The value of the present moment in the book of Qohelet

The book of Qohelet contains a sophisticated and for the Hebrew Bible strikingly explicit discourse on the temporal conditions governing man's life. Within the book's discourse on time the present moment occupies a central position, suggested in several places as a potential venue to attaining meaning within an otherwise problematic human existence.

Accordingly, scholarly readings generally understand the present as something positive and present it as an encouraging counterpoint to the book's lament about human transience. Challenging that viewpoint, this paper will consider whether a radical destabilisation also of the present moment happens in the course of Qohelet's discourse on time.

The paper will examine Qohelet's juxtaposition of the cosmic time-order with time as it conditions human existence and cognition, suggesting that Qohelet highlights the limitations exerted by the time-order upon the human life lived within its constraints. In his juxtaposition of world time and human time, Qohelet stresses the cognitive aspects of man's life in time, and questions especially man's ability to understand and properly respond to his temporal situation. Through this criticism Qohelet is able to question not only the lasting worth of human life, but also the value of the present moment.