

PHILLIP A. DAVIS, JR.

# The Place of Paideia in Hebrews' Moral Thought

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

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475





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ISBN 978-3-16-156003-3/eISBN 978-3-16-156004-0

DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-156004-0

ISSN 0340-9570/eISSN 2568-7484 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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Printed in Germany.

For Adri



## Foreword

The present book is a slightly revised version of my dissertation presented to and accepted by the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Münster in the summer of 2016. My path from my home state of Texas to Münster was a long, complicated, and unexpected one that proved, to my great fortune, exceedingly worthwhile, due in no small part to the efforts and support of my *Doktorvater*, Prof. Dr. Hermut Löhr. Prof. Löhr showed great initial interest in this project at the prompting of an all too unsolicited email in 2012 and welcomed me to a liberating climate of dedicated theological concern matched with freedom of inquiry and a demand for exegetical rigor. Throughout the research, Prof. Löhr offered incisive critique, questions, and promptings for further investigation that unfailingly produced new insights. Beyond all that I learned exegetically from my *akademischer Lehrer*, I perhaps most appreciate that he welcomed a study that does not merely build upon his work, but that in one of its central arguments ultimately contradicts his own monograph on Hebrews. Not all students are so lucky.

Perhaps out of a dedication to biblical studies for its own sake, or perhaps out of faintheartedness, I did not offer any extended theological reflection on the results of this study in the original dissertation and that remains the case here. The implications of the results appeared to speak for themselves. To my surprise, however, this struck readers in Germany as odd – the central text under consideration deals after all with the interpretation of human suffering! – and so I presently offer a few brief thoughts. Even though this book deals with Hebrews’ interpretation of suffering in 12:1–17, it focuses on the ethics of Hebrews as epitomized in that passage, and in so doing it comes into contact, though only in a roundabout way, with Hebrews’ so-called warning passages. The book argues, among other things, that reading Hebrews’ warnings in terms of being in or out fails to reckon with the underlying *moral* rigorism of Hebrews. The danger Hebrews addresses is not falling away versus keeping the faith, but living sinfully instead of “Christianly”. Moreover, according to Hebrews, the suffering of the believer, though not punitive in nature, serves to develop the sufferer in righteousness.

This interpretation makes the hard knot of Hebrews – to borrow Luther’s words – all the more theologically and pastorally discomfiting (though it appears to me that Luther understood the problem in a similar way in his



preface to Hebrews). Yet, at the same time this insight serves strikingly to tie together oft imagined tensions in the New Testament, such as between the grace of Paul and the legalism of Matthew. Hebrews, Matthew, and indeed Paul, all share the perspective that the way one behaves can impact one's salvation. Seen in this way – and this view of things is increasingly being recognized – it is easier to understand how, in contrast to Luther's strategy of pushing Hebrews toward the end of the canon, those responsible for the early manuscript P<sup>46</sup> could place Hebrews directly after Romans. Hebrews, so understood, thus helps us to read the New Testament in a new light, even if some aspects of both the individual writing and the entire collection become thereby even more hermeneutically challenging, if not objectionable.

I am thankful to have had the privilege of spending years on this topic and am grateful to those who played significant roles along the way. First, Dr. Herbert W. Bateman, IV supervised and fostered the identification and initial approach of the research question. Yet perhaps more importantly he took on a pastoral role and taught me that in times of great (spiritual) despair, the pragmatics of Hebrews might in some cases have positive effects. A pair of once fellow students were also key: My good friend Dr. Charles Martin was a daily conversation partner and mutual psychological support. He and I, together with Dr. Michael McKay, also met monthly as a Hebrews think tank in order to read and discuss our projects. I was privileged also to correspond by email with Dr. N. Clayton Croy, with whose work I interact in detail. He graciously read and critiqued some of my early engagement with his book and offered clarifications of his own views. Thanks are due also to my second reader, Prof. Dr. Christina Hoegen-Rohls, for her insights and evaluation, which informed my revisions, as well as to the editor of this series, Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey, for recommending the publication of the manuscript. Finally, my wife Adrienne has had to bear equally with the various forms of stress involved with a doctoral program and she sacrificed much in the six years it took. Dedicating this book to her is embarrassingly little to offer her in love and appreciation.

Bonn, June 2018

Phillip A. Davis, Jr.

# Contents

Foreword .....	VII
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
<i>I. Terms and Method</i> .....	3
<i>II. Recent History of the Discussion</i> .....	8
1. Major 20th Century Contributions .....	9
2. <i>Endurance in Suffering</i> .....	14
3. Works since <i>Endurance in Suffering</i> .....	20
4. Conclusion .....	26
<i>III. The Way Forward</i> .....	27
Chapter 2: Hebrews' Moral Thought .....	28
<i>I. Limits of the Passage</i> .....	28
<i>II. Hebrews in Moral Perspective</i> .....	31
1. Hebrews 1: Purification of Sin through the Exalted Righteous Son....	34
2. Excursus: Righteousness in Hebrews .....	36
3. Hebrews 2:1–4: Devotion vs. Disobedience and Transgression .....	40
4. Hebrews 2:5–3:6: Holiness and Faithfulness .....	45
5. Hebrews 3:7–4:13: The Example of the Wilderness Generation .....	47
a) Psalm 95: Rebellion and Testing .....	47
b) Unfaithfulness as a Matter of the Heart .....	48
c) On the Essence of Apostasy .....	50
d) The Deceitfulness of Sin .....	53
e) The Disobedience of the Wilderness Generation .....	55
f) Diligence vs. Disobedience .....	61
g) Conclusion .....	63

6. Hebrews 4:14–5:10: Obedience to the Sinless Highpriest .....	63
7. Excursus: Obedience and Disobedience in Hebrews .....	68
8. Hebrews 5:11–6:20: From Dead Works to Faithfulness toward God.....	71
a) Maturity in Righteousness.....	72
b) Turning from Sin.....	75
c) Falling as Transgression.....	78
d) Conclusion .....	81
9. Hebrews 7:1–10:18: Cult and Morality.....	82
10. Excursus: Peace in Hebrews .....	86
11. Hebrews 10:19–31: Sin and the Need for Endurance.....	90
a) Going on in Sin .....	91
b) Endurance in Action.....	94
12. Hebrews 11: Expressions of Trust.....	97
13. Hebrews 12:18–29: Refusal and Reverence.....	100
14. Hebrews 13: The Moral Response .....	103
a) Verses 1–7: The Individual Instructions .....	103
b) Verses 8–16: Strange Teachings and Proper Worship .....	107
c) Verses 17–21: Final Exhortations .....	114
d) Theology in Response to Moral Crisis .....	116
<i>III. Conclusions</i> .....	116
<b>Chapter 3: The Educational Tradition of Corporal Punishment</b> .....	119
<i>I. Painful Childhood Memories</i> .....	120
<i>II. Corporal Punishment and its Moral Fruit</i> .....	125
<i>III. Theoretical Conceptions of Corporal Punishment</i> .....	129
<i>IV. Parents and Punishment</i> .....	134
<i>V. Conclusions</i> .....	139

Chapter 4: Proverbs 3–4: Context and Comparison .....	142
I. <i>Sayings in Context</i> .....	143
1. Proverbs 3:1–12 .....	146
2. Proverbs 3:11–12 and Corporal Punishment .....	153
3. Proverbs 4:20–27 .....	161
II. <i>Parallels to Proverbs 3:11–12</i> .....	162
1. Biblical and Second Temple Parallels .....	163
a) Deuteronomy 8:5 .....	163
b) Job 5:17 .....	166
c) Philo, Cong. 177 .....	168
d) Psalms of Solomon 3:4 .....	171
e) The Dead Sea Scrolls .....	174
2. Early Christian Parallels: Rev 3:19 & 1 Clem. 56.4 .....	175
3. Summary of Findings .....	177
III. <i>Conclusions</i> .....	178
 Chapter 5: The Moral Thought of Hebrews 12:1–17 .....	 180
I. <i>Hebrews 12:1–11</i> .....	180
1. Verses 1–2: Putting off Sin with Resolve .....	180
2. Verses 3–4: Struggling against Sin “to the Death” .....	185
3. Verses 5–6: Encouragement and Demand .....	193
4. Verses 7–10: Remaining Steadfast for the Purposes of Discipline ...	195
5. Verse 11: The Moral Fruit of παιδεία .....	205
6. Findings in 12:1–11 .....	212
II. <i>Hebrews 12:12–17</i> .....	213
1. Verses 12–13: Making Straight Paths .....	213
2. Verse 14: Pursuing Peace and Holiness .....	221
3. Excursus: Holiness and Ethics in Hebrews .....	224
4. Verses 15–17: Watching out for Morally Defiling Behavior .....	229
5. Findings in 12:12–17 .....	236
III. <i>Conclusions</i> .....	237

Chapter 6: Final Conclusions.....	239
Bibliography.....	243
Index of References.....	277
Index of Modern Authors.....	286
Subject Index.....	289

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Writing on the anthropological study of religion, Clifford Geertz asserts: “Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of an implicit and directly felt rather than explicit and consciously thought-about sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual *interprets* his experience and organizes his *conduct*” (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup> There is perhaps no greater example of this two-fold aspect of religion in the Epistle to the Hebrews than the passage with which we primarily concern ourselves in the present study: 12:1–17. The author of the so-called epistle takes up the troubles and difficulties faced by the audience (10:32–34) and reinterprets this experience as *παιδεία*, discipline,<sup>2</sup> from the divine father, God: “Endure for the purposes of discipline. God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there whom a father does not discipline?” (12:7).<sup>3</sup> But what is more, the author throughout interprets and explains the present existence and future hope of the audience by developing the significance of Jesus’ death and propitiatory work. All of this interpreting works together to conserve the worldview of an audience that over time has become dull in commitment (5:11–12; 6:11–12). Yet Heb 12:1–17 and indeed the entirety of Hebrews not only correspond to the *interpretation* aspect of Geertz’s definition, but both also display a concern with *conduct*. Thus, according to the passage, divine discipline, when approached with endurance (12:1–3, 7), ultimately functions to yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness (12:11), and the reinterpretation of the audience’s troubles leads to the exhortation to seek peace with all and sanctification (12:14). More pointedly, the author begins the entire chapter with the concern of putting off the encumbrance of sin and striving against it

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 127.

<sup>2</sup> I have translated *παιδεία* as discipline since *παιδεία* and its related forms can range in meanings related to education, instruction, correction, and training. “Discipline” is sufficiently vague an English term so as not to bias the discussion from the outset concerning how it should be understood in Heb 12. BDAG, s.v. “παιδεία”, “παιδεύω”; Georg Bertram, “παιδεύω, παιδεία, κτλ.,” *TDNT* 5:596–625. NB: I have primarily used the English *TDNT* instead of the German original; however, in a few cases where the translation is poor – i.e. not immediately clear – or where I suspected the nuance of particular English words might mislead as to the German, I have consulted and cited *TWNT*.

<sup>3</sup> Translations mine, unless otherwise noted.

(12:1, 4). And just like the aspect of interpretation, the aspect of conduct also pervades the rest of Hebrews in the form of both specific moral directive and exhortation using the language of sin, obedience/disobedience, and faithfulness, among others.

While from a theoretical perspective like that of Geertz the connection between conduct and interpretation of experience may be taken for granted, understanding this interplay in the case of Hebrews has proven quite difficult, particularly regarding 12:1–17. On the one hand, Hebrews generally may be viewed as grandiose theologically and pitifully weak ethically, particularly in light of its paucity of direct moral injunction. As Knut Backhaus puts it: “The theological mountain is in labor – but what is born is a moral mouse!”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, regarding Heb 12:1–17 specifically, there is a range of exegetical opinion on several issues that may be considered moral or ethical. For example, there has been much discussion of whether divine discipline should be understood as punishment for sin or as non-punitive training or education. There is also difficulty in deciding the import of “sin” in 12:1, specifically whether or not it refers exclusively to apostasy. Sin in 12:4 is similarly unclear: it could refer to sin itself, within the individual or among the community addressed, or it could refer to outside opposition like the sinners opposed to Jesus according to verse 3. We might also ask further, what is the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” mentioned in 12:11 as a result of divine discipline? On the question of discipline, the majority of recent publications rightly agree that divine, fatherly discipline functions not as punishment for sin and wrongdoing, as the quotation of Prov 3:11–12 might initially suggest, but rather as educative, “non-punitive” training in virtue. Under the “non-punitive” rubric, however, it can be more difficult to account satisfactorily for the strong language of sin, righteousness, immorality, and godlessness found scattered through verses 1–17, especially in light of the development of such themes elsewhere in Hebrews. That is not to say that those taking the non-punitive understanding of discipline neglect the moral concepts of Hebrews 12 – besides, training and education in the ancient world involved the development of virtue – but rather that the interpretation gives rise to different

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<sup>4</sup> Knut Backhaus, “How to Entertain Angels: Ethics in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 149. The original German reads: “Es kreißt der theologische Berg, und er gebiert eine moralische Maus!” See Knut Backhaus, “Auf Ehre und Gewissen! Die Ethik des Hebräerbriefs,” in *Der sprechende Gott: Gesammelte Studien zum Hebräerbrief*, WUNT 240 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 215. I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Christina Hoegen-Rohls for making me aware that this is an allusion to Horace’s *Ars poetica* 139: *parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus* – the mountains will be in labor and a ridiculous mouse will be born. Horace thus warns against beginning a work by promising more than can be delivered. The line itself alludes to Aesop’s fable of the mountain in labor (fable 520 in Perry’s edition).

exegetical problems that deserve a fresh look in light of the moral thought of Hebrews as a whole.

So, what is the relation between divine discipline and ethics or morality in Hebrews, especially if such parental discipline plays no punitive role? Moreover, how can we interpret the moral terms of 12:1–4 and 12:12–17 alongside the corrective-sounding tones of the quotation of Prov 3:11–12 employed in Heb 12:5–6? Finally, how do the argument and ethics of our passage relate to ethical argument elsewhere in Hebrews? In answering these questions, the present study contends that the moral thought of Hebrews is far from mouse-like, but rather that a moral concern underlies the entirety of the work.<sup>5</sup> That is, the key question of whether the audience will persevere or apostatize is addressed throughout Hebrews in terms of choosing sin or faithful righteousness. In Heb 12, the paradigm of fatherly divine discipline encourages the audience to endure by viewing their situation as a natural, though painful, feature of sonship, but at the same time this implies the need for ongoing submission to God in an educational process that ultimately develops the very virtue expected of the audience elsewhere in the book.

## I. Terms and Method

Before moving to the history of research, which will justify and identify the contribution of this particular treatment of Hebrews 12:1–17, a few words on terminology are in order. Ethics, morality, and ethos can be variously defined. Wayne Meeks, for example, understands ethics as “a reflective, second-order activity: it is morality rendered self conscious; it asks about the logic of moral discourse and action, about the grounds for judgment, about the anatomy of duty or the roots or structure of virtue.” Morality, according to Meeks, “names a dimension of life, a pervasive and, often, only partly conscious set of value-laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes, and habits.” Thus for him, when a parent commands a child to behave, this is morality in so much as the behavior commanded is presupposed as proper, but if the child asks why he or she should behave, then the parent would enter the stage of ethics.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with speaking of “ethics” in relation to the NT, of course, is that the NT writings do not engage in this second-order activity of reflecting on moral discourse systematically, even if they do often offer a rationale for a

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<sup>5</sup> Backhaus in fact contributes to this in “Entertaining Angels,” though with a focus on Heb 13.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 3–5; cf. Leander E. Keck, “Rethinking ‘New Testament Ethics,’” *JBL* 115 (1996): 7.



given exhortation.<sup>7</sup> Ruben Zimmermann has rightly argued in several publications that “implicit and sometimes explicit reasons as well as the argumentative recourse to certain ethical maxims and norms underlie the individual paraenesis.”<sup>8</sup> This is particularly evident in Hebrews. Although explaining the relationship of its supposed expository (or doctrinal) and exhortatory passages is a perennial problem in scholarship, in some cases the exposition clearly lays the groundwork for an exhortation.<sup>9</sup> For example, the exposition of Jesus’ greatness over the angels in Heb 1 leads to the exhortation in 2:1–4 to give greater devotion to the message of Jesus since the consequences of neglecting it are greater than the consequences of neglecting the message delivered by angels. Based on similar observations particularly in the Pauline corpus, Zimmermann has developed a method of analyzing and making explicit the “implicit ethics” of a text. He defines implicit ethics as “precisely the ethics of the text, revealed through language, norms, and forms of ethical reflection, that is [*sic*] placed at the center of the analysis.”<sup>10</sup> The method involves eight interrelated, though separable parts,<sup>11</sup> but for Zimmermann, ethical analysis of a biblical text is “in the first instance a precise description of the ethical language and plausibility strategies of the text itself.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Keck, “Rethinking,” 7, depicts such “moral reasoning” as a mixture of ethics and morality, and like Ruben Zimmermann (see below), speaks of making such rationale explicit in the analysis of a text.

<sup>8</sup> Ruben Zimmermann, “Ethics in the New Testament and Language: Basic Explorations and Eph 5:21–33 as Test Case,” in *Moral Language in the New Testament*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann and Jan G. van der Watt, WUNT II/296 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 22; cf. idem, “Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ: Entwurf einer ‘impliziten Ethik’ des Paulus am Beispiel des 1. Korintherbriefes,” *TLZ* 132 (2007): 273.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Frank Matera, “Moral Exhortation: The Relation between Moral Exhortation and Doctrinal Exposition in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *TJT* 10, no. 2 (1994): 196–82; James W. Thompson, “The Underlying Unity of Hebrews,” *ResQ* 18 (1975): 129–36.

<sup>10</sup> Ruben Zimmermann, “How to Read Biblical Texts Ethically” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, San Diego, CA, 23 November 2014), 2–3. Zimmermann presents the method also in “Ethics in the New Testament and Language,” 19–50 and in “Jenseits,” 259–84.

<sup>11</sup> In brief, the model asks about (1) the linguistic forms, such as imperatives and hortatory subjunctives; (2) norms, maxims, principles and values for action; (3) the tradition-historical context of norms and moral instances; (4) the prioritization of different values (what is better or worse?); (5) ethical argumentation or structure of motives, for example the use of deontological or teleological argumentation; (6) the ethical subject, that is, the group or individuals who make ethical judgments; (7) the resulting lived ethos; and (8) the field of application for a given norm or judgment. See Zimmermann, “Ethics in the New Testament and Language,” 24–28; idem, “Jenseits,” 274–76.

<sup>12</sup> Zimmermann, “How to Read,” 11. So also Hermut Löhr, who states: “a study of implicit New Testament ethics has to begin with a description of the moral language, the terms and categories used, the exposition of the argument, and the rhetorical techniques applied.” See Hermut Löhr, “The Exposition of Moral Rules and Principles in the Pauline

This is the sort of task we will undertake in a significant portion of this study. Instead of morality or ethics in the senses reflected in Meeks's definitions, we want to investigate Hebrews' *moral thought*,<sup>13</sup> which includes its norms, values, commands, rules, the should-to's, and the ought-to's,<sup>14</sup> all understood within the argument of the text and the language used to express it.<sup>15</sup> Since this approach seeks to make explicit the rationale as well as the norms, rules, etc., it would become tedious to distinguish constantly between such words as "ethical" or "moral"; therefore, we will treat the words ethics and morality, together with their derivatives, as interchangeable, but all under the heading of moral thought. While moral thought refers to the entire picture of "morality" in Hebrews conveyed by its argument, this study focuses much attention on the details of the language used in order to develop such moral

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Letters: Preliminary Observations on Moral Language in Earliest Christianity," in *Moral Language in the New Testament: The Interrelatedness of Language and Ethics in Early Christian Writings*, ed. Ruben Zimmermann and Jan G. van der Watt, WUNT II/296 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 198.

<sup>13</sup> Hermut Löhr has suggested the term "moral thought", and it is a convenient way of superseding the contested usage of the terms morality and ethics. On the one hand, morality, as reflected in Meeks' definition, can connote the mundane proper behavior of daily life. For example, the statement "he's a good guy" gives the impression that a certain man is moral (to use the term in the colloquial fashion); that is, he is an upstanding, trustworthy individual in society, who does not lie, cheat, or steal. On the other hand, ethics, again as reflected in Meeks' definition, can connote the academic, esoteric, and philosophical reflection about the values of individuals and society that has little relation to the concerns of the NT. The NT may contain reflection on morality as well as mundane rules of behavior, but often, and Hebrews is a good example, the NT writings are trying to convince their respective audiences to take very particular, situation-specific courses of action. "Moral thought" thus has the advantage of moving beyond the mundane, while at the same time avoiding the esoteric. See Löhr, "Exposition of Moral Rules and Principles," 197 n. 2. On page 198, Löhr rightly points to the possible negative connotation of morals or morality as unreflective, bourgeois rules of behavior.

<sup>14</sup> This follows van der Watt's treatment of ethics as commands or rules, as evidenced in 'ought to' or 'should' language. Our definition is a bit broader in adding the aspect of moral reasoning. Jan G. van der Watt, "Ethics and Ethos in the Gospel According to John," ZNW 97 (2006): 151.

<sup>15</sup> Most recently, Susanne Luther has employed a similar, though more wide-ranging, approach to her study of New Testament speech-ethics (*Sprachethik*). For Luther, *Sprachethik* firstly concerns NT conceptions of morally good and bad speech, but importantly, it also involves the careful observation of the discourse and language employed in communicating what kind of speech is good and bad. She writes: "*Gegenstand der vorliegenden Studie sind daher Paränesen zur rechten Verwendung von Sprache im zwischenmenschlichen Kontext, die in unterschiedlichen Formen und Textgattungen des Neuen Testaments vermittelt werden, sowie deren ethisch reflektierte Begründungs- und Motivierungsstrategien*" (emphasis original). Susanne Luther, *Sprachethik im Neuen Testament: Eine Analyse des frühchristlichen Diskurses im Matthäusevangelium, im Jakobusbrief und im 1. Petrusbrief*, WUNT II/394 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 11; cf. 1–66.

thought. Accordingly, *moral language* refers more specifically to the grammatical and syntactical forms used to express the commands, rules, should's and ought-to's – e.g., imperatives and hortatory subjunctives – as well as to significant morally loaded terms and categories, such as sin or righteousness.<sup>16</sup> More concretely, it is through this sort of analysis that we want to answer such questions as, what does it mean to be righteous according to Hebrews? Why is sin portrayed as the audience's opponent? Why does the author single out sexual immorality as a particularly dangerous sin (12:16; 13:4)? What sort of moral character does *παιδεία* build in the audience, according to the author, and how does this character contrast with their pre-conversion lives? That is not to say, though, that Hebrews builds an ethical system which would guide ethical decision-making. Rather, the study asks about the coherence of claims concerning such things as sin and righteousness together with the author's commands and exhortations.

A bit more complicated for our purposes, though to some extent helpful, is the term *ethos*. Geertz distinguishes between worldview and *ethos*, defining *ethos* as “the tone, character, and quality of [a people's] life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects.” Reflection is key in this definition, since Geertz writes as an anthropologist and thus depends on observation in order to understand the *ethos* of those peoples he studies. By contrast, worldview is cognitive and existential; it is a people's “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society.”<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Geertz's anthropologically oriented definition entails a problem for the NT scholar: the people groups the NT scholar wishes to study are not available for observation.

Nevertheless, NT scholarship has also picked up on an interest in *ethos*. The definition of Michael Wolter is a convenient example:

Unter einem *Ethos* verstehe ich einen Kanon von institutionalisierten Handlungen, die innerhalb eines bestimmten sozialen Systems in Geltung stehen. Ihnen wird Verbindlichkeit zugeschrieben, weil allererst durch solche Handlungen eine bestimmte Gruppe als solche erkennbar und erfahrbar wird.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. the quotation from Löhr in note 12 above. In Zimmerman's construal, analysis of moral language includes also the analysis of the logic of an ethical statement. This is not to be overlooked, as such consideration belongs to any good exegesis. For the purposes here, an even more basic and specific definition of moral language is expedient for referring to the author's actual words or grammatical and syntactical forms without in each case also pointing to the argument. See Zimmerman, “Ethics in the New Testament and Language,” 28–36.

<sup>17</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation*, 126–27.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Wolter, “Identität und Ethos bei Paulus,” in *Theologie und Ethos im frühen Christentum: Studien zu Jesus, Paulus und Lukas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 127.

Wolter goes on to describe the term under two aspects, a material aspect and a functional aspect. Materially, the actions under an ethos are unchangeable, clear, and repeatable, and they do not have to be reworked or re-justified. Functionally, an ethos brings the distinct identity of a particular group into view. It distinguishes the group from outsiders, and as Wolter further points out, any social entity existing under a larger society must delineate itself from outsiders and it must have ways of facilitating the coexistence of its members.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, ethos is more specific for Wolter than for Geertz, but it is nevertheless quite a bit broader than ethics or morality as employed in this study.

On the one hand, the term ethos is helpful in the functional aspect; in fact, studies by Backhaus, Dunning, and Thompson have already contributed to such interests in Hebrews in that they have sought to understand the social function of Hebrews' moral injunctions.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, trying to describe the material ethos of Hebrews, whether the unchangeable, clear, and repeatable (Wolter), or the tone, character, and quality of life (Geertz), would be difficult, as one would have to look behind the text to find the behavior of the community, a community that has proven difficult to describe with much precision. Moreover, what the addressees actually do is a different thing from what the author expects or prescribes.<sup>21</sup> Though we are interested in the condition of the audience, it is unlikely that we can uncover their habits to any great extent. Much more accessible is the way the author portrays the audience and what he expects of them. Even if we wanted to describe the ideal ethos offered by the author we would have difficulty going into much detail. Even though the author does prescribe such repeatable practices as meeting together and encouraging one another, much of what he commands appears contingent upon the particular situation that prompted him to write. Instead, for our purposes it is better to stay with the moral thought of Hebrews. Then we are on surer ground of describing what is available – the ethical rules,

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<sup>19</sup> Wolter, "Identität und Ethos," 128, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Backhaus, "How to Entertain Angels," 149–75; Benjamin Dunning, "The Intersection of Alien Status and Cultic Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 177–98; James W. Thompson, "Insider Ethics for Outsiders: Ethics for Aliens in Hebrews," *ResQ* 53 (2011): 207–19. See also the discussion of "insider ethics for outsiders" in chapter 2 below.

<sup>21</sup> As Keck notes, New Testament ethics comprises the ethics of New Testament *texts*. Thus, he offers the reminder that "The New Testament as canon, like its constituent pieces before they were canonized, not only expresses the faith and ethos of early Christianity but also addresses them in order to correct them." Keck, "Rethinking," 4–5. A further problem for trying to describe the ethos of Hebrews would be the question of whether the author is an ongoing, though presently removed, member of the community addressed, or whether his ideas would be reflective of a different group.

language, and rationale – without attempting to reconstruct the ethos of the addressees.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, Geertz's notion of thick description offers some sense – though limited by the considerations above – to what we seek to undertake here regarding the moral thought of Hebrews and its relation to divine discipline in Heb 12. Thick description, according to Geertz, involves not simply describing what people do within a culture, but interpreting the actions intelligibly; the thick describer wants to interpret what his or her subjects are “up to” and systemize those interpretations.<sup>23</sup> That is what we will try to do with regard to Heb 12:1–17 in its literary and cultural context. We want to describe the moral thought of Hebrews in such a way that we understand what the author is really getting at, reconstructing the inner world and rationale of Hebrews' ethics.<sup>24</sup> “A good interpretation of anything [...] takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation”, Geertz writes. “When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else [...] it may have its intrinsic charms; but that is something else than what the task at hand – figuring out what all that rigamarole [...] is about – calls for.”<sup>25</sup> What then is all the rigamarole about with divine discipline in Hebrews?

## II. Recent History of the Discussion

Perhaps the question given the most recent attention in Heb 12:1–17 has been the question of whether discipline is to be understood as punitive or non-punitive, whether it serves as punishment or education. In fact, there is a long history of discussion on the topic, but the question has become a standard point of consideration especially since the publication of N. Clayton Croy's watershed monograph, *Endurance in Suffering*.<sup>26</sup> Croy has argued, generally quite successfully, that discipline in Heb 12 is educational training in virtue and should not be understood as punishment for wrongdoing. Although his entire program has not achieved consensus status, the majority of important commentaries and studies have accepted it on the whole, and most of Croy's

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<sup>22</sup> Van der Watt's proposed definition of ethos as habitual personal behavior would involve the same sorts of problems for this study as Wolter's definition. Van der Watt, “Ethics and Ethos,” 151. Cf. Löhr's comments on the historical difficulties of investigating early Christian ethos. Löhr, “Moral Rules and Principles,” 197.

<sup>23</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–30.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context*, SNTSMS 98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

critics accept at least parts of his thesis. Croy's thesis is founded upon several major points: first, nowhere does the author express that the audience has done something wrong to warrant punishment; second, the athletic imagery throughout the passage evokes a view of discipline as positive training; and third, the punitive tones of the Prov 3:11–12 quotation do not receive re-mention in the author's exposition of the text. Despite the incisiveness of these points, a few scholars are not totally convinced. In part this is because of the focus on sin directly at the beginning of the passage in 12:1, 3–4, and in part because of the wisdom tradition of parental correction brought up by the use of Prov 3:11–12. Thus, either one may place an emphasis on sin and the immediately apparent background of the wisdom literature, or on the athletic imagery and the lack of a clear punitive construal of discipline in the text. This of course oversimplifies the various treatments, but it captures the interpretive tendencies evident not only in the research since Croy's book was published, but also in the centuries of commentary before it. Whichever direction one may tend toward, a sufficiently systematic accounting for the moral language of the passage is still lacking. Thus, the following will primarily demonstrate the tendencies of the discussion since Croy, while also identifying the need for a more fully developed understanding of the moral language of 12:1–17 in order better to come to grips with the author's imagined results of discipline and their purpose. Since there already exists a full history of the discussion elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> we begin here with the studies devoted to our passage from the 20<sup>th</sup> century before turning to Croy's monograph and its reception.

### 1. Major 20th Century Contributions

First, Werner Jentsch's 1951 study on early Christian educational thought offers some useful analysis of our passage.<sup>28</sup> Jentsch reads Heb 12 from a *heilsgeschichtlich* perspective, and draws a sharp distinction between what he sees as the salvific concern of Heb 12 and the purpose of suffering according to the Stoics, his primary point of comparison. Jentsch gives much attention to the father-son relationship described in 12:4–11, understanding *παιδεία* as *Züchtigung* and considering such discipline to have a corrective function that specifically leads to repentance. It bears recognition, however, that the author does not specifically say that this discipline should result in repentance in chapter 12, and if anything, repentance would be excluded by Hebrews altogether (6:4–6; 10:26; especially 12:17). Interestingly, Jentsch equates the purpose of discipline, a share in God's holiness, to salvation specifically. This

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<sup>27</sup> See the extensive history of research offered by Croy, *Endurance*, 4–35.

<sup>28</sup> Werner Jentsch, *Urchristliches Erziehungsdenken: Die Paideia Kyriou im Rahmen der hellenistisch-jüdischen Umwelt* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951), 161–68.

is an interesting proposal since sin, which would lead in the opposite direction from salvation (10:26), plays such a prominent role in 12:1–4. Nevertheless, further study would have to review whether such an equation of holiness and salvation *per se* is really warranted. This discipline unto salvation contrasts quite markedly, according to Jentsch, with Stoic conceptions of misfortune (*Unglück*). Although Seneca can write, “God hardens, reviews, and disciplines those whom he approves, whom he loves”,<sup>29</sup> the overarching purpose of suffering for the Stoics is rather to become the *Idealmensch*, who overcomes the self and comes to recognize providence in nature and to live in harmony with it. For Jentsch this conception is far different from the NT understanding of God and of salvation history. His salvation-historical approach as a system applied to the passage is questionable, but his concern with salvation and the father-son relationship nevertheless deserve further attention. The differences Jentsch shows between Stoic conceptions of suffering are also important, but nevertheless, the passage makes no explicit reference to repentance, except where it is excluded (12:17), and so there remains an opening for a closer relationship to Stoic thought than Jentsch allows.

In his 1981 dissertation, Farai K. Gambiza offers an analysis of *παιδεία* and *τελείωσις* in Hebrews.<sup>30</sup> He observes some differences between the treatment of Jesus’ suffering and the suffering of the audience in Hebrews. According to him, Jesus suffers unto perfection for the fulfillment of his priestly office. He argues that the audience is never said to suffer unto perfection, but rather to suffer *παιδεία* as instruction, correction, discipline, and punishment. Still, he does view perfection as the ultimate goal, but suffering itself specifically serves a purgative or educational role.<sup>31</sup> Gambiza sees suffering as something which the audience must accept as a necessary part of their path. Though Gambiza’s definition of *παιδεία* remains loose and unclear, and his conception of the perfection of believers as different from the perfection of Jesus seems imprecise,<sup>32</sup> he rightly draws a number of issues in Hebrews together. For example, he takes seriously the description of the audience as needing to learn the discernment of good and evil, and notes that acceptance of *παιδεία* is not inactivity, but rather implies good works and service to God and others.<sup>33</sup> The coherence of such good works together with the purposes of

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<sup>29</sup> *Prov.* 4.7 (Basore, LCL).

<sup>30</sup> Farai K. Moyo Gambiza, “*Teleiosis and Paideia* as Interpretation of Sufferings: The Perfecting of Jesus and the Disciplining of Christians in the Letter to the Hebrews” (ThD diss., Christ Seminary - Seminec, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> Gambiza, “*Teleiosis and Paideia*,” 65–66.

<sup>32</sup> That the “mature” are the ones for whom solid food is suitable in 5:14 (*τελείων δέ ἐστιν ἡ στερεῖα τροφή*) would seem to militate against too strong a distinction between Jesus’ perfection and that of the audience.

<sup>33</sup> Gambiza, “*Teleiosis and Paideia*,” 67–68.

# Index of References

## Old Testament

<i>Exodus</i>		<i>2 Samuel</i>	
17	48, 57	7:13, 16	214 n. 143
		7:14–15	157–58
<i>Leviticus</i>		<i>Esther</i>	
11:44	204	6:10	78
13:46	85 n. 202		
15:31	84	<i>Job</i>	
16:4	84	4:3–4	215–16
19:2	204	4:6	166
21:1–23	84–85	4:7	166
		4:17–18	166
<i>Numbers</i>		5:6–7	166
5:11–31	226	5:17–18	153
14	48, 56 n. 105, 57–	5:17	143, 162, 166–68
	61, 164	5:18–26	167
14:9	50	5:26	166
14:23	72–73	15:14–16	166
14:33	232	33:14–30	167
17:2–3 (LXX)	187	33:14–15	153 n. 44
20	48, 57	33:15	167
		33:19	153 n. 44
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		33:30	167
4:30	164 n. 83	<i>Psalms</i>	
8:2–5	24–25	17:36 (LXX)	214 n. 143
8:3	165	28:2 (LXX)	203
8:5	143, 146, 160, 162,	35:15 (LXX)	221
	163–66, 174–75	45	35
8:7–20	164	95	47–49, 50, 57
8:16	164	96:7 (LXX)	34 n. 22
8:19	165	109:1, 6 (LXX)	35
11:2	165		
17:6	94	<i>Proverbs</i>	
21:18	165 n. 85	3:1–10	146–52
22:18	165 n. 85	3:1	147–48
29:17	205 n. 112, 206	3:2	148–49
	n. 115, 230		
32:43	34		



3:3	149–50	26:3	130
3:4	150	29:1	155
3:5	150, 159	29:15	154
3:6	150		
3:7	150	<i>Ecclesiastes</i>	
3:8	151	6:2	229 n. 203
3:9–10	151–52		
3:9	205	<i>Isaiah</i>	
3:11–12	2–3, 9, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24– 25, 27, 143, 147, 153–61, 162, 168– 69, 178–79, 193– 95, 240	8:17	45, 150
		35:3	12, 214, 215–17
		35:6	218
		53:5	218
		53:19	218
3:11	172	<i>Jeremiah</i>	
3:12	175–76	3:14	51
3:16–17	148–49	7:24, 26	42
3:21–22	151	23:10–12	62 n. 122
3:21	42–43	31	49
3:24–25	211	31:31–24	85
4:20–27	146, 161–62		
4:20–22	151	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
4:21	42–43	14:13	79
4:24	161	15:8	79
4:26	12, 20, 25, 27, 143– 146, 151, 161, 178– 79, 214, 217, 240	18:24	79
		20:27	79
		22:4	79
4:27	161–62, 211	34:29	113
8:36	187	36:6	113
9:7–9	155 n. 53	36:25	226 n. 189
10:2	149		
10:17	159	<i>Daniel</i>	
11:30	152 n. 41, 205–6	6:4/5 (Theodotian)	80
13:2	152 n. 41, 206		
13:18	155	<i>Hosea</i>	
13:24	154, 159–60	5:2	201
15:10	155	10:12	206
16:7	156		
19:18	155 n. 52, 158	<i>Amos</i>	
19:22	149	6:12	206
21:26	149		
22:15	155	<i>Micah</i>	
23:13–14	154–55, 158	7:8–9	62 n. 122

## Deuterocanonical Books

<i>Tobit</i>		21:3	151
4:10	149	22:6	136
12:8–9	149	25:23	215
		30:1–13	136
<i>Judith</i>		30:8	130
5:17–18	51	30:13	130
<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>		<i>1 Maccabees</i>	
2:17	106	1:15	51
3:10	51	2:19	51
6:9	78, 80	<i>2 Maccabees</i>	
10:1	80	6:12	196–97
11:10	157	13:14	189
12:2	78	15:2	203
15:17	75–76 n. 164	<i>4 Maccabees</i>	
<i>Sirach</i>		10:10	16
1:18	151	17:11–12, 14–16	15–16
2:12	215–216	17:14	190
7:34	229 n. 203	18:3	16–17
18:13	12		

## Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

<i>1 Enoch</i>		10:4	174
5:4	51	13	172–73
		13:9	173
<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>		13:11	174
232–33	206	14:1–5	173
		14:1	197 n. 72
<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>		14:9–10	174
3:4	12, 171–74	16:14–15	173
3:5–11	172	17:15–18	173
3:12	174	17:19–20	38 n. 37
8:5–6	216 n. 147	18:4	172
8:29	201	<i>Testament of Levi</i>	
10:1–2	173	3.4	203
10:2	197 n. 72		

## Dead Sea Scrolls

<i>4Q504 1–2 recto III</i>	
5b–7a	174–75

## New Testament

<i>Matthew</i>		<i>2 Timothy</i>	
6:1–18	38–39	1:19	42 n. 56
13:22	54	2:22	222
		4–5	42 n. 56
<i>Mark</i>		<i>Hebrews</i>	
4:19	54	1	4, 34–36
<i>Luke</i>		1:8–9	83
8:13	51	1:9	210
13:11–13	219	2:1–4	4, 40–44, 101
13:13	214 n. 143	2:1	109 n. 285
<i>Acts</i>		2:5–3:6	45–47
14:8	219	2:13	150
<i>Romans</i>		2:18	196
5:3–4	196	3:6	47 n. 78, 47 n. 79, 61
5:15–20	80	3:7–4:13	47–63
11:11–12	80	3:8–15	148
11:11, 22	62 n. 122	3:8–9	22 n. 91, 196
<i>1 Corinthians</i>		3:12	48–53, 61
4:14, 21	137	3:13	53–55
10:1–10	56	3:13–14	61
10:7–10	56 n. 105	3:16–19	55–61
10:8, 12	62 n. 122	4:1	56, 109
<i>2 Corinthians</i>		4:2	58, 60–61
1:12	203	4:6	58, 60
<i>Ephesians</i>		4:7	148
4:22–25	183–84	4:11–13	61–63
6:4	137–38	4:11	61 n. 122, 109
6:9	137–38	4:14–5:10	63–68
<i>Philippians</i>		4:14–16	63–64, 108
1:11	207	4:15	13, 196
<i>Colossians</i>		4:16	46, 111
3:22	138	5:2–3	84
<i>2 Thessalonians</i>		5:7–10	64–68
2:3	51 n. 90	5:7	65–66, 236
<i>1 Timothy</i>		5:8–9	141
6:9–10	54 n. 100	5:8	13, 66 n. 132, 195
		5:9	67
		5:11–6:20	71–82
		5:11–14	20
		5:11	71, 77
		5:12	71–72
		5:13–6:1	109
		5:13–14	209
		5:13	72–75

5:14	10 n. 32, 11, 74	10:32–34	76–77 n. 169, 195
6:1–2	75–77	10:32	15
6:1	72, 93, 109	10:35	47 n. 79
6:2	226 n. 189	10:36	89
6:4–6	9	10:37–39	97–98
6:4	49	10:37–38	36–37
6:6	62 n. 122, 78–81, 187–88	10:38	202
6:7–8	51 n. 89, 51 n. 90, 54, 76–77 n. 169	11	36–37, 97–100
6:9–10	76, 81	11:1	47 n. 78, 98–99
6:10	150	11:3	98–99
6:11–12	72, 77	11:4	37, 90 n. 218, 99
6:13–20	76–77 n. 169, 77	11:5–6	90, 102
6:17–18	150	11:5	99
6:18–20	46	11:6	95 n. 236, 150
6:18	47 n. 78, 185 n. 21	11:7	37, 66 n. 132, 99
6:19	44	11:8	70, 99
7:1–10:18	82–86	11:10	99
7:1–3	82–83	11:13	99
7:4	83–84	11:16	99, 102
7:19	46	11:25–26	54, 93, 100
7:26	84	11:25	54–55 n. 100
8:5	112 n. 296	11:31	68–69, 87–88
8:10	86–87 n. 205, 148	11:32–38	100
8:12	86–87 n. 205	11:33–34	37–38
9:9–10	113	11:33	15
9:10	111, 226 n. 189	11:35–37	100, 188
9:13–14	225, 228	11:36	194 n. 62
9:14	75, 77	11:38–39	107
10:3–4	227	11:39–40	181
10:7	89	11:39	99
10:8–10	65–66	12:1–17	1–3, 8–9, 26–27, 28–30
10:10, 14	228	12:1–13	14, 18
10:11–18	92	12:1–4	13
10:16–17	85	12:1–3	14, 65–66
10:16	148	12:1–2	109, 180–85
10:18	86, 93	12:1	9, 14, 19, 23
10:19–31	90–97	12:2	96–97 n. 242, 234
10:19–24	108–9	12:3–4	9, 185–93
10:19–22	86	12:4	14, 19, 84
10:19	46	12:4–13	12
10:22	49, 226 n. 189	12:4–11	9
10:23–25	91–92	12:5–14	179
10:23	47 n. 78	12:5–11	21
10:24–26	31	12:5–6	13, 154 n. 47, 193– 95
10:26	9–10, 86, 90–94	12:5	147–48
10:29	94 n. 230	12:7–10	195–205
10:32–36	94–97, 119	12:7	195–99

12:8	199–200	13:13–14	107, 113–14
12:9–10	200–5	13:13	69 n. 140, 96, 96– 97 n. 242
12:9	21, 148	13:15–16	42 n. 56, 70–71, 77
12:11–13	13	13:16–18	89–90
12:11	15, 90, 149, 152, 162, 195, 205–12	13:16	104, 113
12:12–13	213–21	13:17–21	114–15
12:13	20, 150, 151, 161– 62	13:17–18	114–15 n. 302
12:14–17	19	13:17	70–71, 113
12:14	88, 90, 162, 221–24	13:18	92 n. 224
12:15–17	229–36	13:20–21	88–90
12:15	84, 223	13:21	104
12:16	112	13:22–25	103 n. 262
12:17	9–10	13:22	110
12:18–29	100–2		
12:23	39–40	<i>James</i>	
12:25	101	1:3–4	196
12:28	66 n. 132, 102	1:22	42 n. 58
12:28–29	104	2:25	68
13	103–116	3:18	207
13:1–7	70–71, 103–7	5:12	62 n. 122
13:2	88		
13:4	32, 84, 89 n. 216, 93, 232	<i>1 Peter</i>	
13:5	107	1:16	204
13:7	106–7, 190		
13:8–16	107–14	<i>2 Peter</i>	
13:8–9	107–12	1:19	42 n. 56
13:9	41		
13:13–18	108	<i>Revelation</i>	
		2:5	62 n. 122
		3:19	175–76

## Apostolic Fathers

<i>Barnabas</i>		<i>Polycarp, To the Philippians</i>	
19.5	134 n. 71	9	67 n. 134
<i>1 Clement</i>		<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	
33	38–39 n. 38	6	38–39 n. 38
12.1	68, 87 n. 209	15.2	51
56.4	176–77	15.3	203
		29.9	231
<i>2 Clement</i>		62.1–2	54–55 n. 100
10.3–4	54 n. 100	96.2	207
<i>Didache</i>			
4.9	134 n. 71, 138		

## Ancient Authors

Aeschylus		Dionysius of Halicarnassus	
<i>Pers.</i>		<i>Ant. rom.</i>	
809–15	17	2.26	131
		20.13	132 n. 59
Aphthonius		Epictetus	
<i>Progym.</i>		<i>Diatr.</i>	
3.24	135	1.24.1	15
Augustine		2.2.13	189–90
<i>Civ.</i>		Eumenius	
19.16	134	<i>Inst. sch.</i>	
<i>Conf.</i>		8.1–2	127
1.9.14	122–23	Euripides	
1.9.15	123	<i>Fr.</i>	
<i>Solil.</i>		952	134 n. 70
2.11.20	123	Herodas	
Ausonius		<i>Mime</i>	
<i>Ep.</i>		3.58–93	123–24 n. 17
22.26–32	133	Horace	
22.33–37	133	<i>Ars</i>	
22.66–79	132	139	2
Cicero		<i>Ep.</i>	
<i>Fam.</i>		2.1.70–71	122
7.25.1	123	Josephus	
<i>Tusc.</i>		<i>Ant.</i>	
3.27.64	134	4.42	54 n. 100
Dio Chrysostom		5.8	68–69 n. 137
<i>Virt. (Or. 8)</i>		6.235	229 n. 203
15, 16	15	Ag. <i>Ap.</i>	
Diogenes Laertius		2.123	52
<i>Lives</i>			
5.18.1–2	126 n. 26		

Justinian		179	137 n. 83, 170
<i>Dig.</i>		212	170
9.2.5.3–6.1	124–25	<i>Fug.</i>	
Juvenal		150	131 n. 55
<i>Sat.</i>		<i>Gig.</i>	
1.15	123	13–14	43 n. 65
Libanius		<i>Ios.</i>	
<i>Progym.</i>		74	137
Chreia 3.8–9	135–36	<i>Leg.</i>	
Lucian		3.48	15
<i>Anach.</i>		<i>Mos.</i>	
20–21	127	1.196–205	169 n. 95
<i>Somn.</i>		<i>Mut.</i>	
10	126	135	131 n. 55
Menander		206	136 n. 82
<i>Mon.</i>		<i>Post.</i>	
573	126	97	131
Ovid		<i>Praem.</i>	
<i>Am.</i>		4–5	15
1.13.17–18	122	70, 72	17
1.13.18	123	<i>QE</i>	
Philo		2.13	43 n. 65
<i>Abr.</i>		<i>QG</i>	
27	211	4.231–33	234
<i>Cher.</i>		<i>Sacr.</i>	
78–82	17	21–24	54 n. 100
<i>Congr.</i>		<i>Spec.</i>	
11–19	168	2.229–30	127–28
151	168	2.232	136
157	170	<i>Virt.</i>	
158–67	168–69	182	52
164	54 n. 100	Plato	
173	169	<i>Ax.</i>	
176	169	366E–367A	122
177	12, 24, 154 n. 47, 168–71, 211		

<i>Leg.</i>		78.16	15
808D–E	130	94.9	128
811D	201	114	127
<i>Resp.</i>		<i>Ira.</i>	
379C, 380A–B	17	2.21	131 n. 54
492D	201		
Plutarch		<i>Prov.</i>	
<i>Caes.</i>		1.1–6	18
61.3	123 n. 15	1.6	22
<i>Mor.</i>		2.2	198
2F	130–31	2.4	198
4B–5C	128	2.5	128
4C	129	2.6	13
8F–9A	133	2.7	128
12B	132 n. 59	4.7–12	18
14A	129	4.7	10
78C	54–54 n. 100	4.11–12	128
Quintilian		Seneca the Elder	
<i>Inst.</i>		<i>Contr.</i>	
1.2.4–8	129 n. 47	9.5.7	134
1.2.6–8	132 n. 59	Sophocles	
1.3.14–17	133	<i>Oed. col.</i>	
1.3.17	134	7	13
2.2.3–8	135	Tacitus	
Seneca (the Younger)		<i>Dial.</i>	
<i>Ben.</i>		29	132 n. 59
3.38.2	138	Xenophon	
<i>Clem.</i>		<i>Cyr.</i>	
1.16.1–5	128 n. 43	1.6.30–32	72
1.16.5–17.1	131	<i>Lac.</i>	
<i>Constant.</i>		2.8	125
12.3	131	6.1–2	135
<i>Ep.</i>		<i>Mem.</i>	
13.2–3	189	4.1.3–4	130



## Index of Modern Authors

- Allen, David M. 24–25, 71 n. 142, 105  
n. 270, 106 n. 271, 145, 146, 165–  
66, 196, 230
- Asting, Ragnar 228 n. 198
- Atherton, Catherine 126, 133 n. 66
- Attridge, Harold W. 36 n. 26, 43 n. 65,  
53, 55 n. 101, 58 n. 111, 65 n. 129,  
85 n. 204, 98 n. 246, 109 n. 285
- Aune, David E. 175–76 n. 122
- Backhaus, Knut 2, 7, 20, 31–32, 104,  
108 n. 281, 220 n. 165
- Barnett, Paul W. 52–53 n. 97
- Bateman, Herbert W. IV 34 n. 20, 34  
n. 22, 35 n. 23
- Benetreu, Samuel 60
- Blackstone, Thomas Ladd 145, 146
- Bolkestein, H. 149 n. 23
- Bornkamm, Günther 194, 198 n. 77,  
199 n. 82
- Bousset, Wilhelm 175–76 n. 122
- Braun, Herbert 43 n. 65, 74–75 n. 159
- Bruce, F.F. 54
- Carcopino, Jérôme 121 n. 5
- Cockerill, Gareth L. 21–22, 44–45  
n. 68, 45 n. 71, 56 n. 107, 57, 60, 85,  
97, 112 n. 295, 114 n. 301, 199  
n. 80, 199 n. 84, 208 n. 125, 234  
n. 233, 236 n. 240
- Croy, N. Clayton 8–9, 13, 14–20, 26–  
27, 29 n. 4, 30, 140, 146, 158 n. 62,  
165, 170, 187–88, 190 n. 44, 192,  
201
- Delitzsch, Franz 48–49 n. 80, 196  
n. 71, 218–19 n. 155
- deSilva, David A. 18 n. 68, 20–22, 45  
n. 70, 65 n. 129, 138 n. 90, 140, 188  
n. 35, 223 n. 177, 223 n. 179
- Dick, Michael B. 149–50
- Dobschütz, Ernst von 76 n. 168
- Docherty, Susan 59 n. 115, 145, 158  
n. 60
- Dodd, C.H. 144
- Dörrie, Heinrich 66 n. 132
- Dunning, Benjamin 7
- Dyer, Bryan R. 33 n. 18, 100 n. 252
- Eisenbaum, Pamela 97–98, 100
- Ellingworth, Paul 29 n. 4, 32 n. 16, 48  
n. 80, 56, 78 n. 173, 82, 85 n. 204,  
98 n. 246, 178 n. 128, 187 n. 31, 193  
n. 57, 221, 223 n. 179
- Filson, Floyd V. 103 n. 263, 106 n. 272
- Fitzgerald, John T. 23
- Foerster, Werner 83, 86, 88, 221, 223  
n. 179
- Foucault, Michel 139
- Fox, Michael V. 147, 150 n. 32, 153  
n. 43, 156–57
- Gäbel, Georg 84 n. 198, 85 n. 204,  
226–27 n. 189
- Gambiza, Farai K. 10–11
- Geertz, Clifford 1–2, 6–8, 212
- Gheorghita, Radu 145
- Giese, Ronald L. 152
- Gräßer, Erich 36 n. 27, 42 n. 57, 45  
n. 71, 65 n. 129, 74–75 n. 159, 90  
n. 218, 98 n. 246, 102, 114 n. 301,  
152, 209 n. 130, 221, 235 n. 235
- Gray, Patrick 64 n. 126, 65 n. 128, 67

- Guthrie, George H. 30 n. 6, 34–35  
n. 22, 63 n. 123, 145, 146 n. 8, 158  
n. 60
- Hagner, Donald 176 n. 126
- Hauck, Friedrich 96 n. 242
- Hays, Richard B. 144–45
- Hofius, Otfried 57, 58 n. 112, 59, 60  
n. 117
- Instone Brewer, David 145 n. 5
- Jacoby, Hermann 32 n. 16
- Jentsch, Werner 9–10, 196 n. 70
- Johnson, Luke Timothy 20–21, 46  
n. 74, 54 n. 100, 67 n. 136, 76–77  
n. 169, 140, 197 n. 75, 204 n. 107
- Käsemann, Ernst 57, 183, 220, 221,  
228
- Keck, Leander E. 7 n. 21
- Klauck, Hans-Joseph 181
- Klawans, Jonathan 224–27, 232 n. 223
- Koch, Dietrich-Alex 143 n. 3
- Koch, Klaus 156
- Koester, Craig R. 20, 21 n. 83, 22, 44,  
85, 94 n. 230, 104, 111, 140
- Kuss, Otto 193 n. 54
- Lane, William L. 29 n. 4, 82 n. 187,  
185 n. 21, 192 n. 51, 197 n. 73, 199  
n. 80, 200, 221
- Lindars, Barnabas 72 n. 146
- Lindström, Fredrik 158 n. 62
- Löhr, Hermut 5 n. 13, 8 n. 22, 25  
n. 102, 47 n. 78, 58 n. 111, 64  
n. 126, 81 n. 183, 91–92 n. 221, 93  
n. 227, 182 n. 7, 183, 235 n. 235
- Logan, Stephen P. 11–12, 146
- Luther, Susanne 5 n. 15
- Malherbe, Abraham 218
- Mantey, J.R. 197 n. 73
- Marrou, H.I. 121
- McCown, Wayne G. 201
- McCullough, J.C. 216 n. 146, 218  
n. 152
- McKane, William 153 n. 43
- Meeks, Wayne A. 3
- Michaelis, Wilhelm 78 n. 175, 79  
n. 176, 81 n. 183
- Michel, Otto 77 n. 170, 92 n. 222, 196  
n. 71, 204 n. 109, 209 n. 130
- Milgrom, Jacob 225 n. 182
- Moffitt, David M. 226 n. 189
- Montefiore, Hugh W. 183 n. 9
- Mosser, Carl 69 n. 138, 69–70 n. 140
- Moyise, Steve 144 n. 4
- Murphy, Roland E. 156–57
- Nauck, Wolfgang 109 n. 284
- O'Brien, Peter T. 21–22, 140 n. 96
- Oropeza, B.J. 52–53 n. 97
- Parker, Robert 225 n. 185
- Peeler, Amy 148 n. 13, 194 n. 60
- Petrovic, Andrej and Ivana 49 n. 81,  
217 n. 151, 225–26 n. 185
- Pfitzner, Victor C. 178
- Pilch, John J. 129 n. 48
- Procksch, Otto 204
- Riggenbach, Eduard 58 n. 111, 187–88,  
229 n. 203
- Rissi, Matthias 66 n. 132
- Rose, Christian 87–88 n. 209
- Saller, Richard P. 132, 134
- Sanders, J.A. 164 n. 83
- Schenk, Wolfgang 105 n. 269
- Schierse, Franz Joseph 210 n. 133, 210  
n. 135
- Schmidt, Thomas E. 18 n. 68, 32–33,  
117
- Schnackenburg, Rudolf 116 n. 308
- Schröger, Friedrich 146 n. 8
- Schulz, Siegfried 32 n. 16
- Small, Brian C. 66
- Spellman, Ched E. 23, 25 n. 103
- Spicq, Ceslas 29 n. 4, 169 n. 96, 204  
n. 108
- Steyn, Gert 103 n. 262, 146 n. 8, 199  
n. 83, 200 n. 86
- Svendsen, Stefan Noordgaard 184 n. 17
- Talbert, Charles H. 12–14
- Thiessen, Matthew 24–25, 196

- Thompson, James W. 7, 31–32, 111,  
112, 192 n. 52
- Toy, Crawford H. 153 n. 45
- Unnik, W.C. van 47 n. 79
- Van der Watt, Jan G. 5 n. 14, 8 n. 22
- Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. 156–57
- Vanhoye, Albert 29 n. 5, 57, 200
- Wallace, Daniel 181 n. 1
- Walser, Georg 24 n. 101
- Waltke, Bruce K. 160
- Wedderburn, A.J.M. 103 n. 263
- Weiß, Hans-Friedrich 35, 95, 193 n. 55,  
229 n. 203
- Westcott, B.F. 54, 56 n. 105, 74 n. 156,  
93 n. 225
- Westfall, Cynthia Long 23, 28 n. 2
- Wette, W.M.L. de 139 n. 92, 196
- Whitlark, Jason 145
- Whybray, R.N. 158–61
- Widdess, A.G. 99 n. 247
- Williamson, Ronald 169 n. 96
- Windisch, Hans 91–92 n. 221, 183 n. 9,  
192 n. 48, 210 n. 135
- Wolter, Michael 6–7
- Young, Norman H. 108 n. 281
- Zimmermann, Ruben 4
- Zuntz, Günther 58 n. 111, 68–67 n. 137

## Subject Index

- Abel 37, 40, 90 n. 210  
Abraham 70–71, 77, 83, 87 n. 209, 99, 168, 196  
Apostasy 2, 32–34, 41–42, 42 n. 56, 50–53, 63, 71 n. 143, 78–82, 86, 91–94, 101, 119, 183, 184 n. 17, 223, 230–32, 236 n. 240, 239  
Athletic imagery 9, 13, 14–16, 21, 29 n. 4, 39 n. 41, 95, 128 n. 40, 181, 185 n. 21, 190, 209 n. 132, 220 n. 165  
Authenticity of Hebrews' 13<sup>th</sup> chapter 88 n. 210, 103–7  
Conscience 30 n. 7, 42 n. 56, 45, 46, 49, 64 n. 126, 70, 75 and n. 160, 77, 89 n. 215, 91–92, 102, 104 n. 266, 111, 113, 115, 148, 203, 225–29, 237  
Corporal punishment  
– conception of children 129–32  
– educational function 124–25  
– opposition to 133–34  
– role of parents 134–39, 153–54, 198 n. 78  
– severity 120–25, 131–33, 135–36  
Correction, *see* Punitivity  
Dead works 75–76  
Defilement, *see* Holiness  
Devotion, *see* Diligence  
Diligence 38–39 n. 38, 41–43, 61–63, 77, 91, 95  
Discipline, *see* Corporal Punishment and Punitivity  
Education, *see also* Corporal punishment  
– moral aspects 72–74, 125–29, 205  
Endurance 15–16, 17, 29 n. 5, 46, 51–52, 89, 94–97, 106–7, 113, 128, 169, 180–85, 195–98  
Enemies 35–36, 91, 94 n. 230, 186  
Esau 19, 30, 112, 169–70, 177, 185, 211, 220, 224, 233–37  
Ethics 1–8, 31–34  
Ethos 3, 6–8, 32  
Exemplars  
– in Hebrews 19, 30, 35, 37, 46, 54–55, 63, 66–68 and n. 132, 70–71, 97–100, 106, 117, 185–86, 234–35  
– parents and paedagogues 128–29, 137, 198 n. 78  
Exposition vs. exhortation 4, 63, 97–98, 108–10, 116, 193–95, 237  
Faithfulness 3, 35, 36–40, 44, 45–46, 48–49, 51–52, 56–61, 65, 68–71, 76–77, 78–81, 98–100, 106–7, 150  
Good works 38–39, 76–77, 89, 91–92, 105, 149–50, 175 n. 122  
Healing 142, 151–55, 161–62, 167, 178, 214 n. 143, 216–21, 237  
Heart 30 n. 7, 33, 42, 44, 47, 48–49, 51, 53, 62–63, 79, 85–86, 91–92, 111, 147–48, 192, 226–27 n. 189, 230, 235  
Holiness 9–10, 19, 29–30, 45–47, 82–85, 92–94, 100, 102, 112, 186, 203–5, 216–17, 221–36  
Hospitality 32, 69, 87–88 and n. 209, 89, 90, 105  
Household codes 137–38  
Imitation, *see* Exemplars

- Job 166–68, 215
- Judgment 36, 39–40, 49, 62–63 and  
n. 122, 71, 76–77 n. 169, 78, 91, 93,  
95, 102, 105, 115, 116, 156, 183,  
186, 188, 202, 210, 236
- Law (Torah) 184 n. 17, 13 n. 48, 34  
n. 22, 35, 40–41, 44, 49, 51–52, 75,  
78, 80, 81, 83, 85–86, 92, 94, 101–2,  
117, 148, 160, 165, 189, 204 n. 109
- Life  
– result of discipline 43, 142, 148–49,  
152, 155, 159, 162, 167, 174, 178,  
200–5
- Martyrdom 11–15, 67 n. 134, 74  
n. 157, 106–7, 188 n. 36, 189–90
- Medical imagery 218–20
- Military imagery 181–82 n. 4, 189–90
- Military training 121–23, 127, 140, 179
- Money, *see* Wealth
- Moral language 4, 6, 9, 19–20, 26–27,  
32–34, 109, 116–17, 178, 180
- Moral lethargy 32–34, 44 n. 68, 117–18
- Moral thought 2–3, 5–8, 27
- Morality 3–8
- Moses 15, 20, 46, 54–55, 56, 58 n. 111,  
93, 100, 105 n. 270, 107, 110 n. 286,  
200, 235
- Nautical imagery 43–44
- Noah 37, 40, 66 n. 132, 99, 102, 211
- Obedience/disobedience 11, 13, 20, 22,  
35, 40–44, 48, 55–61, 61–63, 64–67,  
68–71, 95–96, 114–15, 121, 122,  
135, 136, 138–39, 146, 164–65,  
212–13, 215
- Old Testament, use of  
– function of quoted text 49 n. 82, 85–  
86 n. 205  
– role of original context 142–46,  
177–79  
– role in Hebrews' moral lan-  
guage 34–35, 36, 45, 47–48, 85–86,  
193–94, 200 n. 86, 213–17, 221,  
230, 237–38  
– terminology 143–44 n. 3
- Paedagogues 121, 128–29, 134, 135–  
36, 201
- Paths 29, 43, 148–49, 150–51, 155,  
159, 161–62, 213–21, 234
- Peace 1–2, 15, 19, 26, 29–30, 82–83,  
86–90, 142, 148–49, 161–62, 167,  
169, 178, 205–12, 216–19, 221–24
- Piety, *see* Reverence
- Possessions, *see* Wealth
- Punitivity 2, 14–27, 119–20, 139–41,  
157–61, 163–79, 201–2, 213
- Rahab 68–69, 87–88, 222
- Reproach 54–55, 67, 96, 100, 106–7,  
113–14, 194–95
- Reverence 35, 65 n. 129, 66 and n. 32,  
102, 236
- Righteousness 1–3, 26, 35–36, 36–40,  
67 n. 134, 72–75, 79, 82–83, 87  
n. 209, 151–52, 156, 161–62, 171–  
74, 205–12, 222
- Sexual immorality 6, 89 n. 216, 183,  
227 n. 194, 228 n. 199, 229, 231–35
- Sin, *see also* Apostasy  
– intentional vs. unintentional 91–92  
n. 221, 157–58, 172  
– removal of 34–35, 45–47, 64 n. 126,  
82–86, 90–93, 172–73, 226–29  
– terms for 31
- Sinners 2, 36, 84–85, 172, 174, 184,  
185–88, 191–92
- Social situation of Hebrews 31–34, 44  
n. 68, 52–53 n. 97, 71–72, 95–97  
117–18, 142, 182, 191–93, 194–95,  
237
- Solidarity 31–32, 89 and n. 216, 91, 93,  
105, 117, 223
- Sonship 3, 136, 154, 168–71, 174–75,  
185, 194, 198–200, 234
- Submission to parents 138–39, 194–95,  
200–1
- Suffering, *see* Punitivity and Reproach
- Testing 15, 22, 45, 47–48, 51, 57, 64,  
66, 109–10, 160 n. 71, 164, 169,  
196, 238

Theodicy 199

*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang* 156–57

Wealth 54–55, 95, 106–7, 147, 151–52,  
156, 175–76, 200

Wilderness generation 22 n. 91, 24–25,  
47–48, 55–63, 69, 109, 157, 164,  
165, 168–69, 196

Worship 34–35, 38–39, 42 n. 56, 52, 66  
n. 132, 77, 102, 104, 107–14