

STOICISM AND ANTI-STOICISM IN QOHELETH

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It is a distinct pleasure to submit this comparative and linguistic study to a volume in honor of Shlomo Dov Goitein whose scholarly work did so much to illumine the life of Jewish communities in the Arab world. The present study seeks to probe the impact of one particular Hellenistic philosophy on a Jewish intellectual of the third century B.C.E. whose work was destined to become part of the sacred scripture of his own people as well as of the people of a daughter religion.

Over fifty years ago Galling (1932, p. 276) identified four main questions among researchers in Qoheleth:

(1) How should one read the theme of the book and understand its arrangement? (2) Are the "I-sayings" signs of an autobiography, and can they be coordinated with "historical allusions"? (3) Do there exist connections between Qoheleth's wisdom and the wisdom literature of the ancient near East? and (4) Has Greek philosophy been worked into the book? (My translation)

By and large the same basic questions have continued to dominate in the research since Galling. A fairly thorough survey of research on Qoheleth by James Crenshaw may be found in a recent issue of the *Hebrew Annual Review* (1983, pp. 41–56). Accordingly, a selective update in response to the questions in Galling's earlier essay may serve as an introduction to the present inquiry.

(1) On the issue of arrangement, Zimmerli (1974) has convincingly shown there is a greater coherence among the various sentences than Galling was inclined to accept; Loader (1979) has identified "polarities" within the book and has demonstrated its dynamic unity on the basis of their presence, whereas Wright (1968) and Murphy (1981) have focused on key phrases as a means of establishing its formal unity. Braun (1973, pp. 165, 179), Hengel (1974, vol. 1, p. 115; vol. 2, p. 77, n. 2) and others have continued to see in the book a work akin to the Stoic-Cynic diatribe. Some have seen only part of the work to be a "royal fiction"

(Braun, 1973, p. 163; Loader, 1979, pp. 19–20), whereas others have argued that the entire work should be viewed as a “royal testament” (Loretz, 1964, p. 161; von Rad, 1970, pp. 292–293; Crenshaw, 1981, p. 141). On the issue of theme, Gordis rightly observed: “any restatement becomes a distortion” (1971, p. 125). Gordis, in conjunction with rabbinic and medieval Jewish authorities, sees the basic theme of the book to be *simhā*, the enjoyment of life (1971, p. 131); Crenshaw, on the other hand, identifies five major convictions of our author (death, limits of wisdom, unknowability of God, perversity in the world and limited commendation of pleasure), but focuses on his skepticism and loss of trust in God (1981, pp. 128–144, 190–211). Hengel (1974, vol. 1, p. 126) similarly sees a conjoining of themes (joy, the course of time and the inescapability of death, with the latter occupying “the central point of his thought”). On the other hand, arguments against pressing Qoheleth into a pessimistic or fatalistic mode are given by Loretz (1964, pp. 247–277), Zimmerli (1962, pp. 134–139)¹ and Terrien (1978, pp. 373–380).² In contrast to Gordis and Terrien, Lauha (1978, *passim*) is inclined to press the more pessimistic assessment of the theme of the work.

(2) In addition to the royal fiction or royal testament and self-discourse (=Galling’s *Ich-Aussagen*), various other sub-genres have been identified. Thus, in addition, Loader further identifies the maxim, the *ṭôb* saying, the comparison, the metaphor (*sic*), the parable, the allegory, the observation, woe-saying, benediction, antilogion, rhetorical question, admonition and self-discourse (1979, pp. 18–27). On the other hand, Braun sees three main (and broader) sub-genres: meditative reflection, meditation and instruction (1973, *passim*).

There is also a marked tendency among recent critics and commentators to minimize the amount of editorial activity in the book. See, e.g., the work of Wright and Murphy. Gordis is able to affirm the essential unity of the book by reviving an older theory of the author’s use of quotations (1971, pp. 95–108); Braun sees the work as an anthology of Qoheleth’s and of old sayings in the style of popular Greek philosophy (1973, p. 166); and A. Lauha (1978, pp. 5–7) posits that only redactors were operative: R¹ was responsible for the superscription in 1:1, the introduction of the *Leitwort* in 1:2, its reappearance in 12:8, the colophon in 12:9–11 and the insertion of 1:3–11 as a prologue; to the second, orthodox redactor he assigns only 2:26a, ba; 3:17a; 5:1d; 7:26b;

1. In addition to the “Schulthemata” common to wisdom (joy, work, possession of property, wife) Zimmerli points to Qoheleth’s creation theology and God’s gift of time.

2. Terrien stresses Qoheleth’s modest doubt, theocentricity and deep faith: “In an age of the death of the gods, he was able to affirm God’s presence in silence” (p. 379).

8:12b, 13; 11:9b; and the conclusion, 12:12–14. An assessment similar, but not identical, to Lauha's is made by Crenshaw (1981, p. 146). On the different question of possible historical allusions, speculation continues (Schunck, 1959; Hengel, 1974, vol. 1, p. 130).

(3) Recent studies have been conducted in the near eastern background of the book (Loretz, 1964, pp. 57–134) and (4) on its Greek background (Braun, 1973, pp. 14–171; Hengel, 1974, vol. 1, pp. 115–128; and Lohfink, 1980, *passim*),³ as well as on its date (Whitley, 1979, pp. 123–146).⁴ It may be established that Qoheleth did not remain unaffected by gnomic utterances of the Greeks (especially those of Hesiod and Theognis), by Greek philosophical discussion (especially that of the Skeptics and Cynics) and by Greek attitudes toward nature (especially those of the Stoics). It is the purpose of the present paper to explore further the relation of Qoheleth to Stoic thought and attitudes.

Before turning to this subject, however, a word more may be said about Galling's item no. 2, namely, the significance of the "I-sayings" and the attempt to isolate the autobiographical utterances and their possible historical background. Galling (1932, pp. 280–281) rightly observed that it is impossible to differentiate the extent to which the utterances of Qoheleth reflect actual experiences of the author or past observations which accorded with his own.⁵ Moreover, Galling was correct in my judgment in following Volz (1921, p. 236) and seeing in the book of Qoheleth an autobiographical basis of the ancient sage's reflections. Even though that basis may not be clearly recoverable, we encounter in Qoheleth not simply fiction, but the flesh and blood wrestlings with doubt and agnosticism of a "son of David" who lived—probably "in Jerusalem" (Qoh 1:1).

3. Braun's list of Greek parallels is the most exhaustive assembled to date. Hengel focuses on affinities between Qoheleth and the New Comedy and Greek epitaphs. Twenty selective instances of Greek influences on Qoheleth elicited from Lohfink's commentary are conveniently listed by Crenshaw (1983, pp. 49–50).

It may be appropriate to note here that, with one or two exceptions, the affinities and parallels set forth below in this essay between Qoheleth and the Stoics from before the common era are taken from neither Braun nor Hengel nor Lohfink nor previous studies. To my knowledge the present essay also explores fresh ground in its inquiry into possible anti-Stoicism in Qoheleth.

4. Whitley argues (unsuccessfully, in my judgment) for a mid-second century B.C.E. date. For some of my reasons for this judgment, see Gordis (1971, pp. 46–50, 59–88), Hengel (1974, vol. 1, pp. 115–116) and Schunck (1959).

5. Galling (1932, pp. 280–281) said, with respect to the Solomonic fiction of the author: "Wohl steht sein Leben dahinter, aber uns nicht mehr biographisch fassbar: es eignet sich Situationen zu, die seiner jeweiligen inneren Haltung entsprechen."

In an assessment of these wrestlings it is important to keep in clear focus the tension between what appears to be the original utterances of Qoheleth and those of his more pious, less audacious and less questioning editors or glossators. This tension replicates the kind of reception Qoheleth is apt to have received from some of his pious but benevolently-minded contemporaries and successors. Orthodox glosses are to be found in Qoh 1:1 (*melek*) 2:24b–26d; 3:13, 17; 4:5–6; 7:5–12, 18–19, 26b; 8:5–6, 12–13; 9:17–18; 10:8–20; 11:9–10; 12:9–12a, 13–14. These verses should be assigned to another hand not because it is impossible that one we call Qoheleth wrote them but because their piety, vocabulary and tenor make it more likely that they come from another source. Most, but not all, of these passages identified as glosses have already been so identified by the commentators. A few comments on them therefore will suffice. Qoh 8:5–6 seems best understood as the explicit drawing out on the part of an editor of a teaching already implicit in Qoh 3:1–15. Qoheleth, in my judgment, was willing to let his hearers draw the implications of his teaching for themselves. The editor or glossator here was not content to let the implication of the master remain in its subtler fashion. Qoh 10:8–20, on the other hand, contains proverbs of a more traditional sort which Qoheleth may have assembled but probably did not himself write.

The form-critical task of differentiating between glosses and the original author is of considerable theological significance, for precisely in the glosses we may observe the disagreements and tensions which the inheritors of the text of Qoheleth felt with their predecessor.⁶ Even though it is frequently a matter over which uncertainty reigns, it is hermeneutically and theologically important for the exegete to continue to struggle with the question or probable historical date and background of the biblical utterances under review.⁷ The alternative would be to surrender to the notion that the cultural matrix in which the Scripture arose is a matter of supreme indifference. Insofar as Qoheleth is concerned, it appears most likely, on the grounds of language, priority to Sirach, and kinds of political allusions, that Qoheleth wrote during the

6. It is a great virtue of Childs (1979) that throughout he seeks to remain sensitive to the internal tensions within the respective canonical books.

7. There appears to be a growing sentiment among those scholars concerned to look at the canonical and final shape of the biblical books to relegate inquiries into historical background to a level of secondary or tertiary importance. It is fair to ask: if one allows to fall into relative neglect inquiry into historical context of the biblical traditions, will not an ignoring of the contemporary historical context in which interpretation and proclamation take place soon follow?

reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (ca. 221–204/3 B.C.E.).⁸ Even though the exegete may fall into erroneous expositions (should his or her assessment of date or background subsequently be proven to be wrong), the worse error would be to attempt to interpret with little or no reference to the relation of the biblical author to his or her own cultural environment. In any event, the present essay constitutes an investigation of one aspect of the intellectual and cultural background of Qoheleth. We turn then to an inquiry into the nature and extent of interaction that obtained between Qoheleth and the Stoics with respect to physics, logic and ethics (section I), sayings on “emptiness” and “breath” (section II), and sayings on death (section III).

I

The founder of Stoicism, Zeno (ca. 333–261 B.C.E.), son of Mnaseas (i.e., Manasseh), was a Phoenician, born in the city of Citium in Cyprus (Long, 1974, p. 109; *Diogenes Laertius* 7, 1, 3). If our dates assigned to Qoheleth are correct, the latter was a contemporary of the most prolific and influential Chrysippus, a native of Soli or Tarsus in Asia Minor who was head of the Stoic school from ca. 232 till his death in 208/4 B.C.E. (Long, 1974, p. 113). No Stoic writings from before the common era survive intact. Research is thus forced to rely on reports and quotations found in other ancient writers such as Cicero (ca. 106–43 B.C.E.: *N.D.* 2; *F.*; *P.S.* and *Diogenes Laertius* (fl. 200–220 C.E.). Fragments of Stoic authors have been conveniently gathered together by Johannes Arnim (1903–05). Methodologically it is important to distinguish between the teachings of Zeno, common Stoic belief, and the distinctive teachings of individual Stoic philosophers. Since Cicero and *Diogenes Laertius* it is common for students of Stoic philosophy to speak of Stoicism in general and to identify, where possible and desirable, separate Stoic philosophers. For historical purposes all sources must be used with caution. In inquiries such as the present one it is especially important to remain aware that those passages of Cicero, *Diogenes* and other writers who speak of Stoicism in general may contain assertions not altogether reflective of the Stoicism from Zeno to Chrysippus.

As the studies of Braun, Whitley, Hengel and others have shown, it is apparent that the writings of a number of different Greek philosophers made at least an indirect impact on Qoheleth. Thus when Qoheleth gives

8. Whitley's attempt (1979, pp. 136–137) to show Qoheleth's dependence on the Aramaic of Daniel is not convincing, and even if it were, it would not be conclusive for, as is widely acknowledged, the Aramaic stories of Daniel come from before the Battle of Paneas in ca. 200 B.C.E.

some prominence to the problem of pain (*mak^cδb*) and vexation (*ka^cas*) as he does in the opening chapters of his book (1:18; 2:23), he is focusing also on a major problem of concern to Epicurus.⁹ Even the cluster of alternative solutions which Qoheleth puts forth, of eating and drinking and finding pleasure in toil (Qoh 5:17–19) seem to be mirrored in Epicurean maxims on the pursuit of pleasure with moderation.¹⁰ Similarly, in Qoheleth's affirmation that God has placed severe limits on the extent of human knowledge (Qoh 3:11), he displays a deep affinity with skeptical philosophers such as Arcesilaus (ca. 318–242 B.C.E.), who rigorously attacked the Stoic notion that accurate apprehension was possible.¹¹ As will be seen below, Qoheleth also had an affinity with certain other positions of the Cynical philosophers.

That Qoheleth shares with Greek philosophy presuppositions concerning the make-up of the physical world is apparent from the opening chapter, for he alludes therein to the four primal elements which featured so largely in pre-Socratic and subsequent Greek cosmology: earth (v. 4), fire (=sun, v. 5), air (*rūah*: v. 6), water (v. 7). Of the pre-Socratic philosophers Qoheleth shows affinities with Anaximander (fl. 546 B.C.E.), who perceived the world to have evolved out of the rotary motion of a vortex, perhaps with Anaximenes (ca. 550–500 B.C.E.) who perceived the primal element to be air-vapor, and especially with Heraclitus (fl. 500 B.C.E.), whose doctrine of opposites (day-night, summer-winter, war-peace: Fragment 121 = Diels Fr. 67; Wheelwright, 1964, pp. 102, 106) finds a remarkable echo in the famous fourteen opposites of Qoh 3:1–8.

Stoic philosophy is divided into three interrelated branches: physics, logic and ethics. Even though there is a similarity between Stoic assertions on the circular motion of air (cf. Qoh 1:6 and *SVF* 2. 596), there is a sophistication in Zeno and Chrysippus not found in Qoheleth, on the arrangement of the elements (in spherical tiers) and on the stability of the universe derived from the balance of the pair of light elements (Fire and Air) with the pair of heavy elements (Earth and Water) (cf. *SVF* 1. 99 and 2. 555). Similarly, Qoheleth's teaching that the generations

9. For a balanced treatment of Epicurus (ca. 341–270 B.C.E.) on pleasure and pain, see Long (1974, pp. 61–69).

10. "Simple tastes give us pleasure equal to a rich man's diet when all pain of want has been removed. . . . [I]t is not in drinking and continuous parties nor sexual pleasures nor enjoyment of fish and other delicacies of a wealthy table which produce the pleasant life, but sober reasoning which searches out the causes of every act of choice and refusal and which banishes the opinions that give rise to the greatest mental confusion. . . . Of sources of pleasures, the starting-point and the greatest good is prudence." (*Letter of Epicurus to Menoecus*, pp. 130–132), cited by Long (pp. 65, 67, 69).

11. For a discussion of the skepticism of Arcesilaus, see Long (1974, pp. 88–94).

come and go “but the earth remains” (lit. “stands”: Qoh 1:4) appears to be close to a teaching attributed by Cicero (*N.D.* 2. 26) to the Stoics: *quia et recidunt omnia in terras et oriuntur e terris* (“because all things both fall back to the earth and arise from the earth”). The Stoics, however, developed an eschatology unlike anything found in Qoheleth. For the Stoics the world was perishable (*phthartos*; *DL* 7. 141) and would come to an end in a great conflagration (*ekpyrōsis*) similar to the one taught by Heraclitus.¹² Thus Chrysippus taught that not Earth is the element which persists forever, but Fire (*SVF* 2. 413). Further, as noted, Fire and Air are combined into *pneuma* (=“wind, spirit or gas”).¹³ Different proportions of the blending or mixtures of Fire and Air account for the differences between soul of the animal, plant, stone, etc. (*SVF* 2. 716). Apart from Qoh 3:19–21 it does not seem evident that much of this conceptualization inheres in Qoheleth’s understanding of *rūah* or *hebel*.

A major feature of Stoic physics is the notion of causation. All things are determined by the active principle which bears various labels: *pneuma*, universal *logos*, uncreated and imperishable Nature, and God.¹⁴ A distinction is drawn between a principal and perfect cause, on the one hand, and proximate or auxiliary causes, on the other (Cicero, *De Fato* 18. 41–42). The operation of the principal and perfect cause, which some of the Stoics also call Fate, is comparable to Qoheleth’s understanding of divine causation (Qoh 3:11; 7:13). For Chrysippus human response to the principal cause was not determined. The principal cause makes an impression on a person as an agricultural roller impresses the earth, but the nature of the response to the impression is up to the individual. Stoic physics and ethics thus leave room for diversity of human response within the framework of a determinism. Similarly, Qoheleth assigns a primacy to the divine causation but allows, as in the catalogue of seasons (Qoh 3:1–8), that there are some things over which human beings do have control, such as the decision of when to plant, when to weed, when to embrace and when to refrain from embracing, when to keep and when to cast away (vv. 2b, 5b, 6). For Qoheleth as well a superior and divine causation is operative (Qoh 3:9–15), but this does not altogether nullify or cancel out human initiative.

12. For further discussion on this subject, see Hahn (1977, pp. 185–199, 260–266).

13. Long suggests that the best translation of the Stoic *pneuma* is “gas” (1974, p. 156).

14. See Long (1974, pp. 163–170) and Sambursky (1959, chs. 1–2) for further discussion. An important aspect of Stoic physics is its notion that tension (*tonos*) is innate to air and fire endowing them with cohesion; see Sambursky (1959), pp. 5, 25).

Even though the determinism in Qoheleth and the Stoics is not unqualified, the cyclical, repetitive nature of events in both is equally plain. Thus Qoheleth can say:

What has been is what will be,
 and what has been done is what will be done;
 and there is nothing new under the sun.
 Is there a thing of which it is said,
 "See, this is new"?
 It has been already,
 in the ages before us. (Qoh 1:9–10: RSV)

This teaching is echoed in the following more philosophical, Stoical reflection:

If there could be any man who perceived the linking of all causes nothing would ever deceive him. For whoever grasps the causes of future events must grasp everything which will be. . . . The passage of time is like the unwinding of a rope, bringing about nothing new. (*SVF* 2. 944; tr. Long)

Logic, the second main branch of the Stoic philosophy, was fully developed by Chrysippus (see esp. Mates, 1953). This branch includes not only what we today call logic but also other disciplines having to do with the *logos* (i.e., word, speech or reason) such as rhetoric and grammar. Qoheleth remains by and large untouched by Stoic logic. He does, however, employ the form of the Stoic diatribe, including the rhetorical question (2:2, 15, 19, 25; 3:9, 21, 22; 4:5, 11; 5:10 [Engl. 5:11]; 6:8 [*bis*], 11:12 [*bis*]; 7:13, 16, 17; 8:1 [*bis*], 4, 7; 10:10, 14) and, as we shall see below, Qoheleth also fully explores the connotations of key terms such as did Stoic philosophers of language (see esp. *DL* 7. 62).

Stoic ethics sharply distinguishes between the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad. Although such a marked dichotomy is to be found especially clearly in the glosses to the book of Qoheleth (e.g., 2:26; 3:17; 4:5; 7:9; 8:12–13; 9:17–18; 10:12–15; 12:14), it is also found in Qoheleth proper (e.g., 2:14–17; 4:13; 6:8; 7:4; 7:15; 8:14; 9:1–2; 10:1–2). Further, the observation of Qoheleth that he knows the beauty of the seasons (Qoh 3:11) is remarkably close to the Stoic understanding of the wise man: "The sage is defined by his moral expertise. He knows infallibly what should be done in each situation of life and takes every step to do it at the right time and in the right way" (so Long, 1974, p. 205). Thus an important characteristic of the Stoic sage is "timely behavior". One recent study has put it: "Good timing [is] the point at which the process of a man's action meets and coincides with those events which are the results of a series of causes called Fate" (Tsekourakis, 1971, pp. 91–92; cited by Long, 1974, p. 206).

The relative value of wisdom in Qoheleth (cf. Qoh 1:16–18; 2:9–14; 7:2–4)¹⁵ is approximated but not matched in Stoic philosophy for, on the one hand, knowledge is a pure or simple good (*DL* 7. 98) and, on the other hand, ordinary learning or education is said to be both serviceable (*DL* 7. 129) and unserviceable (*DL* 7. 32). Qoheleth nowhere extols without qualification the value of knowledge and wisdom.

Envy in Stoic ethics is one of several species of forms (*eidē*) of grief (*lypē*: *DL* 7. 111) whereas in Qoheleth envy is rather sardonically (and not altogether negatively) viewed as a prime source of human toil and effort (*kišrôn*, lit. “profit, prosperity”: Qoh 4:4). Joy in Stoic ethics is viewed as something transitory, like a walking exercise, whereas the virtues are considered to be abiding (*DL* 7. 98). Qoheleth similarly regards joy as transitory, but he nonetheless enjoins the pursuit of it as a relative good bestowed on humankind by God as its lot (Qoh 5:17–19, Engl. 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:9).

Zeno, who was said to have been “concise of speech” (*brachylogos*), chided his pupil Ariston for discoursing at length (*DL* 7. 18). The incident is reminiscent of Qoheleth’s “God is in heaven, you are on earth; therefore let your words be few” (Qoh 5:2, Engl. 5:3). The valuation of brevity, however, is too widespread in Israelite and ancient near eastern wisdom, as well as in Greek philosophy, to argue convincingly in favor of a direct influence in this instance. Similarly, there is an association in Stoicism between folly and madness (see esp. Cicero, *P.S.* 4: “every foolish person is mad”). This teaching is echoed in Qoheleth where folly (*siklût*) and madness (*hōllēlôt*) are also linked together (Qoh 2:12; 7:25; 10:13). The association, however, is not sufficiently specific to permit any claim of direct influence.

The discussion above has pointed to similarities and some differences between Qoheleth and the physics and ethics of the Stoics. Inquiry may now be made into the extent of the affinity between Stoicism and the sayings of Qoheleth on “vanity” and death.

II

Two areas in the investigation in which the Stoics made significant and lasting advances were in grammar and the nature of language.¹⁶ As Long (1974, p. 138) puts it: “They recognized and named the five inflections of Greek nouns and adjectives, and the terms they used

15. For an excellent treatment of Qoheleth’s attitude toward wisdom and its relative value, see Loader (1979, *passim*).

16. For an assessment, see Long, 1974, pp. 131–139.

(nominative, accusative, etc.) have become canonical. Equally noteworthy is their analysis of tenses. Here too they fixed the terms which we use (present, perfect, etc.) analysing verbs as a means of signifying different temporal relations." An example of Stoic inquiry into language relevant for this paper may be seen in the following description of Stoic theory found in Diogenes Laertius:

Verbal ambiguity arises when a word properly, rightly, and in accordance with fixed usage denotes two or more different things, so that at one and the same time we may take it in several distinct senses: e.g., in Greek, where by the same verbal expression (*aulē tris peptōke*) may be meant in one case that "'A house three times' has fallen": in the other that "'A dancing girl' has fallen" (*DL* 7. 62; tr. Loeb, slightly modified).

It cannot be demonstrated conclusively that Stoic theory of language affected Qoheleth. It can be, and has been, demonstrated, however, that in the instance of the thematic word *hebel* Qoheleth the author was not only aware of the variety of its connotations but drew upon them all.¹⁷ Seybold (1974, col. 336) identified the following primary connotations.

Insofar as range of meaning (*Wortfeld*) is concerned, it is closest to *riq* "empty" (Isa 30:7), *tōhū* "emptiness, nothingness" (Isa 49:4), *šeqer* "lie" (Jer 10:14; Zech 10:2; Prov 31:30), *ʔāwen* "delusion, illusion, fraud" and its respective parallels: *šāw* "lie, falsehood" (Zech 10:2), *lōʔ yôʕil* "to have no worth, to be good for nothing" (Isa 30:6; 57:12; Jer 16:19, cp. Lam 4:17) and above all *rūah* (Isa 57:13; Jer 10:14; Qoh 1:14 etc.). Indeed, of the range of meaning of *rūah* (1) "wind, breath, storm", (2) "breath of life" (cp. *nēšāmā*), (3) "spirit, *animus*", (4) "Spirit of God", *hebel* includes only a part (i.e. 1 and 2). Accordingly, *rūah* seldom occurs with the same or similar function as *hebel* (e.g., Ps 135:17; Job 7:7; Isa 26:18; 41:29; Mic 2:11; Job 20:3; 15:2; 16:3; Jer 5:13; Qoh 5:15). Indeed *hebel* as a whole, having its own peculiar emotive sense, diverges in meaning from *rūah*.

Insofar as Qoheleth is concerned, it seems to me that Seybold has overstated the distance between *hebel* and *rūah*. In seven instances the word *hebel* is followed by the phrase *wūrēʕūt rūah* (Qoh 1:14; 2:11; 17, 26; 4:4; 6:9) or *wēraʕyôn rūah* (Qoh 4:16), i.e., a "chasing, grasping after, shepherding or herding of the wind". *Hebel* may be translated as

17. Seybold in his article on "*hebel*" (1974, col. 340) says: "[Of Old Testament authors] Qoheleth makes the most distinctive use of *hebel*. Its 38 occurrences prove the *Leitmotiv* character of the word (see Loretz 1964, pp. 169 ff.). A comparison with its use elsewhere makes it plain that Qoheleth knew and used the entire range of meaning (*Schwingkreis*)." In the present essay we seek to set forth a sampling of Qoheleth's usage of the term to demonstrate the correctness of Seybold's assertion.

“(transitory) breath” (so KB; see the LXX of Aquila at Qoh 9:9: *atmos*) or “vanity” (see LXX *mataiotēs*) or “emptiness” (so NEB). It is apparent that the author of Qoheleth intends to stress in the passages where *hebel* is linked with *rēʿûl/raʿyôn rūah* the “incomprehensible, ungraspable” nature of his quest for meaning. Further, *hebel*, like breath or vapor is “fleeting, short-lived, elusive”, and hence “soon gone”. Thus in a number of passages any one of the aforementioned adjectives would be fairly accurate renderings (e.g., Qoh 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8, 16; 5:9; 12:8). This is especially so where the Hebrew *hebel* with a suffix is used as an adjective (6:12; 7:15; 9:9). By way of illustration, the following translation of Qoh 11:8b would best seem to capture the author’s meaning: “Remember the days of darkness, that they will be many, (for) everything which comes is soon gone (*hebel*).”

The translation of *hebel* as “incomprehensible, ungraspable, beyond grasping (i.e., unanswerable)” is especially appropriate where the author poses rhetorical questions the answers to which are beyond his powers to reach with a firm conclusion. As examples, see:

The eyes of the wise man are in his head and the fool walks in darkness, but I also know what the one fate is which will happen to them all. And I said in my mind it will also happen to me as it happens to the fool and why then have I been wise? Do I have an advantage? And I said in my mind: This is another instance which is *hebel* [i.e., beyond grasping] (Qoh 2:14–15).

And who knows whether it will be a wise man or a fool who will rule in all my toil with which I have toiled and in which I have been wise under the sun? This also is *hebel* [i.e., beyond grasping] (Qoh 2:19; see also 2:17 and 6:11 where the same meaning for *hebel* seems appropriate.)

In at least one instance “breath” or “dark breath” is required by the context as a rendering for *hebel*: “For with a (dark) breath he [i.e., a man] comes and into darkness he shall go, and with darkness his name shall be covered” (Qoh 6:4).¹⁸ Sufficient examples have thus been cited to show that the author is indeed fully cognizant of the range of the meaning of *hebel* and seeks to exploit it.¹⁹ It may now be asked whether or not we may see in Qoheleth’s *Leitmotif* on *hebel* any dialogue with Stoicism.

18. Seybold renders this verse similarly, and correctly in my judgment (1974, col. 340). Loader (1979, p. 82) translates: “Its coming is in emptiness”; NEB: “Its coming is an empty thing”; RSV: “For it comes into vanity.” All three miss the positive meaning of *hebel* as “breath.” Qoheleth’s frequent citations of Genesis 1–4 confirm this reading.

19. Ceresko (1982) has shown Qoheleth’s play upon the wide semantic range of yet another word, *mys*.²

The Stoics taught in their cosmology that an infinite “void” or “emptiness” (*kenon*) surrounded the spherical shaped universe (*SVF* 2. 535, 539). In their catalogue of dialectical virtues necessary for the good life they listed *amataiotēs*, literally “lack of emptiness”, or “lack of emptyheadedness”, as Long (1978, pp. 101–124, esp. p. 108) translates. It is conceivable that in the selection of his theme, Qoheleth chose to latch on to a notion which would readily be seen by his contemporaries knowledgeable in Greek philosophy to be counter to Stoicism and more in accord with the Cynics and Skeptics of the Academy. The closest parallel to Qoheleth’s refrain “All is *hebel*” is attributed to the Cynic philosopher Monimus (4th century B.C.E.) who, according to the comic poet Menander, said: “Everything grasped [by humans] is a delusion” (lit. “mist”: *typhos*, *DL* 6. 83). That Qoheleth might be deliberately anti-Stoic in his assertions receives some confirmation by the appearance in his work of another favorite refrain: “a grasping after the wind.” In early Stoic epistemology knowledge takes place with *katalēpsis* (lit. “a grasping”) of an impression caused by external objects.²⁰ Zeno illustrated his theory of knowledge with a homey example of an open hand, a partly closed hand, a clenched fist and one hand grasping the clenched fist. “Grasping” he said is like the third illustration and “knowledge” like the fourth (*SVF* 1. 66; Long, 1974, p. 126; Cicero, *A.* 2.145). In contrast to Stoic teaching Qoheleth, who aligns himself with the Cynics and Skeptics, is rather asserting: everything is ungraspable, a grasping after wind.

III

Stoic philosophy is perhaps closest to Qoheleth in its affirmation of the operation of a universal *logos*, cosmic nature or God. In Stoicism the capacities with which a human being is born are understood to be “the gift of destiny”, i.e., cosmic Nature (*SVF* 2. 991; see Long, 1974, p. 168). For Qoheleth the capacity for joy is a gift from God (Qoh 3:13–14; 5:18–19; Engl. 5:19–20). Similarly, for the Stoics, human beings can control their attitudes to happenings caused by fate, but they can do virtually nothing to alter its operation (*SVF* 2. 957; cf. Cicero, *F.* 18). As a dog tied to a wagon which is being pulled in front of him may follow willingly or unwillingly, so it is with human beings.²¹ So also for Qoheleth the human being is powerless to alter the work of God (Qoh

20. For helpful discussions of the development of this subject, see Long (1974, pp. 123–131; 1978, pp. 101–124), F. H. Sandbach (1971, and Von Staden (1978). (I am indebted to my colleague, Christopher Hernandez, for the last mentioned reference.)

21. This famous illustration is attributed to both Zeno and Chrysippus (*SVF* 2. 975). For a discussion, see Stough (1978).

3:14; 7:13). In another respect Qoheleth is similar to the Stoics, namely, in his view of death as something given, as a part in an overall pattern of life which has its appropriate and even beautiful time (Qoh 3:2, 11; see also Benz, 1929, and Crenshaw, 1978). The Stoics, however, were more consistent (and accepting) in their attitude toward death than Qoheleth was. It will be worthwhile to examine some of the reasons which underlie this divergency.

At least six reasons may be put forward to explain why Qoheleth and the Stoics, on the one hand, are in such concord in their view of death as something given, and on the other hand, so markedly different. First, even though both the Stoics and Qoheleth differentiate between the sage and the foolish, the virtuous (or righteous) and the wicked (cf. Qoh 7:4–5, 14 and Cicero, *P.S.*, *passim*), the Stoic canons of excellence for the sage and virtuous man to attain were so lofty that, as Long (1974, p. 207) put it, “Stoic philosophers themselves did not pass the examination and knew of none who had done so.” Qoheleth has a similar teaching: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Qoh 7:20), but Qoheleth obviously does not distance himself psychologically from the wise and the righteous (see esp. 2:14–15). He rather presupposes that he is among them. Otherwise it is difficult to explain why he is so galled that “one fate” (*miqreh ʿehād* = death) awaits both wise and foolish (Qoh 2:14–19; 9:1–6).

Second, there is nowhere to be found in Qoheleth a teaching comparable to the Stoic doctrine of the equality of sin. In this doctrine one falsehood is not more false than another, one deceit is not more deceitful than another and one sin is not more sinful than another (*DL* 7. 120; Cicero, *P.S.* 3). The practical effect of this doctrine is virtually to remove from consideration a comparison between wise and foolish, good and wicked, on any other than a theoretic plane. “In Stoic ethics a miss is as good as a mile” (Long, 1974, p. 207). Long (1974, p. 204) explains: “The minute element of disharmony present in a man who has nearly reached the top is sufficient to disqualify anything that he does from the accolade of virtue.”²² In contrast, see Qoh 7:16, a passage out of which scholars have never known quite what to make: “Be not righteous overmuch and do not make yourself overwise.”²³ Regardless of our uncertainty as to the precise meaning of this verse, it is plain that

22. For an even more detailed discussion of the Stoic doctrine that all sins are equal, see Rist (1969, pp. 81–96). Rist seeks to make this difficult doctrine more understandable by relating it to Stoic physics and the doctrine of tensional movement.

23. For a helpful discussion on this enigmatic passage, see Whybray (1978). Whybray argues convincingly that Qoheleth is not commending here a golden mean but warning against self-righteousness and pretentiousness in wisdom.

Qoheleth is not commending without qualification a counsel of perfection such as the one espoused by the Stoics. Further, for Qoheleth the difference between righteous and wicked was not only a matter about which distinctions could be made in theory; the differences for him were real, and sufficiently observable so that when death seemed to cancel out the differences, it troubled him deeply.

Third, the observations of Qoheleth on human memory caused him to doubt the extent to which the wise man and fool would in fact be remembered. Both, he held, would be forgotten (Qoh 2:16; 9:5; cf. 1:11). The significance of this teaching can be seen especially clearly when it is contrasted with Stoic optimism that the praise and fame of those who strove for good would not perish. Cicero (*P.S.* 2. 18) eloquently records it: "*Mors terribilis est eis quorum cum vita omnia exstinguuntur, non eis quorum laus emori non potest*" ("Death is terrible for those for whom all things are extinguished upon losing life but not for those the praise of whom cannot be put to death"). In denying that remembrance of the wise would endure, is it possible that Qoheleth is deliberately denying more optimistic affirmations such as those made by the Stoics? To this question we shall return.

Fourth, in Stoic ethics (on which see our fifth reason below), as in the orthodox, Israelite sapiential teaching (see Proverbs 10–15), the righteous would be rewarded and the wicked would be punished. Thus the Stoics (Cicero *P.S.* 2. 19) asserted: "Whereas there can be no well-being for any wicked, foolish or idle person, so it is impossible for any good and brave and wise man to be miserable." Qoheleth, however, protested; for him such was the case neither in life (Qoh 6:1–5; 9:11) nor in death (Qoh 6:6; 7:15; 9:12).²⁴ He simply does not accept the notion that virtue is its own reward and vice its own punishment. Such teaching is incipient in the biblical wisdom literature from the Psalms through Proverbs and Job. It is a teaching not far below the surface of some of the maxims collected by Qoheleth (see Qoh 10:8–11). Qoheleth stops short, however, of exploring this idea. That accomplishment fell to Sirach a generation later who developed it most fully in Sirach 14:3–10 (see Crenshaw, 1975).

Fifth, in Stoic ethical theory untoward events were interpreted optimistically because they were viewed not from the limited perspective of the *part*, but from the more universal perspective of the *whole* (see Long,

24. That Qoheleth protested, like the author of the book of Job, the inadequacies of the orthodox Israelite doctrine of retribution is widely known and has been written on at length. See, e.g., Rankin (1954, pp. 93–97), Rylaarsdam (1946, pp. 74–98) and Tsevat (1966).

1974, pp. 169–174). Qoheleth's avowal that the divine workings are past searching out (3:11) seems to cut short his probings in that direction. Even though the divine has implanted *hā^cōlām* in the human mind, precisely because of human lack of knowledge, it would seem, Qoheleth does not invite his readers to observe the passing human scene *sub specie aeternitatis*, nor does he urge that they assume the perspective of a higher good (such as is found, e.g., in Romans 8:35–39). Thus, Qoheleth does acknowledge that death is but a part of an overall pattern of times and seasons ordained by God (Qoh 3:1–15; cf. 8:5), but he does not advise that one make it a matter of practice conceptually to view all events in the light of the whole.

A sixth and final reason may be given which helps to explain why Qoheleth could on the one hand come so close to a view of death compatible with Stoicism and then turn so vehemently to protest against it. As noted above, one of the three main branches of Stoic inquiry was logic. One of the requirements of logic is that one should seek to bring various parts of one's reasoning into harmony and non-contradiction with other parts (see *DL* 7. 62–83). It is evident that Qoheleth felt no such pressure to evolve a theological-philosophical system brought into consistency with the aid of logic.

Having thus set forth reasons for the divergency of Qoheleth from Stoical teaching on death despite his agreement in one important instance with it, we may now turn to inquire about the extent to which Qoheleth may or may not have been influenced by Stoics in his formulations on death.

1. Even though in one instance (Qoh 3:1–15) our author is in accord with Stoic teaching on death as part of a larger, divine pattern, no convincing case may be made to posit Stoic influence. The long-lived Stoic philosopher Cleanthes (ca. 331–232 B.C.E.) wrote a treatise *Peri chronou* ("Concerning Time": *DL* 7. 174); but in the light of the discussion of Diogenes Laertius of the Stoic conception of time as "incorporeal" and "the measure of the world's motion" (*DL* 7. 141), it is apparent that Qoheleth has drawn from different sources, less abstract, less physical and more oriented to the common occurrences of everyday life.²⁵ There are indeed far closer affinities between Qoheleth's observations on the times and seasons in Israelite sources such as Ps 1:3: "he

25. For a similar judgment on the more pragmatic nature of Qoheleth *vis à vis* Greek philosophy, see the posthumously published essay by Albright (1972, esp. pp. 234–239). (I am indebted to A. R. Ceresko for this reference.) Even though Albright favors a date for Qoheleth two centuries earlier than I, and even though he accentuates the interplay between Qoheleth and earlier Phoenician intellectual tradition more than I do, he

[the one who meditates on the law] is like a tree . . . that yields its fruit in due season” and Gen 8:22: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”²⁶

2. We have already noted that Qoheleth was in all probability a contemporary of the most prolific and influential Stoic philosopher, Chrysippus, who led the school from ca. 232 to his death in 208 B.C.E. Further, we know from Diogenes Laertius that the Stoic philosopher Sphaerus (fl. ca. 220 B.C.E.) expounded the Stoic doctrine of a “grasped impression” in the court of Ptolemy IV Philopator (*DL* 7. 177) and wrote, among other treatises, *Peri doxēs* (“Concerning Fame”) and *Peri thanatou* (“Concerning Death”: *DL* 7. 178). The contents of these treatises has been lost, but we may safely conclude that in at least a few instances the writings of Sphaerus developed his subject along the lines indicated above. Whether or not Qoheleth had direct knowledge of Sphaerus’ treatises is beyond our ability to establish. We may take it as probable, however, that the educated son of David in Jerusalem was not unfamiliar with the main tenets of Stoicism as taught by Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and Sphaerus—either mediated to him directly through writings or translations thereof, or through Hebrew and Aramaic renditions of excerpts carried to him in correspondence from compatriots—most likely from friends in the sizeable Jewish community in Alexandria.²⁷ Thus Qoheleth asserts that after death the remembrance (i.e., fame) of the wise will be forgotten (Qoh 2:16; 9:5; cf. 1:11). It is plausible to conjecture that Qoheleth was deliberately arguing against a known Stoic position. (For the relevant quotation, see the third reason above.)

3. Similarly it may be argued that when Qoheleth in the course of his work expresses dismay over the same fate which would befall the wise and the foolish (Qoh 2:15–17; 9:1–2), he is doing so precisely because he

considered it worthwhile to explore similarities and differences between Qoheleth and Greek intellectual development. Ceresko observed to me after having read this essay: “Some of his [Albright’s] remarks touch on topics you do in surprisingly similar ways.”

26. For citations of possible Egyptian sources of Qoh 3:14, see Loretz (1964, pp. 66–69).

27. On the sizeable Jewish population in Alexandria, see esp. Tcherikover (1959) and Hengel (1974, vol. 1, pp. 6–57).

The presence of a form of Stoicism among influential persons at the court of the Ptolemies dates back at least to Ptolemy III Euergetes (ca. 247–221 B.C.E.). Eratosthenes (ca. 276–194 B.C.E.), the eminent chronographer and head of the library at Alexandria, had been a pupil of Ariston of Chios, the hybrid Stoic-Cynic, as well as of Arcesilaus, the Skeptic. The head librarians were, as a matter of course, tutors of the crown prince. See Peters (1970, pp. 116, 194, 377) and especially Fraser (1972, vol. 1, pp. 480, 485).

has refused to ingest the lofty Stoic definition of the good man and the more theoretic Stoic doctrine of sin that no sin is worse than another. (For discussion see the first and second reasons above.)

Conclusions: In the discussion above in this section we have set forth reasons why Qoheleth ended up espousing a different attitude and stance toward death than the Stoics even though he was in agreement with them on one respect, *viz.*, that it was a part of a larger pattern. In three counts, as we have shown, the differences may plausibly be seen not simply as differences but as deliberate, anti-Stoical arguments.

The present inquiry has thus examined the subject of certain affinities between Stoicism and Qoheleth. We may conclude that the Stoics, along with other Hellenistic philosophies, had an impact on the ancient Israelite sage, not only in specific teachings of divine causation, the cyclical nature of events, the relative value of education/wisdom, etc., but also in form of argumentation and, because of its advanced philosophy of language, possibly also in making Qoheleth more sensitive to the range of connotations in his use of terms such as *hebel*. In Qoheleth's reflections on death the influence of Stoicism is less traceable, yet even here his stance appears to be deliberately anti-Stoic as it also does with respect to the sage, sin, enduring fame, and the possibility of firmly grasping knowledge or impressions.

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