ANOTHER MEANING IS POSSIBLE:
A RE-READING OF HEBEL IN QOHELET

BY

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Table of Contents

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LLD Mokoena   December 2019

Acknowledgments

I have always had a deep and unwavering existential void especially after going through a deep depression back in 2012 which almost cost me my life. It was a sense of feeling lost, mostly sleepwalking through life with endless questions, precisely the question WHY? Why are we here, what is the point to our existence? Mostly I have always wondered how I can get rid of this existential void. This thesis explores those questions and I want to dedicate it first and foremost to all the wanderers and sojourners and to every depression sufferer, may we continue to untangle this web.

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To myself, *YOU ARE THE GHEL*. You did it.

List of Abbreviations

ANES	*Ancient near East Studies*
BI	*Biblical Interpretation*
BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil*
BN	*Being & Nothingness*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Bible Quarterly*
DBSJ	*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*
EH	Existentialism is a Humanism
GS	Gay Science
HTS	*Hervormde Teologiese Studies*
JBL	*Journal for Biblical Literature*
JNS	*Journal of Nietzsche Studies*
JP	*Journal of Philosophy*
JRE	*Journal for Religious Ethics*
JSem	*Journal for Semitics*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTsup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament – Supplements
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
PP	*Philosophical Papers*
RS	*Religious Studies*
SAJP	*South African Journal of Philosophy*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
TSZ	*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

VE	*Verbum ET Ecclesia*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WP	*Will to Power*

Abstract

Throughout the annals of research history, Nietzsche and Qohelet have often crossed paths. This intersection is made possible by the similarity of thought prevalent in both texts which both evaluate the state of human existence in the face of paradigm shifts. Humanity has an existential need to create meaning and ascribe value. When both meaning and value begin to erode, it is our task to reevaluate them and overcome that state of decadence. This thesis explores the various ways in which vanity in Qohelet can be re-read as active nihilism in an attempt to move away from the conventional connotations of *hebel* as pessimism. One such an example is to fuse African existential philosophy with this re-reading of Qohelet as active nihilism. It is the conclusion of this thesis that *hebel* in Qohelet can be re-read as worthlessness and not meaninglessness, thereby inferring value instead of vanity. As a result, active nihilism can also be applied to the post-postmodern philosophy of mindfulness.

Chapter 1: Background to study

1.1. Introduction

This study is concerned with how we ascribe meaning to our lives when previously held signifiers of meaning begin to erode or have become decadent. The study draws parallels between the book of Ecclesiastes (henceforth Qohelet) and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche with a special emphasis on the motif of Nihilism. The specific task is to examine how orthodox signifiers of meaning have eroded, what the causes of their devaluation, and finally suggest ways in which we can transcend decadent pessimism through traditional forms of knowledge to find new ways in which we can ascribe meaning and value for our lives.

Nietzsche once remarked that when people talk a lot about 'values' one knows that values are in trouble, the same is true for the meaning of life (Young 2003:1). The study on the signifiers and value of the meaning of life has been a study that has consumed both philosophy and religion throughout the annals of history ranging with an array of dissertations (Gericke 2011:363-376; Camus 1955, Satre 1943).

Preceding the argument about what signifies existence is the argument of the essence of the values that administer the signifiers of existential meaning. Meaning that, how we ascribe meaning value to existence is always foregrounded by certain beliefs, philosophies and teachings which all should be afforded the same attention. All whom have dealt with the question that has

preoccupied humanity for centuries has habitually also dealt with vanity, skepticism, pessimism and existential nihilism.[1]

If the book of Qohelet is evaluated on the theory that exile led to the social instability and Empire rule forced the nation of Israel into a cultural crisis that led to the pessimistic disorienting effects we see in Qohelet, then it can be argued that Qohelet became disillusioned with the reality of everyday life. Qohelet faced a crisis where all that he had come to know about wisdom, life, and the value of things must be wholly vanity and preceded to offer a radicalized version of reality and wisdom, which centralizes its epistemology on empiricism and emphasized the *Carpe Diem* principle (Van Der Toorn 2007:21; Loader 1976:49).

In nineteenth century, Europe, as pre-modern narratives[2] that secured the meaning of existence were eroding, Friedrich Nietzsche an existential philosopher recognized this phenomenon as nihilism, a crisis of modernity. The phenomenon that both Nietzsche and Heidegger refer to as "nihilism" is often understood as a historical event (process), an episode in late modern Western culture (Del Caro 2013:173). This phenomenon is created when the metaphysical basis for social existence is found wanting, humanity is then faced with an existential void. Active nihilism offers for this human condition a philosophical basis for hope through affirmation as articulated in the philosophy

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[1] It must be noted that nihilism should be qualified in each context as it varies. Moral nihilists deal with morality, epistemological nihilists deal with the possibility of knowledge, ontological and metaphysical nihilists deal with the reality of reality and its existence. These different forms are still not mutually exclusive and can borrow from one another.

[2] By pre-modern I refer to the schools of the Early naturalists, Early rationalists, Sophists, Platonists, Epicureans et al. where existence was centred on faith in a certain deity.

of Nietzsche that nihilism could be overcome through a trans-valuation of values.

For existential nihilists, the belief that life must be meaningless (rejection of values) was enhanced by Nietzsche's maxim that "God is dead!" [*Gott ist todt!*],[3] in 1882. This aphorism propelled Nietzsche into the upper echelons of existential philosophy and was the most misunderstood and misinterpreted of all his aphorisms (Deleuze 2006:152). Nietzsche characterized the *Death of God* not as the literal death of a 'god' nor the denial of the existence of a 'god', but as a period in history that defined a moment where values that once secured meaning for existence had been devalued in themselves and humanity was in need of a new signifier to secure life's meaning (Nietzsche 1888:12). Etieyibo (2011:1) argues similarly that, the Death of God is neither a metaphysical/epistemological nor a religious claim for the proof of God's existence or nature, rather, a socio-cultural claim about the influence of God in people's lives *historically*. This explanation provides reason why nihilism is a historical process and not a feeling or polemic.

Qohelet in his sequence of thought displays similar patterns of thinking and reflection on the nature of traditional wisdom in his time and values that once secured meaning for life, which seemed to be collapsing. Beaulieu (2007:3) argues that, the general tenor of wisdom texts is to teach the art of leading a successful life, in harmony with society and the divine will, which for Qohelet and his counterparts was a source of determining value and meaning. Qohelet, enthused by the reality that everything a person once knew or said to do is now

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[3] The aphorism first mentioned in The Gay Science (1882:119-120) section 125; 108, was later popularized by Zarathustra in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1887).

being wholly faltering, questions the basic presuppositions of traditional wisdom, value, and meaning. The traditional Jewish epistemic worldviews relating to wisdom, value, and meaning were eroding in Qohelet and thus begins Qohelet's endeavor of exploring human conditions, limitations and possibilities. Qohelet has a crisis of epistemic uncertainty, which needs to be resolved.

Qohelet and Nietzsche seemingly display a similar pattern in their thought, taking into cognizance the vast differences in their particular contexts, which will be explained in the following chapters to substantiate why they form a dialectical study. Both are disillusioned by their reality, problematize it, react to it, and want to overcome it. The pattern of thought in Qohelet is one equal to Groenewald and Roper's concept of '*revolting wisdom*' which per my analysis has similar essential main beliefs with active nihilism in Nietzschean philosophy (Groenewald and Roper 2013:1-8).

Active nihilism, (unlike reactive nihilism, which refuses to acknowledge that life cannot have objective meaning and creates an ideological mask), is aware of its hermeneutic essence and interprets reality more openly (Vattimo 1989:15). Reactive nihilism is a type of nihilism that follows existential disillusionment where previously held signifiers of meaning are negated, and states that life is entirely without meaning and does not amount to an active affirmation of existence (Deleuze 2006:143). Sekine (2014:120) argues in the same way and states:

> …because "God will judge the righteous and the wicked" (Eccl 3:17) impartially and, concerning their requital, "they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Eccl

3:11), Qohelet concludes: "vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccl 1:2). It is my view that, in adopting the attitude that everything is ultimately "vanity," Qohelet preached *nihil* and was thus an advocate of nihilism. This can be proven by comparing his thinking with the three stages of nihilism proposed by Nietzsche and Heidegger, although I shall not do so here[4]. Whatever the case, my point here is that Qohelet was someone who frankly doubted and denied the traditional view that God presides over acts of retribution.

To transcend existential nihilism a re-reading of *hebel* in Qohelet and active nihilism in Nietzsche is adopted which negates the disillusionment and decadent of reality and advocates for active affirmation through the re-evaluation of values and existential meaning is necessary.

Firstly, I will provide an overview and the evolution of Qohelet's social setting and significant theories on vanity (*hebel)* to offer a theological exegesis and reflection. The subsequent objective is to put forward a critical reading of (traditional) signifiers of existential meaning, their reception, and erosion. The tasks outlined above will be undertaken through a reflection on Ecclesiastes as it developed as a canonical book and the genealogy of nihilism from the period of the existentialists (i.e. Nietzsche) until the period of the post-modernists/ post-structuralists (i.e. Derrida).

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[4] Heidegger has a much more complex interpretation of Nietzsche's nihilism which he refers to as 'the end of metaphysics' for further discussion see Sekine (1991:3-54)

I will contrast Qohelet's conception of vanity with active nihilism as revolt against objective morality and will argue that, the meaninglessness of life and the Death of God cannot be a concluding remark for existential meaning subsequently offering alternative narratives for affirmation.[5] The attempt is to offer a solution for an existential disillusionment.

1.2. Research problem

Can we ascribe value to our existence or is existence in itself a value making feature of life? This question although it cannot be avoided does not assume the ethical view of what is 'good' or 'bad' when we speak of values and meaning. Rather for the sake of this argument the question addresses what is fundamentally valuable for life to have meaning. Can meaning exist without God? What means do we resolve to when the basic tenants of our faith are in a perpetual disagreement with our given reality and how we experience the world around us. Thus, some of the questions asked culminates as: Can the re-reading of *hebel* in Qohelet offer for us an alternative paradigm of assessing reality and how we come to value our lives?

1.3. Hypothesis

A proposition made from the preceding arguments as formulated in the research question leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

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[5] The two aphorisms 'the meaninglessness of life' and 'the death of God' should in this dissertation not be translated with their literal meanings as they adopt new meaning when applied to specific contexts.

A transition from pessimism, disillusionment and decedent to active affirmation might be possible; another meaning to secure existence could be formulated. A critical re-reading of *hebel* in Qohelet as alluding to worthlessness and not meaninglessness might create space to argue that another meaning is possible. Not only as the process of decentralizing universal absolutism but also as an attempt to add to the arsenal of the production of knowledge in Old Testament studies as interdisciplinary through an application of philosophical themes.

1.4. Methodology

Morse & Richards (2002:2) define method as: "a collection of research strategies and techniques based on theoretical assumptions that combine to form a particular approach to data and mode of analyses." The method defined will be adopted to explain the concepts of this dissertation.

The study undertaken in this thesis is a historical study and narrative analysis which will be descriptive in nature and thus will employ qualitative methods of data analysis. Comparisons in qualitative research are inevitable (Mills 2008:100). Comparisons in qualitative research are often used to contrast entities of the same phenomena. Mills argues that, the underlying goal of comparative research is to search for similarity and variation between the entities that are the object

of comparison. The study will thus do a dialectical study between Qohelet and Nietzsche; *hebel* and Nihilism.

The core phenomena's between Qohelet's vanity and nihilism will be analyzed to discover the underlying process of rationalizing and securing existential meaning. To present the data collected, the study will undertake a typological and comparative methodological approach in its analysis of how Ancient Israel Yehud finds common ground for argumentative purposes with South Africa and post-Nietzschean European philosophy.

The book of Qohelet according to Miller (2002:30) is to be analyzed by means of rhetorical criticism that is concerned to achieve the following five determinations:

(1) The limits of the rhetorical unit to be studied;

(2) The rhetorical situation of the unit, involving persons, events, objects, and relations;

(3) The particular problem or issue that is addressed;

(4) The arrangement of the material; and

(5) The devices of style employed and their function in the process of persuading the unit's audience

The comparative analysis will beg for the borrowing of tools from social anthropology and philosophy as the study is highly interdisciplinary. A typology of the various themes in Qohelet will be undertaken in concurrence with those of Nihilism. A historical-critical approach will be employed on the book of Qohelet to analyses the *sitz im Leben* of

Qohelet's time. Through the literary-critical method of Old Testament exegesis, the biblical text will be disseminated by means of thematically demarcating the structure.

1.5. Literature Review

Research conducted and the material consulted with regards to the subject matter of this thesis are detailed below. The reception and interpretation history of both Qohelet, Nietzschean philosophy of nihilism and African existential philosophy will be analyzed chronologically and thematically. This research endeavor is for the purposes of identifying gaps in the research in order to create argumentative space for the ideas brought forward in the objectives aimed to be achieved in this thesis.

1.5.1. Qohelet

The book of Qohelet presents a necessity for the meaning of life and the value of objects (things) in an array of rhetorical questions and themes. According to Bianchi (1993:211), Qohelet continues to stand as an obstacle in Biblical studies because there is no clear consensus amongst scholars about the main issues of the book concerning unity, structure and message. Douglas (2011:1) cites the seminal work of Eric D. Hirsch (1976:98) where he argues that, "valid interpretation is always governed by a valid inference about genre… Every disagreement about an interpretation is usually a disagreement about genre."

According to Koosed (2006:25) genre analysis is necessary because correct genre identification is entwined with questions of meaning of the text, the setting, and the literary relationship with other texts. Therefore, with no consensus, is Qohelet communicating a message of complete pessimism,

qualified pessimism, realism, repentance and regret, or even possibly a message of joy? (Schlicht 2017:1).

The question surrounding the Gattung of the book of Qohelet as 'philosophical' continues to dominate debates about the book in Old Testament discourses with little consensus. Together with the categorization of the book, the inescapable theme of 'vanity' dominating in the book has also been a traditional problem that has been dealt with and is still largely contested. There are scholars who have argued for Qohelet as being philosophical and some contesting this view (Gericke 2012:106 & 2015:1-7; Fox 1987:137-155, Azize 2003:123-138; Sekine 2014:119-113).

Since the question "who is Qohelet?" has not resulted in any clear meaning, perhaps the question "what is Qohelet?" will prove a more productive avenue of inquiry (Koosed 2006:24). Qohelet, a thinker from the Hellenistic period, which was the final period of the Old Testament, voices his scepticism about the traditional view of God *and traditional wisdom* (Sekine 2014:119). Sekine (2014:119) means by traditional, the views of Ancient Israel on retributive justice that God requites humans for their ethical behaviour good and evil (i.e. Proverbs 10:3).

The preparatory argument of understanding Ancient Israelite wisdom is to conduct a comparative study of the wisdom traditions of Israel and her neighbours Egypt and Mesopotamia. Loader (1979:118) argues that in Egyptian wisdom the cosmic ordering principle is the *maat* where everything is located. Order in Egyptian wisdom is not abstract but relates to everyday life and he who integrates into the order of this life practices wisdom. Such

integration is brought about by the correct conduct on the right time i.e. the inscription of Rechmire: a man is reckoned wise when he has learned to "act according to prevailing circumstances"; the inscription of Amenepope: "Do not say, 'Today is like tomorrow', for how will it end? When tomorrow has come, the river may have turned into a sandbank". The underlining factor is that, relative to time and circumstances, it is determined what is right and what is wrong, and so one can integrate the *maat* (Loader 1979:118).

Although Ancient Mesopotamia produced a large corpus of wisdom literature, the label 'wisdom literature' is largely borrowed from biblical scholarship and the definition of the Mesopotamian corpus is still largely contested (Beaulieu 2007:3). According to Loader (1979:119) in the Sumerian religion, the principle order is *ME*. Although the word is not used in the wisdom literature, the *concept* exists. Mesopotamian wisdom is also concrete and related to time and also fixed in writing, a single utterance can apply to many situations. The most significant piece of wisdom literature in Sumerian is the Instructions of Shuruppak, the Instructions of Shuruppak consists of counsels and proverbs addressed by Shuruppak, son of Ubarutu, to his son Ziusudra (Beaulieu 2007:4).

Beaulieu (2007:5) remarks that, Mesopotamian wisdom literature finds its parallels with Biblical wisdom (literature) when Shuruppak is compared to the biblical Noah according to the Sumerian flood story also called the Eridu Genesis. Ziusudra also appears as a teacher of wisdom under his Akkadian

name, Utnapishtim in the death of Gilgamesh.[6] The Instructions of Shuruppak consist simply of advice on proper conduct, and in this respect, they bear an evident similarity to the wisdom teachings of Egypt and Israel (Beaulieu 2007:7).

According to Van Der Toorn (2007:21) at the turn from the second millennium to the first B.C.E., wisdom began to be a virtue solely of the gods, and this major transformation is witnessed in the standard Babylonian version of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh has not often been associated with wisdom because an epic is an epic, yet Gilgamesh is truly wisdom literature not only by modern standards but also by ancient Assyrian scribes and scholars (Van Der Toorn 2007:21). The difference between the Old Babylonian version of 1600 B.C.E. and the Standard Babylonian version written some five hundred years later in around 1100 B.C.E. is important because it reflects a change in the concept of wisdom (Van Der Toorn 2007:22). The wisdom of the epic in the former version is summed up in the counsel of the tavern-keeper, Siduri, to Gilgamesh at the end of his journey and says:

> O Gilgamesh, where are you wandering?
>
> You cannot find the life that you seek:
>
> When the gods created humankind,
>
> For humankind they established death,
>
> Life they kept for themselves.
>
> You, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,
>
> Keep enjoying yourself, day and night!

---

[6] Cf. The Epic of Gilgamesh: This is clearly expressed in lines 148–50: "You reached [Ziusudra in his abode! The rites of Sumer], forgotten since distant days of old, [the rituals and customs—you] brought them down to the land."

Every day make merry,

Dance and play day and night!

Let your clothes be clean!

Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!

Gaze on the little one who holds your hand,

Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace!

Such is the destiny [of mortal men,] (…)

OB Sippar tablet, iii 1–148

(Van Der Toorn 2007:21)

This version teaches that one must simply learn to accept mortality and enjoy the good things in life with moderation. In the Standard version, that has 28 lines added, line 1 in the old version has become line 29 in the standard version and reads as follow:

ša nagba īmuru [i]šdi māti

[ša kulla]ti īdû kalama hass[u] (. . .)

[nap]har nēmeqi ša kalāmi [īhuz]

[ni]sirta īmurma katimta iptē

ubla tēma ša lām abūbi

He who saw the Deep, the country's foundations,

Who knew everything, was wise in all matters! (…)

He learnt the sum of wisdom of everything.

He saw what was secret, discovered what was hidden,

He brought back a message from before the flood.

Gilg. I i 1–2.6–810;

(Van Der Toorn 2007:23)

The new prologue pictures a man Gilgamesh who has gained wisdom and the *carpe-diem* counsel of the tavern-keeper has disappeared (Van Der Toorn 2007:23). This difference signifies an important shift in the concept of Mesopotamian wisdom; wisdom became out of reach for ordinary mortals and began to be far off in space and time, unless revealed the wisdom became hidden (Van Der Toorn 2007:24). Wisdom shifts from being gained from experience to being a revelation.

This shift changed the category of wisdom and henceforth associated more specifically with manuals that were written down. In the first Millennium, however, the transmission of tradition took the form of formal instruction in the context of the formation of scribes (Van Der Toorn 2007:24). In a society where the population is largely illiterate, the scribalization of wisdom was to make the written word an object of veneration. To them, writing is more a means of encrypting a message than a means of communication and preservation (Van Der Toorn 2007:27).

A crisis that could not be avoided began to surface when the wisdom precepts were fixated into writing and their temporal relevance with time became lost as they became a dogmatic system. The pitfalls of both Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom are that when the precepts became systematized, they lost the relativity of conduct to the right time and judged reality from its ivory towers. This is because what seems right to man can be wrong in the opinion of the gods. People then began to question the dogma of retribution (Loader 1979:120).

Loader (1979:121) observes that the relationship between reality and time is also observed in the Old Testament (i.e. Proverbs 10-29). It can be observed that the systemization of wisdom also entered Israelite wisdom (i.e. proverbs 1-9), but the friends of Job who try to force a systematic doctrine of retribution into reality are the best examples. Qohelet's arguments can be located here, an objection to systematized and dogmatic wisdom (*hokma*) which has no relativity to deed and time.

The reacting character of Qohelet is relativity *and not so much causality.* Loader (1976:49) argues that, relativity is characteristic of literature in revolt against the stagnation of absolutism. This revolt in Qohelet is affirmed by the questioning of Ancient Israelite wisdom. Loader (1976:49) further argues that, if wisdom does not transcend historical determination and cannot be brought back to reality, then it becomes systematized into an absolute doctrine. When this happens, a crisis takes place: wisdom revolts against a rigidity foreign to reality. When relativity is complicated due to the interaction of opposite positions, this relativity is hereby referred to as tense relativity.[7]

According to Loader (1979:122) the relativity can be observed between; wisdom relative to folly, Qohelet's wisdom relative to general *hokma*, diligence relative to sloth, labour relative to certain circumstances, riches relative to certain circumstances – all have relative circumstances. Qohelet disillusioned with traditional wisdom that wicked behaviour is a punishment from God and that piety results in prosperity, argues that the contemporary definitions of deed

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[7] Loader (1967:49) refers to the opposite as '*relaxed reality*' where the given pronouncement [wisdom] has unlimited value relative to time and circumstance. A pronouncement that can be valid for other circumstances.

and consequence do not fit reality through the deconstruction of the dichotomies (Sneed 2002:118).

It may well be established that Israel has a lot in parallel with her neighbours Egypt and Mesopotamia. A shift can also be observed from wisdom being orally transferred to wisdom being a scribal activity and being dogmatized as a system of venerating texts[8]. The epic of Gilgamesh shows us how wisdom went from being accessible to everyone through empirical means, to wisdom being a hidden knowledge, which would be revealed as though one is revealing a secret. The Epic of Gilgamesh thus serves as a precursor to help us understand how wisdom as a concept developed overtime. When this wisdom became scribal wisdom, it had little to do with the practical realities of everyday life because it became knowledge that was only accessible for the scribal elite.

Gericke (2012:1) offers one other recent reading of Qohelet pertaining to Qohelet's philosophical interpretation. Gericke further argues that the book of Qohelet (or Ecclesiastes) is the closest the Old Testament comes to approximate philosophical literature which according to him, if read in the context of the 'value theory[9]', Qohelet's message should be understood as an approach to understand why, how, and to what degree humans should value things.

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[8] Loader (1976:51) argues that, the inconsistencies of the relativity of wisdom with deed and consequence having become an absolute doctrine/venerated texts, made men sinners even when they were evidently not.

[9] In its narrowest sense, "value theory" is used for a relatively narrow area of normative ethical theory particularly, but not exclusively, of concern to consequentialists. In this narrow sense, "value theory" is roughly synonymous with "axiology". Axiology can be thought of as primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are. For instance, a traditional question of axiology concerns whether the objects of value are subjective psychological states or objective states of the world (Schroeder 2008) in Gericke (2015:5-6)

Gericke (2012:2) notes that, Qohelet's examination of the world and the value of the things and how they are valued (x=good) was neither emotive nor prescriptive, he was not telling people what to do based on his conclusions. Rather, Qohelet's statements were supposed to say something about what is wrong in the world. The answer for 'who is Qohelet?' for Gericke (2012:2-3) can be summed up into two statements:

- Qohelet was not an intuitionist in his axiological epistemology. Meaning, Qohelet did not assume that the value of properties not discovered by empirical investigation or rational must be known by intuition. Qohelet was an empiricist. This then makes the opposite apparent that, Qohelet's axiology is naturalistic, and in that he identified goodness with natural properties or property. Hence his empirical investigations.

- Contrary to Qohelet being a realist and naturalist, he was not an objectivist. Qohelet presupposed a subjectivism theory of value because; value was discovered because of the subjective state of agents. Things could be valuable because of their impact on consciousness.

The focus of Qohelet's message according to Gericke (2012:5-6) is that (1) *hebel* in Qohelet should not be translated as '*values do not have intrinsic value in themselves*' denoting a pessimistic monism, (2) Qohelet does not deny the value of things but questions whether the compensation of one's toil is worthwhile with no absolute value and enduring gain, (3) it should thus be concluded that, Qohelet does not teach worthlessness rather, Qohelet teaches a form of active nihilism (cf. Nietzsche) that teaches us to construct meaning

and value where they are lost or are lacking. The ultimate message of the book is thus not life's meaninglessness but life's worthlessness.

Contrary to Gericke (2012:6), Fox (1989:79-80) argues that at the core of Qohelet's message, is the subject of epistemology in the quest to validate wisdom in empirical ways by stating:

> I will argue that Qohelet has an essentially empirical methodology: he seeks both to derive knowledge from experience and to validate ideas experientially. He often reports his findings introspectively, communicating his discoveries as perceptions. He conceives of knowledge as the product of human thought. He emphasizes the limitations of wisdom, but in some ways, he also extends wisdom's field of activity beyond those approved by conventional wisdom. Qohelet teaches the great utility of wisdom, but recognizes its vulnerabilities and failings as well. Finally, he believes that there is an imperative to pursue wisdom, regardless of its utility.

According to Fox (1989:80-81) the terminology of knowledge Qohelet uses makes epistemology (the production of knowledge and how we know what we know) the focus of his message. Azize (2003:123) locates the message of the book of Qohelet in a genre he labels "critique" because Qohelet aims to provoke his readers to question basic assumptions about life, and about what is desirable and worthwhile. Miller (2002:21) argues similarly that: "Ecclesiastes presents itself as the wisdom of one who had searched and dealt with issues of life and is now instructing his readers on making the best of their days."

Gericke (2015:2) is critical of the fact that approaches to the book of Qohelet have often paid attention to Western metaphysical topics such as 'determinism', time and being. An example of metaphysical perspectives in Eastern philosophy relating to Qohelet, is the concept of opposites, compared to the Chinese philosophical views on cosmic order. These metaphysical assumptions tend to be linguistic and theological, hardly philosophical. Gericke (2015:1) further argues that: "research on Qohelet in relationship to philosophy is quantitatively more complex and multifaceted than traditional overviews tend to show."

According to Fuhr Jr. (2013:3-7) Early Jewish commentaries viewed Qohelet through the lens of Torah, while early Christians writers combined an assumption of Solomonic authorship with a view towards the enhancement of the spiritual life of the church to arrive at a thoroughly "ecclesiastical" approach to Qohelet. The Reformation era saw a gradual shift from monastic theology that interpreted Qohelet to teach "contempt for the world" moving towards a rather humanistic, positive approach.

Fuhr Jr. (2013:7) further argues that, theologically, Reformers viewed Qohelet as a discourse against the doctrine of "free-will" (Martin Luther), as a treatise in favour of the doctrine of divine providence (Melanchthon), and as an illustration of Pauline justification (Johannes Brenz). The beginning of the early 1640's saw a pre-critical approach of the Reformers being replaced by the historical-critical approach that sought to critically reconstruct Qohelet as set up in his time until the modern period. The 20th century saw scholars who were arguing for redactional activity in Qohelet. This is where I chose to

position this research as it is an endeavour to study Qohelet from a historical-critical perspective.

Teleological fulfilment of the human life in Christianity has often been advocated to the doctrine of predestination. In the Christian belief, the essence is often thought to precede existence, a philosophical stance that the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Satre (1905-1980), that existence precedes essence would defy, stating that one creates meaning for one's own life. According to Sneed (2012:219) in Ancient Israel, wisdom (and wisdom literature) had a natural affinity with rationalization, a concept that demanded reason and intellectuality to be brought to bear on a particular social facet such as economics, law, or religion. This notion is related to rationality that humans must be culpable, have meaning and order. It is from this perspective with which Qohelet's proclamations should be understood.

This over-rationalization of traditional wisdom caused even more irrationality because life cannot wholly be rational. Life is largely irrational (Sneed 2012:205). Qohelet himself teaches that human wisdom is limited and cannot achieve all its goals (Fox 1989: 89). Qohelet's epistemology is essentially an empirical approach, it is not entirely systematic as he often contradicts himself, and however, he often reports his findings as a product of human thought (Fox 1987:138). His emphasis is often on empirical evidence because he often claims to have pushed beyond traditional wisdom to have gained all of his knowledge (Ecclesiastes 1:12-16).

1.5.2. Nihilism

Nihilism has continued to develop as a philosophy from the time of Friedrich Nietzsche in Northern Europe (1850-1950), until the time of the post-modernists (post-structuralists i.e. Derrida) in France (1970-1990). Nihilism has often been contrasted with 'emptiness', 'void', and 'meaninglessness' which are all considered as extreme pessimistic concepts that suggest meaninglessness as a concluding remark for existential meaning.

In his analysis of Nietzsche's work, Wardle (2016:1) argues that "Nietzsche importantly argues that nihilism does not strictly point to the end of existential meaning as such, but the end of existential meaning reliant upon antiquated traditional forms of Western thought; i.e. meaning contingent upon the *logic of being*". Nietzsche's account of nihilism is a rejection of undesirable existential values that devalue life *hic et nunc (*here and now*)* in favor of transcendental signifiers of meaning which are beyond the lived experience and which should be overcome through a *trans-valuation*[10] *of values.* Hence, for Nietzsche, nihilism is a transitional stage in the history of humanity.

Deleuze (1968:147-148) describes reactive nihilism as:

> …a second, more colloquial sense. It no longer signifies a will but rather a reaction. The super sensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied, they are refused all validity – this is no longer the devaluation of life in the name of higher values but rather the devaluation of higher values themselves. Devaluation no longer signifies life taking on the

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[10] Trans-valuation and re-evaluation will be used interchangeably, however, it should be noted that the former is coined by Nietzsche, and the latter is an adaptation.

value of nil, the null value, but the nullity of values, of higher values.

According to Wardle (2016:3) this existential disillusionment comes after existential meaning associated with previously held values and views is negated, precipitating the conclusion that in the absence of such transcendental signifiers, life must be whole without meaning. Meaning is rejected where none is seen. Nihilism thus becomes reactive in its response to the void of existential meaning following from the demise of previously held signifiers of meaning.

Reginster (2006:34) addresses the fact that the overcoming of nihilism (despair/pessimism) simply by the acknowledgment that there is no reason to affirm life because the values once highly esteemed are deemed illegitimate proves unsatisfactory. This is because this transition trades one variety of nihilism (despair) with another (disorientation). According to Woodward (2013:115), Nietzsche aimed for absolute affirmation, while Spinoza's principle that "all determination is negation" as well as Hegel's dialectical conception of negation suggests that affirmation free of negation is not possible.

Deleuze, however, argued his point successfully through the "logic of difference" to show that affirmation without negation is possible. Norman (2000:190) sympathizes with Nietzsche and states, 'a specter is haunting Nietzsche, the specter of Hegelian dialectics with its methodology of the double negation'. In effect, what this means is that, any attempt to overcome nihilism will be caught up in the dialectical movement whereby the very attempt to move

beyond nihilism will inevitably involve opposition and negation, thus ensure nihilism's (eternal) return.

In *The Will to Power,* Nietzsche (1968:7) accentuates that, "The highest values in whose service a man should live… were erected over man to strengthen their voices, as if they were commands of God, as "reality" as the "true" world, as hope and *future* world. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems "meaningless" – but that is only a *transitional stage.*" After one finds oneself in a stage of disillusionment, Nietzsche's words express that nihilism being a 'stage' or 'condition' which humans must overcome.

A re-evaluation as summarized by Reginster (2006:148) presupposes values in terms of which it is conducted, but it seems that if we are to reevaluate *all* (or, as Nietzsche sometimes says, the "highest") values, we deprive ourselves precisely of all possible terms of reevaluation. By calling all values into question, we seem to be left with no value to underwrite this revaluation. Any adequate interpretation of Nietzschean revaluation must include a resolution of this paradox. Reevaluation presupposes a principle in terms of which it is conducted. The principle cannot be one of the existing ("old") values, since they are to be revaluated (Reginster 2006:150). The values to be revaluated are; (1) values that dictate how life should be lived and impose universality on particular subjects, (2) values with which we ascribe meaning to life, (3) values that are subjective creations of a few men used to dominate others and have no objective erect.

1.5.3. African Existential Philosophy

In the immediate context of the author, African existential philosophy, its values and traditions beg for a critical reflection in this discourse about the meaning and value of life. The question of whether an African philosophy exists has been a cause of disagreement, which has been exhausted. Graness (2016:132) argues that, for centuries, Africa's ability to philosophize has been entirely denied, and African thought was not seen as a part of the world of philosophy. This view is supplemented by the stark contrast between western philosophy being purely text-based and African philosophy with an oral heritage. In a tradition without writing, people make full use of their memories. 'In my own community I know of people, practically illiterate, whose memories are as good as books and, in many ways, better than bad books' (Oruka 1984:391).

In his article, I doubt, therefore, African philosophy exists, Ramose (2003) examines the question of the existence of African philosophy through the examination of the meaning of doubt. Ramose (2003:113) argues that: "In St Augustine and Descartes the basic preposition with regard to doubt is the indubitable certainty that the doubting subject must exist before it can doubt at all." By parity of reasoning, African philosophy must first exist before it can doubt its own existence.

Ramose (2003:114-115) firstly problematizes the etymology of 'Africa/African' as geographic meaning, and as a historical expression. The term has often been used to speak more to the Western historical experience with the people of the continent and much less about the experience of the people concerning

their own self-understanding. In other words, the history of 'Africa' is mainly the history of west European experience of 'Africa' and only incidentally is it the story of the peoples of the continent. This is the reason why for Ramose, the resurgence of 'African philosophy' only occurs after the attainment of independence. It was in my view, a tentative way of Africa to reclaim its identity and prove to the West that it is not devoid of logic.

The era of decolonization is seen as an opportunity to reassert African philosophy, while others consider decolonization is the landmark underlining the beginning of African philosophy. This means that various peoples of the continent may now give expressions to their own philosophy. This will then make sense to speak of certain aspects of Bantu philosophy in i.e. Rwanda, Zimbabwe, or South Africa. Therefore, in African philosophy, particularity must be accorded precedence over universality (Ramose 2003:115).

Oyeshile (2008:57) subjects to scrutiny the polemics surrounding the epistemology of African philosophers by rejecting assertions of the West claimed by anthropologists and sociologists, which rejected the rationality of Africans as primitive. Oyeshile also rejects in the same vein contemporary African philosophers who want to present a purely descriptive, conjectural account of the African worldview. He concludes that African philosophy consists of speculative, conceptual and analytical as well as critical examination of the African traditional thought in light of contemporary global events.

Ramose (2003:116) supplements this view by arguing that, the thesis underlining this denial is firstly the denial of "African" thereby putting into

question the humanity of the 'African'. This denial is also because the 'African' is defective in its ontology, that is, a being without reason; it cannot qualify as a human being; leading to the conclusion that the 'African' can therefore not have a philosophy. 'Early' human societies anywhere in the world have always been debunked for having any intellectual reflection, hence Africa's indigenous cultures were both in principle and in fact disqualified from occupying a place in the philosophical arena (Hallen 2002:3).

Outlaw Jr. (2004:90) argues similarly to Ramose (2003) that, African philosophy, is then meant to facilitate the organizing of the past, present, and future 'philosophical' articulations and practices by and in the interests of African-descended peoples. These efforts of producing, justifying and validating knowledge are not of recent origin and are as old as the African peoples themselves are. Now, to argue that Africa is having 'a late start in philosophy' just because they do not have written records of past philosophical activities is wrongfully to limit the sources from which we could detect traces of such activities (Oruka 1984:392).

The constant denial and speculation of an African Philosophy also lead one to ask, do Africans have metaphysics of their own? Etim (2013:11) avers, without fear of resurrecting the already settled issues of the existence and non-existence of African philosophy, with its attendant polemics and argumentations, the appellation; 'African philosophy' pre-supposes and strongly assumes the existence of metaphysics that is distinctly and peculiarly African; that reflects the African weltanschauung (universe of experience) and African reality of existence.

Africans and their constant confrontation with survival, loss, and deprivation are faced with the fundamental questions of existence that are giving purpose and meaning. This constitutes an 'African Metaphysics'. Etim (2013:12) agrees that African metaphysics methodology is not particularly analytical as Western philosophy, and it does not have to be.

African philosophy has developed in phases that began primarily with what is referred to as 'Ethno-philosophy.' Oruka (1982:383) remarks that 'ethno-philosophy' is best characterized as an impersonal, folk philosophy that was a philosophy of everybody; it is understood and accepted by everyone. Although this philosophy persists, a new phase began to emerge which begged for a professional philosophy that would have trained managers (Oruka 1982:383). The current predominant philosophy is metaphilosphy with the central theme 'What is philosophy?' and a corollary to this question is 'what is African philosophy?' (Oruka 1982:384). Oruka attests to the fact that this kind of philosophy does have its limitations, that is, this philosophy does not have prolonged periods of debates and available literature within which to expand and preserve itself. It is, therefore, the responsibility for the current African and black philosophers to "let one hundred flowers bloom", the future will sort out those flowers and preserve a tradition (Oruka 1982:384).

Oruka is a key figure in the advancement of African sage philosophy. According to Azenabor (2009:69), the term "philosophic sagacity" was coined by Odera Oruka to describe a reflective evaluation of thought by an individual (not collective) African elder who is a repository of wisdom, knowledge and rigorous critical thinking. Oruka (1984:384) justifies his stance on his affinity towards African sage philosophy because other trends (i.e. nationalist

ideological philosophy and professional philosophy) are suspected of smuggling western techniques into African philosophy hence his privilege of one trend over the others and I quote him at length:

> It should be noted that ethno-philosophy implies that traditional Africa is free from (1) Philosophic, rational discourse and (2) personalized philosophical activity. Philosophy here is treated as a general communal activity in which ready-made beliefs and emotions rather than reflection decide the outcome. Philosophic sagacity stands to prove the contrary. It shows that the problem in traditional Africa is not lack of logic, reason, or scientific curiosity, since we can find many sages there with a system of thought, employing a rigorous use of these mental gifts. It shows that communal consensus, a fact typical of most traditional societies, should not be seen as a hindrance for individual critical reflection. Just as religion and all kinds of dogmatic fanaticism did not kill philosophy in the West, traditional African folk wisdoms and taboos left some room for real philosophic thought. Oruka (1982:385)

Oruka (1982:386) explains a sage as someone who; (1) transcends communal wisdom, (2) rationally critical and opt for or recommend aspects of wisdom which satisfy their rational scrutiny, (3) those who are constantly clashing with the die-hard adherents of the prevailing common beliefs, and (4) sages recommend alternative ideas to commonly accepted opinions and practices. According to Gyekye (1988:27), African traditional values and ideas have, generally speaking, not relaxed their grip on modern African traditional life and thought. They should, therefore, be critically examined in order to assess and appreciate their place in our contemporary lives.

This clarion call culminates in the thesis that this dissertation is arguing, a re-evaluation and rethinking of possible ways to critically evaluate African sage philosophy in contemporary times as a way to ascribe value and meaning differently. The application of African sage philosophy is not an attempt to say, "You are wrong about Africa", because persistent affirmation is an indication of uncertainty. Rather this study wants to offer a post-modern critique and evaluation of value and meaning through the dialectics of Qohelet, Nietzsche, and African sage philosophy.

1.6. Objectives of the Study

In this study, the main singular objective is to argue that a transition from pessimism, disillusionment and decedent to active affirmation is possible through a critical reading of African existential philosophy. The specific aims of the research to be undertaken in this proposed study can be outlined as follows:

- To provide a scholarly overview of the text (rhetoric and structure) and context (socio-scientific analysis) of the book of Qohelet and the different approaches and meanings of הבל *(Hebel)*.
- To provide a genealogy of nihilism and its development throughout history inclusive of pre-modern, modern and post-modern variations of interpretations.
- Explore through possible variations and approaches of existential meaning and/or meaninglessness in philosophy (Western and African) and Ancient Near Eastern context(s) (Second Temple Judaism).

- Discuss the principal ideals of African sage Philosophy; this will culminate in the discussion of sagacity philosophy through holism as an alternative paradigm to which we come to value that our life has and provide meaning.
- To justify the option that African sage philosophy is a comprehensive response to a dogmatic, dualistic absolutism view of existence, meaning and value.

Chapter 2: From Israel to Greece

Introduction

This chapter will mainly focus on the Hellenistic influence on Judaic wisdom literature in the Second Temple era. Although the dating of Qohelet will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, it is generally accepted that the book originated from this era. Therefore, this era with the linguistic and cultural influence will firstly be discussed and thereafter I will have a look at the Wisdom of Solomon as an example of Judaic wisdom literature that originated in the Hellenistic era, in order to draw some comparisons with Qohelet.

2.1. Prevalence of Hellenism in Palestine

The question of 'Hellenism' or 'Hellenization' of Judeans has primarily been social and political, it is only later that literary and philosophical aspects were considered (Hengel 1980:67). Early Hellenism has always been viewed as an economic and political force due to the intensive infiltration of territory. Occupied Jerusalem had become a theatre of war and forces of subjugation were intent on developing the country with military, economic and political influences (Hengel 1974:11).

The Jews in antiquity had been subjected to a series of world empires, after the Persians had taken centre stage, the Greeks took over then after brief Macedonian independence the Romans took over (Baumgarten 2002:1). Biblical texts, however, do not fill the gap by discussing the full developments

between Nehemiah (445 B.C.E.) and the beginning of Alexander's conquest (332 B.C.E.) (Delecki 2019:28).   Although the transfer of power from the Persians to the Greeks was nothing new, the literature ramifications would be of huge impact (Baumgarten 2002:1). This literature would then be a clear marker of how Jews interacted with Hellenistic culture, and which Hellenistic values mattered to them (Holladay 2002:65). This interaction also shows us points of resonance and resistance, meaning that, where Judaic literature shows some similar thought patterns and where it resists some of the Hellenistic teachings which do not align with their own theology and culture.

The biblical inspired expression 'Shem in the tents of Japheth' (from the verse Gen. 9:27: "May God make room for Japheth and let him live in the tents of Shem") is useful as a barometer with which the spirit of Hellenism can be measured (Holladay 2002:66). Thompson (2014:1) interprets this verse to explain the conquest of Southeast Asia by Alexander the Great and his Macedonians in 333-323 B.C.E. Japhet was the ancestor of Yavan, the Greeks (Gen 10:2-5) and Shem was the ancestor of the people of the Near East such as Eber (Gen 10:24-5).

Among the descendants of Yavan there is also Kittim (Gen 10:4). Kittim also appears in a Baal prophecy in Numbers 24:24 ''But ships shall come from Kittim, and shall afflict Ashur and Eber, and he also shall perish forever'. The Balaam and Noah prophecies, that are both Pentateuchal texts, cast into the distant future the invasion of Japhet descendants. Making a historical claim to the Greek conquest. The prophecy of Baal which implicates that Kittim will afflict Eber has an impact on the historicity and validity of events that follow

when Alexander the Great conquered Greece. (Niskanen 2004; Dever 2001 et al.).

The impact, limits and prevalence of Hellenism on Israel both in Palestine and the diaspora have dominated post exilic studies. It is imperative for the study of the prevalence of Hellenism to evaluate all the elements which constituted it, whether it be cultural assimilation, language, literary encounters or religious dominance. The prevalence of Hellenism is not only an encounter of cultures but also a clash of civilizations (Collins 2005:1).

There are a number of factors which can help determine the dating, authorship and social location of a book such as language, literary figures and even motifs in the book. These same determinative factors can also reveal intersectional points with other cultures and religions embodied in the literature. These intersectional points become known as literary encounters. A literary encounter is when there are clear indications of loan words, themes, and but not restricted to styles of writing in the narratives which are not indigenous to the theology of the book.

The two most referenced influences that were able to infiltrate Palestinian religious, literary and social fibres were language and culture. The word *ελληνιζειν* as a Greek word that primarily means 'speak Greek correctly' and only secondarily 'adopt a Greek style of life' is the most powerful demonstration to measure the sphere of influence (Hengel 1980:58). A language so powerful that laws were promulgated in it, treatise concluded, a language used by diplomats, men of letters and anyone who wanted to integrate into society (Hengel 1980:59).

The impeccable command of the Greek language, consequently, was the most important qualification to integrate well into Greek society. Fanon (1952:8) explains how speaking the language of the colonizer is to exist for them because to speak a language does not only mean to be in a position to use syntax and grasp morphology but above all it means to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.

The book of Daniel is one of the most referenced books with a large general consensus amongst scholars that it can be dated to the Hellenistic era (Niskanen 2004; Dever 2001 et al.). Another book that has been attributed to this era is Qohelet, which through comparative studies scholars have related philosophical motifs found in Qohelet such as stoicism, Epicureanism and scepticism to Greek doctrines and argued for a Greek influence (Thompson 2012; Gericke 2012; Sekine 2014; Collins 2005; Sneed 2012 et al).

The social and political history of Palestine remains largely in the dusky areas of history, specifically in the early Hellenistic period between Alexander the Great and the death of Antiochus III leading to the downfall of the Hellenistic empire. The few fragments preserved and discovered largely allude to the military conquests and the politic concerned. While much of the information about the social conditions is recovered from a chance combination of archaeology and papyrological discoveries.

The unanimous discovery is that Judah went through a process of Hellenistic cultural hybridity by means of socialization which is evident in the kind of literature produced by the Judeans. Very little is known about the degree of this

Hellenization because non-Jewish literary sources are silent and hardly provide any information about the adoption of Hellenism by the Jews (Hengel 1980:51).

Although non-Jewish sources show very little concern for the adoption of Hellenism by the Jews, for the Jewish literature that can be dated to that period (i.e. Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Songs of Songs) are usually used as 'indirect evidence' of how Hellenism infiltrated or was rejected by the Judeans (Hengel 1980:51).[11] Due to the biased nature of Judean literature from the diaspora, it is difficult to make a clear complete picture because the vast majority of Jewish literature is religious and nationalistic propaganda. It is thus only reasonable to assess the information from individual experiences (i.e. Ecclesiastes in this case) although it does not give a complete picture at best. However, Hengel's thesis is clear; Judaism in Palestine was significantly influenced by Hellenism in the third and second centuries.

Greek-speaking Jews are believed to have produced literature which unfortunately could not be preserved as a complete corpus; however, the Jews are still the only South-Eastern people to have left behind some substantial literature (Collins 2005:1).[12] Literature from the diaspora was classified as Apologetic Literature (Egyptian Jewry literature). This type of literature was viewed as apologetic because it sought to defend Judaism from attacks and win gentiles from the gentile world (Collins 2005:2).

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[11] The terms Hellenism and Hellenization have been disputed as to what they mean. In the present context we are discussing, 'Hellenism' does not only mean a historical period but is to be understood as the designation of a clearly defined culture which sought to take over Judaism through military coup's and cultural hybridity.

[12] The distinction between Greek speaking Jews and Jews is made because the encounter between Judaism and Hellenism took place in two arenas, in Israel and in the Diaspora (Egypt). Although the dynamics were different

The literature was a vast variety and not only apologetic but also consisted of epic poetry, chronographic, national romance, ethnography, allegorical interpretation of scripture to mention a few (Holladay 2002:66). In the alternative variety, Holladay notes that there is an openness to experiment with new literary genres that are quite markedly different from those of the Bible. According to Holladay (2002:66), literary genres provide "barometric readings of the ways Greek-speaking Jews read and interpreted Hellenistic culture," and that in these texts, "we get some sense of which Hellenistic values mattered to them. We also catch a glimpse of what Greek texts they were reading and which ones they considered important enough to imitate."

If the possibility exist that Judaism and Hellenism have a long history before Alexander, then the question begs, which Greek ideas and attitudes did the Philistines bring to Jerusalem. Feldman (2006:74-75) argues that the examples often used to support arguments of Hellenization are often individual Jew and Greek encounters and are thus not substantial to account for acculturation (i.e. Nicholaus of Damascus a Greek philosopher who philosophized with Herod; coins antedate of Alexander; the identification of Enoch (Gen 5:21-22) with Greek mythical Atlas; Theodotus' poem on Shechem) all prove that a philosopher engaging a King, coins, comparing figures and writing poems does not equal Hellenization. The corpus of literature from Palestinian Jews was distinctively different from that of the diaspora.

This encounter between Judaism and Hellenism has not been an unanimously shared view. Gruen (1988:1-40) argued that Judaism and Hellenism were not competing systems or incompatible concepts. It would be inaccurate to assume

that Hellenization meant an erosion of Jewish culture and assimilation. Collins (2005:22) argues that Hellenism was a manifold entity whose different aspects should be differentiated and qualified because Hellenism was not rejected or absorbed as a whole.

2.1.1. Language

The contact between Jews and the Greeks took place in two different arenas. For reasons that were religious rather than cultural, the initial attempt to turn Jerusalem into a Greek polis was met with resistance (Collins 2005:1). With the same dedication scholars attempted to show clear contact points between Judaism and Hellenism, the same has been done to demonstrate that the two were not completely antagonistic. Collins (2005:23) argues that the way of life survived quite well in Greek-speaking diaspora, and was not seriously threatened by the spread of the Greek language. This is because Judaism was a manifold entity and not all aspects were equally important. Jews were not entirely obliged to adapt or die.

The first aspect of Hellenism as a cultural force and its influence on the Jews is often identifiable by the dissemination of language in Palestine. The question "Bilingual Jews/ Greek speaking Jews?" is rooted in the assumption that there were Greek speaking Jews in Palestine and the diaspora alike. Hengel (1974:58) similarly argues that the glue that held the Hellenistic world together even after the death of Alexander was Attic *koine* whose sphere of influence stretched beyond the influence of Aramaic, the Persian kingdom language. The pervasiveness of the language was promulgated by trade, merchants dealt in Greek, treaties and laws were concluded in it, and it was social capital for

anyone who sought respect or to have a reputation had to have a good command of Greek (Hengel 1974:58). Language was a clear prerequisite to be able to understand Greek culture.

Baumgarten (2006:13) argues that bilingualism poses a potential for the speakers of both languages as they can also be bicultural since culture expresses a whole cultural outlook. For Jews, the greatest test came when they had to translate their foundational documents, the Torah in particular into Greek in the face of this cultural wave.

Feldman (2006:2) is, however, sceptical of this interaction between the Jews and Greeks for a number of reasons: (1) travellers such as Hecataeus of Miletus and Herodotus did not find it easy to gain entry into the interior of the countries; (2) Greeks were generally monolingual and it is suspected that they were able to communicate with the Jews; and lastly, (3) the Greeks disturbed the peace of the Persian Empire at the time where Jerusalem was being rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and would hardly be welcomed.

Granting Feldman's contention may find some traction, it is also however unavoidable that although Greeks might not be able to communicate with Jews due to their monolingualism, Jews, however, required Greek to gain entry into Greek culture. Hengel (1974:60) argues that Greek language penetration into Jerusalem was also strengthened by contacts with the Diaspora in Egypt and Asia Minor, Aegean and most importantly the temple in Jerusalem which attracted pilgrims.

Greek loan words just as Greek names are also a viable indicator on the prevalence of Hellenism in Jerusalem. Hengel (1974:60) argues that although the loans are extremely rare in the Old Testament, they are nevertheless present. However, there are words such as *appiryon* which is most likely adapted from the Greek meaning "sedan chair" and also comparable to the various musical instruments in Daniel 3. Hengel (1974:60) reiterates that unlike literary Hebrew, popular Hebrew and Aramaic adopted Greek loanwords as evident in the Mishnaic and Talmudic literature.

Any texts can be compared, but not all comparisons are equally relevant or meaningful (Thom 2009:209). Feldman (2006:38-39) argues that in establishing the influence of Hellenism on Judaism, we should follow a strict methodology that avoids what she refers to as *'parallelomania'* a neologism coined by Samuel Sandman that is explained as; when we wish to assert the likelihood of influence it is important to establish that it was chronologically possible for commercial contact to have occurred and that such a contact was considerable and over a period of time, the implication being that cultural contact follows trade routes.

With Feldman's line of reason on this point, I am compelled to agree because history should reflect who people were based on their unique experiences and not on their experience of conquest. Comparative studies ignore this to their own detriment. According to Feldman (2006:39) (1) many Achaean merchants and craftsman lived in Ugarit, (2) literary material must have existed during the time of commercial contact, (3) the actual literary and cultural parallels must be sufficiently unique to fulfil a rigours set of relevant criteria and lastly, (4) the

parallels both in the realm of ideas and actual language, must be sufficiently numerous, complex, and detailed, and must involve central figures of the material being compared, so as to rule out pure chance. It is Feldman's (2006:39) conclusion that 'to show influence is not to show origin, and to show origin is not to show fundamental influence'.

No one language can lay claim to a specific style of writing, sometimes literary tools can be found to be ubiquitous and therefore lay claim to one another, but do not necessarily point to a prototype of writing. Glicksman (2011:8) argues similarly that many Jewish authors composed works in Greek with vocabulary, syntax and style of Semitic colouring. This then authenticates my claim that intertextuality of literary encounters does not amount to a mirroring of texts or knowledge of one another, but it can also suppose a congruence between thought patterns and themes expressed. Glicksman (2011:11) who also believes that the book might have been composed by one Greek author, also argues that it is not entirely impossible that it was written by a school of Jewish Hellenists who jointly composed and edited the book. As we will see in the author and composer theory, the two are not interchangeable because the author is the one who literally puts words on paper and the composer combines all the literary fragments into one literary unit.

2.1.2. The Wisdom of Solomon as an example of 'Hellenised' texts

The Wisdom of Solomon which is quite different from older Hebrew wisdom writings i.e. Proverbs, Qohelet and Ben Sira, was written in the Greek of Alexandria in the middle of the first century (Collins 2005:143). The author

introduces himself as King Solomon although not immediately but later on Chapter 7 (Glicksman 2011:6). This introduction is anachronistic largely due to the Hellenistic thought that permeates the book therefore making the book a pseudo graphical work where the author is trying to gain authority for his sapiential work (Glicksman 2011:7).

Glicksman (2011:8-9) reasons that the book was written by a Hellenised Jew he then refers to pseudo-Solomon while in the eighteenth century it was once believed that the book was written by Solomon himself in Hebrew while others argued from an Aramaic as the original language (i.e. Collins 2002:93). Three main reasons are proposed by those who espouse the position of a Semitic original for the book namely; (1) The Wisdom of Solomon exhibits numerous Hebraisms and Aramaisms, (2) Strong presence of Hebrew poetic devices knows as *parallelismus membrorum* found throughout the book, and (3) the book contains passages that are difficult to understand in the Greek (Glicksman 2011:8). This means that, through literary and textual criticism, the book mirrored a near exactness to the Biblical Wisdom tradition in terms of style and language therefore affording authenticity to the Semitic original claim of the book.

In the second half of Wisdom of Solomon, the author draws heavily on the tradition of Israeli's liberation from its Egyptian captors supposing an Egyptian milieu in Alexandria (Glicksman 2011:12). However, the liberation model of Egypt would have found relevance because Israelite theology used it as a didactic tale. The Wisdom of Solomon uses techniques of Greek philosophy in order to structure a coherent argument about the value and pragmatism of wisdom. Like traditional Israelite wisdom literature, the book deals with

universal truths and not particular events (Glicksman 2011:1). The biblical terminology is generally retained in the process of transposing texts into philosophical expressions. Greek philosophical terms jostle freely with Biblical locutions (Winston 2002:109). There is a considerable influence of Greek philosophy a philosophy recognized as 'Middle Platonism', which combines Stoicism and Platonic idea of a transcendent deity (Collins 2002:94).

The book which is described as *logos protreptikos* or didactic exhortation alternatively the commends of wisdom or *encomium* is dedicated towards the telling of "what wisdom is and how she came to be," wisdom portrayed "in terms often used for Stoic Logos, as a spirit that holds things together and orders all things well" (Collins 2002:94). Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon it is important to note that it is not itself the deity, but a "breath of the power of God" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26). Wisdom becomes a mediator between God and humanity (Collins 2002:95).

While the Wisdom of Solomon shows clear signs of Stoic influences,[13] it is evident in the central topics of the two texts such as the role of Reason (*Logos*) and Wisdom (*Sophia*) in structuring and maintaining the cosmic order and the moral problems of those who do not recognize God's providence (Thom 2009:196).

Cleanthes of Assos (331/30-230/29 B.C.E.) was second in line to head the Stoa in Athens in 262/261 B.C.E. His only complete text to survive from early Stoicism was his *Hymn to Zeus.* Since Zeus was perceived as both immanent

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[13] Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus is one of the best representative texts of early Stoicism.

and transcendent, the 39-line hymn is considered to be both philosophical and religious, reflecting the typical tripartite structure of ancient hymns; (1) Invocation (vv. 1-6), (2) Argument (vv. 7-31), and lastly, (3) Prayer (vv. 32-39) (Thom 2009:197).

The Wisdom of Solomon does though differ slightly in terms of genre, it belonged to Jewish apocalyptic literature although influenced heavily by Hellenism philosophical thought. The Wisdom of Solomon differs in these points; (1) it is larger in size and contains more diverse topics, (2) it was written in Alexandria in the 1st Century, and lastly (3) the book has a different function. Comparatively, both books find significance in that they both praise divine Wisdom, and life as guided by wisdom (Thom 2009:198).

In the Hymn of Zeus, the term *σοφία* (Wisdom) is not explicitly mentioned, however, it is implied throughout the poem. Another term used in the poem is *λόγος* 'reason' or 'rationality' a term pervasive in Stoicism, in Hellenistic Judaism, *logos* became functionally equivalent to wisdom. Therefore, this establishes a point of contact between the two books and we can establish that in the Hymn of Zeus, the wisdom motif was directly related to divine rationality at work in the universe (Thom 2009:199). Below is a comparison of the two texts and their points of contacts of how divine rationality (or Wisdom) plays a role in the cosmos, human beings and with God (Thom 2009:199-206):

Hymn of Zeus	Wisdom of Solomon
(1) Wisdom and the Cosmos (*κοινὸς λόγος)*: the cosmos here acts as a participant in the divine order, it obeys	(1) Wisdom and the Cosmos: logos is seen as a spirit (*pneuma*) that fills the world and holds it

(vv. 7-8), there is no cosmos outside of God's planned order (vv. 15-16). Nature then becomes for Cleanthes the perfect installation of the conformity of divine order. The cosmos does not only act as a perfect example of rational behaviour but it is also filled with rationality itself because it gives structure and coherence (vv. 12-13). The divine order is however not fully realized because there are still elements that are in conflict (γίγνεσθαι, v. 21). This means that Cleanthes perceived the divine order as a living entity that was able to rationalize and order nature, and that rationalization could only be possible through wisdom (the knowledge of how things worked).

(2) Human beings and Wisdom: Humans in the cosmic order play an indecisive position because, although they are more privileged than animals and can bear Zeus's resemblance, they can still play a negative role. This will refer us back to the first point that the cosmic order has elements that are in conflict, and for Cleanthes those elements are human being because natural elements could not be negative. Human beings can disrupt God's order with their foolish acts (κακοί). It is important to note that these bad people do not have bad behaviour necessarily, but they are epistemologically impaired; ignorance.

(3) God and Wisdom: Cleanthes' deity is both immanent and transcendent in that, he transcends the world ordered by him giving him space to act. He is able to change the disorder made by human beings (v. 19), and save them from it (v. 33).

together (vv. 1:6-7). Wisdom fashions (vv. 7:22; 8:6), pervades and penetrates (v. 7:24), renews (v. 7:27), and stretches out (v. 8:1). Described in feminine terms, wisdom is intimately involved in creation, and she understand the whole 'constituting of the world' (v. 7:17). Due to her intimate knowledge of God, she can impart both secrets and knowledge (vv. 7:21-22). Wisdom therefore mediates in the Wisdom of Solomon, and human beings can understand the world order because their faculty of reasoning with the way the world is structured. Likewise, cosmic order and rational order share the same rationale, logos and Sophia are equated.

(2) Human beings and Wisdom: here the distinction between the wise and the foolish, righteous and unrighteous. The foolish and ungodly, have unsound reason, and their thoughts are perverse and deceitful (vv. 2:1; 1:2-5). Their folly makes them unable to recognize the beauty of God's creation and goodness (v. 13:1-9; 13-15). There is a fixed relationship between their ungodly actions and consequences, i.e. the ungodly bring 'death upon themselves with their erroneous way of life' (vv. 1:12; 16), the righteous are protected and given immortality (1:15; 5:15; 8:13, 17; 10:1, 4-6; 15:3). Furthermore, wisdom must be sought and those who find her become wise.

The Hymn of Zeus does not only praise divine wisdom in the cosmos, its work in the lives of human beings, and as the breath power of God it also highlights how human beings can be impaired epistemologically. Their ignorance disrupts the 'rational world order' envisioned by God.	(3) God and Wisdom: wisdom here is described in further andromorphic terms as 'sitting beside God on his throne' (v. 9:4), and she had perfect knowledge of God's plans (vv. 9:9; 11). She is a 'spotless mirror of the activity of God and an image of his goodness' (v. 7:26).

A number of similarities and differences can be detected from the two texts, in the Hymn of Zeus, human beings are inherently evil until they can be epistemologically aligned with the rationale of Zeus and need Zeus to save them and impart knowledge on them. In Wisdom of Solomon there is a clear retributive cycle that those who are wise will receive immortality and those who are ungodly die due to their erroneous acts. Despite differences in literary genre, social location, and time, there is a clear similarity on how ancient notions of wisdom were perceived, as intimately involved in creation, as the breath of God's power and as something human beings should seek and understand its inner workings.

During the Greek and Roman periods, it was not unusual to find Jewish apocalypse literature with Greek influence, an example of this kind of literature is provided by the Wisdom of Solomon (Collins 2003: 94). In Chapter 5 there is a judgement scene that is modelled after the beginning of the servant song in Isaiah 52:13-15. In Isa 52:13 the servant song exalts a servant who was once despised and shall be lifted up. In apocalyptic literature, the transformation of a despised servant becomes the paradigm for the transformation of the righteous. There is a close parallel between this judgment scene and 1 Enoch

37-71 where kings of the earth are in dismay when they see the Son of Man who had been hidden sits on his throne with Glory (Collins 2002:95). Chapter 5, the judgement scene is said to be resolving a conflict of reasoning encountered in Chapter 2:12-20 where the wicked pursue a life of self-indulgence and exploitation of the belief that they were 'born by chance'. Collins (2002:96) then argues that, the judgement scene seems to have been written in a language familiar to Hebrew and Aramaic apocalyptic literature i.e.:

- "How has he been reckoned among the sons of God, and his lot is among the holy ones (*angels)*" (Wisdom of Solomon 5:5).

- hymnist in the Hodayot from Qumran: "You have purified the corrupt spirit from great sin so that he can take his place with the host of the holy ones and can enter into communion with the sons of heaven" (1QH 11:21-22).

- The Epistle of Enoch promises the righteous that "you will have great joy as the angels in heaven for you will be companions to the host of heaven" (1 En 104:2-6).

Collins (2002:97-98) concludes that, the author of Wis 2:12-20 and 5:1-7 most likely had an apocalyptic source most likely composed in Hebrew and Aramaic and adopted it for their own purposes. This is also because, the idea that we find of immortality on Wisdom of Solomon does not take the form of resurrection. From Chapter 1:13 "God did not make death", death is personified to resemble the figure of Mot in Ugaritic myth, also reflected in Isa 25:7 where death is swallowed up by God forever.

2.1.3. Congruencies between Wisdom of Solomon and Qohelet

With the exception that both books mention Solomon in title and superscription, there is a commonality in themes that are echoed in both texts. While the books are wisdom literature, they differ slightly as Qohelet is said to belong to a branch of wisdom literature known as 'sceptical wisdom' (Dell 1991: page). This is because Qohelet addresses the absurdities of life without conforming to the typical dichotomous tradition of piety wisdom and the Wisdom of Solomon does not challenge tradition wisdom but rather advances and defends it (Grabbe 2014:201).

Grabbe (2014:202) believes that Qohelet (and the author of Job) were geniuses of their time and people had little regard for their sophisticated ways of writing and thus attempted to revert to simple piety traditional wisdom and the Wisdom of Solomon follows this pattern. It is for this reason that unlike Sirach who ignores Job and Qohelet and focuses more on Proverbs, the author of Wisdom of Solomon takes on the challenges of Qohelet and Job drawing from his Greek cultural environment (Hayman 1999:125).

It is made clear though that there is no strong indication that the author of Wisdom of Solomon had any knowledge about Qohelet and the other way around. This does not render an intertextual study unbeneficial because both are products of the Hellenistic period and it will be beneficial to see the degrees of Hellenism in both texts. However, there is a possibility that Wisdom of Solomon was opposing some of Qohelet's perspectives specifically about short-term enjoyment (4:3-6) which Qohelet (2:24-26) clearly advocates. There

is also a radical shift from which Jewish Wisdom tradition emerged that Wisdom of Solomon departs from (Hayman 1999:126).

Wisdom of Solomon is far from the sceptical character we find in Qohelet, instead, the author of the former preserves the tradition of wisdom (Grabbe 2014:201). The tradition alluded to here is the piety wisdom grounded on the leitmotif of retribution, retaining the teachings we see discredited in Qohelet (i.e. there is not even short-term enjoyment (4:3–6); they certainly do not benefit if they live a long time (3:16–19; 4:16; 5:8–14) (Grabbe 2014:202).

Without any rigorous from criticism, the very few similarities that can be accounted for is that both books have a (royal) autobiographical introduction in both Wisdom of Solomon (introduction of the speaker as Solomon 7:1-9; 9:8; 18) and Qohelet (speaker identifies himself as "Solomon" who ruled over Jerusalem 1:1). A number of differences can be gathered from the analysis of both books and they are as follows (Grabbe 2014:212):

Wisdom of Solomon	Ecclesiastes
(1) The narrator speaks in 1st person throughout the book.	(1) In certain instances, the speaker switches from 1st to 3rd person.
(2) Solomon is both ideal king and sage.	(2) The sage in Qohelet assumes a different identity than that the king.
(3) God is universal and not particular to a nation.	(3) God is the God of Israel.
(4) Wisdom is gained through prayer.	(4) Wisdom is gained through empirical ways of testing knowledge.
(5) Wisdom is commended	(5) Wisdom is critiqued

| (6) Immortality is available for the righteous | (6) Life ceases at death |
| (7) Only the wicked focus on the present life, sort term enjoyment does not exist | (7) Carpe Diem principle: Enjoy life while you still have it. |

Qohelet and Wisdom of Solomon may differ radically in certain instances as indicated above, still fundamentally espouse philosophical ideals. Qohelet has often been accused of being an Epicurean sympathiser because according to Qohelet, there is nothing more pleasurable than to enjoy life than to take pleasure in toil (see Eccl 9:7-9) (Grabbe 2014:205). This does not mean that Qohelet probably had Epicurus in mind nevertheless there is some similarity in thought patterns. Epicurus and his friend around 306 BC made a radical innovation by removing themselves from employment, to remove themselves from everyday affairs in order to lead a simpler life in exchange for independence (de Botton 2000:58). Epicurious assembled into categories of three all the things he deemed as essentials for happiness.

There are natural and necessary essentials like friends, freedom, thought (about main sources of anxiety; death; illness, poverty, superstition), food, shelter and clothes (de Botton 2000:60). There are also natural but unnecessary essentials such as a grand house, private baths, banquets, servants, fish, and meat. Lastly there are either natural or necessary essentials like fame and power (de Botton 2000:60). Epicurus espoused a philosophy of moderate living and simplicity which is strikingly similar to Qohelet's advice. The Wisdom of Solomon, in contrast, does not advocate for and speaks negatively of short-term enjoyment thereby denouncing hedonism.

Another fundamental significant difference we see in the issue of the afterlife. Israelite theology primarily believed that life ceases at death (Grabbe 2014:207). Qohelet appears to follow this reasoning although he later seems to radically shift from the traditional thought and expresses his thoughts through doubt i.e. Eccl 3:21 "Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" (Grabbe 2014:207). The Wisdom of Solomon ties the issue of righteousness and wickedness because it is the righteous soul that has a chance at immortality (2:23; 3:4) (Grabbe 2014:207). This righteousness is though not inherent but a gift from God to the righteous (3:4; 4:1; 8:13, 17; 15:3) a doctrine held by the author as *metempsychosis* which means that souls transmigrate as he recounts (Grabbe 2014:208): "As a child I was naturally gifted, and a good soul fell to my lot, or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body" (NRSV).

This doctrine then pits the wicked and the righteous the former with a nihilistic attitude for and the former with hope for immortality (Hogan 1999:1). Pseudo-Solomon also used ambiguous Greek terms for death to signify the difference in meaning for the righteous and wicked (Hogan 1999:2). The differences would mean that the wicked do not know anything about physical mortality and the death of the soul while the righteous knew that their souls are immortal and destined for union with God (Hogan 1999:2).

Synthesis

The confabulation of Hellenism and Hellenistic has led to a conclusion overtime that the Jews had lost all autonomy. Contrary to popular belief, they enjoyed relative autonomy. It is but the prevalence of Hellenism as a culture that had

evident influence on the literary outputs of the time. That cannot be evaded nor avoided as we see in several books which date to the Hellenistic era. We observe in books such as Daniel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, to name a few.

These Judaism and Hellenistic literary encounters have the hallmarks of borrowed argumentative techniques, schools of thought, cultural elements and philosophical ideas. It is only a testament of when and how the two came onto contact or indicative of influence but not assimilation. This is particularly interesting when cognisance of the act that there might have been contact prior to the Hellenistic era and the question is which elements survived and which were re-appropriated into Judaism.

Hellenistic cultural or philosophical influences do not only take place in geographical Judaism but also in the diaspora. Even a colonized people still have room to produce, think and reimaging their existence. It is not always on written word and orality cannot be totally ruled out as means of transmitting messages related to the tribe or nation.

The Wisdom of Solomon is a good example to illustrate the literary encounters between Judaism and Hellenism. It is the perfect example because in reading between those congruencies we get to see how more than bilingualism and loan words there was even literature produced with the lending of Greek philosophical ideas and argumentative techniques. It is therefore of paramount importance to document them as part of the history of the prevalence of Hellenism in Judaism and diaspora.

Chapter 3: Historical-critical perspectives

Introduction

There is no historical thinking without normative elements or values, which are used to make sense of the experience of the past. The past is not in itself already history, but it becomes history by an interpretation, and every historical interpretation uses a criterion of judgment to develop a perspective of significance in which the experience of the past has to be moulded into the narrative feature of history.
(Rüsen 2005:135).

The quotation above demonstrates the difficult task of trying to reconstruct history when dealing with ancient texts. Biblical texts are not social photographs as they are composed of their own religiously motivated and socio-cultural influenced ideologies, which beg for a reconstruction. As it has been widely asserted that the Bible was not written for religious purposes, this makes the task of reconfiguring the history behind the biblical text's painstaking to the textual critic when trying to discern between elements that constitute the real society and ideology. The authors also have their own subjective biases, cultural, traditional and cultural influences that draw the line between truth and objectivity.

It is therefore the task of the textual critic to employ the same normative elements or values necessary and a certain level of judgement or hermeneutic of suspicion. The book of Ecclesiastes (Qohelet) will also be subjected to the

same scrutiny in order to discern the historicity of the text, social and geographical location of the author and his audience, the literary structure of the book and the possible dating.

3.1. Social location

In 323 B.C.E. Alexander the Great had conquered most of the civilized world only to die prematurely. Immediately following his death, the battle for the succession of his Empire began. It was Ptolemy, one of Alexander's closest companions who established himself as ruler in his own right after the empire disintegrated. He bestowed upon himself the title of king and became Ptolemy I Soter ("Saviour") and founded the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, which would last for nearly three hundred years (Sneed 2012:86).

The Ptolemaic kings integrated well into Egyptian society even adopting their customs of marrying their sisters and it was this incest behaviour, which led to the disintegration of the Ptolemaic Empire. Nevertheless, before that, they Ptolemais catered for the Egyptians building temples for their gods and as a result the Egyptian priests enjoyed a certain level of comfort and privilege (Sneed 2012:86).

The Greeks who migrated to Egypt were awarded land grants and this elevated them into upper echelons of Egyptian society. This introduced in what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci calls hegemony. Gottwald (1993:3) describes hegemony in the Hebrew Bible as, wealth and power from three sources that reinforce one another. The first is the traditional hegemony of religious and

theological categories in biblical studies, which stubbornly resists sociology as a threat to the religious integrity and authority of scripture.

As any society that is divided by class would have it, the imbalance would lead to a series of revolts because the subjects are not always going to be generous to their benefactors. This is because the administration of the Ptolemais survived on taxation; subject towns like Jerusalem enjoyed a certain level of peace as long as they paid their taxes (Gottwald 1993:442). The Jews were thus general free as long as they pay their taxes. The Ptolemaic administrative system involved a layering of bureaucracy. In Egypt, next to the king was the *diokētēs*, "the minister of finance and economic affairs," who was "the real administrator of the kingdom" (Sneed 2012:91).

Although the Ptolemaic taxation of subjugated peoples was oppressive, there were some benefits brought by the kingdom, one of the benefits being peace from foreign aggression (Sneed 2012:98). The same way the Ptolemaic maintained good relations with the Egyptian Priests, they maintained the same symbolic relationship with the Judean Priests who helped to control the collection of taxes and keep order in Ptolemaic Judah. Depending on the governing class, the Priests because of their duties and social status would be exempt from taxes (Lenski, *Power and Privilege,* 260).

There was another class of aristocrats who constituted another social stratum. Tcherikover surmises, "There is no doubt that they were the strongest class after the priests" (Tcherikover, 1956:120.) This group became the natural spokesperson of the native people and it has been argued that if it were not for the Ptolemy then this group would have reigned supreme. This group is similar

to what the Judges were before the monarchy was established in pre-monarch Israel. Tcherikover further argues that this group might be older than the priests and finds its root in the Persian period (i.e. Nehemiah 5).

For a nation that has experienced exile, from all accounts it looks like the Jews embraced Hellenism, as Tcherikover (1956:120) argues Hellenism might have been psychologically appealing. Greenspoon (1998:422) attests to the same facts and states:

> Hellenism posed a unique challenge. It incorporated a worldview and way of life that appeared to avoid the excesses and unacceptable features of earlier outsiders' religions and cultures; at the same time, it offered elevated concepts that would join Jews to the rest of the culturally and economically advantaged of the known world (Greenspoon 1998 422).

The upper class seems to have easily embraced Hellenism because that group of elites mostly consisted of the priests and secular aristocracy who could read and write and were in charge of keeping order and also acted as mediators. This is precisely why social class affects the degree of Hellenization (Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 23–24; cf. Tcherikover, 1956:142). It is still, disingenuous to assume that the rest of the Jews were passive to the process of Hellenization because there are certain instances of resistance displayed.

It is now apparent that Judah was under the dominance of Ptolemy as part of Alexander the Greats' Empire. The Ptolemies had a number of subject towns that were paying taxes and that is largely how the kingdom survived for many centuries. Due to the Greeks being monolingual, which made it difficult for them

to speak to the Jews, it was not that easy for them to enter into the interiors of their subject towns like Judah. The Greeks also disturbed peace in Jerusalem during the rebuilding after the Babylonian exile under Ezra and Nehemiah which made them more or less welcome (Feldman 2006:4).

Survival in Egypt depended upon the good relations they had established with the Egyptian priesthood. Lastly, through the monopoly of the Egyptian industries, the kingdom was able to sustain itself through profits and by allowing the merchants to integrate into the upper-class society. To balance power, the Ptolemies were careful not to seize land unlawfully as that would upset the lower class with fears of major revolts that would destabilize the kingdom. People were allowed to be free in their lands as long as they paid taxes. This made the subject town semi-autonomous.

3.2. Dating

The dating of Ecclesiastes has been contested with a myriad of opinions throughout the archives of scholarship history. Superscripts are often an aid for the identification of the author to locate the book in a certain historical setting and period. Grounded on the reference "Son of David" it has been proposed that the author of Ecclesiastes was Solomon, therefore, dating the book traditionally to the time of his reign as King from ca. 965–928 B.C.E. Nevertheless, Solomon is only mentioned in the superscript and the book is not written in first person but largely in third person suggestion a frame narrator, consequently, dispelling Solomonic authorship.

A linguistic examination of the book further dispels the Solomonic period as possible dating of the book. The language in the book betrays a later date because much of the syntax and many nominal formations can be paralleled from centuries later due to the many Aramaic constructions (Zimmerman 1945:17 & Collins 2014:563). An example is the use of the root word *slt* which is mostly found in Aramaic legal documents dating from the Persian period (Seow 1999:47). The root word *slt* in extra-biblical material and extra-biblical texts had "technical" legal or economic nuance which usually referred to the legal rights which a person may be granted to impose taxes, dispose of gods or slaves or to perform certain actions specified in the documents. Seow (1999:47) therefore argues that Ecclesiastes uses the word in the same sense i.e. 2:9; 5:18; 6:2 and perhaps 7:19. To which he dates the book in the Persian period.

There are thus three chronological possibilities for the dating of Qohelet which are, the Solomonic era,[14] the Persian era, and (but not limited to) the Hellenistic era. Broadly and with no specific date, the book has been described either pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic. These historical periods are often characterized by their social, political, cultural and linguistic factors which are malleable enough to be applied in any given period. A precise unanimous dating of the book is most likely never going to be reached. What follows is a survey of the different arguments that have been proposed.

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[14] Based on language and other arguments that is given above and will be discussed later on, this option will later on be ruled out as a possibility.

3.2.1.　　Linguistic evidence for dating

There prevalence of Aramaisms (otherwise Aramaic loan words) in Qohelet has led scholars to conclude what is now known as the "translation theory". The translation theory suggests that the author of Qohelet was likely writing during a time where Aramaic was intensified and was translating certain words from Aramaic into Hebrew (Zimmerman 1949:80-81). There are other late texts such as Esther, Daniel, and Chronicles with a high frequency of Aramaisms which were taken to be indicative of a late date (Mroczek 2013:334). Qohelet also represented a similar diachronic development of Hebrew that was espoused by scholars such as Delitzsch (1975), Gordis (1946) and Zimmerman (1945 & 1949).

Zimmerman (1945:18-19) observes that it seems as though the author of Qohelet had difficulty expressing himself. Although the author writes intelligibly many of the proverbs in the book seemed to lack 'crispness' and are obscure therefore asking the question "why would a writer who deliberately writes for himself and his audience would take great pains expressing himself?". The translation hypothesis seems then to be the frame of reference to assist in resolving these difficulties in Qohelet.

As a practical example to verify his argument Zimmerman (1945:20-22) centers it upon the definite article הַ its uses and misuses in Qohelet. The standard textbook grammatical function of a definite article is that a definite article represents a noun's Identifiability. This implies that when a noun is definite, it should be identifiable by reader/listener. The following example is considered: "I want to buy _the book_" in the clause given the definite noun phrase signals to

the reader the 'real-world' referent (the object referred to is precise and easily identified by the reader/listener). However, when a noun is underdetermined and not definite: "I want to buy *a book*" means that the referent object is unidentifiable until it is identified through sight and description (Cook & Holmstedt 2009:19).

It is Zimmerman's (1945:21) contention that Qohelet sometimes uses the definite article carelessly – when it is required it is absent and when it is not required it is utilized. An example of its unrequired use is in 3:17 where חפץ indicates that המעשה should be undetermined. Another instance is in 3:13 where the article has unnecessary use before האדם because in the sentence it would then read as "the man also whom God has given riches and wealth to him etc." instead of "every man". The hypothesis to explain these grammatical errors is that Qohelet was translating Aramaic to Hebrew because in Aramaic, principally many nouns are only known in their determinative state (Zimmerman 1945:21).

Zimmerman (1949:80-81) also argues that because the author was translating from an original language because it is appalling to him that there would be a misreading on one specific word in all forms that it appears as it is in 6:10 which leads him to believe that perhaps at one time there was only one reading of the word. Nonetheless, according to Miller (1998:16), Qohelet is infamous for antanaclasis, using one word for different meanings, one example is the two different *Hiphil* forms of נוה in Eccl 10:4 "If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave (נוה) your post, for calmness will appease (נוה) great offenses".

There are other words which are considered as Aramaisms according to Mroczek (2013:347-351) which are:

A. טחנה (Qohelet 12:4) the word which means "mill" appears in the Persian period Aramaic papyrus for Saqqara, although the masculine noun טחון appears in Lamentations (5:13). It is Mroczek's (2013:348) argument that although the form of the root might be uncommon in Hebrew, this does not amount to outside influence.

B. The root שלם (Qohelet 2:19; 5:18; 6:2; 8:4; 8) Qal. *be whole*, Piel. *reward, pay* which features predominantly in Seow's (1996:653-654) linguistic argument for dating the book to the Persian period maintains that the word was used in legal Aramaic documents meaning legal right of disposal.

C. The word זמן (Qohelet 3:1) meaning 'time" is the most referenced for Qohelet's Aramaisms. In the Hebrew Bible the word can also be found in Nehemiah (2:6) and Esther (9:27, 31).

There are on the other hand a few limitations to the Aramaisms hypothesis. This implies that the suggestion that to properly expound Qohelet one needs a reconstruction of the Aramaic language which has since lost some traction. The fundamental objection besides the book lacking "crispness" is that it is inevitable that a person faced with a new text in a new language would seamlessly translate it word for word. Human error is guaranteed if that were the case. Sometimes texts are emended purposefully to reflect the views of the translator and their context of meaning. Gordis (1946:69) supports this view and states: "He may tacitly emend the text, read irrelevant matters into it, and

generally fail to penetrate its meaning. But ultimately, he decides upon some view of the passage, which he then expresses in his idiom."

Gordis (1949:70) further contends and argues that Zimmerman's view that words such as מעשה were thoughtlessly mistranslated is false, rather the word occurs sixteen times before the said passage in Qohelet and four times thereafter! This then would mean that Qohelet was deliberate in the repetitive misuse of the word or had a huge lap of memory. Zimmerman (1949:82) opposes that Gordis failed to comprehend the psychology of the translator because during the writing process the author assumes a conscious and unconscious state of writing. The unconscious becomes active when the translator cannot grasp the meaning of the original word and therefore renders meaning according to his best knowledge and experience familiar with the word. Zimmerman substantiates the blind spots in his argument, still, I agree with Gordis that often translators often express their own idioms and generate new meaning with uncommon words or those that speak to a different experience.[15]

Seow's argument that שלט is also a loan word is debunked as can be misleading because the word is also used in Genesis 42:6 and further in Daniel! There is also not enough evidence to prove and even Seow himself does not mention the possibility of the word being used before the Persian

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[15] This can be proved practically when we read the Northern and Southern Sotho translations of the English Bible in the Lord's Prayer and in many other instances as well. Both translations read 'boġobe/bohobe' in Matthew 6:11 for the word 'bread', however, in Northern Sotho the translation would render 'mealie meal/*pap*' while in Southern Sotho the translation would render 'bread' like the original English translation. This does not mean that the translators did not understand the English, but rather appropriated the word to suit how the dialect expresses the word in its own meaning.

period. Gordis (1946:68) also argues against the proposed hypothesis brought forward by Zimmerman specifically that Ben Sira was the author of Qohelet because according to him, Ben Sira is written in the form of poetry and not prose and thus it will naturally seek to appropriate the earlier classical style, this does not mean that Ben Sira is the author of Qohelet. Ben Sira was only imitative of scripture.

Delitzsch (1975:190) argued famously that "If the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic beginning, then there is no history of the Hebrew language." This then implies that attributing the book of Qohelet to Solomon based on linguistic evidence also betrays an earlier date. To which Delitzsch concluded that according to the language of the book, then it should be dated to the post-exilian period of Ezra-Nehemiah. Crenshaw (1987:50) further attest and says: "A date for Qohelet between 225 and 250 remains most likely." Miller concludes that: "Such literary dexterity is part of Qohelet's style". This would mean that the copyist used the form of word that was more commonly used especially in Aramaic.

It is Gordis' (1946:83) conclusion that the author of Qohelet resorted to what he calls 'free' translations. If the author resorted to such means, then this means that the author wrote Qohelet in both Hebrew and Aramaic; an argument also made by Zimmerman that the author like all his contemporaries knew, and ultimately used Aramaic freely. However, this does not mean that the book was written in Aramaic by arguing that the translator could not have been entirely oblivious to two distinct languages, and consequently concludes by saying:

> All these phenomena are natural in the Hebrew of a post-exilic Jewish author; whose style begins to manifest the traits of Mishnic Hebrew. In

conclusion, a reconsideration of the evidence clearly demonstrates that the book of the Hebrew sage, Qohelet, was originally written in Hebrew.

The translation hypothesis has been contradicted and denied, but it has not been answered or disproved. This led Zimmermann to state that Qohelet's author was a Babylonian Jew who knew Aramaic and Akkadian and served at the court of Antiochus III at Antiochia or Seleucia in the last quarter of the third Century B.C. (Bianchi 1993:215). Loader (1976:6) seems to dismiss all together the arguments of what he calls "internal contradictions" based on language and argues that they are invalid. Nevertheless, in terms of thought, Loader believes that the idea that the book of Qohelet represents a 'progressive development of thought' should be criticized.

Language always has the potential to be slippery. It is therefore my belief that based on the translator hypothesis that the language will take the shape of the circumstances that give birth to it. Translators or authors will use words that are familiar and can relate them to your everyday lived experiences to explain concepts otherwise unintelligible to the conscious mind without relevance to visual imagery. To conclude, according to the given arguments it seems that an exact dating is impossible. However, it is overwhelmingly clear that Qohelet is a late text. This thesis will, therefore, assume the proposition of a late Persian or early Hellenistic dating of the book.

3.2.2. Socio economic evidence

The frame narrator in Ecclesiastes 1:1 announces the 'teacher, son of David' as the author of the contents of the book suggesting by virtue of lineage

Solomon. The claim was then the argument used to support a pre-exilic dating of the book. Solomon who reigned from ca. 965–928/971-9319 B.C.E. as documented in 1 Kings 1-11 would then be the acclaimed author and the period of his reign as the *terminus quo* otherwise conservative estimate. Dating a book due to intertextual links is though not enough as we will see because there is more to dating than parallel narrative accounts.

Scholars argue for the socio-economic conditions of Qohelet's times as a possible indication for the dating. The book appears to reflect a time period when there was international peace but considerable internal tension between the rich and the poor (Eccl 5:7–8 [ET 8–9]). Business is thriving (2:4–11; 4:7–8; 5:10–11), but justice is lacking (3:16) (Longman III 2014:44).

These conditions certainly point to a postexilic period in the history of Israel, but, Longman further argues that this alone cannot provide a precise dating of the book because the same socio-economic conditions can be used to substantiate an argument for the possibilities of either the Persian and Greek eras (Burkes 1999:39; Perdue 2008:221) Muilenberg (1954:20-28) and Cross (1955:147:153) argue for mid-second century after fragments of the Ecclesiastes scroll (4QQoha) were discovered at Qumran. Loader (1979:6) quotes Hertzberg who argued that Qohelet was written by 9 different authors who all had different sources (QR2, 3, 4 etc.) all must have worked on the book between the second half of the third century (the time of the "Grundschrift") and the first part of the second century (when the book is already known to Sirach). He contends that it is not possible that so many hands could have written and passed on the book in such a short space of time.

3.3. Authorship

The authorship of Qohelet has been largely contested by scholars leading to a number of conclusions over the years. The conventional argument has always been that Solomon is the sole author of Ecclesiastes, the only detecting clue present in Qohelet which helps to identify the alleged author is the superscript in 1:1 where the author identifies himself as Solomon. Based on this reference, many scholars stood in agreement, while others (myself included) argue differently for an unnamed sage. Recent scholarship has advanced to argue for the possibility of Hezekiah being the author of Ecclesiastes. This theory treats both Hezekiah and the book of Ecclesiastes as assuming historicity and reflecting historical events.

The most important factors used to determine who the author of a book was and when it was written is commonly the language used and the *sitz im Leben* (social location of the alleged author) and sometimes the *Gattung* (typical forms, operational categories that are not to be confused with form as the unique structure of a specific literary unit) of the text. I lean strongly towards language as it is a more reliable source of reference and I add to the list the *school of thought* of the 'time' as a factor to consider (cf. Loader 1979:18).

This because the books lack any historic details and historic accounts hence language becomes more reliable although the language on its own has no conclusive explanation. The advantage of language is that we can trace it chronologically based on epigraphic and archeological evidence (i.e. basalt stones from war victories) and determine based on phonetics to which era it might have been likely to be used.

3.3.1. Solomonic authorship theory

The traditional approach to the riddle of authorship has been to take a close look at the main speaker in the book, and in this case Ecclesiastes whom (Longman III & Dillard 2006:278) believe to be a pseudonym or nickname for none other than Solomon. Such a reading recognizes the reference in 1 Kings 8 where Solomon "assembles" or gathers people to the dedication of the Temple. Taking into cognizance that the verbal root of Qohelet means to assemble. This popular perspective of Solomon being the author is supported by the evidence that there were in fact only two kings who have ruled Israel from Jerusalem namely Solomon and David (Rudman 2001:11). This identification was further made plausible when the author claimed to have "increased in wisdom more than all who were in Jerusalem before me" which is easy to associate with Solomon's legacy of wisdom. From the basic structure of the book as it is in the Bible, there are few things that can be deduced from face value:

a) That the author speaks in the third person at the beginning of his work (1:1);

b) the motto at the beginning (1:2) is also used as an inclusio at the end (12:8);

c) the book divides into two halves at (6:9) and (10), the halves are not only approximately equal in length but also summaries themes (6:9) human effort and (10) human knowledge at the end (Miller 1988: 23-24);

d) the text also seems to suggest that, the sage conducted two activities: one as an original thinker, and secondly, as an editor of the existing sayings (Azize 2003:132).

Educing form the basic structure Koh (2006:146) advocates for the autobiographical argument as that of a Royal voice. The premise of Koh's argument is that the royal voice can be heard prominently in 1:12; 2:26 which are the two dominant texts used to support Solomonic authorship outlined as follows:

1:12   Qohelet's self-introduction;

1:13-18   The purpose and object of Qohelet's experiment;

2:1-11   Qohelet's experiment with pleasure;

2:12-23   Qohelet's experiment with wisdom;

2:24-26   The conclusion to Qohelet's experiment and his practical advice for living.

According to Koh (2006:147) royal autobiographical narratives are well recognized literary forms commonly used in biblical wisdom literature. They are often described as "confession" of "I- narration" easily distinguishable by first person narration. This I-narration shows that the lessons are rooted in personal observations. This is a technique (Slayer 2001:62-63) refers to as seeing through textual I's: narrative theory and fist person texts. This theoretical stance is argued for by Seymour Chatman through the theory of narrative communication, which espouses the idea that readers never respond to actual or historical persons as readers of texts, but instead, respond to textual patterns and devices which mimetically simulate real authors and persons. (Illustrated in the diagram below.)
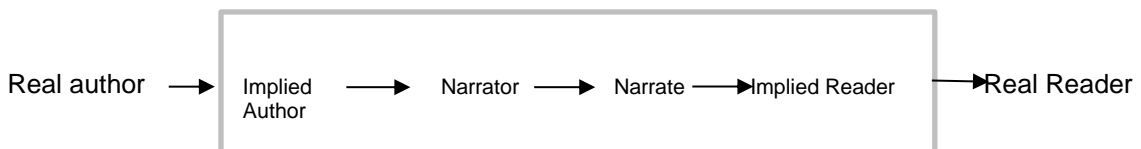

Figure 1: Chatman 's Theory of Narrative Communication (Slayer 2001:62-63)

From the diagram above it can be deduced that from the literary work at hand that textual communication begins with the source of knowledge contained in the text- the implied author. The most important key element in the concept of the implied author is the value to which he/she is committed to. Meaning that, it becomes easily discernible to unmask the identity of the real author (Slayer 2001:62-63). The same can be said for the book of Ecclesiastes, that the choice of metaphors, analogies, types of arguments, values and judgments expressed, moral and ethical conclusions, life expressions and other related issues help us draw impressions of the implied author (Slayer 2001:62-63).

The use of the word 'implied author' suggests that there needs to be a distinction between person (real author) and persona (implied author). The writer is assumed to be the historical living figure, although when the writer died, they are lost beyond recovery, a persona is then assumed. The writer then becomes the object of genetics and the persona the object of poetics. The persona then governs the narrative although the flesh and blooded writer is no more. This argument leads to two conclusions (1) Solomon is the implied author, a narrative device, and (2) the unnamed sage is the real author of the book who is hinted to the prologue and epilogue as 'The teacher'. In order to escape the autobiographical trap that insinuates that Qohelet was written by Solomon, Chatman argues:

> He is 'implied', that is, reconstructed by the reader from the narrative. He is not the narrator, but the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or

images. Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn.

It is noteworthy to mention that the name Solomon is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Qohelet, but it is implied through what the implied author says in epilogue. Christianson (1995:150) uses a plethora of designations such as 'the Solomon guise', 'Pseudo-Solomon', 'abstraction of the Historical', 'putative author' and so forth which all speak to the ambiguity of the real author. Christianson therefore concludes that the Solomon guise is not a pseudonym because the notion of authorship was more fluid in Ancient Near East such that association with Solomon might not have required a name.

Collins (2014:536) contradicts the widely accepted view that Solomon was the author and argues that the language of the book on its own contradicts Solomonic authorship as it has been argued before. There are two clear Persian loanwords: *pardes* ("garden," 2:5, the word from which Eng. "paradise" derives) and *pitgam* ("response, sentence," 8:11). Although it was seventeen-century scholar Grotius who objected to the Solomonic authorship of the book based on the high proportion of Arminianism in the book and pointed to a post-exilic dating. Actually, it was Martin Luther the church father who insisted first that the author of Ecclesiastes was Sirach, and described it as a Talmud (Rudman 2001:12).

Crenshaw (1987:32-33) argues that indeed the section of the book where Solomonic authorship is implied, it seems as though the Egyptian royal

testament offers a prototype. Nevertheless, Qohelet usually speaks as a teacher and not as a king. The argument of viewing Qohelet as a personal name, a substitute for Solomon according to him is weakened by three other things namely: (1) the use of the article, (2) the identification of Qohelet as a wise man (*hakam*), presumably a technical term in this instance (12:9), and (3) the point of view from which the author writes. It seems as though according to (Crenshaw 1987:33) the author was a subject powerless to redress the injustices perpetrated by the higher officials. There are few internal contradictions to this theory namely:

a) In Eccl 1:12 the use of the past tense "I, Qohelet, *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem" implies that there was a time where Solomon was alive and not a king. Solomon died while he ruled Israel (Longman III 1998:5).

b) In Eccl 1:16 Solomon claims to have been wiser than all the rulers who preceded him but only David was king before him. (Longman III 1998:5)

c) In Eccl 4:1-3 Solomon states to have observed oppression and he lamented about how it was a sore sight for him. This would sound strange for a king who created a heavy burden for his people until the end of his reign i.e. 1 Kings 12 especially v. 4 (Longman III 1998:6).

d) In Eccl 10:20 Solomon apparently gives advice about behavior concerning the king from subjects. It is not unlikely, but it was not common for kings to speak of themselves in that manner, the verse sounds rather as an instruction or wise saying being repeated as counsel.

Still, the question begs, why would Qohelet go through so much trouble to hide his identity if indeed it is a pseudonym? This then leads to a conclusion that perhaps Solomon might not necessarily be the implied author because, (1)

after 1:12- 2:26 the allusions to Solomon stop, he is no longer mentioned, (2) from 8:2-8 the implied author now speaks of a royal who is an outsider (Longman III & Dillard 2006:281).

Christianson (1995:151), however, argues that the "voice" of Solomon in Ecclesiastes was simply an amoral strategy of communication, one that ancient readers would likely have recognized as such.[16] Traditionalists neglect the view that not only is it impossible to a degree that Solomon is not the implied author, but also, that there are supposed two voices in the book of Ecclesiastes. The sage in Qohelet and Qohelet the sage. Gammie & Perdue (1990:263) maintain that the sage in Qohelet who has been referred to as the original author can been associated with the following verses: 2:13-14a; 4:5; 6:8-9a; 7:11; 12; 19; 8:1; 9:13-18; 10:1-3; 12-15.

3.3.2. Hezekiah as possible author

The debate regarding the identity of the author has followed the general trajectory of the author of Ecclesiastes as Solomon. The debate has also had other possible authors which have been examined to also include Hezekiah, Jehoiachin or Zerubbabel as possible authors. This assumption is a healthy dose of hermeneutical suspicion which tries to break away from the monotonous sound of the Early Christian and Jewish interpretations whose key presuppositions were either Solomon or an unnamed sage.

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[16] Christianson might be correct about one thing, that in trying to reconstruct we are actually deconstruction what is alien to us and imposing contemporary methods on Ancient texts. It may be possible that the book was written to an audience that was familiar with the inferences, omissions, all together the style of writing.

The assumption that the superscription In Eccl 1:1 might refer to Hezekiah is drawn from a study conducted by Quackenbos (2019). The foundation of Quackenbos' (2019:82) argument is the use of the word בֵּן "son" in the introductory account "son of David" and demonstrates how scholarly opinion has been divided over the meaning of the word. While the Hebrew word connotes biological, next-generation therefore referring to Solomon, other scholars argue that בֵּן could refer to a descendant of David and not necessarily his next-generation sequential son.

To affirm his argument, Quackenbos (2019:82) quotes Crenshaw (1987:56) who argues similarly that "*Ben-dāwid* (son of David) does not necessarily mean one of David's children. In Hebrew usage, it can refer to grandchildren or simply to a remote member of the Davidic dynasty. Furthermore, the word *ben* also denotes close relationships of mind and spirit without implying actual physical kinship". An interpretation of this kind leaves room for further expansion on the identity crisis that is domination Ecclesiastes.

The interpretation of בֵּן as distant descendant has seen two further outliers also entertain the possibility of another author either than Solomon. As detailed in Quackenbos (2019:56-59), as early as 1905 Hubert Grimme suggested that Jehoiachin was the possible author of Ecclesiastes and as relatively later as 2003, Joel Weinberg argued for the possibility of Zerubbabel as the possible author.

Grimme puts forward that Ecclesiastes was written during the Babylonian exile making Jehoiachin the potential author (2 Kings 25:27) by making the following connections between the book and the Kings (Quackenbos 2019:57): Grimme

argues that Eccl 6:10 "that which has come to be as already been named" echoes a portion of the Ashurbanipal inscription in which Ashurbanipal was decreed as ruler by "naming is name" and argued for a similarity in language which supports a Babylonian context for the book.

Secondly, he applies the 'distant descendant' theory literally and states "*jeder Nachkomme Davids ist aber ein,*בֶּן־דָּוִד " meaning "every descendant of David is, however, a בֶּן־דָּוִד". In reading Eccl 1:12, Grimme uses the old age argument that was one of the reasons why Solomon could not be the author as he was dead and the statement could only be applicable to Hezekiah who could only claim to be king while still alive. Quackenbos (2019:239) therefore suggest that Hezekiah who died in 686 BCE at the age of forty-four, who most likely co-reigned with his son Manasseh for the last ten years could have had ample time in his later years to reflect upon the extraordinary events of his life and compose Ecclesiastes. Solomon evidently seems to not have been the only wisest and wealthiest king as he asserts in three separate occasions (2 Chr 30:24; 31:3; 32:27–29) that he was wiser than all kings that came before him, and has vast wealth and livestock (Quackenbos 2019:241).

3.3.3. Unnamed Sage authorship theory

In the book, there seems to be another sage who was actively at work and he is referred to as the student of the original author in the following verses: 4:5; 9-12; 5:2; 6a; 6:7; 7:1-12; 18-22; 8:1-2a; 3-4; 9:17; 10:4; 10-14a; 15-20; 11:1-4; 6. It is also obvious from that, that two voices emanate from the book i.e. 12:9-14 Qohelet is speaking about the sage, which shows that this is clearly the work of another person. It is also possible that 1:1 might also be from the same author

of the epilogue in 12:9-14. In both instances the author uses the term 'The Teacher' to show that he is not speaking of himself but rather chronicling about someone else.

Miller (1988:24) who, on the contrary, argues that the book with the exception of the superscription in 1:1 and the epilogue in 12:9-14 was written by a single sage, although he agrees with the critical view that the book is dated somewhere between the 3rd and 5th century. For Miller, Ecclesiastes refers to the book and Qohelet is the sole sage who is the implied author. It is conversely difficult for me to fathom this autobiographical argument, not only based on the epilogue in 12:9-14 but also with the break in thought apparent in the book i.e. 6:9 and 6:10 to mention one. This for me proves an assembly of multiple sources, if the argument was a single author or multiple authors.

Shields (2006:49-50) holds a similar view that, the position of a single sage seems to be losing favor. This is because of the inference apparent in the epilogue. Shields defines inference as a fundamental part of a reading process: "when a reader recognizes change in the epilogue from first person to third person in speech." Readers thus might have blurred the lines between the implied author and the real author. Inferences encountered in the epilogue are: (1) there are foreign thoughts in the epilogue most notably the "fear God and keep his commandments" in v.13, (2) the unenthusiastic appraisal of the wisdom movement, suggesting a more orthodox alternative.

In sum, the real author of Qohelet thus lurks in the shadows of open interpretation. I am led to believe through the totality of the arguments that; Qohelet is not a nickname for Solomon because Solomon is not the author.

Secondly, the book of Qohelet seems to be an assembly of work, with no pun intended, of three varying sources because; the teacher (i.e. 1:12-18; 2; 3:10-22; 4:1-12; 5:18-20; 6:1-6; 8:9-17; 9:1-18; 10:5-7) and he can only be named as 'the one who once lived', the one who 'tested and tried'.

Then there is the sage who recollected the sayings of the teacher (1:1-11; 12:8-14; 4:5; 9-12; 5:2; 6a; 6:7; 7:1-12; 18-22; 8:1-2a; 3-4; 9:17; 10:4; 10-14a; 15-20; 11:1-4; 6), he is an unnamed sage, who through highly technical narrative tools achieved anonymity. Lastly, there is the collection of wise saying which seem to infer wherever coherent thought is detected (3:1-9; 4:13-16; 5:1-17; 6:7-12; 7; 8:2-8; 10; 11; 12:1-7). I am compelled to conclude that there is no single author for the book of Ecclesiastes.

On the contrary Fox (1977:83) will still disagree with me as he argues that there should be a distinction between authorship and editorship, as it may sound on face value that I am arguing for multiple editors since my focus is the body of work as a finished product. Fox says "I will argue that the *Book of Qohelet* is to be taken as a whole, as a single, well integrated composition, the product not of editorship but of authorship, which uses interplay of voice as a deliberate literary device for rhetorical and artistic purposes".

Synthesis

The major theories that Qohelet dates to the Hellenistic era, have been substantiated by both linguistic and socio-economic evidence. It is the conclusion of this chapter that although an exact date cannot be provided,

Qohelet, however, is a post-exilic book with special emphasis on the Hellenistic era.

This chapter also concludes by agreeing that Solomon can definitely not be the author of Qohelet and resolves that the book was most likely written by an unnamed sage for the purpose of canonization, Solomon was used for pseudo graphical means. The other likely possibility is that through various interpretations of '*Byt-David'* other theories are therefore not discounted, however, for the purpose of this thesis, Solomonic authorship will not be accepted. The possibility of Hezekiah as a possible author were also given attention for the sake of fair hermeneutics because interpretations are bound to vary, but it is very unlikely to be possible.

The unnamed sage theory is the one that this thesis will lean more towards due to certain critical elements embedded within the theory. To say that Qohelet was an unnamed sage, frees us from the hermeneutical baggage of having to live up to certain narrative imbues. Authorship is also intrinsically linked to dating. To insist on anyone either than the unnamed sage will betray the dating of the book which is post-exilic Hellenistic era.

Chapter 4: Literary perspectives

Introduction

Traditional arguments offered by scholars have regarding the genre of Qohelet have mostly been open ended. In the 1980's Murphy (1981:129) concluded that the genre of Qohelet "still escapes us". Crenshaw (1987:28) argues similarly that no single genre governs everything that Qohelet has spoken, although he agrees that the dominant literary type seems to a 'reflection on personal observation', a view I strongly agree with. Bartholomew (2009:61-62) decades later still alludes to the fact that part of the problem in interpreting Qohelet is that there is no consensus about genre and argues that on a micro level, there are a variety of genres which can be identified:

1. The Proverbs (1:15, 18 and multiple proverbs in 7:1-12) which are easily identified because they contain literary devices as parallelism;

2. Autobiographical sections: several sections where Qohelet reflects on his journey;

3. I-narratives: closely related to the autobiographical sections where Qohelet makes personal observations;

4. Poems: most scholars agree that 1:4-11; 3:1-8 and 11:7-12:8 are poems;

5. Rhetorical questions: a literary device pervasive in Qohelet (2:2; 15; 19; 25; 3:9; 21, 22; 4:8, 11; 5:6, 11, 16);

6. Quotations: in certain instances, Qohelet quotes a proverb to support an argument, however, it may also be a proverb by Qohelet himself (i.e. 3:1-8);

7. The examples (4:13-16 and 9:13-16);
8. The woe oracles (4;10 and 10:16);
9. The Blessing (10:17);
10. Commandments and Prohibitions (5:1-7).
11.

With the exception of the points made in 1-4 which can be classified as genres, 5-7 appear to me to be literary devices utilized in a particular genre or specific way of writing and 8-10 seem to be subgenres. The will all be evaluated and discussed and detail in this chapter in in order to see ow they are distributed throughout the whole book and how they collectively form Qohelet's thought.

4.1. Literary perspectives in Qohelet

4.1.1. Qohelet as wisdom

There is a fundamental similarity among scholars that the I-narratives take precedence and that they form a larger part of genre identification. For Miller (1988:21) Qohelet presents itself as the wisdom of one who had searched and dealt with issues of life and now is instructing his readers to make the best of life.

The character of Qohelet's wisdom is that of 'rebellion', 'polemic', and 'revolting' to mention a few which explain the type of wisdom that Qohelet advocates for. Kealy (2012:145) uses the analogy of overs quarrel to explain the character of Wisdom in Qohelet as "…the author wishes things were indeed the way traditional sages claimed - he is truly a student of (and a lover of) ancient proverbs and their ideology. But somehow, he says, reality rarely seems to match wisdom's claims." This means that although Qohelet as be classified as

wisdom, it is not orthodox wisdom and further argues that the presence of Qohelet in the canon as unorthodox wisdom is necessary "*as critical assessment is necessary to keep religion honest*" (Kealy 2012:145).

Scholars have always been in agreement that wisdom as a phenomenon in Ancient Near East existed and was prevalent, however, they are always in disagreement as to which books fall under this umbrella *and Qohelet is one of those books* (Dell 2000:348). The first problem that scholars encounter is definition. Definitions of what wisdom is, is always not an easy conclusion as they can either be too wide or too narrow or simplistic. In certain instances, the problem with definition lies in overstressing human capabilities over the Devine (i.e. 'wisdom is the ability to cope') (Dell 2000:348). This, however, does not come as a revelation as wisdom is the most anthropocentric concept in the Old Testament.

This designation will apply to various types of genre classifications when it comes to Qohelet's thought because it is evident that at the center of his epistemology, he aims to re-evaluate, a pervasive character we find in Qohelet. Sneed (2012:170) reasons similarly and states, "A rhetorical analysis of Qohelet will further confirm this particular literary reading of the book. It will also support the notion that Qohelet is a polemic against traditional wisdom".

According to Azize (2003:132-135) the terms: 'master of collections', 'wise philosopher'[17], 'wise Teacher'[18], 'assemblies of people'[19] with all its variations

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[17] Good News Bible version.
[18] Holy Bible, New International Version.
[19] Seow (1996:387); Shields (2006)

can be argued to be synonyms for sages for the noun Qohelet itself. This could point to a tradition in Ancient Israel where someone like Qohelet would convene groups to listen to his ideas[20]. Crenshaw (2010:108) argues similarly that, 'Biblical sages devoted an inordinate amount of time observing the mundane activities taking place around them and trying to put their acquired knowledge to optimal use' (i.e. Jer. 18:18).

Murphy (1995:222) in relation to the anthropocentric or personification of Qohelet asks this question, "…are we dealing with a personification, a hypostasis, or a person? This question cannot be answered effectively because there is no agreement on the meaning of these relatively abstract words as they are applied to wisdom" and claims that this leads to 'theological baggage of words'. Besides the polemics of etymology, Biblical wisdom nonetheless existed and was embraced even in opposition.

To emphasize this significance of how wisdom was embraced, Crenshaw (2010:108) argues that, not even ants were too tiny to convey significant insights about human productivity, nor drunkards too ludacris to offer examples on negative behavior. The ancient sages essentially processed information about reality and tried to make sense of it.

As a leading expert on Hebrew wisdom literature, Crenshaw (1981:28-29) has been opposed by a few scholars that Ancient Israelite wisdom consisted of a

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[20] A practice also widely practiced by Ancient Greek philosophers who would convene people to the arena to listen to their ideas and they were condemned for corrupting the youth i.e. Plato. (de Button)

professional group of sages.[21] One such scholar is Whybray (1974:135) who does not believe such a group existed, rather believes that wisdom tradition in Ancient Near East spawned from noninstitutionalized upper class intellectuals and has only been supported by a few in this radical preposition as many believe in a 'wisdom tradition' that existed.

Crenshaw (1981:27-29) has still been adamant that this tradition which is asserted in Ancient Near East should be distinguished from that of the priests and the prophets.[22] This is because he believes that the wisdom tradition displayed a "unified world view" or "particular attitude toward reality" different from those of priests and prophets. A view which is supported by Blenkinsopp (1995:14) who argues that: 'In the tradition represented by Israel's sages, ethical and practical concerns are much in evidence, but we shall argue that they presuppose a more or less coherent, if seldom articulated, worldview.'

According to Blenkinsopp (1995:5) if we survey the relevant vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible, we will see that very often wisdom (*hokmah* in Hebrew) implies the possession of a specific skill, e.g. that of the goldsmith (Jer.10: 9), stonemason (1 Chr. 22: 15), or shipbuilder (Ezek. 27: 89). This view corresponds with the assertion made by Fox (1989:79-80) that even someone like Qohelet searched for knowledge through empirical ways. To utilize such empirical methodology, was to possess a unique skill. Wisdom was in essence to know.

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[22] Crenshaw (1969:130) in an earlier publication also argues that there should be a distinction between wisdom tradition, wisdom literature and wisdom thinking in itself as they have distinct *Sitz im Leben* associated with each.

Crenshaw (1981:29) states that, this corpus which he refers to as an 'alien body' is distinctive especially in the Hebrew Bible because, a reader encounters a '*different thought world*' where prominent Yahwistic themes i.e. The Exodus from Egypt, The Davidic covenant, Election of Israel, Mosaic legislation etc. are not present. He even goes as far as referring to wisdom in the Hebrew Bible as an 'alternative to Yahwism.' This corpus at one point according to him included Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, Psalms and Wisdom of Solomon. [23] Crenshaw from this corpus of five books defines Hebrew wisdom as 'the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator' (Crenshaw 1969:130).

Although Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible has not been a thrilling area of Biblical studies throughout the annals of history, it is by no doubt that it has forced its readers to draw disparities between wisdom claims and reality itself. This claim does not mean that wisdom literature should be pushed to the periphery of the canon and not be engaged, and this few scholars have come to understand overtime and even appreciate the character of books like Qohelet and Job in our understanding of Ancient Near East as stated by McKenzie (1967:1):

> It has long been clear to me that I am out of touch with the world of ancient Israel to the extent to which I do not appreciate wisdom literature. Perhaps we do not really understand the historians or the prophets either, but there is no such glaring lack of sympathy as we feel when we turn to the maxims of the sages.

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[23] Crenshaw later rejected the Psalms as part of this corpus. See Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?" *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 8 (2000) 9-17.

As McKenzie (1967:2) reflects on wisdom in this manner, he states that, "My point here is that a literary tradition of such enduring power must have responded to a need of which we are not aware, and it is here that our historical imagination fails us." To restore this failure, McKenzie (1967:2) argues that we should not view wisdom as just wisdom literature but as a living tradition.

In contrast (to Crenshaw 1981:27-29; McKenzie 1967:2; Blenkinsopp 1995:14), Sneed (2011:53) argues against the assertion that a 'tradition' existed in Ancient Near East. Sneed argues that pre-Gunkel German Biblical scholars held to a view that this corpus of wisdom literature was compliments or supplements other types of literature in the Hebrew Bible and should not be isolated. He objects by championing a similar view that Hebrew wisdom literature represented a worldview, tradition or even movement distinct from that of the priests or prophets which provides an alternative to Yahwism as asserted by his predecessors. Sneed advances his view with Waltke's (1979:304) argument that,

> …[t]he sages and the prophets were true spiritual yokefellows sharing the same Lord, cults, faith, hope, anthropology, and epistemology, speaking with the same authority, making similar religious and ethical demands on their hearers. In short, they drank from the same spiritual well.

He further argues that:

> On the contrary, I will argue that the same authors who composed the wisdom literature are also responsible for the composition and/or preservation of the other types of literature. These literary sages, who

were not primarily courtiers, represent Israelite scholarship, and, as such, they were concerned with all the differing traditions and lore of Israelite culture and were involved in their preservation, including priestly and prophetic traditions. Thus, even if material in the biblical writings does not originally come from them, they were the means of its preservation. These individuals also shaped this material, put it in good literary form. Thus, they were intricately involved also in its production. This means that these scholars were not particularistic. As teachers, they studied and taught all the traditions, types of literature, and genres to their students. The wisdom literature, then, needs to be viewed as complementary, not inimical, to the other types of literature found in the Hebrew Bible.

According to Sneed (2011:53) this process of intertextuality happens through what he terms the generic production of meaning. In defense of this process, Sneed argues that, because genres are not found in texts but rather share in them, this also goes for authors, they share in meaning because genres are the production of meaning. Not being able to recognize genre in meaning, may lead to interpretation which explains why wisdom literature is not often associated with other forms of literature because of the explicit lack of the mentioning of dominant Yahwistic views.

Sneed (2011:56) concurs that moderns' comprehension cannot discern a specific kind of genre assimilation in ancient as it is not often explicit. It is, therefore, important to compare Israelite wisdom literature with that of her neighbors. It is therefore his conclusion that Ancient Israelite wisdom literature should be described as a mode of literature and not a static genre. An example

from the Hebrew Bible can be found in Jeremiah 18:18 which reads: "Then they said, 'Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah - for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him, and let us not heed any of his words'".

According to Sneed (2011:57-58) this verse which has been used specifically by Crenshaw seems ironically to be modelling the view that he and other scholars who are in consensus with him are opposing. Sneed brings it to our attention that actually the verse points to a unity of all the professional groups of intellectual leaders and not a divided body of professions.

Therefore, Sneed (2011:71) concludes that Hebrew wisdom was not a 'tradition' or movement but rather a mode of literature that was used to train young scribes to sharpen their wits, a similar input has been made by Carr (2005:33). These young scribes took on many faces as they progressed. Ancient Israel began to see sages emerge from learning this mode of literature.

4.1.2. Qohelet as frame narration

Regardless of the viewpoints discussed pertaining to the existence of a wisdom tradition, Qohelet is in general regarded as wisdom literature. What has been less well recognized is that Qohelet, like some other wisdom books, is also narration: It tells something that happened to someone (Fox 1977:83). Frame narration asks, which voice(s) speak and how does the voice(s) relate to one another. It is obvious that there is more than one voice speaking in Qohelet. Besides Qohelet's dominant voice, there is another one heard in 1:2, 7:27 and

12:8. Whose voice is it? Fox argues that careful examination of this question will reveal fundamental issues in the book's composition.

Perhaps switching to third person is a stylistic device for Qohelet's speech, it would be plausible to qualify this deliberate manoeuvre in 1:2 it would be useless to switch to an alternative voice in 7:27 and 12:8 (Fox 1977:84). It is particularly interesting when we observe 7:27 how we have a third-person quoting a phrase in the middle of a first-person sentence i.e. "See, this I have found,' said Qohelet, 'adding one to one to arrive at a total." A person can speak of him/herself in the third person but it is strange that they would do so in the middle of a first-person sentence.

Fox (1977:85) asks the question if the epilogist who quotes Qohelet could possibly be an editor and if there are any signs of editing visible in Qohelet? Fox mentions three types of editors that we can consider when we are looking at the formation of a book; they are: (1) a passive editor, (2) a re-arranger, and (3) compiler and arranger of small units.

4.1.3. Qohelet as autobiography

Longman III (1998:17) argues for a "framed wisdom autobiography", a genre that draws from Mesopotamian autobiographical texts. The term autobiographical here refers to "an account of the life (or part thereof) of an individual himself or herself", such a composition can be written in the first person and include reminiscences of the past life of the first-person narrator. Longman III & Dillard (2006:278) have been explicit that they believe that Qohelet was a pseudonym for Solomon. This shows that there is a relationship

between genre identification and authorship. Longman's genre identification is framed by who he believes the author to be.

4.1.4. Qohelet as liminal intellectualism

Tracing Liminality

Granting that perhaps the concept already existed but was not yet rendered a technical term, Arnold van Gennep, a sociologist, first used the term 'liminality'. Gennep (1960:1) foremostly explains that every society as it moves from lower to higher levels of civilization becomes accentuated and distinct with clearly marled social divisions. These divisions become markers and have levels of passages one must fulfill. These are the right of passages. He documents in his book a number of them namely; Pregnancy and Child birth; Birth and Childhood; Initiation Rites; Betrothal and Marriage, and Funerals. These rites have clearly marked ceremonies whose purpose is to enable the individual to 'pass' from one stage to the next.

Van Gennep (1960:3) also argues that the universe is also governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity. These can include celestial changes. Gennep (1960:4-6) classifies the development into two types as sympathetic and contagious. He explains sympathetic rites as based on reciprocal belief, opposite on opposite, container on contained, image and real object etc. the latter being rites that are transmissible through direct contact or distance.

Victor Turner's famous expression (cf Thomassen 2014:89), "betwixt and between" situation or object, has opened up space for ambiguity in use and meaning where liminality can be applied to both single individuals, larger groups, a whole society and even civilizations. There is also a temporal dimension to liminality that can relate to moments (sudden events), periods (chronology), and epochs (generations) (Thomassen 2014:89). The temporal dimensions of liminality which are going to be the focus are constituted as follows; sudden events such as death, divorce, or illness; in a group people go through graduations, weddings, and etcetera. In a society there can be an event such as natural disaster, invasion where normality disappears and hierarchies become rearranged. In a period, a society can go through war or revolutionary periods. In an epoch, there could be political instability or intellectual confusion (Thomassen 2014:90).

The essence of liminality is spatiality, it is no coincidence that Gennep begins his book with territorial passages because "spatial and geographical progression correlates with the ritual marking of a cultural passage" (Thomassen 2014:91). The concept is multi/intra disciplinary. Liminality found a home outside of the study of rites of passages with the work of Victor Turner whom while in a liminal space himself stumbled upon the work of Gennep (Thomassen 2009:14). Turner further expanded liminality as not only an 'in between' period but also the human reactions to those liminal spaces through thought and experience.

In two of his works, [24] Turner (1982; 1987) argues on liminal experiences. Firstly, he maintains (1982) that liminal experiences in modern consumerist societies have been replaced by "limonoid moments" where creativity and uncertainty unfold in art and leisure activities. In the latter work (1987), Turner argues that the pilgrimage shares aspects of liminality because participants distance themselves (through movement) from mundane structures and social identities leading to a homogenization of status and a strong sense of *Communitas* (Thomassen 2009:15).

Liminality can thus be viewed as the 'performance' or 'processes' of a society. The key element being transition. Liminality is not liminality without movement. There are a few things which can be further deduced from Turner's work (Thomassen 2009:18) that; liminality can sometimes be framed, produced by a certain liminal experience in a certain spatial context. Secondly, that sometimes liminality can be pure where both spatial and temporal coordinates are in play and it simply becomes inevitable. Lastly, liminality can also be artificially produced the same way they can happen without anyone planning for it, individuals and groups can consciously search for liminal positions which my case in point can be the Qumran community and Qohelet respectively. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that, there are degrees to liminality.

The simplest meaning of the term can thus mean; an intermediate, in-between space, or transition between phases or an intangible construct in a state of ambiguity (Ng & Lim 2018:76). Although originating in anthropology, the concept has been widely used inter disciplinarily. Psychologists and therapists

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[24] "Liminal to Limonoid in Play, Flow and Ritual: an essay in comparative symbology" (1982[1974]); and Church Pilgrimage (1978)

use liminality as consultation as an individualized process. Liminality has also gained recent traction that explained large scale societies as going through liminal situations when facing a collapsing order (Thomassen 2009:19). Thomassen (2009:19) uses the terms "axial moments" or "axial renaissance" when referring to larger scale groups or civilizations.

Karl Jaspers (in Thomassen 2009:20) famously describes the axial age as "it was an in-between period between two structured world-views and between two rounds of empire building"; it was an age of creativity where "man asks radical questions", and where the "unquestioned grasp on life is loosened" (Thomassen 2009: 3); it was an age of uncertainty, where possibilities lie open; it was a period where individuals rise to the test and new leadership figures arise; finally, referring to the spatial coordinates, the axial "leaps" all happened in in-between areas between larger civilizations, in liminal places: *not* at the centers, nor outside reach of main civilizational centers but exactly at the margins, and quite systematically so at that".

The axial age as described by Jaspers bears some liminality, in terms of epistemology, the center's grip loosened and the margin can now articulate for its own, on its own with its own. This according to Thomassen (2009:20) has a bearing on the view of history as not governed by structure but rather has a "flow" or "moments" in what van Gennep refers to as "periodicity" where there is a loosening of structures and new ones emerge. A period characterized by questioning, problematizing, reformulations, eradications and recreations.

Liminality in the Hebrew Bible

In Ancient Israelite mythology, a person could not exist in two worlds, transition was permanent, there was no *in-betweenness.* When events, ideas or feelings did not fit in the established order, that created discomfort and they were often discarded. In his thesis *Moses and Liminality*, Krouwer (2015:17) argues that it is this fixed construction of categories that allows for the existence of liminality, he quotes Neumann (2012:474) who argues that "where pure categories do not apply, feelings of insecurity and danger ensue". This is because overtime ideas begin to erode when reality contradicts them.

Kaunda (2016:52-53) uses the Exodus narrative and how it can be read in light of a Theo-decolonial paradigm suggesting a Theo-liminal pedagogy. I cite this example deliberately because Kaunda describes the wilderness metaphor as an example of reality-creating pedagogy. He describes the wilderness as a liminal space of re-learning and recreation of an identity that is Yahwistic-centered as he argues (Kaunda 2016:61); "The wilderness wanderings show that the Hebrew mind emancipation occurred in the liminal space between Egypt and the Promised Land; between the old and the new; between what they were as slaves and what they would become as a free nation". The Israelites who were now far removed from their known reality, had to make sense of their new one and establish it into the existing order separate from its geographical origins.

Krouwer (2015:17) maintains that the essence of liminality in the Hebrew Bible was separation. He states, "separation is one of the original connotations contained in the word translated from the Hebrew root "קדשׁ" as "holy." Israel is a holy nation (separate from other nations), its cultic practices are also set

apart. Holiness then became a character of distinctiveness. A category that creates order. Although they function in a liminal space, they are open to otherworldly messages through their minds and spirts.

In the Hebrew Bible, liminality is often depicted as dangerous, hence the Torah always stresses boundaries and dualism. Death descends upon those who transcend these boundaries, only those with divine permission or those who were ritually pure could cross over into the liminal territory. In her book *Law and Liminality*, Stahl (1995:34) argues that the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) functions as a hinge in this balancing act between closeness and distance. It provides communication but keeps Israel at a safe distance with God. Liminality is the Hebrew bible is mostly described in spatial or geographical terms hardly as an intellectual exercise.

The liminality argued for in Qohelet is that which transcends the given epistemological order, more than geographical as evident in the Torah because it questions basic tenets of Israelite wisdom. Qohelet if dated to Hellenistic era, found itself in an intellectual liminal stage. A period characterized by a lot of changes, geographical changes, linguistic changes, intellectual changes etc. It was the end of one era and the dawn of a new one for the Judeans that meant new administration and new cultural elements. Since Israel entered Canaan during the Joshua conquest, there have always been threats of syncretism, and with syncretism also comes threats of hybridity (Chia 1998:186). The exile was no different. It is clear that Qohelet underwent some transformation of some sorts. In Qohelet we find a transformation of proverbs, law, story and poetry.

The context and social location of Qohelet creates the literary possibilities for liminality the social circumstances Qohelet finds itself in a moment of great pedagogical opportunity. Qohelet reacts to the liminal circumstances of political instability and intellectual confusion to revisit the basic tenets of existence, wisdom and faith. The epistemology of Qohelet represents a unique tradition in wisdom literature which detaches itself from the typical wisdom that only wants to defend the authenticity of Yahwism. There is also a probability that Qohelet and his breakaway group in liminal intellectuals were going through a period of transition to reformulate their wisdom as a new breed of tradition perhaps even incorporation a few of the previous elements.

The repetition of the phrase "all is vanity" in Qohelet constructs a liminal intellectualism. This is because since its inception as a nation right through to the Babylonian exile and return, the nation of Israel had not known or rather chose no other truth (Franck 2019:43). Stuck between a place that they do not seek to assimilate into and not being able to return home is the liminal space or period that effects change, that *in-betweenness* prepares them to be active participants in their new society where old elements and ways of thinking are not wholly discarded but challenged or can no longer be fully incorporated. According to Turner, we often think of liminality in terms of rituals that enforce social norms, continuing that which is conservative, and he advanced on that idea and argued that liminality can also be anti-structural, or have a creative process, it can be used in revolutionary rebellious ways. In this liminal space, revolutionary behavior is encouraged and the persons can critique the dominant social discourses. Monoa argues that this *Communitas* or "area of commo living" emerges where social structure is not, Communitas is the product of anti-structure, otherwise stagnation or absolutism.

An example of liminality in our own African context is the how gender is articulated in the Ndumbe culture in Uganda. The liminal spaces within Ndembu culture were a process that involved withdrawal from the cultural center (structured society) so as to engage differently certain aspects of cultural norms (see Kaunda 2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2016c). The withdrawal from normal society was meant to enable the community to get a better and clear view of cultural elements that were inadequate so as to upgrade them in order to make the society more responsive to the changed circumstances. This is also an example of an artificially manufactured liminal space.

It is important to note that although the notion of liminality (in the meantime) has been widely used in Western Anthropology, much of the recent understanding of the concept emerges from Victor Turner's observations among the Ndembu people. In other words, although liminality is a western invented concept, its connotation in its post-Turnerian usage is entrenched with Ndembu thought. The argument is that Turner introduced a new concept in Ndembu culture to conceptualize local ideas that already existed for universal consumption. Turner introduced a new language for scholars to rationalize Ndembu complex thought system. This means that even if we replace the concept with a new one, the idea of Ndembu ritual will remain intact.

How can a liminal moment or space be identified? Our societies have simply grown too complex – or at least, with the shift to postmodernism we have discovered that social life is too complex – to easily recognize 'true' liminal phenomena. However, we can articulate a new way of looking at intellectual liminality as a zone of thinking that stretches beyond borders. To better

understand why and how I suggest that Qohelet is an example of liminal intellectualism, in this case defined as a "moment" or breakaway from conventional wisdom in Ancient Israel, I investigate the social setting and background of wisdom literature. The term "wise" in Ancient Israel has always been reserved for or restricted to a certain class or group of people. Described as an acquired skill, wisdom would be applied to a variety of specialized occupations i.e. seamanship, professional mourning, snake charming, house building, craftsmanship, magic and deviation and the interpretation of dreams (Whybray 1990:134).

All these specialized occupations are underpinned by specialized functions as well. However, there was also a wisdom tradition where a sage or sages produced a certain kind of literature characterized as wisdom literature different from those mentioned in Jeremiah 18:18 (priests, prophets and sages), which Crenshaw (1981:27-29) argues that they should be clearly distinguished. This is because he believed that their work reflected a unified worldview different from those of the priests and prophets.

Azize (2003:123) refers to the genre of Qohelet as 'critique'. Although not clear whether Qohelet's predecessors were familiar with this kind of literature, I believe Qohelet nevertheless hints in this direction through satire, rhetoric and reevaluation of old values. However, this line of thought can be accounted for through what Chia (1988:182) refers to as 'liminal intellectualism' as the appropriate term for the classification of Qohelet's thought and genre.

In Chia's (1988:182-183) study on liminal intellectualism, he details three stages of this process as described by van Gennep as: (1) separation (pre-

liminal), (2) transition (liminal), and (3) incorporation (post-liminal). In the first stage, individuals or groups will detach from a fixed social structure. In the second phase, liminality itself becomes the social setting for the detached groups or individuals, anti-structure becomes dominant. Finally, when the transition is over, in the final stage, the detached groups or individuals are reincorporated into the social structure with a call for new behavior or *a re-evaluation of old values* (emphasis added).

When taking into cognizance Qohelet's social status (if it exists), social setting, themes, thought, and conclusions he comes to in the book, it is safe to say that he and his followers were liminal intellectuals, not only did he sway from the conventional school of thought but he sought to re-evaluate social structures and values as they were by reinventing himself as not only a sage but a philosopher as well.

There are a number of concepts which can be detected in Qohelet which aid in the complex process of deciphering the genre of the book. The law of genre demands purity, commonality in singularity, and specific marks of identification. Genres are not to be mixed: "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity (Koosed 2006:25).

4.1.5. Qohelet and acquisition

Biwul (2017:1) proposes a political and economic reading of הֶבֶל. Suggesting that this kind of reading locates a different perspective to Qohelet as an author who from personal observation, saw and addressed life from the point view of

ivory tower aristocrats who sought to control their environment by every means to their benefit. He thus argues that Qohelet uses הֶבֶל as a literary rhetorical device as an evaluation grid to critique aristocracy and to caution them about the unpredictable nature of human existence.

Biwul (2017:5) suggests that the pervasiveness of Qohelet indicates a period of oppressive political and economic behavior Ptolemaic and/or Hellenistic lifestyle. To better understand the economics and politics of Qohelet, an intertextual study between not only texts but also contexts can elucidate. Intertextuality[25] is described as an indefinite range of relationships that exists between texts as a result of shared language, poetic devices, images and ideas (Horne 2014:106). Horne is of the impression that verse 3 of Qohelet evokes a consideration of the value of things, including affinities with Aristotelian economic thought reflecting upon the intertextuality between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. His argument rests upon the various terms used for acquisition and supposes that this language of gain is economical.

The Solomonic[26] reputation is not only known for wisdom, but also for wealth (Horne 2014:109). Questions of human toil read concurrently with the aristocratic poem of the "valorous woman" in Proverbs 31:10-31, help us understand according to Horne the notion of economics and prosperity in Qohelet. Seow (1997:22) also argues that Qohelet presumes and audience that is deeply concerned with economic matters. It is noteworthy to mention that

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[25] *Intertextualité* emerged in the French postmodern intellectual milieu of the late 1960s. The term was first coined and developed by Julia Kristeva, leaning heavily on Bakhtin's dialogism, and followed by an outpouring of literature, not least in biblical studies.
[26] This can only apply if the implied author is taken to be Solomon with a clear indication that the real author remains unknown.

Seow who dates the book of Qohelet to the Persian period, is speaking of post exilic Judah. However, to suggest that this period in the history of Ancient Israel was more concerned with economic activity than preceding periods is ahistorical.

It is Biwul's (2017:6) contention that Judah having been liberated from Babylonian exile, had to contend surviving Persian, Hellenistic and Roman control where the rapid growth and change in the socio-economic developments did not benefit all people equally. Collins (1997:25-26) even goes as far as describing the Hellenistic era as a 'tightly organized money-making machine' to the effect that 'the success of some was built on the misery of others'. From this interpretation, Qohelet's critique is that the aristocrats who are heavily taxing subjects and not putting the money towards their development is like 'chasing after the wind'.

Biwul (2017:6) further contends that, such a reading of *hebel* in Qohelet arises from an observed oppressive sociology of human experience usually perpetuated by those in privilege. I am nonetheless not convinced that Qohelet's aim was to write a full-on economics treatise, although it is a general consensus that it touches on issues of oppression and acquisition of wealth.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle makes a distinction between use value and exchange value (Biwul 2017:6). The elaboration of this distinction suggests that, there is value derived from a use of a thing and value derived from the exchange of a thing. Aristotle places higher value on wealth that derives value from use, wealth that contributes to the well-being within the context (Biwul 2017:6). It cannot be argued that Qohelet was influenced by Aristotle, however, the

similarities are striking in terms of acquisition and distribution of wealth. Qohelet then uses the word 'gain' to reflect upon the value of toil and gathering of wealth with no good use for it (i.e. 2:11) and wealth that will be left as an inheritance when one dies (i.e. 2:18; 6:2) in the Qohelet and Aristotelian sense, what is good is in it then?

This reflection on acquisition and distribution of wealth is one I can also read in the New Testament concurrently with the concept of 'futility' the same word the LXX translates as *hebel* in Qohelet. Jesus also attends to the theme of wealth as Qohelet does i.e. Matt 6:25 especially, Matthew 16:26 'For what will profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?'

Qohelet's self-reflections keep on leading him to a conclusion of *hebel.* His use of *hebel* in this political and economic reading seems to be a direct result of the socio-economic climate. From his empirical data, of the behaviour of royal officials and wealthy Jewish aristocrats was characterised by an ivory tower experience as they had at their disposal the benefit of power and wealth (Biwul 2017:9).

4.1.6. Qohelet as a message of Joy

Qohelet has been inducted in many schools of thought i.e. Jarick (2014:176) has referred to Qohelet as a comedian, (Scheffler 1993:248 and Bartholomew 2014:228) both refer to his message as 'positive'. With such a pervasive mood of skepticism and pessimism apparent in the book, Scheffler asserts that, this is the last book anyone can refer to if looking for positive advice. It is noteworthy

to mention that there are other relatable themes connected to the message of joy i.e. toil, pleasure and *carpe diem* which will all be addressed together.

Human toil leads to a psychological burn out, so does any other suffering, i.e. political oppression leads to tears (4:1-2), the wearisome toil for possessions in order to enjoy life leads to despair, pain and vexation (2:20-23), the loss of riches to darkness, grief, sickness and resentment (5:16) and the physical deterioration of old age to unpleasantness (12:1) (Scheffler 1993:251). This kind of meaningless suffering logically leads to depression. What advice does Qohelet give to overcome this depression?

Anderson (1995:157-158) argues that the 'joy statements' in Qohelet are editorial glosses as they appear to be inconsistent with the mood of the book. These joy statements are explicitly mentioned in 2:24; 3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:8–10. Fuhr Jr. (2013:137) who refers to the 'joy statements' as 'Qohelet's seven commendations' notes that in almost 'every literary unit' in the book to some degree has a joy statement. Although the seven commendations are rooted in the absurdity of life, the *hebel* motif does not overshadow the enjoyment of life. For Qohelet the real and true absurdity is loving life without joy. The first absurdity is God giving power and wealth to someone who cannot enjoy it (6:1-2) (Chia 1988:127). It is incongruity have blessings and not have joy. The overcoming of absurdism (*hebel*) is joy for Qohelet.

4.1.7. Qohelet and Skepticism

Although pessimism has negative connotations, in the book of Qohelet it seems to have positive impact. Anderson (1997:132) from the onset believes that a

skepticism tradition might have existed in the Hebrew Bible. If skepticism is to be understood as 'radical questioning', then it makes sense why there is little said of it in the Hebrew Bible (Priest 1968:319). This is perhaps for the reason that the word of YWHW was regarded as the law. Priest, on the other hand, argues that: "I suspect that there was an informal kind of scepticism operative at all stages of Israel's history but it must be admitted that the formal, intellectual articulation does indeed come after the Exile" (Priest 1968:319).

Qohelet is thus a social protest unlike Job where it was the struggle of one man's contradictions between his theology and his faith (Anderson 1997:132). Crenshaw's argument is that, scepticism belongs to the thought enclave of Israel from early times, secondly, it extends far beyond the intelligentsia, lastly, it springs from two fundamental sources; theological and epistemological (Anderson 1997:132).

Qohelet's pessimism and scepticism cannot be limited to his idiosyncratic character but should be viewed as a survival tactic for the social climate of his time (Sneed 2012:252). Qohelet's pessimism is thus reflective of not only a single man's suffering but also as a proactive response in which he and his peers found themselves in (Sneed 2012:252).

Anderson describes this pessimistic theology of wisdom also as the effects of oppression and injustices which prove to have an effect on the social psychology of the oppressed and exploited (i.e. 1:12-18) (Anderson 2000:145). This is a reality that Biblical scholars like to soften and Anderson argues against that and states the following; "As far as he [Qohelet] was concerned: God was aloof and uncaring, humanity and life in the world oppressive, and

wisdom impotent." This has an eerie similarity to a Greek tragedy. Qohelet's pessimism and scepticism both should be viewed as a reaction to the over-rationality of the wisdom tradition.

4.1.8. Qohelet and Retribution

If we were to take the meaning of *hebel* as > vanity > absurdism > contradiction > a divorce between reality and teachings of traditional wisdom, for the case of the law of retribution specifically in the book of Qohelet the definition is a perfect fit to understand how it operates and contributes to the message of the book.

When one reads the book of Qohelet, the stark difference of wisdom sayings from conventional ones. In the previous chapter, I have already gone in depth about wisdom as 'revolting' in Qohelet, in this chapter, I am just going to analyze briefly how that theme shapes the message of the book.

Qohelet's skepticism/pessimism (henceforth pessimism) is not all together shunned. It is believed to have had a positive function in helping its audience creatively deal with the troubling times of the Ptolemaic period (Sneed 2012:197). This process is actively achieved through a process of what social-psychology studies call 'cognitive dissonance'. Cognitive dissonance is when the mind is confronted with new information causing friction with existing truths. The theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that people will attempt to reduce this dissonance by either changing their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours or by rationalizing them (Sneed 2012:197). Qohelet's polemic is thus aimed at failed mundane retribution.

Retribution stated that: for a person to suffer, he/she must be a sinner. This is the kind of cause and effect law we see in the book of Job other than Qohelet. The message is that one is responsible for one's own misery because one might have done something wrong. The book of Job reacts by denying the doctrine any validity. Qohelet reacts by declaring that all is *hebel.* Therefore, for Qohelet there is no relationship between good causes and good effects. Reality is contradicting this traditional wisdom rule.

4.1.9. Qohelet and Death

The theme of death is an acute problem in in Qohelet. To simply say death, is not convincing, is the nature of death murder, martyrdom, fatal illness or suicide? The concept should be qualified to argue more efficiently. I want to induct Qohelet into the school of the absurd and also introduce the concept of suicide as a direct result of what I term existential depression or simply 'the void'. This is because wisdom was viewed as the maximization of life, long life was a gift to the wise and righteous.

For Longman III (1998:1290) he proposes that Qohelet's preoccupation with death renders wisdom 'meaningless' actually all other achievements in life are rendered useless in the face of death. Nonetheless, Qohelet is not a hopeless sceptic. Fuhr Jr. (2013:124) argues similarly and states that, Qohelet is not a nihilist[27] whose ponderings only end in despair, rather his reflections on death provide a necessary sobriety that enables the wise reader to move forward

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[27] I reject the meaning of nihilism as simply alluding to meaninglessness, I believe nihilism should be qualified and can be overcome.

beyond despair to a renewed vigour and joy of life. This for Qohelet then means that, due to the closeness between death, life and joy, death is the precursor for logic and rationality to how to live life as mortal.

There are a few principles outlined by Fuhr Jr. (2013: 126) that we can deduct from Qohelet's logic on death:

1) Death the only certainty of life regardless of one's ability and social status (*2:14–16; 3:19–22; 5:10–15; 9:2*)
2) Death can be a foil against which the quality of life can be measured (*4:1–3; 6:3–6).*
3) The timing of one's death is ultimately determined by God (*3:2; 7:14–18; 8:7–8, 12–13; 9:11–12).*[28]
4) An Acknowledgment of the Inevitability of Death Will Lead the Wise to Pursue the Enjoyment of Life *(2:24 –25; 3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18 –20; 7:4; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:7–10)*
5) An Acknowledgment of the Inevitability of Death Will Lead the Wise to Remember God *(3:17; 8:12; 11:9b; 12:1–7, 13–14).*

Longman III is the one scholar so far who has touched on the issue of suicide. He argues that, death in itself is 'nothingness'.[29] He further argues that, the state of nothingness, makes death an "anaesthesia against the headrest realities of life" although he argues that Qohelet does not advocate for suicide, he does however mention that in the face of oppression death is better than life.

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[28] What about those who commit suicide? or those who are murdered and killed?
[29] Longman III (1998:128)

It is this kind of argument that I strongly disagree with, where the individual is made to bear social justices, without challenging the status quo and easily terming suicide an anaesthesia. The repression of efforts to combat realities of life is what (Akbar 2003:155) refers to as 'intellectual oppression'. This, however, is an issue I will deal with in the next chapter when I speak of the pragmatism of nihilism and whether it can be overcome.

The question of suicide and absurdity and its closeness with the concepts of death and *hebel* in Qohelet, beg for a dialogue between the two. Sanchez (2018:1) writes; "there was a thinker who preceded Camus by three millennia who shook his fist at the sky and arrived upon similar ideas in his own search. Indeed, the principal speaker of the book of *Ecclesiastes* found in the Hebrew Bible, Qohelet, echoed similar thoughts as the French-Algerian author." In his own words, Camus (1955:32) states:

> Never, perhaps, have minds been so different. And yet we recognized as identical the spiritual landscapes in which they get under way. Likewise, despite such dissimilar zones of knowledge, the cry that terminates their itinerary rings out in the same way. It is evident that the thinkers we have just recalled have a common climate.

Perhaps he was predicting his own collaboration with Qohelet as today they seem to recall a common climate, on the incongruity of life and the inevitability of death. Camus (1955:33) himself says that, to achieve the absurd, one must compare the consequences of reasoning with logical reality (i.e. a man a man who wants to attack a group of people who have machine guns with a sword) and states that:

I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it.

Absurdism is essentially a divorce (Camus 1955:33). This contradiction leads to a cognitive dissonance that requires a reconciliation. This divorce does not lie in the comparison of the elements under investigation but in their confrontation (Camus 1955:33). Absurdism is not in man, nor in the world but in their existence together and how they contradict each other.

There is an undeniable fact about life: that man is prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them for a man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it (Camus 1955:33). Camus (1955:35) argues that, after the climate of the absurd has been scrutinized, there is but one suggestion: escape. Judging whether life is worth living or not is essential in absurdism after accepting the incongruity.

There are a group of sayings known to scholars as the 'better-dead' (cf. Imray 2009:222). Nonetheless, in 9:4b the 'better-dead' sayings are contradicted by the implied author who states that "anyone who is among the living has hope". This irony is then known as the death-positive and death-negative contradiction (Imray 2009:222).

Camus and Qohelet now find themselves in a world that is irreconcilable with their faculties of reasoning and the constant question is 'why?' (Sanchez 2018:10). Both arrived at distinctive answers for obvious reasons. Qohelet's

response to the absurd and death being rooted in theistic presuppositions concludes; "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (*Eccl*. 12:13), and enjoy life *while you can*. Qohelet chooses to live in the tensions with the assurance that, superseding the meaninglessness of the world through God, he can find purpose (Sanchez 2018:11). Camus' response is not as simplistic. "Camus proposes that the person without God must not kill himself, but realize instead that he is condemned to death, and live his life saturated with that terrible knowledge. Camus proposes "awareness itself" to replace faith (Woods 1999:89).

Synthesis

Earlier I discussed the historical-critical reading of the book of Qohelet. This entailed a discussion on the social location of Qohelet whom from the findings we can conclude that he was in the 4rth or 3rd century. This was during a time where the Judeans were under the Hellenistic/Ptolemaic.

The authorship of the book was one of the highly contested themes in this discussion. I have contrasted views of different kinds, those who believe that Solomon was the author, to those who believed in the existence of a group of sages, and ultimately the theory of the unknown author. I concluded that, the implied author (unknown) used the Solomonic guise although there is no mention of Solomon in the book of Qohelet. The presence of editorial glosses refutes that there can be one author, the authorship and dating also refute Solomonic authorship. I therefore came to the conclusion that, the real author *contra* implied author through the Chatman's theory of narrative communication prove that the real author was an unnamed sage.

Preceding to that, regarding the dating of the book of Qohelet, multiple theories were engaged. There are a number of suggestions which is 1) Solomonic authorship[30], which dates the book as far back as the 8th century which is the *terminus quo.* The second possible dating ranges from the 5th Century (cf. Seow 1996) to the 4th and 3rd century (Crenshaw 1980; Gordis 1949; Zimmerman 1945) as the *terminus ad quem.* For the purpose of this study, I chose only to engage two specific genres attributed to Qohelet, although there are many others (i.e. autobiography, irony, humor et al.). I argued that Qohelet for the purpose of this study can be classified as philosophical and as wisdom. The book in itself has an array of themes which Qohelet uses to shape his overall message of *hebel.* The study shows that the themes often overlap, they are context specific and shape the overall message of the book.

4.2. Reception and Interpretation of Qohelet

There a number of different acts of reading and receiving a text, Qohelet has been subjected to the same tradition in a selection of non-biblical disciplines. Non-conformist readings are important in the examination of the reception history because, they have implications in interpretation. The myriad readings have their own different interpretations on certain views expressed in the book, i.e. views on God, views on meaning of life, views on ethics et al.

This act of reading is what Yesudian-Storfjell (2003:5) refers to as a 'dynamic experience' because the authors attempt to reflect, review, question, accept or challenge views expressed in the original text. It is through such a reading that

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[30] Because the authorship links to the dating, any dating that refers to Solomon are contradicting the statement above, which reject the possibility of Solomon being the author.

the potential of the text can be discovered. Meaning can transcend time, and Qohelet's original message can still be revised in order to suit conditions of a specific given time.

4.2.1. Qohelet in Rabbinic Texts

When a community receives a text in written form, the text is read and then there are different sub readings of the same text. This implies that a received text is individually read and thereafter reproduced through myriad interpretations by different members of the same community. The text only retains its homogenous state in its received written form, however, the meaning derived can vary. Stated differently, individual readings of Qohelet are seen as episodes of history because the reader confronts the book of Qohelet as "already read" (Yesudian-Storfjell 2003:5). This means that when examining the reading of the text in its historical context there should also be a history of the reception of the book as well.

The book of Qohelet despite its controversial nature due to the contents of the book was surprisingly received by the rabbinic community. The reception of Qohelet by the Rabbis does still not mean that there were not parts of the book which did not troubled them. The dominant issues for the rabbinic community was the strict adherence to divine inspiration. The set standard was that a book had to be directly inspired or indirectly inspired by God, not a composition of the authors owns thoughts to be granted canonicity (Sandberg 2013:37). The challenge for Qohelet was that the book seemed to have been a royal autobiography and contained individual thoughts. Therefore, the book was regarded as not having been divinely inspired and therefore uncanonical.

The rabbis were concerned that the book would be misunderstood as containing heretical teachings (Sandberg 2013:39). Stated differently the book, as I have discovered invariably contain themes although not restricted to wisdom, life and God which are a divergent from the pious teachings of the Torah making it a threat to conventional religious teachings. Rabbinic exegesis often focused on how books outside of the Torah affirm or connects and provides practical guidance towards obedience of the Torah teachings. The rabbinic preposition therefore was that a community had to be guided by rabbinic interpretation to avoid misreading's. This implies that the rabbis were central to the reading of texts like Qohelet and also Song of Songs for without them the texts could be easily misconstrued.

There is also another reason why the reading of Qohelet had to be guided which is that Qohelet's teachings are also considered to be self-contradictory negating any traits of divine inspiration. Such an example is noted in 8:14 and 9:1-2 that asserts that the righteous and the wicked share the same fate (Dell 2013:13). It seems that the rabbis spent more time re-reading certain parts of Qohelet before giving the actual instruction of the texts without reinterpretation first. In other words, the rabbi's role in re-reading the text was a process of actualizing of the text where the textual structures and signs within the text simulated a response, an interpretation that was colored by their historical context (Yesudian-Storfjell 2003:6)

The key element that helped the book become acceptable is the ancient belief in Solomonic authorship. Dell (1994:303) echoes this sentiment and argues that the persona of Solomon secured the book's authority for inclusion in the

Scripture. More specifically, *Qohelet Rabba* connects the superscription in Qohelet with the narrative of the wisdom gift from God in 1 Kings to argue that divine inspiration did guide Solomon (Sandberg 2013:41). Whatever subsequent arguments there are against the Solomonic authorship of Qohelet, in rabbinic sources he remained the undisputed author.

The most significant rabbinic text as a classic source for the rabbinic interpretations on the book of Qohelet is *Midrash Qohelet Rabbah* (Sandberg 2013:43). There are also other selected sources for the reception history of Qohelet in Rabbinic texts which are Qohelet Rabbah, and the Targum to Qohelet. Qohelet Rabbah is mostly referenced because it is an exegetical Midrash, meaning that is uses verse by verse format interpretation that covers almost the whole book (Sandberg 2013:43).

4.2.2. Qohelet and Philosophy

Qohelet has received a myriad of interpretations varying from linguistic, literary criticism, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, theology and philosophy (Gericke 2015:1; 2012:3-4). A pluralist rich hermeneutic history with this background one might think that scholars have run out of ways in which to exegete the book which is a premature conclusion. This is because there is a gap in a philosophical study and he states: "For while we offer linguistic, literary, historical, theological, sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives, there is to this day no officially recognized, independent and descriptive *philosophical* approach to the study of ancient Israelite religion."

This goes to prove that although there has been substantial attempt in the past, and not altogether absent from the literature, and three kinds are commonly encountered. Gericke (2015:1) has thus developed what he refers to as meta-philosophical perspectives on Qohelet. In his approach towards the book, Gericke (2015:1) opts to move away from the major main stream commentaries on the book which only categorize Qohelet as philosophical by establishing a relationship between the books of Qohelet ancient Greek philosophy. Even though he does agree that Qohelet is the closest that the Hebrew Bible comes to being 'philosophical'.

Gericke (2015:2) lists, although not exhaustive, the following general classifications often associated with Qohelet as:

- General philosophical profiling (classifications)
- Ancient philosophical comparisons (various contexts)
- Modern philosophical comparisons (various contexts)
- Philosophical exegesis (various philosophical [sub-] disciplines and their loci)
- Philosophical reception histories and actualizations (applied philosophy)
- Anti-philosophical readings (attempted dissociations from philosophy).

They are disseminated as such; the first classification involves a general profiling of Qohelet as philosophical based on thought, which leads to the popular classification of Qohelet as a 'philosopher'. Although this assertion might not be that popular among the specialists of the book who mainly attribute the title philosopher to the implied author and not the body pf work as philosophical (Gericke 2015:2).

The second type classifies Qohelet as philosophical based on the comparisons with ancient texts namely Greek and Far Eastern. These comparisons are based on myth, poetry, drama etc. Which are specifically the relationship between Qohelet and post-Aristotelian philosophy, pessimistic Greek philosophers, popular philosophy and Greek philosophy in General (Gericke 2015:2).

The third classification scholars draw on modern trends of philosophy with available literature to assess the book of Qohelet. The research undertaken in this thesis will follow this type of approach as it draws on post-modern perspectives. In this classification, Qohelet is compared to existential philosophy (i.e. Nietzsche, Schopenhauer), absurdist philosophy (i.e. Albert Camus), post-modernism (Derrida, Deleuze) and feminist philosophical critiques of various types (Gericke 2015:4).

The fourth classification where Qohelet is not read as a philosophical body of work but exegeted through philosophical methodologies related to a particular philosophical topic. Few of the philosophical topics which are detected in Qohelet and are exegeted with philosophical methods are; determinism, meaning and existence, death, axiology and epistemology to mention a few (Gericke 2015:4).

The fifth classification is concerned with the philosophical reception of Qohelet and how it is applied. How Qohelet was received and read by i.e. Jewish scholars, Christian theologians, and philosophers alike.

Lastly, the classification of anti-philosophical readings comprises of scholars who deny Qohelet as being philosophical in anyway. This is a view prevalent amongst traditional Christian communities who rather link Qohelet to wisdom than philosophy and a defender of faith against nihilism and skepticism (Gericke 2015:5).

Since we have dissected the typological approaches, now we will look individually into the type of classification relevant for the purpose of this study. Not only is the claim that Qohelet is a philosopher, but the arguments extend further to say that Qohelet is a philosophical body of work in itself through an array of themes and must not be limited only to Wisdom. The two main concepts that aid the classification of the genre of Qohelet as philosophical are skepticism and pessimism, we might add to this list nihilism.

Skepticism as a philosophy has its formal origins in ancient Greece (Anderson 1998:290). Skepticism was largely developed as a response to dogmatic absolutism (philosophies who claimed to have discovered the truth) especially epistemologies from the schools of Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoicism (Anderson 1998:226). This then makes skepticism a theory of epistemology because it asks the question 'how can we know' and epistemology is a branch of philosophy. Epistemologically, skepticism is justified in this regard because it wants to interrogate the limits of knowledge and how we come to know what we know and opposes absolute dogmatism.

Anderson (1998:228) identifies three types of skepticism spanning from the time of Pyrrho to the modern ear which are:

- Skepticism which argues that the objects in question do not, in fact, exist i.e. the existence of God or ethical values.

- A more moderate view from Immanuel Kant which attests that although we might admit that the objects in question do exist, we can still not fully know anything about them i.e. inductive skepticism regarding the laws of nature.

- Lastly, a more radical view of skepticism which attests that, if the objects in question cannot exist, therefore the knowledge of them or doubting them is logically ruled out.

There are five basic modes which are a way of argument upon which "suspension of judgment is inferred" which are: the relative or subjective nature of perception, infinite regress of proof, the conflict of opinions between opponents, the inevitably hypothetical character of all ultimate premises, and the rejection of syllogism or circular arguments (Anderson 1998:230).

The first mode suggests that because human beings are prisoners of their physical and mental sensory perceptions, they may not truly know anything or have any cognitive access to anything beyond their faculties of perception (Barnes 1990:56-57). The second mode refers to what is known as the 'toils of skepticism' that because the essence of skepticism is doubt, the skeptic is left with an infinite number of questions (Barnes 1990:39).

The third claims that because the basic premise is conflicting opinions, this inevitably leads to a toil in doubt over truth (Barnes 1990:1) The fourth mode claims that any hypothesis or preposition will inevitably by its very nature be

subjected to the scrutiny of being questioned or be unprovable (Barnes 1990:91-92).

The last mode of the way to argue cogitates the philosophical mode of stating a proposition, following it with another proposition that provides evidence or argumentative support for the initial proposition, which in turn supports a conclusion about the initial proposition, invalid. For example:

> *No man is a quadruped.*
>
> *Socrates is a man.*
>
> *Therefore, Socrates is not a quadruped.*

A comparative analysis of the methodologies of skepticism in philosophy as '*all knowledge is limited*' and some of the material found in the Hebrew Bible point to a similarity. The essence of skepticism is doubt and questioning fundamental beliefs[31] which is arguably what we can find in Qohelet. Fox (1987:137) argues that although Qohelet's epistemology seems to be unsystematic and inchoate, it does necessitate skepticism because: "…for he speaks explicitly the possibility of knowledge and how he gained it. Indeed, of knowledge — its possibility, its powers, and its limitations the central concerns of his book."

Pfeiffer (1934:100-101) argues that Qohelet's skeptical epistemology is that of 'testing experience and the reflection', he does not jump into conclusions. He first doubts i.e. is human labor profitable (Eccl 1:3; 3:9; 5:16) then concedes that there is no profit under the sun (Eccl 2:11), is wisdom valuable (Eccl 6:8a)

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[31] Anderson (1998:229) argues that it is important to define the term "belief" in contradistinction with "knowledge" because one might believe anything, but believing is not knowing, belief is not knowledge.

and concludes that it is (Eccl 2:13-14a) etc. Fox (1987:139) then concludes this argument to say: "After a consideration of the terms for wisdom and knowledge, I will argue that Qohelet has an essentially empirical methodology: he seeks both to derive knowledge from experience and to validate ideas experientially."

Ecclesiastes is distinctive in its relatively sparse use of the imperative, and in its investigative style which weaves together instruction and historical narrative (Miller 1988:21). Machinist (1995:175) is another scholar who argues for a philosophical genre of Qohelet. This positionality thus classifies Qohelet as what Zuck (1991:46) labels a misfit in the Hebrew canon as he argues "Since it seems to underscore the futility and uselessness of work, the triumph of evil, the limitations of wisdom, and the impermanence of life, Ecclesiastes appears to be a misfit".[32]

The designation is, however, not a negative one because this is not the total picture of the book of Ecclesiastes because Qohelet also makes statements such as; life is a gift from God (2:24; 3:13), life is to be enjoyed (2:24-25; 3:12-13), the fear of God (3:14; 5:7) et al. This schism in thought also does not mean that Qohelet is experiencing a cognitive dissonance although in some instances the opposite is true. The author of Ecclesiastes is not just skeptical; he is

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[32] Elements in the book that supposedly suggest this outlook of secularist despair include (a) the repeated refrains, "everything is meaningless"7 (1:2; 2:11, 17; 3:19; 12:8); "this too is meaningless" (2:15, 19, 21, 23, 26; 4:4, 8, 16; 5:10; 6:9; 7:6; 8:10);8 "chasing after wind" (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9); and "under the sun," which occurs 29 times; (b) death's finality which removes any advantage or gain man may have acquired in life (2:14, 16, 18; 3:2, 19- 20; 4:2; 5:15; 6:6, 12; 7:1; 8:8; 9:2-5, 10; 11:7; 12:7); (c) the fleeting, transitory nature of life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10); (d) life's inequities, including the frustrating nature of work (2:11, 18, 20, 22-23; 4:4), the uselessness of pleasure (1:17; 2:1-2), the inadequacies of wisdom (1:17-18; 2:14-17; 8:16-17; 9:13-16); and uncorrected injustices (4:1, 6, 8, 15-16; 6:2; 7:15; 8:19; 9:2, 11; 10:6-9); and (e) the puzzle of life with its many enigmas of unknowable elements (3:11, 22; 6:12; 7:14-24; 8:7, 17; 9:1, 12; 10:14; 11:2, 5-6). (Zuck 1991:46)

pessimistic in the extreme, having given up the possibility of a meaningful relationship with God and advocating a resigned cynicism about life (Dell 1994:302). Qohelet is a creative author—saying things that have never been said in quite this way before—so that he borrows and stretches the literary forms available to him (Miller 1988:21-22).

Synthesis

This chapter established that in early interpretations Ecclesiastes has always been attributed to Solomon son of David to authenticate the book as Wisdom literature. The Solomonic authorship theory was not only important to classify the book but also for the process of canonization. Rabbis believed that for a book to be included in a canon, it had to be divinely inspired and not to be the thoughts of the author. Solomon as a king, a representative of YHWH was the perfect candidate.

In other arenas of the academy, specifically philosophy the book of Ecclesiastes was easily adopted as it was viewed to espouse philosophical themes. This interdisciplinary relationship makes for a rich interpretation as the book can be assessed outside of mainstream academy and interpreted in everyday life.

Chapter 5: *Hebel* and Qohelet

The word *hebel* has had different schools of thought that have emerged towards the dedication of the meaning of the word itself with a range of semantic implications. The precise meaning of the word has been a bone of contention even in modern linguistics. In this thesis, that argument will be evaluated once more, and a further reading provided. How the word *hebel* is understood ranges from the literal meaning of the word, its usage in Qohelet, translations and scholarly formulations.

5.1. Literal meaning of *Hebel* in Qohelet

The word *hebel* can be found throughout Qohelet and is used thirty-eight times out seventy-three times in the Hebrew Bible (Sneed 2012:154; Fuhr Jr. 2013:29). According to Anderson (1997:8) ascertained by a computer search the root word *hebel* appears approximately eighty-six times in the Hebrew Bible. Sixty-nine times as the absolute noun masculine singular הֶבֶל, seven times in the construct plural הֶבְלִי, five times as the absolute plural הֲבָלִים and five times as a verb.

The word that has occupied synchronic (or literary) analysis due to its various semantic implications and how Qohelet uses *hebel* in the book. With the extensive range of translations and meanings, the standard definition in the Hebrew Bible of the word הֶבֶל as a masculine noun is literally translated as "breathe and/or vapor" (Sneed 2012:154). Meaning that from the derivative of the root word suggests that the word *hebel* literally means "vapor" or "breathe".

From the standard literal definition, we take it that whenever Qohelet uses *hebel*, he is referring to either one. These two definitions have been adopted from the Hebrew because Fox (1986:409) clarifies that there is no direct English translation for the word *hebel* but is often translated to meanings that are close to the original meaning through connotations.

Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the word *hebel* is asserted in different contexts from that implied in Qohelet i.e. "empty" (Isa 30:7); "emptiness, nothing" (Isa 49:4); "deceit, falsehood" (Jer 10:14; Zech 10:2; Prov 31;10); "to have no value, be good for nothing" (Isa 30:6; 57; 12; Jer 16:19; Lam 4:17); and 'wind/breeze" (Isa 57:13; Jer 10:14; Qoh 1:14) (Sneed 2014:156). From the different meanings asserted in the different texts, it is fundamentally clear that the word alludes to something that is either fleeting or inefficient. Fox (1989:29) argues, the word is mostly used in a transferred sense. Meaning that from the original meaning of the word, it is open to new meanings.

Gordis (1968:205) articulates that Qohelet has two distinctions of meaning for *hebel* which are (a) unsubstantial and (b) transitory for the literal definition of breath although the parallelism to רוּחַ is still unclear (cf. Isa 57:13; Eccl 1:14). Fields (1975:105) makes an example of how these nuances can differ in a reading of Eccl 11:10: "So remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, for childhood and the prime of life are *vanity*" if vanity in this verse s to be read as "unsubstantial" does not make sense. Instead vanity in Eccl 11:10 should be understood in a transitory sense only then came the verse make sense. This then means that, Qohelet's advice in Eccl 10:13 is that, childhood and prime of life are not necessarily unsubstantial, still, they are

fleeting, non-temporal. The semantic implication of *hebel* as fleeting is related to the physical nature of "breath" and "vapor" (Anderson 1997:12).

The multiple meanings of *hebel* can be attributed to the fact that in Qohelet is not only a descriptive term, but it can also be a state of how things are or a situation (Fuhr Jr. 2013:19). Fields (1975:106) identifies 10 areas in Qohelet where *hebel* is used differently: Eccl 2:15-16 the "vanity" of human wisdom ; Eccl 2:19-21 the "vanity" of human labor; Eccl 2:26 the "vanity" of human purpose; Eccl 4:4 the "vanity" of human rivalry; Eccl 4:7 the "vanity" of human avarice (greed); Eccl 4:16 the "vanity" of human fame; Eccl 5:20 the "vanity" of human insatiety; Eccl 6:9 the "vanity" of human coveting; Eccl 7:6 the "vanity' of human frivolity; Eccl 8:10,14 the "vanity" of human awards.

From the ten areas where vanity is implied describing the state of humanity and activities humanity is preoccupied with, there is an implication that "without the inclusion of God, the commandments and ensuing judgement, life is, indeed, futile and vain" (Fields 1975:107) although there is no exclusive deceleration that life altogether is not worth living. Qohelet's use of *hebel* describes something far greater than that (Fields 1975:107). Qohelet rather "conveys the notion that life is enigmatic and mysterious" (Ogden 1987:22). Is it easy to assume that Qohelet makes nihilistic pronouncements since the words "all is *hebel* " i.e. 1:2 and 12:8 frame the book's theme, however, according to Fox (1999:35) Qohelet's thematic declaration "show that for Qohelet there is a single dominant quality in the world and that this quality inheres in the particular *habalim* that he identifies."

Fox (1999:36) argues that the thematic expression "all is *hebel"* should be understood as "a concept that applies to all occurrences" not only as "categories that share a multivalent label", it is then that the thematic expression can make sense in established particulars. Miller (2002:6) argues that Fox resorts to such a high level of abstraction because the literal meaning of "vapor" is not faithful to every occurrence in Qohelet, case in point being Eccl 8:14 "There is a *hebel* that occurs on the earth: there are righteous people who receive what is appropriate to the deeds of the wicked and there are wicked people who receive what is appropriate to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this too is a *hebel.*" The text alludes to unjust situations, however, to use the literal meaning and say that the situations are "vaporous" gives no information about the situation (Fox 1999:30). Miller (2002:6), however, argues that Qohelet often uses the term *hebel* with an additional descriptive term to avoid ambiguity i.e. toil is meaningless *and* futile or injustice is meaningless *and* bad.

Seybold (1997:318-320) affirms that in order to understand the use of *hebel* in Qohelet, we need to understand words and phrases lend each other meaning by observing how they are sequenced. He notes how יִתְרוֹן (profit, advantage or gain), in antithesis to הֶבֶל is significant in understanding the meaning of *hebel* in Qohelet. Put together the words forces upon *hebel* the meaning of 'that which does not yield results' or 'that which does not count or matter'. This then means that, in this definition Qohelet creates a system of value, where certain possessions are devalued in what Seybold (1997:319) calls the "devaluation of the system of norms established by the wisdom tradition." The definition by Seybold might be the closest to Qohelet's intended message.

On the other hand, Fields (1975:107) citing Wright (1972:140) who argues that the way in which to understand Qohelet's 'zeros' should be based upon the understanding that the book itself is a "record for the search of the key of life" and Qohelet comes to find that "life has lost the keys to itself", the 'zeros' begin to ad up when the intended reader realizes that "one must acquiesce to the sovereignty of God." The definition rendered by Fields means that everything only becomes *hebel* to those who do not center God in their existence.

One possible explanation for the differences in the two preceding polar definitions affirm what Miler (2002:8) refers to as the multiple sense approach. This implies that, where interpreters inherit the ambiguity already present in how Qohelet uses *hebel.* However, Miller identifies some pitfalls in this approach stating that, "this view fails to account for Qohelet's framing statements that "all is *hebel"* (1:2; 12:8; et al.). A view that Sneed has already addressed that to sharpen this contradiction it is best to assume an abstract definition of *hebel* in Qohelet because a uniform standard definition cannot exist, rather we qualify "all is *hebel"* in particularities.

To move away from the literal meaning, the KJV, NKJV, ESV, and NRSV maintain consistency while interpreting *hebel* as "vanity", whereas the NIV translates *hebel* as "meaningless", and the NLT introduces a variety of translations as "empty" in Eccl 5:7 (Fuhr Jr. 2013:30). In a variety of contexts Jewish Tanakh translates *hebel* as "futility", "fleeting" (6;12; 9:9; and 11:10), "frustration" (8:14) and "nothingness" (11:8) (Fur Jr. 2013:30). The variety of interpretations is because there has not been a successful attempt to translate *hebel* to a single abstract concept (Miller 2006:7).

Hebel is also applied as a metaphor. In the metaphorical sense emerging from the original etymology of "breath" and "vapor" the semantic implications of *hebel* is "worthlessness" (Anderson 1997:13). A parallel reading of *hebel* and its use outside of Qohelet shows that is not that farfetched to assume that indeed in certain instances the metaphoric use of "transience" is applicable i.e. Psalm 144:4 (NIV) Man is like a breath (*hebel*); his days are like a fleeting shadow, Job 7:16 (NASB) I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath (*hebel*). In both verses the implication is "not live forever" which can be applicable, but only when the situation being described relates wit *hebel* needing no secondary explanation (Fuhr Jr. 2013:32). Anderson (1999:13) argues that perhaps the complicated inert-relationship of *hebel* and its various nuances provides a general background to how Qohelet may have understood and used *hebel* in his book.

Not only is the use multifold in the book and evasive in price meaning, scholars have also formulated from their understanding basic translations that have varied since scholarship immemorial. Anderson (1999:14) understand the use of *hebel* in Qohelet as "breathe like", 'vanity", "ephemerality", "mysterious", "enigmatic", "meaningless", "futility", and "absurd". Fredricks (1993:24) and Farmer (1991:143-183) "fleeting", "transitory", "brevity". Fox (1999, 1986) is steadfast in the interpretation of "absurdity". Seybold (1997:323-320) maintains that "*hebel* consistently retains the meanings of 'breath' and 'vapor, mist and smoke' but is also part of the scholars who advocate for the connotation of "fleeting". These are the few of the many interpretations that scholars have advocated for, and I chose these ones specifically because they will center in this thesis and offer me background for when I offer a rereading of *hebel* in Qohelet.

The multiplicities of meaning make it difficult to narrow down Qohelet to a single meaning. This state of affairs leaves *hebel* open to interpretation for continuity in meaning through all the texts *hebel* is mentioned in. Although this context sensitive approach is valid because words do have an ambiguous nature to them, (Fox 1989:36) warns that such an approach might not necessarily be fully applicable to the book of Qohelet. This is because Qohelet's declaration of *hebel* is thematic one, 'everything is *hebel'*, showing that there is fundamentally a single quality that is an attribute to the world that manifest itself as *hebel.* Hence evil, wickedness, together with toil can all be *hebel* for Qohelet.

According to Miller (2002:4-5) to use the literal sense of the word from which all other meanings are derived from 'vapor', could not make sense. There is a known fact in Qohelet that he refers to 'unjust situations' as *hebel,* however, to call those situations 'vaporous' simply does not make sense and does not give any information. Therefore, Qohelet uses *hebel* in an abstract sense making it faithful to each occurrence also to make sense to the overall context of the book.

Miller (2004:6) argues that, Qohelet always uses *hebel* accompanied by additional descriptive terms i.e. 'toil is meaningless and *futile*', 'injustice is meaningless and *bad*'. I therefor propose 'fleeting' as an adjective to *hebel* if re-read as "all is *hebel* and fleeting". I use the term fleeting in particular to demonstrate the absurdity Camus speaks of because existence is fleeting (temporal) and everything under the sun. A few examples can be cited within and outside of Qohelet i.e.

Eccl 6:12 "For who knows what is good for a person in life, during a few and meaningless days **they pass through like a shadow**? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone?"

Ps 144:4 "they are like breath (הֶבֶל) their days are like **fleeting** shadow"

This approach I have undertaken is referred to as 'multiple sense approach'. An approach that encourages translators to apply multiple meanings. Miller (2006:9), however, argues that this approach fails to take into account Qohelet's claim that "all is *hebel"* stating: "If a shopkeeper were to announce that 'all is on sale,' then point to items throughout the store saying, 'this is on sale,' 'that is on sale,' 'this too is on sale,' and finally conclude by repeating 'all is on sale,' we would expect that something of common attribution was being said about each item in that store."

It is thus Miller's (2006:15) conclusion that Qohelet employs *hebel as* a 'symbol,' an image which holds together a set of meanings, or 'referents', that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by a single meaning.

5.2. *Hebel* as fleeting

Frederick's (1993) and Farmers (1991) have been identified as leading scholars in this school of thought that considers a reading of *hebel* in Qohelet as fleeting, below I want to explicate more on their position. Fredrick's (1993:24) thesis is that it seems as though "Qohelet assumes that we have learned that *life* is like breath, brief in length; the facts that we know from many poets and sages, not to speak of our own experience. But now he wants us to

be aware of the fact that *every* experience within life is breath, everything will pass". Meaning that, Fredrick creates a connection of his reading of *hebel* with the theme of "inevitability of death" (Fuhr Jr. 2013:35). To add on to Fuhr Jr.'s understanding of Fredrick's interpretation, I may add that Fredrick also connotes with the sentence "we know from many poets and sages, not to speak of our own experience" that life requires to be affirmed on its own terms. By that I do not discard empiricists but acknowledge that not everything can be quantified based on how we experience it because we do not have cognitive access to everything.

The thesis proposed by thesis proposed by Fredrick (1993:41) is still not a concluding remark that life is like breath and therefore cannot be enjoyed. Like Qohelet, Fredrick also appeals the *carpe diem* 'seize the day' principle as active affirmation meaning that life can still be enjoyed. However, the implication of futility or transience is that the enjoyment of life is the perpetuation of the same futility, therefore, according to Fuhr Jr. (2013:36) the questions begs, why the heed to enjoy life if it is fleeting? Fuhr Jr. (2013:36) answers that, the enjoyment of life should then be a "wise man's concession", recognizing that every day is a gift from God.

I may add to that, from the perspective that assumes that there can still be meaning without God, the interrogation of the values of existence does not necessarily amount to nihilism rather examining life is active affirmation. Fleeting in my opinion is a life that has not been examined and whose values are decadent. My argument aligns with Fredrick's (1993:28) view that there are many direct and negative words such as "nothing", "empty, idle, worthless", "emptiness" used over 100 times in the Hebrew Bible yet Qohelet resorts to a

more obscure use of *hebel* in what he calls the "brevity view". This shows that although we may never fully know Qohelet's intentions, but from what we gather our interpretation teaches us that the use of *hebel* was not to advocate for nihilism.

To remedy the connoting relationship between the use of *hebel* as transience and the "chasing after the wind" judgements, Fredrick (1993:29-30) proposes the translation of "the wind's desire" instead of the common translation of "chasing" supposing a more subjective possessive translation. Alluding more to the direction of the wind whose desire "changes from north, south, east, west, upward, downward, around and even virtually still" meaning that direction of the wind is also transient (Fuhr Jr. 2013:36-37). The overall synthesis of Fredrick' arguments is that metaphoric translations are vital for instances where Qohelet is vague.

Miller (2006:11) notes that what sets the metaphorical sense approach that views *hebel* as a single metaphor of "transience" is a blanket approach of using *hebel* as a host for multiple meanings that should be approached with suspicion. Miller (2006:11-12) uses Farmer's (1991:143-146) treatment of Eccl 8:14 "there is also something else *meaningless* that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve. This too, I say is *meaningless*" (NIV) and argues that it is not wholly substantial for the following reason. Farmer's (1991:181-183) thesis is that in order to appreciate the metaphoric sense of *hebel* in Eccl 8:14 should be read as Qohelet describing a situation that is "sort term" as "such may be the case for a while, but later Gods justice will prevail". Miller (2006:12) argues that although a beautifully presented

argument and valuable but it does not account for other instances such as the role of *hebe*l in 4:7-12 and 6:1-6.

It seems as though Miller is not an advocate of a decadent reading of *hebel* in Qohelet, a defense I pick up in his explanation of why "transience" cannot be sustained as the metaphor for *hebel*. Miller (2006:12) argues that for certain texts i.e. 1:14, 2:11, 17, 26, 4:4, 16 and 6:9, "fleeting" cannot be appropriate for these "chasing after the wind" segments and suggests they should be re-read as "toil" is not fleeting, rather it is the *results* of the toil which are transient. A view I also subscribe to because I am also of the view that Qohelet is more concerned with the value we ascribe to not only existentiality but also the activities we preoccupy ourselves with. To simply attribute meaninglessness to the "all is *hebel*" statements for me seems simplistic and reductionist to a broader spectrum and cannot apply everywhere because in certain instances due to redactional activity or simply Qohelet's own contradictions there is no uniformity of the application of the term.

5.3. *Hebel* as absurdity

Fox (1986, 1989, 1999) has been the leading scholar who has inducted Qohelet into the school of the absurd. A word that originated from the writings of the philosopher Albert Camus in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Fox (1986:409) inducts Qohelet by arguing that is use of the word absurd equivalent to hebel is because "the essence of the absurd is a disparity between two terms that are supposed to be joined by a link of harmony or causality but are, in fact, disjunct". This then means that, "the absurd is

irrational, an affront to reason- the human faculty that seeks and discovers order in the world around us" (Fox 1999:31).

Fox paints a picture of reason that has been disillusioned by the contradictions of life, where harmony is found wanting. A view supported by Camus (1955:2) who explains in the preface of his book why he wrote the *Myth of Sisyphus* that, it was firstly to resolve the issue of suicide without "the aid of eternal values which temporarily perhaps, are absent or distorted in contemporary Europe".

The interrogation of suicide in Camus which he connects with the question of existential will and value is not primarily *how* one should live but to decide whether one *should* live in the first place, to determine whether living is "worth all the trouble" (Morgan 2011:7). A conundrum Camus (1955:3) himself resolves by stating that "even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate. Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amid the French and Europe disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism".

To touch briefly on the issue of death and how it links with the underlying matter of suicide in Camus and Fox's relation to it, In the Old Testament the concept of death if often centred around *Sheol*. This concept of Sheol reflects upon the ephemeral (fleeting) nature of life (Fuhr Jr. 2013:118). *Sheol*, a proper name, is simply referred to as the dwelling place of the dead (open to interpretation).

However, there has been little attention devoted to afterlife studies in the Hebrew Bible because, as Burkes (1999:27-31) argues: "the Israelites had

practically no notion of an afterlife for the individual because of their finely-honed sense of the people's survival in general under God's guidance; community continuity provided comfort in the face of death." Thus, it was this corporate identity that became the Israelite's answer to the problem of death, and there was little need in light of this to answer death in a theological or personally eschatological manner.

Despite the 'general silence' on death as a concept in the Hebrew Bible, Qohelet nevertheless wrestles with the concept. Burkes (1999:27-31) argues that death is actually the "core" of Qohelet's message to signify the transience of life. While most of the Old Testament deals with death as a side note to more pressing matters of national and cultic interest, in Qohelet the inevitability of death rises to thematic prominence as a problem that is not adequately dealt with by traditional answers, thus paving the way for an eschatological solution to the problem.

Fox (1989:292-293) makes a comparison of how the concept of death is conveyed between the Prophets and Qohelet. His argument is outlined as follows; the prophets' eschatological symbolism draws upon imagery and possibly phraseology familiar to common mourning practices, while applying images of and phrases of personified land, city or the world (i.e." the field is robbed, the land mourns" Joel 1:10).

For the prophets, these images depict the disaster to a nation or the world at large. For Qohelet, they represent the demise for the individual. Qohelet shapes the imagery used by the prophets in the contrary (Fox 1989:294). Symbolism usually views the general through the particular (i.e. Daniel

representing the Jewish people in exile) Qohelet views the particular through the general. Qohelet invokes images of general disaster to symbolize an individual's demise (Fox 1989:294).

Chia (1988:101) draws the conclusion from Qohelet's reflections that, Qohelet examines death as an element to invalidate the distinction between human and beast, the wise and fool, *rich and poor*, because the same fate awaits all of them, death. In clearer terms, Qohelet wants to eliminate any kind of thinking that presupposes that the wise have precedence over a fool or the rich over the poor in life simply because of their social status because the only thing certain for all of them is death. This supposes that also at the core of Qohelet's message all people are all equal in that we do not choose to be born and we cannot evade death. [33] However, the meaning attached to death can be different depending on a given context (Mdingi 2014:8).[34]

Fox (1988:294) concludes to the general consensus that, "throughout the book, Qohelet reveals an obsession with death unparalleled in biblical literature". Seow (1997:283) argues in consensus with Fox that Qohelet's understanding of death is that of a 'personal battle' drawing from the imagery found in Canaanite mythology, specifically the battle between Mot, the god of death and Baal (see Eccl 8:8). Camus (1955:4) also argues that fundamental questions of life are "facts that the heart can feel" to paint the imagery of the personalization of an existential crisis.

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[33] Although irrelevant to the argument, I want to clarify this point because Critical Race Theorists will disagree with this based on the argument of ontological disposition. I argue as far as existentialism is concerned and for the sake of this argument chose not to narrow down the argument to ontological disposition as a result of social death.
[34] Mdingi argues that meaning should be qualified as it is an attempt to break away from absolutism that claims to provide absolute meaning to different facets of human existence.

The preceding arguments shows that even in 1950 Europe, there was already a calamity of value decadency that Camus centers on the question of suicide that Fox also connotes to the reading of *hebel*. Fox (1999:31) argues for the possibility of this position by stating that because the absurd is a relational concept which is not inherent in a phenomenon but resides in the tension between a certain reality and framed work of expectations. The book of Qohelet is about meaning and what unites all of Qohelet's complaints is the collapse of meaning. What unites his counsels and affirmations is the attempt to reconstruct (Fox 1999:133).

The argument that the meaning of *hebel* of in Qohelet is absurd does not mean that the literal meanings are discarded. Fox (1989:30) acknowledges that there are verses where "vapor" retains its use the literal translation of *hebel* i.e. 3:19 and 10:11, nonetheless, it does not make sense in a verse like 2:23. This is because Qohelet makes his grammar clear and makes a clear distinction between the *hebel* judgements "all is *hebel*" and situations "this is *hebel*". There should therefore be no confusion with the metaphorical usage. Fox (1989:30) also argues that to say everything is "vaporous" does not give much information, not is not "Nichtiges" a zero, or absence, the reality is actually quite real and substantive.

When there are two realities that are in contradiction with each other, there arises absurdity (Fox 1989:31). Absurdity therefore becomes the precarious human condition because there are constant contradictions (Fox 1989:32). The congruency between Camus and Qohelet's concept of *hebel* based on the preceding statements is that, both express "alienation from the world", "a

distancing of the I from the event it seems to be bound to", " a frustration and longing for coherence", a "sale of meaningless events" and "assessment of the gods".

The common thread in both Camus and Qohelet is that both find themselves disillusioned by reality and want to interrogate it and offer new ways in which existence can be framed. This disillusionment is the cause of what Camus (1955:28) refers to as the "unreasonable silence of the world". A view that this thesis heavily leans on that Qohelet interrogates causality and finds that in reality there is no reasonableness to the expectations of the law of retribution.

Fox (1989:33) warns against the assumption that Qohelet had a president's counsel complex and thought to possess a monopoly of knowledge by implying that "societies perspectives were limited and while implying his were broader". However, what Qohelet was preoccupied with, was simply (not in the simplest terms) evaluation, because "to call something hebel is an evaluation of nature" (Fox 1989:34). Although Camus' absurd is founded upon atheism, the rejection of Christianity and its doctrines dubbing them as contradictory, the question of the *will to live*, is the atheist Camus and theist Qohelet are curiously similar (Morgan 2012:80). Fox (1989:46) argues that implications of hebel as absurdity is that "ephemerality, inefficiency, and deceitfulness are absurd if permanence, efficacy, or reliability are expected of a phenomenon that have these failings".

5.4. *Hebel* as vanity

Hebel as vanity or meaningless is a widely common translation. Glosses that represent vanity are "unsustainability", "futility", and "emptiness" (Fuhr Jr. 2013:52). Understanding *hebel* as vanity or meaningless summarizes the book in terms of value (Huovila and Lioy 2019:36). Fuhr Jr. (2013:52) argues that it is this common interpretation of *hebel* by the general population that is guilty in prejudicing the book as pessimistic. Although it should be considered that Qohelet never really infers or observes that life is "purposeless", rather creates a value system that interrogates situations where human effort can be evaluated (Fuhr Jr. 2013:53).

Synthesis

The variations of the use *hebel* in Qohelet mostly depend on the context given. The intended meaning of Qohelet still evades us, however, it is clear from the arguments above that depending on the intended message, meaning can be generated. All the classifications however all allude to the same thing that in declaring everything as *hebel*, Qohelet was pointing us to the temporal nature of things and how we come to value them. It was necessarily a declaration that all is without value and therefore meaningless.

The elucidation of the various forms of the implied meaning of *hebel* in Qohelet demarcate clearly and compartmentalize the book into thematic sections. From those thematic sections we can see clearly which aspect of *hebel* Qohelet

emphasizes, at any given moment it could be about joy, sadness, laughter, the virtue of labor (although not gathering), or even, obeying the law.

Chapter 6: Another meaning is possible: A re-reading of Hebel as pragmatic nihilism

Introduction

The author has established through this thesis that at the centre of Qohelet's concept of vanity, which is not so much pessimism but a clarion call to revolt against stagnant values which do not correspond with reality, the law of retribution (cause and effect). At the core of Nietzsche's nihilism, derived from his notes on European nihilism, Nietzsche does not advocate for decadence but rather an overcoming and affirmation, more importantly a creation of new values beyond Christian morality.

Unbeknownst to them, I have now made Qohelet and Nietzsche interlocutors, they intersect at the point that argues for a construction of narratives which affirms life and the creation of new values. Nietzsche can assist Qohelet as he was also a philosopher concerned with value, and it is for this reason I induct Qohelet into the school of axiology. Hereby naming Qohelet a value theorist, a rereading of Hebel in Qohelet as the question of the value of things instead of meaninglessness.

The renaming of Qohelet's meaning of vanity then presupposes what Nietzsche calls the "will to responsibility", the responsibility for creating new values. A new

state of meaning where vanity is no longer an intermediate state or in between state which is a means to the end, but as the end itself. A synthesis which suggests that, it has been established that existential meaning is vital for human existence, meaninglessness cannot be a concluding remark for reality and therefore now assumes the task of overcoming instead of lamenting about the state of decedent values. Qohelet will be engaged from the perspective of 'value theorist' rather than the conventional historical-critical analysis which has dominated biblical studies.

'Value theorist' consequently becomes a method of analysis I engage with the text. It is not only a method or proposed outlook with which we can view Qohelet, but also indicative of the presumptions of the author as well which serve as a precursor, that *All is Vanity*! The inherent double nature of biblical texts is beneficial for the imagination of such a concept, and the open-ended culture of post modernism/structuralist dialogue is receptive. This method of analysis is premised on the fact that biblical texts are cultural entities which perform in a cultural paradigm. Qohelet was a critic of religious values, and not only that but through an empirical investigation sought to iron out those contradictions because of causality between life and traditional wisdom.

To hail Qohelet as a value theorist implies that the theory in question should have its own rigour. It should consist of certain elements which constitute it to be a theory as I will explicate. The foremost question might be, how theory of nothingness can aid in value creation. How can nihilism and vanity be pragmatic? It is for this reason I want to explicate more on the tents of the pragmatism of nothingness and what constitutes them for us to arrive at a

comprehensive understanding of why I say Qohelet is a value theorist and why Nihilism is key for this interpretation.

6.1. Nietzschean Nihilism

The roots of Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking come from the Protestant tradition in which he was bred ('I am a descendant of a whole genealogies of Christian clergymen'), in the philosophy of Schopenhauer whom in adolescence he chose for his Master's dissertation and in the Greek studies in which he was engaged by choice and by profession (Blackham 2002:24).

Nietzsche is often seen as destructive, he attacks Christianity, savages Socrates and wages war on morality. It is in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where he invents a Persian prophet who inducts his followers into the same destructiveness, but this destruction, unbeknownst to many, is a way of clearing ground so that an affirming philosophy can be built (Higgins & Solomon 2000:198). The great significance of Nietzsche's work is that it lends itself to a plurality of interpretations with a philosophical register raging from ebullient levity and wistful gravity (Wardle 2016:34).

Nietzsche theorized at the basis of his philosophy the question of the meaning of life as most paramount to his philosophical thought. He further declared that God is dead, reversed Schopenhauer's ethical judgement and denounced Greek rationalism but these influences have no bearing on the influence he made as an existentialist who propelled people to think differently about the meaning of life (Blackham 2002:24).

Martin Heidegger said Nietzsche is "the consummation of the Western philosophical tradition, the thinker who brings metaphysics to its end; that Michel Foucault frequently regarded Nietzsche as the progenitor of his own genealogical method and its stress on discursive practices, that Jacques Derrida considers Nietzsche the deconstructive thinker *par excellence"*. All this serves as eloquent testimony to Nietzsche's claim (Magnus & Higgins 2006:1).

A clear and simple interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophical work has proved to be a difficult enterprise because of his deliberate avoidance of a conventional philosophical system (Magnus & Higgins 2006:21). Nietzsche's books often give the appearance that they have been assembled rather than composed (Danto 1956:19). Often philosophical works are analyzed topically, however, this does not mean that a philosophical body of work should grow by accretion. This is for the reason that often, a philosophical body of work will be built scrap by scrap and without their knowing, the philosopher realizes later that the themes are connected (Danto 1956:19).

As a spectator of his own activities, the philosopher will then assemble the work into a literary unit that is systematic and topical. Unconsciously the philosopher is not aware that even before writing a philosophy, that this is the first process of systemic philosophy in itself (Danto 1956:19). The same can be argued for regarding Nietzsche and the philosophy of nihilism.

On the surface, Nihilism connotes negativity, emptiness (Danto 1956:19), this is the standard dictionary definition. However, in the word Nihilism, nihil does not signify non-being but primarily the *value of nil* (Deleuze 1968:147). Danto compares two bodies of thought that, although distinct from Nietzsche's

nihilism, they do bear some partial resemblance. The first one is, the Nihilism of Emptiness which is essentially that of Buddhist or Hindu teaching that hold that the world we live in and seem to know has no ultimate reality, and that our attachment to an illusion (Danto 1965:28). Reality presents itself has having nor form which all reasonable human beings want to escape.

The second one is, a Nihilism of Negativity, which flourished in the 19th century in Europe, especially in the 1805's and 1806's in Russia, and which found most of its respectable expression in Turgenev's *Father and Sons* (1861) (Danto 1965:28). Russian Nihilism was especially a negative and destructive attitude against a body of moral, political, and religious teachings found or felt by Nihilists to be confining and obscurantist (Danto 1965:29).

It is common belief amongst reviewers that Nihilism is a concept that developed from German philosophical circles and this explains why Russian and German nihilism are dissimilar (Marmysz 2003:17). While German nihilism tends more towards the theoretical and philosophical, Russian nihilism is more associated with radical and revolutionary political movements (Marmysz 2003:17). A difference clearly visible in Turgenev's novel which focuses on the characters of Arcady and Barazov, two college students who upon their return from college come into conflict with the traditional forms of living (Marmysz 2003:17).

Turgenev's novel has been acclaimed and contested, in a response to Turgenev, Nikolai Chernyshevsky in opposition to the negative connotations that Barazov's character implied with Nihilism, wrote a book *What is to be Done*? (Marmysz 2003:18). In his book Nikolai like all those who oppose negative nihilism proposes a depiction of the "new man" (eerily similar to the

Übermensch but not be confused as one) as an alternative mode of emulation (Marmysz 2003:18). Marmysz (2003:18) argues that this is the very essence of Russian nihilism, "a movement of revolutionary repudiation whose positive doctrines were generally vague and disjointed."

For Nietzsche, the beginning of Nihilism was depreciation which was always presupposed by fiction (creative writing). The idea of another world, of a supersensible world in all its forms (God, essence, the good, truth), the idea of values superior to life, is not one example among many but the constitutive element of all fiction (Deleuze 1962:147). When superior values are upheld, the effect is the devaluation of life. Deleuze (1962:147) therefore argues that, the primary colloquial sense is that values which are superior to life are often inseparable from their effect, since their constitutive element is a depreciation of life, the negation of this world.

The next step in nihilism according to Deleuze (1962:147-148) is a reaction, the superior values and the supersensible world are reacted against, denied and refused all validity. In this sense there is no longer a devaluation of life in favor of superior values but rather a devaluation of the values themselves. In this second sense, one denies God, and all forms of the supersensible "nothing is true, nothing is good and God is dead". To differentiate between the first sense and the second one, Deleuze (1962:1470 argues that, the first sense essence was *opposed* to appearance (life is denied in the name of higher values) and in the second sense, essence is *denied* and appearance is retained everything is merely appearance. The first sense is negative nihilism and the second reactive nihilism. I shall dwell on the two before proceeding to active nihilism.

The essence of nihilism is important to discover as Heidegger argues; the logic of nihilism needs to account for the "provenance of those fragile values whose devaluation we currently experience" (Conway 1992:12). Centered in Nietzsche's philosophy is the question of existential meaninglessness, or existential nihilism and its consequences (Wardle 2016:24). It is important to account for the social base that this philosophy emerged from as that of the "wake of modernity" (Wardle 2016:25). It is for this reason that Heidegger (1978:62-63) understands nihilism as a "historical movement and not just any view advocated by someone… nihilism is the fundamental movement of the history of the west".

If nihilism is implied in the history of modernity, then by definition a historiographical exercise should be undertake which incorporates almost all of Western thought. A monumental task which shall not be undertaken in this thesis, perhaps explored further in publications on the relationship between Nietzsche and his predecessors and counterparts. For the purpose of this thesis, although centering Nietzsche, his counterparts will also be glossed upon. The foremost runner is Heidegger who when read concurrently with Nietzsche aids in the understanding of Nietzschean nihilism.

Nietzsche is a fragmentary thinker and therefore the meaning of nihilism remains elusive and ambiguous even in Nietzschean writings themselves. However, there is a clear distinction into two primary categories, Nihilism as (a) as a sign of the increased power of the spirit – active nihilism and (b) as the decline and recession of the power of the spirit – passive nihilism (Marmysz 2003:21). The increased power of the spirit came in the form of existential thinkers engaging in activities Wardle (2016:25) refers to as "uprooting

traditional existential meaning(s) through a critique of dogmatism and general skepticism towards absolutism". Meaning that there was a value decadency ensuing pre-modern narratives that secured meaning for existence.

Although a crisis that warranted attention, Nietzsche was not the chief bearer and diagnostician of the decadency of the West as he owes much of his articulation to his predecessor Arthur Schopenhauer (Wardle 2016:25). Philosophers like Schopenhauer have long before Nietzsche resolved that perhaps becoming is a waste of strength. A conundrum Schopenhauer (1966:586) articulates as 'a problems that presents itself, a task to be worked out' (Wardle 2016:26).

Thus spoke Zarathustra is book which counts amongst the most important in Nietzsche's works, a book that he details as "full of detail which, because it is drawn from what I've seen and suffered, only I can understand. Some pages seem to be bleeding" (Allison 2001:111). A body of work which seems to be very personal Nietzsche where in the beginning he has *Zarathustra* announce that "God is dead!" Proceeding this aphorism Nietzsche critiques traditional Christian morality, the will to power, eternal return, and *Der Übermensch* (Super human).

Primarily the aphorism "God is dead!" can be taken to mean the Judeo-Christian God is no longer believed in (Pangle 1983:45). On the contrary, the Death of God represented what Kinlaw (2012:59) refers to as the "eradication of the supersensible and thereby the collapse of the previous metaphysical foundations (sacred or secular) for one's practical self-conception". Simply put, the death of God is the (re)conceptualization of meaning which seeks to affirm

life in *this* world, undermining all desiderata of meaning beyond the lived experience *hic et nunc* (Wardle 2016:33).

The aim here is not to demonstrate that there was a relationship between Nietzsche and Judeo-Christianity since this is a thesis in Biblical Studies. The reason for this avoidance is the gratuitous association with anti-Semitism (Gericke 2011:445). Nor does this thesis aim to retrieve the reception history of the Hebrew Bible in Nietzsche's philosophy. The specific aim to is to see how his motif of will to power, Übermensch and reevaluation of values, read concurrently with Qohelet's *Hebel* as a critique of worthlessness and the contradiction between written text and reality can be a frame work of overcoming.

6.1.1. Der Übermensch

Der Übermensch, German for The Overman is the second most central to Nietzsche's philosophy of affirmation. To understand the theory of value and how Nietzsche theorizes overcoming and affirmation, understanding the Übermensch is critical to this analysis. In his book, *What Good seekers found in Nietzsche,* Grillaert (2008:14) categorizes the 'God seekers' or '*Bogoiskateli'* as a group or sect of society who moved away from the dominant discourse that engulfed eighteen century Russia. According to Grillaert (2008:14), from the 1860's onwards until the 1890's Russia was dominated by a radical discourse of atheism. The Russian intelligentsia had no interest in creating room for discourse for anything either than social, economic and political themes.

The Russian intelligentsia eventually moved away from the dominant discourse and began to discuss issues relating to and of metaphysics and religion (Grillaert 2008:14). A new movement emerged in Russia of *God seekers* comprising of two groups the "new religious consciousness" and the "neo-idealists" (Grillaert 2008:14-15). From the new religious consciousness group, comprising of creative writers with a desire to reform religious consciousness, began to disseminate Nietzsche's ideas in Russia (Grillaert 2008:15).

Inspired by Nietzsche, the new religious consciousness movement began to embark on a critique of traditional Christianity in the hopes to create a new model (Grillaert 2008:16). Dissatisfied with the lack of metaphysics is Marxism, the neo-idealists geared towards a goal of redefining and revising theoretical aspects of Marxism they did not agree with (Grillaert 2008:16). Marxism was not to be wholly discarded as they sought to integrate revised aspects into their new program (Grillaert 2008:17).

The neo-idealists clashed with conservative idealists because of their reception of Nietzsche, while the former embraced the philosopher's ideas, the latter refuted them. This disjuncture culminated in the neo-idealists hailing Nietzsche as a 'significant source' for their school of thought (Grillaert 2008:18). In Nietzsche they drew inspiration for their protest positivist and utilitarian philosophy, "they found in Nietzsche the re-valuator of all values" (Grillaert 2008:18). It is from this narrative as an example that we shall view how the Übermensch functions the philosophy of Nietzsche as a framework of overcoming and affirmation especially in already existing schools of thought.

Although not clearly defined in his own work, the idea of the *Übermensch* still found traction and interpretation in secondary literature. Cybulska (2015:1) argues that the early loss of his father left Nietzsche with a 'lifelong tendency to idealization'. To cope with his vulnerable state, Nietzsche then formularized the concept of *Der Übermensch.* a coping mechanism which provided Nietzsche a safe space to idealize would then become a conceptual framework with which value can be reevaluated. Cybulska's (2015:1-2) reading of the Übermensch is centered on personality traits, not so much a critique of slave morality as often interpreted. According to Cybulska, the Übermensch is a model for "ideal strength", a protective mask for 'sensitive and passionate interior'.

Cybulska (2015:2-3) draws us to the detail often overlooked that Nietzsche did not in fact invent the term Übermensch, it is rather an expansion of an idea that has already existed. According to Kaufmann (1950:307-308) there had already existed an idea of *hyperanthropos* in ancient writings which alluded to the "Over-Soul", "Beyond-man" which were great influencers in Nietzsche's concept of the German version.

Translating Übermensch has proved to be an evasive exercise, variations have been provided as detailed in Cybulska's (2015:2) study as follows: Shaw (1903) "Superman", Kaufmann (1950/1974) "Overman" as a self-overcoming man who creates his own values, Parkes (2005) "Over human", Jung (1934-1939/1989) "a deification of the ordinary man", Heidegger (1954/1984) "a man grounded in being the grand style of self-creation."

The difficulty to translate and interpreted what Übermensch means according to Cybulska (2015:2) hinges on the prefix 'uber' which has approximately 600

usages in the German Dictionary. Nietzsche himself has used the prefix quite sparingly in addition to Übermensch with words such as *Überreichtum* (super-richness)*, Überfluß* (overflow), *Überfülle* (superabundance)*, Überschuß* (surplus), and *übervoll* (overfull) (Cybulska 2015:2). In the bigger scheme of things, the Übermensch stands as a conceptual framework with which the performance of the world can be judged.

We encounter the concept of the Übermensch in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Zarathustra spears as some sort of prophet who emerges from self-imposed isolation calling people to come and account for their failings and encouraging them to lead a new life (Caro & Pippin 2006:9). The simple characterization becomes complicated when Nietzsche argues that Zarathustra's oracles do not presuppose a" replacement" of one way with another as we shall see when we discuss the trans-valuation of all/higher values (Caro & Pippin 2006:9).

It seems Nietzsche used the *façade* of Zarathustra to correct pitfalls of his earlier philosophical ideals. Zarathustra once believed the world to be a contestation between two forces that of good and evil (possibly alluding to *The Birth of Tragedy*) and advised that humanity side with the force of light (Danto 1965:196). It is important to note that Nietzsche published the first three parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* between 1883 and 1885 which in between a new beginning for his thought emerged producing *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil* (Caro & Pippin 2006:8).

It is after *Beyond Good and Evil* that Nietzsche transcends these binaries alluded earlier in *The Birth of Tragedy* and Zarathustra who made the mistake

of believing that morality was an objective feature of the universe should be the first to rectify this philosophy (Danto 1965:196). In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes (2005:145); "Zarathustra created this fateful error of morality: this means he must be the first to recognize it". Zarathustra (or the historical Zoroaster) now announced that values and morality were relative, arguing that it is impossible for all people to adhere to the same set of values due to their local conditions and perdurance (Danto 1965:196).

Zarathustra in his own words proclaims "When I came to mankind for the first time, I committed the hermit's folly, the great folly, I stated myself in the market place. And when I spoke to all, I spoke to none" (Nietzsche 2006:232). In this proclamation, Zarathustra captures well that as a hermit, who had isolated himself for an undocumented period, had come to be disillusioned with the reality he was now exposed to. A testament of the period in which Nietzsche was a product of, a period of decadence and a period on the verge of erosion. However, it was not only a period that could be captured well in analysis and critique, but it was also a period that warranted a reevaluation of previously held signifiers.

To redeem himself from the moral lacuna he once advocated for, Zarathustra proclaims "Look!" he utters, "I teach you the *Übermensch*! the *Übermensch* is the meaning of the earth!" (Nietzsche 1883:11). Although not explicitly mentioned, it is implicitly nuanced here for the first time that Nietzsche advocated for an overcoming and affirmation. Zarathustra himself further asserts; "But with the new morning a new truth came to me; then I learned to say: "What do the market place and the rabble noise and long rabble ears matter to me!" (Nietzsche 2006/1883:232).

I deliberately employ the German *Übermensch* as opposed to the common variations and interpretations of "Overman", "Superman" or "Higher man" as they have classist and meritocratic connotations and presuppose transcending, to borrow the Nietzschean term the "herd" which in my immediate "post" colonial-Capitalist context would be misleading. My assertion to avoid common interpretations is supported by a claim Zarathustra makes that; "The overman is in my heart , that is my first and only concern – and not human beings; not the neighbor, not the poorest, and not the most suffering, not the best" (Nietzsche 2006/1883:233).

It is possible that my claim of avoidance can be combatted with arguments which assert that I am reading Nietzsche out of context or imposing current trends on a classic text. However, the contrary is true, I am faithful to the context out of which he arose from, and acknowledge that Nietzsche most probably did not have post-colonial Africa, which today as it has been is riddled with multiple layers of oppression in mind when he was writing. Rather he was writing in Europe for Europeans, we can only be faithful to his mastery of thought and fundamental assumptions in his body of work to a certain extent. Nietzsche was writing at the helm of Colonialism, a context I was born into, and I do not see why he should not be challenged on his classist and racist views. It is for this reason I will not pledge any epistemic allegiance to the interpretations of the Übermensch as "Over man" or "Superman" but rather, as a conceptual framework with which overcoming and the pragmaticism of nihilism can be tested against.

Although with a view different to mine, Danto (1965:197) also argues that "Overman" or "Superman" connotes that the Übermensch is a superhuman, an athletic ideal which sounds too domineering with the suggestion of overseer or overlord. It has a sense of beyondness as well as superiority. Thus, choosing to leave the German untranslated.

The untranslated German term, gathering from Nietzsche's works seems to suggest that the Übermensch is an anthesis of mediocrity and stagnation (Kaufmann 2013:309).

There are affinities between the Übermensch and aspirations for greatness, however, not in the common sense of dominance. Later interpretations have adopted the latter while we see in Nietzsche's earlier works that the intended meaning was a "creating of the authentic self". We observe in an essay titled "Schopenhauer as Educator" originally published in 1874 Nietzsche was already flirting with the idea of what an Übermensch looks like. It was Nietzsche's contention that Schopenhauer demonstrated human greatness (Payne 2004:7).

Nietzsche had huge admiration for Schopenhauer's will to continually contest with society and in the process creating his own authentic self and values of his own accord (Payne 2004:7). A necessity to undertake this project for Nietzsche and champion it is courage. Payne (2004:7) argues that courage as a necessity is expressed in earlier works of Kant in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" that humans need courage to achieve the desired state of human existence. Kant even went further to coin the motto for the enlightenment as "*Sapere aude*!" meaning "Have courage to sue your own reason!" implying a release from

"incurred tutelage". Although they differ with Nietzsche, there is an affinity in thought that courage is a necessity.

It can be argued that it also from this line of thinking that led Nietzsche to talk about the "herd" mentality if incurred tutelage is implied as a constraint and the Übermensch as the antithesis. To speak of "incurred tutelage" insinuates that there is another "authentic self" and a "self" created by society, not so much a 'double consciousness' per say, however, an attestation to the will and that the bodies we occupy are not a final version or border of our existence. Nietzsche saw that humanity was wasting away with the adherence to the herd-mob-mentality and the Übermensch was to be an attempt at an ethic of "self-creation" instead of a praise of a creator who sets up a table of predetermined values and codes of behavior (Payne 2004:8). It is here where Nietzsche draws our attention to the importance of higher values and not all values as often attested.

The question might then be to understand the concept fully, why has the Übermensch not yet emerged? Is man naturally reactive? It is interesting for me that to answer these questions we first need to go back to the original question, if God is dead, then what killed him? What killed God is *pity* says Nietzsche (Deleuze 1962:149). What is pity? Pity is tolerance for the states of live close to zero (Deleuze 1962:149). In his analysis Deleuze argues that pity is a category of the negative will (will to nothingness) and reactive forces. Put more aptly, the will to nothingness allows reactive forces to triumph, life as a whole becomes unreal and reactive in particular (Deleuze 1962:148). The will to nothingness merely tolerates reactive forces although it does have a need

for it because it is through reactive forces that life is denied and contradicts itself (Deleuze 1962:149).

Deleuze (1962:149) argues that the result of passive nihilism is when reactive forces break their alliance with the will to nothingness. This comes as a result of the reactive force's anxiety that the will to nothingness might obscure its own goal or a fear that the will to nothingness might turn against them. We are then left with reactive forces with no will, not even a will to nothingness! The end result is to fade away passively (Deleuze 1962:149). Passive nihilism then become a product of reactive nihilism and a prolonging of negative nihilism (Deleuze 1962:149). Pity in Nietzschean symbolism then becomes the reason why the Übermensch cannot emerge. Deleuze (1962:150) says "pity suffocates God. It is as if the reactive life has blocked up his throat".

In the making of the Übermensch, there are a number of other characters to consider besides negative will and passive nihilism. According to Deleuze (1962:164) the theory of "the Higher Man" consists of the (1) prophet, (2) 2 kings, (3) the man with the leeches,(4) the sorcerer, (5) the last pope, (6) the ugliest man, (7) the voluntary beggar and (8) the shadow.

The diversity of all these characters is as follows; the prophet is the representative of passive nihilism (Deleuze 1964:164). He is looking for a sea to drink from, a sea to drown himself in as he says "everything is empty, everything is past!" All our wells have dried up even the sea has receded. The earth is ready to devour us! The earth wants to break open, but the depths will not devour us! Alas, where is there still a sea in which one could drown, truly we have grown too weary to even die" (Deleuze 1962:150-151).

The sorcerer is the bad conscience, the "counterfeiter", the "demon of melancholy" who fabricates his suffering in order to excite pity (the entertainment of the will to nothingness) he "decks out disease even if it showed itself naked Infront of a physician" (Deleuze 1962:164). The ugliest man represents reactive nihilism, he puts himself in the place of the God that he has killed (Deleuze 1962:165). The two kings are a representation of two extremes, they represent species activity grasped in the prehistoric principle of determination and the post historic culture where those customs are suppressed (Deleuze 1962:165).

The man with leeches represents the product of culture as science (Deleuze 1962:165). The last pope is the representation of religion, he represents the product of culture as religion (Deleuze 1962:165). The voluntary beggar is the representation of all that is the product of human's culture and species. He has gone through the whole human species seeking, from rich to poor, heavenly wisdom and earthly happiness (Deleuze 1962:165). The voluntary beggar is always consumed with questions to which he seeks answers for to make sense of his existence. The shadow is the wanderer, species activity itself and culture and movement. The principle of the shadow is that it loses its aim and searches for it again (Deleuze 1962:165).

If these are all the constitutive elements of the Übermensch as a functional element of overcoming, who overcomes and what is to be overcome? The general understanding of Übermensch is often a post-human bigger than life figure. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche refers to a few men which he regards as great men capable of "victory and the seduction of others" i.e. Julius

Caesar, da Vinci et al. (Nietzsche 1973:122). However, although he expresses admiration, these men remain just that, mortal men, also men who are not really widely regarded as Nietzsche does.

Although Nietzsche, who died penniless and insane, having not fully expanded on the concept of the Übermensch, a concept that has evaded us for a long time, was clear from his earlier writing on how the Übermensch would look like:

> I *teach you the Übermensch.* Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man? What is the ape to men? A laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock or a painful embarrassment."
>
> Nietzsche (2003:41-42).

There are a few things that are deducible from the pronouncement, that Nietzsche diagnoses the problem of humanity and the answer to humanity as humanity itself.

6.1.2.   The Will to Power

Nietzsche's interpretation of the Death of God and that of his biggest contender in this range Heidegger differ slightly. Nietzsche articulates the Death of God metaphysically, as the negative displacement of the supersensible and a positive new *Wertsetzen* in the will to power (Kinlaw 2012:60). According to Kinlaw (2012:63) the eradication of the supersensible must be read more

radically as the disvaluing of *all* previous foundations for value outside of its own self constituting will as the will to power.

It is important to note the definition of will and will to power to better understand what is meant here. *The Nietzschean Dictionary* simply defines the will as a series of instances of willing. The will to power is defined as "an *evaluation* and a corresponding striving'. Meaning that the will to power is a relational concept. The will to power cannot be a feeling of the will (because then we would need to posit something that feels), the will to power is itself already an affect and the primary affects are either ascending or weakening (Burnham 2015:343).

In Beyond Good and Evil (259) and Genealogy of Morals (II) Nietzsche describes The Will to Power as the "essence of life" (Reginster 2006:103). Reginster (2006:104) argues that Nietzsche seems to be making a metaphysical claim about the world which implies a few things for the doctrine of The Will to Power. According to Reginster (2006:104), to make such a claim puts the doctrine in conflict with perspectivism and empiricism. First, if knowledge is gained through perspective, that makes it subjective and therefore no theory can make an objective claim about the essence of the world. Secondly, Nietzsche himself claims that knowledge is gained through sensory evidence, this then deprives the theory of the will to power of any empirical legacy due to its abstract and general nature.

The Will to Power like many of Nietzsche's motifs is a difficult concept to grapple with, still, for the task at hand there needs to be a concise definition with which we can work with. For this purpose, I will adopt Wardle's (2017:37) definition aptly put as "as the element in our human constitution which

stimulates and perpetuates an individual human movement towards an ever more meaningful existence". For Eagleton (2009:89) the will to power is "the tendency of all things to realize, expand and argument themselves". From theses definition, we understand that existence is constituted by a certain will, it can be a will to live, will to nothingness or for Nietzsche a will to power.

At the heart of the Nietzschean will to power is the ability to create, because for Nietzsche the will to power acknowledges that meaning is not an affect of existence but should be created (Wardle 2016:37). It is Wardle's (2016:37) contention that the potential productiveness of existential nihilism is in the ability to recognize there is an inherent (*a priori*) absence of existential meaning and the world thereby forcing humanity to be creative and strive to be manufactures of their own meaning. For one to acknowledge absence of something implies a preoccupation with an anxiety about the absence of that which is being searched for. There is an affinity of thought in relation to Heidegger's declaration that our moods have a philosophical significance to existentialism in what he calls the 'attunements to nihilism' (Tartaglia 2016:25). According to Heidegger, anxiety and boredom are the attunements to nihilism (Tartaglia 2016:26).

These attunements are not simple moods because they are a response to a particular circumstance but are significant because they are a response to the human condition as a whole (Tartaglia 2016:26). It is for this reason I advocate for the use of social anxiety or socio-economic/ religio—cultural-ideological/ existentially induced anxiety as a framework with which contradictions can be measured and their performance judged. Tartaglia (2016:26) puts it more aptly and states that, anxiety and boredom unlike other moods which arise as a

result of our involvement in the framework, they arise as a reflection of our condition concealed by our involvement in the framework. Meaning that, with anxiety and boredom, comes a pause and one has to separate themselves from the framework in order to review it, there has to be some disconnect or cognitive dissonance at play.

Withdrawal of participation is important for proper engagement and to discover the anxiety that is associated with being active in the framework (Tartaglia 2016:27). This is the hallmark of sage/seer practices. It is of paramount ontological importance for Heidegger that humanity has the ability to 'snap out' of everyday life once in a while and to attend to attunements. It is even of higher significance that humanity does not 'sleep walk' into a life dictated by circumstances or convenience [Dasein] (Tartaglia 2016:29). The presence of the attunements of nihilism also culminate in the same conclusion for Heidegger that there is no externally point to life, and the attunements call for direct action to be creative. For Heidegger, anxiety and boredom then provide a possible source for liberation, liberation from possibilities which "count for nothing!" and a call to make authentic choices (Tartaglia 2016:31). The will to power therefore makes humans meaning-makers. If there was ever any doubt whether human beings have any "essence" at all, Nietzsche would call it the will to power (Wardle 2016:37).

6.1.3. Trans-valuation of Values

It can be argued that Nietzsche's primary focus was with values (Sleinis 1994:1). His scattered thoughts touch on a number of philosophical sub-disciplines, although moral philosophy presents itself as his passion (Gericke

2011:445). At the center of his critique of morality and value was concerned with the source of decadent morality and value and the act of naming values and putting them to use of active affirmation of existence *hic et nunc*. By active affirmation in Nietzsche we mean, "Yes" to life and "No" to the world-denying spirituality (Gericke 2011:446).

Humanity is governed by a set of values, they may stem from a set of cultural beliefs, religious tenets, philosophical ideals, anthropological dispositions or sub cultures. We often speak of value more that we realize and we are on a constant quest to be value theorists unaware. However, the question begs*, what is value*? According to Andre Gide: "anytime a philosopher attempts to answer a question, what the question is about no longer becomes clear". An attempt to answer the question while preserving what the question is about will be undertaken to a degree.

Value is a relational concept, i.e. 'height is not a value in itself, however, the height of a hill may establish its value as a military concept' (Grunberg 2000:3). This means that value cannot exist in itself, but it has to be in relation to something else to be established. In the plethora of the polyphony of values, not all are equal and relevant. Grunberg (2000:4) distinguishes between ideal and good values. Ideal values 'anticipate action on an imaginative plane' and good values 'are embodied in the cultural works and assign things beyond their perceivable appearance'. Axiologically the generic term is value, not to be conflated with the economical tern "worth". Even in Nietzschean philosophy reevaluation is qualified as revaluation of 'all values' and revaluation of 'highest values' (Sleinis 1994:5).

This enterprise in Nietzschean philosophy is set out in the following (Sleinis 1994:6); (1) although it appears cumbersome and impossible, the question of whether things are as they appear, challenges the structure and status of system of value to a degree where they are subjected to evaluation or modification. (2) the ultimate goal of reevaluation is to 'replace life-denying values with life-affirming values.

In order to understand the whole concept of revaluation of values, first we need to understand how Nietzsche theorizes value. Nietzsche first posits that value cannot arise from outside, it is not a 'ontologically distinct axiological property', meaning that value cannot exist without valuing human beings (Sleinis 1994:1). Value is incumbent on human beings because the issues of axiology are incited the moment human beings begin to 'reflect upon the conditions of their lives, the structure of reality and their place in it' (Hart 1971:29). Human beings are obsessed with order and a primary interest in how things in nature and reality are administered, and when reality contradicts the set of beliefs which govern them, they begin a quest of trying to iron out those contradictions.

When we prefer one thing over the other, our notions of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, real and apparent, we are being preoccupied with value (Hart 1971:29). This then implies that value is the 'striving of clarification for either existential or social existence, an act of freedom and expression of subjectivity' (Baeva 2012:73).

The transvaluation of values lies on the critique of moral values, moral values being human products which Nietzsche classifies into two, Master morality and Slave morality. According to Sleinis (1994:60) these human products acme be

assessed in the following manner in order to distinguish the methods of revaluation; (1) who brought these products into existence (producers), (2) out of which conditions did they arise from (conditions of production), (3) what are their intended function (intended function), (4) what is their general nature, (5) what function do they serve separate from their intended one?

Reevaluation takes place under the aegis of the will to power (Reginster 2006:103). The transvaluation of values lies on the critique of moral values, moral values being human products which Nietzsche classifies into two, Master morality and Slave morality. According to Sleinis (1994:60) these human products can be assessed in the following manner in order to distinguish the methods of revaluation; (1) who brought these products into existence (producers), (2) out of which conditions did they arise from (conditions of production), (3) what are their intended function (intended function), (4) what is their general nature, (5) what function do they serve separate from their intended one?

Reevaluation takes place under the aegis of the will to power (Reginster 2006:103). Meaning that Nietzsche's theory of value is furnished by a value he holds in high esteem, the affirmative attitude towards life (Sleinis 1994:3). The will to power and the reevaluation of values cannot be wholly divorced from each other. This is because in answering the question, what is the evaluation of values worth? Nietzsche in *the Will to Power* answers by saying; "Life is the will to power" (Kaufman 1967:148).

The question begs what reevaluation of values really means. Is it a devaluation of certain values in favor for others? A negation of some sorts and

replacement? Reevaluation as Nietzsche calls it, is an exegesis, a way of interpreting our physiological conditions through our affects (Kaufman 1967:148). Meaning, to understand the basis of what informs our virtues, where do they originate and not the virtue itself, Nietzsche proclaims; "Formerly one said of every morality: "by their fruits ye shall know them." I say of every morality: "It is a fruit by which I recognize the soil from which it sprang." (WP 1885-1886) in Kaufman (1967:149). Nietzsche makes this assertion to support his chief claim that there are moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of these phenomena (Kaufman 1967:149). Hence the famous maxim, there are not facts, only interpretations.

Key to Nietzsche's critique was first the critique of Christian-European morality to which he alluded as being "signs of decline, of disbelief in life, a preparation for pessimism" (WP 258:1885-1886) in Kaufman (1967:149). Nietzsche's critique of morality is that they do not affirm life on its own terms, this happens when our interpretations project contradictions into existence (Kaufman 1967:149). The emphasis of projection is important to note because it then implies that reevaluation of values is made from a definite perspective, a perspective with aims of preserving a certain individual, a community, a race, a state, a faith, a culture (Kaufman 1967:149). The enervation of humanity's creative will need to be freed from repression, from unhealthy morality which makes mankind sick.

Deleuze (1962:174) argues that re-evaluation then means, the change of quality in the will to power. A change where values are no longer derived from the negative but from affirmation. The negative should not simply be replaced

with "in place of" but rather the place itself should change. The element of value changes, the value of value changes its operational principle.

Synthesis

Nietzschean nihilism is not a unilateral philosophy, it has its roots from the dawn of European modernity and its influence. A period in history that presented a crisis where previously held signifiers of meaning were eroding and Nietzsche characterized it as the 'death of God'. The death of God which is not a Christian polemic although Nietzsche levels some critique towards Christian morality, is asymptotic of the nihilistic mood. There are always ambiguities in Nietzsche and often a confusion of what he really meant by nihilism. However, when all the fragments of his thought are pieced together, the message is almost clear, that man something that should be overcome.

Secondary material also aids in the elucidation of Nietzsche's thoughts and it is for this reason I utilize Gills Deleuze's interpretations of Nietzsche's primary motifs relating to the concept of overcoming and affirmation. The motifs of Der Übermensch as a conceptual framework, the will to power, trans-valuation of values and also the eternal recurrence as theoretical frameworks are essential to overcoming and affirmation in Nietzsche's philosophy.

Before I argue for their use in relation to a re-reading of *hebel* in Qohelet, I explicate them in full detail to show the internal contradictions they possess and the limitations those will pose in the next sub section. Nietzsche was clearly assured that nihilism could be overcome and that we ca be free from its negative entanglements. These attunements are necessary to understand the

human condition and the existential experience and what it means and overcome existential nihilism and move towards meaningfulness.

6.2. Qohelet and Nietzsche: Overcoming and affirmation

The main question of this subsection is to ask whether vanity and nihilism can be pragmatic and which attunements can be useful in the aid. This question is based on the premise from the previous two chapters that Qohelet and Nietzsche were both preoccupied with a certain 'will' to overcome decadence and to affirm life on its own terms here and now (*hic et nunc*).

6.2.1. Limitations of overcoming in Qohelet

If the premise of Qohelet's declaration that all is Hebel is the law of retribution (cause and effect), it seems as though language as a concept builder is preventative of a full overcoming thereby compromising the conceptual framework. Qohelet has developed as a corpus in wisdom literature and received post-modern styled readings and interpretations. One such method of interpretation is Derrida's method of deconstruction to show the internal contradictions in the book (Christianson 1998:425-43); Stephens 1999:384; Yesudian 1999; Sneed 1997:303-311; Ortlund 2015:239).

Sneed, (2002:117) argues that Qohelet's most deconstructive accomplishment is his questioning of the contemporary formulation of retribution which the Germans call the deed/consequence connection (*Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*), that is, a person's behaviour is connected with his fortune. Sneed (2002:118) further argues that, due to the theory of retribution, deed and

consequence are already built into the definition of the Hebrew words 'wise', 'righteous', 'fool', and 'wicked'. However, these concepts disintegrate in Qohelet. Qohelet demonstrates that these concepts are not in tune with reality and says:

> I have seen everything in my vain days. There exists the righteous person who perishes in his righteousness, and the wicked person who lives long in his wickedness? Do not be overly righteous. Neither be overly wise. Why ruin yourself? Do not be overly wicked. Neither be foolish. Why die before your time? Better to hold to the one and not withdraw your hand from the other. For the person who fears God will go forth with both of them.
>
> (Ecclesiastes 7:15-18).

Qohelet seems to deconstruct the concept of retribution, but he does not let go of the standard sapiential form of presence, which is the notion of a cosmic retribution or moral order. [35] Essentially, Qohelet does not have a problem with the notion of a retributive connection; he only finds fault with the particular formation of his contemporaries (Sneed 2002:119). Sneed (2002:120) further argues that, although Qohelet opposes traditional wisdom, his alternative is rather conservative and still and is not far removed from the ethic found in Proverbs of which also counsels' moderation in everything. Qohelet it seems, cannot escape the structures which perpetuate dichotomous thinking of his time by replacing 'wisdom'/'folly' with 'God fearing'/'not God fearing' because the fear of God is presence for him.

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[35] A Derridian term in the method of deconstruction, which means: the supposed self-present truth that needs no justification (Sneed 2001:119).

In a response to Sneed (2002:155-126), Ortlund (2015:243) argues that Sneed's contribution to postmodern readings of the Bible is thoughtful and profound, however, Sneed misrepresents both Qohelet and Derrida. Firstly, in the case of deconstruction, and I will quote him at length as (Ortlund 2015:243-244) cites Derrida himself on what deconstruction really is and he states:

> The trouble is that Derrida insists that deconstruction is not a method— not in the ordinary sense, at least. 'Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one', because such a formulation of deconstruction would assume a stable origin, which would then be vulnerable to deconstruction. In fact, Derrida writes that, in order to define 'deconstruction' precisely, one would have to invoke categories, concepts and predicates which themselves are subject to the same destabilizing process. Deconstruction is not a monolithically consistent, stable, predefined set of techniques that a critic applies to a text. Rather, according to Derrida, texts and traditions contain instabilities that tend to rise to the surface. Instead of the application of a stable set of procedures by a critic to a text, deconstruction has more to do with attending to the instabilities making up the text, or bearing witness to them. It is a way of reading which allows these instabilities to rise to the surface. Only in this loose sense can it be called a 'method'.

The basis of Ortlund's (2015:245) argument is because meaning is not independent of language, it is from this perspective that it is difficult to imagine how Qohelet could have deconstructed without being trapped in dichotomies himself. This then renders meaning unstable because texts and signs are continually defined by their opposites. In the words of Derrida himself:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures… [One operates] necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure…

Ortlund (2015:249) argues that, Qohelet was aware of his own limitations, ignorance and certainties. A significant example is found in Ecclesiastes 7:23: 'All this I tested by wisdom. I said, "I am wise", but it was far from me'. Although Qohelet was knowledgeable and skilful, he was aware that the rationale behind the world and how it operates is sometimes beyond him. This large-scale failure makes him to appreciate the smaller victories in his wisdom. He then adopts a *Carpe Diem* principle, enjoy life now.

The second flaw in Sneed's reading of Qohelet according to Ortlund (2015:249) is the contrast between the status of retribution in Qohelet and Proverbs. In Proverbs for instance, the wicked are often rich and the righteous are often needy and vulnerable (i.e. 10:2-3; 11:4; 7; 16; 13:23). Ortlund (2015:250) further argues that, 'Qohelet's refusal to surrender the retribution principle, together with his open admission of the many ways in which justice is not accomplished, creates a kind of presence-in-absence and absence-in-presence'.

The alternative offered by Ortlund (2015:251) is not to impose a 'method' on the text but to allow the text to deconstruct itself by searching for instabilities when claims are made which depend on the text excludes to create meaning. An example is when Eccl 1:2-3 and Eccl 3:11 are brought together. On their

own, they reveal a contradiction without any application of a method. How then can *Hebel* in Qohelet be re-read without being trapped in the dichotomous structures we are trying to transcend?

6.2.2. Limitations of Overcoming in Nietzsche

From a Nietzschean perspective, the Übermensch is a conceptual framework which explains the goal humanity ought to obtain, ultimately being that man should overcome himself and create new values. The theoretical frameworks which underpin the concept of the Übermensch are the will to power, eternal recurrence and the re-evaluation of values as attunements necessary for the overcoming.

Contenders of this project of overcoming have asserted that it is destined to failure due to the affinity between the problem of nihilism and the logic of negation (Woodward 2013:115). A lone voice has nonetheless emerged, suggesting the possibility of overcoming which is Deleuze. Nietzsche advocated for an absolute affirmation of life, however, Spinoza's principle that "all determination is negation" and Hegel's dialectical concept of negation suggest otherwise (Woodward 2013:115). It is Deleuze's "logic of difference" which offers a glimpse of possibility, it allows for an affirmation which is not dialectically reappropriated by negation (Woodward 2013:115).

Woodward (2013:115) agrees with the former that overcoming with Deleuze's "logic of difference" poses a few problems namely that, Deleuze hinges his proposition on the interpretation of the eternal return as 'selective being.' Woodward contends that such a radical interpretation reinstates nihilism at the

very point where it is supposed to be overcome. Norman (2000:189) simply asks, what does Nietzsche want? this question is pertinent because then it seems Nietzsche's determination is contra *contra,* an opposition of oppositionality which is sometimes impossible. It is not possible to reject negation because the will in affirmation is what is called *noble will*. In the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche describes the noble will as; "spontaneous, affirmative, and creating values from itself and its own relentless expansive activity, it affirms itself without essential reference to anything else".

Norman (2000:190) maps out how a self-referencing will can be problematic in the enterprise of overcoming because a spectre is haunting Nietzsche, spectre of Hegelian dialectics. To reject rejection and to oppose oppositionality is impossible according to Norman because the noble will have an essential reference to negativity and opposition making it fundamentally nihilistic.

There is one thing Nietzsche seems to have accomplished, which can also be the reason why overcoming with double negation is impossible. Heidegger described the history of Western metaphysics as the history of forgetting of Being, a forgetting which is accompanied by a growing obsession of the subject itself (Egyed 1989:3). The subjectivity has an increasing effort to dominate and master all that is not itself, making beings into its own use creating an impenetrable veil between Being and being (Egyed 1989:3).

Language, science, metaphysics and technology are for Heidegger the conveyer belts of this veil; therefore, this conception leads Heidegger to believe that Nietzsche completes but does not overcome nihilism (Egyed 1989:3). Nietzsche according to Heidegger's conception of metaphysics, with his

doctrines of will to power, eternal recurrence, and the overman (Übermensch) forces humanity to no longer hide itself from its own truth; its essential subjectivity (Egyed 1989:3). For Heidegger, Nietzsche reaches the highest point of metaphysics thereby completing it.

Wardle (2016:56) argues that another element in the pitfalls of the Übermensch concept in the process of overcoming is that it might possibly be missing a means-to meaning discernible in social relations. The means-to meaning exists between beings by empathetically and exclusively favouring the individual dimension of existential meaning. Within our African contexts this can particularly be true in that human beings are a continual sum of their ancestors and their being and existence is also important for the greater human species and not only for individual excellence.

Wardle (2016:56) quotes two scholars who reverberate this sentiment, firstly Eagleton (2008:98) who argues that 'there can be no definition of meaning which is unique to myself alone' and Bataille (1992:8) who argues that 'Nietzsche never doubted that the possibility would require community. Desire for community was constantly on his mind'. It is an important observation as there is a tendency of wanting to privatize existentialism at the expense of an incorporation of relevant social issues.

6.3. Hebel as active nihilism: The possibilities

'Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live' – Thus Spoke Zarathustra

As we have seen, both Qohelet and Nietzsche are in contestation of decadence and advocating for affirmation and overcoming. Both affirmation and overcoming are concepts perpetually trapped by internal contradictions and language as a concept builder. The crisis we find in Qohelet although imbedded in an Ancient text is a ubiquitous one, the crisis of the fleeting nature of existence and affirmation of positive values. The book of Qohelet functions in this instance as a time image when read in contrast with Nietzsche's various forms of nihilism and secondary interpretations (i.e. Heidegger, Deleuze, Reginster, Kaufman et al).

Within this context, Nietzsche's nihilism holds a distinguished position because it capably transposes the resistance to traditional forms of metaphysics turning novelty into deliberation and unmasking lifting the veil of Platonism and Christian morality. This transposition not only ask his audience to lift the veil, but to also interrogate its essence. To interrogate the essence implies to act in response to the world around you and not to "sleepwalk" into existence as Heidegger argues.
 An active response is of necessity because alleviates passivity, not an active response per say but an active resistance to change. Deleuze (1962:139-140) defines between two forms of nihilism which lead to passivity as:

> Nihil *in* "*nihilism*" *means negation as quality of the will to power. . .* nihilism signifies the value of nil taken on by life, the fiction of higher values which give it this value and the will to nothingness which is expressed in these higher values. Nihilism has a second, more colloquial sense. It no longer signifies a will but a reaction. The supersensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied,

> they are refused all validity. . . only life remains, but it is still a depreciated life which now continues a world without values, stripped of meaning and purpose, sliding ever further towards its nothingness ... The first sense is a *negative nihilism*; the second sense a *reactive nihilism…*

Traditional renderings of Qohelet see a resemblance with the latter. Qohelet pronounces everything as *hebel*, presented as a world riddled with contradictory statements, a glimpse of hope and vanity both seamlessly interwoven. Qohelet's state of melancholy is similar to Nietzsche's voluntary beggar and the wonderer at the same time. We have noted previously that the voluntary beggar "has gone through the whole human species seeking, from rich to poor, heavenly wisdom and earthly happiness. The voluntary beggar is always consumed with questions to which he seeks answers for to make sense of his existence: (Deleuze 1962:165).

A reading of *hebel* in Qohelet is inherently factional, without being misleading, by factional I mean that it is fragmentary because there is no concise meaning of what *hebel* really meant. It is for this reason I lean more towards Fox's interpretation of Qohelet's epistemology as empirical. By qualifying Qohelet's epistemology as empirical, provides space to draw congruencies between Qohelet and the voluntary beggar.

According to Fox (1987:137) Qohelet's epistemology, although not consistently is essentially empirical due to his procedure to "seek experience as the primary source of knowledge and to use experimental arguments testify and validify arguments". Qohelet delineates his epistemology in Eccl 1:12-18 and Eccl 2:1-

3 as an investigation of the world with the aid of *hokamh* (Wisdom) meaning that he will use the power of reason over prior knowledge in his inquiries (Fox 1987:142). Qohelet also uses experience in his investigations. Although not explicitly mentioned, it is hinted in Eccl 7:23, 25, 27 and Eccl 8:16 where he constantly refers back to explorations (Fox 1987:142).

Qohelet's empirical epistemology borrows argumentative techniques from Nietzsche's voluntary beggar. Stick (1986:335) argues that often nihilists often do not offer any new arguments and misuse nihilism in an attempt to appropriate it. This is not an appropriation and a building on existing theories, which is also not entirely wrong, but an attempt to see which features of nihilism can be read concurrently with Qohelet's *hebel* to advance existing arguments.

Qohelet often involves himself in his work and eventually works out a system with which he can describe the world around him in a language full of play and rhetoric. He not only conceives of a language that articulates his reality but he also aims to reform it in his own way. The irony we often encounter in Qohelet is his contradictions. In his book *Qohelet and his Contradictions*, documents various approaches that have tried to account for the internal contradictions in Qohelet.

Fox (1989:19) argues that one of the approaches is harmonization. Harmonization tries to reconcile conflicting statements by showing that they use words differently or deal with matters differently. An example is Eccl 7:9 "irritation rests on the breasts of fools" meaning that irritability remains with fools all the time. Meanwhile Eccl 7:3 implies that the wise man's anger is not

permanent but timely and temporary. It is clear that the permanence or temporality of anger is limited to certain individuals and situations.

Fox (1989:23) nevertheless makes it clear that sometimes harmonization can collapse under its own weight, and when that happens, the possibility of additions should be considered. Additions presupposes that when oppositional statements cannot be harmonized, they can be considered as additions by a second party. This procedure according to Fox (1989:23) can have its own pitfalls because then it becomes difficult to find Qohelet's original thoughts. Since style can be imitated, it does not make sense why a glosser would imitate Qohelet's thoughts instead of a more effective step of superseding it (Fox 1989:25).

Lastly, Fox (1989:26) cites Gordi's approach of quotations as another way to make sense of Qohelet's contradictions. It is Fox's contention that the quotations approach quickly becomes a magic wand for eluding difficulties in texts. The primary function of quotations is to dissociate certain words from the primary speaker and make them belong to someone else. Fox's (1989:28) conclusion is that there is a constant interpretative pressure to raise valleys and lower hills which is sometimes cumbersome. However, a true reading should always try to explain the territory with all its bumps and cliffs.

Spangenberg (1996:58) argues that Qohelet's irony has a function in the bigger scheme of things. Reflecting on his predecessors, Spangenberg argues that according to Good (1981:168-195) Qohelet used irony to address the value system of an acquisitive society, a society that sees the meaning of man's life in his assertive achievements. Spangenberg (1996:58) argues that, Qohelet

does not only reflect on the value system of an acquisitive society but is also cognizance of the whole system of traditional wisdom which promised success, riches, honor, prosperity longevity and joy for those who assimilated to the traditional value system. Qohelet then uses irony to expose the contradictions of those hopes and reality.

Spangenberg (1996:59) therefore argues that Qohelet does not use irony in a negative sense but rather, as a positive message. Spangenberg says; "Qohelet does not convey a message of nihilism, despair, pessimism or resignation-on the contrary, its message is positive: I think we should see in *hebel* not simply a negative meaning, but an ironic one whose ultimate significance is positive and life affirming". I agree with Spangenberg categorization of Qohelet's *hebel* as life affirming. Although I disagree with Spangenberg contestation of *hebel* as nihilism in the negative sense, because in our claiming of nihilism, we should qualify it and specify which nihilism we are alluding to. I am emphasizing this point because Nietzschean nihilism in the colloquial sense as Nietzsche coined it is not negative, and it is for that reason I want to qualify *hebel* as active nihilism.

In the *Will to Power,* Nietzsche states that passive nihilism can be overcome through a reconfiguration of the highest values in order to achieve active nihilism. By reconfiguration Wardle (2016:41) states that affirmation entails an eruption of meaning out of the deep and foreboding abyss of existential nihilism. Wardle surmises that this postulation is aims to reconfigure all that Western humanity has been thus far as a result of reactive forces. This then means that all these forces culminate in passive forces which warrant existential affirmation constituted by the "will to life".

It is through an emergence of active nihilism that passive nihilism can be combated. Wardle (2016:42) argues that active nihilism gives lee way to meaning of meaning(s) beyond forms of nihilism which have pressing hauntology. Active affirmation according to Wardle (2016:42) concedes that there is lack of intrinsic meaning to human existence which owes to the extinction of signified higher values and recognizes that life should be affirmed here and now (*hic et nunc*) on its own terms.

Wardle (2016:42) affirms that active nihilism infers a double negation which has been previously argued to be an impossibility. Active nihilism negates the negative element of nihilism itself through a transvaluation of values. Active nihilism therefore according to Wardle (2016:42) overcomes transcendental escapism (negative nihilism), vindictive valuation (reactive nihilism), and the powerlessness of passivity of pessimism (passive nihilism).

However, both Wardle and Deleuze do concede that double negation is problematic. Wardle (2016:42) quotes Deleuze (2006:162) who argues that, "nihilism is always incomplete on its own" and Nietzsche agrees in *Genealogy of Morals* that "All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming". Yet, humanity has a metaphysical urge for existential meaning, aptly put by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*; 'Gradually man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfil one or more condition of existence than any other animal: man has to believe, to know, from time to time why he exists, *why* his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life, without faith in reason in life'.

It is important to note that this realization befalls humanity at in the face of disorientation. Disorientation according to Reginster (2006:26) as Nietzsche understood it is not a response to skepticism but to *anti-realism*. The typical response to anti-realism is that "nothing really matters at all!", "*All is hebel!*", "Nothing is true, all is permitted!" or perhaps even sterner, "*the gods have forsaken us this is the birth of tragedy, Eli Eli lama Sabachathani why has thee forsaken us*!"[36]

Reginster (2006:27) argues that since there is no fact of the matter- no "truth" about the nature of a supposed good life we are supposed to experience, as Nietzsche says that there are no facts but only interpretations, then there is actually nothing we are deprived of. And if nothing really matters then, it should not matter that nothing really matters. However, Nietzsche characterizes the active response to the devaluation of higher values as a lament, as though it is a loss and asks; "why did we pursue any way at all? It is all the same. Qohelet would add to this and say "*I have applied my mind to everything under the sun, and this too, is hebel*".

6.4 *Carpe Diem*!

Ultimately it seems as though Qohelet, faced with contradictions induced by irony and rhetoric, reverts back to certain elements of the vanity he was critiquing. In his search for meaning he constantly infers that; the fear of God is essential and that one should seize the day, enjoy their wine and love their spouse. These discussion points are found in Eccl 9:1-10 under the theme

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[36] Italics mine.

enjoy life now. Sneed (2012:231) argues that the alleged pessimism in Qohelet does not necessarily detract from the positive functions of the book.

Just to recap, it is clear from the opening lines that Qohelet is interested in the most crucial question: the question of human existence, or more aptly, the meaning of life itself. He later asserts that all is Hebel (vanity) and emphasizes his empirical epistemology for anyone who has any interest in wanting to live a fulfilled life. This is a clarion call to reevaluate all higher values which have become decadent and have outlasted their intended purpose as time passes and situations change.

Qohelet is writing from post exilic-Hellenistic which has been riddled with episodes and systems of oppression, restoration and a reiteration of past events in a cyclic manner. Qohelet is writing from a period of a national crisis. After previous conquests which saw to the obliteration of the temple and the deportation of Jews over decades to several foreign land, he finds himself in the same situation.

It cannot be said that the situation of the Hellenistic conquest was different than the others (i.e. Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian), because they all demanded different things from Jerusalem. However, for Qohelet, the main focus of the intensity of Hellenism is important for a few reasons. The Judeans were faced cultural assimilation, religious unfreedom and lexical issues. It became pertinent for Qohelet to document all the atrocities that the nation was faced with and to have some sort of social commentary regarding them.

While this unnamed sage that we are now accustomed to referring to as Qohelet as living in this era riddled withal these atrocities, regardless of the fact that the pseudo writer identifies him as Solomon, he was nevertheless hit with waves of skepticism, pessimism, and according to me perhaps even nihilism and we can add to that depression. It was in the face of these ailments that he realized that all is not as it seems to be.

Israel has always been a nation which abided by the law of which is in scripted in the Torah. It had always been regarded as blasphemy to deviate or not live according to the law which was provided and sanctioned by YHWH. As a result, the law became the word which was bound and that was not questionable.

For Qohelet nevertheless, as one would imagine and as how I would summarize it, it cannot be that a person can live under precarious conditions and not question. This then becomes Qohelet's *halo moment* where he realizes that actually, the calamity that has befallen Israel is not a new one. It can no longer be that nations will invade, rape our women, kill our children, hijack our economy and there are no existential consequences to all of these events.

In the moment of realization, it also dawns that not only is the nation in an existential crisis, regardless of all the social upheaval, economic downfalls and religious bankruptcy, that also in the bigger scheme of things, the law and its retributive nature should also be subjected to the same scrutiny. Even more pressing is that the nation is in an existential crisis because of the very same law of retribution it subscribes to.

The law of retribution to recap is the law that functions on the basis of causality and negates relativity. Under retribution, you get what you give. Qohelet sets on a mission of collection data for his empirical escapades to prove that the karmic effect does not always come into effect. In the Hebrew Bible we prominently see this contradiction in the book of Job. Where a supposed blameless man loses all his wealth, livestock and all his children die. The question then becomes, how does a man live blamelessly and then be subjected to such calamity.

For Qohelet the question is even greater, how can a nation live according to YHWW's law and yet be subjected to endless conquests. Regardless of the social, economic, and religious ramifications, Qohelet realized that there was deeper implication in how people relate to the law and how reality suddenly becomes disproportioned. It then dawned upon the unnamed sage to ask these existential questions.

In asking these questions Qohelet had come to realize that there is a disconnection between reality and all that he had come to believe. And in wanting to sharpen that contradiction, Qohelet supposes that instead of lamenting over the decadent state of the eroding values, one should in turn live life as it comes.

What Qohelet does as well is to introduce the notion if humanism in his philosophy. His emphasis on humanism centers human ideas, ideals and interests in the place of taking God on face value. Rather people are encouraged to question, they are encouraged against a sleepwalking into life

with any examination. From this perspective, human beings then become important and their existence is that of primary value.

The human experience then becomes a rational exercise and humans have room to engage and negotiate their existence with YHWH's laws. This does not infer that the law loses it superiority nor authority, but what it implies is that now the law is not flowed without question. There takes place a dialogue which has room for humans to reflect on their own experiences and their relationship with their religious life. I therefor summarize and conclude that, Qohelet is active nihilism because it advocates for the affirmation of life and for the overcoming of decadence with the evaluation of the essence of current values in how they have succeeded to devalue life.

Chapter 7: Summary of Findings

This thesis has succeeded in establishing different variations of the meaning of *hebel* in Qohelet and tracing the roots of nihilism in Nietzschean philosophy. It has been explicated that Qohelet's use of *hebel* was concerned with the worthlessness of life and not particularly meaninglessness. Nihilism has been divided in clear and distinct categories and qualified for the purpose of argumentation in this thesis as not alluding to the meaningless of life but an act of overcoming passive and reactive nihilism. Values are often put under a proverbial microscope and interrogated as they are often in trouble of either erosion or eradication. It is the aim of this chapter to find congruencies between Qohelet's empiricism and Nietzsche's motif of the reevaluation of values.

After an examination of the limitations of overcoming, it has been discovered that Nietzsche's is limited by double negation, the possibility of negating negation has been argued to be impossible. Qohelet's limitations are that in wanting to overcome the pessimism of emptiness or vanity, the unnamed sage is often trapped in the dichotomous thinking they are trying to overcome. The solution then becomes to simply affirm life on its own terms, in the place of wanting to devalue life to hold signifiers of existential meaning which exist outside of the realm of lived experience in higher regard. With the dictum "love your spouse and enjoy our wine", Qohelet is offering his positive advice. To simply live for the day, adopting a *carpe diem* principle which means seize the day and be mindful of your neighbors and your community. Mindfulness takes center stage in Qohelet's positive advice as this clarion call is made. The call to

be mindful is important because it takes into cognizance that to achieve this goal, a community is needed.

Nietzsche might have sounded like an aristocrat with his idea of the Übermensch which in popular culture prioritized the individual over community but as it has been argued before, Nietzsche always had a community in mind. Affirmation of life here and now is a potential tool in overcoming and to overthrow the tradition of negativity and passive nihilism

Mindfulness possess a precious and worthy attribute as an attunement of overcoming. An element which has governed especially African countries for centuries, an element of recognizing that life is better lived and more meaningful in the communion of others. It seems then more than possible that a transition from pessimism, disillusionment and decedent to active affirmation is possible through a critical reading of African existential philosophy as one option of a reception of Qohelet.

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