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Death and Symbolic Immortality
in Second Temple Wisdom Instructions

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Abstract

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This study examines the transformations in the constructions of symbolic immortality in the major wisdom instructions of the early Second Temple Period. As a theoretical framework, it draws on a branch of experimental social psychology known as Terror Management Theory (TMT), which builds on the work of social anthropologist Ernest Becker. TMT argues that the natural state of humankind is a constant and debilitating anxiety about death resulting from the combination of a biological predisposition toward self-preservation awareness of death's inevitability. It claims that humankind overcomes this terror of death by constructing cultural worldviews that enable individuals to view themselves as beings of eternal significance capable of transcending death either literally or symbolically.

The present study considers whether and how the various Hebrew wisdom instructions function as buffers against death anxiety in the manner predicted by Terror Management Theory. It begins with Proverbs 10-29, which serves as a baseline for the worldview of traditional wisdom. It argues that Proverbs 10-29 offers its adherents the possibility of death transcendence, primarily in the biological and creative modes. In Proverbs 1-9, the worldview of traditional wisdom comes under threat from alternative worldviews, the worldview defense mechanisms of exaggeration and derogation. Qohelet represents a complete impairment of all modes of symbolic immortality. Having concluded that the modes of death transcendence offered him by his tradition have failed, Qohelet is left unbuffered against death anxiety, which threatens to overshadow him altogether. Ben Sira and 4QInstruction representing competing attempts to resymbolize the wisdom tradition, each preserving aspects of the traditional worldview but reconstituting it through appeal to modes of symbolic death transcendence from outside traditional wisdom—apocalyptic in the case of 4QInstruction and Torah traditions in the case of Ben Sira.

The study suggests that that the process of symbolization, desymbolization, and resymbolization of the wisdom worldview is consistent with the social changes taking places in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods. During this period of cultural transition, at least parts of the traditional worldview collapsed, as evidenced by Qohelet, while others resymbolized, as in the cases of 4QInstruction and Ben Sira.

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Introduction

WISDOM, DEATH, AND SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY

The worldview of Hebrew Wisdom literature experienced a significant transition between the oldest layer of the book of Proverbs and later texts such as Ben Sira and 4QInstruction, which were produced in the early part of the second century B.C.E. For a time the scholarly discourse about this transformation focused on the book of Qohelet and the so-called “crisis” that it represented in the Hebrew wisdom tradition.¹ More recently, interest has been directed toward the “eschatologizing” of the wisdom tradition, particularly in light of the publication of wisdom texts from Qumran such as 4QInstruction.² There continues to be little agreement over the nature of the transformation of the wisdom literature or how the various texts of the tradition should be understood in relation to one another. For instance, Armin Lange continues to argue for a “crisis of wisdom” exemplified by Job and Qohelet, which leads to an eschatologizing of

¹ See especially Kurt Galling, *Die Krise der Aufklärung in Israel* (Mainzer Universitätsreden 19; Mainz, 1952); Aare Lauha, “Die Krise des religiösen Glaubens bei Kohelet,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; VTSup 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 183–91; Harmut Gese, “The Crisis of Wisdom in Koheleth,” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia/London: Fortress/SPCK, 1983), 141–53; and Hans-Peter Müller, “Neige der Althebräischen ‘Weisheit,’” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 238–94. The extreme position of this “crisis” in Wisdom has been sharply critiqued. See James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 196, and Roland E. Murphy, “Qoheleth’s ‘Quarrel’ with the Fathers,” in *From Faith to Faith* (ed. D. Y. Hadidian; PTMS 31; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979), 235–45, among others.

² On the “eschatologizing” of wisdom, see particularly John J. Collins, “The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May 2001* (ed. J. J. Collins, G. E. Sterling, and R. A. Clements; STDJ 51; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 49–65; Matthew J. Goff, *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (STDJ 50; Leiden: Brill, 2003); and John G. Gammie, “From Prudentialism to Apocalypticism: The Houses of the Sages Amid the Varying Forms of Wisdom,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. J.G. Gammie and L.G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 479–97.

wisdom as the tradition seeks to overcome the crisis.³ Matthew Goff, in contrast, critiques the concept of a crisis in wisdom because 4QInstruction and other wisdom texts from Qumran never show any interest in Job or Qohelet. He suggests that the transformation of wisdom should rather be understood against the “crisis” of a “widespread sense of alienation, political upheaval, and the decline of national independence in the Near East.”⁴

Two recent studies have, in different ways, sought to account for the reconfiguration of the wisdom worldview after Qohelet. Samuel L. Adams has undertaken a diachronic examination of the wisdom instructions from Proverbs to 4QInstruction, arguing that the shift evident in these texts fundamentally concerns the nature of retribution. He observes a “preoccupation with death” that characterizes the later instructions such as Qohelet, Ben Sira, and 4QInstruction, in contrast to the book of Proverbs, which exhibits no such concern.⁵ Adams argues that figures such as Qohelet, Job, and Ben Sira “began to see weaknesses in the standard retributive model,” which maintained that individuals received just recompense for their actions in the present life.⁶ Under the influence of apocalyptic traditions, wisdom texts such as 4QInstruction appealed to the concept of literal immortality as a means of deferring retribution into the post-mortem state, thereby overcoming the apparent failure of retributive justice in the present life. Adams concludes that Wisdom undergoes “a profound shift in certain

³ Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* (STDJ 18; Leiden: Brill, 1995).

⁴ Matthew J. Goff, “Recent Trends in the Study of Early Jewish Wisdom Literature: The Contribution of 4QInstruction and Other Qumran Texts,” *CBR* 7 (2009): 388; cf. Matthew J. Goff, “The Mystery of Creation in 4QInstruction,” *DSD* 10 (2003): 181–86.

⁵ Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 273–77 et passim.

⁶ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 274–75.

Second Temple instructions, from an earthly to an otherworldly view.”⁷

In her study of the book of Qohelet, Shannon Burkes examines the emergence of death in the book of Qohelet, suggesting that the book’s preoccupation with human mortality may be indicative of the transformations taking place in the worldview not only of Israelite wisdom, but of the cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly.⁸ Importantly, Burkes suggests that death becomes a problem for Qohelet because he “systematically knocks down every means of continuity his culture had to offer, through children, community, or memory.”⁹ Burkes locates the transformation of worldview evident in the book of Qohelet within the framework of Jonathan Z. Smith’s classic argument that the Hellenistic period induced a cultural shift throughout the Eastern Mediterranean from traditional “locative” cosmologies, strongly rooted in a sense of belonging to the present world, toward “utopian” cosmologies in which the goal of humankind is its “true home” outside of mundane, temporal existence.¹⁰ Burkes argues that Qohelet is caught in the midst of the transition, no longer able to assent to the traditional “locative” cosmology but neither willing to embrace the “utopian” cosmology that is taking its place in his culture.¹¹

In a later work, Burkes attempts to describe the contours of a “religious transformation” she sees taking place in Second Temple Judaism more generally.¹² In this

⁷ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 273.

⁸ Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (SBLDS 170; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

⁹ Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 3.

¹⁰ Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 235–59; cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Influence of Symbols Upon Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand,” in *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 129–46.

¹¹ Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 240–41.

¹² Shannon Burkes, *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (SJSJ 79; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

work, Burkes considers Wisdom texts from Job to Wisdom of Solomon as well as apocalyptic texts such as Daniel and 4 Ezra. She identifies three transformations taking place in the religious worldview of the period, one concerning the nature of God, another the relationship of individual and community, and a third the nature of death and the possibility of immortality. She concludes that “the increasing detachment of the individual from unpredictable and unstable community structures along with a growing expectation that God would be less likely to intervene in worldly affairs . . . combined to create pressures with respect to the role and importance of death in human existence.”¹³

Notably, both Adams and Burkes relate the transformation in the worldview of wisdom literature in various ways to the emergence of death anxiety in the time of Qohelet and the later texts. However, the reasons for increased death anxiety in this period remain unclear. As Jack T. Sanders frames the issue: “Why [Qohelet’s] emphasis on death as unfortunate, when the earlier wisdom tradition--and basically all of older Israelite tradition--had been content to accept death as inevitable and to emphasize the quality of life in the here and now?”¹⁴ Why does death anxiety emerge in this particular way at this particular point in time when it was absent from the book of Proverbs? And in what way is this death anxiety related to the transformation of the wisdom worldview?

In order to address these issues, the present study appeals to the insights of a branch of social psychology known as Terror Management Theory (TMT), which examines the relationship between cultural worldview and death anxiety through empirical investigation.¹⁵ TMT begins from the theoretical work of Ernest Becker, who

¹³ Burkes, *God, Self, and Death*, 252.

¹⁴ Jack T. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions,” *JSJ* 36 (2005): 269.

¹⁵ For an accessible assessment of the state of TMT research, see Sheldon Solomon et al., “The Cultural Animal: Twenty Years of Terror Management Theory and Research,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 13–34 and the other essays in the same volume. The original statement of TMT is Jeff Greenberg et al., “The Causes

argued in his Pulitzer Prize winning *The Denial of Death* and other works that culturally constructed worldviews serve a basic function of buffering people against an innate and terrifying awareness of their own mortality.¹⁶ TMT research has generated a wealth of empirical data supporting Becker's theoretical claims and examining in detail various aspects of the way cultural worldviews function with regard to death anxiety.

Engagement with Terror Management Theory allows us to move beyond an intuitive sense of how the transformation of wisdom literature may be related to the emergence of death anxiety and examine the issue on a scientifically verifiable level.

Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory begins from the evolutionary premise that humans, like all creatures, have “a biological predisposition toward self-preservation.”¹⁷ Unlike other animals, however, humans combine this instinctual drive toward self-preservation with the awareness of inevitable death. Ernest Becker argued that this dual knowledge

and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory,” in *Public Self and Private Self* (ed. R. F. Baumeister; New York: Springer Verlag, 1986). Detailed reviews of the support for TMT at different stages of its development can be found in Jeff Greenberg et al., “Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology Volume 29* (ed. Mark Zanna; Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1997), 61–139; and Tom Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 11–92. For a more broadbased assessment of the implications of the thought of Ernest Becker for the humanities, see Daniel Liechty, ed., *Death and Denial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Legacy of Ernest Becker* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002). For a helpful introduction to TMT, as well as links to a number of online articles, see <http://www.tmt.missouri.edu/>

¹⁶ See primarily Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973); Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); and the excerpts of Becker's work in Daniel Liechty, ed., *The Ernest Becker Reader* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005). For helpful analyses of the significance of Becker's work see Sam Keen's foreword in *The Denial of Death*, xi-xiv, as well as Daniel Liechty's introduction in *The Ernest Becker Reader*, 11-23.

¹⁷ Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 27. On the evolutionary basis for TMT, see Mark J. Landau et al., “On the Compatibility of Terror Management Theory and Perspectives on Human Evolution,” *Evolutionary Psychology* 5 (2007): 476–519; Sheldon Solomon et al., “Human Awareness of Death and the Evolution of Culture,” in *The Psychological Foundations of Culture* (ed. M. Schaller and C. Crandall; Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2003), 15–40; and Constantine Sedikides and J. J. Skowronski, “The Symbolic Self in Evolutionary Context,” *Personality and Psychology Review* 1 (1997): 80–102.

produces in humankind a deep anxiety, which he considered to be the psychological counterpart to the biological predisposition toward self-preservation.¹⁸ According to Becker's theory, the human solution to this terrifying awareness of death was the development of symbol systems in the form of cultural worldviews. In Becker's conception, these symbolic worldviews render the world meaningful and allow individuals to see themselves as creatures of significance whose lives in some sense transcend death, whether literally or symbolically. A similar view of the relationship between cultural worldviews and death finds expression in the work of Berger and Luckman:

[D]eath also posits the most terrifying threat to the taken-for-granted realities of everyday life. The integration of death within the paramount reality of social existence is, therefore, of the greatest importance for any institutional order. This legitimation of death is, consequently, one of the most important fruits of symbolic universes. . . . All legitimations of death must carry out the same essential task--they must enable the individual to go on living in society after the death of significant others and to anticipate his own death with, at the very least, terror sufficiently mitigated so as not to paralyze the continued performance of the routines of everyday life.¹⁹

Drawing on these insights, Terror Management Theory proposes that cultural worldview function to buffer their adherents against the terrifying and potentially debilitating awareness of death that is humankind's natural state.²⁰

Specifically, TMT argues that culturally constructed worldviews buffer people against death anxiety "by convincing them that they are beings of enduring significance

¹⁸ Becker, *Denial of Death*, 25–29.

¹⁹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 101.

²⁰ It is important to note that TMT theorists do not claim that buffering death anxiety is the *only* function of cultural worldviews but rather *one* of the central functions of cultural worldviews: "TMT does not claim that the only function of worldviews is to manage anxiety, or that all sources of anxiety are kept under constant control by worldviews. Rather, the theory posits that faith in worldviews in concert with sustained perception of personal worth and significance (self-esteem) buffers the anxiety associated with the awareness of the inevitability of death" (Landau et al., "TMT and Human Evolution," 493).

living in a meaningful reality.”²¹ A successful cultural worldview will “offer an account of the origin of the universe, prescriptions of appropriate conduct, and guarantees of safety and security to those who adhere to such instructions--in this life and beyond, in the form of symbolic and/or literal immortality.”²² Living within such a worldview, a person is able to perceive the world as structured and meaningful, to achieve a sense of significance by living up to the standards and values of the society, and, as a successful adherent of the worldview, to achieve a sense of death transcendence in the modes provided by the worldview, which may be either literal or symbolic.

While the concept of literal immortality is familiar and requires no explanation, TMT emphasizes that a sense of death transcendence is also possible in symbolic rather than literal forms. In particular, psychological theorist Robert J. Lifton has argued that symbolic death transcendence occurs in a number of modes, each of which gives the individual a “sense, in the face of one’s finite life span, of living on.”²³ While these modes may overlap and combine, for heuristic purposes Lifton divides them into five categories: (1) The *biological mode*, which is perhaps the most obvious mode of death transcendence, gives the individual “the sense of living on, psychologically speaking, in our sons and daughters and their sons and daughters.”²⁴ Through biological connection, one attains the sense of symbolic immortality “epitomized by family continuity, living through. . .one’s sons and daughters, with imagery of “an endless chain of biological

²¹ Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 16.

²² Solomon et al., “The Cultural Animal,” 16.

²³ Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 29. For descriptions of Lifton’s five modes of symbolized immortality, see primarily Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 18–23. See also Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 29; Robert J. Lifton, *Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1970), 21–34; and Robert J. Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 10–27.

²⁴ Lifton, *The Future of Immortality*, 14.

attachment,” extending in both directions, to one’s ancestors and to one’s descendants.²⁵ Lifton also notes the extension of the biological mode in terms of what he describes as a *biosocial mode* of symbolizing immortality, in which the “biological mode of immortality can be extended outward from family to tribe, organization, subculture, nation, or even species.”²⁶ (2) In the *creative mode*, the continuity of life is achieved through the works that one leaves behind after death. The creative mode comprises all acts of achievement and enduring impact, “the sense that one’s writings, one’s teaching, one’s human influences, great or humble will live on, that one’s contribution will not die.”²⁷ One may think here not only of the building of royal monuments to commemorate the achievements of kings or the “immortality” that is associated with great writers and artists, but also of the “more humble influences on families, friends, lovers, families, teachers upon students or vice versa.”²⁸ (3) The *religious mode* connects the life of the individual with some transcendent reality that exists outside of the mundane realm of human existence. While it may include the concept of an immortal soul that continues to exist after death in some trans-earthly realm, it need not do so. The religious mode encompasses those symbolizations that in some way offer the individual “the opportunity to be reborn into a timeless realm of ultimate, death-transcending truths” in which “one can share the immortality of the deity, obtain a membership in a sacred community or a

²⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 19. With regard to the biological mode of symbolizing death transcendence, Lifton notes particularly the Chinese family system as articulated in Confucianism as well as the Roman notion of the *paterfamilias* as both the head of the family and the “priest” of the cult of the ancestors. One may also note the emphasis on family connectivity throughout the Hebrew Bible, evidenced particularly in the emphasis on genealogies and the practice of levirate marriage in order to preserve the family line. Lifton notes that biological continuity is “of enormous importance in all cultures, and may well be the most universally significant of man’s modes of immortality.” (Lifton, *Boundaries*, 22; cf. Lifton, *The Future of Immortality*, 14).

²⁶ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 19.

²⁷ Robert J. Lifton, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 33.

²⁸ Lifton, *The Future of Immortality*, 15.

‘covenant with God.’”²⁹ (4) The *natural mode* symbolizes immortality through connection with nature, which is thought to be eternal. It is “the perception that the natural environment around us, limitless in space and time, will remain.”³⁰ (5) The final mode of symbolizing immortality is the *experiential transcendent mode*, classically the mode of the mystic, which Lifton describes as a “psychic state of experiential transcendence, a form of intense or quiet ecstasy within which time and death disappear.”³¹

By providing functional symbols of death transcendence in one or more of these modes, as well as enabling its adherents to view themselves as persons of significance in a world of meaning, a cultural worldview may successfully buffer its adherents against death anxiety. To summarize Terror Management Theory:

TMT posits that the juxtaposition of a biological predisposition toward self-preservation that human beings share with all forms of life with the uniquely human awareness of the inevitability of death gives rise to potentially overwhelming terror. This potential for terror is managed by the construction and maintenance of cultural worldview: humanly constructed beliefs about the nature of reality that infuse individuals with a sense that they are persons of value in a world of meaning, different from and superior to corporeal and moral nature, and thus capable of transcending the natural boundaries of time and space and, in so doing, eluding death. For this reason, a substantial proportion of human activity is devoted to maintaining faith in one’s cultural worldview and the belief that one is meeting or exceeding the standards of that worldview.³²

Empirical Evidence for Terror Management Theory

Those familiar with the work of Ernest Becker will recognize that TMT does not go far beyond Becker in terms of the theory itself. What TMT does provide, however, is substantial empirical evidence to support Becker’s theoretical claims. It does so by

²⁹ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 20.

³⁰ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 22.

³¹ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 29.

³² Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 27.

deriving empirically verifiable hypothesis from the theoretical framework described above. Of these, two are particularly important for the discussion that follows. First, if cultural worldviews provide buffers against death anxiety, as the theory claims, then weakening the worldview should result in death anxiety rising closer to conscious thought. Second, if cultural worldviews buffer against death anxiety, then making people think about death should cause them to defend their cultural worldview as a way of reinforcing the buffer against death anxiety rising into conscious thought.

To date, more than 300 experiments conducted in independent laboratories in at least 19 different countries (including Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, China, Korea, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States) have given replicable, converging support for Terror Management Theory. There is substantial empirical literature that supports the central tenets of TMT as described above, firmly establishing TMT as a significant theory within the field of social psychology.³³

In order to test the theory that cultural worldviews buffer their adherents against death anxiety, researchers have derived a series of empirically verifiable hypotheses and then designed experiments to test them. For our purposes, one of the clearest examples is the *Death Thought Accessibility* (DTA) hypothesis, which states that if worldviews protect people against death anxiety then weakening a person's confidence in his worldview should raise thoughts of mortality closer to consciousness. In a series of experiments, Schimel et al. demonstrated that weakening a person's worldview does in

³³ Of course, while TMT has attracted a strong following, there are dissenting opinions. For a series of recent critiques of TMT, along with a response from its original proponents, see Tom Pyszczynski et al., "On the Unique Psychological Import of the Human Awareness of Mortality: Themes and Variations," *Psychological Inquiry* 17 (2006): 328–56 and the target articles in the same volume. A similar set of critiques and responses from earlier in the theory's development is Sheldon Solomon et al., "Return of the Living Dead," *Psychological Inquiry* 8 (1997): 59–71, along with the other articles in the volume. For a recent proposal of an alternative to TMT see Travis Proulx and Steven J. Heine, "Death and Black Diamonds: Meaning, Mortality, and the Meaning Maintenance Model," *Psychological Inquiry* 17 (2006): 309–18.

fact result in increased accessibility of death-related thoughts.³⁴ In the study, a group of Canadian participants read an article derogating either Canadian values (the test group) or Australian values (the control group) and then completed a word-fragment completion test that could be answered with either death-related or non-death-related words. For example, the fragment “COFF_ _” could be completed as either “COFFEE” or “COFFIN.” The results showed that the rate of death-related thought-completions was significantly higher for Canadians who read the anti-Canadian article than for those who viewed the anti-Australian article.³⁵ In a continuation of the study, some participants were told that the author of the anti-Canadian article had subsequently renounced his position and written a statement of apology while others were not given this information. In this case, death-thought accessibility was again increased for those who had read the anti-Canadian article but had not read the statement of apology. For those who had read the statement of apology, there was no increase in death-thought accessibility relative to the control group. These results support the hypothesis that the cultural worldview (in this case a pro-Canadian worldview) provides a buffer against death anxiety. Weakening confidence in the worldview reduces the efficacy of the buffer, bringing death anxiety closer to consciousness.³⁶ A final study tested the hypothesis by presenting pro-

³⁴ Jeff Schimel et al., “Is Death Really the Worm at the Core? Converging Evidence That Worldview Threat Increases Death-Thought Accessibility,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007): 789–803.

³⁵ Schimel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 791–93.

³⁶ Schimel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 793–94. A third study repeated the first experiment but used a different mechanism for measuring death-thought accessibility, as well as testing for accessibility of other negative thoughts not related to death in order to eliminate the possibility that the anti-Canadian essay simply raised negative thoughts to consciousness. Using a computer-based response system, participants were asked to distinguish between words and nonwords that were presented rapidly on the computer screen. The test presented 40 non-words, 18 neutral words (tea, chair, tree, etc.) and 6 negative words (suffer, wrong, jerk, fight, fail, and punish) and 6 death words (coffin, buried, dead, grave, killed, and skull). Results showed that those who viewed the anti-Canadian website had significantly faster response times in recognized death-related words as words, confirming that worldview threat increased accessibility of death-related thoughts (Schimel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 794–96).

creationists with an anti-creationist essay, achieving similar results.³⁷

A second hypothesis derived from TMT is called the *Mortality Salience Hypothesis* (MS). This hypothesis tests the correlation between the cultural worldview and death anxiety from the opposite direction of the DTA hypothesis, described above. It proposes that if cultural worldviews buffer against the potentially paralyzing terror associated with awareness of our mortality, then reminders of death should increase the degree to which people defend and bolster their cultural worldviews. Based on this hypothesis, experimenters expected to see that exposing subjects to subtle reminders of death would cause them to cling more forcefully to the values prescribed by their cultural worldviews, a phenomenon known as “cultural worldview defense.”

One set of experiments testing this hypothesis examined the bonds set in a hypothetical prostitution case by 22 municipal court judges in Tucson, Arizona.³⁸ Each of the judges was given a brief questionnaire prior to reviewing the case of a woman arrested for prostitution. Half of the questionnaires contained questions that brought mortality subtly to mind (that is, they induced “mortality salience” [MS]), while the other half did not. The hypothesis derived from TMT suggested that, because prostitution violates the values prescribed by the cultural worldview of the judges, those judges who were mortality salient would reinforce their worldview by assigning a higher bond for the prostitute. The results supported the hypothesis, with the average mortality salient judge setting bond at \$455, compared to \$50 for the control group (those not primed with thoughts of death).³⁹

³⁷ Schimel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 799–800.

³⁸ A. Rosenblatt et al., “Evidence for Terror Management Theory I: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Those Who Violate or Uphold Cultural Values,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989): 681–90, Experiment 1.

³⁹ Rosenblatt et al., “Evidence for Terror Management Theory I,” 682.

A second experiment replicated the results by giving a group of undergraduate students the same assignment; once again the mortality salient students set a higher bond than did the control group.⁴⁰ However, this second study advanced the first in two ways. First, students were asked as part of the questionnaire whether or not they opposed the prostitution. The results showed that the bonds set for the prostitute were elevated only for those mortality salient students for whom prostitution was a violation of their cultural values. Second, this experiment also asked students to evaluate the person giving the assessment as to his likeability, morality, intelligence and knowledge. This was done in order to eliminate the possibility that mortality salience simply results in a lower estimation of all others, regardless of their status in the cultural value system. Results showed that mortality-salient students who judged the prostitute more harshly did not judge the interviewer any differently than did the control group. This supports the claim that mortality salience effects apply only to cultural worldview violators and not to others.⁴¹

Finally, a third experiment was run to test whether mortality salience would also lead to a more *positive* value of someone who *upheld* the worldview and not just to a more negative evaluation of worldview violators.⁴² In this case, students were asked to prescribe a monetary reward to a person who acted heroically by reporting a suspected mugger as well as to prescribe bond for a prostitute. As before, the prostitute received a higher bond from the mortality-salient participants. Mortality salience also led to a higher reward for the hero (\$3746 versus \$1112 for the control group).⁴³

⁴⁰ Rosenblatt et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory I," 681–90, Experiment 2.

⁴¹ Rosenblatt et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory I," 682–684.

⁴² Rosenblatt et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory I," 681–90, Experiment 3.

⁴³ Rosenblatt et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory I," 684.

Taken together, these three experiments support the proposal of Terror Management Theory that cultural worldviews provide a buffer against death anxiety. If the cultural worldview functions to protect the individual against conscious thoughts of death, then exposure to subtle reminders of death (the questionnaire in this case), should cause the individuals to reinforce their worldviews to protect against the increased presence of death-related thoughts in the unconscious mind. The results confirm that mortality salience does lead to a stronger defense of the worldview, suggesting that cultural worldviews do function as a buffer against death anxiety. Further, the phenomenon of reinforcing the worldview is specific to anxiety about death.⁴⁴ “Asking participants to ponder their next important exam, cultural values, speaking in public, general anxieties, worries after college, meaninglessness, failure, being paralyzed in a car crash, being socially excluded, and dental pain or physical pain, or making them self-aware, does not produce the same effects engendered by an MS induction.”⁴⁵

While these experiments tested the effects of mortality salience on participants’ responses to specific individuals who violated the values of the worldview, another set of experiments tested whether the same effects would occur in relation to *symbolic representations* of the worldview.⁴⁶ In this case, participants were asked to complete two tasks: hanging a crucifix on a wall and sifting sand out of black dye using a limited set of tools. In the control group, these tasks could be accomplished by using a block of wood to drive a nail into the wall for hanging the crucifix and using a sheet of white cloth for

⁴⁴ See Rosenblatt et al., “Evidence for Terror Management Theory I,” 681–90, Study 2; Jeff Greenberg et al., “Testing Alternative Explanations for Mortality Salience Effects: Terror Management, Value Accessibility, or Worrisome Thoughts?” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 25 (1995): 417–33; and Greenberg et al., “Terror Management Theory,” 97–99.

⁴⁵ Solomon et al., “The Cultural Animal,” 21.

⁴⁶ Jeff Greenberg et al., “Evidence of a Terror Management Function of Cultural Icons: The Effects of Mortality Salience on the Inappropriate Use of Cherished Cultural Symbols,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21 (1995): 1221–28.

straining the sand out of the dye. In the experimental group, however, the only way to accomplish the tasks was by using the crucifix itself to drive the nail and straining the sand from the dye by using an American flag. Results showed no difference in the time or difficulty of completing the tasks for the non-mortality-salient participants, whether they were assigned the wood and white sheet or the crucifix and flag. Mortality-salient participants accomplished the non-symbolic tasks in similar fashion. However, results showed that mortality-salient participants asked to complete the tasks by inappropriately using the culturally significant symbols of the crucifix and flag took twice as long to complete the tasks and reported more negative feelings about having to complete them. These results suggest that symbolic representations of the cultural worldview such as the flag and crucifix also provide protection against death anxiety, such that subjects for whom death thoughts are more accessible are loathe to violate them.

Other experiments demonstrated that the buffering effect of the cultural worldview against death anxiety may take place at an entirely subconscious level. A set of experiments induced mortality salience subconsciously by inserting subliminal death primes such as the words “death” and “dead” into a computerized questionnaire and then testing for cultural worldview defense.⁴⁷ Results indicated that American participants exposed to subliminal death primes such as the word “death” had increased death-thought accessibility as well as elevated pro-American bias relative to participants subliminally primed with an innocuous word, such as “field.”⁴⁸ The fact that unconscious awareness of death engenders worldview defense gives strong support to TMT’s proposal

⁴⁷ Jamie Arndt et al., “Subliminal Exposure to Death-Related Stimuli Increases Defense of the Cultural Worldview,” *Psychological Science* 8 (1997): 379–85.

⁴⁸ While the participants exposed to the subliminal death primes were not *aware* that they were thinking of death and reported no increase in anxiety level, they scored higher on a death-thought accessibility scale in which they were asked to fill in missing letters to ambiguous words such as sk_ll (skill or skull). Importantly, a further study showed that these effects were specific to death-related primes and did not occur with other aversive but non-death-related words such as “pain.”

that cultural worldviews function outside of human awareness to ease unconscious anxiety about death.⁴⁹

Since the establishment of TMT as a viable theoretical account of human behavior relative to the role of the cultural worldview as a buffer against death anxiety, more than 300 experiments have been conducted demonstrating that mortality salience affects a wide range of human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These include: aggression,⁵⁰ stereotyping,⁵¹ perceptions of fairness,⁵² overconsumption,⁵³ disgust and

⁴⁹ Jeff Greenberg et al., “A Perilous Leap from Becker’s Theorizing to Empirical Science: Terror Management Theory and Research,” in *Death and Denial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Legacy of Ernest Becker* (Daniel Liechty; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 9. People also have conscious thoughts of death, of course, but these are not managed by the TMT defenses related to cultural worldview. Direct awareness of death is generally addressed by employing more direct, *proximal* defenses that remove the immediate threat from conscious awareness, typically in the form of avoidant thinking, denial of vulnerability, or redefinition of the situation. Symbolic defenses come into play only when death has been removed from conscious awareness. This “dual process model” has been demonstrated experimentally. For an overview see Jamie Arndt et al., “The Blueprint of Terror Management: Understanding the Cognitive Architecture of Psychological Defense Against the Awareness of Death,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 35–53. For the key experiments, see Tom Pyszczynski et al., “A Dual Process Model of Defense Against Conscious and Unconscious Death-Related Thoughts: An Extension of Terror Management Theory,” *Psychology Review* 106 (1999): 835–45 and Jamie Arndt et al., “Suppression, Accessibility of Death-Related Thoughts, and Cultural Worldview Defense: Exploring the Psychodynamics of Terror Management,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1997): 5–18.

⁵⁰ H. A. McGregor et al., “Terror Management and Aggression: Evidence That Mortality Salience Motivates Aggression Against Worldview-Threatening Others,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75 (1998): 590–605 Joseph Hayes et al., “Fighting Death with Death: The Buffering Effects of Learning That Worldview Violators Have Died,” *Psychological Science* 19 (2008): 501–7; Tom Pyszczynski et al., “Terrorism, Violence, and Hope for Peace: A Terror Management Perspective,” *Psychological Science* 17 (2008): 318–22.

⁵¹ Jeff Schimel et al., “Stereotypes and Terror Management: Evidence That Mortality Salience Enhances Stereotypic Thinking and Preferences,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 905–26.

⁵² Kees van den Bos and Joost Miedema, “Toward Understanding Why Fairness Matters: The Influence of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Procedural Fairness,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (2000): 355–66; Kees van den Bos, “Reactions to Perceived Fairness: The Impact of Mortality Salience and Self-Esteem on Ratings of Negative Affect,” *Social Justice Research* 14 (2001): 1–23.

⁵³ Gilad Hirschberger and Tsachi Ein-Dor, “Does a Candy a Day Keep the Death Thoughts Away? The Terror Management Function of Eating,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 27

feelings about sex and the body,⁵⁴ romantic relationships,⁵⁵ the structuring of the social world,⁵⁶ feelings about nature, and cultural collapse,⁵⁷ among others.⁵⁸ While not all of these behavioral effects will be relevant to the discussion of the Wisdom literature that follows, a number of them will open up angles of interpretation that have previously been inaccessible within the field of biblical studies.

Terror Management Theory and the Ancient Near East

Since Terror Management Theory derives from evolutionary biology, it proposes

(2005): 179–86; Tim Kasser and Kennon M. Sheldon, “Of Wealth and Death: Materialism, Mortality Salience, and Consumption Behavior,” *Psychological Science* 11 (2000): 348–51; Naomi Mandel and Steven J. Heine, “Terror Management and Marketing: He Who Dies with the Most Toys Wins,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 26 (1999): 527–32; Rosellina Ferraro, Baba Shiv, and James R. Bettman, “Let Us Eat and Drink, for Tomorrow We Shall die: Effects of Mortality Salience and Self-Esteem on Self-Regulation in Consumer Choice,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 32 (2005): 65–75.

⁵⁴ Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “Fleeing the Body: A Terror Management Perspective on the Problem of Corporeality,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4 (2000): 200–18; Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “I Am Not an Animal: Mortality Salience, Disgust, and the Denial of Human Creatureliness,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 130 (2001): 427–35; Cathy R. Cox et al., “Disgust, Creatureliness, and the Accessibility of Death-Related Thoughts,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37 (2007): 494–507.

⁵⁵ Mario Mikulincer et al., “The Terror of Death and the Quest for Love: An Existential Perspective on Close Relationships,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 287–304; Victor Florian, Mario Mikulincer, and Gilad Hirschberger, “The Anxiety-Buffering Function of Close Personal Relationships: Evidence That Relationship Commitment Acts as a Terror Management Mechanism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (2002): 527–42.

⁵⁶ Mark J. Landau et al., “A Function of Form: Terror Management and Structuring the Social World,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87 (2004): 190–210; Mark Dechesne and Arie W. Kurganski, “Terror’s Epistemic Consequences: Existential Threats and the Quest for Certainty and Closure,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 247–62.

⁵⁷ Michael B. Salzman and Michael J. Halloran, “Cultural Trauma and Recovery: Cultural Meaning, Self-Esteem, and the Reconstruction of the Cultural Anxiety Buffer,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 231–46; Michael B. Salzman, “The Dynamics of Cultural Trauma: Implications for the Pacific Nations,” in *Social Change and Psychosocial Adaptation in Pacific Island Nations: Cultures in Transition* (ed. Anthony J. Marsella et al.; International and Cultural Psychology Series; New York: Springer, 2005), 29–51; Schimmel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 789–803.

⁵⁸ Solomon et al., “The Cultural Animal,” 22.

that cultural worldviews have performed terror management functions in all human societies, including those of Israel and the ancient Near East. Several studies have demonstrated that this terror management function of cultural worldviews occurs cross-culturally and is not specifically a phenomenon of Western cultures. The most extensive of these studies tests Terror Management effects in Japanese culture, which is a collectivist culture in contrast to the more individualist culture of the United States, where TMT has been tested most extensively.⁵⁹ The relationship between cultural worldview defense and death anxiety was tested in Japan following a procedure similar to that in the previous mortality salience (MS) studies. Participants in the test group were asked to complete a questionnaire which included questions related to mortality while participants in the control group responded to questions about an important exam. Participants in both groups were then asked to read two letters, the first containing neutral content and the second being an attack on Japan supposedly composed by a foreign student. Participants were then asked to evaluate the authors of the two essays. As anticipated, there was no difference in the evaluation of the neutral-content letter between the MS and control groups. However, for the anti-Japan letter, participants in the MS condition evaluated the anti-Japanese author significantly more negatively than did participants in the control condition. The results showed that in Japan, as in the American studies, “being reminded of one’s mortality was specifically associated with less positive views towards a foreigner who held negative views of one’s country.”⁶⁰ The authors conclude from the study that “terror management effects are not exclusive to Western cultures but are also evident in Japan.”⁶¹ Other studies have shown similar results in both

⁵⁹ Steven J. Heine et al., “Terror Management in Japan,” *Asian Journal of Psychology* 5 (2002): 187–96.

⁶⁰ Heine et al., “Terror Management in Japan,” 191.

⁶¹ Heine et al., “Terror Management in Japan,” 193.

Iran⁶² and aboriginal Australia.⁶³ Taken together, these results support TMT's claim to be applicable to all human cultures, deriving from the evolutionary development of culture to overcome debilitating death anxiety.

While one cannot experimentally verify the terror management function of cultural worldviews in ancient cultures, it is nonetheless possible to recognize comparable phenomena that suggest the appropriateness of the theory. In particular, Jan Assman has given sustained attention to the relationship between death anxiety and cultural production in the context of ancient Egypt.⁶⁴ Like TMT, Assmann argues that "death is the origin and center of culture," and then seeks to demonstrate this claim through his analysis of Egyptian culture.⁶⁵ He observes in the Egyptian harper's songs, as well as in the Babylonian myths of Adapa and Gilgamesh what he refers to as the problem of an "excess of knowledge" that troubles humankind--that being that he must die. "The gods do not know it, for they are immortal, and animals do not know it, for they have not eaten from the tree of knowledge. . . . This knowledge creates an intolerable situation. He who has it should not have to die."⁶⁶ He goes on to suggest that "death--or better, knowledge of our mortality--is a first-rate culture generator. An important part of our activity, and especially the culturally relevant part--art, science philosophy, and

⁶² Tom Pyszczynski et al., "Mortality Salience, Martyrdom, and Military Might: The Great Satan Versus the Axis of Evil," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32 (2006): 525–31.

⁶³ See Michael J. Halloran and Emiko S. Kashima, "Social Identity and Worldview Validation: The Effects of Ingroup Identity Primes and Mortality Salience on Value Endorsement," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 30 (2004): 915–25 and Michael J. Halloran, "Cultural Validation and Social Context: The Effect of Mortality Salience on Endorsement of the Multiple Worldviews of Aboriginal and Anglo-Australians in Contexts Defined by Social Identities" (First International Conference on Experimental Existential Psychology: Finding Meaning in the Human Condition; Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2001).

⁶⁴ Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (trans. David Lorton; Ithaca, N.Y., 2005).

⁶⁵ Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 1.

⁶⁶ Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 6.

charity--arises from the drive for immortality, the drive to transcend the boundaries of the 'I' and its lifetime."⁶⁷ What Assmann claims with regard to ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures is essentially a statement of the fundamental hypothesis of Terror Management Theory. What TMT does for us, however, is to move the claim beyond the realm of theory and verify it empirically. Further, TMT can help us understand the manner in which cultural production protects humankind against death anxiety and the sorts of responses that may be evoked when the cultural worldview fails to perform this function.

Also in support of the applicability of TMT to Israelite and early Jewish tradition is research that has examined modes of literal and symbolic death transcendence in biblical and postbiblical literatures. For instance, in a series of his early articles, John Collins argued that early Jewish apocalyptic literature was centrally concerned with providing its adherents symbols of death transcendence.⁶⁸ He suggested that apocalyptic eschatology "is concerned with the transcendence of death by the attainment of a higher, angelic form of life."⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Collins also considered the attempts to cope with death in the wisdom texts of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon.⁷⁰ He argued that while the Wisdom of Solomon attempts to negate death by denying it a place in the order of creation, Ben Sira approaches the problem by shifting his focus to "some conception of transcendent life--a life which cannot be measured in biological or temporal terms."⁷¹

⁶⁷ Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 9.

⁶⁸ John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," *CBQ* 36 (1974): 21–43; cf. John J. Collins, "The Symbolism of Transcendence in Jewish Apocalyptic," *BR* 19 (1974): 5–22.

⁶⁹ Collins, "Symbolism of Transcendence," 43.

⁷⁰ John J. Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom," *HTR* 71 (1980): 177–92.

⁷¹ Collins, "The Root of Immortality," 192.

More recently, Jon Levenson has given sustained attention to the development symbolic modes of immortality (or “resurrection,” in his terms) in ancient Israel.⁷² Levenson argues in part that Israelite literature comes to symbolize death transcendence in that “the fulfillment of the blessed individual’s life survives him and continues to testify to his final felicity,” particularly through the survival of his offspring.⁷³ The work of Levenson and Collins again supports the applicability of TMT to texts of this period. TMT is fundamentally concerned with the same sorts of symbolic efforts to overcome death that these scholars have identified in these literatures. The advantage of TMT is that it provides empirical data concerning the ways in which various symbolic modes may function to buffer against death anxiety, thereby allowing us to develop a more complete picture of how these texts attempt to overcome death symbolically.

Undoubtedly, my appeal to empirical social psychology as a theoretical framework is an uncommon one within the field of biblical studies. However, to the extent that the theory provides insight into the manner in which cultural worldviews, both ancient and modern, function to buffer against death anxiety, it may shed new light on the transformation of the cultural worldview of traditional Israelite wisdom literature and the relationship of this transformation to death and death anxiety. The applicability of the theory to the ancient context is supported by (1) its derivation from evolutionary biology as a fundamental psychological trait of humankind; (2) its demonstration cross-culturally in both individualist and collectivist cultures; and (3) similar phenomena relating to

⁷² See especially Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), along with Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). Levenson’s work receives a full treatment in chapter 1.

⁷³ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 76 Levenson considers the stories of Abraham, Job, and Jacob, all of whom seem to face death with equanimity precisely because they are surrounded by their families (cf. Gen 25:1-19; Job 42:16; Gen 48:11; 50:23).

culture, symbolic immortality, and death anxiety in previous research into ancient Israel and the surrounding cultures.

Terror Management Theory and the Transformation of Wisdom

Following the insights of Terror Management Theory, the present study examines the wisdom instructions of the early Second Temple Period as cultural worldviews that function, at least in part, to buffer against death anxiety. I examine the modes of symbolic immortality constructed by each text and consider the extent to which these appear to buffer against anxiety over death. As with both Burkes and Adams, I observe a transition taking place in the worldview of these texts, which I account for in terms of the effort to overcome death anxiety by symbolic means, including a desymbolization of the tradition in the book of Qohelet and competing resymbolizations in Ben Sira and 4QInstruction. Finally, I argue that the desymbolization and resymbolization of the cultural worldviews of these wisdom texts can be correlated to the widespread cultural shifts occurring in the region of Palestine during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

For this last point, I draw heavily on the work of Robert J. Lifton, who examines the effects of cultural trauma on worldviews and their capacities to provide functional symbols of immortality.⁷⁴ Lifton argues that “when [historical] change is too rapid and extreme to be readily absorbed . . . it then impairs symbol systems that have to do with family, religion, social and political authority, sexuality, birth and death, and the overall ordering of the cycle of life,”⁷⁵ thus causing a general breakdown in culturally

⁷⁴ See especially Lifton, *The Broken Connection* and Lifton, *The Protean Self*. My first introduction to Lifton’s thought was Dan Mathewson, *Death and Survival in the Book of Job: Desymbolization and Traumatic Experience* (LHBOTS 450; New York: T&T Clark, 2006). Mathewson reads Lifton as a trauma theorist, using his work to examine the character Job as a trauma survivor who has experienced extreme suffering nearly to the point of death. While I have been influenced by Mathewson, my own engagement with Lifton is quite different than his. Unlike Mathewson, my argument will develop wholly without reference to traumatic death. Rather I am concerned with the sort of “slow” cultural trauma that arises from widespread socioeconomic shifts rather than those that result from widespread or violent death.

⁷⁵ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 14.

constructed modes of symbolic death transcendence. This process, which Lifton describes as “historical desymbolization”⁷⁶ or “historical dislocation,”⁷⁷ typically involves “fundamental alterations or recombinations” of the worldview.⁷⁸ I consider the diversification of the wisdom worldview in Qohelet, Ben Sira, and 4QInstruction to be responses to the historical dislocation of the Ptolemaic Period, Qohelet representing a desymbolization of the worldview, while Ben Sira and 4QInstruction constitute competing resymbolizations of the worldview.

Following Adams, I have confined my analysis to the instructional literature of the early Second Temple period (prior to the Maccabean revolt). In Chapter 1, I begin my analysis with Proverbs 10-29, which, while not generically an instruction, provides a baseline for discussing the worldview of traditional Israelite wisdom in the preexilic period. Chapter 2 considers the cultural worldview of Proverbs 1-9, which I argue exhibits signs of being a worldview under stress from the presence of competing worldviews. Because of the significance of the issue of death anxiety for my study, I devote two chapters to the book of Qohelet. In Chapter 3, I examine Qohelet’s efforts to find symbolic death transcendence, arguing that his cultural worldview has become severely impaired. In Chapter 4, I consider the means by which Qohelet copes with the unmediated awareness of mortality that results from the failure of his worldview. In Chapters 5 and 6, I examine the worldviews of 4QInstruction and Ben Sira, which I argue have resymbolized the wisdom tradition in ways that employ symbols previously unknown in the wisdom tradition in order to symbolize death transcendence for their adherents.

⁷⁶ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 293.

⁷⁷ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 14–17.

⁷⁸ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 284–85.

CHAPTER 1

SYMBOLIC DEATH TRANSCENDENCE IN PROVERBS 10-29

The purpose of this chapter is to consider whether the oldest layers of the book of Proverbs, found in chapters 10-29, may be understood as an anxiety-buffering “cultural worldview” in the sense described by Terror Management Theory (TMT). In the understanding of TMT, cultural worldviews provide a buffer against death anxiety by allowing their adherents to see themselves as (1) persons of significance (2) in a meaningful universe (3) whose lives in some manner transcend death. With regard to Proverbs 10-29, the first two of these points have been well established in the scholarly literature. It is the final point--whether Proverbs 10-29 allows its adherents to understand themselves as transcending death--that will receive the most sustained attention in this chapter. I will contend that Proverbs 10-29 does indeed symbolize the lives of the righteous as transcending death.

Date, Setting, and Purpose of Proverbs 10-29

Proverbs 10-29 comprises four smaller collections of proverbs indicated by superscriptions in the biblical text: (1) “the proverbs of Solomon” (10:1-22:16), “the words of the wise” (22:17-24:22), “more (words) of the wise” (24:23-34), and “more proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, copied” (25:1-29:27).¹ Two of these collections give us ostensible historical locations in the reigns of Solomon

¹ I understand Proverbs as a whole to be a text compiled in stages, with Proverbs 10-29 being the earliest, followed by Proverbs 1-9, and then by Proverbs 30-31 (see Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009], 499-500; Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 3-6). The present chapter considers Proverbs 10-29 (the earliest stage) and the next chapter Prov 1-9 (the later stage). Because of their later dating and their uncertain position in the trajectory of Hebrew wisdom, I do not consider Proverbs 30-31.

and Hezekiah, respectively. While the attribution to Solomon is historically suspect, the reference to a collection dating to the period of Hezekiah is plausible.² Since Hezekiah has no traditional connection to Wisdom, the notice in 25:1 likely preserves a historical memory of some collection of sayings resembling 25:1-29:27 being assembled in the period of Hezekiah. The connection between Proverbs 10-29 and the monarchy gains further credence from numerous sayings that presuppose the existence of a king in Israel, suggesting that the compilers of these collections had a vested interest in the workings of the royal court.³ Linguistic indicators lend additional support to a preexilic dating for these Proverbs 10-29.⁴

² While the argument for Proverbs as stemming from a “Solomonic Enlightenment” in 10th century Jerusalem has found some supporters, it does not accord well with what we now know about Judah in the time of Solomon; see, *inter alia*, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 128–45. The attribution to Solomon likely stems from his traditional status as the paragon of the wise ruler (see 1Kgs 3:1-28). While some of the individual Proverbs contained in Proverbs 10-29 may certainly have originated in the Solomonic period (so Clifford, *Proverbs*, 3) the *collections* as we have them are almost certainly later. For a view that espouses a Solomonic dating for these texts see especially Jehoshua M. Grintz, “‘The Proverbs of Solomon’: Clarifications on the Question of the Relation Between the Three Collections in the Book of Proverbs Attributed to Solomon,” in *Twice-Told Proverbs and the Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (ed. and trans. Daniel C. Snell; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 87–114., and, more recently, Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs* (2 vols.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1:31–37.

³ The royal proverbs are: 14:28, 35; 16:10, 12-15; 19:12; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1; 22:11, 29; 24:21; 25:2-3, 5-6; 28:15 and 29:2, 4, and 14. Proverbs 28:15 and 29:2 use the Hebrew *mšl* (“rule”) rather than referring directly to a king. In 28:15, the reference is to a “wicked ruler” (*mōšēl rāšā’*) while 29:2 refers to the time “when the wicked rule” (*bimšōl rāšā’*).

⁴ See especially Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 504–505. Fox notes several distinctive features of Classical Biblical Hebrew in Proverbs 10-29: (1) a preference for a verbal suffix rather than *’et* plus suffix (84 occurrences versus zero); (2) the use of *’ak* meaning “indeed” (Prov 11:23; 14:23; 17:11; 21:5); (3) the use of the infinitive absolute with imperative sense (Prov 12:7; 13:20K; 25:4, 5); (4) the use of the infinitive absolute as a gerund (Prov 15:12, 22; 17:12; 21:16; 24:23; 25:2, 27; 28:21); (5) the order of the pair “silver and gold” (Prov 17:3; 22:1; 27:21) rather than “gold and silver” as preferred in Late Biblical Hebrew; (6) the usage of the earlier members of lexical contrast pairs. In addition, Fox notes the following as likely Aramaisms in Proverbs 10-29: *’azl* “depart” (Prov 20:14); *’kp* “force” (16:26); *’lp* “learn” (22:25); *bhl* “hurry” (20:21); *bhr* “test” (10:20); *bqr* “examine” (20:25); *b’l* + abstract noun, meaning “possessor of a certain quality” (18:9; 22:24; 23:2; 24:8); *hōsen* “strength” (15:6); *hsd* “disgrace” (25:10; 14:34); *mōtar* “advantage” (14:23; 21:5); *millāh* “word” (23:9); *dh* “remove” (25:20); *qbl* “receive” (19:20); *qōšt* “truth” (22:21); *rab* “many” before the modified noun (19:21); *rēa’* “thought” (20:30); *šakkīn* “knife” (23:2). The presence of Aramaisms may suggest a date in the late eighth or seventh centuries, after Aramaic had become the lingua franca.

The purpose of the collections in Proverbs 10-29 was likely to preserve and transmit the values of the elite classes and their scribes with the goal of ensuring cultural stability and continuity. While many of the sayings in Proverbs 10-29 likely had their origins as popular folks sayings,⁵ the collections themselves seem to be the product of a scribal class, whose perspectives and interests shape the collection as a whole according to their own interests. Michael Fox argues that the world depicted in Proverbs 10-29 should not be understood as presenting the world empirically “as it is” but rather as presenting a “coherence theory of truth” by which observations are evaluated according to their “coherence with some specified set of propositions.”⁶ Since Proverbs “sees an orderly world, without deep disruptions” it is able to “sift out some realities that would be obtrusive in the orderly world it posits.”⁷ The worldview of Proverbs is thus in essence an “assertion of faith,” or as I would prefer to say, a symbolically constructed worldview that renders the world a coherent and teaches its adherents how to succeed in the world so constructed.⁸

Values, Success, and “Self-Esteem” in the Worldview of Proverbs 10-29

While it may be true that Proverbs 10-29 functions to preserve and transmit the

⁵ For the position that Proverbs originated as folks saying, see Claus Westermann, “Weisheit im Sprichwort,” in *Schalom: Studien zu Glaube und Geschichte Israels. Alfred Jepsen zum 70. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1971), 73–85; Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples* (trans. J. D. Charles; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); trans. of *Wurzeln der Weisheit: Die ältesten Sprüche Israels und anderer Völker* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); and F. W. Golka, *The Leopard’s Spots* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

⁶ Michael V. Fox, “The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 669–84. and idem *Proverbs 10–31*, 962–76. The quotation is from Fox, “Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” 675; Fox is quoting James O. Young, “The Coherency Theory of Truth,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.p., online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2001/entries/truth-coherence> (accessed [by Fox] November 18, 2006). On epistemology in Proverbs, see also James L. Crenshaw, “The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature,” *WW* 7 (1987): 245–52 and James L. Crenshaw, “Qoheleth’s Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry,” in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Antoon Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 205–24.

⁷ Fox, “Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” 683.

cultural values of the elite classes, it must also adequately address the need of its adherents. Terror Management Theory argues that a successful cultural worldview must adequately address at least three basic psychological needs: (1) it must provide its adherents with a sense of being persons of significance in a meaningful world; (2) it must offer them a sense that the world is relatively safe and predictable; (3) it must show them that their lives in some way transcend death.⁹

The first of these issues concerns “self-esteem,” which in the usage of TMT refers to individuals perceiving themselves to be “valuable and significant participants in the cultural drama to which they subscribe.”¹⁰ The transmission of particular cultural values thus benefits not only the culture itself, by propagating its own conception of the world to a new generation of adherents, but also the individuals within that culture, for whom the values provide a sense of meaning and a benchmark for one’s own sense of success or significance. Indeed, individuals are unable to provide for their own sense of self-esteem, since the value systems from which a sense of meaning and success is derived are ultimately cultural contrivances. Simply put, cultural values provide an answer to the question “What is important for me to do in life?” and offer measures by which a person may determine if he is doing what he is “supposed to do.”

In this way, twitching blobs of biological protoplasm are transformed into culturally constructed mongers who derive psychological equanimity through the belief that they are persons of value in a world of meaning and thus protected from harm in this life and assured a permanent place in the next one. The individual’s self worth is based on the roles and attributes valued within the cultural worldview to which the person subscribes, and cultures typically provide their constituents with a wide variety of valued attributes and roles they can try to fulfill (e.g., smart, funny, athletic, doctor, scientist, entrepreneur).¹¹

⁸ Fox, “Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” 682.

⁹ Tom Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 27.

¹⁰ Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 22.

¹¹ Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 27.

The values by which self-esteem is determined vary widely from culture to culture: the size of the bank account in American culture, the number of cattle in a pastoral society, graciousness in a culture of hospitality, and so on. According to TMT, the primary function of self-esteem is to provide a buffer against anxiety, particularly that associated with vulnerability and death.¹²

In a series of experiments, researchers have demonstrated that raising self-esteem caused subjects to experience less anxiety in the face of a threat, even if the threat was not related to the area in which self-esteem was increased. In one experiment, participants received false feedback on a personality test, suggesting either that their personalities were somewhat weak or were fundamentally strong. Following the feedback, some participants were subject to video images of an autopsy and an electrocution, intended to provoke anxiety, while others watched a nonthreatening video with no depictions of death. Results demonstrated that participants with elevated self-esteem showed no difference in anxiety between the two videos, while those with lowered self-esteem experienced increased anxiety in the death-related video.¹³ A second study demonstrated similar effects, with anxiety measured by skin-conductance and related to anticipation of electric shocks; students with elevated self-esteem demonstrated less anxiety at the prospect of receiving shocks.¹⁴ Multiple subsequent studies have provided convergent support for the proposition that self-esteem reduces anxiety in

¹² For a review of the evidence, see Jeff Greenberg et al., “The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory,” in *Public Self and Private Self* (ed. R. F. Baumeister; New York: Springer Verlag, 1986), 189–212 and Sheldon Solomon et al., “A Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem,” in *Handbook of Social and Clinical Psychology: The Health Perspective* (ed. C. R. Snyder and D. Forsyth; New York: Pergamum, 1991), 21–40.

¹³ Jeff Greenberg et al., “Why Do People Need Self-Esteem? Converging Evidence That Self-Esteem Serves an Anxiety-Buffering Function,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (1992): Experiment 1.

¹⁴ Greenberg et al., “Self-Esteem Serves an Anxiety-Buffering Function,” Study 2.

stressful situations.¹⁵ Thus, one primary function of a successful cultural worldview is to provide a system by which its constituents may perceive themselves as being successful according to the values prescribed by the culture. A sense of success helps to stave off anxiety related to death.

Proverbs 10-29 achieves this function of a cultural worldview by providing its adherents with a relatively clear and coherent set of values under the rubrics of “wise” (חכם) and “righteous” (צדיק).¹⁶ Michael Fox notes eight general characteristics associated with the wise in Proverbs 10-29: receptivity to wisdom, verbal skills, emotional composure, preparedness, shrewdness, avoidance of conflicts, honesty, and justice.¹⁷ Righteousness, on the other hand, “is the all-encompassing quality of human or divine character *in toto* above and beyond specific behaviors, which actualizes as rectitude in moral choices and fairness and benevolence in social transactions.”¹⁸ It includes the characteristics of wisdom, but also more ethically-oriented principles such as honesty, justice, uprightness, honesty, and compassion.¹⁹ The characteristics of the righteous and the wicked, as well as the wise and the fool, are amply described, giving the individual a clear sense of the paradigm toward which he is to strive. The rewards and punishments associated with each type of person reinforce the desire to be righteous and not wicked and provide a benchmark for determining whether or not one is “successful” according to the standards of the worldview. In this respect, Proverbs 10-29 functions effectively as an

¹⁵ For a summary of the experiments, see Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 38–44.

¹⁶ Knut M. Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver: An Interpretation of Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10:1–22:16* (BZAW 273; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 77–82, has demonstrated that the terms חכם and צדיק, while not synonymous, are co-referential. They refer to the same groups of people and the values they embody.

¹⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 924–27.

¹⁸ Sun Myung Lyu, “The Concept of Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 20.

¹⁹ Fox, *Proverbs 10–31*, 928–930.

anxiety-buffering cultural worldview, enabling its adherents to have a strong sense of their own value and significance in the world, which is the first task of a cultural worldview, according to Terror Management Theory.

Order and Security in the Worldview of Proverbs 10-29

The second task of a successful cultural worldview, according to Terror Management Theory, is to provide a sense of a safe and ordered world in which particular behaviors result in relatively predictable outcomes. While this collection of sayings does not, by its nature, offer any single, coherent statement of the nature of the cosmos, it does offer a rich set of symbols through which the world is presented as ordered and secure. For the purposes of the discussion, we can consider three central themes of Proverbs 10-29: (1) behaviors have predictable consequences, (2) YHWH protects the righteous, and (3) the path of the righteous is secure and directed toward positive ends. Taken together, these three aspects of the worldview offer firm reassurance that those who behave according to the values promoted Proverbs 10-29 will find the world safe, predictable, and meaningful.

Proverbs 10-29 and the *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*

According to Terror Management Theory, a successful cultural worldview assuages potentially debilitating anxiety about the ever-present possibility of unexpected death by providing its adherents with a sense that the world is intrinsically safe and predictable. While we will consider how Proverbs 10-29 addresses the specific issue of premature death--as well as death in general--further below, our present concern is with the manner in which Proverbs 10-29 symbolizes the world as being known and predictable rather than threatening and unpredictable.

Proverbs 10-29 construes the world as functioning with a tight correlation between one's actions and their consequences, with the righteous person receiving just

rewards and the wicked receiving punishment. Each type of person, the righteous and the wicked, reaps the outcomes of their actions. A few examples will clearly illustrate the point:

מדרכיו ישבע סוג לב ומעליו איש טוב

The perverse is filled from his ways
and the good man from his deeds.²⁰ (Prov 14:14)

תוחלת צדיקים שמחה ותקוה רשעים תאבד

The expectation of the righteous is joy
But the hope of the wicked perishes. (Prov 10:28)

יד ליד לאינקה רע וזרע צדיקים נמלט

Assuredly²¹ the wicked will not be unpunished
But the righteous ones will go free.²² (Prov 11:21)

לאיננה לצדיק כל-און ורשעים מלאו רע

No trouble befalls the righteous
But the wicked get their fill of evil. (Prov 12:21)

In addition to these sorts of general statements of the consequences of righteousness and wickedness, other sayings envision specific rewards for the righteous, including material reward (11:25, 13:21, 13:25, 15:6) and prolonged life (10:27, 28:16). A large body of

²⁰ Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Here, I read ממעליו (*mimma'ālālāyw*), “his deeds” for MT’s מעליו (*mē'ālāyw*), “above him.” The resulting parallelism is also found in Hos 12:3[2]: ולפקד עליעקב כדרכיו כמעליו ישיב לו (“and to punish Jacob according to his ways (*kidrākāyw*); according to his deeds (*kēma'ālālāyw*) he will repay him.”) See also Isa 3:1; Judg 2:19; Jer 17:19. The sense of the verse is captured effectively by the somewhat paraphrastic translation of the NRSV: “The perverse get what their ways deserve, and the good, what their deeds deserve.”

²¹ The Hebrew יד ליד (*yād lēyād*; lit., “hand to hand”) is obscure. McKane suggests that it “is derived from the practice of striking hands to symbolize the ‘striking’ of a bargain” (William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], 437).

²² The meaning of זרע צדיקים in colon B is disputed. Clifford sees a reference to the descendants of the righteous, and takes the verse as expressing “that not only the righteous but even their children are safe” (*Proverbs*, 125). Read this way, the verse serves as an additional example of the creative mode of symbolic immortality: a person’s righteousness continues to have effect for generations following his death. However, Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; New York: Scribner’s, 1899; repr., 1916), 233, objects to the interpretation on the grounds that “a reference to posterity would be inappropriate here, where the purpose is implied to contrast the fates of the wicked and righteous.” Waltke argues that the phrase זרע צדיקים is a genitive of species meaning “such as are righteous” (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1.498, n.140), the interpretation followed here. On the genitive of species see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 152, P.9.5.3.g; cf. Isa 1:4.

similar sayings demonstrates the strongly integrated relationship of character and consequence that pervades Proverbs 10-29. Those who live righteous lives receive reward: prosperity, plenty, long life, joyfulness, and freedom from trouble. The wicked, in contrast, receive the opposite: trouble, punishment, emptiness, and shortened life. In this manner, Proverbs 10-29 renders the world as just, predictable, and ordered.²³

In his seminal essay on the relationship between actions and their consequences in the Hebrew Bible, Klaus Koch argues that Proverbs provides a worldview in which actions and their consequences have an intrinsic relationship:

What we do find repeated time and time again is a construct which describes human actions which have a built-in consequence. Part of this construct includes a conviction that Yahweh pays close attention to the connection between actions and destiny, hurries it along, and “completes” it when necessary.²⁴

In Koch’s formulation, act and consequence have a more-or-less automatic relationship that is embedded within in the action itself. In this view, it is the nature of the world to be “self-righting,” as Richard Clifford phrases it.²⁵

While most scholars acknowledge that Proverbs 10-29 does seem to function with some version of an “act-consequence” relationship, some of the specifics of Koch’s argument have been challenged. First, his formulation of the act-consequence relationship opened the door to the notion of a “world-order” embedded in the fabric of the universe.²⁶ Harmut Gese suggested that the relationship of act and consequence

²³ The character-consequence relationship is pervasive in Proverbs 10-29, and the entire range of relevant verses is too extensive to be treated here. Of special relevance, however, are 13:13; 17:20; 24:19-20.

²⁴ Klaus Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (trans. T. H. Trapp; ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia/London: Fortress/SPCK, 1983), 64; originally published as “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?” *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1–42.

²⁵ Clifford, *Proverbs*, 19.

²⁶ For a summary of scholarship on the concept of world order in the book of Proverbs, see R. Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (History of Biblical Interpretation 1; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 119–25. Particularly significant are Harmut Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958), 33–45; Hans H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen und israelitischen Weisheitsliteratur* (BZAW 101; Berlin:

represented an “order immanent in the world,” and related it to the Egyptian concept of *maʿat*.²⁷ This concept of world-order was subsequently expanded by both H. H. Schmid and H. D. Preuss into an all-encompassing principle embedded in the cosmos, to which even YHWH is subject.²⁸ However, it is doubtful that Proverbs 10-29 has any such all-encompassing world-order in mind. First, Michael V. Fox has argued that *maʿat* is at best a “crooked parallel” for ancient Israelite Wisdom and that *maʿat* itself is not rightly understood as a mechanistic world-order even in the Egyptian literature.²⁹ Second, Roland Murphy has argued that Proverbs 10-29 itself does not envision a world-order controlling the cosmos but rather expresses that the world functions according to “accepted regularities” that are relatively predictable but not systematically predetermined.³⁰ In this sense, Proverbs 10-29 presents a world in which one has relative assurance of the outcomes of certain behaviors but does not seem particularly interested in speculating about whether the cosmos is intrinsically “self-righting.”

A second critique of Koch’s formulation concerns his assessment of the role of the deity in the retributive process.³¹ Koch argues that YHWH performs a role like a

Töpelmann, 1966); Hans H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte der alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (BHT 40; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1968); Ernst Würthheim, “Egyptian Wisdom and the Old Testament,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; trans. B. W. Kovacs; New York: KTAV, 1976), 113–34; and Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. J. D. Martin; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1972), 124–37.

²⁷ Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit*, 1–50.

²⁸ H. D. Preuss, “Das Gottesbild der älteren Weisheit Israels,” in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (ed. G. W. Anderson; VTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 117–45; Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte*.

²⁹ Michael V. Fox, “World Order and Maʿat: A Crooked Parallel,” *JANES* 23 (1995): 37–48.

³⁰ Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (3d. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 116–18.

³¹ See especially Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 97–110 Peter Doll, *Menschenschöpfung und Weltschöpfung in der alttestamentlichen Weisheit* (SBS 117; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985); and Lennart Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (ConBOT 39; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 142–238.

“‘midwife who assists at a birth’ by *facilitating the completion of something which previous human action has already set in motion.*”³² Koch assumes that the consequences of a particular action are built into the action itself, so that the process proceeds without the intervention of the deity. In certain cases, this does in fact seem to be the case. For instance:

צדקת ישרים תצילם ובהות בגדים ילכדו

The righteousness of the upright saves them,
and by greed the treacherous are captured (11:6)

גמל נפשו איש חסד ועכר שארו אכזרי

A kind man rewards himself
but a cruel man harms his flesh (11:17)

In each of these cases, the outcomes may be understood as proceeding directly from the actions. However, in other cases, the deity seems to intervene to bring about the expected result:

אל־תגזל־דל כי דל הוא ואל־תדכא עני בשער
כִּי־יהוה יריב ריבם וקבע את־קבעיהם נפש

Do not rob a poor person, for he is poor,
and do not crush the afflicted one in the gate
For YHWH will take up their dispute
and rob the life of the ones who rob them. (22:22-23)

The saying emphasizes the cause-and-effect nature of YHWH’s intervention by the repetition of the root קבע in 23b: “[YHWH] robs (קבע) the life of the ones who rob them (קבעים).” Elsewhere, YHWH serves as the direct cause of reward and punishment:

לא־יריב יהוה נפש צדיק וחזת רשעים יהדף

YHWH does not let the righteous person go hungry
but he thwarts the greed of the wicked. (10:3)

בית גאים יסח יהוה ויצב גבול אלמנה

YHWH tears down the house of the haughty,
but he establishes the boundary of the widow. (15:25)

תועבת יהוה כל־גבה־לב יד ליד לא ינקה

Each one with an arrogant heart is an abomination to YHWH
Surely he will not remain unpunished. (16:5)

ברצות יהוה דרכי־איש גם־אויביו ישלם אתו

³² Koch, “Doctrine of Retribution,” 61; italics original.

When a person's ways are pleasing to YHWH
he will make even his enemies be at peace with him. (16:7)

While these proverbs suggest YHWH's direct intervention involvement in reward and punishment, others employ an ambiguous passive in which the agent is left unstated. For instance:

יד ליד לא ינקה רע וזרע צדיקים נמלט

Assuredly, the wicked will not remain unpunished
but the seed of the righteous will escape. (11:21)

In this case, it would be possible to argue that reward and punishment occur automatically. However, the verb is better understood as a so-called “divine passive” with YHWH as the implied actor. As Samuel L. Adams states the case, “The use of a passive verbal form does not necessarily indicate a passive deity.”³³

The absence of an impersonal “world-order” functioning independently of YHWH does not, however, defeat the broader point, which is that Proverbs 10-29 envisions a fundamentally ordered world characterized by a predictable correlation between behavior and consequences.³⁴ The order and predictability of the world functions with two interrelated principles: on the one hand, an intrinsic correlation between character and consequence through which the cosmos appear “self-righting,” and on the other hand, a deity who ultimately insures the just function of the world. If anything, this two-pronged symbolization of the predictability and ultimate fairness of the world strengthens the effectiveness of Proverbs 10-29 as a viable worldview. By providing its adherents with a belief in *both* an inherently just world *and* a deity who intercedes on behalf of those who follow the cultural values expounded by wisdom, Proverbs 10-29 offers a doubly secure world, a strong reinforcement that those who follow its teachings have nothing to fear.

³³ Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 80.

³⁴ Boström prefers the term “character-consequence” since “the relationship reflected in the texts pertains more to life-style than to individual actions” (Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 90–91).

YHWH's Protection of the Righteous

The role of YHWH in the worldview of Proverbs 10-29 is not limited to his intervention in the *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*, however. The text also presents YHWH as taking a personal interest in the righteous and, specifically, protecting them from harm.³⁵ Thus, YHWH functions in the symbolic world of Proverbs 10-29 not only to preserve the *order and predictability* of the cosmos but also explicitly to render the world a *safe* place for the righteous. From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, this latter function is essential to a successful cultural worldview, since a sense of security buffers the anxiety associated with the constant possibility of calamity and death. In Proverbs 10-29, YHWH provides this sense of security for the righteous, as does the imagery of the “path” of the righteous as being safe and secure, discussed in the next section.

For instance, Prov 15:29 depicts YHWH as giving an attentive ear to the prayer of the righteous while ignoring those of the wicked:

רחוק יהוה מרשעים ותפלת צדיקים ישמע

YHWH is far from the wicked,
but the prayer of the righteous he will hear. (15:29)

At issue in this proverb is not simply the aural proclivities of the Deity, but also YHWH's special willingness to act on behalf of the righteous person. The relationship between YHWH's hearing and YHWH's saving action is familiar from texts such as Ps 145:

קרוב יהוה לכל־קראיו לכל אשר יקראהו באמת
רצון־יראיו יעשה ואת־שועתם ישמע ויושיעם

YHWH is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call out in truth.
He does the desire of all who fear him;

³⁵ Some scholars have proposed a so-called “Yahwistic redaction” of Proverbs in which the book was originally absent references to YHWH, which were added at a later stage (see especially McKane, *Proverbs*, 10–22; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* [Oxford Bible Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], 26; and R.N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* [JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994], 157–65). However, it is unlikely that any such version of Proverbs ever existed (see especially the discussion in Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 77–83).

He hears their cries and he saves them.(145:18-19)

In the psalm, YHWH's hearing (שמע) and saving (ישע) are closely related, to the effect that the one whom YHWH hears, YHWH also saves.³⁶ The psalm expresses this relationship in terms of closeness (קרוב), which has both physical and relational connotations. Because YHWH is symbolized as being physically close to the person who cries out in truth, YHWH is able to hear the cry of distress and thus to intervene on his behalf. The same symbolic relationship that governs the psalm also provides the background for the proverb. The wicked person is symbolized as being far (רחוק) from YHWH, suggesting that YHWH neither hears nor saves the wicked.³⁷ In contrast, the righteous are close enough to be heard, so that YHWH will save them from distress.

Elsewhere in Proverbs 10-29, proximity to YHWH is also symbolized as having protective properties. YHWH is depicted as a fortress or stronghold in whom the righteous person may seek refuge in times of distress:

מגדל־עז שם יהוה בו־ירון צדיק ונשגב

The name of YHWH is a strong tower.
The righteous one will run to it and will be safe. (18:10)³⁸

Prov 29:25 also equates trust in YHWH with security:

חרדת אדם יתן מוקש ובוטח ביהוה ישגב

Fear of a mortal sets a snare,
but the one who trusts in YHWH will be made secure. (29:25)

The image of the YHWH as a protective tower may be envisioned here as well, as the term שגב literally means “lift up.”

³⁶ Cf. also Ps 34:7[6]; 18-20[17-19].

³⁷ Cf. Ps 34:17[16].

³⁸ The image of YHWH as a tower occurs also in Ps 61:4[3], which refers to YHWH as a “refuge” (מחסה) and a “strong tower” (מגדל־עז), the latter the same expression as in the proverb. As the Psalm suggests, the image of YHWH as a tower suggests that YHWH offers protection against one's enemies in times of distress.

While YHWH provides security and protection for the righteous, the wicked do not enjoy such benefits. As we have seen, Prov 15:29 depicts YHWH as “far” (רחוק) from the wicked and thus unwilling to act on their behalf. Prov 10:29 makes the point more sharply:

מעוז לתם דרך יהוה ומחיתה לפעלי און

The way of YHWH is a stronghold for the blameless
but destruction to the ones who act iniquitously. (10:29)

The phrase “way of YHWH” (דרך יהוה) is somewhat ambiguous, but most likely refers to YHWH’s way of acting in the world.³⁹ Thus, while YHWH is again said to be a stronghold (מעוז) for the blameless (תם), he destroys those who act iniquitously.

Thus, Proverbs 10-29 presents a worldview in which the righteous are kept safe by a close relationship with YHWH, who provides security and protection.⁴⁰ In this way, Proverbs 10-29 functions as an anxiety buffer not only by symbolizing the world as fundamentally ordered and predictable, but also by reassuring its adherents that the deity will intervene on their behalf, protecting them from harm. As a result, the righteous person is able to encounter the world as safe and predictable rather than as a place of danger and death, “red in tooth and claw.”

The Paths of the Righteous and the Wicked

The third set of symbols that construct the world as ordered and secure are those describing the “paths” of the righteous and the wicked. The metaphor depicts life as a journey--as motion toward a particular end--with the righteous and the wicked each having their own paths through life. The path metaphor thus addresses two different, but related, issues. The first concerns the *security of motion* upon the path itself--that is,

³⁹ The alternative meaning is that “way of YHWH” refers to the path that YHWH has given humankind to walk on. See Clifford, *Proverbs*, 117.

⁴⁰ On the role of YHWH as a “personal god” in Proverbs 10-29, see especially Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 193–238.

whether one can move freely and safely along the path or whether the path is fraught with dangerous twists, turns, and snares. The second concerns the *ultimate destination* of the path, or to what ends the particular way of life ultimately leads.

Security of Motion. In Proverbs 10-29, the notion of one's life as possessing movement is symbolized by the image of the "path" or "way" (דרך). The possibility of movement along these paths is depicted in sharply contrasting terms, as illustrated by Prov 15:19:

דרך עצל כמשכת חדק וארה ישרים סללה

The pathway of the lazy is like a hedge of thorns
but the path of the upright is a well-built highway.

In the second colon of the verse, the path of the upright is described as a "well-built highway." The term describing this path, סללה (*sēlulâ*), denotes a road that has been "built up" or "laid out" in order to permit easy travel. In Isa 57:14, for instance the root is used in a command (סלוי-סלוי) that a road free of obstacles be built to enable Israel's smooth return from exile. In Jer 18:15, it contrasts the ancient ways that cause people to "stumble" (כשל) because they have not been "built up" (לא סלולה). The path of the upright is thus imagined as a well-built highway, free of obstacles, enabling freedom of motion without the fear of stumbling.⁴¹ The path of the lazy, in contrast, is depicted as being "like a hedge of thorns" (כמשכת חדק). The image suggests "an impassable obstruction, and, more specifically, an obstruction that pricks and pains."⁴² Indeed the very purpose of a "hedge of thorns" in an agricultural setting is to provide protection for a field or vineyard by preventing the easy movement of wild animals into the area. Such is the case, for example in the vineyard of Isa 5:5, which is protected by a "hedge" (משוכה), as

⁴¹ Cf. Prov 16:17, in which the path of the upright, is again described a "highway" (מסלה). There, too, the image suggests "the security of the road and the expeditious progress which can be made along it" (McKane, *Proverbs*, 501). In addition, 16:17 suggests that the path of the upright has life-preserving properties. The path "turns aside from evil (סור מרע), and the one who remains on the path is said to "protect his life" (שמר נפשו).

⁴² Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:629.

well as a “stone wall” (גדר). The pathway is hardly conducive to motion at all; walking upon it is like forcing one’s way through a protective hedge. The life of the upright is thus symbolized as being straight and secure while the life of a lazy person is difficult and full of obstacles.

The contrast between the security of the path of righteousness and the danger of the path of wickedness occurs throughout Proverbs 10-29. For instance, 11:5 contrasts the ways of the blameless and the wicked:

צדקת תמים תישר דרכו וברשעתו יפל רשע

The righteousness of the blameless makes straight his way
but the wicked persons falls by his own wickedness.

Here the contrast between the righteous and the wicked is again depicted in terms of ease of movement. The wicked person is symbolized as falling down because of his wickedness, becoming “like a person stumbling in the dark.”⁴³ The blameless person, in contrast, has no such difficulty, as his righteousness keeps his way straight and clear. A similar image is given in 28:18:

הולך תמים יושע ונעקש דרכים יפול באחת

The one walking blamelessly will be kept in safety,⁴⁴
but the one walking crooked paths will fall.⁴⁵

Here again, the movement of the blameless is depicted as secure, while the other path is depicted as “crooked” (נעקש) and treacherous, causing the traveler to fall. The image is

⁴³ McKane, *Proverbs*, 435.

⁴⁴ Following Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 502; literally “will be saved.”

⁴⁵ MT reads the second colon: “the one walking two crooked paths (*dērākayim*) will fall in one,” leading most commentators to emend the text (though see Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* [Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 493). One possible solution is to read *bēšāhat* (“in a pit”) for *bē’ehāt* (“in one”), following S (so Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 2:397, and McKane, *Proverbs*, 622), though the confusion of *’aleph* and *šin* is unlikely. A second possibility, followed by Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 213, n. 23.a. is to render באחת with the sense of “at once, or quickly.” My translation follows G in omitting the word altogether (so Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 502; cf. Clifford who omits on the grounds that the presence of באחת yields an imbalanced syllable count and explains its addition as an attempt to account for the prior odd pointing of *dērākayim* as a dual [*Proverbs*, 243, n. d]).

reiterated in 21:8, in which the way of a “guilty person” (אִישׁ זֹרַר) is said to be “crooked” (הַפְּכַכְךָ), while the conduct of the pure is described as “straight” (יֵשֶׁר).⁴⁶

At other times in the book of Proverbs the ways of the wicked and others like them are depicted not only as crooked, overgrown, and difficult to traverse, but in fact as beset with mortal danger. Prov 22:5, for instance, reads:

צַנִּים פְּחִים בְּדֶרֶךְ עֶקֶשׁ שׁוֹמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְחַק מֵהֶם
Traps and snares are in the path of the crooked person;⁴⁷
the one who protects his life will remain far from them.

Here the “crooked” person is symbolized as a bird whose life is in danger from the traps and snares that await him on the path that he has chosen. These dangers threaten not only to end his life symbolically, by stalling his motion on the forward journey, but also quite literally, as they represent a danger to his very existence. The person who protects his life (נַפְשׁוֹ) remains far from these traps and, by implication, from the crooked person.⁴⁸ This contrast is reiterated in 29:6

בַּפֶּשַׁע אִישׁ רַע מִוֶּקֶשׁ וְצַדִּיק יֵרוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה:
In the wrongdoing of the evil person there is a snare
but the righteous person runs on rejoicing.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The phrase אִישׁ זֹרַר (“guilty person”) in Prov 21:8 has evoked a great many emendations. For a summary see Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 2:160, n. 12. However, the MT may be maintained if *vāzār* is understood as an adjective modifying *’iš* and meaning “guilty” See Franz Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; trans. M. G. Easton; 6 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866–91; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1966), 311, and Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 2:160.

⁴⁷ The meaning of צַנִּים is unclear. G reads *triboloi*, “prickly plants,” which seems to reflect Heb צַנִּינִים, “thorns” (cf. Num 33:55; Josh 23:13), yielding “Thorns and traps are on the path of a perverse person” (so Clifford, *Proverbs*, 194). The pairing of “thorns” with “traps” is unusual however, and a rendering that yields a better parallelism is to be preferred. Toy proposes reading צַמִּים, “traps,” as in Job 18:19 (Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 414–15). The translation given here follows G. R. Driver, who relates the term to Arab. *šinnu*, rendering “[basket] trap” (G. R. Driver, “Problems in the Hebrew Text of Proverbs,” *Bib* 32 [1951]: 186).

⁴⁸ A similar image occurs in 12:13, in which the lips of the evil person act as a “snare” (מִוֶּקֶשׁ), while the righteous person escapes from danger.

⁴⁹ The second colon of MT requires emendation. One plausible solution is to read *yārôn* for MT’s *yārûn*, yielding “but the righteous person shouts and rejoices.” The resulting parallelism with colon A is strained, however. A second possibility, proposed by Pinsker (as cited by Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 427) and

The evil person again finds himself entrapped by a snare (מִקְשָׁ), suggesting that his life may be in danger. The motion of the righteous person, however, is both swift and joyful as he runs along rejoicing.

Direction of Motion. The metaphor of the path concerns not only the *security* of one's movement through life but also the *end* toward which one moves. Here again, Proverbs 10-29 seeks to reassure its adherents that righteousness leads to proper ends and not to insignificant or dangerous ends. That is, in the symbolic worldview of Proverbs 10-29, righteousness not only helps one avoid the dangers of life, but it also insures a proper navigation of life toward the appropriate goals. Thus, the path metaphor in Proverbs 10-29 serves *two* of the purposes of a cultural worldview as understood by TMT: (1) it promises its adherents security in life, as we have seen, and (2) it assures them that they are living life “correctly” (toward proper ends), providing a mechanism for finding self-esteem and meaning in existence, particularly in contrast to the wicked.

Proverbs 10:17, for instance, compares the destinations of those who keep discipline and those who do not:

אָרַח לַחַיִּים שׁוֹמֵר מוֹסֵר וְעוֹזֵב תּוֹכַחַת מֵתַעָה

Those who guard discipline are on the way to life,
and those who abandon correction wander aimlessly.⁵⁰

The verse suggests that the refusal to obey discipline results in undirected motion, “going astray” or “wandering aimlessly” (מֵתַעָה). Thus, the existence of those who avoid correction adds up to little more than pointless movement--a life without purpose. In contrast, the one who “guards discipline,” finds himself “on the way to life” (אָרַח לַחַיִּים). Thus, disciplined adherence to the values promulgated by Proverbs 10-29 orients one

accepted by Clifford, *Proverbs*, 249–50, n. b., is to read *yārûs*, “he will run.” Clifford notes the pairing of “rejoicing” and “running” also in Ps. 19:6[5]: “[the sun] rejoices (*yāśîs*) like a hero running (*lārûs*) his course.”

⁵⁰ Longman, *Proverbs*, 228; cf. NRSV. The reading involves the repointing of the MT’s nominal form, *’ōrah* (“path”), to the participial form *’ōrēah* (“is travelling [towards]”), as well as understanding *ma’eh* as an internal hiphil meaning “to go astray.”

toward the proper end, which is “life.” Failure to be disciplined in this manner, however, leads only to pointless activity with no real value.⁵¹

Elsewhere, however, the wandering of those who have been led astray is symbolized not as being “aimless” but rather as having its ultimate destination in death. Prov 21:16, for instance, states that

אדם תועה מדרך השכל בקהל רפאים ינוח

A man who wanders from the path of insight
will rest in the assembly of the Rephaim.

Here again the one who departs from insight is depicted as “wandering” (תועה), but now the ultimate conclusion of that wandering is specified as the assembly of the Rephaim, the inhabitants of Sheol, the place of the dead in Israelite thought.⁵² The image thus suggests that one who wanders from the path of insight ends his journey among the dead.

In contrast, the journey of the discerning person is depicted as heading in the opposite direction in Prov 15:24:

ארח חיים למעלה למשכיל למען סור משאול מטה

For the discerning person, the path of life goes upward
in order to turn aside from Sheol below.⁵³

This verse has at times been interpreted as a reference to literal immortality, based on the contrast between “upward” and “below.” Waltke, for instance, suggests that “Prov 15:24

⁵¹ Similarly, in Prov 12:26, the path of the wicked is depicted as a path of meaningless wandering: יתר מרעהו צדיק ודרך רשעים תתעם: “The righteous man shows the way to his neighbor, but the path of the wicked causes them to wander.” Colon A is fraught with translational difficulties and admits of several interpretations. For a summary see Clifford, *Proverbs*, 133. The translation given here understands the term מרעהו to be derived from מרע [*mērēa*], meaning “close friend” [cf. Prov 19:17]. This requires a slight repointing from *mērē-ēhū* [MT] to *mērē-ēhū*. Further, I understand the initial verbal form יתר [*yātēr*] as the hiphil of תור, meaning “to cause to explore” or “to show the way” [following André Barucq, *Le Livre des Proverbes* (SB; Paris: Libraire Lecoffre, 1964), 118, n. 26a.]. Cf. J. A. Emerton, who understands the verb as the hophal of נתר [thus *yuttar*] and renders “The righteous is delivered from harm” [J. A. Emerton, “A Note on Proverbs xii. 26,” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 191–93].

⁵² Cf. Ps 88:11; Prov 2:18; 9:18.

⁵³ The words “upward” and “below” do not seem to have been read by LXX, leading some interpreters to omit them as late additions (so., e.g., Barucq, *Proverbes*, 136; McKane, *Proverbs*, 479–80).

implies an ascending from the grave below.”⁵⁴ However, the verse depicts not an “ascending” from Sheol, but rather a “turning aside” (לסור)--that is, an avoidance of the grave altogether. Further, the references to “upward” and “below” need not be understood as references to “heaven” and “hell” in the sense of an afterlife. Likely there is no reference to the heavenly or transcendent realm here at all. Rather, the image relies on the symbolic cosmography that understands Sheol to be located below the habitable earth. By moving upward, the path of the discerning stays as far as possible from Sheol in order to avoid the type of death that dooms the wicked.⁵⁵ The verse provides the positive counterpart of 21:16. There, the one who neglects instruction will find his end among the Rephaim in Sheol, while here the discerning person will “turn aside” from that unfortunate end.

Symbolic Death Transcendence in Proverbs 10-29

The foregoing analysis suggests that Proverbs 10-29 provides a symbolic worldview in which a righteous person can view the world as being an ordered and secure place in which he can live his life toward appropriate ends. In the language of TMT, it shows him that he is a person of significance (“righteousness”) in an ordered and meaningful world. It constructs a world in which proper behavior results in predictable reward, misfortune befalls only the wicked, YHWH intervenes on his behalf, and his safe and purposive movement through life is insured.

⁵⁴ Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:106 Cf. Longman, who suggests that the opposite of Sheol “must be heaven, the very dwelling place of God.” (*Proverbs*, 321).

⁵⁵ McKane argues for the elimination of למעלה and מטה on the basis that “The opposition of ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’ is only intelligible on the assumption that the path of life leads to a blessed immortality rather than a this-worldly enjoyment of vitality” and therefore must represent late additions (McKane, *Proverbs*, 479–80). However, McKane’s assumption that “upward” must mean “blessed immortality” is itself anachronistic. “Upward” simply indicates increasing distance from the dangers of Sheol.

This last point brings us close to the final and most important element of our discussion, which is whether Proverbs 10-29 offers its adherents a mechanism for death transcendence. The last two sayings examined in the previous section begin to point us in this direction. What does it mean to say that the person who wanders will end up in “the assembly of the Rephaim” (בקהל רפאים; 21:16) while the disciplined person will “turn aside from Sheol” (סור משאול; 15:24)? Is it the case the Proverbs 10-29 envisions righteousness and wickedness leading to different outcomes not only during life but also at the end of life? Or is it rather that turning aside from Sheol is only temporary, and that death ultimately wins the day?

No one disputes that Proverbs 10-29 is concerned with the securing of “life.” In fact, Roland Murphy goes so far as to suggest that the word “life” encapsulates the theological vision of the entire book: “The [theological] vision can be stated sharply: the book purports to offer ‘life’ or ‘salvation’ to the reader.”⁵⁶ Crenshaw likewise concludes that “at the heart of the wise’s search for knowledge lay a value judgment: *life* was the supreme good,”⁵⁷ and that “the search for proper analogies [in the book of Proverbs] had as its single purpose the securing of life.”⁵⁸ Indeed images of life abound throughout the book. The mouth of the righteous person is called a “spring of life” (10:11), as are the instruction of the wise (13:14), the fear of YHWH (14:27), and insight (16:22). The “fruit of the righteous” is declared to be a “tree of life” (11:30), as are a dream fulfilled (13:12) and a gentle word (15:4).

The more difficult question has been what sort of “life” it is that wisdom and righteousness offer in the book of Proverbs. Scholars are divided between those who

⁵⁶ Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 28–29..

⁵⁷ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 55.

⁵⁸ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 66.

suggest that Proverbs offers some type of “eternal life” and those who think that it intends to offer “life” only in the proximate sense of abundance and longevity. The first stream of interpretation, represented primarily by Franz Delitzsch and Mitchell Dahood, argues that the “life” offered by Proverbs is eternal life, in the sense of literal immortality.⁵⁹ The position relies heavily on a particular reading of Prov 12:28:

בִּאֲרֵחַ צְדָקָה חַיִּים וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אֵל־מוֹת.

In the path of righteousness is life
and in the way of its path, there is no death.

MT points the final two words, אֵל־מוֹת, as *ʿal-māwet*. Delitzsch argues on analogy with אֵל־טֵל, (“no dew”) in 2 Sam 1:13, that אֵל־מוֹת in the present verse means “no death.”⁶⁰ Based on this interpretation, he concludes that here “Chokma begins to break through the limits of this present life, and to announce a life beyond the reach of death.”⁶¹

Building on Delitzsch’s work, Mitchell Dahood drew on Ugaritic parallels to argue that Proverbs presents a full-fledged doctrine of literal immortality.⁶² In the case of Prov 12:28, Dahood noted that 2 *Aqht* VI: 25-32 uses the Ugaritic *blmt* in parallel with *hym* (“life”). On this basis, Dahood argued that אֵל־מוֹת, which he took to be the Hebrew equivalent of *blmt*, must mean “life” or “not-death” in Prov 12:28. He thus claimed the verse to be a clear demonstration of a doctrine of immortality in the book of Proverbs.⁶³

⁵⁹ See Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 194–95 Mitchell Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963); Mitchell Dahood, “Immortality in Proverbs 12:28,” *Bib* 41 (1960): 176–81.

⁶⁰ Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 194.

⁶¹ Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 195. For a more complete articulation of his views on immortality in Proverbs and in the Bible more generally, see Franz Delitzsch, *A System of Biblical Psychology* (2d. ed.; trans. R. E. Wallis; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899), 473–90.

⁶² Dahood, Proverbs; Dahood, “Immortality in Proverbs 12:28,” 176–81. Dahood is perhaps better-known for making a similar case that a doctrine of immortality is to be found in the book of Psalms (Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms* [3 vols.; AB 16–17A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965–70]).

⁶³ Dahood, “Immortality in Proverbs 12:28,” 176–81.

To bolster the case, Dahood went on to adduce three additional verses in support of his claim of a doctrine of immortality in Proverbs 10-29.⁶⁴

פעלת צדיק לחיים תבואת רשע לחטאת
The reward of the virtuous is truly life;
the fruit of the wicked is truly punishment. (10:16)

כִּן־צדקה לחיים ומרדף רעה למותו
The reward of virtue is truly life,
but of the pursuer of evil his own death. (11:19)

פרי־צדיק עץ חיים ולקה נפשות חכם
The fruit of the virtuous is the tree of life,
And the wise man attains eternal life. (11:30)

Among more recent scholars, the argument for a belief in life after death has been advanced primarily by Tremper Longman and Bruce Waltke. Longman cautiously suggests that Proverbs may have had “a sense of something beyond.”⁶⁵ While he ultimately concludes that “we cannot determine the intention of the ancient sages with certainty,” he offers the possibility that texts such as Prov 12:28; 15:24; and 23:13-14 may point to a doctrine of literal immortality.⁶⁶ Less cautious is Bruce K. Waltke, who takes a position as strong as Dahood’s: “Proverbs teaches immortality.”⁶⁷

In general, the argument for a doctrine of immortality in Proverbs 10-29 has not enjoyed a wide following.⁶⁸ In contrast, the vast majority of scholars understand “life” in

⁶⁴ Dahood, *Proverbs*, 18–28. Translations given here are Dahood’s. For a discussion of the translational and interpretive issues in these verses see the relevant sections below.

⁶⁵ Longman, *Proverbs*, 87.

⁶⁶ Longman, *Proverbs*, 86. It should be noted that Longman twice distances himself from Dahood, whom he accuses of “overreaching the evidence” (*Proverbs*, 280, n. 13; cf. *Proverbs*, 87, n. 113).

⁶⁷ Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:104; see 1:104-7 for his complete argument concerning immortality in the book of Proverbs. Waltke’s position falls squarely in the line of Delitzsch and Dahood, whose positions he frequently cites.

⁶⁸ In my estimation, Dahood’s position on immortality in Proverbs has been decisively critiqued by Bruce Vawter, “Intimations of Immortality in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 158–71. In essence, Vawter argues that one cannot derive a doctrine of human immortality from a text (Aqht) that itself denies that very possibility.

Proverbs to have the sense of “restoration ‘here and now,’ characterized by security, riches, honor, a good name, long life, and so forth.”⁶⁹ For instance, in 22:4, the reward for humility and fear of YHWH is said to be “riches and honor and life” (עֵשֶׂר וְכִבּוֹד וְחַיִּים). It has seemed reasonable to most scholars to suggest that the life offered to the righteous in this verse and others like it is not a life that extends beyond death but rather “the best and fullest life humans can possess.”⁷⁰ From this perspective “death” also comes to be understood not as death in the literal sense--because of course that happens to everyone--but death in the more proximate sense as a life of misery or one that ends prematurely. For example, in his recent study of act and consequence in Second Temple instructions, Samuel L. Adams argues that “the book of Proverbs actually looks at ‘death’ in ethical terms, as the opposite of living in accordance with Wisdom.”⁷¹ Similarly, Raymond Van Leeuwen argues that in Proverbs “the right, the wise road is *already* ‘life.’ ...Conversely the road of the wicked is *already* dark and pregnant with death.”⁷² A compatible position holds that “death” in Proverbs 10-29 refers only to “premature and unhappy death, which is represented everywhere in the OT as a misfortune, a visitation of God as retribution for wrongdoing.”⁷³ According to this perspective, Proverbs 10-29 recognizes that death eventually claims every life and that no one has the capacity to transcend it. As Adams states it, the authors of Proverbs “do not allow for a blessed afterlife, but only for the shadows of Sheol.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 29.

⁷⁰ Raymond Van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 5* (ed. L. E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 53.

⁷¹ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 55–56.

⁷² Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9,” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 114.

⁷³ Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 48.

⁷⁴ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 55.

Tremper Longman argues against this formulation of life and death as purely ethical terms, arguing that “in some contexts such a minimalist reading [of “life” and “death”] makes the sages seem incredibly naive. What does it mean to promise life to those who are wise and death to those who are foolish when everyone knows that all die?”⁷⁵ For Longman, this line of questioning leads back to an argument for literal immortality. However, a more productive objection to the position that all life ends “in the shadows of Sheol” has been advanced primarily by Jon D. Levenson.⁷⁶ While Levenson critiques the imputation of a doctrine of literal immortality to ancient Israel as anachronistic, he likewise rejects the scholarly consensus that “everyone who dies goes to Sheol”⁷⁷ as an uncritical assimilation of ancient Israelite belief and practice to those of the cognate cultures in the ancient Near East.⁷⁸

If the Jewish and Christian theologies of postmortem reward and punishment cause us to misunderstand Sheol in one way, a hasty harmonization to the patterns inferred (not without uncertainty) from Mesopotamian and Canaanite texts induces a misunderstanding in the other direction. For this can mislead us into thinking that without exception all who die--which is to say, all who live--end up in that gloomy place. On this reading, the biblical texts that speak of the life fulfilled by the promise of God cannot be taken seriously, or must at least be relegated to the penultimate stage, for the dreary, Godless existence in the netherworld is the end that awaits everyone.⁷⁹

Levenson proposes that “the pattern predominant in the Hebrew Bible is the duality of death” in which the postmortem state is one of extended blessing for those whose lives had been blessed by God and an extension of misfortune for those whose lives had been

⁷⁵ Longman, *Proverbs*, 87.

⁷⁶ See especially Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) as well as Kevin J. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁷⁷ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991; originally published 1926–1940), 461.

⁷⁸ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 35–81.

⁷⁹ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 79.

outside of God's blessings.⁸⁰ For Levenson this duality of death does *not* mean an "eternal life" for some and "eternal abhorrence" for others, though he argues that it anticipates that later pattern in important ways. Rather, those blessed by God continue to live on in the sense that "the fulfillment of the blessed individual's life survives him and continues to testify to his final felicity," specifically in the survival of their lineage, among other things.⁸¹ Only for those not blessed by God does death entail a murky existence in Sheol cut off from the land of the living.

What Levenson proposes has obvious affinities with the concept of "symbolic immortality" as articulated by Terror Management Theory.⁸² Like Levenson, TMT rejects the dichotomy that *either* one believes in a literal afterlife *or* one believes that death is an ultimate end. TMT suggests that there are numerous ways of symbolizing death transcendence, such that one may simultaneously reject any belief in a literal afterlife and yet believe that death can be transcended. Analyzing Proverbs 10-29 from the perspective of TMT will allow us to identify the rich array of symbols through which the sages symbolized the "dualistic" nature of death--as a continuation of a blessed existence for the righteous and as an utter termination of life for the wicked.

⁸⁰ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 81.

⁸¹ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 76 Levenson considers the stories of Abraham, Job, and Jacob, all of whom seem to face death with equanimity precisely because they are surrounded by their families (cf. Gen 25:1-19; Job 42:16; Gen 48:11; 50:23).

⁸² Levenson explicitly rejects the term "immortality" for the phenomenon he identifies in the Hebrew Bible because he believes that the term "immortality" suggests "untroubled confidence in the survival of an indestructible core, whether of the individual self (the 'soul') or of the larger kin group." He argues that the idea of surviving death in one's children or nation more closely resembles "resurrection of the dead" because it is not guaranteed: "[r]ather...one fervently hopes against hope for continuation, and the fertility, safety, and memorialization that make it possible." *Resurrection*, 121-22). It should be noted that TMT's concept of "symbolic immortality" does *not* imply an indestructible core but is rather, in many of its manifestations, a tentative and hopeful orientation rather than a guaranteed outcome. As we will encounter in the following chapters, the failure of a belief in these "symbolic immortals" is a very real possibility, and may inform the skepticism of a thinker like Qohelet.

Literal and Symbolic Immortality in Psychological Perspective

One of the leading theorists of symbolic immortalities is Robert Jay Lifton, a psychologist whose work has focused on survivors of disaster, from Hiroshima, to Chinese thought reform, to the Vietnam war, and various other disasters.⁸³ The driving question for Lifton has been how it is that survivors continue to live in light of their firsthand encounter with the possibility of death. While Lifton's work began with survivors of trauma, he suggests that the results of his research have significance for humankind in general, whether or not they have experienced disaster. He writes: "In my work in Hiroshima I found that studying an extreme situation such as that facing the survivors of the atomic bomb can lead to insights about everyday day, about ordinary people facing what Kurt Vonnegut has called 'plain old death.'"⁸⁴ Lifton argues that human beings, in order to cope with their inevitable mortality, "require [a] symbolization of continuity -- imaginative forms of transcending death -- in order to confront genuinely the fact that they die."⁸⁵

As I discussed in the introduction, Lifton argues that symbolic immortality may be symbolized in one or more of five modes of: biological, creative, religious, natural, and experiential transcendent.⁸⁶ Subsequent research into Lifton's theories about symbolic immortality have given empirical support to his conclusions. In a series of studies, Victor Florian and Mario Mikulincer assessed the role of various modes of symbolic immortality on both overt and unconscious expressions of anxiety about

⁸³ For a brief review of Lifton's research, see Charles B. Strozier, "Introduction," *Psychohistory Review* 20 (1992): 103–5.

⁸⁴ Robert J. Lifton, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 29.

⁸⁵ Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 17.

⁸⁶ See especially Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 18–23, and my discussion in the introduction, above.

death.⁸⁷ Working with Israeli subjects, they first administered a symbolic immortality scale which determined the subjects' sense of symbolic immortality in the various modes by asking a series of questions related to each mode (e.g., "It is important for me to write, create, or build something that will exist after my death"). After assessing each participant's level of symbolic immortality, they then administered a scale measuring the direct expression of a fear of personal death. The results demonstrated that participants with a higher sense of symbolic immortality scored lower on the fear of personal death scale. Notably, the mode of symbolic immortality that provided the strongest buffer against fear of personal death was the combined biological-creative mode, which I will suggest is likewise the combination at work in Proverbs 10-29.⁸⁸

In a second study, Florian and Mikulincer tested the effects of symbolic immortality on the unconscious fear of death as manifested in the "mortality salience effects" such as worldview defense familiar from previous TMT research. Specifically, Florian and Mikulincer repeated one of the early TMT experiments in which participants were asked to set a level of monetary bond for an alleged prostitute while being in either mortality salient or nonsalient conditions.⁸⁹ As in the original experience, the mortality salience of the participants was manipulated using a questionnaire in which participants being inducted into the mortality salient condition were asked to write about their

⁸⁷ Victor Florian and Mario Mikulincer, "Symbolic Immortality and the Management of the Terror of Death: The Moderating Role of Attachment Style," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 725–34. A second study suggesting the correlation between high symbolic immortality and low death anxiety is Jean-Louis Drolet, "Transcending Death During Early Adulthood: Symbolic Immortality, Death Anxiety, and Purpose in Life," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 46 (1990): 148–60, though Drolet's methodology has been challenged by Florian and Mikulincer, among others.

⁸⁸ Florian and Mikulincer, "Symbolic Immortality," 727–29.

⁸⁹ Florian and Mikulincer, "Symbolic Immortality," 729–30. For the original experiment see A. Rosenblatt et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory I: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Those Who Violate or Uphold Cultural Values," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989): 681–90, and my discussion in the introduction.

thoughts on death while those inducted into the non-salient condition wrote about their thoughts on the end of the academic year. After completing a symbolic immortality scale (in which all five modes were averaged), participants were asked to assign bond to an alleged prostitute, testing their degree of worldview defense. As expected, students in the mortality salient condition with low scores on the symbolic immortality scale assigned a significantly higher bond (\$595) than did those in the nonsalient condition (\$382). Significantly, participants who scored high on the symbolic immortality scale did not exhibit a significant difference in bond assignments (\$397 for the mortality salient group and \$385 for the nonsalient group). These results suggest that a high sense of symbolic immortality does indeed mitigate unconscious death anxiety, so that the next lines of defense, such as worldview protection, do not need to be engaged.⁹⁰ Thus, worldviews that are able to provide their adherents with a meaningful sense of symbolic immortality in at least one of the five modes provide an essential defense against anxiety about death.

With this distinction between literal and symbolic immortalities clarified, it is possible to return again to the issue of death transcendence in Proverbs 10-29. James Crenshaw has observed the lack of death anxiety in Proverbs 10-29 and questioned how it is possible: “The lack of any anxious lament over the universal decree, ‘You must die,’ becomes all the more astonishing when we consider the fact that these wise men and women entertained no hope of life beyond the grave.”⁹¹ Without the distinction between literal and symbolic immortalities and the capacity of the latter to mitigate death anxiety, we are indeed left marveling at the sages as they face death without lament. With Terror Management Theory, however, we are able to take a somewhat different tack on the question. If indeed psychological equanimity in the face of one’s own mortality requires

⁹⁰ Florian and Mikulincer, “Symbolic Immortality,” 729.

⁹¹ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 66.

some means of envisioning oneself as extending beyond death, then Proverbs 10-29 must provide some means of death transcendence, even if not a belief in literal immortality.

The Endurance of Memory in Proverbs 10:7

In order to begin our consideration of how Proverbs 10-29 symbolizes the extension of one's life beyond death, it seems best to begin at a point upon which nearly everyone agrees, which is that in Prov 10:7 a righteous person's "memory" or "name" in some way achieves death transcendence. The text reads

זכר צדיק לברכה ושם רשעים ירקב

The memory of the righteous (becomes) a blessing,
but the name of the wicked will rot.⁹²

The verse contrasts the fate of the "memory" (שם, זכר) of the righteous and that of the wicked after the physical death of the individual.⁹³ The first colon considers the "memory" (זכר) of the righteous, which "becomes a blessing" (לברכה). The first thing to note in the verse is that the righteous person *has* a remembrance. That is, those who continue living, whether they be the person's biological descendants or students, or simply those who witnessed the person's righteous acts during his lifetime, carry the deceased with them in their memories. This remembrance constitutes an extension of the life of the individual beyond death; though he is dead, his memory lives on. On this point there is remarkable agreement among scholars, including those who deny that Proverbs otherwise symbolizes the extension of life beyond death. Whybray, for instance suggests that "the survival of a man's name represented a kind of prolongation of his life,"⁹⁴ while

⁹² *BHS* proposes emending ירקב, "will rot" to יוקב, "will be cursed." While the emendation may produce better parallelism (cf. Pro 11:26; 24:24-25), there is no warrant for it here.

⁹³ The terms זכר and שם are a common word pair in the Hebrew Bible and often, as here, serve as synonyms denoting not merely one's identity but also, and perhaps more importantly, their character and actions; cf. Exod 3:15; Job 18:16; Ps 97:12; 102:12; Hos 12:5 (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:458).

⁹⁴ R. Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 62.

Fuhs interprets the verse to mean that “the righteous lives on in the memory of his descendants.”⁹⁵ Some even go so far as to apply the term “immortality” to this persistence of the name, as Murphy does when he writes that the verse “reflects the notion of the immortality of the name. . . the blessed memory that the virtuous leave after them.”⁹⁶ Whatever the particular interpretation, there is virtual unanimity that 10:7a symbolizes the life of the righteous person as extending beyond his death via the persistence of his memory among those who knew him.

Importantly, the verse does not portray the continuity of the name merely as an act of passive recollection. Rather, the memory itself continues to act in the world, as it is becomes “a blessing” (לברכה).⁹⁷ McKane, while rendering the Hebrew somewhat freely, captures the point clearly in his translation: “The remembrance of a righteous man is a source of blessing.”⁹⁸ That is, the memory of the righteous is not only passively recalled by the living, but rather actively effects a blessing upon them.⁹⁹

The postmortem state of the wicked person is symbolized in 10:7b in quite the opposite fashion.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to the memory (זכר) of the righteous, which as we have seen continues to be connected to the world of the living, the name (שם) of the wicked

⁹⁵ Hans F. Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter: Ein Kommentar* (FB 95; Würzburg: Echter, 2001), 181; my translation.

⁹⁶ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 73.

⁹⁷ Some scholars understand לברכה to have a passive sense here, i.e., “to be blessed.” Toy, for instance, translates the colon, “The memory of the righteous will be blessed,” which he understands to mean that “men will bless the one, or will regard him as an example of blessedness or prosperity” (Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 202; cf. Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 155). Waltke is correct, however, in arguing that “the lexical data support and active sense of *librākā*,” citing as examples Deut 23:6, Neh 13:2, and Ps 37:27 (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:448, n. 22).

⁹⁸ McKane, *Proverbs*, 225.

⁹⁹ So Clifford, *Proverbs*, 113; cf. Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:458.

¹⁰⁰ The clarification “state of being dead” is necessary because English does not clearly distinguish between the two senses of “death”: 1) the act of dying and 2) the state in which one exists after having died.

rots away (ירקב). The verb connotes the rotting of bones or the disintegration of wood and suggests that the name of the wicked, like his body, is rotting away in the grave.¹⁰¹

“Nothing remains of the wicked.”¹⁰² When the wicked person dies, his name and memory decompose together with his body, so that his death signifies his utter annihilation.

The two portrayals of death in this verse clearly contradict any claim that Proverbs is unconcerned with what happens to a person after he has died. As McKane notes, “In this sentence the continuing consequences of righteousness and wickedness beyond death are explored.”¹⁰³ Symbolically, the righteous person transcends physical death through the memories of others, while the wicked person is utterly annihilated upon his demise, as though he had never existed.¹⁰⁴

The belief that the survival of a person’s memory represents his continued connection to the world of the living is apparent elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, in Psalm 109, the psalmist offers the following prayer against his enemy:

יהי־אחריתו להכרית בדור אחר ימה שמם. . .
ויכרת מארץ זכרם

And may his offspring be cut off;
in the following generation may their name be wiped out...
And may their memory be cut off from the earth (Ps 109:13, 15b)

The psalmist wishes for his wicked enemy to perish from the earth, but he recognizes that the death of the individual does not in itself accomplish that purpose. Rather, the psalmist also wishes for the disruption of the symbolic connections through which his enemy’s life transcends the grave: the cutting off of any offspring, the wiping out of his name, and the cutting off of his memory from the earth. The psalmist thus seems to have a strong sense

¹⁰¹ Cf. Job 13:28; Isa 40:20; Hos 5:12 .

¹⁰² Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter*, 181.

¹⁰³ McKane, *Proverbs*, 423.

¹⁰⁴ This may help to explain why, according to Pro 22:1, “a good name is preferred to abundant riches.”

of symbolic immortality in the sense used by TMT: the enemy persists beyond the time of his physical death unless a curse is specifically invoked against him breaking the connections through which he achieves symbolic immortality.

A similar sense of symbolic immortality informs Bildad's speech about the fate of the wicked in Job 18. There Bildad describes the fate of the wicked (רשעים), which includes, among other things, having all memories of them cut off from the earth:

זכרוֹ אֲבָד מִנִּי־אָרֶץ
וּלְאִשָּׁם לֹא עַל־פְּנֵי־חַוּץ

His memory perishes from the earth
and he no longer has a name in the streets (Job 18:17)

Bildad goes on to suggest that the wicked person is “driven out from the world” (18:18) not only because his name perishes but also because he has “no offspring or descendant” (18:19) to extend his life to future generations. In context, Bildad's speech suggests that while the wicked are destined to perish from the earth while quite a different fate awaits the righteous, who will transcend death through the preservation of memory, the survival of their offspring, and so on. Taken together, these passages from Proverbs, Job, and Psalms suggest a belief in a qualitative difference in the concept of death for the righteous and for the wicked. In the language of TMT, these passage evince a symbolic worldview in which the person who upholds the cultural values is able to transcend death symbolically through the persistence of his memory among the living.

Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode

The survival of a person's name after death is one example of what Lifton terms the “creative mode” of symbolic death transcendence. In the creative mode, a person is survived by something that he creates, be it a monument, a work of art, or, less tangibly, his influence on another person. In the case of Prov 10:7, it is the righteous person's name or reputation that survives and continues symbolically to connect the deceased to the realm of life. In Lifton's understanding, the creative mode of symbolic immortality

can function through anything which one produces that will continue to influence future generations.¹⁰⁵ In some cases, this might be a physical object, such as a work of art or literature, a building one constructs, or a memorial erected in one's honor.

This type of creative immortality is clearly at work in the Hebrew Bible, for instance in the pillar Absalom builds for himself as reported in 2 Sam 18:18:

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance"; he called the pillar by his own name. It is called Absalom's Monument to this day. (NRSV)

For Absalom, lacking children, the establishment of a pillar keeps his name in remembrance among the living, even "to this day." Elsewhere in the ancient Near East we find immortality achieved through literature, as is emphasized in the Egyptian New Period composition known as "The Immortality of Writers":

[The scribes] did not make for themselves tombs of copper,
With stelae of metal from heaven.
They knew not how to leave heirs,
Children [of theirs] to pronounce their names;
They made heirs for themselves of books,
Of Instructions they had composed. . . .

Death made their names forgotten
But books made them remembered!¹⁰⁶

The creative mode need not involve physical objects or works of art, however. It may take the form of personal actions such as "humble everyday offerings of nurturing or even kindness--in relationships of love, friendship, and at times even anonymous encounter. Indeed, any form of acting upon others contains important perceptions of timeless consequences."¹⁰⁷ Teachers may seek symbolic immortality by believing that their students will carry on their influence to others with whom they will later come into

¹⁰⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 2:176–77.

¹⁰⁷ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 22.

contact. Similarly, Lifton argues that members of his own psychiatric profession may “associate their therapeutic efforts with beneficent influences that carry forward indefinitely in the lives of patients and clients and *their* children or posterity.”¹⁰⁸

In Proverbs 10-29, the creative mode of symbolic immortality finds expression primarily in the form of teaching--through the influence a person’s words or instruction may have upon others. Each time a righteous person sustains the life of another, his action reverberates through time, benefiting not only the person he saves but also that person’s posterity for all future generations. We find this sort of symbolization, for instance in Prov 13:14:

תורת חכם מקור חיים לסור ממקשי מות

The instruction of the wise person is a spring of life
to turn (one) aside from the snares of death (13:14).

The image depicts the instruction (תורה) of the wise person as a source of life (מקור חיים) for those who are in danger of becoming ensnared by death.¹⁰⁹ Symbolically, the wise person himself becomes a bestower of life, and the one he has saved from death carries on his influence into the future.

A similar expression occurs in Prov 10:11:

מקור חיים פי צדיק ופי רשעים יכסה חמס

The mouth of the righteous person is a spring of life
but the mouth of the wicked covers up violence.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 22. Conversely, this type of effort to achieve symbolic immortality can lead to deep death anxiety if it is perceived that the recipients of one’s care or instruction will not benefit from that influence or pass it along to others, as we will see in our study of Qohelet, below.

¹⁰⁹ The German “Quelle,” which signifies both a “spring” and a “source” may capture the sense of the Hebrew מקור better than any of the usual English translations. While many English translations render the term “fountain,” I have chosen “spring” because it connotes not only the flowing of water, but suggests the originary source of the water. Whereas a fountain *provides* water, a spring *produces* water as its originary source.

¹¹⁰ On analogy with שרש (*šērēš*), which means both “to sink roots” and “to extirpate,” as well as שכל (*siqqēl*), which means both “to stone” and “to remove stones,” Dahood suggests that כסה (*kissā*) here means not “to cover” but rather “to uncover.” Thus he translates the second colon “the mouth of the wicked uncovers violence.” The emendation seems unnecessary if not unwarranted. (Dahood, *Proverbs*,

The phrase “mouth of the righteous” (פי צדיקים) is metonymy for the words of the righteous, a close parallel to the “instruction of the wise” (תורת חכם) in 13:14. Here again, the words of the righteous serve as a source of life to those who listen to them. Longman effectively captures the image when he writes, “As a fountain spews forth refreshing water . . . so the mouth of the righteous utters life-giving words.”¹¹¹ Through the words that he utters, the righteous person sustains the lives of those in the community; he “fructifies and enriches the common life,” thereby extending his influence on the living beyond the confines of his own finitude.¹¹²

The final verse to consider in the category of creative connectivity is Prov 11:30, which is a notoriously difficult verse:

פרי־צדיק עץ חיים ולקח נפשות חכם

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
and the wise gather lives.¹¹³

In colon A, the “fruit of the righteous person” (פרי־צדיק) is said to be a “tree of life” (עץ חיים). As elsewhere in Proverbs, the fruit (פרי) refers to that which is produced by the righteous person, including actions, words, and so forth. Here, the fruit is said to become a tree of life, a source of life for others. While Murphy questions the aptness of the metaphor, it is in fact a fairly straightforward, if slightly strained, agricultural image.¹¹⁴ Fruit is not only an end-product in itself, a food source that provides short-term sustenance for an individual. It also carries within it the seeds of a new tree, a more

18).

¹¹¹ Longman, *Proverbs*, 234.

¹¹² McKane, *Proverbs*, 418; cf. Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche* (2 vols; ZBK 16; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), 1:171: “Zur rechten Zeit wird das für den Nächsten oder für die Gemeinschaft richtige Wort gesprochen, das das Leben stützt oder zurechtbringt und damit dem Zusammenleben zuträglich ist.”

¹¹³ For the translation of colon B, see the discussion that follows.

¹¹⁴ “The metaphors in v 30a are not clear: How can the ‘fruit’ (good deeds?) of the person be a ‘tree of life’? How can fruit become a tree?” (Murphy, *Proverbs*, 84)

permanent source of sustenance that may provide new fruit for many years to come. Drawing on this dual purpose of “fruit,” the image of 11:30 suggests that the actions of a righteous person are not merely ends in themselves, having significance only for the present moment. Rather, the actions of the righteous reach beyond themselves, becoming a source from which others may derive life far into the future.¹¹⁵

The second colon of the verse presents an interpretive problem. As it stands, the verse reads literally, “the wise take lives,” which is a common Hebrew idiom meaning “to kill,” much as it does in English.¹¹⁶ The LXX, presumably in order to avoid the interpretive problem of the wise being ones who kill, renders παρανομῶν (“lawlessness”), apparently reading חַמָּס (*ḥāmās*) for the MT’s חָכָם (*ḥākām*) (“wise”), yielding “but violence takes lives.”¹¹⁷ Such an interpretation seems unnecessary, however, as colon B may best be understood as a continuation of the tree metaphor of colon A, with לקח having the sense of “to pick” or “to gather fruit” as is the common expression in the HB.¹¹⁸ Rather than gathering fruit, the wise here are depicted as gathering “lives” (נפשות). The image requires some explanation. Dahood, for instance, understood נפשות as a plural of majesty, indicating “life par excellence” or immortality: “the wise man attains eternal life.”¹¹⁹ However, it may be that the metaphor functions in

¹¹⁵ Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 1:201.

¹¹⁶ See, e.g., Prov 1:19; Ps 31:14[13].

¹¹⁷ So, e.g. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 238, McKane, *Proverbs*, 228; R. Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 70; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 79;. Other solutions have also been proffered. Otto Plöger, for instance, repoints *lōqēah* as *leqah* (“instruction”), rendering “and the wise gain the instruction (of others)” (Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos [Proverbia]* [BKAT 17; Neuckirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 1984], 143). Daniel C. Snell, “‘Taking Souls’ in Proverbs XI 30,” *VT* 33 (1983): 362–64, following the interpretation of Qimhi, argues that the verb לקח may have the sense “to comprehend,” rendering “one who comprehends souls is wise.” Delitzsch proposes that *lqh* means to “capture” a positive sense: “The wise becomes a winner of souls.” (“Proverbs,” 180).

¹¹⁸ William H. Irwin, “The Metaphor in Prov 11,30,” *Bib* 65 (1984): 97–100; cf. Gen 3:6, 22; 40:9-11; Num 13:20; Deut 1:25.

¹¹⁹ Dahood, *Proverbs*, 24–25.

much the same manner as that of the fountain of life in 13:14: the wise, through the impartation of instruction and the example of their actions (“fruits”) steer others away from death and toward life.¹²⁰ The נפשות gathered by the wise in 11:30b are thus lives of those who come into contact with the wise person and learn the ways of life from his example: “the actions and advice of the wise preserve and enhance the lives of others.”¹²¹

Symbolic Immortality in the Biological Mode

The biological mode is perhaps the most fundamental means for symbolizing death transcendence. As Lifton describes it, this mode is “epitomized by family continuity, living through--psychologically speaking, *in--one’s* sons and daughters, with imagery of an endless chain of biological attachment.”¹²² In this web of symbolic connections, each person ceases to be an isolated individual and instead becomes part of a potentially endless chain of connection extending backwards and forward in time. Within such a chain of connection, the death of the individual is of diminished importance. While an individual may die, he symbolically lives on as part of the chain for as long as the chain itself exists, thus allowing him to transcend death.

In a recent series of studies exploring theory the relationship between offspring and death anxiety, Immo Fritsche et al., conclude that having or anticipating offspring does indeed provide a buffer against death anxiety.¹²³ One study, conducted in German, tested the effects of mortality salience on participants’ stated desire to have children.

¹²⁰ Irwin, “Metaphor in Prov 11,30,” 99–100.

¹²¹ Longman, *Proverbs*, 266.

¹²² Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 19; italics original.

¹²³ Immo Fritsche et al., “Mortality Salience and the Desire for Offspring,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 43 (2007): 753–62. For an earlier study on the effects of mortality salience on a desire for offspring, see Arnaud Wisman and Jamie L. Goldenberg, “From the Grave to the Cradle: Evidence That Mortality Salience Engenders a Desire for Offspring,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89 (2005): 46–61.

Researchers asked a series of questions related to having children to a group having undergone a mortality salience treatment as well as to a control group. Results showed that the mortality salient group expressed a significantly higher desire to have children among both men and women.¹²⁴ A second study tested the accessibility of unconscious thoughts about offspring among participants in a mortality salient state by having participants play a word-association game in which both offspring-related and non-related words were possible.¹²⁵ The results again showed that unconscious thoughts about death were accompanied by an increase in unconscious thoughts about offspring, again for both men and women.¹²⁶ Finally, a third study tested the effects of offspring salience (induced by having the participants write about what it would be like to have children some day) on worldview defense in mortality salient conditions.¹²⁷ The results demonstrated that, as expected, mortality salience induced worldview defense for participants not in the control group, it did not cause worldview defense in those who had been primed with thoughts about offspring.¹²⁸ Thus, the results of all three studies support Lifton's original proposal that offspring (or the anticipation of offspring) provides a sense of symbolic immortality that protects against death anxiety. The study concludes that "having children might start--or rather continue--the transmission of the self into the future. There may be different ways of doing this, but offspring can be one path to--more or less symbolic--immortality."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Fritsche et al., "Desire for Offspring," 755–56.

¹²⁵ Specifically, the word game, which was administered in German, could be completed with "Kinder" ("children"), "Rinder" ("cows"), "Finder" ("finder"), or "minder" ("less").

¹²⁶ Fritsche et al., "Desire for Offspring," 756–68.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between worldview defense and mortality salience, see the introduction.

¹²⁸ Fritsche et al., "Desire for Offspring," 758–60.

¹²⁹ Fritsche et al., "Desire for Offspring," 761.

Closer to home, Jon Levenson has likewise recognized the role of family continuity in addressing mortality within the context of the Hebrew Bible. Levenson argues that

If, in fact, individuals are fundamentally and inextricably embedded within their families, then their own deaths, however terrifying in prospect, will lack the finality that death carries with it in a culture with a more individualist, atomistic understanding of the self.¹³⁰

Levenson notes the degree to which an individual's identity in ancient Israel was entwined with his family, so that, for instance, promises made to Abraham could be fulfilled many generations later without any sense of discrepancy, or Ezekiel could envision God appointing "my servant David" as shepherd over Israel (Ezek 34:23) despite David's having been deceased for some centuries.¹³¹ The point after which Levenson strives from within the Hebrew Bible is quite similar to that of TMT:

[T]he boundary between individual subjects and the familial/ethnic/national group in which they dwelt, to which they were subordinate, and on which they depended was so fluid as to rob death of *some* of the horrors it has in more individualistic cultures....In more theological texts, one sees this in the notion that subjects can die a good death, "old and contented . . . and gathered to [their] kin," like Abraham, who lived to see a partial--though only a partial--fulfillment of God's promise of land, progeny, and blessing upon him, or like Job, also "old and contented" after his adversity came to an end and his fortunes--including progeny--were restored (Gen 25:8; Job 42:17) If either of these patriarchal figures still felt terror in the face of his death, even after his afflictions had been reversed, the Bible gives no hint of it.¹³²

While Levenson may overemphasize the distinction between ancient Israelite culture and our own cultures in terms of the need to belong to in-groups that transcend us (as TMT experiments concerning mortality salience and worldview defense indicate), he is surely correct that a sense of family continuity provides an important defense against death anxiety in the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

¹³⁰ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 109.

¹³¹ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 109.

¹³² Levenson, *Resurrection*, 114.

In the specific case of Proverbs 10-29, we find rich imagery of abundant offspring that may provide a sense of symbolic immortality and a buffer against death anxiety for the righteous. A clear example occurs in Prov 12:7

הפוך רשעים ואינם ובית צדיקים יעמד

The wicked are overthrown, and they are no more
but the house of the righteous will stand.¹³³

The verse draws a simple contrast between the fate of righteous and that of the wicked. In the first colon, the wicked are said to be “overturned” (הפוך), resulting in their complete disappearance (אינם).¹³⁴ As Toy suggests, the sense of this first clause is: “the wicked shall be completely and finally destroyed, without hope of restoration.”¹³⁵ In contrast, the house of the righteous continues to stand. The significance of this verse for biological continuity lies in the term “house” (בית), which refers not to the physical structure in which the righteous person lives, but rather functions as a metonymic reference to the progeny of the righteous person. So understood, the proverb indicates that “the good man will be blessed with posterity but the wicked man will be deprived of it.”¹³⁶ The death of the wicked thus means their utter annihilation: “they are not” (אינם). The righteous persist into future generations.¹³⁷

¹³³ The first word of the verse (הפוך [hāpōk]), is inf. abs. rather than an inflected verb, not an uncommon construction in Proverbs (cf. 15:22; 17:12; 25:4). Some interpreters understand it to have an imperative sense (“overturn”), which is a legitimate rendering of the Hebrew (so, e.g. Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:523, and Murphy, *Proverbs*, 87). Alternatively, the form may be understood to have a passive sense (“once overthrown” or “are overthrown”), which yields a better parallelism with the second colon (cf Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 244–45; Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 205; McKane, *Proverbs*, 228).

¹³⁴ Waltke suggests that in the context of the proverb, the verb הפוך functions as a metaphor for God’s judgment (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:523), while Clifford sees a reference to natural disaster (Clifford, *Proverbs*, 130). Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive, as noted by Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 245.

¹³⁵ Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 245.

¹³⁶ Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 73.

¹³⁷ Such may also be the intent of Prov 10:30, “The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not remain in the land” (צדיק לעולם בליימוט ורשעים לא ישכנוֹ-ארץ). While it is clear in this verse that the righteous persist while the wicked are cut off (and thus a symbolization of continuity for the

Prov 14:11 depicts a similar circumstance in which the family line of the wicked (רשעים) is destroyed while the descendants of the upright (ישרים) flourish:

בית רשעים ישמד ואהל ישרים יפריח

The house of the wicked will be wiped out
but the tent of the upright will bloom.

“House” (בית) and “tent” (אהל) are again metonymies for the family line, so that the proverb contrasts the futures of the family lines of the upright and the wicked.¹³⁸

According to the first colon, the house (בית) of the wicked will be “wiped out” (ישמד), an expression which elsewhere connotes violent and total extermination.¹³⁹ The family of the wicked (that is, their descendants) will be wiped off the face of the earth, as in 12:7.

The metaphor for the family of the upright, however, is extended somewhat from the previous example. Here, the progeny of the upright do not merely “stand,” as in 12:7, but rather are said to “bloom” (יפריח). The family of the upright is thus symbolized as taking root and putting on new buds. The metaphor expresses the full virility and vitality of the family line of the upright.¹⁴⁰ Unlike the biological line of the wicked, which is barren, the family line of the righteous continues in full flower. Such a symbolic connection may also be envisioned by Prov 17:6:

עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

The crown of old men is the sons of their son
and the glory of sons is their fathers.

Notably, Murphy connects this saying to symbolic immortality, arguing the grandparents

righteous), it is not clear on what basis this is true. It may be a reference to biological progeny, though it is not clear from the context. It may also refer to the “biosocial group” of the righteous; that is, people characterized by righteousness will never be shaken from the land (see chap. 2).

¹³⁸ So Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter*, 230.

¹³⁹ As, for instance, in the pronouncement of the destruction of the line of Jereboam in 1 Kgs 15:29: “And this thing became a sin upon the house of Jereboam (בית ירבעם), to destroy it (להכחיד) and to exterminate it (להשמיד) from upon the face of the earth.” The terms שמד and בית occur together elsewhere in Gen 34:30; 1 Sam 24:22; 1 Kgs 16:12; and Amos 9:8), each with similar connotations.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Prov 12:3, 12.

“are able to behold their descendants who are a prolongation of themselves, their immortality, as it were.”¹⁴¹

Proverbs 13:22 continues with the emphasis on future progeny for the righteous in contrast to the wicked. However, with this saying Proverbs moves beyond the purely biological relationship between the father and his children but also begins to consider the other ways in which the righteous person’s lifetime benefits his progeny, here specifically through the bequeathal of an inheritance:

טוב ינחיל בני־בנים וצפון לצדיק חיל חוטא

The good person leaves an inheritance to the sons of their sons,
but the wealth of the wrong-doer is stored up for the righteous. (13:22)

The thrust of the verse is that the good person, by amassing an inheritance to bequeath to his children and grandchildren, ensures the prosperity of the family line extending into the future. The verse is an example of the overlap of the biological and creative modes, as the wealth produced in one’s lifetime (creative) serves to preserve the family line (biological). Even though the “good person” of colon A has died, his life’s labor will continue to have benefit for generations of his family extending far into the future. One may hear an anticipatory answer to Qohelet’s question of what benefit a person has from all the toil of his lifetime. Here, one’s life does in fact produce something beneficial--an inheritance to give to one’s children and grandchildren. Not so for the wrongdoer, who leaves no inheritance to his progeny. His wealth instead sustains the family line of the righteous person, in effect doubly ensuring the symbolic death transcendence of the good person.

It is unclear from the verse whether the wealth of the wicked is left for the righteous because the wicked has no progeny or for some other reason. The poetics of the proverb may provide a clue, however. First, the good person in 13:22a is associated with the phrase בני־בנים, a reference to grandchildren, but literally meaning “sons of sons.”

¹⁴¹ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 129.

The repetition of the word “son” reinforces the image of the good person as surrounded by his progeny. In contrast, the wrongdoer in the second colon stands alone. This image is in turn reinforced by what I take to be a *double-entendre* in the use of the word חיל in the second colon. While the term does properly connote “wealth,” as in the translation above, it also refers to “strength,” and in Prov 31:3 particularly to “strength” as it relates to sexual virility.¹⁴² Re-reading the verse in light of the *double-entendre* yields “the wrongdoer’s *virility* is laid up for the righteous.” The righteous person is thus virile enough to have “sons” and “sons of sons” (בני־בנים), while the wrongdoer is symbolized as flaccid and solitary, leaving both his wealth and his sexual prowess to the good man.

Symbolic Immortality in the Religious Mode

The one point at which Proverbs 10-29 may symbolize connection with YHWH as transcending the death of the individual is the difficult saying of Prov 14:32:

ברעתו ידחה רשע וחסה במותו צדיק

By his own evil the wicked person is overturned
but the righteous person [seeks refuge in his death].¹⁴³

The verse has apparently troubled readers at least since the time of the LXX, which reads the final phrase as “is secure in his holiness” (τη εαυτου σιστοση). At the level of the Hebrew the LXX’s reading involves a simple metathesis from במותו (“in his death”) to בתומו (“in his integrity”). While numerous scholars and modern translations accept the emendation,¹⁴⁴ it seems likely that the LXX offers a facilitating reading of the more difficult MT.¹⁴⁵ Further, it is doubtful that the verb חסה (“to seek refuge”) can take either

¹⁴² So, e.g. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 517, who interprets חיל as “Geschlechtskraft”; cf. also R. Norman Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 423 and Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 540.

¹⁴³ For the translational issues in the bracketed phrase, see the following discussion.

¹⁴⁴ So McKane, *Proverbs*, 233, 475; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 101; R. Norman Whybray, *Proverbs*, 223; REB; NRSV.

¹⁴⁵ MT is also supported by the reading of 4QProv^b.

“in his integrity” (בתומו) or “in his death” (במותו) as its indirect object. As Waltke notes, of the 37 occurrences of the root in the Hebrew Bible, 34 (excluding the present verse) refer to taking refuge in YHWH or in the shadow of YHWH’s wings.¹⁴⁶ This usage pattern suggests that YHWH should be understood as the place of refuge in the present verse, as well.¹⁴⁷ Colon B should thus be rendered as “but the righteous seeks refuge [in YHWH] in his death.”

The final issue in the verse concerns the meaning of במותו, “in his death.” There are three viable possibilities: (1) One possibility is to take the third-person pronoun of במותו as a reference not to the righteous person of colon B but rather to the wicked person of colon A. The verse might then be translated “and the righteous person seeks refuge in him [the Lord], when [the wicked] dies.”¹⁴⁸ (2) A second possibility is to understand the suffix of במותו as a reference to the righteous person himself: “the righteous person seeks refuge in YHWH in his death (being-dead).” So understood, the verse implies that the connection between YHWH and the righteous person extends beyond the grave so that YHWH is, in some fashion, able to provide refuge to the dead. Numerous scholars reject this understanding on the basis that it necessitates a positing a doctrine of immortality in the book of Proverbs, which they are unwilling to concede.¹⁴⁹ Those more predisposed to find immortality in Proverbs, such as Waltke and Longman, naturally find it in this verse, and even Meinhold concedes that 14:32 represents an isolated instance of the righteous seeking refuge beyond the limits of death.¹⁵⁰ (3) Finally, one may posit a slight

¹⁴⁶ In Isa 14:32, the needy are said to seek refuge in Zion, which YHWH has founded. In Isa 30:2, the phrase “take refuge in the shadow of Egypt” is used ironically to show that Israel should have sought refuge in YHWH (Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:582, n. 52).

¹⁴⁷ As concluded by both Plöger, *Sprüche*, 176 and Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 245; cf. Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:582.

¹⁴⁸ Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs,” 144; cf. Vawter, “Intimations of Immortality,” 166.

¹⁴⁹ So Whybray, *Proverbs*, 223 and Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs,” 144.

¹⁵⁰ Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:608; Longman, *Proverbs*, 308; Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 245.

emendation of the final word from the nominal *bēmôtô* (“in his death”) to the infinitive construct *bēmûto* (“in his dying”). This rendering suggests that the close connection between the righteous person and YHWH extends into the most troubling of times, and even up to the moment of one’s dying.¹⁵¹

In my view, one of the latter two interpretations is preferable. Certainly the third possibility (“in his dying”) is in keeping with the close connection between YHWH and the righteous person that we have seen throughout Proverbs 10-29. The question raised by the second interpretation (“in his being-dead”) is whether Proverbs 10-29 envisions the possibility that the connection between YHWH and the righteous extends beyond the moment of death itself. While numerous scholars reject this interpretation because it implies a doctrine of the immortality of the individual, our discussion of Lifton and symbolic immortalities opens another possibility. That is, 14:32 may be understood as a statement that the righteous person, though dead, remains connected to YHWH in much the same way that he remains connected to life through progeny, memory, and the persistence of his creative acts. It need not be understood as an indication of the literal immortality of the individual, but rather as a statement that the individual’s life, though terminated by death, continues to have vitality through its connection with the Deity. Because the righteous individual is connected to YHWH, and because YHWH continues to live, so the righteous individual in some sense continues to live as well. Understood in this manner, 14:32 would be an instance of what Lifton refers to as death transcendence in the *religious mode*.

Do the Righteous Transcend Death?

It is now possible to return to the initial question of the chapter: What kind of “life” is it that Proverbs 10-29 offers to the righteous? Based on the preceding discussion,

¹⁵¹ This is the interpretation followed by Clifford (*Proverbs*, 142), though he does not seem to emend to read the inf. cstr.

I suggest that the passages adduced by Delitzsch, Dahood, and Waltke as indicating a doctrine of literal immortality do in fact indicate a belief that the life of the righteous has the capacity to extend beyond physical death. They do not, however, necessarily indicate a belief in literal immortality. Rather, these verses evince a belief that the life of the righteous person continues to remain connected to the realm of the living even after his death via the symbolic modes of biological, creative, and religious death transcendence, as discussed above.

It is within this framework that verses promising life to the righteous and death to the wicked are best understood. A statement such as that of 11:19

כִּן־צְדָקָה לַחַיִּים וּמִרְדָּף רָעָה לְמוֹתוֹ

Surely righteousness (leads) to life
but the ones who pursue wickedness (go) to death. (11:19)

signifies on both the proximate and ultimate levels. It may be that the righteous person procures a proximate existence that is characterized by the rewards of righteousness, such as prosperity, longer life, and so forth--while the pursuer of evil dooms himself to a premature death. However, the foregoing discussion suggests a second interpretation, which is that it is only the wicked person who will die in the sense of annihilation at the end of his life. The righteous person, in contrast, continues to be connected to life even after he dies, through his children and the people his wisdom has influenced.

Righteousness and wickedness do *not* lead to the same ultimate fate.

A similar interpretation pertains to the twice-repeated statement that “surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off.” Note the statements in Prov 23:17-18 and again in 24:13-14:

אַל־יִקְנָא לִבְךָ בַחַטָּאִים כִּי אִם־בִּירְאֵת־יְהוָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם
כִּי אִם־יֵשׁ אַחֲרֵית וּתְקוּתְךָ לֹא תִכְרַת

Do not let your heart envy in sinners
but rather in the fear of YHWH the whole day
For surely there is a future
and your hope will not be cut off. (23:17-18)

אַכְל־בְּנֵי דְבֶשׂ כִּי־טוֹב וּנְפֹת מִתּוֹק עַל־חֶכֶךְ
כִּן דְּעָה חֲכָמָה לְנַפְשֶׁךָ אִם־מִצָּאת וַיֵּשׁ אַחֲרֵית וּתְקוּתְךָ לֹא תִכְרַת

Eat honey, my son, for it is good,
 and the honeycomb sweet upon your palate.
 Know that wisdom is such to your soul if you find it.
 There is a future and your hope will not be cut off. (24:13-14)

For those inclined to find a doctrine of immortality in Proverbs 10-29, the reference to a “hope” and “a future” seem to refer to an afterlife. Waltke, for instance, writes that “The metaphor *will not be cut off* signifies that the hoped-for abundant life will not be annihilated. The effective motivation to observe both sides of this coin of fervor is the promise that God will fulfill the hope of the righteous for an abundant life both for time and eternity.”¹⁵² Similarly, in the case of 24:14, Longman suggests that the pursuit of wisdom “would lead to life even beyond death.”¹⁵³ The sense of the saying is not immediately obvious, however, and others deny any reference to the afterlife here. Murphy, for instance writes: “This of course has nothing to do with the next life; rather it is a life well lived in the here and now and celebrated by an honorable death which is not foreshortened, nor marked by adversity.”¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Whybray notes that the term אהרית (“future”) in parallel with the term תקוה (“hope”) “denotes a happy and successful life in store for the young pupil.”¹⁵⁵

It is instructive to consider the evidence adduced by Whybray for his interpretation of the saying as a reference to a “happy and successful life.” Whybray notes that the terms אהרית and תקוה also occur together in Jer 29:11, “where YHWH promises a happy existence for the exiles in Babylon, whom he will restore to their homes.”¹⁵⁶ The verse in question reads:

כי אנכי ידעתי את־המחשבת אשר אנכי חשב עליכם נא־יְיָהוָה

¹⁵² Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 2:255; italics original.

¹⁵³ Longman, *Proverbs*, 439.

¹⁵⁴ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 176.

¹⁵⁵ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 337.

¹⁵⁶ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 337.

מחשבות שלום ולא לרעה לתת לכם אחרית ותקוה

“For I know the plans that I am making for you,” says YHWH,
 “Plans for your welfare, not harm; to give to you a future and hope.” (Jer 29:11)

In the context of the promise of restoration from exile, the verse does indeed suggest that the terms אחרית and תקוה refer to an existence characterized by well-being (שלום) rather than by evil (רעה). However, the context also suggests that this promise of restoration does not necessarily pertain to the individuals to whom Jeremiah’s words are addressed, but rather to the community of Israel as a whole. This broader frame of reference is evident in the plural forms of addresses (כ-ם) as well as in the verses that follow:

“You will call to me, and you will come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will search for me and you will find (me) because you will see me with all your heart, and I will let myself be found by you,” says YHWH. “I will restore your fortunes, and I will gather you from all of the nations, from all the places where I have scattered you,” says YHWH. “I will return you to the place from which I sent you into exile.” (Jer 29:12-14)

By promising the exiles “hope” (תקוה) and a “future” (אחרית) Jeremiah is not promising that those who presently hear his words will be returned to their homes and will there live out a “happy and successful life.” Rather, Jeremiah’s words refer to a hope that exists in the longer term. Jeremiah envisions a time in the future when the exiles of Israel will be called back to their homeland and will again live there in prosperity.

The אחרית and תקוה of the hearers of Jeremiah’s oracle are thus neither strictly personal nor oriented to the present. Rather, the hope of the present generation of hearers rests in its continued connection to the later generations of the biosocial group that is Israel. Because Israel has a future, these exiles have a future; because Israel has hope, these exiles have hope. “Hope” and “future” in Jer 29:11 thus have future-oriented and even death-transcendent aspects to them. So, too, with Pro 23:17-18 and 24:13-14. The statement “there is a future and your hope will not be cut off” is not limited to the present existence of the hearer, nor does it refer to a literal afterlife or a trans-earthly existence for the hearer after death. Rather, as in the case of Jer 19:11, it refers to the persistence of

symbolic connections extending into the future. Those who fear YHWH (23:17-28) and find wisdom (24:14) will not have their connection with future generations cut off.

Finally, we may return to the key verse in the argument for a doctrine of immortality in Proverbs 10-29, which is the statement of 12:28:

בִּאֲרַח־צְדָקָה חַיִּים וּדְרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אֱלֹהִים.

The meaning of the verse is obscured by a translational difficulty in the final two words of the verse, אֱלֹהִים. One possibility is to follow the MT, which construes the first word as the negative particle and *ʿal-māwet*, “not-death.” On this reading the verse is an instance of synonymous parallelism, with the second colon serving as a restatement of the first.

Read in this manner, the verse would be rendered:

In the path of righteousness is life,
and in the way of its path there is no death.¹⁵⁷

The verse so interpreted serves as a major reference point for those who would see a doctrine of immortality in the book of Proverbs, extending from Delitzsch, to Dahood, to Waltke.¹⁵⁸ Waltke, for instance, writes that “the God-ordained consequences of that lifestyle [of righteousness] is now said to be in the realm of *immortality*.”¹⁵⁹

The major difficulty with the interpretation of the verse as a reference to immortality is the unusual use of the particle אַל (*ʿal*) to negate a noun, since it elsewhere functions only to negate verbal forms. Beginning with the LXX, this difficulty has led interpreters to revocalize from *ʿal* to the preposition *ʿel* (“to”), which involves no emendation of the consonantal text. However, the resulting second colon, “the way of its path, to death” suggests that righteousness itself, as the subject of the first colon, leads to

¹⁵⁷ In this translation, the phrase דֶּרֶךְ נְתִיבָה is construed as the fs noun *derek* plus the ms noun *nātib* plus the 3fs suffix *-ā*, yielding “the way of its path.” The same two nouns are paired in Jer 18:15, though in reverse order, דֶּרֶךְ נְתִיבוֹת.

¹⁵⁸ Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 194–95; Dahood, “Immortality in Proverbs 12:28,” 186–81; Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:544–45.

¹⁵⁹ Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:544; italics original.

death. As a result, further emendation of the second colon is required. The LXX, for instance, reads ὁδοὶ δε μνηστρακῶν εἰς θάνατον: “but the way of *those who bear malice* (leads) to death,” a reading whose *Vorlage* is difficult to reconstruct. Others emend נתיבה to תועבה, “abomination,” yielding: “the way of abomination (leads) to death.”¹⁶⁰ However, it is difficult to imagine a process by which תועבה could have been corrupted into נתיבה. A more satisfactory solution may be that of Tournay, who emends to פתי בא, yielding: “the way of the simple leads to death.”¹⁶¹ Read in this manner, the saying is rendered:

In the path of righteousness is life,
but the *way of folly leads to death*.¹⁶²

The result is an antithetical saying in which the ways of righteousness and folly are contrasted as leading to life and death, respectively. Based on the framework I have outlined above for understanding the meaning of “life” and “death” in Proverbs 10-29, this verse would then be understood as contrasting the utterly disconnected death of those on the path to folly from the death of those on the path of righteousness, which yet remains connected to life.

However, it is not clear that there is any reason to discard the MT’s reading of אֵל־מוֹת as “not-death.” While it is true that the particle *’al* does not elsewhere negate a noun in biblical Hebrew,¹⁶³ Dahood has identified a similar construction in the Ugaritic text of 2 *Aqht* VI: 25-32. The text evinces a parallelism between the Ugaritic *blmt*, the apparent equivalent to Hebrew אֵל־מוֹת, and *hym* (“life”), suggesting the validity of such a

¹⁶⁰ So, e.g., Murphy, *Proverbs*, 88, n. 28a, Longman, *Proverbs*, 269.

¹⁶¹ R. Tournay, “Relectures bibliques concernant la vie future et l’angélologie,” *RB* 69 (1962): 495–97; followed by McKane, *Proverbs*, 451.

¹⁶² The translation is McKane’s (*Proverbs*, 230; italics original).

¹⁶³ While Delitzsch argued for a similar construction in the usage of אֵל־טֵל (“not dew”) 2 Sam 1:13 (Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” 194), the usage there assumes the negation of an implied verb “let there not be dew.” Such is not the case in Prov 12:28.

parallel in Prov 12:28.¹⁶⁴ Such a reading is supported not only by scholars who elsewhere suggest a doctrine of immortality in Proverbs, such as Waltke,¹⁶⁵ but by others less predisposed to finding references to life after death, such as both Fuhs and Vawter.¹⁶⁶ Particularly instructive is the analysis of Vawter, who accepts the translation of אֵל-מָוֶת as “no death” and yet denies the possibility that this refers to a literal immortality, since in the Ugaritic text from which Dahood derives the meaning, the purpose is to deny that Aqhat is able to have eternal life in the sense that Anath proposes to give it to him. He writes:

Let *'al-māwet* mean ‘no-death,’ as I believe it does. It does not, therefore, follow that the Israelite author is thinking of an immortality in the naive sense which Anath proposed to Aqht and which the Canaanite hero spurned as unreal. There is more to the question than this.¹⁶⁷

From the perspective of the foregoing argument, we may suggest that the character of this “no-death” is symbolic death-transcendence procured via progeny, influence, inheritance, and the persistence of one’s memory. For Proverbs 10-29, the life of the righteous person symbolically transcends death in all of these ways. Thus, for the one who walks in the path of righteousness, there is, in this symbolic sense, no death.

¹⁶⁴ Dahood, “Immortality in Proverbs 12:28,” 176–81.

¹⁶⁵ Waltke, *Book of Proverbs*, 1:518, 544–45.

¹⁶⁶ Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter*, 209, 215; Vawter, “Intimations of Immortality,” 168.

¹⁶⁷ Vawter, “Intimations of Immortality,” 168.

CHAPTER 2

WISDOM AND WORLDVIEW DEFENSE IN PROVERBS 1-9

I have argued in the previous chapter that Prov 10-29 offers its adherents the possibility of transcending death through various modes of symbolic immortality. Those symbolizations were primarily biological, such that righteous person would live on in his progeny long after his own death while the wicked person would be cut off from future generations. This physical extension of the self through one's progeny is complemented in Proverbs 10-29 by symbolizations of immortality in the creative mode, through influence on pupils or others in the community. The symbolizations of immortality in Proverbs 1-9 move beyond those of Proverbs 10-29, particularly by expanding the claims that the tradition itself provides a symbolic connection to the natural and transcendent realms. In part, this heightening of the symbolism seems to be a response to the presence of other discourses, which apparently make claims similar to those of Wisdom, threatening to destabilize the Wisdom tradition by winning over its adherents to their own causes. In the end, Wisdom's symbolization of immortality seems to remain intact, but the seeds are sown for a future breakdown of the symbol system.

Date and Setting of Proverbs 1-9

Determining the date of Proverbs 1-9 has proven to be a complicated task, as the text offers few indicators of its historical provenance. Whybray, for instance bemoans that "it is not possible to date different parts of the book by their contents, points of view, theology, or literary form."¹ Scholars have attempted to determine the date of

¹R.N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 163-64.

composition of Proverbs 1-9 along several lines, though none has proven entirely convincing.² One approach attempts to locate Proverbs 1-9 based on its particular social concerns. For instance, Christl Maier argues that the *אשה זרה* of Proverbs 1-9 serves as a critique of intermarriage, thus placing the writing of Proverbs 1-9 in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah.³ Maier also suggests the polemics against criminals in Prov 1:10-19 and 2:12-15 stem from “solidarity groups” common in the Persian period. Claudia Camp similarly argues for that Proverbs 1-9 and Mal 2:10-16 share common concerns over marriage to foreign women and the desertion of one’s own wife.⁴ However, Proverbs does not seem to be particularly interested in either issue. The *אשה זרה* of Proverbs 7 is already married; therefore she represents neither the temptation of intermarriage nor a concern with abandoning one’s wife, since it would be she who abandoned her husband and not the other way around. Further, resistance to criminals could properly belong to any historical time period.

Others have sought to determine the date of Proverbs 1-9 on linguistic grounds. Harold C. Washington argues for a Persian period dating for the final redaction of the book of Proverbs as a whole (not just chapters 1-9), identifying Late Biblical Hebrew lexemes, such as *פנינים* (“corals”; Prov 3:15; 8:11; 20:15; 31:10), which “is of no clear Semitic derivation,” as well a number of Aramaisms.⁵ Christine Roy Yoder garners a broader array of linguistic evidence in support of a Persian period dating, employing the

² See the brief overview of the history of scholarship in Christine Roy Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31* (BZAW 304; New York: De Gruyter, 2001), 15–18.

³ Christl Maier, *Die ‘Fremde Frau’ in Proverbien 1–9* (OBO 144; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

⁴ Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series 11; Decatur, Ga.: Almond, 1985), 236.

⁵ Harold C. Washington, *Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs* (SBLDS 142; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1994), 117–19. With reference to Proverbs 1-9, in particular, he notes also the use of *אישים* as the plural of *איש* (8:4) and *חוג* (“to encircle”; 8:27).

methods of linguistic typology developed by, among others, Avi Hurvitz and Robert Polzin.⁶ Yoder shows that Proverbs 1-9 displays features of Late Biblical Hebrew⁷ as well as Aramaisms known in the post-exilic period but not in the time of the monarchy.⁸ The orthographic evidence, specifically the prevalence of *matres lectionis*, further supports a post-exilic dating for Proverbs 1-9.

While it seems relatively certain that Proverbs 1-9 stems from the post-exilic period, distinguishing between the Persian and Hellenistic periods proves a somewhat more difficult task. Yoder herself supports a Persian-period dating based on two factors: (1) the absence of Graecisms in Proverbs 1-9 and (2) the typology of the Hebrew, which she identifies as falling between the SBH of pre-exilic Israel and the more developed LBH of other postexilic books such as Qohelet, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Chronicles.⁹ Yoder concludes that the evidence “is consistent with a date between the sixth and third centuries BCE” and that “one might speculate a date earlier rather than later” in that period.¹⁰

⁶ Yoder, *Woman of Substance*, 18–38. On the method of linguistic typology see Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward and Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSM 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976) and Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (CahRB 20; Paris: Gabalda, 1982).

⁷ Yoder’s evidence for LBH includes: (1) vocabulary that is otherwise attested exclusively or predominantly in exilic and postexilic biblical texts (חוג, יעלת, פנינים, בית, as a preposition meaning “between,” מטמון, מרפא, מכר, שכל, קהל, ענד, חון; (2) the use of the first person independent pronoun אני rather than אנכי; (3) a blending of the older morpheme for the third person plural suffix on feminine nouns (-ותם) and the later one (-ויהם); and (4) the use of the piel form of the verb הלך, where SBH prefers the qal.

⁸ Yoder points to: (1) the usage of the feminine abstract form ויה (-*ût*) and (2) lexical Aramaisms (the adjective הטב [“striped”], the noun קנין [“property, possession] and the verb מלל [“to speak”]) that are rare or nonexistent in older forms of Aramaic but prevalent in both Official Aramaic and Proverbs 1-9. On the use of Aramaisms in linguistic dating, see especially Avi Hurvitz, “The Chronological Significance of ‘Aramaisms’ in Biblical Hebrew,” *IEJ* 18 (1968): 234–37.

⁹ Yoder, *Woman of Substance*, 38.

¹⁰ Yoder, *Woman of Substance*, 38.

The argument of the present chapter does not rely on a precise dating of Proverbs 1-9. I will suggest that Proverbs 1-9 reflects a historical milieu in which the worldview of traditional wisdom encounters competition from other worldviews newly available in the culture. Both the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods were characterized by increasing foreign influence and cultural competition in the region of Palestine and would provide a suitable backdrop for my argument. Nonetheless, following the linguistic evidence presented by Yoder, I will proceed on the same premise recommended by Richard Clifford: “Perhaps the best course is to suppose that Proverbs was edited in the same general movement as much of Israel’s other sacred literature in the early Second Temple period, that is, in the period from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E.”¹¹

Beyond the question of date, the setting of Proverbs 1-9 is generally agreed to be an educational one, whether in the context be formal education or education within the family.¹² The nature of education in the early postexilic period, however, remains an issue of debate.¹³ James Crenshaw proposes one plausible scenario for education in

¹¹ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 6.

¹² This claim has rarely been disputed, as Proverbs 1-9 presents itself as an educational (or at least instructive) text, and evidence from cognate cultures suggests the use of instructions in the educational process. However, Stuart Weeks (Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]) has recently argued that the evidence is insufficient to “assign very specific functions and locations within a context about which we know so little.” As a tentative alternative to the educational setting, Weeks suggests placing the composition of Proverbs 1-9 within “a forum for professional writers whose work was sponsored and performed for entertainment and moral elevation” (*Instruction and Imagery*, 178). Weeks’ concern, in part, is that placing Proverbs 1-9 in an educational setting tends to diminish assessments of its artistic value. Like Weeks, I find Proverbs 1-9 literarily compelling, and would not want to imply that it is “just” an educational text. It is, in my view, a literarily artistic text used in the education of scribes in the sapiential tradition.

¹³ The debate over education in ancient Israel has produced lively discussion, but little in the way of consensus. H.-J. Hermisson (Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* [WMANT 28; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968]) argued for an Israelite school at the center of the Wisdom tradition. The case for widespread education in ancient Israel has been made most forcefully by André Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l’ancien Israël* (OBO 39; Fribourg/Göttingen: Editions Universitaires/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); cf. André Lemaire, “The Sage in School and Temple,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990). D. W. Jamieson-Drake challenges the notion of schools in Judah prior to the eighth century (David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach* [JSOTSup 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991]), while both

ancient Israel and its relationship to the Wisdom corpus. He suggests that education may have taken place among several scribal guilds, perhaps controlled by a few families that were eventually conscripted to train professional scribes for government service.¹⁴

Crenshaw argues that the literary shaping of Proverbs and the composition of texts such as Job and Qohelet are the work of at least one (and perhaps more) of these guilds, which he describes as “a sapiential community, but one that has not isolated itself from society.”¹⁵ In any case, It seems likely that Proverbs 1-9 was employed for educational purposes in a sapiential community or scribal guild with interests in transmitting and preserving the cultural values of a uniquely sapiential worldview.

Symbolic Death Transcendence in Proverbs 1-9

Symbolic Immortality in the Biological and Biosocial Modes

In the previous chapter, I argued that the biological mode serves as one of the primary modes of symbolic death transcendence in Prov 10-29. Those chapters depicted the house of the righteous person as enduring (12:7), bursting into full bloom (14:11), and being characterized by fecundity and the security of future generations (13:22). In Proverbs 1-9, biological imagery is deployed to significantly different ends. Specifically,

R. N. Whybray (R. Norman Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition of the Old Testament* [BZAW 135; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1974]) and Stuart Weeks (Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* [Oxford Theological Monographs; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 153) question the existence of widespread education during the monarchic period. F. W. Golka argues for family-based education (F. W. Golka, “Die israelitische Weisheitsschule oder ‘des Kaisers neue Kleider,’” *VT* 33 [1983]: 257–70; ET in F. W. Golka, *The Leopard’s Spots* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993], 4–15. More recently, Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 195 [cf. 88–89] has renewed the argument that “the main context for schooling, and of the production of material suitable for such activity, was at the court of the king,” at least in the case of “high-flying young men destined for powerful positions.” In contrast, David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) argues for an apprenticeship model of education taking place within certain families.

¹⁴ See James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 85–113, especially 112-13.

¹⁵ Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 111.

the text transfers the imagery of *literal* biological progeny to *metaphorical* “progeny” constituted by the transfer of instruction from one generation to the next. That is, it replaces the biological family with the “family” constituted by instructors and their students.

For instance, after a brief introduction in 1:1-7, the instructional form is introduced as the primary mode of discourse in 1:8:

שמע בני מוסר אביך ואל־תטש תורת אמך

Hear, my son, the discipline of your father,
and do not disregard the instruction of your mother. (Prov 1:8)

The relationship between father and son focuses solely on the transmission of instruction from the older generation to the younger. The role of the father is specified as pronouncing “discipline” (מוסר), which the son is commanded to “hear” (שמע). The relationship between mother and son is similarly cast in terms of “instruction” (תורה), which the son is instructed not to disregard (אל־תטש). The direct address of the reader as “my son” persists throughout Proverbs 1-9, always in the context of receiving instruction:¹⁶

בני אִם־תקח אמרי ומצותי תצפון אתך

My son, if you take in my sayings
and store up my commandments within you . . . (2:1)

בני תורתִי אל־תשכח ומצותי יצר לבך

My son, do not forget my instruction,
but let your heart preserve my commandments. (3:1)

מוסר יהוה בני אל־תמאס ואל־תקץ בתוכחת

The discipline of Yhwh, my son, do not reject,
and do not feel disgust for his reproof. (3:11)

בני אל־ילזו מעיניך נצר תשיה ומזמה

Likewise, at the one moment in the text in which the father reflects on his own childhood,

¹⁶ In addition to these verses, see also 1:10, 15; 3:21; 4:1; 10, 20; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24.

he remembers his parents solely as giving instruction and encouraging him in the ways of wisdom:

כִּי־בֵן הֵייתִי לְאָבִי רַךְ וְיָחִיד לְפָנַי אִמִּי
וּיְרַנֵּי וַיֹּאמֶר לִי יִתְמַךְ־דְּבָרַי לְבָךְ שֹׁמֵר מִצְוֹתַי וְחַיָּה

For when I was a son to my father,
tender and darling before my mother,
then he instructed me, and he said to me:
“Let your heart grasp my words;
Keep my commandments and live.” (4:3-4)

The transfer of biological imagery into the context of instruction is further amplified by personified Wisdom’s address to her followers in 8:32a. Here the wisdom tradition itself, personified as the figure of Wisdom,¹⁷ refers to its adherents as “sons” (בָּנִים), saying “And now, sons, listen to me” (וְעַתָּה בָּנִים שִׁמְעוּ לִי). Her claim suggests that the biological lineage of the “sons” no longer refers to a literal biological lineage but rather to a metaphorical lineage constituted by Wisdom herself.

Thus, while Proverbs 1-9 employs the language of biological connectivity, it does so as a means of describing not the literal family but rather one constituted by the transfer of instruction from one generation to the next. Indeed one searches in vain for references to the persistence of one’s literal biological line, a primary symbolization of death transcendence in the earlier material.¹⁸ In every case, it seems that Proverbs 1-9 has transferred the imagery of literal biological connection, so central to Prov 10-29, into a metaphorical relationship characterized by the transmission of instruction.

¹⁷ On the significance of this figure, see the sections on “Natural Connection” and “Religious Connection,” below.

¹⁸ One may possibly identify an image of biological connectivity in 2:20-22, in which the son is encouraged to walk “in the paths of the righteous ones” (אַרְצוֹת צְדִיקִים), because “the upright ones will inhabit the land and the blameless ones will remain in it” (כִּי־יֵשְׁרִים יִשְׁכְּנוּ־אֶרֶץ וְתַמִּימִים יִתְרוּ בָּהּ). However, the description of those who remain in the land lacks the sort of imagery suggestive of progeny such as the “house of the righteous” (בֵּית צְדִיקִים; 12:7) or the “tent of the upright” (יֵשְׁרִים; 14:11). As was the case in 10:30, the reference may be to persistence of the progeny of the upright and blameless in the land. However, it seems more likely that both 10:30 and 2:20-22 have in mind the persistence in the land of people *characterized by* uprightness and blamelessness. In this case, the symbolic appeal would be for the son to become a part of a *community* of people, characterized by uprightness and blamelessness, who will continue to abide in the land.

Not only has biological symbolism been transposed to the metaphorical “family” that is bound by common acceptance of instruction, but so too has the symbolic language of “life” become associated with instruction. Whereas in Prov 10-29, the continuity of life was frequently associated with the biological family, as we have seen in chapter 1, in Proverbs 1-9 the language of “life” is associated solely with the acceptance of instruction. For instance, in Prov 3:2 the acceptance of instruction guarantees “length of days” (אֵרֶךְ יָמִים) and “years of life” (שְׁנוֹת חַיִּים). In 4:10 the “father” exhorts the son to “accept my words, so that the years of your life will be many” (קַח אִמְרֵי וַיִּרְבוּ לְךָ שְׁנוֹת חַיִּים). In 4:13, the “son” is instructed to “seize discipline . . . for she is your life” (הַחֲזֹק בְּמוֹסֵר . . . כִּי הִיא חַיֵּיךָ). In 4:20-22, the father’s “words” (דְּבָרֵי) and “sayings” (אִמְרֵי) are said to be “life to those who find them” (חַיִּים הֵם לְמִצְאֵיהֶם). So, too, acceptance of Woman Wisdom is associated with life. In 3:18, she is described as “a tree of life to all who seize her” (עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא), (לְמַחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ), and in 8:35 she declares that “the one who finds me finds life” (מִצְאֵי מִצְאֵי חַיִּים).¹⁹ Thus, as the imagery of biological relationship has been transferred from the literal biological family to the “family” of shared instruction, so too has access to “life.”

In fact, this sort of transfer of both family imagery and symbolic immortality from the literal biological family to membership in a particular social group is not uncommon. Robert J. Lifton refers to this transfer from biological family to social group as “the biosocial mode” of symbolic immortality, which he classifies as a subset of his “biological mode.” He writes,

Because man is the “cultural animal,” the biological mode can never remain purely biological. . . . The biosocial mode of immortality can be extended outward from family to tribe, organization, subculture, people, nation, or even species. That extension can be associated with varying ethical principles.²⁰

¹⁹ Reading Q מִצְאָ (māṣā) for K (mōṣēʾē). For further discussion of 3:18 and 8:35, see the discussions of the natural and religious modes of symbolic death transcendence, below.

²⁰ Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 19.

For one example, Lifton points to patterns of symbolic familial relationship in premodern Japan, in which “the biosocial mode extended from family to feudal lord, and then in varying ways at different times to the larger clan, clan groups, *shogunate*, . . . and the emperor.”²¹ In the case of Proverbs 1-9, the biosocial “family” is constituted not in terms of political structures, as in Lifton’s example, but rather in terms of a shared cultural worldview, passed from generation to generation in the form of instruction and characterized as “wisdom” (חכמה). One comes to participate in this biosocial family by acceptance and internalization of the father’s instruction, thereby becoming part of the tradition, and it is through this biosocial family that one is able to achieve a life that transcends death.

Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode

The transposition of the biological mode of death transcendence into a biosocial mode via instruction substantially narrows the breadth of the symbolism of death transcendence in Proverbs 1-9 relative to the earlier wisdom of Prov 10-29. In essence, it reduces the hope for death transcendence entirely to the transmission of instruction and the preservation of the biosocial community constituted by that instruction. As a result, the biosocial modes and creative modes are combined in Proverbs 1-9, so that the transmission of instruction (which we considered in the creative mode in Prov 10-29) becomes essentially coterminous with the biological mode, which was more distinctive in Proverbs 10-29. Nonetheless, there is more to say about the transmission of instruction in terms of the creative mode of death transcendence, particularly in terms of the literary form of instruction itself.

The concept of symbolic immortality is itself deeply embedded in the literary genre of instruction. In ancient Egypt in particular, instructional texts seem to have

²¹ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 19.

originally developed from funerary inscriptions--prayers, incantations, and tomb autobiographies--whose explicit purpose was to preserve both the words and the memory of the dead among the living, in essence providing the dead with symbolic immortality.²² Stuart Weeks notes that in funerary texts “[t]he words of the dead, or at least those attributed to them, could now live on, and serve the important function of keeping their memory alive. Future generations could thereby know and admire the achievements of the deceased, and even to learn from them the proper behaviour that would ensure their own success and long life.”²³ Weeks goes on to argue that Egyptian instructions, which seem to have developed from these funerary texts, function in much the same manner. One thinks, for instance, of the *Instruction of Ptahotep*, in which the vizier, apparently already physically dead, passes on the instruction of the ancestors to his own son.²⁴ Such extension of the self through the transfer of instruction is not unique in to Ptahotep. Indeed, noting memorial themes in *Hardjedef*²⁵ and *Khagemni*,²⁶ Weeks proposes that for these early Egyptian instructions “the testamentary aspect is the only common formal factor that can be identified with any precision: all three works present their advice as speeches being passed on by one generation to the next, embodying ancient principles or personal experience.”²⁷

²² Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 5.

²³ Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 5.

²⁴ While the prologue presents Ptahotep as an elderly man (“Age is here, old age arrived, feebleness came, weakness grow, childlike one sleeps all day,” the epilogue suggests that Ptahotep may already be deceased: “Not small was what I did on earth, I had one hundred and ten years of life as gift of the king, honors exceeding those of the ancestors, by doing justice for the king, until the state of veneration!” (Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* [3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006], 1:61–80).

²⁵ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 1:58–59.

²⁶ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 1:59–61.

²⁷ Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 11.

Crenshaw notes a similar function in the didactic literature of ancient Israel. He argues that the authors of Israelite didactic literature, “hoped to communicate with [their children] beyond the grave, to achieve in death what [they were] unable to accomplish in life. No one likes to be silenced, and this reaching out to those left behind amounted to a bid for immortality.”²⁸ Similarly, David M. Carr recognizes the symbolic extension of the self that occurs in the process of indoctrination, which he takes to be the goal of instruction. Based on comparative studies of educational practices in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, Carr argues that in ancient Israel “key goal of . . . education was the cultural reproduction of the parent/teacher: enculturating a son (and some daughters) to play a similar sociocultural role to that of the parent (or pseudoparent).”²⁹ Shaping moral character through education extends the life of the teacher symbolically beyond death, as the student continues to play the teacher’s role in the public sphere.

The process of the cultural “reproduction” through instruction in Proverbs 1-9 is clearly exemplified by the admonition of the “father” to his “son” in Prov 2:1-4:

בני אִם־תִּקַּח אִמְרֵי וּמִצְוֹתַי תִּצְפֵּן אֹתָךְ
 לְהִקְשִׁיב לְחִכְמָהּ אֲזַנְךָ תִּטֵּה לְבֶכֶךְ לְתַבּוּנָה
 כִּי אִם לְבִינָה תִקְרָא לְתַבּוּנָה תִתֵּן קוֹלְךָ
 אִם־תִּבְקֶשׁנָה כַּכֶּסֶף וְכַמְטֻמוֹנִים תִּחְפֹּשְׁנָה

My son, if you accept my words
 and store up my precepts within you,
 making your ear attentive to wisdom
 and stretching out your heart to discernment,
 indeed if you call out for insight,
 give your voice to discernment
 if you seek it out like silver
 and search for it like treasure... (2:1-4)

The rhetoric of these verses indicates the extent to which instruction is actually envisioned as transforming the “son” into a living extension of the “father” himself. In

²⁸ Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 3.

²⁹ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 130–31.

2:1, the son is exhorted to internalize of the teachings of the father: “if *you* accept *my* words and (if) *you* store up *my* precepts within *you*.” Through the transfer of instruction, the son is being reshaped into a kind of storehouse for the father’s words and teachings, so that he now carries the father within himself in the form of instructions and precepts. Proverbs 2:2-3 continues this theme, though now the son yields himself over not only to the father but also to the broader scope of the discourse of traditional wisdom, signified by “wisdom” (חכמה), “discernment” (תבונה), and “insight” (בינה). The discourse stakes claims on various *physical* aspects of the son, making them as extensions of wisdom itself: “making *your ear* attentive to wisdom,” “stretching out *your heart* to discernment,” “giving *your voice* to discernment.” The son, who previously became a receptacle of his fathers teachings, now also gives over his heart, his ear, and his voice in service of the tradition. Finally, 2:4 stakes a claim to the *activity* of the son, requiring that he “seek out” (תבקש) and “search for” (תחפש) wisdom as for silver and hidden treasure.

In the end, there is little of the “son” that remains his own. By submitting himself to the teaching of the “father,” the “son” is remade in the “father’s” image and thereby becomes a living extension of both the “father” and of the worldview he represents. The connection to the father’s symbolic death transcendence could not be more apparent. As the “father” becomes “stored up” within the son, his continued connection to life is guaranteed for so long as the “son” continues to act in the world according to the “words and precepts” of the “father” stored up within him.

Symbolic Immortality in the Natural Mode

To this point, I have argued that Proverbs 1-9 represents a narrowing of the imagery of death transcendence relative to Prov 10-29. Specifically, in the earlier section of Proverbs death transcendence was symbolized not only through one’s influence on students and members of the community but also--and perhaps more importantly--

through the biological extension of oneself in the form of progeny and the flourishing of one's household. In Proverbs 1-9, in contrast, the scope of the imagery is more narrow, so that it is *solely* through one's participation in the wisdom tradition and the propagation of the tradition's values to a new generation that one achieves symbolic immortality.

However, the narrowing of the symbolism is accompanied by a second phenomenon, which is the amplification of symbolism surrounding the significance of the tradition itself.

The first enhancement of the imagery of symbolic immortality occurs in what Lifton describes as the *natural* mode of death transcendence: a sense that "one will live on in the natural elements, limitless in space and time."³⁰ In his studies of the survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, for instance, Lifton found that "the most terrifying rumor among the many that swept the city was that trees, grass, and flowers would never again grow in Hiroshima. The image contained in that rumor was of nature drying up altogether, life being extinguished at its source, an ultimate form of desolation that not only encompassed human death but went beyond it."³¹ For the survivors, even the continuing growth of wild "railroad grass" was perceived as a source of strength and an indication that death had not triumphed over eternal nature.

The connection between the wise and the cosmos envisioned in Proverbs 1-9 is somewhat more intimate than that which Lifton describes. Proverbs 1-9 envisions a world created by YHWH, whose cosmogonic acts consist of establishing limits and boundaries for each element within the structure of the created order. As a result, a human life lived according to the tenets of Wisdom becomes intimately connected with the created order

³⁰ Robert J. Lifton, *Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1970), 23. See also Robert J. Lifton, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 33; Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 22-23; and Robert J. Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 15.

³¹ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 23.

and even functions to sustain the order and “life” of the cosmos. This connection between humankind and the natural order via Wisdom is primarily given in the two cosmogonic texts found in 3:19-20 and 8:27-29.

Proverbs 3:19-20. The first reference in Proverbs 1-9 to Yhwh’s act of creation comes in 3:19-20:

יהוה בחכמה יסד־ארץ כונן שמים בתבונה
 בדעתו תהומות נבקעו ושחקים ירעפו־טל

YHWH, by wisdom, laid the foundations of earth
 He established the heavens by understanding
 By knowledge³² the deeps were split
 And the clouds dripped dew. (Prov 3:19-20)

The description of the cosmogony in these verses is quite brief in comparison to the somewhat expanded account of Prov 8:27-29 and is concerned more with the principles by which God designs the cosmos rather than with the details of the design itself. Thus, the description focuses only on the three basic elements: the founding of the earth (יסד־ארץ),³³ the establishing the heavens (כונן שמים),³⁴ and the controlling of the primeval waters (תהומות נבקעו).³⁵

In constructing the cosmos, YHWH, the master builder, employs the tools of “wisdom” (חכמה), “knowledge” (דעת), and “insight” (תבונה), confirming that the creation in fact functions according to certain principles of design.³⁶ The confirmation of this careful design is suggested in 3:20, which describes YHWH’s careful controlling and

³² Reading דעת rather than דעתו, following LXX. Cf. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 160.

³³ The reference is to the placement of the earth upon solid foundations; cf. Ps 104:5 (יסד־ארץ); 18:16 (מוסדות תבל); Pro 8:29 (מוסדי ארץ); (על־מכונה).

³⁴ The establishing of the heavens envisions the placement of a barrier that separates the waters above from the waters below. Cf. Gen 1:6 where the barrier is referred to as a “dome” (רקיע); elsewhere, the heavens are spread out “like a tent” (כאהל, Isa 40:22; כירעיה; Ps 104:2)

³⁵ This refers to the making of channels from the deep, primeval waters (תהומות) to the inhabited realm (Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 160).

³⁶ Cf. Ps 104:24; Jer 10:10.

allocation of water. In 3:20a, “the deeps are split” (תהומות נבקעו), so that waters of the deep can be mediated into the habitable realm. As Fox notes, “The unruly waters were imprisoned at creation (Job 38:8-11) and are ever straining against their bonds. An excessive release of abyss waters causes catastrophic flooding (Gen 7:11; Hab 3:9b), but a controlled opening of channels is a blessing (Jdg 15:19; Isa 35:6).”³⁷ As evidence that the world functions according to the principles of wisdom, knowledge, and insight, 3:20a presents YHWH as constraining the deeps from becoming a destructive force, transforming them rather into a source of life-sustaining water. YHWH’s control of life-giving waters continues in 3:30b: “the clouds dripped dew.”³⁸ Again the image is of a controlled release of waters from above the dome of the heavens in order to water the earth.³⁹ In establishing the cosmos by wisdom, knowledge, and insight, so that water is properly mediated to the earth, YHWH ensures the vitality of the natural realm.

While the cosmogony of 3:19-20 treats the relationship between wisdom and the created order, the text that immediately precedes in 3:13-18 concerns the relationship between wisdom and humankind:

אשרי אדם מצא חכמה ואדם יפיק תבונה...
 ארך ימים בימינה בשמאלה עשר וכבוד
 דרכיה דרכי־נעם וכל־נתיבותיה שלום
 עִצ־חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר

Happy is the one finds wisdom
 and the one who finds insight...
 Length of days is in her right hand.
 In her left are wealth and honor.
 Her ways are pleasant ways
 and all her paths are peaceful.

³⁷ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 160.

³⁸ Dew, of course, forms by condensation and does not drip from clouds. However, it is not difficult to see how dew could be perceived as originating skywards, as suggested by the English expression “dewfall.” In the HB, dew is frequently depicted as falling from the heavens (see, e.g., Gen 27:28; Deut 33:28; Zech 8:12).

³⁹ For instance in Deut 33:28, the land of Israel is depicted as a land of abundance because there “(Jacob’s) heaven’s drip dew” (שמיו יערפו טל). Conversely, a lack of dew threatens creation, as in David’s curse of Gilboa at the death of Jonathan: “Mountains of Gilboa, may there be no dew (טל) and no rain (מטר) upon you” (2 Sam 1:21).

A tree of life is she to all who grab hold of her,
and the one who grasps her is called happy. (3:13, 16-18)

Here again, it is wisdom that serves as a source of life for those who hold on to her. When a person finds wisdom and insight, he receives long life (ארך ימים), wealth (עשר) and honor (כבוד), all indications of a vital existence, as is the image of walking upon paths that are “pleasant” (נעים) and “peaceful” (שלום).

When the אשׁרִי poem of 3:13-18 and the cosmogony of 3:19-20 are taken together, they indicate that the vitality of human life and the vitality of the created order both derive from the same principles of wisdom (חכמה) and insight (תבונה). That is, by finding wisdom and insight, the wise person is able to anchor his own life in the very principles that give vitality to the cosmic realm. As Richard Clifford comments on this passage, “Since the world was created by wisdom, anyone who lives in accord with it lives in accord with the structure and purpose of the universe.”⁴⁰ Here we can begin to see the outlines of a symbolization of death transcendence according to Lifton’s “natural mode.” A person who heeds the teachings of wisdom comes to live a life that is symbolized as being an integral part of the cosmos. His life is no longer simply an isolated moment between his birth and his death, but rather has become a part of the great flow and existence of the universe itself.

Proverbs 8:27-29. The relationship between humankind and the created realm can be discerned more clearly in the cosmogony of Prov 8:27-29. The central thrust of the cosmogony is Wisdom’s claim that “I was there” (8:27a) when YHWH was fashioning creation.⁴¹ The structure of the passage itself reflects this aim, as in one extended

⁴⁰ Clifford, *Proverbs*, 55.

⁴¹ Many scholars have noted that Prov 8:22-31 seems to be an expansion and clarification of the tradition of 3:19, in which YHWH is said to create “בַּחֲכָמָה.” See, e.g., R. Norman Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 121; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 70–71; Lennart Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (ConBOT 39; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 58. More recently Alan Lenzi, “Proverbs 8:22–31: Three Perspectives on Its Composition,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 694–99, has argued for

sentence it presents six temporal clauses detailing YHWH's creative activity, all dependent on Wisdom's declarative statement, "I was there" (שם אני):

בהכינו שמים
שם אני
בחוקו חוג על־פני תהום
באמצו שחקים ממעל
בעזוז עינות תהום
בשומו לים חקו ומים לא יעברו־פיו
בחוקו מוסדי ארץ

When he established the heavens,
I was there;
when he inscribed a circle upon the face of the primeval waters,
when he made firm the clouds above,
when he made strong the springs of the primeval waters,⁴²
when he set for the sea its limit
and the waters did not transgress his command,
when he made firm the foundations of the earth.⁴³ (Prov 8:27-29)

From the establishing of the heavens to the securing of the earth's foundations, Wisdom observes the structures that order the world, which she subsequently communicates to her "sons" (8:32).

The cosmogony Wisdom describes is of a particular sort, in which "the essence of creation is separation and the marking of boundaries."⁴⁴ YHWH's first act is to "set the heavens in place" (בהכינו שמים). As in 3:19b, the image suggests that "God raises up a great plate, 'the heavens,' to hold back the encompassing waters."⁴⁵ The heavens restrain the waters above the earth (cf. Gen 1:7) and creates the space in which the habitable land

direct literary dependence: "Prov 3:19-20 is one of the literary bases for the composition of 8:22-31. By looking to 3:19-20, Prov 8:22-31, among other purposes, clarified the issue of Wisdom's origins and specified her relationship to YHWH" (694).

⁴² Emending MT בעזוז (*ba'āzōz* [G], "became strong") to בעזוז (*bē'azzēzō* [D], "made strong") following LXX, S, V; cf. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 92, n. f; HALOT, s.v. עזז.

⁴³ Emending בחוקו (*bēhūqō*; "when he inscribed") to בחזקו (*bēhazzēqō*; "when he made firm") in accordance with LXX (καὶ ἰσχυρὰ τὰ θεμελίω της γης); so also Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 285: "MT has *behuqō* 'when he inscribed'; but that is not how foundations are laid. Emend *bhqw* to *bh̄zqw*." The emendation assumes a common scribal misreading of ך for ך.

⁴⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 284.

⁴⁵ Clifford, *Proverbs*, 96.

can be brought forth. The second act of the cosmogony is likewise one of restraint, in which YHWH “inscribes a circle upon the face of the primeval waters (בחוקו חוג על־פני) (תהום)” (27b).⁴⁶ Here, YHWH engraves (חקק) a boundary for the sea, confining the potentially chaotic waters to their appropriate and beneficial place. YHWH then “makes strong the clouds above (באמצו שחקים ממעל) (8:28). Similarly, in Job 37:18, the clouds (שחקים) are described as being “strong like a mirror of cast metal” (חזיקים כראי מוצק). In that context, as here, the strengthening of the clouds connotes the ability to control the weather and so to mediate the dispersion of rainwater into the earthly realm.⁴⁷ This theme continues in 8:28b, in which YHWH “makes strong the springs of the deep (בעזוז עינות) (תהום).” Through these springs which descend into the primordial depths, YHWH is able to control the flow of groundwater, once again maintaining the appropriate role of water in nourishing rather than destroying the cosmos. In 8:29, YHWH “sets a boundary for the sea” (בשומו לים חקו) again employing the root חקק (lit. “to engrave”), to describe the limiting boundary of the waters, as in 8:27b. Finally, YHWH “makes firm the foundations of the earth” (בחזקו מוסדי ארץ), upon which rests the solid, inhabitable ground.

There is a certain pattern discernible in these verses, in which YHWH alternately strengthens those elements of the cosmos that make life possible and limits those elements that, when unbounded, threaten to return the world to chaos. The first verse (8:27) and the last (8:29) describe the creation of inhabitable land, first in the separation of the waters above from those below (8:27) and then in the separation of the sea from the dry land (8:29). Each separation involves one act of strengthening (חזק, כגן) and one act of limitation (חקק). The middle verse (8:28) describes the creation of the mechanisms by which water is to be mediated into the habitable realm in ways that are life-giving

⁴⁶ Cf. Job 26:10: “A circle he inscribed upon the face of the waters” (חק־הג על־פני־מים).

⁴⁷ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 501.

rather than destructive. This mediating process consists of two actions, both acts of strengthening (זזע, אמצ). The pattern is as follows:

- 8:27 Separating the waters above and below:
 (+) “establishing” (הכינו) the heavens (שמיים)
 (-) “inscribing” (חוקו) the primeval waters (תהום)
- 8:28 Mediating water into habitable realm:
 (+) “firming” (באמצו) the clouds (שחקים)
 (+) “strengthening” (בעזו) the springs (עינות)
- 8:29 Separating the sea from the land:
 (-) “setting the limit” (שמו חוקו) of the sea
 (+) “making firm” (בהזקו) the foundations of the earth (מוסדי ארץ)

By limiting the potentially destructive waters to their proper place and strengthening the boundaries that separate the waters from the inhabitable land, YHWH creates a cosmos in which element has its proper role to play and its proper place in the maintenance of the whole.

In his analysis of Prov 8:22-31, Raymond Van Leeuwen argues that “[t]he limits set on human beings have their counterpart and cosmic archetype in the good limits or boundaries, the norms which God has established for creation.”⁴⁸ Van Leeuwen notes the use of the root חקק in describing the boundaries set for both the primeval waters (תהום; 8:27b) and the sea (ים; 8:29b).⁴⁹ The root חקק has two senses, one physical and the other legal, and both seem to be at work in this imagery. On the one hand, חקק means “to engrave” or “to inscribe.” Prov 8:27-29 deploys this sense to describe aspects of the physical universe: the circle of the horizon inscribed upon the deeps (8:27b) and the shore of the sea (8:29a), which define the physical limits of the waters. On the other hand, חקק has the legal sense of “making a decree” or “establishing a legal limit,” which is most clearly invoked in the reference to the sea in 8:29a: “when he set for the sea its

⁴⁸ Raymond Van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume 5* (ed. L. E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 122. See also Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1–9,” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 111–44.

⁴⁹ Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 123–26; cf. idem “Proverbs,” 93–94.

limit (חֶקֶר), and the waters did not transgress his command (לֹא יַעֲרֹבוּ־פִיו).” As Van Leeuwen notes, the term חֶקֶר (or חֶקֶה) often refers to God’s commands to humans, and the phrase “to transgress (his) command” (עָבַר פִּי[ו]) elsewhere refers only to human trespassing of the limits imposed upon them by God.⁵⁰ The invocation of legal language in describing the ordering of the cosmos suggests that both humankind and the cosmic realm are subject to limits and boundaries imposed upon them by God:

The many Old Testament passages concerning the limits of the sea are well-known. But to establish our understanding of the liminal role of the sea in Proverbs 8, it is useful to call attention to the general function of these texts. Their role is to provide an implicit or explicit cosmic basis and norm for discussions and appeals concerning injustice in the human social order. The logic is essentially this: God keeps the chaotic seas within its bounds, thus, where humans have overstepped the bounds of justice, the cosmic Judge is petitioned to restore order to violated boundaries. To put the trespassers, so to speak ‘back in their place.’⁵¹

As God establishes the limits and boundaries of the cosmos, so God establishes the limits and boundaries of humankind. Within the created order each has its place, such that the lives of human beings and the existence of the cosmos are inexorably intertwined.

In the parlance of Proverbs, the boundaries of human existence within the cosmic realm--the proper “place” for humankind within the order of things--are symbolized by the “path” (דֶּרֶךְ, נְתִיבָה, אֶרֶץ), an image familiar from Proverbs 10-29 but now heightened to a more cosmic register. Wisdom, who has observed creation and knows the proper place of all things, including humankind, invites her “sons” (בָּנִים) to “keep *my ways*” (וְאֲשֶׁרֵי דַרְכֵי יִשְׁמְרוּ; Prov 8:32*b*). To those who walk her path, who keep their proper place within the cosmos, she promises “life” (חַיִּים) and “favor from YHWH” (רִצּוֹן יְהוָה; 8:35). As in Prov 3:19-20, the life offered by Wisdom is a life lived “in accord with the structure and purpose of the universe”--a life with a symbolic significance that transcends the

⁵⁰ Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 124. See Num 22:18; 24:13, 1 Sam 15:24.

⁵¹ Van Leeuwen, “Liminality and Worldview,” 125.

individual.⁵²

Crenshaw argues that “the sages believed that their virtuous conduct did more than guarantee good rewards in the form of wealth, health, progeny, and honor. They also thought their actions sustained the order of the world, preventing a return to chaos.”⁵³ In his view, Wisdom offers a life that is not only in *accord* with the cosmos, but one that is actively involved in the *sustenance* of the cosmos. In this sense, as a parent gives life to a child, and as a teacher symbolically “gives life” to a student through example and instruction, the wise “give life” to the cosmos itself by acting in ways that ensure the continued vitality of the created order. As a parent’s life continues to have significance through his progeny, and a teacher’s through her students, so then does the wise individual’s life now have significance for as long as the cosmos continues to exist.

Symbolic Immortality in the Religious Mode

In addition to the “natural mode” of symbolizing death-transcending connectivity between the wise and larger structures meaning, Proverbs 1-9 also invokes what Lifton refers to as the “religious mode” of symbolic immortality. Lifton argues that the religious mode provides symbols through which the worldview’s adherents perceive themselves as being “in harmony with a principle extending beyond the limited biological life span.”⁵⁴ In such a symbolic construction, “one is offered the opportunity to be reborn into a timeless realm of ultimate, death-transcending truths.”⁵⁵ Proverbs 1-9 offers its adherents the opportunity to enter such a realm of transcendent truths by becoming part of a tradition that extends to the beginning of creation and even to YHWH himself. The

⁵² Clifford, *Proverbs*, 55.

⁵³ Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 72.

⁵⁴ Lifton, *The Life of the Self*, 33.

⁵⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 20.

relevant passages are again the cosmogonic passages in 8:22-31 and 3:13-20, as well as 4:5-7.

Proverbs 8:22-31. Wisdom's self-description in Prov 8:22-31 consists of three smaller units, each marked by a distinct rhetorical structure. Each of these units describes a different time period vis-à-vis YHWH's act of creation itself: before (8:22-26), during (8:27-29), and after (8:30-31). As indicated above, the syntactical and rhetorical structure of the central unit, Prov 8:27-29, is clear, with six temporal "when" clauses surrounding the central affirmation "I was there." As we have seen, that textual unit relates to the time during creation, when YHWH was creating the cosmos. The two units remaining units, 8:22-26 and 8:30-31, also have clear structures and correspond to the periods before and after the cosmogony, respectively.⁵⁶ I will address each of these in turn.

יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז
מעולם נסכתי מראש מקדמי־ארץ

YHWH created me,⁵⁷ the first of his works,
More ancient than his works from the *Urzeit*.
Long ago I was formed,⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Victor A. Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? אמן and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22–31," *Bib* 80 (1999): 391–400 argues that this tripartite structure represents the "life cycle" of Wisdom: "She was conceived and born before creation, present at the time of creation, and went out into the world when creation was complete with the appearance of human beings" (396). Hurowitz's identification of a before-during-after structure seems to be correct, though his attempt to correlate it to a "life cycle" is less satisfactory. Most notably, it requires that he include 8:30 in the unit referring to "the time of creation" (thus 8:27-30), so that Wisdom is an אמן ("nursling" in Hurowitz's understanding) during creation itself. This leaves 8:31 as a single-verse unit, as well as the only reference to the time after the completion of creation. It also requires appending the finite verb וַאֲהִיָּהּ in 8:30 to what is otherwise a self-contained unit of dependent clauses (8:27-29) surrounding שָׁם אָנִי in 8:27. If the "life cycle" metaphor is dropped, the text divides neatly into "before" (8:22-26), "during" (8:27-29) and "after" (8:30-31), congruent with the syntactical and rhetorical structures of the text. See further discussion below, as well as Stuart Weeks, "The Context and Meaning of Proverbs 8:30a," *JBL* 125 (2006): 433–42.

⁵⁷ The meaning of קנני is much debated. See discussion further below.

⁵⁸ Reading *n^esakkōtî*, N-perfect of סָכַךְ, meaning "was woven" or "was formed" (so Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 281. In Ps 139:13 and Job 10:11, the same root has the sense of an unborn child being "woven together with bones and sinews" (ובעצמות וניגים תסככני; Job 10:11). MT reads *nissaktî* (N of נָסַךְ), meaning "to be poured out" or "anointed." One may preserve the MT pointing by positing a by-form, נָסַךְ II, meaning "to weave" (so HALOT, s.v. נָסַךְ II; Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* [2d ed.; HAT I.16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1963], 111; Othmar Keel, *Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott: Ein ikonographischer*

from the beginning, from the primeval times of the earth. (Prov 8:22-23)

The effect of 8:22-23 is to establish Wisdom's authority by as the firstborn of creation. These two verses employ four separate locutions referring to "the olden days": עולם, אז, מראש, and קדם. As is clear from the fact that Wisdom refers to these times as existing prior to YHWH's creation of the cosmos, these periods of time are envisioned as the mythological time-before-time, when nothing as yet existed.

The next verses of the cosmogony continue the theme of the antiquity of Wisdom, claiming that Wisdom represents a truth that transcends both time and space:

באין־ההומות חוללתי באין מעינות נכבדי־מים
בטרם הרים הטבעו לפני גבעות חוללתי
עד־לא עשה ארץ וחוצות וראש עפרות תבל

When there were no depths, I was brought forth
When there were no springs heavy with water.
Before the mountains had been sunk,
Before the hills, I was brought forth,
While he had not yet made the land and the fields,
And the first dust of the earth. (8:24-26)

The structure of this unit is marked by the twofold repetition of the verb "I was brought forth" (חוללתי) in 8:24 and 8:25. The remainder of the passage consists of a series of temporal expressions that establishes Wisdom's presence prior the creation of the cosmos. These temporal expressions begin in 8:24 with negative temporal statements ("when there were no" [באין]) concerning the deeps (תהומות; 8:24) and the springs (מעינות).⁵⁹ Verses 25 and 26 constitute one extended sentence consisting again of the finite verb "I was brought forth" (חוללתי) surrounded by four statements of temporal priority: two "before" statements (לפני, בטרם) followed by "while not" (עד לא) in 8:26.

Beitrag zur Deutung des mēšahāqāt in Sprüche 8:30f. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974], 17; cf. Isa 25:7, נסוכה [nēsūkā], "entwined"). Lenzi's claim that *nissaktī* serves as a polemical reference to Ea, the Mesopotamian god of wisdom, places much weight on limited evidence (Lenzi, "Proverbs 8:22–31," 700; cf., more cautiously, Hurowitz, "Nursling," 396–400).

⁵⁹ Lenzi, "Proverbs 8:22–31," 687–714, argues that תהום here is a conscious allusion to the Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat, intended to demonstrate the priority of Israelite Wisdom to that of Mesopotamia. See especially 709-11.

Within this structure, Wisdom claims to have existed and before the mountains and hills (8:25), the earth and its fields (8:26a). Indeed, she claims to be older than dirt (ראש עפרות; 8:25; תבל; 8:26b). Wisdom thus claims to represent not only very old truth, but actually *timeless* truth. In terms of symbolic immortality, one can hardly imagine a more effective symbolic connection. Upon becoming part of the Wisdom tradition, one becomes part of a chain of being that transcends time itself.

Not only does Proverbs 1-9 depict Wisdom as transcending time, but also as having an intrinsic connection to YHWH himself, expressed most clearly in in 8:30-31:

ואהיה אצלו אמון
ואהיה שעשעים יום יום
משחקת לפניו בכל־עת
משחקת בתבל ארצו
ושעשעי את־בני אדם

And I have been⁶⁰ faithfully beside him.⁶¹

⁶⁰ For this translation, see Weeks, “Context and Meaning,” 438, n. 19: “Whether one describes the *wāw* on the verb as conjunctive or consecutive, a reference to the present (‘and I am’), or perhaps more properly to a present situation established in the past (‘and I have been’), is perfectly possible.” For the use the preterite form (*wāw*-consecutive) in a shift of temporal sense from past to present, cf. Ps 29:10: יהוה למבול ישב וישב יהוה מלך לעולם: “YHWH sat enthroned at the flood; YHWH rules as king forever.”

⁶¹ The debate over the meaning of the term אמון has occupied readers of Prov 8 practically since the *Urzeit* itself. Relatively recent summaries of the arguments may be found in Cleon L. Rogers, “The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word אמון in Prov 8,30,” *ZAW* 109 (1997): 208–21; Michael V. Fox, “Amon Again,” *JBL*, 115 (1996): 699–702; and Gerlinde Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9* (FAT 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 131–38. Four main positions have been argued:

(1) “Craftsman, architect.” So, e.g., Franz Delitzsch, “Proverbs,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament* (ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; trans. M. G. Easton; 6 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866–91; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1966), 137–140 [“master of the work”]; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 47, 48 n. 30a. [“artisan”]; Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 203 [“craftsman”]. This position derives אמון from Akkadian *ummānu*, meaning “master, foreman.” The root occurs with this sense in Song 7:2[1] as אמן (*’ommān* [pausal]) and may perhaps be found in Jer 52:15 as האמון (so, e.g., William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* [2 vols.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 2:437 and Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 862), though more likely the term there is an orthographic variant of ההמון meaning “crowd”(cf. the parallel passage in 2 Kgs 25:11). The major objections to this position are (a) that it has difficulty accounting for the presence of *waw* in the orthography (as we expect *’omman* or *’ômman* rather than *’ammôn*) and (b) that Prov 8:22-29 depicts YHWH, and not Wisdom, as the craftsman or architect of the cosmos.

A variation on this position, most recently posed by Rogers, “Meaning and Significance,” 208–221, who understands אמון as an accusative of state in apposition with the 3ms suffix of אצלו, and thus referring not to Wisdom but rather to YHWH: “I was close to Him (the Lord in His role as) a master workman” (“Meaning and Significance,” 220). Others arguing similar positions include Whybray,

I have been (his) delight day by day,⁶²
 Playing before him in every time,
 Playing in his inhabited world.
 And my delight is humankind (Prov 8:30-31)

Temporally, this textual unit describes the period of time beginning after creation and extending to the present. While some read 8:30 in relation to the preceding textual unit as

Proverbs, 136; Mitchell Dahood, “Proverbs 8,22–31: Translation and Commentary,” *CBQ* 80 (1968): 512–21; Keel, *Die Weisheit*, 21–25. The proposal seems to have originated with P. Bonnard, cited (and rejected) in André Barucq, *Le Livre des Proverbes* (SB; Paris: Libraire Lecoffre, 1964), 235.

(2) “Sage.” A related line of interpretation also derives the word from Akkadian *ummānu*, but with the less common sense of “sage.” So Clifford, *Proverbs*, 24–27, who reads: “‘I was at his side as a (heavenly) sage,’ that is, as a heavenly figure mediating to humans the knowledge they need to be good and blessed servants of God” (*Proverbs*, 26). A somewhat similar position is taken by Lenzi, “Proverbs 8:22–31,” 687–714, who combines the two meanings of *ummānu* into a broad semantic field including “‘master,’ ‘craftsman,’ ‘scholar,’ ‘mediator of knowledge,’ etc.” (“Proverbs 8:22–31,” 707).

(3) “Nursling.” A more common position derives אָמוֹן from אָמַן II: “to nurse.” Traditionally this has been understood as a G-passive participle, meaning “one who is raised or nursed (so Aquila [τιθηνομενη = “nursed”]) and, among modern commentators, e.g., Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* [ICC; New York: Scribner’s, 1899; repr., 1916], 177–78. However, it may be objected that the expected participle would be feminine, as with מְשַׁחֶקֶת in the following colon. Fox obviates this difficulty by rendering אָמוֹן as the G infinitive absolute of אָמַן II, so “growing up” (Fox, “‘Amon Again,” 699–702; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 286–87). A similar position is taken by Hurowitz, “Nursling,” 391–400 as well as Lenzi, “Proverbs 8:22–31,” 709, who, however, understands “growing up” as a secondary meaning of אָמוֹן.

(4) The interpretation followed here (“constantly,” “faithfully”) was proposed as early as Symmachus and Theodotian, who rendered εστηρικμενη (“set firm”). In modern times, several attempts have been made to justify a similar reading. Plöger (“beständig”), and more recently Waltke (“firmly, faithfully”), understand אָמוֹן to be the infinitive absolute of אָמַן I used adverbially (Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos [Proverbia]* [BKAT 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 1984], 95; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs* [2 vols.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 1:420). Against this interpretation, scholars (including Plöger himself) have noted that אָמַן I is not productive in the G-stem of the verb. Recently, however, Stuart Weeks (“Context and Meaning,” 433–42), has proposed that אָמוֹן should be understood as a *nominal* form functioning as an adverbial accusative. In particular, Weeks notes the use of אָמוֹן as the name of the Judean king (2 Kgs 18:21–25), arguing that “it seems hard to believe that a king would have borne a name that might be understood as ‘little child,’ or that he would deliberately have been named ‘craftsman’” (“Context and Meaning,” 439). *HALOT* suggests “faithful” as the meaning of king Amon’s name (s.v. אָמוֹן II). Weeks also notes the nouns אָמוֹן (ʿēmūn or ʿēmūn), meaning “faithful one” or “faithfulness” (“Context and Meaning,” 440).

Finally, note should also be made of the interpretation of R. B. Y. Scott, “The ʿAmon of Proverbs VIII 30,” *VT* 10 (1960): 213–23, who renders “a living link (or ‘vital bond’)”; cf. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 72. His interpretation has not found a following.

⁶² In keeping with his theme of the “life cycle” of Wisdom, Hurowitz interprets שְׂעִשְׂעִים as referring to the actions of a child, particularly noting its usage in Isa 11:8 and Jer 31:20 (“Nursling,” 395). While שְׂעִשְׂעִים certainly *may* have the sense of “childlike play,” it does not *require* such an interpretation, as the term may also refer to the enjoyment of those who are not children (cf. Ps 94:19; Isa 5:7; Ps 119:16, 47, 70). See Rogers, “Meaning and Significance,” 217.

referring to the time period of creation, in my estimation the syntax does not support such an interpretation. The NRSV, for instance, reads the entirety of 8:26-31 as one long sentence, so that the statement “I was beside him” (וַאֲהִיָּה אִצְלוֹ) is the governing verb of the temporal clauses in 8:27-29 (“when he established the skies,” and so forth). However, as discussed above, 8:27-29 is a self-contained grammatical unit, with the temporal clauses dependent on the statement “I was there” (שָׁם אָנִי) in 8:27. There is no reason to suggest that the verb in 8:30 (וַאֲהִיָּה) continues this sequence, as it represents a rather stark break in the grammatical structure. The twofold repetition of וַאֲהִיָּה in 8:30 represents a shift in timeframe, further indicated by the temporal indicators “day by day” (יוֹם יוֹם) and “in every time” (בְּכָל־עֵת). Rather than indicating Wisdom’s position at the time of creation, which she has already stated in 8:27, the statements in 8:30-31 present Wisdom’s position near YHWH in the time *since* the cosmogony and up to the present.⁶³

Both the structure and content of this brief passage thus suggest Wisdom’s continued presence both with YHWH and with humankind. The connection she establishes between YHWH and humankind in this manner comes to poetic expression in the chiasmic structure of 8:30b-31:

וַאֲהִיָּה שְׁעֵשְׂעִים יוֹם יוֹם
 מִשְׁחַקַּת לִפְנֵי בְּכָל־עֵת
 מִשְׁחַקַּת בְּתֹבֵל אֶרֶץ
 וְשְׁעֵשְׂעִי אֶת־בְּנֵי אָדָם

The verse moves from the heavenly realm to the earthly realm through the the repetition of the two lexemes שְׁעֵשְׂעִי and מִשְׁחַקַּת, each used once in relation to the heavenly realm and once in relation to the earthly. As Wisdom plays (מִשְׁחַקַּת) before YHWH, so she plays (מִשְׁחַקַּת) in the created order. As Wisdom is YHWH’s delight (שְׁעֵשְׂעִים), so humankind is Wisdom’s delight (שְׁעֵשְׂעִי). In this way, Wisdom serves as a connection point between

⁶³ Weeks, “Context and Meaning,” 438.

humankind (אדם) and YHWH, between the transcendent realm (לפניו) and the earthly sphere (תבל ארצו).

Because Wisdom was present with YHWH to witness the creation of the cosmos and now moves between YHWH and humankind, she connects her adherents to both the mythological time beyond time itself (8:22-26) and to the heavenly realm beyond the physical cosmos itself (8:22-29), including the Deity (8:30-31). On this basis, those who keep to her paths are declared happy (ואשרי דרכי ישמרו; 8:32), as they will find “life” (חיים) and “the favor of YHWH” (רצון מיהוה; 8:35).

Proverbs 3:13-20. The transcendent nature of Wisdom is likewise suggested in the imagery of 3:16 and 18:

אֶרֶךְ יָמִים בְּיַמִּינָהּ בְּשִׂמְלֹהָ עֵשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד . . .
עֵץ-חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ וְתַמְכִּיהָ מֵאֲשֶׁר

Length of days are in her right hand,
and in her left wealth and honor...
A Tree of Life she is to all who grab hold of her
and the ones who grasp her are called happy (3:16, 18)

While the origin of the imagery in these verses is disputed, its reference to the transcendent realm is clear. Christa Kayatz has argued that the imagery of 3:16 derives from the Egyptian goddess Ma'at, who is often depicted holding an *anh* emblem (representing life) in her right hand and a *w's* scepter (perhaps representing wealth and honor) in her left.⁶⁴ Fox challenges Kayatz's association with Ma'at in particular but goes on to note that “the Egyptian practice of depicting gods holding symbols for their powers and blessings may be in the background of the picture of Lady Wisdom.”⁶⁵ Newsom states the matter more succinctly: “[T]he meaning of the image does not require knowledge of the allusion. A figure who holds life in her hand belongs to the

⁶⁴ Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9* (WMANT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966), 105.

⁶⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 157.

transcendent.”⁶⁶ Though the image of the tree in Prov 3:18 seems to have been demythologized to the extent that it no longer grants *literal* immortality, it nonetheless retains a connection to *symbolic* immortality. Those who “seize her” (למחזיקים בה) and “grasp her” (ותמכיה) establish a firm connection to a reality that transcends the limitations of their own finitude.

Further, the pursuit of Wisdom connects one to YHWH, who also employs Wisdom in his creation of the cosmos. As we have seen, in 3:19-20 YHWH founds the earth *by* wisdom (בהכמה), establishes the heavens *by* insight (בתבונה), and contains the chaotic waters *by* knowledge (בדעת).⁶⁷ Similarly, the macarism of 3:13 declares happy the one who finds “wisdom” (הכמה) and “understanding” (תבונה),” the same terms employed to describe YHWH’s act of creation in 3:19. It is a rather remarkable claim for the sages to make, that it is possible for a human being to discover and claim for himself the same attributes employed by YHWH to design the cosmos at the beginning of time. Yet this is the claim that Proverbs 1-9 makes: the one who follows the instruction of the “father” participates in “a timeless realm of ultimate, death-transcending truths.”⁶⁸

Proverbs 4:5-7. In a similar fashion to 3:13-20, in which the sages are invited to use the same principles of “wisdom” and “insight” employed by YHWH in the act of cosmogony, the root קנ"ה in 4:5-7 likewise describes actions that both YHWH and the

⁶⁶ Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1–9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 150. The image of the “tree of life” (עץ־חיים) in 3:18 likewise has divine and mythological connotations. In Gen 3:22, the “tree of life” is a source of immortality, and in Egypt certain trees were thought to convey eternal life.

⁶⁷ The Hebrew Bible elsewhere depicts YHWH as employing wisdom in the creation of the world: “He makes the earth by his power (בכחו), establishes the world by his wisdom (בהכמתו), and by his understanding (בתבונתו) stretches out the heavens” (Jer 10:12 = 51:15); “How many are your works, YHWH! All of them you have made by wisdom (בהכמה); the earth is full of your creations” (Ps 104:24).

⁶⁸ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 20.

sages take with regard to Wisdom. The root occurs four times in 4:5-7, each time in the imperative form.⁶⁹ In 4:5, the father recounts the lesson that his father in turn taught him:

קנה חכמה קנה בינה

Acquire wisdom! Acquire insight! (4:5a)

In 4:7, the grandfather reasserts his instruction:

ראשית חכמה קנה חכמה
ובכל-קנייך קנה בינה

The beginning of wisdom: acquire wisdom!
And among all your acquisitions, acquire discernment!

Both verses depict wisdom as something to be acquired by the young apprentice in the process of becoming wise, and both employ the root קנ"ה ("acquire") to describe the action the apprentice is to take with regard to Wisdom. Particularly in 4:7, this acquisition of Wisdom serves as the beginning point (ראשית) of the process of becoming wise. That is, the command to acquire Wisdom (קנה חכמה) describes the "beginning of Wisdom" (ראשית חכמה) for the young apprentice.

The root קנ"ה is likewise used in Prov 8:22 to describe YHWH's action toward Wisdom at the beginning of his own path:

יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו

YHWH created me, the beginning of his path. (8:22a)

The precise meaning of the verb קנני in this verse remains greatly disputed, though most modern commentators understand it to have the sense of "create" or "beget" rather than "acquire," as it has in 4:5, 7.⁷⁰ Regardless, the use of קנ"ה in reference to Wisdom and

⁶⁹ The root occurs once more with regard to the wise, in 1:5: ונבון תחבלות יקנה ("and let the discerning person acquire guidance").

⁷⁰ The debate over the meaning of קנני (*qānānī*) is an ancient one. LXX translates with κτίζω meaning "to create," reflected also in S and T. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian, in contrast, translate with καταλαμβάνω, meaning "to acquire" or "to possess." The Hebrew root קנ"ה most often has the latter meaning, "to acquire;" whether it also means "to create" is a debated issue. William H. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" *JBL* 80 (1961): 133–42, and Bruce Vawter, "Prov 8:22: Wisdom and Creation," *JBL* 99 (1980): 205–16, argue that קנ"ה *always* means "to acquire," thus concluding that Wisdom is an entity already in existence when YHWH acquires her. Several HB texts, however, seem to require that קנ"ה have the sense "to create" (Gen 4:1; 14:19, 22; Deut 32:6; Ps 139:13 [Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 280]), suggesting that "he created me" is defensible in the present case as well. This latter

“the beginning” (ראשית) suggests an important relationship between YHWH’s action and that commanded of the young sage. Fox makes particular note of this connection between YHWH and the sages established by the root קנה, arguing that קנה “is chosen to designate divine acquisition of wisdom to show that this is the prototype of human acquisition of wisdom, even though they gain wisdom in quite different ways.”⁷¹ The Wisdom that can be acquired by the young apprentice as the beginning of his own path is precisely the same Wisdom that is acquired by YHWH at the beginning of *his* path.

Wisdom as Heavenly Archetype. What is clear from the foregoing discussion is that in Proverbs 1-9 Wisdom in some way forms a bridge between the sages and the heavenly, transcendent realm of YHWH. The same Wisdom used by YHWH in the creation of the cosmos (3:19-20) can be learned and employed by the sages in the living of their own lives. The same Wisdom that is present before YHWH also enters into the earthly realm and interacts with humankind (8:30-31). The same Wisdom that transcends historical time enters into the temporal reality of the sages and the concrete realities of their daily lives. The same Wisdom that exists outside of space, being in the presence of YHWH prior to the creation of the cosmos (8:22-23), also enters into the earthly realm, taking her stand “on the top of the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads” (8:2) and crying out “beside the gates at the entrance to the city, at the entryways” (8:3).

Scholars have offered many and varied answers to the question of the nature of Wisdom as depicted in Proverbs 1-9.⁷² Particularly useful for current purposes is the view

interpretation is followed by most modern commentators (e.g. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 279–80; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 91 [“begot”]; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 48 [“begot”]; Plöger, *Sprüche*, 85 [“hat hervorgebracht”]). Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 219–20, however, renders “got,” noting that “[h]ad the writer been aware of the later theological problems caused by this ambiguity, he would doubtless have expressed himself more precisely.”

⁷¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 280.

⁷² For discussions of the major views, see R. Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (History of Biblical Interpretation 1; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 71–78, and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 353–54. Fox identifies four main positions: (1) the equation of Wisdom with Torah, commonplace in

of Michael Fox, who argues that Wisdom functions as a “universal.”⁷³ Fox writes:

Lady Wisdom symbolizes the perfect and transcendent universal of which the infinite instances of human wisdom are imperfect images or realizations....[The wisdom-universal] dwells in special proximity to God --“before him,” present to his mind--while maintaining a distinct and separate existence. As a universal, it exists simultaneously in the supernal realm (universal, extra-temporal, extra-mundane) and the human world (time-bound, worldly, belonging to particular peoples, realized in specific words)...God’s wisdom and man’s wisdom, though incomparable in magnitude, are in essence the same.⁷⁴

We may press Fox’s conception of Wisdom as a “universal” somewhat further by considering its similarity to the conception of the heavenly “archetype” as employed by Mircea Eliade.⁷⁵ Indeed, Fox himself previously described Wisdom as an “archetype,” though he has abandoned the term due to its Jungian connotations.⁷⁶ In Eliade’s

the rabbinic midrashim; (2) Wisdom as a hypostasis of God’s wisdom (Wilhelm Schencke, *Die Chokma [Sophia] in der Jüdischen Hypostasenspekulation* [Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1913], 15–25; Gerhard Pfeifer, *Ursprung und Wesen der Hypostasenvorstellungen im Judentum* [AzTh 1/31; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1967], 25–27; Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* [Lund: H. Ohlsson, 1947]); (3) Wisdom as the primeval order (Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* [trans. J. D. Martin; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1972], 144–76); (4) Wisdom as a goddess (most notably Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* [New York: Pilgrim, 1986] and, more recently, Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007]: “Wisdom as a teacher is both the queen of heaven . . . and the divine offspring who mediates between Yahweh and the world of human habitation” [56]).

The question of the *background* of the figure of Woman Wisdom is a separate issue with a complex history of its own. For helpful summaries of the major positions, see Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs*, 71–78; Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 333–341; and Yoder, *Woman of Substance*.

⁷³ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 356, quoting A. D. Wesley in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 8:196.

⁷⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 356.

⁷⁵ While much of Eliade’s work has subsequently been surpassed, his description of archetypes is nonetheless a useful lens through which to consider the role of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9. For a critique of Eliade that yet attempts to retain the value of his ideas for contemporary thought, see Jonathan Z. Smith’s introduction to Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (introd. J. Z. Smith; Bollingen Series 46; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9–21.

⁷⁶ Michael V. Fox, “What the Book of Proverbs is About,” in *Congress Volume Cambridge 1995* (VTSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 53–67, employs the term “archetype” to explain Wisdom’s role. In his commentary, however he has abandoned the term in favor of “universal,” noting with respect to “archetype” that it “would fit well except that it now has indelible Jungian connotations” (Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 356, n. 230). In the preface to the 1959 edition, Eliade, like Fox, distinguishes his usage of the term “archetype” from that of Jung: “In using the term ‘archetype,’ I neglected to specify that I was not referring to the archetypes described by Professor C. G. Jung....But in my book I nowhere touch upon the

conception, the mundane sphere of human existence in many ancient cosmologies consists precisely in the imitation and repetition of “celestial archetypes,” which were “revealed *ab origine* by gods or heroes.”⁷⁷ Understood as an “archetype” in this Eliadean sense, Wisdom invites her adherents to participate in the replication of a timeless truth, initiated by YHWH himself at the beginning of time. In doing so, the sages acquire for themselves a connection that reaches beyond death, securing for themselves a powerful image of symbolic immortality in the religious mode.

Worldview Enhancement as a Response to Worldview Threat

This analysis shows that Proverbs 1-9 represents a dramatically elevated claim for the capacity of Wisdom to provide symbolic immortality relative to Proverbs 10-29. The exaggerated claims that the tradition makes for itself may be evidence of a worldview under threat from competing worldviews in its cultural milieu. Research in Terror Management Theory suggests that threats to the cultural worldview may result in an increased awareness of death anxiety, which may in turn evoke the defensive strategy of exaggerating the claims of the original worldview.

As I discussed in the introduction, TMT research has demonstrated that the presence of alternative worldviews that challenge the primary cultural worldview may raise death anxiety closer to conscious thought for adherents of the primary worldview. Research suggests that this is true even when the challenge from alternative worldviews in no way includes an increase in the threat of actual death. According to the theory, exposure to alternative worldviews may threaten one’s confidence in one’s own cultural worldview. Since the worldview serves as a buffer against death anxiety, such a loss of

problems of depth psychology nor do I use the concept of the collective unconscious. As I have said, I used the term ‘archetype’ just as Eugenio d’Ors does, as a synonym for ‘exemplary model’ or ‘paradigm,’ that is, in the last analysis, in the Augustinian sense” (Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, xxix).

⁷⁷ Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 32.

confidence may raise death anxiety closer to consciousness. The experiment that has tested this hypothesis most directly is Schimel et al., which I described in the introduction.⁷⁸ In brief, Canadian participants were asked to read an article challenging Canadian values and then given a word-fragment completion test including words that could be answered with either death-related words (“COFFIN”) or words not related to death (“COFFEE”). The study showed that the number of death-related completions was significantly higher for those Canadians who had read the anti-Canadian essay than those who had read an anti-Australian essay. This suggests that confidence in the worldview serves a buffering function against death anxiety, and that weakening the worldview brings death anxiety to the surface.

Researchers have demonstrated that bringing awareness of death closer to conscious thought tends to cause adherents of a particular worldview to exaggerate their claims about the continuity provided by a particular worldview.⁷⁹ For instance, in one study, researchers administered a measure of perceived collective continuity to people in mortality salience (MS) and control conditions.⁸⁰ Participants in the MS condition demonstrated a heightened sense of the group’s *cultural* continuity (the extent to which group beliefs, values, customs, etc., are believed to have been transmitted from generation to generation) as well as its *historical* continuity (the degree to which the group itself has persisted in time). The study concludes that

[I]n order to defend themselves from the psychological salience of their own mortality, people enhance the perceived continuity through time of the ingroup,

⁷⁸ Jeff Schimel et al., “Is Death Really the Worm at the Core? Converging Evidence That Worldview Threat Increases Death-Thought Accessibility,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007): 789–803.

⁷⁹ Fabio Sani, Marina Herrera, and Bowe Mhairi, “Perceived Collective Continuity and Ingroup Identification as Defence Against Death Awareness,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45 (2009): 242–45.

⁸⁰ In these studies, mortality salience was induced by asking participants to write about death or to contemplate death. However, the same results would apply to mortality salience induced by the weakening of the worldview through an encounter with alternative modes of thought, as described above.

which in turn increases their group identification. This is because the ability to transcend individual existence makes our identification with a group, and its related worldviews, particularly suitable as a defense against the thought of our finite individual existence.⁸¹

The exaggeration of the continuity of the Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 relative to Proverbs 10-29 may thus suggest a defensive maneuver that protects its adherents against a heightened sense of death anxiety in the culture brought about by the encounter with alternative worldviews that threaten the efficacy of the cultural worldview of traditional wisdom.

Evidence of Competing Worldviews in Proverbs 1-9

In fact, Proverbs 1-9 is replete with evidence of alternative cultural worldviews that compete with the Wisdom tradition for the allegiance of the younger generation. From the father's opening instruction in 1:10-19 to the closing reflection on Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly in 9:1-18, the transfer of instruction from "father" to "son" is constantly under threat from a series of figures who attempt to entice the son with discourses of their own. The seminal study of these figures is that of Jean-Noël Aletti, who observes that the dilemma that faces the uninstructed "son" in Proverbs 1-9 is that he is addressed by multiple voices, each beckoning him to join their cause, each using similar language and offering similar rewards to those offered by Wisdom.⁸²

Aletti notes that the "father" of Proverbs 1-9 repeatedly identifies the primary threats facing his young "son" as coming in the form of "speech" or "instruction" placed in the mouths of shady characters. In 1:10, the "father" warns the son that the "sinners" (חטאים) will "deceive you" (פתוך) and characterizes the man of Prov 2:12 as "speaking perversities" (מדבר תהפכות). He describes the "strange woman" (זרה) of 5:3 as having "lips that drip honey" (נפת תטפנה שפתי זרה) and "a palate slicker than oil" (חלק משמן חכה).

⁸¹ Sani, Herrera, and Mhairi, "Perceived Collective Continuity," 244.

⁸² Jean-Noël Aletti, "Seduction et Parole en Proverbes I-IX," *VT* 28 (1977): 129-44.

Likewise, the “foreign woman” (נכרייה) “makes her words slick” (אמרייה החליקה) (2:16; 7:5), and, the “wicked woman” (אשת רע) is said to have a “slick tongue” (חלקת לשון) (6:24). In 7:21, the father attributes the power of the adulteress to “her tender instruction” (רך לקחה)⁸³ and “her smooth speech” (חלק שפתייה) [lit. “the slickness of her lips”]). Indeed, the “strange woman” of Proverbs 7 lures her unsuspecting victim into her home with her words rather than with her beauty or with the luxuries of her lifestyle:⁸⁴

הטתו ברב לקחה בחלק שפתייה תדיחנו
 She turned him aside by the abundance of her instruction,
 By the smoothness of her lips she diverted him. (7:21)

The young victim’s downfall lies in allowing the woman to speak to him, which she does “abundantly” (ברב) and “smoothly” (בחלק). Her speech is characterized as “instruction” (לקחה), a term used elsewhere for the teaching of the father (4:2) and the learning of the wise (1:5; 9:9), suggesting that the adulteress offers an alternative set of values that lures the young man away from the cultural worldview of his own tradition.

On closer examination, one recognizes that the speech of the oppositional figures is characterized as “smooth,” “slick,” and “deceptive” precisely because, in its use of vocabulary and imagery, it appears almost indistinguishable from the speech of the father and of Wisdom herself.⁸⁵ For instance, to the uninstructed the invitations of Woman Wisdom and the oppositional figures sound much the same. As Woman Wisdom beckons the simple to her house saying “Come!” (לכו; 9:5), so too the sinners of 1:10-19 and the adulterous woman of chapter 7 invite the son to “Come!” (לכה; 1:11; 7:18). Just as Woman Wisdom calls out: “You that are simple, turn in here!” (מי־פתי יסר הנה; 9:4), so too Woman Folly extends the same invitation: “You who are simple, turn in here! (מי־פתי; 9:16). While Woman Wisdom is described as calling out “in the street” (בחוץ)

⁸³ Reading רך for MT רב; see note above.

⁸⁴ Aletti, “Seduction et Parole,” 129: “la séduction s’opère par le dire.”

⁸⁵ Aletti, “Seduction et Parole,” 132–35.

and “in the squares” (ברהבות; 1:20), the adulteress is also found “in the street” (בחויץ) and “in the squares” (ברהבות; 7:12). While Wisdom extends the invitation to her banquet “from the high places of the town” (מרמי קרת; 9:3), so too Woman Folly’s invitation comes “from the high places of the town” (מרמי קרת; 9:14). In each of these cases, the use of semantic equivalents conveys the sense that, to the uninstructed, the invitations of Wisdom and the oppositional discourses appear virtually indistinguishable.⁸⁶

To make matters more difficult for the uninstructed, the *rewards* offered by both wisdom and the oppositional figures are again described in semantically similar terms.⁸⁷ For instance, Wisdom promises to “fill the treasuries” of those who love her (ואצרתיהם ואמלא; 8:21), while the “sinners” plan to “fill our houses with booty” (ונמלא בתינו שלל; 1:13). Wisdom is presented as the object of “embrace” (תחבקנה; 4:8), while the temptation presented by the “foreign woman” is also cast in terms of embrace: “Why...should you embrace the bosom of a foreign woman?” (ולמה... תחבק חק נכריה; 5:20). While the father instructs the son to rejoice in his wife, so that “her breasts may fill you at all times” (דדיה ירוך בכל־עַת; 5:19), the words of the adulteress seem to mirror his blessing: “Let us take our fill of lovemaking until morning” (נרוה דדים עד־הבקר; 7:18).⁸⁸ The father’s instruction to “drink water from your own cistern,” (שתה־מים מבורך; 5:15) seems to be echoed in Woman Folly’s proclamation that “stolen water is sweet” (מים־גנובים ימתוקו; 9:17). Both Wisdom (9:1-7) and Folly (9:13-18) invited passersby to a banquet where “bread” is on the menu (להם; 9:5, 17). Finally, while the father describes the teaching that he offers to

⁸⁶ The exception to the characterization as “precise semantic equivalents” is the invitation of Wisdom in 9:5, which employs the plural impv. לכו rather than the singular imperative לכה that appears in 1:11 and 7:18. However, this difference arises simply from the difference in narrative context, as Woman Wisdom is addressing passersby in general rather than a specific individual. All three employ G impv. forms of the root הלך.

⁸⁷ The following paragraph generally follows Aletti, “Seduction et Parole,” 132–33.

⁸⁸ The repetition of the root דדי and the wordplay between “breasts” (דדים; *daddîm*) and “lovemaking” (דדים; *dōdîm*) leads Aletti to conclude that 7:18 is “an obvious allusion to 5:19” (“allusion évidente à v. 19”); Aletti, “Seduction et Parole,” 133.

his sons as “instruction” (תּוֹרָה; 4:2, cf. 1:5), he uses the same word in describing the seductive speech of the adulteress (7:21).

In this manner, Proverbs 1-9 presents the world as consisting of competing “instructions” that confront the “son” with multiple sets of cultural values by which to orient his life. As Carol Newsom argues in her study of discourse in Proverbs 1-9, “the world is presented as a place of competing and conflicting discourses: the words of the father, the words of the crooked man, the words of the strange woman. One is hailed from many directions, offered subject positions in discourses that construe the world very differently.”⁸⁹ In the parlance of Terror Management Theory, Proverbs 1-9 depicts the world as a competition among cultural worldviews, each of which vies for the allegiance of the younger generation, thereby threatening the efficacy of the worldviews with which it competes.

The Dynamics of Cultural Worldview Defense

As we have seen, Terror Management Theory proposes that cultural worldviews consist of “humanly constructed beliefs about the nature of reality that are shared by individuals in a group that function to mitigate the horror and blunt dread caused by knowledge of the reality of the human condition, that we all die.”⁹⁰ Two implications of this proposal prove particularly important for the current analysis: (1) because cultural worldviews are humanly constructed belief systems about the nature of reality, they are susceptible to breaking down when challenged by alternative belief systems, thereby increasing accessibility of death-related thoughts for adherents of the worldview; (2) because cultural worldviews protect against unmediated awareness of human mortality, people will go to great lengths to defend their worldviews against outside threats.

⁸⁹ Newsom, “Woman,” 146.

⁹⁰ Tom Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 16.

The study of Schimel et al. described above suggests that mere presence of persons who hold to an alternative cultural worldview may threaten the efficacy of the traditional worldview, evoking death anxiety in its adherents. As Schimel et al. conclude their study:

[E]very now and again, cherished values and beliefs are brought into question, causing absolute faith in people's views of reality to wane. When this happens, people's fundamental beliefs need to be fortified and safeguarded or else goal-directed action may, over time, bog down with chronic thoughts and concerns about human mortality. In support of this theoretical view, the current research has shown that when people's protective beliefs are damaged, thoughts about death do indeed creep closer to the surface. To put it in Jamesian terms, when absolute faith in the cultural conception of reality is weakened, the worm at the core of cultural prescriptions for happiness is revealed.⁹¹

Indeed, Robert Jay Lifton argues that the eventual collapse of every cultural worldview is finally inevitable. Lifton suggests that history functions as a kind of "symbolizing treadmill," a continuous process of symbolization, desymbolization, and resymbolization of cultural worldviews around the issues of death and the continuity of life.⁹² A particular cosmology remains viable, Lifton argues, only so long as it is able to account adequately for the lived experience of the people who to adhere to it. As historical conditions change, a worldview constructed in earlier circumstances may become more and more unable to account for lived reality. When this happens, that cosmology will begin to change shape and eventually, if the historical dislocation is significant enough, to break down completely.⁹³

In the next chapter on the book of Qohelet, I will consider what happens when the death anxiety that rises to the surface in such situations cannot be effectively managed. For now, however, I am concerned with the processes by which people defend their

⁹¹ Schimel et al., "The Worm at the Core," 802.

⁹² Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 285.

⁹³ Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 14.

cultural worldviews against threats to the worldview. Since Proverbs 1-9 gives evidence of the presence of worldview violators in its cultural milieu, we may expect to see tactics of worldview defense evident in the text. I have already noted above the tendency of threatened worldviews to exaggerate their claims to offer symbolic immortality, and I have demonstrated how that pattern is visible in Proverbs 1-9. Two other modes of worldview defense are also relevant to our discussion: derogation and the association of the outsider with death.

Derogation

One of the fundamental claims of Terror Management Theory concerns the extent to which mortality salience evokes derogation of cultural worldview violators. In early TMT experiments, judges exposed to unconscious death stimuli more harshly evaluated prostitutes than did judges who were not primed with death thoughts, suggesting that derogation of worldview violators protects people against thoughts of death by reinforcing their own cultural values. Further, Christians in a state of mortality salience judged Jewish targets more severely, indicating that worldview defense may produce derogation not only of worldview violators but more generally of anyone who adheres to a different set of cultural values, whether or not they actively violate the subject's worldview.⁹⁴ Researchers also demonstrated that German participants in mortality salience (MS) conditions tended to sit closer to German nationals and further from Turkish nationals in a waiting room.⁹⁵ The results suggest that when thoughts of death are closer to consciousness, people evaluate adherents of their own worldview more

⁹⁴ Jeff Greenberg et al., "Evidence for Terror Management Theory II: The Effects of Mortality Salience on Reactions to Those Who Threaten or Bolster the Cultural Worldview," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 308–18.

⁹⁵ Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11*, 73–74; the experiment itself is R. Ochsman and M. Mathy, *Depreciating of and Distancing from Foreigners: Effects of Mortality Salience*. Unpublished manuscript, Universitat Mainz, Mainz, Germany.

positively and adherents of other worldviews more negatively.

These studies also reveal the extent to which people in mortality salient conditions view others not merely as individuals but also as symbolic representations of the cultural worldview to which they are perceived as belonging. In one study, American students in mortality salient conditions displayed increased levels of stereotyping German targets than did participants in the control group.⁹⁶ Mortality salience causes people to perceive members of other cultural groups in simplified, symbolic terms that support the individual's own worldview.⁹⁷

Association of Worldview Violators with Death

A second observation of TMT about cultural worldview defense that is relevant to the current discussion is the extent to which the death (real or imagined) of cultural worldview violators reduces anxiety about death and reinforces the traditional worldview. In one study, Christian subjects were asked to read a worldview-threatening article claiming that "Muslims are gaining dominance in Nazareth."⁹⁸ The study presented this dominance in non-aggressive terms, emphasizing that Muslims had become a majority on the city council and had built a mosque across the street from the Church of the Annunciation, which is considered holy by many Christians.⁹⁹ Some of the participants who read this article were also shown an additional paragraph explaining that a number of Muslims had died in a plane crash on their way to take part in a celebration

⁹⁶ Jeff Schimel et al., "Stereotypes and Terror Management: Evidence That Mortality Salience Enhances Stereotypic Thinking and Preferences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77 (1999): 907–910.

⁹⁷ Schimel et al., "Stereotypes," 910.

⁹⁸ Joseph Hayes et al., "Fighting Death with Death: The Buffering Effects of Learning That Worldview Violators Have Died," *Psychological Science* 19 (2008): 501–7.

⁹⁹ Hayes et al., "Death with Death," 501–7.

in Nazareth.¹⁰⁰ After reading the articles, participants were assigned a word-fragment completion task in which fragments could be completed with either death-related or non-death-related words as a measure of the accessibility of death-related thoughts.¹⁰¹

Results showed that the Christians subjects who read only the article about Muslim dominance in Nazareth evinced a significantly higher level of death-thought accessibility (DTA) compared to a control group who had read a nonthreatening article about the aurora borealis. However, Christian subjects who had read both the article about Muslim dominance in Nazareth *and* the paragraph announcing the deaths of Muslims on the way to the celebration demonstrated no increase in death anxiety relative to the control group.¹⁰² These results suggest that associating cultural worldview violators with death has a buffering effect against death anxiety even when the death of the worldview violators is independent of any action on the part of the adherents of the primary worldview themselves. In other words, one need not actually kill adherents of an opposing worldview in order to receive the anxiety buffering effects that accrue to knowing that they have died.

Robert J. Lifton frames this desire for the death of worldview-threatening others in terms of symbolic immortality, arguing that every worldview tends to seek the primacy of its own construal of reality by making “an exclusive and incontestable claim to the symbolization of immortality.”¹⁰³ That is, a threatened worldview may seek to show that “there is just one valid mode of being--just one authentic avenue of immortality.”¹⁰⁴ Each worldview threatened by the existence of others typically claims for itself the exclusive

¹⁰⁰ Hayes et al., “Death with Death,” 503.

¹⁰¹ Cf. the description of Schimel et al., “The Worm at the Core,” 789–803, above.

¹⁰² Hayes et al., “Death with Death,” 504.

¹⁰³ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 298.

¹⁰⁴ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 298.

power to dispense symbolic immortality, depicting the adherents of all other cultural worldviews as deserving or receiving death. Proverbs 1-9 is no exception.

Worldview Defense in Proverbs 1-9

This analysis of worldview defense in the psychological literature now positions us to better understand the dynamics of worldview defense in Proverbs 1-9. The tactics employed by the “father” are clearly visible in Proverbs 2, which in turn can be seen as a kind of epitome of the themes of Proverbs 1-9 as a whole.¹⁰⁵ The chapter divides into four segments corresponding to the four points of the father’s argument: *if* the son will accept and internalize the wisdom discourse as taught by the father (vv. 1-11) *then* he will be protected from the “man who speaks perversities” (vv. 12-15); and from the “foreign woman” with her “slick words” (vv. 16-19) *so that* he can remain on the paths of the righteous, and through them retain his connection with the land (vv. 20-22).¹⁰⁶ The advantage of internalizing the wisdom discourse, according to the “father’s” speech is that it ensures the vitality of the “son’s” existence and protects him from the discourses of death. If he accepts instruction, YHWH will become his “shield” (מגן), protecting him and “keeping the way of his faithful one” (וּדְרַךְ חֲסִידוֹ יִשְׁמֵר; 2:8).¹⁰⁷ Accepting Wisdom gives him the ability to discern “every good path” (כָּל־מַעַלְלֵי־טוֹב; 2:9). “Prudence” (מְזוּמָה) will watch over him, and “discernment” (תְּבוּנָה) will guard him.

¹⁰⁵ The significance of Prov 2 for Proverbs 1-9 as a whole has been recognized by many scholars. Meinhold, for one, considers the chapter to be a *Lehrprogramm* for Proverbs 1-9 as a whole, anticipating the themes of the various *Lehrreden* in chs. 3-7 (Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche* [2 vols; ZBK 16; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991], 1:43, 62). Weeks somewhat more cautiously suggests that “it does seem likely that chapter 2 is intended to condense or foreshadow major interests or motifs. It . . . probably comes as close as anything to epitomizing Proverbs 1-9 as a whole” (*Instruction and Imagery*, 62).

¹⁰⁶ This summary of Prov 2 generally follows Newsom, “Woman,” 146. Newsom, however, suggests only three divisions (vv. 1-11, 12-15, 16-20). However, למען (“therefore”) in 2:20 suggests that the verse should be understood as the beginning of a new unit (vv. 20-22) rather than as the conclusion of the previous one (vv. 16-20), as in Newsom’s division.

¹⁰⁷ Preserving K, חֲסִידוֹ (“faithful one”), rather than Q, חֲסִידֵי (“faithful ones”).

In contrast, the “father” depicts the paths of the oppositional discourses as being death equivalent and ultimately as leading to death itself. In 2:12-15, the path of the “man” is described as the “path of evil” (עַדְרַךְ רָע; 2:12). He has left the “straight paths” (אַרְחוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל), preferring instead to walk upon the “ways of darkness” (בְּדַרְכֵי-חֹשֶׁךְ; 2:13). His paths are said to be “crooked” (עִקְשִׁים) and “devious” (נִלְוִזִים)--not the smooth, straight, well-lit paths of vital existence, but rather the treacherous, winding, dark paths of death equivalence. The connection between the oppositional discourses and death is made even more explicit in the case of the “strange woman” (2:16-19):

כִּי שָׁחָה אֶל-מֹת בֵּיתָהּ וְאֶל-רִפְאִים מֵעַגְלֵתֶיהָ
כִּלְבֵּאִיהָ לֹא יִשׁוּבוֹן וְלֹא-יִשְׁגּוּ אַרְחוֹת חַיִּים

For her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the Rephaim.
All those who go to her do not return;
they do not regain the paths of life (2:18-19)

The message is clear: only the wisdom discourse has the power “to save you from the path of evil” (לְהַצִּילְךָ מִדֶּרֶךְ רָע; 2:12), “to save you from the strange woman” (לְהַצִּילְךָ מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה; 2:16), whose path goes down to death. “Therefore,” the father concludes in 2:20, “walk in the paths of the good and observe the paths of the righteous” (לִמְעַן תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי הַטּוֹבִים וְאַרְחוֹת צְדִיקִים תִּשְׁמַר).

The general outlines of the conflict among cultural worldviews becomes clear from this analysis: the “father” characterizes his own worldview as the purveyor of “life” and all other worldviews as being characterized by “death.” As expected, Proverbs 1-9 presents each of these alternative worldviews in derogatory terms, claiming the superiority of its own values to those of its competitors. Further, Proverbs seeks to establish itself as the sole purveyor of symbolic immortality by presenting all other worldviews as leading inexorably to death. A further examination of the portrayal of these oppositional figures in Proverbs 1-9 may help us to further explicate the tactics of worldview defense employed by Proverbs 1-9, as well as to identify the nature of the

threats to the Wisdom worldview posed by these figures representative of alternative values.

The “Sinners”

The first oppositional figures presented in the text are a band of “sinners” (חטאים) whom the “father” depicts as enticing the “son” to join their group.:

לכה אתנו נארבה לדם נצפנה לנקי חנם
נבלעם כשאול חיים ותמימים כיורדי בור
כל־הון יקר נמצא נמלא בתינו שלל
גורלך תפיל בתוכנו כיס אחר יהיה לכלנו

“Come with us! Let us lie in wait for blood!
Let us set an ambush for the innocent without cause!
Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,
And whole, like the ones going down to the pit!
We will find every precious treasure.
We will fill out houses with booty.
Throw in your lot with us!
Let there be one purse for all of us! (1:11-14)

Notably, this imagined invitation from the band of “sinners” follows immediately upon the “father’s” own enticement of the “son” to join the community of instruction:

שמע בני מוסר אביך ואל־תטש תורת אמך
כי לוית חן הם לראשך וענקים לגרגרתיך

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction
And do not disregard your mother’s teaching
For they are a garland for your head
and pendants for your neck (1:8-9)

From the outset, Proverbs 1-9 presents a competition of invitations for the “son” to follow in the ways of two divergent cultural worldviews: the worldview of Wisdom, represented by the “father” and “mother” and some other value system, here depicted as being characterized by “sinners” who “ambush the innocent without cause.”

The precise historical referent of these “sinners” has been a matter of some dispute. Fox, for one, takes the text’s description quite literally, suggesting that the passage is a straightforward warning against joining a street gang: “Gangs and robbery were surely a widespread, perhaps universal, phenomenon, and a warning against

violence would be appropriate in any era.”¹⁰⁸ Others, however, have suggested that the reference may have a broader significance. “It is scarcely credible that the advice should be taken at face value as career counseling,” argues Newsom. “It is much likely that this depiction of brigands is a metaphor for something else.”¹⁰⁹ That the text has something more in mind than a group of highway robbers seems to be indicated in 1:19a: “Such are the ways of everyone who greedily makes a profit” (כן ארהות כל-בצע בצע). It is not the case that the “father” the “son” being confronted by a literal street gang, but rather that he imagines the son being enticed by those “who greedily make a profit,” whom the “father” in turn likens to members of a street gang.

It should be emphasized that the characterization of these figures as “sinners” who “lie in wait for blood” is placed in the mouth of the “father” and therefore can hardly be accepted as an objective description of the historical referents themselves. Such an interpretation neglects the symbolic derogation that typically accrues to worldview defense, as described above. Indeed, one need not assume that the historical referents of these figures engaged in *illicit* economic practices. Rather, the most we can say is that these figures were viewed as worldview violators (“sinners”) from the perspective of the father’s worldview. That is, they engaged in economic practices that were unacceptable from the perspective of traditional Israelite Wisdom.¹¹⁰

The invective of 1:15-19 is thus aimed not at literal street gangs but rather at those who engage in economic practices of which the text disapproves. Notably, the

¹⁰⁸ Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Newsom, “Woman,” 145.

¹¹⁰ Newsom, “Woman,” 145, argues from the usage of “we” language rather than the “I-you” pairing of the father’s speeches, that “the persuaders are not fathers hierarchically related to the son, but peers.” While this may indeed be the case, it is not a necessary conclusion. More to the point is her identification of the economic basis of the temptation, which “offers young men immediate access to wealth rather than the deferred wealth of inheritance.” See the further discussion of Persian-Period economics in the “Conclusion” section, below.

“father” warns against such alternative worldview both by derogating their adherents and by associating them with death:

בני אל־תֵלֶךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲתֶם מִגַּע רִגְלֵךְ מִנְתִּיבֵתֶם
 כִּי רִגְלֵיהֶם לִרְעָה יִרְוּצוּ וַיִּמְהָרוּ לְשִׁפְך־דָּם
 כִּי־חֲנָם מִזְרָה הַרְשֵׁת בְּעֵינַי כָּל־בַּעַל כֹּנֶף
 וְהֵם לְדָמָם יֵאָרְבוּ יִצְפְּנוּ לְנַפְשֵׁתֶם
 כִּן אֲרַחֲוֹת כָּל־בַּצַּע בַּצַּע אֶת־נַפְשׁ בַּעֲלָיו יִקַּח

My son, do not go on the way with them;
 restrain your foot from their path,
 for their feet rush to evil
 and they hurry to spill blood.¹¹¹
 Surely it is useless for the net to be spread
 in the sight of every bird!
 These lie in wait for their own blood;
 they set an ambush for their own lives.
 Such are the paths of a everyone who greedily makes a profit--
 it takes the life of its owner.(1:15-19)

The “father” effectively dismisses the apparent attractiveness of alternative economic practices by associating them with violence and stupidity. Not only do those who engage in these practices “hurry to spill blood” and “rush to evil,” but they also set a net in the plain sight of the birds they are attempting to capture. Indeed, the way of the “sinners”-- as the way of all who disagree with the father’s cultural values--leads ultimately to death, “taking the life of its owner.”

The speech of Woman Wisdom in 1:20-33 further establishes Wisdom’s “exclusive and incontestable claim to the symbolization of immortality.”¹¹² The poem is constructed chiasmically, focusing on the prediction of calamity for those who do not give heed to the values of Wisdom’s worldview:¹¹³

גַּם־אֲנִי בְּאִידְכֶם אֲשַׁחַק אֲלַעַג בְּבֹא פְחַדְכֶם
 בְּבֹא כְשָׂאוֹה פְחַדְכֶם וְאִידְכֶם כְּסוּפָה יֵאָתֶה בְּבֹא עֲלֵיכֶם צָרָה וְצוּקָה

¹¹¹ Some omit verse 16 as a later addition to MT, drawn from Isa 59:7 (so, e.g., Clifford, *Proverbs*, 37).

¹¹² Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 298.

¹¹³ Phyllis Trible, “Wisdom Builds a Poem: The Architecture of Proverbs 1:20–33,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 509–18.

Surely I will laugh at your disaster.
I will mock when your terror comes--
when your terror comes like a storm,
and your disaster comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and calamity come. (1:26-27)

Here Wisdom herself rejoices in the destruction of those who refuse to heed the values she promotes, laughing and mocking the terrors that befall those who will not listen to her. From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, this is classic worldview defense in which belief in the primary worldview is bolstered by thoughts of the annihilation of outgroup members. Indeed, Wisdom's speech discredits the alternative worldviews as inherently flawed. Those who undergo calamity do so not by happenstance but rather because it is the "fruit of their way" (פרי דרכם; 1:31). All alternatives to the Wisdom worldview lead to calamity and destruction. Finally, Wisdom closes her speech by making the explicit claim that her worldview conveys life while all alternatives are characterized by death:

כי משובת פתים תהרגם ושלוח כסילים תאבדם
ושמע לי ישכ־בטח ושאנן מפחד רעה

For the faithlessness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will exterminate them,
but the one who listens to me will live in security,
and will be at ease from the fear of harm. (1:32-33)

In the view of Proverbs 1:10-33, only following Wisdom secures one's life; all other cultural values lead ultimately to death and extermination.

The "Man Speaking Perversities"

Likewise, the "man speaking perversities" (איש מדבר תהפכות) seems to represent a worldview in competition with the father's own cultural worldview. The figure appears in the extended sentence that constitutes Proverbs 2.¹¹⁴ While the group of "sinners" in 1:10-19 seemed to represent disapproved economic practices, the "man speaking

¹¹⁴ See the discussion of Proverbs 2, above.

perversities” and his cohort do not function so specifically. Rather, as Newsom argues, “His function is definitional. He simply serves to signify whatever stands over against ‘us,’ the group of the father’s discourse.”¹¹⁵ We need not assume that the man literally speaks of things that are perverse; rather, the “father” derogates the claims of the values the man promotes as being “perverse” from within the Wisdom worldview. Through the figure of this man, the “father” is thus able to cast all other cultural worldviews as being death-equivalent, thereby claiming the unique capacity of Wisdom to offer life and protect from death.

The “Strange Woman”

A third oppositional in Proverbs 1-9 is commonly called the “strange woman” by scholars, though she is referred to variously in the Hebrew text as זרה (5:1-23), נכרייה (6:20-35), or both (2:16-19; 7:1-26). The scholarly debate over the historical referent of this figure is complex, but a few major positions can be demarcated.¹¹⁶ (1) A number of scholars have argued that the idea of “foreignness” (נכרייה) refers to participation in a non-Yahwistic cult.¹¹⁷ (2) A similar position claimed by Richard Clifford views the זרה as being derived from the imagery of ancient Near Eastern goddesses.¹¹⁸ (3) Others have viewed the זרה אשה as referring not to a literal foreigner, but rather to one who is “off limits” in the context of marriage. Michael Fox, for instance, views the warnings against

¹¹⁵ Newsom, “Woman,” 148.

¹¹⁶ See the recent review of the literature in Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, *The “Foreignness” of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif* (BZAW 381; New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 3–13.

¹¹⁷ The position is associated with Gustav Boström, *Proverbiastudien: Die Weisheit und das Fremde Weib in Spr. 1–9* (LUÅ 30.3; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1935), who argued that the נכרייה represents a cult prostitute associated with the worship of Ishtar. Cf. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, who associates the woman with Astarte worship.

¹¹⁸ Clifford, *Proverbs*, 48, 70–72, and 84–90.

the “strange woman” as literal cautions against the temptation of adultery.¹¹⁹ (4) Still others understand the *אשה זרה* to be related to the Persian period controversies over marriages with foreign woman (Ezra 9-10; Neh 10:30; 13:23-27).¹²⁰ (5) Another approach argues that the *אשה זרה* represents all of the problematic women in the community of post-exilic Yehud, be they adultresses, foreign wives, or women who function as opponents to Woman Wisdom.¹²¹ (6) More recently, Stuart Weeks and his student Nancy Nam Hoon Tan have argued that the model for the “strange woman” is to be found in the biblical motif of adulterous women as representative of the temptation to apostasy. Weeks and Tan conclude that the “strange woman” stands for any discourse that threatens to turn the “son” away from the instruction of Wisdom.¹²² (7) A related line of interpretation views the “strange woman” as representative of the discourses of the “other.” Carol Newsom, for instance, argues that “the strange woman figures the irreducible difference that prevents any discourse from establishing itself unproblematically. That is to say, she is not simply the speech of actual women, but she is the symbolic figure of a variety of marginal discourses.”¹²³

The interpretations of Weeks, Tan, and Newsom are most relevant for present purposes. Whether the “strange woman” specifically represents the allure of religious

¹¹⁹ See the extended discussion in Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 252–62, as well as Toy, *The Book of Proverbs*, 45–46.

¹²⁰ Harold C. Washington, “The Strange Woman (*אשה זרה/נכרייה*) of Proverbs 1–9 and Post-Exilic Judaeon Society,” in *Second Temple Studies, vol. 2: Temple Community in the Persian Period* (ed. T. C. Eskenazi and K. H. Richards; JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 217–42, and Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Proverbs 1–9,” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 457–73. See also Maier, ‘*Fremde Frau*’.

¹²¹ Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSup 320; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Maier, ‘*Fremde Frau*’.

¹²² Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery*, 128–47. For Weeks, “Wisdom” refers to some form of the Torah itself.

¹²³ Newsom, “Woman,” 149.

apostasy, the temptation toward intermarriage, or the literal seduction of illicit sexual encounters, the salient point is that she represents some alternative set of cultural values that stand in opposition to the cultural worldview of Wisdom. Given the insights of TMT research, we expect to see both generalization and symbolic derogation in the depictions of alternative worldviews, making it difficult to assess what specific historical referent the “strange woman” represents, if any specific referent at all. What *is* clear, however, is that she represents an alternative value system of considerable attractiveness for the young men of Proverbs 1-9, as she has apparently “seduced” not merely a man or two but rather “multitudes” (רבים) and “vast numbers” (עצומים; 7:26).¹²⁴

Here again, the rhetoric of the “father” unequivocally associates the perspectives of the alternative worldview with death. As we have seen, in 2:16-19, the אשה זרה and נכריה are depicted as having a “house that sinks down to death” (שחה אל-מות ביתה) and “paths that lead to the Rephaim” (אל-רפאים מעגלתיהם). The ones who follow her “do not return” (לא ישובון) and “never regain the paths of life” (לא-ישיגו ארחות חיים). Likewise, the path of the “strange [woman]” (זרה) in 5:3-6 is depicted in terms suggesting death equivalence and ultimately as leading death itself. She “does not observe the path of life” (ארה חיים פן-תפלים) and “her paths meander” (נעו מעגלתיה) (5:6). Finally, “her feet go down to death” (רגליה ירדות מות) and “her steps take hold of Sheol” (שאול צעדיה יתמכו). In similar fashion, the woman of Prov 7 is depicted as a veritable highway to Sheol:

כי-רבים חללים הפילה ועצמים כליה-רגיה
דרכי שאול ביתה ירדות אל-הדררי-מות

For many are the slain she has caused to fall,
And those killed by her a vast multitude
Her house is the paths of Sheol
Going down to the inner chambers of death. (Pro 7:26-27)

From the perspective of Terror Management Theory these associations between the “strange woman” and death serve two main purposes. First, they stake a claim to Wisdom

¹²⁴ This latter term is used in Gen 18:18 to describe the descendants of Abraham, “a nation great and populous” (גוי גדול ועצום), connoting countless persons.

being the sole proprietor of symbolic immortality--Wisdom leads to life, but the זרה to Sheol. Second, they provide an anxiety buffering function for the adherents of the Wisdom worldview, who may gain confidence in their own worldview by relishing the annihilation of those who oppose their cultural values.

The choice between life and death is summed up in the portrayal of Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly in Proverbs 9. In the first movement of the passage (9:1-12), Woman Wisdom is depicted as offering life to her adherents:

Abandon simplemindedness and live! (9:6)

עזבו פתאים וחיו

In contrast, in the final verse of the section (Prov 9:18), heeding the call of Woman Folly (אשת כסילות) leads to death:

But they do not know that the Rephaim are there;
the one who heed her call are in the depths of Sheol. (9:18)

ולא יידע כִּי־רפאים שם בעמקי שאול קראיה

With these stark words, Proverbs 1-9 the rhetorical derogation and imagined annihilation of competing worldviews is complete. The text closes with a clear defense of its own worldview in the terms of symbolic immortality: Wisdom leads to life. All alternatives lead to death.

Conclusions: Proverbs 1-9 as a Worldview under Threat

The foregoing analysis suggests that Proverbs 1-9 reflects a cultural worldview threatened by alternative value systems, which offer their own symbolic constructions of the world to the younger generation. These alternative worldview threaten to undermine the efficacy of Wisdom as a successful worldview and, consequently, to diminish its capacity to serve as an effective buffer against death anxiety. Employing the perspective of Terror Management Theory, I have argued that Proverbs 1-9 engages in worldview defense, which takes three forms in the text. First, Proverbs 1-9 enhances the claims of its own worldview to provide symbolic immortality, relative to the older worldview of

Proverbs 10-29: it offers its adherents a strong sense of symbolic immortality by connecting them to a timeless truth embedded in the fabric of the cosmos and a cosmic archetype employed by YHWH himself. Second, Proverbs 1-9 derogates alternative worldviews, depicting them as bands of “sinners,” men who “speak perversities,” and harlots who seduce young men. Finally, Proverbs 1-9 engages in symbolic annihilation of these alternative worldviews, depicting them as being inherently marked by death-equivalence and leading ultimately to death, destruction, and Sheol. Only Wisdom offers life; all other cultural value systems result in death. In this manner, Proverbs 1-9 forcefully, and seemingly with great success, presents itself as having “an exclusive and incontestable claim to the symbolization of immortality.”¹²⁵

This general depiction of Proverbs 1-9 as a cultural worldview under threat comports well with what we know of the Persian period in Jewish history.¹²⁶ The period of Persian rule brought widespread changes to the traditional structures of Israelite society. Most obviously, the destruction of the native monarchy and the establishment of Yehud as a Persian province deprived the region of its status as an independent entity. While it is true that Judah had long been a vassal state under the Mesopotamian Empires, the persistence of a king on the throne had provided some sense of independence and

¹²⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 298.

¹²⁶ For a thoroughgoing analysis of the Persian Empire, see especially Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002). For many years the standard text on the Persian Empire was A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1959), still a valuable resource. In recent years, the study of the Jews during the Persian Period has flourished. See, for instance, Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian Volume One: The Persian and Greek Periods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 27–145; Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (SBLDS 125; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); James W. Watts, ed., *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SBLSS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Lisbeth S. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Biblical and Judaic Studies 10; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004); Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

autonomy.¹²⁷ More importantly, absorption into the Persian Empire transformed Yehud from a relatively isolated and unimportant region into a major corridor for international trade.¹²⁸ By 515 B.C.E., when Persia incorporated Egypt into its empire, Yehud had become integrated into trade routes that included Persia, Egypt, Greece, and the other kingdoms of the Mediterranean basin. This increased international trade was undoubtedly accompanied by an increased interchange of ideas and exposure to alternative value systems and worldviews. As Jon Berquist notes, these foreign influences “would have been most clearly felt within the wisdom traditions of scribes who needed to learn about other languages and cultures.”¹²⁹ From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, this type of exposure to alternative constructions of reality could be expected to cause instability in the traditional worldview, resulting in the worldview defense tactics of derogation and exaggeration that are apparent in Proverbs 1-9.

Incorporation into the economic system of the Persian Empire also altered traditional patterns for gaining and preserving wealth, calling into question the cultural values promulgated by traditional wisdom. In a new economic system, the cultural values by which traditional wisdom sought to ensure success for its adherents no longer proved reliable, casting doubt on the efficacy of the cultural value system as a whole. This period witnessed the transformation of the economy from a small-scale agrarian system to a commerce-based economy.¹³⁰ The Persian system of property grants disrupted the traditional passage of property from one generation of a family to the next. Instead, the land came under the control of the Persians, with government officials offering land to

¹²⁷ Grabbe, *The Persian and Greek Periods*, 143.

¹²⁸ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 91.

¹²⁹ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 206.

¹³⁰ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 21–23.

their relatives, friends, and favorites with relative arbitrariness.¹³¹ The wealth that had been made possible by family ownership of land in the period of the monarchy thus became increasingly unreliable, with many becoming tenants on the estates of others.¹³²

Further, the system of loans that developed under Persian rule often charged exorbitant interest rates, up to 120 percent in some cases.¹³³ The disruption of society occasioned by the economics of the Persian Period is reflected in the book of Nehemiah:

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive." There were also those who said, "We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine." And there were those who said, "We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others." (Neh 5:1-5, NRSV)

By the middle of the fifth century, the time in which Nehemiah was active, incorporation into the Persian economy appears to have wreaked havoc among the inhabitants of Yehud, particularly among the lower classes. The text reflects high tax burdens, loss of property, exorbitant loan rates, and the sale of children into slavery. As Carol Newsom argues, this new economic reality may underlie the depiction of "the sinners" in Prov 1:10-19.¹³⁴ It is a small wonder that Proverbs 1-9 views the economic practices of the day as something akin to highway robbery.

Beyond economics, the Persian Period also saw deep conflicts over identity and kinship. In particular, conflicts arose between those who had remained in the land following the Babylonian Exile and those who returned to the land during the Persian

¹³¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 25; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, 417–18.

¹³² Grabbe, *The Persian and Greek Periods*, 115–16.

¹³³ *TAD II*, 4.2.

¹³⁴ Newsom, "Woman," 145.

period, with the latter generally considering themselves to be the “true” continuation of the Israel of the monarchy. Issues of identity are particularly apparent in the missions of Nehemiah and Ezra. In the case of Nehemiah, the fortification of Jerusalem is met by resistance from those who had remained in the land (Neh 4:1-23). For Ezra, the primary issue of identity concerned the marrying of foreign wives (Ezra 9-10). Kenneth Hoglund has argued that these disputes over ethnicity reflect “the effort on the part of the Achaemenid empire to create a web of economic and social relationships that would tie the community more completely into the imperial system.”¹³⁵ He postulates that this concern rose particularly in the fifth century as the Persian Empire sought to solidify its hold on Yehud in the wake of the Egyptian revolt. He argues that “the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah were an effort to compel loyalty to the imperial system by tying the community’s self-interest to the goals of the empire.”¹³⁶ There were undoubtedly competing value systems within the society of Yehud, some calling for allegiance to Persia and others resisting, with each claiming to be the legitimate extension of the pre-exilic monarchy. In this environment, the younger generation was undoubtedly hailed from many directions, each attempting to secure its allegiance to their own worldview, as Newsom has argued.¹³⁷ These competing voices may be reflected in the figure of the “strange woman” (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) of Proverbs 1-9, who attempts to seduce the young novice away from adherence to the “proper” cultural value system.

Such tremendous cultural shifts during the Persian period undoubtedly produced strain on the cultural worldview of traditional Wisdom. My analysis suggests that it responded with the characteristic tactics of worldview defense: exaggeration, derogation, and an exclusive claim to being the sole purveyor of “life.” While these defensive

¹³⁵ Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 244.

¹³⁶ Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 244.

¹³⁷ Newsom, “Woman,” 142–60.

maneuvers seem to have had some success in the case of Proverbs 1-9, preventing the complete breakdown of the cultural worldview, the same cannot be said in the case of Qohelet. In that text we will find what Lifton refers to as a “desymbolization” of the worldview, in which it loses its capacity to buffer against death anxiety altogether.

CHAPTER 3
 DESYMBOLIZATION OF SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITIES IN THE BOOK OF
 QOHELET

While Proverbs is said to have “had as its single purpose the securing of life,”¹ the same cannot be said for the book of Qohelet, which has been characterized as existing “in the shadow of death.”² Whereas Proverbs presents a cosmos characterized by meaning, order, and vitality, Qohelet describes the world as disordered, inscrutable, and essentially meaningless. While Proverbs expresses confidence that “in the paths of wisdom there is no death,” Qohelet can only focus on the inevitability of death, which he believes encounters everyone on equal terms. This transformation in attitudes between Proverbs and Qohelet indicates some sort of transition in thinking, but the nature of the differences between the thought of Qohelet and traditional wisdom remains unclear. As Jack T. Sanders phrases the question: “Why this emphasis on death as unfortunate, when the earlier wisdom tradition--and basically all of older Israelite tradition--had been content to accept death as inevitable and to emphasize the quality of life in the here and now? Why has death become a tragedy, even when it comes at the end of a long and successful and happy life?”³

The emergence of death anxiety in Qohelet is undoubtedly related to his overarching conclusion that “everything is *hebel*.”⁴ However, scholarly attempts to

¹ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 66.

² James L. Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death in Qoheleth,” in *Israelite Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (ed. John G. Gammie et al.; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), 205–16.

³ Jack T. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions,” *JSJ* 36 (2005): 269.

⁴ Qoh 1:2; 12:8; and 36 additional occurrences in the book. On the meaning of the term *הבל*, see below.

identify the conceptual root of Qohelet's sense of life's futility have resulted in a number of competing proposals and little agreement. Surveying the literature, several general lines of argument can be identified: (1) *A sense of being estranged from the cosmos*. This case was made most forcefully by Harmut Gese, who argued that Qohelet evinces a "mutation of structure" in comparison with earlier Israelite wisdom in that he "recognizes no relationship between act, situation, and reputation, having rejected any connection between a person and that individual's act or state."⁵ As a result, Gese argues that for Qohelet "the essence of the person is determined not only in that one perceives oneself as an individual but also in that one sets oneself against world affairs as a stranger to the world."⁶ (2) *A sense of increased distance from God*. Scholars have often noted the remoteness of Qohelet's God, whom one scholar describes as "an inscrutable despot."⁷ Of those who have placed this distance from God at the center of Qohelet's thought, J. A. Loader may be considered representative.⁸ Loader argues that Qohelet "accepts God, but God is far--this is the ground for the polarity in his thought."⁹ For Loader, the increased distance between God and humankind results in Qohelet's sense of the world as *hebel*: "God is remote. Therefore a vacuum originates over and against him. . . . *And this is hebel*."¹⁰ (3) *The rise of individualism*. Robert Gordis has pointed to what he views as a

⁵ Harmut Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Koheleth," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia/London: Fortress/SPCK, 1983), 143.

⁶ Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom," 142–43.

⁷ Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet* (BKAT 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 17.

⁸ J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet* (BZAW 152; New York: De Gruyter, 1979), 129–131.

⁹ Loader, *Polar Structures*, 129; author's italics removed.

¹⁰ Loader, *Polar Structures*, 130; italics original; transliteration normalized. Cf. Sanders, "Wisdom, Theodicy, Death," 264–65: "Qoheleth, then, present[s] us with what is widely called the crisis of wisdom. This crisis is one of theodicy. According to the proverbial tradition, wisdom/righteousness should lead to *shalom*, and folly/wickedness lead to *ra'ah*. . . . Alas! however; anyone can see that life does not operate that way."

“fundamental revolution in men’s thinking” taking place between periods of Proverbs and Qohelet.¹¹ Specifically, he argues that the “ancient Semitic outlook . . . had placed the well-being or decline of the group, the family, tribe or nation in the center of men’s thought. This collective viewpoint now gave way to a heightened interest in the individual.”¹² (4) *The failure of memory*. Leo Perdue identifies the central issue in Qohelet as the failure of memory: “The crisis for Qoheleth is the inevitable loss of collective (1:8-11) and individual (5:20) memory. With the loss of memory, experience does not achieve unity through time.”¹³ (5) *The inevitability of death*. The argument that death serves as the central issue in Qohelet’s thought has been taken up most extensively by Shannon Burkes, who argues that “the linch-pin in [Qohelet’s] despair is the inevitability of death, which recognizes no distinctions of age or virtue, and is the ultimate negation of knowledge.”¹⁴ Similarly, Crenshaw argues that “the arbitrariness of death troubles Qohelet more than anything else. . . . Because death cancels every human achievement, Qohelet concludes that life has no meaning.”¹⁵ (6) *The collapse of meaning*. Finally, Michael Fox argues that the fundamental issue in Qohelet’s thought is the “collapse of meaning.”¹⁶ Fox maintains that while Qohelet laments over other issues

¹¹ Robert Gordis, *Koheleth--the Man and His World* (3d ed; New York: Schocken, 1968), 25. A similar case has been made more recently by Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (SBLDS 170; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); cf. Shannon Burkes, *God, Self, and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period* (SJSJ 79; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 67–85.

¹² Gordis, *Koheleth*, 25.

¹³ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 197.

¹⁴ Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 35.

¹⁵ James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 25; cf. Crenshaw, “Shadow of Death,” 205–16.

¹⁶ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 133.

such as the pervasiveness of injustice and the brevity of life, the root of his frustration is that “life cannot be ‘read,’ that the multiplicity of disjointed deeds and events cannot be drawn together into a coherent narrative with its own significance.”¹⁷

While these different proposals are often presented in the literature as competing candidates for *the* central problem in Qohelet’s thought, the foregoing discussion of Terror Management Theory suggests that all of these issues are in fact intrinsically related to one another. In particular, TMT demonstrates the fundamental relationship between cultural constructions of meaning and the presence of death anxiety. To the extent that a cultural worldview renders the world meaningful, death anxiety is successfully buffered from conscious thought; however, a loss of confidence in the worldview raises death anxiety to the level of consciousness, as would appear to be the case for Qohelet. Further, TMT has demonstrated that a fundamental task of any functional cultural worldview is to provide some means of symbolic immortality by which adherents of the worldview are able to see that their lives as transcending death. Notably, the areas identified by biblical scholars as the root problems for Qohelet, above, correspond quite closely to the modes of symbolic immortality adduced by Robert J. Lifton: Gese’s estrangement from the cosmos corresponds to Lifton’s *natural mode*; Loader’s distance from the deity to Lifton’s *religious mode*; Gordis’s observations about the loss of sense of connection to family and community to Lifton’s *biological/biosocial mode*; and Perdue’s identification of the loss of memory to Lifton’s *creative mode*.

In what follows, I will explore the relationships among these phenomena identified as central issues in the book of Qohelet and the concept of symbolic immortality derived from TMT. I will argue that the breakdown in each of these areas contributes to Qohelet’s perception of death as a complete termination of his life--a sharp departure from the view of traditional wisdom, in which life was thought to transcend

¹⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 133.

death in multiple symbolic modes. Finally, I will argue that the failure of these modes of death transcendence and the accompanying emergence of death anxiety result from the collapse of the cultural world of traditional wisdom that attends a period of rapid societal changes taking place in Palestine in the time of Qohelet.

“What Profit is There?”: A Search for Death Transcendence

From the opening words of his book, Qohelet expresses the desire to discover a vitalizing symbol that will allow him to imagine his life as having death-transcending significance. He expresses the question in terms of יתרון, a term most likely drawn from the economic language of his day, but employed by Qohelet to raise questions of ultimate meaning and significance:

מה־יתרון לאדם בכל־עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

What profit does a man have in all his toil which he toils under the sun? (1:3)

This question signals one of the major themes of the book, which is a quest for a some aspect of life that will extend beyond physical death. The key term in Qohelet’s question is יתרון (“profit”), which occurs ten times in the book.¹⁸ Michael Fox helpfully distinguishes two different uses of יתרון in the book of Qohelet: (1) the comparative usage, in which it means “advantage,” referring to the relative benefit of one thing over another, and (2) the absolute usage, in which it means “profit.”¹⁹ In the second usage, יתרון functions within a commercial metaphor as a reference to “the balance of the balance sheet.”²⁰ In Qohelet, however, the metaphor is applied to life itself, so that יתרון

¹⁸ Qoh 1:3; 2:11, 13(bis); 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10, 11. Two related forms also occur in Qoh: מותר (3:19) and יותר (2:15; 6:8, 11; 7:6, 11; 12:9, 12). יתרון does not occur elsewhere in the HB.

¹⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 112–13 For the comparative usage: 2:13 (bis); 3:19; 5:8; 6:8, 11; 7:11, 12; 10:10, 11. For the absolute usage: 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:15.

²⁰ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 205; cf. Mitchell Dahood, “Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth,” *Biblica* 33 (1952): 221; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 103–4.

in its absolute usage comes to refer to the balance sheet of one's life: what is left over when all is said and done?

In my view, Leo Perdue sees correctly when he argues that “Qoheleth desires to find something that endures beyond the limited lifespan of a human being, something that would enable one to live beyond the grave, at least in human memory. Thus *yitrôn* in Qoheleth intimates ‘continuation’ or ‘endurance.’”²¹ Graham Ogden takes a similar approach in his study of Qohelet, arguing that Qohelet's quest for יתרון is the search for “an ‘advantage’ beyond death for the faithful.”²² However, a failure to understand the significance of symbolic immortalities leads Ogden to the erroneous conclusion that Qohelet is entertaining the possibility of “resurrection to life beyond the grave,” and that it is therefore “the earliest Old Testament document to express, albeit in a tentative manner, the thought that there might be something beyond death, at least for the wise.”²³ However, contra Ogden, Qohelet does not appear to be experimenting with the *new* concept that one's life might transcend death through resurrection, but rather trying to recover the *old* symbols through which the earlier sages *did* transcend death, albeit in symbolic ways. Qohelet's tradition promised him that his life would yield יתרון, but Qohelet now finds those promises bankrupt.

While the failure of the traditional symbols of a death-transcending יתרון will be explored extensively below, it should be noted that from the opening words of the book Qohelet foreshadows his ultimate conclusion that there is nothing upon which one can rely, since everything is like vapor.²⁴

²¹ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 192; cf. Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 252.

²² Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (2d ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 18.

²³ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 18.

²⁴ In keeping with the consensus of scholarship, my reading of the book of Qohelet assumes that

“Completely vaporous!” said Qohelet,
 “Completely vaporous! The whole thing is vapor.” (Qoh 1:2)

Capturing the sense of the term הבל, which Qohelet employs here and repeatedly throughout the book, has been a matter of ongoing difficulty. Traditionally הבל has been rendered by “vanity,” following the Old Latin *vanitas*, and most modern translations retain a similar sense.²⁵ Qohelet’s usage of הבל, however, does not always commend this translation, prompting scholars to propose a broad selection of alternatives.²⁶ The root meaning of הבל connotes something such as “breath” or “vapor,” prompting Douglas B. Miller to propose that הבל functions symbolically in Qohelet in ways that evoke the material sense of “vapor.”²⁷ Miller draws particular attention to the characteristics of vapor as being insubstantial, transient, and foul. While “foul” seems doubtful, the

Qohelet himself is responsible for Qoh 1:2-12:8 while later redactors have added a brief prologue (1:1) and two epilogues (12:9-12 and 12:13-14). My own interpretation focuses on the thought of Qohelet as presented in 1:2-12:8. Several recent scholars have shifted the focus of interpretation from the persona of Qohelet in the body of the book to the author of the epilogues in 12:9-14. See Michael V. Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet,” *HUCA* 48 (1977): 83–106, and his subsequent works; Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 37–39; Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (trans. O. C. Dean, Jr.; ed. Klaus Baltzer; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 208–15; and, most strenuously, Martin Shields, *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006) and Carolyn J. Sharp, “Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet,” *BI* 12 (2004): 37–68.

²⁵ So NRSV, NAB, NJB; also “futility” (NJPS, REB), “emptiness” (NEB), “meaninglessness” (NIV).

²⁶ For example: “enigmatic and mysterious” (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 21–26 and Graham S. Ogden, “‘Vanity’ It Certainly is Not,” *BT* 38 [1987]: 301–7); “absurd” (Michael V. Fox, “The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qoheleth,” *JBL* 105 [1986]: 410–13); “irony” or “ironic” (Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* [London: SPCK, 1965; rpt. Sheffield: Almond, 1981], 176–83); “meaningless” (Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen Zur Eigenart Des Buches Qohelet* [BZAW 183; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989], 40–51). For a thorough summary of scholarly approaches see Douglas B. Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet’s Work* (Academia Biblica 2; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 2–14, and Choon-Leong Seow, “Beyond Mortal Grasp: The Usage of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes,” *ABR* 48 (2000): 1–16.

²⁷ Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric*, 91–156, et passim (see also Douglas B. Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of הבל,” *JBL* 117 [1998]: 437–54). Miller defines “vapor” as “a quantity of visible matter diffused through or suspended in the air” (88); cf. Daniel C. Fredericks, *Coping with Transience* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993): “breath of breaths.”

characteristics of vapor as transient and insubstantial seems appropriate to Qohelet's intention.²⁸ C. L. Seow profitably extends Miller's argument to conclude that הבל refers to those things that are "imprehensible"--that is, not apprehensible and not comprehensible--things "beyond mortal grasp."²⁹ It is in this sense that I understand Qohelet to employ the term הבל: as a symbolic appropriation of "vapor" referring to those things which are imprehensible to humankind.

Qohelet's framing of the book within an *inclusio* of the הבל refrain (1:2; 12:8) provides a clear sense of Qohelet's understanding of the world and the impossibility of יתרון.³⁰ Since all things are transient, insubstantial, and vaporous, there is no means of establishing a connection with anything permanent that will assure one's continued connection to life beyond death. Further, since a world in which it is impossible to transcend death appears meaningless, as TMT has shown us, everything that happens becomes incomprehensible. Qohelet's refrain prepares the way for our understanding of the book as a whole: the world cannot be rendered meaningful, and no advantage over death can be found.

The Failure of Symbolic Immortalities in Qohelet

In order to fully appreciate Qohelet's quest for יתרון, it is possible to proceed in the categories of symbolic immortality offered by Lifton, as in previous chapters. This procedure allows comparison with the symbolic immortalities available to Qohelet through the traditional Wisdom worldview of Proverbs, as well other modes of symbolic immortality available to him in the broader culture of the ancient Near East. The analysis will suggest that Qohelet tests each of the modes of symbolic immortality available to

²⁸ Seow, "Beyond Mortal Grasp," 13–14

²⁹ Seow, "Beyond Mortal Grasp," 1–16

³⁰ Qoh 12:8 reads: הבל הבלים אמר הקהלת הכל הבל ("Vapor of vapors," says Qohelet, "The whole thing is vapor").

him and rejects them as ineffective, resulting in his reflections on the nature of death as a complete termination of life, which I will explore at the end of the chapter.

The Failure of Symbolic Immortality in the Biological/Biosocial Mode

The Biological Mode. References to biological progeny are difficult to find in Qohelet, an indication of the extent to which the symbolic significance of progeny is muted in the book. Qohelet does, however, consider the value of leaving accumulated wealth to future generations, which I have previously considered under the rubric of biological immortality:

ושנאתי אני את־כל־עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש
שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי
ומי יודע החכם יהיה או סכל
וישלט בכל־עמלי שעמלתי ושחכמתי תחת השמש
גם־זה הבל

וסבותי אני ליאש את־לבי על כל־העמל שעמלתי תחת השמש
כ־יִישׁ אדם שעמלו בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון
ולאדם שלא עמל־בו יתננו חלקו
גם־זה הבל ורעה רבה

I hated all my toil for which I had toiled under the sun, which I will leave to the man who will come after me. But who knows--will he be wise or foolish? But he will have proprietorship³¹ over all my toil for which I have toiled and for which I have acted wisely under the sun. This, too, is vaporous.

And I turned to let my heart despair over all the toil which I had toiled under the sun. For there is a man who toils with wisdom, knowledge, and skill,³² but to a man who did not toil with (wisdom) he will give it as his portion. This is vapor and a great evil. (2:18-21)

In contrast to Prov 13:22, in which the capacity to leave an inheritance to one's children served as an important benefit of being righteous and a means of symbolically

³¹ The root שָׁלַט, which occurs exclusively in late biblical texts, derives from legal contracts, in which it refers to “the right of disposal of property, a transferable right” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 136). However, Seow’s attempt to date Qohelet to the Persian period based on this usage is doubtful (see Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 187).

³² The term כִּשְׂרוֹן occurs in the HB only in Qoh 2:21; 4:4; and 5:10. In the current in context, it signifies “skill”. See the discussion in Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (2 vols.; OLA 143; Leuven: Peeters, 1992–2004), 2:447–49.

transcending death, Qohelet concludes that leaving an inheritance is “vapor and a great evil” (הבל ורעה רבה) (2:21).³³ The reason for Qohelet’s dismissal of the value of an inheritance is not entirely clear, though it seems to be related to the uncertainty over whether the inheritor will be “wise or foolish” (2:19). Qohelet complains that while he labors “with wisdom, knowledge, and skill” he may leave his wealth to one who did not labor with these (2:21).³⁴ Whereas in the tradition of Proverbs 10-29 one could generally presume that the children of the righteous would “follow after him” (Prov 20:7), being wise themselves, Qohelet does not show such confidence in future generations, asking with a shrug “Who knows--will he be wise or foolish?” (2:19). This is doubly the case if we follow the interpretation of Fox, who argues that “the man” in 2:18 is not Qohelet’s heir but rather a “generic” man who just “happens to receive Qohelet’s wealth.”³⁵ In this case, Qohelet would seem to have no control at all over who receives his wealth, let alone whether he is wise or foolish, rendering the immortalizing capacity of his bequeathal entirely unpredictable.

The Biosocial Mode. In the previous chapter, I argued that the biological symbolization of immortality, so prevalent in Prov 10-29, largely yields to a biosocial metaphor in Prov 1-9. Rather than the literal biological family, it is the biosocial “family” of the sages that secures the symbolic immortality of the individual of the teacher. This sense of biosocial continuity is most obviously expressed in Prov 1-9 through the use of the biological metaphor of “father” and “son” to describe the connection between the

³³ Cf. 2:19: “This too is vanity” (גם־זוה הבל).

³⁴ The referent of בַּר in 2:21 is ambiguous. Most commentators understand it to refer to חֶלְקִי, (“his portion”), yielding the translation “(he) must leave it as an inheritance to another man who has not worked for it” (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 57; cf. Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth* [trans. Sean McEvenue; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 21; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 185). However, given the three-fold use of instrumental בַּר in the preceding clause, it is more likely that the בַּר here is likewise instrumental (“with it”) referring to “wisdom” (and “knowledge” and “skill”), drawing a contrast to the manner of Qohelet’s labor and “the man” who receives his wealth.

³⁵ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 187.

teacher and his student, or between the older generation of sages and the younger. Qohelet, in contrast, refuses this form of address altogether. The phrase “my son” occurs only in the epilogue (12:12), which is generally agreed to stem from the hand of an epilogist and not Qohelet himself.

Nor does Qohelet ever refer to the value gained by giving instruction or leading by example. The words of the wise are not a spring of life for Qohelet, nor the fruit of the wise a tree of life, as they were in Proverbs 10-29. Qohelet makes no mention of the “paths” (דרכים) of the wise upon which one should walk. The only path that he commends is an isolated path with no apparent connection to either future or past generations: “Walk on the paths of your heart” (בדרכי לבך; 11:9). In his construction of the world, there is no previously trodden road to follow, nor anyone walking along behind. Each person traverses his path alone.³⁶

This is not to suggest that Qohelet finds no value in the wisdom tradition. He frequently offers proverbs that sound much like traditional wisdom and at times commends the advantages of wisdom:

וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן־הסכלות כיתרון האור מן־החשך

And I saw that there is an advantage to wisdom more folly
Like the advantage of light over darkness. (2:13)

טובה חכמה עם־נחלה ויתר לראי השמש

Wisdom is as good as³⁷ an inheritance,
an advantage to the ones who see the sun. (7:11)

Importantly, in each of these cases wisdom offers only a *proximate* advantage. It does not provide symbolic death transcendence. In 7:11, wisdom is an advantage “to the ones who

³⁶ Qohelet does find some use for companionship, notably in 4:9-12 and 9:7-10. The significance of these passages will be considered in the next chapter.

³⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 249, notes that this passage is often misunderstood as saying “better than” an inheritance because of the series of “better than” (טוב מן) sayings in the preceding verses.

see the sun” but not to the ones who have died.³⁸ In 2:13, Qohelet explicitly limits his observation about the advantage of wisdom over following by noting that “the same fate befalls them both” (מקרה אחד יקרה את־כלם; 2:14) when it comes to death.³⁹ While wisdom can perhaps offer some advantages while one is alive, it offers no ultimate advantage over death.

The Failure of Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode

In 1:12-2:17 Qohelet considers the possibility of death transcendence in the creative mode. In order to do so, he takes on the guise of King Solomon, producing a kind of *qal va-homer* argument.⁴⁰ He concludes that even Solomon gains no advantage over death through his accomplishments. If death transcendence is impossible for Solomon, then how much more so is it impossible for anyone else?

Qohelet fashions himself in the guise of Solomon in several ways. First, in 1:1 the book is introduced as “the words of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (דברי קהלת), a superscription that seems to parallel the attributions to Solomon in other wisdom texts (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; cf. Song 1:1). In 1:12, he refers to himself as “king over Israel in Jerusalem” (מלך על־ישראל בירושלם; 1:12), a designation only befitting Solomon amongst the sons of David, as no other kings reigned over Israel from Jerusalem. Further, Qohelet appeals to other traditions of Solomon known from 1

³⁸ See the discussion in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 249.

³⁹ On the significance of 2:14-17, see the section on “The Broken Connection” at the end of the present chapter.

⁴⁰ The significance of the Solomonic persona is understood already in *Qohelet Rabbah* 3:11: “If someone else had said, ‘He has made everything proper in its time’ (3:11), I should say, ‘This fellow who never ate a crust of bread in his life says so!’ but Solomon, ‘whose bread daily was thirty kor of fine flour’ (1 Kings 5:2), may properly say so. Another view, If anyone else had said, ‘Vanity of vanities,’ I should say, ‘This fellow, who never owned two cents, presumes to despise all the wealth of the world!’” (cited in Gordis, *Koheleth*, 379).

Kings.⁴¹ (1) Qohelet's statement that "I increased wisdom" (הוֹסַפְתִּי חִכְמָה; 1:16) recalls the words of the Queen of Sheba, who exclaims to Solomon that "you have increased wisdom" (הוֹסַפְתָּ חִכְמָה). (2) Qohelet's claim in the same verse to have "become great" (הִגְדַּתִּי) reflects 1 Kgs 10:23, "King Solomon became greater than all of the kings of the earth" (וַיִּגְדַּל הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מִכָּל מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ). (3) Qohelet's claim in 2:10 that he did not deny himself "anything that my eyes asked for" (כָּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי), evokes the story of Solomon at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:1-14), in which God offers to grant Solomon whatever he asks for (שָׁאַל מֵה אֶתֶּן-לְךָ; 1 Kgs 3:5) and then grants even what he did not ask (גַּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-שָׁאַלְתָּ נָתַתִּי לְךָ; 1 Kgs 3:13).⁴²

If it is the case that Qohelet fashions himself in the persona of Solomon, it is notable that he does not simply adopt the *name* of Solomon, which appears nowhere in the book. In other pseudepigraphical texts, the authors claim the name of Solomon for themselves; that Qohelet does not may suggest some literary strategy.⁴³ In light of Qohelet's quest for symbolic immortality (some יִתְרוֹן that persists beyond death), we may suggest that the author evokes the person of Solomon but obscures his name in order to undermine the claim of Prov 10:7 that "the memory of righteous" (זְכוֹר צְדִיק) survives death. In Qohelet's world, not even the name of Solomon can be remembered, but only an obscured reference to him as "the collector."⁴⁴

⁴¹ See especially Choon-Leong Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See* (Fs. D. N. Freedman) (ed. A. B. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 277–78.

⁴² Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," 277. On Solomon's dream at Gibeon, see also David M. Carr, *From D to Q: A Study of Early Jewish Interpretations of Solomon's Dream at Gibeon* (SBLMS 44; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 136–45.

⁴³ See Proverbs, Psalm 72, the Odes of Solomon, the Psalms of Solomon, the Testament of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

⁴⁴ The name Qohelet derives from the root קה"ל, meaning "to gather" or "to assemble" and probably means "Gatherer" or "Collector." The name may refer to Solomon as a gatherer of wisdom or wealth (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 97).

Qohelet next undertakes an extended description of his accomplishments as king in 2:4-11. As has become increasingly apparent in recent scholarship, this textual unit exhibits many of the features of West Semitic and Akkadian royal inscriptions and appears to be intentionally drawing upon the genre.⁴⁵ Within their original contexts, royal inscriptions preserved a permanent record of a king's great deeds for future generations. They were, as Seow argues, "to be the king's assurance of immortality."⁴⁶ The connection between inscriptions and symbolic immortality can be seen clearly, for instance, in the case of Esarhaddon, who reports that he "had documents made. . . . the deeds which I had achieved, my works of my hand I wrote thereon and placed them in the foundations. I left them to eternity."⁴⁷ Qohelet adapts the genre of for the explicit purpose of undermining its claim to provide symbolic immortality.

First, Qohelet describes the building projects that he has undertaken:

הַדְּגַלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי
בְּנִיתִי לִי בְּתִים וְנִטְעֵתִי לִי כַרְמִים
עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנוֹת וּפְרָדְסִים וְנִטְעֵתִי בֵּהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי
עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְּרֻכּוֹת מִיָּם לְהִשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יַעַר צוּמַח עֲצִים

I accomplished great works:
I built house for myself. I planted vineyards for myself.
I made gardens and *pardesim* for myself.
I planted trees of every kind of fruit in them.

⁴⁵ For comparisons of Qohelet to West Semitic and Akkadian royal inscriptions, see especially Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," 275–87; Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991); and, more recently, Longman, *Ecclesiastes*. While Longman's studies are suggestive and support the connection between Qohelet and the *narû* literature, he has been criticized for forcing a supposed tripartite structure onto the material that is unsupported by closer analysis (see especially Y. V. Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth* [BZAW 369; New York: De Gruyter, 2006], 106–12). Koh himself offers a helpful analysis of Qohelet in light of ancient Near Eastern parallels (*Royal Autobiography*, 72–145), though his attempt to find a pervasive royal voice in the book has not proven persuasive.

⁴⁶ Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," 284. In the terms of Terror Management Theory, this is a "creative" mode of symbolic immortality, in which the king's connection to life is preserved through both his great deeds and through the physical entity of the inscription itself.

⁴⁷ Riekele Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (AfO Beihefte 9; Graz: Weidner, 1967), 119, cited in Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," 284.

I made pools of water to irrigate a forest of sprouting trees. (2:4-6)

Such royal boasts about building projects are familiar particularly from the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions.⁴⁸ Ashurnarsipal II, for instance, boasts in his dedicatory inscription of the Ninurta temple at Calah: “I planted orchards with all kinds of fruit trees,” a phrase reminiscent of Qoh 2:5.⁴⁹ Similarly, Sennacherib exhibits a particular interest in creating gardens filled with uncommon plants and trees.⁵⁰ One possible purpose of the boasts concerning trees is a demonstration of the king’s power to control the elements. Notably, in 2:5 Qohelet employs the *pardesim*, a Persian term connoting a royal park which may have been tended by the king himself.⁵¹ The capacity for the king to grow uncommon plants and to control the flow of water in order to bring forth vegetation in inhospitable environments demonstrated his great power of the monarch over the natural elements and established him as being greater than a mere mortal.⁵² The godlike power of the gardener-king may be especially emphasized in Qoh 2:4-6, in which a series of intertextual echoes with Genesis 1-2 compares Qohelet’s building projects to God’s creation of the world.⁵³ For the purposes of the fictional autobiography, Qohelet establishes that he has the godlike powers to plant and tend a garden of the most extraordinary kind.

Next, Qohelet extends his royal boast to include the acquisition of great wealth beyond all who were before him:

קניתי עבדים ושפחות ובני־בית היה לי

⁴⁸ For a full discussion, see especially Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 94–96.

⁴⁹ Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 95, citing Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 154.

⁵⁰ Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 96.

⁵¹ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 232–40. Xenophon reports that Cyrus ordered each of his satraps to establish *pardesim* (Cyr. VIII.6.12), apparently as a sign of royal power.

⁵² Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 233–34.

⁵³ Arian Verheij, “Paradise Retrieved: On Qohelet 2:4–6,” *JSOT* 50 (1991): 113–15.

גם מקנה בקר וצאן הרבה לי מכל שהיו לפני בירושלם
 כנסתי לי גם-כסף וזהב וסגלת מלכים והמדינות
 עשיתי לי שרים ושרות ותענוגת בני-האדם שדה ושדות

I acquired male and female servants, and I had houseborn slaves;
 I also had a great flock of cattle and sheep, more than all who before me in
 Jerusalem.
 I also collected for myself silver, gold and the treasure of kings, along with
 provinces.⁵⁴
 I acquired for myself male and female singers and the delights of men: many
 concubines.⁵⁵ (2:7-8)

Again, Qohelet's list of acquisitions finds close parallels in the Assyrian Royal
 Inscriptions descriptions of booty collected after military victories.⁵⁶ Finally, Qohelet's
 claim to have exceeded the greatness of all of his predecessors (2:9; cf. 1:16; 2:7, 12)
 echoes similar claims in both West Semitic and Assyrian inscriptions.⁵⁷

Having established his claims to symbolic immortality in the style of the royal
 inscriptions, Qohelet pauses to consider what he has gained. While the royal inscription
 anticipate that the king's claims will be left "to eternity," providing the king's perpetual
 connection to life even after his physical death, Qohelet explicitly rejects any such claim

ופניתי אני בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות
 והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח ואין יתרון תחת השמש

⁵⁴ The construction והמדינות מלכים has troubled many commentators, who have offered various emendations (for a discussion see Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* [BZAW 148; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1979], 21). The present translation reads the *waw* of המדינות as *waw-conconmitaniae* (see GKC §154.a, Note1) with Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 130.

⁵⁵ The translation of שדה ושדות, which is a *hapax legomenon*, is much disputed. LXX, Syr render "male cupbearer and female cupbearers," Vg "cups and waterpots," Tg "baths and bath houses." Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 131) translates as "in chests," related to postbiblical *šiddā* ("chest, box"); cf. NJPS. More common among contemporary commentators (though extending back at least to Ibn Ezra) is to take the phrase as a reference to women taken in plunder (from *š-d-d*, "to plunder")--concubines, or a harem (so, e.g., Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 49; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 180; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 218–19) derives a similar sense by relating the word to *šad* ("breast"), but the form does not exist elsewhere). That the phrase occurs in a list of other human acquisitions commends the translation as "concubines," as does the connection to Assyrian booty lists noted by Koh (*Royal Autobiography*, 96–97, n. 272).

⁵⁶ See the discussion in Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 96–98. Koh finds parallels in the inscriptions of Ada-Nirari I, Ashurnarsipal II, and Sennacherib, concluding that "this parallelism suggests an awareness on Qoheleth's part of these ancient texts and the likely "borrowing" of this particular literary feature of the ARI for his own composition" (99).

⁵⁷ Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 82–85, 99–100.

But I turned (to consider) all my deeds which my hands had done and all the toil which I had labored to do and behold!: the whole thing was vanity and chasing after the wind. And there was no profit under the sun. (2:11)

When Qohelet looks over all of the accomplishments that were supposed to secure symbolic immortality for him, he concludes that there is no possibility of יתרון--nothing left at the end of his life to secure symbolic transcendence of death.⁵⁸

While in the immediate context Qohelet is not explicit about the reasons for his conclusion that there is no יתרון, one may surmise from his subsequent reflection that it is related to the failure of human memory. In 2:16 Qohelet observes that the death of the wise and the death of the fool will be the same in that

כי אין זכרון לחכם עם־הכסיל לעולם
בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח

For there is no memory for the wise along with the fool forever when already the days are coming when both will be forgotten.⁵⁹ (2:16a)

Qohelet does not seem to lament the fact of death so much as the realization that human forgetfulness renders the death of the wise and of the fool exactly the same: neither will be remembered. The failure of memory previously concluded the opening poem of Qoh 1:4-11, which serves as an initial answer to Qohelet's question of יתרון in 1:3. In that context Qohelet concludes that there is no יתרון because

אין זכרון לראשנים וגם לאחרנים שיהיו לא־יהיה להם זכרון עם שיהיו לאחרינה

There is no memory of those who were in the beginning, and likewise for the later ones who yet will be. There will be no memory of them among those who will be still later.(Qoh 1:11)

For Qohelet, the unreliability of memory makes death transcendence in the creative

⁵⁸ While Qohelet denies the possibility of an *ultimate* (death-transcending) יתרון, he acknowledges the possibility that one may receive a *proximate* “portion” (חלק) to enjoy in life (2:10). For a full discussion of Qohelet's commendation of *proximate* vitality in the face of *ultimate* annihilation by death, see my discussion in Chapter 4.

⁵⁹ For a full discussion of this verse and its implications for Qohelet's understanding of death, see the section on “Death in Qohelet,” later in this chapter.

mode impossible. It does not matter what a person accomplishes if even the greatest deeds (like those of Solomon) are ultimately forgotten.

Twice more in the book Qohelet reflects on the impossibility of acquiring symbolic immortality through extraordinary accomplishments. In 4:13-16, he relates the case of a “poor but wise youth” (ילד מסכן וחכם) who comes out of prison to replace the king.⁶⁰ He rises to such prominence that “all the living who walked under the sun” (כל־החיים המהלכים תחת השמש) are with him. Yet Qohelet remarks that “those who come later will not rejoice in him” (האחרונים לא ישמחו־בו). Whether this implies the forgetfulness of the future generations or the fickleness of people’s loyalties is not clear. In either case, neither the youth’s wisdom nor his rise to prominence secure his future, a reality that Qohelet labels הבל ורעיון רוח (4:16).⁶¹ The second case involves “a poor, wise man” (איש חכם מסכן) who, by his wisdom, saves a city from destruction (9:13-16). In this case, too, Qohelet concludes that despite the significance of his actions, “no one remembered that poor wise man” (ואדם לא זכר את־האיש המסכן ההוא; 9:15). That these two stories should be understood together is suggested by the description of both men as “מסכן (ו)חכם” (4:13; 9:15). Whether a person’s wisdom procures one kingship or saves a city, he is nonetheless destined to be forgotten.⁶²

⁶⁰ The syntax of the textual unit is difficult, to the extent that commentators are not even agreed on how many youths are referred to in the story: one, being the king’s immediate successor; two, being the king’s immediate successor and the one who comes after him; or three, being these two plus a third, who comes next in line. For a review of the possible interpretations, see Friedrich Ellermeier, *Qohelet* (Herzberg: Jungfer, 1967), 217–28, and, more recently, Aaron Pinkner, “Qohelet 4,13–16,” *SJOT* 22 (2008): 176–94.

⁶¹ Ze’ev Weisman, “Elements of Political Satire in Koheleth 4,13–16; 9,13–16,” *ZAW* 111 (1999): 547–60, suggests that Qoh 4:13-16 recalls the division of the kingdom after Solomon (1 Kings 11-12). While the evidence of a textual connection is scant, Weisman is correct in his more general point that Qohelet uses the anecdote “to persuade his audience that there is no history: the causality operating in it is paradoxical and memory, the thread connection various events to history, is nothing more than an illusion” (554). Dominic Rudman, “A Contextual Reading of Ecclesiastes 4:13–16,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 57–73, largely following Graham S. Ogden, “Historical Allusion in Qoheleth IV 13–16?” *VT* 30 (1980): 309–15, suggests an allusion to the stories of Joseph (Gen 37-50) and Daniel (Dan 1-6).

⁶² Of course, one may note the irony of the author of Qohelet having achieved symbolic

The Failure of Symbolic Immortality in the Natural Mode

A third mode of death transcendence offered by this older tradition is the *natural mode*, which plays a significant role in the worldview of Proverbs 1-9, as I argued in the previous chapter. In particular, the cosmologies of Proverbs 3 and Proverbs 8 present the world as being carefully crafted “by wisdom” (בהכמה), “by understanding” (בתבונה) and “by knowledge” (בדעת; 3:19), with each element of the cosmos—including humankind—given its proper place (8:27-29). As a result, the sages of Proverbs 1-9 seemed to believe that “their actions sustained the order of the world, preventing a return to chaos.”⁶³ In this manner, Proverbs 1-9 depicts humankind as deeply and intrinsically related to the cosmos, such that the perpetuation of the cosmos provided a symbolic mode of death transcendence for the sages: since they are intrinsic to the cosmos itself, they continue to be connected to life for as long as the cosmos persists.

Qohelet also seems to believe that God has created a cosmos in which everything has its proper time and purpose. The well-known poem of 3:1-8 claims that “for everything there is a time, and a season for every experience under heaven” (לכל זמן ועת) (לכל־הפץ תחת השמים), before proceeding to name a series of polarities, each of which has its proper season. Qohelet does not share in Proverbs’ optimism about the role of humankind in that cosmos, however, as his interpretation of the poem in 3:9-11 makes clear.⁶⁴

מה־יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל
ראיתי את־הענין אשר נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו

immortality through his writings. See especially Michael Carasik, “Transcending the Boundary of Death: Ecclesiastes Through a Nabokovian Lens,” *BI* 14 (2006): 425–43.

⁶³ James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 72.

⁶⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Ecclesiastes 3.1–15: Another Interpretation,” *JOT* 66 (1995): 55–64, suggests that 3:1-8 and 3:9-15 should be read as “text followed by idiosyncratic commentary” (58), postulating that the poem in 3:1-8 may stem from Stoic circles and is “cited but not authored by Qoheleth” (60). For current purposes, I am less interested in the origin of the poem than in the essence of Qohelet’s commentary, especially in 3:9-11.

את־הכל עשה יפה בעתו גם את־העלם נתן בלבם
 מבלי אשר לא־ימצא האדם
 את־המעשה אשר־עשה האלהים מראש ועד־סוף

What profit does the one who does something have in that at which he toils?
 I have seen the preoccupation⁶⁵ that God has given to humankind to preoccupy
 him.
 He has made everything appropriate⁶⁶ in its time.
 Yet,⁶⁷ he set eternity⁶⁸ in their hearts
 so that⁶⁹ humankind cannot find out
 the work that God has done
 from the beginning until the end. (3:9-11)

In response to the poem about the times, Qohelet again raises the question of יתרון. In a cosmos constructed in the manner Qohelet has just described, what advantage do people

⁶⁵ With most commentators, taking the root ענה to be related to the Arabic *'ana*, meaning “to disquiet, occupy, make uneasy.” Qohelet may also be engaging in a wordplay with the Hebrew root ענה meaning “to humble (see discussion in Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:427–32).

⁶⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 209, notes that the usage of יפה here is close to the Greek *κοσμιος* (“well-ordered”), as also in 5:17 (Eng 5:18).

⁶⁷ Interpreting the particle גם as an adversative, as in 4:8 (גם־עיניו לא־תשבֹע) and 6:7 (וגם־הנפש לא). Gordis, *Koheleth*, 222, remarks that the adversative usage is “an earmark of Koheleth’s style,” though a number of his examples have been challenged (see especially Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:128–34). This is also the position of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 162. The common alternative reads גם with an additive sense (“also”), a position recently taken by Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 260, as well as Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 22. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 192, seems to combine the two: “But he also.” The sense of the verse depends more on the translation of אשר מבלי (see below).

⁶⁸ The translation of the term העלם is a persistent *crux interpretatum*. For recent reviews of the major scholarly positions, see Brian P. Gault, “A Reexamination of ‘Eternity’ in Ecclesiastes 3:11,” *BSac* 165 (2008): 39–57, and Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:223–25. Three major positions may be identified: (1) Reading *hā’ōlām* (“eternity”) as pointed in the MT and supported by LXX (*aiōn*); (2) Revocalizing the vowels to *hā’ēlem* from an alternative form of the root meaning “hidden” or “dark” (see, e.g., James L. Crenshaw, “Qoheleth’s Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry,” in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* [ed. Antoon Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998], 221); (3) Postulating a textual emendation to העמל “toil” (recently argued by Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 210–11). Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 260, who renders העלם with “Ewigkeit,” rightly concludes that “eine Änderung von עלם עמל ist völlig unbegründet. Kein Textzeuge überliefert diese Lesart.” While it seems most likely that Qohelet uses the term to mean something like “eternity” here as elsewhere (1:10; 1:14; 2:16; 3:14; 9:6; 12:5), it is notable that in all but one of these cases he employs *plene* orthography (the exception is 1:10, which is plural [לעלמים]). It is thus conceivable that Qohelet intends a wordplay between the two meanings of the root עלם: “eternity” and “hidden.”

⁶⁹ The phrase אשר מבלי has uncertain meaning and occurs in the HB only here. Two possibilities are most likely: (1) a result clause: “so that” or (2) an exceptive clause: “only that.” See the discussion in Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:147–48.

find in their labor? Qohelet's response to his own question in 3:10 suggests that a person's toil is little more than a "preoccupation" that ultimately produces no יתרון. The reason for this conclusion, given in 3:11, is that while God has made everything "appropriate" (יפה) in its own time, God has also obscured human understanding "so that [they] cannot find out the work that God has done." The phrase מראש ועד־סוף is a merism connoting the totality of time, indicating that humankind cannot grasp any of God's activity throughout time.⁷⁰ Far from the worldview of Proverbs 1-9, in which the sages envisioned themselves as acting according to the very principles by which God founded the cosmos, Qohelet understands human efforts to have no connection to the cosmos, thereby yielding no יתרון in the natural mode.

According to Qohelet 3:11, the mechanism by which God confounds human knowledge is given by the Hebrew העלם. In the pointing of the MT, the word is *hā'ōlām*, encountered elsewhere in Qohelet in its *plene* form, העולם, meaning "eternity" or the like.⁷¹ The word admits of a second meaning, however, derived from the alternative root עלם meaning "hidden" or "dark."⁷² Most likely the use of עלם here is a wordplay between the two meanings of the root, suggesting that it is a sense of the duration of time that confounds human understanding of what God is doing in the world. That is, humankind's inability to grasp the cosmos results from a lack of access to things that happened long ago, in the mythical time of creation, by which humans are separated by עלם. While Proverbs 8 boldly claims that Wisdom transcends the temporal distance between creation

⁷⁰ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:218.

⁷¹ "Eternity" should be understood in the sense of a long span of time rather than that which exists beyond time, *contra* Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 119, who seems to find here something akin to "immortality."

⁷² Scholars who hold some version of this position include, e.g., George A. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 105–6; Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence," 206; R. Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 73–74; Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding," 221.

and the present, Qohelet believes that humans perceive nothing other than the temporal distance itself.

The disconnection between humankind and the created world is also apparent in Qohelet's description of the cosmos in 1:4-8. Here again, there is no mention of the time of the cosmogony as there was in Proverbs 8. From Qohelet's perspective, it is as though the world has stood and will stand "forever" (לעולם), the primordial time before its creation being unimaginable to him. This sense of the permanence of world does not provide Qohelet with a means of procuring symbolic immortality, however, as the poem immediately contrasts the permanence of creation with the transience of humankind:

דור הלך ודור בא
והארץ לעולם עמדת

A generation goes and a generation comes,
But the earth⁷³ remains forever. (1:4)

While in other contexts, the existence of the earth "forever" (לעולם) functions to provide humankind with a sense of symbolic immortality in the natural mode, such does not seem to be the case for Qohelet.⁷⁴ In Psalm 148, for instance, all of the works of creation--the angels and the heavenly host; the sun, moon, and stars; the heavens and the waters above the heavens--are called upon to praise Yhwh because "he established them forever and ever" (יעמידם לעד לעולם; Ps 148:6a). The establishment of the heavens in perpetuity creates an order in which the earthly realm is able to have existence, as specified in the

⁷³ Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 109, argues that הארץ should be understood to refer to all humankind rather than to all of the physical world ("le monde' rather than 'la terre'"), citing Gen 6:11; 11:1; 1 Kgs 2:2; Ps 33:8). However, with the exception of Gen 6:11, in which case it is not clear that humankind is the reference, all of the other passages cited use the phrase כל-הארץ to refer to humankind. In Qoh 1:4, the use of הארץ alone suggests he is referring to the physical world rather than humankind. On the significance of these verses, see also Katharine J. Dell, "The Cycle of Life in Ecclesiastes," *VT* 59 (2009): 181–89.

⁷⁴ See also, e.g., Ps 33:11, in which "the counsel of Yhwh stands forever" (עצת יחזה לעולם תעמד), with the result that "the nation whose god is Yhwh" is declared "happy" (33:12); and Isa 40:8, in which "the word of our God is established forever" (ודבר-אלוהינו יקום לעולם), which connects the people, who "are grass" (40:7), directly to the word of "our God," which stands forever.

second half of the verse, “he set a boundary, and it will not pass away” (חִקְיָתָן וְלֹא יֵעָבֹר; 148:6b). As in Proverbs 8, these limits create the conditions which sustain earthly life, as the second half of the psalm makes clear. All of creation, both cosmic and earthly, both human and nonhuman, are bound together in one coherent, unending order established by YHWH. Psalm 148, like Proverbs 8, thus represents a cosmology in which humankind exists in an extensive web of interconnection that itself has a quality of permanence, existing “forever” (לְעוֹלָם).

For Qohelet, in contrast, the existence of the earth לְעוֹלָם emphasizes the *transience* and *impermanence* of humankind.⁷⁵ The participial forms בָּא (“going” and “coming”) create a sense of the constant motion of humankind onto and off of the stage of existence. Meanwhile, the parallel use of the participial עֹמֵד in relation to the earth establishes the constancy of its ongoing existence. The earth “is remaining” while the generations of humankind continue to come and go. The use of the contrastive *waw* separating the two parts of the verse (וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֵד) draws the distinction between humanity and the earth even more sharply: “A generation is going and a generation is coming, *but in contrast* the earth remains forever.” Humankind has no meaningful place in the cosmos, which moves on endlessly without regard for the continual passing of the generations.

In this passage, Qohelet expresses less confidence that the cosmos itself has purpose than he does in 3:1-11. Here Qohelet describes the world in terms of the circular movement of its elements--the sun, the wind, and the rivers--which move ceaselessly but ultimately achieve nothing.⁷⁶ The twin themes of circularity and exhaustion are expressed

⁷⁵ The interpretation of a contrast between human transience and the permanence of nature is the usual view (see recently Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 161; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 49–50; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 41). For a critique of this view, see especially Graham S. Ogden, “The Interpretation of דֹּר in Ecclesiastes 1.4,” *JSOT* 34 (1986): 91–92, and, from a somewhat different perspective, Fox, “Qohelet 1.4,” 109.

⁷⁶ For a contrasting perspective on the significance of the repetition in 1:4-11, see Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 40–42, who argues that “The greatest difficulty for modern readers of this poem is that our

artistically in Qohelet's depiction of the movement of the sun in 1:5:

וזרח השמש
ובא השמש
ואל-מקומו שואף
וזרח הוא שם

The sun rises
and the sun sets
and to its place panting⁷⁷
There it rises

The structure of the verse moves the sun back to the place where it started, ready to rise again, in a potentially endless chain of repetition. The sun is depicted as a racer who runs his course from east to west and then races under the earth from west to east in order to rise again in a journey that leaves him “panting.”

The circularity of the cosmos continues in 1:6a, in which a series of verbs with no clear subject continues the circular motion:

חולך אל-דרום
וסובב אל-צפון
סובב סבב הולך

It goes to the south
And going around to the north
Going around, going around, it goes

Here again the poetry itself is both circular and repetitive, like the cosmology it

spontaneous reaction, in the face of its continuous assertion of the eternal return of the same, is to judge that this is a negative and depressing message. . . . The poem praises the cosmos as glorious and eternal in the image of cyclic return” (40). Lohfink is undoubtedly influenced here by the thought of Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (introd. J. Z. Smith; Bollingen Series 46; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). In my view, Lohfink fails to account for the imagery of exhaustion that characterizes the cosmos Qohelet's description (see the argument that follows). For an analysis of the significance of circularity and turning in Qohelet's thought in general see Michael Carasik, “Qohelet's Twists and Turns,” *JSOT* 28 (2003): 192–209.

⁷⁷ For translation of the verb שואף see the discussion in Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:418–19. The term has occasionally been related to the Aramaizing participle of the root שוף “to blow” (so Harold L. Ginsberg, *Koheleth Interpreted* [New Commentary on the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings; Tel Aviv: Newman, 1968], 60 [Heb]). Schoors concludes that “the verb can only have a meaning such as ‘comes panting’” (2:418). Seow further notes that שואף may also mean “to stomp” (citing Amos 2:7; 8:4; Ezek 36:3; etc.) but concludes that “both meanings . . . --puffing and stomping--are relevant. The words convey vigorous activity, but also tiredness” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 107).

embodies. The description, which comprises three symmetrical phrases of three words each, again ends where it begins, with the word הלֹךְ (“going”), along the way passing through a three-fold repetition of the root סבב (“to turn around”): “round and round and round (it) goes.” Only at this late stage does the poem introduce a subject for these verbs, הרוח (“the wind”). The syntax of the construction is ambiguous enough, however, that the subject could also be construed as השמש (“the sun”) from the previous line.⁷⁸ The effect of this displaced subject is to create the sense that the whole thing--the sun, the wind, and even the reader--are spinning round and round and round in an endless circle. In verse 6b, the focus shifts specifically to the wind, which now “returns upon its circuits” (ועל־סביבתיו) (שב הרוח) to where it began, only to go around again upon its course. These two verses thus present a remarkable sequence of action resulting in the sun and wind ultimately remaining in the same place--ten verbs altogether, and they end precisely where they began.

In his description of the rivers in 1:7, Qohelet repeats the theme of circularity but adds an explicit element of incompleteness:

כל־הנחלים הלכים אל־הים
והים איננו מלא

All the rivers flow to the sea
but the sea is not filled. (1:7a)

The rivers, despite the constancy of their motion, do not increase the level of the sea. It is constant motion with no net effect. In light of Qohelet’s original question of the profit (יתרון) of human toil (1:3), the rivers stand as a witness to the fact that, even in the natural world, no amount of activity produces any net gain. Yet, in the face of the inevitable cosmic stasis, the rivers continue to do what they have always done, stubbornly persisting in their toil:

אל־מקום שהנחלים הלכים

⁷⁸ So LXX: “arising there it proceeds southward and goes around to the north” (cf. Syr, Vulg, Targ).

To the place where the rivers go,
there they continue to go (1:7b)

Constant activity producing nothing thus marks Qohelet's symbolization of the cosmos; there is no net profit to be gained under the sun, even for the natural world itself.

The Failure of Symbolic Immortality in the Religious Mode

Humankind's Connection to God. In the previous chapter, I argued that Proverbs 1-9 symbolizes connectivity to God through the Wisdom tradition itself. It depicts God as enacting the principles of חכמה, דעת, and תבונה in the creation of the cosmos, establishing the heavenly archetype that the sages replicate in ordering their own lives according to Wisdom. Further it envisions Wisdom herself as forming a connection between God and people, playing before God and delighting in humankind. Qohelet, in contrast, imagines no such connection between God and humankind--the figure of Wisdom does not appear in his book, and his God remains distant, inscrutable, and disconnected.

This is not to suggest that God plays no part in Qohelet's view of the world--indeed the word אלהים appears 40 times in the book.⁷⁹ However, the corresponding absence of the proper name יהוה provides a first indication that Qohelet's view of the Deity has shifted from that of Proverbs, in which יהוה occurs more than 80 times. Further, the verbs associated with the Deity are markedly less personal in Qohelet than in the book of Proverbs.⁸⁰ Qohelet associates God primarily with the three verbs עשה, נתן, and שפט ("to do," "to give," "to judge").⁸¹ The God of Proverbs, in contrast, "loves" (3:11),

⁷⁹ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:93.

⁸⁰ On Qohelet's use of verbs with God as the subject, see especially Hans-Peter Müller, "Wie Sprach Qohälät von Gott," *VT* 18 (1968): 507-21.

⁸¹ עשה: 3:11, 14; 7:14, 29; 11:5; נתן: 1:13; 2:26; 3:10, 11; 5:17, 17; 6:2; 8:15; 9:9; 12:7; שפט: 3:17; 11:9 (יביאך במשפט); 12:14 (יבא במשפט) (Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:93). Seven other verbs also occur

“guards your steps” (3:26), “does not let go hungry” (10:3), “keeps watch” (15:3; 22:12); “delivers” (20:22); “takes up the case” (22:23); “rewards” (25:12); “gives sight” (29:13), and so on. While Proverbs envisions a God who intervenes on behalf of the righteous to protect them and ensure their well-being, Qohelet’s God acts on an impersonal level and in ways that humankind cannot understand.

This inscrutability of God’s actions is a particular emphasis of Qohelet. In 8:16-17, Qohelet denies the possibility that humankind can understand how God acts in the world, drawing particular attention to the inability of the wise to “find out” what God is doing:

כאשר נתתי את־לבי לדעת חכמה ולראות את־עני נאשר נעשה על־הארץ
 כי גם ביום ובלילה שנה בעיניו איננו ראה
 וראיתי את־כל־מעשה האדם למצוא את־המעשה אשר הנעשה תחת־השמש
 בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם־יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא

When I set my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done upon the earth (for one’s eyes do not see sleep either by day or by night),⁸² then I saw all the work of God. Surely⁸³ humankind is not able to find out the work that is done under the sun. Therefore⁸⁴ humankind will labor to seek it out, but he will not find it. And even if the wise man will claim to know, he is not able to find it. (8:16-17)

This perspective represents a sharp departure from the worldview of Proverbs 8, in which Wisdom was depicted as having a direct connection to the Deity. While Proverbs does

with אלים as the subject: בקש (“seek out”; 3:15); ברוך (“to bring to light”; 3:18); קצף (“to be angry”; 5:5); שלט (“to allow”; 5:18 [Eng 5:19]; 6:2); ענה (“to keep busy”; 5:19 [Eng. 5:20]); עוות (“to make crooked”; 7:13; cf. 1:15); רצה (“to favor”; 9:7).

⁸² The grammatical sense of the phrase *כי גם ביום ובלילה שנה בעיניו איננו ראה* has troubled some commentators. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 289, for instance, considers it to be transposed from v. 17. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 289, reads *bē’ēynay* “my eyes” (cf. H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952]). The present translation follows the common view that *כאשר* introduces the *protasis* and *וראיתי* the *apodosis*, with *כי גם* introducing a parenthetical (see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:134–35, followed by Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 433).

⁸³ On the use of *כי* in this verse, see Dominic Rudman, “The Translation and Interpretation of Eccl 8:17A,” *JNSL* 23 (1997): 109–16.

⁸⁴ The meaning of *בשל אשר* is disputed (see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:145–46). Literally, it means “on account of which,” and may be understood as “since” (Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, 161), “even if” (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 287), or “thus” (Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 108).

not claim that humankind can fully know the mind of God, it does clearly imagine that God's actions have discernible patterns that can be understood through the teachings of Wisdom. Qohelet has no such confidence.

Qohelet considers the unintelligibility of God's actions and the efficacy of Wisdom more extensively in 6:10-7:14.⁸⁵ The opening unit of the section again denies the possibility that humankind can ever know what is "good" in life:

מה שהיה כבר נקרא שמו ונודע אשר־הוא אדם
ולא־יוכל לדין עם שהתקיף ממנו
כי יש־דברים הרבה מרבים הבל מה־יתר לאדם
כי מי־יודע מה־טוב לאדם בחיים מספר ימי־חיי הבלו
ויעשם כצל אשר מי־יגיד לאדם מה־יהיה אחריו תחת השמש

Whatever happens has already been named
And the course of humankind is known.⁸⁶
One cannot dispute with one who is stronger than he is.
For many words increase vanity. What advantage does humankind have?
For who knows what is good for a person in life,
the number of the days of his vain life, which he makes like a shadow?
Who will tell humankind what will happen in the future⁸⁷ under the sun? (6:10-12)

According to this passage, God (who is not named but clearly implied) determines the course of human life. Because of God's superior strength, no one can dispute with him about anything that happens--words are simply a waste of breath. The final verse acknowledges that no one is able to find out "what is good for humankind" since no one can reveal what is going to happen in the future. Here Qohelet's worldview differs starkly from that of Proverbs, in which the future can be secured by following the tenets commended by the Wisdom tradition.

⁸⁵ On this textual division, see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 229–51.

⁸⁶ The phrase נודע אשר־הוא אדם cannot mean "it is known what man is," as noted by Gordis, *Koheleth*, 263. Some commentators displace the Masoretic pause: "It is not known what it is. Man is not able to dispute..." (e.g., Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 246). Preferable is the solution of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 232, who reads 'ašūrēhū 'ādām ("his course, the human's = "the course of human beings").

⁸⁷ Literally "after him" (אחריו), but referring temporally to the future.

The inefficacy of the Wisdom tradition is reiterated in the next unit of material, a list of “better than” with the ring of traditional wisdom (7:1-12). While Qohelet seems to quote this material approvingly and without an anti-Wisdom polemic, he nonetheless acknowledges that the insights of wisdom are limited by disconnection from the Deity. While Wisdom may suggest that some things are better than others, when all is said and done one “cannot know what is good.” In contrast to Proverbs 8, in which Wisdom herself claimed to be “at the beginning of his path” (ראשית דרכו; Prov 8:22), the wise person in Qohelet has no special access to the transcendent realm. All of its advice about what is “good for a man” is contingent, no longer grounded in any special access to the Deity or knowledge of his actions.⁸⁸

At the close of the section, Qohelet raises the possibility that God not only acts in ways that are unknowable but also that God treats humankind “crookedly”:

ראה את־מעשה האלהים כי מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עותו
 ביום טובה היה בטוב וביום רעה ראה
 גם את־זה לעמת־זה עשה האלהים
 על־דברת שלא ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה

Consider the work of God,
 for who is able to straighten that which he has made crooked?⁸⁹
 On the day of prosperity, be joyful, and on the day of adversity, consider:
 Surely God has made this one corresponding to that one
 in order that⁹⁰ a person may not find out anything that will be after him. (Qoh
 7:13-14)

Qohelet explicitly claims that God’s actions “make things crooked” (עותו). Elsewhere in the HB, God is also the subject of the verb עות, but in each case the expectation is that

⁸⁸ For a full treatment of Qohelet’s relationship to the Wisdom tradition, see chapter 4.

⁸⁹ See the similar statement in Qoh 1:15a: מעות לא־יוכל לתקן (“That which is crooked is not able to be straightened”). While the subject is not explicitly stated in 1:15a, the similar statement of 7:13 suggests that Qohelet has God in mind here as well. The translation given here assumes *lētuqqan* (“be straightened”) for MT’s *litqōn*, following G. R. Driver, “Problems and Solutions,” *VT* 4 (1954): 225.

⁹⁰ The expression על־דברת־ש, found only here in Qohelet, corresponds to the Aramaic על דברת ד (“so that,” “in order that”); cf. Dan 2:30; 4:14.

God does *not* make things crooked.⁹¹ For instance, in Job 8:3 Bildad the Shulihite objects to Job's claims of God's injustice by asking the rhetorical question, "Does God pervert (יעור) justice, and does Shaddai pervert (יעור) righteousness?" Clearly for Bildad the answer is no--one cannot accuse God of acting in such ways. Similarly in Job 34:12 Elihu claims that "Shaddai does not distort (לא-יעור) justice."⁹² Qohelet, however, states that God acts in precisely the manner that these representatives of traditional wisdom reject: he makes things crooked (עור), so that no one is able to make them straight (מי יוכל לתקן). Qohelet's specific example of this is crookedness is the "day of prosperity" (יום טוב) and the "day of adversity" (יום רעה), both of which God makes. Whereas in the "straight" world of traditional wisdom, these two would reward the righteous and punish the wicked, respectively, Qohelet's God makes them precisely in order to confound humankind: "in order that a person may not find out anything that may be after him."

Qohelet's view of the power and inscrutability of God seems to result in a conception of the "fear of God" that is quite different from that found in the book of Proverbs. Aarre Lauha argues that Qohelet's use of the phrase suggests not the sort of reverent trust in God's sovereignty we observed in Proverbs, but rather a sense of fearful uncertainty before an unfathomable and unpredictable God:

Auf Grund der Unabänderlichkeit seines Tuns und seiner fernen Erhabenheit bewirkt Gott beim Menschen Furcht und zittern vor dem Unbegreiflichen. Die Gottesfurcht bei Kohelet ist also kein williger Gehorsam und keine persönliche Verbundenheit, sondern Angst, veranlaßt durch Ungewißheit und Hilflosigkeit.⁹³

Indeed, Qohelet typically frames his commands to "fear God" in terms of the negative consequences that may accrue to the one who fails to do so:

שמר רגליך כאשר תלך אל-בית האלהים וקרוב לשמע מתת הכסילים זבח
כי-אינם יודעים לעשות רע
אל-תבהל על-יפיך ולבך אל-ימהר להוציא דבר לפני האלהים

⁹¹ See the discussion in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 147.

⁹² Cf. Job 19:6, in which Job claims that "God has treated me crookedly" (עורתי).

⁹³ Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, 70.

כי האלהים בשמים ואתה על־הארץ על־כן יהיו דבריך מעטים
 כי בא החלום ברב ענין וקול כסיל ברב דברים
 כאשר תדר נדר לאלהים אל־תאחר לשלמו כי אין חפץ בכסילים
 את אשר־תדר שלם
 טוב אשר לא־תדר משתדור ולא תשלם
 אל־תתן את־פִיך לחטיא את־בשרך ואל־תאמר לפני המלאך כי שגגה היא
 למה יקצף האלהים על־קולך וחבל את־מעשה ידיך
 כי ברב חלמות והבלים ודברים הרבה כי את־האלהים ירא

Watch your steps⁹⁴ when you go to the house of God; to listen is more acceptable⁹⁵ than fools giving sacrifice, for they do not know that they are doing evil.⁹⁶ Do not be hasty with your mouth, and do not let your heart be quick to issue forth a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are upon the earth. Therefore let your words be few. For dreams come with abundant preoccupation, and a fool's voice with abundant words. When you make a vow to God, do not hesitate to fulfill it, for there is no pleasure in fools. That which you vow, fulfill. It is better that you not make a vow than that you make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin,⁹⁷ and do not say before the messenger⁹⁸ that it is an error.

⁹⁴ Reading the dual form *raglêkâ* with the Ketib rather than the singular form *raglêkâ* of the Qere, though the sense of the text is unchanged in either case. The singular form is attested in LXX, Syr, Vulg, and Targ, as well as Pss 2:12; 119:105; Job 23:11; Prov 1:15; 3:25; and 4:26-27. However, the dual is attested in Pss 31:9; 40:3; 45:14; and 119:59, so there is no persuasive reason to emend the text here.

⁹⁵ The form *qārôb* may be understood either as an imperative form (“draw near”) or as an adjective (acceptable). The imperative, however, renders *mittêt* difficult, requiring one to postulate a “pregnant use of *min*” in which the attributive idea must be supplied from the context (so Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 149). A simpler solution is to render *qārôb* as an adjectival form, as do Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 194), Fox (*A Time to Tear Down*, 230), and NJPS. For a similar usage, cf. 1 Kgs 8:59: “Let these my words, with which I pleaded before YHWH, be acceptable (*qērôbîm*) to YHWH.”

⁹⁶ The text literally reads “For they do not know doing evil.” LXX and Syr avoid this problematic phrase by emending the mt’s *râ’* with *καλον* (“something beautiful”) and *tb* (“good”), respectively. Others suggest emending *la’āsôt* to *milla’āsôt*, yielding “they do not know *except* to do evil (so, BHS, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*; Alan H. McNeile, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904], E. Pödehard, *L’Éclésiaste* [Paris: Libraire Victor Lecoffre, 1912]). Preferable is to recognize that *lēyōdēa’* can have the sense of “to know of” or “to recognize,” as in Ps 69:5: ידעת לאולתי (“you recognize my folly”); cf. 2 Sam 7:20; Jer 3:13; 14:20; Isa 59:12 (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 194–95).

⁹⁷ The form *lahāṭî’* is an apocopated form of the hiphil infinitive construct *lēhahāṭî’*; see GKC §53q.

⁹⁸ The correct sense of this verse has been disputed since earliest times. The MT reads המלאך (“the messenger” or “the angel”), but both LXX and Syr seem to reflect אלהים (“God”). While it is sometimes argued that MT’s המלאך is a secondary attempt to add “a degree of caution” to the text (so Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 232; cf. Whitley, *Koheleth*, 48–49), such an interpretation seems unlikely given that “God” is referred to incautiously elsewhere in Qohelet text without correction. Among those who take MT’s המלאך as original, there is disagreement whether the referent is a divine or human figure (see

Otherwise⁹⁹ God may become angry by your voice
and destroy the work of your hand,
for meaningless dreams are plentiful and words abound.
But fear God. (4:17-5:6 [Eng 5:1-7])

In this passage, Qohelet's final instruction to "fear God" (5:6) is set within the context of a warning of the dangers that a careless person may encounter in the presence of the Deity. Qohelet instructs his reader to approach the Temple with caution: "Watch your steps when you go to the house of God" (4:17). Elsewhere in the HB, it is *God* who watches over the worshiper's steps to protect him from danger;¹⁰⁰ here it is the worshiper who must watch his own steps precisely because God is dangerous. As Ruth Fidler notes

Qoh 4:17a reveals its ironic streak. Rather than rely on the blessing popularly believed to emanate from the house of God or on the divine protection traditionally extended to its visitors . . . the addressee is better advised to be his own guard, against none other than the dangers and follies lurking in his temple visit!¹⁰¹

Further, Qohelet instructs his reader to keep quiet before God (5:1), since foolishness is revealed when one speaks too much (5:2). The rationale for this instruction is "because God is in heaven and you are on earth" (5:1), a notable shift from earlier biblical texts that depict God as being both in heaven and upon earth (cf. Deut 4:39: "Yhwh, he is God in heaven above and upon earth below"). The image reinforces Qohelet's conception of God as inaccessible to humankind. In such a worldview, the only proper mode of approach to God is hesitant trepidation, since any action at all may anger

Robert B. Salters, "Notes on the History of Interpretation of Koh 5,5," *ZAW* 90 [1978]: 95–101). Targ understands המלאך as a reference to an angel, as do Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus, as well as Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, 340–44. An alternate line of interpretation understands המלאך to refer to a human messenger such as a priest (see most recently Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 196; cf. André Barucq, *Ecclésiaste* [VS 3; Paris: Beauchesne, 1968]; Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*; and Salters, "Koh 5,5," 95–101).

⁹⁹ Reading למה with a "quasi-rhetorical" sense (cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 324).

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., Psa 91:11-12; 121:3; Gen 29:15).

¹⁰¹ Ruth Fidler, "Qoheleth in 'the House of God': Text and Intertext in Qoh 4:17–5:6 (Eng. 5:1–7)," *HS* 47 (2006): 12.

the Deity. Qohelet warns against improper sacrifice (4:17), speech (5:1, 5), and the making of vows (5:3-4). Notably, the motivational clause in 5:5 is purely negative: “God may become angry because of your speech and destroy the work of your hand” (למה יקצף יהוה על־קולך ידיך; 5:5 [Eng. 5:6]). Caution before God is not commended for the possibility that God will favor those who are reverent, but rather because God will become angry with those who are irreverent.

Lauha concludes that the “fear of God” Qohelet commends is “kühl und zurückhaltend,” stemming from “Ohnmacht und Resignation.”¹⁰² Consequently, he has famously characterized Qohelet’s God as “unbegreiflichen Despoten.”¹⁰³ While Lauha’s assessment of Qohelet’s God as despot may be somewhat overdrawn, it does seem to be the case that Qohelet envisions God as being rather like a royal sovereign. Indeed, Michael Fox likens Qohelet’s God to “a distant monarch ruling a minor province. The ruler must be feared, not cherished. His subjects await his decisions nervously....disobey him and he will harm you. Obey him and you’ll be spared harm. Maybe.”¹⁰⁴

While in my view the evidence supports the view that Qohelet renders God in the image of a distant, inscrutable sovereign, others attempt to retrieve a more positive portrayal of the Deity. William Brown, for instance, rejects the idea that Qohelet’s God is “distant, occasionally indifferent, and sometimes cruel,” arguing that such interpretations ignore Qohelet’s more positive depictions.¹⁰⁵ Brown offers the counterproposal that for

¹⁰² Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, 101.

¹⁰³ Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, 17; cf. Leo G. Perdue, “Cosmology and the Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. J.G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 471: “God is not the beneficent deity who redeems from sorrow, but rather the despot whose decrees cannot be altered by human response.” Elsewhere, Perdue refers to the deity as “a tyrant who rules the world in secrecy” (*The Sword and the Stylus*, 252).

¹⁰⁴ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2000), 132, quoting Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 35–36.

Qohelet “God’s hand remains open, not to break into history to crush a foe or break one’s bonds, but to offer the simple gifts of sustenance and joy.”¹⁰⁶ In making his case, Brown draws attention to a number of passages in which Qohelet describes God as the maker of the day of prosperity (7:14), the creator of life (12:1), and the one who gives humankind the capacity to work (3:22; 9:10). More importantly, Brown emphasizes that for Qohelet “every good gift comes from the ‘hand of God,’” referring specifically to Qoh 2:24; 3:12-13; and 5:18 (Eng. 5:19).¹⁰⁷ Far from supporting Brown’s positive portrayal of Qohelet’s God, however, these passages give further evidence that Qohelet views the Deity as being “distant, indifferent, and sometimes cruel.”

First, the statement in 3:22 that a person should “take joy in his work” (שמחה האדם במעשה) comes in the context of the longer passage of 3:18-22, in which Qohelet laments that God has no more regard for humans than for animals, since all eventually turn to dust.¹⁰⁸ It is only because “everything is vaporous” (הכל הבל; 3:19) that one should enjoy his labor; that is, joyful labor provides a distraction from the otherwise meaningless existence that God has provided.¹⁰⁹ Similarly in 9:10, the rationale for working is “because there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol” (כי אין מעשה) (והשבון ודעת והכמה בשאול). Finally while it is true, as Brown argues, that Qohelet views God as creating the “day of prosperity” (יום טובה) in 7:14, he does so in the context of questioning the character of God’s creative activity altogether, suggesting that it is “crooked” (עוּתוּ) and cannot be “straightened” (לתקן).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 134.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 132.

¹⁰⁸ See my discussion in the section entitled “Death in Qohelet” later in this chapter.

¹⁰⁹ The role of work and enjoyment in Qohelet’s thought are addressed extensively in chapter 4.

¹¹⁰ See the translation and discussion of these verses, above.

Perhaps the stronger case for a benevolent God in Qohelet is to be found in Qohelet's statements that humankind's capacity to "eat, drink, and find pleasure in his toil" is a "gift of God" (2:24; 3:13; 5:18). In context, however, these statements only further demonstrate that God is fickle and unpredictable, arbitrarily granting and withholding the capacity to eat, drink, and enjoy. We can begin with the statement in 3:12-13, which reads:

ידעתי כי אין טוב בם כי אם-לשמוחה ולעשות טוב בחייו
וגם כל-האדם שיאכל ושתה וראה טוב בכל-עמלו
מתת אלהים היא

I know that there is nothing good for them¹¹¹
except to rejoice and to do what is good in life.
And surely every man who¹¹² eats and drinks and sees the good in all his toil--
it is an allowance¹¹³ of God.¹¹⁴

This passage is sometimes misunderstood as an indication that God gives *every* person

¹¹¹ Two MSS read באדם ("for a man") rather than בם ("for them"), rendering the idiom familiar from 2:24 (אין-טוב באדם) and 8:15 (אין-טוב לאדם). However, it is likely that these readings are harmonizing for the more difficult בם. While G. R. Driver has argued that בם is an abbreviation for באדם ("Once Again Abbreviations," *Textus* 4 [1964]: 80), it is more likely that it is simply the preposition with 3cp suffix, referring back to האדם in 3:11. As Seow notes, the shift between singular and plural suffixes is attested in 3:10, 11, 13-14 (*Ecclesiastes*, 164).

¹¹² The phrase -ש הכל אדם has been interpreted along two lines. Some commentators suggest that *every* person has the capacity to eat and drink given by God (e.g., "all people should eat and drink" [Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 158]; "that every person should eat and drink" [Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 92]). This translation has difficulty accounting for the relative pronoun -ש, however. Better is the translation "every man *who* eats and drinks," which suggests not that every man receives the ability to eat and drink but rather that anyone who does have these abilities receives them from God (cf. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 192).

¹¹³ Interpreters tend to misconstrue the Hebrew term מתת as indicating God's benevolence as the "Giver of good gifts." However, the Hebrew term מתת "has no affective connotation of a benevolent gift but expresses God's determining action" (Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:363-64). Rather, it simply means "a thing given." The present translation ("allowance") is an attempt to capture the nuance. While the nominal מתת occurs only twice in Qohelet (cf. 5:18 [Eng 19]), the verb occurs 25 times, with God as the subject 12 times (the subject of נתן in 9:9 is disputed). While God does give positive gifts (e.g., the capacity for enjoyment), God also gives ענין רע ("an unhappy preoccupation") in 1:13 (cf. 2:26). Thus, God's "gifts" are not always pleasant or benevolent.

¹¹⁴ The syntax of 5:13 is difficult, as it apparently has no main verb. The first half of the sentence is a relative clause governed by -ש, and the end of the verse is a verbless clause (מתת אלהים היא). It is apparently an anacoluthon of the same type as the parallel statement of 5:18 (Eng. 5:19), on which see further below.

the capacity to eat, drink, and see good in his toil, as in the NRSV: “moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.” However, as my translation above indicates, the verse does not suggest that God gives *all* people the capacity for enjoyment but rather that any person who *does* have the capacity to enjoy the fruits of his labor has received it from God. God dispenses enjoyment, but enjoyment is in no sense guaranteed to any person. Such seems to be the case in 2:24-26, as well:

אין־טוב באדם שיאכל ושתה והראה את־נפשו טוב בעמלו
 גם־זה ראיתי אני כי מיד האלהים היא
 כי מי יאכל ומי יהוש חוץ ממני
 כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה
 ולחוטא נתן ענין לאסוף ולכנוס לתת לטוב לפני האלהים
 גם־זה הבל ורעות רוח

There is nothing good for a person (except) that¹¹⁵ he should eat and drink and make himself see the good in all his toil. Even this, I saw, surely it is from the hand of God. For who will eat or drink apart from him? For to the man who is fortunate before God he will give wisdom and knowledge and joy. But to the one who is unfortunate,¹¹⁶ he has given a preoccupation to gather and to collect to give to the one who is fortunate before God. Also, this is vaporous and a pursuit of wind.

Here again, Qohelet’s point is that no person has the capacity to eat, drink, and find enjoyment apart from God. God’s granting of these abilities, however, is a fickle enterprise. Those who are “fortunate” (טוב) receive a blessing from God, while those who are “unfortunate” (הוטא) toil for someone else’s gain. Qohelet gives no rationale for the disparity in the treatment of the “fortunate” and the “unfortunate.” Rather, God does whatever God will do, and human beings do the best they can with the lot they receive.

¹¹⁵ In the parallel אין טוב expressions in 3:12 and 8:15, Qohelet uses כי אם (“except”) rather than -ש. It is possible that Qohelet here uses -ש to as a substitute for אם כי (so Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 139). Otherwise, one might translate: “There is nothing better for person than that he should eat and drink...”

¹¹⁶ Ginsberg, argues that the terms טוב and חוטא used here “mean respectively (as is generally recognized) ‘pleasing to God’ and ‘displeasing,’ or ‘lucky’ and unlucky’--not righteous and wicked” (Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, 139). Schoors likewise concludes that in 2:26 and 7:26 “חוטא (and its opposite טוב לפני אלהים) does not have the traditional moral meaning but denotes an element of divine (dis)favour without an ethical connotation” (Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:227).

Qohelet addresses the disparity in God’s treatment of people again in 5:18. Here, Qohelet depicts the situation of a person to whom God gives both prosperity and the capacity to enjoy what he has been given:

גם כליהאדם אשר נתן־לו האלהים עשר ונכסים
והשליטו לאכל ממנו ולשאת את־חלקו ולשמה בעמלו
זה מתת אלהים היא

Surely to every man to whom God has given wealth and possessions
and whom he has enabled to partake of them and to accept his lot
and (to) find enjoyment in his toil--
this is the allowance of God.¹¹⁷ (Qoh 5:18 [Eng. 5:19])

Qohelet envisions one upon whom God bestows wealth and possessions, as well as the capacity to enjoy them. As in the verses cited above, Qohelet suggests that one cannot enjoy wealth of one’s own accord, but only when God gives one the power to do so. Observing the parallel structure and language of 5:17 confirms the point. Qohelet’s second observation (6:2) negates the “good” situation that he has just described, as a side-by-side comparison of the two passages reveals :

<p>Surely to every man whom God gives wealth (עשר) and possessions(נכסים)</p> <p>and whom he allows (השליטו) to partake of it (לאכל ממנו) and to accept his lot and (to) find enjoyment in his toil</p>	<p>The man to whom God gives wealth (עשר) and possessions(נכסים) and honor (כבוד) so that he lacks nothing for his appetite from all that he desires and God does not allow him (לא־ישליטו) to partake of it (לאכל ממנו)</p> <p>but a stranger partakes of it (איש נכרי יאכלנו)</p>
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¹¹⁷ The syntax of this verse is difficult and a matter of some debate; cf. 3:12-13. Some view this verse as a “universal rule” to which 6:2 is an exception. This interpretation takes כליהאדם to mean “all men,” thus suggesting that God gives wealth, possessions, and the capacity to enjoy them to all people in general. This interpretation requires taking אשר as the marker of the object of the verb ראיתי in the previous verse. For example, Seow reads: “Here is what I have observed is good: (a) that it is appropriate to eat, drink, and enjoy good, (b) that God has given to them (wealth and assets)” (*Ecclesiastes*, 208–9). This translation has difficulty accounting for the phrase גם כליהאדם prior to אשר, a syntactically awkward position: “indeed all people: that God has given to them...” (ibid.). The simpler solution is to read as an anacoluthon, as rendered above (so Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 239–40; cf. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 116, NRSV, NJPS). In this case, אשר functions as a relative pronoun, such that the initial phrase must mean, literally, “Surely every man to whom God has given to him wealth and possessions.” Thus, the verse does not supply a general rule, but an example of limited scope, which is then counterposed by the parallel example of 6:2 (see below).

This is the gift of God (זה מתת אלהים היא) (Qoh 5:18) This is vaporous (זה הבל);
it is a grievous ill (חלי רא הוא) (Qoh 6:2)

In the second passage, as in the first, Qohelet has God bestowing wealth (עשר) and possessions (נכסים) upon a person. In the second case, God appears even more beneficent, granting not only these things, but also honor (כבוד), such that this second person “lacks nothing of all he desires” (ואיננו חסר לנפשו מכל אשר־יִתְאוּוֹה). However, the great irony that Qohelet see here is that, in direct contrast to the previous case in which God “enables him to partake of his wealth and possessions” (השליטו לאכל ממנו), in the second case God “does *not* enable the person to partake of it” (לא־יְשַׁלְטֵנוּ אֱלֹהִים לֵאכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ). Instead, “a stranger partakes of it” (כי איש נכרי יכלנו). Importantly, Qohelet makes no distinction in the character of the two people described in these scenes.¹¹⁸ God is the only actor, the nameless recipients of God’s gifts doing nothing to warrant unequal treatment. In the one case, God enables the recipients to enjoy their wealth, which is called an “allowance of God” (מתת אלהים). In the other case, God withholds that ability, an action that Qohelet refers to as “vaporous” (הבל) and an “evil sickness” (וחלו רע). These two verses question the adequacy of characterizing Qohelet’s God as a “giver of gifts” who encourages human enjoyment of life. While it is true that God sometimes gives humans material goods and the capacity to enjoy them, it is also God who withholds the capacity for enjoyment from others, and this distinction is made with apparent capriciousness. Qohelet’s God acts arbitrarily in relation to humankind, sometimes benevolently and sometimes punitively, without apparent regard for merit. One cannot know how whether God acts for good or ill, and as a result one cannot feel connected to God.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ For an attempt (unsuccessful in my view) to draw a distinction between the two, see Marie Maussion, “Qohélet vi 1–2: ‘Dieu ne Permet Pas...,’” *VT* 55 (2005): 501–10.

¹¹⁹ Leo Gorssen, “La Cohérence de la Conception de Dieu dans l’Ecclesiaste,” *ETL* 46 (1970): 282–324, effectively captures Qohelet’s sense of disconnection from God: “Les sorts se succèdent et ne se laissent pas insérer dans un cadre de communion personnelle. Les événements ne constituent plus le langage du Dieu du salut. Ils sont là, tout simplement. L’homme ne ‘reconnaît’ pas son Dieu dans tout ce qui lui arrive. Il y a, dans l’Ecclesiaste, une rupture, non pas entre Dieu et l’histoire,

Perhaps the best we can say about Qohelet's God is that he sometimes gives a person both prosperity and the capacity to enjoy it, and at other times he denies a person one or both of these things for no apparent reason. Qohelet's God is powerful but arbitrary, exercising sovereignty for its own sake rather than for the benefit of humankind. Michael Fox describes Qohelet's God as "a hard ruler. . . . He does not seem to love mankind, nor does Qohelet seem to love *him*. Qohelet fears God, certainly without warmth or fellowship."¹²⁰ Or, as Tremper Longman says, "Qohelet may well believe in divine providence, but it is no source of comfort to him as he faces the unpredictable chaos of life."¹²¹ Qohelet's God is not one who can be relied upon to secure his future, whether in life or beyond death.

Literal Immortality in Qohelet?. To this point, I have discussed the religious mode of symbolic death transcendence in two primary forms: (1) direct connection to the deity and (2) participation in a community that has its roots in the transcendence sphere (such as Proverbs' claim that its Wisdom derives directly from God). There is, of course, a third form of death transcendence in the religious mode that has not been invoked to this point: literal life-after-death. While it is my position that a belief in literal immortality is not introduced into the Hebrew wisdom tradition until 4QInstruction, other scholars see it emerging already in the book of Qohelet.¹²²

mais entre Dieu et l'homme. L'histoire, oeuvre de Dieu, n'est plus lieu de révélation. Les événements étant incompréhensibles, Dieu n'adresse plus à l'homme une parole qui puisse fonder et entretenir un dialogue. C'est dire que Dieu ne parle plus" (315).

¹²⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 136–37, italics original.

¹²¹ Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 135.

¹²² For a thorough, recent review of the scholarly discussion of literal immortality in Qohelet, see especially Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 141–52. Adams concludes that Qohelet was engaged in a dispute with opponents who believed in a literal afterlife, but that he himself did not hold such a belief.

One argument in favor of literal immortality in Qohelet concerns several passages that seem to support the idea of eschatological judgment. Leo Perdue, for instance, argues that such a belief underlies 3:17; 11:9; and 12:13-14.¹²³ Other scholars have rejected these verses as additions of a later orthodox glossator for similar reasons.¹²⁴ While 12:13-14 does seem to be the work of an epilogist, as practically all agree, there is no need to excise 3:17 or 11:9 from text; nor is there reason to conclude that these suggest an eschatological horizon. Rather, Qohelet simply expresses a rather traditional belief that God will intervene to reward the righteous and punish the wicked.¹²⁵ Qohelet expresses a similar sentiment in 8:6a, which is rarely considered a gloss.¹²⁶

The more compelling case for an awareness of the belief in literal immortality concerns Qohelet's reference to the ascending spirit of humankind in 3:21:

מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא למעלה
ורוח הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ

Who knows--the spirit of humankind, does it¹²⁷ go upwards,
and the spirit of the animal, does it¹²⁸ go downwards to the earth?

Some scholars have seen in this passage a reference to the immortality of the soul, which rises to the heavens after death. Samuel Adams makes the compelling case that Qohelet's question reflects descriptions of astral immortality found in Greek texts from the early

¹²³ Leo G. Perdue, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic: The Case of Qoheleth," in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (ed. Florentino García Martínez; BETL 168; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 256.

¹²⁴ In particular, see Alexander A. Fischer, "Kohelet und die frühe Apokalyptik: eine Auslegung von Koh 3,16–21," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Antoon Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1998), 339–57, followed by Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 141–42.

¹²⁵ See Prov 10:29; 15:29; 18:10; 29:25; Ps 145:18 and the discussion of "Yhwh's Protection of the Righteous" in Chapter 1.

¹²⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 318.

¹²⁷ Reading the interrogative *hă'ôlāh* rather than MT's definite article (*hā'ôlāh*).

¹²⁸ Reading the interrogative (*hăyōredet*) rather than MT's definite article (*hayōredet*).

Hellenistic period.¹²⁹ Certainly by this period belief in a literal afterlife was beginning to develop in Jewish apocalyptic circles, perhaps as a response to the same disruption of cultural worldviews that Qohelet was experiencing, and it is likely that Qohelet is addressing some such belief here.¹³⁰ However, to whatever extent Qohelet himself is aware of the concept of belief in a literal afterlife, he does not entertain it as a legitimate possibility for death transcendence.¹³¹ The expression *מי יודע* rhetorically expresses disagreement throughout the book of Qohelet, so that the sense of 3:21 is “No one knows that the spirit of humankind goes upwards,” a denial of any claim to literal immortality.¹³²

This interpretation would seem to be confirmed by 12:7, in which the death of a person is envisioned: “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it” (וישב העפר על־הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל־האלהים אשר נתנה).¹³³ In this case, Qohelet gives his own view of death, which is also the traditional view of the HB, in which the body returns to the dust and the lifebreath to God.¹³⁴ Importantly, as Adams notes, the “‘breath’ (רוּחַ) of a person ‘returns’ (שׁוּב) to God (signifying the end of earthly life), rather than *ascending* (עֲלֵה) to some sort of eternal existence” as in the astral

¹²⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 147–149.

¹³⁰ See , e.g., *1 En.* 12:2-3; 103:4; *Jubilees* 23:30-31.

¹³¹ Contra Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 67, who argues that Qohelet is entertaining the possibility of a life after death: “It is apparent that Qoheleth believes some distinction [between humans and animals] is required even though it presently lies beyond proof, beyond empirical testing. Qoheleth’s term *yitrôn* holds within it hope for some post-death resolution.”

¹³² Qoh 2:19; 3:21; 6:12; 8:1. James L. Crenshaw, “The Expression *Mi Yôdēa’* in the Hebrew Bible,” *VT* 36 (1986): 247–88, argues that in Qohelet and Proverbs “serve as strong denials and are thus equivalent to ‘no one knows.’”

¹³³ For a full discussion of Qoh 12:1-8, see Chapter 4.

¹³⁴ Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (BLS; Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 197: “This ‘taking back’ of the life-spirit does not imply an afterlife, but merely the dissolution of the components of the living being.”

immortality texts of the period.¹³⁵ Thus, while Qohelet may be aware of conversations about literal immortality taking place in his cultural milieu, he flatly denies the possibility of this mode of death transcendence along with all others.¹³⁶

Death in Qohelet: The Broken Connection

Having examined Qohelet's rejection of all attempts to symbolize death transcendence in the modes offered him by his tradition, it is now possible to understand Qohelet's reflections on death, which casts a shadow over the entire book.¹³⁷ In her thoroughgoing study of death in Qohelet, Shannon Burkes identifies thirteen texts explicitly related to death.¹³⁸ While I will consider the significance of each of these texts in Chapter 4, three warrant special attention in light of the present discussion: 2:14-16; 3:18-21; and 9:1-3).¹³⁹ These three texts constitute Qohelet's most sustained considerations of the nature of death, which he considers in terms of the "fate" (מקרה) of humankind. Examining each of these passages in context will help us to clarify the nature of death in Qohelet and why it proves so troubling to him.

Qohelet 2:14-16

Qohelet's first reflection on the מקרה of humankind appears in 2:14-16, closely

¹³⁵ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 146.

¹³⁶ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 146; cf. Sanders, "Wisdom, Theodicy, Death," 270: "Qoheleth seems to know that some people conceive of some kind of spiritual existence after death, but he roundly rejects the concept."

¹³⁷ Crenshaw, "Shadow of Death," 205–16.

¹³⁸ Qoh 2:14-16; 3:2, 19-21; 4:2-3; 5:15-16; 6:3-6; :1-2, 4, 17, 26; 8:8; 9:2-12; 11:8 (Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 59–71).

¹³⁹ My enumeration of the passages differs somewhat from Burkes. First, while 3:18 does not refer explicitly to death, it cannot be separated logically from 3:19-21, which is the text unit Burkes identifies (Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth*, 63). Second, I consider 9:4-10 to be separate from the explicit theme of death, 9:4-6 being concerned with proximate connections and 9:7-10 with enjoyment. They are considered in the relevant sections of Chapter 4.

following his reflection on the failure of the creative mode of death transcendence (2:1-12). Qohelet despairs that there is no difference between the wise and the fool when it comes to death in contrast to the claims of his tradition:

החכם עיניו בראשו והכסיל בחשך הולך
וידעתי גם־אני שמקרה אחד יקרה את־כלם
ואמרתני אני בלבי כמקרה הכסיל גם־אני יקרני
ולמה חכמתי אני אז יותר
ודברתי בלבי שגם־זה הבל

The wise person has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness,
but I also¹⁴⁰ know that the same fate befalls both of them.¹⁴¹
And I said in my heart: just like the fate of the fool, so it will happen to me.
And why then have I been so very wise?
And I said in my heart that this too is *hebel*. (2:14-15)

According to traditional wisdom, the post-mortem fate of the wise and the fool should not be the same. In Proverbs the wise were symbolized as transcending death through progeny, inheritance, the perseverance of one's name, the influence of one's instruction on younger generations, participating in a timeless truth founded before creation, contributing to the ongoing existence of the cosmos, and being connected to God through Wisdom.¹⁴² Yet Qohelet denies the claims of symbolic death transcendence in traditional wisdom: the wise do not in fact have an advantage over the foolish. "Just like the fate (מקרה) of the fool," concludes Qohelet, "so it will happen to me."¹⁴³

It has become commonplace in scholarship to argue that in the book of Qohelet "מקרה" always connotes death."¹⁴⁴ However, this view lacks nuance in that it fails to grasp

¹⁴⁰ Both the *waw* and *gam* are adversative, indicating the extent to which Qohelet's own experience contradicts the perspective of traditional wisdom. On adversative *גם* see notes on 3:11. On contradictions in Qohelet, see Chapter 4.

¹⁴¹ *כל* may mean "both" when referring to two items (Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:5); cf. Qoh 7:15.

¹⁴² See the extended argument in Chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁴³ On Qohelet's contradictions and his relationship to the Wisdom tradition, see Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:205. For extended discussions of the sense of *מקרה* in Qohelet, see Peter Machinist, "Fate, *Miqreh*, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C.*

the symbolic nature of both death and death transcendence. For example, Crenshaw argues that Qohelet “realizes that his teachers have overlooked the most important fact of all, a bond that unites villain and hero, fool and sage. Qohelet announces his discovery in an emphatic manner: ‘Yet I also know that a single happening will befall both of them.’”¹⁴⁵ That Qohelet’s predecessors could have “overlooked” death seems preposterous from the perspective of TMT, which identifies death awareness as a fundamental human concern. Further, Crenshaw’s interpretation renders Qohelet’s “emphatic” discovery rather banal: “everybody dies.” Unless we are willing to concede that the sages of Proverbs overlooked the physical reality of death and that Qohelet’s radical “discovery” consisted of noticing (as if for the first time) that death happens to everyone, then we must consider that מקרה has some further nuance in Qohelet’s usage.

Elsewhere in the HB, מקרה refers to events which happen by themselves without being attributable to the will of any known author, typically with the sense of “accident” or “chance.”¹⁴⁶ The determination that it refers specifically to “death” in Qohelet is derived from a contextual analysis of its seven occurrences in the book.¹⁴⁷ Antoon Schoors, for instance, argues that the sense of מקרה in the context 2:14-15 is “expressly suggested” in 2:16: “the same fate that will happen (יקרה) to both wise and fool is to be understood as death: ימות החכם עם־הכסיל.”¹⁴⁸ However, if we examine the relevant verse in its entirety, it becomes clear that Qohelet has something more in mind than simply physical death when he refers to the common מקרה of wise and fool:

כי אין זכרון לחכם עם־הכסיל לעולם

Greenfield (ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour p Gittin, and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 165–70, and Schoors, *The Preacher*, 203–5.

¹⁴⁵ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 84.

¹⁴⁶ See Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:203; cf. *HALOT*.

¹⁴⁷ Qoh 2:14, 15; 3:19 (three times); and 9:2.

¹⁴⁸ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:204–5.

For there is no remembrance for the wise along with¹⁴⁹ the fool
when already the days are coming they both will be forgotten.
How can the wise die just like the fool? (2:16)

Qohelet's concern in this verse is not that both the wise and the fool undergo physical death, which in any case seems inevitable, but rather that "the wise will die *just like* the fool" (ימות החכם עם-הכסיל). The significance of "just like" is given in the preceding statement: "there is no enduring memory for the wise along with the fool" (אין זכרון לחכם) (עם-הכסיל לעולם בשכבר) and that "already in the coming days they both will be forgotten" (הימים הבאים הכל נשכח). What Qohelet bemoans here is not merely physical death, but rather the fact that both the wise and fool will *die and be forgotten*. That is, the מקרה אחד to which Qohelet refers in 2:14-15 is not merely the reality of physical death, but rather the failure of the symbolic systems that should distinguish the death of the wise from that of the fool--in this case the failure of memory.

Notably Qohelet's conclusion comes shortly after his extended exploration of the creative mode of immortality undertaken in the guise of Solomon (2:4-11). In that text, as I argued above, Qohelet explores the possibility that one can symbolically transcend death through great wisdom or great achievements, finally concluding that "there is no יתרון under the sun" (2:11). It should be clarified that Qohelet does *not* determine that his building projects and other endeavors produce no יתרון because death is inescapable, as some interpreters would have it. Crenshaw, for instance, wrongly concludes that "the threat of death rendered every conceivable bonus in life utterly meaningless" for Qohelet.¹⁵⁰ The structure of Qohelet's argument suggests that precisely the opposite is true: the failure to achieve any יתרון (as promised him by his inherited worldview) has

¹⁴⁹ For discussion of Qohelet's use of עם, see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:201–3. In both instances in 2:16, עם denotes "like, on a par with" (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 222); cf. Ps 106:5; Job 9:26; 1 Chr 25:8.

¹⁵⁰ Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 242.

rendered the prospect of death utterly threatening.¹⁵¹ As a result, Qohelet concludes that he “hates life” (שנאתי חיים) and that “everything is vapor and chasing after the wind” (הכל הבל ורעות רוח; 2:17).

In terms of Terror Management Theory the structure of the passage can be understood as follows: (1) the traditional worldview fails to provide Qohelet with symbolic means of death transcendence (יתרון; 2:1-11), (2) bringing him face-to-face with an unbuffered awareness that death is a complete termination of the self (2:14-16), (3) causing Qohelet to hate the life he now perceives as meaningless and fleeting (2:17). The failure of symbolic structures of meaning leads to increased despair over death, and not the other way around.

Qohelet 3:18-21

In the following chapter, Qohelet again contemplates the nature of death, this time comparing humankind to animals. While I have already considered the final two verses of the text unit (3:20-21) in the section concerning literal immortality, above, the first two verses are of particular relevance in the present discussion:

אמרתי אני בלבי על־דברת בני האדם לברם האלהים
ולראות שהם־בהמה המה להם
כי מקרה בני־האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם
כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל
ומותר האדם מן־הבהמה אין
כי הכל הבל

I said in my heart: Concerning humankind,

¹⁵¹ Cf. Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 4: “The ‘lost theme’ to be addressed is not quite death itself. These days, in fact, one has the impression . . . that death has been all too much found. Much more elusive is the psychological relationship between the phenomenon of death and the flow of life.”

God has tested them to show them¹⁵² that they themselves are animals.¹⁵³
 Surely the fate of humankind and the fate of animals is the same fate¹⁵⁴
 Just like the death of this one, so is the death of that one, and both have the same
 breath. There is no advantage for humankind more than the animal. For everything
 is vanity. (3:18-19).

Whereas Qohelet had previously suggested in 2:12-17 that there is no distinction in the post-mortem states of the wise and the foolish, here he concludes that humans and animals are alike in death. When Qohelet concludes that “just like the death of this one, so is that death of that one” (כמות זה כן מות זה), he once again does not simply mean that both humans and animals physically die, which would be a rather unremarkable observation. Rather, Qohelet is troubled by the idea that humankind has no advantage over animals when it comes to transcending death (3:19; ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין). Qohelet reaches this conclusion based on his observations concerning the relationship of human work to God’s work (3:1-11). Because God has placed *עלם* in the human heart to obscure their understanding of “what God has done from beginning to end” (אשר-עשה) (3:11; האלהים מראש ועד-סוף), human efforts can be nothing more than “preoccupations” (ענין; 3:10) that provide no ultimate “advantage” (יתרון; 3:9). Thus, once again it is the observation that human life produces no *יתרון* that results in Qohelet’s view that death is an utter annihilation, and not the other way around. Death does not nullify *יתרון*; rather, a lack of *יתרון* amplifies death.

¹⁵² The two infinitive construct *לברם* and *לראות* have often troubled commentators. The present translations derives the first from *בר"ר* meaning “to set apart,” functioning as a finite verb. The second infinitive, *לראות*, should be revocalized from MT’s qal *lir’ôt* to hifil *lar’ôt*. See Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 276–77 (“Gott hat sie ausgesondert und gezeigt, dass sie an sich nur Vieh sind”) and Gordis, *Koheleth*, 158.

¹⁵³ Reading *להם* as an ethical dative (see Whitley, *Koheleth*, 37–38, and Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:113–14).

¹⁵⁴ While LXX, Syr, and Targ omit the initial *waw* in *להם*, and *ומקרה אחד להם*, the MT should be preserved as the more difficult text. The *waw* functions as *waw apodoseos*, introducing the predicate of the *casus pendens* (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 168).

The magnitude of the collapse of Qohelet's symbolic buffers against death anxiety is suggested by his equation of human death with that of animals. TMT research suggests that people faced with reminders of death attempt to distance themselves from their animal nature, responding with heightened degrees of disgust to their own bodily functions, as well as to animals in general.¹⁵⁵ The researchers conclude that “distinguishing ourselves from animals may be an important component of the way in which most, if not all, worldviews protect humans from anxiety associated with the awareness of death.”¹⁵⁶ Qohelet's conclusion that humankind is no different than animals suggests that he has experienced a total collapse of the anxiety-buffering symbolism of traditional wisdom.

Qohelet 9:1-3

Finally, the collapse of Qohelet's culturally constructed buffer against mortality salience is also evident in the observations of Qoh 8:16-9:3, which functions as a summary of Qohelet's perspective on life and death.

כי את־כל־זה נתתי אלי־בי ולבור את־כל־זה אשר הצדיקים והחכמים ועבדיהם
 ביד האלהים גם־אהבה גם־שנאה אין יודע האדם הכל לפניהם
 הכל כאשר לכל מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב ולטהור ולטמא ולזבח
 ולאשר איננו זבח כטוב כחטא הנשבע כאשר שבועה ירא
 זה רע בכל אשר־נעשה תחת השמש כי־מקרה אחד לכל
 וגם לב בני־האדם מלא־רע והוללות בלבבם בחייהם ואחריו אל־המתים

¹⁵⁵ Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “I Am *Not* an Animal: Mortality Salience, Disgust, and the Denial of Human Creatureliness,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 130 (2001): 427–35. See also Cathy R. Cox et al., “Disgust, Creatureliness, and the Accessibility of Death-Related Thoughts,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37 (2007): 494–507, and Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “Fleeing the Body: A Terror Management Perspective on the Problem of Corporeality,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4 (2000): 200–18.

¹⁵⁶ Goldenberg et al., “*Not* an Animal,” 433. In a separate article, the authors argue that the need to distance themselves from the animals accounts for typical human embarrassment and highly ritualized behavior around sexual behavior and human waste (Goldenberg et al., “Fleeing the Body,” 200–18). One may think here of Gen 3:6-7, in which human self-awareness is accompanied by the donning of clothes to cover up nakedness.

Therefore I set all this to heart, to examine all this: that the righteous and the wise, and their works are in the hand of God, both love and hate.¹⁵⁷ No one knows everything that is before them.¹⁵⁸ Everything is just the same for everyone. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good and for the bad,¹⁵⁹ for the pure and the impure, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not sacrifice. As are the favored so are the disfavored, the one who does not swear an oath just like the one who reveres an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that there is one fate for all. Also, the heart of human beings is full of wickedness and madness is in their hearts during their lives. And afterwards, to the dead. (9:1-3)

Once again, Qohelet's reflections on death proceed from his observations that humankind cannot understand the work that God does in the world. Since people are disconnected from both God, who is inscrutable, and from the cosmos, in which they cannot participate in any meaningful way, they are unable to participate in any systems of meaning larger than themselves, rendering death an utter disconnection from life.¹⁶⁰

This passage is often misconstrued to suggest that Qohelet's concern is about either the universality of death or the fact that righteous people sometimes die earlier than they ought. For instance, according to Michael Fox, Qohelet "remarks on an injustice that befalls all: death. Equal fates for unequal persons is an absurdity from which not even the fortunate are exempt. Qohelet alone in the Bible complains about the universality of

¹⁵⁷ Whether *גם-אהבה גם-שנאה* refers to human love and hate or God's love and hate is unclear. Some commentators prefer the latter: "Die Gerechten und die Wiesen und ihre Werke sind in der Hand Gottes. Ob Liebe oder Hass -- der Mensch weiß es nicht" (Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 439). However, the more usual Hebrew expression would be *אם...אם* rather than *גם...גם*. More likely, the verse intends that all aspects of a person (both love and hate) are in God's hand.

¹⁵⁸ Many commentators read *לפניהם* with the beginning of 9:2, which they emend to *הבל*: e.g., "Alles, was ihm zur Verfügung steht, ist eitel" (Lauha, *Kohelet*, 163).

¹⁵⁹ Adding *ולרע* with LXX (*και το κακο*).

¹⁶⁰ While Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 436, recognizes that Qohelet's concern in 8:16-17 "ist letztlich schöpfungstheologisch begründet," his conclusion that "steht er nicht am Rande, sondern im Zentrum der biblischen Tradition" does not follow. (For a similar position, see Stephan De Jong, "God in the Book of Qohelet: A Reappraisal of Qohelet's Place in Old Testament Theology," *VT* 47 [1997]: 154-67). While it is true that much of the HB views God's ways as being beyond human understanding (e.g. Isa 55:8-11), God is also understood in those texts as providing some guidance for human life (through Torah, prophecy, wisdom instruction, and so on). For Qohelet, not only can one not know what God is doing, but neither can one know "what is good for humankind" (Qoh 6:12).

death.”¹⁶¹ As my analysis has shown, Fox is only partially correct in his assessment of Qohelet. While it is true that Qohelet is troubled by equal fates befalling unequal persons, it is not the case that the common fate that concerns him is the *universality* of death. Rather, Qohelet complains that death terminates all *connections* to life for both the righteous and the wicked.

Death is not the central problem in the book of Qohelet any more so than it was in Proverbs. There is no difference in the death that so troubles Qohelet and the death that hardly gives pause to the sages of Proverbs 10-29, who boldly claimed that in the paths of wisdom “there is no death” (אל מות; P 12:28). People have always died. Rather, the central issue in the book of Qohelet is the collapse of the cultural worldview that buffered those earlier sages against the finality of death by rendering them persons of significance in a meaningful universe whose lives in some manner transcend death. Whereas that worldview succeeded for the sages of Proverbs, it has failed Qohelet abjectly.

Qohelet in Historical Context

The failure of the traditional worldview as seen in the book of Qohelet should not be surprising. In fact, Robert Jay Lifton argues that such collapses are ultimately inevitable in every culture. Each worldview has the potential to collapse in circumstances in which “[historical change] is too rapid and extreme to be readily absorbed.”¹⁶² Lifton argues that shifts in historical context demand attendant shifts in the symbolic structures of the cultural worldview in order to keep that worldview relevant. In this “symbolizing treadmill,” Lifton argues, “major turning points in human history involve fundamental

¹⁶¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 292; cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 304: “As elsewhere in the book, the ‘one fate’ here refers to death as the great leveler. In 2:14-15, the fool and the wise are said to have ‘one fate,’ in as much as they all die. In 3:10, it is said that human beings have the same fate as animals, since they all die. Now the author reiterates that there is one fate for everyone.”

¹⁶² Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 14.

alterations or recombinations of these modes [of symbolic immortality].”¹⁶³ Worldviews that are unable to adapt rapidly enough, however, eventually collapse, a process that Lifton refers to as “historical desymbolization”¹⁶⁴ or “historical dislocation.”¹⁶⁵ As Lifton explains the process:

Historical . . . dislocation consists of the breakdown of social and institutional arrangements that ordinarily anchor human lives. The dislocation can be brutal, as in wars, epidemics, and the many forms of murder and cruelty human beings have inflicted upon each other. But the dislocation is a product of historical change in general, whatever its relation to destructive or creative forces, when that change is too rapid and extreme to be readily absorbed; it then impairs symbol systems that have to do with family, religion, social and political authority, sexuality, birth and death, and the overall ordering of the cycle of life.¹⁶⁶

The type of historical dislocation described by Lifton would seem to account for the breakdown of the cultural symbols of death transcendence expressed by Qohelet. In a period of cultural instability, the traditional cultural worldview became impaired for Qohelet, resulting in a failure of symbolic death transcendence and an outpouring of anxiety over death.

While the historical setting of the book of Qohelet remains a matter of some controversy, a general consensus continues to view the book as a product of the Ptolemaic period.¹⁶⁷ The *terminus ad quem* for Qohelet is determined by 4QQoh^a

¹⁶³ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 284–85.

¹⁶⁴ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 293.

¹⁶⁵ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 14–17.

¹⁶⁶ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ A number of recent scholars place the writing toward the end of the Ptolemaic period. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, prefers a date “in the end of the Ptolemaic period, perhaps during the last quarter of the third century” (219). Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 121, proposes a date in “as late as 200 B.C.E.” Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 19, suggests “the last years of the third century (after the accession of Ptolemy V in 204 B.C.E. At the extreme, Whitley, *Koheleth*, 165, places the book in the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The major proponent of a Persian period dating is Choon-Leong Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qoheleth,” *JBL* 115 [1996]: 643–66, who places the book in the late fifth or early fourth centuries (James L. Kugel, “Qoheleth and Money,” *CBQ* 51 [1989]: 46, also dates to the Persian period on different grounds). For an argument for a pre-exilic date, see Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-Evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts and

(4Q109), a manuscript containing portions of Qoh 5-7, which is dated to the middle of the second century. Many scholars agree that Ben Sira (ca 190 B.C.E) had access to some version of the book of Qohelet, suggesting it was produced no later than the end of the third century.¹⁶⁸ The linguistic features of the text, including two Persian loanwords,¹⁶⁹ a high frequency of Aramaisms,¹⁷⁰ and numerous features of Late Biblical Hebrew,¹⁷¹ commend a dating in the post-exilic period, either in the late Persian or Ptolemaic periods.¹⁷² A socioeconomic analysis of Qohelet, while yielding no definitive date, accords well with the Ptolemaic period.¹⁷³ Martin Hengel, for instance, argues that Qohelet reflects the harsh administration of the Ptolemaic period, as well as the increasing economic disparities between landed classes and laborers characteristic of the

Studies 3; Lewiston/Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1988). However, Fredericks' study has been severely criticized on methodological grounds.

¹⁶⁸ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1: 115–16.

¹⁶⁹ The Persian loanwords are *pardēs* (2:5) and *pitgām* (8:11).

¹⁷⁰ The widespread presence of Aramaisms was, for a time, taken as an indication the the book was translated from an Aramaic original (see F. C. Burkitt, "Is Ecclesiastes a Translation," *JTS* 23 [1922]: 22–28; Frank Zimmerman, "The Aramaic Provenance of Qohelet," *JQR* 37 [1945–46]: 67–84; C. C. Torrey, "The Question of the Original Language of Qohelet," *JQR* 39 [1948–49]: 151–160; Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*. The theory of Aramaic origins, however, has not been found convincing; see especially Robert Gordis, "The Original Language of Qohelet," *JQR* 37 [1946–47]: 67–84; Robert Gordis, "The Translation Theory of Qohelet Re-Examined," *JQR* 40 [1949–50]: 103–16; Robert Gordis, "Koheleth--Hebrew or Aramaic?" *JBL* 71 (1952): 93–109; and Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:6–16.

¹⁷¹ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:221–22, finds 34 features of Late Biblical Hebrew in Qohelet.

¹⁷² While Seow has attempted to further specify the date of Qohelet to the Persian period through an analysis of the root ש"ל"ט, among other things, his position has not found a wide following (Seow, "Dating of Qoheleth," 643–66). Following Douglas M. Gropp, "The Origin and Development of the Aramaic *Šallit* Clause," *JNES* 52 (1993): 31–36, Seow argues that the term ש"ל"ט has the legal sense of "a right of disposal" in the Persian period, but not in later Aramaic, where it is generally replaced by the term רש"י (with ש"ל"ט continuing to be used with the sense of "power" but not "right of disposal"). However, Dominic Rudman, "A Note on the Dating of Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 47–52, notes occurrences of ש"ל"ט with the latter sense into the Ptolemaic period and well beyond.

¹⁷³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 21–36, argues that the socioeconomic background of Qohelet corresponds equally well to the Persian period.

period.¹⁷⁴ Others have noted a broad array of literary and philosophical similarities between Qohelet and Greek thought, be they direct influences or, more likely, reflexes of a common intellectual milieu.¹⁷⁵

Following the current scholarly consensus that Qohelet was produced in the Ptolemaic Period, I will show how that period provides a plausible setting for the type of desymbolization and death anxiety found in Qohelet. However, it should be noted that the specifics of my argument do not hinge on a precise dating of the text, but only on the hypothesis that the book was written during a time of significant cultural flux in Palestine. Thus, my argument would not be significantly affected by dating the book's composition to the end of the Persian Period, as argued by Seow and others.¹⁷⁶

Despite the violent transition to Hellenistic rule at the end of the fourth century, the first half of the third century in which Qohelet wrote was a period of relative peace and prosperity. Palestine itself saw no violence between the destruction of Samaria in 296 and the invasion of Antiochus III in 219, though wars between the two halves of Alexander's kingdom continued sporadically elsewhere.¹⁷⁷ Thus, it is unlikely that the death anxiety expressed in the book of Qohelet reflects a period of intense violence or an increased exposure to premature death. However, uncertainty about the political future

¹⁷⁴ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:115. He goes on to argue Ptolemaic period provides the best context in which to locate Qohelet's discussions of striving after riches (4:8; 5:10ff; 6:2; 7:11) and the oppression of the poor (4:1; 5:7; 7:7) (2:78 n. 58); cf. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 19–21.

¹⁷⁵ In more recent scholarship, see for instance Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "*Nicht im Menschen Gründet das Glück*" (*Koh 2,24*): *Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie* (HBS 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 274–332; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 6–17; Whitley, *Koheleth*, 165–75; and Ranier Braun, *Kohelet und die frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (BZAW 130; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973). The assessment of Greek influence on Qohelet continues to be a disputed issue. Oswald Loretz, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und Theologischer Thematik Des Buches Qohelet* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), for instance, rejects any Hellenistic influence in Qohelet.

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of the social conditions of the Persian Period, see Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁷ The five Syrian wars occurred in 274–271, 260–253, 246–241, 221–217, and 201–200/198.

and loyalties divided between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids have contributed to a weakened sense of the world as “safe” and “meaningful,” thus reducing the anxiety buffering capacity of the worldview.

More than political instability, however, it is the rapid increase in international trade during the Ptolemaic period--and the attendant exposure to alternative values, customs, and beliefs--that may have led to the desymbolization of the traditional worldview expressed in Qohelet. The economic situation in Palestine during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus is known to us from the correspondence of Zeno, an official of the finance minister Apollonius, who visited Palestine in 259-58. The Zeno papyri describe robust international trade between Syria-Palestine and Egypt, as well as with Arabia, western Asia Minor, and the Aegean.¹⁷⁸ The Zeno correspondence describes the importation of honey, wine, cheese, and nuts from Greece and the Aegean, which were then transported to Egypt.¹⁷⁹ With this international trade came the cultural influences of those regions, as well. As Hengel notes, the Khirbet et Kom ostraca demonstrate the cross-cultural influences of international trade. Dating from approximately 277 B.C.E., the ostraca include four written in Edomite, one in Greek, and one that is bilingual.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, the Greek language began to make its way into Palestine quite early in the third century, primarily through soldiers and merchants; business transactions began to be written in both Greek and the local languages from an early period.¹⁸¹ Inscriptions in Palestine

¹⁷⁸ Avigdor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*. (trans. S. Applebaum; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrix Publishers, 1999), 67–70; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 56.

¹⁷⁹ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 70.

¹⁸⁰ Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 25.

¹⁸¹ Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian Volume One: The Persian and Greek Periods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 217.

came to be written almost exclusively in Greek from the third century onward.¹⁸²

Increased exposure to the world outside of Palestine undoubtedly brought with it new cultural concepts that challenged the traditional cultural worldviews of the Jews. For instance, Tcherikover notes the salutation of Tobias's letter to Apollonius, in which he employs the typical Greek formula "many thanks to the gods" (*C. P. Jud.* 4). As Tcherikover argues, "The plural is surprising in a letter of a Jew . . . it is hard to assume that a strict Jew would have permitted such a letter to be sent from his own home signed with his own name."¹⁸³ Indeed, the story of the Tobiads demonstrates a marked change in the characteristics necessary for success in the milieu of Hellenistic Palestine.

Whereas Tobias' letter to Apollonius demonstrates a willingness to accommodate traditional beliefs to the Greek worldview, the story of his son Joseph suggests the emergence of an entirely different pathway to success than that suggested by traditional wisdom. As the story goes, Joseph appealed to Ptolemy II to be the chief tax collector for the Ptolemies in Syria, promising to double the amount of taxes raised under the previous administrative system. Through his own financial inventiveness and his willingness to punish severely those who resisted him, Joseph rose to a position of prominence in the Ptolemaic administrative system and amassed for himself considerable wealth. Tcherikover describes the principles of Joseph's success as "those of the Hellenistic epoch as a whole, dominated by the striving of the strong personality to make its way in life. Joseph's character manifests those basic traits so typical of a number of Greeks of the period: immense willpower, rapidity of action, self-confidence and, resulting from them, undisguised contempt for ancestral tradition."¹⁸⁴ In this milieu, in which the

¹⁸² Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 58–59. Many tomb, ossuary, and synagogue inscriptions--those most religiously significant--continued to be written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

¹⁸³ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews.*, 71.

¹⁸⁴ Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews.*, 134.

financial savvy and force of personality of one like Joseph the Tobiad lead to great prosperity, traditional wisdom's advice on how to be successful became less relevant, based on unstable assumptions about the social structure.

In my view, it is this inability of the traditional value system to account for the changing circumstances of the period that ultimately leads to the collapse of worldview expressed by Qohelet. The onset of the Ptolemaic Period and the attendant socioeconomic transitions represent what Robert J. Lifton refers to as a "historical dislocation" in which a cultural worldview becomes stressed by change that is "too rapid and extreme to be readily absorbed."¹⁸⁵ Lifton argues that in such cases cultural worldviews must seek out new symbolic configurations to replace those that have become impaired, or else face the prospect of desymbolization in which the worldview collapses. The book of Qohelet represents such a desymbolized worldview, unable to offer its adherents any sense of being persons of significance in a universe of meaning, or any functional modes of symbolic immortality. In the absence of such buffers, Qohelet's death anxiety rises to the fore, threatening to overwhelm him.

¹⁸⁵ Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 14.

CHAPTER 4

READING QOHELET AS A DESYMBOLIZED WORLDVIEW

In the previous chapter, I argued that the symbols of death transcendence available in traditional wisdom have collapsed for Qohelet, leaving him with no functional buffer against death anxiety. Terror Management Theory (TMT) suggests that such an unmediated awareness of death is psychologically untenable, leading to potentially debilitating terror (from which the name “Terror Management” derives). Before moving on to examine the resymbolizations of symbolic immortality in 4QInstruction and Ben Sira in subsequent chapters, it will be instructive to consider how reading Qohelet as a desymbolized cosmology may give insight into the text as well as how Qohelet himself attempts to overcome death anxiety in the absence of a functional worldview.

Qohelet and Cosmic Death

One of the most puzzling sections of Qohelet for scholars has been the closing poem of 12:1-7. The text has been read by some as an allegory of an aging body, by others as a depiction of a funeral scene, and by still others as a depiction of cosmic upheaval associated with the Day of the Lord. Reading the text as an expression of a desymbolized cosmology that has lost its capacity to buffer against death anxiety provides a framework from which to understand how the imagery of individual death and the imagery of cosmic destruction relate to one another in a coherent whole.

Scholars are generally agreed that Qohelet 12:1-7 is one half of a larger textual unit that extends from 11:7-12:7, and therefore it should be read within that context. As a whole, this unit is a comparison of youth and old age, or perhaps of the beginning of life and its end. The first movement in 11:7-10 is addressed to a youth who is commanded,

“Rejoice, young one, in your being young, and let your heart make you glad in the days of your youth” (11:9).¹ The opening verse of the second unit (12:1-7) echoes the sentiment of this verse:

וזכר את־בוראיך בימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא־יבאו ימי הרעה
והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אין־לי בהם הפץ

Remember your creator² in the days of your youth
before the days of misfortune arrive
and the years draw near about which you will say,
“I have no pleasure in them.” (12:1)

The first verse of the unit recalls the encouragement to “rejoice while you are young” (שמח בחור בילדותיך) in 11:9. Here the admonition to “remember your creator in the days of your youth” (וזכר את־בוראיך בימי בחורתיך) invites the contrast with the time of old age and death, which is introduced in the second half of the verse. The “days of misfortune” refer to the inevitable days of old age in which pleasure has faded.

The end of the passage (12:5b-7) envisages a funeral procession culminating in a reflection on death:

כי־חלך האדם אל־בית עולמו וסבבו בשוק הספדים
עד אשר לא־ירחק חבל הכסף ותרוץ גלת הזהב
ותשבר כד על־המבוע ונרץ הגלגל אל־הבור
וישב העפר על־הארץ כשהיה
והרוח תשוב אל־האלהים אשר נתנה

For the man is going to his eternal home,
and the lamenters walk about in the street.

¹ On the significance of this and other admonitions to be joyful in the book of Qohelet, see further, below.

² בראיך appears to be a plural form. Some have understood it as a “plural of majesty” (e.g. Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth* [trans. Sean McEvenue; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 139) though it is more reasonably explained as the singular form of a III-ה root, given the common confusion between III- and III-א in LBH (Robert Gordis, *Koheleth--the Man and His World* [3d ed; New York: Schocken, 1968], 340). The unexpected reference to God as “creator” in Qoh has led to proposed emendations, notably (1) *bē'ērka* (“your well/spring/wife”); (2) *bôrēka* (“your pit/grave”); (3) *boryāk* “vigor.” Crenshaw suggests a wordplay that “suggests one’s greatest pleasure (the wife) and one’s ultimate destiny (the grave)” (James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987], 184–85). Most modern scholars, however, “your creator” (e.g., Fox, Krüger, Murphy, Schweinhorst-Schönberger, Seow). Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 139, suggests that this, too, is a word play: “The reader of v.1 expects ‘death’ but hears at first ‘crater,’ then realizes that ‘Creator’ was what was said.”

Before silver cord is snapped³,
 and the golden bowl is crushed,
 and the jar is shattered upon the spring,
 and the vessel⁴ is smashed at the pit,
 and the dust returns to the earth as it was,
 and the breath returns to God who gave it.(12:5b-7)

While some of the imagery in the passage is difficult, the overall picture is clear:

someone has died and is being laid to rest in his grave (בית עולמו).⁵ Along the way, the deceased is surrounded by lamenters, who accompany his body to the grave. In 12:6, a number of implements are destroyed. While the precise identities of these vessels are a matter of some dispute, the imagery surely describes the finality of death. One possibility is that the silver cord and golden bowl (12:6a) are two elements of a lamp, which were commonly used in burials, perhaps to give light to the dead in the netherworld.⁶ The breaking of the vessels in 12:6b may reflect an ancient funerary custom in which breaking pots symbolized the return of the body to dust (cf. 12:7).⁷ Whatever the precise intent of the imagery, the man is buried, and 12:7 describes the return of his body as dust to the earth, and his lifebreath back to God.

While the poem thus begins with a reflection on old age and ends with the imagery of a funeral and burial, the remaining material in 12:2b-5a is more difficult to decipher:

עד אשר לא־תחשך השמש והאור והירה והכוכבים
 ושובו העבים אחר הגשם

³ Reading *yinnātēq* with most commentators. Neither Q *yērātēq* (“is bound, joined”) nor K *yrh̄q* (“is distant”) yield a sensible translation.

⁴ See Mitchell Dahood, “Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth,” *Biblica* 33 (1952): 213–14.

⁵ While the phrase בית עולמו occurs only here in the HB, it is found also in Egyptian, Palmyrene, Punic, and later Jewish sources (for references see Ernst Jenni, “Das Wort ‘ōlāmim im Alten Testament,” *ZAW* 64 [1952]: 197–248 and Ernst Jenni, “Das Wort ‘ōlāmim im Alten Testament,” *ZAW* 65 [1953]: 1–35).

⁶ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 381.

⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 381.

ביום שיזעו אנשי החיל ובטלו הטחנות כי מעטו
 וחשכו הראות בארבות
 וסגרו דלתים בשוק בשפל קול הטחנה
 ויקום לקול הצפור וישחו כל־בנות השיר
 גם מגבה יראו וחתחתים בדרך וינאץ השקד
 ויסתבל החגב ותפר האבינה

Before the sun grows dark,
 and the light, and the moon, and the stars,
 and the clouds return after⁸ the rain.
 On the day when the guards of the house will tremble
 and the men of valor will convulse⁹
 and the women who grind will be idle because they are few,
 and the women who watch at the windows grow dim,
 and the doors in the street are shut.
 When the sound of the mill is diminished,
 and the sound of the bird¹⁰ rises,
 and all the daughters of song come down low.
 Surely from the heights they see¹¹ terrors on the road.
 The almond tree becomes revolting,¹² the locust droops,
 and the caper plant sheds.¹³ (12:3-5a)

⁸ So most commentators. In his commentary, Seow argues for “with” (*Ecclesiastes*, 353–54) but in a later work he renders the term as “after” (Choon-Leong Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” *JBL* 118 [1999]: 212).

⁹ Following Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 355.

¹⁰ The subject of the verb ויקום is disputed. Some take the subject as unspecified (“one rises at the sound of a bird”; so NRSV) and others offer various emendations of the text. It is preferable, however, to take לקול הצפור as the subject. The ל may be understood as a marker of the subject, as occurs in LBH (Joüon-Muraoka §125.1) or, alternatively, as an “asseverative-lamed” (cf. Qoh 9:4). (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 358).

¹¹ The consonantal text suggest the root ראה (“to see”) rather than ירא (“to fear”), though one must revocalize the MT’s *yirā’û* to *yir’û*. The manuscript evidence and versions provide evidence for both. While Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (2 vols.; OLA 143; Leuven: Peeters, 1992–2004), 27–28, argues that all the ancient interpretations can be understood to derive from *yirā’û*, it is also possible that the latter reading is influenced by חתחתים (“terrors”), which follows.

¹² While the Ketib has the root as נאץ “to disdain,” the Qere, followed by most interpreters, reads נצץ, “to blossom.” The latter interpretation requires understanding the ך as an instance of plene orthography (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 345). Seow rightly objects that plene ך marks *ā* rather than *ē* as the present instance requires, and occurs solely with hollow roots rather than geminates (*Ecclesiastes*, 361). The present translation, following Seow, takes the verb to be hifil of נאץ (“to cause repulsion”).

¹³ The MT vocalizes as hifil of פרר, thus “to break, frustrate, make ineffectual, bring to naught.” Cf. Ugaritic *pr* “to break, to break from” and Arabic *farra*, meaning “to fall off, to shed” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 363).

The complex collage of imagery has led to numerous strategies amongst interpreters. Traditionally, the passage has been understood as an allegory for the aging human body.¹⁴ The allegorical interpretation finds its strongest support in 12:3, in which the “women who grind” (הטחנות) are understood as the teeth which “become diminished” (מעטו) and thus “become idle” (ובטלו). The “ones watching in the windows” (הראות) (בארבות) who “grow dark” (וזשכו) represent the eyes, which grow weak or become blind. Similarly, the “ones guarding the house” (שמרי הבית) are variously understood as representing the knees, the ribs, the legs, the arms, or the hands, which begin to “tremble” (יזעו) as one ages.¹⁵ Finally, the “the strong men” (אנשי היל) may represent either the arms or, more commonly, the thighs, which become crooked or weaken (ויתעוּתו).

Even in this verse, where its case is strongest, the allegorical interpretation begins to encounter difficulties, however. While most ancient and modern allegorical interpreters agree on the referents of the “grinders” (הטחנות) and the “watchers” (הראות), there is greater diversity in the referents of both the “the strong men” (אנשי היל) and the “ones guarding the house” (שמרי הבית). The variance of interpretations only increases as we move beyond this verse.¹⁶ Depending on which interpretation we accept, “the sun grows dark” (תחשך השמש; 1:2) may refer to the light of the face or forehead dimming, the eyes being unable to see the sun, or the fading of life’s enjoyment. Similarly, the “doors in the street are closed” (וסגרו דלתים בשוק) are variously claimed to refer to the feet, bodily

¹⁴ So Targum, midrash, Talmud (*b. Shab. 151b-152a*), Jerome, Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra. Among modern interpreters, the allegorical approach has been taken up, to varying degrees, by Walther Zimmerli, *Das Buch Des Predigers Salomo* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962), 241–43; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 253–55; André Barucq, *Ecclésiaste* (VS 3; Paris: Beauchesne, 1968), 188–93; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 338–39; Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet* (BKAT 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 210–15; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 136–41; and Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 262–73.

¹⁵ For references, see Gordis, *Koheleth*, 342.

¹⁶ For a full discussion, see Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 344–45.

orifices, ears, or lips either suffering or closing. The “daughters of song come low” (וישחו) (כל-בנות השיר) are taken as references to the voice rasping, losing pitch, or becoming weak, or alternatively, to the person becoming deaf. Especially difficult for the allegorical interpretation is the reference to the “locust becoming laden” (וּסְתַבַּל הַחֲגָב), which is variously understood to indicate everything from labored breathing to swollen ankles to a flaccid penis.¹⁷

Even proponents of the allegorical approach recognize its failure to provide a coherent interpretation of the text. Tremper Longman, while cautiously accepting the allegorical interpretation, acknowledges that “the problem with this type of allegorical interpretation of the passage is the arbitrariness of many of the associations that are made and the fact that there are often multiple possibilities for association. The whole approach is thus extremely subjective and, therefore, suspicious.”¹⁸ Michael Fox states the case more bluntly: “the procrustean character of this interpretation may make it appear more effective than it really is. It is easy enough to connect almost any image with some ailment in the manifold physical and psychological processes of aging and death.”¹⁹

Recognizing the difficulties with the allegorical interpretation, a number of scholars have offered alternative approaches to the text.²⁰ One influential view most

¹⁷ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 345.

¹⁸ Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 263–64.

¹⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 345. Similarly Gilbert: “Enfin, sur la lancée de l’interprétation allégorique, on a vu un détail physiologique à chaque pas de la description; on en est arrivé ainsi à une interprétation apparemment cohérente dans son principe, mais qui abusait du texte, puisque celui-ci multiple les images sans y mettre la cohérence qu’on croit y voir” (Maurice Gilbert, “La description de la vieillesse en Qohelet XII 1–7 est-elle allégorique?” in *Congress Volume, Vienna, 1980* [ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981], 109).

²⁰ A diversity of other interpretations of the imagery have been offered, though none has achieved scholarly consensus. These include: (1) the approach of a thunderstorm (C. D. Ginsburg, *Cohelath, Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with a Commentary, Historical, and Critical*. [London: Longman, 1861 [repr. New York: KTAV, 1970]], 457–69; Michael Leahy, “The Meaning of Ecclesiastes 12,1–5,” *ITQ* 19 [1952]: 297–300); (2) a ruined house representing the failure of human efforts (John F. A. Sawyer, “The Ruined House in Ecclesiastes 12: A

recently expounded by Michael Fox argues that the text describes a funeral procession.²¹ Fox observes that “during the funeral, doors are closed and the mills grow silent. The mill maids cease their work, because they have grown few in number, perhaps because they have gone to join the mourning. The passing cortège brings normal activities to a halt.”²² Certainly a funeral procession is envisioned in 12:5b, in which “the mourners go about in the street” while “the man goes to his eternal home,” and it is not impossible that the images of 12:3-5a likewise depict a village in mourning. However, as Fox goes on to note, a funeral procession by itself is not sufficient to account for the sense of terror that is evident in the text. “The reaction of the denizens of Qohelet’s village transcends a community’s formalized expressions of grief. Everyone, and not only the immediate family, seems to be deeply smitten with grief, and not only grief but terror, which funerals would not normally evoke.”²³ He concludes that “behind the surface, looming in the background, is a disaster of cosmic magnitude.”²⁴

While Fox argues that the scene depicts the “literal” imagery of a funeral overlaid with the “symbolic” imagery of an eschatological cataclysm, the apocalyptic imagery alone may be sufficient to account for the details of the text.²⁵ Beginning in 12:2, the

Reconstruction of the Original Parable,” *JBL* 94 [1976]: 519–31); (3) a literal description of old age (Gilbert, “Qohelet XII 1–7,” 96–109); (4) a gloomy winter day (Oswald Loretz, *Qohelet und der alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet* [Freiburg: Herder, 1964], 189–93).

²¹ Fox’s argument follows on those of Charles Taylor, *The Dirge of Coheleth in Ecclesiastes XII* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1874) and M. V. Anat, “The Lament on the Death of Man in the Scroll of Qoheleth,” [Hebrew] *Beth Mikra* 15 (1970): 375–80.

²² Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 337.

²³ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 341.

²⁴ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 339.

²⁵ Scholars have increasingly recognized the eschatological imagery in Qoh 12:2-5a. See especially Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 368–82 and idem, “Eschatological Poem,” 209–34; Timothy K. Beal, “C(ha)osmopolis: Qohelet’s Last Words,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 290–304; and Thomas Krüger,

darkening of the heavenly luminaries portends cosmic catastrophe, a topos familiar from prophetic depictions of cosmic disaster.²⁶ In his description of the “day of YHWH” (יום יהיה), for instance, the prophet Joel writes that “the sun and the moon will grow dark and the stars will withhold their shining” (שמש וירח קדרו וכוכבים אספו נגהם; Joel 2:10), an image that recurs throughout the prophets.²⁷ In the case of Qohelet, the distinction between “the sun” (השמש) and “the light” (האור) recalls the creation narrative of Genesis 1 in which “light” (אור) is created first (Gen 1:3) and the sun (המאור הגדול), the moon (המאור הקטן) and “the stars” (הכוכבים) only later in Gen 1:16. The darkening of these four light sources in Qoh 12:2 thus suggests the undoing of creation--the unmaking of the world. The image also draws an important contrast with the role of the sun in the opening poem of Qoh 1:3-11. In that text, the sun rises and sets in seemingly endless sequence, Here, in its final mention of the sun in the book, the pattern is broken; the sun grows dark. Whereas the constant cycles of nature had served in the earlier as evidence that the “earth stands forever” (והארץ לעולם עמדת), here its darkening suggests that soon the earth will no longer stand.

The image of the “clouds returning after the rain” (שבו העבים אחר הגשם), also suggests cosmic destruction. It is possible that the imagery evoked here is that of the Divine Warrior going out to battle cloaked in the clouds.²⁸ C. L. Seow draws a parallel

“Dekonstruktion und Rekonstruktion: prophetischer Eschatologie im Qohelet-Buch,” in *“Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit”*: Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit; Diethelm Michel Zum 65 Geburtstag (ed. Anja A. Diesel et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 114–24, which is largely reprised in Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (trans. O. C. Dean, Jr.; ed. Klaus Baltzer; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 195–205.

²⁶ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 139.

²⁷ See also Joel 3:4 (Eng 2:31), 4:15 (Eng 3:15); Amos 5:9, 20; Isa 5:30; 8:22; 13:10; Jer 4:23; Ezek 32:7-8; Zeph 1:15.

²⁸ So Seow, “Eschatological Poem,” 213, n. 17, citing Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 105–11, 147–94. See 2 Sam 22:12 = Ps 18:12 (Eng 18:13); Jdg 5:4; Isa 19:1; Job 36:29; 37:19.

with the Deir ‘Allā inscription, in which the first signs of cosmic destruction are likewise rain clouds and darkness:

A female deity present at the assembly is charged with the task: With your raincloud (*b*) ordain darkness and not light.” The words that follow in the inscription are debated, although it appears that there is terror (*ht/t*) and a dark raincloud (*fʿ/b hšk*) that blocks out all possibilities of light. In this manner, then the Deir‘Allā inscription portrays the end of the world.²⁹

One may also note in connection with this text that Qohelet later refers to “terrors” (התחתיים) approaching on the road (12:5). Further, the “Day of YHWH” (יום ליהוה) is elsewhere associated with the arrival of clouds, as in Ezek 30:3 (“the day of YHWH is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time (of doom) for the nations” [קרות יום ליהוה יום ענן עת] [גוים יהיה]) and Joel 2:1b-2a (“The day of YHWH is coming; surely it is near--a day of darkness and thick gloom, a day of clouds and deep darkness [כיבא יום-יהוה כי קרוב יום] [השך ואפלה יום ענן וערפל]). In any case, the return of clouds after the rain in 12:2 does not bode well, as it represents nature turned upside down.

The following verses (12:3-5a) describe the events that will take place in Qohelet’s imagined village “on the day that” (ביום ש-) the ominous portents of 12:2 take place. Against the allegorical reading of the text as referring to old age, these events are depicted as taking place on one day as opposed to the plural “days of your youth” (בימי) (בחורתיך), “days of unpleasantness” (ימי הרעה) or “approaching years” (וגיעו שנים) of 12:1. The phrase -ביום ש- suggests that these events occur in one moment rather than over a period of time and should perhaps be read in light of the similar expression יום אשר in Mal 3:21 (Eng 4:3), which refers to “the great and terrible day of YHWH” (יום הגדול והנורא); Mal 3:23 [Eng 4:5].³⁰ The approaching cataclysm accounts for the “trembling” (יזעו) of the guards and the “convulsing” (התעיתו) of the strong men, verbs which both connote fear rather than weakness. In fact, Qohelet’s village appears very much like the “city of

²⁹ Seow, “Eschatological Poem,” 213.

³⁰ Seow, “Eschatological Poem,” 214.

chaos” (עיר תוהו) in the proto-apocalyptic text of Isaiah 24.³¹ There, the “remaining men are few” (נשאר אנוש מזער; 24:6), the noise of the city is stilled (24:8), and “every house is shut so no one can enter” (סגר כל־בית מבוא). In Qohelet’s scene, the “women who grind” (הטחנות) “become few” (מעטו), “the doors in the street are shut” (וסגרו דלתים בשוק), and “the sound of grinding is low” (בשפל קול הטחנה).³² The “sound of the birds rises” to fill the silence where the village had been, and the “daughters of song” come low to settle in the places of human habitation, having “seen terrors on the road” from their lofty places (מגבה).³³ Finally, in 12:5aβ Qohelet employs imagery of nature’s languishing, again a topos familiar from prophetic depictions of cosmic destruction.³⁴ Three plants give the appearance of dying: the almond tree, known for its beauty, “causes repulsion” (וינאץ); the locust tree begins to “droop” (ויסתבל); the caper plant “sheds” (ותפר). Likewise, in Isaiah’s “city of chaos” the land “dries up and withers” (אבלה נבלה), while the earth “wastes away and withers” (אמללה נבלה; Isa 24:4). Similar imagery also occurs in the context of divine judgment in Amos 1:2 (“The pastures of the shepherds dry up and the top of Carmel becomes dry” [ואבלו נואת הרעים ויבש ראש הכרמל]) and Hab 3:17 (“the fig tree

³¹ Beal, “C(ha)osmopolis,” 297.

³² The stifling of sounds in the context of anticipated desolation occurs also in Jer 25:10.

³³ The meaning of the phrase בנות השיר has variously understood as (1) female singers, perhaps from Ugaritic *bnt hll snnt*, “daughters of praise” (so Dahood, “Canaanite-Phoenician Influence,” 215 followed by Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* [BLS; Sheffield: Almond, 1989], 304, who understands the reference to be to women in mourning; (2) birds, in parallel with הצפור, depicted as “swooping down from the heights” (see discussion in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 359–60). In support of the latter interpretation, Seow, “Eschatological Poem,” 220, notes a parallel in the Deir ‘Allā text in which the “voice of vultures sings” (*ql rh[m]n y’nh*) in anticipation of the devastation

³⁴ The meaning of these images is exceedingly difficult (see translational note, above). It would be possible to find here a depiction of nature’s *flourishing*, as many scholars do (e.g., Krüger, Fox, Lohfink, Loretz). In this case, the resurgence of nature would be understood to contrast the demise of humankind (so Loretz, *Qohelet und der alte Orient*, 191, followed by Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 328. Since the sun has already been extinguished in 12:2, it is difficult to understand how nature could flourish.

does not bloom and there is no produce on the vines” [תאנה לא־תפּרה ואין יבול בגפּנים].³⁵

As a whole, then, Qoh 12:1-7 moves from a description of approaching old age (12:1) to the impending destruction of the cosmos (12:2-5a) to a description of one man’s funeral (12:5b-7). How are we to make sense of this sequence of images? It is clear, at least, that the scene of cosmic destruction and the funeral scene are related by the particle כִּי, which suggests that the cosmic destruction happens “because” the man is going to his grave.³⁶ One way to understand the connection is given by Seow, who presses the eschatological imagery one step further, arguing that 5:5b-7 depicts “the end of human existence.”³⁷ The difficulty with this interpretation is that apparently not all of humankind goes to the grave in 5b, but only one man (הָאָדָם).³⁸ If all of humankind is dying, one would not expect mourners to “march in the street-bazaar.”³⁹ Rather, the scene depicts the death of one individual (הָאָדָם), on account of which the cosmos undergoes cataclysmic destruction. For Qohelet, the death of this one individual is apparently confounded with the destruction of the cosmos.⁴⁰

³⁵ Both Michael Fox (*A Time to Tear Down*, 338–43) and Thomas Krüger (*Qoheleth*, 201–5) argue, in different ways, that the imagery of these verses functions on multiple levels. For Fox, it describes both a funeral procession and cosmic destruction; for Krüger simulatensouly on the level of “cosmology, anthropology, and theology.” While neither of these readings is impossible, the imagery can be accounted for with eschatological imagery alone.

³⁶ The כִּי in 5b can be understood as giving the reason for the entire series of images in 5:2-5a.

³⁷ Seow, “Eschatological Poem,” 225; cf. idem, *Ecclesiastes*, 380.

³⁸ While הָאָדָם may refer to humankind as a whole, most commentators agree that it does not do so here.

³⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 380.

⁴⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 333–38, offers a somewhat similar interpretation. He ultimately concludes that the death that is depicted in this passage is the death of the reader: “they see and mourn for *you*, to whom Qohelet addressed his advice and warnings, the ‘you’ of v.1. Qohelet wants you to look upon your death and funeral from the outside. It is *your* death that appalls the village” (338, italics original). Cf., Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 210: “Here one finds the inextricable entwining of anthropology and cosmology in Qoheleth: the decline of human vitality and death compares to the decline and death of the cosmos.”

This unexpected merger of individual and cosmic death comes into focus within the framework of Qohelet's desymbolized worldview and its attendant impairment of death transcendence. Stemming from his studies of survivors of Hiroshima, Robert J. Lifton has observed that for many people whose systems of symbolic immortality have crumbled "one's individual death cannot be separated from the sense that (as Hiroshima survivors put it) 'the whole world is dying.'"⁴¹ Lifton argues that "even in the absence of holocaust" people whose worldviews are severely compromised "can equate the end of the self with the end of everything."⁴² He suggests that the merger of individual and cosmic death stems from the sense of radical disconnection that characterizes periods of desymbolization. Because people cannot envision being connected to anything outside of themselves, they come to imagine that life itself will cease when they die. The end of one's own life comes to be perceived as the end of *everything*.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Qohelet as reflects a period of historical desymbolization in which the author is unable to imagine his own existence as having any meaningful connection to any יתרון that transcends death. If that is the case, then we may suggest that Qohelet imagines the merger of individual death and cosmic destruction to be quite literal. The snuffing out of the light of the individual's life cannot be separated from the dimming of the primal light of creation. For Qohelet, his own death *is* the death of the cosmos. Once he has died, nothing remains.

The Incursion of Death into Life

To this point, I have been concerned with Qohelet's efforts to extend his life symbolically beyond the boundary with death through the means provided him by his wisdom tradition--a quest which has failed abjectly. This, however, is not the end of the

⁴¹ Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 47.

⁴² Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 47.

story for Qohelet. In the same manner that life can extend itself beyond the boundary with death, so that the decedent's death-state comes to be characterized by continued life and vitality, it is also possible for death to breach the boundary in the opposite direction, so that one's life-state comes to be experienced not as vital existence but rather as death-in-life, or "mimetic death."

The concept of life experienced as death is familiar within the HB, particularly in the lament Psalms.⁴³ One thinks for instance of the speaker of Psalm 88:

I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
 I am like those who have no help,
 like those forsaken among the dead,
 like the slain that lie in the grave,
 like those whom you remember no more,
 for they are cut off from your hand.
 You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
 in the regions dark and deep. (88:5-8 [Eng 4-7]; NRSV)

While the speaker of the Psalm is clearly not dead in the literal sense, he numbers himself among the dead, like those who lie in the grave. The existence of the psalmist has become such that he experiences life as a type of death, not distinguishing himself from those who have literally died. Philip S. Johnston argues that "[t]he psalmist who can pray is clearly not dead" since "death necessarily entails total deprivation of life."⁴⁴ While this is certainly true in a strictly biological sense, Johnston fails to recognize the symbolic nature of both life and death. Jon Levenson, arguing against Johnston, insists on a permeable boundary between life and death:

Whereas we think of a person who is gravely ill, under lethal assault, or sentenced to capital punishment as still alive, the Israelites were quite capable of seeing such an individual as dead. . . . In fact, they saw illness as continuous with death and thought of the reversal of illness as so miraculous as to be in the nature of

⁴³ See especially Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 35–81; cf. Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (BO 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); Christoph Barth, *Die Erretung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (2d ed.; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987).

⁴⁴ Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 93.

resurrection.⁴⁵

From the perspective of modern psychological theory, Levenson is surely correct here, not only with regard to ancient Israelites, but perhaps with moderns as well.

While it may be tempting to think of life and death as separate and sequential entities, with death beginning at the moment life ends, Robert J. Lifton argues that in fact “death does not appear out of nowhere [at the end of life] but is ‘present’ for us in some way at all times.”⁴⁶ While it is of course quite impossible for any living person to know what being dead is like, Lifton suggests that we begin to imagine the death-state through our own proximate experiences of separation, disintegration, and stasis:

Images of death begin to form at birth and continue to exist throughout the life cycle. Much of that imagery consists of ‘death equivalents’--image-feelings of separation, disintegration, and stasis. These death equivalents evolve from the first moment of life, and serve as psychic precursors and models for later feelings about actual death. Images of separation, disintegration, and stasis both anticipate actual death imagery and continue to blend and interact with that imagery after its appearance.⁴⁷

Long before they are able to conceptualize death itself, young children begin to develop “some feeling of death . . . in order to prepare one for actual imagery of death.”⁴⁸ Thus, human existence is never experienced as purely vital but is always--to a greater or lesser extent--marked by death in the form of these death equivalents.

In order to grasp what Lifton means by “death equivalents,” we might consider the manner in which proximate experiences of *separation* may anticipate death as the loss of all of one’s personal connections. When a person contemplates her own death, it may be imagined as the total severance of all connections--the loss of her family, friends,

⁴⁵ Levenson, *Resurrection*, 38–39.

⁴⁶ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 53.

⁴⁷ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 53.

⁴⁸ Robert J. Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 16.

work, ideas, etc.--as we have seen in the preceding chapters. She can anticipate this feeling of total severance precisely because in her life she has experienced equivalent separations on a smaller scale: from her mother, family, friends, and so forth. Even though she cannot experience death prior to the fact, she can imagine it through the “death equivalent” experiences of separation in her own life.

Similarly, at the level of death itself, Lifton refers to *disintegration* as the familiar idea of death as a test of the integrity of life: “Tell me how you die and I will tell you who you are.”⁴⁹ The implication, Lifton suggests, is that one expects a “cause-and-effect” relationship between one’s manner of living and one’s manner of dying, so that life and dying should have an integrated relationship.⁵⁰ One need not wait until the moment of death to test the congruity of the relationship between one’s way of living and its outcome, however. On the proximate, daily level, “disintegration” concerns the predictable relationship between one’s actions and their outcomes. If the relationship between a person’s actions and their outcomes is perceived as reliable and coherent, then one experiences life as characterized by vitality. However, if one experiences a lack of a reliable relationship between actions and their outcomes, then life itself is experienced as humiliating, incoherent, and absurd--and therefore as characterized by death rather than vitality. With regard to Proverbs, Lifton’s category of integrity/disintegration is given in terms of the *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*. To the extent that act and consequence follow reliably upon one another, life is experienced as vital; when the relationship is broken, life may be experienced as death-equivalent.

Finally *stasis* refers at the most basic level to a literal lack of bodily motion. A young child is likely to perceive absolute stillness as a death-like state, such that

⁴⁹ Octavio Paz, quoted in Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 100.

⁵⁰ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 100.

“absolute stillness suggests the negation of vitality.”⁵¹ Because death comes to be “anticipated as an abrupt termination of the process and motion of life,” the symbolization of life as possessing purposive movement becomes an important element in individual and collective feelings of vitality.⁵² At a more advanced stage, movement and stasis may take on less literal significance and come to refer not to one’s literal, physical movement but rather to a metaphorical sense of motion related to a person’s sense of growth or life’s movement toward a goal. Stasis may be experienced as something like “stagnation,” a state in which both external and internal movement and growth have ceased. Such an existence will be experienced and symbolized as lacking vitality and therefore as tending toward death equivalence.⁵³

Of course, no one experiences life as purely death equivalent or as purely vital. Rather, as Lifton argues, death imagery is always present in life to a greater or lesser degree along the axes of connection-disconnection, integration-disintegration, and motion-stasis. The task of a successful cultural worldview not only to provide its adherents with a sense of ultimate death transcendence but also to render life itself as vital by providing a sense of connection, integration, and motion:

For modes of immortality to be symbolically viable . . . they must connect with direct, proximate experience as well as provide ultimate patterns of continuity. A viable biological (or biosocial) mode, for instance, includes intense, direct (or proximate) emotions as well as a more unspoken sense of unending continuity.⁵⁴

It is possible, however, to imagine a situation in which a severely impaired cultural worldview might fail to provide vitalizing imagery on the proximate level, tending toward the opposite poles of disconnection, disintegration, and stasis. When this happens,

⁵¹ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 63.

⁵² Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 109.

⁵³ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 109–12.

⁵⁴ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 283.

life itself may come to be experienced as a death-like state, which Lifton refers to as “mimetic death,” by which he means “life imitating death: the idea of ‘death in life,’ or loss of vitality, or being frozen in some form of death terror.”⁵⁵

Examining these three axes in the book of Qohelet reveals that Qohelet’s thought tends almost exclusively toward the negative end of these polarities--disconnection, disintegration, and stasis--the attributes that Lifton refers to as “death equivalents.” This suggests that Qohelet’s worldview has failed not only to provide modes of symbolic death transcendence but also to prevent death from crossing the boundary in the opposite direction, so that it threatens to overwhelm any sense of vitality in life itself. For Qohelet, life is in danger of becoming mimetic death.

Separation

As I have argued in the previous chapter, Qohelet does not place a great deal of weight on interpersonal and familial connections, particularly in relation to death transcendence at the ultimate level. However, we do find at least one instance in which Qohelet calls attention to the particular meaninglessness associated with individuals who do not have relationships or who have them but cannot find meaning in them.⁵⁶

ושבתי אני וראיה הבל תחת השמש
יש אחד ואין שני גם בן ואח אין-לו
ואין קץ לכל-עמלו גם-עיניו לא-תשבע עשר
ולמי אני עמל ומחסר את-נפשי מטובה
גם-זה הבל וענין רע הוא

I turned and observed another vapor under the sun:
There is one who has no second person;
he has neither a son nor a brother.
But there is no end to all his toil.

⁵⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 47.

⁵⁶ In several passages Qohelet commends the value of relationships to his readers (see especially 4:9-12, which follows immediately on the present verse). In my view, these instances are part of Qohelet’s attempt to find vitality in the midst of mimetic death, and so will be treated in the following major section.

Surely his eye⁵⁷ is not satisfied by wealth.
 “So for whom am I toiling and depriving myself of good things?”
 Surely this is vapor and a terrible business. (4:7-8)

Here Qohelet envisions the case of a solitary person, who has no one to benefit from all of his labor. Yet the person continues to labor endlessly, unable to find satisfaction in his wealth. Qohelet labels this situation “vapor” (הבל; 4:7, 8) and “a terrible business” (ענין רע; 4:8). While Qohelet elsewhere describes the impossibility of satisfying oneself with the products of one’s labor (see the section on “stasis” below), in this case it is specifically work *in isolation* that distresses Qohelet. The opening of the verse יש אחד ואין שני emphasizes the point: “there is one and there is no second (שני).” The verse goes on to emphasize, that the “one” has neither son nor brother. The conclusion that the situation is ענין רע and הבל is not only about his “depriving myself of good things” (ומחסר את-נפשי) (מטובה), but doing so as an isolated individual in the absence of companions, a point which is emphasized in the verses that follow in 4:9-12. The unusual switch to the first person in the middle of the verse (“And for whom am I toiling and depriving myself of good things”) has led some scholars to speculate that the person being described here may be Qohelet himself, especially as he describes himself as the “unfortunate toiler” in 2:18-19.⁵⁸ If this is the case, it confirms the point that Qohelet views himself as an isolated individual without connection to others; even if not, Qohelet views such isolation as “vapor and a terrible business.”⁵⁹

Disintegration

The second pole of Lifton’s paradigm is integrity-disintegration, by which he refers to the reliability of the relationship between one’s actions and their outcomes. The

⁵⁷ Reading Q עינו rather than K עיני. The sense is unaffected in either case.

⁵⁸ See especially Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 222.

⁵⁹ The case of a man who has a hundred children (6:3) will be considered below in the section on “Life as Mimetic Death.”

integrity of life is one of the central themes of Proverbs, which consistently envisions both the daily experience of life and the ultimate outcome of one's existence as bearing a strongly integruous relationship between cause and effect (the so-called *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*). For Qohelet, however, the situation is quite different. Earlier, I discussed Qohelet's failure to find any distinction between the wise and the foolish (and indeed the human and the animal) when it comes to the issue of death itself. In addition, Qohelet describes a proximate existence in which the relationship between act and consequence has also disintegrated. A few examples should suffice.⁶⁰

ועוד ראיתי תחת השמש
מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע

And again I saw under the sun:
in the place of justice, wickedness was there,
and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there. (3:16)

את־הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי
יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

I have seen both in the days of my *hebel*:
there is a righteous one perishing in his righteousness
and there is a wicked one living long in his wickedness. (7:15)

שבתי וראה תחת־השמש
כי לא לקלים המרוצ ואלא לגבורים המלחמה
וגם לא לחכמים לחם וגם לא לנבנים עשר
וגם לא לידיעים חן כִּי־עת ופגע יקרה את־כלם

I turned and I saw⁶¹ under the sun that:
the race does not belong to the swift,
and the battle does not belong to the mighty,
and surely bread does not belong to the wise
and surely wealth does not belong to the intelligent
and surely favor does not belong to the knowledgeable--
for time and chance⁶² befall all of them. (9:11)

As these verses suggest, Qohelet describes a proximate existence characterized by

⁶⁰ Other instances of the disruption of the integrity of act-consequence include: 8:14

⁶¹ *ראה* (*rā'ōh*) is an inf. abs. functioning as a finite verb; cf. 4:2; 8:9.

⁶² It is possible to read עת ופגע as a hendiadys: "a timely incident" (so Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 308; cf. Lauha, Fox). LXX has *καιρος και απαντημα*.

disintegrity, or the breakdown of the *Tun-Ergehen Zusammenhang*. From the perspective of Lifton's categories, Qohelet's disintegrated experience of life suggests that symbolic death has begun to penetrate into lived existence in the form of mimetic death.

Stasis

Recalling the earlier discussion of death equivalents, stasis may be understood as the absence of purposive movement toward an achievable goal--that is, as stagnation and a lack of accomplishment. Like the disintegrity of life, the theme of the stagnant nature of human existence pervades the book of Qohelet. I have already discussed at length Qohelet's conclusions about the impossibility of achieving any יתרון that has death-transcending significance. However, Qohelet also reaches similar conclusions about the proximate scale of lived experience: not only can a person not achieve death-transcending accomplishments but neither can he accomplish anything meaningful during his own lifetime.

Already in the opening poem of 1:4-11, we see the theme of stagnation, not only of humankind but also of the cosmos itself. Qohelet describes the world in terms of the circular movement of its elements--the sun, the wind, and the rivers--which move ceaselessly but ultimately achieve nothing. The connection between the stasis of the cosmos and the stasis of humankind is suggested by 1:8, which serves as a transition from Qohelet's description of nature (1:4-7) to its implications for human existence (1:9-11). The first colon is ambiguous as to its meaning, allowing it to serve both as a conclusion to the preceding depiction of the cosmos and an introduction to the effects on humankind. The Hebrew דברים could refer either to the "things" (elements of creation) described in the foregoing verses or to the "words" people use to describe them. Similarly, יגעים, could be legitimately rendered either "weary" or as "wearisome."⁶³

⁶³ As Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 109) notes, the distinction between "wearisome" and "weary" is made in English but not in Hebrew. He concludes that the English sense of the participle is ambiguous: "the

Thus, two renderings are possible:

All rivers flow to the sea, but the sea is not filled.
To the place where the rivers go, there they continue to go.
All things are weary; a man is not able to express it. (1:7-8a).

or

All words are wearisome; a man is not able to speak.
The eye is not satisfied to see, and the ear is not fulfilled by hearing (1:8)

The statement thus provides a summary of the preceding description of the cosmos: it is exhausted. It also describes the effects of this endless repetition on humankind: speaking, seeing, and hearing are all ultimately unsatisfying. The reason, as expressed in the following verse, is that

מה־שהיה הוא שיהיה
ומה־שנעשה הוא שיעשה
ואין כל־חדש תחת השמש
יש דבר שיאמר ראה־זה חדש הוא
כבר היה לעלמים אשר היה מלפננו

What was is what will be
And what was done is what will be done
And there is nothing new under the sun.
There may be a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new!”
It has already been for ages that were before us. (1:9-10)

Because the world moves in endless, wearying cycles of repetition, there is nothing worth saying or doing.

Two important locutions for fulfillment appear in 1:8b: שבע (“to be satiated”) and the nifal of מלא (“to be fulfilled, satisfied”):

לא־תשבע עין לראות ולא־תמלא אذن משמע

The eye is not satisfied to see, and the ear is not fulfilled by hearing. (1:8b)

In the context of 1:8b, both of these expressions refer to the possibility of fulfillment or satisfaction.⁶⁴ Just as the sea is never filled by the rivers that continually flow to it, so

things/words are wearying--i.e., they are both worn out and wearisome.”

⁶⁴ See Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:247, 301.

neither the eyes nor the ears of human beings are never satisfied or fulfilled. The second of these expressions (מלא ni.) occurs elsewhere in Qohelet only in 6:7:⁶⁵

כל־עמל האדם לפיהו וגם־הנפש לא תמלא

All of a man's toil is for his mouth,
and yet his gullet (being) is never satisfied. (6:7)

Here Qohelet denies the possibility that human toil can achieve anything meaningful. All of a person's toil (כל־עמל) goes to satisfy appetites; like the unfilled sea in 1:8, his bottomless gullet (נפש) can never be satisfied. Playing on the two sense of נפש as both a person's "throat" and his "being/self," Qohelet insists that life is a zero-sum game: toil can never satisfy one's stomach or one's spirit.

In 5:9-11 the impossibility of fulfillment from one's wealth is again addressed, this time employing the second locution from 1:8 (שבע):

אהב כסף לא־ישבע כסף
ומי־אהב בהמון לא תבואה ג־זה הבל
ברבות הטובה רבו לבעליה כי א־ראית עיניו
מתוקה שנת העבד א־מעט וא־הרבה יאכל
והשבע לעשיר איננו מניח לו לישון

The one who loves money⁶⁶ will not be satisfied by money,
nor whoever loves riches with gain. Surely this is *hebel*.
When goods increases, the ones who consume them increase,
but what profit is there for the owner⁶⁷ except for something to look upon?
Sweet is the sleep of the slave,⁶⁸ whether he eats much or little,
but the plenty of the rich person does not allow him to sleep. (5:9-11 [Eng 5:10-12])

⁶⁵ מלא also occurs in 11:3 in a reference to the clouds being filled with rain (א־יגלא העבים גשם), but this passage is irrelevant to the present discussion.

⁶⁶ BHS and most commentators read המון for בהמון, as אהב never occurs with the preposition ב. Seow argues that emendation is unnecessary (*Ecclesiastes*, 204–5). The sense is not affected.

⁶⁷ בעליה is a plural of excellence (GKC §124i; Joüon-Muraoka §136,d); cf. 5:12; 7:12; 8:8. For בעל with plural of majesty outside of Qohelet, see Exod 31:29, 34; 22:10 (Eng 22:11); Isa 1:3.

⁶⁸ Reading *hā'ebed* ("the slave") for MT's *hā'ōbēd* ("the worker") with most MSS and LXX. Prov 12:11 states the *'ōbēd 'ādāmā* ("tiller of the ground") will be satisfied (*yīšba'*) with food while the *mēraddeḅ rēqīm* ("pursuer of worthless things") will be "satisfied" with poverty. Qohelet, however, is not comparing the hardworking poor with the lazy wealthy, as here the person toils for his wealth.

Here again Qohelet observes that people are never able to be satisfied by the wealth they accumulate. Increasing one's possessions simply increases the number of persons who consume them, yet another version of the stasis of the sea (1:7) and gullet (6:7). The most one can hope for in accumulating wealth is "something to look upon" (ראות עיניו), but Qohelet has already stated that "the eye is not satisfied by seeing" (לא־תשבע עין לראות); 1:8). Thus, Qohelet claims that the rich person gains no profit (כשרון) from his toil, but instead suffers from a lack of sleep. In contrast, the slave (העבד) sleeps well precisely because, as a slave, he does not have the capacity to seek fulfillment through the accumulation of property.⁶⁹

If these first two texts suggest that one's toil cannot achieve any fulfillment because of people's ever-increasing appetites, 5:12-16 (Eng 5:13-17) suggests that the unpredictability of the world also negates all possibility of human gain:

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו
 ואבד העשר ההוא בענין רע והוליד בן ואין בידו מאומה
 כאשר יצא מבטן אמו ערום ישוב ללכת כשבא
 ומאומה לא־ישא בעמלו שילך בידו
 וגם־זה רעה חולה כל־עמת שבא כן ילך
 ומה־יתרון לו שיעמל לרוח
 גם כלי־מיו בחשך יאכל וכעס הרבה וחליו וקצף

There is a tiresome misery that I have seen under the sun:
 wealth was kept by its owner to his hurt.
 The wealth was lost in a bad venture.
 He begot a son, but he had nothing in his hand.
 Just as he came forth from his mother's womb,
 naked he shall return, going just as he came,
 and he will take nothing for his toil that he may take in his hand.
 Also this is a tiresome misery:
 just as⁷⁰ came, so shall he go--
 and what profit does he have in all his toil that he toils for the wind?
 Indeed, all his days he eats in darkness,⁷¹

⁶⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 236.

⁷⁰ The preposition עַמַּת is elsewhere always preceded by ל, making MT's כל־עַמַּת improbable. It is best understood as a compound of כ + ל + עַמַּת; thus, *ki'ūmmat* (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 253). See also Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:146–47.

⁷¹ James L. Kugel, "Qoheleth and Money," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 38–40, suggests reading *bēhāsāk*

and vexation increases, and sickness, and anger.
(5:12-16 [Eng 5:13-17])

In this case, the impossibility of progress in life is graphically illustrated by the image of the man leaving the world naked in the same manner that he entered from his mother's womb. Because of a bad business venture, he has gained nothing from his labor that he may leave his son.⁷² When all is said and done, his life has accomplished absolutely nothing, as he goes naked just as he came. The expression "all his days he eats in darkness" (כל-ימיו בחשך יאכל) (5:16[17]) suggests the death-equivalence of his life, as elsewhere "darkness" (חשך) describes both death itself and the disconnection that accompanies it (6:4).⁷³ Seow likewise notes this connection, arguing that "consuming in darkness means roughly the same thing as going in darkness, being dead."⁷⁴

Life as Mimetic Death

For Qohelet, then, life itself is characterized by the death equivalents of separation, disintegration, and stasis. Death has breached the boundary and threatens to overrun life altogether. The world Qohelet describes is what Robert J. Lifton refers to as "mimetic death"--a kind of death-in-life in which existence takes on the symbolic characteristics of death rather than the vitality that should characterize existence.⁷⁵ Lifton argues that mimetic death may in fact be perceived as a more terrible fate than death

("in want") rather than *baḥōšek* ("in darkness"). The emendation is unnecessary.

⁷² Norbert Lohfink, "Kohelet und die Banken: zur Übersetzung von Kohelet V 12–16," *VT* 39 (1989): 488–95, argues that the phrase בידו is technical language meaning "on his account," in the sense of money deposited in the bank (cf. idem *Qoheleth*, 83). However, the phrase occurs elsewhere without the technical sense (see especially Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 206–7).

⁷³ חשך has a similar sense in 11:8, in which it describes the days of old age, which lack the vitality of life. and 2:14, in which it refers to the life of fools.

⁷⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 222. Seow likewise draws attention to Barth's comment about people living in misery: "The life of a sick person has become so weak that it no longer deserves the name, and can now only be termed darkness" (Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode*, 101).

⁷⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 47.

itself. That is, death-in-life is an unnatural state that must be endured until one can enter the natural state of death-in-death: better to be dead in death than to be dead in life. As a result, when life is perceived as mimetic death, the dead may be imagined to have more “vitality” than the living, thus resulting in a preference for death over life.⁷⁶

At times, Qohelet expresses such a preference for death over life, which may result from his experience of life as mimetic death. For instance, in 7:1-2 Qohelet suggests that “the day of death is better than the day of birth” (יום המות מיום הולדו) and that it is “better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting” (טוב ללכת (אל-בית-אבל מלכת אל-בית משתה). Krüger argues that Qohelet’s preference for the day of death “brings to expression an attitude toward life that is known to the readers of the book of Qoheleth from their contemporary environment, according to which people should forgo enjoyment in their ‘earthly’ life in order to experience true happiness after death in the ‘beyond.’”⁷⁷ While this connection to contemporary cultural influences is certainly possible, my analysis commends a different explanation. Qohelet is not citing others who suggest that dying is better than being born; rather, this is the position that he himself holds (at least in this verse). Qohelet expresses the belief that death is better than life precisely because life itself has for him come to be characterized by death equivalence. If life is mimetic death, then it is better to be dead.

Other instances in which Qohelet expresses disdain for life or a preference for death would seem to confirm the point. For instance, in 2:17 Qohelet remarks that he “hated life” (ושנאתי את-חיי). The context indicates that Qohelet’s hatred of life in this verse is related to the finality of death, on the one hand, and the futility of lived existence--that is, its death equivalence--on the other:

כי אין זכרון לחכם עם-הכסין לעולם

⁷⁶ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 47; here he refers to Heinrich Böll’s description that “The living are dead and the dead alive.”

⁷⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 136.

בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח
 ואיך ימות החכם עם-הכסיל
 ושנאתי את-החיים
 כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש
 כי-הכל הבל ורעות רוח

For there is no remembrance for the wise along with the fool forever,
 when already the days are coming the whole thing will be forgotten.
 But how can the wise die along with the fool?⁷⁸
 And I hated life,
 for the deeds that are done under the sun were troubling to me,
 for everything is *hebel* and striving after the wind (2:16-17)

Qohelet's conclusion that he "hates life" follows immediately on his conclusion that death is a complete termination of all his connections to life, since in the coming days "all will be forgotten." His observations about the inefficacy of traditional modes of symbolic death transcendence leads him to his disdain for life. It is the following statement about the inefficacy of all the work one does in life, however, that supports his conclusion: "for (כי) the deeds done under the sun were troubling to me." Qohelet's hatred of life arises in the context of recognizing *both* the ultimacy of death *and* the death-equivalence of life. He hates life because it is nothing more than mimetic death that precedes actual death.

In 4:1-3, Qohelet goes beyond expressing a hatred of life to stating a preference for death itself or, even better, for nonexistence:

ושבתי אני ואראה את-כל-העשקים אשר נעשים תחת השמש
 והנה דמעת העשקים ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם
 ושבח אני את-המתים שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה
 וטוב משניהם את אשר-עדן לא היה
 אשר לא-ראה את-המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

I turned, and I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun:
 the tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter;
 from the hand of their oppressors power, but they have no comforter.
 So I value more highly⁷⁹ the dead who have already died
 than the living who are still alive--

⁷⁸ For translation and discussion of 2:16, see chapter 3.

⁷⁹ On this translation of שבה see Kugel, "Qoheleth and Money," 45. Kugel identifies the root with שב"ח as it occurs in Mishnaic Hebrew, meaning "to increase in value" (G) or "to raise higher in value" (D). The form is piel inf. abs. functioning as finite verb (GKC §113.gg).

but better than both of them is the one who has not yet been,
 who has not seen the terrible activity that is done under the sun. (4:1-3)

The logic of Qohelet's argument is important to notice here, as there is more nuance to his thought than that "death is better than life." First, Qohelet comments on the nature of life, which he expresses in terms of the death equivalents of disconnection and disintegrity. There are oppressions practiced under the sun, indicating that the world is not a just, integrous place with a consistent relationship between act and consequence, but rather a place of injustice and oppression. Further, Qohelet says that neither the oppressed nor the oppressor has anyone to comfort them, thus suggesting that, regardless of one's position in life, existence is characterized by isolation and disconnection. Only then does Qohelet declare that he values more highly "the dead who have already died than the living who are still alive." The logic suggests that it is better to be dead than to endure an existence that is characteristically death-like. This is confirmed by Qohelet's preference for "the one who has not yet been" precisely because this one "has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun." It does not seem to be the case that Qohelet prefers the day of death to the day of birth because one is awaiting "to experience true happiness after death in the 'beyond.'"⁸⁰ Rather than being concerned about happiness after death, Qohelet prefers death because it is a natural state, whereas existing in a death-equivalent state while yet being alive is unnatural.

Qohelet's statement of 6:3-5 confirms this interpretation:

אם־יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יהיה
 ורב שיהיו ימיו־שניו ונפשו לא־תשבע מן־הטובה
 וגם־קבורה לא־היתה לו אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל
 כי־בהבל בא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה
 גם־שמש לא־ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה

If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, however many the days of his years may be,⁸¹ if his appetite is not satisfied from bounty and he does not

⁸⁰ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 136.

⁸¹ For the sense of רב see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:261–62 and Gordis, *Koheleth*, 248. Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 211) reads *rāb* ("yet he complains").

receive a burial--I say a stillborn is better than he. For he⁸² comes in *hebel* and he goes in darkness, and in darkness his name is covered. Surely the one who neither saw nor knew the sun has more rest than he.⁸³ (6:3-5)

Here Qohelet contemplates the case of a man who lives many years but never finds satisfaction with a stillbirth that never sees the light of day. Qohelet again expresses a preference for the one who does not have to experience life but rather remains unknowing and at rest. Again, the lot of the man is expressed in terms of death equivalence, as he exists in stasis, finding no satisfaction in living. The stillbirth, too, exists in stasis, never seeing the sun or knowing anything, yet this stasis is described as “rest” because stasis is appropriate to death where it is unnatural in life. Qohelet’s conclusion again suggests that it is better to remain in a state of nonexistence than to experience life as mimetic death. Better to be dead and unaware than to be conscious for an existence that is nothing more than mimetic death.

Vitality in the Midst of Mimetic Death

While Qohelet at times seems at times to give in to the temptation to characterize life as mimetic death and to prefer death over life itself, there is another impulse evident in his thought--one which seeks to stem the encroachment of mimetic death into his life. While Qohelet’s worldview may have failed to provide him with adequate symbols to keep death from terminating his life, he refuses to allow death to overwhelm his current existence as well. Qohelet employs two primary tactics in this effort, commending both enjoyment and companionship.

⁸² The referent of 6:4 is ambiguous; grammatically, either the man or the stillborn could be the subject of the 3ms verbs. While most commentators apply it to the stillborn, Fox argues--convincingly in my view-- that the man is the proper subject. He notes that: (1) the verse does not give a clear reason to prefer the stillbirth; (2) a lengthy description of the stillbirth seems out of place in this context; (3) the stillbirth does not have a name to be covered; and (4) the still birth does not come into *hebel*, which is a condition of life (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 243)

⁸³ Following Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 241–43, who argues that the verbs are nominalized (cf. Cant 8:5).

Qohelet and Enjoyment

The first means by which Qohelet seeks to find vitality in the face of mimetic death is through enjoyment. As Eunny Lee points out in her extensive study of enjoyment in Qohelet, much recent scholarship has tended to diminish the importance of the enjoyment passages in Qohelet's thought, or even to dismiss them altogether.⁸⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, a second strain of scholarship has tended to overemphasize Qohelet's commendation of enjoyment.⁸⁵ Lee herself attempts to find a path between these two extremes, contending that "Qohelet's notion of enjoyment entails an authentic experience of the world that recognizes both its tragic limitations and its joyous possibilities of good."⁸⁶ However, Lee's own argument tends to slip toward a depiction of Qohelet as a "preacher of joy," as evidenced by her claim that "Qohelet's love of life pulsates throughout his discourse, at the start in a muted beat but growing until it swells into a veritable celebration of life."⁸⁷

My own position is close to Lee's originally stated purpose, recognizing that Qohelet's commendations of enjoyment occur in the context of finding some source of proximate vitality in the face of life's "tragic limitations." It is my contention that the theme of enjoyment in Qohelet can best be understood within the framework of the

⁸⁴ Eunny P. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Rhetoric* (BZAW 353; New York: De Gruyter, 2005), 32. As examples of scholars who inappropriately dismiss these passages she cites: William H.U. Anderson, *Qoheleth and Its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (Mellen Biblical Press Series 54; Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997); Frank Zimmermann, *The Inner World of Qohelet* (New York: KTAV, 1973); Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*; and Longman, *Ecclesiastes*.

⁸⁵ The phrase comes from R. Norman Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982): 87–98; cf. R. Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). Lee also distances herself from the position of Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (2d ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 26, who argues that "[t]hese calls to enjoyment are actually theological statements of faith in a just and loving God, despite many signs which might appear contrary"

⁸⁶ Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 34.

⁸⁷ Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 81.

failure of symbolic death transcendence and the accompanying ingress of death into life in the form of death equivalence and mimetic death. Rather than a “veritable celebration of life,” Qohelet’s commendations of enjoyment serve as a final attempt to prevent the complete transformation of life into mimetic death.

We may identify eight central “enjoyment passages” in the book of Qohelet (2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17-19; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-12:7).⁸⁸ Matthew S. Rindge profitably notes that each of these enjoyment passages occurs in close proximity to passages related to death, to the extent that they are “virtually inseparable.”⁸⁹ We may press Rindge’s observation somewhat further by recognizing that in every instance Qohelet’s commendations of enjoyment follow shortly after a reflection on either (1) the finality of death, (2) the character of life as mimetic death, or (3) both death and mimetic death. While here I will focus on the enjoyment passages associated with the three מקרה passages discussed in the previous chapter, the same pattern holds for the other passages as well.

Qohelet 2:24-26⁹⁰. In the previous chapter, I discussed 2:24-26 in light of its depiction of God. In the present context, I am concerned with its understanding of enjoyment itself. In 2:24a, Qohelet concludes that “there is nothing good for a person except that he should eat and drink and make himself see the good in all his toil” (איִן־טוֹב) (באדם שיאכל ושתה והראה את־נפשו טוב בעמלו). The passage itself comes at the conclusion of the longer text unit of 2:1-26, and its relationship to Qohelet’s quest for symbolic

⁸⁸ Most scholars do not include 7:14 in this list (so, e.g., Whybray, “Preacher of Joy,” 87). Eunny Lee (*The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 3), however, argues for its inclusion based on the expression “be in good.” For the sake of completeness, it is included here.

⁸⁹ Matthew S. Rindge, “Mortality and Enjoyment: The Interplay of Death and Possessions in Qoheleth,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): forthcoming.

⁹⁰ For text and translation of this passage, see chapter 3.

immortality may best be understood within that context.⁹¹ The progression of the passage as a whole is as follows: (1) In 2:1-3, Qohelet engages in a test of enjoyment (אנסכה בשמחה), concluding that it is “vanity” (גם־הוא הבל), that amusement is “inane” (לשחוק) and that enjoyment “accomplishes nothing” (מה־זה עשה); 2:2). He then sets out in 2:3 to “see what is good for a person to do” (אראה אי־זה טוב לבני האדם אשר יעשו) during his life. (2) As we have seen in the previous chapter, Qohelet then tests the efficacy of the creative mode of symbolic death transcendence in order to determine whether it is possible for a person (even one as great as Solomon) to achieve a death-transcending יתרון (2:4-11), concluding that there is “no profit under the sun” (אין יותרון תחת השמש; 2:11). (3) Next Qohelet examines the nature of death, concluding that, because of the failure of symbolic modes of death transcendence, the wise and the fool encounter the same “fate” (מקרה)--they are forgotten when they die (אין זכרון לחכם עם־הכסיל לעולם); 2:16).⁹² (4) Qohelet then exclaims that he “hates life” (שנאתי חיים; 2:17), since life is nothing more than mimetic death--constant toil resulting in utter stagnation. (5) Qohelet then tests the biological mode of death transcendence in the form of inheritance given to progeny, concluding that it offers no advantage over death (2:18-21), as discussed in chapter 3. (6) Qohelet then returns once again to a reflection on the nature of life as mimetic death, focusing on the static nature of a life in which mortals gain nothing from all their toil except pain, vexation, and a lack of sleep (2:22-23). (7) It is only then, after twice concluding that the traditional modes of death transcendence have failed him and twice reflecting on the character of life as mimetic death, that Qohelet finally commends enjoyment (2:24-26).

⁹¹ For this text division see Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 174. Others mark the unit as 1:12-2:26 (so, e.g., Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 56–60).

⁹² See the extended discussion in chapter 3.

The logic of the passage suggests that enjoyment represents Qohelet's final toehold in the symbolic struggle against death. In the beginning of his quest for יתרון, Qohelet concludes that enjoyment is "vaporous" (הבל), laughter is "inane" (מהולל), and again that enjoyment "accomplishes nothing" (מה־זה עשה). After testing the modes of symbolic immortality offered to him by his tradition, however, Qohelet recognizes that his worldview has failed to provide him with any successful means of death transcendence and, moreover, has allowed the incursion of death into life itself. For a moment, Qohelet seems to give into the despair of mimetic death (2:17; cf. 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 7:1b), but he manages to find one small token of vitality in life: enjoyment. When Qohelet proclaims that "there is nothing good for a person except that he should eat and drink," he is thus not declaring that enjoyment is a great good, as he has already declared it vain and pointless. Rather, despite the inanity of enjoyment, Qohelet can find no greater good. Therefore, one should enjoy one's life not because doing so is particularly commendable, but rather because there is nothing better for one to do.

Qohelet 3:22. The same general pattern can also be observed in the enjoyment statement of 3:22, which occurs in the longer text unit of Qoh 3:16-22. This passage begins with an observation of the disintegrity of life: "In the place of justice, wickedness was there. And in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there" (מקום המשפט שמה) (הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע 3:16). Qohelet then introduces a statement of a type familiar from his traditional wisdom worldview, "God will judge the righteous as the sinner" (את־הצדיק ואת־הרשע ישפט האלהים) (3:17), which quickly yields to a reflection on death. In this case, Qohelet concludes that humans and animals both have the same "fate" (מקרה) (אחד 3:19), which I have argued previously means that death functions as a complete termination of life's connections in both cases. It is only at this point that Qohelet turns to the commendation of pleasure:

וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כי־הוא חלקו
כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה אחריו

And I saw that there is nothing better than that

a man should have enjoyment in his work, for that is his portion.
For who is able to bring him to see what will be after him? (Qoh 3:22)

Once again, Qohelet commends enjoyment only after recognizing the failure of symbolic death transcendence and observing the incursion of death into life itself. Enjoyment is the best one can do.

Here Qohelet employs the term חלק to describe the benefit that a person gets from enjoying his labor.⁹³ Like יתרון, the term חלק derives from economic discourse, perhaps referring to the practice of the assignment of royal grants, in keeping with Qohelet's depiction of God as a distant and arbitrary sovereign.⁹⁴ As Schoors argues, in its typical usage in Qohelet, חלק “functions as an existential category referring to man's portion in this life under the sun, which mainly consists in the enjoyment potential of one's wealth, but which also includes such things as human feelings.”⁹⁵ However, in contrast to יתרון, which represents a “profit” left over at the end of life, חלק is a temporary portion that does not extend to the dead (9:6). As Seow explains “when one has a portion, however imperfect that portion may be, one had better make the most of it, for that portion can be enjoyed only when one is alive. No one can take the portion along with him or her when death comes.”⁹⁶ Thus, while a “portion” (חלק) is a good to be enjoyed when possible, it does not constitute the death-transcendent “profit” that Qohelet ultimately seeks.⁹⁷ This point is made clear in 2:10-11, in which Qohelet first acknowledges that he has a “portion” in all his toil (זה חלקי מכל-עמלי) (2:10) and yet concludes that “there is no profit

⁹³ For discussions of חלק see especially Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:198–200; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 109–11; and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 24–25.

⁹⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 24–25.

⁹⁵ Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:200.

⁹⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 24.

⁹⁷ There is no need to conclude, as Krüger does, that a חלק is “meaningless and worthless” (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 67). A “portion” has worth, but not permanently so.

under the sun” (אין יתרון תחת השמש) (2:11). In the context of the present discussion about life and mimetic death, we may consider חלק an effort to find a space of vitality (life-in-life) in a world that is characterized by mimetic death (death-in-life). While a person’s חלק cannot extend life beyond death, as a יתרון could, it can forestall death’s creepage into life itself.

Qohelet 9:7-10. The final enjoyment passage connected to a מקרה passage is 9:7-10, which falls at the end of the longer text unit of 8:16-9:10.⁹⁸ As I discussed in chapter 3, this text begins with an extended reflection on humankind’s alienation from both God and the cosmos, resulting in Qohelet’s conclusion that death completely annihilates both the righteous and the wicked (לכל מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע; 9:2). In 9:3, Qohelet extends his observation to include the fact that the life leading up to death is itself death-equivalent:

וגם לב בני־האדם מלא־רע והוללות בלבבם בחיים
ואחריו אליהמתים

Also, the heart of human beings is full of wickedness
and madness is in their hearts during their lives.
And afterwards, to the dead (9:3)

In 9:4-10, Qohelet makes two attempts to stake out a portion (חלק) for himself. The first involves retaining a proximate connection to the living (9:4-6), itself a tactic to find some vitality in the midst of death equivalence, as I will argue below. Then, at the close of the unit, Qohelet again commends joy:

לך אכל בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב־טוב יינך
כי כבר רצה האלהים את־מעשיך
בכל־עת יהיו בגדיך לבנים ושמן על־ראשך אל־יחסר
ראה חיים עמ־אשה אשר אהבת כל־ימי חיי הבלך
אשר נתן־לך תחת השמש כל ימי הבלך
כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר־אתה עמל תחת השמש
כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה
כי אין מעשה וחשבון ודעת וחכמה בשאול אשר אתה חולך שמה

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment and drink your wine with a cheerful heart,
for God has already approved your deeds. At all times let your clothes be white
and do not let oil be lacking upon your head. Enjoy life with a woman whom you

⁹⁸ For this text division see, e.g., Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 287–95; cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 109–10, who delimits the unit as 8:16-9:6. Others divide the unit at 9:1.

love, all the days of your vaporous life which have been given to you under the sun,⁹⁹ for that is your portion in life and in your toil which you are toiling under the sun. All that you your hand finds to do, do it with your strength, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are going. (9:7-10)

A number of scholars have noted the similarities between these verses and the words of Siduri in the *Gilgamesh* epic:¹⁰⁰

As for you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,
 Enjoy yourself day and night.
 Find enjoyment in every single day,
 Dance and play day and night.
 Let your garments be clean,
 Let your head be washed; bathe in water.
 Look upon the little one who holds your hand,
 Let your spouse enjoy herself in your embrace. (Gilg M iii 6-14)¹⁰¹

While it has often been noted that Qoh 9:7-10 parallels Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh in that it "urges, in the very same order, feasting, putting on bright garments, the anointing of one's head with oil, and the enjoyment of one's family,"¹⁰² we should not overlook the critical differences between the two passages.¹⁰³ Even in these lines, so often cited as the epitome of the epic's *carpe diem* attitude, we find a clear reference to symbolic immortality in the biological mode: Siduri the tavern keeper instructs Gilgamesh to "look upon the little one who holds your hand." Elsewhere, Gilgamesh is said to construct walls for the city of Uruk, which secures his symbolic immortality in the creative mode (I 11-

⁹⁹ The MT repeats the refrain כל ימי הבלך. However, it should be omitted as vertical dittography as reflected in LXX, OL, Tg, Jerome, and several Heb mss.

¹⁰⁰ In particular, William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2000) has profitably compared Qohelet to *Gilgamesh*, both in this passage and as a whole.

¹⁰¹ As translated in Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 305; cf. *ANET*³, 90).

¹⁰² Choon-Leong Seow, "Beyond Mortal Grasp: The Usage of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes," *ABR* 48 (2000): 6; cf. idem, *Ecclesiastes*, 305–6.

¹⁰³ Bruce William Jones, "From Gilgamesh to Qoheleth," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III* (ed. William W. Hallo et al., N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 369–73, notes numerous common elements between the two passages (cf. Lee, *The Vitality of Enjoyment*, 64–67; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 162–63). More skeptical are Gordis, *Koheleth*, 293–94, and Jean-Jaques Lavoie, "Bonheur et Finitude Humaine: Étude de Qo 9,7–10," *Science et Esprit* 45 (1993): 313–24.

29; XI 323-334).¹⁰⁴ Thus, the suggestion that *Gilgamesh* denies the possibility of immortality, is somewhat imprecise. More accurately, *Gilgamesh* denies the efficacy of certain *modes* of immortality while commending others. Siduri's message to Gilgamesh is *not* that he should accept that death completely terminates life, so that he should enjoy himself in the meantime. Rather, she advises Gilgamesh to accept the modes of symbolic death transcendence available to him rather than wasting his life striving after the unattainable goal of literal immortality. The situation is quite different for Qohelet, who denies the efficacy of *all modes* of immortality, as we have seen. While Gilgamesh can enjoy life in the knowledge that his progeny and construction projects will continue his connection to life, Qohelet commends enjoyment in the face of a death that will be the utter termination of his entire existence.

The difference in these conceptions of enjoyment is further emphasized in Qoh 9:10, which frames the entire instruction within an explicit reference to “Sheol, where you are going” (שאוּל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה).¹⁰⁵ The significance of this phrase is often overlooked because of the common assumption that prior to the advent of a belief in literal immortality in Jewish thought Sheol was understood to be the common destination of all. However, in Chapter 1 I argued extensively that the sages of Proverbs did *not* understand themselves to be bound for Sheol.¹⁰⁶ Rather, they believed in what Levenson calls a “duality of death” in which only the wicked were bound for Sheol while the righteous extended their connection to life through various modes of symbolic

¹⁰⁴ For an alternate interpretation of these lines, see Neal Walls, *Desire, Discord, and Death: Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Myth* (ASOR Books 8; Boston: ASOR, 2001), 72.

¹⁰⁵ Siduri also reminds Gilgamesh that “The life thou pursuest thou cannot find. When the gods created mankind, death for mankind they set aside, Life in their own hands retaining” (*ANET*³, 90). However, the here is Gilgamesh's quest for literal immortality, a different issue than Qohelet's utter disconnection. Proverbs, after all, did not deny that people must undergo physical death, but only that such death did not terminate their connection to life.

¹⁰⁶ So, too, Levenson, *Resurrection*, 35–81.

immortality.¹⁰⁷ If this is the case, then Qohelet's declaration that all are headed to Sheol represents a stark departure from his precedent tradition.¹⁰⁸ Qohelet's commendation of enjoyment thus functions somewhat differently than the *carpe diem* attitude in Gilgamesh. Indeed, Qohelet's commendation of enjoyment is all the more remarkable given the inevitability of utter annihilation that he sees before him. Absent any means of symbolizing life as transcending death, Qohelet salvages some sense of proximate vitality by commending enjoyment and companionship as one's "portion" (חלק), thereby preventing death from completely overwhelming life itself.¹⁰⁹

Enjoyment in Psychological Perspective. TMT research has demonstrated that the turn toward material pleasure is a common human defense mechanism for staving off the encroachment of death anxiety into conscious thought. In a series of recent studies, researchers have demonstrated that enjoyment of food has significant short-term effects in buffering against death anxiety.¹¹⁰ In one experiment, Israeli students were

¹⁰⁷ See Levenson, *Resurrection*, 81, and Chapter 1, above.

¹⁰⁸ Levenson likewise notes that Qohelet represents a departure from biblical thought on this point (*Resurrection*, 80). However, Levenson--incorrectly in my view-- attributes Qohelet's attitude to "vestiges . . . of the older view . . . that all who die end up in Sheol" (Levenson, *Resurrection*, 80). In contrast, my argument suggests that Qohelet's view that all end up in Sheol is the *newer* view (with respect to the wisdom tradition, at least), brought about by the collapse of the modes of symbolic immortality by which the righteous could evade Sheol in the earlier tradition (see chapters 1 and 2, above).

¹⁰⁹ The other enjoyment passages in Qohelet (3:12-13; 5:17-19; 7:13-15; 8:15; 11:7-10) follow the same pattern, each occurring in the context of Qohelet's reflections on either (1) the failure of symbolic death transcendence or (2) the character of proximate existence as mimetic death.

¹¹⁰ Gilad Hirschberger and Tsachi Ein-Dor, "Does a Candy a Day Keep the Death Thoughts Away? The Terror Management Function of Eating," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 27 (2005): 179-86; Rosellina Ferraro, Baba Shiv, and James R. Bettman, "Let Us Eat and Drink, for Tomorrow We Shall die: Effects of Mortality Salience and Self-Esteem on Self-Regulation in Consumer Choice," *Journal of Consumer Research* 32 (2005): 65-75; Jamie Arndt et al., "The Urge to Splurge: A Terror Management Account of Materialism and Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 14 (2004): 198-212; Jamie Arndt et al., "The Urge to Splurge Revisited: Further Reflections on Applying Terror Management Theory," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 14 (2004): 25-29; and Naomi Mandel and Steven J. Heine, "Terror Management and Marketing: He Who Dies with the Most Toys Wins," *Advances in Consumer Research* 26 (1999): 527-32.

administered a personality test that included a section of questions about either death (mortality salience), failing an exam (failure salience) or television (neutral).¹¹¹

Following the induction, students were then randomly given one of three food samples, either butterscotch candy (pleasant), a saltine cracker (neutral), anise-flavored candy covered with a bitter solution (unpleasant), or no food at all. Finally, students were administered an exam in which they answered questions related to a series of articles describing worldview transgressions (such as prostitution). Each participant was then asked to evaluate both the severity of the transgression and the severity of punishment that should be administered.

The results showed that students inducted into mortality salience conditions but given no food assigned significantly more severe punishments for worldview violations than did participants in either “fail” or “control” conditions, as would be anticipated. However, with regard to the question of the buffering effects of food, the study found that participants in mortality salience conditions who were given pleasant food assigned punishments that were significantly *less* severe than those of participants in the “fail” and “control” conditions. The study also found that mortality-salient participants who were given food showed a significant decrease in the severity of punishments assigned. The administration of food seems to have entirely counteracted the effects of mortality salience, even when the food administered was unpleasant or neutral.¹¹² The study summarizes its results as follows:

Our findings present preliminary evidence supporting the contention that food has terror management properties that provide people with temporary relief from death-related concerns. Specifically, we found that death primes led to more worldview defense compared to both a neutral and a negative non-death-related prime, when no tasting sample was provided. However, participants who were given a tasting sample immediately following the death prime did not exhibit the worldview defense. These results suggest that a taste of food even bitter and foul tasting, buffers the impact of death primes on the worldview defense. However, it

¹¹¹ Hirschberger and Ein-Dor, “Function of Eating,” 179–86.

¹¹² Hirschberger and Ein-Dor, “Function of Eating,” 182–83.

seems that the more pleasant the food, the stronger its buffering effect.¹¹³

In the absence of other defenses against death anxiety, such as the symbolic immortalities provided by a cultural worldview, turning to food seems to be a natural human response, functioning to minimize death anxiety in the short term.¹¹⁴

Qohelet's commendations of enjoyment serve a similar function. His appeals to enjoyment are invariably associated with his observations about the finality of death and the breakdown of symbolic modes of immortality. He commends enjoyment not as a great good in its own right but rather because it has the capacity to provide a temporary buffer against awareness of death. Qohelet practically says as much in his commendation of joy in 5:17-19 (Eng 5:18-20). After commending enjoyment as "what I have seen is good" (אשר-ראיתי אני טוֹת; 5:17), Qohelet concludes that its value is that the one who has the capacity to enjoy "For he will not often remember the days of his life, since God occupies him¹¹⁵ with the enjoyment of his heart." The benefit of enjoyment is that it serves as a distraction from thoughts about the limits of life. In the absence of functional symbols of death transcendence, this is the best one can hope to do.

Qohelet's Counsel for Human Connections

Interpersonal connections serve as similar function for Qohelet. He first

¹¹³ Hirschberger and Ein-Dor, "Function of Eating," 183.

¹¹⁴ These results from TMT may also have significance for the question of influences on Qohelet. Since the turn to food in the face of death anxiety would seem to be a natural human response, one must be cautious in attributing the appearance of a so-called *carpe diem* attitude in two cultures to direct influence of one upon the other. It is entirely plausible that similar ideas on this topic could develop independently of one another. The burden of proof for direct dependence must lie in literary connections and not in content alone.

¹¹⁵ Reading *ma'ānēhū* ("occupies him") for MT *ma'āneh* with support from LXX (περισπαυτον) and Syr (*m'n' lyh*). The form is generally considered hifil ptc. of ע"ה (III), "to occupy." Gordis (*Koheleth*, 255–56) derives from ע"ה (I), "to answer," which he understands to mean "provide" in the hifil. Norbert Lohfink, "Qohelet 5:17–19--Revelation by Joy," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 625–35, follows Gordis, but extends the argument by understanding "answers (him) to have the sense of "revelation." Lohfink's interpretation has not found a following. See discussion in Schoors, *The Preacher*, 2:430–31.

commends relationships with others in 4:9-12:

טובים השנים מן־האחד אשר יש־להם שכר טות בעמלם
 כי אם־יפלו האחד יקים את־חברו ואילו האחד שיפול ואין שני להקימו
 גם אם־ישכבו שנים וחם להם ולאחד איך יחם
 ואם־יתקפו האחד השנים יעמדו נגדו והחוט המשלש לא במהרה ינתק

Two are better than one, since they have a good reward in their toil.
 For if one falls, his companion will lift him up,
 but woe to the one¹¹⁶ who falls and there is no one to lift him up.
 Again, if two are lying down, they will have warmth,
 but how will the one become warm?
 And if someone overpowers the one, the two will stand.
 A threefold cord is not easily broken. (4:9-12)

Notably, this passage follows immediately after Qohelet's reflections on death-equivalent disconnection of the solitary toiler in 4:7-8.¹¹⁷ The rhetorical connection suggests that Qohelet's commendation of proximate connections in 4:9-12 serves as a kind of antidote to the death-equivalent disconnection of the individual in the preceding verses. William Brown notes with regard to this passage that "only through the other can the individual receive benefit, indeed be saved."¹¹⁸ Some caution is required in assessing Qohelet's understanding of community, however, as this passage gives no hint of an emotional connection. The benefits of interpersonal connections are, in this case, entirely practical.¹¹⁹ The passage describes the safety that is possible in community, as they are able to help one another up when the fall (4:10), to keep warm on a cold night (4:11),¹²⁰ and to defend themselves when attacked (4:12).¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Reading אִי לֹא with 23 Hebrew mss, LXX, Vg, Syr, and many commentators (see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:148).

¹¹⁷ See the discussion in the section on "Stasis," above.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 52.

¹¹⁹ So Gordis, *Koheleth*, 242.

¹²⁰ The context does not seem to be the warmth of a marriage bed, but rather the more practical issue of sharing body heat on a cold night (Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* [WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1992], 42); cf. 1 Kgs 1:1-2; 2 Kgs 4:32-34.

¹²¹ Gordis' suggestion that 4:10-12 serve as "an ironic comment" on 4:9 is without warrant

A second commendation of interpersonal connection has more emotional overtones, specifically the enjoyment of life with a woman whom one loves:¹²²

ראה חיים עם־אשה אשר אהבת כל־ימי חיי הבלך
אשר נתן־לך תחת השמש כל ימי הבלך

Enjoy¹²³ life with a woman¹²⁴ whom you love, all the days of your vaporous life which have been given to you under the sun.¹²⁵

The instruction occurs in the context of Qohelet's broader commendation of enjoyment in 9:7-10. In that context, the advice seems to be less about practical benefits such as the monetary or social gains possible from marriage and rather commending the enjoyment of another person "whom you love (שֶׁחָרַרְתָּ אֹהֶבָתָּ)."¹²⁶ Qohelet does not imagine that connection to a loved one provides any possibility of death transcendence, as the preceding passage in 8:17-9:3 makes abundantly clear, but he does find that companionship offers provides some "portion" (חֵלֶק) in life (9:9b) in connection with other expressions of enjoyment (9:7-8).

Human Connection in Psychological Perspective. As was the case with enjoyment Terror Management Theory has also found that close interpersonal relationships provide significance buffering effects against death anxiety.¹²⁷ In one study,

(Gordis, *Koheleth*, 242).

¹²² For a discussion of 9:7-10, see the section on "Qohelet and Enjoyment," below.

¹²³ Literally, "see life" (ראה חיים); cf. ראה טוב in 3:13.

¹²⁴ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 295; points out that אשה without the article means "woman" and not "wife," though he ultimately concludes that "it is hard to see what Qohelet could have in mind besides marriage." Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 301) notes that אשה without the article means "wife" in Gen 30:4, 9; 1 Sam 2:43; Deut 22:22, and that the similar passage in Gilgamesh (see below) uses *marḥitu* ("wife") rather than *sinništu* ("woman").

¹²⁵ For a discussion of this passage within the context of 9:7-10, see above.

¹²⁶ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 294.

¹²⁷ See Mario Mikulincer et al., "The Terror of Death and the Quest for Love: An Existential Perspective on Close Relationships," in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 287–304; Mario Mikulincer et al., "The Existential

participants were randomly assigned to either mortality salience, physical pain salience, or a control condition to test whether increased death awareness produces a change in attitudes toward feelings of commitment. The results showed that only mortality salience (and not pain salience) led to a heightened sense of commitment to one's partner.¹²⁸ In a second study, the capacity of relationships to buffer against death anxiety was tested by measuring reactions to social transgressions. Participants in mortality salience conditions showed a significant increase in negative judgments of social transgressors, as we have come to expect, but those who were also asked to think about romantic commitments showed no increase in negative judgments over control conditions.¹²⁹ In a final study, participants who were asked to think about problems in a relationship demonstrated a higher rate of death-thought accessibility than did those who were asked to think about either academic problems or a neutral issue.¹³⁰ Based on these experiments, the researchers have concluded that "close relationships seem to have an inoculating power against basic existential threats."¹³¹

In the case of Qohelet, personal relationships seem to provide some buffer against immediate and overwhelming awareness of death. However, relationships do little to relieve Qohelet's existential problem, as evidenced by the fact that he follows his commendation of "enjoying life with the woman you love" (9:9) with the immediate

Function of Close Relationships: Introducing Death Into the Science of Love," *Personality and Sociology Review* 7 (2003): 20–40; Mario Mikulincer et al., "The Death-Anxiety Buffering Function of Close Relationships: Exploring the Effects of Separation Reminders on Death-Thought Accessibility," *Personality and Psychology Bulletin* 23 (2002): 287–99; and Victor Florian et al., "The Anxiety-Buffering Function of Close Personal Relationships: Evidence That Relationship Commitment Acts as a Terror Management Mechanism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (2002): 527–42.

¹²⁸ Florian et al., "Close Relationships," 531–33.

¹²⁹ Florian et al., "Close Relationships," 533–36.

¹³⁰ Florian et al., "Close Relationships," 536–38.

¹³¹ Florian et al., "Close Relationships," 538.

reminder that everyone ultimately goes to Sheol (9:10). For Qohelet both relationships and enjoyment function on the proximate level as a means of staving off the incursion of mimetic death into life; they do not, however, relieve Qohelet of his ultimate anxiety over death.

Qohelet and His Contradictions

One final area in which Terror Management Theory may provide some insight into the significance of Qohelet's thought is on the issue of the contradictions found throughout the book. While Qohelet expresses contradictory thoughts on numerous topics, two are particularly difficult to assess: retributive justice and the value of wisdom.¹³² On the issue of retributive justice, Qohelet at times pronounces the failure of the relationship between actions and their consequences (3:16; 7:15; 8:14; 9:11), but at other times expresses confidence in God's ultimate vindication of the retributive order (3:17; 8:6, 12b-13; 11:9).¹³³ At times, these contradictory perspectives are directly juxtaposed. For instance:

ועוד ראיתי תחת השמש
מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע
אמרתי אני בלבי את-הצדיק ואת הרשע ישפט האלהים
כי-עת לכל-חפץ ועל כל-המעשה שם

And again I saw under the sun:
in the place of justice, wickedness was there,

¹³² For example, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 47–48, observes the following list of contradictions: “Qohelet affirms divine action, both punishment and reward (3:11, 14; 7:18, 26; 11:5), but he also contends that the deity's remoteness permits no one to comprehend the divine ways (5:1 [2E]; 8:17). Life is better than death (9:4-6), but the dead are more fortunate (4:2), and Qohelet hates life (2:17). Wisdom, unprofitable and empty (1:17-18; 2:13-16), gives one advantage when accompanied by an inheritance (7:11). Furthermore, it is useful (7:19) and preferable to force (9:16-18). Joy is empty (2:2-3, 10-11), but good (5:19 [20E]; 8:15), for it comes from God (2:24-26). Work is grievous and unprofitable (1:13-14; 2:11, 18; 3:10; 4:6), but God gives it for human enjoyment (5:18). Woman lacks real worth (not one in a thousand, 7:27-28), but a man ought to enjoy the woman he loves (9:9). Retribution does not operate (8:10-14), for the grave treats all alike (9:2-3), but God keeps a tally of merits (7:18, 26) and will eventually judge everyone (11:9).”

¹³³ On the transformations in the understanding of act and consequence in the Wisdom literature, see most recently Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there.
I said in my heart: God will judge the righteous and the wicked,
for he has appointed¹³⁴ a time for every matter and concerning every deed. (3:16-17)

Or again:

כי גם־יודע אני אשר יהיה־טוב ליראי האלהים אשר ייראו מלפניו
וטוב לא־יהיה לרשע ולא־יארֶיך ימים כצל אשר איננו ירא מלפני אלהים
יש־הבל אשר נעשה על־הארץ
אשר יש צדיקים אשר מגיע אלהם כמעשה הרשעים
ויש רשעים שמגיע אלהם כמעשה הצדיקים
אמרתי שגם־זה הבל

Even though¹³⁵ I know that it will go well for the ones who fear God,
who are fearful before him, and it will not go well for the wicked man,
and he will not prolong his shadow-like days¹³⁶ because he does not fear God,
there is *hebel* that is done upon the earth:
There are righteous people who are treated according to the deeds of the wicked,
and there are wicked people who are treated according to the deeds of the
righteous.
I said that also this is *hebel*. (8:12b-14)

In each case, Qohelet first makes a statement on retributive justice that sounds much like traditional wisdom, then follows with a statement that contradicts the principle of retributive justice.

Likewise, Qohelet expresses contradictory sentiments about the value of wisdom, some times praising it (2:13-14; 7:11; 7:19; 8:1; 10:10, 12), while at other times belittling it (1:17-18; 2:15, 16; 6:8; 10:1). For instance, Qohelet states on the one hand that “wisdom has an advantage over folly like the advantage of light over darkness” (יש יתרון)

¹³⁴ The meaning of ׀ש is a persistent *crux interpretatum*. For a review of the issues and proposed solutions, see Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:100–1, and, more recently, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 166–67. The present interpretation revocalizes MT’s *šām* to *śām* (“He has appointed”), though it must be noted that the placement of the verb is unusual. Perhaps one is wise to follow Schoors: “This prudent judgment must be recommended: there is no certainty in this case.”

¹³⁵ The sense of כי גם is disputed. Gordis (*Koheleth*, 297) argues that, like כי גם, it indicates a concessive (“even if, although”), citing parallels in 4:14 and 8:16. Though the latter of these is disputed (Schoors, *The Preacher*, 1:135–36), most scholars follow Gordis in translating 8:12b concessively (though see . Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 286). Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 288, argues (correctly, in my view) that the concession precedes the statement of 8:14 rather than following 8:11-12a.

¹³⁶ Literally, “days like a shadow.”

לחכמה מן-הסכלות כיתרון האור מן-החשך (2:13), yet later he rhetorically asks “what advantage does wisdom have over folly?” (מה-יותר לחכם מן-הכסיל) (6:8) in a context which presumes that the answer is that it has none.

Typically, readers of Qohelet have attempted to settle Qohelet’s contradictions so that one statement (usually the more unorthodox) is said to represent Qohelet’s true perspective while the other is in some way foreign to Qohelet’s thought. For instance, some have postulated orthodox glossatorial insertions into an originally unorthodox text, thereby rendering a radical Qohelet made more respectable by later hands.¹³⁷ Many recent scholars have preferred other means of accounting for the contradictions, however, primarily because of the methodological imprecision of identifying glosses.¹³⁸ A second approach maintains that the book is largely the product of one author who introduces quotations from traditional wisdom, typically in order to reject them.¹³⁹ One may again object that the method requires the interpreter to make *a priori* decisions about what constitutes Qohelet’s own thought.

Others attribute the contradictions in Qohelet’s thought to an intentional rhetorical or literary strategy by the author. One version of this approach, given its classic “Zwar-Aber-Tatsache” formulation by Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, proposes that Qohelet

¹³⁷ This approach was more common to scholarship of the early 20th century, a period in which biblical scholarship in general was particularly focused on multiple source theories. See, eg., Carl Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied* (HKAT II 3/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898), George A. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), Alan H. McNeile, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), and E. Podechard, *L’Ecclésiaste* (Paris: Libraire Victor Lecoffre, 1912).

¹³⁸ Though see Alexander A. Fischer, *Skepsis oder Furch Gottes? Studien zur Komposition und Theologie Des Buches Kohelet* (BZAW 247; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), who proposes an original book by Qohelet, updated by two epilogists, each responsible for various changes and corrections within the body of the text itself, and Lauha, *Kohelet*, who likewise attributes substantial material to two later redactors. Scholars almost universally recognize the presence of one or two epilogists in 12:9-14.

¹³⁹ R. Norman Whybray, “The Identification and Use of Quotations in Ecclesiastes,” *VT* 32 (1981): 435–51; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 95–108; Diethelm Michel, *Qohelet* (EdF 258; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988); Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen Zur Eigenart Des Buches Qohelet* (BZAW 183; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989).

first offers a traditional wisdom saying (“Zwar”) and then counters with a second observation or insight (“Aber”) that demonstrates the limitations of the first.¹⁴⁰ For Hertzberg, Qohelet’s own view is to be identified with the “Aber” statement, while the “Zwar” statement is rejected.¹⁴¹ A related approach identifies the genre of Qohelet as a dialogue. Among modern scholars, this approach has been undertaken most productively by T.A. Perry, who argues that the book of Qohelet presents an argument between a pious sage (“the Presenter” [P]) and a more skeptical interlocutor (“Kohleth” [K]).¹⁴² The P character represents the perspective of traditional wisdom, while K raises objections to those pious traditions by way of his own observations and experiences. To both Perry and Hertzberg, it may be objected that each depends on the sense of the interpreter to determine what is “traditional” and “skeptical” rather relying on any clear evidence inherent in the text itself.¹⁴³

Recognizing the difficulties inherent in trying to “settle” Qohelet’s contradictions in favor of one perspective or another, some recent scholars have attempted to show how the contradictions themselves may be meaningful. One version of this approach has been

¹⁴⁰ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *Der Prediger* (KAT 17,4; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963). Hertzberg lists the following examples (30): 1:16(Z), 1:17-18(A); 2:3-10(Z), 2:11(A); 2:13-14a(Z), 3:14bff(A); 3:11a(Z), 3:11b(A); 3:17(A), 3:18ff(A); 4:13-16(Z), 4:16b(A); 7:11-12(Z), 7:7(A); 8:12b-13(Z), 8:14-15(A); 9:4b(Z), 9:5(A); 9:16a(Z), 9:16b(A); 9:17-18a(Z), 9:18b-10:1(A); 10:2-3(Z), 10:5-7(A).

¹⁴¹ Michael Fox rightly raises two objections to Hertzberg’s approach: (1) “that it allows us to assign one of the contrary propositions to someone other than Qohelet with no indication besides a presupposition about what kind of things Qohelet would say;” and (2) that Qohelet himself does not seem to accept the “Aber” statements as satisfactory resolutions: “The relation between the two propositions is ‘this is true *and* -- alas -- that is true’” (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 16–17).

¹⁴² T. A. Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). See also Athanasius Miller, “Aufbau und Grundproblem des Predigers,” *Miscellanea Biblica* 2 (1934): 104–22.

¹⁴³ Perry’s work has been consistently critiqued on this point. So Fox: “Whatever Perry considers more pious and cautious, he ascribes to ‘P,’ thereby *creating* that voice” (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 24). Similarly, Schoors: “the distribution of the text with respect to the two characters is almost totally arbitrary” (Antoon Schoors, review of T. A. Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes*, *JBL* 114 [1995]: 719).

proposed by J. A. Loader, who argues that Qohelet structures his thought in terms of “polarities,” first offering a “pole,” and then placing it in tension with a “contra-pole.”¹⁴⁴ Thomas Krüger argues that Qohelet presents contradictory viewpoints in order to encourage his readers to make judgments of their own.¹⁴⁵ The tensions and contradictions are “intended and meaningful elements of larger trains of thought and argumentation” that function to “provoke readers to a repeated reading and to the formation of their own judgment.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, in his view Qohelet is not trying to force his own conclusions on the reader but rather presenting the reader with contradictory modes of thought and allowing her to reach her own conclusions.¹⁴⁷

Michael Fox, while also allowing the contradictions in Qohelet’s thought to stand, offers a somewhat different rationale.¹⁴⁸ He suggests that Qohelet “continues to straddle two views of reality, wavering uncomfortably but honestly between them.”¹⁴⁹ Unlike Krüger, Fox does not view the tensions in Qohelet’s thought as purposive, but rather as an indication of an inherent multiplicity in Qohelet’s own understanding of the world. To

¹⁴⁴ J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet* (BZAW 152; New York: De Gruyter, 1979).

¹⁴⁵ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 15–19.

¹⁴⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 19.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 49: “As in a kaleidoscope, apparently incongruent features of the text come together almost magically, framing many different but meaningful configurations.”

¹⁴⁸ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 134–35 and Fox, *Contradictions*. Fox’s approach bears some similarity to others who attribute Qohelet’s contradictions to changes in his own thought. E.g., S. R. Driver argues that the book “reflects the author’s changing moods and these, for some reason, he has presented side by side without always bringing them into logical connexion with each other” (S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* [9th ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1913], 466). Similarly Vincenz Zapletal: “Qoheleth recorded his thoughts as they came to him. . . . The result may be in part that apparently quite contradictory judgments are given in regard to the same object, just as we often judge the same thing differently at times” (Vincenz Zapletal, *Das Buch Kohelet* [Freiburg: Gschwend, 1905, 2d ed. 1911], 31). Fox, however, does not attribute contradictions to *changes* in Qohelet’s thought; rather, he argues that Qohelet holds contradictory positions *at the same time*.

¹⁴⁹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 134.

support his position, Fox makes a compelling appeal to the concept of “perceptual frames” in which the beliefs of traditional wisdom serve as “models of reality belonging to [Qohelet’s] world construction; they are the ways he sees the world.”¹⁵⁰ The perceptual frame of traditional wisdom proves inadequate to Qohelet’s own experience, causing him to move away from his inherited worldview. However, “Qohelet does so only in part.”¹⁵¹

The simultaneous adherence to contradictory worldviews that Fox proposes finds support in Terror Management Theory. Robert Jay Lifton argues that when worldviews collapse, as I have argued Qohelet’s has done, they do not simply disappear. Rather, they become “less effectively internalized, more a matter of external requirement. Hence, there is a loss of a sense of fit between what individuals *feel* themselves to be and what a society or culture, formally or informally, *expects* them to be.”¹⁵² In this light, Qohelet’s contradictions may be understood as a product of his partial internalization of the collapsed worldview of traditional wisdom. The sayings of Qohelet that seem to stem from traditional wisdom represent his attempt to interpret his experience through the partially internalized symbol system of his traditional worldview. However, since that worldview has lost its capacity to render the world coherent and meaningful for him, Qohelet expresses a “loss of a sense of fit,” frequently observing the points at which it does not square with his lived reality and trying to move beyond it.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 135 In his discussion of epistemology in Proverbs, Fox develops a similar idea along the lines of “coherence theory.” People view the world according to “faith systems” that determine how observations are processed and received. (see Michael V. Fox, “The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” *JBL* 126 [2007]: 669–84, and idem *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [The Anchor Yale Bible 18B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009], 962–76, as well as my discussion in chapter 1). In Fox’s view, Qohelet is simultaneously employing two different coherence systems, resulting in his contradictory perceptions of the world.

¹⁵¹ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 135.

¹⁵² Robert J. Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 14; italics original.

¹⁵³ This need not be taken to imply that Qohelet’s historical context is one in which retributive justice actually functions any less effectively than it ever did. Since the worldview functions as a filter

Thus, in my view Qohelet does, as Fox suggests, simultaneously adhere to two contradictory worldviews. Or, perhaps more accurately, he has partially internalized one worldview that no longer functions successfully for him. Qohelet's contradictions express his partial but incomplete internalization of the wisdom tradition, a symbol system he no longer finds effective.

The Collapse of Wisdom in Qohelet

For a time toward the middle of the last century, it was common to characterize Qohelet as something of a renegade sage who instigated a crisis in the Wisdom tradition by challenging its most basic assumptions.¹⁵⁴ For instance, Walther Zimmerli argues with respect to Qoh 8:17 that

All his [sc. Qohelet's] endeavor is basically a great polemic against wisdom, which believes itself able to understand the things of the world in their connections, and thereby also (to understand) God, and to construct thereon its confident knowledge of life.¹⁵⁵

Similarly, Gerhard von Rad suggests that "Kohleth is turning against not only outgrowths of the traditional teaching but the whole undertaking."¹⁵⁶ For a number of scholars, the "crisis" expressed in Qohelet represented the beginning of the end for Wisdom tradition, or perhaps even of Israelite religion altogether. Egon Pfeiffer, for example, argued that "mit dieser vorwiegend statisch-ontologischen Gottesanschauung

through which experience is interpreted, the impairment of the worldview may render Qohelet's *perception* of the world less just even if the level of justice in the world is empirically unchanged.

¹⁵⁴ See especially Kurt Galling, *Die Krise der Aufklärung in Israel* (Mainzer Universitätsreden 19; Mainz, 1952); Aare Lauha, "Die Krise des religiösen Glaubens bei Kohelet," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; VTSup 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 183–91; Harmut Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Kohleth," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia/London: Fortress/SPCK, 1983), 141–53; Hans-Peter Müller, "Neige der Althebräischen 'Weisheit,'" *ZAW* 90 (1978): 238–94.

¹⁵⁵ Zimmerli, *Predigers Salomo*, 223, as translated in Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 91.

¹⁵⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. J. D. Martin; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1972), 233.

ist Kohelet ein unüberhörbares Zeugnis der Erschöpfung der alttestamentlichen Glaubenswelt, zugleich aber ein Hinweis auf die Notwendigkeit eines Neuansatzes, der sich für und später in Jesus Christus ereignete.”¹⁵⁷

In my view, this understanding of Qohelet requires several important modifications. First, my analysis suggests that Qohelet should be viewed neither as a great intellectual liberator of a dogmatized wisdom tradition or as a disillusioned agitator seeking to bring down the house altogether.¹⁵⁸ Rather, as the analysis of Qohelet’s contradictions above suggests, Qohelet is more properly viewed as a sage operating within a tradition that has lost its efficacy than as an attacker of that tradition. Here I am somewhat close to the position of Roland Murphy, who argues that while Qohelet may have a “quarrel” with traditional wisdom, he argues from within the tradition and is accepted as part of the tradition.¹⁵⁹ In my view, Qohelet is not so much interested in trying to “correct” the tradition as he is in trying to find some meaning for himself within the tradition, particularly with regard to death transcendence.

Second, my analysis may offer some insight into the so-called “crisis” of wisdom often associated with the book of Qohelet. As I argued in Chapter 3, Qohelet does appear to reflect a historical circumstance in which widespread socioeconomic changes and increased exposure to alternative worldviews created conditions under which traditional worldviews would have been prone to strain and possible collapse. In this cultural milieu, the worldview of traditional wisdom does indeed appear to have collapsed in the case of Qohelet. Whether we can speak of a collapse of the wisdom worldview as a whole is

¹⁵⁷ Egon Pfeiffer, “Die Gottesfurcht im Buche Kohelet,” in *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land: F. S. H. W. Hertzberg* (ed. H. G. Reventlow; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 158.

¹⁵⁸ Similarly Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 23: “the book of Qoheleth is not to be understood, as often happens in the literature, as a symptom or trigger of a ‘crisis of wisdom,’ but rather as an attempt to overcome the ‘crisis’ of traditional wisdom.”

¹⁵⁹ Roland E. Murphy, “Qoheleth’s ‘Quarrel’ with the Fathers,” in *From Faith to Faith* (ed. D. Y. Hadidian; PTMS 31; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979), 235–45; cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxi-lxiv.

doubtful, however, particularly given the paucity of textual evidence. Indeed, in Lifton's conception of the "symbolizing treadmill," it is not the case that rapid historical changes necessarily lead to worldview collapse. Far more often, in fact, such strain on the worldview produces "alterations or recombinations" of the symbol system (what we might call "resymbolization") rather than collapse (or "desymbolization"). It is notable that the wisdom texts produced soon after Qohelet do not merely reproduce the symbol system of traditional wisdom but rather give evidence of significant resymbolization of the tradition with regard to the issues of symbolic immortality and death transcendence, as evident in Ben Sira and 4QInstruction. This suggests that the pressures that led to the collapse of the traditional wisdom worldview in Qohelet were felt more broadly within the tradition, resulting in resymbolizations of symbolic immortality and death transcendence in the later texts.

CHAPTER 5

THE RESYMBOLIATION OF SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY IN 4QINSTRUCTION

We cannot be certain how widespread the desymbolization of the wisdom worldview expressed by Qohelet really was. It is possible that Qohelet represents an isolated case of an individual sage who found the symbolic worldview of traditional wisdom inadequate to his own quest for significance and ultimately for some form of death transcendence. That other wisdom texts subsequent to Qohelet do not share his skepticism may be taken as an indication that the “crisis” expressed in Qohelet did not have far-reaching effects.¹ However, if this were the case, we would expect to find wisdom texts from the period shortly after Qohelet that continue to assert the worldview of traditional wisdom. Instead, as the following analysis will attempt to demonstrate, the major wisdom texts of the period after Qohelet are engaged in a process of significant resymbolization of the traditional worldview. Most dramatically, 4QInstruction appeals to apocalyptic motifs in order to restructure the symbol system of traditional wisdom. At about the same time, Ben Sira recombines traditional wisdom motifs with Torah traditions and the history of ancient Israel, on the one hand, and with Greek literary forms, on the other. Significantly in my view, the appeals of these texts to discourses previously foreign to the wisdom tradition serve the purpose--at least in part--of offering new constructions of symbolic immortality that address the sorts of issues that troubled Qohelet. It is not necessary to suggest that these later texts knew and responded directly to Qohelet. However, it does seem to be the case that the wisdom worldview was stressed by the transition to the Hellenistic period, particularly with regard to its capacity to

¹ This is the position of Matthew J. Goff, “Recent Trends in the Study of Early Jewish Wisdom Literature: The Contribution of 4QInstruction and Other Qumran Texts,” *CBR* 7 (2009): 388, which will be discussed in more detail below.

symbolize death transcendence. Some adherents seem to have experienced a desymbolization of the world, as evidenced in the case of Qohelet. Others aggressively reconfigured the tradition to provide new symbolic means of death transcendence, thereby avoiding the collapse experienced by Qohelet.

In these final two chapters, I will analyze two of these texts--Ben Sira and 4QInstruction--analyzing how they reconfigured the worldview of traditional wisdom with regard to death and death transcendence. While the two texts stem from roughly the same period at the beginning of the second century B.C.E., I begin my analysis with 4QInstruction. The reason for this decision is simply that 4QInstruction offers a fairly radical reconstruction of the wisdom worldview through an appeal to apocalyptic motifs, including the possibility of literal immortality. Placing 4QInstruction last in the analysis, as many do, tends to give the impression that Ben Sira is little more than a conservative holdover from traditional wisdom, overshadowed by its more radical counterpart. By placing Ben Sira last in my analysis, I hope to show that in fact it is an aggressive resymbolization of the wisdom tradition in its own right, but one which appeals to a different set of external influences to accomplish its aims.

Background to 4QInstruction

I begin with 4QInstruction, the most extensive of the wisdom texts found at Qumran. While the origin of the text is disputed, it seems to have been popular among the members of the *yahad*, as either six or seven manuscripts have been found, including one stored in Cave 1 with other important sectarian texts. Despite its popularity in the *yahad*, most scholars attribute authorship of 4QInstruction to a pre-*yahad* community, as there are no explicit sectarian markers in the text and because 4QInstruction appears to have been a source for both the Hodayot and the Treatise of the Two Spirits in 1QS.²

² See the discussion in Matthew J. Goff, *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (STDJ 50; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 219–28. For the argument that 4QInstruction is source for 1QH and 1QS,

Scholars have tended to date the composition of 4QInstruction to the early part of the second century B.C.E., roughly contemporaneous with Ben Sira.³ To some degree, this dating of the composition depends on the date of the formation of the *yahad*, which scholarship has more recently begun to date to the early first century rather than the second.⁴ Samuel Adams dates 4QInstruction to the late second century and “a few generations later than the career of Ben Sira,” based largely on his argument that the wisdom tradition develops from an earthly to an otherworldly focus over time.⁵ Perhaps some degree of circularity is inevitable if we attempt to specify the date of the text too closely. Matthew Goff more cautiously suggests that “The early second century dating favored by Elgvin remains a legitimate possibility. But it is prudent to posit that 4QInstruction was written in the second century without specifying a more specific date within that period.”⁶ I myself prefer a date in the early part of the second century, but this

see Torleif Elgvin, “Priestly Sages? The Milieus of 4QMysteries and 4QInstruction,” in *Sapiential Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May 2001* (ed. J. J. Collins, G. E. Sterling, and R. A. Clements; STDJ 51; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 84, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning for Understanding Ones: Reading and Reconstructing the Fragmentary Early Jewish Sapiential Text 4QInstruction* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 44; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 199–200. On identifiers of sectarian texts, see especially Carol A. Newsom, “‘Sectually Explicit’ Literature from Qumran,” in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters* (ed. William H. Propp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 167–87.

³ John Strugnell and Daniel J. Harrington, *Qumran Cave 4.XXIV: Sapiential Texts, Part 2. 4QInstruction (Mūsār Lē Mēvīn): 4Q15ff. With a Re-Edition of 1Q126*. (DJD 34; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 21, argue that the text could have been written in the Persian, Ptolemaic, or Seleucid periods. Elgvin, “Priestly Sages,” 83, proposes a date in the early second century prior to the Maccabean revolt. Armin Lange, “In Diskussion mit dem Tempel: Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kohelet und weisheitlichen Kreisen am Jerusalemer Tempel,” in *Kohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Antoon Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 157, dates the composition to the middle of the second century and argues that it is influenced by the Maccabean crisis. Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 244, proposes a date in the late second century.

⁴ See especially Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁵ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 243–47.

⁶ Matthew J. Goff, *Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SVT 116; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 67.

is undoubtedly related to my own skepticism about the type of straight trajectory Adams seems to suggest. I prefer to view the developments of the wisdom tradition in the second century as pluriform, with Ben Sira and 4QInstruction representing alternative rather than sequential resymbolizations of traditional wisdom.

4QInstruction presents itself as the advice of a teacher to his student. While the editors of *DJD 34* suggest that the social setting of the text is the training of scribes for administrative functions within that state bureaucracy, this position has not found much support.⁷ The addressees of 4QInstruction appear to have experienced some degree of economic hardship. The addressee is frequently referred to as “poor” (e.g., 4Q416 2 ii 20), sometimes to the extent of lacking food and basic necessities (4Q417 2 i 17-19). Tigchelaar has tentatively proposed that 4QInstruction may reflect an educational setting in which a משכיל gives instruction to a group of students, perhaps inductees into some sort of community or group.⁸ His identification of the word משכיל in 4Q418 238, which he takes to be the beginning of the composition, along with the phrase להו[סִיף לקה לנבינים (“to increase learning for the understanding ones”) supports this view. The position taken here is that 4QInstruction represents the teaching of a משכיל for members of pre-yahad sectarian community, intended to inculcate newer members into the cultural value system of the community.⁹

⁷ *DJD 34*, 20–21.

⁸ Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 244–45.

⁹ My position should be distinguished from that of Torlief Elgvin, “Early Essene Eschatology: Judgment and Salvation According to Sapiential Work A,” in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Conference on the Texts from the Judean Desert, Jerusalem, 30 April, 1995* (ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks; STDJ 20; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 126–65, who argues that 4QInstruction is an “early Essene” text produced by teachers who later went on to form the Dead Sea Sect. While it is possible that some members of the community of 4QInstruction were also members of the yahad, it is also possible that the yahad has taken over the texts of a group not directly related to it.

Much of 4QInstruction is concerned with the practical matters of daily living, including how to treat a noble person (4Q417 2 i 2), how to receive a flogging (4Q417 (2 i 25), the importance of honoring one's father and mother (4Q416 2 iii 15-18), marriage (4Q416 2 iii 19-iv 4), and so on. It provides a clear set of cultural values by which the addressee is to conduct himself in order to be a good member of the community. However, for present purposes, the texts related to 4QInstructions of symbolic immortality are of more central concern, as they provide the framework within which the cultural values take shape.

Symbolic Immortality in the Biological and Biosocial Modes

While the appeal to literal life after death for the righteous and eschatological punishment for the wicked represents the most dramatic resymbolization of symbolic immortality in 4QInstruction, as I will discuss below, it is not the only one. In fact, 4QInstruction aggressively reconfigures the symbolic immortalities of traditional wisdom in several modes, primarily through its appeal to various apocalyptic motifs. In the case of the biosocial mode, 4QInstruction radicalizes the sense of ingroup connection among its adherents by appealing to a belief in a dual creation of humankind. It envisions its own adherents as being set apart from the rest of humanity, created in the image of the angels and endowed with special, revealed knowledge.¹⁰

Its understanding of the nature of the two humanities is set forth most clearly in 4Q417 1 i 15-18¹¹, a text relating the bequeathal of the "Vision of Hagu" to the "spiritual people" (עם רוח).¹² After introducing the "Vision of Hagu" in line 15-16a, the text

¹⁰ John J. Collins, "In the Likeness of the Holy Ones: The Creation of Humankind in a Wisdom Text from Qumran," in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (ed. Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 609–18.

¹¹ The text was originally numbered as 4Q417 2 i 15-18.

¹² The significance of the "Vision of Hagu" itself will be discussed in the section on the creative

continues:

וינחילה¹³ לאנוש עם עם רוח כ[י]א
כתבנית קדושים יצרו ועוד לוא נתן הגוי לרוח בשר עי לא ידע בין
[טו]ב לרע כמשפט [ר]וחו
(4Q417 1 i 16-81)

The translation of the passage has been disputed among scholars, particularly with regard to the identity of אנוש in line 16. Some understand אנוש as a generic reference to “humankind.”¹⁴ While the term takes this meaning frequently in the Hodayot (e.g. 1QH IX:27)¹⁵, Collins points out that it is here it is associated with, but not identical to, the עם רוח and distinct from the בשר רוח, making “humankind” impossible.¹⁶ Others, most notably Armin Lange, have understood אנוש as a reference to the antediluvian figure Enosh, the son of Seth.¹⁷ However, the portrayal of Enosh as belonging to a faithful remnant of “spiritual people” is unknown elsewhere in the tradition; nor does he elsewhere appear as the recipient of a book.¹⁸ A more likely interpretation is offered by Collins, who understands אנוש as a reference to Adam, the original human being created

mode of symbolic immortality, below. The present argument concerns the nature of humankind as presented in this passage, and not with the vision itself.

¹³ The original text appears to preserve the form ינחילה, though it has been corrected by a second scribe to read ינהילנו, perhaps because the antecedent of the 3fs suffix was unclear. See the discussion in *DJD* 34, 163.

¹⁴ So Torlief Elgvin, “The Mystery to Come: Early Essene Theology of Revelation,” in *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson; JSOTSup 290; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 140, and, tentatively, Daniel J. Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran* (London: Routledge, 1996), 53 (“Humankind [or, Enosh]”) and *DJD* 34, 155 (“Humankind/Enosh”).

¹⁵ Line references for the Hodayot follow Hartmut Stegemann and Eileen Schuller, eds., *1QHodayot^a: With Incorporation of 1QHodayot^b and 4QHodayot^{a-f}* (translation of texts by Carol Newsom; DJD 40; New York/Oxford: Clarendon/Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Collins, “Likeness of the Holy Ones,” 610.

¹⁷ Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* (STDJ 18; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 53.

¹⁸ Collins, “Likeness of the Holy Ones,” 612; cf. Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination*, 88.

by God.¹⁹ He finds support for this interpretation in 1QS III17, “(God) created אנוש to have dominion over the world (והואה ברא אנוש לממשלת תבל). Following this line of interpretation, 4Q417 i 1 16-18 might best be translated as follows:

He (God) gave it to Adam along with the spiritual people, f[ō]r he (God) fashioned him in the likeness of the holy ones. But he still did not give Hagu²⁰ to the fleshly spirit, for he could not discern between good and evil according to the judgment of his [sp]irit.

If this interpretation is correct, then 4QInstruction envisions humanity as being created with two different essences. The first, the biosocial group of 4QInstruction, is a “spiritual people” (עם רוח) who, like Adam, is created “in the likeness of the holy ones” (כתבנית קדושים). The term קדשים is almost certainly a reference to the angels, thereby figuring the adherents of 4QInstruction being inherently connected to the divine realm as part of the community of angels. The rest of humanity, in contrast, belongs to the “fleshly spirit” (רוח בשר), apparently lacking any connection to the angels and having no capacity discern between good and evil. By employing this dualistic view of humankind, 4QInstruction construes its adherents as the only “persons of significance” in the world (to use the language of TMT), reducing all other worldviews and their adherents to a second-class status.²¹

A second passage further amplifies the distinction between the adherents of 4QInstruction and the rest of humanity:

[א]ז הבגילכה בכול
רוח בשר ואתה הבדל מכול אשר שנא והנזר מכול תעבות נפֿשׁ] כי אֵ הוא עשה כול

¹⁹ Collins, “Likeness of the Holy Ones,” 612, 615.

²⁰ For a discussion of the Book of Hagu, see the section on “Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode,” below.

²¹ A similar duality in human nature is found in the Treatise on the Two Spirits: “The character and fate of all humankind reside with these spirits. All the hosts of humanity, generation by generation, are heirs (ינחלו) to these spiritual divisions, walking according to their ways; the outworking of every deed inheres in these divisions according to each person’s spiritual heritage (נחלת איש), whether great or small, for every age of eternity. God has appointed these spirits as equals until the last age, and set an everlasting enmity between their divisions.” (1QS 4:15-17; following the translation of Wise, Abegg, and Cook in *DSSR* 4:273)

ויורישם איש נחלו והוא חלקה ונחלתה בתוך בני אדם [ובנ]חלתו המשילכ׳הם ואתה
 בזה כבדהו בהתקדשכה לו כאשר שמכה לקדוש קודשים [לכול [תבל ובכול [א]ל[ים]
 הפיל גורלכה וכבודכה הרבה מואדה וישימכה לו בכור ב[]ל[]

[Th]en he separated you from every
 fleshly spirit so that you may be distinguished from all that he hates
 and separated²² from all that (his) being abominates.²³ For he has made everyone,
 and he has caused each one of them to inherit his inheritance. But he himself is
 your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the sons of humankind.²⁴
 And he has given each of them dominion over his inheritance. And you
 glorify him in this, when you sanctify yourself to him just as he has placed you
 as the holy of holies [for all] the earth and among all the [a]n[gels]
 he has cast your lot. And he has greatly increased your glory.
 And he has set you for himself as a firstborn among []. (4Q418 81+81a 1-5)

Here again, 4QInstruction figures its adherents as being set apart from the “fleshly spirit” (רוח בשר) and placed in a special relationship to the deity. It employs language of division and separation (הבדילכה, הבדל, הנזר) to reinforce the uniqueness of the community as being set apart from the rest of humanity. Further, 4QInstruction emphasizes the special relationship of its adherents to God, referring to them as “the holy of holies” (קדוש) and as God’s “firstborn” (בכור). In contrast, 4QInstruction figures those outside of its biosocial group as deserving the wrath and hatred of God. They are described as “all whom (God) hates” (כול אשר שנא) and as being an “abomination” to God ([תעבות נפש]). In this manner, 4QInstruction stakes a powerful claim as the only immortalizing worldview among all its competitors. All other worldviews are discourses of death.

This passage further extends the biosocial metaphor to include the predetermined fates of each of these groups of humanity. It employs the language of inheritance (נחלה) to describe the outcomes given to each person by God, who “has caused each one of them

²² For the nifal of גזר, cf. Ezek 14:7.

²³ For the use of נפשו to refer to God’s being, cf. געלה נפשי in Lev 26:11, 15, 30, 43 (*DJD* 34, 304).

²⁴ Cf. Num 18:20: בני ישראל: אני חלקך ונחלתך בתוך בני ישראל (“I am your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the sons of Israel”).

to inherit his inheritance” (ויורישם איש נחלו) 4Q418 81+81a 3).²⁵ In 4QInstruction all people receive an inheritance from God, whether for the good or for the bad, emphasizing God’s control over the fates of all humanity. For instance, 4Q417 1 i 24 states that the wicked person “according to his inheritance in it will be tr[eated as wicked]” (בפי נחלתו בה) (יר[שע]). The inheritance of the ingroup members, in contrast, is said to be among the angels, where God has cast their lot (הפיל גורלכה) [א]ל[ים] [א]ל[ים].²⁶

4QInstruction aggressively reinforces the significance of the biosocial group by imbuing it with a special religious connection: group members are specially chosen by God for communion with the angels and are thereby able to transcend their status as “mere humans.” As we will see further below, this special connection to God also offers a literal life after death, so that ingroup members have a special claim to an immortality that is not shared by the adherents of any other worldview. In contrast to the worldview of traditional wisdom, the biosocial group of 4QInstruction is not a loosely constructed group based primarily on the transmission of instruction from one generation to the next. Rather, it is a group specially endowed by God and set apart from the rest of humanity, destined for life after death among the angels. Adherents of this worldview need not doubt that their membership in the group makes them significant; indeed, they are the only people who are significant to God.

Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode

The process by which 4QInstruction reconfigures the worldview of traditional wisdom can also be seen in its deployment of the creative mode of symbolic death

²⁵ Cf. 4Q416 3 2 (מאתו נחלת כל חי): “from him comes the inheritance of every living thing”), 4Q423 5 3 (מעש[ה] בידו) כל [מעש]ה בידו): “[h]e divided the [in]heritance of all rulers and fashioned every [dee]d in his hand”), and 4Q418 81+81a 20 (כי אל פלג נחלת[ו] בכ[ו]ל [חי]): “for God divided [his(?) inheritance [among ever]y [living thing]”).

²⁶ For a complete discussion of the significance of punishment and reward in 4QInstruction, including the claim that the elect have a lot among the angels, see the discussion further below.

transcendence, wherein one transcends death through the persistence of something one creates. For Proverbs, one particularly important statement of death transcendence in the creative mode was the promise of the survival of one’s name in the form of one’s “memory” (זכר) that would continue to “be a blessing” (לברכה) to those who came after (10:7).²⁷ This mode of death transcendence was severely disrupted for Qohelet, however, due to his observations about the instability of human memory.

Like Proverbs, 4QInstruction offers the possibility of death transcendence in the creative mode via the remembrance of one’s name. However, it does not simply reassert the symbolic view of Proverbs, but instead circumvents the failure of human memory altogether by transposing the task of remembrance into the heavenly realm. It does so through an appeal to a “book of memory” (ספר זכרון) that preserves the names of the righteous before God himself:

מבין רֹשׁ פִּעֲלַתְכָּהּ בְּזַכְרוֹן הַשֵּׁ [לּוֹם כִּי] בַּא הֲרֹת ״חֹקֶכָּהּ וְחֻקֶּיךָ״ כֹּל הַפְּקוּדֹה־
 כִּי חֲרֹת מַחֻקָּק לְאַל עַל כֹּל עִׁׁׁ [] בְּנֵי שֵׁת
 וְסֵפֶר זַכְרוֹן כְּתוּב לְפָנָיו לְשִׁמְרֵי דְבָרָהּ וְהָאָה חֶזוֹן הַהֶגְוִי לְסֵפֶר זַכְרוֹן

Understanding one, inherit your reward, remembering that requital for it comes.
 Engraved is your ordinance, and inscribed is all the punishment.
 For engraved is that which is inscribed by God against all [] the sons of Seth.
 And a book of remembrance has been written before him of the ones who keep
 his word. And it is the vision of Hagu, for a book of remembrance. (4Q417 i 15-16)

The text alludes to Mal 3:16-17, which similarly describes a “book of remembrance”

(ספר זכרון):²⁸

אֲז נִדְבְּרוּ יִרְאוּ יְהוָה אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ
 וַיִּקְשַׁב יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זַכְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה וּלְחַשְׁבֵי שִׁמּוֹ
 וַהֲיוּ לִי אֱמִר יְהוָה צִבְאוֹת לְיוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה סָגְלָהּ
 וְחַמְלַתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר יַחְמַל אִישׁ עַל־בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֹתוֹ

Then the ones who feared Yhwh spoke among themselves, each to his companion.

²⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 1.

²⁸ The parallel phrasing of the two passages suggests a close relationship between the two texts:
 4Q417 i 15-16: וְסֵפֶר זַכְרוֹן כְּתוּב לְפָנָיו לְשִׁמְרֵי דְבָרָהּ
 Mal 3:16: וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זַכְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה

And Yhwh paid attention and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him for the ones who feared Yhwh and thought upon his name. “They shall be mine,” said Yhwh of Hosts, “a personal possession on the day when I act. I will have compassion for them just as a man has compassion for the son of the one who serves him. (Mal 3:16-17)

In the Malachi text, the ספר זכרון preserves before God the names of the ones who fear him in order to insure that God will not forget them on the day of judgment. In this manner, the righteous are promised that their lifetime of keeping the commandments will result in a profit for them (Mal 3:14), as YHWH will remember them on the day of his coming. A similar motif occurs in Dan 12:1, in which those “found written in the book” (הנמצא כתוב בספר) are delivered from the “time of anguish” (עת צרה) at the final judgment. Likewise, in *1 Enoch* the phrase “your names are written before the glory of the Great One” (104:1) concerns God’s remembrance of the righteous on the day of judgment.²⁹

4QInstruction appears to draw on the motif of the ספר זכרון in a similar fashion. The “book of remembrance” preserves the names of the righteous before God, again in the context of the day of judgment.³⁰ The “ones who keep his word” (שמרי דברו)--presumably the adherents of 4QInstruction--are assured that their names will be preserved before God so that they will “inherit [their] reward” (רוש פעלתכה). They will be kept apart from the “sons of Seth” (בני שׁוֹת) and the “punishment” (הפקוֹה) that is determined for them. This appeal to a motif familiar from apocalyptic traditions allows 4QInstruction to obviate the problem of the instability of human memory by transposing remembrance in the heavenly realm, where it guarantees that the reward of the righteous will be commensurate with their actions in life.

²⁹ The motif of heavenly tablets has a long history in ancient Near Eastern writings. See especially Shalom Paul, “Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life,” *JANESCU* 5 (1973): 345–53 and Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 69–79. Closer to the period of 4QInstruction, heavenly tablets are found in *1 Enoch* (47:3; 93:1-2; 108:3), *Daniel* (7:10; 20:21; 12:1) and *Jubilees* (30:20-22).

³⁰ For a discussion of eschatological judgment in 4QInstruction, see further below.

However, the ספר זכרון does not appear to be confined entirely to the heavenly realm. The text refers to the ספר זכרון as “the Vision of Hagu” (חזון ההגוי; 4Q417 1 i 16).³¹ As we have seen in the preceding section, the “vision of Hagu” is said to have been given to Adam and “the spiritual people” (עם רוח) but not to the “fleshly spirit” (רוח בשר; 4Q417 1 i 16-17). The description of the giving of “the Vision of Hagu” to the “spiritual people” is then followed by this admonition:

...
ואתה בן מבין הבט vacat ברוז נהיגה נדע
[] ת כול חי והתחלכו הפקוד על מעש[י]

And you, understanding child, gaze *vacat* on the mystery that is to be, and know [] everyone who lives and the manner of his walking concerning all his deed[s]. (4Q417 1 i 18-19)³²

This text suggests that the instructee of 4QInstruction has the capacity--through the “vision of Hagu” and the “mystery that is to be”³³--to know the rewards and punishments foreordained for both the righteous and the wicked. The ספר זכרון and “vision of Hagu” thus not only symbolize death transcendence in the creative mode for the adherents of 4QInstruction but also reinforce the uniqueness of the biosocial group of the instruction and its special connection to the heavenly realm. The adherent of

³¹ The “Vision of Hagu” appears only in 4Q417 1 i 13-18 but has received a great deal of scholarly attention. See especially Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 80–90; Collins, “Likeness of the Holy Ones,” 609–18; Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 80–126; Benjamin G. Wold, *Women, Men, and Angels: The Qumran Wisdom Document Musar LeMevin and Its Allusions to Genesis Creation Traditions* (WUNT 201; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 124–49; and Jean-Sébastien Rey, *4QInstruction: Sagesse et Eschatologie* (STDJ 81; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 292–304.

³² The text omitted here (4Q417 1 i 15-18) is discussed above in the section on symbolic immortality in the biosocial mode.

³³ The phrase רז נהיגה is the noun “mystery” followed by the nifal participle of the היה, “to be.” It has been variously translated as “le mystère passé” (Roland de Vaux, “La Grotte Des Manuscrits Hébreux,” *RB* 66 [1949]: 66), “a mystery to be” (Isaac Rabinowitz, “The Authorship, Audience and Date of the De Vaux Fragment of an Unknown Work,” *JBL* 71 [1952]: 22), “le mystère futur” (D. Barthélemy and J. T. Milik, *Qumran Cave I* [DJD 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1955]), “the mystery that is to be/come” (Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, 49). The translation followed here is that of John J. Collins, “Wisdom Reconsidered, in Light of the Scrolls,” *DSD* 4 (1997): 272; cf. Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 30–79.

4QInstruction is not only secure in the knowledge of his own fate, but he knows the fate of all others, as well.

Symbolic Immortality in the Natural Mode

Terror Management Theory proposes that one of the essential elements of a successful worldview is that it render the world meaningful, so that its adherents can construe themselves as “beings of enduring significance living in a meaningful reality.”³⁴ Proverbs 10-29 constructed the world as essentially secure and predictable, so that its adherents could be relatively assured of success by living according to the values promoted by the worldview. Proverbs 1-9, made the connection more explicitly, appealing to cosmogonic scenes that depicted the world as being carefully designed according to the principles of “wisdom” (חכמה) and “understanding” (תבונה; Prov 3:19-20), which were then communicated to humankind through Wisdom herself (Prov 8:22-36). Qohelet, in contrast, depicted the design of the cosmos as being utterly obscured from human understanding, so that humankind could not perceive the world as meaningful nor its own actions as significant. 4QInstruction restores a belief in an orderly cosmos that is accessible to human understanding, but again it does not simply reassert the worldview of Proverbs. Rather, it appeals to an array of apocalyptic motifs in order to resymbolize the wisdom worldview in ways that mitigate the sort of problems expressed in the book of Qohelet.

The Orderly Design of the Cosmos

4QInstruction begins with an extended description of the cosmic design,³⁵ which

³⁴ Tom Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 16.

³⁵ There is general consensus that 4Q416 1 preserves the beginning of 4QInstruction, as indicated by a wide right margin of approximately 3cm. See *DJD* 34, 17–19.

can be reconstructed as follows:³⁶

<p> <u>כוכבי אור</u> <u>ירוצו מעת עולם</u> <u>ואין להדמות בכושר ילכו</u> <u>ת לממלכה</u> <u>]</u> <u>]</u> <u>ומאורות</u> <u>ו]</u> <u>]</u> </p>	<p> כָּל רוֹחַ] ולתכן חפצִי] מועד במועד ו] לפי צבאם למש[ור במשורה ולס וממלכה למד[ינה ומדימה לאיש ואיש לפי מחסור צבאם]משפט כולם לו וצבא השמים הכין ע]ל למופתיהמה ואתות מו]עדיהמה זה לזה וכול פקודתמה י[שלימו ו]ספרו] </p>
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<p> Every spirit [and to apportion the matters of³⁷ [season by season, and [Properly³⁸ they go] according to their host to ru[le by dominion (?)³⁹ and to and kingdom, for pr[ovince and province, for man and man according to the circuits of their host.⁴⁰ [And the regulation⁴¹ of all of them is His] </p>	<p> stars of light] they run from eternal time,] not to stand still. for kingdom]] </p>
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³⁶ This reconstruction follows Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, “Towards a Reconstruction of the Beginning of 4QInstruction (4Q416 Fragment 1 and Parallels),” in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (ed. Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 99–126, and Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 175–93. Tigchelaar identifies a number of fragments associated with 4Q418 that properly belong to a separate manuscript, which he calls 4Q418*. Along with 4Q416 1, these fragments seem to preserve the beginning of 4QInstruction. The transcription presented here is 4Q416 1 supplemented with the text of 4Q418 1, 2, 2b (underline), 229 (double underline), and a number of small 4Q418 fragments (bold) as arranged by Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 176–77. The translation is my own.

³⁷ The transcription of חפצִי (“the matters of”) follows Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 177. The editors of *DJD 34* transcribe ולתכן חפצו and translate “And to order His (?) good pleasure.” However, they go on to note that “the meaning of the two words, especially in conjunction, is not clear” (84). Tiglechaar plausibly argues that חפצִי is a plural noun in the construct state meaning “affairs or tasks” (cf. 1QS 3:15 and 1QH^a 9:15).

³⁸ *DJD 34* reconstructs בכון rather than בכון[שר (442). Rather than “properly they go,” one might render “in eve[ry time] they go” (see discussion in Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 178).

³⁹ The meaning of למש[ור במשורה is highly uncertain. *DJD 34* suggests that the terms should be derived from either *s-r-h* or *s-r-r* meaning “to rule” (84). Alternatively, Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 178, proposes a bi-form of מסורה, with interchange of *samek* and *sin*, rendering “to keep station.”

⁴⁰ *DJD 34* notes the difficulty of “poverty of their host” (84-85). Tigchelaar gives the same rednering but notes the possibility that מחסור could be a transposition of מסחור, thus perhaps “going around” (Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 179).

⁴¹ While *DJD 34* translates משפט as “judgment,” Tigchelaar correctly notes that the context suggests “regulation” (Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 179).

And the host of heaven he has established ov[er and luminaries]
 for their portents and the signs of their ap[ointed times]
 one to the other. And all their assignments th[ey shall complete and] recount []
]
 (4Q416 1 1-9)

Tigchelaar has further proposed that this cosmological section is introduced by 4Q418 238, which he thus takes to be the initial lines of the entirety of 4QInstruction.⁴² This fragment preserves the word מְשַׁכִּיל, perhaps indicating that 4QInstruction was addressed to the “instructor” or, alternatively to a בֵּן מְשַׁכִּיל (cf. 4Q417 1 i 25).

If these lines do indeed preserve the beginning of the text, it is notable that 4QInstruction frames all of its paraenetic material within a description of the orderly design of the cosmos. Though the lines are fragmentary, it appears that God has given the heavenly host their “regulation” (משפט) and their “assignments” (פקודתמה) which they dutifully “fulfill” (ישלימו). In particular, the luminaries keep the times of the seasons so that humankind will know when to celebrate the festivals (ואתות מן עדיהמה). The proper movement of the cosmos thus serves as the basis for the behaviors prescribed for being a successful adherent of the worldview.⁴³ One who keeps instruction performs an act of cosmic significance in harmony with the universe itself. In the framework of TMT, this construction allows each person to view his own actions as significant and, as a result, his own existence as meaningful, allowing him to transcend himself through participation in larger systems of meaning.

Elsewhere 4QInstruction appeals more explicitly to the predetermined design of the cosmos as the proper grounds for the instructee’s behavior:

כִּי־אֵל הַדְּעוֹת סֹד אִמְתּוֹ וּבְרִי נְהִיָּה
 פָּרַשׂ אֶת אֹשֶׁה וּמַעֲשֵׂיהָ ־־־ לְכָל חֶכְמָה וְלְכָל עֲרֻמָּה יִצְרָה וּמִמְשַׁלֵּת מַעֲשֵׂיהָ
 לְכָל־וְלִסְלִמָּה וְכוּל־אֵת כָּל־וְלִסְבָּאִים פֶּאֶרֶשׁ לְמַבְיָנָתָם לְכוּל־מִן עֲשֵׂה לְהַתְהַלֵּךְ
 בְּיָצָר מְבִינָתָם וַיִּפְרֹשׁ לְאִוְם־וְכוֹשֵׁר וּבְכוֹשֵׁר מְבִינֹת נֹד־עוֹ נִסְתְּרִי
 מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ עִם הַתְהַלְכוֹן תְּמִימִים בְּכוּל־מִן עֲשֵׂיו

⁴² Tigchelaar, “Reconstruction of the Beginning of 4QInstruction,” 122.

⁴³ *DJD* 34, 8.

For the God of knowledge is the foundation of truth, and by the myster that is to be he has spread out its foundation and its deeds. [by all wis]dom and by all[c]unning he has fashioned it. And the dominion of all its deeds for a[l] . . . and all . . . he explained for their understanding every deed,⁴⁴ so that he might walk about in the inclination of their⁴⁵ understanding. And he explained for m[an]. . . and in proper understanding the [my]steries of his plan have been made kn[own] along with his walking perfectly in all his deeds. (4Q417 1 i 8-12)⁴⁶

The first lines of this passage depict God laying out (פרש) the foundations of truth. God then proceeds to “explain (פרש) for their understanding every deed, so that he might walk about in the inclination their understanding.” The text draws special attention to the connection between God’s founding of the cosmos and his explanation of its design to the instructee through a wordplay between *pāraś* (“to spread out”) in line 9 and *pāraš* (“to explain”) in line 10.⁴⁷ The wordplay reinforces the connection between the instructee and the Deity, who explains his actions “for their understanding” (למְבִינָתָם) so that they are able to “walk about in the inclination of their understanding.” The passage reiterates the instructee’s capacity to understand God’s action by asserting that “the secrets of his plan” are “made known” to them “in proper understanding” by means of the “mystery that is to be.” One may note the similarity of this passage to Prov 3:19-20 in terms of both language and function. In that earlier passage, God creates the cosmos “by wisdom”

⁴⁴ This word is transcribed as מְעִשֵׁיָהּ in *DJD 34*, 151 (cf. *DSSR* 4:104). *DJD 34* goes on to note that “the space would allow for either מְעִשֵׁיָהּ or מְעִשֵׁיָהָ” (155). The latter transcription suggests a plural with a feminine suffix, the antecedent of which would be unclear. I have opted for the former transcription, as do Torleif Elgvin, “An Analysis of 4QInstruction” (Ph. D. diss.; Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), 256; Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 52; and Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 66 n. 133.

⁴⁵ This translation follows the transcription of *DJD 34*, 151, which reads מְבִינָתָם (cf. *DSSR* 4:104). Others read מְבִינָתוֹ, “his understanding” (so Elgvin, “An Analysis of 4QInstruction,” 256; Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 56; Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 51). *DJD 34* allows that the space may permit תּוֹ-, but argues that the positioning of the character on the line favors the תָּם- reading. The presence of מְבִינָתָם in the previous line further supports this reading (see also Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 66 n. 134).

⁴⁶ See also the parallel text in 4Q418 43, 44, 45 i 6-9.

⁴⁷ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 66.

(בהכמה) and “by understanding” (בתבונה), which are then revealed to humankind through the teachings of Proverbs. In 4QInstruction, God creates “by the mystery that is to be” (ברז נהיה), which elsewhere is said to be specially revealed to the adherents of 4QInstruction, as I will discuss below. Once again, 4QInstruction can be seen to restore the worldview of traditional wisdom not by simply reasserting it but rather through an appeal to a motif (esoteric knowledge) previously unknown in the wisdom tradition.

Periodization of History

If 4QInstruction begins with a description of the orderly cosmos (4Q416 1-9), then that description is followed immediately by a description of eschatological judgment, including a periodization of history, in 4Q416 1 10-14. References to “the period of truth” (קץ האמת; 4Q416 1 13) and “all periods of eternity” (כל קצי עד; 4Q417 1 14) suggest that 4QInstruction views history as falling into distinct periods, some of which may be characterized by iniquity and others by truth. 4Q416 1 13 claims that in the eschatological judgment “all iniquity shall come to an end, while the period of truth will be completed.” This suggests a conception of history in which the present period of history may be marked by iniquity, but the ultimate termination of iniquity and the onset of a period of truth are assured.

4QInstruction does not display as complex a periodization of history as do other apocalyptic texts, but it does seem to view history as consisting of a series of periods (קצים), the last of which is marked by the eradication of iniquity and the restoration of justice.⁴⁸ 4Q416 3 3-4 offers a fragmentary reference to there being “wrath in every peri[od]” (חרון בכל ק[ץ]) along with the affirmation that “wickedness will come to an end”

⁴⁸ On the periodization of history in apocalyptic literature, see especially John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (The Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls; London ; New York: Routledge, 1997), 52–70.

(עד תום רעשה).⁴⁹ 4Q418 123 ii 2-4 further suggests at least a three-fold periodization of history into the epochs of what has been, what is, and what will be:

למבוא שנים ומוצא קצים []
 כול הנהיה בה למה היה ומה יהיה בו []
 קצו אשר גלה אל אוזן מבינים ברז נהיה

for the coming of years and the going of times []
 everything that is in it, from what has been to what will be in it []
 his period which He has revealed to the ear of the understanding ones by the
 mystery that is to be.

The text refers to the passing of periods (קצים) with reference to “everything that is in it, from what has been to what will be in it.” These three divisions may simply refer to past, present, and future or, more likely, to primordial time, present time, and eschatological time.⁵⁰ The text also makes reference to “his (God’s) period” (קצו), which suggests a future time in which God’s reign is to be fully realized. Elsewhere, 4QInstruction seems to refer to the “pe[riod] of wrath” (4Q416 4 1)⁵¹ and to the time when “wickedness is completed, for there will be wrath in every per[iod] ([חרון בכל ק] [צ])” (4Q416 3 3). 4QInstruction anticipates that the culmination of the periods of history will be a period of final judgment followed by a period variously referred to as the “period of tru[th]” (קצ) (קצ האמ[ת]; 4Q416 1 13) or the “period of peace” (קצ שלום; 4Q418c 9).⁵²

This schematization suggests that God is fully in control of history, despite any appearances to the contrary. This perspective allows 4QInstruction to account for one of the major difficulties encountered by Qohelet, for whom the presence of injustice in the

⁴⁹ See also 4Q416 4 1, which also appears to preserve a reference to a “period of wrath” (קצ [חרון]).

⁵⁰ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 59–60; cf. 4Q417 1 i, which also seems to refer to a three-part division of time.

⁵¹ The text reads [חרון בכל ק] [צ]. *DJD* 34, 34, notes that the text could be transcribed as either אחרון קצ or קצ חרון. Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 49, transcribes as [צ] [חרון].

⁵² So *DJD* 34, 502. Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 189, translates the phrase as “period of completion.”

world suggested either that God was not in control of history or that God was not particularly concerned with justice or the welfare of humankind. Again employing apocalyptic motifs, 4QInstruction defers God's vindication of righteousness to the eschatological future, allowing for present injustice to coexist with a belief in God's ultimate justice without any sense of contradiction.

Creation and Eschatological Judgment

The connection between the orderly creation (4Q416 1 1-9) and the periodization of history resulting in eschatological judgment (4Q416 1 10-14) serves an important function in 4QInstruction. Unlike Proverbs, which assumes a reasonably predictable relationship between act and consequence that is discernible in the present, 4QInstruction concedes the apparent injustice of the world at any given moment. However, even in the face of present injustice, 4QInstruction is able to maintain its claim of a meaningful cosmos (one of the key components of a functional worldview) by appealing to the motifs of the periodization of history and a belief in eschatological judgment.

The eschatological horizon of 4QInstruction is evident from its opening scene. Following directly upon the description of the cosmic design in 4Q416 1 1-9, discussed above, 4QInstruction continues with a vivid description of eschatological judgment in 4Q416 1 10-14.⁵³

בְּשָׁמַיִם יִשְׁפּוֹט עַל עֲבוֹדַת רָשָׁעָה וּכְלֵי בְנֵי אֲמִתּוֹ יִרְצֹף לָּוֹ
 קִצָּה וַיִּפְחָדוּ וַיִּרְיָעוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר הִתְגַּלְלוּ בָּהּ כִּי שָׁמַיִם יִרְאוּ
 [יָמִים וְתַהֲמוֹת פָּחָדוּ וַיִּתְעַבְּרוּ כָּל רוּחַ בֶּשֶׂר וּבְנֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם] מִ
 [מִשְׁפָּטָה וְכָל עוֹלָה תִּתֵּם עוֹד אֶשְׁלֵם קִץ הָאָמֶת] לֵם לֵם לֵם
 בְּכָל קִצֵּי עֵד כִּי אֵל אֲמִתּוֹ הוּא וּמְקוֹמוֹ שְׁנִי]

In heaven he will judge the work of wickedness,
 but all his faithful children will be accepted by []
 its end. And all who defile themselves in it will be in terror and cry out,
 for the heavens will fear, [] and (the earth) will be shaken from its pl(ace).]

⁵³ The text presented here is 4Q416 1 supplemented with the text of 4Q418 1, 2, 2b (underline), 229 (double underline), and a number of small 4Q418 fragments (bold) as arranged by Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 176–77. The translation is my own.

The [s]eas and the depths will be in terror, and every fleshly spirit will cry out.⁵⁴
 But the sons of heaven [in the day of]
 its [judg]ment. And all iniquity shall come to an end,
 and the period of truth will be completed []
 in all periods of eternity, for He is a God of truth (4Q416 1 10-14)

Though the text is somewhat fragmentary, it clearly describes a scene of eschatological judgment involving a cosmic cataclysm. The heavens and the earth are shaken, and the depths and the seas are in terror. The period of iniquity comes to an end, while the period of truth (קץ האמת) is brought to fruition. Within this eschatological scene, 4QInstruction contrasts the fate of the wicked and the faithful. The “work of wickedness” (עבודת רשעה) is brought under heaven’s judgment and the “fleshly spirit” (רוח בשר) cries out in fear. In contrast, “his faithful children” (בני אמתו) are said to “accepted” (ירצו). A fragmentary reference to the “sons of heaven” (בני שמים) seems to contrast them to the “fleshly spirit,” though the precise connotation is unclear. In any case, the text clearly anticipates an eschatological future in which reward and punishment will ultimately be determined.⁵⁵

If 4Q416 1 1-14 preserves the opening lines of 4QInstruction, then the juxtaposition of cosmic design and eschatological judgment gives the framework for the entire instruction. As Adams notes, this type of opening framework is more typical of apocalyptic texts such as *I Enoch* (1:1-9) than other Hebrew wisdom texts. He notes that Ben Sira opens by praising Wisdom, while Proverbs opens by laying out its pedagogical goals.⁵⁶ However, it should not be overlooked that we do have one other wisdom instruction that begins with a cosmological (though not eschatological) framework, that being the book of Qohelet (1:4-7). In that case, as we have seen, the cosmological

⁵⁴ The sense of the verb יתערער is disputed. Torleif Elgvin, “Analysis of 4QInstruction,” 245, suggests the hiptael of ערה, meaning “to be uncovered.” *DJD* 34, 86, says that the term “is obscure,” translating “will be destroyed (?).” Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 180, proposes a correction to יתריעעו, hipolel of רוע meaning “to shout,” which is the sense followed here.

⁵⁵ On retribution in Second Temple instructions, see especially Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, passim.

⁵⁶ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 221.

introduction serves not to provide a ground for human behavior but rather to suggest that the cosmos churns away without regard for human activity. One of Qohelet's primary examples of the indifference of the cosmos (and of God) toward humankind is the failure of the retributive order, such that the righteous are treated as wicked while the wicked are treated as righteous (e.g., Qoh 8:14). From Qohelet's perspective, one cannot assert a moral order to the cosmos without first accounting for the disruption of the act-consequence relationship. On this basis, Qohelet rejects the perspective of Proverbs, which construes the world as having an orderly design that humans can discern to their benefit (e.g., Prov 3:19-20; 8:22-36).

While it cannot be known whether 4QInstruction is responding directly to Qohelet's rejection of a morally ordered cosmos, 4Q416 1 1-14 does nonetheless mitigate the concerns expressed by Qohelet through its appeal the apocalyptic motif of eschatological judgment. The deferment of justice to an eschatological future provides 4QInstruction with an effective means of maintaining a belief in an ordered and meaningful universe even when present evidence may be to the contrary. Whereas Qohelet's crisis of belief in the wisdom worldview seems to have been motivated at least in part by an increased sense of injustice in the world, 4QInstruction's appeal to eschatological judgment allows uncertainty and injustice to be absorbed into the broader flow of history. Thus, 4QInstruction does not simply *reassert* the old worldview of Proverbs, but rather *reconstructs* it through an appeal to symbols previously foreign to its own discourse. It would seem that, after the time of Qohelet, a morally ordered universe could no longer be assumed without in some way accounting for the observable disparity between actions and their consequences.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The theme of the eschatological judgment of the wicked will receive further consideration below in the section on symbolic immortality in the religious mode.

Esoteric Knowledge of the Order of Creation

4QInstruction figures this revealed knowledge in terms of a secret teaching known as the *rāz nihyeh*, or the “mystery that is to be.” The precise nature of the mystery that is to be remains a matter of some debate, though several clues can be gleaned from the text. It is apparently a written text, which can be “studied” (רז נהיה דרוש; 4Q416 2 iii 14),⁵⁸ “gazed upon” (הבט ברז נהיה; 4Q416 2 i 5; 4Q417 1 i 18),⁵⁹ and “meditated upon” (הגה; 4Q417 1 i 6).⁶⁰ It may also be transmitted orally or read aloud, as indicated by the recurring phrase “he opened your ears to the mystery that is to be” (גלה אזנכה ברז נהיה).⁶¹ Armin Lange views the mystery that is to be as synonymous with the Mosaic Torah.⁶² In contrast, Daniel Harrington, proposes that it is a body of teaching distinct from the Torah, perhaps to be associated with the Treatise of the Two Spirits, the Book of Hagu, or the Book of Mysteries.⁶³ Collins argues that the mystery that is to be need not be identified with any particular known writing but that it remains, rather appropriately, a mystery.⁶⁴

In any case, the mystery that is to be appears to encompass the entire divine plan, from creation to eschatological judgment.⁶⁵ In 4Q417 1 i 8-9, translated above, 4QInstruction depicts the mystery that is to be as being embedded in the fabric of the cosmos at the time of the cosmogony. The statement that “by the mystery that is to be

⁵⁸ See also the parallel text in 4Q418 9-9c 8.

⁵⁹ See also the parallel texts in 4Q417 2 i 10 and 4Q418 43-45 i 4, respectively.

⁶⁰ See also the parallel text in 4Q418 43-45 i 4.

⁶¹ 1Q26 1 4; 4Q416 2 iii 18; 4Q418 10a,b 3; 4Q418 123 ii 4

⁶² Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 58.

⁶³ Harrington, *Wisdom Texts from Qumran*, 55.

⁶⁴ John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 123.

⁶⁵ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 34–35.

(ברז נהיה) he (God) has spread out its foundation and its deeds” recalls Prov 3:19, in which Yhwh is said to found the earth “by wisdom” (בהכמה). Because the world functions according to the mystery that is to be, continually studying the mystery that is to be will reveal to the instructee “truth and iniquity, wisdom and foolishness” (אמת ועול חכמה) [ואול]ת 4Q417 1 i 6-7). In 4Q416 2 iii 9-10, the instructee is instructed

ברז [נ]היה דרוש מולדיו ואז תדע נחלתו ובצדק תתהלך כי יגיה אל ת[אר]הו בכל דרכיכה

By the mystery that is to be study its origins, and then you will know its inheritance. You will walk in righteousness, for God will make his count[en]ance shine upon all your ways.

By coming to understand the connection between the mystery that is to be and the design of the cosmos, the instructee is able to grasp how he should behave, thereby ensuring God’s favorable response to his behavior. Studying the mystery that is to be allows him to “understand all the ways of truth” (התבונן בכל דרכי אמת) and to “contemplate all the roots of iniquity” (כל שורשי עולה תביט) (4Q417 2 iii 14-15). Through the mystery that is to be, he is able to “know [the path]s of all life, and the manner of walking that is appointed for [his] deed[s] ([] ודע); 4Q417 1 i 18). Studying the mystery that is to be also allows the instructee to “grasp the generations of humankind and gaze upon the prosperi[ty] . . . and the punishment of his [ac]tivity” (וקה תולדות[א]דם) (וראה בכוש[ר] . . . ופקודת מ[עשהו] 4Q418 77 2-3). In short, access to the mystery that is to be allows the instructee to discern the what actions are in proper keeping with the orderly design of the cosmos and so to keep on the paths that lead to prosperity. As Collins concludes, “the ethics in this Qumran wisdom text . . . are grounded in a comprehensive view of the purpose of creation, summed up in the enigmatic phrase *mystery that is to be*.”⁶⁶

In this regard, the similarity of the functions of the mystery that is to be in 4QInstruction and Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 should be readily apparent. Like Proverbs,

⁶⁶ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 121.

4QInstruction symbolizes its adherents as tightly integrated into the design of the cosmos, thereby allowing them to transcend their own sense of finitude. However, unlike Proverbs' publicly available *הכמה*, which “shouts in the streets” and “offers her voice in the squares” (Prov 1:20), the mystery that is to be is esoteric knowledge available only to the elect few who belong to the ingroup of 4QInstruction. In this manner, the biosocial and natural modes of symbolic immortality become mutually reinforcing, since only the elect are integrated into the cosmic design. Only those who have access to the mystery that is to be are able to discern proper behavior and therefore to live in accordance with both the design of the cosmos and the will of the Deity. 4QInstruction's appeal to esoteric knowledge thus provides an effective buffer against the threat of competing worldviews, since all alternatives can be summarily dismissed as being the uninformed perspectives of the non-elect. Here again, the appeal to apocalyptic modes of thought allows 4QInstruction to resymbolize traditional wisdom in a manner that elevates its claim to provide symbolic immortality in a milieu of competing worldviews.

Further, according to 4QInstruction, the mystery that is to be reveals not only the design of the cosmos but also the flow and meaning of history itself. 4Q418 123 4 suggests that everything, “from what has been to what will be in it” has been revealed “to the ear of the understanding ones by the mystery that is to be.”⁶⁷ A similar construction occurs in 4Q417 1 i 2, in which the instructee is instructed to “gaze [upon the mystery that is to be and the deeds of old, what is and what is to be]” (*הִבְטֹּ [ברזו נהיה ומעשי קדם למה]*) (*נהיה ומה נהיה*).⁶⁸ The mystery that is to be reveals not only the past and present, but also the future. More specifically, the mystery that is to be provides knowledge of salvation and the ultimate destinies of all life. For instance, 4Q417 2 i 10-11 instructs the instructee

⁶⁷ For translation notes on this passage, see above.

⁶⁸ The phrase *קדם למה נהיה ומה נהיה במה* is guaranteed by the parallel in 4Q418 43-45 i 2.

to “gaze upon the mystery that is to be and grasp the origins of salvation. Know who inherits glory and toil” ([הבט ברז] בנהיה זקה מולדי ישע ודע נוהל כבוד ועמל).⁶⁹

Once again, we can contrast this view to that of Qohelet. There, too, God was said to be in control of the passage of time from beginning to end (מראש ועד-סוף), but far from revealing the meaning of the times to humankind Qohelet’s God “set eternity in their hearts so that humankind could not find out the work that god has done from the beginning until the end” (Qoh 3:11).⁷⁰ Thus, 4QInstruction’s appeal to the mystery that is to be overcomes one of the primary disconnections expressed by Qohelet--the inability to grasp the nature of God’s work in the world. Through the mystery that is to be, 4QInstruction reveals to its followers the meaning of God’s work in the world, past, present, and future, and assures the ultimate vindication of righteousness over wickedness.

Conclusions on the Natural Mode

By recombining the worldview of traditional wisdom with the apocalyptic motifs of the periodization of history, eschatological judgment, and revealed wisdom, 4QInstruction creates a worldview in which its adherents are intimately connected to both the inner workings of the cosmos and to the overarching plan of God. These claims stand in stark contrast to the view of Qohelet, for whom the meaningfulness of the cosmos was obscured from human understanding. Far from believing that the secrets of the cosmos were made known to humankind, Qohelet imagines God as intentionally confounding human understanding (Qoh 3:11), reflecting a sense of humankind’s alienation from the cosmos. 4QInstruction obviates this problem through its appeal to a carefully designed world in which humankind has a specific way of “walking about” (התהלך) that is in

⁶⁹ The words הבט ברז at the beginning of the phrase are not preserved in 4Q417 2 i 10, but can be confidently reconstructed from the parallel text in 4Q416 2 i 5.

⁷⁰ For a translation and discussion of this verse in the context of Qohelet, see Chapter 3.

keeping with the overall plan of the cosmos through a view of history that accounts for the apparent injustice of the present world, and through an appeal to esoteric knowledge that allows its adherents to know their place in the overall design of time and space.

Immortality in the Religious Mode: Literal Life after Death

I have previously discussed 4QInstruction's deployment of the motif of eschatological judgment as a means of accounting for the apparent injustice of the world. However, it remains to consider the specifics of eschatological judgment within the framework of 4QInstruction and the fates it envisions for both the righteous and the wicked. Here we find one of the most radical innovations of 4QInstruction within the trajectory of Hebrew instructional literature--a belief in literal immortality. While the precise nature of life-after-death envisioned by 4QInstruction remains a matter of some debate, the text clearly affirms some form of literal death transcendence for its adherents while promising the ultimate destruction of those who do not conform to its worldview.

The Final Destruction of the Wicked

As I have discussed previously, 4QInstruction begins with imagery of the eschatological judgment of the wicked (4Q416 1 i 10-14), which follows immediately upon the description of the orderly creation in 4Q416 1 i 1-9. The placement of this scene of eschatological judgment at the beginning of the composition indicates its importance to the worldview of the text as a whole. Indeed the ultimate destruction of the wicked is a repeated theme throughout 4QInstruction. One central passage in this regard appears in 4Q418 69 ii 6-9:⁷¹

⁷¹ The transcription follows Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 209, and includes the overlap with 4Q417 5 (underline). There has been some debate about whether 4Q418 69 ii is original to the composition of 4QInstruction. *DJD* 34, 14, suggests that 4Q418 55 and 4Q418 69 ii "might have been originally composed (or function) as twin set-pieces now integrated into the instruction for the maven. Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 208–24, observes numerous variations of these fragments from the rest of 4QInstruction, particularly the use of the second person plural address, the use of rhetorical questions, and the absence of the word מִבֵּין. Nonetheless, he concludes that the common features shared with the

אֲתֶם [] לֹא נִוצַרְתֶּם וְלִשְׁחַת עוֹלָם תִּשׁוּבְתֶכֶם כִּי תִקְיֶיז לְהָ [] הִטְאֲכֶמָּה []
 מִחֲשֻׁכֵיהָ [] יִצְרָחוּ עַל רִיבְכֶם וְכֹל נְהִיָה עוֹלָם דּוֹרְשֵי אֱמֶת יַעֲזֹרוּ לְמִשְׁפָּטְכֶם [] וְאִז
 יִשְׁמְדוּ כֹל אֲוִילֵי לֵב וּבְנֵי עוֹלָה לֹא יִמְצָא עוֹד [] וְכֹל מִחֲזִיקֵי רִשְׁעָה יִבְשׁוּ [] וְאִז
 בְּמִשְׁפָּטְכֶם יִרְעִעוּ מִסְדֵי הָרְקִיעַ וִירְעִעוּ כֹל צִ []

You were fashioned []⁷² but your return shall be to the eternal pit,
 for it shall awaken to [] your sin, and [the creatures of]⁷³
 its darkness will cry out against your pleading, and all who are exist forever,
 the ones seeking truth, will rouse themselves to judge yo[u]. And then]
 all the ones of foolish mind will be destroyed, and the sons of iniquity
 will not be found any longer, [and a]ll those seizing wickedness will wither
 aw[ay].⁷⁴ And then]
 And then at your judgment the foundations of the firmament will cry out, and all
 [] will thunder.

Together with 4Q416 1, discussed above, this passage presents the expectation of a day
 of judgment that affects the entire cosmos.⁷⁵ The imagery of the natural world crying out
 and writhing in fear has been compared to the theophanies of the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁶ The
 judgment anticipated by 4QInstruction will consist of a display of divine power that will
 be inescapable and will effect the entirety of the cosmos.

rest of 4QInstruction “may indicate that they have the same provenance as the rest of the *Instruction*,”
 though going on to note the possibility that they are reworkings of a different *Vorlage* (224). In any case,
 the passage as it stands has been integrated into 4QInstruction. As Goff concludes, “There is no reason to
 doubt that 4Q418 60 ii, like 4Q416 1, is a key text for assessing 4QInstruction’s eschatology” (Goff,
Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom, 175).

⁷² *DJD* 34, 283, supplies “[by the power of G]od,” though this reconstruction is speculative.

⁷³ Following *DJD* 34, 281.

⁷⁴ Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 210, reads “will be ashamed” from בּו"ש rather than ש"בו.

⁷⁵ On the eschatology of these texts, see also Émile Puech, “Les Fragments Eschatologiques de
 4QInstruction (4Q416 1 et 4Q418 69 Ii, 81–81a, 127),” *RevQ* 22 (2005): 89–119; Émile Puech, “Les
 identités en présence dans les scènes du jugement dernier de 4QInstruction (4Q416 1 et 4Q418 69 ii),” in
*Defining Identities: We, You, and the Other in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Fifth Meeting of
 the IOQS in Groningen* (ed. F. García Martínez and M. Popović; STDJ 60; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 147–73;
 and John J. Collins, “The Eschatologizing of Wisdom in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Sapiential
 Perspectives: Wisdom Literature in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Sixth International
 Symposium of the Orion Center, 20–22 May 2001* (ed. J. J. Collins, G. E. Sterling, and R. A. Clements;
 STDJ 51; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 49–65.

⁷⁶ See Collins, “The Eschatologizing of Wisdom,” ; Elgvin, “Early Essene Eschatology,” 150;
 and especially Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 179–85.

While earlier wisdom texts such as Proverbs 10-29 promised that individual wicked persons would be utterly annihilated by death so that nothing of them remained--their children cut off, their inheritances transferred to the children of the righteous, their names rotting in the grave along with their bodies--4QInstruction anticipates the eradication of wickedness altogether. We find a gesture toward this idea in 4Q418 69 ii 8, which claims that “the ones of foolish mind will be destroyed, and the sons of iniquity will not be found any longer.” A similar idea appears in 4Q416 13, which states that “all iniquity shall come to an end (כל עולה תתם), and the period of truth will be completed.” 4Q418 113 1 similarly employs the root תמם to refer to the eradication of iniquity.⁷⁷

According to 4Q418 69 ii 6-9, the text cited above, the wicked are destined to be swallowed up by Sheol. The text refers to the “eternal pit” (שחת עולם) to which the wicked will return. The pit is said to “awaken” (תק״ץ) in order to condemn the sin of the wicked, accompanied by creatures “from its dark places” (מהשכיה) who will cry out against their pleading. According to 4Q418 126 ii 7, God is said “to shut (the door) upon the wicked” (לסגור בעד רשעים), another reference to the imprisonment of the wicked in Sheol. The term סגר occurs in the Hodayot as a reference to the “doors of the pit” which are closed (סגר) upon the wicked (1QH XI:19), and appears to have the same sense here.⁷⁸ Other references to the “pit” in 4QInstruction would seem to confirm this interpretation. 4Q418 177 2, for instance, appears to refer to “the pit” in conjunction with “Abaddon” (שח[ת] ואבדון). The conception of eschatological judgment for the wicked would thus seem to be that they are confined to the pit of Sheol and have the doors closed upon them eternally, so that they are forever cut off from life.

⁷⁷ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 198.

⁷⁸ The complete phrase in 1QH 11:19 reads ויסגרו דלתי שחת בעד הרית עול (“And the doors of the pit close behind the one who is pregnant with iniquity”). For text and translation, see *DJD* 40.

There remains some question as to whether 4QInstruction understands Sheol to be a place of eternal punishment or whether it is to be understood as the termination of existence.⁷⁹ Occasionally, the text seems to entertain the possibility that the wicked will be punished eternally. For instance, 4Q417 1 i 7-8 refers to “their punishment (פְּקוּדָתָם), in all ages everlasting, and the punishment of eternity (פְּקוּדַת עֵד).” However, the theme of eternal punishment in 4QInstruction is muted in comparison to other apocalyptic texts from the same period. For instance, *I Enoch* 10:13 anticipates that the fallen angels “will be led away to the fiery abyss, and to the torture, and to the prison where they will be confined forever.”⁸⁰ Similarly, the Treatise on the Two Spirits refers to the judgment of those who walk in the ways of evil as follows:

The visitation of all the ones walking in it (wickedness) will be an abundance of afflictions by the hand of all the angels of destruction, the eternal pit (לְשֹׁהַת עוֹלָמִים) in the anger of God’s vengeance, for eternal terror and everlasting shame with a disgraceful destruction in the fire of the dark regions (בְּאֵשׁ מְהַשְׁכִּימָם). And all their periods for generations will be in the sorrow of agony, bitter evil in the destructions of darkness until their termination without remnant or escape. (1QS 4:11-14)⁸¹

Since these texts belong to the same milieu as 4QInstruction, one may presume that the author of 4QInstruction was familiar the concept of eternal punishment for the wicked and may very well have had it in mind in his own writing, as 4Q417 i 7-8 may suggest. However, the punishment of the wicked is not a central theme of 4QInstruction and is never explicitly addressed. For this text, the point seems to be that death for the wicked will be a complete termination of their existence, so that they are locked away forever in Sheol--whether dead or awake to eternal punishment does not seem to be an issue of much concern.

⁷⁹ See the discussion in Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 200–4.

⁸⁰ The translation is that of George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *I Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 29.

⁸¹ My translation.

“according to the likeness of the holy ones,” presumably a reference to the angels, who are likewise said to have as their lot “eternal life” (חיים עולם נחתתם; 4Q418 69 ii 13). The promise of a life among the angels for the ones who remain faithful also appears in 4Q416 2 iii 11-12:

מראש הרים רא'שכה ועם הדיבים הושיבכה ובנחלת כבוד המשילכה

Out of poverty he has lifted your head. He has seated you with the nobles,
and he has given you authority over an inheritance of glory.

The term “nobles” (נדיבים) in this passage has generally been understood as a reference to the angels.⁸⁵ It seems unlikely in the context of 4QInstruction, in which the poverty of the addressees is repeatedly emphasized, that a literal move from poverty to wealth was implied. Rather, the passage appears to be an eschatologizing of a verse from Hannah’s song in 1 Sam 2:8: “He raises up the poor (דל) from the dust...to make them sit with princes (נדיבים) and inherit a seat of honor (וכסא כבוד ינחלם)” (cf. Ps 113:7-8).⁸⁶ As Goff argues, on this reading “the eschatological rewards of the addressee are in contrast to the poverty he endures in this world. His possession of an ‘inheritance of glory’ in life anticipates the eternal life he will enjoy with the angels after death.”⁸⁷

The belief in an angelic afterlife is common in Second Temple apocalyptic literature and is consistent with imagery found elsewhere in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁸⁸ In particular, the Hodayot suggest that the sectarians may have believed themselves to have

⁸⁵ See especially Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 209. Cf. Wold, *Women, Men, and Angels*, 155–56, and Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 228.

⁸⁶ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 209–10.

⁸⁷ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 210.

⁸⁸ For instance, Dan 12:3 and *I Enoch* 104:2-6. See also James H. Charlesworth, “The Portrayal of the Righteous as an Angel,” in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms* (ed. John J. Collins and George W. E. Nickelsburg; SBLSCS 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1980), 135–51; Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of I Enoch 1–36, 72–108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (JSPSup 11; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 316–17.

an angelic existence that began in the present life and continued beyond death. For instance:

I thank you, Lord, that you have redeemed my life from the pit, and that from Sheol-Abaddon you have lifted me up to an eternal height, so that I walk about on a limitless plain. I know that there is hope for one whom you have formed from the dust for an eternal council. And a perverted spirit you have purified from great sin that it might take its place with the host of the holy ones and enter into community with the congregation of the children of heaven. (1QH^a XI: 20-23)⁸⁹

In this passage, the speaker anticipates becoming part of the “eternal council” and taking his place among “the host holy ones” (צבא קדשים), becoming part of the “eternal council” (סוד עולם) and the “congregation of the children of heaven” (עדת בני שמים). Elsewhere in the Hodayot, the speaker claims to be “in the lot with your holy ones” (בגורל עם קדושיכה); 1QH^a XIX: 14-15. The self-glorification hymn makes the claim that presence among the angels is a present reality:

[Who in speech is comparable[to me? beloved of the king, companion to the holy ones. And it will not] come [and to my glory it will not compare. For, as for me, my station is with the divine beings] and glory [r not with fine gold I will k for myself. (1QH^a XXVI 5-8)⁹⁰

While the Hodayot make the most explicit claims to eternal life among the angels, other sectarian texts bear witness to a similar belief. For instance, the Damascus Document holds that “those who hold firm to it (the faithful house in Israel) shall receive everlasting life” (חיי נצח; D 3:20).⁹¹ Similarly, 1QS declares to its adherents that God “has given them an inheritance in the lot of the holy ones” (וינחיהם} לם בגורל קדושים) (3:7) and promises that they will be rewarded with “eternal life” (חיי נצח; 4:7).⁹²

⁸⁹ Translation follows *DJD* 40, 155.

⁹⁰ *DJD* 40, 308. The text in brackets is guaranteed by 4QH^a 7 i.

⁹¹ Following the translation of Edward M. Cook in *DSSEL*.

⁹² Fellowship with the angels is also central to the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice, though whether this text is a product of the *yahad* is a matter of some dispute (see Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 140–43).

While the conception of eschatological reward in other sectarian texts supports the claim that 4QInstruction offers its adherents an angelic afterlife, several important differences should be noted.⁹³ Most significantly, texts such as the *Hodayot* seem to promote a “realized eschatology” in which the speaker considers himself to be in fellowship with the angels in the present life as well as the future life. In contrast, 4QInstruction warns that the addressee against contacting evil (עוֹלָה), since “all who are touched by it will not be held innocent” ([כִּי־א כּוֹל הַנּוֹגֵעַ] בַּה לֹא יִנְקָה). While the ultimate fate of a life among the angels is presented as part of God’s plan in the “inheritance of glory” (4Q416 2 iii 11-12), the addressee must nonetheless obey instruction in the present in order to become part of the angelic communion after death.⁹⁴

Beyond its angelic character, the nature of the afterlife envisioned by 4QInstruction continues to be a matter of some debate. A few scholars have argued for a conception of bodily resurrection in 4QInstruction.⁹⁵ Of particular focus in this regard has been the statement of 4Q418 69 ii 7 that “all the ones who are forever, the ones seeking the truth, will arouse themselves to judge you” (וְכֹל נִהְיָה עוֹלָם דּוֹרְשֵׁי אֱמֶת יַעֲרִירוּ) (לְמִשְׁפָּטָם]). Elgvin interprets the passage in light of *1 Enoch* 91:10, which states that “the righteous will arise from his sleep.” Puech likewise argues that the phrase connotes bodily resurrection, drawing support from several texts in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁶ However, Tigchelaar and others have argued that the passage does not depict resurrection but rather the angels rising up as part of the final judgment.⁹⁷ This interpretation seems more

⁹⁴ For a discussion of the eschatological fate of the righteous in 4QInstruction, see especially Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 206–14.

⁹⁵ See Elgvin, “Early Essene Eschatology,” 143–44; idem, “Analysis of 4QInstruction,” 115; and Puech, “Les Fragments Eschatologiques,” 89–119.

⁹⁶ In particular, Job 14:12, Isa 26:19, Dan 12:2, and Ps 17:15.

⁹⁷ Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 211, finds the more likely parallels in *1 Enoch* 100:4 (“the Most High will arise on that day of judgment amongst sinners”) and Ps 35:23, which likewise combines

plausible than the righteous arising in judgment, which would be a most unusual eschatological motif. If that is the case, then 4QInstruction does not give evidence of a belief in bodily resurrection.

However, bodily resurrection is not the only mode of literal afterlife attested in the texts of this period, which give evidence of other types of post-death existence (see, e.g., *I En* 1-3:4; 104:2). One such possibility is astral immortality, which is evident, for example, in Dan 12:3, *I Enoch*, and Wis 3:7.⁹⁸ Elgvin, in particular, has argued that 4QInstruction envisions the righteous person as dwelling among the angels and shining like the stars.⁹⁹ While this interpretation is not impossible, it should be noted that the text itself does not employ astral imagery in this context.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the most we can say is that 4QInstruction envisions the righteous person's spirit as continuing to live among the angels even after his body has died.¹⁰¹ In 4Q418 103 ii 9, the instructee is told that his "flesh" (בשר) will "come to an end" (יָתֵמוּ). However, he is also instructed elsewhere to protect "your holy spirit" (רוּחַ קִדְשִׁיכֶּה; 4Q416 2 ii 6; cf. 4A416 2 iii 5-7). The conception of afterlife for the righteous in 4QInstruction seems to be close to that suggested by Goff, who argues that "the addressee is warned to protect his "holy spirit" during his lifetime through upright living and sound decisions. . . . But his body will die. Having preserved his spirit in life, upon death it simply continues living. His spirit enjoys eternal life with

the verbs קִיץ and עֵרָר in the context of judgment. Cf. Collins, "The Eschatologizing of Wisdom," 56–57; Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 176–77; Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions*, 223–24.

⁹⁸ Elgvin, "Early Essene Eschatology," 151.

⁹⁹ Torlief Elgvin, "Early Essene Eschatology: Judgment and Salvation According to Sapiential Work A," 143.

¹⁰⁰ Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 208.

¹⁰¹ See especially Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 208–9.

the angels as a reward for ethical conduct in life.”¹⁰²

Conclusions on the Religious Mode

4QInstruction employs apocalyptic motifs of eschatological judgment and life after death to sharpen distinction between the death-states of the righteous (those who adhere to its cultural value system) and the wicked (those who do not). It should be noted that while the introduction of eschatological judgment and a belief in literal life after death are unprecedented in the Hebrew instructional literature, the concept of differentiation between the death-states of the righteous and the wicked is not. On this point, my position contrasts with that of Samuel Adams, who argues that the earlier tradition did not distinguish between the deaths of the righteous and wicked.¹⁰³ Rather, Adams suggests that “earlier Wisdom texts could only threaten a premature demise and/or a qualitative death.”¹⁰⁴ In support of this position, Adams cites Qoh 9:10.¹⁰⁵ However, as I have argued in previous chapters, Israelite wisdom did in fact distinguish between the deaths of the righteous and the wicked even in its earliest stages. In Proverbs 10-29, for instance, the righteous retain a connection to life that extends beyond physical death in the form of progeny, influence upon future generations, the persistence of their memory among the living, the bequeathal of inheritance, and so on. For the wicked, in contrast, death serves as a complete termination of existence and the severance of all connection to life. The anomaly in the Hebrew wisdom tradition in this regard is not 4QInstruction, but rather Qohelet, which alone among the instructions we have examined fails to recognize a distinction between the deaths of the righteous and the wicked.

¹⁰² Goff, *Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom*, 208–9.

¹⁰³ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 224–27.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 224.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 227.

What is new in 4QInstruction is not the concept of a differentiation between the ultimate fates of the righteous and the wicked after death, but rather the deployment of apocalyptic motifs to inscribe these differences more dramatically. The annihilation of the wicked, which was limited in Proverbs to the annihilation of wicked individuals upon death, is transformed in 4QInstruction to the destruction of wickedness itself. The survival of the righteous, which was construed in terms of symbolic immortalities in the biological, creative, and natural modes in the earlier tradition now also includes a belief in literal immortality.

4QInstruction and the Wisdom Tradition

The relationship of 4QInstruction to the worldview of traditional wisdom has been a matter of ongoing debate. The editors of *DJD 34* suggested that 4QInstruction should be seen as “a true ‘missing link’ to be set somewhere in the history of common (i.e. non-sectarian) Jewish wisdom tradition, datable between Proverbs and Sirach.”¹⁰⁶ However, this assessment has not withstood scrutiny. In particular, it has difficulty accounting for the significant apocalyptic elements of 4QInstruction, which have more in common with texts such as *I Enoch* and Daniel than with either Proverbs or Ben Sira.

Two other proposals have been influential in situating 4QInstruction within the trajectory of Second Temple Wisdom. First, Armin Lange has argued that the mystery that is to be of 4QInstruction represents a reassertion of the traditional wisdom claim that God has created the cosmos according to what he calls a “präexistenten weisheitlichen Urordnung” (a pre-existent sapiential order).¹⁰⁷ In Lange’s formulation, the mystery that is to be elevates into the realm of divine revelation the traditional wisdom belief in an

¹⁰⁶ *DJD 34*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 40; cf. Armin Lange, “Die Weisheitstexte aus Qumran: Eine Einleitung,” in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (ed. Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 17–26.

orderly cosmos.¹⁰⁸ He understands this development as a response to the “crisis of wisdom” instigated by Job and Qohelet, essentially functioning as a reassertion of the traditional view in light of the critiques leveled against it by the more skeptical tradition.¹⁰⁹

Torlief Elgvin, by contrast, has argued that the mystery that is to be represents an attempt by the redactors of 4QInstruction to *displace* Woman Wisdom, instead claiming authority for its own revelation.¹¹⁰ Elgvin’s argument rests on his assertion that 4QInstruction represents two layers of tradition, one a traditional wisdom text and the other a later reworking by an apocalyptic group. He argues that mystery that is to be represents “an apocalyptic reinterpretation of the concept of divine Wisdom.”¹¹¹ Elgvin’s postulation of two layers has not received broad acceptance. In particular, Bilhah Nitzan has convincingly argued for the literary and ideological unity of 4QInstruction. Based on her analysis of the themes and vocabulary of the theological discourses and practical admonitions, she concludes that “this composition is not a random collection of sapiential instructions, but rather a deliberately composed work, written by a specific author, who adhered to an apocalyptic-deterministic ideology.”¹¹² Elgvin’s proposal assumes that wisdom and apocalyptic are rigidly distinct worldviews; 4QInstruction, however, attests to the merger of these worldviews into a unified literary composition.

¹⁰⁸ Lange argues that the *רז נהיה* in 4QInstruction should be identified with the Torah (“mit der Thora zu identifizieren”), a position which supports his view of 4QInstruction as a more traditional text (Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 58). However, the identification is doubtful (see especially Goff, *Discerning Wisdom*, 29).

¹⁰⁹ Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Torlief Elgvin, *Wisdom and Apocalyptic in 4QInstruction* (STDJ 38; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹¹¹ Elgvin, *Wisdom and Apocalyptic*, 237.

¹¹² Bilhah Nitzan, “The Ideological and Literary Unity of 4QInstruction and Its Authorship,” *DSD* 12 (2005): 279.

Nonetheless, Elgvin does pose the question of whether 4QInstruction should be understood as an attempt to *reassert* traditional wisdom, as Lange would have it, or rather to *displace* it with its own teaching. It seems to me that these two proposals need not stand as mutually exclusive alternatives. Rather, 4QInstruction claims to be the rightful successor of traditional wisdom and yet also transforms that tradition to the needs and beliefs of its own community. It is neither a simple reassertion nor a complete abandonment of the worldview of traditional wisdom, but rather an adaptation of it for a new context. More specifically, 4QInstruction represents an aggressive resymbolization of the Hebrew Wisdom tradition achieved through the incorporation of the symbols of apocalypticism. In particular, scholars have noted a close connection between 4QInstruction and the Enochic materials. Elgvin, in particular, has argued that the two texts are related at the level of literary dependence, positing that the author of 4QInstruction used the *Epistle of Enoch* in his composition.¹¹³ Tigchelaar has rejected Elgvin's proposal, arguing that it is more likely that 4QInstruction influenced the author of the *Epistle*.¹¹⁴ Perhaps it is better to affirm the more recent assessment of Loren Stuckenbruck, who more cautiously suggests that the two texts represent "a growing body of sources extant from the 2nd century B.C.E. whose ideas were able to cross-fertilise as their distinct forms of apocalyptic wisdom took shape."¹¹⁵

It seems clear that 4QInstruction represents a resymbolization of traditional wisdom in light of an apocalyptic worldview such as that expressed in *1 Enoch*. However the question remains as to impetus for such a reconstruction of the symbol system. As we

¹¹³ Elgvin, "An Analysis of 4QInstruction," 169–70.

¹¹⁴ Tigchelaar, *To Increase Learning*, 215–17.

¹¹⁵ Loren Stuckenbruck, "4QInstruction and the Possible Influence of Enochic Traditions: An Evaluation," in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (ed. Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 245–61 (quotation from 261).

have seen, Lange argues that 4QInstruction represents a response to the “crisis” of the wisdom tradition represented in particular by Qohelet.¹¹⁶ While my own view shares some similarities with Lange’s view, it should be carefully distinguished from it. Goff, for one, has critiqued Lange’s model as follows:

The problem is that 4QInstruction never shows any interest whatsoever in Job and Qoheleth--a striking absence found generally in Qumran wisdom literature. These biblical books critique traditional wisdom. The question is whether from this one can conclude that there was a widespread “crisis of wisdom.” It does not appear that 4QInstruction endorses the position that there was. . . . The introduction of hallmark apocalyptic themes such as revelation and determinism into the wisdom tradition is consistent with a prevailing intellectual climate in the Hellenistic age that has been associated with widespread sense of alienation [sic], political upheaval, and the decline of national independence in the Near East. This backdrop may be the “crisis” against which the theme of revelation in 4QInstruction should be understood rather than a crisis of wisdom.¹¹⁷

As I have argued in the previous chapters, the collapse of wisdom in the book of Qohelet reflects the strain placed on the traditional wisdom worldview brought on by the widespread socio-economic turmoil associated with Ptolemaic Palestine, which Goff aptly describes as a “sense of alienation, political upheaval, and the decline of national independence.” The strain placed on the traditional wisdom worldview during this period required adaptation (or what Lifton calls “resymbolization”) in order to avoid collapse (what Lifton calls “desymbolization”). In my view, Qohelet represents a desymbolization of the traditional wisdom worldview while 4QInstruction presents a resymbolization of that same worldview, both presumably in response to the pressures of the Hellenistic age.

Goff raises the further question of how widespread the “collapse of wisdom” could have been given that 4QInstruction and other wisdom texts from Qumran show little interest in either Job or Qohelet. It is clear that these texts had some influence on later tradition, given that they were preserved and that Ben Sira, at least, seems to have

¹¹⁶ Lange, *Weisheit und Prädesination*.

¹¹⁷ Goff, “Early Jewish Wisdom Literature,” 388; cf. Matthew J. Goff, “The Mystery of Creation in 4QInstruction,” *DSD* 10 (2003): 181–86.

known Qohelet. However, the question of whether the *entire* wisdom tradition experienced a desymbolization of the type expressed by Qohelet is an apt one. Realistically, the lack of textual evidence from the period makes it difficult to know. However, one can certainly imagine that Qohelet and 4QInstruction represent *alternative* responses to the transition into the Hellenistic period rather than *sequential* ones. It may be that the transition to the Hellenistic period stressed the traditional wisdom worldview, causing some strands of it to desymbolize (Qohelet) while others creatively resymbolized in light of other cultural symbol systems (4QInstruction). What does seem clear from the preceding analysis, however, is that 4QInstruction adapted apocalyptic themes into the traditional wisdom worldview in ways that accounted for the failures of the wisdom tradition experienced by Qohelet. Whether this is a response to Qohelet or rather an alternative response to the pressures felt by Qohelet cannot be known with any certainty.

CHAPTER 6
RESYMBOLIATIONS OF SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY
IN THE BOOK OF BEN SIRA

The final text for the analysis of the transformation in the symbols of death transcendence in Hebrew instructional literature is the book of Ben Sira, a rough contemporary of 4QInstruction, which was the subject of the previous chapter. I have postponed discussion of Ben Sira until last in order to trouble the notion that Jewish thought headed inevitably toward apocalyptic modes of thinking, which could be the impression given by a trajectory that treats 4QInstruction as the final text in the series. In my view, it is better to see Ben Sira and 4QInstruction as parallel and competing resymbolizations of the wisdom worldview than as sequential points on a linear trajectory. Treating Ben Sira subsequent to 4QInstruction may help to remind us that 4QInstruction is not an apocalyptic development from Ben Sira but rather that both Ben Sira and 4QInstruction are developments from the precedent wisdom tradition.

Viewing the book of Ben Sira as an alternative resymbolization of the Wisdom tradition allows us to examine the unique ways in which it attempts to address the issue of symbolic death transcendence through appeals to traditions and literary traditions previously unattested in Hebrew Wisdom texts. Though Ben Sira is often viewed as a conservative and a traditionalist, he is in fact resymbolizing the traditional wisdom worldview rather aggressively through appeals to both Torah traditions and Greek and Egyptian literary forms, which together enable him to ground the wisdom worldview more concretely in the people, traditions, texts, and institutions of ancient Israel and the Judaism of his day. From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, the identification of the wisdom worldview--which had previously relied on rather diffuse

sources of authority not easily identified with any institution--with these more tangible sources of authority, provides a more robust buffer against challenges to the worldview, allowing it to exist more securely in its pluralistic environment.

Date and Social Setting of Ben Sira

Of the Wisdom texts presented in this study, the date and social setting of Ben Sira are the most confidently reconstructed.¹ Ben Sira's work, originally written in Palestine in Hebrew, was translated into Greek by his grandson, who claims to have arrived in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Euergetes, who is almost certainly to be identified with Euergetes II (170-164 and 146-117 B.C.E.).² This chronology would place the grandson's arrival in Egypt in 132 B.C.E. Assuming he was an adult upon his arrival, the career of his grandfather Ben Sira would have taken place some time in the early second century. Since Ben Sira appears to be writing prior to the time of the troubles under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164), his work is generally dated to between 190 and 180 B.C.E.

Ben Sira himself was a professional scribe who describes the life of the scribe in some detail (Ben Sira 38:24-39:11). His professional life most likely consisted of training administrative officials for government service. Ben Sira also seems to have had some relationship to the priesthood, though the exact nature of that relationship remains disputed. Stadelmann argues based on a comparison with Ezra that Ben Sira was a priest himself.³ On different grounds, Saul Olyan argues that Ben Sira had a strong interest in

¹ On the dating of Ben Sira, see Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 8–16.

² Only two rulers carried the name Euergetes, the first being Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246-222) and the second being Ptolemy VII Physkon Euergetes II (170-164 and 146-117). Only the second reigned for more than 38 years.

³ Helge Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter: Eine Untersuchung zum Berufsbild Des vor-Makkabäischen Sofer unter Berücksichtigung seines Verhältnisses zu Priester-, Propheten- und Weisheitslehrertum* (WUNT 2/6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 25.

the Aaronid priesthood and was most likely himself a pan-Aaronid priest but not a Zadokite.⁴ In contrast, John Collins argues that, while Ben Sira “depended on the patronage of the High Priest,” he was not himself a priest. Rather, Collins views Ben Sira as “a wisdom teacher, who makes extensive use of the Torah, but [who] makes no pretense of authoritative interpretation of the kind that he reserves to the priesthood.”⁵ Whether we conclude that Ben Sira was a priest or a scribe in the service of the priesthood, his commitment to the priesthood, the Temple, and the traditions of the Torah profoundly shape his resymbolization of the wisdom tradition.⁶

The period in which Ben Sira wrote seems to have been a period of relative peace and prosperity in the region of Palestine. The challenges to the traditional wisdom worldview in the time of Ben Sira would have arisen primarily through contact with other, competing worldviews encountered in international trade with foreign nations and through the profound cultural influence of Hellenism in the region of Palestine. In this regard, the situation of Ben Sira may have been quite similar to that of Qohelet, though by the time of Ben Sira, Jewish culture had sufficient time to adapt to the new socioeconomic environment and the attendant pressures on its traditional worldview. Ben Sira engages in an active process of bolstering the worldview of Hebrew wisdom through a creative resymbolization that involves an appeal to symbols and literary genres previously unattested in the Israelite wisdom tradition, including those both internal to Jewish tradition and those borrowed from other cultural influences. The resulting worldview of Ben Sira is recognizable as belonging to the Jewish wisdom tradition, but

⁴ Saul M. Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” *HTR* 80 (1987): 261–86.

⁵ John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 37.

⁶ Benjamin G. Wright III, *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (JSJSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 97–126, argues that Ben Sira “actively took the side of the Temple priests in polemical opposition against those who criticized them” (98)

through a creative reconstruction that makes it more robust in its new socioeconomic environment.

Symbolic Immortality in the Biological and Biosocial Modes

The Biological Mode

In keeping with the tradition of Proverbs, Ben Sira holds up progeny as a primary means of preserving one's own connection beyond the grave:

At the father's death, he will not seem dead,
since he leaves after him one like himself,
Whom he looks upon through life with joy,
and even in death, without regret:
The avenger he leaves against his foes,
and the one to repay his friends with kindness.⁷ (30:4-6)

Even after he dies the individual “will not seem dead,” (ὡς οὐκ ἀπεθάνεν)⁸ because of his son who lives on after him. The son is said to be “one like himself” (ὁμοιον αὐτω) perhaps a reference to his physical likeness or to the character traits that have been passed on from father to son. A similar idea is found in Tobit 9:6, in which Gabael remarks of Tobiah: “Blessed be God, because I have seen the very image of my cousin Tobit!”⁹ Further, the son functions as an extension of the activities of the father, carrying out vengeance against the father's enemies and returning the kindnesses of the father's friends. In Ben Sira's worldview, then, death does not sever a person's connections with the living. By leaving “one like himself” to carry on his image and his life's activities, a person retains a connection with life even after his physical death.

The Biosocial Mode

Also in the tradition of Proverbs 1-9, Ben Sira extends the biological mode to

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Ben Sira are those of Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*. In those places where I have found it necessary to depart from their translation, I have provided notes to that effect.

⁸ The Hebrew of these verses is not contained in the available manuscripts.

include the biosocial “father” and “son” of the teacher-student relationship, creating a biosocial “family” extended indefinitely in time.¹⁰ Like the biological family, this family constituted by the transmission of instruction may function as a means of symbolic immortality, allowing each member of the chain to see himself extended into the future through his students, who serve as his biosocial children. However, while Ben Sira adopts this motif from traditional wisdom, he shapes it in a very particular way. While Proverbs left the identities of the members of this biosocial family unspecified, preferring to speak of an undefined chain of “fathers” and “sons,” Ben Sira solidifies the existence of the biosocial family by grounding it in a line of specific individuals stretching back through history from the present to the antedeluvian period. In his Praise of the Ancestors (chapters 44-50), Ben Sira praises his Israelite ancestors from Enoch (44:16) to Nehemiah (49:13) before concluding with the praise of Simon, the high priest of his own day (50:1-24).¹¹ While I will further explore the function of this praise of the ancestors in the section on creative immortality, for now I am particularly interested in how this text functions to incorporate the reader into the biosocial community of the people of Israel.

As Benjamin Wright argues, the introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors in 44:1-16 “tacitly enlists the reader as one of the descendants of these righteous ancestors, thus placing the reader in a chain of inter-generational transmission of the patriarchal

⁹ Cited in Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 376.

¹⁰ The phrase “my son” occurs 19 times in the book: Sir 2:1; 3:12; 3:17; 4:1; 6:18; 6:24; 6:32; 10:27; 11:10; 11:20; 14:11; 16:22; 18:14; 21:1; 31:22; 37:26; 38:9; 38:16; 40:28.

¹¹ On the significance of this passage, see especially Jeremy Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15 as Introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors,” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006* (ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér; JSJSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151–81; Wright, *Praise Israel*, 25–47; Burton L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Thomas R. Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50* (SBLDS 75; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

order.”¹² That is, Ben Sira’s praise of the ancestors serves, at least in part, to incorporate his reader into the long line of righteous ancestors. Specifically, Ben Sira refers to the great patriarchs of Israel’s history as “our ancestors,” thereby implying a biosocial family tree which includes not only Ben Sira himself, but also his reader. As Wright notes, “By framing this entire section with the first-person plural ‘we’ and ‘us,’ Ben Sira has placed his sons, both students and readers, in a larger chain of father-son relationships of which they are expected to become the fathers who pass on the inheritance to their descendants.”¹³

Unlike the biosocial family of teachers and students in Proverbs, Ben Sira’s biosocial family tree is populated by specific individuals whose stories can be retold and remembered. In Proverbs 1-9, the father had made reference to his “father” before him, thereby implying a biosocial family of instruction extended in time (4:3). The existence of the chain remained elusive, however, dependent on the premise that instruction had been passed down from generation to generation. Ben Sira, in contrast, makes this chain concrete and identifiable through his references to specific figures whose stories were well-known in the traditions of Judaism outside of the wisdom tradition itself. By naming figures from the antediluvian period such as Enoch and Noah, Ben Sira demonstrates the antiquity of the chain to which the reader is invited to belong. The list also includes the great figures of the tradition, from Abraham to Moses and Aaron, to Nehemiah. By becoming a part of this family of tradition, Ben Sira’s enables his reader to understand himself as belonging to a movement that is both ancient and significant, to which the greatest figures in history have also belonged. In the language of Terror Management Theory, Ben Sira enables the reader to see himself as “a person of significance” in the world, part of a great line of connection that transcends his own individual existence.

¹² Wright, *Praise Israel*, 33.

¹³ Wright, *Praise Israel*, 33–34.

Ben Sira's Praise of the Ancestors transforms the biosocial mode of symbolic immortality in yet another way, by introducing Israel as the recipient of a special covenant with God. References to Israel and the covenant are notoriously absent in the earlier wisdom tradition, but Ben Sira enlists them here to great effect. We see the emphasis on the covenant with Israel already in the second line of the introduction, in which Ben Sira refers to "our ancestors" as "The Most High's portion, great in glory, reserved for himself from ancient days" (רַב כְּבוֹד חֶלֶק עֲלֵינוּ וּגְדֻלוֹ מִיְמֹת עוֹלָם; 44:2).¹⁴ In the Praise of the Ancestors itself, Ben Sira refers numerous times to the special covenant that this biosocial community has with God. Of Abraham, Ben Sira says that he "entered into a covenant with him" (וּבָא בְּבְרִית עִמּוֹ; 44:20) through which God promised "to bless the nations through his descendants, to make him numerous as the grains of dust, and exalt his posterity like the stars" (ἐνευλογηθῆναι ἔθνη ἐν σπερματι αὐτοῦ πληθύναι αὐτὸς ὡς χουστὸν τῆς γῆς καὶ ὡς ἀστρά ἀνυψῶσαι τὸ σπέρμα αὐτοῦ; 44:21).¹⁵ Likewise with Jacob, whom he calls by the name "Israel", Ben Sira claims that "the covenant with all his forebears God fulfilled for him, and the blessing rested upon the head of Israel" (בְּרִית כָּל רֵאשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִית עִמּוֹ וּבְרִכָּה נָחָה עַל רֵאשִׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל; 44:22b-23a). Again with Moses, Ben Sira refers to the commandments that God has given "that he might teach his precepts to Jacob, his covenant decrees to Israel" (לְלַמֵּד בִּיעֶקֶב חֻקֵּי וְעִדּוּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו לְיִשְׂרָאֵל; 45:5). By appealing to Torah traditions related to the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, Ben Sira establishes not only the antiquity of the biosocial community to which the reader is invited, but also to its status as the specially selected, covenanted partner of God himself.

¹⁴ The Heb text given here is that of MS B. The translation of Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 498, which is followed here, reads *wəḡōrālō* (lit "and his allotment") for MS B's *wgdhw*. See Skehan and Di Lella for translational notes and Ps 125:3 for a parallel usage of גֵּרָל.

¹⁵ The textual witnesses differ with regard to 44:21b-d. MS B lacks 21 c-d. Syr reads "that through his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed; that he would make his descendants numerous as the sands of the seashore, and that he would set his descendants above all other nations" (Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 504).

Outside of the Praise of the Ancestors, Ben Sira also refers to the chosen status of Israel: “Over every nation he places a ruler, but the Lord’s own portion is Israel” (εκαστω εθνει κατεστησεν ηγουμενον και μερις κυριου Ισραηλ εστιν;17:17). Relying not only on the amorphous biosocial community of instruction but more concretely on the biosocial community of the nation and people Israel enables Ben Sira to offer his reader a more tangible mode of biosocial immortality--the perpetual survival of Israel. Ben Sira makes this connection explicitly in 37:25: “Limited are the days of one’s life, but the life of Israel is days without number” (ζωη ανδρος εν αριθμω ημερον και αι ημεραι Ισραηλ αναριθνηται).¹⁶ By participating in the people of Israel, the adherents of Ben Sira’s worldview achieve connection with an entity that allows them to transcend the finality of death.

Symbolic Immortality in the Creative Mode

The Survival of the Name

Beyond the biological and biosocial modes of symbolic immortality discussed in the previous section, Ben Sira also emphasizes the survival of one’s name and memory as a primary means of death transcendence. As we have seen, the motif of the everlasting name is familiar in the older Wisdom tradition, principally in Prov 10:7. While Ben Sira draws on the tradition for his symbolization of immortality, he again expands the significance of this motif, employing it with uncommon frequency.¹⁷ For instance, in 41:11-13 Ben Sira remarks on the permanence of the name in contrast to the frailty of the body:

The human body is a fleeting thing,

¹⁶ MS B appears to preserve the same reading as Gk, though the end of the line is broken (דיי איש ... מספר ימים והייעם ישראל). MS D preserves מספר ימי אין מספר (“the life of the upright is days without number”).

¹⁷ O. Rickenbacher, *Weisheitsperikopen bei Ben Sira* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 95–98. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 43, suggests that this increased prominence “reflects a heightened sense of honor and shame in Sirach’s Hellenistic milieu.” See, e.g., 40:19; 41:12-13

but a virtuous name will never be annihilated.¹⁸
 Have respect for your name, for it will stand by you
 more than thousands of precious treasures;¹⁹
 The good things of life last a number days,
 but a good name, for days without number.

In this passage, Ben Sira enables his readers to view themselves as being symbolically immortal, as their names “will never be annihilated” (לא יכרת)–provided, of course, that they are “virtuous” (חסד). That is, adherence to the principles and values of Ben Sira’s worldview allows its adherents to transcend death. Likewise, in 15:6 the reader is told that Wisdom will “endow him with an everlasting name” (ושם עולם תורישנו). Elsewhere, Ben Sira says that “one wise for his people wins a heritage of glory, and his name will live forever” (ושמו עומד בהיי עולם; 37:26).²⁰

By far the most extensive redeployment of the theme of the everlasting name in Ben Sira’s book appears in the form of the Praise of the Ancestors.²¹ Jeremy Corley, drawing on an analogy with the Egyptian text *Immortality of Writers*, argues that one of the principle functions of the Praise of the Ancestors is “to record the achievements of Israel’s past heroes, so that their name does not perish.”²² Drawing on the work of Otto Mulder, Corley proposes that Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors was originally intended to be read in the Temple precinct during the feast of Rosh Hashanah.²³ Corley notes the

¹⁸ Both MS B and MS M preserve לא יכרת (lit. “will not be cut off”).

¹⁹ The end of this verse varies widely in the manuscripts. The translation of Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, given here, follows MS B^{mg}, אוצרות חמדה (lit “treasures of desire”). MS Bt^{xt} reads אוצרות חכמה (“treasures of wisdom”). Gk reads θησαυροσπορευματα (“treasures of gold”). Regardless, the name is more valuable because it lasts “for days without number.”

²⁰ Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira* translate the final phrase “and his name lives on and on.”

²¹ On the theme of importance of the preservation of the name in Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors, see especially Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15,” 151–81.

²² Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15,” 170 For a similar view, see James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 236–37.

²³ Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15,” 154–55. On the connection between Ben Sira and the festival of

emphasis on remembrance associated with Rosh Hashanah, concluding that the purpose of the Praise of the Ancestors is essentially related to preserving the symbolic immortality of Israel's past heroes: "to ensure the glorious memory of Israel's heroes of faith."²⁴

The literary genre of the Praise of the Ancestors supports this conclusion.²⁵ In praising the ancestors, Ben Sira employs a form of writing that does not have clear parallels in the traditions of the Hebrew Bible. While lists of ancestors were not uncommon in the time of Ben Sira (see, e.g., 1 Macc 2:51-60; 4 Macc 16:20-23; 18:11-19), these tended to perform a hortatory function, holding up past heroes as models of virtue that others should seek to embody. Ben Sira's list of ancestors, in contrast, recalls past heroes not as examples to be followed but rather as individuals to be praised.²⁶ Rather than seeking parallels within the Hebrew Bible, most scholars have concluded that in his praise of the ancestors Ben Sira has been influenced by Greek literary forms.²⁷ In particular, Thomas R. Lee has argued that the text resembles the Greek encomium, which shares the similar purpose of praising particular individuals.²⁸ While Lee argues that Ben

Rosh Hashanah, see especially Otto Mulder, *Simon the High Priest in Sirach 50: An Exegetical Study of the Significance of Simon the High Priest as Climax to the Praise of the Fathers in Ben Sira's Concept of the History of Israel* (JSJSup 78; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 169–73.

²⁴ Corley, "Sirach 44:1–15," 154.

²⁵ On the history of scholarship concerning the genre of the Praise of the Ancestors, see especially Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 97–100.

²⁶ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 97–98.

²⁷ Several proposals for the genre of the Praise of the Ancestors have been significant in the scholarly discussion. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1:136, notes the theme of succession in the Praise of the Ancestors and points to parallels in Eupolemus, Josephus, and *Pirqe' Aboth*. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 111–37, examines Ben Sira 44–50 in light of Jewish and Hellenistic precursors and concludes that it is "a poem with decidedly encomiastic traits" but which "should not simply be called an encomium, any more than a chronicle or epic history" (136).

²⁸ Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44–50*, 83–245.

Sira 44-50 serves as an encomium of the High Priest Simon II, John Collins has offered a helpful corrective, observing that the stated purpose of the text is to “praise those godly people, our ancestors, each in his own time” (44:1). Collins rightly concludes that the poem “must be viewed as an encomium of all the heroes of Israelite history, and not just an encomium of Simon.”²⁹

In fact, the introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors (44:1-15) suggests that Ben Sira’s purpose is not only to praise Israel’s great heroes but also to rehabilitate the memories of those virtuous but lesser-known Israelites who have been forgotten in the passage of time.

Some of them have left behind a name
 so that people recount their praises;
 But of others no memory remains,
 for when they perished they perished completely,
 And are as though they had never lived,
 they and their children after them.
 Yet these also were godly people
 whose virtues will not be forgotten;³⁰
 Their wealth remains in their families,
 their heritage with their descendants.
 Through God’s covenant with them their family endures,
 and their offspring for their sake;
 For all time their progeny³¹ will last,
 their glory will never be blotted out.
 Their bodies are buried in peace,
 but their name lives for generation upon generation;³²
 At gatherings their wisdom is retold,
 and the assembly declares their praises. (44:8-15)

In the background of Ben Sira’s praise of the great heroes is the praise of those for whom no memory remains and therefore who have “perished completely and are as though they had never lived” (יִישְׁבְּתוּ כְּאִשֶּׁר לֹא הָיוּ הָיוּ; 44:9). Ben Sira does not seem to

²⁹ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 99.

³⁰ MS B appears to be corrupt at this point. Gk preserves αἰ δίκαιοσυνα οὐκ ἐπελησθησαν.

³¹ MS M reads זרעם and Gr σπέρμα αὐτῶν. MS B appears to preserve [זכר]ם (“their memory”).

³² My translation, following MS M: שָׁמַם חַי דּוֹר וְדוֹר. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 498, render “their name lives on and on.”

intend that this is the deserved fate of these individuals, as he goes on to state that “these also were godly people ” (ואולם אלה אנשי חסד) (44:10).³³ The text then offers several means by which those forgotten continue to remain connected to the living despite the failure of memory: through their wealth and heritage (44:11), the covenant God has made with them (44:12), and the survival of their progeny (44:13). Ben Sira goes on to claim that those forgotten continue on in the survival of their names, which “live for generation upon generation” (כי דור ודור; 44:14). While it would seem counterintuitive that someone already forgotten could have an everlasting name, Ben Sira seems to consider that it is the invoking of the memory of those forgotten that perpetuates their reputation through the recollection of their wisdom and the praise of the assembly (44:15). In this sense, Ben Sira’s praise of the ancestors may function as something like a tomb for unknown soldiers. Establishing a memorial for those whose names have been forgotten allows them to be recalled to memory and preserved in the national consciousness. Like a tomb for the unknown, Ben Sira’s Praise of the Ancestors preserves the memories of all those whose identities have been lost to time.

Ben Sira thus seems to acknowledge that the passage of time has led to the loss of the memories of at least some of the righteous who have gone before. In this sense, he agrees with the sentiment of Qohelet, that human memory has proven too frail to be relied upon for the preservation of one’s memory and reputation beyond death. However, while Qohelet floundered upon this observation, Ben Sira attempts to circumvent the frailty of human memory through his extended praise of the ancestors, which includes not only the great heroes of the past but also those virtuous persons who have been forgotten. In doing so, Ben Sira appeals to symbols previously unattested in Hebrew Wisdom literature--the traditions of the Torah, on the one hand, and the Greek literary genre of the encomium, on the other. It is notable that 4QInstruction evinces a similar preoccupation

³³ Contra Corley, “Sirach 44:1–15,” 171.

with restoring the reliability of human memory, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Like Ben Sira, 4QInstruction also appeals to symbols outside of traditional wisdom in order to overcome the difficulty, most notably through apocalyptic motifs such as the “Book of Memory” (ספר זכרון), which serves to transfer the locus of memory into the heavenly realm. While Ben Sira does not make such cosmic appeals, he nonetheless solidifies the memory of the past into written form and transfers it to a communal, liturgical setting. Evidently the anxiety about human forgetfulness expressed in the book of Qohelet was felt more broadly within the wisdom worldview during the Hellenistic Period, and the later texts attempted to obviate the problem by resymbolizing the tradition in light of other symbol systems.

The Transmission of Instruction

Ben Sira also constructs symbolic immortality through the expansion of a second motif familiar from traditional Israelite Wisdom--the transmission of instruction. Like Proverbs 1-9, Ben Sira views his teaching both as being ultimately derived from the teaching of Wisdom herself and as extending into the future to influence later generations:

Now I, like a rivulet from her [Wisdom’s] stream,
channeling the waters forth into a garden,
Said to myself, “I will water my plants,
my flower bed I will drench”;
And suddenly this rivulet of mine became a river,
the this stream of mine a sea.
Again will I send my teachings forth shining like the dawn,
to spread their brightness afar off;
Again I will pour out instruction like prophecy,
and bequeath it to generations yet to come. (24:30-33)

Here Ben Sira uses the imagery of a stream in order to describe his own relationship to the tradition. On the one hand, Ben Sira understands his own wisdom as emerging like a rivulet from Wisdom’s own stream. Notably, he views himself as transmitting a tradition

that itself has a heavenly origin and thus as participating in a transcendent reality.³⁴ More importantly for present purposes, Ben Sira views his own teaching as expanding from a rivulet to a river to a sea, ascribing to it a significance like that of the dawn. His instruction, which begins modestly in his own garden, expands its reach like the infinite sea or the dawn that shines upon all of humanity. It becomes his bequest for “generations yet to come” (γενεας αιωνων; 24:33). The expression connotes generations extending indefinitely into the future, and could be rendered as “to generations forevermore.” Far from viewing himself as an isolated individual, Ben Sira presents himself as an integral part of the great stream of tradition extending from primordial Wisdom herself to the generations of the future. By taking his place in this long tradition, Ben Sira joins himself to an unending reality and thereby renders his own physical death less significant. When he dies, the tradition to which he has committed his life continues to persist for generation upon generation.

Ben Sira strikes a similar note in 33:16-19, in which he views his labor of teaching as being connected to both past and future:

Now I am the last to keep vigil,
as one gleaning after the vintagers;
Since by God’s blessing I too have made progress
till like a vintager I have filled my winepress,
Take notice that not for myself only have I toiled,
but for every seeker after guidance. (33:16-19)

As in 24:34, Ben Sira claims that his labor as a sage has influence that extends beyond his own lifetime.³⁵ He labors in the field of those sages who have gone before him, his own insights gleaned where they also had labored. Having filled his winepress with his own gleanings, he passes the product on to those who come after. As in the previous

³⁴ Wright, *Praise Israel*, 172–73.

³⁵ Wright, *Praise Israel*, 174.

passage, his own labor benefits future generations in the form of instruction.³⁶ Ben Sira's view of instruction stands in stark contrast to that of Qohelet, who believes that one's toil can have no lasting effect. For Ben Sira, the labor of instruction extends his influence far into the future, thereby providing him with what Qohelet would call יתרון or profit--a positive balance at the end of one's life. As Ben Sira describes symbolic immortality that accrues to the sage:

Many will praise his understanding;
his fame can never be effaced;
Unfading will be his memory,
through all generations his name will live.
The nations³⁷ will speak of his wisdom,
and the assembly will declare his praises.
While he lives he is one out of a thousand,
and when he dies he leaves a good name. (39:9-11)

Symbolic Immortality in the Natural Mode

One of the most vigorous and innovative resymbolizations of traditional wisdom undertaken by Ben Sira is his depiction of the relationship between humankind and the cosmos. As we have seen, Terror Management Theory proposes that one essential element required for a worldview to provide a successful buffer against death anxiety is that it render its adherents “beings of enduring significance living in a meaningful reality.”³⁸ As we have seen in earlier chapters, this effort to render the world ordered and meaningful appears to have been a central concern for many of the texts produced during the early Hellenistic period. While Qohelet found that the design of the cosmos was essentially obscured from human understanding, 4QInstruction attempted to provide a

³⁶ Wright makes a similar observation that “the sage’s labors are for others and not just for himself” (Wright, *Praise Israel*, 174–75).

³⁷ My translation, following Gk σοφίαν αὐτοῦ διηγῆσονταὶ ἔθνη. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 448, noting that this verse is essentially the same as 44:15, follow the Hebrew of that verse, “the congregation will speak of his wisdom.”

³⁸ Tom Pyszczynski et al., *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2003), 16.

sense of order through an appeal to apocalyptic motifs such as special revelation and the periodization of history. Ben Sira's attempt to symbolize the world as meaningful depends in large measure on his concept of the created order as consisting of antinomies or polarities.³⁹

The clearest statement of this formulation occurs in 33:7-15:⁴⁰

Why is one day more important than another,
 when the same sun lights up every day of the year?
 By the Lord's knowledge they are kept distinct;
 among them he designates seasons and feasts.
 Some he exalts⁴¹ and sanctifies,
 and others he lists as ordinary days.
 So, too, all people are of clay,
 for from earth humankind was formed;
 Yet in the fullness of his understanding the Lord has divided them;⁴²
 in different paths he has them walk.
 Some he blesses and makes great,
 some he sanctifies and draws to himself.
 Others he curses and brings low,
 and expels them to their place.
 Like clay in the hands of a potter,
 to be molded according to his pleasure,
 So are people in the hands of their Maker,
 to be requited according as he judges them.
 As evil contrasts with good, and death with life,
 so are sinners in contrast with the just;⁴³
 See now all the works of the Most High:

³⁹ On Ben Sira's conception of opposites in creation, see especially Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 399–401; Randal A. Argall, *I Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment* (SBLEJL 8; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 135–154; and Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 84–89.

⁴⁰ On the significance of this poem, see especially G. L. Prato, *Il Problema della Teodecia in Ben Sira* (AnBib 65; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1975), 13–61.

⁴¹ Following Gk ἀνοψώσεν. MS E appears to read “blesses” (ברך[...]) with Syr.

⁴² Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 394, translate “the Lord makes people unlike.” Both MS E (תבדילם) and Gk διεχώρισεν αὐτούς are more literally translated “divided them” or “separated them.”

⁴³ Both MS E and Syr add “and darkness with light.” Since Syr lacks “sinners in contrast with the just,” it is likely that MS E has produced a composite text combining G and Syr (Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 396).

they all come in pairs, the one the opposite of the other (33:7-15).

Ben Sira suggests that a duality exists in creation as determined by God, the creator.

When he looks at the things God has created, Ben Sira sees that “they all come in pairs, the one opposite the other” ([זה] וְעוֹמֵת זֶה וְעוֹמֵת זֶה; 33:15). In the beginning of the passage, Ben Sira explains how this principle obtains to the days of the year. He suggests that “by the Lord’s knowledge they are kept distinct” (בְּחִכְמַת יְיָ נִשְׁפָּט; 33:8), with some being sanctified for seasons and feasts while others are ordinary days (33:9). As there exists a polarity in days, so too there exists a polarity in humanity, with God “dividing them” (תְּבַדִּילֵם), blessing and sanctifying some while cursing others and bringing them low. In this manner, Ben Sira is able to account for why some people succeed and other people fail, why some are blessed and others are cursed. Ben Sira reiterates his view of the world as consisting of complementary pairs in 42:23-24:

Everything lives and abides forever,
and to meet each need all things are preserved.
All of them come in twos, one corresponding to the other;
yet none of them has he made in vain.

Here again Ben Sira asserts that God’s works occur in twos corresponding to one another (כֻּלָּם שְׁוִיִּים זֶה מִזֶּה),⁴⁴ each serving its proper purpose in the proper time.

Ben Sira repeatedly insists on the goodness of all creation. While it may at times appear that aspects of God’s creation are evil, Ben Sira insists that these things are good for the righteous and only evil for the wicked:

The works of God are all of them good;
for every need in its own time he provides....
Good things for the good he provided from the beginning,
but for the wicked, good things and bad.
Chief of all needs for human life
are water and fire, iron and salt,
The heart of the wheat, milk and honey,
the blood of the grape, and oil, and cloth;
For the good all these are good,
but for the wicked they turn out evil...

⁴⁴ This is the reading of MS B. MS M seems to preserve a similar concept but in different language (כֻּלָּם לְעִמַּת זֶה [.....]).

The works of God are all of them good;
 for every need in its own time he provides.
 No cause then to say: This is not as good as that--
 each shows its worth at the proper time. (39:16, 25-27, 33-34)

Elsewhere, Ben Sira acknowledges that even the righteous are subject to “plague and bloodshed, fiery heat and drought, plunder and ruin, famine and death,” but he insists that these things occur “for sinners seven times more” (40:7). Collins objects that “the claim that disasters (including death!) befall the wicked at a greater rate can scarcely be taken seriously. . . . It is difficult, however, to avoid the suspicion that all Sirach has to offer here is wishful thinking.”⁴⁵ While Collins is surely correct that Ben Sira’s statement cannot be empirically verified, such verification is beside the point. What Ben Sira has done is to provide his followers with a symbolic framework in which such things can be *believed* to be true. Here Michael Fox’s appeal to a “coherence theory of truth” may once again be profitable.⁴⁶ The symbolic worldview that Ben Sira has created allows his adherents to “sift out some realities that would be obtrusive in the orderly world it posits.”⁴⁷ Ben Sira’s readers are able to experience a world in which bad things occur sevenfold for sinners because they are predisposed by the worldview to believe the world works in this way--whether verifiable or not.

Ultimately for Ben Sira, the magnificence of the cosmos serves as a testament to the power and glory of the God who created it. In 42:15-43:33 Ben Sira engages in an extended description of creation, beginning with the celestial heights of the firmament (43:1-12), continuing with the meteorological phenomena of the sky (43:13-18) and then of the ground (43:19-22) before finally concluding in the depths of the sea (43:23-26). At each step along the way, Ben Sira demonstrates God’s governance over the created order.

⁴⁵ Prato, *Il Problema della Teodicea*, 94.

⁴⁶ See Michael V. Fox, “The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 669–84, and my discussion in Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ Fox, “Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs,” 683.

God is the one who created the sun and gives its orders (43:5). Likewise the moon, which keeps the sacred seasons and the pilgrimage feasts, “by the Lord’s command it keeps its prescribed place, and does not fade as the stars watch (43:10). God “marks out the path of the hail” (43:13), “makes the rain clouds fly like vultures” (43:14), “gives the clouds their strength and lops off the hailstones” (43:15). He shakes the mountains and drives the winds (43:16a), makes the snow fly and pours out the frost (43:17b, 19), and brings dew to quench the land (43:22). There is nothing that happens in the world that is outside of God’s control: “For him each messenger succeeds and at his bidding accomplishes his will” (43:26).

Through his insistence on God’s control over the cosmos and particularly through his innovative appeal to the complementary pairs in creation, Ben Sira successfully renders the world safe and meaningful for his followers. Notably Ben Sira once again overcomes one of the difficulties articulated in the book of Qohelet through an appeal to symbols previously unknown in the Hebrew Wisdom tradition. The source of the symbols to which Ben Sira appeals remains a matter of significant dispute. A number of scholars have noted the apparent influence of Greek thought on Ben Sira’s conception of opposite pairs, particularly in the works of Stoic Philosophers such as Chrysippus, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus.⁴⁸ While acknowledging that Ben Sira’s conception of opposites differs in important ways from that of the Stoics, John Collins, for instance, argues that “the appearance of this idea in the Hellenistic period, and its resemblance to the Stoic doctrine, can hardly be coincidental.”⁴⁹ Others have been more doubtful of Stoic influence on Ben Sira.⁵⁰ Sharon Lea Mattilla, for instance, concludes that there is

⁴⁸ See especially Th. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); D. Winston, “Theodicy in Ben Sira and Stoic Philosophy,” in *Of Scholars, Savants, and Their Texts* (ed. R. Link-Salinger; New York: Lang, 1989), 239–49; and Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 84–89.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 85.

⁵⁰ The relationship between Ben Sira and Stoic thought is an ongoing debate. See especially

no evidence that Ben Sira was aware of Stoic thought, preferring to locate his influences in “an international network” of traditions, including Demotic sages and other “local scribal and priestly officials indigenous to the lands in which he traveled.”⁵¹ Wherever we may locate the source of the symbols to which Ben Sira appeals, what is clear is that he successfully resymbolizes the worldview of traditional Wisdom, rendering the world ordered and meaningful through an appeal to motifs previously unknown within the tradition.

Humankind’s Place in the Cosmos

From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, a successful worldview not only renders the world ordered and meaningful but also allows its adherents to view themselves as persons of significance within that cosmos. Ben Sira accomplishes this task first by demonstrating the intrinsic connection between humankind and the rest of the created order, and then by showing how humanity holds a place of special significance within the natural world. The passage that demonstrates this connection most clearly is the extended description of creation in 16:24-18:14. Ben Sira begins by describing God’s act of creation as a process of assigning each element of the cosmic realm a specific and significant part to play in the cosmos as a whole:

When God created the first of his works
and, as he made them, assigned their tasks,
He ordered for all time what they were to do
and their domains from generation to generation.
They were not to hunger, nor grow weary,

Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras*; Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983); Otto Kaiser, “Die Rezeption der Stoischen Providenz bei Ben Sira,” *JNSL* 24 (1998): 41–54; Ursel Wicke-Reuter, *Göttliche Providenz und Menschliche Verantwortung bei Ben Sira und in der Frühen Stoa* (BZAW 298; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000); Ursel Wicke-Reuter, “Ben Sira und die Frühe Stoa. Zum Zusammenhang von Ethik und dem Glauben an eine Göttliche Providenz,” in *Ben Sira’s God: Proceedings of the International Ben Sira Conference Durham - Ushaw College 2001* (ed. Renate Egger-Wenzel; BZAW 321; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 268–81; and Sharon Lea Matilla, “Ben Sira and the Stoics: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 473–501.

⁵¹ Sharon Lea Matilla, “Ben Sira and the Stoics: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 500.

nor ever desist from their tasks.⁵²
 Not one should crowd its neighbor,
 nor should they ever disobey his word.
 Then the Lord looked upon the earth
 and filled it with his good things.
 Its surface he covered with all manner of life
 which must return into it again. (16:26-30)

Like the cosmologies of Proverbs 1-9 and 4QInstruction, the world Ben Sira offers his readers in this passage is carefully designed, with each element functioning according to the will of God, “who ordered for all time what they were to do” (16:27; *εκοσμησεν εις αιωνα τα εργα αυτου*).⁵³ Nothing in Ben Sira’s cosmos attempts to violate its prescribed bounds. Nothing “should ever crowd its neighbor” (*εκαστος τον πλησιον αυτου ουκ εξθλιψες*) or “disobey his word” (*ουκ απειθησουσιν του ρηματος αυτου*). Like Qohelet, Ben Sira envisions the elements of this cosmos as carrying out their assigned tasks throughout the generations, but Ben Sira’s cosmos does so with vitality rather than exhaustion. Whereas Qohelet finds that “all things are weary” (*כל-הדברים יגעים*),⁵⁴ Ben Sira specifies that “they were not to hunger, nor grow weary” (*ουτε επεινασαν ουτε εκοπιασαν*). The natural order envisioned by Ben Sira is one of order leading to vitality in which each element of the cosmos dutifully and ceaselessly carries out its tasks.

In the passage that follows, Ben Sira establishes the connection between humankind and the natural order that he has described in 16:26-30. He begins in 17:1 with the statement that “The Lord from the earth created humankind, and makes each person return to earth again” (*κυριος εκτισεν εκ γης ανθρωπον και παλιν απεστρεψες αυτον εις αυτην*). Notably, humanity is not something other than the natural world but rather an integral part of it. People derive from the earth, and at the end of life they will

⁵² Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 276, read “from their rounds.” However, *των εργαων αυτων* is better rendered “from their tasks” or “from their works.”

⁵³ The Hebrew of this passage is extant only for 16:26 (MS A).

⁵⁴ See the discussions of this verse in chapters 3 and 4, above.

return back from whence they came, in a sense being reunited with their natural state. This imagery is a classic example of what Robert Lifton calls the “natural mode” of symbolic immortality.⁵⁵ Since people come from the earth and return to it, they in a sense remain connected to existence for as long as the earth endures. The connection between humankind and the created order is further emphasized by the parallelism between this description of humankind in 17:1 and the earlier description in 16:30 of “all manner of life” (ψυχη παντος ζωου), which likewise “must return into it (the earth) again” (εις αυτην η αποστροφη αυτων). Not only does humankind have an intrinsic connection with the earth, but also with the other living creatures upon the earth.

While in this manner Ben Sira emphasizes the fundamental connection between humanity and the natural world, he does not view humankind as being merely the same as other animals. We may here recall the TMT research which indicates that distinguishing humans from animals is one of the ways in people buffer themselves against death anxiety.⁵⁶ In 17:1-12, Ben Sira establishes that humans, while created beings, are endowed by God with a special significance that sets them apart from other animals:

Limited days of life he gives them,
with power over all things on earth.
He endows them with a strength that befits them;
in God’s own image he made them.
He puts the fear of humans in all flesh

⁵⁵ See Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 22, as well as the discussions in preceding chapters.

⁵⁶ See especially Sander L. Koole and Agnes E. Van den Berg, “Paradise Lost and Reclaimed: A Motivational Analysis of Human-Nature Relations,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (ed. Jeff Greenberg et al.; New York: Guilford, 2004), 87–90; Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “I Am Not an Animal: Mortality Salience, Disgust, and the Denial of Human Creatureliness,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 130 (2001): 427–35; Cathy R. Cox et al., “Disgust, Creatureliness, and the Accessibility of Death-Related Thoughts,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37 (2007): 494–507; and Jamie L. Goldenberg et al., “Fleeing the Body: A Terror Management Perspective on the Problem of Corporeality,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4 (2000): 200–18.

and allows them power over beasts and birds. (17:2-4)

Drawing on the traditions of Genesis, Ben Sira emphasizes that God has set humankind apart from other creatures by endowing them with “a strength that befits them” (καθ’ εαυτους ενεδυσεν αυτους ισχυν),⁵⁷ creating them “in (God’s) own image” (κατ’ εικονα αυτου) and giving them “power over all things on earth” (εξουσιαν των επ’ αυτης). Also setting humankind apart from the animals are the special tasks and instructions with which God has endowed them:

He has set before them knowledge,
and the law of life he has given them as an inheritance.⁵⁸
An everlasting covenant he has made with them,
his commandments he has revealed to them. (17:11-12)

In a cosmos in which God has assigned each of his works their own proper tasks (16:26-28), God has also given humankind its proper tasks, which he has revealed to them in “his commandments” (κριματα αυτου). The language that Ben Sira employs emphasizes the connection between God’s instruction and vitality, most notably in his reference to the “law of life” (νομον αυτου) that God has given them as an inheritance (εκληροδοτησεν). The imagery also emphasizes the connection that these instructions provide with structures of permanence, particularly in the reference to the “everlasting covenant” (διαθηκην αιωνος). By successfully adhering to the values promoted by the worldview in the form of these laws and commandments, a person is able to transcend himself by living in harmony with the will of God and in consonance with the whole of the natural world. By constructing this tight relationship between humankind and the

⁵⁷ Some commentators, including Joseph Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Septuaginta 12/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) and Rudolf Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1906), 155 emend καθ’ εαυτους (“that befits them”) to καθ’ εαυτον (“like his own”). However, the emendation is unsupported by the Gk MSS, and the unemended text makes good sense. As Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 282, conclude: “The point of 3a is that God has given human beings all the strength they need in order to fulfill the purposes of their creation, viz., to subdue the earth.”

⁵⁸ Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 277, translate νομον ζωης as “a law pledging life.”

cosmos in this manner, Ben Sira allows his followers to view themselves as “persons of significance in a universe of meaning.”

Creation and Human (Im)mortality

From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, it is notable that Ben Sira’s discussion of the place of humankind within the natural world includes reflections on human mortality. Ben Sira describes death as the natural limitation of human existence just as it is for all living creatures.⁵⁹ Importantly for our purposes, Ben Sira introduces human mortality in the context of his discussion of the way each element of the cosmos follows its prescribed law and keeps to its own proper place in the scheme of the whole. Death is the proper end of humankind just as rising and setting is the natural course for the sun, “for not immortal is any human being” (οτι ουκ αθανατος υιος ανθρωπου;17:30b). In describing the inevitability of human mortality, however, Ben Sira also offers several modes of symbolic immortality by which a person can envision herself as having a significance that transcends physical death. First, death represents a return to the ground and a reconnection with the earth to which a person naturally belongs. As long as the earth exists, a part of the deceased person remains connected to the world of the living. Death is a sort of homecoming rather than an aberration. Second, in this passage Ben Sira depicts each person as carrying out a special role within the cosmos as a whole. Symbolically, each individual achieves significance by doing his part to sustain the proper order of the cosmos. Because he has become connected to the cosmos in this way, his own life continues to have significance for as long as the cosmos exists, thereby

⁵⁹ The one exception to Ben Sira’s view of death as the natural limit of humankind appears in Ben Sira 25:24: “In a woman was sin’s beginning; on her account we all die.” The statement occurs in the context of Ben Sira’s extended reflection on wicked women (25:13-26) and clearly draws on the story of Genesis 2-3. While there is no reason to suspect that this passage is not original to the text, it is the case that “this explanation of the origin of sin and death is anomalous, and unsupported by anything else in Ben Sira” (Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 59). It seems rather to be “an ad hoc comment, made in the context of a lengthy reflection on ‘the wicked woman,’ but it has not been integrated into a coherent theological system” (Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 81).

rendering his death less potent. Finally, in this passage Ben Sira offers his readers symbolic immortality through his reference to the law and commandments, which he refers to as the “eternal covenant.” Those who adhere to Ben Sira’s system of values participate in a way of life that has not only been specially endowed by God but which is a covenant of eternal significance.

The relationship to life and death sketched out by Ben Sira in this passage is a hopeful but realistic one. He explicitly denies the possibility of literal immortality (17:30) and acknowledges death as an unfortunate and unavoidable reality:

The sum of a person’s days is great
if it reaches a hundred years;
Like a drop of the sea’s water, like a grain of sand,
so are these few years among the days of eternity.
That is why the Lord is so patient with human beings
and showers his mercy upon them.
He sees and understands that their death is grievous,
and so he forgives them all the more. (18:9-12)

Yet even as he acknowledges that death is inescapable and grievous, he offers his adherents a rich set of symbols within which to view themselves as “persons of enduring significance in a meaningful reality.” For Ben Sira, one must face the inevitability of death, but this death does not represent the complete termination of the significance of one’s life, as it had done for Qohelet. A person dies, but yet lives on through his connection to the natural world. Having done his part to sustain the continued existence of the cosmos and then returned to the dust of the earth where he belongs, having lived his life according to the command of God, each person lives on symbolically for as long as the earth remains, for as long as the covenant endures.

Symbolic Immortality in the Religious Mode

While Ben Sira offers his readers possibilities for death transcendence in the biological/biosocial, creative, and natural modes, it is the religious mode where Ben Sira innovates most effectively. As we have seen, the religious mode of death transcendence

may involve a belief in a literal afterlife, as was the case with 4QInstruction. However, Lifton insists that a literal afterlife represents only one possible expression of symbolic death transcendence in the religious mode.⁶⁰ More generally, the religious mode of symbolic death transcendence involves a sense of special connection to the divine realm or a life lived in the service of ultimate, divine truths. “One can share the immortality of the deity, obtain membership in a sacred community or a ‘covenant with God.’”⁶¹ While Ben Sira does not promote a belief in literal immortality, he does offer his followers symbolic immortality in the religious mode through an aggressive resymbolization of the Wisdom tradition that allows him to provide his reader with a real and present sense of intimate connection to the divine realm. He does this through three primary innovations: (1) introducing a more personal view of God into the Wisdom tradition; (2) grounding Wisdom in the text and traditions of the Torah; and (3) connecting Wisdom to the institutions of Jewish religion through incorporation of both Temple and priesthood.

Personalizing God

More than any other wisdom text, Ben Sira emphasizes the close relationship between the righteous person and God, who can be directly accessed through prayer and who can be trusted to respond to the needs of the petitioner.⁶² The appeal to prayer as a means of accessing the deity is particularly striking in Ben Sira, being mentioned more than 20 times.⁶³ While we do encounter three references to prayer in Prov 10-29,⁶⁴ it

⁶⁰ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 20.

⁶¹ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 20.

⁶² John Collins likewise suggests that “Sirach speaks of God in personal terms more than any previous wisdom writer” (Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 89).

⁶³ See, e.g., 3:5; 4:6; 7:10; 7:14; 17:20; 21:1; 21:5; 22:27-23:6; 28:2; 34:24; 34:26; 35:17; 37:15; 38:9; 39:6; 48:20; 50:19; 51:1-12.

⁶⁴ See Prov 15:8, 29; 28:9.

plays a minor role in that book and occurs nowhere in Qohelet. Ben Sira, in contrast, develops an expectation that God listens to prayers and responds directly to those in need. To the ill he advises, “My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, for it is he who heals” (בני בחולי אל תעבר התפלל אל אל כי הוא ירפא) (38:9). He envisions the prayer of the one who is distressed as reaching the heavens (28:20) and the prayer of the lowly as piercing the clouds (28:21).

In the course of his text, Ben Sira offers two or three prayers of his own (22:27-23:6 and 51:1-12, with 36:1-22 being disputed). The first of these prayers functions as a petition in which Ben Sira asks God to intervene at the level of his words, thoughts, and cravings in order to keep him from falling into sin:

Who will set a guard over my mouth,
and upon my lips an all-purpose seal,
That I may not fail through my lips,
that my tongue may not destroy me?
Lord, my Father and the Master of my life,
permit me not to fall because of them!⁶⁵ (22:27-23:1)

Ben Sira expresses belief in a God who not only intervenes in history on behalf of his people, but one who intervenes personally within the heart and mind of the petitioner. A further innovation of Ben Sira beyond traditional wisdom is the reference to God as “my Father” (πατερ μου) which occurs both here and in 23:4.⁶⁶ Again in 51:10, Ben Sira says to God, “Lord, you are my Father! My mighty savior only you!” (”אבי אתה כי אתה גבור”) (ישעי).⁶⁷ References to God as “father” are rare in the Hebrew Bible, occurring only in Isa

⁶⁵ The Gk of 23:1 includes 23:1b, μη εγκαταλιτης με ες Βουλη αυτων (“do not abandon me to their designs). In Lat and Syr, this clause is found after 23:4a and so has been omitted here.

⁶⁶ In 23:4, the reference is to “father and God of my life” (πατερ και θεε ζωης μου). Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 29, disputes the phrase “my father” in 23:1,4, arguing that God was not addressed as “my father” in Hebrew prior to the Christian era, arguing instead that the original text read “God of my father.” Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 89, notes the use of “my father” in the Prayer of Joseph (4Q372) from Qumran, which he dates to the early second century B.C.E. Collins rightly concludes that “there is no reason to question the authenticity of the Greek text of Sir. 23:1,4.

⁶⁷ The reading of this verse is disputed. While the Hebrew text of 51:10 reads “Lord, you are my

63:16, Mal 2:10, and possibly 1 Chron 29:10, and in each case referring to God as the collective father of Israel.⁶⁸ Ben Sira's reference to God as "my father" represents an exceptionally close expression of relationship with the deity. For the one who follows Ben Sira's instruction, a similarly close relationship with God can be achieved.

Wisdom as God's Presence in Temple and Torah

As in Proverbs 1-9, Ben Sira symbolizes the connection between humankind and God primarily through the figure of Wisdom. In the opening verse of the book Ben Sira proclaims that "All wisdom is from the Lord, and it remains with him forever" (πασα σοφια παρα κυριου και μετ' αυτου εστιν εις τοσ αιωνα; 1:1). The person who embodies wisdom and follows its ways embodies a principle that derives from and remains with the deity. The poem goes on to describe Wisdom's primordial origin and the timelessness of her truth: "Before all things else wisdom was created; and prudent understanding, from eternity" (προτερα παντων εκτισται σοφια και συνεσις φρονησεως εξ αιωνος; 1:4). This wisdom that God has fashioned "he has poured her forth upon all his works, upon every living thing according to his bounty; he has lavished her upon his friends" (εξεχεεν αυτην επι παντα τα εργα αυτου μετα πασης κατα την δοσιν αυτου και εχορηγησεν αυτην τοις αγαπωσιν αυτον; 1:9b-10). This introduction establishes Ben Sira's book as presenting a worldview of timeless, heavenly character, which stems directly from God.

The more extended description of Wisdom occurs in 24:1-23. Notably Wisdom's speech in these verses is given "among her own people" (εν μεσω λαου αυτης; 24:1) and "in the assembly of the Most High" (εν εκκλησια υψιστου; 24:2), suggesting that Wisdom continues to provide an interconnection between the people and the divine

Father," the Greek preserves "Lord, father of my lord" (πατερα κυριου μου). See especially A. Strotmann, *Mein Vater bist du* [Frankfurt am Main: Knecht, 1991], 83-92).

⁶⁸ See the discussion in Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 89.

council, a conduit to the transcendent realm. In a speech reminiscent of Proverbs 8, Wisdom describes her genesis as follows.⁶⁹

From the mouth of the Most High I came forth,
and mistlike covered the earth.
In the heights of heaven I dwelt,
my throne on a pillar of cloud.
The vault of heaven I compassed alone,
through the deep abyss I took my course.
Over waves of the sea, over all the land,
over ever people and nation I held sway.
Among them all I sought a resting place:
in whose inheritance should I abide? (24:3-7)

Like the poem in Proverbs 8, Wisdom's speech establishes her connection to heaven and her priority over all of creation. She claims to originate "from the mouth of the of the Most High" (απο στοματος υψιστου; 24:3) thus being of divine origin if not herself divine (cf. Prov 2:8). The speech suggests that Wisdom is coming to be more closely identified with God, as it ascribes imagery to Wisdom that has previously been reserved for God.⁷⁰ The description of Wisdom as being seated "on a pillar of cloud" (εν στυλω νεφελης; 24:4) is reminiscent of God's presence in a pillar of cloud before the Israelites in the story of the Exodus, as well a sign of God's presence in the tabernacle and Temple.⁷¹ In 24:5, Wisdom claims that "the vault of heaven I compassed alone" (γυρω ουρανου εκυκλωσα νονη), a task said to belong to God in Job 9:8. Further, Wisdom claims to have taken her course "through the deep abyss" (εν βαθει αβυσσων) and to have held sway over the sea. Ruling over the sea is a divine characteristic in ancient Near

⁶⁹ The dependence of Wisdom's self-presentation on Egyptian Isis aretologies has been made particularly by H. Conzelmann, "The Mother of Wisdom," in *The Future of Our Religious Past* (J.M. Robinson; New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 230–43. See also Johannes Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BZAW 272; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 47–71, and Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.157–60. The influence of the Isis aretologies has been questioned by Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, 45–50 and Patrick W. Skehan, "Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 365–79.

⁷⁰ See Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 50–51.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Exod 13:21-22; 14:19, 24; 33:9-10; Ps 99:7.

Eastern literature in general and in the Hebrew Bible in particular (e.g., Pss 65:8; 89:10; 93:4). As John Collins notes, in Sirach “Wisdom is never said to be divine, but it appears to be the instrument of God’s presence and agency.”⁷²

Wisdom, who thus manifests the presence of God for Ben Sira, also becomes more concretely accessible in Ben Sira’s thought than in the earlier wisdom tradition. Ben Sira connects Wisdom both to the written Torah and to the Temple, which themselves become tangible signs of God’s presence among the people of Israel. The continuation of Wisdom’s self-revelation in Ben Sira 24 makes explicit the connection to the Temple:

Then the Fashioner of all gave me his command,
and he who made me chose the spot for my tent,
Saying, “In Jacob make your dwelling,
in Israel your inheritance.”
Before the ages, from the first, he created me,
and through the ages I shall not cease to be.
In the holy Tent I ministered before him,
and then in Zion I took up my best.
In the city he loves as he does me, he gave me rest;
in Jerusalem is my domain.
I have struck root among the glorious people;
in the portion of the Lord, his⁷³ inheritance. (24:8-12)

While wisdom sought a resting place among all the nations, God directs here specifically to the Temple in Jerusalem, the locus of his earthly connection to the people. As József Zsengellér has recently argued, this passage relates Wisdom to the Deuteronomistic vision of the Jerusalem Temple, which is found in Jerusalem (Ps 50:2) and which is the portion of the Lord (Deut 32:9).⁷⁴ In connecting Wisdom to the Temple, “Ben Sira

⁷² Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 51.

⁷³ Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 330–31, read “in the portion of the Lord is my inheritance,” following Ziegler, *Sirach*. The Gk MSS preserve “his inheritance” (κληρονομιας αυτου).

⁷⁴ On Ben Sira’s conception of Wisdom and the Temple, see especially József Zsengellér, “Does Wisdom Come from the Temple? Ben Sira’s Attitude to the Temple of Jerusalem,” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006* (ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér; JSJSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 135–49.

opened a new way of writing wisdom. He describes Torah/wisdom as coming out of the temple, as the central meeting point of men and God, and in this sense as the source of teaching.”⁷⁵ The implications of this connection to the Temple are profound from the perspective of Ben Sira’s symbolization of immortality. Whereas in the precedent tradition wisdom could be elusive (see, e.g., Job 28), for Ben Sira it can be located concretely in the Jerusalem Temple. While Wisdom continues to spread to the nations (24:30-33), she has taken root in the city of Jerusalem itself, where she has “spread out my branches like a terebinth, my branches so bright and so graceful “(24:16). This imagery creates a tangible connection between Wisdom, which represents the presence of God, and the individual. By worshiping in the Temple, by living in Jerusalem, and by simply being counted among the Jewish people, each individual has direct contact with God’s Wisdom. Connection to the divine is no longer elusive, but firmly rooted in a sense of place.

Ben Sira’s resymbolization of the Wisdom tradition to render God’s presence more tangible can likewise be seen in his association of Wisdom with the Torah. At the conclusion of Wisdom’s speech in 24:3-22, Ben Sira comments that “All this is the book of the Most High’s covenant, the Law which Moses enjoined on us as a heritage for the community of Jacob” (ταυτα παντα βιβλος διαθηκης θεου υψιστου νομος ον εξετειλατο ημιν Μωυσης κληρονομιαν συναγωγαις Ιακωβ; 24:23). For Ben Sira, the connection of Wisdom to the Torah is largely symbolic and does not reflect the actual content of his teaching. As Maurice Gilbert has shown, Ben Sira in fact shows little concern with the details of the Torah’s precepts, and much of his teaching is not based on the Torah at all.⁷⁶ Rather, Ben Sira’s appeal to the Torah functions as a symbolic reinforcement of his

⁷⁵ Zsengellér, “Ben Sira’s Attitude to the Temple,” 148.

⁷⁶ See especially Maurice Gilbert, “Wisdom Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second*

teaching. Crenshaw notes that with Ben Sira's identification of the Torah with God's wisdom "a divine attribute has taken up residence in Jerusalem, assuming visible form in the Mosaic covenant, the Law."⁷⁷ Again, Ben Sira's emphasizes making the Wisdom of God visible and tangible, located in specific place and embodied in a specific text. From the perspective of Terror Management Theory, the connection of God's Wisdom to the Temple and the Torah functions to provide an individual with a sense of death-transcending connection to the divine. One can participate in God's own Wisdom by going to the Temple and by meditating on the Torah, and thereby participate in a transcendent reality that brings one into communion with God himself.

God's Presence Embodied in the Priesthood

Beyond localizing Wisdom in the Temple and in the Torah, Ben Sira also draws on the priestly and prophetic traditions in order to make manifest God's presence on earth. The role of the priesthood in Ben Sira has been studied especially by Saul Olyan, who concludes that "it is not overstating the case to argue that Ben Sira all but equates the individual's relationship with God to the same individual's relationship to the priesthood."⁷⁸ Ben Sira's emphasis on the priesthood has already been anticipated in the Wisdom's self-declaration. Not only does she describe herself as taking up residence in the temple but also as giving forth perfume "like the odor of incense in the holy Tent" (ὡς λιβανου ατμις εν σκηνη; 24:15). The production of incense consisting of galbaum, onycha, and mastic mixed with frankincense was used only for liturgical purposes (Exod

Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus (ed. Michael E. Stone; CRINT 2/II; Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1984), 295 and Maurice Gilbert, "L'ède la Sagesse (Siracide 24)," *RTL* 5 (1974): 326–48.

⁷⁷ Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 70–71.

⁷⁸ On the connections between Ben Sira and the priesthood see especially Olyan, "Relationship to the Priesthood," 261–86 (quotation on 263); Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, and, more recently, Wright, *Praise Israel*, 97–126. For a more negative assessment, see Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 86–87.

30:38) and could be offered only by authorized personnel (Num 16:6-7, 17-35; 2 Chr 26:16-19). The image of Wisdom as incense in the Temple suggests that God's presence thus suggests that the priesthood may play some legitimate role in mediating God's presence in the Temple.⁷⁹

The more telling passage regarding the importance of the priesthood as a mediation of the divine presence is 7:29-31:⁸⁰

With all your heart, fear God
 And treat as holy his priests.
 With all your might, love your maker
 And do not forsake his servants.
 Honor God and honor the priest,
 And give their portion as you are commanded:
 The trespass offering, and [voluntary] offering,
 [The sacrifice of] righteousness, and the holy offering.⁸¹

As Olyan observes, “the parallelistic structure of this passage is striking.”⁸² Ben Sira pairs each instruction concerning God with a parallel instruction related to the priesthood. As one should “fear God” (פחד אל) he should also “treat as holy his priests” (כהניו הקדיש). Not only is it proper to “love your maker” (אהוב עושרך) but also “not [to] forsake his servants” (את משרתיו לא תעזב). As one is to “honor God” (כבד אל) so should would “honor the priest” (הדר כהן), As Olyan concludes, “The structure of the poetry makes the message very clear: part of giving God his due is giving the priest his livelihood and appropriate honor.”⁸³ More than any text in the Hebrew Bible, Ben Sira views a relationship with the

⁷⁹ Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 58–61.

⁸⁰ On the interpretation of this passage, see especially Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 263–67 and Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 58–61.

⁸¹ The translation is that of Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 264, who emphasizes the connections to Deut 6:5 (see below).

⁸² Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 264.

⁸³ Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 264.

priesthood as a relationship with Yahweh.⁸⁴ Both Stadelmann and Olyan also note the close relationship between this passage and the text of the Deut 6:5, noting particularly the linguistic parallels (בכל לבך [7:29], בכל מאודך, אהוב עושרך [7:30]). While Stadelmann claims that Ben Sira is neither citing nor interpreting Deut 6:5,⁸⁵ Olyan argues that Ben Sira evokes the language of the Shema in order to give symbolic weight to support his parallelism between the priest and God. “Loving and honoring God means to Ben Sira giving the priest his due and his place of honor at the apex of society.”⁸⁶

The symbolic connection between God and the priesthood created by Ben Sira in this passage further localizes the presence of God to the Jerusalem Temple, while also making God present in tangible ways. For Ben Sira, the presence of God is made visibly manifest in the Temple, in the Torah, and in the priesthood. Ben Sira’s rapprochement of the wisdom tradition with Torah and Temple traditions provides it with a firm footing rooted in a specific place and a specific set of symbols and persons. Rather than the abstract concept of Wisdom found in Proverbs and ultimately lost by both Qohelet and Job, Ben Sira provides solid, tangible evidence of connection to both Wisdom and to God. These institutional symbols function in Ben Sira to bolster the Wisdom worldview in Ben Sira, giving it stability and credibility. In the terms of Terror Management Theory, it provides a tangible connection to systems of transcendent truth and divine power, allowing Ben Sira’s adherents to believe themselves to be participating with God in a divinely approved way of life. This enables his adherents to face death knowing that their own lives have had death-transcending significance, as they have participated in relationship with the divine and lived their lives according to transcendent truths.

⁸⁴ Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 264.

⁸⁵ Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 59.

⁸⁶ Olyan, “Relationship to the Priesthood,” 266.

Literal Immortality in the Book of Ben Sira?

The Greek versions of the Book of Ben Sira contain several references to resurrection, which seem to have been introduced into the Greek in the process of translation from the Hebrew. The original translator has introduced references to resurrection in 7:17b and 48:11b, for example, while a later redactor of the Greek adds other references in 2:9c; 16:22c; and 19:19.⁸⁷ Most scholars agree that Ben Sira himself does not refer positively to literal immortality in the Hebrew text. One major exception to this scholarly consensus is Émile Puech, who argues for allusions to resurrection in the Hebrew of 48:11, 13.⁸⁸ While Puech does not assert that Ben Sira held a belief in a general resurrection, he argues based on his reconstruction of 48:11 that Ben Sira anticipated a limited resurrection at the time of the return of Elijah. In 48:13, Puech suggests that the phrase “from his place he was created” suggests the resurrection of Elisha. While Puech offers a plausible reconstruction of a fragmentary Hebrew text, his interpretation stands in conflict with other statements of Ben Sira that clearly deny the possibility of immortality (“for not immortal is any human being”; 17:30b). Collins’ assessment of the argument seems correct: “In view of Sirach’s emphatic insistence on the finality of death elsewhere (Sir. 14:11-19; 38:21-22; 41:4), such a view cannot be attributed to Sirach himself. We have seen that both the text and the interpretation are

⁸⁷ Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 86. On these Greek expansions, see C. Kearns, “The Expanded Text of Ecclesiasticus: Its Teaching on the Future Life as a Clue to Its Origin” (Ph.D. diss., Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1951) and C. Kearns, “Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach,” in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (ed. R. C. Fuller; London: Nelson, 1969), 541–62 (as cited in Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 95)

⁸⁸ Émile Puech, “Ben Sira 48:11 et la Réurrection,” in *Of Scribes and Scrolls, Studies on the Hebrew Bible: Intertestamental Judaism and Christian Origins* (ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 91–90. See also Émile Puech, *La Croyance des Esséniens en la Vie Future: Immortalité, Résurrection, Vie Éternelle?* (Paris: Gabalda, 1993), 73–79. F. Saracino, “Risurrezione in Ben Sira?” *Henoch* 4 (1982): 185–203, has also argued for references to literal immortality in Ben Sira 46:12 and 49:10, but he has not found a following.

uncertain in any case.”⁸⁹

Death in the Book of Ben Sira

To this point I have argued that Ben Sira’s worldview offers its adherents the possibility of death transcendence in multiple modes, which include: (1) biological progeny; (2) the biosocial community of instruction; (3) membership in God’s chosen people Israel; (4) the preservation of their names in the sacred story of Israel and in the assembly; (5) connection with the earth from which they were made and to which they return; (6) living according to God’s instruction in consonance with the design of the cosmos itself; and (7) through access to the divine presence in the forms of Wisdom, Torah, Temple, and priesthood. In the framework of Terror Management Theory, each of these symbols of death transcendence allow adherents of the worldview to see themselves as “persons of enduring significance” and so to face death without viewing it as a complete annihilation of their existence.

Ben Sira offers a number of reflections on death, which together suggest that he views death as something that weighs heavily on humankind but that should not be feared. I have already discussed Ben Sira’s treatment of death in 18:12, in which he acknowledges that “[God] sees and understands that their death is grievous, and so he forgives them all the more.” In 41:1-2 he remarks that death may come as bitter foe or as welcome relief depending on one’s health and social status. Perhaps the clearest statement on death in Ben Sira is 41:3-4, which Collins refers to as “Sirach’s view of death in a nutshell”:⁹⁰

Fear not death, the decree for you;
Remember, those before you and those after you are with you.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 96.

⁹⁰ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 92.

⁹¹ My translation. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 464, offer translate rather freely:

From God this is the decree⁹² for all flesh;
 why then you should you reject the Law (תורה) of the Most High?
 Whether (one has lived) a thousand years, or a hundred, or ten,⁹³
 there is no reproof of life in Sheol.⁹⁴

Collins remarks of this passage that “Sirach’s views on this subject are no different than those of Qoheleth, except that he holds them with resignation, whereas Qoheleth chafes against them.”⁹⁵ What Collins seems to mean is that neither Qohelet nor Ben Sira allows for a belief in “resurrection or a blessed afterlife.”⁹⁶ While this statement is surely true, it does not follow that Qohelet and Ben Sira share the same beliefs about death and differ in attitude only. As I have argued at length in earlier chapters, Qohelet’s “chafing against death” results from the collapse of all symbols of death transcendence to which he has access in his tradition. As a result, Qohelet faces a death that will be an utter annihilation of himself, rendering him as though he had never existed.

Ben Sira does not face the same prospect of death as does Qohelet. While he does not hold a belief in “resurrection or a blessed afterlife” he *does* believe that his life--or at least the *significance* of his life--will transcend his death. The difference between Qohelet and Ben Sira is not merely one of attitude, but rather one of functional symbols of symbolic death transcendence. Ben Sira even hints at the difference in conceptions of

“remember it embraces those before you and those after you.” MS B reads ז[.]ר כי ראשנים ואחרנים עמך while MS M preserves זכר קדמון ואחרון עמך.

⁹² Reading *hōq* with Gk κριμα (Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 468). MS B has חלק while MS M has קץ.

⁹³ My translation. Skehan and Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 464, render “Whether one has lived ten years, a hundred, or a thousand.”

⁹⁴ My translation, following MS B^{mg} and Gk (ל[.]ל חיים) = אין תוכחת בש[.]ל חיים = ουσ εσστιν εν αδου ελεγμας ζωης).

⁹⁵ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 92 For a full discussion of Collins’ views on death in Ben Sira see *Jewish Wisdom*, 92-94 and John J. Collins, “The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom,” *HTR* 71 (1980): 177-92.

⁹⁶ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 92.

death in 40:3, “Fear not death, the decree for you; Remember, those before you and those after you are with you.”⁹⁷ For Ben Sira, even death is a communal experience in which one is connected with others who have lived and who will live. Death for Ben Sira is not to be thought of as isolation and severance from all earthly connections, but rather as unity in the universal fate humankind.

In my view, one of the important contributions of Terror Management Theory to our evaluation of attitudes toward death in ancient texts is its insistence that a conception of literal immortality is not the only--or even the most effective--way in which human beings can grapple with the reality of death. While we who live in the Christian world may tend to think of “a blessed afterlife” as the only “true” mode of death transcendence, TMT insists that death transcendence can be symbolized in any number of modes, all of which may be effective at mitigating anxiety about death, at least to the extent that death can be managed. This subtle bias against non-literal modes of death transcendence may be evident in Collins’ claims that “the only hope for immortality that he [Ben Sira] maintains . . . is for the person’s name and reputation (41:12-13) and continuity of one’s progeny (30:4-6).”⁹⁸ Collins goes on to suggest that in Ben Sira “death falls on just and wicked alike” since “there is no judgment in Sheol.”⁹⁹ However, as I have attempted to demonstrate with regard to the book of Proverbs, just because all people die does not mean that death falls on all people *alike*. Rather, for Proverbs and Ben Sira death encounters the righteous quite differently from the way it encounters the wicked. While both physically die, the wicked are utterly cut off from the world of the living while the righteous continue to remain connected through progeny, the survival of the name, and so on. It is thus misleading to refer to the survival of progeny and reputation as “the only

⁹⁷ See translational note, above.

⁹⁸ Collins, “The Root of Immortality,” 94.

⁹⁹ Collins, “The Root of Immortality,” 94.

hope” for Ben Sira, which expression would seem to imply inadequacy. Rather, the survival of progeny and reputation provide genuine hope, enabling Ben Sira to grapple with death honestly and realistically rather than merely chafing against it.

Conclusion

Like 4QInstruction, Ben Sira resymbolizes traditional wisdom in ways that strengthen the worldview’s claims to offer symbolic modes of death transcendence and therefore to provide a buffer against death anxiety. Ben Sira, however, has taken a markedly different approach than 4QInstruction, appealing not to symbols arising from Jewish apocalyptic but rather to those of the Torah traditions as well as international thought, including perhaps both Greek and Egyptian influences.¹⁰⁰ For present purposes, the most compelling observation concerning Ben Sira’s resymbolization of the Jewish wisdom tradition is the extent to which he reinforces its efficacy by localizing it to tangible Israelite traditions, places, and customs. Even when Ben Sira is most clearly influenced by foreign literary forms, such as the Greek encomium in the Praise of the Ancestors (44-50), it is to emphasize the longevity and magnificence of the Jewish people and their long tradition of heroes. Ben Sira appeals to the persistence of the people of Israel, God’s unique covenant with the Jews, the embodiment of Wisdom in the Torah, the Jerusalem Temple as the root of Wisdom, and the Temple priests as a means of accessing God.

¹⁰⁰ As with the doctrine of pairs discussed above, the extent and direction of foreign influence on Ben Sira more generally continues to be a heavily disputed point. For instance, Middendorp argued that Ben Sira tried to bridge Greek culture and Jewish tradition, claiming to have identified more than a hundred passages in which Ben Sira relies on Greek literature (Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras*). J. T. Sanders challenged Middendorp’s conclusions, finding Ben Sira to be only lightly influenced by Greek literature but more dependent on the Egyptian *Phibis* (Pap. Insinger), adopting its sayings, format, and orientation toward life (Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom*, esp. 105). Miriam Lichtheim argues for understanding Ben Sira in the context of an international wisdom movement and suggests that it may have been Ben Sira that influenced *Phibis* (Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: A Study of Demotic Instructions* [OBO 52; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983], 107–234).

Conclusion

DEATH AND SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY

The worldview of Hebrew wisdom literature underwent a significant transformation between the earliest layers of the tradition, preserved in Proverbs 10-29, and the texts produced in the early second century B.C.E., such as Ben Sira and 4QInstruction. In particular, the contours of this transformation can be traced through the symbols of symbolic immortality and death transcendence that each text provides for its adherents. Drawing on Terror Management Theory (TMT), I have argued that one of the primary functions of any successful cultural worldview is to buffer its adherents against death anxiety by providing them with a sense of being a “person of enduring significance in a world of meaning” whose lives in some way transcend death, whether literally or symbolically. Because of the nature of these worldviews as cultural constructs which have explanatory power only by common consensus, they are subject to strain and potential breakdown in historical periods in which socioeconomic conditions change dramatically or in which alternative worldviews arise to challenge the uniqueness of the dominant construction of reality. In such periods of sociohistorical stress, cultural worldviews may undergo “fundamental alterations or recombinations” of their constructions of symbolic immortality in order to maintain their efficacy, a process which Lifton refers to as “the symbolizing treadmill.”¹⁰¹ If the historical stress is severe enough, worldviews that are unable to resymbolize in this way may undergo a process of collapse, or “desymbolization.” In such cases, adherents of the desymbolized worldview may

¹⁰¹ Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1979), 284–85.

experience pronounced anxiety over death, since the worldview no longer performs its buffering function. My analysis has suggested that the broad socioeconomic pressures associated with the transition from monarchical Judah into the periods of Persian and then Hellenistic rule created an environment that stressed the constructions of symbolic immortality in the worldview of traditional wisdom, leading to desymbolization among some adherents of the worldview, represented by Qohelet, and competing resymbolizations among others, as evidenced by 4QInstruction and Ben Sira.

Before analyzing the alterations and recombinations of the construction of symbolic immortalities in the wisdom tradition, it has been necessary to establish that traditional Israelite wisdom did in fact allow its adherents to understand their lives as transcending death. While Proverbs 10-29 clearly offers its adherents “life” as opposed to the “death” destined for the wicked, most scholars have insisted that this distinction pertains only to the quality of life in the present and not to a distinction in the type of death-state that awaits each group after physical death. In this consensus view, both the righteous dead and the wicked dead are bound “only for the shadows of Sheol,”¹⁰² with no distinction made between the two. While I concur with the view that Proverbs 10-29 does not promise a “blessed afterlife,” having no conception of literal immortality, I have argued that it nonetheless envisions what Jon Levenson has called a “duality of death,”¹⁰³ through which the righteous are able to view themselves as transcending death while the wicked do not.

An appeal to social psychology in the form of Terror Management Theory provides a useful framework from which to analyze the symbolic buffers Proverbs 10-29 provides against death anxiety. TMT posits that death anxiety is a fundamental reality of

¹⁰² Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (SJSJ 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55.

¹⁰³ Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 81.

human existence and that one essential function of any successful cultural worldview is to provide buffers against that anxiety, allowing their adherents to view themselves as in some way transcending death. TMT, drawing on the work of psychological theorist Robert J. Lifton, demonstrates that a belief in literal immortality is only one means of effectively symbolizing death transcendence, and that death anxiety may be successfully buffered by other modes of symbolic immortality as well. Lifton categorizes these modes of symbolic immortality as (1) biological/biosocial, (2) creative, (3) natural, (4) religious, and (5) transcendent, each of which has been described in earlier chapters.¹⁰⁴ TMT suggests that the uncritical identification of a blessed afterlife as the only “real” form of death transcendence may be a culturally embedded preference of our own individualistic societies, influenced by Christian conceptions of the immortality of the soul. TMT insists that other forms of symbolic immortality have efficacy as well, warning us against a certain myopia that may at times creep into our conversations about death transcendence in ancient cultures.

Viewed in this light, the worldview of Proverbs 10-29 enables its adherents to view themselves as living in a safe and ordered world in which adherence to the values of the worldview produces predictable, positive results in life as well as the assurance that death will not be a complete termination of their connection to life, as it is for the wicked. Proverbs 10-29 offers the possibility of symbolic death transcendence in the creative mode through the survival of one’s name, which will continue to be a blessing for later generations (10:7), as well as through the positive influence a person’s instruction and righteous action may have on another, propagated then into future generations (e.g., 10:11; 11:30; 13:14). Further, Proverbs 10-29 offers symbolic death transcendence in the biological mode through the promise that one’s progeny will flourish while the offspring of the wicked wither away (e.g., 12:7; 13:22; 14:11; 17:6). Through these symbols of

¹⁰⁴ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 18–23.

death transcendence, Proverbs 10-29 provides the righteous with an effective buffer against death anxiety, allowing the sages to face death with relative equanimity, even going so far as to claim that “in the paths of righteousness, there is no death” (12:28).

By the time of the production of Proverbs 1-9, presumably sometime during the Persian Period, the worldview of traditional wisdom shows signs of strain from the presence of alternative worldviews within the culture. Drawing on experimental studies of cultural worldview defense stemming from Terror Management Theory, it is possible to identify tactics of cultural worldview defense within the symbolism of Proverbs 1-9. First, Proverbs 1-9 engages in a process of worldview exaggeration whereby it extends the claims of its tradition, symbolizing it as a timeless truth embedded in the fabric of the cosmos and employed by YHWH himself in the creation and sustenance of the world. It offers its adherents symbolic immortality in the religious mode through connection to a timeless truth, in the natural mode as playing a role in the sustenance of the cosmos, in the creative mode as transmitters of instruction, and in the biosocial mode as part of a community of sages extending indefinitely through time. Second, Proverbs 1-9 shows evidence of worldview strain in its derogation of alternative worldviews and its characterization of them as leading inexorably toward death. It symbolically represents cultural worldview violators as “sinners” (חטאים; 1:10-19), a “man speaking perversities” (איש מדבר תהפכות; 2:12-15), a strange woman (אשה זרה) who seduces unwary young men into Sheol (7:1-27) and “Woman Folly” (אשת כסילות), whose guests are among the dead (9:13-18). In these ways, Proverbs 1-9 protects itself against cultural worldview violators by claiming for itself “an exclusive and incontestable claim to the symbolization of immortality.”¹⁰⁵ Though under strain, in these ways Proverbs 1-9 manages to remain a functional cultural worldview, providing its adherents with a sense of symbolic immortality in the face of competing worldviews.

¹⁰⁵ Lifton, *The Broken Connection*, 298.

The same cannot be said of the worldview of Qohelet, which appears to have completely desymbolized, offering its adherents no possibility of symbolic death transcendence. The collapse of the traditional modes of symbolic death transcendence leaves Qohelet with no alternative but to view the death of the righteous as being in no way distinct from the death of the foolish, since both ultimately result in a complete termination of life, leaving the deceased no connection whatsoever to the living. Qohelet frames his quest for some lasting connection to life in terms of “profit” (יתרון 1:3), but ultimately concludes that there is no possibility of יתרון since “everything is vaporous” (הכל הבל; 1:2; 12:8). My analysis suggests that Qohelet reaches this conclusion on the basis of his testing of the various modes of symbolic death transcendence offered to him by the traditional worldview of Proverbs and his broader culture. Because of the failure of human memory, the unreliability of future generations, the alienation of humankind from the inner workings of the cosmos, and the capriciousness of the deity, the wise person dies just like the fool” (ימות החכם עם־הכסיל). While it is sometimes argued that Qohelet has concluded that “the threat of death rendered every conceivable bonus in life utterly meaningless” for Qohelet,¹⁰⁶ my analysis has suggested that the opposite is true: the failure of the traditional modes of symbolic immortality has rendered death utterly threatening for him.

Viewing the book of Qohelet as the product of a desymbolized worldview opens up new interpretive possibilities for the book. Terror Management Theory enables us to consider how people are likely to respond when their cultural buffers against death anxiety have been weakened and how different kinds of coping mechanisms that can develop in the place of such cultural buffers. TMT demonstrates a particular affinity with Qohelet in that research suggests that both enjoyment and close personal relationships

¹⁰⁶ James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 242.

have been shown to provide a temporary buffer against death anxiety even when the cultural worldview has been weakened. I have argued that this analysis from TMT may help account for the relationship between death and enjoyment in Qohelet's thought. Each instance in which Qohelet offers a commendation of enjoyment follows directly upon a reflection on either the impossibility of death transcendence, the incursion of mimetic death into life, or both. Thus, enjoyment appears to serve for Qohelet as a final line of defense against life itself being completely overwhelmed by death. Personal relationships may serve a similar function for him. Finally, Robert J. Lifton's studies of people living in desymbolized cosmologies provide insight into two other puzzling aspects of Qohelet's thought. First, Lifton shows that those who have no available symbols of death transcendence may come to view their own individual death as being equivalent to the death of the world itself. Qohelet appears to express a similar view in the closing poem of his book in 12:1-7. Second, Lifton argues that persons living in a desymbolized cosmology may function simultaneously from two worldviews, the traditional one, which remains partially internalized, as well as a new one, which may be skeptical of the claims of the traditional view. This position lends support to Michael Fox's claim that Qohelet "continues to straddle two views of reality, wavering uncomfortably but honestly between them."¹⁰⁷ I have argued that the emergence of death anxiety in the book of Qohelet suggests that the transition to the Ptolemaic Period placed significant strain on the cultural worldview of traditional wisdom, which had already exhibited signs of stress during the Persian Period, as evidenced in Proverbs 1-9. The impairment of symbols of death transcendence in the book of Qohelet suggests that the worldview had collapsed entirely for at least some of its adherents. How broadly the collapse expressed by Qohelet was experienced by other adherents of the tradition is

¹⁰⁷ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 134.

difficult to say given the lack of textual evidence. However, that the book of Qohelet was popular enough within the tradition to have been preserved and updated suggests that his experience resonated at least somewhat broadly among adherents of the worldview. It is also significant that the wisdom texts produced within the century or so following Qohelet do not simply replicate the worldview of traditional wisdom but give evidence of a significant resymbolization taking place within the wisdom tradition as a whole. While it is unlikely that Qohelet represents a collapse of the wisdom tradition as a whole, as was sometimes argued in scholarship of the last century, it does seem to be the case that the circumstances that led to the collapse of wisdom in Qohelet also evoked a process of resymbolization in the wisdom tradition more broadly.

An examination of 4QInstruction and Ben Sira, two roughly contemporary wisdom texts composed in the first half of the second century B.C.E., suggests that the nature of the resymbolization of the wisdom tradition taking place during this period was pluriform. Both texts appear to be actively reconfiguring modes of symbolic immortality in ways that account for the types of problems expressed in Qohelet. For instance, both find ways to circumvent the problem of human memory, both connect their adherents to a biosocial group with special status before God, both render the cosmos ordered and intelligible, and both restore a close connection between their addressees and the realm of the transcendent. However, in order to do so, the two texts appeal to radically different symbol systems, with 4QInstruction turning primarily to apocalyptic motifs in its resymbolization while Ben Sira draws from Torah traditions as well as Greek and Egyptian thought.

These two competing resymbolizations of the wisdom tradition being generated in the same period caution against overly schematic conclusions that the wisdom tradition following Qohelet moved from “locative” to “utopian” cosmologies¹⁰⁸ or from an

¹⁰⁸ Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (SBLDS 170; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 253–59.

“earthly” to an “otherworldly” focus.¹⁰⁹ Certainly 4QInstruction represents a resymbolization of the wisdom tradition that is utopian and other-worldly. It proposes a fundamental distinction between its own addressees, who are among “the spiritual people” and the rest of humankind, who belong to the “fleshly spirit.” It envisions a period of eschatological judgment in which wickedness itself will be destroyed. Most notably, it offers its adherents the possibility of literal immortality and a place among the angels after death. However, Ben Sira resymbolizes the wisdom tradition in a profoundly locative way, grounding its symbols of death transcendence in the long chain of Israelite ancestors, God’s covenant with the people of Israel, God’s presence in the Temple and the priesthood, and the wisdom of God revealed in the Torah.

The overall picture that emerges from this study suggests that the worldview of Hebrew wisdom underwent a marked transformation between the monarchical period and the early Hellenistic period with regard to its capacity to provide its adherents with functional symbols of death transcendence. The broad socioeconomic flux associated with the onset of the Persian and early Hellenistic periods impaired traditional symbols of death transcendence, including the preservation of one’s name in human memory, the persistence of one’s biological line, and the positive effect of one’s teaching and righteous actions on future generations. While this period of historical transition stressed the worldview considerably, causing its collapse for at least some of its adherents, it ultimately resulted in the creative reconfigurations of the tradition in Ben Sira and 4QInstruction, better adapted to new historical circumstances. While the symbolizing treadmill would inevitably move on, for a time symbolic immortality had been restored.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 274.

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