

## Psalm 69:23a-30b and divine retribution – a question of Ma'at?<sup>1</sup>

Alphonso Groenewald (UP)

### ABSTRACT

*The strophe comprising the cola 23a-30b is characterised by a remarkable series of imprecations which the supplicant directs against all those enemies who act against him in villainy (23a-29b). The supplicant appeals to God to let justice triumph by redressing the injustices he suffers on behalf of him (God). These imprecations should therefore impel God to make an end to the discrepancies existing between the enemies' deeds and their (apparent) well-being. Clearly the theme of divine retribution functions as the hermeneutical key in order to understand, not only this strophe, but also this Psalm. The question to be answered in this paper is what should one understand by the so-called 'doctrine of divine retribution' and what is the theology underlying this doctrine? In order to do this I will outline different views on the doctrine of divine retribution, as an underlying element of wisdom theology. This outline will especially focus on the opposing views held by K Koch and B Janowski on this issue. Whereas Koch emphasises the natural automatism inherent in the deed-consequence-nexus, Janowski follows in Assman's footsteps by defining retribution in ancient Israel in terms of 'connective justice' (iustitia connectiva); which could be explicated with the ancient Egyptian concept Ma'at, which represents the principle of solidarity, reciprocity and retribution. Having given this overview of the different viewpoints, this paper will defend the thesis that, in line with Janowski, Jan Assman's view of this doctrine can contribute to a better understanding of this series of imprecations included in the present BHS text of Psalm 69.*

### A THE TEXT (Ps 69:23a-30b)

.vqem d ] μymivl yl i0j p:l ] μhynp]l i μnj :l vAyhiy<sup>23</sup>  
 .d [h'h' dymit; μhynēt]nW twar]me μhynf [e hnk]v] ]T<sup>24</sup>  
 .μgyCiy" oP]a' =wrg ]w" om,[z]4uhyl d[A]Jpv]<sup>25</sup>  
 .bvqeyhiy]A l a' μhyl t]a]B] hMvho]μtryf]AyhiT<sup>26</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This article is published as part of a Post-doctoral Fellowship Programme in the Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. It is an adaptation of a paper which was read at the Annual Congress of the Old Testament Society of South Africa, 11-13 September 2002, Stellenbosch.

W̄rP̄syòȳl .l.j } b̄w̄ak̄h̄Al̄ āw̄W̄p̄dr; t̄yK̄h̄Ar̄va} h̄T̄āAȳK̄i<sup>27</sup>  
 .òt̄q̄d̄x̄B̄] W̄abȳAl̄ āw̄W̄p̄dr/ [̄Al̄ [ ' :/ [̄Ah̄n̄:T̄]<sup>28</sup>  
 .W̄bt̄KȳAl̄ a' μȳq̄j̄D̄ix' μ [̄w̄òμȳl̄j' r̄p̄S̄enī W̄j̄ M̄yl̄<sup>29</sup>  
 .yn̄b̄ê̄c̄:T̄] μȳh̄il̄ ḡòòt̄j̄[̄W̄v̄ȳò̄b̄aw̄k̄w̄òyn̄l̄; yn̄l̄āj̄<sup>30</sup>

- 23a Let their sacrificial table become a trap for them,  
 b and a snare for (their) well-being.
- 24a Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see;  
 b and make their loins tremble continually.
- 25a Pour out upon them your wrath,  
 b and the glow of your anger will overtake them.
- 26a Let their settlement be desolate,  
 b let there be no inhabitant in their tents.
- 27a Indeed, the one you have smitten, they persecute;  
 b and they talk about the pain of your slain.
- 28a Add guilt to their guilt,  
 b that they may not enter into your righteousness.
- 29a May they be erased from the book of life,  
 b and with the righteous may they not be inscribed.
- 30a But I, I am poor and in pain;  
 b may your salvation, O God, set me on high.

## B INTRODUCTION

In this article our attention is directed towards the long curse section occurring in Psalm 69. The strophe, comprising the cola 23a-30b, is characterised by a remarkable series of imprecations which the supplicant directs against all his enemies who act against him in villainy (23a-29b).<sup>2</sup> Instead of positive petitions for his own cause, the supplicant now has come with this series of imprecations. When reading this strophe, one is immediately struck by the huge number of imprecations these cola comprise.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly the supplicant appeals to his God to let justice triumph by redressing the injustices he, who regards himself as a servant of Yahweh (69:18a), suffers on behalf of Yahweh (8a). These imprecations should indeed impel God to make an end to the discrepancies existing

<sup>2</sup> The demarcation of the cola 23a-30b as a strophic unit is dealt with extensively in another publication (cf Groenewald 2003). This publication is simultaneously handed in as a dissertation which was completed under the supervision of Prof Dr Ulrich Berges at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Prof Dr G T M Prinsloo (University of Pretoria, South Africa) acted as co-supervisor.

<sup>3</sup> Cf Gerstenberger (1997:9), Lindström (1994:326) and also Van der Velden (1997: 109ff). Different curses against the enemies are of course a quite common element of the Gattung individual complaint song. However, this should not obscure the fact that this section (23a-29b), together with the chain of curses in Psalm 109:6-20, are both in form and content altogether unmatched in relation to these short cries of revenge.

between the enemies' deeds and their well-being (Tillmann 1993:235).<sup>4</sup> They – the enemies – should reap what they sow. According to Hossfeld and Zenger (2000:276) these imprecations are to be regarded as 'der Schrei nach der Gerechtigkeit *und* nach dem Sieg der Wahrheit. Und es ist die Hoffnung, daß diese Börsartigkeit letztlich an sich selbst scheitern wird (Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang)'.<sup>5</sup>

The theme of the doctrine of divine retribution functions as the hermeneutical key in order to understand the cola 23a-30b.<sup>5</sup> The question to be answered here is what should one understand by the so-called 'doctrine of retribution'. What does it imply? What is the theology underlying this doctrine? And how does this understanding contribute to a better understanding of the text of Psalm 69?

### C THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION

The older exegesis understood this doctrine as retribution in the sense of an absolute theory of punishment.<sup>6</sup> Gunkel (1972:1) is of the opinion that the belief in retribution existed in the religion of Israel 'von Anfang an'. According to him it began as a simple act-consequence relationship, but he did not hesitate to use the term 'retribution'. However, in 1955 Klaus Koch (1955:1-42)<sup>7</sup> questioned the

<sup>4</sup> Van der Velden (1997:80-81), however, questions this point of view; he formulates his critique as follows: 'Diese Engführung der Feindschädigungsbitten in Ps 69 auf den Tat-Tatfolge-Zusammenhang wird von N. Tillmann als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt, ohne sie weiter nachzuweisen ... Für alle diese Belege einen impliziten Ausdruck des Tat-Tatfolge-Zusammenhangs voraussetzen zu wollen ist spekulativ.' In spite of his critique of Tillmann it will become clear from the subsequent discussion that these cola can hardly be interpreted without the hermeneutical key of the 'doctrine of retribution'.

<sup>5</sup> Although 'retribution' usually indicates deserved punishment in modern parlance, strictly speaking it also embraces reward. The term is retained in this study for the sake of convenience and its place in past research, and is used neutrally to signify both divine reward and punishment (cf German Vergeltung). It is often also referred to as the 'act-consequence relationship'.

<sup>6</sup> Cf Schwienhorst-Schönberger (1998:334). According to Janowski (1994:249-250) the absolute theory of punishment is to be defined as follows: '... ist nach der absoluten Straftheorie die absichtliche Übelszufügung der Strafe die gerechte Vergeltung für die willentliche Übeltat des Normverstoßes: Der Täter wird bestraft, weil er eine vom Bestrafenden gesetzte bzw. vom Sittengesetz erfaßte Norm schuldhaft verletzt hat (*punitur, quia peccatum est*). Wird diese Theorie auf das Gott-Mensch-Verhältnis übertragen, so wird die göttliche Vergeltung ein »Gleichnis aus der irdischen Rechtssphäre« und die Religion in Rechtsbegriffe gefaßt: Gott ist der »Richter«, der in seiner »gerechten Vergeltung« die gute Tat »belohnt« und die böse Tat »bestraft« (*iustitia distributiva*).'

<sup>7</sup> See also Koch (1972b:130-180).

existence of a doctrine of retribution in his very influential essay, ‘Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?’. The importance of this essay is evident in the debate it triggered about the existence or non-existence of an OT doctrine/dogma of retribution.

Koch (1972a:xi) is very critical of the – as he puts it – ‘gedankenlose Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der dem Alten Testament ein Vergeltungdenken unterstellt wird’. In this essay – mainly on the basis of texts from Proverbs 25-29,<sup>8</sup> Hosea, the Psalms and the Deuteronomistic history – he argues that there is no such thing as a doctrine of retribution in the OT and that instead ‘each deed is like a seed which produces a sphere of influence for good or for ill and each deed of man will in the end yield its own fruit’.<sup>9</sup> Koch therefore – instead of the term ‘doctrine of retribution’ (‘Vergeltungsdogma’) – rather favours the designation ‘fate-charged sphere of activity’ (‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’), according to which the act mechanically generates its effects.<sup>10</sup> It triggers a momentum, so that each act produces a corresponding effect for its doer. He denies that it is Yahweh who rewards or repays (Koch 1972b:137). He therefore does not want to speak of retribution at all, as it would imply that by means of a juridical action something external is brought into the whole process. On the contrary, the deed-consequence-nexus should solely be understood as a causal relationship between deed and consequence where the deed carries its own consequences within itself. According to him, Yahweh is not thought to be so much a judge over the process; he is rather the midwife who brings to completion what the individual has initiated. Yahweh thus exposes the deeds that carry their own consequences, turns the good completely into salvation and evil into destruction (Koch 1955:26).<sup>11</sup> In his study on ‘Wisdom in Israel’ Von Rad (1970:170-172) took over Koch’s view in this regard.<sup>12</sup>

The question arises whether this viewpoint can be accepted. The answer to this question is indeed negative. Not all of Koch’s respondents have found themselves in agreement either with his conclusions or with his methods of

<sup>8</sup> The validity of this view for Proverbs is firmly refuted by Boström in chapter three, which is titled ‘God, retribution and order in the book of Proverbs’ (1990:90-140).

<sup>9</sup> Gammie’s (1970:1) formulation of Koch’s view.

<sup>10</sup> Cf also Dohmen (2000:115) and Schuman (1993:562).

<sup>11</sup> Koch (1972a:xi) formulates it as follows: ‘die Tat bildet eine unsichtbare Sphäre um den Täter, durch die eines Tages das entsprechende Geschick bewirkt wird; die Gottheit wacht über diese innermenschliche Ordnung und setzt sie ständig dort in Kraft, wo sie sich abzuschwächen droht.’

<sup>12</sup> He postulates: ‘Tatsächlich war es irreführend, wenn man diese und andere Sentenzen theologisch von einem »Vergeltungsglauben« her meinte verstehen zu müssen. Nicht um einen göttlich richterlichen Akt geht es in diesen Sentenzen, der den Menschen nachträglich segnend oder strafend erreicht, sondern um eine erfahrbare Lebens-ordnung’ (Von Rad 1970:172).

reaching them. The main objections could briefly be summarised as follows. Although both Koch and Von Rad concede that the order, which is disturbed by a wrong deed or maintained by a good deed, is the order of God, their viewpoint hardly does this justice.<sup>13</sup> The fact that God is the subject of retribution cannot be accounted for by this point of view.<sup>14</sup> The distinction which was thus made by Koch and Von Rad appears to be a highly technical one and therefore too loaded for the retribution question. Whether it works juridically, or simply maintains the order, the structure of the phenomenon remains the same.

Fohrer (1979:495) also differs from the view of Koch and Von Rad. He disagrees with the idea that the correspondence between deed and consequence is mechanical; he rather ascribes the outcome of human conduct to the retributive intervention of God, who necessarily acts in accordance with his righteousness. This viewpoint is also shared by Gese (1972:234). Loader (1979:97) postulates one should rather, in accordance with Fahlgren, speak of a ‘synthetische Lebensauffassung’ (Fahlgren 1972:126-129)<sup>15</sup>: it is without doubt a case of each act carrying its own consequences in itself, as Koch and Von Rad say, but the chokmatic belief in God<sup>16</sup> subjects it to God’s intervention.<sup>17</sup> Important in this regard is the following inference by Schmid (1966:146): ‘Jahwe gilt zunächst als der, der den Zusammenhang zwischen Tat ... und Ergehen garantiert und in Kraft setzt ... Für Israel ist der Zusammenhang zwischen Tat und Ergehen von Jahwe gewirkt.’ Koch’s objection that the use of the term ‘retribution’ implies a judicial act overstates this point. The term can be used without implying a realistic judicial procedure.<sup>18</sup>

Koch (1972c:433-434) appears to have eased the stringency of his views on retribution, as a reaction to the criticism his essay received. Though he stuck to a

<sup>13</sup> Cf also Burger (1989:85).

<sup>14</sup> Loader (1979:97). Cf e.g. Pr 15:29: ‘The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous’ (NRSV). See furthermore Pr 10:3, 27, 29; 14:27; 15:8; 16:3, 5, 7, 20; 18:10; 19:17, 23; 20:22; 22:12; etc.

<sup>15</sup> See also Fahlgren (1932:50-54).

<sup>16</sup> In general the chokmatic wisdom is regarded as *Lebenskunde*, i.e. the integration into the order of life (Loader 1979:97). This order is God’s making. If one acts in harmony with this order, it is correct conduct and prosperity follows. If one’s conduct disturbs this order, it is wrong and misfortune follows. Cf also the discussion by Schmid (1966:144-155).

<sup>17</sup> Cf also Schwienhorst-Schönberger (1998:334): ‘Kritik am Modell der schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre konzentrierte sich auf die Frage, ob die Rolle JHWHs hierbei nicht unterschätzt wird. Einige Texte scheinen vorauszusetzen, daß der Zusammenhang von sich aus, gleichsam nach einer immanenten Gesetzmäßigkeit abläuft (11,5f.17; 26,27f), andere sagen ausdrücklich, daß er von JHWH aufrechterhalten bzw. in Kraft gesetzt wird (2,6-8; 3,33f; 10,29; 12,9; 15,3.9.25f; 16,5; 21,3; 22,12.23; 23,11; 24,12).’

<sup>18</sup> Cf Loader (1979:98).

rather narrow conviction of the deed-consequence-nexus, it was no longer seen as mechanical: Yahweh accomplishes the deed-consequence-nexus that is set in motion by human volition. He acknowledges that Yahweh is the co-worker in the deed-consequence-nexus; but according to him Yahweh is not acting as a judge in bringing the blood guilt of a person back upon his head (Koch 1972c:456).<sup>19</sup> Reventlow (1972:412ff) is also very critical of Koch's approach.<sup>20</sup> According to him, the formula 'his blood(-guilt) is on his head' was at first a mechanical one: the act itself activated tragedy. When at a later stage of the cult it was spoken as a prayer, it was presumed that Yahweh would chastise the guilty (1 Ki 2:32a, 33;<sup>21</sup> 8:32).<sup>22</sup> A further step towards the downfall of this mechanistic concept was the declaration of the formula by the prophets in the name of Yahweh, especially in Ezekiel: 'The word of the Lord came to me: ... "If any one who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head"' (33:1, 4).<sup>23</sup>

Schuman (1993) devoted a whole dissertation to the question of retribution, as well as to the debate which followed the publication of Koch's article in 1955. He is also critical of Koch's view of retribution. He, *inter alia*, postulates that time and again the vibrant description of the fate of the people, which emerges

<sup>19</sup> Cf e.g. Lv 20:9, 11: 'All who curse father or mother shall be put to death; having cursed father or mother, their blood is upon them ... the man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death; their blood is upon them' (NRSV). In this regard Koch (1972c:454) infers as follows: 'Aber auch ohne Klärung dieser Fragen ist hoffentlich schon durch die bisherigen Ausführungen deutlich geworden, daß die israelitischen Anschauungen, die mit dem Spruch "Sein Blut bleibe auf seinem Haupt" und der Blutrache zusammenhängen, an keiner Stelle den Rahmen einer Auffassung von schicksalwirkender Tat durchbrechen, sondern ihn im Gegenteil stets voraussetzen'.

<sup>20</sup> He infers as follows: 'Schon hiermit ist gegen die Auffassung Kochs, der sich insbesondere mit Entschiedenheit gegen jegliche juristische Begrifflichkeit in diesem Zusammenhang wendet und sich leidenschaftlich gegen eine auch nur entfernt mit einem rechtlichen Begriff zu umschreibende "Richtertätigkeit" Jahwes, des Gottes, der im Mittelpunkt des gesamten israelitischen Glaubens und Lebens steht, aus-spricht, Entscheidendes gesagt' (Reventlow 1972:424-425). See also Reventlow (1972:415, 416, 431).

<sup>21</sup> 1 Ki 2:32a, 33 reads as follows: 'the Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head ... so shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendents forever ...' (NRSV).

<sup>22</sup> 1 Ki 8:32 reads as follows: 'then hear in heaven, and act, and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding them according to their righteousness' (NRSV). Cf also Reventlow (1972:426-427).

<sup>23</sup> In this regard Reventlow (1972:427-428) infers as follows: 'Für diesen Wandel ist vor allem Ezechiel, der Prophet der unbeschränkten Herrlichkeit Jahwes, ein Zeuge.' Compare also Burger (1989:86).

from their actions, seems to display the mode of Yahweh's response to those specific human actions (Schuman 1993:567).<sup>24</sup> Yahweh's response is always expressed in anthropomorphic terms. He (Schuman) furthermore argues for an acknowledgement of the distributive character of the divine provision of justice, without detracting from the notion of salvation, which is seen as a result of the divine righteousness. According to him it appears to be evident that this provision of justice has, as its converse, the notion of 'punishment'. He concludes his summary by stating that Koch tried to prove too much, but in the end he did not avail himself sufficiently of the opportunity to describe the unique Old Testament view of the doctrine of retribution. He furthermore argues that Koch's argumentation cannot withstand the test of criticism in favour of another view. That other view remains nonetheless necessary, just as the *principium talionis* remains fundamental for the various Old Testament witnesses and for their interpretation. In Schuman's view (1993:459) the talionic principle equals the principle of retribution. He interprets the term *principium talionis* as follows: 'In vele culturen en religies vindt men te allen tijde blijken van het bestaan van een vergeldingsprincipe [*principium talionis*]: dat iemand dient te ontvangen wat hij verdiend heeft. Dat principe komt tot uiting in de overtuiging van het geloof in een gerechtigheid die heel de werkelijkheid zinvol ordent, althans zou moeten ordenen' (Schuman 1993:504).<sup>25</sup> In order to illustrate this principle he, for example, mentions the following sample: Because Nadab and Abihu (Aaron's sons) offered unholy fire unto Yahweh, a fire emanated from Yahweh's face and consumed them; they died before the face of Yahweh (Schuman 1993:460).

Jan Assmann – an Egyptologist – defines retribution in ancient Egypt in terms of the concept 'Ma'at'. Before discussing retribution in the ancient Egyptian society, it is of the utmost importance to first illuminate the term or concept 'Ma'at'. Ma'at was a goddess in the Egyptian pantheon; her vocation was truth and justice. Ma'at is thus a word in the Egyptian language, 'und ein – wenn nicht geradezu *der* – Zentralbegriff der altägyptischen Kultur' (Assmann 2001:15).

The question could then be posed whether 'Ma'at' should be seen as a culture or as a religion? Assmann answers this question as follows: With the concept Ma'at an ancient culture construed a concept on a very high level of abstraction (Assmann 2001:17). This concept combines both human action and cosmic order, and by adopting it, it positions the law, morality, state, cult and the religious world-view on one common foundation. As a central concept of

<sup>24</sup> See also Schuman (1993:503-506).

<sup>25</sup> It could also be formulated as follows: 'Daaronder versta ik de innerlijke overtuiging dat daad  $x$  een waarde vertegenwoordigt die alleen met die tegenwaarde in de vorm van daad  $x^1$  adequaat kan worden gecompenseerd. De gelijkwaardigheid van  $x^1$  dient bovendien zoveel mogelijk uit te komen in gelijksoortigheid. Maar daarmee is  $x^1$  niet identiek met  $x$ ' (Schuman 1993:459).

Egyptian thought it is actually untranslatable.<sup>26</sup> Therefore Assmann prefers to leave this concept untranslated – which is according to him the best solution – otherwise one should describe the content of this concept with sundry words, for example ‘Wahrheit, Gerechtigkeit, Weltordnung’, ‘vérité, justice, ordre’ or ‘truth, justice, order’ etcetera.

In the concept Ma’at parts of the whole are combined into one integrated system, which only later on was separated into the different branches which today could be designated as political philosophy, moral philosophy, natural philosophy and theology (Assmann 2001:18). Flowing forth from this supposition is the factum that the Egyptian Ma’at-precept refers to the position of the individual in society, the position of society in the pharaoh’s state, as well as the position of the state in the bigger cosmos. As a generic term it is synonymous with what one could – most appropriately – designate as ‘Egyptian religion’. Assmann (2001:18) furthermore infers: ‘Die Ma’at-Lehre ist eine “Religion”, aber eine heidnische, sie ist weltbezogen, innerweltlich und umfassend; als In- und Oberbegriff aller Normen, Verpflichtungen und Axiome, die das menschliche Leben in den sozialen und politischen Ordnungen des Zusammenlebens steuern, deckt sie sich mit dem, was auch “Kultur” genannt werden könnte, sie ist eine “symbolische Sinnwelt”, die alles Handeln und alle Ordnungen und Institutionen fundiert.’ One can thus assert that Ma’at is a complex systemic combination of both religious and cultural concepts, which affects every single sphere of ancient Egyptian society. The golden age of the Ma’at-precept – as a cultural religion – lies between 3000-1500 BCE (Assmann 2001:24). These introductory remarks will suffice as background information with regard to the understanding of this concept in relation to the doctrine of retribution.

In the concept Ma’at the idea of reciprocity is set on a high level of abstraction. Whoever does Ma’at, will receive Ma’at; whoever does Isfet, will receive Isfet.<sup>27</sup> In a world where Ma’at reigns, the deed will return to the doer. This statement is fittingly illustrated by the following quotation: ‘Der Lohn eines Handelnden liegt darin, daß für ihn gehandelt wird. Das hält Gott für Ma’at’ (Assmann 2001:65). The idea underlying this quotation could be designated by the term ‘active solidarity’ (‘Füreinander-Handeln’); active solidarity is Ma’at. Ma’at thus represents the principle of solidarity, reciprocity and retribution (Assmann 2001:66). According to this Egyptian understanding retribution is,

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Er steht und fällt mit dem ägyptischen Weltbild. Es scheint kaum eine Sprache zu geben, die ein Wort ähnlichen Bedeutungsumfangs kennt, denn es gibt keine Kultur bzw. Gesellschaft, die ein dem altägyptischen hinreichend ähnliches Weltbild ausgebildet hätte’ (Assmann 2001:17).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Und so wird Ma’at gegeben dem, der tut, was geliebt wird, und so wird Isfet gegeben dem, der tut, was gehaßt wird. Und so wird Leben gegeben dem Friedfertigen und Tod gegeben dem Rebellischen’ (Assmann 2001:64).



however, not to be seen as ‘Sache eines bestrafenden und belohnenden Gottes noch einer Privatinitiative der jeweils Betroffenen. Vergeltung ist aber auch nicht einer unpersönlichen Weltordnung anheimgestellt, sondern einer eminent zivilisatorischen Sozialordnung, einer Ordnung des Aneinander-Denkens und Füreinander-Handelns’ (Assmann 2001:66). According to this order the individual is set into a specific social locality and into a specific time. It also cannot be separated from ‘yesterday’, otherwise the act-consequence-nexus is disrupted, which is not cosmically guaranteed. Assmann hereby criticises Koch’s view of a ‘fate-charged sphere of activity’ (‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’) according to which Israel would have observed its reality. According to him there is neither in Egypt nor in Israel an automatism of the deed-consequence-nexus – as Koch claims to be the case in Israel.

On the contrary, the idea that a bad deed will return to the doer was a widespread idea in Egyptian texts. The deed-consequence-nexus is thus a reality, but it is nowhere stated that it is activated spontaneously. Causality does not exist at all; an evil-doer thus can be exempted from punishment. Once the natural order falls apart, no ‘fate-charged sphere of activity’ (‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’) is capable of getting even with him/her. Only the solidarity of the group is capable of assuring that the nexus between deed and consequence is to be maintained. Assmann (2001:67) names this principle ‘connective justice’ (*iustitia connectiva*). According to him even the deity is not excluded from this chain of events. It must be kept in mind that this principle of solidarity and reciprocity – which occurs in the texts of the Middle Empire<sup>28</sup> as a deployment of the meaning of Ma’at – should always be interpreted and seen as a vertical occurrence. Ma’at operates from top to bottom, as well as from the bottom to the top. This notion could be formulated as follows: ‘Stellt man den Begriff der Reziprozität in diese Perspektive einer “vertikalen Solidarität”, dann bildet die Gottheit die Spitze, und der König, aber auch der Hofmeister ... und jeder andere der Ma’at zum Durchbruch verhelfende Rechtspfleger bilden die göttliche Ma’atverwirklichung nach unten hin ab’ (Assmann 2001:68).

In order to end this discussion of Ma’at, the following concluding remarks will suffice. ‘Active solidarity’ can be formulated in more general terms: solidarity as ‘*iustitia connectiva*’ implies that when the responsible party does not take steps against the injustice, this party will be implicated in the injustice as well. Because of this, even the deity – respectively God – will be implicated in the injustice if (s)he does not take steps against the injustices of this world (Assmann 2001:60).

Janowski – in an essay published in 1994 with the title ‘Die Tat kehrt zum Täter zurück. Offene Fragen im Umkreis des »Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhangs«’ – also offers critique of Koch’s viewpoint. According to him Koch’s theory of a

<sup>28</sup> In Egyptian history the period from 2040 to 1786 BCE (Deist 1990:157).

‘fate-charged sphere of activity’ (‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’) gives the impression – in spite of numerous efforts to contradict it – that the deed-consequence-nexus is a natural automatism. This natural automatism, however, would degrade the deity’s involvement to the level of a secondary determination (Janowski 1994:256).<sup>29</sup> Janowski – following Assmann’s theory of the concept of Ma’at – elucidates that in the OT the doctrine of retribution should also be understood in terms of ‘connective justice’ (*iustitia connectiva*), as it functioned in Egypt (Janowski 1994:258). Fundamental to this interpretation is the notion that society is characterised by the principle of solidarity. Justice cannot be materialised on its own, but is dependent on solidarity with the other – in acting, listening as well as in thought.<sup>30</sup> These three aspects build the foundation for a ‘living-with-one-another’. Justice then is based on the principle of reciprocity, and is as such not a natural sequence of a good deed, but rather a function of societal action (Janowski 1994:261). The notion of ‘connective justice’ (*iustitia connectiva*) as meaning retribution should be interpreted within the framework of the communicative structure of reality as a social interaction. This interaction is not simply acknowledged according to natural law, but is maintained through active solidarity. Yahweh’s action should also be understood within this context. It too emanates from the principle of reciprocity, which is fundamental to the action model (‘Handlungsmodell’) of social interaction. The crucial difference, however, is the fact that even when his intervention is indeed to be expected, it remains unavailable – as if it were, so to speak, an act of ‘mercy’. Yahweh thus indeed stands in relation to the deed-consequence-nexus, but his free will remains unaffected by it.<sup>31</sup> The central issue in this whole debate thus remains the question whether Yahweh’s role is not devalued by means of the model of a ‘fate-charged sphere of activity’ (‘schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre’). Recently Koch

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<sup>29</sup> He furthermore infers as follows: ‘Der im Zuge dieser Kritik Alternativbegriff der »schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre« ist m.E. aber wenig geeignet, die alttestamentlichen Sachverhalte sachgemäß zu erfassen, da er wesentliche Aspekte des Problems gar nicht in den Blick kommt. Dazu gehört vor allem das Prinzip der »konnektiven Gerechtigkeit« (*iustitia connectiva*)’ (Janowski 1994:266).

<sup>30</sup> ‘... wenn sie füreinander handeln (aktive Solidarität), aufeinander hören (kommunikative Solidarität) und aneinander denken (intentionale Solidarität)’ (Janowski 1994:261).

<sup>31</sup> Janowski (1994:269-270) puts this assumption into words: ‘Gottes Handeln folgt demnach demselben Prinzip der Gegenseitigkeit, wie es dem Handlungsmodell der sozialen Interaktion zugrundeliegt – mit dem entscheidenden Unterschied, daß sein Eingreifen zwar erwartbar ist, aber unverfügbar bleibt, also gleichsam ein Akt der »Gnade« ist. JHWH steht zwar in Relation zum Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang, die Freiheit seines Willens bleibt davon jedoch unberührt.’

(1998:55-58) has expressed critique of Janowski's view and once again has reiterated his earlier viewpoint.<sup>32</sup>

#### **D RETRIBUTION IN DIFFERENT OT CORPORA**

No one writing on the theology of retribution today can afford to ignore this debate which followed the publication of Koch's article in 1955. After referring to this debate in part, it is fruitful to focus briefly on the functioning of this doctrine in the different OT corpora of literature respectively. According to Loader (1979:97)<sup>33</sup> the so-called doctrine of divine retribution is deeply anchored in the wisdom literature; one could even postulate that the ground structure of wisdom thought was moulded by this principle. The traditional doctrine is profusely attested in the book of Proverbs. According to the general hmkj-wisdom the whole universe exists of a fixed order, which is God's making. The typical everyday hmkj of Proverbs operates with the acknowledgement of a righteous God intervening in the world where man acts. If man's conduct should be in accordance with God's order, it is good and God's blessing results; prosperity and well-being consequently follow. If man's conduct is disharmonious, it disturbs this order because it is wrong and false, resulting in God's punishment. One can furthermore say success and prosperity succeed a good deed and failure and adversity succeed a bad deed (Loader 1976a:43).<sup>34</sup> This doctrine applies to all dimensions of human life, namely the economical, social and political.

Clear-cut examples of this wisdom thought is also to be found in the Psalter, and namely in the wisdom Psalms.<sup>35</sup> Burger (1989:75) infers there are three

<sup>32</sup> He again formulates his viewpoint as follows: 'Was hier zutage tritt, läßt sich an vielen alttestamentlichen Stellen nachweisen und ist von mir anderwärts Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang genannt worden. Das meint eine Auffassung, nach der sittlich qualifiziertes Verhalten, sei es im Guten oder im Bösen, eine unsichtbare Substanz hervorbringt, die wie eine Hülle den Täter begleitet und eines Tages in ein entsprechendes Ergehen für ihn ausmündet. Der Mensch wird also als ein vom Schöpfer unausgefüllter Entwurf verstanden, der sich durch seine Taten seinen Weg (däräk) schaffen, sich sein Schicksal bereiten soll. Dabei wirkt die Gottheit auf ihre Weise mit, fördert die Durchsetzung solcher Tatfolgen, beschleunigt sie, bringt aber nicht ein dem Tun fremdes Verhalten von außen über den Menschen' (1998:56).

<sup>33</sup> Compare also Loader (1983:20).

<sup>34</sup> Compare e.g. the following texts: Pr 12:21 reads as follows: 'No harm happens to the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble' (NRSV); Pr 14:11: 'The house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes' (NRSV). Cf also Boström (1990:139) and Schwienhorst-Schönberger (1998:334).

<sup>35</sup> Burger (1989:93) classifies the following Psalms as wisdom psalms: Pss 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, 127 and 128. With regard to the number of wisdom Psalms in the Psalter, Kuntz (1977:232) identifies 9 psalms and also adds Ps 133 to Burger's list

related major themes in the wisdom psalms, *viz* the law of Yahweh, the fear of Yahweh and retribution. There is a logical association existing between these themes: in order to ensure well-being, human beings have to fear Yahweh by observing his law. Yahweh will then repay them for their good behaviour. The cohesive factor in this logical relationship is the order in the natural cosmos which was created and is maintained by Yahweh. By living wisely, human beings can find a place in this order, thereby gaining security in their own lives. Several psalms reflect the doctrine of retribution in a typical convention of the wisdom theology when they announce a blessing for the righteous, for example Psalms 1, 91, 112 and 128 (Gunkel & Begrich 1998:296). According to Kuntz (1977:232) this dimension of retribution assumes a conscious agent who justly oversees the bestowing of reward and punishment; this is something other than just an automatic act-consequence relationship.

Psalm 1 is certainly one of the best known examples of wisdom poetry in the Psalter with regard to the traditional wisdom concept.<sup>36</sup> Psalm 1 likens the righteous (qydx) to the tree transplanted along streams of life-giving water and contrasts him to the wicked ([vr), who is like worthless chaff destined for oblivion. In distinction to the wicked, who has no basis for hope, the righteous may appropriately await a life of infinite blessing. Kuntz (1977:228-229) justly refers to retribution in Psalm 1 as 'traditional', since this psalm is characterised by an 'easy orthodoxy'. It could also be designated as dogmatic; according to this psalm a person is either righteous in God's eyes or else he is not. There is nothing in between. This description is typical of the black-and-white character of dogmatic wisdom.

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of wisdom psalms. According to Burger (1989:93) these psalms show a resemblance to wisdom literature in both their form and content. This comes to the fore in such formal aspects as, *inter alia*, the yrvā-formula, the alphabetical structure, the 'son'-formula and the rhetorical question. As far as content is concerned such themes as the righteous versus the wicked, the two ways, the fear of Yahweh and the law of Yahweh, and practical counsel with regard to everyday life, also occur in these psalms. Cf in this regard also Crenshaw (1981:180-185); Crenshaw (2001:87-95); Kuntz (1977:224) and Kuntz (2000:146-149). According to Gunkel & Begrich (1998:297) from its mood Psalm 73 also belongs to wisdom poetry; it treats the battle over the doctrine of retribution and the amazement at the fate of the godless. See also Hossfeld & Zenger (2000:335) and Loader (2001:12).

<sup>36</sup> Rendtorff (1998:296) formulates it as follows: 'Dabei ist der Grundgedanke leitend, daß zwischen dem Tun des Menschen und seinem Ergehen ein Zusammenhang besteht: Wer das Richtige tut, dem ergeht es gut – und umgekehrt. Dieser in der Weisheitsliteratur vielfältig ausgesprochene und diskutierte Gedanke findet in Ps 1 seine spezifische Ausprägung in der Verbindung mit der Tora: Der Gerechte, der sich ganz der Tora hingibt, ist auf dem guten, heilvollen Weg; der Weg des Frevlers, der die Tora verachtet, führt ins Verderben.' Cf also Rendtorff (1998:334): 'Dieser klassische weisheitliche Gedanke ist hier, wie in Psalm 1 ...'

This is, however, not the only view the wisdom psalms portray. The Psalms 34, 37, 49, 73 and 112 give expression to the crisis into which the wisdom thought was precipitated by this black-and-white interpretation of the doctrine of retribution (Loader 2001:9-13; see also Burger 1989:90-91 and Kuntz 1977:230-232). These psalms have a more realistic way of interpreting the world than the more traditional wisdom psalms with their more dogmatic way of interpreting reality; these psalms thus give a less uncritical view of life. The more realistic attitude comes to expression in the realisation that the just and righteous, in spite of their devotion to Yahweh, can become the victims of suffering as a result of the imperfect world we live in. But in spite of this realisation the psalmists of these psalms stick to the conviction that sooner or later the *ṣḏq* will receive its punishment in this world and that the *qydx* will be rewarded. These examples make it clear that, no matter how severe the crisis, the wisdom psalms maintain the doctrine of retribution. Even when the breakdown is as severe as in the books of Job and Qohelet, the doctrine of retribution is never abandoned in the wisdom psalms. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed from Qohelet's response towards the doctrine of retribution that his experience of the crisis was more severe than the supplicants of the wisdom psalms experienced it. The difference does not lie in the crisis – which presumably is the same – but in the reaction: whereas the wisdom psalms stick to the doctrine of retribution, Qohelet rejects it (Burger 1989:92).<sup>37</sup>

The belief in retribution finds its final and most conspicuous form in wisdom literature in the OT. But in fact, retribution for both good deeds as well as bad deeds is not exclusively a wisdom concept, but is present in all the different perspectives of OT literature (Loader 1986:104; see also Würthwein 1978:706-707). The prophets threatened the faithless Israel with retribution for their bad deeds. It takes up a central place in the legal perspective, for example when offenses are punished.

In the Deuteronomistic history the concept of twofold retribution is the core and centre of the view of history, as may be seen with particular clarity in the book of Judges (Würthwein 1978:710). The whole course of history is schematically understood in terms of national sin and divine punishment, national conversion and divine aid.<sup>38</sup> It is apparent that the Deuteronomist wrote to confirm the fairness of God's acts in the destruction and exile and, consequently, to persuade his readers of that fact. The Deuteronomist, no less than the Chronicler, understood Yahweh to be presiding over the course of history and recompensing the deeds of this covenant people. The book of Deuteronomy calls

<sup>37</sup> Loader, however, clearly differs on this point; he formulates it more profoundly: 'Die Theodizee ist bei Kohelet weder gescheitert noch aufgegeben – Kohelet hat sie nicht einmal versucht' (2001:15).

<sup>38</sup> Cf Kelly (1996:219): 'Retribution is one of the fundamental themes of the Deuteronomistic History'.

for a fashioning of life with reference to the divine law of recompense, which also recognises God's blessing upon obedience. But because Israel and Judah had failed to comply with that law, their histories ended in destruction. This idea is clearly expressed in Deuteronomy 4 and 28; it is stressed that compliance with the Sinaitic covenant will bring prosperity as well as the secure ownership of the land; but apostasy will lead to judgement and the exile of the people (cf Würthwein 1978:708-710).

Chronicles also does not reflect Koch's view. The Chronicler (like the Deuteronomist) also treats the exile as an inevitable outcome; an indication that he most likely understood this event as the result of repeated disobedience to which numerous acts contributed. Kelly (1996:220), however, infers that the Chronicler emphasises the short-term nature of retribution, as well as its 'individual' character. He furthermore postulates that 'the Chronicler's theology, so far from being a sclerotic dogmatism about cause and effect or a species of "divine pragmatism", as it has been generally depicted, is in fact a reflex of the writer's convictions about *divine grace*, an emphasis concerned above all to highlight Yahweh's mercy and restorative activity toward his people' (Kelly 1996:236).

It was, however, inevitable that the consistent optimism of the belief in retribution should be shown to be hollow when confronted with real life. Job and Qohelet were ardent opponents of the solidification of wisdom thought (cf Loader 1976a:47; see also Loader 1976b:54). Qohelet grants that academic wisdom has a relative value, because the fate of the wise does not depend, as their teaching maintains, on their just and pious conduct, but is already prepared in God's hand in a way which cannot be fathomed or known. However, 'instead of being negatively overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness, Qohelet's advice is that man's life has to be *lived* for as long as God permits it. Life's uncertainties should not haunt man; he should rather be prepared to enjoy unreservedly what is pleasant, should it be granted – *carpe diem*' (Van Niekerk 1991:103). The author of Job wrestles with the doctrine of retribution in an attempt to achieve a new structure of life which will lead to true human existence beyond mere living. It is rooted in the experience that the destiny of man rests in the puzzling and inscrutable, but purposeful, acts of God (Fohrer 1979:495-496).<sup>39</sup>

## E CONCLUSION

The doctrine of retribution is fundamental to the understanding of the text of Psalm 69. The whole idea of retribution, which so preoccupied the Israelites,

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<sup>39</sup> Loader (2001:22): 'Aber dem Leidenden wird in der Natur als Schauplatz der Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes – also in der Welt – die Möglichkeit geboten, in der Begegnung mit einem zwar Geheimnis unwitterten, aber trotzdem doch immanenten Gott Ruhe zu finden.' Cf also Dell (1991:35-39).

certainly must have played an important role in the life of the supplicant of Psalm 69, as well as motivated his conduct. It is evident from different phrases in the text that the supplicant had a deep fear of Yahweh: for example, his zeal for Yahweh's house testifies in favour of this assumption (10a). He furthermore designates himself as a servant (18a) of Yahweh, who endures reproach for Yahweh's sake (8a), as well as for Yahweh's house (10a). The idea of divine retribution must have influenced his outlook on his immediate reality. The fact that this supplicant addresses his God (4a) and Lord (7a) as *twabx hwhy* (Yahweh Zebaoth – 7a) indicates that for him Yahweh is the heavenly king to whom he can turn for salvation and deliverance in the face of his adversaries. Because Yahweh, in particular, is a righteous God (28b), the supplicant must have hoped that Yahweh would reward him for being righteous. Hence, there is seen in Yahweh, as a righteous God, a guarantee that a correct relation between conduct and destiny, a true harmony between deed and reward or punishment – which was so important for Israel – would in fact be maintained. The supplicant's reality, however, tells a different story. He experiences vehement ill-treatment from his adversaries; they, inter alia, accuse him of theft (5ef), they reproach him (10b), they have made him a byword (12b) and they hate him (5b, 15c). Indeed, this is the quintessence of the situation described in this text: they (i.e., the enemies) do not act according to *Ma'at/hqdx*; instead, they act against solidarity with the supplicant. Therefore God should act in solidarity with him.

No wonder that the supplicant, from colon 23a onwards, comes with a series of imprecations directed against his enemies. The supplicant appeals to his God – whom he calls Yahweh Zebaoth – to let justice triumph by redressing the injustices he suffers. These imprecations should impel God to make an end to the discrepancies existing between the enemies' deeds and their well-being.<sup>40</sup> In terms of 'connective justice' (*iustitia connectiva*), God is compelled to act against the enemies – because they act against the principle of solidarity with the supplicant. Otherwise, when the responsible party – which now is God – does not take steps against the injustice, he will be implicated in the injustice as well. Only his solidarity can now assure that the nexus between deed and consequence is to be maintained. Subsequently justice will prevail. In this regard I conclude with the following quotation: 'Es ist der Schrei nach der Gerechtigkeit *und* nach dem Sieg der Wahrheit. Und es ist die Hoffnung, daß diese Bösartigkeit letztlich an sich selbst scheitern wird (Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang)' (Hossfeld & Zenger 2000:276).

<sup>40</sup> A classic expression of the idea of retribution occurs in Proverbs 22:8a; it reads as follows: 'He who sows injustice will reap calamity.' In common idiom it means, 'you reap what you sow' (Burger 1989:83). The supplicant thus urges God to recom-pense his adversaries, in order that they reap what they sow.

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Alphonso Groenewald, Department of Old Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, Republic of South Africa.

*E-mail: agrwald@yahoo.com*