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On the Conceptual Motivation Behind Animal Imagery in the biblical Book of Proverbs

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the conceptual motivation underlying selected proverbs from the biblical *Book of Proverbs* that contain animal names. The analysis examines references to a range of animals, including birds, reptiles, and both wild and domesticated mammals, and highlights their culture-specific symbolic significance for the interpretation of the proverbs. Employing methodological tools from Cognitive Linguistics – specifically conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and metaphonymy (Goossens, 1990; Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011) – the study demonstrates that animal imagery in Proverbs functions as a vehicle for moral and practical instruction. The corpus for this analysis is the English Standard Version of the Bible, available at <https://biblehub.com/>.

KEYWORDS

conceptual metaphor; conceptual metonymy; metaphonymy; proverbs; symbolism

1. Introduction

A close reading of the Bible, particularly the *Book of Proverbs*, reveals that animal references are deliberate and play a significant role in conveying moral, social, and theological concepts. Both domesticated and wild animals frequently carry symbolic meanings shaped by their cultural context. This study investigates the reasons for the presence of animal terms in *Proverbs* and their contribution to the construction of moral and instructional messages. The primary objective is to demonstrate that these figurative uses can be systematically explained through concepts from Cognitive Linguistics, including conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and metaphonymy. This approach provides a novel perspective on the interplay between culture, cognition, and figurative language in ancient texts.

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 introduces the corpus from which the data are drawn; Section 3 outlines the adopted theoretical framework; Section 4 reviews previous scholarship on animal metaphor in the Bible; Section 5 presents a detailed cognitive-linguistic analysis of selected examples of animal

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imagery from Proverbs, followed by conclusions that highlight the explanatory potential of this approach.

2. The corpus

The animal terms analysed in this study are listed by Forti (2008, p. 11) and all appear in the *Book of Proverbs*. These terms refer to representatives of various species, including birds (*sparrow, eagle, vulture, raven, crow*), insects (*ant, locust*), reptiles (*serpent, viper, gecko*), wild mammals (*bear, lion, pig, dog, deer, rock-cony, hyrax*), domesticated animals (*ox, goat, donkey, horse*), and, as noted by Forti (2008, p. 11), “animals whose identification is problematic.” Indeed, the difficulty of identifying certain animals is evident in various translations of the Bible, where different terms are used for the same referent – for example, *bird* instead of *sparrow* or *swallow*, or *vulture* instead of *eagle*. This issue highlights the interpretative challenges inherent in translating ancient zoological terminology.

In the present paper, 12 animal terms from among more than 30 listed by Forti (2008) and found in the *Book of Proverbs* appear in the proverbs selected for analysis. These are: *lion, ox, bear, swallow, sparrow, eagle, raven, pig, serpent, viper, horse, and donkey*. Together, these animals represent a wide spectrum of predators, prey, domestic and wild species, enriching the metaphorical and moral imagery of *Proverbs* and reflecting the diverse natural environment known to the biblical authors. All these animal names were sought in the English Standard Version of the Bible available at <https://biblehub.com/>. This online version of the Scriptures serves as a valuable resource for obtaining data on the frequency of occurrence of each term.

The *Book of Proverbs* is an ideal source for studying animal imagery in the Bible because it reflects the everyday life and beliefs of ancient Israel¹. As a wisdom text, *Proverbs* connects human behaviour to the natural world, often using animals as symbols to show virtues, faults, and moral lessons. Its teaching style relies on clear and memorable figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, where animals represent qualities like hard work (the ant), uncleanness (the dog), danger, or authority (the lion). This use of animal imagery not only shows how people viewed the natural world but also makes *Proverbs* a strong example for cognitive linguistic analysis. It allows us to see how animal symbolism shapes moral teaching and how people understood the link between humans and nature.

¹ Eilberg-Schwartz (1990, p. 117) argues that “fauna supplied the Israelites with images for thinking about human experience and social life and these metaphors shaped the practices and narratives of Israelite religion”.

3. Theoretical framework

This paper employs the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor, originally proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and further explored by various linguists, including Kövecses (2002, 2015, 2020). Additionally, conceptual metonymy (e.g., Radden & Kövecses, 1999) and metaphonymy, as analysed by scholars such as Goossens (1990), Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez (2002), and Barcelona (2000), are key theoretical constructs on which my analysis is based. As articulated by Kövecses (2015, p. ix), conceptual metaphors are mental mechanisms that involve systematic correspondences or mappings between two domains of experience. The meaning of a specific metaphorical expression, representing an underlying conceptual metaphor, relies on such correspondences. In contrast, metonymy, according to Kövecses (2006, p. 99), is a cognitive process wherein one conceptual element or entity (thing, event, property) – the vehicle – provides mental access to another conceptual entity (thing, event, property) – the target – within the same frame, domain, or idealized cognitive model (ICM).

In my analysis, a crucial aspect is the recognition that in the process of conceptualization, whether expressed through metaphor or metonymy and regardless of the mode of expression, these two phenomena can co-occur. This interaction between metaphor and metonymy is termed metaphonymy (Barcelona, 2000, pp. 9–12; Goossens, 1990, pp. 366–369). Regarding the phenomenon of metaphonymy (Goossens, 1990), Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez (2002, p. 522) observe that due to its internal structure within a domain, metonymy always plays a subsidiary role in conceptual interaction compared to metaphor. In other words, metonymy consistently occurs within the source or the target domain of the metaphor. Consequently, the authors propose the use of such concepts as source-in-target and target-in-source metonymies to elucidate the dynamics of the interplay between metaphor and metonymy (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2000, p. 124). My aim is to demonstrate that the use of animal imagery in the Bible can be considered a manifestation of the interaction between metaphor and metonymy.

4. Literature review

There is a notable scarcity of publications devoted to the analysis of the figurative use of animal terms in the Bible from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective. Only a few relevant studies have been identified, some of which are briefly referenced in this section. For example, in his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Seufert (2019) applied conceptual blending theory to analyse selected animal metaphors in the Old Testament, focusing on the lion, donkey, snake, deer, and wolf. Conceptual blending theory, proposed by Fauconnier (1994), posits that metaphors emerge through the interaction of multiple mental spaces, enabling the conveyance of creative and abstract concepts. Seufert's analysis demonstrated that animal metaphors are not merely symbolic representations but arise from embodied

understanding of the targeted animals and their associated attributes². For instance, the lion metaphor is grounded in the perception of lions as powerful and majestic creatures, conveying notions of strength, authority, and courage.

In turn, Basson (2008) developed a cognitive account of conceptual metaphor, focusing specifically on the lion metaphor. He argued that the lion metaphor is grounded in our understanding of lions as social creatures with a hierarchical structure, conveying notions of leadership, authority and power.

On the other hand, Foreman's (2011) monograph provided a comprehensive discussion of animal metaphors in the Book of Jeremiah. The scholar examined how animal imagery is used to convey various themes, including divine judgement, human sinfulness, and the hope for restoration. Foreman's analysis demonstrated the multifaceted nature of animal metaphors, highlighting their ability to convey both negative and positive connotations.

Finally, Kuczok (2020) delved into the interplay of metaphor and metonymy in Christian symbolism, specifically examining the lamb as a metaphorical representation of Jesus Christ. The author highlighted how the lamb metaphor draws upon both the literal qualities of a lamb (gentleness, vulnerability) and its symbolic associations (sacrifice, redemption) to create a rich meaning. This analysis underscores the dynamic interplay of metaphor and metonymy in shaping religious symbolism.

This paper focuses on how metaphor and metonymy work together in animal imagery, showing that not only the lamb but many other animals in *Proverbs* are used in this way. These examples highlight how different animals are used figuratively, offering many cases where metaphor and metonymy interact in biblical texts.

5. The analysis

A general issue relevant to the analysis of religious symbolism is highlighted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 40), who claim that "cultural and religious symbolism are a special case of metonymy". Following this line of reasoning, it is possible to formulate several biblical animal metonymies of the type ANIMAL FOR THE SYMBOLISM ASSOCIATED WITH IT, such as SERPENT FOR SATAN'S DECEPTION, SERPENT FOR EVIL, LOCUSTS FOR GOD'S JUDGEMENT, LION FOR COURAGE, DOG FOR UNCLEANLINESS, and PIG FOR FILTH.

² "It is only the essential, culturally and psychological salient properties, such as behaviour, internal states, desires, emotions, limited cognitive abilities of animals that are mapped onto humans, and consequently, it is these properties that are lexicalized in the form of various linguistic constructions" (Martsa, 2003, p. 136). In turn, Kimmel (2004, p. 281) emphasises the fact that "a potent source for metaphor is animals. The profound significance of animals derives from their double role as part of our enduring biological heritage as humans and as being outside society, so that metaphor allows men to be animals, while also remaining distinct".

Animal symbolism and imagery in the Bible can be examined from two overlapping perspectives that involve both metaphor and metonymy. The metaphorical perspective addresses the creation of particular religious symbols and the motivations underlying them. For instance, the biblical metaphor UNCLEAN PEOPLE ARE DOGS is rooted in the cultural and religious context of the time, when dogs were often regarded as unclean or impure animals. In the Bible, dogs are occasionally mentioned in a negative or derogatory manner, associated with scavenging, impurity, and wild behaviour. For example, in Philippians (3: 2), the term *dogs* is used metaphorically to refer to those who engage in evil deeds or false teachings. Similarly, in Revelation (22: 15), dogs are listed among the morally impure and excluded from the heavenly city. The metaphor UNCLEAN PEOPLE ARE DOGS reflects a cultural understanding of purity and cleanliness prevalent in biblical times. One may, therefore, point to a number of mappings between the source domain *dogs* and the target domain *people* in the conceptual metaphor PEOPLE ARE DOGS. For example, dogs are often seen as unclean and impure animals, and people who are considered sinful or corrupt may be associated with these same characteristics. Dogs may also be seen as barking and noisy, and people who are considered loud or disruptive may be associated with these same qualities.

Conversely, the metonymic perspective on the figurative use of animal terms in the Bible concerns how specific elements within the domain of ancient Israelite religion are activated or evoked by those familiar with this domain. Conventional symbols such as serpent, locusts, pig, dog, and donkey can serve as metonymic shortcuts, providing mental access to other aspects of ancient Israelite culture and religion without requiring the original metaphorical motivation to be recalled. For example, SERPENT FOR TEMPTATION, LOCUSTS FOR PLAGUE OR GOD'S PUNISHMENT, PIG FOR UNCLEANLINESS, DOG FOR IMPURITY, and DONKEY FOR HARD WORK. However, the level of animal imagery in biblical texts can be even more conceptually complex, as discussed in the following sections.

5.1 Sparrow and swallow in the proverb "Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, so a curse without cause does not alight" (Proverbs 26: 2)

This proverb draws upon the perceptually salient behaviour of small birds, specifically sparrows and swallows, to conceptualise the behaviour of a *curse without cause*. The crucial image-schematic feature of these birds is their erratic, restless flight, characterised by darting, circling, and never coming to rest. This salient behavioural property licenses a WHOLE FOR ATTRIBUTE metonymy (or more specifically, an ANIMAL FOR ITS CHARACTERISTIC TRAIT metonymy), in which the terms *sparrow* and *swallow* stand for the attribute of constant motion or non-alighting movement³.

³ See Ryken et al. (1998, p. 356) according to whom, "the ceaseless unresting flight of the swallow is likened to a curse that cannot alight on its undeserving target (Proverbs 26: 2)".

Through this metonymic operation, the salient properties of the birds are conceptually foregrounded and made available as a source for metaphorical projection. This gives rise to the following conceptual metaphors:

- A CURSE IS A BIRD (with the potential to fly and to alight).
- TO TAKE EFFECT / TO HAVE CONSEQUENCES IS TO ALIGHT.

These metaphorical mappings imply that an ineffective curse – one lacking just cause – behaves like a bird that never lands, hence producing no tangible effect. This metaphorical projection is grounded in embodied experience: the visual perception of small birds flitting about without ever settling evokes a mental image of transience and harmlessness.

Consequently, the proverb constitutes a clear case of metaphonymy (Goossens, 1990; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011; Ruiz de Mendoza & Díez, 2002), since the metaphorical mapping (CURSE IS A BIRD) is activated by a metonymically selected feature of the birds' behaviour – their non-alighting flight. In other words, the metonymy SPARROW/SWALLOW FOR FLIGHTINESS / NON-ALIGHTING MOVEMENT functions as the conceptual trigger for the metaphor CURSE WITHOUT CAUSE IS A NON-ALIGHTING BIRD, which in turn entails the inference NO EFFECT / NO RESULT.

From a pragmatic perspective, the proverb serves a didactic function: it reassures the addressee that a causeless curse cannot “settle” or harm its target but remains in flight, ineffective. By invoking a vivid and culturally salient image, the proverb allows the listener to grasp the moral and psychological insight that groundless curses hold no genuine power.

This interpretation is consistent with the broader tradition of biblical animal symbolism, where specific animals are selected as vehicles for conveying moral, spiritual, and behavioural lessons (see Foreman, 2011; Forstner, 2001; Forti, 2008; Keel, 1997; Ryken et al., 1998). In this case, the sparrow and swallow embody restlessness and impermanence, which are projected metaphorically onto the abstract domain of verbal maledictions. The result is an interesting case of metaphor-metonymy interaction, where metonymy serves as a conceptual and experiential bridge to metaphor.

5.2 Horse and donkey in the proverb “A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools” (Proverbs 26: 3)

This proverb begins with concrete, physical instruments used to control animals, namely the whip for horses and the bridle for donkeys. In both cases, we observe a WHOLE FOR FUNCTION metonymy (cf. Radden & Kövecses 1999), where the physical instrument stands for its function – control, discipline, or guidance. These instruments are not merely literal objects but represent the corrective actions that force the animals to follow the handler's will.

The third line extends this metonymic pattern to the human domain by invoking the rod, a common biblical symbol of punishment and correction.⁴ In this case, the ROD FOR PUNISHMENT/DISCIPLINE metonymy draws on the frequent scriptural use of the rod as an emblem of chastisement (cf. Forti, 2008; Ryken et al., 1998). This yields a general metonymic schema:

- INSTRUMENT FOR FUNCTION (CONTROL, GUIDANCE, CORRECTION)

Once this metonymic relationship is established, it is metaphorically projected onto the human sphere, giving rise to the conceptual metaphors:

- FOOLS ARE STUBBORN ANIMALS (with horses and donkeys functioning as source domain elements representing creatures requiring external control)
- DISCIPLINE IS PHYSICAL CONTROL

The metaphor thus maps the human–animal control relationship onto the socio-moral domain, where authority figures or society play the role of the handler, and fools are conceptualised as animals that must be restrained for their own good. The rod for fools’ backs becomes a metaphorical instantiation of corrective discipline as the only effective means of regulating foolish behaviour – just as physical instruments are necessary to guide or restrain livestock.

From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, this proverb represents a clear case of metaphonymy (Goossens, 1990; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011; Ruiz de Mendoza & Díez, 2002), since the metaphorical projection (FOOLS ARE STUBBORN ANIMALS) is triggered by a series of metonymically selected elements:

- WHIP FOR ITS FUNCTION (THE ACTION OF CONTROLLING A HORSE) (metonymy)
- BRIDLE⁵ FOR ITS FUNCTION (THE ACTION OF CONTROLLING A DONKEY) (metonymy)
- ROD FOR ITS FUNCTION (THE ACTION OF CONTROLLING A FOOL) (metonymy)

This parallel structure establishes a conceptual analogy in which the control mechanisms used for animals are extended metaphorically to the disciplinary measures necessary for fools. The proverb relies on embodied, culturally shared experience – namely, the use of tools to guide and correct animals – to frame its didactic message: fools, like livestock, require external regulation.

It may further be argued that the proverb carries a rhetorical and evaluative force, bordering on dehumanisation. By invoking animal-control terminology, the

⁴ For a discussion of the rod as an instrument of discipline or punishment see Ryken et al. (1998, p. 2467).

⁵ “The image of the bridle is used in the Bible primarily as an image of restraint and control” (Ryken et al., 1998, pp. 452–453).

fool is implicitly positioned at the same evaluative and moral level as domesticated animals – creatures perceived as incapable of rational self-guidance. This is not just a neutral comparison but an evaluative statement: the fool's lack of wisdom is seen as a reason, even a requirement, for corrective actions similar to those used with animals.

5.3 Ox in the proverb "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but an abundant harvest comes through the strength of the ox" (Proverbs 14: 4)

The concept designated by the expression *ox* in the proverb "Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but an abundant harvest comes through the strength of the ox" (Proverbs 14:4) functions as a metonymic vehicle for accessing a metonymic target within a metaphorical source domain. In this context, the ox is not merely a literal reference to the animal but constitutes a metaphonymic construction, in which metonymy provides access to a more abstract metaphorical mapping. Specifically, *ox* stands metonymically for the entire agricultural infrastructure and productive system, of which it is the most salient component. In ancient agrarian societies, the ox was indispensable for ploughing fields, threshing grain, and transporting harvests, making it a natural mental reference point for farming productivity.⁶ Therefore, this represents a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, where the ox (a salient part) provides mental access to the broader concept of agricultural labour and infrastructure (the whole) and at the same time giving rise to the more specific OX FOR AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE metonymy.

However, what is even more interesting, the proverb uses this metonymic reference as the source domain for a conceptual metaphor in which agricultural infrastructure and labour are mapped onto a more abstract notion: PROSPERITY IS AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE. The result is a metonymy-based metaphor (metaphonymy), in which the metonymic vehicle (*ox*) grounds the metaphorical reasoning about prosperity and abundance. In conceptual terms, the proverb creates a causal schema:

No ox → empty manger → no produce → lack of prosperity
 Strong ox → abundant harvest → economic well-being

This causal chain is grounded in embodied experience of farming: the ox's physical strength literally drives the plough and produces food, which then figuratively represents economic and existential security. The figurative mapping is therefore motivated by a real-world correlation between animal labour and harvest, aligning with the view of

⁶ For a discussion of the symbolism of the ox in the Bible see Ryken et al. (1998, pp. 2089–2092).

Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez (2002, pp. 521–522) that metaphonymies are complex structures in which metaphorical targets are grounded in metonymic mappings.

5.4. Lion and bear in the proverb “Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Proverbs 28: 15)

The proverb “Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people” (Proverbs 28: 15) provides another instance of metaphonymy, where metaphor builds upon a prior metonymic association grounded in embodied experience. The roaring lion⁷ and the charging bear⁸ are metonymic triggers of fear and danger. In each case, the animal’s characteristic behaviour (roaring, charging) stands for its predatory aggression and the imminent threat of physical harm. This is a BEHAVIOUR FOR STATE metonymy (or more precisely, SOUND/ACTION FOR AGGRESSION) which then becomes the source domain of a conceptual metaphor: A WICKED RULER IS A DANGEROUS PREDATOR.

The target domain (the ruler’s oppressive actions) is construed in terms of predatory behaviour, highlighting danger, uncontrollability, and the helplessness of the victims (the poor). Just as a lion’s roar or a bear’s charge signals an unavoidable and potentially deadly attack, so too does the wicked ruler’s behaviour threaten the survival of vulnerable people.

This is thus not a *pure* metaphor but rather a metonymy-based metaphor (or metaphonymy): the lion’s roar and the bear’s charge are not simply chosen as arbitrary symbols of danger but are metonymically salient cues of threat. This creates a very compact figurative image that portrays the poor as prey, highlighting both their vulnerability and the ruler’s wrongdoing. The power of the proverb comes from evoking the deep human fear of predators, a fear that is first triggered by metonymy and then metaphorically linked to social and political oppression.

5.5. Raven and eagle in the proverb “The eye that mocks a father, And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it” (Proverbs 30: 17)

This proverb presents a striking image in which the eye stands metonymically for a person’s attitude, inner disposition, and rebellious spirit. The EYE FOR ATTITUDE/REBELLION relationship is a clear case of PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, where a body part most associated with haughty looks, scorn, and

⁷ Ryken et al. (1998, p. 2917) characterise the lion as “a universal symbol in the ancient Near East of royal power and authority” but lions are also seen as “dangerous, hostile and ruthless-devourers of human beings” (p. 2310). It is, therefore, a complex and multifaceted symbol, associated with several meanings, all of which appear to stem from the core ideas of danger and power (see Strawn, 2005, p. 27; see also Keel, 1997, p. 76).

⁸ According to Ryken et al. (1998, p. 144), the Israelites perceived the bear as a dangerous animal. It symbolises “violence and power, usually in conjunction with the lion”.

mockery is used to represent the entire moral stance of the offender. In biblical Hebrew, *the eye* frequently encodes an evaluative or emotional attitude (e.g., *haughty eyes*, *evil eye*),⁹ and here it functions as a symbolic locus of contempt¹⁰ toward one's parents.

The punishment is depicted in the proverb using a vivid and realistic image: ravens plucking out the eye and young eagles eating it. This is not just a literal prediction of events but serves as a metaphor for divine punishment. In the ancient Near East, scavenging birds were seen as natural symbols of decay and death¹¹, and thus they metonymically stand for death, divine judgement, and the inevitability of moral consequences. This is another case of metonymy, namely ANIMAL FOR EVENT/RESULT, where, the birds, as real participants in the disposal of corpses, represent the broader context of death and judgement.

The proverb thus combines metonymy and metaphor into a metaphonymy. The metonymy identifies the sinner through the body part most associated with contempt, and the metaphor frames the punishment as a natural, almost *ecological* process: just as scavenger birds clean the land by consuming what is dead, so divine justice removes those who transgress the moral order. In this way, the natural process of predation becomes the source domain in the conceptual metaphor DIVINE JUSTICE IS PREDATION. The image of the eye being plucked out also suggests the removal of the capacity for rebellion, symbolically erasing the sinner's ability to mock or scorn again.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, the proverb activates the CONTAINER schema (the eye as the locus of rebellious intent) and the FORCE schema (divine retribution as a force acting upon the rebellious person). The result is a compact, forceful piece of moral instruction that ties a specific body part (eye) to a moral failing (contempt) and then links that failing to its inevitable outcome (death) via a metaphonymic blend.

5.6 Pig in the proverb "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion" (Proverbs 11:22)

This proverb creates a striking, almost grotesque image to convey its moral lesson. At the surface level, the gold ring in a pig's snout is incongruous: gold is an object of beauty, refinement, and high value, while the pig was considered an unclean

⁹ For the symbolism of the eye in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel see Dilek (2021, p. 3).

¹⁰ In Matthew (6: 22–23) we read: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness". This passage presents the eye as a gateway through which either spiritual light or darkness can enter, depending on what a person chooses to focus on and their underlying intentions.

¹¹ See Ryken et al. (1998, p. 716) for a discussion of "demons as animals" where the raven is presented as one of the "unclean" animals "linked to the Prince of Darkness".

and coarse animal¹² in the biblical world. The juxtaposition of these two elements conveys a sense of wasted value or misplaced ornamentation.

From the cognitive perspective, the gold ring functions metonymically as a symbol of beauty, refinement, and social attractiveness – it stands for human efforts to enhance appearance or signify status. Conversely, the pig functions as a metonymy for filth, lack of refinement, and moral corruption, as pigs were ritually unclean animals in the Israelite worldview.¹³ When these two elements are combined in the image of a *gold ring in a pig's snout*, the result is a conceptual blend that signals a mismatch between outward beauty and inner reality.

The second line of the proverb resolves the comparison: a beautiful woman who lacks discretion is being equated with the incongruous image of a pig with a gold ring. The metonymy BEAUTY FOR WOMAN'S SOCIAL VALUE is at play here: the woman is described by her physical attractiveness, but her lack of discretion (a moral and intellectual trait) undermines the expected harmony between appearance and character. The result is a metaphonymy, because a metonymically selected attribute (beauty) becomes the source domain of a larger metaphorical mapping: LACK OF MORAL INTEGRITY IS DESECRATION OR MISPLACEMENT OF VALUE.

The proverb's cognitive mechanism relies on image-schematic incongruity. The pig's snout is a CONTAINER (or LOCATION) schema that holds the gold ring, yet this containment violates the cultural expectation that gold belongs in a context of purity and refinement. Similarly, beauty is metaphorically conceived as a precious adornment, but when it is *contained* within a person who lacks moral sense, it becomes as inappropriate – and even grotesque – like jewellery on an unclean animal.

Thus, Proverbs (11: 22) achieves its rhetorical force through the interplay of metonymy (PIG FOR FILTH; GOLD RING FOR BEAUTY; BEAUTY FOR WOMAN), metaphor (INCONGRUOUS CHARACTER IS INCONGRUOUS ADORNMENT), and cultural understanding about animals and purity. The resulting metaphonymy frames moral discretion as the proper container or setting for beauty and warns that beauty without moral integrity is not merely neutral but becomes meaningless and senseless.

5.7 Serpent and viper in the proverb “Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. Its end is like a serpent that bites, and like a viper that secretes [venom]” (Proverbs 23: 31–32)

This proverb warns against the seductive power of wine by presenting a vivid shift from pleasure to danger. At first, wine is described in appealing, sensory terms: it is red, sparkles in the cup, and goes down smoothly. These descriptions

¹² See Ryken et al. (1998, pp. 2807–2809) for detailed symbolism of this animal.

¹³ See Borowski (2002) for the perception of the pig by the Israelites.

function metonymically, as they highlight salient perceptual qualities (colour, sparkle, smooth taste) that represent wine's seductive appeal and promise of pleasure. Therefore, the first line uses metonymic selection of visual and gustatory features to frame wine as desirable and tempting (PRODUCT FOR ITS SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS metonymy).

The second line abruptly transforms this image by comparing wine's *end* – its ultimate consequences – to a serpent and a viper. This is a metaphorical mapping in which WINE'S EFFECTS ARE DANGEROUS ANIMALS. The serpent¹⁴ and viper¹⁵ are culturally salient symbols of danger, poison, and death, and they metonymically evoke harm, pain, and treachery¹⁶ through the most salient feature of these animals: their venomous bite.

The proverb thus exemplifies metaphonymy: the process begins with a metonymic highlighting of wine's appealing sensory properties, which attracts attention and lures the drinker. Then, through metaphor, wine's long-term effects are mapped onto the domain of poisonous snakes, leading to the understanding that indulgence results in harm, like being bitten and poisoned. Thus, the metonymic relation (chain) is clear: SERPENT FOR SERPENT'S BITE FOR DANGER, and this serves as the basis for the metaphorical mapping between wine's pleasurable surface and its destructive consequences.

Crucially, the proverb employs an image-schematic contrast between the CONTAINER schema of the cup (holding the sparkling wine) and the EVENT schema of a snake's attack. The container is initially associated with pleasure, but it metaphorically transforms into a source of harm – much like a snake whose beauty or stillness hides a deadly threat. The reader is thus warned that what appears smooth and desirable may conceal a fatal sting.

In short, Proverbs (23: 31–32) uses metonymy to foreground wine's seductive qualities and then applies metaphor to reframe the overall scenario as one of danger, producing a metaphonymic structure that teaches moral caution: do not be deceived by the surface allure of intoxicants, because their hidden "bite" will harm you in the end.

6. Concluding remarks

The analysis demonstrates that the *Book of Proverbs* is a rich repository of animal imagery, with over thirty distinct animals mentioned throughout its text, including domesticated species (e.g., ox, donkey, goat, horse), wild mammals (e.g., lion,

¹⁴ De Chapeaurouge (2014, pp. 136–138) discusses the figurative characteristics of the serpent in Christian symbolism.

¹⁵ Ryken et al. (1998, pp. 774, 2287, 2300, 2383, 2718, 2751, 3143) discuss numerous biblical contexts in which the viper is portrayed as a venomous creature.

¹⁶ See Ryken et al. (1998, p. 508) for a discussion of the serpent's treachery in the Bible.

bear, deer, hyrax), birds (e.g., raven, eagle, sparrow, swallow), reptiles (e.g., serpent, viper, lizard), and insects (e.g., ant, locust). In the set of proverbs analysed here, twelve of these animals serve as key vehicles of figurative meaning.

The analysis has shown that these animals typically serve as source domains/vehicles for conceptualising human behaviour, moral qualities, and social relations. For example, the lion and the bear are used to represent power, danger, and authority; the ox stands for agricultural infrastructure and, by extension, prosperity; and small birds such as sparrows or swallows symbolise ephemerality and transience. The corresponding target domains include abstract concepts such as righteousness, folly, anger, courage, fear, and divine justice.

A particularly valuable insight is that all of these instances are analysed not as isolated metaphors or metonymies, but as metaphonymies, in which metonymic motivation underlies metaphorical projection. This analytical perspective helps explain why these proverbs possess enduring symbolic and didactic power: they connect concrete, embodied experiences of the natural world with moral and spiritual lessons, making them conceptually salient and memorable for their audience.

Animal imagery also serves an important pedagogical function. By evoking familiar creatures and their behaviours, the *Book of Proverbs* enables its audience – originally an oral culture – to grasp abstract truths through vivid and memorable scenarios. The moral lesson is both heard and pictured mentally, which makes it easier to remember and absorb. In this way, animal proverbs function as cognitive anchors, linking lived experience with ethical instruction.

Due to space limitations, this discussion has been necessarily selective. Further analysis could explore, for example, the development of animal symbolism across different books of the bible, the role of cultural dimension and historical context in shaping animal-related imagery, cross-linguistic comparisons of animal proverbs in other ancient Near Eastern texts, and the pedagogical strategies underlying the selection of particular animals in moral instruction. These aspects represent promising directions for future research.

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