives of the omniscient gods regarding mortal agency in fate are essential to understanding the competing power relationships in the divine cosmos.

In the *Odyssey*, Homer discusses divine perspective on mortal agency in the first book, lines 32-34. Zeus makes a speech, in response to Athena's plea for the consideration of Odysseus' plight, that will set a precedent for the fateful events that face Odysseus across his journey:

Hom. *Od.* 1.32-34

32. ὦ πόποι, οἷον δὴ νῦν θεοὺς βροτοὶ
αἰτιόωνται:

33. ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασι κάκ' ἔμμεναι, οἱ δὲ καὶ

34. αὐτοὶ σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόνον
ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν,

Oh! Mortals now blame the gods:

For whatever reason they say that bad things
are from us

yet they themselves possess pains beyond
their fate due to their own presumptuous
sin.⁴⁰

Zeus asserts that while humans are indeed subject to the fates imposed by the gods, they equally afflict suffering upon themselves by means of their own agency and choice in the mortal world. He is frustrated that humans blame only the gods for their plight. Homer, speaking through Zeus, appears to argue that humans are both arrogant and complacent in their state of mortal existence.

³⁹ While the Attic Greek word *nostos* is not used in the biblical tradition, the concept of a virtuous and hard-earned homecoming is significant in mortals' return to the Kingdom of Heaven and their resulting achievement of immortality. The evidence provided throughout the paper, especially in the section entitled "Becoming a Hero" will make this evident.

⁴⁰ While ἀτασθαλία (*atasthalia*) also refers to wickedness and recklessness, I utilize the phrase "presumptuous sin" in my translation to emphasize the agency that Zeus asserts mortals use to bring undue suffering upon themselves. For the dictionary definition, please see the University of Chicago's *Logeion*.

Therefore, mortal arrogance leads humans to cling to the concept of inevitable death; which, by this logic, liberates them to make reckless decisions.

Mortals appear to conceptualize fate as a supernatural phenomenon and they, as mere mortals, are neither wise nor powerful enough to rule. Mortals cleave to this belief that their pains are not the result of their own actions. They assert that their sufferings are single-handedly the consequence of divine fate. Odysseus will explicitly demonstrate his mortal folly in Book 9 after he cleverly blinds Polyphemus to escape his cave:

Hom. *Od.* 9.502-505

502. Κύκλωψ, αἴ κέν τις σε καταθνητῶν
ἀνθρώπων
503. ὀφθαλμοῦ εἴρηται ἀεικελίην ἀλαωτύν,
504. φάσθαι Ὀδυσσῆα πτολιπόρθιον
ἐξάλαῶσαι,
505. υἷὸν Λαέρτεω, Ἰθάκῃ ἐνὶ οἰκί' ἔχοντα.

Aha! Cyclops, if any mortal man asks you
About the ill-favored blinding of your eye,
Say that Odysseus sacker of cities completely
blinded you,
Son of Laertes, who has a house in Ithaca.

Odysseus was seeking the short-term reward of defeating his challenge, through the form of *metis* that he could embody. Though he tricked Polyphemus, he stumbled on his mortal arrogance which yielded foolishness and will conjure Poseidon's wrath in Book 13. If he is to have any chance of returning Home, he must humbly accept the aid of Athena. For Athena personifies and embodies the purest form of *metis*. Nevertheless, even with Athena by his side, Odysseus will indeed experience the pains of his agentive mortal arrogance. He will have to face his fate (*aisa*):⁴¹

Hom. *Od.* 13.307-310

⁴¹ For the use of *aisa* see e.g. *Od.* 13.306.

307. σὺ δὲ τετλάμεναι καὶ ἀνάγκη,
 308. μηδέ τῳ ἐκφάσθαι μήτ' ἀνδρῶν μήτε
 309. γυναικῶν, πάντων, οὐνεκ' ἄρ' ἦλθες
 ἀλώμενος, ἀλλὰ σιωπῆ
 310. πάσχειν ἄλγεα πολλά, βίας ὑποδέγμενος
 ἀνδρῶν.

You must suffer out of necessity,
 And not speak out to any of the people, not
 man nor woman, for the purpose that you
 have returned from wandering, but in silence
 you must
 Bear much pain,⁴² submitting to the force of
 men.

While he has technically made it home, he has not achieved a true homecoming. He must face the challenge of becoming unrecognizable in his homeland. Athena affirms that Odysseus will indeed return home one day, but he must face the consequences for blinding Poseidon's son Polyphemus.⁴³ He must continue to overcome trials before he can be recognized by his kingdom. He must become a discrete subject in his kingdom, fine-tuning his *metis* under Athena's explicit guidance.⁴⁴ This is a critical point in both the epic poem and this comparative analysis as it is in this scene that Odysseus accepts his fate and accepts the divine aid of Athena.⁴⁵

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the author explains, through anecdotes, that without righteousness, the human is cursed to the sinful inclinations and temptations that yield greed, arrogance, and selfishness.⁴⁶ He contrasts this with evidence about the reward of pursuing righteousness. He even discusses the inherent foolishness of humans, due to the curse of sin and death, and professes that there will indeed be a "blameless" mortal who will be truly righteous.⁴⁷ However, due to the inherent foolishness of mortals, they will scorn to death this truly righteous

⁴² The word for pain (*algos*) was used by Zeus in book 1, line 34.

⁴³ Hom. *Od.* 13. 340-343

⁴⁴ Hom. *Od.* 13. 393-403

⁴⁵ Sun, 2021, p. 109, asserts that "righteous obtain wisdom through divine protection and acceptance of divine provision." While she is referring to the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the same qualifiers are true of cunning Odysseus' obtaining of Athena's wisdom through shared *metis*.

⁴⁶ Wsd. 2:6-12

⁴⁷ Ibid.

man,⁴⁸ who was blameless, to death.⁴⁹ They will not recognize him, even though he stands before his eyes:

Wsd. 2:21-22

21. Ταῦτα ἐλογίσαντο καὶ ἐπλανήθησαν
ἀπετύφλωσεν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἡ κακία αὐτῶν
22. καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν μυστήρια θεοῦ οὐδὲ
μισθὸν ἤλπισαν ὀσιότητος οὐδὲ ἔκριναν
γέρας ψυχῶν ἀμώμων

Having reasoned these things for themselves, they were led astray. For their own wickedness blinded them and they did not recognize the mysteries of God. They did not hope for the reward of holiness nor did they decipher that there is a reward for blameless souls.

Only through Wisdom, who perfectly embodies righteousness, can mortals access their Home in the Kingdom of Heaven. In this passage, the author explains that human pursuit of knowledge (ἐλογίσαντο) beyond their lot is the reason for their demise. The conflicting power and temptation of evil and wickedness attempts to portray itself as Wisdom. Humans cannot know via experience what they are not intended to. Humans who seek to know beyond their *moira* or *aisa* are choosing wickedness.⁵⁰ They are pursuing the opposite of righteousness, which is wickedness. This makes them incapable of hoping (expecting through faith) for the reward of pursuing and demonstrating righteousness to attain wisdom. Mortals cannot achieve divine wisdom during their life in the mortal realm. That is why they must seek to know truth through Wisdom, which requires the pursuit of righteousness and the practice of humility in navigating the trials of this life.⁵¹ Should humans reject wisdom, they abandon the opportunity to love

⁴⁸ Presumably Jesus, the son of God. More research is necessary here.

⁴⁹ Wsd. 2:12-18.

⁵⁰ As demonstrated via Adam and Eve's temptation in Genesis chapter 3.

⁵¹ Will be discussed later.

(ἀγαπᾶειν) and be loved (ἀγαπᾶσθαι) by God.⁵² They will for themselves a death in vain and forfeit the divine pardon from eternal suffering.

At the beginning of the second chapter, the author speaks in the words of a group of foolish men who are exercising their free-will that is vacant of wisdom.⁵³ The foolish man expresses that they will test the strength of their enemy—the righteous man.⁵⁴ They ignorantly reason that they are able to see via experience, or ultimately know, whether or not God will save the righteous man from them.⁵⁵ Indeed, however, these wicked people “having reasoned for themselves, were deceived because their own wickedness blinded them” and in Greek, ἐλογίσαντο καὶ ἐπλανήθησαν ἀπετύφλωσεν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἡ κακία αὐτῶν.⁵⁶

The author utilizes this prophetic statement to illustrate the human folly of attempting to reason the things that they simply cannot know. This phrase also serves as an ironic foreshadow to illustrate that while humans are cursed to experience death, they may be delivered from the curse through the pursuit of Wisdom through righteousness. The foreshadowed life and ultimate sacrifice of God’s son Jesus shows that their righteousness is immortal and that because humans are cursed to the temptation of sin, they need Wisdom to be their guide through the physical world.

Becoming a Hero

In Homeric tradition, mortals cannot achieve an immortal life in the heavens with the gods. However, heroes can achieve an undying fame or glory (κλέος or *kleos*) that is credited to their name and spoken of throughout the ages. Homeric mortals achieve heroic status by two

⁵² Referring to *agapē*.

⁵³ Wsd. 2:1

⁵⁴ Wsd. 2:17

⁵⁵ Wsd. 2:18

⁵⁶ Wsd. 2:2

requirements. They become heroes crowned with *kleos* by virtue of descending from a divine lineage and by virtue of a valiant early death via bravery. Odysseus is an acclaimed Homeric hero because he descends from the lineage of Hermes as the son of Laertes and he led his army to victory in the Trojan War. Yet, while he has met the traditional requirements of becoming a hero, he must still suffer his ill-fated journey Home to restore his crown so that his name may be acclaimed forever. Odysseus illustrates a foolish mortal that through his well-pleasing virtue, is favored by the Gods. By exhibiting *metis*, accepting Athena's council and bearing his fates, Odysseus is always destined to go Home. It is by Zeus' will that his suffering is not in vain.

His epic, while distinctly Homeric, appears familiar to the Judeo-Christian mortal man who commits himself to righteousness through the mentorship of Wisdom. The mortal man—who pursues righteousness, journeys through and inevitably stumbles on the trials, tribulations, and temptations of the sin-corrupted world—is guided and shielded by the omnipotent God so that he may fulfill his destiny of conquering death and returning Home.

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, however, humans do not and cannot become heroes⁵⁷ in mortal life—especially not by the fame of their own name. Rather, their pursuit of righteousness allows them to acquire the guiding spirit of Wisdom and secure a crown of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. To conquer death in the Judeo-Christian tradition means to righteously navigate the trials of the death-defiled world. The journey Home is a persistent pursuit of Wisdom through righteousness and continual hope for the restoration of God's immortal world. In this continual hope and divine expectation, humans are welcomed into an intimate relationship with God and are unified with Him through reciprocal love (*agapē*).⁵⁸ Thus, humans can achieve immortality through righteousness, wisdom, and faithfulness.⁵⁹ It does not matter whether or not

⁵⁷ Hero, as defined in the Homeric context.

⁵⁸ Wsd. 4:10-11.

⁵⁹ Wsd. 5:16.

they are recognized in the sight of men. In fact, they may, will, and have been punished by mortals who have chosen to pursue wickedness, as illustrated by the foolish mens’ reasoning in chapter two. However, the death of the righteous is glorified and the death of their adversaries is divinely shameful.⁶⁰

The agentive pursuit of righteousness through Wisdom is what qualifies one as hero-like in the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Righteousness will be recognized (γινώσκεται) in the eyes of fellow mortals, of God, and the greater Kingdom of Heaven:

Wsd. 4:1-2

1. κρείσσων ἀτεκνία μετὰ ἀρετῆς ἀθανασία
γάρ ἐστιν ἐν μνήμῃ αὐτῆς ὅτι καὶ παρὰ θεῶ
γινώσκεται καὶ παρὰ ἀνθρώποις

2. παροῦσάν τε μιμοῦνται αὐτήν καὶ ποθοῦσιν
ἀπελθοῦσαν καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι
στεφανηφοροῦσα πομπεύει τὸν τῶν ἀμιάτων
ἄθλων ἀγῶνα νικήσασα

Childlessness with virtue is better. For
immortality is in the memory of virtue
because it is known by God and by people.

When virtue is present, they imitate it and
when it departs they long for it. And into the
ages, it is triumphant—victorious and wearing
a crown, competing in the struggle for the
undefiled rewards.

The concept of “τῶν ἀμιάτων”⁶¹ is key to understanding the gravity of the reward of immortality. Because the omnipotent God is the creator of all things, concrete and abstract, only He can grant the purest form of wisdom. The righteous, however, will recognize it. It is a privilege and honor to have earned the divine reward of immortality. Earthly rewards of crowns and trophies are only imitations (μῖμοι *or mimoi*)⁶² of this divine reward. Mortals can ore gold and silver, and build their own kingdoms through experiential knowledge. However, the text suggests that these earthly tokens of achievement are mere *mimoi* of the divinely-ordained and

⁶⁰ Sun, 2021, p. 116.

⁶¹ Meaning literally “undefiled things,” but referring to the reward of righteousness.

⁶² *Mimountai* in the second verse means “they imitated.” *Mimoi* is the noun that expresses the act of imitation.

hard-earned reward of immortality. All mortals will know the gravity and pain of their death in the mortal flesh, but it will not be eternal:

Wsd. 18:20

ἦψατο δὲ καὶ δικαίων πείρα θανάτου καὶ
θραῦσις ἐν ἐρήμῳ ἐγένετο πλήθους ἀλλ' οὐκ
ἐπὶ πολὺ ἔμεινεν ἡ ὀργή

The experience of death touches the
righteous, and in the desert a multitude were
destroyed but the wrath did not remain for
long.

Those, choosing to bear their *moira*, commit to the path of righteousness, and accept the mentorship of divine Wisdom, will achieve their *nostos*.

Ultimately, according to the *Wisdom of Solomon*, all people have the power of free-will to make earthly sacrifices, suffer exile and righteously navigate the trials of the fallen world to go Home. They equally have the power to do the opposite. There is a cosmic conflict, between the curse of death and the promised eternal life, that humans experience. To become righteous through wisdom requires them to understand that these two forces are at play against each other in a realm that they cannot access. Nevertheless, it is by mortal conscious choices in the death-filled world that they do know, to compete for victory. This competition requires reciprocal love, knowledge of human limits, and respect for God's will. It requires trust and humility to heed one's position as created and not the Creator.

In both the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Odyssey*, these chosen mortals (ἐκλεκτοί or *eklektoi*) strive to achieve cosmic equilibrium by restoring their destiny. Odysseus' destiny is to return Home. The main reason that he cannot return after Zeus' blessing to Athena is because he did not respect the power and will of the gods. His agency got in the way of his destiny. He had to suffer more in order to learn his lesson. While Poseidon was acting out of wrath, Zeus was testing Odysseus' fitness to become a Hero. Whenever Odysseus disrespected the cosmic

requirements of the gods and abandoned his knowledge of limits, he was punished. Nevertheless, he was never thrown beyond Zeus's will. He was always destined to return Home, but Zeus allowed for him to face "ill-fated" challenges.

Similarly, the mortal discussed in the *Wisdom of Solomon* will face trials in his journey home. If he chooses to abandon righteousness and dismiss Wisdom, he becomes a part of the wicked whose existence in the world is in vain because they themselves reject the invitation to go Home. Again, they actively choose eternal suffering for themselves and seek the fickle rewards of relatively short-lived fame amongst fellow members of the wicked, who "living in a war of ignorance as a result of much wickedness designate evil as peace" or καὶ ἐν μεγάλῳ ζῶντες ἀγνοίας πολέμῳ τὰ τοσαῦτα κακὰ εἰρήνην προσαγορεύουσιν.⁶³ All mortals, whether exhibiting righteousness, wickedness or *metis*, will suffer. However, the omnipotent Gods⁶⁴ appear to have purposefully allowed, even the most favored of mortals, to suffer. Zeus in the *Odyssey* and God in the *Wisdom of Solomon* have a purpose for ill-fated journeys Home.

Managing Trial & Navigating Fate to Achieve *Nostos*

Nostos, most closely associated with the homecoming of a Homeric hero, is not only the central theme of the *Odyssey*, but also the driving principle of Judeo-Christian philosophical beliefs. *Nostos* is central to the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Odyssey* because the pursuit of *nostos* is the purpose behind all decisions made—whether the decisions are influenced by cosmic conflict or mortal free-will. Ultimately, *nostos* is the reward for the mortal's navigation of the trials that are fated upon them. The trials are fated upon mortals as an assessment of their worthiness of the Kingdom.

⁶³ Wsd. 14:22

⁶⁴ Zeus in the *Odyssey* and God in the *Wisdom of Solomon*.

In the journey toward *nostos*, agency and fate exist dialectically and are mediated by the guidance of the personification of divine Wisdom.⁶⁵ In both the *Odyssey* and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, mortals must find favor through demonstrating the necessary virtue.⁶⁶ These mortals' disposition towards the cosmic conditions of their experiential world is what sets them apart from other mortals. They honor and respect their positionality as created beings who are subjects of the divine will of their God(s).

As discussed previously, obeying the divine will is the cornerstone of achieving *nostos*. Should a mortal disrespect the divine order and seek glory by means of their own will, they will indeed solicit the wrath and punishment of the God(s). Zeus' blessing to Poseidon regarding Odysseus' fate Book 13 is quite an interesting case study of such:

Hom. *Od.* 13. 143-45

143. ἀνδρῶν δ' εἴ περ τίς σε βίη καὶ κάρτει
εἶκων
144. οὐ τι τίει. σοὶ δ' ἐστὶ καὶ ἐξοπίσω τίσις
αἰεὶ.
145. ἔρξον ὅπως ἐθέλεις καὶ τοι φίλον ἔπλετο
θυμῷ.

If any man, yielding to power and strength
Does not regard you as anything, retribution is
yours forever.
Do as you wish and what is dear to your soul.

Humans are responsible for their own actions. In order to achieve a true homecoming and welcome, they must commit themselves to the necessary virtue,⁶⁷ respect and humility. Agency and fate exist dialectically in the presence of Wisdom. To become wise is to humbly accept the will and the aid of the Gods and navigate one's fate and the trials through virtue. One can only become wise once they return Home. Wisdom, personified via Athena and Sophia, is the divine mentor to mortals. She cannot alter their destiny, but she can guide the mortals' path, even when

⁶⁵ As defined in their respective cultural and literary contexts.

⁶⁶ Namely righteousness and virtue, respectively.

⁶⁷ Blanketly defined as "wisdom," but namely righteousness and *metis*.

they do not recognize her.⁶⁸ Mortals may achieve the reward of *nostos*, but it requires that they continue to choose virtue so that they may be divinely chosen to achieve their destiny. Why, then, does the omnipotent immortal create trials for favored mortals to overcome?

The *Wisdom of Solomon* deals explicitly with this question throughout the text, but especially in the third chapter. Verses four through six discuss the salvation of the mortal from the curse of death. The following excerpt asserts that trials are the test to examine mortal worthiness of obtaining the guidance of Wisdom and ultimately earning the reward of immortality in the Kingdom of Heaven:

Wsd. 3:4-6

4. καὶ γὰρ ἐν ὄψει ἀνθρώπων ἐὰν κολασθῶσιν
ἢ ἐλπίς αὐτῶν ἀθανασίας πλήρης
5. Καὶ ὀλίγα παιδευθέντες μεγάλα
εὐεργετηθήσονται ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐπείρασεν
αὐτοὺς καὶ εὗρεν αὐτοὺς ἀξίους ἑαυτοῦ
6. ὡς χρυσὸν ἐν χωνευτηρίῳ ἐδοκίμασεν
αὐτοὺς καὶ ὡς ὀλοκάρπωμα θυσίας
προσεδέξατο αὐτούς

For even in the sight of mortals, they would be chastised. Their hope is in full immortality. Having been trained slightly, they will benefit from the great rewards because God tested them and found them worthy of Himself. Like gold in the furnace, He tested them by trial and like a burnt offering he favorably received them.

Moreover, measures of fitness are recurring assessments providing several opportunities to accept Sophia, as explained by the *Wisdom of Solomon*:

Wsd. 12:10-11

10. κρίνων δὲ κατὰ βραχὺ ἐδίδους τόπον
μετανοίας οὐκ ἀγνοῶν ὅτι πονηρὰ ἡ γένεσις
αὐτῶν καὶ ἔμφυτος ἡ κακία αὐτῶν καὶ ὅτι οὐ
μὴ ἀλλαγῆ ὁ λογισμὸς αὐτῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα
11. σπέρμα γὰρ ἦν κατηραμένον ἀπ' ἀρχῆς
οὐδὲ εὐλαβούμενός τινα ἐφ' οἷς ἡμάρτανον
ἄδειαν ἐδίδους

Judging little by little, you granted them a place for repentance not ignorant that their birth is wicked and their evil inherent and that their minds would not be transported into eternity. For the seed was cursed from the beginning. Not fearing anyone, You were

⁶⁸Hom. *Od.* 13.299-300 and Wis. 2:21-22.

granting refuge from the things which they were sinning.

God continually provides opportunities for mortals to turn back, even though His omniscience already knows their fate. In the same way, he continually assesses those whom He knows will receive His council through Wisdom and return Home. Similarly, Zeus continues to allow Odysseus to face challenges throughout his journey to judge his fitness to achieve *kleos* by returning Home. In short, the God(s) create and allow favored mortals to experience suffering and challenge to assess their fitness to achieve their destiny. It is not by mere chance nor accident that either mortal reaches their destiny.

Conclusion

Both narratives establish homecoming (*nostos*) as the ultimate reward for finding favor with the divinities, through virtue. While the *Odyssey* and the *Wisdom of Solomon* conceptualize Wisdom quite differently, the protagonist utilizes the required virtue through the patron divinity or spirit, respectively. Both mortals understand the fated conditions of the cosmos in which they operate, but their mortal free-will poses a threat to their fate. In order to virtuously and victoriously make it Home, mortals must accept their fate. In doing so, they must sacrifice their pride. For all things are bestowed upon them by the Gods. Even their ill-fates are granted to them by omnipotent forces—ultimately for the purpose of assessing their worthiness. Mortal trials are fated, but their choices determine the journey. Agency is equally as powerful as fate. Mortals must heed Wisdom as their guide.

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