"Nothing is Good in Them":

The Prestigious Voice in Eccl 3:9-22

❖ Preface: points for discussion

i. What should be improved upon this narrative approach of Eccl 3:9-22? What are the weaknesses and risks of using this kind of narrative reading instead of reading the text verse by verse individually?

ii. Should טוב in 3:12 be translated as a predicate adj. "good" or a comparative adj. "better"? What are the textual evidences? (מִן ["than"] and the definite article are both missing in this verse, but the similar "there is nothing good than to…" expression in 2:24 has the particle -שֶׁ ["that"] prefixed in שֶׁיֹּאכַל ["than to eat"] which some scholars have argued for its comparative function.)

iii. Keywords: Qohelet, first-person speech, mediator, empirical knowledge, prestigious voice

1. Introduction

My OTSEM paper last year had dealt with the literary devices and their functions that contribute to the autobiographical voice of Qohelet in Eccl 1:12-2:26. The paper concluded that through the first-person narrative stance, the speaker is able to evaluate his experience of the human condition drawing heavily from his anthropological standpoint. While 1:12-2:26 focuses solely on the speaker's personal level of empirical understanding, in Eccl 3 he extends his evaluation to the relationship between humankind and God with the addition of the notion of time. He reaffirms the authority of God and acts like a mediator between God and human while teaching about God's control of time and the gift of enjoyment. Then he proceeds to bring in the analysis of fate and judgment using the analogy between human and animal, arriving at the conclusion that nothing is better than taking pleasure in life. What interests me is how the speaker places himself in a distinct yet distant position from humankind in general, and how this affects the way we perceive his didactic voice.

This paper analyzes the construction of Qohelet's character through the speaker's prestigious voice in Eccl 3:9-22. The speaker i.e. Qohelet's evaluating voice addresses humankind's labor and God's judgement with emphasis on the timeliness of the world. Peculiarly, this section is a crucial text in the book where the speaker addresses humankind using the third-person indicator (such as בם in v. 12) while emphasizing his first-person seeing (ראיתי) and knowing (ידעתי) of God's judgment. His knowledgeable and prestigious didactic stance is vivid. However, midway through his observations, he encounters the need to ponder upon himself ("I"-Heart formula), and near the end of the passage, his rhetorical questioning using the combination of the interrogative מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows…") and הֲ ("if, whether…") about the spirit's destination in v. 21 seems to bring him as close to human as it gets. Is he deliberately speaking with a prestigious voice? Has he shown vulnerability not knowing certain knowledge in the Godly realm? By deciphering the literary functions of specific terms and the narrative close reading of this passage, I seek to locate where the didactic voice of the speaker is situated in relation to humankind and to God. I will first provide my translation and critical notes for 3:9-22, followed by the context, outline, and summary of the text. Then I will explore the voice of the speaker following the literary markers in the text: (1) the superior establishment with first-person verbs; (2) mediating between God and Man using the first person vs. third person; (3) the double function of the "I"-Heart formula; and (4) exposing vulnerability with interrogatives. The findings may suggest that the literary strategies in Eccl 3:9-22 allow the speaker to establish his voice above all living beings with exclusive divine knowledge while remaining personal, flawed, and "human" at the same time.

2. Translation and Critical Notes

3:9 What profit does the one who works have in which he had labored?

10 I have seen the work that God has given to humankind to be occupied with[1]. ***11*** He has made everything proper[2] in its time; yet, he has given/placed eternity[3] in their hearts, so that humankind will not[4] find out the work God has done from the

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[1] Cairo Geniza (𝔠) has the verb לְעַנּוֹת meaning "to be humble with/afflicted with" instead of לַעֲנוֹת. Both usages derive from the root ענה which could mean both "be occupied" and "be afflicted." The appeal to understand the term as "be afflicted" is due to the negative connotation that Qohelet expresses about work/labor (הענין) that is given to humans by God. However, this is not conclusive. Crenshaw suggests that the noun for "work" (הענין) "retains an oppressive connotation throughout Ecclesiastes, even when the translation appears neutral (task, business)" (*Ecclesiastes*, 97), but even so he follows MT and translates the verb לַעֲנוֹת as "to occupy" (*Ecclesiastes*, 91). A. Lange suggests this meaning by the rule of *lectio difficilior* (*Weisheit und Torheit bei Kohelet und in seiner Umwelt* [Frankfurt 1991], 98), but this is disputed by Schoors, saying that the rule is "not a law of Medes and Persians" and that "the idea that God afflicts people is not expressed by Qoh" (*Preacher* II, 429). Seow also translates the verb according to MT ("to be preoccupied") but emphasizes that there might be "the possibility of wordplay" between the two meanings (*Ecclesiastes*, 121). The meaning, thus, remains open. Nonetheless, according to the context of Eccl 3, the speaker does not explicitly express a negative view towards "work" and that the following v. 11 speaks about God making everything proper. To say that the verb ענה shows God "afflicting" work onto humankind seems unfitting, and therefore it is better to translate it as "to be occupied with."

[2] While *BDB* suggests the adj. form יָפֶה means "fair, beautiful" (*BDB* 421), *HALOT* specifies its meaning as "right" in this verse (*HALOT* 424). W. C. Williams and U. H. Ringgren both note that יָפֶה is taken as a synonym of the word טוב, meaning "good, proper" which is more evident in Eccl 5:17(18) (W. C. Williams, *NIDOTTE* 2: 494; U. H. Ringgren, *TDOT* VI: 220). However, the book has used טוב 52 times and especially once in v. 12, right after v. 11's usage of יָפֶה. Observing this, Schoors draws from the conclusion of L. Gorssen to say that "יפה belongs to the sphere of intelligibility, but the meaning 'appropriate' is closer to the mark, since it is bound with בעתו, which must refer to the appropriate times in 3,1-8, whereas in Gen 1, טוב appears more to belong to the sphere of laudatory acknowledgment and admiration of the good qualities of God's creation" (Schoors, *Preacher* II, 257; referencing L. Gorssen, *ETL* 49 [1970], 292: "reléve de l'ordre de l'intelligibilité").

[3] The meaning of the term עֹלָם (or its plene form עוֹלָם as written in Eccl 3:14) remains disputed, although *BDB* and *HALOT* generally have it to be "long duration, antiquity, futurity" (*BDB* 761; *HALOT* 798). Both N. H. D. Preuss and A. Tomasino have expressed the difficult understanding of this word in Eccl 3. However, Preuss suggests that the usage הָעֹלָם here should be understand along the context of the other occurrences in the book. Examining the usage of the root: in 1:4, the word לְעוֹלָם entails "forever" in the sense that everything in this world remains perpetually the same; in 1:10, the word לְעֹלָמִים either is viewed to be an intensive plural or as a succession of ages; and in 12:5, the term עוֹלָמוֹ with a suffix evidently means "grave, eternal home" (N. H. D. Preuss, *TDOT* X: 541-42). It seems as if this concept of "eternity" in 3:11 and 3:14 is locked, according to the other appearances in the book, within the human existence in this world. Likewise, Preuss notes that "Eccl. 3:14 can merely underscore that v. 11 in its own turn is saying that the 'duration' of which God has made human beings aware is not nor can it be a consciousness of human existence as such, but rather again the experience of the torment of existence as a burden through the passing of time and through the experience of the burdensome, inaccessible, and incessant nature of existence" (Preuss, *TDOT* X: 542). That is, instead of being the "eternity" as a transcend understanding of God's timelessness, the word usage here in 3:11 is rather a way to emphasize the limited and insignificant experience that incorporates human existence as a whole. Similarly, Tomasino suggests this reading of the word in Eccl 3, stating, "this statement probably refers to the knowledge that all events occur in their proper time (season, life, death, etc.; cf. 3:1-9)" (A. Tomasino, *NIDOTTE* 3: 350). Thus, עֹלָם could be translated as "eternity" with the sense of humankind's incapability to comprehend God's doings—a feeling of prolonged futile.

[4] The literal translation "from without that man will not find the work…" is nonsensical. Both Schoors and Seow observed that the phrase מבלי אשר לא is unparalleled (see Schoors, *Preacher* I, 147-48; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 163), so Seow suggests that it might introduce "a result or final clause (so LXX, Vulg, Targ, and Syr)" (*Ecclesiastes*, 163).

beginning to the end. ***12*** I know that nothing is good in them[5], except to rejoice and to do good/well in their lives. ***13*** And also every human who shall eat and drink and see good in all his labor, this is the gift of God.

14 I know that all that God does will exist to eternity; upon it nothing will be added, and from it nothing will be reduced. God has done (this) so that they will be fearful before him. ***15*** Whatever is, it already was; what is to be, already is. And God seeks what is pursued[6].

16 Furthermore, I saw under the sun the place of judgment there was wickedness, and the place of righteousness there was wickedness. ***17*** I said in my heart, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked, because there is a time for all matter and upon all the deed there[7]." ***18*** I said in my heart, "As regards to humankind, God (sought) to test

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[5] There are two MSS that attest the easier reading באדם ("among the man") instead of the MT's בם ("among them"). Scholars have agreed that this is a scribal correction to fit with similar phrases in 2:24 and 8:15, as well as to provide a harmonized reading with the term בחייו ("in his life") with a 3ms suffix (so Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 164; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 80-81; Fox, *Time*, 212; and Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth*, 130). However, there is no need for such correction since בם refers back to the generic and collective האדם ("humankind, human being") that accompanies the plural expression בלבם ("in their hearts") in v. 11. It is one of the features of Qohelet to refer to humankind (אדם) interchangeably between the singular and plural forms, especially with the article, which is "in keeping with the frequent occurrence of the word with the general meaning of 'mankind' in the rest of the Bible, where e.g., his creation by God is emphasized, or where an opposition to other creatures such as animals is suggested" (Schoors, *Preacher* II, 46; see also S. H. Auerbach, *Das Buch Koheleth neu übersetzt mit einem hebräischen Commentar* [Breslau 1837], 37). This notion of "mankind" is especially evident in Eccl 3 when Qohelet compares it/them with animals at the end.

[6] The ending את־נרדף ("pursued") is difficult to understand in context. The question at hand is what is God seeking after? Crenshaw has summarized the historical interpretation of this *crux interpretum*, noting that four answers have been offered: (1) the persecuted (LXX, Peshitta, Targum, and Sirach), (2) the events of the past (Vulgate), (3) the same, and (4) what God sought previously (*Ecclesiastes*, 100). Although the first interpretation has been assumed by many medieval commentators, modern scholars have been skeptical about its fit with the context (so Schoors, *Preacher* II, 108; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 100; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 30). Seow proposes the view that "*rdp* is also a synonym of *rʿh* 'pursue'" as in Hos 12:2 which denotes a resemblance with "*rĕʿût rûaḥ*" and "*raʿyôn rûaḥ*" in Ecclesiastes; therefore, for Seow the clause means that "God will look after what people have pursued in vain" (*Ecclesiastes*, 165-66). However, this connection is not as convincing since the notion of "pursuing after the wind" is not a main expression in Eccl 3. Alternatively, Crenshaw draws from the similarity of 1:9 about the notion that "there is nothing new" and suggests that "Qohelet envisions God pursuing the past in order to bring it back into the present" (*Ecclesiastes*, 100). This understanding is agreed by Fox who focuses on the context of v. 15a and states that "the gist of the sentence seems to be that God seeks to do things he has already done" (*Time*, 214). Schoors follows this order while drawing attention to Jerome's "*id est quod periit, quod expulsum est, quod esse cessavit*" (what is missing, it has been expelled, and it is finished) and Vulgate's same understanding "*Deus instaurat quod abiit*" (God will call the past) (*Preacher* II, 108). He observes, also, that this interpretation that "God recalls/brings back what is past" is adopted by the majority of interpreters (see Schoors, *Preacher* II, 108). Murphy, similar although coming entirely from spotting the similarity between 3:15 and 1:9, suggest that "the reference then is to the past or the events of the past, which God will call back into existence, in line with the thought of v. 15a" (*Ecclesiastes*, 30). Therefore, with a large body of scholarship agreeing to the interpretation of a reoccurring past, the phrase את־נרדף should be understood as that reoccurrence of events under God's will.

[7] Scholars have very scattered opinions on what the meaning of שׁם ("there") is since it is a crux. According to a narrative reading, it could either point towards God's judgement or time itself in v. 17. Peshitta and LXX reads accordingly with the masoretic as "there" while Vulgate determines it as "time" (*tunc*). Schoors has sorted out

them[8] and to show[9] that they are animals in themselves[10]." ***19*** For the fate of humankind and the fate of animals are a fate of one/the same to them. As one dies, so

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that there are these following understanding of the term in scholarship: (1) Sheol or the world to come, the divine court; (2) "the place of justice" referring to שמה in v. 16; (3) "place, proper place" with the pointing שָׂם; (4) repointed as שָׂם to mean "he has appointed, decreed"; and (5) the Akkadian *šumma* meaning "if" or "behold" (*Preacher* I, 100-1). Since there is no consensus among scholars, Schoors has strongly suggested that there is no certainty in this case, and Murphy suggests the same (*Ecclesiastes*, 30). Seow, aside from listing out all possibilities in scholarship, suggests that the word "corresponds to Akkadian *šiāmu/šâmu* 'to determine' and *šīmtu* 'fate, destiny'" and uses "destiny" in his translation (*Ecclesiastes*, 167). However, Qohelet uses the noun מקרה for fate later in v. 19, so reading שם here with the same meaning seems to be out of place. With a narrative reading, since Qohelet speaks of God's judgment (v. 17) and also "the place of judgment/justice" with the adverb שמה (v. 16), the term שם is seemingly most fitting with the context, suggesting the deeds that are being judged under that circumstance.

[8] The verb לברם ("to test" or "choose, select") is difficult to understand while the root is ברר ("purify, choose"). Although the exact meaning of the root is obscure in this context, the construction is likely to have God as the subject and the suffix -ם ("them, the people") as the object (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 103; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 30). The main issue is whether to view לברם as an infinite or a finite verb with an emphatic ל? The insertion of "God" between "to test" and "to show" (לראות)—assuming one takes them as infinite—is awkward, and the clause lacks a finite verb. Scholars who agree with the ל used emphatically would suggest that the verb ברם is in the form of a perfect and the continuing verb ולראות is "an infinitive consecutive, used in place of a finite verb in continuation of the perfect ברם, and the *lamed* is again emphatic" (Schoors, *Preacher* I, 113), so therefore Gordis, C. F. Whitley, V. E. Reichert-A. Cohen, and Seow. The sentence would therefore be translated as "Surely God has chosen them to show that they are nothing but animals." However, scholars who maintain that both verbs are infinitives see the verbs depending on the verb אמרתי ("I said") as the finite complement (so Ginsburg, W. A. Irwin, Crenshaw, and Murphy), which translates to "I said in my heart concerning humankind *that* [my italics] God is testing and showing them…" assuming that a copula was presupposed by the text (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 103; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 30). Both readings are possible since the text itself is difficult. Yet, since both verbs לברם and לראות should be read together with the *waw* consecutive, "it is quite normal that it [לברם] be parsed as an infinitive of ברר plus suffix and preceded by the usual preposition ל" (Schoors, *Preacher* I, 112). Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall have also suggested by reading both verbs as infinitives they form "a null copula clause with האלהים as the subject and a compound ל–PP/infinitive as the copular complement" (*Qoheleth*, 138). Following this lead, I would also propose that since both v. 17 and v. 18 begin with the same idiom אני בלבי אמרתי ("I said in my heart"), I understand the content of the speaker's narrative as a sequential train of thought. Instead of taking אמרתי as the finite complement of the infinitives לברם and לראות, I suggest that the speaker connects them to ישפט ("he [God] will judge") in v. 17 as the complement. If this is the case, the insertion of "God" between "to test" and "to show" acts as a narrative supplement that completes the connection between v. 17 and v. 18 with God being the continuous subject. The mention of "God" between the two intinitives thus serves as a parenthesis usage.

[9] While BHS has the verb וְלִרְאוֹת in Qal form ("to see"), LXX, Peshitta, and Vulgate have all opted to read it as the Hiphil infinitive "to show" (equivalent of וְלַהֲרָאוֹת). Syntactically, although Targum associates the verb with the finite אמרתי ("I said") at the beginning of the verse, Crenshaw suggests to view it as "a consecutive infinitive with God as subject and the people as object" along with the previous infinitive לברם (*Ecclesiastes*, 103). This falls in line with the narrative flow that I have suggested in the previous footnote on the verb לברם ("to test"): God is the subject of these two infinitive verbs and the finite verb ישפט ("he [God] will judge") in v. 17 is the complement.

[10] The clause שהם־בהמה המה להם ("that they are animals in themselves") is difficult to interpret when המה seems like a dittography of בהמה (so LXX, H. L. Ginsberg, Whitley, Crenshaw, Seow, etc.), but more peculiar is the ending on להם ("to them"). Schoors explains that Whitley suggests to view להם in the case of emphatic ל, and Schoors himself suggests *dativus ethicus* that is well-used in BH and later Hebrew (Schoors, *Preacher* I, 112-13). Whitley's view is affirmed by Crenshaw as well (*Ecclesiastes*, 103). Murphy assumes that it is a *dativus commodi* (*Ecclesiastes*, 30). All of these views understand להם as dative which renders the meaning to "in/of themselves," and that the preceding המה is the copula, although in many biblical cases the dative should be

dies the other. And one/the same spirit for all. And advantage of the person over the animal—there is none. For all is a puff of wind. *20* All go to one/the same place: all are from dust, and all return to dust. *20* Who knows if the spirit of humankind ascends upward and if[11] the spirit of animals descends downward (in)to the earth? *22* And I saw that nothing is better than that the person should be glad in his works, for that is his portion. For who can bring him to see whatever will be after him?

3. Textual Analysis

3.1 Context

Eccl 3:9-22 comes after the frequently quoted Poem of Time in the beginning of Eccl 3, where the speaker lists mostly in binary pairs the appropriate moments for different human activities. The principle of the poem is to show that there is a time for everything while humans have little to no control over time. The concept of time being used in 3:1-8 is not a fixed time or date but rather an occasion.[12] Some activities like planting and uprooting (v. 2) humankind can have control, but some like giving birth and dying (v. 2) are completely beyond human hands. Then there are the activities concerning human emotions (v. 4 and 8) that rely heavily on the circumstance that the individual is experiencing at that very moment, which are difficult to determine whether they could be controlled by human action and mind. All this vagueness lends to the insecurity that time is ungraspable and out of reach.

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used along with a verb (Seow, Ecclesiastes, 168; Schoors, *Preacher* I, 112). Agreeing with this dative use, I tend not to view המה as a dittography but rather an emphatic wordplay between the former הם ("they") and בהמה ("animal") construct. Krüger has also suggested that this is an intentional pun (*Qoheleth*, 82).

[11] Many scholars believe that the MT having הָעֹלָה ("the one ascending") and הַיֹּרֶדֶת ("the one descending") with an article is a revocalization of the interrogative -ֶה ("if, whether") due to dogmatic reasons. Seemingly, the masoretes "regard the doubt of human immortality expressed in this question as heretical" (Schoors, *Preacher* I, 213; see also Fox, *Time*, 216; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 82; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 168; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 31). This assumption, however, is questioned by Gordis as he realizes that in v. 19 the similar heterodox teaching remains untouched in v. 19 (*Koheleth*, 238; also Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 104). Nonetheless, if according to MT the translation would be "Who knows the spirit of humankind the one ascending upward, and the spirit of animals the one descending downward (in)to the earth," which renders the sentence syntactically strained and unfitting with the context. Therefore, most ancient versions have read both verbs with the interrogative: הַעלה ("whether if… ascend?") and הֵיֹרדת ("whether if… descends?"). This is widely agreed by contemporary scholarship. In order to maintain the rhetorical questioning that fits with the narrative flow, it is clear that the verse should be read with the interrogative -ַה.

[12] Fox observes that the time here is "an *occasion*, a type or configuration of circumstances, whether on the grand scale of world history (such as war and peace) or on the minute scale of an individual's routines (such as planting and keeping silent)" (*Time*, 298).

Some scholars have suggested that the Poem of Time (3:1-8) concludes with the rhetorical question in v. 9.[13] However, others have either viewed v. 9 as an introductory question for the following section or an independent verse.[14] Textually, one could simply judge by the minor paragraph break ס after v. 8 that v. 9 is set off from the poem. With deeper observation, v. 9 speaks about human labor and its payoff. Before the verse, the Poem of Time is set with the mindset about human activity (in a sense about laboring), but on the other hand, vv. 10-15 also addresses the question of עמל ("labor") that is raised in relation to העושה ("the one who works") in v. 9. Therefore, rather than identifying v. 9 with the poem (vv. 1-8) or with the response to the poem (vv. 10-15), I suggest that the verse is functioning as the bridge between the two sections. The question in v. 9 serves both as the immediate doubt of control over the outcome of human activity in the poem as well as the rhetorical introductory for the following analysis on time, labor, divine intervention, and human activity. The Poem of Time will be omitted from this paper since the main goal is to identify the speaker's personal voice.

Thematically and syntactically, this section ends 3:22, especially with Qohelet's signature phrasal break: nothing is better than to enjoy the present.[15] On the syntactic level, the verb

[13] Concerning scholars who view 3:1-9 as a unit: Seow compares 3:9 with 1:3, the latter being the introduction of the poem in 1:3-9 while the former "concludes the poem on times and seasons (3:1-9)" (*Ecclesiastes*, 169). Murphy might also be suggesting the same when using the verb ראה ("see") in v. 10 as a division break, thus "3:10-15 seems to be a clear development of the initial poem on time" (*Ecclesiastes*, 31). Krüger is vague in defining the borders of the text, only suggesting that "the time-bound nature of human activity described in vv. 2-8 limits the possibilities of gain (יִתְרוֹן, *yitrôn*) for human beings," which appears in v. 9 (*Qoheleth*, 78). Krüger also sees 3:1-9 and 1:3-11 as individual poetic blocks. Initially, Fox is also clear to perceive 3:1-9 as a unit and that v. 9 serves as the conclusion of the "Catalogue of Times" when providing the outline of the text (*Time*, 192), but his later comments suggest otherwise (see next footnote).

[14] Concerning scholars who view 3:9-15 as a unit: Longman III provides a clear-cut division between vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-15, suggesting that the later draws immediate conclusion from the former (Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 111). Peculiarly, Fox—albeit viewing 3:1-9 as a literary unit as mentioned in my previous footnote—also identifies 3:1-8 as the "Catalogue of Times" and that "the following verses, vv. 9-15, draw conclusions from this fact [everything has a time]," which renders his textual borders indecisive (Fox, *Time*, 194). For me, Fox's inconsistency shows the fluidity of v. 9 in terms of where it belongs. Crenshaw, on the other hand, seems to view v. 9 standing on its own and leaning more to the following section as he asks accordingly to the poem, "Does God relinquish the tight hold on the correct moment for a particular activity?" and his observation is that "Qohelet addresses that issue in the next section" (*Ecclesiastes*, 96; commentary on v. 9).

[15] See also 2:24-26 and 3:13.

שוב ("again") in 4:1 denoting a repetition is well documented in the MT and is used similarly in 4:7 and 9:11.[16] The function of שוב as a syntactic break in Ecclesiastes has been observed by several scholars,[17] but the watershed between Eccl 3 and Eccl 4 is more evident when the thematic level is taken into consideration. In 3:16-22, the speaker revisits the question of fate (first introduced in 2:12-17) while in 4:1-3 he addresses the oppressions that happen in the world. Although it could be argued that his reflection on the oppressed comes from the injustice of uncertain fate, 3:22 has already marked Qohelet's iconic ending of a unit: to enjoy in laboring.[18] More evidently is the doubting of the afterlife (v. 19, 21) that binds Eccl 3 together as a complete section. Unknowing what comes after death poses an existential question under humankind's vague control of time, which happens to be the main theme of vv. 1-15. In addition, the remark that "there is a *time* for all matter and upon all the deed there [during judgment]" in v. 17 secures the fact that vv. 16-22 is a continuation of the previous section (vv. 1-15). In this paper, 3:1-22 will be viewed as a literary unity while the poem (vv. 1-8) will be set aside to focus on the speaker's didactic strategies.[19]

3.2 Outline and Summary

Eccl 3:9-22 follows the Poem of Time (vv. 1-8) that portrays every human related activities as proper in its appointed time. However, it is not humankind that has control over time but God who "makes everything proper in its time," the speaker answers in v. 11. Then, if the speaker is himself human, how does he know the will of God? Is he using this type of speech to position himself as a prestigious being than the ordinary human in order to

[16] *BDB*, 998.

[17] Seow suggests that "the phrase *wĕšabtî ʾănî wāʾerʾeh* [ושבתי אני ואראה] is, thus, equivalent to *wĕʿôd rāʾîtî* [ועוד ראיתי] in 3:16. However, whereas *wĕʿôd rāʾîtî* seems to stress continuity with the preceding materials, *wĕšabtî* appears to stress the discontinuity" (*Ecclesiastes*, 177). Fox follows the same thought and adds that the verb שוב "is adverbial to the following verb" and that it "points to another in a series of actions or events and means 'afterwards,' 'next,' or the like" (*Time*, 219). Thus, Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall draw conclusion from Seow and Fox to say that the verb שוב functions "in its monovalent capacity and signals, like פנה (2:11, 12) and סבב (2:20; 7:25), that Qoheleth is 'turning' to yet another observation" (*Qoheleth*, 143).

[18] Murphy has also observed that v. 22 is "Qoheleth's patented conclusions" (*Ecclesiastes*, 32).

[19] Although excluding 3:9, Krüger also views 3:10-22 as a thematic unit, titled "God and the 'Good': Happiness as 'Portion'" (*Qoheleth*, 83).

demonstrate his superior knowledge? In last year's paper, I have established the ground that in 1:12-2:26 the speaker poses with Qohelet's autobiographical voice while assuming his authority through the identity of the kingly Solomonic character. In this section, although the Solomonic identity has not been assumed, the features of ANE royal voice remains. The speaker assumes an intimacy with divine knowledge—a prestigious knowledge—to continue that authority in his voice, speaking on behalf of God. The main feature that determines the sub-units in this section is the initial verbs with the first-person suffix, listed in the following outline:[20]

A. 3:9. Rhetorical Questioning
B. 3:10-15. Response to the Question: Time
    a. 3:10-11. God Stores Proper Time (ראיתי, "I have seen")
    b. 3:12-13. Enjoying Life as the Gift of God (ידעתי, "I know")
    c. 3:14-15. God's Deeds Transcends Time (ידעתי, "I know")
C. 3:16-21. Continued Response with Attention to Fate (ועוד, "furthermore, again")
    a. 3:16. Transitional Observation (ראיתי, "I saw")
    b. 3:17-18. God Will Judge and Reveal Human's True Nature[21] (אמרתי אני בלבי, "I said in my heart" in both verses)
    c. 3:19-20. Reflection: Fate of Death Befalls Every Being
    d. 3:21. Interrogative Outcry: Life Beyond Death is a Mystery
D. 3:22. Conclusion: Take Pleasure in Labor (ראיתי, "I saw")

As shown above, the verbs that the speaker uses all have a strong indication of his exceeding knowledge or experience, and conveniently, the initial verbs can be used to identify the sub-units of the text. The only verses that lack the initial verb as the identifier are v. 9 and vv. 19-21, in which v. 9 and v. 21 are rhetorical questions while vv. 19-20 is an explanatory note. 3:9 begins with the rhetorical questioning about the worth of human laboring. The speaker has chosen to use the participle הָעוֹשֶׂה ("the one who works") most likely for rhetorical reasons:

[20] Krüger has provided a very similar outline "in regard to the expressions in first person singular, which in each case introduce a new step in the train of thought" (Qoheleth, 83). Others have simply distinguished between vv. 1-8(9), 9(10)-15, and 16-22 (Fox, Time, 194-216; Seow, Ecclesiastes, 158-59, 169; Longman III, Ecclesiastes, 111, 125; Lohfink, Qoheleth, 59, 66, 68; Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, Qoheleth, 120, 135).

[21] This is my narrative assumption since all commentators have expressed the difficulty to understand why humans are being equated with animals during the time of judgment.

"to set up the emphasis on what God has done" later in the text.[22] And certainly, the same verb in Qal perfect עָשָׂה ("he [God] made") shows up again in v. 11 where God's temporal doings are being explained. There is no doubt that the rhetorical question which "passes judgment on human activity as being without profit" is "to be explained by the reasoning in vv. 10-15."[23]

Thus, the reasoning of section B (vv. 10-15) tackles God and His proper time for human labor. The key here is that with the verbs used in the beginning of v. 10 (ראיתי, "I have seen"), 12 (ידעתי, "I know"), and 14 (ידעתי) all suggest the speaker expressing his knowledge and experience on the issue raised in the followings. Hence, vv. 10-11 build on empirical data[24] having *seen* that God has stored proper time for everything as well as placed "eternity" in the hearts of humankind. However, what does this "eternity" mean and how could the speaker have experienced this exclusive knowledge of God's? Moreover, what is the function of this mode of speech? This will be discussed in section §4.1. In vv. 12-13 and 14-15, the speaker uses "knowing" as his empirical authority[25] to provide his observation that the gift of God is to enjoy the labor in life (v. 12-13) and that God transcends past, present, and future to eternity (vv. 14-15), the same "eternity" mentioned in v. 11. Thus, humankind—using the third plural suffix "they"—should know to fear God. Peculiar is also the fact that the speaker addresses humankind excluding himself, consistently using the third person for them as opposed to his personal first-person observation. It resembles the king mediating between God and man in ANE royal fictions.

[22] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 162.
[23] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 34.
[24] Empirical data meaning knowledge from experience. See Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth*, 127.
[25] Crenshaw agrees that "although Qohelet complains about inability to discover God's secret times, he does claim to possess sure knowledge of a sort" (*Ecclesiastes*, 98).

Section C (vv. 16-21) is introduced with the adjunct ועוד ("furthermore, again"), which is another break indicator.[26] The speaker's attention now focuses on fate which is determined solely by God's judgment and time. With the adjunct ועוד, v. 16 stands alone as the transition and the introductory observation that wickedness exists among judgment and righteousness. As explained in the footnote of my translation, vv. 17-18 need to be read as a continuous statement to make sense of v. 18, coupled together with the same "I"-Heart formulaic beginning: אמרתי אני בלבי ("I said in my heart…"). The theme here is that God will judge the righteous and the wicked, both subject to time, and reveal their true nature as bare as how animals are naked. Since the verb יִשְׁפֹּט ("he [God] will judge") in v. 17 is in its imperfect form, I suggest that the wickedness mentioned within judgment and righteousness in v. 16 is in a prejudgment state ("place of judgment") subject to time. It is evident that this "place of judgment" exist within the human world since v. 16 has the equal phrase תחת השמש ("under the sun"). Hence, God's judgment of the righteous and the wicked in vv. 17-18 is to sort them apart.[27] The inner dialogue in vv. 17-18 redirects the target of the speaker's speech away from the general public and to his inner self, pondering and making sense of God's judgment. The result is the conclusion he draws in vv. 19-20 which gives a conclusive statement of his personal view on "fate" (מקרה). Using the same term בהמה ("animal"), the speaker leads into vv. 19-20 to elaborate on the same fate that befalls both humans and animals—death.[28] This moment marks the speaker's realization that no certain distinction between humans and animals have been guaranteed with God's judgement, as both return to dust in the end (v. 20). There is a strong sense of existential crisis during this moment in the

[26] Seow notes that the adjunct "signals a new section and links the new section to the preceding unit: the author observes again (cf. *rāʾîtî* in v 10), but he sees a new thing" (*Ecclesiastes*, 166). See also "scalar quality" in Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth*, 135.

[27] Contra Krüger, who suggests that "the distinction between the 'righteous' and 'evildoers' (v. 17) is abolished here in speaking of 'human beings'" (*Qoheleth*, 92). Krüger's reading is based on the linguistic problems in v. 18 in which he reads separately from v. 17.

[28] According to my reading, thus, בהמה ("animal") should be used metaphorically in v. 18 while used physically in v. 19 for comparison.

text, especially when the speaker cries out "who knows?" considering the fate of the spirit, both humans and animals, in v. 21.[29] This outcry is also the most "human-driven" status the speaker ever had since prior to v. 21 he has always presented himself as the one knowing many mysteries of God and men. In the end, with this unresolvable uncertainty concerning God's time and judgment, v. 22 stands alone as the conclusion of Eccl 3 that echoes vv. 12-13: nothing is better than to take pleasure during one's labor.

Overall, the narrative sequence entails a shift in the speaker's tone, from his affirmative voice in 3:9-15, to his inner dialogic judgment in 3:16-20, and finally the collapse of his assertive voice in vv. 21-22. For him, the uncertainty that lies beyond human life is a mystery that he may never understand, albeit how much he understands about the divine knowledge of God's time, eternity, and judgment. The shift in his voice throughout this narrative process highlights his ultimate identity as a mere human being, incapable of grasping the immense knowledge of God.

4. The Prestigious Voice in Eccl 3:9-22

This section is the main analysis of the paper which deals with the speaker's formation of his prestigious voice. In my previous paper, I have shown that Eccl 1:12-2:26 is presented as the character's autobiographical narrative through the high frequency of the first-person pronoun אני ("I"). At that time, I have focused on bringing to attention the first-person pronoun as the significant feature of the autobiography, but as we read along the text, it becomes evident that the pronoun אני rarely stands on its own. In fact, אני is almost always accompanied by a first-person suffixed verb before its appearance.

[29] Murphy sees this as the "equivalent to a denial" (*Ecclesiastes*, 37). Longman III suggests that Qohelet "is frustrated with the unknowability of the afterlife, if not its existence" (*Ecclesiastes*, 130). Crenshaw, rather than saying that Qohelet is frustrated by uncertainty, suggests that "he does not rule out the possibility, but he dismisses such speculation as a waste of time" (*Ecclesiastes* 104). Either way, Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall suggest the possibility that the mention of the human spirit ascending and the animal spirit descending may reflect "the Platonic view of the human versus animal soul," and that "Qoheleth recognized that some of his intended audience may have adopted this Hellenistic belief" (*Qoheleth*, 140).

Therefore, in this section, I take into account the first-person verbs that play an important role in characterizing the speaker's autobiographical tone. Drawing from this analysis, the interesting distance between the speaker and humankind who are addressed mostly with the third-person verbs and prepositions is also worth exploring. How does the speaker place himself among humankind? Does he see himself as a higher rank and closer to God, perhaps to maintain the king's persona? In the process I would also revisit the function of לֵב ("heart") to see how it is used in this context. Finally, I will examine the interrogative מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows…") and הֶ ("if, whether") in 3:21, of how they define the meaning of the verse and therefore render the speaker vulnerable against the omniscience of God.

4.1 The Superior Establishment: "I have seen" (ראיתי) and "I know" (ידעתי)

The first two appearances of ראיתי as verse openings occur in 1:14 and 2:13. Speaking of the root ראה ("see"), Seow suggests that all 47 appearances of the verb in the book, it is used "for purposeful and reflective observation,"[30] 18 of which occurring in the first person singular of the perfect tense. In Schoors' review of the verb ראה, he concludes that the verb "expresses his [Qohelet's] experience, his examination of it or the knowledge he draws from it."[31] Schoors also finds that Ogden's definition of the verb best incorporates Qohelet's usage: "It speaks of more than casting a casual eye over things; it connotes a scientific and empirical examination of the realities of human life."[32] Indeed, in 1:14, 2:13, and 3:10 the verb provides conclusive observations of the world that the speaker experiences. In other words, Qohelet's usage of the verb ראה ("see") is purely rooted in the empirical knowledge of this world. The first-person verb is intimate as it represents the speaker from a personal level.

[30] Seow, Ecclesiastes, 121. Also Longman III, Ecclesiastes, 81. Interestingly, Crenshaw, Fox, Murphy, Krüger, and Lohfink have not provided discussion about the verbs in 1:14 or 2:13.

[31] Schoors, *Preacher* II, 75. On his thorough analysis and review on the verb, see *Preacher* II, §1.6.

[32] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 39. See also Longman III who furthermore emphasizes that Qohelet "does not appeal to revelation of any kind of special insight into God or the world" (*Ecclesiastes*, 81).

That said, returning to the context of 3:10-11, although the speaker's observation of God-given work in this world is reasonable (v. 10), the observation that God "has made everything proper in its time" and "has given/placed eternity in their hearts" (v. 11) does not seem to fit with the empirical-based observation mentioned earlier. How would the speaker be able to perceive that mysterious eternal property (עֹלָם) of God, given to humans, if the speaker is human and subjected to time as well? As an alternative, P. H. F. Fuhs provides a difference perspective on the verb ראה with respect to the context of Ecclesiastes, suggesting that ראה is stripped of any personal interests and is used to announce a collective experience of the community by the speaker.[33] In terms of Qohelet's speech, in most cases ראה is used as an observation of the collective human experience. However, the high frequency of the first person ראיתי has more to it than simply the collective usage.

The first person singular verb ראיתי ("I have seen") in v. 10 is based on the personal level of interest, or else the speaker could have easily replaced the third-person plural בלבם ("in their hearts") in v. 11 for a collective first-person plural בלבנו ("in our hearts"), suggesting that he is one among the collective humankind. Yet, he never does so. The distinction reminds us that the speaker in vv. 10-11 is speaking of humankind as a collective human "they" while he stands aside and observes as a prestigious spectator. Fuhs, providing the theological usage of ראה, observes that

> *rā'â* denotes the entire spectrum of situations in which human beings experience or encounter God in their *personal vision* [my italics]. In this sense *rā'âh* is complementary to → גלה *gālâ*, "reveal": God emerges from the concealment of divinity, being revealed in and through every possible form of human experience. Thus *rā'â* denotes the act of revelation itself, God's self-

[33] P. H. F. Fuhs suggests that ראה "refers not to communication of one's own observations and experience but to critical analysis of what claims to be knowledge based on collective experience, to determine the validity of this claim" ("רָאָה," TDOT XIII: 227).

> manifestation in person and in action. In this usage *rā'â* is not a specifically theological term but remains epistemological. The theological element is the concern that dominates its use in describing the relationship between God and humanity: to express the epistemological character of this relationship.[34]

When looking at the speaker's words in 3:10, he states that he has seen "the work that God has given to humankind," and continues to speak as God's agent while revealing the עֹלָם ("eternity," v. 11), "the gift of God" (v. 13), and how God acts with the eternity that humankind cannot understand (vv.14-15). It is as if he has experienced these traits of God personally and is enlightened by the empirical knowledge that comes with that experience. This privileged divine knowledge empowers him beyond the common person, allowing him to comment from a mediating position—a spectator of this world—between God and man. The way he speaks to us is in a royal demeanor, much like the king in ANE literature, who surpasses common humankind and is prestigious with divine knowledge. Nonetheless, he shares this knowledge with his audience with the combined didactic, prophetic, and priestly voice that an ancient king would have. It would be even clearer when taking the distinct distance between his first person singular and the third person plural (humankind, or simply, "them, they") that constantly appears in his speech into consideration. I will address this in the next section (§4.2). The key is that although the speaker does not directly reveal how he obtained his divine knowledge, he teaches his audience with a very strong epistemological sense, making them aware of their relationship with God.

Observing from the structure of the passage, the usage of ראיתי ("I have seen") in 3:10-11 marks the initial observation of the speaker, followed by two sections using the first-person verb ידעתי ("I know") as empirical feedbacks on the observations in vv. 12-13 and vv. 14-15. The verb ידעתי is used in v. 12 and v. 14 to respectively explain God's gift of pleasure

[34] Fuhs, "רָאָה," TDOT XIII: 229.

to humankind (vv. 12-13) and God's deeds in eternity (vv. 14-15).[35] Thus, the two verbs ראיתי ("I have seen") and ידעתי ("I know") have a strong causal relationship, the former being the observation while the latter is the feedback rooted in personal experience.[36] The consequences of the speakers observation led to two feedbacks of this own: to do well in life which is "the gift of God" (vv. 12-13) and to fear God because eternity is in his hands (vv. 14-15). Murphy is quite right in using "nearness" to express the speaker's distance between human and God, for that nearness is what provides the speaker in the text with both of these mysteries—on time and God's work.[37] Both of these empirical feedbacks are being emphasized by the ידעתי ("I know") statement but cannot be detached from the ראיתי ("I have seen") observation. It is clear that by using ידעתי ("I know") as the emphatic expression, the speaker is sharing to his audience with a didactic purpose of his empirical knowledge. Therefore, the speaker poses as an intellectual superior while passing judgment on human life and speaking to his audience.

Consequently, it is worth noting that the knowledge that the speaker shares is not totally rooted in human experience. The speaker's observation in 3:10-11 includes the knowledge of God's appointed work for humankind and also the divine עֹלָם ("eternity") that belong to God and is seemingly exclusive to the speaker. In addition, the way that he understands pleasure in life is the gift of God (v. 13) and the way time and eternity works in God's term (vv. 14-15) proves that he is not only intellectually privileged but also understands divine knowledge to some degree that no other human being should have known. The question now is how does he speak of himself: does he include himself among humankind?

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[35] Schoors similarly observes that when the first-person ידעתי is used, Qohelet "expresses what he has concluded from his experience," and in the context of v. 12, "Qol draws a conclusion from vss. 1-11, be it this time a practical one, whereas in 3,14 he formulates the more theoretical conclusion of the same periscope" (*Preacher* II, 131, 136).

[36] Certainly as Murphy has noted in v. 14, "'I know' forms an emphatic introduction to certain data about God that underlie what has been previously said: God's actions are in the category of עֹלָם (*ʿōlām*)" (*Ecclesiastes*, 35).

[37] Murphy's note on the speaker is that "one is caught between the nearness of a God who fixes times and the mystery of a God whose work is unintelligible; in this situation fear of that God is the proper response" (*Ecclesiastes*, 35).

4.2 Speaking between God and Man: "in them" (בם)

While in Eccl 3:10-15 the speaker speaks from human experience, it does not guarantee that he is speaking on the same level as humankind as a whole. Empirical knowledge only guarantees experience on the personal level but does not define the identity of the speaker. For instance, the flood narrative in Genesis when God speaks to Noah about never flooding earth again (Gen 9), one may also see that as an empirical evaluation from a divine being. In order to identify how the speaker in Eccl 3:9-22 views himself, it is crucial to decipher his distance from God and humankind.

One of the scholarly addressed issue is the third-person בם ("in them") in 3:12, where there are ancient versions that prefer modifying בם into באדם ("in the man") for the easier reading.[38] However, as I have mentioned earlier, there is no need for such correction since בם refers back to the generic and collective האדם ("humankind, human being") that accompanies the plural expression בלבם ("in their hearts") in v. 11. The preposition בְּ viewed in relation to the term טוֹב ("good") that precedes it in v. 12 describe the speaker observing no "good" quality of human life besides pleasure. From a narrative perspective the meaning of בם here points to the moral judgment of humankind's character as a whole ("nothing is good in them"), because according the context of 3:9-22, the speaker always addresses humankind collectively, at most distinguishing them apart by הצדיק ("the righteous") and הרשע ("the wicked") in v. 17, which are also morally collective. The reason for his inclination to judge that "nothing is good in them" in v. 12a is to prepare for the comparative and ultimate better in v. 12b: לשמוח ולעשות טוב בחייו ("to rejoice and to do good/well in their lives").

Observing the first-person verb ידעתי ("I know") along with the third-person בם ("in them") in 3:12 is an example to knowing how the speaker views himself. Following the analysis in §4.1, it is evident in 3:9-22 that the speaker uses the first-person verbs several

[38] See my footnote on 3:12 in the translation section.

times to introduce his empirical observations and feedbacks, such as ראיתי ("I have seen," v. 10, 16, 22), ידעתי ("I know," v. 12, 14), and אמרתי ("I said," v. 17, 18). At the same time, humankind as the receiver of God's deeds, by contrast, is always addressed in the third person: בלבם ("in their hearts," v. 11), בם ("in them," v. 12), בחייו ("in their lives," v.12),[39] בכל־עמלו ("in all his labor," v. 13), שיראו ("that they will fear," v. 14), לברם ("to test them," v. 18), שהם־ בהמה ("that they are animals," v. 18), להם ("to them," v. 18), במעשיו ("in his work," v. 22), and חלקו ("his portion," v. 22). There is not once that the speaker has chosen to use the first-person plural to address himself along *with* humankind as a collective One. The speaker has chosen to distance himself from humankind, perhaps not fundamentally but rhetorically so that he may speak to the audience with a dominant voice while sharing his empirical knowledge.

Finally, the distance between the speaker with God can be measure by the first-person verbs he uses when addressing God. As mentioned earlier, in section 3:10-15, ראיתי ("I have seen") and ידעתי ("I know") are the verbs that demonstrate the speaker's superior knowledge than the average person. But to what extent? To answer this, the context must be considered. On several occasions, the knowledge that the speaker present is truly beyond human. Time being the main theme being discussed in this section, the speaker introduces also the idea of עֹלָם ("eternity") which he deems a trait that is given to humankind by God and from God alone. What does עֹלָם mean when used in v. 11 and v. 14? In Bo Isaksson's observation, "the whole context is pervaded by time" and "an interpretation that retains a temporal meaning in *ʿōlām* must therefore be given priority."[40] Schoors similarly observes that "עולם has a strong temporal denotation, and the context of 3,11 deals with pre-ordained time (3,1-8) and remote or unlimited time (vs. 14: לעולם, and even the end of vs. 11 itself: את־המעשה אשר־עשה האלהים

[39] Literally, "in his life," but the interchangeability between the singular and the plural form is well documented in Ecclesiastes (Schoors, *Preacher* II, 46).

[40] Isaksson, *Studies*, 180. For his thorough discussion with scholarship, see pp. 179-81.

מראשׁ ועד־סוף)."[41] Evidently, the term עֹלָם is used strictly along the concept of time but not conformed to time, rather, "a sense of that which is timeless and, as such, stands in contrast to *'ittô* 'its time.'" [42] If taking עֹלָם ("eternity") to entail the timelessness of God, then supposedly this knowledge is beyond human comprehension. Nonetheless, the speaker is still able to perceive this divine trait being placed within the human heart (בלבם) through his empirical observations (ראיתי, vv. 10-11). The contradiction comes right when he states that God's purpose of doing this is "so that humankind will not find out the work God has done from the beginning to the end" (v. 11b). The speaker himself understands this exclusive knowledge belonging to God that is not revealed to humankind. Clearly, he is suggesting that he has figured out this mystery—directly or indirectly—which places him in between the distance of God and humankind. The speaker's knowing of God's intention to make people "fearful before him" by placing the sense of eternity in the human heart (v. 14) is evidence to how he portrays himself as a teacher of God's deeds. Hence, the speaker in 3:10-15 poses with a didactic authoritative voice, making observations and judgments between God and man.

4.3 Double Function of the Heart (לב): Dialogic and Judgmental

After establishing that the speaker in 3:10-15 gains his authoritative voice through sharing exclusive divine knowledge, I now turn my focus to 3:16-22. One of the focuses of my previous paper is the function of the לב ("heart") that is often used as a dialogic partner of the speaker alongside the first-person pronoun אני—a pattern that I have coined the "I"-Heart formula. He uses this mainly as a way of reflecting on his observations and to provide evaluation for his findings in life. In vv. 16-22, there are two cases that he uses this construction: אמרתי אני בלבי ("I said in my heart") in the beginning of v. 17 and v. 18. The functions are no different from how the idiom is used in 1:12-2:26, which is a combination of using the heart as a dialogic partner and also a notion of inner dialogue.

[41] Schoors, *Preacher* II, 224. For his thorough discussion with scholarship, see pp. 221-25.
[42] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 163.

What's worth mentioning in 3:16-22 is the context given to the usage of the "I"-Heart formula. In vv. 17-18, the "I"-Heart formula introduces the speaker's observation of God's action during the time of judgment with the continuous theme of time from the previous section. The tone that the speaker uses to address this is in a very confident voice, using the imperfect verb ישפט האלהים ("God will judge") to demonstrate God's action and then providing the rationale using the causal conjunction כי־עת ("for there is a time") to explain further about God's judging action in v. 17. The trajectory of this firm statement anticipates that the event of judgment will happen according to God's will *in his time*. Whether this judgment is eschatological is debatable since the speaker may have expected judgment within worldly time as he gradually move towards the topics of death and fate in vv. 19-20.[43] The key is to understand fully that judgment is solely in God's hands.[44]

The use of the "I"-Heart formula at the beginning of v. 17 and v. 18 redirects the addressee of this speech: whereas the speaker had been addressing his audience from vv. 9-16, he now turns to speaking with his heart or speaking to himself in order to provide a thorough examination of God's judgment (vv. 17-18). This confident usage of the "I"-Heart formula is somewhat different from the way he uses it to pass brief observations (1:16), to give direction to the heart (2:1), and to question the motivation of his life (2:15)—the pursuit of knowledge. Rather than an experimental function of the formula, now the speaker uses it as a mode of

[43] Seow has suggested that the expression here "need not refer to eschatological judgment" and that it does not imply a future setting for the events to happen: it simply means that "God will judge in God's own time" (*Ecclesiastes*, 166). I agree with the judgment not being strictly an eschatological one but it remains difficult to say that the speaker excludes all future anticipations of judgment within worldly time.

[44] Judging by the contrast between v. 17a and 17b, Krüger observes two possible understandings that do not mutually exclude, but rather complement each other: (1) "The concept of divine judgment is thus integrated into the understanding of God's activity that is developed in 3:1-15 and at the same time thereby relativized: of everything that God makes is beautiful and appropriate in its time (v. 11), this is true both for his tolerance of wickedness and for his intervention against it;" and (2) "Yet one can also understand v. 17 to mean that here the concept of a divine judgment is being reinterpreted in the sense of the understanding of divine activity that was previously developed: the changing of the times (cf. 3:1-8) not only allows wickedness but also limits its duration" (*Qoheleth*, 91).

speech to declare a conclusive statement on the relationship between God and man, as he himself speaks as a spectator.

Whether the judgment of God lies ahead of his time, or is it already happening now accordingly to God's appointed times, the speaker rests assured that it is what it is, that judgment is beyond human control and only subject to God alone. Humankind is the receiving end of judgment with no means to alter it. Thus, the לֵב ("heart") being used here with the formula is both dialogic (speaking to oneself, or, considering on one's own) and also judgmental (God's judgment is undeniably divine). The didactic content comes after these two inner dialogues and is revealed in vv. 19-20 where the speaker consolidates that fate is no different between humankind and animals when all shall return to dust.

4.4 Vulnerability Exposed: "Who knows…" (מִי יוֹדֵעַ) and "If/Whether…" (הֲ)

So far in Eccl 3:9-20, I have shown the speaker in all his confidence, of how he stands above humankind as a didactic teacher with divine knowledge revealed to him, and of how he evaluates with ease the process and properties of God's judgment. With all the authoritative voice the speaker has built up through the previous sections, it is interesting to find him drastically falling into an existential crisis in v. 21-22. The theme of v. 21 follows his preceding reflection in vv. 19-20 that the fate of death befalls every living being, regardless of humans or animals; and thus, the unknown destination of the רוּחַ ("spirit"). The verse begins with the idiomatic interrogative מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows…") which entails that the "exclamatory and rhetorical questions in מִי must be recognized from context," and that this fixed expression entails that "the outcome is unobtainable."[45] The context addresses the notion that spirits head either upwards or downwards, depending on human or animal.[46] The answer, thus,

[45] Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 321. See also Van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 323.

[46] According to Krüger who quotes Schwienhorst-Schönberger, v. 21 is "often understood as a polemic 'against a popular idea—which perhaps arose under Greek-Hellenistic influence—of the continued life of individuals after death'" (Krüger's translation in *Qoheleth*, 82; translated from Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen*, 120). Martin Hengel also notes that "both in Euripides and in Greek epitaphs there often appears

according to this rhetorical question: no one knows.[47] It entails a meltdown of the speaker's intellectual authority underlying Eccl 3 until this very verse (v. 21). What the speaker is suggesting, is that there is no guarantee of life after death.

Many scholars have believed that the ancient masoretes may have turned their attention to the more obscure use of the participle העלה and הירדת, revocalizing them as הָעֹלָה ("the one going upward") and הַיֹּרֶדֶת ("the one going downward") for the sake of orthodox traditions.[48] Whether this is true or not, scholarship has widely agreed that the masoretic reading is difficult, because the revocalization would produce a syntactically problematic meaning. Therefore, the prefixed ה attached to both verbs is actually the interrogative הֲ ("if/whether"), thus rendering both verbs as הַעלה ("if [the spirit of humans] ascends?") and הֲיֹרדת ("if [the spirit of animals] descend?"). The verse would thus demonstrate a very strong sense of unknowingness towards the afterlife. Usually the interrogative הֲ functions as a yes/no question in the MT, but according to the context here, since מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows…") has already taken up the rhetorical function of the question, הֲ should be understood as an open-ended indirect question.[49] That is, הֲ ("if, whether") contributes to the uncertainty of the spirit's destination while מִי יוֹדֵעַ ("who knows…") asks the rhetorical question that entails the answer: no one knows.

Consequently, the interrogative combination in 3:21 "does not necessarily deny the possibility of the afterlife;" it is just that "the issue is beyond the pale of human possibility."[50] For the speaker to ask the impossible question of afterlife (v. 21) that holds such an enormous

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the conception that after death the human soul mounts to its dwelling place, the *aether*, the seat of the gods" (*Judaism and Hellenism*, 1:124).

[47] For Schoors, this type of rhetorical questions in Ecclesiastes "function as an expression of skepticism or, more exactly, agnosticism, *pace* Mazzinghi, who himself admits that they express the impossibility of a human being grasping the deeper sense of reality" (*Preacher* II, 132; quoting L. Mazzinghi, *Ho cercato*, 58: "esprime l'impossibilitá, per l'uomo, di cogliere il senso profondo della realtá").

[48] See text-critical footnote 11 in my translation.

[49] For the functions of the interrogative הֲ, see Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 322. For its function in the context of 3:21, see Holmstedt, Cook, and Marshall, *Qoheleth*, 141.

[50] Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 130.

amount of uncertainty, without answering, and especially with so much determination and confidence in vv. 9-20, it only shows that even with exclusive divine knowledge on God's time and eternity the speaker is still human. It is even more evident when he concludes this section by falling back to his idiosyncratic conclusion: nothing is better than pleasure (v. 22). This conclusion has appeared also in 2:24 and 3:12, which always functions semantically as an outcry of the speaker's personal limitations. His final verdict is always that the חלק ("portion") from God is the enjoyment in human activities. In addition, the speaker apparently cannot see past his own death, once again using the rhetorical interrogative מִי ("who") to ask who will lead humans to see among their lives (v. 22). The answer is simple: no one. Simply put, as knowledgeable as the speaker is, he is bound to the world and lives merely as a human being.

5. Summary

In this paper, I have explored the stark distance between the speaker and humankind as he addresses himself using the first-person while consistently using the third-person for the collective humankind in Eccl 3:9-22. Throughout the analysis whilst employing a narrative approach, it has become clear that the literary devices he uses in his speech, functions in a way that distances himself from the general common people. These devices are: (1) the beginning verbs in several verses that are in first person (ראיתי, ידעתי, אמרתי) referring to his superior observations and evaluations; (2) the consistent use of the third-person suffix on prepositions, nouns, and verbs pointing to humankind and the reluctance to use a collective first-person plural to included himself among humankind; (3) the "I"-Heart formula that concludes the relationship between God's eternity and human's incapability over fate, while he judges as a bystander; and (4) the rhetorical questioning at the end that serves as an outcry of his very own incapability. Even as the intellectual authority, he is still man.

Nonetheless, in order for the speaker to maintain his authoritative voice with a didactic function, he distances himself from the general public. The possession of exclusive divine

knowledge about God's time, eternity, judgment, and gift enables him to share his empirical knowledge as the wisdom supreme with the people—just as the role of the king in ANE literature. This oral design remains effective in maintaining the authoritative Solomonic royal voice from the previous section (1:12-2:26). The result is a teacher who teaches accordingly to his so-called "privileged experience," while realizing in the process that he is subject to what he teaches. Longman III thus provides this section (3:9-22) with a very fitting closure: "Qohelet's statement has an objective tone to it. By his use of third-person narration, he presents himself as an impartial observer. It is clear, though, from his expressions of pain throughout the book, that Qohelet understood that he too was subject to the same realities and conclusions. He was not just an observer; he was both observer and participant."[51]

[51] Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 121.