In the previous chapter I pointed out that the wisdom undertaking, as we find it in both Proverbs and Qoheleth, is an earthly exercise with earthly concerns. This statement can be further qualified: the wisdom enterprise is not only earthly, but it is anthropocentric in its aims. Its goal is not simply to understand the world *per se*, but rather to understand the place of a human being in the cosmos. Ultimately, the sages wished to understand the world in order to improve the quality of their existence, to use a modern phrase. Therefore, an attempt to formulate the sages' worldview cannot be made without close examination of their anthropological perspective, their social views and the socio-economic structures reflected in the two books. 

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1 I must clarify that I do not wish to imply here that wisdom is, as it is sometimes claimed, solely or predominantly anthropocentric in its entirety, i.e., that it is concerned only with questions of human nature and activity. I fully agree with Perdue (1994:46–48) that in order to do justice to wisdom, it is not possible to consider it merely as an attempt to understand humanity, nor is it possible to relegate wisdom entirely to the sphere of cosmological deliberation. Rather, both of these elements are key aspects of the wisdom quest. Wisdom is about understanding the whole world for the sake of, and with special emphasis on, humanity; it is about human players on the cosmic stage. Thus, its concerns are anthropocentric, but these concerns are addressed in a wider cosmological context.
apparent that the sages had a high anthropology, somewhat resembling the *imago dei* perspective of Genesis:

- He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, he who shows grace to the underprivileged respects him. [Prov 14:31]
- He who derides a poor person scorns his maker, he who rejoices over disaster will not go unpunished. [Prov 17:5]
- A rich person and a poor person share this: Yahweh made both of them. [Prov 22:2]
- A poor person and an oppressor share this: Yahweh gives light to the eyes of both of them. [Prov 29:13]

There is an apologetic concern in the background of these verses; they are aiming to refute an implied claim that the poor can be freely oppressed, because the socio-economic divide is evidence that such oppression is permissible, and most likely, that it is a right that the rich are divinely granted. It is in this context that the theologically-based argument of the previous verses makes best sense; the sages argue that all human beings, irrespective of their social standing, are due a certain dignity because they all have the same maker. This is not to say that Proverbs principally rejects any social arrangement that is hierarchical, nor that the sages considered poverty and wealth as arbitrary states outside of a person's control. On the contrary, poverty is most frequently portrayed as self-inflicted and riches the product of wisdom. The quoted verses are not intended as a critique of the existing social arrangement, only of using it as a justification for behaviour otherwise considered unacceptable; that which is unacceptable with respect to the rich is also unacceptable with respect to the poor.

A human being, as envisaged in Proverbs, could be called *homo docilis*; when humanity was created by God, it was endowed by him with certain abilities such as those exemplified in the following proverb:

- Hearing ear and seeing eye, Yahweh made both of them. [Prov 20:12]

This has two main implications. First, human senses are God-given and should, therefore, be cultivated and used in coming to grips with the larger created world. God equipped people to observe, to learn and so gain knowledge and skills; it is, therefore, wrong not to employ these faculties. Yet, an additional and more cautious tone can be detected in the proverb. Since these senses were created by God, their perception

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\[2\] Lit. *meet.*