

IS THE "TATSPHÄRE" ALWAYS A SPHERE?

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Nearly three decades ago K. Koch proposed that the OT view of retribution be conceived not as a legal act of God imposed from outside the human realm but in terms of "die schicksalwirkender Tatsphäre."¹ According to this view each act surrounds its agent with a lasting power-laden sphere which is of real materiality, just like his physical property. Though the effects of that power-sphere may be delayed in materializing, the outcome is inevitable: A good act will of itself produce prosperity, an evil one misfortune. In support of this specifically spherical conception, Koch cited the consistent presence of the preposition *be-* in statements depicting the act-result connection.

Though this proposal sparked a plethora of scholarly comment,² no attention has been paid to the adequacy of the spherical formulation of Koch's view. Evidence from several complaint psalms suggests the following thesis: The act-result connection was understood not only in spherical terms but in linear ones as well. Furthermore, careful consideration of several texts where the *Tatsphäre* is indeed evident yields some clarification concerning its operation.³

That Ps 7:17a reflects the dynamistic process is obvious.⁴ It affirms that the

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¹K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?", *ZTK* 52 (1955) 1-42. Cf. also his *Šdq im Alten Testament* (unpublished dissertation, Heidelberg, 1953) 35 ff., 85 ff.

²F. Horst, "Recht und Religion im Bereich des Alten Testaments," *EvT* 16 (1956) 49-75; H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der Alten Weisheit* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1958) 33-50; E. Pax, "Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen," *SBF* 11 (1960-61) 56-112; H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (BZAW 101; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966) 146-164; idem, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung* (BHT 40; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1968) 144-186; R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1965) 73-112; J. Scharbert, "Stm im Alten Testament," in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (ed. K. Koch; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972) 300-324; P. Zerafa, "Retribution in the Old Testament," *Ang* 50 (1973) 480-494; J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JTS* 30 (1979) 1-14. For a convenient summary of the discussion see my *Dynamistic and Legal Language in Complaint Psalms* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont, 1980) 21-55.

³One terminological clarification for what follows: What Koch calls "die Tatsphäre" I prefer to call "the dynamistic process" or "the dynamic" because the latter connotes the idea of an impersonal force that, when released by acts, effects the appropriate results. In any case the connection of acts and consequences that the theory of "dynamism" articulates is meant.

⁴Koch, "Vergeltungsdogma" 16; H. J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BKAT 15/1-2; 5th ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen, 1978), 2. 200.

scheme aimed at the innocent petitioner will land on the schemer himself, just as a catapulted stone falls back on the thrower.⁵ I have noted elsewhere that this verse functions structurally as a description of the fate of the wicked in support of the speaker's affirmation of confidence (vv 11-12).⁶

But what is significant is the verse's ontological assumption. Taken literally, the phrase assumes that the unjust action (*'āmālō*) described earlier (v 15) leaves the agent en route to the victim (and thus does not envelop him) but then changes direction in the course of events and "returns" (*yāšūb*) to strike the perpetrator. The effect is more that of a "boomerang" than of a power-sphere. A linear not spherical ontology is presupposed.

The same is true of Ps 54:7a. Here the form is not a description but a petition: "May the evil act [aimed for me] return to my slanderers."⁷ The speaker asks for the connection of the enemies' act (*hāra'* = the slanderous attacks) with its consequence (= its return to its initiators). If taken concretely, the underlying ontology emerges. That the speaker asks that the evil act "return" (*yāšōb*) assumes that the act has gone out from him toward the speaker but will now, if Yahweh grants him his petition, not reach him but turn around and strike its agent. If Yahweh fails to act, the emitted act will presumably proceed on its present course and victimize the speaker. Once again the text evidences a "boomerang" process in which an act sent out in the direction of another returns to victimize its agent.

To summarize up to this point: These two texts with the root *šūb* reflect the dynamistic process along linear lines. They suggest that that process must not be understood exclusively in spherical terms.

A totally different phenomenon is evident in Ps 59:13b-14a.⁸ In form this phrase is an appeal for the punishment of the speaker's enemies.⁹ He prays, "For

⁵Ibid. Cf. Prov 26:27b; Sir 27:24; Eccl 10:8; and the Egyptian parallel noted by B. Gemser, "The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature," *Congress Volume, Oxford, 1959* (VTSup 7; Leiden: Brill, 1960) 125-126.

⁶Hubbard, *Dynamistic* 60-61.

⁷Reading the first word as *yāšōb*, a Qal jussive, with the targum and the BHS editor. The translation of *šōerāy* as "my slanderers" is supported by its usage elsewhere (Ps 5:9; 27:11; 59:11); cf. the suggestion of M. Dahood, *Psalms II* (AB 17; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968) 25-26.

⁸Shifting the *rebīa'* to the preceding word permits the verse to read more in line with its meaning. A comment in support of taking vv 13b-14a as a linguistic entity is in order. In my judgment, that the LXX translates v 13a literally by putting *ḥaṭṭa't . . . debar* in the accusative case speaks in favor of the MT and against the many emendations proposed by commentators. I suggest that v 13a is parallel to vv 13b-14a, that the phrase *ḥaṭṭa't-pimō debar-šepātēmō* (v 13a) is an accusative of cause (cf. GKC 1181, although this text is not cited) parallel to *ūmē'ālā ūmikkaḥaš* (v 13b), and that the *waw* of the following verb is emphatic (cf. the suggestion of Dahood, *Psalms II* 72-73, who, however, takes the opening words of v 13a to be accusatives of means).

⁹For evidence that a private individual—not the king or the community—is the speaker here, see my *Dynamistic* 119 ff.

the cursing . . . they utter, consume them in wrath."¹⁰ Careful examination of this petition yields something surprising: What is requested here is the completion of the dynamic process. This startling suggestion is rooted in the causative use of the preposition *min*, which (according to Gesenius) derives from the preposition's concrete sense of "starting from anything."¹¹ In other words, the cause of any resulting action or state is seen as the point of departure from which the result has set out.

If this is so, then the speaker's plea here presupposes the dynamistic ontology. His petition assumes that the actions of his foes have already started something en route to its result. He merely pleads that that result happen—to be more specific, that Yahweh act and, in the process, bring to realization the end that the enemies had initiated. Though its parallel petition clearly reflects the conception of the *Tatsphäre*—that is, it seeks the ensnarement of the foes in their own evil actions (v 13a)—all traces of a spherical conception are absent here. Rather, the expression of the act-result connection in linear terms that was seen above reappears. What must be noted particularly, however, is that this text represents a second form of that conception, one phrased with the preposition *min*.¹²

This of course confirms the point made earlier—namely, that the ontology of the dynamic, far from being conceived exclusively in spherical terms, was understood in linear terms as well. This likewise suggests the need for an alternative term under which the linear and spherical conceptions of the dynamic may be subsumed, a point to which we shall return below.

A slightly different phenomenon appears in Ps 109:17a. Form-critically the verse functions as part of the speaker's citation of curses that his enemies have uttered against him (vv 6-20).¹³ It offers one item of the lengthy reason for the curses (vv 16-18): That horrible list (vv 6-15) is to be inflicted because the accused is corrupt internally. His love of cursing has, as it were, warped his own soul and entitled him to punishment. That punishment is sought in the petition of v 19: Yah-

¹⁰The word *'ālā* is a legal technical term that Scharbert defines as "the curse which a plaintiff pronounces against his neighbor who is accused of wrong, in order to force a divine judgment"; cf. J. Scharbert, "lh," *TDOT* 1 (1974) 263; cf. also his "'Fluchen' und 'Segnen,'" *Bib* 39 (1958) 1-26; F. Horst, "Segen und Fluch. II. Im AT," *RGG* 5 (3rd ed.; 1962) col. 1649 ff.; and C. A. Keller, "'ālā: Verfluchung," *THAT* 1 (1971) col. 149 ff.

¹¹GKC 119z (italics his); cf. P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique* (Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1965) 132d, 133e.

¹²Cf. Ps 5:11, where the same two descriptions of the dynamic stand in parallelism to each other.

¹³This suggestion, offered long ago by H. Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament* (BZAW 49; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1928) 41, has received a thorough defense by Kraus, *Psalmen* 920 ff. The interpretation has been accepted by the following: A. Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 690-691; H. L. Creager, "Note on Psalm 109," *JNES* 6 (1947) 121 ff.; F. Hugger, "'Das sei meiner Ankläger Lohn . . .?' Zur Deutung von Ps 109,20," *Bib Leb* 14 (1973) 108 ff.; E. Leslie, *The Psalms Translated and Interpreted in the Light of Hebrew Life and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1949) 388-389. Scholars rejecting it include E. Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 109 (108)," *ITQ* 19 (1951) 1 ff.; F. Baumgärtel, "Der 109. Psalm in der Verkündigung," *Monatsschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 42 (1953) 246; Dahood, *Psalms III* 99 ff.

weh is asked to take the process begun in vv 17-18 one final, fatal step—namely, the total demise of the accused in an enveloping sphere of cursing. The curser is to become the accursed.

As far as I know, however, the dynamistic nature of this phrase has not yet been recognized. The reason is that the LXX has misled many into repointing the MT of vv 17-18, while I have interpreted the latter as it stands. In my judgment the weight of the LXX rendering of the latter verses is undercut by an unexplained inconsistency—that is, it renders vv 18a and 18b with aorist indicative verbs (= MT imperfects with *waw*-conversive) but its parallel, v 17, with a pattern of aorist indicatives followed by future indicatives (MT consistent imperfects with *waw*-conversive). That inconsistency is ignored by the *BHS* editor who recommends, against the LXX, that v 18b be rendered according to the LXX pattern of v 17. Retaining the MT as is, v 17a reports, “He loved to curse, and it [i.e., cursing] entered him.”

Now that this sentence is dynamistic derives from at least two considerations. First, the term *qelālā* not only refers to imprecatory activity (and hence to the verbal manipulation of the dynamic) but also to the result of that activity: misfortune (and hence demonstrates one crucial characteristic of language that reflects the dynamic—namely, that the same word connotes both an act and its result).¹⁴ Thus the word itself is a dynamistic one. Second, within v 17a itself is evident a connection of act and result—that is, the verse reports that the act (the speaker’s alleged cursing activity) produced a result (cursing “entered” him, it so penetrated him as to pervert his inner self; cf. v 18b-c).

For our purposes, however, v 17a is important for one reason: It offers a brief glance at how the *Tatsphäre* is presumed to work. That we are dealing with the power-sphere is evident from v 18a, which states that “he clothed himself in cursing like his garment.” In other words, his habit of cursing has become “his second nature,”¹⁵ as much a habit as a favorite outfit. Hence vv 17a and 19a both allege the envelopment of the speaker in a power-sphere started by his cursing.¹⁶

In both cases, however, the result of that power-sphere—the presumed consequences of that action—is the “entrance” or penetration of that cursing into the very inner nature of the curser (cf. the root *bō*, “to enter,” in both). Thus one way

¹⁴This characteristic was first noted by K. Hj. Fahlgren, *Šedāqā, nahestehende und entgegengesetzte Begriffe im Alten Testament* (unpublished dissertation, Uppsala, 1932). Fahlgren went on to posit his theory that a “synthetische Lebensauffassung” underlies the OT world view. That *qelālā* evidences this dual meaning is apparent in this text: In v 17a the word refers to the act of cursing, whereas in v 18b-c it (supplied as the subject of *wattābō*) connotes the effect of that action; so also F. Zorell, *Lexikon Hebraicum et Aramaicum Veteris Testamenti* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1968) 725, but not BDB 887.

¹⁵A. A. Anderson, *Psalms* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 2. 764.

¹⁶Koch, “Vergeltungsdogma” 19, with respect to v 18a but not v 17a. Since the root *qll* Piel and its derivatives always describe acts and results done by one person to another, there is no justification for the suggestion of Kraus, *Psalmen* 923, that v 18 refers to a ritual of *Selbstverfluchung* involving “oil” and “water” by which the speaker seeks self-protection.

that the *Tatsphäre* connects acts and results is through the penetration of the consequence into the very inner nature of the person.

Finally, attention may focus on Ps 26:6. I have argued elsewhere that the setting of this text is the so-called "Torgericht" to whose existence Pss 15 and 24 testify.¹⁷ Fearing exclusion from the temple for alleged apostasy, the speaker pleads for acquittal of the charge (v 1) and for Yahweh's penetrating judicial examination of his inner being (v 2). The reason for the latter plea is that he is innocent (cf. his extended affirmation of that fact, vv 3-8). To support his claim of innocence he performs a ritual act of purification (v 6a).¹⁸

That the dynamistic ontology underlies v 6a is evident from close scrutiny of the phrase *beniqqāyôn* and its parent root. Koch observed that the root *nqh* in the Niphal means to be free not only of an evil act but also of its resulting misfortune.¹⁹ This is confirmed by the further observation that the root and its derivatives are often used in connection with the preposition *min*, which we noted above basically connotes separation—that is, distance, remoteness or motion away from something (Gen 24:8, 41; Num 5:19, 31; Ps 19:13-14; Josh 2:17, 20). Hence, to be "free from" (*min* implied) is to be separated from, remote from something. By the same token, that that remoteness is itself a state is borne out by the fact that three of the five usages of *niqqāyôn* have the preposition *be-* attached (Gen 20:5; Ps 26:6; 73:13; in all three cases the reference is to the innocence of the hands). What is evident in the wider usage of the parent root and its derivatives may, by extension, be assumed for the present form.²⁰

Thus the underlying ontology is that of dynamism: To be "innocent" is to be free from the course of events from guilt to punishment. One's act surrounds him with a state that separates him from such misfortunes.²¹ The speaker claims in reality that he is free from the operation of the dynamic—that is, the course of events from act to guilt to consequence. On the other hand, that freedom from the guilt-consequence is itself a positive state with which his acts have surrounded him (cf. the locative preposition). That positive state sticks to his hands just as evil does to the wicked's and is presumed to lead to positive consequences. The focus is not upon his acts but the state that those acts have produced. The appropriate outcome is admission to the temple (vv 6b-7).

Thus Ps 26:6a offers clarification of the ontology of dynamism. To be innocent is, on the one hand, to be far away, separated from liability to suffer the operation

¹⁷Hubbard, *Dynamistic* 204 ff.

¹⁸Cf. the analogous ritual in Deut 26:1 ff.

¹⁹"Vergeltungsdogma" 28.

²⁰The adjective *nāqī*, for example, means not only to be "free from guilt, clean, innocent" (Exod 23:7; Job 4:7; 17:8; 10:8; 15:5; Prov 1:11) but also to be "free from punishment" (Exod 21:28; 2 Sam 14:9); cf. BDB 667.

²¹If the concrete meaning "to be empty, drain" (Qal) or "to be empty, be clean" (Niphal) is correct, when used with the locative preposition as in the present case the root suggests that one's *Tatsphäre* is void of the power that produces calamitous results but full of the power that brings blessing. Cf. BDB 667; C. van Leeuwen, "*nqh* ni.: schuldlos sein," *THAT* 2 (1976) col. 102.

of the dynamistic process, and, on the other hand, to be present in a state of righteousness that entitles one to blessing.

To sum up: Two insights into the operation of the act-result connection emerged in two texts. In Ps 109:17a the power-sphere was seen to effect the nexus of act and consequence by the penetration of the act into the inner being of the agent. In Ps 26:6a, on the other hand, to be innocent was to be at a distance away from vulnerability to the dynamic—a state that means at the same time to be present in a state of blessing. Further, two examples of a linear conception of the dynamic were found, one using forms of the verb *šûb*, which describes a “boomerang” effect, and the other formulated with the preposition *min*. From this followed the implication that the dynamistic process must be understood both in linear and spherical terms.

Finally, we must return to the terminological problem raised by the existence of a linear conception of the dynamic. It is apparent that the term *Tatsphäredenken* adequately describes the spherical conception but not the linear one. Thus rather than being the larger category under which all phenomena of the dynamic may be subsumed, it too must be subordinated alongside the linear view under another category. Since both phenomena describe the operation of the dynamic, I suggest that as the comprehensive term for both. Whether or not the dynamic was conceived in additional ways awaits the discoveries of future research.