The meaning of the second half of Prov. xi 30 is not clear; the verse reads:

\[ \text{pri } \text{sad} \text{diq } \text{ez } \text{hayyim } \text{ve} \text{lq} \text{eqah } \text{ne} \text{pas} \text{ot } \text{hakam} \]

that is,

*Vetus Testamentum* XXXIII, 3 (1983)
The fruit of a righteous person is a tree of life, and one who takes souls is wise.

Elsewhere "to take a soul" means to take a life, as in Prov. i 19b "(unjust gain) takes the soul of those who do it". Similar is Ps. xxxi 14b (English 13b), "they plot to take my soul". But if it is a bad thing to take a soul, how can a wise person be responsible for it? It seems more likely that the phrase "take souls" is to be understood positively, but exactly how it is to be understood is unknown.

A commonly accepted way out of the difficulty is to emend ħākām "wise" to ħāmās "violence" and to translate, as the RSV does, "but lawlessness takes away lives". This translation rests on the Septuagint, which reads ἀφείροονται δὲ ἄωροι φυχαὶ παρανόμων "but the souls of transgressors are borne off before their time".1 Though ħāmās does not mean "transgressor", ἁπανόμος is used to translate the plural of ħāmās in Prov. iv 17b: (Hebrew) "they drink the wine of violent acts", and (Greek) "they are drunk with transgressing wine". But this emendation of ħākām to ħāmās does not really recommend itself. The imprecise translation of the posited ħāmās by παράνομος may be a result of the struggle of the translator to make sense of a text that was opaque to him, and it does not necessarily follow that the emendation will bring us back to the text that stood before the Septuagint translator.2

One might note that the verses surrounding Prov. xi 30 are mostly in antithetical parallelism, so that since xi 30a is about something good, xi 30b must be about something bad. But exceptions to the rule of antithetical parallelism include Prov. xi 25, which is probably textually corrupt, and also xi 29, which seems to present two essentially negative instances: "One who troubles his house will inherit wind, and a fool is a slave to the wise of heart." Thus it does not seem impossible that xi 30 was intended to present two positive instances to balance xi 29.

Within Proverbs there is a suggestion for a solution to the lack of clarity in the verse, as was recognized by Moses Qimḥi in his commentary:

\[\text{ǔlqeqh corresponds to ki leqah ḫb...[For good understanding...Prov. iv 2], and one who makes souls wise is wise, and he informs them about moral things. What is it like if someone "takes" your heart? He makes you wise. Or again "he acquires" (qôneh) is like those who bring purchases (miqqāḥōt), and in the language of the Sages they call acquisition (qinyān) purchase (miqqāh) which is to say the acquisition of} \]