APPENDIX A

ANIMAL IMAGERY AS A HERMENEUTICAL TOOL FOR ANALYZING THE CONCEPTUAL POLARITY IN QOHELETH

The question of the Qoheleth’s inclusion in the canon was debated by the rival schools of Hillel (for) and Shammai (against) (m. Yad 3:5, Ēd. 5:3; b. Meg. 7a). Rabbinic sources offer two main arguments against its inclusion among the canonical books: (1) the book contradicts itself (b. Šabb. 30b); (2) it expresses heretical views (Qoh. Rab. 1:3; 11:9; Num. Rab. 161b). Its eventual admission to the canon was evidently because of the ancient Jewish tradition that its author was King Solomon, “the son of David, king in Jerusalem (Qoh. i 1; cf. i 12; see also Song Rab. 1:1, 10), the archetypal wise man. Another explanation, no less important, may be the orthodoxy of its closing verses (xii 12–14; see b. Šabb. 30b).

The apparent lack of internal coherence, which was not lost on the ancient rabbis, is a recurring issue in modern scholarship about Qoheleth. Different voices are heard in the book: one in which the author refers to himself in the first person, and another that refers to Qoheleth in the third person. A more serious problem concerns the dissonance between conservative statements that relate to various phenomena of life, on the one hand, and skeptical observations that contradict traditional beliefs, on the other hand. The skeptical voice has been attributed to the original author—the hākām or sage—while the conservative views have been attributed to a pious glossator or editor (one or more).¹ Another approach attributes the contradictory

An earlier version of this appendix was published as “The Fly and the Dog: Observations on Ideational Polarity in the Book of Qoheleth, in Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, ed. R. L. Troxel et al. (Winona Lake, IN, 2005), pp. 235–255.

¹ See C. G. Siegfried, Prediger und Hoheslied (Göttingen, 1898), pp. 2–12. For surveys of theories about the identity of the alleged glossator(s), see: M. V. Fox, Qohelet and his Contradictions (JSOTSup 71; Sheffield, 1989), pp. 23–25; Roland E. Murphy, “The Sage in Ecclesiastes and Qoheleth the Sage,” in The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN, 1990), p. 263; C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes (AB 18C; New York, 1997), pp. 38–43.
voices to the same author and offers two solutions for the inconsistencies: (1) The author is presenting a debate, with a genuine or fictional interlocutor, in which he quotes traditional views in order to contradict them.2 (2) The author is expressing the changing perspectives of sequential stages in his life and the evolution of his own worldview.3 In other words, the conflicting points of view represent a dialogue between Qoheleth and himself.

Qoheleth employs a wide variety of expressive modes for his observations and sketches a procedure for investigation. For example, he writes, “I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun” (i 13); “and so I set my mind to appraise wisdom and to appraise madness and folly” (i 17); “for all this I noted and I ascertained all this” (ix 1). The style of Qoheleth’s confessional monologue is characterized by strings of sentences connected by coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. For example, he uses the particle šē-, along with āšer, not only as a relative particle (as in classical biblical Hebrew) but also as a conjunction to introduce the subject of an object clause, a usage typical of late Biblical Hebrew.4

Although scholars have tried to analyze Qoheleth as a carefully planned composition divided into separate units,5 it is difficult to demarcate the individual pericopes. Often there is a continuous flow of thought in the argument of a literary unit; elsewhere the thematic continuity seems to be forced. Given the complexity of this issue, it seems preferable to read the text in the order in which it has come down to us and to evaluate the content of each pericope in situ.

My main concern here is to evaluate the rhetorical impact of two aphorisms that involve animal imagery (first x 1 and then ix 4). An examination of their syntactic and thematic settings will shed light on two well-known scholarly problems:

---


5 For various methodologies in delineating a planned structure of the book, see ibid., pp. 43–47.