

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF QOHELETH'S EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE IN ECCLESIASTES

Victor Umaru

Abstract

Ecclesiastes, a book by Qoheleth, is a philosophical exploration of existential themes central to the human condition. It emphasizes the transient nature of life and the futility of human endeavors in the face of an immutable passage of time. Qoheleth challenges conventional notions of achievement and success, advocating for a deeper, spiritual understanding of existence. Wisdom is a pivotal concept in Qoheleth's existential analysis, as he emphasizes the value of wisdom and knowledge while grappling with the limitations of human understanding. Despite its significance, wisdom does not shield individuals from life's inherent uncertainties and injustices. Qoheleth's existentialism in Ecclesiastes encourages readers to confront existential dilemmas, contemplating the transient nature of life, the quest for meaningfulness beyond material pursuits, and the complexities of wisdom amidst life's uncertainties. This paper explores the existentialist concepts presented by Qoheleth in the biblical book of Ecclesiastes to clarify the many approaches, interpretations, and conclusions related to his reflections on the meaning, impermanence, and wisdom of life. The research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing upon theological, philosophical, and literary analyses to provide a holistic understanding of Ecclesiastes' existential themes. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of Qoheleth's existentialism, offering insights into the human condition and the quest for meaning across diverse cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts.

Keywords: Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth, Philosophy, Existentialism, Life, and Knowledge

Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes, attributed to the Qoheleth, is a testament to the profound philosophical inquiry into the essence of existence. It contains questions of existential pondering, exploring life's intricate landscapes, meaning, and wisdom. Qoheleth's reflections serve as an intellectual voyage, inviting readers into a labyrinthine exploration of the human condition, urging contemplation on the enigmatic facets of existence that echo across epochs. Qoheleth's profound

introspection on the nature of life is central to Ecclesiastes's philosophical discourse. Through a prism of contemplative skepticism, he scrutinises the ephemerality of human endeavours and the transience inherent in human mortal existence. His striking remarks on life's cyclical nature—its repetitions and transience—force one to take a close look at the depths of the temporal universe.

Moreover, Qoheleth grapples with the perplexing question of meaning amidst life's apparent futility. He dissects wealth, pleasure, and knowledge pursuits, questioning their significance in the grand scheme. His relentless pursuit of understanding transcends the mundane and enters the existential void, seeking a foothold for purpose and significance within the human experience. At the crux of Qoheleth's philosophical contemplations lies the essence of wisdom—an ethereal pursuit that encompasses the discernment of life's intricacies, the acceptance of its uncertainties, and the recognition of the limitations of human knowledge. He challenges conventional notions of wisdom, juxtaposing it against the capriciousness of fate and the inscrutable workings of the divine, inviting discourse on the elusive nature of true wisdom and its relevance in navigating life's labyrinthine pathways.

Ecclesiastes serves as an intellectual beacon, illuminating the corridors of human consciousness and inviting scholars, theologians, and philosophers alike to engage in a profound dialogue on the nature of life, the pursuit of meaning, and the enigma of wisdom. Through a lens of profound philosophical analysis, exploring Qoheleth's existentialism in Ecclesiastes offers rich insights that reverberate through the annals of philosophical thought, challenging paradigms and inviting introspection into the fundamental questions that define the human experience.

This analysis of Qoheleth's existentialism within Ecclesiastes aims to uncover ancient wisdom and relevance in contemporary philosophical discourse. By dissecting Qoheleth's existentialism, the paper seeks to unravel the layers of Qoheleth's introspection, extracting nuggets of insight that resonate across cultural and temporal boundaries. The universality of Qoheleth's existential themes transcends cultural boundaries, providing a platform for cross-cultural dialogue and enabling a deeper understanding of human existential concerns across diverse societies and epochs. In essence, analysing Qoheleth's existentialism within Ecclesiastes not only unearths ancient wisdom but also catalyses a deeper exploration of the perennial questions that shape the human experience,

transcending time and inviting contemplation in the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and wisdom.

Historical and Literary Context of Ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes, also known as "Qoheleth" (Leong, 2023:291) in Hebrew, is a book that explores philosophical and existential themes. It is part of the Wisdom Literature in the Hebrew Bible and is renowned for its introspective tone, skepticism, and exploration of life's uncertainties and existential dilemmas. The book is a series of reflections and observations attributed to Qoheleth, presenting a cyclical and contemplative narrative. Emerging during a period of intellectual and cultural flourishing in ancient Israel, Ecclesiastes likely contributed to the multifaceted spectrum of Jewish wisdom literature. Its existential themes and reflections on the human condition have permeated cultural and philosophical discourse, transcending religious boundaries. Understanding Ecclesiastes's historical and literary context provides a lens through which to interpret the profound philosophical inquiries that permeate its verses. Its existential themes and reflections on the human condition have permeated cultural and philosophical discourse, transcending religious boundaries (cf. Lohfink 2003: 1-2).

Ecclesiastes is traditionally attributed to King Solomon, known for his wisdom. However, contemporary scholarship presents divergent views on its authorship, with some scholars questioning Solomon's direct authorship due to linguistic and cultural differences within the text. Linguistic analysis and historical context suggest a composition date between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE, which differs significantly from Solomon's era. Mark R. Sneed believes that Ecclesiastes emerged during Israel's post-exilic period following the Babylonian exile (2012:45-49). This period marked the Israelites' return, Jerusalem's rebuilding, and cultural and religious reformation. The post-exilic period was characterised by diverse cultural influences, including Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic thought. Jewish wisdom literature, including Ecclesiastes, blends indigenous Israelite wisdom traditions with influences from surrounding cultures. Ecclesiastes aligns with other wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, such as Proverbs and Job, which explore existential themes, philosophical reflections, and pragmatic advice. This genre often encompasses teachings on ethics, the nature of life, and the pursuit of wisdom, aiming to guide living a meaningful and virtuous

life. Understanding these debates and historical underpinnings enriches the interpretation of Ecclesiastes' existentialist reflections.

Authorship and Historical Context

The authorship of Ecclesiastes, attributed to Qoheleth, is a contentious issue among scholars. Traditional attributions suggest King Solomon wrote the book, but scholarly discourse challenges this attribution, citing linguistic, cultural, and contextual differences. Some scholars propose multiple authors or later redactions, citing linguistic discrepancies and shifts in theological themes. The historical context of Ecclesiastes is also debated, with scholars arguing whether it was authored during Solomon's reign (10th century BCE) or later (5th to 3rd century BCE). But for Stuart Weeks "Ecclesiastes was written no earlier than the Persian period, and is more probably a product of the Hellenistic period" (2021:5; Seow 1996:643-66; 1996:168-95; Crenshaw 1998:205-24)). Conflicting views arise regarding the socio-political climate and religious influences shaping the author's worldview, impacting interpretations of Qoheleth's existential contemplation. The debates surrounding Ecclesiastes still need to be solved, with varying opinions on the attribution to King Solomon and the historical context of its composition. Scholars continue to analyse linguistic, cultural, and contextual elements within the text to decipher the authorship and historical milieu, leading to conflicting theories about Qoheleth's identity and the era in which Ecclesiastes was written (Lohfink 2003, 6-7).

Conflicting perspectives arise regarding the historical context shaping Qoheleth's reflections, leading to debates on the socio-political milieu and religious influences during the presumed time of writing. Scholars debate the composition of Ecclesiastes based on various factors such as socio-political ideology, religious and cultural influences, and theological context. The era of writing, whether during Solomon's reign in the 10th century BCE (Shields 2007; Fredericks 1988) or a later post-exilic period (5th to 3rd century BCE), is a crucial factor in shaping Qoheleth's existential contemplation. Religious beliefs also play a significant role in shaping Qoheleth's musings, with some viewing them as reflective of traditional Jewish thought. In contrast, others highlight philosophical and existential elements seemingly detached from religious doctrines. Cultural and philosophical influences from neighbouring societies and philosophical trends of the time also influenced Qoheleth's contemplation. Theological and philosophical context also plays a role in shaping the text's implications. These

differing views on the historical context and religious influences contribute to diverse theories about Qoheleth's existential contemplation.

Theological vs Philosophical Readings

Theological interpretations of Ecclesiastes lead to conflicting perspectives among scholars, resulting in diverse readings rooted in religious contexts. Whybray (1982:87-98) interprets Ecclesiastes within the confines of religious doctrines, seeking moral or spiritual lessons from the text. Waston (1994:283) incorporates the book into theological frameworks in an effort to bring Qoheleth's reflections into line with accepted religious doctrine. Theological significance is explored to extract theological principles and insights applicable to religious contexts. However, conflicting theological views among different religious traditions or denominations can result in divergent readings and interpretations of Qoheleth's contemplation within Ecclesiastes (Bartholomew 1999: 4-20). Theological predispositions or interpretative biases influence scholars' readings, leading to varying theological perspectives on Qoheleth's existential reflections.

Conversely, some scholars adopt a purely philosophical lens, focusing on existential themes divorced from theological implications, leading to divergent views on the essence of Qoheleth's reflections (Dell 1993:301-29; Shead 1996:24-37; Shead 1997:67-91). These interpretations of Ecclesiastes focus on existential themes, exploring the text's contemplation on life's uncertainties, the transient nature of existence, and the quest for meaning. It aims to analyse Qoheleth's reflections independently of religious doctrines, extracting existential or philosophical insights without attributing them to specific theological frameworks. They also emphasise the human condition and meaning, examining Qoheleth's observation on life's meaning, the ephemeral nature of human endeavours, and the quest for enduring significance. These perspectives highlight the universal relevance of Qoheleth's reflections, aiming to extract philosophical insights applicable beyond specific religious contexts or beliefs. Philosophical readings of Ecclesiastes aim to extract existential and philosophical insights, focusing on the universal human experience and the quest for meaning.

Nature of Qoheleth's Intentions

Conflicting interpretations exist regarding the tone and intentions of Qoheleth's reflections in Ecclesiastes. Some scholars like Crenshaw (1992:277), view Qoheleth's contemplation as pessimistic, emphasising the futility of human

endeavours and the ultimate emptiness of life's pursuits. Others view it as pragmatic realism, acknowledging life's uncertainties without necessarily endorsing a negative outlook and as an honest assessment of life's transient and unpredictable nature without advocating a wholly negative perspective (Fox 1989; Ogden 1987; Murphy 1992). These divergent interpretations stem from varied readings of the text. This contrasting approach to Qoheleth's reflections leads to varied assessments of Ecclesiastes' underlying tone and intentions.

Bartholomew (1999:4-20) presents several scholars who debate whether Qoheleth's observation acknowledges and accepts life's impermanence or critiques and laments its limitations, leading to conflicting assessments of his stance. Some view it as acknowledging and accepting life's impermanence, while others see it as a critique or lamentation of its limitations. Some interpret it as acknowledging the inevitable nature of human existence and worldly pursuits without necessarily critiquing or lamenting this reality. Others suggest that Qoheleth's contemplation critiques or laments life's impermanence, potentially expressing dissatisfaction or despair with the transient nature of human endeavours. These divergent perspectives stem from differing readings of Qoheleth's tone and intentions within Ecclesiastes, leading to varying assessments of whether his observation acknowledges impermanence or involves a more profound critique or lamentation of its limitations. The conflicting assessments reflect differing readings of the text's nuances, leading to varied perspectives on Qoheleth's stance towards life's impermanence within the broader context of Ecclesiastes' existential contemplation.

i. Qoheleth's Reflections on the Quest for Meaning

Qoheleth's reflections on the quest for meaning involve examining the perceived significance of pursuits such as wealth, pleasure, and knowledge in the context of human existence. He looks at the ephemeral aspect of wealth, its inherent unpredictability, and the sense of emptiness or unhappiness that comes with pursuing it. He also examines the pursuit of pleasure, questioning its ultimate significance and lasting fulfilment. He challenges the notion that pleasure-seeking pursuits lead to enduring satisfaction, suggesting a sense of emptiness or dissatisfaction in their pursuit. He also examines the pursuit of knowledge, acknowledging its value but questioning its limitations in providing ultimate meaning or fulfilment (cf. Leong 2023:302-303).

Qoheleth's critique of human endeavours highlights the apparent futility of human efforts and accomplishments in the face of life's impermanence and cyclical nature. He critiques that human actions, achievements, and pursuits can provide enduring meaning or satisfaction due to their transient nature. He emphasizes how short life is and how meaningless it is, casting doubt on the idea that human endeavors may bring to long-term fulfillment or importance. Qoheleth also confronts the existential absurdity inherent in the human search for purpose amidst a world that appears to operate within cycles of repetitiveness and impermanence. He critiques the underlying assumptions that underpin the human quest for lasting meaning, pointing towards a sense of existential bewilderment in the face of life's uncertainties. This extends to conventional beliefs and societal norms that ascribe significance to pursuits such as wealth, pleasure, or knowledge. He challenges the conventional wisdom that assigns ultimate meaning or fulfillment to these pursuits, fostering a sense of disillusionment with their perceived ability to offer lasting satisfaction. Qoheleth invites readers to reevaluate the values and aspirations often attached to human endeavours, encouraging introspection into the deeper essence of existence and contemplating the broader existential realities of life's impermanence.

ii. Qoheleth's portrayal of wisdom

Qoheleth's concept of wisdom in Ecclesiastes is multifaceted and goes beyond mere intellectual knowledge. It involves a holistic understanding that involves discernment, practical insight, and a profound comprehension of life's complexities. This wisdom is characterised by the ability to make discerning judgments and prudent decisions in facing life's uncertainties and ambiguities. He acknowledges the limitations of human wisdom in comprehending the more profound mysteries of existence. It advocates for wisdom in moderation and prudence, requiring the discernment to navigate life's complexities with humility (cf. Dell 2020:137-152). Wisdom is intertwined with living virtuous conduct, emphasising that true wisdom involves intellectual acumen and a moral component that guides actions towards virtuous living. His portrayal of wisdom mirrors the intricacies and uncertainties inherent in the human condition. It embodies an understanding that grapples with life's paradoxes, the transient nature of existence, and the limitations of human comprehension.

Qoheleth's concept of wisdom and fate is a complex and interconnected exploration of human existence. Wisdom is a valuable attribute that aids in

making prudent decisions and navigating life's complexities. On the other hand, fate is an overarching force that seems beyond human control. He emphasises the limitations of wisdom in influencing or altering the predetermined course of fate as it guides decision-making. While Qoheleth acknowledges divine intervention, he does not necessarily equate wisdom with divine influence. Divine intervention operates independently of human wisdom, introducing a transcendent element beyond human understanding.

While wisdom is a valuable attribute, it also acknowledges its limitations in comprehending the more profound mysteries of existence. Human understanding is finite and constrained by the inability to grasp life's ultimate purpose or intricacies. Qoheleth juxtaposes wisdom's practical utility with the inherent limitations of human cognition. His comparisons highlight the interconnectedness of these concepts and the challenges posed by the intertwining nature of these existential realities. He presents these concepts as interwoven yet distinct facets of the human experience, highlighting their complexities and the nuanced interactions that shape human existence.

iii. Qoheleth's Existentialist Perspectives

Qoheleth considers the momentary nature of human existence, employing the Hebrew term "hebel" to convey a sense of transience or vapour-like quality (Lumanze 2022:37-55). He observes the temporality of life's pursuits, likening them to chasing after wind, suggesting an inherent impermanence characterising human endeavours. The term "hebel" describes the brief nature of life, often translated as "vanity" or "meaninglessness." This term signifies a breath-like quality that vanishes quickly, illustrating human endeavours' ephemeral and insubstantial aspects (Seow 2000:1-16). Through vivid imagery and metaphors, Qoheleth likens human endeavours to chasing after wind or striving after the ungraspable, emphasising the impermanence and lack of lasting substance in pursuits of wealth, pleasure, knowledge, and worldly success.

The usage of "hebel" by Qoheleth invites reflection on the transient character of human accomplishments and the illusionary nature of worldly goals. He urges a more thorough investigation of the temporal aspect of human existence, challenging traditional ideas of fulfillment derived from material prosperity or fleeting pleasures (Miller 2002). A fundamental component of Qoheleth's existential reflection is his portrayal of life's impermanence, which raises existential concerns about the ultimate value of human endeavor in a world

where accomplishments seem temporary. Qoheleth used "hebel" in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 2:11 to express the transience and eventual insubstantiality of human endeavors (cf. Meek, 2022).

Within Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth reflects on the cyclical nature of life, emphasising recurring patterns in nature and human experiences. He observes cycles in the natural world, such as the sun's rising and setting, the changing seasons, and the continuous flow of rivers, highlighting the repetitive nature inherent in the cosmos. These natural cycles symbolise the rhythm and regularity embedded in the fabric of existence, presenting a sense of inevitability and repetition. Qoheleth's reflections on human life suggest that human endeavours, achievements, and circumstances often follow cyclical patterns, echoing the rhythms observed in the natural world (Eccl. 1:5-7 and 3:1-8). This emphasis on cyclical patterns prompts contemplation on the predictability and repetitiveness inherent in life's experiences, challenging notions of linear progression and raising questions about the ultimate significance of actions and endeavours that seem to repeat without a discernible endpoint. Qoheleth's philosophical exploration of life's transitory and cyclical aspects reveals a tension between the desire for permanence and the inevitability of change. He questions the lasting impact of human efforts in a world where everything appears transient. His observations highlight the paradox between humanity's longing for lasting significance and the reality of a world where everything appears transient. This tension highlights individuals' existential dilemma, seeking meaning and permanence in a world of constant change. His focus on the transience and cyclical aspect of existence inspires deep philosophical reflection, encouraging the search for lasting meaning in a world of constant change. These observations prompt introspection into the human condition, encouraging individuals to reassess the significance of worldly accomplishments that may fade or prove transient in the grander scheme of existence. He also encourages reflection on the lasting impact of their actions in a world characterised by impermanence, urging contemplation on the legacy they leave behind.

Ecclesiastes 3:19-22 and 9:7-10 encapsulate this contemplation on human mortality, the brevity of life, and the uncertainty surrounding the lasting impact of human actions. His contemplation prompts profound introspection into the human condition, encouraging individuals to seek enduring significance beyond transient pursuits and a quest for deeper meaning in the face of life's impermanence. In 3:1-8, Qoheleth presents a poetic reflection on the various

seasons and phases of human life, illustrating the cyclical nature of existence. He employs rhythmic repetitions, contrasting pairs of opposites, to portray the duality and cyclicity inherent in human experiences. The passage underscores the inevitability of life's contrasting seasons and events, emphasising that each phase has its appointed time within the cyclical nature of life. Readers are prompted to ponder on the transient nature of human life and the contradictory interaction between the longing for permanence and the certainty of change by Qoheleth's observations on the fleetingness and cyclical patterns of existence.

Qoheleth's Existentialism and Prominent Existentialist Thinkers

While Qoheleth predates the formal development of existentialist philosophy, the parallels between his existential reflections in Ecclesiastes and the inquiries of prominent existentialist thinkers reveal shared themes of existential angst, the quest for meaning, and the confrontation with life's uncertainties and absurdities. Qoheleth's contemplation in Ecclesiastes reflects existential angst, questioning the futility and transience of human pursuits. Philosophers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus, existentialism emphasises human freedom and responsibility, advocating for individual choice and responsibility in an inherently absurd and indifferent universe (cf. Wartenberg 2008; Kaufmann 1960). Qoheleth questions the ultimate meaning of human pursuits and the ability to find lasting significance in a transient world. Existentialism also emphasises the struggle to create meaning in an indifferent universe. His reflections highlight the importance of personal authenticity and choices in shaping individual existence. The parallels between Qoheleth's reflections and existentialist inquiries highlight the shared exploration of existential dilemmas and the search for meaning amidst life's uncertainties.

Qoheleth's existentialism in Ecclesiastes reflects the absurdity and meaninglessness of life's pursuits, a concept explored by Albert Camus (1979:11-12) in his works like "The Myth of Sisyphus." Søren Kierkegaard also questions the ultimate significance of human endeavours and the quest for enduring meaning. Nietzsche critiques conventional values and societal norms, challenging assumptions attached to pursuits like wealth, pleasure, and knowledge. Sartre emphasises human freedom and responsibility in the face of life's uncertainties and explores the concept of existential choice in his works like "Being and Nothingness."

The existential reflections of Qoheleth and Camus's Absurd Hero are similar, as they face life's absurdities and seek meaning in a seemingly meaningless world (1979:57). These parallels demonstrate shared themes between Qoheleth's existentialism in Ecclesiastes and the contemplations of prominent existentialist thinkers, as they both grapple with existential dilemmas, the absurdity of life, the quest for meaning, and the complexities of the human condition, albeit within different cultural and historical contexts. Albert Camus (1979) and Friedrich Nietzsche explore the absurdity of life and the search for meaning within an indifferent universe (Rasheed et al., 2021:95). They both emphasise the absurdity of existence and the inherent meaninglessness in human pursuits, questioning the coherence and purpose behind actions in a chaotic world. Friedrich Nietzsche shares Qoheleth's exploration of life's transience and the cyclical nature of human existence. Both challenge conventional values and question the ultimate truth's lasting significance in societal norms and cultural values.

Jean-Paul Sartre emphasises human freedom and responsibility (Oyeshile 2004:122-138), while Qoheleth's reflections on human agency within uncertainties echo Sartre's emphasis on human freedom and responsibility. Both address existential angst and the struggle for meaning, addressing the finite human perspective and the mysteries of existence. Søren Kierkegaard's concept of existential anxiety and the struggle for meaning are explored in Qoheleth's reflections. In order to answer the need for authenticity, Martin Heidegger's emphasis on the temporality and fleetingness of life is also examined.

In Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth reflects on the folly of existence, emphasizing the transient character of human endeavors and their inconsistency in an ever-changing and transient environment. He emphasizes the cyclical character of life and casts doubt on the idea that these endeavors have any enduring importance or consistency. This idea aligns with existentialist thought, which suggests that human endeavours often unfold in a universe lacking inherent purpose or meaning. This aligns with Qoheleth's portrayal of the apparent lack of lasting significance or coherence in human pursuits, reflecting the existentialist notion of the absurdity of existence. Both perspectives emphasise the human struggle to find meaning and coherence in a world without ultimate purpose or significance, making human actions seem absurd or futile.

Qoheleth's existential musings in Ecclesiastes, despite not being within the framework of existential philosophy, incorporate themes of absurdity,

authenticity, and the complexities of human freedom found in existentialist thought. These reflections offer insights into individuals' existential struggles in a world marked by impermanence, uncertainty, and the quest for enduring meaning. Qoheleth emphasises the absurdity of life's pursuits and advocates for living and virtuous conduct, intertwining them with the pursuit of wisdom. He also reflects on human agency within the confines of fate and the cyclical nature of life, echoing existentialism's emphasis on human freedom and responsibility despite the constraints of existence. His existential musings offer a timeless contemplation on the universal dilemmas of existence, enriching our understanding of the human experience despite predating the formalisation of existential philosophy.

Qoheleth's Existentialism in Philosophical Discourse

Qoheleth's observation of life's momentary nature aligns with modern existential concerns about the impermanence of human existence. In an era marked by rapid changes, technological advancements, and transient experiences, his insights resonate with individuals grappling with the ephemeral nature of modern life. In today's rapid technological advancements and societal transformations, individuals often face constant flux. Qoheleth's reflections on the transient nature of life resonate with those experiencing brief moments in modern experiences. In a society driven by instant gratification and short-lived successes, his insights on the impermanence of human endeavours become relevant. His contemplation prompts reflection on the sustainability and lasting significance of achievements in a culture prioritising immediate results over enduring contributions. His recognition of life's impermanence offers a philosophical lens through which individuals can cope with the uncertainties and rapid changes of the modern world. His insights encourage a contemplative approach to navigating life's transience and its implications on personal identity and existential fulfilment.

His skepticism towards the lasting significance of human pursuits echoes existential inquiries about the meaning of life in a world often dominated by materialism, consumerism, and the pursuit of success. This resonates with those questioning the value and purpose behind societal norms and conventional aspirations. Qoheleth's skepticism is relevant in today's materialistic culture, where value is often associated with possessions and consumption (Weeks 2012). His contemplation challenges the idea that material wealth or possessions provide lasting meaning, prompting individuals to question the trustworthy source of

fulfilment beyond material pursuits (1:8, 1:13–18, 2:12, 3:11, 7:16, 7:23–24, 8:17, and 12:12). He encourages reflection on these pursuits' true value and lasting significance in a society driven by success and achievement. He also encourages individuals to critically assess societal norms and values, as they often dictate life's goals and aspirations. Qoheleth's skepticism aligns with contemporary existential inquiries into the authenticity of meaning and purpose, encouraging individuals to seek genuine sources of fulfilment beyond societal expectations. His skepticism about the lasting significance of human pursuits aligns with contemporary existential inquiries into the true meaning of life beyond materialism and societal expectations.

In an era characterised by global challenges, existential dilemmas, and societal upheavals, his contemplation offers a philosophical framework for individuals to address global challenges such as climate change, political instability, and socio-economic uncertainties. It addresses existential dilemmas and anxiety related to identity, purpose, and the search for meaning. Qoheleth's reflections resonate with the existential anxiety stemming from these uncertainties to confront the inherent uncertainty of human existence contributed by societal upheavals, cultural shifts, and rapid changes. Qoheleth's contemplation guides individuals in navigating these upheavals, encouraging a reflective approach to understanding and confronting the complexities inherent in societal transformations (<https://www.majesticvision.com/existentialism-as-discourse>). Qoheleth's contemplation encourages reflection on moral values, highlighting them as intrinsic components of navigating life's uncertainties and seeking enduring significance. This integration of ethical living with existential contemplation resonates with ongoing ethical discourse, fostering discussions on the relevance and application of ethical principles in a dynamic and ever-changing societal landscape.

His observation encourages individuals to engage with existential questions beyond conventional boundaries. In a modern context where existential themes are approached through various disciplines, Qoheleth's reflections invite us to engage in multidisciplinary dialogue about the nature of existence. Qoheleth's contemplation on existential themes is a foundational framework for diverse disciplines to engage with the complexities of human existence. It encourages a holistic understanding of existential themes across different fields of study, such as psychology, anthropology, and ethics. Qoheleth's reflections remain relevant in a modern context, as they invite individuals to consider existential inquiries from

multiple perspectives, fostering a prosperous and inclusive discourse on the nature of existence. The contemplation also invites reflective dialogue across disciplines, encouraging individuals to delve deeper into existential inquiries and engage in nuanced discussions that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. In conclusion, Qoheleth's contemplation invites multidisciplinary engagement with existential questions, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in existential themes and their relevance in a multidimensional, modern context.

i. Diverse Interpretations of Qoheleth's Existentialist Ideas

Qoheleth's existentialist ideas in Ecclesiastes are interpreted differently, ranging from pessimism to pragmatism, religious to secular, and emphasising ethics and life's impermanence. These interpretations contribute to the philosophical discourse's richness, stimulating ongoing dialogue and offering a spectrum of perspectives on the human condition and the quest for enduring meaning.

The interpretation of Qoheleth's existential musings often falls between philosophical pessimism and pragmatic realism. Philosophical pessimism emphasises the futility and vanity of human endeavours, highlighting human efforts' insurmountable challenges and inherent meaninglessness. This perspective views Qoheleth as presenting a bleak outlook on existence, stressing the insurmountable challenges and inherent meaninglessness of human efforts (Priest 1968:324; Anderson 1998: 295-97; Forman 1958:336-43). On the other hand, pragmatic realism views Qoheleth's contemplation as a pragmatic acknowledgement of life's uncertainties, acknowledging the honesty and realism in his reflections without necessarily committing to complete despair (cf. Leong 2023:297-298). This divergence between these perspectives allows readers to engage with the nuances of Qoheleth's existential contemplation, highlighting the multifaceted nature of his reflections on the human condition.

Qoheleth's existential musings are interpreted from various religious and secular perspectives. Religious interpretations place Qoheleth's reflections within a religious framework, often attributing them to spiritual insights or divine guidance. They view his contemplation as a call for deeper spiritual understanding, exploring the limitations of earthly pursuits in the context of divine wisdom. On the other hand, secular perspectives focus on philosophical inquiry, separating Qoheleth's existential contemplation from religious

connotations. They view his contemplation as a philosophical exploration of existential themes without explicitly referencing divine inspiration or religious context (Sneed, 2012; Robinson, 2012; Weeks, 2012). The religious interpretation aligns Qoheleth's reflections with spiritual or divine contexts, often seeking moral or spiritual lessons. Conversely, the secular perspective views Qoheleth's existential scrutiny as a standalone philosophical inquiry, divorced from explicit religious influences. These varying lenses offer diverse approaches to understanding Qoheleth's existential ideas, showcasing the multifaceted nature of interpretations surrounding his existential ideas.

Interpretations vary regarding the acceptance or rejection of life's impermanence. Some view Qoheleth as accepting and acknowledging the transient nature of existence, while others perceive his reflections as a critique or lamentation of this impermanence. Qoheleth's contemplation on life's impermanence is interpreted differently by different perspectives. Some see it as a sobering realization of life's impermanence and an impartial assessment of it. Others view it as a critique or lamentation of life's limitations, expressing dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory nature of a transient existence (Bartholomew 1999:4-20). The interpretations of Qoheleth's stance on life's impermanence vary significantly, with some viewing it as accepting life's impermanence. In contrast, others see it as a critique or lamentation of the limitations associated with life's impermanence. These contrasting interpretations offer contrasting lenses through which Qoheleth's contemplation on impermanence is understood within the context of Ecclesiastes.

ii. Theological Implications of Qoheleth's Existentialism

Qoheleth's existentialism in Ecclesiastes holds significant theological implications, sparking various discussions and interpretations within theological discourse. His reflections on life events reveal a world where events seem arbitrary and unpredictable, challenging traditional views of divine justice. He observes instances where the righteous and wicked face similar fates, contradicting the expected outcomes. The absence of clear cause-and-effect and uncertainty in divine intervention also challenge the notion of direct correlations between actions and outcomes. Existential reflections on the human experience raise questions about the comprehensibility of divine providence within the human experience. The divine plan is challenged, introducing the idea of inherent randomness and unpredictability (cf. Walsh 2012:12-17). He also questions the cause-and-effect

relationship between righteous living and positive outcomes or wickedness and negative consequences and the consistency and predictability of divine intervention based on human actions. Qoheleth's observations on the indiscriminate nature of events within the human experience prompt reflections on the comprehensibility of divine justice in the context of existential uncertainties. He encourages reevaluation of divine plans, considering the complexities of divine providence in a world that sometimes appears arbitrary.

Qoheleth's portrayal of human endeavours in Ecclesiastes challenges the perceived significance and lasting value of worldly pursuits like wealth, pleasure, or knowledge. Given their transient character, it invites theological considerations on the ultimate goal and lasting meaning of human endeavors. Qoheleth's contemplation prompts evaluations of human contributions and the relationship between human agency and divine intentions, examining the role of human endeavours within divine providence (Brueggemann, 1997; Crenshaw, 1995). Existential implications arise from existential questions on achievement, fulfilment, and the quest for enduring meaning and significance amid the apparent futility of specific human pursuits. Furthermore, Qoheleth's reflections on human control raise questions about the limitations of human agency in an unpredictable and transient world. They prompt contemplation on the extent to which human actions can shape outcomes in reality characterised by impermanence. Existential considerations prompt questions about the nature of human agency and its implications in navigating life's uncertainties.

Wisdom in divine context prompts contemplation on wisdom within divine contexts, exploring how divine wisdom influences human understanding and guides existential contemplation. Theological implications of wisdom encourage reflections on the theological significance of wisdom in navigating existential uncertainties and seeking divine insights within human experiences. Wisdom's role in understanding existence aids in comprehending life's complexities and navigating existential dilemmas within theological perspectives. Integrating wisdom and divine intentions promotes contemplation on how wisdom contributes to understanding divine intentions and human purpose within theological discourse. The nature of divine wisdom and its role in navigating existential uncertainties within a religious framework is significant in human life, guiding moral choices and understanding the purpose of life (cf. Longman III, 1998). Qoheleth encourages discussions on how divine wisdom is integrated into religious beliefs, rituals, and teachings, offering guidance for believers in

navigating life's uncertainties. It highlights divine wisdom as a foundation for faith and religious understanding, influencing interpretations of the human condition within religious frameworks.

iii. Evaluation of Qoheleth's Arguments

Qoheleth's philosophical reflections on life's transient nature are authentic and relatable, appealing to those seeking a genuine understanding of existence without sugarcoating its complexities. They transcend cultural or temporal boundaries, allowing individuals across periods and diverse backgrounds to identify with and contemplate the inherent impermanence of human endeavours. Qoheleth's honest assessment of life's uncertainties speaks to the human experience without downplaying the challenges, fostering a genuine dialogue about the inherent impermanence of human endeavours. This honesty prompts introspection and philosophical contemplation, making Qoheleth's reflections significant.

Qoheleth is a philosophical concept that combines wisdom and ethical living, emphasising the interconnectedness between knowledge and virtuous conduct (see Gericke 2015:1-9; cf. Sneed 2012:13–20). This approach offers a holistic approach to life's complexities, emphasising intellectual understanding and practical application of ethical principles. It also emphasises the moral dimension in existential contemplation, acknowledging the moral dimension within the quest for meaning. This incorporation of ethics elevates the existential discourse, encouraging individuals to consider moral implications while navigating life's uncertainties.

Qoheleth's critical contemplation challenges societal norms by scrutinising the pursuit of wealth, pleasure, and knowledge, prompting individuals to question culturally endorsed values and fostering a deeper examination of commonly accepted pursuits. This critical contemplation stimulates philosophical inquiry into the nature of meaningful pursuits, fostering a deeper introspection and search for enduring significance beyond societal conventions. However, Qoheleth's reflections may lack definitive answers, leading to potential existential disquiet and dissatisfaction. The lack of clear resolutions may leave readers grappling with existential questions without providing reassuring insights, potentially leading to dissatisfaction. Existential ambiguity may also evoke disillusionment among readers, as the absence of definitive answers contributes to feelings of disillusionment or uncertainty about life's meaning or purpose.

Qoheleth's pessimistic tone highlights the futility of human endeavours in the face of life's transient nature, potentially leading to a sense of hopelessness. This negativity may overshadow the potential for discovering moments of meaning, joy, or fulfilment within life's impermanence. Additionally, Qoheleth's focus on life's impermanence may lead to a narrow view of existence, overlooking other dimensions such as relationships, creativity, and personal growth. Despite these limitations, Qoheleth's candid assessment of life's impermanence remains a thought-provoking contemplation that encourages more profound reflection on the meaning of human existence and the quest for enduring significance.

Conclusion

The discourse on Qoheleth's existential observation within Ecclesiastes explores various themes and perspectives. The book's historical and literary context is a topic of debate, with controversies surrounding its authorship and structure. Qoheleth's existentialist perspectives include the "fleetingness of life," cyclical patterns, and philosophical significance, challenging conventional notions of achievement and permanence. The book's philosophical analysis parallels existentialism, examining absurdity, authenticity, and freedom within its reflections. Qoheleth's assertions are evaluated for their strengths, weaknesses, relevance in modern discourse, and alignment with contemporary societal questions about impermanence. The discourse also discusses various interpretations and conflicts, including pessimism versus realism, religious versus secular interpretations, and varying emphases on ethics and impermanence. The discourse also gets into the role of wisdom in existential contemplation and its theological implications. The study reveals that Qoheleth's existential contemplation in Ecclesiastes challenges conventional beliefs and stimulates discussions on impermanence, wisdom, ethics, and the divine. Its relevance spans historical, philosophical, theological, and modern contexts, igniting reflections on the human condition and the quest for enduring meaning within a transient existence.

Ecclesiastes offers timeless insights into the human condition, challenging individuals to confront the impermanence of life and navigate uncertainties. It prompts philosophical inquiries into the quest for meaning and purpose, integrating considerations with existential contemplation. It provides a lens to understand modern existential concerns, addressing societal upheavals and pursuing meaning in a transient world. The existential reflections of Ecclesiastes

influence philosophical, theological, and ethical debate by tackling common human issues like mortality, the transient nature of existence, and the search for lasting value. It transcends cultural and religious boundaries, influencing thinkers and schools of thought grappling with questions of existence, meaning, and impermanence. They inspire individuals to contemplate the brevity of life, fostering a deeper understanding of human experiences and the quest for enduring meaning.

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