

VARIATION IN GRAMMATICAL GENDER IN BIBLICAL HEBREW A STUDY ON THE VARIABLE GENDER AGREEMENTS OF דָּרָךְ, 'WAY'¹

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Abstract

The first part of this article provides a review of the attestations of the noun דָּרָךְ ('way') in the Hebrew Bible, offering a new classification according to grammatical gender. In the second part of the article, an explanation of the variation in the grammatical gender of דָּרָךְ is proposed. The author suggests that neither chronological, poetic, semantic or syntactic factors can explain the variation in gender in a satisfactory manner; although such factors may be of some importance in specific cases, the underlying decisive clue can be found rather in morphological and phonological features of words syntactically dependent on דָּרָךְ.

I General Remarks on the Variation in Gender Agreement

It is one of the characteristics of Semitic languages that nouns whose referents do not have a natural gender can have variable gender agreements:² while being treated grammatically as masculine in one case, they are treated as feminine in another, as can be seen by the gender

¹ This article is dedicated to Professor Ernst Jenni, whose work on the language of the Hebrew Bible has deeply influenced my own research.

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² The phenomenon of double- and multiple-gender nouns is found in other language groups as well; see, e.g., Greville G. Corbett, *Gender* (Cambridge 1991), 181–3. Hybrid nouns must be distinguished from double- and multiple gender nouns; in the case of hybrid nouns, the — more or less regular — change in gender agreement is based on specific semantic usages of the respective noun; either there is a conflict of different semantic assignment rules (e.g., German 'Mädchen', which belongs both to the categories 'feminine' and 'diminutive'), or there is a conflict between the gender of the noun in its normal use and the gender expected in view of what it denotes in the transferred use (e.g., French 'sainteté', used as a title for humans); see Corbett, *Gender*, 225–60.

agreements of verbs, adjectives and so on of which the noun in question functions as a head. This variation is striking for those whose mother tongue belongs to the Indo-European language family, since the phenomenon is a rare feature in these languages, attested for instance in the narrow area of those nouns whose referents have a natural gender and whose morphology is identical when they refer to males or females respectively (see, e.g., German 'der Angestellte' — 'die Angestellte').³

A variation in the grammatical gender of nouns whose referents do not have a natural gender is also attested in Biblical Hebrew. In the Hebrew Bible there are two groups of nouns that can be distinguished.

Firstly those nouns which are attested in two different forms, the second form being marked as compared to the first one by the addition of the feminine suffix ה- ⁴ (for instance: $\text{צֶעֶד} - \text{צֶעֶדָה}$). Depending on the method of counting, there are about 117 nouns that appear as pairs of such a type.⁵ A subgroup of this category is formed by those nouns whose variable gender agreement is interrelated with number (for instance: $\text{נְתִיבוֹת} - \text{נְתִיב}$).⁶ This group must again be distinguished from those nouns whose plural forms (or at least some of their plural attestations) belong to the grammatical gender contrary to the one used in the singular attestations of the same noun, but are treated in the same way as the singular attestations as far as grammatical gender is concerned. In such cases the plural endings do not designate the grammatical gender of the noun, as they normally would (for instance: אֲבָנִים 'unhewn stones').⁷

The second group is formed by those nouns which are designated syntactically in some instances as masculine and in other instances as

³ It is, however, true not only for Indo-European languages, but also for the other language families, that 'a noun has typically one value for the gender feature' (Corbett, *Gender*, 146).

⁴ Or — less frequently — by the corresponding segholated form (example: מְשֻׁמֶרֶת — מְשֻׁמֶר) or the ending ית (example: $\text{מְרֻעָה} - \text{מְרֻעִית}$).

⁵ See Mordechai Ben-Asher, 'The Gender of Nouns', *Semitics* 6 (1978), 1.

⁶ The feminine singular נְתִיבָה is attested in all five instances; but in three instances (Ps. 119:105; 142:4; Job 30:13) it is possible to read נְתִיבוֹתִי instead of נְתִיבָתִי without any emendation of the consonants of the MT and with the support of some of the old textual witnesses; and in the two remaining cases (Isa. 43:16; Prov. 12:28) the versions from Qumran also have a plural. It seems plausible, then, that a fem. sing. form נְתִיבָה never existed.

⁷ Deut. 27:6. A list of the respective nouns can be found in Diethelm Michel, *Grundlegung einer hebräischen Syntax* 1 (Neukirchen 1977), 35ff.

For possible explanations of the phenomena mentioned in this paragraph see Ben-Asher, *The Gender*, and Diethelm Michel, 'Das Genus im Hebräischen', in Michel, *Grundlegung*, 25–81).

feminine, without any relation of the varying gender agreements to possible morphological changes of the respective nouns. There is no consensus about the number of nouns that have to be classified within this group.⁸ According to Albrecht's two-part study 'Das Geschlecht der hebräischen Hauptwörter', the following 26 nouns must be assigned to this group:⁹ בָּקָר (317f.), אָנִי (320), שָׁמֶשׁ (324), רוּחַ (42–44),¹⁰ עֵת (44f.), שְׁבֵת (47), דֶּרֶךְ (54f.), אוֹת (55f.), תְּהוֹם (62), עֵצָה (73), יָד (74f.), לָשׁוֹן (75), עֵינַי (75), צִלָּע (76), שִׁפָּה (76), שֵׁן (76), יָמִין (77), פָּנִים (78), חֵיק (78f.), חֵיק (80), כָּד (89),¹¹ סִיר (89), עֲבֹת (89f.), תַּעַר (91), בֵּית (94f.), גִּפֹּן (106f.). שְׂעִיר (86) and מַמְלָכָה (119) are classified as borderline cases by Albrecht: שְׂעִיר is usually masculine, but in the case of a feminine personification it is used as a feminine; מַמְלָכָה is usually feminine, but in those cases in which it designates the warriors, it is used as a masculine. With respect to some of the 26 nouns just mentioned, it is possible to explain the variation in grammatical gender semantically or chronologically: in the case of עֵינַי, צִלָּע, שִׁפָּה, שֵׁן, פָּנִים, חֵיק, and possibly also עֲבֹת, the difference in grammatical gender is directly interrelated with a semantic difference (for instance: שִׁפָּה is feminine when it means 'lip', but masculine when it means 'hem [of a garment]').¹² As regards בֵּית and גִּפֹּן, Albrecht supposes that the nouns were originally used as feminines only; only in the course of the development of the language was the feminine usage replaced (בֵּית) or supplemented (גִּפֹּן) by a masculine one.¹³ If one subtracts the seven cases that are semantically conditioned and the one case in which a gradual displacement of one of

⁸ Cf. the entries in the more recent dictionaries. A random example for divergencies in the assignment of the gender of individual nouns: according to Albrecht נָ is always masc. (see Karl Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht der hebräischen Hauptwörter', *ZAW* 15 [1895], 313–25, and *ZAW* 16 [1896], 41–121; the reference to נָ is found in *ZAW* 16, 53), whereas the entry in DCH adds the qualification 'sometimes f.' (see David J.A. Clines [ed.], *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, II [Sheffield 1995], 366).

⁹ The brackets indicate the respective pages of Albrecht's two-part study 'Das Geschlecht'.

¹⁰ The fact that among those attestations of רוּחַ that refer to God's spirit masc. usages can also be found (e.g. Gen. 6:3; 1 Kgs 18:12; 22:24; Isa. 34:16; Mic. 2:7 and others) puts a question mark to the hypothesis of the 'femininity' of God understood as related to God's natural gender. Concerning the variation in gender agreement of רוּחַ see the remarks in Wolfram von Soden, 'Der Genuswechsel bei *riḥ* und das grammatische Geschlecht in den semitischen Sprachen', *ZAH* 9 (1992), 57–63.

¹¹ This is a special case of double gender assignment: all sing. attestations are fem., all plural attestations masc.

¹² Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 76. Concerning עֵינַי see also C.H.J. van der Merwe, J.A. Naudé and J.H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield 1999), 179.

¹³ Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 94f., 106f.

the two genders occurs, only 18 'true' cases of variable gender agreement of nouns with referents that do not have a natural gender remain, דָּרָךְ being one them.

A survey of dictionary entries would surely provide a larger number of nouns that could be assigned to the group mentioned in the previous paragraph. Such an assumption can be based not only on random surveys comparing Albrecht's list with entries in dictionaries and grammars,¹⁴ but also on Albrecht's list itself. For in this list about 140 additional nouns are enumerated which have some attestations in the gender opposite to that of the majority of the noun's other attestations or contradicting the gender that would be expected morphologically. In all these cases, however, Albrecht rejects the assumption of a deviation in gender. The majority of these apparent deviations are explained on the following grounds:

- textual corruption;
- aversion to the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf.;
- the adjective must be understood as neuter;
- the predicate precedes the subject;
- neuter plural;
- masculine suffixes are the result of *Sprachverwilderung*.¹⁵
- different word of reference;
- the adjective precedes the noun;
- the adjective is used adverbially;
- the predicate is neuter;
- passive construction;

Such explanations can also be found in grammars, and can be supported by many examples. This is true, for instance, for the suggestion of an aversion to the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf., which is mentioned, e.g., in GK §145 u and — in a more general version, without restriction to the 3 pers. — in Waltke and O'Connor 6.6 c. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether these ways of explaining away a variation in gender agreement are sound; in most cases the grammatical reasons adduced by Albrecht are not compelling since they do not apply without exception, and in too many instances, Albrecht has to resort to conjectural

¹⁴ Cf. the divergency in the gender ascription of דָּרָךְ between Albrecht and DCH mentioned above. Another random example is דָּרָךְ; contrary to Albrecht ('Das Geschlecht', ZAW 16, 115f.), the entry of DCH mentions a deviant gender assignment with respect to two attestations (Clines [ed.], *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, II, 457). Also the list of some double gender nouns in Joüon and Muraoka §134 m has to be mentioned (Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* [Rome 1993], 496) : it consists of nouns that according to K. Albrecht do not belong to the group of double gender nouns.

¹⁵ In a condensed form several of the explanations mentioned can also be found in Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', ZAW 15 (1895), 316f.

emendations. One gets the impression, therefore, that reducing the phenomenon of variation in gender agreement was one of the aims of Albrecht's study. This aim, in turn, is partly due to the fact that too high a frequency of this phenomenon would compromise Albrecht's claim that even the gender of nouns whose referents are entities without any natural gender can be explained on the basis of natural characteristics. Albrecht holds that 'alles Gefährliche, Wilde, Mutige, Geachtete, Grosse, Starke, Mächtige, Thätige, Herrschende, Hervorragende, Feste, Schädliche, Lästige, Verwundende, Scharfe, Harte' was conceived of as masculine by the Semites, whereas 'alles mütterlich Umfassende, Gebärende, Erhaltende, Ernährende, Gelinde, Schwache, Kleine, Furchtsame, Zierliche, Dienende, Beherrschte, unten Liegende, Schwankende, Lasten Tragende, minder Geachtete'¹⁶ was conceived of as feminine. He then goes on to explain the gender of every single noun in accordance with this basic assumption. He claims, for instance, that 'Getränke, ohne die kein organisches Wesen bestehen kann', are masculine without exception;¹⁷ on the other hand, it is maintained that the 'Speisen, die dem Körper dienen und von ihm zermalmt und verbraucht werden', are feminine.¹⁸

Such explanations of grammatical gender, based on the relation between the natural characteristics of the extra-linguistic referents of the respective nouns and natural gender differences in the human (and animal) realm, lead to almost inextricable problems. This can be demonstrated from the example quoted above: how, for instance, is it possible to explain the grammatical gender of a thick fluid that, on one hand represents a beverage necessary for life, and on the other hand a kind of food that sustains the body? Cannot the function of a beverage be considered as sustenance for the body? And cannot food be counted among the elements fundamentally necessary for life? The problems inherent in such explanations of gender ascription could easily be multiplied. It is not surprising, therefore, that the shortcomings of this extra-linguistic way of explaining grammatical gender have long been realized;¹⁹ they need not bother us any further in the context of this

¹⁶ Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 120f.

¹⁷ Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 98.

¹⁸ Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 99.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., Brockelmann §16 a: 'Die gewöhnliche Fem.-Endung *at, t* dient ursprünglich nicht zum Ausdruck des natürlichen Geschlechtes (Sexus), das vielmehr durch besondere Wortstämme unterschieden wird' (Carl Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* [Neukirchen 1956], 13). As early as 1908 Brockelmann commented with respect to gender differentiation: 'Mit dem natürlichen Sexus hat aber diese Unterscheidung wahrscheinlich von Hause aus nichts zu tun' (Carl Brockelmann,

study. They are not, however, totally overcome, as can be seen in the context of an investigation of the grammatical gender of דָּרָךְ.

II Observations on the Variable Gender Agreement of דָּרָךְ

1 Survey

Not only in Albrecht's investigation,²⁰ but in all the descriptions of the gender of דָּרָךְ the classification of דָּרָךְ as a double gender noun is recognized; cf. the following entries:

- BDB: 'n.m. [Dt 17,16] and (less often) f. [Ex 18,20]';
- DCH: 'n.m. (sometimes f.)';
- Gesenius¹⁸: 'F., aber häufig (i. Pl. immer) M.';
- HALAT: 'sg. f., auch m. (1 Sam 21,6), pl. stets m.'.

Besides these entries in dictionaries, the following statements concerning the gender of דָּרָךְ can be found:

Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, I [Berlin 1908], 404). Kedar states: as one of the features of the noun, gender originally has nothing to do 'mit dem natürlichen Geschlecht' (Benjamin Kedar, *Biblische Semantik* [Stuttgart 1981], 109). Cf. also Joüon and Muraoka §134 e: 'Apart from living beings gender is metaphorical:... the reason which determines the gender often escapes us' (*A Grammar*, 494). Van der Merwe and his co-writers comment: 'There is no logical reason for allocating gender to inanimate objects' (*A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 176). A thorough clarification of the topic is found in Muhammad Hassan Ibrahim, *Grammatical Gender* [Den Haag/Paris 1973] (see especially the comprehensive remarks on pages 50 and 102f.). It is rather astonishing that in more recent comments on the subject the old transfer theories reappear, for instance in the explanation of the feminine gender of names of countries and cities which claims that they were considered as 'Mütter und Ernährerinnen ihrer Einwohner' (so Michel, *Grundlegung*, 76).

The recognition of the fundamental difference between grammatical and natural gender has consequences for a question that is much debated in the theological field, namely the question of God's 'gender'. Quite often the determination of רִיחַ as a feminine noun, which can be observed in many of its occurrences, is understood as an indication of the 'femininity' of God's Spirit (cf. German 'die Heilige Geistin'); such an inference, however, can be held only if the obvious difference between grammatical and natural gender is blurred. The complexity of the question should not be unduly simplified by ignoring on the one hand the masc. attestations in the theological usage of רִיחַ and on the other hand the ambiguity in the assignment of God's Spirit to personal or non-personal entities. Concerning the theological use of the term רִיחַ see especially Manfred Dreytza's study *Der theologische Gebrauch von RUAḤ im Alten Testament* (Giessen/Basel, 1990).

²⁰ See Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 55: 'Das Ergebnis ist also, dass דָּרָךְ meist und zwar zu allen Zeiten weiblich gebraucht ist, männlich tritt es häufiger erst seit Ezechiel auf, stets männlich ist der Plural'.

- Joüon and Muraoka §134 l: 'in the sing. usually fem., in the pl. always masc.';
- Watson, 'Gender-Matched Synonymous Parallelism in the OT', 335: 'derek, "way", is normally feminine'.

From this survey it is already clear that, in spite of the unity in the overall picture, there are differences in describing the predominant gender of דֶּרֶךְ and, by the same token, in determining its grammatical gender in specific attestations of this noun in the text of the Hebrew Bible. As far as the general description goes, the findings range from 'primarily masc.' (BDB; DCH) to 'primarily fem.' (Albrecht; HALAT; Gesenius; Joüon and Muraoka).

2 Classification of the attestations of דֶּרֶךְ according to grammatical gender

As far as the classification of specific single attestations goes, there are three studies which provide a comprehensive list of all the attestations of דֶּרֶךְ which can be classified according to gender. These are Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht der hebräischen Hauptwörter'; Ratner, 'DEREK'; and Dorsey, *The Roads*.²¹ A comparison of the gender attributions presented by the three authors respectively shows a convergence in the majority of the attestations. Nevertheless, there are divergencies with respect to no less than 36 cases which shall be discussed below.²²

²¹ See Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 54f.; Robert Ratner, 'DEREK, Morpho-Syntactical-Considerations', *JAO* 107 (1987), 471; D.A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore/London 1991), 220f.

²² The results are different again if one follows Watson's proposal to assign gender on the basis of gender related parallelism, especially in poetic texts. Watson mentions three examples in which the grammatical gender of דֶּרֶךְ can be determined on the basis of such parallelisms (see Wilfred G.E. Watson, 'Gender-Matched Synonymous Parallelism in the OT', *JBL* 99 [1980], 328–39): in Isa. 40:3 דֶּרֶךְ-מִדְּבָר // מִסְלָה-עֲרָבָה corresponds to a sequence 'masc. – masc. // fem. – fem.'. In Isa. 43:16 דֶּרֶךְ is classified as fem., since it is probable in this case that the sequence דֶּרֶךְ-בָּיִת // נְתִיבָה-בְּמִיִּם corresponds to a sequence 'masc. – fem. // masc. – fem.'. In Ps. 67:3 finally דֶּרֶךְ is classified as masc., since it is probable in this case that the sequence דֶּרֶךְ-בְּאֶרֶץ // יְשׁוּעָה-בְּכָל-גּוֹיִם corresponds to a sequence 'fem. – masc. // masc. – fem.'. If one follows Watson's method, the gender of דֶּרֶךְ can be determined in many more instances than is normally assumed. The examples given above demonstrate that such an approach can have valuable results. The problem remains, however, that the postulation of such gender related parallelisms is not normally convincing and does not, therefore, justify the allocation of grammatical gender. In the case of Isa. 40:3, for instance, it seems more plausible to postulate that the parallelism is related to the phonological level (presence or absence of the ending הָ—) in addition to the dominant semantic level.

The divergencies are based mainly on two suppositions of Albrecht's:

- In three instances (Jer. 31:9; Prov. 14:12A; 16:25A) he understands יָשָׁר as standing in the *status constructus* dependent on דָּרָךְ; as a consequence, the gender of דָּרָךְ cannot be defined in these instances.
- In eleven instances (Num. 22:32; Deut. 14:24; 19:6; 2 Sam. 22:31; 1 Kgs 19:7; Jer. 23:12; Ezek. 33:20; Hos. 14:10; Ps. 10:5; 18:31; 119:5) he interprets the predicate governing דָּרָךְ as bearing no information about the gender of דָּרָךְ, since the predicate precedes the subject.²³

In order to proceed in this investigation, the following classification of the relevant attestations of דָּרָךְ is suggested, slightly diverging from the three classifications just mentioned.

The following attestations are classified as masc.: Gen. 28:20; Exod. 13:17; Num. 22:32; Deut. 14:24; 17:16; 19:6; 28:7A/B.25A/B; 1 Sam. 21:6; 2 Sam. 22:31; 1 Kgs 13:10A; 18:6A/B; 19:7; 2 Kgs 6:19; 17:13; Isa. 30:21; 65:2; Jer. 22:21; 23:22; 32:39; Ezek. 13:22; 18:25A/B/C.29A/B/C; 20:43.44; 21:24A.26B; 23:13; 33:11B.17A/B.20A; 36:31; Hos. 14:10; Zech. 1:4; Ps. 10:5; 18:31.33; 35:6; 36:5; 49:14; 101:6; 119:5; Prov. 2:12; 4:26; 8:13; 12:15; 16:29; 21:2.8; 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14; 17:3; 28:26.

The following attestations are classified as fem.: Gen. 24:42; 42:38; Exod. 18:20; Num. 9:10; Deut. 1:22.33B; 13:6; 28:68; Josh. 3:4A; 24:17; Judg. 2:19.22; 18:5.6; 1 Sam. 9:6; 12:23; 24:20; 1 Kgs 8:36; 13:10B.17.33; 22:43; 2 Kgs 7:15; 19:28.33; Isa. 37:29.34; 40:27; Jer. 12:1; 18:11A.15B; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3.7; 42:3; Ezek. 3:18.19; 36:17B; Jon. 3:8.10; Ps. 1:6B; 101:2; 107:7; 119:33; Job 3:23; Prov. 7:27; 12:26; 22:6; 28:18; Lam. 1:4; Ezra 8:21; Neh. 9:12.19B; 2 Chron. 6:27; 20:32.

The following attestations are classified as both masc. and fem.: Jer. 6:16B; 23:12; 31:9; Prov. 14:12A; 16:25A.

The following attestations need a more detailed explanation:

1. Exod. 13:17

Dorsey's omission of this attestation among those cases in which דָּרָךְ has to be classified as masc. cannot be justified, since the relation of הָיָא to דָּרָךְ is unambiguous.

2. Num. 22:32

This is one of the cases in which a 3 pers. sg. masc. predicate precedes the subject; according to GK §145 o the gender of the noun cannot be determined with certainty in such cases.²⁴ It must be kept in mind,

²³ See Albrecht, 'Das Geschlecht', ZAW 16, 54f.

²⁴ Cf. Waltke and O'Connor 6.6 c: 'Gender agreement may also lapse when (as is

however, that this rule does not apply automatically in every instance; the possibility remains that the respective attestations of דָּרָךְ can be classified as masc.²⁵

3. *Deut. 14:24*

See note on Num. 22:32.

4. *Deut. 17:16*

Dorsey's omission of this attestation among those cases in which דָּרָךְ has to be classified as masc. cannot be justified since דָּרָךְ is unambiguously identified as masc. by הִזָּה.

5. *Deut. 19:6*

See note on Num. 22:32.

6. *Josh. 3:4A*

Contrary to Dorsey's non-determination of the gender of דָּרָךְ, דָּרָךְ can be classified as fem. based on the suffix attached to the preposition *beth* (בֶּה) which refers to דָּרָךְ.

7. *Judg. 2:22*

In this case the reading of the MT (דָּרָךְ יְהוָה לְלֶכֶת בָּם) appears to be grammatically incorrect; it must be corrected either according to T by replacing דָּרָךְ by דִּרְכֵי, or according to some Hebrew manuscripts, Sebir, LXX, S and V which replace בָּם by בֶּה. Based on the weight of the majority of the old textual witnesses, the second variant must be preferred; דָּרָךְ can be classified accordingly as fem.

8. *1 Sam. 21:6*

The phrase הוּא דָּרָךְ חַל suggests that דָּרָךְ must be classified as masc. because of the masc. form of the preceding pronoun (הוּא). According to Brockelmann §16 g, however, it is possible that the gender indicated by הוּא refers to the construct chain as a whole which would leave the gender of דָּרָךְ undetermined.

9. *2 Sam. 22:31*

Albrecht's non-classification of the attestation may be based on the assumption that the clause הָאֵל תָּמִים דְּרָכּוֹ has to be understood in the

often the case) the verb precedes the subject; the subject may be feminine singular or plural, and the verb may be masculine singular' (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake 1990], 109).

²⁵ The same goes for Deut. 14:24; 19:6; Ezek. 18:25A, 29A; 33:17A, 20A; Ps. 35:6. A preceding 3 pers. pl. masc. predicate is found in Ps. 10:5; 119:5.

sense of 'God is perfect as regards his way'; alternatively, Albrecht might be guided by the assumption that the predicative תָּמִים is indeed referring to דֶּרֶךְ but — as can be inferred from GK §145 r — does not contain an indication concerning the gender of דֶּרֶךְ because it precedes the noun. It seems to be more plausible, however, to understand the clause הָאֵל תָּמִים דֶּרֶכּוֹ as a *casus pendens* meaning 'this God — his way is perfect',²⁶ and to assume that the rule stated in GK §145 r, and qualified only as a possibility, does not apply here, with the result that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ can in fact be deduced from תָּמִים.

10. 1 Kgs 13:10A

Albrecht's classification of this attestation of דֶּרֶךְ as fem. could only be justified on the basis of an emendation of אַחֲרֵת to אַחֲרֵי. The unanimous evidence of the old textual witnesses, however, favours the reading of the MT. There is no reason, therefore, to object to a classification of this attestation of דֶּרֶךְ as masc.

11. 1 Kgs 19:7

According to Albrecht the gender of דֶּרֶךְ cannot be determined here, since the predicative רַב precedes the noun דֶּרֶךְ. It seems, however, that such an analysis again applies the rule stated in GK §145 r too strictly.

12. 1 Kgs 22:43

Albrecht maintains that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ remains undetermined in spite of the anaphoric מִמֶּנּוּ, because מִמֶּנּוּ could refer to כָּל- . Albrecht's suggestion is not wholly impossible, but one must take into consideration that deviating from the (right) way is a frequently attested cliché,²⁷ in which דֶּרֶךְ is normally not combined with כָּל-; it is therefore more probable to assume that the deviation is related directly to דֶּרֶךְ and not to כָּל-. This means, in turn, that מִמֶּנּוּ in 1 Kgs 22:43 refers to דֶּרֶךְ and not to כָּל-, thereby indicating a masculine gender for דֶּרֶךְ. Yet another argument could be adduced against the determination of the gender of דֶּרֶךְ based on the masculine suffix of the preposition *min*: according to Waltke and O'Connor 16.4 b one has to take into consideration that 'the masculine pronoun is often used for a feminine antecedent'.²⁸ This argument has to be relativized, however, since the rule stated by Waltke and O'Connor is not generally applicable; it states a mere possibility, not a law.

²⁶ So recently Seybold in his commentary on Ps. 18:31 (Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* [HAT I/15, Tübingen 1996], 77).

²⁷ E.g., Exod. 32:8; Deut. 9:12.16; 11:28; 31:29; Judg. 2:17; Isa. 30:11; Mal. 2:8.

²⁸ A similar comment can be found in GK §135 o (Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräische Grammatik*, revised by E. Kautzsch [Hildesheim 1991, repr. of 28th edition], 461).

The decisive factor for the classification of the present attestation of דָּרָךְ, however, is the variant reading of the suffix attached to the preposition *min* as attested in some of the ancient Hebrew manuscripts and Sebir; instead of מִמֶּנּוּ they read מִמֶּנָּה. Although the attestation of this variant reading does not seem especially strong, it has to be preferred against the MT; for the parallel version in 2 Chron. 20:32 as well as both other instances in which דָּרָךְ is referred to by a suffix attached to the preposition *min* read מִמֶּנָּה instead of מִמֶּנּוּ.

13. 2 Kgs 6:19

Albrecht justifies the indefiniteness of the gender of דָּרָךְ by the assumption that זֶה has to be understood in a neutral sense (= 'this'). It has to be admitted indeed that זֶה can be understood in this way in many instances. In 2 Kgs 6:19, however, such an explanation is not valid because of the parallelism between זֶה הַדָּרָךְ and זֶה הָעֵיר. The contrast to זֶה which is clearly formed as a fem. indicates that in this case זֶה does not function as a gender neutral architerm, but as a masc.

14. Isa. 30:21

As in 1 Kgs 22:43 one has to consider the possibility mentioned in GK §135 o and Waltke and O'Connor 16.4 b that the masc. suffix of the anaphoric preposition *beth* does not indicate the gender of the antecedens דָּרָךְ. But even if this rule could be applied in the present case, the gender of דָּרָךְ can be determined as masc. because of the preceding זֶה.

15. Isa. 35:8B

The determination of the grammatical gender of דָּרָךְ is especially difficult in the present case. If one holds to the reading of the MT, the anaphoric לָהּ indicates a fem. usage of דָּרָךְ (of its first attestation, however!), while both יִקְרָא and יַעֲבֹדּוּ indicate a masc. usage of דָּרָךְ (again of its first attestation). Against this, one could argue that יִקְרָא has to be understood in the sense of an impersonal 'one will call' which would detach the verb from דָּרָךְ; moreover, one could assume that יַעֲבֹדּוּ refers to מַסְלִיל and not to דָּרָךְ. The separation of יִקְרָא from דָּרָךְ is not compelling, however, and it seems more probable that יַעֲבֹדּוּ refers to דָּרָךְ on account of its proximity, than to מַסְלִיל which stands further away. The most plausible solution, however, is to delete the first attestation of דָּרָךְ as a gloss or dittography.²⁹ In this case, יִקְרָא as well as לָהּ

²⁹ See, e.g., Wildberger's commentary (Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39* [BKAT XI/3, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982], 1354f.).

and יַעֲבֹרֻּ are not related to דָּרֶךְ, but to מַסְלִיל, with the result that the gender of דָּרֶךְ remains undetermined.

16. Jer. 6:16B

Contrary to Albrecht, the gender of דָּרֶךְ must be considered both masc. and fem. Albrecht's statement to the effect that אֵי-דָּרֶךְ is 'nicht beweisend' is certainly correct. However, the classification of the present attestation of דָּרֶךְ as masc. does not depend on אֵי-דָּרֶךְ, but on הַטֹּב. This interpretation presupposes that in spite of the missing definite article before דָּרֶךְ the phrase הַטֹּב דָּרֶךְ does not have to be understood as a construct chain;³⁰ rather טֹב functions as an attribute to דָּרֶךְ. The classification of the present attestation of דָּרֶךְ as fem. follows directly from the suffix of the preposition *beth* (בֶּה), which refers to דָּרֶךְ.

17. Jer. 22:21

The immediately preceding demonstrative pronoun זֶה suggests that the gender of דָּרֶךְ has to be determined as masc. Although such conclusions may be drawn from the use of זֶה, they would not be valid in the case of אֵי-דָּרֶךְ, since there is no corresponding fem. version אֵי-זֹאת.³¹ However, the determination of the gender of דָּרֶךְ is not absolutely sure in these cases, because according to GK §136 b a neuter use of זֶה cannot be ruled out.

18. Jer. 23:12

The predicate יִהְיֶה which immediately precedes דָּרֶךְ indicates that the gender of דָּרֶךְ is masc., while the anaphoric בֶּה at the end of the colon indicates that its gender is fem. Against the use of יִהְיֶה as a factor in determining the gender of דָּרֶךְ one could again — as Albrecht does — refer to the rule stated in GK §145 o; most probably, however, this rule does not apply in the present case, judging by the use of וַתֵּהִי, instead of the more neutral masc. form, in the immediate context (i.e. the second colon of verse 10).

19. Jer. 31:9

According to Albrecht, יֵשֶׁר stands in the *status constructus* dependent on דָּרֶךְ; therefore, only the following בֶּה could be helpful in determining the gender of דָּרֶךְ. This interpretation of יֵשֶׁר, however, is not convincing, since a construct chain is more normally formed with a real noun in the function of the *nomen rectum*; this objection is even more

³⁰ With the implication that טֹב had to be understood as a neuter.

³¹ This concerns the following passages, in which דָּרֶךְ is combined with אֵי-דָּרֶךְ: 1 Kgs 13:12; 2 Kgs 3:8; Job 38:19,24; 2 Chron. 18:23.

relevant in the present case because there is a noun (יֶשֶׁר) that corresponds to the adjective יֶשֶׁר, and could have been used in its stead.

20. *Ezek. 16:27*

There seems to be no textual basis for Dorsey's determination of the gender of דָּרֶךְ.

21. *Ezek. 18:25A.29A*

See note on Num. 22:32.

22. *Ezek. 18:25C.29B/C; 33:17B*

The gender ascription is not completely unambiguous, because according to GK §145 u (and Waltke and O'Connor 6.6 c) a verbal form following the noun that functions as its subject does not necessarily indicate the gender of the respective noun if this verbal form has been used to avoid the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf. The masc. verbal forms, then, may simply indicate an aversion to the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf., and may not have any relation to the gender of דָּרֶךְ. The consistent use of the masc. in this expression, however, suggests that the gender of דָּרֶךְ was actually understood as masc.

23. *Ezek. 20:43*

The classification of the present attestation of דָּרֶךְ as masc. is based on the anaphoric בָּם at the end of the first colon. According to GK §135 o masc. plural suffixes can also refer to fem. entities; nevertheless, it is at least equally likely that the masc. form בָּם is based on a conscious reference to the preceding nouns דָּרֶךְ and עֲלִילָה. Since עֲלִילָה is clearly fem., however, the masc. form בָּם should most probably be taken as an indication of the masc. gender of דָּרֶךְ.

24. *Ezek. 33:9*

The indefiniteness of the gender of דָּרֶךְ in the present instance, as suggested by Dorsey, needs to be corrected on the basis of the anaphoric מִמֶּנָּה; the suffix of the preposition which refers to דָּרֶךְ indicates that דָּרֶךְ is treated syntactically as fem.

25. *Ezek. 33:17A.20A*

See note on Num. 22:32.

26. *Ezek. 36:17B*

Contrary to Dorsey, the present attestation of דָּרֶךְ has to be classified as fem. on account of the verbal form הִיָּתָה which precedes דָּרֶךְ.

27. *Hos. 14:10*

Concerning the first indication of the gender of דָּרָךְ in verse 10 see the note on 1 Kgs 19:7. The second and third indications are provided by the suffix of the preposition *beth* (בֵּת). According to GK §135 o and Waltke and O'Connor 16.4 b, the masc. suffixes can refer to fem. entities; nevertheless, since דָּרָךְ has already been bound to be masc., in its first attestation, it may be assumed that the masc. form of the suffix provides reliable information about the gender of דָּרָךְ.

28. *Ps. 10:5*

This is one of the cases in which a predicate in the 3 pers. pl. masc. precedes the noun; according to GK §145 p and Waltke and O'Connor 6.6 c the gender of the noun cannot be determined with certainty since the masc. gender of the verb may be the result of a general aversion against the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf. Since this is not a generally applicable rule, however, the respective attestations of דָּרָךְ can still be classified as masc.

29. *Ps. 18:31*

See note on 2 Sam. 22:31.

30. *Ps. 18:33*

The construction of the second hemistich is uncommon; it seems best to interpret תָּמִים as an attribute preceding דָּרָךְ. Since the rule GK §145 o affects finite verbs only and since the rule GK §145 r is restricted to preceding adjectives in nominal sentences, תָּמִים may be taken as an indication of the masc. gender of דָּרָךְ.

31. *Ps. 35:6*

The fact that דָּרָךְ is preceded by the verbal form יְהִי suggests that its gender is masc. in this attestation. The gender cannot be determined with certainty, however, on the following grounds: according to GK §145 o one has to reckon with the possibility that the masc. gender of the preceding predicate does not indicate the gender of the following subject; and secondly, the fem. form תְּהִי is never attested without a prefixed *waw*, which suggests that תְּהִי was replaced by יְהִי in each instance, regardless of the gender of the corresponding subject.

32. *Ps. 49:14*

Ratner's classification of the present attestation of דָּרָךְ as masc. is based on the demonstrative pronoun זֶה, which immediately precedes דָּרָךְ. While this conclusion may be drawn from the use of זֶה, it would not follow in the case with אֵי-זֶה, since there is no corresponding fem.

version אִי-זֹאת. The determination of the gender is not totally certain, however, because according to GK §136 b it cannot be ruled out that הָ is being used as a neuter.

33. Ps. 101:2

In contrast to the usual classification the present attestation of דֶּרֶךְ has to be considered as fem. For on the one hand, the first colon of verse 2 makes more sense if בְּדֶרֶךְ תָּמִים is understood as a construct chain, which implies that תָּמִים does not indicate the gender of דֶּרֶךְ; and on the other hand it seems probable that דֶּרֶךְ functions as subject of תְּבוּאָה, which in turn forces one to determine the gender of דֶּרֶךְ as fem.

34. Ps. 101:6

Albrecht's and Ratner's proposal that the grammatical gender of דֶּרֶךְ is masc. in the present attestation is justified by its relation to the following attribute תָּמִים. It cannot be ruled out completely, however, that בְּדֶרֶךְ תָּמִים has to be understood as a construct chain in which case no inference can be made regarding the gender of דֶּרֶךְ.

35. Ps. 119:5

See note on Ps. 10:5.

36. Prov. 2:12

The assumption that רָע has to be understood as an adjective functioning as an attribute of דֶּרֶךְ, is entirely legitimate. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out completely that רָע has to be understood in the sense of 'the evil one' as a person or — based, *inter alia*, on its use in verse 14 — in a neuter sense; in this case, the phrase מִדֶּרֶךְ רָע would form a construct chain which in turn would mean that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ could not be determined.

37. Prov. 4:26

This case bears some similarities to 1 Kgs 22:43: Albrecht maintains that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ remains undetermined in spite of the verb יָכֵנוּ, because יָכֵנוּ could refer to כָּל- . Again, Albrecht's suggestion is not wholly impossible, but one must take account of the fact that דֶּרֶךְ is not normally combined with כָּל- in the other instances that speak about the steadfastness of the ways.³² Therefore, it is more likely from a semantic point of view that יָכֵנוּ refers directly to דֶּרֶךְ and not to כָּל- . It must be admitted, however, that even if יָכֵנוּ is actually to be related to דֶּרֶךְ, the verbal form does not necessarily provide a clear indication of the gen-

³² E.g., Ps. 119:5; 2 Chron. 27:6.

der of דֶּרֶךְ, since it could be the result of the aversion to the 3 pers. pl. fem. impf. (cf. GK §145 u).

38. *Prov. 7:27*

The present attestation of דֶּרֶךְ has to be classified as fem., since it is probable that the fem. participle יֹרְדוֹת refers to דֶּרֶךְ.

39. *Prov. 13:15*

According to the reading in the MT, the gender of דֶּרֶךְ should be determined as masc. in agreement with its attribute אֵיתָן. It is probable, however, that אֵיתָן has to be emended to אֲדִים.³³

40. *Prov. 14:12A*

The remarks in this case are similar to those concerning Jer. 31:9. According to Albrecht, יֹשֶׁר stands in the *status constructus* dependent on דֶּרֶךְ and, as a result, יֹשֶׁר is not useful in determining the gender of דֶּרֶךְ. This interpretation of יֹשֶׁר, however, is not convincing, since a construct chain is more normally formed with a real noun in the function of the *nomen rectum*; this objection is even more relevant in the present case because there is a noun (יֹשֶׁר) that corresponds to the adjective יֹשֶׁר, and could have been used in its stead. While the connection with יֹשֶׁר, then, determines the gender of דֶּרֶךְ as masc., there is good reason to accept an alternative, parallel determination of the gender of דֶּרֶךְ as fem., on the basis of the nominal phrase וְאֶחָרִיתָהּ, whose suffix clearly refers to דֶּרֶךְ.

41. *Prov. 16:2*

Dorsey classifies the present attestation of דֶּרֶךְ as masc. The lack of agreement in number between דֶּרֶךְ and דֶּרֶכִּי, however, prohibits a determination of the gender of דֶּרֶךְ based on the adjective דֶּרֶךְ. It must also be considered possible that דֶּרֶךְ is related to כָּל־.

42. *Prov. 16:25A*

See note on Prov. 14:12A.

43. *Prov. 21:2*

The close similarities in the phrasing of Prov. 21:2 and Prov. 16:2 raise the question whether the attribute (יֹשֶׁר) is related to כָּל־ rather than to דֶּרֶךְ also in Prov. 21:2, an interpretation that would leave the gender of דֶּרֶךְ undetermined. In the present case, however, such a supposition

³³ See, e.g., McKane's commentary (William McKane, *Proverbs*. London 1970, 455).

does not seem probable, since the attribute even agrees with דֶּרֶךְ in number. In theory it could be assumed that the gender of the construct chain דֶּרֶךְ-אִישׁ is determined by the *nomen rectum*. This would mean that יֵשֶׁר does not indicate the gender of the *nomen regens* דֶּרֶךְ (cf. Brockelmann §16 g), but this assumption is rather unlikely.

44. Prov. 21:8

In accordance with Dorsey, the gender of דֶּרֶךְ must be determined as masc.; for דֶּרֶךְ functions as subject of the predicative הַפְּכָפֶךְ, which is clearly a masc. adjective. As in Prov. 21:2, there is a theoretical possibility that the gender of the construct chain in which דֶּרֶךְ functions as *nomen regens* is determined by the *nomen rectum*. This would imply that הַפְּכָפֶךְ does not indicate the gender of the *nomen regens* דֶּרֶךְ, but again this possibility has to be considered very slight. Similarly, the rule GK §145 r, according to which the preceding predicative does not indicate the gender of the following subject, does not necessarily apply in the present instance.

45. Prov. 28:10

It could be suggested that רָע should be understood as an adjective qualifying דֶּרֶךְ. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that רָע may also be understood in the sense of 'the evil one' as a person, or even in a neutral sense. In this case רָע בְּדֶרֶךְ should be interpreted as a construct chain, with the result that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ could not be determined. This interpretation, however, seems to be less likely than in Prov. 2:12.

46. Prov. 28:18

Dorsey's classification of the present attestation of דֶּרֶךְ as fem. can be justified by the fem. form of בְּאַחַת. The interpretation of this form, however, is much debated.³⁴ There is probably a conscious ambiguity: בְּאַחַת means both 'on one of the two ways' (local) and 'at once' (temporal). If this interpretation is correct, it is actually possible to infer the gender of דֶּרֶךְ on the basis of the form בְּאַחַת.

47. 2 Chron. 28:26

The plural attestation of דֶּרֶךְ seems to be qualified by the attributes הָרְאשִׁימִים and הָאַחֲרוֹנִים, whose endings indicate a masc. determination of דֶּרֶךְ. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the attributes refer to דְּבָרִים instead of דְּרָכִים.

³⁴ For a better understanding of the form some exegetes take refuge in the emendation בְּשַׁחַת. Cf., e.g., the commentaries of McKane (William McKane, *Proverbs* [OTL, London 1970], 622) and Plöger (Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos* [BKAT XVII, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984], 331).

3 Explanation of the variable gender agreement of דָּרָךְ

The observations and deliberations expressed so far have demonstrated that, in those cases in which the gender of דָּרָךְ can be determined, masc. and fem. attestations show approximately the same frequency.³⁵ In view of this distribution the question arises whether it is possible to explain the remarkable phenomenon of the variation in gender agreement of דָּרָךְ, which even occurs within a single attestation in six cases. There are several suggestions.

Albrecht gives the following explanation: the different gender attributions are related to the number of דָּרָךְ and to chronological factors.³⁶ As to the first aspect, it cannot be denied that all the plural attestations of דָּרָךְ are morphologically marked as masc. (ending ים / י). There are, however, two instances in which the plural of דָּרָךְ is treated grammatically as a fem.: Prov. 7:27 and Lam. 1:4.³⁷ This shows that *Albrecht's* first explanation is not generally applicable. As to the second aspect, *Albrecht* maintains that a masc. usage of דָּרָךְ can be observed regularly only from Ezekiel onwards. It is true that there is a striking predominance of masc. as against fem. attestations in Ezekiel, but an examination of a complete list of attestations does not support the chronological argument. A chronologically differentiated development of the use of the two genders can only be constructed on the basis of very hypothetical chronological ascriptions of the individual texts.³⁸ In the one case in which one can assume unambiguously a chronological sequence of two textual corpora, viz. in the case of the books of Samuel and Kings on the one hand and Chronicles on the other, a shift from fem. to masc. usages of דָּרָךְ cannot be observed. One also has to take into consideration the general rule that nouns whose referents denote salient features of reality are rather resistant to shift of gender in the course of time.³⁹ It has to be admitted, however, that there is a contrary tendency according to which nouns change their grammatical gender in the course of time in cases where the functional regularity of language can be increased by this shift.⁴⁰

³⁵ 68 masc. versus 62 fem. attestations. Only two (or three) of the plural attestations — that are morphologically always marked as masc. — are fem.: Prov. 7:27 and Lam. 1:4, with reservations also Prov. 28:18 (for details see below).

³⁶ See *Albrecht*, 'Das Geschlecht', *ZAW* 16, 55.

³⁷ In addition, Prov. 28:18 contains a dual attestation; in this case, however, the adjective describing דָּרָךְ is used in the singular.

³⁸ In spite of this weakness *Albrecht's* reasoning is repeated by *Michel* (see *Michel, Grundlegungen*, 77).

³⁹ See *Ibrahim, Grammatical Gender*, 56.

⁴⁰ See *Ibrahim, Grammatical Gender*, 80. In the case of דָּרָךְ such a shift is easily

Dorsey's explanation runs as follows: 'the gender is determined, not by author, genre of literature, or grammatical considerations, but by meaning'.⁴¹ According to him, דֶּרֶךְ is masc. if it refers to a 'figurative course of travel not conceived in physical, literalistic terms',⁴² if it can be rendered by 'direction' or if it refers to a journey which is qualified as רֶכֶּב. On the other hand, דֶּרֶךְ is fem. if it refers to a physical way or to a physical journey or to 'a metaphorical road or course of travel conceived in physical, literalistic terms'.⁴³ Indeed, it is generally accepted that the figurative use of a noun can result in a change of its grammatical gender;⁴⁴ but one has to keep in mind that 'the gender assigned to a particular noun neither adds to, nor subtracts from, the meaning of that noun'.⁴⁵ Apart from these general considerations, an examination of the attestations of דֶּרֶךְ shows that in many cases Dorsey's explanation does not hold up. There are, for instance, several cases in which דֶּרֶךְ is used as a fem. although it refers to a figurative way not conceived in physical, literalistic terms: Exod. 18:20; Deut. 13:6; Judg. 2:19.22; 1 Sam. 12:23; 1 Kgs 8:36; 13:33; Isa. 40:27; Jer. 12:1; 18:11A.15B; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3.7; Jon. 3:8.10; Ps. 1:6B; 101:2; 119:33; Prov. 12:26 and others. There are also cases in which דֶּרֶךְ is used as a masc. although it refers to a physical way or a physical journey: Gen. 28:20; Exod. 13:17; Deut. 17:16; 19:6; 1 Kgs 13:10A; 18:6A/B; Ezek. 21:26B and others. Finally, it can also be observed that in some instances in which דֶּרֶךְ refers to a figurative way conceived in physical, literalistic terms, the noun is used as a masc.: Num. 22:32; Isa. 30:21; Hos. 14:10; Ps. 35:6; 36:5; Prov. 4:26; 28:10 and others. Moreover, the line between metaphorical usages with and without retention of the physical aspects of 'way' cannot be sharply drawn.⁴⁶

conceivable: the masc. attestations could be understood as a result of the intention to bring about a change from an original fem. usage to a masc. usage, an intention which could be rooted in the fact that דֶּרֶךְ is not marked as a fem. noun phonologically or morphologically. The usage of דֶּרֶךְ in later stages of the Hebrew language, however, does not support such an assumption; at least one would be forced to admit that the postulated attempt was not successful.

⁴¹ Dorsey, *The Roads*, 220.

⁴² Dorsey, *The Roads*, 221.

⁴³ Dorsey: *The Roads*, 220f.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Joüon and Muraoka §134 a (*A Grammar*, 493); Kedar, *Biblische Semantik*, 110; Waltke and O'Connor 6.4.1 e (*An Introduction*, 104).

⁴⁵ Ibrahim, *Grammatical Gender*, 52.

⁴⁶ The way in which Dorsey carries out the differentiation is not convincing. With regard to the attestations that he classifies as metaphorical with simultaneous retention of the physical aspect, the following are questionable: Exod. 18:20; Deut. 13:6; Judg. 2:19; 1 Sam. 12:23; 1 Kgs 8:36; 13:33; Isa. 40:27; Jer. 18:11.15B; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3.7; Ezek. 3:18.19; Jon. 3:8.10; Ps. 1:6B; 119:33; Prov. 12:26; 14:12B;

One disadvantage of Dorsey's approach is the fact that he needs to make textual emendations⁴⁷ or highly questionable interpretations of individual attestations of the gender of דֶּרֶךְ in order to make the respective attestations fit into his picture (e.g., Judg. 2:22; Ezek. 36:17B; Ps. 101:2; Prov. 16:2). That Dorsey is aware of the weaknesses of his explanation can be deduced from his remark that one has to reckon with exceptions, especially in Ezekiel.⁴⁸ On the other hand, one has to admit that with some smaller semantic classes a certain consistency in the use of the gender of דֶּרֶךְ can actually be observed. This, in turn, may be connected to syntactic features, for similar semantic nuances are often found in similar syntactical environments.

Another explanation is provided by Ratner. He claims that the gender assignment can be partly explained by syntactical features: 'In biblical Hebrew, *derek* governs either masculine or feminine agreements in independent clauses and in some dependent clauses, but governs only feminine agreements in relative clauses'.⁴⁹

An examination of the attestations shows that Ratner's observations are valid for most cases: in almost all the relative clauses depending on דֶּרֶךְ which are introduced by אֲשֶׁר, the gender of דֶּרֶךְ can be determined as fem. based on the fem. sing. suffixes attached to the prepositions *beth* (Gen. 42:38; Deut. 1:22.33; 13:6; Josh. 3:4; 24:17; Judg. 18:6; 1 Kgs 8:36; 13:10; 13:17; 19:28.33; Isa. 37:29.34; Jer. 42:3; Neh. 9:12.19; 2 Chron. 6:27) or 'al (Gen. 24:42; Judg. 18:5; 1 Sam. 9:6) or to a verb (Deut. 28:68). The only exception is Ezek. 20:43 — if indeed the attestation of דֶּרֶךְ has to be classified as masc. based on the anaphoric כֵּן.⁵⁰ A further difficulty is raised by the fact that not all relative clauses need to be introduced by אֲשֶׁר and that such clauses cannot be clearly distinguished from other types of subordinated or dependent clauses. In addition to the relative clauses introduced by אֲשֶׁר, there are a total of 15 attestations of דֶּרֶךְ in which דֶּרֶךְ is related to

16:25; 22:6. On the other hand, the physical aspect actually is present in some attestations that Dorsey classifies as metaphorical without retention of the physical aspect: Num. 22:32; Jer. 6:16; 31:9; Hos. 14:10; Ps. 36:5; Prov. 4:26; 28:10.

⁴⁷ See 1 Kgs 13:10A, which he classifies as fem. rather than masc.; there is, however, no textual reason for an emendation of אָחֵר to אֲחֵרָה.

⁴⁸ See Dorsey, *The Roads*, 221.

⁴⁹ Ratner, 'DEREK', 471.

⁵⁰ One should also point to Ezek. 46:9E (the passage is not mentioned by Ratner) which says: לֹא יָשׁוּב דֶּרֶךְ הַשָּׁעַר אֲשֶׁר-בָּא בוֹ. Probably, the problem should be solved either by relating the masc. suffix attached to the preposition *beth* directly to the masc. שָׁעַר, or by assuming that the masc. suffix attached to the preposition *beth* refers to the construct chain דֶּרֶךְ הַשָּׁעַר as a whole, assuming that the gender of the chain is determined by the *nomen rectum* (cf. Brockelmann §16 g).

a dependent subordinate clause. In two cases, we are dealing with relative clauses that are not introduced by אֲשֶׁר: Exod. 18:20 and Jer. 31:9; in both cases דָּרָךְ is referred to anaphorically by the preposition *beth* whose fem. suffix determines the gender of דָּרָךְ as fem. In another case (Exod. 13:17) the subordinate clause is introduced by the conjunction כִּי; in this case דָּרָךְ is determined as masc. (כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא). It is clear, then, that — as stated by Ratner — not all subordinate clauses qualify דָּרָךְ in every instance as fem., only the relative clauses. In two other cases, the clause dependent on דָּרָךְ consists of a final clause introduced by the preposition *lamed*; in the first case (Judg. 2:22), דָּרָךְ is referred to again by the preposition *beth* whose — postulated⁵¹ — fem. sing. suffix determines דָּרָךְ as fem.; in the second case דָּרָךְ is referred to by the preposition *min* whose fem. sing. suffix determines דָּרָךְ as fem. In seven cases the dependent clause is connected with דָּרָךְ by the conjunction *waw*. In one of these cases (Jer. 6:16) we again find the anaphoric preposition *beth* with a fem. sing. suffix, in another case (Hos. 14:10), however, the same preposition is found (twice) with the masc. pl. suffix. In another case (2 Chron. 20:32) the preposition *min* is found whose fem. sing. suffix determines the corresponding attestation of דָּרָךְ as fem. In still another case (Ps. 119:33) דָּרָךְ is referred to by a fem. sing. suffix attached to a verb (אֶצְרֶנָּה), and in two further cases (Prov. 14:12; 16:25) by a fem. sing. suffix attached to a noun (אֶחָרִיתָהּ). The remaining cases are 1 Kgs 22:43, Isa. 30:21 and Prov. 22:6. As far as 1 Kgs 22:43 is concerned, in addition to what has been stated above it needs to be pointed out that a great number of the ancient textual witnesses connect the clause לֹא-סָר מִמֶּנּוּ to דָּרָךְ with the conjunction *waw*, thus creating an even greater congruence with 2 Chron. 20:32. In Isa. 30:21 (וְהָהִדָּרָךְ לְכוּ בּוֹ) the connection with the clause dependent on דָּרָךְ is particularly loose. It is especially striking that the anaphoric preposition *beth* does not show a fem. sing. suffix or a masc. pl. suffix, but a masc. sing. suffix (בּוֹ). If indeed the masc. form of the suffix is original, it can be explained as a reflection of the preceding demonstrative pronoun הֵן. Also in the case of Prov. 22:6 the connection of the clause dependent on דָּרָךְ is very loose. In this case, it is the preposition *min* with a fem. sing. suffix which refers to דָּרָךְ.

Based on the examination of the attestations of דָּרָךְ, the following explanation of the variation in gender agreement of דָּרָךְ seems to be the most adequate one. Slightly modifying Ratner's hypothesis, it can be maintained that in almost all relative clauses and in most other

⁵¹ See above for the relevant discussion of the passage.

types of subordinate clauses which are dependent on דָּרֶךְ, דָּרֶךְ is qualified as fem. Contrary to Ratner's hypothesis, however, one might argue that the main reason for this phenomenon is not to be found primarily in the syntactic subordination of these clauses, but rather in morphological and phonological factors — factors, though, that largely coincide with the syntactical ones.⁵² Ezek. 20:43 shows that the coincidence is not complete. If one places the morphological and phonological factors before the syntactical ones, the gender of דָּרֶךְ in Ezek. 20:43 need not be classified as an exception as it is in Ratner's explanation. The relevant morphological and phonological features which play an important, predictable role in the gender ascription of דָּרֶךְ can be described as follows: where דָּרֶךְ is referred to by a sing. suffix attached to the prepositions *beth*, *min*, and *'al* or to verbs or nouns, the respective suffix regularly takes the fem. form (מִמֶּנָּה, בָּהּ, עָלֶיהָ etc.); where, however, דָּרֶךְ is referred to by a pl. suffix which is only attested in connection with the preposition *beth*, this suffix appears in the masc. form (בָּם).⁵³ This assumption is confirmed by the observation that even in the case of מַסְלִיחַ which has to be classified as masc. on morphological grounds, the sing. suffix attached to prepositions that refer to מַסְלִיחַ appears in the fem. form.⁵⁴ The only exception is Isa. 30:21 which has בּוֹ, instead of בָּהּ; the breaking of the rule can be explained, however, by the specific linguistic circumstances mentioned above.

The observation that morphological and phonological factors, as well as possible syntactical factors, may have been decisive for the gen-

⁵² Alternatively one can assume in certain cases that the word-class to which the word indicating the gender of דָּרֶךְ belongs might be of crucial importance; this is true in the present case especially for the word-class 'preposition'.

⁵³ According to the variant mentioned previously one could establish the following rule: References to דָּרֶךְ by way of suffixes attached to prepositions always use the fem. gender, with the exception of the plural where — in accordance with the morphology of דָּרֶךְ in the plural — a masc. suffix is used.

The question arises as to whether the results established here, are not, after all, indicative of a diachronic change, although in a way that differs from Albrecht's suggestion. Does the predominant use of the fem. sing. suffix and the completely regular use of the masc. pl. suffix indicate that in a stage prior to the biblical period דָּרֶךְ was always used as a fem. noun in the singular and as a masc. noun in the plural? Was the use of דָּרֶךְ as a masc. noun in the singular, then, only initiated by later formal considerations which used the absence of a formal marking of the fem. gender with respect to דָּרֶךְ for defining the noun as masc.? And was the apparent failure of the attempt to replace the fem. sing. usage of דָּרֶךְ completely by the masc. sing. usage the result of the fact that דָּרֶךְ is a basic word which is used very often and which functions to designate a salient feature of reality?

⁵⁴ In this case the preposition *lamed* is involved (לָהּ).

der assignment of דֶּרֶךְ is confirmed by an investigation of those attestations of דֶּרֶךְ in which the grammatical gender can be determined on the basis of adjectival attributes instead of subordinate clauses dependent on דֶּרֶךְ. The following rules can be observed: in combination with לא־טוב, אחד, תמים, דֶּרֶךְ is always used as a masc., in combination with טוב it is always fem.⁵⁵ Regarding the syntagm דֶּרֶךְ אחד, it should be added that, as a rule, the masc. gender is attested whenever דֶּרֶךְ occurs in combination with numerals and adjectives like ראשונים and אחרונים.⁵⁶ The situation is somewhat more complicated concerning the combination with רע: if the adjective is used in the plural, the masc. form is always used — in accordance with the morphological shape of דֶּרֶךְ in the plural;⁵⁷ in the singular, however, there are attestations of both fem. and masc. gender.⁵⁸ In this context, it must also be pointed out that in all the instances in which דֶּרֶךְ is combined with the demonstrative pronoun הַזֶּה, דֶּרֶךְ is used as a masc.⁵⁹

To a certain extent, the observation that a fem. verbal form is always used in verbs that are dependent on דֶּרֶךְ and follow it, instead of preceding it, may also be explained by morphological and phonological factors.⁶⁰ In this case, however, it is not possible to separate the morphological and phonological factors from the syntactical ones. The same goes for the rule that the gender of דֶּרֶךְ is always masc. when the

⁵⁵ For the combination with לא־טוב see Isa. 65:2; Ps. 36:5; Prov. 16:29.

For the combination with אחד see Deut. 28:7A.25A; 1 Kgs 18:6; Jer. 32:29; Ezek. 23:13 (concerning the exception Prov. 28:18 see the respective notes above).

For the combination with תמים see 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:31.33; 101:6.

For the combination with טוב see 1 Sam. 12:23; 24:20; 1 Kgs 8:36; 2 Chron. 6:27. Jer. 6:16B, where טוב appears as a masc., is the only exception as far as the combination with טוב goes. This irregularity can be easily explained, however: the masc. gender of טוב (and consequently also of דֶּרֶךְ) could be understood as a reflection of the preceding אֵי־הַטֹּב; the assumption is even more probable that אֵי־הַטֹּב functions as a neuter which means that דֶּרֶךְ must not be understood as an adjectival attribute, but as a substantivized adjective.

⁵⁶ See Deut. 28:7.25 (שְׁבָעָה); Ezek. 21:24A.26B (שְׁנֵים/שָׁנִי); 2 Chron. 17:3 (רָאשֹׁנִים); 28:26 (אֲחֵרֹנִים, רָאשֹׁנִים).

⁵⁷ See 2 Kgs 17:13; Ezek. 33:11B; 36:31; Zach 1:4; 2 Chron. 7:14. The same can be said concerning יָשָׁר; but no rules can be established concerning this adjective, since it is attested only once (Hos. 14:10) as an attribute of דֶּרֶךְ in the plural.

⁵⁸ With regard to those adjectives which are combined with דֶּרֶךְ only in one passage, it is not possible to deduce any rules.

⁵⁹ See Gen. 28:20; Deut. 17:16; 2 Kgs 6:19; Isa. 30:21; Jer. 22:21; Ps. 49:14. In this connection, the combination with אֵי־הַזֶּה in Jer. 6:16B must be mentioned as well.

⁶⁰ See Jer. 12:1; Ps. 1:6B; 101:2; Job 3:23; Prov. 12:26. In some cases the verbal form appears as a participle: 2 Kgs 7:15; Jer. 18:15A; Prov. 7:27; Lam. 1:4.

noun is combined with the verbs כִּן and תִּכֵּן on the one hand⁶¹ and the verb רָבָה and the corresponding adjective רַב on the other.⁶²

With the explanation proposed here the gender assignments of דֶּרֶךְ remain unexplained only in those cases in which דֶּרֶךְ is combined with the adjectives יָשָׁר and רַע in the singular, and in those cases where the verb, which is dependent on דֶּרֶךְ as its subject, actually precedes this noun. After all, as far as the combination with יָשָׁר is concerned, it can be observed that the variation in gender agreement is connected with a variation in the semantic quality of דֶּרֶךְ: while the fem. attestations refer to a physical road or journey, the masc. attestations represent metaphorical usages of דֶּרֶךְ.⁶³ The textual basis, however, is too narrow to derive a fixed rule from these observations. Concerning the combination with רַע it can be argued that the boundaries of gender distribution correspond to the boundaries of the individual biblical books: fem. sing. forms are attested in 1 Kgs, Jeremiah and Jonah, masc. sing. forms in Ezekiel and Proverbs.⁶⁴ Here, again, the textual basis is not sufficient to draw definitive conclusions. With regard to the diverging gender assignment with the sing. of רַע, one could also consider the possibility that this diversity is rooted in the difference between a true adjectival function of רַע and a quasi-substantival function of the adjective (as a substantivated adjective רַעָה), which would mean that the variant usages are syntactically motivated and not related to the boundaries of individual biblical books.⁶⁵

Compared to other approaches, the explanation of the variation in gender agreement presented here seems to have the disadvantage of not proposing an all-embracing theory that can be applied to every single case in the same way, but rather reckons with additional factors that operate only from case to case. However, it is debatable whether a more complex explanation such as this does not have the advantage of

⁶¹ See Ezek. 18:25A/B/C.29A/B/C; 33:17A/B.20A; Ps. 119:5; Prov. 4:26.

⁶² See Deut. 14:24; 19:6; 1 Kgs 19:7. This phenomenon has already been recognized by Dorsey (*The Roads*, 221).

⁶³ Fem. are the attestations in Ps. 107:7 and Ezra 8:21; masc. are the attestations in Jer. 31:9 and Prov. 12:15 and 21:2.

⁶⁴ Fem. are the attestations in 1 Kgs 13:33; Jer. 18:11A; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3.7; Jon. 3:8.10; masc. are the attestations in Ezek. 13:22; Prov. 2:12; 8:13; 28:10. The attestation in Jer. 23:22, in which רַע appears as a masc., is an exception; the textual transmission of this verse, however, is not certain (the *textus Graecus originalis* of the Septuagint omits מִדְּרֶכֶם הָרָה).

⁶⁵ Another way of explaining the variation of gender agreement of דֶּרֶךְ turns out to be incorrect: An examination of all the attestations of דֶּרֶךְ where the gender of דֶּרֶךְ can be determined demonstrates that the variation in gender agreement cannot be related to the influence of juxtaposed nouns, especially of juxtaposed nouns denoting 'way'.

being more consistent with the fluidity and complexity of language processes, at least with respect to certain linguistic features.⁶⁶ A more complex explanation such as this has the specific advantage of being adaptable to the obvious flexibility in the gender assignment of דֶּרֶךְ, without generating arbitrary solutions based on single attestations, and resulting in utter arbitrariness.

The usefulness of the new explanation given here will have to be evaluated by an examination of the variation in gender agreement attested by other nouns in Biblical Hebrew and in the other Semitic languages.⁶⁷ If similar observations can be made with regard to other nouns, the explanation proposed in this article may claim a more general validity.

⁶⁶ It does not seem very probable that native Hebrew speakers in ancient Israel would have given much thought to the question whether דֶּרֶךְ was used in a given instance in a subordinated clause or not, in order to decide afterwards whether the gender of the noun should be determined as masc. or fem.

⁶⁷ It should immediately be recalled that the Arabic cognate of דֶּרֶךְ, *ṭariq*, is also a double gender noun.