

Shaping Desire: A Parent's Attempt

Proverbs 1-9

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Cupcakes. Six pictures of them. Dark chocolate with sprinkles. Lemon with chocolate crème frosting. Exquisitely decorated and photographed from up close or a step or two away. Below the glossy images—if you can tear your attention from them—is the side-view of a silvery-blue Honda CR-V alongside the word **CRAVE**: the three letters CR...V and the horizontal bar of the A in bold so you know immediately that *this* car is intrinsic to longing itself. Like a delicious cupcake, *this* “irresistible” car “more than satisfies.” The last line on the page and the slogan for the advertising campaign by Honda—“something new to crave”¹—seems an apt description of the consumer culture in which we live. The marketplace urges us to believe that what we purchase and consume will make us happy, that our desires can be satisfied by cruising around in a Honda,² sporting the newest fashion, acquiring the latest novelty. And when our longing grows restless again, as it inevitably does, there is always “something new to crave,” some new object to captivate our desire. Surely Vincent Miller is right: advanced capitalist societies like ours have “the most sophisticated systems for forming and inciting desire that the world has ever seen.”³

In contrast, when the church speaks publicly about desire—if and when we do—our focus is largely on controlling sexual desires and condemning certain sexual behaviors. This narrow construal of desire leaves largely unchallenged the relentless shaping of desires by the marketplace and communicates instead an uneasy, time-worn suspicion of desire as dangerous. Indeed, the line is long of philosophers and theologians who would eliminate desire, particularly erotic desire, as part of an ethical life. The Greek Stoics, for example, believed that the attainment of virtues brought freedom from passions. Paul encouraged believers not to marry unless they lacked self-control (“It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion,” 1 Cor 7:9). And Immanuel Kant argued that sexual desire leads to “using” people and thereby degrading their humanity, a tendency that only marriage, with its promises of mutual concern might limit.⁴ Implicit in these points of view is the notion that desire—intense and impure—lacks intentionality and cannot be redirected: desire is, so to speak, “hardwired” into human psychology and, as a result, is contrary to knowledge and good judgment.⁵ Accordingly, the challenge is to control and repress it.

It is therefore striking that Proverbs 1-9, the hermeneutical key to a book that aims to teach wisdom and to form “fearers of the LORD” (1:2, 7), engages erotic desire as a vital element of the moral life. Framed as a father’s instruction to his son or sons, the chapters place an “extraordinary emphasis” on desire—an emphasis “out of all proportion” with treatment of the topic elsewhere in the book⁶—not with hope of repressing or eliminating desire, but rather of pointing the youth’s desire toward the “right” *objects*. Desire itself is assumed; the concern is the power of desire rightly or wrongly directed. And whereas we may anticipate correctly that “right” objects of desire include one’s lifelong companion (“the wife of one’s youth,” 5:18) and “wrong” objects include another person’s spouse (“the wife of another,” 6:26), the parent’s

extension of erotic desire to talk about our relationship with the abstract concepts of “wisdom” and “folly” is unexpected. Suddenly, the pursuit and attainment of knowledge is not about the extirpation of passion. Rather, it requires cultivation of it.

Not surprisingly, the parent’s teaching about desire is entwined with similarly abundant language of emotion.⁷ Proverbs 1 alone, for example, refers to greed (1:19), love and delight (1:22), hate (1:22, 29-30), terror, distress, and anguish (1:26-27, 33). Personified wisdom identifies herself as “delight” (8:30-31). And God is said variously to love like a parent (3:12), to hate (6:16), and to revel with wisdom (8:30). Although typically considered distinct phenomena, desire and emotion (along with appetites) have been grouped and analyzed together since Aristotle. Recent studies in philosophy, ethics, psychology, and neurobiology emphasize their close connection.⁸ Far from irrational impulses or animalistic energies, emotions are increasingly considered forms of intelligence and discernment. As Martha Nussbaum argues, emotions have objects: they embody a person’s perception of and beliefs about the object, and invest the object with value—as significant for some role it plays in the person’s life. As such, emotions appear to be concerned with a person’s flourishing.

Desire, in turn, is an aspect or consequence of emotion.⁹ Emotion frequently inspires a desire to act: so fear may prompt a desire to run away, gratitude may prompt the desire to reciprocate. Certainly, not all emotions motivate a definite plan of action (happiness, for example, may prompt simply a desire for more happiness), but the connection, that emotions give rise to desires, suggests desire is also intentional and about human flourishing.

Erotic desire is admittedly more complex, exhibiting elements of push *and* pull. On the one hand, it is a drive that arises independently of the presence of an object, and *pushes* for satisfaction. On the other hand, erotic desire may be *pulled* into being by the value of an object and thereby exhibit selective intentionality (as in the case of Eve and the fruit of the tree in the garden, Gen 3:6).¹⁰ The parent of Proverbs 1-9 assumes the push: not once is erotic desire itself labeled a vice; not once is the youth told to repress it. Instead, the parent seizes on the pull of erotic desire—its intensity and partiality—and attempts to direct the youth’s desire by teaching about the value or danger of its potential objects. The attempt reveals a conviction that desire may, at least in part, be formed or socially constructed (something the marketplace grasps all too well).¹¹ And the inclusion of both persons *and* concepts (such as wisdom) as potential “objects” signals an understanding that erotic desire includes, but is not limited to, sex; *desire is a potent metaphor for how one comes to know the world, others, oneself, and God.*

My aim is to consider how the parent of Proverbs 1-9 describes erotic desires rightly and wrongly directed. I argue that the wise, by desiring “right” objects, gain knowledge and flourish; they become interdependent¹² with God, wisdom, and others. Conversely, the fool’s misplaced desires result in isolation and alienation from others and spark rage and violence in the community.

Before I turn to the parent’s characterization of desire, however, it is important to note that the intended audience of Proverbs 1-9 is arguably young men of relatively privileged circumstances. As prior studies highlight,¹³ the portrait of erotic desire we encounter is thus male, and the text reflects and reinforces a context that is patriarchal in structure and androcentric in bias. For example, the juxtaposition of personified wisdom and folly perpetuates a polarization of women as wholly good or wholly evil, with

men as either their beneficiaries or their victims, and a woman outside of one's household who initiates sex is cast as a dangerous aggressor (7:6-23; cf. 6:23-26). Moreover, the parent's conception of desire assumes that self-centeredness (being "wise in [one's] own eyes," 3:7), arrogance, and autonomy are key obstacles to a wise, ethical existence—an assumption that a description of women's erotic desire might well not share.¹⁴ Alert to the parent's particularity, and to the possibilities and perils of his pedagogy, I turn now to the parent's construction of erotic desire as essential to the moral life.

I. Desire Directed Rightly

As the parent describes it, the wise person is a desiring subject—one who longs for the right object: wisdom. The parent urges the youth repeatedly to "seek" wisdom (1:28; 2:4; 7:15; 8:17), to cry out for it (2:3; cf. 1:28), to search for it as for hidden treasures (2:4), and to watch and wait daily at personified wisdom's door (8:34). Moreover, even when the youth "finds" wisdom (e.g., 2:5; 3:13), even when he "acquires" her (3:13; 4:5, 7), his pursuit of wisdom continues. The book's prologue, for example, beckons the discerning to learn more (1:5-6), the wise are to be ardently receptive to instruction (e.g., listening, watching, inclining their hearts), and personified wisdom's invitation to her house and the feast that she prepares is a string of imperatives; it is perpetual and immediate (9:4-5). Paradoxically, one can never wholly possess wisdom; there is no arrival at or achievement of intellectual or contemplative purity. Instead, the predominant metaphor for life in Proverbs 1-9—a path or way—indicates that the wise (and foolish) are on a journey, while active verbs convey movement toward the good.¹⁵ Assumed is a lifelong yearning for and pursuit of wisdom. Compare wisdom's self-revelation in Sir 24:21: "Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more." Desire for wisdom is intrinsic to the virtuous life. And because that desire is never sated, the wise never cease reaching for the good.

The parent's emphasis on desire locates what is good for the human *outside of the self*. Inherent is an understanding of the human as limited and in need of knowledge from beyond oneself for wholeness. Conversely, wisdom is pictured as independent, not simply part of its pursuer. The parent underscores wisdom's independence variously: calling wisdom a divine gift (2:5-6), personifying wisdom as a woman who takes her stand in the city (1:20-21; 8:2-3), extolling wisdom's preeminent and mysterious relationship with God (8:22-31), celebrating wisdom as the means by which God formed the world (3:19-20), and with only one exception (5:1), never referring to wisdom as belonging to a person—that is, with a possessive suffix. Furthermore, by designating God as the source of wisdom (2:5-6), the parent couples desire for wisdom with desire for God, so waiting and longing for wisdom become acts of reverence. The parent thus portrays the wise as incomplete in and of themselves, and wisdom, the good they seek, as mysterious, holy, and elusive "other."

The characterization of desire for personified wisdom as *erotic* signals its partiality and intensity. The parent encourages partiality by celebrating wisdom's incomparable value—she is *more* precious than jewels, gold, and choice silver (3:14-15; 8:10-11, 19); twice the parent insists, "nothing you desire can compare with her" (3:15b; 8:11; cf. 4:7). Use of particular verbs, often as imperatives, demonstrates that desire for wisdom prompts acts of emotional and physical intensity: seize her (3:18; 4:13),

take hold of her (3:18), do not abandon her (4:6), guard her (4:6), embrace her (4:8; cf. 4:13), watch over her (4:13), do not let her go (4:13). The parent implores the youth to love wisdom and cherish her (4:6, 8; cf. 8:17, 21)—the emotions most likely to prompt a desire to be with wisdom—and to “acquire” her (so 4:5, 7), a verb that connotes possession and/or marriage (cf. Ruth 4:5, 10). The youth should call wisdom his “sister,” an expression of romantic endearment (7:4; cf. Song 4:9, 10, 12), and wait expectantly, as lovers do, “day by day” outside wisdom’s house (8:34; cf. Job 31:9; Song 2:9; Sir 14:20-25). At every turn, the parent seeks to inculcate in the youth a passion for wisdom that is comparable to the erotic desire of a lover for the beloved—a passion that wisdom, in turn, promises to reciprocate: “I love the one who loves me” (8:17; cf. 4:6, 8-9).

Such desire for wisdom, the parent contends, is *necessary* for human flourishing. Not only does the desire itself inspire happiness (“Happy is the one who...watches daily at my gates,” 8:34), but wisdom herself bestows it (3:13, 18; 8:32, 34). She is “delight” (8:30b), and before God and in the world, she “rejoices,” a verb that refers broadly to “making merry.” God and humanity revel with her as she does with them. Learning so conceived is neither tedious nor burdensome, but a joy-filled relationship with knowledge and God that, in turn, fosters health and long life (3:16, 18; cf. 3:8), dispels fear and anxiety (1:33; 4:6; cf. 2:11), and makes possible honor and prosperity (3:14, 16; 4:9; 8:15-16, 18-19, 21).

Whereas philosophers have long cautioned that the partiality and intensity of erotic desire make it adverse to general social concern—that passion for another fosters exclusivity—the parent of Proverbs 1-9 contends exactly the opposite with regard to the desire for wisdom. Desire for wisdom turns one outward; it dismantles preoccupation with oneself and prompts one to regard others and the world not as things for one’s enjoyment, but as independent and divinely-wrought. Desire for wisdom thus engenders a fierce commitment to neighborliness and justice: *it empowers moral agency*. At the heart of the prologue of Proverbs, for example, the sages claim that wisdom motivates “righteousness, justice, and equity” (1:3b)—terms that together refer comprehensively to ethical conduct in personal and communal relationships. The wise are said to “understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path” (2:9), and to walk, as does wisdom, on “paths of justice” and peace (e.g., 2:8; 3:17; 8:20; cf. 2:20; 4:11). Indeed, the terms “wise” and “righteous” soon become interchangeable in the book, and the wise person’s sphere of concern is said to include the land and all creatures, animal and human (10:5; 12:10; 24:27; 27:23-27). By orienting a person outward, desire for wisdom awakens one to the worthiness of creation and to the suffering of others, and compels one to act with compassion and justice.

At the same time, the parent urges the youth to nurture intimate relationships. Longing for wisdom does not necessitate rising above or purging oneself of erotic desire for another person, but it rather claims such desire as also part of the moral life when directed rightly—here to “the wife of one’s youth” (5:18). The parent’s use of water as a metaphor for her in 5:15-18, an association made similarly in the Song of Songs (cf. Song 4:12, 15), conveys the wife’s considerable value and mystery. Water is essential for life and, particularly in a desert climate, is limited and precious. Water is also mysterious and chaotic, even when, as several of the parent’s descriptions denote, it is channeled or contained (“cistern... well... fountain,” 5:15-16, 18). The sense

may be that the “wife of one’s youth,” like wisdom, is never fully known. More explicit, however, is the parent’s conviction that a husband’s passion for and fidelity to his wife is essential to the wellbeing of the couple and the community. Without it, whether by choice or by force, his wife will eventually abandon him, a fate that the parent depicts in brushstrokes of chaos—waters “scattered outside” and flowing “in the city squares” (5:16-17).

The parent thus implores the youth to take pleasure in the “wife of your youth:”

May her breasts quench your thirst at all times,
may you always stagger because of her love. (5:19bc)

Rather than admonishing the youth never to “stagger” (that is, to go astray), despite the excitement and passion that connotes, the parent encourages him to do so and regularly (“at all times”) *with his wife*. Thus erotic desires for one’s life companion and for wisdom are two parts of the same story: the wise human as desiring subject.

In sum, the parent characterizes the moral self as dependent and independent, as susceptible and accountable. The wise desire the good that lies beyond themselves—namely, wisdom, a good they never ultimately control—and, “pulled” by that desire, they make decisions about how to act in ways that best enable them to attain it. Desire for the right object(s) is constituent of human flourishing, arguably its very source, and striving through good choices and efforts of the will are acts of dignity. For the parent of Proverbs 1-9, desire for wisdom is not a means to an end, a state of being that moves one to some perfect and abstract realization of knowledge, but an enduring passion that grounds one firmly in the human situation by inspiring acts of justice and kindling fierce loves.

II. *Desire Directed Wrongly*

Woven tightly with this portrait of the wise person as a desiring subject is a cautionary tale about desire directed wrongly. On center stage are fools who, unlike the wise, live according to what is “wise in [their] own eyes” (3:7). Trusting their wits alone, fools are smugly self-sufficient, willful, complacent, and careless. Not surprisingly, their emotions and desires are skewed: fools loathe objects they should love (“Fools despise wisdom and instruction,” 1:7b) and esteem objects they should hate (Wisdom asks “how long...will you love being naïve?” 1:22). Their moral universe is upside down, characterized by antipathy for God, wisdom, other people, and even themselves (e.g., 1:7, 22, 29, 30; 5:12; 8:36; 9:8).

The fool’s erotic desire is pulled into being by physical appearance and the possibility of an illicit encounter. Unlike the descriptions of personified wisdom that mention only her hands (1:24; 3:16), lips, and mouth (namely, her speech, 8:6-8), the parent’s depiction of the “strange woman” or folly teems with visual cues about her body and mannerisms. Moreover, much about her appearance is misleading—what Raymond van Leeuwen calls the “*seeming* beauty of Folly.”¹⁶ Although identified as married in 7:6-27, for example, she wears the garments of a prostitute—perhaps a veil that covers her face (Gen 38:14-15; cf. Job 24:15). She is noisy and restless (7:11; 9:13)—her brazenness is written across her “hardened” face (7:13). Her “feet,” which may also be a euphemism for her genitalia (cf. Deut 28:57; Ezek 16:25), do not stay at home. Instead, she is out and about, “in the street...in the squares” (7:12)—where

lovers seek each other (Song 3:2) and prostitutes wait (Jer 3:2; Ezek 16:30-31). And, as is true of the lover in Song of Songs, folly's lips drip with honey (cf. Song 4:11b) and her palate is oily smooth, although here what is initially smooth and sweet quickly turns bitter, poisonous, and sharp as a two-edged sword (5:4). The fool's longing ignites at the possibility of such a mysterious companion—a lover who is “out of bounds” as the terms used for her, *zarâ* and *nokrîyyâ*,¹⁷ suggest. Not surprisingly, the parent cautions, “Do not desire *her* beauty” (6:25).

What the fool longs for is a one-night stand, passions indulged immediately and without consequence. Not interested in a relationship such as that offered by personified wisdom and the “wife of your youth,” the fool seeks what folly promises: the opportunity to “consume” each other until satisfied. Neither party regards the other as a person of wholeness and identity; rather the other is a means to one's own pleasure. Metaphors underline this consumptive element. Folly invokes language of eating and drinking, the satiation of appetites, as a euphemism for sexual intercourse when she invites the fool to follow her: “Come! Let us drink our fill of love-making; let us together taste love” (7:18). The parent likens folly to fire—an enduring symbol of the suddenness, intensity, and power of erotic passion to devour a person: one who “goes into” her and “touches” her will surely be burned (6:27-29). And folly's house and path are compared to Sheol—a place notoriously ravenous for human life (5:5; 7:27; 9:18). In Proverbs, the greedy want, like Sheol, to swallow their victims alive and whole (1:12), and Agur counts Sheol among four things that never say “Enough!” (30:15-16). Folly is likewise insatiable—“many” and “numerous” are her victims, warns the parent in 7:27. Ironically, the fool's desire to consume ends up consuming him.

Fools soon surrender their agency, becoming not the subject of verbs (as are the wise), but the objects of them. The object of the fools' desire—folly—lingers near street corners, “lying in wait” for them like an animal on the hunt (e.g., Ps 10:9; Lam 3:10). With fluttering eyelashes, folly seeks to “capture” the unsuspecting (6:25). She “stalks” them (6:26). And whereas the wise pursue and hold fast to wisdom, folly finds and seizes the fool, flattering him by making him think that he alone is the object of her tenacious search—“I have come to meet *you*...to seek *your* face eagerly...and now I found *you*” (7:15). The flattery works. Her words “turn [the youth] aside;” her smooth words “shove” him. Folly is so compelling, the parent contends, the fool goes after her “suddenly” (7:22), without hesitation or protest. In an instant, he is an animal: an ox on its way to the slaughter, a stag that “bounds”—unthinking—toward the trap, a bird that rushes headlong into a snare (7:22-23; cf. 1:17-19). The fool is “fresh meat” and does not know his wound is fatal.

The fools' lack of judgment and callous disregard for others imperil the fools and their communities. The fool loses everything (5:8-14). Gone is any wealth, the loss of which is particularly grave because it goes to “others,” “strangers,” people not of one's family (5:9-10). Lost is any hard-earned honor. Imperiled is the fool's health—his “flesh and body consumed” (5:11). And certain are conflict and violence in the community. Despite the strange woman's assurances otherwise, her husband's rage at the fool proves unrelenting; her husband shows “no restraint” and will accept no amount of compensation or hush-money (6:34-35). Arguably, the fool suffers a beating, and there are no indications of reconciliation. In the end, it is only in the waning days of the fool's life that, in a moment of public humiliation and self-loathing, the fool laments his errant passions: “I hated discipline...my heart spurned reproof... and now

I am ruined” (5:12-13). It is a moment of recognition, for sure, but one that comes far too late.

III. Conclusion

The parent’s construction of erotic desire as integral to the moral life in Proverbs 1-9 invites us to reflect on the work of moral formation. The parent advocates a holistic understanding of the human: he teaches to and for the whole person and resists easy distinctions and dichotomies between the rational, the emotional, and the passionate as he fosters certain habits and beliefs in the youth. To educate, as Michael V. Fox insists, “more is required than sententious warnings and somber maxims or even a logical demonstration of cause and effect, for by themselves these are abstract and lack rooting” in people’s experience.¹⁸ It is not enough, then, to proclaim but not evoke, to teach but not enable affective participation, to appeal to the intellect and not tend to the body—a claim I expect is not new to pastors, educators, and caregivers everywhere. The parent reminds us that the formation of moral, faithful individuals and communities depends urgently on our capacities to engage human pathos and cultivate passion.

Such work poses a challenge for the Christian church, which has long been wary of desire, particularly erotic desire, in theology and practice. Compounding the challenge is the stranglehold on desire and its formation enjoyed by the “something new to crave” consumer culture. Notably, the marketplace’s construction of desire cultivates much of what the parent of Proverbs 1-9 describes as misplaced, foolish desire—namely, desire that is self-interested, appearance-oriented (even when that appearance proves misleading), insistent on immediate satisfaction, and heedless of consequences.

In the face of this, the parent of Proverbs 1-9 urges a different portrait of desire, desire for knowledge and God that is sweet in its unquenched intensity, desire that directs our gaze outward for understanding and convicts us of our accountability to the world we see, desire that fuels lifelong love stories. Moreover, by teaching this desire to children early and weaving it inseparably with everyday decisions and practices (e.g., 1:10-19; 3:27-31), the parent lays claim to the immediacy and power of desire as inherent to life as a “fearer of the LORD.” The wise and faithful in Proverbs 1-9 are not “objective” and removed, but people of passion—motivated to keep learning, captivated by beauty and goodness, disgusted by wickedness, devoted to God, wisdom, and others. Such a relational understanding of what it means to be wise challenges our cultural push for atomism, the view that every individual is a sovereign self who is by nature not bound to anything or any authority. Taking her stand in the heart of the city, wisdom calls us away from such folly, ushering us instead into a landscape of towering loves, fidelities, and profound responsibilities—a landscape the ancient sages deemed ripe for human flourishing.

Notes

1 See <http://automobiles.honda.com/cr-v/>.

2 Compare Chrysler’s “drive=love” sales campaign several years ago.

3 Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 107.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (trans. L. Infield; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 163-64.

- 5 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 461. See also Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), esp. 1-15.
- 6 Roland Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 600.
- 7 "The Objects of Our Affections: Emotions and the Moral Life in Proverbs 1-9," in *Shaking Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Walter Brueggemann and Charles B. Cousar* (ed. C. Roy Yoder et. al; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 73-88.
- 8 Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*; Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 160-67.
- 9 Roberts, *Emotions*, 160-67; Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 135-36.
- 10 Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 131.
- 11 Roberts, *Emotions*, 351; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love," *Ethics* 1 (1988): 234-35; *Upheavals of Thought*, esp. 139-237.
- 12 By "interdependent" I mean (a) recognizing that those whom we love are separate from us and not mere instruments of our will; (b) depending on them in certain ways (without insisting on omnipotence); and, in turn, (c) inviting others to depend on us and committing ourselves to be responsible to and for them in particular ways (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 224-29).
- 13 See, e.g., Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. Day (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 142-60; Gale A. Yee, "'I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh': The Foreign Woman (*iaaâ זכר*) in Proverbs 1-9," *JSOT* 43 (1989): 53-68.
- 14 See Wendy Farley, *Eros for the Other: Retaining Truth in a Pluralistic World* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 105-10.
- 15 Note use of the verbs "walk", "run", "stumble", "enter", "avoid", "go", "turn away", and "pass by" in Prov 4:12-19 alone.
- 16 Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9," *Semeia* 50 (1990): 116.
- 17 See, for example, Prov 2:16. The first term (*zarâ*) elsewhere in the Old Testament designates an "outsider," someone not of one's family (e.g., Deut 25:5), tribe (e.g., Num 1:51; 18:4, 7), or community (i.e., "foreigners," e.g., Hos 7:8-9; Isa 1:7). Such a "stranger" is often considered illegitimate (e.g., Hos 5:7), forbidden (e.g., Jer 2:25), and/or an enemy (e.g., Isa 29:5; Jer 30:8). The second term (*nokrîyyâ*), contrary to many modern translations ("adulterous," cf. NRSV), typically denotes a "foreigner," usually a non-Israelite (e.g., Deut 17:15; Judg 19:12; 1 Kgs 8:41), but at times anyone outside a person's family (e.g., Gen 31:15). With the two terms, then, the parent identifies the woman as "other" without specifying exactly what makes her so. She is "strange:" someone outside socially-accepted categories, whether ethnic, legal, social, or sexual.
- 18 Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (AB18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 348.