Justice, Righteousness, and Shalom:
An Interpretive Virtue Ethic of Isaiah 32:16-17
For the Whole Community

> 16 Then justice will inhabit the wilderness, and righteousness will dwell in the orchard.
> 17 The result of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quiet confidence forever. (Is 32:16-17, HCSB)

Verse 16 describes the future transformation of the whole of nature—from "wilderness" to "orchard"—but it goes beyond describing the new creation by explaining its catalyst: moral and spiritual principles. I use the word "principle" here in the classical philosophical sense to mean a fundamental source like an origin or cause of something (e.g., a principle of religion), not so much a fundamental truth like a law or fact (e.g., a principle of physics). Isaiah makes clear that the origin of this imminent animation of nature consists of two fundamental Hebraic principles: righteousness and justice. Even the psalmist writes of their primary and important nature: righteousness and justice are the foundation of YHWH's throne (Ps 89:14a, my words).[1] That is, the moral and spiritual principles God values most in his kingdom are justice and righteousness.[2] The psalmist tells us, "He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the LORD's unfailing love" (Ps 33:5, HCSB) and "Your throne, God, is forever and ever; the scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of justice" (Ps 45:6, HCSB). For what is wealth without justice? And what is affluence without righteousness? But before I elaborate as to what "justice" and "righteousness" mean, I would like to discuss their source.

According to verse 16, it appears that not only the natural world but also human society will be changed by an outpouring of divine spirit. *Justice* and *righteousness* are the biblical principles and moral practices (or virtues) responsible for Isaiah's vision of a renewed society—a new age of God's rule (cf. 2:1). But from where are

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[1] For a complementary reading of the paired concepts ("justice and righteousness") as representing the highest values of human behavior and the human condition according to the prophet Amos, please see Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 56-62.

[2] The paired-terms "justice and righteousness," or a combination thereof, appear in the OT (NASB) 124 times in 59 verses: Gn 18:19; Dt 16:19; 2 Sm 8:15; 1 Kg 10:9; 1 Ch 18:14; 2 Ch 9:8; Jb 29:14; 34:17; 35:2; 37:23; Pss 33:5; 37:30; 72:2; 89:14; 97:2; 99:4; 106:3; 119:121; Pr 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 21:3; 21:15; Ec 3:16; 5:8; Is 1:21, 27; 5:7; 9:7; 16:5; 28:17; 32:16; 33:5; 56:1; 59:9, 14; Jr 4:2; 9:24; 12:1; 22:3, 13, 15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezk 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Hs 2:19; Am 5:7, 24; 6:12; Mc 7:9; Hab 1:4; Zph 3:5.

these virtues derived? That depends on how one interprets vv. 1-8. In short, I favor both a messianic and non-messianic reading of these verses (of course not to be prophetically fulfilled at the same time). That is, Isaiah envisions King Hezekiah reigning righteously and his rulers ruling justly.[3] This imminent, miraculous salvation manifested in the natural realm via Hezekiah's reign is supported in Isaiah 36-37. But I believe 32:1-8 speaks ultimately of an eschatological oracle concerning Israel's messianic king—King Jesus/Jesus Messiah—who rules and governs a nation "on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with *justice* and *righteousness* from now on and forever" (Is 9:7c-d, HCSB, emphases added). This means that Isaiah's prophetic message is not simply concerned with the miraculous aspect of God's kingdom.[4] (As a matter of fact, prophetic theology is not about Israel's messianic King bringing history to a close.)[5] The prophet is also concerned with the moral and spiritual principles and practices that effectively govern God's kingdom, ultimately transforming the entire world.

Brevard S. Childs (1923-2007), American Old Testament scholar and former Professor of Old Testament at Yale University, explains it in detail:

> The value of good government and general human civility is a high concern of Isaiah's message. This is to say that the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are not held apart in a radical sectarian polarity, but are seen together as two sides of one truth. In order properly to understand prophetic theology, it is crucial to see that the kingdom of God is indeed to transform the entire world and that sacred and secular society are held together in an integral unity.[6]

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[3] Klaus Koch discusses the monarchy and its relationship with social order at the time of the prophet Amos. He keenly points out that justice and righteousness are biblical practices associated with the king, which is corroborated by 1 Kings 10:9 and Jeremiah 23:5. But he goes on to explain the top-down effect of social order from the monarchy to God's people: "*The king* became the intermediary between God's *ṣᵉdāqā* ["righteousness"] and *mišpāṭ* ["justice"] on the one hand, and the *ṣᵉdāqā* and *mišpāṭ* of the people on the other hand." Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 60 (emphases in the original).

Later, in his discussion of the prophet Isaiah, he explains the importance of the relationship between king and people: "The insistence of having a king at the country's head is probably connected with a Hebrew 'concentric' anthropology, which sees the single person, not as an isolated individual, but as a branch on the tree of his group, as an inseparable member of his people. Man is only viable as part of a corporate personality." Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 137.

[4] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, KT: Westminster Knox Press, 2001), 241.

[5] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, KT: Westminster Knox Press, 2001), 241.

[6] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, eds. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom, and David L. Petersen (Louisville, KT: Westminster Knox Press, 2001), 241-2.

Justice and Righteousness

I would like to briefly discuss the biblical meaning of justice and righteousness as a virtue ethic. Admittedly, I follow Klaus Koch's leading as to their definition and relationship. Koch (1926-), Professor of Old Testament and History of Ancient Near East Religions at the University of Hamburg, Germany, in his book, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, expounds on the prophet Amos' spiritual-moral order of God's *ṣ·dāqā* ("righteousness") and *mišpāṭ* ("justice") and the *ṣ·dāqā* and *mišpāṭ* of the people. I understand their meaning to be universal to all prophets during the Assyrian period, from Amos to Hosea, and Micah to Isaiah.

Justice and righteousness are necessary moral associates with dynamic and spontaneous actions benefitting the whole community. Here is how Koch explains it:

> *Mišpāṭ* means . . . the institutional order, the intact but dynamic form of community, its specific characteristics and actions, the positive order of existence *per se. [Ṣ·]dāqā* means the spontaneous act in favour of an ordinance of *mišpāṭ*—in the individual case it may be in favour of a neighboring clan or place or a fellow-countryman. A person has to 'plough under' the *ṣ·dāqā* given to him through what he does ([Amos] 6.12; cf. Hos.10.12). He will then reap the harvest of a successful and harmonious life in the framework of the very society which he upholds.[7]

A biblical community can be and should be the glorious outcome of virtuous ethics (i.e., just and righteous acts) by individuals for the good of the society in which they live. In this kind of community, the yoke of righteousness, which each person dons, is perpetually being formed and fashioned by just actions towards her neighbors. And the fruit of this moral causality is *shalom*, or as Koch puts it, "the harvest of a successful and harmonious life…."[8]

I am also partial to Wright's biblical explanation of the couplet virtues of "justice and righteousness," in what is technically called a *hendiadys* (i.e., a single idea expressed through two words, such as "law and order."). In Hebrew, *ṣdq* is the root expressed in two common noun forms: *ṣedeq* and *ṣ·dāqâ. À la* Wright, in his book, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, there is no significant difference between them.[9] In English Bibles, the usual translation is "righteousness," which falls short of its full range of Hebrew meaning. "The root meaning," pens Wright, "is probably 'straight': something fixed, and fully what it should be. So it can mean a norm—something by

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[7] Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 59.

[8] Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 59.

[9] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 255.

which other things are measured, a standard."[10] In other words, *righteousness* means "rightness," what ought to be or be done. Wright elaborates,

> [Righteousness] is used literally of objects that are or do what they are supposed to be or do: for example, accurate weights and measures are 'measures of *ṣedeq*' (Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:15).… When applied to human actions and relationships, it speaks of conformity to what is right or expected….[11]

By design the nature of human beings is to do what is "right or expected,"[12] according to a standard of behavior exercised by God's spiritual-moral polity.

Wright does split hairs, however, as to the meaning of *ṣedeq* and *ṣᵉdāqâ*, respectively: *ṣedeq* is more conceptual and *ṣᵉdāqâ* more dynamic.[13] He quotes Moshe Weinfeld (1925-2009), Professor Emeritus of Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to punctuate his point:

> In general, *ṣedeq* refers to the abstract principle of righteousness, while *ṣᵉdāqâ* refers to the concrete act. *Ṣedeq* as an abstract ideal is thus personified; it is said to 'look out from heaven' (Ps. 85:12; cf. Isa. 45:8); peace [*shalom*] and *ṣedeq* are said to kiss one another (Ps. 85:11); *ṣedeq* and *mišpāṭ* are considered the foundation of God's throne (Ps. 89:15, 97:6).… By contrast, *ṣᵉdāqâ* is bound up with actions (see Isa. 56:1, 58:2; . . . did *ṣᵉdāqâ*, i.e., acted righteously), and later it became a Hebrew word for giving alms to the poor (Dan. 4:24).[14]

Righteousness then is the way life ought to be *and* be lived. Like life it has two realities: the ideal and the real. There are biblical grounds for both. *Ṣᵉdāqâ* focuses on the particular acts of righteousness, such as giving money to the poor, and *ṣedeq* epitomizes it. They are complementary. The community of God aspires to *ṣedeq* via *ṣᵉdāqâ*. Without an ideal form of righteousness, which "smiles down from heaven (Ps 85:11, NLT) as a divine attribute, individual acts of "righteousness" miss their heavenly mark; and without concrete acts of righteousness, the ideal loses its power

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[10] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 255.

[11] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 255-6.

[12] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 256.

[13] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 255 (footnote 3).

[14] Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1995), 34; quoted in Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 255 (footnote 3).

to inspire rightness. Keeping these minor differences in mind, however, when righteousness is compared to justice, it is not as active or dynamic.[15]

Broadly speaking, *mišpāṭ* or justice is what "needs to be done in a given situation if people and circumstances are to be restored to conformity with *ṣedeq/ṣᵉdāqâ*."[16] In other words, justice is a relational act in favor of maintaining or restoring right relations—righteousness—with others in the community of God. Wright goes on to say, "*Mišpāṭ* is a qualitative set of actions—something you do . . . [and] *ṣedeq/ṣᵉdāqâ* is a qualitative state of affairs—something you aim to achieve."[17] In this sense, "justice serves righteousness,"[18] as my spiritual mentor and former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, Jefferson McCrory (1953-), likes to say. This means that the purpose of just actions is to establish an ontological state of righteous being. Therefore, justice and righteousness are necessarily linked together. Allow me to explain further: justice is the *act* of being in right relations within the community of God, and righteousness is the *state* of being in those right relations. Categorically and emphatically speaking, justice is relational (about *doing*) and righteousness is ontological (about *being*).[19] We could say that justice or "the positive order of existence,"[20] in Kochean terms, is a moral means to realizing the end goal of righteousness.

Please keep in mind that this this means-to-end ethic is not a morality of an end that justifies the means; rather, the end goal of righteousness exemplifies the means of justice. That means that *ṣedeq/ṣᵉdāqâ* within a community is represented or realized by individual acts of *mišpāṭ*. For example, when a business contract is honored by both parties, then justice prevails, which helps the community to thrive. But when one party breaches a (verbal or written) contract and dishonors the other party, she needs to "right" the wrong done in order to maintain an equilibrium of righteousness, which makes *shalom* possible, as verse 17 explains: "The result of righteousness will be peace [*shalom*]; the effect of righteousness will be quiet confidence forever" (HCSB).[21]

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[15] With that said, there is a great deal of overlap between justice and righteousness.

[16] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 257.

[17] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 257.

[18] Jeff McCrory, Jr., "OT502: The Hebrew Prophets Class Outline" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, Summer 2012).

[19] Furthermore, this ontological state of being is ecumenical. Jesus, in the NT, picks up this theme of unity via another dominant theme, love. (Cf. John 15:12-17; 17:20-26)

[20] Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period*, Vol. I, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 59.

[21] Notice that in these poetic lines the second line specifies the first line. That is, *shalom* is described as "confidence." Isaiah's use here of literary devices falls under the category of specifying parallelism.

Shalom[22]

It is important here to iterate what *shalom* means: "well-being," "wholeness," "soundness," "satisfaction," "completeness," "contentment," "confidence," "friendship," "security," "salvation," "prosperity," and "peace" via divine favor. These positive states of being and emotions, together, contribute to what I call a proper morality of happiness (happiness properly understood necessarily involving biblical moral components), which, as we have just witnessed, is biblically based. In other words, *shalom* is nearly synonymous with true happiness.

Shalom or happiness is a result of the positive interaction between "justice and righteousness." Walter Brueggemann (1933-), American Protestant Old Testament scholar, theologian and former William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, in his book, *Living Toward A Vision*, concurs with Isaiah's assessment of *shalom* (32:17) with commentary: "The consequence of justice and righteousness is *shalom*—an enduring sabbath of joy and well-being." He moves to warn us, however, as to the ramifications of failing to live a moral and thus happy life: "But the alternative is injustice and oppression, which lead inevitably to turmoil and anxiety with no chance of well-being (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21)."[23] Where there is injustice there can be no righteousness. And where there is unrighteousness there can be no *shalom*. And where there is no *shalom* there can be no happiness. Therefore, injustice equals the opposite of (objective) happiness.[24] Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (1946-), former President of Calvin Theological Seminary and current Senior Research Fellow at Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, calls this unhappiness or violation of good (sin/evil), the "spoiling of shalom." In his book, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, he explains,

> Sin is a culpable and personal affront to a personal God. But once we possess the concept of shalom, we are in position to enlarge and specify this understanding of sin. God is, after all, not arbitrarily offended. God hates sin not just because it violates his law but, more substantively, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be. (Indeed, that is why God has laws against a good deal of

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[22] Just as *shalom* is the prominent OT term for "peace," the dominant NT term for "peace" is *eirene*. Both words carry a wide range of denotative and connotative contexts, which are ultimately the outcome of divine blessings, favor, or grace. But that does not preclude the ethical demands of peace on God's people. As we have discussed, *shalom* is an effect of the spiritual-moral standard of "justice and righteousness." But so is *eirene* a result of spiritual-moral obedience to God within the church, which is evidenced whenever a believer exercises peace as a fruit of the Spirit (Gl 5:22).

[23] Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward A Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (New York: United Church Press, [1976] 1982), 19.

[24] These concepts of injustice and unrighteousness constitute wrongness. For an ethically rich discussion of *wrongness*, read Robert Merrihew Adams, "A New Divine Command Theory," in *Ethical Theories: An Anthology*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, [2007] 2009), 242-247.

sin.) God is for shalom and *therefore* against sin. In fact, we may safely describe evil as any spoiling of shalom, whether physically (e.g., by disease), morally, spiritually, or otherwise.[25]

It is important for us to adopt a biblical theology and anthropology. When we start with the flourishing of Adam and Eve in the garden with each other, God, and their environment, and then move to discuss the fall from felicity, we are better equipped to explain at its core what original sin violates: *shalom* or divine favor "because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be."[26] But when we emphasize the decay of humanity over *the way things are supposed to be*, we begin to pave a perilous path: an unhealthy obsession with hamartiology (i.e., the doctrine of sin) and thus a distorted view of anthropology.[27]

A biblical anthropological ethic tells us our *telos*: God has created us for good works (e.g., justice and righteousness) and fulfillment. To delight in what is good is a daring-faith activity in which we believe that the lifestyle we have been predestined for is *shalom*.

Listen to how Plantinga explains it:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.[28]

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[25] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1995] 1996), 13-14 (emphasis in the original).

Yes, sin offends God, but it also robs us of our true happiness. Ironically, we sin because we think it will make us happy. But then, sin turns on us like a wild beast denouncing us and perverting happiness. Sin, then, not only profits us nothing, it also condemns us.

[26] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1995] 1996), 14.

[27] American evangelical author, Nancy Pearcey (1952-), in her widely-influential book, *Total Truth*, admonishes something similar, wherein she balances the doctrines of the Creation of God and the Fall of man with the cosmic Redemption of Christ. "A genuinely biblical theology must keep all three principles in careful balance: that all created reality comes from the hand of God and was originally and intrinsically good; that all is marred and corrupted by sin; yet that all is capable of being redeemed, restored, and transformed by God's grace." Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, [2004] 2005), 95.

[28] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1995] 1996), 10 (emphases in the original).

St. Augustine said something similar when he talked about the concept of ordered love. The root difference between the two cities, City of God and City of Man, is whether or not love is " 'rightly ordered love'," (St. Augustine, *City of God*, XV.22) or, as Plantinga puts it, "the way things ought to

According to Isaiah 32, *the way things ought to be* is the positive consequence of divine righteousness empowering human righteousness (i.e., the righteous reign of King Hezekiah.) In the OT God uses a standard conduct by which to adjudicate a righteous king from a rebellious one. If a king lived or practiced the ethical standard of the Tanak (viz. a healthy fear of God via fulfilling a virtue ethic of justice and righteousness), then he was considered righteous and just.[29] These moral norms have been called the "Yahweh criteria" by McCrory. Thus, the Yahweh criteria of justice and righteousness result in modeling a morality of happiness, or, in short, *shalom*.

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be." When we love God, who is deserving of love, we exercise virtue, which is "the condition of the good life" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, XV.22), and everything is as it should be. But when we love others in place of God, we exercise vice or disordered love, which spoils even the possibility of *shalom*.

[29] A healthy fear of God is contrasted with an unhealthy fear of God, which forces one to obedience out of *fear* (i.e., a feeling of being hurt), all the while believing that God is a bloodthirsty tyrant seeking to strike down those who oppose him.