Research Article

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Making Wise the Stranger: Sapiential Hospitality in Proverbs 1–9

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0183>

received July 30, 2021; accepted October 15, 2021

Abstract: Jayme Reaves uses Genesis 19:1–14; Joshua 2:1–22; Judges 19:14–27; and the cities of refuge texts in Deuteronomy 4:41–3 and 19:1–10 as biblical sources to conceptualize a so-called “protective hospitality.” This article utilizes the book of Proverbs to argue that it reflects the same protective motivations regarding hospitality, with a sapiential twist. Specifically, Proverbs 1–9 depicts two forms of hospitality: sapiential hospitality and pseudo hospitality. Sapiential hospitality protects the stranger from fraudulent hospitality. It is a form of absolute hospitality, meant to avert strangers from falling into the trap of false hospitality offered by organized crime syndicates. Although Lady Wisdom is vulnerable to attack from villainous strangers, she is also resilient enough to make strangers wise and thrive.

Keywords: Proverbs 1–9, welcome, protective hospitality, absolute hospitality, Lady Wisdom, migration, journey, migrant, stranger

1 Introduction

In her book, *Safeguarding the Stranger: An Abrahamic Theology and Ethic of Protective Hospitality*, Jayme Reaves provides a lengthy thesis:

Protective hospitality and its faith-based foundations, specifically in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, merit greater theological attention. More specifically, the practice of protective hospitality in Christianity can be enhanced by better understandings of Judaism and Islam’s practice of hospitality, namely their codes and etiquettes related to honor. Additionally, the positive potential for protective hospitality’s contribution to peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and reconciliation and the possibility of development of a “cooperative theology” among the Abrahamic traditions are particularly valuable.¹

In developing her thesis, Reaves uses Genesis 19:1–14; Joshua 2:1–22; Judges 19:14–27; and texts on cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 4:41–43 and 19:1–10 as the biblical basis for her so-called “protective hospitality” in the Hebrew Bible. This article affirms and builds on the first part of Reave’s thesis, concerning the theme of protective hospitality in the Abrahamic tradition. It then seeks to add Proverbs 1–9 to the list of biblical texts that address the protective nature of hospitality, in a manner specific to Proverbs that I call “sapiential hospitality.”

This article consists of four parts. First, I provide a survey of the contemporary discussion on welcome and hospitality from biblical, missiological, sociopolitical, philosophical, and psychoanalytical perspectives. Second, I describe the narrative world of Proverbs 1–9 to demonstrate how travel, migration, and

¹ Reaves, *Safeguarding*, xv.

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hospitality serve as the backdrop to the collection. Third, I develop four core characteristics of sapiential hospitality. Fourth and finally, I describe three forms of pseudo hospitality depicted in Proverbs 1–9, from which migrating strangers are protected.

2 Contemporary studies on migration, welcome, and hospitality

A survey of scholarly discussion on the theme of hospitality reveals how the practice of hospitality is historically associated with early religious traditions including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.² When discussing motivations and justifications for hospitality, theologians, biblical scholars, and sociologists identify the following.

A first motivation concerns “divine command theory.” Here, hospitality is authoritatively commanded by God himself in the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Hebrews 13:2 states, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”³

Second, a narrative of reciprocity maintains that, just as the Israelites were strangers in their early history, so they are expected to show hospitality to others in similar circumstances. Exodus 22:21: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (see also Exod 23:9). Peter Phan has reflected extensively on this subject and underscores the value of remembering one’s migrant status to keep one’s “sense of solidarity with new immigrants.”⁴ In a similar vein, Thomas Reynolds merges the tropes of hospitality and disability and argues that this represents a mutual sharing of human vulnerability and disability statuses between hosts and strangers in the presence of the divine.⁵

A third major justification for rendering hospitality to others is theological, emphasizing the God incarnate in Jesus and *imitatio Dei*. Here, the focus is on God as loving and hospitable. Christians are charged to “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom 15:7). Peter Phan’s so-called “migration theology” conceives the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – as migrants, although manifesting differently.⁶ With their associated christological, ecclesiological, missiological, and eschatological utilities and ramifications, the book of Exodus, Matthew 25:31–46, and Luke 10:25–37; 14:12–14 are often used as prooftexts in support of the *imitatio Dei* argument for hospitality. For instance, hospitality is conceived as forms of evangelism and missions modeled by Jesus.⁷ Similarly, Jesus Christ is the hospitable host in the Eucharist and in the final eschatological reception of the righteous and judgment of the wicked.⁸ The church is therefore tasked to spearhead the sacred work of hospitality.⁹

Fourth, modern sociological and political frameworks conceive of hospitality as constitutive of doing justice and righteousness to affirm the human rights and identity of twenty-first-century migrants and refugees.¹⁰

Contemporary scholarly discussion on hospitality has identified at least two major forms of hospitality: conditional and absolute. Scholars like Amy Plantinga and Richard Kearney are proponents of conditional hospitality, because of the perceived evil and danger of the stranger-other. Plantinga justifies her view, saying, “While our aim is to say yes to good and no to evil, in the concrete this often involves saying no to particular persons. Saying no to people we perceive as evil, as well as to evil attitudes and actions, is a necessary part of being human.”¹¹ In such situation, Kearney proposes a “diacritical hermeneutic of

² Oden, *And You Welcomed*.

³ Unless noted, all Bible quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

⁴ Phan, “Always Remember,” 177.

⁵ Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*.

⁶ Phan, “Deus Migrator,” 845–68.

⁷ Jipp, *Saved by Faith*; and Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*.

⁸ Fitzgerald, “Whose Table?,” 134–47.

⁹ Phan, *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration*.

¹⁰ Frederiks and Nagy, *Religion, Migration and Identity*.

¹¹ Pauw, “Hell and Hospitality,” 15.

alterity,” recognizing that strangers, demons, and gods are indeed within us as self. Yet, he simultaneously proposes making a distinction between the self and stranger, demons and the gods. Kearney argues for using diacritical hermeneutics as a form of phronesis in the practice of hospitality. He writes, “Not all ‘selves’ are evil and not all ‘others’ are angelic.”¹²

By contrast, Douglas Jacobsen connects hospitality with religious purity and holiness. He maintains that “Hospitality and holiness can be viewed as contradictory concerns. Hospitality seems to embrace everyone, while holiness can sometimes exclude some. But do hospitality and holiness need to be juxtaposed in this way?”¹³ In his paper, he attempts to harmonize the two opposite virtues, hospitality and holiness. He writes, aptly:

We are all welcomed as we are, but we are called to become something else, something better. We are called to become more faithful, more consistent in our prayers and concern for others, more disciplined in our personal struggles against sin and selfishness. Everyone is welcomed, but that welcome is an invitation to change. It is an invitation to undertake a newly disciplined life. It is an invitation to holiness.¹⁴

Jacobsen’s textured discussion is progressive because his concept of hospitality is not about maintaining safety and does not begin and end in hospitality alone; rather, he takes it to another level, transforming the other toward holiness. I provide my adaptation of this trajectory in the ensuing pages.

Joshua Mills-Knutsen, building on Jacques Derrida’s book *Of Hospitality*, is likewise a proponent of the moral imperative of absolute hospitality, arguing that “the stranger is always worthy of our hospitality.”¹⁵ Rejecting Kearney’s proposal, Mills-Knutsen maintains that conditional hospitality “is always bound to a power of welcoming and shunning.”¹⁶ Similarly, Richard Beck approaches the issue from the perspective of the human psychology of disgust and contagion; he argues that emotions leading to social and moral disgust and aversion toward others are to be rejected because they hinder hospitality as demonstrated in the Bible. Although Beck admits that “disgust has some positive aspects,”¹⁷ he asks, “Why do churches, ostensibly following a Messiah who broke bread with ‘tax collectors and sinners,’ so often retreat into practices of exclusion and the quarantine of gated communities?”¹⁸

This brief summary of motivations relating to hospitality and the debate between absolute and conditional hospitality reveals that essentially all of these scholars are united in affirming the basic value of hospitality. Where they differ is in the way that hostile social realities, human psychological factors (fear, disgust), and religious purity laws should affect the theory and practice of hospitality toward others.

Given that conditional hospitality, in particular, has been predicated on the utility of “discrimination,” “disgust,” and/or “discernment,” and that this language is organic in Proverbs, I am interested in the nature of the hospitality described in Proverbs 1–9, and specifically whether it comports with a conditional approach to hospitality or an unconditional one. My thesis is ultimately akin to Douglas Jacobsen’s, although it conceives of hospitality and resilience (instead of hospitality and holiness) as the two virtues to be held in tension. In addition, I seek to provide refinement and a redefinition of Kearney’s “diacritical hermeneutics” and “discernment.”

3 The narrative world of Proverbs 1–9

I do not wish to bloat this section with the scholarly debates on the source, form, and redactional critical issues of Proverbs 1–9. Instead, I want to build on the general consensus among Proverbs scholars that,

¹² Kearney, *Strangers*, 10; and see also 17–20.

¹³ Jacobsen, “Hospitality,” 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵ Mills-Knutsen, “Becoming Stranger,” 523.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 532.

¹⁷ Beck, *Unclean*, 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

despite being comprised of ten different poems, Proverbs 1–9 is compositionally a coherent collection that it provides the conceptual and interpretive framework for the variegated, wisdom sentential literature found in the other parts of Proverbs.¹⁹

When the ten poems are read together as a compositional unity, a travel journey narrative emerges. As Norman Habel likewise observes, “Travelers on the way of wisdom are urged to assume a variety of appropriate attitudes toward their guide or guidelines for the journey.”²⁰ To be sure, readers need an informed imagination to recognize the journey metaphor and structure embedded in this collection. Additionally, an awareness of ancient Near Eastern travel situations is necessary to apprehend the journey narrative.²¹

Gadi BenEzer broadly defines a journey as “a state of movement.”²² The journey imagery in Proverbs 1–9 is evident in the repeated references to the “ways,” “streets,” “roads,” “paths,” “street corners,” and “city.” The semantic possibilities of דרך (*derek*), in particular, include track, path, and journey. Norman Whybray and Katharine Dell have fleshed out the city life depicted in the collection, with Whybray emphasizing that “That the way of life depicted in these chapters is that of a city and not a village is confirmed by the lively tone and by the impression that is given of constant, bustling movement.”²³ Dell also sees that a city lies beneath the literary narrative, noting that “all of the concrete description of a city background for Proverbs 1–9 comes through these [two women] figures.”²⁴ The names of the roads and destinations are metaphorically and morally named: the “way of wisdom,” the “way of peace,” the “good path,” the “crooked path,” the “straight path,” the “way to Sheol,” etc.²⁵ Although travel by camel or mule was an ancient practice, foot travel is primarily in view here; this is evident from the many references to “feet,” “walking,” “run,” “stumble,” “swerve to the right or left,” “turn,” “pass over,” and so on. Ancient travelers journeyed for various purposes and reasons, including leisure, trade, sports, religion, and health.²⁶

From the Hebrew מצא “to find” (2:5; 3:4, 13, 4:22; 8:12, 17, 35) and the synonym נסח “to seek diligently” (1:28; 7:15; 8:17), we infer that the purpose of embarking on a journey is to pursue a better and flourishing life. References to riches, wealth, silver, and gold acknowledge the most common reasons for ancient travel (2:4, 3:14–16). Seeking health and well-being may also be reasonably inferred (3:8, 18; 4:22). Ancient people also traveled in search of spouses (5:18, 18:22, 19:14), as reflected in many of the ancestral narratives, as well (compare Gen 24:1–66). Lastly and briefly, I note that ancient travel necessarily included tavern hospitality, here competently offered by Lady Folly and Lady Wisdom. This theme will be developed more fully in the last section of this article.

In the narrative of Proverbs 1–9, the father (and mother) gives the wayfarer son warnings, instructions, and advice as he embarks on his journey (3:21–23, 4:12, 14–15, 26–27), which is depicted as an ostensibly voluntary migration. Presumably, this son is young and inexperienced in traveling; this is perhaps his first life journey away from the parents (4:1–3). When it comes to their cognitive, social, and moral awareness of travel and migration, the parents are critical realists rather than idealists. This emerges from their own lived travel experience (1:10, 6:1, 7:6–9). While the narrative includes the positive experience of meeting Lady Wisdom, it also notes that one may encounter wicked, dangerous, and deceptive people on the way. I construe Proverbs 1–9 as a literary collection depicting the different people, scenes, and situations the migrant son may encounter on his journey. The general concern of the collection is how the parents instruct the son (“my son” in 2:1, 3:1, 11; 4:1, 5:1, 7:1) to make the right choices and wise decisions on this journey.

¹⁹ Keefer, *Proverbs 1–9*; Kim, *Proverbs 1–9*; and Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 111–44.

²⁰ Habel, “Symbolism,” 138.

²¹ Casson, *Travel*.

²² BenEzer, *Migration*, 6.

²³ Whybray, “City Life,” 247.

²⁴ Dell, “Wisdom and Folly,” 399.

²⁵ Recent studies on metaphor explain the strong connections between metaphorical language and the physical world. Metaphors are conceptual abstractions of concrete and material realities. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*.

²⁶ Rabotic, “Special-Purpose Travel,” 99–114; and Al-Shorman “Travel and Hospitality,” 22–8.

4 Making wise the stranger: The sapiential hospitality of Lady Wisdom

As I explicate the peculiarity of sapiential hospitality as depicted in Proverbs 1–9, I label the wayfarer son the “stranger,” in order to locate him explicitly and accurately within the conceptual framework of migration, travel, and hospitality. The son is a stranger as a function of leaving his home to travel to a distant and foreign land because this places him in the position of the “other” in the self-other relations described by the narrative. Lady Wisdom is our main character, and she operates as and embodies the host who offers hospitality to traveling strangers. Below are four characteristics of what I call “sapiential hospitality.”

4.1 Lady Wisdom as sapiential host

Sapiential hospitality has a feminine host in the form of Lady Wisdom, whose sapiential character is explicitly described in numerous places (1:20–33; 3:13–20; 4:5–9; 7:4), although Proverbs 8:1–36 and 9:1–12 offer especially prominent descriptions. What does the use of an explicitly feminine host contribute to the construction of a sapiential hospitality? First, her feminine gender typecasts her to embody the tender, loving care vital to the ministry of hospitality. Analogously, Christine Pohl recalls the role of women as hosts in John Wesley’s time: “Some Methodist women made their homes centers of renewal, sites for meetings and preaching, and places of welcome for traveling preachers. Women were also housekeepers.”²⁷

Lady Wisdom’s feminine personification could easily be construed as rendering her a second-class citizen, limited to domestic affairs by the stereotypical feminine gender identity of the ancient world. A careful reading of Proverbs, however, suggests that the Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8:1–36; 9:1–12 is arguably the same woman as the one depicted in Proverbs 31:10–31. In Proverbs 31:10–31, Lady Wisdom is depicted as אִשָּׁת חַיִּל, often translated as “valiant woman.” Lexically, *hayil* (חַיִּל) is associated with strength, might, fortification, and the military, and is a lexeme mostly used to describe the bravery, strength, and honorable status of masculine characters like Boaz (Ruth 2:1). In Proverbs 31:10–31, Lady Wisdom’s abilities are purposely compared to masculine heroes.²⁸ In order to draw attention to her feminine gender, scholars like Christine Yoder therefore prefer to call her a “woman of substance,” suggesting that she represents a postexilic, Persian period Israelite woman who is strong and versatile.²⁹ She is loved, respected, and honored both in and out of her home. Altogether, Lady Wisdom combines the character traits of a masculine and feminine host in a coherent whole – an embodiment perfect for the ministry of welcome and hospitality. She is not the weak, subservient, and inept woman stereotypical of naïve, unschooled, and domiciled women. Instead, she is strong, yet gentle, and never contentious. She embodies the role of the giver rather than a receiver.

This sapiential host builds and possesses a palatial house in which the stranger is to dwell with her (9:1–6). Lady Wisdom has male and female servants. She prepares luxurious meat and wine. She possesses the necessary economic resources and logistical infrastructure to provide hospitality. Now, we ask, is economic prosperity a necessary ingredient in practicing hospitality? I submit that her wealth and affluence should not be interpreted in quantitative terms but as her state of being. She is prepared to offer hospitality and to act as a host. Hospitality is her chosen vocation, not just a hobby or an afterthought.³⁰

Moreover, as a local resident in her geographical location, Lady Wisdom is a suitable host. Proverbs 8:22–29 speaks of Wisdom’s preexistence before the creation of the world (vv. 22–26) and how the world was

²⁷ Pohl, “Practicing Hospitality,” 21.

²⁸ Wolters, “Proverbs 31:10–31,” 446–57. For more on the valiant woman in Proverbs 31:10–31.

²⁹ Yoder, *Wisdom*.

³⁰ From a biblical-theological framework, the extravagance of hospitality is designed to have a typological function for the eschatological divine banquet.

created in wisdom (vv. 27–29). This language may indicate a supernatural existence, even a divine being. A reading sensitive to the travel journey narrative of the collection also recognizes that Lady Wisdom has a “home court advantage.” She possesses historical, social, and cultural knowledge and experience, which the traveling stranger can only hope to have. Lady Wisdom has mastered life in her home court and thus has good and wise resources to share with the traveling stranger coming her way.

The stranger, on the other hand, is in a disadvantaged position. He is inexperienced and gullible, at least in this unknown land. Insofar as he is a sojourner in this foreign city, he is weak and vulnerable at many levels – cognitively, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Migration places the migrant in vulnerable situations and creates many forms of cognitive dissonance. This migrant does not have the cognitive or social advantage of local residents; he is in a state of liminality, desperately looking for home, acceptance, relationships, and provisions. Precisely because of this liminal state of being, hospitality becomes necessary and valuable.

Reciprocity, or mutuality, is a common theme in contemporary discussions of migration and hospitality. Reciprocity emerges out of a mutual hospitality between the host and the stranger. In a process of reciprocity, there is a role reversal between the host and the stranger, such that the host becomes the stranger and the stranger the host. There is the blurring of the identities and roles of the host and stranger, deconstructing the objective distinction between the host and guest. In his book *The Gift of the Other*, Andrew Shepherd interacts with Emmanuel Levinas’s and Jacques Derrida’s work, to discuss how our self is in the other and the other is in our self in the context of hostility and fear. He then argues for the utility of Christian Trinitarian resources in the work of hospitality. Shepherd’s work represents a general trajectory in hospitality studies, namely, to conceive the host and the stranger as standing on equal footing and of equal status.

In sapiential hospitality, by contrast, the roles of the host and the stranger in a given situation are irreversible. The inequality of resources, knowledge, and experience between the two is maintained in order to maximize the practice of sapiential hospitality. To reverse the roles is a departure from sapiential hospitality. The host’s advantageous position over the stranger is a necessary condition to become *truly* a host, living up to what sapiential hospitality entails. That said, it must be clear that, as host, Lady Wisdom welcomes the stranger not to dominate nor control but to impart wisdom, advice, and warnings, so that the stranger may in turn flourish in a foreign land.

4.2 Absolute hospitality and risk management

In *And You Welcomed Me*, Amy Oden describes four stages of hospitality: “It frequently begins with welcome, then turns to restoration of guest, followed by being with or dwelling with the other, and ends in the sending forth.”³¹ Oden describes the first stage in the following manner:

The first stage encompasses a set of practices that welcome the guest. This involves a warm greeting, words of welcome or an embrace, even going out to meet the guest. In some cases, this is an act of full of enthusiasm or emotion.... The offer of sanctuary to an exile or fugitive also falls within the first stage of welcome. In such a case, simply receiving the stranger or allowing one to stay is an act of welcome.³²

Informed by Oden, I observe that sapiential hospitality is a proactive hospitality. Lady Wisdom comes out of her home and places herself on the street, plaza, and gateways of the city, at the heart of busy streets, and presumably during the day (1:20–21; 8:1–3). She calls out at the top of her lungs and gives her invitation

³¹ Oden, *And You Welcomed*, 145.

³² *Ibid.*, 146.

Wisdom cries out in the street;
 in the squares she raises her voice.
 At the busiest corner she cries out;
 at the entrance of the city gates she speaks (1:20–21)

Lady Wisdom even sends her servants to call people to come to her palatial house (9:1–3). Lady Wisdom does not keep strangers at a distance. Proactive invitation is thus a fundamental ingredient in sapiential hospitality. Lady Wisdom does not expect strangers to choose her hospitality unless she goes out into the street to issue an invitation. “The act of invitation itself is a sign of disarmament or approval, that the host acknowledges her or his position and welcomes the other who, while still possibly a threat, will abide by the rules laid down as part of the cultural practice of hospitality.”³³ Without coercion or violence, Lady Wisdom issues her invitation in good faith.

Moreover, sapiential hospitality is a wide-open invitation to “all people” (8:4a), to all “that live” (8:4b). Her call is open to everyone who passes by, accepts her invitation, and who listens to what she has to say.

To you, O people, I call,
 and my cry is to all that live.
 O simple ones, learn prudence;
 acquire intelligence, you who lack it. (8:4–5)

These strangers may even be “simple ones” and “fools”; Lady Wisdom’s hospitality is inclusive, casting her invitation as widely as possible.³⁴ She instantiates proactive and absolute hospitality that embraces all strangers regardless of their background.

Lady Wisdom is nevertheless not naïve about the hostile realities of the world. Surely, just as there are benevolent strangers, there are malevolent ones as well. Indeed,

‘hostility’ and ‘hospitality’ share a common root which has to do with food. The root of the word *hostis* is the Sanskrit *ghas* meaning ‘to eat’, ‘to consume’, or even ‘to destroy’. And even though it is unclear as to who eats and what, a *hostis* is a stranger and a foreigner. Only later did it come to mean the object of hostility, an ‘enemy’. Now *hosps*, on the other hand, is thought to have originally been a compound, a union of *hostis* and the prefix *pa* – from *pasco* meaning ‘to cause to eat’, ‘to feed’, ‘pasture’. Hence *hosps* as ‘he who entertains a stranger, a host’.³⁵

Far from being ignorant of the realities of the world, Lady Wisdom is intentional in postponing judgment and discrimination. She breaks some “habits, familiarity, comfort and laziness”³⁶ to show absolute hospitality. She holds no prior reticence, adversarial, or conflictual assumptions about the strangers. Despite the potential dangers and threats of her hospitality, she does not keep others at a safe distance. Claudia Camp describes her as “one of the most universal, non-xenophobic images in the Hebrew Bible.”³⁷ Xenophobic tendencies are absent in sapiential hospitality.

Such absolute hospitality is advantageous to the stranger, but not to the host, to whom it is intrinsically dangerous and risky. Ordinarily, putting oneself in harm’s way is antithetical to the wisdom enterprise: wisdom is about turning away from evil. Thus, “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil” (3:7); “The wise are cautious and turn away from evil, but the fool throws off restraint and is careless” (14:16). In fact, it is reckoned foolish not to turn from evil and trouble (13:19). “Evil” refers in these texts to both the *process* of wrongdoing and the *result* of trouble or suffering. Wisdom is thus fundamentally about caution, circumspection, vigilance, and pain aversion. What, then, is the motivation for absolute hospitality? More importantly, what is Lady Wisdom’s risk management plan, and what resources does she have to carry it out?

³³ Reaves, *Safeguarding*, 46.

³⁴ Fitzgerald, “Whose Table?,” 134–47.

³⁵ Minkinen, “Hostility and Hospitality,” 1.

³⁶ Jacobsen, “Hospitality and Holiness,” 52.

³⁷ Camp, “Wise and Strange,” 141.

David Gushee identifies several possible motivations for taking risks to protect a stranger: personal ties, intra-group ties, reference group influence (pressured to conform), patriotism and political ideologies, religion, and humanitarian motives (commitment to justice, care obligation, and emotional empathy).³⁸ These motivations are supported by empirical studies, Lady Wisdom's motivation may even overlap with some of them – however, Lady Wisdom's main motivation appears to be to make the stranger wise by protecting him from evil and folly. Implicit is the assumption that the protector-host operates from a position of power and strength – a notion that will perhaps be disliked by some hospitality scholars. Thus, for example, Reynolds speaks negatively of a “cult of normalcy” in which offer hospitality from a position of strength, power, and security, showing pity and charity to the stranger who is lower in position.³⁹ According to Reynolds, the proper motivation for hospitality should instead be *loving* the stranger, because “it is a general ethical duty or obligation owed universally to everyone.”⁴⁰ Reynolds' thesis seeks to affirm equality and renounce hierarchical relationships.

Yet, although Lady Wisdom's hospitality is predicated from a position of strength and power, it may be argued that protecting the stranger from evil is a fitting manifestation of love. The capacity to protect is the paramount criterion to become a protector. One must ask: between equality and love, which is more fundamental to hospitality? Unlike conditional hospitality, the aim of sapiential hospitality is not to protect oneself from strangers but to protect strangers from the “complicated wickedness” and “complicated misery” that they may encounter on their journey.⁴¹ Diverging from contemporary discussion of reciprocity and equality in hospitality, sapiential hospitality advocates loving by protecting. As a protective host, Lady Wisdom operates from a position of wisdom and strength in order to transcend real threats and dangers because she is determined to protect.

4.3 Dwelling together and shared pursuit of flourishing life

Here, I merge Oden's second and third stages of hospitality to explain the third characteristic of sapiential hospitality: dwelling together with the stranger. Oden's second stage involves restoring strangers by addressing their immediate physical needs; her third stage concerns the dwelling together of host and stranger. Oden opines, “Particularly important in this set of practices is the willingness to share one's life with the other, to be present to the mundane and ongoing realities of one another's lives.”⁴² Additionally, she maintains that at this stage there is a reframing of “social relations away from exploitation and toward dwelling together These reorientations of social relations fall within this stage of hospitality to the degree that they seek life together, a hospitality of presence.”⁴³

Applying Oden's descriptions, I construe Proverbs 9:1–6 as portraying the “dwelling together” of Lady Wisdom and the stranger through table fellowship:

“You that are simple, turn in here!”
 To those without sense she says,
 “Come, eat of my bread
 and drink of the wine I have mixed.
 Lay aside immaturity, and live,
 and walk in the way of insight.” (9:4–6)

³⁸ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, 105–14.

³⁹ Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 114–5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹ Pohl, “Practicing Hospitality,” 7.

⁴² Oden, *And You Welcomed*, 146.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 147.

Table fellowship, as a mundane daily activity, is the best representation of dwelling together. Both parties stand on equal ground, sharing a common human need and the pleasure of eating and drinking. Reaves explains –

There is a mysterious, but tremendous, power in the role of food and drink among people, and the recognition of that power and its accompanying rituals signal its significance in the exploration of hospitality. On a personal level, sharing a meal or a cup of coffee invites a level of encounter that is difficult to induce without it. There is something very basic, very human, very egalitarian to the act of eating and drinking together. To sit at the same table – on the same level with and next to another person – invites a particular level of intimacy that is difficult to replicate in other contexts.⁴⁴

Table fellowship is a humane and safe space for a real conversation to take place. “Intellectual Welcome”⁴⁵ creates a space for a coming together, where a variety of opinions can be expressed in the common pursuit of wisdom, leading to the flourishing of human life. In the face of modernity’s increasing individualism and xenophobia, meal sharing with a stranger may be considered subversive. However, this was a regular practice in ancient experience.⁴⁶

Metaphorically, the offering and eating of food and drink is understood within Proverbs as teaching and receiving knowledge. Nili Shupak writes

Learning, for example, is compared to the receptive process of eating. In Proverbs ix, wisdom is presented as a woman who invites those passing by to a meal to celebrate the dedication of her house. Here wisdom plays the part of the teacher, and the pupil is invited, in fact, to enjoy an intellectual meal: he is invited to attend school. A similar image appears in Ben Sira xv 3, which describes the wages of a man who cleaves to wisdom thus: “...And he who partakes of it [wisdom] has the bread of discernment and will drink water of understanding”.⁴⁷

Theoretically, conversation is inherently dialogical, but the above verses (9:4–6) depict a largely one directional conversation, as Lady Wisdom imparts knowledge and instructions to the stranger. This imagery could be easily misconstrued as imposing one’s belief and practice upon the stranger. Since the hospitality has been provided by Lady Wisdom, the stranger might become subservient to her in a crude way: held captive and unable to respond freely and critically.

As a rejoinder, it is important to recognize that Lady Wisdom is the embodiment of wisdom. The social relationship between Lady Wisdom and the stranger is governed by wisdom principles. What, then, characterizes a wisdom-oriented “dwelling together,” as expressed in their table fellowship?

First, far from theoretical, esoteric, and abstract knowledge, Lady Wisdom imparts practical wisdom on how to navigate life in a deceptive and broken world. This dwelling together has the common goal of pursuing what is *truly* righteous, just, and fair, in order to facilitate human flourishing (1:3; 8:8, 15–16).⁴⁸ Second, Proverbs is a major resource for espousing speech etiquette. Pursuit of true knowledge is accomplished through mutual dialogue and confirmation (15:22). Dialogue should first begin with hearing; otherwise, it is folly and shameful (18:13). Wisdom dialogue dislikes hasty speech (29:20). Those who engage in it seek to listen to many testimonies, not just one before making a judgment (18:17). They refuse to speak arrogant and perverted speech (8:13); instead, they speak with pleasant and persuasive speech (16:21, 23). They do not speak “like a scorching fire” (16:27). Lady Wisdom embodies the creation of conducive space for congenial conversation to take place; her persuasion is characterized by truth, justice, righteousness, and life (8:6–9, 20). Instead of using enticements or deception, she lets the stranger freely choose her (8:10). She speaks no lies or perversity (8:13–14).

In sum, dwelling together in sapiential hospitality is governed by wisdom principles – standards that are meant to protect rather than harm the stranger. It is making wise the stranger in a foreign land.

⁴⁴ Reaves, *Safeguarding*, 49–50.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁶ In ancient world, people offered hospitality for numerous reasons: to disarm one’s fear of strangers, fear of the gods, to please the gods, and for personal benefits. Reaves, *Safeguarding*, 77–80.

⁴⁷ Shupak, “Learning Methods,” 425.

⁴⁸ Classen, “The Woman of Substance.”

4.4 Vulnerability of Lady Wisdom and the virtue of resilience

Since sapiential hospitality includes openness and dwelling together, the host and her hospitality is inescapably subject to the stranger's responses. What then are the responses of the stranger?

Proverbs scholars are in agreement regarding the programmatic function of Proverbs 9, with Proverbs 9:1–6 and 13–18 functioning as the literary frame of the chapter. This frame compares the opposing forms of hospitality offered by Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly.⁴⁹ Then right in the middle is 9:7–12 as cited below.

Whoever corrects a scoffer wins abuse;
 whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt.
 A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you;
 the wise, when rebuked, will love you.
 Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still;
 teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.
 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
 and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
 For by me your days will be multiplied,
 and years will be added to your life.
 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself;
 if you scoff, you alone will bear it. (9:7–12)

This unit offers two paradigmatic responses to sapiential hospitality. First, the stranger may respond to Lady Wisdom positively by accepting her wisdom (9:8b–12a). Dwelling together is about socializing and growing together as wise in pursuing what constitutes human flourishing. Second, the stranger may respond to sapiential hospitality negatively and violently. Proverbs 9:7–8a delineates the vulnerability and risk associated with the practice of sapiential hospitality. Regardless of the gentle manner of instruction, “scorners and sinners reject chastisement, however delivered.”⁵⁰ Roland Murphy speaks of “degrees of obduracy,”⁵¹ while William McKane explains that “to teach wisdom to men who are impervious to it is to expose oneself to abuse and indignity.”⁵² The stranger is free to respond to Lady Wisdom with rejection, abuse, harm, and hate. In any situation of hospitality, violent and tyrannical behaviors are possible not only on the part of the hosts but also on the part of the strangers. From a Christian perspective, Pauw uses 2 John 10–11 as a reminder of “the world full of treachery and falsehood.”⁵³ The world is simultaneously loved by God but also a threat to the children of God. It is naïve to imagine that the real world is populated only by angels. It is with this in mind that Reaves's protective hospitality is defined as “the provision of welcome and sanctuary to the threatened other, often at great risk to oneself.”⁵⁴ Although Lady Wisdom seeks to protect, she is equally susceptible to violent attack. In this, she truly represents human vulnerability, even as she may simultaneously have divine and transcendent characteristics.⁵⁵ Undeserved pain and suffering are inevitable in the practice of hospitality.

Contemporary discourse on hospitality almost always includes a discussion of human vulnerability. This is meant to encourage embracing vulnerability as part and parcel of being human. However, I find such discourse to be, in effect, a call to resignation and powerlessness to accept one's ill fate. Thus, instead of

⁴⁹ For more information on source critical issues, see Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 306; Toy, *Critical and Exegetical*, 193; and Murphy, *Proverbs*, 61.

⁵⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 307.

⁵¹ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 61.

⁵² McKane, *Proverbs*, 368.

⁵³ Pauw, “Hell and Hospitality,” 15.

⁵⁴ Reaves, *Safeguarding*, xii.

⁵⁵ Divinity, moreover, is not a guaranteed protection from human attack and pain. Jesus is both divine and human, yet he suffered and died at the hands of cruel Roman leaders and soldiers. In Psalms and prophetic literature, Yahweh is also depicted as being subject to rejection and pain due to Israel's rebellion.

accepting human vulnerability as an end in and of itself, and instead of Kearney's cautious discrimination, I argue that Proverbs 24:15–16 provides a more compelling alternative to human vulnerability. Rather than becoming traumatized, defeated, demoralized, or even vengeful due to strangers' hostility and antagonism, Lady Wisdom stands steadfast against and after every hostile response by the strangers. Observe below:

Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the righteous;
do no violence to the place where the righteous live;
for though they fall seven times, they will rise again;
but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. (24:15–16)

This maxim shares a similar trope with Proverbs 9:1–6. The scene is located in the context of the home of the righteous; the wicked one lurks outside the house. The righteous one is here a moral appellation of Lady Wisdom: despite multiple antagonistic attacks and violence, even stumbling seven times, undefeated she rises each time, for she is strong and uncompromising. She may be knocked down, but she has not been destroyed. Lady Wisdom is resilient and anti-fragile. Conversely, having no moral muscles, the wicked are easily shattered and destroyed by one blow, rebuke, or calamity. Lady Wisdom embodies the inner strength of resilience – an indispensable wisdom virtue in the task of absolute hospitality.

Some hosts give up on hospitality when they are confronted by the strangers' hostile responses. Reeves observes this in real practice: "Positive outcome of hospitality and teaching cannot be guaranteed. However, it is this lack of guarantee, this possibility of risk, failure or endangerment that dissuades many from extending protective hospitality to the threatened other in favor of one's own safety, control and ultimately, isolation in what might be particularly hostile times."⁵⁶ Is vulnerability to attack and fear of rejection the reason why John Wesley spoke of *visiting* instead of *hosting others* in one's home as a practice of hospitality?⁵⁷ Lady Wisdom is paradigmatic of a resilient host. She takes the calculated risk and nurtures her capacity to overcome the potential rejection of her invitations. Negative, unfortunate experiences with a stranger do not make her withdraw from the work of hospitality. In response to Pauw's dilemma, sapiential hospitality exhorts the hosts to cultivate the virtue of resilience.

5 Protecting the stranger: Pseudo hospitality in Proverbs 1–9

Proverbs 1–9 also depicts how a stranger in a foreign land is also susceptible to "pseudo hospitality." In this form of hospitality, the host has ulterior motives, namely, to exploit and harm the stranger. The host may initially appear to offer a warm welcome, but the true nature of the hospitality emerges as the stranger lingers: this is a kind of hospitality that the stranger will eventually abhor and regret. The following are three pseudo hospitalities in Proverbs 1–9: the street bandits (1:10–19), the adulterous woman (5:3–14; 7:1–27), and the fraudulent debtor (6:1–15).

5.1 Pseudo riches and success: Crime syndicates and robbers

Proverbs 1:10–19 records the invitation of false hospitality from a community of street bandits. Lincoln Blumell's informative article describes how ancient street bandits posed a threat to the life of ancient travelers.⁵⁸ The street bandits tap into the stranger's psychological longing for acceptance, belonging, and economic prosperity, as they entice the stranger to participate in their street robbery project. That

⁵⁶ Reeves, *Safeguarding*, 135.

⁵⁷ Pohl, *Practicing Hospitality*, 29–30.

⁵⁸ Blumell, "Beware of Bandits!," 1–20.

the wicked bandits lie in wait for innocent victims is evident from Proverbs 1:11: “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent.” The lure of comradery is evident in Proverbs 1:14: “Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse.” This purse is “a common fund of spoil to be equitably distributed among the members of the gang.”⁵⁹ A defenseless and inexperienced stranger will easily succumb to this false invitation; the stranger is warned to be aware of the bandits’ smooth and poisonous speech.

Yet, the stranger is caught between two dilemmas. If he does not accept the invitation, he could be killed right there and then. To accept their pseudo hospitality, however, is to be recruited as a member of the criminal group. While his life may be spared for the moment, he will eventually lose it, for punishment will chase after him. Fox says it well: “The bandits hold out two promises: wealth and comradeship; there is much emphasis on sharing the loot. But what they will really share is their own disaster.”⁶⁰ Unlike Lady Wisdom, who issues a non-violent and refusable invitation, the bandits issue a coercive one; refusal only leads to one’s harm.

5.2 Pseudo resting place: Sexual predators

Another form of false hospitality is the tavern hospitality of Lady Folly, the adulterous woman (2:16–19; 5:3–14; 6:20–7:27; 9:13–18).⁶¹ Lady Folly also “lurks” (7:12) in wait for her target victim at night (7:9, 26). She uses sweet and seductive yet deceptive words (2s:16; 5:3–6; 6:24; 7:21). As a trickster, she uses external charm and the beauty of her eyelashes to bewitch the traveling stranger (6:25).⁶² As a prostitute, her hospitality is primarily to render immoral sexual intercourse (6:27–35). Lady Folly offers an immediate yet temporary veneer of pleasure and hospitality, but this momentary pleasure entraps the stranger in a sexual snare (2:18–19; 5:5; 6:29–35, 7:27).

In Proverbs 9:13–18, Lady Folly stations herself outside the door of her house, calling people to enter her place. The call to “turn in here” is not unique to Lady Folly (9:16), but is used by Lady Wisdom as well (9:4). However, Lady Folly specifies that she is after those “who are going straight on their way” (9:15). That is, the intent is to make strangers digress to mislead and derail them on their life journey. The food and drink she offers are stolen, indicating illicit and superficial pleasure (9:17). This hospitality is merely a façade covering up snare, death, and Sheol (7:26–27; 9:18).

Lady Folly represents the competing host who is equally proactive in offering absolute hospitality. If the stranger ends up in her arms, however, that stranger is on the way to losing his way in life. Organized sexual predators offer pseudo hospitality detrimental to strangers.

5.3 Pseudo transaction: Financial scammers

The third form of pseudo hospitality is offered by false financial partners. Proverbs 6:1–5 narrates an instance of such fraud:

⁵⁹ Toy, *Proverbs*, 16.

⁶⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 93.

⁶¹ Murphy makes a distinction between Lady Folly in Prov 9:13–8 and the strange woman in 2:16–9; 5:1–14, 20; 6:24–32(35); 7:25–7. *Proverbs*, 277–87.

⁶² Camp, “Wise and Strange.”

My child, if you have given your pledge to your neighbor,
 if you have bound yourself to another,
 you are snared by the utterance of your lips,
 caught by the words of your mouth. (6:1–2)

Here, the stranger is credulously disposed to act as a loan guarantor in a money lending agreement with a borrower and a lender. The stranger as a loan guarantor promises to fulfill the obligation if the borrower defaults. To have “bound yourself to another” is to make vows of loyalty and commitment, leading to brotherhood and community. This form of welcome generates in the stranger the semblance of a sense of contribution and participation in a transactional relationship, this time not as a receiver but as a giver.

In this instance, however, the borrower has ostensibly defaulted – but this payment dodge is pre-conceived, rather than an afterthought. The inexperienced and naïve stranger has unwittingly become a victim of a financial scam. The only solution, as painful as it is, is to “debase yourself and implore your neighbor to release you from your obligation. Pester him day and night until he wearies and gives in” (6:4).⁶³ Otherwise, the stranger will be forced to work hard like the ants to honor his words and pledge (6:6–11). Proverbs more generally dissuades its audience from acting as a loan guarantor or taking other unnecessary risks. Making surety for others is considered foolishness (17:18; 22:26–27; 27:13).

These warnings to the stranger about the forms of pseudo hospitality he may encounter on his journey make clear that Proverbs is unashamed to expose the obnoxious and wicked personalities of the real world:

A scoundrel and a villain
 goes around with crooked speech,
 winking the eyes, shuffling the feet,
 pointing the fingers,
 with perverted mind devising evil,
 continually sowing discord (6:12–14)

All these malevolent characters pose a potential threat and danger to the stranger in a journey (see also 6:17–19). Without the strategic existence and invitation of sapiential hospitality, however, the stranger will likely end up in the hands of these pseudo hosts. Insofar as strangers are unfamiliar with their surroundings, in need of aid and assistance, and callow in their youthful inexperience, pseudo hosts will exploit their weaknesses to serve their own abominable purposes.

Sapiential hospitality, then, is not protecting oneself but protecting the stranger from fraudulent hospitality. It is reorienting the strangers’ journey from the way of evil to the way of wisdom that leads to flourishing life (3:7; 4:27). Sapiential hospitality means maintaining the boundaries *not* between Lady Wisdom and the stranger, but between the stranger and pseudo hospitality. Sapiential hospitality’s disgust is directed against crime syndicates bent on exploiting the gullibility of strangers and not against the strangers themselves.⁶⁴ Sapiential hospitality is protective hospitality. As Jayme Reeves opines,

In short, protective hospitality should be an affirmation of life in all its fullness, and while violence may be an inevitable part of the greater picture of human life, it is not inevitable within the practice of hospitality. Instead, the power of protective hospitality resides in its capacity to resist and counteract violence and injustice, tell the truth to power by considering the interests of and giving sanctuary to a threatened other and provide a healing balm for that which violence has sought to destroy.⁶⁵

⁶³ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 216.

⁶⁴ Contemporary migration and refugee scholar David Hollebach speaks about the Kew Gardens principle, which presents five conditions in which the agent is tasked with a positive responsibility to help a migrant and refugee: (1) there is a critical need; (2) the agent has proximity to the need; (3) the agent has the capability to assist; (4) the agent is likely the last resort from whom help can be expected; (5) the action can be taken without disproportionate harm to the one providing assistance. Hollenbach, “Borders and Duties,” 156.

⁶⁵ Reeves, *Safeguarding*, 174.

6 Summary

A sapiential hospitality based on Proverbs 1–9 is a form of protective hospitality that seeks to protect strangers by making them wise to the dangers that surround them. It entails averting the stranger from the traps of false hospitality, such as organized by crime syndicates, sexual predators, and financial scammers and opportunists. Despite the potential risks and dangers to herself in offering her hospitality, Lady Wisdom has mustered the resilience necessary to render true sapiential hospitality to the strangers she encounters on the journey.

Funding information: Author states no funding involved.

Conflict of interest: Author states no conflict of interest.

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