WISDOM, ANTI-WISDOM, AND THE
ETHICAL FUNCTION OF UNCERTAINTY:
THE BOOK OF QOHELETH / ECCLESIASTES
IN THE CONTEXT OF
BIBLICAL AND GREEK WISDOM THEORY

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ABSTRACT

In Qoheleth, the limitations of Man are emphasized more than his potential. The unpredictability of human experience and the rôle of Chance also have a high profile. Since this approach is not characteristic of the Bible overall, Qoheleth is sometimes regarded as

i a non-pietist work, and

ii a misfit in the Biblical canon.

In the Greek wisdom tradition, however, this very emphasis on Chance is the hallmark of the pietist approach. The opposing, anthropocentric viewpoint is based on faith that Man’s calculating intelligence can plot a successful path to his self-chosen goals. Qoheleth, a Hellenistic wisdom book, and cast in this mould of Greek pietist wisdom, is therefore most naturally construed as a pietist work.

Moreover, Qoheleth is integral to the Bible, which, like ancient Greek literature, reflects a tension between positive and negative evaluations of wisdom. In the Bible, this implies a need to clarify the dividing line between an acceptable, pietist wisdom and a destructive, antipietist ‘wisdom’ (anti-wisdom). Only Qoheleth directly addresses this need. The book asserts uncertainty as the dominant factor in human experience; and from this Solonic perspective, it assesses wisdom in relation to the key issue of mainstream Biblical piety. This issue is the choice before Man between
accepting his subordinate status as creature, and on that basis cultivating God’s Presence, or alternatively isolating himself from the Divine Presence and following his own self-chosen goals.

_Qoheleth_ reveals, through its allusive imagery and evocative structure, that anti-wisdom is focussed on egocentric goal-seeking; whereas real wisdom consists of receptive interaction with God, with one’s fellow-men and with the God-ordained unpredictability of external circumstances. True wisdom is the racecraft of obedience to God. Uncertainty is not an undesirable gap in human wisdom; it is essential to the course of the race.
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INTRODUCTION

*Qoheleth* is a mystery still to be solved. Its message is often regarded as obscure, even self-contradictory; and its place in the Biblical canon as a grave puzzle, due to its supposed heterodoxy.¹ This thesis aims to reveal where *Qoheleth* stands in relation to the ancient controversy about the nature and status of wisdom, and to demonstrate, in the light of the possible literary influences on the book,² its own particular contribution to that longstanding debate. Through this process, the thesis is also designed to clarify the core purpose of *Qoheleth* itself, as a single, coherent work in its own right.

The main factor frustrating so many past attempts to interpret *Qoheleth* is that the book can not be understood in depth unless interpreted squarely in the context of Antiquity’s moral ambivalence in its evaluation of human wisdom, and of the proud, powerful and independent self-image of man which the concept of wisdom tended to evoke.

In the Bible, it is of crucial importance that the wisdom of Man, unique among all creatures, is intimately connected with his drive to greatness and self-exaltation, equally unique among all creatures. Since this drive has a potential for moral evil,

¹Discussed below, Chapter 5, Sections i and ii.

²Both direct and indirect, and both Biblical and non-Biblical.
then the ‘wisdom’ from which the drive springs also has strong associations with evil. These same associations are significantly echoed elsewhere in ancient literature outside the Bible. Such overtones of evil are familiar, for example, in cases where someone has fallen foul of the divinely appointed order and / or of man’s established ethical system.  

Their own individual understanding, however acute, has at best fallen short of grasping this order or system, and at worst, has actually defied it. 

Hence the co-existence, even within one and the same human value system, of both wisdom and anti-wisdom: i.e., of both a positive and a negative concept of wisdom. On the one hand, human wisdom is accepted instinctively as beneficial and noble; yet, at the same time, it is equally instinctively viewed with suspicion as inherently dangerous and ignoble: as arrogant, selfish and anti-social, and as the prime tool of treachery and of subtle deceit.

It seems probable that it was largely this ‘wisdom’ versus ‘anti-wisdom’ crux which provoked the composition of *Qoheleth* in the first place. This is partly because the problem was a pregnant paradox, inherited from earlier antiquity, which had never

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3 As Creon in Sophocles’ Antigone is destroyed by offending the gods as well as defying human ethics, because he will not allow his dead enemy to be properly buried. See below, Chapter 3, Sections iv and vi, and especially Chapter 4, Sections i, ii, v and vi.

4 E.g., in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus, who is greatly revered by the Thebans for his wisdom in solving the Sphinx’s riddle, nevertheless kills his father and marries his mother (a grievous offence before gods and men alike), as Apollo’s oracle foretold he would. His failure to grasp the outworking of the system through the fulfilment of the oracle undoubtedly contributes to this. For he brings about its fulfilment by trying to prevent it, through fleeing from the couple who are not his parents in fear for them because he believes they are. See below, Chapter 3, Section vi for his flight from Corinth and Chapter 4, Sections i and vi for his failure to understand the implications of the oracle in relation to his circumstances. Compare Chapter 4, Sections ii, v, vi and vii for Oedipus’ position vis à vis the wisdom versus anti-wisdom controversy, and for the question of whether or not his reliance on his own wisdom, which in itself makes his complete misunderstanding of the oracle highly ironical, constitutes a defiance of the system in addition to his failure to grasp it.
yet been fully satisfactorily resolved. That might well recommend the matter to the
author as a problem of universal importance, which needed to be addressed in its own
right; and the fact that it was recognized as an issue in more than one culture would
also enhance its attractiveness to an educated writer like Qoheleth, with his special
liking for collecting sayings from a wide variety of sources.  

Another possible reason, however, why such an ancient controversy might have
inspired this particular book is that it could have assumed a sharp new contemporary
relevance in the light of what the author saw as the major foibles and misconceptions
of his own milieu. Perhaps it seemed to him to be the most appropriate ethical and
epistemological framework in which to set more urgent reflections about pressing
choices for the present. For although he was reflecting on the human condition in
general, he wanted to choose for his reflections the theoretical background which
would best expose what he saw as the folly most characteristic of his own era, and
perhaps of his own class in particular.  

This was the folly of extravagance in human
aims and claims: claims to greatness, to power, and especially to certainty. His
objective was perhaps to warn his own society in particular, even before mankind
overall, that such claims only encourage a sterile, destructive complacency and
irreverence; and through this negative attitude, Man loses both his special identity as
a creature and the privileges and benefits which he was meant to enjoy by virtue of
this creaturely status.

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5 See Qoh. 12:9b.

6 See below, Chapter 7, Section v and Chapter 10, Section i (cf. Section iv, 17th. footnote); see also
Appendix Three, THE ERA OF QOHELETH.
Qoheleth is an exhortation to re-acknowledge the mysterious, incalculable element in the divine dispensation, and to re-affirm the creaturely limitations of Man and of human understanding. Written in an age of Greek intellectual dominance, and also deeply influenced by its author's Biblical / Near-Eastern literary heritage, this book has a unique role to play in pinpointing those insights into the 'wisdom' versus 'anti-wisdom' controversy which are common to both Hellenic and Hebrew tradition. It invites fruitful comparison with a variety of Hebrew, Greek and other works which expose either the blind tyranny of misguided human self-assurance before the inscrutability of the divine order, or the baffled helplessness of human anguish (whether deserved or undeserved) in the unpredictable supernatural minefield of experience. Any such comparisons, from whichever of these cultural and literary traditions, could shed important light on Qoheleth's treatment of this common theme, which is permeated with awareness of the dangers of trusting human wisdom.

In order to elucidate the exact aim peculiar to Qoheleth, however, it is essential to bear in mind that this book not only  

7  disparages human claims to certainty, but also  

8  depicts Man's actual uncertainty as pre-ordained by God to serve a positive, even indispensable, moral function in maintaining his identity and correct status as mere Man. To understand how our author came to this position, it is necessary to examine where he stands in relation to other thinkers on the issue of how Man undermines the proper order of things, - and thus also undermines his own wellbeing, - by trying to be more than Man.

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7 Like the other books of the Bible.

8 In this respect (by contrast) it is, within the Canon, probably unique.
On this issue, it is the other works of the Hebrew Bible with which Qoheleth should be compared first. For it is close comparison with the other Biblical authors, and perhaps on this topic more than on any other, which exposes the superficiality of the frequent claims that Qoheleth is a misfit in the Biblical Canon. Such claims only serve to obscure the author’s real purpose, which is essentially pietistic. The key convictions behind this purpose are derived from and organically related to the same matrix of Hebrew faith from which the other books of the Bible and Qoheleth itself all emerged.

Ultimately, however, the non-Biblical literary influences on Qoheleth are also of crucial importance. This is partly because the literary scope of the ancient ‘wisdom’ versus ‘anti-wisdom’ controversy, with its associated issue of Man’s dangerous tendency to aspire to godhead, extends beyond the Bible. But it is also due to another related problem: Qoheleth’s concept of what it is that actually constitutes piety. For in shaping this concept, the ethics of Greek wisdom-theory, as well as the ethics of Hebrew tradition, appear to have had their part to play. This is largely why Qoheleth’s particular brand of piety appears highly idiosyncratic when examined in an exclusively Biblical context, without reference to Greek wisdom; so much so, that his piety has often been misconstrued as cynicism.

The literary sources examined in this thesis, therefore, will include both Biblical and non-Biblical material impartially. The works discussed will comprise not only those likely to have influenced Qoheleth directly, but also any which shed light on the
ancient and universal ‘wisdom’ versus ‘anti-wisdom’ controversy in such a way as to clarify either the internal meaning of the book or its place in the overall literature concerned with that controversy.

[^If this issue was indeed a major stimulus in motivating the composition of Qoheleth, as it appears to have been, such works will have had considerable indirect influence on the book, and should therefore have an important part to play in the task of interpreting it, by shedding light on the very problem to which the book is chiefly addressing itself.]
CHAPTER 1

QOHELETH'S VIEW OF MAN IN THE ETHICAL CONTEXT OF THE
HEBREW BIBLE

CREATURE, NOT DIVINITY: QOHELETH EPITOMIZES THE BIBLICAL VIEW
OF MAN

In view of Qoheleth's persistent reputation as a misfit in the Biblical canon, and the frequent charges brought against it of negativity and the absence of divine justice, one might reasonably ask whether the book is representative of Biblical ethics at all, on this issue or on any other.

At first sight, perhaps, such a question might appear to be "meaningless" and "a chasing after the wind" ¹ anyway. For it could be argued that, in a way, there is no such thing as 'Biblical Ethics': not, at least, in the simplistic sense of one single, comprehensive ethical system, which could be applied consistently to the entire Bible. Qoheleth could not be 'representative' of a system which does not even exist. Moreover, even if it did exist, it seems likely that our author would be the first to

¹N.I.V. translation of Qoh. 1:14 b, "הַבְיֶלָה רַעַת רַעַת".
warn us against naïvely or precipitately accepting it.  

Nevertheless, despite this book’s reputation for so-called unorthodoxy, and despite also the immense variety of the many different Biblical books, in style, era and theological approach, everything the Hebrew Bible has to tell us about relations between God and Man always seems to point to the same conclusion, and one with which Qoheleth is no less in harmony than the rest of the Canon. The prime issue is always to denounce and to oppose the perversity of ego in Mankind that seduces him to assert his own personality and will contrary to God’s sovereignty. This moral priority, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, is perhaps the only value which is adamantly omnipresent throughout the entire Hebrew Bible; and this specific value, uniquely unifying because uniquely ubiquitous to the entire Biblical Corpus, Qoheleth reflects with fiercer intensity than any other single book within that Corpus. For it is the bluntest of all the Biblical books in ruthlessly demolishing all man’s independent ego and aspirations to self-sufficiency. This makes it representative of Biblical ethics, in the sense of epitomizing them, to an unparalleled degree.

Paradoxically, however, this very intensity with which Qoheleth crystallizes the Bible’s ultimate implication about Man, - i.e., his lack of justified and independent power, - makes this book as untypical of the Hebrew Bible in mood ³ as it is

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³It is untypical in mood because its direct, focal attention to humanity’s limitations gives it a more sombre perspective on human life than most of the Bible. The other books emphasize rather the limitless power of God, and therefore also the genuine and often remarkable achievements of His followers through His guidance, support and intervention on their behalf. Even in Job, which comes nearest to Qoheleth in stressing how dangerous it is for Man to think he is wise and knows all the answers, the hero’s restoration to all his former greatness and more besides as an esteemed and powerful chieftain brings the
quintessential of the Bible in its formulations about the point of life. These formulations include Chapters 2:24 & 25; 3:13, 14 & 22; 9:1 & 7-9; and especially 12:13 & 14. Such formal statements in the book about Man’s highest good and essential limitations are intimately interdependent. For Qoheleth’s prime theme is that for Man, failure to understand and accept his limitations is his greatest problem, resulting in the very anxiety and ambition he should avoid. His highest good is to live intelligently and contentedly within the framework of these limitations, whether they are limitations of choice, or of duration, or of understanding.

One could perhaps argue that Qoheleth, in thus attempting to define formally the relation of Man to life, and to reconcile Man with himself and with life focus back, at the very end of the book, to how great Man can be when God is with Him, instead of how helpless Man is in himself.

"The idea that these last two verses are later glosses by pietist editors trying to tame the cynicism of the original author is highly unlikely. In fact, it is doubtful whether this claim can be upheld for any passages of Qoheleth, even the much-disputed 8:13, as explained below, this Chapter, this Section, in regard to the wicked thinking their prosperity will enable them to cheat death; see also this Chapter, Section ii on the moral implications of death; and Chapter 5, especially Sections i & ii.

2:22-6.


As in 3:1-15 or 9:11 & 12.

See 2:14-16; 7:2; 9:5 & 6.

7:23 & 24; 3:11.

See, e.g., the unusual phrasing of 12:13b, where fearing God and keeping His commandments is called "מֶאָכָל מְלֹא מֶאָכָל - מָלֵא מֶאָכָל "

"the whole of Man".

It is not the characteristic style of the Biblical writings to use the concept of reverence and obedience to God (even while acknowledged, as here, to be the most important thing in life) simply as a tool to define Man. Qoheleth, however, unlike most Biblical writers, is concerned with defining Man, in so far as he is concerned with the delimitation of Man by indicating the boundaries of Man’s understanding and capabilities.
in general, with or without reference to any divinity, is more characteristic of the Greek philosophical schools than of anything else in the Bible. Nevertheless, his adherence to the outstandingly consistent ethical priority of the entire Hebrew Bible - i.e., the all-importance of viewing Man as without legitimate power, except as derived from and dependent upon God, - is more organic and all-pervasive to his work than any quasi-philosophical habits of thought. This adherence is consistent, despite his unusual way of expressing humanity’s necessary dependence. He describes it in terms of deliberately, divinely imposed limitations, especially incompleteness of knowledge. In fact, even this is not unique within the Bible. It accords exactly with the main implications of the account of Man’s Fall in Genesis, including Adam and Eve’s alleged exclusion from being " -as gods", 11 and the fact that the forbidden fruit is a tree specifically

"of the knowledge of good and evil". 12

Another link with this Genesis story is the high value Qoheleth sets on enjoyment 13 and on companionship. 14 While this is also easily compatible with Greek values, 15 it nevertheless reflects with more striking exactness the same mindset as the Biblical Creation and Fall story. In Genesis, although the tree of

11Gen. 3:4.

12Ibid. 2:17; compare 3:5 & 6, where the tree is said to be "desirable for gaining wisdom".

13Qoh. 2:24-6; 3:12; 9:7 & 9, etc.

14Ibid. 4:9-12; 9:9.

15See below, Chapter 2, Sections v and vi. See also below, Chapter 10, Section i on Simon the Just’s apparent interest in introducing into his native piety, as a possible antidote to the social dislocation of his age, a concept modelled on the Greek ideal of "φιλοσοφία".
knowledge is forbidden, all other trees in the Garden, which is purely a pleasure-garden anyway, are allowed, for both nourishment and delight. Furthermore, being alone is the very first thing that God pronounces "not good."

God’s abrupt statement of disapproval here is bound to impress the reader / hearer most forcibly, since the account up to this point has been punctuated with the refrain,

"And God saw that it was good.". This reiteration of divine approval climaxes in 1:31 in the slightly expanded form,

"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."

There is no doubt that the undesirability of solitude is a major ethical point of the Genesis Creation and Fall Account as we have it, since it could hardly have been more heavily emphasized than it is. This account is a strong negation of Man’s aspirations to the lofty, lonely pinnacle of godhead. Man is affirmed as a creature; and as a creature, he is designed for enjoyment and for companionship. These are his essential hallmarks, and the key to his special identity among spiritually aware beings.

\[16:2:17.
\[17:1:29; 2:16.
\[18:2:18.
\[19:Chapter 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21 & 25.
\[20:On this point, compare Qoh. 9:7-9 with Gilgamesh Tablet X, iii, 2-14, as discussed below, Chapter 7, Section i and Appendix One.
The enjoyment and companionship which are Mankind's appointed lot before the Fall are represented as being of so high an order as to include complete awareness of God's presence, complete dependence on God, and complete, peaceful and happy familiarity with the opposite sex. All this Adam and Eve enjoy without any of the associations of fear, shame or unease later attached to awareness of God's presence, to dependency of any kind, and to easy openness between the sexes. The ethical emphasis of this Fall Account, then, implies a vehement rejection both of independence and of the aspiration to individual greatness as guiding ideals of life, since these attitudes are represented as having played the main part in robbing Man of the joys of Eden.

It is not hard to believe that Qoheleth lives in Ptolemaic Palestine, in an era whose acquisitive, arrogantly man-centred spirit was initiated by the vaunting ambition of the 'god' Alexander. Alexander unwittingly blazed the trail for some singularly uninspiring Ptolemaic and Seleucid tyrants to rule his divided empire after him, and aspiration to godhead was one of the (to a Hebrew monotheist) unacceptable traits numbered among their various eccentricities. Understandably unattracted by the semi-divine king ideal introduced by an alien culture, Qoheleth returns to a basic axiom of

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21 Despite both the man and the woman being without clothing; see Gen. 2:25, and contrast Ibid. 3:7 and 10-11.

22 E.g., Gen. 3:8-10, Ex. 19:10-14; cf. Ibid. 20:18-21.

23 Even on God.

24 Even when clothed. E.g., Gen. 24:65.

25 See below, Chapter 7, Section v and Chapter 10, Section i (cf. Section iv, 17th. footnote); see also Appendix Three, THE ERA OF QOHELETH.
his native faith, and confirms the creaturely nature of Man, as expressed in *Genesis*. He invokes the mood of the *Genesis* picture by cryptic allusions to it, reminding us that we must return to dust. 26 He also chooses to emphasize the difference between the human and the divine, as the Bible overall tends to do, albeit usually less stringently than *Qoheleth*.

So also, in many ways, does highly influential ancient literature outside the Bible. 27 However, non-Biblical attitudes toward human aspirations to or connexions with godhead display some intriguing potential for tension between horror and sympathy, as is illustrated by, e.g., the Adapa Myth, 29 or by Sophocles' sympathetic picture of the hero Oedipus' miraculous passing from life in *Oedipus at Colonus*. 30 Pindar 31 mentions both the differences and the similarities between men and gods, and their close kinship with each other. In *Qoheleth*, however, as elsewhere in the

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27 See, e.g., *Gilgamesh*, discussed below, Chapter 7, Section i and Appendix One; also *Iliad* Books 5, L.440 ff., 17, L.443 ff., 21, L.462 ff., and 24, L.525 ff.

28 The very fact that some very popular legendary characters (like Achilles, Herakles, etc.) are of half human and half divine parentage shows that a concept of kinship between gods and humans played an important part in the mythopoetic imagination.

29 The very similarities between this myth and the *Genesis* Creation and Fall story only serve to make the differences between the two stories all the more striking. Particularly remarkable is the fact that the god who created Adapa is actually deceiving him when he warns him not to eat the bread of life and the water of life which Anu offers him. In fact, this bread and water would literally have given him immortality; and this implies that, in Anu's view at least (by contrast with Ea's), immortality is actually Adapa's rightful entitlement, by virtue of his wisdom.

30 By contrast, however, for the same poet's presentation of Oedipus as a pseudo-sage of anti-wisdom in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see below, Chapter 3, Section vi; Chapter 4, Sections i, ii (third footnote), v, vi and vii; and Chapter 7, Section v.

31 In *Nemean Ode 6*. See also below, Chapter 2, Section ii.
Bible, we find unreserved disapproval for Man overreaching himself.

Just as Gen. 3:19b points forward to Man's ultimate return to dust in order to humble his disastrous ambition to become as a god, so also Qoh. 3:20 invokes the same image as the best antidote to that type of "superb self-confidence in humanity"

which might lead us to forget that

"Man is not God, and it is impious to think it." 34

Qoheleth, however, goes further than Genesis. Not only is Man not a god; he is the same sort of creature as an animal. 35 Furthermore, the author sees this not just as an abstract, scientific fact, but as something Man has an ethical obligation to understand about himself:

"As for Man, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals." 36

Ps. 49:12 & 20 is making exactly the same point as Qoheleth here: because prosperous men perish "like the beasts", their prosperity should not deceive the wicked into thinking they can cheat death. 37

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32 Even in Ps. 8, where Man is celebrated as ruler of all God's works (vv 5-8), the main emphasis is still the majesty of God more than of Man (Ibid. vv 1-3 and v 9). In the light of God's greatness, the Psalmist marvels that He has shown mere Man such great honour (v 4).

33 As also does Ps. 90:3.

34 H.D.F. Kitto, The Greeks, P.61. See also below, Chapter 2, Section ii.

35 Qoh. 3:18-21; cf. Ps. 49:12 & 20.

36 Qoh. 3:18.

37 For the tendency of the rich to forget they have to die, see below, Chapter 6, Section iv. Compare Ps. 49:5-10 with Qoh. 2:14b-16, and also with 8:8. On 8:13 & 14, see also below, this Chapter, Section ii. A non-cynical interpretation of 8:13 makes far more sense of its juxtaposition between 8:13, an
This is a clear example of how Qoheleth's view of Man is the same view as is found elsewhere in the Bible, only more so. By intensifying the picture in *Genesis* 3:19b, he goes beyond it so far as to alter its immediate implications radically. In *Genesis*, the emphasis is that Man is above the animals, not that he is on a par with them. He is, admittedly, represented as a fellow-creature, and as one who, like them, has become subject to death. Nevertheless, the main point is that God had made Man originally in His own image, and to have dominion over the animals; and there is no suggestion that this dominion is revoked after the Fall. If anything, it rather intensifies.

Qoheleth does not deny this dominion of Man over the other creatures, but neither does he echo the note of triumph about it found elsewhere in the Bible. Similarly, he is not enthusiastic about the dominion of particular human kings over other men. He does affirm the King's authority; but he affirms it with no warmth at all, and without even expecting it to last very long. Unlike many professed affirmation of belief in divine justice, and 8:15, which is a statement of Qoheleth's realistic, homely counter-policy to the unrealistic, vaunting arrogance of the wicked in their prosperity. Both 8:14 and *Ps.* 49 tell us that the prosperity of the wicked is only fleeting. The parallels in actual wording and overall message between *Ps.* 49 and *Qoh.* are too striking to be ignored here; and since the moral message of *Ps.* 49 is unmistakable, it makes no sense to take *Qoh.* 8:13-15 as anything other than the same moral message. Cf. Chapter 5, Sections i & ii.

38 The possibility of different sources having made up *Genesis* as a whole is not the issue here, since Qoheleth is more than likely to have known *Genesis* in its present, unified form.


40 Ibid. 9:2 & 3.

41 Especially in Psalm 8.

42 *Qoh.* 8:2-5 and 10:20; see, in striking contrast, the decided warmth of *II Sam.* 7:8-18; *Prov.* 16:10 & 12-15; 20:8; 21:1; *Ps.* 45; 72; 2:6 ff., etc.
devotees of 'wisdom', he does not desire, aim for or recommend dominion and control. As the glory of specific kings and rulers does not excite him, so neither does the exaltation over other creatures of Mankind as a whole, whom God is elsewhere said to have made

" -only a little lower than the heavenly beings,
And crowned - with glory and honour". 44

Qoheleth does not exult with the Psalmist that God

" -made him ruler over the works of His hands,
(and) put everything under his feet:
All flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
All that swim the paths of the seas.". 45

As far as Qoheleth is concerned, Man has nothing to be proud of at all. He cannot guarantee anything, not even ethical essentials like justice, 46 let alone his own security against general disaster, 47 or against death and consequent obscurity forevermore. 48 So for humanity to recognize its lowly status, as mere creature, subject to death, is a major ethical priority in Qoheleth. The book shows this to be essential in order for Man to have any hope at all of real self-understanding.

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43 Qoh. 4:13-16.
44 Ps. 8:5.
46 3:16; 4:1-3 & 8; 7:15b; 8:14; 9:2 & 3.
47 5:14; 6:2 & 3; 9:12.
The main reason why Qoheleth makes such frequent reference to death is because he believes that remembering one has to die is the key antidote to arrogant irreverence, which is the nadir of human misconduct. The chief point of saying that everyone ends up in the grave, whether wicked or righteous, wise or foolish, is not to convince the wise and the righteous that there is no point in their virtues, which he values sincerely. Since he prefers good to evil, he feels no need to persuade the righteous of anything, or to change their viewpoint at all; he agrees with their position anyway. Rather, his aim here is, on the contrary, to convince the wicked that there is no point in being wicked.

This is the force of 8:8:

"No man has power over his spirit to retain it,
So no-one has power over the day of his death.
As no-one is discharged in time of war,
So wickedness will not release those who practise it."

This message is particularly for the wicked, since it is the wicked who most of all need convincing. They are the ones who are blinded by their own arrogance and self-

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49 See also below, Chapter 3, Section iv.

50 9:2.

51 2:14-16.


53 Cf. Prov. 1:20-23 and 8:5, specifically addressing those who are not wise; and Prov. 8:1-10 and Qoh. 12:9, showing both bodies of Wisdom to be intended for the general public, not just for an élite group or caste of Wisdom-initiates.

54 Though it is also relevant to encourage those suffering oppression by the wicked.
importance into believing that their wickedness - their ruthless selfishness and unscrupulous cleverness - is the answer to everything. This is what they believe will deliver them from the hazards of fortune to which all mankind is vulnerable; and this is what they believe will exempt them from the need to conform to any rules at all. Rules are only for those who are not wicked, and therefore weak and vulnerable enough to feel bound to submit to them.

In Ps. 73:3-12, there is a perfect reflection of the same kind of attitude Qoheleth also envisages in the wicked, who think themselves way above the chances and misfortunes of lesser men. In vv 4 & 5, the Psalmist has been deceived into envying the wicked because of their outward prosperity. Also, their blind belief in their own success and their own swaggering self-image of felicity, wildly misguided though they are, have begun to mislead the Psalmist as well, and to convince him that the wicked are well off. So he says bitterly,

"They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to Man, They are not plagued by human ills."

So far, they sound suspiciously like the "gods" of Gen. 3:5; and vv 7b, 8b, 9 & 11 of this Psalm do nothing to alleviate this image:

"The evil conceits of their minds know no limits 55, - In their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, And their tongues take possession of the earth. - They say, "How can God know?"

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55 Compare below, Chapter 2, Section iv, for reference to Euripides' Eurystheus and to Aeschylus' Xerxes as examples of hybristic men, essentially because their thoughts / intents / self-estimation exceed the limits proper to mortals. For hybris on these lines, see also below, Chapter 3, especially Sections iii, iv, v and vi, and Chapter 4, especially Sections i, v (including final footnote), and vii. For Xerxes, see also Chapter 3, end of Section iv; Chapter 4, Section i and end of Section v; and Chapter 9, Section iv.
Does the Most High have knowledge?" 56

Despite all the boundless power this type of person imagines he has, Qoheleth is insistent that there is one rule even this type must obey, and one "burden common to Man" and "human ill" to which even he is subject, and that is the law of death. 57 The wicked are the one category of person who, because they are arrogant, and "pride is their necklace", 58 do not really take in the fact that they have to die. 59  Ps. 49:6-14 also reflects this point, e.g., in vv 11 & 12:

"In their thoughts, (those whose faith is in riches think) their houses shall remain forever, their dwellings for endless generations;
-But Man, despite his riches, does not endure.
He is like the beasts that perish.".

So also in Qoh. 7:4; although

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning", nevertheless,

" the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.".

Qoheleth’s message to these fools is that because

" -death is the destiny of every man,
The living should lay this to heart.". 60

This is the only sobering antidote to the arrogant aping of godhead that causes Man

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56Cf. above, this Chapter, Section i, for the comparably negative picture Psalm 49 gives of the blindly materialistic outlook.

57Cf. Pss 37:35 & 36; 49:10, 12 & 20; and 73:27.

58Ps. 73:3 & 6.

59See also below, Chapter 6, Section iv and Chapter 7, Section i.

60Qoh. 7:2.
to pile sin on sin, to thwart his own primary needs, and to become odious to God and to his fellow-Man.
Qoheleth emphasizes man's limitations, but the Bible overall stresses his potential.

A favourite theme of Qoheleth is that human life is essentially transient. "Transient" is not the least important overtone of his oft-reiterated term "ךְלָל", which argues for a non-cynical interpretation of 8:14. For the good fortune of the wicked will not last, and neither will the ill-fortune of the good; they are both "fleeting". Because life is so fleeting, and all man's endeavour and hope of influencing his own fate ends in death anyway, there is no more to man than fearing God and keeping His commandments.

This is indeed an epitome of what the entire Hebrew Bible implies about man; and it means that, since any power and dignity he has is merely derived from God, man simply in himself would be powerless and insignificant. However, what marks Qoheleth out from the rest of the Biblical writers is that he is not content simply to imply; he is concerned to press the point home. And the singular intensity characterizing his crystallization of man's intrinsic helplessness as a self-contained being takes the form of a deeply disturbing picture of human endeavour.
Qoheleth vividly reflects the fact that the ceaseless bustle, toil and movement of the relentlessly repetitive cycle of activity "under the sun" are not balanced by any clear evidence of lasting profit or progress. Qoheleth poses, in effect, the question, "Do all this activity and vigour, despite the impressive show of significance and progress they present, lead to any real, solid benefit for Man? Or does the frantic cycle of human life tend only toward frustration, with Man pursuing an ephemeral and only dimly understood goal, trapped in an unfathomable pattern of empty repetition?"

He not only asks this question by implication, in the restless picture he draws of the cycle of nature and of human history, but he also asks the question directly:

"What gain / profit is there....?"

No other Biblical author challenges us so directly as to whether the ceaseless, strenuous ambition and activity so characteristic of Man, the chief hallmark of his species, is of any real profit. The uniqueness within the Hebrew Bible of this level of challenge to humanity as a whole is due to the fact that the other Biblical

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65 1:5-11.

66 1:2 & 3; 1:14 & 17; 2:11, etc.

67 E.g., in 1:1-11.

68 E.g., in 1:3, 3:9 and 5:16; cf. 2:22.

69 See, e.g., below, Chapter 9, Section vii, for the counter-productiveness of pursuit, especially intellectual / verbal pursuit, in that pursuit itself can actually rob the pursuer of the object pursued.

70 As distinct from the wicked in particular, who are commonly challenged in the Bible. Their endeavours are bound to be frustrated, because God Himself is committed to frustrating them. See, e.g., Ps. 146:9b and 147:6b. Notice, however, that Job 5:13 reflects implicit awareness of anti-wisdom as a concept; here, 'the wise' have somehow become synonymous with God's traditional opponents 'the wicked'. Now it is 'the wise' whom God is out to trap and to bring down. Cf. Jer. 8:8-9, Is. 29:14b, and the other prophetic protests against 'the wise', discussed below, this Chapter, this Section. They also use the term 'wisdom' in the sense of 'anti-wisdom' and 'the wise' as a negative term.
books do not push their implication of Man’s helplessness in himself to its logical conclusion with the relentless acuity that *Qoheleth* does. 71

In the case of the other Wisdom books, this is because, with their more humanistic perspective than the rest of the Bible, they are neither as disenchanted with human ambition, nor as cynical about the possibility of human greatness and magnificence, as *Qoheleth*. 72 *Proverbs*, in particular, strongly affirms ambition as a value, sometimes virtually equating Wisdom with the means whereby one succeeds

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71 *Job*, however, comes closest to *Qoheleth* in its insistence on Man’s blindness to his own lack of understanding. See Chapter 5, Section iii, and also Sections v and ix for the light shed by *Job* on *Qoh*. 5:1’s “the sacrifice of fools who do not know that they do wrong”.

This standpoint of *Job* and *Qoheleth* is not, in reality, negative about humanity in itself as it is sometimes taken to be, negative though it is about humanity’s false pretensions to knowledge and its unprofitable, insatiable striving. *Qoheleth* does not blame Man for his helplessness, however uncompromising he may be in pointing it out. Since Man was deliberately designed to be a dependent creature and not a god, this author does not see his dependence as a defect. He does, however, see Man’s failure or refusal to recognize and acknowledge this dependence as a defect, since it lures him into fruitless efforts which frustrate his real needs. See also above, this Chapter, Section i and below, Chapter 2, passim, especially Sections iv-vi.

72 See Ps. 112:1-3, 8 & 9; Prov. 3:16, 4:8 & 9 and 8:18; *Song of Songs* 3:6-11; and *Job* 42:10 & 12-17; cf. Ibid. 1:2 & 3.

The idealized lover in *Song of Songs* 3:6-11, marked out by the magnificence of his carriage and its impressive escort, is actually named (vv 7, 9 & 11) as Solomon. Solomon is the character chosen for the lover because he is the outstanding symbol of human wisdom, and hence of the greatness, wealth and power often associated with ‘wisdom’. It is also the attractiveness of these attributes which is celebrated in *The Song of Songs*, not only the physical attractiveness of the lovers (e.g., 5:10-16 and 6:4 - 7:9) and the delights of love and of nature’s beauty in general.

Wedding celebrations are often associated with the greatness of Man as opposed to his smallness relative to the divine. This is why the ritual ribaldry associated with them in many cultures and eras is often explained as an attempt to ward off the evil eye or the jealousy of the gods. The popular image of brides and grooms, reinforced by the wedding rituals of many cultures, tends to be one of dignity and royalty anyway. The custom of the wedding-crown referred to in 3:11 is probably not confined to actual kings, but symbolizes the kinglike dignity of bridegrooms as such. Solomon is, therefore, a natural symbol to choose for the idealized lover. By contrast to the celebration of Man’s greatness, however, see below, Chapter 7, especially Section ii, for a discussion of *Qoheleth*’s rejection of all that Solomon traditionally symbolizes: both the type of wisdom he represents, and the magnificence and power closely associated with it.

34
in life. 73

In most Biblical books other than the Wisdom books, however, it is for the opposite reason that Man’s standing in Creation and his ability to influence events of ultimate importance are not so drastically reduced to the minimum as in Qoheleth. That is to say, it is because the authors’ interests are in most cases more God-orientated than Man-orientated. Neither Law nor Prophets, Psalms nor Historical Books reveal the same urgent drive to expose the insignificance of human ambitions with the ruthless clarity of Qoheleth. For since God and His greatness constitute the chief focus of their attention, Man does not; hence, neither does Man’s relative insignificance, nor the futility of his ambitions and efforts.

Furthermore, these prophets and earlier pietists tend to stress that God is not arbitrary, and always keeps His Word, sometimes pointing this as a deliberately poignant contrast with human faithlessness. This means that if a man is a loyal vassal of God, he is in a very strong position, especially if he is also one of God’s covenant people, since he can negotiate an agreement with God on absolutely secure terms. They emphasize the predictability of God, 74 and stress retribution theology, in order to confirm that He is reliably committed to ethical principles, 75 even though they also display, in balance with this, a corresponding concern about the suffering of the

73 Prov. 3:16; 4:8; 8:18 & 21; 14:24. For Qoheleth’s strongly contrasting view, see below, Chapter 7, Section v.

74 This is sometimes regarded as a reaction against what may have been taken as the capriciousness of their ancestral, ethnic God in some strands of tribal tradition. See, e.g., Gen. 4:4-5; Ex. 4:24; I Sam. 26:19; and I Ki. Chs. 17 - 22, for possible reflections of this.

75 Is. 31:2; Mal. 3:6a; Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29.
The Wisdom school, however, prior to Job and Qoheleth, and particularly the trim pedagogic elegance of the Proverbs approach, had the effect of streamlining retribution theology in such a way as to minimize direct reference to this problem. Wisdom tended to stress that God could be relied upon to give people their just deserts rather than addressing the issue of the suffering of the righteous; and although the Sages of Proverbs themselves promoted a high standard of personal humility, which tended to counterbalance this omission, and to neutralize its morally negative potential, there is evidence to suggest that the Wise Men of succeeding generations declined from this standard.

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77 Jer. 5:27-8 and 12:1 & 2; Ps. 37:1, 7, 35 & 36; Ps. 73:3-7 & 12; Mal. 3:15, etc.

78 E.g., Prov. 10:3 & 24; 11:21 and 12:7.


80 Namely, the prophets' protests against 'wisdom' and 'the wise'. See, e.g., Is. 19:11-15, 29:14 and 44:25, and probably also 5:20-1, if "those who are wise in their own eyes" refers there also to a professional class of wise men, as it appears to in the other passages. Also, Jer. 8:8 & 9 seems to be similarly referring to 'the wise' as a definite class in society. Their social significance is shown in v 8 to be religious, because they falsely claim to be experts on the religious law, whereas in Is. 19:11-15, since "the wise" are Egyptian courtier-counsellors, it is in a political capacity that they are supposed to be 'wise'. Is. 31:2's comment that God too is wise is a sarcastic reference to their supposed monopoly of wisdom as a class of political advisers. However, in Is. 44:25 'the wise' are religious, since they are classed with false prophets, and, as in Ibid. 29:14, God shows the same zeal in his commitment to refuting them that He reserves for false religionists. False religionists are the objects of His particularly fierce wrath because it is He whom they are misrepresenting. Jer. 8:9 conveys the same sense that God is in direct opposition to 'the wise' and fully committed to discrediting their 'wisdom' as Is. 29:14.

These unworthy successors of the Wisdom tradition appear, in effect, to have, trivialized its axioms by retaining the simplicity of its reward and punishment theory, but losing sight of the old humility, probably through looking at the original axioms from a cynical perspective that would have been wholly foreign to their originators. Judging by the terms in which the reaction against this kind of ‘wisdom’ is phrased in Job and Qoheleth, it seems as though this negative trend in the wisdom school had transformed the old teaching, especially with regard to reward and punishment theory, into a rigid, selfish recipe for religiously justifying worldly success on any terms, and hence for either condemning or ignoring the unfortunate, on the grounds that those who are doing well must always be morally right, or they would not be doing well.

In his insistence that he has seen

"A righteous man perishing in his righteousness and a wicked man living long in his wickedness", 81 it is against this facile abuse of reward and punishment theory that Qoheleth is reacting. It is an abuse which could easily become a hallmark of the ‘□’ as a class, especially in a situation where wisdom is an élitist pursuit. 82 Abuse of professional ‘wisdom’ induces a dangerously unrealistic intellectual arrogance in the religious ‘expert’. It is against this that Qoheleth is protesting, not, as C.H. Dodd thinks, against the pietistic belief that

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81 Qoh. 7:15; cf. 8:14, with its "righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, And wicked men who get what the righteous deserve.".

82 See below, Chapter 7, Section iii for Qoheleth’s opposition to élitist wisdom and Chapter 7, Section v for his opposition to a wisdom-based success ethic.
"there is a principle of justice somewhere embedded in the divine dealings."

It is not Qoheleth's objective to deny this principle of God's justice and reliability. For the arrogance with which he takes issue is not caused simply by belief in this principle, but rather by abusing belief in it. Moreover, he himself believes in an appointed 'time' for judgment, just as he believes in an appointed 'time' for everything. The time for judgment is just as specifically appointed by God as the time for anything else; and for Qoheleth, with his sensitivity to the miseries of the oppressed, and his desire for a cohesive, caring society based on mutual generosity instead of the dislocated society of selfish individualism he sees around him, the time for judgment and for an end to social injustice is the time on which his interest is most strongly focussed.

Judging by the emphasis in Job and Qoheleth on the importance of not laying 

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84 3:17.


86 E.g., 3:17, 11:9, 12:14.

87 See below, Chapter 10, Sections iv and vi.

88 See 4:1-3.

89 See Chapter 8, passim and Chapter 10, Sections i, ii, v and vii.

90 Note how the pattern of opposite times in 3:1-8 is sketched in as a theoretical background for the climactic statement of the passage in 3:17, that there is a time for judgment in particular, following 3:16's complaint about unjust judges. For Qoheleth's special interest in and unusual approach to the issue of judgment, see below, Chapter 9, end of Section i and Chapter 10, Sections iv and vi.
false claim to knowledge, and their challenging use of the term ‘wisdom’, these late Biblical wisdom books seem to be a continuation of the prophets’ protest against the abuse of ‘wisdom’ as a concept and against the corruption of ‘the wise’ as a religious and / or political caste. In fact, not only Qoheleth’s book but also his teaching of the people constitute a protest against abuse of the Wisdom tradition.

This abuse seems to include a complacent attitude amongst ‘the Wise’ to the social advantages they enjoy because the forerunners of their class, perhaps originally the Wise Men of Solomon’s Court, have become a privileged caste. Even Ben Sira, with his professed respect for the artisan, reflects nonetheless a view of wisdom which confines it to the leisured classes only, and which hence, in effect, makes it the unfair privilege of the materially fortunate.

This is not the standpoint of Qoheleth, since he

91 Sometimes reminiscent of the ironical use of the term by Isaiah and Jeremiah, and of the feeling these prophets convey that God is personally offended by and deeply opposed to anti-wisdom (i.e., to morally negative ‘wisdom’). See, e.g., Job 5:13, “(God) catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away.”.

92 Even though a proto-Sadducaean milieu seems quite a plausible setting for Qoheleth, with his interest in the Temple (5:1) and his lack of belief in the resurrection of the just (3:19-22), he is a pietist first before considerations of sect, class or politics, and if anything seems to want to dissuade people from avoidable political intrigue and dissidence (4:16, 8:2-3, 10:4).

93 Contrary to the apparently élitist tendencies of most wisdom-experts of his time.

94 Perhaps originally the Wise Men or political advisers of Solomon’s Court. If so, it is something of a historical irony that Is. 19:11-15 should be challenging the Egyptian counsellors. For Solomon, with his close relations with the Egyptian Court (I Kt. 3:1), may well have established his own Israelite class of Wise Men deliberately on the Egyptian model, perhaps with far-reaching negative consequences on Israelite society for many generations to come.

95 See 38:24ff.

96 In 38:32 & 34.
"-taught the people knowledge",
in line with the earlier popular image of wisdom in Prov. 1:20 ff. His editor, however,\(^\text{97}\) implies from the phrasing of 12:9 that this is unusual for his own era, apparently regarding teaching the people as something extra, beyond the normal duties of a Wise Man:

"Not only was Qoheleth a Wise Man, but also he imparted knowledge to the people."

Qoheleth seems to empathize more readily with the unfortunate than with the fortunate.\(^\text{98}\) The tragic spectacle of anguished and broken individuals, who have haplessly fallen foul of a pattern of circumstances they failed to interpret, foresee, escape or adjust to, like fish caught in a net,\(^\text{99}\) is more directly his concern than the preoccupations of a petty, privileged class of 'experts', who think that God is as small as they are, and that they have Him all worked out and in their pockets. Even the lonely figure of Gilgamesh, struggling fruitlessly to attain the impossible, just because the gods happen to be set against him achieving his quest for immortality, is easier

\(^{97}\)Or, if 12:9 also is written by the author of the main text himself, then he is speaking of himself here in the third person, whereas previously (e.g., 1:12-2:25, 3:17-4:7, etc.), he referred to himself in the first person.

\(^{98}\)See, e.g., the poignant repetition of 4:1’s 
"And (the oppressed) have no comforter".
It is this spectacle of oppression which evokes, in 4:2 & 3, one of the strongest anti-life statements of the entire book:

"And I declared that the dead, who had already died,
Are happier than the living, who are still alive.
But better than both is he who has not yet been,
Who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun."

Cf. Ibid. 6:3-6; see also below, Chapter 2, Section i, for the sensitivity to human vulnerability to reversals of fortune and unpredictable mischance which often lies behind such passionate anti-life outbursts, not only in Qoheleth but also in Greek literature as well.

for Qoheleth to relate to than a complacent religious élite, who believe that the
divine always favours them, and always works everything out cosily to their
advantage. 101

In emphasizing those aspects of God which are not predictable, Qoheleth is
probably seeking to reverse what he sees as the professional religious arrogance of
members of his own class. 102 He is not, as the Prophets and Lawgivers were,
addressing a nation urgently challenged by danger or controversy, and so needing
primarily to be told what they can be sure of about God. If perplexed by war, they
needed to know that God would prove a reliable defender; if tempted, confused or
intimidated by Baal-worship or some other foreign cult, they needed to be informed
or reminded that the true religion is about righteousness and justice, not sexual orgy,

100 Nevertheless, Qoheleth himself adopts in the end a completely opposite position from Gilgamesh’s
strenuous attempt to escape the inevitability of death; see below, Chapter 7, Section i and also below,
Appendix One. See also below, Chapter 3, Section iii, for how, at first, his own reaction to the inevitability
of death (and hence to the limitations death imposes on wisdom and on the influence wisdom brings) was
at first very extreme. Like Gilgamesh, he found it hard to come to terms with these realities, and showed
his non-affirmation of them by hating life (2:16-17). Yet despite having this past experience in common
with the hero famous for rebelling against death’s inevitability, Qoheleth comes round to a more mature
acceptance of the limitations imposed by mortality, because he comes to see that they serve an ethical
purpose.

101 There is a pagan error more or less parallel to this monotheistic one, namely the error of thinking
that τὸ χάριν (‘chance’) will always be on your side. See, e.g., Thucydides, Hist. IV, 18.3-4, where the
Spartan ambassadors warn the Athenians not to make this mistake. For a discussion of this, see Edmunds,
Lowell, Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides (Harvard, 1975), P.101 ff. See also below, Chapter 4,
Section ii, for how Oedipus in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus appears to misunderstand the nature of τὸ χάριν
by overlooking the danger of this same mistake.

Closely related to this error is the idea that present good fortune is bound to continue; see below,
Chapter 3, Section iii and Chapter 4, Sections iii, v final footnote, and vi. Qoheleth, in true Greek pietist
fashion, strongly opposes this idea; see below, Chapter 10, Sections iii and iv.

102 See R. Gordis, Koheleth - The Man and His World (New York, 1955), P.32-4, for a plausible
outline of what that class might be. See also below, Chapter 7, Section v and below, Appendix Three, for
Qoheleth’s possible setting.
nor inducement of fertility by mere ritual, nor any other amoral or immoral irrelevance. Yet these do not appear to be the kind of issues on which Qoheleth feels his public needs to be informed, since he does not address himself directly to these matters.

By contrast, however, Qoheleth does address himself to the moral problems arising from materialism, such as over-acquisitiveness, waste, both of goods and of effort, and social injustice and oppression of the poor. Also, he notes the danger of temptation to sin and of temptation to despair caused by neglect of justice.

This suggests that he is familiar with extremes of poverty and riches, an under-privileged poor class prone to despair and an over-privileged religious aristocracy, too secure in their simplistic reward-and-punishment theology to realize

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103. Whether of man, beast or field.
104. 2:26b; 4:4 & 7-8; 5:10-17 and 6:7-9.
106. 3:16, 4:1-3 and 5:8. The complaint of 4:2-3 is phrased in such extreme terms that the level of oppression he has witnessed must be, in his eyes, utterly intolerable.
107. 8:11.
108. 4:1 ff.
109. 3:16.
110. Perhaps, as Bickerman suggests in The Jews in the Greek Age (Harvard, 1988), Pp.258-9, because traditional Jewish tribal values in the Holy Land were breaking down in early Hellenistic times, so the rich no longer felt naturally obligated to the poor by strong social ties as they once would have done. See below, Chapter 10, Sections i and ii.
that prosperity is not absolute proof of merit. If so, it is important to explain to these two classes, in their opposite extremes of self-contempt and self-confidence, that they do not understand the full pattern of how and why Providence dispenses good fortune to some and hardship to others, nor of how human fortunes tend to alternate between opposite circumstances anyway, 111 nor the certainty of God’s just judgment in the end. 112

Probably, then, we should see Qoheleth as concerned not only to bring home to the under-privileged that God has an appointed time for judgment when their wrongs will be righted, 113 but also to warn his more prosperous fellows that God is not a tame, predictable being who will passively allow them to manipulate His Temple cult to their own advantage, or who will never confront them with any kind of challenge, such as a reversal of their own material fortunes, or a religious truth which does not fit in with their preconceptions.

However, in so far as the main body of the Hebrew Bible, in contrast to Qoheleth, emphasizes those aspects of God which are predictable, it does so in order to present Him as the ideal ally, both in power and in reliability. This is why most of the Bible keeps the spotlight on Man’s potential strength as God’s protegé, instead of, or at least as much as, his potential weakness without God. Most of the Biblical

111 See Qoh. 3:1-8, 7:14. etc. See also below, Chapter 3, Section iii and end of Section vi, footnote; Chapter 4, Section ii, end of twelfth footnote; also Section iii; Section v, final footnote (cf. second footnote of Section i); and Section vi. See also below, Chapter 10, Sections ii, iii, and iv.


113 See, e.g., below, Chapter 10, Section vi.
corpus, despite its infinite variety culturally and stylistically, is motivated by the same practical aim: it is consistently recommending love and loyalty toward God as Man's highest good, and even mere negotiation with God as very much in Man's interests; and no-one can successfully persuade A to negotiate with B unless they carry conviction both that B is trustworthy and that A will derive benefits of great value from the undertaking.

Since Man can rely on his strong God to make good to his advantage whatever he in himself lacks in strength, \(^{114}\) it is hardly surprising if his own weakness, which is unimportant apart from the part it plays in defining the vassal-nature of his relationship with God, is far from being the focus of attention. This is why, in \(Is.\) 40:6 & 11, the words "all flesh is grass" are succeeded by,

"(God) shall feed His flock like a shepherd";

and \(Ps.\) 103:15 ff.,

"As for Man, his days are as grass",

is similarly both softened and dignified by,

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him". \(^{115}\)

The entire psalm is insistent on the intimacy of God's care for the individual who worships Him, especially verses 13 & 14,

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.".

\(^{114}\)Is. 41:10-20; Jer. 1:8; \(Ps.\) 18 and 91, etc.

\(^{115}\)Ibid. v 17.
Similarly, Ps. 90 remembers \(^{116}\) that God returns men to dust; but then, in the final verse \(^{117}\) asks for the honour of God’s special favour and support.

According to this world-view, no explicit limitation is placed on Man at all, except the obligation of loyalty to God. The fact he is dust is treated sympathetically, as an opportunity for God to show compassion and favour to Him, not harped upon to humble his arrogance, as in Gen. 3:19b and Qoh. 3:19 & 20. \(^{118}\) For the Prophets, Psalmists, Lawgivers and Deuteronomists / Historians, as for the earlier Wisdom writers, Man with God on his side is just as powerful, even awesome, \(^{119}\) as Man without God is helpless.

Unlike Qoheleth, therefore, they do not posit Man’s non-acceptance of his limitations as his greatest problem. For them, to do so directly would be slightly out of focus. For this would not allow full scope for the vision they entertain of humanity’s potential status, or even of its present standing and position in creation overall, as one of great exaltation and dignity when under God’s acknowledged sovereignty. \(^{120}\) Therefore, they represent Man’s worst possible condition and attitude in terms of his negative standing directly in relation to God, \(^{121}\) rather than

\(^{116}\) Verse 3.  
\(^{117}\) Verse 17.  
\(^{118}\) And perhaps also Ibid. 12:7.  
\(^{119}\) See also below, Chapter 7, Section iv.  
\(^{120}\) Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:3-8.  
\(^{121}\) I.e., as direct disobedience to and open rebellion against God. See, e.g., Is. 1:19 & 20; Deut. 28:15 ff.
in Qoheleth's terms of his misunderstanding of himself, which is what his non-recognition of his own limitations amounts to in effect.

This viewpoint, while not incompatible with that of Qoheleth, nevertheless allows Man a potentially glorious self-image of great dignity; whereas Qoheleth, by contrast, avoids glorifying Man by vigorously challenging the worth of the very endeavours by which Man characteristically most hopes to gain glory. ¹²³

¹²²For in Qoheleth's eyes, Man's misinterpretation of himself, based on his non-acceptance of his own limitations, leads him into alienation from God, through over-asserting his own personality, views and objectives instead of listening to God; see Qoh. 5:1-7. See also below, Chapter 5, Sections v, vii, viii and ix. Cf. Chapter 9, end of Section iv, and, for the importance of avoiding excessive verbal self-assertion, Section vii. The alienation from God Qoheleth is warning against here is not unlike the rebellion envisaged by the earlier pietists, since both involve Man's egocentric self absorption in his own concerns, shutting out genuine communication with God.

¹²³See below, Chapter 7, especially Sections ii, iv and v.
IS THERE A RELATIVE REMOTENESS ABOUT QOHELETH'S GOD WHICH MAKES ITS PICTURE OF MAN UNIQUE WITHIN THE BIBLE?

In practical terms, this difference between Qoheleth and the Biblical mainstream as to what constitutes Man’s worst error is more one of atmosphere than of ethical outcome, because both transgressions produce the same problem. The actual result of both is the arrogant and unrealistic aspiration in Man to power and grandeur of his own, independent of God. In this aspiration, the rebel is doomed to ultimate frustration and total powerlessness. In Genesis, as in Qoheleth, this frustration is summed up in the inevitability of death.

In conceptual terms, however, highlighting rebellion against God as the central, prime evil, as most of the Bible does, presupposes that God is the correct and natural centre of human life; whereas Qoheleth’s pinpointing failure to understand oneself as the central human evil does not necessarily presuppose this. In theory, it could arise instead, no less naturally, from a world-view in which God is very remote from Man, far more so than He is in most Biblical writings; and some might argue that in Qoheleth, the reflective gaze of humanity falls primarily not on God, but on himself: that, from a position of relative isolation from God, though cautiously aware of Him as by far the most powerful piece on the chessboard of life, Man tries in this book to assess whether there is any mode of spending his life which can yield him lasting

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124 I.e., incorrect self-definition and self-interpretation, or direct and conscious rebellion against God.

125 I.e., “being as gods”, as in Genesis 3:4.

126 Gen. 2:17 and 3:3; also Ibid. 3:19b, echoed by the allusive wording of Qoh. 12:7 on death.
profit. 127

This idea, however, would wrongly presuppose that Qoheleth's own outlook coincides with the self-orientated and anthropocentric commercialism which, in reality, these reiterated questions about profit are designed to challenge. His use of commercial terminology in these passages is highly ironic; it is merely a rhetorical device for weighing the fanatical merchant in his own scales and finding him wanting. 128

Similarly, it would be rash to assume that Qoheleth is himself remote from God, or that he imagines everyone else is, simply because he depicts so vividly the wearisome sterility of the self-inflicted alienation from God which he finds so unsatisfactory wherever he does encounter it. The sense of God's remoteness in Qoheleth is represented as Man-induced. It is not a characteristic of God Himself; it is a negative by-product of Man's self-absorption and over-emphasis on his own petty personal goals, which cuts down his entire horizon to nothing but his own repetitive and feverish activity. 129 Qoheleth, while reflecting in the structure and imagery of

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127 Qoh. 1:3; 2:3b, 11 & 22; 3:9; 5:11b & 16; 6:12.

128 For the technique of "answering a fool according to his folly", i.e., demonstrating his deficiency even by his own criteria of assessment, see Prov. 26:5. Alternatively, in some cases it is more effective not to answer the fool "according to his folly", but rather to challenge his wrong criteria themselves, since arguing in accordance with them would make you look as if you also accept them (i.e., would make you look a fool yourself); see Ibid. 26:4. See also below, Chapter 7, Section 5, for Qoheleth's use of commercial terminology as a deliberate challenge to what he sees as the folly of profit-mania.

129 For the question of God's supposed remoteness in Qoheleth, see below, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix, which sets this issue in the context of the prime importance in Israel's spiritual tradition of God's literal presence.
his book the alienation from God which he sees in his own society and perhaps in Mankind more generally, is far from commending or even tolerating it. His disapproval of Man's isolation from God\textsuperscript{130} parallels his disapproval of Man's isolation from his fellow-men.\textsuperscript{131}

It is the difference between the practical and conceptual aspects of what he sees as Man's prime flaw that explains how Qoheleth can both epitomize the Biblical view of Man, and yet at the same time imply disavowal of Man's potential greatness and glory with an intensity which is peculiar to himself. What he believes about the practical outcome of rebellion against God is no different from what one finds elsewhere in the Bible; in fact, it is "the same only more so", i.e., formulated in more directly abstract, generalized language. This gives it more symbolic clarity and more theoretical breadth of application than any account of specific instances\textsuperscript{132} of human rebellion against God. In fact, Qoheleth does not directly refer to rebelling consciously against God as a recognized external entity; he refers instead to the fruitlessness of the self-appointed goals Man sets himself to pursue when he fails to be actively loyal to God. Like other Biblical authors, he presents for our disapproval a picture of human alienation from God; but he presents this alienation in terms of self-absorbed failure to perceive and interact with God, rather than of active rebellion

\textsuperscript{130}See below, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix.

\textsuperscript{131}Compare his declaration of his own ideals in 4:9-12 with his picture of social dislocation in 4:1-8 and 4:13-16. See also below, Chapter 10, especially Sections i, ii, v and vii; and cf. Chapter 8, Section iii on Qoheleth's exhortation to take risks in generosity, not hold back from giving for fear of not getting anything back.

\textsuperscript{132}1:12-2:21 is recounted in the first person as a specific personal experience; but the overall context in which it is set is much more generalized; and 2:20's reminiscence of personal despair is a launching pad for the general statements of 2:21 ff. on the human condition overall.
against Him or active loyalty to Him, both based on definite awareness of Him.

The meagre conceptual image this projects of Man's standing and influence in Creation overall gives *Qoheleth* a markedly different mood from the other Biblical books, despite reflecting much the same beliefs as the others about the ruinous consequences of alienation from God. This may be because *Qoheleth* is preoccupied with trying to capture and depict the exact essence and flavour of the general feeling of alienation from God which he has discerned in his fragmented society, whereas the other Biblical authors are content to convey God's message and demands regarding the negative situation, without feeling they have to paint so exact a portrait of the situation itself.

Hence, instead of projecting a prophetic-style enjoyment and triumph in the exalting vision of a God so great and glorious that the human inhabitants of the earth seem like grasshoppers by comparison, *Qoheleth* presents a horizon delimited by the grasshoppers instead; and we find their transience, feebleness, frantic activity, lack of integrity, wrong motivations and inappropriate self-importance unsatisfying.

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133 Quite probably, however, the author does not share this sense of distance from God on a personal level, since he does not embrace the materialistic and self-orientated way of life which gives rise to it. See below, Chapter 5, Section vii and Chapter 10, Section i and vii.

134 As in Is. 40:22.

135 8:8b & 10.
We can not catch a direct vision of God to rejuvenate our jaded spirits. 136

God seems too far away 137 even to punish the wicked according to any easily discernible pattern. 138 Although 3:17 expresses faith in divine justice, the reference to the "time" of judgment shows that this justice is subject to the same inscrutable principle expressed in 3:11: there is a time for judgment, 139 but as the man suffering the injustice does not know the predestined time of judgment, this is of no immediate comfort to the sufferer. So he is open to the temptation to feel resentful and despairing; and his prime effort in such times of misfortune must be to avoid an aggrieved self-righteousness, and maintain a pious patience. 140 He is not invited to expect a direct and speedy intervention to deliver him. 141 Rather, he must learn to adapt to the present situation 142 and await the right time 143 for the ultimate

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136The power of God and of His words are described as like dew, rain or cloud in, e.g., Deut. 32:2; Is. 44:3 and 55:10-11; Hos. 6:3b; Ps. 63:1, 42:1-2 and 143:6. (Cf. how, in Ps. 72:6 and in Prov. 16:15b and 19:12b, the favour of a human king is described in similar imagery of life-giving dew and raincloud.) In Qoheleth, the only glimpse of the refreshing dew of God's power to create and to restore, so familiar from the other Biblical books, is the indirect vision of it reflected in the author's concept of godly generosity, imaged by the clouds of 11:3a, which show they are genuinely full of water by pouring their rain on the earth. This verse is closely related to 11:1-2 on the importance of generous giving. See below, Chapter 8, Section iii and Chapter 10, Sections i and ii, cf. v and vii.

1373:2b.

1383:16; 4:1-3; 8:14; and 9:2 & 3; cf. Theognis Ll.373-92 and 743-52.

1393:17.

1407:14; Cf. Job 1:21b and 2:10.

141In contrast to, e.g., Ps. 17:13 & 14, 18:3-19, etc.

142See 7:14 for the fact that there is a divine purpose behind the bad times as well as the good ones, as discussed below, Chapter 10, Section iv.

1433:17.
judgment which will come in the end.  

Qoheleth does not, then, convey a vivid sense of God's intimate and immediate influence on human life; nor does he paint a warm or even arrestingly impressive picture of God's attributes in any detail, despite his theological conviction of God's supremacy. He never calls Him 'the Lord', which is His relatively familiar title as Israel's own Covenant God and special protector, but always by the more universalistic name 'Elohim'. This is probably partly because he identifies with the cosmopolitan approach of the Wisdom School tradition.

However, it is not necessarily, as often claimed, because he himself lacks the prophets' or psalmists' privilege of a sense of deep intimacy with God. For even if he himself does enjoy intimacy with his God, he is not eager to boast of it. On the contrary, he is suspicious of religious privilege and over-familiarity as a corrupting influence, for example on the national cult. He dislikes its devotees presuming on God's indulgence, perhaps because they consider themselves to be part of a supposed spiritual élite. He prefers not so much keeping a deliberate distance between men and God, but nevertheless emphasizing the fear of God rather than ease of access to Him. For he sees the alternative as over-inflated human self-esteem and slipshod irreverence:

__144__1:14; see below, Chapter 10, Section vi.

__145__See below, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix.

__146__5:1-7.

__147__See Chapter 6, Section i.
"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. 
Go near to listen, rather than to make the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. 
Do not be quick - to utter anything before God. 
God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so let your words be few. - 
Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, stand in awe of God."  

Qoheleth’s allusive use of Job in this passage suggests that he agrees with the importance attributed in Job to manifestations of God’s literal presence. However, this is because this kind of theophany is an unmistakably awesome manifestation of God’s presence. The presence of God in this literal sense, because it enhances the fear of God, is far preferable to maintaining a sense of remoteness from Him. Nevertheless, remoteness is preferable to a false, cheap pretence of intimacy without reverence; and Qoh. 5:1 ff. may reflect the fact that the familiar ritual of a well-established sacrificial cult can lull the worshipper into the misconception that the presence of God is cheap. It is in those situations where Man appears to have power, through prescribed sacrifice, to summon God, that irreverence can reach its grossest extremes; and it may be some such cultic scenario that lies behind Qoheleth’s censure of "the sacrifice of fools" in 5:1.

There is no reason, however, to interpret Qoheleth’s disapproval of presumptuousness in cult participants as evidence that he is against the cult as such. If anything, his insistence on not acting irreverently in the House of God argues

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148 5:1, 2 & 7. 

149 See below, Chapter 5, Section ix. 

150 5:1 ff.
his deep concern about the cult. He could perhaps be part of a proto-Sadducaean ruling class. His lack of faith in life after death, his advice to make full use of one's worldly goods, and even perhaps his claims to wealth seem to point in this direction; and so may his upper class sensibilities and his apparent interest in material refinements.

Even if he is part of such a wealthy and powerful circle, however, he seems dissatisfied with the unthinking materialism of his own class. To him, it is actually enjoying one's possessions that is worthwhile, not just heaping them up through pride or irrational compulsion. He also seems dissatisfied with the quality of the men he has seen officiating as priests. If, as part of a priestly party, Qoheleth is demanding reform of the cult, though not abandonment of it, the following suggestion of H.L. Ginsberg's seems plausible. He proposes translating 8:10 as:

"So too I have seen wicked men approaching to serve and profane"

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153 2:8 & 9. He may intend us to see this as part of his Solomon-image, rather than to take it literally; see below, Chapter 7, Section ii. Alternatively, however, he may be literally a wealthy man, who was influenced by this fact in choosing to assume the persona of Solomon in the first place. See also below, Appendix Three.

154 2:4-10. Here again, on one level he is playing the part of 'Solomon'; but the details he supplies sound like a building project of around his own era. See, e.g., the similarly massive building work attributed to Hycanus in Josephus' Ant. XII.230-4. Qoheleth may here be referring to something that he has literally done himself or seen his contemporaries doing. Note the same Persian loanword for 'parks' in both Qoh. 2:5 and Ant. XII.233, as described below, Chapter 7, Section v.

155 4:4, 7 & 8; 5:10 - 6:7.

156 I.e., as priests; Ginsberg is here reading "approaching", instead of "buried".

157 reading "profaned", instead of "used to go".
the Holy Place; whereas those who acted uprightly were forgotten in the city." 158

If, then, Qoheleth is critical, not perhaps of the cult itself, but at least of how it is conducted in his experience, this may help to explain how a book of otherwise apparently Sadducaean leanings found its way, despite Pharisaic authority, into the canon; whereas a book like Ben Sira, with its fulsome praise of Simon the High Priest and of the cult of his day, 159 naturally enough did not. It would certainly not offend the piety of the Rabbis that Qoheleth advised people to keep at a respectful distance from God in order to avoid sinful presumption; nor that, for the same reason, he would deny man’s ability to systematize certain knowledge of God into an accurate picture of His entire Providential plan. In his eyes, no-one should claim to have all the answers, however wise he might be. 160 This would be an unexceptionably reverent view to any pietist school, including the Pharisees, provided that they understood it as such.

If, however, Qoheleth belongs to a priestly ruling class, then his attitude may perhaps be untypical of the social circle he comes from. This circle may well have been characterized more by the self-confidence, buoyancy, and preoccupation with the outward magnificence of the cult which we find in Ben Sira. 161 It may even,


159 Sir. 50.

160 3:11b; 8:17; 11:5b.

161 See below, Chapter 6, Section i, Appendix Three and Appendix Six.
because it is politically active in an environment ultimately ruled by a pagan king, be
largely anti-pietist and motivated chiefly by ruthless worldly ambition, even in its
administration of the cult. If so, it would no longer recognize humility and a sense
of Man’s limitations as a key element in wisdom like the pietist sages; and yet it
might nevertheless see itself as the sage-class, \(^{162}\) and as the circle with the
monopoly on wisdom, despite its lack of understanding of what real wisdom is.

If so, the apparently negative attitude of Qoheleth toward human endeavour and
individual achievement is perhaps to be explained as the author’s reaction against the
impiety and lack of social conscience which the individualistic ambitions of the
privileged class engendered. The book’s re-iterated insistence on what Man is not
capable of achieving and not capable of understanding is unique within the Hebrew
Bible, even though, notwithstanding the controversy surrounding it, it was ultimately
not excluded from the Bible. And although Qoheleth’s refusal to idealize leading
figures in the Temple cult or favouritize the religious biasses of his own class may
well have commended his work to the Rabbis, nevertheless his sober and subdued
reflections on God, which some interpret as a cool and distant attitude to Him, and his
emphasis on the negative aspects of Man rather than on his positive achievements and
responsibilities, is noticeably uncharacteristic of the Bible overall.

\(^{162}\) Especially in the politically active capacity of statesman-counsellors to their ruler, as in Ben Sira
39:4. Here, this political aspect of the sage is given a setting perfectly compatible with piety (39:1, 5, 6,
8, etc.; see also below, Appendix Three). However, if for some of the leisured classes this aspect of
‘wisdom’ has become detached from piety (i.e., has become ‘anti-wisdom’), it could very easily become
iniquity: i.e., greed, extortion, neglect of underprivileged compatriots in order to keep in favour with a
foreign king and his favourites, etc.
In the Torah, by contrast, God’s presence is keenly felt as the direct Mastermind behind not only His Grand Plan for all Creation, but also the most intimate and immediate details of his worshippers’ lives. These details may be intensely human and individual, like the exact choice of a wife for Isaac through miraculous signs, and his consequently receiving comfort for the death of his mother; or cultic and communal, such as the exact structure of the Tabernacle, even down to the types and colours of the curtains. And in matters of epoch-making ethical and historical importance, like the giving of the Ten Commandments or the parting of the Red Sea, God’s intervention is made as startlingly and as unequivocally direct as it possibly could be.

Similarly in the Prophetic and Historical Books of the Bible, God is seen as taking all the key initiatives. On a practical level, it is He Who really directs events;

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163 Which Qoheleth also in principle concedes that He is; but he expresses this (in 3:1-8) in terms of a generalized pattern of alternating opposite circumstances, in which negative experience goes closely side by side with positive, the one giving way to its opposite in a (to Man) unpredictable pattern of alternation. God is said to have devised this pattern for His own purpose (3:11-14), and to be in control of it. However, He is controlling it from offstage; for Qoheleth does not in the course of the book attribute any immediate intervention in any particular specified event directly to God. This is very unusual in a Biblical book. Even in Job, God makes a personal appearance at the end, in answer to Job’s demand that He should appear; and even in Esther, the salvation of the Jews can only be interpreted as a direct answer from God to the prayer and fasting of Esther and her associates, which they performed specifically to this very end. Qoheleth, however, presents Man as too absorbed in his own schemes, and hence as too detached from God, to demand or request anything from Him. In this book, God controls human experience despite Man’s indifference to Him rather than in direct response to Man’s anger or to Man’s prayers.


165 Ex. 26:15-30.

166 Ibid. 26:1-14.

and on a personal level, love and loyalty toward Him is really the whole point of living. Furthermore, this same view is also reflected with particular force in the Psalms. These, while belonging, like the pure Wisdom Books, to the category of the 'Kethubim', and showing affinities with the Wisdom teaching in, e.g., Pss 37, 49, 112 and 128, are nevertheless predominantly a book of devotional songs. Here, God is not only all-powerful, but also the whole point of life: the foremost focus of legitimate moral loyalty, and the chief source of both national and personal happiness.

Qoheleth does not attempt to depict God's vivid and all-pervasive influence on this level and in this style, and nor does Job. This is not because they are like the earlier Wisdom Books, which come nearer as a genre to a humanistic perspective than any other works in the Bible, adopting a relatively simplistic and serene theology, and not reflecting an intense personal involvement with God. In Job 3:15, for example, is a statement to rival any in the Bible for depth of passion about God; and Qoheleth also is more a pietist of passion than of serenity. But in Job too, Man rather than God occupies centre-stage most of the time. And in general, this is a major distinguishing feature of the Wisdom works as opposed to other Biblical writings. Even in books or passages of books written by sages whose ethics are ultimately

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168 E.g., Is. 40:12-15.

169 Hab. 3:17 & 18 puts this all-pervasive sentiment as powerfully as any passage in the entire Bible.

170 Psalms 16:11; 42:1-3 & 11; 63:1-8, etc.

171 Serene in the sense of without as much room for surprises or for undeserved anguish as Job or Qoheleth. See above, this Chapter, Section iii.
theocentric rather than anthropocentric, the focus of immediate attention is Man, whether they are describing and reflecting upon Man's problems and perplexities, like Job, or whether they are prescribing rules of conduct whereby a man may gain success in the world, and the acceptance and respect of his fellow-men, as in Proverbs.

Qoheleth fully shares this characteristic. Even when the author seems to be insisting that Man is virtually powerless over his own destiny, it is still human experience, human emotions and human frustrations which determine the content of the book, control its direction, and maintain its prevailing mood. God may dominate the universe, but Man dominates the book. This is chiefly through its all-pervasive flavour of futility and impermanence, which is a reflection and a reminder of the fact that Man sets himself ambitions which are not appropriate to his transient nature and limited status, thereby dooming himself to frustration. God, however theoretically all-powerful, is not presented as the intimately animating force of the scene which the book unfolds; God Himself is in the background, while human preoccupations occupy the foreground.

Where Qoheleth differs from most Wisdom writers, however, is that these human preoccupations are profoundly sorrowful. At the centre of the book, we

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174 Except perhaps Job, which, with Ps 39 and 49 comes closer to Qoheleth in outlook and message than any other Biblical Wisdom. Admittedly, if Ps. 49:15 refers to life after death, as is sometimes suggested, then it strikes a note of certainty which is very unlike Qoheleth; but this does not seem a particularly persuasive interpretation of the text anyway.

175 7:2-4.
find a direct commendation of sorrow, an unequivocal statement in its favour, as it is
the true keynote of Man's existence. This cautionary "Memento mori" probably
reflects the spirit of Greek tragedy, and of its Homeric and Lyric roots, with which
Qoheleth seems deeply imbued. 176 This same commendation of sorrow also
expresses dissatisfaction with those very Man-boundaried horizons which the book
itself presents. 177 For despite the relatively human-oriented style and tradition of
the author's chosen genre, his theocentric ideal is the motivating force of his own
inspiration; 178 hence his characterization of the Manscape he depicts as "תֹם תֹם".

The fact that Man occupies centre-stage is recognized in Qoheleth, as in Job,
as absurd, an aberration from the correct pattern of Creator-creature interaction. In
Job, the incongruity of Man dominating the action is acknowledged by the bombastic
nature of the friends' speeches and by the stark contrast between Job's self-confidence
before God's appearance and his apologetic self-effacement when confronted by God's
reality. In Qoheleth, the same incongruity is reflected by the barrenness of the
Manscape, with its ever-retreating horizons, its futile strivings, and its unfulfilling
'achievement' of self-imposed goals that yield no lasting 'profit'.

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176 As discussed below, Chapter 2. H.L. Ginsberg's suggestion (op. cit., P.149) that Qoheleth's Hellenic
attitudes are not derived from a deep knowledge of Greek literature does not seem very convincing.
Ginsberg admits on the very same page to the belief that our author is an educated man; and as he seems
well acquainted with Gilgamesh (see below, Chapter 7, Section i, and also Appendix One), which does not
reflect the dominant culture of his era (see Appendix Three), then it seems reasonable to suppose that he
should be even better acquainted with Greek literature, which most emphatically does.

177 Cf. the similar God-centred motivation behind the importance attached to learning "how to weep"
in Jer. 9:20, discussed by Brueggemann in "The Epistemological Crisis of Israel's Two Histories (Jer. 9:22-
3)", ap. Gammie, John G. [et al.], eds., Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honour of

178 See below, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix.
The dry sterility of this picture is a protest against Man’s refusal to interact with God, and hence also against the consequent absence of the refreshing dew of His evident presence, which is so praised by the prophets and psalmists. For although Qoheleth may imply that a sense of remoteness from God can be a lesser evil than (so to that extent preferable to) religious presumption, nevertheless the remoteness he depicts is still Man-induced, not God-induced. It is Man’s remoteness from God, not God’s from Man; and it is the negative outcome of Man’s unjustifiable self-absorption.
CHAPTER 2

RECONCILING MORTALITY AND KINSHIP WITH THE DIVINE: ECHOES IN QOHELETH OF HELLENIC UNEASE

ETHICS AND EVALUATION OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF MAN'S VULNERABILITY

Qoheleth's view of sadness as the keynote of human life probably reflects the perspective of the Greek tragedians and their forerunners. For both he and they give equal prominence to the painful tension between on the one hand Man's essential dignity and obvious value, and on the other the fact that

"Death is the destiny of every man". ¹

It is important that

" -the living should take this to heart",
in order for human beings to preserve a sense of proportion. ²

This is necessary not only to dissuade them from hybris against the gods, but also to maintain their bond of tolerance and sympathy for their fellow-men, who have

¹ Qoh. 7:2b.

² See also awareness of death prescribed as the antidote to blind materialism, above, Chapter 1, Section iii; cf. Chapter 6, final Section.

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* For the use of the terms "Hellenic"/"Hellenized" (rather than "Hellenistic"/"Hellenisticised") regarding traditional Greek ethical attitudes, see bottom of p. 201, final footnote. See also footnotes to pages 603 and 617.
to share the same fate of death and the same vulnerability to changes of fortune within life. A poignant illustration of this fellowship of feeling between men, - even between enemies, - is the encounter between Priam and Achilles in *Iliad* 3 24, Ll.472-672. 4

This level of fellowship in feelings is something that can only be shared between human and human. Even though the gods in *Il. 24* are sorry for Priam, and undertake to arrange his meeting with Achilles, they could never actually experience such depth of shared feeling as mortals, with their common misfortunes.

Later, in tragedy, the gods seem even more excluded from this kind of sensitivity. They have no part to play, for example, in the forgiveness between Hippolytus and Theseus in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. 5 Both Artemis and Aphrodite, 6 legitimate though their claims to their proper honour are, have limited the range of their concerns so totally to those claims that they are not even aware of the human characters' depth of feeling and breadth of magnanimity; much less could they actually enter into them.

One of the main reasons why fellowship of feeling between mortals is such an ethical priority is the universal vulnerability of mortals, especially to sudden disaster

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3 Abbreviation, *Il.*

4 See below, Chapter 3, Sections ii and iii and Chapter 4, Sections ii, iii, and iv.

5 Compare Theognis' point, Ll.325-8, that *human beings* should be magnanimous about offences, by implied contrast to the *gods*, who are unwilling to bear with faults.

6 Artemis and Aphrodite in this play are the two superhuman forces symbolizing chastity / virginity and sexuality respectively. They are opposites, difficult for mere mortals to reconcile in life; yet both are equally intransigent in insisting on their right to due worship from Man, whatever the cost in human conflict and misery.
and reversals of fortune. Qoheleth and the author of Job share this Hellenic sensitivity to the likelihood of sudden reversals of fortune. Evidently, they are not willing to assume that such reversals, whenever they occur, could only be examples of divine judgment. On the contrary, they are aware that any such simplistic view would show a dangerous naïveté in the face of the hostile forces of the universe, whether natural or supernatural: forces such as injustice and oppression in Qoheleth, Satan in Job, and in both books Man's lack of foresight, and of insight into his own and other people's situations.

Traditionally attributed to Solon is the idea that a man may be called "lucky" in this life, but "happy" only after his entire lifespan has proved free from disaster, which means in effect that the term happy can only be applied to anyone with full justification after death. This supposedly Solonic teaching appears to be the root of the

"Call no man happy until he is dead"

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7 See also below, Chapter 4, Section iii, especially Cairns' comments on the relevance of universal vulnerability to misfortune in enabling men to feel pity and fear over the experiences of others.

8 E.g., as God's reprisals against someone who must have been too secure in their power or prosperity to give the divine its due. See e.g., Qoh. 7:15 and 8:14, which show that this is not Qoheleth's view. See also Job's frequent protestations of his innocence despite his sufferings; e.g., he rejects (Job 9) Bildad's argument of Ibid. 8:1 ff., convinced that he will continue to suffer anyway, however innocent he may be.

9 eπυπχή. 

10 άλλος.

11 See Herodotus' History, 1.32. See also below, Chapter 4, Section vi. Cf. Theognis, L.1013-6.

12 Whether or not it literally originated with Solon, this saying, together with the brand of piety and attitude toward Chance associated with it, is referred to in this thesis, for the sake of brevity, as the Solonic viewpoint.
dictum in Greek literature, in all its various permutations.  

Wherever this common "γνώμη" recurs in tragedy, it seems to be this sensitivity to Man’s vulnerability to reversals of fortune which lies behind it, and

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13 See below, Chapter 4, Sections vi and vii. See also Chapter 3, Section ii for reference to Andromache L1.100-3, Agamemnon L1.928-9 and Oedipus Tyrannus L1.1528-30.

14 See, e.g., Euripides, Trojan Women L1.509-10; Hecabe L1.375-8; Andromache L1.100 ff.; and Children of Heracles L1.866 ff.; Sophocles, Trachiniae, first three lines; and Oedipus Tyrannus, L1.1528-30; also, Aeschylus, Agamemnon L1.928 ff.

It may, however, be of some significance that the wording of Qoheleth’s claim (6:3-6) that the unborn and those who die as soon as possible are better off than the living is particularly reminiscent of Theognis L1.425-8, perhaps even more directly than of anything in Tragedy:

"For men on earth, the best thing of all is not to be born, and not to see the rays of the bright sun; but once a man has been born, the next best is to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible, and lie covered by a heap of earth."

Here, both Theognis and Qoheleth are ostensibly expressing a direct preference for non-life rather than life. Probably, the reason for this preference is still, by implication, Man’s vulnerability to reversals of fortune, as elsewhere. Yet the fact that neither of them in these passages says so directly makes their phrasing unusual and strikingly similar.

Admittedly, Qoh. 6:3-6's preference for the peace of never having seen the sun is also like Job 3:16-17's preference for the peace of never having seen the light; for in both cases, the privileged party who enjoys this peace is identified as the "τρύγος", the miscarried, aborted or still-born child, which is not the case in the above Theognis passage. Also, the root for the word denoting peace or rest, in both Qoh. 6:5 ("παν") and Job 3:17 ("παν τῆς") is "παν"; and since Theognis L1.425-8 does not specifically mention peace or rest, Job 3:16-17 seems, all in all, the closest parallel to Qoh. 6:3-6. For some reason, however, Qoh. 6:5 prefers "sun", "ΥΔΠΥ", (cf. "οὐράς ζησος ηελίου" in Theognis L.426) to Job 3:16's "light", "ΤΙΚ".

One should not take for granted, then, that Job 3:16-17 is necessarily the direct source for Qoh. 6:3-6, despite these similarities. There may have been a number of proverbs of this sentiment known both to Qoheleth and to the author of Job, some of them using the word "sun" and others the word "light", so that each of these two authors could have made a different choice of wording to express, in essence, the same familiar saying. Alternatively, however, if Qoheleth was influenced directly in 6:3-6 by Job, this does not necessarily rule out the possibility that he was also influenced, in the same passage and equally directly, by Theognis L1.425-8 as well. See, e.g., below, Chapter 5, Sections v and ix, for the apparent double intertextuality of Qoh. 5:1 ff. with both Job 42:7-9 and 1 Sam. 15:22. Since Qoheleth is a highly allusive writer, and seems to echo Job in passages other than 6:3-6, this proposal of double intertextuality seems quite a likely explanation of the wording of 6:3-6, especially since Qoheleth also appears to echo Theognis in a variety of passages as well. For apparent allusions to Theognis, see, e.g., Ranston, Harry, Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature (London, 1925), Pp.13-62. See also below, Chapter 10, Section vi; see also Chapter 9, Section vii, for the possibility of Qoh. 2:3 being influenced by Theognis L1.211-2, although perhaps not in quite the way Ranston would suggest.

15 For Solon and Theognis on the moral importance of the unpredictability of future events and of Man’s ignorance of outcomes, see below, Chapter 3, Section iii; and for Qoheleth’s apparently similar views, see below, Chapter 10, Section iv. Cf. also Chapter 6, passim.
not actual dislike of life as such. The same is also true of all the passages in Qoheleth which speak of death, or of a pre-life state, as preferable to life. 16

Conversely, wherever Qoheleth expresses a pro-life sentiment, 17 it is in very extreme terms; and this also has Hellenic precedents, most notably Achilles’ statement that even the life of a slave is preferable to a hero’s existence in Hades. 18 The same tension between pro-life and conditionally anti-life sentiments is found both in Greek epic / tragedy and in Qoheleth, to the same extreme and apparently for the same reasons. Yet this tension is not particularly characteristic of the Bible; Qoheleth and of Job are exceptional in this respect.

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16 Qoh. 4:2 & 3; 6:3-6; 9:11 & 12; cf. Job 3 passim, e.g., 3:11.

17 E.g., 9:4.

18 Od. 11, L1.488 ff.
ii QOHELETH'S USE OF THE TERM "נֶפֶשׁ" IN ASSESSING LIFE AND
ACHIEVEMENT

If the anti-life aspect of Qoheleth's thinking stems from his awareness of man's vulnerability and the unavoidability of death, the pro-life aspect of it also owes much to his sensitivity to human transience. One should make the best of life while one has it, because it is so fleeting. This conviction pervades 11:6-10; 12:1-8; and 9:7-10, especially v 10:

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom".

In 12:6, Qoheleth underlines the high value he sets on life, by choosing the most precious commodities to represent the life which is being lost: silver, gold and water. Similarly, he rates youth very high, though at the same time as showing its limitations. 20 Because

"Youth and vigour are fleeting", 21 they must therefore not be wasted, but used to the full. The word "נֶפֶשׁ", "breath" or "vapour", can not here signify "meaningless", 22 since this would make nonsense of the urgent advice of:10a, which presupposes that youth and vigour are precious

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19 Which is a familiar Hellenic attitude; see, e.g., Simonides, Frag. 8, West; Anacreon, 395 P.M.G.; Pindar, "Pythian Ode No.8", L1. 88-97, quoted below, this Chapter, this Section; Theognis, L1.527-8, 567-70, 877-8, 1007-12, 1017-22, 1063-70, 1119-1122, and 1131-2.

20 11:7 - 12:1.

21 11:10b.

22 As translated by, e.g., the New International Version Bible.
enough to be a matter for urgent advice in the first place:

"So then, cast off anxiety from your heart,
And banish the troubles of your body."

The following statement,

"For youth and vigour areIMAL",

is meant to be the logical conclusion of:10a.

This word "IMAL" is reiterated constantly throughout the book to describe the whole of human existence and every human endeavour. The point is that none of the things so described yield any lasting profit. They are, if not illusory, at least elusive. The core meaning of "IMAL" in this book is likelier to be "transience" rather than "futility" as such; for Qoheleth's major point is that human endeavour, because it all ends in death, is limited. The overtones of futility in the book are therefore secondary, arising from the transience, which is the primary meaning "IMAL" is meant to convey.  

Nevertheless, the overtones of futility are of some significance in the book. Qoheleth does see futility arise in human life; but only because people waste life on over-ambitious goals that do not fit in with its pre-ordained, intentionally limiting framework. This means that the simple things which people really need to make them happy, such as love and companionship, security with adequate financial

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23See this Chapter, Section v; Chapter 7, Section ii; Chapter 5, Section ii; and Appendix One.


254:8-12; 9:9 ff.
resources, and the right practical use of such resources when one does have them, are not sought after as they should be. For Man's grand ambitions take up all his time and effort instead, leaving them no scope ever to be satisfied. Ironically, over-ambition obstructs the fulfilment of these genuine needs: for ambition is a wild goose chase anyway, since even its successes are very unstable.

This does not mean that life is in itself futility, nor that contentment is literally unattainable. Yet it does mean that all aspirations too grandiose to fit into its restricting framework inevitably short-circuit any hope of the individual finding contentment. If life itself were futile, Qoheleth would not be thus urging us to make the best of it. But life is like a mist or vapour, in that it passes away quickly, leaving no lasting mark or memory behind it. Even though it has value, it still does not last; and

"Who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and fleeting days he passes through like a shadow?"

Compare Ps. 39:4b-7a,

"Let me know how fleeting is my life -
Each man's life is but a breath -
But now, Lord, what do I look for?"

This shadow-imagery invites comparison with Pindar's reference to Man as a

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26 4:5; 7:12; 10:18 & 19.

27 2:24-6; 4:8; 5:10-20.


29 4:13-16.

30 1:11.

31 Especially in view of the associated exhortation to make the best of one's youth, Qoh. 11:7 - 12:1.
shadow in one of his victory odes for a young athlete:

"He who wins suddenly some noble prize
In the rich years of youth
Is raised high with hope; his manhood takes wings;
He has in his heart what is better than wealth.
But brief is the season of Man's delight.
Soon it falls to the ground; some dire decision uproots it.
Thing of a day! Such is man: a shadow in a dream.
Yet when god-given splendour visits him,
A bright radiance plays over him, and how sweet is life!". 32

The fact that this poem rates youth and achievement highly, and that it moves back from sadness to a positive note at the end, is arresting because it brings out poignantly the belief that essential worth and value are as much a part of human life as its transience; but also because it lays bare by its emotional impact how these two qualities sit sharply ill at ease with each other. This is perhaps not unlike the way, in Qoh. 3:11, Man's very slight inkling of eternity 33 sits ill at ease with the narrowness of his overall vision, and his inability to grasp the total picture of the scheme of Providence, even though he senses dimly that such a scheme must exist.

Pindar again underlines this kind of tension in Nem. 6, Ll.1 ff.:

"One is the race of gods and men; from one mother we both draw our breath. Yet are our powers poles apart; for we are nothing; but for them the brazen heaven endures forever, their secure abode.".


33 However, this is taking Qoh. 3:11's " נֶפֶשׁ" as " נֶפֶשׁ", "eternity". For the alternative reading " נֶפֶשׁ", "ignorance", see Barton, George Aaron, Ph.D., A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, 1908), P.105. See also below, Chapter 6, Section iii.
Kitto comments on this verse, 34

"Pindar's whole point here is the dignity and the weakness of Man; and this is the ultimate source of that tragic note that runs through all classical Greek literature."

He finds the same tension in Il. 6, Ll.145 ff.:  

"As is the life of the leaves, so is that of men. The wind scatters the leaves to the ground: the vigorous forest puts forth others, and they grow in the spring season. Soon one generation of men comes and another ceases."

However, Kitto does not find the same poignancy in the Biblical Man-is-like-the-grass passages, 35 despite their virtually parallel nature-imagery. He writes, 36

"The note (in the Biblical passages) is one of humility and resignation. Man is no more than grass, by comparison with God. But the Homeric image takes a very different colour from its context of heroic striving and achievement. Man is unique; yet for all his high quality and brilliant variety, he must obey the same laws as the innumerable and indistinguishable leaves. There can be no romantic protest - for how can we protest against the first law of our being? - nor resigned acceptance (as if the individual were of no greater importance than the leaves). - There is instead this passionate tension which is a spirit of tragedy: - (on the one hand) passionate delight in life, and (on the other) clear apprehension of its unalterable framework."

Nevertheless, there is a comparable sense of tension in Qoheleth, even though Kitto does not specifically identify this. The part-deterministic framework of life described in Qoh. 3:1-11, already outlined in 1:4-11, with its inevitable end in death, 37 is represented as being in tension to a painful degree with the goals Man is naturally

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35Ps. 103:15, and Is. 40:6 ff., as quoted above, Chapter I, Section iii.


378:8a.
inclined to set himself.

Kitto concludes his summary of Greek Man's self-evaluation with the comment,

"So far was the Greek from thinking that Man was a mere nothing in the sight of the gods that he had to be constantly reminding himself that Man is not God, and that it is impious to think it. Never again until - the Renaissance do we find such superb self-confidence in humanity.". 38

In relation to this self-image, Qoheleth writes like a man who has not fully achieved the "resignation" which Kitto sees in Ps. 103 and Is. 40, - perhaps because the spirit of tragedy, exactly as Kitto himself describes it above, has struck deep roots in his own soul, - but who nevertheless believes passionately in the "humility", and is highly cynical about so-called "heroic striving and achievement" and "superb self-confidence in humanity". For, says Qoh. 4:4,

"I saw that all striving and achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbour. This too is "חיפש", a chasing after the wind.".

QOHELETH FOCUSES ON MAN'S LIMITATIONS, BUT THE TRAGEDIANS ALLOW ALSO FOR HIS AMBITIONS

This is a far cry from Hesiod's idea of the two different "Erides" or "Strifes". Hesiod sees only the Eris which causes war and upheaval is bad, whereas the Eris which makes a man strive to keep up with the Joneses is actually good! Moreover, Hesiod's position is far from extreme or idiosyncratic. If anything, it is nearer to axiomatic for the mainstream of Greek culture. Well beyond his own era, throughout the classical age and even into Hellenistic times, some such idea underlay the Heroic aspect of people's understanding of Man.

Qoheleth's belief that even this 'good' Eris yields no lasting profit is one factor in his reasons for totally rejecting the Heroic view of Man. Admittedly, he does feel very deeply the tragic tension between Man's innate dignity and the inevitability of death, with a sharpness that the writers of Ps. 103, of Is. 40, and indeed of most of the Bible, never could; for their belief that God is not limited, and nor is His potential kindness to Man, completely neutralizes for them the fact that Man is limited. Nevertheless, Qoheleth believes that it is scaling down one's ambitions that enhances human dignity, not giving full rein to them.

Surprisingly, he seems to go beyond even the Greek tragedians in this belief. Although it is virtually a truism that the tragic poets are outstandingly unswerving in

40 2:24; 3:12, 13 & 22.
their ethical opposition to hybris, Qoheleth's aversion to arrogance, indeed his total
contempt for it, surpasses even theirs. For he decisively rejects the heroic view of
Man altogether. Not only does he make Man's recognition of his limitations his chief
virtue; he also makes exposition of Man's limitations the chief subject of his
discourse. This is certainly an unusual approach. Just as the Biblical writers tend to
see great significance in Man's glory when favoured by God, so pagan writers see
Man's greatness as genuine and effectual, provided he does not go too far by denying
the rights of gods or of other men to their appropriate honour. Even the Cynics see
their independence or "self-sufficiency" 41 as a great strength. Their concern is not
so much to deny that there is such a thing as achievement for a human being, but
rather to caution people against defining achievement uncritically, i.e., by the criteria
of whatever happen to be the accepted conventions of their particular society.

The tragedians are particularly revealing to contrast with Qoheleth in their
emphasis. For despite their ethical concern to point out that Man should not exceed
"δίκη", there is some truth in Rex Warner's implication that they tend to concentrate
on those occasions when he does exceed it, and that this is partly because to some
extent they sympathize with the human factors leading to the excess. Clearly, these
factors constitute a common human problem, requiring some measure of sympathy in
the poet's approach if he is to understand and represent them truthfully and to good
purpose. So the tragedians,

"From the time of Aeschylus - have taken as their theme the grandeur
and catastrophes of revolt and of excess. The tragic hero is always one who
tries to stand alone against the forces of nature, of God, or of public opinion,

41 οὐτόρχειον".
and finds that these forces are too strong for him. Death, madness and disaster are the results of his rebellion, and yet, in his rebellion, we are bound to sympathize with him, since it expresses the most vital and primitive forces within ourselves - (and) - typifies - our own transitory position of self-confidence between the inscrutabilities of birth and death - . The tragic hero is to be admired for his self-assertion, yet feared for the fate which certainly overcomes what is extraordinary. It is in the balance between these two feelings that there arise the "pity" and "terror" (as specified by Aristotle in his section on tragedy in his Poetics) which "purge" the mind of the spectator.

This view seems well supported by the literary evidence. In Antigone 43 L.332-374, e.g., Sophocles' so-called 'Ode to Man' 44 does not seem to be proved false by Creon's fall. 45 The Ode only underlines ominously how easy it is for Man to go too far. It also reflects what a loss it is when he does, precisely because his outstanding excellency is real. Also in Ajax, the reality of the eponymous hero's outstanding valour is poignantly underlined after his self-inflicted death has misguidedlly put an end to it. 46

Similarly, in Aeschylus' The Persians 47 the greatness of the Persian nation, and the ambitious vision of Xerxes' expedition, is described in terms of dazzling glory. Xerxes' hybris in defying the Hellespont is indeed horrifying, and the Greeks

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43 Abbreviation, Soph., Antig.

44 See also below, Chapter 3, Section iv.

45 For the reasons behind Creon's fall, see below, Chapter 4, Sections i and v.

46 See Ajax L.1.924-5, 1266-87, 1338-45 etc. Given that Saul's death was also self-inflicted, II Sam. 1:17-27 reflects a comparable waste, also stemming from a stubborn and unyielding temperament; cf. Ajax L.1.926-30.

47 Abbreviation, Aesch., Pers.
compare very favourably with the Persians because of their lack of corresponding hybris; but the downfall of the Persian expedition is represented as the downfall of something genuinely impressive, and worth lamenting over. 48

The death of Euripides' protagonist in *Hippolytus*, who falls because he has neglected Aphrodite, is also a lamentable loss. This neglect is real, and the adverse effect of it on his character is plain to see in his extreme reaction to Phaedra. Yet nevertheless, it can not be denied that the sincere single-mindedness of character which he shows in his devotion to Artemis could be a remarkable strength. If only he had not taken it too far, it might have proved worthy of great admiration. 49

Qoheleth, however, does not focus his attention on the rebel and the tragic hero. For he feels that it is

"the inscrutabilities of birth and death",

and the fact that our

"position of self-confidence between the two"

is only transitory, which deserve the main emphasis, rather than some fleeting trace

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48 Some critics would deny this, on the grounds that the Persians' extravagant laments are merely part of their negative image of overall excess, and that the gold-bedecked glory of their vast army is nothing more nor less than another aspect of this same fulsome hybris-image. On one level, this is even true; these extravagant images are Aeschylus' ideological vehicle for expressing his disapproval of Persian excess and his endorsement of what he sees as the contrary Greek values and virtues. However, insatiety is recognized in Greek wisdom to be a characteristic of Man, not just of foreigners. See Solon, Fr. 1, L.71 ff. D1. See also below, Chapter 7, Section v, for Lowell Edmunds' discussion of this passage from the viewpoint that it is Man's imperfection which drives him to insatiety, through striving for sufficiency even though he lacks a definition of sufficiency (Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides, P.79). It is too much to believe that the Greek audience feels no possibility of empathy at all with the Persians' drive toward insatiety, given the Solonic wisdom-theory underlying the thought-forms of Greek tragedy as an art-form.

49 See also above, this Chapter, Section i, for the magnanimity of Hippolytus to his father, which compares very favourably with the harshness of the gods.
of the transitory self-confidence instead. It seems likely that it is the Hellenic side of his culture which has brought home to him that the limitations of Man are a problematic issue, because the tensions of the tragic outlook are still working on his heart. 50 If so, then his choice of topic is partly the outcome of the Greek side of his heritage.

On one level, his solution to the problem is more that of the Prophets and Psalmists than that of either the tragedians or the Cynics or the Epicureans. Throughout the book, he embraces the humility of the Biblical response; and he makes a bold attempt to attain the resignation as well. 51 Nevertheless, the fact that Qoheleth singles out arrogance as his prime target for censure is probably a double heritage from both his Hebrew and his Greek cultural background: and the actual angle from which he attacks it, and also attacks its consequences, such as social injustice, is different from the Pentateuchal and Prophetic approaches.

The Law and the Prophets exhorted people to remember justice and social concern as an obligation of Israel’s National Covenant, marking her out from other nations. 52 Qoheleth bitterly complains of the oppression he sees around him; 53 but

50 Hence the lack of Biblical "resignation" mentioned above, this Chapter, end of Section ii.


52 Deut. 4:5-9; Is. 5:7. However, see below, Chapter 10, Section i for Bickerman’s suggestion that this sense of Covenant obligation had broken down by Simon the Just’s time, so that Simon felt the need to introduce a Jewish equivalent to "φιλοσοφοί", as if the ideal of social responsibility furnished by this Greek concept were something new in addition to Torah and the Cult, instead of an integral part of them as it traditionally used to be.

his purpose is not to denounce individual instances of oppression, and insist that they must be put right, as the Prophets would have demanded. He is apparently not exhorting specific wrongdoers to repentance, but simply describing the human condition in general terms. His point is rather that injustice is endemic to that human condition, and that this is the reality with which we have to contend. Judgment, like harvest time, has an appointed season which can not be anticipated, so that the oppressed have to wait for it with patience.

In 5:8, Qoheleth exhorts us,

"If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be dismayed / stupefied at such things."

Part of the reason we are not to be dismayed is that corruption and oppression are the usual conditions of the world, not something new or astounding; these are the troubled waters God has set the pious man the task of learning to navigate. Also, however, we are not to be dismayed because God is ultimately in control. He does not abruptly stop the oppressors from piling up their ill-gotten gain; but this is only because He is

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54 Although he seems to have no doubt that the wicked will, in God’s time, be brought to justice; see 3:17, 11:9 and 12:14.

55 Cf. Theognis L.373-92 and 743-52 for this treatment of social injustice.

56 3:16; 4:1-3; 7:15b; 8:14; 9:2 & 3.

57 See below, Chapter 10, Section vi; cf. also Chapter 10, Section iv on Job 24:1 "Why does the Almighty not set times? (i.e., for Judgment)"

58 See below, Chapter 10, Section vi for the probable allusion of 5:8a to Theognis L.191. This would imply that although evildoers may get away with wickedness at first, God will get the better of them in the end; and it would mean that "Do not be dismayed at / phased by such things" is a better translation than the more popular "Do not be surprised at such things".

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letting them go on piling it up to take it away from them and give it to someone else.

The sinner can lay this message to heart and repent if he so chooses. It is not difficult to see the advisability of repentance from Qoheleth's general picture of the uselessness of impiety and of over-ambition, and of the certainty of Judgment in the end. Qoheleth does not appeal in particular to the sinner to repent, nor does he call for a hero of the faith to be raised up to deliver the righteous from their oppressors. He seems rather to be addressing himself mainly to those oppressed people who might be unnecessarily shaken from their faith by the dismal conditions of the society they see around them. Yet for those wrong-doers who are willing to receive it, there is a clear message for them as well: the necessary antidote to the arrogance, hard-heartedness and over-ambition which cause these evils is to remember constantly that we all have to die, and that

"All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.".  

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60 For the futility of over-ambition, see below, Chapter 7, especially Section v.

61 3:20.
Here, perhaps, are traces in Qoheleth’s mood of the traditional Greek tension between Man’s non-divine status and his kinship with the divine; this seems implicit in his sadness over human helplessness and in his, at first sight, apparently detached attitude to the problem of justice as such. But insofar as Qoheleth is involved in this controversy, he is firmly against any notion of Man partaking of divinity. In fact, with regard to this particular issue, he appears to be deliberately anti-Aristotelian. The final verses of his book actually constitute, as a kind of

62Once the reader discerns Qoheleth’s conviction that Judgment has its definite appointed time, however (see below, Chapter 10, end of Section iv and Section vi), his lack of enthusiasm for revolutionary or precipitate attempts to change the status quo no longer seems incompatible with his complaints over oppression (3:16, 4:1-3, 5:8, etc.), his commitment to justice as a principle (8:11 & 14), and his conviction that Judgment is bound to come in the end (3:17 and 12:14). Qoheleth is not interested in egocentric exploitation of political situations for opportunistic gain, but rather in people’s safety and security, and avoiding harm as much as possible (8:2-5 & 10:4). He also prefers an interactive acceptance of others (of kings, of the poor, of one’s lover or of one’s brother) rather than aloofness from others to pursue one’s own private goal; see below, Chapter 10, Sections i, ii, v and vii.

Qoheleth thus represents, in effect, the opposite approach to life from the Hyrcanus-type (see below, Chapter 7, Section v: cf. APPENDIX THREE), who becomes fabulously rich, but in the process oppresses others and renders his own position so unsafe in the contemporary climate of political change that, in the end, he takes his own life rather than face the consequences of his actions. The sort of person who ruthlessly exploits the political instability of the times for immediate gain will eventually become the victim of that very same instability; and this is exactly the course from which Qoheleth aims to dissuade his contemporaries.

63This is not to say that it is necessarily wrong to suspect an echo of Aristotle in 1:4b, "But the earth remains for ever". If Qoheleth is here betraying Aristotelian views about the eternity of matter, this would actually fit well with his point about the sea in 1:7; see below, Chapter 10, end of Section ii, for Aristotle’s point, in Met. II.3 (356 B), L1.7-10, that what is true of the universe / matter in general holds good for the sea as well: if the one is eternal, then so is the other.

There is nothing implausible about Qoheleth consciously agreeing with Aristotle on one issue yet disagreeing with him on another. See below, Chapter 8, Section iii for what seems to be Qoh. 11:1-2’s deliberate contradiction of Theognis L.108, despite his equally direct apparent agreement with the same poet on several other points (see, e.g., Chapter 10, Section vi on Qoh. 5:8a and Theognis L.I.191 and 1349). Harry Ranston notes several cases of what he feels to be Qoheleth’s conscious disagreement with Theognis in Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature (London, 1925), Pp.40-2, even though in Ibid. Pp.13-63 overall he draws attention to more cases of what he feels to be agreement between these two writers than of disagreement.
summary, an ethical definition of Man himself, apparently in direct and conscious contradiction of Aristotle’s definition of Man in *Nicomachean Ethics* \(^{64}\) 1178a L1.7 & 8.

Furthermore, he does not endorse the

"startling declaration of Aristotle"

by which Qoheleth’s own era is said to have been

"ushered in - when Alexander was conquering the East" \(^{65}\).

This refers to Aristotle’s *Nic. Eth.*, 1177b, L1.33-36 / X.vii.8:

"And we should not follow those \(^{66}\) who enjoin that a man should have man’s thoughts, and a mortal should have mortal thoughts (ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἀνθρώποιν δύναται θυμία τὸν θυμίαν); but we ought so far as possible to achieve immortality."

Instead of agreeing with the philosopher’s exhortation not to limit our thoughts to those which befit mortals, Qoheleth clearly believes that we *must* so limit them, and leave immortality to God. He either ignores, or, more likely, deliberately takes issue with, any Aristotelian idea of the human mind being divine, \(^{67}\) and any resultant notion that aspiring to operate on the contemplative \(^{68}\) level is therefore the most characteristically and appropriately human desire possible. \(^{69}\)

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\(^{64}\) Abbreviation, *Nic. Eth.*


\(^{66}\) It may well be the tragedians that Aristotle has in mind here, and perhaps even Aeschylus in particular, since he seems to be echoing the wording of Aesch., *Pers.* L.820; see below, this Section.

\(^{67}\) E.g., *Nic. Eth.* X.vii.8.

\(^{68}\) And hence, from Aristotle’s perspective, divine.

\(^{69}\) See Ibid. X.vii.7-9.
Positing "the life of the intellect" as ⁷⁰

"the best and pleasantest life for Man, inasmuch as the intellect especially is Man",

Aristotle goes on to say ⁷¹ that

"The life of moral virtue, on the other hand, is happy only in a secondary degree. For the moral activities are purely human";

whereas, ⁷² since

"the intellect is something divine in comparison with Man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life".

In effect, then, and whether in deliberate disagreement or not, Qoh. 12:13b's "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of Man",
cuts across Aristotle's pattern of associations by linking the divine ("Fear God") with the life of moral virtue ("and keep His commandments"), rather than with the intellect. Far from seeing any part of Man as divine, Qoheleth implies that there is no more to Man than obedience to a Divinity Who is entirely external to him, and Whom Man should only approach with the silence of deep reverence. ⁷³ In complete contrast to Aristotle, Qoheleth resonates to the anti-hybris warnings of earlier Greek literary tradition. ⁷⁴

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⁷⁰Ibid. X.vii.9.

⁷¹Ibid. X.viii.1 ff.

⁷²Ibid. X.vii.8.

⁷³Qoh. 5:2. The fact that, in Qoheleth's view, the reverence due to God takes the form of silence in particular is one feature of the strong warning he issues to Man against defining himself by his intellect or identifying himself with the mind. See below, Chapter 9, Section vii on the danger of verbal and intellectual over-assertion robbing Man of real experience, and hence of his true identity. Compare Chapter 5, Sections vii and ix on the spiritual importance of silence.

⁷⁴Cf. II. 5, L.440; Herodotus, History I.34.1, 3.40.2 and 8.109.3; Theognis, L.151 and 153; Aeschylus, Niobe, fr. 154a 12-21 Raed.; Id., Agamemnon, L.750 ff; Id., Pers. L.816 ff; Sophocles, Ajax L.758-61. See
However flagrantly Aristotle may be flouting the Greek literary tradition on this issue, Qoheleth is here firmly within that tradition. It could possibly even be argued that Qoheleth's emphasis on the difference between God and Man goes even beyond the traditional Greek outlook. For he has inherited the Hebrew prophets' view of God's transcendence.

also Euripides' description of Eurystheus in *Children of Heracles* L.933 as "-μετιζον της δικης φρονην", since a hybristic man is one whose intents and thoughts go beyond the limit appointed for mortals. Also, the wording of Aesch., *Pers.* L.820, "-ου ινερεφευ θηντον δντα χρη φρονειν", is particularly telling to compare with *Nic. Eth.* 1177b, L.33-6 (as noted above, this Section), especially since Aeschylus' very next word in Line 821 is "hybris".

It is important not to under-rate the debt this literary tradition (especially tragedy) owes to wisdom-theory, including the poetry of and other ideas attributed to Solon.

Contrast above, this Chapter, Section ii, Kitto's discussion of men's similarity to, as well as difference from, the gods.

There are even those who think that he shares their sense of God's transcendence without also sharing their counterbalancing sense of God's intimate involvement and direct intervention in the world, and that this makes the gulf he sees between God and Man wider still. This idea is not inconceivable, since reconciling God's transcendence with His immanence did eventually become a key philosophical problem for Jewish spirituality. This is why Philo later felt the need to posit a host of intermediary 'powers' to explain how a transcendent God could intervene in human history to help His people.

However, see below, Chapter 5, Sections vii-ix for Qoheleth's view that Man has a duty to take some initiative himself in cultivating God's presence. Qoheleth does not directly address the problem of whether or not God is willing and able to intervene in the personal affairs of individuals, so we do not know whether this is an issue for him or not. He does, however, seem to reflect strong views on the question of whether or not Man is willing to cease from his self-assertion as Man in order to listen to and obey God; so this problem about how Man fails to interact with God is a key issue in his religious thinking, even if he does not have a corresponding problem about God failing to interact with Man as well.
MAN'S HIGHEST GOOD DEPENDS ON ACCEPTING HIS CREATURELY STATUS

Qoheleth's strong recommendation of enjoyment, then, like his high estimation of companionship, is intrinsic to his ethical beliefs about man's proper place in creation. It is not merely some frivolous excursion into hedonism; that kind of transient indulgence would be just as much "לעשות" and chasing the wind as would over-grandiose human aspirations to wealth, power and magnificence. There is every reason for seeing his advice to make the best of life's pleasures as ethical, and none for seeing them as cynical.

The expression "לעשות" is closely linked with "לעשות", but this does not mean, as sometimes thought, that "לעשות" is an amoral term. Even if, as is often held, it is equivalent to the Greek "εὖ πρῶτειν", then presumably it has the same socially responsible overtones that "εὖ πρῶτειν" has in philosophical writings, i.e., of a decent, balanced way of living, avoiding disaster, deprivation and excess. If the highest of all goods available to Man is "εὖδαμονία" / "εὖδαμονεῖν", and if "εὖδαμονεῖν" is to be equated with "εὖ πρῶτειν", 84

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78 See above, Chapter 1, Section i.
79 2:1, 2 & 11; 11:9.
80 2:4 & 9; 4:8.
81 3:12.
82 However, as this is by no means certain, see both this section and Chapter 8 below for fuller discussion of this idea.
83 Which Nic. Eth. Liv.1 & 2 gives very confidently as the majority opinion.
then "εὐδαμομονεῖν", like "εὐδαμομονεῖν" and its equivalent "εὐ δήν" in the same
passage, is one of the few key terms signifying the Ethical Ultimate or Highest Good,
i.e., the proper prime objective of all human action. Considering Aristotle’s above
equation of "εὐδαμομονεῖν" with "εὐδαμομονεῖν", it is not inconceivable that Qoheleth
may be equating "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" with "γέμη" in parallel with this usage of
Aristotle’s, with "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" corresponding to "εὐδαμομονεῖν" and "γέμη" to
"εὐδαμομονεῖν". However, "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" is a moral term, irrespective of whether
or not it is equivalent to "εὐδαμομονεῖν". The close link between the verbs "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον"
and "γέμη" in 3:12, far from marking out "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" as an amoral term by its
association with "γέμη", has rather the reverse effect: it gives an ethical colouring
to "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" by its association with "γέμη". For Qoh. 7:20’s usage of
"καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" reveals that it is an ethical term. In 7:20, its meaning could not be
other than ethical, since in this verse, "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" is the act specifically of the
hypothetical "τοὺς ἐλεφανταζόμενος". Although "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" is open to a non-moral interpretation in
some contexts, and so is "Ἀπελειπθή", nevertheless "τοὺς ἐλεφανταζόμενος" is not; the reader is bound
to take it in a moral sense. Hence the association of these three terms together in 7:20
serves to reinforce the fact that it is the moral sense of "Ἀπελειπθή" and of "καὶ τὰ ὅσα Λάφρον" which

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84 As stated in Ibid. I.iv.2.

85 Cf. "εὐπροέτειν", Ibid. V.v.4; also, Xenophon, Memorabilia 3.9.14.

86 For a fuller discussion of various alternative possibilities, see below, Chapter 8, Sections i-iii, on the
terms "εὐδαμομονεῖν" and "ποτεῖν ἄγαθον" and their ethical implications for Qoh. 3v12.

87 E.g., Judges 20:16, "Ἀπελειπθή".
are here intended; and once these terms have occurred in a moral sense at all in *Qoheleth*, this introduces the probability of them bearing the same sense elsewhere in the book.

Similarly, *Qoh. 2:26* is deliberately echoing a moral adage already familiar to the reader from *Prov. 13:22b* and *28:8*, so that, here in this passage also, "כֶּסִי" and "חֲצֵי" are not being used in an amoral sense, as is often thought. The word "נֵבְלָה", denoting insubstantiality, is always used, for shock-contrast with our usual expectations, of something popularly considered "heavy": i.e., either of something people find "heavy" in the sense of "arduous" / "irksome", or of something wrongly thought to be of lasting value or potency, even though *Qoheleth* would warn us that it is not. So in 2:26b, "הַבְּלִיל" refers to the arduous toil of the sinner, which will not benefit him in the end, even though he thinks it will. Because this recurring motif "נֵבְלָה" is beginning to accumulate a subtly thought-provoking variety of associations already, even as early as this second chapter, its use here adds some extra colour to this variation on a familiar moral theme: sin does not pay.

The occurrence of "לְשׂוֹר וַחֲשֶׁרֶת" in 3:12 in close conjunction with "לְשׂוֹר וַחֲשֶׁרֶת" implies, then, that "לְשׂוֹר וַחֲשֶׁרֶת" has an ethical meaning in 3:12, as a twin goal with "לְשׂוֹר וַחֲשֶׁרֶת". Even though it is common to take the close association of these two terms in 3:12 the opposite way, as an indication that "לְשׂוֹר וַחֲשֶׁרֶת" is an amoral term, meaning simply "to succeed" in some particular, short-term project, this idea can

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88 Cf. also *Job 27:16 & 17.*

89 I.e., as "weighty" or "profitable".
not be upheld. For it would involve disregarding the fact that "לעשתה תּוֹרָה ב" in 7:20 is assumed to characterize specifically the "זְרָה"; and it would also entail making the two following unjustifiable assumptions.

1) The first of these would be that "rejoicing"/"לְשׁוֹם" is by definition incapable of having an ethical significance, and so would not be conjoined with "לעשתה תּוֹרָה ב" as a twin goal if "לעשתה תּוֹרָה ב" were an ethical term. This, however, is absurd, especially in view of the many and varied philosophical assessments of pleasure, with some schools of thought seeing pleasure as the highest good. As Qoheleth is self-confessedly a book of collected ideas, which the author used to "teach the people knowledge", it seems highly unlikely he would not have made use of popular awareness of these ideas, especially those reflections of it which had already crystallized into proverbs.

It seems also particularly absurd to rule out an ethical significance for pleasure in Qoheleth in view of the Genesis tradition, with which the author is evidently acquainted. Genesis represents innocent bliss, untroubled by any cares, as God’s original intention for Mankind. Only Man’s eccentric desire for a kind of goal different from and incompatible with unclouded happiness prevented such happiness from remaining his lot, according to Genesis. The fact that the continuance of this unmixed happiness and pleasure for Man would have been God’s preference for Man surely gives happiness and pleasure very substantial ethical weight, at least in the
context of Biblical thought, even if in no other context. There is, then, no reason at all why "rejoicing" / "רָגְעָה לֹעָרָה" should not be highly ethical in significance, nor why it should not be closely linked as a goal with an equally ethical "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה ".

2) The second erroneous assumption underlying the non-moral interpretation of 3:12's "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" is twofold, namely:
   a) that "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" could only be intended as an exact Hebrew equivalent of the Greek "εὖ πράξεων"; and
   b) that "εὖ πράξεων" is itself a non-moral term. However,
      a) it is not necessarily the case that "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" is an attempted Hebrew version of "εὖ πράξεων" anyway. It is possible that Qoheleth was not directly familiar with the Greek language. Furthermore, even if he was, the particular idea he was attempting to express in 3:12 may not have been a transference to Hebrew from a Greek prototype. Moreover, even if it was, the fact that LXX consistently translates "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" not as "εὖ πράξεων" but as "ποιεῖν ἠγερθόν" instead argues against "εὖ πράξεων" being the indisputably obvious Greek equivalent to "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" and universally accepted as such. If it did not seem the obvious Greek equivalent of "בָּרֵךְ לֹעָרָה" to the LXX translators, there is no overwhelming reason why we should assume that it was the Greek term Qoheleth himself had in mind either.

   In addition,

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90 In addition, the Epicureans attributed prime moral importance to the rôle of refined pleasure in the life of Man as well; but see below, this Chapter, Section vi for the way their interpretation of this rôle differed considerably from the Genesis-Qoheleth interpretation.

91 See Chapter 8, Sections i and iii.
b) even if Qoheleth did originally intend "ב רע  תJoshע ל" as a Hebrew version of "€€ Πρμττείν", and the LXX translators simply did not understand his intention, nevertheless the most natural meaning of "€€ Πρμττείν" itself, in a searchingly reflective context, is distinctly ethical. 92 The fact that "€€ Πρμττείν" can mean, e.g., the ethical Highest Good, and may even have been familiar in this sense either to Qoheleth himself or to others of his acquaintance, is true irrespective of whether or not this was the meaning of "€€ Πρμττείν" with which the LXX translators were most familiar.

Since, in a philosophical and ethical context, the overtones of "€€ Πρμττείν" are moral, then it is not inconceivable that to those whose prime ethic in life is the respectable pursuit of refined pleasure, "€€ Πρμττείν" could perhaps, within its rôle as a moral term, develop a specialized meaning of creaturely enjoyment and happiness as the ethical Highest Good. But given the necessary milieu, this could happen to any ethical term for the Highest Good, not just to "€€ Πρμττείν". And even if such a case should arise, nevertheless if "€€ Πρμττείν" were equivalent to "ב רע  תJoshע ל", this would still argue for "ב רע  תJoshע ל" being an ethical term, not for its being an amoral one. However, it is not necessary to speculate about any such hypothetical specialized usage of "€€ Πρμττείν" or of "ב רע  תJoshע ל" in order to grasp Qoheleth’s understanding of Man’s Highest Good. Since he says that there is ‘nothing better’ for Man than "תJoshע ל וJoshע ל ו Joshע ל ו Joshע ל" and "ב רע  תJoshע ל ו Joshע ל ו Joshע ל ו Joshע ל", 93 he echoes the phrasing of 2:24 & 25,
"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink, and find satisfaction in (the profits from) his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God. For without Him, who can eat or drink or find enjoyment?"

Whatever the exact meaning of "לֶעַשְׂרוּ לָזָן" in 3:12, the implication of the expression "nothing better" is the same in this verse as in 2:24. Its function in both these verses is to set limits to human aspiration, and basically the same limits in both verses. It may be that "לֶעַשְׂרוּ לָזָן" denotes an entire and calculated method of living, the way of life designed to be most profitable for oneself and / or for others. Alternatively, it may rather mean to prosper or fare well in a less calculated or in a more strictly self-oriented way. Or then again, perhaps it has instead the ad hoc socio-ethical sense of performing kind and useful acts for other people's benefit simply as the need arises. 94 Notwithstanding these various possibilities of nuance for "לֶעַשְׂרוּ לָזָן", however, both 2:24's "eat and drink" and 3:12's "while they live" tell us that the term "nothing better" is limited to the mortal realm. There is "nothing better" than the pleasures and benefits, whether given or received, of the specifically creaturely sphere: happiness in this world, emphasizing the most basic of physical and emotional needs and pleasures. Therefore, because there is nothing better than this, one should not set one's sights on goals beyond this, such as everlasting fame 95 or certainty. 96

94 For this third possibility in particular, see below, Chapter 8.

95 1:11, 2:16.

96 3:11, 8:17.
It is God who is ultimately in control of Man's life and destiny, not Man himself. This conviction is what underlies Qoheleth's high estimation of pleasure, with its assumption of death's imminence and of Man's limitations as a creature. For being content with the pleasures human life offers is the only realistic way to give God His due as being far greater than we mortals. Qoheleth's earlier attempts to make a lasting name for himself by his great wealth, fame, building projects, etc., are bound to come to nothing; for, as he comes to realize, death is unavoidable, and people are not remembered after they die, nor do they have any more control over their former possessions or spheres of influence. Qoheleth is convinced, therefore, that if Man thinks his arrogant ambitions and drive to self-aggrandizement are what life is about, then he is taking himself far too seriously. This includes spiritual and intellectual ambitions, as well as materialistic ones. 


98:3:12-14.

Whether literally true in his own experience or part of his fictitious 'Solomon'-persona; see below, Chapter 7, Section ii and APPENDIX TWO.


100:16 & 20.

101:5:10-17.
This is why he alludes so pointedly 103 to Siduri’s attempt to dissuade Gilgamesh from his quest for immortality. He seeks to commend the moderate enjoyment of essentially creaturely pleasures as a deliberate reaction against the heroic quest to be more than a creature. 104 Man’s impious attempts to be more than Man result in frustration, weariness and hatred of life. 105

Human pleasure, however, is not possible without God’s intervention; so for human pleasure, only God can take the credit. Neurotic and self-destructive activism, on the one hand, is deeply ingrained in Man’s own nature; and by nature, he finds that 106

"All his days, his work is pain and grief; even at night, his mind does not rest."

The ability to enjoy, on the other hand, is not an innately human faculty; it is

" -from the hand of God. For without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" 107

Similarly, 3:13, 5:19, 6:2, etc., all represent the faculty of ‘enjoying’ as a direct endowment of God, not as an ability inherent in Man. The mere fact that Man is endowed with the bodily senses which make pleasure physically possible does not, in Qoheleth’s view, guarantee that he will actually experience enjoyment.

103:7 ff.

104 i.e., immortal; see below, Chapter 7, Section i.

105 2:17.

106 2:23.

107 2:24b & 25.
This is not only because Man is unable to control his circumstances, and hence unable to guarantee avoidance of ruin and opportunity to pursue enjoyment. It is also because human pleasure and satisfaction of the appetites are closely linked with human labour. Sometimes pleasure is at least the intended goal of labour; and even then, the hard and wearisome labour is necessary, in order to provide the material substance necessary for the pleasure. But sometimes, which is much worse, pleasure is not even the goal of Man’s efforts. Instead, preoccupation with labour and with acquisition in themselves can be pleasure’s victorious rival in the competition for human attention.

Even when Man’s circumstances, then, present in themselves no obstacle to his enjoyment, tendencies intrinsic to his own nature, such as acquisitiveness do nevertheless prevent pleasure. Moreover, whether the goal is pleasure or whether it is striving for striving’s sake, the natural link between pleasure and labour can loom oppressively close. Like labour, the appetites reflect the potentially wearisome, never-ending, cyclic frenzy of nature, as described in 1:4-7. Just as "the sea is never full" despite all the rivers flowing into it, so

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108 Although this is part of the reason; see 9:12.

109 6:7 and 2:4-11.

110 4:8b.

111 See below, Chapter 7, Section v.

112 1:8.

113 1:7.
"The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing"; 114

and

"All a man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied". 115

Gratification of the physical senses alone, therefore, is no guarantee of enjoyment, since it can be in itself almost a type of toil. 116 It is a feverish human activity, going round and round in circles, and depending in turn on the equally feverish and cyclical human activity of labour, since only from this can the resources for this gratification come. Therefore, since true enjoyment or happiness is the best that human life has to offer, 117 then God, by retaining in His own hands the ability to bestow or to withhold it, 118 clearly holds the trump card in His dealings with Man. Enjoyment of this life's only definite 'plus' or profit is totally dependent on "revering Him". 119 Qoheleth is thus using his awareness of the importance of this life's creaturely pleasures to re-inforce his point 120 that Man's acceptance of his creatureliness is of key importance, in ethics, in self-understanding, and in self-fulfilment. For Man can experience his Highest Good, which is happiness and enjoyment of his goods in this world, only if he acknowledges his lowly status as

114:8.

115:6:7. See also below, Chapter 9, Section vii, for how Man's grasp on present experience, including pleasure, tends all the more to recede and to escape him the more he pursues it.

116:10 & 11.


120 As discussed above, this Chapter, Section v.
mere creature, dependent on God to bestow on Him the ability to enjoy.

In view of Qoheleth's perhaps deliberate disagreement with Aristotle over whether Man should aim for immortality, it seems significant that Aristotle regards equation of Man's highest good with pleasures as more suitable for cattle than for men, dismissing such an equation scornfully as "-the sentiments of Sardanapallus". For Qoheleth, in sharp contrast to Aristotle's implied disdain for cattle, is at pains to point out that Man is just the same as the animals. He does not even soften the point by implying that this is only a fair assessment of a man who has riches "without understanding". This may, then, be another example of deliberate disagreement with Aristotle on Qoheleth's part. Although he seems in 1:4 to be echoing Aristotle's view that the earth "remains forever", and although he may well have sympathized with that philosopher's rejection of moneymaking as a potential "highest good" for Man, Qoheleth is probably treating Aristotle in the same way as he treats Theognis: sometimes pointedly agreeing with him, and sometimes equally

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121 Mentioned above, this chapter, Section iv.
123 A legendary Assyrian king.
125 As Ps. 49:20 does.
126 On the contrary, he says that the same fate overtakes both the fool and the wise man (2:13-6), just as the same fate overtakes both the human and the animal 3:19.
pointedly disagreeing with him. 128

Moreover, Aristotle's scorn for Sardanapallus makes a very striking contrast to Qoheleth's sympathy for Assyrian opinions on the importance of creaturely pleasures. 129 Sardanapallus's epitaph, although perhaps more frivolously intended, is quite similar in sentiment to Siduri's advice in *Gilgamesh*, quoted in *Qoh*. 9:7-11. According to the Greek translation we have of his message, the King says,

"Eat, drink and play, since all else is not worth this snap of the fingers"; 130

"Here's what I have: what I ate, and my pleasurable experiences of excess and lovemaking. My many rich possessions, though, are all gone." 131

Qoheleth's proposal of pleasure 132 as the key solution to the human dilemma is certainly no new idea. Due to the intrinsic sadness of the human condition, pleasure has often been suggested as the most effective, albeit sadly temporary, counterweight to the problem of life. However, in pointing out that the faculty of enjoyment is not innate, but rather it is "the gift of God", Qoheleth gives recognition of the key importance of pleasure and happiness a uniquely pietistic slant. Not only

128Qoheleth's tendency sometimes to agree and sometimes to disagree with the same author by allusion is also referred to above, this Chapter, beginning of Section iv. In the case of Theognis, he sharpens both his agreement and his disagreement by echoing the actual wording of the poet; see, e.g., below, Chapter 8, Section iii.

129See below, Chapter 7, Section i; see also Appendix One for the inclusion of Assyrian ideas in Hebrew Wisdom. See too Barton's comment (op. cit., P. 40) about the influence on the Jews of Palestine of the Jewish colony in Babylonia known as the 'Gouliouth'. He believes that "It was through this channel that this Babylonian philosophy of life became known to Qoheleth and influenced him.".

130Athenaeus 336.

131Ibid. 530.

132Though in his case, specifically of pleasure as the gift of God, received through reverence for Him.
is his pietism unusual among thinkers who regard pleasure as life's only reliable gain; but also, his clear indication that pleasure is of such priority importance is equally unusual amongst pietists.

Despite, then, his own claim that there is "nothing new under the sun", the combination of these two perspectives gives Qoheleth a standpoint of some originality in dealing with the practical problem of life's inherent sadness. He does not give up on this life, and point us to an after-life where the suffering and injustice won't matter any more, like some pietists. Nor does he point us to a discipline for attaining indifference to suffering through a tranquillity of mind that is essentially within ourselves, and nothing to do with God, such as the "αταξεφαξο" of Epicurus, or the "οδηθεια" of the Cynic / Stoic spectrum of thought. Instead, he offers us a cheerful sense of interaction with God in this life as the antidote to suffering:

"(A man) seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart". 135

The fact that Qoheleth is not looking for some formula to liberate people from their vulnerability to changes of fortune makes his approach seem unusual for his times. Although sixth century Wisdom such as that of Theognis had seen a possible

133:9.

134 E.g., Wisdom of Solomon, which appears to take issue with Qoheleth about the uncertainty of the after-life, etc. See Barton, op. cit., Pp.57-8.

135 5:20. See also below, Chapter 5, Sections vii-ix, for the importance, in his view, of cultivating God's presence.

136 7:13-14. See below, Chapter 6, and also Chapter 10, Section iv, for his belief that this susceptibility to unpredictable changes of circumstance, far from being undesirable, is essential to the cultivation of true wisdom and piety.

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purpose in painful misfortunes, \textsuperscript{137} Man’s desire to escape his notorious vulnerability had, by our author’s time, made

in one form or another, the (objective) of all the Hellenistic philosophies". \textsuperscript{138}

This "\textit{

\begin{itemize}

\item 1. \textit{\}\textsuperscript{137} See below, Chapter 3, Section iii.\textsuperscript{137}

\item 2. \textit{\}\textsuperscript{138} See Dudley, D.R., \textit{A History of Cynicism} (London, 1937), P.95.\textsuperscript{138}

\item 3. \textit{\}\textsuperscript{139} Letter to Menoeceus 128.\textsuperscript{139}

\item 4. \textit{\}\textsuperscript{140} Apud Teles; see Hense, P.38,3; quoted in Dudley, Donald R., \textit{A History of Cynicism} (London, 1937), Pp.45-6.\textsuperscript{140}

\item 5. \textit{\}\textsuperscript{141} See Diogenes Laertius, \textit{Lives of the Philosophers}, ii,93,94.\textsuperscript{141}

\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{98}}
In the former passage, Crates describes, with wry humour and in excruciating detail, 
the agonizing discomfort and total frustration characterizing every stage of a human life, from infancy to old age.

This whole trend in philosophy underlines the acute sensitivity to the misery of the human condition which generally characterized the Hellenistic Thinking Man, however humorous his personal style of self-expression might be. In view of this prevailing attitude, therefore, Qoheleth displays no little audacity in dismissing the many and weary days of our mortal life, with all their manifold agonies, simply by saying \(^{143}\) that we will not bring them to mind much anyway. Perhaps this is an example of Qoheleth's own wry humour. Nevertheless, he sees God's programme for us as keeping us too busy and too happy in the present for the overall sadness of the human condition to force simple, creaturely pleasure down to a low priority-level for the individual. For although he is well aware of the characteristic "evil(s) under the sun", he does not see their preponderance as automatically and mechanically outweighing pleasure. The key issue for him is not whether there simply happens to be more pain in the world than pleasure, but rather whether a man is one of those to whom God has given the gift of enjoyment \(^{144}\) or not. \(^{145}\)

If a man does not receive this gift from God, then however prosperous he is,

\(^{142}\)ld., Ibid., 87,88.

\(^{143}\)5:20.

\(^{144}\)5:19.

\(^{145}\)6:1 & 2.
or however long he lives, his whole life is a complete waste of time; for he gains nothing at all from ever having been alive. But whoever does receive this gift can not really be disadvantaged by the mere fact that the overall quantity of pain in life outweighs that of pleasure, because it is nevertheless the pleasure of which he is chiefly aware. Therefore, the mere quantitative preponderance of pain over pleasure, which to Crates and Hegesias's followers (above) seems to be of such prime importance, is of no real practical importance to Qoheleth, since this pain is not the factor which is highlighted in his consciousness.

Perhaps Qoheleth's viewpoint is not unlike that of Aristippus in believing that the present moment is the only reality. For 5:20's "He seldom reflects on the days of his life" would be easier to understand if an implied "now" was added to the following "because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart", as if a man were occupied with gladness in a perpetual present that mysteriously overrides the reality his past troubles seemed to have in their time.

By contrast, the mainstream philosophical schools, even though in other ways very diverse from each other, nevertheless share a strong conviction that because moments of pain will outnumber moments of pleasure, individual experiences of

147 5:19 & 20.
148 Epicureans, Cynics, Stoics, etc.
pleasure can not be of great importance. To Qoheleth, however, they are of the greatest importance: pragmatically, because they are the only definite gain Man receives in life; and ethically, because they serve a unique function in underlining his dependence on God. The latter point is essential to Man’s self-limitation, which in effect makes it essential to his self-definition/self-understanding, without which there can be no fulfilment.

Qoheleth does not recommend concepts like "αρωκζιο" or "αποθεωξ", even though they would protect people from despair over the changeable circumstances of life of which he is so acutely aware; for they would also protect people from an alert awareness of those changes. Rather, he advises us to respond to changing fortunes: to rejoice when times are good; but to accept, when times are bad, that there is a divine purpose behind it. It is all-important that Man should not be made impervious to changes of fortune. For God has made him subject to these changes of fortune deliberately, so that he

"-can not discover anything about his future".

The main objective in Qoheleth’s view, then, is not some philosophical self-anaesthetization technique, to protect oneself from the adverse effects of these changes, even though it is important to be happy. The priority issue is rather to

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149 And especially of mere creaturely pleasure, as opposed to the more worthwhile pleasure of the soul.

150 7:14.

151 A view which would certainly have surprised Epicurus.

152 7:14.
accept that God’s right to keep Man in ignorance about his future is of great ethical importance.\textsuperscript{153} For the chief obstacle to true piety is arrogance;\textsuperscript{154} and the fact that God reserves the right to withhold knowledge from Man in certain areas, together with His unique ability to grant or deny the faculty of enjoyment, constitute the main antidote to human arrogance. Qoheleth’s recognition of this is a key element in his own distinctive brand of piety.

\textsuperscript{153}See below, Chapter 6 and Chapter 10, Section iv.

\textsuperscript{154}See below, especially Chapter 4; see also Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7.
CHAPTER 3

ANTI-WISDOM AND IMPIETY IN GREEK AND HEBREW ETHICS

1 BOTH CULTURES REFLECT A MORALLY AMBIVALENT CONCEPT OF WISDOM

Qoheleth’s strong rejection of the wisdom based on human arrogance, on the grounds that it apes godhead, could in theory be an outcome of his Hebrew heritage alone. For this viewpoint is well-represented in the Bible. Ezekiel 28:1-9 rejects and ridicules the same kind of wisdom; and v 2 shows clearly that it is on this type of ‘wisdom’ that the King of Tyre bases his direct and blatant false claim to be a god. Ibid. 28:9, which sounds like an ironic echo of Gen. 3:4 & 5, is particularly scathing:

"Will you then say I am a God in the presence of those who kill you?"

Ibid. 28:4 also presents the same image of lavishly piling up wealth as Qoh. 2:8. ¹

Nevertheless, in view both of the Greek cultural dominance of his era ² and of his own individual insights, it seems far likelier that Qoheleth’s rejection of wisdom-based pseudo-godhead springs from a combination of Hebrew and Hellenic

¹See below, Chapter 7, Sections iv and v, for this and other Biblical examples of proud kings represented as pseudo-gods because of their spurious ‘wisdom’.

²See below, APPENDIX THREE.
culture, and from a detailed knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek literary traditions.

For the way he expresses his discernment of wisdom’s limits, and his terms of reference for the implications of those limits regarding the status of Man relative to divinity, display many points of contact with Greek Wisdom tradition in particular.

Moreover, there is nothing forced or self-contradictory in this approach. It makes sense that Qoheleth’s wary appraisal of Wisdom, especially his insistence on the unpredictable and unfathomable aspects of the divine plan, should make use of Greek attitudes and motifs absorbed into his more optimistic native wisdom-tradition. There are clear Hebrew parallels to the Greek phase of questioning the morality or the efficacy of wisdom and the probity of professional Wise Men. The issue of whether wisdom is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, - which can also be viewed as a controversy between two rival ‘wisdoms’, one good or pious, the other evil or anti-pious, - is no less crucial to Israelite intellectual and spiritual history than to Greek. As far as this

3See also above, Chapters 1 and 2.

4Apart from Qoheleth itself, the Biblical Wisdom books are little inclined to question the spiritual standing of wisdom, which is why I describe the Hebrew Wisdom tradition as, in a sense, ‘more optimistic’ than the Greek. Nevertheless, the Prophets do indeed question it, as is clear from, e.g., Is. 19:11-15, 29:14 and 44:25. If the Prophets’ contributions to wisdom-theory are to be regarded as part of Hebrew Wisdom overall, rather than classified as a different genre, then the Hebrew Wisdom genre should be described as self-critical. Similarly, Greek Wisdom must also be regarded as self-critical if one regards the contributions of the Tragedians and Philosophers, as well as those of the earlier wisdom-poets, as a continuation of the same genre, rather than as a departure from it.

5See Gordis, op. cit., P.18, Para.3, for reference to the cynical overtones eventually associated with both the “οδικός” and the “σοφοστής”.

6The ultimate version of how exact and absolute the opposition can be between Wisdom and Anti-wisdom (i.e., between Man’s ‘wisdom’ and God’s Wisdom) is probably St. Paul’s version. See, e.g., I Cor. 2 passim, esp. vv. 5-7; cf. II Cor. 1:12. St. James also is aware of two opposing ‘wisdoms’ (Jas. 3:13-18), one “earthly” (Ibid. v 15), the other “from heaven” (Ibid. v 17). It appears from I Cor. 1:19’s direct quotation of Is. 29:14 that this viewpoint is consciously based on earlier prophetic denunciation of Anti-wisdom. This is a thought-provoking reflection of how longstanding and deep-rooted in Biblical thought the concept of the two opposing ‘wisdoms’ (one pious and the other anti-pious) appears to be.

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particular topic is concerned, the insights of both cultures appear to be naturally compatible. Qoheleth is therefore able to incorporate them both in one single work on the spiritual status of Wisdom without any jarring contradictions.

Awareness of the Wisdom versus Anti-wisdom controversy in both cultures, rather than simply in his own culture alone, may, then, serve to explain the intensity of Qoheleth's position. The Sophists come to be condemned by some for "-making the weaker argument appear the stronger".

This claim apparently originated with Protagoras, and is often interpreted as meaning "using cleverness to undermine truth and justice". Aristotle, for example, in Rhetoric II.xxv.11, comments, "κατά τὸ θέτω δὲ λόγους κρέμασα ρειτεν τοῦτον εἰς τὴν διδασκαλίαν οὶ διάφοροι τῷ Προσταγάρχου ἐκφράζεται. γενέσθαι τὸ γέρον εἴτε, καὶ ωῷ ἀληθείς ἀλλὰ φανταμένου εἰςός, κατὰ εἰς νόμον τῇ τέχνῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν σύμβουλῳ καὶ δραματικῇ.". "And this is what is meant by 'Making the lesser / worse argument (appear) the better.'". Hence people rightly disapproved of the profession of Protagoras. For it is a lie, and not a real probability, just an apparent one, not used in any skill except rhetoric and eristic.". (For a late reference to strong public disapproval of Protagoras' supposedly amoral 'wisdom' in other areas, see also Diog. Laert. IX.52).

Some argue that Protagoras' ἐπάγγελμα could be interpreted in a non-amoral way. John Henry Freese, e.g., argues in a footnote to his Loeb translation of Aristotle's Rhetoric (London and New York, 1926), P.334, that the lesser or weaker argument is not necessarily identical with the worse argument as Protagoras' detractors assume, and therefore supporting the weaker argument does not necessarily amount to supporting untruth or injustice. Nevertheless, as W.J.M. Starkie points out in The Clouds of Aristophanes (London, 1911), P.37, the amoral interpretation of Protagoras' claim is perfectly natural linguistically. In Clouds L.112-118, Strepsiades exhorts his son to learn this knack with the lesser / worser argument, so that he can evade payment of his debts. Starkie, in his comment on L.113, says "Protagoras' profession was interpreted, as by Strepsiades here, in the sense that it was his purpose to make the more unjust argument the stronger, and so to defeat the ends of justice. Nor was Strepsiades wrong linguistically, since 'ἡτταν' means 'inferior', 'worse', and so 'more unjust'.' He then refers to the boast of the Unjust Reason that he won his title of 'ἡτταν λόγος' or 'Worser / Lesser Argument' (L.1038) because (L.1039-40)

"πρὸς τὴν κρίσιν εἰς ἐννοίαν τῇ δικαίᾳ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀναπληρώσει",

which could be translated,

"It was I who pioneered the idea
Of confuting the laws and justice".

For the opinion that it is unfair to construe the wisdom of Socrates as amoral, and that it has been so construed only because it is confused with that of the Sophists, see Xenophon, Mem. I.i.12 and Plato, Apol. 19 B. These controversies reflect vividly to what extent the concept of anti-wisdom, i.e., a 'wisdom' whose effects are ethically negative, became a major issue in Greek thinking. They also show that not everyone who rejected amoral wisdom rejected wisdom altogether. The idea was recognized, at least
rather as the Prophets 8 condemn the "wise in their own eyes" for making good out to be evil and evil out to be good. This cynical expediency is challenged from various angles in both Greek and Hebrew literature, not only for its moral turpitude but also for its inherent lack of realism. The kind of attitudes which are felt to lie behind it, for instance, tend to be represented as base, stupid and fundamentally self-defeating.

The sentiments of Med. L1.580-3 constitute one example of this:

"έμοι γὰρ ὅστις δίκοις δὲν σοφὸς λέειν πέφυκε, πλείστην ζημίαν ὑφισκᾶνει.
γλῶσσῃ γὰρ σῶχον τάδικα ἐὰν περιστελεῖν,
τολμῆς πανουργεῖν. ἦστι δ ’οὐκ ἔγχαν σοφὸς.”.

"To my mind, it's the villain who's a clever ("σοφὸς") speaker who foots the heaviest bill for his crimes. For he's a reckless stop-at-nothing, who boasts quite openly (literally: 'with his tongue') of his skill at cloaking his dishonesty. And that's where he's not too clever ("σοφὸς")." 9

Medea is here making an additional point about false (i.e. deceitful) wisdom. She sees that verbal skill in deceit (in "making the weaker argument appear the stronger", etc.) is not merely immoral; it is also self-defeating. For the pride engendered by that kind of verbal skill, combined with the verbal forwardness which engenders it, leads to boasting; and boasting gives the game away. Whoever advertises himself as a clever deceiver is not a clever deceiver; for he forewarns his intended victim. 10

implicitly and by some, that there was a positive, acceptable wisdom as well as, and opposed to, the negative anti-wisdom.

8E.g., Is. 5:20 & 21. See also below, this Chapter, Section ii.

9Although 'with his tongue' should be construed with 'boast', it also colours the word 'cloaking', since the cloaking-skills of which this villain is boasting are of the verbal type.

10Cf. Prov. 1:17,
"How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!".
Medea knows, of course, that Jason is going to pay heavily for having revealed so brazenly and complacently to her the coolness of his double-dealing against her. Even though Jason’s attempt to make himself sound in the right has demonstrated his blind confidence in sophistic technique, he has displayed not so much rhetorical skill as rhetorical effrontery; and all his complacent eloquence has actually achieved is to forewarn his victim so she can plot her revenge. No-one in their right mind would agree with the horrifying revenge she undertakes; and yet, morally and emotionally repugnant though she may be, she is, on a factual level, correct. Trusting in this kind of spurious ‘wisdom’ is entirely as foolish as she says it is. Human cleverness simply is not adequate to outwit either fate’s twists and turns or life’s superhuman, supra-rational forces.
THE BELIEF THAT MERE AMORAL INTELLIGENCE IS DANGEROUSLY LIMITED AND IS NOT ‘REAL’ WISDOM

The revenge of Medea is a terrifying warning that the popular new faith in human intelligence is blind. The rational faculty of calculation and planning, of persuasion and of prediction, which some were coming to view as the answer to everything, is no guarantee even of escaping absolute ruin, let alone of controlling and organizing everything to one’s own advantage. Medea’s vengeance-plan is purely the outcome of outraged passion; and this plan is far from rational, since it hurts herself and her innocent sons as well as her enemy. Nevertheless, it succeeds; and she makes her escape far out of Jason’s reach, in her supernaturally provided dragon-chariot. Jason’s plan, however, does not succeed, despite his rationalist pretensions. All his coolly-framed calculations to make himself invincibly comfortable fail miserably; and he is left worse than comfortless.

Medea no less than Isaiah, then, sees clearly the fruitlessness of deceitful and cynical wisdom. Those who arrogantly think themselves wise, for their ability to pervert justice and attain their own selfish ends by intelligent planning, in reality are not wise at all. For there is no reason to suppose that their false wisdom will succeed,

11Passion is the very thing Jason despises. He has no more realistic a grasp than Hippolytus of the deadly danger of underrating its power. This is evident (LI.569 ff.) in the patronising way he refers to women in particular setting a high value on passion and regarding the security of sexual relationships as their main priority. This implies that he himself does not, and feels only scorn for those who do. He makes it abundantly clear that his motivation for his new marriage (despite Medea’s jealous insinuations to the contrary) has nothing to do with desire and everything to do with cold-blooded and self-interested calculation. He is completely seduced by the hazardous allurement of rationalism, and his doom is sealed in consequence.

12 Is. 29:14; cf. Jer. 8:9.
especially against elemental forces which are not subject to or even compatible with the human rational faculty for planning. The disciples of amoral rationalist wisdom prize this faculty too highly because they imagine that through it they can control everything; but their faith in this ‘wisdom’ is completely misplaced. For their anti-wisdom of rational calculation and foresight is constantly being challenged, undermined and then brought to its knees by the irrational, the incalculable, and the unforeseeable. This idea is woven into the very fabric of traditional Greek wisdom and piety; and in Greek drama this traditional wisdom offers powerful resistance to the contemporary challenge of rationalism.  

If Qoheleth is indeed aware of the similarity of Hellenic and Hebrew moral conclusions on the stupidity of amoral ‘wisdom’, that may be partly why Qoh. 1:7 echoes Aristophanes’ *The Clouds* L1.1290-5, on the theme of the sea never becoming full even though all the rivers flow into it. For *The Clouds* is the classic caricature

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13 I.e., the type of amoral, anthropocentric and manipulative intelligence, with no basis in piety, which for the purposes of this thesis is termed ‘anti-wisdom’.

14 See also below, this Chapter and Chapter 4, All Sections.

15 Strepsiades uses this traditional riddle about the sea as an absurd argument against having to pay the interest he owes on some debts:

"ΣΤΡΕΨΙΑΔΗΣ:
τι δήτα; την θάλασσαν ξαθ' ὅτι πλεύονα
νυν ἐνομίζεις ἢ πρὸ τοῦ;

ΑΜΥΝΙΑΣ:
μὰ Δ' ἀλλ' ἵσην.
οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον πλεύον' εἶναι.

ΣΤΡΕΨΙΑΔΗΣ:
κέκτα πῶς
αὕτη μὲν, ὅ κακόδαιμον, οὐδὲν γέγονεν ἐπιρρέοντα τῶν ποταμῶν πλεύον, σοὶ δὲ
ζητεῖς ποιήσαι τάργύριον πλεύον τὸ σόν;"

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of the duplicity of the ‘Sophists’ and the standard spoof on the pretensions of amoral ‘wisdom’. The wording of Qoh. 1:7 may well be a deliberate reminder of this play’s sentiments. If so, the fact that this echo of the Anti-wisdom take-off of all time occurs in the first few verses of Qoheleth suggests that the allusion is an opening trumpet-call on the author’s part. Right from the outset, he wants his readers / hearers to know that this book spells all-out war on the cynical brand of ‘wisdom’ (i.e., on anti-wisdom).

The dishonesty of ‘The Wise’, the social evils of too much ‘wisdom’ and the limitations of its practitioners are also favourite topics in Tragedy. Sophocles, for example, makes the danger of letting the human drive to control 16 override the

"STREPSIADES:
Look here, do you suppose that the sea is fuller
Now than it used to be?

AMYNIAS:
Of course not; it’s just the same.
If it were fuller, it would be against nature.

STREPSIADES:
In that case,
You poor idiot, if the sea doesn’t increase at all
With the rivers streaming to it, then how can you
Be expecting to get your money to increase?"

For the further relevance of Clouds L.1.1290-5 to the message of Qoheleth, see also below, Chapter 10, Section ii, QOHELETH AND RECIPROCITY IN ETHICS AND IN NATURE, on the implications of the word ‘ὄφθαι’ in L.1292.

16Because Man’s faculties of wisdom and calculation tend to be his most prized tool in the quest for control, ‘wisdom’ as a concept is often implicitly equated with mere ability to control. This then makes the conflict between piety and the impulse to control the same conflict, in effect, as that between pious wisdom and anthropocentric anti-wisdom. For Sophocles’ treatment of this, see below, this Chapter, this Section and Section iii; but see especially Chapter 4, Sections i, v, vi and vii. The entire control issue, with all its notorious temptations to hybris, is in essence a prime issue of wisdom-theory in particular. Precisely because ‘wisdom’ (or, more correctly, anti-wisdom) is popularly identified with control - as, e.g., Aj. 1252-4 all too clearly reflects, - then it is only natural for a sage, or for anyone claiming to have a stake in wisdom (or in piety, like Sophocles) to address, directly or indirectly, the issue of whether such an identification is justified.
demands of piety a major theme in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in *Antigone* and in *Ajax*. Both the character of Odysseus in *Philoctetes* and the Atreidae's obsession with control in *Ajax* put the anti-wisdom of manipulative cleverness in a very tawdry light by comparison with the heroic magnanimity and empathy of Neoptolemus in the former play and of Odysseus in the latter. Euripides also reflects his society's awareness

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17In *Aj.* Li.1250-4, Agamemnon reflects the same petty preoccupation as Menelaus does at Li.1067-70. Their feeling toward Ajax is merely a continuing desire to master him, and nothing more. See below, Chapter 10, Section vii for Qoheleth's view on the impoverishing effects of relationships being confined to the level of mere control instead of genuine interaction. See also below, Chapter 4, Sections ii, iii, iv and v, for how pointedly the Atreidae’s attitude toward Ajax here, especially in the context of refusing him burial, contrasts with Achilles’ attitude toward Priam requesting Hector’s body for burial in *Iliad* XXIV. It is Achilles’ idea of the divinely ordained changeableness of human experience, so that life is never all good, but there is always some bad fortune (Ibid. Li.525-551), which underlies his awareness of all mankind’s common vulnerability to grief. This awareness forms the basis of his empathy with Priam in this confrontation-scene: an empathy which is unmistakably powerful, despite the deep and grievous grounds of their enmity.

The Atreidae’s lack of this pietist perspective leaves them no room for any fellowship of feeling with Ajax, or for sympathy with those mourning him. It therefore rules out the possibility of their partaking of any share in the greatness and the dignity of Ajax by identifying with him in his humanity and in the sadness of his lot. By contrast, however, Achilles and Priam share in each other’s dignity through their mutual respect in *Iliad* XXIV Li.480-4, 519-21 and 628-34, and through their shared mourning, Ibid. Li.507-24. The way that Agamemnon and Menelaus defy their pious obligation to grant Ajax a funeral also demonstrates that they have no innate greatness of their own. The formidable warrior against whom they are so intent on scoring their point at last is now dead, which renders any reprisal they might take against him now worse than meaningless.

Agamemnon’s crude ‘brain-always-conquers-brawn’ image at 1252-4 shows that he belongs solidly to the anti-wisdom camp. Not only does he over-rate altogether the importance of being in control; he also sees control as an achievement exclusively of the intellect, and does not acknowledge that other qualities, such as valor, strength, flexibility or noble affections might also have a part to play in a legitimate art of control. Furthermore, this anti-wisdom outlook leaves no room for the sense of awe due to Ajax for his inherent greatness. It reduces everything to the level of merely human intellectual manipulativeness, dangerously ignoring the powerful forces of the numinous, which are not subject to control by the human intellect. As in *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, so also in *Ajax*, Sophocles champions the reverent and flexible wisdom which is awed by the numinous and which openly acknowledges respect for that which commands respect and amazement at that which calls for amazement. Conversely, he again exposes the hollowness of petty, manipulative anti-wisdom and its self-absorbed opposition to that awe for the unknown and for the unpredictable which he sees as the essence of piety.

For the mutual awe of Priam and Achilles in *Iliad* XXIV and Achilles’ awareness that the gods are active on Priam’s behalf, see below, Chapter 4, Sections ii and iii; for Sophocles’ interest in hero-cults, see below, Chapter 4, Section ii. For the importance of numen in Qoheleth, see below, Chapter 9, Sections v, vii, viii and ix; and for the spiritual significance of awe, see Chapter 4, Section iv and Chapter 9, end of Section vii and Sections viii and ix.

18A writer with whom Qoheleth also seems to share other preoccupations. See, e.g., APPENDIX EIGHT.
of a negative aspect or type of wisdom, often in brief, impassioned or bitingly sarcastic references such as Hipp. L.640-4 and Med. L.294-9 and 580-3. 

Compare also the threatening Androm. L.245,

"σοφή σοφή σό. κατθανεῖν δ' δμως σε δει!"  

with Qoh. 2:16b,

19 By contrast, however, Elec. L.294-6 seems to present a much more sympathetic concept of wisdom, associating wisdom with compassion and deficiency in compassion with ignorance. If this passage is indeed projecting a positive wisdom, as opposed to the negative wisdom of the other Euripides passages just referred to, this suggests that Euripides also is consciously aware of and has a standpoint regarding the wisdom / anti-wisdom antithesis: i.e., that there is a positive, moral type of wisdom as well as a negative, amoral type of wisdom opposite to it. See also below on the two different sides to Androm. L.245 and its implications about 'wisdom'.

20 Hermione's direct meaning here is, "You may be smart (i.e., smart with your answers to all my accusations and insults), but that won't stop me from killing you.". However, because of the morally two-edged implication of the term σοφίς, one side negative but the other positive, this same wording could convey an indirect meaning much broader and more generalized than Hermione intends: namely, that even admirable wisdom or cleverness does not necessarily save anyone from death, even if they deserve to be saved from death.

This more general truth is a very poignant one, and likely to arouse the audience's sympathy. Hermione does not mean it to be taken that way; she does not intend to imply anything poignant, since she is referring to her rival's cleverness with contempt, as something very shallow. Yet the fact that the wisdom of the wise can not save them from death very naturally excites human compassion; and the poet may be using the wisdom / anti-wisdom antithesis here to extract a double meaning from Hermione's words: a hateful picture of Andromache in her eyes, but a positive picture of her in the eyes of the audience. For Andromache, who is older than Hermione and tutored by adversity, is not spoil'd and sheltered in the extreme way that Hermione is by her father, who supports her ruthlessly even in her intent to murder; and it could be argued that Andromache actually is wise: not in the shallow sense of L.245's taunt, but in the profound way that can come only from encountering extreme reversals of fortune.

Grievous reversal of fortune is the very experience for which Homer's Andromache is a byword, and Euripides' Andromache reinforces this image (e.g., L.1.1-15, 64-5, 91-117, 384-405). Since Andromache is an obvious product of the refining effects of the alternation principle in human circumstances, it seems very appropriate that she should be the mouthpiece for what appear to be elegant maxims, such as L.207-8's statement that it is virtue rather than beauty which wins the heart of a bridegroom, or the point that children are life to all mortals at L.418-9. The fact that the Solonic maxim (so popular in Greek Tragedy, see especially below, Chapter 4, Section vi), that one should never call a mortal blessed until you see how their life ended, is spoken in this play by Andromache herself at L.100-3, tends to reinforce the impression that she is a mouthpiece of genuine wisdom, and not just an expert in sophistic argument (nor, for that matter, in the 'wisdom' of mere witchcraft, as suggested at L.31-5).

Admittedly, sometimes the Solonic maxim is expressed in Tragedy by characters who are unwise and hybristic, such as Aeschylus' Agamemnon in Ag. L.928-9; but in this type of case, the irony is obvious. Agamemnon is condemning his own hybris in advance by citing this maxim and then doing the very thing that the principles associated with it are warning him not to do. Andromache's statement of this saying, however, can be taken just as much at its face value as a statement of the same principle would be from the Chorus, as in O.T. L.1528-30.
"The wise man too must die!". 21

21Cf. Ibid. 2:14b and Ps. 49:10. Cf. also all the above-mentioned sayings from Tragedy with the sentiments of Is. 5:20-21.

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
and clever in their own sight.".
iii QOHELETH OVERCOME S HIS INITIAL DISAPPOINTMENT OVER THE LIMITATIONS OF WISDOM

Despite this shared preoccupation with the limitations of wisdom, - both with its potential amorality and with the foolishness of trusting too much in its efficacy, - Qoheleth nevertheless has his own distinctive views on this common theme. Although Androm. L.245, with its very similar wording to Qoh. 2:16b, is a taunt, and although the same or a similar verbal formula can also be tauntingly invoked against the amoral pseudo-sages of spurious wisdom, who deserve their plans to be foiled, it is nevertheless unlikely that Qoh. 2:16b is a taunt. 22 It is more likely, in view of the book's overall drift, to be a neutral statement of wisdom's limitations, irrespective of a particular sage's deserts, positive or negative. As a wise man himself, Qoheleth has no hostility against the sage as such. 23 This saying of 2:16b,

"Like the fool, the wise man too must die",

can be associated, in both Greek and Hebrew thinking, with the pathos of unexpected reversals of fortune, which are often as undeserved as they are unexpected. 24 This

22 However, as Qoheleth's disavowal of the notion of wisdom as a guarantee of success could be mistaken for a low view of wisdom (see below, Chapter 7, Section v, WISDOM AND THE SUCCESS ETHIC), so 2:16b could similarly be mistaken for a taunt, even though it probably is not. Even Androm. L.245 itself is probably not merely a taunt on every level of its meaning. It is directly intended as a taunt by the speaker; but it seems to reflect indirectly the more positive and sympathetic attitude of the playwright, who is aware that there is pious wisdom as well as sophistic 'wisdom'. Since Andromache has the wisdom that comes from harsh experience (a much deeper wisdom than the mere cleverness or sophistic disputational skill implied by "οοφή οοφή οοφή"), Hermione's taunt may well remind the audience that there is great pathos in the fact that even real wisdom can not save the sage from death.

23 See, e.g., 9:13, where the author himself is impressed by a poor sage's wisdom, even though others fail to appreciate it as he does (Ibid. vv 15-16).

24 The proverbial fate of Andromache, an innocent victim of war in Euripides' play of that name as she was in Homer, is one of the most obvious cases in point imaginable, even though Hermione (her rival in Euripides) is too narrowly committed to her own point of view to see that.
association arises from the fact that death, like disaster, is a great leveller of inequalities.

This is partly why Qoh. 2:17 speaks of hating life. At first sight this looks odd as a follow-on from his statement of the inevitability of death, given that the author represents that inevitability as regrettable. Since he values both wisdom and fame, which only have meaning and worth if life has meaning and worth, it seems strange for Qoheleth to say that he actually reached the point of no longer valuing life itself. But the point is that death, by cancelling out the difference in value between the wise and the foolish, has made the wise, in effect, level with the foolish. This has convinced Qoheleth that his superiority in wisdom, however genuine, is not, after all, the passport to everlasting fame he once hoped it to be; and the fact that he reacts to this conviction by "hating life" shows that his original desire to attain lasting glory and control, as the traditional epitome of power and success, the wise King-figure,

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25He sees death's inevitability as regrettable because it neutralizes the advantages of wisdom (2:15 & 16). Wisdom is the quality which he most values (2:13 & 14a), and which he recognizes in himself (1:16, 2:15b) as well as in others (4:13, 8:1, 9:13 ff.). The implication of 2:16a, following closely the personal slant of v 15's "What then do I gain by being wise?", is that once his dearest hope was to gain lasting personal fame through his exceptional wisdom; but now the inevitability of death, with the limitations it places on the span of human memory, has brought home to him that this hope was a vain one.

262:17.

27See 1:12, 13, 16. In his symbolically assumed persona of Solomon (see below, Chapter 7, Section ii and APPENDIX TWO), Qoheleth has no doubts of the superiority of his wisdom over that of all the other rulers over Jerusalem before him. He casts himself in the rôle of a sage-king of legendary power, even though he himself is a more mundane type of sage altogether: a popular teacher (12:9). This is because he recognizes that the real appeal of wisdom (however apparently mundane its immediate function) and the mystique of the power it is supposed to bring belong at root to the fabric of legend and the primaeval drives enshrined in myth, especially the human drive to gain and exercise control, which is symbolized by the traditional figure of the sage-king. In Qoheleth's culture, Solomon, although an historical figure, is the prime example of this wisdom-king type, because his image has absorbed the same appeal and the same symbolic meaning as that of mythical sage-kings.
- was extreme: beyond the limits proper to a mortal, and hence unrealistic and inappropriate.

This lack of realism stems largely from prizing greatness and coveting special distinction too much. "Hating life" is a very extreme reaction to the discovery that one's fame and control will not last forever, since this temporary nature is the common lot of all mankind. If wisdom is to be at all workable, it demands coming to terms with Man's insurmountable limitations and scaling down one's ambitions to accommodate mortality. The fact that death is a great leveller of inequalities, and that the wise can therefore be 'level with' the foolish, can not be dismissed as merely negative, a regrettable flaw in the glory of the great and nothing more. It is true that this levelling element adds to life's overall insecurity, and to the force of the question-mark that looms over all its accepted values and expectations. But Greek wisdom tradition recognizes that this is far from entirely negative.

As a sage himself, then, albeit of a non-legendary type, Qoheleth takes on the formidable rôle of the wisdom-potentate because he senses that it is in the power, glory and fame of this awesome king-type, with its apparent timelessness and lack of limitations, that the basic allure of wisdom really lies. Therefore, it is by assuming the dramatic rôle of this mythical type that he can best expose the very nature of wisdom, and hence also of anti-wisdom, right to its morally ambivalent roots, including the associated ambition of Man to be a god instead of Man. By admitting the mythical stature (and hence, by implication, demi-god associations) of Man's wisdom-ambitions, Qoheleth steers clear of the cosy veneer of mundane pragmatism by which some wisdom books (even if pious in intent like Ben Sira) can mask the spiritual dangers of the wisdom-spectrum as a whole. Qoheleth recognizes both extremities of this wisdom - anti-wisdom spectrum: its exactly opposite poles of intelligent piety on the one hand and the supreme impiety of spurious godhead on the other.

\[28\] In this case, lasting fame and power through pre-eminence in wisdom.

\[29\] 2:16.

\[30\] 2:18-19.

\[31\] I.e., 'have no advantage over'.
The equality of everyone before death, so unpalatable to Qoheleth at first, adds
to the sense that unpredictability, - and hence also the impossibility of lasting
influence and of real control, - do indeed constitute the keynote of life. 32 But in this
unpredictability, and in the consequent impossibility of human certainty and control,
there is a positive challenge to piety and to human intelligence: a sense that here is
a mystery demanding explanation and worthy of enquiry. Although it seems
burdensome, threatening and even unjust to those who see no ethical purpose to it,
nevertheless traditional Greek piety does see an ethical purpose to it, and represents
acceptance of the unpredictability and changeableness of human fortunes as a high-
profile prerequisite of real, practicable wisdom.33

32 As also the helplessness common to all mankind in the face of inscrutable supernatural powers, or
in the grip of uncontrollable forces like the wars and other disasters which reverse human fortunes
(sometimes even beyond all expectation), adds to the same impression.

33 This principle plays a powerful ethical rôle in promoting not only reverence for the gods but also a
sympathy between human beings which is potentially universal, since it can span the gap even between
obvious and bitter enemies. In Sophocles' Ajax, Odysseus (L.1359 and 1361) conveys deftly how a change
in circumstances can make willingness to change one’s sympathies a moral necessity, instead of a moral
weakness as Agamemnon implies at L.1358. Cf. Prov. 24:17-18’s prohibition of gloating over a fallen
enemy with Odysseus’ refusal to do exactly that (Aj. L.1332-49) when directly invited to by Agamemnon
(Ibid. L.1348). Even though Tecmessa (L.961-2 and 971), like the Chorus (L.956-60), has expressed fears
that he may join with the Atreidae in mocking his fallen enemy, he will not do it. When Agamemnon
suggests that his change of heart toward his former enemy is fickle (L.1358) and disloyal to himself
(L.1346), Odysseus replies in effect that although he is on Ajax’ side now, in the present dispute about his
right to burial, nevertheless (L.1347)

"έμεσθέντα, χνύν, μισεῖν καλόνν",
"Yet I hated him when hating him was right".

The time-word ‘χνύν’ at the time when’ presupposes the idea expressed in Qoh. 3:8: that there
is a time to hate, and that to hate outside the proper time for it would not be ‘καλόν’ (‘right’). It would
in fact be arrogant: a refusal to submit to the divinely appointed alternation of times and circumstances.

Similarly in O.T. L.1516, when Oedipus bewails the unwelcomeness of having to submit to C.O.T’s
(Creon’s) instructions to go indoors, C.O.T. replies with a proverb:

"πάντα χρόνον καρφί καλά",
"All things are right in their proper time."

(Note Qoheleth’s use of ‘τηλ’ for ‘καλόν’ / ‘καλόν’ in 3:11,
"τηλήν τιμή τιμή λογίαν τηλήν", like the later Rabbinic usage of ‘τηλ’ for ‘right’, also by analogy with ‘καλόν’ / ‘καλό’.
By comparison with the neat axiom-style brevity of O.T. L.1516 and of the original Hebrew of Qoh. 3:11, LXX Qoh. 3:11
seems relatively clumsy:

"ἐν σφάλματι ἄντων καλά ἐν καρφί σκότος")

C.O.T.’s use of a proverb at this climactic moment in O.T. serves to remind Oedipus how basic a principle

* In fin. 33 and hereafter, 'C.O.T.' means the Creon of Adipus Tyrannus, as distinct from 'C. Ant.', which means the Creon of Antigone. See below, P.132, fin. 5; see also P.156, fin. 63, Para. 2.
Correspondingly, the tendency to exaggerate the predictable element in experience, to mis-predict or mis-calculate by setting too high a value on calculation and hence over-relying on it, is seen as spurious wisdom, and as a type of impiety. The sentiments of the wisdom-poets such as Solon and Theognis are later of wisdom submitting to the alternation of times is. Not to do so would be arrogant, a denial of the basic structure of reality. Furthermore, C.O.T.'s parallel-looking remark at L.1522, "πάντα μη βολην κρινέν", "Don't aim at controlling everything", is, in a sense, saying the same thing. The following line (L.1523) refers to the fact that Oedipus' control of things did not keep pace with his life-span; and this relates very closely to the Solonic wisdom which Herodotus saw as particularly important (and particularly difficult) for kings in particular to accept; see below, this Chapter, Section ii.

As a reflection of the Greek tendency to regard acceptance of the alternation of times and of the unpredictability of changeable human fortunes as an essential element of wisdom, Odysseus' willingness to support and sympathize with Teucer over Ajax's right to burial (Aj. L.11376 ff.) strongly invites comparison with the shared tears of Achilles and Priam in Iliad XXIV L.507-551 over their mutual sorrows, and also, by implication, over the sorrows common to all mankind. The parallel is the more striking because the issue at stake here, as in Ajax, is a dead hero's right to an honourable burial; and here also his enemy eventually concedes that right. Achilles' behaviour in this scene is pointedly not that of a savage lion out of control, as Apollo views him (Ibid.39-54); rather, despite his previous abuse of Hector's corpse, we now find, in this confrontation with Priam, that he lives up to the god-fearing picture presented of him by Zeus (L.1155-8) and by Iris (L.184-7). It is noteworthy, therefore, that it is in this scene Achilles makes his point that the chequered (and hence, in effect, unpredictable) nature of human fortune is controlled by Zeus and the gods (L.525-551). Although he appears to believe that some people may experience unmixed misery (L.531-3), he evidently regards mixed and changeable fortune as the norm, with no mortal experiencing unclouded bliss.

Critics do not always see why Achilles' reference to how no mortal enjoys undiluted happiness has to have such a prominent place here in particular, except in so far as it provides human, emotional grounds for his empathy with Priam. However, there is an additional dimension to his point that goes even deeper than his recognition of the emotions common to Priam and to himself, and that is the dimension of his piety. He accepts that it is Zeus who dispenses human fortune, and that Man himself is never in control. Greek piety sees recognition of the insecurity which all human beings share in the face of life's unpredictability as the mainstay of civilized values. It is this recognition which safeguards the rights of the suppliant as sacrosanct. For it amounts to the realization that anyone, however influential, could find themselves reduced to the rôle of suppliant; and so all men are in a sense equal before the forces that could reduce them to it. Achilles' explicit acknowledgement and clear articulation of this unpredictability principle at this point underline as nothing else could that he is not a lion out of control, but an essentially pious and civilized man. See also below, Chapter 4, Section iii.

34 As Jason does in Eur. Medea.

35 Theognis, for example, reflecting on the innate changeableness of life, - its mixture of good and bad fortune, its unpredictability, and its tendency to switch abruptly from one set of circumstances to the opposite (Li.657-666), - teaches that we should not lay claim to certainty about what can or can not happen. The gods resent such claims, because the outcome (τέλος) of a matter is their domain (Li.659-60). Solon similarly attributes to Zeus the ultimate outcome of matters (again τέλος), in this case the outcome of judgment for wrongdoing (Fr.1, L.17 D3). Here, Zeus watches over the outcome by making sure wrongdoing is paid for in the end (Ibid. L.7-32), even though judgment is not immediate. (For Qoheleth's
expanded and developed in Tragedy to counter the claims of rationalist amoralism.

Qoheleth’s standpoint can only be understood when viewed as part of this comparable view that judgment, although certain, is characteristically delayed, see below, Chapter 10, Section vi, THE NON-IMMEDIACY OF JUDGMENT FOR SIN AND ITS SOCIO-ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS.) This same passage of Solon goes on to show (LI.63-75 D²) that Man’s inability to foresee the outcomes of his enterprises (LI.65-6) is closely linked with the fact that it is the god who determines success or failure (LI.67-70) rather than human skill.

As in Qoheleth (e.g., 3:11 & 14), so also in the work of Solon and Theognis, Man’s ignorance of outcomes is represented as playing a particularly significant moral rôle in promoting reverence. For this ignorance bears constant witness to the fact that it is not Man who is in control, but rather it is a god (Solon, Fr.1, L.69 D²) or gods (Ibid., L.64). The type of piety characterized by giving this ignorance of outcomes such a high profile tends also to regard recognizing that Man must accept whatever fate or the gods send, both good fortune and bad, as a prime indication of wisdom, courage and virtue. See Solon, Ibid., LI.63-4 and Theognis, LI.657-8. Cf. Qoh. 7:14.

For Qoheleth’s view that the virtuous man is a product of every type of experience God sends him, and could not be produced by less than everything God sends, see below, Chapter 10, Section iv, QOHELETH 7:13-18:-THE FUNCTION OF THE RECIPROCAL OPPOSITES AND OF THE RANDOM PRINCIPLE IN RELATION TO PIETY AND JUDGMENT. There may well be a strong affinity between Qoheleth’s opinion here and Theognis LI.657-8,

"Μηδὲν δὲνιν χαλεποίησιν ἀσώ φρένα μηδ’ ἄγαθοῖσιν χαίρ’, ἔπει ἐστ’ ἄνδρός πάντα φέρειν ἄμεθοφ.".

"Never get too downhearted when things are rough, Nor too glad when they’re good. For being able to take both (lit. ‘take everything’) Is the hallmark of a good / brave man."

In view of the contrast in these lines between two opposites, rough times and good times, one might expect the poet to recommend enduring ‘both’ rather than enduring ‘everything’. Nevertheless, ‘everything’ is appropriate, because this particular contrast is the ultimate extreme in opposite experiences, i.e., good experience as opposed to bad; and the contrast between that pair of opposites seems by implication to embrace potentially every kind of experience that could befall anyone.

Theognis is apparently saying here that it is the characteristic of the tough or estimable man to be able to take both extremes of fortune in his stride without over-reacting to either. To say that this is the characteristic of the worthy man seems to mean at least that successfully doing this proves the man to be worthy; and it may even imply that it is through the process of mastering the ability to do this that the man actually becomes worthy. If this is indeed how Theognis envisages becoming an estimable man, then there is a noteworthy similarity between his viewpoint and that of Qoheleth as interpreted below, Chapter 10, Section iv: only the man who is a product of every kind of experience (because he has proved that he can adapt to and be refined by every kind of experience God sends him) is a truly wise and pious man. For a later development of a similar idea, see also Phil. 4:11-14, where Paul refers to his ability to adapt to a variety of opposite conditions as if it were a cultivated skill acquired as part of his overall spiritual discipline.

36See below, this Chapter, Sections iv and vi and below, Chapter 4, Sections i, iii, vi and vii.
ongoing contest between pietist and antipietist wisdom, spanning Greek culture as well as Hebrew. Qoheleth’s initial petulance at the limits placed on Man by death, and by the unpredictable and hence uncontrollable elements in experience, does not last. The "hatred of life" declared in 2:17 gives way to a more mature acceptance of Man’s limitations, and an understanding of the function they serve in the purposes of God.\footnote{See also below, Chapter 9, Section vii.}

This change indicates the spirituality of the sage\footnote{Solomon, but in a symbolic sense: Solomon as representative of all sages, of whoever makes the pursuit of wisdom their main priority.} gaining the upper hand over his self-oriented personal ambition of using wisdom to gain unparallelled eminence and lasting power. The piety Qoheleth displays here is very Greek, in that it emphasizes how Man’s lack of knowledge in particular keeps him subject to the Divine. This contrasts with most Biblical authors, who tend to stress the rôle of revelation, i.e., the way Man’s pious cultivation of knowledge keeps him subject to his God.\footnote{In this case, the knowledge in question is revealed to Man by God Himself for this very purpose. See, e.g., Ps. 119 Passim, e.g., vv 11 and 12, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees."}
Man's Wisdom and ability to think and plan are often taken to be his chief claim to an intermediate rôle between creatures and God or the gods, above the level of animals and approaching the divine. Yet, since these faculties are no match for reversals of fortune, or even for a normal and timely death, they do not give Man any real control over his life and his ultimate fate. In Sophocles' so-called Ode to

40 E.g., as in Prov. 1:1-5.

41 Pedersen, op. cit., P.240, L.24 ff.; cf. Ibid. P.238 L.24 ff. Inventive wisdom and technical skill, as well as calculation, persuasion, prediction and strategic planning, are also seen as a link with the divine. In Protagoras 322A, e.g., Man is said to "have (his) share in a divine portion", "θεοίς μετέχει μοίρας", now that Prometheus has stolen for Man "skill in the arts and crafts" ("τῆς ἔντεχνης σοφίας", Ibid. 321D). He has stolen this wisdom specifically from gods, namely Hephaestus and Athena.

42 The co-existence in Man of both wisdom and mortality is a significant controversy in myth, precisely because wisdom is so closely associated with divinity. Man's wisdom is widely regarded as linking him with the gods to such an extent that it raises the question of whether it is right that he should be subject to death in the first place. Perhaps he should have divine status instead of mortal status. So in the Adapa Myth (B L.57-9), Anu sees it as incongruous that Ea should have bestowed wisdom on a being who is mortal. Although Ea has given Adapa wisdom, he has not given him eternal life (A L.3-4). Initially, Anu is gravely concerned that Adapa, a mere human being, has succeeded in breaking the wing of the south wind by the power of his curse (B L.4-13, 34-6 and 46-56). Once he is mollified over this issue, however, he seeks to rectify the fact that Adapa's mortality is incompatible with his wisdom by, in effect, offering him immortality to go with his wisdom (B L.60-61). See Pritchard, James B., ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton / New Jersey, 1969), Pp.101-3.

Because of this close association between wisdom and immortality / divinity, Man's wisdom can be seen as the chief basis of any claim he might try to press for more than mortal status. God's train of thought in Gen. 3:22 reflects this idea. He takes it that now Man has knowledge, his next goal will naturally be immortality. The reader can see that this is no idle assumption, because Ibid. 3:5 has already shown that becoming "Ο ἄνθρωπος" ("as gods" or "as God") was the prime motive recommended by the serpent for attaining this new knowledge in the first place. Since 'wisdom' (or, more exactly, anti-wisdom) is so intimately connected with Man's claims to divine status, it is not surprising that the whole issue of wisdom becomes a major spiritual controversy, and that even the very term 'wisdom' (except when a conceptual distinction between wisdom and anti-wisdom is recognized) acquires the very negative overtones of association with hybris and impiety.
Man's cunning enables him to outwit and control animals and other aspects of nature; but death he cannot overcome. Moreover, even the dazzling level of his intelligence, which is fully and vividly acknowledged here, is no protection against the absolute necessity for piety. For this intelligence is entirely ambivalent morally. Man, though possessing all this wisdom, nevertheless "τοτε μὲν κακόν, ἀλλοτρέω δισθλὼν ἐρπεῖ", "turns sometimes to evil and sometimes to good". 46

Man's ingenuity, then, however gloriously pre-eminent amongst creatures, cannot guarantee his honourable status, or even his basic acceptability, as a social being. As this same Chorus of the Antigone asserts, 47 the all-important social identity of Man is entirely dependent on piety:

"νόμους τεροίρων χθονίς θεοίν δένοροκον δικαν υψίπολις. 48 ἔπολις δεὶ τὸ μὴ καλὸν ξύνεστι τόλμας χάριν."

"He who honours the laws of the land 49 and the justice of the gods upheld

43 Ant. 332-372.
44 L.337-351.
45 L.360.
46 Ibid. L.367.
47 And as Qoheleth also believes. For his view that social cohesion depends on piety, see below, Chapter 10, especially Sections i and v.
48 For a vigorous justification of preferring "standing high in the πόλις" to other proposed translations of "ὕψιπολίς", see Ehrenberg, Victor, Sophocles and Pericles (Oxford, 1954), P.64, fn. 1.
49 "Laws of the land" is acceptable here only if "νόμοι χθονίς" is meant in the sense of "νόμοι ἐπιχάριοι". If not, however, then it means "laws of the earth", and hence also laws (or rites) of the gods of the earth, especially the correct rites governing the burial of the dead. That would then make this assertion from the Chorus a potentially controversial one, since it would raise by implication the question
by oath will stand high in the state; but the man conjoined through insolence with evil shall be stateless.". 50

As Ehrenberg points out, 51

"The praise of Man's unconquerable mind and his cultural achievements is followed by the exposition of the moral dangers inherent in Man's achievements, and of the fundamental necessity of other than 'cultural' standards. Sophocles has, to a large extent, adopted Protagoras' Myth, 52 but only to make the issue far deeper and ultimately, in fact, to turn praise into warning. Man is shown in his complete independence, both when he conquers nature and when he follows his own laws. From it results his greatness as well as his doom. The poet's intention in singing of Man's achievements and his ultimate nothingness is not to debate certain Sophistic theories and topics, but to stress the urgent need of law, tradition and religion, their relevance to the life of the individual as well as of the community, and the tragic impact of their neglect."

In Greek as in Hebrew thinking, then, a double limitation is set on Wisdom.

Not only is it not always morally upright; 53 but also even upright and sober wisdom

of the burial rites due to Polyneices himself.

50Ant. L.I.368-71. The negative overtones of "τολμάω" in L.371 are comparable to the implications of the same term in Med. 583. This unholy boldness is the opposite to the religious awe which, according to the pietist view, is the essence of real Wisdom. See below, Chapter 5, Sections v-ix, esp. viii, for this idea that awe of the Divine is essential to Wisdom. See also below, Chapter 4, Section iv for the Atreidae's lack of awe and reverence in Ajax. The negative depiction of their lack of respect for Ajax's own greatness is particularly noteworthy in view of Sophocles' interest in hero-cults; and it contrasts pointedly with Achilles' evident respect for Priam (despite his occasional brusqueness) in the Iliad. The reverence due to divinity and the respect due to other human beings shade into each other in certain areas, especially in the semi-deification of heroes.


52Plato, Prot. 320D.

53When 'wisdom' is not upright, this calls into question its right to be termed Wisdom at all, as above, Med. L.583 on the clever villain,

"And that's where he's not too σοφός".

Hence my own adoption of the term Anti-wisdom, to reflect the popularity of this implication that unscrupulous 'cleverness' is not really cleverness after all.

As Elliott points out in his comment on Medea's opinion here, it seems that

- she does not think clever speaking is an advantage to the unprincipled - but something which ensures their downfall: the more elaborate the plot, the more certain is it that a mistake will be made. -

"The plot of the Clouds of Aristophanes (produced in 423) is an excellent commentary on these lines. The simple-minded Strepsiades imagines that he will get away with dishonesty by learning
does not survive death, nor does it make one immune to those sudden reversals of fortune that make Man most miserable. In the Ode to Man, the inability of Man’s ingenuity to save him from death is closely linked with the fact that this ingenuity lacks any intrinsically moral quality. The poet’s purpose in associating these points so closely with each other is partly to re-assert the traditional morality, that because we are mortal (i.e., by definition subject to death) we should not think "more than mortal thoughts"; but also, against the background of this re-assertion, to show that once we really believe in the ability of our own wisdom and of our own powers of persuasion and planning to control everything, then thinking "more than mortal thoughts" is exactly what we shall be doing. The new rationalism is, in fact, no less hybris in the eyes of Sophocles than Xerxes’ bridge across the Hellespont is to Aeschylus.

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how to persuade (at Socrates’ thinking-shop), but finds that the idea boomerangs.”. Elliott, Alan, Euripides Medea (Oxford, 1969), P.84. The reason Medea refers to this view of hers as unusual in L.579 is probably simply to underline how widespread the bad influence of Anti-wisdom is. Her representation of her own view as untypical is a sarcastic comment on the folly of popular contemporary values.

^4 Ant. L.360. This close association of Man’s mortality with the independent and anti-pious tendencies of his intelligence may be Sophocles’ subconscious reflection of the same link between death and rebellion against divinity that Gen. 3:2 ff. expresses consciously and overtly.

^5 Ibid. L.367.

^6 See also below, Chapter 4, Section vii, for Aeschylus’ standpoint on uncertainty.
v THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF QOHELETH’S APPROACH TO HOW MAN’S INDEPENDENT EGO UNDERMINES HIS TRUE IDENTITY

Like Sophocles, Qoheleth also emphasizes the link between the amorality of Man’s wisdom and the fact that this manipulative cleverness can not save him from death. Both these aspects of Wisdom’s dethronement are key elements in Qoheleth’s repudiation of human self-assertive ego, the ego which grates against his obligation to be loyal and obedient to God. For he sees reminding Man of his mortality as necessary 57 in order to humble him before God and to keep him from aiming beyond what is appropriate to mortals. It is a common Biblical theme that, at its most rebellious, the human ego seduces Man from loyalty to God. Repudiation of this destructive ego is perhaps the only ethical principle which is common to the entire Bible 58, though in differing degrees of intensity in different books. In Qoheleth this same carnal ego is seen as destroying his receptivity to the Divine Presence, and hence ultimately destroying also Man’s own identity. For that human identity is essentially that of a creature, a being properly in constant creative and recreative interaction with God. 59

The problem of the human ego as a potential obstacle between God and Man could fairly be described as the central issue of Biblical ethics, and of Biblical ethics uniquely. Yet although Qoheleth epitomizes this principle probably more exactly than

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57 See below, Chapter 7, Section i, and APPENDIX ONE.

58 See above, Chapter 1, Section i.

59 See below, Chapter 5, Sections vii-ix.
any other book in the Canon, it is largely because its author is influenced by literature other than the Bible that he does so. He has access to other mental frameworks that have grown up apparently independent of the Bible’s direct influence, which enables him to recognize that this is the central issue of Biblical ethics. He realizes this by that unique form of illumination that can come only from comparison. This is how he sees the unique significance and value of that particular ethical focus, as distinct from that underlying any other types of literature with which he is acquainted. In counterpoise to this, Qoheleth’s knowledge of the Bible also gives him freedom from the limitations of the other literary perspectives influencing his thinking. So he is not just echoing the problems of a pagan mindset. Rather, he is contributing his own solution, basically from the framework of his native piety, to the universal issue of the frustration that dogs Man ubiquitously because his first instinct is to aim beyond his reach.
One of the factors contributing to Qoheleth’s freedom of approach is that in the Bible there is only one God; so the issue of loyalty and humble obedience to God, which is the most essential moral issue of all in Qoheleth’s view, comes across in *Genesis* with a novel clarity. By comparison, in the Gilgamesh and Adapa Myths, and in other myths of the Middle Eastern and Hellenic world, such a theme is impossible. For different gods can have conflicting interests in Man, or even in the same individual. Not only does the polytheistic world-view render impossible the ethic of personal loyalty to One Who alone is God; more than that, it rules out any hope of the human race feeling at peace with the divine at all. In Greek tragedy, for example, there are powerful supernatural forces to reckon with, which can hit out at Man savagely if he offends them, as Dionysus in *The Bacchae* attacks Pentheus, or as Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* attacks the hero. Even worse, however, is the fact that there is no foolproof method to avoid giving such offence by reference to the gods themselves alone. For these formidable forces are not consistent with each other; e.g., when Aphrodite destroys Hippolytus, it is for his exclusive devotion to Artemis. The only safety-devices against these dangers are the virtues of moderation and flexible adaptability to changing circumstances.

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60 E.g., Ea’s interest in Adapa conflicts with Anu’s.

61 For the idea of this moderation or pious sobriety as true wisdom and the opposite to anti-wisdom see below, Chapter 4, Section vii.

62 This flexibility is, in a sense, the same virtue, since it is part of moderation / wisdom. See below, Chapter 9, Sections ii, iii and vii. See also below, Chapter 10, Sections iii and iv.
It is hardly surprising, then, if pagan Man feels intimidated and perplexed by the whole spectrum of divinity. He is well aware of his own destructive tendency to aim beyond his reach, as Tragedy and Epic clearly attest. Nevertheless, he can not seek an antidote (as the Hebrew pietist can) in the form of confident, consistent loyalty to one single God. This option is simply not open to him. The pagan wise man also well knows that the supernatural realm is too vast and complex a threat to render safe for himself. He knows he is not capable of interpreting it sufficiently reliably to devise any effective means of self-protection against it on the basis of his interpretation. So it is small wonder if pagan sages also conclude that wisdom / intelligence and Man’s ability to plan are not the answer to the human dilemma. For even the greatest human wisdom and ingenuity can fail to escape disaster.

Indeed, this drive to plan and to act out strategies can even bring about the disasters it aims to prevent, and by the very attempt to prevent them at that. Perhaps the most compelling representation of this viewpoint is Sophocles’s *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The way that Oedipus’ flight from Corinth, for example, leads him to fulfil the very oracle he fled from Corinth to avoid fulfilling is a chilling exposure of how misguided his faith in his own powers of initiative and calculation really are. The main theme of the play is that

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63 In the mental climate of revealed religion, by contrast, this type of insight is never very prominent, despite the fact that it is by no means impossible. This is because revealed religion commonly emphasizes interpretation of what has been revealed, rather than acknowledgement of that which has not. See also below, Chapter 10, Section iii, THE NON-LINEAR NATURE OF RECIPROCAL REALITY AND ITS INHERENT PRINCIPLE OF RANDOMNESS, 6th. page.

64 O.T., L1.787-833.
"Certainty and control: both are illusory. - Human control is an illusion.". 65

Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* make up perhaps the most powerful pietist wisdom-counterblast his society ever produced against the current rationalist type of antipietist anti-wisdom. It is no accident that both these plays centre around the fall of a powerful King-figure, and make

"-the ruler of a State the opponent and victim of the divine powers". 66

This is both a reflection and a development of the tradition that great kings frequently typify anti-wisdom in its most far-reaching and destructive form. The same view is also made explicit in *Ajax*. 67

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65 Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, P.181. See also below, Chapter 4, Sections i, iii, v, vi and vii.

66 Ehrenberg, op. cit., P.141.

67 One could hardly find a blunter statement of this belief that the very nature of kings as such poses a fundamental problem to piety than *Aj.* L.1350, where Agamemnon says,

"τὸν τοι ἄριστον ἔστεβετιν οὔ ρέδων",

"For the King to have reverence is not easy."

Notice by contrast the far-reaching implications of Oedipus’ description of himself in *Oedipus at Colonus* L.287 as “λεπός” and “εὐσεβής”. This description is a far cry from the hybristic attitude or state often associated with kings, including the Oedipus of *O.T.*; and in fact it reflects a pointedly different situation from Oedipus’ position as a self-reliant and self-made ruler in *O.T.*. Then, far from being “λεπός” and “εὐσεβής”, he was, on the contrary, a source of deadly ritual pollution to his entire city. At the beginning of *O.T.*, when his people hope that his wisdom may be able to save them from the plague, as it did from the Sphinx, Oedipus is supplicated almost as if he were a god. See *O.T.* L1.1-13, esp. 3. This is a very disturbing and startling opening. It can hardly bode well that a man should be approached with the kind of reverence appropriate to gods alone. The priest’s attempt in L1.31-4 to offset this ominous impression by remarking, in effect,

"I do not equate you with the gods, Oedipus, but..."

only highlights the fact that his behaviour, and that of the other citizens, makes it look as if they do equate this wise, resourceful Oedipus with the gods. That is the only reason why the priest raises the issue of equating Oedipus with the gods at all. He realizes that his own behaviour and that of the other suppliants is so unusual that it requires an explanation.

The early stages of *O.C.*, however, in sharp contrast to the opening of *O.T.*, show *Oedipus himself as a suppliant*. In fact, not only is he a suppliant (e.g.,L1.45-6 and 284), and as such “λεπός” and “εὐσεβής” in the sense of protected by the sanctions of piety from abuse by others, as well as coming in a spirit of reverence himself; he is also on a very exceptional level an agent of Apollo, which adds an extra dimension to his description of himself as “λεπός” and “εὐσεβής”. Furthermore, far from being a source of pollution,
In these plays Sophocles is utilising that tradition to clarify the negative moral implications of current antipietist anti-wisdom trends in his own society.

he is destined to be a source of substantial and god-ordained benefit (L.288) to the city he has come to. As Theseus says, Phoebus has sent him (L.664-5), and his prophecies have turned out to be true (L.I.1516-17). Oedipus has now become actively believing and consciously reporting and enacting Apollo’s oracles himself (e.g., L.I.101-5), openly claiming Apollo and Zeus as the authorities for his predictions (L.I.621-8 and 791-3). Similarly, he predicts on the authority of the gods his own end (L.I.1511-15). Apollo’s direct and continuing involvement in his fate is re-inforced by reports of further oracles at L.I.413-15. His invocation of the Sun as his protector at L.I.868-70 may be intended to underline this intimate connexion with Apollo still further.

It is particularly challenging, considering Oedipus’ angry repudiation of Tiresias’ message in O.T. L.I.300-446, that in O.C. the same mythical character is represented as having become almost a second Tiresias: i.e., the blind man who can see what sighted people can not see, because he is Apollo’s inspired spokesman. The reference to Oedipus’ usefulness despite his blindness in O.C. L.I.73-4 seems particularly reminiscent of Tiresias’ rôle in the past. The contrast between the Oedipus of O.T. and that of O.C. seems too exact and too pointed for the continuity of theme between the two plays to be denied. When Oedipus was a wise, powerful, acclaimed and self-reliant king, his sharp, aggressive intelligence misinterpreted both his own identity and the facts behind the plague at Thebes, and through this blindness to the truth he became a pollution to an entire state. When, however, his circumstances are exactly reversed, and he becomes a physically blind suppliant instead of the insighted ruler who was once himself approached by suppliants for his help, he can both see and foresee accurately mysteries which no-one else can.

This seems to imply that the pattern of alternation between opposite circumstances which is built into the fabric of human experience is not only inevitable but also constructive. (See below, Chapter 10, Section iv for the function of opposite experiences in refining character and in promoting reverence.) Oedipus has undergone a total reversal of his circumstances, from a self-reliant human ruler, trusting in his own insight and intelligence to control events, and himself an object of supplication, to the complete opposite: a blind and humanly helpless suppliant, dependent on the goodwill of another ruler (Theseus), and relying for his simplest everyday practical needs on his daughter. His insights are no longer his own, but now come directly from the gods. However horrifying the reversal of his circumstances may have been in itself, it is nevertheless through that reversal that Oedipus’ fate has now come to have a positive and beneficial significance for Athens. Although, already even in the days of his power, he was a curse to Thebes, he has nevertheless become, in the days of his human helplessness, a guarantee of future benefit to Athens (O.C. L.I.91-2, 287-8, 459-60, 462-4, 576-82, 626-30 and 1518-25).

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See below, Chapter 4, especially Sections i, ii, v, vi and vii.
CHAPTER 4

THE FALSE WISDOM OF CERTAINTY AND CONTROL, AND THE
GREAT RULER AS ITS PRIME SYMBOL

i FALSE CERTAINTY, INFLEXIBILITY AND THE EXTRAVAGANT EXERCISE
OF CONTROL

In Greek literature, traditional Wisdom’s challenge to the idea of human intelligence as the means to certainty or control seems to have reached its peak in Tragedy. This is largely why Tragedy subjects kings and leaders to a particularly penetrating scrutiny. Although in theory a good king can symbolize the epitome of true Wisdom, nevertheless in practice great rulers often represent the loftiest and

1 As noted above, Chapter 3, Section vi.

2 This is not to say that the Great Ruler is the only standard hybristic ‘type’ in Greek wisdom-theory; there are other standard types of hybris, such as the very young and inexperienced (see, e.g., Aristotle, Rhet. 1389 A ii - B xii; see also Douglas L. Cairns’ discussion of this hybristic type among others in Pp.7-8 of "Hybris, Dishonour and Thinking Big", Journal of Hellenic Studies CXVI, 1996, Pp.1-32). However, as Cairns’ article itself reflects, the rich and powerful, like the very young, are also obvious types of hybris to Aristotle, both in Rhetoric and Politics (op. cit., P.7); and one could argue that in both cases the reasons are the same: inexperience of misfortune amounts, in effect, to non-awareness, or at least non-acceptance, of the fact that alternation between good fortune and bad is the normative human experience.

The rich, the powerful and the fortunate can have a similar type of naïveté to that of the young: namely, they suppose that their present experience of power and good fortune signifies that power and good fortune are their settled lot, and will always continue. In fact, in Aeschylus’ Persians, Atossa (interestingly, mother of a king both powerful and young) points out not only that people with present good fortune expect it to continue (L.601-2), but also that conversely people in bad fortune similarly expect things to keep going wrong (L.598-600). Traditional Greek wisdom, however, emphatically asserts the opposite: the alternation of circumstances between good and bad fortune is the norm.

Tragedy, while not neglecting other hybristic types (e.g., Euripides’ Hippolytus and Hermione are
most hazardous peak of Anti-wisdom.

Both *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, in presenting piety as an absolute necessity, represent the prime threat to pious values as a king and a great man. Although it is often stated that the Creon of *Antigone* is not a ‘great’ figure in the same individual sense as the self-made ruler Oedipus, who became King through his own wisdom in defeating the Sphinx’s riddle, nevertheless both are ‘great’ in the sense that they represent kingship or control of the state. Hence they represent the state itself, something greater than any individual, whether brilliant or mediocre. Also, both these king-figures reflect an unrealistic degree of ‘certainty’: Oedipus because his speed and skill in calculation and his initiative in taking action can commit him rapidly to paths (both literal and metaphorical) leading in the wrong direction; the Creon of *Antigone* because he lacks the flexibility characteristic of real Wisdom. The spokesman of genuine Wisdom in *Antigone* is Haemon, who expounds deftly both young), nevertheless furnishes particularly striking examples of hybristic kings. If Athenian democratic ethics and also Herodotus’ History contribute much to this emphasis in Tragedy, they in turn owe much to Solonic views of men, of gods and of Chance. In addition to these influences, the fact that Greek wisdom no less than Hebrew sees the prime aim of anti-wisdom as control (see above, Chapter 3, Sections ii and vi) tends to make the Great Ruler theoretically the ultimate διόσκορης, the epitome of anti-wisdom and impiety.

3 Ehrenberg, op. cit. Pp.66-8 and 141-2, points out several important parallels in this regard between the treatment of Oedipus in *O.T.* and that of Creon in *Antigone*, even though he fully acknowledges differences between them as well.

4 E.g., away from Corinth, where he is not in danger, to Thebes, where his doom is sealed, Ll.787-833; also, into disbelieving Teiresias, who happens to be right, and condemning Creon, who is actually innocent (Ll.380 ff., etc.).

5 The Creon of *Antigone* is hereafter referred to as C.Ant. and the Creon of *Oedipus Tyrannus* as C.O.T., in order to avoid confusion. This is especially necessary in view of the unresolved controversy among critics as to whether C.Ant. and C.O.T. are the same ‘character’, or whether they have little or nothing in common.

6 For further implications of the fact that Haemon is the character whom Sophocles selects as his direct exponent of these basics of traditional Wisdom, see also below, Chapter 9, Section iv.
and diplomatically the traditional wisdom-principle of interactive receptivity. He stresses how a man must not to be too sure he is in the right, but rather he must be flexible and willing to listen to others.

7Ant. L.683-723. I can not agree with those critics who condemn Haemon's type of sentiment or imagery as second rate or merely conventional simply on the grounds that it is 'gnomic', a quality which they rather vaguely assume to be somehow reprehensible. This would hardly hold water with Solomon or with Amennemoe as just grounds for condemnation, and I fail to see why an entire genre honoured amongst Jews and Egyptians should be regarded as second rate when practised by Greeks. There is no reason why the Greek Tragedians, when writing in gnomic vein, should not be doing so in perfectly natural and conscious succession to admired artistic predecessors (fellow-poets, despite the fact that they are not playwrights) such as Theognis or Solon, whose art is fully acknowledged to be gnomic. The appearance in several tragedies of Solon's maxim (apud Herodotus), that we should call no-one blessed until their life has ended (e.g., Andromache L.100-2, Ag. L.982-9 and O.T. L.1528-30), reflects the tragedians' deep involvement in the gnomic genre (see also below, this Chapter, Section vi). So also does the Chorus' regular practice of offering comments which, though stimulated by the immediate and specific action onstage, are nevertheless generalized in themselves, revealing the universal wisdom-principles behind what is happening in this particular case.

It is even conceivable that the allegedly trivializing identical gnomic endings in the texts of five of Euripides' plays (Andromache L.1286 ff., Medea L.1417 ff., Alcestis L.1161 ff., Bacchae L.1300 ff. and Helen L.1690 ff.) are not trivializing at all, but perfectly justifiable dramatically by reference to wisdom-theory. For this concluding reflection, underlining the unpredictability of the gods' dispensation of human affairs, represents an axiom of Greek wisdom which is supposed to be of universal application anyway; so there seems to be no reason why this same generalization should not be applied to all these five examples of particular, and in many ways very different, human experiences. This repetition of the same gnomic ending in five different plays may have been regarded as a thought-provoking demonstration of "the similarities in dissimilars", which, from a different angle, Aristotle considers so important in his discussion of metaphor in the Poetics.

It may well be the common and perhaps unconscious prejudice against Wisdom as an entire genre which chiefly underlies the view that the final Chorus of O.T. (L.1524-30) is spurious. This idea is surprisingly persistent; but for a different view, see below, this Chapter, Section vi. See also, for a discussion of these lines as a functional part of the play overall, Arkins, Brian, "The Final Lines of Sophocles' King Oedipus (1524-30)", Classical Quarterly N.S. 38 (1988, O.U.P.), Pp.555-8. Frederick Ahl also has some light to shed on this issue in Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction (Ithaca and London, 1991), Pp.242-3. He realizes that the deliberate parallel between Herodotus' Creous and Sophocles' Oedipus points to the probability that the Solonic sentiment (apud Herodotus) of the final Chorus is indeed highly relevant to the play overall and an appropriate ending for it. However, there may be more to the Croesus / Oedipus parallel than even Ahl realizes. See also below, this Chapter, Section vi.

8See also Haemon's comment at L.757, which, although less calmly and self-restrainedly expressed, is nevertheless consistent to the same point:

"βοῦλει λέγειν τι κατ' λέγον μηθέν κλέειν;"
"You're resolved to speak and yet never to listen?"

Compare also Odysseus' point in Ajax L.1353, discussed below, this Chapter, Section v.

Like C.Ant., the Oedipus of O.T. is also regarded by some as a weak listener. See, e.g., Ahl, Frederick, Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction (Ithaca and London, 1991), Pp.26-7:

"Oedipus may know how to answer questions, but he has little sense of how to ask questions and listen to other people's answers, or of how to prevent his interlocutor from sidetracking him or avoiding points at issue. Yet, as Knox comments, The characteristic tone of Oedipus in the first two thirds of the play is that of an impatient, demanding questioner. [Knox, Oedipus at Thebes]"
In close association with their unrealistic degree of 'certainty', both these kings set too much store by being *in control*, at least as they construe control. Whether wilfully or genuinely by mistake, C.Ant. misinterprets Haemon's advice to take stock of the citizens' sympathy for Antigone's point of view merely as evidence that Haemon is extravagantly infatuated with Antigone. He calls this

"Being a slave to a woman" 9,
an idea with which he seems to be exaggeratedly preoccupied. At L.525, e.g., he abruptly closes his exchange with Antigone herself with the remark, - irrelevant to the

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(London, Oxford and New Haven, 1957), P. 121.] Knox goes on to reckon up some of the numerous questions Oedipus raises. He poses eleven to Creon in forty lines (89-129), some nineteen to Teiresias, and so forth.

"Oedipus in fact asks too many questions too quickly. He rarely digests the answers to one question before asking another. When he went to Delphi to inquire who his parents were, Apollo sent him away 'not honoured' with an answer, he tells Jocasta; rather, the god told him that he would kill his father and have sexual intercourse with his mother (L1.787-93). From this point on, his actions are based on the assumption that his father and mother are the people about whom he had been so uncertain in the first place, even though he concedes that the oracle did not answer his question. In short, he behaves as if the oracle had said: *Yes, your parents are those who claim to be your parents; but you will kill your father and have intercourse with your mother.*

"No less important, Oedipus has little sense of how to determine the credibility and truthfulness of those he asks for advice and information. He is not strong in dialectic or even in the practical techniques of cross-examining witnesses. Such a failing would have been apparent to many Athenians who participated in trials, attended comic plays, such as Aristophanes' *Wasps and Clouds* which presuppose familiarity with trials, or heard the famous 'conversations' of Socrates."

For the importance in overall wisdom-theory of not only willingness to listen but also receptivity in general, see below, Chapter 9, Sections iii and iv; for the importance of receptivity (especially listening) in *Qoheleth*, see below, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix; also Chapter 10, Sections i and vii.

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9L.756. This control-vocabulary seems unwarranted here because it is irrelevant to the pressing needs of the situation. Here as in other remarks of C.Ant.'s, control-terminology seems to reflect the preoccupation with which he is already pre-programmed internally, and which leaves no room for alertness to the immediate and the external, the very alertness which is most urgently needed to deal with this moral and political crisis. Haemon's recommendation of taking public opinion on the Antigone case into account (L1.688-700) carries no suggestion that he is a slave to anyone; if anything, it reassures the politically sensitive Greek audience that he respects the whole citizen body, and is not a slave to one single man, i.e., C.Ant. Haemon's point is based simply on traditional wisdom. His counsel (L1.705-23) is, in effect, the old-school counsel of piety: to be aware of one's limitations and alert to external forces, and thereby keep in check the notoriously anti-pietist human drive to be (or to believe oneself to be) in control. See also this Chapter, Sections v and vii.

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issue they were actually disputing, -

"But over my dead body will some woman have the upper hand."

In view of the urgency of the moral crisis facing them, this remark of C.Ant.'s appears dangerously frivolous. It is a brusque diversion into a relatively minor point, which cuts off arbitrarily his dispute with Antigone about the main crux of the matter. For the real issue at stake is nothing less than the burial of the dead. This is easily recognizable to the audience as a pressing moral priority for all human beings, transcending any rivalry between the two sexes.
ii RESPECT FOR THE RIGHT TO BURIAL AS SYMBOLIC OF PIOUS VALUES

OVERALL

Some might argue that C. Ant.'s preoccupation with gender politics is not after all merely frivolous, but genuinely relevant to the larger issue. For they might claim that in Sophocles' culture the rites due to the family's dead were seen as the particular responsibility of women, whereas affairs of state were regarded as the particular responsibility of men. Therefore, C. Ant.'s preoccupation with his preference for the pre-eminence of men rather than of women should be viewed as signifying his identification with the needs of the state as a whole, whereas Antigone's insistence on the burial shows that she identifies with the duties and interests of private individuals, which include family obligations to one's dead.

This interpretation, however, falls short of the exact ethical focus of the play, by assuming that its central issue is the clash between the authority of the state and the rights or obligations of the individual. Its real focal point, however, is rather the clash between the human drive to control and the basic demands of piety. The prime importance of Polyneices' right to burial, therefore, arises from the fact that this right is a central issue of traditional piety. ¹⁰

Respect for the right to decent burial is to Sophocles a potent and evocative

¹⁰It is scarcely surprising that respect for people's right to a proper funeral should be thus regarded as a mainstay of pious values. For, together with the mutability of men's good or bad fortunes while they are alive, the inevitability of death is the other main common bond uniting all human beings, as discussed above, Chapter 3, Section iii, in connexion with Qoh. 2:16.
symbol of traditional piety, incorporating, by implication, all the values which that tradition stands for. Alert though the playwright is to the topical issues of his own society, his overall view of life embraces the legendary past of epic heroes as well as contemporary affairs; and according to this broader perspective, neither gender politics nor the rights of the individual as opposed to those of the state have a higher profile than correct burial of the dead. For the latter is a fundamental requirement of piety binding on all human beings, on men as well as on women and on the entire community as well as on the individual or family. 11

This gives the issue of correct burial a unique function, in Antigone as in Ajax: it is the touchstone issue which exposes, through a key character's unwillingness to

11 That this obligation to bury the dead is very far from being exclusively the concern of women is nowhere more poignantly expressed than in the Iliad. When Patroclus is kept out of Hades because his funeral rites have not yet been formalized, he does not appear to some woman and entreat her to attend to them; he appeals instead to Achilles. In addition, the entire Greek army is involved in the funeral games held especially in Patroclus' honour. See Il, XXIII, L1.62-93. At L1.95-6, Achilles promises to do as Patroclus has asked him; and even before this apparition, he is already (L1.43-7) anticipating Patroclus' funeral in terms implying that he himself will bear the main practical responsibility for it. The scene that follows Patroclus' apparition (L1.110-257) shows that the preparations for the funeral (collecting wood, etc.) involves many men. In all the meticulous details, even to the point of gathering up the dead man's bones into a golden urn, no woman is specifically mentioned, though Achilles is often mentioned, Agamemnon is referred to at L.110, Meriones at L.124, the charioteers and men on foot at L1.131-4, etc. This is not to deny that the women play a necessary part in preparing for funerals in the Iliad; see, e.g., XXIV L1.587-8, where the maids wash Hector's body. But even here, Achilles and his comrades take over again, lifting the body etc., in the very next lines (589 ff.). The rites of deceased warriors and leader are thus represented in the Iliad as far from being an exclusive concern of women or even of the dead person's family alone, but rather as a major issue of religious obligation for the whole community.

The fact that the funerary practices of Sophocles' society were so radically different from those of Homeric epic does not in any way undermine the deep symbolic significance for the tragedians' audience of the Homeric concept of responsibility for funerals. In this as in most aspects of Greek life, the influence of Homer, conscious and subconscious, is beyond calculation. Furthermore, Polynices is far more like a Homeric warrior than anybody one might meet in fifth century Athens. His story belongs intrinsically to the epic-heroic context, which makes heroic values about the importance of and the right to a funeral seem very naturally applicable to him. Moreover, for Sophocles himself, who appears to have a particular interest in hero-cults, Homeric and epic-heroic values concerning funerals may well have even more conscious significance than they have for the majority of his audience. Funerals and sites of burial are sometimes thought to be particularly central to his religion. See, e.g., Knox, Bernard M.W., The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy (Berkeley & Los Angeles and Cambridge, 1964), Pp.54 ff., especially P.55 regarding the centring of the worship round the supposed site of the hero's burial.
allow burial to an enemy, that character’s fundamental and dangerous lack of pious values overall. Furthermore, it is significant that in both plays the culprits detected in this impiety are kings. 12

12 Also a king is the eponymous hero of O.T., who is conspicuous in placing his trust as a great leader in his γνώμη (L.398), with which he deviously compares Tiresias’ prophetic art as a means of saving the city from danger. This is no small irony, considering that the later play O.C. depicts him virtually as a second Tiresias himself; see above, Chapter 3, Section vi, for how his position has completely reversed. It is not until he attains this prophetic character, independent of his own γνώμη and without even physical eyesight, that he becomes a source of benefit to a state, instead of a source of civic pollution.

It is worth bearing in mind that Oedipus’ standing in O.T. as wise and respected leader reliant on γνώμη strongly invites comparison with Pericles. Victor Ehrenberg has already noted possible allusions to Pericles and his situation in the Oedipus of O.T. (as well as in other characters of Sophocles) in Sophocles and Pericles (Oxford, 1954). See, e.g., op. cit. Pp.112-6 for the Periclean overtones of O.T.’s plague situation, and also of calling Oedipus ‘the first of men’ (’πρώτος ἀνήρ’), see Thuc. Hist. Book I, end of Section 139 (’ἀνήρ...πρώτος’), with γνώμη almost the first word ‘Pericles’ utters when he starts to speak in Section 140.1. Even more intriguing, in the context of the ethical standing of kings in wisdom-theory, is Ibid. Book II, Section 65.10:

“So (the government of Athens) started to become nominally a democracy, but in reality rule by its foremost citizen (τοῦ πρῶτου ἀνδρὸς δραχμῆ)...”.

Challenging though Ehrenberg’s observations are about Sophocles’ possible attitude to Pericles, however, they do not tell us as much by themselves about Sophocles’ standpoint in the Wisdom versus Anti-wisdom controversy overall as they do when viewed in the light of Lowell Edmunds’ later work Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides (Harvard, 1975). Ehrenberg explores the closer association of Pericles with rationalism than with piety in any deep sense (Sophocles and Pericles Pp.91-8), seeing him as probably influenced by Anaxagoras’ teaching on the displacement of τύχη and ἀνάχαλμα by ‘pure and absolute νοῦς’ (Ibid. P.94). Lowell Edmunds, however, examines Thucydides’ use of Pericles as epitomizing preference for γνώμη as opposed to τύχη, against the background of the γνώμη-τύχη / τύχη-τύχη antithesis. He realizes that Pericles is represented as seeing planning as the positive priority, and as relegating adverse τύχη merely to the negative opposite of planning: something

“-unplanned, badly planned, or contrary to plan. In this way, Pericles trivializes chance, while yet admitting its existence. Chance is not an objective force impervious to human reason as in Archidamus’ view (Book I, Section 84.3), but - is reduced to the same status as human error, that is, to the subjective. - The self-confidence of Pericles is in marked contrast with the humbler view of Hermocrates (Book IV, Section 64.1), who considers it foolishness to believe - That I am complete master equally of my own mind and of chance, which I do not rule (τῆς ὑμῶν δραχμῆ τύχης)...”.

Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides, P.17). Later (Ibid. Pp.81-2), Edmunds returns to this attitude of Pericles as depicted by Thucydides, to contrast it with the religious view of τύχη which is the heritage of Solon:

“For Pericles, chance is mere randomness. Chance is defined subjectively, that is, from the human point of view, and negatively, as that which is contrary to calculation. For Solon, the vicissitudes of life are an expression of Moira and the gods’ purposes, which mortals can neither understand nor prevent. The polis, like the individual, can only tread cautiously and hope by moderation to avoid hybris. It is important to remember that the popular belief in this ancient connection of τυχή with the gods persisted in Athens and was even in a sense official: ‘theoi’ and the phrase διὰ τύχην τύχην frequently appear together in Attic inscriptions and are coupled in the headings of Attic inscriptions. There is also the fact that Chance and the divine are associated again and again in Pindar and the Tragedians. Aristotle says, in reporting the various common opinions concerning τυχή, There are some who believe that τυχή is a cause, but obscure to human reason as being
In the eyes of Sophocles, this epic-heroic dimension to the significance of funerals, extending beyond the customs merely of his own contemporary society or of any one society, is far from obsolete. The climactic dispute of his Ajax and its final resolution leave no doubt that he sees proper burial, even of enemies, as essential to piety and to civilized values. In this case, the most influential defender of Ajax’s right to a proper funeral is Odysseus: not a woman, as in Antigone, but a man; not a something from the gods and rather daemonic (Phys. 196 B 5-7). In his commentary on this passage, Simplicius preserves the curious fact that At Delphi (the formula) ‘Chance and Loxias, do you give answer to this person?’ was the beginning of the consultation of the oracle. (Simpl. Phys. 333)\cite{139}. In fact, Edmunds views Thucydides’ Pericles more or less as a spiritual and political Anti-Solon. It could be argued that Sophocles, with a Solonic view of τοξη (like Archidamus), feels that both Oedipus (O.T. L.1080 ff.) and Jocasta (Ibid. L.977 ff.) are misled by their rationalism or trust in γνώμη to misunderstand completely the nature of τοξη. In L.979, Jocasta, (like Pericles, according to Edmunds’ interpretation of Thucydides), associates Chance with randomness. In L.1080 ff., Oedipus seems to expect Chance to be always on his side, the very idea the Spartan ambassadors caution the Athenians against in Thuc. Hist. Book IV, Section 18.3-4, since they expect the Athenians to have the less religious and more trivializing view of τοξη which would lead them to forget the full extent of territory of τοξη’s jurisdiction, and so to forget also that what lies within the jurisdiction of τοξη (in this case the duration of wars) lies outside the control and the predictive abilities of Man. There is no real justification for Jocasta’s view of τοξη as random simply because it is not planned or foreseen by Man, since this does not prevent it from being planned or foreseen by the gods. Nor is τοξη the “giver of good” only, as Oedipus seems to assume at L.11080-1 when he refers, with terrifyingly misplaced triumphalism, to “Τοξης - της ει διδοσθησης”. Rather, τοξη is the force behind the unpredictability of outcomes and the alternation of one kind of experience with its opposite, as illustrated by Achilles picture of Zeuss’ two jars, one of good fortune, but the other of ill fortune (see II. XXIV, L.525-33, also referred to below, this Chapter, this Section). Hence the importance of accepting whatever the gods send (Theognis L.657-666, etc.), good or bad. Cf. Qoh. 7:13-14 (further discussed below, Chapter 6), "Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what He has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; But when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. So a man can not discover anything about his future.\textquotedblright. 

Oedipus’ experience in Sophoclean drama is completely reversed more than once, first from stateless wanderer to revered and powerful King of Thebes, then from great King to horrifying and mutilated miasma, and then from helpless wanderer again to prophet and hero, with a spectacularly supernatural passing from this world at Colonus by a ‘painless and god-sent τοξη’ (O.C. L.1585). The range of his experiences, in terms of extremes of change along the good fortune / bad fortune spectrum, is depicted as awesome and terrifying. His passing from this world is too glorious a sight for Theseus to look at without shading his eyes (Ibid. 1650-2). This is the extreme and exact opposite to the horrifying sight of his self-mutilated eyes, which the Chorus (O.T. L.1304-7) can not bring themselves to look at because it is so grievous and fearsome. The ultimate fate of Oedipus, as the final Choric comment of O.C. L.1777-8 reflects, seems quite the reverse of negative. The opposite extremes of his changing circumstances seem to have come into an eventual balance which gives his extreme range of experiences, in the final reckoning, overall validity ("καιρος", final line of O.C.).
member of the dead hero’s family, as in Antigone, but an outsider and former opponent. The poet sees the moral issue of funerals, then, as a universal one, transcending both gender and private or family issues.

Whether or not Sophocles has a particular interest in hero cults which has played a large part in bringing him to this point of view, the moral importance he attaches to acknowledgement of the right to proper burial is far from peculiar to him, or even to devotees of hero-cults in general. It is very noteworthy and poignant that Odysseus’ pious magnanimity in the climactic scene of the Ajax is harking back to the Homeric values of common humanity that bind Achilles and Priam together in their mutual grief in Iliad XXIV, and which are inspired and activated by the gods in encouraging and guiding Priam through the daunting task of retrieving his son’s dead body for burial.

The proper burial of the dead is shown in the Iliad to be important to the gods. Achilles proves that he does respect the gods after all by being willing to give back the dead body in the end; and the encounter between himself and Priam which leads into the returning of the body demonstrates their mutual respect as human beings despite their deep enmity. This is a powerful display of how basic civilized values, the rights of a suppliant and the right of the dead to proper burial, transcend even the overwhelming pressures of enmity in war, despite the fierce exacerbation of enmity aroused by bereavement through battle. The sharpness both of Priam’s and of Achilles’ grief, and the residue of Achilles’ more brusque and ferocious emotions, are clearly and forcefully portrayed; and yet the values of piety are shown to prevail
nonetheless.
THE PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATION OF HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE OBLIGATION TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENT UNPREDICTABILITY OF MAN'S FORTUNES AS CENTRAL TO GREEK PIETY

It is important to realize that Achilles' picture of the alternation of human fortunes as allotted by Zeus is at the very heart of this overall piety. His description of the two urns of Zeus, with his point that no human being, even the exceptionally fortunate, enjoys happiness unmixed with sorrows, is not some picturesque fairy-tale digression from the immediate human sorrow of his suppliant. Rather, it is central to his understanding of what links him with Priam and with the rest of mankind, and of what makes their common feeling and the sharing of their tears possible.

As Cairns notes,

"Both pity and fear require the notion of one's own vulnerability to misfortune;"
by contrast, those who believe that their current good fortune renders them invulnerable to reversal are disposed not to pity or to fear, but, being *hybristai* (*Rhet. 1383 A ii*), and 'in a hybristic condition (*diaethesis*)' (*Ibid. 1385 B xxx-i*), to *hybrizein* (*Ibid. 1385 B xxi*).

The alternation concept, which Achilles describes with reference to the two urns in Zeus' palace, is Greek piety's answer, enshrined in the form of a mythical illustration, to exactly this dangerous lack of awareness of one's own vulnerability to misfortune.

Kitto comments,

"The pyre was lit, and Croesus, remembering Solon's words, groaned aloud and called his name three times. They asked him why, and Croesus told them. Then Cyrus relented - and it is interesting to see why this purely Greek story makes him relent. Not from any specifically moral scruple; he does not realize that he is being abominably cruel. He reflects that he, being himself a man, is about to burn another man alive, one who had been as prosperous as himself. In fact, he follows the Greek maxim 'Know thyself', which means, remember what you are - a man, and subject to the conditions and limitations of mortality. Therefore, says Herodotus, fearing retribution (*xtaiç*), and reflecting that nothing human is constant, he ordered the fire to be put out.".

In one sense, however, Kitto is not quite fair if he assumes that Croesus' change of heart has nothing to do with moral virtue at all, even though he seems right in thinking that it is not inspired by perceiving the moral evil of being "abominably cruel". For the tragedians, and perhaps especially Sophocles, convey the idea that the receptivity through which a man takes into account the "conditions and limitations of mortality" (with their implied threat of *xtaiç*) is itself a virtue, as also is the flexibility that enables him to act on these insights by relenting. Conversely, the lack of receptivity and the inflexibility which prevent people from yielding when yielding is appropriate are presented as defects. See above. Chapter 3, *passim*, especially Section vi; see this Chapter, *passim*; and see especially below. Chapter 9, Section iv (cf. also Chapter 10, Section ii with reference to Ajax).

*Qoheleth* seems to represent a similar view; see, e.g., below, Chapter 10, Section vii, The Cohesive Wisdom of Interaction, for the importance in *Qoheleth* of receptivity and flexibility in creating a stable society; for lack of these virtues precludes the possibility of real human relationships, and hence also of all the mutual benefits arising from human relationships. It is surely a significant part of the Croesus-Cyrus story that, once Cyrus has taken the first step of showing willingness to spare his enemy's life, the next step is that these enemies then become *friends*; and, as Kitto says, op. cit., Pp.111-2,

"Croesus gave Cyrus some very shrewd advice on how to manage the Lydians".

'See below. Chapter 10, Section ii, Qoheleth and Reciprocity in Ethics and Nature, for Anaximander's concept of *xtaiç*.

Although Cairns does not himself mention the concept of alternation of human fortunes in Achillean terms, and therefore does not directly reveal any awareness that this concept as such is traditionally recognized as fundamental to the pious and anti-hybristic viewpoint, he does nevertheless see "inexperience of misfortune" (op. cit., P.7) as a significant causal factor in producing *hybris*, which he sees primarily as the over-valuation of oneself relative to others and the wrong acts arising from this over-valuation. See his comment on Xerxes' hybristic character (quoted below, this Chapter, end of Section v) in relation to Atoosa's reference to the human tendency blindly to believe that present good fortune will continue forever (Aesch., *Pers.* L1,601-2).
It is no accident, then, that this illustration 18 occurs at the heart of the scene in which Achilles demonstrates that he does fear the gods after all, despite his previous abuse of Hector's corpse. The recognition that no-one has joy unmixed with sorrow is here elevated above the level of mere observation of fact to the status of a principle of piety. This is a warning that the consequent changeableness and unpredictability of human fortunes are meant to be. 19 The chief significance of the misfortune which is therefore mingled into the lot even of the relatively fortunate is that it breaks the continuity (and hence the predictability) of their blessedness; and the fact that Man can therefore never tell what is going to happen to him is his main antidote to the arrogance and self-absorption which would otherwise cut him off from fellow-feeling with his enemies and blind him to the entreaties of a suppliant.

It is also no accident that the Ajax

"-is notable for its development of the idea of alternation in human affairs," 20 recalling the same concept, - and again focussed around the importance of proper burial of the dead, - as this very encounter between Priam and Achilles in Iliad XXIV, in which Achilles emphasizes the same issue of alternation. Although he seems to be saying that some particularly unfortunate people may have unmixed bad fortune 21, he evidently believes that no-one, even if exceptionally favoured by the gods, has

18 II. XXIV, Ll.534-551.

19 This point is strongly endorsed by Qoheleth; see, e.g., below, Chapter 6; also, Chapter 10, especially Sections ii, iii, iv, v and vi.

20 I.e.,
"-that no-one can remain uninterruptedly prosperous or successful all their life.". So A.F. Garvie in his preview to his forthcoming edition of Ajax (Glasgow, 1997?).

21 Ll.531-3.
unmixed good fortune. Sorrow is the keynote of mortal life; and alternation of good fortune and bad is the norm. 22

Given that this alternation of circumstances is inescapable for mortals, it follows that the inherent unpredictability of life is also inescapable. The lesson to be learned from this, in the Ajax as in the Iliad before it, and as in Qoheleth after it, is that a cautious reverence for the divine and an open-hearted generosity toward other mortals are essential. Since absolute certainty is impossible, so also is absolute control; and since control is impossible, arrogance is unrealistic. A realistic grasp of the insecurity of the human condition, with its continual alternation between good fortune and bad, and between one set of circumstances and its opposite, demands a piety which accepts that Man's future is meant to be unfathomable to him. This is ordained by a higher authority than Man; and so Man should accept the unexpected and the unforeseeable, and accept the wide variety of experience with all its changes of fortune. 23

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22 L.525-551. See also above, Chapter 3, Section iii, for the moral implications of Achilles’ acceptance that it is Zeus who dispenses this mixture of human fortunes, so that it must be accepted. Compare Amasis’ view in Herodotus’ Hist. III.40. Amasis is very convinced that this alternation of good and bad fortunes is correct, and that unclouded good fortune would spell danger. But he goes much further than merely acknowledging the correctness of the alternation pattern wherever it occurs, and enduring whatever it sends, however unwelcome. He actually advocates trying to induce the alternation pattern, in a case where it appears to have broken down because someone is experiencing unbroken good fortune. For he regards this unbroken good fortune as unnatural and dangerous.

23 See Qoh. 7:14. Cf. Solon fr. 1, L.63-75 D3 and Theognis L.657-666, as discussed above, Chapter 3, Section iii. Both Solon and Theognis in these passages relate the importance of accepting whatever the gods send to the unpredictability of outcomes and the alternation of one kind of experience with its opposite.
By the same token, along with the unforeseeable, Man should accept also the numinous, and give to what is awesome the respect due to it. In the Ajax, for example, Sophocles reflects the view that the Atreidae’s outlook does not allow for the necessity of reverence, the sense of awe that mortals should have for someone or something greater than themselves. Their petty attitude toward Ajax, especially in this context of refusing him burial, makes a pointed contrast with the awe of Homer’s Achilles at the sudden appearance of Priam to ask for Hector’s body. 24 Iliad XXIV, Ll.480-4 describes Achilles and his companions as seized with wonder at the sight of godlike Priam, even though Priam’s humble entreaty in the very next lines 25 reinforces poignantly that he is in every way at the disadvantage.

If anyone might be pardoned, then, for thinking himself in control of this situation, it is Achilles; but his respect for Priam is none the less for that. Even though the savage emotions which led him to abuse Hector’s body in the first place are still far from dead, Achilles still does not make the mistake of over-rating a fleeting human experience like appearing to be in control; for he has an in-depth perspective on the changeableness of human fortunes, which makes all human beings alike vulnerable to sorrow. 26 He shows his instinctive awareness that this unites mankind by a common bond of suffering, from his reaction to Priam at Ll.507-521.

\footnote{24 See also above, Chapter 3, Section ii; cf. above, this Chapter, Section iii.}

\footnote{25 Ibid. 485-506.}

\footnote{26 Ll.522-551.}
In Ll.628-34, both Achilles and Priam are full of admiration for each other; and in
Ll.519-21, Achilles expresses his amazement at Priam’s courage in braving the
Greeks’ camp for his son’s body.

This mutual respect and empathy is shown to be all the more remarkable by the
poet’s reminders of how overwhelming the feelings of both men really are concerning
the bereavements they have suffered, and how Achilles fears succumbing to the
temptation to mistreat Priam instead of revering him. The way that these two can
sit and weep together over their common sorrow as human beings is as remarkable
as their mutual respect. It would not be possible without the respect for the gods to
which Priam appeals at L.503. Achilles is not slow to sense that the gods must be at
work, helping Priam in his quest for Hector’s body; and he justifies the confidence
of Zeus that he is not without reverence, despite Apollo’s uncouth picture of him
He shows that he does after all respect the god-ordained rights of a suppliant.

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27 See, e.g., Ll.568-71 and 582-6.
28 Ll.507-17.
29 Ll.563-7.
30 At Ibid. Ll.155-8, echoed by Iris at Ll.184-7.

31 Ll.39-54. Not that Apollo’s grim picture of Achilles is actually wrong. His treatment of Hector’s
body up to now has already demonstrated that this ferocious aspect of his character is definitely real, even
though it is not the whole story. But it does not cancel out or make any less real his ability, when
confronted with the suppliant Priam, to show reverence and sympathy toward him. It may even be that the
co-existence of the capacity for ferocity and for reverence both in this same person is somehow in harmony
with the overall pattern of alternation in human experience anyway. The ability to kill and the ability to
heal (Qoh. 3:3) or the ability to tear and to mend (Ibid. 3:7) may correspond in some way to the time to kill
and the time to heal, the time to tear and the time to mend. For the relationship between belief in the
necessity of alternation of opposite circumstances in human experience, and belief in the human character
being balanced between or encompassing within itself opposite qualities as the outcome of these opposite
experiences, see above, Chapter 3, Section iii; see also below, Chapter 10, Section iv. Cf. also Deut. 32:39
(of God):

"I put to death and I bring to life; I wound and I heal."

Given that this is said against the background of the blessings and curses of Ibid. Ch. 28, this also relates
Particularly revealing of Achilles' inherent piety is his strategy at L.582-6 to prevent from occurring at all a situation in which, if it did occur, he knows he is capable of killing Priam, and hence grossly offending Zeus.

to a time to kill and a time to heal (even though there is no echo of actual wording between this passage and Qoh. 3:3 & 7), since the blessings are prescribed for obedience, but the curses for disobedience, which would respectively create completely opposite "times" or sets of circumstances.
THE DRIVE TO CONTROL CONFLICTING WITH REVERENCE, REALISM AND THE OVERALL DEMANDS OF PIETY

If two men with such strong reasons for hating each other as Achilles and Priam can be so strangely united in mutual awe and mutual tears by the pious values they share, it would not be much to ask of the Atreidae in Ajax that their attitude should embrace profound respect for the quality of Ajax's valour, whatever they feel about his conduct in other ways, and that they should at least allow him the right of a decent burial. However, against this burial, - and so, in effect, against the accepted values of piety - Menelaus argues the claims of the authority of the State; but the fact that he launches straight into this from his complaint that Ajax would never listen to his words/orders makes his motivation for this superficially political justification sound suspiciously personal, as do the hybristic overtones of Ll.1087-90.

Both Menelaus and Agamemnon represent the main issue here as one

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31Like C.Ant. in Antigone.

32.Ll.1071-87.

33.Ll.1069-70.

34.Ll.1067-70.

35.Perhaps he is making the same dangerous identification of himself with the whole state that Oedipus seems to be making in his dispute with C.O.T., O.T. Ll.628-30.

36.For a discussion of these lines from the point of view of what exactly constitutes hybris, see Cairns, op. cit., Pp.11-13.

37.Ll.1067-70.

38.Ll.1250-4.
of control, Agamemnon seeing intelligence as the key to control, \(^39\) whereby brain masters brawn. \(^40\) But here in Ajax, as in Antigone, \(^41\) the quarrel is not directly between the authority of the state \(^42\) and the rights of the individual; rather it is between the drive \(^43\) for mere control (which Agamemnon envisages in terms of manipulative intelligence) and the claims of piety, which should overrule such self-centred drives. Just as Menelaus sums up his expression of his desire to master Ajax in terms which are essentially hybristic, \(^44\) so also Agamemnon openly represents his concept of kingship (and therefore, in effect, his drive to control) as antipietist in

\(^39\) Not unlike Pericles as represented in Thucydides; see Edmunds, op. cit., Passim.

\(^40\) L.1252-4.

\(^41\) In Antigone, the eponymous heroine herself identifies the issue as one of piety, referring to the competing claims of merely human laws on the one hand (L.449), and on the other hand to those of the "unwritten laws" (L.454-5) as reflecting the higher authority of the gods (L.450-60). C.Ant., however, insists on interpreting the issue as one of merely human control, i.e., of who is in charge, himself or Antigone: hence his extravagant and misplaced use of control-vocabulary. In L.525, he says "No woman will be in charge (δυστη) while I'm alive". However, there is no question of Antigone aiming to be in charge; she is simply trying to bury a corpse, an act which would not be a defiance of C.Ant.'s authority at all, if only he were not so intent on making it one by adopting an untenable position himself. The real control issue here is between himself and the gods, not between himself and Antigone. Cf. below, this Chapter, end of Section vii, regarding whether Oedipus or Zeus is the real King in O.T..

Similarly, in Antig. L.756, C.Ant. refers to Haemon's mere willingness to listen to Antigone's point of view as being her slave, another melodramatic misapplication of control-vocabulary, since willingness to listen to others is simply sober and sensible. Again at L.1096 he insists that "To yield is grievous";

"How hard it is to change one's resolve!"

This is as unrealistic as his assertion that enemies never become friends. Human experience is full of yielding, of giving in and of changing one's resolve; this is inevitable, given the unpredictability of circumstances and the impossibility of certainty. Anyone who finds it as hard and as grievous as C.Ant. professes to find it has little hope of survival in the real world, as Haemon has already indicated in his illustrations from nature and sailing at L.710-7.

\(^42\) Especially not in the true sense of the entire state, rather than just one ruler claiming to represent it.

\(^43\) Which is fundamentally the drive of an individual, not of a state.

\(^44\) L.1087-90.
essence, in his comment at L.1350 that kingship and reverence (ἐὐσεβεῖν) are difficult to combine:

"τὸν τοι τύραννον ἐὐσεβεῖν οὐ ραδίον".  

This is the problem of kingship in a nutshell: the human drive to control, operating through the wisdom or cunning of a great ruler, in direct confrontation with the demands of piety. However, as Haemon in Antigone points out to C.Ant., so in Ajax Odysseus says to Agamemnon, i.e., one can only control through willingness not to control:

"παύσαι. κρατεῖς τοι τῶν φίλων νικώμενος."

"Forbear! The way to have power / conquer is to be conquered by friends.".

In saying that the only way to rule is by having the flexibility to yield, where appropriate, and to give way to good advice, Odysseus is in one sense saying that control is not really the main issue after all; to him, the piety of magnanimity and of paying honour wherever it is due is more central to life than mere control.  

See also below, this Chapter, this Section and Sections vi and vii, for the relevance of this comment to Oedipus Tyrannus as well, since these plays both depict the human drive to control at odds with the pious values which insist on paying to the gods and / or to other human beings whatever honour is due to them.  

In saying that the only way to rule is by having the flexibility to yield, where appropriate, and to give way to good advice, Odysseus is in one sense saying that control is not really the main issue after all; to him, the piety of magnanimity and of paying honour wherever it is due is more central to life than mere control.  

Perhaps rather as family love and loyalty are more important to Antigone than enmity (Antig, L.523). C.Ant.’s passionate assertion at Ibid. L.522, that an enemy can never turn into a friend, not even when he dies, is blatant nonsense, precisely because of the principle of the alternation of human circumstances between opposites. As Oedipus points out in O.C. L.607-20, not only do enemies become friends, but friends also become enemies, friendship and enmity switching back and forth (Ibid. L.615) in the course of time, which is "all-conquering" (Ibid. L.609) in its ability to effect these changes. 

Similarly, in Aj. L.1359, Odysseus dismisses Agamemnon’s claim that becoming friendly to a former enemy is capricious by saying bluntly that people are alternating between friendship and enmity all
Paradoxically, however, Odysseus’ use in L.1353 of parallel active and passive words relating to conquest, "κρατεῖς - νικόμενος", excites one’s curiosity about the nature of control, as if ‘control’ in some sense might be the issue after all. He seems to be hinting at some legitimate art of control, which consists mainly of flexibility and adaptability to what is right and / or to what is inevitable. In the context of wisdom controversy, given the close association between the concept of wisdom and the concept of control, this implies that wisdom also consists of flexibility, of adaptability and willingness to yield. Because wisdom is popularly misconceived as mere control, and therefore seen primarily as the tool of rulers, with rulers the chief embodiments of wisdom, Odysseus seems here to be answering the ‘fools’ who see wisdom in this light ‘according to their folly,’ 48 by saying, in effect,

"Very well; if wisdom is control, then control is the willingness not to seek control, where control is impossible or inappropriate.".

This viewpoint strongly invites comparison with C.O.T.’s point in O.T. L.1522,

"πάντα μή βούλου κρατεῖν",

"Seek not control in all things.".

Although Oedipus presumably does not associate his political attitude with gender-

the time. He fully accepts that this kind of change is simply a natural part of life. His comment at L.1347, that he was Ajax’s enemy at the time when it was right to be, is even more revealing, since it implies that it would be wrong to continue hating, once the right time for it is past, the same man that you were right to hate before the time for it was past; see also above, Chapter iii, Section iii. Just as Agamemnon and Menelaus, in clinging out of season to their hatred for Ajax, are refusing to submit to the nature of reality, so too C.Ant. in Antig. L.522 is defying the same inevitable pattern of human experience. Furthermore, like the Atreidae in Ajax, he is doing so out of inflexibility; and this inflexibility arises from his extravagant desire to control, which makes him unwilling to submit or adapt, as men must submit or adapt, to the forces that inescapably shape and control human experience (Ibid.Lll.710-17).

48 According to the terminology of Prov. 26:5, in the case where it is appropriate to answer your opponent in their own terms of reference and according to their own criteria; as distinct from Ibid. 26:4, where it is not.
rivalries like C.Ant., \(^{49}\) he is nevertheless, in his own way, over-preoccupied with control. His identification of himself with the sovereign power seems fanatical. At L.I.628-30, he stubbornly persists in his groundless accusation against C.O.T., refusing to check the facts with Delphi, as C.O.T. reasonably suggests at L.603 ff. At L.I.628-30, he replies to C.O.T.'s challenge,

"And if you've got it all wrong?" \(^{50}\)

with the disturbing reply,

"ἀρκτέον ἐς δῆμος", \(^{51}\)

"Kings / I have to rule just the same".

C.O.T.'s retort

"Not if they rule badly!" \(^{52}\)

is hardly outrageous in the circumstances; but Oedipus over-reacts to it by exclaiming

"ὁ πόλις πόλις!" \(^{53}\),

as if C.O.T.'s caution against wrong behaviour on his part were an attack on the state itself. Yet this is not the case, since Oedipus is only one man; and C.O.T. is quick to correct him by pointing out \(^{54}\) that it is his state as well, not just Oedipus'.

The presumptuousness of identifying himself with the entire state is probably

\(^{49}\)Since he respects his consort and shares his sovereignty with her (L.579-80).

\(^{50}\)L.628 a.

\(^{51}\)L.628 b.

\(^{52}\)L.629 a.

\(^{53}\)L.529 b.

\(^{54}\)L.630.
what Oedipus' incest with his mother is intended to symbolize: an attempt to control what it is grossly inappropriate to control. In L.981-2, Jocasta reminds Oedipus that men often dream they have married their mother. In view of the other Herodotean echoes in this play, it would be no surprise if the first such dream which springs to the Athenian audience's minds were Hippias' dream of intercourse with his mother; 56 and although Hippias is mistaken to interpret the dream as an omen that he would recover his power at Athens (his mother-country), the important thing is that this is what the dream means to his own imagination. It is, in fact, a hybristic dream. This association therefore brings out a possibly hybristic undertone in O.T. L.980. On the surface, Jocasta is simply saying "Don't be afraid of marrying your mother"; 57 but beneath the surface, the remark could be taken as "Have no scruples about desiring political tyranny over your mother-city". 58 Even though Jocasta and Oedipus themselves seem unaware of this sinister hidden implication in Jocasta's remark (since they do not realize that Thebes is Oedipus' mother-city anyway), the audience is well aware of it, because they know that Oedipus is a native-born Theban.

55I.e., this is what it is meant to symbolize in Sophocles' play. What the myth on which the play is based might symbolize is, at least to some extent, a different question. For while it would be wrong to assume that myths can not have political implications, it would also be wrong to assume that any particular myth necessarily has such implications.

56Herod. Hist. VI.107. This is especially likely since, in antiquity, such dreams were regularly given a political interpretation. Ahl (op. cit. Pp.168-9) notes that Plato associates this kind of dream with people who are tyrannical and unfit to govern in Rep. 9.571 C-D. He also notes that Plutarch mentions a similar dream in Caesar 32.6.

57I.e., don't be afraid because it will never happen; it's only something men dream about, not a reality.

58I.e., because such dreams (i.e., desires) are common.
It may well be, then, that Oedipus' presumptuous identification of himself with the entire state, which is out of order because he is only one man, is symbolized in this play by his sexual conjoining with his mother, which is also out of order even though it is unconscious. Oedipus' position at Thebes (on the surface simply incest, but beneath the surface also political presumption) is in reality obscene and a pollution, even though he himself does not see it. The poet has fused Oedipus' incest and his tyrannical attitude into one, presenting his total position in the state as an unconscious but highly destructive act of outrage. This outrage of trying to control what it is inappropriate to control is related to the outrage implied by rationalism; Man's belief that he can be in control through intelligence is a form of antipietist anti-wisdom, and as such is a serious affront to the gods. 59

It is over-rating the importance of control which causes Oedipus to persist in his suspicion that C.O.T. is plotting against him to seize power, even though the latter's argument in his own defence, 60 that reigning single-handed is not so attractive a prospect as the tripartite rule which he shares at present with Oedipus and Jocasta, is not unconvincing. Perhaps, then, reigning single-handed does seem an attractive prospect to Oedipus himself; otherwise, he would probably not find it so hard to believe that it seems unattractive to C.O.T. Rather as C.Ant. extravagantly supposes that Antigone sets great store by being "in charge" 61 just because he does,

59 As mentioned above, Ehrenberg's interest in possible parallels between Oedipus in O.T. and Pericles (op. cit., Passim) richly repays comparison with what Lowell Edmunds' Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides has to say about Thucydides' depiction of Pericles in relation to what this thesis refers to as anti-wisdom.

60 L.583 ff.

61 Antig. L.525.
Oedipus seems to regard who is in control as the main issue himself, and solely because of this assumes that this is the main issue in the eyes of C.O.T. as well.

There are, however, no real grounds for this assumption. C.O.T. claims that at present he enjoys the advantages of influence without the disadvantages, whereas if he seized power he would often have to act against his own wishes. This claim may perhaps be sincere; it is perfectly plausible that C.O.T. is strongly influenced by thinking that having power is not always in the interests of the man who has it, precisely because the same character brings this point up again (albeit with a different slant) at L.1522-3. The play which opens with strong emphasis on Oedipus’ position as ruler, and the universal respect he enjoys as such, ends, but for the closing Choric summary, with C.O.T.’s exhortation to him,

"πάντα μη βούλου κρατεῖν.
καὶ γὰρ ακράτησας οὐ σοι τῷ βίῳ ξυνέστησον.".

"Don’t aim at controlling everything;
For the control / power you had has not kept pace with your lifespan.".

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62 L.591.

63 Qoh. 8:9 b also raises this point. See below, Chapter 10, Section vii for the fact that Qoheleth does not rate mere control very high, certainly not as a major function of wisdom.

If C.O.T. really is strongly influenced by this view, then that supports the argument of those who say that he is not the same ‘character’ as C.Ant. (i.e., as the ‘Creon’ persona in Antigone, who, by contrast, rates control very high). This is not really a problematic view anyway. Cf., for example, Sophocles’ magnanimous ‘Odysseus’ in Ajax with his mean-minded ‘Odysseus’ in Philoctetes.

64 E.g., L.14,
"ο χραττόνων Οδήπους",
etc.

65 L.1522-3.

66 I.e., "It has not lasted / kept up with you / stayed with you right up to the end of your life.".
The fact that power does not necessarily last is, of course, no small part of the reason why it must not be over-rated and why exercising it is sometimes detrimental to one's interests. This is particularly so because although its continuance or non-continuance is beyond human ability to predict, exercising it nevertheless tends to blind people to this, so that they imagine their power will always last. See, e.g., Cairns, op. cit. P.13,

"Xerxes is also a typical hybristês in believing that his good fortune and that of his nation can only continue - god is guiding Persian destiny for the best, and the Persians themselves have merely to follow."

The author is referring here to Herodotus' Xerxes in Hist. VII.8; but it is noteworthy that Aeschylus' Xerxes in The Persians makes the same assumption, and that Cairns comments on this as well (op. cit., P.21), referring to the

"stress - on Xerxes' confidence (Pers. L.1.352, 372-3), which the Queen later explains in terms of the human tendency blindly to believe that present good fortune will continue forever (Ibid. L.1.601-2). The unpredictability of fortune or of the gods who grant and withhold good fortune has been a theme since the beginning of the play (see L.1.93-100, 157-8 & 161-4); it was with the help of "some god" that Darius amassed his great prosperity, and the correct attitude in anyone who would retain such prosperity is caution.".
This was exactly what Herodotus’ Solon anticipated happening to Croesus, which was why he told him that no man, however fortunate, can be called ὄλβιτος until he has come to the end of his life, and ended it as well as he has lived it so far:

"πρὶν δ’ ἄν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν, μηδὲ καλέσειν κω ὄλβιον ἀλλ’ εὕτυχέα."

"We must wait until he is dead, and not yet call him happy, but only fortunate.". 67

It is therefore no surprise 68 that the Chorus concludes the O.T. 69 with a re-worded version of the same maxim at L.1528-30. As L.1529’s "μηδὲν ὄλβιζεν" reflects

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67 Herod., Hist. I.32.

68 The ending of the play (L.1524-30) should not be a surprise at all, considering the parallel between Oedipus and Herodotus’ Croesus in, e.g., their peculiarly adamant, over-confident interpretation of oracles. However, L.1524-30 are particularly unsurprising if one accepts as genuine C.O.T.’s comment at L.1523, since this comment blatantly invites a re-articulation of the celebrated Solonic γνῶμη which, variously re-phrased, is so familiar in Tragedy (e.g., Androm. L.100-2, Agam. L.1928-9, etc.). This familiarity is well-justified by the high profile in Greek Wisdom of the need to recognize unpredictability for what it is, and to steer clear of mistaking uncertainty for certainty. The problem of false certainty is intimately related to the false belief that Man can have control, because it is Man’s supposed ‘certainty’ which gives him the confidence to believe that he is in control, and which he sees as his chief tool in wielding that control. For Oedipus’ confidence in himself, and the confidence of others in him, see, e.g., Knox, B.M.W., Oedipus at Thebes (London, 1957), P.21 ff.

Oddly enough, even H.D.F. Kitto, who accepts L.1522-3 as genuine, still does not accept L.1524-30 as genuine (see Greek Tragedy, P.181). This is particularly strange since he fully recognizes O.T. as an exposé of the dangers of false certainty (see op. cit., Pp.177-186, where he expounds this with perfect clarity and in considerable detail). He identifies “The hybris that breeds the tyrant” (L.892) as, in effect, Oedipus’ intellectual self-reliance (Kitto, op. cit., P.184) and as

"The blindness of the intelligent man, his false confidence, when circumstances are treacherous" (Ibid. P.179). He even draws attention (Ibid. Pp.180-1) to the contrasting wisdom of C.O.T.’s profession of uncertainty in L.569 and L.1520 (misprinted as L.1546).

Given that Kitto’s viewpoint here is hard to refute, the link between Solonic pietist wisdom (including as Herodotus represents it) and Sophocles’ representation of wisdom and anti-wisdom in O.T. seems to go very deep; so the force of Kitto’s argument makes the gnostic verses of L.1124-30, with their unmistakably Solonic maxim, seem all the less likely to be spurious. For the problem posed by the fact that O.T. is not the only play which finds this ending, see Arkins, Brian, "The Final Lines of Sophocles’ King Oedipus (1524-30)", Classical Quarterly N.S. 38 (1988, O.U.P.), Pp.555-8.

69 L.1528-30.
Herodotus' "μηδε καλειν κω δλιτον", so L. 1527's "κλυδωνα δεινης συμφορις" recalls Solon's
"ουτω δεν Κροίσε παν εστι ανθρωπος συμφορη.",
"So then, Croesus, human life is entirely a matter of Chance."

The name of Solon is not only associated with recognition of Man in general as a thing of Chance, subject to divinely ordained hazard and unpredictability. Solon is also seen, because of the equalizing tendencies of the social policy associated with him and the flavour of the didactic rôle attributed to him, as symbolizing the recognition that kings and men of power have a special need to lay life's unpredictability to heart. The Great Ruler has a particular weakness for forgetting the unpredictability inherent in human life. This is not just because of his good fortune; it is also because of his false certainty, his misplaced confidence in his own judgment.

The Solonic sentiment of O.T. 1524-30 is not abruptly inviting a new and unexpected comparison between Oedipus and Solon; it is simply highlighting the implications of the parallel the audience has already seen.

Part of this parallel, as Ahl notes, concerns the peculiar blindness of both to the true meaning of Apollo's oracles in matters intimately relating to them.

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70. "A tempest / surge of shocking mischance".

71. I.e., because no one of all the days of a man's life is like any of the others, so that everything is unpredictable.

72. See, e.g., Knox's comments on Oedipus' confidence, op. cit., Pp.21-2.

However, although Ahl claims that Oedipus, like Croesus,

" -meets disaster through oracular ambiguity, by interpreting too literally the Delphic responses given him",

it would be more exact to say that they both interpret the oracles too confidently rather than too literally. Both the oracles in question actually require a literal interpretation. The mistake of Croesus and of Oedipus is not that their interpretations are too literal, but rather that they are both too certain that their interpretation is the only possible interpretation.

Moreover, the further points in common between Croesus and Oedipus 74 are also particularly relevant to the association of kings and great men with antipietist anti-wisdom. At the end of the play, we are reminded 75 that this pitiful, maimed figure before us is none other than Oedipus, who saved Thebes by knowing the answer to the Sphinx's riddle and was (therefore) formerly the most powerful man in the state, envied and admired by all. 76 As Sophocles calls Oedipus enviable in O.T. L.1526, so also he calls C.Ant. enviable in Antig. L.1161. C.Ant.'s fall too is taken as confirmation that, since Man's fate is by nature unpredictable because of the ebb and flow of τὸ χρόνιον, then wealth and kingly power in themselves are no guarantee of

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74 Since, as noted above, this Chapter, Section ii, there also seem to be points of comparison between Pericles and Sophocles' Oedipus, it is tempting to wonder if Sophocles is both inviting his fellow-citizens to be cautious about Periclean rationalism and advising Pericles himself to take more seriously the concepts of Man and of Chance represented by the teaching of Solon (including Solon as depicted by Herodotus). This idea is particularly appealing in view of Lowell Edmunds' perception of Thucydides' Pericles as a virtual anti-Solon in terms of wisdom-theory. See also above, this Chapter, Section ii and below, Chapter 7, Section v.

75 Ll.1524-7.

76 Aeschylus' description of Oedipus' glory in Seven Against Thebes Ll.772-7 gives a similarly superlative impression of the level of admiration he enjoyed. It makes one feel that if a man as great as he could fall into misfortune, presumably anyone could.
joy 77 and without joy are of no use. 78 To us ordinary mortals, this point may seem obvious; but to the Great Ruler type, it is notoriously far from obvious, a fact with which the audience are already familiar from Herodotus’ account of Croesus.

Croesus is at first actually angry with Solon for not regarding his wealth as proof that he is the happiest of men, and so dismisses him ignominiously without any gracious gifts. 79 He disagrees with, or at least finds not to his taste, Solon’s emphasis on final outcomes 80 rather than on his present prosperity, which he assumes will continue. However, when Croesus eventually comes to see the wisdom of Solon’s point of view, he describes this sage as the one whom he wishes that in particular all kings (πᾶσιν τυράννοις) would consult. 81

The reason that Croesus sees Solon’s message as especially relevant to the τυράννος is because he now recognizes himself that false certainty and excessive faith in one’s own unshakeable control is particularly characteristic of the Great Ruler figure. He also realizes how the power and wealth of kings marks them out from other men, and how their immediate experience of power beguiles them into

77 Ibid. L.1.1158-9.
79 Hist. I.33.
80 This is probably because τῆλος is known to be the special province of the gods, as already indicated by the above-quoted Solon Fr. 1, L.17 D' and Theognis L.1.659-60 (see Chapter 3, Section iii). Since Theognis is warning us in these lines never to say that such and such a thing could never happen, because the gods would resent such a claim, he would presumably regard Croesus’ attitude of assuming his prosperity could not fail to continue as no less dangerous than the kind of verbal assertion that he is warning against here.
81 Hist. I.86.
discounting the possibility of losing it. Croesus based his own previous claim to be
the most δλβιος of men on his wealth 82 and on his power, the fact that he was, in
Solon's words,

" -very rich and King of many men". 83

He was shocked then that Solon rated the happiness of even some private citizens
above his, even though he was a king. However, when Solon turns out to have been
right after all, Herodotus represents Croesus as rating the sage's previous insights in
advance of the disaster as scarcely short of prophetic:

"Croesus, as he stood on the pyre, remembered even in his evil plight how
divinely inspired was that saying of Solon, that no living man was δλβιος",

" -τό του Σδλωνος ὃς οί εἴη σὺν θεῷ εὑρημένον, τὸ μηδένα εἶναι τῶν
ζωντων δλβιον.". 84

This idea of the sage with a warning for a king having a virtually prophetic
quality is so striking that Sophocles' tense scenario of Oedipus threaterngly
dismissing Tiresias could readily be taken as an intensified version of the same
encounter. Oedipus' discourtesy is, of course, far more extreme, especially since
Tiresias is literally a prophet, whose message to Oedipus is even more specifically and
explicitly "σὺν θεῷ" than Solon's to Croesus. However, encounters between prophets
and kings, although not unusual in the Bible, 85 are sufficiently unusual in Greek

82E.g., the "treasures" of Hist. I.30.

83Ibid. I.32.

84Hist. I.86.

85 In the Deuteronomic History the prophets are the main human instruments of God in dealing with
kings. Where the king represents mere human power acting without or against piety, the prophet in
confrontation with the king represents the ethical divine authority which is above mere power. See, e.g.,
I Sam. 15:13-35 (Samuel and Saul); II Sam. 12:1-23 (Nathan and David); I Ki. 13:1-10 (a Judahite prophet

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literature for Oedipus' blindness to the truth in what Tiresias is saying to remind us vividly of Croesus' blindness to the truth in what Solon was saying.

Because Croesus' downfall represents the tendency of kings as a category to fall a prey to over-confidence, and because the Herodotean Solon plays the part of 'prophet' in his story, it is natural to see Sophocles' King-figures, Oedipus in

and Jeroboam); Ibid. 14:1-18 (Ahijah and Jeroboam's Queen); Ibid. 17:1, 18, and 21:17-28 (Elijah and Ahab); Ibid. 20:35-43 (an unnamed prophet and Ahab); Ibid. 22:1-38 (Micaiah ben Imlah and Ahab); II Ki. 3:14 (Elishah and Joram), etc. Of a similar type are the confrontations, e.g., between Moses and Pharaoh in Ex. 5:1-12:33, between Jeremiah and Zedekiah in Jer. 32 ff., and between John the Baptist and Herod in Matt. 14:1-12.

Outside the Bible and literature directly or indirectly influenced by it, however, this pattern of prophets in confrontation with kingly hybris is unusual. Sophocles is remarkable in that in both Antig. and O.T. he represents the prophet Tiresias dealing with an obstinate king, and in both cases the authoritative pronouncement he makes against the king comes true. In each of these plays the poet presents a head-on clash between human kingly power and the supernatural authority of prophecy, probably the most direct and colourful examples of this kind of encounter outside the Bible. It is not clear exactly why Sophocles is so interested in the vindication of oracles and the rôle of prophecy in particular in limiting the power of rulers, or why he is so committed to the conviction that Man is not 'the measure of all things'; but even Herodotus' recognition of the divine inspiration behind Solon's insights is fairly tame by comparison with Sophocles' formidable picture of Tiresias in inspired confrontation with Oedipus (O.T. L1.300-462) and with C.Ant. (Antig. L1.988-1090), or with his awesome depiction of Oedipus the spokesman of Apollo's oracles in Oedipus at Colonus.

Of course kings in Greek literature often make use of prophecy; but this kind of direct personal encounter between a king and a prophetic individual telling him something he does not want to hear has a strong dramatic interest which creates a very different atmosphere from a king merely consulting Delphi, or even consulting his own soothsayers on a fairly routine matter of ritual, etc. Both Herodotus' Solon and Sophocles' Tiresias are unusual, and unusual in a similar way.

As Croesus' own reference to kings in particular as in need of Solon's counsel (Hist. I.86) underlines.

Not just metaphorically, but in a rather more direct way, since he is, in effect, the spokesman of the pietist point of view: namely, that τέλος is the domain specifically of the gods, and therefore no human being should ever lay claim to certainty, especially about the outcome of their enterprises. Cf. Solon Fr. 1, L.63 ff. D:

"It is Fate that brings to mortals both good and ill; and the gifts of the immortal gods can not be refused. In all undertakings there is risk, and no-one knows at the beginning of a matter how it is to end. In fact, one man trying to do his work well falls unawares into great and bitter ruin; whereas to another who is a shoddy worker a god grants good luck in everything, which proves to be a deliverance from folly."
O.T. and C.Ant. as a re-enactment of the Croesus-Solon paradigm. This paradigm was already easily recognizable as the standard demonstration that kings are not necessarily to be envied, and that their failure to grasp that very element of unpredictability which is the keynote of human experience, together with the false certainty arising from that failure, constitute the main reason for this.

In fact, Sophocles' parallels between Oedipus / C.Ant. and Croesus evoke the standard pietist viewpoint that the Great Ruler figure epitomizes Man's most dangerous delusion of all. This is that deadly outcome of false certainty, the belief that one can be, even is, in control. Hence the perfect appropriateness of C.O.T.'s comment at O.T. L1.1522-3,

"πάντα μὴ βούλου κρατείν.
καὶ γὰρ ἀκράτησας οὐ σοι τῷ βίῳ ξυνέσπετο."

"Don't aim at controlling everything;
For the control / power you had has not kept pace with your lifespan."

Sophocles' reworking of the Croesus paradigm in O.T. and Antigone, in giving a high profile to the problem of false certainty in kings and its relation to their distinctive proclivity to arrogance and hybris, is in effect giving a high profile to the problem of anti-wisdom in its starkest form. The false belief that one can be in control is the root of the controversy between true wisdom on the one hand and, on the other, the false wisdom referred to in this thesis as anti-wisdom. The essence of anti-wisdom is over-assertiveness of one's own 'mind' (e.g., 'plan', 'purpose', 'interpretation', etc.), over-estimating the reliability of human calculation and under-
rating the influence (e.g., on outcomes) of that which to Man is unpredictable and incalculable. In any investigation into the cause of this erroneous anti-wisdom, its foundation seems to be the idea that wisdom is to be equated with the ability to control. This appears to be the case whatever stage of wisdom-tradition is under investigation.
Sophocles’ representation of kings in conflict with representatives of a higher power, although apparently inspired by Herodotus’ Croesus and Solon story and ethically in harmony with it, is an advance on it in terms of pietist wisdom theory. The original Croesus paradigm as presented by Herodotus demonstrates that it is wrong to judge a man by his present good fortune and to disregard the likelihood of change, and thereby it shows that the wealth and power of kings are no guarantee of their happiness. Yet although Croesus’ unjustified anger against Solon and shabby treatment of the sage for telling him the truth are proved to be unjustified, Croesus is still perceived as, in essence,

"κατ’ θεοφιλής καὶ ἄνηρ ἀγαθός",  
"both god-fearing and estimable".

His invocation of Apollo is sincere and heartfelt, and the god does hear him and save him, even though he disagrees with Croesus’ criticism of his oracle.

By contrast, however, the implied clash between kingly arrogance and the authority of Apollo is far more radical in the case of Oedipus and Jocasta’s

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90 Hist. I.32.
91 Ibid. I.87.
92 Ibid. I.87.
93 Ibid. I.91.
94 Ibid. I.90.
rationalism in *Oedipus Tyrannus* than in that of Croesus' temporary coolness toward Apollo's oracle. Sophocles is here taking the anti-pietist implications of the Great Ruler figure beyond those reflected in the Croesus story. Croesus' hybristic attitude, even though he is a king, is on a similar level as Aristotle's example of hybris in very young people, arising from their inexperience of reversal and misfortune, and hence their failure to recognize the alternation principle. But the hybristic ambience surrounding Oedipus' position in the state does not arise from mere inexperience, despite his misunderstanding of the nature of τύχη; it arises from his false image as the real force in control, through his own calculating intelligence.

Following Oedipus' insulting dismissal of Apollo's prophetic representative

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95 This false image is reflected by Jocasta's reference to Oedipus as the state's 'helmsman' in L.923, given the negative context (L.911-23) in which she uses this familiar metaphor for political leaders. For here she seems to be implying that she has only come to pray to Apollo for his help because Oedipus, who should be the real guide of events, is not behaving as rationally as he should. Her underlying assumption is that Man should be the one who is in control of the city's course, not the gods.

Like Aeschylus, who calls Zeus "shaper of men's paths to sobriety" (Ag. L.176-7), and who symbolizes Agamemnon's self-willed plotting of his own path to Troy (through the blood of his sacrificed daughter) by the glaring path of the purple carpet he treads hybristically to his own doom, Sophocles also recognizes the antipietist implications of path-plotting imagery. Both poets see the link between Man's misguided faith in his powers of calculation and his determination (though ultimate inability) to plot his own path. Both poets also reflect implicitly that wisdom is often but wrongly regarded as an issue of mere control, and that this control is often visualized or activated as a form of path-making, pursuing, searching, tracking or route-plotting.

This may be so literally and physically, like Agamemnon's path to Troy; or it may be so mentally and metaphorically, like Oedipus' search, which begins as the search for Laius' murderer and the source of Thebes' pollution, and then gradually evolves into the search for his own origin and identity, even though he does not realize these two quests are virtually one and the same (since the murderer is himself and the victim is his origin). See, e.g., Knox, op. cit., Chapter 3, especially Pp.110-20, for the use both in the Ode to Man in *Antigone* and in *Oedipus Tyrannus* passim of dynamic path-making images as illustrations of the 'control' concept of 'wisdom'; see, e.g., Ibid. P.111 for the helmsman, ploughman and hunter images of Oedipus. These path-seeking images reflect his identity as a sage of anti-wisdom, a self-reliant pursuer of his own path. See also Ibid. Pp.182-3 for the way the frequent puns on the second half of his name, "ποτζ" ("foot", the instrument of pursuit and path-making), are slanted in such a way as to put the self-investigative zeal of his swift intelligence in a negative light.

For 'wisdom' as path-making or route-plotting, see also below, Chapter 9, especially Sections ii and iv.
Tiresias and his high-handed refusal (trusting his own judgment instead) to follow up C.O.T.’s suggestion of consulting Apollo’s oracle on the question of his guilt or innocence, and following Jocasta’s lengthy exchange with Oedipus which begins and ends with her disavowal of the prophetic art, the Chorus then reverses the emphasis by asserting the importance of the oracles and of honouring Apollo. They say, in effect, that

"δῆρις φυτεύει τύραννον",
"Hybris breeds a tyrant",
in situations where divine oracles are not proved to be right, where Apollo is not publicly honoured and the divine order (or the worship of the gods) is overthrown,

"κούδομοι τιμαῖς Ἀπόλλων ἐμφανῆς,
ἐρρεῖ δὲ τὰ θεῖα.“.  

As Knox says, "If the equation of oracular prophecy to reality is a false equation, then religion as a whole is meaningless. Neither Jocasta nor Oedipus can allow the possibility that the oracles may be right, and they accept the consequences of this stand, as their subsequent statements make clear. But they have gone too far for the Chorus, which now abandons Oedipus and turns instead to those high-footed laws [hypsipodes, 866] which are the children of Olympus and not a creation of mortal man. The Chorus calls on Zeus to fulfil the oracles: If

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96 L.445-6.
97 L.603-4.
98 L.709 ff.
100 And hence also, to all practical intents and purposes, of the relevance of Apollo’s oracles.
101 L.909-10.
102 Oedipus at Thebes, P.154.

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these things do not coincide [harmosei, 902] - if the oracles are not equated to reality - then the divine order is overthrown [errei ta theia, 910].”.

By making it clear that it is the gods who must be proved right and not human reasoning and calculations, Sophocles is showing that it is the gods too who must be seen to be in control and not Man. In Herodotus, however, although Croesus’ reference to Solon as the ideal counsellor specifically for all kings (πασι τωρονοισι) already implies that there is something usually wrong with the values of kings in particular, it is nonetheless left to the Tragedians to clarify in what way this problem of values is particular to kings.

The error peculiar to kings involves more than simply being misled by present power, prosperity or good fortune into overlooking the unpredictability of the future; some other hybristic type such as the very young or the merely rich (rather than an actual political ruler) could fall into that error just as easily as a king. It is not just present good fortune and the unknowability of the future alone which lead kings astray, but rather these things in combination with excessive zeal to control, to pursue one’s own objective or to impose one’s own interpretation or injunction, even when doing so is contrary to the dictates of justice or of necessity. The practice of this excessive assertiveness is anti-wisdom, a kind of spurious wisdom which is incompatible with real wisdom.

\[103\text{Hist. I. 86}\]
In *Antig.* Ll. 1242-3, Sophocles calls anti-wisdom "όβουλαχ".  The best thing for Man, by contrast, is what he seems to regard as true wisdom. True wisdom is not confidence in one’s cleverness to plan, control and predict. It is not calculation or knowing the answers, like Oedipus’ success in solving the Sphinx’s riddle, which he particularly boasts of as his own human talent, independent of anything supernatural. Rather, real wisdom (τὸ φρονεῖν) consists of piety and the flexibility that comes from piety’s insights into human limitations.

This ‘soundness of mind’ is the very quality C.O.T. finds missing in Oedipus,
but claims for himself, and in view of this claim, it is worthy of note that he also
uses this same word ‘φορνεῖν’, although in its other meaning (‘to know’), in his two
outstanding statements that he refuses to lay claim to certainty when he is not certain:

"οὐκ ὁδεγόν. ἔφοιτος γάρ μὴ φορνῷσεν φιλῶν",

"I don’t know; and when I lack knowledge it’s my habit / policy to keep silent."); ¹⁰⁹

and

"α μὴ φορνῶ γάρ οὐ φιλῶ λέειν μοῦτην",

"(Not necessarily); for I’m not in the habit of asserting without foundation things I don’t know.". ¹¹⁰

As Kitto says, ¹¹¹

"The contrast between certainty and caution is very much in Sophocles’ thoughts, and we saw that in the first part certainty led to hybris."

C.O.T.’s choice of the term ‘φορνεῖν’ yet again, and to describe a policy he regards
as central to his approach to life, underlines that he is advocating a realistic sobriety
diametrically opposed to the false certainty and false confidence characteristic of the
hybristic ruler-figure.

The sober wisdom of the term ‘φορνεῖν’ is closely related to that of
‘σωφρονεῖν’, with its extra overtones of safety and soundness. Both terms imply the
exact opposite to the boasting spirit of arrogance. Sometimes the experience of having

¹⁰⁸ L.600.
¹⁰⁹ L.569.
¹¹⁰ L.1520.
¹¹¹ Greek Tragedy, P.181.
to pay for such arrogance by suffering can bring people to a mature wisdom in which they recognize their limitations. Aeschylus outlines this process in *Agamemnon* when he immediately reinforces L.175's "φρεν ὄν τὸ πῶν" ("with a comprehensive wisdom") by his description of Zeus in L.176 as

"-τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοῦς ὀδώσαντος",
"-the one guiding / shaping mortals' paths into wisdom",

and then refers to this same kind of "wisdom through suffering" (the "πάθει μάθος" of L.177) as "σοφρονεῖν" in L.180.

The message of this Chorus of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* seems the same as that of the final Chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Like Sophocles, Aeschylus sees that there can be an element of constraint in the way gods bring men to the sober wisdom of seeing their own limitations. Sophocles concludes that arrogant speech, which constitutes impiety against the gods, is punished by blows equivalent to the offence, and that this retributive pattern leads in the end to wisdom (τὸ φρονεῖν):

"-μεγάλοι δὲ λόγοι
μεγάλας πλήγμας τῶν υπεραύχων
ὁποτίσοντες
γῆρα τὸ φρονεῖν ἐδίδαξαν.".

Aeschylus reflects a very similar picture of how this wisdom or sobriety of thinking (σοφρονεῖν) comes even to men who do not desire it, even against their will,
He calls this wisdom, in effect, a gift of the gods that can come with violence.⁴¹⁷

There is a type of person who honours Zeus actively and deliberately,⁴¹⁸ and who therefore has a very comprehensive wisdom or good sense, without needing to be forced into sobriety. Nevertheless, this Chorus shows Zeus as leading both the willing and the unwilling, in their different ways, to this sober understanding of Man's limits.

Zeus is also described as

"(Zeus who guides mortals' paths into wisdom, who has authoritatively established that it is through suffering that understanding is gained.)."

In line with this is Li.250-1's

"Δικα δε τοις μεν παθούσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιμέπτει",

¹¹⁶Ag. Li.180-1.

¹¹⁷"πορτος" or "πορτος", Ibid. L.182.

¹¹⁸"προφόρος", Li.173-4.

¹¹⁹"φρενὼν τὸ πάν", L.175.

¹²⁰Echoed by implication from L.173.

¹²¹The word "πάθει" here means not simply an affectively neutral occurrence (i.e., a mere experience); rather, it means actual suffering. This is evident not just from the Chorus' general atmosphere of foreboding, but also from the close association of "πάθει" in sense with L.180's "μνησιπῆμον πόνος", "toil / trouble bringing memory of suffering".

¹²²Ag. Li.176-8.
"Justice / nature is weighted toward suffering being the price of wisdom."

This point of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, that suffering is the price of wisdom, is closely related to the idea of wisdom or sobriety being enforced on stubborn and arrogant people even against their will, which is echoed in Sophocles’ *Antigone* and summed up in its final Chorus. The fact that both *Agamemnon* and *Antigone* deal with the fall of a hybristic king is another related factor. The close general association between suffering and wisdom arises largely from the fact that it is often "inexperience of misfortune" which lies behind hybris. The wisdom that comes from misfortune in general is bound to be an example of the wisdom that comes by constraint (βτοτως), since misfortune, virtually by definition, is something one does not want, and therefore would accept only if forced to.

The hybris of kings in particular, however, arises largely from their false certainty, their desire to be and their belief that they are both right and in control. Therefore, the type of suffering that would bring sober wisdom to them, - or if not to themselves then to others through witnessing the example of their fall, - would be the type of suffering that demonstrates how false their supposed certainty and / or control really are. This kind of suffering would come on its victim particularly "βτοτως", since the arrogant, stubborn and powerful ruler requires more force than an ordinary

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123 I.e., of "φρονετω" and "μαθως" in L.177-8, of "σωφρονετων" in L.180-1, and of "μαθως" in L.251-1.

124 Aeschylus’ Agamemnon conspicuously and ominously invokes against himself at L.928-9 the very Solonic maxim applied to Oedipus’ situation in the final Chorus of *O.T.*, and which Herodotus’ Croesus by implication recommends "κατι τυφλωνοσι", "to all kings".

125 As noted by Cairns, op. cit., P.7.
person to be brought down to the level where their confidence or their control is unmistakably broken. In some cases, only their death or the death of their nearest and dearest can bring them to this point.

The fact that Qoh. 1:18 reflects an intimate connexion between wisdom and sorrow and so does Ag. Ll.177-8, 180-1 and 250-1 is worthy of note, even though in the Agamemnon passages the words for "wisdom" unmistakably indicate pious sobriety (i.e., restraint from impious recklessness), whereas in Qoh. 1:18 "חֲרִישׁתָה" is deliberately morally ambiguous.

The sentiments of Qoh. 1:18 do reflect this same tradition of the close association between wisdom and suffering, eventually embodied in the Greek proverb "suffering is learning" referred to by Barton in his commentary regarding Qoh. 7:3. In 1:18, the sage warns,

"For in much wisdom is much sorrow. As knowledge increases, grief increases."

The traditional connexion between wisdom and suffering is there beneath the surface, even despite Qoheleth’s reversal of the usual order. He seems to be implying here that the wisdom is the cause of the sorrow, - or at least precedes it, - rather than just reflecting the old idea that the sorrow is the source of the wisdom. Qoheleth has to presuppose his readers’ familiarity with the traditional order of the saying for his thought-provoking reversal of it to have the desired effect. The force of this anti-mashal is to challenge the common aphorism that "wisdom" (whatever that means) is a cast-iron guarantee of wellbeing (cf., e.g., Prov. 3:13-8), not to challenge the Greek belief that wisdom is inextricably linked with suffering because suffering is a necessary source of wisdom.

This is not to deny that Qoheleth’s reversal of the usual order is highly significant. It is, because it is his way of reversing the focus of attention from the suffering to the wisdom. For him, it is wisdom itself which needs to be subjected to scrutiny. The word "חֲרִישׁתָה" here suggests neither "ὄπωρ" nor "σοφία", rather the morally ambivalent "σοφία", either "wisdom" or "anti-wisdom". By implying the question, "If "חֲרִישׁתָה" causes so much sorrow, is it really wisdom, or is it anti-wisdom?" Qoheleth is challenging his readers to examine the nature and the significance of wisdom. The tragedians, by contrast, focus attention on the suffering instead, scrutinizing events to discover the significance of the suffering.

Nevertheless, Qoh. 1:18, far from undermining the tragic view that wisdom and suffering are closely linked, is if anything re-inforcing that connexion by re-stating it from an arrestingly new angle. Moreover, 7:1-6 seems reminiscent of the tragedians’ view of suffering as ethically functional, especially v 3, which may mean
Given that this viewpoint is common to both *Agamemnon* and *Qoheleth*, it is tempting to read *Qoh.* 1:11, 129 which is often taken as a counsel of despair, in a more positive light, as a triumphant assertion that it is God who is in control, not earthly tyrants. For the similar sentiments of *Ag.* L168-72 in the same Chorus are definitely triumphant from the pious point of view of the poet:

"οὐδ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἂν μέγας,  
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρών,  
οὐδὲ λέγεται πρὶν ὄν.  
δὲ ἐπειτ' ἐφυ, τριακτήρος οἴχεται τυχόν".

"Whosoever formerly was great, swelling with belligerent presumption, shall not even be mentioned as having formerly existed; and he who sprang up thereafter 130 has met with his over thrower and is dead and gone."

Here, the former great ones now forgotten are presented in an unambiguously vainglorious and arrogant light; 131 and however lacking in confidence the elders of

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129 "Sorrow is better than laughter,  
Because through a sad face the understanding is improved.".  
Gordis claims (op. cit., P.258) that Qoheleth here  
"does not discern a moral purpose in suffering - (and) is not urging the moral benefit of suffering";  
but this idea does not fit well with his interpretation of  
"πάμμαχῳ θράσει βρών", as, in effect, "improves the understanding", rather than the alternative interpretation "cheers the heart" (see, e.g., Crenshaw, op. cit., P.134). This verse may mean not only, as Gordis thinks, that the sadness of face that comes from recognizing the reality of death and of suffering is evidence of wisdom in the person who looks sad, but also that suffering actually plays a vital part in producing wisdom. See also below, Chapter 10, Section iv, for the rôle of alternating opposite circumstances in producing the pious character.

130 Cf. *Qoh.* 4:15-16 for the point that as great men of one generation pass away, so also in turn do their successors.

131 Admittedly, if these lines were to be taken in isolation, one might think they could be translated with a less sinister slant, e.g., rendering  
"παμμάχῳ θράσει βρών"  
more positively as
the Chorus may feel as they are speaking, torn as they are between hope and foreboding for their own king, this statement they are making of the transience of human power and glory \textsuperscript{132} is a very confident expression on the poet’s part of his own triumphant piety that hybris never goes unpunished.

Although \textit{Qoh.} 1:11 in its immediate context gives a perfectly neutral, non-hybristic picture of these forgotten men of old, our interpretation of 1:11 may legitimately be coloured by the preoccupations of the book overall, including his grief at the spectacle of unpunished oppression \textsuperscript{133} and his interest in the certainty but nevertheless non-immediacy of Judgment. \textsuperscript{134} It would make sense structurally if 1:11 were a triumphant statement that God is in charge and not Man, of the same type as \textit{Ag.} L.168-72, because this is the concluding verse of the opening general section of the book about the God-ordained reciprocal cycle of the natural world and of human history in general, with v 12 starting off in a markedly new direction by homing in on the personal statement of the author in particular. To end that opening section on a high note of confidence and with a clear declaration of an unmistakably pietist standpoint with a Greek flavour would enhance both the clarity of the book’s message and the attractiveness of its comprehensively eclectic approach to wisdom-theory.

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid. L.159.

\textsuperscript{133}4:1-3.

\textsuperscript{134}See below, Chapter 10, Section vi.
The piety of Aeschylus' stance is evident from the next statement of this same Chorus of *Agamemnon*, that by contrast, those who honour Zeus attain wisdom to the full. The way that the hybris of the great ones whose downfall and disappearance the Chorus is celebrating is being contrasted with the sobriety of those who honour Zeus reflects (albeit indirectly) that the transience of human greatness and the totality of the former great ones' obliteration (without even remembrance) are often good news for the pietist; for the great are often their oppressors. Qoheleth of all people, the popular teacher, a strong advocate of neighbourly generosity and social conscience and a counsellor of the oppressed, would be well aware of such an entrenched image, and therefore may possibly be alluding to it cryptically in 1:11.

The Chorus in the *Agamemnon*, while eager to speak well of their king and auspiciously of his future, nevertheless make it increasingly clear, especially from Ll.218 ff., that he is exactly the type of impious Great Ruler type whom they have just

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135 Ll.173-5, as referred to above, this Chapter, this Section.

136 Cf. Ps. 37:1, 2, 10, 20 & 35-6, especially since "βρόδων" in Ag. L.169, implies "budding" like a plant. The use of plant-imagery to describe the wicked probably reflects the concept of hybris referred to by Cairns, op. cit., P.24, as "-a force which has its origins in the energy-giving properties of food or in the inherent fertility or fecundity of the subject itself, and which eventually grows so powerful that it can be contained no longer and "breaks out". This idea of hybris as a form of unchecked energy is present not only in its associations with plants and animals, not only in the use of plant and food imagery in the context of human hybris, but also in many of the standard contexts in which the concept is at home - (such as) in the common link between hybris and wealth".

137 12:9.

138 See below, Chapter 8; see also below, Chapter 10, especially Sections i, ii, v and vii.

139 See below, Chapter 10, Section vi.

140 And the more impressively so for the very fact that they are doing so against their own will.
described as doomed to be swept away to oblivion. Even their attempt to wish Agamemnon well in L.255 ff. turns against their will and without their knowledge into an omen of disaster. They pray that the outcome of events will be good: but good "according to the wish of their country’s sole-protecting guardian", whom they then ominously identify in L.258 as Clytaemnestra. They are therefore, in effect, praying for Clytaemnestra’s will to be put into effect for Agamemnon. They do not realize what the audience realizes, namely that this means they are praying for their king’s destruction; but ironically, the fact that this is what it means makes their prayer for Agamemnon accord all too well with the overall sentiment of piety they themselves have just expressed about the downfall of the impious. This is an eloquent statement of the fact that it is not Man who is in control, even of his own utterances. Rather, the gods operate their principles inexorably, irrespective of Man’s knowledge or ignorance of what he himself is doing or saying.

Similarly emphasizing that Man is not in control is the formidable image of Zeus as

"τὸν θρόνον βροτοὺς Ὀδύσσαντα".

Not only does he

"lead mortals on the road to understanding",

if they are willing; he shapes their path in that direction whether they are willing or not. Whoever shapes men’s paths, or whoever sets their course, is the one who is

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141 Note the accumulation of terms for impiety in these lines: "δυσσεβής" (L.219); "ἀναρχον ἀντερον" (L.220); and "παντότολμον" (L.221), in their description of Agamemnon’s own past actions in sacrificing his daughter to get the following wind he wanted for his fleet to get to Troy, L.205-48.

142 Its "μονόφροσον ἔρκος", L.257.
really in control. For path-making is symbolic of control, and the hybristic person is often depicted as one who is stubborn in holding to the course of their own choice.  

One's course or route is tantamount to one's total destiny. If Zeus is the one guiding the way and shaping men's paths ("δοκεσκοντα"), it is futile for men to pretend they are certain of their course or that they are in control.

Deprecation of human certainty, and hence of the human arrogance arising from false belief in one's certainty, is very much the heart of the piety reflected by the Agamemnon. This is evident not only from its emphasis on the transience of human greatness and on the rôle of Zeus as path-maker, but also from the ritual caution displayed in this very Chorus in addressing Zeus, which Rex Warner 144 takes as an expression of Aeschylus' own spiritual refusal to claim a presumptuous certainty:

"Ζεύς, δόστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τὸδ' αὐτῷ
τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ,
τούτῳ νῦν προσενέπω".

"Zeus, whoever he is, if it pleases him to be invoked by this name, by this name I address him.". 145

Warner, while recognizing the uncertainty implicit in the expression "Zeus, whoever he is," as "necessary", since, in Aeschylus' day,

"Moral philosophy was non-existent, history was hearsay (and) religion in the

143 As in Haemon's illustration in Antig. Ll.715-7. For the dangers of impiety inherent in the idea of assertive wisdom as path-making or goal-seeking, see also below, Chapter 9, especially Sections ii, iv, and vii.

144 In The Cult of Power (London, 1946), Pp.100-1. However, he does not mention the apparently parallel caution expressed by one of Sophocles’ Choruses, i.e., in O.T. Ll.903-5, referred to below, this Chapter, this Section.

145 Ag. Ll.160-3.
Olympian sense was wildly inconsistent", 
nevertheless finds that uncertainty remarkable, wondering

"How is it that, in a sense, Milton 147 appears to us as a less religious poet than Aeschylus? - (Because Milton's) aim is not to discover, or to worship, or to contemplate, but that:

*I may ASSERT Eternal Providence
And justify the ways o f God to men.*

One feels that Aeschylus, if he had known the word 'assert', would not have used it in this context.". 148

"Aeschylus is not trying to explain or to record or even to persuade. He is trying to discover.". 149

This approach, however, does not appear to be peculiar to Aeschylus.

Sophocles seems to be displaying comparable caution in *O.T. L.903-5*. Here too the Chorus does not *presume* that Zeus is the god's preferred name, but adds the qualifying

"ειπερ δροθνόкоνεις",

which probably means,

"if this is the correct way to address you.". 150

This cautious approach may well be the ritual norm for addressing Zeus in certain circumstances; and whether it is the norm or not, it still underlines that in Sophocles' treatment of Oedipus, as in Aeschylus' of Agamemnon, denial of human certainty is


147 Whom Warner recognizes as contrastingly characterized by claims to certainty.


149 Ibid. P.99.

150 *O.T. L.903.*
recognized as being a key element of piety.

It is in this same Chorus \(^{151}\) that Zeus is called upon to fulfil the oracles, or
\[^{152}\]

" -the divine order is overthrown". \(^{153}\)

Jocasta is still very certain that the oracles have proved false, \(^{154}\) and Oedipus seems inclined to agree with her, if only one or two more puzzling details can be cleared up. \(^{155}\) In this following Chorus, however, that same Zeus who is invoked to fulfil the oracles after all is also called "\(\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\)", "ruling / in control", the term formerly applied to Oedipus himself by the priest in L.14, who at the time appeared to be supplicating Oedipus almost as if he were a god. \(^{156}\)

This interweaving of implications indicates deftly that it is Zeus who is really King, not Oedipus; \(^{157}\) and it is as King that Zeus is going to reveal the falseness of the human certainty that the divine oracles have failed. For that false certainty is at the heart of the spurious kingship, - almost spurious deity, - that is usurping Zeus'
(and Apollo’s) honour. The issue here is that of who is in control, Man (in the person of Oedipus) or the gods (as represented by Zeus). This underlines that the true epitome of anti-wisdom is the hybristic Great Ruler, not just any of the standard hybristic types, such as the very young or the merely rich and fortunate. For the antipietist drive to control / rule, based on false certainty, is the central feature of anti-wisdom.

Wisdom, by contrast, is a pious sobriety that accepts Man’s limitations. Warner, in recognizing that piety is more closely related to a receptive attitude of contemplative discovery than to assertion, has pinpointed a crucial principle of wisdom which both Aeschylus and Sophocles have in common with Qoheleth. It is because this principle is a focal point of Qoheleth’s piety that he particularly enjoins reverent silence in God’s presence and warns against verbal over-assertiveness.

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159 Qoh. 5:1-7. See below, Chapter 5, Sections vii-ix, especially ix; see also below, Chapter 9, Section vii.
CHAPTER 5

QOHELETH: CYNICAL OR DEVOUT?

1. QOHELETH'S PIETY AFFIRMED DESPITE DISPUTES ABOUT THE BOOK'S CANONICITY / ORTHODOXY

The Talmudic claim that Qoheleth both begins and ends with "words of the Torah" is far from empty. In fact, the popular image of the book as fundamentally cynical is essentially unrealistic. Particularly far-fetched is the notion that the passages asserting the certainty of God's justice are merely pious interpolations, inserted by a later editor to make the book acceptable for the Canon.

The fact that Rabbinic analysis of texts was decidedly atomistic rather than holistic argues in itself against the probability of such a mass-interpolation policy.

1. *Shabbath* Gemara 30b.

2. 3:17, 8:13, 11:9b, 12:14, etc.

3. One example of this is the idea that 8:13 was inserted to tame the original heterodoxy of 8:14; but see above, Chapter 1, Section i, fnns. 4 and 37 for the more probable implications of 8:13 & 14. On the moral significance of death, see Chapter 1, Section ii; just as the wicked in Ps. 73 are misguided to think their wickedness will enable them to cheat death, so the triumph of the wicked in 8:14 is merely "fleeting", because it will not last. See also below, this Chapter, for the non-cynical tendencies of other earlier wisdom writings on which Qoheleth sometimes appears to be basing his approach.

4. Even though, hypothetically, such interpolations could perhaps have been performed earlier than the Rabbis, by some school of thought *not* committed to the atomistic principle, we have no record of any such school, of their opinions or of their reasons for making any such interpolations. It was Pharisaic authority, however, which ultimately determined the canonicity or non-canonicity of the book; and it is the voice of the Rabbis which has survived in disputation on this issue of canonicity, and hence also, by implication, on the issue of the book’s orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Rabbinic views on Qoheleth, therefore, are inevitably of
For the blatant contradictions that such ‘interpolations’ would introduce into the text would be far likelier to result in the book’s exclusion from the Canon than the supposed ‘heterodoxies’ they were supposed to mask. The Rabbis seize eagerly on any internal contradictions within a text; so they would be much quicker to see a problem in this type of undeniable and obvious contradiction than in the overall drift to an entire book being open to the possibility of a heterodox interpretation.

Therefore, such corrective additions would be useless anyway unless the supposedly heterodox passages had been deleted. On the other hand, however, if these objectionable passages had been deleted, such corrections would then be unnecessary. So, since it would actually be easier, as well as more effective, simply to delete the objectionable passages, so no ‘orthodox interpolations’ would be necessary anyway, - rather than adding material that would only result in contradictions, - it is highly unlikely that whoever was willing to make such additions would not be more willing to make the alternative deletions instead.

If it be argued that feelings of natural reverence for a ‘holy’ text would proscribe such deletions, it has to be said that such feelings do not fit rationally with the view that the same text is so unorthodox it requires correction in order to be acceptable; and yet correction is exactly what the imaginary ‘pious additions’ would really have amounted to. Since, therefore, there would have been nothing to gain (and something to lose) by grafting pious additions onto Qoheleth to offset the effect of its special interest in assessing the modern view of the book as cynical by comparison with the way it was viewed in antiquity. See, e.g., the discussion of Qoheleth’s canonicity in Barton, op. cit., Pp.3-7.
supposed cynicism, then it seems unlikely that anyone would have felt motivated to do so, even if *Qoheleth* really were a cynical or heterodox book.

Moreover, a closer examination of the Rabbis' disputations on *Qoheleth* quickly reveals that what they are discussing is not 'heterodoxy', nor is it 'orthodoxy'; even the very terms themselves seem anachronistic and incongruous in the context of these debates. This again points to the fact that the whole idea of corrective additions shows no understanding of the Rabbis' critical criteria. Where they discuss the actual reason for disputing *Qoheleth*’s canonicity, the verses that appear 'heterodox' to the eye of modern scholarship are not even mentioned. All the Rabbis do mention is apparent contradictions in the text. So Rabbi Tanhum of Neway, *Shabbath* Gemara 30a; so also Rab Judah son of R. Samuel b. Shilath, Ibid. Gemara 30b:

"The Sages wished to hide the Book of *Qoheleth* because its words are self-contradictory".

In addition, even the contradictions actually discussed here are not the alleged contradictions which are sometimes thought to be evidence of pietist interpolations sitting ill at ease with the original, such as the supposed contradiction between 8:13 and 8:14. In view of this, it is difficult to believe that these really are contradictions at all; for the Rabbis are so eagle-eyed in their detection of real contradictions that they would surely have noticed them if they were. Rabbi Tanhum's impassioned outburst in *Shabbath* Gemara 30a leaves no room for doubting the prime importance

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5Unfortunately, however, not all echoes of the controversy about *Qoheleth*’s canonicity have the reasons specified. Passages of the Mishnah and corresponding Gemara which mention the controversy but do not specify the reasons for it include *Yadaim* 3.5 (see H. Danby's O.U.P. Mishnah, P.781) and *Eduyoth* 5.3 (Ibid., P.431).
of this major criterion of judgment:

"Thou, Solomon, where is thy wisdom and where is thine understanding? Is it not enough for thee that thy words contradict the words of thy father David, but that they are self-contradictory! - thou saidest, "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead", \(^6\) but yet again thou saidest, "for a living dog is better than a dead lion". \(^7\)."

There follows a lively debate aimed at demonstrating that there is no real difficulty; and this takes the form of an attempt to reconcile the initially supposed contradiction.

Finally, the ‘heterodoxy’ sometimes ascribed to Qoheleth by modern critics - cynicism about divine justice, etc., - is never given by the Rabbis as the reason for disputing the book’s canonicity, disputed though it was. In fact, the kind of objections raised about Qoheleth in Shabbath Gemara 30b \(^8\) are no different at all from the type of objection raised about Proverbs; and Proverbs has never had a reputation for controversy about its canonicity and orthodoxy. Despite focussing on human life rather than directly on the divine, Proverbs is not ‘heterodox’, about divine justice or about anything else; and accordingly its perspective has traditionally been regarded as pietist.

In the final analysis, then, even though Qoheleth is one of the Biblical books whose canonicity was questioned in antiquity, \(^9\) that does not mean that it had the reputation of being a ‘heterodox’ book in the sense that some modern scholars have

\(^6\)Qoh. 4:2.

\(^7\)Ibid. 9:4.

\(^8\)E.g., the supposed contradiction between Prov. 26:4 and 26:5, etc.

\(^9\)Like Ezekiel and The Song of Songs.
claimed. There is no evidence that any cynical overall drift or non-pietist general outlook it reflected led it to be regarded as an odd-man-out within the canon. Although the book was not accepted as canonical without a fight, the fight in question was not about cynicism as opposed to piety, but rather was about its internal contradictions.

In fact, the Gemara on Shabbath 30b mentions Qoheleth’s piety as its obvious redeeming feature. The implication here is that, however disquieted one might be by its contradictions, at least it has one universally unquestioned merit, namely, its piety. This is the real point of the book being said to "begin and end with words of the Torah". Therefore, although it remains to this day a cherished axiom of modern scholarship that Qoheleth is a highly cynical book, this idea seems very far-fetched in view of its acceptance in antiquity as primarily a pious book.
Qoheleth, despite his individual rather than national-Covenantal perspective, displays considerable affinities with Prophetic and Deuteronomistic pietism. He also adds to them a new, apparently Greek-influenced emphasis on moderation and the essential limitations of Man. In this, he is moving wisdom away from humanistic cynicism and toward being a pietistic genre. In fact, if texts such as Prov. 1:7, 3:5-12, 9:10 and 15:33 represent earlier wisdom, he is moving the genre back toward pietism.

Indeed, Qoheleth seems to be in harmony with earlier wisdom to a significant degree. On one level, he is very much within the tradition of Biblical Wisdom writers, despite his relatively late date. He reflects certain key views common to all of them, and even relies on his reader’s familiarity with them to make his own meaning clear. On, e.g., God’s ability to overrule the success of the wicked, compare Qoh. 2:26b with Prov. 13:22b. This underlines the fact that, contrary to

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10 Cf. Qoh. 12:13 and Deut. 4:6; Qoh. 3:14 and Deut. 4:2. See also below, Chapter 6, Sections i and iii, and Chapter 7, end of Section ii and Section iv, for how Qoheleth stands in relation to the Deuteronomistic standpoint.

11 "But to the sinner ("כָּנָן תַּל") He gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God."

12 "But the wealth of a sinner ("כָּנָן") is stored up for the righteous." Cf. Ibid. 28:8,

"He who increases his wealth by excessive interest..."

(a "כָּנָן" by implication, even though it is not directly stated)

"...amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor".

See also Job 27:16 & 17 of the wicked man (called in v 13 "יְשֵׁפֵר עֲלָה"):

"Though he heaps up silver like dust
And clothes like piles of clay,
What he lays up the righteous will wear,
And the innocent will divide his silver."

(N.I.V.). Qoh. 2:26b, then, is evidently a variation on a well-known maxim, and is not expressing an original sentiment for which the reader / hearer has no already-established frame of reference to help him
Ginsberg’s view, the terms "דבורה הַלֹּאִים" and "לֹא תְעוֹדו" in Qoh. 2:26 do mean "righteous" and "wicked", not just "lucky" and "unlucky"; cf. also 7:26. 14

It seems likely, then, that 2:26 is deliberately echoing a common axiom already familiar to the author’s readers / students, at least from Prov. 13:22b and 28:8, if not also from common parlance and / or other writings; and if so, Qoheleth can not be using the terms "דבורה הַלֹּאִים" and "לֹא תְעוֹדו" in a non-moral sense here. For he knows that his readers will be led interpret them in a moral sense by the fact that this is the sense in which they are employed in these other already familiar and parallel sayings. These sayings appear to be the original inspiration behind his choice of words anyway; perhaps he is deliberately reminding us of them by allusion, in the same way as he reminds us of Genesis, Deuteronomy and Gilgamesh, by echoing either their wording or their themes. If so, it makes nonsense to suppose that his real meaning is non-moral, since he would then be deliberately misleading his readers by thus inviting them to take his meaning as moral, and thereby perversely mystifying them to no purpose. *

Qoheleth’s concluding remark in 2:26b,

"This too is לֹא תְעוֹדו and chasing the wind",

interact its terminology.


14 Cf. above, Chapter 2, Section v, Pp.85-6 on Qoheleth’s use of ‘דבורה הַלֹּאִים’, etc., as a moral term, not an amoral one as is sometimes claimed.
is sometimes thought to argue against a moral interpretation of "בד חטא" and "ר ו נ ה" earlier in the verse. However, it could only do this if it were applied strictly to the very last point that has been made, and only to that very last point, namely that it is the righteous who gain from the endeavours of the wicked in the end, not the wicked who gain from them. The idea of exactly this final point being "ר ו נ ה" does, of course, make moral nonsense; on the contrary, it is actually a victory for divine justice that the righteous should emerge as the victor and the wicked as the loser. But the term "ר ו נ ה" here should not be applied with rigorous exactitude to the immediately preceding statement; that is most unlikely to be the author's intention here.

This is because Qoheleth’s oft-reiterated expression

"ר ו נ ה and chasing the wind"
is not a pedantically exact philosophical description, but rather a loose refrain, with Epic-poetic overtones from Gilgamesh, 15 more like the chorus of a song. 16 Even at this early stage of the book, the same refrain has already appeared several times, 17 and will re-appear many times later on. 18 Since the kind of activity to which it regularly refers is the heavy or pseudo-heavy kind, 19 "ר ו נ ה" in 2:26 seems likeliest

15 See below, Appendix One; cf. also below, Chapter 7, Section i.

16 It might be of some importance in interpreting Qoheleth's work to know whether or not he intended it to be sung to a musical instrument. See, e.g., Ps. 49:4’s reference to expounding wisdom to the accompaniment of the harp. The affinities of this Psalm with Qoheleth have already been noted above, Chapter 1, Section i, P.25, incl. Ptn. 37. Compare also the twentieth century usage of Qoh. 3:1-8 as a popular song in English.

17 1:14 & 17; 2:11b; 2:33, etc.

18 E.g., 4:16b; 6:9b.

19 I.e., feverish, sweat-inducing and fruitless activity: the great ambitions and strenuous endeavours of men which turn out not to benefit them in the end.
to refer to the feverish activity of the sinner in storing up all this wealth.

In the context of 2:26, therefore, the meaning of

"This too is חֲרָמָה and chasing after the wind"

is that the sinner’s arduous endeavour to "gather and store up wealth" for himself is

"חרまして": i.e., that it comes to nothing in the end. It does not mean that the fact the
righteous man gets the benefit of the sinner’s labours is "חרまして"; this would not
conform at all to the mental picture that Qoheleth has built up for his reader
everywhere else throughout the book of the type of activity he means by "חרませ". Elsewhere, he uses this word, or the expression "chasing the wind", or both together (epitomizing lightness or ephemerality), as a shock-contrast term for what appears to
be very heavy: the "heavy burden" 20 of hard labour and of ceaseless, restless
movement. From all this strenuous activity, one would expect some kind of gain, progress, or solid, lasting achievement, to measure up to the weightiness of the effort. Hence the effectiveness of the contrast between this expectation and the reality; the
real outcome is nothing but "vapour" or "wind".

There is not the slightest hint of frenzied striving, however, about the righteous
man simply waiting passively to become the recipient of the sinner’s prosperity; nor
is there anything feverish about God’s cool agency in masterminding the transfer. The
righteous calmly waits in patient faith; and God calmly and deliberately allots to the

20 As in 1:13.
sinner the "task" of, in effect, serving the righteous. It is not the patient faith of the righteous, then, nor the fact that he is the one who benefits from the sinner's endeavours in the end, to which Qoheleth is here referring as " دولב". Rather, it is the hard labour of the sinner which, as far as his own interests are concerned, is "ドルב": he himself will not gain from it. This conforms exactly to the usual nuance of the term "ドルב" in this book. Therefore, the conclusion

"This too is دولב, a chasing after the wind"

is not an argument against taking "Подроб" and "ภูษת" in a moral sense; there is no sense other than moral in which these terms can be taken, given the tradition of usage which Qoheleth is consciously echoing, and given the meaning he regularly attaches to the word "ドルב".

Another conscious echo by Qoheleth of previous Biblical Wisdom can be seen in the many views Qoheleth shares in common with Ps. 49, such as the idea that

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[21]Since it is the righteous who will ultimately benefit from the sinner’s labours, it is the righteous for whom the sinner is unconsciously working in his "gathering and storing up wealth".

[22]Unless Ps. 49 is itself borrowing from Qoheleth; but see below, this Chapter, Sections v and ix, for Qoheleth's apparent intertextuality with I Sam. 15:22 and with Job; see also below, Chapter 6, Section iii, for Qoh. 3:14’s allusion to Deut. 13:1. Qoheleth seems very late relative to other canonical writers (see below, Appendix Three); so whenever there is such a close similarity between his work and another Biblical book that one text seems likely to be dependent on the other, Qoheleth never seems any less likely to be the borrower than the other Biblical author. Moreover, allusion appears to be a regular feature of his style, and has not been demonstrated to be such a regular stylistic feature of the authors of Deuteronomy, I Samuel, Job, Ps. 49, Prov. 13:22, or of any other Biblical writer whose text seems to be displaying such affinities with his. This makes him seem more likely, in cases where it is not clear which of the two writers is the earlier, to be the borrower rather than to be the writer who is being referred to or quoted by the other.

In view of this, it is interesting that later and non-canonical books like Ben Sira (see below, Appendix Three) or Wisdom of Solomon (see, e.g., Barton, op. cit., Pp.57-8) do seem to be alluding to Qoheleth, the former positively and the latter negatively. This may be, in both cases, at least partly due to the stylistic influence on the wisdom genre of Qoheleth itself. Qoheleth’s own fondness for incorporating quotations of and references to other works into the flow of his own narrative may have made the technique far more popular in wisdom writing than it had been before him. However, see also what appears to be a parody of Ps. 8:4,

"What is Man that You are mindful of him?"
the Wise Man has to die just like the fool, and leave his wealth to someone else; \(^23\) also the idea that riches, greatness, and magnificence can not redeem a man from death. \(^24\) Even though the mighty think highly of themselves and their grandeur, and are lulled by it into thinking they will go on forever, \(^25\) the truth is that none of this wealth puts them above the level of the animals. \(^26\)

The close parallel between *Ps.* 49:12 & 20 and *Qoh.* 3:18-20 only serves to confirm the impression *Qoheleth* gives in its own right, by its ironic parallel with the career of Solomon and its exhortation to minimize one’s ambitions. \(^27\) This impression is that the book’s chief contention is against mankind’s illusions of grandeur. Even though *Qoh.* 3:18-20 is more general than *Ps.* 49:20’s

"A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish", the Psalmist is still not denying Qoheleth’s contention that Man in general is like the beasts that perish; in v 12 he admits this. But even here, his preoccupation is still with riches. Man dies like the beasts "despite his riches"; and it is obvious from the whole context, especially v 11, that he is in continual need of being reminded that

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\(^23\) *Ps.* 49:10; *Qoh.* 2:16, 18 & 19.

\(^24\) *Ps.* 49:7; *Qoh.* 8:8.

\(^25\) *Ps.* 49:6 & 11.

\(^26\) See also below, this Chapter, Section iii, for views on the relative status of Man and of animals common to *Job* and to *Qoheleth*, but not found in other Biblical books.

\(^27\) Instead of maximize them, as *Proverbs* is more inclined to suggest.
riches and present splendour can not buy him immortality. 28 This is exactly Qoheleth’s viewpoint. This echo of Ps. 49 is no empty display of erudition, but a feeling allusion to a kindred work on the same theme.

The ‘no-limit’ 29 attitude to piling up wealth is sometimes thought 30 to be particularly characteristic of the entrepreneurial drive and colonialist greed of Qoheleth’s late Ptolemaic or early Seleucid age. 31 In Bickerman’s view, the attitude behind this new, the-sky’s-the-limit idea of ‘χρηματιστική’ 32 is significantly different from that motivating the more traditional concept of ‘οίκονομική’ / ‘οίκονομία’. 33 The latter, by contrast, has limits, prescribed by the limit to the

28 See above, Chapter 1, Section i, for a discussion of the similar ideas in Ps. 73.

29 See also below, Chapter 7, Section v, especially fn. 117.

30 See below, Chapter 7, Section v, incl. fn. 109 on Good’s and Bickerman’s opinions; see also below, Appendix Three.

31 See below, Appendix Three, The Era of Qoheleth.

32 ‘Business’ or ‘money-making’.

33 ‘Domestic management’ (which Bickerman thinks amounts to, in effect, acquisition for consumption), referred to in, e.g., Aristotle’s Politics, I.3-4 and I.iii.2. Aristotle in his era, however, has a different perspective on the difference between the two. He mentions (Ibid. I.ii.2) that some people regard ‘χρηματιστική’ as the same as ‘οίκονομία’ or as the most important part of it; nevertheless he himself considers the two as different, in that the function of ‘χρηματιστική’ is to acquire substance, whereas the function of ‘οίκονομία’ is to use it (Ibid. I.iii.2). Aristotle, then, does not see ‘οίκονομία’ as acquisition at all, even for consumption, but rather as the art of correct use (or correct consumption) of what is acquired by ‘χρηματιστική’.

This need not invalidate Bickerman’s point about the implications of the term ‘χρηματιστική’ in the Hellenistic age being different from its original implications. If it is no longer seen as acquisition primarily for the purpose of ‘οίκονομία’, but rather as an end in itself with no limits, then its meaning does indeed seem to have changed. Nevertheless, even if Bickerman is right on this point, it is not that ‘χρηματιστική’ has displaced an older, more sober concept of acquisition called ‘οίκονομία’, since the latter was apparently not conceived of as a type of acquisition anyway, however sober. It is rather that a new concept of ‘χρηματιστική’ has displaced an older and more sober concept of ‘χρηματιστική’; i.e., the overtones of the term ‘χρηματιστική’ have changed in such a way as to make it no longer the intimately inter-related complement to ‘οίκονομία’ it used to be, but rather an end in itself independent of ‘οίκονομία’.
practical requirements of a household; but in Hellenistic times, according to Bickerman,

"'χρηματιστική' - is based on the notion that there is no limit to the acquisition of riches. This accumulative art of money-making became a determinant feature of the Hellenistic age.". 34

It is hardly surprising, then, that this feverish piling up of wealth is one of the main blind alleys which Qoheleth denounces. Nor is it surprising that he has such close fellow-feeling with Psalm 49, a wisdom-Psalm denouncing arrogant trust in wealth, whether this Psalm dates from his own age, or whether it is an older wisdom-work and part of the long tradition that influenced Qoheleth's thinking overall.

34Bickerman, Four Strange Books of the Bible, P.159.
Where Qoheleth differs sharply from other, especially pre-Job, Wisdom writers, however, is on the issue of certainty of reward for righteousness. Qoh. 3:21 and 9:5 & 6 show that for him, part of the poignancy of death is that the dead

"Have no further reward". 35

He also tends to differ from other Biblical Wisdom writers on the certainty of reward in this life. Whereas Psalm 19:11 exhorts the reader to keep God’s commandments because

"In keeping of them there is great reward",

Qoheleth exhorts him to keep them because

"This is all there is to Man". 36

So instead of seeing God’s commands as a launching pad for Man’s exaltation, he sees them as the measure of Man’s limitation.

Similarly, whereas Proverbs stresses lavishly the incomparably precious rewards that virtue and wisdom bring, 37 Qoheleth, like Job, conveys a feeling that the priority Wisdom-issue is the difficulty of finding Wisdom in the first place, 38 and the deep sorrow, perplexity, frustration and loss that Man finds in the course of

35Ibid. 9:5.

3612:13. See also below, Chapter 6, end of Section iv.

37Prov. 2:3-5; 3:13-18; and 4:5-9.

38Qoh. 7:23 & 24; Job 28:20.
pursuing it. Furthermore, *Qoheleth* is even farther than *Job* from any doctrinaire insistence on a regular, discernible pattern of reward for righteousness and of punishment for unrighteousness.

Yet the Book of *Job* comes by far the closest to *Qoheleth* in seeing failure to recognize one’s limitations as the fundamental human problem. It also comes closest to *Qoheleth* in its newer ethical emphasis on human limitations, and its recognition that vulnerability is Man’s key characteristic, apparently irrespective of whether he is righteous or unrighteous.

However, *Job* as we now have it does differ from *Qoheleth* in this respect: in depicting its maligned hero as exonerated visibly by God in the end, by the restoration of his earthly blessings and material prosperity, it shows a warmth, almost a naïveté, whose hero is at least restored to his prosperity in the end of the final text of the book as we now have it (42:10-17).

Although the fact that the pattern of justice is not regular or discernible in the eyes of Man does not lessen *Qoheleth*’s confidence in ultimate judgment (3:17); see below, Chapter 10, Sections iv and vi.

Job does not read like an attempt to deal with the problem of human suffering, although this is what it is often held to be (see also below, Appendix Three, fn. 6). Nor does *Qoheleth* appear to concern, as, e.g., Ginsberg argues it does (op. cit., P. 147, also discussed below, Chapter 8, Section ii), the supposed “arbitrariness” of God. Rather, like *Job*, it is a warning to Man not to trust in his own blinkered ‘wisdom’.

Nevertheless, *Qoheleth*, although he does not see God as arbitrary, still does not copy the ‘happy ending’ conclusion of *Job* by suggesting that a just world order will ultimately manifest itself in simplistic terms. The author (or final editor) of *Job* feels he can get away with resolving the problem like this; for although the moral message of the book is very serious, the literary style of its inflated eloquence is similar
of enthusiasm for the spectacle of how great a man can be when God is on his side. 45

Job both begins and ends with its protagonist a great man. Because he enjoys God’s favour, he presents a very impressive figure at the start and finish of the book, 46 however sordid and pitiable his plight in the intervening period, when God’s protection has been temporarily withdrawn from him. 47

Therefore, in Job too, the sense of alienation from God, Who is Man’s only guarantee of dignity and a life worth living against the threat of abject misery, is

to that of a burlesque drama (its drama-like qualities have often provoked comment, even though tragedy was the type of drama it was compared with in overall form; see below, Appendix Three, fn.9, para. 3). So the book can easily carry off a touch of the absurd, or at least of the fantastic, in the final dénouement. The ludicrous over-eloquence of Job’s critics in the speeches could hardly be taken seriously if it were meant to be realistic, especially considering Job’s pitiable condition; but as an element of ironic hyperbole, it reflects very effectively his friends’ lack of sensitivity and wisdom.

Qoheleth, however, is neither a burlesque nor, apparently, any other type of drama. In fact, it does not belong stylistically to any easily identifiable genre. If it is a cryptic set of companion-notes to his lectures, it may have been fully comprehensible only to his contemporary disciples. If not, however, then it may be mysterious deliberately, from aesthetic or political motives, or perhaps even for religio-experiential reasons (see below, this Chapter, Sections v - ix, esp. vii and viii). This seems far more likely than the idea that it is merely a set of notes, since this kind of highly allusive style usually characterizes an unusually sophisticated type of writing, cunningly crafted and carefully polished, whatever the era or culture in which it is found (e.g., in Old Norse court poets, T.S. Eliot, etc.). Also, the structure of the book seems deliberately and skilfully designed to play an organic part in conveying its meaning; see below. Chapter 9, Section vii. Perhaps Qoheleth is describing a revelation in lyrical form; or perhaps it is a political or religious critique (see below, Appendix Three) written in coded symbolism; or perhaps it is a “dark saying upon the harp”, as the musician of Ps. 49 (a poet whose close affinities with Qoheleth are referred to below, Chapter 1, Section ii and also this Chapter, Section ii) describes his own work in v 4 of his song.

For whatever reason, however, Qoheleth does not attempt to resolve, - either in burlesque dramatic style like Job, or otherwise, - the mystery with which he has presented us. He prefers to leave us with the sense of God’s inscrutability still to the fore, and remain consistent to his own statement in 8:17 that “No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, Man can not discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, He can not really comprehend it.”.

45 Reflecting more the attitude of other Biblical books discussed above, Chapter 1, Section iii, and below, Chapter 7, Section iv, by contrast with Qoheleth’s emphasis on Man’s limitations.

46 Job 1:1-5 and 42:10-17.

47 Ibid. 2:7 & 8.
presented as a very major human problem. Job’s misery is caused largely by the feeling that God’s favour as well, not just His protection, has been withdrawn from him. However, this feeling later turns out to be groundless. His sense of alienation proves in the end to have been unnecessary, and would never have arisen were it not for his failure to allow for his own limitations of understanding, and particularly his friends’ failure to allow for the limitations of theirs, in their attempts to interpret the significance of his misfortunes. 48

48See also below, this Chapter, Section ix. The closeness of Qoheleth’s perspective to that of Job is very striking. Job is a model of piety, until his three friends come to him and try to make ‘straight’ what God had made ‘crooked’ (see below, Chapter 6, Section iii; cf. Sections ii and iv): i.e., try to expound what God has made far too complex for them to understand, despite their misguided, self-confident conviction that they do understand.

Job has proved his exceptional piety by responding with such stalwart reverence to the terrible blows of misfortune he has just suffered. But when his friends try to tell him, in effect, that God would not allow this suffering to happen to him except as a punishment for some terrible secret sin, it is this, not his misfortunes, that give Job a negative attitude toward God. His personal tragedy and reversals of fortune are not sufficient to make him blame God at all. Even though Job’s misfortunes are deliberately painted in the most extreme terms possible, Job still says (1:21),

"Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked I will return there (?) (יָלַד). The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
May the name of the Lord be praised."

Similarly in 2:10a he asks,

"Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

Then, to drive home the point of Job’s patience beyond all doubt, we are told (1:22),

"In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

Judging by the parallel wording of Qoh. 5:14 (in English translations, 5:15) and Job 1:21a, and of Qoh. 7:14 with Job 1:21b and 2:10b, Qoheleth seems to sympathize with the pious attitude that Job first adopts, because he would see it as reflecting a more realistic view of Man’s standing before God than his furious protestations against God in Job Chapters 9 and 10. Yet the poignant message of Job is very clear: pig-headed insistence on a false theology is more capable of tempting people to impiety than anything else, including the most extreme forms of reversal of fortune, the worst possible in human suffering, the worst catalogues of disaster, even the direct machinations of Satan. Job suffered all this, and yet "In all this, (he) did not sin in what he said."

But the foolish insistence of Job’s friends that they had all the answers when in fact they did not was able to stir him to a depth of bitterness and a horror of insecurity about God’s justice and righteousness scarcely less surprising (in view of his former fortitude in the face of disaster) than his previous piety and faith in 1:21 and 2:10. Such are the dangers, Job is designed to warn us, of a ham-fisted application of simplistic retribution theology to the misfortunes of a particular individual. This false wisdom, the ‘wisdom’ of the over-privileged and the over-fortunate, who lack the refining experience of misfortune to improve both their character and their understanding (see below, Chapter 10, Section iv), has far more power to galvanize the individual to the wildest extremes of anguish, bitterness and, in the end, impiety, than even the most dire misfortunes.
The fact that Job presents this failure as a salient problem places Job in agreement with the ethical emphasis of Qoheleth to a degree unique among Biblical books and among wisdom books, since failure to recognize one's limitations is the very human problem Qoheleth aims to highlight most. This common moral priority in Qoheleth and Job may possibly arise from a shared Hellenized sensitivity to the dangers of something akin to hybris. If so, however, this sensitivity, although a result of Hellenization, is the heritage of traditional Greek wisdom and of tragedy; it is not a reflection of the contemporary values of the Hellenistic era in particular, except insofar as Hellenistic culture still reflects the influence of that earlier classical and pre-classical tradition.

This Greek influence seems to have contributed to the fact that the authors of Qoheleth and Job display a slightly different perspective from that of the earlier Biblical writers. These earlier writers differ from them in that, while depicting...
alienation from God as the worst evil that can befall Man (e.g., through disobedience), they still allow Man, even within this theocentric moral landscape, more scope to be great and magnificent in himself. Qoheleth allows him none; and the author of Job, who allows some, nevertheless keeps us sober by showing us his hero first covered in boils and reduced to despair, and finally repenting in "dust and ashes". Other Biblical authors, however, do not see recognition of Man’s limitations as such a high priority.

Another aspect of this unusual emphasis on Man’s limitations, again common both to Qoheleth and to Job, is their approach to the relative significance of Man and animals. The implication of this in Job is that the book argues for a consciously theocentric view of life, rather than an anthropocentric one, whether conscious (as among pagan Greeks and Hellenizers), or unconscious (as in the case of Jews who are not zealous enough in their faith, or have not thought out its implications to their logical conclusion). As Robert Alter notes, Job gives us a pointed contrast between the extreme inwardness of Man and the limitless vista of the outward-looking nature of God. Alter describes Job’s first poem, Chapter 3, as

"A powerful, evocative, authentic expression of Man’s essential, virtually ineluctable egotism: the anguished speaker has seen, so he feels, all too much,

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50 In this, he seems to go even farther than classical and pre-classical Greek pietist opposition to hybris, as pointed out above, Chapter 2, Section iii.


52 See above, Chapter 1, Section iii and below, Chapter 7, Section iv. Another distinctive attitude common to both Qoheleth and Job is their stance on the issue of alienation from God. This takes the form of setting the highest possible value on seeking God’s literal presence; see below, this Chapter, Sections v, vii and viii.

and he wants now to see nothing at all, to be enveloped in the blackness of the womb / tomb, enclosed by dark doors that will remain shut forever. In direct contrast to all this withdrawal inward and turning out of lights, God's poem is a demonstration of the energizing power of panoramic vision. Instead of the death wish, it affirms from line to line the splendour and vastness of life, beginning with a cluster of arresting images of the world's creation and going on to God's sustaining of the world in the forces of nature and in the variety of the animal kingdom.". 54

The effect of this is to glorify God's greatness as Creator, and remove Man from his usual centre-stage position even in the context of created beings, since God has made creatures too great for Man to contend with or even to understand.

This makes an important new departure in Biblical literature, since, as Alter points out, there is

" -little descriptive nature poetry in the Bible: the natural world is of scant interest in itself; it engages a poet's imagination only insofar as it reflects Man's place in the scheme of things or serves his purposes. But in the uniquely vivid descriptive poetry of Job 38-41, the natural world is valuable for itself, and Man, far from standing at its centre, is present only by implication, peripherally and impotently, in this welter of fathomless forces and untamable beasts." 55

The reference in Qoh. 3:18-20 to Man having no advantage over the beasts, although far more prosaic, constitutes a comparably unusual attack on anthropocentrism parallel to, and perhaps inspired by, that of Job. Qoheleth does not describe the animals at all, either as magnificent, varied, or formidable. Yet the fact that they and Man are placed on a par as joint-products of the same Creator, and as sharing the same limited duration, points in its muted way in the same direction as Job's lyricism in describing God's non-human creatures: away from anthropocentrism and towards theocentrism.


55 Alter, op. cit., P.104.
In *Job*, God rebukes the hero because he has so far seen himself as in the right and God as in the wrong.\(^{56}\) This criticism of God is not only arrogant but is also based on failure to admit, or even to discern, that he does not know the full facts of the case. Exactly the same is true of his friends’ criticism of him. Job criticizes God on the assumption that his sufferings can only be a punishment for some terrible sin. Since he has not actually committed any terrible sin, he concludes that God is unjust, because his ‘punishment’ is unfair. So God must be an arbitrary tyrant, in his view.\(^{57}\) However, since his sufferings are not a punishment for sin anyway, deserved or undeserved, his criticism of God is based on a totally false premise. In reality, God, so far from accusing him of some heinous sin, actually commends his singular integrity with unusual warmth;\(^{58}\) and his sufferings are a special test arising from this unusual integrity, not a punishment at all.

The author’s distinction between this true reason\(^{59}\) for the harshness of Job’s

\(^{56}\) *Job* 40:2 & 8; cf. 32:2.

\(^{57}\) See esp. *Job* Chs. 9 & 10.

\(^{58}\) *Job* 1:8 and 42:7-9.

\(^{59}\) Some might argue that this true reason is no less unjust than the false reason, and that this injustice undermines the point of the book. This objection, however, would be based on the idea that Job’s contention is the injustice of his suffering; and on this basis, since God and the satan playing betting games with each other is not a just reason for Job to suffer, one could claim that Job’s conclusion is still right, even though his premise is wrong: he is suffering unjustly, even though not for the reason he imagined.

From the main emphasis of the book’s speeches, however, it seems likelier that Job’s real contention is not the injustice of his suffering simply as such, but rather the injustice of denying his integrity. This is what sending such vast calamity on him as a punishment for sin would amount to, since it would imply that he has committed some sin which is also vast, in proportion to the calamity. He is only protesting the injustice of his suffering, then, insofar as his suffering is interpreted as a punishment for sin; until his friends interpret it in that light, he is not protesting the injustice of his suffering at all (2:10b), even when he wishes he had never been born (3:1-26). His vigour, eloquence and single-mindedness in defending his integrity are astonishing, given the mental anguish and physical weakness to which the blows of circumstance have
suffering and the false reason for it given by his ‘friends’ does not ameliorate the harshness of the suffering itself. It does, however, make a vital point about the human condition, especially about Man’s tendency to false certainty and over-adamant judgments, which arises from his erroneous assumptions, and from blindness to his own narrowness of vision as opposed to the vast horizons of God. This point is closely related to the problem of hybris, because, like hybris, it arises from not reduced him. He is mysteriously energized to rise on wings of eloquence above his pain, and above his unprepossessing appearance and undignified situation, so totally absorbed is he in arguing his deeply cherished belief in the basic uprightness of his character.

Once we see to what lengths Job is prepared to go to defend his integrity, it puts in a different light the extraordinary lengths to which God Himself goes to demonstrate His Own confidence in that integrity. For it is to show His faith in Job’s uprightness, which the satan is impugning, that God takes on the adversary’s bet (1:12 and 2:6) in the first place; and it is God who is proved right about Job’s character (1:22 and 2:10). Job’s suffering, and his pious response to it, prove the satan’s claims against him (1:11 and 2:5) are nonsense. Without that suffering, the hero’s integrity could not have been proved as it has been. The fact that Job’s suffering has proved, as nothing else could, what Job subsequently reveals is the very point that he most wants proved makes it very difficult to imagine him disagreeing with God’s response to it if only he knew about it; but the whole point is that he does not know about it. He is angry with God because he thinks he knows what God is doing, and thinks he knows that God is wrong; but in reality, God’s position is the exact opposite from what he thinks it is. God is not accusing Job of sin, but earnestly maintaining against the satan, Job’s genuine piety. Like all wise men who claim to know about something, Job “Can not really comprehend it.” (Qoh. 8:17).

Although it is difficult to imagine Job disagreeing with God about the bet, it is, of course, impossible to imagine anyone except Job agreeing with Him about it. Job is the larger-than-life hero of a book which is itself a gigantic hyperbole. In this respect, he is more like the ‘type’ of a Hellenistic comedy than a naturalistically depicted all-round human character. An ordinary mortal would not be capable of such single-minded application to arguing in defence of his character in circumstances of such mental distress and physical pain as those suffered by Job; nor would he find the new children bestowed on him in 42:13 any compensation for the ones he lost in 1:18-19.

However, although the depiction of Job may be influenced by such dramatic or other literary ‘types’, nevertheless, if so, Job himself is a completely new type, one whom we have never actually seen in any previous drama, whether comedy or tragedy: the man whose supreme preoccupation is his own justification, with all the traits, both negative and positive, which that implies. On the one hand, he has been guilty of false certainty, for which God reproves him; but on the other hand, once he is directly confronted with God in person, he is very quick to repent of his false certainty (unlike his ‘friends’); and he is proved right to have pinned all his hopes of resolving matters on a literal manifestation of the divine Presence, (see below, this Chapter, Sections vii and ix), and not on his own ability to settle the issue. This theocentric attitude is taking piety to its only possible logical conclusion; but this is a conclusion to which, even so, many who claim to be pietists would never dream of taking it.

Job is, in fact, a towering figure of tough and awesomely single-minded uprightness, whose outstanding stature has still attracted the special admiration and commendation of God (1:8, cf. 42:7 & 8), reproof or no reproof. The fact that God takes on the challenge in 1:12 shows His supreme confidence that the good character he gave Job in 1:8 is the truth, and that putting it to the test can only prove Him right.

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recognizing one's limitations - in this case, limitations of understanding.  

Qoheleth's primary concern is to get across that Man should not overestimate himself and be arrogant before God, but should revere Him. The author of *Job* takes a very similar line, especially in the speeches of God advising Job to recognize that His power and wisdom are incomparably above Job's, and Job should not judge and criticize Him, but rather worship Him for His astounding work of creation. The essence of both books, especially *Qoheleth* (perhaps taking its lead from *Job*), is therefore to diminish Man and exalt God; and their main recommendation is piety toward God.

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60 Compare how, in Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus's reactions can be unfair and harsh, precisely because (despite his great reputation for wisdom) he just does not see the whole picture, and jumps to conclusions on the basis of his limited vision of the truth. See, e.g., his accusations against C.O.T. (Creon), L.380 ff., discussed above, Chapter 4, Section v, Pp.153 & 155-7; cf. Section i, fn. 4. Note also the ironical prominence of the blindness-motif in connexion with Oedipus, the man famed for his special wisdom and insight, which once saved Thebes from the Sphinx when no-one else was wise enough to save the city; see above, Chapter 3, Section vi, fn. 67, paras. 4 & 5.
iv  UNCERTAINTY AND THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF PROVIDENCE

However, although Qoheleth is a pietist, his pietism, like that of the author of *Job*, is a turbulent one, focussing not just on divine principles, but also on human experience, however disconcerting. 61 He does not expound patterns of divine Providence which he feels to be predictable and solidly within human grasp; rather, he advises us to keep in mind the perplexing effect on humanity of the anomalies in these patterns: the "crookedness" of the paths of Providence, 62 which God has deliberately made in such a way that Man can not see round the corners, so that its patterns are never entirely predictable. 63

This does not mean that Qoheleth sees God as completely arbitrary, or that he sees some blind fate as controller of the Universe, as Ginsberg 64 and C.H. Dodd in his interpretation of *Qoh*. 6:10-12 65 believe. There is no real evidence that Qoheleth has lost the vision Dodd thinks he has lost, the vision he ascribes primarily to the teaching of the prophets, that

"God does act on principle. It may be difficult to discover and define the principle of his action in particular cases, but He is never merely capricious, and never inconsistent with Himself"; 66

61 :9:2 & 3, etc.
63 3:11 & 22b; 7:14b; 8:17.
65 In *The Authority of the Bible*, P.179.
also that

"There is a principle of justice somewhere embedded in the divine dealings.". 67

Qoheleth still believes in God's predestined pattern, 68 including the set "time" for justice. 69 For Man, however, the predestination of the pattern (since only God can see it) does not, in his view, eradicate life's threatening unpredictability. 70

Although he holds that the divine pattern is there, and is entirely comprehensible to and controlled by God, nevertheless for Man it is essential, both practically and morally, to realize that this pattern is impossible for him to grasp in full. 71

Qoheleth's position is comparable with Kitto's picture of the Tragedians:

"Greek tragedy is built on the faith that in human affairs it is Law that reigns, not chance. In Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannos - it is prophesied long before Oedipus is born that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He does these things in complete ignorance. But it makes nonsense of the play to interpret this as meaning that Man is the plaything of a malignant fate. What Sophocles means is - that in the most complex and apparently fortuitous combination of events there is a design, though what it means we may not know. It is because the gods can see the whole design that Apollo could foretell what Oedipus would do. In Aeschylus, the Law is simpler: it is moral law. Punishment follows hybris as the night follows day." 72

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69 3:17.

70 7:14b; 9:12.

71 3:11-14.

72 Kitto, The Greeks, P.177.
Some, then, see Aeschylus’ approach as similar to that of the prophets, \(^73\) in that his objective is to demonstrate the existence of great principles, such as the certainty of divine retribution for hybris, by showing them in operation. However, even if this is so, Aeschylus’ emphasis on these reliable principles is balanced by his awareness of a principle of human uncertainty as well; \(^74\) and Sophocles and Euripides also reflect this sense of uncertainty, perhaps even more than Aeschylus.

Despite the great differences between these two tragedians, they do have this in common: like Qoheleth, they take care to avoid presenting an overly simplistic picture even of ethical principles which they know find general acceptance.

\(^{73}\)The prophets have certain unerring principles in mind, concerning God’s nature or His methods in dealing with men, which they aim to demonstrate are utterly reliable; and their means of demonstration is the fulfilment of their prophecies. A favourite such principle among the prophets is that religious exercises simply in themselves are no guarantee of prevailing with God. Worship is not magic; it can not actually compel God. Furthermore, God is not only too powerful for that; He is also too consistent and reliable in His moral integrity. He can not be ‘bought off’ from His fixed purpose by the mere outward performance of prayer or sacrifice, irrespective of repentance or of willingness to conform to His ways. See, e.g., Is. 1:15 and 31:2; Mic. 3:4; Jer. 7:16; 14:11 & 12; 15:1 & 2; cf. I Sam. 15:29. The prophets hope to show that these principles they are revealing do not change, in order to clarify and confirm what is the correct way for Man to behave toward God and other people.

Interestingly, H. Weir Smyth expresses a comparable idea about Aeschylus in the Introduction to his Loeb translation of Aeschylus’ plays, Vol. I (Harvard, 1956), P. xiii: 

"If he has less variety than Euripides and even than Sophocles, he sees life more as a unity than they. He related the eternal verities of the ancient wisdom of the race, the maxims of conventional ethics, to the life of Man as it acts and suffers; and at the same time he displayed the universality of their application in the personages of the heroic past."

This suggests that Aeschylus’ aim, not unlike that of the prophets, is to show that these "eternal verities" (in Aeschylus’ case certain fundamental principles of wisdom-theory) are utterly reliable; but being a tragedian, he does this by demonstrating them in dramatic action.

However, see above, Chapter 4, Section vii, esp. Pp.180-3, for the fact that Aeschylus, like Sophocles, sees acknowledgement of uncertainty as essential to piety and to real wisdom (albeit probably uncertainty as well as Smyth’s "eternal verities" rather than uncertainty instead of them). Although Smyth may be right in suggesting that Aeschylus’ drama is consciously designed to embody what he sees as the universal principles of wisdom-theory, the same could be said of Sophocles, whose piety has more in common with that of Aeschylus than Smyth allows for. None of the three great Athenian tragedians, including Euripides, could be described as without any stake in wisdom, even though they will have differed as to the exact nature and emphasis of their wisdom-theory; and none of them were naïve enough to imagine they would be safe to trust in any universally reliable truths without due attention to the minefield of uncertainties constituting the overall spiritual environment in which Man has to operate.

\(^{74}\)See above, Chapter 4, Section vii, Pp.180-3.
In itself, this does not, of course, mean that they do not believe in those principles. They represent people as failing to see the design of fate, not to imply that there is no design to see, but quite simply because in real life, people very often do not see it. Failing to see the design of fate obviously does not mean that the design does not exist, nor is the existence of the design any guarantee that Man will necessarily see it. Nevertheless, from Sophocles' and Euripides' perspective, the fact that we do not always see fate's pattern, and the possible human consequences of a man or woman not seeing the design of fate, could potentially be of vital importance in themselves, because of their devastating effect on the individual(s) concerned. It is not just the overall significance, ethical or otherwise, of the Grand Design itself which is important. Hence the inscrutability (from Man's limited perspective) of fate, and the human consequences of this inscrutability, become an issue for Tragedy in themselves. The focus shifts from the large-scale aim of demonstrating ethical principles, or the shape of fate, in themselves, to examining instead the effect on particular human beings of being out of one's depth in such a complex pattern of cause and effect.

Admittedly, it is a small step from this position of focussing on the human predicament, instead of on the divine principles, to seeing the divine as a threat to Man, and hence voicing the cry of the human soul against the tyranny of the supernatural, especially when the evidence seems against God or gods being on the side of right. The tragedians, like Qoheleth, and like the author of Job, often express what is sometimes taken as a preference for death over life, but is really an acute sensitivity to humanity's vulnerability (which ceases only at death) to sudden,
unforeseen reversals of fortune.  

This is reflected in, e.g., Qoh. 6:3 ff. and 9:12; Euripides' Hek. L1.375-8 and Women of Troy L1.511 ff.; and in the closing lines of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannos. In these passages, it is only the problem of reversals of fortune that produces this negative sentiment about life; and it is not about life altogether, but rather about the fact that even the greatest good fortune can never be relied upon to last throughout the whole of life. Occasionally it can reach the extreme of what appears to be the ultimate anti-life sentiment, namely, that death is actually preferable to life.  

Nevertheless, this 'preference' for death rather than life is entirely dependent on the fragility and ephemerality of life’s good times, and has nothing to do with the morbid, depressive preference for death rather than life that comes from not valuing and enjoying life’s good times in the first place. All these writers show from their work that they know very well what ‘joie de vivre’ is.

Moreover, despite their sympathetic depiction of Man’s anguish in the face of reversals of fortune and the inscrutability of fate, none of them are claiming that there is no divine justice. In Euripides’ Children of Herakles, L1.863 ff., for example, the familiar ‘Call no man happy till he die’ - ἔως ὅτι θανάσῃ  has a positive sentiment, even though in other passages it tends to have a sombre implication. For here it is the

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75 As discussed above, Chapter 2, Section i; cf. Chapter 3, Section ii, fn. 20, paras. 2 & 3.

76 E.g., Hek. L1.375-8.

77 For various implications of this saying, traditionally ascribed to Solon, see above, Chapter 2, Section i, Pp.64-6; Chapter 3, Section ii, fn. 20, esp. paras. 3 & 4; and Chapter 4, Sections vi, passim and vii, P.166.
enemy who suffers the reversal of fortune, when Iolaus defeats Eurystheus through a miraculous intervention. The Chorus celebrates this as a vindication of divine justice, exhorting the City to uphold what is right because the gods have demonstrated beyond all doubt that they are deeply committed to upholding δημοκρατία.

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78L. 901-9.
HOW REMOTE IS QOHELETH'S GOD?

Because Euripides and Sophocles preserve a tension between on the one hand believing that the universe is controlled by the forces upholding ὄντος, and on the other acting as spokesmen for Man's anguish in the face of circumstances which might seem to deny this, they express very clearly Man's unease with the supernatural forces that control his destiny. Qoheleth, whatever his own personal feelings, seems to be addressing himself to a world familiar with this attitude. Where he differs perhaps from any other Biblical writer is not in disbelieving in divine justice, but rather in appearing to reflect an intense sympathy toward this potential unease with the divine. This unease arises largely from a sense of remoteness from the divine; and Qoheleth's sensitivity to it provokes questions as to whether he himself shares it, and perhaps even shares the sense of distance from God that causes it. If so, this would make him even more different from any other Biblical writer.

This is because the idea that divinity is somehow distant, though not uncharacteristic of Greek Tragedians, is very uncharacteristic of Biblical writers in general, who give the overall impression that God, though awesome, is accessible. In the Theophany on Sinai, e.g., despite the people's nervousness at meeting God, and their request that Moses should act as go-between instead, there is no suggestion of any unwillingness for an encounter with Man on the part of God Himself. In Gen. 20:3 ff., God speaks to a Philistine king in a dream, warning him about a moral issue concerning Abraham's wife. Elisha 79 seems surprised that although the Shunammite

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79 I K. 4:27.
woman is in such distress, the Lord has not told him about it, which implies that normally He would have done so. God discusses the content of Jeremiah’s visions with him in some detail; \(^80\) and, according to \textit{I Chron.} 28:12 & 19, He shows David the correct pattern of the coming Temple.

Particularly revealing about the level of interaction between God and Man is the traumatic situation of \textit{I Ki.} 17:20-22. Here, Elijah’s reaction to the sudden death of his widow-friend’s child gives the impression that he may at first have suspected God of capriciously killing the child. But even in this emotionally fraught situation, which could have degenerated into a classic confrontation between Man and the hidden, overpowering supernatural forces he instinctively mistrusts and fears, the Prophet soon recovers his confidence in his God by confronting him directly with his protest. As soon as he does this, God responds, in this case by giving him faith to raise the child back to life. This could not happen, despite the Prophet’s willingness to confront God, unless God were equally willing to be confronted.

This willingness for direct contact with men is very characteristic of God as He is depicted throughout the Hebrew Bible, and is not seen in any way as a dilution or contradiction of His awesome quality. It is a directness of contact which is recognized as healing many fears. \(^81\) It is so intrinsic a part of the whole Hebrew tradition of what God is like that it even appears as late as \textit{Job}, and not as a mere poetic embellishment, but as the climax of the whole book. God only appears to answer Job

\(^80\) \textit{Jer.} 1:11 ff.

\(^81\) \textit{Ps.} 116:1-8; \textit{II Ki.} 20:4-6; \textit{Jer.} 1:7-10; etc.
after a very lengthy wait, and even then His answer is not to the issue Job expects Him to answer. Instead, He dwells on His astounding achievements as Creator. These, it is felt, place His activities far above human comprehension and therefore, in effect, above human criticism. Because God’s appearance here is in the form of set formal speeches, full of rhetorical hyperbole, \(^2\) some might say that this encounter does not seem as genuine or as profound as encounters between Man and God elsewhere in the Bible. That impression, however, is given only because Job, unlike most Biblical books, is similar to a play or an oratorio, an artistic composition designed to get across a certain point, rather than written in the style of a personal account of real life experiences.

Some perhaps might argue that this same impression is a reflection of the writer’s spiritual generation, with its diminished sense of God’s accessibility. Nevertheless, one should note that, despite his generation, the writer of Job felt somehow obliged to adhere to the older tradition to the extent of God putting in a personal appearance to answer Job directly. Moreover, it is essential to the correct interpretation of Job to grasp that this confrontation is far from cosmetic, but if anything climactic. This fact has not escaped Robert Alter; \(^3\) and it is evident to Samuel Terrien in his work on what he calls ‘the Hebrew theology of presence’.

At first sight, therefore, the way Qoheleth’s God does not seem to be directly

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[^2]: Job Chs. 38 - 41.

[^3]: See above, this Chapter, Section iii, P.7.

[^4]: See below, this Chapter, Section vii, Qoheleth and the Divine Presence.
confronted by Man in any obvious sense strikes a very odd note for a Biblical book.\(^{85}\)

In *Qoheleth*, there does not appear to be even the occasional sense of closeness to God by proxy (i.e., through contact with Man) that one finds in, say, *Proverbs*, such as,

"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord -
And that which he hath given will He pay him again."\(^{86}\)

In so far as *Qoheleth* is trying to come to terms with God at all in his book, he is usually thought to be dealing with Him intellectually only, without betraying any unmistakable signs of a direct, personal closeness to Him.

One should not, however, assume too much from this surface-impression, since a closer examination of his main interweaving themes gives a rather different picture. For example, he is not unaware of, or even in disagreement with, the old ideal of God’s personal presence with Man, and Man drawing near to God, as the ultimate object of religious aspiration, either in a private or in a cultic context, even though *Qoh*. 5:1-7 is sometimes misunderstood to be an attack on this ideal. Joseph Blenkinsopp, e.g.,\(^{87}\) considers that

"*Qoheleth’s* relationship to the traditional and ancestral religion is tenuous to say the least, and his attitude to the external expressions of that religion - animal sacrifice, prayer, vows etc. - is critical and detached."

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\(^{85}\) As, indeed, would the absence of any direct reference to God in *Esther*, were it not for the fact that Esther’s fasting, and God’s powerful answer to her prayers, imply a dynamic level of mutual contact between them.


\(^{87}\) Commenting on this passage in *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1983), P.68.
However, although the expression ‘sacrifice of fools’ is indeed ‘critical’, of someone or of something, this derisive language would seem to indicate that our author’s attitude is a little too heated to be called ‘detached’; and the object of his criticism is not necessarily the traditional religion itself. He is also saying,

"Guard your steps *when* (not *if*) you go to the house of God".

He recommends that we "draw near to *listen*", not that we refrain from drawing near; and when he reminds those who have made a vow to God to pay it, his point is unmistakably identical to that of Deut. 23:21-3. In fact, his evocative references to Deuteronomic thinking in general \(^{88}\) make it difficult to believe that his relationship to the ancestral religion is as tenuous as Blenkinsopp suggests.

Qoheleth’s allegedly detached attitude to spirituality, \(^{89}\) and the way in which he is often said to stand at a distance from God, could perhaps be defended anyway, even if it were real, on the grounds that it is adequate for his own rôle as a wisdom teacher, and not an indication that he is at odds with the basic ideals underlying the original cult. Wisdom is traditionally thought to involve more of the human and less of the supernatural than, e.g., prophecy, which is dependent for its validity on the prophet’s direct contact with and illumination by God.

Moreover, *Qoh. 5:1-7*, although open to misinterpretation as a supposed radical statement that God is literally not approachable, in reality can not be that; for this

\(^{88}\) See *qoheleth*, Ch. 7, Section ii, *The Symbolic Rôle of Solomon in Qoheleth*, and below, Chapter 6, *passim*.

\(^{89}\) If it were detached anyway; but see below, this Chapter, Sections vii - ix.
passage is actually a conscious and emphatic re-statement of the traditional standards (whether or not the traditional type) of piety. Its pregnant allusions to I Sam. 15:22 and Deut. 23:21-23 make this very clear. Although it may possibly reflect negatively on the actual state of the Jerusalem cult in the author's own day, it is not an ironic and hostile reflection on the old ideal of cultivating God's presence with Man, whether through the cult or otherwise. 90 Qoheleth is not here denouncing all attempts of Man to approach God in any way. 91 What he is denouncing is unmistakably actual irreverence, and apparently of a type urgently familiar to him in his own experience, not something remote in the past, whether an ideal or a practice.

It is, of course, possible that Qoheleth has no sense of personal closeness to God, as an individual or as a devotee of the Jerusalem cult; but it is impossible to infer from his book either that he has or that he has not. If he has, he never unambiguously refers to it; he speaks of God as if He were a remote subject of his discourse, rather than the centre of his personal life. But this is at least partly because in his eyes acceptance of God's remoteness, in the sense of a reverent awareness that God is not to be approached brashly, is essential to piety, not a contradiction of it. 92 For 5:1-7 show not that conventional piety is necessarily wrong, but rather that a man who is presumptuous in approaching God and rash in what he says to God is not pious.

90 See above, Chapter 1, Section iv, Pp.53-6 and below, Appendix Three, for the possibility that he is deeply committed to the cult, and concerned about it as a critical insider (e.g., as a member of the priestly class), not as a hostile outsider.

91 On the contrary, Man's artificial, egocentric remoteness from God can not be acceptable to him, or he would not say in 5:1, "Draw near to listen.".
See above, Chapter 1, Section iv, e.g., Pp.48-9 and 60-1.

92 See above, Chapter 1, Section iv, pp.52-3.
at all, conventionally or otherwise. Eagerness to perform religious acts and to make religious vows is not in itself any evidence of being devout. This is a theme already well-familiar from the prophets, and its reiteration by Qoheleth here certainly cannot be taken to indicate his rejection of the cult as such, or of any kind of worship, public or private, but only as expressing his disapproval of their abuse.

The abuse in question is described in 5:1 as "the sacrifice of fools". Qoheleth's "Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools" recalls 1 Sam. 15:22,

"To obey is better than sacrifice (הָעָבֵד נִדְמָר)."

The extraordinary foolishness of Saul in this chapter stems from his insincerity and preoccupation with mere appearances. He wants Samuel to believe that he has obeyed the Lord, and insists that he has done so, even though it is obvious that he has not. Sacrificing to the Lord is the very issue he then decides to make into an excuse for having kept alive the animals he has been ordered not to keep alive. Even when, after much denial, he finally admits that he has sinned, he then, in his very next breath, glibly requests that Samuel now accompanies him in an act of worship; and that only to keep up appearances, so that he will still appear estimable to the elders of the people.

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93 E.g., Is. 1:10-18.
94 1 Sam. 15:13 & 20.
95 In v 24.
96 V 25.
97 V 30.
Even though God has just announced his disapproval of Saul by rejecting him as King, Saul’s next comment after the announcement is an ultra-brief admission of guilt followed by his proposal to perform a religious act in order to look admirable in the sight of men. He makes it painfully clear that he is not moved at all by God’s disapproval of him; but he is very concerned indeed about men’s opinion of him, and that is why he is going to sacrifice to the Lord. Evidently, this sacrifice of Saul’s is what Qoheleth means when he refers to "the sacrifice of fools" in 5:1. His point here is that it is not those most forward in outward acts of worship who are necessarily the most spiritual. Better to be backward in approaching God than to mock him with an outward show of superficial worship. The irony of I Sam. 15 is that Samuel explains this quite clearly in v 22; but Saul, as he still insists on his empty sacrifice, presumably does not get the point. Qoheleth, however, evidently does get the point, and refers to it in 5:1.

It is also significant to the allusion that the "fools" of 5:1

"do not know that they are doing wrong".

This too is reminiscent of Saul, whose personality seems to disintegrate, becoming erratically violent under the influence of an ‘evil spirit’. Saul loses his integrity even to the point of consulting a witch, even though he himself had previously conducted a purge of witches. It seems that he no longer knows what is right at all, even on matters in which he once had strong convictions and once unflinchingly acted on those convictions. He also has delusions of being supported by God, despite the fact that

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98 However, for the probability of a double intertextuality here, with Job 42:8 as well as with I Sam. 15:22, see below, this Chapter, Section ix.
God’s favour has definitely departed from him and now rests with David. In *I Sam.* 23:7, e.g., he says,

"God has handed (David) over to me",
even though God is in fact supporting David against him. Saul is thus an unusually pointed example of one who loses not only his integrity, but also his grip on reality; not only is he doing wrong, but he also

"does not know that he is doing wrong." 99

Similarly, Qoheleth’s warning in the following verses against careless vows to

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99 Given that Solomon, another king, is also used as an anti-type by Qoheleth (see below, Chapter 7, Section ii and Appendix Two), these negative allusions to Saul too make one wonder whether there is an attack on David as well somewhere in the book. It seems not unlikely that *Qoh.* 4:13 refers to David, in the light of Ogden’s argument that 4:14b’s reference to the wise youth being poor (*W") is more reminiscent of David than anyone else. See Ogden, Graham S., "Historical Allusion in *Qoh.* IV 13-16?", *Vetus Testamentum* XXX, Fasc. 3, P.313.

This might seem a positive reference to David rather than a negative one, since the poor but wise youth who comes to the throne is said in v 13 to be *better* than the old and foolish king. The old and foolish king "no longer *knows* how to take warning" (v 13); this sounds very like Saul, who heeded neither Samuel’s warnings nor Jonathan’s, especially coming as it does only three verses before 5:1’s exhortation to *listen / obey*, and its reference to

"The sacrifice of fools who do not *know* that they are doing wrong.".

At first sight, then, 4:13-5 looks like a commendation of David, because he is an improvement on Saul. Notice, however, the anti-climax of v 16b; even the old and foolish king’s successor did not maintain his popularity in the end. Furthermore, Ogden himself notes that the word *W"* is also reminiscent of Uriah as well as of David; and the word is sufficiently unusual in the Bible apart from *Proverbs* (where it occurs twenty-two times) and *Qoheleth* (where it occurs twice) for this connexion between David and Uriah to be significant. According to Ogden, this word *W"* only occurs six times elsewhere, once in *I Sam.* 18:23 of David, and three times

"On the lips of Nathan the royal counsellor. These latter three examples in *II Sam.* 12:1, 3 & 4 make the counsellor’s allegory particularly poignant, for the once poor (*W") David, having become King, unfortunately behaves toward the poor (*W") Uriah in a manner similar to the deranged Saul’s actions toward himself."

(Ogden, op. cit., P.313).

Ogden is not primarily concerned to assess whether the reference to the poor youth in *Qoh.* 4:14b is positive or negative, but rather to establish that the reference probably is to David, and / or to kings or leaders (such as Joseph) particularly connected with wisdom-tradition as such. This seems likelier than interpreting the poor youth as just some ruler of merely topical importance (see also below, Appendix Three, fin. 2), who would need more than a cryptic allusion like this in order to be recognizable. Nevertheless, Ogden has still said enough about the implications of the term *W"* in the David story to give a very negative impression of Qoheleth’s implications in 4:13-16 if this passage really is referring to David.
the Lord is well in line with traditional standards of piety, echoing exactly the sentiments of Deut. 23:21-3, even to the fact that not making a religious vow at all is perfectly acceptable, which is definitely preferable to making one but failing to keep it. The comparison in Qoh. 5:3 & 7 of dreaming with talking too much may reflect the idea that false words in general are as odious and as potentially dangerous as the false dreams of Deut. 13:1-5.

This is especially likely since Qoheleth concludes v 7 with an exhortation to "Fear God", instead of paying any attention to empty dreams and idle words; and this is exactly the message of Deut. 13:4: don't be led astray by false dreams, but fear God. These false dreams of Deut. 13, although spoken with great confidence, and with every appearance of divine inspiration, are nevertheless lying revelations, designed to entice the people into idolatry. Similarly, the airy dreams and idle words that Qoheleth refers to in 5:2-7 can be an arrogant 'wisdom' based on false certainty, which leads to dangerous delusions. Job's "words without knowledge" would have continued to "darken counsel", had he not humbled himself before God in the end; and the dream-visions of Eliphaz only confirmed him in his wrong opinion of Job's situation.

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100 Deut. 23:22.

101 Ibid. vv 21 & 23.

102 See also below, Chapter 6, Section iii, for Deut. 13.

103 Since the miraculous signs the dreamer promises actually come to pass.

104 Job 4:12-21.

105 See also below, this Chapter, Section ix.
False wisdom, no doubt, can be just as dangerous as false prophecy, and as Eliphaz’s ‘revelation’ suggests, perhaps related to it after all; cf. Elihu’s endorsement of such ‘dreams’ as a genuine source of wisdom in Job 33:15, showing that there is not such a clear dividing line between wisdom and the supernatural realm (e.g., prophecy) as is often thought. Evidently Solomon’s dream in I Ki. 3:5 was not the last of the wisdom-dreams.

It seems natural, therefore, that the true wisdom teacher should denounce false wisdom, just as true prophets have to denounce false prophecy. It is also natural that in doing so Qoheleth should employ allusions to the piety of the Deuteronomists. For the motivation behind his teaching is entirely devout. It would not even be true to say that his emphasis on wariness in approaching God is stronger than that of the traditional pietists. No warning to be careful in approaching God could be clearer than, e.g., II Sam. 6:6-10, where Uzzah is supernaturally killed for presumptuously steadying the Ark.

However, despite David’s alarm at the incident, this story is not meant to signify that God’s presence is undesirable, nor that having or desiring this presence is by definition presumptuous. For in v 11, the man whose house receives the Ark is particularly blessed because of it. Similarly, far from dissuading men from drawing

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107 Qoheleth’s wariness seems in any case completely reverent and positive; there is no evidence in the text that it is based on mistrust of God, or on a negative desire to stand aloof from Him.

108 The Ark symbolizes God’s presence, and is a pre-eminent focus of faith in evoking God’s literal presence.

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near to God, Qoheleth simply says in 5:1,

"Draw near to listen".

Rather than approaching God to assert, by word or by deed, one’s own standing, intention or opinion, one should rather approach Him in readiness to obey Him and to respond to Him. Better not to approach God at all than to approach Him in arrogant assertiveness, instead of in humble receptivity. A truthful and reverent remoteness is far preferable to a false and presumptuous show of intimacy.

This attitude suggests that Qoheleth is unusually open to the numinous. Willingness to keep quiet before God indicates an unusual degree of faith in God’s external reality. If Qoheleth were a lesser pietist, he would not be so emphatic about the importance of listening in God’s presence rather than speaking; for he would not have such faith in God’s ability to communicate something for the worshipper to listen to. It is not necessarily the case that the Temple cult, for all its possible musical aspects, offered organized teaching or reading and exposition of scripture by human agents, in the way the synagogue ultimately did. For the synagogue was presumably established as an attempt to supply something in public worship which previously had been lacking. So when Qoheleth exhorts drawing near in the house of God to listen, he probably means listen to God rather than listen to Man teaching about God. Listening to God would also fit better with the echo of I Sam. 15:22, since it is God that Saul should have been concerned to obey, rather than seeking to win the good opinion of men by appearing in public to sacrifice to the Lord.

Despite, then, the fact that we are accustomed to consider direct, supernatural
contact with God as necessary for the prophet's ministry but not for that of the
wisdom teacher, \(^{109}\) the grounds for this distinction are far from solid. Qoheleth's
belief in listening to God certainly sounds like a more realistic setting for experiencing
a genuine mystical encounter, whether in the form of revelation or otherwise, than the
'sacrifice of fools' scenario he repudiates in 5:1. It would be interesting indeed to
know if our author had a closer sense of God's personal presence after all than he
directly reveals in his book. \(^{110}\)

\(^{109}\) See above, this Section.

\(^{110}\) See also below, this Chapter, Sections vii & viii.
Qoheleth's emphasis on God's mystery, rather than on His accessibility like earlier Biblical authors, is perfectly consistent with the ancient concept of God's holiness, which is thoroughly Hebraic. Yet even so, his way of expressing this sense of mystery may still owe something to the influence of the Greek wisdom poet Theognis. Theognis too is noted for his awareness of divine inscrutability; and Qoheleth often seems to echo the wording of Theognis on other topics, despite the massive time-gap between them.  

This poet's frequent warnings to acknowledge and revere the gods and to enlist their help are far from empty, even though he evidently does feel remote from the gods, and is forcefully blunt about the fact that he sees no recognizable justice in their way of dispensing Providence. But so far from rejecting them for this remoteness and inscrutability, Theognis sees these very qualities as a major reason why we must revere them. The gods direct everything; we can not figure out the end from the beginning, and so we are often misled. The gods' ways are hard

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111 See, e.g., above, Chapter 2, Section iv, P.80, fn. 63, para. 2. For the extraordinarily longstanding influence of this pre-classical (sixth century B.C.) Greek wisdom-writer, - even up to the first century C.E., - as the popular moralist par excellence, see Ranston, Harry, Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature (London, 1925), P.14.

112 E.g., Theogn. Li.171-2; 355-60; 653-4; 1139-40; 1178a-1180.

113 Li.373-92; 731-52; 865-8, etc.

114 Li.133-142; 1075-8.

115 Li.401-6.
to understand, but it is their prerogative to direct events, and so they have the right to surprise us. We should not be presumptuous and alter (i.e., add to or take from) a god’s oracular response.

The influence of Theognis’ reverent acceptance of the inscrutability of the

\[116\text{L.659 ff.}\]

\[117\text{L.805-10; cf. Deut. 4:2 and 12:32; also Qoh. 3:14, a similar warning against adding or taking away. The possibility of a connexion between Qoheleth’s thinking and Theognis’ here is probably stronger if Qoh. 3:11’s “ignorance”, “eternity”, is emended to “"secret" or “darkness” (see above, Chapter 2, Section ii, P.70, fn. 33 and below, Chapter 6, Section iii), since this would make the sentiment of 3:11 more similar to Theogn. 1075-8, with “darkness” prominently placed at the beginning of L.1077; see below, Chapter 6, Section iii.}

Some might argue that Theogn. L.805-10 is not comparable to Deut. 4:2 and 12:32 after all, since the Deuteronomic passages are referring to God’s commandments, not to an oracle. However, the reasons why the Deuteronomic commandments must not be altered are similar to the reasons why the oracle of Theogn. L.805-10 must not be altered. Firstly, the original versions, both of the commandments and of the oracle, are the authentic words of the divinity in question; but if anything were added or taken away, the altered version would not be authentic. Secondly, any such alteration on the part of mere Man would be rash, presumptuous and misleading. It could be deliberately deceitful, intended to represent as the words of the god a version which in fact is not; and this would amount to usurping the authority of the god to ratify the words of a mere mortal. Alternatively, it could be erroneous, based on the notion that the original is not authentic, even though in fact it is, or on the outrageous idea that even though the original is authentically spoken by the god, Man knows better than the god and can therefore ‘improve’ on the god’s own words. The latter possibility would be grossly impious, as well as erroneous.

Another potential point in common between commandments and oracles is that some oracles directly influence human conduct, since the enquirer interprets them virtually as instructions. This is a very hazardous practice, given the notorious ambiguity of oracles; but although oracles lack the reliable clarity of the Deuteronomic commandments, the sense of reverence and obligation to obey they inspire in the believer may sometimes be similar to that inspired by the commandments.

\[118\text{This is not to say that Theognis’ acceptance of this divine inscrutability is meekly unquestioning. The fact that we can not "straighten" what God has made "crooked" (Qoh. 7:13) means not only that "A man can not discover anything about his future" (Ibid. 7:14), but also that his accepted ideas of equity can be baffled too, and sometimes even outraged. Theognis reflects this sense of outrage in L.373 ff., “Dear Zeus, I am shocked with you (Θεουμαζω σε). - How is it, then, that your mind can endure To subject the righteous and the wicked to the same fate?” Similarly, in L.743 ff., he demands, “Yet how can it be just, King of Immortals, That a man who takes no part in unjust acts, And commits no offence nor any perjury, But is a just man, gets unjustly treated?”}

However, by contrast to "Θεουμαζω σε" in L.373, see L.191 ff., "μη θεουμαζε", "Be not shocked / dismayed" (probably the direct model for "πονηρα - ἤχον" in Qoh. 5:7-8), where he expresses faith that evildoers do not get away with their wickedness in the end, even though they may at first. Just because divine
divine could conceivably modify and counterbalance Qoheleth's native faith of direct revelation (and hence, of relative certainty), though without directly contradicting it, in such a way that Qoheleth can accept the idea of God actually withholding knowledge: and accept it not as a random misfortune, which has befallen Man because God is capricious, but rather as a rational, major aspect of His overall deliberate policy in dealing with mankind. Moreover, this is a policy with a definite moral purpose behind it, which could not have been fulfilled in any other way than by withholding knowledge from Man.

In this respect, of course, Qoheleth is going beyond Theognis, and is reverting to type as a believer within the Biblical tradition; for he is representing God's unknowability and His withholding of knowledge as, paradoxically, something we can actually know about Him. Qoheleth believes that if we grasp the fact that withholding understanding from Man is an important and positive aspect of God's policy, we can understand both Him and our own existence far better than we would have understood them had we imagined that we can know more about them than we really can.

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justice does not proceed directly to its goal by a path easy for Man to understand, this does not mean that there is no divine justice. For the similarity of thought and wording between Qoheleth and Theognis here, see below, Chapter 10, Section vi.

119 This is essentially a tradition of revelation: see, e.g., John 4:22b and Acts 17:23b, where the Samaritans and the Athenians respectively are represented as worshipping something they do not know. In this, they are in sharp contrast to the Jews, whose distinctive characteristic is that they operate on the basis of knowing the God they worship.

120 This is slightly reminiscent of Socrates' standpoint in The Apology, that his wisdom consists of recognizing his lack of knowledge; see below, this Chapter, Section viii.
As noted above, it is commonly claimed in studies on Qoheleth that the book gives an impression of distance between God and Man which is unusual by comparison with other Biblical books. Yet not enough attention is given to the question of the author's reason for presenting this picture. It is sometimes assumed to be his own sense of remoteness from God, and a lack of ambition or of faith for direct, intimate experience of Him, which constitute the reason. However, as already suggested, there could be quite different reasons for it, which would then call for careful consideration.

It could, for example, be the result of Qoheleth's strength of feeling about how one should or should not "draw near" to God. His disapprobation of those who are too presumptuous even to check their consciences as a necessary preliminary to drawing near God - which is presumably why they

"Do not know that they are doing wrong" -
is comparable with Jas. 4:8-10's exhortation to cleanse oneself from evil-doing and pride in order to be able to "Draw near to God".

By comparison, Ps. 15, in saying that righteousness is the way to stability, also concretizes this state of stability, of blessing or wellbeing, by equating it with

\[^{121}\text{Chapter 1, Section iv and this Chapter, Section v.}\]

\[^{122}\text{5:1 ff.; see above, Section v.}\]

\[^{123}\text{V S.}\]
It is the righteous who may live in God’s presence, as it is the righteous who shall "never be moved"; the two states are parallel. The prerequisite for both is moral righteousness. Whether or not a would-be worshipper attaches significance to ritual cleanness or to the sacrificial system, it is an absolutely elementary requirement that, before approaching God, one should check one’s own moral conduct first, and approach Him only when one has shown Him the respect of trying to conform that conduct to His stated requirements. Hence Qoheleth’s indignation about the sacrifice of fools is scarcely surprising, however strongly he might believe that Man should seek to be close to God, as long as the worshipper sincerely aims to please God by behaving uprightly. We do not need to suppose that Qoheleth disapproves of or disbelieves in intimacy between God and Man in order to explain his indignation at such slipshod worshippers.

Another possible reason for Qoheleth projecting this impression of distance between Man and God might be to underline how much Man needs God’s presence with him, and how barren and futile human life and effort is without it.

There is much to be said for Samuel Terrien’s arguments for the central importance to the Bible overall of what he calls the theology of the presence of God. It is no doubt significant that it was in his study of the Book of Job that this idea first began

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124 V 1.
to take shape; for *Job* has many striking perspectives in common with *Qoheleth*. 125

Terrien points out 126 that when Job speaks of repentance in 42:6, 127 he is not repenting of some particular wrong act, but rather of egocentricity, as opposed to theocentricity. Terrien sees God’s willingness to manifest Himself to Man as giving Man the ability to become God-centred instead of Man-centred; and only the resulting communion with God, a God-centred perception, can enable Man to rise above his trials and challenges and continue to be.

In an unpublished article, quoted by James Sanders, 128 Terrien sees the "Hebraic theology of presence" as the key issue in the quest for an overall theological unity of the Bible, saying,

"The entire literature of the Bible portrays the Deity as coming to Man - . (The earlier attempt to centre Biblical theology in the idea of Covenant) ignored the diversity of its meaning in Israel - (and tended) also to confuse the means with the end, for the idea of Covenant was in any case subservient to the prior reality of Presence.".

Similarly, Terrien sees the distinguishing feature of Israel’s faith as

"A determined and even obstinate will to live in the presence of the Holy God".

125 See also this Chapter, Sections iii, v and viii; and below, Chapter 10, Section iv.

126 In *Commentaire de L'Ancien Testament* XIII, P.47.

127 Cf. 40:4.


There is indeed plenty of Biblical evidence for the idea that certainty of God’s presence is the pinnacle of human experience, and the only guarantee of Israel’s security and wellbeing. This is clearly the implication of Moses’ request in Exodus 33:15 & 16, 130 and of the manifestations of the Presence in the Tabernacle 131 and in the Temple. 132 The nadir of Adam and Eve’s failure is that they hide from God instead of, on the contrary, seeking His presence, 133 even though He is seeking their presence. 134 By contrast, the high adventure of the pietists is to seek God out eagerly. 135

Nevertheless, the image of God’s self-revelation as only partial, even when He is intimately present, is also very persistent. In Ex. 33:18-23, Moses is allowed to see God’s back, but not His face. God says in Is. 45:7a,

"I form the light and create darkness";

and in v 15, the prophet addresses Him as

"A God who hides Himself".

God insists in v 19 that He is accessible:

"I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, Seek Me in vain".

130Cf. Ex. 13:21 & 22, Num. 14:14, Is. 63:9, etc.

131Ex. 40:34 & 35.

132I Ki. 8:10 & 11; cf. II Chron. 7:2.

133Gen. 3:8-10.

134Ibid. v 9.

135E.g., Pss. 42:1 & 2 ff. and 63:1 ff.; Ex. 33:18, etc.

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However, the very fact that God is characteristically challenged about seeming to "hide His face" \textsuperscript{136} shows that losing or lacking a sense of God's presence is the main source of anxiety to His creatures, \textsuperscript{137} especially to His worshippers. Sometimes, though not always, they lament their own unfaithfulness or their own slothfulness in failing to seek His presence zealously enough as the cause of this sense of loss. \textsuperscript{138}

By contrast to the unwelcome side of God's apparent self-concealment, there is also the contrastingly glorious and intriguing mystery of the darkness which seems to conceal Him in part, but which is felt to be perfectly consistent with His self-revelation and with a strong sense of His presence. In Deut. 5:24, the people are satisfied that

"The Lord our God has shown us His glory and His majesty",

even though vv 22 & 23 show that He has spoken to them from

"the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness". \textsuperscript{139}

Ezek. 1:27 emphasizes the fiery aspect of his vision of the Lord. In one sense

\footnote{Cf. Ps. 44:24; Job 13:24, etc.}

\footnote{E.g., Ps. 104:29a.}

\footnote{Song of Songs 5:2-8 could perhaps be a lyrical example of this kind of lament, if this book is indeed an allegory about the course of true love between God and His Covenant People not always running smoothly. The allegorical theory has quite a long history. It is noteworthy that Rabbi Akiba sees this book as not merely holy, but "most holy", as if to say it is approaching very close to the most central issue of spirituality. If this is so, 5:2-8 would seem to confirm the idea that this central issue is indeed God's intimate presence with the believer, as he communes with them directly. For a discussion of Song of Songs, see Yadayim III.5.}

\footnote{See also Ibid. 4:11, Ex. 19:18 & 20:21, and Ps. 97:2 & 3, for this motif of fire combined with cloud and darkness in God's appearances.}
this is an instrument of concealment, because it is too dazzling to look at, as in \textit{Ps. 104:2a}, where God

"wraps Himself in light as with a garment";

but in another sense, it is an instrument of revelation, because of its arresting brightness, not unlike the burning bush in \textit{Ex. 3} attracting Moses closer to investigate.

There is a similar ambivalence about the clouds and darkness, which Solomon recognizes in \textit{I Ki. 8:12} \textsuperscript{140} as a hallmark of theophanies. In \textit{Ex. 40:34 & 35}, the cloud is obviously a symbol not of God's absence, nor even primarily of His self-concealment, but rather of His presence. In \textit{Ps. 18:11}, however, darkness and rain-clouds are God's covering.

Therefore, although Terrien is right to see Israel's faith as primarily the determination to

"live in the presence of the holy God",

it is nonetheless normal in the context of this faith to regard an element of mystery and self-concealment as part of the awesome nature of the very God in whose presence the people sought to live: indeed, to regard it even as part of the actual manifestation of His presence itself. The fact that Moses is allowed to see God's back only, not His face, \textsuperscript{141} does not in any way lessen the reader's impression of how lofty Moses' level of revelation is. If anything, it actually heightens our appreciation of Moses' privileged intimacy with God, by enhancing our awareness of God's mystery.

\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Cf. II Chron. 6:1.}

\textsuperscript{141}\textit{Ex. 33:18-23.}
Evidently, then, Qoheleth’s reference to God putting ignorance in men’s hearts, and his recognition of God’s enigmatic aspect, are in no way at odds with the Israelite tradition of seeking direct revelation of God. Certainly this recognition of God’s mysterious quality on Qoheleth’s part is no evidence that he himself is not seeking or even experiencing such revelation.

Qoheleth’s preference for the worshipper keeping silence before God is also in line with traditional pietistic awe of Him. This silence does not indicate any lack of intimacy with God, but rather the opposite. It is a sign of genuine experience of His true presence, since this is the only genuine source of the kind of personal awareness of His awesomeness which the pietists (e.g., the prophets) express. The exhortation of Is. 41:1a,

"Be silent (חָל֯ מִצָּנָה) before me, you islands!",
is a necessary, reverent preliminary to the people being allowed to speak, to meet with God at the place of judgment and present their case, as the rest of this verse shows.

142 If this is what "תלע" in 3:11 means. See below, Chapter 6, Section iii; cf. Chapter 2, Section ii, fn. 33.

143 Qoh. 3:11b; cf. Is. 45:7 & 15 above.

144 See 5:2, 3 & 7. See also below, this Chapter, Section ix.

145 Sometimes the reciprocal listening of God and Man is described as proceeding in the reverse order, as Auffret believes he sees in the consecutive Psalms 80 and 81:

"Ils apparaissent comme largement complémentaires: aux appels pressants, adressés à Dieu dans le premier, répondent, dans le second, les non moins pressantes invitations à l’écoute et à la docilité, adressées par Dieu à son peuple."

See Auffret, Pierre. "'Écoute, Mon Peuple': Etude Structurelle du Psaume 81", Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament, VII, 2 (1993), P.284. However, the fact that, even in Ps. 81 alone, God hears the people’s cry (v 7) before He calls upon the people to hear Him (vv 8, 11 & 13 ff.) only leads to a stronger emphasis on their need to listen. For we

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Similarly, Zech. 2:13’s

"Be still (מְסַיֵּל) before the Lord all Mankind",

like Hab. 2:20’s

"But the Lord is in His holy temple;
Let all the earth be silent (מְסַיֵּל) before Him",

reflects not the remoteness of God, in the sense of His absence, but rather a strong awareness of the reality and awesome immanence of the divine numen. These exhortations to silence also imply, in addition to a reverent warning against presumption, a high level of faith in God’s outwardness, His willingness and ability to impart something to the worshipper. For silence implies willingness to listen; and no-one listens unless they believe there is something to listen to. As mentioned above, that is also the message of Qoh. 5:1’s

"Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools”;

obedience and receptivity, not arrogant assertion, form the only acceptable basis of Man’s liberty to approach God.

In this emphasis on receptivity, Qoheleth’s piety toward God dovetails with his pragmatic approach to the limitations of Man and to the inscrutability of shifting circumstances, producing a form of wisdom consisting of unlimited reactive alertness. This Wisdom is the flexibility not only to achieve a higher success-rate in

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are left with Man’s paramount obligation to listen to God and be receptive to Him as the final point. It is because this is the point on which all hope of real interaction between God and His people depends that we are left still pondering over it till the end of the latter of these two consecutive psalms; see Ps. 81:13-16.

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146 This Chapter, Section v.

147 2:24 and 3:22; 7:14, etc.
avoiding failures, defeats and frustrations than might appear possible, 148 but even to accept them when they occur, by consciously grasping and pondering 149 that they directly contribute to the unpredictability which is necessary to our life-pattern 150 if God is to receive the reverence due to Him. 151

This type of wisdom operates largely through perceiving, in a particular life-situation, the ‘ΠΨ’, 152 and then matching one’s action to it in response to this perception. 153 It also operates, however, through contemplative humility, the continual perception, irrespective of any particular situation, of one’s proper place before God. This proper place is that of openness to receiving from God, as opposed to that of habitual assertion of one’s narrow, merely human viewpoint, whether to Him or about Him.

These two spheres in which wisdom operates intersect in the recognition that there is a "time to keep silence" 154 as well as a "time to speak". 155 In a particular life-situation, the "time to keep silence" may be, e.g., a time when it simply happens

149:7:14.
150:8:17.
151:3:14.
152 I.e., the ‘correct / opportune point in time’, LXX 'κατάρχη'; see, e.g., 3:1-8 & 17, 8:5 & 6, 9:11 & 12.
153 See below, Chapter 9, especially Section v.
154 Root "ΠΨΠ".
155:3:7b.
to be dangerous to speak. Yet having the wisdom and humility to see that it is the "time to keep silence", even in this purely pragmatic sense, can entail considerable reactive flexibility, as Prov. 22:3 and 27:12 already point out:

"The prudent see danger and take refuge, But the simple keep going and suffer for it."  

Awareness of the "time to be silent" before God, however, requires a consistently receptive spiritual sensitivity to Man's humble standing before God:

"God is in heaven, and you are on earth; So let your words be few."  

In Qoheleth's view, it is this responsive, reactive alertness, in one's dealings both with God and with Man, which constitutes wisdom.

It may well be, therefore, that Qoheleth's reason for projecting the sense of God's 'remoteness' so often remarked upon in his work is not so much any feeling on his part of being remote or distant from God, but rather the reverse: an unusually sharp awareness of God's presence, and therefore also of His nature, which all Biblical tradition consistently represents as uniquely awesome. This would explain his reiterated insistence on the Deuteronomic exhortation specifically to "Fear God".  

The fear of a divinity is intimately related to specific experiences of that  

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156 Such as that in Amos 5:13.  
157 Cf. Ibid. 14:16.  
158 Qoh. 5:2b.  
159 Qoh. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12 and 12:13. For Qoheleth's links with the Deuteronomistic school of thought, see below, Chapter 6, especially Sections i and iii.  
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divinity’s numen, and to recollections of such experiences, whether in the personal memory of an individual or in the group memory and/or ancestral memory of a people. As regards God in the Bible, this fear is characteristically expressed in practical terms by the literal keeping of God’s commandments, which is exactly what Qoheleth enjoins on us as almost his parting shot in 12:13. Obedience to God’s commandments is indissolubly linked with the practice and awareness of His presence, hence the spectacular theophany at the giving of the Ten Commandments, etc.  

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161 For the idea of *practising* God’s presence, and of *practising* the fear of God, see comments on *Ps.* 111:10, below, this Chapter, end of Section viii.

162 See also below, this Chapter, Section ix.
The idea of

"The fear of the Lord (as) the beginning of wisdom,
And knowledge of the Holy One (as) understanding"

is familiar from Prov. 9:10. Here fear of God is a necessary attitude in order to attain wisdom as a quality of character for guiding one's actions. As we have seen above, "fear of God" (i.e., obedience to God's commands) is by no means as prosaic a concept as it might sound. For the Bible's account of Israel's salvation history and religious experience overall depicts this "fear of God" as closely associated with a mystical sense of God's awesome presence.

Wisdom, however, in the sense of the task of the wisdom-teacher, seems at first sight to be very prosaic. Qoheleth and his canonical wisdom-predecessors say nothing of miraculous visions like those of Zechariah and Jeremiah, nor of fasting before God like Moses or Nehemiah, nor of angelic visitations like those of Daniel, nor of the 'word of the Lord' coming to them, in the miraculous sense that it was said to come to the prophets, both oral and literary. As described in Qoh. 12:9b & 10, compiling a wisdom-book sounds quite pedestrian and worldly:

"He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true."

However, this mundane first impression may be misleading. As Rex Warner points out,

163 This Chapter, Section vii.
"The deliberate and careful choice of words and the order of words seems to have been originally connected with magic or religion";\textsuperscript{164} the least one can say is that there is nothing intrinsically incompatible between supernatural experience and the diligent editorial efforts of scribes. A relatively late (perhaps second century) but appropriately laborious example of this is Nechautis' careful re-editing in Greek of the ancient Egyptian book of Imhotep.\textsuperscript{165} Nechautis claims that he has done this re-editing in grateful response to a direct encounter with Imhotep himself, in which the god healed him of a violent fever and fierce pain in his side.

The experiences of Eliphaz in \textit{Job} 4:12-21 shed some light on the experiential aspect of wisdom. His 'wisdom' as such, or at least its application to Job, is false; and his experiences sound occult rather than holy.\textsuperscript{166} Yet even so, his description of receiving the teaching he repeats in \textit{Ibid.} 4:17 ff. from a spirit whose manifestation he found very frightening\textsuperscript{167} shows that wisdom also, and not just prophecy, can be associated with the supernatural, and with the startlingly supernatural at that. For he gives his account of how he received his wisdom-teaching as if its supernatural source constitutes his credentials as a genuine sage. This suggests that a real sage is not expected to derive his wisdom from purely human sources in a down-to-earth way, however diligently and carefully he compiles it. Rather, he is perhaps expected to be

\textsuperscript{164}The Cult of Power, P.93.

\textsuperscript{165}Described in \textit{Praise of Imouthes-Asclepius}, Ll.32-202; see Grenfell, B.P. and A.S. Hunt, \textit{The Oxyrhynchus Papyri}, Part XI (1915), Pp.226-9 and P.230-1, for the story of how and why the scribe undertook this work.

\textsuperscript{166}See below, this Chapter, Section ix.

\textsuperscript{167}\textit{Ibid.} 4:14-16.
supernaturally inspired.

Qoheleth himself betrays the same combination of concerns that has been known to lead others to turn to mystical experience. For he emphasizes strongly the inadequacy of human understanding in the quest to attain wisdom;\footnote{E.g., 8:17.} but at the same time, he greatly desires wisdom, and has long searched for it. It would, therefore, be no great surprise if he were galvanized by this into the habit of seeking the direct supernatural presence of God as his source of illumination and wisdom. For this is the obvious logical next step for someone who

\begin{enumerate}
\item a) is convinced of the inadequacy of human efforts (including his own) to attain wisdom;\footnote{7:24 & 28a.} but who also
\item b) has a strong desire for wisdom nonetheless.
\end{enumerate}

Qoheleth's desire for wisdom (despite his insistence on its limitations) is beyond doubt from the length and persistence of his previous search for it. He doggedly tested everything by wisdom, saying

"I am determined to be wise",\footnote{7:23; cf. 1:17 & 18.}

and was continually "searching but not finding".\footnote{7:28a.} There is an unmistakable note of personal warmth in 8:1's comment on how wisdom affects a man's appearance,
and in his confession in 9:13 of how the poor wise man's wisdom "greatly impressed" him, however unimpressed and ungrateful those who directly benefited from it may have been. Yet despite this genuine zeal for wisdom, the wisdom that he has consists, on a human level, mainly of his awareness of his own and others' lack of real, lastingly effectual knowledge; and he knows that many err by thinking that they have knowledge when they have not:

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, Man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it." 173

This blend of attitudes to wisdom constitutes a very likely recipe for producing a mystic. One notable outcome of the same blend would be Socrates, as he is depicted in Plato's writings. Socrates reaches a viewpoint not unlike Qoheleth's from the fruitless disputes he describes in Apology 21C-E. He has sought interviews with people renowned for their wisdom, in order to disprove the Delphic oracle that he is the wisest of men. However, he emerges from each disputation, contrary to his previous expectations, thinking,

"Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any kind of knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent; that I do not think I know what I do not know." 174

In 23A, he says that

"Real wisdom is the property of the god (lit: 'it is the god who is wise'), and

172 See also below, Chapter 10, Section vii.

173 8:17.

174 Ibid. 21D.
this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value.".

Then in 23B, he interprets the oracle not as a tribute to his wisdom as an individual, but rather as a generalization, that

"The wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless.".

The picture that ultimately emerges from the *Apology*, when all the arguments are concluded, is that Socrates' willingness to risk death by continuing his teaching is due to his belief that this is his divinely appointed duty. The supernatural element is very clear in 31D and 33C. In 31D he relates,

"I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience (θείαν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον), which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood - a sort of voice which comes to me; and when it comes, it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on."

Similarly in 33C, he describes his examination of those who

"think they are wise when they are not"

as a duty he has accepted

"in obedience to the god's commands, given in oracles and dreams, and in every way that any other divine dispensation has ever impressed a duty upon Man."

In *Euthyphro* 3B-C, Euthyphro interprets Meletus' indictment of Socrates as a reaction against the latter's claim to this 'divine monitor' (τὸ δαιμόνιον). He says that it is this claim on which the charge of 'making innovations in religion' is chiefly based, pointing out that Meletus is here exploiting the public's heavy prejudice against all those who claim supernatural experience. Euthyphro himself also claims such experience, saying that he has even delivered prophecies before the Assembly which

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then came to pass; yet the members still think he must be mad to be claiming inspiration at all. As Tarrant points out, these experiences of Euthyphro’s, and the attitude displayed to soothsayers in Attic comedy, are a clear forewarning of what Socrates can expect from his judges. His reference to the ‘divine monitor’ in the course of his trial is certain to worsen his standing with them considerably.

Since thus stating his belief in his divinely appointed mission is bound to count heavily against Socrates, and in a trial potentially for his life at that, it is undoubtedly highly significant that he decides to state it nonetheless. The most obvious explanation of this decision is that he must consider his mission, and therefore also, by implication, the supernatural experience which convinced him of its reality, to be more important than his own survival.

There are very well-known precedents, then, for those who, like Qoheleth, combine earnest desire for wisdom with realization of its inaccessibility by human means, to look beyond the human in their search for it. Once the seeker after wisdom grasps the narrowness and unreliability of human perceptions, this insight offers strong incentive to seek direct experience of the external reality of God. This quest for the numinous is a conscious attempt to avoid the inevitable misconceptions into which human perspectives and perceptions would otherwise lead them. So Is. 55:6, 8 & 9 exhort the believer:

\[175\text{In his notes to Hugh Tredennick’s }\text{The Last Days of Socrates (London, rev. edn. 1993), P.55 and P.205, Note 61.}\]

\[176\text{E.g., Aristophanes’ }\text{The Birds.}\]
"Seek the Lord while He may be found; 
Call on Him while He is near; - 

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, 
Neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. 
As the heavens are higher than the earth, 
So are My ways higher than your ways 
And My thoughts than your thoughts.".

If Qoheleth’s writing is itself the product of this kind of experience, this might help to explain its notoriously enigmatic, allusive structure and style. A work of this type, with its music-like or race-like progression pattern, appears to be the fruit of contemplation rather than a form of assertion. Moreover, by emphasizing the dangers of cerebral ‘certainty’ and of verbal assertiveness, of "many words" and of "many books", it also invites contemplation rather than assertion.

To the reader of Qoheleth, contemplation seems the only appropriate response.

\(^{177}\)See, e.g., Wright, A.G., "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth", Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 30 (1968), Pp.313-34, for one of many attempts to explain this book’s structure (though without reference to supernatural experience). See also below, Chapter 9, Section vii, for my own views on the structure.


\(^{179}\)See below, Chapter 9, Sections ii, iii and vii.

\(^{180}\)And also, in Ceresko’s view, with its extensive use of antanaclasis. He regards cumulative associations of the various different meanings of the same word as Qoheleth’s main stylistic tool in conveying his message. See Ceresko, Anthony R., "The Function of Antanaclasis (\(\text{Ko\text{\textalpha}}\) ‘to find’ /\(\text{K\text{\textalpha}}\) ‘to reach, overtake, grasp’) in Hebrew Poetry, Especially in the Book of Qoheleth", Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 44 (1982), Pp.551-569. See also below, p. 289, fn. 78.

\(^{181}\)5:3b, 10:14.

\(^{182}\)12:12b.
to the book. For it uses words only to hint at what is beyond words, not to express
a progression of unambiguous proposals. The different cycles of association-clusters
built up in the course of the book are not individually resolved, one by one, into clear
inferences from the issues raised within them. Rather, they are used as mutual
channels leading into each other, or as mirrors to reflect each other, like the mirror of
the eighth king in the ‘show’ of kings descended from Banquo,

"Which shows (us) many more". 183

The witches in this scene cry

"Show! Show! Show!"

and

"Show his eyes and grieve his heart!" 184

For they are maliciously looking forward to the painful impact of their supernaturally
revealed procession of unwelcome realities to come. Qoheleth, however, with the aim
of warning, and therefore of potential healing, not of harming, 185 shows us a picture
to meditate upon of the human condition.

The book as a connected whole has the air of a spectacle for us to contemplate;
but it is a procession of associations rather than an actual visual picture. In this sense,
it is unlike the literal ‘visions’ of Jeremiah 186 or of Zechariah, 187 which are

183 Macbeth, Act IV, Scene 1, L1.112-20.

184 Ibid., L1. 107-10.


186 Jer. 1:11-15.

187 Zech. 1:8ff.; 2:1 & 2; 3:1 ff.; 4:2 ff.; 5:1, 2 & 6-9; and 6:1 ff.
pointedly visual, as distinct from the non-visual 'Word of the Lord', which also comes to prophets. ¹⁸⁸

*Qoheleth* is *not* like a vision in that, as Good says of a piece of music, it must be

"Heard through before any sense of its whole is possible. Its relations are relations in time, necessarily non-simultaneous and successive, while those in a (visual image) are best when comprehended simultaneously." ¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, this book *is* like a vision in that it is artfully constructed so as to invite contemplation; and through this contemplation the reader / hearer is meant to ingest and absorb the association-patterns the work presents. Despite the need for its step-by-step unfolding in time, ¹⁹⁰ which Good rightly observes, *Qoheleth* still demands to be meditated upon as an ordered whole. For it can not be rationally dissected step-by-step, as if it were a series of arguments, with each step in the series inferential and self-contained. The holistic meaning of this book can only be intuited through internalizing the full sweep of its overall association-scape.

In order to assess the probabilities ¹⁹¹ of *Qoheleth* being the product of religious experience in the numinous sense, the following points should be considered:-

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¹⁸⁸ E.g., to Zechariah; Ibid. 6:9; 7:1; 8:1, etc.

¹⁸⁹ Good, op. cit., P.59.

¹⁹⁰ See also below, Chapter 9, Section vii.

¹⁹¹ It is not possible to go beyond mere probabilities, because there is no explicit reference in the book to supernatural experiences; whereas in prophetic books, many such references are found.
a) the author’s particular insistence on the fear of God, i.e., on awe and reverence before Him; 192

b) his conviction that Man must recognize he is "like the animals"; 193

and

c) his undoubted love and desire for wisdom, despite his insight into the narrowness and unreliability of human vision and knowledge.

These three qualities, when found in close association with each other, tend to be organically linked with the conscious practice of the numinous presence of God, as reflected in the following passage:

"Man is properly awed 194 in the presence of that which is mysterious or majestic, or that which is greater than he. - With an intuition of the Holy (that is, of God Himself, or of unfallen angelic beings) the numinous awe one feels is profound indeed. In this Presence, Man's creatureliness is exquisitely realized and acknowledged. He knows the fear of God and finds, as the Scriptures promise, the reward of a wisdom that does not originate in himself. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who practise it. (Ps. 111:10). 195 To 'practise' this fear is, of course, to practise the


193:18-22; see also above, Chapter 2, Section vi, P.95 and this Chapter, Sections ii and iii.

194Note also John Eaton's comment on the awe of the sage of Prov. 30:18 ff., in The Contemplative Face of Old Testament Wisdom (London, 1989), Pp.41-2:

"Nothing in God's creation is too slight to deserve profound attention. The sage considers till he is overcome with wonder. - Wonder fills him too as he observes and enters the life of small and flimsy but exceedingly wise creatures: the ant, the badger, the locust, the lizard (30:24-28).

"It is all akin to the wonder that opens the heart to the immediacy of God's presence in the great speeches of the Lord to Job (Job 38-41).".

195The original ("חַיְּרוֹע") appears to mean "practise / do them", not "practise it" as in Mrs. Payne's version. This is surprising, however, because there is no obvious plural antecedent to the pronominal object suffix which looks as if it means "them". Mrs. Payne seems to be taking the antecedent to the pronominal object suffix of "practise / do" as the singular noun "fear", hence her rendition "all those who practise it (not them)". This interpretation may perhaps be correct (see below, paras. 3-6).
Presence - to call to mind often the objective Presence of the Unseen Other - whether or not there is an active intuition of Him. The Divine Object draws awe and worship from the subject. Man's creatureliness is affirmed."

If it is not correct, however, "them" presumably refers to "God's precepts" (so N.I.V.), since they constitute the only plausible plural antecedent for the suffix of "ןוֹנֶה". Yet this N.I.V. translation seems very forced. Admittedly, it is tempting to look for a plural antecedent to the pronominal suffix of "ןוֹנֶה" instead of a singular one, because the final "וֹנ" of "ןוֹנֶה" makes its suffix look plural. But "ןוֹנֶה" is here in v 10; and the last reference to God's precepts was back in v 7. Moreover, other nouns such as "redemption" and "covenant" appear in the intervening verses, breaking any clear link of association between the plural noun in v 7 and the apparently plural object suffix in v 10. These intervening nouns would not be the antecedent to a genuinely plural object suffix either, since they too, like "fear", are singular nouns.

In favour of Mrs. Payne's understanding of the verse is the fact that "fear" seems by its position to be the most likely antecedent. Not only is it in the same verse as the pronominal suffix, but it is also the noun most emphasized by the sense of the verse, and therefore one expects it to be referred to again so that some further statement can be made about it. If this emphasis were not followed up by such a further statement, the reader would actually be puzzled as to why his attention had been thus drawn to this "fear of the Lord" in the first place. Yet although "fear" seems for this reason the most obvious noun to take as the antecedent of the suffix, I have not seen as yet any other example of the fear of God as the direct object of the verb "וֹנ". And the fact remains that "fear" is singular and the suffix looks plural.

However, it has to be borne in mind that "וֹנ" is an unusually versatile verb, often used of observing religious obligations such as festivals (see, e.g., Num. 9:4 of Passover; Deut. 5:15 of Sabbath; Ibid. 16:10 of the Feast of Weeks, etc.). This verb does sometimes take the commandments, laws or precepts of God as its object (see, e.g., Deut. 16:12, "וֹנ"; Ibid. 30:8, "יְהוָה עַם תְּפֻלָה; Neh. 9:34, "יְהוָה עַם תְּפֻלָה", etc.). Since the commandments of God are so closely linked with "fear of God in the familiar Deuteronomic exhortation to "Fear God and keep his commandments"

(e.g., Deut. 5:29; 6:2 & 24; 8:6; 13:4; 17:19; 28:58 and 31:12; see also below, Chapter 6, Section i, incl. fn. 6.), it would not be surprising if "וֹנ" sometimes took the fear of God as its object (at least in speech, even if this is not attested in the Bible other than in Ps. 111:10), by analogy with the way it often takes the commandments of God as its object. If so, "וֹנ" with the fear of God as its object would presumably mean to "practise / observe the fear of God" as a religious obligation, in the same sense as one observes God's Law, observes Sabbath or observes festivals.

If, however, Ps. 111:10 really does mean

"A good understanding have all those who practise (the fear of the Lord)",

then the final "ו" of "וֹנ" requires explanation. Some might regard it as a scribal error, since there seems to be no plausible candidate for a plural object of "וֹנ" in this verse. However, another possible way of explaining a final "ו" which seems hard to justify in its context is to interpret it as a so-called "enclitic" "ו". In this case, such an interpretation would have the advantage that the text would not have to be emended from "וֹנ" to "וֹנ" in order for the object-suffix to be construed as singular. Instead, "וֹנ" could simply be taken as "וֹנ" + enclitic "ו".

Enclitic "ו" may perhaps be an emphatic "ו", as the Ugaritic "ma" is taken to be. For a discussion of the possible merits and demerits of interpreting as enclitics otherwise inexplicable final "ו"'s like that of Ps. 111:10, see James Barr's Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament (London, 1983 edn.), pp.31-3; see especially p.32, where the possibility is discussed of taking a comparably puzzling final "ו" in Ps. 29:6 as an enclitic "ו".

Payne, Leanne, The Healing Presence (British edn., 1990), P.140 (emphasis mine).
There is, however, a certain irony in this close association of emphasizing reverence, creatureliness and wisdom with seeking God’s objective presence. The very fact that cultivation of the fear of God, affirmation of Man’s mere creatureliness, and the quest for the objective presence of God were all destined to become primary wisdom-issues is itself somewhat ironical. For the *Genesis* Fall Account challengingly depicts Man’s desire to be ‘wise’ \(^{197}\) as the cause of his abandoning the fear of God by disobedience, and of his rejecting his rôle as creature by aiming to be as a god. This is how he comes to lose the sense of God’s presence, first by hiding from Him voluntarily, \(^{198}\) and then by formal banishment from Eden. \(^{199}\) The precept of *Ps.* 111:10 and *Prov.* 9:10,

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom",

may, then, be a consciously radical statement of an alternative wisdom, to counteract the already negative association of established ‘wisdom’ with Man’s egocentric bid to be a diminutive god.

The Bible depicts this familiar negative wisdom (which is a merely human quality, and the focus of Man’s pride and his attempts to oppose God) as shunning God’s presence, not seeking it. The new pietist wisdom, therefore, in positing God as its source, seeks to offset any apparent contradiction between piety and wisdom by claiming for wisdom an intimate partnership with God in Creation. \(^{200}\) Since

\(^{197}\) *Gen.* 3:5 & 6.

\(^{198}\) Ibid. v 8.

\(^{199}\) Ibid. vv 22-4.

\(^{200}\) *Prov.* 8:22-31.
Creation pre-dates the Fall, and the Fall is the first departure-point in human history from which Biblical tradition traces the close alliance between pursuit of wisdom and opposition to God. \(^{201}\) 

*Prov.* 8:22-31 is a revolutionary step toward freeing wisdom as a concept from its association with Man only as seeking independence from God, and not in partnership with Him.

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\(^{201}\) *Gen.* 3:6.
The climactic place given to the theophany in Job shows a further and much later development from the relatively God-friendly Wisdom of Proverbs. Proverbs, although a very Man-centred book in its subject-matter, already reflects the possibility of God and wisdom as partners. Job, however, preaches not just God-friendly wisdom, but God-centred wisdom, Terrien’s "dénuement du moi". Job is perhaps the first example of the Wisdom genre directly positing the objective presence of or encounter with God as the only force capable of silencing human wisdom. This human wisdom is now perceived as the "much-speaking" that characterizes the fool. Such "words without knowledge", which is all the human wisdom that asserts itself independently of God’s presence really amounts to, is said to "(darken) counsel".

As wisdom-writing, Job reflects the fact that the polarity between the two wisdoms is now complete: there are two distinct and opposite wisdoms, the anthropocentric anti-wisdom and the theocentric wisdom, at war with each other. As Terrien perceives and Alter implies, the human quality most under attack in Job is egocentricity. When God appears, Job’s "words without knowledge" cease; he says

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203 E.g., Qoh. 5:3, 6:11, 10:14, etc.; cf. Job’s anguished sarcasm in 13:5, which is far more profound and central to the issue of the book than he himself realizes.

204 Job 38:2.

205 See above, this Chapter, Section iii.

206 Ibid. 40:4 & 5.
that he no longer has \textit{anything} to say. Instead of speaking, he now listens. Only God’s personal appearance could have brought him to this state; otherwise, he and his ‘friends’ would have wrangled on, at loggerheads with each other forever, each unassailable in their conviction of being right, and each inexhaustible in their eloquence. Only the objective and recognized presence of God can return Man to his proper status as a reacting and responsive creature rather than a groundlessly but endlessly assertive one.

Even when God does appear, however, there is a noticeable difference between Job’s own level of response and that of his companions. Job, the man who has particularly pinned his hopes on God appearing in person, is also the one who reacts wisely to the theophany, by

"(Speaking) of (God) what is right"

in 40:3-5 and 42:2-6. His friends, however, as God notices in 42:7, do not respond this way. The implication here is that however wrong Job may have been to have thought he would be able to justify himself before God at His eventual appearance, nevertheless is \textit{not} wrong to have made the literal arrival of God’s presence the focus of his hopes. Job’s raw spirituality in desiring, however angrily, God’s personal appearance, is represented as being far wiser than the opinionated and humanly self-contained ethical eloquence of his friends.

\footnote{Now adopting himself the very policy he has previously recommended to his ‘friends’, at Ibid. 13:5.}

\footnote{Ibid. 42:3 & 4.}

\footnote{As in 19:25-7.}

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However superficially and verbally defensive of God their speeches may have been in the safely limited context of that self-containment, and however impious and hostile Job's attack on God may have sounded, it is ardent desire for God's presence like Job's that is the real key both to wisdom and to piety. It is Job to whom God openly shows his favour, at the end of his life as at the beginning. God's preference for Job's attitude over that of his companions in vv 7-9 is unmistakably pointed, and is intended to commend to us Job's unusual zeal in seeing the manifestation of God's presence as the answer to his dire problems. It also indicates God's approval of Job's realism and honesty about his creaturely status, which he demonstrates by humbling himself before God when God eventually comes. In this respect, the Epilogue's appearance of naïveté is misleading, since it is completely consistent with, and an effective reinforcement of, the central standpoint of the book overall.

The contents of *Qoh.* 5:1-7 appear to be affirming this standpoint of *Job,* by reflecting that alert attentiveness to God and devout contemplation of Him constitute the only source of wisdom; whereas over-confident assertion of one's own human viewpoint leads only to confusion and distortion of the facts: the "words without knowledge" of Job himself and those of his accusing 'comforters'.

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210 E.g., 19:6 & 7.

211 42:7 ff.

212 Ibid. v 12.

213 See above, this Chapter, Section iii, ft. 44.

214 *Job* 38:2 and 42:3.
Qoheleth writes in 5:1 of coming into the presence of God and listening, and he contrasts it vehemently with egocentric loquacity in vv 2 & 3. Then in v 6b, even though the immediate context concerns keeping vows, he seems to be recalling Job’s opinionated friends when he says,

"Why should God be angry at what you say? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.".  

This is apparently echoing Job 42:7,

"I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has."

Certainly the friends have uttered "many words"; in fact, they have said "many words without knowledge", like Job. Unlike Job, however, as noted above, they have not subsequently renounced their egocentricity by despising themselves and repenting in dust and ashes, as Job has in 42:6 when God appears.

Speech is traditionally regarded as a major focus of Man’s rebellion against God; hence, e.g., the curse of Babel in Gen. 11:1-9. This seems to be because the tongue is the focus of the human ego, as in, e.g., Ps. 12:4’s boastful

"We will triumph with our tongues; We own our lips - who is our master?"

Such is the boasters’ pride in their tongues, it leads them to believe that even God is not their master. This is because there is no God on their narrow horizon; all they can see or hear is themselves articulating their own ambitions. In Qoh. 5:2, which begins and ends with a warning against too much talk, heavily reinforced by vv 3b, 6a & 7,

215 Ibid. 42:7.
216 5:6b & 7.

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we are reminded in between the two warnings that

"God is in heaven and you are on earth". 217

This reminder is not primarily, however, to emphasize God's absence or distance, as is sometimes thought, but rather to remind us of the Job-scenario.

Here, God is at first conspicuous by His absence, and Job longs for Him to come; 218 but this initial absence only makes His eventual appearance all the more startling. It seems likely that Qoh. 5:6b's

"Why should God be angry at what you say?"

is deliberately reminiscent of Job 42:7, even though "what you say" in Qoh. 5:6b also refers back to the unfulfilled vow. For what Eliphaz and his friends have said and what they have failed to say are so exactly what God is angry about in Job 42:7. Like Job, the friends should be humbled once they actually see God and realize how small they and their opinions really are. They should be awestruck at God's greatness and repent of their false and presumptuous wisdom; but they fail to do so. They betray no sign of awe or even of recognition at God's presence; they do not respond to Him at all. Only Job interacts with God when He appears. His friends are only forgiven because Job prays for them. They do not take the initiative of seeking forgiveness for themselves by expressing repentance as Job did. For unlike Job, - the true pietist, whose hopes are pinned on God Himself and on His literal presence, - the friends perceive no sin in themselves to repent of; they are

217 A point which would not have found much favour with the Babel-builders of Gen. 11, since they intended their tower to reach "to the heavens" (Ibid. v 4) anyway.

218 E.g., in 19:27.
"Fools, who do not know that they are doing wrong".

In Qoh. 5:2, then, it is as though God's distance away ("in heaven") is not laying the stress on His absence at all, but is only mentioning His absence in anticipation of His coming presence before long. Qoheleth's device for hinting at this imminent appearance of God is his allusion to the book of Job, with its climactic theophany. Qoheleth's point here is a moral one. God's apparent distance away ("in heaven") gives those "on earth" an exaggerated sense of their own wisdom and greatness. If because of this, like Job and his friends, one is very eloquent and opinionated in one's judgments on matters beyond one's understanding before God's appearance, one may well find that when He eventually does appear, He will be angry at what one has said. 219

219 The idea that Qoheleth contains allusions to Job may, of course, be contested. The similarity between Job 1:21a and Qoh. 5:14, for example (5:15 in English translations), has provoked speculation as to whether the Qoheleth-passage is echoing Job, or whether both passages reflect an independent proverb known to the authors of both books. Gordis, e.g., op. cit. P.45, inclines to the latter view.

However, it may well be significant that this echo of Job 1:21a (as discussed above, this Chapter, Section iii, fn. 48) occurs in the same chapter of Qoheleth as the apparent allusions to Job discussed here in Chapter 5, Section ix. This tilts the balance of probabilities somewhat away from Gordis's opinion toward the probability of direct intertextuality between Job and Qoheleth. Compare how several points similar to ideas in Simonides' Eulogy on Scopas occur all in the same chapter (7) of Qoheleth; see below, Chapter 8, Section ii. Similarly, most of the apparent references to the Wisdom of Amenemope in Proverbs are grouped closely together in the same section, between Prov. 22:17 and 23:10-11. E.g., the "thirty chapters" of Prov. 22:20 (cf. Amen. XXX.1); the skilled man worthy to serve at court in Prov. 22:29 (cf. Amen. XXX.10); and the riches that sprout wings and fly off to the sky in Prov. 23:4-5 (cf. Amen. VII.1, 15).

It seems, then, to be not unusual for wisdom-writers who, like Qoheleth, quote or allude to other people's proverbs in their own work, to concentrate several sayings or ideas of the same sage into the same passage of their own work. In view of this practice, therefore, when in doubt as to whether one really has detected in Qoheleth an echo of some other particular author, it is worth looking to see if there are any other echoes of that same author nearby in the same passage of Qoheleth. If there are, then one's initial identification of that author's work in the Qoheleth passage seems somewhat likelier to be correct than if there are not.

Also, the fact that Qoheleth is said to have made collections of proverbs (Qoh. 12:9 & 10) makes it seem likely that it is he who is echoing someone else's work; and allusion works best with a book that is well known and well-liked, which makes Job a fairly likely choice. For the probability of Job being the
To underline that Qoheleth is evoking here the idea of a theophany or literal manifestation of God’s presence, it should be added that there are further indications of allusion to Job in Qoh. 5:1-7. In 5:1’s reference to

"The sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they are doing wrong",

the intertextuality is double: i.e., not only with I Sam. 15:22, but also with Job 42:7-9. For the very reparation God demands from Job’s friends for having so angered Him is a sacrifice. 222

Moreover, the friends have already demonstrated that they are too complacent to

"Know - that they are doing wrong".

For Job’s apology to God 223 is so emphatic and uncompromising, and moreover later repeated and enlarged upon, 224 that the absence of any comparable remarks from the friends makes a deafening silence by contrast; they have not

"Spoken of (God) what is right, as (His) servant Job has". 225

Inevitably, therefore, the "sacrifice of fools" in Qoh. 5:1 recalls the sacrifice of Job’s friends in Job 42:8 & 9.

earlier work and Qoheleth the borrower, rather than vice versa, see also above, this Chapter, Section iii, ftnt. 48.

220 Apart from the words of Job’s friends having occasioned God’s anger.

221 See above, this Chapter, Section v, regarding Saul.

222 Ibid. v 8.

223 40:4 & 5.

224 42:2-6.

225 42:7.
Similarly, in 5:3, Qoheleth speaks of a dream that comes

"When there are many cares (מִבְּרֵךְ עַל כֵּן)".

This is not unlike the disquieting night-vision of Eliphaz in Job 4:12-21,

"بذلעייתך מַחְוֵיכֶךָ לְיִלּוֹת"

which is described in lurid supernatural detail, grating uneasily against the commandments of the Torah against contact with familiar spirits. Qoheleth compares the

"dream - when there are many cares"

with "many words", which are characteristic both of the fool (as he himself says in v 3b) and of Job's friends (as we know from the inordinate length of their speeches). Then, straight after v 6c's reference to God being angry at one's words, Qoheleth returns in v 7 to the negative association between "much dreaming" and "many words" (both of which he describes as 'བོད'). He recommends instead the fear of God.

It has to be said that Eliphaz, by contrast, sets great store by his vision, which contributes, among his other credentials as a wise man, to the confidence he expresses in Job 5:27. Also, Elihu 227 ratifies such night-visions as a genuine source of wisdom. He calls them 'dreams' in v 15, as do Job himself 228 and Zophar. 229

In view of this, the pointed attack in Qoh. 5:3 & 7 on dreams as something opposed

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226 See Lev. 19:31, Ibid. 20:6 & 27 and Deut. 18:11; cf. 1 Sam. 28:3 & 7-9; II Ki. 21:6 and 23:24; I Chron. 10:13; II Chron. 33:6; Is. 8:19 and 19:3. Saul's compromise in 1 Sam. 28:5-25 on these very same commandments is intrinsically bound up with losing his true identity and his grasp of reality, a disintegration of character which is the complete opposite of wisdom; see above, this Chapter, Section v.

227 Ibid. 33:15-18.

228 Job 7:14

229 Ibid. 20:8.
to the fear of God points again to Job’s friends, whose wisdom is empty because it is centred on Man and on his spectacular experiences, on his words and on his dreams, instead of centred on fearing God and keeping His commandments. This ‘wisdom’, therefore, is not unlike the empty, boasted pomp of the wicked in Ps. 73:19 & 20, which is also compared to a dream. God will despise it as mere fantasy, so swiftly will it be swept away at their sudden judgment.

There is, then, in Qoh. 5:1-7, a dense interweaving of motifs reminiscent of Job: the “sacrifice of fools”; “many words” and "not (knowing) that they are doing wrong” as the fool’s characteristics; God’s anger at one’s words; and the worthlessness of dreams, in parallel twice with the equal worthlessness of many words. This seems to confirm that the fools of 5:1 should be identified with Job’s friends, and hence also, by implication, with all misguided counsellors of like kind, who wrongly insist that they have certainty about the ways of God.

The fact that Qoheleth’s intertextuality with Job is so penetrating and organic in 5:1-7 adds to the probability that the author is here implying a pending theophany. However, instead of a personal appearance from God to ensure justice in his personal cause, as Job is hoping for, Qoheleth seems to be expecting a general

\[\text{230} \text{Or in rivalry with the fear of God in their claim to be the source or the hallmark of true wisdom.}\]

\[\text{231} \text{5:3 and 5:7.}\]

\[\text{232} \text{See Job 19:25-9; contrast 19:7, where he is grieved because he feels he is not yet getting justice.}\]

\[\text{233} \text{E.g., in 3:17 and 12:14; and perhaps also in 11:9.}\]
Judgment Day or Day of the Lord, as the prophets of Israel's past also expected. If so, the partiality for hanging fire that this allusive scene-setting reveals also sheds some much-needed light on the book's emphatic anticipation of coming judgment. Qoheleth does, after all, leave us with

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil", as his parting shot, which implies that the issue of judgment is in his eyes a prime issue.

The reference to judgment in 3:17 is no less revealing about the key importance of this issue to Qoheleth than the fact that he chooses to end his book with the abrasive reminder of it in 12:14. For 3:17 is about the exactly correct time for judgment. This verse is the climax of the most extended passage on the correct times in the entire book; and it is the recognition of and correct response to these times

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234 See below, Chapter 10, Section vi; cf. also Chapter 10, Section iv.

235 12:14.

236 3:1-17. However, this section also has a sub-climax at 3:8, since v 8 marks the end of the catalogue of times in pairs of opposites from 3:1-8. This main "times"-passage thus falls into two halves: 3:1-8 and 3:9-17.

3:1-8 gives a description of the pattern of "times", showing the form of their overall framework as semi-deterministic and arranged in opposites (see also below, Chapter 10, Section iv); and 3:9-17 outlines the ethical implications of this pattern of times, showing that God has put us all at the mercy of the unpredictable alternation of circumstances. All of us are subject to the fact that everything has its right time (v 1) and that everything is right in its time (v 11), but that, nevertheless, we still can not fathom out for ourselves what that appointed time will turn out to be for everything that is going to happen (v 11; see below, Chapter 6, especially Section iii). Therefore, no-one can afford to be over-ambitious (v 12) or irreverent (v 14); and the wicked are not, as they imagine, secure from punishment through their usurpation of the machinery of justice (v 16), because there is a time for their judgment too, exactly as there is a time for everything else (v 17); it's just that the wicked do not realize and acknowledge this (cf. above, Chapter 1, Section ii).

The fact that the entire passage 3:1-17 is leading up to this key issue of judgment is underlined by v 17's echo of the wording of v 1. 3:1 asserts that "there is a time for everything"; and 3:17 infers that, in
which form the backbone of the practical application of wisdom in Qoheleth. 237 Therefore, it makes sense to suppose that whatever subject forms the climax of this "times"-passage in particular 238 will be the writer’s priority issue: i.e., the main issue to which he wishes us to apply the wisdom he is here expounding.

Since, then, the perception and exploitation of the "times" is the most important practical wisdom issue in the book, and since 3:1-17 is the most explicit exposition of it, for Qoheleth to have made the time for judgment the climax of this passage surely suggests that the key time for judgment is the most crucially important of all the key times. As recognizing and responding to the key times in general is the most prominent practical issue in the book, so the certainty of the coming ultimate judgment is its most prominent ethical issue. It is therefore no surprise that the subject of 3:17, the crowning peak of the ‘times’ passage and the immediately related comments, is the ultimate judgment of the righteous and the wicked, the same climactic theme as that of the final verse of the book.

This same section of Chapter 3, conjoining exposition of the all-important times with expectation of the judgment, also emphasizes 239 our ignorance of the future.

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237 See also 8:5 & 6.

238 I.e., whatever subject forms the climax of 3:1-17.

239 In vv 11 & 14.

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This is also reflected in 9:11 & 12, where the limited vision of Man, resulting in his failure to recognize and act on the time, contributes to him becoming the victim of that time. Hence the time in question is said to be ‘evil’, and depicted by the melodramatic image of the unexpected, deadly net. The key importance of the times and of one’s response to them is part of the inherent structure of reality. One either learns to ride this beast, or is destroyed by it. That is why recognition of and appropriate reaction to the times is the most important practical issue in Qoheleth.

This repeated association of suddenness and unpredictability as the key characteristics of experience in general, coupled with the judgment of the good and of the wicked as the ever-imminent climax of experience, leads one to suppose that, whether the coming judgment Qoheleth envisages is a personalized experience for the individual or an eschatological Day of the Lord with a universal relevance, he pictures it as unpredictable, just like the lesser "evil times" by which individuals are frequently netted. Therefore, for the wicked, it is horrifying in its abruptness, like the ‘Dies Irae’ of Verdi’s Requiem; hence the abrupt and startling final verse of the book.

An equally abrupt and startling judgment of the wicked is depicted in Ps.

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240 See below, Chapter 10, Section iv.

241 As in Job.

242 Which is what I believe Qoheleth really has in mind; see below, Chapter 10, Section vi.

243 9:12.
Note the strong emphasis in this Psalm on the presence of God. The Psalmist says in vv 16-17 that coming into God's presence played the most vital part in his illumination on the very issue that had so puzzled and embittered him. Although Ps. 73's references to the divine presence reflect chiefly a personal awareness, on the part of the worshipper, of God's presence specifically with him, nevertheless God's presence on a less personal level is also recognized in the Biblical writings as necessary for the purpose of judgment.

The literal presence of God has been forcefully associated with national judgment; and it is also essential to the personal judgment of Job. If Qoheleth is a direct product of supernatural religious experience, then 5:1-7 may be an attempt to promote this kind of experience, by guarding against the superficiality and presumptuous self-conceit which would erode the probability of its occurrence in the normal course of religious practices. The practices envisaged may be in a private

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244 Discussed above, this Chapter, this Section, for v 20's dream-comparison. For further implications of Ps. 73 for ethics and wisdom-theory, see above, Chapter 1, Section ii, Pp.29-30 and below, Chapter 6, Section i.

245 Vv 17, 22-3, & 28. For the presence of God, see above, this Chapter, Sections v, vii, viii and this Section, and below, Chapter 6, Section i.

246 E.g., in Mal. 3:1 & 2, etc., where God's literal coming is essential for judgment. There is a close connexion between the way the experience of God's presence on a personal level is seen as bestowing illumination on the individual and the way the impact of God's presence on a national and universal level is regarded as reflecting His right to intervene, to judge Man and to change human institutions and the course of human history. See below, Chapter 6, Section i, for the implications for wisdom-theory of God's literal presence / intervention.

247 See, e.g., Mal. 3:1-5; cf. Ibid. 4:6.

248 Or, to be more exact, vindication.

249 Not like the occult experience of Eliphaz receiving wisdom from a terrifying spirit, or of Saul consulting the witch at Endor, which are contrary to Torah, but supernatural experience of God and / or His angels granting illumination, like the experiences of the prophets, patriarchs, etc.
context, or in a public and conventionally devotional setting.

Even if, on the other hand, *Qoheleth* is not a product of mystical experience after all, but simply a God-fearing man's cerebrally calculated composition, nevertheless the book still fuses the issue of the desirability of recognizing and cultivating God's presence with that of the ethical necessity for the humbling and silencing of Man. For as *Job* implies that only a sense of God's presence can bring about this humbling process, so *Qoheleth* insists that the reality and realization of God's presence must bring it about; for it is Man's solemn obligation to recognize this presence and be humble / silent before it.

The exhortation in *Qoh*. 5:2 not to be "Hasty in your heart to utter anything before God", coupled with the fact that Job ultimately recognizes he has been hasty in his utterances before God, gives the impression that the writers of both books see the contemplative silence appropriate to Man before God as a central Wisdom issue. Because this receptive approach to God can only be cultivated by renouncing anthropocentricity and embracing a God-centred world-view, it makes sense to the writers of both books to posit an actual presence of God to startle Man out of his self-absorption. In *Job*, therefore, a suitable theophany is dramatically presented as

\[\text{\[250\] As in *Dan*. 9:3 ff., where the presence of God is represented, in v 21 ff., by an angel.}\]

\[\text{\[251\] Such as that of *Is*. 6, where the prophet's vision seems to come to him when he is literally in the Temple.}\]

\[\text{\[252\] That favourite theme of Terrien's!}\]
literally taking place; and in Qoh. 5:1-7, God is represented as an aware and listening numen, of whose objective, external presence the worshipper must keep himself in mind in order to avoid offence. This presence is not startling and unmistakable like the God of Job, speaking out of a whirlwind; ²⁵³ but this absence of dramatic manifestations is all the more reason for the worshipper to need reminding of his duty to stand in awe of God until He does make His presence manifest.

Qoheleth's God is not a God who is absent, but rather a God whose presence Man must strive to remember by not allowing his own words, - the prime outflow of the human ego, - to swarm into the foreground and blot out his awareness of that presence. Man's words are equated in 5:3 & 7 with dreaming, a universal symbol of insubstantiality. Although words are the choicest fruit of Man's egocentric creativity, and hence to him his proudest and 'weightiest' achievement, Qoheleth warns that "much dreaming and many words" are not substantial after all; they are actually "ךָֽלָּל", which is the complete opposite of substantial.

The "fear of God" in 5:7b, however, provides the key contrast to v 7a's "much dreaming and many words", the typical hallmark of Man. For God is not "ךָֽלָּל", but a substantial and definite Presence, as in Is. 40:6b-8:

"All men are like grass,
And all their glory is like the flowers of the field.
The grass withers and the flowers fall,
Because the breath of the Lord blows upon them.
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers and the flowers fall;

²⁵³ Or at least, not until the appointed time for judgment referred to in 3:17; at this stage God is still seen as "in heaven", by contrast with the worshipper "on earth".
But the word of our God stands forever."

In the closing verses of Qoheleth, this solid, lasting "word of our God", in the form of the commandments, \(^{254}\) is contrasted with the typical words of Man, the "many books" of 12:12, like the insubstantial "many words" of 5:7. The obligation to obey God's commandments is stated in 12:13 so that, at the end of the book, the word of God is left as the dominant assertion; and Man is left silent as the recipient, with the duty of obedience, an essentially listening, responsive and non-assertive rôle.

\(^{254}\) Qoh. 12:13b.
CHAPTER 6

A PIETY OF UNCERTAINTY AS THE KEY TO QOHELETH’S SPIRITUALITY

i  QOHELETH AND THE DEUTERONOMISTIC TRADITION

The highly allusive way that Qoheleth gradually unfolds his picture of Solomon as his anti-hero 1 presupposes his readers’ close familiarity with Deuteronomistic writings, both Deuteronomy itself and the I Kings account of Solomon’s career. 2 The warning in 12:12 against the “making of many books” and “much study” is a case in point, since it calls to mind I Ki. 4:30-34. 3 This is the standard portrait of this wisdom super-hero, emphasizing heavily the quantity of his output (i.e., "many" books) and the extent of his learning ("much" study). This is the prevalent image of Solomon in Antiquity.

Qoheleth exploits this in 12:12 to confirm as a parting shot his repudiation of the wrong kind of wisdom, which he sees as the specifically Solomonic brand, and to

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1 As outlined below in Chapter 7, Section ii and in Appendix Two on the symbolic rôle of Solomon.

2 See Chapter 7, Section ii, fn. 29 for the direct correspondence between the prohibitions of Deut. 17 and the account in I Kings of Solomon’s failures.

3 Especially v 32’s reference to Solomon’s three thousand proverbs and his one thousand and five songs.
lead into his contrasting affirmation of the right kind:

"Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole of Man." ^

This recalls the frequently reiterated exhortation of Deuteronomy to fear God, usually in conjunction with remembering or keeping his commandments, although sometimes without direct reference to the commandments. ^

Qoheleth's use of Deuteronomistic sources in his repudiation of Solomonic wisdom, while it is at least implicit throughout his book, is at its most explicit in 1:12-2:26. Here he uses data from the I Kings account in some detail in his description of the fruitlessness of his quest for lasting achievement and satisfaction. In 2:8, e.g., he gathers gold and treasure, and gathers it from "kings and provinces". This would be very surprising if we were meant to understand the person doing this as a private citizen, even if he is an unusually wealthy one; but it fits the Deuteronomistic Solomon perfectly. I Ki. 9:14 mentions the treasure from Hiram of Tyre, 9:28 speaks

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^Whether or not Qoheleth is here exhorting us to observe literally all the moral and ritual commandments as found in the Pentateuch is not clear from the text of his book as such. It seems unnatural, however, except on the strongest of evidence, to see "דַּבֵּרָה יִשְׂרוּאֵל[דַּבֵּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל]" in 12:13 as referring to something other than these commandments, especially since, in the very same verse, "דַּבֵּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל" is coupled with "Fear God" in the Deuteronomic style.

Admittedly, we can not literally prove that Qoheleth is ritually observant; and this means that we can not measure exactly the extent of his conformity to specifically Deuteronomistic piety. His book in itself does not refer to Shabbath or to other specific ritual commandments directly. Nevertheless, the onus of proof would seem to be on those who would argue for the word "דַּבֵּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל" in 12:13 being interpreted other than in its usual sense. See also below, Chapter 9, end of Section i, for Qoheleth's apparent harmony with Ps. 19's celebration of Torah. Despite my inclination to support the idea of Qoheleth's priestly background (see, e.g., Chapter 1, Section iv and Appendix Three), it may be anachronistic to see evidence in his work of a schism between cult-supporters and Torah-supporters, a foretaste of the rivalry between the Sadducees and Pharisees of later generations. Torah, after all, both prescribes and regulates the cult.

^Cf. Prov. 9:10. See also above, Chapter 5, Section viii.


^6:13; 10:20; 14:23, etc.
of the treasure that came in through traders associated with Hiram, and 10:10 mentions the treasure he gained from the Queen of Sheba. Ibid. 10:14 speaks of yearly income excluding trade; and although it also excludes revenue from Arabia’s governors, this explicit exclusion of Arabia’s revenues alone seems to imply inclusion of money from governors of other provinces. So this yearly income of I Ki. 10:14 may well be the "treasures of provinces" referred to in Qoh. 2:8. The lavish building projects of Qoh. 2:4 seem to reflect I Ki. 7, which shows that Solomon builds far more than just the Temple. He builds a palace of his own, which takes nearly twice as long to build as the Temple, and also a palace for the Egyptian Princess and the Hall of Judgment. The idea of Solomon as the builder King par excellence is very much the Deuteronomistic picture.

Another apparently Deuteronomistic echo is the hint in Qoh. 2:18, 19 & 21 at the folly of Rehoboam. The implied question here,

"Who knows whether the man who succeeds me (Solomon) will be a wise man or a fool?",

is a skilfully evocative one, since his actual successor, Rehoboam, clearly is a fool. So the reader is invited to indulge in a sympathetic chuckle, knowing that ‘Solomon’ is here speaking more truly than even he himself could realize. All the wealth and power that he has built up with such ingenuity and effort is indeed destined to be wasted by a foolish successor, even as he himself fears it may. ⁸ This phenomenon of the foolish successor to a wise and accredited leader is an important motif in the Deuteronomistic History, because this is one of the factors that can render a once-

⁸See also Appendix Two.
reliable dynastic authority reliable no longer, and hence helps to explain why God sometimes decides to ordain revolution against the establishment.

Potentially, this is a major point of contact (or, alternatively, of conflict) between this History and other genres, especially Wisdom. For it raises the whole issue of God’s sovereignty and of His direct, invasive impact on human experience; and this in turn has epistemological implications for the individual which are no less profound than its political consequences for entire kingdoms. Qoheleth’s exposé of the danger of belief in ethical certainty relates closely to the Deuteronomists’ recognition of the danger of assuming a dynasty’s divine right to continuity; a recognition also very evident in Jeremiah.  

A kindred issue, which can similarly link or divide genres along the fault-line of God-orientation versus Man-orientation, is the question of God’s literal presence. This relates closely to God’s sovereign right and desire to impact directly on human experience, with all the ensuing implications in terms both of practical/political outcomes and of epistemology and wisdom-theory. One of these implications is the undesirability of the type of ‘wisdom’ which is geared to the glorification of Man and to the perpetuation of Man’s institutions as self-contained entities

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9 This puts the Rabbinic suggestion of Jeremiah’s authorship of Kings in an interesting light; see Baba Bathra, 15. Brueggemann’s epistemological study on Jeremiah has indirectly brought to light the fact that the question of Jeremiah’s standpoint relative to Deuteronomistic thought is worthy of further consideration. It seems that the points of contact between Jeremiah and the Deuteronomists go further than the issue of National Retribution alone.

10 See Chapter 5, especially Sections v and vii-ix.

11 I.e., anti-wisdom.

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independent of God. The counterbalancing implication is the desirability of a wisdom based on at least recognition, if not cultivation, of God’s initiatory, invasive and transforming influence.

There is an inevitable connexion between recognizing God’s sovereign right to shatter one’s interpretations and recognizing His parallel right to shatter one’s tangible environment, such as social structures. The Job’s-comforter mode of interpretation, that suffering is a punishment for sin and that God rewards the righteous, tends ultimately toward justification of the status quo throughout entire societies, confirming the establishment irrespective of its merits or demerits, and freezing relations between rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged and other social poles into a stagnant block. Clearly, this is wholly incompatible with the Deuteronomistic History’s consistent picture of God’s effective sovereignty, of God’s right to enrich or impoverish, to raise up beggars from dunghills and seat them among princes. \(^{13}\)

Given the fact that this is such a major pietist issue, it is hardly surprising that Jeremiah should clash with the royal establishment over the sovereignty of God versus the self-sufficiency of Man, including Man’s tendency toward perpetuating his own authority-structures irrespective of God’s will. Nor is it surprising that in this confrontation, Jeremiah should see the crisis as largely a wisdom-issue. \(^{14}\)

\(^{12}\)See above, Chapter 5, Sections iii and ix.

\(^{13}\)1 Sam. 2:7 & 8.

\(^{14}\)Or, in Brueggemann’s terminology (see following footnote), an epistemological issue. See Jer. 8:7 - 10:25’s frequent and challenging references to real *wisdom / knowing.*
Brueggemann applies to Jeremiah's wisdom-crisis the theoretical distinction between the Mosaic-Covenental interpretation of history, which focusses upon God's intrusion into the existing order to bring justice, and the Davidic-Royal interpretation, which emphasizes God's creative support of the existing order.

Since these two histories, as Brueggemann himself says, it seems reasonable to consider Qoheleth's approach to certainty in the light of this same polarity of histories. Brueggemann associates the wisdom tradition with the Davidic-Royal interpretation of history, and points out that this

"royal (sapiential) tradition, inevitably conservative, fashions a life-world which is essentially settled."

For Jeremiah, however,

"True knowing consists in facing Yahweh's remarkable freedom. (This) is - the other history, of planting and building, of plucking up and tearing down. - Kings can not do that."

This writer is correct to see a general connexion between the wisdom tradition and the royal interpretation of history, with its tendency toward belief in self-sufficiency, and hence resistance to the idea of God's intrusion. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Qoheleth, although a wisdom-writer, has a very similar approach to the

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17 Ibid., P.87.
18 Ibid., P.91.
problem of knowing to that of Jeremiah. For, in the rift between pietist wisdom and establishment anti-wisdom, Qoheleth belongs solidly to the pietist camp, even if he belongs to the priestly ruling class.  

In Jer. 1:10, the prophet's commission is

"To uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow",

including on the epistemological level, as much as and even before it is

"To build and to plant".

Qoheleth too makes allowance for uprooting as well as planting, for killing as well as healing, for tearing down as well as building, for weeping as well as laughing and for dying as well as for being born. See Brueggemann’s comments on the importance Jer. 9:20 attaches to responding appropriately to death, i.e., learning "how to weep"; cf. also Qoh. 7:1-4. This presents an obvious challenge to any pro-establishment, "essentially settled" interpretation that resists God’s sovereign right to intervene.

Moreover, Qoheleth’s affinities with Deuteronomistic thought reinforce the probability that his sympathies with the revolutionary God run deep. For this

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19 As suggested above in Chapter 1, Section iv, and below in Appendix Three.

20 3:2 ff.


22 Despite his evident opposition to the egocentrism and consequent breakdown in social interaction which often underlies the motivations of revolutionary Man, by contrast with the revolutionary God. Compare Dostoyevsky’s negative picture of the initial lack of receptivity to Prince Myshkin displayed by Burdovsky and his revolutionary-minded companions in The Idiot, Part II, Chapters 8 and 9. This lack of receptivity is also rooted in egocentrism, and the verbal over-assertiveness typical of egocentrism, in writing as well as in face-to-face discourse.
image of God, the Mosaic-Covenantal, is the keynote of the Deuteronomistic History’s present view of His dealings with Israel’s own institutions, right from the Song of Hannah through David’s God-ordained replacement of Saul, Jeroboam’s prophetically inspired takeover of the North Kingdom, Jehu’s divine commission to extirpate the House of Ahab, etc.

Furthermore, Qoheleth echoes Job in representing human deference before the literal presence of God as crucial to ethics and to illumination, and seems to be recommending the conscious cultivation of God’s presence. This is in harmony with a directly interventionist view of God, the Mosaic-Covenantal view, which ascribes to God the maximum ongoing initiative; it is not in line with the Davidic-Royalist tendency to resist or disbelieve in God’s corrective intrusions.

Belief in the central importance of the presence of God has epistemological relevance and profound implications for wisdom-theory on a personal as well as on

However, given Qoheleth’s negative view of the contributions of Solomon, Saul and perhaps even David (see, e.g., above, Chapter 5, Section v), his dislike for human revolution is probably also largely due to fear of the consequences for the revolutionary rather than to a particular sense of loyalty to kings as such. The Hellenistic kings are even less likely to have inspired his profound loyalty than the great kings of his own people’s history, since the former are formidable foreign enemies; their power seems all the more terrifying for being so remote by comparison with the power of Israel’s native kings of the past.

Nevertheless, Qoheleth’s anti-revolutionary feelings may well arise partly from the attitude of mutual receptivity that he feels should characterize society as a whole; he sees no reason to exclude kings in particular from the overall pattern of social cohesion which he is advocating. See below, Chapter 10, Section vii. For the possible implications of his reference in 8:2 to taking an oath of loyalty to the King, see below, Chapter 9, Section vi.

23 I Sam. 2:1-10.

24 See above, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix.
a national-historical level, \textsuperscript{25} as Ps. 73 shows. At first, \textsuperscript{26} the Psalmist is deceived by the wicked feeling so certain of their own security; so he is tempted to feel bitterly that he has been righteous to his own detriment. However, although the struggle to come to terms with the prosperity of the wicked proves too much for him in isolation from God, \textsuperscript{27} he receives understanding of the coming judgment of the wicked by entering God's sanctuary, \textsuperscript{28} which in effect means entering His presence, since the sanctuary represents His presence. This is an arresting example of the crucial importance of God's direct incursion into one's experience in order to gain correct knowledge. Entering the presence of God is represented as the turning-point, when the Psalmist receives understanding; \textsuperscript{29} and maintaining the sense of God's presence is the basis of his new assurance of his own continued wellbeing. \textsuperscript{30}

When the Psalmist was led by his own mind, he was "senseless", "ignorant", "like a brute beast", \textsuperscript{31} locked into the negative self-containment of his envy-reaction because of his limited vision. However, the means of his illumination has been the conscious continuation of God's presence, through which he has received guidance. \textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{25}See above, Chapter 5, Section ix.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid. Verses 2-15.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid. Verse 16.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid. Verse 17.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid. Verse 17 ff.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid. Verses 23-26 & 28.

\textsuperscript{31}Verses 21 and 22.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid. verses 23 and 24.
In v 27, he characterizes the wicked as insecure because they are "far from God", contrasting this with his own security because he is "near God". The Psalmist was strongly convinced of his original false opinion, or he would not have felt so eloquently bitter in his envy of the arrogant; so his direct encounter with God has brought him to a radical change of heart which he could not have accomplished without it.

It seems, therefore, that God's direct presence and intervention is widely associated with Man's liberation from his false certainties in general. This is true not only on a national level, about the fate of Israel or the future of a dynasty, but also on an individual level, as Jer. 10:23-24a implies:

"I know, O Lord, that the way of Man is not in himself, that it is not in Man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O Lord."

Because Qoheleth's message, like Job's, concerns Man's liberation from his false certainties, through recognizing the sovereignty of God and the unfathomable nature of His total plan, he tends to stress the random principle in God's dealings, and the tendency for expected continuities to be unexpectedly broken off, so that paths do not necessarily proceed to their apparent goals, nor do present circumstances and established institutions necessarily continue, even when their continuation is generally accepted as beyond question. Qoheleth no less than Jeremiah accepts the

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33 Ibid. verse 28.
34 Ibid. verses 2-14.
35 See below, Chapter 10, Section iii.
36 See below, Chapter 10, Section iv.
fact that continuity can not be relied upon; and he also sees this fact as a God-ordained tool for promoting piety and reverence, and as a positive consequence of God’s sovereignty.

The allusive method whereby Qoheleth chooses to repudiate anti-wisdom reflects an organic, deep-level sympathy with the potentially revolutionary ethics of Deuteronomistic thinking. Qoheleth is not, as is sometimes held, simply displaying sporadic and superficial verbal similarities with the Deuteronomists unmatched by a consistent underlying compatibility of spirit.

The Deuteronomists see Solomon the powerful hero-king, with his international acclaim, his international wisdom-cult and his international high-class harem, as a miserable failure in terms of the criteria of his own nation’s faith. They fully acknowledge his potential for good, and his promising beginning. Yet the crisis of Solomon’s career is represented as a knife-edge of choice between blessing and cursing, just like the choice in Deut. 28 for the whole nation: to do right or to do wrong, and to get as a result blessing or a curse; the choice is theirs. In exact parallel to this in the Deuteronomistic History, the choice is Solomon’s. He is subject to

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37I.e., the self-reliant, complacent ‘wisdom’ which seals Man safely off, as a self-contained entity, from believing that God can give him any disruptive surprises.

38E.g., Gordis, op. cit., P.44, comments, “With regard to vows, the substance of Koheleth’s thought is virtually identical with that of Deuteronomy; but the two books are worlds apart in temper and spirit.”. However, because of the close similarity in the basic convictions underlying both works (despite their difference in era) this remark needs careful qualification.

39Ki. 3:5-28, etc.

40Ibid. 9:1-9
exactly the same criteria of judgment; and when weighed in the same balance, he is found sadly wanting.  

The fact that Qoheleth displays the same overall values as these Deuteronomistic writings, and also directly alludes to them to re-inforce certain ethical priorities, is particularly striking in a Hellenistic writer. His was, after all, an era which produced some very influential rival values, totally alien to this whole outlook. Subject peoples who felt their own national identities threatened by Greek dominance revelled in romances glorifying their national heroes, whose extraordinary achievements, - religious, philosophical, military, technical and political, - were held to have inspired the emergence of their particular nations as recognizable entities.

As the Egyptians do with Sesostris and the Syro-Mesopotamians do with Semiramis, so Artapanus (to take one example) does with Moses, in the same spirit of national self-glorification. Artapanus’s dazzlingly competitive historiography makes Moses into an impressive national symbol, credited with enough civilizing inventions and achievements to rival many national heroes and Egyptian deities put together. In the process of creating this great leader-figure, however, the author has Moses instituting the Egyptian quasi-animal worship and credited himself with divine honours, with Abraham having taught the Egyptians astrology, etc. This is a very un-Deuteronomistic viewpoint in every way; but it is a natural outcome of the priorities

\[41\] Ki. 11.

it presupposes. If cutting an impressive figure amongst other nations is the prevalent ambition, \(^{43}\) and holiness by separation or loyalty to the specific commandments of the Torah is not, then Artapanus’s approach to Moses is sure to be popular.

If Qoheleth’s Deuteronomistic resonance comes as something of a surprise, however, this is not because God’s commandments as such are out of vogue in wisdom-circles, \(^{44}\) even if they are unfashionable in other literary circles. It is rather because Qoheleth endorses the Deuteronomistic belief in God’s sovereign right to disrupt Man’s self-absorbed ‘certainties’ (whether institutional or epistemological). It is this belief which tends to be out of favour with more affluent sages, who identify with the Establishment and therefore approve the continuity of its institutions.

Ben Sira is, in effect, celebrating continuity \(^{45}\) by glorifying the ongoing institution of the High Priesthood; \(^{46}\) whereas Qoheleth is disavowing predictability (and hence also continuity) in order to contrast Man’s limited grasp of reality with God’s complete control of it. While Qoheleth’s God-oriented, Deuteronomistic reservations about Solomon’s glory imply for him reservations about any man’s aspirations to greatness, Ben Sira, by contrast, shows that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like Simon the high Priest.

\(^{43}\) See I Sam. 8:5b and context for Deuteronomistic disapproval of this ambition anyway, even when it is not directly associated with astrology and animal-worship, let alone when it is.

\(^{44}\) See, e.g., Ben Sira’s identification of the whole of wisdom with Mosaic Law, Sir. 15:1, 24:23, etc. See also Appendix Three, ft. 51 and Appendix Six, passim.

\(^{45}\) In contrast to Qoheleth’s emphasis on non-continuity; see, e.g., below, Chapter 10, Sections iii and iv.

\(^{46}\) Sir. 50.
This is likelier to be a Greek-inspired reflection of Man's "superb self-confidence in humanity" than Ben Sira resonating to the spirit of the Torah, however admirable his knowledge of its letter may be. Moreover, although Ben Sira expresses his own reservations about the real Solomon, he does not allow this to dim his enthusiasm for the continuity of institutions, as his assessment of Rehoboam's folly and its consequences reflects. Here he mentions only the negative aspect of Jeroboam's taking control of the North Kingdom. He says only that Jeroboam "led Israel into sin and started Ephraim on its wicked course", interpreting his rebellion as wrong from the beginning. He says nothing of any idea that God intended him to take the North out of Rehoboam's control. This is a very noticeable difference of moral slant from the Deuteronomistic account.

Qoheleth's unusual level of agreement with the Deuteronomistic perspective adds ironic piquancy to the echo in Qoh. 7:20 of Solomon's prayer, "For there is no-one who does not sin", which implies pointedly that Solomon little realizes how right he is. It also confirms

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47 Kitto, The Greeks, P.61, as referred to above, Chapter 2, Section ii, P.72.

48 47:19 ff.

49 47:23.

50 Cf. 1 Ki. 14:7-14.

51 See 1 Ki. 11:29 ff., esp. vv 31, 35, and 37-9; and compare Ibid. 12:22-24, where God confirms that it is He who is behind Jeroboam's actions, and also that His support for Jeroboam's dynasty too is conditional upon its satisfactory performance.

52 1 Ki. 8:46.
that Qoh. 5:1-7’s allusions to Deut. 23:21-3 and I Sam. 15:22 \(^{53}\) are far from superficial. They reflect a significant level of agreement with Deuteronomistic concepts of what constitutes real piety as distinct from false piety.

In view of this striking overall agreement with the earlier pietistic history (despite his relatively late date), Qoheleth’s conclusion "Fear God" \(^{54}\) comes as no surprise. For it is a typically Deuteronomistic sentiment, and one which he has already placed at other climactic points of the book. \(^{55}\) It is altogether in accord, both with Qoheleth itself and with the Deuteronomistic works that Qoheleth echoes on other issues, to regard fear of God as the main ethical priority; hence the prominence of this principle in the book’s concluding verses.

\(^{53}\) As discussed above, Chapter 5, Section v.

\(^{54}\) 12:12.

\(^{55}\) Qoh. 3:14, 5:7, 7:18 and 8:12.
WHY A PIETY OF UNCERTAINTY?

As discussed in Chapter 5, Section viii above, humility and fear of God constitute the essence of piety for Qoheleth; and the same is true for the Deuteronomistic Historians. It will be helpful at this point to note that equally common to both is the intrinsic connexion between impiety (proud, self-oriented human independence) and falsity (not only falsehood, i.e., dishonesty, but also unreality). Both "the sacrifice of fools" of *Qoh*. 5:1 56 and the vow-breakers, empty dreamers and babblers of *Qoh*. 5:2-7 57 are odious because of their falsity. They are proud, deceitful and superficial; and the essence of their destructiveness is the falsity of their claims.

Saul, whose sacrifice is recalled by the wording of *Qoh*. 5:1, 58 begins to lie 59 whenever it suits him. He loses his grip on truth altogether, claiming, and perhaps even believing, 60 that God has delivered David into his power when in fact God is with David and against him. His inconsistencies, especially toward David, 61 are so extreme that his own human personality appears to be disintegrating altogether. 62

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56 Cf. *I Sam.* 15:22.
57 Recalling the empty oath of *Deut.* 23:21-3 and the vain prophets of Ibid. 13.
58 See above, Chapter 5, Section v.
60 Ibid. 23:7.
61 As David sees, Ibid. 26:25 and 27:1a.
62 Ibid. 16:14, 18:10.
He undoes all his own work (i.e., makes it no longer real) by going back on his own principles. 63 Eventually, he destroys himself literally and deliberately, 64 fiercely contesting against his own reality. Not only does he remove himself forcibly from life, but he even manages to leave very little trace of himself behind, because he includes his sons as well in his own destruction. 65

This is a horrifying picture of wanton self destruction, leaving Saul almost as if he had never existed. The self-destruction is very much based on falsity. Since it is God Himself who first made Saul King, and for His purposes, Saul’s kingship ceases to have any meaning once it is no longer pleasing to God. 66 Nevertheless, Saul still clings to the empty outward appearance of kingship, and even of worshipping God, however meaningless it may be. 67 He is too proud either to admit that his kingship is meaningless unless he pleases God or to change his behaviour so that he will please God. Full of inconsistencies, false claims and false outward image, he is completely opposite in character to God, who characteristically "does not change His mind.". 68 He is also very unlike Samuel, God’s prophet, who allows God to rescue him from false certainties by listening to Him. 69

63 Ibid. 28:3b & 7 ff.
64 Ibid. 31:4.
65 Ibid. 31:6.
66 Ibid. 15:26 & 28.
67 Ibid. 15:25 & 30.
68 Ibid. 15:29
69 Ibid. 16:6-13.
Similarly, the vow-breaker of Qoh. 5:1 and Deut. 23 may well be motivated by pride, in a desire to make empty boasts of what he will do for God. This is the man of Prov. 25:14,

"Like clouds and wind without rain,
- a man who boasts of gifts he does not give",
echoed in Qoh. 11:3. 70 Whatever his motivation, however, the vow-breaker too makes false claims. He speaks, but there is no reality in his words, and nothing comes of them; so there was no rain in those clouds after all.

The false dreamers of Deut. 13:1-6 are also guilty of false claims. For although the signs and wonders they prophesy do come to pass, 71 they are contradicting God's express commandment by advocating the worship of other gods. So their claim to be speaking from God is false. Yet another kind of false claim is a confident statement based on ignorance, as in Job 38:2; Job acknowledges the foolishness of this kind of falsity when he says,

"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me to know.
- Therefore I despise myself,
And repent in dust and ashes.". 72

These various categories of falsity, - lies, boasts, broken promises, fantasies, 73

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70 Discussed below, Chapter 8, Section iii.

71 V 2.

72 Ibid. 42:3b & 6.

73 6:9.
claims based on ignorance, etc., are all anathema to Qoheleth. Qoheleth's hallmark is that

"He searched to find just the right words,
And what he wrote was upright and true.".  

The only way to avoid a tendency to such delusion and false claims is to preserve a right sense of God's over-ruling reality; and this entails humility and knowledge of one's limitations before God, as Job 42:3b & 6 reflect. God respects Job's honesty for saying the right thing about Him at last, and correcting his previous errors; but He is angered by failure of Job's 'friends' to do the same.  

In line with this viewpoint, it is axiomatic to Qoheleth's picture of Man's proper limitations before God that one can not attain certainty about the overall pattern of divine providence. A claim to certainty about this matter which God has hidden from our understanding is impious falsehood. This overall pattern is the ultimate in

"Things (we do) not understand,
Things to wonderful for (us) to know".

Furthermore, God has made certainty about this pattern unattainable deliberately. To grasp that this is deliberate, and why, is to approach the very centre of Qoheleth's spirituality.

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74 See, e.g., above, Chapter 5, Section ix's treatment of dreams in Qoheleth, Job and Ps. 73:20, etc.

75 12:10.

76 Ibid. 42:7.
In Chapter 8:16 & 17, Qoheleth proclaims the inscrutability of the divine plan:

"When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to observe Man's labour on earth - his eyes not seeing sleep day or night - then I saw all that God has done. No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, Man can not discover its meaning. Even if a wise man thinks he knows, he can not really comprehend it."

What he means by "all that God has done" is not immediately clear. But the meaning of

"Then I saw all that God has done"

is dependent on the next sentence,

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun."

The connexion between the two sentences is this: what Qoheleth means by "all that God has done" actually is the fact that

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun".

This is because "what God has done" is to devise a system of total reality so complex that

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun".

God has deliberately ordained this complexity so that

"Despite all his efforts to search it out, Man can not discover its meaning",

and so that even a wise man who claims he knows

"can not really comprehend it".

Already in 7:13 & 14, Qoheleth has used that same phrase, "what God has
done", to describe the impossibility of being certain as to God’s overall plan, showing thereby that this impossibility is God’s own work:

"Consider what God has done:  
Who can straighten what He has made crooked?  
When times are good, be happy;  
But when times are bad, consider:  
God has made the one as well as the other,  
So that a man can not discover anything about his future."

In 7:13, the verbal balance between "what God has done" and "what He has made crooked" shows clearly that "what God has done" is to have made things crooked. By then placing "Who can straighten?" in parallel with the imperative "Consider!" Qoheleth is again stressing the ethical correctness of contemplative receptivity to God. He sees this receptivity as generally opposed by neurotic activism, the struggle to grasp / attain / understand / acquire ("κλαμα") 77. By his multiple use of this root "κλαμα" in its various different shades of meaning, 78 he progressively builds up a negative picture of this struggle as a rat race and a lost cause.

This is the same spiritual ambience as that of 5:1-7, with an imperative to listen to or to ponder on God’s initiative, not to perform meaningless sacrifices like Saul, or make empty boasts of what we will do or give, like the votive of Deut. 23. The reason for this emphasis on receptivity rather than on activity is that it is more conducive than activity to awareness of God as an external numinous reality; which means, in effect, that it is more conducive to the fear of God, with its accompanying

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77 See below, Chapter 9, Section vii.

78 The technique referred to as ‘antanaclasis’ by Ceresko, op. cit., passim. See above, p. 244, fn. 180.
practical virtue of obedience to His commandments. This is precisely the priority to which Qoheleth feels faith must return. 79

In order to understand why "straighten" is the verb he selects to represent the undesirable activism in contrast with "consider", it is necessary to remember that the traditional expression to "straighten" something "crooked" has very different implications from our own concept of "straightening" as equivalent to "putting right" and "crooked" as "morally perverse" or "factually false". Although the root Qoheleth uses for "crooked" (הָרְשׁוּ) does occur frequently in Hebrew in the sense of "morally perverse", the proverbial associations of straightening what is crooked are not Hebrew but Greek, and have two main implications which are both activist, as opposed to receptivist in the sense that Qoheleth could be called receptivist.

One implication of straightening what is crooked in proverbs is to change something to the opposite of what it was before; and the second is to direct to one's own target what was not originally designed by oneself to hit one's own target, though it may have been designed by someone else to hit theirs. This adaptation of something to accomplish one's own ends, instead of the ends it was originally designed to accomplish, does not necessarily have the effect of "putting right" something that was "wrong" or of "correcting" a "falsehood". Directly, this type of

79 12:13b.

80 For examples of this see Numbers Rabbah, S. 10, on perverting judgment (through drink causing the Law to be forgotten); Niddah 12B, on unfavourable evidence 'making' the suspect crooked, i.e., showing her to be unfit for marital relations; and Ibid. 10B, on the possibility of women corrupting girls, i.e., making them bent, as in the contemporary idiom.

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"straightening" has nothing to do with correcting something wrong / false; and indirectly, it can sometimes have even quite the reverse effect.

A startling example of this is in Aeschylus’s *The Libation Bearers*, in which the Chorus quotes the proverb,

"ἐν ὀγγέλῳ γὰρ κυπτὸς ὁρθοῦται λόγος",

"By a messenger, a crooked message may be straightened". 81

In itself, this only means that a messenger has the power to change the message entrusted to him into whatever suits his own purposes, i.e., to whatever is "straighter" or "more on target" from his point of view. Applying the proverb in this particular context, however, implies in effect twisting the truth to suit oneself. What the Chorus means here by suggesting that the Nurse "straightens" Clytaemnestra’s message to Aegisthus is that she falsifies it to suit her own purpose. The real message is that Aegisthus should bring his armed guard with him; but the "straightened" (i.e., altered) version is that he should come alone. The Chorus urge that the message should be thus straightened in order to accomplish their own purpose, which is to make it easier to kill Aegisthus. "Straightening" in the sense of this proverb, then, can, in another sense, amount to "twisting". 82

Qoheleth’s point in 7:13 seems, therefore, to be that we can not grasp the total

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81 L.773.

82 The main implication of this use of "ὁρθοῦται" in the sense of "to straighten" may perhaps be "to shape in the 'right' direction", or "to set up in the 'right' way"; and this means, in effect, to shape or set up specifically in such a way as to accomplish one’s own ends. From that perspective, the "crooked" state of a message might be regarded as simply the original state of it: its condition before our desires have got to work on it and adjusted it to go straight to our objectives.
pattern of God's providence in order to exploit it to our own ends, or interpret it according to our own preconceptions, for God will not allow this. He has made things "crooked", i.e., the way they are in full, not streamlined to fit in with what Man thinks is desirable or correct. Man's task is to consider what God has done, not to 'improve' it so that it conforms better (i.e., more directly, by a straighter route) to his own goals or concepts. When it does conform to them, he should seize his opportunity to be happy about it; but when it does not, he should remember that the latter situation is equally from God, since it contributes to Man's necessary inability to see where he is going. Only this gives him adequate opportunity to refine his spiritual character, to develop and to broaden his horizons by adapting to a wide range of different circumstances.  

One could almost say that God has made our life-destiny crooked so that we can not see round its corners, and can not see where we are going. The whole appeal of straightness, as of smoothness, is that it brings us to a direct accomplishment of our goal, without detours or obstacles; a straight path means a clear route to success or to safe arrival. Yet Qoheleth says, in effect, that there is not a single, clear and definite goal before Man which he can know he will attain. For God has not given his goal-seeking activism a free rein. Again, we are faced with a surprising statement about "what God has done": what He has done is deliberately designed overall experience in such a way that Man does not see his goal, and

"Can not discover anything about his future.".

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83:14.

84 See below, Chapter 10, Section iv.
It is vital to our understanding of Qoheleth's spirituality, then, to see why he believes God has done this. It is, after all, very surprising to be told with such emphasis that God is withholding knowledge from us. For in the context of a religion based on revelation, it is the norm to see lack of knowledge and lack of certainty as a weakness. Hence Prov. 2:3 & 4 exhorts us to

"Call out for insight
And cry aloud for understanding,
(to) Look for it as silver
And search for it as for hidden treasure".

It is also, and has long been, a popular assumption (and not exclusively amongst the religious themselves) that the religious man is supposed to have all the answers: that true piety means always to know what is right, always to know who is right, and always to be able to prescribe the correct course of action in any crisis. Despite the many moral, spiritual and practical problems this interpretation of religion causes, it is surprisingly persistent. 85

This, however, is not Qoheleth's view of what constitutes piety. He directly states, as the author of Job implies, that we do not know all the answers. Furthermore, the recognition of this fact is a large part of what, in his view, really constitutes piety, even though the popular view is that this is the ultimate failure of piety. To Qoheleth, the successful sage is not the one who claims to have worked out a perfect system for explaining all the vicissitudes of life, and then seeks to justify everything by reference to it. Qoheleth believes it is not possible to have a perfect

85 To be fair to Job's 'friends', the social pressure imposed by this false belief in the religious sage's obligation to know all the answers (at least to his own satisfaction) may have played a part in influencing them to answer Job in the way they did.
system for explaining all the vicissitudes of life in the first place, still less to justify everything by reference to it. Should such a super-sage boasting in such a system attempt to explain a man’s sufferings by saying he must have sinned, Qoheleth will say ⁸⁶ that there are

"Righteous men who get what the wicked deserve,
And wicked men who get what the righteous deserve";

or should he seek to explain the sufferings of the righteous by saying they will be rewarded in the after-life, Qoheleth will ask, in effect, Who knows if there even is an after-life? ⁸⁷

Qoheleth prefers, then, that those looking for a meaning to this life find that meaning within this life, rather than construct a theoretical system for ‘justifying’ the injustices of this life. For such a theoretical system relies on going beyond the evidence, which would be doing violence to reality; whereas the truly pious man, by contrast, regards the totality of God’s system, puzzling anomalies and all, as sacrosanct. Therefore, rather than do violence to reality to find an answer, he would admit, instead, that he does not know the answer. This glorifies God by bearing honest witness to the skilfully designed inscrutability of His system; whereas pretending to understand that system fully would not be doing justice to His greatness or to His skill.

However, as 12:9 says, Qoheleth is an accredited wisdom-teacher, who

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⁸⁶8:14; cf. 7:15.

⁸⁷See 3:21.
"(Imparts) knowledge to the people".

If the only knowledge he imparts is that

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun" 88

and that a man

"Can not discover anything about his future", 89

this simply in itself is unlikely to have made his reputation as a sage. Mere uncertainties, however edifyingly humbling, can not be the sum total of his message.

More illuminating is the fact that the uncertainties are not an accident. Instead, they are "what God has done"; i.e., God has brought them about for a purpose. Since, however, the idea of God ordaining uncertainties is in potential tension with the tradition that He ordains revelation, one feels that Qoheleth owes us an explanation as to why God has done this. Furthermore, if he imparts knowledge to the people, then there must be something that he claims actually to know. 90

In fact, Qoheleth does give us a very strong statement of something he claims to know; and in the process, he actually solves the central mystery of his own piety, namely, why it is that God has chosen to prevent us from comprehending what goes on under the sun, and from knowing anything about our future. This surprising statement of certainty (one of the very few in his book) is in 3:14:

88:17.

89:14.


"Plato's Socrates denies that he knows. Yet he frequently claims that he does have certainty and knowledge. How can he avoid the contradiction between his general stance about knowledge (that he lacks it) and his particular claims to have it?"

For the supernatural aspect of Socrates' sources of guidance, see above, Chapter 5, Section viii.
"I know that everything God does will endure forever".

Qoheleth here speaks of "everything God does" as a short-hand term for the whole of reality. However, because this expression "everything God does" echoes the phrasing of 7:13-14's and 8:16-17's "what God has done", it also carries 7:13-14's and 8:16-17's overtones of God deliberately imposing limitations on our understanding: making things crooked and preventing us from comprehending. So the message of 3:14 is, in effect,

"I know that the total reality God has devised, with all the complexity He has built into it to withhold complete comprehension of it from us, will endure forever".

It is, therefore, only in the light of 7:13-14 and 8:16-17 that one can understand the full message of 3:14,

"I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will fear Him."

Here at last is the answer to the question of why God withholds knowledge from us. He does it

"So that men will fear Him".

This interpretation of 3:14 is, of course, reinforced by the close proximity of 3:11c’s

"So they can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end".

This is clear even as the text already stands; and if Barton’s proposed emendation for

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917:13.
928:17.
3:11b is accepted, this makes the point even clearer. Barton suggests that the word "טועה", "eternity", should be re-pointed to read "טועה", "ignorance / obscurity". 3:11b-c would then read,

"God has set ignorance in the hearts of men,
So that they can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

This seems a reasonable suggestion, since it is difficult to see how putting "טועה" in the hearts of men would be possible; and even if it were possible, it would not prevent them from fathoming

"What God has done from beginning to end.".

In fact, if "טועה" means "eternity", its presence in men’s hearts might even be expected to assist them in doing so. This is why some suggest translating 3:11,

"God has set eternity in the hearts of men,
Yet they can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end.". 96

94 Following Döderlein, Grätz, Plumtre and Haupt.
95 "Eternity" or "the world / age".
96 E.g., N.I.V. takes "טועה" in 3:11 as "yet"; but contrast A.V., "so that - (no man)", as if "טועה" were introducing a negative purpose clause. This comes much nearer to the true sense than the N.I.V. rendering (see also below, this Section, ftns. 97 & 98 on "טועה"), since "טועה" is introducing the consequence of God putting "טועה" into men’s hearts: a consequence which is indeed intentional, as 3:14 reflects in the expression:

"וניבוב ניבוב יתגר עigrated עלים עלים".
"So God causes them to have reverence before Him".

Qoheleth’s use of "וניבוב" here to mean "cause to" is parallel to the use of "יִשָּׁנָּה בְּקֶשׁ הָאָרֶץ" in Ezek. 36:27,

"וַיִּשָּׁנָּה בְּקֶשׁ הָאָרֶץ - הָקֵרַת הָלְבָר - (And I will) - cause you to follow my decrees - ".

This makes my translation of 3:14c,

"God does it so that men will fear Him",

seem at first sight rather long-winded, since "וניבוב" here does not literally mean "does it" (i.e., does what He is described as doing in vv 10-14b.). Rather, it means "causes"; so the literal meaning of the verse is simply,

"So / And God causes that they fear before Him.".

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However, this does not really make sense either. For "כִּי מֵלָעַן", which basically means "because not", tends to have a conjunctive-sequential flavour rather than a disjunctive one. Its natural meaning is "so that not" or "so that there is no", pointing ahead to a negative outcome which one would expect as a consequence of what comes before it, and it never seems to mean "yet not", pointing ahead to a negative idea which does not seem the expected consequence of what comes before it.

One would therefore expect this verse to mean that God has set something in the hearts of men with the result / consequence that "They can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

However, this would be an over-concise translation. For "כִּי מֵלָעַן" in 3:14c does by implication (albeit not literally) refer back to the total picture outlined in vv 10-14b, in the sense that it is by the means described in vv 10-14b that God causes men to fear Him. In particular, 3:14c refers back to the immediately preceding v 14a-b, so that, in effect, 3:14c means, "And by the means outlined above, God causes them to fear before Him". Therefore, the translation, "God does it so that men will fear Him" is fairly appropriate, since it indicates the implied reference back to the preceding verses, but without over-emphasizing it so that the translation sounds cumbersome.

It may also be the case that Qoheleth is deliberately using here in v 14c the same verb ("כִּי מֵלָעַן"), albeit in a slightly different sense, that he uses twice in v 11 of God, once in v 12 of Man, and once again of God in v 14a. This is perhaps because he has (as Ceresko suggests, op. cit., passim) a special purpose in thus using the same word in several different senses; he is trying to unfold his point progressively by building up clusters of inter-related associations. If so, then it may be worth translating "כִּי מֵלָעַן" in v 14c in a way that reflects something of its other meaning(s) in other verses nearby; although, for an author who does not use this kind of technique, it would be preferable to do the opposite, and choose a translation that clearly distinguishes the meaning of "כִּי מֵלָעַן" in v 14c from its meaning(s) in vv 11a, 11c, 12 and 14a.

97 In the sense of "from lack of".

98 E.g., in Jer. 2:15, "His towns are burnt so that there is no inhabitant (כִּי מֵלָעַן כָּלָמָה)".
Cf. Ezek. 14:15, "(The country) becomes desolate so that no-one can pass through it (כִּי מֵלָעַן בִּגְלָד) because of the beasts.".

Even in Job 4:20, 6:6 and 24:7-8, where "כִּי מֵלָעַן" does not have its usual causal or consequential connexion with what precedes it, it still does not have the disjunctive-contrastive force of "yet" or "even though one might expect otherwise". Rather, it simply means "without".

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In view of this expectation, Barton's suggestion that the very thing He has set there is "ignorance" or "obscurity" ("ד' ע"א") is undeniably attractive. Even though the word does not seem to occur with this meaning elsewhere in the Bible, Barton's appeal to the Talmudic usage of "ד' ע"א" as "secret" or "that which is concealed" does not seem forced given the late date of *Qoheleth* relative to the Biblical corpus overall, its often remarked-upon Aramaisms, etc.  The Bible is such a specialized corpus anyway, with such a limited sample of vocabulary, that even suspecting this meaning for "ד' ע"א" in a Biblical book earlier than *Qoheleth* would not necessarily seem fantastic; and in *Qoheleth*, such a meaning seems even probable. 100

*Pesahim* 50a presupposes that "secret" or "secrecy" is one possible meaning for "ד' ע"א" in its comment on "ד' ע"א - ע"א ל ע"א" in Ex. 3:15. 101 This verse is usually translated, "This is My Name forever",

taking "ל ע"א" here as "ל-'elem". The Rabbis, however, see the potential relevance for Ex. 3:15 of another meaning of "ל ע"א" , namely, "ל-'elem", "for secrecy". The

99 See below, Appendix Three.

100 Note *Qoheleth*‘s use of the word "ד' ע"א" meaning "right" or "appropriate" (like "καλὸς") in the very same verse, 3:11. For further implications of *Qoheleth*‘s Greek-looking use of "ד' ע"א" here, see below, Chapter 8, Section i, fn. 10.

In Biblical Hebrew, "ד' ע"א" usually means "beautiful"; but, as Barton points out, (op. cit., P.105), it occurs outside the Bible in the broader meaning of "good" (Zibim 2.2; Makshirin 5.10; Mikwa’oth 10.6, etc.). Barton also notes that Ben Sira 39:16 & 33 seems to be paraphrasing *Qoh*. 3:11; and if so, it translates "ד' ע"א" by "ד' ע"א".

101 This is also the presupposition behind the same point in *Yerushalmi Yoma* 3.7 [VI C].

"This is My Name forever (Ex. 3:15) may be read This is My Name, which is to be concealed.". See Neusner, Jacob, ed. and tr., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, Vol. 14, *Yoma* (Chicago, 1990), P.96.
reason this verse is so written (i.e., with "ול שם") is, they claim, to allow the reading, "This is My Name for secrecy".

Midrash may also be of help in assessing the merits of Barton's proposed emendation. For although the compiling of Midrashim as such was not begun until the second century C.E., the midrashic method was already employed well before the Christian Era; and even much of the material in the Midrashim goes back to the Talmudic period. The Midrash on Ps. 9 sheds some light on possible meanings of "ול שם" by seeing a possible example of its plural form ("ול שם" in v 1's "ול שם"), or "ול שם". When the text is read as the latter, "ול שם ת לבב" is taken as "secrets" or "things hidden".

At the beginning of Section 4, "ול שם ת לבב" is taken as "'alemut labben", "faults hidden from a son". Alternatively, at the beginning of Section 2, and the end of Section 3, "ול שם ת לבב" is taken as "'alemut libban", "concealed from the heart". Much of the wordplay in this Midrash is based on presupposing that "ול שם" means, in one sense or another, "things hidden". Section 1 is particularly interesting for displaying knowledge of both the two possible

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102 P.134. The section numbers and page numbers for this Midrash are given according to William G. Braude's translation, The Midrash on Psalms, Vol. I (New Haven, 1959), Pp.131-49.

103 I.e., the sins a son of Israel commits unwittingly, which he is forgiven on the Day of Atonement.

104 P.131.

105 P.134.

106 P.131.
interpretations of "דלי" in Qoh. 3:11, "the world" and "the unknown". Section 2 refers to Qoheleth trying to understand certain ordinances, but finding God unwilling to have His ordinances enquired into. The idea of God deliberately concealing information is backed up here by quoting Is. 64:3,

"Since the beginning of the world, men have not heard,
- Neither hath the eye seen,
- What He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him."

This Midrash, then, is evidence that Qoheleth in particular has long been associated with the teaching that God has chosen to conceal certain things from Man.

Moreover, this same Midrash may also be a reflection of the special association between Qoheleth and the issue of judgment. He is depicted here in Section 2 as pursuing the question of the reward of the righteous and that of when the Day of Redemption is coming. The gist of the passage, however, is that these mysteries are indeed concealed.

In Section 3, although Qoheleth is no longer explicitly referred to as he was in Sections 1 and 2, discussion continues on the question of rewards for obedience to precepts. R. Abba bar Kahana and his disciple R. Aha insist that these rewards are

"عالمת לבוב" ("alemut libban"), "concealed from their hearts".

This, says Aha, is

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107 Pp. 131-3.
108 Cf. below, Chapter 10, Section vi.
"So that the children of Israel will respect and observe the Torah as a whole."

He says this to reinforce Bar Kahana's teaching (already underlined by R. Hiyya's point in the orchard-parable), that if people knew exactly what reward to expect for obedience to particular precepts, they would be inclined to leave out those precepts which carry a lesser reward.

This, then, brings us to yet another characteristic preoccupation of Qoheleth's: his insistence on accepting everything God has done as a whole, not just some of it, and on obeying everything He has commanded, without adding anything to it or taking anything away from it.  

R. Hiyya's parable seems particularly significant, here in a midrash rich with references to Qoheleth's priority concerns. For he tells this parable in support of the teaching,

"Be as heedful of a minor precept as of a major one; for you do not know the reward for the heeding of the different precepts."

This is the very teaching Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi is also supporting in Aboth 2.1 with his unusual book-keeping metaphor, similar to that of Baba Bathra 78b; and the use of the term "י"ו פ" in this passage of Baba Bathra 78b seems very relevant to the possible meaning of the same word in Qoh. 7:27 & 29, especially its connexion with judgment and reward, Man's ultimate "י"ו פ" or "reckoning" with God.

It seems likely, then, that the direct references in this midrash to Qoheleth and

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110 See below, this Chapter, this Section and Section iv; cf. also Chapter 10, Section iv.

111 See below, Chapter 10, Section vi; cf. Chapter 10, Section i, ftn. 7.

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also the discussions (even without direct reference to him) of concerns particularly characteristic of his book are not gratuitous, but rather are based on a genuine recognition of and agreement with the core issues of his teaching. If so, the fact that it is supposedly the word "חֹלְכָּה חָלְכָּה" (plural of "חֹלָה") which sparked off all these associations may make us wonder all the more if Barton’s emendation to "חֹלָה" in Qoh. 3:11b is correct.

Another point in favour of this emendation is that, if we do accept "חֹלָה" as the original meaning, it is not difficult to explain how it came to be misinterpreted and wrongly pointed as "חֹלָה". For the predominant rôle of revelation in the Biblical writings overall, and the consequent unpopularity of the idea that God would withhold knowledge, could easily lead to such a mistake. Also, Barton’s emendation would make this passage even more strikingly similar to Theognis L.1075 than it already is, which is particularly interesting in view of Theognis’s interest in the "κατατόρπος" coupled with the fact that Qoh. 3:11a looks like a monotheistic adaptation of a well-known Greek proverb about the "κατατόρπος". See below, Chapter 8, beginning of Section i.

112 Even though it is a midrash on Psalm 9, not a midrash on Qoheleth as such.

113 This is especially so by comparison with, e.g., the exciting story of Daniel’s revelations giving him more influence over his foreign king than the king’s native pagan magicians had over him. See above, this Chapter, Section i, incl. ft. 42, for the apologetic tendency in Hellenistic Jewish writing, emphasizing how much more impressive Jewish traditions are than those of other nations. In historiography, this is a common approach with subject nations of Hellenistic rulers at the time.

114 See below, Chapter 8, beginning of Section i. Not that Theognis’s point is about the "κατατόρπος" in L.1075 as such; here, he simply says, "It is very difficult to understand how God will bring an unfinished work to its end. For darkness ("οἰδωνη") is (over it); and before what is to be comes to pass, the end-point of perplexity is not calculable for mortals.". However, it would be interesting if Qoheleth’s "אָכְלַי" ("ignorance") were consciously modelled on Theognis’ "οἰδωνη" ("darkness"). See Ranston, op. cit., P.18.
Another advantage of Barton's emendation is that it would dispense with the stylistic clumsiness of having "דָּבָר יִתר" in both 3:11 and 3:14. This does look like a real mistake, as if "דָּבָר יִתר" in the sense of "eternity" or "for a time-span" was genuinely meant to be in 3:14 only, but accidentally crept into 3:11 as well by wrongly influencing the pointing of 3:11's "דָּבָר יִתר", perhaps through scribal eyeskip. If this emendation is accepted, then 3:11 clarifies still further, along with the usage of "what God has done" in 7:13 & 14 and in 8:16 & 17, that the expression "everything God does" in 3:14 is meant to evoke God's withholding of knowledge.

If God's purpose in thus limiting human knowledge is to ensure that "men will fear Him", 115 this implies that without such a restriction, men would not fear Him. If they actually could

"Fathom what God has done from beginning to end", 116 they would set themselves up as literal masters of or as theoretical authorities on His system, manipulating it for their own advantage or expounding it to their own glory, without directly consulting Him at all, even though he established everything Himself.

In fact, even though it is not literally possible to grasp God's total plan, and actually work it to one's own advantage independently of Him, there are those, nevertheless, who imagine they have so grasped it, and who accordingly claim to be experts on it.

It seems that Qoheleth, like the author of Job, has noticed the fact that such people do not really fear God. They are lacking in practical piety. On this point, the two books are in agreement.

1153:14.

1163:11.
Consider, for example, whether Job’s friends feared God, when they told Job about the non-existent faults for which God had supposedly brought disaster upon him and his children. On Qoheleth’s level, they did not fear God, because he associates the fear of God with refraining from excessive speech, as he shows in 5:1-7, contrasting the fear of God in v 7b with the "much dreaming and many words" of v 7a; compare 10:14, where speaking at great length is the characteristic of a fool. God is angry with them because, He says, they

"Have not said the right things about Me".  

This complaint of God’s is more than justified, since it is not Job’s troubles, but his friends’ claim that God is punishing him for some deep sin, which makes Job indignant with God. In their false claims to certainty, the friends are misrepresenting God to Job just as surely (albeit unknowingly) as the satan misrepresented Job to God. The salient difference is that God does not believe the satan’s misrepresentation of Job; but Job does believe his friends’ misrepresentation of God.

Although Job disagrees with his friends’ contention that he is guilty of some sin, he irrationally fails accordingly to disagree also with their inference that God is punishing him for this sin which he has not committed. Therefore, he is angry with God for punishing him unjustly; but his anger is itself unjust, because God is not

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117 See above, Chapter 5, Section ix for the lack of reverence in Job’s friends, particularly as evidenced by their lengthiness of speech. God is angry at what they say; and initially He is also angry with Job himself. Job is, if anything, even more loquacious than his friends, until his change of heart at God’s appearance.

118 Job 42:7.
punishing him at all. Up to a point, this injustice is Job’s own failure, since the fact that he has less faith in God’s integrity than he has in his own is not based on reason or evidence, but is merely an instinctive product of his own egocentrism. Nevertheless, his friends must share a greater proportion of the blame than he. For their false certainty that God is punishing him, by wrongly convincing him, does more to shake his piety than any of his misfortunes succeeded in doing.

In 13:5, Job says to his friends,

"If only you would be altogether silent; For you, that would be wisdom.".

This, of course, is exactly Qoheleth’s perspective on wisdom:

"Let your words be few", 120 and, in effect,

"Let your books be few",

the implication of 12:12. Moreover, above all, avoid false claims, especially false claims to certainty. This, to him, is very much the essence of piety.

Even in 3:14, the very verse where he claims to know something, he says in his next breath,

"Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it.".

This phrasing is a caution against false knowledge. It echoes the warning of Deut.

119 If Job believed in God’s integrity with the same ardour that God believes in Job’s, he would not insist on his innocence without also insisting,

"Therefore God can not be punishing me, because God is just.".

1205:2.
13:1,

"See that you do all I command you.
Do not add to it, or take away from it."

This passage then goes on to warn against false prophets and false revelations, which of course would result in the worst false "additions" to Israel's faith possible: false gods. This is what Solomon was accepting in I Ki. 11, building shrines for Chemosh and Molech to please his foreign wives.

As with Qoh. 3:14, the same religious caution against wrong / false additions may lie behind the phrasing of 12:12,

"Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.". 121

The fact that this comes so soon after 12:10's recommendation of the author's unusual accuracy and truthfulness 122 probably implies that it is Qoheleth's characteristic

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121 This translation, though often contested, nevertheless may well be correct. Gordis (op. cit., P.344) prefers to take "ה connexion ת" in 12:12 as simply "furthermore" (like Vulg. "Hic amplius"); cf. "as to the rest" (so Heiligstedt, Dale and Zöckler). According to these suggestions, "ה connexion ת" refers only forwards and in a general sense to whatever remains to be said, instead of backwards and specifically to the authentic "words of the wise" in 12:11. This, however, makes no particular sense of v 11's "words of the wise" being placed where they are, between the reference to Qoheleth's careful accuracy (12:9 & 10) and the warning not to accept any writings of lesser calibre (12:12).

If, on the other hand, with Ehrlich, Barton, Crenshaw, etc., we take "ה connexion ת" as "in addition to" (i.e., "in addition to the words of the wise"), it preserves the flow of the sense from vv 9-12. The negative attitude of v 12b toward the making of "many books" suggests that the warning of v 12a should most naturally be taken as against more precepts "above and beyond" / "in addition to" those recommended in vv 9-11.

In 2:15 and 7:16, "connexion ת" seems to mean "extra", "by way of gain", "above and beyond", or "in excess". Barton points out (op. cit., P.199) that this approaches the Mishnaic meaning of "additional" found in the kindred form "connexion ת" / "connexion ת". "Furthermore" or "as to the rest" seem far too vague and tame a translation for "connexion ת". It is far easier to believe that "connexion ת" here means literally "in addition", and that "connexion ת", indicating exactly what it is that is being added to, refers back to an antecedent already specified (in this case "the words of the wise" in 12:11), as pronouns regularly do. There seems no reason at all for taking "connexion ת" as referring forward to something non-specific which has not even been mentioned yet when there is a perfectly good specific masculine plural noun for the "connexion ת" of "connexion ת" to refer back to, in the shape of "the words of the wise" in 12:11.

122 See also above, this Chapter, Section ii.
carefulness not to make unjustified additions or omissions to which the editor chiefly attributes this accuracy.

The formula "Do not add and do not take away" is specifically the language of legal and religious exactitude. It occurs elsewhere in Deuteronomy apart from 13:1 with the same implications. Theognis also warns us not to add anything to or take anything away from the Pythia’s answer from Apollo, since that will offend heaven. Although the influence of Theognis and Proverbs on Qoh. 3:14 is plausible in view of their general relevance to Qoheleth as wisdom works, the key influence here is Deuteronomy.

The verbal similarity between 3:14 and Deut. 13:1 is striking. Firstly, Deut. 13:1’s

"לא תוסיף, ולא תמעיר ממנה" is echoed by Qoh. 3:14’s

"לאיר את נוה סתי, דמשק אך לא大切". Qoheleth is reminding us here in 3:14 of this verse from Deuteronomy. 125

Next, there is the same emphasis in both Deut. 13:1 and Qoh. 3:14 on the word

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123 E.g., Ibid. 4:2 and 12:32; cf. Prov. 30:5 & 6; Rev. 22:18 & 19.

124 L.805-10.

125 This could, perhaps, colour our interpretation of 12:12 as well, even though the word implying "addition" in 12:12 is "הלך", and is not a word from the root "תדרש" as in Qoh. 3:14 and Deut. 13:1.
"לכל", since it is imperative that nothing must be left out. *Deut.* 13:1 warns the people to observe

> אֲחַז בָּל - הָרֹבֶּר אֵשֶׁר אֶבָּכֵי מַגָּה אָחָה

and *Qoh.* 3:14 starts with

> יָרֶה בָּל - אַשָּׁר יָשָׁה הָאֲלָלִים

Straight after this comes the already-mentioned echo of the same *Deuteronomy* verse, Qoheleth's rephrasing of *Deut.* 13:1's

> לָא - תַּשֵּׁר, וֹלָא תַּגְּרֵשׁ מָמָר

as

> עַלְכֵּי אֶיךְ לַחְוָסִית.

> וְמֵמָמָר אֶיךְ לַגָּרְשׁ.

Finally, the very next words show the unmistakably Deuteronomic motivation of the entire verse:

> והָאֲלָלִים יָשָׁה שִׁירָא מַלְכְּךָ

> "And God does it so that men may fear Him".

The very same passage here compared with *Qoh.* 3:14 goes on to say,

> "I t is the Lord your God you must follow,

and Him you must fear (יִתְנַהוֹ בֵּיתל רָא).

This is the very heart of Deuteronomy. The expression

> "to fear the Lord your God, and to keep His commandments"

is not only the main standard formula in this book, but also a summary of its chief

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ethical priority. One out of many possible examples of this is Deut. 5:29,

"O that their hearts would be inclined to fear Me and keep all My commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever.".

Since, then, Qoh. 3:14’s reference to Deuteronomic spirituality is unmistakably deliberate here, just as it is in the book’s allusions to Solomon, it is important to discern correctly the purpose of this intertextuality. It does not necessarily mean that Qoheleth’s warnings against illicit additions and omissions are referring to the literal Torah only. Admittedly, the book of Deuteronomy is referring to literal commandments; and the above-quoted examples of similar verbal formulae, from Proverbs, Theognis and Revelation, are all referring to divinely inspired words, not deeds. Nevertheless, Qoheleth’s references to "what God has done" are not confined to something verbal; they are very intimately connected with actual events.

In 8:17, "what God has done" covers the whole spectrum of "What goes on under the sun",
the totality of life’s experiences, which people try to fathom but can not. In 7:13-14, it refers to good times and bad times, actual events woven together deliberately in such a pattern as to render the future unpredictable. In 3:14a, "what God has done" refers back to 3:11a,

"He has made everything right in its season";
and, as in 7:14, He has done this in order to make the future impenetrable, so that

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127 See above, this Chapter, Section i.

128 On the other hand, however, I see no reason to suppose that it does not refer literally to Torah, whatever else it may include as well. See, e.g., Chapter 9, end of Section i.
"Can not fathom what God has done from beginning to end." 129

In turn, 3:11 refers back to 3:1-8, which is unmistakably about events, not just about words, even divinely commanded words. For it is about the right times that God has ordained for the varied actions in life; therefore, it is, in effect, a pattern of actions, since Man's actions inevitably follow this pre-ordained pattern of opportunities for those actions; there is no other available route for those actions to follow.

The method 130 by which God is said to have

"made everything right in its season" 131

is by arranging the framework of Man's opportunities for specific actions (and hence, in effect, the actions themselves) into a pattern of paired opposites. 132 The effect of this is that Man has to be forever poised for surprises, poised for change and for adaptation, and hence open to new instructions. He must

"Go near to listen" 133
to the God Who alone understands His own work, and Who impacts on human

1293:11c.

130Which is the same as "what God has done" in 8:16-17 and in 7:13-14.

1313:11a.

132Like the good and bad experiences of 7:14, which are also opposites.

1335:1.
experience. Man must not impose his own words, plans or interpretations on that which God has designed to a different pattern and for a different purpose from anything Man would understand.

Despite the closeness of Qoheleth’s affinity with Deuteronomy, therefore, it is still true to say that what he is enjoining us not to add to or take away from is not, as in Deuteronomy, the Divine Word alone, whether Torah or prophecy. It is rather the total pattern of God’s providence, the totality of "reality" or "what God has done". For He has arranged it in this way for a purpose. The purpose is that men will fear Him, and not try to live in some false "reality" of their own, that does not conform to the inevitabilities which He has fore-ordained but which they do not know.

Qoheleth is not, therefore, simply repeating the Deuteronomists’ message about God’s commandments; he is resonating to it, but then extending it beyond the commandments alone to something which he takes as ordained by God in parallel with those commandments. The aim of echoing Deut. 13:1 in Qoh. 3:14 is to evoke the same caution and reverence for divine inscrutability that Deuteronomy evokes in the

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134 See above, this Chapter, Section i.

135 This is not to say that the Deuteronomists see any dichotomy between word and action. On the contrary, their emphasis on the fulfilment of prophecy shows that they see Divine Word and Divine Action as indissolubly interlinked. However, Qoheleth’s interest in "what God has done" goes beyond the point where the link between Divine Action and Divine Word is discernible to human beings. In prophecy and its fulfilment, the link is made very obvious, in order to illustrate the guidance given to men in relation to specific and imminent divine actions. Qoheleth, however, unlike the Deuteronomists, is concerned not primarily with the fact that God chooses sometimes to reveal to men what He will do, and with how men respond to this revelation; he is more directly concerned with the fact that God chooses sometimes not to reveal what He will do, and with how men respond to this lack of revelation. To him, the actions God chooses not to reveal (in advance or as they are unfolding), and His reasons for not revealing them, are just as important and as worthy of reverence as the acts He chooses to reveal. Therefore, how Man reacts to lacking revelation can be no less important than how he reacts to having revelation.

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context of God’s Commandments specifically. However, Qoheleth wants this same reverence and humility, the same diligent attention to details and the same unshakeable scruples against adding to or subtracting from the original, to be applied not just to God’s Commandments, but to the entire dispensation of divine providence, which in his eyes is identical with the total pattern of life’s realities. God has arranged and established this pattern Himself, just as He has revealed His Commandments Himself; and this is why it demands the same scrupulous acceptance, in every detail, as the Divine Word.

In Qoheleth’s view, then, the total pattern of reality is quite literally

"כָּל - אַשְּרָה צָעָשָׁה הָאָלָהִים"

for God has masterminded it all Himself. As 7:13 says,

"When times are good, be happy;
But when times are bad, consider:
God has made the one as well as the other".
An inevitable consequence of this viewpoint is that it is morally unacceptable to do violence to this total pattern by omitting parts of it that should be there, or by adding parts that should not, in order to make it fit some imaginary system of our own, or to make it fit our imaginary picture of God's system. To do this would be just as impious as omitting parts from the Law, or adding parts to the Law.

Unfortunately, however, this is exactly what some people do; and Qoheleth, like the author of Job, has the air of one speaking from a position of protest against this malpractice. In 1:15a he says,

"What is crooked can not be straightened",

using the same root (D IV) for "crooked" as in 7:13,

"Who can make straight what (God) has made crooked?".

He then adds in 1:15b,

"What is lacking can not be counted / reckoned in".  

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136 This juxtaposition, in 1:15a & 15b, of straightening what is crooked with making false additions suggests a possible connexion between the prohibition of straightening what is crooked in 7:13 and the warning against wrongful additions and omissions in 3:14. For "straightening" what is crooked in the sense of "adapting something from its original form to suit one's own ends", see above, this Chapter, Section iii. Potentially, adding or subtracting data could be part of the same type of adaptation process as straightening it.

One example of this is mentioned by Nechautis, editor of the popular version of The Divine Book of Imhotep, who describes (Col. 8, L.I.175-7) how he "Filled in defects and struck out superfluities" in the original account as part of the editing process, in order to get straight to the point. See Grenfell, B.P. and A.S. Hunt, The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Part XI (London, 1915), Pp.228-9. He is not implying that the original was at fault as regards the purpose for which it was written. Nevertheless, what he is aiming to do is to streamline the account in order to fit it more to his purposes. He does not describe the original as "κυτταρος" ("crooked", as in the proverb in Aeschylus' Libation Bearers, L.773, quoted above, this Chapter, Section iii). Rather, he calls it "διλεκτιδλογος" (Ibid., Col. 9, L.180): "wordchanging", i.e., "complicated", "longwinded".

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apparently meaning that it is wrong to pretend something is there when it is not. Only a very dishonest accountant would enter a non-existent credit or debit in his ledger. Nevertheless, the games people often play with the realities of human existence, even its most baldly obvious realities, are no less dishonest than that. It is a common practice to tamper with the books of experience, trying to make totally unworkable accounts look as if they balance. 137

A salient example of this is the approach of the materialist. 138 Many have wondered why Qoheleth gives us such frequent reminders of death. At first sight this creates a slightly schizoid effect alongside the lyrical imperative-to-joy aspect of his work, such as 9:7 ff. or 11:7 ff., where we are advised to enjoy with all our might all that life has to offer. 139 Another reason why the many references to death puzzle some readers is that they think the imminence of death is too obvious for any

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137 Compare below, Chapter 10, Section i, ft. iv and Section vi for Rabbinic book-keeping metaphors in connexion with the Judgment and the moral accountability of Man.

138 See also above, Chapter 1, Sections i and ii.

139 The exhortation to enjoyment, however, has the serious purpose of underlining Man's creaturely status (see above, Chapter 2, Sections v and vi). In view of this, the advice does not, after all, seem incompatible with the equal seriousness of reminding us of death. In addition, there is a "Carpe diem" aspect to Qoheleth's reasoning. This is a natural result of the necessities imposed by his belief in the correct "times" for every activity, and the key importance of recognizing and responding to those "times". This viewpoint implies a practical need and an ethical obligation to seize the correct "time" for rejoicing, despite the even greater importance of responding to the correct "time" for mourning as well (7:1-4, cf. 3:4), and despite the implication that death and judgment too are equally "right", in their proper "times" (11:7-10).
reminder to be necessary. This is far from being the case for everyone, however. For although

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning", the heart of the fool is not. 140 To the materialist, it is not obvious at all that he has to die, because he makes a special point of conveniently forgetting the fact. That is exactly why he needs a reminder.

His motive in forgetting this is that death is the particular part of life’s total reality which it suits him to leave out, since only by leaving it out can he make his most cherished axiom appear viable. This guiding axiom is that the most important thing in existence is making money. The true materialist regards making money as far more important than enjoying what money can buy. 141 However, once one acknowledges the whole of God’s ordained reality, one necessarily includes death; and once one includes death, it makes nonsense of the idea that the most important thing is making money. It is therefore essential to the materialist’s whole approach to life that he refuses to acknowledge the whole of reality. This is his fundamental impiety. For the totality he refuses to accept is God-ordained; its integrity should therefore be preserved, just as the integrity of the Torah should be preserved, with no illicit omissions or additions.

The impiety of the ‘Job’s Comforter’ is very similar to that of the materialist.

140 7:4.

141 See below, Chapter 7, Section v, fn. 122, identifying pleasure as “the enemy” in the austere eyes of the serious and dedicated materialist.
The only way he can preserve the most cherished axiom of his anti-wisdom is, again, by violating the total reality as God has made it. He has to make "straight" what God has made "crooked"; and he does this by excising that part of reality which does not fit in with what he has decided to believe. In his case, what needs excising to make his system look viable is the suffering of the righteous: or, perhaps more accurately, the potential righteousness of the sufferer. He refuses to accept that one who is deeply suffering can be righteous. If he were to embrace the total pattern of God’s providence, and accept it with humble reverence, the system he wants would not work; and that is why he succumbs to the impiety of rejecting part of that total pattern of God’s providence.

To help us avoid these pitfalls of temptation, therefore, Qoheleth presents us in 3:1-8 with a symbolic skeleton of the whole providential framework. This is designed to dissuade us from distorting the sacrosanct whole, either by wrongful additions or by unjustified omissions. He hereby renders both dishonesty and stupidity about the wholeness of the pattern a great deal more difficult. He does this by representing the essence of the totality as a series of opposites:

"A time (יו) to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to uproot,
A time to love and a time to hate, -
A time to search and a time to give up, - ",

etc.

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142 Which is that if you are suffering dire misfortune, you must be guilty of some comparably dire (though perhaps secret) sin.

143 I.e., both fraudulent denial of the totality and simple failure to recognize it.
The above series is summed up in 3:1 as

"A time for every activity under heaven."

This idea is powerfully reinforced by the arrangement of the activities and their "times" into opposites. For by implication, what lies between opposites is nothing less than everything. Between two opposite poles, precisely because they are opposite, everything is contained. This is probably the real implication of the expression

"The knowledge of good and evil"

in Gen. 2:9. There are some who take this expression to mean sexual knowledge instead; but Cyrus Gordon's claim that it means simply "knowledge of everything" seems more plausible.  


Qoheleth's picture suggests that Man's characteristic sin has mutated somewhat since the Fall. It is in one sense the same, but in another sense not the same. His sin in Eden was literally attaining the potentially universal knowledge ("knowledge of good and evil") to which he was not entitled (Gen. 3:22). The sin with which Qoheleth joins battle is basically the same. For, as W. Zimmerli says, he sees that real understanding depends on willingness to

"seize only the portion and not the whole".

See "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology", Scottish Journal of Theology, XVII (1964), P.158; see also below, Chapter 8, Section iii. Nevertheless, Qoheleth is also aware of the dangers of pretending to have universal knowledge, and maintaining this pretence by actually refusing certain aspects of knowledge deliberately.

Hence, as Adam usurps total knowledge, so Qoheleth's Man misrepresents total knowledge, by pretending to have it when he does not. For pretending to have it when he does not has become an irrational aspect of that same emulation of godhead which motivated his attempt in Eden to usurp it in reality. Inevitably, in pretending to grasp the totality of God's pattern when he does not, Man resists and refuses knowledge of certain aspects of that pattern, and hence wilfully projects a distorted image of its totality. This false totality does not do justice to the whole and true reality, and so does not do justice to the God who designed that whole either. There is an obvious example of this type of false totality underlying the theories of Job's friends about his disastrous circumstances. This false wisdom of his friends made Job unjustly angry with God for 'punishing' him with these disasters when God was not punishing him at all.

These two sins of usurpation of universal knowledge and misrepresentation of total knowledge / reality are very closely inter-related, because they are both based on refusal to acknowledge that only God
By arranging 3:1-8's skeletal framework of God's entire dispensation of providence into opposites, therefore, Qoheleth underlines the importance of preserving its divinely ordained entirety. He condemns as presumptuous Man's tendency to omit puzzling or inconvenient anomalies, and to add misleadingly inadequate theories. The consistent and evocative use of Deuteronomistic formulae and standpoints throughout this book indicate that it is pietistic organically, and not a mixture of basic cynicism and pious interpolations.

Notwithstanding the author's creative and sympathetic grasp of the Deuteronomists, however, he is actually going beyond them in this sense: he extends to the entire dispensation of providence, to the whole pattern of life's reality, as outlined in 3:1-8, the same reverence that they reserve for Torah specifically, including the accompanying principle that nothing should be added to it and nothing taken from it. He is therefore surpassing even traditional pietistic scrupulousness, by striving to give due weight to literally

"All that God has done",
enjoining faithfulness not just to the commandments God has given Man by which to live, but to the integrity of the whole pattern of reality He has created.

Since, therefore, Qoheleth's concept of Man's religious obligation is more all-embracing, extending to

"All that God has done",

has the right to universal knowledge, and Man does not.
he is setting Man on a larger stage than the earlier pietists; and in doing so, he is revealing all the more clearly Man's essential smallness. Whereas traditional wisdom, such as Ps. 19:11, would exhort us to keep God's commandments because

"In keeping them there is great reward",

Qoheleth says,

"Fear God and keep his commandments, For this is all / the whole of Man". 146

In one sense,

"This is all / the whole of Man"

emphasizes the smallness of Man. For part of its meaning is,

"This is all there is to Man; there is nothing more".

Unlike the wisdom of Proverbs, then, Qoheleth is not showing us the path to Man's greatness or promotion; he is rather holding up a mirror to Man's limitations. For it is through not recognizing these limitations that he falls into impiety and into the anti-wisdom of false certainty. It is through not seeing his inability to comprehend the whole, and therefore attempting the impossible, that Man adds what should not be added or takes away what should not be taken away. By doing this, he confounds all hope of understanding even what he can and should understand. He fails to reach even the full measure of his own modest potential for wisdom; and that is a waste, since wisdom is a genuinely worthwhile goal. 147

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146 12:13.

By trying to be too wise and too good, then, Man becomes neither wise nor good at all; and by trying to be more than Man, he becomes less than Man. Nevertheless, by cultivating a humble, listening and receptive posture before God, and by learning obedience to God’s commandments in place of his own instinctive self-assertion, Man can become re-instated as a creature, and hence as his real self. Only in his relation to God can he find his true identity; and that relation is as a subordinate. This is the positive side to Qoheleth’s "This is all of Man":

that by obedience, and only by obedience, Man can become his full self, and nothing less. Perhaps there is a pleasing reminiscence of 3:14 in 12:13’s use of "יָবֹא" / "all": an implication that, if nothing is illicitly added to Man, nothing will be taken from him either. His potential stature will no longer be diminished as it was at the Fall, when Man tried to add to himself the universal knowledge to which he is not entitled.

Qoheleth, therefore, while standing squarely within the wisdom tradition, and loyal to its ideal of wisdom as a desirable goal, is nevertheless leading the wisdom-genre in a new direction, away from any humanistic associations toward fresh

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148 7:16 & 17.

149 See also above, Chapter 5, Section ix.

150 Depicted in such dignified terms in, e.g., Ps. 8:4 ff., as referred to above, Chapter i, Section i, Pp. 25-7 (incl. ftms. 32, 41, 44 and 45).

151 Cf. above, Chapter 5, Sections i and ii.
and pietistic pastures. 152

152 Even though this is not how the author of Wisdom of Solomon seems to have interpreted Qoheleth; see, e.g., Barton, op. cit., Pp.57-8.
CHAPTER 7


I. GILGAMESH’S HEROIC QUEST VERSUS THE CREATURELY PLEASURES MORE APPROPRIATE TO MAN

The fact that Qoheleth focuses so directly on Man’s refusal to live within his limitations as the chief human evil may well reflect the influence of the epic Gilgamesh. Admittedly, this topic is closely related to the theme, so familiar in Hebrew and Greek literature, of the undesirability of overreaching oneself through arrogance. Arguably, nevertheless, it is pre-eminently Gilgamesh which constitutes the classic statement of Man’s need to live within his limits. Qoheleth could, therefore, be regarded as rejecting the heroic view of Man most unmistakably and decisively in rejecting, by allusion, the quest of Gilgamesh.

This quest is to escape the necessity of death, and it is undertaken by an archetypal "great man" or hero, i.e., a man excelling in both wisdom and strength. However sombre death may be, and however sincere Qoheleth is in recommending...
putting away grief \(^1\) and enjoying life’s pleasures, he does not want to relinquish the frequent contemplation of death and its inevitability. For this would be both unrealistic and an encouragement either to hybristic arrogance or to under-valuing life and not enjoying it. He therefore settles for an equal preoccupation both with death and with the imperative to joy, and reconciles them by adopting the same advice that Siduri the Ale-wife gives Gilgamesh when he says to her: \(^2\)

"Let me not see the death which I ever dread."

She replies: \(^3\)

"The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find. \(^4\)
When the gods created mankind,
Death for mankind they set aside,
Life in their own hands retaining.
Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
Make thou merry by day and by night.
Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,
Day and night dance thou and play.
Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom,
For this is the task of mankind."

This sentiment is consciously echoed in all the passages of Qoheleth which advise men to minimize their ambition, enjoying the simple creature comforts afforded

\(^1\) 11:10.

\(^2\) Tablet X, ii, 13.

\(^3\) Tablet X, iii, 2-14.

\(^4\) As Shamash says in X, i, 8.

\(^5\) Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, 90A.
by using to the full such material substance as God has given them. It is well-known that the actual wording of the above *Gilgamesh* passage is very closely paralleled in *Qoh.* 9:7-9:

"Go, eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart; for it is now that God favours what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with fresh oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this fleeting life that God has given you under the sun - all your fleeting days. For this is your lot in life, and in your toilsome labour under the sun."

It is hard to believe that Qoheleth does not have the *Gilgamesh* passage explicitly in mind here, however frequently and however adamantly the possibility of this is denied. For he seems to be echoing its wording deliberately. Although these are more or less universal human sentiments, and this may have been a standard Middle Eastern formula for expressing them, *Gilgamesh* is a very eminent epic, and works of such quality and influence, rather than borrowing from current maxims, are often the original source for what only later come to be standard formulae for common sentiments. For a fuller discussion of points of contact between *Qoheleth* and *Gilgamesh*, see below, APPENDIX ONE.

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7 See Appendix One, second page.

8 Compare the many familiar expressions originating from *Hamlet*, such as "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune", "To be or not to be", etc. (both Act III, Sc. 1, Ll.56-8); or comparably familiar sayings from *Isaiah*, e.g., "There is no peace for the wicked", (Is. 48:22).

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Gilgamesh, however, is not the only eminent symbol of the Heroic view of Man which Qoheleth is expressly repudiating. He also uses the figure of Solomon for the same purpose. In this lies the true answer to the old crux about whether or not Qoheleth assumes the role of Solomon, and if so, whether or not he means his Solomonic identity to be taken literally. The overwhelming probability is that Qoheleth is ironically adopting the persona of Solomon; but only because Solomon is the standard type who best sums up the complete opposite of what he believes a man should be. On this issue of repudiating the "Great Man" type, i.e., the legendary hero-king, with his outstanding strength and wisdom, he is not only embracing wholeheartedly the ethical viewpoint of the Assyrian epic; he is also fully in line with those Prophets and Deuteronomists who teach that one should not aim for power, greatness, magnificence or immortality, but rather for loyalty and obedience to God.

In Qoheleth the two philosophies, that of the Gilgamesh epic and that of the Prophets / Deuteronomists, merge into one, in the form of a decisive rejection of the "Wise Man" idol, and especially in its most primitively exotic form, i.e., the Hero-King figure, pre-eminent in power through his wisdom, such as the "Solomon" of the

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9 See also below, Appendix Two.


11 Since the tragic fruitlessness of the quest for immortality is the whole point of Gilgamesh anyway.
Deuteronomists. In line with this, Qoheleth also rejects the characteristically Solomonic recipe for wisdom intrinsically associated with that particular idol.

This recipe is, in effect, a success-ethic of ultimately humanistic and antipietistic tendencies. It may have formatively influenced a professional class of Wise Men, who owed to Solomon and his internationalist / humanist outlook the original institution of their influential and privileged social class. If so, and if Qoheleth is their literary (and perhaps also social) successor, this may have given him a special sense of obligation to take issue with their anti-wisdom; for this anti-wisdom is also part of his heritage, and will therefore become part of his identity by default unless he actively opposes it. He is, then, perhaps both the successor to the Wise Men and their opponent. His reaction against their false presuppositions begins with addressing himself to the issue of distinguishing between what is worthwhile or profitable in life and what is not. The idea of "that which amounts to profit" is contrasted, by implication, with "that which is fleeting / can not be

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12 Although the Deuteronomists recognize Solomon's wisdom as vitiated by his disloyalty to God, they fully acknowledge its reality. In / Kings, his wisdom is represented as having gained him and his country international recognition, bringing great power and influence. This wisdom is also shown to have had a potential for good as well as for evil, even though the latter prevailed in the end.

13 This stance of conscientious protest against cynical, materialist / antipietist 'wisdom' (i.e., against anti-wisdom) is in some respects similar to disinterested Greek criticism of the Sophists for the sake of truth in its own right, as noted above, this Chapter, Section i.

14 The more so since this anti-wisdom is called wisdom; and in the absence of any recognized distinction between worldly anti-wisdom and true pietist wisdom, a man who is a sage and a son of sages would seem to be at above-average risk of falling into gross impiety. See also below, Appendix Six.

15 Qoh. 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:16; 7:11. His opposition to anti-wisdom begins with these questions about 'profit' because of the intrinsic bias of anti-wisdom toward ambition, greed and self-aggrandizement.

16 By implication, "lasting profit" (see below, Chapter 9): "", 2:13 of Wisdom's value; or "", 6:8 of the wise man's advantage over the fool.
grasped and held onto". 17

Of the situations and pursuits which Qoheleth classifies as "אֵל", he pointedly specifies a number which are eminently (and, when placed together as he places them, uniquely and unmistakably) characteristic of Solomon. This is in addition to the clear indication in 1:12 that the author is to be identified with Solomon - identified with him symbolically in the fruitlessness of his quest for lasting achievement and satisfaction through all the activities described in 1:12 - 2:26. In 2:8, he gathers gold and treasure, and gathers it from monarchs, as Solomon did; 18 in 2:7 & 8 he amasses servants. 19 In 2:4, he refers to great building projects, an obvious hallmark of Solomon; and in 2:18, 19 & 21, he seems to be hinting at the folly of Rehoboam. He is clearly not impressed with the opulence he describes, - which is so grandiose that it can only be the proverbial wealth of Solomon, - nor with the way he imagines that monarch spending his time 20. He sees no "profit" 21 in his great possessions, 22 his silver and gold, 23 his building, 24 etc.

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17 E.g., 1:2 & 14; 2:1, 11 & 15.

18 Cf. I Ki. 9:14 & 28; and Ibid. 10:10, 14 & 21, in which Hiram of Tyre and the Queen of Sheba are specified.

19 Cf. I Ki. 10:5 & 8.

20 2:4-11.

21 2:11.

22 2:7.

23 2:8.

24 2:4.

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Above all, Qoheleth rejects the most typically Solomonic achievement of all:

"Of making many books there is no end; and much study wearies the body.".

This amounts to a dismissal of the famous wisdom of Solomon as described in I Ki. 4:30-34, including 26 songs, proverbs and works on natural history, all in great numbers, far too numerous to conceive of them being remembered without being written down. There was a long tradition of wisdom being committed to writing, 27 but no apparent tradition of scientific works being committed to memory. 28 The Deuteronomistic history here presents us, deliberately to invite our disapproval, with a Solomon whose wisdom includes encyclopaedic knowledge and prolific literary output about nature, practical planning ability in ambitious projects, and skill in defence, international trade and diplomacy, as if these useful but amoral abilities were on a level in importance with the traditional, prime requirement of an Israelite leader. This requirement is the wisdom to discern right from wrong in such a way as to make correct judicial decisions.

Although Solomon does manifest this specifically moral type of wisdom as well, he only does so in the earlier part of the narrative, e.g., in I Ki. 3. Here, he is still represented in a favourable light, and has not yet received the warning in Ibid, 9:6 ff. against disobedience and worshipping foreign gods. However, the long-term results

25 12:12.

26 Verses 32 & 33.

27 Although there is no reason why this written wisdom should not have been subsequently "spoken", i.e., recited.

28 Cf. above, Qoh. 12:12, "many books".

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of his promiscuous wisdom - of which *I Kings* depicts the more materialistic and amoral aspects gradually eclipsing the ethical and judicial - are vast riches, a mighty war-machine, impressive trade and commerce, gratification of the senses, intellectual learning, external splendour on an unparalleled level, and ultimately, as the negative logical conclusion to it all, eventual apostasy from the one, true God. The greater part of his 'wisdom' was proved by this to have been corrupted, in effect, into anti-
wisdom.

Despite the later date of *Qoheleth* than of the Deuteronomistic works which launch the only comparably direct and frontal attack on Solomon's ways, it is precisely the same Solomonic recipe for wisdom, with exactly the same salient details as described in the *I Kings* account of Solomon's career, that Qoheleth has here in mind, and is explicitly and pointedly rejecting. Like the Deuteronomistic writers, he rejects unequivocally the antipietist success-ethic regarded as the legacy of Solomon, and rejects it explicitly in the very persona of Solomon.

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29 These are pointedly condemned in the wording of the restrictions governing kingship (*Deut. 17:14-18*). It is impossible to read these without immediately thinking of Solomon as the exact embodiment of everything they prohibit. With *Deut. 17:16a's statement that kings must not "multiply horses", compare *I Ki. 4:26*. Compare also *Deut. 17:16b with I Ki. 10:26 & 28 on courting Egypt; Deut. 17:17 with I Ki. 11:3 & 4 on multiplying wives; and Deut. 17:17 with I Ki. 10:14 & 21 on multiplying silver and gold.
The fact that the Solomonic type is a major target of the Pietists also reflects negatively on the whole institution of the in their eyes. Not only was Solomon the archetypal practitioner and patron of wisdom; but the of later generations follow in precisely the same materialistic path which Solomon pioneered, and which eventually led to his apostasy. They and the ruling classes who follow their advice are said to

"Take counsel, but not of (God)"; 

"They look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord; Yet He also is wise." This reference to God being "wise" is a sarcastic understatement, mocking the distinctive term "The Wise" by which these anti-pietist courtier-counsellors are professionally known, and by which they imply that they have a monopoly of wisdom.

Qoheleth has reservations similar to those of the prophets about 'experts' claiming a monopoly of wisdom; in this sense, he is a Pietist with the same ideals. This is a piquant position, since he certainly belongs firmly in the wisdom tradition.

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30 Lk. 30:1.

31 Ibid. 31:1 & 2.

32 8:17.
as well. In his overall preoccupations, he echoes now and again thoughts familiar from *Proverbs* and from wisdom Psalms. Occasionally he adopts the traditional wisdom style, giving nuggets of practical advice in the form of short, pithy proverbs. He may even belong to the leisured and privileged class of professional; 12:9 suggests he was well-educated and did not have to earn his living, at least by any means other than his teaching. Yet he is very dissatisfied with the simplistic theology of reward and punishment in this life, which can so easily be exploited by the ambitious and unscrupulous to justify wrongdoing, on the grounds that worldly success is itself a proof of virtue.

This is why, when he speaks of justice, he does not speak of it absolutely, simply in itself; he regards it more from the angle of its proper "time". He does not wish us to doubt the certainty of its eventual arrival or the rightness of the time for it when it comes; and he sees that we might doubt these things. We might doubt because we are preoccupied with the present, and quite reasonably so, since youth is also the right *time* for enjoyment. Another possible reason for doubt might be that

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34 As noted above, Chapter 5, Section ii.

35 *Pss.* 39, 49, etc.


37 See also below, Chapter 7, Section i.

38 Nevertheless, the time for judgment in 3:17 is the climax of the "times"-passage in 3:1 ff; see also below, Chapter 5, Section ix, Chapter 7, Section ii and Chapter 8, Section iii, Footnote 9. Although it is specifically from the perspective of its proper "time" that Qoheleth discusses judgment, judgment is nevertheless a matter of priority importance to him.

people's good or bad deeds are "hidden" until the time of judgment comes 40, so the righteous man in misfortune might despair, whereas the wicked man in prosperity think himself invulnerable. Qoheleth, although an accredited sage 41 and scholar / writer 42 by no means projects the image of the élitist. His students are "the people"; 43 and he stresses the impossibility of certainty, 44 the fact that the Establishment and the privileged are often wrong, 45 and that the righteous often suffer. 46 He does not wish, therefore, to be associated with some class of experts, 47 or with an over-privileged class of people who trust in their prosperity as if it can be relied on forever, or as if it proves their merit.

This is particularly arresting in view of the fact that some of his ideas suggest he belongs to a proto-Sadducaean milieu: his interest in the cult, 48 whether positive or negative; his familiarity with refined pleasures; his lack of faith in an after-life, etc. He must indeed be uncertain about the after-life, to resist the temptation of positing reward and punishment in the next life as a solution to the problem of the injustice

40:12:14.
41:12:9.
42:12:10.
43:Contrast, e.g., 3:11, 7:14, 8:17.
44:3:16, 4:1 & 13, 5:8, 9:17, 10:6, 8:9.
45:7:15, 8:14.
46:1:16 is turns out to be ironical in view of 2:15 ff.
47:5:1.
he sees around him. For this clearly affects him deeply, 49 since the preference for
death it inspires contrasts starkly with the sentiment of 9:4; and the latter sentiment
is necessarily more characteristic of the book as a whole, because of his emphasis on
the all-importance of exploiting the "times". 50 The message of *Wisdom of Solomon*
and of *Daniel 12:2 & 3* suggests that reward in the after-life is a popular solution
amongst pietists and moralists; indeed, it always has been and always will be; 51 yet
nevertheless Qoheleth resists this solution.

In view of the fact that he is often held to have a far less vivid and intimate
awareness of a personal God than most Biblical writers, it may even be somewhat
surprising that he adopts the Pietist viewpoint and target of attack; yet he does. 52
He also opposes the false wisdom of the Prosperity = Righteousness Party. Moreover,
although the idea of a proto-Sadducaean setting 53 for Qoheleth seems plausible, such
a possible background only makes his rejection of the Great Man Cult more striking.
He has absolutely no desire at all to select a Solomon-substitute such as Ben Sira’s
Simon the High Priest. 54 Despite his disinclination toward rebellion and of social

49:1 & 2.


52 This in itself gives some grounds for doubt as to whether his awareness of God is so lacking in
intimacy after all, as already noted above, Chapter 5, Sections v and vii-ix.

53 Or at least a cultured and prosperous origin, with a good grounding in the Torah and in literature
generally.

54 *Sir*, 50; see below, Chapter 6, Section i.
change \(^{55}\) and his preference for making the best of the political set-up one already has, \(^{56}\) he still resonates to the Deuteronomistic History, with its belief in God's overall sovereignty, and hence His right to overturn or uproot whatever does not please Him. \(^{57}\) Even if Qoheleth is a 'proto-Sadducee', therefore, he is nevertheless a pietist first and foremost.

\(^{55}\) 4:14-16, 10:20.

\(^{56}\) 8:2-6.

\(^{57}\) See below, Chapter 6, Sections i - iv and Chapter 7, Section iii.
Qoheleth also goes further than the Deuteronomists, and perhaps further even than most of the Prophets, in rejecting entirely the legitimacy of the Great Man / Special Leader ethic. To Qoheleth, the Great Man, whether Israelite or foreign is, at least potentially, equivalent to the Rebellious Man or Counterfeit God of Gen. 3:5 & 6 and Ezek. 28:1, 2, 6 & 9. This figure's quest for wisdom is closely associated with his illegitimate desire to ape godhead; and he also corrupts and abuses wisdom. "For the sake of (his) splendour", as in Ezek. 28:17. Similarly, in Dan. 4:34-7, a parallel proud-ruler-type is made to repent and acknowledge God. Qoheleth lacks enthusiasm for the King, despite his disapproval of rebellion against the King no less than of rebellion in general.

Qoheleth has a particularly close affinity with the Deuteronomists, since it is he who launches the only equally obvious and equally direct attack on Solomon as typifying everything to which he is opposed. Intriguingly, however, a diatribe of comparable spirit, Ezek. 28's attack, in very similar terms, on a Wise Man / Pseudo God figure, is directed against the King of Tyre; and this monarch is closely...
associated with Solomon, especially in *I Ki. 5* and *Ibid. 9:11-14 &.27*. Ezekiel too, then, is attacking exactly the same false values, and through very nearly the same human symbol of them. This King of Tyre is another version of the Wise and Powerful King Figure, a man aiming to be more than just a man:

"Thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, *I am a God; I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas*. Yet thou art a man, and not a God, thou that set thine heart as the heart of God.". 63

It is helpful, therefore, to consider both where Qoheleth stands firmly within the already established pietist tradition, - which he shares with, e.g., the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic writers, - and where he differs from them in emphasis. Where he differs most from these other Pietists, and from virtually all the Biblical writers, is in the degree to which he confines himself to Man's limitations, and almost ignores his positive achievements as a topic. Even 9:13-16 is primarily about how what is admirable fails to get the reward it deserves, rather than a celebration of praiseworthy wisdom.

In most of the Bible, by contrast, how great Man can be when God is for him is emphasized at least as much as, if not more than, how helpless and wretched he is if God is against him. 64 However ungodly exaggerated ambition can be if wrongly motivated, 65 nevertheless success and advancement, of nation and of individual, are generally regarded in the Bible as, at least potentially, the just rewards of virtue and

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63 *Ezek. 28:1.*

64 See above, Chapter 1, Section iii.

65 *II Sam. 15:6; I Ki. 1:5 & 6; Num. 12:2ff. and 16:3ff.*

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wisdom. The appointment and advancement of gifted individuals is also seen as a prime tool in effecting God's purposes and helping his people and humanity in general.

The observation of Prov. 29:2a,

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;
But when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn",

underlines that success for a good man is desirable, not only for his own fulfilment, but also for the good of others. The success of the righteous is therefore seen as desirable, not only as a reward for them, but also for much broader ethical reasons: for the wellbeing of the whole nation, and even of mankind in general. Even Solomon's wealth in 1 Kings is seen as not totally without positive outcome in effecting the divine purpose. For it accomplished the public service - which also embraced potentially all mankind - of providing the Temple, despite the King's later aberrations. So even the Deuteronomic works do not project the same jaundiced view of ambition and advancement altogether. Unlike the message of Qoheleth, I Kings does not represent greatness and magnificence as in themselves the

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67 Ex. 3:10; Deut. 18:18; Judg. 2:16; 1 Sam. 3:1-21, 9:17 and 16:1-13; 1 Ki. 19:15 & 16; II Ki. 9:1-10; Is. 6:8 ff.; Jer. 1:4-10; Gen. 39:2-6 & 21-3 and 45:5-8; Est. passim, e.g., 4:14b; Dan. passim, e.g., 2:47 & 48 and 3:28-30; Prov. 8:15 & 16; etc.

68 Ibid. 8:41-3.

69 Ibid. 6.

70 Ibid. Ch. 11 ff.

71 Which, with Ezek. 28, come closest to Qoheleth in addressing directly the issue of the Solomonic brand of ultimately antipietistic Wisdom, and explicitly repudiating it.
problem. Solomon's greatness and his promiscuous wisdom are negative in *I Kings* because they typify human self-reliance, resulting in apostasy; and the greatness and mystique of the hero-king figure are not represented as wrong simply in themselves.

In the Deuteronomistic History God is consistently represented as having to intervene because of apostasy or other sins in His appointed leaders. The unreliability of human leaders is therefore clearly recognized, even emphasized, as a recurring problem. Nevertheless, He continues to deal with this problem by appointing some new leader in the rebellious leader's place. His answer is still to select a protegé, promote him to power, and then replace him by someone else if he rebels. This He would hardly continue to do if He saw the promotion to and the power of national leadership as in themselves negative.

One major implication of *I-II Kings* does, admittedly, seem to be that kingship is not the ideal means of governing God's people; but the reader is still left to draw his own conclusions from the not entirely monochrome evidence. And there are some indications that the real problem is human fickleness, rather than power and greatness in themselves, or even kingship simply in itself. This is clear in the alternatives placed before Solomon in *I Ki.* 9, the consequences of obedience and

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72 Saul, Solomon, Jeroboam, etc.

73 E.g., *I Ki.* 14:7; 16:2.

74 These are reinforced by the fact that not all the kings are bad; see, e.g., *II Ki.* 3:14; 20:3-6; Chs. 22 and 23, esp. 23:25.
disobedience respectively. \(^{75}\) In all these cases, God is said to have been prepared to ensure a continuing dynasty for these leaders, on condition only of their continued obedience. Even in *I Samuel*, which contains the classic anti-kingship passage of 8:5 ff., there are indications that kingship is not the whole problem, but rather the fickleness and unreliability of human nature. In 8:1-3, Samuel’s sons have been appointed judges. This is presumably the prime mode of leadership the writer prefers to kingship, to judge by the rest of the chapter. Yet even *their* appointment proves a disaster; for despite their honourable office, they are corrupt as individuals.

If even kingship, therefore, the human role which comes nearest to providing a substitute for God, \(^{76}\) is not in itself the prime problem in the eyes of the Deuteronomic historians, then in all probability neither are human greatness and power as such the problem either. The real stumbling block to Israel’s faith and welfare is rather a rebellious and unco-operative attitude \(^{77}\) in those who aspire to greatness or who exercise power.

\(^{75}\) Cf. *I Sam.* 13:13 & 14 of Saul; *I Ki.* 11:38 of Jeroboam.

\(^{76}\) *I Sam.* 8:7.

\(^{77}\) Ibid. 15:23.
This leaves *Qoheleth* the only exception within the whole Bible to the tendency to allow that Man can have legitimate greatness, a measure of magnificence and of real, effectual power which is beneficial and appropriate. The other wisdom books, with their more humanistic slant than the rest of the Bible, allow it because their writers absorbed belief in the success ethic from the Solomonic legend and tradition, to which their social class and genre of literature owed its origin. The other more theocentric Biblical books allow it too, because God's compassion not only saves His worshipper from enemies stronger than himself ⁷⁸, but also makes him no less than ruler and conqueror. ⁷⁹ Allowance is made for the fact that between the alternatives of being either a hammer or a nail, or either a "head" or a "tail" ⁸⁰, there may well be no middle ground to occupy; there may be only a stark choice between the hammer / head rôle or annihilation.

Such a relatively positive attitude to both conquest and leadership can play an important part in setting the stage for a positive attitude to success in a more general sense or on a more personal level, such as the acquisition of wealth, influence or fame by a gifted individual. In *Qoheleth*, however, Man is light years away from being exalted into a ruler or a conqueror, since the whole scale and spectrum of his existence is so limited by death that such terms could have no meaning for so small

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⁷⁸Ps. 18:17.

⁷⁹Ibid. vv 43-9.

⁸⁰Deut. 28:13.
a creature. And occupying the middle ground, far from being impossible, is his chief moral obligation. Qoheleth, probably under the influence of Greek ethics rather than simply as a pious Hebrew antidote to arrogance, sees avoiding extreme adherence to one type of experience or behaviour only as a major ethical priority, and regards true piety as entailing willing acceptance of all the opposite types of experience God sends.

This viewpoint is organically interlinked with his rejection of the kingly Wisdom-Hero, of Élitist Wisdom and of the wisdom-based Success Ethic. Together they constitute repudiation of that false godhead which Man characteristically usurps by cultivating a 'wisdom' independent of God. This anti-wisdom is exactly the spurious wisdom of Gen. 3:4-11, which amounts to disobedience to and alienation from God.

Qoheleth's rejection of this false godhead could in itself be simply an example of native Hebrew piety; but the way he links his disapproval of the Wise Man's false godhead with his belief in the divinely allotted alternation of opposites and their associated "times" reflects a major preoccupation of specifically Greek piety. So does his indirect approach to the dangers inherent in great wisdom-leaders. Ezekiel 28, by contrast, in its attack on the King of Tyre, presents the false claim to godhead

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81 If the latter, then more surprisingly, because in contrast to other Biblical writers.

82 7:13-18.

83 I.e., by cultivating anti-wisdom.

84 3:1-14.
directly as a personal affront to the real God; he makes no reference to any divinely ordained but nonetheless abstract uncertainty principle which the King of Tyre (in trusting his own wisdom) is affronting God indirectly by disavowing. 85 The danger the Biblical Prophets see in the great anti-wisdom King is that he aims to arrogate to himself, directly and explicitly, the majesty and authority due only to God Himself; whereas the danger Qoheleth sees in him is that he fails to acknowledge that it is the God-ordained uncertainty principle and the consequent alternation of the opposites in human experience which are in control, and not his own intelligence.

Although this perspective of Qoheleth’s is in no way incompatible with the objections of other Biblical writers to men usurping deity, it is nevertheless the viewpoint of Greek piety in particular. Kings and leaders who refuse to acknowledge that Man can not foresee his fate, and that the uncertainty principle and the pattern of alternation of opposite circumstances are in control, not their own wisdom, deny the power of the gods who ordain that framework of existence, and are therefore dangerously close to being false gods, aiming at "control in everything", as C.O.T. warns Oedipus not to do. 86 This is why the force of C.O.T.’s proverb in O.T. L.1516 87 is identical with that of Qoh. 3:11. 88 Like Qoheleth in his "times"
passage, C.O.T. is asserting the uncertainty / alternation of opposites principle. He is making this point in the light of Oedipus' fall from the position of power he formerly attained through his own wisdom.

In the figure of Oedipus in O.T., we see the type of the Wisdom-Hero and revered King who is almost a pseudo-god, who aims for an unrealistic level of control and who trusts in his own γνώμη, hence misunderstanding - and so, in effect, under-rating - the rôle of Τοχή. We also see, in this same figure, the embodiment the same proverb at 3:11, in close association with the fact that human experience alternates between opposite circumstances (3:1-8) and that this alternation and uncertainty are ordained by God so that men will revere Him (3:11 & 14).

88 "να εν υπό το έπειτα καταξείματα," LXX "τα σύμπαντα & ἐποίησεν καλα εν θαυμαφ οὕτωσιν".

89 L.398. Oedipus' favourable comparison of his own γνώμη with the prophetic art of Tiresias is painful irony in view of the fact that the audience already knows Tiresias is right in proclaiming him the source of Thebes' pollution (L.353), Laius' killer (L.362) and guilty of some wrong relationship with his close kin (L.366-7), so that Oedipus' angry rejection of these insights is wrong.

90 L.1080 ff. suggests that he expects Τοχή to be always on his side. This is exactly what the Spartan ambassadors in Thuc. Hist. 4.18.3 caution the Athenians not to expect, probably because they associate the Athenian way of life with the rationalist view of Τοχη rather than the traditional, more respectful view of it, and therefore they expect the Athenians to under-rate Τοχη by over-rating γνώμη, in line with the viewpoint Thucydides represents as being particularly characteristic of Pericles. See Edmunds' comment on this passage (op. cit., P.101), "For the Spartans, it is a foregone conclusion that chance will overcome γνώμη in the sense of rational judgment."

Jocasta (L.977 ff.) also misunderstands the influence of Τοχη, by associating it with mere randomness, also taking a rationalist view of it rather than seeing it as a numinous force which serves a necessary ethical function, and hence also, in effect, under-rating its influence.

Edmunds' insights about Thucydides' depiction of Pericles' close association with γνώμη, and of his correspondingly non-pietist view of Τοχη, are worth pondering in the light of Ehrenberg's observations (op. cit., Passim) about possible parallels between Pericles and Sophocles' Oedipus and C.Ant. Any misgivings of Sophocles about Pericles may well have been rooted in a belief that Pericles was on the wrong side of the wisdom versus anti-wisdom controversy. He may have seen Pericles as placing too much trust in γνώμη, and dangerously under-rating Τοχη, through failing to discern either that the uncertainty and alternation principles are inbuilt into the structure of reality or that they have an important ethical function, especially in curbing tyranny, which is what Pericles' opponents saw him as representing. This is not to say that we should necessarily view Sophocles as an absolute opponent of Pericles. Since he reflects a positive side to Oedipus' experience as well as a negative side, it would be no surprise if he had similarly
of a dazzling legend of attaining success through wisdom; but this legend has such a bitter sting in the tail that it speaks volumes against the wisdom-based success ethic. Oedipus’ wisdom in solving the riddle of the Sphinx brings him from his supposedly obscure origin to a position of great eminence, and, through marriage to a royal bride, to the kingship of Thebes; yet in the end these achievements turn out to be worse than nothing and a living nightmare.

Qoheleth also has no time for any fairy-tale success-ethic which represents wisdom as the infallible tool for attaining personal advantage. He therefore assumes the persona of Solomon ironically, to debunk the whole idea of the Solomonic success-ethic being the epitome of wisdom. As a result, wisdom is no longer the royal bride who promotes men to dizzy heights of grandeur, \(^91\) whether of public leadership or of more personal ‘success’. She has been reduced to the level of a defence from mischance. \(^92\) The wisdom tradition offered the key to success; \(^93\) but Qoheleth says that success is over-rated anyway, \(^94\) and wisdom can not defeat death, which neutralizes any type of success. \(^95\) The best course is to avoid extremes of mixed feelings about Pericles’ experience as well. However, the Oedipus of O.T. (as distinct from O.C.) is on the wrong side of the wisdom / anti-wisdom controversy. His influence does not become a positive one instead of a miasma until O.C., when he is transformed into the spokesman and prophet of Apollo, instead of the impatient King who misjudges Tiresias and C.O.T., and is blind to the truth that they and Apollo’s oracle have told him because he trusts in his own γνώμη.

\(^91\) As in Prov. 4:8 & 9; 7:4; 8:15 & 16.

\(^92\) Qoh. 2:14 and 7:12.


\(^94\) 2:11.

\(^95\) Ibid. 2:14b-16.
any kind, even of virtue, whether over-laziness or over-diligence, rather than risk falling in blindly with the rat-race. Wisdom, like other virtues and advantages, does not guarantee success.

This should not be misconstrued, however, as a low view of wisdom. Since success is over-rated anyway, the fact that wisdom does not guarantee success is hardly a slur on wisdom. Furthermore, guarantees in general, whether of success or anything else, are not good for Man either. God has deliberately made men ignorant of their future. Wisdom is in no way undermined as a desirable goal by the fact that it is represented as not guaranteeing success. The true function of wisdom is to show man his limitations, not to show him the road to promotion and exaltation. Real wisdom is neither a recipe for success nor a claim to certainty. Rather it is a realization that exact calculation, and hence also perfect pre-planning, are impossible; therefore constant adjustment to the incalculable and unforeseeable, an alert flexibility to changing circumstances and to

"the correct time and procedure for every matter", 102

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96 Ibid. 7:16-18.
97 Ibid. 4:5 & 6.
98 Ibid. 4:4.
99 9:11.
100 3:11, 7:14; cf. 9:12; see also below, Chapter 6, especially Section iii.
101 I.e., the proper boundaries within which he has to live in order to be happy.
102 8:5 & 6.
is the prime necessity. This attitude is also necessary in one’s approach to God\textsuperscript{103} and to proper behaviour toward other human beings.\textsuperscript{104}

No small part of \textit{Qoheleth}’s perennial appeal is that it is widely (and correctly) understood as debunking the ‘rat-race’, that sweaty, breathless scramble for the material gain which does not make one happy in the end. This is partly the point of its attempt to examine what is or is not \textit{profitable} to Man.\textsuperscript{105} In contrasting that which amounts to lasting profit\textsuperscript{106} with “\textit{ןִּלּוּל}”,\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Qoheleth} is deliberately

"-(answering) the fool according to his folly"\textsuperscript{108} in employing the language of financial profit.\textsuperscript{109} Appropriately, it is the scales of the merchant he chooses in which to weigh the materialist wisdom-practitioner’s values and prove those values wanting. His argument is not against those who want to make money simply in order to enjoy whatever blessings can be derived from it;

\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{103}] See also below, Chapter 5, Section vii.
\item[\textsuperscript{104}] See below, Chapter 8, near end of Section iii.
\item[\textsuperscript{105}] 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:16; 7:11.
\item[\textsuperscript{106}] ‘’ןִּלּוּל’’, 2:13 of Wisdom’s value; or ‘’ןִּלּוּל’’, 6:8 of the wise man’s advantage over the fool.
\item[\textsuperscript{107}] E.g., 1:2 & 14; 2:1, 11 & 15; see also above, this Chapter, Section ii.
\item[\textsuperscript{108}] Prov. 26:5.
\item[\textsuperscript{109}] See the list of commercial terms \textit{Qoheleth} uses in Good, Edwin, \textit{Irony in the Old Testament} (London, 1965), P.183, and Good’s comment,

"I suggest that \textit{Qoheleth} is musing upon a society dominated by commerce, an acquisitive society that sees the meaning of Man’s life in his assertive achievement.”.

Good was stimulated to compile this list by Mitchell J. Dahood, S.J., commenting about \textit{Qoheleth}’s use of commercial terminology in \textit{Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth} (Rome,1952), Pp.52-3. E.J. Bickerman expresses very strong views about what he feels to have been the previously unparalleled acquisitiveness of \textit{Qoheleth}’s era in \textit{Four Strange Books of the Bible} (New York,1967), Pp.158-167 and \textit{The Jews in the Greek Age} (Harvard, 1988), Pp.231-4; see below, this Chapter, this Section.
\end{enumerate}
for he sets a high value on pleasure. He is opposing rather the advocate of Solomonic 'wisdom', i.e., of a wisdom-based success-ethic. For since wisdom does not guarantee success anyway, the idea of a wisdom-based success-ethic is arrant nonsense.

Qoheleth is neither against wisdom nor against success. He has the warmest admiration for wisdom; he appreciates the wise man who saved the city even though the citizens he rescued did not. Nor has he anything against success. Just because "Nor does food come to the wise", that does not mean that nobody attains food; nor does it mean that attaining food is a bad thing instead of a good thing. What Qoheleth denies is the falsely simplistic connexion drawn between wisdom and attaining the food. For wisdom may not be what won a man his food; and even when wisdom did contribute to its attainment, that wisdom should include the realization that wisdom alone would not have been enough to win it. "Time" and "chance" have to be included in the calculation as well.

Hence to preach wisdom as the automatic guarantor of success is a gross oversimplification of life's realities. Although Qoheleth is very much in favour of the skill

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110 See above, Chapter 2, Section vi.


112 9:13 & 16a.

113 9:16b.

114 9:11.
that promotes success\textsuperscript{115}, he sees true skill as a faculty that promotes flexibility, the ability to exploit 9:11’s "time" and "chance". He is not in favour of an attitude to skill or to success which, on the contrary, freezes one’s view of divine providence and life’s overall realities, so that one imagines success as the inevitable outcome of wisdom. "Time" / "opportunity" and "chance" are not synonyms, but opposite and complementary sides of the total circumstance facing a man. "Chance" is something beyond his control; it simply ‘happens’ to him. "Time", however\textsuperscript{116} is the critical moment which constitutes an opportunity for success as well as a risk of failure; it is the "opportunity slot" which is capable of being manipulated to his advantage, because it allows him room to activate his skill. Skill is therefore genuinely important, in that it is well capable of having a strong influence on outcomes. It is not, however, the sole factor involved in success; because chance is involved as well.

In thus pointing out that there is no direct, automatic correlation between wisdom and success, Qoheleth is not belittling wisdom, but rather elevating it, by prizing it away from the stifling, sweaty grasp of the feverish success-ethic advocates. For as well as being a simplistic misrepresentation of reality, the wisdom-based success-ethic is also a grotesque underestimation of wisdom’s true function. To him, the spectacle of wisdom as the bond-maid of materialism is highly incongruous. So his observation that she is not even a very effective bond-maid of materialism is an important practical step toward liberating her from this humiliating rôle. It no more debunks wisdom than Hans Andersen undermines the glory of his exceptionally

\textsuperscript{115}10:10.

\textsuperscript{116}πη", LXX "καπροκς".
beautiful swan by pointing out that it makes a singularly unattractive duckling. Qoheleth is demonstrating that wisdom is not suitable for this materialistic rôle simply to arouse our curiosity as to its true function. He is challenging our assumption that the correct use of wisdom is as a tool to attain one's goals, deliberately arousing our curiosity to open us to the possibility of a different use of wisdom.

One of the hazards of Solomonic wisdom is that the extent of the wealth the acquisitive man tries to heap up seems to be without limit, and hence the toil that

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117 See Solon, Fr. 1, L.71 ff. D1. This emphasis on insatiety is organically inter-related with his point about Zeus overseeing final outcomes earlier (L.17 ff.) in the same long poem, as already referred to above, Chapter 3, Section iii and Chapter 4, Section vi. See also Lowell Edmunds'comment on L.63-76, op. cit., P.79. He begins with a quotation of Kathleen Freeman's translation, from her The Work and Life of Solon with a Translation of His Poems (Cardiff, 1926), P.211:

"Verily, fate brings to mortals both evil and good; the gifts of the gods may not be declined. In every kind of activity there is risk, and no man can tell, when a thing is beginning, what way it is destined to take. One man trying to do his work well falls unexpectedly into great and bitter ruin; to another who blunders in his work the god grants good luck in everything, to save him from his folly. [71] In wealth no limit is set up within Man's view; those of us who now have the largest fortune are doubling our efforts; what amount would satisfy the greed of all? Gain is granted to mankind by the immortals; but from it arises disastrous Folly, and when Zeus sends her to exact retribution, she comes now to this man, now to that."

Edmunds then continues,

"According to Solon's pessimistic theology, Man's very mortality pushes him into error. Man is imperfect in comparison with the gods; Man's imperfection compels him to strive for the sufficiency which will repair the imperfection of his mortal existence. But Man lacks a definition of sufficiency; his condition therefore drives him to insatiety; Man then overreaches himself and the gods punish him. It is easy to understand Solon's political reforms as a reflection of these beliefs. What Solon saw all around him in Athens was vast inequality of wealth, which is one of the most constant themes of the fragments. The seisachtheia and the redistribution of land are a political remedy for the aete of mortal acquisitiveness. The Solonian constitution has divine sanction and is enforced by the promise of divine retribution against wrong-doers. Solon achieved his reforms "with the gods" (fr. 23.18 D3)."

In view of Edmunds' picture of Thucydides' Pericles as Anti-Solon, and Ehrenberg's observation in Sophocles and Pericles of certain parallels between Pericles and Sophocles' Oedipus (see above, Chapter 4, Sections ii and vi), this final point about the divine sanction associated with Solon's statesmanship puts in a challenging light Oedipus' insistence that he saved Thebes by his own intelligence and without supernatural help (O.T. L.I.396-8), despite the priest's earlier contrasting suggestion that he was divinely inspired (Ibid. L.I.38-9). Oedipus is thus depicted as the Periclean type of statesman as directly opposed to the Solonic type. This in turn implies that in Oedipus Tyrannus (as distinct from Oedipus at Colonus, in which, on the contrary, he is virtually a prophet), Oedipus is a sage of rationalist anti-wisdom, and not of pietist wisdom.
goes into its acquisition is also without limit. This also owes much to Man’s misconception of his own limitations, and hence of the proper function of wisdom. Acquisitive Man, like the hero-king or the pseudo-god, sees wisdom not as a guide to his limitations, but as a tool to employ to attain his goals. However, a wisdom that is directed to attaining goals is of no use unless the goal to which it is directed is itself first established as desirable, appropriate and feasible. Man’s misconception and misapplication of wisdom have much to do with his automatic employment of his wisdom to attain his ends, without recognizing that his ends are not themselves realistic.

Qoheleth’s main purpose in subjecting the common goals of acquisitiveness, etc., to his searching question “What profit is there?” is to discourage people from aiming for goals which are not profitable for Man, because they take no account at all of Man’s limitations; therefore they do not meet his real needs. Having once used his wisdom for the purpose of attaining goals, and then finding no gain in it after all, he prefers to use his wisdom for the purpose of scrutinizing Man’s goals themselves, and establishing the limits within which he should set them.

This brings him to some very challenging conclusions, especially by contrast with the cherished ideals of the commercialist, which seem to be the dominant ideals

\[118^a: 4:8, 5:10-12.\]
\[119^a: 2:1 ff.\]
\[120^a: 2:11.\]
of his era. Qoheleth's high estimation of pleasure \(^{121}\) contrasts sharply with the quasi-ascetic entrepreneurial ideal which Elias J. Bickerman believes underlies the original version of the story of the Tobiads, later reworked by Josephus. \(^{122}\) It is indeed worth pondering that Josephus, in what Bickerman sees as his subsequent version of this earlier story, \(^{123}\) uses exactly the same Persian loanword for "parks" as *Qoh.* 2:5 in his description of Hyrcanus's similarly lavish building project:

"δι χαι παραδείσους ἐκόσμησε παμμῆκεσι",

"which he also embellished with huge parks".

Ironically, this fabulously rich man is forced to commit suicide because the "cruel net" \(^{124}\) of adverse political change falls unexpectedly upon him. It is hard to believe that Bickerman and Good are far wrong in seeing exactly this false ideal of unlimited and ruthless \(^{125}\) acquisitiveness as a major target of Qoheleth's criticism. \(^{126}\)

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\(^{121}\) See above, Chapter 2, Section vi.

\(^{122}\) Bickerman very plausibly reconstructs this outlook, which identifies pleasure in particular as "the enemy", in *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Harvard, 1988), P.233. Qoheleth, however, in seeing the moderate enjoyment of pleasure as a major defence against gross impiety, could hardly have a more opposite point of view.

\(^{123}\) See *Ant.* XII.233.

\(^{124}\) This is *Qoh.* 9:12’s term for exactly the type of unforeseen circumstance that precipitated Hyrcanus’ ruin. It is tempting to wonder if perhaps the appropriateness of the term to Hyrcanus’ situation is no accident. This is especially so if some echo of Hyrcanus’ parks and buildings is intended in *Qoh.* 2:4-6, especially if their grandeur was so famous (or notorious) as to constitute virtually a proverbial example; see also below, Appendix Three. If so, then presumably their ultimate uselessness to their wealthy but doomed owner must have been equally proverbial.

\(^{125}\) For reference to Hyrcanus’ alleged opportunistic banditry, see Jos. *Ant.* XII, end of 229.

\(^{126}\) However, although it seems right to suspect Qoheleth is alluding to the values and perhaps even to the characters behind the story that Josephus is thought to be retelling in *Ant.* XII, this does not give us a clear idea of how to date exactly whatever and whoever it is Qoheleth may be alluding to. For there are some dating problems within Josephus’ account of the Tobiad story anyway. See, for example, Momigliano’s point (*I Tobiadi*, pp.170 ff.), that Josephus is mistaken in saying that Hyrcanus himself actually built the fortress associated with him in *Ant.* XII.230, because the Zenon papyri show that there was already a fortress there as early as the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus. This point is referred to by Ralph Marcus in his Loeb translation of Josephus *Ant.* XII-XIV (Harvard, 1986), P.117, commenting on Section.
At the same time, Qoheleth also attacks the foolish admiration that makes heroes out of these misguided financial giants, by pointing out the similarity between their extravagant acquisitions and those of Solomon, the *bête noire* of the pietists in their tradition of faith. He is concerned not only about the self-destructive acquisitiveness of capitalist supermen, 127 but also about the people, 128 who might be misled by envy 129 into wasting their efforts chasing the same ideals. His redirection of the use of wisdom, away from chasing horizons to setting boundaries,

230; and Marcus adds,

"The ruins of what was probably Hyrcanus' fortress have been discovered at 'Arāk el-‘Emîr in Transjordan, c. 10 miles N.W. of Heshbon and c. 12 miles E. of the Jordan; they are fully described in *Publications of the Princeton Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904/5.* - The name Tōbîyāh (Tobiah) inscribed on the rock in one of the caves nearby probably refers to an early Tobiad, perhaps to the Tobiah who was a contemporary of Nehemiah."

If Josephus is mistaken about Hyrcanus himself being the builder of this fortress, one may wonder if he might also be mistaken about Hyrcanus being the figure associated with it who was forced to commit suicide because of the abrupt change in his political fortunes. Even though such a figure may have existed, and may have been associated with the massive building work described in *Ant.* XII.230-4, and with the political suicide described at the end of Ibid. 236, it does not necessarily follow that this person must have been Hyrcanus. So even if *Qoh.* 2:5's 138 does refer to the reality behind Josephus' "-παρακείστως - παρακείστων", we can not be quite sure to what individual and at what period he is hinting. What is possible, however, is that his ambitious building project came to be regarded as somehow embodying the values for which he stood, and that these were impious and materialistic values which Qoheleth regarded as worthless and unrealistic. If so, and if the man in question did take his own life because of a reversal of his circumstances, this would seem to Qoheleth to endorse his own rejection of the man's values. For the man who reacts this way to reversals of fortune would appear to have been unnecessarily taken by surprise, having felt too secure about the continuation of his good fortune to have anticipated the danger to which his rapacious lifestyle was exposing him in the light of the ever-present possibility that his circumstances might change. Also, he would seem to Qoheleth too unyielding and narrow-minded to accept the change and to try to adapt to it and see possible good in it once it did occur.

For another apparent error, or at least lack of clarity, in Josephus' dating, see Marcus' comments (op. cit., P.119, fns. d & e), on *Ant.* XII.234-5. See also below, APPENDIX THREE, for the question of *Qoheleth's* date.

127 4:8.

128 12:9.

129 4:4.
and away from pursuing goals to assessing goals, brings a greater sense of immediacy to experience, as in 6:9,

"Better what the eye sees than the wandering of the appetite".

As this proverb discourages putting off present pleasure until the future attainment of some desired object, so 5:20's

"He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart"

discourages dwelling on the past to the detriment of present enjoyment. Qoheleth aims for joy as a continuous experience in a continuous present, unencroached upon by past or future invading the present and undermining its integrity as the present.

Enjoyment is the key to this:

"So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.". 131

Pleasure serves a vital function in fending off the distant vistas of future and past, which either demand planning unrealistically far ahead, or cramp the mind and the heart into the strait-jacket of memory, thereby limiting their grasp of the present. The enjoyment of the moment discourages Man from the pretentious over-calculation or over-contemplation that robs him of the present. For in enjoying the moment, he does not feel so tempted away from it toward the far horizons of future or past. This enables him simply to be, instead of always exerting himself forward in pursuit of

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130 See above, Chapter 2, Section vi.

131 8:15.
some new goal, or backward to recapture or to re-interpret on some lost former dream or past experience.

This release into a pure present of simply being is of great practical importance in cultivating the listening, non-assertively receptive spirit toward God that Qoheleth recommends. His wisdom is therefore a wisdom not merely of acting but also of being. It is a wisdom not of worldly ambition and chasing rainbows, but of piety and of the concrete experience of present realities.

132 See below, Chapter 5, Sections vii-ix.
CHAPTER 8

"DOING GOOD": THE ETHICS OF QOHELETH

"יְבָרֵךְ הַלַּעֲשֹׁרָה" CANNOT BE PRESUMED A NON-MORAL TERM ON THE BASIS OF ITS SUPPOSED EQUIVALENCE TO "εὖ προτείνω"

Few aspects of Qoheleth’s teaching have excited more debate than his recommendation of "doing good" ("יְבָרֵךְ הַלַּעֲשֹׁרָה"). In 3:12 he says,

"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and to do good while they live."

In a book emphasizing so heavily what we do not know, this claim to definite knowledge about doing good is enough in itself to highlight its importance. Yet in addition, doing good is described superlatively: we are told there is "nothing better". This has justifiably generated much curiosity as to what Qoheleth means by "doing good"; for clearly a firm grasp of the exact meaning of "יְבָרֵךְ הַלַּעֲשֹׁרָה" will lay bare his view of the ultimate best in life.

Discussion of this term "יְבָרֵךְ הַלַּעֲשֹׁרָה" has tended to centre round the issue of whether or not it is equivalent to the Greek term "εὖ προτείνω". This is not, however, crucial to any and every attempt at interpreting "יְבָרֵךְ הַלַּעֲשֹׁרָה", since there are some aspects of its meaning which are already clear even without resolving this
question. For example, the controversy as to whether or not "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" is a moral term does not depend on whether or not it is equivalent to "€€πράγγετεν". In 7:20, we read,

"There is not a righteous man on earth who does good ("ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש") and never sins."

In this verse, "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" is marked out as an ethical term by the fact that it denotes the type of behaviour one would expect specifically of the "€€πράγγετεν" (LXX "ἀνθρωπος - δικαιος"). The term "€€πράγγετεν" is exclusively and unmistakably moral in meaning; therefore so is "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" a moral term, irrespective of whether or not it is equivalent to "€€πράγγετεν". Furthermore, "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" may well not be equivalent to "€€πράγγετεν"; and even if it is equivalent, "€€πράγγετεν" is itself frequently used in a moral sense.

This does not mean that the issue of whether or not "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" is equivalent to "€€πράγγετεν" is unimportant. For any clues as to the exact nuances of "ב ר י צ י ו ל א ר י ש" could provide an invaluable key to Qoheleth's spectrum of values. Nevertheless, scholarly debate on this question so far has been less helpful than it might have been. For it has been based on only a vague idea of the range of meaning which the term "€€πράγγετεν" actually embraces. Furthermore, the debate has proceeded with scant attention to the following two points:-

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1 As already stated above, Chapter 2, Section v.
2 See below, this Chapter, Section iii, "πολεμίων ἀγαθῶν".
3 See below, this Chapter, Section ii, "€€πράγγετεν".
1) Whatever Qoheleth originally meant by "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה", there must be some significance in the fact that LXX does not translate it as "εἰς πράττειν", but as "ποιεῖν ὁγαθόν", a term with a distinctly ethical slant.

2) Even supposing that the LXX translation is eccentric, and "εἰς πράττειν" was indeed Qoheleth's original meaning, "εἰς πράττειν" is, in its own way, no less potentially ethical than "ποιεῖν ὁγαθόν", even though it seems to lack the specifically socio-ethical connotation of conferring concrete benefits on others, which "ποιεῖν ὁγαθόν" has. In a philosophical context, "εἰς πράττειν" is a well-established expression of the ethical ultimate, in terms of the general overall conduct of one's affairs.

The equivalence or non-equivalence of "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה" to "εἰς πράττειν" has, then, been used as a false criterion for trying to establish whether "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה" itself is an ethical or a non-ethical term. This approach, instead of shedding light on "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה", has unexpectedly revealed underlying confusion as to the meaning of "εἰς πράττειν" itself. Gordis, e.g., ⁴ seems to assume that "εἰς πράττειν" is an ethical term, and hence that "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה", which he understands as "enjoy oneself", ⁵

⁴In Koheleth, P.222.

⁵Yet this is not what "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה" seems to mean in, e.g., Ps. 37:3, where "Trust in the Lord and do good" is in pointed contrast to the "evil men" who "do wrong" in v 1. Taking this imperative in a non-ethical sense would be ignoring the whole point of the contrast: that the gains of the wicked are short-lived anyway, so doing wrong is not the way to your heart's desire after all; the true way to your heart's desire is doing right and delighting yourself in the Lord (v 4). Qoheleth, being well-steeped in earlier wisdom (see above, Chapter 5, Section ii), might well be using the moral associations of "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה" in this wisdom-psalm to colour his readers' likely interpretation of the same word in his own work.

Gordis also seems to take for granted that "enjoy oneself" (even if, after all, that were the meaning of "כָּל הַעֲשָׂרָה", which seems unlikely) can not have ethical connotations; but for the danger of this
can not be its equivalent. Crenshaw, by contrast, while also seeing "ברע תעשוה" as probably non-ethical (though as "succeed" or "fare well" rather than as "enjoy oneself"), nevertheless thinks it may be equivalent to "אָדוֹן תַּקּּוֹץ". This implies that, unlike Gordis, Crenshaw takes "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ" to be non-ethical.

From these and other such contradictory underlying assumptions about "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ", it emerges that some discussion of "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ" in its own right is called for. For since the question of the equivalence or non-equivalence of "ברע תעשוה" to "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ" has been and still is used as a guideline for trying to establish the meaning of "ברע תעשוה", any unconscious and hence unexpressed disagreements as to the meaning of "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ" will inevitably add to the confusion surrounding "ברע תעשוה" as well. In addition, LXX's choice of the completely different Greek term "ποιεῖν ἀγαθέν" to translate "ברע תעשוה" has not received the attention it deserves.

However, in discussing the respective meanings of "אָדוֹן תַּקּוֹץ" and "ποιεῖν ἀγαθέν" in some detail, this Chapter does not aim merely to compare the respective claims of these two expressions to be the true Greek equivalent of "ברע תעשוה".

To do this would not advance the argument for regarding "ברע תעשוה" as an ethical term, since both Greek terms are ethical anyway. So even if either of the two

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6 Ecclesiastes, P.98.
7 See below, this Chapter, Section ii.
8 See below, this Chapter, Section iii.
proved to be the exact Greek equivalent of "ב רע נ נשועי" (whichever of the two it was), this would merely confirm what we already know from Qoh. 7:20: i.e., that "ב רע נ נשועי" is an ethical term.

Moreover, such a competitive comparison of Greek terms would not solve the crucial questions about the meaning (ethical or otherwise) of "ב רע נ נשועי". For it would be based on a false equation of two completely different types of equivalence.

Scholarly interest in the possible connexion of "εν πράττειν" with "ב רע נ נשועי" has been based on the idea that this Greek term lies behind Qoheleth's Hebrew.

\[\text{For Qoheleth to regard "ב רע נ נשועי" as a reasonable Hebrew translation of the Greek ethical term "εν πράττειν" implies one type of 'equivalence' between "ב רע נ נשועי" and "εν πράττειν". But if the LXX translator(s) regard "παιδί προσέπτον" as a reasonable Greek translation of Qoheleth's Hebrew ethical term "ב רע נ נשועי", the 'equivalence' which that implies between "ב רע נ נשועי" "παιδί προσέπτον" is of a quite different type. It is important for the distinction between these two types of equivalence not to become blurred.}

\[\text{This idea presupposes a closer connection between Qoheleth's own thinking and specifically Greek terminology than has yet been definitely substantiated. Nevertheless, the fact that "ב רע נ נשועי" seems particular of Qoheleth within the Biblical corpus does invite legitimate speculation about a possible foreign origin for the term, with Greek remaining the most plausible language suggested so far. In Qoh. 3:11a, the word "נוש" seems to have the same broad meaning as in rabbinic Hebrew, even though in elsewhere in the Bible "נוש" has a much narrower meaning (see Barton, op. cit., P.105, discussed above, Chapter 6, Section iii, fn. 100). This use of "נוש" is strikingly similar to the Greek ethical term "καλός" ("right"). Moreover, the exact proverb in 3:11a has a long history of popularity in Greek, occurring in many permutations, such as,}

\text{"πάντα χρόνος, καθώς καθ' χρόνον εξελε",}
\text{"Everything is acceptable in its own (proper) time"}
\text{(Vita Aesopi); cf.}
\text{"καθώς πάντα πρόσεπτε καλά",}
\text{"In their season all things are appropriate",}
\text{etc. See, e.g., Renzo Tosi's Dizionario delle Sentenze Latine e Greche (1991), Pp.270-1.}

\text{It is indeed hard to believe that Qoheleth's "נוש" is not a deliberate translation of "καλός", since 3:11a looks like a monotheistic adaptation into Hebrew of this very Greek proverb. Particularly close to the wording of Qoh. 3:11a,}
\text{"נוש יירע נושע לבר הון-ניק",}
\text{is Sophocles's version of the saying, in O.T. L.1516,}
\text{"πάντα χρόνος κανάρ καλό".}

Qoheleth's interest in this saying fits organically with the importance he attaches to the "נוש" / "καλό" (3:1-17, 8:5 & 6, and 9:11 & 12), since 3:11a means that the rightness of an action depends on the "καλό". See above, Chapter 3, Section iii, P.117, fn. 33, esp. para. 2 (cf. Chapter 4, Section v, P.151, fn. 47, para. 2) for the ethical implications of Sophocles' and Qoheleth's use of this proverb; and see below, Appendix Four, for the fact that Sophocles also has a strong interest in this aspect of "καλό", See also 360}
If LXX's "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν" is seen, by contrast, as merely a Greek translation of Qoheleth's Hebrew, this does not tell us anything at all about what Greek or other foreign term (if any) may have been behind Qoheleth's Hebrew.

The objective, then, of examining both these Greek terms is not primarily to uphold the claim of one as against the other to a legitimate connection with the Hebrew "לעשות_LABEL", as if establishing the claim of the one finally invalidated the claim of the other. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the connection many scholars see between Qoheleth's "לעשות LABEL" and "εὖ πράττειν", however plausible, is theoretical only; whereas the connexion between Qoheleth's "לעשות LABEL" and "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν" is more concrete, in the sense that it is in writing in the LXX. The fact that the translator(s) in antiquity, infinitely closer to the mindset of Qoheleth than any modern scholar, saw "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν" as a reasonable translation of his "לעשות LABEL" must be of some significance; whereas the fact that modern scholars see "εὖ πράττειν" as the possible inspiration behind his usage of "לעשות LABEL" only may be significant.

Therefore, given the fact that there is a connexion between "לעשות LABEL" and both these Greek expressions, and allowing for the fact that one connection is only theoretical and the other more concrete, the following exploratory tour of the two terms has two objectives. The positive aim is to shed fresh light on the range of

above, Chapter 5, Section vii, and below, Chapter 9, esp. Section iii (cf. iv and v) for the link between receptivity to the divine presence and the ever-flexible reactive alertness that makes possible the correct response to the "καταχωρέσσεται". It is this two-sided, reactive receptivity, to God and to circumstances, which Qoheleth represents as his idea of wisdom.
possibilities as to the ethical implications of "לֻּעַ֣ה יְּהֵֽוָ֣ה הַֽעֲלֹ֔ו בּ. The negative aim is to
dispel some of the stale fog which still impedes our understanding of "לֻּעַ֣ה יְּֽהֵֽוָ֣ה הַֽעֲלֹ֔ו סד" through past attempts to explain its meaning by reference to "אֶֽדְמַ֣ו יְ֔רֵד אֱלֻ֖עָֽע לְעֹדִ֑י" without
a sufficiently broad understanding of "אֶֽדְמַ֣ו יְ֔רֵד אֱלֻ֖עָֽע לְעֹדִ֑י" itself.
Aristotle’s equation of "εὖ πρᾶττειν" with "εὔδοµονεῖν", and his acceptance of the general consensus that "εὔδοµονεῖν" is the highest good of Man, "The highest of all the goods that action can achieve", shows that "εὖ πρᾶττειν" is a recognized term for the ethical ultimate, the proper objective of all action. Aristotle considers various possibilities as to what the best life for a human being is, rejecting each of them in turn: the life of pleasure; the life of honour or virtue; the moneymaking life. Eventually, he selects the life of the intellect as the best and happiest life for a man, even in preference to the life of moral virtue.

Even before this exact usage crystallized, the term "εὖ πρᾶττειν", when used transitively (with an understood "τὰ αὐτῶν"), in the sense of "to bring one’s affairs to a good issue", had always carried strong overtones of prudence and good sense, so that the success is considered the result of the subject’s own practical wisdom. In this

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11 *Nicomachean Ethics* I.iv.2.

12 Ibid. I.v.1 & 2.

13 As stated in Chapter 2, Section v.

14 Ibid. I.v.1-3.

15 I.v.4-6.

16 I.v.8.

17 In X.vii.9 (cf. I.v.7).

18 X.viii.1 ff.
respect it is different from "εὖ πρᾶττειν" used intransitively. For the intransitive meaning of this verb is not as starkly different from that of "εὐτυχεῖν", where the result depends more on chance than on practical wisdom; but the transitive "εὖ πρᾶττειν" stands in sharp contrast to "εὐτυχεῖν". 19 There is nothing strained or artificial, therefore, in Aristotle using "εὖ πρᾶττειν" as a term for the ethical ultimate in abstract philosophical discussion, since that particular verb had already developed a nuance of merit even in its normal usage, even though this nuance had originated from its unambiguously transitive use with "Τὰ δῶτο".

Hence the abstract noun "εὐπροσότα" is used in Plato's Euthydemus 281 B of well or right doing (i.e., doing things properly or correctly), as opposed to mere good luck. 21 Similarly, its variant form "εὐπροσίτα" can be used in a general sense of right (i.e., meritoriously effective) conduct. In Nic. Eth. VI.v.4, it is used in close conjunction with "φρόνησις" ("insight", "prudence") in the course of an attempt to define the latter:

"Doing well ("εὐπροσίτα") is in itself the objective of "φρόνησις". So

A closer implication of merit may still be reflected in, e.g., the transitive "εὖ πρᾶγμα" ("accomplish something good/satisfactorily") in Sophocles' O. T., L.1006; cf. Ibid. L.1004, where the reward to be given is said to be "deserved" ("μονή") See also Id., Oedipus Colonus, L.391, where the intransitive "Τὰ — ς πρᾶγμαν ἄρχει" means, by contrast, merely "Who—could stand to gain?", and potentially in the most cynical sense of "gain". Appropriately, then, the intransitive use of this verb had no implications of merit in itself, even though it can have such implications when used by analogy with its transitive counterpart.

Socrates's association of "εὐτυχεῖν" with "εὐπροσότα" in Euthydemus 281 B, like his equation of "σοφία" with "εὐτυχεῖα" (Ibid. 279 D), and his description of the expert flute-players as "fortunate" for their "εὐπροσότα" in flute-playing (Ibid. 279 E), is very much tongue-in-cheek; he simply cannot resist teasing his youthful and simple-hearted interlocutor. His real point is that if one actually has "σοφία", then "εὐτυχεῖα" is not even necessary, as he later states directly (Ibid. 280 B). Similarly, his reference to "εὐτυχεῖα" (Ibid. 281 B) in close conjunction with "εὐπροσότα", as a fellow-fruit of knowledge, is not serious. His real point is that none of the potential advantages discussed in the previous passage would be of any benefit without "εὐπροσότα" ("the right way to act"), which in this particular context is equivalent to "the correct usage" of the above-mentioned advantages. Furthermore, "εὐπροσότα" is in turn dependent on knowledge. To Socrates, it is because there would be no "right conduct" or "correct usage" without true knowledge that knowledge is the most indispensable ethical equipment of all.

21 Cf. Ibid. 279; cf. also Protagoras 345 A, where the study of healing the sick is described as 'the "εὐπροσότα" that makes a good doctor'. The doctor is effective through the skill he has cultivated himself, not just through chance circumstances; so the fact he is successful is an indication of merit.
"φρόνησις" must be - a truth-attaining, rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings.". 22

In Xenophon’s Memorabilia, 3.9.14, "εὐπροεξῆς" is again represented as the ethical ultimate, or the best goal possible for human conduct:

"When someone asked (Socrates) what seemed to him the best pursuit for a man, he answered, Doing well ("εὐπροεξῆς")."

This passage is particularly revealing about the implied contrast between "εὐπράττειν" and "εὐτυχεῖν", since Xenophon continues,

"Questioned further as to whether he thought good luck ("εὐτυχία" 23) a (worthy) pursuit, he said:
On the contrary, I’d think "luck" and "doing" are opposite poles. To hit on something right by luck without search I call good luck; but to do something well after study and practice I call doing well; and those who pursue this seem to me to do well ("εὐ πράττειν"). And the best men, and dearest to the gods, he added, are those who do their work well: if it is farming, as good farmers; if medicine, as good doctors; if politics, as good politicians. He who does nothing well ("μηδέν εὐ πράττοντα") is neither useful in any way nor dear to the gods.".

The usage of all such terms is inevitably flexible; nevertheless, Xenophon’s contrast here between "εὐτυχία" and "εὐ πράττειν" is arresting in emphatic, reflecting the former as non-meritorious and the latter as unmistakably meritorious.

Aristotle’s equation of "εὐ πράττειν" with "εὐδοκομοεῖν" 24 may possibly

22VI.v.1 ff.

23If, as Xenophon seems to imply, "εὐτυχία" ("success") is primarily good luck, rather than the due outcome of skill or merit, it is noteworthy that the meaning of the contrasting word "άτυχία" ("failure") does not seem to have developed along parallel lines into the exact opposite of "εὐτυχία". It could be argued that the word for a failure which is mere bad luck rather than a matter for moral reproach tends to be "ἀκαθάρτια"; whereas "άτυχία" can often signify a failure which is one’s own fault. For such an argument, see Bosworth, A.B., "The Humanitarian Aspect of the Melian Dialogue", Journal of Hellenic Studies CXIII (1993), P.41.

find an echo in Qoh. 3:12. If "כָּלְכָּלָה יַגְּדִיד" is equivalent to "εὕδαμονεῖν", Qoheleth’s thought may be:

"I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy ("εὕδαμονεῖν") and do good ("εὖ πράττειν") while they live." 25

Since to Qoheleth creaturely enjoyment is an ethical priority anyway, 26 it is no surprise to find in the very next verse,

"That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil, this is the gift of God.". 27

Qoheleth’s point here is that it is essential to have received God’s favour in order to extract the only available profit (i.e., enjoyment) out of life; and he is making this point directly after 3:12’s apparently Aristotelian statement that life’s highest good is "εὕδαμονεῖν" and "εὖ πράττειν". In view of this curious juxtaposition of ideas in Qoheleth 3:12 & 13, Xenophon’s view that being dear to the gods depends on "εὖ πράττειν" deserves careful consideration, especially since Xenophon too sees "εὖ πράττειν" as the ethical ultimate.

It will be helpful in this attempt to understand Qoheleth’s concept of "doing good / well" to consider further this idea that there is a connexion between divine favour and the merit implied by the term "εὖ πράττειν". Qoheleth seems to reflect some such connexion in 2:24-6, where he commends eating, drinking and creaturely satisfaction in the same terms as he commends "כָּלְכָּלָה יַגְּדִיד" and "כָּלְכָּלָה יַגְּדִיד" in 3:12

25See also above, Chapter 2, Section v, for discussion of "כָּלְכָּלָה יַגְּדִיד" as an ethical term implying correct conduct, not an amoral term as sometimes supposed.

26See above, Chapter 2, Sections v and vi.

(i.e., by saying there is "nothing better"), adding,

"This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment?".

His next point in v 26 seems to be ethical; for he contrasts the fate of the man who pleases God with that of the sinner:

"To the man who pleases Him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness; but to the sinner, He gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.".  

Given that the eating, drinking and finding satisfaction of 2:24 are also found in 3:13, following immediately after 3:12's "לעשת והנהו" "לעשת והנהו", and assuming that the same association of ideas applies between 2:24 and 2:26 as between 3:12 and 3:13, then 3:26 should perhaps be read as meaning,

"To the man who does well / good, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness".

This would make the immediate contrast with the sinner in 3:26b even more pointed; and, like Xenophon's Socrates, it would be closely associating "pleasing God" and "doing well".  

Since Xenophon shares with Plato the common bond of friendship with Socrates, it is interesting that Plato seems to be reflecting the same connexion between "έόντατειν" and being loved by the gods when he ends his magnum opus The

\[^{28}\text{See also above, Chapter 5, Section ii, P.189-93, incl. ftm. 12.}\]

\[^{29}\text{This is a very different interpretation from, e.g., that of H.L. Ginsberg in "The Structure and Contents of Qoheleth", Vetus Testamentum Supplement, Vol. III, Pp. 138-149. Ginsberg takes the favour of God in 2:26 as completely arbitrary. The man who pleases God pleases Him for no reason at all, ethical or otherwise; God just happens to like him.}\]
RH with the words "e'd πράττωμεν". For the immediate context of this final passage is the idea of reward in the after-life and being dear to the gods:

"We shall hold ever to the upward way, and pursue righteousness with wisdom always and ever, that we may be dear to ourselves and to the gods, both during our sojourn here, and when we receive our reward, as the victors in the games go about to gather in theirs. And thus, both here and in that journey of a thousand years, about which I have told you, we shall fare / do well ("e'd πράττωμεν")."

A similar and surprisingly abrupt connexion is made in Protagoras 345 B-C. Here Socrates suddenly introduces the subject of the gods’ favour in the middle of a tortuous discussion on the meaning of a controversial poem by Simonides (his Eulogy on Scopas of Thessaly), which discusses the ethical standing of the man who has done well / ill ("ε'd / κακῶς πράξας"): "So the meaning of this part of the poem is that it is impossible to be a good man and continue to be good, but possible for one and the same person to become good and also bad, and those are best for the longest time whom the gods love.".

Whatever we make of Socrates’ interpretation of Simonides’ eulogy, it seems evident that this poem is teasing us with the fact that "ε'd πράττειν" can have more than one meaning. Simonides speaks of "irresistible mischance" overthrowing his hypothetical man, implying that his trouble is not his own fault. In the same sentence, however, he also provokes us by pointedly applying to him the epithet κακῶς:

"οὐκ ἔστι μὴ οὐ κακῶν ἐξμεναί, διν ἀμάχανος συμφορὰ καθέλη";

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"The man whom irresistible mischance has overthrown
Has no option but to be base.". 31

Then the next lines display the perplexing ambiguity of "εὖ πράττειν", in that its meaning potentially embraces both "do well" and "fare well":

"πράξας γὰρ εὖ πᾶς ἀνήρ ἀγαθός,
kακός δ᾿εὶ κακιον,
kάπι πλείστων δριστών τοὺς θεοὶ φιλωσίν";

"Every man, if he has done / fared well, is good;
And bad if he has done / fared ill;
And all in all, they who are loved by the gods are best.". 32

Here in Simonides too, then, as above in Xenophon's Mem. 3.9.14 and in Plato's Republic, we find the interconnexion of "εὖ πράττειν" and being dear to the gods. Of the three, however, only Simonides reflects an obvious and strong tension between the pragmatic overtones of success in "εὖ πράττειν" on the one hand and, on the other, its nuance of moral merit. Once this tension is observed in Simonides' poem, all these writers provoke the curiosity of the modern reader 33 as to which side of the balance between the moral and the pragmatic nuances of "εὖ πράττειν" a particular instance of their usage of the term may actually lie.

Given the fact that

i) a moral / pragmatic polarity in the meaning of "εὖ πράττειν" is already

31 Li.10-11. This suggests that "κακός" is also ambiguous, potentially meaning either "morally bad" or "unsuccessful".

32 Li.12-14.

33 The modern reader, who is used to a clear distinction between the two (success in pragmatic terms being one concept and moral merit another), can see it is pointless to deny that ancient Greek authors also have at least some concept of a distinction between the two; for Simonides' poem reflects this in the way it discloses the two opposite poles of "εὖ πράττειν"'s spectrum of potential meaning.
recognized even in antiquity, and

ii) Greek literature consistently links "εὐ προττεῖν", in all its variety of nuances, with the love and favour of the gods, then it is not inconceivable that Qoh. 2:26's representation of "wisdom, knowledge and happiness" as God's gift to "the man who pleases Him" may be an attempt to cover both poles of the meaning in three words that overall include both success and moral rightness.

In Qoheleth, eating, drinking and enjoying the fruits of one's toil, either as "from the hand of God", 34 or as "the gift of God", 35 are doubly linked with "doing good" ("ברענש הודיעון"). Firstly, they are linked by parallel wording, since in 2:24 there is "nothing better" than

"To eat and drink and find satisfaction in (one's) work",

and in 3:12 there is "nothing better" than

"To be happy and to do good".

Next, they are linked by juxtaposition, since 3:12's

"To be happy and to do good"

is immediately reinforced by 3:13's

"That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil - this is the gift of God."

To Qoheleth, this is just as much the morally right thing to do as it is the

34:2:24.

35:3:13.
pragmatically expedient thing to do, because of his strong ethical belief in the importance of recognizing Man’s status as purely creaturely. This would not be so clear, however, without 3:14’s

"God does it so that men may revere Him"

and 2:26’s comparison between the man who pleases God and the sinner. The man who pleases God receives not only happiness but also wisdom and knowledge, with all their complex implications, both pragmatic and moral.

The close connexion, described above, between 3:12’s "doing good" and 2:24’s

"Eating, drinking, and finding satisfaction in (the fruit of one’s) toil"

is not, however, simplistic. Ginsberg oversimplifies it thus:

"‘To do good’ in 3:12 means ‘to do that which we concluded it was good to do’ in 2:24."

Stylistically, however, this would be unlike Qoheleth. In view of his liking for antanaclasis and for expanding a term’s range of possible meanings by cumulative association, the echo of 2:24 in 3:12 is not likely to be an attempt to restrict the meaning of "םלוע היעש" in 3:12 simply to what he concludes is good in 2:24, and nothing more than that. Rather than trying to limit the meaning of 3:12 by reference to 2:24, he is probably aiming to expand the implications of what he commended in 2:24 by linking it with 3:12. For the term "םלוע היעש" in 3:12 opens broader

36 See above, Chapter 2, Sections v and vi.


38 See Ceresko, op. cit., Passim.

39 See, e.g., Good, op. cit., Passim. See also below, Chapter 9, Section i, ftn. 2 and Sections ii and vii.
horizons of thought than those normally associated with anything as apparently mundane as

"Eating, drinking, and finding satisfaction in (the fruit of one’s) toil", largely because of the persistent tradition of linking the Greek equivalent of "לא נפשו ל жизнь" 40 with divine favour.

This association suits Qoheleth’s belief in the faculty of enjoying creaturely pleasures as specifically the gift of God. 41 Because of the ethical importance he attaches to willingness to enjoy, and also to limiting one’s ambitions within the scope of that which is appropriate to a creature, Qoheleth is looking for an organic way to consolidate the connexion he has already made in 2:24-6 between the favour of God and

"Eating, drinking, and finding satisfaction in (the fruit of one’s) toil".

The juxtaposition of 3:12’s

"(Being) happy and doing good"

with 3:13’s

"Eating, drinking, and finding satisfaction in (the fruit of one’s) toil"

is a delicate move in that direction. For at the same time as it exploits the fact that "doing good / well" is already traditionally linked with the idea of divine favour, it also opens the way to implying that willingness to receive the faculty of enjoyment from God is an important part of what constitutes "doing good / well", not only pragmatically but also ethically.

40 If "εὖ πρὸτετειν" is indeed the Greek equivalent of "לא נפשו ל жизнь".

41 3:13; cf. 2:24-6.
This idea that willingness to enjoy is an important aspect of doing (or even of being) good is radically different from the idea that God gives us things to enjoy as a reward for being good. Hence Qoheleth's God is not arbitrary, as Ginsberg claims:

"Koheleth regards God as the absolute and arbitrary \(^{42}\) master of destiny, who bestows the gift of extracting the potential plus out of life upon those He likes (regardless of merit), and denies it to those He does not like (again regardless of merit), 2:24-6, 3:13, 5:18." \(^{43}\)

Ginsberg is right if he means that where God bestows the faculty of enjoying, it is not as a reward for good conduct that He bestows it. He is mistaken, however, if he assumes that God is morally arbitrary in giving it simply because He does not give it as a reward for moral uprightness. That idea is based on the assumption that doing or being good is something completely different from and independent of willingness to receive enjoyment. Yet however acceptable such an idea of moral goodness might be to Ginsberg, Qoheleth can not conceive of a real moral goodness without willingness to receive from God the gift of enjoying the creaturely pleasures. Without such willingness, Man would be a pseudo-God, or the super - \(\text{אָדָם}\) of 7:16, instead of the reverent, genuine creature he should be; and this would not be morally correct.

So the fact that God bestows this gift of enjoyment other than as a reward for moral goodness does not mean that He bestows it without any reference to moral goodness, in a spiritual landscape devoid of any concept of morality. For without

\(^{42}\)The italics are Ginsberg's.

willingness to receive this gift, true moral goodness, such as is genuinely suitable for a creature, would be impossible; so the gift of enjoyment enables moral goodness. Moreover, without an appropriate recognition of its humble status, no creature would be open to receiving this gift. For willingness to recognize one's creaturely status is exactly what receiving the gift of creaturely enjoyment implies; and this willingness is morally correct.

In terms of practical ethics, therefore, it is hardly very surprising that the man who receives this "gift of God" and "the man who pleases (God)" in 2:26 are one and the same. The fact that this gift is not represented as a reward for moral goodness does not mean that it has no moral implications, nor that it has no moral effect. Qoheleth's God is not morally arbitrary simply because He does not reserve this gift as a direct reward, since there is more to the practical outworking of ethics than reward-and-punishment mechanisms.

It is worth noting that Simonides' Eulogy on Scopas does not simplistically equate "doing well" with direct reward for good conduct any more than Qoheleth does, even though, like Qoheleth, it does associate "doing well" with divine favour. Like most ancient writers, Simonides admits by implication that the reasons behind divine favour are not so simple as to be clearly understood by Man, but without claiming that divine favour must therefore be arbitrary.

Another aspect of Simonides' poem which is illuminating with regard to Qoheleth is that it uses the ambiguity of "εὖ πρᾶττειν" to show the problematic
nature of trying to determine who is or is not an ethically acceptable person. The poet approaches this task with enterprising individualism. Because what determines who is or is not "ἀγαθός" or "ἄριστος" is largely beyond our control, he therefore sets forth his own criteria, independent of whether or not someone is "ἀγαθός", for determining who is or is not acceptable to himself. He declares he will never throw his life away on the empty quest for a perfect person, whom he knows he will never find. 44 Instead, he will be content with whoever avoids the extremes of evil. 45 Enough for him, he says, is a just, public-minded citizen,

"δὲ μὴ γαθός μεθ ἐκείν ἀπόλαμνος"

"He that is neither good nor overly worthless / useless." 46

The poet’s final emphasis is on moderation and his determination not to reject others through judging them by unrealistic criteria.

This poem is revealing about the development of "ἐν πρᾶττειν" as a term because it furnishes an example of both its moral overtones of right conduct and its non-moral undertones of success coming into play at once. 47 Furthermore, the tension between the two is exploited for deliberate effect. The statement in L.14 that it is those whom the gods love who are "best" does, in its immediate context, imply that it is those whom the gods love who "do best" or "fare best", the ambiguity being deliberate.

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45 L.21 "ἀσχολήν", L.27 "ἀσχολήν".
46 L.24. Cf. Qoh. 7:16-18 Although the line numbers given for Simmonds 542 are from Edmonds' best text unless stated, this L. 24 (Simmonds) is L. 20 in King's text (see below, P. 177, foot two footnotes). It is also L. 34 in Campbell's text. See this page.
47 As perhaps does Qoh. 2:26, above.
48 This later reconstruction may be preferred to Edmonds' version, which was first published in 1931. The latter means "someone that is neither good nor overly worthless/useless".

See also below, P. 318, foot note.
This seems to be a cautious and tolerant concession to the fact that there is a certain mystery surrounding both the issue of who comes out on top in the success stakes and that of who is or is not a morally estimable or acceptable person. Wisely, the poet does not attempt to go beyond his knowledge by suggesting a key to the mystery; rather, he recalls in L.9 the opinion of Pittacus (an earlier sage) that it is difficult to be estimable,

"χαλεπόν (φάτ'), ἔσθλόν ἐμμενώι". 48

The poem as a whole not only confirms this, but also shows that the task of assessing what constitutes worthiness or estimability in others is just as difficult. To say that what determines it is the love of the gods is an urbane and admirably cautious way of saying that it is not human judgment which determines it. Estimability is beyond human assessment and understanding, just as attaining worthiness / success is beyond human control.

The reason attaining success is beyond human control is Man’s susceptibility to "ἀμαρτανος συμφορα", 49 the eternal incalculable element in human fortunes. Simonides is not willing to reject or disdain anyone for what is beyond their control. It is the fact that being "ἀγαθος" is beyond Man’s control 50 that persuades Simonides not to reserve his approval just for one who is "ἀγαθος". The idea that all men are subject to "ἀμαρτανος συμφορα", reversals beyond their control, is of

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48 In professing to 'disagree' with Pittacus' sentiment, all he really means is that Pittacus is understating his point.

49 ‘Hopeless / unmanageable calamity’ (L.11); cf. Qoh. 9:11 & 12.

50 Because it is equivalent to "πρόξως - εὖ", which is in turn beyond Man’s control.

376 *Included among the 'Seven Sages', and ruler of Mytilene, 590 - 580 B.C.
course common. Many ancient authors emphasize the suddenness and unexpectedness of such disasters. They are regularly characterized as at least unforeseen, if not unforeseeable.

Simonides’s train of thought in this poem is tantalizingly like Qoheleth’s in some ways, and yet unlike it in others. The poet’s use of "εὗ πρῶτειν" is ambiguous. It incorporates elements of success by good fortune rather than by good management or virtue; yet it is very clear that it does have overtones of moral estimability, since the "ἄγοθος" man of L.12,

"πρῶξες γὰρ εὗ πᾶς ἄνηρ ἄγοθος",
is equated by implication with "ἐςθλῶν" of L.9, and associated with the love of the gods in L.14.

It may even be because this poet uses a word for well-doing / well-faring with a slightly different slant from Qoheleth’s “יippleע תולע" that Qoheleth can echo his ideas but give them a deliberately different flavour. To take one such idea, Simonides, in the strongest possible terms, represents the quest for the blameless man as fruitless, saying that it would be throwing one’s life away emptily on an impracticable hope. This invites comparison with Qoh. 7:20, which says there is no such thing as

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51 Qoh. 9:12, Aesch. Ag. L.1005, etc.
52 See above, Chapter 2, Section i, Pp.63-6; Chapter 3, Section ii, P.109 and P.112, ftm. 20, paras. 3 & 4; also, Section iii, P.117-8, ftm. 33; Chapter 4, Section iii, Passim, and Section v, P.156-7, ftm. 66.
53 Cf. Qoheleth’s treatment of Theognis, apparently sometimes agreeing and at other times deliberately disagreeing with his line of argument; discussed in Ranston, H., Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature, Pp.40-1; see also above, Chapter 2, Section iv, P.80, ftm. 63, para. 2; also below, this chapter, Section iii.

* L.12 in Edmonds’ text (see Bibliography, P.694); but L.17 according to Campbell, op. cit., P.434, and also L.17 in Page, P.192, Hutt, D., ed., Poetici Helici Graeci (Oxford, 1962), P.282.
* L.9 and 14 in Edmonds’ text; but L.13 and 20 respectively in both Campbell, op. cit., P.434 and Page, op. cit., P.282.
a blameless man, and with Qoh. 7:28, where "searching but not finding" is linked by association with the search for the blameless man by the mention of finding only "one man among a thousand"; then v 29 follows it with a reference to Man's loss of his original probity. Qoheleth, however, gives the fruitless search a slant of pathos by emphasizing that he has been searching, despite the fact that he has not found. In 2:17, Qoheleth even says he "hated life" because of all his fruitless toil; but Simonides says in L.16 that he will never throw away his life on such a fruitless quest.

Similarly, in L.23-4, Simonides says, in effect, that he is content with someone "neither estimable nor excessively incapa ful."

In 7:16 & 17, Qoheleth expresses a similar idea about avoiding extremes of good and bad in conduct. He may be giving it a slightly different slant, by referring primarily to the unrealistic standards we should not set for ourselves, whereas Simonides is referring to the unrealistic standards we should not demand of others. Yet, like Simonides, Qoheleth is expressing here an aversion to over-demanding standards; and he probably does mean to include our attitude to others within the scope of his point. His declaration nearby in 7:20 that no-one is blameless probably implies that we should not apply these extreme standards to others either.

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54 Cf. also Theognis, L.615.

55 I.e., for v 27's "scheme of things".

56 Probably 7:15 is relevant to our attitude to others as well as 7:20. The main point of these verses may well be to dissuade would-be sages from blaming sufferers for their misfortunes, since the "over-wise" of v 16 and the "fool" of v 17 could be referring again to Job's comforters (as in 5:1; see above, Chapter 5, Section ix). This is especially likely since v 18's picture of the truly God-fearing man "coming forth from" or "being the product of" potentially opposite extremes of experience is very reminiscent of Job (see below, Chapter 10, Section iv for this interpretation of 7:18).
It seems, however, that Qoheleth’s use of "םר יתב הולש" in 3:12 and 7:20 does not correspond exactly to Simonides’s use of "ἐν πράξειν". Simonides uses the term with a calculated ambiguity which it does not appear to suit Qoheleth’s purposes to mirror. However emphatic Qoheleth may be in 9:11 & 12 about the powerful influence of chance and of unexpected catastrophe on the human condition, nevertheless it is not clear that chance ("עב לולע") or catastrophe ("ץרל" ) is necessarily crucial to his concept of what actually defines "םר יתב הולש".

Simonides, however, despite his recognition of "ἐν πράξειν"’s ethical overtones, makes it beyond doubt that whether you can be called "πράξεις - ἐν" or not is completely dependent upon chance; if you suffer some unmanageable catastrophe, then you can not.

Different writers betray different degrees of sensitivity to this double-edged quality in the meaning of "ἐν πράξειν" by whether or not they consciously exploit it. It is possible to use the term in both senses, with moral overtones and without, and yet show no awareness of a potential contradiction. Xenophon, e.g., uses one end of the sense-spectrum of "ἐν πράξειν" in Mem. 3.9.14., 57 but edges toward the opposite end in Ibid. 1.6.8,

"He who supposes nothing goes well with him (μηδὲν ἐν πράξειν) is not..."
happy, (but) he who believes that he is successful (καλῶς προχωρεῖν)."

Whether or not Xenophon is conscious of the striking difference in the nuance of ἐδ πρᾶττειν between the two passages, he does not draw any attention to it. By contrast, however, the playful interplay of "ἐυπροσχαλη" and "ἐυτυχία" in Euthydemus 281B does draw attention to it, even though perhaps to a milder degree than Simonides's use of "πράξος - ἐ" in the poem discussed above. Similarly, in the opening lines of Platonic Epistle III, the writer is so alive to the potential ethical overtones of "ἐδ πρᾶττειν" that he even sees them in the term when it is used as a form of greeting, and on this basis discusses the advantages of "ἐδ πρᾶττειν" as a preferable alternative greeting to "χαῖρειν". It would be perfectly normal, however, to see this usage of "ἐδ πρᾶττειν" as simply parallel to "χαῖρειν". 59

Although it is by no means out of the question that Qoheleth may have intended "ב רע נ רע ו" as a conscious translation of "ἐδ πρᾶττειν", especially in view of the above discussion of possible trains of thought in common with earlier Greek writers, it is nevertheless only the ethical usage of the term "ἐδ πρᾶττειν", denoting the ideal way for a human being to live or conduct himself (i.e., "succeed" ethically) that seems to have any suggestive points of contact with Qoheleth. A pragmatic meaning, such as "succeed" in a generalized sense, with overtones of worldly ambition, would not fit the author's intention; for he is at pains to point out that success, in that sense, is over-rated and short-lived anyway. And although

58 C.f. also Charmides 164D.

59 See, e.g., II Maccabees 9:19, where, as often in formal greetings, no distinction is perceived between the two terms at all.

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Qoheleth does recommend enjoyment, Gordis is probably right in thinking that "εὖ πράττειν" can not mean "enjoy oneself". However, in thinking that " Heb  ה י י ל" by contrast, does mean "enjoy oneself", Gordis seems to be reading the wrong implications into its being coupled with " י ה י ה" in 3:12. The close association of these two words does not signify that their meanings are identical. Rather it reflects an ideal familiar in both Greek and Biblical thought: the moderate reciprocity of receiving good and doing it. As Theognis says,

"εὖ ξοργών εὖ πάσχε",

"Do good and receive good / be treated well".

Receiving the benefit of pleasure as a gift from God better befits the modest status of Man than striving to be the high-powered super - ה י י ל ("י ה י ה י י ל") of 7:16. Similarly, doing good, which the preceding eleven verses show God has limited to doing the right thing at its appropriate time, is also more appropriate to Man's status than the arrogance of the ultra-wicked. These latter not only (like


61 It is revealing, e.g., that Plat. Epist. III's preference for "εὖ πράττειν" rather than "χαράειν" is based on the idea that "χαράειν" does have overtones of "enjoy oneself", whereas "εὖ πράττειν" does not.

62 L.573.

63 3:12's " י י ל".

64 3:12's " י י ל".

65 3:1-11.

66 7:17.
the super-righteous) refuse to fit in to the limitations God has built into their scheme of options, but in addition they face judgment for the evil they have done. 67 They do not think about this sobering prospect; 68 but they should, because they should take into account that they are only mortal.

The natural reciprocity of doing good (bestowing benefits) and in return receiving good (enjoyment, happiness) is much celebrated in Proverbs, e.g.,

"A kind man benefits himself; But a cruel man brings trouble on himself."; 69

"A generous man will prosper; He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."; 70

However, the type of doing good or doing well envisaged in these passages is somewhat different from the type of doing good / well implied by "ἐδώ πράττειν" in Aristotle's or Plato's concept of the ideal way of life, or the ideal way of "conducting oneself" in general. Proverbs presents its picture of right conduct in terms of the correct pattern of interaction with others, a very social, outward and object-oriented concept of right-conduct. 71 Accordingly, it gives quite a high profile to bestowing material benefits on others:


68 7:4.

69 11:17.

70 11:25. See also Ibid. 11:24 & 27; cf. Luke 6:38, "Give and it will be given to you.", and Theognis L.573, above.

71 It does not represent doing good / well simply in terms of the right way to conduct oneself, which could be described as a less outward and more self-oriented or subject-oriented concept of right conduct.
"One man gives freely, yet gains even more;  
Another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty."  

This concrete, interactive concept of "doing good", with its emphasis on helping other people's material needs, is a strong influence on Qoheleth, with his carefully balanced interest in the exact significance of enjoying material things, including its limitations. This obvious influence may well have played a major part in the LXX translators' choice of "ποιεῖν ἀγαθὸν", not "ἔδω πράττειν", as the Greek Bible's rendition of " noop n ποιεῖν" in Qoheleth.

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Despite the fact that "ποιεῖν ἀγαθὸν" and "εὖ πράττειν" have now come to mean virtually the same, their different histories provide useful clues as to why LXX translates "בнием נמשיע" as "ποιεῖν ἀγαθὸν", not "εὖ πράττειν"; and this in turn sheds some light on what Qoheleth himself may have meant by "בнием נמשיע". For while the LXX's choice does not ultimately disprove the idea that Qoheleth may have intended "בнием נמשיע" as a Hebrew translation of "εὖ πράττειν", it does strongly suggest the translator(s)' conviction that Qoheleth's terminology was intended to convey a socio-ethical meaning. Hence they have used for "בнию נמשיע" the Greek term ("ποιεῖν ἀγαθὸν") which to them conveys the most social, interactive aspect of "doing good / well", whether or not Qoheleth would, at the time he was writing, have regarded "ποιεῖν ἀγαθὸν" as the most socio-ethical term himself.

The term "εὖ πράττειν" does not occur very often in LXX, "ποιεῖν" being a far more popular verb than "πράττειν" overall. Nevertheless, "εὖ πράττειν" does occur, so it could, perhaps, have been selected to translate "בнию נמשיע" in Qoh. 3:12 and 7:20, had it seemed appropriate. Instead, however, the LXX usage of "εὖ πράττειν" is confined to formal greeting, without moral content:

"πολλὰ χαίρειν καὶ ύψιστευειν καὶ εὖ πράττειν!". 75

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71 If, as seems very likely, he knew Greek.

74 Though significantly, it does not seem to occur in the Canonical books.

75 1 Macc. 9:19.
Despite, therefore, the alertness to the ethical overtones of "εὐ πράττειν" evident in other and earlier writings, exceptionally even in a supposedly formal greeting,⁷⁶ there is no evidence that it is the moral sense of "εὐ πράττειν" which is most familiar to the LXX translator(s). This may well be the reason why it is bypassed in favour of "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν" to translate "ἵνα ἤσυχον" in Qoh. 3:12 and 7:20. By contrast, "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν", along with its variants "ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖν" and "ἀγαθοποιεῖν", has the decidedly practical and ethical meaning of conferring benefit and performing good, kind and / or right acts. In LXX, "ἀγαθοποιεῖν" is used of God's beneficent acts.⁷⁷ In LXX Prov. 11:17, "ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖν" is used to translate "ἡμᾶς",

"τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτοῦ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ ἀνήρ ἔλεημων".

The fact that it is himself the kind man benefits here does not in any way undermine the obviously moral nature of the point. A kind man brings upon himself the kindness he has deserved through his kindness to others, just as the cruel man brings on himself the trouble he has deserved by causing trouble for others.

Other LXX terms for benefitting others also tend to have "ποιεῖν" - verbs rather than "πράττειν" - verbs; e.g., Lev. 5:4, "καλῶς ποιησάω"; Num. 10:29, "εὐ σε ποιησομεν". Terms for moral right do occasionally occur with "πράττειν" / "πράσσειν", e.g., Prov. 21:7, "πράσσειν τῇ δίκαιᾳ", II Macc. 12:43, "καλῶς πράττων", and IV Macc. 3:20, "καὶ ἐπράσσειν καλῶς". Yet nevertheless, the degree

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⁷⁶See reference to opening lines of Plat. Epist. III, above, this Chapter, Section ii.

⁷⁷Later on, in the New Testament, it would still be used of God's actions (e.g., Acts 14:17), but would come to be the regular term for men's good deeds as well as God's (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9, 33 & 35; III John v 11).
of socio-ethical interaction implied by these expressions is not equal to that of "ποιεῖν ὁγιαθῶν", but rather lies between that of "ποιεῖν ὁγιαθῶν" and that of "ἐδ Πράττειν". They do not include the adverb "ἐδ"; and in the case of "ἐδ Πράττειν", the "ἐδ" is not just the usual adverbial variation on "ὁγιαθῶν", but is actually part of what gives "ἐδ Πράττειν" its less interactive, more subject-oriented or self-oriented meaning. For it reflects the history of "ἐδ Πράττειν" as used transitively, with an understood "τὰ οὐτοῦ", 78 in the sense of "to bring one's own affairs to a good issue".

However, although these LLX "Πράττειν"- / "Πράσσειν"- verbs are indirectly interpersonal, in the sense that any term involving concepts like "τὰ δίκαια", etc., are bound to imply interpersonal exchange, they still do not have the same implication as "ποιεῖν ὁγιαθῶν" of directly benefitting a particular party. Although ethical in meaning, they are more subject-oriented or self-oriented than "ποιεῖν ὁγιαθῶν" and its variants. The latter are decidedly interactive and object-oriented, and also more specific in meaning. Josephus' use of "ἐδ Ποιεῖν" in Ant. XII.23 is comparable. Here, Aristeas urges the King to release all the Jewish slaves, because

"All men are the handiwork of God, and particularly because I know that He is pleased with those who do good (τοῖς ἐδ Ποιοῦσιν)".

The type of well-doing Josephus is thinking of is the conferring of concrete benefits such as manumission, rather than the subject-oriented and more generalized achievement of attaining the most suitable way of life for Man. 79 Therefore, it is natural to Josephus to use a "Ποιεῖν" - verb, with the "ἐδ" in this case probably

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78 So that "ὁγιαθῶν" instead of "ἐδ" would be impossible.

79 As discussed above, Section ii, "ἐδ Πράττειν"; see, e.g., Aristotle's Nic. Eth. Liv-v and X.vii.9.
signifying far less difference (if any) from "ocrisyóv" than in the case of "eîd prótttein" discussed above. 80

Even in classical and earlier Greek, "ocrisyóv prótttein" already had strong ethico-social overtones of honourable, beneficent acts toward a particular party. While ethical terms with " prótttein" meant simply to act / behave correctly, those with " prótein" implied a concrete benefit to someone. This is in line with the general trend that wherever the meanings of " prótein" and " prótttein" diverge, it seems to be " prótein" which carries the nuance of "making", implying a resultant, lasting product. It is " prótttein", however, which emphasizes the "acting" or "doing" simply in itself, irrespective of any concrete product, and potentially irrespective even of how it affects others. The focus of meaning in " prótttein" is the correct conduct of the subject, not some benefit to an object.

Sometimes, however, by contrast, " prótein" and " prótttein" can be interchangeable in classical Greek. When their meanings thus converge, it seems that " prótein" is absorbing " prótttein"'s flavouring of continued, open-ended action, thereby losing its own usual sense of a completed act with a defined result / product. So, for example, Demosthenes 90.14 81 refers to what Diopites

" prótttein koi mel/ei prótein",

"Is doing or is going to do";

80 E.g., perhaps Josephus's "eîd prótein" implies a more general tendency to doing good than " prótein ócryóv", but not a less concrete type of good than " prótein ócryóv".

81 On the Chersonese, Para.2.
and Id. 41.21 states that, had circumstances been different, Philip

"οὔδὲν δὲν δὲν νυντ πεποτήκεν ἐπραξέν"

"Would never have gained his present successes".

Again in 45.27, \( \piράττειν καὶ ποιεῖν \)
referring to the right

"Policy to adopt and action to take".

Despite these examples of convergent meaning for these two verbs, however, it is clear when they diverge in meaning where the difference between them lies. It is "ποιεῖν" which points toward a potential product of the action. So, even allowing for the fact that both verbs can carry an ethical meaning, "ἐδ πράττειν" and "ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖν" had different implications right from the beginning, "ἐδ πράττειν" meaning simply to act correctly, with emphasis on the conduct in itself, but "ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖν" pointing to the benefit conferred on the other party.

So Isocrates 357B calls Teisias a man who

"μηδὲν ἀγαθὸν ποιήσας τὴν πόλιν",

"Never did the city any good".

Similarly, Herodotus refers to

"δὲσα ἀγαθὰ πόρος Πέρσας πεποιήκοι",

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82 Philippic I, Para.5.
83 De Corona, Para. 62.
84 The Team of Horses, 48-50.
"All the good which Cyrus had done for Persia".  
Later on, where Cyrus is described as

"ἡπιῶς τε καὶ ἄγαθά σφι πάντα ἐμπεμπήσατο",

"Kind, and always occupied with plans for his people's wellbeing".  

An earlier usage of "ἀριστα πεποιητα" is similarly concrete. This is an ironic understatement of the major injury and insult Menelaus received at the hands of Paris:

"Has so great a kindness been done to you in your house by Trojans?"  
Although the context is here personal (the abduction of an individual's wife) rather than public (like the examples from Isocrates and Herodotus), the usage is nevertheless similar, in that it is the lasting effect of the action on the victim or beneficiary which is significant, not simply the action in itself and / or the action in relation to the person performing it.  

In view of the long history of "ἄγαθον ποιεῖν" as a term denoting beneficent acts, it seems that its variant "ποιεῖν ἄγαθον" was selected as LXX's translation of Qoheleth's "Εὕρηκα ἓν θέλημά ἐμοί" because it was far more specifically socio-ethical in its implications than "εὖ πράττειν". In fact, "ποιεῖν ἄγαθον" was probably the most

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85 *Hist.* 3.75.  
86 Ibid. 84.  
87 Here, Cyrus is favourably compared with Darius, who is said to have been "Only out for profit wherever he could get it", and with the tyrant Cambyses, who was allegedly "Harsh, and careless of his subjects' interests.".  
88 l. VI, L.56.
obvious term available to indicate acts of kindness to one's fellow men. If so, this choice is well in line with the concrete nature of Qoheleth's view of right action, as expressed in 11:1 & 2:

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Give portions to seven, yes, to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land."

Verse 1 shows that Qoheleth \(^{89}\) expects liberality and benevolence to be repaid, \(^{90}\) even though the words "after many days" are also significant, reflecting his rejection of belief in direct, clearcut cause-and-effect links between good conduct and wellbeing. Similarly, Qoh. 10:8 implies that hostile acts do in some way set the scene for potential retribution, even though, again, the connexion between the original act and its recompense is loosely drawn.

The motif of sowing in Qoh. 11 has particularly strong implications for the importance of good deeds (even where generosity might seem reckless), especially in view of Prov. 11:18b's reference to the man who "sows" righteousness

"(reaping) a sure reward"

straight after v 17's

"kind man (benefitting) himself". Since Qoh. 11:6's exhortation not to be discouraged from sowing is a summary of the implications of the passage as a whole, \(^{91}\) and since v 4's reference to planting and reaping is the pivotal point of the passage,

\(^{89}\) Like the sage who wrote Prov. 11:17a,
"A kind man benefits himself".

\(^{90}\) As Plumptre comments on 3:12,
"Doing good is in some way the best way of getting good",
"in some way" being an appropriately indirect way of putting his point.

\(^{91}\) Vv 1-6.
it seems that "□נֵי" in v 1 means bread-corn, and that Qoheleth is recommending "sowing the waters.".

Ranston has already suggested 92 that vv 1 & 2 are a deliberate contradiction of Theognis's warning against

"Sowing the waters of the grey ocean"; 93

and his argument seems to me to be reinforced by the previous association in Proverbs between generosity and "sowing" righteousness. Theognis is cautioning us not to be generous to the baser type of person, for fear of not getting a return for it. Sowing, however, is the perfect illustration of gaining or achieving something by appearing to throw it away. Hence Prov. 11:18b's reassurance about the "sureness" of the reward for sowing righteousness. For the fact that any act of sowing appears, superficially, to be a loss acts as a potential disincentive to sowing, which is why the reassurance of a solid outcome is needed. Qoh. 11:1's

"And you will find it again after many days"

is a similar reassurance.

This image of sowing as gaining through loss is very familiar and its implications very deep-rooted. The same image persists into the New Testament as well. See also John 12:24-5,

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal


93 L.106.
Also revealing is 1 Cor. 15:36,

"How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."

The implication of "How foolish!" is that the no-gain-without-loss significance of the sowing-motif is so familiar and so obvious that Paul feels he should not even have to explain it. It is also noteworthy that Prov. 11:24, where a generous man is said to gain by giving and a mean one to lose by hoarding, is in the same chapter as the above-quoted vv 17 & 18, where v 18b uses sowing as a symbol for doing good.

Qoheleth, being acquainted with the viewpoint both of Theognis (hence the echo of Theognis' wording) and of the Sages of Proverbs, has here decided, in favour of the sages and against Theognis, that the risk of loss implicit in the sowing motif is an intrinsic and unavoidable aspect of "doing good". Echoing the wording of Theognis is a clever didactic tactic. For the sayings of Theognis were very well known by educated people throughout the Hellenistic world; and any aspiring sage able to read a Hebrew wisdom-book as well, including Qoheleth, would also know the Biblical Proverbs as a basis for comparison.

By exhorting his readers / hearers to "sow the waters" in 11:1, therefore, Qoheleth stands to gain a considerable shock-impact by challenging directly a well-established axiom of Greek wisdom. Part of his reason for attacking this axiom is that he rejects simplistic, easily discernible cause-and-effect links between good conduct and reward. He is deeply suspicious of the whole idea that important life-patterns, moral or otherwise, are easily discernible. Therefore, he is pre-committed to the idea
that one has to take risks, because everything is a risk; and this gives him a particularly strong incentive to attack Theognis's opinion here. 94

It is not difficult to see why Theognis's emphasis on the importance of favours being returned seems to Qoheleth overly timid, and not well-matched to the unpredictability that he feels is inescapably woven into the whole framework of reality anyway, and deliberately at that, by no less than God's own design. Theognis asks in L.101,

"For what advantage is a friend from among the baser sort?",

expanding his point in L.105-8:

"He that does good to the baser sort gets vain thanks; 95 he might just as well sow the waters of the grey ocean (Ἰσον καὶ σπείρειν πόντον ἀλλὰς πολιής). You would no more receive good in return if you did good to the base than reap a rich harvest if you sowed the waters."

Although there follows a rational enough attempt to calculate what type of person is worth helping and what type is not, 96 Qoheleth does not recommend over-reliance on calculation anyway, however rational it might seem to be. As usual in this book,

"עַקֵּלֵלַי / "ץַקֵּרַתְךָ 97"

94 Stronger than even Ranston realizes, although he recognizes (Op. cit. P.40-1) Qoheleth's contention with Theognis in this passage.

95 Cf. L.133 and 955.

96 L.109-112.

97 11:2 & 5b / 11:5a.
is the watchword. He indicates in 11:4 that there is a danger of necessary moral action being inhibited by over-calculation:

"Whoever watches the wind will not plant;  
Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap."

Verse 3a shows that only actions can furnish any proof of one’s good character or good intentions, by implying that if a cloud does not pour rain on the earth, it can not have been full of water in the first place. The clouds and rain in v 3 followed by v 4’s wind and clouds are subtly reminiscent of Prov. 25:14,

"Like clouds and wind without rain  
Is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give."

This echo intensifies the impression that v 3a posits giving (including material generosity) as major evidence of goodness. If a man is good, he will prove it by good actions. Rain (like dew) is a compelling symbol for acts of beneficence, for refreshment and sustaining of life, for words and deeds that do good, and are powerful in their nurturing and fertilizing effect.

Similarly, 11:3b shows that guesswork is worthless:

"Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,  
In the place where it falls, there will it lie."

This means that only actual events or definite actions can determine, influence or even reveal outcomes. A tree can only lie where it does, in the event, fall. It can not lie where it has not fallen, not even in a place where it should have fallen, according to

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99 See also Deut. 32:2; Ps. 133:3; Is. 55:10 & 11; Hosea 14:5.

Cf. also Matt. 5:45’s reference to sun and rain in connexion with good deeds, again not endorsing Theognis’ type of advice: namely, to calculate carefully who deserves your kindness and who does not, and to ration it accordingly. Matt. 5:43-8 also warns against this approach.
some idealistic or pragmatic calculation which did not measure up to reality; it can lie only where it actually has fallen. Furthermore, once it has fallen there, it will stay there. A time will come when there is no more opportunity for even action to influence outcomes. This makes the period when we have such opportunity all the more important to use.  

The teasing antanaclasis of "\( \Pi \Pi \)" in v 4 (wind) and v 5 (spirit? or wind again?) points back to the mysterious force that in v 3 propels the clouds and causes the tree to fall where it does fall rather than somewhere else; yet it also points forward to the mysterious work of God in v 5b, where God's creative spirit follows a

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101] The comparison between the wind and "those born of the Spirit" in John 3:8 seems to be based on this passage. The idea of birth by the Spirit of God recalls Qoheleth's reference to the child forming in the womb. The whole John passage lays so much emphasis on birth (vv 3-9) that Nicodemus even takes this more physically than it is actually meant. Most significantly, however, is that it is the wind which is selected for comparison with God's Spirit, and hence, in effect, with God's whole mode of operation, since it is by His Spirit that He operates. Jesus' whole point in using the wind for his illustration is that "You can not tell where (the wind) comes from or where it is going";

and the outcome of God's work, - in this case, spiritual offspring, "born" by the operation of His Spirit - is just as enigmatic as the wind. This is exactly why Qoh. 11:5a originally used the wind to compare with God's method of working:

"As you do not know the path of the wind (i.e., its route) -
- so you can not understand the work of God,
The Maker of all things."

The expression "Maker of all things" confirms what the womb-imagery earlier in the verse suggests: that the "work of God" envisaged here in v 5, and throughout vv 1-6, is the power He manifests particularly in creation, pro-creation, planting and reaping, and the bringing to pass of outcomes (cf.Is. 55:10 & 11). Qoheleth's point here is that results will flow from initiatives, and the good which men do will have an outcome; there will be issue from your actions, therefore act.

The unpredictability of God's method in bringing a result from our efforts, that element of mystery in what determines outcomes, is that very "wind" which v 4 tells us we should not watch. For focussing our attention on trying to calculate what is too difficult for us to calculate is the very thing that will discourage us from taking opportunities (the one freedom genuinely open to us in life's limited framework). It will do this by engendering in us the false belief that our attempts to do good might come to nothing. To prevent such discouragement, the sowing and planting imagery of vv 1 & 4, conjoined with the picture of God as "Maker of all things" and overseer of the embryo in the womb in v 5, dignifies men's initiatives, by associating with them the same inevitability of outcome that Isaiah attributes to God's own initiatives in Is. 55 vv 10 & 11: the natural inevitability of reaping resulting from sowing.
mysterious path we can not understand. Because of this compact style of using the
same word(s) with several different potential meanings, v 4 can not be translated
without amplification. However, insofar as "Friends" stands for the mysterious and
unknowable element in the forces that determine events, and the clouds for sources
of the good treatment one receives in life (whether this goodness is charity or reward),
v 4 could be interpreted as,

"Whoever makes certainty of outcome the prerequisite for action will never
bestow benefits (plant good); whoever demands certainty of reward for their
good works will never receive any reward (reap good)."

This is why v 6 sums up the passage with an exhortation to see life's
uncertainty of outcome as an incentive to action, not as a disincentive. Theognis sees
it as a disincentive, since in the passage cited above his main point is the unlikelihood
of reward. However, where Theognis chooses to stress the danger of being
shortchanged for the future, Qoheleth prefers to stress the danger of missing an
opportunity in the present. He is fiercely adamant about the all-importance of the
opportunity afforded by the present, as the urgency of 9:10 and the bitterly ironical
passivity of the dead lion as opposed to the living dog in 9:4 make plain. Theognis
believes in the future glory of fame in remembrance; 102 but Qoheleth has no faith
in this. 103 So Qoheleth focusses mainly on the present, especially on grasping the
opportunities the moment presents for "rejoicing" and "doing good", 104 i.e.,
receiving and bestowing benefits.

102 L1.237 ff. and 867.
104 3:12.
Admittedly, Theognis also believes strongly in the importance of the "καιρός" or "opportune moment". In this attitude, which is axiomatic to so many Greek thinkers, he has an important point in common with Qoheleth. The similarity between Qoh. 3:11a,

""καίρας ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς βίου ἡ μεγάλη",

and Sophocles' *O.T.* L.1516,

"πάντα γὰρ καιρὸς καλῶν",

is striking not only in sentiment, but also in forceful brevity of expression; and examples of sayings which, like Qoh. 3:11a, emphasize the importance of the "καιρός", abound in Greek literature. "Καιρός" is also the word the LXX translator uses to render Qoheleth's "ΠΥ", perhaps reflecting the fact that Qoheleth's viewpoint on "καιρός" is seen as the same as that of traditional Greek wisdom.

Despite Theognis' respect for the "καιρός", however, his reservations about risking loss lay him open to the possibility of missing occasions for doing good. To Qoheleth, by contrast, it is the freedom to take the initiative and seize these opportunities which is the priority, not the effort to avoid loss. For him, keeping a clear run to seizing the opportune moment ("ΠΥ" / "καιρός") is the main practical objective of wisdom. So desirable is doing good that one should keep sowing

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105 See, e.g., Ll.401-2.

106 As noted above, this Chapter, Section i, ftn. 10.

107 E.g., Soph. El. Ll.75-6 (see also below, Appendix Four); Isocrates *Ad Nic.* 33; Pindar *Ol.* 13, 47, etc. See Tosi, Renzo, op. cit., Pp. 270-1, Sections 572 and 574.

108 3:1-12, 8:5 & 6, 9:10-12.
righteousness even in the evening; \textsuperscript{109} i.e., even at the very time when one would rest from most types of labour.

The remainder of Chapter 11, and the following and final Chapter 12, reinforce the urgency of 11:6 about sowing the necessary seed. They underline this urgency by stressing that our days of vigour to take opportunities will not last forever, and that obedience and loyalty to God are paramount. \textsuperscript{110} Indeed, the entire book is geared to exhorting the reader not to waste opportunities to do good and to get good, \textsuperscript{111} precisely because these opportunities are limited to time. In that respect, 9:10 is the keynote of the whole work:

"Whatever your hand finds to do,
Do it with all your might.
For in the grave, where you are going,
There is neither working nor planning, nor knowledge nor wisdom."

Nowhere is this more obvious than in 3:1-12, the very passage which concludes with \textsuperscript{112} v 12's exhortation to "rejoice" and to "do good": i.e., to receive / enjoy

\textsuperscript{109} 11:6.

\textsuperscript{110} 11:9; 12:1, 13 & 14.

\textsuperscript{111} E.g., 3:12.

\textsuperscript{112} This is its conclusion in the sense that this is the practical inference drawn from 3:1-11; given the situation outlined in 3:1-11, the recommendation of 3:12 is Man's wisest response to that situation, the most godly and realistic course of action open to Man. As explained above, however (in Chapter 5, Section ix, esp. fn. 236), the reference in 3:17 to the "\textsuperscript{11}t\textsuperscript{22}m\textsuperscript{14}t\textsuperscript{20}" or "correct time" for judgment should be regarded as ultimate culmination of the passage 3:1 ff. For recognizing that judgment between the good and the wicked will come in the end, despite appearances to the contrary, represents a peak in God's dispensational landscape of "times" beyond the peak represented by v 12. Whereas v 12 concludes the pattern of "times" in the sense that it states the implications of that pattern, as to how men should behave and to what goals they should limit themselves, v 17 caps the pattern by telling us which of the "times" will be climactic one, the consummation of the pattern as a whole. 3:8 is also a key point in the passage, since v 8 rounds off the description of the "times" as arranged into opposites; and this arrangement into opposites is essential to their function.
benefits, \textsuperscript{113} and to bestow them on others, as exhorted by \textit{Prov.} 11:17, 25, etc., and by Theognis L.573's

"\textit{εὕρονε ἐπίκε."}.

As in 11:1-6, the uncertainty of outcomes is emphasized, \textsuperscript{114} but again as an incentive to action, not as a disincentive.

A broad variety of actions is set out in 3:1-8, most of these actions involving a measure of initiative and choice-making; and we are told that for each one there is a correct "time" ("\textit{ἡμών}"). These actions are arranged in pairs of opposites, which implies that there is no type of action which is ruled out per se. For the spectrum of possibilities contained between two opposites is, in effect, everything. The fact that every one of these activities has its set "time" means that each one has a time when it is "right" ("\textit{πρὸς}"): "\textit{He has made everything right in its time}." \textsuperscript{115}

So performing a particular action in its right time will be doing the right thing. "(Being) happy / rejoicing" and "(Doing) good" are enjoined on us in 3:12, the practical climax of the passage expounding the "times", because it is only by discerning and acting upon the correct "time" / opportunity for an action that we can be happy or do good.

\textsuperscript{113} Especially material, creaturely benefits, as v 13 clarifies.

\textsuperscript{114} Especially if Barton's emendation of 3:11a's \textit{αἰών} from "eternity" to "ignorance" (discussed above, Chapter 6, Section iii) is accepted.

\textsuperscript{115} 3:11a.
This is the only real wisdom open to Man. And although 8:5 & 6 state confidently \(^{116}\) that one can know and act upon the "\(\text{ד} \text{נ} \text{ה}\)"; \(^{117}\) nevertheless 9:12 shows that there is a dangerous margin of helplessness within this pattern. It is also possible to fail to recognize and exploit the "crisis-point" or "critical moment" (another nuance of "\(\text{ד} \text{נ} \text{ה}\)"), and so become its powerless victim. Moreover, 3:11b shows that, even though we may recognize and respond correctly to a particular "time", we can never comprehend the providential pattern of "times" as a whole, in order to work out in advance a wisdom constituting a total strategy of how to live. As Zimmerli says, \(^{118}\) Qoheleth is

"The frontier-guard, who forbids wisdom to cross the frontier towards a comprehensive art of life. - Wisdom - is possible when it is willing to seize only the portion and not the whole - when it is willing to enjoy the gift that God gives today and will not try to make God's promise an item in the calculation of Man's life.".

This perspective is due not only to Qoheleth's reverence for God's sovereignty and freedom, as Zimmerli sees, but also to his awareness of the necessarily fragmentary nature of our understanding, and to his abhorrence of false claims to certainty. If Man did devise a "comprehensive art of life", it would be completely false. For it would be based on some picture of overall reality, instead of on the individual's interaction with God and with known reality in the here and now. Man is not capable of grasping the reality of God's overall pattern of "times" genuinely.

\(^{116}\) As 3:1-12 also implies.

\(^{117}\) I.e., do the right thing at the right time.

in all its fulness, and hence as it really is. Therefore, any picture he thinks he has of the whole is bound to be unreal. This is why any comprehensive art of life based on that picture of the whole would be spurious. As 8:17 makes clear,

"No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, Man can not discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he can not really comprehend it."

Because Qoheleth knows that any picture Man has of overall reality must be a false picture, the type of wisdom he would wish to promote has to be a cultivation of the flexibility of mind and of the receptivity and adaptability to emerging and changing perceptions and circumstances which best equips one to grasp the "TIV" and to enjoy and bestow good as the opportunity presents itself. For him, therefore, the correctness of the moment for a particular right action is the factor that chiefly determines its rightness. It is more than likely that this contributed to the LXX’s translation of Qoheleth’s "

" Especially important is receptivity to the divine presence, see above, Chapter 5, Sections v and ix. Without this, Man is unable to restrict his attention to interaction with God in the here and now, and is almost certain to try and grasp some imaginative picture of overall reality instead. Also, without numinous awareness of God, he is not self-aware either in the true sense (i.e., he is not aware of himself in his essential nature as a creature in relation to God). Hence Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8) are depicted as shunning God's presence in close association with losing their original identities as beings created by God and relating intimately to Him. Qoheleth associates true receptivity to the divine presence (as distinct from empty and presumptuous religious activity) with listening (see 5:1, "Go near to listen"). This is the opposite to Adam's reaction in Gen. 3:9,

"I heard you - so I hid". Instead of drawing near to listen, Adam backs away to avoid listening. The very fact that Qoheleth’s idea of desirable behaviour is so exact an opposite to fallen Adam’s behaviour in Genesis only serves to underline how deep-rooted in Biblical tradition (whether explicitly or implicitly) Qoheleth’s idea of spirituality,

"Go near to listen", really is.

3:12.
"ποιεῖν ἀγαθῶν" denotes is also a specific, finished act, peculiar to a particular point in time. By contrast, "εἰς πράξειν" suggests an ongoing, continuous policy without a defined end-point. In a philosophical context, as discussed above, Section ii, it can refer to an entire way of life and quality of life, the general ideal of consistent right conduct and wellbeing.

This is not to say that there is anything intrinsically impossible in Qoheleth having intended "כ יא נ ה יא" as a translation of "εἰς πράξειν". Certainly 3:11a looks like a direct translation of a very Greek and very popular proverb; and there are times when Qoheleth seems to be directly addressing himself, either in agreement or in disagreement, to the train of thought of an earlier and sometimes Greek wisdom-writer such as Theognis. It highly unlikely that Qoheleth was unacquainted with the Greek language; and even if he was, he was not unacquainted with Greek Wisdom, from one source or another. Moreover, he does believe in ‘faring well’ in the sense of having, where possible, a prudent, productive and successful life, which is what "εἰς πράξειν" means.

He does not, however, present this as his main priority, preferring the exhortation to "rejoice" ("ח נ י ו ל ו", 3:12). "ח נ י ו ל ו" allows of an ad hoc and inspirational application more appropriate to Qoheleth’s view of the limitations of our knowledge and the unpredictability of circumstances than a carefully calculated plan for ‘faring well’ overall. When conjoined in the same verse (3:12), "ח נ י ו ל ו" and

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121 He is evidently a cultured literary figure; and in Hellenistic times (see below, Appendix Three), anyone with any cultural pretensions would have to have known Greek.
"ככן לה والعדו" together seem to cover the entire spectrum of reciprocal receiving and giving of good adequately, without any need to refer to prospering or succeeding specifically. If "ככן לה والعדו" did mean "εὐ πράττειν" instead of "ποιεῖν ἀγαθῶν", it would undermine the perfect balance of 3:12's expression of the (in Hellenistic times) familiar proverb,

"εὖ ἔρωμεν εὖ πάσχε".

Overall, the argument for "ככן להเทคโนโลย" having been deliberately designed to convey "εὐ πράττειν" in Hebrew is not particularly compelling. For the LXX translator is not unaware of Qoheleth's affinities with Greek wisdom, rendering "决" correctly as "καλδος" ("right") and "לע" as "κατρός", etc. Although there is always the possibility of deviant translations in any work, there seems to be no overwhelming reason for suspecting the LXX translator(s) of radically misunderstanding Qoheleth's intentions and translating his Hebrew term by "ποιεῖν ἀγαθῶν" even though he actually meant "εὐ πράττειν". Moreover, there is so much controversy about the language background of the book anyway, that at this stage it would be difficult to decide what the correct criteria would be for entertaining such suspicions.

The LXX's use of "ποιεῖν ἀγαθῶν" rather than "εὐ πράττειν" to translate "ככן לה технологии" probably reflects the translator's recognition that "ככן לה технологии" denotes "doing good deeds", in the object-oriented sense of helping other people,

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122 This is not to deny that there is a marked literalist tendency in Qoheleth's LXX translator(s), which could in some way have influenced their choice of Greek word to render "ככן לה технологии". Some even think the LXX version here is Aquila. Yet there is a difference between literalism and misunderstanding; and it is difficult to see why literalism simply in itself should prompt a preference for "ποιεῖν ἀγαθῶν" rather than "εὐ πράττειν".
rather than "faring / doing well" in the subject-oriented sense of "εὖ πράττειν". This interpretation matches very well Qoheleth's view that it is recognizing and acting upon the correct time for a deed that makes the deed right. For this view would involve specific, concrete right acts defined by time, such as could be denoted by "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν", but could not by "εὖ πράττειν". If on these grounds we accept "ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν" as the correct translation, this confirms the internal evidence of the affinities with Prov. 11, etc., that "בָּרֵעַ תָּפֵל" has the strongly ethico-social meaning of performing concrete and specific good deeds.
CHAPTER 9

THE RACECRAFT OF QOHELETH

i QOHELETH AND THE RACE OF THE SUN.

Although there is only one direct reference in Qoheleth to a race,\(^1\) the idea of a race is omnipresent in the book.\(^2\) The insistence of 1:1-11 on a cyclic, repetitive pattern as intrinsic to all creation including human experience is already hinting at a many-lapped race. The first three sections\(^3\) of the book underline this impression by their structure; for their successive repetition of the same themes from a different perspective is like the repetition of the same landmarks in the successive laps of a race. This same implication of a race is re-inforced throughout the book by the vocabulary of pursuit: of seeking, grasping, chasing, taking, overtaking, etc.\(^4\) It is also affirmed by the emphasis on the all-importance of Καίρος,\(^5\) and by the radically

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\(^1\)In 9:11. See below, this Chapter, Section vi.

\(^2\)See below, this Chapter, Sections ii and vii, and end of Section iii.

\(^3\)The first three sections are: i) 1:1-11; ii) 1:12 - 2:23; and iii) 2:24 - 3:22. See also below, this Chapter, Sections ii and vii, for the cumulative effect of the lapped structure in enhancing the level of meaning conveyed by the repeated motifs.

\(^4\)As noted by Ceresko, op. cit., passim.

\(^5\)See below, this Chapter, Sections iii, v and vi; see also APPENDIX FOUR: ΚΑΙΡΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES' ELECTRA and APPENDIX FIVE: QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR'S ISTMIAN ODE IV.
challenging references to typical human goal-seeking and path-steering, such as feverish accumulation of wealth, etc. Even the early reference to the cycle of the sun evokes strong associations of racing and of chariot-lore, because of the sun’s association with both in Hebrew and Greek literature.

See below, this Chapter, Sections ii, iv and end of vi.

The close connexion of the sun with horses and chariots is recognized in Biblical literature; II Ki. 23:11 shows this unmistakably. This passage reflects the expected monotheistic objection to dedicating literal horses and chariots to the sun as if it were a deity; nevertheless, the thinking behind the choice of offering so clear is it is. It is because of the proverbial swiftness of the sun that horses are so closely associated with it. This connexion is said by Herodotus (Hist. L.216) to be explicitly recognized by the Massagetae, who explain their practice of sacrificing horses to the sun by the fact that the sun is “The swiftest of the gods and therefore they give him the swiftest of mortal things”.

It is not difficult to see that other examples of sacrificing or dedicating horses to the sun are probably based on the same connexion, whether explicitly or implicitly. Perhaps the imaginative identification of the sun’s heat with the hot breath of horses is also of very ancient origin. See below, this Chapter, this Section. The additional association of the sun with chariots presumably arises from the sun’s appearance in combination with its swiftness and strength. Furthermore, because of the sun’s reputation for speed and power, racing may be associated with it independently of horses and chariot-lore as well. The vigorous champion image of the sun in Ps. 19 v 5b is unlikely to be referring to anything other than a literal race. The ‘mighty man’ is here said to rejoice in running (Y H I) his course; and the reason a man of strength would thus exult in running is because it is only in the context of competition such as racing that the H I has a chance to show his strength fully.

The Greek poetic models of the sun as charioteer are very plentiful. For a list of references see, e.g., James Diggle’s commentary Euripides’ Phaethon (Cambridge, 1970), P.79 (comment on L.2). For Attic vases representing the sun’s winged horses, see Ibid., P.137 (n. L.173, Para.2).

Particularly illuminating, however (though not mentioned in Diggle’s list of sun-charioteer images), is Soph., Antig. L.1064-5. Here, the sun’s daily courses are apparently pictured as laps in a race. Teiresias refers to days as “τρόχους ὁμοληπτήρας ἥλιου” (“competitive courses of the sun”). By this he could only mean either “races of the sun” or “laps within the race of the sun”. Of these, the latter meaning is by far the more appropriate. Not only is he speaking of these ‘courses’ in the plural, but more importantly his whole message depends on the fact that they are courses which would naturally be run in swift, immediate succession to each other. Since the very thing he is trying to convey to Creon is the terrifying imminence of his downfall, the idea of gaps between these courses would be totally counterproductive to his point. Therefore, ‘courses’ must mean ‘laps’, not ‘races’. For the lapped structure of chariot races, see, e.g., Pindar’s reference to twelve laps of a race in Pyth. V, L.32-3 / 41-2. For Sophocles’ own dramatic utilization of a sense of mounting tension as lap rapidly succeeds lap, see his reference to the completion of the sixth and then the seventh laps in Elect. L.726, as he leads up to the fictitious racing accident which ‘kills’ Orestes.

Probably, then, Antig. L.1064-5,

“ὁλλ’ εἶ ἐκ τοι κόττισθι μὴ πολλοὶς ἔτι
τρόχους ὁμοληπτήρας ἥλιου τελεῖν.....”

means,

“But know for sure that not many more ‘competitive’ (i.e., ‘racing’, ‘of a race’) laps of the sun will end.....”

before Creon’s doom is upon him. Alternatively, some take “τελεῖν” as transitive (governing “τρόχους”), and “ὁμοληπτήρας” as a substantive for the ‘competitive’ (i.e., ‘racing’) chariot-horses. These lines would
From the opening verses of *Qoheleth*, we can feel the hot breath of the sun’s chariot steeds panting ("טִּקרְבִּים" 1:5b) toward the next sunrise; and, as in v 5, we can sense the rhythm of strenuous, repetitive wheeling and circling pursuit in v 6, as the wind, or perhaps even the sun again.

"Goes to the south and turns to the north, round and round - , ever returning on its course".

Gordis is insighted to sense the affinity between the "panting" sun of Qoh. 1:5 and the sun’s panting steeds ("equis anhelis") in Vergil, *Georg. I*, L.250, since "panting" is indeed the meaning both of "TeX KTV" and of "anhelus", and probably Qoheleth is hinting in 1:5 at the familiar picture of the sun as a charioteer.

However, both Gordis and Crenshaw are mistaken in attributing this panting then mean,

"But know for sure the coursers of the sun will not complete many more laps....." etc. In either case, however, the deadly finale of a single race is approaching; and this idea evokes all the usual associations peculiar to racing: unexpected reversals, shock finishes, the tension of crucial moments in which outcomes hang in the balance, etc., all heightened by the alarming factor of breathless speed.

On the tradition attributing not only 1:5 but also 1:6 to the sun, instead of regarding 1:6 as referring to the wind, see Japhet, Sara, "*Goes to the South and Turns to the North* (Ecclesiastes 1:6): The Sources and History of the Exegetical Traditions", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, 4 (1993-4), Pp.289-322. For the relevance of the tradition to this chapter, see also below, APPENDIX 7, SUN OR WIND? THE QUESTION OF QOHELETH 1:6 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR QOHELETH’S SYMBOLIC IMAGERY OF THE SUN.

Gordis, op. cit., P.196.

LXX’s rendition of "TeX KTV" as "שלוש" does not shed any doubt on "pant" as the correct meaning of "TeX KTV", since this is only a shortened form of "אָטְלָא תָּאָוָא", "draw out the breath" (i.e., "pant"). See, e.g., LXX’s "אָטְלָא תָּאָוָא" for *Ps. 119:131’s "שְׁתָּה יָאָו יָאָו"*. See also Japhet, op. cit., P.300, fn.30.

Crenshaw, op. cit., P.63-4.
of the sun to weariness. Rather, it reflects the fiery eagerness of the sun's horses, which is proverbial. In searching out how this popular image may have affected Qoheleth, the only way to make the best of Gordis' Vergil reference is to consider the probable Greek or other model(s) behind it. This is not only for the obvious reason, that only this prior model could be early enough to have influenced Qoheleth directly; it is also because even Vergil's own meaning could be misunderstood unless sufficient attention is paid to the prototype(s) of his image. This is even more true of Vergil than of most poets, since he, like Qoheleth, is an unusually allusive writer.

Both the Vergil passage referred to by Gordis, *Georg. I*, L.250, and the similar passage in *Aen. V*, L.738-9 (which Gordis does not mention), attribute these panting steeds not just to the sun in general, but to "Oriens", which is specifically the rising sun, i.e., Dawn. It is highly unlikely that the rising sun would be panting from weariness, since he is only just about to start his race. Rather, he (or more exactly, his horses) are panting with eagerness to be off. Furthermore, Oriens in *Aen. V*, L.739 is described as "saevus", "harsh" or "cruel", and this word is juxtaposed with

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13 In *Job 7:2*, for example, this same verb "ןולנ" is used of the slave "panting" or "longing eagerly" for the shadow (i.e., the shadow of evening, when he can stop working). In *Is. 42:14b*, it is used of the harsh-sounding breathing of God (directly compared to the urgent cry of a woman in labour), in strong contrast to His previous silence and self-restraint in v 14a. Here, "ןולנ" signifies God's eagerness to go into action at last (v 15 ff.), after waiting so long (v 14a); and His desire for action is reminiscent of the fierce battle-zeal of the berserker (v 13). In *Jer. 14:6*, the wild donkeys are panting with desire for water. Admittedly, there is no water or pasture to satisfy the animals' desire (vv 3 & 4), so the idea of them being weary does fit this context well; but that does not mean that this is what "ןולנ" itself means; in itself it signifies the urgency of their panting and the eagerness of their longing for the very water they lack.

14 Like the eagerness of the Psalmist "panting" for God's commandments in *Ps. 119:131*. Cf. also the modern Hebrew derivative "יולנ" meaning "ambitious".

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"equis", so that this formidable quality of Dawn, which is hardly compatible with exhaustion, reflects indirectly on its horses and their panting as well.

Admittedly, Ovid uses this same word "anhelus" for the panting of the sun's steeds at the end of the day as Vergil uses for them at dawn. All this shows, however, is that "panting" is a standard epithet of the sun's horses, which can be applied indifferently at sunrise, sunset or any time of day. Ovid sheds more direct light than Vergil on the implications of this panting by explaining what the breath of the sun's horses is like. At Ibid. II, L.119, they are described as "breathing forth fire" ("ignemque vomentes"); and in L.154-5,

\[Aen.\] V, L.739:
"et me saevus equis Orients adflavit anhelis".

\[See Met. XV, L.418-9,\]
"Desinet - dies et in alto Phoebus anhelos aequore tinguet equos",
"The day will come to an end, and Phoebus will bathe his panting horses in the deep."

Although these lines refer to the end of the day, to interpret "anhelos" as "panting with weariness" would be to undermine Ovid's aim here. He has surrounded the two words implying fiery heat, "Phoebus anhelos" with those signifying the deep Ocean "alto - aequore". He thereby not only projects a clear visual picture of sunset over the sea, which makes the sun look as if it is completely engulfed by the water, but also produces an interesting juxtaposition of fire with water, surrounding the former with the latter. If the reader overlooks the fiery implications of the word "anhelus" (as applied to the sun's horses) the picture loses its edge.

Qoheleth seems to be applying it primarily to sunrise, since the sun in 1:5 is panting to its starting place in order to rise; but since we are told in effect that it is panting back to its starting place to rise again, immediately after the reference to it having set and in the context of an ongoing cycle of rising and setting, this tilting of the term's application toward sunrise rather than sunset is only slight.

This puts in an intriguing light the function of the word "בּהֲדָף" in Qoheleth's opening section (1:1-11), since in 1:2 it is used very repetitively, and twice in superlative terms, "בּהֲדָףֹ יִנְחָם יִנְחָם". This word "כּוֹכַב" means not just "breath" but, by implication, "warm / hot breath". E.g., in Y. Ab. Zar. III, 42d, it is used of the "hot vapour" of a bathroom; cf. Ye. 80b, of a body not giving off "steam". Some explain Moses' fear of the "כּוֹכַב" ("breath") of the angels in Sabb. 88b by suggesting their breath is hot and fiery.

If for Qoheleth the fiery breath of the sun's chariot-horses signifies zeal and eagerness to get on with the race, then perhaps the prominence of the word "כּוֹכַב" in his opening passage about the heatedness of the repetitive cycle of human life (vv 4-10), with its frenzied and fruitless goal-seeking (vv 3, 8, 11), means that everything is hot fiery breath: i.e., everything is ambition, everything is hot, eager pursuit. The heat and zeal with which men pursue is more in evidence than the purpose for which they pursue, and more in evidence than any profit they may acquire by pursuing. Whether they gain anything by their efforts is
"-hinnitibus auras
flammiferis inplent pedibusque repagula pulsant",

"They fill the air with flame-bearing whinnyings and paw violently against their bars".

This is an unmistakable picture of violent eagerness; and in L.127-8, the sun god explains to Phaethon that there is no need to spur them on; the difficult part is to check their zeal.

The panting of the sun’s horses, then, is identified with fire: both with literal fire and heat, and with the speed and eagerness which fire symbolizes. In view of its association with fire, the likeliest model for this standard "panting" image of the sun’s horses is probably Pindar. In Olymp. VII, L.71 / 130, referring to the sun god’s special connexion with Rhodes, he describes the breath of the sun’s horses as simply and literally fire. Like Vergil and Ovid as quoted above, Pindar seems to be making eager zeal and a physically penetrating quality the keynote of this picture of the sun and his horses, calling the sun

"όξειάν Ὠ γενέθλιος ἀκτίνων πατήρ,
πηρ πνεῦντων ἀρχὸς ἄπων".

"The natural father of the piercing / eager beams of light,

not clear at all (which is why that question has to be raise as early as 1:3, and repeated by implication all the way through vv 1-11). All that is clear is the efforts themselves. It is the fiery heat of this strenuous ambition (not the purpose of it, if there is one) which constitutes the keynote of life. Perhaps, then, "םכלנ" in 1:2 means something like,

"The whole of life is fiery ambition",

or

"The whole of human behaviour is hot pursuit".

19 This is noteworthy considering that Pindar seems to have other points of possible contact with Qoheleth. See, e.g., APPENDIX FIVE on Qoh.9:11 and Isthm. IV, and (briefly) on Qoh.6:12 and 11:7-9 and Pyth. VIII L.88-97 / 127-139.
Ruler of the horses whose breath is fire". 20

There is no doubt that the chariot-horses of the sun simply in themselves, with or without reference to their fiery breath, are a common image in Greek literature and art from early times. 21 It seems likely that the Vergil passage which Gordis associates with Qoh. 1:5b is indebted to Od. XXIII, L1.244-6 for the idea of Dawn as such having a chariot and team, and to Pindar's Olymp. VII, L.71, or some later work influenced by it, for the image of the proverbially fiery breath which gives "anhelus" its point as his standard epithet for the sun's horses. If Qoheleth also derives the "panting" of his sun from Pindar's fire-breathing horses, 22 the implication of this

20 Eur., I. A. L1.158-9, refers to
"Brilliant dawn,
And the fire of Helios' chariot-team",
"Λυμπνυσπίτως,
πότος τε τεθριππων τον 'Αελιου".
Probably, "τεθριππων" is to be taken literally as "chariot-team", not merely as standing indirectly for the chariot itself (cf. Eur., Ion, L.82, where the "team" of the sun and his "chariot" are mentioned separately). It would be interesting to know, therefore, whether the rather bald expression "the fire of Helios' chariot-team" means specifically their breath, following Pindar. Whatever Euripides means by this description, he must consider it self-explanatory to his immediate audience, since he does not enlarge on it. He may possibly mean the chariot-team actually is fire, since this would involve only a slight transference from the sun himself to his horses. Nevertheless, since "the fire consisting of" would more naturally apply to Helios himself than to his horses, there is no actual need for such a transference, natural and unforced though it would be. It may indeed be, then, that this "fire of Helios' chariot-team" is associated or even identified with their panting breath. The fact that Roman poets known for a zealous use of Greek models regard this image as standard implies that it must have been well-established in Greek poetic imagery.

21 Other references to the chariot of the sun include Mimnermus ap. Athenaeus, 46, 9ff. (see also Edmonds, J.M., tr. and ed., Elegy and Iambus, Loeb Edn., I, P.95); also several Homeric Hymns: II (to Demeter) mentions the sun's horses at L.63 and both horses and chariot at L1.88-9; IV (to Hermes) has both horses and chariot setting into the ocean at L1.68-9; XXVIII (to Athena) has the team of horses only, L1.13 & 14; and XXXI (to Helios) mentions the horses at L1.9 & 14, and both horses and chariot at L 15-16. Also, although, as Diggle says in his note on L.2 of Eur., Phaethon (op. cit., P.79), Helios is not by name credited with a chariot in Homer, nevertheless there is surely little difference between the chariot of the sun as such and the chariot of dawn, which definitely is mentioned in Homer. Dawn's chariot and team in Od. XXIII, L1.244-6 is described in terms very similar to the above descriptions of the chariot and team of Helios.

22 Compare the author of Job's similar interest in the idea of a creature that breathes fire (Job 41:19, 21, etc.). Not unlike Ovid, the poet here goes into vivid visual detail to convey the literalness of this fire. Intriguingly, this same Leviathan has also (Ibid. v 18) an association with Dawn, since "His sneezes flash light, and his eyes are like rays of Dawn".
panting will not be weariness, as Gordis and Crenshaw both suppose, but rather unabated vigour and eagerness to run and re-run the race, despite its unending repetitions.

It may be that those who interpret the panting of Qoh. 1:5 as weariness are understandably influenced by 1:8's reference to all יְנָּבֹרַיִּים as "wearisome". Probably, however, this means "words" rather than merely "things" in general, 23 and therefore can not be assumed to dictate the implications of 1:5's יְנָּבֹרַיִּים. The reason Qoheleth depicts the human habit of excessive verbalization as wearisome 24 is that it represents the attempt to grasp and retain that which by its very nature can not or should not be grasped and retained.

This attempt to grasp and hold actually causes the quarry to retreat farther from Man's grasp. Hence it is parallel to the voracious appetite of eye and ear, which will always be eluded by the prey of satisfaction if the individual tries to arrest sensation and hold onto it. 25 Instead, he should simply accept that pleasure, like sorrow, is

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23 See below, this Chapter, Section vii.

24 Like יְנָּבֹרַיִּים in 12:12.

25 The faculty of sight furnishes a salient example of this principle, that the very pursuit of one's quarry can in itself cause that quarry to escape. See, e.g., W.H. Bates, Better Eyesight Without Glasses (London, repr. 1983), P.49,

"The eye with normal sight never tries to see. If for any reason - the dimness of the light, for instance, or the distance of the object - it can not see a particular point, it shifts to another. It never tries to bring out the point by staring at it, as the eye with imperfect sight is constantly doing.
limited to its appropriate "time". What is wearisome is not so much the fact that the eye has to go on looking or that the ear has to go on listening, since these processes are in themselves natural and God-ordained. The problem is the attempt of the

"Whenever the eye tries to see, it at once ceases to have normal vision. A person may look at the stars with normal vision, but if he tries to count the stars in any particular constellation he will probably become myopic, because the attempt usually results in an effort to see. A patient was able to look at the letter K on a test card with normal vision, but when asked to count the twenty-seven corners which that letter happened to have, he lost it completely. -

"The eye possesses 'perfect vision' only when it is absolutely at rest."

The practice of pursuing experience or knowledge by verbalization furnishes yet another example of this same principle; see below, this Chapter, Section vii.

26 Such, at least, is the implication of Prov. 20:12, "Ears that hear and eyes that see - the Lord has made them both."

Also, Qoheleth has a special concern about judgment and its misleading non-immediacy (see above, Chapter 5, Section ix and below, Chapter 10, Section i, fn. 7 and Section vi); and this probably explains his frequent oblique references to the popular reputation of the sun as all-seeing and therefore the guardian of justice (see below, this Chapter, this Section, Pp.48-22). In this connexion, Ps. 94:9 is also thought-provoking:

"Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?"

Here, these human organs of receptivity are not only affirmed in their positive significance by the fact that they intimately reflect the characteristics and purposes of God himself. In addition, in Ps. 94 the particular purpose of God the Psalmist has in mind is that of judgment. He strongly exhorts God in vv 1-7 to rise up in judgment, because the wicked claim He does not see their wickedness or pay heed to it. However, God knows very well that these human purposes and schemes are futile (v 11); and He will most certainly judge after all (vv 10, 15 & 23).

The phrasing of v 11,

"הוהי יִזְרִי מַשְׁכֶרֶת אָדָם כִּי - הַשִּׁמְעָה מִזָּה"

"The Lord knowns that the schemes / purposes of Man are הַשִּׁמְעָה", establishes a link between "הַשִּׁמְעָה מַנְשֵׁב" ("schemes") and "הַשִּׁמְעָה" ("futility" or "non-attainability") which seems to be echoed in Job 21. At 21:27, Job launches into a criticism of his friends' calculations about the workings of justice and their interpretation of his situation,

"...Denied understanding of his situation"

which he concludes in v 34 by dismissing their views as "הַשִּׁמְעָה" and falsehood. The "הַשִּׁמְעָה הַמָּנוֹרָה" of Ps. 94:11 are "schemes" in the sense of plots, goals or purposes; but Job also, in 21:27, seems to be accusing his friends not just of misguided interpretative calculations, but rather of purposive intrigues against him ("וַיִּשְׁלַק מַשְׁכֶרֶת"), deliberately designed to damage his cause. The fact that Job seems to be referring to Psalm 94:11's link between "וַיֵּשֶׁלֶךְ מַשְׁכֶרֶת" and "הַשִּׁמְעָה" suggests that this link is very much a live issue of wisdom theory. Admittedly Job's allusion to Ps. 94 is ironic, like the echo in Job 7:17 of Ps. 8:4; for Ps. 94 expresses strong certainty of God's judgment, whereas Job is claiming in 21:32-3 that the wicked man continues to enjoy peace and prosperity literally to the grave. Nevertheless, the connexion he reflects between Man's schemes, goals or individualized purposes and "הַשִּׁמְעָה" is in itself exactly the same as in the Psalm; Job has simply taken the place of God as the one who sees through the schemes, substituting "וַיֵּשֶׁלֶךְ מַשְׁכֶרֶת" for Ps. 94's "וַיֵּשֶׁלֶךְ מַשְׁכֶרֶת". This is the author's delicate irony against Job himself within Job's irony against Ps. 94; and it affirms Terrien's view that the major issue in Job is the problem of human egocentricity (see above, Chapter 5).
senses to pursue, lock onto and retain experience, to seize and capture it as if it could be their prisoner, instead of adopting the passive posture which alone can genuinely receive sense-experience. 27 The receptive attitude would, instead, allow sense-experience (and allow time itself, in which the experience takes place 28) to move on, and would itself move on with time, in correct interaction with the immediate external realities.

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27 See, e.g., Bates, op. cit., Pp.50-51:
"The act of seeing is passive. Things are seen, just as they are felt or heard or tasted, without effort or volition on the part of the subject. When sight is perfect the letters on the test card are waiting, perfectly black and perfectly distinct, to be recognized. They do not have to be sought; they are there. In imperfect sight they are sought and chased. The eye goes after them. An effort is made to see them.

"The muscles of the body are supposed never to be at rest. The blood vessels, with their muscular coats, are never at rest. Even in sleep thought does not cease. But the normal condition of the nerves of sense - of hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch, - is one of rest. They can be acted upon; they can not act. The optic nerve, the retina and the visual centres of the brain are as passive as the fingernail. They have nothing whatever in their structure that makes it possible for them to do anything, and when they are the subject of effort from outside sources their efficiency is always impaired.

"The mind is the source of all such efforts from outside brought to bear upon the eye. Every thought of effort in the mind, of whatever sort, transmits a motor impulse to the eye, and every such impulse causes a deviation from the normal in the shape of the eyeball, and lessens the sensitiveness of the centre of sight. If one wants to avoid errors of refraction, therefore, one must have no thought of effort in the mind. Mental strain of any kind always produces a conscious or unconscious eyestrain, and if the strain takes the form of an effort to see, an error of refraction is always produced."

28 And with it the "times" of 3:1-8.
This attempt to retain experience, to be "filled" 29 with its sense-impressions instead of letting them come and go, in effect robs people of experience and of the pleasures of the senses. 30 In this respect, human patterns of sense perception such as seeing and hearing are parallel with the large-scale processes of nature described in 1:5-7. The stability of the cosmic order depends on the sea not becoming full by retaining its waters, but instead maintaining the natural cycle of influx and evaporation; 31 and this pattern of necessary reciprocity has serious implications for how Man should behave, 32 including the fact that our capacity for pleasure depends on our letting sense-experiences come and go, instead of being "filled" with them, i.e., hoarding them.

The sun is the obvious opposite partner of the sea in this cosmic illustration of reciprocal balance. Just as the sea does not try to arrest the continual motion of the water cycle and hoard its waters, 33 so the sun does not refuse to rise or refuse to set

29 In 1:8, the expression "Nor is the ear filled from hearing", recalls the phrasing of the previous verse, "Yet the sea is never full".

For the proverbial commonplace that it would not be "natural" or "right" for the sea to become full, and for the importance of this well-established principle in Qoheleth's ethics, see below, Chapter 10, Section ii. In view of this, the parallel phrasing above implies that for the senses to try to seize and retain experience is also not "natural" or "right".

30 See also below, this Chapter, Section vii.

31 See below, Chapter 10, Section ii.

32 See above, Chapter 8, Section iii; also below, Chapter 10, Section iii in relation to wisdom theory and Sections i, iv and vi in relation to social behaviour.

33 Nor does it go to the opposite extreme of drying up and disappearing altogether, see below, Chapter 10, Section ii.
at the appropriate time. It appears to run its daily course when that is right, it withdraws for the night when that is right, and it returns when that is right. In all this, its vigour and regularity is unimpaired; it pants with zeal back to its place to rise again. It is undeterred by the impossibility of attaining a final goal and breaking its perpetual cycle by remaining there forever. It is undismayed by the fact that it will never attain and retain a permanent prize. It is satisfied with the oft-repeated race simply in itself.

In this, it is exactly like the sun of Ps. 19:5, whose cause of rejoicing is simply the race itself. The absence of any retainable award for victory does not inhibit the continual and zestful repetition of its strenuous activity. The overall picture of 1:3-11 is to emphasize not exhaustion, but rather the inexorable continuation of the necessary cycles, including the sun’s course, notwithstanding the universality of הַלַיְלִיָה. The sun’s panting, in this context, signifies not the flagging of energy, but the relentlessness with which he continues to traverse his circuit, regardless of הַלַיְלִיָה.

Qoheleth is not, then, introducing these endless natural cycles to demonstrate that they themselves are futile, but rather to show that it is not in the nature of reality for life to consist of a single, lightning lunge in a simple straight line to a direct and retainable target. The eye and the ear, the major organs of receptivity, must continually re-embark on their task of looking and listening. Man can not freeze the

34 Cf. 3:1-8 & 11.

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sensations they give him so as to hoard them, but should submit to the same natural reciprocity of receiving and letting go, of ebb and flow, rising and setting and coming and going, as the sea and the sun.

In view of this, the contrast sometimes drawn between Qoheleth's picture of the sun and that of Ps. 19 is misleading. Crenshaw, for example, considers that Qoheleth's picture of the sun lacks this Psalm's mood of "celebration and wonder", and that Qoheleth's sun is not "the vigorous champion" of Ps. 19, but is "exhausted". He is, however, overstating the difference of perspective between the two works. Qoheleth makes allusive use of the sun's literary associations with vigour, with chariot-lore, and with racecraft in general, including its race in Ps. 19. The Psalmist's sense of "celebration and wonder" arises from the fact that (v 1 ff.) nothing less than the glory of God Himself is his direct theme, as displayed first through His natural creation (vv 1-6), especially the sun and its cycle (vv 4-6), and then through His Torah (vv 7-13). If Qoheleth is less overtly celebratory, this is not because he has a radically different view from that of the Psalmist of the cycle of the sun and its spiritual implications as such. It is rather because his immediate theme is less lyrically exalted than the Psalmist's. His theme is that Man is part of the cyclic and non-linear natural order in fact, and therefore should conform his behaviour to that fact, not try to live at odds with it.

[^35]: See below, this Chapter, Section vii, for his misguided attempts to do so through excessive verbalization; hence the wearisomeness of all words is expressed in the same verse (1:8) as the necessity for the eye and the ear to be continually re-embarking on their task so as to conform to the natural pattern.


[^37]: As well as misunderstanding the implications of "תא גל", as discussed above, this Section.
To conform human behaviour adequately to this reality will entail radical moderation of the current, crude brand of goal-seeking wisdom-theory. There is no place in Qoheleth's scheme of things for the idea that wisdom is a quick sprint on a direct route to some self-determined and graspable target; it is rather a long-drawn-out race of many laps, subject to many deviations from expected patterns and outcomes. Any futility that the author discerns is not in the natural cycles of sun and sea, of the coming and going of human generations, or the sense-perceptions of eye and ear. Rather, the futility lies in Man's habit of behaving in a manner which is at odds with these cycles, and with what they imply about the nature of Man and about the intentions of the Creator who designed them. Man characteristically tries to seize, to grasp and to hold that which can not be seized, grasped and held. Because these attempts contradict the natural processes of the God-ordained cosmos of which Man himself is an integral part, they ultimately contradict Man himself, and short-circuit the human nature. The human nature is essentially a creaturely nature, designed for obedience to Torah, which is "the whole of Man" (12:13).

The race of the sun has a natural connection with the issue of Law. Ps. 19 itself, with its extensive use of sun-imagery, is probably an artistic reflection of this link. For half of this Psalm, and the climactic half, is dedicated to a celebration of Torah, in terms which, by implication, compare Torah to the sun. This is partly because the sun is often associated with Law and Justice. As Walcot points out, 38

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38Walcot, Peter, Hesiod and the Near East (Cardiff, 1966), P.92, discussing Shamash, the Babylonian sun-god, mentioned by Hesiod in Op. II.127-34:

Do not utter libel, speak what is of good report.
Do not say evil things, speak well of people.
One who utters libel and speaks evil, men will waylay him with his debit account to Shamash.
"The fact that the sun appears to watch over all men and their deeds made Shamash as well the god of justice, who, according to a long hymn of two hundred lines, 'determine(s) the lawsuit of the wronged' (L.127). Shamash is depicted commissioning Hammurabi to draw up his code of laws on the stele on which our copy of the code is inscribed.

"The idea that the Sun-god has this dual function helps us to interpret a puzzling reference in the Works and Days where Hesiod says that the all seeing and all perceiving eye of Zeus, if it is so inclined, looks down on the kind of justice a city practises (L.127-9). Other allusions make it very probable that by the eye of Zeus Hesiod meant the sun. Thus Homer refers to Helios 'who sees all and hears all' (Il. III, L.277, and Od. XI, L.109 and XII, L.323), and it is Helios who sees Ares and Aphrodite at their play and carries a report to the husband Hephaistos (Od. VIII, L.270-1 & 302). In this passage from the Works and Days, therefore, it is likely that the sun acts as a god of justice on the pattern of the Mesopotamian and Hittite Sun-gods, although elsewhere in the poem this is the prerogative of either Zeus or his daughter Dike."

In view of Qoheleth's special concern about the judgment of oppression and sin that he sees going unpunished, this association of the all-seeing sun with Law and Justice may account for his distinctively liberal use of the phrase "under the sun". The phrase as such is not unpopular outside Qoheleth, since it also occurs in Homer, Greek tragedy, Phoenician inscriptions, Gilgamesh, etc.; but it is far more sparsely

Beware of careless talk, guard your lips;
do not utter solemn oaths while alone (Cf. Qoh. 10:20),
for what you say in a moment will follow you afterwards;
but exert yourself to restrain your speech."

This Hesiod passage also reflects the popular picture of the sun as the ideal judge because nothing is hidden from his sight.

39 For the Hymn to Shamash, see A.N.E.T., Pp.387-9.


41 See 3:16-17, 4:1-3, 7:15, 8:11-14; see also below, Chapter 10, Section i, ftn.7; also Chapter 10, Section vi, on the non-immediacy of judgment, and Chapter 10, Section iv on the implications of this for how we should live.

42 See APPENDIX ONE, especially for the usage of "under the sun" in Gilgamesh. This seems the most significantly similar to that of Qoheleth, since it is so closely associated with the idea of Man's endeavour as a "puff of wind". However, the expression does not appear to carry overtones of judgment
used elsewhere, even in *Gilgamesh*. Qoheleth’s exceptionally lavish use of this formula may be his way of keeping the statement of 3:17, that judgment will come in the end, at the forefront of his readers’ minds. If so, he is probably indebted chiefly to *Ps.* 19 for this added nuance. He refers to the circuit of the sun directly only once (1:5); yet his much-recurring expression "under the sun" occurs for the first time only shortly before this (1:3) and for the second time not long after it (1:9), which probably means that the reader is meant to connect the two. This connexion seems to be a sign of *Ps.* 19’s influence; for the Psalmist concludes his reference to the sun’s circuit with the same popular, all-seeing image of the sun that Qoheleth’s "under the sun" seems to evoke, asserting (v 6),

"Nothing is hidden from its heat".

Although the all-seeing sun is a commonplace in ancient literature, and although the sun’s connexion with Law and Justice is also well established, the Psalmist is here intensifying these associations rather than merely alluding to them. As C.S. Lewis recognizes, it is from this crucial statement about the sun that the psalm launches into its celebration of the Law, describing it, in terms very similar to the sun, as strong, pure, soul-restoring, light-giving, etc.:

"The key phrase on which the whole poem depends is, *There is nothing hid from the heat thereof.* It pierces everywhere with its strong, clean ardour. Then at once, in v 7, he is talking of something else, which hardly seems to

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in *Gilgamesh*, unlike *Qoheleth* and perhaps unlike other examples of its use as well. See, e.g., Zeus’ claim in *Il.* IV, L.44 that he loves Troy best "-of all the cities that men live in under the sun and starry sky". He then refers to the faithfulness of the Trojans’ sacrifices to him as if he regards their imminent destruction as unjust on that account. See APPENDIX EIGHT for other examples of "under the sun" with apparent implications of justice and of the sun’s rôle in judgment.

43 Or 1:5-6; see APPENDIX SEVEN.
him something else because it is so like the all-piercing, all-detecting sunshine. The Law is 'undefiled', the Law gives light, it is clean and everlasting, it is 'sweet'. No-one can improve on this and nothing can more fully admit us to the old Jewish feeling about the Law: luminous, severe, disinfectant, exultant. One hardly needs to add that this poet is wholly free from self-righteousness and the last section is concerned with his 'secret faults'. As he has felt the sun, perhaps in the desert, searching him out in every nook of shade where he attempted to hide from it, so he feels the Law searching out all the hiding places of his soul.".

Allowing, then, that there is nothing remarkable about Qoheleth's expression "under the sun" simply in itself, nevertheless its initial proximity to 1:5's description of the sun's strenuous race (recalling Ps. 19's sun as a vigorous champion) coupled with the frequency of its subsequent repetition seems to imply agreement with Ps. 19:6's

"Nothing is hid from its heat",

because it reminds us that everything without exception is "under the sun", so that there is nothing which is truly hidden. The Psalmist applies this to his individual conscience and 'secret faults'; but Qoheleth applies it to the injustices in society as a whole: because nothing is truly hidden, there is nothing which will not ultimately come to the light of God's judgment. His repetitions of "under the sun" are, in that respect, not unlike Verdi's ominous background repetitions of the words "Dies Irae" at various points in the course of his treatment of the Day of Judgment in the Requiem Mass.

If Qoheleth is indeed building on Ps. 19 in this way, then he is in effect evoking the Psalmist's parallel between the sun and Torah as well. The sun is the

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first vivid image of the book; and "the conclusion of the matter" (12:13) is

"Fear God and keep His Commandments". 45

Moreover, the explicit reason for this (12:14) is the coming judgment, which will include

"-every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil".

Although the verb for 'hidden' is different from that of Ps. 19:6, this parting shot of Qoheleth does reflect the Psalm’s parallel between the all-penetrating sun and Torah. For to Qoheleth too, as to the Psalmist, nothing is hid from Torah, because nothing is hid from God’s judgment; and Torah is the standard on which God’s judgment is based.

It seems likely, then, that as the ebb and flow of the sea represents the ideal of reciprocal generosity which stabilizes society and holds it together, 46 so in parallel to this the race of the sun symbolizes the all-pervasive power of Torah. 47 Qoheleth’s exhortation not to cease 48 from the perpetual mutuality of good deeds finds its natural symbol in the unceasing, repetitive movement of the water-cycle, with the sea never filled and the streams, in effect, returning to their source. Similarly, the all-importance of Torah is expressed in terms of perpetual movement, in this case the never ending race of the sun. For it is not the goal or prize a man attains for his

45I.e., keep the the Torah.

46See below, Chapter 10, Sections i, ii and iv. This ideal is akin to Simon the Just’s recommendation of "Gemilut Hasadim"; see Aboth I.2 and Bickerman, E.J., The Jews in the Greek Age, Pp.258-9 and 285-6.

47It is noteworthy that Simon the Just’s ethical formula in Aboth I.2 comprises Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim. See below, Chapter 10, Section i.

48E.g., with 11:1-2 compare 11:6b, "And at evening let not your hands be idle".
efforts which matters, whether riches, power or any merely human goal deemed desirable. What matters is the race itself, the essential skill of piety, the strenuous exercising of Torah and the reverent cultivation of the Divine Presence. 49 Qoheleth sees the entire circuit of life as divinely designed as a means to cultivate piety simply in itself, not as a means to any self-chosen end. 50

This is a radical departure from the common axiom of wisdom theory that wisdom is primarily the practical ability to reach a particular and usually self-chosen goal, to carve a viable route to one’s objective. Since goal-seeking of that kind, which is essentially a type of navigation or path-steering, is so fundamental to the entire wisdom tradition, it is important to see where Qoheleth stands in relation to goal-seeking 51 in order to understand his unique contribution to wisdom-theory.

49 Cf. Qoh. 5:1’s reference to “the house of God” with Simon’s reference in Aboth I.2 to “Avodah” as well as “Torah” and “Gemilut Hasadim”.

50 See below, this Chapter, end of Section iv.

51 See below, this Chapter, Section ii.
In comparing Qoheleth’s “Golden Mean” to that of Aristotle, Ernest Horton, Jr. points out that Qoheleth’s theory

- does not provide a clear course to follow or specific point at which to aim, in the sense of the Aristotelian mean. - In calculating the difference between wisdom and foolishness, Koheleth provides few if any directions for aiming at and hitting the mean, as Aristotle does.”.  

This is true, but it is not because Qoheleth fails to see course-steering or aiming for targets as in any sense an issue. It is rather because he believes that one can not count on the continuance of any particular set of circumstances; hence, neither can one count on being able to maintain indefinitely any particular course at will. He considers that any chosen path could be interrupted, deflected or even terminated at any point, and this has a radical effect on his view of path-steering. The fact that his views on this subject are far from conventional, however, does not mean that it is not

52For the application of this term to Qoheleth’s teaching, see also Gordis’ reference (op. cit., P.51) to the “Golden Mean” of Qoh. 7:14-18. Gordis is right to see Qoheleth’s approach as unique, but to describe his view of the mean as

- “in a spirit entirely remote from the ethical considerations of the Greek philosopher” (i.e., of Aristotle), seems something of an overstatement. The fact that goal-seeking or path-making is a prime issue in Greek ethics, permeating the vocabulary and imagery of Greek wisdom, has deeply influenced both Aristotle and Qoheleth. Despite their sharply differing objectives, this point in common between them should not be under-rated, since it affects quite significantly their choice of illustration and imagery. The idea that there is nothing in common at all between Aristotle’s “mean” and Qoheleth’s ignores their shared inheritance of a tradition in which wisdom, for better or for worse, is often implicitly identified with steering one’s course successfully to a particular goal.


54See below, Chapter 10, Section iii, on the non-linear nature of reality and its element of randomness; see also J.B.Y. Scott’s point in his Anchor Bible Commentary on Qoheleth (New York, 1965), P.235, “Everything has its opposite - so that Man must not count on the continuance of either good or bad fortune.”. In fact, Qoheleth does not believe one can count on the continuance of any specific conditions in the tide of human affairs. Like a literal tide, it is bound to ‘turn’ when the appointed time comes.
Horton appears to misinterpret his position as completely unrelated to course-steering or goal-seeking altogether, claiming that

"-he does not so much as hint that finding the mean is like finding the centre of a circle, straightening a warped board, or swinging a ship clear of the surf.".

Horton is here referring to the comparisons employed by Aristotle in *Nic. Eth.* II.9 to illustrate the unusual and difficult skill of finding the mean in right conduct. However, the very fact that Qoheleth is at such pains to point out that precision-steering is impossible 55 constitutes in itself a big hint that finding the right mode of conduct is related to these path-steering skills, in the sense that it is part of the overall path-steering or goal-seeking issue.

If, as Horton seems to think, Qoheleth were not involved in this issue at all, and if he had no share of any kind in its traditional imagery, this would have implications far beyond the question of his affinity or non-affinity with Aristotle’s concept of right conduct as a mean. For all goal-seeking wisdom-imagery, including Aristotle’s, reflects more than just a desire for exact accuracy; its roots go back to the prime instinct behind goal-seeking, 56 behind carving one’s self-chosen path to one’s own objective: the individual’s exertion of will itself.

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56 And hence to the prime drive behind wisdom, in the goal-seeking sense of the term.
As Homer's Nestor links the arts of woodcutter, of ship's pilot and of charioteer, so does Aristotle link the skills of geometrician, ship's pilot and woodcutter, perhaps through a subconscious reminiscence of this very passage of Homer. Here in Aristotle, then, is the time-honoured wisdom-theme of path-steering; and one can not say that Qoheleth stands aloof from this theme, or even that his imaging of right conduct has nothing in common with Aristotle's. In 10:10, he himself represents right conduct in terms of the skill of the wood-cutter; and, like Aristotle before him, in doing so he recalls the familiar woodcutter of II. XXIII, L.315. This in turn evokes the helmsman of Ibid. L.316-7 and the charioteer of L.318, because of the tight-knit association between the three in the Homer passage:

"μήτι τοι δρυτόμος μεγ'αμείνων ἡ βηθή.
μήτι δ'οὖτε κυβερνήτης ἐνί οἴνοπτι πόντῳ
νήα τῆν ἰδονεί ἐρεχθομένην ὀνείμοισι.
μήτι δ' ἴνα οχος περιψήνεται ἱνδοιοιο.

"By wisdom / skill is a woodman much better than by strength; by wisdom too does a helmsman on the wine-dark sea guide accurately a swift ship buffeted by winds; and by wisdom does charioteer prevail over charioteer."

57 II. XXIII, L.315.

58 N.E. II.9.

59 Note the conscious reference to Homer (Od. XII, L.219) in the same chapter, N.E. II.9,3.

60 For the characteristics of μήτης, and its similarity in meaning to πόος, see below, this Chapter, Section iii, esp. fn. 105, 111; see also this Chapter, Section vii, P. 1415.

61 Cf. Qoh. 9:16a,

"So I said, Wisdom is better than strength."

In view of his woodcutter image in 10:10, perhaps II. XXIII, L.315-8 is the very version of this maxim that Qoheleth is pondering in 9:16. For his qualification of this tradition, see below, this Chapter, Section vi; see also APPENDIX FIVE, QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR'S ISTHMIAN ODE IV, for the theoretical relationship between wisdom and strength, whether they are viewed as in rivalry to each other or as complementary to each other, etc.
Each of these experts in turn, beginning with the woodcutter, is said to achieve his task by skill / wisdom, not by strength; and, exactly like them, the woodcutter of Qoh. 10:10 triumphs by skill / wisdom, not by strength. Qoheleth is here evoking wisdom conceived of as making a path to one’s objective, whether the path is made through wood with an axe, through the sea by ship, or over land in a chariot. Hence Horton is overstating his case to say that Qoheleth "does not so much as hint" that right conduct is related to the path-finding skills to which Aristotle compares it directly. The difference between them is rather that Aristotle is simply reflecting the ideals of goal-seeking or path-finding wisdom, since he belongs wholeheartedly to that school of thought; whereas Qoheleth’s evocation of those ideals, though not wholly detached, is nevertheless more critical and evaluative, involving reservations and qualifications.

Nestor, in his threefold parallel, makes the skill of the charioteer his climax. He is using the illustration of woodsman and helmsman only to lead up to the question of the skill he aims to instil in his son Antilochus for the coming chariot-race. However, even if one were to take this passage out of its Funeral Games context and circulate it as a universal maxim, its climax is still appropriate. For it could be argued that chariotlore is, in a sense, the acme of goal-seeking wisdom anyway. The charioteer is the ultimate symbol of wisdom because of his superlative grasp of accommodating to the time-chance interaction, which is often regarded as the

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62 As Aristotle in N.E. II.9 is reflecting.

63 This time-chance interaction is referred to in Qoh. 9:11. See below, this Chapter, Sections iii, v and vi, and APPENDIX FOUR, KAIPOE AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’ ELECTRA, for the idea that a correct grasp of the time-chance interaction is the key to success in racecraft and goal-seeking in
supreme skill of racecraft and of all goal-seeking. This makes racecraft a natural motif for Qoheleth. For, far from standing aloof from the traditional concept of goal-seeking or path-steering as a prime wisdom issue, he applies himself to this question with a unique and radical vigour, consistently utilizing, by implication and imagery, the recognized supremacy of the charioteer as goal-seeker.

The fact that Qoheleth’s thinking is still involved with goal-seeking and path-steering, despite his critical approach to it, is reflected in his overall thought patterns, his diction and imagery, and the lapped effect of the book’s arrangement in the opening sections. The first section in 1:1-11 sets forth the unending pattern of repetition and pursuit which characterizes the processes of the natural world and of human experience. It also tells us that everything is בְּנִי (1:2). It introduces (1:3) the challenge as to what Man gains and his lack of remembrance by future generations (1:11). As yet, we do not know what the cycle of pursuit signifies, nor what exactly “בְּנִי” means, nor what is meant by ‘gain’.

These same motifs, however, are repeated either directly or by implication in the following sections in such a way as to illuminate their meaning step by step by means of each of their successive new settings in turn. It emerges gradually that בְּנִי is an ironic counterbalance to ‘pursuit’, signifying that which defies pursuit or general.

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64 These opening sections are: i) 1:1-11, ii) 1:12 - 2:23 and iii) 2:24 - 3:22.

65 But see above, this Chapter, Section i, ftn. 18, for one possible implication of “בְּנִי” in this opening passage.

implies the pointlessness of pursuit, i.e., that which can not be grasped or retained. 'Gain' emerges as something which, if it is to be genuine, is incompatible with long-term ambition or distant desires (both concepts closely associated with pursuit). Eventually, the implication of the term 'remembrance' crystallizes as 'lasting control', an influence which continues into the future indefinitely. In Qoheleth's view, this is not Man's lot.  

These successive sections of the book repeat the same thematic landmarks until they become familiar, but each repetition shows them with a different slant from before, building up our grasp of their meaning by a gradual synthesis of cumulative associations. This periodic repetition of familiar motifs but from a new angle is reminiscent of the constant repetition of the same circuit in a race, and the way the same familiar landmarks of the circuit keep reappearing lap by lap, but in different circumstances and from a different aspect.

This lapped structure does not seem to be equally in evidence throughout the entire book, but is most pronounced in the earlier stages from 1:1 - 3:22, probably in order to reinforce Qoheleth's assertion of the cyclic nature of reality in 1:4-10. This provides an opening which sounds the keynote of the whole book. For it points out that a 'race' structure, i.e., a repetitive pattern of pursuit, is intrinsic to the natural order, and that the activities and appetites of Man do share in this race-pattern; yet, by the conflicting interplay of this 'pursuit' theme and the 'יִרְבְּך' motif, reinforced by

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67See below, this Chapter, Section vii, for the details of how the lapped structure gradually illuminates the meaning of these repeated motifs.
the repeated challenge as to what is to be gained, it also raises a number of implied questions about the identification of wisdom with goal-seeking. It invites us to wonder if any goal is really attainable, or even desirable; and even if there can be a realistic goal, or a desirable one, how would one discern the realistic goal from the unrealistic, the desirable from the undesirable?

Thus Qoheleth, armed with his clear perception of the human condition’s multiple unpredictabilities and uncertainties, is at pains to point out that life is not a swift, crude, one-lap shoot-out to an obvious and self-chosen goal. The tactical subtleties implicit in his personal slant on the traditional maxim that

"The race is not always to the swift" 68

are most effectively demonstrated in a many-lapped race of some length; and this is the main reason why the author casts his opening sections in this lapped structure.

In his first lesson of 1:1-11, Qoheleth underlines the cyclic, repetitive nature of reality with such emphasis because he sees that those who are absorbed in the rat-race do not perceive this circularity, even though one might think they are bound to see it, because they share it with the vast processes of nature like the cycles of the sun and of the sea. 69 They have a concept of an ideal path, but they misinterpret this...

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68 See 9:11 for Qoheleth’s version of this saying. See also below, this Chapter, Section vi, for how his presentation of this idea differs from that of other wisdom-writers.

69 Cf. 3:18,

"As for men, God tests them, so that they may see that they are like the animals."

One might hope that the similarity is sufficiently obvious for men to be able to see this anyway, without God having to structure reality and experience especially to enable Man to see it. Nevertheless, in practice, the similarity often goes unnoticed. Even its most startlingly obvious aspect, the fact that Man has to die like the animals (3:19-21), tends to be overlooked by Man. This is because he is so completely absorbed in his ‘wisdom’ (i.e., his goal-seeking) that he overlooks everything that is not immediately relevant to his
ideal path as the quickest route to an obvious, self-oriented target. In reality, however, their course will be of many laps (i.e., repetitions of the same circuit) involving many a challenge to adapt to unexpected changes. What they thought was the horizon they were striving for will retreat before them, and they will not attain it after all; what they thought was progress will turn out to be "nothing new" after all; what they thought was a great prize to pursue will turn out to be no "gain" after all; and what they thought was a passport to everlasting fame will not even be remembered.

While this is not the cynical symphony of pessimism that some critics have thought it to be, since according to 3:14 God has arranged things that way for the definite purpose that men will "fear Him", the skill of fearing Him emerges from this picture as an exacting discipline. Fearing God successfully, the art of piety as in 12:13, involves considerable understanding of the nature of the course to be traversed, and particularly of the limits to this understanding and of the God-ordained reason for those limits.

True piety, then, is far from automatic; it entails the same level of constantly watchful skill as racecraft. An intuitive grasp of the nature of the course, and of the divine providence behind its enigmatic design, is essential in order to develop the stamina, pacing, patience and reflectiveness required, a self-restraint in the scaling down of ambitions and, in complement to this, a venturesome boldness in taking self-chosen goals, even his obvious mortality. This over-absorption in his self-oriented anti-wisdom is closely related to Man's faculty of speech (see below, this Chapter, Section vii for the negative potential of speech). The fact that animals do not share this faculty serves to obscure still further Man's awareness of their common lot as fellow-creatures. See also reference to Balaam's donkey, this Chapter, Section iv.

^See below, this Chapter, Section vii.
initiatives in the fleeting moments of opportunity and in "sowing the seed" of good
deeds without fear of no return for one's labour. Particularly crucial is awareness
of realities external to oneself and to one's own ambitions: the behaviour of one's fellow men, changing conditions, the inscrutability of the Creator's overall plan and hence the mystery of the overall pattern in which the race as a whole will unfold. One can not have an adequate overview of the whole in advance, for the divine race must unfold step by step, stage by stage, lap by lap, in time; so one's perception of it and reaction to it must unfold, also step by step, in alert interaction with each of its unforeseeable critical moments, each one demanding its own immediate and appropriate response.

This point is conveyed more by Qoheleth's structure than by its direct assertions; hence Good's astute observation that the book itself can only unfold its message temporally, i.e., step by step in time. In this sense, it is analogous to music, but not to a painting; and this quality of Qoheleth should have a major influence on our approach to receiving its message:

"There are fundamentally two ways of interpreting a text. One is to see it whole, finding the unifying structure, theme, image or idea that lights up the entirety and gives place and perspective to the parts. The other is to follow the text through its own process, to pursue its linearity in order to uncover the meaning progressively as the text itself presents it. The former way is analogous to viewing a painting, in which the point is to stand back and see the whole. The latter is analogous to listening to a piece of music, which is followed through time, the musical process itself disclosing the meaning. - The main mode of communication in a painting is non-temporal, for one may receive a sense of it entire at first glance. A musical work must be heard

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71 See above, Chapter 8, Section iii on 11:1 ff.

through before any sense of its whole is possible. Its relations are relations in

time, necessarily non-simultaneous and successive, while those in a painting are

best when viewed simultaneously.

"On the whole, I believe, biblical interpreters have operated on the first way of

interpreting, seeking out that which unifies a passage or book, looking for

structures, unitary messages or ideas. But I suggest that a linear or temporal

(I am tempted to say, musical) mode of approach may elicit from a text

something that the unitary or structural one misses."

Good's emphasis on the temporal dimension in interpreting Qoheleth is exactly

right. The only problem with his outline of approach is that in this context, to equate

"temporal" with "linear" or to speak of pursuing the book's "linearity" seems slightly

incongruous in view of the book's decidedly cyclic path of reiterated motifs. This

structure is an integral part of the emphatically cyclical and non-linear picture of

reality Qoheleth aims to present. In the case of Qoheleth, therefore, one should

accept that temporal can not be equated with linear; that the book's meaning does

indeed unfold only in time, but like a lapped race, in a predominantly cyclic form

rather than a linear form.

The reason the author has structured his book so that we can not "see it whole"
or "receive a sense of it entire on first glance" is that he feels God has structured

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73 See below, Chapter 10, Section iii.

74 Not, at least, in the common sense of the word. Probably, Good means "linear" primarily from the
linguistic standpoint, namely, that, since one can not utter more than one word at a time, a text is
automatically "linear" in the sense of "one-dimensional".

However, it should perhaps be borne in mind that the word "linear" has another and more literal
sense, i.e., "in lines" (with implications of "long and narrow"); and this would not be the ideal word to
describe the pronouncedly cyclical structure of Qoheleth. A circle amounts to only one continuous line, not
to "lines". Furthermore, it is a very particular type of line: curved, although some lines are straight; and
endlessly self-repeating, although some lines are not.
reality in exactly the same way, so that we can not see that "whole" (3:11). This does not mean that we can not meaningfully engage with it; but it does mean that we can only engage with it as it unfolds itself in the pattern of the various "times" for particular actions (3:1-8). The design of Qoheleth's work deliberately mirrors the design of God's in this respect in order to illustrate that we can not grasp the whole at once. As Good says with regard to Qoheleth's work, so Qoheleth might say with regard to God's:

"The process of presentation, the methods of discourse, the stylistic devices that carry a poem, a story, an argument along are not mere embellishments, dispensable by a clever interpreter, but are themselves integral elements of meaning.". 75

Similarly, the way God has structured the basic processes of nature and of human experience is not an incidental irrelevance, or an obstacle to be circumvented by human wisdom, but is rather an integral element of His meaning.

Gradually, the book reveals that the non-attainability of goals is a result of misconstruing attainment or possession as retaining that which can not be retained. Unlike the sea (1:7), we try to become "full", 76 hoarding up whatever flows our

75Ibid., P.59.

76For a similarly negative use of the term "fulness", see Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, The Brothers Karamazov (Harmondsworth, repr. 1967), tr. David Magarshack, Vol. I, Pp.356-7:
"For today everyone is still striving to keep his individuality as far apart as possible, everyone still wishes to experience the fulness of life in himself alone, and yet instead of achieving the fulness of life, all his efforts merely lead to the fulness of self-destruction; for instead of full self-realization, they relapse into complete isolation."

Cf. King, Martin Luther, Strength to Love (London and Glasgow, 1963), P.69.
"A victim of the cancerous disease of egotism (fails) to realize that wealth always comes as a result of the commonwealth".

This is followed (Ibid. P.70) by an exhortation to solve the problem and expense of storing surplus food by using it to feed the hungry instead. See also below, Chapter 10, Section ii.
way, instead of releasing our assets back into the natural cycle of reciprocity whereby they would return to us anyway "after many days" (11:1), i.e., at the right time. Not every time is the right time for gathering and for keeping (3:5a, 3:6b); for the reciprocity of nature works in a cycle of opposites, so that the right time for throwing away can not be the right time for keeping, and the right time for scattering can not be the right time for gathering. 77

The desire to maintain personal control over the future seems just as unrealistic to Qoheleth as the desire to hoard up individual wealth. Just as money is worth nothing except at the moment it is enjoyed, and will not return to us to benefit us again unless it is first spent and so released to rejoin the cycle of reciprocity, so also the only point of time relevant to us is now. We have no calculable stake in any other time, and no direct influence over any other time. Unless we settle for limiting our influence and interaction with reality to now, we will lose the benefit even of now, and will not have a real interaction with and influence on reality at all. 78

Time, like wealth, is pictured as an alternating cycle. By trying to seize it and retain it, we lose it. Only by fitting in with its natural process through letting it go do we benefit from the cycle and its pattern of repetition. Day would not come back to us at dawn had it not left us at sunset. The sun does not try to prolong its time of influence; it simply rises and sets and rises again. The wording of 1:5’s reference to

77 See the sea and water images of 11:1-3 and the discussion of them above, Chapter 8, Section iii. See also below, Chapter 10, Section ii on the sea-image of 1:7; and cf. APPENDIX SEVEN.

78 See below, this Chapter, Section vii.
this is almost brusque in its brevity and mechanical unadornment. The sun's setting is as automatic as its rising. Having set, it hurries back to its place to rise again; and it could hardly do this if it had failed to set in the first place. If it so failed, time could no more continue than the water-cycle could continue if the sea tried to resist evaporation, or if in some other bizarre manner it tried to flout nature by retaining the water that is constantly flowing into it from the rivers. Just as the sea-image of 1:7 illustrates the danger of irrationally piling up and clinging onto wealth and acquisitions, because the commonwealth the sea represents could not be maintained in the face of such individualistic greed, so the sun-symbolism implies it is dangerous to begrudge the natural limitation set on one's appropriate life-span, or one's due period of influence, or even of one's allotted quota of pleasurable moments. 79

As Man's relation to his acquisitions, then, should parallel that of the sea to the ebb and flow of its waters, so his relation to his span of influence should parallel that of the sun, the symbol of chariotlore and of wise exploitation of the opportune present. In 1:4a,

"Generations come and generations go",

but the permanence of the earth (1:4b) transcends the ephemerality of each single generation and remains there for the next one. Since 1:5a,

"The sun rises and the sun sets",

looks parallel to 1:4a, representing only a single day (sunrise to sunset), then it seems probable that 1:5b,

"and hurries back to where it rises",

79See also below, Chapter 10, Section ii.
represents the ongoing continuity of time, transcending the individuality of 1:5a's single day in parallel to the permanent continuity represented by the earth in 1:4b.

If one were to take v 5a's sunrise to sunset as the entire lifespan of an individual (their total period of influence), this would make v 5b's returning dawn the continuity of the human race overall, transcending the life of the individual, which is quite a close parallel to v 4b. Alternatively, v 5a might represent a particular period of influence (one 'day') within an individual's lifespan, like the "good times" of 7:14 which will give place eventually to "bad times", or like the reign of "the King's successor" (4:15), who will in turn be supplanted by another successor. In either case, however, these opportunities to make one's mark come and go. They can not be controlled at will; they have their proper times, whether repeated or not, the incidence of which can not be induced and the duration of which can not be extended. They can only be encountered and responded to in their proper times; hence the all-importance of correctly exploiting the κατωδός, the characteristic skill of the charioteer, and of scaling down one's ambitions to the piety of the intuited present.  

A notable example of this brand of piety is Shakespeare's Hamlet, who ultimately comes to embody Qoheleth's ideal with remarkable exactness. Concerning his rapidly approaching end, Hamlet says,  

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80 The pattern of one generation succeeding another.

81 See below, this Chapter, Sections iii, v and vi; see also APPENDIX FOUR.

82 See below, this Chapter, Section vii.

"The readiness is all",
and then adds,
"Since no man of ought he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes, let be.".
This shows he realizes how dominant a characteristic of Man is the drive to try and retain what should not or can not be retained. Yet he is determined not to allow this tendency in himself to dim the razor-sharp clarity of the very wisdom he himself has just uttered:
"The readiness is all."
He does not want the edge of his readiness, at this critical moment, blunted by trying to cling on to more than the short present allotted to him. He therefore selects "now" as the focal point of his meditations, referring everything too that:

"If it be now, 'tis not to come;
If it be not to come, it will be now;
If it be not now, yet it will come:
The readiness is all.". 84

It is of no small significance that in this same final scene, Hamlet's last breath is devoted to his successor. He is resolved to have no possible doubt about who is to succeed to the Throne; this is essential in order to avoid further turmoil, suffering and corruption in the State, in addition to the disruption and dislocation it has suffered already. This reflects an exactly opposite standpoint to that of Qoh. 2:18-22,

"I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?" 85

84 Ibid., Ll.209 ff.
85 Cf. the apparently egocentric implication of 2:12's
   "What more can the King's successor do than what has already been done?"
This passage belongs to the self-centred section of 1:12 - 2:23, reflecting the stage of the author's development when he still aimed for personal fame and an influence which would last, and could not be satisfied without trying to exercise some continued hold over the future. The emotions he expressed in his unwillingness to hand over to his successor were very extreme:

"So I hated life" (2:17);

"I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun" (2:18);

and

"So my heart began to despair" (2:20-1).

Once he has embraced the piety of the intuited present, however, his attitude is notably transformed. 86

Hamlet's single-minded and unemotional preoccupation with his successor in his last few moments 88 underlines forcibly his own acceptance of the same type of piety:

"I can not live to hear the news from England,
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.".

This "dying voice" is building future security 89 for the living, whom he has to leave behind at his death. It is in line with the formula,

86 2:24 - 3:22.

87 See 2:24, 3:12, 13 & 22. See also below, this Chapter, Section vii, esp. Pp.21-6.

88 Act V, sc.ii, L1.343-8.

89 By helping to prevent civil war over the succession.
"The King is dead; long live the King",
and agrees, in effect, with Qoh. 1:5.

"The sun rises and the sun sets,
And hurries back to where it rises",
i.e., to continue the perpetual race. By refusing to cling to what can not be retained
by the individual, it affirms the cycle of reciprocal giving and receiving and of
interaction with that which is external to self, and hence contributes to its peaceful
continuation. Such an affirmation is, in effect, assenting to participate in the race, to
practice the racecraft of piety; and this in turn implies recognition of alertness to the
opportunity or challenge of the critical moment as a prime obligation of piety:

"The readiness is all".

Qoheleth may in fact be the first thinker to devise a piety of racecraft. If so,
this concept of piety originated as his contribution to the long-standing problem of
wisdom as goal-seeking, a tool to encompass one’s objective. As such, his teaching
is an attempt to move away from goal-seeking in the narrow, egocentric sense that
blinds one to externals, and to work towards a theocentric and socially responsible
concept of wisdom. Probably, later racecraft-imagery as an element within piety
is directly indebted to Qoheleth, even though its emphasis in relation to goal-seeking
as such is not identical to his.

The Pauline race-imagery of Phil. 3:12-14 and I Cor. 9:24-7 seems to be
influenced by Qoheleth. In Paul’s exhortations to be wise in both Eph. 5:15-6 and

90 For the social implications of Qoheleth’s teaching, see above, Chapter 8, Section iii and below,
Chapter 10, Passim, esp. Sections i, ii, iv, v and vi.
Col. 4:5, he defines "being wise" as, in effect, "redemption" or optimum use of καιρός ⁹¹:

"ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν" (Eph. 5:16),

and

"τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι" (Col. 4:5).

In Eph. 5:16 he adds,

"-because the days are evil",

an expression reminiscent of the "evil times" of Qoh. 9:12, the verse immediately following 9:11’s

"For time (LXX καιρός) and chance happen to them all".

The race of I Cor. 9:24-7 occurs in a context emphasizing strongly the need for flexibility, and of being

"All things to all men" (v 22b).

This passage is well-known as an illustration of the level of dedication and discipline Paul enjoins (esp. vv 24-7). The believers are competing for a lasting crown (v 25), not a transient one. Therefore, as their rewards are greater and their stakes higher than those of the worldly athlete, so also should their level of commitment be correspondingly higher. ⁹² However, although I Cor. 9:24-7 is generally

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⁹¹The word καιρός has a far broader range of possible meanings in N.T. (and even from much earlier, see this Chapter, Section iii, fn.1) than just its classical meaning of "opportunity" or "critical moment". Nevertheless, in Eph. 5:16 and Col. 4:5, the overall context and Paul’s particular view of wisdom suggest that it is "opportunity" which is meant.

⁹²Cf. Hebrews 12:1, which is also about level of commitment to the race:
"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, - let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."
acknowledged to be an exhortation to dedication and alertness, it is not so generally recognized that it represents adaptability as the main form which this commitment takes and the key skill through which it is expressed. The fact that the race image (vv 24-7) is set within an overall context stressing receptive adaptability (vv 19-23) is not sufficiently noted. See, e.g., vv 21-2,

"To those not having the Law I become like one not having the Law. - To the weak I become weak. - I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

Other possible traces of Qoheleth’s influence may be found in Paul’s phrasing of the race passage of Phil. 3:12-14. His threefold use of the verb "καταλαμβάνω" may be inspired by Qoheleth’s threefold use of "ΧΩΔ" in 8:17. For although two of Paul’s three uses of "καταλαμβάνω" here are positive, nevertheless the emphasis of the passage overall, like that of Qoh. 8:17, is negative: on "not having laid hold", "not having grasped":

"Οὐχ οὐδὲ ἔλαβον ἢ ήδη τετελείωμαι, - . ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἐμαυτόν οὕτω λογίζομαι κατεληφέναι".

"Not that I have already obtained / taken (all this), or have already been matured; - . Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.".

93In v 12, "καταλάβω" and "κατελήμφθην", and in v 13 "κατεληφέναι".

94From vv 12-13.

95The two positive uses of "καταλαμβάνω" are in the intervening passage:

"But I press on to take hold of ("καταλάβω") that for which I was taken hold of ("κατελήμφθην") by Christ Jesus."

The fact that this verb occurs three times in the passage is probably significant, even though only one of them is negative, because the implications of the overall range of meaning of "καταλαμβάνω" are particularly like those of "ΧΩΔ". So there may be some kind of parallel or echo in the fact that there are three occurrences of "καταλαμβάνω" here to match the three occurrences of "ΧΩΔ" in Qoh. 8:17. However, there is also a treble negation in this passage, "Οὐχ - ἔλαβον", "Οὐ τετελείωμαι" and "Οὐπώ - κατεληφέναι". It is this in particular which gives the Pauline passage a similar thrust to Qoh. 8:17, with its threefold negation, "Χ ἔλαβο - Χ", "ΧΩΔ - Χ" and "Χ ἔλαβο - Χ".
Similarly, Qoheleth’s threefold repetition of "ΚΨΩ" in 8:17 is negative:

"לא ידכל טארון למסר...לא ידכל קבצ...לא ידכל קי..."

The verb "καταλογισάνω" has similar overtones to "ΚΨΩ". The LXX translation of "ΚΨΩ" in Qoh. 8:17 ("εὑρείν" - "εὑρήσετ" - "εὑρεῖν") does not evoke quite the idea "ΚΨΩ" conveys of "catching", "seizing", "overtaking", etc., as well as "finding out"; but "καταλογισάνω" does have this range of associations. Furthermore, Paul’s point, like Qoheleth’s, is negative as far as grasping or retaining is concerned (v 13),

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it", -
even though it is positive regarding the urgent necessity of continued participation in the race, as reflected in v 12,

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me", 96

and in v 14,

"I press on toward the goal".

It is because the denial of having grasped or attained is central, for Paul here as in Qoh. 8:17, 97 that the race has to continue (vv 12 & 14).

This is, then, a piety of racecraft not unlike Qoheleth’s in some respects. Even

96 Notice earlier in the same verse, "Not that I have already obtained", "Oὕχ δει ἡδη ξεθαβον", the simple verb underlying the compound "καταλογισάνω", and again negative.

97 Paul is denying only that he has "grasped" or "attained" his goal as yet, whereas Qoheleth is denying that an overall "grasp" of total reality can ever be attained. Yet although this difference is an important one, the emphatic quality of their denials is similar, both in style and in spirit. Both passages are rooted in an ardent standpoint regarding the racecraft of piety.
though Paul seems more optimistic and exact than Qoheleth about the prospects of attaining a clearly defined mark in the end (Phil. 3:14), it is probably not by a predictably fixed course. Flexible adaptability and correct exploitation of καταρκτικές are still seen as the key skills of piety, and Paul’s emphatic negation of having grasped / attained is comparably forceful to that of Qoh. 8:17. It seems likely that he is indebted to Qoheleth for this insight, and that Qoheleth is the pioneer of this concept of piety as a form of racecraft.

Qoheleth is still unique, nonetheless, in that he emphasizes the race itself as the issue, not the reaching of a destination or the attainment of a goal. He is not trying to "attain" eternal life as a target; rather, he is attempting to "practise" piety as an ongoing exercise of giving and receiving good. His racecraft is not just the use of goal-seeking imagery within a system of pious practice or literature. Rather, it is in itself his dynamic of religious practice; and this practice is not goal-seeking in the conventional and egocentric sense.

It is not, however, surprising if later goal-seeking wisdom, such as that of Paul, is indebted to his insights. For Qoheleth, while posing a strong challenge to the tradition of goal-seeking wisdom, is nevertheless deeply indebted to that tradition for his imagery and framework of thought.

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98See, e.g., Acts 16:7-10 for the persistence of the idea that God’s plan and providence is largely hidden even from believers. It is a N.T. commonplace that the flexibility required for the life of faith is necessary to fit in with God as well as to be "all things to all men". This is particularly clear in Acts, e.g., 10:19 & 20.

99Cf. Phil. 3:14 and I Cor. 9:24 & 25.
EXPLOITATION OF ΝΥ / ΚΑΙΡΟΣ AND OPENNESS TO THE DIVINE PRESENCE BOTH REQUIRE THE SAME RECEPITIVE ALERTNESS.

It seems from Chapter 8, Section iii that Qoheleth's view of wisdom involves a balanced reciprocity of doing and receiving good. It would also appear that he envisages doing good not as a pre-planned 'comprehensive art of life' (as if we could know all the right moves of the game in advance), but rather in terms of concrete, \textit{ad hoc} acts of kindness to others as opportunities arise. This in turn will call into play another balanced reciprocity: the traditional interplay of 'time' and 'chance' (9:11), without which there would be no opportunities, either to succeed or to fail.

\textsuperscript{100}See Marcel Detienne and Jean-Paul Vernant, \textit{Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society}, P.223, for a discussion of the traditional complementarity of καιρός and τύχη. Qoheleth's context and phrasing in 9:11 does seem to reflect this tradition, even though LXX, perhaps surprisingly, translates \textit{υφίστα} in 9:11 as ἀπόντημα instead of τύχη. Απόντημα may be preferred simply because τύχη had acquired negative overtones unsuited to a pietist work, perhaps as a false deity. From Hellenistic times, Τύχη is far more important as an object of worship than in the classical era, as Bickerman explains in \textit{Four Strange Books of the Bible}, Pp.146-7. Also, although Qoheleth's pairing of "time" and "chance" in 9:11 does suggest that he himself is influenced by the classical Greek concept of καιρός ("exact / right / critical time" or "opportunity") and by its association with τύχη, nevertheless the LXX translator(s) of his book may not have given such a high profile to classical usage. As James Barr points out in \textit{Biblical Words for Time} (London, 1962), P.32, the word καιρός began even from Aristotle's era to expand its meaning to include the broader sense of "period of time". While this would not prevent those familiar with the classical meaning from continuing to use and to recognize it, especially in an allusive literary context, it does nevertheless introduce the possibility of the LXX translator not recognizing a reference to the καιρός-τύχη antithesis which Qoheleth originally intended, and which to a reader or translator expecting the classical usage would have been obvious.

In effect, this complementarity of καιρός and τύχη is parallel to what Lowell Edmunds calls the τέχνη-τύχη (or γνώμη-τύχη) antithesis. See Id., \textit{Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides}, Pp.1-2 (including footnotes), for the Greek literary evidence of this antithesis as an accepted commonplace. Admittedly, the parallel is not absolute. For καιρός, like τύχη, refers to an aspect of the external reality facing Man, either to his advantage or to his disadvantage; whereas γνώμη and τέχνη contrast with τύχη because they are not external, but qualities emanating from within Man himself. Nevertheless, the specific aspect of the external which καιρός represents is that aspect which, by contrast with τύχη, allows the human element (γνώμη or τέχνη) to interact with it, thereby giving Man a degree of influence over outcomes. Therefore, as regards the sphere of Man's influence or non-influence over outcomes, the parallel between the καιρός / τύχη complementarity and the τέχνη-τύχη (or γνώμη-τύχη) antithesis is valid; and it is exactly this sphere of human influence over outcomes to which Qoheleth particularly applies the idea of the καιρός / τύχη interaction in 9:11. See also below, following footnote, and \textit{APPENDIX FIVE, QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR'S ISTHMIAN ODE 4}.
This interplay is double-edged. Without the Πρόταση (Classical Greek and LXX καταράς), the opportune / critical moment, there would be no opening for Man to deploy his skill and influence events at all. For its complement, ‘chance’, is the part of experience by definition beyond Man’s control: the unforeseeable element, and

Detienne and Vernant (op. cit., P.223) regard τόχη as an ambivalent term which can also have a positive meaning, “the opportunity to succeed, the desired goal reached, success attained”. It may be, however, that this promising ambivalence belongs more fundamentally to καταράς itself, and that τόχη only ever displays the same colouring through its close association with καταράς. The nuance peculiar to τόχη as such, which means simply ‘that which one encounters’ as distinct from ‘that over which one’s own choice has any influence’, is the more threatening overtone of the uncontrollable, implying “the individual buffeted by the waves, whirling with the winds, rolling helplessly hither and thither without respite” (Ibid., P.223). The more optimistic aspect of the καταράς / τόχη complementarity stems primarily from καταράς. For although the ambivalence of καταράς embraces the threat of the crisis-point as well as the hope afforded by the propitious opportunity, it is καταράς which constitutes the opening for human influence, whether a daunting opening or an enticing one; whereas τόχη, whether favourable or unfavourable, smiles or frowns beyond the reach of human influence, except by virtue of καταράς. See, e.g., Edmunds, op. cit., P.191, for the traditional view that τόχη is “-objective and is connected with the divine, comes from outside and is what befalls one.”

Admittedly, Edmunds considers that Thucydides views τόχη as not totally objective and external, but as “-originating in the (human) passions” (op. cit., Pp. 194 and 198). Even if this is correct, however, it would not in itself make τόχη as Thucydides sees it any more susceptible to reasoned human control than the more traditional, numinous τόχη. Furthermore, this would be a view of τόχη in which Thucydides would differ sharply even from mere conventions of Greek popular wisdom; so he would differ still more from the essentially pious wisdom-perspective of Solon, which contributed so substantially to the moulding of the popular conventions in the first place.

To Solon, as to Qoheleth, it is an axiom that the objectivity of τόχη, the total helplessness of all men before it and hence the utter inscrutability of the outcomes of human goal-seeking all argue strongly against unbridled acquisitiveness in particular. This ethico-religious view of τόχη, which continues to exercise a strong influence on other literary forms such as Tragedy, is primarily the heritage of the Wisdom-genre, and particularly of Solon. On this issue of τόχη, Qoheleth stands firmly in the tradition of Solon. Just as “It is easy to understand Solon’s political reforms as a reflection of these beliefs” (Edmunds, op. cit., P.79), so also it is easy to see Qoheleth’s denunciation of acquisitiveness and its morbid effects on society (see below, this Chapter, Section v) as a reflection of similar beliefs. Once the instability of human happiness and the impossibility of human control is recognized as affecting all Mankind, rich and poor alike, and is recognized also as “-caused by the god -, who teaches that for mortals it is better to be dead than alive”, (Id., op. cit., P.77), antisocial individualism is unthinkable. For the equality of all men before God which this degree of human helplessness implies underlines that no individual, however rich or ambitious, can afford to isolate himself from others and pursue his independent goals without any sense of fellowship with or responsibility for the rest of society.

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hence not open to pre-calculation. Without 'chance', on the other hand, the opposite would be the case; every outcome would lie completely at the mercy of Man's manipulative faculties. For everything would be open to prediction, and hence subject to Man's calculation. There would be no Unexpected to block off any plan from the direct route to its fulfilment. The existence of chance, however, places the obstacle of the unpredictable between Man and his objectives. Chance creates the need to overcome this obstacle to one's goals; and the "καιρός" (the "time" or "opportune moment") provides the opportunity of doing so. 102

It is important to grasp that there are no certainties here. Although the factor of the potentially exploitable ΠΥ / καιρός makes the attainment of human goals possible, the path to this attainment lies across a 

"-world of movement, of multiplicity and of ambiguity - (and of) fluid situations which are constantly changing and which at every moment combine contrary features and forces that are opposed to each other. - In order to seize upon the fleeting καιρός, μήτης 103 (has) to make itself even swifter than the

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102 Although in absolute terms one might expect the incidence of καιρός itself to be dependent on τόχη, especially in a non-monotheistic context, nevertheless this antithetical use of καιρός and τόχη as the opposite poles of a spectrum of possibilities is in fact not absolute. For the spectrum in question does not embrace the whole of reality; it embraces only the specific situation to which the antithesis is being applied. A particular situation confronting an individual has its καιρός aspect and its τόχη aspect, which respectively permit / demand or preclude interactive response on the part of the individual so confronted. It is this immediacy of the confronting situation to which the καιρός / τόχη antithesis is applied; and in such a context, a theoretical transcendence of τόχη would have no meaning. Conversely, in a context where τόχη was regarded as determining everything, the καιρός / τόχη antithesis would have no meaning, since this conceptual polarity derives its significance from the critical immediacy of the situation so polarized.

In addition to the non-transcendence of τόχη in terms of the καιρός / τόχη antithesis, it is also possible, at least monotheistically, to conceive of καιρός without considering the rôle of τόχη at all. This seems to be implied by, e.g., Esther 4:14-15. For the reference to "just such a time as this" is placed between implications of divine intervention: v 14's "relief and deliverance for the Jews - from another place" and v 15's reliance on fasting (i.e., before God). It seems from this that Mordechai and Esther regard the incidence of καιρός (referred to twice in v 14) as dependent on God, not on τόχη. They do not betray any interest in whether τόχη plays a part in outcomes or not; they base their strategy on a piety which does not explicitly include τόχη, even though the piety of Qoheleth does explicitly include it.

103 'Μήτης' is the fluid, adaptable type of intelligence: 'skill' or 'cunning'.

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καιρός. In order to dominate a changing situation, full of contrasts, it must become even more supple, even more shifting, more polymorphic than the flow of time: it must adapt itself constantly to events as they succeed each other, and be pliable enough to accommodate the unexpected so as to implement the plan in mind more successfully."

In Qoheleth’s view, therefore this responsive, reactive alertness, the adaptable, intuitive intelligence (ἡττης / μητίς), can be of far higher significance than a mere instrument for implementing Man’s self-chosen plans. It can be a prime tool of piety, pointing the way to the divine presence which transcends merely human

104 See Detienne and Vernant, op. cit., P.20.

105 See above, Chapter 5, Section ix and Chapter 7, Section v.

106 André Caquot virtually identifies μητίς and ἡττης in "Israelite Perceptions of Wisdom and Strength in the Light of the Ras Shamra Texts", ap. Gammie, Israelite Wisdom, P.26. This may shed light on the high profile of ἡττης / καιρός for Qoheleth, and on his concept of fluid adaptability as ἡττης’s very essence. For μητίς, as Detienne and Vernant underline, is very familiar from a wide range of Greek literature as the faculty most closely associated with exploiting the καιρός. If ἡττης does indeed carry the same overtones as μητίς, then Caquot’s insight is very illuminating for the interpretation of Qoheleth, even though he does not apply it directly to Qoheleth.

For the modern English reader, ‘wisdom’, even in his own language, has a bewilderingly broad range of possible nuances (e.g., pragmatic, idealistic, mystical, etc.), some of them strongly coloured by the Platonic development of the term ἠττητα and by the vigorously influential tradition based on this development. For the reader to resist allowing his interpretation of Qoheleth’s Hebrew to be coloured by this tradition is more difficult than is generally recognized. For, as Caquot mentions (op. cit., Pp.4-5, following Detienne and Vernant, op. cit., Pp.315-6), μητίς, the intuitive / receptive type of wisdom, suffered in reputation because of the intellectual dominance in Greek culture of a philosophical mindset preferring analytical and verbally assertive wisdom rather than the interactive wisdom of traditional μητίς. See also Payne, op. cit., Chapter 10, Pp.133-7, on the resulting artificial rift in western thinking between the concepts of intuitive knowledge and of discursive reasoning, the later exacerbation of this rift by Paduan Averroism, and its continuation to the present.

Caquot, however (like Mrs. Payne) points out that Biblical literature, by contrast, does not reflect this low view of the intuitive / receptive aspect of intelligence. He also adds that, on the contrary, it is essentially that intuitive type of wisdom which is meant not only by the Greek term μητίς, but also by the Hebrew term ἡττης. If this is not clearly grasped when attempting to interpret Qoheleth, Qoheleth’s insistence on the key importance of fluid, receptive flexibility, of exploiting the καιρός, and of not mistaking uncertainties for certainties, can not so easily be placed within a tradition of Wisdom-theory. If, however, the intuitive implications of ἡττης are kept in mind, then it is easy to see the continuity of Qoheleth’s wisdom with the well-established traditional wisdom of the helmsman, the hunter, the warrior and above all, the charioteer (see this Chapter, passim, especially above, Section ii and below, Section v, Καιρός and the Art of the Charioteer; see also APPENDIX FOUR, ΚΑΙΡΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’ ELECTRA; and APPENDIX FIVE, QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR’S ISTHMIAN ODE 4.

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plans. For the sphere of uncertainty in which this intuitive ilDDH operates strictly limits opportunity for assertive human pre-calculation. This reduces experience to a series of immediate interactions with a challengingly unpredictable present (see below, this Chapter, Section vi). This in turn minimizes the danger of human verbal assertion taking the place of intuited reality, hence removing a prime obstacle between Man and God and between Man’s wisdom and God’s wisdom. So, in effect, ilDDH can also be a means of guiding people by divine perspectives in choosing their goals, not merely a means of carving out a path to achieving a goal irrespective of whether or not the goal is worthy by pietistic criteria.

Potentially, therefore, ilDDH is a major weapon against human egocentric manipulativeness. This self-centred manipulative drive in Man fails to acknowledge his creaturely status before God, and as a result strives against his own fulfilment. For it causes his awareness to retreat from God, his plans to clash with God’s, and hence his goals to be beyond his reach, since they are based on distorted misconceptions of the total reality within which he is operating. In recognizing the potential of ilDDH to counteract this drive, Qoheleth is taking a very radical step both in piety and in wisdom-theory. For ilDDH/μητίς is conventionally viewed as a mere tool of that very drive, as indeed is intelligence in general, whether receptive /

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107 Verbal assertion about God and about His principles are represented as taking the place of the reality in Job 38:2’s “words without knowledge”; and merely hearing about God in words usurps the place of experiencing His reality, and of the awe proper to such experiences, until God actually appears (Ibid. 42:5 & 6) to break into this wilderness of words. When mental and vocal assertion thus take the place of intuiting present reality, Man is insulated by the inflexibility of his self-chosen course and by the limitations of his self-generated perspectives from fully interacting with any external reality, not only with God but also with other people, with experiences that should bring creaturely enjoyment, etc. Hence his life consists of pursuing instead of experiencing (see below, this Chapter, Section vii).

108 See also above, Chapter 7, Section v.
intuitive or assertive / analytical.

This narrowly Man-centred image of active, effectual intelligence is a major driving-force behind Antiwisdom, the anthropocentric ‘wisdom’ which directly clashes with theocentric Wisdom and undermines all attempts to produce a pietistic Wisdom-principle which is both coherent and profound. *Job* is the book in which the absolute polarity between pietist Wisdom and Man-centred Anti-wisdom is presented most starkly, in its most absurd extreme. On the basis of this clear recognition of the polarity, Qoheleth proceeds to expose the internal inconsistency of Antiwisdom, by implying that ἢδος / μητις has natural tendencies which render it incompatible with being confined to serving anthropocentric goals. As a prime source of awareness of and interaction with God, ἢδος is far more at home as a tool of piety than of Man-centred goals. By exposing Antiwisdom as an artificial concoction which pushes ἢδος into a rôle unworthy of its unique pietistic potential, Qoheleth clears the path to a new platform for expounding a pietist Wisdom with a solid foundation: solid because it is based on what he regards as the very nature of reality, and of the only way open to Man for interacting with reality, given its inbuilt uncertainties.

Qoheleth implies it is a major strategic coup on God’s part that the same responsive, intuitive alertness inherent in Man, which alone enables him to ride the beast of changing circumstance by exploiting the καιρος, also opens him to

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109 See above, Chapter 5, beginning of Section ix.

110 See APPENDIX SIX, QOHELETH AND BEN SIRA: THEOCENTRIC WISDOM VERSUS ANTHROPOCENTRIC PIETY.
experiencing the objective, external reality of God. His self-asserting calculations can not open Him to God's presence; and equally nor can they ensure the success of his self-serving plans, given that the environment in which he has to try and make them succeed is one of

"-transient, mobile, disconcerting and ambiguous realities which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, nor to exact calculations, nor to rigorous reasoning." 111

Just as experience and human circumstances do not lend themselves to aspirations toward certainty and to exactitude of analysis, nor does the Creator they reflect lend Himself to these things. He can only be experienced and reacted to as He really is and as He chooses to reveal Himself. Furthermore, He reveals Himself only to those who are ready to forbear from the rebellious and would-be self-contained ego, - which asserts its own goals, its own answers and its own flawed picture of reality, - in order to listen and to receive. 112

_Qoheleth_ reflects a God who has arranged reality in such a way that the same receptive alertness which alone makes responsiveness to His externality possible is also indispensable even for accomplishing one's own most egocentric goals. Even the attempt to accomplish one's own goals, therefore, necessitates cultivating faculties which point one beyond one's own goals, and which provide a clue to the mystery of God's presence. If Man tries to take even the most self-oriented goal-seeking, with the skills and faculties it entails, to its logical conclusion, he finds not a conclusion at all (logical or otherwise), but rather an ever-retreating horizon, which points beyond


112 Qoh. 5:1 ff.; Job 38:3, 40:4-5, 42: 1-6.
his self-oriented goal.

This ever-retreating horizon exposes the folly of limiting oneself to goals, to the pursuit of something afar off that one is trying to catch and grasp, to seize and keep. For thus limiting oneself to pursuit of a future possession or achievement excludes the possibility of experiencing and enjoying immediate realities in the present. It seals off the individual from direct experience of anything external to his own assertive will, including God.

This is why Qoheleth uses mindless pursuit as his symbol for Antiwisdom, the rejection of God in favour of Man's own assertive ego. He is building once again on the viewpoint of Job; for the vastness of the externality independent of Man's assertive will is already familiar from Job as symbolic of God's perspective on existence, in its marked contrast from Man's perspective. The God of Qoheleth, like the God of Job, is emphatically the God of forces beyond Man's control and of vistas beyond man's imagination. 113

In addition, however, Qoheleth is symbolically exploiting the fact that it is the very verbal assertiveness with which Man conceptually and purposively pursues reality that causes the reality to elude his grasp. It is not simply that God thinks in terms of expanding horizons, whereas Man thinks in terms of enclosure and restriction.

113 See Alter, op. cit., Pp. 103-4: “In both structure and thematic assertion, (Job) Chapters 38-41 are a great diastolic movement, responding to the systolic movement of Chapter 3. The poetic of suffering in Chapter 3 seeks to contract the whole world to a point of extinction, and it generates a chain of images of enclosure and restriction. The poetic of providential vision in the speech from the storm conjures up horizon after expanding horizon, each populated with a new form of life.”.

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Qoheleth, as well as noting, like Job, that Man's verbal self-reliance acts as a substitute for reality, illustrates in addition that, ironically, this is because he tries to use that verbalizing ego as a net in which to catch some aspect of reality which he deems desirable. This is why the opening sections of Qoheleth are structured in such a way as to reflect retreating horizons; and the motif of חַלְבִּים, that which can not be caught and held, underlines the irony of the eternal pursuit which constitutes human life.

114 See below, this Chapter, second half of Section vii, for how the various "laps" or sections of Qoheleth relate to these retreating horizons, and what the author aims to teach us from this (about the nature of "gain", etc.).

In fact, a symbolic representation of retreating horizons is already built in to a literal lapped race anyway, before literary art such as that of Qoheleth even gets to work on the conceptual implications of such a race. The start-finish line in a lapped race is a symbol of the retreating (in a sense even illusory) goal. For the real goal in a race is the moment of victory, which is a point in time, not a point in space. Strictly speaking, there is no purely spatial goal; for the same place which constitutes the finish-line when it is time to finish (i.e., after the appropriate number of laps has been run / driven) does not constitute the finish-line at any other point in the race.
GOAL-SEEKING, PATH-MAKING AND RECEPITIVE / INTUITIVE WISDOM.

Exploitation of the κατρόδες is especially the skill of the path-maker competing against rivals or obstacles, as "-the helmsman pits his cunning against the wind so as to bring the ship safely to harbour despite it".

The ability to find and hold to a path toward one’s goal is fundamental to the concept of wisdom. This is why the image of a way or path (e.g., גַל or פַּל), God’s or Man’s, good or bad etc., is so popular in Hebrew Wisdom, especially in Proverbs and Wisdom Psalms. Unfortunately for sages of pietist conviction, however, the fact that goal-seeking and path-steering is such a prime issue of Wisdom is precisely what attracts the antipietist egotist to Wisdom as the ideal tool for him to use in accomplishing his own personal ends.

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115See also below, this Chapter, Section iii. 116Detienne and Vermant, op. cit., P.144. 117See, e.g., Prov. 2:8,9,12,13,15 & 20; 3:6 & 17; 4:11,12,14,15,18,19,26 & 27; 5:8 & 21; 6:23; 7:25 & 27; 8:20 & 32; 9:6 & 15; 10:9b,17 & 29; 11:5; 12:15a & 28; 13:15b; 14:2,12,14; 15:19,21b & 24; 16:9,25 & 29b; 20:24; 21:2,8, & 16; 22:5 & 6; 23:19 & 26; 28:6,10 & 18; and 30:18 & 19. Among the main recurring images of Proverbs, as Alter remarks (The Art of Biblical Poetry, Pp.170-1), "The most frequent metaphor is that of walking on a path or way. - The way may be smooth and straight, or full of pitfalls and crooked or meandering."

Also, see Psalms 1:1 & 6; 18:21,30a,32b; 25:4,8,9,12; 27:11; 32:8; 37:23 & 34; 44:18; 51:13; 67:2; 77:19; 81:13b; 85:13; 86:11; 95:10; 103:7a; 107:7; 119:1,3,9,15,30,32,101,104,105 & 128; 128:1; 138:5; 139:24; 142:3; 143:8; 145:17; and 146:9c. Cf. Is. 26:7 & 8. God is often represented in Psalms as the ideal path-finder; His ways are perfect. A man can follow a wrong path or a right path. A man can follow God’s ways; and God can find a path for a man, and deliver him from trouble or frustration.

118This is so even though such an approach to path-making wisdom hardly does justice to the traditional ideal of God Himself as the ultimate Path-maker. This ideal finds magnificent expression in, e.g., Ps. 18:29-36, with overwhelming victory represented as the direct outcome of God’s path-making intervention (vv 37-45). Cf. Ibid. vv 15-19, which are reminiscent of the parting of the Red Sea in Ex. 14:21 & 22. In Ex. 13:17, 18 & 20, the psychological subtlety of God’s path-making skill manifests in His choice of route; and in Ibid. 14:21-31, He shows astonishing power as a remover of obstacles in His Peoples’s path, as well as cunning in luring their enemies into His net. It is also thought-provoking that this ‘net’ takes the form of a false route or path, in the sense that for the Egyptians it is not a real path, even though for the Israelites it is. This Exodus passage overall, therefore, presents us with an impressively
Wisdom-literature’s strong preoccupation with goal-seeking and with accomplishing one’s objectives is symbolically reflected in Prov. 30:18-19:

"Three things are too wonderful for me;
Four I do not understand:
The way of an eagle in the sky;
The way of a serpent on a rock;
The way of a ship on the high seas;
And the way of a man with a maiden."

Blenkinsopp comments on this saying, 119

"In this instance the sequence has the effect of stressing the fourth ‘way’, in the sense that the mysterious element in the first three provides the clue to the meaning. In other words, the common element in the first three, a mysterious form of propulsion, leads into a consideration of the deep mystery of sexual attraction."

The first sentence of this comment is correct; but the second misses the central point. What specifically arouses Agur’s admiration in all four cases is the mysterious faculty that finds a path in the apparently pathless, and thereby attains an apparently unattainable goal. It is not simply the mysterious force of the sexual drive in itself which excites his wonder, but rather the resourcefulness of the courtship-procedure by which a man attains success in satisfying it. 120 This parallels the fact that it is not the mere propulsion of bird, snake or ship which he admires so much, but rather the consummate accuracy with which that propulsion is directed to the right destination. For the snake finds its way past an apparently insurmountable obstacle; and the eagle and the ship find (or rather, make) a path to their goal over an effectively pathless

varied picture of God’s path-making wisdom; and it is exercised on the behalf of His People in situations where without Him they would either have failed to find a route at all or have selected the wrong route.


120. Correctness of procedure/method is, of course, intimately interdependent with the rightness of one’s timing, as Qoheleth himself reflects in 8:5 & 6.
expanse. It is this aspect of the bird’s, snake’s and ship’s movement which the sage invites us to apply to human sexual behaviour.

The mystery of the bird finding its way through the sky is reflected in the line from a popular hymn, where God

" -guides the eagle through the pathless air".

The sea, like the sky or air, is also regularly characterized as pathless. As Detienne and Vernant point out (op. cit., P.290), the Greeks call the sea ἔπιερος

" -not because it is without limits or boundaries, but because it is the expanse that can not be crossed (περιβάλλει) from one side to the other, an impassable expanse, where a path is obliterated as soon as it is made and disappears from the everchanging, smooth surface of the waters.".

Therefore, navigation on the high seas,

" -every time it is undertaken, (is) a new adventure, an exploration of a virgin expanse, unmarked by any trace of men, a πόρος to be opened up and constantly replotted on the wide surface of the waters, just as if they had never been crossed before."

(Ibid. P.152). Both sea and air, then, are by their very nature notoriously ‘pathless’; yet a path is exactly what these creatures have found through it. Similarly, the man’s subtle and delicate task in courting the essentially a new bride or girlfriend (and hence not yet familiar to him), involves making a way, by wisdom, through previously uncharted territory. Yet, amazingly, a way is found and the task accomplished. The wisdom employed here is of the same order as that of the eagle, the serpent and the helmsman. 121

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121 Some (e.g., Toy) take the following verse, Prov. 30:20 (about the way of the adulteress), as a gloss on Ibid. 30:18 & 19. They therefore think that the נַלְלָית of vv 18 & 19 is the adulteress of v 20. This seems unlikely, however, unless the gloss is simply a poor one. For in v 19, the man is the navigator who must plot the path. The נַלְלָית corresponds to the sky, to the rock and to the seas, as the man corresponds to the bird, to the snake and to the ship (and hence also, by implication, to the helmsman who guides the ship). V 19, then, ends with “the way of a man”, the man being cast in the rôle of pathmaker and the
This Wisdom of path-finding and of accomplishing goals, although dazzlingly impressive, as Agur reflects, is nevertheless fraught with spiritual hazards, due woman in the rôle of terrain; but v 20 begins with "the way of an adulteress", with the woman cast in the rôle of pathmaker. To identify the adulteress of v 20 with v 19's נָשִּׁית would, then, spoil the overall symmetry of v 19, and jar against its deft parallels. Either v 20 is not a gloss on vv 18-19, or it is a very misguided one.

Against this, some have argued that v 20 seems intrusive in its immediate context unless it is a gloss. For if instead it is a proverb in its own right, it is a different type of proverb from the others in its surrounding context, in that it is not based on number-patterns like 30:15-16 and Ibid. vv 18-19, 21-3, 24-8 and 29-31. However, 30:20 is no more abrupt in its stylistic departure from the number-pattern sequence of proverbs around it than is v 17 in differing from the number-pattern sayings before it (vv 15b-16) and after it (vv 18-19); yet v 17 could not be a gloss on the preceding saying in vv 15b-16, since it has no theme in common with that saying. In addition, v 17 is thematically unambiguous and consistent, and is sufficiently well-rounded, self-contained and well-balanced by its internal parallels to be a proverb in its own right. Compare the way 30:7-9 is a lengthy number-pattern proverb based on the sage's request for "two things"; but v 10 is a short, self-contained proverb nothing to do with number-patterns; and vv 11-14 constitute an extended example of a different stylistic type of proverb, unconnected with v 10 before it except by the theme of cursing, which v 10 and v 11 have in common.

It does not seem to be a stylistic requirement of wisdom-books, then, to avoid clusters of number-pattern proverbs being interrupted by proverbs of a different type. It may be that as long as there is some connecting link between juxtaposed proverbs, it does not matter what the nature of the connexion is (e.g., whether it is stylistic, thematic, having a common author, etc.). It is not entirely clear, however, what the criteria are for deciding what does or does not constitute an adequate link to justify juxtaposing two proverbs. It is not even beyond dispute that any formal link is required at all; yet groups of proverbs placed together in wisdom books often do manifest noticeable characteristics in common with each other, as if these points in common may have been the editor's reason for putting them together.

If it is stylistically acceptable for v 17 (which is a proverb and not a gloss on the saying before it) to be placed amongst a set of other proverbs which are based on number-patterns, even though v 17 is not, then there is no reason why v 20 should not be a proverb in its own right as well, separate from vv 18-19 in meaning, and yet placed in the same passage as other proverbs based on number-patterns even though v 20 itself is not. V 20 does have the theme of a "way" in common with the preceding v 19; and if the common theme of a curse was enough to justify following v 10 by v 11 (even though they have nothing else in common), then the same kind of link should suffice to justify putting v 20 as a separate proverb after vv 18-19. It cannot be argued that the link between the "way" of the bird, snake, ship and man in vv 18-19 and the "way" of the adulteress in v 20 is too superficial to justify the juxtaposition of the two sayings. For both refer to a "way" or "path" which will disappear without trace once the goal is attained. In the case of the adulteress this disappearance is elaborated into a guilty pretence; she pretends that she never committed the sin in the first place, concealing her "way" deliberately. But in the case of the bird, snake, ship and man, there is no need for any pretence; it is simply one of the wonders of nature that the path they traverse in order to reach their goal is one of such subtlety and delicacy that it disappears naturally, without any artificial efforts to conceal it.

Agur is not trying to turn path-finding Man into a type of god obsessed with his own objectives, since he places the human wisdom of helmsman and lover in the same category as the animal wisdom of bird and snake (cf. Prov. 30:24-32 on the various lessons to be learned from wise creatures, including the ants, as in Aesop's Fables). He also shares the emphasis of Job and Qoheleth on reverence and the limitations of human knowledge (30:2-6), warning, like Qoheleth, against adding to God's words (v 6). But whereas Job appeals to the power and splendour of God's animal creation to humble Man and remind him of what is greater than he and beyond his control, Agur sees the essential similarity of Man and animals (cf. Qoh. 3:18). His king is not necessarily more or less powerful and dignified than his lion (Prov. 30:30-1); they are two of a kind.

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to the narrow horizons of self-centred human vision. The overall range of Proverbs and the Wisdom-Psalms reflects that God Himself is to be celebrated unreservedly as the great path-maker; and He can also make a man's path stable for him. Yet when it comes to human path-making, it also reflects that a man's way may or may not be God's way. Hence Man's wonderful and mysterious faculty for path-finding is not unequivocally celebrated as it is in the sayings of Agur. Moreover, human path-finding / goal-seeking has been used as arguably the most powerful motif in ancient literature for evoking anthropocentric impiety. This is a deeply disturbing choice of image for hybris, because path-finding is so fundamental to the very concept of wisdom and to the very nature of Man. Nevertheless, the image is employed all the more effectively (especially in Tragedy) precisely because it is disturbing. The close association between impious arrogance and path-making is recognized as a challenge which, however morally perplexing, must be faced.

The use of this motif in Aeschylus's The Persians illustrates how narrow is the

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This interestingly reconciles the humility proper to Man with his innate dignity. He recognizes himself as creature not god, sharing the inevitable limitations of all creatures; but he is potentially no less formidable a creature than any other (cf. Jdg. 14:5 & 6). Indirectly, this perspective helps to defuse the potential danger of path-finding wisdom, which may be why Agur feels free to celebrate it so directly and so emphatically despite his emphasis on humility. Not only will the king surrounded by his army allow no obstacle to rob him of his objective (v 31), but nor will the lion; nor, in their proper spheres will the cock or the goat. These are clearly very limited creatures, and the two last are not even particularly strong (like the ants and the rock badgers of vv 25 & 26); but the dignified self-assurance of the cock and the amazing agility of the goat clear an effectual path for them to their own goals within their respective habitats. Hence Agur can represent path-finding as impressive and admirable within its prescribed limits, rather than as an illegitimate challenge to the necessary acceptance of limits.

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123 See above, this Section, fns. 117 and 118.

124 One reflection of how fundamental this is to Man's self-image is that in the celebrated Ode on Man in Sophocles's Antigone (L1.332 ff.), the first image employed is that of Man finding a path through the sea. Yet the same image is then given an unmistakably sour twist in Haemon's warning to his father (L1.715-7) about the foolish sailor who courts disaster by his inflexibility. This is the stubborn adherence to his chosen path, refusing to bend to any factors of external reality, however vital.
dividing line between extreme wisdom and extreme foolishness. The creation of a 'way' across the impassable by technical ingenuity becomes here a symbol not of wisdom but of rash folly, even of madness. Xerxes's artificial creation of a way (δύσμα, L.71, πόρος, L.747) across the Hellespont (L.71-2) is interpreted as an outrage (L.745-50), as the attempt of a mortal to gain control over gods (L.749-50).

The infamous purple carpet of the Agamemnon, the King's path of blatant and literally visible hybris to his own destruction, is the most lurid of all symbolic representations of the ruthless arrogance associated with human path-making. It recalls the blood of the daughter already sacrificed to carve out a bloody route to Troy and to the fulfilment of the father's ambition, as well as anticipating the blood of the father himself, walking to his own death across it. The blindness of a man narrowly bent on achieving his own goal is depicted here not only as futile but as horrifying. Mere words can not describe it; only this visible, blood-coloured symbol of a man's self-chosen path, spread out before the very eyes of the audience, can convey the horror of this narrow, blinkered goal-seeking adequately. Here is the exact anthropocentric antithesis to the divine act of salvation in Ex. 14:21-31: Man carving his own path to his own destruction, as opposed to God devising for Man a

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125 The visual prominence on stage of Agamemnon's vehicle (ἀρημνη, L.906, cf. L.1039), as well as the carpet itself, would highlight this association for the audience. For verbal (rather than visual) effect created by reference to a vehicle, compare Soph., O.T., L.800-13, where Laius is described as confronting Oedipus in a carriage at a three-branched path. Laius contests the right of way with ruthless violence, which is all the more intimidating because he is in a carriage and Oedipus is not. The hybristic picture this creates of the father Oedipus is fated to kill inevitably affects the audience's view of the events radically, especially the futile arrogance of Laius's attempts in the past to circumvent the oracle by relying on his own plan to dispose of Oedipus as an infant. Oedipus' trust in his own intelligence rather than in Tiresias' oracles seems ominously similar. The image of these two each contesting with the other to the death his right to pursue his own path is a terrifying picture of the self-assertive path of Man, without due reference to considerations external to his own goals and preconceptions.
supernatural path to safety. 126

The fact that this kind of highly charged, spiritually negative symbolism is closely, persistently associated with goal-seeking and path-making adds piquancy to Qoheleth's insistence on God's control over human goal-seeking, especially by contrast with Man's lack of control over it. Qoheleth celebrates God's tactical genius in tying the necessary means for goal-seeking firmly to an intuitive receptivity which points toward the external reality of God: a reality which transcends both the goal sought and the narrow self-centredness of Man's nature. He sees this as brilliant strategy on God's part. For its outcome is that men actually do "fear Him" (3:14), even at the point where they are at the greatest risk of impious self-orientation: i.e., in their pursuit of their personal goals.

The reason this is the point of highest risk is that absorption in pursuing one's own goal (as distinct from pursuing it only with a due awareness of higher realities...
than the goal pursued) leaves no room for a proper sense of awe before that which is greater than oneself. In *The Persians*, the nature of the obstacle in Xerxes's path is divine. Therefore, Xerxes is impious in imposing his path to his own objective onto it, like a yoke on its neck (L.72). He fails to intuit the divine nature of the Hellespont, and instead he blindly pursues his own goal against its greater power.

Qoheleth’s reverence for the ‘crookedness’ of experience, - for the twists and turns away from our hopes and goals and from what seems right or desirable to us, - is not, then, unique. Although he uses this idea in an original way within the context of revealed religion, the way he applies it to the goal-seeking aspect of wisdom is in line with traditional Greek piety about avoidance of hybris. Just as the crooked element can not be straightened (1:15; 7:13) so as to make certain what is uncertain, so also it can not be modified so as to lead us straight to our own desired goal. The divine origin of the crookedness renders attempts to straighten it (1:15, 7:13).

127. The moral failure of refusing to take into account higher realities than the goal pursued is closely related to the practical failure to absorb even external realities which have to be recognized in order to render the goal pursued realistically attainable anyway. Divine and moral realities are in this sense all of a piece with every other aspect of total reality.


Similarly, the complex ‘crookedness’ of external reality, with its threatening chance factor, is ‘stronger’ than Man’s understanding; and Qoheleth sees this superiority as directly divinely ordained for a pious purpose. This (like Aeschylus’s assessment of the Hellespont’s superior power as divine, and like other similar poetic divinizations of that which Man must not attempt to control or make a path through) makes the obligation not to resist or attempt to override this crookedness considerably more obvious than the obligation of a nightingale not to resist a hawk (although Bosworth argues strenuously that the blameworthiness of this type of folly was perfectly clear to the ancients).

129. I.e., to show the limits of Man’s ability to grasp God’s overall providence; hence, in effect, to show the limits of revelation.
7:14) impiety, as discussed above, Chapter 6, Sections iii and iv. Qoheleth's perspective on the perennial wisdom-issue of path-making is to picture this impiety of 'straightening the crooked' as an attempt to plot so direct (straight) a route to one's own goal that the intrinsic crookedness of the terrain through which it is plotted is not taken into account. This is what he means by straightening what is twisted in 7:14 (and also in 1:15, although he makes us wait until 7:14 before we see that). Rather as Xerxes, in plotting his route over the Hellespont, does not take its divine power into account, so the antipietist Wise Man, in plotting his route across "what God has done", does not take its divine crookedness into account. Small wonder, then, that the intended route is not realistic.

In describing the task before the goal-seeker, duly endowed with the necessary quality of μητις, Detienne and Vernant (op. cit., P.5) also indicate the impossibility of literal straightness and the essentially twisting nature of μητις:

"In order to reach his goal directly, to pursue his way without deviating from it, across a world which is fluctuating and constantly oscillating from one side to another, he must himself adopt an oblique course and make his intelligence sufficiently wily and supple to bend in every conceivable way and his gait so 'askew' that he can be ready to go in any direction. - You could say that the.

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130 In pointing out that the supposed goal-seeker / path-maker par excellence (i.e., the practitioner of hard-edged, commercialist wisdom) characteristically plots an non-viable route, Qoheleth is again answering the fool "according to his folly" (Prov. 26:5), as he is (see above, Chapter 3, Section v) in challenging him as to what 'profit' there is in frenzied, materialist goal-seeking. The implied equation of piety with realism and of impiety with 'much dreaming' (5:7) is a similar attack on the values of the rich oppressor who relies on his 'realism'. He thinks that because the poor have no comforter now (4:1; 5:8), all pious hopes of judgment to come are mere pipe-dreams. The real climax of Qoheleth's much-expounded and even much-sung exposition of the 'times' in 3:1-8 is the relatively neglected 3:17:

"God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked; for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed."

The unpredictability of the time for Judgment is the crowning glory of God’s overall strategy in devising this system of 'times'. Hence Qoheleth's climactic theme is indeed judgment, even though this is not generally acknowledged in discussion of his work.
The ambiguity of terminology here is important. For to pursue the ‘straightest’ possible path on a twisting course, i.e., to follow the quickest (because most direct) route, the ‘perfect line’, is genuine racecraft, a demonstration of true skill and success in interacting with external realities; whereas to ride a twisting course as if it were straight would be courting certain disaster, and quite the reverse of racecraft. A major problem with human ingenuity is that it often neglects to take into account the difference between the two. In its eagerness to proceed to its self-chosen goal by the most direct route possible, it often fails to perceive (and hence fails to make allowance for) the fundamental crookedness of the circuit through which it must proceed to its goal.

This indicates a fatal deficiency, a lack of intuitive / receptive wisdom. It is precisely the type of mistake which the snake on the rock (Prov. 30:19) is so

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131 ‘With twisting or versatile cunning / skill’. Hesiod, e.g., uses this term in the Theogony of two crafty, agile minds: Kronos (L.168) and Prometheus (L.546).

132 As Detienne and Vernant themselves imply by their wording of this very passage.

133 This is exactly the same as the perfect ‘line’ of present-day motorsport.
celebrated for not making. An attempt to pursue the literally straightest possible course would entail boring directly through the rock like a drill. Since rock is hard, this would only damage the snake's nose, without in any way advancing his objective. Instead, therefore, the snake adjusts its route to the nature of the terrain, and wisely twists and turns over the rock, or round it to the right or to the left. It deviates from its chosen path to the perfect degree: no less and no more than enough to get past the obstacle and then rejoin its self-chosen path. Thus, through its pliant, sinuous movement, making due allowance for immediate externals running contrary to its chosen path, it pursues the perfect line to its goal.

This delicacy and adaptability is the essence of path-finding wisdom. Without it the eagle would fail to discern the thermals it has to seek out and ride; and the ship's pilot would not maintain his constant, attentive interaction with the crucial external features of his environment:

"the weather, the seasons, the sky, the stars and the winds"

(Plato, Rep. 488D-489). Above all, this flexible, receptive wisdom is essential to "the way of a man with a maiden", since Eros is the supreme refinement in delicate interaction between two complex living beings. Eros is persistently characterized in Antiquity by his pliancy and adaptability of movement. He is the ultimate symbol of the principle that interactive flexibility is the secret of a safe and successful path to one's goal.

It is this same quality of flexibility which is recommended by implication in Euripides' Hippolytus, whose hero meets with disaster because he refuses to pay
honour to Aphrodite. The Chorus’s response to news of the hero’s death is to relate the victory of Aphrodite and Eros over the ‘ἀκομπτός φρήν’ or ‘unbending disposition’ (L.1268 ff.), an expression whose positive overtones are of dauntless, uncompromising courage, but whose negative nuances are of obstinacy and inability to adapt or submit. This unyielding nature is similar to the ‘σκληρὸς ψυχή’ deprecated by Odysseus in Soph. Ajax L.1361 and the ‘σκληρὸς ὁγον φρονήματο’ denounced by Creon (Antig. L.473) as bound to lose control of events and suffer disaster. Both ἀκομπτός and σκληρὸς imply incapacity for the type of pliant, sinuous movement which can accommodate twists and curves: exactly the kind

134 For a positive perspective, see Pindar’s "ψυχήν ἀκομπτός" in Isth. IV, L.53 / 89-90 (L.I89-90 according to Heyne’s line-numbering). Compare, however, the negative overtones of pride in the same poet’s Pyth. II, L.51 / 93-4 (Heyne’s L.I93-4). The implication here is that the god ‘bends’ those who are inappropriately intractable. Such haughtiness is neither proper nor realistic for mortals; therefore a power higher and stronger than themselves will ‘bend’ them.

135 This trait of inflexibility is diametrically opposed to the traditional concept of Eros and of everything he represents. Hence the opposition between Hippolytus and Aphrodite runs incurably deep.

Plato’s insistence (Symp. 195C-196B) on the nature of Eros as essentially opposite to and incompatible with everything σκληρός hinges on his concept of how Eros actually operates, described essentially in terms of pliancy of movement (196A):

“He is very young, and very delicate, and moreover pliant in form. For he would not be able to wrap himself completely around us, nor manage to steal first into and then out of every soul secretly, if he were hard.”

It is no surprise, then, that of all the gods it is Aphrodite who is Hippolytus’s opponent. Similarly in Antigone, Eros and Aphrodite are the forces contrasted with the unyielding temperament. Creon (L.I473 ff.) pictures Antigone as the unyielding type doomed to destruction because of her hardness; but Haemon in effect counters this (L.I710-23, esp. 712-17) by depicting Creon in turn as vulnerable because he too is unyielding. Thematicallly, it is surely no accident that Creon (however inaccurately) scornfully attributes Haemon’s dissent to love alone (L.756). For although Haemon is motivated by wisdom as well as by Eros, Creon’s lack of wisdom makes Eros within Haemon (operating through his love for Antigone) Creon’s deadly and bitter enemy. This is part of the fundamental contrast between the flexibility of Eros and the unyielding stubbornness of folly. So is the timing of the Chorus (L.I781-800), hard on Creon’s stubborn decision as to Antigone’s mode of execution, in celebrating Eros and Aphrodite as ‘invincible’ (L.I781 and 800). The Chorus here, like Symp. 195C-196B, emphasize Eros’s delicacy and his breadth and freedom of movement, the opposite of stubbornness and inflexibility.

Sophocles’s choice of Athena rather than Aphrodite as the opponent of Ajax may, therefore, seem surprising, in view of this widespread image of Eros in particular as the prime enemy of inflexibility. However, it is not so surprising in view of Athena’s unique association with calculating control and with wisdom. To conquer the inflexible is as natural to calculating intelligence as it is to Eros; for μὴτις, like Eros, is also essentially fluid and adaptable, and therefore adept at gaining control. In Ant. L.705-723, the
of movement essential for realistic path-making and goal-seeking. 

Since driving diplomatic Haemon tactfully represents the epitome of wisdom as willingness to listen to advice. This ideal of flexible receptivity is in direct contrast with the foolish sailor image of L.715 ff., representing the stubborn assertiveness opposed to receptivity. In attributing his son’s pro-Antigone stance simply to desire for her, therefore, Creon is seeing at best only part of the truth. Not Eros alone but also wisdom underlie Haemon’s recommendation of flexibility and of receptivity to others, especially alertness to the opinions of others. In this respect, Eros and Wisdom are of the same nature and closely akin to each other.

This is why in Antigone it is Haemon who is the chief spokesman of calculating wisdom. Since his opinion is compatible with Tiresias’s, this is a striking example of human, calculating wisdom agreeing with the prophetic voice of superhuman inspiration, which is above human calculation. It makes an arresting contrast with the same poet’s Oedipus Tyrannus, where Oedipus, the type of calculating wisdom, explicitly favours his own intelligence above the supernatural inspiration of Tiresias. Although Antigone, therefore, shows that calculating wisdom can be a force for piety, arguing against hybris and the flouting of the gods’ laws, nevertheless Oedipus Tyrannus shows that the opposite can also be the case. Oedipus’ trust in his powers of calculation entails mistaking uncertainties for certainties; and this means that his human wisdom works against piety instead of for it by blinding him to the truth of what Tiresias is saying.

Kομπτείν is the normal word for a horse taking a turn (see, e.g., Xen., Eq. 7.15). The boldness and subtlety of skill required to accommodate bends is a major challenge of racecraft, and the bend itself is a prime symbol of racing’s intrinsically hazardous nature. Notice that it is at the turning-post (Soph., Elect. L.744, “κομπτοντος ἵππου”) that Orestes makes his fatal mistake. Even though he is said to have driven all the other laps safely and steadfastly (LI.741-2), when he does make a mistake, it is at a turn that he makes it. Apparently, it is also at a bend in the track that Aeschylus’s Orestes (Choeph. L.1022-3) pictures his bolting ‘chariot-team’ wrestling his path hopelessly out of his control.

"δεσπερ ἵππος ἵνιοστροφῶν ἥιδημου ἐξωτέρων".
"It's as though, with my team, I take a bend too wide of the track;";

i.e.,
"It's as though - I am taking a bend and in the process I come off the track altogether".

Although "I take a bend" is not a popular understanding of ἵνιοστροφῶ (with translators (in fact ἵνιοστροφῶ is inclined to fall a prey to textual emendation), nevertheless cf. Detienne and Vernant’s translation of the same passage, op. cit., P.191:

"It is as if my horses, at a bend in the track, suddenly left the path".

This translation seems to be based on the same interpretation of ἵνιοστροφῶ. One would expect this verb to mean either "guide by the reins into a turn" (if used transitively, with horses as the object), or "take a turn by using reins" (if used intransitively). The ‘turning’ of a horse is regularly στροφῆ (e.g., Xen, Eq. 7.15 & 17; 10.15). Compare also II. VIII, L.168’s "ἵππος τε στρέψα" and Od. XV, L.205’s "στρέψ’ἵππους".

This sense of losing control is Orestes’ inevitable response to the approaching numen of the angry Eumenides, since they are a supernatural force which it would not be appropriate for Man to control. Nevertheless, the clash between their genuine rights and his genuine duty to avenge his father is not Orestes’s fault. This clash is an enigma, an unavoidably invisible, unpredictable hazard of pursuing what seems from one perspective (because one can not see round bends) to be the right course of action. The runaway chariot, signifying loss of control, is therefore very sympathetic imagery, since the audience also will have experienced unpredictable and unavoidable hazards, even though they will not have been on such a horrific level; so up to a point, they will recognize Orestes’ predicament. The bend in the track symbolizes a particular example of the ‘crookedness’ of the external reality Man struggles to traverse; and this crookedness, as Qoheleth points out, is intrinsic to human experience. Pursuing a path involves a multiplicity of unpredictable factors anyway; and a bend in the track multiplies the unpredictabilities, because it hides one’s immediate destination from view. Orestes’s immediate objective was to avenge his father at Apollo’s command by killing his mother. This is the path Orestes had to pursue, since he had no choice. His vengeance was a bend in the track he had to attempt. But this crooked course of vengeance has by its very nature entailed, although hidden from his view, the wrath of the Eumenides; and now that Orestes has accomplished his intended matricide, he has arrived at that wrath and lost control of his fate.
a chariot is persistently the prime symbol of such path-making, therefore, the Chorus's reference to the overthrow of the 'τικομπτος φρήν' when they hear of Hippolytus's death in his chariot is disturbingly ironical even though it is clearly apt. For the excessiveness of this hero's desire to steer his own path is as prominent a characteristic as his inability realistically to do so.

It is no accident, then, that the force which destroys Euripides' Hippolytus (Aphrodite) and the force which destroys Sophocles' Ajax (Athena) are both represented as deities. For the tendency of human beings to plot too 'straight' (i.e., too 'direct') a path of their own choosing is commonly recognized as a form of impiety, since it does violence to an overall reality which is of a higher order than Man himself, and refuses to acknowledge external numina which are also of a higher order than Man himself. 137

There is a peculiar poignancy in Hippolytus losing control (L.1219-42) of his under the threat of their power. Only the flexible wisdom of Athena can resolve the competing claims of Apollo and the Eumenides, giving due weight to both, and render Orestes's unavoidable path safe.

137 On this point, the contrast between Balaam and his donkey (Num. 22:21-34) is particularly illuminating. Balaam is just as impervious to the numen of the angel blocking his intended path as Aeschylus' Xerxes is blind to the divinity of the Hellespont he tries to bridge. The donkey sees the angel and reacts to its presence and purpose correctly, by abandoning her attempt to get past it; but Balaam himself is too intent on pursuing his path to perceive the angel at all. His pre-planned intent blots out his awareness of everything external to it, even beings of an obviously higher order of importance than himself and his intended path. The angel (v 32) echoes the sentiments of the donkey (v 28), underlining that there is a basic harmony of mutual awareness between them; but Balaam is at first isolated and insulated from sharing in this harmony of interaction by his own goal-seeking self-will. As Qoh. 3:18 implies, Man does not automatically sense and accommodate himself to his creaturely inter-connexion with the animals. In order to "see that he is like the animals", he has to be tested and found wanting in his attempts to be totally unlike them. He tries to be totally unlike the animals in the scope of the goals he sets himself, objectives exceeding his stature, the span of his years and the range of his influence (Qoh. 3:18-22), and hence more suitable to a god than a man. Yet it is not in the scope alone of his goals that he is unlike the animals, but also in the blindness and inflexibility of his absorption in them, which paralyses his ability to intuit essentials that are external to those goals.
chariot-horses, whom he knows so well and is so well-practised in handling (L.1166, 1219-20, 1239-41, 1355-7). Yet however much we feel for Hippolytus, we know it is not in the nature of reality for the ‘\( \xi \kappa \omega \mu \pi \tau \omicron \zeta \phi \rho \eta \nu \)’ to maintain control. For the elemental forces which Poseidon’s power to terrify the chariot team represents, and which materialize in the form of the unexpected menace of the supernatural bull, are changeable forces which defy exact calculation and exact understanding (L.1102-1110). Hence they are beyond control. This is exactly the nature of Aphrodite, whom Hippolytus has flouted by steering too straight a course by his own personal preferences, instead of modifying and adapting his path to accommodate her formidable power.

A chariot-scenario is perfect for depicting the visceral anguish of a clash between the uncontrollable and the human desire for control. For this desire is a fundamental drive behind all goal-seeking and path-making. See below, this Chapter, especially Section iii, Καιπός and the Charioteer. See also below, APPENDIX FOUR, ΚΑΙΠΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’S ELECTRA.

Significantly, Eros is described in the same Ode as ‘\( \pi \omicron \chi \alpha \lambda \omicron \lambda \omicron \pi \tau \epsilon \omicron \rho \omicron \)’, combining within a single term the idea of changeable, manipulative flexibility with the limitless motion of flight. This is this type of force or being, essentially mobile and adaptable, which characteristically cannot be controlled, but which rather exercises control. Note that the Antigone’s Eros-Ode also both begins (L.781) and ends (L.800) with declaring this power invincible (L.781, \( \alpha \nu \kappa \alpha \kappa \alpha \xi \) and L.800, \( \delta \mu \omega \chi \omicron \zeta \) ). These declarations flank the description of Eros’s delicacy and his liberty of wide-ranging movement.

The symbolic meaning of Poseidon’s part in destroying Hippolytus is indirectly illuminated by Détienne and Vannant’s discussion (op. cit., Pp.199-206) of the respective specialized rôles of Poseidon and Athena re horses and chariots.

"(Athena’s) province is that of control" (op. cit., P.206), through the typical arts of racecraft (such as seizing the \( \kappa \chi \rho \delta \zeta \) ); whereas Poseidon’s sphere is particularly that of the power involved, in that he can choose if he wishes to release the violence within the horses’ fiery spirit. Although this discussion surprisingly does not feature the rôle of Poseidon in the Hippolytus as such, its findings from other sources have important implications for that play. The fact that it is Poseidon who sends the agents of the hero’s destruction suggests that Hippolytus’s death represents the defeat of human desire for exercising control by that which both can not and should not be controlled. This implies that Man’s desire for exercising control and his belief in its possibility go beyond the bounds of what is compatible with the nature of reality. This is not unlike the defeat in Medea of Jason’s carefully premeditated plan (confidently backed with cool, sophistical argument) by the irrational unpredictability and sheer violence of Medea’s counterplan.

Believing one is in control is dangerous, just as believing that one knows all the answers is dangerous; it is flouting the nature of reality. Hence the need for flexible, receptive wisdom to counterbalance the human drive to gain control by forging one’s own personal path in defiance of externals. Haemon’s likening of his father (L.715-7) to a sailor who courts disaster by refusing to slacken his sail when necessary expresses the lack of this balance all the more effectively by virtue of being a path-finding image.
Qoheleth's warnings not to "make straight" what is in fact "crooked" seem very much in the mould of exactly this type of path-making and goal-seeking wisdom. Nevertheless, there are arresting qualitative differences between Qoheleth and other examples of this genre. The fact that the crooked is crooked not fortuitously but by divine design adds lustre to the racecraft of reverence which aims to accommodate itself to the twists and turns. The fact that the purpose of this divine design is to conceal the future (7:14) and withhold total comprehension of events (8:17) challenges effectively many simplistic preconceptions about the purpose of wisdom (e.g., that it is merely for attaining maximum knowledge, or gaining maximum ability to manipulate events to encompass one's self-chosen aims).

In seeing the nature of reality as ordained by God to preclude easy, direct routes to human goal-attainment without reference to Him, the book implies an intrinsic connection between realism and reverence, practicality and piety which reflects God as the ultimate strategist: a very attractive picture of Him to the 'wise' type of goal-seeking strategist the author aims to convert to piety. It transcends other books on goal-seeking wisdom by challenging the very concept of goal-seeking itself. So indeed does tragedy; but Hebrew wisdom literature does not usually pose this challenge so directly or so boldly, since it is more concerned with human goal-seeking

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It is set at the heart of L.705-23's plea for flexibility as a stubborn instance of intractable goal-seeking (or more exactly, of attempting to over-control) which utterly flouts this very principle. Compare L.705-11's reference to thinking only oneself could possibly be right or wise and refusing to be influenced by others with Theogn. 221 ff., Qoh. 4:13, and Job 12:1-3. Also, compare L.723 with Hes. Op., L.295, which implies delicately that although innate wisdom without need for advice would be the best wisdom of all if it were possible, nevertheless since is hardly very likely to happen, we must bear in mind that willingness to listen to others is the next best thing.

140 Neither conceptually mistake for straight nor actually treat as if straight; see above, Chapter 6, Section iii.
(and correspondingly less concerned with the numinous) than is tragedy.

In the final analysis, Qoheleth does not reject goal-seeking; rather, he designs the imagery and structure of the book to evoke goal-seeking (because the world the book reflects is so imbued with it), in order to challenge us about what wisdom really is, and particularly about whether wisdom's definition and intrinsic worth are purely dependent on whether or not wisdom is the ultimate tool in goal-seeking. Goal-seeking emerges as legitimate in its place and within modest bounds; and the ability to pursue the perfect line is seen as a genuine skill. Yet both are impossible if the true, twisted nature of the course is not correctly discerned at the outset.

Furthermore, frustration is inevitable if the divine purpose behind the twists and the obstacles is not recognized as more important than attaining the goals in question. For receptivity to the divine, with its accompanying numinous awe and obedience to divine commandments (the 'fear of God'), is the ultimate skill the entire circuit of life is designed to cultivate. This is 12:13's "whole of Man". This receptivity to the Divine Presence is hence more important than winning the races (i.e., attaining the self-chosen goals). For the coming judgment, which is the book's parting shot (12:14) will not be judgment of whether one attained one's goal (of wealth, control, etc.), but rather of whether each deed is "good or evil". Hence the goals in pursuit of which we perform these good or evil deeds are merely incidental; the important thing is the goodness or wickedness of the deeds.
KAIPOΣ AND THE ART OF THE CHARIOTEER.

Even before the direct reference in 9:11 to ‘chance’ as the limiting, counterbalancing factor as against ‘time’, it is clear from the ‘times’ passage of 3:1-17, especially vv 1-8, that there is some counterbalancing element to the opportunities the ‘times’ present. For although in theory Man’s opportunities for manipulation might be regarded as boundless, these ‘times’ are arranged in pairs of opposites. On the one hand, admittedly, this implies that no particular activity is ruled out per se, so that the whole spectrum of possibility between the two poles represented by the two opposites of each pair is available. Also, the activities over which we seem to have little or no choice (birth and death) are in the minority. On the other hand, however, the arrangement in opposites implies limitation, since for a particular individual the exact ΝΥ / κατρᾶζ for a particular activity, however voluntary that activity in itself may be, can not also be the exact ΝΥ / κατρᾶζ for its precise opposite. 141

Before 9:11’s direct reference to ‘chance’, 142 therefore, we already see that there is a divinely appointed limit to Man’s choices. God has ordained experience in such a way that Man has to cultivate the skill of exploiting the ΝΥ / κατρᾶζ, an art entailing the utmost intuitive alertness to entities completely external to himself and his own personal goals. For without this art he is not capable of doing the right thing,

141 This inevitably implies also that if one mistakes the opportune time for a particular activity or purpose as the time for its opposite, then inevitably one’s efforts will be counter-productive.

142 Presumably even the limit imposed by the mutual exclusivity of the opposite ‘times’ would not be operative without chance; but even if chance is implicit in 3:1-8, it is not explicitly mentioned until 9:11.
even from the most anthropocentric and self-oriented of viewpoints.

This art is pre-eminently that of the charioteer, as Greek literature makes especially clear. This is probably because the charioteer is more than just a path-maker; he personifies the path-maker essentially under the pressure of a supreme challenge. He combines most fully the rôle of the staunch and skilful path-finder with that of competitor (hunter, warrior or athlete). He competes not only against the impersonal elements, with their innate ‘crookedness’ away from his purpose, but also against other human beings endowed with cunning comparable to his. The charioteer seeking the perfect line around a twisting circuit, using his wisdom to devise the path which best accommodates the features peculiar to that circuit, is like the path-steering helmsman maintaining his course despite both the inscrutability of the pathless sea and the active opposition of the adverse winds and other elements. However, he faces in addition the challenge common to all competitive athletes, whether obvious racers (and hence also path-steerers) such as sprinters, or whether non-racing athletes (such as wrestlers), who are not path-steerers in any obvious sense. For any athlete, the hidden opponent of unpredictability, inherent to some extent in all endeavour, is multiplied almost to infinity by the fact that he is in direct and conscious competition with other people, and hence also with the ἱκανοδος-exploiting skills of others.

Furthermore, the charioteer has to control not only his own body, but also his vehicle and the horses which draw it; he has not one rival for victory, but several; and his race is long and subtle, presenting a prolonged challenge to strength, patience, alertness, endurance and critical judgment. His race (unlike the short race of a
sprinter) unfolds in a long series of laps, which superficially are merely a series of repetitions of the same circuit, but which in reality are not, since circumstances and conditions vary from lap to lap. 

The repeated circuit, although the same spatially, is not the same tactically, since the strategy required to traverse it successfully varies considerably and unpredictably from lap to lap. The charioteer, then, is not just a path-maker or path-steerer, but the ultimate path-steerer facing a unique subtlety and intensity of challenge. In his hands, therefore, the art of exploiting καιρός reaches its highest level.

In *Isthmian II*, L.22 Pindar particularly praises Nicomachus for his skill in giving his chariot-horses their heads "κατά καιρόν", at the perfect moment. Antilochus’s triumph by a ruse over his rivals’ undeniably faster horses (*Il. XXIII, L.309-11*) is attributed explicitly (L.311-19) to the general quality of μὴτες. But implicitly and more particularly it is ascribed to exploitation of the καιρός. When Antilochus urges his horses to run their fastest (L.414) as their part in the endeavour, and then promises them, as if in complement, to use his skill to slip past their rivals, he concludes pregnantly (L.416),

"οὐδὲ μὲ λήσει",

"and it shall not escape me",

the obvious unexpressed subject being an implied καιρός. Καιρός plays a similarly

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143 Notice the crucial new factor introduced on the seventh lap in Soph. *Elec. L.726*; also the poignant reference (L. 741-2) to how successfully Orestes had traversed all the other laps until he attempted his last fatal turn (L.743 ff.). See also Pindar’s praise for the charioteer in *Pyth. V* who has managed to drive Arcesilas’ chariot unscathed to victory through all twelve laps (L.32-3 / 41-2), even though forty other chariots were wrecked in the course of the race, (L.L.49-51 / 65-7). The ability to adapt to and remain unshaken by the rapidly changing conditions as lap succeeds to lap is of paramount importance.
crucial rôle in Antimachus fr. 32 (Wyss) 144. Here, the two divine horses in Adrastus’s perfect chariot team are Areion (signifying natural excellence) and Kairos, implying that element of racecraft which at least complements if not transcends natural excellence or advantage: the all-important ability to seize the opportune moment. Detienne and Vernant (op. cit., P.16) interpret Antimachus of Colophon’s symbolism here as meaning that

"Having the swiftest horses is not enough; one must know how to spur them on at the decisive moment.",

When, therefore, Qoheleth’s main and unmistakably direct reference to racing appears in 9:11,

"The race is not always to the swift",
it comes as no surprise. Chapter 3:1-8 has already shown his acceptance of the καρπός as a decisive factor in determining the rightness of an action. So in view of the longstanding, intimate connexion between καρπός and racecraft, and the general recognition that perfect exploitation of the καρπός is the characteristic skill of the charioteer above all others, 145 Qoheleth’s use of racing as the first element of 9:11’s quadruple proverb is the most natural choice possible. The notion of a race is strongly implied throughout the book, by vocabulary and imagery, by the lapped structure of the opening sections, by insistence on the cyclical nature of experience, etc. 146. It

144 Cited by Pausanias, VIII,25,9. In this passage, the same partnership between natural speed / advantage on the one hand and on the other hand ability to seize the καρπός is expressed by an implied complementarity between two horses, instead of by a complementarity between horses and driver as in the case of Antilochus’s exhortation in Il. XXIII.

145 See also APPENDIX FOUR, ΚΑΡΠΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’S ELECTRA, and APPENDIX FIVE, QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR’S ISTMIAN ODE 4.

146 See this Chapter, above, Section ii and below, Section vii.

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would indeed be surprising, therefore, if the notion of a race, the very motif so consistently implicit throughout the book, were at no point made explicit. Moreover, if as seems likely, the model for Qoh. 9:11 is Pindar's *Isthmian Ode IV*, with its conjoined associations of chariot-lore and warfare, the type of racing implied in 9:11 could only be chariot-racing. 147

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147 See APPENDIX FIVE, QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR'S ISTHMIAN ODE IV.
vi THE RACE IS NOT ALWAYS TO THE SWIFT.

The proverb of Qoh. 9:11,

"The race is not always to the swift",
as the first element of a fivefold proverb, heads a list of examples where the outcome of the time / chance interaction overrules natural advantages like speed and strength. The first two elements of the saying lull the listener / reader into a false security of expectation; we think this is merely a re-statement of the familiar principle that the mind, by its attitude or by its cleverness, influences outcomes far more potently than merely physical advantage or disadvantage is capable of influencing them. Hence, skill / wisdom can triumph over the limitations imposed on the individual by physical disadvantage.

The beginning of Qoh. 9:11, therefore, reminds us of Aesop’s tortoise winning the race because the hare’s over-confidence in its natural speed-advantage made it careless instead of tactically alert. It is similarly in line with the trickery of Antilochus in II. XXIII triumphing over the undoubtedly swifter horses of his rival. It also recalls the proverb ¹⁴⁸ of Od. VIII, Ll.329,

"κικλέει τοι βροδος δικυν",

"The slow catches the swift".


"Χω βροδος δεν εβεβουλος ξελεν τοχιν δενδρα διπςων,
Κοφει, σφιν ευθεθη θεουν δεικη διανωταν".

"Even the slow, with good counsel, catches up the swift, Cymus, through the straight judgment of the immortal gods."

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In this *Odyssey* passage, much is made of the fact that Hephaestus, for all his slowness (L.330) and lameness (L.332), has caught Ares (L.330), despite the latter's outstanding swiftness (L.331). Tellingly, the line (331) devoted to Ares's swiftness is completely encompassed by the lines (330 & 332) referring to Hephaestus and his disabilities, as if the lame god himself is now identified with the all-encompassing net he has cleverly designed to trap his rival. Once again, it is the triumph of mind, in this case by its cunning (τέχνης, L.332), over mere physical advantage.

The proverb of *Qoh*. 9:11, however, soon proves itself a true anti-mashal. 

For after its first two elements, it startlingly ventures forth beyond this familiar

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149 This is James G. Williams' term, in *Those Who Ponder Proverbs* (Sheffield, 1981), for this type of proverb, which proceeds not to its expected conclusion, but rather to an unexpected one. Robert Alter (op. cit., P.170) comments on this term, "Embedded in the prose of *Ecclesiastes* are occasional versified proverbs, or even short sequences of versified proverbs, and each of these proves to be, as James Williams aptly calls it, an 'anti-mashal'. - The conventional simile of the conventional-sounding first verset - is - wrenched around by the stark assertion of the second verset. More typically, the antiproverbs use no figurative language and instead stress the point for point reversal of traditional wisdom-utterances:

*For the more the wisdom, the more vexation;*

*Who gets more knowledge gets more pain* (1:8);

*Sometimes the righteous perishes in his righteousness,*

*While the wicked lives on in his wickedness* (7:15).

However, the anti-mashal can be used to expand conventional wisdom rather than flatly to contradict it. The foiling of the reader's expectation is then intended to lead him on to new thoughts on an old subject (see following footnote). The entire book of *Qoheleth* is a protracted exercise in arousing expectations and then introducing the reader to a new perspective on the subject by not proceeding to the expected conclusion, as Edwin Good rightly notes in "The Unfilled Sea", ap. Gammie, *Israelite Wisdom*, Pp.59-73. Since Qoheleth is a highly allusive writer (see above, Chapter 5, Sections v and ix, on his intertextuality with *I Samuel* and *Job* respectively) his reason for this is probably not to express mere dissatisfaction with previous wisdom. It is more likely that his aim is to *use* old wisdom (whether by disagreeing with it or whether by building on a basic agreement with it) as a launching pad to new wisdom. For manipulating subtle, pre-existing concepts into a new form, the most effective shorthand of all is indeed allusion: invocation of already-familiar ideas, associations and even clusters of associations by one single motif, and their development in new directions simply by combining the motif representing them with another such pregnant motif, one which is just as familiar in itself but which has never been combined or associated with them before. If Qoheleth's main concern with previous wisdom is to use it allusively as a code in which to compose a new message, he is understandably not concerned as to whether his allusion is positive or negative. This helps to explain why he seems sometimes to agree and sometimes to disagree even with the same author / editor. See Ranston, op. cit., P.67 for similarities with Hesiod followed by an apparent disagreement; cf. Ibid., P.40-42 for instances of sharp difference between Theognis and Qoheleth, although Pp.13-57 deal chiefly with their apparent points of agreement.

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territory, in the lines:

"nor does food come to the wise,  
nor wealth to the brilliant,  
nor favour to the learned;  
but time and chance happen to them all."

Here, then, the time / chance interaction \(^{150}\) supersedes not only merely physical factors like speed and strength, but even wisdom and knowledge themselves. For even wisdom simply in itself (i.e., when considered independently of the time / chance interaction) can no more ensure success than speed or strength simply in themselves.

Naturally, wisdom does not have to be separated from the time / chance interaction. It is not impossible, as 8:5 \& 6 show, for wisdom to discern the 'time' (\(\Pi\nu / \kappa\alpha\iota\rho\delta\varsigma\)) and exploit it correctly. Understanding and manipulating the \(\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\delta\varsigma\)-factor is a recognized element of wisdom, and we are well accustomed to the idea of the wise driver or helmsman foreseeing the exact moment for a manoeuvre and seizing

\(^{150}\)According to Williams (op. cit., P.68), the function of an anti-mashal is to convey, by the starkness of the paradox it expresses, the writer's  
"doubt regarding the capacity of certain received symbols and doctrines to represent reality". However, Qoheleth's purpose here goes further than merely showing his dissatisfaction with received wisdom about the triumph of Mind over natural disadvantage. He wishes to point out not only that wisdom is not the ultimately decisive factor in determining outcomes, but also that the time / chance interaction is. In point of fact, he is far from denying that the mind and wisdom are capable of significantly influencing outcomes (2:14a; 8:1, 5 \& 6; 9:13-16a, 17 \& 18). The purpose of the anti-mashal in Qoheleth is not primarily to debunk the tradition of rating wisdom highly, since as far as it goes, that tradition is justifiable. It is rather to point beyond this traditionally lauded factor of calculation and planning (even though, as 9:15 shows, predictive planning is indeed an important aspect of wisdom) to another principle which overrules even that. (See also below, this Chapter, Section vii, for the importance in racecraft of distinguishing between what can be predicted and what can not).

Qoheleth makes very clear that the overruling factor to which he is pointing here is the time / chance interaction, since this is the unmistakable climax and parting shot of 9:11. As with 3:17, which points to a climactic 'time' of divine judgment beyond the apparent climax of the 'times' passage in 3:8, so in 9:11 'time and chance' is introduced as a factor even more decisive in influencing outcomes than wise planning simply in itself, even though wisdom (especially in its pre-planning, calculating aspect) is often lauded by wisdom writers in such supreme terms that they presumably take wisdom itself as the ultimate decisive factor. As usual, Qoheleth is pointing to a new horizon of perception beyond the previous 'horizon'.

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the καρδία perfectly. Yet 9:12 interrupts the expected celebration of this very skill by warning us abruptly of the καρδία we do not foresee, so that instead of us seizing the הЉ, the הادية seize us. It thus becomes a net which catches us, and a cruel net:

"אָני יָרֵא הַרְעָה - מָצֵא רְעָה רְעָה".

This is a particularly apt symbol since מַחְלָש, the receptive wisdom which alone is capable of exploiting the καρδία, is also the wisdom most typical of those who use nets, i.e., of hunters and fishermen (see Detienne and Vernant, op. cit., Pp.30-4 and 43-6). Since seizing the καρδία is the epitome of human subtlety, 9:12’s picture of the καρδία turning the tables on those who would seek to seize it is a startling demonstration that the divinely-ordained external reality is too subtle for Man, even for the subtlety of Man. \(^\text{151}\)

Qoheleth’s use here of an anti-mashal, a proverb whose end points us in a different direction from what its beginning led us to expect, is particularly graphic because it parallels structurally the phenomenon he is describing. The reader fails to foresee where Qoheleth is leading him because the proverb begins with what he thinks he knows, and then by an unexpected twist leads him to consider instead the crucial importance of what he does not know. It is often the fact that a man does not recognize ‘his time’ or his critical moment (ñana) which has the most decisive effect on his fate. In saying how wisdom often does not save us, because the ‘time’ becomes our destructive enemy through our failure to recognize it, Qoheleth is already interrupting his proverb from a direct path to its normal climax, which would be a celebration of the power of wisdom to save us. Instead of proceeding to the expected

\(^{151}\text{Cf. Ps. 18:26.}\)
certainty, he dwells instead on the threatening reality of uncertainty, the area of the unexpected, where wisdom does not save.

Furthermore, not content with this, Qoheleth surprises us yet again by another deviation, not only from the path of normative wisdom, but even from his own previous drift. In 9:13-15b he takes another unexpected turning and shows that sometimes wisdom is equal to the challenge presented by some crisis, and actually does save us. Then, with yet another startling twist, he points out that even in such a situation, this saving wisdom may not be appreciated (9:15c & 16), and its effects (9:16a, 17 & 18a), though genuinely valuable, may be undermined, so that the gains of wisdom are reduced to zero again (9:18b). Qoheleth, far from taking issue with the traditional positive evaluation of wisdom, wholeheartedly agrees with it, but sees nothing inconsistent about coupling positive evaluation of wisdom with recognition of its limitations (cf. the contrast between 9:16a and 9:16b or between 9:17-18a and 9:18b with the contrast between 2:13-14a and 2:14b). Qoheleth's belief that

"Wisdom is better than strength"
(9:16a), however sincere, is not his main point. His climactic point is rather that the effects of wisdom's genuine excellence can be neutralized by counterbalancing negative factors inherent in the human condition.

In Qoh. 9:11, therefore, the proverb

"The race is not always to the swift"

\footnote{See also below, Appendix Five.}
is not, after all, the simple affirmation of wisdom’s superiority to physical advantage, the straightforward triumph of the \( \mu \nu \tau \alpha \zeta \) of Antiochus or the \( \tau \varepsilon \chi \nu \alpha \) of Hephaistus over the superior swiftness of their adversaries. In short, it is not a celebration of human goal-seeking, glorifying the strategy by which men overcome the obstacles nature puts in their path to their goals. The proverb is rather, in this context, a signpost to the very nature of reality itself, to the subtle crookedness of the overall human situation, which is the circuit round which we have to plot the route to our goals. For despite the genuine perception behind

"Wisdom is better than strength",

the traditional gnome of 9:16a, there are nevertheless further insights beyond that insight. Qoheleth shifts the emphasis from the ideal line or proper path to one’s goal (which is the emphasis of Proverbs and Wisdom-Psalms) to the nature of the circuit around which the path must be plotted. For without a thorough knowledge of the crooked nature of the circuit, the path plotted will not be realistic.

One may wonder why Qoheleth is at such pains to keep his readers or hearers alert, constantly taking unforeseeable turns to frustrate their expectations. This may, however, be a deliberate attempt to instil in his disciples the very quality of alertness he advocates: the reactive alertness of the charioteer. His aim is that they should cultivate expectation of the unexpected, readiness to react to the unforeseeable. For without this they will never succeed in the life of pious wisdom, so demanding a circuit is the human condition. The more one scrutinizes the circuit of life, the more

\[153\] Even though 9:16a boldly refers to the very principle we expected it to affirm, this principle has clearly been reduced to the status of an issue subsidiary to the main point.
one realizes that its twists and turns are in fact beyond all prediction, and that beyond every subtlety there is always the possibility of a further subtlety.

One example of just such a ‘further subtlety’ concerns the reason why
"The race is not always to the swift".

The art of deliberately holding back, and not running or driving as fast as one could, can itself be a tactical ploy. A win is still a win, whether it is by a large margin or by a small one. Therefore, there are many advantages in aiming to win deliberately by a small margin in conscious preference to aiming to win by a large one. It gives more scope for conserving oneself and one’s equipment; so it maximizes one’s control of the situation and minimizes the risk of accidents and hence of not finishing at all. It also avoids unnecessarily galvanizing one’s opponents into stretching themselves to their maximum potential speed, thereby reducing the risk of them going faster than one can possibly beat.

This recognition is a sophistication of racecraft which presents the fact that
"The race is not always to the swift"
from a new angle. It represents an advance beyond the traditional slant of the same proverb. The old version was that relative slowness is simply a natural disadvantage, and that the glory of wisdom, i.e., that which makes it "better than strength" (Qoh.

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154 The crucial importance in racing of holding back when necessary and of not putting mere speed too high on the list of priorities is reflected in Soph. Electra, when first the Athenian charioteer (L1.731-3) and then Orestes (L1.734-5) are said to have held back successfully to avoid a multiple accident. The accident was caused by the Aenian's horses colliding with the Barcaean chariot on the seventh lap (L1.725-7). The other drivers did not succeed in avoiding the crash; and at L1.736-40, the fact that Orestes is no longer holding himself back contributes, by implication, to the intensified competitive excitement that leads to his fatal mistake at the turning-post.
9:16), is that it devises tactics which effectively overcome this natural disadvantage. Yet this truth is strictly limited. Even this time-honoured trump card of the Wise Men is not the key to Zimmerli’s forbidden ‘comprehensive art of life’. It is a highly treasured axiom of wisdom’s advocates; but it still does not constitute an effectually exploitative grasp of total reality.

The proverb of *Qoh*. 9:11, however, comes closer to such a comprehensive strategic trump-card. It recognizes that there is a special type of slowness which is not a fortuitous disadvantage but a deliberate tactic. The ‘slowness’ of disciplined self-restraint can play a decisively effectual rôle, even in the very context of assertive, competitive goal-seeking. This is a far cry from the passive ‘rôle’ of slowness in conventional wisdom: that of a mere natural disadvantage for tactical wisdom to overcome. *Qoh*. 9:11 is surely hinting at that specifically calculated, relative slowness which can actually constitute one’s tactical wisdom in itself. For this type of ‘slowness’ is intimately related to correct discernment and exploitation of καιρός, since there is a correct time to put on the crucial spurt of speed that wins the race, but there is also a correct time to hold back from full speed. Furthermore, the fact that all accomplishment, including successful racecraft, is subject to the interaction of καιρός and τόχη ¹⁵⁵ is the climactic and explanatory point of this very proverb:

“For time and chance happen to them all”.

¹⁵⁵ The multiple crash of Soph. *Elect*. L1.723-30 furnishes examples of this crucial interaction. For the initial collision (L1.725-7), although in itself an unforeseeable τόχη, leads directly to the drivers being confronted with the opposite half of the τόχη / καιρός antithesis: a critical moment which tests their ability to react appropriately. This moment is both opportunity and challenge. Not only does it allow them to react; it demands of them that they react. The Athenian (L1.731-3) and at first Orestes (L1.734-5) exploit this crisis to their advantage; but the same crisis overthrows the other drivers. This is one example of the type of experience referred to in *Qoh*. 9:12, when times of crisis catch people in their nets.
The proverb of *Qoh*. 9:11, then, is an anti-mashal typical of Qoheleth’s unique and teasing approach, illustrating an aspect of wisdom beyond traditional wisdom. Like finding the perfect (i.e., ‘straightest’) line on a twisting circuit, mastering this art of calculated restraint from one’s full potential speed is essential to racecraft. Together, they constitute its major twin interactive skills: the former the skill of receptiveness to the external details of the circuit, and the latter that of receptiveness to the equally detailed externality of one’s fellow-competitors. Mastering this latter skill of restraint, of holding back until the crucial spurt at the exactly right moment (Pindar’s "κατά κατάραν") requires a truly rare degree of self-assurance and self-control in a driver, as well as an exceptionally penetrating grasp of the overall race-situation. 156

It is probably because this deliberate, tactical ‘slowness’ is thus recognized as a supreme challenge of racecraft, coupled with the fact that it is also a product primarily of the responsive / receptive aspect of intelligence, that Qoheleth chooses to place it (as the implied concept behind the words "The race is not always to the swift"), at the beginning of his fivefold proverb at 9:11. One should view this calculated slowness of conscious strategy not as a natural disadvantage for assertive wisdom to overcome, but rather as the defence of receptive, interactive wisdom against the

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156 For the rarity of this ability, see, e.g., Hilton, Christopher, *Alain Prost* (London, 1992), P.72: "Staying his hand? You see that for what it is, and it is threefold. First you have the actual confidence to do it, second you guard the element of surprise so they will never know what hit them, especially since they didn’t see it coming. You didn’t let them. Third you have already learnt the most significant lesson in all motor-racing: you extract the maximum without stretching your machine or yourself a single fraction beyond what you need to. Not one in a thousand can.".
danger of under-rating the 'chance' factor, and hence of being overthrown by the 'time' instead of riding it out by adapting to it. \(^{157}\)

Consistent demonstration of this ability in racing is so unusual that it continues to excite wonder even to this day, presumably because a perfect balance between

\(^{157}\)This is probably the best explanation of Qoheleth's anti-revolutionary sentiment in 8:2-4 (and hence by implication also those in 10:4 & 20). For the following verses (8:5 & 6) argue vehemently for adaptability rather than resistance to an unpredictable force, and for adaptability on the basis of correct discernment of the 'times' and hence of the 'procedures' appropriate to them.

No other explanation of Qoheleth's anti-revolutionary statements is really satisfactory. They cannot be explained by any particular enthusiasm for kingship as such (though see below, Chapter 10, Section vii for the fact that receptive interaction is no less his priority when dealing with kings than it is when dealing with anyone else). This is clear not only from Qoheleth's ironical use of the Solomon-antitype but also from his recognition of the ethical and practical problems involved in kingship (4:13-16; 10:5-7). Neither can they stem from favouritism of privilege or from lack of concern about the inequalities within society. For, as Ranston rightly says (op. cit. P.41, referring to 3:16, 4:1 and 7:2 ff.), he allows the spectacle of oppression to undermine his own happiness. See also above, Chapter 8, Section iii for Qoheleth's concept of socially responsible reciprocity of good deeds; and note the plaintive repetition of "And they have no comforter" in 4:1. Dissatisfaction with society may well be his chief motivation for becoming a popular teacher (12:9) rather than an elitist one. See below, Chapter 10, Sections i and v and Appendix Three; cf. above, Chapter 1, Section iv and Chapter 7, Section iii.

Qoheleth's reference to the oath taken to the King may seem at first sight to be an important factor in his anti-revolutionary views, since he gives that some emphasis (8:2). Nevertheless, if this 'oath' is a deliberate literary echo of Theognis 823-4 (as Ranston suggests, op. cit., P.37-8), rather than just a literal feature of monarchy as Qoheleth knows it, then its main significance is likelier to be allusive rather than strictly political. It is probably not a topical pronouncement on the spiritual status of kingship in Qoheleth's own day, nor a statement of his own contemporaries' moral obligations to their kings, but is perhaps a reference to one of the concerns that he and the Greek wisdom writer have in common. Theognis in general complains bitterly about reversals of fortune through revolutions; and Qoheleth's allusion may be to demonstrate that he sympathizes with such pain; therefore, he recommends minimizing the probabilities of this type of disruption by paying due regard to the rôle of 'time and chance'. He is warning us not to underrate their influence in determining outcomes, since only by being forewarned can one be forearmed, either against taking foolish risks (8:3-5), or against unnecessary fears (10:4). A morally alert adaptability, the key to correct exploitation of the 'times', is hence also the key to survival without compromise. It is this survival which most concerns Qoheleth in 8:2, rather than primarily ethical ideals about kingship as such, despite the genuinely moral content in the reference to an 'oath'.

It is worth noting that the couplet of Theognis which Qoheleth seems to be evoking in this verse is itself a careful balance between two extremes. First we are warned not to advance a man to kingship (or not to exalt a king) irresponsibly through greed for gain (L.823); and only then (L.824) are we told not to betray him once we are under oath to him before the gods either (cf. the unsatisfactory inconsistency described in Qoh. 4:14-16). Theognis is not, therefore, arguing for devotion to kings as such, but rather for basic decency, honesty, respect for the gods and the good sense to avoid risky political adventures. It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that Qoheleth's apparent adaptation of Theognis's 'oath before the gods' to a king does not imply any more devotion to kings as such than Theognis's original use of the same idea himself.
assertive, goal-seeking intelligence and receptive, intuitive intelligence is no less exceptional now than it was in Qoheleth’s time. Not only is it hard to attain by those seeking it, but it is also surprisingly rarely recognized, valued and sought after in the first place. As in antiquity it was supremely the art of the charioteer, so now it seems to be primarily in motorsport that its importance is recognized and discussed. An experienced instructor of racing drivers 158 expresses near incredulity at Prost’s early ability, as a young man facing a uniquely crucial challenge, to

" -not squeeze to the maximum because he felt he didn’t need to. - I’ve never known anyone else hold back like that, no."

There is nothing inherently surprising about Lautour’s level of amazement at finding such calculating self-discipline in one of his students, instead of the usual

" -carousel of mindless acceleration"

which he has found to be more typical of the young men in his charge. For, as the flawed charioteer Antilochus himself admits, the μητίς of young men in a race-situation is notoriously inadequate. 159

However, despite Antilochus’s tactful appeal to his youth as the cause of his offence, the more exact cause of this type of problem in racecraft is a lack of balance

158 Simon de Lautour, ap. Hilton, op. cit., P.71. Cf. Ibid., P.227, with the same driver’s lead under threat from Alboreto (Monaco Grand Prix, 19/05/85):

"Prost had the boost turned firmly down to conserve the car - and it rained. Both drivers decided to settle for what they had, Prost crossing the line 7.541 seconds ahead. Prost’s insight: I had to be patient, which was difficult because it is not one of my natural characteristics. I knew I had to bide my time, I knew I had to wait and I did wait."

159 l. XXIII, L.590,

" -λεπτή δε τε μητίς",

"Their cunning is lightweight".

There is a genuine calculating intelligence (μητίς) already operating in the young driver, but it has not yet attained the stability that will come with maturity. Antilochus pleads that this is why his racing strategy was so flawed.
between the assertive and receptive aspects of wisdom; and such balance in an individual may or may not (Qoh. 4:13) improve with age. The rarity of the ability (so highly praised by Lautour above) to refrain where desirable from full potential speed is a prime example of just such a typical problem in racecraft. This ability is rare because the lack of assertive/receptive balance in human wisdom is the norm. This in turn is largely because of the emotional intensity of the self-absorbed goal-seeking instinct in Man. This is the instinct which, when unrestrained by the receptive, interactive aspect of wisdom, can lead to hybris; and failure to restrain this same drive is also the root of antipietist wisdom theory.

The pseudo-chariot-race in Sophocles's Electra furnishes an arresting illustration of this disproportionate intensity. Even though the Athenian charioteer

\[\text{[\text{160} \text{Detienne and Vernant (op. cit., P. 16) shrewdly attribute Antilochus's ruse (with its lack of "weighty reflection") not to his youth alone, but directly to being "Carried away by his desire to win". Although Antilochus may be right in representing youth as the cause in his particular case, this ploy of overtaking by intimidation is in general a problem of human self-assertion beyond the proper bounds, not simply a problem of immaturity as such. It can affect any age-group in one way or another, and is strictly speaking an abuse of wisdom. For it involves calculation, but unjustifiable calculation on a morally unstable basis.\]]\]

In a non-racing context, one obvious example of this excessive over-assertiveness (i.e., resistance to receptivity) is refusal to listen to advice. Qoh. 4:13, like Antig. L1.701-65, attributes this type of foolishness to an old king, not to a young charioteer. Yet in terms of wisdom-theory, it is essentially the same fault: that of blindness to externals and to other people's rights or viewpoints because of absorption in one's own personal goal or interpretation. This is why Antilochus redeems himself so completely by his willingness to listen to Menelaus' protest after the race, and to acknowledge that he is right after all. This represents a very significant change of heart, and Menelaus' gracious response shows that he realizes as much. By selecting an old man to demonstrate the same fault, however, both Qoheleth and Sophocles are issuing a warning signal. One would expect an old man to have had time to learn that inflexibility is dangerous; therefore, if he has not learnt this already, the implication is that he must be unwilling to learn it, and therefore never will.

\[\text{[\text{161} \text{Ironically, it is in racecraft, ostensibly the most extreme expression of human path-plotting and goal-seeking, that the counter-productiveness of self-absorption is most mercilessly exposed. For it is here that the blinkered urge to proceed 'straight' to the personal objective of one's own internal will clashes most dangerously and most dramatically with a plenitude of unpredictable externals.}\]]\]
(731-3) and Orestes (734-5) both successfully hold back to avoid a multiple accident, yet Orestes still makes his fatal mistake at the turning-post (736-40). It seems that finding himself and the Athenian the only real contenders left makes the urge to go all out against his rival a higher priority for Orestes than the careful selection of the tactically ideal moment (καιρός) for this final spurt. One could argue, therefore, that Orestes is here represented as making the cardinal error for a charioteer, by letting his desire to attain his own goal override his sensitivity to externals and hence to the all-important καιρός.\(^{162}\) The messenger seems to imply that because the breathtaking excitement of the neck and neck, one to one competition with the Athenian suddenly emerges out of the previous mêlée, Orestes ceases to stay his hand; and it is from this error, according to the fiction of the messenger-speech, that he proceeds straight to his alleged doom in the racing accident. Yet, up until then, he has succeeded in holding back (L.734, 741-2); this is how, like the Athenian driver, he avoids the earlier multiple accident of L.724-30.

The implication that Orestes is suddenly unable to maintain his previous coolness, and this is why he makes the fatal error at the turning point (L.743-5), underlines poignantly how difficult an art it is to hold back until exactly the right moment. It requires the utmost receptive intelligence to intuit the total situation in which one is operating. Maintaining this receptivity unwaveringly despite the fluctuations of circumstance is a key element in the self discipline essential to success.

\(^{162}\) This chariot-race is therefore a highly intriguing and perhaps ironical fiction in the context of the play overall. For the real action of the play, including Orestes’s ultimate triumph against his enemies, is above all designed to challenge us (and to challenge Orestes and Electra) about καιρός. Not only does it underline the pragmatic importance of recognizing and correctly acting upon the καιρός, but it even reveals the supernatural dimension of its importance. See APPENDIX FOUR, ΚΑΙΡΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’S ELECTRA.

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A driver must not at any point allow a tunnel-vision that blinds him to everything but his own personal goal of winning to blot out any details of the shifting, unstable environment with which he must interact fully in order for his pursuit of that goal to be consistently realistic. The internal drive to win must not overrule his grasp of the external realities.

In Orestes' case, however, the sudden, sharp realization of a new, intensely one to one rivalry with the Athenian driver is represented as having thrust these crucial external details out of focus for him, as the imminent goal of a probable win, and with it the assertive aspect of his intelligence plotting toward it, came correspondingly more into focus. This is why he could no longer hold back as before. And his rivals in the same race (except the Athenian driver) could not even hold back earlier to avoid the multiple-crash. As Hilton says, 163

"Staying his hand? - Not one in a thousand can."

Qoheleth's difficulty in finding his "one in a thousand" 164 similarly derives from the weakness of people's interactive receptivity by comparison with their assertive, goal-seeking drives. 165 This imbalance undermines socio-spiritual cohesion. For it is incompatible with the nature of overall reality, which is chiefly characterized by a pattern of reciprocity that must be maintained to ensure stability

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164 7:28.

165 The wisdom Qoheleth is advocating is subtle, in that it attempts to balance the assertive aspects of endeavour with a carefully disciplined receptivity. He is not saying that God has made it impossible for anyone to succeed; but he is saying that egocentric ambition is not the road to success. In the light of this, skill in executing one's egocentric ambition is not wisdom, but rather is anti-wisdom.
and by a random element which plays a large part in determining outcomes. 166

166See below, Chapter 10, esp. Section ii on reciprocity in nature and ethics and Section iii on the element of randomness inbuilt into reality.
The reverent receptivity to God which Qoheleth enjoins in 5:1-7 includes realization of the limits of one's knowledge and predictive faculties. In this, it resembles the charioteer's alert intuition of the unforeseeably changeable circumstances of his unfolding race. It involves the same disciplined abstinence from the egocentric blindness characteristic of undiluted, unmodified goal-seeking. For over-indulging the self-assertive analytical drive which aims to calculate everything in advance would put the aspiring believer just as dangerously out of touch with the total reality of his environment as it would the charioteer.

Clear recognition of uncertainties (i.e., the ability to distinguish them from certainties) is, then, a key necessity in piety as in racecraft. Therefore, it relates closely to the skills described above in this Chapter as essential to both racecraft and piety: goal-seeking / path-steering, 167 and correct exploitation of κατάρδιος, 168 which includes the rare ability to hold back from full potential speed until the opportune moment. 169 Qoheleth seems to assume his public knows that these skills, and the recognition of uncertainties on which they depend, are necessary to racecraft.

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167 Section iv.

168 Sections iii and v.

169 Section vi.
He is using general acceptance\textsuperscript{170} of this as a basis for implying that the same skills are necessary to piety as well. It is common knowledge that the conditions of racing

"-do not lend themselves to - exact calculations", \textsuperscript{171}

or at the very least, not to exact pre-calculations. What is less often recognized, however, is that the conditions of piety do not lend themselves to exact calculations either. In a tradition of \textit{revealed} religion, \textsuperscript{172} this is far from immediately obvious; nor, in such a spiritual context, is the crucial importance of recognizing uncertainties necessarily obvious.

\textsuperscript{170}Qoheleth can safely take this general acceptance for granted because in antiquity such knowledge was difficult to survive without. For the same skills were required for the all-important practice of warfare as for racecraft; and this fact was enshrined in Greek literature. Hence the close association of racing and warfare in \textit{Qoh}. 9:11, \textit{Isth.} IV, etc. (see APPENDIX FIVE). See also \textit{Olymp.} XIII for the close association between μητης (L.50 / 70), military excellence (L.51 / 71), and the supreme tactical importance of καιρος (L.48 / 68). In L.48 / 68, the key rôle of καιρος is applied to Pindar’s sense of right timing in his poetic art by analogy with the same faculty in athletic or martial skill. The poet sees himself as a ‘contender’ (δημοσιος) in his work of praising the number of victories won by Xenophon’s family (L.43-5 / 61-3). Compare Ibid. L.93-5 / 133-5, where he pictures himself as a spearman with a great number of javelins to throw, because he has so many fine Corinthian achievements to praise. The association between military and athletic excellence is very clear, in this poem as always in Pindar’s work, despite the fact that his immediate subject is not war, but a pair of victories by the same Corinthian athlete (one of them a race, although not a chariot-race).

Our contemporary mindset, by contrast, is far from universal awareness of the basic skills of racecraft (or even necessarily of warfare), and still further from alertness to the dependence of these skills on discernment of uncertainties; for the majority’s main hopes of survival as a species are not consciously based on such skills. Nevertheless, among specialists in racecraft (and in warfare), the key importance of discerning uncertainties and distinguishing them from certainties is still recognized and discussed in modern times, as is the radical influence on outcomes exercised by unpredictability of the time-chance interaction.

Kamomoto’s particular attention to gambling was an example of this; his interest was entirely pragmatic, based on his belief that chance is under-rated (by comparison with calculation) as a factor contributing to military outcomes. In motor-racing, Senna showed a keen theoretical interest in the contribution of chance. See, e.g., Hilton, \textit{Ayrton Senna: The Legend Grows} (Sparkford, 1995), P.23,

“That night - (as) he and some of the support team sat round a table - Senna talked for a long time about chance, about the meaning and consequences of chance.”.

This same book also furnishes indirectly an arresting example of the complementary importance of καιρος in racing alongside τυχη, and the extent to which the concept of καιρος also permeates the thinking of everyone deeply involved in racecraft. For the book about Senna begins with a quotation of \textit{Qoh}. 3:1-8 (Ibid., P.6); and each chapter is named after one of the “times” specified by Qoheleth in this passage: e.g., Chapter 1, “A Time to Speak” (from v 7), and Chapter 4, “A Time to Weep” (from v 4). The overall structure of the book is thus derived from the framework of “times” in 3:1-8.

\textsuperscript{171}Detienne and Vernant, op. cit., Pp.3-4.

\textsuperscript{172}As distinct from natural religion, without claims to specific revelation.
One area of racecraft which highlights the importance of recognizing uncertainties is the danger created by the errors of others.

"It is not necessarily that you make a mistake but that you trust the judgment of somebody else too much. You can not always anticipate what the person you are passing is going to do. The irrationality of those situations is on such a scale that you can not anticipate. Because of (Prost's) level of intelligence - he has worked this out in his mind and he is able to keep himself out of trouble." 174

The intelligence commended here is not the ability to predict, but rather the ability to discern areas where one can not predict, because certainty is impossible. 176

An even more guarded attitude toward 'certainties' characterizes the same driver as regards path-steering, that highly controversial wisdom-issue (see this Chapter, Section ii) of finding the 'straightest' or most direct route possible to one's might well be forgiven for adding " -and of theology".

173 Job might well be forgiven for adding " -and of theology".
175 Although Prost is also credited with unusual foresight in circumstances where foresight is applicable (see Hilton, op. cit., Pp. 65 and 71), what Watson is praising here is his ability to recognize when it is not possible. This is both clear from the context and reinforced by the chiasmic double negative "You can not always anticipate - you can not anticipate.".
Clearly the best policy is to avoid the highest levels of unpredictability; but in order to avoid them, the driver must first recognize where they lie. In this example, Prost has recognized the judgment of the other drivers as an area of above-average unpredictability and hazard; therefore he makes a priority of cultivating the skill to avoid situations which would make him dependent on their judgment. Since this same driver manifests consistently both unusual foresight and the ability to recognize and accommodate himself to situations where foresight is not possible, he is in practical terms adept at distinguishing between certainties and uncertainties. The fact that he is adept at distinguishing between the two, even in the many demanding immediacies of this subtly and vigorously interactive context, is indicated by the fact that he habitually selects the right response for whichever of the two is confronting him in a particular situation.

This faculty of distinguishing between certainties and uncertainties, however, is very different from asserting, or even from simply believing, that nothing is ever certain. This is so both in racecraft and in piety; yet it is frequently overlooked, especially in scholarly discussion of Qoheleth. See also below, this Section.

176 Similarly, J. Wynne writes, of one of the very few drivers of comparable ability, "Michael Schumacher says his greatest talent is in knowing precisely the limits of his control."; "Back to the Front", F1 News 1996 No.2, Feb. 21st., P.50.
In this context, "the limits of his control" includes, by implication, "the limits of his ability to predict".
goal without doing violence to the nature of reality. Inevitably this entails a razor-sharp alertness. For if one’s line is not 'straight' enough, precious time is wasted; but if it is too ‘straight’, it collides with some contrary external. When taking a fast corner of a racing circuit, trying to save time by

"(making) straight what God has made crooked",

although flirting with destruction, is nevertheless an ever-present temptation. In this context, Prost is regarded as exceptional for his

" -extraordinary perception of the ideal line around a circuit". 177

Ironically, however, 178 he owes this very perception to recognizing that, in terms of foolproof theory, there is no ideal line around a circuit. At pupil level, he disagreed with his instructors because

"-there is a line, a trajectory, which is called and always called ideal. I did not take this. I braked very late and entered the corner very early. Understandably the instructors were not pleased, but the stopwatch showed that I was consistently quick.".

"I understood that there is no such thing as an ideal rule. - You feel how to drive.". 179

One instructor comments,

"Talking about the Mistral Straight, I told him which was the best line and said it could save fractions of a second. - He replied that he’d already tried various permutations on the track himself to find the best line. Himself...". 180


178 And possibly unknown to Chevrier, since he does not refer to this paradox.


In theory, then, there was a pre-calculated ideal line, a received certainty which could be taught to everyone for all racing circumstances. Yet this received certainty did not measure up to the reality of Prost's experimentation. His method, therefore, was not to trust a preconceived ideal rule, but to trust only his own "various permutations" in immediate interaction with the present realities of the circuit. This is exactly the approach of traditional μητίς. It reflects the "-many-coloured, shimmering nature of μητίς, (which) is a mark of its kinship with the divided, shifting world of multiplicity in the midst of which it operates. It is this way of conniving with reality which ensures its efficacy. Its suppleness and malleability give it the victory in domains where there are no ready-made rules for success, no established methods, but where each new trial demands the invention of new ploys, the discovery of a πόρος that is hidden.". 182

The true 'ideal line' of racecraft is an example of this type of "πόρος that is hidden". It is not a pre-calculated certainty, but rather is awaiting discovery as a fruit of μητίς in action.

In racecraft, then, it is possible to reject the concept of a theoretical ideal line without denying oneself the attainment of an ideal line in practice. In Prost's case, this is because his grasp of the ideal line is not a predictive preconception but a present experience. His alertness to the present reality as it unfolds enables him to achieve the very perfection of line which attempting to pre-calculate in isolation from the experience would prevent him from achieving. Chevrier's commendation of his "extraordinary perception of the ideal line",

though justified, might be misconstrued as unjustified if Prost's rejection of a pre-

181 A way, passage, or route; a way through or across.

182 Detienne and Vernant, op. cit., P.21.
conceived ‘ideal line’ were falsely equated with rejecting the practical possibility of an ideal line. Prost’s cynicism in regard to the ideal line is, however, more apparent than real. It is of the same order as Qoheleth’s so-called cynicism in regard to wisdom. For Qoheleth, through his challengingly ironic use of goal-seeking imagery and through his denial that wisdom is capable of grasping in advance the overall scheme of ethical reality, is certainly not denying the possibility of genuine wisdom. Rather, he is sharpening wisdom to a fine edge by reducing it to nothing but interaction with reality in the moment. For if interaction is not reduced to the present moment, we do not meaningfully interact with reality at all; and if wisdom is dealing with less than reality, it is not real wisdom.

Qoheleth’s cynicism about pretentious wisdom is therefore nothing but careful pruning of wisdom’s scope, to make real wisdom attainable. He does not even explicitly reject wisdom’s traditional image as a path-steering, goal-seeking skill; but he does reject naïve or arrogant assumptions about the goals to be sought and about the ideal line to their attainment. For these things can not be pre-calculated in advance and in egocentric isolation from external realities. They await discovery through interaction with God, with Man, and with circumstances; and this interaction can only take place in the present of experience.

The danger of over-ambitious pre-calculation inhibiting effective interaction with present external realities is closely related to the problem of verbal assertion

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183 The overall יַדְעַן of human accountability, and also of reward and punishment for one’s conduct. See, e.g., Baba Bathra, 78B.
taking the place of external reality altogether. For Man’s calculations, and indeed his words in general, can become extensions of his own personality and inner world encroaching on the rightful territory of externality. Not only does this prevent him from effectively exploiting καταράζ and attaining success, but it also blinds him to the numinous presence of the God he should revere. In addition, it prevents him from experiencing pleasure and satisfaction, which, since he is a creature akin to the animals, should be his ‘lot’ (גְּפֹל, 3:22), and which can be his experience in the context of piety (2:26, 5:20). As soon as utterance and the goals it expresses gain more foothold in Man’s mind than present reality, they supplant and in effect destroy the reality.

Qoheleth describes how this principle applies in his own personal experience. While he lives at the centre of experience in itself, he receives pleasure (2:10):

"My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labour.".

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^1^ This connexion should occasion no surprise, since conscious experience of the presence of God is closely related to pleasure anyway in Biblical literature. The language of Ps. 16:11 (cf. Pss. 36:8 and and 43:4) is not just a devotional formality, but is rooted in the tradition of a literal Eden, where the intimate accessibility of God is symbolized by a garden of pleasures. Expulsion from the garden denotes the loss of familiarity with God and hence the loss of pleasure. It also symbolizes a present and perfect reality being replaced by a future goal of godhead which has no reality. It is mere utterance (Gen. 3:5), not substance; and yet it takes the place of, and thus destroys, the reality. A mere goal replacing a present reality is explicitly denounced in Qoh. 6:9, and implicitly denounced throughout the entire book.

^2^ It is possible Qoheleth may intend the word גְּפֹל as a Hebrew equivalent to the Greek term μυοπαξ. If so, then the word would emphasize the inevitability of this aspect of the human condition, underlining that it is flouting the very nature of reality to try and escape it by setting one’s sights higher than creaturely satisfaction.

^3^ Again, he uses the word גְּפֹל, since this ‘reward’ is only normal and appropriate, and should be inevitable.
But when he turns aside from the experience itself to consideration of it, he no longer has any pleasure, which means in effect that he no longer has any reward (2:11):

"Everything was ungraspable, a chasing after the wind. Nothing was gained under the sun."

Similarly, Qoheleth’s intellectual scrutiny of his own reaction to pleasure (2:1-2) comes to nothing, as do his attempts to analyse and evaluate mentally his enjoyment of folly while still in the process of enjoying it (2:3):

"I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly - my mind still guiding me with wisdom."

As Plumptre comments, he is here trying to

"retain his self-analysing introspection even in the midst of his revelry."

Taking Gordis’s interpretation (op. cit., P.209) of 2:11’s "...מָלֵאָפָה יֶדֶמְכֶם", “I turned in order to observe”, as turning from the experience itself to the contemplation of it instead.

Ranston, op. cit., P.42, dismisses this astute observation of Plumptre’s as "hardly the point here"; but in fact it is exactly the point, and all too often overlooked. Ranston misunderstands Qoheleth’s reference to the intellectual focussing of this experiment as exactly parallel with Theognis 211-12’s recommendation of drinking "ἐπιστομήνων". But by this term, Theognis means merely "with one’s wits still about one", hence "moderately" or "without folly or riotous excess". So Ranston’s identification of Qoheleth’s "הַלֵּכֵה וּלְבָנַתי (2:3) with Theognis’ "ἐπιστομήνων" makes nonsense of Qoheleth’s key point, that "embracing folly" was essential to the experiment. Theognis’ "ἐπιστομήνων" is simply an adverb describing one’s manner of drinking; and although Qoheleth may be influenced by this passage of Theognis, he is not simply copying it. His own more elaborate expression, "הַלֵּכֵה וּלְבָנַתי", reflects, by its syntactic rôle as a contrast to the preceding clause, the writer’s conscious attempts in the past to build an artificial bridge between his actual experience and his analytical evaluation of that experience:

"I put to the test in my mind (_coupon מִנָד) the act of cheering with wine my flesh, and (with) my mind (_coupon מִנָד) leading the way (i.e., directing the experiment) through wisdom, (1)...."

Here, as often with Qoheleth, the slant of the word כְּלֵי (heart or mind, the core or centre of the individual) is intellectual, as the verb ‘put to the test’ shows. Although he sometimes uses the word כְּלֵי in the emotional sense (2:10, 5:20, 11:9, etc.), the mental sense which it carries here is very common in this book, often with verbs of application, of searching or pondering (1:13, 16 & 17, 2:3 & 15, 3:17-18, 7:25, etc.). The whole experience of enjoyment in 2:3 is represented by the word-order as trapped between the two references (_coupon מִנָד and_coupon מִנָד) to the mind evaluatively assessing that enjoyment. Such unnatural fusion of an experience with the rational analysis of that experience is, however, a contradiction. This is reflected by the word 'גרָנַף (‘grasping’) ironically linking together the words "folly" and "wisdom" in contradictory partnership within the verse:
However, trying to experience enjoyment and to analyse it intellectually both at the same time is a notoriously self-defeating practice. For it robs the subject both of his experience and of his analysis, by distancing him from the former and blurring the accuracy of the latter. This is because the analytical intellect does not engage directly with immediate reality, but surveys it from the slightly removed position of self-consciousness. This is why

"As thinkers, we are cut off from what we think about; as tasting, touching, willing, loving, hating, we do not clearly understand. The more lucidly we think, the more we are cut off; the more deeply we enter into reality, the less we can think. You cannot study Pleasure in the moment of the nuptial embrace, nor repentance while repenting, nor analyze the nature of humour while roaring with laughter."

We are forced to choose, then,

"- either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste - or, more strictly, to lack one kind of knowledge because we are in an experience or to lack another kind because we are out of it."

This oxymoronic flavour is characteristic of 2:3 overall, which reflects the writer's awareness that his approach at this earlier stage of his experience proved contradictory and hence self-defeating. The transition from flesh (ירש) to mind (לב), abrupt despite the pause on ירה, is as pointed as the paradoxical implication of using wisdom to grasp folly. This is especially so since ירה leads into the explanation of the rational quest motivating the author's irrational indulgence. This explanation rounds off the picture of the entire drinking episode as fatally netted by the mind and its analytical drive. Qoheleth's eagerness to analyse Man's Chief Good has his revelry surrounded: on one flank by his description of the experiment itself ("ירש - לבך") and on the other by a continuation of the description, including the motivation behind the experiment ("ירש - לבך").

However, although the contradictions implicit in this verse proved counterproductive in this particular experiment, this does not undermine Qoheleth's acceptance of the all-important and ethically positive rôle of opposites as such, in their reciprocally mutable inter-relationship as one set of circumstances gives way to another (see below, Chapter 10, Sections ii and iii, and esp. Section iv on 7:16-18 as compared with 2:3).


190 Ibid., p.65. This reveals the importance of uncertainty from a new angle, namely its direct relation to the possibility of pleasure. For fully conscious certainty is only attainable through reflecting on knowledge; but such knowledge actually brings grief (1:18). Even reflection in the sense of 'remembering'
It is this dilemma which lies behind Qoheleth's emphasis on pursuit versusSELF, or goal-chasing versus the unattainability of the goal. For as an ardent pursuer of intellectual understanding, he knows from experience that his quarry can not be grasped (8:17). Moreover, he also knows why. It is the self-conscious, essentially verbalized reasoning of the thinker which causes his prey to elude his grasp. This is the meaning of 1:8's teasing

"כל - ורברים קפעים",
"All things / words are wearisome".

At first sight (or hearing), "כל - ורברים" could mean "all deeds", the sum-total of human endeavour. The next clause, however,

"ל - רבר אשי לברר",
"A man is not able to utter (them)",
implies that the real meaning of "כל - ורברים" is "all utterance". In 12:12, the

(5:20) is expressed by Qoheleth in terms of a contrast to "gladness of heart". For although such reflection does not rob the thinker of the past reality of what they are remembering, it does distract them from the immediate reality of the gladness which they could be experiencing now.

191See Ceresko, op. cit., passim, for the prominence in Qoheleth of wordplay on the root קסנ, with its rich variety of meanings in regard to pursuing, catching up with, overtaking, seizing, capturing, attaining, acquiring, etc. This wordplay plays an important part in reinforcing the author's motif of racerecraft and goal-seeking, exploiting to the full their long-standing associations with both genuine skill and self-defeating hybris. They evoke the same moral ambivalence exactly as wisdom itself, which makes racing the perfect symbol for the entire Wisdom-Antiwisdom spectrum of endeavour. In addition, the fact that קסנ has both a physical and an intellectual meaning ('chase / grasp' and 'understand') helps us to see the parallel between on the one hand the unending cycle of pursuit representing racing as such (the rawest and most obvious image of human goal-seeking self-assertion) and on the other hand the pointlessness of pursuing knowledge by means of ceaseless verbal 'assertion', since this is the very method which in effect only pushes knowledge further from our grasp.

As well as this frequent and varied use of קסנ noted by Ceresko, however, Qoheleth's more modest use of the verb תנק is also worthy of attention. This alternative word for 'grasping' plays an interesting rôle in associating opposites in 2:3 and 7:18; see below. Chapter 10, Section iv.

192By slightly delaying the word "לברר" after the assertion that "כל - ורברים" are wearisome, the author is teasing the reader's or hearer's mind by delaying his grasp of what the expression "כל - ורברים" means. The reader's mind, therefore, automatically begins to 'pursue' its meaning. This constitutes a pursuit within a pursuit, drawing the reader into the pattern of cyclical, repetitive pursuit which Qoheleth is describing in the passage overall (1:3-10). This may be more than just a stylistic aid to vividness. See
written word receives the same treatment as the spoken word in 1:8. For excessive study of books is described as

"Weariness to the flesh". 193

Such spoken and written verbalization is zealously pursued because it is believed to be the key to grasping reality; and yet its true effect is often to keep reality at a distance.

It is this insight into the negative potential of verbalization, Qoheleth's perception of how words can "multiply נובע" (6:11), 194 which chiefly underlies the pervasiveness of his retreating horizon motif, and his view of pursuit as fruitless and unending. It is largely his negative experience of verbal and intellectual pursuit which motivates his negative imaging of pursuit in general. For, along with greedy pursuit of material gain 195 it is verbal-intellectual pursuit which most obviously deprives above, this Chapter, Section vi for the suggestion that Qoheleth aims to instil expectation of the unexpected in his students as a pious discipline.

193 Cf. Britton, James, Language and Learning (Harmondsworth, 1970), P.230, quoting sixteen-year-old Clare:

"My problem - is that I want to write, but not to be a writer, because I am frightened of losing myself in my writing and of taking the part of an observer......The effect of words in formulating and analysing experience is probably enlightening to the reader, and it can be to the writer as well, but it can also destroy the spontaneity of his feelings.....

"This problem has been forced on me by - the sheer volume of literature which I have had to read, so that I am beginning to explore its vast depths, which I have only just begun to comprehend. Writing is bound up with philosophy, with 'ultimate reality' - I sometimes think I would rather live my life on the surface, and so not write. I am happiest when I am in contact with people, and the sudden insight into intellectual abstraction, although it can be very thrilling, is not as exciting as being kissed in the back of a car."

194 I.e., increase overall 'ungraspability', keeping immediate reality always at a distance from its pursuer.

195 Which indefinitely postpones and hence in the end prevents the actual enjoyment of that material gain.
the pursuer of the very object pursued. What makes verbalization so wearisome (1:8) is not primarily the strenuous eagerness with which we practise it, but rather the fact that it deprives us of the very quarry we use it to pursue, which in turn renders the pursuit unending and unconsummated. As Clyde S. Kilby says, 196

"We intellectualize in order to know, but, paradoxically, intellectualization tends to destroy its object. The harder we grasp at the thing, the more its reality moves away. - (We are) convinced that the main avenue to knowing is the making of statements. Yet all statements whatever, indeed all systems, in becoming statements and systems, become self-destructive. One is at sixes and sevens to translate a language of one hundred thousand words into a language of one thousand words. This is Man's predicament. What Man is, what he feels himself to be, makes a wasteland of language. Yet because of Man's insatiable desire to know, he requires some sort of verbal actualization. He is like the old woman who said, How do I know what I think until I hear what I say? Yet Man's saying, i.e., his systemizing, is always inadequate. The more he defines, the more he abstracts, the farther a satisfying reality seems to fly."

Serres is describing the same phenomenon, although outwardly in different terms, when he calls knowledge

"Illumination at the cost of obscurity". 197

He likens knowledge to a light which also casts shadows, and to a fire which leaves ash as it burns:

"Knowledge makes shade, as a factory pollutes the surrounding area. - Always and everywhere knowledge mixes with misunderstanding, is continually accompanied by it. It is the subtle spectrum of light and shadow, of chiaroscuro. - I focus the light on a well-determined place. The more pinpointed the light, the brighter and harsher it is, and the more I rim this spot with a little circle of shadow and blindness. The discrete ensemble of these spots and these rings forms a spectrum of light and shadow. - And I'm not


counting the destruction of the object lit by too harsh a torch." 198

Despite Serres’ different choice of image here for the self-defeating attempt at knowledge, the focussing of a light instead of Qoheleth’s and Kilby’s picture of literal grasping or pursuit, there is a hidden link between these two concepts of the drive toward knowledge, the concept of it on the one hand as illumination and on the other as pursuit; and this connexion includes the self-defeating aspect of knowledge. Serres’ recognition of the measure of obscurity produced by focussing a light to attain knowledge is related very closely indeed to the idea of pursuit to attain knowledge causing the quarry to retreat and hence keeping knowledge at a distance. In the natural world, these two images of illumination and pursuit actually fuse into one. According to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, the photoelectric effect of light makes it impossible to measure the position of a particle exactly.

"To see where a particle is, you have to shine light on it. But Einstein had shown that you couldn’t use a very small amount of light; you had to use at least one packet, or quantum. This packet of light would disturb the particle, and cause it to move at a speed in some direction. The more accurately you wanted to measure the position of the particle, the greater the energy of the packet you would have to use and thus the more it would disturb the particle. However you tried to measure the particle, the uncertainty in its position times the uncertainty in its speed would always be greater than a certain minimum amount." 199

Like Qoheleth, then, Heisenberg discerns a principle of uncertainty which is built into the very nature of reality; and his discovery reveals the link between Serres’ light / shadow image and Qoheleth’s pursuit / הבקע dynamic. For Heisenberg’s perception casts light in the rôle of pursuer or of instrument of pursuit.


The image of the pursuit of knowledge placing knowledge out of reach and the idea of certainty regarding some matters being unattainable by the very nature of reality are both, then, fairly well established in human experience and conceptualization. Even the part played specifically by words in rendering Man's pursuit of knowledge thus self-defeating is quite widely acknowledged, at least in our own era 200, though perhaps not so widely in antiquity. In the Bible, interestingly, the potentially negative rôle of human verbalization is perceived, but not as an automatic consequence of the limited nature of words in themselves. 201 Rather, this negative potential seems to be directly related to the fact that Man's words are the direct expression of his individual ego, coupled with the fact that this individual human identity is separated (even aloof) from God's identity, to an unnatural and morbid degree. The peculiarly human drive toward assertive verbalization and its spiritually negative associations are therefore inextricably bound up with an individual's self-awareness as an independent being. As Kilby says, it is

200 E.g., by C.S. Lewis, Kilby, Britton, etc., as quoted above, this Chapter, this Section.

201 That the fault does not lie with words simply as such can be seen from the fact that there is no negative element in God's words as there is in Man's words. There is no distance between God's words and reality, even though there is between Man's words and reality. In Gen. 1:3, God says "Let there be light", and immediately light appears. Furthermore, so far from this light producing darkness, like the light of Man's pursuit of knowledge as described by Serres, God is explicitly said to separate it from darkness. It is simply light; darkness is something else. Cf. I John 1:5, "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all."

Cf. also Ps. 119:130,

"The unfolding of your words gives light".

God's words are uniquely pure, refined and flawless (Ps. 12:6), unlike the proud boasts (Ibid. vv 3 & 4) of the lying oppressors who trust in their deceptions to get their own way (Ibid. v 5). Man's words, by contrast with God's, can bring darkness instead of light (Job 38:2). Although the teaching of godly men can also be light (e.g., the sage of Prov. 6:23), and the words of God's prophets can also become reality, nevertheless a contrast is often drawn between the truth, realism and straightforwardness of God's words and the unreliability and redundancy of human verbiage in general (e.g., Num. 23:19 and I Sam. 15:29; see also Is. 55:10-11, comparing the efficacy of God's words with the feebleness of Man's thoughts in vv 8 & 9). In these passages, God's words, in their truth and power, are contrasted not just with the words of bad men, but with the words of Man as a whole.
"What Man is, what he feels himself to be"

which makes his "wasteland of language".

In the Biblical context, the whole question of a person's self-awareness as an independent ego, and hence also the closely related matter of human verbalization, are highly delicate issues, and closely related to the ethical controversy of Wisdom versus Antiwisdom. For these issues are virtually inseparable from the memory of Man's rebellion from God, of the spurious 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' aimed for in Gen. 3:5-6, and of the perverse misrepresentation and then denial of something God said (Gen. 3:1 & 4) which precipitated the Fall. The proud boast of Ps. 12:4,

"We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips - who is our master?"

reflects the intimacy of the association not only between the tongue and the individual identity but also between the tongue and power, control both legitimate and

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202 See, e.g., the use of the word "כְּלָלִי" ("My glory / esteem / worth") for "my tongue" in Ps. 57:8-9, and apparently also in Ps. 16:9. From the former, it seems that "כְּלָלִי" means "my tongue" or "my voice", since Ps. 57:7 says, "I will sing and make music", and v 8 continues, "Wake up my glory (כְּלָלִי), wake up harp and lyre.". Apparently, then, "my glory" is parallel with "I will sing", because the "glory" is the organ which is about to sing (i.e., the tongue), in the same way as the phrase "harp and lyre" is parallel with "make music", since they are the instruments which are going to make the music. In Ps. 16:9, however, the same word "כְּלָלִי" ("my glory") is parallel with "כָּלֶד" ("my heart / core"), which is the usual term for the central, individuality-determining factor of a personality. Cf. Prov. 23:7, where כָּלֶד is used in parallel with כַּלֶד for the real, inner personality:

"As (the stingy man) reckons / calculates within himself (כַּלֶד), so is he;

He says "Eat and drink", but his heart (כָּלֶד) is not with you.".

Admittedly, the man's words are here placed in contrast with the inner reality of the man's true thoughts, and not in parallel with it; but this is a startling departure from normality, which gives Prov. 23:7 a peculiar impact. If, then, "כְּלָלִי" means "tongue" or "voice" in Ps. 16:9, as it does in Ps. 57:8, then Ps. 16:9 is by implication placing the faculty of speech on a level with כָּלֶד and כַּלֶד in its centrality as the determining factor of the human personality. The voice is here virtually equated with the identity. Ps. 16:9's usage probably reflects the more normal idea of the tongue as parallel with the 'heart' as the centre and core of the personality, whereas the disagreement in Prov. 23:7 between the stingy man's inner thoughts and his outward words is not so much denying the centrality of speech to human personality as rather attributing a slightly schizoid flavour to the personality of this stingy man. Cf. Jas. 3:9-12. James could not be more emphatic about the centrality of the tongue to the direction of a man's being and to the entire course of his life; and yet he does not deny the possibility of extreme verbal contradiction. On the contrary, he implies
illegitimate. The roots of this explosive fusion of associations lie in the rebellious origin of Man's first Eden encounter with 'wisdom'. Not only is the tongue the key to power, control and even survival, and not only is it also the key to the individual's independent self-awareness, but in addition it gives a negative slant both to power-seeking and even to self-awareness, because of their joint association with rebellion and with verbalization as a key symbol of the innate rebelliousness of the human ego.

This unpleasant and tightly bound parcel of associations sheds an interesting light on the fact that Qoheleth's phase of intense self-awareness, when he discusses everything exclusively from the perspective of his own personal experience (1:12 - 2:21) is simply one stage in his overall spiritual quest: the period when he is still in that such contradiction is all too common; yet nevertheless, it still makes no sense, it still "should not be". It is like a fig-tree bearing olives, or fresh water and salt water flowing from the same spring: a schizoid aberration from what human nature and behaviour should be.

The above interpretation of "יִהְדָּה" ("my glory") in Ps. 57:8 as, in effect, "my tongue" would solve the problem created by the fact that one can hardly address one's "glory" in the abstract sense of the term, still less instruct it to "wake up". This difficulty has led some scholars to suggest emending "יִהְדָּה" to "יִהְדָּה", "my liver" (regarded as animate, and therefore, in a sense, capable of "waking up"). The liver, however, does not make a natural parallel with the "harp and lyre" of v 8, whereas the human voice raised in song does, especially after v 7's

"I will sing and make music.".

203 See, e.g., Prov. 18:20-21,
"From the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled;
With the harvest from his lips he is satisfied.
The tongue has the power of life and death,
And those who love it will eat its fruit."
Cf. Ibid., 13:2a.

204 The idea of the tongue as the central factor in determining both personality and power is ultimately combined into one in The Epistle of James. Here, the tongue is the bit (Jas. 3:3) or the rudder (Ibid. 3:4) by which the individual steers his entire course. It is by the tongue that he not only influences others and sets in train external events (vv 5-6), but even defines his own identity and ethico-spiritual standing (v 2-6). The tongue is here the ultimate instrument of control, setting Man apart from the animals, which he himself has learnt to control (vv 7-8). Here also, although the tongue has potential for good, its primary associations are the negative ones of poison (v 8) and destructive fire (vv 5 & 6). See Jas. 3:2-12.
the process of finding his own voice as a sage and searching for his own unique contribution to wisdom-theory. He then passes beyond this stage to a vision first for Man as a whole (2:24 - 3:22) and then for his own society in particular (4:1 ff.).

This is why Plumptre is justified in speaking of Qoheleth's "self-analysing introspection". This way of putting it may at first occasion surprise, since even at this early stage Qoheleth is primarily analysing experiences rather than himself, evaluating them in order to find Man's Chief Good (2:3b). Nevertheless, the issue of his unusual degree of self-consciousness as an author has to be addressed, since its prominence as a feature of his book sets him apart from other Biblical Wisdom-writers. The entire book is marked by occasional appeals to personal experience and observation, and opinions or reflections in the first person; and in 1:12 - 2:20, the author's personal quest and egocentric experimentation dominate the text. Even his celebration of his own wisdom in 1:16 goes beyond merely presenting the necessary credentials as a wisdom-teacher. He is, in addition, revealing the self-awareness of special abilities which originally underlay his personal ambition as a sage: to achieve an influence over events that would last, either directly in his own lifetime and / or through his memory and fame. From the frustration of these self-centred aims

\[205\] At least with regard to that particular point of the author's spiritual development which 1:12 - 2:21 represents.

\[206\] Although Ranston, op. cit., Pp.15-16, is probably right in seeing a connexion between Theogn. L1.769 ff. (where the poet presents both his credentials and his obligations as a sage) and Qoh. 1:16, especially if 1:16 is read in conjunction with 12:9-10, which has strikingly similar phrasing to the Theognis passage.

\[207\] Described in the second section of the book, 1:12 - 2:23.
he extracts a lesson for Man in general about his Chief Good (as defined in 2:24, 3:12 and 3:22) which effectively bypasses the type of frustration he has experienced.

The first section of Qoheleth places Man's appetites (1:8) and overall pattern of existence (1:4a & 9-11) in the setting of the overall processes of the natural world as a whole. These processes, though full of activity and repetitive pursuit, do not include any example of a lasting hold over anything pursued or attained. Then the second section of 1:12 - 2:23 turns abruptly from this universal cycle of nature and of Man's drives in relation to the universal cycle, and homes in specifically on the author himself, on his personal experiences and the frustration of his personal goals. The third section then expounds the lesson Qoheleth has learnt for Man as a whole from his own experiences. Because there is no way to exercise control over the future, one must seize the present and interact with its immediacy on a creature-level, enjoying the fruit of one's toil by eating and drinking (2:24, 3:13 & 22), not denying one's close affinity with the other creatures (3:18-22). Once again, in 3:22, the word "

The first, central and last verses of this third section, 2:24, 3:12-13 and 3:22, reinforce each other by the fact that they are very similar to each other. However,

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208 See the third section, 2:24 - 3:22.

209 1:1-11.

210 As earlier in 2:10, referring to the pleasure which has been the author's experience, until over-much reflection robs him in 2:11 of the immediate reality of the present, and hence also of pleasure. Cf. 5:20.
2:24-5 gives Man’s dependence on God for everything he enjoys as the reason for scaling down his ambitions to creature-comforts, whereas in 3:22 the reason is Man’s lack of knowledge and control of the future; and in 3:12-13, by implication from 3:11, these two reasons are fused into one and the same, since the inscrutability of the future is God’s work anyway, just as much as the provision of food and pleasure is God’s work. The only time over which Man has any control is now: or, more exactly, over a series of ‘nows’ (3:1-8), only as and when they occur. So Man must scale down his consciousness to the present experience only, otherwise his misguided ambition to experience or to influence more than the present moment will rob him of his power to experience or influence even that present moment.

This exhortation to creaturely enjoyment, with its bold, direct comparison with the animals bringing this third section of the book to a close, is an ambitious attempt to counter the destructive tendency for over-ambitious goals to rob Man of his single, effectual moments of real experience and real influence. As such, it is implicitly but closely related to Qoheleth’s warnings about negative verbalization; for an obvious distinguishing feature between Man and animals is that animals are non-speaking.

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211 Many (though not all) would say the most obvious. For the various views from antiquity on Man’s chief distinguishing feature from other creatures, see Renehan, Robert, “The Greek Anthropocentric View of Man”, Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 85, 1981, Pp.239-259. This article (P.248) refers to the following as holding speech to be Man’s major distinguishing quality: Isoc., Nic. 3.5-9 and Antid. 15.253-7 (cf.Paneg. 4.47-50 and C48); Xen., Mem. 1.4.12; Arist., H.A. 536 B1-2. Since Man’s speech (λόγος) is the external manifestation of his rationality, this view of speech as the main difference between Man and animals is closely related to the idea that Man’s capacity for intellectual activity is his main distinguishing feature. This concept of Man as the “ζητων λόγιον” has very deep roots (see Renehan, op. cit., passim), reaching back by implication even to Homer (see, e.g., Od. L.239-40).

212 The present writer regards Balaam’s ass and Achilles’ horse simply as the exceptions which prove the rule.
The first section of *Qoheleth* (1:1-11), having just opened with the author's self-identification, then abruptly makes the ultimate statement of אביו (v 2), namely that everything is ungraspable. Next, it challenges Man about what he gains from all his labour (v 3), but does not as yet indicate what exactly is meant by 'gain'. There is not even a hint as to what type of gain the author actually has in mind until after the cyclic images of endless repetition in both natural and human realms (vv 4-9). Then, however, the section closes with two suggestions (but not definite statements) of what might be meant by 'gain': an original contribution (v 10, something "new"), and being remembered (v 11 a & b).

The next section (1:12 - 2:23) traverses, in effect, the same circuit, in that it passes the same thematic landmarks, but this time from a specifically personal perspective, whereas 1:1-11 dealt with these same themes from the global viewpoint of human history's countless generations (1:4), natural phenomena like sun and sea (1:5-7), and appetites common to mankind in general, like the drive to see, hear, etc. (1:8). At the opening of this second section, the wording of 1:12-13 echoes 1:1 by returning to the author. This is partly to demonstrate that we have, in a sense, returned to the beginning, and we are now about to repeat the same thematic circuit from a different viewpoint. It is also, however, to indicate what this new viewpoint is: that of the personal aspirations of an exceptionally gifted man. These verses 1:12-

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213 Here, the uppermost meaning of אביו seems to be "vapour", that which can not be grasped. As with קייו (see above, this Chapter, Section ii), so with אביו, sometimes one meaning seems uppermost, at other times another. The author uses deliberately the fact that the same word can have more than one meaning, as Ceresko points out (op. cit., Passim):

214 And perhaps also wind; but see Japhet, Sara, op. cit., as discussed above, this Chapter, Section i.
13 emphasize the individuality of the author, by introducing the point that his devotion to wisdom is exceptional among sages (cf. v 16).

Within this same second section, 1:14 repeats from the first ‘lap’ (1:2) the statement of universal "ודבכל" or "ungraspableness", that this quality of לנדבכל (cf. 1:17’s "chasing the wind") covers everything. This is part of the process of repeating the fruitless pursuit motif from the first ‘lap’ (1:5-9). In this section, however, the challenge about what is gained, designed as a repetition of the same challenge in the first section (1:3), is stalked very cautiously by the oblique references to "what is good" in 2:1 & 3 before it is echoed directly and even provisionally answered in 2:11. Although "what is good" does, in this context, mean "what Man gains for his efforts", nevertheless the actual word "gain" ("زيارة") is not directly repeated from 1:3 until 2:11, where the first section’s "זיאزيارة - יהוה" is answered by the second section’s "זיאزيارة - יהוה".

This is because Qoheleth wants to lead us into a clearer understanding of what gain or good is; and he aims to base this understanding on the difference between what he now means by gain and what he once meant (and others still mean) by gain. As with all his themes, so also with this theme of gain: the only way he can lead us into such an understanding is by the gradual unfolding of a train of thought that loops back on itself, adding a new layer of meaning to each repeated theme with each successive repetition.  

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215This is not unlike the process of thinking advocated by Serres (op. cit., P.79), an " -operation of knotting, of folding - (which) comes back on itself, loops back around and is intertwined. - (It) condenses, attaches, entwines, folds back, associates, links, creates a network
Once he has described how he started to scrutinize his pleasures, (2:10) and found that nothing was gained, (2:11), Qoheleth’s next step is to lay bare for the first time what his original criteria of gain were. He reveals in 2:12b that the possibility of a new contribution and in 2:16 that the prospect of remembrance were both essential to what, at this stage of his development, he regarded as gain. Gain to him was to exercise a decisive and original influence, and an influence which would last. This is why he devoted himself to wisdom, in the hope that through wisdom he would attain this level of influence. In 2:12-16 we find not only a repetition of 1:10 & 11’s ‘something new’ and ‘remembrance’ themes, but also an expansion of them. This passage shows that had innovation and remembrance been attainable, they would have constituted ‘gain’ in the author’s eyes; but because one’s influence and control is cut short by death (2:14-16), he consequently questioned whether even wisdom has any real gain to offer (2:15).

Comparing this process favourably with ‘analysis’, which unties or unknots, he calls it a ‘desmology’, from δεσμός (knot, tie, band, fetter), describing it as

" -a discourse of bonds, ligaments, ligatures. The strands that overlap shadow one another; it is in accepting this shadow and this overlapping that knowledge grows and sums itself up. - No, knowledge is not only separation, distinction or deployment; - knowledge also folds like a cord; - knowledge twines around itself like cording, like a protein or a tissue; like them, it is invaginated and thus becomes dense, filled with temperament, with information; yes, it moves toward wisdom.".  
(Ibid., P.79).

Similarly, Qoheleth can only "move toward wisdom" by allowing his themes, through repetition, association and expansion, a gradual process of growth like an organism. He can not stalk wisdom, or any other achievement, as a quarry to be hunted and captured in the primitive sense. For him, wisdom is not a trophy to be seized and displayed; wisdom itself is an ongoing act of adaptation and response, and wisdom teaching is a lapped and overlapping discourse of association, and repetition, of echo and expansion. For everything is יִדְּחַכ; nothing can be grasped, rendered static and held. Instead, the sage must traverse and re-traverse his circuit of themes, letting each lap be a new stage in the growth of his message, and letting this act of racecraft itself be his wisdom.

216 First referred to in 1:10.

217 First introduced in 1:11. The fact that 2:11’s יִדְּחַכ יִדְּחַכ echoes 1:11’s יִדְּחַכ יִדְּחַכ underlines Qoheleth’s original identification of gain with lasting fame and influence.
The next step (2:17-20) is to heighten the personal flavour of this second section of the book, already evident from its frequent use of the first person, by describing the author's intense (even extreme) subjective reactions to his realization: "hating" his acquisitions, and life itself (2:17 & 18), and overall despair (v 20). In 2:21-3, however, the scene begins to broaden out again from the author's personal experiences and reactions, to Man as a whole. The sharpness of the subjective emotions referred to in these verses, pain, grief, anxious restlessness, etc., is not in any way diluted by being extended from the author to Man in general (vv 22-3); Qoheleth uses his feelings about his own ambition and frustration as a bridge from the second to the following section. The author's anguish fuses with the anguish of all Mankind to lead us into the more universal subject-matter of the third section beginning at 2:24.

The extreme intensity of the emotions expressed in 2:17-23 indicates that we have come to the heart of the matter regarding Qoheleth's personal crisis. The cause of his frustration is that 'gain' means in this section that innovative and lasting influence or control which was his original motivating ambition; whereas לְבַנָּא means, in effect, the impossibility of just such an influence. In 2:17, the reason he gives for hating life is לְבַנָּא; and in 2:18, which is parallel in meaning 218, his reason for hating his acquisitions is that they must be passed on to someone else at his death. This means that they too are לְבַנָּא, ungraspable or non-retainable; for in passing to his successor, they are passing irrevocably beyond the scope of his influence or control.

218 In 2:18, "-all the things I had toiled for under the sun" corresponds to v 17's "life", and v 18's "-because I must leave them to the one who comes after me" corresponds to v 17's summing up of all activity under the sun as "grievous" because it is לְבַנָּא.
In 2:19, Qoheleth's values, criteria and emotions are confirmed as being first and foremost those of a sage: the reason it is so hard to bear (v 18) the inevitability of a successor taking control of his previous sphere of influence is that he may be a fool instead of a wise man (v 19); there is no way of knowing. Furthermore, he has not worked for this inheritance (v 21), and this is incongruous. For (so vv 21-2 seem to imply) one would think that the person who has worked for it should retain by right some lasting benefit from it; but this is not the case after all. Thus 2:22 returns by implication to the motif of gain, and the end of 2:23 finishes the entire section with an explicit repetition of the_theme.

In essence, then, this second section has been a thematic reiteration of the first, displaying the same ground from a more personal angle. Their repetition in Section Two has clarified and enhanced the significance of the following themes from Section One: לֶוֶת (1:2); gain (1:3); strenuous, repetitive activity without gain (1:4-9); and originality and remembrance, which combined together add up to a meaningful impact and influence on the world (1:10 & 11). In particular, the meaning of ‘gain’ has been expanded and clarified. In the first section, although its early mention (1:3) indicates its importance, its equation with the ‘innovation’ / ‘remembrance’ partnership (which does not occur until 1:9-11) is not established at all. Also, in Section One, the full extent of what ‘remembrance’ really entails is not yet clear either. In Section Two, however, ‘remembrance’ (2:16) is identified with a measure of influence over the future (2:18-22). The meaning of לֶוֶת is confirmed in Section Two as the elusiveness of all possible objects of pursuit; but the new time perspective introduced by Section Two’s references to death (2:14-16) and succession (2:12, 18-19 & 21)
give a new exactitude to the nature of this universal elusiveness: nothing can be grasped and retained; everything is fleeting in this particular sense, that the only effectual reality is now.

It is clear from 2:22-3 that reward or gratification in return for toil is not to be found either in the process of toil itself or in the mere accumulation of its fruits, but only in the direct enjoyment of its fruits. The third section, therefore, both begins (2:24) and ends (3:22) with a direct statement that the ultimate good for Man is the present enjoyment of the fruits of his toil. The storing up of goods is referred to only ironically (2:26); what is recommended is the actual enjoyment of them, an activity which, by its very nature, is limited to the present. So this highest good for Man, as expressed in 2:24 and 3:22, is, in effect, a renunciation of Qoheleth’s previous ambition, that of trying to exercise some lasting influence, a measure of control over the future. In 3:22, moreover, the inscrutability of the future is explicitly given as the reason for this limitation of the ultimate good to the present. The present to which Man’s influence is now seen to be limited, however, is described more fully in 3:1-8 as a series of complementary presents.

This third ‘lap’ of Qoheleth’s thought (2:24 - 3:22) repeats once again the familiar landmarks from 1:1-11 and 1:12 - 2:23. In 2:26 and 3:19, the הַנְּהָנה refers to senseless storing up of goods, which can not and should not be indefinitely stored; it also refers to the fact that even the breath of living beings, human as well as animal,

219 Merely storing them up would not contribute any genuine benefit, since hoarding is only ever for the abstract future which never really comes.
can not be retained. Again we are challenged about gain (3:9), as in Section One (1:3). For Section Two’s denial that there is any gain (2:11) was limited to Qoheleth’s past viewpoint, that only a guarantee of innovatory influence extending to the future could possibly merit being called gain. However, now that Man’s sphere of influence has been reduced to a series of presents, which he can live out only one at a time (3:1-8), the question of gain can now (3:9) be reintroduced meaningfully. Once every possible activity or experience is limited only to its own appropriate present, there is a rightness about everything (3:11) in the context of that appropriate moment, which suggests that gain in some sense, something good or worthwhile for Man, is possible after all. Sure enough, in 3:12-13 (as in 2:24 and 3:22) an Ultimate Good is indeed proposed: one which is limited by its very nature to the immediacy of present reality. In addition, from its close proximity to 3:1-11, this Ultimate Good expressed in 3:12-13 must be the natural conclusion to vv 1-11. It implies, therefore, the alertness to recognize and correctly react to each individual \( \kappa\alpha\iota\rho\delta\zeta \) as it occurs, which is the ultimate skill of racecraft.

The theme of feverish and fruitless endeavour is also briefly repeated (2:26) from the previous sections, but only in relation to the sinner, who is not sensitive to the God-ordained ‘times’ of 3:1-8. The pageant of activity in 3:1-8 is, by contrast, expanded at some length, as if this more positive picture \(^{220}\) is a conscious

\(^{220}\)This picture is unambiguously positive; for each of these activities is explicitly said to be right (\( \Pi\Delta \)) in its proper time (3:11). The N.I.V.’s translation ‘burden’ for 3:10’s “\( \Upsilon\Pi\Upsilon\Pi\)" is misleading, since “\( \Upsilon\Pi\Upsilon\Pi\)" in itself is rather a neutral term. Qoheleth seems to be saying that God has given Man business to occupy him rather than a burden to afflict him. Although this verse is a deliberate echo of 1:13, where the business in question is described as “\( \Upsilon\Upsilon\Upsilon\Upsilon\)" or “\( \Upsilon\Upsilon\Upsilon\Upsilon\)" or “sorry task" of 1:13 was "to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven"; and since
substitute. The unavailing cyclic bustle of the previous sections is therefore repeated only by implication, in the form of this contrasting and deliberately alternative cycle, conveying a similarly vigorous impression without the fruitlessness. The pattern of opposite times in 3:1-11 combined with the Ultimate Good formulae of 2:24, 3:12-13 and 3:22 constitutes some advance toward reconciling Qoheleth’s assertion of our non-control over the future with the concept of Man having a meaningful influence over events. For our non-control over the future is not represented as negative. On the contrary, it is given an unmistakably positive slant by the fact that the rightness of each individual act in its appropriate time (3:11) is in effect defined by its limitation to the present appropriate for it.

This third section, then, is another lap of the same thematic circuit as the first two sections; but it displays the same themes from a broader and more explicit perspective ethically. For the complementary opposites of 3:1-8 embrace symbolically the totality of Man’s options and experiences. The third section also paints a vaster scene in the sense that it is not confined to the viewpoint of one man like Section Two, but covers Man in general and also contains frequent references to God and the comparison of men with animals. Section One is broader than Section Two in one sense, in that it deals with the cyclic, repetitive quality of all natural processes, not

" -all of them are גון and chasing after the wind" (1:14), it is small surprise that the intense, analytical scrutiny of them all constitutes "a sorry task". The echo of 1:13 in 3:10 is, therefore, slightly ironical, since the task (יִלְדָּע) which God has set for Man does not actually have to be "sorry" or "bad"; whether it is or not is up to Man. Since God has made everything right in its time, Man can, if he so wishes, accept that pattern and conform to it by limiting himself to what is appropriate to the time, instead of

" -(studying and exploring) by wisdom all that is done under heaven". Qoheleth used to scrutinize everything in this way before he realized that the best thing for Man to do is to eat and drink and confine himself to the present; but now he has realized this, the "sorry task" of 1:13 has become simply a task (3:10), with the sense of the rightness of each particular thing in its proper time paramount.
just of human behaviour; whereas Section Two describes the frustrated aspirations not only of Man alone but even of one particular man alone. Nevertheless, the reverse is true in terms of ethical explicitness, since Section Two broadens the base of our understanding of the repeated themes ( Heb, gain, etc.); and Section Three, building on this enlarged thematic basis, extends the range of participants in the drama as well, to include not only the author but also Man in general, and the animals in relation to Man, and God Himself, whose scheme of times reveals the formidable extent of His control over Man.

The difference in character between these three sections of Qoheleth, then, is well defined. It is fairly clear where one section succeeds another. This clarity is partly due to the characteristics the different sections have in common (the repeated themes); but it is also partly because of their differences, i.e., the extreme and even abrupt changes of perspective from which these shared themes are viewed from one section to another. There are some successive additions, new features introduced in each new section. For example, there are explicit references to wisdom in Section Two by contrast with Section One’s silence on the subject; and there are frequent references to God in Section Three by comparison with Sections One and Two, which scarcely mention Him. The isolated remark in 1:13 about God giving Man a sorry task could be, and sometimes is, interpreted as distant, colourless and negative. Section Three’s picture of God, however, emphasizes His intelligence and power as

\[\text{\footnote{This is especially likely if it is taken simply as it stands, and not imaginatively expanded by comparison with Section Three’s more detailed counterpart of it in 3:10 ff. Here, the “sorry task” of 1:13 is expanded from a mere task into an entire system of Providence. But at 1:13, the broader picture of 3:10 ff. has yet to be seen. The first time we see the "task" of 1:13, we have no inkling of the new direction in which 3:10 ff. is later to develop it.}}\]
planner and controller; and since Qoheleth's interest has always been in wisdom, in influencing events and making his mark, it is difficult not to interpret this emphasis on his part as a positive view of God. Although such new features as are added section by section are essential to the development of the book, they do not mask its underlying skeleton of basic, recurrent themes, and the way their repetition from section to section from different angles illumines stage by stage their full meaning.

This peculiar lapped structure reinforces the sense of repetitive pursuit with which Qoheleth seems uniquely preoccupied. Paradoxically, however, it also enables him to create a sense of progress in the gradual unfolding of his overall message. The very fact that he does persistently repeat his main ideas establishes a backcloth of thematic stability, against which a subtle network of meaning can then be woven by delicate successive extensions and associations of the original, reiterated motifs. For example, Section One's notion of the impossibility of remembrance (1:11), which reappears in Section Two (2:16) and there develops into the idea of lack of effectual, lasting influence over the future (2:18, 19, 21, etc.), begins to acquire in Section Three an additional nuance; it is no longer just lack of control over the future, but even lack of knowledge of the future (3:22):

"For who can bring (a man) to see what will happen after him?"

This thematic gradation from control to knowledge is not an abrupt or an irrational change; it arises naturally from Qoheleth's prior association of wisdom and knowledge

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222 At its first appearance in 1:11, the claim that there is "no remembrance" could simply mean that there is no lasting glory, no way to win the esteem of later generations and be held in honour forever. It is not until Section Two, with the new associations of 2:16-21, that 'remembrance' comes to suggest a more dynamic form of influence, akin to control.

223 Cf. 3:11's statement of Man's inability to fathom God's plan.
with power to control, to shape events. To him, knowledge and control were originally almost identified into one concept, that of the assertive, predictive human drive to manipulate and to attain goals.

In view of this, it is significant that Section Three, which contains Qoheleth's most emphatic and colourful statement of Man's limitation to now \(^{224}\) and its most re-iterated implicit insistence on the key rôle of \(\kappa \alpha \iota \rho \delta \zeta\) (3:1-8) is also the first section to introduce the prominence in God's plan of Man's divinely ordained uncertainty. For the racecraft of piety, the obligation of alertness to the opportunity and challenge of the present critical moment, is in fact closely related to the pragmatic scaling down of ambition to the present necessitated by Man's inability to encompass more than the present. In Qoheleth, the positive, creative limitation to the present (i.e., the skill to exploit \(\kappa \alpha \iota \rho \delta \zeta\)) relates closely to the apparently negative limitation to the present stemming from Man's uncertainty of the future. Uncertainty limits us to now in the sense that now is all that it offers us; and the racecraft of piety commits us exclusively to the intuited present as the only point at which we fully enter into experience and influence outcomes. The apparent negative of uncertainty is in fact, therefore, reinforcing the positive skill to exploit \(\kappa \alpha \iota \rho \delta \zeta\), and thereby to live in full and to creatively shape the present.

Once uncertainty thus begins to emerge as the ally (3:11 & 14) of Qoheleth's racecraft of piety, with its ardent faithfulness to the intuited present, it then becomes impossible to view uncertainty as a negative after all. Already we are being prepared

\(^{224}\)Or, more exactly, his limitation to a system or series of complementary nows.
for the startling statements of 7:13-14 and 8:17, - which without such a preparation would appear either blasphemous or simply unbelievable,\textsuperscript{225} - that God is the direct and deliberate author of Man’s uncertainty.

\textsuperscript{225}The idea of God deliberately instituting uncertainty does indeed seem unbelievable to many, perhaps to the majority, even to the present day. See, e.g., below, Chapter 10, Section iii for Einstein’s unease about Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, which he summed up in the comment, “God does not play dice.”. Qoheleth’s insights, even after all this time, have apparently never found a widespread following.
SOCIO-SPIRITUAL COHESION IN QOHELETH.

i QOHELETH’S PICTURE OF THE SOCIAL DISLOCATION OF HIS AGE.

Qoheleth complains in 7:28-9 that he can only find

"One man in a thousand, and not one woman among them all."

He can not find one upright and trusty friend or lover with whom to share his life. This scarcity of love and companionship owes much to the feebleness of people’s interactive receptivity by comparison with their assertive, goal-seeking faculties. This imbalance fragments the human environment around him, with each following their individual assertive will and hence everyone pursuing their separate goals. They have chosen this way of life rather than a socially cohesive interaction. Interaction would entail alert, receptive intelligence in the light of the common ties of humanity: a reciprocity of good deeds and a scaling down of personal goals and horizons to the intuited present.

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1We can not assume that the reference to "one man" means that his quest for a male friend was necessarily more successful than his quest for a woman to love. For "one man" could be an ironic reference to himself. If so, these verses mean that he has found no-one at all that he can trust except himself.

2The "many schemes" of 7:29.

3See above, Chapter 8, Section iii and below, this Chapter, Sections ii, iv and vi.

4See above, Chapter 9, especially Section vii.
With each self-orientedly pursuing their "many schemes", even love is not available (v 29). For in a society whose keynote is individualistic goal-seeking, a woman is a predator and a snare (v 26) rather than a lover. This is the ultimate extreme in social fragmentation. When even sexual activity (which should be the ultimate in human mutuality) is commonly a self-oriented goal rather than a receptive / interactive reciprocity, sexuality has become a contradiction in terms - as indeed has 'society' as well.

An antidote to this pathological fragmentation of society has to be found; and to Qoheleth, piety is the antidote. Piety involves curbing the verbally and actively assertive ego and assuming a listening attitude before God. This is why the

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5 Notice that 9:9's exhortation to enjoy life with the woman you love is closely associated with 9:7's "For it is now that God favours what you do" and with that same verse's recommendation of the creaturely enjoyment of food and drink (cf. 2:24, 3:13 etc.). Without the piety of the intuited present, there is no possibility of love, since there is no possibility of any genuine interaction.

6 Cf. Prov. 6:26 and the contrast of Ibid. 5:1-14 with vv 15-19.

7 Qoheleth goes beyond Proverbs 5 and 6 in representing predatory sexuality as the social norm (7:28) rather than as simply a possible evil to be avoided. His indictment is of society as such, since he associates this evil with the fact that people have "gone in search of many " (7:29), i.e., each in pursuit of their own individual advantage. Qoheleth's own more public-spirited quest, however, is for the overall " " (7:27, cf.vv 23-5). He wants to make moral sense of human affairs overall, not just follow a self-seeking "scheme". Cf. Baba Bathra 78B, where " " in the singular is used twice, in two slightly different senses, but both global. The first usage means the 'account' of the world (human affairs in general, pictured as a balance sheet). Then the 'accountability' of the world is said to be gone, as if there was no reward or punishment.

Qoheleth has a particular interest in the fact that judgment does not follow sin immediately (see below, this Chapter, Section vi), realizing that this makes the stupidity of wickedness and the moral rectitude of the overall "account" or "scheme of things" (7:23-5) far from self-evident. So he is perhaps playing on the difference between the singular and plural meanings of " " here. He is weary of the individualistic self-seeking of the followers of "many " . Only the attempt to grasp the single, overall " " indicates a true spiritual and social conscience. This is not incompatible with his warnings against claiming false certainty (see, e.g., 7:24), since he admits by implication that the 'time' for judgment is not known (3:17), despite his belief that it will come. He also declares boldly (3:16) the grossness of the injustices that are allowed, for the present, to stand, which makes nonsense of the popular false 'certainties' that punishment automatically follows sin and that good fortune is proof of merit.
exhortation to pious silence of 5:1-7 follows hard on 4:1-16's portrait of social dislocation.

In 4:1 - 6:12, Qoheleth pursues the same themes as in the three previous sections, but this time specifically in relation to the society around him. Within this overall sketch of society, 4:1-16 in particular expresses its chaotic dislocation, caused by individuals pursuing their separate paths without reference to God or to each other. It is not ambition and goal-seeking alone which engenders this lack of cohesion, but rigid individualism, pursuit of paths totally separate.

The oppressed have "no comforter" (4:1); Qoheleth finds this so unnatural that he has to repeat it, as if struggling to convince himself it could possibly be true. No one sees comforting the oppressed as either their moral duty or to their political advantage. Not only have they no altruistic comforter; they do not have even a self-

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8The former three sections are 1:1-11, 1:12 - 2:23 and 2:24 - 3:22; see above, Chapter 9, Sections ii and vii. In each of these sections, Qoheleth repeats all his main themes. The pursuit motif, the question of what is gained, and Man's limitation to the present. In each section in turn, however, he views these themes from a different perspective and in relation to a different sphere of experience: in Section 1 to the natural world as a whole, though including Man; in Section 2 to the author's own personal quest; and in Section 3 to Mankind as a whole, and that which is good for Man considering his nature and his circumstances (e.g., where he stands in relation to God and to animals). For these three specific spheres of application for Qoheleth's themes, see especially Chapter 9, Section vii.

9Compare Dostoyevsky's comment in The Brothers Karamazov, (Harmondsworth, repr. 1967), I, P.357, "For in our age all men are separated into self-contained units, everyone crawls into his own hole, everyone separates himself from his neighbour, hides himself away and hides away everything he possesses, and ends up by keeping himself at a distance from people and keeping other people at a distance from him. He accumulates riches by himself and thinks how strong he is now and how secure, and does not realize, madman that he is, that the more he accumulates the more deeply does he sink into self-destroying impotence. For he is used to relying on himself alone and has separated himself as a self-contained unit from the whole. He has trained his mind not to believe in the help of other people, in men and Mankind, and is in constant fear of losing his money and the rights he has won for himself. Everywhere today the mind of Man has ceased, ironically, to understand that true security of the individual does not lie in isolated personal efforts but in general human solidarity.".
seeking comforter, such as David attracting the disaffected to his cave at Adullam because he needs their help against Saul, or a rebellious Absalom enlisting their support for his own ends. The achievers in this society seem to be simply ignoring the oppressed altogether, completely isolated from them.

These achievers are also ignoring each other. They are pursuing their isolated goals without a reason and heaping up wealth to no purpose at all, since they have no creative contact with their peers (4:4) and no dependents for whose benefit they are achieving (4:7-8). Even the spur of rivalry Qoheleth perceives is not the galvanizing emulation of mutual contact, the fellowship of iron sharpening iron (as in Prov. 27:17); rather, it is the sterile aloofness of mere envy (Qoh. 4:4), as each is sealed off from his fellows in separate and mutually exclusive compartments.

The fool, who is neither oppressed nor an achiever (4:5), has no sense of commitment even to regard his own interests, let alone anyone else's. He simply folds his hands, disdaining contact with anything, even his own mouth to feed it (cf. Prov. 6:10, 24:33 and esp. 19:24b). He does nothing at all, and is free to do so, because he has no connexion with anything or anyone else to rule out this option of passivity.

Qoheleth is here exposing, then, a society that is no society, homing in on individual types within the overall dislocation to demonstrate his general point that society is indeed dislocated.
After this bleak picture in 4:1-8, a positive passage (4:9-12) breaks into the
gloom to assert the contrasting ideal of mutual help and interaction which the author
himself advocates. However, 4:13-16 immediately follows, reverting back to the
picture of dislocation: kings not listening to their advisers (v 13); the chance of a
better successor failing through lack of consistent support for him (vv 14-16);
everywhere there is a lack of social cohesion, of continuity and of meaningful
interaction. There is neither continued loyalty and stability of succession nor the
single-minded determination for a successful revolution either. It is a picture full of
individual assertion, but without mutual receptivity and sustained, fruitful interaction.
The obvious exception is the bright gnomic gem of 4:9-12, which states clearly
Qoheleth’s own positive values:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down, his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls and has no-one to help him up!
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

This intervening passage is placed in its dark setting between the twin dislocation
passages (4:1-8 and 4:13-16), both ending in declarations of הֵינָּל (4:8 and 4:16), to
sharpen the author’s point about the all-importance of interactive social cohesion.

This protest against social dislocation relates closely to Qoheleth’s demand for
a reciprocity of good deeds. His protest may also be provoked by a relatively
recent erosion of a previous social organization and system of values which were more
based on the Torah than the way he sees society developing in the present. If there

[10] See above, Chapter 8, Section iii.
was an earlier system that still provided a fairly clear pattern of mutual obligation, the present rule by remote foreign kings through their ruthlessly rapacious favourites may have played a large part in replacing that system with an entrepreneurial jumble, in which everyone is hermetically sealed off from everyone else, and the poor have no automatic recognition or clearcut rights.

Potentially, the characteristically Greek high evaluation of friendship, a relationship based on choice, may to some extent have taken the place of more traditionally determined relationships as an alternative basis for benevolent interaction. Yet Qoheleth, although he may be including friendship in 4:9-12, is probably not referring to friendship exclusively, since in 4:8 he cites "son" and "brother" as the obvious relations for whose sake one might wish to prosper. Friendship alone is not sufficient to cement together an entire society precisely because it is an elective relationship between equals, and therefore does not include any element of dependency or of automatic obligation.

In fact, Bickerman himself attributes Simon the Just's exhortation to Gemilut Hasadim to the breakdown in early Hellenistic times of traditional

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11See below, Appendix Three.

12As Bickerman thinks in The Jews in the Greek Age, P.285.


14Aboth 1.2.

15Bickerman, like Frankel, Graetz and Halevy, but unlike Krochmal, identifies Simon the Just with Simeon b. Onias I, referred to in Ben Sira 50 and in Jos. Ant. XII, 2.5 and 4.1.
Jewish tribal values in the Holy Land. Commenting on Simon’s teaching that the present age is based on three things, "Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim", he says that "זָוֶד וְאֵוֶת אֲוֵרָה" / "Torah" and "עָבֹדָה" / "Avodah" were no longer enough to hold the faith together without the addition of the third element, "ןִבּוֹל עַזְפִּים" / "Gemilut Hasadim" or "reciprocity of kindnesses". This third element Bickerman sees as a Jewish version of the Greek "philanthropia".

However, Bickerman’s term "tribal" is not the most appropriate to use of this late era (since the ancient tribal system had already suffered the blows of Solomon’s reign and even of the Exile long before Hellenistic times). It might be nearer the truth to say that some relatively recent development had launched a fresh attack on Jewish social cohesion in the Holy Land; and in identifying that development as acquisitiveness nurtured by the powerful favourites of the Ptolemies, Bickerman may perhaps be right; see below, Appendix Three.

Since "Torah" in the literal sense includes "בֵּית לֵד הָעֵרָה" anyway (without "בֵּית לֵד הָעֵרָה" having to be ‘added’), Simon’s addition of "בֵּית לֵד הָעֵרָה" as a new element separate from Torah (or at least conceptually differentiable from it) implies a very restricted view of Torah. In fact, even regarding "עָבֹדָה" as a separate category implies a narrow view of Torah, since the cult is based on and (at least theoretically) regulated by the Bible. See below, this Chapter, Section ii, for the fact that Qoheleth does not seem to share this narrow view of Torah; for the fact that he advocates his reciprocity of good deeds by saying "לְאָוֶת עֵרָה אַלּוֹלָה לְשֵׁדֵז בְּטִף הָעֵרָהּ"; while saying "לְאָבֹדָה לְשֵׁדֵז בְּטִף הָעֵרָהּ" suggests that perhaps he recognizes the practice of "לְאָבֹדָה לְשֵׁדֵז בְּטִף הָעֵרָהּ" as already implicit in Torah, even if Simon does not.

It may be that for Simon and his circle the use of the term "Torah" as a category of religious obligation has been reduced to the meaning study of the commandments only, and this is why they have to devise new, additional terms ("מַעְלָה" and "מַעְלָה מַשָּׁבַת" for the actual practice of those commandments). If so, then when wisdom-writers of his circle such as Ben Sira present their standard identification of Wisdom with Torah (see below, Appendix Six, Passim and Appendix Three, fn. 51), they are therefore identifying wisdom also (like Torah) with study only, and not with practice. This would of course sharpen Qoheleth’s determination to establish that wisdom must consist of ethical practice. True wisdom is not just a literary pastime for leisureed gentlemen, studying and writing books (which, by contrast, is the picture presented by Ben Sira, with his emphasis on prolific output). Rather, writing wisdom-books is over-rated (12:12), wisdom is for the people, and not just for the leisureed class (12:9), and wisdom consists of upright conduct, of keeping God’s commandments, not simply studying them.

Although, then, regarding Torah as only the study of the Law need not in itself present an ethical problem for Qoheleth (since new terms such as "מַעְלָה" and "מַעְלָה מַשָּׁבַת" can be added to denote the practice of it), it does present an ethical problem for him if wisdom is then identified with this new, truncated meaning of Torah as "study". For true wisdom has to be right conduct, the socially responsible reciprocity of giving and receiving good; mere study (even of God’s Law, and even when accompanied by literary creativity) can not amount to wisdom.
"An egalitarian benevolence to fellow beings that was the most prized social quality of a good man in the Hellenistic city. The High Priest Simon the Just wants to use "Gemilut Hasadim" as a means of firmly uniting the Jewish people in a period when the limitless greed of the new acquisitive society nurtured by the Ptolemies threatened their moral stability.". 18

If this assessment of Simon's ethical priority is correct, then it tends to confirm Qoheleth's picture of social dislocation as the major moral problem of his era. 19

18 The Jews in the Greek Age, P.286.

19 See also below, APPENDIX THREE, THE ERA OF QOHELETH.
As Bickerman himself admits, however, Simon's need to instate "Gemilut Hasadim" as a "new" element, a Jewish version of a Greek virtue, presupposes a prior erosion of the sense of mutual obligation to kindness and of general social responsibility already engrained in Torah itself. The Mosaic tradition of duty to the poor had once been sufficient in itself to

"(Raise) social responsibility to the level of a sacred duty and - (protect) the self-esteem of the needy.". 21

Perhaps this is why Qoheleth does not himself use the term "Gemilut Hasadim" as such, but is content instead to refer people back to the original Law of God (the ""ליגשתו" or "commandments" of 12:13). Nevertheless, his work overall displays exactly the same emphasis on reciprocity of good deeds as Simon reflects by his use of the term "Gemilut Hasadim". 22 In view of the similar implications of Qoheleth's "ןוירב וטולא" / "ποιεῖν ἁγαθόν" 23 and Simon's "בְּנֵי לא תיטר" / "זקן", it is interesting that LXX uses the almost identical "ἁγαθόν ποιεῖν" to translate Prov. 11:17's מִבְּנֵי, the same root as that of Simon's "בְּנֵי לא תיטר" / "Gemilut" or "reciprocity".

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20 Ibid., P.285.
21 Ibid., P.285.
22 This makes Bickerman's dating of the Simon of Aboth 1.2, within the lifetime of Qoheleth's close successor Ben Sira (see below, Appendix Three), very attractive.
23 See above, Chapter 8, Section iii on "ποιεῖν ἁγαθόν", the Greek term selected by the LXX translator(s) for Qoheleth's "ליגשתו וטולא".
Indeed, Qoheleth is highly sensitive to reciprocity altogether, as a feature not
only of ethics but of human experience in general, and of the natural world external
to Man but closely related to him. This is implicit in his use of the old saying that
the sea is never full, and also in his careful arrangement of the "times" (3:1-8)
appropriate to Man's range of activities into exact opposites. Both passages reflect
the traditional concept of δικη or "what is natural" maintaining normative reciprocities
and balancing the effects of encroachments by one element at the expense of another.

From this viewpoint, it is accepted practice to apply the same principle, that of
"δικη" maintaining balance between opposite qualities, to human action and attitudes
as well as to the processes of nature. Hence Sophocles' Ajax refers to the natural
reciprocity of cold and heat, day and night, and compares the fact that he is obliged
to give way before the Atreidae with the way that winter gives place to summer and
night to day, a turbulent sea to a subduing wind, sleep 24 to waking, etc. 25

Although he does not refer explicitly in this passage to a right "time" for each
of these opposites, it is nevertheless self-evident that either member of each pair of
opposites does have its exclusively appropriate "time", and that the time for night can
not be the time for day, etc. As well as being thus related to κοιμος, the present
critical moment, each pair of reciprocal opposites is equally inevitably related to

24See also, e.g., Od. XIX, L.591-3 for, in effect, a statement that there is a proper appointed time for
sleep.
χρόνος, time as a continuum. For the passing of time overall is the only possible background against which one critical moment can succeed to another, and the time appropriate to one action be replaced by the time appropriate to another. As Anaximander says, 26 it is

" -according to the assessment of Time (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν)"

that the opposite substances, which together constitute the differentiated world, pay

" -penalty and retribution to each other (δίκην κατ τίςν ἀλλήλοις) for their encroachment / 'injustice' (τῆς ὀδικίας)". 27

26 As Kirk, Raven and Schofield point out, The Presocratic Philosophers, P.119-20,

"Anaximander is the first in whom the concept of opposed natural substances (which recurs in Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and in the Pythagoreans certainly as early as Alcmaeon) clearly appears."

They then give an outline of his ideas, including the fact that his concept of reciprocity spans both natural phenomena and human ethics (interpreting his use of the term δίκη as anthropomorphizing courtroom language applied to nature metaphorically), and also including the question of whether he himself first conceived of the Opposites as such, or whether others derived this abstract idea from his more concrete notion of opposite qualities (Ibid., P.120):

"Doubtless he was influenced by observation of the main seasonal changes, in which heat and drought in summer seem to be pitted against cold and rain in winter. The constant interchange between opposed substances is explained by Anaximander in a legalistic metaphor derived from human society; the prevalence of one substance at the expense of its contrary is 'injustice', and a reaction takes place through the infliction of punishment by the restoration of equality - of more than equality, since the wrong-doer is deprived of part of his original substance, too. This is given to the victim in addition to what was his own, and in turn leads (it might be inferred) to κόρος, surfeit, on the part of the former victim, who now commits injustice on the former aggressor. Thus both the continuity and the stability of natural change were motivated, for Anaximander, by means of this anthropomorphic metaphor. The main opposites in cosmogony were the the hot substance and the cold substance - flame or fire and mist or air. These, with which are associated dryness and moisture, are also the main cosmological opposites, most notably involved in the large-scale changes in the natural world. They were probably isolated by Heraclitus (fr. 126) before ever they were elevated to the form of standard irreducible elements by Empedocles. Caution must be shown, to be sure, about the opposites in Anaximander: it is possible, for example, that the Peripatetics substituted their own more abstract formulations, the hot and the cold and so on, for more concrete expressions used by Anaximander himself. For him, the world may have been made up of substances which, while they each possessed individual tendencies contrary to those of some of the others, need not have been formally described as opposites, that is, for example, as the hard and the soft; but simply as fire, wind, iron, water, man, woman, and so on.".


Kirk, Raven and Schofield, Ibid., P.120-1), comment on the expression "κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν":

"The idea of a time-limit is appropriate: the injustice of summer has to be made good within the roughly equal period of winter, that of night within the period of day, and so on. No uniform
Solon's expression "ἐν δὲ χρόνοις" also underlines the importance of time in the process of reciprocity, and applies this process not just to nature, but also directly to human ethics. The court in which earth will appear in support of Solon’s decision to remove the boundary stones is the court of time; for it was in the process of time that earth has become free from the boundary stones which previously enslaved her. Since Solon often stresses the inevitability of corresponding recoil following encroachments, he probably means that the process of time was enough to make it inevitable that the earth would eventually be freed.

Qoheleth’s reference in 1:7a to the sea never being full despite all the rivers flowing into it is an indirect reflection of the concept of δὲ καιρὸς or of the reciprocity of nature as maintaining cosmic stability. This "time-honoured enigma (τὴν ἀρχαῖαν ἀπόρθωσιν)" as Aristotle calls it,

"-that the sea becomes no fuller even though innumerable rivers of immense size are flowing into it every day",

owes its origin to the principle of δὲ καιρὸς. For if the sea permanently increased its period can be meant; Time makes the assessment to meet the particular case. That the additional idea of inevitability is implicit in the remarkable personification of Time here may be indicated by the strikingly similar "trial conducted by Time" in Solon (see following footnote), roughly a generation before Anaximander.

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28Fr. 24, Diehl. The expression must mean "in the court of time", since he refers to earth as his supporting witness ("συμμαρτυρομένη") in it.

29So Kirk, Raven and Schofield, Ibid. P.121:

"Here earth justifies Solon’s claim because with the lapse of time she has become free; that is what Time’s trial signifies. No pre-determined time-limit is intended here. Elsewhere in Solon, too, it is the inevitability of retribution that is stressed again and again; so in Anaximander, we may infer, injustice must inevitably be punished, sooner or later in time - but here the periods, since they are those of the great seasonal changes, as well as other less important ones, must be supervised and assessed appropriately to each case."

30In Met. II.2 (355 B), L.21-5. Cf. Ibid. L.17, where, like Qoheleth, he specifies that all the rivers flow into the place occupied by the sea.
overall size (i.e., became ‘full’), this would be at the expense of its opposite, the land. So the sea would then have encroached on the proper domain of the land without suffering the requisite retribution.

The fact that it is the concept of ὑκτείς and of natural reciprocity which is behind this ancient proverb about the sea is reflected in Aristoph. *Clouds*, L.i.1287-95. Strepsiades appeals to the fact that the sea never gets any fuller (L.i.1290-1), even though all the rivers flow into it (L.i.1293-4), as an excuse for not paying Amynias the interest he owes him. He uses the sea as an analogy on which to base his claim that the original sum of money he borrowed can not have got any larger. When he poses Amynias the trick rhetorical question, "Is the sea any fuller than it used to be?", it elicits, as he knew it would, an unhesitating, emphatic "No!", on the grounds that it would not be "natural" or "in accordance with ὑκτείς" for it to be fuller ("οὐ γὰρ ὑκτείνον πλεῖον ἐίνα λαῖται"). This reply shows that the popular assumption about ὑκτείς maintaining the elemental status quo is the real point behind this old proverb or riddle about the sea. 31

Admittedly, Strepsiades’ trick on Amynias is probably, as Starkie suggests in his commentary on *The Clouds* 32,

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31 For another example of the sea as the prime embodiment of ὑκτείς in the workings of nature, see Solon’s description of the sea as in itself "πάντων ὑκτείνατητη", even though it can be stirred by the external influence of winds; Plut., Vit. Sol., 3.5 (fr.9, 1-2).

"A sneer at the ethical employment of natural philosophy affected by certain philosophers".

Nevertheless, even though some teachers of ethics might pretentiously strain the parallel between δικαιοσύνη in the physical realm and δικαιοσύνη in the human and ethical realm, it was far from customary to deny such a parallel any validity whatsoever, as is evident from Anaximander's legal analogy above. Sophocles, e.g., employs this type of comparison between reciprocity of opposites in the realm of nature and in the sphere of human behaviour without pretentious exaggeration. 33

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33 See Kitto's comments on Sophocles' Electra in Greek Tragedy, Pp.134-7, for the significance of a universal δικαιοσύνη relating to human ethical conduct. Kitto discerns in the play a natural process, on the ethical plane, of action provoking reaction, in a manner analogous to the natural reciprocity of opposites in the physical realm.

Admittedly, in Ajax L.666-77, the poet seems to be underlining his attack on the "unyielding temperament" through his protagonist's bizarre misapplication of the principle of reciprocity to human behaviour; but this is not to say that the same principle could not be applied to the human realm more appropriately, had Ajax understood it better. The fault lies not in the analogy between the natural realm and the human, but rather in the hero's distortion of it.

In no way does the principle of opposite giving way to opposite justify Ajax's suicide, as he seems to think. Its implications as to how he should act are the complete reverse of how his inflexible disposition leads him to construe them. So far from night destroying itself to give way once and for all to an everlasting day, it is, on the contrary, an essential aspect of this ongoing process of reciprocity that the time for night, after giving way to day at the right time for day, will nevertheless at some later stage return; and if night should not return when its proper time returns, the consequences would be disastrous. Similarly, heat does not destroy itself to make way for constant cold. For although the arrival of the time for cold makes it necessary for heat temporarily to withdraw, the time for heat will later return, then necessitating in turn the withdrawal of cold.

Ajax's 'solution' to the dominance of the Atreidae is, therefore, a complete travesty of the very principle to which he appeals to justify this suicide. Only the wise / flexible person can understand this principle correctly. The heroic yet unadaptable Ajax either completely misunderstands it or, worse still, deliberately and ironically distorts it, because of his inability to accept his situation for what it is. This is the type of attitude Qoh. 7:18 argues against, exhorting us to lay hold on every type of situation, because every type of circumstance, even reversal and adversity, can contribute to the development of piety in the individual who experiences it.

Ajax's deadly misapplication of the principle of reciprocal opposites confirms the danger of the "unyielding temperament" ("σκληρός ψυχή") of L.1361; cf. Antig., L.473, for the "σκληροτρίχης φρονήσατα" which Creon disastrously fails to discern in himself, even though he can recognize them in his adversary Antigone. Ajax, like Antigone, affirms the fact that interactive flexibility is the sine qua non of wisdom. See above, Chapter 9, Section iv, Goal-Seeking, Path-Making and Receptive / Intuitive Wisdom.
In a Hellenistic context, then, the idea of the sea never becoming full despite the massive influx of the rivers readily evokes the familiar concept of δικρατία and of cosmic stability due to the reciprocity of opposites. The fact that regulated reciprocity is accepted as normality implies that total isolation from or extravagant encroachments on others are unnatural and unrealistic, and therefore threaten stability. The juxtaposition in Qoheleth of the sea-image (1:7) with the insatiability of Man’s verbalizing drive and of his sense-appetites (1:8) is an implied rebuke of greed. If the sea hoarded up its streams as a miser hoards up gold, instead of spending it, either on his own or his dependents’ enjoyment (4:7-8), or on charity to the poor (11:1-2), the natural order of the cosmos would be destroyed.

However, as Qoheleth’s public probably recalls from his apparent allusion to Aristotle (1:4 b), this is not the case. The sea does not hoard up water; it allows its waters, augmented by the influx of the rivers, to withdraw again by evaporation. Eventually, therefore, because the normal order of give and take is maintained, the waters which have thus withdrawn from the sea will in due course return to it again.

The same process operates also in the ethical realm. If you give bread to the poor,

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34 Nor, for that matter, drying up completely either. For various views about the implications of this for cosmic stability, see Kirk, Raven and Schofield, op. cit., Pp.138-140.

35 This is also mentioned above, Chapter 9, Section ii.

36 In effect, what is lost by evaporation is restored by rainfall (Arist., Met. II.3, L1.22-31).
"After many days you will find it again." 37

There is no point in withholding largesse from where it is obviously needed and storing it up 'just in case', because one never knows what will happen or not happen (11:2). This typically human habit of attempting to calculate beyond one's ability runs counter to the natural pattern of reciprocity, as does the kindred practice of denying one's present human need, or that of others, in order to hoard.

The social interaction of give and take, then, maintains society. However, once arrest the steady flow of that natural process, and there is no society, just as there would be no natural universe if the sea voraciously devoured all its incoming waters, resisted evaporation, and swelled beyond its proper proportions at the permanent expense of its opposite, land. If this happened, the natural order as we understand it would cease to exist; and similarly, illicit hoarding 38 precipitates socio-economic

37 Qoh. 11:1. Here, "the waters" means the sea, since this verse is alluding to Theognis L.108's comparison of generosity to base men with casting seed on the sea (see above, Chapter 8, Section iii, for Qoheleth's direct disagreement with Theognis on this point). Hence, 11:1 recalls 1:7's "sea (which) is never full". As in 1:7 the sea 'returns', in due course, the waters with which the rivers augment it, so in 11:1 it 'returns', after many days, the bread which is cast upon it. The reference in 11:3 to the 'fulness' of the clouds then affirms 11:1's association with 1:7 and its 'never-full' sea, reinforcing its use of the sea as an illustration of the unnaturalness of hoarding. For the rain in 11:3, like the sea in 1:7, is water which must, by the very law of nature, be given away once it reaches a certain volume. The very fulness of the clouds in 11:3 makes it inevitable that they will give away their rain; once their fulness of water is attained, this makes it the "time" to pour rain on the earth. The connexion between the water-imagery of 1:7 and that of 11:1-3 is underlined by the fact that they represent different stages of the same water-cycle, as discussed in Aristotle's Meteorologica.

38 The term "hoarding" is used in this Chapter in its usual pejorative sense of morally unacceptable storing or gathering: either
a) saving / accumulating to excess;
b) saving / accumulating things which, by their very nature, should not be saved / accumulated; or
c) saving / accumulating when it is the wrong time to do so (Qoh. 3:5-6 indicates that since there is a time for letting things go as well as a time for acquiring or retaining them.).

An example of b) would be the joining of "house to house" in Is. 5:8 ff. Since a home is something everyone needs, and since no individual needs a large number of them, then those who join "house to house" are depriving others of what they need and accumulating for themselves something they do not need. The outcome will be such deprivation for those without that there will be no society; the greedy will "live alone in the land". Not only is such conduct socially irresponsible, in that it deprives other individuals of their
chaos,\textsuperscript{39} causing society as such to disintegrate.\textsuperscript{40}

Hoarding is not tolerated by Torah, which imposes its own restrictions on what, when and how much one is or is not allowed to save / gather. These restrictions are in the form of broad guidelines, and are not rigorously detailed. Yet the implication of these guidelines is clear: limitless accumulation is not acceptable, largely for reasons of social responsibility. See \textit{Lev.} 19:9 & 10; \textit{Ibid.} 23:22; \textit{Deut.} 23:24 and \textit{Ibid.} 24:19-22. The irrationality of hoarding is also subtly condemned in \textit{Ex.} 16:19-25, which demonstrates the difference between saving manna against God’s command, when it breeds maggots and stinks, and saving manna according to God’s command (so it will not be necessary to gather it on the Sabbath), when it does not breed maggots and remains wholesome. This reflects the idea that people can not be left to save or not to save simply according to their own ideas of which is appropriate at which time; God is sovereign in the matter of when Man saves and when he lets go. Cf. the sacrifice in \textit{Lev.} 19:5-8. In addition to the dimension of social responsibility, therefore, the issue of hoarding also involves the fact that the hoarder is not accepting God’s sovereignty or trusting in His faithfulness as divine provider. The issue of the restrictions on saving / accumulating is, then, an issue of faith and reverence toward God directly, as well as of responsibility to one’s poorer neighbour.

\textsuperscript{39}Cf. \textit{Prov.} 11:24-6,

“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.”.

\textsuperscript{40}Martin Luther King argues the unnaturalness of hoarding as a problem for the world overall, as well as for a particular society, because of the “interdependence of men and nations” in economic and spiritual terms. He describes the storage of hoarded goods as a burden for the hoarder, as well as an unnecessary perpetuation of the deprivation of others:

“Our nation’s productive machinery constantly brings forth such an abundance of food that we must build larger barns and spend more than a million dollars daily to store our surplus. Year after year we ask (see \textit{Lk.} 12:17), \textit{What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?} I have seen an answer in the faces of millions of poverty-stricken men and women in Asia, Africa and South America. I have seen an answer in the appalling poverty in the Mississippi Delta and the tragic insecurity of the unemployed in large industrial cities of the North. What can we do? The answer is simple: feed the poor, clothe the naked, and heal the sick. Where can we store our goods? Again the answer is simple: we can store our surplus food free of charge in the shrivelled stomachs of the millions of God’s children who go to bed hungry at night. We can use our vast resources of wealth to wipe poverty from the earth.”

\textit{Strength to Love} (Glasgow, repr. 1977), P.70.

Hoarding also inevitably results in deprivation for the hoarder in other less overt ways as well, because of the “inescapable network of mutuality” by which

“Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality”.

\textit{Ibid.}, P.70. The hoarder’s bread, then, will not return to (him) after many days”, because he has not “cast (it) upon the waters” (\textit{Qoh.} 11:1).

In fact, Dr. King’s “inescapable network of mutuality” implies that not only is the hoarding of wealth unrealistic, but so is the blinkered pursuit of it as well; see also below, this Chapter, Section v.
Man, however, does not perceive this parallel automatically. He has to be reminded that he belongs to the context of the cyclic, interactive flow of the natural world in order to see that only consistently maintained reciprocal interaction produces stability. This is the real point of 1:4 b, that the earth remains forever. It simply reflects Aristotle’s point that if the κόσμος / τὸ πᾶν is eternal, therefore so is the sea:

"It is, then, generally agreed that the sea had a beginning if the universe as a whole had; for the two are supposed to have come into being at the same time. So, clearly, if the universe is eternal, we must suppose that the sea is too."

Qoheleth, then, in remarking that the earth remains forever, is reminding us of Aristotle’s viewpoint, including its implications about the sea as well as the earth. He then builds on this, with the sea as his symbolic image of society, a picture of social stability as dependent on natural reciprocity being maintained.

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41 Similarly, Man often has to be tested by God in order to see that he is "like the animals" (3:18); he does not necessarily have the ability to perceive it automatically.

In the course of his next argument, Aristotle reveals his belief in the inevitably cyclical quality of the continuing processes of nature. He asserts that after an excess of wet, the opposite will happen, the earth will dry out again, and the necessary cycle of reciprocity will continue.

"καὶ πάλιν γένεται τοῦναντιον. καὶ διὰ τοὺς γένεται, ξηρανεῖται πάλιν. καὶ τοῦθεν ύπος κάτα κύκλον ἀναγκαῖον ἀεὶ βαδίζειν."

"In due course the opposite will happen in turn. And after that the earth will again dry up. And so the process must continually carry on in a cycle.".

This idea of a cycle of opposites as inevitable in order to maintain cosmic stability is also relevant to Qoheleth's own view of cycles. This is not to say that Qoheleth has any theory about the underlying causes of the polarity of opposites. On the contrary, the fact that he appears not to have any such theory is of considerable interest. For, as Horton points out, in Greek philosophical treatment of the opposites, the inner causation of their pattern of reciprocity has a high profile relative to the issue of opposites overall. Qoheleth does not, e.g., seem to envisage a cycle of reciprocal causation between opposites, like that of Plato in Phaedo 70-72:

"For if generation did not proceed from opposite to opposite and back again,

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43 He is Contesting the idea that the sea could go to the opposite extreme to becoming full, and actually dry up altogether, Met. II.3 (356 B), L.10 ff. As for the complementary fact that the sea does not increase either, he attributes this to evaporation, especially accelerated evaporation due to input of water from the rivers spreading out in a large space. See Met. II.2 (355 B), L.21-33.


going round, as it were, in a circle (ὅσπερ εἰς κύκλῳ), but always went forward in a straight line without turning back or curving, then, you know, in the end all things would have the same form and be acted upon in the same way and stop being generated at all.". 46

Nevertheless, despite the absence of any such theory in Qoheleth, there is a connection between the author’s interest in cycles and the key rôle he assigns to the interaction of opposites, despite his preoccupation with the external manifestation of these opposites rather than with their inner interconnexion. For he does not believe that social stability can continue if the human will proceeds in a straight line to individualized goals, any more than Plato believes the physical world could continue if the generation of opposites proceeded straight forward instead of being cyclic and reciprocal.

This is largely because Qoheleth considers that such blinkered goal-seeking is based on ignorance or underestimation of the random factor in human experience, and he therefore wishes to enhance people’s awareness of this random factor. Horton 47 realizes that his exclusive concentration on external manifestations of the different types of circumstance is unusual:

"Unwilling to speculate on any inner connexion (causal or otherwise) between the opposites, (Qoheleth) is content merely to observe that both pairs of an opposite do occur and do tend to follow each other.". 48

In this context, however, the word "merely" is misleading. It is not that the author is

46Ibid. 72 B.


content with the external pattern of reciprocities alone, and is without curiosity as to its cause. His celebration of God as Mastermind of the system belies that idea. Rather, the traditional philosophical views about inner causation tend to exaggerate the predictable element in experience. Since Qoheleth aims to reverse this emphasis, it would be counterproductive to his objective to dwell in detail on a theory of inner causation, even if he has one. If he were to do so, it is almost inevitable that some at least of his disciples would pervert his theory into a tool for making over-ambitious predictions, the very thing he wishes to dissuade them from doing.

The following of good times by a change of direction to bad times (7:14), and the following of the appointed time for one activity by a swing to the appropriate time for its opposite (3:1-8), constitute unpredictable interruptions of the present state of affairs. Emphasizing this as a self-evident fact of experience and as an inherent feature of Man's circumstances underlines the need for adaptable alertness and the impracticality of complacency in a way that no theory of inner causal connexion between the opposite "times" possibly could. It also underlines the impossibility of proceeding in a straight line, armed with definite predictions of success, to any pre-determined goal.

This is a radically different view of the reciprocal opposites from the idea that the pattern of their reciprocity is actually a constant, as, in their different ways, Plato and Aristotle both appear to think. Once the pattern of their interaction is construed as a constant, the opposites tend to be viewed as the allies of predictability. Qoheleth, by contrast, sees them as the enemies of impiously over-ambitious prediction.
conceives of the pattern of their continual interchange as cyclic; but he sees this cycle as reciprocal in the simple sense that one activity must not encroach on the proper "time" of another. The opposites with which he is chiefly concerned are opposite human activities and the attitudes associated with them, not primarily the opposite physical qualities of the universe as such, even though his focus on the former is firmly set in the context of the latter. He does not wish to discuss the causation (reciprocal or otherwise) of the interactive opposites within the cycle; he simply wishes to point out that Man himself belongs to this cycle, and therefore Man's will can not plot a straight line to any goal.

The impossibility of plotting a single, uninterrupted straight line to any goal is a concept which dogs the imagery of wisdom-theory to this day. Other aspects of reality, imaged as non-linear even when the random principle does not apply, are also conceived of in negatively goal-seeking terminology, as preventing predictable progression in a straight line to a particular target. One example of this is the effect of the curvature of space-time by the matter and energy in it, according to the general theory of relativity. Attempts to explain this use the metaphor of deviation from an attempted goal. In terms of the challenge posed by wisdom to anti-wisdom's predilection for simplistic goal-seeking, this 'curvature' is comparable to the

49 For a particularly emphatic statement of this, see 1:9-10, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, Look! This is something new? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time."

50 See APPENDIX SEVEN for the possibility of 1:6 and 1:7 being a juxtaposition of sun and sea, reflecting in concrete terms the traditional reciprocity of the more abstract qualities "dry" and "wet". Cf. above, Chapter 9, Section i, P.10 for the balanced regularity of sea and sun in the natural world.
'crookedness' which Qoheleth regards as intrinsic to God's overall pattern of reality, even though the causes of these two types of curvature / crookedness are not comparable.

Hawking, e.g., explains this curvature of space-time in slightly anthropomorphized terms, his repetitions of the verb "try" giving his picture of the phenomenon a familiarly goal-seeking slant:

"Objects like cannonballs and planets try to move on a straight line through space-time, but because space-time is curved, warped rather than flat, their paths appear to be bent. The earth is trying to move on a straight line through space-time, but the curvature of space-time produced by the mass of the sun causes it to go in a circle around the sun. Similarly, light tries to travel in a straight line, but the curvature of space-time near the sun causes the light from distant stars to be bent if it passes near the sun. -

"(This) discovery completely transformed the way we think about space and time. They were no longer a passive background in which events took place. No longer could we think of space and time as running on forever, unaffected by what happened in the universe. Instead, they were now dynamic qualities that influenced and were influenced by events that took place in them."

Although the type of crookedness or curvature described here does not defy prediction, the metaphor of this non-linear quality within nature as an 'obstacle' to the earth and to the light in their 'attempt' to reach a goal is of some interest, for the sake of any standpoint it may reflect in terms of the overall history of wisdom-theory and of its characteristic preoccupations. The contemporary sage still adheres to goal-seeking imagery; but, like Qoheleth, he feels no unease at the fact that this imagery is negative: i.e., that it reflects the interruption and the non-consummation of paths

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\(^{51}\)Hawking, Stephen, Black Holes and Baby Universes, Pp.73-4.

\(^{52}\)The italics are mine, not the author’s.
to a goal. This relatively new predominance of *negative* goal-seeking imagery may reflect some degree of progress toward liberation from anti-wisdom's preoccupation with manipulating external realities to achieve subjectively conceived goals. Although the curvature of space-time is not seen as precluding the possibility of prediction, it is still accepted as curvature. A type of wisdom which accepts the possibility of prediction, but which also accepts whatever 'crookedness' happens to be evident in the overall pattern of reality, making allowance for this in its predictions, is very different in quality from anti-wisdom, which craves predictability to the extreme of resisting the reality of the 'crookedness', trying to "make straight" what God has "made crooked". 53

The circumstantial environment in which Qoheleth sees Man pursuing his goals is also 'curved', by the (in this case apparently random) alternation between each circumstance and its opposite, and the consequent non-continuation of any one circumstance. Small wonder, then, that it is impossible to plot a straight path through this environment. To Qoheleth, the very fact that the opposites whose alternation makes up the cycle of reciprocity show no evidence of any inner causal connexion with each other makes them in his view a demonstration of the principle of randomness, i.e., that there is no linear continuum in life along which one could proceed in certain knowledge of reaching some target. The element of randomness which determines the alternation from one circumstance to its opposite is therefore of no less importance than skill, since the abruptness of the resulting changes of

53 See also below, this Chapter, this Section, for the importance of not limiting the concept of wisdom to the concept of positive, simplistically linear goal-seeking, and for the expansion of the imagery of wisdom-writing to include non-goal-seeking or negative goal-seeking imagery.
circumstance can utterly defeat the skill which was previously in control, as well as provide an opportunity for previously hidden skill to be demonstrated. No outcome of any endeavour, therefore, is determined without the time-chance interaction.

This is the real reason why,

"Unwilling to speculate on the inner meaning of the universe, Qoheleth sticks to the task of describing natural events as they happen” 54,

and

" -does not fit the opposites together into a neat, complete pattern, join them by an inner mystical cord, or assemble them within some comprehensive scheme.". 55

This is not so much, as Horton thinks, because

"He does not regard the natural processes as interacting", 56

but rather because it is the random element which determines how they interact; so it is the random element, and its interruption of expected paths, which he aims to emphasize.

This does not mean that the "natural processes" to which Horton refers do not interact; nor does it mean that every aspect of experience is random, since the factor of human skill and calculation must also be borne in mind. Yet the fact remains that the random element is of vast importance: not only is ΗΥ / κοιρδος a factor in

54 Horton, op. cit., P.17.
55 Ibid., P. 21.
56 Ibid., P.21.
546
outcomes, but so is τοχη. 57

In parallel with this principle, not only is revelation a vital aspect of spirituality, but also so is the piety of uncertainty. In the context of revealed religion, this point needs to be emphasized, since uncertainty is often assumed to be incompatible with revelation and with piety altogether. The basis of this idea has never been very clear; but whatever the reason for it, the assumption is of long standing, and very persistent. It is akin to the puzzlement in the realm of science caused by the coexistence of things which are susceptible to definite knowledge and things which are not.

In fact, the theological and the scientific aspects of the problem posed by uncertainty and by randomness actually converge in Einstein’s expression of unease about quantum mechanics and its uncertainty principle,

"God does not play dice".

As Hawking points out,

"But all the evidence indicates that God is an inveterate gambler, and that He throws the dice on every possible occasion. 58

"(The) uncertainty principle of Heisenberg showed that one could not measure the state of a system exactly, so one could not predict exactly what it would do in the future. All one could do is predict the probabilities of different outcomes. It was this element of chance, or randomness, that so disturbed Einstein. He refused to believe that physical laws should not make a definite, unambiguous prediction for what would happen. But however one expresses it, all the evidence is that the quantum phenomenon and the uncertainty

57-Τοχη" seems so obviously the natural translation for "Τοναξι" in Qoh. 9:11 that LXX’s choice of "απαντημα" is surprising; but see above, Chapter 9, Section iii, fn. 100.

principle are unavoidable, and that they occur in every branch of physics." 59

Although Hawking makes no reference to this himself, it is possible that what lies behind the difficulty of accepting the principle of randomness in physics is the same as what makes it difficult in theology: the widespread and longstanding acceptance of positive goal-seeking 60 or direct path-finding as the essence of wisdom. The debt of western science to Aristotle, and the influence on Aristotle of the goal-seeking imagery of Greek wisdom, may have had a part to play in how the same reluctance to accept randomness came to occur in both fields of thought. Once wisdom is construed as the skill of navigation to a self-chosen objective in a simple straight line (rather than as "the fear of God", 61 with its unimaginable horizons and "crooked" paths), this leads in turn to a demand for reality to consist of trackable paths and attainable goals. Any other concept of reality would probably be regarded as disorderly and meaningless, even impossible, and would certainly be seen as unattractive. The desire to plot a path to some objective has become so widely accepted as the most prominent of all human aspirations that a crooked or curved universe without any uninterruptable straight lines to anywhere may well seem an unimaginable affront to the human ego.

Nevertheless, this absence of uninterruptable straight lines is exactly the aspect of the universe particularly prominent in contemporary wisdom, as is reflected in the


60 I.e., proceeding to a predictable goal by a fixed route without deviating from it.

imagery (negative in terms of conventional goal-seeking wisdom) used to illustrate, e.g., Feynman's concept of a sum over histories. Hawking describes it in terms of a particle whose potential movements are not confined only to one possible straight line toward a single predictable goal:

"Consider, for example, a particle that is at Point A at a certain time. Normally, one would assume that the particle will move on a straight line away from A. However, according to the sum over histories, it can move on any path that starts at A. It is like what happens when you place a drop of ink on a piece of blotting paper. The particles of ink will spread through the blotting paper along every possible path. Even if you block the straight line between two points by putting a cut in the corner, the ink will get around the corner."

This same type of image is reflected in Serres' mistrust of confinement to the single straight line or to the 'obvious' direct route:

"My hope rests in the unexpected -. My hope lies not in the direct path, this bleak, monotonous method that novelty has always fled; my hope is the shortcut, the broken path drawn at random at each stop by the wasp, the bee, or the fly in flight. -

"I can't tell where the wasp will go, I can't understand the dust that dances in the solar ray issuing from the fissure of systems; but if I know, if I find out, if I could one day predict - what an incredible fortune to be won finally at roulette; what a major stroke of genius; what a solar blast of intuition; what hope - no, my only hope.".

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62 This is the idea that a system has not merely one single, definite history in space-time (as in a classical non-quantum theory), but instead has every possible history. Without this concept, it seems that Einstein's theory of general relativity could not be reconciled with the uncertainty principle of quantum theory.


64 Serres is drawing on the imagery of a passage of Paul Verlaine's (Sagesse 3.3), beginning with the word "hope"; hence the prominence of the word "hope" here.

In terms of conventional goal-seeking anti-wisdom, the imagery of both these passages seems negative; for they both disavow, in effect, the simplistic concept of one single, predictable path being consistently pursued. Yet neither Serres nor Hawking sees any disconcerting denial in their picture of the possibility of wisdom. Neither protests against the complexity of their imagery, and the implicit problems this poses to the prospects for prediction; in fact, Serres actually affirms this complexity warmly.

Despite his rhetorical claim to the ambition of predicting the unpredictable, Serres’ real aim here is to declare the unpredictable. His suspicion of ‘straight’ lines reflects a desire to do justice to the factor of randomness in reality, and thereby to escape the snare of false certainties and the poor economy of "illumination at the cost of obscurity".

"No-one has ever really determined the price of the ignorance that knowledge pre-supposes, demands, produces. - Epistemology has long since neglected to keep the books, the balance sheet, the accounts. - Knowledge, like everyone else, must pay in domestic coin, in its own currency, in the currency of understanding; but it pays in misunderstanding. Thus shadow follows

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{bid., P.74. See also above, Chapter 9, Section vii.}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize \cite{Indirectly, the balance-sheet concept here is related to Qoheleth’s idea of the \textit{}\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{}}} the balance sheet of human accountability to God (and hence, indirectly, of reward and punishment). For true knowledge, illumination which does not produce the obscurity of false certainties, is a moral necessity. See above, Chapter 9, Section vii; see also this Chapter, above, Section i and below, Section vi.}}\]

The intrinsically reciprocal nature of human life means that there is also a balance-sheet of men’s interdependence or indebtedness one to another, even in the sphere of ordinary trade and commerce.

"Each of us is eternally ‘in the red’. We are everlasting debtors to unknown men and women. We do not finish breakfast without being dependent on more than half of the world", because of the vast variety of goods from all over the world which we use throughout the course of every day. King, op. cit., P. 70. This complex picture from the present day of the outcome of international trade is only the logical conclusion of the tendency to economic interdependence which trading of any kind has always implied, even from Antiquity.
Il 68

clearity.". 68

This uneconomical quest for "knowledge", which produces the opposite of knowledge, is akin to the verbalized assertion in Qoh. 6:11 which in fact "multiplies רזוק; it is the same type of so-called knowledge which makes things less "grasped" or "known" instead of more so. 69 There is no way to avoid Qoheleth's multiplication of רזוק, or Serres' non-cost-effective knowledge, without facing up to the principle of randomness, and hence of unpredictability and unknowability, inherent in the nature of experience itself.

The normative pattern of nature is not a linear progress to an individualized goal, but a cycle of alternating give and take; therefore, we should not expect the dominant pattern of our human life to be a linear, individualistic progress either. For despite Man's capacity to conceive of a personalized and egocentric goal, he belongs to the same pattern of cyclic reciprocity as inanimate nature, whose various elements do not attain any such goal on any such linear path. Their interdependent reciprocity is maintained in a continual yet irregular interchange of the time for one purpose being superseded by the time for another. Hence any course toward any objective whatever is constantly vulnerable to potential interruption, termination or diversion into another direction.

Such a varied pattern is too complex, too globally all-embracing and too

68 Ibid., P.74.

69 See above, Chapter 9, Section vii.

551
directly obstructive to Man's egocentric will to be anything less than the deliberate design of God to counteract the self-centred human drives that undermine spirituality and social interaction (3:9-14). The next four Sections explore how Qoheleth sees this God-ordained pattern working toward Judgment, piety and social interdependence, and against egocentrism and greed.

There is an indispensable link between the positive ethical rôle of the reciprocity of opposites and the divinely ordained random element in reality. For the mutable inter-relationship between the opposites depends entirely on their giving way to each other as one set of circumstances is succeeded by another; and the succession is not necessarily regular, repetitive and relatively smooth, as in night succeeding to day or winter to summer, but is often abrupt and unpredictable. The path of events can not be relied upon to continue as expected along its present route, but tends to take sharp, unprecedented turns, making it "crooked" (1:15, 7:13).

The link between this principle of randomness and the ethical rôle of opposites is reflected in 7:13-18. The passage begins by reminding us that the element of randomness is an ineradicable aspect of experience (7:13), and that both extremes of the opposite types of experience are equally God-ordained (vv 14). In v 15, Qoheleth points out that this affects the dispensation of judgment: the righteous do not proceed in a predictable straight line to long life and prosperity, nor the wicked directly to the destruction which they deserve.

Then in vv 16-18, we find again the same contrary elements as in 2:3: wisdom and folly, and an exhortation to 'grasp' both (expressed by the same root, יִתְנָה, as in
Yet this time the combination makes a sufficiently comprehensible pattern of experience for Qoheleth to be able to base some positive advice on it. Here, he is not just recounting the experience of a failed experiment as in 2:1 ff. (see above, Chapter 9, Section vii); rather, he is actually contributing to a solution. His advice is based on recognition of how abruptly and unpredictably one type of circumstance can be supplanted by its opposite (7:14):

"God has made the one as well as the other (i.e., bad times as well as good), so that a man can not discover anything about his future."

In Qoheleth, the opposites represent primarily the abruptness and the unpredictability of change and of reversals of fortune. That is why flexibility between wisdom and folly is the most essential skill to be cultivated. Because the appropriate time for the one is succeeded by the appropriate time for its converse with such daunting and unforeseeable rapidity, flexibility is the prime virtue.

Qoheleth’s early attempt to combine wisdom with folly at one and the same time (2:3) does not succeed. For traditional wisdom is essentially calculating and self-assertive, whereas folly, by contrast, is in essence self-abandoning, relinquishing all claim to control events. Therefore pleasure can not be experienced (i.e.,

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70 It seems likely, therefore, that 7:16-18 is deliberately phrased in this way to remind us of 2:3.

71 This is why, to extremist goal-seekers like the rapacious Tobiads, "pleasure - is considered the enemy" (Bickerman, The Jews in the Greek Age, P.233). This is the very position Qoheleth most directly rejects.

72 Except to the extremist goal-seeker, pleasure is the desirable end of the ‘folly’-spectrum (i.e., of that aspect of experience which is more receptive than assertive). It is not focussed primarily on the drive to control; but even so, it is not completely ego-negating, as is the extreme form of folly or self-abandonment. Its parallel opposite, the desirable end of the ‘wisdom’-spectrum, is genuine skill. Real skill, although more assertive than receptive (in that it attempts primarily to control or influence external reality, rather than
enjoyed) and analysed 73 both at one and the same time. By contrast, however, the author’s later policy of ethical flexibility (7:16-18) does succeed. For this policy, although it too involves grasping both good and bad, wisdom and folly, entails grasping each in its appropriate time only. So it fits in with the very essence of human experience, the unpredictable mutability of Man’s circumstances.

_Qoh._ 7:18 seems deliberately phrased to recall the concept of ‘grasping folly’ in 2:3. However, unlike 2:3, 7:18 does not reflect an attempt to subject folly to the scrutiny of wisdom or to seize folly as a captive of wisdom, as if both wisdom and folly could be grasped at the same time. Instead it accords a symbolic equality to both as reciprocal opposites, stating that the God-fearer will emerge from both of them: or, more exactly, from _all_ of them (편). For the terms ‘wisdom’ and ‘folly’ signify more than just one pair of opposites; like ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘folly’ constitute a shorthand for opposites in general, as symbolizing every possible circumstance, the whole spectrum of potential experience.

Wisdom and folly are perhaps the only pair of opposites that are no less suited to this symbolic purpose than good and evil. For in the context of a wisdom text, they are on equal terms with good and evil in representing the ultimate opposite poles of the ethical spectrum. Moreover, in _Qoheleth_ specifically, the implications of the terms "wisdom" and "folly" are also coloured by the author’s focus on the "times"

simply to be positively affected or influenced by it) is nevertheless not unrealistic. For it is still receptive enough to gage accurately (and hence to avoid running counter to) the nature of the reality it seeks to influence.

73 E.g., subjected to a calculating scrutiny of its intrinsic worth, as in 2:1-3. See above, Chapter 9, Section vii, esp. fn. 188.
rather than on mere qualities. He appears not to see wisdom and folly as static qualities of human types, like the standard types of a Hellenistic drama. Man's characteristics must not be frozen into a fixed pattern irrespective of the "times"; for he will not survive without the utmost alertness to the nature and implications of his circumstances.

The claim of 7:18, that the God-fearer

"אַנָּהֳנָק וּלְכֵם",
i.e.,

"comes forth from them all", seems unlikely to mean literally that he "avoids them all", as it is usually interpreted. It is more likely that "(וַלַּכֵו) - נָק וּלְכֵם" has a similar meaning to "נָק וּלְכֵם" or "comes forth from" (e.g., Num. 16:35, Jer. 23:15), implying not so much "depart from" or "avoid / escape", but rather "be generated / produced by". This would then mean that the constant, unsettling interplay of opposites, and the cultivation of the flexibility necessary to adapt to the changes it brings, together produce the God-fearer: piety is the result of this unpredictable interplay of opposites which is built into the nature of reality. 77

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74 See below, this Chapter, this Section, fn. 92.
75 I.e., the whole range of all possible circumstances or experiences; see below, this Section.
76 The N.I.V. translators, e.g., incline toward the view that "(וַלַּכֵו) - נָק וּלְכֵם" refers to the God-fearing man's avoidance of all extremes; but this is only so indirectly, as a result of his accepting in a positive spirit whatever kind of experience God sends (7:14). The N.I.V. decision to translate 7:18b as "The man who fears God will avoid all [extremes]" is not really justified, since "נָק וּלְכֵם" is unlikely to mean "avoid"; see below, this Section.
77 See also below, this Chapter, this Section.
This interpretation would reveal a close agreement between the sentiments of 7:18 and the message of 3:11 & 14, that God causes life’s unpredictability so that men will fear Him. Similarly, 7:18 is saying that the whole structure of reality, with its fundamental arrangement into opposites, and hence into broken paths, which can not be dependably and consistently pursued to their ultimate conclusions, is designed this way deliberately to instil the fear of God into Man.

It is unusual to find the verb קָנֵּם taking a direct object as it does here, instead of a preposition of separation, implying movement from; and even when it does take a direct object, it can still signify simply a physical movement out of or away from something, rather than calculated escape or avoidance. See, e.g., the expression "גָּבַר וַיָּקָר, "נָּקַם וַיָּקִיא" in Gen. 44:4 and Jer. 10:20’s "נָּקַם וַיָּקִיא". Delitzsch, commenting on Qoh. 7:18, aptly compares the former with the Latin "Egressus est urbem". If קָנֵּם with a direct object can mean emergence or separation from, in the simple physical sense of Gen. 44:4, then it will probably also bear the sense of emergence from with the slightly different slant of ‘being produced by’. This is the meaning of the root קָנֵּם in Num. 16:35 and Jer. 23:15, and this is perhaps a likelier meaning.

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78 See this Chapter, Section ii.

79 See this Chapter, Section iii.

80 The meaning of the verb here does not seem noticeably different from when it is used with the usual preposition instead of with the direct object, as in, e.g., Is. 49:17, "נָּקַם וַיָּקִיא", "they depart from you".


82 Although in these two passages the verb קָנֵּם does not simply take a direct object, either with the object-marker נ (as in Gen. 44:4) or with an object suffix (as in Jer. 10:20). Instead, it uses נָּקַם to denote movement from.
for this term in \textit{Qoh. 7:18} than the rather over-subtle (though popular) translation "avoid (all extremes)".

This is because translating "\textit{hC X} " as "avoid" does not suit the drift of 7:18 overall. Qoheleth can hardly be saying,

"It is good to \textit{grasp} the one and also \textit{not let go of} the other, \textit{for} the man who fears God will \textit{avoid} all of them.".

One could hardly find a more blatant contradiction than an exhortation to grasp and not let go of something because we should avoid it. So taking "\textit{hC X} " as "avoid" in \textit{Qoh. 7:18} creates awkward problems, seriously impeding the normal flow of the sentence.

These problems are reflected in, e.g., the N.I.V. translation of this verse. N.I.V. provides "extremes" as an oblique, implied expansion of the object "\textit{□ ł̄ y}" , a measure which is based on the assumption that "\textit{hX ṣ}" means "avoid". This assumption then proves inconvenient, because the only way to make it fit "\textit{□ ł̄ y}" as its object is to suppose that "\textit{□ ł̄ y}" means simply "all". In reality, however, it means "all of them", so that the reader / hearer expects the word to be referring back to something already and recently mentioned, probably in the same sentence. Therefore, it would be more natural to take this expression "all of them", the object of "\textit{hX ṣ}" , as simply referring back to the very same object which the verse exhorts us to "\textit{grasp}" and "not let go of".

This is the obvious thing to do syntactically; and it can \textit{only} be problematic if "\textit{hX ṣ}" means "avoid". It seems reasonable, therefore, to suppose that "\textit{hX ṣ}" does not mean
"avoid". 83

The rather forced N.I.V. interpretation of 7:18 seems also to be based on the further assumption that 7:18 is advocating first and foremost the Golden Mean: but the Golden Mean in the rather negative, watered-down contemporary understanding of the term, rather than in the original and more adventurous Aristotelian sense. Aristotle's avoidance of extremes is not in reality negative anyway. For it does not elevate Avoidance as such to the level of a prime objective; it is merely part of an exercise in high-precision target-seeking. The reason Aristotle thinks in terms of avoiding everything which is not his exact ethical goal is simply to facilitate attaining his ethical goal with nothing less than perfect exactitude. It is attainment, therefore, not avoidance, which is the prime objective. Aristotle's Golden Mean approach is thus firmly within the realms of the dynamic, goal-seeking wisdom tradition. 84 Similarly, the ethic of Qoheleth focusses far more on dynamic adaptability than on the static concept of 'moderation' which the term 'Golden Mean' evokes for most modern thinkers, including perhaps the N.I.V. translator(s) of Qoh. 7:18.

The real meaning of this verse seems to be that having to adapt our behaviour to suit the demands of circumstances is good, because "all of them" (i.e., all these challengingly different potential circumstances in their various combinations and

83 Especially since "avoid" is not what this verb normally means; rather, it usually means "come forth (from)", either in the sense of simply "leaving" (as in Is. 49:17), or in the sense of "being produced (by)", like the Golden Calf produced by the fire in Ex. 32:24.

84 See Nic. Eth. II.ix.1-5, with the author's zest for exactitude reflected in images from geometry (2), navigation (3) and carpentry (5). See also above, Chapter 9, passim, for the high profile of goal-seeking in wisdom overall (especially in relation to Qoheleth), and Chapter 9, Section ii for how this emphasis affects Aristotle as well as Qoheleth.
permutations) work together to produce ‘God-fearers’. The type of people produced or generated by having to adapt to challengingly mutable conditions are not complacent people, but rather God-fearing ones. Hence, 7:18 means, in effect,

"It’s a good thing that you have a grip on one type of situation and that you also keep your hold on the opposite type; for it is by all of them that the God-fearing person is produced."

The first word of the sentence is "נַעֲרָע" / "good", as if to reassure those who fear changeable circumstances and the adaptability they demand: this changeability is good, even though Man, with his love of planning and prediction, tends to misconstrue it as bad. The last word of the sentence is "םִֽלְּכָּג", "all of them", implying that without "all of them" people do not really become God-fearing. For unless they have faced the challenge of unpredictably mutable circumstances, and hence become flexible, they are not really God-fearing at all. Rather, they are self-confident in Man’s "wisdom", and therefore resistant to God’s wisdom. Human self-confidence, and hence also impiety, thrive in circumstances where reliable and comprehensive prediction seems plausible. The God-fearer, therefore, can only be produced by "all of them"; merely "some of them" will not be enough to instil godliness.

The same standpoint is reflected in Is. 29, which speaks of the unforeseen (vv 11 & 12) overturning Antiwisdom, the spurious wisdom of the wicked (v 14):

"Therefore once more will I astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."

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85 Cf. the advice of Theognis L.658, "πάντας φησιν"; see above, Chapter 3, Section iii, ftn. 35, esp. paras. 3-5, P.119.
The climax of this process is the return of true judgment and justice (vv 18-21), and the healing and deliverance of the disabled and the oppressed. God’s unpredictability is depicted as working uncompromisingly for justice and restoration, not against it as some might fear. For the people disturbed by the unpredictability of God’s actions are the unjust and the oppressors. It is these antipietists, those who rely on their own wisdom as a rival to God’s wisdom and who therefore perpetrate injustice, who are thrown into confusion by the inscrutability of God’s methods.

A similar view of the strenuous adaptability required for piety and for navigating the changes of direction built into the nature of reality seems to be reflected by Job 23:10. Here, as in Qoheleth (see especially 3:11 and 14), God can fathom what Man can not; and the end product of this skilfully devised inequality is piety. This is the more noteworthy since this verse of Job, like Qoh. 7:18, also uses the verb "K'y with overtones of being generated or produced. In Job 23:10 it expresses the climax of a process designed by God to bring forth a high-quality product:

"K"הכ ותים יד פל חא אצק

"(When) He has tested me like gold I shall come forth".

In vv 2-7, Job longs to present his case directly to God; but in vv 8 and 9, he confesses himself unable to fathom God’s movements and track Him down. He dwells with some heat on God’s baffling moves from one direction to its opposite:

"But if I go to the east, He is not there; If I go to the west, I do not find Him."
When He is active in the north, I do not catch Him; When He turns aside to the south, I do not glimpse Him."

Yet although God's unpredictable movements defeat Job, Job's movements, by contrast, are nevertheless known to God:

"But He knows the way that I take. When He has tried me like gold I shall come forth."

Job himself does not understand God's moves, including His disposition of Job's own affairs; but God knows Job's position so exactly that these testing and incomprehensible circumstances in Job's life are automatically taken to be His work.

Here in Job 23:10, "εἰς εὐθείαν ἔρχομαι", "I shall come forth", implies not that Job will escape or avoid these disturbing reversals of fortune; indeed, it is already too late to avoid them. Rather, the author wishes to convey that in his ultimate excellence, Job will "come forth" from them, in the sense that he will, in his ultimate character, be produced largely by them, just as the testing process of gold is part of what produces the gold in its final and perfect form. Job 23:10 is apparently deliberately reminiscent of Zech. 13:9. This prophetic verse refers to the "testing" of gold in parallel with the refining of silver, as a process involving intense heat which, in

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86Again the same root "תקנ" for "catch" / "grasp" as in Qoh. 2:3 and 7:18. God is hard to "catch" because His route may be interrupted and His course re-plotted without notice at any moment. His path is so far from simplistic or obvious that it is, as far as Man can tell, random. The expression "קנ טל וירב", for example, may suggest a rather abrupt change of direction, perhaps "turns aside to the south". Even if there is an accepted or expected route, God is not following it (Cf. Chapter 9, Section vii, Pp.3-6).

87Similarly, when Aaron in Ex. 32:24 says that he threw the gold into the fire and "Out came (ירב ותל) this calf", he means that the calf was produced by a process involving fire.

88Using the same expression for it as Job 23:10.

89The "fire" of v 9 is closely related to, if not to be identified with, the upheaval and judgment of vv 7 & 8; and it is God who brings His destined remnant into this fire, since the entire process of refinement is devised and put into operation by Him.
effect, produces the fear of God. 90 Those who are tested and refined by it will, as a result,

"-call on My Name and I will answer them. I will say, They are My people, and they will say, The Lord is our God". 91

This process is not, therefore, merely "testing" gold in the sense of investigating and confirming the quality of the product which is already there. Rather, it is a process which itself plays an important part in making the product what it ultimately is, and in giving it such a high quality. 92 It may be that all Job himself sees in the

90A similar image from metal-refining is used of producing moral righteousness other than in the individual alone. Prov. 25:4-5 refers to purging a king's court of its evil elements for the good of the state overall:

"Remove the dross from the silver, And material for the silversmith comes forth is produced (KY ?); Remove the wicked from the King's presence, And his throne will be established through righteousness.".

91Zech. 13:9b.

92This suggests that the author of Job (like Qoheleth, with his insistence on flexibility and adaptability) conceives of character not as static, but rather as involved in a process of becoming. This idea of character developing as a result of a process of refinement, or through a policy of interactive adaptation, is only implied in these two authors, not definitely asserted. Nevertheless, the implication is sufficiently strong to contrast quite challengingly with the concept of personality which Bickerman believes to be enshrined in the eulogy of the Tobiads, preserved and developed in Joseph., Ant. XII:

"Ancient biographers wrote about worthies in politics, literature, and art - from lawgivers to flute players - but the eulogist of the Tobiads praises two tax gatherers. The narrator follows the Aristotelian idea (which largely influenced Greek biographical writers) that a man's actions are a constant expression of his true nature; little traits, Plutarch says, are often more revealing than great deeds. This conception presupposes Man's character to be both monolithic and static. Theophrastus' Characters, the plays of the New Comedy, and Hellenistic art portray individuals according to this heuristic postulate as the braggart, the boor, the young lover, and other such types. To their biographer, the Tobiads exemplify cleverness."

(Bickerman, op. cit., P.231).

Bickerman regards the original Tobiad story, later used by Josephus, as "written at the time of Hyrcanus' grandeur" (Ibid., P.231). If he is right, this eulogy of cleverness may well exemplify exactly that adulation of Anti-wisdom which Qoheleth is opposing. The original of the Tobiad story may even be contemporary with Qoheleth's writing, and enshrine the very concept of wisdom which his book is directly contesting (see below, APPENDIX THREE, THE ERA OF QOHELETH). If so, and if Qoheleth is therefore consciously adopting the opposite view of wisdom from that underlying the Tobiad Saga, then it is hardly surprising if he also embraces an equally opposite view of character from the notion of the static "type", as found in that same Tobiad story. Qoheleth seems to endorse the view of character reflected in Job: i.e., that a human
refining process of 23:10 is legalistic vindication of the basic integrity he already has; but if so, his author is hinting at something beyond Job's own understanding. 93

Job is not really going to be vindicated by bringing a court case against God for punishing him when he is innocent, since his suffering is not a punishment anyway. Although he is right when he says he will be genuine gold at the end of his testing experience, this is not because he is going to win a legal case. It is rather because this experience will purge away his egocentricity by clearing his path to a genuine and direct contact with God: not just a theory about God and about his own innocence in relation to Him, but actually God's very presence (42:5-6).

At the beginning of the next chapter, Job displays his impatience with God's unpredictability because he feels that it works against justice. This is the opposite

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being is in a process of development or refinement, and that this ongoing process, and the individual's reaction to it, are of vital importance.

To Qoheleth, therefore, the wise or 'clever' man is quite the opposite to the 'clever' blinkered, egocentric materialist like Joseph or Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus, for example, blindly pursues his goal of heaping up wealth, but as a result is forced into suicide (cf. Qoh. 5:13) by his inability to adapt to the change from Ptolemaic to Seleucid rule. By contrast, the wise man in Qoheleth's view is adaptable, and not only because this is the best policy from the pragmatic point of view, although he recognizes that in fact it is. More importantly, however, a non-materialistic interactiveness is desirable as a matter of principle. The best interests of both realism and spirituality converge in the moral duty of flexible receptivity to God and to one's fellow men for the sake of their intrinsic worth. Otherwise, attainment of goals and accumulation of wealth are pointless.

"For whom am I toiling?" (4:8) reminds us of the unique value of one's fellow men, and that the real purpose of wealth is to share it with one's fellows (see above, Chapter 8, Section iii). This is no less important than the individual's practical need for friends and family to protect and support himself (4:10). Similarly, Man's need to prevent his plans running counter to God's is based not only on God's superior intelligence (3:11) and the inevitability of Judgment (12:14), but also on the unique inherent worth of God and of His Law. Fear of God and fulfilment of Torah constitute "the whole of Man" (12:13). This is the ennobling race which the strong man rejoices to run (cf. Ps. 19:5), not just to attain rewards or avoid penalties, but above all for its own sake; see above, Chapter 9, Section i.

As in 21:27, with its ironical echo of Ps. 94:11. Here the author is deftly ridiculing Job's egocentricity, despite his general affirmation of his hero's integrity. See Chapter 9, Section i.

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opinion to the *Wisdom in opposition to Anti-wisdom* view of, e.g., *Is. 29*, \(^{94}\) which holds that the superficial irrationality of God’s behaviour is in reality nothing but a divine subtlety superior to anything Man can comprehend. \(^{95}\) When in 24:1 Job demands,

"Why does the Almighty not set times (יֵשָׁנ)??",

he evidently means times for *Judgment*. For in v 2 ff., he describes the gross injustice and oppression that would seem to necessitate speedily setting a definite date for Judgment; and v 12 concludes the passage with a complaint that in spite of this gross overgrowth of injustice, God has still not brought any formal charges against the perpetrators of all this evil.

Evidently, then, this passage resumes (from 23:2-7) Job’s desire to get his case into court, and to set in motion the wheels of divine Judgment, as fast as possible. His question at 24:1 shows that he interprets the unpredictability of God’s paths and

\(^{94}\) As quoted above, this Chapter, this Section.

\(^{95}\) It is clear from the relatively late *1 Cor.* 1:19 - 2:16, launched from a quotation of *Is. 29:14*, that this verse of *Isaiah* was eventually regarded as indicative of a fundamental dichotomy between the wisdom of God and the rival and contrary wisdom of Man, and that this extreme dichotomy was a prime influence on the direction of human history. Paul’s viewpoint, like the *Song of Mary* in *Lk.* 1:46-55, reads like a continuation of the Deuteronomistic concept, crystallized by the *Song of Hannah* in *I Sam.* 2:1 ff., of God’s right to overturn or cut off any human institution (such as a dynasty), expectation or accepted continuum. Like *Is. 29:14, 1 Cor.* 1:25 & 27-9 unambiguously celebrate God’s apparent foolishness as superior wisdom, too difficult for His enemies to fathom:

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than Man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than Man’s strength. - But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before Him."

Even though it is unusual for a specialist in the wisdom genre to give this issue such a high profile as Qoheleth does, therefore, the general belief that the *Wisdom / Anti-wisdom* dichotomy is of crucial importance is nevertheless of ancient origin in pietist thinking, and also proves vigorous in its later persistence and development.
the inscrutability of His ways as evidence that He is completely arbitrary and chaotic, and that therefore He has not set "times" for Judgment in the orderly and reassuring fashion the man believes He should. Job's question is, then, purely rhetorical. He is not really asking why God has not set times for Judgment; he is simply rebuking God because he wrongly assumes that God has not set times for Judgment.

His standpoint here may well represent a popular misconception, commonly inferred from widespread recognition of God's inscrutability: that because Man can not discern the pattern of God's justice, and does not know the set timing for His Judgment, therefore there can not be any divine justice, and there is no set time for Judgment. If so, Qoheleth's firm assertion that God has set a "time" for judgment (3:17), in the very same chapter that asserts so forcefully God's inscrutability (v 11), must be deliberately aimed to refute this very misconception. However widely accepted it may be that God's unpredictability works against justice, indicating that He has not appointed a time for Judgment, this only makes Qoheleth, like the final author of Job, all the more insistent that the reverse is the case. God's unpredictability is no evidence at all against the certainty of divine Judgment. Qoheleth, like Job, sees the inscrutability of God as an argument in favour of piety not against it, because it works against the impious oppressor who is outwitted by it, and hence works for justice. Also like Job, Qoheleth discusses the issue of the fixed

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96 23:10-16 imply, as God sees in 40:8, that Job himself is more orderly and reliable than God, and that Job is frightened of Him because He is capricious, disorganized and unjust.

97 Inevitably, such a view would constitute a major argument against the worth of piety.

98 Qoheleth and the final author of Job may well be in agreement with each other in disagreeing with the character Job on this point. And in the end even Job himself presumably has to come round to their way of thinking, despite his reflection of the opposite view in 23:11 - 24:12.
"תַּע" for Judgment, pointing out that the fact Judgment does not occur when Man thinks it should does not mean that God has not fixed the right time for it in reality.

This common thematic ground between Qoheleth and Job makes it all the more likely that Job 23:8-10 and Qoh. 7:13-18 reflect the same idea: that the God-ordained unpredictability of human fortunes in some sense produces or generates piety, the God-fearing attitude. It therefore also seems likely that the meaning of "נִקָּחָה" in Qoh. 7:18 is similar to the meaning of the same verb in Job 23:10, despite the absence of any direct object in Job 23:10. The "testing" referred to in the latter passage is not just a misadventure for Job to escape or a hazard for him to avoid, but a deliberately designed process for perfecting him as a sage of unalloyed piety; and without this process, so pure a brand of piety could not be produced in him. Similarly in Qoh. 7:18, the God-fearer will emerge or "come forth" from the interplay of the full range of life's potential experiences, i.e., from "all of them" ("תְּכֵן"), and could not emerge from anything less than that full range.

The verbal parallel between 7:14's
"ולא - והמעץ - ולא - נא - דב" / "The one as well as the other"

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99This puts the implications of Qoh. 7:15 into perspective. This verse is not simply a passing comment or complaint about a moral anomaly; if it were, there would be no particular point in setting it in this passage (7:13-18) rather than somewhere else. Rather, it is designed to place the non-immediacy of Judgment and life's deviations from the most direct route to justice in the context of God's control of the deviations, of the fact that He Himself has designed them (vv 13 & 14), and of the purpose (that of producing and refining piety) for which He has done so (v 18). Thus a common argument against piety, namely that the righteous and the wicked to not proceed straight to their just deserts, is here reset in a pious context as part of a God-ordained pattern of broken paths, of paths divinely and deliberately interrupted from their expected goals.
and 7:18’s

"ז"ות קוב"ר ראב / "The one as well as the other"

probably implies a parallel between the different types of experience in v 14 100, on the one hand, and on the other the different types of behaviour and character in v 18 101 which are generated, exercised and revealed through those experiences.

However, despite the close connexion of verse 18 with the different types of behaviour in vv 16 & 17, which colours v 18’s "ז"ות קוב"ר ראב" with overtones of character and conduct, nevertheless the prime reference even of v 18’s "ז"ות קוב"ר ראב" is probably also, like that of v 14, to different experiences and mutable circumstances, not to different types of behaviour as such. For v 18’s "ז"ות" seems to refer literally to the last word of v 17, "ז"ות", "your time". If so, v 18 does not literally mean

"It is good to grasp one way of behaving, but also not let go of its opposite", even though it does mean this by implication. Rather, its primary meaning is

"It is good to grasp (make the best of) one type of circumstance ("ז"ות") 102, but also not to lose one’s grip on (control of) the opposite type; for the pious man is the product of all of them".

The pious man is thus said to be primarily the product of the full range of all possible

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100. Such as the righteousness and wickedness, wisdom and folly of verses 16 & 17 immediately preceding.

101. Picking up the idea of "ז"ות" or "circumstance" / "time" from "ז"ות", the last word of the previous verse, "Why die before your time?".

To adopt a course of action that causes one to die before the proper time appointed for one’s death (3:2) perhaps signifies a failure to grasp fully and embrace wholeheartedly the required adaptability to the pattern of times.
circumstances, rather than the product of the full range of all possible behaviour.

Nevertheless, this is not to deny that having an equal grasp on opposite circumstances inevitably involves flexibility of behaviour, since the mode of behaviour appropriate to one type of circumstance is clearly the opposite to that appropriate to the opposite type of circumstance. There is no doubt that Qoheleth is indeed advocating flexibility and receptivity as prime requirements of piety; and it is worth noting that he is not doing so simply because they are attractive virtues, nor even because they are expedient in the shallow or selfish sense, for the purpose of mastering reality as it simply and arbitrarily happens to be. Rather, he advocates them because he believes these qualities are demanded by God, and that His desire to instil them in Man is what lies behind the mutable nature of the divine design of reality.

This is because the character these qualities give rise to, one composed of

"The creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony", 103

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103 King, Martin Luther, Strength to Love (Glasgow, repr. 1977), P.9. This is the type of character Dr. King advocates in the first sermon of this book, entitled "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart", which expounds Mt. 10:16,

"Be therefore wise as serpents and innocent as doves".
This address begins with a discussion of the saying,

"No man is strong unless he bears within his character antitheses strongly marked".
Like Qoheleth, it emphasizes the ethical importance of opposite qualities within the character of the individual.

Also, like Qoh. 7:18, it emphasizes that willingness to adapt to changing circumstances is "good" in its effects, even though Man tends to dislike change. The person who has failed to cultivate the antithesis of tough mind and tender heart which Dr. King recommends, and instead is "softminded", always fears change.

"He feels security in the status quo, and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. - The softminded person always wants to freeze the moment and hold life in the gripping yoke of sameness."
(King, op. cit., P.11). This passage implies Dr. King's recognition of the rôle of adapting to opposite types of experience in engendering the balance of opposite qualities he advocates.

The type of softmindedness Dr. King here deprecates would be ruinous to anyone attempting to live
is supremely receptive to God’s Presence, and complementary to the divine wisdom and dynamism which controls Creation. It is compatible with this divine wisdom precisely because it avoids the pseudo-god syndrome of Gen. 3:5: it does not strive to know and to control too much, nor to imitate the divine nature too exactly to co-exist with God Himself as an external entity in His own right.

in Hellenistic Palestine, especially around 200 B.C., with the country hovering between Egyptian and Syrian rule. Anyone dependent on the continuation of the status quo for their sense of security would have no hope of any sense of security at all. This may have had some considerable influence on Qoheleth’s decision to emphasise the importance of adaptability as strongly as he does. See below, Appendix Three.
GREED FOR GAIN VERSUS NATURAL INTERDEPENDENCE AND PIETY.

As well as having important implications for Qoheleth's pietist ethics and for the issue of judgment, \(^\text{104}\) both the reciprocal, non-linear nature of experience and its random element also argue against individualistic goal-seeking. This is true of such ambition not only in the form of grasping at knowledge or skill as a tool for overall control, but also in the form of grasping at material gain. Both are equally unrealistic. As the former is not compatible with the unpredictable alternation of opposite types of circumstance, so the latter isolates the materialist from the other members of his community, and from the cycle of give-and-take that maintains society.

The sketch in 1:4-10 of natural and human cycles is not, therefore, a tangential departure from 1:3's challenge about the possibility of gain, but a continuation of it. The coming and going of human generations (v 4), the repetitive cycles of the sun (vv 5-6) \(^{105}\), of the streams constantly flowing into the sea (v 7), of endless utterance, endless looking and endless hearing (v 8), and of the changeless unoriginality of all experience without exception (vv 9 & 10) all add up to a cumulative negation of the crude, linear vision of life as a quick sprint to a single, consummatory goal. Qoheleth's point here is that if even the vast, grandiose processes of nature and history do not proceed to an obvious and final consummation, how can Man's petty plans to make a fast profit do so? The whole of life, of nature and of society, operates to a

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\(^{104}\) See above, this Chapter, Section iv.

\(^{105}\) Or of sun (v 5) and of wind (v 6); see APPENDIX SEVEN.
pattern totally incompatible with such a shortsighted ambition.

In *Qoheleth*, then, greed for material gain is regarded as no less foolish a form of goal-seeking than greed for the 'knowledge' of over-ambitious verbal assertion as an attempt to freeze, capture and hold on to experience. As the latter cancels out the possibility of real and present experience, so the former prevents the present enjoyment of material benefits. Both, by aiming at the impossible, are in effect robbing Man of the present, which is his only real possession (9:7). 

Qoheleth’s deprecation of greed and of individualism appeals to the very nature of cosmic reality. As the stability of the cosmos rests on the cycle of reciprocities among natural forces, so the stability of society rests on the giving and receiving of good, the reciprocity of social responsibility. This is Qoheleth’s equivalent to Simon the Just’s "Gemilut Hasadim".

In this context, greed is completely unrealistic. It is an attempt to grasp the ungraspable, retain the unretainable and to escape from the inescapable, what Martin Luther King refers to as Man’s "inescapable network of mutuality". 

Like Qoheleth, Dr. King sees this mutuality as inbuilt into the very nature of things, the "inter-related structure of reality". Therefore, the rich and selfish hoarder is a fool.

\[106\] See also Chapter 9, Section vii.

\[107\] King, op. cit., P.70.

\[108\] Referring to *Luke* 12:20, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee". Like the hoarder of *Qoh*. 4:8, this foolish rich man, although not against enjoyment in theory, is in fact committed to an unrealistically long-term programme of hoarding (v 18), and therefore relegates enjoyment
"The rich man was a fool because he failed to realize his dependence on others. His soliloquy contains approximately sixty words, yet "I" and "my" occur twelve times. He has said "I" and "my" so often, that he has lost the capacity to say "we" or "our". A victim of the cancerous disease of egotism, he failed to realize that wealth always comes as a result of the commonwealth. He talked as though he could plough the fields and build the barns alone. 109 -

"He was an individualist gone wild. When an individual or a nation overlooks this interdependence, 110 we find a tragic foolishness.". 111

Predictably, this same rich man also fails to realize his dependence on God:

"He talked as though he unfolded the seasons and provided the fertility of the soil, controlled the rising and the setting of the sun, and regulated the natural processes that produce the rain and the dew. He had an unconscious feeling that he was the Creator, not a creature." 112

(v 19) to second place: a second place that, in his case (as with many a hoarder), he never actually gets around to doing anything about, since he dies before he has the chance. Also, he mentions only his own enjoyment, and says nothing about sharing his material blessings with either son or brother (cf. again Qoh. 4:8), nor about giving to the poor. So, as in Qoh. 2:18 ff., 6:2, etc., the rich man is challenged that when he dies abruptly,

"Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20 b & 21).


110 Yet overlooking (or rather, actually taking issue with) Solon's assertion of this very principle of interdependence (in Herod., Hist. I.32.8) is exactly the political stance of Pericles, according to Thucydides' picture of him. See Edmunds, op. cit., P.83:

"In Herodotus, Solon observes that no mortal can possess every attribute of happiness, just as no region can provide everything for itself (I.32.8). In the funeral oration, Pericles says that the Athenians have - All things from the whole world (II.38.2). Pericles says of his generation that it has made the city by every means self-sufficient - for war and peace (II.36.3). Solon also draws a comparison between the human condition as regards happiness and the human body: - So no one person is self-sufficient (I.32.8). But Pericles says of the Athenians (II.41.2) - : One and the same man from our city would present himself as self-sufficient for the most plans of action and with the most graceful versatility. Pericles' words sound like a reply to the Herodotean Solon."

King's picture of economic mutual interdependence (op. cit., P.70) is in line with that of Solon, but on a larger scale:

"We do not finish breakfast without being dependent on more than half the world. We - reach for a sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific Islander. We reach for soap that is created for us by a Frenchman. The towel is provided by a Turk. Then - we drink coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese, or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave for our jobs, we are beholden to more than half the world.".

111 Ibid., P.71.

112 Ibid., P.71.
In fact, this rich man of Luke 12 is a clear example of the blinkered goal-seeker. He is vastly over-preoccupied with his own plan. Verses 17-20 are a ludicrously egocentric exposition of his self-centred scheme for the future, hence the frequency of the word "I" referred to by Dr. King. He pursues his "many schemes", to borrow the terminology of Qoh. 7:29, without any reference to God's will or to interdependence on others, and without any self awareness of his own limitations at all. Small wonder that God Himself breaks in on his monologue so brusquely at v 20. He is nauseated by the man's stupid boasting about a future beyond his understanding.

Boasting is a major aspect of hybristic verbal assertiveness, and perhaps the most destructive of all. Boasting is the probable cause of the broken vow in 5:4-6. It also seems to be the subject of Qoh. 10:14 a, which 113 is a characterization of the fool. The fool is here said to "multiply words" or to "make big / many claims" (םבכ רשא), even though 114 (v 14 b),

"No-one knows what is coming; who can tell him what will happen after him?".

This expression "םבכ רשא" 115 is particularly likely to mean boasting because of the implied contrast between the unjustified confidence which motivates boasting and the inscrutability of the real future, and also because v 14, like vv 12-13, is about the fool, and the self-destructive wickedness of his words, which are said to be

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115 It is interesting that the phrasing "םבכ רשא" here in 10:14 is slightly reminiscent of 6:11's לברמאכ והז, since 6:11 is also about the fruitlessness of unrealistic verbal assertion, although not necessarily about boasting in particular; see Chapter 9, Section vii.
madness, i.e., completely divorced from reality.

This condemnation, in Qoheleth and in Luke, of boasting about one's over-ambitious and over-predictive plans is also found in James, and again with special reference to materialistic greed. James denounces this kind of boasting as "evil" 116; instead, we ought to say,

"If it is the Lord's will, we will live to do this or that". 117

Since we do not even know from one day to the next if we will live to fulfil our plans or spend our money, it is the height of arrogance and foolishness to fill the forefront of our minds with self-devised, self-centred and long-term schemes for gain, and to brag loudly about our schemes. We should be quiet and humble before God so that we will be able to hear His will instead.

"Now listen, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. Why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. You are a mist 118 that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 119

"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." 120

116 Jas. 4:16.
117 Ibid., 4:15.
118 "יאת", The N.T. Greek here is "ατατζ", which (see Crenshaw, op. cit., Pp.57-8) is used to translate "יאת" in the earliest Greek translations of Old Testament books, prior to the relatively late LXX translation of Qoheleth, which renders "יאת" as "מאתודא".
120 Ibid., 4:8-10.
James’ debt to Qoheleth here is probably conscious and direct. For in denouncing the blinkered pursuit of gain, the Apostle makes much of the fact that it is inconsistent with Man’s ephemerality, the very point which Qoheleth also finds so compelling; and he even goes so far as to quote directly Qoheleth’s favourite word, ".Future" ("άρτοιος"). Also like Qoheleth, James counters the arrogance implied by this shortsighted greed with an ideal of pious humility focussed on God’s literal presence, not only in the future as Coming Judge, but also in the present as the object of the believer’s loyalty and intimate devotion. This humble and submissive spirit which

"(Draws) near to God"

also prefers godly sorrow to superficial, frivolous or mocking laughter:

"Change your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom."

This is very reminiscent of Qoh. 7:2-6, especially v 3:

"Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart." 123

Another important point of agreement between Qoheleth and James is that both

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121 Jas. 5:7-9.

122 Ibid., 4:7-10. Cf. the emphasis on humility in this passage with Qoh. 5:1-7, and especially Jas. 4:8 a’s

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you"

with Qoh. 5:1’ s

"Draw near to listen".

As in Job, so also in Qoheleth and in James, humility is closely associated with seeking God’s literal presence, not as a mystical adjunct to the mainstream of life, but rather as the main focus and wellspring of action. In both writers, seeking God’s presence is diametrically opposed to following one’s own self-chosen and egocentric goal, and particularly to orienting one’s whole life around money-making.

123 Jas. 4:9.

124 See also APPENDIX FIVE for a comparison of James’ and Qoheleth’s views on joy and sorrow with the message of Is. 22:12-13. The appropriate “time” for repentance can not also be the appropriate "time" for rejoicing.
insist on the certainty of ultimate Judgment. However, both also place great emphasis on the non-immediacy of Judgment; and James’ reason for this may well, in view of the many points in common between the two writers, shed light on Qoheleth’s reasons for adopting the same viewpoint.

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125 Qoh. 3:17, 8:12-13, 11:9; Jas. 5:1-9.

126 Qoh. 3:16, 4:1-3, 7:15, 8:11 & 14; Jas. 5:7-8.

127 As discussed below, this Chapter, Section vi.
vi THE NON-IMMEDIACY OF JUDGMENT FOR SIN AND ITS SOCIO-ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS.

*James* 5:1-9 proclaims with prophetic urgency that rich oppressors, the same class of wrongdoers as in *Qoh.* 4:1, will certainly be judged. Yet Ibid. 5:7, 8, 10 & 11 makes very clear that the non-immediacy of Judgment is absolutely intrinsic to the nature of reality, which makes godly patience of paramount importance in coping with the immediacies of that reality.

Like *Qoheleth,* James takes it for granted that even God's Judgment, sure and reliable though it is, does not proceed in a simplistic, predictable straight line. In 5:11, he cites Job as a prime example of pious perseverance in coping with this fact. James may believe that this non-immediacy of Judgment arises partly from the fact that God has several objectives regarding judgment, which may lead Him to opposite policies and varied courses of action at different times. However, his main point is to underline the key importance of waiting for Judgment. To illustrate that this

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128 Cf., e.g., *II Pe.* 3:7-10, which points out that there will be a "Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (v 7); but one reason for its delay is that God wants to give sinners time for repentance before it comes (v 9). Also, He works on a much vaster time scale than Man (v 8, cf. *Ps.* 90:4), and an elastic time scale (His time is therefore apparently not "time" as we understand it). So what seems a long time to Man can be short to God, and vice versa (v 8). The two contrasting currents of divine activity specified here, then, are God's desire to judge the wicked and God's desire to spare from Judgment those who will prove willing to repent once they are given the opportunity. Inevitably, He will not be enacting both these purposes to the same degree at exactly the same time on the stage of human history; for the time for one will not be the time for the other.

Interestingly, however, v 10 indicates that even though one can expect the Day of Judgment to be delayed, nevertheless when it does come it will be very abrupt, a sudden interruption of the expected continuum of events. As is evident from *Mt.* 24:36-45, *Mk.* 13:32-7, *Lk.* 12:39, *I Thess.* 5:2, etc., this expectation of an unpredictable and disruptive Day of Judgment is common currency amongst the Apostles, and James evidently shares it.
waiting is perfectly natural, and in no way an aberration from the normative patterns of life and nature, he appeals to the familiarity of waiting in agriculture, because both the seasonal rains are necessary to mature the harvest:

"See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.". 130

The importance he ascribes to the seasonal rains automatically reflects the importance of the changing of seasons or "times" altogether. Once the believer can see from the familiar pattern of agriculture that it is only natural to wait for the harvest season, then he can see that there must also be a corresponding seasonal "time" for judgment 131, and that he has to wait for that as well. For James, the idea of Judgment Day as a harvest is already a universally accepted image amongst his fellow-believers 132. The same is also true for Qoheleth, since already in his day this harvest image of Judgment Day is well established. 133

129 "παρουσία", literally, "presence". Cf. v 7a, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's "παρουσία".
130 Jas. 5:7b-8.
131 As in Qoh. 3:17.
133 The appointed "time" for Judgment can be either a grape harvest or a corn harvest. See Joel 3:12-13 for an identification of Judgment with a grape harvest, not unlike Is. 5:1-7, except that Joel's reference is to a massive, climactic Judgment of all nations, not just of Judah. Jer. 51:33 also calls the Judgment of Babylon a harvest. The "harvest" of Judah in Hos. 6:11 is evidently Judgment, since it is set in a context of recounting Israel's and Judah's crimes. The corn harvest of Is. 17:5 is probably an appointed "time" of Judgment, since v 4's "in that day" may well have overtones of the Day of the Lord, as in Ibid. 13:6 & 9-10; see also Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11 & 31 and 3:14, Zeph. 1:7 & 14-16, Mal. 4:1 & 5, and Ob. v 15. The "threshing-floor" of Is. 21:10 may also be Judgment, since the overall setting of this verse is a series of prophecies against various nations for their crimes, for which they will be brought to justice in the end.

It is evident from these Biblical references that both the image of Judgment as a harvest and the idea of the "Day of the Lord", i.e., a set time for Judgment, are longstanding, widely accepted and interrelated concepts. It is almost unthinkable that Qoheleth, with his particular interest in both Judgment and
This association between waiting for the "time" for Judgment and waiting for a harvest may furnish the likeliest explanation of the notoriously problematic Qoh. 5:9,

"וְחַדְּרָה בַּעֲבוֹדָה בַּעֲבוֹדָה מָלֵךְ לְשֵׁר הָעֵבָרָה."

This appears to mean something like,

"And the harvest is universal; It is the King who profits from the field."

appointed "times", should not make use of these deep-rooted inherited concepts, especially since his style is highly allusive anyway.

Sometimes his allusions are so brief that for us they are easy to miss; see below, this Section, on his use of Theognis in Chapters 5 and 6, also on the subject of Judgment. To his contemporaries, these references to other writers' work on Judgment may have seemed obvious; for they, knowing that Judgment was Qoheleth's special theme, may well have come to expect in his work intertextuality on this issue, both with Hebrew Prophets and with Greek sages. However, for readers not knowing what type of allusion to expect, or perhaps not even expecting intertextuality at all, it would be easy to miss an allusion in Qoheleth, even if it were to something obvious, like the well-established Biblical concept of Judgment as a harvest. Such an oversight may partly underlie the widespread scholarly perplexity over the apparently abrupt agricultural reference in 5:9. While this is indeed cryptically expressed, the traditional Harvest-Judgment image makes the probability it refers to Judgment hard to deny; and if it does refer to Judgment, it is not abrupt after all, but fits perfectly well in its overall context. See below, this Section.

Cf. also the associations of Judgment in the description of God's disappointment over His grape harvest in Is. 5:1-7, followed by more threats of Judgment at v 8 ff. (e.g., the overt reference to justice in v 16).

Literally, "the increase of the land".

LXX's understanding of "יִהְיֶה הָרָה הַגָּלְעָד" as belonging with the second clause of the verse seems likely to be a mistake. LXX reads, "ἐπὶ παντὶ ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ ἀρχοντὸς ἐγκαταστάσεως". Yet if (as seems likely to Gordis, op. cit., P.240) the Hebrew before the LXX translator(s) was MT as we have it, then LXX seems slightly wider of the mark in construing "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" in the second half of the verse instead of with "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" in the first half. The emphatic position of "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" in the Hebrew, marked with an 'athnach as if firmly concluding the first clause, seems to argue for keeping "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" (which probably means not so much "over all" in authority as "universal" or "applicable to all" in scope) in the first clause of the verse. This would mean that "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" relates to the "increase of the field" in the first clause, not to the "King of the Field" in the second clause. Nevertheless, the LXX interpretation of "יָדַעְתָּ תַּחַל הַגָּלְעָד" may be influenced by the translator's awareness of the universal authority of God as King of the Field or Lord of the Harvest (i.e., Judge, presiding at the Harvest of Judgment). If so, this fits in well with the probably meaning of v 8, which also seems to be saying that God is the supreme authority (see below, this Chapter, this Section). Such an interpretation may indicate that the LXX translator(s) have a firm grasp of the drift of the passage overall, even though it does less than complete justice to the exact meaning and order of the Hebrew. For it may reflect the fact that the translator(s) recognize that 5:8-9 are about Judgment.
or

"It is the King of the field who profits / is served."

According to Crenshaw, 137

"The meaning of this verse is totally obscure".

Gordis 138 similarly describes it as

"An insuperable crux".

Although Gordis is right in saying that none of the many attempts to translate this verse are very convincing, his own preference for an interpretation underlining the importance of agriculture 139 is not solidly convincing either. He supports his preferred interpretation by claiming that


139 Although I do not find the agricultural interpretation very convincing, it has proved fairly popular. Ginsberg advocates repointing "יִשְׂרָאֵל", "King" to "יִשְׂרָאֵל", "man of property / wealth"; and on this basis, "יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל" could be taken as "wealthy landowner". This proposed repointing, however, does not seem to have any philological justification; see also below, Appendix Two, for the fact that it would not fit its context either. If it were accepted, then in socio-economic terms, the verse would seem to mean,

"Agricultural produce is the one commodity needed by everyone; so it's the agricultural landowner who is 'served' by labourers (יִשְׂרָאֵל)."

I.e., the landowner is sure to be solidly economically dominant, with labourers working under him, because he is the one whose produce will always be an absolute necessity for everyone.

This interpretation has some advantages. It would mean that the comments on the pointlessness of greed in v 10 ff. follow on smoothly in sense from v 9: Qoheleth prefers the slow but dependable method of making a living by the land rather than the hectic, unstable life-style of aiming for greater profits but by the riskier methods of commerce, and without ever being satisfied however huge the profits. This would then imply that the sentiment of 5:9 about the landowner who "is served" ("יִשְׂרָאֵל") is closely connected with v 12's statement about the labourer ("יִשְׂרָאֵל", a word from the same root as "יִשְׂרָאֵל"). The connexion would be that the lot of the agricultural labourer is also stable, like that of the agricultural landowner, since neither have to take dizzy risks or aim for impossible horizons. They are, for example, less tempted to aim for unlimited profit; for farming people are well acquainted with the principle of having to lose in order to gain, i.e., of having to sow in order to reap (see above, Chapter 8, Section iii), which is an important aspect of the reciprocity of nature.

However, it seems likelier that 5:9 is not just an economic statement about agriculture, however valid such a statement might seem at its face value. LXX evidently understands "יִשְׂרָאֵל" literally as "King", not as a figurative term for an owner, nor (according to Ginsberg's repointing) as "יִשְׂרָאֵל" / "man of property", which, as Eissfeldt says in his Old Testament Introduction, P.493, seems unjustified.
"It would anticipate the standpoint of the Sadducees, who identified themselves with the country party against the urban Pharisees."  

Yet there seems no strong argument for reading back the socio-economic standpoint of the Sadducees as far as Qoheleth’s era, especially in view of the political and religious changes that succeeded it. Furthermore, if we accept Ranston’s association of 5:8 with Judgment, this makes reference to Judgment seem a preferable interpretation of 5:9 as well.

If, as seems likely, "[...]", is to be taken at its face value as "King", and if there are strong overtones of Judgment in the previous verse 5:8, then 5:9 seems to be hinting at the dominance of God as Judge. It is God Himself and His Justice which will be "served" by the final outcome of events, not the rich and selfish oppressors heaping up money for a future that will never come. If the words "[...]", are kept together as a single expression, they probably refer to God as King of the Field or Lord of the Harvest, just as, in Is. 5:1-7, He is the Owner of the

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141 See below, this Chapter, this Section.

142 On similar lines to LXX’s curious translation “βασιλεὺς τοῦ ἐργασίας τοῦ ἐργασίας”.

143 Cf. Mt. 9:38’s "Lord of the Harvest", which, in this context of the Harvest as the Divine Judgment, means God Himself. Although Matthew is admittedly late, he is also steeped in ancient Biblical prophecies, frequently citing them in support or explanation of Christ’s ministry and experiences; and he is also keenly interested in eschatology and Judgment. It would hardly be surprising, therefore, if his expression "Lord of the Harvest" in this sense of Judge reflects a very ancient popular usage. Such a usage might have been be common for generations amongst, e.g., the timeless class of oppressed peasant labourers, like those of James 5:4, who had plenty of reason not only to favour agricultural imagery, but also to long for a divine Judgment and believe in it, even if they did not win themselves a place in the Bible by prophesying it. If there was such a popular usage, Qoheleth, as a teacher of the people (Qoh. 12:9), was just the man to make use of it, even if other literary men of his time on the whole did not.
This passage of Qoheleth appears to be foreshadowing the association of ideas in James, enjoining a grave and silent reverence before God instead of actively asserting one's own plans or promises (vv 1-7), and advising the same confident patience with regard to Judgment (v 8), rather than jumping to wrong conclusions because Judgment does not follow immediately on the offence, or because in some other respect it does not come when one thinks it should. Given the longstanding prophetic metaphor of the Day of Judgment as a Harvest, Qoheleth's statement that the harvest is universal is probably a reminder that no-one, however rich or privileged, can escape Judgment.

Referring to Judgment here in 5:9 as the "harvest" or "increase of the land" reminds us that we have to wait for Judgment, as we have to wait for a harvest slowly ripening, which God will reap in His own good time. If "harvest" is indeed what the expression means, it can only mean "the harvest as it is growing"; the Hebrew does not mean a harvest at the time when it is cut down. If we accept that Judgment is a type of harvest, then having to wait for it in no way undermines the

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144 Alternatively, if מַלְמַלְמַלְמַלְמַלְמַלְל is not taken as a single phrase, then מַלְמַלְמַלְמַלְל לְשׁוֹרָה כַּנְבָּר perhaps means "The King is served by the field", with לְשׁוֹרָה כַּנְבָּר as a dative of agent (as in Aramaic, and so not unlikely in late Hebrew such as that of Qoheleth). This also is an acceptable interpretation, despite my own preference for taking מַלְמַלְמַלְמַלְל as a single phrase.

145 E.g., that there is no Judgment to come; or that the time it will come is exactly predictable; or that the right "time" for it must necessarily coincide with one's own subjective assessment of the right time, etc. Cf. also II Pe. 3:8-10 on the difference between Man's perspective and God's on the right time for Judgment.
certainty that it will come. For Judgment is then seen as something that it is perfectly natural to wait for, just as it is natural to have to wait for the agricultural harvest to ripen:

"The farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop". 146

This interpretation of 5:9's agricultural image makes the best sense of its overall setting. For the previous verse (5:8) is almost certainly referring to God and to the fact that the non-immediacy of His Judgment in no way lessens its ultimate certainty (see below, this Section). This message of 5:8 immediately follows 5:1-7's exhortation to humility toward God, and is then followed by 5:10 - 6:9's attack on the mindless and pointless accumulation of wealth. This entire passage (5:1 - 6:9) is in turn set within Qoheleth's main section on social dislocation (4:1 - 6:12). While insisting on the all-importance of humility (5:1-7), and on the pointlessness of accumulating wealth for its own sake, instead of sharing and enjoying goods (5:10-17 and 6:3-12), Qoheleth also shows that whether or not a man can enjoy his possessions is completely dependent on God (5:18 - 6:2). It is in this general context of the society dislocated by its egocentric materialism (4:1 - 6:12), with all its selfishness and oppression, that he looks forward to the intervention of God as Judge (5:8 and 6:10).

It is natural to take God as the topic of 5:8 b, since 5:8 follows straight after 5:1-7's strong expression of God as central, and of the appropriate attitude toward God.

146 Jas. 5:7-9. This is exactly James' argument here, as he exhorts the oppressed brethren to wait patiently for the just Judge to come, as the farmer waits for his crop.
as one of reverent silence. If "וינת görm" in 5:8 is a plural *majestatis*, we may accept Ranston’s translation 147 of 5:8 b,

"כפי אנה מעלה גובה שמים וגבורה עליים",

as

"For high one above high one is watching, And the Most High above them."

This follows on well from the exhortation of 5:8 a,

"If you see the poor oppressed in a province, and justice and rights denied, Don’t let it throw you into confusion."

Qoheleth is understandably concerned to pre-empt the potential consternation of the righteous at the sight of unpunished injustice, in case they are so astounded by this dreary spectacle that their bewilderment overwhelms them, and they lose their faith altogether. Ranston takes 5:8 a’s

"איל - והתרותח",

"Don’t be astounded / confounded",

as a Hebrew version of Theognis’

"μη θαυμάζετε". 148

The likeliest source for the expression is Theogn. L.191, since the surrounding context deals with the non-immediacy of judgment. 149 The poet points out 150 that


148 As in Theogn. L.191 and 1349. Interestingly, LXX uses the same verb for this expression, translating it "μη θαυμάζετε".

149 Cf. See Theogn. L.204-5. The fact that delay is characteristic of Judgment is also referred to, with varying emphases and nuances, in Qoh. 3:16-17, 4:1-3, 7:15, 8:11 & 14.

150 Ibid., L.197-208.
although evildoers get away with perverting justice at first, in the end

"θεῶν δ’ ὑπερεσχε νόος",

"The mind of the gods gets the better of them.". 151

Ranston points out that the root "\(\text{πλάς}\)" so prominent in \(Qoh. 5:8b\), has the same implication of "being above" as "\(\text{ὑπερεσχε}\)" in Theognis L.203; and he interprets 5:8b as a declaration of God’s superiority, since

"High official squeezes his fellow official, but deity is the Superior Officer."

In support of Ranston’s viewpoint, it might be added that this same Theognis passage 153 which he believes has influenced \(Qoh. 5:8\) begins by emphasizing that wealth which comes from Zeus by just and pure means will last, by contrast with ill-gotten gain, which will not last. Qoheleth also, in 5:19-20 and 6:1-2, contrasts wealth which lasts long enough to enjoy with wealth which does not. The fact that Qoheleth regards God as the Giver of the wealth in both cases, whereas Theognis only specifies Zeus as the giver of the wealth which lasts, is of course a highly significant difference. Such a difference does not, however, argue against Qoheleth having used this Theognis passage in Chapters 5 and 6; it only shows that he has not simply copied it without modification.

It is only to be expected that Qoheleth would not duplicate Theognis’

\[151\] Ibid., L.203.

\[152\] Ranston, op. cit., P.21.

\[153\] L.197-208.
simplistically black and white picture exactly, because Theognis' aim is to present a principle whose outworking is predictable, whereas Qoheleth's is the opposite. Qoheleth is looking for an example of something which is not predictable, in order to demonstrate the random element. He wants to illustrate the abrupt changes in direction of human experience, not a steady, linear progression to an expected outcome: not even an outcome like that of the Theognis passage, which is expected only by the righteous, and unexpected to the wicked people, who imagined that they would hold onto their ill-gotten gains. Even that small degree of predictability does not satisfy Qoheleth's requirements.

Hence in 6:2 he says both that it is God who gives the man wealth and that it is God who does not enable him to enjoy it. For this illustrates precisely the type of abrupt change of direction in which he is interested; whereas Theognis' original does not furnish exactly this pattern of experience that he is looking for. What it does provide him with, however, is a contrast between wealth which lasts and wealth which does not last, and moreover in the very context of indicating how misleading the non-immediacy of Judgment could be. Here, then, is an association of ideas which Qoheleth does want; and therefore he finds it well worthwhile to use the Theognis passage, despite the fact that he has to adjust it somewhat to fit his exact purpose.

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154 Cf., however, Solon, Fr. I (Edmonds, Elegy and Iambus Vol. I [Loeb], Pp.126-133), which does give a fuller picture. The gods give (L.74), but people become insatiably grasping, and this leads to retribution sent by Zeus (L1.75-6). The general impression is that the gods both give and take away. This is not arbitrary and without reason; but nevertheless, it is in effect the same gods who both give and also send retribution, at least in the sense that they judge greed by sending Ate (L.75), so that those to whom they gave wealth do not continue to enjoy it peacefully. Solon also makes the point that Zeus does not judge straight away (1.25 ff.), but bides his time.
Ranston has further insights to offer on this same Section of *Qoheleth* \(^{155}\). In 6:10 b,

"No man can contend with One who is stronger than he", he takes the "One who is stronger than he" to be God. If he is right, this means that 6:11's warning against egocentric or boastful verbalization, a plethora of words that only "multiply מְדַבֵּר", is juxtaposed with a reference in 6:10 to God as superior. The thought-pattern of 6:10-11 would then be the same as that of 5:2-7, where the warnings against verbal arrogance are based on the reality of God's literal Presence as *superior* ("in heaven") to Man ("on earth"): 

"Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything *before God*. - Let your words be few. - Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God."

The fact that this association of ideas is characteristic of Qoheleth, therefore, supports Ranston's interpretation of 6:10 b.

Furthermore, his reason for seeing 6:10 b as a reference to God is its legal-sounding terminology, which he thinks is derived from a passage of Theognis referring to the gods. He sees

"וַיְאָמַר אֲלֵיהֶם לָרֹם עַל שָׁחֵתָם שלָם וַיְהִי מָכָל\(^{156}\),

"No man can fight a lawsuit against One who is stronger than he", as evoking the courtroom language of *Theogn*. Ll.687-8,

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\(^{155}\) *Qoh.* 4:1 - 6:12, the Section on social dislocation and the various evils that he discerns within his society.

\(^{156}\) The idea of a human being seeking a lawsuit with Divinity but finding it is not realistic after all is very prominent in *Job*. See above, this Chapter, Section iv, for the fact that it is not by vindicating himself in a court case that Job will "come forth as gold".

588
"Οὐκ ἔστι θνητοῖς πρὸς ἀθανάτους μαχέσασθαι, οὐδὲ δίκην εἰπεῖν. Οὐδὲν τούτο θέμις",

"It is not for mortals to contend with immortals, 
Nor to argue a legal case (against them). 
This is permissible to no-one.",

This would then mean that 6:10 is telling us we can not argue with God in Judgment, since He has foreknown all existence and experience, and He knows Man for exactly what he is:

"Whatever exists has already been named, 
and what Man is has been known...".  

If Ranston’s interpretation here is correct, then the nature of the contention with God in v 10 b is actually verbal. This would mean that not only is 6:11 a warning against specifically verbal assertiveness before God, but 6:10 is as well. This makes even stronger the reinforcement in 6:10-11 of 5:1-7’s association of verbal restraint with God’s Presence and superiority.

In effect, then, the fact that 5:1-7 associates the importance of verbal restraint so closely with the Presence and superiority of God does add weight to Ranston’s idea that 6:10 b’s "One who is stronger" is God Himself. God is envisaged here as Judge, and literally present, just as, ultimately, He confronts the hero literally in Job.

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157:6:10 a.

158 Again, exactly as in *Job*, where 23:4 sounds the keynote of the entire book: 
"I would state my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

This book is full of arguments, bristling with verbal contention from beginning to end; but even so, to Job himself these arguments with his fellow men are nothing but a pale substitute for the disputation he is really seeking, since he aspires above all to a verbal confrontation with God Himself over his misfortunes.
Ranston's interpretation of 6:10 (like his understanding of 5:8) also fits Qoheleth's tendency to make the issue of Judgment the climax of key passages. Examples of this tendency include the "time" for Judgment (3:17) capping the famous "times" passage of 3:1-8; the certainty of Judgment in 11:9 constituting the focus of the celebration of life and youth in 11:7-10; and, above all, the certainty of Judgment proving to be the parting shot of the entire book (12:14). Qoheleth, then, like Theognis in the passage he evokes in 5:8, is warning us not to be deceived by the non-immediacy of Judgment into thinking that it will not come at all, the very point which he raises in 3:17 and reinforces in 11:9.

This also seems to be the conclusion of Bab. Bath. 78b, "The wicked says, There is no High One, /i /7 /W/7 is perished." - (But) the

159. Theogn. L1.197-204.

160. In 6:10 he is warning us not to contend with God as in a lawsuit, as Job longs to contend, to "argue (his) case with God". Job 13:3, 23:4, etc. See also above, this Chapter, Section iv, for Job's image of himself as contending with God in a lawsuit. If the case of Job is indeed the main example Qoheleth has in mind of this type of contention, then the message of 6:10 is closely related to that of 5:8. For in his "court case" against God, a major complaint of Job's is that God has not set "times for Judgment" (24:1 ff.). The fact that this image of God as negligent over Judgment has such a high profile in Job's brief may imply that the non-immediacy of Judgment is recognized as the standard issue at stake in all cases of theoretical "legal disputes" with God. If so, then the error of thinking Judgment will never come because it does not come immediately (the subject of Qoh. 5:8) is, in a sense, the same issue as the inappropriateness of "taking God to court" (the message of Ibid. 6:10).

These two concepts, the non-immediacy of Judgment and the idea of taking God to court, still to this day constitute, in effect, one single issue. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II says in Crossing the Threshold of Hope (London, 1994), P.61, "The history of salvation is also the history of Man's continual judgment of God". Although the reason for this is usually (including Ibid., P.60) said to be the overall problem of sin and suffering, it is not really the mere existence of sin or suffering which leads Man to judge God. More exactly, it is the fact that God's Judgment of the sin and His deliverance from the suffering are delayed instead of immediate which provokes Man to this reaction, unless (as in II Pe. 3:9) he can see the possibility of a worthwhile purpose behind the delay.

161. I.e., There is no accountability, so There will be no Day of Judgment.
Holy One, blessed be He, said, *Wait until Judgment cometh.* 162

This is probably significant for the interpretation of *Qoheleth*, because this *Baba Bathra* passage plays on the word "יָדָעִים" 163 in a manner apparently reminiscent of *Qoh.7:27*’s

"Adding one thing to another to discover the יָדָעִים".

The word-play of the Rabbinic passage leads into a commercial metaphor based on the double-entry system of book-keeping:

"Come יָדָעִים means Come, let us consider the account of the world: the loss incurred by the fulfilment of a precept against the reward secured by its observance, and the gain gotten by a transgression against the loss it involves.".

A very similar book-keeping metaphor 164 is used in *Aboth* II.1, just after Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi’s instruction to be

"Careful with a light precept as with a grave one".

He says this because we do not know the relative scale of reward for obeying the positive precepts. 165 It is thought-provoking to find here in Rabbinic literature what looks like a possible example of *Qoheleth*’s influence: in effect, an exhortation not to "add to or take away from" the relative importance of various precepts. For although the Rabbis do not, like *Qoheleth*, literally use the Deuteronomic phrasing, to "add to or take away from", their concern is, nevertheless, that the precepts which we think

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162 This means that, despite the false claims of the wicked, there will be a Day of Judgment after all.

163 From *Num. 21:27*-8, where it is, on the literal level, a place-name.

164 Although not including the double-entry method.

165 Strictly speaking, the uncertainty about Man’s account re Judgment could to some extent apply to his account for punishment as well as his account for reward, even though Rabbi Judah’s point here is actually about reward. For although there are penalties for offences laid down in the *Torah*, there is no guarantee that every punishment for every offence is covered.
carry lesser rewards will be "taken away" from the totality of God's commandments: i.e., we will not in fact bother to keep them.  

It is especially interesting that this exhortation is based on the limitations of our knowledge. Superficially, one precept may look less important or less profitable to obey than another; but in reality, we can not know that this is so. Perhaps there is a close connexion between the caution expressed here in terms of a balance sheet and Qoheleth's view in 3:14 that "nothing can be added" to God's work and "nothing taken from it". It would not be surprising if this close association between Man's account (¶ νυυν) with God and the importance of recognizing the limits of Man's knowledge goes back to Qoheleth. For he seems unique among Biblical authors in placing this double emphasis on the certainty of Judgment and yet also on the ethical function of uncertainty.

In view of Qoheleth's own ironical use of commercial terminology, and the similarity between the accounting imagery of Bab. Bath. 78 B and that of Aboth II.1, it would be interesting to know whether Qoheleth's understanding of the term "¶ νυυν" is the same as the intended sense of the term in Bab. Bath. 78 B. Qoheleth's obvious caution about Man's attempts at calculation does not rule out this possibility. For Aboth II.1, which also advises a cautious awareness of what Man does not know, uses the same book-keeping image as the Baba Bathra passage. This suggests that

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166 This is, in effect, Rabbi Hyya's point in the Midrash on Ps. 9, section 3 (Braude, op. cit., p.134), in connexion with exactly the same teaching of the sages, "Be as heedful of a minor precept as of a major one". In this Midrash, Qoheleth is mentioned explicitly, in connexion with issues which do seem to be genuinely the concerns expressed in his book. See above, Chapter 6, Section iii.
the *Baba Bathra* passage too is compatible with a belief in the impossibility of an exactly accurate reckoning. There is nothing in this passage to suggest it is rashly claiming that Man himself can reckon exactly his own accountability. If anything, the sophistication and complexity of the accounting metaphor probably suggests the opposite, that Man’s account with or accountability to God must *not* be regarded as simplistic enough for Man himself to grasp fully.

It seems that in Qoheleth’s view there is a genuine "ר י ו י י ת מ" (7:27) which we have an obligation to consider; but also there are many individuals misguidedly and self-centredly pursuing their different and separate "ר י ו י י ת מ" (7:29). These "ר י ו י י ת מ" apparently include selfish plans which undermine the cohesion of a society by working against the natural reciprocity of kindesses which maintains that society.

Probably, these "ר י ו י י ת מ" also include misguided interpretations of justice and of other people’s moral balance sheet with God, not unlike the "ר י ו י י ת מ" of Job’s friends, denounced in *Job* 21:27. Such ideas also undermine the normal reciprocity of obligations and kindesses, and the cohesion of society which is built thereon, by providing unstable or spurious grounds for judging and rejecting one’s fellows. Job bitterly criticizes the "ר י ו י י ת מ" of his friends because he is weary of being told how the wicked always get their just deserts in the end. This, he says in effect, is a false calculation regarding Judgment; for, as he points out in vv 31-3, the wicked are

\[^{167}\] The double-entry system of book-keeping is apparently not attested elsewhere as early as this text.

\[^{168}\] See also above, this Chapter, Section i.

\[^{169}\] See also above, Chapter 9, Section i, 21st. footnote.
often never denounced, and even enjoy wellbeing and popularity even to the grave. He sums up at v 34,

"So how can you console me with your דבכ ל?"

The "יתנ" of Job’s friends, then, are just as much דבכ ל as are, by implication, the "יתנ" of Qoh. 7:29. 170

Qoheleth is aware, then, of a variety of potential miscalculations about Judgment, arising from its non-immediacy, which cause or exacerbate a fragmentation of society. One is disbelief that Judgment will ever come at all. This hardens both the complacency of the oppressor and the despair of the oppressed, so that the gulf between them widens. Another such mistake is construing the delay of Judgment as unnatural or wrong. This impatience for Judgment leads to insurrection, with all the unwelcome risks which that involves. 171

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170 Both words come from the same root "יתנ", which covers not only intrigues and plots but also intentions, calculations, reckonings, etc. For ינות as נאכל, see also Ps. 94:11.

171 See 8:2-6. See also above, Chapter 9, Section vi, ft. 48, for the fact that Qoheleth’s dislike of revolution is not based on any particular liking for kingship. It is based rather on his views about the nature of Man and of experience overall. Alertness to the "times" and receptive interaction are the priority requirements, in dealing with politics and with kings no less than in dealing with other types of activities and personalities; see also below, this Chapter, Section vii.
Qoheleth sees these unrealistic responses to the non-immediacy of Judgment in the same light as he sees egocentric goal-seeking, including greed for gain. They are destructive tendencies which undermine socio-spiritual cohesion, dividing Man from God, subject from King, lover from lover, comforter from afflicted and rich from poor. They are not compatible with the fundamentally inter-reactive nature of reality, the reciprocal mutuality of existence.

The exhortation of 8:2-3 to obey the King’s command and not to leave his presence abruptly is typical of Qoheleth’s viewpoint on human relations in general. It is responsiveness and interaction which win the day, not severance and isolation (8:3, 10:4), nor manipulation and domination (8:9-10). In 8:5, the author combines co-operative reactiveness to one’s fellow men with alert adaptability to circumstances:

"Whoever obeys (the King’s) command will come to no harm; and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.”.

Wisdom in Qoheleth, then, has genuine power: the power to ameliorate problems and to protect, to preserve life and to contribute substantially to overall security, even for an entire city (7:12, 8:5, 9:13-18). It can even bestow authority (4:13-15, 7:19). However, to Qoheleth, it is by definition a skill of inter-relationship. Wisdom is in essence a pious submission before God. It does not consist of individual autonomy in goal-seeking at all; still less, therefore, does Wisdom mean the

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172 The author’s statement of his failure to find even “one woman” in 7:28 may perhaps refer to an unsuccessful quest for a woman to love, especially in view of the ideal he expresses in 9:9.
skill to seize or maintain domination over others (8:9 b), to ensnare others with blandishments (7:26), or to overthrow someone else's authority through plots and intrigues (8:3). In fact, the quality of Wisdom Qoheleth emphasizes most is not *control* at all, legitimate or illegitimate, but rather, responsiveness. The essence of his brand of Wisdom is interaction, not only with the "times" by

"(Knowing) the proper time and procedure", 173

but with God and Man as well: interaction with kings instead of rebelling against them, with the poor instead of ignoring them, with a lover instead of manipulating him / her, with one's peers instead of confining oneself to a sterile, self-contained rivalry against them.

The "תִּשָּׁבַע" of Qoh. 7:29 are destructive because, in dividing men into many independent quests, they send them in many unrelated directions and seal them off from creative contact with each other; so the socio-spiritual community ceases to exist as such. Similarly, the woman of 7:26 is "more bitter than death" because she is nothing but a "snare", a "trap" and "chains": her entire nature seeks *only* to control; there is no place in her purposes for interaction. She is like the predatory and manipulative harlot of Prov. 7:13, with the "hard" face inexorably set to her own deceitful and deadly (v 27) goal.

Wisdom, however, is the quality opposite to this, which changes the "hard" face into an expression showing readiness to respond and interact. It makes the face

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173:8:6 a.
"shine", like the face of God 174 about to react to His people's prayers and show favour toward them:

"Who is like the wise man? And who knows the explanation of a matter / the meaning of a saying? The wisdom of Man makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is transformed.". 175

This verse immediately follows the "manyיאוי" of Qoh. 7:29. The author is thus challengingly juxtaposing the interactive ideal he advocates with the contrastingly divisive evil he repudiates.

Because stability depends on maintaining the natural reciprocity inherent in the nature of things, true Wisdom is the faculty which always upholds this reciprocity, keeping the way open for interaction between God and Man and between Man and his neighbour. Hence, real Wisdom is, in effect, the skill which upholds and preserves stability. This means that the self-seeking skill of the brilliant, egocentric individualist is not real Wisdom, however ingenious it may be. 176 This is really Anti-wisdom, not Wisdom; for it tends to threaten stability, not preserve it.

Qoheleth is pointing away from this divisive Anti-wisdom, which is based on the individual ego striving for its personal goal. He points instead toward the interactive faculty which is rooted in the reciprocal nature of reality, and which binds the socio-spiritual community together. This is the skill which he recognizes as...

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174 In Num. 6:24-6,

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn His face towards you and give you peace."

175 Qoh. 8:1.

176 See also above, this Chapter, Section iv, and APPENDIX THREE, THE ERA OF QOHELETH.
Wisdom.

It may be that Qoheleth has proved untypical of his educated class in adopting this view of Wisdom, and has suffered as a result.

"As the book of Ben Sira shows, law-abiding Jerusalem felt secure under the wings of the Covenant. The Pontiff of Jerusalem, however, disturbed this complacent attitude. He said that Torah and Avodah, while necessary, are not sufficient: God's abundant grace demands more, namely, Gemilut Hasadim."

Perhaps Qoheleth has paid a heavy price for recognizing the same need as Simon and for playing his own part in disturbing this very type of complacency. His stance as a "teacher of the people" (12:9) may well be uncomfortably contrary to the expectations of his social peers; the teaching of Ben Sira 38:24-5 shows that not every sage sees Wisdom as the people's concern. Moreover, his complaint that he has found only

"One man among a thousand, and not one woman" suggests that, not unlike the pioneers of Cynic philosophy in their day, he has sometimes suffered loneliness and rejection, probably for his unusual beliefs and way of life. Even today, his book continues to be regarded as a misfit in the Biblical canon, even though he is richly steeped in the Biblical writings and profoundly in agreement with their pietistic ethic.

There is, then, a bitter irony in the fact that a man can suffer such isolation through preaching against voluntary isolation and individualism, and speaking out in

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177 Bickerman, op. cit., P.284.
178 7:28.
favour of spiritual and social cohesion. However, as Father Zossima's mysterious friend says, 179

"Even if he has to do it alone, a man has to set an example at least once and draw his soul out of its isolation, and work for some great act of human intercourse based on brotherly love, even if he is to be regarded as a saintly fool for his pains. He has to do so that the great idea may not die...".

179Dostoyevsky, op. cit., P.357.
CONCLUSION

Even before Qoheleth, both Hebrew and Greek piety already accepted, in effect, that there is an anti-pietist and spurious 'wisdom' as well as a godly and genuine wisdom. But it was Greek piety rather than Biblical which also accepted, as a closely related issue, the unpredictability of human experience as divinely appointed; and therefore it also accepted, in effect, the high-profile ethical necessity of Man's uncertainty.

_Qoheleth_ is both an integral and an indispensable part of the Hebrew Bible: integral because it is a devout work of Hebrew piety, but also indispensable because it seems unique within the Canon in stating bluntly the God-ordained necessity of Man's uncertainty. This gives it a special part to play in distinguishing wisdom from anti-wisdom as well; for it is necessary to recognize the ethical function of uncertainty in order to distinguish wisdom from anti-wisdom.

The Bible already reflected a sense of the _need_ to make this distinction even before _Qoheleth_ stated directly the positive concept of uncertainty which furnishes the requisite theoretical background for such a distinction. In supplying this statement that Man's uncertainty is divinely ordained and that it fulfils the ethical function of keeping Man in awe of God, _Qoheleth_ is therefore providing the answer to a need which formerly must have been long and keenly felt by those who, like himself, revered and pondered deeply the already existing scriptures to discover what true wisdom means in terms of practical piety.
The Biblical writings before Qoheleth shared with Greek wisdom-theory the same tension between positive and negative evaluations of wisdom, and a similar sense of the need to clarify the dividing line between acceptable, pietist wisdom and destructive, anthropocentric anti-wisdom. However, the fact that these earlier Biblical books did not share Greek piety’s close association between this wisdom / anti-wisdom controversy on the one hand and on the other the need for Man to acknowledge his uncertainty was largely due to the high profile of the concept of

1Especially uncertainty in the sense of his inability to predict outcomes, which gives a vital urgency to Man’s consequent need to acknowledge his limitations and his merely mortal status.

This is not to say that uncertainty about outcomes does not form any part of the earlier Biblical authors’ view of how God might choose to contend with a particular instance of anti-wisdom in a given circumstance. In Is. 29:14, e.g., the prophet who states God’s determination to “confound the wisdom of ‘the Wise’” probably sees the inability of ‘the Wise’ to predict outcomes as no less plausible a tool for God to use in confounding them than any other potential means He might choose to employ. Nevertheless, this is still not the same perspective as that of pagan piety, which emphasizes Man’s uncertainty of outcomes in particular as a major weapon of the gods against human impiety.

Moreover, the Biblical books do not associate the pious outlook so indissolubly with insistence on the intrinsic uncertainty of Man as such. On the contrary, the Hebrew pietist often sounds, and indeed even is, more certain than the non-pietist. For the certainty of a prophet who is informed by divine revelation is often depicted in the Bible as a striking contrast to the ignorance of the non-pietist. See, e.g., I Ki. 17:1 (cf. 18:1-46) on Elijah’s certainty about the coming three-year drought, and Ibid. 18:21-39 reflecting his certainty of God’s ability (by contrast with Baal’s inability) to send supernatural fire to light his sacrifice; or see Ibid. 22:1-38 on Micaiah ben Imlah’s certainty about the outcome of Ahab’s forthcoming battle (cf. also Elijah’s related prophecy, Ibid. 21:19). Since God Himself has the ability to predict outcomes (see Is. 42:9), it is not regarded as strange that His prophets can also make accurate predictions, given that they seem to enjoy a notable intimacy with Him. See, e.g., how Elisha, in II Ki. 4:27, seems surprised that God has not informed him already why the Shunammite woman is so upset, as if He usually does provide the prophet with this type of detail about people who are coming to him for help (see also above, Chapter 5, Section v).

Nevertheless, here as often (see above, Chapter 6), the Deuteronomists’ outlook shows some affinity with that of Qoheleth. God allows His prophet to be surprised. However close the working relationship between God and Elisha may be, the prophet is a dependent creature, from whom God still reserves the right to withhold certain details if He so chooses. Although Qoheleth brings this aspect of the pious viewpoint more explicitly into focus than most earlier books of the Bible, such traces of it in the earlier books, especially the Deuteronomic History, are significant.

The Bible is the richest source for instances of certainty as a characteristic of the pious (especially of prophets directly addressing specific issues), in contrast to the pagan association of piety with uncertainty. Nevertheless, Sophocles’ use of Tiresias’ sense of certainty, as he represents the authority of the gods in direct confrontation with human authority (see both Antigone and Oedipus Tyrannus), is worthy of more detailed comparison with Biblical prophetic figures, in their similar clashes with human rulers, than is possible in the scope of this thesis. See above, Chapter 4, Section vi.
direct divine revelation \(^2\) in Hebrew spirituality.

Because Biblical piety, unlike Greek piety, was traditionally held to rest on faith in far-reaching, specific and detailed supernatural revelation, it did not readily view uncertainty in a positive light. Uncertainty was at risk of being relegated to the neutral or even negative status of mere absence of certainty, arising from a gap or deficit in the unambiguously positive phenomenon of revelation.

According to Qoheleth's interpretation of piety, however, it is essential to recognize the positive ethical purpose \(^3\) of these gaps God has built into Man's understanding, because without recognizing this purpose, it is impossible to discern correctly the difference between wisdom and anti-wisdom. For whenever Man views the gaps in his own revelation or understanding \(^4\) as intrinsically negative, as a mere deficit in his own being as Man, he is failing to discern that his human nature is properly that of a dependent creature, not that of a god. From this failure in discerning his own nature as inherently and legitimately dependent, failure to distinguish wisdom from anti-wisdom inevitably follows. For he will then regard

\(^2\) The rôle of revelation, not only as part of the experience described within these Biblical writings, but also as the source of their authority in the tradition about them, tended to create a close association between Hebrew piety and the acknowledgement of certainty, by contrast with the Greek pietist association between piety and the acknowledgement of uncertainty. Admittedly, this did not create a direct contradiction between the Greek and Hebrew brands of piety, since the Hebrew pietists' certainty is certainty in God's reliability, not in the sufficiency of human sagacity and human powers of calculation. However, the access to God on which revelation depends, as recognized in Job and Qoheleth, is impossible in the context of an egocentric human milieu. In such a milieu, such as that depicted in Job (see above, Chapter 5, Sections iii and vii-ix), 'wisdom' sinks to the level of a morass of presumptuous guesswork, where there is neither the inspired certainty of the prophets nor the pious uncertainty of the pagan sage, but only blind uncertainty falsely posing as certainty.

\(^3\) Namely, "that men should revere Him". See Qoh. 3:14; see also above, Chapter 6.

\(^4\) And hence the gaps in his own power to calculate and therefore also to control.

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egocentric, anti-pietist anti-wisdom, the self-centred skill whereby he hopes to plot his own route and put into effect his own plan, as 'wisdom'.

* Qoheleth, by bringing his Hellenized awareness of the positive ethical function of uncertainty to bear on his Bible-based spirituality, is able to see and to convey that the gap in Man's revelation does not amount to a deficit in his wisdom or to a defect in his nature. For real wisdom consists of skill in receiving and interacting with the presence of God Himself and with the totality of His plan exactly as it is, including its deliberately designed gaps in the revelation He has granted to Man.

* For the terms "Hellenic"/"Hellenized" (rather than "Hellenistic"/"Hellenisticised") regarding Greek ethical values which are in themselves traditional, not Hellenistic, see bottom of p. 201, final footnote, final fin. p. 62 and fin., p. 627.
APPENDIX ONE

THE TERMS "UNDER THE SUN" AND ""לְבָרֶךְ" IN QOHELETH AND GILGAMESH

An expression very dear to Qoheleth, which is also found in Gilgamesh, is "under the sun"; so is the comparison of all men's achievements with mere "breath" or "vapour"; and this is all the more significant for the fact that in both Gilgamesh and Qoheleth they are in close conjunction with each other, occurring within the space of a few lines. Gilgamesh says to Enkidu,

"Who, my friend, is superior to death?
Only the gods live forever under the sun.
As for mankind, numbered are their days.
Whatever they achieve is but the wind.
Even here thou art afraid of death.
What, then, of thy heroic might?" ¹

This adds to the argument that the primary meaning of "לְבָרֶךְ" in Qoheleth is likelier to be transience than actual futility, ² even though the word does have secondary overtones of futility, because Man aims higher than his mortality makes feasible for him. ³ Since Gilgamesh's dismissal of human achievement as "but the wind" is pointedly sandwiched between the two references to death in L.28 & 32 of the above quotation, one would expect the intended nuance of "but the wind" (L.31)

² See above, Chapter 2, Sections ii and v; cf. Chapters 5, Section ii and 7, Section ii.
³ I.e., higher than the modest and temporary enjoyment of his creaturely, material blessings.
to be that of transience. This in turn makes it likely that transience is the nuance uppermost in Qoheleth’s mind too. For he seems to be deliberately echoing the wording and sentiments of these *Gilgamesh* passages. In theory, these might possibly have become absorbed into a later accepted body of proverbial wisdom familiar to Qoheleth, and thus might be available to him other than directly from *Gilgamesh* itself; but the way he uses them suggests awareness of their implications in their epic context. 4

In addition, 5 Crenshaw points out that the earliest Greek translations of the Hebrew word "יִשָּׁרֶד" rendered it as "ἀετιζ" or "ἀετιδζ", thus expressing the nuance of ephemerality, even though the later Greek translators of *Qoheleth* came to render it as "ματαιάττες", favouring instead the nuance of absurdity or futility, which Jerome’s "vanitas" later followed. Crenshaw argues that the original Hebrew of *Qoheleth* has overtones of both. He seems unaware, however, of the probable link between Qoheleth’s use of the term and the similar use in *Gilgamesh* of wind and breath imagery, 6 even though he is aware of the parallel between Siduri’s advice and *Qoh. 9:7-9*. He is probably right in thinking that Qoheleth uses "יִשָּׁרֶד" in both senses; but perhaps it should be added that "transience" is likeliest to be his primary meaning. 7

4See below, this Appendix.


6See below, this Appendix, for examples other than A.N.E.T. P.79 B, Ll. 28-33.

7This is the sense in which James 4:14 uses "ἀετιζ". The prime meaning is transience; but this transience implies that we should not make over-ambitious plans for too far ahead (v 13). Because such plans are not appropriate to our transient natures, these plans will prove futile if we insist on making them. See above, Chapter 10, Section vi for other points of contact between Qoheleth and James. James may well be consciously referring to Qoheleth’s "יִשָּׁרֶד" in 4:14, since the context exactly suits Qoheleth’s use of the term. Probably, James' understanding of Qoheleth's "יִשָּׁרֶד" is "ἀετιζ", unlike Qoheleth’s LXX translator(s),
The overtone of "futility" is merely a result of the transience combined with Man's inability to restrict his ambitions in a manner appropriate to this transience.

The fact that the motifs "under the sun" and "דַּלֶּל נָה and chasing the wind" recur over and over again in Qoheleth, and yet they are the only such recurring motifs in the whole book, also argues for Qoheleth having Gilgamesh and his fruitless quest consciously in mind in fixing on these two refrains. The probability of this is supported by the fact that Gilgamesh's quest makes a very suitable symbolic opposite to the approach to life which Qoheleth is advocating. In 1:14, the two expressions even occur together, and in 1:2 & 3 in close association with each other, as they do in Gilgamesh itself, which again Qoheleth seems to be imitating consciously.

The expression "under the sun" occurs nowhere else in the Bible; and even outside the Bible it is not particularly well attested, except in classical literature, where its occurrences do not blend it into one with the notion of ephemerality under its wind / breath image; this deliberate fusion of the two motifs seems peculiar to Gilgamesh and Qoheleth, which reinforces the hint of a direct influence from the

who translate it as "μακασιάνης".

As applied to Man's achievements and strivings.

Though probably not the ultimate opposite; for that, see above, Chapter 7, Section ii and below, Appendix Two on Solomon.

Cf. also 2:19; 4:7; 9:9, etc.

Though it occurs in the Phoenician inscriptions of Tabnit, 6th. Century, and Eshmunazar, 5th. Century.

E.g., II. 4, L.44; Euripides, Alc. L.151 & 395; Thucydides, Hist. 2.102; and Demosthenes VIII.270. See below, Appendix Eight.
former to the latter. The word "ברך" does occur elsewhere in the Bible, but usually in the same sense as in Qoheleth, i.e., it is used of men being limited by the necessity of death; it is less typical to find it used with a strongly pejorative slant, as in Ps. 78:33, etc. In Qoheleth, however, the otherwise Biblically unknown "under the sun" occurs thirty times. Similarly, "ברך" occurs about thirty-three times, often in conjunction with "chasing the wind".

This makes these two expressions very prominent motifs indeed in Qoheleth, and also underlines their close association with each other. In their joint use and overall implication, they are peculiar to Qoheleth within the Biblical corpus. This makes even more noticeable the fact that this book uses them in a similar pattern to their usage in Gilgamesh, and that the latter of the two motifs is also used in Qoheleth often in the same sense as in Gilgamesh, even though "ברך" is sometimes capable of other senses in the Bible. This Qoheleth-usage of the term seems a clear echo of the very similar expression "in quest of a wind-puff", which, in the Assyrian version of Gilgamesh, is re-iterated as a motif or refrain in exactly the same way as the parallel phrase in Qoheleth. In Gilgamesh, Assyrian Version, Tablet X, Col.i, Ll. 49 & 56

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13Pss. 62:9; 89 vv 5 & 11; 94:11 and 144:4; Job 7:16.

141:3, 9 & 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20 & 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7 & 15; 5:13 & 18; 6:1, 5 & 12; 8:9, 15 (twice) & 17; 9:3, 6, 9 (twice), 11 & 13; and 10:5.

151:2 (twice) & 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23 & 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8 & 16; 5:7 & 10; 6:2, 4, 9 & 11; 7:6 & 15; 8:10 & 14 (twice); 9:9; 11:8 & 10; and 12:8 (twice).


17Though whether or not it is used as often as in Qoheleth is a different question; it is impossible to be sure, since not all of the Assyrian version of Gilgamesh is extant.
and Col.iii, Ll. 7 & 14 the formulaic repetition of this phrase is very reminiscent of *Qoheleth*. It is tempting to see *Qoheleth* as imitating this formulaic repetition from *Gilgamesh*, and perhaps (though not necessarily) using it much more frequently than the original. Note the same gap of exactly seven lines between the phrase’s occurrence first in Line 49 and then in Line 56 of X, i; and again between its appearance first in Line 7 and then in Line 14 of X, iii. See also Tablet XII, Line 82, where Enkidu’s spirit is said to be like a wind-puff.  

Strange though this might seem in view of the language barrier, - since there is no obvious reason why our author or his intended readers should have known the Akkadian original, - it does appear as if Qoheleth is echoing the wording of *Gilgamesh* deliberately and allusively. This raises the question of whether he has access to a then-familiar translation now lost to us. Wisdom is traditionally a uniquely international type of literature; but although there is nothing surprising in Qoheleth following the tradition of his genre by making use of *Gilgamesh*, it is not clear how he or his readers became familiar enough with the epic for him to use it in this apparently allusive way.

There may, however, be a clue in *Nic. Eth. I.v.3*. Here, Aristotle refers to "the sentiments of Sardanapallus" (a legendary Assyrian king) without even quoting them.
as if they were too well known to need repeating. Inevitably, translating a whole epic would be a much more daunting task than translating a few sentences from the supposed epitaph of the mythical "Sardanapallus". Nevertheless, if the sayings of Sardanapallus were as well known and as appealing to his Greek contemporaries as Aristotle evidently believed they were, a Greek translation of the entire epic of *Gilgamesh* may well have met with an enthusiastic response if it ever was accomplished; and if such a translation existed, it may have been known to *Qoheleth*, or to acquaintances of his who referred to its contents.

If any translation of *Gilgamesh* at all was known to *Qoheleth*, whether Greek or Hebrew, it may possibly have been the entire epic, rather than just a few nuggets of wisdom taken from it here and there. For there is more of a case for translating an epic as a whole than for translating Wisdom books whole. Many Wisdom books divide easily into very short but complete and satisfying sense units that are of obvious value despite their brevity. In the case of an epic, however, although there may be certain small-scale gems within it which can be extracted from it, and circulated independently without losing the sense of the extract, it is clearly much more satisfying to have the whole epic. Epics are concerned with the exploits of heroes, and involve a sequence of events, a definite goal to be accomplished, the suspense generated by uncertainty of the hero's ultimate success or failure, and climactic action which resolves the suspense.

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22 See above, Chapter ii, Section vi for their similarity in spirit to Siduri's advice in *Gilgamesh*. For references to Sardanapallus, see also Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XII.530b and c (Gulick, Loeb V, Pp.392-3); Ibid. VIII.335f-336b (Gulick, Loeb IV, Pp.24-5).

23 See above, Chapter 7, end of Section i.
It would not, therefore, be that surprising if a Greek or Hebrew translation of *Gilgamesh* as a whole was known to Qoheleth, and especially a Greek one, since epic was such a familiar genre in Greek, so the work might well find a ready audience amongst Greek-speakers. Moreover, the particular use Qoheleth makes of the interrelating terms "יִהְיֶה" and "under the sun" does suggest a wider knowledge of the epic than just a few snippets, originally from *Gilgamesh* but now divorced from their original context. Rather, this particular use of these motifs implies a clear grasp of the overall drift of the poem, and of how the futility of the hero's quest makes the epic's interlocking use of these two motifs appropriate both to the theme of *Gilgamesh* itself and to *Qoheleth*’s own theme.

To underline further the fact that Qoheleth’s use of "under the sun" seems peculiar to him and to the *Gilgamesh* epic, it may be useful to distinguish this phrase from "under the heavens". The fact that "under the heavens" does occur elsewhere in the Bible does not dilute the uniqueness within the Bible of *Qoheleth*’s "under the sun". For, contrary to Crenshaw’s assumptions, and perhaps also to Gordis’s, there does seem to be a different shade of meaning anyway between Qoheleth’s formulaic "under the sun" and the less distinctive "under the heavens". The heavens may be quite innocuous; they may even hold the blessing of clouds, with their promise of rain. The Middle Eastern / Mediterranean sun, however, is a formidable,

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24 E.g., Ex. 17:14; Deut. 7:24 and 9:14, etc.; Qoh. 2:3 and 3:1.


26 See op. cit., P.195 on Qoh. 1:3.
sometimes negative power, especially when closely associated with "heaviness"; i.e., with hard work and strenuous, frantic endeavour.

This "heaviness" is exactly what it is associated with in Qoheleth:

"What does Man gain from all his labour at which he toils under the sun?";

"What a heavy burden God has laid on men!
- all the things that are done under the sun";  

"So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labour under the sun";  

and

"What does a man get from all the toil and anxious striving in which he labours under the sun? All his days, his work is pain and grief."  

This recalls the implications of the sun’s hostile role in Gen. 3:19’s reference to "sweat":

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.".

This is a verse which we know holds considerable meaning for Qoheleth from the

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27Furthermore, even when it is emphatically positive in character, it is no less formidable. See above, Chapter 9, Section i and below, Appendix Eight, for the idea of the sun as an all-seeing judge of conduct. See also C.S. Lewis’ discussion (as quoted above, Chapter 9, Section i) of Ps. 19’s apparent comparison of Torah with the sun:  
"Luminous, severe, disinfectant, exultant, - searching (the Psalmist) out in every nook of shade where he attempted to hide from it, - searching out all the hiding places of his soul.".

28For other associations of "heaviness", see above, Chapter 2, Section v.


301:13 & 14.

312:20.

322:22 & 23.
dust-echoes of 3:20 and 12:7. Admittedly, in this book, the sun itself is not exempt from this endless round of toil; but 1:5 depicts it as panting in eager haste, to get back to its starting place. The sun itself does not seem a victim; but from one perspective, it could nevertheless be viewed as part of the wearisome, cyclical scenario to which Man belongs, and which he finds inherently burdensome to him because his ambitions (and therefore also his labours) exceed what is appropriate to his stature. Since the already heavy burden of his labours is proverbially exacerbated by the sun’s heat, the sun can appear to Man the most burdensome part of the whole natural order.

It is beyond dispute that the implications of "under the sun" must be of key importance to Qoheleth in conveying his message, since it is otherwise unthinkable that he would repeat it thirty times, especially when there seems to be no precedent in ancient literature for doing so. As the sun’s cycle is constantly repeated (1:5), like that of the wind (1:6), and like the movement of the rivers (1:7), so is the motif "under the sun" constantly repeated throughout Qoheleth. The ceaseless movement of nature should not beguile Man into a constant, neurotic activism, since this is not what the cycle of nature is intended to inspire. Mere activity does not of itself produce any "gain" (1:3), just as the rivers do not increase the volume of the sea, even though they all run into it (1:7). Without gain / profit / increase, activity seems to Man to be nothing but wearisome; the usual aim of his activity is profit or lasting gain. But the endless repetition of nature’s movements, epitomized by the cycle of

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33This is actually a positive fact, not a negative one as is sometimes thought; see Chapter 10, Section ii for the fact that it would be unnatural and destructive for the sea to become "full". Nevertheless, Man does not easily see this point as positive, since it poses a serious challenge to his most basic assumptions and drives. This is because insatiety is very much Man’s salient characteristic (cf. Solon’s view, above, Chapter 7, Section v, fn. 117); and Qoheleth may see it as characteristic of his own society in particular (see below, Appendix Three).
the sun and by the water-cycle, etc., does not result in anything that can be grasped or retained. So Man should beware of thinking his feverish activities will bring him lasting gain.

Some would argue that the reiteration of "under the sun" as a refrain is warning us that Man’s busy, ambitious activity, like the cycle of nature, is simply futile bondage. If the expression "under the sun" signifies Man’s slavery, since the sun makes him sweat at his labours, then the frequent repetition of "under the sun" represents the inescapability of this slavery. In fact, because of its repetitive cycle, some even claim that the sun itself is depicted as in bondage in Qoheleth. Like Man, who toils beneath it, the sun can not break free from this bondage of endless repetition; so the sun’s slavery represents, on a grander scale, Man’s.

This may not be an entirely unwarranted notion, since there might be a Biblical background to this image of the ceaseless round, in which the slavery of the sun is a prominent symbol of the slavery of Man, or at least is somehow connected with that of Man. See, e.g., the story of Samson, whose very name denotes "sun", made prisoner in spite of his proverbial strength, and forced to toil beneath the level of his dignity, grinding corn for his enemies at Gaza (Judges 16:21), and consequently going round and round, like the daily repeated cycle of the sun. This kind of symbolism might perhaps agree with part of Qoheleth’s message, that blind ambition is really slavery, and that such restless activism is not appropriate for Man. This idea of the sun as especially associated with the slave-like toiling of Man, - either as symbolic of it, like Samson (the Sun) grinding the corn, or as a sweat-inducing impediment to
it, as implied in Gen. 3:19, may, then, be somehow connected with Biblical tradition in origin, and of some relevance to Qoheleth.

Nevertheless, such a negative notion of the sun's cycle, the idea of the sun as virtually a slave, could only be attributed to Qoheleth if he represented lasting gain as the only adequate reward for activity, and saw activity for any other purpose than gain as negative. The evidence, however, points in the opposite direction: Qoheleth sees Man's demand for lasting gain as unjustified and unrealistic. For this reason, his obsessive pursuit of gain is slavery. Yet that does not mean that activity itself, either that of the sun or that of Man, is slavery just because it does not result in lasting gain. Activity which reflects the skill and racecraft of piety has worth in its own right, completely irrespective of gain. It is greed and the feverish, blind pursuit of gain which is pointless.

The fact that the cycles of nature, like that of the sun and the sea, do not produce lasting gain does not mean that they are defective, or slavish and unworthy of imitation by Man. For the continuation of these cycles, which would be impeded and, eventually, destroyed by attempts at lasting gain, is necessary to maintain cosmic stability. It seems that, far from decrying the cycle of the sun, etc., for their constant repetition with no visible gain, Qoheleth is, on the contrary, using the impressive elemental activity of sun, sea, wind, etc. as symbolic of activity greater,

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34 See above, Chapter 9, Section i.

35 See above, Chapter 9, Section vii and Chapter 10, Passim.

36 See above, Chapter 10, Section ii.
more dignified and powerful than anything Man is capable of; and he is pointing out that if these mighty activities do not yield any profit to the sun, sea or wind, then Man’s fanatical demand for profit from his puny labours can not be reasonable, but is out of proportion to his humble status in creation overall.  

This means that the repetition of "under the sun" does not conjure up images of slavery: i.e., of endless labour for no return, amounting in the end to futility. The associations of the phrase "under the sun" in Qoheleth are not so much negative as double-edged: good news for the godly, but bad news for the greedy. This is partly because the motif "under the sun" has overtones of infallibly fair judgment, since the sun sees all; but it is also partly because the cycles of nature endorse the values of the godly, but expose those of the greedy. The cycles of nature illustrate that piety has value in its own right, despite lack of "gain"; like them, piety contributes to overall stability. Greedy pursuit of individual gain, on the other hand, does not lead to lasting profit, even for those individuals who selfishly pursue it; rather, it undermines social cohesion and stability.  

Probably, then, the main point to note about Qoheleth’s repeated allusion to "under the sun" from Gilgamesh is that, like Gilgamesh, Qoheleth uses the expression in conjunction with the idea of Man’s transience. The fleeting, breath-like, essentially

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37 In this case, the sun, sea, wind, etc. in Qoh. 1:1-11 would be playing a similar rôle to the mighty and impressive animals in Job, which are used to humble Job in his estimation of Man’s status.

38 See below, Appendix Eight.

39 See above, Chapter 10, Passim.
light nature of the ardent gain-seeker's achievements or rewards is clearly out of proportion with the arduously heavy toil he has to endure to attain to those rewards. Qoheleth's message is that he is utterly rejecting the "heroic" view of Man, and the glorification of arduous human labours. He is embracing the philosophy of Siduri rather than that of Gilgamesh himself. In the end, no hero has the answer to the question,

"What, then, of thy heroic might?"

What indeed? All human endeavour, to attain wealth, success or greatness, ends in death; and often, in the course of life, such endeavour prevents one's enjoyment of the simple pleasures life could have afforded in the meantime. Therefore, Qoheleh teaches, one should not aim for power, greatness, magnificence, and, least of all, immortality. Rather, one should aim for contentment.

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40See also above, Chapter 5, Section ii, Pp.191-2.
DOES QOHELETH ASSUME THE PERSONA OF SOLOMON?

Ginsberg’s assertion that Qoheleth does not assume the persona of Solomon at all, and that "רצה" here means nothing but "landowner" can not be correct, since the wording of 1:12, "King of Israel in Jerusalem", must be referring both to a literal king and to a king previous to the division between Israel and Judah. The expression "Landowner of Israel in Jerusalem" would not make sense, since Jerusalem had been in Judah, not Israel, since the divided monarchy; and even "King of Israel in Jerusalem" would only make sense before the divided monarchy, when Israel as well as Judah was ruled from Jerusalem.

Furthermore, since 1:12 says "King of Israel in Jerusalem", then David, Solomon and Rehoboam are the only possible candidates. David is ruled out by 1:1, which describes the writer as a "son of David"; so Solomon or Rehoboam must be meant. Rehoboam is hardly a likely candidate for a wisdom writer, and would be a pointless pseudonym to choose; whereas Solomon is the traditional patron of wisdom par excellence, and therefore the first rôle the reader would suspect the author of playing.

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1 Op. cit., P.148, Section 3; see also above, Chapter 10, Section vi, ftn. 139.
2 Not "of Judah".
3 Not "in Samaria".
The reasons Qoheleth does not say in so many words that he is Solomon are simply that firstly, it is not literally true; and secondly, that in so far as it is symbolically true, his hint is so obvious that no more than this hint is needed. There is no need for the author to labour the point once he has already conveyed that he wishes us to see him as playing the part of Solomon, albeit ironically; and 2:18-21 seems to be a reference to the folly of Rehoboam as Solomon’s successor, which serves to confirm that Solomon is the part he is playing.  

The reason he chooses this part to play is that Solomon is the supreme symbolic opposite of what Qoheleth believes a man should be. He is like Gilgamesh, only much more so. Gilgamesh is a king, distinguished for his strength and wisdom; and Solomon is the epitome (albeit a more sophisticated version) of this very ideal of kingship, distinguished for his political power, his wealth, and his "wisdom" in a variety of senses. If a wisdom school developed as a privileged social class in service to the Crown, it will have been regarded as the legacy of Solomon, who may well have originally founded it on the model of the Egyptian class of Court-Counsellors. The increasingly humanist and secularist success-ethic which relies on "making flesh one’s arm", and for which the post-Solomonic "מְלַעֲנֵי" attracted strong Prophetic criticism, was also regarded peculiarly as the legacy of Solomon. This is why the Pietists long regarded Solomon as their bête-noire.

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4 See also above, Chapters 6, Section i and 7, Section ii.

5 Jer. 17:5; cf. Ibid. 18:18, apparently reflecting the "מְלַעֲנֵי" as a distinct class.

6 As implied in Is. 30:1 and 31:1 & 2.
This was apparently well enough known already for Qoheleth to be safe in assuming that his pseudonym, and his reasons for adopting it, would be clear enough to his readers without him having to labour the point. But the two works which express this negative view of Solomon the most clearly and uncompromisingly in the entire Biblical Canon are the Deuteronomistic writings and *Qoheleth* itself.  

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7See above, Chapters 6, Section i and 7, Section ii.
APPENDIX THREE

THE ERA OF QOHELETH

Wisdom books, because of the universal nature of their subject matter, are notoriously difficult to date; and Qoheleth is no exception. Although 4:13-16 and 10:16 have sometimes been taken as topical references to particular kings, they could just as easily be stereotypes of common, frequently recurring political situations.

Furthermore, Eissfeldt’s idea that the contents of the book—to some extent already (indicate) its historical setting

1Ben Sira, however, does appear to be an exception; see below, this Appendix.

2So, e.g., Eissfeldt, Introduction to the Old Testament, Pp. 496-7. Crenshaw, op. cit., P.49, claims, “The so-called historical references in 4:13-16, 8:2-4, 9:13-15 and 10:16-17 invited use because of their typicality. Therefore, they offer no real assistance in dating the book or in locating its cultural setting.” Ogden, at the beginning of “Historical Allusion in Qoheleth IV 13-16”, points out that the current trend in scholarship is away from trying to identify specific historical references in Qoheleth, “Either because there is so little evidence available from the text itself to allow specific identifications, or because it is regarded as an irrelevant undertaking in the light of the typical or generalized nature of Qoheleth’s presentation of his ideas.”

While recognizing that Eissfeldt’s statement of this point of view (op. cit., P.496) is somewhat over-adamant, since he claims that there is “no question” of any such direct and literal historical allusions, I see no reason to differ sharply from this current trend away from seeking such allusions. Unless 8:10 is a reference to a specific profanation of the Holy Place, then I do not see anything in Qoheleth that looks as if it were intended as a direct historical reference; and 8:10 could just as easily be taken as the description of a more general trend toward cultic irreverence, albeit a trend of the writer’s own times, and probably one which he has personally observed. For Ginsberg’s understanding of 8:10 as referring to profaning the Sanctuary, not to burial as it is sometimes taken, see above, Chapter 1, Section iv.


4This view would be easier to justify if the “contents” referred to here were primarily the book’s linguistic contents, including the Mishnaic style of the Hebrew and the occasional Persian loanwords, such as “mediynah” for “province” in 2:8 (and also “pardes” for “park” in 2:5, as discussed above, Chapter 7, Section v). These features genuinely do point to a late date for the book in terms of the Biblical canon. As Crenshaw points out, op. cit., P.49, “The high percentage of Aramaisms places Ecclesiastes alongside other late canonical books
is somewhat misleading. Although this standpoint is not unpopular, it overlooks entirely how radical differences of opinion about the nature of the book’s contents can be. Eissfeldt himself sees the author’s "world-weary resignation" as, on the whole, outweighing his faith in God,

"which has been pushed right to the fringe of a philosophy of life".  

He therefore sees Qoheleth’s attitude as very different from that of the author of Job, and considers that

"Such a tired philosophy of life (as Qoheleth’s) is only possible in the last stages of the Old Testament development.".

This is a difficult viewpoint to justify, since a "tired philosophy of life" can only arise from the temperament or the personal circumstances and experiences of the individual who embraces it, and can not arise from ‘lateness’, nor, for that matter, from ‘earliness’ either, in any sense of either term. Moreover, apart from the oddity

(Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Song of Songs)."

What Eissfeldt chiefly means here by "contents", however, is what he believes to be the message, or, more exactly, the mood of Qoheleth. The mood of the book is something which he could be wrong about anyway; and the mood would still not tell us anything definite about the date, even if he were right about it.

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6For my own contrasting view that the outlook of Qoheleth is much the same as that of Job, see above, Chapter 1, Sections iii and esp. iv, Chapter 5, Sections iii and ix and Chapter 10, Section iv. Although Job is often referred to as if it were an attempt to deal with the problem of human suffering, the book franky reads nothing like a text on the problem of human suffering. Rather, it comes across as an eloquent exposition (with a case of extreme human suffering as the setting) of how utterly false the whole idea of human certainty really is. Just as Qoh. 8:17 states, so the whole of Job demonstrates (not only through Job’s adamant stance about his own point of view, but also through the stubbornness of his so-called ‘friends’ about theirs), that:

"Even if a wise man claims he knows, he can not comprehend".

For a similar view about the common standpoint of Job and Qoheleth, see, e.g., Rolf Rendtorff, The Old Testament: An Introduction, tr. John Bowden (London, 1985), P.265-6.

of Eissfeldt's idea that tiredness could be produced by lateness, Qoheleth's outlook
does not even seem 'tired' in the first place to everyone. To the present writer, for
example, Qoheleth seems zealous for the reformation of the disintegrating socio-
spiritual community, by returning it to piety and to seeking the divine presence. To
others again, he seems ardently committed to the privileged individual’s pursuit of
pleasure: perhaps amorally, but at least enthusiastically.

However, this is not to say that only the linguistic evidence can provide internal
cues about the book’s date, and that nothing about the author’s opinions and / or
feelings ever will. The general consensus about the highly Aramaized vocabulary,
word-formation and constructions of Qoheleth has long been that they seem to indicate
at least a post-exilic date for the book, 8 if not a later one; and if we accept this view,
then we may be able to use this as a rough frame of reference for finding in the
author’s thought evidence of a more exact date for his work. Although, then, the
book’s supposed cynicism or ‘tiredness’ does not in itself help to clarify further its
date of composition, other aspects of its thought may.

One possible approach to dating Qoheleth through its ideas is scrutinizing the
book for evidence of Greek influence. Even though many attempts to do this have
met with little success, 9 this is not because that approach is in itself an unpromising

8 Though not necessarily an Aramaic original, as Gordis points out, e.g., in "Koheleth - Hebrew or

9 Harry Ranston's Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature (London, 1925) is one of the
very useful exceptions. This is partly because Ranston is not too sweeping in the conclusions he tries to
draw from the evidence, hoping that his readers will continue to ponder for themselves what the implications
might be of the parallels he believes he has discovered. Chiefly, however, it is because Ranston's work is
centred on Greek Wisdom Literature, and not on some other Greek genre. Wisdom is Qoheleth's chosen
one; on the contrary, the question of Greek influence is far too important to ignore. It is rather because it has proved all too easy in such investigations to get onto the wrong trail by looking for the wrong kind of Greek influence, given the literary genre which Qoheleth represents.

This problem undermines even Barton's attempt to establish a date for Qoheleth, which otherwise seems convincing. Barton argues that the terminus ad quem for the book is fixed for us by The Wisdom of Ben Sira, on the basis that genre, and so it makes sense to suppose that this is the field of Greek studies which may well prove to be the most useful in elucidating his work.

Perhaps it should be added, however, that the literary successors to the ancient wisdom poets, whose work continued to wield considerable cultural and cross-cultural influence centuries after the literal wisdom-poets were dead, are in many ways the tragedians. The religious / wisdom element of tragedy must have played a large part in keeping the issues of Greek wisdom alive to later generations, because of the social implications of the fact that staging and witnessing a play is an impressive civic and communal event. As a showcase for Greek culture to conquered peoples of other cultures, drama, like athletics, makes a more immediate and spectacular impact than a book or even a recital of wisdom poetry. Although Ranston is probably right in seeing literal echoes of Theognis, Solon etc. in Qoheleth, it is less likely that the Greek wisdom genre in itself would have continued to enjoy the popularity it did so long after the era of its poets, had not tragedy continued as a vigorous art form alongside it, conveying a similar message about Man's proper standing in the universe: a message at least partly derived from the wisdom poets in the first place.

It is an important testimony to the positive impact of tragedy on Jewish piety that this was the genre in which the Jewish poet Ezekiel was eventually to cast his reworking in Greek of the Exodus story. It is noteworthy too, especially in view of the close link between the message of Qoheleth and that of Job (referred to above, this Appendix) that tragedy has so often been claimed as the model for the artistic form of Job. See, e.g., Moses Hadas, Humanism: The Greek Ideal and its Survival (London, 1961), Pp.6-7: "Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 428) excluded Job from his Bible because he believed that it was an imaginative, not a historical, work, whose author deliberately emulated the spirit and form of Greek tragedy. The Council of Constantinople of 553 restored Job to the canon, but its dramatic character continued to be recognized and commented upon. Theodore of Beza, lecturing upon it in Geneva in 1587, divided it into acts and scenes, and Bishop Lowth in an extensive treatment of the book (1753) found that it fulfilled all the requirements of Aristotle's Poetics, except that it lacked action; it was therefore not a tragedy. But if the author of Job learned from Greek tragedy, as many contemporary critics hold he did, - the essence of the matter is that Job in his suffering, in his attitude to God (who is not, as He is elsewhere in the Old Testament, the patron of a particular nation), and in his acceptance is as like a tragic hero as he is unlike other personages in the Bible.".

Barton, writing in 1908, suggests about 200-195 B.C. as the terminus ad quem. Interestingly, Cross, writing far later in 1955, dates fragments of Qoheleth from Qumran Cave 4 to the first half of the second century B.C.; see Cross, F.M., "The Oldest Manuscripts from Qumran", Journal of Biblical Literature, 74 (1955), Pp.147-72, cf. Pp. 153 and 162. So also does their editor Mullenburg, as Eissfeldt points out (op. cit., P.497) in reference to Cross' article.
Ben Sira actually knows *Qoheleth* and alludes to it frequently, apparently with approval. Barton sets out this claim that Ben Sira refers to *Qoheleth* persuasively enough. His attempt to establish a *terminus a quo*, however, seems less satisfactory. He settles for the Conquest of Alexander, feeling that *Qoheleth* must have been writing in the Greek period not the Persian period. This may well be correct; but the reasons he gives for this seem a little forced:

"If our recognition of a Greek idiom in *Ecclesiastes* is valid, it points to a date posterior to the conquest of Alexander the Great, for we must agree with the almost unanimous opinion of recent interpreters that the author lived in Palestine. The absence from his work of any important Greek influence - is sufficient, to mention no other feature, to make a non-Palestinian residence on his part out of the question".  

Apart from the fact that the expression "out of the question" has more than a hint of overstatement about it, it is not the case that *Qoheleth* shows no sign of

11 Whose date, he argues (op. cit., Pp.59-60), can be fairly accurately determined.


13 Barton's initial condition here, "If our recognition of a Greek idiom in *Ecclesiastes* is valid", makes only a slim point, since he seems less than absolutely convinced that any such recognition *is* valid; see, e.g., op. cit., Pp.32-3.


15 In fact, several different possible settings for *Qoheleth*’s work have been proposed since, such as Paul Humbert's idea of Egypt in *Recherches sur les sources égyptiennes de la littérature sapientiale d'Israël* (Neuchâtel, 1929), or Mitchell J. Dahood's Phoenician suggestion in, e.g., "The Phoenician Background of *Qoheleth*", *Biblica* 47 (1966), P.264-282. These views have not proved very popular, as Crenshaw points out, op. cit., P.49; but even relatively unappealing ideas like these bear witness to the fact that a non-Palestinian provenance for *Qoheleth* can not be dismissed as simply "out of the question".

Part of the problem is that Barton (op. cit., P.64) reads far too much into 5:1 and 8:10 as evidence of *Qoheleth*’s place of residence, claiming that 8:10 "makes it clear that his home was Jerusalem". This is not the case; there is no definite proof in these verses of where *Qoheleth* lives, even though at least one possible interpretation of these verses would fit in well with his home being Jerusalem (see below, this Appendix).
any important Greek influence; it simply shows no sign of commitment to any Greek philosophical school, which is by no means the same thing. All the attempts Barton refers to here to trace a significant level of Greek influence in Qoheleth are attempts to connect it with Greek philosophical notions; and since it is not a philosophical work, but rather a pietist wisdom-book, the first possible Greek point of contact with the book to examine is Greek wisdom, especially in its relation to Greek religious thinking.

Qoheleth, like Solon, but unlike other Hebrew wisdom writers, stresses the limits imposed by chance on the scope of human planning and control. The fact that he presents his emphasis on chance as a pietist stance is probably more revealing of his Greek influence than any other aspect of his thinking. For in Greek tradition, the idea that it is the supremacy of chance and the universal threat of the unpredictable which bring home to men their socio-moral obligations toward their fellow-men is easily recognizable as the distinctively pietist view.

Furthermore, the longstanding influence of tragedy as a robust and widely

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16 See op. cit., Pp.34-43.

17 See above, e.g., Chapter 4, Section iii.

18 This is why Thucydides' interpretation of the difference between Peloponnesian and Periclean viewpoints has been described as casting the Spartans rather than the Athenians in the rôle of spiritual successors to Solon; see Edmunds, op. cit. P.81. Thucydides represents the Spartans as more aware of "the general limitation imposed on human intelligence by the power of chance, (so that for them) soundness of judgment would presumably rest on awareness of this limitation, whereas - for the Athenians, sound judgment means defiance of τύχη in the name of γνώμη or τέχνη." Ibid., P.96-7. This policy of trusting γνώμη or τέχνη to make inroads into the natural territory of τύχη is basically a humanist view, like that of Thucydides's Pericles (although it would not be the view of more traditional Athenians of his time, nor that of pious wisdom at any time). By contrast, acknowledgement that τύχη imposes very important restrictions on human intelligence is the religious view.
accessible art-form indebted to Greek wisdom preserved awareness of and respect for these pietist values over a far longer time span than would have been the case if the entire world-view of the Greek wisdom genre had perished with the generation of its poets. In fact, even if that world view had not perished, and yet had become in the end accessible only to literate people who actually read the wisdom poetry itself, instead of to audiences of drama as well, the Solonic view of Man and of Chance would not perhaps have continued to command such respect as long as it did. It even penetrated into the Hellenistic era, where the newer and incompatible concept of deified Τῆς φυσῆς in the sense of "Luck" had come to exist uneasily alongside it. 19

Respect for Τῆς φυσῆς, then, in the older, traditional sense of wisdom and tragedy, had for several centuries been associated with piety in a Greek cultural context; but in Hebrew wisdom it seems peculiar to Qoheleth. There is no reason why a Jewish writer, simply as a Jew, should assign such an important function to the unknowable,

19. Bickerman, e.g., in Four Strange Books of the Bible, P.146, sees it as "very significant that it was Fortuna who became the divine projection and celestial protector of new Hellenistic cities: 'Luck of Antioch', 'Luck of Dura-Europos'". In one sense, this idea of Τῆς φυσῆς could be called a new concept, in that it is not the Τῆς φυσῆς of Greek piety; it is neither the Τῆς φυσῆς of wisdom-poetry, nor that of tragedy, nor is it the "in a sense official" understanding of Τῆς φυσῆς in the formulae described by Edmunds, op. cit. P.81-2; see also above, Chapter 4, Section ii. This is not to deny, however, that the beginnings of this 'new' concept of Τῆς φυσῆς can be traced probably at least as far back as fifth century rationalism. See, e.g., Chapter 4, Section ii for Oedipus' apparent misunderstanding (from the playwright's pietist perspective) of the implications of being the "son of Τῆς φυσῆς" in O.T. L.11080-5. Oedipus here, like Jocasta at L.1977 ff., seems to see the dominance of Chance as a reason for not fearing; but the poet demonstrates, by the way events defy their expectations, that both of them should have taken it the opposite way, as a reason for fearing. For the dominance of Τῆς φυσῆς renders Man entirely vulnerable to the unpredictable and the incalculable, thereby underlining, often traumatically, his own insufficiency, especially the insufficiency of his powers of calculation, his self-reliant 'wisdom'. This theme of Oedipus' 'misinterpretation' of Τῆς φυσῆς, then, implies that a new concept of Τῆς φυσῆς is already emerging even at this stage, under the influence of rationalism; and the pietist poet is aware of his own more traditional concept of Τῆς φυσῆς as incompatible with it.

Admittedly, then, it seems that the cult of Τῆς φυσῆς in this tamer guise as mere "Luck" reached new proportions in Hellenistic times; whereas in Sophocles' time, his traditional idea of Τῆς φυσῆς as a much more formidable force was still probably the majority view, while the tamer, rationalist idea was the less common view. Nevertheless, the origins of the tension between these two incompatible concepts of Τῆς φυσῆς seem to go back at least to classical times.

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and especially not on religious grounds, since Hebrew faith is a faith of revelation anyway. If anything, Jewish piety tends to make life seem less unpredictable, not more so, since the people's God has proved willing to communicate.

If *Qoheleth* were simply a pietist book which did not emphasize the unpredictable, it could never be proved to reflect a genuinely Hellenized attitude on any deep level, since doubtful and indirect supposed references to Greek ideas would only reflect a possibly superficial acquaintance with such ideas, not a profound acceptance of their worth. Since, however, *Qoheleth* is a pietist work which does emphasize the unpredictable, it is difficult to explain how its piety has even managed to accommodate such an emphasis, let alone come to feel the need for it, if not through exposure to specifically Greek concepts of wisdom and of piety. Moreover, the author must be deeply committed to these views and not just superficially acquainted with them. For he is adhering to them in contrast to the main emphasis of his own religious tradition, even though his thought forms and phrasing are permeated with that Biblical tradition, to which he is also deeply committed.

Furthermore, if *Qoheleth* merely stressed the limitations of human knowledge without also stressing the certainty of judgment and the fact that human ignorance serves the function of underlining God's control of Man, there would be no reason to connect it with piety at all, Greek or otherwise. But this book combines a detailed, interpretative Biblical piety with a truly Solonic grasp of the stupidity of mindless greed and goal-chasing in view of Man's helplessness before chance. This argues strongly for Greek influence, and on no superficial level.

* The terms "Hellenic" / "Hellenized" are more appropriate than "Hellenistic" / "Hellenisticized" for Greek ethical values which are in themselves traditional, not Hellenistic. This is still the case even if it was in the Hellenistic era that they became most widely known (from, e.g., classical and pre-classical literature, etc.). Cf. final footnotes for pages 62, 201 and 603.
The idea that Qoheleth is a pietist work and the idea that its Greek influence runs deep reinforce each other strongly. For giving a high profile to chance and the random element in human life \(^{20}\) is a peculiarly Greek form of piety, in sharp contrast to non-Greek types of piety; and it is also a particularly pietist approach by comparison with secular or rationalist Greek habits of thought, which assign a far lesser rôle to chance, and a far greater one to human intelligence.

It seems, then, that Barton, and others who see in Qoheleth possible traces of superficial Graecism but no important Greek influence, are mistaken. In Barton's case, this in turn calls into question his insistence on a Palestinian setting and on a Hellenistic date, since he appears to be basing these claims on the idea that the possibility of Greek idiom in the book argues a date well into the Hellenistic era, and yet once that late date is accepted, no other setting but a Palestinian one can explain the absence of more organic Greek influence than a mere verbal idiom here and there. However, although Barton's own argument for a Palestinian setting and a Hellenistic date may not be valid in themselves, both these claims are nevertheless quite attractive for other reasons.

The Palestinian setting has never been either proved or disproved to satisfaction. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg \(^{21}\) mentions several features that he feels

\(^{20}\) See also below, Chapter 10, esp. Section iii.

would suit a Palestinian setting, including wells, \(^{22}\) farmers paying attention to wind, \(^{23}\) the leaky house and sagging roof, \(^{24}\) etc. Most of these do not really argue for a Palestinian provenance for the book, because most of them are features which anyone steeped in the Bible, - and therefore also in the economics, customs, staple products, etc. referred to in the Bible as characteristic of the Holy Land, - might mention purely as a reflection of their *literary* familiarity with them from the Bible itself. \(^{25}\) However, the reference in 8:10 to "the Holy Place" and to "the City" might prove to be the exception, possibly furnishing a genuine clue as to the book’s setting. For this reference is phrased in the language of personal experience, as if the author has literally seen \(^{26}\) the wicked men who are unworthy of the priestly office approaching to minister in the Holy Place.

If he really has seen this in person, and he means us to take 8:10 as the literal eyewitness account it sounds like, this would indeed mean that he is familiar with Jerusalem, \(^{27}\) if not resident there. \(^{28}\) The ideal of the widely-travelled sage \(^{29}\)

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\(^{22}\) 12:6.

\(^{23}\) 11:4.

\(^{24}\) 10:18.

\(^{25}\) Crenshaw comments, op. cit., P.49, that these observations of Hertzberg’s are not very convincing evidence of a Palestinian setting, and *without* taking the reference to the Holy Place (which he notes) as a possible exception.

\(^{26}\) "תִּלָּכֶה" as in 3:10 & 16, 4:4, 6:1, etc. These are passages where he seems to be appealing to his own personal observations to give authority to his teaching.

\(^{27}\) Referred to cryptically in 8:10 as "the City"; he regards it as too obvious what city he means to feel any need to name it. It is surely significant also that the very first verse of the book mentions Jerusalem by name. Although this does not in itself tell us what exactly Jerusalem signifies in the book, literally or symbolically, it does tell us that Jerusalem is regarded as very important to the self-definition of the author, either by the author himself (if 1:1 is literally the work of his own hand), or by his editor if 1:1 represents someone else’s attempt to define Qoheleth and his mission on the author’s behalf.
could potentially make the whole issue of trying to discern the geographical

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24 I can not accept Barton’s claim, however, that Qoheleth’s reference to the Holy Place in 5:1 ff. and 8:10 actually

"-makes it clear that his home was Jerusalem”

(op. cit., P.64). For mere acquaintance with Jerusalem does not actually prove that he lived there, or even

that he had any fixed home than following the lifestyle of an itinerant teacher. Ben Sira, for example,

sets great store by the experience he has gained from braving the dangers of extensive travel, seeing this

as necessary to the life of the wise and educated man (34:9-12). In 39:1-11, he shows that he sees travelling

widely (v 4) not just as an aspect of worldly wisdom, but as part of the lifestyle of the true sage and devotee

of Torah (v 1), along with prayer (v 5), giving good practical help and advice (vv 4 and 7), preserving and

preserving the sayings of past wisdom-writers (vv 2-3; cf. Qoh. 12:9b-10), and producing original wisdom-

compositions of his own (v 6).

If, as Ben Sira claims, being widely travelled is recognized as part of the rôle of the true sage,

Qoheleth’s apparent acquaintance with Jerusalem, and the fact that he feels strongly about the things he has

seen there, do not prove that it is his home town, even if he does have some permanent home town or fixed

base. If, however, 8:10 is based on personal observation, then it does suggest, like 5:1 ff., that the Temple

cult is one of the issues he feels about most strongly.

29 See previous footnote for Ben Sira’s comments on this. If Qoheleth also conforms to this ideal, this

may be relevant to his apparent interest in the skills of racecraft, which he appears to make his special

symbolic model for the skills of piety; see above, Chapter 9, passim. In theory, this interest could be

derived from literature alone, since Greek literature is replete with examples of racecraft (see above, Chapter

9 and Appendix Four). Pre-classical Greek literature also reflects a very religious interpretation of racecraft

and of competitive athletics in general, so as to make racecraft seem a very natural choice as a model for

the skill of piety. However, since such competitive activities continue to be an important feature of civic

life in the Hellenistic world, Qoheleth’s experiences as a well-travelled man of means may well contribute

to his interest in chariot-lore, since he may have visited large Greek-style cities with very spacious circuits

for racing, and therefore seen some impressive examples of it.

The ideal of the well-travelled sage implies that there is nothing intrinsically contradictory about

Qoheleth regarding Jerusalem, where there is no circuit, as his home, and yet having nonetheless witnessed

chariot-racing frequently. People of any era who are keen on racing that requires a special type of circuit

are usually willing, if they have the means, to travel in order to watch races at a variety of different venues;

the variety of the circuits varies the demands made on the drivers’ skills, and therefore adds greatly to the

appeal of the racing.

Also, if Qoheleth is a member of the ruling classes, interest in chariot-racing would be very natural,

since chariot-racing traditionally has a special association with the wealthy, even from pre-classical times.

This is not primarily because of the travelling aspect, but largely because equipping chariot-teams is very

expensive, and patrons willing and able to finance a team are highly esteemed for this service, both by the

drivers whose teams they finance and by the public who enjoy the spectacle of the races. For the wealthy,

then, taking an interest in chariot-racing can furnish not only a personal pleasure for themselves in watching

the races, but also an opportunity for civic service by equipping a chariot-team; so it can form part of the

special rôle they play in society. If, then, Qoheleth’s interest in chariot-lore is literal and not merely literary,

this is not at all surprising if he is both upper class and accustomed to travelling widely in his capacity as

a sage, since foreigners of comparable class and culture are often deeply involved in chariot-racing, not only

as spectators but also as patrons.

If Qoheleth is really a native of Jerusalem, he would not have any opportunity to be a local patron

of the sport himself; but this would not stop him from being influenced by other, perhaps foreign, enthusiasts

of equivalent class whom he has met abroad. Although, then, 5:1 ff. and 8:10 do not prove, as Barton

claims, that Qoheleth lives in the Holy Land, there would still be nothing intrinsically contradictory about

him taking a keen interest in chariot-racing, and yet regarding Jerusalem, where there are no facilities for

this kind of racing, as his home.
provenance of *Qoheleth* seem relatively unimportant, were it not for the fact that this very ideal is chiefly associated with the wealthy and leisured class who are most able to travel; and since this is, in effect, the ruling class, then it *is* important after all to know where a sage from this background calls home. For as a member of the ruling class, he will have the potential to exercise a very considerable influence on his home-city. This type of strong civic influence could even be the key to his self-definition and the core of his sense of self-identity, especially in a Hellenistic culture, with its profound respect for the civic virtue of *φιλανθρωπία*. 30

As Gordis points out:

"(The) cosmopolitan character of Wisdom is - most naturally explained in terms of its upper-class origin. Foreign contacts, opportunities for travel and trade, and a fondness for the culture and fashions of other lands have always characterized the aristocracy. Ben Sira - includes travel as an element in the life of the ideal scribe (39:4). Koheleth speaks of amassing 'the treasures of

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30See also above, Chapter 10, Section i.
kings and provinces”. On the other hand, the peasant, the petty merchant and the craftsman have neither the opportunity nor the penchant for such contacts.

While Qoheleth, as a popular teacher, does not share Ben Sira’s view that wisdom

31 However, see the comparison with 1 Ki. 9:14 & 28 and 10:10, 14 & 21 (above, Chapter 7, Section ii) for the fact that this phrasing owes much to Qoheleth’s symbolic Solomon-persona. Since this means that taking 2:1-11 literally is by no means the only way to make sense of the passage, it may be that the author does not mean it to be taken literally (i.e., taken as an account of an actual personal experience), but rather intends it to be taken as a symbolic statement only.

To do justice to Gordis’ point, however, this is probably not the whole truth. Qoheleth may well have chosen this persona partly because he sees an ironic parallel between the lavish lifestyle of Solomon in his day and the present lifestyle of certain of his contemporaries, including some of his own class, and perhaps even including himself, at least at some stage in his life. See, e.g., above, Chapter 7, Section v for the massive building-work attributed to Hyrcanus by Josephus in his write-up of the Tobiaid Saga. Qoheleth himself may also have been at one time literally involved in large building-projects. If so, the fact that he chooses eventually to describe this earlier stage in his development in language reminiscent of his anti-hero (see above, Chapter 7, Section ii on 2:4) does not in itself mean that he never literally behaved in this way; it simply means that, if he ever did, then he later came to reject the values which prompted him to the activities of 2:1-11 at the time.

If so, this would then mean that 2:1-11 has all the more authority because it is based on his own personal experiences, like the “’י תקנ” - passages of 3:10 & 16, 4:4, 6:1, etc. Also, it would give some indication of how he has progressed and developed in understanding from an initially false position or misguided outlook to a more mature understanding. Cf. above, Chapter 3, Section iii, on Qoheleth overcoming his original, unrealistic frustration at the unwelcome limitations of wisdom.

32 This is not to say that “the people” are necessarily Qoheleth’s only students. The allusive nature of his book suggests that he also has disciples with a broad and Hellenized literary education. Also, the wording of 12:9 implies that his popular teaching is something additional to his ordinary work as a sage, as if teaching the ruling class is all that most sages regularly do.

If, as Ben Sira 38:24 - 39:11 seems to imply, there is an ongoing controversy as to whether or not artisans make suitable students of wisdom, then there may be some value in Bickerman’s comparison of the popular aspect of Qoheleth’s preaching with that of the Cynic philosophers, such as

“His Greek contemporaries Bion and Teles”
(The Jews in the Greek Age, P.167), even though attempts to connect Qoheleth with Greek philosophical schools are, on the whole, unconvincing. See, e.g., Dudley, (op. cit., P.45), for Crates’ opinion that Philiscus the cobbler is better qualified for philosophy than Themison, the King of Cyprus whom Aristotle thought supremely qualified for it, largely by his wealth (and hence leisure). For further reference to Crates, see also above, Chapter 2, Section vi. If regarding artisans as potential sages really is as untypical a viewpoint in Qoheleth’s milieu as Ben Sira tries to make it sound, then it may be significant that Qoheleth adopts, in contrast to the more typical view, what could perhaps be interpreted as a Cynic position.

Haupt (op. cit., P.1 ff.) suggests that the word “’י תקנ” as applied to Qoheleth means “head of a school”, as in the Talmud (e.g., Gitin 62a and Berakoth 64a). Barton (op. cit., P.64) dismisses this view, because, he says,

"proof is altogether wanting that, at the time when (Qoheleth) wrote, schools such as Haupt contemplates had arisen. It is more probable that the word "king" is a part of his literary artifice.”.

In one sense, Barton is right; the word “’י תקנ” in 1:1 is indeed “a part of (Qoheleth’s) literary artifice” (see also above, Chapter 7, Section ii and Appendix Two); for he calls himself in the same verse “son of David”, an expression clearly designed to invest the word “’י תקנ” with implications of kingship.

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is the monopoly of the leisured classes, it is worth considering the possibility that he originates from the high-priestly circles who were running his country in the late Persian and the Ptolemaic eras, and is dissatisfied with the standards of his own class, both in administering justice and in conducting the Temple cult.

This view seems particularly appealing in the light of what appear to be proto-

However, to be fair to Haupt’s viewpoint, the sort of school he has in mind would not be that hard to imagine in Qoheleth’s era. For, as Gordis points out (op. cit., P.32), “The extant Hebrew text of Ben Sira offers the first known use of the familiar technical term bet hamidrash, house of study, in his plea: מדרשׁ אל שלום וידידי א inode מדרשׁ, Turn aside to me, ye fools, and tarry in my house of study (51:23).”

Ben Sira, by Barton’s own admission (op. cit. P.60), is probably not very much later (perhaps one generation later) than Qoheleth. Furthermore, he appears to approve of the earlier book (Ibid. P.56), unlike the author of Wisdom of Solomon (Ibid. Pp.57-8). If he has modelled his own book on Qoheleth’s book (and the evidence presented in Ibid. Pp.53-6 of his dependence on it does seem quite ample), then it is possible that his concept of his own teaching rôle may also be modelled to some extent on what he knew about the teaching rôle of Qoheleth. So if Ben Sira is the head of a school, then it is not inconceivable that Qoheleth before him may also have been the head of a school. If so, however, and if Ben Sira wants to present himself as formally in harmony with Qoheleth to a substantial degree, then he may feel that his disagreement with him about the non-leisured classes (e.g., artisans) having a stake in wisdom as well as the ruling class needs some special justification. Hence, his account of his point of view on this issue in 38:24 - 39:11 is quite long and detailed; and in 38:31-2, he is careful to express respect for the type of work which he does see as appropriate to the non-leisured classes, perhaps in order to prevent his disagreement with Qoheleth being misconstrued as hostility to him, or as contempt for those he is known to have taught, respected and held dear.

This possibility puts Haupt’s idea of Qoheleth as head of a school in a rather less fantastic light. Admittedly, the word “תלמוד” in 1:1 can not, in juxtaposition with “ﬁל” - “rebbe”, mean “head of a school” instead of “king”. However, it is just possible that 1:1 may contain a double entendre, and that “תלמוד” is meant to signify both “head of a school” and “king”. Alternatively, if no double meaning is intended, and “תלמוד” simply does not mean “head of a school”, that does not in itself mean that Qoheleth could not possibly have a “school” in some sense of the term.

33Compare Ben Sira 38:24 ff. with Qoh. 12:9, as discussed above, Chapter 1, Section iii; see also Chapter 7, Section iii.

343:16.

355:1 ff. and 8:10.
Sadducean leanings in his personal beliefs. It might also serve to explain how he knows that the men he refers to in 8:10 are wicked; if they belong to the same class as himself, this would give him more opportunity to observe their behaviour, including how they conduct themselves in their priestly office, than if he were an outsider. Also, if he is of priestly family, this might be partly the reason for his dissatisfaction at malpractice in connexion with the cult. While this would be a matter of concern to any upright believer, it would seem to a conscientious member of the priestly class not only a matter of concern but also a personal responsibility. Someone has to speak out against these abuses of the cult; and no-one could be more appropriate to do so than one of that very stratum of society most directly responsible

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36 As discussed above, Chapter 1, Section iv and Chapter 7, Section iii. For Qoheleth’s dissatisfaction with the state of society by contrast with Ben Sira’s attitude, see below, Appendix Six. See also above, Chapter 6, Section i for further points of contrast with Ben Sira.

Others who have made comparable suggestions include: A.H. McNeile in Introduction to Ecclesiastes (Cambridge, 1904) P.10, who thinks that Qoheleth was perhaps a religious official of high priestly family, and that this may be why it was seen as important to preserve his book; and Paul Haupt in Koheleth (Leipzig, 1905) and The Book of Ecclesiastes (Baltimore, 1905), who actually calls Qoheleth a Sadducee. Barton (op. cit., P.65), while criticizing this as an anachronism, nevertheless concedes that “He belonged undoubtedly to that wealthy sceptical aristocracy out of which the Sadducees were developed.”

While it is surprising that Barton should use so absolute a word as “undoubtedly”, nevertheless it is not surprising that this idea of a priestly background to Qoheleth has proved so attractive to several critics. Ben Sira, a writer familiar with Qoheleth’s book and dated by Barton as not so very much later (op. cit., Pp.59-60), gives the impression that it is exactly this kind of influential, cultured and prosperous type of man who is likeliest to be writing a wisdom-book. Also, critics will inevitably be drawn to Qoheleth’s expression of interest in the cult in 5:1 ff. and 8:10, and are bound to try and make as much of it as possible, because it is all they can find in the book which could possibly relate the author to any specific location or point of view with any plausibility at all.

However, even though there is little evidence to go on in the text, and therefore it is a strong temptation for scholars to read too much into what little there is, nevertheless the idea that Qoheleth may belong to the priestly ruling class still represents the least forced and the most sober and coherent attempt as yet to furnish him with some personal details. Some might object that, although priestly commitment to the cult and desire to reform it do indeed constitute one possible ground for interpreting 5:1 ff. and 8:10, nevertheless Qoheleth’s interest in the Holy Place could, alternatively, be taken in a more negative way: as a caution against being too quick to get involved in the cult at all (e.g., if he regards it as so corrupt as to be beyond reform). Some might even contend that Qoheleth, far from having priestly connexions, is a complete outsider to the priestly class and entirely hostile to it, and as such is warning us in 5:1 ff. to keep away from the cult. But see above, Chapter 5, Section v for why this seems an unconvincing interpretation of 5:1 ff.

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If Qoheleth is indeed firmly anchored in the Holy Land by the civic and cultic responsibilities of his class, and if he is deeply committed to the Jerusalem cult, then the Palestinian geographical setting is an important feature in interpreting the book, not a relatively peripheral one as it otherwise might have been. If one accepts the Palestinian setting, then within the overall possible time span from the Persian period to the reign of Antiochus IV, one plausible period to place Qoheleth is the

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37 Which he himself interprets as including responsibility for teaching the people (12:9), even if other comparable sages do not. For his ideas of economic responsibility to those less fortunate, see above, Chapter 8, Section iii; cf. Chapter 10, Sections i, ii, v and vii for his overall ideal of social cohesion and responsibility to one's neighbours.

38 As his profound dissatisfaction with malpractice in the cult in 5:1 ff. and 8:10 could well be taken to imply.

39 It seems very unlikely that Qoheleth could be writing as late as the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who reigned from 175-163. A book such as his, which seems deeply imbued with the values of both Hebrew and Greek pietist wisdom, would seem impossible for either party to accept in so polarized a religio-political conflict. Indeed, it would be hard for a Hebrew pietist to sufficiently maintain his original respect for Greek culture to feel able to write such a book in the first place, never mind find a sympathetic audience for it; and even if he could bring himself to write such a book in such circumstances, it is unlikely he would do so without including some message of particular relevance to the immediate spiritual crisis precipitated by Antiochus' religious policy. Qoheleth seems to belong squarely to the period before Hebrew piety and Hellenisation became incompatible.

Also, Ben Sira could have been writing in about 180-175 (see Barton, op. cit., P.60); and one would imagine Qoheleth to have been written about a generation before. For whether or not one accepts Barton’s view that Ben Sira knew the book "after it had once been glossed", it would still take time for it to become so well known that Ben Sira could presuppose his own readers’ familiarity with it; and unless he could pre-suppose this, his allusions to Qoheleth seem to have no point or appeal.

If Muilenberg and Cross are right in dating their substantial Qoheleth fragments from Qumran Cave 4 to the first half of the second century B.C. (see above, this Appendix), it is no great surprise anyway that Qoheleth does not seem to have been writing as late as the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ reign. For if he were writing that late, this would not appear to leave his work enough time to become sufficiently revered, or at least sufficiently widely known, to motivate the Qumran community to have copies of it.

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period either just before or just after the Ptolemaic rule of Palestine was replaced by Seleucid rule in 198. Perhaps the latest plausible time to place him is the beginning of Antiochus IV's reign in 175, before his persecution; but this is not very appealing, because this would seem to make him contemporary with Ben Sira instead of separated by a generation; and this would make Ben Sira's familiarity with and allusions to his book hard to explain. The most attractive period to place Qoheleth seems, then, to be toward the end of Ptolemaic rule or in the early years of Seleucid rule over Palestine. 41

40 Admittedly, Barton's idea of placing it just after the beginning of Seleucid rule (op. cit., P.62) seems no less plausible than placing it just before. Barton's reasons for thinking it more plausible, however, are slender. He takes 10:17's

"Blessed are you, O Land, whose king is nobly born (ד""ה ),
And whose princes feast at the proper time"

as

"Qoheleth's welcome of the strong rule of Antiochus III",
by contrast with 10:16's

"Woe to you, O Land, whose king is a child (יהי ),
And whose princes feast in the morning",
the child in question being the young Ptolemy V. This suggestion, however, while far from impossible historically, is nevertheless very unlikely on stylistic grounds. If we take "יהי " in 10:16 as "child", instead of its other possible meaning "servant", this undermines the contrasting parallel of "יהי " in v 16 with "ד""ה " meaning "a noble" in v 17. "Servant" is, therefore, almost certainly the meaning of "יהי " here; and this meaning does not fit the political setting Barton is envisaging for these verses.

41 However, this would mean that, if Josephus' dating of Hyrcanus' suicide is correct, then Qoheleth may have already written his book without ever seeing the final outcome of Hyrcanus' career, even if he was well acquainted with the similar values of earlier Tobiads, especially Joseph, Hyrcanus' own father. Josephus appears to contradict himself about the timing of Hyrcanus' career and suicide, reckoning his years of control over Transjordan as only seven, and yet saying that he controlled it during all the time (Ant. XII.234, "ונתא תונ ז""ז") that Seleucus ruled over Asia; yet Seleucus IV reigned for thirteen years, from 187-175. Also, in XII.236, Josephus says that Hyrcanus' property was seized by Antiochus after Joseph's suicide; but II Macc. 3:11 ff. tells a different story: that his property was seized in the previous reign, that of Seleucus IV, from the Temple treasury, and not necessarily after his death; in v 11, he is referred to simply as "Hyrcanus son of Tobias, a man of very high standing";

as if he might still be alive.

These apparent discrepancies and uncertainties in the details and dating of the Hyrcanus story are unfortunate. For if, as suggested below, this Appendix, Qoheleth saw himself as the opponent of the kind of values the Tobiad family were represented by some as epitomizing, then it would be interesting to know if he ever found out (and especially if he found out before he wrote his book) that such a prominent member of that clan ended his dazzling career of antipietist goal-seeking in disaster and suicide. As the matter of dating stands, however, the probabilities seem against Qoheleth's book being influenced by the suicide of Hyrcanus, unless either Hyrcanus' death occurred considerably earlier than Josephus thinks, or far less time
Admittedly, the problems which led to the fragmented society described in *Qoh.* 4:1-8 and 4:13-16 may, for all we know, have been developing quite rapidly ever since the return from Exile, and do not in themselves prove a later date for the book than the Persian period. Nevertheless, since the Hellenistic dating seems preferable in view of the apparently Greek flavour of Qoheleth’s brand of piety, it is perhaps worth adding that the picture of oppression, greed and injustice in 3:16 and 4:1 ff., and the uselessness of opposing the power of the King, even if he lacks discernment and promotes the wrong people, seems to suit the late third or early second century B.C.

Barton draws the following sobering picture of this troubled era:

"The century which followed the death of Alexander was a trying century for the whole East, but especially so for Palestine. Possessed by the Ptolemies, but claimed by the Seleucidae, Palestine found herself in the precarious position of an apple of discord. The gratitude which Seleucus I felt toward Ptolemy I for the aid rendered him in obtaining his empire (see Bevan, House of Seleucus, I), at first secured peace between Egypt and Syria. As the century advanced, elapsed between the composition of *Qoheleth* and the composition of *Ben Sira* than Barton thinks.

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42 See above, Chapter 10, Sections i and vi.

43 The later *Qoheleth* is dated, as long as it is prior to Antiochus Epiphanes’ persecution, the easier it is to explain this apparently Greek quality. For a relatively late date would give the influence of Greek letters more time to permeate the thinking of the educated Jewish upper class. Qoheleth seems not only aware of Greek wisdom-standpoints, but also sometimes critical of them. See above, Chapter 2, Sections iv and vi, Chapter 8, Section iii and Chapter 10, Section vi (Theognis); Chapter 3, Section iii (Theognis and Solon); Chapter 2, Section iv and Chapter 10, end of Section ii (Aristotle); etc. This suggests that these standpoints have already become sufficiently familiar (perhaps even accepted by many as established opinion) to need challenging and rejecting explicitly wherever Qoheleth feels unable to agree with them.

Also, whether Qoheleth is agreeing with Greek axioms or disagreeing with them, he alludes to them no less cryptically than he alludes to *Job* or to parts of the Deuteronomic History such as *I Sam.* 15; see above, e.g., Chapter 5, Sections v and ix. This also gives the impression that he is pre-supposing widespread familiarity with these Greek sayings amongst the readers of his book. Unless his readers can easily recognize the maxim he is alluding to, his whole point is lost. It is not easy, therefore, to imagine an earlier date for *Qoheleth* than the late Ptolemaic period.

44 10:5-7.
however, the Seleucid claims were pressed and Palestine first had to pay taxes to both (Jos. Ant. XII.4) and then, toward its close, became the unhappy bone of contention between her two powerful neighbours, suffering severely. Then, too, her internal organization must have been such as to bear heavily upon the poor. Ptolemy III had deputed Joseph, son of Tobias, to collect the taxes of the country (Jos. Ant. XII.4), and Joseph had grown rich by farming out the taxes to subordinates, and founded a powerful house. (The ruins of the palace of Joseph's son, Hyrcanus, may still be seen at Arak al-Emir, east of the Jordan. Oppressed by the tax collectors, a prey to their rich and powerful neighbours, suffering increasingly as time went on from the ravages of war, oppressed during the later years of the century by the drunken favourites of a king who was a helpless child, what more fitting theatre than the Palestine of this time could be sought for a book like Ecclesiastes?"

Given that Qoheleth is at such pains to put individualistic greed and ambition in such a negative light, it may be of no small importance that this puts his message in such sharp contrast to that of the very Tobiad Story to which Barton is here referring, especially since the Tobiad story is far from giving a gloriously spiritual impression of the High Priestly circles. There are grounds for thinking that this Tobiad story represents avarice and ruthless ambition as 'wisdom'; that is to say, that the story is, in a sense, an anti-wisdom tract, presenting the opposite ideal to that

45But see also above, Chapter 7, Section v, for the fact that there are some doubts as to how closely Hyrcanus in particular is to be associated with this fortress. Even if Hyrcanus contributed to the building work on this fortress, that does not necessarily mean that he was the only Tobiad closely associated with it, especially if, as Ralph Marcus points out in his Loeb translation of Josephus' Antiquities (Harvard and London, 1986), P.117,
"The name Tobiah inscribed on the rock in one of the caves nearby probably refers to an early Tobiah, perhaps to the Tobiah who was a contemporary of Nehemiah."
Marcus is referring here to Momigliano's "I Tobiadi nella preistoria del moto maccabaico", Atti della reale Accademia delle Scienze di Torino (ARAST) 67 (1932), Pp.170 ff. However, Momigliano may be slightly misjudging Josephus here when he claims that author is mistaken in saying (Ant. XII.230) that Hyrcanus 'built' this fortress. Josephus may not be claiming that Hyrcanus began it, but rather that he 'built' it in the sense that the building work he contributed to it was substantial enough to give it what came to be regarded as its final form.


47See Jos., Ant. XII.160-236.
of Qoheleth, and choosing as the anti-heroes of this ideal Joseph and Hyrcanus, close relatives of the High Priest Onias.

Bickerman 48 appears to be right when he says,

"To their biographer, the Tobiads exemplify cleverness",

not unlike the portrayal of a "type" in a Hellenistic comedy. For the vocabulary of this story, as it appears in Josepus' Ant. XII.160 ff., is bristling with intelligence-terminology 49 in its descriptions of its protagonists, first Joseph and then his son Hyrcanus; and the context of these words denoting intelligence is weighted toward

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48 The Jews in the Greek Age, P.231.

49 Of Joseph, see 160, on his "πρόνοια" or "foresight"; 172, his negative assessment of old people's "διάνοια" by comparison with that of young people like the King and himself; 173, praise of his "εὐφροσύνη" or "versatile wit"; 175-9, an anecdote about his cleverness in gaining his tax-farming rights from the King, including 177's reference to the way he comes across with answers as "σφόδρος ἄστειος", "with highly urbane adroitness"; and 180-5, an account of his cleverness in currying the King's favour by killing people in order to get the taxes in for him, and of his further cleverness in winning over the King, Queen and court notables with expensive gifts, a policy he regards in 184 as "φρόνημα" or "sensible" / "wise". He is summed up approvingly in 224 as

"A strong / estimable and lofty man (ὅνηρ ἰσχυρὸς γενόμενος καὶ μεγαλόφρον) who had brought the Jewish people from penury and weakness to brighter opportunities of life in the twenty-two years when he managed the taxes of Syria, Phoenicia and Samaria.".

Of his son Hyrcanus, see 190, on his "σοφία" or "intelligence", which provokes the envy of his brothers; 192-5, an account of his practical sagacity, including the fact that in 193 he "ἐξενόησεν τῷ στρατηγικῶν καὶ τῆς ἡλικίας πρεσβύτερον",

"Thinks up a plan worthy of an older man",

and that in 195 his father is more than pleased with his "φρόνημα", which here probably means "clear-headedness" or "good sense", since it is coupled with his "δέξιης τῆς δικονομας", the "sharpness / shrewdness of his thinking". (Cf., however, the King's admiration for Joseph's "φρόνημα" in 182; there, "φρόνημα" seems to mean "strongmindedness" or "resolution", i.e., in ruthlessly executing his objectives: a related but slightly different meaning of the same word.) See also 214, where Hyrcanus' answer is said to be "σοφὸς", "cunning" or "smart", and the King admires his "εὐφροσύνη" or "versatile wit".

This emphasis on manipulating events by the mind (i.e., by the will and by the intellect) does imply that the story is motivated not just by political, family or any other kind of interest in the characters involved, but rather particularly by interest in the skill of using the mind as an instrument of manipulation. It is probably impossible now to discern how much of this story is fictitious and how much of it is based on fact. However, it is still evident that the story is using recognizable members of the high priestly family as the protagonists in what appears to be a piece of pro-anti-wisdom propaganda. This projects, from the perspective of Biblical piety (including the prophets' hatred of anti-wisdom as anthropocentric and anti-pietist), a very negative, unspiritual picture of the ruling classes, and hence also, by implication, of the official cult which they control.
commendation of the ‘heroes’, despite the unyielding 50 high-handedness of the activities in which they display this ‘wisdom’.

This kind of ‘wisdom’ is wholly incompatible both with the pietist sobriety of Greek wisdom and with the pietist Hebrew identification of wisdom with Torah, 51

50 And hence, - from the point of view of Qoheleth and of traditional pietist wisdom, - unwise.

The commendatory tone of the summary of Joseph’s career in 224 and the writer’s apparent enthusiasm for Hyrcanus’ bold and haughty intelligence are quite surprising (although hard to deny with any plausibility). For the evidence of the actual worthlessness of Joseph’s and Hyrcanus’s celebrated unscrupulous cleverness is there in the story itself, even though its own author appears to ignore the fact. Hyrcanus’ much-lauded “μεγαλοθροσσόνη” or “high-handedness”, which the King admires so much in 207 (the same quality as that ascribed to Joseph in 224 by calling him “μεγαλόθρον”), precipitates the loss of his own father’s favour described in 221, which loses him access to Jerusalem and forces him to withdraw in fear across the Jordan in 222. Hyrcanus refuses to listen to the reasonable objections of the steward Arion in 203-8 with an unyielding arrogance that would do credit to the Creon of Antigone, forcing the steward to hand over against his will a huge sum of his father’s money with which to win the King’s favour away from his father and over to himself instead. Not surprisingly, his father resents this behaviour; yet ironically, it is only the logical conclusion of the qualities which Hyrcanus shares with his father, and which his father has always up to now approved of and encouraged in him. Therefore, one must suppose that his father has chiefly himself to blame, and that the way he has been upstaged by his son is just retribution for the scornful way that he himself in his youth scorned older people for their lack of “ὄνοια” by comparison with young people (XII.172).

All this suggests that both Joseph and Hyrcanus are lacking in good sense, and lacking in the traditional type of wisdom which depends on flexibility, sobriety and recognizing one’s limitations; see above, Chapter 3, especially Sections ii and iii and Chapter 4, Sections i, iii, vi and especially vii. Yet ironically, good sense is the very quality their author insists on attributing to them most, even though Hyrcanus ultimately underlines the fact that he is a loser and not a survivor as emphatically as he possibly could by committing suicide in 236. Like Ajax’s suicide (see above, Chapter 10, Section ii), it shows that Hyrcanus does not grasp the true significance of the pattern of changing “times” (Qoh. 3:1-8) or alternation of circumstances. He has none of the flexibility of traditional wisdom, to enable him to adjust to these changes of circumstance. So, since these changes are intrinsic to the very nature of human existence, and are its most prominent feature, then in not being equipped for these Hyrcanus is not equipped for real life at all, according to the criteria of pietist wisdom. If, then, this story is inviting us to see Joseph and Hyrcanus as ‘wise’, or, to use Bickerman’s terminology, as "exemplifying cleverness", this invitation must be based on anti-wisdom, the self-reliant, antipietist concept of wisdom diametrically opposed to Qoheleth’s viewpoint and to that of the pietist wisdom-tradition altogether.

51 For Qoheleth and Torah, see above, Chapter 9, end of Section i. See also below, Appendix Six, for the significant difference between the way Ben Sira attempts to identify wisdom and Torah and the way Qoheleth approaches at least reconciling if not also identifying them. For the idea of wisdom as a synonym for the Law in general, see, e.g., John Bright, A History of Israel (London, 2nd. ed. 1972), Pp.440-1:

"This identification, which is explicit in the rescript granted to Ezra (Ezra 7:25), is expressed so frequently and so consistently that to document it would be tedious. One finds it in The Psalms (e.g., Ps. 1: 37:30 ff.; 111:10: 112:1; 119:97-104; et passim), in The Proverbs (e.g., Prov. 1:7; 30:2 ff.; etc.), elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Job 28:28; Eccl. 12:13 ff.), and equally in Ben Sira (e.g., Ecclus. 1:14, 18, 20, 26 et passim) and other Jewish writings. Indeed, scribe and wisdom teacher were probably members of the same class; Ben Sira was certainly both (Ecclus. 38:24, 33 ff.; 39:1

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both of which Qoheleth appears to endorse. Anti-wisdom, as Qoheleth would construe it, has therefore gained high-placed followers in the very heart of what should be the pietist camp. If, as seems likely, the era of Joseph the Tobiad is the era of Qoheleth, then here perhaps is Qoheleth’s opposition: the anti-sages within his own priestly ruling class. His book, in that case, is designed to refute the false ‘wisdom’ which Joseph’s circle is probably already seen as embodying before the Tobiad story as Josephus retells it was actually written. Then, at some stage, the original version of this Tobiad story was written to glorify their anti-wisdom amongst their admirers.

Although Bickerman may perhaps be over-confident about the dating of the Tobiad story, his views are nonetheless worth pondering carefully. He believes that Qoheleth and Ben Sira both refer to the same "arrogant aristocracy" which was "swept away by the Maccabean tempest because of its unorthodoxy". His strong convictions about where and when the original version of this story was written would, if correct, have very significant implications for our understanding of Qoheleth. He sees the Tobiad story as "A panegyric, in Greek, of the Tobiads Joseph and his son Hyrcanus, obviously written at the time of Hyrcanus’ grandeur.".

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52 If Bickerman is right about the Tobiad saga being written "at the time of Hyrcanus’ grandeur", this would probably be after Qoheleth was written, depending perhaps at what stage of his "grandeur" is meant (e.g., before or after his control of Transjordan). Bickerman presumably takes it that the original story did not include the account of Hyrcanus’ suicide included in Josephus’ reworking of it!

53 The Jews in the Greek Age, p.231.

54 Ibid., p.231.
Equally confidently, he sees the story as

"Obviously written in Palestine. Readers in Alexandria or Ascalon would hardly have been enthusiastic about a tax-collector who cheated them. But Jerusalem was proud of these native sons who did so well and who, like the other successful businessmen of the Hellenistic age, remembered their hometowns. Joseph, we are told (Ant. XII.224), brought the Jewish people from poverty to a splendid economic situation. The publication of the biography of the Tobiads shows that among the contemporaries of Ben Sira there were many in Jerusalem who not only read Greek but also appreciated a book written to the Greek taste, one in which the only Jewish elements were the proper names of the heroes of the story.".  

As Bickerman also points out, the weakness of the Tobiad-style self-made man is that he is dependent on royal favour.

"Friends of the Ptolemies, Joseph and Hyrcanus were friendless in Seleucid Palestine. Although Antiochus III did not seize their fortune, Antiochus IV finally did put an end to the razzias of Hyrcanus (now in Transjordan) against the neighbouring Arab tribes. Fearing his coming punishment, Hyrcanus committed suicide and his property was confiscated by the King. His Transjordanian seat, still unfinished, was apparently abandoned, for which reason some remains of it have been preserved.".  

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55 Ibid., P.233.

56 Ibid., P.233. Cf. the description, Ibid. P.234, of the other lavish building work also associated with Hyrcanus, "some six hundred metres to the south". After describing its gigantic stonework and quite remarkable embellishments, Bickerman adds, regarding what he believes to be the same site,

"Josephus speaks of artificial landscaping, of terraces and gardens laid out around the central edifice. The conduit of water, consisting of stones in which a thirty-centimetre channel was cut, brought water to the park and to the deep, wide moat around the palace. A fountain with a stone lion for a water-spout has been discovered on the east side of the edifice. This seigneurial residence reminds us of Kohelet, who built houses for himself and made gardens and orchards and pools of waters.".

For Josephus' description, see Ant. XII.230-4, as also referred to below, Chapter 7, Section v. As XII.233 locates this magnificent residence as "not far from Heshbon", it is tempting to wonder if this has any light to shed on Qoheleth's apparent wordplay on the singular and plural forms of the word "heshbon" in 7:27 (יַהֲשַׁבָּה) and 7:29 (יָהֲשַׁבָּה). For his meaning here is in fact rather obscure; and obscurity after the event is the typical ultimate fate of literary conceits which, at the time they were written, were the last word in up-to-date, controversial topical allusion. See above, Chapter 10, Section i, for the fact that the overall drift of 7:27-9 seems to be a criticism of selfish pursuit of one's own individual advantage at the expense of seeking the common good. If this interpretation is correct, a sarcastic allusion to this palace near Heshbon would be very appropriate, since the palace perfectly symbolizes exactly that very same type of individualistic self-aggrandizement.
Dependence on royal favour necessitates in turn dependence on the continuation of the status quo; and this is exactly what Qoheleth, entirely in line with old Solonic wisdom, is careful to point out can not be depended upon. The political status quo did, in fact, suffer precisely that radical change which the policy of Hyrcanus and his kind could not afford. The consequent forced abandonment of Hyrcanus’ magnificent building project is an eloquent symbol of the tendency for narrow-minded goal-seeking, however grandiose the goal, to be brusquely interrupted by unpredictable change so that the goal is never consummated. Furthermore, Hyrcanus’ suicide reflects his extreme over-absorption in his one goal of influence, wealth and grandeur, to the utter exclusion of cultivating the necessary flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

Since these are the very problems with which Qoheleth is most pre-occupied, it would not be surprising if the era of the Tobiad anti-wisdom story coincides with the era of Qoheleth. Qoheleth may have been provoked to write his exposition

The fact that Hyrcanus’ career seems, if we follow Josephus’ dating, to have been later than Qoheleth does not rule out the possibility of the author seeing the Heshbon Palace as a symbol of the values he opposes. If Momigliano is right to claim that Josephus is mistaken in saying that Hyrcanus built this fortress (or at least right in discerning, in effect, that Hyrcanus did not begin the building of it), and if Ralph Marcus also is right to claim that the Tobiads were already associated with that building much earlier than Hyrcanus (see above, Chapter 7, Section v), then perhaps so were their values associated with it much earlier as well, including up to Joseph’s heyday. If so, Hyrcanus may have taken over the fortress from his father (just as Josephus’ story says he took over his father’s political influence and favour with Ptolemy) before doing the extensive new building work there which Josephus mentions in Ant. XII.230. If, then, the Heshbon Palace was already associated with the Tobiads, - and hence with values to which Qoheleth was known by his public to be opposed, - before Hyrcanus took it over, then even if Qoheleth’s book antedates Hyrcanus’ zenith of influence, or at least his suicide, it is still not inconceivable that the author could be making a sarcastic reference to the Palace in 7:27-9.

See above, Chapter 10, Section iii, for Qoheleth’s belief that this kind of blinkered goal-seeking is based on underestimating the random factor in human experience. He aims to make people more aware of this random factor in order to dissuade them from plotting these impracticable and over-ambitious courses.

Especially the career of Joseph, Hyrcanus’ father, which is easier to relate to Qoheleth’s probable date than the career of Hyrcanus is.
of the type of wisdom he believes in by seeing that the anti-wisdom of the Joseph-type was gaining many followers and admirers, and was posing a dangerous threat to the heart of his people’s faith by claiming influential adherents from among the country’s political and religious leaders. While probably seeing the identification of Pietist or ‘real’ wisdom with literal Torah as valid, Qoheleth may be reacting against what he sees as the priestly class’s disastrous theoretical identification of antipietist or ‘false’ wisdom with a pseudo-religious correctness posing as Torah, 59 but not based on genuine and detailed adherence to its theocentric orientation. 60

Even if we are justified, however, in identifying the era of Qoheleth with the era of Tobiad anti-wisdom, 61 that does not decisively settle the question of Qoheleth’s date. For as Schwartz points out, 62 many scholars are inclined to disagree with Josephus for dating the Tobiad story in the early second century, in the days of Ptolemy Epiphanes, preferring instead to date it in the third century; 63 and yet their grounds for this could easily be challenged as inadequate. He then proceeds

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59 Including in relation to the cult, since Torah itself prescribes and regulates the cult.

60 See also below, Appendix Six, Qoheleth and Ben Sira: Theocentric Wisdom Versus Anthropocentric Piety.

61 I.e., the anti-wisdom of the values described in the original story of Joseph and Hyrcanus, which (so Bickerman believes) was later reworked by Josephus.

62 Prof. Daniel R. Schwartz in Josephus’ Tobiads: Back to the Second Century?, a pamphlet based on his lecture of the same name, delivered 24/07/95 at the Annual Conference of the British Association for Jewish Studies.

to challenge them as such, in eight closely argued points 64 which demonstrate at the very least that the matter is well worthy of debate.

Schwartz presents a lively argument in support of Josephus’ dating of the story, 65 yet nevertheless, even if Josephus is right, the early part of the Tobiad story as he dates it 66 still coincides with Barton’s preferred terminus ad quem for Qoheleth, which is 200-195. 67 Furthermore, if, alternatively, Josephus is mistaken after all, and if the popular third century dating for the Tobiad story is right, then it is not inconceivable that even the entire Tobiad story, including Hyrcanus’ suicide, could belong before Barton’s terminus ad quem for Qoheleth. 68 Moreover, Barton’s terminus ad quem may even be over-cautious anyway, leaving a longer time-span between Qoheleth and Ben Sira than is necessary to explain the latter’s dependence on the former.

Although a definite date seems impossible to determine for Qoheleth, and although no definite date has been fixed as yet for the Tobiad story either, the date of the latter should continue to be a matter of interest to those pondering the possible

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65 Josephus begins the story in the reign of Ptolemy V Epiphanes, who reigned from about 203-181, losing Palestine to Antiochus III in 198.

66 Joseph’s dealings with Ptolemy.

67 Barton, op. cit., P.60.

68 If, for example, Stern’s dating (op. cit., Pp. 43-5) of the twenty-two year career of Josephus were correct, i.e., about 240-218 B.C., that would allow plenty of time for even the seven-year career of Hyrcanus, as well as the earlier career of his father Joseph, to fit in before Barton’s terminus ad quem for Qoheleth.
dates for the former. For if Qoheleth really is, like the Tobiads, a member of the priestly ruling class, and if Tobiad-style rapacity is indeed as repugnant to his values as the contents of his book would seem to suggest, then any evidence of correspondence or overlap between the era of Josephus' Tobiad story and the era of Qoheleth demands careful investigation. This kind of data should continue to have much to reveal about the values of Qoheleth's age and milieu, and about the ethical and historical significance of Qoheleth's response to them.
APPENDIX FOUR

ΚΑΙΡΟΣ AND CHARIOT-RACING IN SOPHOCLES’ ELECTRA

The messenger-speech of Electra 680-763 features the report of a pseudo-chariot race in which Orestes is falsely said to have been killed. This speech is the pivotal point of a play with a unique emphasis on the decisive moment for action. It abounds in references to καιρός, both direct (L.22, 39, 75-6, 1259, 1292, 1368) and indirect (see, e.g., closely related expressions like "ἐργον ἀκμή" in L.22 and "ἀπηλλαχθα δ’ἀκμή" in L.1338). The poet regularly returns to the theme of the crisis-point when the right moment for action has come, and challenges us with notions like the undesirability of delay (see, e.g., Ll.320-1, 1326-38, 1367-71, 1394-6, 1485-93, 1501).

The play opens with the aged servant’s assertion (L.1-22), reinforced by Orestes (L.23-76), that the right time for vengeance, the climax of long-cherished hopes, is at last in sight. This opening reaches a rousing climax in Orestes’ tribute to καιρός (L.75-6) as

"the greatest captain of all human endeavour". ¹

Everything about the action which follows serves to maintain and underline this high evaluation of καιρός. The protracted laments of Electra, the agony of waiting for vengeance while (961-2) her

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¹ "καιρός γὰρ, δισερ ἀνδράσιν
μέγιστος ἔργων παντὸς ἤστ’ ἐπιστάτης".
"-youth withers fast, unloved, unwed",
the visible damage to her looks through the long years of waiting (1179-81), and the
constant humiliations, threats and painful clashes with members of her own family that
the waiting entails, all add to the sense of how incomparably significant this long-
awaited moment for action must be.

What makes the messenger's report of Orestes' death in the 'chariot-race' such
a pivotal point, coming as it does about halfway through the play, is that it marks the
point where for the first time the gods, as well as the human instruments of
vengeance, are seen to have reached their καταρχή for action. Orestes and his servant
have already declared that they have reached theirs in the opening lines.
Clytemnestra's outrageous prayer to Apollo, asking him that she may rule on in
security over the realm she seized by murder, is the perfect moment for the god to
launch his deceit to trap her. It is immediately followed by the entry of the messenger
who brings her the false report of Orestes' death. Orestes' death is the hidden desire
of her heart hinted at in her prayer at 657-9. This message, therefore, appears, and
appears by its very timing, to be a direct and immediate answer to her prayer; yet in
reality it is a lying message. It is indeed entirely as perfectly timed as she is bound
to think it is; but ironically it is perfectly timed not to affirm that her prayer is
answered, but on the contrary to lure her to her doom, through that very false
confidence which the apparent answer to her prayer has given her.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{l.634-59. Kitto (Greek Tragedy, P.133) aptly describes this as
"A prayer of unexampled blasphemy".}\]
The audience knows from L.47-9 that Orestes’ death in the chariot-race is a fiction forged to trick Clytemnestra. It also knows that Apollo, the very god whom Clytemnestra has insulted by addressing with a prayer inviting him to connive at injustice, has been Orestes’ chief adviser in his overall strategy (L.35 ff.). Orestes’ καπρὸς and Apollo’s have now converged, since Orestes’ perfect opportunity to avenge his father’s death coincides with Apollo’s ideal moment to avenge the insult of Clytemnestra’s prayer. Here, then, we see the human and the divine planes merging to produce the outcome of Clytemnestra’s overthrow; and the poet’s choice of the perfect moment for action as the focal point at which these two planes are so spectacularly brought together projects forcefully his intense concept of the significance of καπρὸς, which embraces potentially even a mystical dimension.

3 See above, Chapter 9, Section i and below, Appendix Eight for the association between the sun or sun-god and justice.

4 This, however, is not necessarily because Sophocles sees anything specifically divine or mystical about the concept of καπρὸς in itself. It may be simply because of his particular interest in interconnections between the humanly natural or inevitable on the one hand and on the other that which is supernaturally inspired (such as prophecy) or ordained (like the outworking of the "unwritten laws" of Antig. L.454-5). See, e.g., Kitto, Greek Tragedy, P.136 on Electra: "Orestes is an autonomous agent; but the gods are moving on a path parallel to his.

Καπρὸς has sometimes been the object of religious veneration; see, e.g., Detienne and Vernant’s reference (op. cit., Pp.223-4) to epigraphical and other evidence from Elea (Velia) of ‘Καπρὸς the Olympian’ as one of a trio of sea-deities. Nevertheless, this is also true of many other aspects of human experience (notably τῶχη) which are sometimes conceived of literally as deities or supernatural forces, but sometimes viewed in more natural terms. It seems likely that Sophocles is not here presenting Καπρὸς as a divine power in itself, but rather as an aspect of human experience which harmonizes with Apollo’s objectives. However, the fact that Καπρὸς does have mysterious associations makes this harmonization more believable. While not treating Καπρὸς explicitly as a divinity, the poet is still making dramatic use of its divine overtones.

Sophocles’ treatment of Τῶχη in O.T. is similarly challenging. What it brings home is not, as Kitto thinks (Greek Tragedy, P.183), "the sharp opposition between (τῶχη) and prophecy", although he is right to see it as affirming "the close connexion of prophecy and religion". Rather, the poet’s handling of Τῶχη in O.T. refers back to the Solonic view, making use of the supernatural dimension of Τῶχη as the force equalizing everyone before its inscrutability, and hence defying not only the superiority of kings but even human intelligence. In representing himself as the son of τῶχη (L.1080 ff.), Oedipus is not envisaging τῶχη as a threat to him, but rather as the ‘luck’ of the self-made man, who has done well even if his origins are humble. This, not unlike Jocasta’s attitude to τῶχη (L.977-80), is a natural view of it, not a supernatural one. However, the superhuman slant which is then given to his idea by the following Chorus, speculating on which god and nymph must have begotten Oedipus on Cithaeron,
The presentation of this crucial Messenger-speech as an account of a chariot-race serves to highlight the unique importance of the κατρός even more sharply, since the greatest skill in exploiting the κατρός is recognized to be pre-eminently the glory of the charioteer. This is why no other imagery could heighten as effectively as does the chariot-race imagery the certainty that the decisive moment is approaching: and heighten it with such breathless tension of impending outcome.

To underline still further the uniquely organic interconnection between chariot-racing and κατρός, and the clear exploitation of it in this play, the extraordinary Chorus of 472-515 anticipates the chariot-scenario of 680-763 in a highly evocative way at 503-515. Just previously, the Chorus have declared with a new prophetic certainty (472 ff., 500-2) that the longed-for vengeance of Agamemnon is coming both definitely and soon (L.478, "οὐ μοιχρὸν χρόνον"). Then suddenly, at 503, they is not only ironic but also distinctly ominous, precisely because the supernatural associations of Τύχη are ominous. Similarly, Jocasta's concept of Τύχη is inadequate because she sees it in natural terms only, and does not comprehend its supernatural dimension. She may be right to see τύχη as governing all human affairs; but she is wrong to assume that this makes accurate prophecy literally impossible (her superficially pious distinction between "the god" and "his servants" in L.711-2 seems, in the circumstances, forced and merely cosmetic). She is also wrong to think the supremacy of τύχη implies that men should live at random without fear; for τύχη is a highly threatening force, especially to men of power such as kings, who rely on their innate superiority in strength or wisdom.

As a divinity, Τύχη represents that formidable aspect of experience which is not open to human calculation (see Chapter 9, Section iii, fn. 1), and which therefore makes all men equals in helplessness. It is, therefore, the obvious and deadly pietist foil to Oedipus' proud reliance on his own wisdom in preference to the superhuman forces represented by Tiresias' prophecy (L.390-8). Sophocles is here using the fact that people can understand the same term τύχη in a natural or in a supernatural way to introduce a note of ironical menace into Oedipus' concept of himself as the "son of Τύχη", and into Jocasta's view that the supremacy of Τύχη implies we need not fear prophecy. One would expect Τύχη in its divine aspect to constitute the greatest of all possible threats to a man who places such exceptional reliance on his own powers of understanding and calculation; and sure enough, it deals him a more devastating blow than anything he could possibly have imagined, and completely destroys Jocasta. Nothing he thinks he has calculated for his own protection (e.g., his flight from Corinth to prevent him killing his 'father', etc.) has proved correct. Τύχη has proved far too strong an adversary for the wisdom of Oedipus, as it always proves too strong for human powers of calculation.
depart without warning from their prophetic vision for the future and launch into a 
lament over a "woeful chariot-race" ("πολύπονος ἰππεῖον"). The audience must be 
startled, since it does not become clear until L.510 that this incident concerns the 
mythical Myrtilus, rather than the more recent past. So at first, the reference to a sad 
chariot race also seems prophetic. Perhaps they even wonder if the Chorus has 
somehow found out about the coming ruse of Orestes' fake chariot-death. In fact, 
however, they are lamenting the sorrows that came on their royal house from olden 
times through the curse of Myrtilus the charioteer. They turn so abruptly and 
unexpectedly from their prophecy to this theme of the past that the vision of Myrtilus 
hurled by Pelops from his chariot to a watery grave fuses with their picture of the near 
future, ripe for imminent action. Since that action is about to be launched by a lying 
verbal image of Orestes hurled from his chariot to his death, the Chorus here are more 
prophetic than they realize.

Such a dramatic effect is possible only because chariot-racing is recognized as 
the activity most evocative of κοιρὸς in all its mysterious power and with all that it 
entails. The association is deep-rooted and organic. The chariot-race is the prime 
symbol of the approaching critical moment ripe for action and pregnant with potential 
triumph or disaster.
APPENDIX FIVE

QOHELETH 9:11 AND PINDAR'S ISTMIAN ODE IV

The similar combination of mental associations in both Qoh. 9:11 ¹ and Pindar's Isthmian 4 is intriguing. Both refer to racing; ² both do so in connexion with popular wisdom about the weaker overcoming the stronger; and both again give the impression that they are aiming to add to or advance beyond the popular adage rather than simply repeat it.

A particularly arresting point in common is that both emphasize the key rôle of τὸ χηρόν; but both also show interest in the issue of how skill or wisdom does or does not inter-relate with τὸ χηρόν in producing the final outcome. Both Pindar and Qoheleth see as daunting the way that τὸ χηρόν renders the outcome of a contest inscrutable until the very end, and also introduces the possibility of the lesser overcoming the greater. Pindar's reference to chariots is chiefly in the context of games not of war (e.g., L.28-9 / 49-50), and yet both Pindar and Qoheleth convey a sense of parallel between chariot-racing and war. Pindar does this by his description of the achievements of the Cleonymids specifically in both fields. Qoheleth reflects the same parallel more

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¹See above, Chapter 9, esp. Section iv.

²In Pindar's case, the type of racing referred to is chariot-racing; see L.25 'δρομα' and L.29, 'ἄλφαρος'. Although the victory Pindar is immediately celebrating in this Ode is a Pancration victory, not a racing victory, nevertheless the victor, Melissus, is a skilful charioteer as well; his chariot victory at Nemea (see Isth. III) is thought to have been the following year. More important, it is chariot-lore for which his family won their legendary fame and glory (Isth. III, L.15 / 23 ff.; Isth. IV, L.14 / 22 and L.25-30 / 43-50). His success in the games is seen as a welcome renaissance of that glory (Ibid. L.19-25 / 32-43). The emphasis on chariot-racing in this poem is therefore hardly surprising, since the poet is in reality celebrating not only a particular victory but also an entire family strongly associated with chariot-racing and horse-breeding.
directly by choosing racing and battle as the twin subjects of the first two balancing limbs of his proverb at 9:11. Qoheleth’s proverb here reinforces this association by echoing the popular adage invoked by Pindar about the victory of the weaker over the stronger and linking it directly with that of the slower vanquishing the swifter.

The first two elements of Qoh. 9:11, therefore, appear to be a very succinct reference to the entire drift of Isth. IV, Ll.1-35/58. In this passage, the Cleonymid background of war and chariot-lore is built up gradually as the twin setting of the inscrutable work of τόχη in determining outcomes; and the passage culminates in the maxim of the potential victory of the weak over the strong (Ll.34-5 / 57-8). It is clear from Ll.31-5 / 53-8 that this potential victory is attributed to a combination of τόχη and τέχνη. Qoheleth’s conclusion to 9:11,

"For time and chance happens to them all",
indicates agreement with the importance Pindar attaches to the "ἀφωνεῖα τόχας" (L.31 / 52-3).

The intervening elements of 9:11, however,

"Nor does food come to the wise,
Nor wealth to the brilliant,
Nor favour to the learned",
indicate a modification of the rôle Pindar attributes to τέχνη in contributing to the same outcome. Pindar appears to regard the overthrow of the stronger by the weaker as the outcome of chance interacting with skill or wisdom. So does Qoheleth, insofar

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3 Isth. IV, Ll.34-5 / 57-8, which applies to war as much as to athletic contest.
as τέχνη / καπρός represents the τέχνη / τέχνη spectrum. Yet Qoheleth takes the traditionally more pious line of emphasizing the importance of the chance element at the expense of the wisdom element. For while Qoheleth values the particular type of adaptable, receptive wisdom which can recognize and respond appropriately to a given καπρός, this is a skill which is confined to the immediate present; and this is why he values it.

By contrast, he is deeply suspicious of any ‘wisdom’ that claims to offer anything that can be depended upon to last; even a store of food (such as that laid up by the clever ant in Prov. 30:25) can not be guaranteed to the wise; even that could be threatened by an unexpected disaster (9:12). The ant has unusual foresight, and foresight is often equated with wisdom; but there is no foresight which is proof against every possible disaster (9:12). Qoheleth wishes to emphasize here what wisdom will not achieve rather than what it will; it will not achieve anything that can be guaranteed to last. Therefore, the time-chance interaction in Qoh. 9:11 plays a parallel rôle to that of death in 9:10: it reduces all hope of influencing events or having any effect on outcomes to the present alone: now is Man’s moment, and only now.

Although, therefore, both Qoheleth and Pindar allow that outcomes are a product of an interaction of skill and chance, and although both are attempting to put

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4See above, Chapter 9, Section iii.

5Despite the genuine usefulness of foresight as an element within wisdom, see also Chapter 9, Section vii, Pp.2-3 and fn.3, for the special importance of recognizing the limitations of foresight, and the vital ability to discern where prediction is impossible.

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a different slant on the fact from that of the received wisdom, they approach their task with very different aims. Qoheleth’s aim is to advance beyond wisdom-worship by pointing out that wisdom does not guarantee any effect that will necessarily last, and therefore it is not, as is often thought, the key to control over events or people. Its effects, however valuable for a limited period, can be reduced to nothing again very easily (9:13-18). Pindar’s aim, however (although, like Qoheleth, he is overturning the received wisdom), is to point out that cleverness does not have to be the weapon always of the weaker man in overthrowing the stronger; Melissus’ μητές (L.47 / 79) has shown that cleverness can be the weapon of the stronger man as well.

For this reason, Pindar is still preoccupied with what wisdom can achieve and not with what it can not. Even though he is going beyond the usual proverbial alliance of cleverness with natural disadvantage, he is still pondering how wisdom can contribute to the individual attaining his personal goal. Furthermore, he is not pretentious about the type of goal he is considering. He knows that victories in athletic contests are fleeting, however sweet the moment of victory may be at the time (Isth. III, L.19-20 / 29-30 and Pythian VIII L.88-97 / 127-139). This is exactly the sort of temporally limited achievement to which wisdom or skill can contribute. Qoheleth himself would also admit this (9:13-15a), even though he is at pains to point out that it can not guarantee anything lasting (9:15b-18), whether provision, prosperity, respect, influence, or beneficial effect (9:11-18). It is not surprising, therefore, that the balance between τὸ χρη and τεχνη in Isth. IV is fairly even, whereas in Qoh. 9:11 ff., the threat presented by chance seems to be emphasized more and wisdom or skill correspondingly less.
A quite different view of Isthmian IV’s perspective on τὸ χνη and τέχνη is offered by Lowell Edmunds in Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides, P.104. Edmunds argues that Pindar’s special sympathy for natural advantage over skill / cunning leads him to see Melissus’ victory as a triumph of strength or natural advantage over skill, which had unfairly masked the natural greatness of the Cleonymids until Melissus’s victory brought it to light once again. Since the wisdom of this Ode seems to provide some useful clues for interpreting that of Qoheleth, it is worth examining the poem in more detail, and with the poem, Edmunds’ views about its meaning. For if Edmunds is right, Pindar is also (like Qoheleth) trying to dethrone wisdom / skill from its reputation as the key to success, and this would mean that Qoheleth’s triple-diminution of wisdom at 9:11,

"Nor does food come to the wise,
Nor wealth to the brilliant,
Nor favour to the learned,
For time and chance happen to them all",

is very akin to Pindar’s point indeed. Both would then be emphasizing the time-chance interaction specifically at wisdom’s expense, in the sense that they would both be arguing against the over-rating of wisdom by pointing to the strict limits imposed on wisdom by the time-chance interaction.

However, although Qoheleth is doing this (in the limited sense that he is showing how the effects of wisdom do not necessarily last), it seems likely, contrary to Edmunds’ view, that Pindar is not. For Pindar is not here discussing whether the effect of certain outcomes is lasting or not; therefore, he does not have to address himself to the limitations of wisdom / skill in order to be realistic, except insofar as factors other than skill must not be under-rated relative to it. Furthermore, to deny
the fact that wisdom / skill is an important factor in determining outcomes (irrespective of whether or not those outcomes yield any lasting benefit) would be entirely unrealistic; and Pindar is simply too knowledgeable about the details of actual contest to make such a mistake, even for the sake of a prejudice in favour of natural advantage over ‘cunning’.

Where the anti-mashal of Qoh. 9:11 and Isth. IV do seem alike is in the view each reflects of the traditional τοχη / τεχνη interaction. For although Edmunds believes that Pindar is here departing from the traditional τοχη / τεχνη antithesis, this is unlikely to be the case. The train of thought in Isth. IV moves from victory in chariot-racing (Ll.25-30 / 43-50) to the uncertainty of outcome that characterizes all contests, the source of this uncertainty being clearly identified as τοχη (Ll.31-3):

"ἔστιν δ’ ἄφανεια τοχας καὶ μαρνομένων,
πρὶν τέλος δικρόν ἰκέσθαι.
τῶν τε γὰρ καὶ τῶν διδοῖ.".

"And even for those who do contend, chance keeps the outcome uncertain right up until they reach the final result. For chance can go either way."

Next comes the γνώμη of the weaker man overcoming the stronger, skilfully phrased so that the reference to ‘tripping’ evokes Melissus’ wrestling victory, yet at the same time generalized so as to be applicable to any form of conflict, even actual war (Ll.34-5):

"καὶ κρέσσον’ ἀνδρῶν χειρόνων
ἐσφόλε τέχνα καταμάρψαισ’.".

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6 The contrast is with those who, by implication, are not contending, so their potential for competition or combat has never been put to the test. These are the ‘untried’ of Ll. 30 / 51, above.

7 Literally:
"There is uncertainty of chance (i.e., of outcome)."
If we follow Bury and others in reading (as here) MS B’s τέχνη (dative) instead of D’s τέχνη (nominative), then the subject of L1.34-5 is, as Edmunds believes, an implied τόχη:

"And chance seizes and throws the stronger through the skill of weaker men."

Despite Pindar’s implied sympathy for the stronger, Edmunds appears to be misunderstanding its application here. The poet seems to be saying that the battle (or wrestling match) is not always to the strong, because natural advantage alone is not enough, since both τόχη and τέχνη have to be taken into account as well as natural advantage. This is indeed similar to Qoheleth’s line of thought, which is that the battle is not always to the strong because πυ and ύλ (καπρός and τόχη) have to be taken into account. For since καπρός is that aspect of experience which particularly provides opportunity for τέχνη (as opposed to τόχη, which, simply in itself, does not), there is, in practical terms, a parallel between Qoheleth’s πυ / καπρός and Pindar’s τέχνη. Both writers are referring here to the traditional τέχνη - τόχη

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8 See Edmunds, op. cit., P.104, for B’s greater popularity with editors on the principle of lectio difficilior.

9 ‘Throws’ in the context of Melissus’ wrestling; but ‘destroys’ / ‘defeats’ in the broader context of war. Overtones of war, and the parallel between athletic contest and war, are never far from mind in this poem. This is because of the misfortunes in war of the Cleonymids (16-17b / 25-27), whose glory Melissus’ success has revived (L1.18-25 / 29-43). Note how Pindar associates this family equally with war (L1.9-17b / 15-27) and with chariot-racing in the games (L1.25-30 43-50). This may well shed light on the closeness of the association between racing and war reflected in the first two elements of Qoheleth’s fivefold mashal at 9:11,

"The race is not always to the swift"

and

"Nor the battle to the strong."

For however obvious the connexion between racing and war might be to warrior-horsebreeders like the Cleonymids, who find it naturally cost-effective to use chariots both for war and for games, it would not necessarily be equally obvious to a Hebrew wisdom-writer of a totally different era living in a city with no hippodrome. The source of the association for Qoheleth is likelier to be wisdom literature rather than actual experience of racing and war as interconnected; and Pindar himself is not deficient in wisdom-content.

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antithesis between that which is susceptible to human manipulation by wisdom, and that which is not.

If Edmunds were correct in claiming \(^\text{10}\) that Pindar is here departing from this traditional antithesis, then the above parallel between Qoheleth and Pindar would not be valid. However, Edmunds’ interpretation, although appealing in view of Pindar’s sympathy for the Cleonymids and what they seem to represent, does not suit the way he chooses to represent Melissus’ achievement in particular. To make Melissus’ victory the triumph of natural advantage over cunning, as Edmunds wishes to do, would make nonsense of Pindar’s point (Ll. 48 / 81) that in a competitive situation one must take *everything* into account. For by "everything" he means *all* the interactive factors that could possibly contribute to the outcome, which would inevitably *include* cunning, not exclude it. Moreover, if Pindar were really identifying Melissus’ success with the superiority of natural advantage over cunning, this would also render inexplicable why Pindar chooses to emphasize that Melissus was a mixture of natural advantage (his strength, L.51 / 86) and natural disadvantage (his small stature, L1.49-50 / 83-5). His attitude of mind is also described in terms of contrast, since it combines the qualities of two very dissimilar creatures, the boldness of the lion (L1.45-7 / 77-9) and the "μῆτις" (i.e., "cunning") of the fox (L1.47 / 79).

Melissus’ versatility and flexibility, then, are clearly recognized as key factors in his success. They are bound to be when athletic outcomes depend so heavily on the constant inter-fluctuation of factors susceptible to human control with other factors.

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\(^{10}\) Op. cit., P.104.
not susceptible to it; and it is this inter-fluctuation that Pindar is really referring to (LL.31-5 / 52-9) in placing the triumph of the weaker over the stronger in the context of the τέχνη - τύχη interaction.

In reading into this reference a prejudice against τέχνη or wisdom and in favour of strength or natural advantage, then, 11 Edmunds is under-rating the extent to which this would undermine the value of Melissus' victory, and hence take away from Pindar's main point, which is to celebrate that victory. The overall balance of the poem would suggest that the part played in Melissus' triumph by his μητέρις is just as important as the part played by his strength. The latter Edmunds rightly sees as reminiscent of the natural ὀρετή of the Cleonymids. Yet to imply with Edmunds that the sole merit of Melissus' success lies in bringing that ὀρετή to light again

" -after chance and the guile of inferior men - had kept it in darkness for so long"

is to underrate that success in its own right. It is also to underrate the way this victory in particular illustrates Pindar's point about taking every factor into account, to a degree that the previous achievements of the Cleonymids may not necessarily illustrate it.

However much Pindar may regret that the stronger may be brought down by

11 It is also important to bear in mind that the ideal of wisdom and strength as naturally combined in the same hero may well have greater antiquity than the idea of wisdom and strength as almost by definition pitted against each other. See Caquot, André, "Israelite Perceptions of Wisdom and Strength in the Light of the Ras Shamra Texts", Ap. Gammie, op. cit., Pp.25-33. There is no reason why Pindar should not prefer and even enlarge upon the perhaps more traditional view that the two qualities of strength and wisdom go naturally together, rather than confining himself to what could become a rather narrow and oversophisticated notion that they are inevitably in opposition to each other. We can not, therefore, assume that Pindar feels obliged to choose between favouring a strong contestant or favouring a cunning one, nor that his positive evaluation of natural ὀρετή implies a correspondingly negative view of τέχνη.
the guile\textsuperscript{12} of the weaker, it is a fact of life that it may. This fact may well have
played a part in the regrettable eclipse of the Cleonymids, in which their \( \alpha \rho \varepsilon \tau \eta \) was
temporarily eclipsed with them. If so, then Pindar finds especial satisfaction in the
victory of Melissus because his versatility has ensured that his \( \alpha \rho \varepsilon \tau \eta \) was not wasted.
Melissus’ strength has not perished, but prevailed; and it has to be understood that his
\( \mu \eta \tau \zeta \) has had its part to play in making this possible.

This is the real point of L.48 / 81’s
"\( \chi \rho \eta \ \delta \varepsilon \ p\alpha \nu \ \varepsilon \rho \delta \oeta \tau ' \alpha \mu \alpha \omega \upsilon \nu \rho \sigma \alpha \ \tau \delta \nu \ \varepsilon \chi \theta \rho \on \)"

"One has to employ every tactic to eclipse one’s adversary."

If, as Edmunds claims,\textsuperscript{13} this were simply an ‘excuse’ for Melissus’ \( \mu \eta \tau \zeta \), and if
Melissus’ ‘guile’ were of a type which Pindar does not favour, then neither the \( \mu \eta \tau \zeta \)
itself nor the excuse for it would be so climactically placed in an ode celebrating
Melissus’ victory: and furthermore, celebrating it in a way which carefully gives due
and equal weight both to what the victor has in terms of natural advantage and to
what he has not. This time, the strength of the Cleonymids has prevailed, because this
time it is combined with \( \mu \eta \tau \zeta \). Perhaps the \( \tau \chi \nu \eta \) of its opponents worked for its
downfall in the past; but this time, its own \( \tau \chi \nu \eta \) has worked for its glory.

This interpretation of Pindar’s poem makes sense of the areas he chooses to

\textsuperscript{12}One could equally well say ‘by the skill of the weaker’ or ‘by the wisdom of the weaker’. Whether
the word \( \tau \chi \nu \eta \) is interpreted positively or negatively makes no difference to the real point, which is that
\( \tau \chi \nu \eta \) regularly plays an important part in determining outcomes.

\textsuperscript{13}Op. cit., P.105.
highlight; whereas Edmunds’ view leaves one baffled as to why he makes so much of the victor’s μῆτας, not only in itself but also in pointedly juxtaposing it with lionlike qualities. He is emphasizing that the athlete needs to have the contrasting virtues of fox and lion, however strange this new and arresting combination may seem, if he is to be truly competitive. Edmunds’ understanding of the poem also leaves us wondering why Pindar draws so much attention to Melissus’ natural disadvantages as well, rather than simply to his advantages alone. His lack of stature (L1.49 ff. / 83 ff.) provokes the poet to a lengthy description of Heracles and all the honours he still enjoys (L1.52-68 / 86-113), on the grounds that Heracles was short too (L1.53 / 89). Surely Pindar is thereby dissuading us from jumping to conclusions about where natural disadvantage ends and natural advantage begins, rather than adopting a simplistic standpoint of preference for the latter over the skill which can bring victory to the former. A poet as well-acquainted as Pindar with the bewildering details and unexpected twist and turns of real-life contest would not make the mistake of over-simplifying the exact dividing line between strength and weakness, advantage and disadvantage.

Even if Pindar’s personal preference is for natural ἀρετή, and he does not wish to champion τέχνη like Od. VIII L1.329-332 and earlier Wisdom, this does not mean that he is pretending ignorance of earlier Wisdom. He could hardly retain his credibility if he chose to ignore it. His desire is to add to it and advance beyond it, not ignore it. Whatever Pindar’s enthusiasm for natural advantage, he knows that various factors other than natural advantage play a part in victory, and that these various factors are very fluid in their permutations and combinations. τέχνη can be
the trump-card of the weak; but equally it can be the trump-card of whoever is willing
to use it, weak or strong. There is no reason why the strength of the lion should not
avail itself of the fox’s cunning; to suppose that there is any such reason would be to
stultify Wisdom, freezing it into rigid stereotypes and thus denying it precisely that
subtlety of permutation and combination without which it can not accurately match
up to the subtleties of the real-life experience it seeks to reflect and direct.

The fluidity of inter-relationship between the various factors which determine
success or failure also relates to another aspect of Edmunds’ reading of Isthmian IV
which seems unconvincing. Although he is probably right in preferring MS B’s
"τέχνα" (dative) in L.35, and hence an implied τοχη as the subject of the verb, he
then appears to misread what this implies about the way τέχνη and τοχη are here
interacting:

"Τέχνη then becomes the agent of τοχη, which might be surprising considering
that these concepts are sharply antithetical elsewhere (especially in
the Hippocratic De Arte)."  14

He then attributes to Pindar the same preference for innate ὁπέτη that he attributes
to Thucydides’ Spartans to explain this surprising factor. There is nothing wrong with
the idea of Pindar having such a preference; but it is not necessary to invoke this in
order to explain this poem’s supposed departure from the traditional τέχνη / τοχη
antithesis. In reality, it does not depart from the usual conceptual polarity between
τέχνη and τοχη anyway. For to say that τέχνη here becomes the agent of τοχη in
any generalized sense is vastly overstating the case.

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This is because Pindar is not using the terms τέχνη and τόχη with the same abstract absoluteness as Edmunds is using them. Edmunds' interest is in the exact significance of these terms as terms; whereas Pindar's interest is in the way the forces these terms represent actually manifest themselves in the abruptly and unpredictably oscillating conditions of a contest. However antithetical the terms may be when viewed specifically from their conceptual dividing line, nevertheless when viewed in action in the thrills and spills of athletic contest, they swap roles with bewildering rapidity; and this interchangeability is not a contradiction of their antithetical relationship as absolutes. The fact that Contestant A's τέχνη may well be, in effect, Contestant B's τόχη is simply the natural outcome of the fact that A and B are competing against each other. For B may be presented with a circumstance not amenable to his manipulation (i.e., a mere τόχη, over which he has no opportunity for exercising influence and control); but to A, this same circumstance may be above all a propitious κοινός, a notable opportunity for exercising τέχνη.

This does not in any way undermine the the antithetical relationship of τέχνη and τόχη as such. To suggest it does would be to undermine the peculiar poignancy of contest. In a contest, that which (to B) is τόχη may overcome him through that which (on A's part) is τέχνη. In this sense, because B's τόχη overcomes him through A's τέχνη, one could argue that A's τέχνη is, in a limited way, the 'agent'

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15 They may be viewed in this absolute way, not only by a modern scholar such as Edmunds but even, to some extent by a historian like Thucydides, who depicts Pericles as aiming to encroach on the territory of τόχη by pushing forward the frontiers of γνώμη / τέχνη at the expense of τόχη. This absolute use of the terms τέχνη and τόχη would not, however, be appropriate to Pindar's purpose (even though awareness of the basic antithesis between them would). For confining his view of the two terms' inter-relationship of meaning only to the conceptual dividing line between them would not adequately cover their full range of potential inter-related meaning in the shifting subtleties of a specifically competitive situation.
of B’s τύχη; and there is a delicate implication of that idea in Isth. IV Li.31-5 / 52-8.

But even this idea should not be overly laboured; and it does not in any way mean, as Edmunds suggests, that Pindar is here representing τέχνη in general an agent of τύχη in general. This claim overlooks completely a crucial factor of athletic contest, namely that the τέχνη of one contestant is pitted against the τέχνη of the other. This means that the respective τέχναι of each are not in practical terms the same force at all, but are two opposite forces striving toward exactly opposite outcomes. This makes it unlikely that B’s τέχνη could be an ‘agent’ of the same τύχη as that of which A’s τέχνη could be an agent. Such a concept would not have any real meaning in the context of Pindar’s subject-matter.

Since Edmunds is mistaken to claim that τέχνη as such becomes here the agent of τύχη as such, his inference from that claim, that Pindar is here overturning the traditional antithesis between τέχνη and τύχη, can hardly be upheld. Pindar is only stretching the normal τέχνη / τύχη antithesis to its limits (i.e., to the point of thought-provoking paradox, but not of contradiction) to underline how incomparably startling the twists and turns of fortune really are in a specifically contest / conflict situation. The fact that one man’s τέχνη can operate through his opponent’s τύχη highlights effectively the uniqueness of contest, and the exactness of the opposition between one man’s τέχνη and his opponent’s τέχνη.

Far from departing, therefore, from the traditional τέχνη / τύχη antithesis, Pindar is here using the tradition to good effect. For in terms of that tradition (not in contradiction of it), there is a piquant paradox in presenting τέχνη as operating
'through' τόχη, in the strictly limited sense outlined above. The paradox underlines aptly the startling quality of competition, with its disturbing tendency to overturn expectations and preconceptions. Like the verse of Qoheleth apparently inspired by it, Isthmian IV is perhaps, in a sense, a type of extended anti-mashal, since its outcome overthrows our expectations. Yet it does so not by departing radically from the normal τεχνη / τόχη antithesis, nor by under-rating μητις / τεχνη relative to τόχη, but rather by showing that τεχνη is not an exclusive monopoly of the weak; it is not simply the compensatory tool of the weak against the strong (which the received wisdom has already told us it can be), but never anything else. It can also be the crowning glory of the strong. 16

Qoheleth may well be following Pindar in devising an anti-mashal incorporating several aspects of Isthmian IV's train of thought. Qoheleth's anti-mashal, however, is that not only does natural advantage not guarantee success (which we already know), but also (more surprisingly) nor does wisdom. Moreover, even when success is attained by wisdom, its effects may not last. This is a different emphasis from Pindar's. Pindar dissuades us from limiting, by conventional expectations, the permutations and combinations of factors that produce success; but his focus of interest is still on which combinations of factors do produce success. The fact that success is fleeting does not distract him from this focus of interest, because Man himself is fleeting, and yet his success can still make him happy despite this (Pythian

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16 This is probably a return to an ideal even older than the "Slow catches the swift" type of proverb (see beginning of Chapter 9, Section vi). The character of Odysseus, with his combination of strength and cunning represents a longstanding ideal. For ideals of wisdom combined with strength, see Caquot, op. cit., Passim. Nevertheless, the aphoristic popularity of the theme of the disadvantaged overcoming the advantaged by cunning must have presented no small challenge to this ideal; and it is not surprising, therefore, if Pindar sees a need to re-state this older ideal in fresh terms.
On this point, Qoheleth and Pindar differ all the more noticeably because of their quite significant similarities. For although Qoheleth also recognizes the necessity to enjoy life’s pleasures strictly in accordance with its fleeting nature, his particular interest in judgment makes this the climax of his thinking ultimately. This is so even in 11:7-9, where his motifs seem similar to those of *Pythian VIII* L.88-97. Both associate pleasure not only with youth (which is a commonplace) but also with light, and the fact that Man is fleeting and his happiness does not last long. Yet this emphasis in both passages is more telling than the other points in common, which are far from unusual. For although light is generally associated with pleasure, Pindar’s manner of describing it is very individual and arresting, and would lodge in the memory far more readily than a relatively colourless platitude on the same theme. Pindar paints a moving contrast between the brilliance of light which makes life pleasant and Man’s “dream of a shadow” nature, indicating that Man does not live long (Qoh. 6:12 also compares Man to a shadow). Qoheleth makes essentially the same contrast, though from a slightly different angle (11:7-8): Light is pleasant — but the days of darkness will be many.

It might be argued that a nearer parallel (perhaps the nearest) to the actual wording of Qoh. 11:7a is Eur. *I.A.* L.1219 (mentioned by Crenshaw, op. cit., P.183). However, there is no other striking connexion in sentiment between the two passages, apart from the reference to the light being sweet and the sight of the sun welcome, which simply in itself is a common notion. There may, admittedly, be more chance of a significant connexion between Qoheleth and the praise of life and light in another work by the same playwright, *Alec.* L.691-3 & 722; see APPENDIX EIGHT. Yet despite certain associations common to both *Alec* and *Qoheleth*, this does not undermine the possibility of Qoheleth being influenced by Pindar, since either Euripides or Qoheleth could be influenced by Pindar independently, irrespective of whether or not Euripides also directly influenced Qoheleth. Crenshaw (ibid.) suggests that despite the similar wording to *I.A.* L.1219 and other comparable parallels, the train of thought in *Qoheleth* 11:7 ff. is closer to that of *Isaiah* 22:13,

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die". Probably, however, Qoh. 11:7 ff. is closer to *Pyth. VIII* L.88-97 in sentiment than to any of these other passages, including those which are closer in the wording of the proverb about the pleasantness of light. As Crenshaw recognizes, there is no special importance in this proverb being similarly worded to its equivalent in *Qoheleth* (unless there are other striking connexions with *Qoheleth* in a passage which contains such verbal parallels), because it is so familiar a saying. Nevertheless, Qoh. 11:7, far from being closer to the worldly exhortation of *Isaiah* 22:13 than to its Greek verbal parallels as Crenshaw thinks, is on the contrary more alien to the sentiments of *Isaiah* 22:13’s revellers than to any of the Greek parallels mentioned above, even *I.A.* L.1219.

This is because "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" is an exhortation with which Isaiah *disagrees*. It is not in any way the writer’s personal advice to his reader; whereas Qoh. 11:7 ff. is. The author here emphasizes (11:8-10) that the rightness of enjoyment, in its proper time, is no justification for forgetting the inevitability of judgment; for judgment too has its "proper time",

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Pindar’s real climax is the happiness of those youthful moments of success and radiance, however fleeting they may be, whereas Qoheleth is looking beyond them toward the fact that the judgment of God is a reality despite its apparent remoteness (11:9). Not only is Qoheleth looking beyond success to the negative further horizon, i.e., the factors that can undo even genuine human success and reduce its effects to zero again (9:13-18); he is looking even beyond this, to the further horizon of ultimate judgment.

Qoheleth and Pindar differ significantly in their perspective on success. For the
prime function of the Odes is to celebrate athletic victories, so that Pindar has to *focus* on success. Qoheleth, however, is concerned with the certainty of Divine Judgment. Hence he is also concerned with the danger of mindless goal-seeking diverting Man into quests for ‘success’ that are irrelevant to the criteria of the Judgment. Like Simon the Just, Qoheleth regards "Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Hasadim" as life’s main priorities, and does not favour lesser objectives usurping their place. Nevertheless, *Isthmian IV* and *Qoh. 9:11* are alike in that both point to the importance of the traditional τέχνη-τύχη or καρδία-τύχη interaction in determining outcomes. Neither natural advantage nor skill-wisdom nor even τύχη simply in themselves are sufficient to determine outcomes. Interestingly, however, it is Qoheleth (rather than Pindar, as Edmunds argues) who is using the formidable importance of the καρδία-τύχη interaction at the expense of wisdom’s reputation. For in 9:11 he is emphasizing its power to over-rule wisdom. This is to dissuade his disciples from regarding wisdom as an invincible and infallible tool for attaining their personal goals.

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18. See *Aboth* 1.2; see also below, Chapter 10, Section i.

19. Which in this type of context are in effect the same antithesis.

20. See above, Chapter 7, Section v for the fact that reducing wisdom to the level of a tool for personal success would be to degrade it anyway.
APPENDIX SIX

QOHELETH AND BEN SIRA: THEOCENTRIC WISDOM VERSUS ANTHROPOCENTRIC PIETY

Qoheleth is exceptional in digging such a deep foundation for a pietist wisdom-theory. This is not to say that he is alone among wisdom-teachers in realizing that wisdom has fallen to the antipietists by default, and that it needs to be redeemed for the pietists. Ben Sira apparently also recognizes this need. In seeking to reconcile wisdom with Torah ¹ (and hence, in effect, with piety), the latter author seems to be taking issue with the popular assumption that they are incompatible spheres. So, like Qoheleth, he sees the need to clear the path to a pietist Wisdom-theory and mount a challenge to the antipietists' assumed right to a monopoly of wisdom. However, his challenge does not hit the target and demolish the monopolistic standpoint of the antipietists convincingly; for he does not directly confront the spectre of cynical wisdom.

This is perhaps because he lacks Qoheleth's clear perception of Antiwisdom: of its exact opposition to pietist Wisdom, and of its consequent futility. Ben Sira fails to identify humanist Antiwisdom as the enemy; hence in his work the distinction between humanist Antiwisdom and pietist Wisdom is dangerously blurred. The raw

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¹For Ben Sira's identification of the two, see Ecclus. 6:37; 15:1; 19:20; 21:11; 39:1-11. See also above, Appendix Three, fn. 51, for the issue of identifying Torah with wisdom in general, including Bright's comment on Ben Sira that, "No-one identifies wisdom with law more consistently than he." (op. cit., P.441, fn.26).
spirituality of Qoheleth, and his dissatisfaction with society, are both missing in Ben Sira’s work. Ben Sira’s objective is more to justify his own privileged position and his own political affiliation. Although he favours piety, he is first and foremost a cultured literary man who finds having to choose between piety and wisdom unpalatable. So his work of identifying wisdom with Torah is designed for the purpose of freeing himself from the obligation of choosing between them. However, he fails to identify them convincingly. He does not demonstrate the oneness of the two; he merely asserts their oneness, by presenting them as one in a literary statement.

This approach sidesteps the whole problem of the Man-centred ‘wisdom’ based on the ‘many words’ of human self-assertion, as opposed to that reverent silence in the presence of God which Qoheleth sees as essential for true understanding and discovery. It is no accident that the Antiwisdom of Job’s friends was couched in utterly pious language. Although their wisdom is represented as unmistakably antipietist in the author’s terms, since it is said to make God angry (Job 42:7), the friends themselves misrepresent it as pietist. Ben Sira does not reflect urgent awareness of a Man-centred wisdom directly opposed to true, pietist Wisdom; whereas Qoheleth (5:1 ff.), like the author of Job, recognizes not only the existence of antipietist wisdom, but even the fact that it masquerades as piety.

Nothing could be more natural than the desire of a God-fearing wisdom-enthusiast to establish a pietist Wisdom. Nevertheless, it is all-important morally to address the dangers of Antiwisdom before any attempt to assert the compatibility of wisdom and piety. For the humanistic type of false wisdom (i.e., from the pietist
perspective, Antiwisdom) is most emphatically not compatible with piety. Without firstly distinguishing the God-centred, receptive Wisdom from the Man-centred, assertive Antiwisdom, and then secondly eliminating every element of Antiwisdom from one’s definition of Wisdom, one simply can not safely identify wisdom with Torah or with piety. For to do so is to risk undermining the very foundations of piety from within. Any attempt to reconcile a hybrid wisdom with piety would open the door not to a theocentric wisdom, but to an anthropocentric ‘piety’. This is the "sacrifice of fools", the ‘piety’ of those who do not

"Guard (their) steps when (they) go to the House of God". ²

Attempts to posit a pietist Wisdom can, then, be dangerously superficial, posing an insidious internal threat to the very foundations of piety itself; and Ben Sira’s mechanical verbal identification of wisdom with Torah may be a case in point. Either Ben Sira ignores the dangers of over-hastily identifying piety with an ill-defined ‘wisdom’, or he is completely dependent on Qoheleth, presenting his identification in the knowledge that it would not be morally acceptable except against the backdrop of Qoheleth having addressed itself to those dangers before him. Qoheleth’s work, however, is a pioneering advance in wisdom-theory. It builds creatively on the insights of Job to challenge the frigid amoralism and internal inconsistency of anthropocentric Antiwisdom by appealing to nothing less than the very nature of reality itself, with its inbuilt principle of God-ordained uncertainty.

²5:1 ff.
APPENDIX SEVEN

SUN OR WIND? THE QUESTION OF QOHELETH 1:6 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR QOHELETH'S SYMBOLIC IMAGERY OF THE SUN.

The persistence and antiquity of the tradition attributing not only Qoh. 1:5 but also 1:6 to the sun, instead of regarding 1:6 as referring to the wind, is discussed in Sara Japhet’s aericle, "Goes to the South and Turns to the North (Ecclesiastes 1:6): The Sources and History of the Exegetical Traditions", Jewish Studies Quarterly I, 4 (1993-4), Pp.289-322.

If, as the present writer suspects, Qoheleth means us to remember in 1:5 the popular image of the sun as a charioteer driving the successive laps of his race, then it would be very appropriate if 1:6 refers to the sun and not to the wind. For 1:6 would then be a strong reinforcement of 1:5’s picture of the sun ever returning on his repetitive course. This would vividly emphasize the implication of a race with its repetitive, lapped structure, since it is the sun which is directly associated with chariot-imagery. There is no need to place an equal emphasis on the wind ever returning on a repetitive course, since there is no popular image of the wind as a charioteer, only of the sun. Moreover, the wind does not repeat over and over again broadly the same circuit, in the way that (from the earth) the sun appears to do. As Qoheleth well

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1See above, Chapter 9, Section i, Qoheleth and the Race of the Sun.
knows, ² the path of the wind, far from being predictably repetitive, is notoriously *unpredictable*.

Furthermore, if 1:6 does refer to the sun rather than to the wind, it would mean that the sea (1:7) follows on immediately after the sun: a juxtaposition of opposites (concrete embodiments of the qualities wet and dry) which would be very natural in Qoheleth, with his keen interest in reciprocal opposites, in ethics as in nature. ³ A correct perception of the interplay of opposites is crucial to Qoheleth, not only because in his view reciprocity plays a vital part in maintaining universal stability, with each activity or quality giving way to its opposite at the appropriate time, but also because he sees the pattern of this reciprocity as essentially unpredictable, and is unique in the emphasis he places on this unpredictability. Such a juxtaposition of sun with sea, then, would suit very well Qoheleth’s map of external reality and of ethical priorities.

Even his use of race-imagery, while important in the view of the present writer, is not more important than his interest in the reciprocity of opposites. Although, therefore, the sea (unlike the sun) is no more traditionally associated with racing or chariot imagery than the wind is, it would not need to be for Qoheleth to prefer following a comment on the sun with a comment on the sea rather than with one about the wind. The sea’s ‘oppositeness’ to the sun alone would be enough to make representing it in terms parallel with the sun artistically justifiable. Nevertheless, there

²See Qoh. 11:5; cf. John 3:8.

³See, e.g., 3:1-8; also the challenging interplay of righteous and wicked, wisdom and foolishness in 7:15-18. See also below, Chapter 10, Sections ii and iii.
is also a readily comparable cyclic or ‘lapped’ activity associated with the sea as well as with the sun, which adds to this artistic justification. For 1:7’s reference to the sea being "never full" evokes Aristotle’s reference to the same phenomenon in his account of the water-cycle; ⁴ and the water-cycle, which is clearly included in 1:7 by the reference to the streams returning to their source, is indeed a reasonable parallel to the cycle of the sun. It is, up to a point, similarly repetitive and predictable, ⁵ whereas the movements of the wind are not. Therefore, a reference to the wind in 1:6 might well be an unwelcome intrusion, spoiling the smooth balance of juxtaposing the cycle of the sun in 1:5 with the water-cycle in 1:7.

However, although the idea of 1:6 referring to the sun is not unattractive, some aspects of Prof. Japhet’s argument in the above-mentioned article are not very appealing. As she rightly says, LXX uses two different Greek words to translate the Hebrew "πνεῦμα", i.e., "πνεῦμα" here in 1:6 (as in 1:14, 1:17, 11:5, etc.), but "δύναμις" in, e.g., 11:4. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to read anything ‘spiritual’ into the passages opting for "πνεῦμα" in preference to "δύναμις", as she suggests in the concluding words of her article (P.322), and also earlier on P.302:

"Even within the narrow framework of the translation of Ecclesiastes, without reference to the usage of these terms ("πνεῦμα" and "δύναμις") throughout the Septuagint as a whole, a clear differentiation is made between "πνεῦμα" in the physical-natural sense ("wind") and "δύναμις" in the internal-spiritual sense "spirit"). The former is translated as "δύναμις" (Eccl. 5:15; 11:4) and the latter as "πνεῦμα". By including the term in verse 6 within the latter semantic field, the translator showed that he viewed "πνεῦμα", not as the wind, the breeze, one of the powers of nature, but as spirit, the soul of all living beings, the life-

⁴See Arist., Met. II.2, 355b, L.21-5; see also below, Chapter 10, Section ii.

⁵Working by influx and evaporation, etc. (Ibid. L.21-33).
Such a rigid distinction, however, between the implications of "πνεῦμα" and those of "ὔνεμος" is not necessary, since "πνεῦμα" also can be a type of "breath" and hence "wind". This is why LXX does not seriously undermine the deliberate wordplay on the two senses of "Πνεῦμα" in 11:4-5 by translating it as "ὔνεμος" in 11:4 and "πνεῦμα" in 11:5. This point does not in itself argue against the idea that 1:6 may refer to the sun (like 1:5) and not to the wind; this is perfectly possible. Yet it is also possible that 1:6 may refer to the wind instead of the sun; and it is even conceivable that it may refer to both. For it may originally have meant the sun primarily, but also the "winds" or "exhalations" closely associated by some philosophers with the sun.

This last possibility might, in fact, serve to explain why the uncertainty as to whether 1:6 refers to sun or to the wind is so longstanding. For it seems to be the apparent north and south movements of the sun, not its the daily east to west movements, which were attributed by some to these exhalations; and "πνεῦμα" is the word used for this type of "wind", which was thought to be caused by the sun’s heat. So Kirk, Raven and Schofield, The Presocratic Philosophers, P.138, sum up Anaximander’s views (see also Ibid., P.137),

"Wind causes most other phenomena, - including, probably, the movements north and south of sun and moon".

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6 It seems very unlikely, however, that the life-force could be represented as whirling about in different directions as Qoheleth would, on this view, seem to be depicting it.

7 It is worth noting that Qoh. 1:6 specifically refers to north and south. Perhaps 1:6 is now describing the yearly movements of the sun in deliberate contrast to 1:5’s description of its daily movements, which appear to be east to west.
Aristotle refers to this type of idea in *Met.* BI, 353 b 6,

"δύν ἐς τὸν ἡλίου ἔξηρονδημον τὸ μὲν διατήρισαι
πνεύματα καὶ τροπᾶς ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης φασὶ ποιεῖν":

"But, being dried by the sun, the part that is exhaled makes winds and turnings of the sun and moon, they say".

Aristotle later expresses his dissatisfaction with these ideas, ⁸

"The same illogicality results - for those who say that when the earth, too, was at first moist, and the part of the world round the earth was being heated by the sun, air was produced (ἀέρα γενέσθαι), and the whole heaven was increased, and that this (air) causes winds (καὶ τούτον πνεύματά τε παρέχεσθαι) and makes its (i.e., the sun's) turnings (καὶ τὰς τροπὰς αὐτοῦ ποιεῖν)".

Although neither of these passages makes entirely clear whether it is the hot exhalation / air itself or the winds (πνεύματα) produced by it which directly cause the turnings of the sun, Kirk, Raven and Schofield (Ibid.Pp.137-8) think the latter likelier, because Seneca ⁹ claims that Anaximander

"Referred everything to wind (Omnia ad spiritum rettulit)".

Probably, then, Anaximander considered πνεύματα (winds produced by the sun's heat) to be responsible for the τροπαί of the sun; and the phrasing of both the above Aristotle passages (e.g., φασὶ in *Met.* BI, 353 b 6) implies that this view gained a considerable following.

If, therefore, *Qoh.* 1:6 does refer to the sun and its πνεύματα rather than to the wind in the normal sense, or even if it does not refer to the sun in the Hebrew original but the LXX translator(s) misconstrued it as doing so, then some such concept of

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⁸Ibid. BII, 355 a 21.

πνεύματα causing the τροποί of the sun may well lie behind the LXX’s choice of "πνεύμα" instead of "ζνεμος" to translate "Π Σλη" in 1:6. The idea that this verse in the original Hebrew refers to the sun and its πνεύματα (rather than to the wind in the usual sense) thus remains perfectly plausible; 10 but the idea that LXX’s choice of "πνεύμα" here to translate "Π Σλη" indicates a spiritual interpretation of "Π Σλη" rather than a physical one is no longer an unavoidable consequence of taking 1:6 as referring to the sun, since the πνεύματα regarded as causing the τροποί of the sun are definitely physical, not spiritual.

It would be interesting to know whether the familiar image of the chariot-horses of the sun, with their fiery, panting breath, 11 owes something of its origin to this concept of the πνεύματα, caused by the sun’s heat and in turn causing the sun’s movement. Since the hotness of horses’ breath is very noticeable, and since it is the horses which cause a chariot’s movement, a connexion between these two ideas is far from impossible.

10 Although if this is what the original means, or even if the LXX translator(s) merely take it that way mistakenly, it is not clear why the translator(s) should prefer the singular "πνεύμα" to the plural "πνεύματα". For Aristotle’s references (quoted above) to the idea of the sun’s heat producing "winds" give the impression that the plural "πνεύματα" was probably the usual way of referring to this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Hebrew "Π Σλη" is singular; and Qoheleth’s LXX translator has a strong literalizing tendency. Even if Qoheleth could reasonably translate the Greek plural "πνεύματα" into Hebrew as a singular, that would be unlikely to prevent the LXX translator later on from feeling impelled to keep the Hebrew singular as a singular in his Greek rendition.

11 See above, Chapter 9, Section i; see also Pindar’s reference in Olymp. VII, L.71 / 130, to the sun’s horses as "πῦρ πνεύματον" or "breathing fire", since "πνεύματον" is from the same root as "πνεύματα".
APPENDIX EIGHT

"UNDER THE SUN" AND OVERTONES OF JUDGMENT.

Because of the widespread association of the all-seeing sun with judgment and justice in antiquity, there are some grounds for suspecting that Qoheleth’s frequent reiteration of the expression "under the sun" is a method for emphasizing the certainty of ultimate judgment. ¹ It is therefore worthwhile to consider whether other writers’ use of "under the sun" evokes this connexion of the sun with justice as well, ² especially in such a way as to imply the certainty of judgment. This will shed light on the degree of probability that Qoheleth himself is doing this, and also help us to grasp the exact nuance of meaning intended by all the authors involved.

In particular, Euripides’ use of "\( \phi\,\!\varepsilon\lambda\,\!\varphi \)" in *Alc.* L.1.151 and 395 deserves careful reflection. It is not clear from the immediate context of these lines whether the expression carries overtones of an all-seeing sun who will intervene to save the heroine from the "injustice" of an undeserved early death, or whether it is simply a common formula for "still alive". Nevertheless, it must be of no small significance that in the end, Alcestis is saved from death by the intervention of Heracles. Moreover, this seems to Heracles only fair, because Admetus is so faithful to the laws of hospitality despite his grief (e.g., L.1.853-60, 1010-4). Heracles actually calls

¹See above, Chapter 9, Section i. For other overtones of "under the sun", see APPENDIX ONE on its use in *Qoheleth* and *Gilgamesh*.

²Apart from those mentioned by Walcot and the works quoted by him, op. cit., P.92. See above, Chapter 9, Section i.
Admetus "just" because of this faithfulness to the obligations of host (Ll. 1147-9).

Also, it is noteworthy that in the passage where the 'justice' of Alcestis' death is most hotly debated, - the traumatic scene (Ll.614-740) where Admetus accuses his father Pheres of wrong in not being willing to die for him (L.629 ff.), and his father accuses Admetus in turn of wrong for allowing Alcestis to die for him (Ll.694-8, 730-3), - that the most emotive references to the sweetness of life and of the light occur. These references are indeed similar to Qoh. 11:7. In Ll.689-96, Pheres defends his decision not to die for his son, beginning "How have I wronged you?", using a word from the same root as δίκη, as Heracles does in L.1147 when he calls Admetus "just". Pheres then continues (Ll.691-3),

"You rejoice to see light; do you think your father does not rejoice (to see it)? I certainly reckon our time below a long time, and our lifespan short, but for all that, sweet."

He then calls Admetus' attempt to prolong his life shameful, because he has killed his wife by evading his appointed lot (L. 694 ff.). In L.722, Pheres again defends his decision by appealing to his love for the light, in a line beginning and ending with the word "dear",

"Dear is this light of the god, dear".

This direct reference to the sun as "the god" is striking in a play where Apollo

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3 However, see APPENDIX FIVE, Pp.16-7, ftn.15, for the similarity of thought with Pindar as well. Euripides may not be the influence behind Qoh. 11:7; and even if he is, Alcestis seems a much likelier source of the influence than I. A., L.1219, mentioned by Crenshaw, op. cit., P.183, for its similar wording to Qoh. 11:7a.
is a literal participant, and so firmly on Admetus' side. Although Death calls Apollo "unjust" for siding with Admetus against him (L.30, 39 etc.), Apollo's claim "δική - Εχο" (L.38) seems vindicated by Admetus' "just" treatment of Heracles later on, confirming the worth that Apollo sees in him from the beginning.

In view of the high profile of δική in the play overall, therefore, especially since it is δική in connexion with Apollo in particular, it is not unlikely that Euripides' use of "under the sun" is a deliberate evocation of the sun's association with justice. Even though the immediate context in which the expression occurs does not particularly suggest this, the thematic direction of the play as a whole does. Whether or not this play as such influenced Qoheleth, the apparent overtones of justice in its use of "under the sun" tend to support the idea that the use of this same expression by Qoheleth and by other writers may well be intended to evoke the idea of an all-seeing and unfailing "justice", or a sense of reciprocity, proportion or rightness, which in the end will assert itself and restore a correct balance to life.

Thucydides' use of "under the sun" in Hist., II.102, 5-6 is indirectly evocative of δική:

"There is a story that when Alcmaeon son of Amphiaras was a wanderer after the murder of his mother, Apollo directed him to inhabit this land, decreeing by his oracle that he could find no release from the terrors that haunted him until he could discover a place to settle in which, at the time when he killed his mother, had never been seen under the sun and was not in existence as land

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⁴See, e.g., L.10, where he calls Admetus "holy" like himself.
The parallel between "μητρο ύπο ἦλιου ἄνθρωπο" and "μηδὲ γῆ ἤν" may at first sight appear to reflect the supposedly blander meaning of "under the sun", i.e., merely "in existence". In reality, however, this is not a "bland" meaning, since this very passage shows that it is in any case closely linked with the graver implication of "under the sun", i.e., the idea of the sun as guardian of justice. Even this parallel between "μητρο ύπο ἦλιου ἄνθρωπο" and "μηδὲ γῆ ἤν" has a ritual solemnity about it; its legalistic exactitude in expressing the requirements for the matricide's new dwelling place twice to avoid ambiguity serves to underline the dangers involved in failing to meet those requirements. The overall drift of the passage is unmistakably to emphasize that the sun can not overlook that which is evil; and Apollo's direct rôle dictating the oracle which Alcmaeon must follow to restore ὅτιν underlines the sun's association with judgment. Whatever the expression "ὕπο ἦλιου" means to Thucydides himself, it is not difficult to see that the phrasing of the oracle he is obliquely quoting here, including the expression "ὕπο ἦλιου", is strongly influenced by a concept of the sun as an all-seeing guardian of right conduct; and Thucydides himself must be aware of this.

Even the apparently tame use of "under the sun" in Demosthenes XVIII 6 may imply more about the sun's traditional association with justice than meets the eye after

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6Greek expressions such as "ὕπο ἦλιου" here and "ὕπο τοῦ τοῦτον τόν ἦλιου" (Demos., Cor., 270) mean, in effect, "under the sun", despite using the genitive and accusative cases respectively, instead of the dative like Euripides' "ὄφ' ἦλιον". Cf. the same diversity of case in the various expressions for "under the earth", e.g. genitive in Plato, Ap. 18B, "τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς" and in Arist., Met. 352B, 6, "τῶν ὑπὸ γῆς χασμάτων", but accusative in Ibid. 349B, 29, "ὑπὸ γῆν".

6De Corona, 270.
all. When the orator launches into

"If you, Aeschines, can name any human being, Greek or barbarian, of those under the sun here (tòv ὑπὸ τούτων τὸν Ἡλιον - ὀνθρόπων).....", he is actually approaching very close to the heart of the injustice he feels has been done to himself and hence also to his client, since they are being blamed for decisions that everyone at the time agreed upon and which failed only because of circumstances beyond their control. This passage is not an aside or an embellishment ancillary to the main issue, but is directly addressing the fundamental wrong attitude which has led to the charges being brought against Ctesiphon in the first place.

This is not in itself enough to suggest that the expression "under the sun" is more to Demosthenes than a casual phrase for "anywhere at all", nor in itself is it enough to suggest that the orator sees a strong connexion between the sun and justice. However, in Ibid. 141, where he invokes all the gods and goddesses of Attica to witness his honesty, the only one he refers to specifically by name is

"Pythian Apollo, the ancestral divinity of this city";
and this reference to Apollo is left until last, as if he is the epitome of what all the other gods stand for, namely, discernment of the truth, and hence right judgment based on this discernment. Demosthenes moves straight from the mention of Apollo into his plea to be judged and vindicated as telling the truth:

"And I solemnly beseech them all that, if I shall speak the truth now, and if I spoke the truth to my countrymen (about this evil-doer), then may they grant to me prosperity and safety. But if with malice or in the spirit of personal rivalry I lay against them any false charge, I pray that they may dispossess me of everything that is good."

This passage does suggest that he and his hearers are fully aware of the sun-god's reputation as uniquely all-seeing and therefore as Man's chief guarantee that truth will
come to light and justice will prevail in the end. This perception of the sun's traditional rôle in law and judgment may, therefore, be the key to what he means and to what he expects the court to understand by "under the sun" in Section 270.

In assessing the likely implications of the formula "under the sun" in any context where it occurs, therefore, it is worth bearing in mind the popular image of the sun as the special guardian of justice, in case this has some bearing on the author's choice of this expression. It should not be dismissed as merely a picturesque alternative for "in existence" or "anywhere at all on earth" or even "alive". For although it does carry all these implications, the image of the sun as all-seeing protector of truth and right seems to have a sufficiently strong and widespread influence for the expression to conjure up very readily the idea that right judgment will come to pass, even against the odds.

7Including Qoheleth, where it occurs with unparalleled frequency, and therefore may also be of unparalleled significance.

8I.e., on earth as distinct from under it, and under the sun as distinct from under the earth.

9As Demosthenes seems to be hoping in De Corona.
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