THE THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF HOMILETICAL APPLICATION AND ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to expose the theological-hermeneutical substructure of homiletical application, and thereby to produce a fresh approach to homiletical application. Broadly construed as the point of contact between the text and the congregation, homiletical application is the most significant problem facing contemporary homiletics. Chapter one introduces the problem and identifies the four contemporary homiletical approaches to application: Contemporary Traditional Homiletics (*CTH*), New Homiletics (*NH*), Post-Liberal Homiletics (*PLH*), and (radically) Post-Modern Homiletics (*PMH*). Chapter two is a case study of *CTH*, exposing its theological-hermeneutical presuppositions and their impact on the view of application espoused by *CTH*.

In chapter three we classify the three ways in which contemporary homiletics conceive of application hermeneutically: as *distinct* from understanding, *involved* in understanding, and *determinate* of understanding. *CTH* espouses the former view, *NH* the middle view, and *PMH* the latter view. *PLH* taps into both the involved and the determinate approaches. Exploring the hermeneutical ecology of application (textuality, language, history, and epistemology) reveals strengths and weaknesses of each view and establishes the polymorphous nature of application; i.e., its object determines the nature of application.

In chapter four we face the inevitable challenges of objectivism on the one hand and radical relativism on the other hand. Navigating these two extremes in terms of the role of application in the process of understanding brings the nature of application sharply into focus. Conceiving of understanding in Gadamer's terms of a fusion of horizons allows the homiletician to respect the heterogeneity of the whole range of language games, to affirm a robust understanding of the nature of truth, to discipline interpretation by the text at hand and yet to acknowledge the necessary and creative role of the interpreter in the process of understanding, and finally to recognize the transformative power of the text.

In chapters five and six we approach Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 with the view of application developed in chapters one through four. Chapter five is an interpretation of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 with attention given to the particular way in which the reader is structured into the meaning of the text, and thus to the specific nature of application in the process of understanding this particular text. Chapter six identifies three questions that empower a preacher to make the move from studying the passage to preaching the passage. These three questions reveal that a polymorphic approach to application not only exposes the weakness and exploits the strengths of *CTH, NH, PLH,* and *PMH,* but it also empowers one to go beyond the current approaches into a more robust homiletic that enables the preacher and congregation to engage the immediate presence of the text as the interconnection of thought, feeling, imagination, and truth is recovered.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF HOMILETICAL APPLICATION

The Christian church, throughout its length and breadth, has maintained a commitment to Scripture as her authoritative text, and in Scripture the church has expected and continues to expect to hear God speaking.[1] Closely connected to this commitment and expectation has been an equally ancient and widespread commitment to the distinct yet inseparable nature of Scriptural exegesis and preaching.[2] Such a view is behind the first sentence of the most influential book ever written on homiletics, Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*,[3] "There are two things on which all interpretation of scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt."[4]

Unfortunately, the inviolable connection between Scripture and sermon, so long cherished, has fallen prey to the atomizing and fragmenting effects of the Enlightenment. Hence Ellen Davis' salient observation, "Indeed, it is now widely regarded as axiomatic that one should not do exegesis in the pulpit. Conversely, 'homiletical treatments' of Scripture are dismissed by biblical scholars as inherently lacking in substance."[5] The tension created by the current bifurcation, on the one hand, and the memory of a two-thousand year long commitment, on the other hand, creates the Janus-faced reality that Richard Lischer points to when he writes, "It is as

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[1] Cf., Barth's statement: "The fact of the canon tells us simply that the church has regarded the Scriptures as the place where we can expect to hear the voice of God." However, this is not to commit to any particular view of the text beyond its authority. Barth acknowledges as much when he follows the previously quoted sentence with the statement: "The proper attitude of preachers does not depend on whether they hold on to the doctrine of inspiration but on whether or not they expect God to speak to them here" (*Idem, Homiletic,* 78). There have been deviations from the twofold commitment to Scripture as authoritative and to the expectancy to hear God's voice in Scripture, but it is well documented that such views and practices have been exceptions to the norm.

[2] Even a cursory survey of the history of preaching will notice the constitutive nature of Scripture to preaching. E.g., Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*, esp. 1-10; Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 178-79. Also, see the multi-volume, unfinished history of preaching by Old, where the fundamental relationship of Scripture to preaching is assumed in the title: *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church.* For a recent attempt to separate Scripture and preaching, see Farley, "Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching," 167, 170; *Idem,* "Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel," 90-104; Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, 11-13, 23-29.

[3] Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church,* vol 2, 386; Rowe, *St. Augustine Pastoral Theologian*, 45; Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching*, 60; Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church*, 99.

[4] Augustine, *On Christian Teaching,* I:1. Hereafter, referred to as *DDC.*

[5] Davis, *Wondrous Depth*, xii.

difficult to find ministers who are against biblical preaching as it is to find biblical preaching."[6]

Fortunately, the estrangement of preaching from its source and norm has not gone unnoticed.[7] Thomas Long, for example, describes the whole of contemporary homiletics as nothing more than so many attempts to redress the relationship of Scripture to congregation in the act of preaching.[8] At its most basic level homiletical application is the point of contact between the text and the congregation,[9] therefore Long has identified the essence of contemporary homiletics as the search for a clarification of homiletical application. Briefly stated, application is the most vexing problem facing homiletics today.

The many attempts to restore the relationship of Scripture and congregation, to solve the problem of homiletical application, can be grouped into four main categories. Each group is constituted by a cluster of approaches that despite important differences nonetheless have enough in common to legitimate identification as a singular constellation. The approaches are: Contemporary Traditional Homiletics, New Homiletics, Post-Liberal Homiletics, and (radically)[10] Post-Modern Homiletics.[11] Contemporary Traditional Homiletics (hereafter referred to as *CTH*) construes the relationship of Scripture and congregation in terms of the historical-cultural gap between the contemporary hearers and the original recipients of the Biblical texts. To overcome this gap, the preacher abstracts timeless truths from the text in order to apply these truths to the concrete situation of the

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[6] Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching,* 57.

[7] E.g., Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (1970); Von Rad, *Predigt-Meditationen* (1973); Achtemeier, *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel* (1973); Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit* (1978); Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (1980); Thompson, ed., *Preaching Biblically* (1981).

[8] Long, "And How Shall They Live," 180.

[9] In homiletics, 'application' is not the only term used to describe the point of contact between the text and the congregation. Depending on one's particular view of the nature and function of the relationship between the text and the congregation, one may use: application, implication, appropriation, actualization, effect, contextualization, significance, or relevance. However, I am using and defining the term 'application' in such a basic way as to identify the common denominator in each approach to homiletics. That is, on its most basic level, in all of the approaches to preaching, homiletical application is the point of contact between the text and the hearer(s). Therefore, this definition is valid whether one is, e.g., describing the way a text is heard by and appropriated by a specific hearer or group of hearers or if one is describing the subjective appropriation of the text by the preacher.

[10] Wilson correctly identifies various post-modern influences in both the New Homiletics and Post-Liberal Homiletics, and yet distinguishes a third category of preaching that is more thoroughly post-modern. See his, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory,* 136.

[11] The hermeneutical circle is at work here, in that it is my work on the hermeneutical substructure of application (chapters two through four) that led me to this taxonomy.

contemporary congregation.[12] New Homiletics (hereafter referred to as *NH*) addresses the problem of application via the event of language as the universal key to being and understanding. In contrast to *CTH, NH* aims not at the application of propositional truth, but at the evocation of a Word-event that is experienced by the congregation.[13] Post-Liberal Homiletics (hereafter referred to as *PLH*) understands the relationship of Scripture and congregation narratively. In this approach, the Biblical story is carried forward into the contemporary world by incorporating the contemporary world into the world rendered by the Biblical narrative.[14] Finally, (radically) Post-Modern Homiletics (hereafter referred to as *PMH*) erases all boundaries between Scripture and congregation.[15] Through language that is confessional and evocative the preacher opens up space for a participatory conversation that generates meanings.[16]

The diversity of these four approaches to the homiletical relationship between Scripture and congregation is deeper than method. Methodological pluralism is neither new, nor necessarily problematic for preaching. Thus, narrative sermons, expository sermons, apologetic sermons, topical sermons, allegorical sermons need not be contradictory in that they can be legitimate sermonic forms/methods that focus upon different aspects of the text under consideration. However, the various approaches to homiletical application (*CTH, NH, PL, PMH*) exhibit a deeper form of pluralism that is problematic. This type of pluralism operates at a subterranean level. It is rooted in issues of language, epistemology, history, and textuality. Differences at this level are often irreconcilable. For example, McClure's view of textuality,

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[12] E.g., Robinson, *Biblical Preaching,* 88-96; *Idem,* "The Heresy of Application," 20-27; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 40-44, 199-224; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 131-140, 182-187, 224-227; Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*; Mayhue, ed., and Thomas, assoc. ed., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, esp. "Part III: Processing and Principlizing the Biblical Text"; Zuck, "Application in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition," 26; Adams, *Truth Applied*; Estes, "Audience Analysis and Validity in Application," 219-229; Krabbendam, "Hermeneutics and Preaching," 239; McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 279.

[13] E.g., Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 19; Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, esp. chp. 3, "Inductive Movement in Preaching"; *Idem, Preaching*, esp. 25-27, 85-86, 148-50, 194-209; *Idem, Overhearing the Gospel*, esp. chps. 6-7; *Idem,* "Preaching: An Appeal to Memory," 69-73; Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, esp. the chap. entitled, "Experiencing the Gospel"; *Idem, Doing Time in the Pulpit,* 13, 23, 26, 32, 36, 82, 85; *Idem, How to Preach a Parable,* 21-26; *Idem, The Sermon*, 31, 32, 36-37, 39; *Idem,* "The Revolution of the Sermonic Shape," 110-11.

[14] E.g., Campbell, *Preaching Jesus,* 250-57; Elingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*; Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination*, esp. chp 1, "Our Home in the Narrative."

[15] McClure has done more than any other homiletician to incorporate this aspect of philosophical-deconstruction into homiletics. See his, *Other-Wise Preaching,* 13-26.

[16] E.g., Rose, *Sharing the Word,* 98-113, 130-31; Bond, *Trouble with Jesus*; McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*; Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance*; Webb, *Comedy and Preaching*; *Idem, Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism.*

articulated in *Other-Wise Preaching*[17] is antipodal to Mathewson's view expressed in *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. One cannot work with both views; they are mutually exclusive. To choose between the two is to choose a fundamental view of reality.[18]

The four theoretical areas I have identified (language, epistemology, history, and textuality) coalesce under the subject of thought that has been identified since the last half of the twentieth century as philosophical or contemporary hermeneutics.[19] Because this area of study is foundational and formative for all theory construction[20] it is critical that homiletics takes time to examine its relationship with these larger philosophical issues.[21] At present, no such investigation has been undertaken with regard to homiletical application. Until such a study is done confusion and lack of clarity will continue to mark the various solutions to the central problem of contemporary homiletics.[22] Therefore, this investigation will address the problem of homiletical application by examining the relationship of application to theories of language, epistemology, history, and textuality.[23] That is, the focus of this study is the relationship of homiletical application to hermeneutics.[24]

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[17] McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching.*, 13-26.

[18] Cf. Bartholomew's analysis of methodological and philosophical pluralism in OT studies, *Idem, Reading Ecclesiastes,* 2.

[19] Cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory,* esp. chp 2, "What is Philosophical about Philosophical Hermeneutics?"; Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*; Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*; Palmer, *Hermeneutics.*

[20] Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Idem, Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 3-17.

[21] Cf. Jacques Derrida's comment: "To say to oneself that one is going to study something that is not philosophy is to deceive oneself. It is not difficult to show that in a political economy, for example, there is a philosophical discourse in operation. And the same applies to mathematics and the other sciences. Philosophy, as logocentrism, is present in every scientific discipline and the only justification for transforming philosophy into a specialized discipline is the necessity to render explicit and thematic the philosophical subtext in every discourse. The principle function which the teaching of philosophy serves is to enable people to become 'conscious', to become aware of what exactly they are saying, what kind of discourse they are engaged in when they do mathematics, physics, political economy, and so on. There is no system of teaching or transmitting knowledge which can retain its coherence without, at one moment or another, interrogating itself philosophically, that is, without acknowledging its subtextual premises; and this may even include an interrogation of unspoken political interests or traditional values" (Kearney, 'Jacques Derrida' in *idem, Dialogues With Contemporary Thinkers*, 125).

[22] For a good survey of the fragmented state of contemporary homiletics, see Immink, "Homiletics: The Current Debate."

[23] There are alternative ways of assessing the foundations of current homiletical approaches to application. For example, one could query the various homiletical proposals with regard to their assumptions about divine revelation. Such an approach is worthy of further investigation.

[24] In light of our focus on this specific relationship (i.e., homiletical application and hermeneutics), at times, throughout this dissertation, 'application' will be used in a strictly hermeneutical sense to describe a particular aspect of the interpreter's involvement in the act of interpretation. (This will be dealt with extensively in the end of chapter two and throughout chapter

In his masterful work, *The Desire of the Nations,* Oliver O'Donovan provides a helpful introduction to our task when he writes: "The passage from what God said to Abraham to what we are now to do about Iraq, is one which the intuition of faith may accomplish in a moment, and a preacher's exhortation in under twenty minutes. An intellectual account of it, however, can be the work of decades."[25] This challenge we are facing is so difficult not only because of the depth of analysis required, but also because the subject of homiletical application demands a multi-disciplinary range of vision. The problem we have articulated encompasses three broad areas of inquiry: homiletics, hermeneutics, and biblical studies. Each of these fields, in turn, draws upon several disciplines.[26] Thus this project is susceptible to: a failure to do justice to all disciplines involved,[27] the privileging of theory over practice,[28] and the uncritical adoption of ideologies.[29] And yet, despite the threats one faces, such a study is essential for contemporary homiletics. Indeed homiletics cannot exist without some solution to the problem of application. That solution may be explicit or it may be implicit – shaped on the basis of a traditional view that has not been critically considered.[30] But some solution is at work anytime a passage of Scripture is preached or preaching is reflected upon (homiletics). It is not, then, a question of whether the problem ought to be solved, but rather if the solution upon which a sermon depends or a homiletic built is adequate.

Our investigation is divided into two parts. Part one is a depth-hermeneutical analysis of homiletical application. It begins in chapter two with a case study of *CTH.* We will identify the nature of the *CTH* view of application, and will analyze it to expose the shaping influence of foundational hermeneutical commitments. Chapter three interrogates each of the four contemporary homiletical approaches to application in light of their construal of the hermeneutics of application. Chapter four concludes part one of the dissertation by identifying the nature of the relationship of

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three.) On other occasions, 'application' will be used in the more general homiletical sense of the point of contact between the text and the congregation. The sense of the term will be explicitly named (e.g., "hermeneutical application" and "homiletical application") or it will be apparent based upon the context.

[25] O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, ix.

[26] E.g., Sternberg has observed that biblical studies, "is not a discipline by any stretch of the term but the intersection of the humanities par excellence." As a result, "the progress it so badly needs is conditional either on all-around expertise, not given to humans or on a truly common pursuit of knowledge" (*Idem, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 21-22).

[27] Cf., Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 149-51.

[28] Cf. *Ibid.*, 146.

[29] Here I am using the term in its negative sense.

[30] Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic*, 14.

hermeneutical application and homiletical application. Together, chapters three and four constitute a fresh proposal for the nature of homiletical application. In part two we move from theory to praxis by applying the insights from part one to a specific biblical text: Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. Chapter five is an interpretation of the passage with attention given to the way in which hermeneutical application is structured by the text. This constitutes the first of Augustine's two homiletical moments, the preacher in the study. Chapter six addresses the second moment, the preacher in the pulpit, by exploring the results of our approach for the role of application in the preaching of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. Chapter seven, the conclusion to this project, is a summary of the journey taken and the results achieved.

PART ONE:
THE THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF HOMILETICAL APPLICATION

CHAPTER 2

A CASE STUDY: THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS AND APPLICATION IN CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL HOMILETICS

Introduction

There are three reasons for beginning our analysis of homiletical application with *CTH*. First, *CTH* is the oldest approach, and in important ways (that will become apparent in chapter three) the other three approaches are reactions to or divergences from it. Second, *CTH* is particularly illuminating for the central argument of this dissertation because of all the various contemporary homiletics it prides itself on being a form of preaching that is the most "biblical."[31] John MacArthur, for example argues that: (1) "God gave His true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached." (2) "God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered, without altering the message." (3) "Only the exegetical process that yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2."[32] While this is extreme for most homileticians of *CTH*, it does illustrate the overall confidence that *CTH* holds in this particular approach to preaching as being eminently biblical. The third reason for beginning with *CTH* is because of all the homiletical approaches to application, *CTH* makes the strongest claim to objectivity. In what follows we will identify the *CTH* approach to application and analyze its theological and philosophical commitments in order to expose the relationship between the hermeneutical substructure and the homiletical proposal.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the historical development of the *CTH* approach to application. This will position us to accurately grasp the nature of

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[31] E.g., Kuiper, "Scriptural Preaching," 253; Litfin, "Theological Presuppositions and Preaching," 169-70; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20; Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 17-43. Some, such as Chapell, are more humble in their promotion of *CTH*. See, *Idem*, "What is Expository Preaching?," 11-18. But compare this to, *Idem*, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 22-25. Greidanus broadens the definition of and treats "expository preaching" in such a way that he actually moves beyond *CTH* in critical areas. One result is that he assumes a humbler stance than others in *CTH*. See his, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 10-16; and *Idem*, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, esp. 288-90.

[32] MacArthur, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy," 25-26 [emphasis original], see also 23-24.

application in *CTH,* which will in turn prepare us to query its hermeneutical substructure and thus to determine the relationship of that substructure to the *CTH* view of application.

The Intellectual Parentage of Application in Contemporary Traditional Homiletics

John Broadus (1827-1895), the father of *CTH,*[33] defined homiletics based upon the union of rhetoric and preaching in "the hands of devout men like Basil, Gregory, Chrysostom, Ambrose" and most especially "Augustine."[34] However, Broadus understood Augustinian rhetoric through the prism of his own (i.e., Broadus') culture's view of rhetoric, and it is here, in the lens through which Broadus perceived Augustine's work that the *CTH* approach to homiletical application is largely determined. Therefore, it is to specific forces that shaped Broadus' understanding of Augustinian rhetoric and homiletics that we must attend. This necessitates that we begin in the Renaissance with the person who most influenced rhetoric in the sixteenth and seventeenth century—the Regius Professor of Eloquence and Rhetoric at the University of Paris, Pierre De La Ramée.

Ramistic Rhetoric (Pierre De La Ramée, 1515-1572/75)[35]

In his work on the relationship of dialectic to rhetoric, Ramée broke up the five-part system of Ciceronian rhetoric (which Augustine followed) assigning invention and judgment (or arrangement) to dialectic (or logic), leaving style and delivery in their original discipline and basically eliminating memory.[36] Invention, according to Ramée, was specifically concerned with identifying the *loci* (or topics), i.e., the objects of thought and their relations.[37] Arrangement involved taking the *loci*

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[33] His book on homiletics, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons,* still in print more than a century after it was written, is the seminal text for *CTH.* See, Hogan and Reid, *Connecting,* 122; Craddock, "Is There Still Room for Rhetoric?," 67; Wardlaw, "Introduction/The Need for New Shapes," 14; and Edwards, *A History of Preaching,* 655.

[34] Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons,* 4th ed., 10. Originally published in 1870 under the title, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons.*

[35] Also known as Petrus Ramus and Peter Ramus. His death is sometimes cited as 1572 and sometimes as 1575. Cf. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 249; Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*; *Idem, Ramus and Talon Inventory*; and Sharratt, "Recent Work on Peter Ramus (1970-1985)," 7-58.

[36] If one were rigorously logical in the arrangement of thought then memory would not be a problem. See, Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England,* 148; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 250. Notice how this decreases the realm of rhetoric to teaching.

[37] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 250; Edwards, *History,* 473.

and "stating them propositionally as 'axioms.'"[38] Dialectic (or logic), that art which consists of discovery and arrangement of arguments, is universally applicable. Thus, the logic of poetry is the same as the logic of mathematics.[39] Two results of this approach are critical for our analysis. First, by reorganizing rhetoric and dialectic, Ramée distinctively "stripped rhetoric of everything but elocution...and delivery."[40] And yet, Ramée actually had very little to say about delivery, "and his successors usually omitted it" altogether.[41] Rhetoric, therefore, was reduced to "verbal embellishment."[42] Second, by separating and dividing the five-part system the way that he did, Ramée, in contrast to Aristotle, implied that the process of discovering what was true was different from the process of presenting what was true.[43]

The influence of Ramism on homiletics cannot be overestimated. The composition of a sermon became chiefly an act of logic, giving sermons the form of written, "logical discourse rather than oral persuasions."[44] Persuasion, to be sure, was still a goal, but the legitimate means of persuasion were logical not rhetorical (the latter being understood only in terms of style and delivery).[45] The shifts with regard to rhetoric and logic affected by Ramée quickly came to be reflected in the Puritan aesthetic in general and in particular the Puritan sentiments about preaching as plain thinking.[46]

William Perkins (1558-1602)

In 1592 William Perkins published *The Arte of Prophesying.*[47] This book, which deeply influenced both Calvinistic preaching and, more importantly for

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[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Bocheñski, *A History of Formal Logic*; Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England.*

[40] Shugar, *Sacred Rhetoric,* 193. Kennedy notes Ramée's "hostility to Quintilian, for the latter's failure to understand that rhetoric was only a matter of style and delivery" (*Idem, Classical Rhetoric,* 251). In 1549 Ramée published, *Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian.*

[41] Shugar, *Sacred Rhetoric,* 193

[42] *Ibid.* However, Kennedy makes the important point that it was, ironically, Augustine's extended emphasis on style and brief treatment of invention in book 4 of *DDC* that set the trajectory for "the view that rhetoric is largely a matter of style" (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 180).

[43] Cf., Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching,* 88.

[44] Edwards, *History,* 363.

[45] This is not to be confused with Augustine's understanding of rhetoric as largely a matter of style. The chief difference, on this point, between Augustine and Ramée being that for Augustine preaching is more concerned with style than reasoning (or judgment/arrangement). See, Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 181.

[46] See Adams, "Ramist Conceptions of Testimony, Judicial Analogies, and the Puritan Conversion Narrative," 251-68; and Miller, *The New England Mind,* 333.

[47] Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying.* Original Latin edition published in Cambridge in 1592; first English translation in 1607.

Broadus, was the first and most influential homiletic to espouse the Puritan Plain Style sermon, is essentially Ramist rhetoric baptized into homiletics.[48] According to the Puritan Plain Style view of preaching, it is the clarity of speech, distinctness of ideas, and rigor of analysis that fund persuasion. Thus after establishing the soundness of a particular doctrine (or doctrines) all that remained in the sermon was to articulate the relevance of that doctrine(s) to the life of the congregation. The will has become the servant of reason.

Jean Claude (1619-1687)

One hundred years later, and across the Channel, a similar shift in preaching occurred. Jean Claude, the last Hugenot preacher of Paris before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), wrote what has become one of "the most highly prized of Protestant books on homiletics,"[49] *Traité de la composition d'un sermon* (1688). Standing at the end of the Neo-Classical approach, Claude appropriated the insights of Graeco-Roman rhetoric to homiletics. Especially influential was his emphasis on the Aristotelian notion of the unity of theme. This marked a break with the Reformation homiletical tradition in which the sermon was essentially a running commentary on a paragraph or a chapter of Scripture. In this version of the Protestant Plain Style sermon, simplicity and clarity are achieved by focusing the sermon on a single point in order to preserve unity of thought.[50]

The Plain Style Sermon

With both Perkins and Claude it is evident that a shift has occurred that, in the words of Ellen Davis, is "more than a changing aesthetic within the church; it is part of a fundamental epistemological shift in Western culture, a change in the way truth itself is understood, or at least how we may grasp truth."[51] In fact, Claude's homiletic was not a direct outgrowth of Perkins, instead both approaches to

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[48] Halloran argues, "It would be difficult to make sense of a Puritan sermon except as a deliberate application of Ramistic rhetoric" ("Rhetoric in the American College Curriculum, 96). See also, Miller, *The New England Mind,* esp. chp 12, "The Plain Style."

[49] Dargan, *A History of Preaching,* vol 2, 125.

[50] Cicero first identified the rhetorical technique (*De Inventione,* 84 B.C.E.), and the Mendicant orders of the thirteenth century were the first to incorporate it in a systematic and pervasive way into preaching. These traveling preachers merged the influences of monasticism and scholasticism to produce homiletical textbooks (the *Artes praedicandi*) that emphasized a unified theme and its division through outline. See, e.g., Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching,* 76-82; Edwards, *A History of Preaching,* chp 9, "The Explosion of Preaching in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries."

[51] Davis, *Imagination Shaped,* 3.

preaching are responses to pervasive social forces that were affecting a shift in consciousness throughout the West. These forces influenced and found focus in the life and writings of a figure who overlapped both Perkins and Claude: René Descartes.[52] It is to Descartes, a central figure in the development and articulation of the powerful forces that affected the dawn of modernity, that we must turn in order to continue describing the development of application in *CTH.*

Cartesian Epistemology (René Descartes, 1596-1650)

With Descartes the universal path to all human knowledge was systematic doubt[53] and self-evident reasoning.[54] Such reasoning must measure up to the rigors characteristic of geometry[55] in order to be irrefutable, thus providing certainty.[56] Only disciplined and critical reason is capable of overcoming the information about the world rendered by one's senses and imagination.[57] All was suspect. However in the process of doubting everything, one thing was indubitable—one's own "cogitating."[58] The "I" who is conscious of doubting certainly exists (*Ego sum, ego existo*).[59] So Descartes' attempt to avoid the skepticism of Montaigne by finding a single certain thing that made other certainties possible was satisfied in the *cogito.*[60] The thinking self is the basis, and first principle, and the paradigm of all knowledge.[61] The self of the knowing subject is located at the center of the epistemological task.

In *Meditations* Descartes establishes one's own existence first from the autonomy of the self. Then, based on human reason, he deduces the existence of God, as a logical necessity. From God's existence he establishes "the God-

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[52] George Huppert has shown that Descartes' work is the flowering of humanist ideals emanating from the Parisian philosophers of the early sixteenth century, the chief of whom Huppert identifies as none other than Pierre de la Ramée (see, Huppert, *The Style of Paris*).

[53] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method,* I-III, IV, § 1; *Idem, Principles of Philosophy,* I, § 6; *Idem, Meditations,* I; II, § 1; *Idem, Rules for the Direction of the Mind,* II.

[54] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method,* I, II; *Idem, Rules for the Direction of the Mind,* I, II.

[55] His first important work, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind,* is basically an "extension of geometrical algebra into a *sapiential universalis* ('universal wisdom') capable of encompassing all of the sciences" (Heffernan, "Introduction," in Descartes, *Meditations,* 5-6; see also, I, § 8).

[56] *Ibid.;* II, § 4.

[57] *Ibid.,* II, § 1-2; IV, § 1; *Ibid., Discourse,* IV, § 1.

[58] Descartes, *Meditations,* II, § 6, 8.

[59] *Ibid.,* II, § 3, 6.

[60] Toulman, *Cosmopolis,* 62.

[61] In *Discourse on the Method,* Descartes identifies "Je pense, donc je suis" as "le premier principe de la philosophie" (IV, § 1).

guaranteed reality of the objective world and its rational order."[62] In this quest for foundational certainty, human reason is enthroned "as the supreme authority in matters of knowledge, capable of distinguishing certain metaphysical truth and of achieving certain scientific understanding of the material world. Infallibility, once ascribed only to Holy Scripture or the supreme pontiff, was now transferred to human reason itself."[63]

From the foundation of knowledge (*Cogito, ergo sum*),[64] Descartes inquired as to what constitutes certainty and truth and determined it to be clarity and distinctness: "All that which I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true."[65] In other words, that which can be clearly and distinctly conceived is certain knowledge. For Descartes, such knowledge is the *only* type of knowledge there is.[66] Knowledge must measure up to the bar of human reason employing the clear-and-distinct-idea criterion. In keeping with Ramée, Descartes saw no place for rhetoric (again, conceived of as style and delivery) in persuasion.[67] For Descartes, like Ramée, persuasion is important, it is just that the means to persuade is found within the discipline of logic: "Those with the strongest reasoning and the most skill at ordering their thoughts so as to make them clear and intelligible are always the most persuasive, even if they speak only low Breton and have never learned rhetoric."[68] Here one is once again faced with the full subjugation of the will to reason; authority is in ideas. Language is marked by theoretic rigor and metric precision, stripped of any poetic character, of allusion and figure, sanitized of ambiguity. In this "aseptic use of language,"[69] speech is plain and direct, clear and rigorous;[70] word is divorced from thing.[71]

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[62] Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 279.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, IV; *Idem, Principles of Philosophy*, I, § 7, 10.

[65] Copleston, *Descartes to Leibnitz*, 70.

[66] Descartes, *Meditations*, III, § 2; *Ibid., Discourse on the Method*, IV, § 3.

[67] This rejection was more in theory than in practice. Like many philosophers, Descartes "found it necessary to utilize rhetorical methods to communicate with a general audience" (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 270).

[68] Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, I. This view was picked up by John Locke (1632-1704). See his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 504-9. A similar view is found in chapter five of Hobbes', *Leviathan*.

[69] Levine, *Flight*, 2.

[70] *Ibid.*, 2-3. See also, Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," 4; Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity*.

[71] Shugar, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 247.

Richard Whately (1787-1863)

In the work of Whately,[72] the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, Ramism and Cartesian rationalism coalesce and were directly integrated into homiletics.[73] Unlike Ramée, however, Whately reaffirmed the Aristotelian (and Ciceronian) view of rhetoric as, above all, the art of persuasion. Furthermore, the Archbishop reaffirmed Aristotle's location of rhetoric as a branch of logic.[74] And yet, unlike Aristotle, and in keeping with the spirit of Ramée, Whately separated the role of logic from that of rhetoric. Logic seeks to discover truth by investigation. Rhetoric seeks to present that discovered truth in such a way as to establish it for the satisfaction of another.[75] That is, unlike Aristotle, Whately does not include the discovery of truth within the purview of rhetoric.[76] And in even closer keeping with the work of Ramée, Whately focused on invention and arrangement as the key to persuasion. In fact, Whately solidified this approach by fully locating assent to belief in Cartesian reasoning.[77]

To his intended audience of Oxford students preparing for ordination Whately's work was not necessarily revolutionary. By defining rhetoric as the study of "argumentative composition generally and exclusively,"[78] Whately merely codified for preachers, in the words of Hogan and Reid, "a theory of argument in support of the validity of revealed truth."[79]

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[72] *Elements of Logic* (1826); *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828). The latter went through numerous editions with extensive revisions after he became Anglican archbishop of Dublin in 1831.

[73] Due to the constraints of length, this survey excludes many important figures and moments, such as the humanistic influences (especially the celebration of the rhetoric of antiquity including Augustine's *DDC*) mediated by Melanchton (1497-1560) and the work of the Dutch Reformer, later to reside in Marburg, Gerhard of Ypres (1511-1564), often refered to as Hyperius. Of special significance is Melanchton's homiletical textbook, *De Officiis Concionatoris,* of 1535. See, Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching,* 76-184; Edwards, *History*, esp. chps. 9, 16, 17; Ann Hoch, "Jean Claude," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching.*

[74] Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, 4.

[75] *Ibid.*, 5-6, 35.

[76] Whately does identify "invention" as a rhetorical task, however it is invention of a sort that was left to rhetoric after logic had discovered the truths.

[77] See esp. Bizzell and Herzberg, "Enlightenment Rhetoric," 657.

[78] Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, 4. See also, Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 832.

[79] Hogan and Reid, *Connecting*, 39. Ehninger, editor of the modern edition of *Elements of Rhetoric*, writes that the "chief business" of the book is "to arm the pulpit orator for his task of conveying to an unlettered congregation the indisputable doctrines of the Christian faith and (2) to arm the Christian controversialist who is called upon to defend the evidences of religion against the onslaughts of the skeptic" (Ehninger, "Editor's Introduction," in Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, ix). See also, Reid, *The Four Voices of Preaching,* 45-52.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century North American Evangelical Theology

Across the ocean, the same social forces that influenced Perkins, Claude, and Whately exerted influence on North American evangelical theology as it developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, the perception of a rising threat from the empirical sciences at this time lead Princetonian theologians on a Cartesian quest for "an intellectually unassailable bedrock on which to construct...[a] theological house."[80] The indebtedness of this move to Cartesian epistemology is evidenced by the fact that these theologians were fully committed to the Enlightenment's universalization of the canons of scientific method to all fields of knowledge. They saw science and theology as distinct in content but unified in method. For example, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) fully embraced the epistemological hegemony of the empirical sciences that he was actually seeking to resist.[81] The result is clear in his writing:

> The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts: and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.[82]

For Hodge, the combination of Cartesian epistemology with certain influences from Protestant Scholasticism resulted in the Bible being viewed as a storehouse for true propositions, and the theologian's job being understood as abstracting propositions from Scripture and then arranging them logically.[83] Furthermore, Hodge applied these ideas to the nature of language itself in his debate with Horace Bushnell (1802-1876). Based largely upon the nature of metaphor, Bushnell rejected Hodge's idea that revelation communicates "cognitive quasi-scientific propositions."[84] As Bushnell developed this insight, he also rejected a penal-substitutionary theology of the atonement, insisting that "Jesus was a 'sacrifice' only in the same metaphorical sense...[that] Jesus was a 'lamb.'"[85] In defense of the prevalent theory of the atonement, Hodge posited the Bible as a storehouse of facts over against the Bible as metaphorical. Thus the conservative-liberal debate in America was misdirected into

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[80] Grenz, "Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind," 29.

[81] See his discussion of method in *Ibid.*, chp 1, "On Method," 20-31; and his discussion of the nature and definition of theology in chp 2, "Theology," 31-34.

[82] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1, 27.

[83] Vanhoozer, *Drama*, 266-272.

[84] Thiselton, "Biblical Interpretation," 300.

[85] *Ibid.*

an unfortunate dichotomy.[86] The irony is that in his effort to resist certain encroaching elements within the Enlightenment mindset, Hodge imported "a residual rationalism" into the heart of the North American Evangelical approach to Scripture.[87] And this is the framework of John Broadus' approach to Scripture and reality.[88]

John Broadus (1827-1895)

Broadus stood firmly within the tradition just sketched; a tradition rooted in the rhetorical theory of Ramée and the epistemology of Descartes, and articulated for homiletics by Perkins, Claude, and Whately, and theology by eighteenth and nineteenth century North American Evangelical theologians such as Hodge. It is this complex interplay of Enlightenment Rationalism and the Protestant Reformation that constitutes the forces that shaped the lens through which Broadus viewed Augustine's union of rhetoric and homiletics.

Broadus' homiletical heritage defined for him the preacher's task as "basic catechesis of a particular apologetic sort."[89] In the preface to *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, he wrote:

> The subject of Argument is thought by some to be out of place in a treatise on Homiletics or on Rhetoric in general. But preaching and all public speaking ought to be largely composed of argument, for even the most ignorant people constantly practise it themselves, and always feel its force when properly presented...The well-known chapters of Whately have been here freely employed.[90]

Broadus quickly warned against the "dangers of rhetorical studies,"[91] and yet his overall argument and his much quoted description of homiletics as "a branch of rhetoric, or a kindred art"[92] guaranteed the perpetuation of a rhetorically framed approach to preaching.[93] In the fourth edition of *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons,* published in 1979, Vernon Stanfield's revision was consistent with the

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[86] *Ibid.*, 300-1.

[87] Thiselton, "Biblical Interpretation," 287.

[88] See Broadus' biography of James Boyce for the former's appreciation of Hodge (Broadus, *A Gentleman and a Scholar*).

[89] Edwards, *History*, 600.

[90] Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 2nd ed., xi.

[91] Broadus, *On the Preparation,* Dargan edition, 11.

[92] *Ibid.*, 16.

[93] E.g., at one point Broadus defines homiletics as, "rhetoric applied to this particular kind of speaking [i.e., the sermon]" (*Ibid*).

spirit of Broadus when it defined homiletics as "simply the adaptation of rhetoric to the particular ends and demands of preaching."[94]

As we examine this particular rhetorical point of entry into homiletics and its influence upon the *CTH* conception of application, we must bear in mind the wider philosophical and theological forces thus far sketched that exerted a shaping pressure upon the evolution of homiletics. This is especially important with regard to Broadus' appropriation of the sermonic thesis.

As mentioned earlier, Claude broke with the Reformation tradition of structuring the sermon as a running commentary on a pericope. Instead, he used the notion of theme to focus the sermon on a single point. In 1796 Charles Simeon translated Claude's essay into English and included it as an appendix in his *Horae Homileticae*. Simeon trumpeted with great success the use of Scripture in the sermon that he learned from Claude: a sermon should unfold a "single message from the text rather than a series of ideas strung together but not essentially related....By doing this one could achieve unity of theme."[95] Broadus' homiletic stands directly in line with this Claude-Simeon trajectory. According to Broadus, "The sermon may or may not have a text. It must have a subject...the focal idea...one main point."[96] More specifically, the "subject (idea)" should be combined with a "predicate" so that it can be cast in the form of a "proposition."[97] The sermonic proposition, in other words, is "a complete declarative sentence" that clearly and simply identifies "the gist of the sermon."[98] In short, "the discourse is the proposition unfolded, and the proposition is the discourse condensed."[99] The purpose of this technique is to give the sermon unity[100] and clarity.[101]

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[94] *Ibid.*, 10-11. See also, Fasol, "John Broadus," 21; and Rose's remark in *Sharing the Word*, 14-15.

[95] Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Vol 5, 569.

[96] *Ibid.*, 37-38.

[97] Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 45-47.

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] Broadus identifies this as a quote of Fénelon but does not give a specific reference (*Ibid.*, 45). It is important to realize that Broadus appears to be using the "proposition" in the sense of rhetoric and not in the sense of logic. However, the inheritors of Broadus' tradition confuse this distinction, as will soon be seen, with great effect on the construal of application.

[100] Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 38-40.

[101] *Ibid.*, 212.

The Current State of Application in Contemporary Traditional Homiletics

An important point from our historical survey is that neither the rhetorical device of a theme sentence nor the commitment to unity and clarity are philosophically neutral. This technique and these values are deeply entwined with the philosophical forces of Enlightenment rationalism. To be sure, *CTH* is not the only contemporary advocate of the sermonic thesis or of unity and clarity.[102] But *CTH* is distinct in its particular view of and use of this device and these values, and its distinctiveness is a direct result of the forces of Enlightenment rationalism that we have outlined. It is this particularity that, in turn, is determinative for the distinctiveness of the *CTH* approach to application.[103]

For the purposes of this project we will now focus mainly, though not exclusively, on a homiletician whose writings provide a uniquely fruitful angle of entry into the nature of application for *CTH.*

Haddon Robinson (1931-)

Haddon Robinson is a major contemporary preserver and reshaper of the homiletical tradition stemming from Broadus.[104] Through his immensely popular homiletical textbook, *Biblical Preaching* (it has sold more than 200,000 copies[105] and is required reading in more than 160 colleges and seminaries[106]), and his more than

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[102] Wilson identifies the wide variety of contemporary homileticians, most of which could not be identified as belonging to *CTH* who advocate the homiletical use of a theme sentence (*Idem, The Four Pages of the Sermon*, 42).

[103] Cf., Craddock also traces the evolution of rhetoric employed in preaching as "fashioned by Cicero, adapted by Augustine, and mediated through John Broadus" (Craddock, "Is There Still Room for Rhetoric?" 70). However, Craddock fails to account for the shift in the construal of rhetoric that occurred during the Enlightenment. Randolph makes a similar mistake in his analysis of Broadus (Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching,* 21).

[104] Again, there are significant differences within *CTH*, and Robinson represents only one strand. Another significant branch, for example, of *CTH* is identified by its way of doing theology, i.e., biblical-theological preaching. This would include: Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*; *Idem, Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*; *Idem, Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*; Pratt, *He Gave us Stories*; Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*; Adams, *Truth Applied.* Even within this subcategory of *CTH* there are critical differences. However, for the purposes of this project it is necessary to treat *CTH* as a whole, and, as will become apparent, Robinson provides an angle of entry into the discussion that is uniquely fertile for our purposes.

[105] Duduit, "1999 Book of the Year," 6.

[106] Anderson, "Books that have Shaped the Practice of Preaching," 719.

forty years of teaching homiletics,[107] Robinson has become one of the most influential persons in the current field of homiletics.[108]

The Sermonic Thesis

Robinson's relationship to Broadus is apparent not only in his strong affirmation of the role of the thesis ("To ignore the principle that a central, unifying idea must be at the heart of an effective sermon is to push aside what experts in both communication theory and preaching have to tell us."),[109] but also in his insistence that the thesis be cast in the form of a (rhetorical) proposition. Robinson labels this propositionally cast thesis, "the big idea."[110] In fact, Robinson's most influential contribution to contemporary homiletics is his clear analysis and single-minded advocacy of the nature of a proposition: An idea (Robinson's term for a proposition) consists simply of a *subject* and a *complement*—nothing more and nothing less. [111]

The Sermonic Thesis and the Nature of Scripture

In a collection of essays dedicated to Robinson, one of his former students and subsequent collegues who is now the president of Wheaton College, Duane Litfin, argues that at the core of Robinson's approach is the view that Scripture is God's chosen instrument of communication. Furthermore, "because God chose to communicate his...revelation in the form of ordinary human language, that

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[107] Nineteen years at Dallas Theological Seminary, twelve years at Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary (as President), and since 1991 he has been Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA. His influence is even greater when one takes into consideration his former students who work in the field of homiletics. E.g., Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College.

[108] Duduit, "Expository Preaching in a Narrative World: an Interview with Haddon Robinson," in *Preaching with Power*, 151. In a 1996 poll conducted by Baylor University Robinson was named one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world ("Baylor Names the Twelve Most Effective Preachers").

[109] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 37. Originally published, 1980. Robinson clearly states that his term "idea" signifies the same notion that others embrace with terms such as "central idea, proposition, theme, thesis statement, main thought" (*Ibid.*, 36).

[110] *Ibid.*, esp. chp. 2, "What's the Big Idea?" See also, Willhite and Gibson, eds., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching.*

[111] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41. The latter term, "complement," being what Broadus describes as the "predicate." See, Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 45. So, like Broadus, Robinson insists that the theme of a sermon is constituted by, in the words of Duane Litfin, "something being predicated about something else" (Litfin, "New Testament Challenges to Big Idea Preaching," 54. Cf. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, chp. 2 "What's the Big Idea?"). Davis offered the same analysis of an idea (but labeled it a "thought") more than two decades before Robinson. See, his groundbreaking, *Design for Preaching*, 2, 20, 22, 37.

communication of necessity will consist of organized units of discourse."[112] The "smallest unit of discourse" being "the simple, grammatically complete, declarative sentence. Such a sentence consists by definition of a single idea [i.e., a proposition]."[113] Therefore, Litfin continues, in order "to understand...[Scripture] we must discern these units and discover the ideas [i.e., propositions] they embody."[114] A few paragraphs later, Litfin applies this approach to preaching. "If we [preachers] are to handle the text of Scripture with integrity, Haddon Robinson has taught us, we must listen to it at the level of its ideas [i.e, propositions]."[115] So Litfin is implicitly pointing to Robinson's view of the nature of Scripture as primarily a collection of various units of discourse that contain theological propositions.[116] James Daane succinctly states the point: "Every properly selected text[117] expresses a truth which can be stated in propositional form."[118] At this point one senses a failure to grasp the distinction between a rhetorical and a logical proposition. It is important to realize that Broadus did not labor under this confusion, he used "proposition" in the sense of rhetoric and not in the sense of logic. This confusion is critical for the *CTH* construal of application.

The rhetorical insight of Cicero that was allied to preaching in Augustine, picked up by the Mendicants, affirmed by Claude, Simeon, and Broadus, has now been assumed as a defining characteristic not only of the sermon, but also of Scripture itself. In making this move, Robinson, according to Litfin, sees a "close synergy" between the nature of Scripture and the nature of the sermon: The sermon employs a propositionally cast thesis and Scripture, in its essence, is a collection of propositional truths. This dual focus, on propositional sermons and Scripture as propositional, is a defining characteristic of *CTH* that radically shapes the approach

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[112] Litfin, "New Testament Challenges to Big Idea Preaching," 55.

[113] *Ibid.*, 54.

[114] *Ibid.*, 55.

[115] *Ibid.*, 56.

[116] In his discussion of the various genres contained within Scripture, Robinson clearly argues that all genres contain propositional ideas. See, Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 68-70.

[117] The qualification of a "properly selected text" is important. Greidanus argues that not "every text or verse has a theme...but that every *preaching-text* has a theme." A preaching-text is defined as a "complete literary unit, a thought unit, a thematic unit. If a chosen text does not have a theme, it is not because not all preaching-texts have a theme but because not all selected texts are proper preaching-texts" (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 132).

[118] *Idem, Preaching with Confidence*, 132. Some within the *CTH*, such as Willhite, argue that a passage "may have several dominant ideas from which the preacher can choose....I am not suggesting, then, that the Bible was written with the intent that there is one...[main idea] per passage" ("A Bullet Versus a Buckshot," 16). However, there is also a strong strand within *CTH* that insist each passage has one main idea. E.g., Reu, *Homiletics*, 437. Cf. Wilson's analysis of Reu's work in this regard in, *Idem, Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 9.

to application. (Notice, especially, the presence of Cartesian rationalism with its over-privileging of ideas.)

In summary, *CTH* asserts the propositional nature of Scripture based upon the rhetorical principle of a propositional idea (thesis) as necessary for effective communication. In other words, entering the homiletical conversation from the perspective of rhetoric, *CTH* employs a specific logic that leads from the rhetorical principle of a theme to a propositionalist view of Scripture.[119] The logic can be summarized as follows: (1) Effective communication will employ a thesis, which is the unifying thought of the work (verbal speech or inscribed text). (2) A thesis is best expressed in the form of a proposition. (3) In Scripture, God has communicated his revelation through ordinary human language patterns. (4) Therefore, Scripture is, "of necessity,"[120] fundamentally propositional.

Granted, this is not a tight logical argument. However, it is reflective of the rationale used within *CTH* to support the propositionalist view of Scripture and the role of the thesis in a sermon. A key reason that this logic, as loose as it is, is readily accepted by *CTH* is because of the philosophical commitments embraced by the homileticians and by the theologians on whom they rely. For example, a key twentieth-century heir of Hodge's approach is Carl F. H. Henry (1915-2003).

Henry argued that "all human language depends on a common logic and on identical modes of thought."[121] And, since the Bible takes the form of "rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual verbal form,"[122] it is only reasonable to surmise that "the whole canon of Scripture... objectively communicates in propositional-verbal form the content and meaning of all God's revelation."[123] This means that the entire Bible contains "a body of divinely given information" that is either already "expressed...in propositions" or is "capable of being expressed in propositions."[124] The various literary devices of Scripture, "parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical

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[119] By "propositionalist" I mean to distinguish the view that Scripture contains propositional truths from the *CTH* notion that Scripture is *essentially* "a propositional revelation of the unchanging truth of God" (Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:457).

[120] Litfin's phrase in "New Testament Challenges to Big Idea Preaching," 56.

[121] Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:222.

[122] *Ibid.*, 2:12; cf. 3:455. Vanhoozer points to a critical mistake of Henry: "the tendency to equate propositions with statements," as this "leads to a reductionist picture of language for which the only significant aspect in communication is the information conveyed. It is as if all the action has been drained away from the communicative act" (*Idem, Drama*, 87).

[123] Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:87.

[124] *Ibid.*, 3:457.

questions," used by its writers, "have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false."[125] The philosophical presupposition here is that a particular linguistic entity, a proposition, is the best bearer of truth.[126] Poetic or metaphoric language is insufficient because it lacks precision and clarity. Therefore, any truth it carries can be, and is better off distilled into propositional form.[127]

The Evangelical instinct is to preserve the truth content of Scripture. This is mixed, however, with philosophical assumptions involving certain views of science, truth, and language.[128] The result is a particular framework for analyzing the nature of Scripture that eventuates in the Bible being construed as primarily "propositional revelation from God."[129] The homiletical result is that just as the scientistic approach assumes a subsumptive-theoretic view of explanation[130] so *CTH* assumes a hermeneutic in which the text at hand (and all texts for that matter, just as all of nature, are treated the same) is reduced to a propositional truth. This homiletical hermeneutic is based upon the presupposition that all texts contain propositions.[131] Preaching, in this tradition, has imbibed the various philosophical commitments that we have highlighted throughout this historical survey: (1) truth is characterized in terms of clarity and distinctness, with the result that; (2) language that is aimed at truth is plain and direct and stripped of poetic character, allusion, figure, and ambiguity; and finally, (3) the will is the servant of reason. The purpose of the

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[125] *Ibid.* 3:453; see also 4:120. Henry defines the propositional revelation thus: "God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesmen in the express form of cognitive truths, and...the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates these truths in sentences that are not internally contradictory" (*Ibid.*, 3:457).

[126] "The telltale gesture of the propositionalist is to extract the propositional content from the particular form and setting of a speech-act" (Vanhoozer, *Drama*, 279).

[127] Vanhoozer argues that this approach to theology, "views the Bible as revelation, revelation as teaching, teaching as propositional, and propositions as statements susceptible of truth or falsity" (*Ibid.*, 267).

[128] For a well balanced rehabilitation of the propositional component in theology that resists propositionalism, see *Ibid.*, 265-359.

[129] Grenz, "Nurturing the Soul," 36. Grenz cites the following as examples of this view: Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, 150; Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 92-93; Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation*, 66.

[130] Describing what he claims to be one of the three basic tenets of positivism, Wright defines the subsumptive-theoretic view of explanation as "the subsumption of individual cases under hypothetically assumed general laws of nature" (*Idem, Explanation and Understanding*, 4). Tarnas identifies this quest for general laws that define a single objective reality as characteristic of Enlightenment rationalism (*The Passion of the Western Mind*, 368).

[131] See Buttrick, "Interpretation and Preaching," 46-58. Buttrick cites Frei as demonstrating that "the notion" of texts containing "'truths' [i.e., propositions] arose at a time when skeptical rationalism was assailing the mythy embarrassments of biblical narrative." Refers to Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 51-154.

sermon is to communicate a clear, precise, reasoned explanation of Scriptural truth so that understanding can occur which in turn will enable assent or persuasion to action.[132]

The Nature of Application in Contemporary Traditional Homiletics

By exploring the *CTH* view of the nature of Scripture as propositional we are prepared to understand their answer to the problem that this project is exploring: How does preaching connect Scripture and hearers? The answer presumed by *CTH* is that the propositional truths of Scripture must be *applied* to the hearers. In reducing propositions to assertions, and in seeing all Scripture in terms of propositions, the essence of Scripture is the conveyance of information. This philosophy of language results in the truth of the Bible being located at the level of universally valid general principles. A preacher, therefore, must: (1) discover the meaning of the biblical passage;[133] (2) separate the truth that is represented in that meaning from the concrete, particular, occasional nature of the biblical passage thereby creating an abstract principle in propositional form;[134] (3) (Re)Apply the abstracted principle to the current concrete, particular, occasion.[135]

Within *CTH* there are important differences regarding the way to identify the principle and the way to connect that principle to the contemporary hearers. Robinson and Chapell both locate the universal principle in the "theological purpose" of the particular text and connect the contemporary hearers to that universal principle via identification.[136] Humanity and God remain consistent through time, therefore a preacher must find the "vision of God"[137] and the "fallen condition focus"[138] on

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[132] Cf. Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 13-16.

[133] This is typically accomplished through the use of historical criticism. Cf. Achtemeier, "The Artful Dialogue," 23. For a typical example of the *CTH* view of historical-criticism as yielding the meaning see Mayhue, ed., and Thomas, assoc. ed., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, esp. "Part III: Processing and Principlizing the Biblical Text."

[134] Principlizing is the "bridge...between interpretation and application" (Zuck, "Application in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition," 26). As the middle term in the move from meaning to application, the concept of principlization is typically the point of greatest discussion in an analysis of application by *CTH*. As a result, most treatments of application in the *CTH* model focus on methods for identifying what is cultural, and how to accurately "transfer" the essential meaning bound in the past particularity of the text into the present particularity of the contemporary congregation. See Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 20-27; Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*; Adams, *Truth Applied*; Estes, "Audience Analysis and Validity in Application," 219-229.

[135] E.g., Krabbendam argues that once the meaning has been discovered the preacher is ready to "harvest the universal principles and patterns from the biblical text" which enables one to navigate the relationship between meaning and application (*Idem*, "Hermeneutics and Preaching," 239).

[136] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 88-96. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 40-44, 199-224.

[137] Robinson's phrase. See *Biblical Preaching*, 94-5.

humanity in the text and this will be the point in which the contemporary hearer can identify with the text. Greidanus nuances this approach by insisting that the identification is not supposed to be between the contemporary hearers and the characters of the biblical stories but between the contemporary hearers and those "who first heard or read the letter."[139] The identification cannot be based upon the "grounds that men are the same in every age and that therefore Israel's experience is instructive for the church,"[140] but on the grounds that "we are all God's people—covenant people."[141] Thus, Greidanus differs from Chapell and Robinson with regard to the best location for an interpreter to stand in order to hear the message of the text.[142] And yet, like Chapell and Robinson, Greidanus locates the theme in the theological purpose of the text[143] and most importantly, for our purposes, affirms the *CTH* logic of application.[144]

For *CTH* the truths of the Bible demand application because, built upon the temperament of Enlightenment rationalism, this approach construes truth by nature as abstract, general, timeless propositions. Truth is shorn of any relationship to particular situations. And yet, the Bible itself, according to Chapell, "tells us that its pages instruct, reprove, and correct."[145] But notice how Chapell immediately interprets the passage of Scripture he is alluding to (2 Tim 3:16) according to his particular view of the propositional nature of the Bible: "God expects scriptural truths to transform his people. Faithful preaching does the same."[146] For Chapell it is the "scriptural truths" that transform, not Scripture itself, but always and only the truths that lie buried like kernels within the husk of the text. Since those truths are abstract and hence unrelated to concrete situations, Chapell must go on to claim that "without application the preacher has no reason to preach because truth without

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[138] Chapell's phrase. See *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 40-44. In a lecture delivered at Asbury Theological Seminary to the Beeson Pastors on December 11, 2001, Robinson used the label of "depravity factor" to express the same notion Chapell addresses with "fallen condition focus."

[139] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 171. Also, 226.

[140] Greidanus approvingly quotes Achtemeier, *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, 122. See, Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 172.

[141] *Ibid.*, 171.

[142] *Ibid.*, 173.

[143] *Ibid.*, 173-175.

[144] Greidanus does not fit neatly into *CTH*. He demonstrates a critical awareness of important hermeneutical issues, and yet he often expresses deep commitments to core, identifying convictions of the approach to application espoused by *CTH*. See esp., *Ibid.*, 131-140, 182-187, 224-227.

[145] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 44.

[146] *Ibid.*

application is useless."[147] It is for this same reason that Greidanus writes, "application of his word to today is...mandatory."[148] And, again, it is the reason McQuilkin claims, "After the meaning of a passage is established, it must be applied."[149] Chapell's "truth," and Greidanus' "his word," and McQuilkin's "meaning" are all the same condensed, timeless essence of a particular biblical text. By "burning off the cultural elements and distilling the essence of Scriptural truth in the form of transcultural principles" the preacher is left with a truth that, in order to be universally valid, is shorn of all cultural trappings.[150]

CTH answers the question regarding the way in which Scripture and congregation connect by asserting the method of re-applying (or re-concretizing, or re-particularizing) the truths that were once applied (i.e., Scripture is occasional) but then abstracted (i.e., the act of interpreting Scripture in order to discover its buried truths) to the contemporary congregation.[151] Out of such a tradition Woodrow Kroll defines application as the process of bringing "the truths of the Word to the listener on a personal basis."[152] Edmund Clowney argues that after one "discover[s] the meaning" of Scripture, it is necessary to then "show its significance for our hearers."[153] James Massey describes application as the "link" between "the truth stated in the text and sermon" and the "hearer's situation and need."[154] Throughout *CTH* application is basically the end point of an arc that begins in the biblical text, races to abstraction (a propositional-truth),[155] and finally comes to rest in the concrete situation of the present hearers.[156] Application is the point at which the abstract-propositional-truth embedded in the text is related to the concrete situation

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[147] *Ibid.*, 200.

[148] Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 121.

[149] McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 279.

[150] Clark, *To Know and Love God*, 92. This approach also stands firmly on the shoulders of a significant exegetical tradition. For example, an OT scholar who has significantly impacted *CTH* is Bernard Ramm. In *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, his book most widely read and quoted in *CTH*, Ramm states: "The proper [method] is to *principlize* the Old Testament. To *principlize* is to discover in any narrative the basic spiritual, moral, or theological principles. These principles are latent in the text and it is the process of deduction that brings them to the surface" (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 199-200). Ramm's view, however, of the relationship between revelation and the words of Scripture has shifted over the years. Cf., his earlier three books, *Idem, The Witness of the Spirit*; *Idem, Special Revelation and the Word of God*; and *Idem, The Pattern of Religious Authority*, 96-98, with his later book, *Idem, After Fundamentalism*. See, Vanhoozer, "Bernard Ramm," 290-306.

[151] For a prime example of this approach, see Adams, *Truth Applied*, 48, 132.

[152] Kroll, *Prescription for Preaching*, 176.

[153] Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 23.

[154] Massey, "Application in the Sermon," 209, 210.

[155] Cf., Vanhoozer, *Drama*, 274.

[156] Cf. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 202, 204.

of the contemporary hearer.[157] According to *CTH* this understanding is rooted in theology, and yet there has been a marked unawareness throughout *CTH* of fundamental philosophical commitments driving this theology.

The Hermeneutics of Application in Contemporary Traditional Homiletics

In the time between John Broadus and Haddon Robinson hermeneutics changed from a technical project, the "science of rules governing the interpretation of texts," to something more elemental, an "orientation of thought" focused on "the universality that the question of interpretation assumes."[158] Contemporary (or philosophical) hermeneutics in contrast to technical (or methodological) hermeneutics is concerned with a philosophical exploration of understanding. *CTH* has largely avoided the exposure by contemporary hermeneutics of philosophical commitments underlying methods of interpretation, however, by appealing to the hermeneutical theory of one who has resisted the philosophical turn in hermeneutics – E. D. Hirsch. In the final section of this chapter, we will trace the historical evolution of hermeneutics from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Hirsch in order to offer a depth analysis of the nature of application in *CTH.*

Eighteenth-Century Hermeneutics (Pre-Schleiermacher)

The roots of the view of application embraced by *CTH* originate in the hermeneutical theory of Friedrich Schleiermacher. However, in order to correctly understand Schleiermacher's work the story must begin with several hermeneutical strands against which Schleiermacher's thought was developed.

The Enlightenment oriented hermeneutics of the eighteenth century were steeped in rationalism and presumed non-understanding or misunderstanding to be the exception. Interpretation, as verbal explication aimed at pragmatic or pedagogical ends, was not normally needed and was therefore clearly distinct from understanding.[159] The whole task of hermeneutics consists of two united, purely technical elements: *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicandi*

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[157] Some argue that this relationship must be made very specific and particular (e.g. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, esp. chp. 8, "The Practice of Application") while others argue that the preacher should "be content with general applications. This grants the Holy Spirit...His rightful place in speaking to individual lives" (MacArthur, "Moving from Exegesis to Exposition," 300).

[158] Grondin, "Hermeneutics and Relativism," 42-44.

[159] Chladinius, *Einleitung*, (1883), § 648. See also, Schleiermacher, "The Academy Addresses of 1829: Second Address," 210; Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 8; Gadamer, *TM*, 182-83. Frei, *Eclipse*, 113.

(explication)[160] — the latter being grounded in the first. In this approach, the meaning of a text[161] is directly grasped in understanding. Explication, the appropriate reproduction of the work as a given and determinate structure,[162] whether oral or written, is a step beyond understanding that one takes for the purpose of another. The accessible, original, singular meaning of a text is logically and technically (not substantively) distinct from and governs application (meaningfulness or significance).[163] Both aspects, meaning and application, are "constant and reliable, and uninfluenced by one's reading".[164]

The Pietists,[165] in contrast, did not construe application as a secondary element to meaning. August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), one of the significant original leaders of this tradition,[166] argued: "Behind every word is to be found something inward, namely, an affective condition of the soul impelled toward expression."[167] Rambach, a follower of Francke, joined this idea to the expressive nature of language, and argued that the affect which fills every word uttered in human discourse is not merely a secondary happening; it is 'anima sermonis,' and is therefore what is to be conveyed to the reader of Scripture.[168] All of this resulted, *inter alia*, in the addition of *subtilitas applicandi* ("the capacity to inscribe the affect

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[160] Ernesti, *Institutio interpretis Novi Testamenti*, § 4; Meier, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst*, § 1; Semler, *Vorbereitung zur theologischen Hermeneutik*, vol 1, 160f. The nominative *subtilitas* indicates capacities, "discriminating judgments" (Kimmerle, "Notes," in Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, 246, n. 14; "talents requiring particular finesse of mind" [Gadamer, *TM*, 307]; or "power that demands a special fineness of spirit" [Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 187]).

[161] It was debated whether this was verbal meaning or subject-matter meaning. For an excellent summary of this important debate see Frei, *Eclipse*, 96-104, 165-167, 245-266.

[162] *Ibid.*, 303.

[163] *Ibid.*, 109, 110. While Semler did not confine the singular meaning to the author's own meaning, Wolff, Chladenius, Ernesti, and others did (see *Ibid.*, 252; see also, Mueller-Vollmer, *Hermeneutics*, 4).

[164] Frei, *Eclipse*, 107.

[165] Interestingly, Semler, a key contributor to eighteenth century Enlightenment oriented hermeneutics was brought up as a Pietist but "abandoned Pietism through the influence of Spinoza and Deism" (Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 61).

[166] While some insist that Johann Arndt founded pietism at the end of the sixteenth century, and others trace the beginnings of pietism to English Puritans or the Dutch Calvinists, it appears that the strongest arguments are those that propose Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) as the founder, and his *Pia Desideria* (1675) as the manifesto of Pietism. Francke was Spener's "most effective disciple" (Old, *Reading and Preaching*, vol 5, 74). Cf. Edwards, *History*, 840-45. Brecht, Deppermann, Gäbler, and Lehmann, *Geschichte des Pietismus*; Brown, *Understanding Pietism*; Ritschl, *Die Geschichte des Pietismus*; Stoeffler, *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity*; Erb and Stoeffler, eds., *Pietists*; Stein, *Philip Jakob Spener*.

[167] Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 60. Cf. Francke, *Praelectiones hermeneuticae*, 196.

[168] Grondin, *Introduction*, 61.

of Scripture, as it were, upon the affect of the listener")[169] to the two traditional elements of pre-Romantic hermeneutics.[170] In this view, *subtilitas intelligendi, subtilitas explicandi,* and *subtilitas applicandi* taken together constitute the fulfillment of understanding.[171] Meaning is not associated merely with the explicative sense of a work, but hovers between it and the text's significance for others. Hermeneutics thus includes the task of adapting the text's meaning to the concrete situation within the interpreter's purview.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Schleiermacher, under the influence of Kant's devastating critique of rationalism via transcendental philosophy,[172] asserted the universality of misunderstanding. He thereby established the universality of hermeneutics by reversing the pre-Romantic assumption of understanding as the norm.[173] This reversal affected a fundamental change in the notion of interpretation. First of all, Schleiermacher removes the sharp distinction between interpretation and understanding. Secondly, and closely following from the first, rather than "the communication of the way understanding has been attained,"[174] Schleiermacher identifies interpretation as "the explicit form of understanding."[175] Interpretation is no longer an ancillary, occasional, and pedagogical supplement to understanding. Now it occurs in, is mediated by, understanding.[176] The two are "closely interwoven, like the outer and the inner word."[177]

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[169] *Ibid.*

[170] See Rambach, *Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae*: "*Solemus autem intelligendi explicandique subtilitatem (soliditatem vulgo).*" Translated in Gadamer, *TM*, 307. Unfortunately, Gadamer does not reference the exact location of the quotation.

[171] Gadamer, *TM*, 307; Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 187.

[172] In good Kantian fashion, Schleiermacher posited the centrality of the subject in the interpretive process. The presence of this epistemic approach will remain throughout the hermeneutical trajectory being traced.

[173] Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics" in *Idem, Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 227, 228. This is not meant to indicate that Schleiermacher was wholly a Romantic. For example, he rejected the pantheism of Schlegel, etc. and argued strongly for the role of grammatical analysis.

[174] Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "The Academy Addresses of 1829: Second Address," 210-11.

[175] Gadamer, *TM*, 307.

[176] As Gadamer says of Schleiermacher: "interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" (*Ibid.*).

[177] *Ibid.*, 184. Gadamer references, Schleiermacher, *Sämtliche Werke*, III, part 3, 384 (repr. In *Philosophische Hermeneutik*, eds. Gadamer and Boehm, 163): "Interpretation differs from understanding only as speaking aloud from speaking silently to oneself."

As previously mentioned, in the pre-Romantic conception, *subtilitas intelligendi* and *subtilitas explicandi* formed the unified task of hermeneutics. Actually, the combination was superficial and supplemental, and the interpretative task focused on the latter. In Schleiermacher the union is dissolved and the focus is reversed.[178] Hermeneutics undergoes a fundamental shift by simultaneously limiting its extent to *subtilitas intelligendi* while extending its scope to the phenomenon of understanding (*Verstehen*) in general.[179] The real target of interpretation then becomes rooted in humankind's linguisticality. "Every act of understanding is the inversion of a speech-act [*Akt des Redens*], during which the thought which was the basis of the speech must become conscious."[180] Heremeneutics is then composed of a double movement: "a reversal of the original—moving from discourse back to thought—and...a reconstructive or reproductive forward motion."[181]

In his early work, Schleiermacher conceived of the object of hermeneutics as thought and expression acting as "essentially and internally entirely the same."[182] Through the influence of transcendental deduction, he abandoned the notion of identical representation and came to regard the object of hermeneutics, according to Kimmerle, as "the process by which thinking emerges into empirically graspable linguistic form...with special reference to how in this process of the externalization of thinking the individuality of the speaker comes to be known."[183]As Schleiermacher famously words it in the first Academy Address of 1829: "The task of hermeneutics is to reproduce the whole internal process of an author's way of combining thoughts."[184] That is, one seeks to make transparent "the internal process"

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[178] Understanding is the new focus of hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "The Aphorisms of 1805 and 1809-10," 41, 43. Cf. also, "Hermeneutics: The Compendium of 1819 and the Marginal Notes of 1828," 96). In Bowie's translation of the Compendium there is included a gloss by Lücke that makes the break with Ernesti and Rambach even more explicit (Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, "Hermeneutics," 5). See also, *Ibid.*, "General Hermeneutics," 227). Describing the reversal and refocusing, Frei argues: "Explication becomes secondary" as the external side of understanding (*Idem, Eclipse,* 305).

[179] Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "Aphorisms of 1805 and 1809-1810," 44. He is using understanding in the Kantian sense of "an underlying capacity for thought and experience" (Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 9).

[180] Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 7.

[181] Frei, *Eclipse,* 303.

[182] Schleiermacher, *Sämmtliche Werke*, pt. 3, vol 2, 232. Translated in Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "Editors Introduction," 36. Cf. also, Schleiermacher, "General Hermeneutics" written in 1809-10, in Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 230, section 21.1.

[183] Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "Editors Introduction," 36. Cf. also, Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik*, 321.

[184] Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, "The Academy Addresses of 1829: First Address," 188. Hermeneutics aims at reconstructing this unconscious production. In "every act of

so that "the entire relationship between the production of the thoughts and its formation in language is now fully and immediately evident."[185] Again, Kimmerle's summary is insightful.

> The object of understanding is no longer the given content. It is now the process of movement from the internality of thought to language. Now hermeneutics aims not so much at understanding something as at understanding how something is an empirical modification of an ideal reality.[186]

According to this understanding meaning is located neither in the explicative sense, nor ambiguously between explicative sense and significance. *Wortauslegung, Sinnverstand, Sacherklärung* and the connection of these three to the origin of the process in the spirit of the author and in the spirit of the author's age constitute meaning.[187] Thus is comprised the goal of understanding.

The interesting issue for the present study is how all of this bears upon the construal of application in relation to hermeneutics. When Schleiermacher fuses understanding and interpretation into an indissolvable unity, both *subtilitas explicandi* and *subtilitas applicandi* are bracketed out of the hermeneutical task. The former is relegated to rhetoric, and the latter (i.e., the interpreter's interest in the text and the text's relevance for the present) is construed as a secondary, subsequent, independent operation all together. Gadamer clearly identifies one major implication: "The edifying application of Scripture in Christian preaching, for example, now seemed very different from the historical and theological understanding of it."[188]

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

Wilhelm Dilthey is "the watershed between the nineteenth-century theories, which were an outgrowth of Romanticism, and those of the twentieth century which comprise philosophical hermeneutics and the methodological concerns of the social and historical sciences."[189] Via the establishment of a unique object of study, a unique methodology of study, and a unique relationship between the subject and the object of study Dilthey sought to secure the autonomous objectivity of the

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understanding" one must "grasp the thinking that underlies a given statement" (*Ibid.*, "Hermeneutics: The Compendium of 1819 and the Marginal Notes of 1828," 97).

[185] *Ibid.*, "The Academy Addresses of 1829: First Address," 193.

[186] *Ibid.*, "Editors Introduction," 39.

[187] *Ibid.*, "The Academy Addresses of 1829: Second Address," 211-12. Cf. Frei, *Eclipse,* 305.

[188] Gadamer, *TM,* 308.

[189] Mueller-Vollmer, *Reader,* 23; cf. also, Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 51.

Geisteswissenschaften[190] in order to effect an emancipation from the intellectual imperialism of the *Naturwissenschaften.*[191]

The object of study for the *Geisteswissenschaften* is life (*das Leben*), that which is specifically human: the inner, psychic life (a person's thinking, feeling, and willing) of historical and social agents. The method of study, dictated by this unique object, is understanding (*Verstehen*).[192] To understand a text is to comprehend, to grasp, to possess the relationship of the expression to the *Erlebnis*[193] (that is, to grasp the meaning intended by the author[194]). This understanding is accomplished when the interpreter projects his or her self into the alien, concrete, historical, lived experience (*Erlebnis*) in such a way as to make it (the alien *Erlebnis*) his or her own.[195] Such a transposition, this re-living of the world as another meets it, is possible because the inner life is manifested externally through signs.[196] Understanding is the process by which we infer back from the outer to the inner, thereby coming to participate in and thus "know something of the mental life through the perceptible signs which manifest it."[197] Textual interpretation is the art of understanding applied to the manifestations that are written.[198] In the *Geisteswissenschaften* the interpreter cannot

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[190] This term was first introduced by Schiel, in his 1863 translation of Mill's *A System of Logic.* However, it was Dilthey who popularized the term. Essentially the *Geisteswissenschaften* consists of those sciences that investigate the socio-historical reality of humankind (i.e., history, politics, political economy, theology, literature, art, etc.).

[191] See his groundbreaking essay of 1900, "The Development of Hermeneutics," (*Idem, Selected Writings*) for Dilthey's most articulate programmatic statement of this attempt to secure the epistemological foundations of the *Geisteswissenschaften.* Gadamer questions the depth of the methodological difference in *TM.* See also, Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today.*

[192] "A science belongs to the human studies...only if its object becomes accessible to us through a procedure based on the systematic relation between life, expression, and understanding" (Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 86; translated in Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 114). See also, Mueller-Vollmer, *Reader*, 25.

[193] Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 60.

[194] Dilthey's belief that the fixedness of the author's meaning is the precondition for objective interpretation is similar to Schleiermacher's notion of the "affinity of minds." See, Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and their Life-Expressions," trans. by and reprinted in Mueller-Vollmer, *Reader,* 161.

[195] *Ibid.*, 159; Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII, 191. Cf., Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 115, 104; Thiselton, *Two Horizons,* 236; Mueller-Vollmer, *Reader*, 25. Dilthey uses words such as: re-experience (*Nacherleben*), reconstruction, re-creation, re-living, etc. (See, e.g., Dilthey, "The Understanding of Other Persons and their Life-Expressions," in Mueller-Vollmer, *Reader,* 159-162.) The influence of Schleiermacher should not be missed.

[196] *Ibid.*, 152-64.

[197] Dilthey, "The Development of Hermeneutics," in *Idem, Selected Writings,* 248.

[198] There is a significant difference between Dilthey's early work and his later work. In *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, strongly influenced by his particular reading of the psychological understanding of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, Dilthey asserts an interpretive psychology as the philosophical foundation for the *Geisteswissenschaften.* However, by the time of *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, under the influence of neo-Kantian and Husserlian thought, Dilthey gave *Verstehen* an objective turn by framing it from the

remain an outsider in relation to the object of study (that is to "stand over against" the object)[199] in the same sense that one is able to in the *Naturwissenschaften.*[200]

What is important for our purposes is Dilthey's conception of understanding,[201] and his irreconcilable distinction of understanding (*Verstehen*) and explanation (*Erklärung*) as competing modes of intelligibility constituting the fundamental methodological cleavage between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften.*[202] The former is characterized by *Verstehen* – an empathetic understanding of the other's *Erlebnis* that has objectified itself in the "traces of inner life experiences and world views (*Weltanschauungen*)."[203] That is, the logic of understanding addresses the phenomena that unite the inner and outer, the internal connection of experience (*Erleben*) and expression (*Ausdruck*), in such a way as to render the subjective meaning in an objective manner.[204] The *Naturwissenschaften*, on the other hand, are characterized by *Erklärung* – a causal explanation of events and processes whereby hypotheses are submitted to empirical verification and individual cases are subsumed under nomological hypotheses.[205] The dichotomy of *Verstehen* and *Erklärung* represents two fundamentally incompatible modes of knowing, attitudes, and spheres of reality (nature and mind).

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perspective of a quasi-transcendental life philosophy. However, Dilthey derived this approach to *Verstehen* from Droysen, and thereby is manifested a direct relation of Schleiermacher, Boeckh, Droysen, and Dilthey. Cf. Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 1-3.

[199] Gadamer, *TM*, 506.

[200] For a fine analysis of the development of the *Naturwissenschaften* see Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 29-30.

[201] Kimmerle, "Hermeneutical Theory or Ontological Hermeneutics," 27.

[202] The first to exhibit a consciousness of this dichotomy was Droysen, in his "Gundriß der Historik" which appeared in manuscript form in 1858 and as a book in 1868.

[203] Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, 41.

[204] "The *Geisteswissenschaften* have the objectification of life as that which is comprehensively given to them. To the extent, however, that the objectification of life is something intelligible to us, it contains throughout the relation of the outer to the inner. Accordingly, this objectivation is everywhere related in understanding to the experience in which its own content is disclosed to a life-unit and which allows the interpretation of all others" (Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 85, reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, VII. English trans. in Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 5).

[205] Von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 4. See also, Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, xiv-xv. For an articulation of explanation as a mode of knowledge see, Hempel's classic essay, "The Function of General Laws in History"; see also *Idem*, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation.*

Emilio Betti (1890-1968)

Maintaining the *Erklärung—Verstehen* distinction, Emilio Betti calls for a return to Romantic hermeneutics.[206] Not a total return, for he draws on the work of Edmund Husserl and neo-Kantian thought in an effort to resist the psychologism of the early Dilthey in order to rehabilitate the idea of a hermeneutics guided by strict scientific standards that guarantee an objective account of interpretation in the human sciences (i.e., a methodically disciplined *Verstehen*).

In this approach interpretation is the "procedure that aims for, and results in," understanding the "objectivations of mind"[207] in general, and in particular, "the written expressions of life."[208] Interpretation is the inversion of the process of creation from within to without.[209] The interpreter is to re-trace, to re-cognize, to re-construct "the inspiring, creative thought within" the object, "to rethink the conception or recapture the intuition revealed in" the meaning-full forms.[210] Such a retranslation of the external, thus interpretable "thought of an Other, a part of the past, a remembered event, into the actuality of one's own life," is actually an adaptation or integration of particular forms in which their "ideal objectivity of...values" is transposed into the "intellectual horizon within the framework" of the interpreter's own experiences.[211] Understanding, then, is "a bridging through a kind of arc, a bringing together and reuniting of these forms with the inner totality that generated them and from which they separated."[212] The interpreter is not a passive receiver of some "mechanical procedure" but one who has to "reconstruct within himself with the help of his subtle intuition and on the strength of his own insight

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[206] Betti, *Die Hermenutik als allgemeine Methode der Geisteswissenschaften*. Trans. as "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*" in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 51-94. Some of those that Betti includes in this noble history are: Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Droysen, Humboldt, Steinthal, Lazarus, Böckh, Dilthey, Savigny, Niebuhr, Ranke.

[207] Betti, "Hermeneutics," 56, 58.

[208] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 73; see also, *Idem*, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding" in *Idem, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 145, 150, 152. The objective existence of these manifestations is the precondition for the relative objectivity of interpretation. This is consistent with Dilthey, and similar to Schleiermacher's notion of the "affinity of minds," Cf. Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 30; Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 57.

[209] Betti, "Hermeneutics," in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 57.

[210] *Ibid.*, 57, 62. In a notion similar to Schleiermacher's concept of the affinity of minds, Betti states that this requires the "con-geniality" of the interpreter and the author. The two individuals must respectively have a mind of the same level for understanding to occur. "If it is the case that mind alone can address mind, then it follows that only a mind of equal stature and congenial disposition can gain access to, and understand, another mind in a meaningfully adequate way. An actual interest in understanding is by itself not enough" (*Ibid.*, 85).

[211] *Ibid.*, 57, 62; Betti, *Allgemeine Auslegungslehre als Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*, 36. Trans. in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 29.

[212] Betti, "Hermeneutics," in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 57.

and of the categories of thought located in his own creative, practical knowledge."[213] Betti is not following Schleiermacher's appeal to a psychological dimension. His focus is aimed toward a historical process. Furthermore, the interpreter must respect the autonomy of the meaning by excluding personal interests and projections (prejudices are a barrier, not a condition, for understanding).[214] Such a construction leads to a firm distinction between meaning and application revealed in Betti's description of the three types of interpretation: recognitive, reproductive, and normative.

Normative interpretation, also known as application, occurs in jurisprudence, where a function of the nature of the law is that the application of the law demands concretion. The demand for practical relevance also applies to theological interpretation of Scripture on account of its "directive, i.e., normative, task."[215] This task is markedly different from historical interpretation, wherein the goal is "purely contemplative."[216] To employ normative interpretation in the search for historical truth would be paramount to inviting "subjective arbitrariness," misrepresentation, and distortion.[217]

Betti frames the relation of the interpreter and the text in traditional pre-Heideggerian categories of subject and object. Despite his affirmation of the inescapable subjectivity of the interpreter,[218] Betti insists that the interpreter can avoid the negative effects of historical situatedness (e.g., participation "in a tradition, universal discourse, etc.")[219] and ensure the amenability of the object to objective investigation[220] by "detaching *Verstehen* from its relation to experience, on the subjective side, and on the objective side, from the real psychic processes it is supposed to reproduce."[221]

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[213] *Ibid.*, 62-3. See also, *Ibid.*, 53. Betti recognizes the implication of such a view for the notion of objectivity. "It should be admitted that objectivity means something quite different in the *Geisteswissenschaften* compared with the natural sciences where we are dealing with objects that are essentially different from ourselves" (*Ibid.*, 63).

[214] *Ibid.*, 62-3.

[215] *Ibid.*, 83.

[216] *Ibid.*

[217] *Ibid.*

[218] *Ibid.*, 62.

[219] Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 123. In a subsequent book, Bleicher points out that the Dilthian tradition is objectivist in that, *inter alia*, "all traces" of the subject's "socio-historical situatedness can be eliminated or at least neutralized" (*Idem, The Hermeneutic Imagination*, 52).

[220] *Ibid.*

[221] Apel, *Understanding and Explanation*, 12. Apel is describing the neo-Kantian critique of Dilthey's psychologism as represented by Rickert (*Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen*

E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (1928-)

The hermeneutical thought of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. stands squarely within the hermeneutical trajectory of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Betti. Hirsch's work centers upon the concepts of meaning and significance. Such a center is a direct result of his Kantian concern to secure the objective validity of knowledge, and, like Dilthey, the capacity of the progress of understanding against the limitation of history.[222] For such progress to occur, objective knowledge must be possible. For objective knowledge to be possible, "meaning itself" must be "unchanging" and "reproducible."[223] The only candidate for the "permanent meaning" of a text, according to Hirsch, is the *mens auctoris*—whatever the author "has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs."[224] The possibilities include "the affects and values...[the] subjective feeling, tone, [and] mood" that are "necessarily correlative" to the meaning as content or intentional object.[225]

In direct contrast to the immutability of meaning is the endlessly mutable nature of significance, meaning-as-related-to-anything-else.[226] While authorial meaning is internal to the text, significance is an external relationship.[227] This differentiation, so crucial to the "possibility of hermeneutical knowledge,"[228] is one between the content of the text which is autonomous and the context or the relevance of the text beyond itself "as a function of the interests, values, and norms which preside over its evaluation."[229] In failing to maintain this "simple and essential distinction" contemporary hermeneutical theory manifests "enormous confusion."[230] To correct this confusion, Hirsch proposes the traditional separation of *subtilitas intelligere* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicare* (explanation).[231]

Begriffsbildung) and Windelband. Betti's logic, however, is consistent with that which Apel is critiquing. See Betti, *Allgemeine Auslegungslehre als Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*, 166.

[222] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, vii-xi; *Idem, Aims of Interpretation*, 1-3, 12. Hereafter, the former will be referenced as *VI*, and the latter as *AI*.

[223] *Ibid., VI*, 214, 216. See also, *AI*, 2.

[224] Hirsch, *VI*, 31. See also, 5-6, 25-27, 216; *AI*, 7, 74-9, 85-92.

[225] Hirsch, *AI*, 8.

[226] *Ibid.*, 80. This something else can be "a person, or conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable" (Hirsch, *VI*, 8-23, 39, 140-44; *AI*, 2-3, 79-81, 85-86, 146).

[227] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?*, 77.

[228] Hirsch, *AI*, 2-3.

[229] *Ibid.*, 3. See also, Ricoeur, "Construing and Constructing," in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario Valdés, 196.

[230] Hirsch, *VI*, 8.

[231] Hirsch, *AI*, 19, 127.

The interpreter is chiefly concerned with re-producing in his self "the author's 'logic,' his attitudes, his cultural givens, in short, his world"[232] so that understanding can occur. By "'understanding,' therefore, I mean a perception or construction of the author's verbal meaning, nothing more, nothing less."[233] Since meaning is determinate and shareable, the act of understanding is "autonomous" – it "occurs entirely within the terms and proprieties of the text's own language and the shared realities which that language embraces."[234]

Understanding is an active construction focused on authorial meaning.[235] Explanation, on the other hand, for Hirsch, is a public conveyance focused on the constructed meaning.[236] Since "each different sort of audience requires a different strategy of interpretation," the historicity of explanation is an unquestioned fact in contrast to the intrinsic and timeless nature of understanding.[237] This particular trajectory in modern hermeneutics has, thus, come full circle. Notice, this construal of understanding and explanation ignores the entire *Erklärung—Verstehen* debate and the technical use of the respective English terms that had developed. Hirsch appeals to the pre-Romantic, Schleiermacherian approach. And yet, as we have demonstrated *CTH* has not been able to remain detached from the hermeneutical issues raised by contemporary hermeneutics and its exposure of the philosophical issues driving application. The great benefit of contemporary hermeneutics is that we are now alert to larger philosophical issues at work in our hermeneutical commitments. Hermeneutics has shifted away from a methodology that merely assumes these philosophical commitments to a focus on the way in which we understand. If we are going to work on homiletical application, then, we cannot avoid contemporary hermeneutics. The issue of the relationship of explication and understanding, as we saw in our development of the hermeneutical trajectory from Schleiermacher to Hirsch, has become crucial for how one thinks about application.

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[232] *Ibid.*, 242. Hirsch readily admits his indebtedness to Betti, Dilthey, Boeckh, and Schleiermacher. See, e.g., *VI*, xi-xii, 4, 23, 134, 143, 242; *AI*, 17.

[233] Hirsch, *VI*, 143.

[234] *Ibid.*, 134. "To understand an utterance it is, in fact, not just desirable but absolutely unavoidable that we understand it in its own terms. We could not possibly recast a text's meaning in different terms unless we had already understood the text in its own terms....Verbal meaning has to be construed in *its* own terms it if is to be construed at all" (*Ibid.*, 134-35).

[235] *Ibid.*, 170.

[236] *Ibid.*, 129, 142.

[237] *Ibid.*, 137.

Conclusion

CTH is right to insist on the importance of application by locating it at the heart of preaching,[238] and yet *CTH* underestimates the nature of the problem. The problem of application, we have seen, is about more than how one distinguishes the culturally bound from the universal truths. The great insight of contemporary hermeneutics is that larger issues are at work. With its focus on the structure of understanding, contemporary hermeneutics exposes the philosophical issues driving any construal of application. The attempt of *CTH* to ignore contemporary hermeneutics by appealing to Hirsch has been not been successful in that *CTH* remains philosophically committed.

In this chapter we have seen that the view of application espoused by *CTH* is neither neutral nor objective, but is shaped by theological-hermeneutical assumptions such as: issues of epistemology, the structure of understanding, the nature of truth and of texts, and the philosophy of language. In other words, we have established the foundational and formative relationship of theological-hermeneutics to application in *CTH*. Furthermore, we have illustrated the importance of and some benefits of addressing homiletical application in relation to theological-hermeneutics. In chapter three we will broaden our discussion to include all four contemporary homiletical approaches to application. In addition, we will critically evaluate each approach to homiletical application in light of the hermeneutical ecology of application, and ultimately identify a key aspect of a hermeneutically aware approach to homiletical application.

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[238] E.g., Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 200; Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 121; Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 23.

CHAPTER 3

THE THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF APPLICATION, PART 1: THE HERMENEUTICAL ECOLOGY OF APPLICATION

Introduction

Traditional hermeneutics is based upon the recognition that texts are historically conditioned. Contemporary hermeneutics is marked by the discovery of the historically conditioned nature of human culture and understanding. In other words, contemporary hermeneutics "begins with the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided." The impact of history shapes the interpreter no less than the text.[239] And yet, for Scripture to speak there must be some point of contact between it and the interpreter. The four approaches to homiletical application construe the structure of this contact in different ways. In chapter two we saw how *CTH* handles the relationship of the text and the congregation.

Space does not allow us to treat *NH, PLH,* and *PMH* with the same level of historical analysis that we applied to *CTH* in the previous chapter. Furthermore, such a treatment is unnecessary for the specific purpose of our investigation because *NH, PLH,* and *PMH* fully accept the beginning point of contemporary hermeneutics (i.e., the impact of history upon both the text and the interpreter). As a result, these three approaches admit to the shaping influence of their own theological-hermeneutical presuppositions. And yet, the problem of application in contemporary homiletics has not been investigated at the level of these depth commitments. It is here that our investigation must focus in order to make sense of the divergent solutions to the problem of application and to move the discussion forward.

In chapter two we surveyed the hermeneutical tradition from which *CTH* draws. In this chapter we will survey the historical development of contemporary hermeneutics, the strand of hermeneutics that undergirds the views of application presented by *NH, PLH,* and *PMH.* The two hermeneutical sketches (one from chapter two, and one from this chapter) form the environment from which we can properly explore the hermeneutics of homiletical application. First of all, they will enable us

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[239] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons,* 11.

to identify a typology of hermeneutical views of application. Secondly, the sketches together with the typology will form the parameters within which we can identify and explore the hermeneutical ecology of application. At the conclusion of this chapter, we will bring together all of these resources to articulate a concise but adequately hermeneutical view of homiletical application.

Contemporary Hermeneutics as the Intellectual Parentage of the Hermeneutics of Application in New Homiletics, Post-Liberal Homiletics, and (Radically) Post-Modern Homiletics

NH, PLH, and *PMH* construe homiletical application from the perspective of contemporary hermeneutics. This strand of hermeneutics can be viewed through the lens of two interacting developments: the movement from a regional to a general hermeneutic, and the movement from an epistemological to an ontological hermeneutic.[240] The first shift began with the attempt at a universal hermeneutic, albeit in embryonic form, in the seventeenth century with the writings of J. C. Dannhauer (1603-1666).[241] While subsequent authors, such as J. M. Chladenius (1710-1759) and G. F. Meier (1718-1777) produced a host of general theories of interpretation, now virtually forgotten, the general sweep of hermeneutics continued to be localized, rationalist, technical theories.[242] In the second half of the eighteenth century Kant's (1724-1804) attack on the autarchy of human reason devastated the rationalism on which Dannhauer, Chladenius, and Meier depended. Working in this environment F. D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) offered a profound contribution to the development of hermeneutics by significantly changing their direction and influence. He reoriented hermeneutics from the form of "a mere service discipline"[243] mainly concerned to "support, secure, and clarify"[244] an understanding

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[240] While there are many who recognize these shifts Paul Ricoeur specifically utilizes them as an effective way to survey the history of contemporary hermeneutics. See *Idem, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 43-62.

[241] This is a minority reading of the history of hermeneutics. See, Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 1-15, 47-75. In a personal conversation Anthony Thiselton argued that Dannhauer attempted a universal hermeneutic only in a methodological sense, but not in the more important transcendental sense that we see in Schleiermacher. Thiselton's view is supported by, *inter alios*: Ebeling, "Hermeneutik," in *Idem, Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, cols. 242-62, esp. 255; Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 45-48; Mueller-Vollmer, *Hermeneutics*, x-xi; Frei, *Eclipse*; Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, 41; Warnke, *Gadamer*, 2ff.

[242] E.g., Chladenius, *Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernünftiger Reden und Schriften*; Meier, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst.*

[243] Thiselton, *Interpreting God*, 48. See also, Grondin, *Intro*, 59, 63-64.

[244] Kimmerle, "Hermeneutical Theory or Ontological Hermeneutics," 107, cf. 108-21.

already accepted by an interpreter or community.[245] Instead hermeneutics should focus on "the linguistic and inter-subjective conditions" that make understanding and interpretation possible.[246] In doing this, Schleiermacher synthesized the Enlightenment (and Kantian) vision of human autonomy and the limits of reason with the Romanticist interpretation of religious reality that can only be understood "through an analysis of human consciousness focused on feeling and intuition."[247]

The movement of deregionalization, having begun in Dannhauer and given a new beginning and significantly advanced by Schleiermacher, reached its climax in W. Dilthey's (1833-1911) decisive contribution—the location of the philological and exegetical problematic within the historical.[248] Throughout this movement the nature of hermeneutics was consistently construed in epistemological terms, and even into the beginning of the twentieth century, hermeneutics continued to take the form of a theory aimed at producing methodological directions for the interpretive sciences, with the goal of reducing, as far as possible, conflicting interpretations. By fully realizing the deregionalization of hermeneutics through an elevation of the historical

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[245] In this sense, hermeneutics was a pedagogical discipline aimed at formulating hermeneutical principles retrospective to a successful interpretation in an apologetic effort to establish rules that would provide validation of the given interpretation by establishing the route necessary for others (i.e., the student) to arrive at the same interpretation. See Gadamer, *TM,* 184; Thiselton, *Interpreting God,* 48; *Idem, New Horizons*, 205.

[246] *Ibid.*, 231. See also Mueller-Vollmer, *Hermeneutics*, 8-9. Thus, the broadening movement of hermeneutics from a local to universal focus is more than a simply quantitative expansion.

[247] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 15. The significance of Schleiermacher is vast. To begin with, this is the first sign of a break with the deepest commitment of Enlightenment rationalism: that the human mind could penetrate, by means of thought, "the logical and regular construction of the world" (Grondin, *Introduction*, 64). It will be a century, though, before this break is finalized. Secondly, by shifting the focus of hermeneutics "from a pedagogical function of interpretation as an aid to the other's (i.e., the student's) understanding" Schleiermacher removes the sharp distinction between interpretation and understanding. They are "closely interwoven, like the outer and the inner word, and every problem of interpretation is, in fact, a problem of understanding" (Gadamer, *TM,* 184). Finally, in Gadamer's view the most significant contribution of Schleiermacher's achievement is the recognition that hermeneutics is not a mechanistic process but an art (*Ibid.*, 186ff).

[248] For whatever reason, though he greatly privileged the Romantic insight of the ineluctable uncertainty of interpersonal understanding, it appears that Schleiermacher did not conceive of this uncertainty as derivative of historical conditioning, hence Dilthey's critical contribution. However, it was actually Droysen (1808-1884) who recognized that the indubitable success of the natural sciences was the fact that "they have made their tasks, their means, and their methods fully conscious and that they observe the objects that lie within the sphere of their research from the viewpoints on which their method is based, and only from them" (Droysen, "Erhebung der Geshcichte," 386. Cited in Grondin, *Introduction*, 79). He argued, therefore, that historiographers must "develop their own methods" while resisting "the incursion of a methodology appropriate to mathematics and physics" (Grondin, *Introduction,* 80). "We need a Kant to provide [not merely a model for gathering] historical materials but a critical paradigm for theory and practice toward and in history" (Droysen, "Erhebung der Geshcichte," 378. Cited in Grondin, *Introduction*, 79). Therefore, though Dilthey is rightly credited with developing the notion of a critique of historical reason, the first appearance of such a concept was in Droysen.

nature of knowledge Dilthey set the stage for the second shift.[249] This change was not in the perfection of the epistemology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*[250] but in the questioning of Dilthey's fundamental postulate – that the *Geisteswissenschaften* can compete with the *Naturwissenschaften* by means of a methodology. This presupposition, vis-à-vis hermeneutics construed as epistemology, is precisely the point at which M. Heidegger's (1889-1976) revolutionary thought occurs.

The shift from epistemology to ontology begins in Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity – the search for a "hermeneutical reconceptualization of philosophy" demonstrated in his lectures throughout the early nineteen-twenties and culminating in 1927 with the publication of *Sein und Zeit*. While this monograph contained only the briefest treatment of his insights into the fore-structure and ontological circularity of understanding,[251] and while he immediately began to turn from a hermeneutical philosophy, the die had nevertheless been cast: hermeneutics was no longer a marginalized, provincialized epiphenomenon. It is a foundational characteristic of the existence of a being that is concerned with being, and understands itself as temporalized.[252]

While Heidegger marks the turn to ontology,[253] it is in the work of H.-G. Gadamer (1900-2002) that the two streams of contemporary hermeneutics finally come together into a fully expressed universal ontological philosophical hermeneutic. Gadamer resisted the later Heidegger's abandonment of hermeneutics, developing instead the early Heidegger's hermeneutical agenda centered on historical facticity. Gadamer's magisterial contribution to thought, in the words of Grondin, is in showing how "the historicity of being pertains to our historically situated consciousness and the human sciences in which that consciousness expresses

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[249] The brevity of this survey necessitates the unfortunate omission of many important details, such as, in this case, the crucial role of Husserl in pushing hermeneutics to the threshold of ontology.

[250] For the genesis and development of this term see, Bleicher, *The Hermeneutic Imagination*, 56.

[251] This issue was treated in half of a page at the conclusion of section 7 (phenomenology).

[252] While Dilthey did insist that the interpreter must not forget his own finitude, he was finally trapped in the very objectivism that he was attempting to overcome. His attempts to justify historical knowledge through a methodically rendered objectivity finally failed to recognize that the real claim of historical knowledge is that the subject has a historical standpoint towards everything. Therefore, Heidegger's work highlighted the inappropriately narrowed horizon of traditional hermeneutics by grounding understanding in the structure of *Dasein* thus rendering the full ontological background of hermeneutics.

[253] Heidegger's turn to ontology was a change of direction, that is, this is not meant to indicate that the hermeneutic of Heidegger was a fully expressed ontological hermeneutic.

itself."[254] Gadamer's hermeneutic,[255] therefore, fully realizes the shift from the "*normatively* oriented, and hence also *epistemologically and methodologically relevant,* conceptions" of the older, more traditional hermeneutics to a "*temporal-ontological,* and that is to say, *happening-theoretical*" hermeneutic.[256] In Gadamer hermeneutics has become a philosophical exploration of the understanding that is necessarily ontological.

This narrative is not meant to indicate a historiography of contemporary hermeneutics that is reductionistically unitary or teleological. In fact, it is the scattering of hermeneutical views across the epistemological and ontological, regional and general spectrums that result in the differences that fund competing understandings of the nature of application in hermeneutics.[257]

A Typology of the Hermeneutics of Application

In chapter two we sketched the historical development of traditional hermeneutics. In the first part of this chapter we have sketched the historical development of contemporary hermeneutics. Besides giving us the hermeneutical background for the approaches to application in *CTH, NH, PLH,* and *PMH* these two sections have prepared us for a typology of hermeneutical application. Meant to be neither conclusive nor determinate, this typology will serve as a heuristic guide leading to a more fully orbed and nuanced discussion of the hermeneutical ecology of application. Without such a guide our analysis threatens an indefinite dispersion into detail.

The various homiletical approaches to application are funded by distinct hermeneutical views of application. At their roots, these competing hermeneutical

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[254] Grondin, *Introduction*, 8.

[255] In speaking of the hermeneutics of Gadamer, in my opinion, it is appropriate to use the singular form, i.e., hermeneutic, when grammatically possible, in that Gadamer, more than any other, establishes and champions the universal nature of the discipline. Furthermore, the singular term conveys a more fundamental and philosophical orientation versus a methodology. Cf. Robinson and Cobb, eds., *New Frontiers in Theology: II,* ix-x. See also, Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 3. For a competing view see Braaten, "How New is the New Hermeneutic?," 220.

[256] Apel, "Regulative Ideas or Truth-Happening?," 68.

[257] Even among those hermeneutics that are characterized as both ontological and general in their orientation, there are important differences. Caputo argues that subsequent to *Being and Time* hermeneutics "moved in three directions" as represented by the later Heidegger himself, Gadamer, and Derrida. Caputo argues that Gadamer's work is consistent with the "fundamental standpoint of *Being and Time*" and disregards Heidegger's later development and critique of his own views. Meanwhile, Derrida "exploited the radically deconstructive side of Heidegger...and directed it against what he called the 'metaphysics of presence,' within which he included hermeneutics itself as a metaphysics of meaning and truth" (Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 95).

views of application are distinguished on the basis of their construal of the relation of application to understanding. There are three basic ways to construe this relationship: application is *distinct* from understanding, application is *involved* in understanding, and application is *determinate* of understanding.[258] Like the typology of homiletical approaches to application, this typology gathers a cluster of perspectives into a unified group because of key common commitments. Such categorization is not meant to dissolve important nuances within each group. This typology will function as a compass. It will guide our exploration of critical subtextual premises that shape every approach to homiletical application. For example, when we look at the field of homiletics, we will find that three of our approaches to homiletical application correspond neatly with the typology of hermeneutical application. *CTH* is built upon the hermeneutical view that application is *Distinct* from understanding; *NH* upon the view that application is *Involved* in understanding; and *PMH* upon the view that application is *Determinate* of understanding. *PLH* does not fit neatly into one single category, it draws from both the *Distinct* and *Determinate* views.

Exploring the Hermeneutical Ecology of Application

In what follows we will focus and deepen our exploration of the hermeneutics of application in two ways. First, we will utilize chiefly E. D. Hirsch, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida as paradigmatic examples of the *Distinct* approaches, the *Involved* approaches, and the *Determinate* approaches, respectively. Second, we will identify and develop four components that constitute the hermeneutical ecology of application. This will enable us to set in bold relief the depth-philosophical issues that shape the competing hermeneutics of application and to move beyond critique to a solution for the current problem of homiletical application. In order to set up our exploration of the ecology of application we will begin with an analysis of textuality in terms of Umberto Eco's notion of open-closed texts.

Textuality (Open and Closed Texts)

In his essay "*Intentio Lectoris:* The State of the Art," Umberto Eco identifies the paradigmatic shift that has occurred in the last several decades regarding the role

[258] Throughout the chapter these groupings will be referred to as "the *Distinct* approach," "the *Involved* approach," and "the *Determinate* approach."

of the interpreter in understanding a text.[259] The first section of the essay is a chronicle, beginning in the structuralist dominated 1960s, of the growing awareness that an explanation of a text's function must not only take into account its generative process, it must also (or, for the most radical theories, exclusively) account for "the role performed by the addressee and the way in which the text foresees and directs this kind of interpretive cooperation."[260] With the publication of three monumental works[261] – Gadamer's *Warheit und Methode* in 1960, Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961, and Umberto Eco's *Opera aperta* in 1962 – the focus on the trilogical dialectics between the roles of the author, text, and reader significantly shifted to the tension between the latter two poles.[262]

In analyzing the dialectic of text and reader from within the field of semiotics, Eco rigorously argues for the constructive distinction between types of texts represented by the polar characteristics of open and closed.[263] Such a construct allows Eco to explore the wide diversity of texts ranging from simple, functional, and transmissive texts, which deliver a given content, to complex, productive, and generative texts, which elicit the reader's participation into an act of meaning construction.

Eco describes the former category of texts as:

> obsessively aim[ed] at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers (be they children, soap-opera addicts, doctors, law-abiding citizens, swingers, Presbyterians, farmers, middle-class women, scuba divers, effete snobs, or any other imaginable sociopsychological category).[264]

These texts endeavor to guide the reader along "a predetermined path," wisely presenting their "effects" in order to produce "pity or fear, excitement or depression"

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[259] Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 44-63.

[260] Eco, *Limits*, 45. "Reader-response theories emerge in more careful and philosophically-based forms in Iser, in more balanced and comprehensive semiotic forms in Eco, and in less restrained and more far-reaching pragmatic forms in Bleich, Holland, and Fish" (Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 15).

[261] Eco highlights a host of other important works in his brief summary of the development of this emphasis through the separate streams of hermeneutic and semiotic-structuralist approaches (Eco, *Limits*, 46-50).

[262] This shift to the latter two poles does not necessarily demand the "death of the author." Eco, for example, argues the obvious when he points out that someone had to encode the text with its devices of constraint and freedom. Furthermore, to indicate that the shift occurred in the early 1960s is not intended to neglect the insight of Schleiermacher, writing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when he argued that understanding entails "consideration of two factors: the content of the text and its range of effects" (Schleiermacher, *The Handwritten Manuscripts*, 151).

[263] More precisely, the labels "open" and "closed" are descriptions of the extreme ends of a continuum that moves from "immoderately 'open'" to fully 'open.' That is, all texts are, to some degree, open. See Eco, *Role*, 4-8. The development of Eco's thought on this subject can be traced through: *Opera aperta* (1962); *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976); *The Role of the Reader* (1979); *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984); and *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990).

[264] Eco, *Role*, 8.

at the appropriate time and place. "Every step of the 'story' elicits just the expectation that its further course will satisfy." In this case, closed texts are "structured according to an inflexible project."[265] A paradigmatic example of such a text is an engineering handbook. Anthony Thiselton suggests that Philemon is probably an example of a biblical book that primarily functions in this capacity.[266]

On the other end of the spectrum are open works that contain, among their "major analyzable properties, certain structural devices that" depend upon "a system of psychological, cultural, and historical expectations on the part of their addressees" who in turn are encouraged to choose between a plurality of interpretive options.[267] So, an open text is created with the active role of the reader in the interpretive process envisaged from the beginning.[268] In fact, according to Eco, if this originary component is not present, a text is not characterized with the communicative strategy and structure of openness.

There are many biblical texts that function in just this way. For instance, there is some type of an awareness of this characteristic in C. H. Dodd's 1935 publication, *The Parables of the Kingdom,* in which Dodd argued that some of Jesus' parables produce a limited amount of doubt in the mind of the interpreter as regards their precise application, the effect of which is "to tease it into active thought."[269] Job and Ecclesiastes, Thiselton suggests, also seem to function in a similar way. They frustrate the interpreter looking for pre-packaged pieces of doctrinal data because they "do not function *primarily* as raw-material for Christian doctrine." Instead, readers are led on a journey whereby they are invited, or even provoked to "wrestle actively with the issues, in ways that may involve adopting a series of comparative angles of vision."[270] Therefore, "a digest of contents or a bare description of 'the message'" of either book would hardly "be the same thing as actually reading" the books themselves. An "'answer'... offered independently of the reader's struggle"

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[265] *Ibid.*

[266] Thiselton, *New Horizons,* 20.

[267] Eco, *Limits,* 49-50.

[268] "An open text is a paramount instance of a syntactic-semantico-pragmatic device" whose foreseen interpretation by an active interpreter "is part of the picture of the generative process of the text" (Eco, *Role,* 3-4).

[269] Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom,* 16. Cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons,* 65. See also, Via, *The Parables,* 24.

[270] Thiselton, *New Horizons,* 65-6. Elsewhere Thiselton develops this concept under the rubric of "polyphonic voices" and an analysis of such in the texts of Job, Eliot, and Dostoyevsky (*Idem,* "Communicative Action," 172-182).

would short circuit the intention of the book – a first hand engagement with the problems set out.[271]

Open and Closed Texts and the Involved Approach

Eco's theory of open and closed texts constitutes an important component of the view of the role of application in understanding for the *Involved* approach. To begin with, Eco has recognized, as Thiselton points out, that: "'transmissive' or 'handbook' texts may function with an encoding and decoding hermeneutic different from that which may be presupposed in 'productive' or 'literary' texts. Indeed, diverse 'subcodes' may operate within each category."[272] Eco himself says as much when he explains that in producing a text that occupies a specific place on the open-closed continuum, an author must "rely upon a series of codes that assign given contents to the expression he uses."[273] Therefore, in order to render a communicative text, the author must assume his archipelago of codes can be and will be shared by his possible readers. The author must foresee a "model of the possible reader...able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them."[274] This "model reader" may be general, e.g., readers of English, or specialized, e.g., a neurologist. Here we have the heart of Eco's insight into the role of application in the process of interpretation. Since various types of texts differ in their requirements concerning the interpreter's participation, or lack thereof, in the interpreting process, interpreters must approach a text with a reading strategy that is conducive to "the type of cooperation requested of the reader" by the text.[275] Therefore, the *Involved* cluster of perspectives indicate that the role of application in understanding a text is determined by both the level and type of reader cooperation invited by the text. This represents a *via media* between the harsh

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[271] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 65-6.

[272] Thiselton, "Communicative Action," 170. Thiselton points out that this bears a close resemblance to Culler's notion of "competency" and Searle's concept of engaging with a "background." Cf. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*; *Idem, The Pursuit of Signs*; Searle, *Intentionality*, 141-59.

[273] Eco, *Role*, 7.

[274] *Ibid.* The notion of a model reader is debated. For good introduction to the debate, see The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible*, 41-61. Powell, for example, distinguishes between the implied reader and ideal reader. See his, "Types of Readers and Their Relevance for Biblical Hermeneutics," 76. Finally, Chatman has a good discussion of the issues in *Idem, Coming to Terms*.

[275] Eco, *Role*, 33; see also, 256.

separation of meaning and application found in the *Distinct* approaches and the radical relativism of the *Determinate* approaches.

In contrast to the latter, the various *Involved* approaches offer an important qualification of open texts: the quality of openness does not allow for an infinite variety of interpretations. Eco argues this in the clearest possible terms.

> The notion of unlimited semiosis does not lead to the conclusion that interpretation has no criteria. To say that interpretation (as the basic feature of semiosis) is potentially unlimited does not mean that interpetation has no object and that it 'riverruns' merely for its own sake. To say that a text has potentially no end does not mean that every act of interpretation can have a happy end.[276]

An open text does not legitimate textual misuse. An interpreter cannot use the text any way that she wishes since she is limited by the constraints of the text itself.[277] Therefore, the open text actually "outlines a 'closed' project with its Model Reader as a component of its structural strategy."[278] For example:

> When reading Ulysses one can extrapolate the profile of a 'good Ulysses reader' from the text itself, because the pragmatic process of interpretation is not an empirical accident independent of the text qua text, but is a structural element of its generative process. As referred to an unsuitable reader (to a negative Model Reader unable to do the job he has just been postulated to do), Ulysses qua Ulysses could not stand up. At most it becomes another text.[279]

This moderating nature of an open text becomes most apparent as one considers the strategies for the interpreter's cooperation that are induced through "interpretive choices which even though not infinite are, however, more than one," and produce "an imprecise or undetermined response."[280] The concept of the open text, then, while radical in the context of the structuralism of the sixties when it was first introduced as a theory of semiotics, is decidedly conservative in the context of today's "most radical reader-response theories" because it sets the role of the interpreter in this dialectic of "fidelity and freedom."[281] In other words, while

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[276] Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 23-24. See also, *Idem, Role*, 9; *Idem, Limits*, 6; Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 79.

[277] Cf., Ricoeur, "World of the Text, World of the Reader," 495-96.

[278] Eco, *Role*, 9. This is contrasted to the closed text which does not "inflexibly" plan its reader into its structural strategy (*Ibid.*, 8).

[279] *Ibid.* Eco argues that an implication of this approach to textuality is that closed texts, ironically, are immoderately "open to any possible 'aberrant' decoding," since "the only one not to have been 'inflexibly' planned is the reader" (*Ibid.*, 8). But the open text, on the other hand, has the distinct advantage, in Eco's view, of its ability to resist aberrant readings by allowing for the widest possible array of interpretive actualizations.

[280] *Ibid.*, 4.

[281] Eco, *Limits*, 50. In *Interpretation* Eco writes, "In 1962 I wrote my *Opera aperta*. In that book I advocated the active role of the interpreter in the reading of texts endowed with aesthetic value. When those pages were written, my readers mainly focused on the open side of the whole business,

application does play a role in understanding it does not completely take over the interpretive process.

Open and Closed Texts and the Distinct Approach

In contrast to the *Involved* approach, it is a characteristic of the *Distinct* approach to treat all texts as closed.[282] Some of the problems resulting from this conflation are strikingly evident in the hermeneutical theory of E. D. Hirsch. For example, after discussing Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, Hirsch observes:

> Many sentences, especially those found in poetry, actualize far more possibilities than illustrative sentences in a dictionary. Any pun, for example, realizes simultaneously at least two divergent meaning possibilities. But the pun is nevertheless an actualization from langue and not a mere system of meaning possibilities.[283]

Hirsch is right to assert that a pun is an "actualization from *langue*" of a divergent array of meaning possibilities. That is, it is a *parole* characterized by multiple meaning actualizations. Therefore, it is not surprising that a few paragraphs later he argues that it is possible for a text to contain "numerous different *paroles*" pointing to an ironic sentence as an example.[284] And yet, when Hirsch is defining "determinacy" as a fundamental characteristic of meaning, he goes to extreme, often polemical, lengths to argue that it is impossible for any text to contain an array of meanings (either actual or possible).

He begins by arguing that a text cannot be a locus of possible meanings because "a human mind cannot entertain a possible meaning; as soon as the meaning is entertained it is actual."[285] And, if a human mind were to apprehend in a single text an array of actual meanings two tragic errors would occur. First of all, meaning would lose its "self-identical" status. (By this Hirsch is arguing that a meaning cannot mean something at one point in time and something else at another point in time; it must remain identical to itself each time it occurs.) Secondly, a text cannot be

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underestimating the fact that the open-ended reading I was supporting was an activity elicited by (and aiming at interpreting) a work. In other words, I was studying the dialectics between the rights of texts and the rights of their interpreters. I have the impression that, in the course of the last decades, the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed" (23; see *Limits*, 6 for a nearly identical statement).

[282] A motivating factor in this approach appears to be the "supposed" threat of any open text type of concept to de-stabilize the notion of single and determinate meaning.

[283] Hirsch, *VI*, 232.

[284] *Ibid.*, 233.

[285] *Ibid.*, 45.

an array of actual meanings because then meaning would be indeterminate in that we would have "no norm for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek."[286] To summarize, this self-identical, determinate meaning is an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next—that is changeless...always the same in different acts of construing."[287]

In these two sections of his argument, the section concerning puns and the section defining determinant meaning, an aporia becomes apparent in Hirsch's theory. On the one hand, the functional aspect of puns and ironic statements forces Hirsch to recognize that a single text can "actualize" multiple and "divergent" meaning "possibilities."[288] On the other hand, his commitment to the ironclad determinance of meaning demands the impossibility of an array of meaning "possibilities."[289] So, a voice is present in Hirsch that recognizes the divergent functionality of texts along an open and closed continuum, however this voice is quickly hushed by the epistemic framework of his philosophizing. Hirsch's underlying theory of the nature of meaning has mis-shaped his hermeneutical theory.[290]

To be fair, Hirsch does assert that, "there may be different kinds of textual interpretation corresponding to different kinds of texts."[291] And that, "interpretations will substantially depend on [the interpreter's] guesses about the type of meaning expressed."[292] However, his entire discussion at this point serves the notion of genre distinction. When Hirsch asserts that, "an interpreter's notion of the type of meaning he confronts will powerfully influence his understanding of details," he is not speaking of different types of meaning but of different genres which produce the same type of meaning (determinate) through specific, genre-bound contexts.[293]

> We found the types of meanings we expected to find, because what we found was in fact powerfully influenced by what we expected. All along the way we construe this meaning instead of that because this meaning belongs to the type of meaning we are interpreting while that does not. If we happen to encounter something which can only be construed as that, then we have to start all over

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[286] *Ibid.*, 46.
[287] *Ibid.*
[288] *Ibid.*, 232-233.
[289] *Ibid.*, 45-6.
[290] The precise nature of Hirsch's mistaken view of meaning that determines his inadequate view of texts will be addressed in the next section (language).
[291] *Ibid.*, 112.
[292] *Ibid.*, 75.
[293] *Ibid.*

> and postulate another type of meaning altogether in which that will be at home. However, in the very act of revising our generic conception we will have started over again, and ultimately everything we understand will have been constituted and partly determined by the new generic conception. Thus, while it is not accurate to say that an interpretation is helplessly dependent on the generic conception with which an interpreter happens to start, it is nonetheless true that his interpretation is dependent on the last, unrevised generic conception with which he starts. All understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound.[294]

Contrary to Hirsch's language, he is not speaking of different types of meaning. He is describing different meanings. As Richard Palmer argues, "our underlying theory of knowledge and our theory of the ontological status of a work...determine in advance the shape of our theory and practice of literary interpretation."[295] Hirsch's approach to application depends in part upon a monolithic view of meaning (i.e., self-identically reproducible) that precludes any affirmation of textual openness, since this quality of openness yields a notion of meaning characterized more by experience, relationship, and action than concept, fact, and proposition. Clearly the *Distinct* approach illustrates the weakness of a hermeneutical theory that fails to address the way in which some texts may foresee and direct interpretive involvement.

Open and Closed Texts and the Determinate Approach

Deconstructionists claim that interpretation should resist metaphysics. Instead of "arresting the play, recentering the system, stabilizing the flux, breaking the code, reintroducing the nostalgic longing for the origin," the point of interpretation is to get caught up into the "the trembling and endless mirror-play of signs." An interpreter is to keep "texts in play."[296]

Rooted in a philosophy that affords movement and change the highest priorities, the deconstructionists' emphasis on the "innocence of becoming" is a claim for the irrepressible nature of the play of signs. This characteristic dominates the reading process and celebrates the death of "Being as presence."[297] Taking up Heidegger's work and radicalizing it, Derrida argues:

> Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in

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[294] *Ibid.*, 76.
[295] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 80-1.
[296] Caputo, *Radical*, 118.
[297] *Ibid.*, 117.

> which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse...that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.[298]

As nothing more than the ceaseless displacement of one sign by another, the text becomes an endless play of signs that refuse to ever come to rest on something in the world. Meaning is only and always horizontal, adjectival, immanent to language; meaning is never discovered, it is always and only made. The absence of the transcendental signified is the absence of extralinguistic reference, nothing escapes the endless play of language. We never have Being itself, only "an endless shifting from sign to sign which can never be terminated or fixed." What is left is a "non-center."[299] *Langue* precedes *parole.* Between us and the world is always and only *langue.* We have no way of directly relating to the world.

Through a metaphysics of absence and the concomitant view of reality as imprisoned within language, the *Determinate* approach rejects the functional capacity of texts to be either transmissive and communicative or productive and polyvalent, or some combination thereof.[300] Texts converge under the single linguistic model of play. Interpretation is indefinite because meaning is infinite. In the failed "attempt to look for a final, unattainable meaning" one is led to accept an ever-present and "never-ending drift or slide of meaning."[301]

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[298] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 280.

[299] Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*, 116.

[300] Granted Derrida insists on "protocols of reading" (Derrida, *Positions*, 63), and strongly contends "that within interpretive contexts...that are relatively stable...it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy." This leads to his criticism of some of his critics, "who no longer respect the elementary rules of philology and interpretation, confounding science and chatter as though they had not the slightest taste for communication" (*Limited Inc*, 146, 157 n.9). However, these claims must be held in tension with Derrida's own practice of deconstruction (e.g., of Husserl, Saussure, Biblical texts, etc.), and of his deconstruction of the distinction between theoretical or philosophical texts and more literary texts. This latter move results in a significant blurring of generic lines, facilitates a centering of the latter type of texts in philosophical discussions, and creates no less than an arbitrary, often hostile environment for traditional discussion (cf., the "debate" between Gadamer and Derrida). Consider also the implications of Derrida's following complaint for his attack on authorial-discourse interpretation: "I can be reproached for being insistent, even monotonous, but it is difficult for me to see how a concept of history as the "history of meaning" can be attributed to me...I find the expression rather comical...Nor can I go through, line by line, all the propositions whose confusion, I must say, rather disconcerted me..." (Ibid., *Positions*, 50-51).

[301] Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 32. While Eco does argue that all texts are somewhat open, this is not the same as rejecting any theory of texts which fall under the category of closed or transmissive.

In the end, this approach transforms the universe into "one big hall of mirrors, where any individual object both reflects and signifies all the others."[302] In doing this, the *Determinate* approach is claiming that language is characterized by the twin aspects of universality and non-referentiality. So reality is a "linguistic phenomenon" but language is denied "any power of communication."[303] Richard Rorty, for example, reminds us that the ancient cosmologies pictured the world atop an elephant. When asked what the elephant stood upon, one ancient cosmologist responded: "It's elephants all the way down." So it is with language, according to Rorty. Words do not rest upon an ultimate reality: their referent is simply more words. "It's words all the way down."[304] Knowledge is reduced to language.[305]

The *Determinate* approach is epitomized by the deconstructionists' privileging the reader and reducing the text to ambiguous possibilities.[306] In his work on Derrida, Evans concludes that *Speech and Phenomenology* and *Of Grammatology* demonstrate interpretation as "a performance that, instead of reading the texts ostensibly under discussion, enframes them as raw material for a writing that, for whatever reasons, ultimately exhibits no interest in those texts themselves."[307]

In replacing the purposeful strategy of openness designed to elicit free interpretative choices with an over-privileging of the interpreter's freedom and rights, the text becomes

> an uncommitted stimulus for a personal hallucinatory experience, cutting out levels of meaning, placing upon the expression 'aberrant' codes. As Borges once suggested, why not read the Odyssey as written after the *Aeneid* or the *Imitation of Christ* as written by Céline?[308]

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[302] *Ibid.*, 31.
[303] *Ibid.*, 32.
[304] Rorty, *Consequences of Nature*, xxxv.
[305] See esp. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 7.
[306] I understand that the idea of a critical reading of deconstruction is committed to ideals of truth and epistemic accountability that are deconstructed by deconstructionists. This results in a dilemma that Evans points out: either I work within the medium of deconstruction, in which case I cannot raise the traditional standards of legitimacy and justification, or I reject that medium, in which case my standards receive a negative answer *a priori* through a deconstructive deconstruction of the very standards themselves. In this sense, one may accuse the present discussion of philosophical naiveté (*Idem, Strategies of Deconstruction*, xv, 167). However, Derrida himself calls for deconstruction to pass through traditional criteria of rigor, even if the ultimate aim is to show that such rigor is mis-founded, far from absolute (i.e., Derrida, *Limited, Inc.*, 114, 147-48; *Of Grammatology*, lxxxix, 158.). Thus, "the import of a deconstructive reading is parasitic on the rigor of the text being deconstructed. Since this is the crucial premise, the plausibility of the deconstructive story is in its turn also crucially dependent on the rigor of its reading" of the text (Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction*, 175).
[307] *Ibid.*, 178.
[308] Eco, *Role*, 40.

The *Determinate* approach places the interpretation of the text solely in the discretion of the interpreter's will and desire.

Conclusion

In summary, any hermeneutical view of application that only addresses one type of text, or only sees one type of text is insufficient.[309] Such a hermeneutic reveals an interpreter who is imprisoned within a particular philosophical commitment.[310] Thiselton captures the fact that biblical texts transcend any single form, type, or goal of language or text theory.

> They teach, but they also invite us to celebrate with joy the deeds and reign of God. They make truth-claims about the world and reality; but they also make us uncomfortable recipients of judgment and comfortable recipients of grace. They subvert our idols, but they also address us, heal us, build us, and transform us. Any theory of textuality which cannot make room for these textual functions cannot be given a paradigmatic place in biblical interpretation.[311]

There is a need for homiletical application to be supported by a robust hermeneutics that is able to embrace the whole range of texts in order to adequately service our interpretive endeavors. By totalizing a transmissive view of texts, the *Distinct* approach (on which *CTH* depends) reduces meaning (and truth) to mere concepts leaving no room for the broader sense of meaning (and truth) as experience, relationship, and action. After all, "the Bible is not only information but also address; not only indicative, but also imperative."[312] The *Determinate* approach (which funds

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[309] Barton and Morgan argue that questions concerning textual meaning cannot be worked out in abstraction. Barton rejects all colonialist claims that any one model of meaning is sufficient for each and every Biblical text (Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation,* 215ff). This includes the approach of Frei (who, as we will see in chapter six, is a major theological and hermeneutical theorist for *PLH*) with its emphasis on non-referential, intra-linguistic, and inter-textual world (Barton, *Reading the Old Testament,* 163-167). Frei's model, applied whole-sale to the Biblical texts, undervalues and even denies, at times, the transmissive function of some texts in communicating a determinate content. Unfortunately both *Biblical Interpretation* and *Reading the Old Testament* argue for a type of interpretive pluralism which denies the possibility of discovering the nature of a text with regard to the way it is intended to be read. Ironically, this is a type of liberal imperialism.

[310] For example, as Ricoeur points out, structuralism works "in every case in which one can: (*a*) work on a corpus already consitituted, finished, closed, and in that sense, dead; (*b*) establish inventories of elements and units; (*c*) place these elements or units in relations of opposition, preferably binary opposition; and (*d*) establish an algebra or combinatory system of these elements and opposed pairs." However, this approach to language eliminates any consideration "of the acts, operations, and processes that constitute discourse." So structuralism dangerously leads to an antinomic conception of the relationship between language and speech (*Idem,* "Structure, Word, Event" in *The Conflict of Interpretations,* 79-96).

[311] Thiselton, *New Horizons,* 131-32.

[312] Thiselton, *Two Horizons,* 320. Furthermore, Hirsch's overzealous attack on anti-representationalism is unfortunate. His effort to reinstate reference and representation as well as single determinate meanings as the singular approach to language is doomed to failure. As Thiselton points

PMH, and *PLH* to some degree) neglects both the functional capacity of texts to be transmissive and communicative and the fact that texts are objects possessing and offering legitimate constraints to the interpreter. These twin mistakes result in the convergence of all texts under the single linguistic model of play. In a defense of the rightful place of application in the process of understanding, meaning must not be dissolved into post-modernized significance. While the *Involved* approach (which supports *NH,* and *PLH* to some degree) does the best job of allowing particular texts to establish the ground rules for their interpretation even this positive appraisal must be tempered. For example, consider the work of Gadamer. While he does not go as far as the *Determinate* approach, unfortunately his correct insistence that understanding always involves application is not qualified in such a way as to allow for some sort of needed distinction between meaning and application.[313] To put it another way, and to mention a concept (fusion of horizons) that will not be dealt with until the next chapter, the fusion of horizons that occurs when a relatively closed text is understood does not render meaning and application a completely indistinguishable union. Hirsch's hermeneutic efforts helpfully remind us that some interpretations are more and some less contingent than others.

The notion of an open – closed continuum of texts has revealed some of the strengths and weaknesses of the various hermeneutical approaches to application that fund *CTH, NH, PLH,* and *PMH.* This analysis of textuality, has furthermore, alerted us to deeper issues at play. It is to these that we are now prepared to turn. The following analysis will focus on three more components which, together with textuality, constitute the ecology of understanding: language, history, and epistemology.

Language (Ideality)

The subject of language is large and complex. To focus our discussion on the issues most important to the hermeneutics of application, we will address a very

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out, this approach tends to demote the importance of non-referential, non-representational, language by suggesting "that the grossly over-simple, over-general, exhausted distinction between meaning and significance could serve as a panacea for all hermeneutical headaches. To be sure, "Hirsch's attempts to revitalize the humanist model of language contained much of value, but unfortunately his conceptual and semiotic tools were too dated and general to address fully the complexities and nuances of the postmodern world" (Thiselton, "'Behind' and 'In Front of' the Text," 103-04).

[313] Hirsch rightly accuses Gadamer of rejecting "any distinction between the understanding, the presentation, and the application of a text's meaning" and thus of subsuming all types of interpretation under the notion of application (*VI,* 112). Hirsch points to *WM,* 280ff.

specific aspect of language. In "The Promise of Speech-Act Theory for Biblical Interpretation," Nicholas Wolterstorff reveals the largely unrecognized role of ideality in the currently competing approaches to hermeneutics. This notion was first articulated by Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) during the last part of the nineteenth century in their reaction to the psychologism of Romanticism and the emphasis on sociological explanations that grew out of historicism.[314] So strong was their critique that a fundamental shift to logicity in the *Geisteswissenschaften* was effected as they argued that meaning is not the idea in someone's mind, but an ideal object which can be identified as one and the same by different individuals at different times. Under this view, meaning is objective, not in the sense that a desk is, but in the sense that it can be expressed in a different way and yet remain the same meaning. The concept of ideality, then, identifies a certain ontology of the sense of the text.

For Frege, the ideal dimension of a proposition is that which is constituted by the sameness of the sense in the unlimited occurrences of its mental actualizations. This is similar to Husserl's approach which grounds ideality in the context of intentional acts (noesis), the content of which (noema) are not reducible to the psychic side of the acts themselves.

For example, if one analyzes belief and judgment according to the two categories of *content* and *stance*[315] – "The content of the belief that 2+3=5 is *that 2+3=5*, and the content of the judgment that today is warm and sunny, is *that today is warm and sunny.*" The stance is either *belief* or the *action* of judgment.[316] – then in Frege's terms the content of beliefs and judgments are actually *entities* of some sort (*Gedanken*). However, Frege resolutely maintained that "*Gedanken* are not states of

[314] Historicism in this sense is the "epistemological presupposition that the content of literary works and in general of cultural documents receives its intelligibility from its connection to the social conditions of the community that produced it or to which it was destined." Therefore, to understand a text, one must "consider it as the expression of certain socio-cultural needs and as a response to certain perplexities well localized in space and time" (Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 89-90). Thus, for historicism, understanding depends upon "genesis, the previous form, the sources, and the sense of the evolution" (Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 31). For a more detailed treatment of historicism see Bebbington, *Patterns in History*. For a discussion of the various ways in which this term has been used see, Mandelbaum, "Historicism," 22-25. For intimations toward a profound critique of historicism, see O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 58-75; 162; *Idem, The Desire of the Nations*, 28-29.

[315] *Stance* being that of a *stance* of belief or the *action* of judgment.

[316] Wolterstorff, "The Promise of Speech-act Theory for Biblical Interpretation," 77.

mind."[317] This is not at all to say that they are physical entities, either, rather they are "abstract entities – or as the hermeneutic tradition preferred to call them, *ideal* entities."[318] The characteristics which distinguish *Gedanken* from other abstract entities such as properties is that *Gedanken* "can be believed and asserted, and that they are all either true or false."[319] Therefore, "believing something consists of taking up the stance of belief toward that entity which one believes, and judging something consists of performing the action of judging on that entity which one judges to be true."[320]

The *Distinct* approach and the *Involved* approach agree that the hermeneutical object is characterized by ideality, although they do different things with this observation. The *Determinate* approach, as characterized by Derrida, makes ideality the beginning point of its attack upon hermeneutics.[321] Ideality, then, plays a crucial role in all three approaches to application. What follows will prepare for chapter four where we will see that the notion of ideality is the mediating link in the fusion of horizons that constitutes understanding, and as such it is indispensable for a consideration of the relationship of application and meaning.

Ideality and the Distinct Approach

Hirsch's sharp distinction between meaning and application is largely wrapped up in his effort to resist a growing epistemological skepticism.[322] Objective knowledge, in Hirsch's view, cannot be bound to changing subjective situations; that which is objectively known cannot be subjectively relative. Objective knowledge must be knowledge of the object as it exists independently of a relation to subjects and their situatedness.[323] This is similar to the problem which constitutes the beginnings of Husserl's philosophizing, which Klaus Held identifies as concerned with the question: "how are the *manners of givenness* of objects, in which we comprehend them as things in themselves, that is, as objectively existing, connected

[317] *Ibid.*, 78. This qualification was a central component in his project to dismantle psychologism in logic and mathematics.
[318] *Ibid.*
[319] *Ibid.*, 77-78.
[320] *Ibid.*, 78.
[321] Derrida opposes ideality with iterability and thus "ruptures the notion of communication as transport of meaning" (Bartholomew, "Babel and Derrida," 322).
[322] E.g., Hirsch, *VI*, viii, 210, 212.
[323] E.g., *Ibid.*, 214.

back to originary, subject-relative manners of givenness."[324] It is not surprising then, that Hirsch finds in Husserl, "the most detailed, penetrating, and convincing account of meaning that I am acquainted with (*Logische Untersuchungen,* Part II)."[325]

Drawing upon Husserl's phenomenological account of intentionality, Hirsch defines authorial intent as the object that the author is conscious toward.[326]

> The general term for all intentional objects is meaning. Verbal meaning is simply a special kind of intentional object, and like any other one, it remains self-identical over against the many different acts which "intend" it. But the noteworthy feature of verbal meaning is its supra-personal character. It is not an intentional object for simply one person, but for many—potentially for all persons.[327]

As the "sharable content" of the "author's intention," the meaning of a text is identified as an object of consciousness, in the sense of Husserilian phenomenology. This is meant to draw a contrast between textual meaning and all subjective mental acts.[328] Therefore, meaning, under this view, is to be held in sharp distinction from significance,[329] which is "the relationship between" the meaning of the text and "a person, or conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable."[330] It is the integrity of this distinction that, for Hirsch, determines the possibility of objective knowledge, and "failure to consider this simple and essential distinction...[is] the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory."[331] One major "failure" in this regard is any view of understanding that involves application.[332]

To be fair, Hirsch does recognize the difficulty of bracketing out application from understanding.

> In practice we are always relating our understanding to something else—to ourselves, to our relevant knowledge, to the author's personality, to other similar works. Usually we cannot even understand a text without perceiving such relationships, for we cannot artificially isolate the act of construing verbal meaning from all those other acts, perceptions, associations, and judgments

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[324] Held, "Husserl's Phenomenological Method," 8. See also, Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 47.

[325] Hirsch, *VI*, 58; see also, 219.

[326] In this Hirsch is using the notion of "Authorial Intent" in a very different way than he is commonly accused of by critics who identify his approach with the more psychic view of "Authorial Intent" often associated with Schleiermacher. E.g., Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 60, 86.

[327] *Ibid.*, 218.

[328] "Although textual meaning is *determined* by the psychic acts of an author and realized by those of a reader, textual meaning itself must not be *identified* with the author's or reader's psychic acts as such" (*Ibid.*, 216-17). It is an all too common mistake to accuse Hirsch of the mistaken Romanticist focus on recovering the author's psyche.

[329] *Ibid.*, 219.

[330] *Ibid.*, 8.

[331] *Ibid.*

[332] Consider Hirsch's characterization of Gadamer's hermeneutics as "radical historicism," "extreme historicism," and "cognitive atheism," (e.g., *VI*, 42, 46, 112, 123, 153, and Appendix II, "Gadamer's Theory of Interpretation"; *AOI*, 17, 39, 40, 49, 159).

> which accompany that act and which are instrumental in leading us to perform it.[333]

Hirsch admits the difference between his discussion of understanding as an isolated event and the way in which understanding occurs. Just one page later, he goes on to reiterate the point in relation to "criticism" as an illustration of a "universal distinction."

> The indication of significance assumes that a prior construction of meaning has been made, and the indication of meaning exploits a relationship, which is to say, a significance. The two functions and goals are distinct, though they are never separate in textual commentary. The distinction between interpretation and criticism, meaning and significance, points to a phenomenon that is not limited to textual commentary. It represents a universal distinction that applies to all fields of study and all subject matters.[334]

And yet the stakes (the possibility of objective knowledge) are too high. Despite his several admissions of the obvious role of application in understanding, his particular view of objective knowledge and his fear of relativism[335] result in an inflexible dichotomization of understanding and application. "Understanding (and therefore interpretation, in the strict sense of the word) is both logically and psychologically prior to what is generally called criticism.... A text cannot be made to speak to us until what it says has been understood."[336]

In order to uphold this insistence upon a sequential relationship, we have demonstrated that Hirsch depends upon a static view of ideality. This enables him to protect meaning from the pollution of application by relegating application to the safely posterior position (relative to understanding). This view of ideality is entirely dependent upon certain Enlightenment oriented philosophical commitments, especially in regard to history and the subject-object relationship.[337] Through an exploration of the role of ideality in the *Involved* approach Hirsch's particular construal of ideality will come sharply into focus, as will an alternative conception that affirms the stability of meaning while recognizing application as involved in the process of understanding.

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[333] Hirsch, *VI*, 140.

[334] *Ibid.*, 141.

[335] "The danger of the view is, of course, precisely that it opens the door to subjectivism and relativism, since linguistic norms may be invoked to support any verbally possible meaning" (*Ibid.*, 226).

[336] *Ibid.*, 209-10.

[337] These will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Ideality and the Involved Approach

Gadamer's understanding of meaning relies upon the Fregian-Husserlian ontology of sense. This is most apparent in the section of *Truth and Method* entitled "Language as the Medium of Hermeneutic Experience."

> [The] capacity for being written down is based on the fact that speech itself shares in the pure ideality of the meaning that communicates itself in it. In writing, the meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication. A text is not to be understood as an expression of life but with respect to what it says. Writing is the abstract ideality of language. Hence the meaning of something written is fundamentally identifiable and repeatable. What is identical in the repetition is only what was actually deposited in the written record. This indicates that "repetition" cannot be meant here in its strict sense. It does not mean referring back to the original source where something is said or written. The understanding of something written is not a repetition of something past but the sharing of a present meaning.[338]

In this passage Gadamer clearly embraces Frege's and Husserl's notion of ideality.[339] The same allegiance is found in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. In defining discourse as the dialectic of event and meaning, Ricoeur argues that meaning gives discourse its ability to endure.

> An act of discourse is not merely transitory and vanishing [i.e., event], however. It may be identified and reidentified as the same so that we may say it again or in other words. We may even say it in another language or translate it from one language into another. Through all these transformations it preserves an identity of its own which can be called the propositional content, the "said as such."[340]

This reveals the view of language that pervades Ricoeur's theory of interpretation. Discourse is based upon the "intentionality of language, the relation of noesis and noema in it. If language is *meinen*, an intending, it is so precisely due to this *Aufhebung* through which the event is cancelled as something merely transient and retained as the *same* meaning."[341] Furthermore, the inscription of discourse is premised on the notion of ideality. "What we write, what we inscribe is the noema of the act of speaking, the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event."[342] The grammatical marks express "in an exterior and public way, the intentional exteriorization of discourse" which enables the meaning to "be identified and re-

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[338] Gadamer, *TM*, 392.
[339] *Contra* Aylesworth, "Dialogue, Text, Narrative," 73, 75.
[340] Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 9.
[341] *Ibid.*, 12.
[342] *Ibid.*, 27.

identified as being the same."[343] In this sense, Ricoeur is expressing the same understanding of speech, writing, and ideality that Gadamer described in the above quotation.

Given these examples from the writings of Gadamer and Ricoeur, it is obvious that the *Involved* approach affirms the Fregian-Husserlian notion of ideality.[344] Yet, it is this very ontological sense of the meaning of the text that Hirsch appeals to in order to ground his sharp distinction of meaning and application, while Ricoeur and Gadamer view application as a constituent part of the understanding process.

The difference between the two views of ideality is apparent in the quote of Gadamer above. In the third and fifth sentences Gadamer's conception of meaning sounds identical to Hirsch's: "A text is not to be understood as an expression of life but with respect to what it says....The meaning of something written is fundamentally identifiable and repeatable."[345] In the remainder of the paragraph, it becomes apparent that Gadamer conceives of ideality in a different way than does Hirsch:

> What is identical in the repetition is only what was actually deposited in the written record. This indicates that 'repetition' cannot be meant here in its strict sense. It does not mean referring back to the original source where something is said or written. The understanding of something written is not a repetition of something past but the sharing of a present meaning.[346]

Ricoeur understands ideality in a similar manner. He begins by proposing the ideality of meaning in the act of discourse.

> An act of discourse is not merely transitory and vanishing....It may be identified and reidentified as the same....We may even say it in another language or translate it from one language into another. Through all these transformations it preserves an identity of its own which can be called the propositional content, the "said as such."[347]

This enduring content is none other than the Fregean-Husserlian ideal object. Granted, at this point, Ricoeur is addressing verbal discourse. However this ontology of sense remains when discourse is inscribed. "What we write, what we inscribe is the noema of the act of speaking, the meaning of the speech event, not the event as

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[343] *Ibid.*

[344] Cf. also Gadamer, *TM*, 185-188, 390-395; Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 14-16, 27; Eco, *Limits*, 7. This is not to deny Gadamer's and Ricoeur's important critique of Husserl's idealistic interpretation of phenomenology.

[345] Gadamer, *TM*, 392.

[346] *Ibid.*, 392.

[347] Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 9.

event." Through the grammatical marks, meaning is expressed "in an exterior and public way." They represent the "intentional exteriorization of discourse."[348] It is in the final chapter of *Interpretation Theory*, when Ricoeur addresses appropriation (*Aneignung*), that a view of ideality arises that is different from Hirsch's. After highlighting the Fregian-Husserlian development of ideality, Ricoeur affirms their "main presupposition concerning the objectivity of meaning in general."[349] He then argues that the "goal" of interpretation is the actualization of "the meaning of the text for the present reader."[350] But, Ricoeur asks, "What is indeed to be understood—and consequently appropriated—in a text?" It is in his answer, that one finds the essential difference between the notion of ideality as expressed by the *Distinct* approach and expressed by the *Involved* approach.

> What has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. In other words, what has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text...the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine referential power of the text.[351]

In the *Involved* approach ideality is objective and stable, and yet in its reception it becomes dynamic. It is "the project of a world, the pro-position of a mode of being in the world that the text opens up in front of itself." The result is that the reader "is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself."[352] Understanding, then, in the words of Hoy, "is itself a concrete happening, a form of doing and creating that has consequences (Wirkungen) in and of itself."[353] On the other hand, for the *Distinct* approach, the ideal nature of meaning makes meaning a static object that one can possess, take hold of, indeed something that one can acquire. Thus Hirsch can claim that "all valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition of what an author meant."[354] Meaning is recovered and copied.

Hirsch is able to conceive of meaning in this way because he insists that meaning is always a typological affair. In the last appendix to *Validity in Interpretation*, he argues that the function of consciousness is typification; the formulation of a type idea. "The essential feature of a type idea is its ability to

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[348] *Ibid.*, 27.
[349] *Ibid.*, 91; see also, *Idem, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* 184-85.
[350] *Ibid.*, 92.
[351] *Ibid.*
[352] *Ibid.*, 94.
[353] Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 93.
[354] Hirsch, *VI*, 126.

subsume more than one experience and therefore to represent more than one experience."[355] Since understanding of "a particular thing is always a type idea" types necessarily have "an inescapable constitutive function."[356] It is no wonder then, that at the end of his discussion of types Hirsch appeals to Kant's epistemology.

> To point out the constitutive character of types is merely to extend a Kantian insight into the realm of ordinary experience. The ultimate categories by which we structure and constitute experience may be reducible to ten or twelve, but in their unreduced variety they are as numerous as the countless type ideas through which we come to know the particulars of experience, and these type ideas are no less constitutive of experience than time, space, and causality...The Noumenal world beyond the categories is to us inaccessible, but the phenomenal world through which we learn our types is also the world which can teach us to revise them.[357]

Ultimately, in this approach, particulars are, in the evocative words of Frank Lentricchia, relegated to "cognitive darkness."[358] In Hirsch's words, "Verbal meanings, i.e., shared meanings, are always types and can never be limited to a unique, concrete content."[359]

Hirsch's commitment to the epistemological superiority of types enables him to maintain the meaning—significance distinction. Lentricchia's description again proves apropos.

> For Hirsch, particularity is the great dark beast who would turn all into violent anarchy and silence if it should ever get its claws into universals—hence the particular and the type are kept at safe distance from one another so that communication and community may be preserved.[360]

This is why Hirsch conceives of meaning as a possessable object in distinction to Ricoeur's concept of meaning as dynamic, and Gadamer's notion of understanding as always already involving application.[361] "Dynamic" and "application" both speak of the particular which must, for Hirsch, be cleanly severed from the universal. The particular must be kept at a distance from the type lest mere proximity yield fatal contamination.

The basic problem with Hirsch's approach is that it is simply not realistic. Central to the view of the *Involved* approach is that concreteness and universality are integrated modes of discourse; they are not distinct realms of being. The act of

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[355] *Ibid.*, 265.
[356] *Ibid.*, 272.
[357] *Ibid.*, 273.
[358] *Idem, After the New Criticism*, 265.
[359] Hirsch, *VI*, 50.
[360] Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 268.
[361] "Understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation" (Gadamer, *TM*, 308).

separating the concrete from the universal violates the normal pattern of discourse. In the end, Hirsch's conception of meaning makes "the normal function of meaning that of being an object for consciousness."[362] But, as Evans points out, Husserl did distinguish between an "act of meaning [*Akt des Bedeutens*]" as "the determinate manner in which we refer to our object" and the "ideal meaning" as the "universal, the species of the acts of meaning-intentions."[363] In the former instance, meaning is the general way in which an object is intended. It is this way, this manner, that can be repeated in an unlimited number of acts. These acts of intention are concerned with an object, not meaning (though the objects can be meanings). According to Husserl,

> If we perform the act and live in it, as it were, we naturally refer to [*meinen*] its object and not to its meaning. If, e.g., we make a statement, we judge about the thing it concerns, and not about the statement's meaning, about the judgement in the logical sense. This latter first becomes objective to us in a reflective act of thought, in which we not only look back on the statement just made, but carry out the abstraction (or better, the Ideation) demanded.[364]

The important point here is that meaning is given a primarily functional definition. It is usually the coming to consciousness in the varying modalities that constitutes meaning. To be sure, this approach maintains a view of the ideal as that which is offered in principle to all possible subjects as one and the same. However, just as a judge cannot restrict himself to a strictly historical "reading of the law if he wants to promote justice. Nor will the literary interpreter be able to restrict himself to a strictly historical exhumation of sources and antecedents if he wants to understand the *literary* meaning of the text."[365] Conceived of in a dynamic way the ideal meaning of the text is world-disclosing. This disclosure of a new mode of being is the "meaning" of the text. The *Involved* approach captures this crucial sense of meaning.

Once one sees human beings as "thrown into the world" and inevitably traditioned, as do the post-Heideggerian hermeneuticians, the dependence upon the notion of ideality for a conception of objective meaning and understanding becomes apparent. For all of their having moved beyond Frege and Husserl, Gadamer and Ricoeur retain a fundamental element of the Fregian-Husserlian ontology. As Craig Bartholomew correctly points out, not only is this a sort of Archimedean point in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Gadamer, it is also the very "point that Derrida sets

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[362] Evans, *Strategies of Deconstruction*, 9-10.
[363] *Ibid.*, 10. Cf. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, II.1, 49, 100.
[364] Husserl, *Logical Investigations* II, 1, 103.
[365] Hoy, *The Critical Circle*, 54.

about to deconstruct" in his approach to interpretation.[366] The stakes could not be higher. For if the notion of ideality is loosened then the view of interpretation espoused by Gadamer and Ricoeur "would logically be set adrift in a strongly postmodern fashion."[367]

Ideality and the Determinate Approach

According to Derrida, those who hold to the Fregean-Husserlian notion of ideality are guilty of a "Platonism of meaning," of reifying it, of making meaning into a thing-in-itself.[368] Barely three pages into the introduction of *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida ties his driving question for phenomenology ("Is not the idea of knowledge and of the theory of knowledge in itself metaphysical?")[369] to the status and value of presence. Then presence is immediately tied to Husserl's notion of ideality, the presence of sense. In a later chapter, entitled "Meaning and Representation," Derrida again explicitly indicates the centrality of ideality to his critique of Husserl.

> According to Husserl, the structure of speech can only be described in terms of ideality. There is the ideality of the sensible form of the signifier...There is, moreover, the ideality of the signified...in certain cases there is the ideality of the object itself...It could therefore be said that being is determined by Husserl as ideality. ...This determination of being as ideality is paradoxically one with the determination of being as presence.[370]

Contemporary and traditional views of meaning are, therefore, enslaved by only so much metaphysics – "a metaphysics of nearness and proximity, of truth and shining presence."[371] So radical is Derrida's criticism that John Caputo points out it "means to be no hermeneutics at all but a delimitation, a deconstruction of hermeneutics as a nostalgia for meaning and unity."[372]

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[366] In "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida argues that there are two interpretations of interpretation: that bound to the tradition of the metaphysics of presence, and that which in good Nietzschean fashion sets texts in play (*Writing and Difference*, 292).

[367] Bartholomew, unpublished essay, "Derrida and Husserl."

[368] Ironically, Derrida began his doctorate working from the orientation of Husserl's phenomenology and focused on the ideality of the literary object, however he never completed the thesis. See *Idem*, "The Time of a Thesis," 34-50. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida explicitly states that grammatology, which in his view is the theory or science of writing (in a certain sense), is preconditioned on the "undoing of logocentrism" [read ideality] (*Idem*, 74).

[369] Derrida, *Speech*, 5.

[370] *Ibid.*,, 52,53.

[371] Caputo, *Radical*, 97.

[372] *Ibid.*

Derrida counters ideality, "the preservation or mastery of presence in repetition,"[373] with "an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value."[374] The foundations of such an approach (the irony is intentional) turn on a Nietzschean affirmation of the innocence of becoming, on an irrepressible play that Derrida wants to preserve above all else. The metaphysics of presence, a redundancy for Derrida, opposes movement and becoming by its ceaseless attempts to arrest play.

> Derrida...wants to...put Being as presence into question, to uproot the desire of metaphysics to stabilize, ground, and center beings in an onto-theo-logical ordering, in a system of permanent presence *(stetige Answesenheit)* which takes its clue from the temporality of the 'present' *(Gegenwart)*. To that end Derrida enlists the deconstructive energy of Nietzsche, the pitiless Nietzschean critique of metaphysics as Egyptianism and mummification of life which declares becoming guilty.[375]

Utilizing Saussure's three fundamental principles – (1) "the arbitrary nature of the sign,"[376] (2) the operation of language as "a system of interdependent terms" in which meaning is generated by relations of *difference,*[377] and (3) the distinction between *langue* and *parole* – Derrida radicalizes arbitrariness and difference.[378] This is buttressed with a reading of Peircean semiotics.

> The thing itself is a sign....There is thus no phenomenality reducing the sign or the representer so that the thing signified may be allowed to glow finally in the luminosity of its presence....The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move.[379]

As Gayatri Spivak, Derrida's collaborator and translator, points out, "Derrida's trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present."[380] Endlessly deferred, presence is never fully present. Meaning is a mirage continually fading into the distance as we grasp after signs that endlessly displace one another – never resting on some thing in this world. Meaning is primarily a matter of

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[373] Derrida, *Speech*, 5.

[374] *Ibid.*, 6. Defining the ideal object as "that which may be indefinitely *repeated* in the *identity* of its *presence*."

[375] Captuo, *Radical*, 117.

[376] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 68.

[377] *Ibid.*, 114.

[378] As Thiselton has pointed out, "Saussure never envisaged that his work would lead to the kind of conclusions advocated by Barthes, Derrida, and the post-structuralist deconstructionists, even if Derrida insists that Saussure's work logically implies the outcome when it is 'radicalized'" (Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 83).

[379] Derrida, *Grammatology*, 49. Derrida's handling of Peirce has been much criticized. Cf. Eco, "Unlimited Semiosis and Drift," in *Limits*; and Madison, *Hermeneutics*, 112-13.

[380] Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Derrida, *Grammatology*, xvii. Cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 109.

signification: A chain of words point to other words, sentences to other sentences, texts to other texts, all *within* language.[381]

To label this approach to the role of application in understanding as *Determinate* is admittedly ironic. On the one hand it seems that this approach is the most radical of all three approaches in its limitation of the interpreter's powers. After all, it appears to present hermeneutics with an either/or. Either we are constrained in our interpretations by a preexistent meaning which we seek to "double" or we are imprisoned in the self-enclosed, self-subsisting entity of language. In both cases, there seems to be little or no room for application in understanding. On the other hand, in denying ideality, the text inevitably becomes a playground for the free play of consciousness.[382] Meaning is purely adjectival as every word is constituted by "a potentially infinite tissue of differences."[383] This interpretive playground consists of signs that draw the reader into an act of play in its textual arena, presents the interpreter with endless choices, but which does she choose, or better yet why does she choose one over the other? She simply chooses. In denying meaning a presence, in denying ideality, all that is left is application.

Response to Derrida

In at least two crucial ways, Derrida's private, antihistorical, asocial, essentially anarchic experience of reading and Hirsch's approach are actually the flip side of the same coin.[384] Both ignore the position of the reader in history.[385] The *Determinate* approach additionally collapses the object into its appearances and profiles. To reduce the text into its immediate appearances is similar to taking a "drama to be just its interpretation, so that every new staging is like the composition of a new play."[386] It is to "take the judicial application of a law to be like the writing of a new law (more accurately, perhaps, they abolish the distinction between

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[381] Eco points out the irony: "Even in the case of self-voiding texts (see the chapter "Small Worlds") we have semiosic objects which without any shade of doubt speak of their own impossibility. Let us be realistic: there is nothing more meaningful than a text which asserts that there is no meaning" (Eco, *Limits*, 7).

[382] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 292.

[383] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 110.

[384] For a fuller treatment of these elements within Derrida's work see, Keefer, "Deconstruction and the Gnostics," 74-93. Also see, Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 60-63, 79; Eco, *Interpretation*, 1-43; Watson, *Text and Truth*, 77, 80, 82.

[385] Since this issue will be dealt with extensively in the next section I will only mention it at this point.

[386] Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics," 229.

legislation and application)."[387] The *Distinct* approach, on the other hand, argues that one can perceive an ideal object in isolation from its various modes of appearance. Thus, to formulate interpretation and appearance in such extreme terms is, in the memorable words of David Hoy, to force a choice between "either sheer objects without manifestation or sheer appearance without things. It is like an argument between a coward and a fool about a matter that can only be settled by courage."[388] What is missing is the requisite subtlety to express the interaction of being and manifestation. The *Distinct* approach, with its singular focus on the being of ideality fails to account for manifestation. While the *Determinate* approach with its focus on the absence of ideality has nothing to work with except the manifestation of absence.

Thiselton highlights another problem with the *Determinate* approach in his argument that Derrida's notion of play tragically betrays him into silence regarding the role of the human subject in discourse when it presents language as an independent system of inner relationships. Saussure's principles of *langue* and *parole* guards against such a mistake, in that *parole* are "concretely actualized in events...which result from *conscious judgments* on the part of speakers."[389] As Wittgenstein argues, "Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning."[390] Thiselton's summary of this criticism is important.

> Language abstracted from the speaking subject and from *inter-subjective judgments and practices* has neither stability nor purchase-power....To inherit a language-system is like having the chess pieces set out on the chess-board. But the speech-act or *parole* results from a judgment, like moving a piece on the board.[391]

Ricoeur also criticizes this unidimensional view of language, and opposes it with a two-dimensional approach. Language consists of "two irreducible entities, signs and sentences."[392] The sign is virtual; only the sentence is actual in the event of speaking.

> This is why there is no way of passing from the word as a lexical sign to the sentence by mere extension of the same methodology to a more complex entity. The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made

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[387] *Ibid.*

[388] *Ibid.*, 229-30.

[389] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 127.

[390] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, § 173. Cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 127.

[391] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 128.

[392] Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 6. This is a different duality than Saussure's *langue* and *parole*, or structuralism's code and message.

> up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words. A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign.[393]

Ricoeur points to the work of Emile Benveniste who elucidates the relationship between the sign and the sentence as reliant upon the possibility of two types of actions: integration into larger wholes, and dissociation into constitutive parts. The first action yields sense, the second yields form. A sentence is constituted by the "synthesis of two functions: the identification and the predication."[394] The identification function identifies what the sentence is speaking of. The predication function predicates what the sentence is saying about that of which it is speaking. This is nothing more than the Fregian distinction between sense and reference. Ricoeur's work provides the further crucial insight that the sense-reference distinction is not possible on the sign level, but only on the sentence level. In the abstract level of language system, signs only refer to other signs within the system, but on the level of sentence, language points beyond itself. "Whereas the sense is immanent to the discourse, and objective in the sense of ideal, the reference expresses the movement in which language transcends itself."[395] Furthermore, when speech is inscribed, it is the noema, the meaning, of the speech-event that is inscribed, not the event as event. Language, then, only has a reference in use. Therefore, language is not a world; and certainly not a world of its own. As Bartholomew points out, language is not the ground of reality, rather we bring experience to language.[396] "It is because there is first something to say, because we have an experience to bring to language, that conversely, language is not only directed towards ideal meanings but also refers to what is." Semiotics, then, despite Derrida's view, is an abstraction of semantics. Through an identification of the ideal meaning as the dialectic of sense and reference meaning is delivered from the

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[393] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 7. See also, Strawson's analysis of basic particulars as a concept so primitive that one cannot explain it via something more basic. The sentence, then, is a basic particular. And the mistake of the *Determinate* approach is in reducing the study of sentences (and persons) to categories that are only appropriate to *langue*. See, *Idem, Individuals.*

[394] *Ibid.*, 12.

[395] *Ibid.*, 20.

[396] As Bartholomew argues, a Christian view of language insists, "Language is world-disclosing and world-constituting, but not finally world-creating" ("Before Babel," 151). Van Leeuwen makes a similar point when he points to current "arguments against...a knowable reality, which holds humans accountable, [that] exploit the protean ambiguity dwelling on the margins of language. Yet, though language shapes humans' grasp of reality (Gen 2:19-20), only God orders a reality for Adam to name and to shape (Gen 2:21-23). Consequently, it is possible to shape reality truly or falsely" (*Proverbs*, 72).

onesidedness of non-dialectical conceptions that prejudice either intention (*Distinct* approach) or dialogue (*Determinate* approach).

Conclusion

To conclude the response to the *Determinate* approach, and to draw this entire discussion of ideality to a close, there remains a fundamental criticism of the *Determinate* attack upon the ontology of sense. As Thiselton argues, the perspectives of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida "constitute the most serious and urgent challenge to theology, in comparison with which the old-style attacks from 'common-sense positivism' appear relatively naïve."[397] George Steiner also recognizes the violence of the deconstructionist attack.

> It is Derrida's strength to have seen so plainly that the issue is neither linguistic-aesthetic nor philosophical in any traditional, debatable sense – where such tradition and debate incorporate, perpetuate the very ghosts which are to be exorcized. The issue is, quite simply, that of the meaning of meaning as it is re-insured by the postulate of the existence of God. "In the beginning was the Word." There was no such beginning, says deconstruction; only the play of sounds and markers amid the mutations of time.[398]

Therefore, a final response to Derrida must be explicitly theological.[399] In this spirit Steiner goes on to provide what is perhaps the most devastating critique of Derrida. He begins by highlighting the difficulty of criticizing Derrida and deconstructionists.

> *On its own terms and planes of argument*...the challenge of deconstruction does seem to me irrefutable....I do not, therefore, believe that an answer to its challenge, to the negating epistemology of the surd, of the *a-logical* and annulment of the *Logos*, can be found, if it can be found at all, within linguistic or literary theory. I do not believe that "the dismantled fortress of consciousness" (Paul Ricoeur) can be restored or made stormproof by replacing this or that fallen brick.[400]

There is not an adequate secular response to Derrida's "claims of nothingness." If one engages deconstruction solely on the terms of "immanence" then "the free, real presence of meaning with form cannot be adequately defined or given metaphysical plausibility."[401] The most important response to the whole deconstructionist enterprise is a response to its most critical repudiation. Steiner counters the unfaith of Derrida with faith. He is worth quoting at length on this point.

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[397] Thiselton, *Interpreting God*, 16.

[398] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 120.

[399] Milbank argues, "if Derrida can give a Gnostic hermeneutic of the human text in the light of the Gnostic logos, then we should have the confidence to give a Christian hermeneutic in the light of the real one" (Milbank, *Word Made Strange*, 79).

[400] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 132-33.

[401] *Ibid.*, 199.

> So far as it wagers on meaning, an account of the act of reading, in the fullest sense, of the act of reception and internalization of significant forms within us, is a metaphysical and, in the last analysis, a theological one. The ascription of beauty to truth and to meaning is either a rhetorical flourish, or it is a piece of theology. It is a theology, explicit or suppressed, masked or avowed, substantive or imaged, which underwrites the presumption of creativity, of signification in our encounters with text, with music, with art. The meaning of meaning is a transcendent postulate. To read the poem responsibly ("respondingly"), to be answerable to form, is to wager on a reinsurance of sense. It is to wager on a relationship – tragic, turbulent, incommensurable, even sardonic – between word and world, but on a relationship precisely bounded by that which reinsures it.... What I affirm is the intuition that where God's presence is no longer a tenable supposition and where His absence is no longer a felt, indeed overwhelming weight, certain dimensions of thought and creativity are no longer attainable. And I would vary Yeats' axiom so as to say: no man can read fully, can answer answeringly to the aesthetic, whose 'nerve and blood' are at peace in skeptical rationality, are now at home in immanence and verification. We must read *as if*.[402]

In resistance to the cold flux of the *Determinate* approach[403] Steiner offers a theological hermeneutic that does justice to the other. This involves an initial act of trust, a surrender of precedence to the text over the interpreter. This is not the *Distinct* approach in that "context is at all times dialectical. Our reading modifies, is in turn modified by, the communicative presence of its object. This vitalizing reciprocity extends far beyond any formal, technical order." Steiner's "courteous" hermeneutic[404] models the *via media* of an *Involved* approach to the role of application in understanding.

We have seen that the philosophy of language is fundamental for all three approaches to the role of application in the event of understanding. It is evident that the static ideality of the *Distinct* approach funds the radical dichotomization of meaning and application and forces application into its ancillary, secondary position. However, such a linearity is an unreal abstraction. The dynamic ideality of the *Involved* approach provides room for the possibility of a thick objectivity, as ideality is the mediating link in the fusion of horizons that is understanding (again, this will be developed in chapter four). In addition, we have seen that the only defense of ideality is ultimately theological. To affirm the possibility of real meaning is to wager on a Real presence.

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[402] *Ibid.*, 215-16, 229. On the previous page Steiner quoted Yeats: "No man can create as did Shakespeare, Homer, Sophocles, who does not believe with all his blood and nerve, that man's soul is immortal" (*Ibid.*, 228).

[403] Caputo describes the deconstructive approach as "cold hermeneutics" (*Idem*, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 187-92).

[404] *Ibid.*, 146 ff.

The notion of ideality in one's philosophy of language, however, is only one part of the hermeneutical ecology of application. In fact, another aspect of this ecology produces a powerful shaping influence upon one's view of language. That is, the various views of ideality are influenced by a particular view of history. In the following section we will explore the impact of one's view of history upon one's view of the relationship of application to understanding; and thus upon one's view of homiletical application. This will establish even more firmly the general argument of this project—the necessity of approaching homiletical application from a rigorously hermeneutical perspective. With regard to the four contemporary homiletical approaches (*CTH, NH, PLH,* and *PMH*), the following discussion of history will further reveal: (1) The massive cost exacted by the strict separation of meaning and significance. I.e., In seeking to resist the tide of relativism by withdrawing into the sphere of thin, objective, certainty, the *Distinct* approach, which funds *CTH,* illustrates the solitary, alienated brooding that is the ultimate crisis of modernity. (2) The *Involved* approach to application (as the foundation of *NH* and to some extent *PLH*) suffers from what Oliver O'Donovan describes as "the attempt of a conservative historicism to mend the breach which radical historicism has created."[405] (3) The view of history assumed by the *Determinate* approach (buttressing *PMH* and to some extent *PLH*) which is actually a negation of history itself.

History

Every text is historical in the sense that it arises out of a space in time. In a similar manner, every interpreter is a historical being, a person conditioned by history. The *Distinct* approach recognizes the former and neglects the latter. The *Determinate* approach collapses the former into the latter. The *Involved* approach seeks to maintain a dialectical tension between the former and the latter. It is the burden of this section to establish these assertions and the relationship between one's view of history and one's view of the role of application in the process of understanding.

[405] *Idem, Resurrection and Moral Order,* 162.

Philosophy of History and the Distinct Approach

Standing in the stream of Schleiermacher, Droysen, and Boeckh, Hirsch[406] strongly insists on the historical condition of the text. As a result, he demands that understanding a text requires language analysis (including grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and style)[407] together with an exploration of the various contexts (linguistic, literary, and historical).[408] Hirsch implicitly acknowledges that the historical location of the interpreter plays a role in the event of understanding when he admits that in practice meaning and significance are not so distinct as his theory portends. "We cannot artificially isolate the act of construing verbal meaning [Hirsch's definition for understanding] from all those other acts, perceptions, associations, and judgments which accompany that act and which are instrumental in leading us to perform it."[409] Shortly after this statement Hirsch again intimates the role that an interpreter's particularized involvement plays in coming to understand a text. "The indication of significance assumes that a prior construction of meaning has been made, and the indication of meaning exploits a relationship, which is to say, a significance."[410] Yet Hirsch ultimately and decisively neglects the historicity of the interpreter[411] as his thesis of separation becomes more radical through his clarification of it.

After defining interpretation as "the explanation of meaning" and understanding as the "construction of meaning,"[412] Hirsch clearly limits history's

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[406] "My own objectivist views can be considered a throwback to the 'genuine' or 'authentic' tradition of Schleiermacher." By "genuine" and "authentic" Hirsch is distinguishing his view of Schleiermacher from Gadamer's (Hirsch, *AI*, 17). Cf. *Ibid.*, 159, chp 2, n. 1.

[407] "Every speaker and every interpreter must have mastered the convention systems and the shared meaning associations presupposed by a linguistic utterance" (Hirsch, *VI*, 134). "All serious students of texts from the past—texts of any genre—are historians" (*Ibid.*, 138).

[408] *Ibid.*, 134; *Ibid.*, 149.

[409] *Ibid.*, 140.

[410] *Ibid.*, 141.

[411] In this regard, Hirsch is following in the hermeneutical footsteps of Schleiermacher, who recognized the double-sided effect of history—consider his awareness of an interpreter being knowledgeable of the necessary linguistic, sociological, and historical information, and even applying this information to the text in a rigorous fashion, and yet due to a lacuna of creative insight failing to understand the text—and then subsequently failed to give due consideration to the impact of history upon the interpreter's role in constructing understanding because of a basic commitment to individuality. As a result, Gadamer rightly says of Schleiermacher, his "problem is not historical obscurity, but the obscurity of the Thou" (Gadamer, *TM*, 190-91. Cf. 162-73; *Idem, Kleine Schriften III*, 133-34).

[412] Drawing on Ernesti (*Institutio Interpretis Novi* Testamenti, chp 1, sec. 4), Hirsch identifies interpretation as *subtilitas explicandi*. This is to be distinguished from understanding, *subtilitas intelligendi*. This distinction between the art of understanding and the art of explaining is, according to Hirsch, "one of the most venerable in hermeneutic theory" (*Idem, VI*, 129). "In normal usage both of these functions are embraced flaccidly by the single term 'interpretation,' but clarity would be served if we limited that word to the *subtilitas explicandi*—the explanation of meaning—and delimited the *subtilitas intelligendi* by the term 'understanding' (*Ibid.*). Again, "Just as understanding is a

effects to explanation. "The historicity of interpretation is quite distinct from the timelessness of understanding....All understanding is necessarily and by nature intrinsic, all interpretation necessarily transient and historical."[413] It is not surprising then that Hirsch disagrees with Gadamer's claim that we can "only understand a text in *our* own terms."[414] According to Hirsch "understanding is autonomous" because,

> it occurs entirely within the terms and proprieties of the text's own language and the shared realities which that language embraces. To understand an utterance it is, in fact, not just desirable but absolutely unavoidable that we understand it in its own terms. We could not possibly recast a text's meanings in different terms unless we had already understood the text in its own.[415]

And then again, only a few paragraphs later Hirsch repeats this view. "Verbal meaning has to be construed in *its* own terms if it is to be construed at all....If we do not construe a text in what we rightly or wrongly assume to be its own terms then we do not construe it at all."[416] Hirsch's insistence on the hard distinction between meaning and significance can be maintained, ultimately, only with a dismissal of the interpreter's historicity.

This rejection becomes blatantly obvious in Hirsch's essay length critique of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* where he argues that the meaning of a text, being "reproducible, is the same whenever and wherever it is understood by another."[417] Only the significance of a text ever changes. Therefore, if Gadamer had correctly noticed the difference between meaning and significance, Hirsch claims, he "could have avoided self-contradiction by perceiving that" the *Horizontverschmelzung* "always involved two processes that are separate and distinct no matter how entangled they may be in a given instance of understanding."[418] Apparently Hirsch no longer believes his own claim that it is impossible to "artificially isolate" understanding from "other acts, perceptions, associations, and judgments which accompany that act and which are instrumental in leading us to perform it."[419]

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construction of meaning (not of significance...), so interpretation is an *explanation* of meaning" (*Ibid.*, 136). See also, *AI*, 19.

[413] Hirsch, *VI*, 137-38.

[414] *Ibid.*,, 135.

[415] *Ibid.*, 134.

[416] *Ibid.*, 135. It appears that Hirsch is making an argument that is similar to Habermas' vigorous contention that one cannot really understand a language game unless one is resocialised within it.

[417] *Ibid.*, 255.

[418] *Ibid.*

[419] *Ibid.*, 140.

While Hirsch's strained theory is an attempt at an admirable goal, the protection of the possibility of genuine knowledge, his argument depends upon two principles that are deeply problematic. First, as was explored earlier, he espouses a static view of ideality that results in meaning being an object that is possessable and void of any functionality.[420] Second, he postulates an interpreter, unfettered by history, acquiring the object (meaning) in a sterile, unmediated moment of understanding. In Hirsch's view, any mixture of subjectivity into the process of understanding irrevocably pollutes objective meaning. Thus, it is in the quest for epistemological security that Hirsch effectively denies the historicity of the interpreter. "The interpreter's construing and understanding of textual meaning" must be "prior to everything else." The "else" including especially any application of the interpreter's perspective. Application cannot be a part of the understanding process since its very presence will subjectivize meaning. This need to bracket out application from the moment of understanding drives Hirsch to delimit history's effects to the text.[421] Needless to say, no fusion of horizons occurs in the process of understanding. The only time that there is any type of fusing of horizons is when a meaning, already understood, is related to something else. But even here, Hirsch is reticent to give application any access to meaning construction. "This recasting *could* be called a fusion of horizons, but it would be more accurate to call it a perception of the relevance assumed by the text when its meaning is related to a present

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[420] Granted, Hirsch does argue that his definition of meaning does allow for "not only any content of mind represented by written speech but also the affects and values that are necessarily correlative to such a content. Defined in Husserl's terms, 'meaning' embraces not only intentional objects but also the species of intentional acts which sponsor those intentional objects" (*AI*, 8). And yet, as was argued in the section regarding ideality, Hirsch does limit meaning to the intentional object. His claim that meaning can also expand to cover the acts which "sponsor those intentional objects" is hollow in light of: (1) his denial of the interpreter's historicity; (2) his definition of meaning in relation to his definition of significance; and (3) his totalizing separation of meaning and significance.

[421] To his credit, Hirsch rightly recognizes that this view is a "return to a pre-Heideggerian naïveté" (*Ibid.*, 255-56). His justification for such an approach is that, in his perception, he "by no means abandons the concept of historicity—assuming that the word is taken to represent a fundamental differentness between past and present cultures" (*Ibid.*). In other words, Hirsch flatly denies the historicity of the interpreter (the one who is engaged in the process of understanding), while affirming the historicity of the text (see also: Fee, "History as Context for Interpretation," 11; Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 27-45.) To support this claim, Hirsch argues, in *AI*, against the criticism that his meaning-significance distinction contradicts what actually happens in understanding: "If this were so the objection would be fatal, since empirical truth is the ultimate arbiter of theories in the practical disciplines. But I doubt the empirical validity of the objection" (Hirsch, *AI*, 80). In summary, while at one point Hirsch admits that an interpreter can only construe meaning (i.e., understand a text's meaning) through acts of perception, association, and judgment (*Ibid.*, 140), for the most part, in order to maintain his argument, Hirsch denies that an interpreter ever construes meaning through such acts.

situation."[422] So the only appropriate place for application in the entire interpretive enterprise is after understanding has occured.

> The most obvious example of *applicatio* would be the Sunday sermon that interprets and applies a biblical text...*Interpretatio* is an indispensable foundation for an indefinite number of tasks of *applicatio*, which it implicitly precedes just as understanding precedes explanation.[423]

While Hirsch's fear of "the relativizing power of interpretive appropriation"[424] is valid, his attempt to counter the disruptive and disorienting power of rank subjectivism and radical relativism through a naïve historical objectivism, because anything that mediates truth is a prejudice and barrier that separates me from truth, in an effort to produce a naked confrontation between the text as isolated object and the interpreter as autonomous subject, is nothing more than a continuation of the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice," to borrow Gadamer's celebrated phrase. The underlying idea that literary and historical knowledge is only adequate when it is arrived at sans subjective and intersubjective agencies betrays a philosophy of positivism and neo-Kantianism that is fueling the untenable removal of application from the process of understanding. Ironically, then, for all of its insistence upon a separation of meaning and significance in an attempt to protect objectivity, the *Distinct* approach depends upon a presupposed worldview that is far from objective. The postulate of reliable knowledge characterized by such a thin objectivity, whereby the historical perspective of the interpreter is excluded on an *a priori* basis, is by no means value-neutral.[425] It arises out of the Enlightenment's pernicious dichotomization of fact and value.[426]

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[422] Hirsch, *VI*, 255. This relegation of application to the moment of explanation is made explicit when Hirsch argues that *ars explicandi* (the art of explanation), as the "public side" of understanding, "includes not only what biblical scholars have named *interpretatio,* but also what they have traditionally called *applicatio* (significance). Interpretation includes both functions whenever it answers both the question, What does this text mean?, and also the question, What use or value does it have: how is its meaning applied to me, to us, to our particular situation?" (*AI*, 19).

[423] *Ibid.*

[424] Lundin, "Interpreting Orphans," 40.

[425] MacIntyre argues in his Gifford Lectures that instead of attaining a god's-eye-point-of-view, the Enlightenment developed a blindness to assumptions that continued to influence, whether acknowledged or not (*Idem, Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*). Stout points out, "Modern thought was born in a crisis of authority, took shape in flight from authority, and aspired from the start to autonomy from all traditional influence whatsoever." Furthermore, this quest for autonomy "was also an attempt to deny the historical reality of having been influenced by tradition" (*Idem, The Flight from Authority,* 2-3).

[426] Pannenberg helpfully points out that it is this very distinction, between "facts, on the one hand, and their evaluation or significance on the other hand," that is exemplified in the work of Rudolph Bultmann, who "carries out this distinction by relegating the early Christian Easter message totally to the significance side, describing it as the interpretation of Jesus' cross" (Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," 126; cf. 101-33).

Philosophy of History and the Involved Approach

Bjørn Ramberg's ringing summary of the role of history in understanding for Gadamer is entirely appropriate for the *Involved* approach.

> Our historicity is what permits understanding, it is not something to be abstracted away through Kantian suspension of content or to be overcome by the self-transformational methodological constraints of romanticist hermeneuts. To put the Gadamerian point with un-Gadamerian bluntness: the idea of interpretation as recovering the intentions of a producing subject is ultimately linked to a normative conception of a universe of ahistorical, free-floating receptivities, bumping into objects with essences that are determinately what they are independently of any particular description or point of view.[427]

In contrast to the twin influences upon the *Distinct* approach of a positivist notion of bare facts in abstraction from understanding and the neo-Kantian dualism of fact and value, N. T. Wright argues that to claim "*somebody*, standing *somewhere*, with a particular *point of view*, is knowing something does not mean that the knowledge is less valuable: merely that it is precisely *knowledge*."[428] Furthermore, "It is not the case that some things are purely objective and others purely subjective, or that one must reduce either to the other."[429] It is with just such a perspective that the *Involved* approach warmly embraces the impact of history upon epistemology while concurrently insisting upon the corrosiveness of radical relativism with regard to the issues of meaning and truth. Application is involved in understanding, but it must not be allowed to perniciously dominate.

To begin with, an interpreter is always influenced by prejudices that are an outgrowth and function of historical existence.[430] It is the epistemologically necessary prior understanding of the whole, revealed in the notion of a hermeneutical circle, that Gadamer labels as a prejudice in the sense that it is a judgment that precedes inquiry. Such a prejudice is indispensable for understanding; that is, understanding is possible only when understanding has already begun.[431] A prejudice, in this sense, is to be understood as a legitimate component of genuine understanding precisely *because* it is linked to the historical (thus finite) nature of human beings.

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[427] Ramberg, "The Source of Subjective," 464.

[428] *Idem*, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 89.

[429] *Ibid.*, 90.

[430] I am using prejudice in the sense of Gadamer's use, which was borrowed from philosophical Romanticism and reinterpreted through the Heideggerian notion of pre-understanding.

[431] Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 14. This approach, so very similar to Anselm's *Credo ut intelligam*, is miles away from the Cartesianism of the *Distinct* approach.

While Hirsch does recognize the role of preconceptions in the interpretive process, he does not grasp the crucial connection to historicity. As a result, he displays an insufficient regard for human facticity in his time-less conception of the hermeneutical circle. It is this failure of the Enlightenment orientation to recognize the embeddedness of *both* the text and the interpreter in the historical process that results in the ahistorical view of reason that feeds the contrast of reason and method with prejudice and tradition. In opposition to such a view, Gadamer, in the words of Grondin, persuasively argues that "we belong to history more than it belongs to us."[432] The unsurpassable notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* reminds us that:

> Historical consciousness must become conscious that in the apparent immediacy with which it approaches a work of art or a traditionary text, there is also another kind of inquiry in play, albeit unrecognized and unregulated. If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, we are always already affected by history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there—in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon—when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.[433]

Ricoeur insightfully points out the direct connection between the Gadamerian concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* and history when he defines the former as an awareness of one's exposure "to history and to its action, in such a way that this action upon us cannot be objectified, because it is part of the historical phenomena itself."[434] Such awareness is not easy or ever fully available due to the limitations of our finitude. Nevertheless this historical awareness is crucial to understanding. As Gadamer argues:

> We cannot extricate ourselves from the historical process, so distance ourselves from it that the past becomes an object for us...We are always situated in history...I mean that our consciousness is determined by a real historical process, in such a way that we are not free to juxtapose ourselves to the past. I mean moreover that we must always become conscious afresh of the action which is thereby exercised over us, in such a way that everything past which

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[432] Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 89. Cf. Also, Ricoeur: "Man's link to the past precedes and envelops the purely objective treatment of historical facts" (*Hermeneutics*, 76).

[433] Gadamer, *TM*, 300. Warnke helpfully defines Gadamer's conception of *Wirkungsgeschichte* as: "The operative force of the tradition over those that belong to it, so that even in rejecting or reacting to it they remain conditioned by it" (Warnke, *Gadamer*, 79).

[434] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 61. In terms sympathetic to Hans Jauss, the historical conditionedness of understanding lies in the fact that readers are situated within a given tradition of reading that was generated by the preceding successive horizons of expectation and thus understanding. See, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

> we come to experience compels us to take hold of it completely, to assume in some way its truth.[435]

Commenting on this quotation Ricoeur helpfully highlights the necessary relationship of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* and historical distance as "the nearness of the remote."[436]

While *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* is hermeneutically beneficial, it must be recognized that it also illuminates the impossibility of an "*overview* which would enable us to grasp in a single glance the totality of effects."[437] Since all human knowledge is conditioned by our finiteness, it is impossible to achieve any final Hegelian-type synthesis. This reveals a true "ontology of finitude."[438] By assigning an ontological primacy to historicity, and recognizing "that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice," Gadamer exposes application as that which "gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust."[439] While the Enlightenment bequeathed illusion of the possibility of neutrality deceives the *Distinct* approach into believing that one can deny the present in order to go into the past and therefore deny the role of application in understanding, the notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* demonstrates that the meaning of a past object "cannot be seen solely in terms of itself." It can only be seen "in terms of the questions put to it from the present."[440] Understanding depends upon a historical and relational frame. By removing the core prejudice of the Enlightenment – the bias against bias – "an appropriate

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[435] Gadamer, *Kleine Schriften I*, 158. Trans. in Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 73-74.

[436] *Ibid.*, 74. Paradoxically, it is the 'otherness' of the past that renders *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* efficacious.

[437] *Ibid.*

[438] *Ibid.*

[439] Gadamer, *TM*, 270 cf. 307. This caused Gadamer to argue that prejudgments are not something that the interpreter should aim to eliminate; rather, they are the basis of our being able to understand at all, the basis of our being. "The prejudgments of the individual are more than merely his judgments; they are the historical reality of his being" (Gadamer, *WM*, 261. Translated in Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 182). Furthermore, "The prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings. Rather, this separation must take place in the process of understanding itself, and hence hermeneutics must ask how that happens. But that means it must foreground what has remained entirely peripheral in previous hermeneutics: temporal distance and its *significance for* understanding" (Gadamer, *TM*, 295-96. emphasis mine).

[440] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 182. This is in direct contrast to the Enlightenment *prejudice against prejudice* which is revealed, among various other places, in modern science's use of Cartesian doubt: accept "nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopt the idea of method that follows from this rule" (Gadamer, *TM*, 270). In fact, Gadamer argues that "not until the Enlightenment" did "*the concept of prejudice* acquire the negative connotation familiar today" (*Ibid.*, 270). Ironically, the global demand for the eradication of all prejudice is itself a prejudice. Descartes' critical mistake was in assuming that self-reflection (*ego cogito, ergo sum*) was primary and therefore an adequate basis for epistemology.

understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness"[441] allows tradition and authority to experience a status that they have not enjoyed since before the Enlightenment.[442]

The *Involved* approach to application rests upon the fact that events are only experienced in a context in which they have significance and as such the context can be described as an organically whole word-event. History itself forms the tradition that supplies the context in which texts are created.

> Tradition is not a mere disposable cultural wrapping which disguises the 'proper' way to see historical facts. To suggest this is to imply that meaning is detachable from the events, or that bare events or brute facts can be abstracted from the tradition and then re-interpreted.[443]

Just as the meaning of an event is understood in the whole act-interpretation nexus, so the contemporary interpreter of an ancient text is not supposed to attempt some sort of fact-abstraction from the text that can then be significated to the present situation, as it were, producing a subsequent application. The *Involved* approach refuses to allow the wholeness of the interpretive act to be torn apart, with either facts (*Determinate* approach) or interpretations (*Distinct* approach) evaporating.

As Gadamer states: "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition,* a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated."[444] Application for the *Involved* approach can be defined, then, as the part of the event of understanding in which past and present interpenetrate (the fusion of horizons). So in direct contrast to the positivist myth of an exegesis void of interpretation, Gadamer demonstrates that all understanding is interpretation and that there is no such thing as a presuppositionless interpretation.[445]

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[441] *Ibid.*, 276.

[442] Such an epistemological conception results in a view of reason that has moved closer to faith. This is not to agree with much of the postmodern hermeneutics which fail to recognize the imprisonment that occurs when one prematurely assimilates the past within one's own presupposed meaning. The idea of *Wirkungsgeschichte* requires one to dwell within the dialectical tension of a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. "Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own....Projecting a historical horizon, then, is only one phase in the process of understanding; it does not become solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs—which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superceded" (Gadamer, *TM*, 306-7).

[443] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 81.

[444] *Ibid.*, 290.

[445] At this point Gadamer's indebtedness to Heidegger could not be stronger: "Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something given in advance" (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 150. Translated in Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 136). Weinsheimer's reading of Gadamer highlights this issue:

Philosophy of History and the Determinate Approach

Derrida has tirelessly exposed the role of subtextual premises in all modes of discourse. He rightly reminds us that uninterpreted knowledge is a myth. Seeing is always *seeing as*; perception is always *theory-determined.* It is not surprising then that Derrida has a strong view of the historicity of humanity.[446] However, according to Derrida, the very concept of history is "the unity of becoming, as the tradition of truth or the development of science or knowledge oriented toward the appropriation of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-presence," therefore it is complicit with "a teleological and eschatological metaphysics."[447] Consequently, as with Being as presence, the notion of history falls prey to the all-consuming appetite of language. Indeed "there is nothing outside of the text...there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de horstexte.*"[448]A parasite on the decaying body of the text, the reader creates the meaningful moment, to use one of Rorty's popular images. Thus Caputo claims that the only thing that matters is "the historicity of the truth-event, of *a-letheia*, of its endless flux and transiency."[449] In the face of Derrida's grammatology, which collapses all stable meaning into a vanishing cloud of traces, history implodes. It vanishes as nothing more than a linguistic mirage, it finally yields to inescapable play and "the order of the sign."[450]

With the stabilizing Being-as-presence now replaced by the ultimately unstable Being-as-becoming, the reign of radical plurality has begun. The impact of this fundamental concept upon the relationship of history to application is exemplified in Derrida's distinction between the poet and the rabbi.[451]

> In the beginning is hermeneutics. But the *shared* necessity of exegesis, the interpretive imperative, is interpreted differently by the rabbi and the poet. The difference between the horizon of the original text and the exegetic writing makes the difference between the rabbi and the poet irreducible. Forever

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"We *already* know. We are always already prejudiced by tradition, which asserts its validity prior to consciousness. The fact that we never completely rid ourselves of prejudice certainly marks the finitude of historical being—but some prejudices are true. The fact that the knower's own being comes into play in his knowledge certainly betrays the limitation of objectivity and method, but it does not prevent truth. Despite our will to be methodical and objective, despite our desire to remain a bystander detached from the game, despite our attempts to prevent it, the truth of tradition occurs to us" (Weinsheimer, *Reading*, 258-59).

[446] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 4-6.

[447] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 291.

[448] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

[449] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 115.

[450] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 292.

[451] This first arises in Derrida's article, "Edmond Jabés et la question du livre," *Critique* 201 (January 1964) which addressed *Le Livre des questions* (1963) by Jabes. This article was later reprinted as chapter three in Derrida, *L'écriture et la difference* (1967).

> unable to reunite with each other, yet so close to each other, how could they ever regain the *realm?* The original opening of interpretation essentially signifies that there will always be rabbis and poets. And two interpretations of interpretation.[452]

According to Derrida, the rabbinical interpretation of interpretation seeks an "original" and a "final truth."[453] "An origin which escapes play and the order of the sign."[454] Derrida, of course, mocks this notion of origin with his affirmation of Nietzschean innocence. The originary is no more than a fable; everything is derivative. The poetical view of interpretation, on the other hand, in choosing not to seek "truth" and "origin," seeks "the play of interpretation."[455] As such, this Derridian interpretation of interpretation,

> tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in otherwords, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play.[456]

This "poetical" attempt to "pass beyond man" through the free play of signs is, in the words of Caputo, an "antitheological, antihermeneutic interpretation of interpretation" that denies "truth itself."[457] The distinction between the meaning of the text and interpretation completely dissolves. Here we have access to Derrida's view of the relationship of history to application. When "there is nothing outside the text" then all that is left is application; when reading and writing fold into one another then past collapses into present. The text as an event in the public world of intersubjective action and human agency is denied as I, the reader, joyfully surf the endless flux of free play.[458]

The negation of history that is required for the elevation of a purely intratextual or interlinguistic world to the place of ultimate hegemony renders language the characteristic of "an endless, disseminating deferral of any definite referent."[459] Interpretation, then, is always and only creatively metaphorical in the Nietzschean sense. As "the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic,"[460] metaphoricity marks, on the one hand, the inescapable captivity of reality

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[452] Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* 67.
[453] *Ibid.*, 311, chp. 3, n. 3.
[454] *Ibid.*, 292.
[455] *Ibid.*, 311, chp. 3, n. 3.
[456] *Ibid.*, 292.
[457] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics,* 117.
[458] Cf. Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 264.
[459] Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* 158.
[460] Derrida, *Dissemination,* 149.

to language and, on the other hand, the ultimate freedom of free association transforming readers into authors.[461] This is readily observable in Derrida's own interpretations. Consider his interpretation of a Platonic dialogue regarding mimesis in light of Mallarmé's prose-poem about a mime. The only connection between the two texts is the linguistic similarity of the terms "mime" and "mimesis."[462]

As was argued in the section on ideality so it is here. The only effective response to Derrida's approach is a theological assertion. It is to a theology of history that we now turn. This discussion will begin with a comparison of two theological approaches to history, which align neatly with the *Distinct* approach to application of Hirsch and the *Involved* approach of Gadamer. It will not be until the conclusion of this section that the full implications of a theology of history that coheres with the Christian tradition is realized with respect to the *Determinate* approach.

Theology of History and the Role of Application in Understanding

Is historical change something within the created order or not?[463] This is a complex and debated theological point with important implications for one's hermeneutic. If change is not part of the created order, then the impact of historicity upon all of life, including interpretation, is something that one should strive against and seek to escape. If historical change is within the created order, then one has significant theological ground for arguing that truth is not threatened by the mediating influence of history upon the interpreter and the interpretation process. If time is part of the created order then Gadamer's affirmative view of the role of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the involved role of application in understanding is more consistent with a theology of history that coheres with the Christian tradition than Hirsch's meaning-significance distinction with its anti-historical orientation and Derrida's *Determinate* approach with its conflation of the past into the present.

This is not to suggest that Gadamer has a Christian view of history. In fact a theological view of history would help Gadamer avoid his most recognized

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[461] Cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 123.

[462] See Derrida, "The Double Session," in *Dissemination*.

[463] In what follows there is no intention to reduce creation to history. O'Donovan, in *Resurrection and Moral Order*, see esp. chp. 2-3, has rightly and strongly argued against the tendency to perform such a reduction. "When history is made the categorical matrix for all meaning and value, it cannot then be taken seriously *as history*" (60).

weaknesses—a "deep ambiguity"[464] regarding the twin foci of a conservatism which anticipates the completeness (truth) of the text that is available through the universality of language and *Wirkungsgeschichte*[465] and the subjectivising effects of a historicized interpreter actualizing the text in a context-relative event.[466] Gadamer's "peculiar oscillation"[467] between the role of application and the anticipation of coherence has produced variations of both the socio-pragmatic hermeneutics of postmodernism and the metacritical hermeneutics of high-modernism. Neither alternative is acceptable notwithstanding the difficulty of reconciling the two foci. It is my contention that a theology of the resurrection holds significant resources for doing justice to both the historicity of the interpreter and the role of tradition in regard to the experience of truth in understanding.

In *The Triune Creator* Colin Gunton surveys the unique characteristics of the Christian doctrine of creation in relation to other accounts of how things came to be. One such characteristic, *creatio ex nihilo,* indicates that God created purposefully. The implications of this for our discussion of the relationship of history to the role of application in the process of understanding are important. Arguing that all of creation is filled with a *telos* implies that history, in the words of Murray Rae, "is to be understood as the space and time opened up for the world to become what it is intended to be."[468] Another implication of *creatio ex nihilo* is that creation fully belongs to God. In the memorable words of Abraham Kuyper, "There is not a square inch of the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"[469] It is a mistake to conceive of history in some Manichean fashion as a struggle between conflicting forces.[470] Instead one should argue that "all things happen under the will and purpose"[471] of God who is continuing his involvement in creation, "guiding its movement and enabling

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[464] Thiselton's phrase, *New Horizons,* 25. See also, Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism.*

[465] "It cannot, in other words, come to terms with the problem of ideology – with the fact that the unending 'dialogue' of human history is as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless...It refuses to recognize that discourse is always caught up with a power which may be by no means benign" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 63, 64).

[466] On several occasions, Thiselton has noted this tension in Gadamer. E.g., Thiselton, "Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics," 531.

[467] Warnke's phrase, *Gadamer,* 98-9.

[468] Rae, "Creation and Promise," 285.

[469] Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," 488.

[470] This criticism applies to both Hirsch and Derrida.

[471] Rae, "Creation and Promise," 285.

anticipations of its final perfection to take place."[472] In this sense, a theology of history confesses that it has "an overall coherence under the creative, providential and redemptive care of God."[473] This leads us to the resurrection as the key to a theological hermeneutic.[474]

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead provides the basis for resisting both the tyrannizing effects of history (*Determinate* approach) and the Enlightenment mirage of historylessness (*Distinct* approach). Oliver O'Donovan makes such an argument in his claim that, "before God raised Jesus from the dead, the hope that we call 'gnostic', the hope for redemption *from* creation rather than for the redemption *of* creation, might have appeared to be the only possible hope."[475] We see that O'Donovan's emphasis on the resurrection also provides a valuable means for avoiding the Gadamerian extremes of conservatism and opportunism.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Ricoeur for that matter,[476] establishes the constructive role of eschatology with regard to hermeneutics. An implication of the hermeneutical circle is that the individual human being "receives the meaning that constitutes his wholeness only in relation to an encompassing whole."[477] This encompassing whole is addressed in the Christian apocalyptic tradition's teaching that one final event will "gather together all earlier single events into...a whole."[478] Here we see that Pannenberg and O'Donovan are close to one another for this final wholeness was portrayed *proleptically* and *provisionally* in Jesus Christ. In that the wholeness is portrayed provisionally, the historical problem continues to lie at the heart of hermeneutics. And yet an optimistic basis for hermeneutics is provided in the prolepsis.[479] "The anticipated coming of the end of history in the midst of history, far from doing away with history, actually forms the basis from which history as a

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[472] Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 10.

[473] Rae, "Creation and Promise," 285.

[474] In fact, I would argue that any hermeneutic that claims to be a Christian hermeneutic must give a significant role to the gospel of Jesus Christ, for otherwise it could not be a *Christian* hermeneutic. Cf. the first sentence in O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 11.

[475] *Ibid.*, 14.

[476] Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another;* also *Idem, Time and Narrative.*

[477] Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol 1, 164.

[478] Pannenberg, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," 122.

[479] The two characteristics of provisionality and proleptically signal Pannenberg's resistance to the Hegelian foreclosure by establishing "the basis for the openness of the future for us, despite the fact that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of the God of Israel as the God of all men....The openness of the future belongs constitutively to our reality—against Hegel" (Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol 2, 25).

whole becomes understandable."[480] All of this leads Pannenberg to argue that it is the insight into our lack of understanding of the whole of history that "leads to the impasse of relativism."[481] Therefore, the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey are not able finally to root out relativism due to an inadequate concept of universal history. Inadequate in that it lacks some reference to God's activity in Jesus Christ.[482] The historical problem that lies at the heart of hermeneutics is finally controlled by the resurrection of Jesus Christ with its proleptic and provisional establishment of the eschatological goal.

The resurrection of Christ provides a transcendent framework of wholeness that is essentially necessary to understanding for an interpreter that is situated in the historical particularity of the present. If God did indeed raise Jesus from the dead then that changes everything. For in raising Jesus from the dead, the origin, sustainer, and *telos* of history acted *in* history. This is the heart of Christian faith and the cornerstone of hope in regard to history. In this way a hermeneutic can recognize the impact of the fall upon history while affirming the invading action of God in Christ into that very same history. This view of understanding can accept the reality of historicized texts *and* historicized interpreters all the while insisting on the possibility of genuine knowledge.

Ironically Derrida speaks affirmatively of the "apocalyptic tone."[483] But it is an apocalypse that, in the words of Thiselton is, "always *on the way*."[484] Such an endless deferral is clearly different from the view of Pannenberg and O'Donovan for whom "the end of history has proleptically taken place in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead."[485] As the current exploration of a theology of history has sought to establish, it is within the framework of creation and resurrection that human action can be conceived of in a properly historic fashion.[486]

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[480] *Ibid.*, 36-37.

[481] *Ibid.*, 164.

[482] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 83.

[483] Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptical Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," 63-97.

[484] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 114. Cf. Derrida, "Living On"/"Border Lines," 94; Derrida, *De l'esprit*, 126-29.

[485] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 334. The quotation is specifically addressing Pannenberg. McGrath makes no reference to O'Donovan. However, I am appropriating the quotation as an appropriate description of the views of both.

[486] Rae, "Creation and Promise," 284.

With regard to both the *Distinct* approach and the *Determinate* approach, if truth has been loosed from the past (e.g., Derrida) or the present (e.g. Hirsch)[487] is it really truth? I am arguing that it is not. Such quasi-dehistoricizations are firmly opposed by the incarnation narrative of the New Testament. After all, the redemption, reconciliation, and the fulfillment of God's purpose all "take place not without but precisely through" the historical particularity of the incarnate Jesus Christ.

> In the event of the incarnation, God's purpose in creation is realized; the goodness of the created order is confirmed and its suitability as the medium for that working out of God's purpose is made clear. It is for this reason that the gospel writers take care to locate historically their accounts of the things that have taken place concerning Jesus – including, quite crucially, the resurrection.[488]

To disparage the historicity of our existence is a form of the too often repeated Gnostic error that fails to recognize the vision of the Revelation as a testimony to God's plan to "redeem the world as a whole, to gather the whole of our history into reconciled relationship with himself."[489] The incarnation confirms the goodness of history. It shows history to be the medium through which God works his redemption plan. In the resurrection, as Pannenberg, O'Donovan, and Rae, argue, the *telos* of history is firmly held forth.[490] In summary, the incarnation, from birth through crucifixion and especially the resurrection, boldly challenges any devaluation of history.

> It is possible to find in the history of Jesus an answer to the question of how 'the whole' of reality and its meaning can be conceived without compromising the provisionality and historical relativity of all thought, as well as openness to the future on the part of the thinker who knows himself to be only on the way and not yet at the goal.[491]

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[487] The result of such a view of history upon one's interpretive approach is ably summarized by Lundin: "[History] is the void through which we must travel to reach the text in its original purity, the debris we must clear before we can dig beneath the surface of the text into the very mind of its author. As a repository of prejudices, misconceptions, and illusions, the history of interpretation is almost always more likely to conceal rather than reveal the meaning of a text. With his emphasis upon method and divination, Schleiermacher sought nothing less than to overcome history and its opposition to right understanding" (*Idem*, "Interpreting Orphans," 34).

[488] Rae, "Creation and Promise," 291.

[489] *Ibid.*, 292. It is a similar view that causes Eco to argue that one of the recurring expressions of Gnosticism is to view time as "a deformed imitation of eternity." He then perceptively comments that, "unlike Christianity, Gnosticism is not a religion for slaves but one for masters" (Eco, "Interpretation and History," 36). As Rae highlights, the roots of the Western intellectual denigration of history lie in the "the devaluation of the realm of space and time in Greek thought, and [it] has been allowed to flourish...because of a neglect of the doctrine of creation" (Rae, "Creation and Promise," 295).

[490] For Augustine on this issue, see *The City of God*, XII.13.

[491] Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, 1:183.

It is this theology which supports and refines a critically *Involved* approach to understanding.

Conclusion

Hirsch's meaning-significance dichotomy, and Derrida's meaning as significance implosion are both presuppositions in the guise of conclusions that fail to account for the actual event of understanding that regularly occurs. In attempting to articulate a view of how understanding actually works, Gadamer's view of history is more legitimate.

As Ricoeur puts it, "The illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without presuppositions. There is no philosophy without presuppositions."[492] The *Determinate* approach is wrong in so far as it claims that there is no point of departure. The *Distinct* approach is wrong to assume that there is a point of departure without presuppositions. Fortunately, there is no need to succumb to the false dichotomy of an eternally *present* prison (*Determinate* approach) or a naive escape to the past (*Distinct* approach).

In this chapter I have argued that a hermeneutic informed by a theology of history that coheres with the Christian tradition and that conceives of ideality in a dynamic way provides an approach to understanding that views application as not merely unavoidable in the event of understanding, but necessary and beneficial to genuine, objective, knowledge.[493] Throughout the discussion thus far, we have often bumped into the issue of epistemology, especially in the sense of the subject-object relationship. In an effort to focus the analysis I have, for the most part, said little about this relationship. It is now time to address it head on because one's epistemology goes hand in hand with one's view of history and of language.

Epistemology (Subject and Object)

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, the relationship of the subject to the object is an issue of epistemology. Roderick Chisholm correctly points out that: "The relation between the self, or subject of experience, and the other is central to all

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[492] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 348.

[493] I am rejecting the modernistic dichotomy of universality or particularity. While not denying particularity, one can still have a "universal intent." Cf. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 37-145; Benhabib speaks of "interactive universalism" as the "practice of situated criticism for a global community" in *Situating the Self*, 228.

of hermeneutics."[494] More particularly for the present discussion, how one perceives the subject-object relation strongly influences one's view of the hermeneutical nature of application, and therefore of the nature of homiletical application. The *Distinct* approach, working from a Cartesian epistemology and Husserl's early phenomenology insists upon a sharp separation between the subject and the object: The sovereign, active consciousness (subject), through the solitary monological activity of self-purification via self-reflection, can achieve the self-transparency and self-understanding that will enable an objective investigation of a passive and manipulable world (object). Both the *Involved* approach and the *Determinate* approach are rooted in Heideggerian ontology. They see the subject-object relation as a more organic unity.[495]

> Interpretation is not a sovereign attitude over against a pre-established context of meaning, so that I can decipher it and possess it exhaustively and definitively. Interpretation is an ongoing process of life in which there is always something behind and something expressly intended. Both an opening of a horizon and a concealing of something take place in all our experiences of interpretation.[496]

It is this issue of the subject to object relationship, in fact, that led to Heidegger's initial break with his admired teacher, Husserl. The various views of this relationship form a significant part of the foundational differences that separate the *Distinct* approach from both the *Involved* and the *Determinate* approaches. The differences between the *Involved* approach and the *Determinate* approach that have been identified thus far (with regard to their view of texts, ideality, and history) must be taken into account in what follows. There are significant differences between the latter two with regard to the subject-object relationship. For the purpose of this dissertation it is best to treat them together for this particular issue, since they share in Heidegger's critique of Husserl regarding the subject-object relationship.

The focus of Heidegger's criticism concerned the notion of consciousness.[497] Heidegger "interpreted the temporal structure of *Dasein* as the movement of interpretation such that interpretation doesn't *occur* as an activity in the course of life, but *is* the *form* of human life."[498] This is a radical critique that goes right to the

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[494] Chisholm, "Gadamer and Realism," 103. While I am using the word subject, Descartes speaks of the cogito, Kant of the transcendental unity of apperception, James of the pure ego, and Husserl (later) of the transcendental ego.

[495] Cf. Kockelmans, "Beyond Realism and Idealism," 234-36.

[496] Gadamer, "The Conflict of Interpretations," 222.

[497] *Ibid.*, 220-21.

[498] *Ibid.*

roots of Cartesianism. Descartes misunderstood being, and in particular, being-in-the-world. Human beings interpret "by the very energy" of their life, which means they project in and through their "desires, wishes, hopes, expectations, as well as in all...[their] life-experience."[499] Interpretation is nothing more than "a special aspect of the process of human life as a whole."[500] Gadamer's contribution along these lines is significant.

> That we are thrown into the world and not invited is just the symbol for the constitutive fact that we are always on the way; and that is true for interpretation, too. Perhaps the key insight in my own work is that we are never at the zero-point, we are never starting out new, we are always already en route, *wir haben immer schon angefangen.* ...Interpretation is the element in which we live, and not something into which we have to make entry.[501]

The central reason that the *Involved* approach and the *Determinate* approach are reticent to distinguish too sharply between the subject and the object is because the two are thrown together in the flow of history. The *Distinct* approach, on the other hand, in its appeal to the early Husserl's phenomenology, described by Bartholomew as a "last-ditch attempt to secure the autonomy of humankind in the knowing process, that is, epistemologically,"[502] attempts to "justify...[a] realistic conception of the hermeneutical object"[503] that will support just such a sharp distinction. Therefore, in order to explore the disparate approaches to the subject-object relation with a view to the resulting perceptions of the role of application in understanding it is necessary to compare the relevant parts of Heideggerian ontology and Husserlian phenomenology.

A key overall difference between Heidegger and Husserl centers upon the nature of perception. In Gadamer's words, "Heidegger's doctrine of the priority of being-ready-to-hand...contradicts the entire order of the building up and founding of intentionalities that Husserl erected in his phenomenology."[504] It is Heidegger's uneasiness concerning Husserl's endeavor to set human consciousness at the root of all phenomenological experiences in an effort to transcend subjectivity which drives their differences. For Heidegger, facticity is more fundamental than human

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[499] *Ibid.*

[500] *Ibid.*, 219-220.

[501] *Ibid.*, 220-21. Since one's thrownness in the world is fundamental, even to conscious acts, understanding is an event in which we are caught up; "It is something that happens to us" (Ramberg, "The Source of Subjectivity," 461).

[502] Bartholomew, "In Front of the Text," 137.

[503] Madison believes that Hirsch "insufficiently and incorrectly construes Husserl's meaning" (Madison, *Hermeneutics*, 7).

[504] Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 169.

consciousness and human knowledge. Husserl, on the other hand, tended to regard even the facticity of being as a datum of consciousness.[505] So while Heidegger's hermeneutics are often labeled phenomenological, his version of phenomenology is very different from Husserl's.[506] One way to summarize this difference is the very word *hermeneutic*. Surprisingly, Husserl never used the word with regard to his own work, while Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, went so far as to claim that "the authentic dimensions of phenomenological method make it hermeneutical."[507]

As these differences are brought forward into the views of application's role in understanding there are interesting developments.

The Distinct Approach and Husserl

In order to keep application firmly removed from the process of understanding, Hirsch appeals to Husserl's early phenomenology as the basis for a claim to the objectivity of the object of consciousness. In Madison's view this is an unknowing misinterpretation of Husserl. In recognizing the act of consciousness as distinct from the object of consciousness, Madison argues, "Hirsch assumes that the object of consciousness must therefore exist fully in its own right as something permanent, self-identical, unchanging, and reproducible."[508] After all, if it were not independent, "how else, Hirsch reasons, could it be intended by the same consciousness at different times or by different consciousnesses at the same or different times?"[509] In Madison's opinion, this is a version of Platonic realism.

In Hirsch's defense, many critics read the first edition of *Logical Investigations* in just this way. After all, its subtitle is *"Prolegomena zur reinen Logik."* And, not a few commentators read the book as an "avowed Platonism" with a "devastating critique of all forms of psychologism in philosophy."[510] Under this view Husserl stringently denied the reducibility of the object to the subjective acts of intention. Proponents of this approach to Husserl often point to a statement from *Ideas I*, albeit subsequent to the first edition of *Logical Investigations*, as an indicative argument for the ontological distinctness of the object *as* intended and the object which *is* intended.

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[505] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 125.
[506] This is not to say that Heidegger was not at all indebted to Husserl. See, *Ibid.*
[507] *Ibid.*, 126. See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*.
[508] Madison, *Hermeneutics*, 8.
[509] *Ibid.*
[510] E.g., Smith, *Husserl*, 5.

> The *tree pure and simple,* the physical thing belonging to nature, is anything but this *perceived tree as perceived* which, as perceptual sense, inseparably belongs to the perception. The tree simpliciter can burn up, be resolved into its chemical elements, etc. But the sense—the sense of *this* perception, something belonging necessarily to its essence—cannot burn up; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties.[511]

The first edition of *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) distinguishes between the real content of an act and its intentional content. Yet Madison is correct in that the later Husserl substantially modifies his views as he develops the concept of transcendental idealism (which did show up in the subsequent editions of *Logical Investigations*).[512] This turn in Husserl's thought, centering around his engagement with the concept of constitution, is well established by the time of *Cartesian Meditations.*[513]

With his 1908 lectures on the theory of meaning[514] and his *Ideen I* (1913) Husserl introduced the labels *noesis* or *noetic moment* to identify the "real content of an act," and *noema* for the "intentional content" of the act. Intentionality consists of the "noetic-noematic correlation."[515] In Husserl's terminology, the *noema* is the "object as intended" and is opposed to the "object *simpliciter.*" The former, according to Husserl, is "a meaning or *sense* (*Sinn*)."[516] As the correlation of the object *as* intended and the object which *is* intended, this modified approach to intentionality holds the object of consciousness as actually ideal with "neither meaning nor being" apart from consciousness. This is, in Husserl's terms, transcendental idealism.[517]

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[511] Husserl, *Ideas I,* 216. As modified according to the original German in *Ideen I* (1976), 205; *Ideen I* (1913), 184. Cited in Drummond, "The Structure of Intentionality," 73.

[512] In the first editions, *Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Band* and *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band* published in 1900-1901, Husserl distinguishes between the real (or phenomenological) and the intentional content of an act (see *Logische Untersuchungen, Husserliana* XIX:2, 411). A second edition contained a revision of the prolegomena and the first five investigations in 1913, with the sixth investigation revised in 1921. This second edition (1913) contains "a crucial change in the treatment of intentionality, a change whose significance is barely noted in the *Investigations* themselves and that reflects a train of thought finding its first detailed statement in the simultaneously published" *Ideen I* (1913) (Drummond, "The Structure of Intentionality," 68-9).

[513] "The objective world...this world, with all its objects...derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, *from me as the transcendental Ego,* the Ego who comes to the fore only with the transcendental-phenomenological ephoche" (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations,* § 11. Cited in Madison, *Hermeneutics,* 8).

[514] Husserl, *Vorlesungen über Bedeutungslehre.*

[515] Smith, *Husserl,* 22.

[516] *Ibid.* Husserl's highly nuanced use of *Sinn* broadens the notion beyond the common linguistic meaning. For a detailed discussion of his use see Drummond, "The Structure of Intentionality," 72-74. Furthermore, Husserl explicates the notion of *noema* in various ways resulting in the current competing interpretations of Husserlian intentionality. For an overview see: Bernet, Kern, and Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology,* 100-101; and Drummond, "The Structure of Intentionality," 73; and Smith, *Husserl,* 22.

[517] Cf. Madison, *Hermeneutics,* 8.

Many critics regard this as an "inexplicable relapse into neo-Kantian idealism."[518] But Madison tries to downplay the difference between this idealistic view and the earlier realistic approach. Citing Gaston Berger for support, Madison argues that the conversion from realism to idealism is actually only a result of the natural trajectory of Husserl's thought.[519] Other critics, such as Reinach, Ingarden, Føllesdal, Willard, and Smith read Husserl as a realist (despite the interpretation of his later work which suggests otherwise).

Ironically, in his later work, Husserl, in clarifying the notion of intentionality, "came to see...that the objectivity of the object is entirely *relative* to the subjectivity of the (transcendental) subject."[520] For Madison "there can be no act which does not intend some object, conversely, there can be no object apart from an actual or possible consciousness which intends it."[521] Hirsch's problem, then, according to Madison, was that he did not recognize a key implication of the intentional nature of consciousness in that "the object is always given with consciousness and in fact has no meaning, no significant being, apart from consciousness."[522]

In summary, some interpreters of Husserl argue that "the world is dependent on consciousness...[and therefore,] knowledge consists in just the evidential relations of corroboration among intuitive experience and higher levels of judgment."[523] Others insist that this is not the best approach to Husserl, since he "sought to do justice to the claims of common-sense realism (claims to the effect that, for example, things like trees exist independently of consciousness and are the objects of our experiences)."[524] It is in accordance with the latter view that Hirsch is utilizing Husserl's work.

In addition to Husserl, Hirsch draws upon the work of Emilio Betti. It was Betti's argument that the object of interpretation is "an objectification of man's spirit

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[518] Gadamer, *Hermeneutics*, 143. This issue is made no less simple by the fact that both Kant and Husserl use the label of *transcendental idealism* when referring to their own positions.

[519] *Idem, Hermeneutics*, 8. See also, Gadamer, *TM*, 243-44.

[520] Madison, *Hermeneutics*, 9.

[521] *Ibid.*

[522] *Ibid.*

[523] *Ibid.*, 36. This Husserlian transcendental idealism, in reducing the world to the status of being, "a mere correlate of consciousness, [is] a move which flows from the conviction that philosophy must have a grounding insight which has its source of evidence within itself. This idealist Husserl is even more radical than Kant, insisting...that there is no thing-in-itself beyond the reach of possible experience. Even the thing-in-itself is a mere rule for the synthesizing activities of consciousness" (Smith, *Husserl*, 13).

[524] *Ibid.*, 13.

expressed in sensible form."[525] Thus, interpretation is a re-cognition, to use Hirsch's term,[526] a re-construction of the meaning that the author intended. According to Palmer, this means "the observer must be translated into a foreign subjectivity" and through a reversal of the original process of creation, arrive at "the idea or 'interpretation' which is embodied in the object."[527] Amongst other things, this view implies an autonomous object and a distinctly foreign interpreter. It is not surprising then, that for Betti (and by extension, for Hirsch), according to Palmer, "the first canon of all interpretation [is] to affirm the essential autonomy of the object."[528]

Lentricchia's criticism of this approach is significant. To maintain the autonomous object, the subject is construed in terms of a rigid, rationalistic humanism where consciousness and intended meaning are "not free of the 'history' that may be typologically reconstructed," but are disconnected from the historical nature of the interpreter.[529] That is, in order to maintain interpretation that is absent of all subjectivity, there must be severance—meaning from significance, understanding from evaluation, interpretation from criticism, and fact from value.[530] Driving this violent act is the Cartesian view of the subject-object relation transposed into the

> dualism of Husserlian phenomenology, where [the] 'intentional object' is cleanly cut off from the realities of actual human consciousness. These various acts of severance, which serve the heuristic needs of [Hirsch's]...hermeneutics, are reflections of a fundamental dualism that is the basis of his thought.[531]

Hirsch's construal of the subject-object relation clearly contributes to his view of the role of application in understanding. The interpreter as a subject dualistically isolated, self-sufficient, and enclosed is able to transcend history and remain wholly apart from the object of interpretation therefore rendering the strict segregation of meaning and application.

Among other weaknesses, this approach is built upon an internal contradiction. Hirsch's "preinterpretive foundation for understanding" actually presupposes a form of understanding that cannot be reduced to Husserlian

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[525] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 57.

[526] *Idem, VI*, 126.

[527] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 57. Cf. also Bleicher, *The Hermeneutic Imagination*, 64-68, 81-87; Gadamer, *TM*, 186-89 ("a reconstruction of a construction").

[528] *Ibid.*, 57. Bleicher provides an analysis of Betti's project which set "the whole problematic of hermeneutics within the subject-object scheme" (*The Hermeneutic Imagination*, 81-87).

[529] Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 263.

[530] *Ibid.*, 263.

[531] *Ibid.*

consciousness.[532] It is this presupposed form of understanding that post-phenomenological, post-Heideggerian hermeneutics enables one to reflect upon.

The Involved Approach, the Determinate Approach, and Heidegger

One must initially recognize the shift affected by Heidegger's consideration of the philosophical locus of understanding when, in *Being and Time*, he sought to establish the foundations of the ontological problem not in the relationship of being to another, but in the relationship of being to the world. The primordial sense of understanding, in Ricoeur's words, "is implicated in the relation with my situation, in the fundamental understanding of my position within being."[533] While Betti and Hirsch built upon the Dilthian perspective, linking "the question of understanding to the problem of the other person,"[534] Gadamer followed the early Heidegger of *Being and Time*.

> The purpose of my investigation is not to offer a general theory of interpretation and a differential account of its methods (which Emilio Betti has done very well) but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding and to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.[535]

In this way, Gadamer's work highlights a crucial weakness in the *Distinct* approach to the subject-object relation. In direct contrast to the priority accorded consciousness over tradition and prejudice, Gadamer insists on facticity as the constitution of consciousness:

> History does not belong to us; but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the predjudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*[536]

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[532] In *AI* Hirsch makes explicit his refusal to consider his own metaphysical presuppositions. "No doubt it can be argued that analysis always carries metaphysical implications, and no doubt a shrewd ontologist could deduce metaphysical principles from the analytical distinction between meaning and significance. Yet I would wish to reply that the exercise would be pointless, since the distinction concords with a number of different metaphysical positions. Moreover, I would argue that there is far less danger in ignoring metaphysics than in introducing it prematurely into the practical questions of interpretation. A precocious ascent into the realm of ontology is just what needs to be avoided in the descriptive, analytical side of hermeneutic theory" (81).

[533] Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 55.

[534] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 55; Gadamer, *TM*, 186f.

[535] *Ibid.*, xxxi.

[536] Gadamer, *TM*, 276-7. Emphasis his.

While it is an overstatement to claim that the "self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life,"[537] Gadamer's emphasis on the priority of prejudice to the interpreter and her reflection is valid. The interpreter belongs to history before belonging to herself.

Ricoeur makes a similar point when he argues for "permanent mistrust of the pretensions of the subject imposing itself as the foundation of its own meaning."[538] The understanding of the self is always indirect; understanding proceeds from the appropriation of the meaning of signs that I interpret. These signs are external to myself, given to me in my culture and history. Therefore, in 1971 Ricoeur wrote,

> I would now dare to say that, in the coming to understanding of signs inscribed in texts, the meaning rules and gives me a self. In short, the self of self-understanding is a gift of understanding itself and of the invitation from the meaning inscribed in the text.[539]

By 1976 Ricoeur had removed any hint of tentativeness from his language when in the final sentence of *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, he asserts that, "it is the text, with its universal power of world disclosure, which gives a self to the ego."[540] In a later essay Ricoeur continues to strike at the heart of Cartesian epistemology as he points out that *Ego cogito, ergo sum* "remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be 'mediated' by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. It is in these objects, in the widest sense of the word, that the Ego must lose and find itself."[541] The similarity of Ricoeur's argument to Heidegger's argument, that to be human is to be bound up with others and the material world, should not be missed. Rather than accidental, our relationships with others and with the material world are constitutive of our life. The world is no object; something set over against the human subject. We cannot get outside of the world in order to stand against it: We are subjects inside a reality that cannot be fully objectified. In this sense, reality, encompassing both subject and object, constitutes humanity as much as humanity constitutes reality. As Stiver

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[537] Thiselton rightly observes that this statement "gives too many hostages to postmodern selfhood" (*Interpreting God*, 61).

[538] Ricoeur, Preface to Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, xv.

[539] *Ibid.*

[540] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 95.

[541] Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 106.

succinctly puts it, "human beings are inextricably beings-in-the-world who precede the subject-object split."[542]

Reflection is no longer the constituting activity but a second order activity.[543] It "arrives... within an experience that bears us, and it constitutes us as the subject of the experience."[544] This abandonment of the pretension of a constituting reflection in favor of a mediated reflection forms a fundamental basis for the *Involved* approach's organically unified view of the subject-object relation establishing the involved role of application in a process of understanding.[545] In Gadamer's analogy of game playing the impact of mediated reflection upon the subject-object relationship is illustrated with regard to the role of application in understanding.[546]

When one plays a game one is not standing over against the game; one participates in the game. Playing a game seriously "precludes treating the game as an object."[547]

> In the same process of playing that prevents objectifying the game, players lose their status as subjects. As part of the game, participants play parts that are not merely themselves insofar as they have been assigned roles to perform. Playing consists in a performance of what is no object, by what is no subject. And if interpreting is like playing, as Gadamer argues, then it always involves something like performing a drama, for the player who takes the play seriously interprets it from within, by belonging to and playing a part in it.[548]

Play, in this regard, is an important clue to the movement beyond objectivism and relativism. The *Involved* and *Determinate* approaches contend that the subject and the object are already englobed in an inclusive relation; there is no autonomous subject or adverse object.[549] Understanding "is not construal or construction, not the act of a subject on an object; it is not fundamentally something interpreters do at

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[542] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur,* 38.

[543] *Ibid.,* 39.

[544] Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation,* 107. Cf. also Stiver's description of this aspect of Heidegger's thought: "At the beginning, we interpret the world in terms of meanings. Only later, by abstraction, do we break it up into its parts" (*Idem, Theology after Ricoeur,* 39).

[545] Remember, the definition of application presented in the last section: the part of the event of understanding in which past and present interpenetrate (the fusion of horizons).

[546] Gadamer develops this analogy in the course of his critique of Kant's subjectivization of aesthetic consciousness. See esp. *TM,* 101-134,

[547] Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 14. Ironically, as already pointed out, Hirsch refers to this same Wittgensteinian concept, yet he does not draw the implications from it that Gadamer does. This reveals an area of weakness for Hirsch: he often draws superficially upon philosophical discussions (cf. Hirsch's use of Saussure and Husserl).

[548] *Ibid.*

[549] In his summary of this Gadamerian notion, Ricoeur states: "In entering a game we hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader" (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* 187).

all."[550] The understanding involved in interpretation is neither subjective nor objective, in the scientific sense. Now "there is an Other, who is not an object for the subject but someone to whom we are bound in the reciprocations of language and life."[551] This inclusive or englobing relation can, in Gadamerian terms, be described as the notion of participation, or in Heideggerian language as a belonging-to.

Conclusion

The *Distinct* approach, as exemplified by Hirsch, is largely shaped by an objectivism built upon Husserl's construal of intentionality that depends upon the absolute separation of the subject and the object. Hirsch insists upon framing the issues of hermeneutics in the context of the dichotomizing question: Does the text shape interpretation or interpretation shape the text?[552] As I have argued in this and the previous section, such a Cartesian effort to secure a knowable world is based upon the modern notion of the centrality of an enthroned transcendental subject, that not really itself a part of the world, brings the world to be. The human is prior to history; history flows from humans. In order to achieve total disinterestedness and complete objectivity the world is dissolved into objects as the interpreter, purged of the predilections that accompany historicity, nakedly examines the text for the purpose of producing an untainted transcription of its authorially intended meaning. Understanding, then, is an unmediated activity. Interpretation is something that the interpreter does directly to the text. As was pointed out in the section on history, the *Distinct* approach assiduously avoids the contaminatory effects upon objective meaning that, in their view, unavoidably result from mediated understanding. For objective meaning that is understood through mediation of history is therefore subjectivized by that mediation and is in return no longer objective meaning. Objective meaning must be objectively understood in order for the interpreter to trust that the knowledge is of the genuine object.

The *Involved* and the *Determinate* approaches on the other hand, abandoned the pretension of a constituting reflection for the notion of a mediated reflection in light of the irrefragable nature of the historicity of the interpreter.[553] That is to say,

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[550] *Ibid.*

[551] Gadamer, "Foreword" in Grondin, *Hermeneutics*, x.

[552] Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 106.

[553] Merleau-Ponty wryly writes: "The most important lesson which the [phenomenological] reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, xix). As Palmer points out, "To speak of an object apart from a perceiving subject is a conceptual

there is no unmediated knowledge. In its quest for objective meaning, the distinct approach is guilty of attempting to dispossess the interpreter of the only route to knowledge that is available – the historicized self.[554] Instead of the subject as an active agent analyzing a passive text, like some scientist performing an experiment on an object, the *Involved* and the *Determinate* approaches insist that understanding occurs as a result of the encounter between the interpreter and the object of interpretation. In this case the text cannot be described in the same terms as those one would employ for knowing an object in the sense of Cartesian epistemology where the object is purely represented in the mind of the subject. Never a presuppositionless, detached, ahistorical, neutral observer of objects, the interpreter is a participant with the text in the event of meaning. Application, as the part of the event of understanding in which past and present interpenetrate (the fusion of horizons), is always already involved in the process of understanding because the object and the subject are not isolated from one another by a gulf of time, but are bound up in *Wirkungsgeschichte.* This approach sees the subject-object relation as that of two subjects in authentic dialogue.[555]

In respect to an open text the involved role of application is especially pronounced. But even with a closed text there is a deep sense in which the interpreter is facing the text as one already thrown into a relationship with that which is being interpreted. This exposure of the "false consciousness"[556] of objectivism is not meant to put an end to objectivity as a goal. Ricoeur's insights are important at this point, for they temper Gadamer's weakness to the socio-pragmatism of some strands of post-modernism.[557]

> If there is no objective meaning, then the text no longer says anything at all; without existential appropriation, what the text does say is no longer living

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error caused by an inadequate realistic concept of perception and the world" (Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 24). By failing to submit historical consciousness to reflective criteria, Hirsch's theory exemplifies the epistemological naiveté of the Enlightenment. "What can be submitted to reflection is always limited in comparison to what is determined by previous formative influences. Blindness to the fact of human finitude is what leads one to accept the Enlightenment's abstract motto and to disparage all authority" (Gadamer, *TM*, 571).

[554] Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, 263.

[555] So in contrast to the *Distinct* approach's focus on rules and their application, the *Involved* approach holds it as an axiom that "Dialogue underwrites the very concept of an encounter with intelligible form" (Steiner, *Real Presences*, 198). As will be argued in chapter three, this is what makes understanding possible.

[556] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 191.

[557] Pannenberg, Apel, Habermas, and Betti point out that Gadamer underrates the need for objectivity in his severe de-emphasis on method.

> speech. The task of a theory of interpretation is to combine in a single process these two moments of comprehension.[558]

The *Distinct* approach holds to a false objectivity which is driven by a prioritized present-at-hand over the world of *Dasein*. Just as with its approach to types of texts, the *Distinct* approach's view of the subject-object relation once again results in an orientation to truth that is limited to the level of concept, idea, cognition, and proposition and thus is unable to deal with the broader sense of truth as experience, relationship, and action.

True objectivity depends upon the appropriate relationship of the methods of interpretation to the nature of the inquiry and to the object of interpretation.[559] It is inappropriate to assume that one particular model of epistemology is the only objective model. Descartes' mistake, which the *Distinct* approach buys into, was to look to mathematical knowledge as the model of epistemology that can provide assurance that "Being has been securely grasped."[560] It is legitimate for the interpreter to aim at discovering "what the text says." Nevertheless, the pure description of absolute scientific objectivity is an illusion. The *Involved* and the *Determinate* approaches stand within the general philosophical movement of the twentieth century that endeavored to overcome the one-sided orientation toward the scientific fact, that was taken for granted by neo-Kantianism and positivism.

Having critiqued some key illusions of the subject-object relation, illusions linked to the primacy that is afforded the subject by modern philosophy, in as much as the latter is rooted in Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, that must be overcome, a path toward the sound appreciation of the role of application in understanding has been formed.

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[558] Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 398.

[559] Cf. Bultmann's insistence that objectivity can only mean "a knowledge appropriate to the subject" (Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theologica*, 255).

[560] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 128. This is not to indicate that the methods of science are not valid within the specialized concerns of science. cf. Gadamer, *TM*, 551-52; and Rosenthahal's discussion of Heidegger's view of the subject-object relation in *Die Überwindung des Subjekt-Objekt-Denkens als philosophisches und theologisches Problem*, 13-14. See esp., Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, 254-55.

The Polymorphic Nature of Application

Wittgenstein[561] argued that a "craving for generality" (i.e., "the method of science") and "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case" leads the philosopher astray.[562] With regard to language, Wittgenstein calls for a "radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose."[563] Hence one of his most famous illustrations.

> Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, nails and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.) Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their application is not presented to us so clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy![564]

This understanding of language is behind Wittgenstein's notion of "language games" which highlights the connection between language, as it is used, and life. Speaking, in other words, is an activity.[565] Thiselton's exposition of this concept, and then his use of it to critique Bultmann provide us with the means to draw together the various aspects of this chapter and to articulate the nature of application.

According to Thiselton, Wittgenstein was saying, "What language is depends on the setting or language-game in which the term 'language' is used."[566] Bultmann, however, fails to see this when he argues that Paul "understands faith primarily as obedience; [and]...the act of faith as an act of obedience."[567] The mistake here is in "viewing the concept of faith 'outside a particular language-game.'"[568] Thiselton goes on to make the profound argument that "the theological vocabulary of the New Testament contains some polymorphous concepts."[569] Three such concepts, that Thiselton briefly explores, are πίστις, σάρξ and σαρκικός, and ἀλήθεια. Regarding the latter, Thiselton points to occasions in the NT when it: points to a

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[561] For this brief discussion of Wittgenstein I am indebted to Thiselton's work in, *Two Horizons*, chp 13 "Philosophy and Language in Ludwig Wittgenstein," and chp 14 "Wittgenstein, 'Grammar,' and the New Testament."

[562] Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 18. In chapter one we saw that Dilthey distinguished the *Geisteswissenschaften* from the *Naturwissenschaften* on the basis of *Verstehen* and *Erklärung*, respectively. The latter being a causal explanation of events and processes whereby hypotheses are submitted to empirical verification and individual cases are subsumed under nomological hypotheses.

[563] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 304.

[564] *Ibid.*, § 11.

[565] *Ibid.*, § 23.

[566] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 407.

[567] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 314.

[568] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 408-9.

[569] *Ibid.*, 408.

"correspondence with the facts of the matter" (e.g., John 4:18; Eph 4:25; 2 Cor 7:14); designates "faithfulness, honesty, or reliability" (e.g., 2 Cor 6:4-7); indicates "the gospel of Christ" (e.g., 2 Cor 11:4; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 3:7); identifies the quality of being genuine over against being counterfeit (e.g., John 1:9; 4:23,24; 6:32,55); contrasts with "that which is hidden" (e.g., John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13); and is the means of "'valid' witness" (e.g., John 5:31, 32). Finally, ἀλήθεια is used at times in "an over-arching way that holds together several of these other uses" (John 14:6). The bottom line is that, "We cannot ask questions about 'the New Testament concept of truth,' or even 'John's concept of truth,' outside a given context of language-game."[570]

Our analysis of the hermeneutical ecology of application suggests that application is a polymorphous concept. What application is varies from language-game to language-game. It does not always function in the same way. The attempt to nail down the precise nature of application in the abstract leads only to confusion and to misunderstanding. What Thiselton argues about key NT concepts is also true of application. "The point we are making is not simply a point about lexicography, although clearly it involves lexicography. The primary point is a logical one."[571] The precise nature of homiletical application is dependent upon the text at hand. The failure to notice this has resulted in each of the contemporary approaches to homiletical application (*CTH, NH, PLH,* and in *PMH*) suffering from a debilitating monological constraint that inevitably twists texts into *a priori* molds. With a polymorphic view, one approaches every text in such a way as to allow the nature of application as that particular text shapes it to inform the nature of homiletical application for that particular text. Approaching the text with this kind of openness helps the interpreter resist reducing or distorting the text in the process of interpretation (in the study) and in the process of preaching (in the pulpit).

Conclusion

This chapter alerts us to both the complex factors that shape the structure of application and to the root differences between the three hermeneutical approaches to application that fund the various approaches to application in homiletics. In our explanation of the open-closed text continuum we saw the need for a vigorous and

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[570] *Ibid.*, 411-14.
[571] *Ibid.*, 415.

flexible view of application's role in understanding. This was followed by analysis of the notion of ideality. The static view of the *Distinct* approach, the dynamic view of the *Involved* approach, and the denial of the *Determinate* approach all pointed to the presence of deeper issues. It was in the section regarding history that some of the most basic forces, i.e., pre-philosophic assumptions, behind the competing views of application began to emerge. In fact, by the end of our exploration of the hermeneutical ecology of application, we saw that the various views of history, coupled with the construal of the subject-object relation significantly shaped the differing approaches to ideality. At this point we see how and why each school is able or unable to deal sufficiently with the full range of texts.

In this chapter we demonstrated the fact that different approaches to homiletical application are the result of deep theological, philosophical, and prephilosophical differences that often constitute antithetical views of reality. Derrida's view of ideality, for example, is irreconcilable with Hirsch's. And homiletical approaches to application that are shaped by these different views are not simply different ways of doing homiletical application; one must decide between them. Consequently an examination of the hermeneutical basis of homiletical application has been critical for our study.

In the following lengthy quotation, Paul Ricoeur weaves together the various nuances regarding the relationship of application and meaning and the role of application in the process of understanding that we have highlighted throughout this chapter.

> The task of interpretation, when applied to a specific text, is not "to understand its author better than he understood himself," according to a phrase which goes back to Schleiermacher. Rather, the task is to submit oneself to what the text says, to what it intends, and to what it means. But this independence, this sufficiency, this objectivity of the text presupposes a conception of meaning which borrows more from Husserl than from Dilthey...The moment of exegesis is not that of existential decision but that of "meaning," which, as Frege and Husserl have said, is an objective and even an 'ideal' moment (ideal in that meaning has no place in reality, not even in psychic reality). Two thresholds of understanding then must be distinguished, the threshold of "meaning" which is what I just described, and that of "signification," which is the moment when the reader grasps the meaning, the moment when the meaning is actualized in existence. This entire route of comprehension goes from the ideality of meaning to existential signification....Therefore, far from the objective and the existential being contraries...it must be said that the meaning of the text holds these two moments closely together. It is the objectivity of the text, understood as content—bearer of meaning and demand for meaning—that begins the existential movement of appropriation...If there is no objective meaning, then the text no longer says anything at all; without

> existential appropriation, what the text does say is no longer living speech. The task of a theory of interpretation is to combine in a single process these two moments of comprehension.[572]

This view of interpretation does not fit neatly into the *Distinct, Involved,* or *Determinate* approaches but moves beyond all three in important ways, and highlights two issues that remain for our discussion. First, we need a way of wrestling with the problem of how the historicity of the text and the historicity of the interpreter can be simultaneously respected, without the center of gravity shifting to either pole, without either being swallowed up by the other. A way is needed that does not claim too much or too little with regard to the inter-relatedness of application and meaning, since both result in an effective taming of the text that, in the words of Trevor Hart, "is utterly inappropriate for a Christian reading of it as Scripture."[573] Second, it has become apparent over the course of this chapter, and is an implication of the quotation from Ricoeur, that the relationship of homiletical application and hermeneutics is focused in the role of application in the process of understanding. It remains, therefore, to provide an account of the nature of application in light of the structure of understanding. Ricoeur's insight sets us up to explore these last two issues before moving from theory (part one of this dissertation) to praxis (part two of this dissertation).

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[572] Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 397-98.

[573] Hart, "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture," 194. See also, Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; Turner, "Historical Criticism and Theological Hermeneutics of the New Testament."

CHAPTER 4

THE THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF APPLICATION, PART 2: THE STRUCTURE OF UNDERSTANDING AND THE NATURE OF APPLICATION

Introduction

Over the course of chapter three we saw that it is the role of application in the process of understanding that provides the key to a proper construal of homiletical application. It was established that application is necessarily involved in understanding. This brings up an unavoidable question—How is objective knowledge of meaningful phenomena possible once one has abandoned the pretension of a constituting reflection? In other words, is mediated truth objective truth? Once we realize that we cannot, through reflection, transcend historical context and horizon and know things as they really are in themselves, how does one know anything?

The current chapter builds upon the hermeneutics that fund *NH* and *PLH*. However, we will go beyond the hermeneutical substructure of these two approaches in order to correct and strengthen what is presently there. Therefore, the *Involved* label will be maintained, but it is no longer to be understood as neatly compatible with the hermeneutical foundations of *NH* and *PLH*. What follows is an articulation of how and why the historic moment of understanding can be "harnessed for arriving at the truth which is attainable to us despite all the limitations imposed upon us by the finitude of our understanding."[574] We will see *how* an opposition to the Cartesian and Husserlian quest for a starting point does not necessarily yield a radical relativism. The standard dichotomies, entrenched since the Enlightenment—reason and tradition, reason and prejudice, reason and authority—are finally avoidable. Most importantly, in our analysis of the structure of understanding the nature of application will come more sharply into focus. This will prepare us for part two of this dissertation – an interpretation of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, followed by a

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[574] Bleicher, *The Hermeneutic Imagination*, 73. See also his definition of "the 'problem of hermeneutics'" as the issue of how it is possible to "render accounts of subjectively intended meaning objective in the face of the fact that they are mediated by the interpreter's own subjectivity" (*Idem*, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 1).

demonstration of the movement from interpretation to preaching that demonstrates the role of application in the process of understanding as the specific link between the theological-hermeneutical analysis of application and the nature of homiletical application.

The Trustworthiness of Practical Knowledge

To argue that reason is inseparable from its historical context, rooted in human finitude, is an attempt to defend practical knowledge against the inappropriate hegemony of a technology based on the *Naturwissenschaften.* This approach resists the belief that in the final analysis the only viable alternatives open to us are either some form of objectivism or some form of relativism. The implicit suggestion throughout this project has been that such a misleading and distortive dichotomy is based upon an acceptance of some sort of Cartesianism. In this manner, relativism and objectivism are two sides of the same coin.[575] Regarding the role of application in understanding, the differences of the *Distinct* approach and the *Determinate* approach are less significant than what they share.[576]

Our quest for a *via media* between the positivistic meaning of the *Distinct* approach and the solipsistic phenomenalist meaning of the *Determinate* approach has exposed deep flaws and posed serious questions for the very intelligibility of these two hermeneutical approaches. In the current chapter, this critique will continue while moving in a more positive direction through an examination of Gadamer's notion of *Horizontverschmelzung.* In this notion the radical relativism of the *Determinate* approach will be further undermined as we establish how understanding can be limited without being closed, how understanding is essentially open to the appropriation of that which is alien. On the one hand, this will implicitly critique the myth that we are forever imprisoned in our own horizons, paradigms, and culture. On the other hand, it will expose the myth of the arbitrary – what we believe to be real, true, or right is nothing more than an arbitrary approval of the tradition to which we belong. While it is true that we belong to history before it belongs to us, and it is therefore foolish to think that one can escape the prejudgments that constitute our

[575] Cf., Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism,* 19; and Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge,* 135.

[576] Cf., Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur,* 7.

being, it will also become evident in the discussion of horizons that "we are always in the process of modifying and shaping what we are becoming."[577]

The general weight of "public" opinion (both inside and outside the academy) still seems to be tilted toward relativism. As Bernstein colorfully writes, "Relativism, a stream in the philosophy of the past two hundred years that began as a trickle, has swelled in recent times into a roaring torrent."[578] Given the current proliferation of readings that over-privilege the freedom of the interpreter, it is understandable that the *Distinct* approach is concerned to reaffirm the need for objectivity in hermeneutics. However, faced with the threat of relativism and skepticism, Hirsch and company go too far in the opposite direction and become unnecessarily dogmatic regarding theoretical objectivity. For Hirsch, there is "no objectivity unless meaning itself is unchangeable." He furthermore understands that the notion of meaning that is changeable "destroys the basis both for any agreement among readers and for any objective study whatever."[579] As we saw in chapter three, attempts to move from pure meaning to pure application are not so clear as the *Distinct* approach would have one believe. The commitment to objectivism has driven the *Distinct* approach to neglect the finitude of the interpreter. This results in the attempt to split off two distinct moments in understanding. But it is a mistake to view application as something that one adds to a cognitive (philological or historical) understanding because application partially constitutes the very core of understanding.

The *Involved* approach is not blind to the threat that relativism poses for genuine knowledge. Gadamer holds just such an awareness clearly in view.[580] This is why Jean Grondin can describe Gadamer's interpretation of understanding as "animated by an essential tension between the fidelity of the text and the necessity of its application to the present context."[581] While some interpretations do less justice to the text than others, and some even do violent injustice, the *Involved* approach attempts to respect the reader as a particularized human being and the text as an entity on its own rather than a pliable substance to be molded in the reader's hands.

The danger is that one's hermeneutic commits one to either (1) some sort of reductionism rendering meaning as possessable in its pure unadulterated essence,

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[577] Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, 167.
[578] *Ibid.*, 13.
[579] Hirsch, *VI*, 214.
[580] E.g., Gadamer, *TM*, 332.
[581] Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 107-8.

void of the interpreter's point of view, or (2) collapsing meaning into its significance. There is no such thing as a bare historical event; and there is no such thing as bare meaning. We must renounce the fiction of a human interpreter gaining a god's eye view of meaning. We must equally deny the fiction of having no choice but to collapse meaning into perception. A critically involved view of the role of application will insist on a full account of the perspective and context of the interpreter (this will become more precisely articulated in the remainder of this chapter) together with a view of the stability of meaning characterized by the notion of dynamic ideality. This essential otherness of the text has a life and set of appropriate meanings that are not only potentially independent of the author, they are also potentially independent of the interpreter.

Under this approach an interpretation is different from and yet also the same as that which is being interpreted. As Weinsheimer argues, if it lacks an essential coherence (in some sense) to the text, it is not an interpretation but a new text. However, if it is not different (in some sense) then it is not an interpretation but a copy of the text. Interpretation moves between the two poles of correctness and creativity. The correct pole recognizes the fact that interpretations of texts are indeed interpretations of texts that are "continuous and self-identical over time." This is why there can be wrong interpretations. The creative pole explains the "discontinuity and self-difference" which render interpretations "not just duplicates" of the text at hand "but genuinely other."[582]

Craig Bartholomew helpfully reminds us that one should refuse "to make the aims of the interpreter decisive." A hermeneutic aimed at hearing the "message of the text" will insist that the "primary responsibility of the interpreter is to read the text along the grain, as it were."[583] Having offered such a warning, Bartholomew carefully nuances a type of objectivity that is possible and necessary. "Thick objectivity" contrasts with the "thin rationalist understanding of objectivity which reduces the truth of biblical texts to rational propositions and the thin historical-critical approach which generally fails to recognize the literary and kerygmatic nature of biblical texts because of its overwhelming interest in history." While thin objectivity should be rejected because it distorts the biblical text, one "would be quite wrong to relinquish *any* notion of objectivity or realism, as some postmoderns

[582] Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 87.
[583] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 220.

do." One should reject the "reductionistic Enlightenment understanding of objectivity" because it does not account for all of the "factors that influence the acquisition of knowledge, and it yields a narrow view of biblical textuality." Bartholomew argues for a "thicker notion of method *and* of biblical textuality...since interpretation involves both of these elements." This means that we must broaden rather than abandon "the quest for objectivity." The "thicker notion" of textuality takes into account three qualities of the biblical text: the historical, literary, and ideological (or theological).[584] To accompany this thicker notion of textuality, Bartholomew calls for a correspondingly "thicker notion of readers which takes into account religion, gender, culture, historical period and so on."[585]

This is to reject the scientistic view of objectivity as "the means by which clean, clear, conceptual knowledge unalloyed by subjective preconceptions is obtained by accepting nothing that the 'natural light' of reason cannot 'verify' through experiment."[586] The hermeneutical experience should be understood as objective, in the sense of a truly historical objectivity.[587] It is a historicized interpreter who is seeking to understand a historicized text.[588]

One more point needs to be made, the issue of objectivity versus subjectivity, of trustworthy knowledge versus a radical relativism cannot be ultimately faced in a theological vacuum. Bartholomew states the issue clearly.

> Contra Barthes [*sic*] anti-theological move which is endorsed by many postmoderns, we insist that the reality of God and the existence of humans, texts and history as part of his creation makes determinate meaning principally possible. There is such a thing as the true meaning of a biblical text and this meaning ought to be the goal of interpretation, even if as finite humans we can never be sure we have discovered it in its fullness. We share this commitment to objective truth with historical critics, but our understanding of objectivity is different from theirs.[589]

In the last chapter we saw the necessity and the fruitfulness of just such a response.

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[584] See the first chapter of Sternberg's, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* for a masterful articulation and defense of the biblical text as characterized by these qualities.

[585] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 220-21. Cf. Toulmin's discussion of "thick description" in *Cosmopolis*, 43. See also, Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 45.

[586] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 243.

[587] Cf., *Ibid.* As MacIntyre points out, "a great deal turns on the nature of our awareness of the contingencies of our historical situatedness and that a certain kind of awareness, while not providing a standpoint outside history, can transform our relationship to that history" (*Idem*, "On Not Having the Last Word," 158).

[588] Vanhoozer insightfully addresses this issue in his article, "Truth" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 820.

[589] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 211-12.

The Fusion of Horizons

It is obvious from chapter three how the *Involved* approach avoids the objectivism of the *Distinct* approach. Thus far in the current chapter we have argued that one must resist the radical relativism of the *Determinate* approach. But *how* precisely does one stop the meaning of the text from falling completely under the "empire of the finite capacities" of the reader?[590] The answer lies in the notion of dynamic ideality.

In the section of chapter three on ideality, I appealed to Ricoeur's description of understanding as the appropriation of "the meaning of the text itself, conceived of in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text."[591] The ideal meaning of a text is characterized by its power of disclosure, "the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things...the project of a world, the pro-position of a mode of being in the world that the text opens up in front of itself."[592] This is far from saying that the text is subjected to the power of the subject who interprets it. The primary projection should not be that of the reader, but that of the text. Understanding then is the event of disclosure whereby the subject gains an enlarged horizon.

In this view of application, the meaning of the text ceases to appear as a kind of object to be possessed. As Ricoeur points out, application implies "a moment of dispossession of the egoistic and narcissistic ego."[593] The role of application in understanding is perhaps best understood as following the "arrow" of the ideal sense of the text.[594] This enlarged horizon, actually this enlarged (new) self, proceeds from an understanding of the text and is therefore in contrast to the ego, which claims to precede the understanding of the text. As Ricoeur argues, in this approach the text "gives a self to the ego."[595]

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[590] Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 94.

[591] *Ibid.*, 92.

[592] *Ibid.*, 94. In the first and last volumes of *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur offers a distinction between the "world of the text" and the "world in front of the text." The former identifies the immanent "narrated world" of the text, while the latter is akin to Gadamer's notion of *Horizontverschmelzung*. See, vol 1:77-81; vol 3: chp 7. However, this is not to imply that a fusion of horizons does not occur until the second threshold. As Gadamer points out, a fusion is necessary even in the understanding of the first threshold; that is, a fusion must occur at every stage in order for understanding to occur at all. And yet, the fusion is more pronounced at the latter stage.

[593] Ricoeur, *Interpretation*, 94.

[594] *Ibid.*

[595] *Ibid.*, 95.

In combining this approach to application with the dynamic notion of ideality one realizes that to interpret a text is to "submit oneself to what the text says, to what it intends, and to what it means." But the independent meaning of the text is only the first of two thresholds that constitute understanding. The second threshold emerges "the moment...the reader grasps the meaning, the moment when the meaning is actualized in existence."[596] To accomplish this, the interpreter must

> follow the path of thought opened up by the text...place oneself *en route* towards the *orient* of the text. We are invited by this remark to...search beyond a subjective process of interpretation as an act *on* the text – for an objective process of interpretation which would be the act *of* the text.[597]

In this sense it is a mistake to assert that the meaning of the text is the intention of the author. Rather, here the meaning of the text is what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction. The text seeks to place the interpreter in its meaning.[598] In short, a good text will avoid both the tyranny portrayed by the *Distinct* approach and the anarchy of the *Determinate* approach. Against the former, one will reject the idea that application is simply an external addition to the text; something that occurs after exegesis. Against the latter, one will reject the idea that "our cognitive frameworks separate us into incommensurable camps, living in the aftermath of the mythical tower of Babel."[599] If the first threshold is absent, there is no objective meaning and the text can say nothing at all. If the second threshold is absent then "whatever the text does say is no longer living speech." The job of a theory of interpretation, Ricoeur argues, is to "combine in a single process these two moments of comprehension."[600]

We have arrived at the key concept of *Horizontverschmelzung.* In order to maintain a balance of fidelity to the text and fidelity to the historicity of the interpreter in an appraisal of the role of application in understanding, a fusion of horizons, in which "the interpreter is grasped and addressed, and can appropriate...[the] truth as his own,"[601] must be in view. In the following exploration of this magisterial concept, we will see that "historicity is the motive force behind

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[596] Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations,* 397-98.

[597] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* 161-62. In his use of "threshold," Ricoeur is not indicating a sharp temporal distinction between the two moments. In fact, a great deal of overlap occurs, so that the two thresholds are distinguishedable more in analysis than in reality.

[598] Vanhoozer wryly observes: "Skepticism, insofar as it dissents from this [chastened] view in its all-or-nothing insistence on knowledge, resembles an epistemological tantrum that refuses to accept the human condition" (*Idem, Meaning,* 300).

[599] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur,* 88.

[600] Ricoeur, *Conflict,* 397-98.

[601] Thiselton, *Two Horizons,* 319.

every effort to understand,"[602] ideality is the mediating link in the fusion of horizons, and application is beneficially involved in the process of understanding while not overrunning the event.

When an interpreter seeks to develop a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* she is attempting to become aware of her hermeneutical situation, her standpoint—a vision limiting place, a point of view.[603] This *horizon* is defined by Gadamer as, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[604] The importance of this concept for the process of understanding caused Heidegger to draw together the two ideas of perspective and the hermeneutical circle in order to explain that for understanding to occur "what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way."[605] In Gadamerian terms, to understand something one must get hold of the appropriate horizon – the horizon of inquiry that is conducive to the tradition being encountered. This getting-hold-of-the-right-perspective, though, is not a matter of disregarding one's own horizon as one moves into the other's horizon.

> Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation. For what do we mean by "transposing ourselves"? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of "transposing ourselves." If we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we will understand him—i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting *ourselves* in his position.[606]

Gaining the appropriate horizon is to look past the *close-at-hand*, not in order to *look away* from it,[607] but so that one can see it more clearly—within a larger perspective.

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[602] Grondin, *Introduction*, 143.

[603] The difficulty of such a task is obvious when one considers the fact that "the very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it" (Gadamer, *TM*, 301). This is not a function of inadequate reflection, it is because we are finite beings; and one implication of our finitude is that we can never be completely aware of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. "The standpoint that is beyond any standpoint, a standpoint from which we could conceive its true identity, is a pure illusion" (Ibid., 376).

[604] Ibid., 302. This concept is not entirely new with Gadamer. Husserl's phenomenology highlighted the concept of *Lebenswelt*, which Heidegger and Gadamer successively exploit.

[605] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 195.

[606] Gadamer, *TM*, 305.

[607] Ricoeur helpfully points out that this mistake is the error of objectivism whereby one presumes to abandon one's own perspective and to purely adopt the perspective of the otherness of the text. "Nothing is more disastrous than this fallacious assimilation. For the text, thus treated as an absolute object, is divested of its claim to tell us something about something. This claim can be sustained only by the idea of a prior understanding concerning the thing itself. Nothing destroys more the very sense of the historical enterprise than this objective distancing, which suspends both the tension of points of view and the claim of tradition to transmit a true speech about what is" (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 75).

Ironically, it is only by the juxtaposition of the two horizons that one becomes aware of either horizon.[608] There is, then, a characteristic circularity, or better, a dialectical tension, to the relationship of the two horizons. Thus, an attempt to disregard one's own "horizon of a particular present"[609] in an effort to obtain the best horizon for understanding is doomed for two reasons. On the one hand, the horizon constituted by one's own prejudices is never totally separate from the horizon of the past. For, in order to form the horizon of the present one must foreground something. In foregrounding something it is necessary to foreground that something from something else, which is in turn foregrounded from it. As Gadamer articulates it, "all foregrounding also makes visible that from which something is foregrounded."[610] So the horizon of the present can only be formed in relation to the horizon of the past. And on the other hand, as the above quote of Gadamer addressing the concept of transposing oneself indicates, the present horizon is necessary in order to form a past horizon. Ricoeur effectively grasps the interrelatedness of the two horizons when he claims that the interpreter's horizon is "the finitude of what is near in its openness towards the remote."[611] It is a mistaken view of *Horizontverschmelzung,* then, to infer that the two horizons can be purely isolated and then clearly brought together.

Approaching a text with a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* is to approach a text with a present horizon that enables one to listen in such a way that the text is allowed to bring out its own meaning.[612]

> [A] person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why an hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings.[613]

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[608] Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another.*

[609] Gadamer, *TM,* 305.

[610] Ibid.

[611] Therefore, "only insofar as I place myself in the other's point of view do I confront myself with my present horizon, with my prejudices. It is only in the tension between the other and the self, between the text of the past and the point of view of the reader, that prejudice becomes operative and constitutive of historicity" (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics,* 76).

[612] "Hermeneutics encourages not objectification but listening to one another" (Gadamer, foreword to *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics,* xi). "As I know that I have been worked by history, I am aware that I am in its debt, but I am also aware of the limits of my knowledge. This knowledge allows me to open myself to the perspective of others" (Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer,* 100).

[613] Gadamer, *TM,* 269, cf. 293.

This is Gadamer's version of what Heidegger was getting at when he encouraged the interpreter to "com[e] to the text in the right way."[614] Here one understands a text not in spite of tradition (prejudice) but because of the appropriate "foregrounding" of tradition.

Openness to the truth-claim of that which one is encountering is a fundamentally distinguishing mark of hermeneutical consciousness.[615] Gadamer argues that the structure of this openness is actually the structure of a question since to genuinely question is to be open to that which is not yet determined.[616]

> When one knows he does not know, and when he does not therefore through method assume that he only needs to understand more thoroughly *in the way he already understands,* then he acquires that structure of openness characterizing authentic questioning.[617]

This is not to say that genuine questioning is absolutely open or boundless. After all, "the sense of the question is the only direction from which the answer can be given if it is to make sense."[618] By asking a *certain* question the thing being questioned is cast in a *certain* light. There is a crucial distinction between authentic questions and inauthentic questions. The latter are presented with the sole intention of proving oneself right and not of gaining understanding.[619] To ask an authentic question one must genuinely "want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know."[620] So a real question presupposes openness and, at the same time, necessarily delimits options of response.[621]

Asking good questions is an art, not a skill or a craft. It is to "allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in a dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion."[622] Ultimately then, the good questioner, the good interpreter, is one who can preserve a stance of openness.

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[614] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 195.

[615] Gadamer's eloquent claim that, "The soul of hermeneutics consists in recognizing that perhaps the other is right" (*Suddeutsche Zeitung* of 10-11 February 1990. Quoted in Grondin, *Philosophy*, 100).

[616] Gadamer, *TM,* 362.

[617] Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* 198. Emphasis his.

[618] Gadamer, *TM,* 362.

[619] Gadamer highlights the fact that "Plato shows in an unforgettable way where the difficulty lies in knowing what one does not know. It is the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain an admission of ignorance. It is opinion that suppresses questions" (Ibid., 366).

[620] Ibid., 363.

[621] Cf. the famous dictum of Merleau-Ponty, "Something of the nature of the question passes into the answer" (*Idem, In Praise of Philosophy,* 14).

[622] Ibid., 367.

Since "to understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question,"[623] choosing a good question is essential to understanding. An appropriate interpretation will be related to the question presupposed by the text; the question of which the text is an answer.[624] The initial requirement of interpretation "is to understand the horizon of meaning or of questioning within which the direction of meaning of the text is determined."[625] But this presents a problem. One can only approach the horizon of the text from within one's own horizon; therefore one's own questions of the text cannot be identical with the questions driving the original author of the text. The process of understanding, therefore cannot be reproductive; it will be creative through a reversal of the question and answer relationship.

When an interpreter engages a text the text actually puts a question to the interpreter. There is, then, something "like a dialogue in which the reader exposes himself...to the effects of the text, while the text is exposed to the reader's interests and prejudices."[626] This process reveals that all texts, no matter where they may be located on the Ecchian open – closed continuum are actually open to some degree.

> In order to answer the question put to us, we the interrogated must ourselves begin to ask questions. ...Reconstructing the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer itself takes place within a process of questioning through which we try to answer the question that the text asks us. A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that circumscribed the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have been encountered by the traditionary word.[627]

Here is one of Gadamer's most important contributions to hermeneutics. "On the one hand there is no presuppositionless interpretation. On the other hand the text must be able to speak what is new. It must not merely reflect the interpreter's own" prejudgments.[628] Seen in this way conversation is a "non-manipulatory mode of apprehending truth." What counts as true is not predetermined and something that is

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[623] Gadamer, *TM,* 375.

[624] Ibid., 370; *Idem, Philosophical Hermeneutics,* 11. For good analysis of this aspect of Gadamer's thought see, Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics," 225.

[625] Palmer, *Hermeneutics,* 200. Marshall argues that, "The power of interpretive consciousness lies in grasping a question—not a question we put critically to a text, but the question the text puts to us. A text that puts us to the question separates us from our mere desires and wishes, from the commitments and entanglements of our present course of life" (*Idem,* "Truth, Universality, and Interpretation," 82).

[626] Vanhoozer, *Meaning,* 106. Cf., Grondin, *Introduction,* 124. Gadamer insists that this is a genuine dialogue, for not only do interpreters apply their horizons to the text, "to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves" (*TM,* 398).

[627] Gadamer, *TM,* 374.

[628] Thiselton, *Two Horizons,* 304.

genuinely new emerges—something "which does not reflect the prior manipulative interests of one or more of the speakers."[629] The pursuit of an understanding, in a dialogue, requires more than merely "putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view." The goal is to be "transformed into a communion in which" the participants do not remain as they were.[630] It is this axiom of question and answer that underwrites the concept of encounter that constitutes the *Horizontverschmelzung* that is all hermeneutical experience.[631] My finitude precludes any final Hegelian-type synthesis, but it does not imprison me in my own point of view precisely because my point of view is not fixed and immutable; it can be enlarged.

In summary, when an interpreter approaches a text with a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*, there is an engagement between the otherness, or the pastness, of the text and the interpreter's present horizon. There must be a steadfast refusal to allow either horizon to eclipse the other. It is this meaningful encounter wherewith the two horizons are allowed to form and inform one another that yields the experience of understanding. This process is similar to the process of understanding that occurs in an ordinary conversation between two individuals in which it is essential for each person to discover the other's perspective in order to understand their ideas. There is a mutual attempt to understand the significance of what that person is saying (whether it is agreeable or not).[632]

> *Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as* participating *in an event of tradition,* a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated [*vermitteln*]. This is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.[633]

For Gadamer, understanding is the encounter of the dialectical tension of the points of view of the other and the self that results in the fusion of the horizon of the subject and the horizon of the object.[634] However, in an interview with Riccardo Dottori, Gadamer clearly disclaims "that the horizon that one speaks of in the fusion of the

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[629] Thiselton, *Interpreting God*, 70-1.

[630] Gadamer, *TM*, 379.

[631] Thiselton describes the fusion of horizons as the "productive interaction" resulting from the tension set into play by "*the distinctiveness of the horizons of the* text as against the distinctiveness" of one's own horizon (Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 8. Emphasis his.).

[632] Gadamer, *TM*, 270.

[633] *Ibid.*, 258.

[634] *Ibid.*, 306. This is directly opposed to Hirsch's view which envisages the subject and the object as essentially independent.

horizons of interpretation is nothing that one ever reaches, so it can't assume a metaphysical position....The horizon of interpretation changes constantly, just as our visual horizon also varies with every step that we take."[635] And still, the notion of *Horizontverschmelzung* takes us to the depths of how understanding occurs. Thiselton applies it to biblical interpretation. "Two horizons can never become totally identical; at best they remain separate but close...The Bible can and does speak today, in such a way as to correct, reshape, and enlarge the interpreter's own horizons."[636] The hermeneutical circularity of alienation and reunion is the heart of *Horizontverschmelzung*.[637]

It is the nature of the hermeneutical problem as shaped by the double-sided impact of history that Gadamer affirms in his articulation of meaning as a productive event of understanding. One might wonder if this precludes any distinction whatsoever between 'meaning' and 'significance,' or 'meaning' and 'appropriation,' or 'interpretation' and 'criticism'; for surely such a distinction is necessary and evident. The problem lies when one takes the various pairs of terms as polar opposites. By avoiding such a modernist paradigm, Gadamer himself highlights the relative distinction between what a text meant and what it means today.

Conclusion

In *The Symbolism of Evil* Paul Ricoeur wrote, "Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again."[638] Historical exegesis is essential[639] yet insufficient. For the purpose of understanding there must be both distancing and openness to the text. In response to the above quotation, Lewis S. Mudge wrote beautifully of the desire to encounter the Living Word of God; to hear the Scriptures speak today.

> This longing is shared today by the many for whom historical-critical method remains indispensable, but at the same time insufficient to bring us to a "post-critical moment" of openness to the biblical summons. Is there an intellectually responsible way through the critical sands, always shifting, sometimes

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[635] Gadamer, *A Century of Philosophy*, 61. It is interesting to compare this to Schleiermacher's insight, highlighted by Duke, in "Translator's Introduction," 6.

[636] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, xix.

[637] Cf. the earlier reference to Ricoeur's articulation of the task of interpretation theory as combining into a single process the two thresholds of meaning and appropriation.

[638] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 349.

[639] Even Gadamer recognizes this. Consider his question: "How does the duty to think critically bear on the fact that understanding is determined by tradition?" (Gadamer, *TM*, 555). In other words, as Stiver says of Ricoeur on this point, the hope of providing "a pathway out of the life-sapping critical desert" is not the offer of a "shortcut" (*Theology after Ricoeur*, 64).

> abrasive, to an oasis where bedrock, with its springs of water for the spirit, once again appears?[640]

Chapters three and four have outlined the role of application in understanding for just such a way forward. This approach respects the heterogeneity of the whole range of language games that constitute the written text of the Bible. It does not ignore the subtleties of *how* various texts convey content, sense, meaning, and ultimately, truth, to which we are called to respond.[641] This approach vigorously affirms a robust understanding of the nature of truth. Because Christianity is grounded upon particular and historical events it would be an error to reduce the truth of Christian faith to abstract propositions, just as it is an error to presume that the truth of Christian faith is amenable to the types of epistemic procedures that demand an indubitable warrant.

It is now time to turn from theory to praxis. The next chapter will begin part two of this dissertation. There we will focus on a specific biblical text. Application is polymorphous and therefore must be considered in relation to particular language-games. In chapter five we will interpret Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. As we experience a vigorous involvement with the struggles set out by Qoheleth we will see that the nature of application in homiletics grows out of the relationship of application to the event of understanding. This will illustrate the necessity of our long hermeneutical route to the problem of homiletical application.

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[640] Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," 1.

[641] Again, Thiselton's work is beneficial. Regarding the wide variety of texts in Christian Scripture, he writes that they, "teach, but they also invite us to celebrate with joy the deeds and reign of God. They make truth-claims about the world and reality; but they also make us uncomfortable recipients of judgment and comfortable recipients of grace. They subvert our idols, but they also address us, heal us, build us, and transform us. Any theory of textuality which cannot make room for these textual functions cannot be given a paradigmatic place in biblical interpretation" (Thiselton, *New Horizons,* 131-32). In addition, it should be restated that the notion of open-closed texts respects the author as a necessary component in interpretation. After all, it is obviously the author who encoded the text with a degree of constraint or freedom.

PART TWO:
HOMILETICAL APPLICATION AND ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATION IN THE STUDY: INTERPRETING ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29 WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE ROLE OF APPLICATION IN THE PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The time has come, in the colorful words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, "to put some flesh on these dry bones of abstraction."[642] Our concern in part two of this dissertation is to approach homiletical application *via* a particular language game since application is a polymorphous concept, and therefore what application *is* varies from language game to language game. In this, the first of two chapters in part two, we will interpret a particular biblical text in such a way as to expose the nature of application as that particular text shapes it. In the next chapter we will move from the nature of application in the process of understanding the particular text to the nature of application in the preaching of the particular text.

Only one text has been chosen. In order to get to the depths of the issue our interpretation of this text requires no less of a commitment to detail and rigour than was required in our analysis of the theological hermeneutics of homiletical application (i.e., part one of this dissertation). To be sure, this type of work needs to be done with a whole host of other texts, but for the purposes of this dissertation our single passage of scripture is enough.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is our text. One reason for this selection is that a "preacher" has authored it. From the third century C.E. until rather recently, Christian commentators followed the LXX in rendering קֹהֶלֶת as Ἐκκλησιαστοῦ and therefore took the author to be one addressing the ἐκκλησια. The current shift away from this reading is primarily based upon etymological arguments and because of the view that the author of the book is a skeptic. The early interpreters, however, were correct to associate Ecclesiastes with the ecclesia,

> for the author's message was directed at "the people" (12:9), namely the people of whom he was a part (that's what Greek *ekklēsiastēs* means). Moreover, his teachings are not presented as timeless philosophical propositions but as the

[642] Wolterstorff, "The Importance of Hermeneutics for a Christian Worldview," 29.

> deliberate proddings of a *rō'eh* ("shepherd, pastor") based on traditional teachings (12:11).[643]

In Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 we will see Qoheleth involved in two conversations. First, in a conversation with the tradition (which we now identify as the Biblical tradition of OT Wisdom). Second, in a conversation with his people whereby he works to draw them more deeply into the tradition. In this Qoheleth illustrates the two conversations any good preacher is involved in: a conversation with the text and a conversation with the congregation. In "Rehabilitating 'The Preacher," Seow demonstrates that Qoheleth not only reflects on the OT Wisdom tradition, he also "reflects upon the contemporary world in which his people" live, and he brings these two conversations together.[644]

A second reason that Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 has been chosen is because it is not an easy text. For this reason alone it is particularly suited to highlighting the hermeneutical substructure of the interpretation process. Difficult texts require the interpreter to step back and to reflect upon the reading process. Ecclesiastes as a whole is uniquely difficult. Choon-Leong Seow has described it on multiple occasions as probably the most "controversial" book in the Bible.[645] Commentators debate, *inter alia,* its place in the canon, date (anywhere from the tenth to the first century B.C.E.), overall message (from thoroughly pessimistic to radically optimistic), relationship to the OT Wisdom tradition (from iconoclastic to completely consistent), cultural setting (from Greek to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and even Buddhist), and structure (or complete lack thereof). Even in such a difficult book, our passage stands out as "one of the more difficult and perhaps one of the most notorious passages."[646] Its lack of cooperation with the reader, so to speak, means that this text is particularly cooperative for our purposes of hermeneutical reflection upon the nature of application and its role in the process of understanding.

Part one of this dissertation began where Augustine began in *DDC:* "There are two things on which all interpretation of scripture depends: the process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have

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[643] Seow, "Rehabilitating 'The Preacher,'" 113.

[644] *Ibid.*

[645] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, ix; *Idem,* "Rehabilitating 'The Preacher,'" 91; *Idem,* "Theology When Everything is Out of Control," 237. Seow, however, is certainly not alone in this observation.

[646] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 77-78. *Pace* Seow who gives pride of place to Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 in *Idem,* "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem," 209.

learnt."[647] Here, at the beginning of part two, we have therefore come back to the starting place. In the current chapter we will "discover what we need to learn." In the following chapter we will investigate the move from understanding the text to presenting the sermon. Together these two chapters will illustrate the relationship of the role of application in the preacher's conversation with the biblical text and the preacher's conversation with the gathered, worshiping community of faith.

N. T. Wright once wrote that, "Practice without theory is blind, but theory without practice is dumb."[648] It is time to leave the theory and get on with the practice. We have laid a foundation upon which to build the remaining work of this project. We have seen that one's view of the role of application in preaching is largely determined by one's view (conscious or unconscious) of the role of application in understanding. Now we will see that taking hermeneutics seriously not only helps us get at the text in important ways, it also leads to a fresh and powerful analysis of homiletical application.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 7:23 contains a semantic paradox. Qoheleth affirms that he has wisdom (כָּל־זֹה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה),[649] only to immediately deny his ability to acquire wisdom (אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי).[650] How does one handle this paradox?

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[647] Augustine, *DDC*, I:1.

[648] Wright, *New Testament*, 118.

[649] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries: Qoheleth 7.23-8.1a," 27; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 239-40; *Idem*, *A Time to Tear Down*, 263. While most commentators read the preposition ב in בַחָכְמָה to indicate agent or instrument (as Fox does), a few read בַחָכְמָה as the object of Qoheleth's search. Seow argues that nowhere in the Old Testament is the preposition -ב used to designate חָכְמָה as a direct object (*Idem*, *Ecclesiastes*, 120). For summary of the literature on this debate see Schoors, *Pleasing Word*, II:10-12.

[650] The antecedent of הִיא is most naturally taken to be "wisdom" or "becoming wise"' (i.e., אֶחְכָּמָה). E.g., Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 144; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 252; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 100; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 123; Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet*, 125; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 146; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 178; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 200; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144; Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 329. *Contra* Ginsberg, and Fox and Porten who identify the antecedent with זֶה, thus rendering the verse: "I examined by wisdom all that occurs in the world...; I said, I would be wise, but it—all that occurs in the world—was beyond my grasp" (Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 101; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 29). Then in *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, Fox invokes an Aramaism (reading the Aramaic חכם, "to know") while repointing אֶחְכָּמָה as אֶחְכְּמָה and thus takes the antecedent to be מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה (Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 239-41). However, in *A Time to Tear Down*, Fox seems to resist this approach (258, 264).

The History of Interpretation

In this chapter I will offer a brief survey of the history of interpretation of Ecclesiastes 7:23, in light of the paradox. The survey will focus on four illustrative moments: early Christian, rabbinic (early through medieval), Reformation (Martin Luther), and contemporary (Michael Fox). The main section of the chapter, a detailed exegetical analysis of the passage with special attention given to the hermeneutical aspect of interpretation, will follow.

Early Christian Interpretation (third century C.E. – Reformation)

In the earliest extant Christian interpretation of Ecclesiastes,[651] Gregory Thaumaturgos' *Metaphrasis in Ecclesiasten*[652] (3rd c. C.E.), Origen's disciple gives the book a distinctively Christian reading. He renders 7:23 Ἔγνων δὲ ταῦτα ἐγὼ ἅπαντά σοφίαν ἐκ Θεοῦ λαβών ἣν ὕστερον ἀπὸαλῶν οὐκέτι οἷός τε ἦμην ὅμοις εἶ ναι.[653] So, Qoheleth's admission of the inaccessibility of wisdom, becomes "Solomon's confession that he 'rejected' (ἀποβάλλω) wisdom after earlier 'receiving' (λαμβάνω) it from God."[654] In this interpretation the paradox is solved by chronology: Qoheleth had wisdom at one point, only to lose it later.

The general consensus of the Fathers was that the wisdom books collectively revealed "some of the finest wisdom about the deeper meaning of life that was available prior to the time that God became incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ." As a result, wisdom texts were seen as

> an acknowledgment of the limits of human understanding and of the difficulty for human beings to grasp the ultimate meaning of life, short of an intervention from God that Christians came to call the incarnation. Such ambiguities, even the futility, frustration and mere vanity of life, could be stated but not finally solved short of an understanding of Christian revelation.[655]

In this light, many of the Fathers (e.g., Athanasius, Basil the Great, John Cassian, Jerome, and Gregory of Nazianzus) read Ecclesiastes 7:23 as essentially a revelation of the immeasurability of Wisdom, which is a personification or personified agent of

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[651] Hippolytus of Rome and Origen both wrote on Ecclesiastes, but only a few fragments have been preserved.

[652] Thaumaturgus, *Metaphrasis in Ecclesiasten*, 987-1018. See Jarick's excellent translation, *Gregory Thaumaturgos' Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes*. Hereafter referred to as Thaumaturgos, *Ecclesiastes*.

[653] Thaumaturgos, *Ecclesiastes*, 183.

[654] *Ibid.*, 184.

[655] Wright, "Introduction to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon," in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, xvii.

God.[656] For, if Solomon, "the wisest of all,"[657] was unable to grasp Wisdom, to plumb the dizzying depths of God,[658] then what hope is there for any other human?[659] Thus, in the Patristics the presence and absence of wisdom in 7:23 is seen as a function of chronology (i.e., Gregory of Thaumaturgos) or due to the fact that wisdom itself is simply unreachable (i.e., Athanasius, Basil the Great, John Cassian, Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Luther). Early Jewish interpretation is similar.

Rabbinic Interpretation (first – sixteenth centuries C.E.)

Classic rabbinic Judaism spans the first six centuries C.E., and is represented by the *Midrash Rabbah. Qoheleth Rabbah*,[660] whose final form was set somewhere between the sixth and tenth centuries C.E.,[661] generally identifies wisdom as knowledge of Torah.[662] This is especially apparent in the *Midrash* on 7:23.

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[656] E.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, interprets 7:23 as a comment on the dizzying "profundities" of "the subject of God" (*On Theology, Theological Oration* [c. 380], 2 (28).21. Cited in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. Wright, 255.

[657] Basil the Great, *Concerning Faith*. Cited in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. Wright, 255. See, *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, eds. Catholic University of America (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947-), 9:63; Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Theology, Theological Oration*, 2 (28).21.

[658] "The more he [Solomon] entered into profundities, the more dizzy he became. And he declared the furthest point of wisdom to be the discovery of how very far away wisdom was from him" (Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Theology, Theological Oration*, 2 (28).21. Cited in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. Wright, 255). In another writing, Gregory illustrates this approach with a picturesque metaphor: "[T]he joy of what we have discovered is no greater than the pain of what escapes us; a pain, I imagine, like that felt by those who are dragged, while yet thirsty, from the water, or are unable to retain what they think they hold, or are suddenly left in the dark by a flash of lightening" (Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Defense of His Flight, Oration*. Cited in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. Wright, 255).

[659] For similar readings of 7:23-24 by Athanasius, Basil the Great, John Cassian, and Jerome see Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, 255.

[660] The basic Midrashic view of Ecclesiastes is that it is "the lessons of the greatest of all ancient wisdom teachers," Solomon (Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 19), who, having experienced both the glories and the disappointments of this world, wrote the book in his old age in order to expose the trivialness and transience of all worldly pursuits and earthly goods, and to show that happiness consists in study of Torah and good deeds (See, Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 32-3; and Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xxv). In order to support this biographical view of Solomon, a legend developed wherein Solomon, after having been "elated with riches and wisdom, departed from the ways of the Lord,...was dethroned by Ashmodai, the king of the demons, and expelled from his capital as an example of the effects of sin." Later, "[h]aving...confessed his sins, and denounced the folly of attempting to find satisfaction in earthly pleasures, the penitent Solomon was in his old age reinstated in the possession of his kingdom, here he died, at peace with God and man." It was this old, penitent, reinstated Solomon who wrote Ecclesiastes (Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 32-3).

[661] Sandberg, relying on Hirshman, Strack, and Stemberger, sets the date in the eighth century C.E. (Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 28. See, Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 345). However, Hirshman suggests somewhere between sixth and eighth centuries. *Idem*, *A Rivalry of Genius*, 107). Fox claims that it was the ninth or tenth century C.E. (Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, xxiv).

[662] E.g., *Qohelet Rabbah* on 1:13 "I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun. An unhappy business, that, which God gave men to be concerned with!" (JPS). One midrash states: "Rabbi Abbahu says: This refers to the futility of Torah study; for a person learns

> "All this I tested with wisdom."...Solomon was given wisdom equal to that of all Israel..."He became wiser than all men" (I Kings 5:11) – than Adam [who was wise enough to give names to all the created beings]....than Abraham...than Moses...than Joseph...Solomon said, Concerning all these (commandments) I have stood and investigated (their meaning), but the section of the red heifer (Numbers 19) I had to research. When I labored over it and studied it deeply, "I thought I could become wise, but it is far from me."[663]

While the identification of wisdom with Torah knowledge differs fundamentally from that given by Christian interpreters, there is an important similarity in the reading. By interpreting 7:23 as a reference to "the unattainability of a perfect understanding of Torah,"[664] the Rabbis see no paradox.[665] And yet, with the *Midrash* there emerges a crucial difference from the early Christian view, and it is in this Jewish interpretation that one finds the beginnings of the classic modern approach which sees the inaccessibility issue as a result of degree: It is "perfect understanding" that is beyond the grasp of humanity. In the eleventh century C.E., the gradation of wisdom as the interpretive key to 7:23 becomes more explicitly and precisely articulated.

Rashbam[666] (c.1080-c.1160), the renowned medieval French Talmudist and Biblical scholar, approached Ecclesiastes with a determined effort to interpret according to the literal meaning (Peshat).[667] He distinguishes two types of wisdom: one is readily accessible,[668] and is identified by the definite article,[669] the other is unattainable,[670] and is indefinite.[671] "[C]ommon,"[672] "ordinary wisdom"[673] leads one

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Torah and then forgets it. The Babylonian rabbis...said: It is for the good of humanity that one learns Torah and forgets it. For if a man studied Torah and never forgot it, he would be occupied with learning Torah for two or three years, and then he would return to his ordinary work and pay no attention to it the rest of his days. However, since a man studies Torah and does forget it, he will not remove himself from words of Torah" (Cited in Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 99).

[663] *Midrash Qoheleth* 7:23, cited in Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 103.

[664] *Midrash Qoheleth*, 7.23 from *Midrash Rabbah*.

[665] The traditional Jewish interpretation sees Ecclesiastes as Solomon's story after he has regained the throne and thus explains the paradox chronologically. See *Targum Qoheleth*.

[666] Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, grandson of famous Talmud and Bible commentator Rashi. For analysis of the debate over the authenticity of Rashbam's commentary on Qoheleth see, Japhet and Salters, eds. and translators, *The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth*, 19-33. (Hereafter referred to as *Rashbam*.) Japhet and Salters confirm Rashbam as the author.

[667] Japhet and Salters in *Rashbam*, 37, 59-63. For a discussion of the relationship of Rashbam to ancient Jewish interpretation and to modern exegesis see Sandberg, *Rabbinic Views of Qohelet*, 38-39; cf. Halivni, *Peshat and Derash*, 37.

[668] Rashbam on 2:13-14 (*Rashbam*, 108).

[669] Rashbam on 2:13 (*Ibid.*). Rashbam reads the definite article as the indicator for "common wisdom which the world needs...and with which we are conversant" (*Ibid.*). *Contra* Gordis who argues that the definite article indicates "*Hokmah par excellence*" (*Idem*, *Koheleth*, 209, 280).

[670] Rashbam on 2:3; 7:23, 24 (*Rashbam*, 104, 162).

[671] Rashbam on 2:13 (*Ibid.*, 108).

[672] Rashbam on 2:13-14 (*Ibid.*).

[673] *Ibid.*

to navigate life successfully. "[P]rofound,"[674] "superior"[675] wisdom explores "the attributes and works of" God and seeks "to comprehend his mind."[676] Unsurprisingly, then, Rashbam writes of 7:23-24:

> All this I have tested with wisdom: I have tested by my great wisdom everything regarding this matter. For I had said in my heart that I would become wise in profound wisdom; but it — this profound wisdom — is far from me, for I am unable to understand it or cope with it. That which is, is far off: profound (wisdom), which is of the past...it is far from me in that I cannot cope with it. [A]nd deep, very deep: is the quality of this superior wisdom, and who is that man who, by his great wisdom, can find it out?[677]

So influential is this view, that it is found five hundred years later in the work of Ibn Yachya, the great sixteenth century Italian Rabbi: "I could not master the kind of wisdom that would enable me to solve the deeper perplexities of life."[678] Martin Luther also followed this interpretation, and effectively carried it into the Protestant Reformation.

Reformation Interpretation (c. 1526 C.E., Martin Luther)[679]

In a significant way, Luther's reading of 7:23 has more in common with the Jewish readings of the eleventh century and later than with the regnant Christian approach. First of all, Luther explicitly rejects Jerome's *contemptus mundi* reading of Ecclesiastes, the standard Christian interpretation for a millennium.[680] Instead of teaching that one should "isolate oneself from human society, to live in stillness and silence; for it was impossible to serve God in the world,"[681] Luther interprets Ecclesiastes as Solomon's desire "to put us at peace and to give us a quiet mind in

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[674] Rashbam on 2:3, 13-14; 7:23, 24 (*Ibid.*, 104, 108, 162).

[675] Rashbam on 2:3; 7:24 (*Ibid.*, 104, 162).

[676] Rashbam on 8:17 (*Ibid.*, 176). Fox summarizes Rashbam's view of "profound" wisdom as the type of wisdom that seeks to grasp "God's motives" and "justice," and "the mysteries of creation" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, xxvi).

[677] Rashbam, on 7:23-24 (*Rashbam*, 162).

[678] Cited in Zlotowitz, trans. and compiler, *Koheles*, 142. *The Zohar* (c. 1290) goes back to a more traditional approach, in seeing no paradox, but rather an admission of the incomprehensibility of God: "All thoughts weary themselves when thinking of Him; and even Solomon, of whom it is said 'he is wiser than all men' (1 Kings 5:11), sought to perceive Him in thought, but could not; and so he said, 'I said: I will get wisdom; but it was far from me.'" The Zohar, *'En-Sof* and the World of Emmanation' 7, in Lachower and Tishby, eds., *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:268; similarly 3:1124). Cited in Christianson, *Ecclesiastes Through the Centuries*.

[679] Luther's "Notes on Ecclesiastes" come from a series of lectures delivered in 1526. See, Martin Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," 1-187.

[680] E.g., Luther's "Preface" and subsequent introduction in Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," 3-11. Cf. Jerome, *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, 1062-1174.

[681] Luther, *Ecclesiastes*, 4.

the everyday affairs and business of this life, so that we live contentedly."[682] It is "the vanity of the human heart" to be "never content with the gifts of God that are present." Instead, we think of "them as negligible" and "continually" look "for others, and then still others," and therefore are "not satisfied until" we achieve more, only to then despise what we have now "achieved" and so we look again "for something else."[683] In Ecclesiastes, then, Solomon is not condemning the world in itself, or its creatures. He is exposing and inveighing against the "miserable" and "depraved" state of human "affections."[684]

In light of his understanding of the overall thrust of Ecclesiastes, Luther writes of 7:23 that Solomon is showing us the pain that resulted from his own lack of contentment with the gift of wisdom he had received from God, and his pursuit of a wisdom that does not exist to humans.

> There is indeed such a thing as wisdom, but there is no such thing as a wise man of this kind....I wanted to be overly wise and to bring it about that the world would be governed by the strictest laws possible.[685]

The wisdom that does not exist (for a human, i.e., everything under the sun) is a wisdom that governs the world perfectly. Luther makes a similar comment with regard to 1:13: "And yet so wise and prudent a King," as Solomon himself, "did not achieve" everything he wanted, because "God did not give him this wisdom to make him capable of everything."[686]

Luther, like Ibn Yachya, approaches the paradox as Rashbam did. Modern commentators, both Christian and Jewish, continue this interpretative tradition,[687] resolving the paradox by seeing either two different *degrees* of wisdom (e.g., Delitzsch, Ogden, Brown, Provan, and Seow)[688] or two different *types* of wisdom (e.g., Gordis, Crenshaw, Christianson, Whybray, and Fontaine).[689]

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[682] *Ibid.*, 7.
[683] *Ibid.*, 10.
[684] *Ibid.*, 8, 11.
[685] *Ibid.*, 128-29.
[686] *Ibid.*, 22.
[687] Pahk, a rare exception, reads the paradox similarly to the Fathers when he argues that "wisdom of any kind is utterly beyond human reach" (*Idem*, "The Significance of אשר in Qoh 7,26," 374).
[688] Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 329; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 118; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 82-3; Provan, *Ecclesiastes*, 153, 155; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 259.
[689] Gordis, *Koheleth*, 209, 280; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 145; Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 208, 209; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 123; Fontaine, "'Many Devices,'" 144.

Contemporary Interpretation (1978 – present, Michael Fox)

Perhaps more than any other contemporary interpreter, Michael Fox has set the agenda with regard to this passage. Beginning with his 1978 article, co-authored with Bezalel Porten, "Unsought Discoveries: Qohelet 7:23-8:1a," and continued in his three subsequent commentaries,[690] Fox has highlighted the peculiarity of Qoheleth's admission of failure in his quest to become wise when all along he has insisted "that he succeeded quite well in becoming wise, and he never denies that his knowledge, whatever its limitations and vexations, was truly wisdom (and the epilogue agrees; see 12:9)."[691] Therefore, Fox argues, the solution to the paradox "must" lie in "a difference between the wisdom Qohelet aimed at but did not reach (implied by *ʾeḥkamah*) and the wisdom he *did* have."[692] A key difficulty with this approach, Fox points out, is in "finding the defining marks [of the different types of wisdom] in the context rather than coming up with a distinction *ad hoc*."[693]

For example, commentators too often, Fox points out, distinguish Qoheleth's attained versus unattainable wisdom by qualifying the latter in such a way that it can be nothing less than "a degree of wisdom obviously reserved for deity."[694] Ginsburg is guilty of such when he describes Qoheleth's desire as the intention to "obtain" that wisdom which would enable him to "fathom and comprehend the mysteries of Providence...the counsels of the Almighty."[695] This mistake is repeated in: Delitzsch's "metaphysical wisdom" that if "fully and completely" possessed would enable one to "expound the mysteries of time and eternity, and generally to solve the most weighty and important questions which perplex men;"[696] and in Ogden's "pure wisdom" able to transcend "all limits," and "lift the sage above the boundaries of

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[690] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*; *Idem, A Time to Tear Down*; and *Idem, Ecclesiastes* JPS.

[691] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 263; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 27; Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50-51. Longman argues that Fox makes the mistake of expecting too much consistency from Qoheleth, "forgetting that at times Qohelet's words are almost stream of consciousness." Longman prefers to read v 23 as an instance of Qoheleth stating "his wisdom program," then immediately catching himself, and admitting his failings. Thus, for Longman there is no paradox, the latter statement (אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכְּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי) is simply a correction of the first (כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה) (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 200).

[692] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264. See also, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28: "It does seem that Qohelet is using...[חכם] in two different ways here....There is a type of wisdom Qohelet claims to have and a type he does not claim." And, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50: "He amassed much wisdom—he learned a lot—yet the deeper wisdom eluded him."

[693] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264.

[694] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 27; see also Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264.

[695] Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 384-85.

[696] Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 331, 329.

human thought and experience;"[697] and Brown's "kind of wisdom that is...powerful enough to explain the world;"[698] and Provan's wisdom that is a "comprehensive" and "cumulative" understanding of the "universe;"[699] and Whybray's wisdom that is an "intimate knowledge of the divine activity itself;"[700] and Seow's "perfect wisdom" that is able "to understand the world thoroughly...to know the mysteries of the universe, to explain all the discrepancies that exist" and thus yield "control over life."[701] Fox's critique is twofold. First, whatever the difference between the attained and the unattainable, it must be determined by the context – that is, by an examination of Ecclesiastes in general, and the cotext of 7:23 in particular. Second, from an examination of Ecclesiastes it is apparent that Qoheleth does not suffer from so great a hubris that he would expect "a degree of wisdom...reserved for God,"[702] and then become "embittered when such...is denied him."[703] The latter mistake confuses Qoheleth's unattainable wisdom with a metaphysical speculation commonly recognized in wisdom literature as beyond human abilities (e.g., Prov. 30:3,4; Ben Sira 43:31-32; 11:4b; 16:20-22; 18:4-7; Job 11:7f; 28).

A second inadequate solution, that Fox points out, is to identify two types of wisdom that are distinguished, following Gordis, as "practical Wisdom" over against "speculative" wisdom (called "*Hokmah par excellence,*" and the "organon of Hokmah," and "the fundamental Wisdom").[704] Fox rightly argues that this distinction is of no help with Ecclesiastes 7:23, because it is a distinction that "the Israelite sages would not have made," and because Qohelet possesses and uses both "practical" and "speculative" wisdom[705] in his sprawling and capacious exploration (1:13).[706]

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[697] Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 118.

[698] Brown, *Ecclesiastes,* 83.

[699] Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,* 153, 155.

[700] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 123, cf. 124.

[701] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 259, 270.

[702] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 264.

[703] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 27.

[704] Gordis, *Koheleth,* 209, 280. [Fox cites Gordis, *Koheleth,* 199 for the term "speculative" wisdom, but it appears to be a wrong page reference.] Crenshaw follows Gordis' nomenclature (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes,* 145), but not his argument that the two types of wisdom are distinguished by the presence or absence of the definite article (Gordis, *Koheleth,* 209). (On the problematic nature of Gordis' reliance on the definite article see Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:11).

[705] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 264. While Fox does not clarify what he means by his own use of the term "speculative wisdom," it is clear that he does not mean the rational intellect as "the faculty used in the investigation and derivation of new truths," because he plainly states that the author of Ecclesiastes is the only Biblical author to associate the rational intellect ("the faculty used in the investigation and derivation of new truths") with *ḥokmah,* and furthermore, only the author of Ecclesiastes describes its operation, though there is an awareness of it in Job 28 (*Ibid.,* 74, 75).

In his most recent treatment of the paradox, Fox has affirmed Murphy's view:

> Obviously Qoheleth was a sage in the traditional sense; the entire book testifies to his deep roots in the wisdom tradition. But the tests he put it to made him realize that he was not truly wise or did not possess the wisdom he sought for.[707]

The wisdom that Qoheleth claims to *have* is a unity[708] constituted by a complex of two modes – faculty[709] and knowledge[710] – and various aspects – learning,[711] ingenuity,[712] good sense,[713] and speculative or theoretical wisdom.[714] (The last characteristic, speculative or theoretical wisdom, is significantly deepened and nuanced, in Fox's most recent analysis, with the replacement term: reason, understood as "the capacity for orderly thinking whereby one derives valid conclusions from premises.")[715] The wisdom that Qoheleth is unable to attain is defined in the context.[716] In this case, Qoheleth defines the unattainable wisdom by "showing what goal the activity indicated by this verb [אֶחְכְּמָה] could *not* attain."[717] According to Fox, the goal is revealed in 7:24 as מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה. In short, the unreachable wisdom is the "understanding of the rationale of events, including anomalous and unjust occurrences."[718]

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[706] Ginsberg offers a third option to the paradox when he invokes an Aramaism (reading the Aramaic חכם, "to know") while repointing אֶחְכְּמָה as אֶחְכְּמָה in order to create an object suffix that refers to כָּל־זֹה in v 23 and מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה in v 24. In *Qohelet and His Contradictions* Fox accepted this solution, but has since followed the vast majority of scholars in rejecting this as hyper-speculative. For specific interaction with Ginsberg, see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 258.

[707] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 72. See, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264.

[708] See Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 129-30.

[709] "As a faculty, wisdom is an intellectual power similar to intelligence in the uses to which it can be put. It encompasses common sense and practical skills. It includes the faculty of reason, that is, the capacity for orderly thinking whereby one derives valid conclusions from premises" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73; also, *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 116).

[710] Knowledge signifies "that which is known, the communicable content of knowledge. Knowledge gained and transmitted by study of books and lore is 'learning' or, if extensive and deep, 'erudition'" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73; also, *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 116).

[711] Learning encompasses: the "[k]nowledge gained and transmitted by study of books and lore" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73, 264); "knowledge of teachings and beliefs of the sort taught in wisdom literature. It is the type of wisdom that can be deliberately aggrandized (1:16)" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28). See also, Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50.

[712] Ingenuity speaks of "expertise in solving problems and attaining one's goals" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73).

[713] Good sense includes the "practical intelligence" or "practical know-how" that yields success in "personal behavior," "human relations," and in gaining "wealth" (*Ibid.*, 74; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28).

[714] "The acquired intellectual ability by means of which one can investigate the world (1:13; 7:23a)" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28).

[715] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 73.

[716] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28.

[717] *Ibid.*, 28; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264.

[718] *Ibid.*, 265.

The Problem with Fox

Fox's interpretation effectively exposes interpretations that import foreign understandings of Qoheleth's wisdom into the text. By insisting on and modeling a reading that pays careful attention to the nuances of Qoheleth's epistemology, Fox helpfully directs us to the text itself. He is right to point out the inadequacies of any interpretation that seeks to resolve the paradoxical presence and then absence of wisdom based upon *ad hoc* definitions. And yet, there is a fundamental aspect of the text that Fox fails to regard: its quality of openness, especially with regard to temporality. This mistake ultimately results in a misreading of the paradox itself.

Ecclesiastes, as Fox himself has argued ironically, exhibits the literary characteristics of narrative.[719] Narrative assumes plot.[720] Furthermore plot is constituted by events "arranged in an ordered time sequence of some kind."[721] One way in which this temporal aspect is rendered in 7:23-29 is through the ever present sense of Qoheleth's mental journey.[722] In fact, it is this aspect of Ecclesiastes that Fox is describing when he describes Ecclesiastes as "introspective autobiography."[723] That is, in Ecclesiastes Qoheleth reports "his explorations" of reality, baring

> his soul, not only his ideas, because he seeks to persuade by empathy. He bares his soul in all its twistings and turnings, ups and downs, taking his readers with him on an exhausting journey to knowledge. If the readers can replicate the flow of perception and recognition as it developed for Qohelet, they will be more open to accepting the author's conclusions as their own.[724]

A fundamental difference between narrative and certain other means of discourse is the temporal relationship of ideas to one another. In a narrative, the order of events is constitutive of the whole discourse itself, and, no less importantly, of the meaning. Therefore, to read a narrative non-temporally (or in a non-linear or non-sequential or non-chronological fashion) is to risk, or as I will argue in Fox's case, to effect an underreading, even a misreading.

A more appropriate approach to Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is to "follow the text through its own process, to pursue its linearity in order to uncover the meaning

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[719] Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," 83.

[720] E.g., Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 47-48. Regarding plot in Ecclesiastes see, Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 24-33.

[721] *Ibid.*, 30. *Contra*, Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 83-85.

[722] T Fox, "Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," 83; Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 212; *Idem*, "The Ethics of Narrative Wisdom," 206-7; Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 24, 28, 133; Davis, *Getting Involved with God*, 115-118.

[723] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 79.

[724] *Ibid.*

progressively as the text itself presents it."[725] Fox's reading of 7:23-24 is more akin to Good's example of the viewing of a painting in which the interpreter stands back and searches for the "unifying structure, theme, image, or idea that lights up the entirety and gives place and perspective to the parts."[726] I am suggesting instead that Eccl 7:23-29 should be read as one would, in Good's terminology, listen "to a piece of music, which is followed through time, the musical process itself disclosing the meaning."[727]

Fox's reading helpfully highlights Qoheleth's intentional ambiguity. Unfortunately Fox unhelpfully treats the text in general, and this element in particular in a non-narratival way. In effect, the meaning of a journey has been reduced to an abstraction. By ignoring the effect of the text's narratival texture as it is experienced in chronological order, and by forsaking the illocutionary force of Qoheleth's story, which is designed to provoke in the reader the experience of Qoheleth's own frustration, Fox has neglected his own keen insight: "If the readers can replicate the flow of perception and recognition as it developed for Qohelet, they will be more open to accepting the author's conclusions as their own."[728] Suppressing the poetics of engagement, Fox has overrun "a more complex process of discovery" in his quest to "merely comprehend a single, aptly illustrated idea."[729] In Murphy's language: "The message of Ecclesiastes has suffered from excessive summarizing."[730]

A Temporal Reading of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29

The following reading will proceed along the lines laid out thus far in this project. Edwin Good, in "The Unfilled Sea," has illustrated the fruit of this approach, to a certain degree, for Ecclesiastes 1:2-11. In that essay, Good highlights the

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[725] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 59. This approach has much in common with conservative reader response criticism such as Eco's work. See also, Iser, *The Act of Reading; Idem,* "The Reading Process," 50-69; Perry, "Literary Dynamics," 35-64, 311-61; Brett, "The Future of Reader Criticisms?", 13-31.

[726] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 59. In light of Gadamer's work on the structure of understanding with regard to the aesthetic, there are problems with this analogy. Nevertheless, Good's point is clear.

[727] *Ibid.,* 59.

[728] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 79.

[729] Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible,* 88. In these quotations Long is actually addressing the parables of Jesus, but his insight applies to Ecclesiastes.

[730] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* lviii.

hermeneutical insights of "the theory of affect of Gestalt psychology."[731] The crucial insight being the fact that, in Good's words, the sequential reader encounters a stimulus that

> leads one to expect a particular consequent, hence arouses a tendency to respond. If the expected consequent does not occur, the tendency to respond is inhibited, and affect arises. Subsequently the expected consequent may occur, and the inhibition of the tendency to respond is relieved. One feels satisfied, the affect subsides, and the meaning of the process is perceptible.[732]

Applied to a text, something arouses, in the reader, a responsive tendency, which yields the anticipation of a consequent. If that consequent is inhibited, an affect is produced. And with regard to reading texts, "'affect' is the realization that one's mental expectations are being frustrated, that the consequent of the stimulus is different from what one had expected."[733]

In what follows, I will allow Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 to present its meaning "in the very process by which the passage makes its linear way" commenting upon "the process as it unfolds"[734] in the interpretation.[735]

Ecclesiastes 7:23

כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה
אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי׃

All this I have tested by wisdom.
I said, "I will be wise!" But it was far from me.

One is immediately faced with a grammatical ambiguity: What is the referent of כָּל־זֶה? Is the feminine demonstrative limited in scope to the observation of vv 23b-24 that wisdom is elusive?[736] Or, does כָּל־זֶה reach beyond its immediate context, either cataphorically[737] or anaphorically? If the latter, as most commentators take it, a

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[731] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 61. Good's understanding of this theory is largely dependent on Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*.

[732] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 61.

[733] *Ibid.*, 62.

[734] *Ibid.*

[735] In some ways, the following reading will be similar to Iser's reading strategy, most fully developed in, *Idem, The Act of Reading*.

[736] Lauha, *Kohelet*, 137; Cf., Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144-45.

[737] Rankin, *Ecclesiastes*, 67. Crenshaw, Whybray, and Christianson see this as a possibility (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 123; Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 94). See also Pahk, who argues for a cataphoric function, but understands what follows in v 23 as a summary of his "past intellectual experiment accompanied 'by wisdom'" (Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 374-83, esp. 374). Christianson likewise recognizes a cataphoric function in addition to its primary anaphoric function (see below) (*Idem, A Time to Tell*, 94).

further decision must be made as to how far back to reach:[738] 7:19?[739] 7:15?[740] 7:1?[741] Or even further back.

Notice the function of ambiguity as a stimulus. First of all, it stimulates the anticipation of a consequent: one expects the referent to be identified. In a linear reading, it is crucial though, that one not only expect the identification, but also that one recognizes that this expectation has been aroused. Secondly, the ambiguity stimulates a search for possible referents. While the reader expects that sooner or later greater conviction in some direction will be justified, the initial direction of thought is in the direction of possibilities.[742] A crucial hermeneutical challenge is to resist premature closure, to allow the possible referents to remain viable options. "The linear mode of interpretation works best if one resists haste in making decisions but, reading with care, ponders possibilities" and suspends any final decision.[743] The different possible meanings are, at this point, hypothetical, not evident or determinate.[744]

As ambiguity stimulates the anticipation of a consequent and provokes the search for a referent, it functions as a structure of involvement, driving the interpreter to engage more deeply with the text. Ellul is referring to precisely this aspect of the poetics of Ecclesiastes when he writes: "The Hebrew text obligates us to make choices and interpretations."[745] Struggling with the ambiguity, expecting subsequent clarity, working at identifying its referent, the reader delves more deeply into both Qoheleth's and the reader's own journey. The poetics of ambiguity, therefore, do not afford the reader a liberty to approach the act of reading this passage as if one were a

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[738] A few commentators read כָּל־זֹה anaphorically without identifying its precise scope. E.g., Whybray suggests that it is possible to read the referent as simply that which "precedes" without explicitly or implicitly offering any more specificity (Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 123); Cf. Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:8, 366. Christianson prefers reading the referent as 7:15-22, however he suggests that "all that he [Qoheleth] has observed until that point," without further specification, is a strong possibility (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 94. Further, see n. 96 below).

[739] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 118; See also, Johnson, "A Form Critical Analysis of the Sayings in the Book of Ecclesiastes," 162.

[740] Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 329. Murphy comments that while 7:1 is a possible option, 7:15-18 is the more likely "particular" referent (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 72). Christianson sees 7:19 as a possibility, but prefers 7:15-22 (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 94, 209 n. 108, 230 n. 27).

[741] Barton is vague as to the *terminus a quo*, but appears to set it at 7:1 (*Ibid.*, *Ecclesiastes*, 146). The following suggest 7:1 is a *possible* option: Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 199-200; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 69, 71; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 153.

[742] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 65.

[743] *Ibid.*

[744] Good's terminology, borrowed from Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. See Good, "Unfilled Sea," 62.

[745] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 199.

passive observer, as if reading it were easy. On the contrary, to read this passage is to be in a situation where a work of "writing demands engagement because it requires that an effort be made to come to terms with its meaning."[746] And furthermore, as Wolfgang Iser points out, this type of engagement "is far above mere perception of what is written" in that it activates the reader's imaginative faculties that recreate the world presented by the text.[747]

As we progress through Qoheleth's testimony, it will be seen that the implied reader is a fellow *disciple*, and "the object of...interpretation...is the interpreter as much as it is the text," and the act of interpretation "is *performative* as much as it is hermeneutical." So, one is not given the option of reducing this passage "to an object for an analysis...by staking a pseudo-empirical claim to objectivity" from some external "Archimedean point."[748]

After a pause to ponder possible referents, the reader, moves on, allowing the text to be the guide, and immediately, the expected consequent (identification of the referent) appears to be approaching: כָּל־זֹה is the direct object of נִסִּיתִי, which is used only one other time in the book—2:1.[749] This strengthens the conviction that כָּל־זֹה is anaphoric, and that its scope stretches beyond chapter 7, perhaps as far back as 2:1. Furthermore, the next word – בַּחָכְמָה – continues to confirm this as a possibility. בַּחָכְמָה is used three times prior to 7:23. All three instances are associated with the initial Royal Experiment: once at the beginning (1:13) and twice within the pleasure portion of the experiment (2:3, 21). Fox points to further connections between 7:23 and 1:13, when he argues that נִסִּיתִי is "functionally synonymous" with לִדְרוֹשׁ וְלָתוּר in 1:13.[750] Therefore, with each successive word in v 23 the reader is more and more compelled to identify the referent of כָּל־זֹה as everything that occurred since his

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[746] Martinez, *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony*, 18. Martinez is describing the experience of reading Kierkegaard's works, but in this context it is an apt description of reading Ecclesiastes.

[747] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 279.

[748] Bockmuehl, "Reason, Wisdom and the Implied Disciple of Scripture," 64. Bockmuehl is talking about reading the Bible in general.

[749] Some older commentators (e.g., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Lapide) parse MT אֲנִסֶּכָּה (2:1) as cohortative pi. of נסך ("to pour out"). However, the vast majority of commentators follow all of the versions, except Vg *affluam*, parsing it as pi. of נסה ("to test, try") plus 2ms suffix. Also, the majority view suits the context, in that the 2ms suffix matches the following imperative – ראה (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:365). Finally, as Seow points out, the alternative spelling of the 2ms suffix (i.e., with the *mater lectionis*) in אֲנִסֶּכָּה is not unique in the Hebrew Bible, and is widely attested at Qumran (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 125-26; Cf. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §94.h). The latter, hereafter referred to as Joüon-Muraoka.

[750] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 263; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 27. See also, Seow, *Eccleisastes*, 270; Whybray, *Eccleisastes*, 123; and Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 341, n. 46.

stated intention to seek and search out by wisdom in 1:13.[751] By the end of the first line, the text has set up in the reader a tendency to respond, it has aroused an expectation of a consequent, which has been, to some degree, fulfilled.

In this analysis, the ambiguity of כָּל־זֹה has been shown to function in two directions. On the one hand, by stimulating the anticipation of a consequent, the reader is pulled forward, into the text, in expectation of relief. Each passing word effectively narrows down the options for the referent. On the other hand, it also produces a strong backward effect[752] drawing the reader back to the Royal Experiment (1:13-2:26). This backward effect exploits the already powerful "primacy effect," i.e., the power of a text's beginning over the entire reading process.[753] Christianson picks up on this, and more, when he identifies in chapter one, the instigation of a proleptic plot.[754] A critical component in this plot is Qoheleth's seeking in 1:12-13a, which is a kernel event (i.e., "an event that initializes narrative motion")[755] that covers "every subsequent observation."[756] So the Royal Experiment, because of its chronological location, and because of the functionality of 1:12-13a as a kernel, plays a substantial role in the response of the reader over the course of a temporal progression through the text. Interacting with Sternberg, Perry, and Iser, on this point, Salyer argues that, "the impact of the autobiography-like material used in the King's Fiction (2.1-11) cannot be underestimated."[757] 7:23 exploits all of this energy as the reader is drawn back into the Royal Experiment. Furthermore, by the use of the words נִסִּיתִי and בַּחָכְמָה one is not only reminded of the Royal Experiment in general, one is also reminded of a specific aspect of Qoheleth's quest: his empirical epistemology.[758]

Fox has persuasively argued that Qoheleth employs a "'weak' type of empiricism, which maintains that all knowledge comes from experience because every proposition is either a direct report on experience or a report whose truth is

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[751] Cf. *Ibid.*, 342.

[752] Perry, "Literary Dynamics," 58-61.

[753] Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*, 93-98; Perry, "Literary Dynamics," 53-58; Iser, "Narrative Strategies as a Means of Communication," 100-117.

[754] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 24-33.

[755] *Ibid.*, 26.

[756] *Ibid.*, 28.

[757] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 106.

[758] For the empirical nature of בַּחָכְמָה, see argument below. For empirical nature of נִסִּיתִי see, Greenberg, "נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," 273-276.

inferred from experience."[759] Fox's definition of empiricism can be improved along the lines of Dallas Willard's identification of empiricism (as expressed by Locke and Hume) as the view that "sense experience or observation...set...the boundaries of reality and knowledge—not, of course, totally excluding authority and reason, but placing firm boundaries...on what they could claim."[760] Notwithstanding this nuanced correction, Fox's insight sets Ecclesiastes in explicit contrast to the rest of the Wisdom tradition[761] which is not empirical.[762]

Fox's work in identifying Qoheleth's use of "wisdom" shows that once Qoheleth begins his investigation (1:13), he fundamentally alters[763] the notion of wisdom by employing an empirical epistemology.[764] Basically, Qoheleth "assumes that the foundation of knowledge is experience," and thus relies on "independent intellect to discover new knowledge and interpret the data" from that experience.[765] Fox explores this empiricism as it is revealed in three areas: Qoheleth's methodology, argumentation, and ontology of knowledge.[766]

Regarding methodology, Qoheleth is "unparalleled" as a sage in that he chooses "to seek out sensory experience as a path to insight."[767] It is implied that all of his teachings and observations were discovered during his royal investigation (1:13-2:26).[768] In this investigation, חָכְמָה is a tool, "in the sense of reason,...an

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[759] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 76, n. 6; see also, Seow, "Rehabilitating 'The Preacher,'" 93-94.

[760] Willard, "The Bible, The University and the God Who Hides."

[761] "Qoheleth's epistemology is, as far as I can tell, foreign to the ancient Near East" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81; cf., 75, 76, 77; *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 121).

[762] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 80; *Idem*, "Qoheleth's Epistemology"; *Idem*, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions*, ch. 3; *Idem*, "The Innerstructure of Qohelet's Thought," 229. *Contra* Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 27; Frydrych, *Living Under the Sun*, 18, 222; Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question as a Literary Device in Ecclesiastes," 222; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxiii; Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry," 224; Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 175.

[763] Fox's repeated use of the word "innovation," with regard to Qoheleth's epistemology in relation to the epistemology evidenced in the rest of Old Testament wisdom, is indicative of Fox's view that Qoheleth is advancing wisdom (or at least that Qoheleth's epistemological alteration is not a negative development). See, e.g., *Idem*, *A Time to Tear Down*, 71, 76, 81; *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 119-123.

[764] "In preparation for the task he has taken upon himself, he [Qoheleth] accumulates wisdom and knowledge surpassing that of his predecessors (1:16). This *ḥokmâh-da'at* must be knowledge, not a faculty, because it is something increased and amassed. It was presumably learned from traditional teachings, since he says that he carried it beyond his predecessors, meaning that they too possessed it....Once the investigation is under way, the wisdom used is not the wisdom learned. Qoheleth does not employ learned wisdom in his investigation, but only his own faculties of observation, analysis, and reason. He never invokes (though he may quote) the teachings of other sages to support his conclusions" (Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 120; also, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 71-86; *Idem*, "Qoheleth's Epistemology."

[765] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 76.

[766] *Ibid.*, 77-85.

[767] *Ibid.*, 77. *Contra* Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 67.

[768] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 77.

instrument of guiding, organizing, and interpreting experiences" (e.g., בַּחָכְמָה in 1:13; 7:23).[769]

Regarding his method of argumentation, Qoheleth is also experiential.[770] Indeed his "new epistemology engenders a new rhetoric: the introspective autobiography."[771] The wisdom of traditional sages is certainly derived "in part from experience," but those sages "do not present their experience as the source of new knowledge."[772] Qoheleth, however, repeatedly "appeals to what he has 'seen' as evidence for his conclusions."[773]

Finally, regarding the ontology of knowledge, traditional wisdom conceives of wisdom as "essentially independent of the individual mind. What the individual knows would be known even without him."[774] This is evident in two places primarily. First, in the personification of wisdom (e.g., Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-12; Ben Sira 14:20-15:8; 24:1-29), regarding which Fox makes the important point:

> if personified wisdom meant something fundamentally different from wisdom elsewhere, the figure of wisdom as a person would communicate nothing about the wisdom the sages were trying to inculcate. The personification represents wisdom as existing, archetypally, in essence if not in specifics, prior to mankind.[775]

A second place where wisdom is portrayed as a "static entity, independent to the human mind," is in the way that traditional wisdom demonstrates wisdom is acquired: "by absorbing and applying existing knowledge."[776] In his essay on "Wisdom in Qoheleth," Fox succinctly states the matter:

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[769] *Ibid.* In this sense, נִסִּיתִי is an empirical reference, in that it is best interpreted as "to have experience of." See, Greenberg, "נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," 273-276.

[770] Qoheleth, according to Fox, employs two types of empirical argumentations: testimony and validation. See Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 121-122; *Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 79).

[771] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 79.

[772] *Ibid.,* 80. Fox argues that traditional wisdom texts, such as Proverbs 7, which seem to exhibit empirical reasoning, actually "do not claim the observation as the source of new knowledge or even as proof of the principle taught," rather the observation is used as a "teaching device to illustrate" a "fact called to mind" not a "truth discovered or inferred" (*Ibid.*).

[773] *Ibid.,* 79; see also 84.

[774] *Ibid.,* 83.

[775] *Ibid.,* 83-84. See also, *Idem,* "The Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," 613-33; and van Leeuwen, "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9," 111-144, where van Leeuwen argues that, "in Woman Wisdom we have the 'self revelation' of an archetypal normativity built into the cosmos, a *tertium quid* that mediates between God and the world, a something embedded in the fabric of creation, but which is not simply to be identified with created things. This cosmic Wisdom serves to ground and legitimate wisdom teaching" (116). See also, *Idem, Proverbs,* 96-97.

[776] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 84. Fox recognizes in Job 28 the presence of a conception of wisdom "as the product of discovery." However, he argues that the sage is presenting such a view in

> Outside Qohelet, *ḥokmah* is never an instrument in open-ended exploration. Proverbs teaches us to seek wisdom, not to seek something else by wisdom. The truths that wisdom literature would have us grasp are already given. If you call to wisdom and go forth to meet it, you will find it (2:4-5; 8:17; etc.). Once you have found wisdom, you need only embrace it. Wisdom is and always has been out there, waiting for your embrace.[777]

Qoheleth, in contrast, "conceives of knowledge as a product of thought and discovery."[778] Fox points out that although Qoheleth nowhere phrases his view in this way,

> such a notion is implied by his description of what happens when he reaches the boundaries of knowledge. Having surpassed his predecessors in wisdom, he sets out on his own "to investigate and explore with wisdom all that occurs under the heavens."[779]

In fact, Qoheleth's most celebrated "discovery"—הֶבֶל הֲבָלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים הַכֹּל הָבֶל —is a "new perception. He never suggests that anything other than his own investigations led to that discovery."[780]

In summary, by the time that the reader has progressed to the end of the first line of 7:23, some of the hypothetical meanings of כָּל־זֶה have been borne out. As a result, there is a new level of meaning: evident meaning. In the next line, the second line of v 23, this evident meaning is confirmed in two ways. First of all, there is a return to the autobiographical style of chapters one and two,[781] in which Qoheleth engages in interior monologue (1:16; 2:1, 15a; cf., 3:17-18).[782] Secondly, the empiricism of Qoheleth's quest is once again brought into view. As Christianson points out, of the twenty-eight occurrences of the verb חכם in the Old Testament, only in Ecclesiastes does it take the first-person form, and of its three occurrences there, the first two are in the Royal Experiment (2:15, 19) and the third is 7:23. Christianson's insight into the significance of אֶחְכָּמָה further develops the view that at this point the reader is indeed meant to recollect Qoheleth's investigative journey.

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order to invalidate it (*Ibid.*, 85; also, *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 120). Job 28 is, as Westermann says, polemical and radical (*Idem, Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob*, 132). Fox argues that, in fact, the passage is even "more skeptical" than he interprets Qoheleth to be, in that the former "insists that whatever man can attain by his skills and efforts is not to be reckoned as wisdom." Qoheleth, on the other hand, according to Fox, "believes that the knowledge the human intellect is able to grasp is truly wisdom, though the confines of this wisdom are tight and oppressive" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 85).

[777] Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 120.

[778] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 82.

[779] *Ibid.*

[780] *Ibid.*; see also, *Idem*, "The Innerstructure of Qohelet's Thought," 229.

[781] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 116; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 143.

[782] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 341.

> [O]nly in Ecclesiastes is the idea of becoming wise related so reflexively to the speaker. In the *tunc* of Qoheleth's story, becoming wise is within the grasp of the experience of his self. Unlike Job 28 and Proverbs 8, where the poet seeks wisdom itself, Qoheleth seeks to *be* wise—to *become* wise.[783]

At this precise moment, as the reader is being reminded of Qoheleth's Royal Experiment to explore כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם with the aid of wisdom as a crucial tool within his empirical epistemology,[784] Qoheleth says that wisdom is רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי. The profundity of the paradox, that the reader senses, is hard to overestimate: How can this be? How can one who tests everything by wisdom, not have wisdom? How can one use a tool one does not possess? And, most disturbingly, what about the journey that I have traveled with Qoheleth if the very ground and goal and instrument of that journey is somehow not as I assumed it was?[785]

At the moment in which Qoheleth is "concluding" from his entire life journey, a gap is opened. The reader is suddenly confused. What does Qoheleth mean by the term חָכְמָה? And is he using the term consistently? As mentioned above, Fox follows a tradition that goes back at least to Rashbam by solving the paradox through a comparative difference in the wisdom of בַּחָכְמָה (v 23a) and the wisdom of אֶחְכָּמָה (v 23b).[786] However, Fox's articulation of this solution tips his hand to a critical interpretative mistake. Fox argues that the *only* solution to the paradox is a difference in types of wisdom, and thus applies his energies to identifying the precise differences. It is in his assumption of the nature of the solution that he is prematurely closing a significant portion of the gap that the author has intentionally opened. In other words, the main problem, *at this point*, with Fox's reading, is not in regard to the correctness or incorrectness of his proposed solution (i.e., the word "wisdom" used in different ways). The issue, at this point, has to do with Fox's failure to suspend closure. Perhaps Fox is right, and Qoheleth is using "wisdom" in different ways, however the point is that *at this point* there are other interpretive options. The paradox opens a gap, and the direction of thought is to be the search for *possibilities*.

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[783] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 208.

[784] Lohfink sees the issue of epistemology as central to this passage. This is evident in his argument that 7:23-8:1a is centered around the problem of inductive versus deductive knowledge. By inductive knowledge, he means knowledge that is "based on experience and observation" in contrast to more traditional wisdom which understands knowledge as "based on learning proverbs" (*Idem, Qoheleth*, 100).

[785] Christianson reminds us that in chapter two, Qoheleth clearly stated that he did achieve wisdom (*Idem, A Time to Tell*, 208).

[786] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264; *Idem, Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50.

A critical hermeneutical challenge is to resist closure, and thus to allow *possible* solutions to remain *viable* options in the hope that a continued linear reading of the passage will result, at the appropriate time, as directed by the text, in resolution, satisfaction, and thus determinate meaning.

An option that Fox nowhere considers is the possibility that Qoheleth is using the term "wisdom" in a consistent manner, thereby either contradicting or ironizing himself. Regarding contradictions in Ecclesiastes, Fox himself has provided much insight.[787] Regarding irony, it is not uncommon for interpreters to see a marked degree of this rhetorical device in Ecclesiastes.[788] Therefore, when Fox writes, in his commentary, on v 23: "There *must* be a difference between the wisdom Qohelet aimed at but did not reach (implied by *ʾeḥkamah*) and the wisdom he did have,"[789] he prematurely closes the gap, confusing a hypothetical meaning with a determinate or even an evident meaning. The reader must allow the narrative to unfold sequentially, respecting its temporal flow.[790] In 7:23 there simply is not a logical

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[787] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*.

[788] There is a long history of the recognition of Qoheleth's ironical method of reasoning. E.g., Galling, "Kohelet-Studien" (1932), 276-99; *Idem*, "Stand Aufgabe der Kohelet-Forschung" (1934), 355-73; Bréton, "Qoheleth: Recent Studies" (1973), 22-50; Beentjes, "Recente visies op Qoheleth" (1980), 436-44; Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy" (1982), 87-98, esp. 93; Crenshaw, "Qoheleth in Current Research" (1983), 41-56; Michel, *Qohelet* (1988); Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (1989); Murphy, "Recent Research in Proverbs and Qoheleth" (1993), 119-40; and Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes* (1998), 229-37. For full-fledged treatments of irony in Ecclesiastes, one must begin with Good's 1965 publication, *Irony in the Old Testament* in which he dedicates a chapter to Qoheleth's use of irony. This was followed by Polk, "The Wisdom of Irony" (1976), 3-17; Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist" (1988); Spangenberg, "Irony in the Book of Qohelet" (1996), 57-69; and Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet" (2004), 37-68. Even Fox argues that this pericope is marked by "a certain self-directed irony" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 34; also, Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 51). And, Porten, in the same article, concludes his section, which is the concluding section of the article, with a comment on the irony of Qohelet's discovery (*Ibid.*, 38). Others see irony in this particular passage, e.g., Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 148-49.

[789] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264 (emphasis mine). See also, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28; *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50.

[790] It is obvious how a chronological reading exposes the weakness of approaches that fail to recognize the cognitive dissonance that occurs in the mind of the reader at this point. Longman, for example, argues that Fox makes the mistake of expecting too much consistency from Qoheleth, "forgetting that at times Qohelet's words are almost stream of consciousness." Therefore, Longman prefers to read v 23 as an instance of Qoheleth stating "his wisdom program," then immediately catching himself, and admitting his failings. There is, then, no paradox, the latter statement (אָמַרְתִּי אֶחְכָּמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי) is simply a correction of the first (כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחָכְמָה) (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 200). Seow, does not see the issue as a function of "stream of consciousness," but he does minimize the significance of any paradox, arguing that the issue is a matter of degree, not contradiction. He compares the issue with the notion of righteousness as developed in 7:15, 20. In v 15 Qoheleth admits the existence of a righteous person, but in v 20 he denies the possibility "of a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 259). Seow points out that Qoheleth is not, in this instance, contradicting himself, but is highlighting the impossibility of someone being perfectly righteous. Qoheleth, according to Seow, is doing the same thing with wisdom in v 23: he is denying the possibility of a person being "wise enough to understand the world thoroughly...to know the mysteries of the universe, to explain all the discrepancies that exist" (*Ibid.*).

"must" regarding the nature of the solution to the paradox being in "a difference between the wisdom Qohelet" did and did not have.[791]

Ecclesiastes 7:24

רָחוֹק מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה וְעָמֹק עָמֹק מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ׃

That which happens[792] *is far off, and deep, very deep, who can grasp it?*

V. 24 begins with רָחוֹק – a direct link to v 23 via its penultimate word, רְחוֹקָה, itself the explosive impetus for the paradox. So Qoheleth is continuing to develop the paradox in general and the negative side of the paradox in particular.

Qoheleth ends v 23 with the statement that wisdom (הִיא referring to the חכמה of אֶחְכָּמָה) is far from him (רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי), and he begins v 24 continuing the thought. Fox rightly points out that the wisdom of v 23b is identified in v 24 by מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה.[793] This is the fourth time that Qoheleth has used מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה (1:9; 3:15; 6:10), which is found nowhere else in the OT. As several commentators have argued, this phrase is virtually synonymous with כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם in 1:13, and כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ in 1:14.[794] So, once again, the reader is drawn back into Qoheleth's experiment.

A problem with Seow's approach, in my opinion, is that the non-existent, perfectly righteous person in v 20 is explicitly qualified with וְלֹא יֶחֱטָא, whereas nowhere in vv 23-29 is wisdom qualified in such a way. Therefore, Seow's gap-filling is baseless. I am attempting to illustrate another possibility for that gap. The real problem, however, is that both Seow and Longman fail to recognize the tremendous effect produced by Qoheleth's admission upon the reader who has within her consciousness the Royal Experiment, and that the empirical aspect of this experiment has been explicitly referenced. As Salyer says regarding another aspect of reading Ecclesiastes, so it is true at this point: "Here is a classic example of being so historically focused that the scholar cannot see the forest for the trees" (Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric,* 100).

[791] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 264 (emphasis mine). See also, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28: "It does seem that Qohelet is using...[חכם] in two different ways here....There is a type of wisdom Qohelet claims to have and a type he does not claim." And, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50: "He amassed much wisdom—he learned a lot—yet the deeper wisdom eluded him."

[792] I follow the view that all four occurrences in Ecclesiastes of מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה should be read as an absolute present. See, e.g., Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth,* 76, 82, 87, 90-91; Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:55, 56; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 252, 259, 270; Fox, *Qohelet,* 151-52, 240; *Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 247, 265; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 200; Cohen-Reichert, *Ecclesiastes,* 77 (Hereafter, Cohen-Reichert, *Ecclesiastes*); Barton, *Ecclesiastes,* 146, 148; Ginsberg, *Koheleth,* 102. Cf. Perry, *Dialogues,* 130. Contra those who translate it as preterite ("what has been"): Zimmerli, "Das Buch des Predigers Salomo," 123-253; Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," 194-195. Regarding the more dynamic sense of "happening" over against the more static sense of "exists" see summary of debate in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:54-59.

[793] Some argue that the reference of מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה is to reality or being (e.g., Loader, *Polar Structures,* 51; Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 156; Lauha, *Kohelet,* 138. Others argue that it refers to wisdom (e.g., Gordis, *Koheleth,* 280). Fox's reading justifies both sides of the debate.

[794] E.g., Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 263; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 27; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 230, 270; Whybray, *Eccleisastes,* 123; Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of*

For the first time in the book, it appears that Qoheleth is defining *what he means* by wisdom. The "far from me" wisdom of v 23 is the "far off, and deep, very deep" מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה of v 24. רָחוֹק renders this distance through a horizontal image, while the repetitive apposition of עָמֹק shifts the physical direction of the metaphor and increases both the intensity of the metaphor itself and the intensity of the paradox by denoting a vast depth.[795] Crenshaw argues that the twin metaphors of spatial imagery form an intentional connection to the two infinitives in 1:13: לִדְרוֹשׁ and וְלָתוּר. These words denote the "comprehensive nature of Qoheleth's search."[796] The first infinitive refers to the "length and breadth of the search," and the second to "the inner depth dimension, the penetration beyond the surface of reality."[797] This corresponds to רָחוֹק and עָמֹק, respectively.[798] If Crenshaw is right, this is the second occurrence (the synonymous relationship of מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה to כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם in 1:13 and כָּל־ הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ in 1:14, being the first) in v 24 of the backward effect initiated in v 23.

V 24 concludes by developing the statement regarding the distance of wisdom into an interrogative form that only thinly hides its true intention, which is not to seek but to present information.[799] In other words, Qoheleth addresses the reader with one of his more than thirty rhetorical questions. However, before the reader can reflect upon the rhetorical function of a rhetorical question in general, there are two aspects about this particular question that demand immediate attention. First of all, the word יִמְצָאֶנּוּ is lexically ambiguous.[800] מצא can emphasize process (e.g., "approach") or end result (e.g., "overtake");[801] it can denote the physical act of

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Ecclesiastes, 185; Salyer relates 7:23-24 to 1:13-18, but does not discuss any specific aspect of the relationship (*Idem, Vain Rhetoric*, 341, n. 46).

[795] The LXX translates רָחוֹק מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה as μακρὰν ὑπὲρ ὃ ἦν and עָמֹק עָמֹק as βαθὺ βάθος. Following this lead, Gregory Thaumaturgos carried the notion even further in his paraphrase of Ecclesiastes, by rendering רָחוֹק with a noun of horizontal distance and an adjective of immeasurability, μῆκος ἄπειρον, and likewise rendering עָמֹק עָמֹק with a noun of vertical distance and an adjective of immeasurability, βάθος ἀμέρητον (Thaumaturgos, *Ecclesiastes*, 185).

[796] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 72.

[797] *Ibid.*, see also, 145. Gordis argues the opposite, לִדְרוֹשׁ refers to "searching the depths," and לָתוּר to "the depth of the matter" (*Idem, Koheleth*, 209). Seow argues that the vertical and horizontal distinction "may not" be intended (*Ecclesiastes*, 145).

[798] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 145.

[799] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," xv.

[800] Regarding lexical ambiguity, in general, see Barr's helpful warning against "illegitimate totality transfer," in *Idem, The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 218; and Payne's caution against the use of cognate languages for the "over-discovery" of polysemy, in *Idem*, "Old Testament Exegesis and the Problem of Ambiguity," 48-68; *Idem*, "Characteristic Word-Play in 'Second Isaiah,'" 207-29.

[801] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260.

finding a tangible object (e.g., "find") or a mental act (e.g., "understand"). As Anthony Ceresko states in his study of this word, מצא encompasses an "unusually wide range of meanings."[802] Depending upon context, the word can mean any of the following: "approach," "arrive," "reach," "overtake," "seize," "acquire," "find," "discover," "grasp," "understand."[803] In v 24, however, the ambiguity is not difficult to resolve. Qoheleth is using מצא in the intellectual sense, "to grasp, understand, learn" with a focus on the end result.[804] Although, as Ceresko points out, there is an aspect of מצא in v 24 that is nearly impossible to capture in English: "the spatial metaphor for...incomprehensibility" (רָחוֹק and וְעָמֹק עָמֹק) "recalls also the sense of 'reach, attain.'"[805] Therefore, translating יִמְצָאֶנּוּ with "grasp it" seeks to pick up this subtle, yet beautiful wordplay.

The second aspect of this rhetorical question which demands attention is the fact that מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ and רָחוֹק constitute an intertextual allusion to the Song of the Valiant Woman, Prov 31:10-31.[806] The song begins with the question מִי יִמְצָא and is immediately followed by the word רָחֹק (v 10). Here, the question is also rhetorical,[807] and the Valiant Woman is widely recognized as the personification of wisdom.[808] So the two passages use the same rhetorical question, and same adjective to refer to the elusiveness of wisdom.

With regard to the function of rhetorical questions, it is important to understand that this is yet another literary device employed to evoke reader involvement.[809] Firstly, reader involvement is evoked via the rhetorical question by function of the fact that Qoheleth has already established the idea that wisdom is far removed (vv 23b, 24a). The redundancy, therefore, of the question "suggests," in the words of Raymond Johnson, "not only its reinforcement of the previously argued premise, but the shift to an interrogative formulation suggests the desire to induce

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[802] Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis*," 567. For Ceresko's summary of the etymological sources of this ambiguity, see, *Ibid.*, 552-557.

[803] See Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis*," 552-557 for a helpful summary of literature on the meaning of this word.

[804] See, *Ibid.*, 565-69; also, Schoors, *Pleasing Words* II:171-72; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 68, 72.

[805] Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis*," 566 n. 64. Despite the fact that Ceresko reads the object of this "incomprehensibility" as "the divine mind," the insightfulness of his observation remains.

[806] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 275; Perry, *Dialogues*, 130.

[807] *Ibid.*; van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 260.

[808] E.g., Wolters, "Proverbs 31:10-31 as Heroic Hymn," in *The Song of the Valiant Woman*, 13; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 264.

[809] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," xvii.

audience contact" by inviting "the reader to share without prejudice in the formulation of an argument."[810] Secondly, reader involvement is generated through a psychological hook. Stanley Fish highlights this aspect when he describes one effect of a question: "to ask it is always to create a psychological need for its completing half."[811] Even though the reader knows the answer to the question, there is still a gravitational pull into the discourse as one anticipates the answer. From Ecclesastes 7:23b to v 24b, the reader has been driven by a desire for a resolution to the paradox.[812] The rhetorical question, however, rather than resolving the paradox, actually reiterates and intensifies it. Thus far in the book, the reader has trusted Qoheleth to be a man of wisdom, now he is strongly, and emotionally[813] asserting that he cannot find wisdom. By delaying the anticipated consequent (a resolution to the paradox) the reader is pulled more deeply into the gap of the paradox itself.

The delay, however, does offer the reader the benefit of an important clarification: Qoheleth has sharpened our comprehension of what he means by "wisdom." Wisdom is a "true"[814] and "real"[815] "understanding of reality,"[816] "of the rationale of events, including" those that are "anomalous and unjust."[817] In essence, then, to be wise is to grasp what happens in "life itself."[818] Unfortunately, such an understanding is beyond our reach: a fact that destabilizes a fundamental norm developed throughout the text up to this point[819] — Qoheleth's possession of a great amount of wisdom (1:16) that has formed the ground and instrument of his lifelong search. The paradox of 7:23-24 effectively pulls the reader into a disorienting and destabilizing vortex.[820]

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[810] *Ibid.*, 250. Johnson is describing the function of another rhetorical question in Ecclesiastes, and not 7:24. However, his comments are appropriate.

[811] Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 60.

[812] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," 260.

[813] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 342.

[814] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28.

[815] Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50.

[816] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28.

[817] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 265.

[818] Fox, *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50. This is very similar to Barton's interpretation when he seems to indicate that Qohelet's failure to become wise is to be understood in light of his failure to grasp מָה־שֶּׁהָיָה, understood as "the true inwardness of things, the reality below all changing phenomena" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 146). See also Isaksson, who follows Barton, "True wisdom...would involve insight into the real nature of the things going on under the sun, is beyond human intellect, and this is exactly what is expressed in 7:24" (Isaksson, *Studies*, 90).

[819] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," 253.

[820] Cf. Johnson's argument that, "the book of Ecclesiastes is no safe place for the insecure reader is attested by the book's use of rhetorical questions which victimize the audience via literary gaps and destabilized contexts" (*Idem*, "The Rhetorical Question," 254).

To be sure, Qoheleth has already observed, from several different perspectives, the traditional sapiential notion that there is a certain mysterious and elusive nature to life.[821] (See especially the other three occurrences of מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה: 1:9; 3:15; 6:10). The issue in 7:24 is not that deep insight into the "real nature of things going on under the sun...is beyond the reach of human intellect."[822] The import of v 24 lies in the fact that this insight is cast specifically against the backdrop of the identification of Qoheleth's "wisdom."

Wolfgang Iser's analysis of the role of memory in reading is helpful at this point. In brief, Iser notes that on reading a text, "[w]hatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened." However, when it is "evoked again" it cannot "reassume its original shape" because it will be "set against a different background."[823] This results in the reader's opportunity to "develop hitherto unforeseeable connections." The new setting, therefore, "brings to light new aspects of" that which the reader "had committed to memory; conversely these, in turn, shed their light on the new background."[824] Therefore, by provoking the memory of the Royal Experiment and the empirical nature of Qoheleth's epistemology in the context of identifying for the first time the nature of Qoheleth's "wisdom," the reader suddenly sees that wisdom in a new light.

Fox argues that v 24 is a definition of the wisdom indicated by אֶחְכָּמָה (v 23b) over against the wisdom indicated by בַּחָכְמָה (v 23a). This is a viable option. However, if Qoheleth is not using "wisdom" in different ways; if Qoheleth is indicating the same "wisdom" by both words, and is using the wisdom of אֶחְכָּמָה and its further development in v 24 to foreground an important aspect of the wisdom indicated by בַּחָכְמָה not only in 7:23, but throughout the book thus far, then Qoheleth is revealing something about the nature of *his* wisdom. Qoheleth, in other words, could be ironizing his own wisdom. Johnson's work supports such a reading. He argues that Qoheleth's rhetorical questions are "instrumental in conveying" an ironic agenda.[825] Two characteristics in particular, of irony, reveal how naturally suited

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[821] Cf. e.g., Prov. 21:31; 25:2.

[822] Isaksson, *Studies*, 90.

[823] If the memory is able to resume its original shape, then "memory and perception" would be "identical, which is manifestly not so" (Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 278).

[824] *Ibid.*, 278.

[825] Johnson argues that Qoheleth's ironic agenda is: (1) "the irony of the pursuit of profit," and (2) the irony of "the pursuit of wisdom" (*Idem*, "The Rhetorical Question," 246, 47). Accordingly, Qoheleth's rhetorical questions function to develop the "tension between the old wisdom and the

rhetorical questions are to the ironic mood: (1) "double-layeredness;" (2) "inherent opposition," "incongruity," or "clash of meaning."[826] According to Good, irony "begins in conflict, a conflict marked by the perception of the distance between pretense and reality."[827] One possible reading of 7:23-24, then, is the ironic presentation of Qoheleth's pretense of wisdom. Such a reading, then, has only been ruled out by Fox's assumption of the nature of the solution to the paradox.

Both Fox's solution (different types of wisdom) and my proposal (ironization of Qoheleth's wisdom) are viable at this point in the text; both are hypothetical meanings. As previously stated, the reader must suspend closure, resist a final determination at this point, and allow the text to provide its resolution, in its time. The reader's job is to, in Fox's own words, "replicate the flow of perception and recognition as it developed for Qohelet," and thereby assume the position necessary to accept Qoheleth's "conclusion."[828]

Ecclesiastes 7:25

סַבּוֹתִי אֲנִי וְלִבִּי לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן
וְלָדַעַת רֶשַׁע כְּסֶל וְהַסִּכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוֹת׃

I turned, I and my heart,[829] *to know and to explore and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things,*
And to know the wickedness of foolishness, and the folly[830] *of madness.*[831]

Having been pulled into a narrative experience of Qoheleth's exasperation,[832] the reader comes to v 25 expecting the consequent thus far delayed, the resolution of the paradox. However, with the first word of the verse the reader sees a physical shift

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wisdom of Ecclesiastes" (*Ibid.*, 222-23). In this he is following Crenshaw (*Old Testament Wisdom*, 146) and Loader (*Polar Structures*, 65-66, 115). I agree with Johnson regarding the ironic function of rhetorical questions, but do not agree with his analysis of what is being ironized. Johnson, unfortunately, follows the old historical-critical approach that sets Ecclesiastes over against wisdom. The weaknesses of this view have been ably presented (Johnston, "Confessions of a Workaholic," 26-28; etc.) In addition, Johnson does not recognize Qoheleth's empiricism.

[826] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," 245-46. Johnson is drawing upon Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 14.

[827] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 14. For definitions of irony see, *Ibid.*, 13-33; Colebrook, *Irony*, 1-21; Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, 7-27; and Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*.

[828] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 79.

[829] Cf. e.g., *Ibid.*, 265; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144-45. *Contra* Isaksson, who argues that the independent personal pronoun after the verb in Ecclesiastes is "not intended to emphasize the subject but the thought" (*Idem*, *Studies*, 171, see 163-71).

[830] Note the unusual presence of the definite article. See, *Ibid.*, 146.

[831] The syntax of the second line is difficult. My translation will be supported in what follows. Cf., Luther, *Ecclesiastes*, 129-30; Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 385-87; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 281-82; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 240.

[832] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 342.

in Qoheleth's perspective.[833] With this shift, instead of resolving the paradox, Qoheleth takes the reader back, once again, to the story of his quest.[834] As Salyer points out,

> The reference to Qoheleth's heart (*lēb*) and the double pleonastic use of *ʾnî* in vv 25-26 remind the reader of Qoheleth's confession-like style during the early stages of Qoheleth's monologue. That this observation refers back to the pursuit of pleasure catalogued in 2.1-8 is further supported by the use of the verb *tûr* ('to spy out') used here and in 2.3.[835]

In fact, with each passing word of this verse, as terms that have by "now become synonymous"[836] are heaped upon one another, words that are inseparable from Qoheleth's personal search, the reader is repeatedly driven back to the sweep of Qoheleth's story.[837] Salyer rightly argues that vv 25ff. function "like a narrative flashback recalling the pursuit of wisdom that has characterized his [Qoheleth's] life since youth."[838] However, as per Iser's work on memory, this flashback is not an exact duplication of what was previously read. The reader's encounter, at this point in the text, with the remembered journey is against a new background, i.e., the as yet unreconciled paradox that is governing the present passage. It is as if Qoheleth is saying to the reader, "Now that I have pulled the rug out from under you by indicating that there is something not right about a critical assumption I've allowed you to have, let's go back to my investigation and this time you will see something new." V 25, then, is not merely an expanded restatement of v 23a, it is a restatement

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[833] Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 374. Pahk refers to Lohfink, "War Kohelet ein Frauenfeind?", 276, n. 8. Isaksson argues that the location of the independent personal pronoun after the verb occurs at moments of great importance, "where the narrative halts for a moment to make a conclusion or introduce a new thought" (Isaksson, *Studies*, 171). Also, it will not do to argue that סבב indicates the beginning of a new section or subject, since 7:25 is a restatement of 7:23 and more importantly of 1:17, to which 7:23-24 constantly refer (i.e., the now evident referent of כָּל־זֶה).

[834] This is not to indicate that a new section begins in v 25. Contra, e.g., Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 119; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 144; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 202. Pahk, argues that the connection between v 25 and vv 23-24 is affirmed by the repeated use of the theme-words, מצא and חכם (*Idem*, "The Significance of אשר," 374. Pahk refers to Lohfink, "War Kohelet ein Frauenfeind?," 276, n. 8). See earlier argument for the view that 7:23-29 holds together as a single, coherent unit.

[835] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 342-43. Of the 18 occurences of לֵב plus first person suffix (1:13, 16 [2x], 17; 2:1, 3 [2x], 10 [2x], 15 [2x], 20; 3:17, 18; 7:25; 8:9, 16; 9:1), 12 are in the Royal Experiment.

[836] Perry, *Dialogues*, 130.

[837] Rudman points out numerous echoes that occur between 7:25 and "the so called 'Royal Experiment' of 1:12-2:26" (*Determinism*, 103-104). Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76. Many commentators see 7:25 as a repetition of 1:13. Cf. Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 30; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 124; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 101; Isaksson, *Studies*, 170; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 205.

[838] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 342-43. Every word in 7:25 except כְּסִל and חֶשְׁבּוֹן is found in chapters 1, 2, or 3.

in a new setting which presents the opportunity of detecting hitherto unnoticed aspects of Qoheleth's journey.

An important aspect of this new reading of Qoheleth's journey is found in the word paired with חָכְמָה. Dominic Rudman points to the fact that the partnering word, חֶשְׁבּוֹן, is unique to Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament.[839] Furthermore, according to Rudman, it does not "fit...in with the rest of the passage." As a result, he follows Fox, who follows Ginsberg, in emending the MT to the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן. Based upon this emendation, Rudman understands the word to carry "the general idea of intrigues."[840] However, without revising the MT one has three viable options. First, one can interpret the noun in close connection to its root – חשב, "think," "account." This option provides three alternatives. (1) The mental *process* of thinking. For example, "reasoning,"[841] "thought,"[842] or "philosophizing."[843] (2) The *result* of thinking. For example, "Untersuchungsergebnis, Resultat,"[844] "conclusion,"[845] "the sum or substance of what I found,"[846] "conclusion, substance of thought."[847] (3) A combination of 1 and 2. Perry illustrates this approach by describing Qoheleth's "ambition...to arrive at wisdom by totaling up his experiences."[848] Ogden offers, "knowledge reached by the process of deduction."[849] Lohfink proposes, knowledge reached by "induction."[850] And Fox plainly states the issue: "*ḥešbon* designates both the process of reckoning and the answer arrived at by the reckoning."[851] Notice how this provides the nuance of empiricism.[852] The second general option is to interpret

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[839] Occurs three times in Ecclesiastes: 7:25, 27; 9:10. In 7:29, חִשְׁבֹנוֹת (also in 2 Chr 26:15) is from the same root, but is not merely the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן, it is a different noun. See below, comments on 7:29. For a discussion of the various meanings of the word see, Loretz, "'Frau' und griechisch-jüdische Philosophie im Buch Qohelet," 258-60.

[840] Rudman, "Woman as Divine Agent in Ecclesiastes," 426. See, Ginsberg, *Koheleth,* 103; and Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 265. However, while Fox does emend it to the plural, he translates it as "solutions."

[841] Geier, *In Solomonis Regis Israel Ecclesiastern Commentarius,* 277. Cited in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:445.

[842] Castelli, *Il libro del Cohelet,* 286. Cited in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:445.

[843] Loretz, "'Frau' und griechisch-jüdische Philosophie im Buch Qohelet," 258-60; see also, *Idem,* "Altorientalische und kanaanäische Topoi im Buch Koheleet," 275-280.

[844] Michel, *Untersuchungen,* 235.

[845] Auerbach, *Das Buch Koheleth,* 73. Cited in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:445.

[846] Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic,* 226.

[847] Gordis, *Koheleth,* 271; Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes,* 145.

[848] Perry, *Dialogues,* 131.

[849] Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 120.

[850] Lohfink, *Qoheleth,* 101.

[851] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 30.

[852] Cf. Schoors' argument that the addition of בקש and תור to דעת indicates Qoheleth is taking a new path in that he not only wants to know by "repeating traditional wisdom," but he also wants to

the word according to its commercial sense, as it is widely used in the Near East, "accounting" or "balance" or "calculation."[853] This conjures up the image of Qoheleth, poring over his objects of inquiry, "trying to give an account of every item."[854] Seow follows this view, but insists that, like the third alternative for the first option, it should incorporate not only the "sum of matters," but also "a summary of the details" and "the process of accounting."[855] The final general option is to follow the *Vulgate*— "rationem"—and offer something like, "the rationale of things."[856]

Syntactically, חֶשְׁבּוֹן is a refining synonym of חָכְמָה.[857] Recognizing a hendiadys, Machinist skillfully incorporates the presentation of "wisdom" in v 24 (i.e., an understanding of reality), and the sustained emphasis on epistemology (i.e., the allusions to Qoheleth's empiricism, vv 23-24),[858] with a view of חֶשְׁבּוֹן similar to that of Seow, Perry, Ogden, Lohfink, and Fox in his definition of the word: "a considered assessment of life, that is, what is arrived at by a deliberate process of reasoning."[859] In his most recent affirmation of this view, Fox insightfully remarks that "Qohelet is thinking about thought and must shape the vocabulary to allow himself to do so."[860] The translation found in both the NIV and ESV, "scheme of things," (also suggested by Good and Farmer)[861] captures well the full dynamic of this word.[862]

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know by exploring and searching. "He no doubt aims at a "critical" knowledge" (*Idem, Pleasing Words*, II:131).

[853] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260-61, 271. Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 74.

[854] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 271.

[855] *Ibid.*, 261. Delitzsch is close to this approach: "the *facit* of a calculation of all the facts and circumstances relating thereto" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 331). Also Whybray, "the sum of things...something which makes sense of the whole...the process of thought, of which he has anticipated the conclusion in v 24" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 124). This is similar to Ogden, see above.

[856] McNeile, *Introduction to Ecclesiastes*, 75; Rudman affirms this interpretation (*Idem, Determinism*, 188)

[857] E.g., Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 83; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 120; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 146; Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 331. Whybray suggests that together with חָכְמָה, it constitutes a nominal hendiadys (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 124). Cf. Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:15, 169, 446; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260; Michel, *Untersucheungen*, 235-36; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 100-101; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 145; Rudman, "Woman as Divine Agent," 422.

[858] Cf. Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 120; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 100-101.

[859] Machinist, "Fate, *miqreh*, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," 170. See, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 268. Machinist's definition is of חֶשְׁבּוֹן as used in 7:27. He does mention that this is maybe the notion of the term when it appears in 7:25 and 9:10. I follow Fox in viewing this as an insightful definition of the word as used in v 25.

[860] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 268.

[861] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 189, n. 34; Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?*, 179. Also fits well with the work of some recent critics. Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:445. Cf. Vg. and Cohen-Reichert, *Ecclesiastes*, "the rationale of things."

[862] Here we have just one of many occasions within Ecclesiastes wherein one must explicitly determine between significantly contrasting translation options based upon issues of interpretation. On

The four nouns in the second half of the verse have, like חֶשְׁבּוֹן, generated no small amount of debate. The three basic options are to read them as two pairs of double accusatives,[863] or as four parallel direct objects of the infinitive,[864] or as genitives construct.[865] On the one hand, in all three options the general idea is consistent: a restatement of the impulse and scope of Qoheleth's journey (cf., 1:13, 17; 2:12),[866] a reminder that Qoheleth's story is an all-encompassing search ("all that is done under heaven") for the "scheme of things."[867] On the other hand, bound up with each interpretative option are significantly different implications for the meaning of the pericope.

Schoors argues that nowhere in Ecclesiastes does "folly" have a "moral connotation." Perhaps "in 7,17," folly could carry a moral quality, but, Schoors points out that "parallelism does not necessarily mean synonymy."[868] 7:17, like 7:25, can be interpreted without casting wisdom or folly within a rubric of morality.[869] Schoors admits that it is precisely because he understands Qoheleth to never construe wisdom and folly with moral connotations that he (Schoors) rejects reading the syntax as two pairs of words in construct. He prefers the option of a pair of double accusatives (e.g., "to know wickedness to be folly") because, and this is the only reason he provides, one cannot, necessarily, invert the relationship (e.g., "folly is wickedness"), thus preserving the moral neutrality of folly.[870] Simply put, Schoors

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this issue, see "On Translating Ecclesiastes," where Murphy cites a thesis proposed for the Stuttgart symposium on biblical translation: "Interpretation of the text, textual criticism, and reconstruction of a basic text are *presupposition* for translation, not part of the work of translating; they come *before* one translates. Translation *is not* interpretation; it rests upon interpretation" (Gnilka and Rüger, eds., *Die Ubersetzung der Bibel-Aufgabe der Theologie*, 271). Cited in Murphy, "On Translating Ecclesiastes," 577.

[863] E.g., Gordis translates it: "wickedness is foolishness, and folly is madness" (*Koheleth*, 178, 282); also Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 330; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 144; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 74; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 252, 261; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 146; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 144; Cohen-Reichert, *Ecclesiastes*, 47; Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:131, 188, 169; *Idem*, *Pleasing Words*, I:187-88.

[864] So, NJV, English translation of TANAKH by JPS. Also Fox, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions*, 240; *Idem*, *A Time to Tear Down*, 265, 267-68; Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:131.

[865] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 203. Contra, Ginsburg who argues that in such case the second word of each pair would have a definite article (*Coheleth*, 386).

[866] Cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 57; Isaksson, *Studies*, 170.

[867] Gordis, *Koheleth*, 282. Fox and Porten argue that בִּקֵּשׁ indicates seeking "with the intention of attaining." So, Qoheleth wants to both "understand and attain wisdom," but he only wanted to "understand, observe from the outside, folly and wickedness" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 30).

[868] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:169.

[869] *Ibid.*, also, 24.

[870] It is consistent with the Israelite Wisdom tradition to assert that while all wickedness is folly, not all folly is wickedness. (See, Plantinga, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be*, 118-21). In this sense, Schoors is on solid ground. However, Schoors is not making this point. His point is that

rejects reading the syntax as a pair of genitives of construction solely because it moralizes folly: "the wickedness of folly" suggests "that folly has wickedness in it, i.e., is wicked."[871]

Schoors is right to point out that Qoheleth typically casts צַדִּיק not חָכְמָה as the opposite of רֶשַׁע (e.g., 3:16, 17; 7:5; 8:14; 9:2).[872] If one assumes the developmentalistic understanding of Old Testament wisdom and views Job and Ecclesiastes as representatives of a "crisis" or "bankruptcy" of,[873] or polemic against[874] wisdom in Israel, then it would be no small step to baldly state that since Qoheleth does not imbue wisdom and folly with morality at any other point in the book he cannot do so at 7:25. But, the twentieth-century focus upon the tradition history of Ecclesiastes, with its resultant developmental reconstruction has been significantly questioned as of late.[875] While it is not the purpose of this project to pursue the origins and development of Israelite wisdom, it is important to note that one's presuppositions regarding the nature of Israelite wisdom hold important implications for how one settles the ambiguous syntax of this verse. I am persuaded that the developmental reconstruction of Old Testament wisdom which reads Ecclesiastes and Job as a "crisis"[876] or even as a serious "critique"[877] of traditional

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Qoheleth does not render folly in terms of morality, i.e., he intends to preserve the moral neutrality of folly in Ecclesiastes.

[871] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:169.

[872] *Ibid.*

[873] E.g., Galling, "*Der Prediger,*" 80; Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Koheleth," 141-53; Preuss, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur,* 114-136; Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*; Crüsemann, "The Unchangeable World"; Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation,* 116, 193-242.

[874] E.g., Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung,* 8; Zimmerli, *Das Buch des Predigers Salomo,* 132-35; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 305. 315-16; Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit,* 186; Loader, *Polar Structures*, 117.

[875] E.g., In *Theology of the Old Testament,* Brueggemann exposes the anachronistic nature of this approach, specifically in light of Old Testament Theology, by pointing to its dependence upon an epistemological grid constituted by a Hegelian sense of history as progressive and evolutionary. See *Idem, Theology of the Old Testament,* esp. 1-15. See also, Murphy's exposure of the flawed presuppositions that fund the "crisis of wisdom" view (*Ecclesiastes,* lxif.). Also, Gladson's and van Leeuwen's criticism via a sharpened understanding of retribution in OT wisdom. (Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29"; van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty," 25-36). Bartholomew summarizes the point argued by these two: "Once one recognizes that Proverbs's understanding of retribution is more complex than a mechanical deed-consequence notion, then Ecclesiastes' and Job's relationship to Proverbs and traditional wisdom has to be reevaluated" (*Idem,* "A God for Life, and Not Just for Christmas!", 50).

[876] Galling, Gese, Preuss, Schmid, etc.

[877] E.g., Zimmerli, *Das Buch des Predigers Salomo*, 132-35, 223; Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit,* 8; Loader, *Polar Structures*, 117; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel,* 233; Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit,* 186.

wisdom should be rejected.[878] By this I do not intend to imply that the relationship between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, for example, is simple, but I do intend to indicate that Qoheleth thought and wrote within the wisdom tradition, and "his work is intelligible only in this perspective."[879]

A second issue of importance with regard to the nature of Old Testament wisdom and one's interpretation of Ecclesiastes in general and this passage (even these few words) in particular is the relationship between wisdom and law.[880] In the late nineteenth century and throughout the first three-fourths of the twentieth century, this relationship was typically measured against a presupposed understanding of the OT as centered around God's acts in history. Since "OT wisdom literature appears to say little or nothing about God's great saving acts, its secondary status was confirmed for many."[881] As a result there was a general failure to account for wisdom within Old Testament theology, positing its sharp division from law.[882] For the interpretative impact of this dichotomy consider scholarly treatment of the epilogue to Ecclesiastes, or at least 12:13b. Simply put, because of the perceived separation of wisdom and law, the epilogue is often assigned to some later redactor's attempt to make Qoheleth orthodox or to "thematize a relationship between wisdom and...the Law."[883] Again, this is a debate that cannot be pursued in the current project therefore I will simply state my view. Following Bartholomew, *inter alios*, I understand "the strong distinction between law and wisdom" to be "a modern construct."[884]

Going back to Schoors' reading of 7:25, to say that Qoheleth has not (explicitly) categorized wisdom and folly in terms of morality is very different from saying that for Qoheleth wisdom and folly "have no moral connotation."[885]

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[878] Cf. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, II: 81ff.; Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, e.g., 72, 100.

[879] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxiv. See also, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 67

[880] Blenkinsopp offers a useful discussion of the relationship of these two traditions in, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*.

[881] Bartholomew, "Wisdom Books," 120.

[882] For a fine summary see, Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology*, 172ff. Preuss is the most vigorous proponent of the illegitimacy of Israelite wisdom to Old Testament theology. See his, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*.

[883] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 258-59.

[884] *Ibid.*, 259. "[C]ertainly by the third century BC it is likely that wisdom and law would not be considered separate paths to successful living in the minds of teachers and populace since both relate to ordering life in all its dimensions" (*Ibid.*) See Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," 146-158, for the seminal argument behind this approach.

[885] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:169.

"Wisdom" and "folly" are fundamentally and essentially of a moral, ethical, and religious nature in Israelite wisdom.[886] The complexity of this issue is hard to overstate, however a simple point is easily made. In Proverbs 3:19-20 and 8:22-31 Yahweh creates the world by and with wisdom,[887] and in Proverbs 9:10 and Job 28:28 the beginning of wisdom is "the fear of the Lord," and hence in OT wisdom there is an inseparably ethical and religious connotation to wisdom and its opposite, folly.[888] As Murphy writes:

> [T]he very origins and the authority of Wisdom suggest more than a personified order of creation. Wisdom is somehow identified with the Lord. The call of Lady Wisdom is the voice of the Lord; she is the revelation of God, not merely the self-revelation of creation. She is the divine summons issued in and through creation, sounding through the vast realm of the created world, and heard on the level of human experience.[889]

Murphy argues that Israel "did not 'believe' in the Lord who spoke through the prophets in contrast to 'knowing' him through his creation and the experience of it."[890] In von Rad's words: "The experiences of the world were for her [Israel] always divine experiences..., and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world."[891] Israelite Wisdom, in Murphy's words, never perceived experiences in the world as purely secular, "as apart from the Lord who controls it and who is revealed in it."[892] Again, von Rad writes:

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[886] "Most scholars now agree that OT wisdom is rooted in theology of creation and that in this sense it is religious and not secular" (Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 47). However, this is not meant to indicate that all occasions of folly count as sin. For a helpful introduction to this distinction see chapter 7, "Sin and Folly," in Plantinga, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be*, 113-28.

[887] However one chooses to translate אָמוֹן ("artisan," "trustworthy friend," or "ward"), the point of the passage is that Yahweh created the world by and with wisdom. Cf. van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 88-99; *Idem*, "Liminality," 96-97.

[888] I am thinking of, for example, van Leeuwen's idea of the "carved" created order. "The socio-ethical order of Proverbs1-9 is grounded in the creation order revealed by Wisdom who accompanied God as he set the cosmic boundaries" (*Ibid.*, 117, see ff.). This is the point that Fox makes, as pointed out earlier, regarding the assumed ontological nature of OT Wisdom as external to the sage who uses observation only as a means of support. As Bartholomew puts it, "Order and instruction or torah go hand-in-hand, and obedience requires both a good creation *and* instruction. Similarly Wisdom Literature assumes certain ethical principles that are not just read off creation but are often very similar to the principles found in the law" (Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 55).

[889] Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 138. Von Rad makes a similar point when he describes wisdom as "the form in which Jahweh's will and his accompanying of man (i.e., his salvation) approach man....Still, the most important thing is that wisdom does not turn towards man in the shape of an "It," teaching, guidance, salvation or the like, but of a person, a summoning "I." So wisdom is truly the form in which Jahweh makes himself present and in which he wishes to be sought by man" (*Idem*, *Old Testament Theology*, 444).

[890] Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 114.

[891] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 62.

[892] Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 114. This understanding lies behind Oliver O'Donovan's view of ethics as presented in *Resurrection and Moral Order*. He insists that setting kingdom ethics over

> We hold fast to the fact that in the case of the wise men's search for knowledge, when they expressed their results in a completely secular form, there was never any question of what we would call absolute knowledge functioning independently of their faith in Yahweh. This is inconceivable for the very reason that the teachers were completely unaware of any reality not controlled by Yahweh.[893]

In a similar manner, Cornelius Plantinga's exploration of sin, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be*, argues that, "The book of Proverbs usually doesn't even bother to distinguish between righteousness and wisdom: it pairs up righteousness with wisdom and wickedness with folly in such a way that the distinction between a moral judgment and a prudential judgment fades."[894] Bartholomew states the matter plainly, Israelite Wisdom, rooted in a theology of creation, knows nothing of the dualism "that has dogged the footsteps of theology and Church life in the twentieth century" with its "sacred/secular dichotomy."[895]

For someone to state that Qoheleth has been assuming wisdom and folly as morally neutral, the burden of proof is heavily upon that person, in light of Ecclesiastes' setting within the Israelite Wisdom tradition, to establish Qoheleth's departure from a central and foundational concept of that tradition: the givenness of wisdom as a religious concept.[896] It is more reasonable to assume that Qoheleth is *assuming* the morality of wisdom and folly,[897] and that he can make this assumption

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against creation ethics is a false dichotomy. In fact, O'Donovan even defines morality as "man's participation in the created order" (*Idem, Resurrection and Moral Order*, 76).

[893] Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 64. Von Rad, to be sure, was not completely consistent on this issue. In fact, as Murphy points out, von Rad's approach, along these lines, was better in his earlier treatment. E.g., cf. *Old Testament Theology*, I, 444 and *Wisdom in Israel*, 153-156. In light of von Rad's two proposals, exemplified in the two references, Murphy writes: "One does not have to choose between God and creation in Lady Wisdom, as von Rad does. Ultimately the revelation of creation is the revelation of God. God speaks through wisdom/creation, which is turned to human beings and speaks in the accents of God. Such is the thrust of Prov. 8" (Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 139).

[894] Plantinga, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be*, 115-16.

[895] Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 44. Cf., Murphy, "Wisdom – Thesis and Hypotheses," 38. Also, see Wolters' insightful study of the sacred/secular dichotomy as it pertains to wisdom in *The Song of the Valiant Woman*.

[896] Consider, for example, the profound and inextricable unity illustrated by the association of wisdom and the fear of the Lord. It is, in fact, this relationship that moved scholars in the last quarter of the twentieth century to begin to understand the deeply religious nature of OT wisdom. E.g., Bartholomew writes: "Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes all assert that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 16:6; 31:330; Job 28:28; Eccles. 5:7; 12:13)....[This] assertion...indicates that the writers assumed the validity of the historical and prophetic traditions" (Bartholomew, "Wisdom Books," 120). Cf., Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology"; Day, Gordon, Williamson, "Introduction" to *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, 1; Murphy, "Religious Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom," 449-58; *Idem*, "Israel's Wisdom," 1-43; *Idem, The Tree of Life*, esp. "Yahwism and Wisdom (The Wisdom Experience)," 121-26.

[897] Cf. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 132-33.

explicit at any given moment.[898] Behind Schoors' view, therefore, is either a failure to regard the deeply religious nature of Israelite wisdom, or a construal of wisdom along the lines of an evolutionary developmentalism with Ecclesiastes representing something like a "crisis" of wisdom.

Like Schoors, Rudman also works to eliminate any sense of moral judgment from this passage.[899] With Rudman, however, an exegetical insight emerges that strengthens the case I am marshalling: Qoheleth does not mention רשע in the Royal Experiment.[900] Combining this observation together with the absence of כסל anywhere else in Ecclesiastes (with the exception of the abstract noun in 10:6), Rudman suggests that רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל may be "an exegetical gloss inserted to link 7.25 with the 'wicked' woman in 7.26."[901] Deleting the "gloss" would leave וְלִרְעַת with two direct objects (foolishness and madness) to balance the two direct objects of 25a (וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן חָכְמָה). The effect of this emendation, Rudman asserts, is that "[t]he whole of 7.25 would then essentially be a restatement of Qoheleth's intent which he sets out in 1.17."[902]

However, "the circular intent at totality drive[s] us to explore other avenues before concluding that" this is a later addition.[903] For example, under the effect of the paradox, the chronological reader is in the midst of re-casting Qoheleth's entire story. The re-casting, is, however done by a disoriented reader who expects a reorientation with regard to Qoheleth's wisdom. This is a crucial moment in the story, and the sensitive reader is open to discovering something previously unnoticed about Qoheleth's journey. In this sense, Rudman is perceptive to highlight the uniqueness of רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל. Furthermore, the ease with which Rudman is able to emend the text into such a shape that merely restates 1:17 may reveal that רֶשַׁע כֶּסֶל is indeed an "insertion" into the Royal Experiment. However, the assumption that this insertion was provided subsequently (i.e., by a redactor), instead of by Qoheleth is

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[898] This is not to say that Qoheleth is slavishly bound to every aspect of traditional wisdom. However, if Qoheleth were to cast wisdom and folly in morally neutral categories he would be striking at the very heart of traditional wisdom, and surely would evidence such a radical move with more than that which Schoors indicates is the cause of his view.

[899] Rudman, *Determinism*, 100-117.

[900] The abstract noun is used in 3:16; 7:17.

[901] *Ibid.*, 104.

[902] *Ibid.*

[903] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 258. He is actually referring to the all too common attempt to assign the epilogue to the work of a later editor, however the logic stands for Rudman's proposed emendation also.

arbitrary, hastily dismissive of the circular intent at totality, insensitive to the flow of the narrative thus far, and lacks a respect for the poetics of repetition. As a result, Rudman's resolution cuts out a significant and compelling moment in Qoheleth's rhetoric. Before deleting the "twist" that is put upon the "restatement" (i.e., repetition) of 1:17, one should investigate the possible effects of the "twist." Doing this, leaving the MT as is, the reader is moved to remember the Royal Experiment in light of its morality.

Longman's reading, "the evil of foolishness, and the folly of madness,"[904] allows for the fact that Qoheleth may be intending to set before the reader the moral weight of wisdom and folly, in the midst of the reader's recollection of Qoheleth's journey. This approach is consistent with the fact that the paradox initiated in 7:23b continues to govern the passage. 7:25b, then, is another instance of deliberate grammatical ambiguity. Through ambiguous word order, the nuanced meaning of v 25b is left open. The reader is meant to engage more closely in reading the text in order to determine all the various options, and to suspend closure.[905] The questions the reader must ask, and refuse to answer decisively at this point are: Does v 25 direct the reader to see the "hitherto unforeseeable" insight that Qoheleth's mental journey has a certain (im)moral aspect? And, if so, how does this "shed...light on the new background"[906] (i.e., the paradox)? The importance of these questions is obvious from their *implications*, but Qoheleth also marks the issue by the "grouping of 'quest' verbs [which] suggests that Qoheleth has enlisted all of his powers of observation."[907]

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[904] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 201, 203.

[905] This ambiguity satisfies the controls presented by Raabe for discerning intentional ambiguity from ambiguity invented by the reader: (1) the issue is not based on cognate languages; (2) the context has offered anticipations; (3) there is a weighty semantic and theological significance at play (*Idem*, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," 227).

[906] Iser, *The Implied Reader*, 278.

[907] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 94.

Ecclesiastes 7:26

וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי
מַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוֹדִים
וַחֲרָמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים יָדֶיהָ
טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמָּלֵט מִמֶּנָּה וְחוֹטֵא יִלָּכֵד בָּהּ׃

And I find
the woman, more bitter than death, whose[908] *heart is snares*
and nets,[909] *and hands are fetters.*
The person who pleases God escapes from her, but the sinner is captured by her.

After the "elaborate introduction" of v 25,[910] Qoheleth identifies what he continually finds[911] in his extensive investigation (בקש, תור, דעת) of חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן, וְהַסְכְלוּת הוֹלֵלוּת רֶשַׁע כְּסָל;[912] he finds "the woman."

When we encountered מצא in v 24, the word was interpreted with regard to the semantic field of knowledge and understanding, but what is the meaning of the word in v 26? Is Qoheleth using it in the intellectual sense, "grasp, understand, learn"? If so, is he about to present to the reader a conclusion to his lifelong search? Is Qoheleth going to express the bottom-line result of his research? Or, has Qoheleth, in the midst of his searching, found something tangible? The reader must continue reading in order to make any final determination. (Once again, lexical ambiguity causes the reader to be engaged more closely in reading the text.)

In search of the nature of Qoheleth's "finding," the reader is faced with the task of identifying this woman. Whybray rightly observes that the "introduction of this reference to woman into the discussion has perplexed commentators from very early times."[913] However, the linear reader, in reading v 26 as a continuation of the

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[908] While I have taken אֲשֶׁר as a relative adjective, and thus non-restrictive, it is possible to take אֲשֶׁר as causal, thus: "More bitter than death is woman, *if* she is a snare" (E.g., Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 268-69; Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 373-83).

[909] MT uses *darga* accent to link מְצוֹדִים and וַחֲרָמִים. LXX translated מְצוֹדִים as modifying the woman, and וַחֲרָמִים as modifying her heart. I have followed the MT, and thus take הִיא as nominative absolute, emphasizing the subject and resumed in the suffixes of לִבָּהּ and יָדֶיהָ. BHS disagrees with the linkage, and places a poetic line-break between the two nouns. Cf., Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 263; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 269. *Contra*, Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, I:49; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31.

[910] Murphy, *Eccleasiastes*, 76.

[911] The initial participle (the only occurrence of the participle form of מצא in Ecclesiastes) is perhaps meant to indicate repetition and continuation. See, Isaksson, *Studies*, 66; Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, I:184; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 261; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 203.

[912] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 123; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 26, 30; Rudman, "Woman as Divine Agent," 413.

[913] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 125.

thought begun in vv 23-25 (especially the extensive investigation, elaborately introduced in v 25), is not caught off guard.

In v 23 Qoheleth reminds the reader of his life's investigation (i.e., the Royal Experiment), and in so doing he introduces a troubling paradox: although Qoheleth has used wisdom in his lifelong search, he does not possess wisdom. In the next verse (24), Qoheleth reiterates the paradox, intensifying its negative side – the elusiveness of wisdom. V 25 is a second reminder of the investigation, but this time, instead of nuancing the investigation with the paradox (v 23) Qoheleth reiterates the twin objects of his search: wisdom and folly (cf. 1:17; 2:12; see also, 2:3), all the while strengthening the connections thus far offered to the Royal Experiment, firmly placing this experiment as the backdrop to that which is happening at this point in vv 23-29. Now, in v 26, Qoheleth tells the reader that in his search, he repeatedly "finds"[914] a woman that is "more bitter than death."[915]

Qoheleth's repeated "finding" is "the woman."[916] This would appear to preclude the interpretation of וּמוֹצֵא along the lines of an intellectual understanding, and instead support something more like "finding" in the sense of finding a tangible object. (E.g., As one finds one's keys after searching [cf., בקש in v 25] for them.)[917] The meaning of מצא is different here from that in v 24. A shift has occurred. This is a classic example of antanaclasis,[918] a specific type of lexical ambiguity that, like other

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[914] Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 203; Krüger, *Qoheleth,* 143-47; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 268.

[915] Again, notice that Qoheleth delays the direct object, and thus sustains the anticipation, by reversing the typical word order (s+o+do). This also serves to emphasize the quality of this woman – "more bitter than death." Death, as we have seen and will continue to see throughout Ecclesiastes, is particularly troublesome for Qoheleth.

[916] Contra, those who interpret the phrase, מַר מִמָּוֶת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה, as a quotation. E.g., Schoors, *Pleasing Words* I:188, 191; Strobel, *Das Buch Prediger,* 121-25; Lohfink, *Qoheleth,* 100-103; Loretz, "Poetry and Prose in the Book of Qohelet (1:1-3:22; 7:23-8:1)," 183. For a discussion of the weaknesses of these approaches see, Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 111-13.

[917] Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis,*" 567. Contra, Schoors, *Pleasing Words* II:172. Pahk erroneously appeals to Ceresko's article to suggest "understand" as a viable interpretation of מצא in v 26 (Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 378n31), but he (Pahk) fails to mention that Ceresko specifically translates this occurrence of the word as "find" in explicit opposition to "grasp, learn, understand," i.e., its "intellectual sense" (*Idem,* "The Function of *Antanaclasis,*" 566-67).

[918] Cf., Casanowicz, "Paranomasia in the Old Testament," 105-67; Sasson, "Wordplay in the OT," 968-70; Schökel, *Estudios de poètica hebrea,* 72-77; Bühlmann and Scherer, *Stilfiguren der Bibel,* 19-21; *The Oxford English Dictionary,* "antanaclasis." Ceresko demonstrates the special skills of the wisdom poets of the OT in exploiting the variety of possible meanings of מצא, and furthermore, it is the author of Ecclesiastes, according to Ceresko, who displays the greatest proficiency with this fecund word ("The Function of *Antanaclasis,*" 568-69). Contra Fox who argues that מצא is "best rendered consistently throughout" for the insufficient reason that, while "[s]uch a word play is possible,...the shifts in meaning of the verb in this passage are hard to follow" (*Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 271). However, the difficulty and subtlety of the shifts of meaning in a word should not be seen as proof of the absence of such a technique. Cf. Wolters's discussion of the presence of such

ambiguities we have faced thus far, causes the reader to be engaged more closely in reading the text.

Proceeding through the text, the reader wonders why this woman is qualified with such a negative exclamation: "More bitter than death!"[919] Qoheleth immediately (for a change) tells us why: the woman is extremely powerful and dangerous, as signified by three closely parallel nouns: "snares," "nets," and "fetters." So, who is "the woman"? Traditionally, scholars have identified four basic options[920] for the woman's identity: women in general,[921] a specific type of woman (i.e., adulteresses, temptresses, harlots),[922] a specific woman (e.g., his wife),[923] and a personification of folly (i.e., Woman Folly).[924] The cotextual, contextual, and linguistic evidence strongly points to the last option.[925]

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linguistic dexterity in Ancient Near Eastern literature, in "*ṢÔPIYYÂ* (Prov 31:27 as Hymnic Participle and Play on *SOPHIA*"), esp. 582-84.

[919] Typical word order (obj followed by any modifiers) is reversed (modifiers followed by object) for emphasis.

[920] Ogden's suggestion that she is "premature death" has met with virtually no acceptance (*Qoheleth,* 120-21). Krüger's proposal that she is Lady Wisdom has also been summarily dismissed ("'Frau Weisheit' in Koh 7,26" *Bib* 73 (1992): 394-403; *Idem, Qoheleth,* 146-47. Cf., Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 381-82, n. 49; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric,* 345, n. 54. However, Christianson offers limited approval in "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 120-21.

[921] Thaumaturgos, *Ecclesiastes,* 187-90; Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 387; Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes,* 331-34; Guillaumont, "L'Ecclésiaste," cited in Ellul, *Reason for Being,* 199; Gordis, *Koheleth,* 282; Zimmerman, *The Inner World of Qohelet,* 29-30, 152; Zimmerli, *Das Buch des Predigers Salomo,* 208-9; Baltzer, "Women and War in Qoheleth 7:23-8:1a," 127-32; Michel, *Untersuchungen,* 225-38; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *"Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück" (Koh 2,24),* 173-80; Fox, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions,* 242; *Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 266-69; *Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 51; Isaksson, *Studies,* 65-66; Garrett, "Ecclesiastes 7:25-29 and the Feminist Hermeneutic," 309-21; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 204. Rudman's proposal, that the woman of 7:26 is God's agent of deterministic force, ultimately fits within the category of women in general. See, *Idem, Determinism,* 101-116, 124; *Idem,* "Woman as Divine Agent," 418-19, 421. Lohfink's view also fits within this category. See, Lohfink, "War Kohelet ein Frauenfeind?,"281-82; *Idem, Kohelet,* 279, 281ff.; *Idem, Qoheleth,* 101-102. Cf., JB and NEB.

[922] *Rashbam,* 164; Luther, *Ecclesiastes,* 130-31; Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 157; Loretz, *Qohelet,* 115ff., 205; Riesener, "Frauenfeindschaft," 193-207; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes,* 146; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 125; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,* 154, 157; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 76; Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 382; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes,* 116; Shields, *The End of Wisdom,* 187. Cf., RSV and The Living Bible. Christianson argues that the presence of the definite article with the noun (אִשָּׁה), the only occurrence of this in OT wisdom literature, "gives weight to the idea that a particular type of woman is under consideration; i.e., '*the* [kind of] woman who is traps...'" (Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 111n.4).

[923] Lys, *L'Ecclésiaste ou Que vaut la vie?,* cited in Ellul, *Reason for Being,* 199; Tamez, *Horizons,* 102; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs,* 205.

[924] LXX, SyrH, and Copt (see, Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 261); Friedländer, *Der Prediger,* cited in Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 82; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 51, 261-63, 274-75; Perry, *Dialogues,* 132; Fontaine, "'Many Devices,'" 147; Brown, *Ecclesiastes,* 83; Tamez, *Horizons,* 102; Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good?,* 179; McKenzie, *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society,* 154. While Christianson does not give his full support to this view, he does suggest that there is a similarity of purpose between Qoheleth's woman and the "wicked woman" of Proverbs (*Idem,* "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 120). However, in *A Time to Tell,* Christianson appears to identify Qoheleth's woman as women in general (*Idem,*145). In Proverbs, the "strange" or "alien" or "adulterous" woman is a metaphorical illustration

Regarding the cotextual evidence, the focus of the pericope has thus far been on wisdom and folly. Qoheleth has just stated that he wants to understand, explore, seek and "attain wisdom,"[926] and he wants to understand and observe folly and wickedness (vv 23, 25). Most importantly, the paradox initiated in v 23 continues to govern the passage. Indeed, the reader's deep need to solve the riddle has been teased and provoked in every line of text. Between that initial moment of tension and the current moment of discovery, Qoheleth has repeatedly driven the reader back to his Royal Experiment, all the while, highlighting two issues: (1) his empirical epistemology (נִסִּיתִי and בַּחָכְמָה in v 23, חֶשְׁבּוֹן in v 25), and (2) his twin foci – wisdom and folly (cf. v 25 and 1:17; 2:3, 12-16). In a search focused on wisdom and folly in general, it seems less likely that Qohelet is suddenly introducing the topic of women in general, or even of a particular type of woman, than that the referent of the dangerous woman is הַסִּכְלוּת, the only definite noun in the preceding verse.[927]

Van Leeuwen's work on Proverbs is helpful with regard to the relevant wider wisdom context. He argues that Proverbs presents a web of bipolar metaphors displaying systematic coherence: two women, each with their own house and invitation/call, who are in turn responded to by two youths, one positive and one negative, who follow two ways. The point at hand is that the two Women (together with the two houses, roads, invitations, and youths) are root metaphors in Old Testament Wisdom, that "together embody different, though related aspects of one underlying worldview," or map of reality.[928] As I have stated previously, Qoheleth's work is intelligible only in the Old Testament wisdom perspective. Therefore, the strong emphasis on wisdom and folly is, to the involved reader, a fertile stimulus for the entire web of wisdom symbols. In other words, Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly,

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of folly. See Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:330 for good summary of rabbinic and modern views of this woman.

[925] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 262. Also see Fox's critique of the view that reads this woman as a specific type of woman, i.e., temptress (*Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 269).

[926] Fox and Porten argue that בַּקֵּשׁ indicates seeking "with the intention of attaining" ("Unsought Discoveries," 30).

[927] Seow points out that this is the interpretation of the earliest Greek translators – the first interpreters of the text on record (Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 262, 271). In his emendation of v 25, Rudman inadvertently recognizes what I am arguing for when he states that רֶשַׁע כְּסָל may be "an exegetical gloss inserted to link 7.25 with the 'wicked' woman in 7.26" (*Determinism,* 104). Porten also supports this connection by his structural analysis of the מצא–בקש wordplay, with its 1+3 pattern in 7:23-8:1a. The critical element of Porten's argument for the point at hand is that Porten demonstrates v 25 as the 1 use of בקש with vv. 26-27 containing the 3 uses of מצא. This tightly connects the "finding" of v 26 to the "seeking" of v 25, and therefore sets the "woman" of v. 26 in the context of the search for wisdom and the desire to know folly. See, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 34-38.

[928] Van Leeuwen, "Liminality," 113.

together with their two houses, two invitations/calls, and two ways are in the background the entire time. When Qoheleth elaborately introduces his empirical quest to find wisdom and folly, and then states that such a quest has resulted in him continually finding a certain dangerous and deadly woman, the most natural and most immediate identification of this woman available to the implied reader is Woman Folly.

The linguistic evidence that confirms this interpretation is both thematic and verbal. For example, Farmer states the matter plainly.

> If we ask who 'the woman' is who best fits this description, we might easily find an answer in the personification of Folly in Prov 9:13-18. As in Proverbs, so here in Ecclesiastes the one who pleases God is said to be able to escape from the nets of folly, 'but the sinner is taken by her' (Eccl. 7:26).[929]

Perry makes a similar point by drawing out the connection of Eccl 7:26 and Eccl 2 while arguing that the dangerous woman is a "figure of speech" for the "emptiness of pleasure" [Eccl 2], which is deeply reminiscent of the "foreign woman" described throughout Proverbs 1-9.[930] Murphy also affirms this connection: "The discovery seems to be an old *topos* celebrated in the wisdom literature...the adulterous woman."[931] Even Fox, who rejects the identification of the woman in 7:26 with Woman Folly, notes the similarity between Qoheleth's woman and the strange woman of Proverbs (e.g., Prov 22:14; 23:27).[932] Seow points to connections between 7:26 and Woman Folly in Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:3-6; 6:24-26; 7:5-27; 9:3-18 who is personified as a seductive adulteress laying deadly traps,[933] and from whom one must escape.[934] In Prov. 5:4-5 the adulterous woman is כַּלַּעֲנָה מָרָה[935] who leads one to

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[929] Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good*, 179.

[930] Perry, *Dialogues*, 132. Cf., Fontaine, "Many Devices," 147.

[931] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76; see also *Idem*, "On Translating Ecclesiastes," 575. Granted, Murphy reads the woman of Eccl 7:26 as a specific type of woman (adulterous woman) and not as Woman Folly. However, he draws the connection between Eccl 7:26 and Proverbs; therefore, in light of the rest of my argument, Murphy's observation can be understood to support my working hypothesis.

[932] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 269. However, Fox immediately qualifies, "But Qohelet is speaking about all women, having failed to find even one who escapes the verdict" (*Ibid.*). With his appeal to v 29, once again, the non-temporal nature of Fox's reading is evident.

[933] E.g., Seow points out that the association of חֵרֶם with the "ban" may suggest the extreme danger that this woman poses (*Ecclesiastes*, 263).

[934] *Ibid.*, 262; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 83; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76. See also, Meinhold, *Die Sprüche, Part 1*, 158-59; Riesener, "Frauenfeindschaft," 205; Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good*, 179; Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 120. Seow argues that "the use of the definite article" suggests "that the audience is expected to know who this feminine figure is." And that, "the most obvious" "antecedent referent" would be the feminine noun, "folly," the only noun in v 25 that is definite (Ecclesiastes, 262, 271).

[935] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 146.

מָוֶת.[936] In Ben Sira 9:3, there is a warning to "not approach a strange woman, lest you fall into her trap...[and to] not associate with a harlot, lest you be caught in her snares [παγίδας]." Seow argues that the מְצוֹדִים of Eccl 7:26 is equivalent to Ben Sira's παγίδας.[937] In summary, the identity of this woman is only ambiguous when it is read apart from its wisdom context, out of its immediate cotext, or with a developmentalism that issues forth in a "crisis of wisdom" view.

Interpreting the woman as Woman Folly reveals an irony. Qoheleth clearly wanted to explore folly. In 2:3, he plainly states his desire to "lay hold of folly," and now that he has found this object of his search (v 25), he is deeply disappointed ("More bitter than death"). But what is the cause of this bitterness? The negative experience appears to be a result of the death-grip Woman Folly has on Qoheleth ("snares," "nets," and "fetters"). In 2:3, Qoheleth announced his intention to use wisdom ("my heart still guiding me with wisdom") as a tool that would enable him to "*lay hold on folly*, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life."[938]Again, in 7:25 he clearly indicates his desire to "know" folly. Now, however, he decries the "bitterness" of folly. Why? Because he has not "laid hold on folly" but folly has "laid hold" on him, and he cannot escape. But why cannot he escape her? Why cannot he use her as he intended (as a source for discovering "what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life" [2:3], and as a source for discovering wisdom [7:23-25]) and then simply release her? The last line of v 26 answers this question: Only the טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים escapes from her, in contrast to the חוֹטֵא, who is doomed to her clutches.

It is necessary to recognize that, as we saw with regard to רֶשַׁע כְּסִל in v 25, so here there is a significant trend in recent scholarship to interpret טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים and חוֹטֵא as categories void of any ethical or religious qualification regarding the subject. Murphy's view is illustrative: "The terms טוב, 'good,' and חוטא, 'errant,' are best understood as in 2:26, not as moral qualifications, but as designations of human beings in terms of the inscrutable divine will. Some will fall victim to this type of

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[936] In Proverbs, the adulterous (or strange) woman (a personification of folly) is constantly connected with death. E.g., 2:16-19; 5:5-6, 20; 7:5, 22-27; 9:18.

[937] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 263. See also, Ben Sira 26:22; Skehan, "Tower of Death or Deadly Snare? (Sir 26,22)," 154.

[938] ESV, emphasis mine.

woman, but others will not, as God pleases."[939] If this approach is correct, then Qoheleth's bitterness is a result of God's activity, completely outside of his own (Qoheleth's) control. However, if Qoheleth has fallen prey to Woman Folly as a result of his own ethical failing, then he is responsible for his bitter experience.

Typically, the ethically neutral view is built upon one or more of the following three premises: (1) The "original profane meaning" of חוֹטֵא is "to miss (a target), fail to attain."[940] (2) The restriction of sin to a narrowly conceived moral, ethical, or religious failure. (3) A developmentalistic approach combined with the view of retribution in traditional wisdom as an iron-clad causality.[941] Each of these premises, however, are problematic.

First of all, while there are a few times in the Old Testament in which חטא lacks any ethical or religious sense,[942] there are more than 230 occurrences of the verb and more than 350 occurrences of the noun in which there is undoubtedly an ethical and religious sense.[943] As Whybray points out, there is "no evidence that the meaning of *ḥôṭe'* here is other than the usual one."[944] In fact, as Whybray points out, it is "specifically contrasted with" טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים.[945]

The second presupposition behind the recent trend to read the two types of persons in 7:26 (טוֹב and חוֹטֵא) as void of any ethical or religious meaning is the

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[939] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

[940] Cf. Clines, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* 3, 194-200; Van Gemeren, *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 2, 87-93; Botterweck, Ringgren, Fabry, eds., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* 2, s. v. חָטָא, ḥāṭā', by Koch; Jenni and Westermann, eds., *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* 1, s. v. חטא, ḥṭ', *ich verfehlen*, by Knierim.

[941] Fox argues for the ethical neutrality of טוֹב and חוֹטֵא (e.g., Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 117, 128-30) but he rejects reading Ecclesiastes against Proverbs. Fox sees Qoheleth as extending Proverbs. By doing so, Qoheleth sets his sights on life itself, and ultimately God. "Wisdom fails to reach the grand goals that Qoheleth (sharing the attitudes of the other sages) sets for it. This failure is due not so much to the inherent feebleness of human intellect as to the cussedness of life. An absurd world thwarts understanding. Qoheleth's complaints are not a polemic against wisdom, but a protest against life – and God – on wisdom's behalf" (Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 126; cf. *Idem, A Time to Tear Down*, 92).

[942] Judg 20:16; Job 5:24; Prov 8:36; 14:21; 19:2; 20:2; Is 65:20.

[943] Cf. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 64. Schoors also admits that "in almost all these instances it has the theological force of 'to sin'" (*Idem, Pleasing Words*, I: 225-26).

[944] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.

[945] *Ibid.*, 64-65. However, Whybray argues that both in 7:26 and 2:26 the reasons are hidden as to why one person is a sinner and another is pleasing to God (*Ibid.*, 64-65, 125). Fox makes the same argument, stating that it is not the behavior of the חטא that results in "the unfortunate fate." Instead, it is the "unfortunate fate" that makes the man "unfortunate" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 30-31). It is my opinion that, of the eight times that חטא is used in Ecclesiastes (2:26; 5:5; 7:20; 7:26; 8:12; 9:2; 9:18; 10:4), it is only possibly morally neutral in 9:18 and 10:4. However, even these two occurrences are charged with a sense of ethics if one accepts van Leeuwen's notion of a "carved" order. See argument below.

restriction of sin (and by implication, righteousness) to narrowly construed categories of ethics and piety. According to this perspective, the person who is ensnared is not "necessarily a sinner in the moral sense but a fool or somebody who makes mistakes."[946] The problem with this view is illuminated by van Leeuwen's notion of created order. To begin with, van Leeuwen presupposes

> Woman Wisdom...[as] the 'self-revelation' of an archetypal normativity built into the cosmos, a *tertium quid* that mediates between God and the world, a something embedded in the fabric of creation, but which is not simply to be identified with created things. This cosmic Wisdom serves to ground and legitimate human wisdom teaching.[947]

The world, described by van Leeuwen as "the arena of human existence," is characterized by two fundamental features: first is its boundaries, or limits; second is "the bi-polar human *eros* for the beauty of Wisdom, who prescribes life within limits, or for the seeming beauty of Folly, who offers bogus delights in defiance of created limits."[948] All of creation is carved (see בְּחֻקּוֹ in Prov 8:27) with limits. That is, "limits in the social," natural, and cultural spheres are all "grounded in and reflect" the orderedness of "creation itself."[949] As James Fleming writes: "wisdom...was wrought into the constitution of the universe." The wise person, therefore, is the one who "find[s] out what it [the divine constitution of the universe] is, then order[s] himself accordingly."[950] This is what van Leeuwen means when he describes the wise person as the person who stays within Wisdom's "prescribed cosmic-social boundaries." In contrast, the person who is characterized by folly is the person who engages in "the deadly pursuit of things out of bounds."[951] Furthermore, "good" is defined as staying within the prescribed boundaries,[952] and "evil" is defined as "the trespassing of these limits."[953] In this approach there is no secular-sacred dichotomy

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[946] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:227.

[947] Van Leeuwen, "Liminality," 116. He acknowledges this as "essentially von Rad's view" (*Ibid.*).

[948] *Ibid.*

[949] *Ibid.*, 117, see also, 119, and Prov 15:25; 22:28; 23:10-11; Deut 19:14; 27:17; Hos 5:10; 1 Kgs 21; Is 28:23-29.

[950] Fleming, *Personalities of the Old Testament*, 502.

[951] *Ibid.*, 116.

[952] Von Rad defines the "good" person as the person who "submits" to the pattern of reality "which can be discerned in the world...Such a man...was called by the teachers...a *ṣaddîq*" (*Idem, Wisdom in Israel*, 78). See also Knierim's notion of righteousness as "imbedded in and in accordance with [God's] creation of the world" (*Idem*, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," 96-97).

[953] Van Leeuwen, "Liminality," 116. Schmid is working from this perspective when he defines righteousness as the ordering of nature, society, and culture in the way God intended. See his, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation," 102-17. Consider also, the notion of sin as presented in Genesis 3, whereby Eve's trespass was the tasting of fruit that did not belong to her (Gen. 3:11, 17). This fruit, as part of God's creation, was declared good by God's sevenfold declaration (Gen. 1:4, 10,

because all of God's creation is subject to his ordering boundaries. "Wisdom is ethical conformity to God's creation."[954] Therefore, for a human to violate God's boundaries is to be seduced by Woman Folly, a liminal figure found in every sphere of life. This approach to wisdom expands one's understanding of the ethical, moral, and religious. Indeed, it demands that foolishness and folly be construed in terms of morality. For one to act foolishly, or to engage in folly is to commit a moral evil in that one is crossing a boundary set by the Creator through Wisdom at the creation of the world.[955]

The third presupposition behind the current a-moral view of טוֹב and חוֹטֵא in 7:26 is the idea that there exists within traditional wisdom a conception of retribution that is based upon a mechanical act-consequence nexus. Schoors explicitly states the relationship:

> In view of Qohelcth's criticism of the traditional connection between a moral attitude and good fortune (act-consequence process), we may conclude that in 2,26; 7,26 חוֹטֵא (and its opposite טוב לפני אלהים) does not have the traditional moral meaning but denotes an element of divine (dis)favour without an ethical connotation.[956]

The logic appears to be: In traditional wisdom divine reward and punishment is based upon one's actions. Qoheleth rejects the traditional view. Qoheleth, therefore, intends no ethical or religious reason behind one being determined by God as either טוֹב or חוֹטֵא and thus either escaping or getting caught by the dangerous and deadly woman.

In the last two centuries, many scholars have read Proverbs as simplistic dogmatism, a naïve presentation of the idea that one prospers or lacks prosperity based upon one's deeds.[957] Wisdom, in this reading, automatically leads to life and prosperity, while folly leads to poverty and destruction. Eventually, as the view goes, this iron-clad causality crumbled beneath the sheer weight of reality resulting in a crisis in Wisdom represented, in different ways, by Ecclesiastes and Job.

12, 18, 21, 25, 31), therefore it was not intrinsically bad. However, God did declare it off limits to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:17). In this respect, van Leeuwen defines sin as, "an attempt to displace God as the Creator by redrawing the limits of creation to suit our will rather than his" (van Leeuwen, "Enjoying Creation—Within Limits," 30). This insight is even more compelling for Ecclesiastes in light of Qoheleth's oft highlighted indebtedness to Gen. 1-3.

[954] Fleming, *Personalities of the Old Testament*, 502.

[955] Wolters provides an excellent analysis of this approach to OT wisdom in his *Creation Regained*, esp., 13-51.

[956] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:227.

[957] An important essay, regarding this view, despite his rejection of the term "retribution," is Koch, "Is There a Theology of Retribution in the Old Testament?", 57-87.

If this is an appropriate reading of early wisdom (e.g., Proverbs), then Ecclesiastes is obviously reacting with a criticism of the tradition. However, literary and canonical readings of Israel's wisdom literature, with their reappropriation of the Wisdom books as literary wholes, have posed significant, and in my view, convincing challenges to this all too commonplace approach. For example, van Leeuwen argues that the large blocks of sayings in Proverbs that assert a simple cause-and-effect relationship between righteousness and wealth, wickedness and poverty are better identified as developing a "character-consequence-nexus" rather than an individual "act-consequence-nexus."[958] The consequential relationship, then, is not between individual, concrete actions and results but between character and destiny. Van Leeuwen's work exposes the reading of mechanical retribution into Proverbs as the result of atomizing the text and missing the real focus on long-term character.[959] Van Leeuwen sums up his reading of the nature of retribution in Proverbs as follows:

> In general, the sages clearly believed that wise and righteous behaviour did make life better and richer, though virtue did not guarantee those consequences. Conversely, injustice, sloth, and the like generally have bad consequences. The editor-sages who structured Proverbs sought first to teach these basic 'rules of life,' thus the heavy emphasis on character-consequence patterns in both Proverbs 1-9 and 10-15. We must first learn the basic rules; the exceptions can come later. Though very aware of exceptions to the character consequence rule, the sages insisted that righteousness is better than wickedness. The most fundamental and profound reason for this is that they believed that God loves the one and hates the other. For Israel's sages that sometimes seems the only answer....the sages knew that there are limits to human wisdom. General patterns may be discerned, but many particular events may be unjust, irrational, and ultimately inscrutable.[960]

As I said before, those who read the victim and the escapee of 7:26 in a morally neutral sense base their view upon one or more of the three presuppositions presented. Fox, for example, in *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, defends his neutral reading via the second presupposition (together with a rather deterministic view of God).[961]

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[958] Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty," 27. See also, Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 90.

[959] Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty," 28-29. Others who have argued against the commonplace reading of an iron-clad causality into Proverbs include, Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29"; Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, 34-36.

[960] Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty," 32, 33.

[961] "While most sages take it for granted that God is offended only by sin or moral folly, Qoh believes that God (like a human ruler) may treat a person as offensive for inexplicable reasons and not necessarily because of actual sin or folly" (Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 189).

> As many interpreters recognize, the *ḥote'* here [2:26 and 7:26] is not a transgressor against the law or moral norms, but rather one who has somehow incurred God's disfavor. Still, the concept of *ḥote'* is not diluted to the point of being merely an "unfortunate" man (thus Ginsberg).... [It] always denotes offensiveness to someone...In Qoh 2:26 and 7:26 the *ḥote'* is someone who is offensive to God.[962]

However, Fox goes on to argue that the person in 7:26 that is offensive to God "may be no more or less virtuous than others. Qohelet calls a man pleasing or offensive to God in accordance with his fate rather than his deeds."[963] This is a restatement of Fox's view articulated twenty-one years earlier in the article co-written with Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," in which Fox suggests that Qoheleth sees himself in both 2:18-21, 26 and in 7:26-28 as the חטא.[964] However, in both passages it is not the behavior of the חטא that results in "the unfortunate fate," rather it is, according to Fox, the "unfortunate fate" that makes the man "unfortunate." This must be understood in light of the fact that "wisdom literature teaches that a man's fate shows his moral quality." Therefore, in 7:26, Qoheleth is arguing that "escaping" from this woman, "whatever the reason," is fortune, "a sign of God's favor, while getting caught by her is a great misfortune, a sign of God's disfavor." To untangle this Gordian knot, Fox makes the following proposal: "the moral valuation of both depends upon one's beliefs as to how one receives favor from God, whether by righteousness or by luck."[965]

In his 1993 essay, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," Fox shifts the burden of evaluation from the interpreter to Qoheleth, arguing that Qoheleth "does not regard wisdom as an ethical or religious virtue."[966] Proverbs, according to Fox, does present, as its "central principle," the idea that being "smart" is being "righteous and being righteous makes you smart," but this is

> a new doctrine being expounded programmatically by the authors of Proverbs or, more likely, a layer of proverbial material. It is a teaching that Ben Sira absorbed better than Qoheleth. Qoheleth never says that wisdom entails or ensues righteousness or fear of God, though he certainly affirms these virtues. There is no suggestion, for example, that the "wise" youth of 4:13 has any moral superiority over the old king, or that amassing wealth "in wisdom" (i.e., by intelligence) is an inherently honest process, or that Qoheleth himself was pursuing some moral imperative in seeking wisdom (1:12-17). He does pair

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[962] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 189-90.
[963] *Ibid.,* 269; cf., Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31.
[964] *Ibid.,* 34.
[965] *Ibid.,* 30-31.
[966] Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 128.

> righteousness and wisdom in 7:16 and 9:1, but he is bracketing the categories as positive values, not equating them.[967]

Ecclesiastes is, therefore, more in line with the rest of the Old Testament in viewing *ḥokmah* as "ethically neutral" and rejecting the notion that "*ḥokmah* is *ipso facto* a moral virtue" (Proverbs).[968] How else, Fox argues, with this perspective in view, in *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, could "[w]icked men and nations...have *ḥokmah* (e.g., 2 Sam 13:3; Isa 29:14; 47:10; Ezek 28:5)?"[969]

In sharp contrast to Fox's view, van Leeuwen rejects all three presuppositions. He argues that Old Testament Wisdom is best understood as a "totality concept": wisdom is "as broad as reality and constitutes a culturally articulated way of relating to the entire world."[970] (Again, we see the deep rootedness of wisdom in creation theology.) Thus, the Old Testament describes "good sailors, metalworkers, weavers, counselors, scribes, and builders" as חכם. So van Leeuwen, like Fox,[971] recognizes the presence in the Old Testament of a conception of "wisdom" as referring to any human skill, competence, or craft.[972] However, by approaching wisdom as a "totality concept," he rejects the conclusion that the wide-ranging aspects of "wisdom" in the Old Testament are fundamentally competing conceptions of wisdom.[973] Proverbs is not abandoning the notion of wisdom as expertise (e.g., Ex 35:10, 25, 35) by focusing on the articulation of "the religion-based, sociomoral aspects of human competence and virtue in relation to Yahweh."[974] As in the earlier discussion of Murphy, von Rad, and Bartholomew, so here with van Leeuwen, the point is that Old Testament "wisdom thought and practice are never 'secular,' even where God is not mentioned. Thus, even farming is an aspect of religion (Isa. 28:23-29)."[975] Folly and wisdom, then, are "forms of action" in a world created and carved by Yahweh,[976] and a particular action is wise

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[967] *Ibid.*

[968] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 72.

[969] *Ibid.* At this point it seems that Fox has effectively dismissed his earlier view that "fool" and "sinner" are "two concepts," that "are almost inseparable in wisdom literature" (Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 30).

[970] Van Leeuwen, "Wisdom Literature," 848.

[971] Fox clearly recognizes Old Testament Wisdom as "expertise of all sorts" (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 72; See also, *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 116-117).

[972] Van Leeuwen, "Building God's House," 205; *Idem*, "Wisdom Literature," 848.

[973] *Ibid.*

[974] *Ibid.* Contra Fox, as mentioned above, but also Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*.

[975] Van Leeuwen, "Wisdom Literature," 848.

[976] *Ibid.*

or foolish based upon its harmony or lack thereof with "the wisdom by which God created the world (cf. Prov. 3:19-20; 14:1; 24:3-4; Exod. 31:1-3; 1 Kings 7:13)."[977] Albert Wolters' work on the history of interpretation of the Valiant Woman of Prov 31:10-31 profoundly illustrates this point.[978] Here is a woman whose everyday tasks "are seen, not as something opposed to, or even distinct from her fear of the Lord, but rather as its *external manifestation.*"[979] In other words, all of her "actions are rooted in (or even constitute) her fear of the Lord."[980] Qoheleth, on the other hand, has crossed a boundary that: (1) justifies his being labeled a חטא, and (2) positioned him to be "captured" by Woman Folly.

The interpretation that identifies the woman of v 26 as Woman Folly and the final phrase as a moral evaluation of Qoheleth is strengthened by a subtle wordplay between the first word and the penultimate word of the verse. As previously mentioned, one of the many meanings of מצא is "to seize, acquire, grasp." In fact, Samuel Iwry's research presents the case for the use of מצא, in some passages, to indicate a "military *terminus technicus* for 'captive'; e.g., Judg 20:48."[981] In v 26a Qoheleth informs the reader that his Royal Experiment has led him, repeatedly, to "*find* [מצא] the woman." This woman, turns out to be Woman Folly with her fetter-hands and snare/net-heart. Qoheleth ends v 26 stating that the חוֹטֶא is "captured" (יִלָּכֶד) by her. So, Qoheleth has found (מצא) the woman, only to be found, in the sense of captured (לכד as a synonym of מצא) by her.[982]

This interpretation of v 26, and the above-described word-play are supported by two insights offered by Bezalel Porten in his exploration of the rhetorical use of the מצא-בקש combination throughout the Old Testament. First of all, of the four examples that Porten explores (Gen 37:15-17, 32; Cant 3:1-5; I Sam 9:1-10:27; Ecc 7:23-8:1a), the latter three demonstrate a "surprise finding" that each seeker experiences while engaged in his search. [983] With regard to Eccl 7:26, Porten identifies Qoheleth's surprise finding to be the fact that "woman is more bitter than

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[977] *Ibid.*

[978] Wolters, *The Song of the Valiant Woman.*

[979] *Ibid.*, 25.

[980] *Ibid.*, 26.

[981] Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis,*" 555. See, Iwry, "'והנמצא' — A Striking Variant Reading in IQIs[a]," 33-43.

[982] If someone thinks this wordplay is too subtle, see note 918 above.

[983] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 35-37.

death."[984] While my view with regard to the *identity* of the woman is inconsistent with Porten's, Porten's *logic* is consistent with my reading. The difference between Qoheleth's desire for wisdom and his desire for folly is that the latter desire is subordinate to the former. Somehow, Qoheleth thinks that understanding folly will help him with this goal.[985] In 2:3, it is his possession of wisdom that will protect him during his foray into the house of folly. However, 7:26 reveals Qoheleth to be under the control of Woman Folly – quite the opposite of his intent stated in 2:3 and 7:25b. This leads to Porten's second relevant insight.

In the first three of his four examples (Gen 37:15-17, 32; Cant 3:1-5; I Sam 9:1-10:27), Porten argues that the respective subjects (Joseph, Saul, and the Beloved) are "found by someone else."[986] Qoheleth, on the other hand, according to Porten, is not found by someone else in Eccl 7:23-8:1a. However, the מצא–לכד wordplay indicates, albeit subtly, that Qoheleth does indeed fit the pattern. Qoheleth not only surprisingly found Woman Folly, she also "found" (i.e., מצא in the sense of "captured") him. The seeker has been found.

In summary, the wise person is the one who stays within "prescribed cosmic-social boundaries," however the חוֹטֵא has strayed outside the carved boundaries of Yahweh's created order and is therefore "captured" (לכד, synonym of מצא) by Woman Folly. The question remains, what is Qoheleth's sin? When and where did he transgress the boundaries? Perhaps in the answer to this question the paradox (vv 23-24) will be resolved.

Before proceeding to v 27, two points should be made. First of all, in v 26 we see that the two options initially presented with regard to the paradox of vv 23-24 (i.e., Fox's proposal versus mine) have led in two very different directions. Sticking to his presupposition (i.e., "There *must* be a difference between the wisdom Qohelet aimed at but did not reach and the wisdom he did have."),[987] Fox misses the most obvious (based upon the cotextual, contextual, and linguistic evidence) reading of v 26: Qoheleth has successfully discovered the second of the twin objects of his search (v 25), folly. Secondly, the surprise finding is not only a surprise to Qoheleth; it is

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[984] *Ibid.*, 37.

[985] In 2:3 Qoheleth indicates that wisdom is meant to control his foray into folly, for he explicitly: (1) subordinates his *intention* to "lay hold of folly" beneath the guiding rubric of his search for the "good"; and (2) subordinates folly as a *tool* beneath his use of wisdom as a *tool*.

[986] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 36.

[987] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 264 (emphasis mine). See also, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 28; *Ecclesiastes* JPS, 50.

also a surprise to the reader. Qoheleth has structured his speech, and formed his rhetoric in such a way that it communicates not only a summary of Qoheleth's experience, it also has led the reader on a similar journey. Qoheleth's discourse has re-enacted for the reader his [Qoheleth's] narrative experience.[988] Indeed, the reader has been surprised by the paradox, and now is surprised by Qoheleth's "capture." By demanding a "high degree of interpretive cooperation from...[its] readers,"[989] Qoheleth's story is structured so that the interpreter experiences meaning as a combination of what the text is "saying" and what the text is "doing."

Suspending closure on the nature of the paradox in vv 23-24 has produced a reading of the text unnecessarily precluded by Fox. The ironical reading becomes, in v 26, an evident meaning, as the reader sees Qoheleth's methodology as critically mis-leading him into the grip of Woman Folly. While the tone of ironic self-criticism is becoming increasingly apparent, there is still the question of Qoheleth's wisdom. What is Qoheleth saying about the wisdom that he supposedly possessed, but somehow does not?

Ecclesiastes 7:27

רְאֵה זֶה מָצָאתִי אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת אַחַת לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן׃

See! This is what I have found, said Qoheleth, adding one to one to find the scheme of things

Pondering the identity of Qoheleth's sin, the linear reader is called to attention by the first word of v 27, the imperative "See!" What better word could Qoheleth use in his instruction to the reader, for his rhetorical technique has immersed the reader in a journey. Qoheleth's poetics have demanded the reader's *involvement*. Qoheleth tells his story in such a way that the reader experiences his own twistings and turnings, anxieties and surprises – just as Qoheleth did in his journey. "See" is not merely a command to cognitively "Consider!" or "Pay attention!" He is telling the reader to actually "see" something.[990]

Qoheleth syntactically directs the reader's attention to the verb's object (זֶה).[991] However, both object and verb are ambiguous: the latter lexically, the former

[988] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 397-98.
[989] Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 18.
[990] Cf. Scow, *Ecclesiastes*, 275.
[991] Delitzsch indicates that Qoheleth is emphasizing his conclusion by placing the direct object (זֶה) before the verb (מָצָאתִי) (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 333, 334).

grammatically. Qoheleth wants the reader to look carefully at that which he has מצא, but where should this attention be directed (what is the referent of זֶה), and which meaning of מָצָאתִי is intended?

Beginning with זֶה, the temporal reader proceeds in a manner similar to v 23 (when faced with the grammatically ambiguous כָּל־זֹה): recognizing the arousal of an expectation, one slows down, delves more deeply, and imaginatively into the text, reading with care and suspending closure in order to ponder possibilities. Initially, two basic options present themselves, either the referent precedes[992] (i.e., the woman of v 26, or the evaluative statement that concludes v 26) or the referent follows[993] (i.e., something or someone that lies ahead). Moving forward, brings us to the polysemic, מָצָאתִי. The perfect tense, not to mention the sense of importance generated by the opening imperative (רְאֵה) seems to indicate that our attention has been commanded in order to focus upon an end result (and not a process). Could it be that we are on the verge of a concluding insight from Qoheleth's lifelong search (referenced in v 23, and reiterated in v 25, and including the surprising discovery of v 26)? Vv 23-24 informed us of what Qoheleth did not "grasp" on his search (i.e., "wisdom"). It was this revelation that set the entire pericope into motion via its resulting paradox. Perhaps the revelation of what he did actually "grasp" will help the reader to re-read Qoheleth's story in such a way that the paradox is finally resolved, and an important meaning is given to the book. Such a reading yields the translation of מָצָאתִי as "found" in the sense of an intellectual discovery.

Moving through the text, the reader is surprised by a startling interruption: אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת.[994] The fourth and fifth words in v 27 not only remind the reader that "it is still the frame narrator who is telling the story,"[995] they also, being the first time

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[992] Lauha, *Kohelet,* 142; Schoors, *Pleasing Words* II:173; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31. However, Fox changes his view in *A Time to Tear Down,*270.

[993] The majority of commentators hold this view. However, the supporting arguments typically focus on v 29, and therefore cannot, at this point in a linear reading, be marshaled. E.g., Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes,* 333; Michel, *Untersuchungen,* 229; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 269; Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 388; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 126; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 76; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 252, 264; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 205; Perry, *Dialogues,* 126; Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 122; Schoors, *Pleasing Words* I:57; *Idem, Pleasing Words* II: 173.

[994] Most commentators redivide אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת to read אֲמַר הַקּוֹהֶלֶת, following LXX, Copt, and 12:8. Cf. GKC, §122.r. See the summary of this view in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* I:79-80; *Idem,* II: 432. For the minority view, see, e.g., Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 388; Perry, *Dialogues,* 132; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *"Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück" (Koh 2,24),* 176-7; Dahood, "The Phoenician Background of Qoheleth," 277; *Idem, Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology,* 20.

[995] Christianson, *A Time to Tell,* 46, cf. 93.

that the narrator makes his presence explicitly known in the body of the book,[996] produce a similar effect to the previous three words:[997] this moment is profoundly and incomparably important.[998] And, by inserting the phrase dramatically between the expectation and the completion, this is yet another instance of a delayed fulfillment to an expected consequence.

With the sixth and seventh words in v 27, אַחַת לְאַחַת, Qoheleth again interrupts his stated intent to disclose what he has found, and thus continues to fend off his readers, forcing us to hold our breath in suspense as we anticipate the identification of the actual "culminative"[999] conclusion. The precise nature of this particular delay is Qoheleth's introduction of a reminder of the nature of his investigation. That is, the adverbial accusative of manner,[1000] אַחַת לְאַחַת, reminds "the reader," in Barton's words, of "Qoheleth's laborious and thorough process of investigation."[1001] Gordis picks up the additional and important mathematical nuance by describing Qoheleth's "long process of *adding* detail to detail."[1002] Schoors, in his historical survey of the various attempts to translate this troublesome phrase, draws out the important implication that Qoheleth's "intention" with "the formula" is to highlight the "inductive" (read, empirical) nature of his investigation.[1003]

Having summarized his method, Qoheleth, in the next phrase, interrupts his offering for yet a third time, protracting his delay this time by restating the goal of his thinking and investigation: Qoheleth has been "calculating, adding, and configuring" with the purpose of finding חֶשְׁבּוֹן. The last time we encountered חֶשְׁבּוֹן

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[996] The phrase, which is inserted into the middle of a sentence, is neither an editorial insertion nor is it Qoheleth's own reference to himself (in the third person). As Fox argues, the grammar is too smoothly constructed for the former, and the latter does not make sense of the text (Fox, "Frame-narrative," 84-87).

[997] Christianson notes the addition of the emphatic "רְאֵה זֶה to the lone verb of discovery at 7.26a" (מָצָאתִי) yields a greater emphasis than even the grouping of "'quest' verbs'" in 7:25 (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 94-95).

[998] Cf. *Ibid.*, 95; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 272; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 345-46; also Lohfink, according to Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 126.

[999] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 230.

[1000] Joüon-Muraoka § 126.d; GKS § 118.q. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 264; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 147n.113; Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 379n.37.

[1001] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 147.

[1002] Gordis, *Koheleth*, 284. Emphasis mine. Cf., Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 333; Schoors, *Pleasing Words* II:278-79; Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 230-31; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31; Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 154; Tamez, *Horizons*, 102.

[1003] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:278-79. Cf., Luther, *Ecclesiastes*, 132; Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 387-88; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 147; Levy, *Das Buch Qoheleth*, 111; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 284; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 270; Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 379n.37, 381n.47; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 205; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 100-103; Tamez, *Horizons*, 102.

was v 25, where it constituted half of a nominal hendiadys that was the object of three infinitives לָדַעַת וְלָתוּר וּבַקֵּשׁ. Here it is the object of the single infinitive לִמְצֹא. In this, the fifth occurrence of מצא in this pericope, the parallelism with the three verbs of v 25 indicates מצא is being used in v 27 with its intellectual sense of "to understand." As indicated in vv 23, 25 Qoheleth wants to understand חכמה, however here he shortens the nominal hendiadys of v 25 to the single word חֶשְׁבּוֹן.[1004] לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן, then, forms an inclusion with וּבַקֵּשׁ חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן of v 25: Qoheleth's search is for חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן.

Earlier I argued that חֶשְׁבּוֹן carries the sense of both the *result* and the mental *process* of thinking, together with an emphasis on an empirical epistemology.[1005] Just as when the paradox which governs this passage was raised in v 23, with בַּחָכְמָה acting as a reminder of both the Royal Experiment in general and the empirical nature of Qoheleth's epistemology in particular, and just like the use of חֶשְׁבּוֹן together with חָכְמָה which imported an epistemologically empirical nuance into the notion of Qoheleth's "wisdom," so here the reader is reminded of the empirical nature of both Qoheleth's method[1006] and his goal: Qoheleth appears to be indicating that his empirical methodology has shaped the nature of the wisdom he is seeking.[1007]

In summary, Qoheleth begins v 27 with an arresting command, "See! This is what I have discovered." However, before identifying what "this" is, the moment is marked as critically important with syntax and more significantly with the narrator's intrusion. Then, following the narrator's interruption, when the narrative returns to Qoheleth's pronouncement, the reader finds that Qoheleth does not complete his thought by identifying the highly anticipated discovery itself, but delays the fulfillment of the reader's expectation even further by his own interruptive focus upon the method and goal of the investigation itself.

[1004] See, Schoors' argument with regard to לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן (*Pleasing Words*, II:173, 279); Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 264; Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 382, n. 36. *Contra*, Pahk, "The Significance of אשר," 381, n. 47.

[1005] "A considered assessment of life, that is, what is arrived at by a deliberate process of reasoning" (Machinist, "Fate, *Miqreh*, and Reason," 170).

[1006] Pahk argues that "אחת לאחת, being an adverbial accusative of manner...corresponds to בחכמה in 7,23" ("The Significance of אשר," 379n.37).

[1007] Is this what Schoors is getting at with his translation of חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן as "wisdom obtained by induction" (*Idem, Pleasing Words*, II:210)?

Two important points bear emphasis. First, as Good writes of Qoheleth's similar use of delay in 1:6, "That is style! To delay certainty of meaning as shrewdly and as long as these lines do is remarkably effective...The delay is of the essence. And it is affective."[1008] In v 27 Qoheleth structured his speech both to communicate the notion that he was surprisingly captured by Woman Folly, and to produce in the reader a similar experience of surprise and discovery. In v 28, Qoheleth is also remarkably affective in his speech-acts; producing the expectation and frustration in the reader that he is communicating actually happened to him on his journey.

Second, Qoheleth's interruption, which just so happens to be his most succinct précis of the whole of his thinking and investigating (לְאַחַת לִמְצֹא חֶשְׁבּוֹן אַחַת), is composed of an "intriguingly simple" image: Qoheleth has been "calculating, adding, and configuring"[1009] in order to find (an empiricized) wisdom. An expanded translation could be:

> "Pay attention! This is what I have found," said Qoheleth, "in the whole of my investigation in which I have been adding one piece of knowledge, gained empirically, to another in order to find [wisdom, here indicated as] the scheme of things."

In Iser's terms, then, in v 27 the reader is offered a reorientation in the wake of the disorientation affected by the paradox introduced in v 23. In this reorientation, there is a growing conviction that one had previously assumed the nature of Qoheleth's "wisdom," and now a new understanding of that "wisdom" is being held out for view. The truthfulness of Ellul's attack on superficial readings of Ecclesiastes is now distinctly apparent: "we must try...to grasp what Qohelet is talking about when he uses this word [wisdom], even if we fail to understand it fully or to define it."[1010]

Ecclesiastes 7:28

אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מָצָאתִי
אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֶלֶף מָצָאתִי וְאִשָּׁה בְכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מָצָאתִי׃

which my soul has sought repeatedly but I have not found.
One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all of these I have not found.

[1008] Good, "Unfilled Sea," 67.

[1009] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 230-31.

[1010] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 133. Contra Ingram, who argues that the meaning of "wisdom" in Ecclesiastes is clear, while the attitude toward "wisdom" is ambivalent (*Idem, Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, 12-13).

To the linear reader, the introductory אֲשֶׁר is naturally read as a relative particle, with חָשְׁבּוֹן at the end of v 27 as its antecedent.[1011] נפש indicates lexically[1012] and emphasizes syntactically the idea that Qoheleth has "put all his energy, his full personality"[1013] into the act of constantly (עוֹד)[1014] searching (בקש) for wisdom.[1015] In v 27 Qoheleth interrupts the announcement of his discovery to remind the reader of his methodology and goal. V 28a continues the interruption first by emphasizing Qoheleth's diligent and intense attempt to achieve that goal, and then by stating his failure. So, the first line of v 28 ends with yet another restatement of the negative side of the paradox from v 23: wisdom eludes Qoheleth (וְלֹא מָצָאתִי).[1016] But what is happening in the second line of v 28?[1017]

In order to hear this phrase as the linear reader encounters it, let us pause momentarily from commentary on the verse itself in order to rehearse the flow of Qoheleth's discourse up to this point. In v 23 Qoheleth introduces the explosive paradox (the "wise man" who has journeyed with "wisdom" in search of "wisdom" cannot grasp wisdom)[1018] in the context of a rehearsal of his Royal Experiment. Immediately (v 24), he reaffirms the paradox by focusing on its troubling negative side (the elusiveness of wisdom). Then, once again, he evokes his life's investigation

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[1011] This is by far the majority reading. E.g., Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 264; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 206; Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 122; Isakkson, *Studies,* 91; Baltzer, "Women and War," 131. Despite suggestions to the contrary, there is nothing in the text, at this point, to imply an interpretation other than the natural. For those who argue for different interpretations of אֲשֶׁר: Murphy reads it "as introducing a new statement that further defines the זה מצאתי of v 27" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 75n28.a; also 76-77; *Idem, Wisdom Literature,* 142; *Idem,* "On Translating Ecclesiastes," 574-75. See *Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 75n28.a for list of others who read it this way). See Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 112-13 for the weakness of Murphy's approach. Other minority approaches to this word include, Lohfink, *Kohelet;* and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes,* 147.

[1012] Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:220. Schoors cites Murtonen's conclusion to his study of נפש, in which he states that the word "means, functionally expressed, man seen from the aspect of life and action, or, substantially expressed, living and acting man" (Murtonen, *The Living Soul,* 69. Cited in Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:218).

[1013] Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:220.

[1014] The noun עוד acting as an adverb. Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* I:116; see also, Isakkson, *Studies,* 91. Cf. Gen 46:29; Ruth 1:14; Ps 84:5; Qoh 12:9.

[1015] There is ample support for this reading. (1) It offers a natural progression from v 27 to v 28. (2) It requires no emendation, thus respecting the MT.[1015] (3) The attachment of the adverb עוד to the verb בִּקְשָׁה "prompts one to consider the earlier mention of...[בקש] in v 25," where the object is the hendiadys, חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן. (Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 264. See also, Rudman, "Woman as Divine Agent," 422). So, in v 28, the object is once again wisdom, which is now shortened to חֶשְׁבּוֹן (v 27).

[1016] מָצָאתִי in v 28a continues the intellectual sense of understanding referenced by לִמְצֹא in v 27b, as they share the same object: חֶשְׁבּוֹן. The first occurrence of מצא (v 27b) indicates Qoheleth's intent; the second occurrence (v 28a) indicates Qoheleth's failure to achieve that intent.

[1017] Seow states the obvious: "This statement is a notorious crux for the interpreter" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 273).

[1018] The quotation marks are because we are no longer sure of our initial understanding of the "wisdom" Qoheleth possessed and used in his Royal Experiment.

by recalling his search for wisdom (v 25), but this time he mentions an important mediating goal – his desire to explore folly as a means to his end (i.e., the acquisition of wisdom).[1019] The secondary goal, is achieved. Qoheleth finds folly (v 26), however the encounter is not what he had expected. Folly, personified as the female nemesis of Lady Wisdom, gains a dangerous and deadly vice-like grip on Qoheleth, which Qoheleth, surprisingly, is unable to escape.[1020] At the end of v 26 the reader has a shocking discovery of the reason why Qoheleth is impotent in the hands of Woman Folly: Qoheleth is a sinner. Still reeling from this surprise, the reader is then brought back to the ultimate goal of Qoheleth's journey, and thus to the paradox that governs the passage (v 27). At this point, as a result of the arresting command to pay attention, the reader eagerly awaits the identification of Qoheleth's discovery that will hopefully resolve the paradox, answer the newly initiated question—What is Qoheleth's sin?—and perhaps show a relationship between the two issues. However, after the initial promise of v 27, the reader is continually frustrated by repeated interruptions which once again reiterate the method (empiricism) and goal (empiricized wisdom) of Qoheleth's search. These interruptions lead directly into v 28a, where more interruptions occur as Qoheleth once again reminds the reader of his life's quest for wisdom, and repeats the paradoxical notion of his failure to reach this goal. This failure is a further reinforcement of Qoheleth's captivity to Woman Folly.

Throughout the journey from vv 23-28a, Qoheleth has repeatedly recast his investigation against the backdrop of the paradox with a recurring emphasis on the empiricized nature of the wisdom he employs and for which he searches. In brief: Vv 23-24 introduce the paradox; vv 25-27 focus the paradox within the context of Qoheleth's life's quest, introduce the disturbing capture of our wise man by Woman Folly, shock the reader with Qoheleth's inability to escape resulting from his status as a sinner, and end with a segue into Qoheleth's announcement of a discovery, the identity of which is teasingly delayed; and finally v 28a, like v 24, reiterates the paradox of v 23 with a focus on its negative side: Qoheleth has sought wisdom, but has not found it. It is at this point that the reader encounters v 28bα.

[1019] Qoheleth subtly subordinates his desire for folly to his desire for wisdom through his language: He intends "to know, to explore, and to seek" wisdom, but he only intends to "know" folly. Cf. Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 29-30.

[1020] I recognize that there is a debate with regard to how one is to understand Lady Wisdom, precisely. For a summary of the debate see Murphy, "Lady Wisdom," in *The Tree of Life*, 33-49.

"One man among a thousand I have found." Most commentators (and translations) assume the phrase to be elliptical, and thus supply a missing qualification for this person that Qoheleth has found. Typically the unnamed attribute is understood to be a moral[1021] quality: "a good" person,[1022] an "authentic" person,[1023] a person "who is reliable, useful to friends, and ethically upright,"[1024] a true friend,[1025] "a perfect person, an ideal person,"[1026] a "real human" in contrast to a "brutish" or "dumb animal."[1027] According to this view, the person that Qoheleth is diligently looking for is virtuous (in some respect), and the act of finding confirms the existence of such a person: Qoheleth can find one person out of a thousand that is virtuous, therefore one such person exists.

The problem with this approach is that it misses the emphasis of both the verse and pericope. To begin with, the use of אָדָם in v 28bα is significant. "Here as almost always in the Bible, [אָדָם] means *homo*."[1028] The man is simply an unnamed person, neither male, nor female.[1029] The missing quality is missing because it does not matter. The issue is the successful action of *finding* something hard to find. Following immediately upon the heels of v 28a with its statement of Qoheleth's *failure* to *find* wisdom, the aphoristic phrase about *finding* "one man" in the midst of "a thousand" is not primarily about the gender, or the identity, or the quality of the object, but about a contrast intended to highlight the overall *ability* of the *subject* (Qoheleth) to *find*.[1030] Furthermore, the pericope as a whole is focused upon searching and finding. So, with regard to v 28b, as Christianson argues, "[t]he real issue is the value that Qoheleth attributes to finding as opposed to not finding."[1031]

[1021] This assumption is often justified by appeal to vv 26, 29. E.g., Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 77; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 205-6. There are a few interpretations that offer the missing characteristic as something other than a moral quality. E.g., Baltzer suggests "soldier" (*Idem*, "Women and War," 130-31); Lohfink suggests the ability to escape death (*Idem*, War Kohelet ein Frauenfeind?," 280-81); Ogden suggests premature death (*Idem*, *Qoheleth*, 120-21).

[1022] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 52.

[1023] Tamez, *Horizons*, 103.

[1024] Lauha. Cited in Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 270. Brenner offers a similar interpretation (*Idem*, "Some Observations on the Figurations of Woman in Wisdom Literature," 59).

[1025] Diethelm Michel. Cited in Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 113-114.

[1026] Ginsberg. Cited in Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 270. Ellul also presents this quality as the missing datum (*Idem*, *Reason for Being*, 201-203.

[1027] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 271.

[1028] Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:45.

[1029] *Contra*, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 264. For a summary of the debate with regard to the meaning of אָדָם, see Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, II:44-49.

[1030] After all, the passage is structured around the מצא-בקש combination. See, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 34-38.

[1031] Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 113, see also 115.

Porten's insightful study, previously mentioned, of the מצא-בקש combination illuminates the rhetorical function of this word pair "to develop a theme, structure a unit, and trace a theology."[1032] The theme of this particular pericope is Qoheleth's unsuccessful *search* (for wisdom). A paraphrase, then, of the clause would not be, "Out of a thousand people, I found *one*." Instead, Qoheleth is saying, "Out of a thousand people, *I found* one." I.e., "*I* have the *proven* ability to *find* a needle in a haystack."[1033]

This leads the reader to v 28bβ, and Qoheleth's declaration of his own inability to find "a woman" (אִשָּׁה). So there is a contrast between Qoheleth's proven ability to find in general (v 28bα), and his unsuccessful search (v 28bβ). However, this time, the identity of the object is significant, as evidenced by three issues, none of which can be said of אָדָם in v 28bα. First of all, the identity of אִשָּׁה is significant by virtue of the specific word itself; secondly, by virtue of the fact that the object (אִשָּׁה) is given a significant identity within this verse; and finally, by virtue of the fact that אִשָּׁה is given a specific identity within this pericope.[1034] Regarding the word itself, unlike אָדָם, אִשָּׁה is not used in Hebrew as a generic term for humanity. It can only be gender specific: "woman" or "wife." Fox insightfully highlights the implication when he describes אִשָּׁה not as the opposite of אָדָם; the former is actually a subset of the latter.[1035] Regarding the identification of this "woman" or "wife," the significance of מצא in this passage (demonstrated by the rhetorical use of antanaclasis and the מצא-בקש formula) makes the fact that only twice, in its thus far

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[1032] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 34.

[1033] This interpretation rejects the common accusation of Qoheleth as a misogynist. While I see no theological problem with Qoheleth being a misogynist, such a view is simply not consistent with the text. In order to make the case for misogynism from this verse, one must assume that the person that Qoheleth is diligently looking for is virtuous (in some respect), and that the act of finding this person is meant to confirm the existence of such a person. Qoheleth's vocal admission of his subsequent failure to find such a woman, in this reading, then indicates his misogynism. See, Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 387; Gordis, *Koheleth,* 272-75; Baltzer, "Women and War," 147; Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions,* 241; *Idem, A Time to Tear Down,* 271; *Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 52. There are other approaches that attempt to soften or eliminate the element of misogynism. For a good summary and critique see Christianson, "Qoheleth the 'Old Boy,'" 110-22.

[1034] Seow insists that this word, אִשָּׁה, indicates אָדָם in v 28bα "clearly means a man, a male" because "one person in a thousand" would make no sense in light of the contrast with "woman" (Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 264). However, as I stated earlier, the primary contrast is between finding and not finding. Secondly, while there is some degree of contrast between "man" and "woman," the contrast is meant to be superficial. The play on words is lexical and not semantical. Ironically, Seow goes on to point out that of the forty-nine occurrences of אדם in Ecclesiastes, this would be the only instance in which it means "a male" and not "humanity" or "a person" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes,* 265; See also, Brown, *Ecclesiastes,* 84).

[1035] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions,* 242.

seven occurrences, is the word used with the negative particle (לֹא) all the more conspicuous. In its only other occurrence, v 28a, the object of מצא + neg. ptc. is wisdom (חֶשְׁבּוֹן). Here, in v 28bβ the object is an unfound woman. Identifying her as Lady Wisdom, fits well in cotext. It constitutes a use of מצא + neg. ptc. in v 28b that is parallel to its use in v 28a. After all, the entire pericope has been driven by the explosive admission that he does not posses wisdom, and every verse of the pericope, with the significant exception of v 26, has explicitly reiterated Qoheleth's desire and/or his failure to "find" wisdom.[1036] Thus, for him to state that there is a "woman" whom he cannot find—what else would the implied reader have in mind, other than Lady Wisdom? Furthermore, the elusive nature of wisdom was already presented (implicitly, via intertextual allusion) in terms of a search for Lady Wisdom in v 24.[1037]

This interpretation reveals an inner structure to Qoheleth's discourse. V 25 summarized both his primary goal ("to know, and to explore, and to seek wisdom") and his mediating goal (to "know" folly"). V 26 describes the success of the secondary goal, via an image that is central to OT wisdom literature: Woman Folly. Now Qoheleth tells the reader, once again, of his failure to find wisdom, this time identified as Lady Wisdom. The structure is chiastic. (A) v 25a – Qoheleth's intent to find wisdom; (B) v 25b – Qoheleth's intent to find folly; (B^{1}) v 26 – Qoheleth's discovery of Woman Folly; (A^{1}) vv 27-28 – restatement of Qoheleth's intent to find wisdom and his failure to find Lady Wisdom.[1038]

[1036] Krüger argues that the emphasis given to seeking and finding possibly indicates the "one woman in a thousand" that Qoheleth could not find to be Lady Wisdom (*Idem*, "'Frau Weisheit,'" esp. 398). In his 2004 commentary, *Qoheleth*, Krüger does not offer this interpretation.

[1037] I.e, the intertextual allusion created between Eccl 7:24 and Prov 31:10 via the rhetorical question מִי יִמְצָאֶנּוּ and the adjective רָחֹק. Interestingly, Hugo of St Cher identified a connection between the woman of Eccl 7:28 and the woman of Prov 31:10, in his thirteenth-century work, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*. Cited in Wolters, "Nature and Grace," 153-66.

[1038] Cf. Krüger's structural analysis of the passage, where he argues that v 25 describes a "test" of which vv 26-29 reveal three results. This highlights the controlling relationship that I am articulating for v 25 over vv 26-28 (*Idem, Qoheleth*, 143-44). See also, Seow's argument that "[V]v 25b-26 are balanced by vv 27-28a. The former concern Folly; the latter concern Wisdom" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 275). Seow stops with v 28a because he argues that v 28b is an unfortunate scribal redaction based upon the redactor's misunderstanding of v 26. Seow's argument for this emendation is twofold: (1) The use of אָדָם in v 28b is the only time out of the 49 occurrences in Ecclesiastes, that the word means "man" and not "humanity" or "person." In addition, אָדָם is used in its normal (for Qoheleth) sense in the very next verse. Therefore, according to Seow, this use of אָדָם "contradicts the meaning of the word in the immediate context, as well as elsewhere in the book" (*Ibid.*, 274). (2) V 28b is intrusive. "After...'I have not found' (v 28a) we certainly do not expect...'I have found' (v 28b)....Indeed, if one omits v 28b altogether, one can read the passage without skipping a beat" (*Ibid., Ecclesiastes*, 265; See also, Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 84). In response to his first argument, Qoheleth's skillful use of antanaclasis has already been established well enough to render suspicion with regard to

V 28b is, then, epexegetical to v 28a: the singular point of v 28 being the elusiveness of wisdom. V 28a restates the paradox of vv 23-24 in terms of Qoheleth's overall investigation, with a focus on the negative aspect; and v 28b casts this notion in imagery (Lady Wisdom) that balances the shocking "capture" of Qoheleth by Woman Folly in v 26.[1039]

In this reading, the illustration of Qoheleth's experience and ability at finding a needle in a haystack (v 28bα) heightens the sense of shock at his inability to find Wisdom.[1040] The shock is certainly significant, both to Qoheleth and to the reader. Consider the shock experienced in vv 23-24 when first learning that Qoheleth did not possess, and cannot find Wisdom. In OT Wisdom, wisdom is both a divine gift (e.g., Prov 2:6) and a human achievement (e.g., Prov 2:1-10; 4:7; 8:1-21). Lady Wisdom is precious (Prov 31:10; Job 28), yet she generously calls out to all (Prov 1:22-23), inviting everyone to her house for a "feast of insight and understanding"[1041] that she has prepared (Prov 9:1-12). She promises the riches of her knowledge to those who heed her call (Prov 1:22-23; 9:5-6). The implication is that Lady Wisdom is genuinely available to those who diligently seek her (Prov 2; 8:1-3, 17, 21).[1042] However, those who do not heed her invitation soon find that even though they determine to seek her, she is not to be found (Prov 1:24-32; 8:36; Sir 6:27).[1043] Such a person finds, instead, Woman Folly (Prov 7). That is, the web of metaphors in Proverbs 1-9 that develops wisdom's doctrine of two ways indicates human

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an argument based upon a unique use of אָדָם. Ironically, Seow himself has argued masterfully for Qoheleth's linguistic dexterity. See, *Idem*, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qoheleth," 4, 96. In response to the second argument, Seow has little support from Ecclesiastes as a whole to argue in favor of an emendation based upon the prospect of smoothing out Qoheleth's logic. After all, this is the book that begins with the torturous journey of 1:4-11. Overall, Seow's argument against v 28b is a rare moment of weakness in an otherwise well argued commentary.

[1039] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 275.

[1040] Contra Fox who rejects reading אשר as a relative particle, proposing the emendation of אשר to אשה instead, because אשר "would be lacking an antecedent." חֶשְׁבּוֹן (v 27b) is not eligible, "because in the next sentence [28b] he says that he *did* find a *ḥešbon*" (*Idem*, *A Time to Tear Down*, 270. Italics his. See also, Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 31).

[1041] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 31.

[1042] As Fox points out, the purpose of Prov 31:10 "is to extol her preciousness, not to lament her statistical rarity, and the author of that poem believes that such a woman *can* be found." Unfortunately, Fox immediately states that, "Koheleth does not" think such a woman can be found (*Idem*, *Ecclesiastes*, 52).

[1043] Seow strangely points to Prov 1:28 as a passage that develops the unattainability of wisdom via "the motif" of the unsuccessful "lover's pursuit," i.e., "seeking and not finding" (*Idem*, *Ecclesiastes*, 264). However, this passage articulates the opposite view. In fact, the entirety of Prov 1 is about the attainability of wisdom (e.g., vv 20-23). Her unattainability is only mentioned to highlight her attainability as the norm that is forfeited upon one's refusal to listen (vv 23-24). And this condition is precisely the context of v 28.

responsibility for walking either the path of wisdom or the path of folly.[1044] Commenting on this notion, Bartholomew says, "[T]he Wisdom books hold out the hope of truly finding life in God's good creation."[1045] Qoheleth has been captured by the other woman, Lady Wisdom's nemesis, the dangerous seductress who seeks to lure one away from Wisdom's embrace. Why? The answer, according to OT Wisdom, is that somehow, and at some point Qoheleth ignored Wisdom's call and cut against the grain of creation. But when did this "wise man" do something so foolish? What is his specific transgression? Where did it occur? Or in the vocabulary of v 26: What specifically makes Qoheleth a חוֹטֵא? The reader approaches v 29 with these questions swirling, as we journey with Qoheleth searching in vain for Lady Wisdom as he struggles without hope against the cold as death hands of Woman Folly.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

לְבַד רְאֵה־זֶה מָצָאתִי אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יָשָׁר וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים׃

See! This alone I have found, that
God has made humans[1046] *upright, but they have sought many schemes.*

The unusual usage of לְבַד (i.e., the only occurrence of this word to introduce a main clause in BH) intensifies the sense of importance[1047]—already developed by the initial use of רְאֵה־זֶה מָצָאתִי in v 27a, and by the inordinately long interruption of vv 27b-28—that the reader feels with regard to the promise of finally getting to "see" the highly anticipated discovery.[1048] What insight has Qoheleth hit upon in his failed quest for wisdom? Will it be the cumulative result of his investigation?[1049] Is the reader on the verge of a discovery that will solve the tensions developed by both the

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[1044] For a discussion of the tension in OT Wisdom literature between the availability and hiddenness of Wisdom see Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 45-47.

[1045] *Ibid.*, 46.

[1046] The mas. sing. הָאָדָם is a gender inclusive collective singular, and thus legitimately transl. as "man" (understood as a gender inclusive collective singular) or as "humans/humanity," as evidenced by the subsequent plural pronoun הֵמָּה. Interestingly enough, Ginsburg argues that this use of הָאָדָם is "irrefragable proof" that the same word is used in the same way in v 25, contra Seow's argument for the omission of v 28b based largely upon the "different" use of אָדָם in v 28b in comparison to the rest of Eccl and esp. v 29 (Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 390; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 274-75).

[1047] Thaumaturgos captures this emphasis in his paraphrase: "Κατενόσα δὲ ἐκεῖνο μάλιστα," – "This is what I learned most of all" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 192).

[1048] Delitzsch refers to the רְאֵה as an "interjected *nota bene*" (*Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 334).

[1049] "The Preacher is driven to a single point which is the source of the calamities previously described (vv. 15-28): here is the grand total of his spiritual calculations" (Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 116).

paradox and the revelation of Qoheleth's entrapment by Woman Folly and his status as a sinner?

The second line of v 29 begins: "God has made humans" יָשָׁר. When יָשָׁר is used of material things, it means "straight, smooth, level."[1050] However, as in the overwhelming majority of occurrences in which it is used of humans, and as in nearly every use of it in OT Wisdom literature,[1051] in Eccl 7:29 יָשָׁר carries an ethical, moral, or religious connotation.[1052] V 29bβ begins with a ו. But is it a ו-conjunctive or a ו-adversative? The latter is indicated by the contrasting nature of the second half of the line. In distinction from their created natures, humans בִּקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים.

This is the third occurrence of בקשׁ in this pericope. In its first occurrence (v 25), its object was the hendiadys: חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן. In its second occurrence (v 28), the object was חֶשְׁבּוֹן (v 27b). Some argue, therefore, that חִשְׁבֹנוֹת is the plural form of חֶשְׁבּוֹן.[1053] However, the MT vocalization is not the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן, but a different word entirely (although coming from the same root),[1054] a word used elsewhere in BH only in 2 Chron 26:15 where it means "war machine."[1055] In Eccl 7:29 the word is valued negatively in opposition to the righteous state (יָשָׁר) in which God made humanity.[1056] This suggests, as Schoors argues, that the word has the morally negative connotation often indicated by the verb חשׁב: "to contrive evil, ruin."[1057] Schoors goes on to suggest that, the resultant meaning of the noun refers "to human inventions, a planned and technically conceived activity which is often wrong,

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[1050] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 127.

[1051] Shields, *The End of Wisdom,* 189. Cf. Job 1:1,8; 2:3.

[1052] Athanasius, *Against the Heathen,* 7.5-6. Cited in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon,* ed. Wright, 257. Midrash, cited in Zlotowitz, *Koheles,* 145-46; *Rashbam,* 166; Luther, *Ecclesiastes,* 133; Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes,* 334-35; Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 390; Barton, *Ecclesiastes,* 148; Gordis, *Koheleth,* 285; Krüger, *Qohelet,* 149; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 75, 77; Brown, *Ecclesiastes,* 84-85; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes,* 127; Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs,* 205-6; Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes,* 73; Tamez, *Horizons,* 103; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes,* 116-17; Rudman, *Determinism,* 107; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 207; Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:174, 371, 447; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs,* 325; Pahk, "The Significance of אשׁר," 381, n. 48. Contra, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down,* 272. For analysis of the weaknesses of Fox's argument see, Shields, *The End of Wisdom,* 189; Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:371, 447.

[1053] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions,* 243; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 207; Rudman, *Determinism,* 187. See also, LXX where the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן from v 25 (λογισμόν) is used in v 29 (λογισμοὺς).

[1054] Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:211.

[1055] Schoors is right to say that "Lohfink wrongly introduces this meaning into our text," because in "2 Chr, this meaning is connected with the context," whereas in Eccl 7:29 the context highlights the basic meaning of the word: "devices, inventions" (*Ibid.,*174; cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth,* 103).

[1056] Shields, *The End of Wisdom,* 189; Schoors, *Pleasing Words,* II:447.

[1057] *Ibid.*

ineffective, or evil."[1058] There is perhaps an allusion here to Genesis 6:5 – "and every intention of the thoughts [מַחֲשָׁבָה] of his heart was only evil."[1059]

To identify the specific evil indicated in Eccl 7:29 it is important to recognize Qoheleth's use of phonetic ambiguity.[1060] The emendation of חִשְׁבֹנוֹת to the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן, that some scholars recommend, is a failure to identify the presence of a parasonantic pun: חִשְׁבֹנוֹת is a phonetic allusion and an intentional evocation of חֶשְׁבּוֹן.[1061] The deliberateness of this connection is evidenced by the use of the same verb (בקשׁ) in all three instances (not to mention the fact that this particular verb is critical to the theme, structure, and theology of this pericope).[1062] Rather than completely dissolving חִשְׁבֹנוֹת into the plural of חֶשְׁבּוֹן, the reader should allow the deliberate allusion and evocation to impact the reading. By using חִשְׁבֹנוֹת instead of the plural form of חֶשְׁבּוֹן, and by contrasting חִשְׁבֹנוֹת with יָשָׁר Qoheleth has presented the reader with an ingenious word play that recasts his search for wisdom (חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן in v 25, and חֶשְׁבּוֹן in v 27) in a *specifically* negative light.[1063] Lauha comments on the critical nature of this pun for the entire pericope:

> Der ganze Gedankenbogen von V. 26 bis 30 [sic?] wird durch dieses Wortspiel umspannt: Kohelet machte sich auf, die Quintessenz seiner, Erfahrungen zu suchen (בקשׁ חֶשְׁבּוֹן), und kommt dabei zu dem Ergebnis, dass die Menschen >>vierlei Berechnungen<< anstellen, d.h. viele schlaue Kunste suchen (בקשׁ חֶשְׁבּוֹן).[1064]

In v. 23 Qoheleth introduced the explosive paradox: he cannot grasp wisdom. In v 24 he reiterates the negative side of the paradox. In v 25a he restates his quest for wisdom, identified by the hendiadys: חָכְמָה וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן. After the important interlude of vv 25b-26, Qoheleth once again restates his unsuccessful quest for wisdom, this time identified by the second half of the hendiadys—חֶשְׁבּוֹן (vv 27-28). And finally, in v 29 Qoheleth identifies his great discovery as the finding (מצא) that the search

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[1058] *Ibid.*

[1059] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 207; Krüger, *Qohelet*, 149; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 147.

[1060] For a description of this poetic device and an exploration of its use in the Psalter, see Raabe, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," 217-218.

[1061] This is similar to the parasonantic pun that Raabe highlights in Ps 16:4 where "the feminine noun plus suffix עַצְּבוֹתָם from עַצֶּבֶת ('their pains'; cf. Ps 147:3) evokes the homophonous masculine noun plus suffix עָצְּבֵיהֶם—from עֶצֶב ('their idols'; cf. 1 Sam 31:9; 1 Chr 10:9; 2 Sam 5:21; Isa 46:1; Pss 106:36; 115:4)" (*Ibid.*, 218).

[1062] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 34.

[1063] Perry glosses חֶשְׁבּוֹן (vv 25, 28) as "strategy" and חִשְׁבֹנוֹת (v 29) as "stratagems" and thus captures in the wordplay a nuanced shift from positive to negative (*Idem, Dialogues*, 131-133).

[1064] Lauha, *Kohelet*, 143.

(בקשׁ) for חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת is a sin which has corrupted the יֹשֶׁר of humans. There is, in the words of Fox, "self-directed irony" here: "Qohelet is, of course, speaking above all about himself."[1065] His discovery, is that his own search for wisdom (חֶשְׁבּוֹן) failed because it was, after all, his own particular version of humanity's evil search for חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת—which has distorted God's good creation of humanity as יֹשֶׁר.[1066] Farmer points out the appropriateness of the word "scheme" to render this notion through the wordplay in vv 25, 27, 29. "Scheme" can be understood to mean either:

> "an overall plan" or "devious plans." Qoheleth says that he has tried to use wisdom to find "the scheme of things" but all he could discover was that human beings are all "schemers" (in spite of the fact that God created them "upright").[1067]

Not only, however, is this subtle wordplay a critical signal for a "significant shift, i.e., a reorientation, in [Qoheleth's] thought,"[1068] it is also an important component in the poetics of this passage that serve to effect for the reader a reorientation with regard to both Qoheleth and his search.

In vv 23-24 the reader was disoriented by the destabilizing confession of Qoheleth's lack of wisdom. Immediately, Qoheleth began to recast his entire journey by describing his quest in terms that set before the reader the moral weight of wisdom and folly (v 25), and the moral condition of Qoheleth, himself (v 26). V 27 then teasingly initiated a reorientation with regard to the nature of Qoheleth's "wisdom." Finally, in v 29 this reorientation is complete, as Qoheleth utilizes a skillful wordplay to identify his own search as an evil scheme that has distorted his "uprightness." Thus, the reader is presented with the answer to the question lingering since v 26: What is Qoheleth's transgression? His transgression is his search![1069] But what exactly is it that makes Qoheleth's search for wisdom an evil thing?

The answer lies in the pun. Qoheleth has lead the reader on a journey of discovery in which חָכְמָה has shaded into חֶשְׁבּוֹן (with its empirical emphasis) which in turn has shaded into חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת (with its evil emphasis). Mark Sneed insightfully observes that "wisdom" is becoming "vacuous, its edges of distinction quickly assimilating with those of folly."[1070] In Salyer's words, "So powerful is the prism of

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[1065] Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 33-4. See also, Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 272; *Idem, Ecclesiastes*, 53.

[1066] Cf. Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 231; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 344.

[1067] Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good*, 179.

[1068] Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question," 261.

[1069] Contra those who see this pericope as about the general elusiveness of wisdom.

[1070] Sneed, "Qohelcth as 'Deconstructionist,'" 307.

private insight in these verses that it nearly empties the term of its meaning for the speaker."[1071] In his article, "Qohelet's Twists and Turns," Michael Carasik discusses Qoheleth's use of figurative language to describe his departure from יָשָׁר in terms of epistemology.

> Qohelet's description of his own path to knowledge makes clear that such a path is full of false starts. I can think of no other biblical text which expresses this view. Certainly it is contrary to the perspectives of Proverbs and Deuteronomy, in whose intellectual footsteps Ecclesiastes follows....It is clear that Qohelet's path to wisdom is an indirect one, involving constant changes in direction as one's mind prompts one to explore this or that intellectual path. This permitting one's mind to roam where it wishes is exactly the opposite of the mistrust, throughout the rest of the OT, of the untrammeled power of the mind. This is expressed most sharply in the warning of Deut. 29:17-18.[1072]

Carasik agrees with Fox that Ecclesiastes is not a "polemic against 'wisdom or Wisdom Literature or a Wisdom School or the 'received wisdom', but" according to Carasik, it is

> as *Leviticus Rabbah* [28:1][1073] hints, the deliberate assertion of an intent to pursue wisdom using exactly the kind of mental freedom prohibited by the Numbers [15:39].... No, Qohelet's path to wisdom is not merely different from that recommended elsewhere in the Bible, it is very much its opposite—and consciously so.[1074]

Carasik is right that Qoheleth narrates a departure from the path to wisdom espoused by the rest of the OT in general and the OT Wisdom literature in particular, however his (Carasik's) specific identification of the epistemological problem as mental freedom is correct only if he (Carasik) understands this freedom in terms of autonomy. The specific point of Qoheleth's transgression is revealed in Eccl 7:23-29 to be his empiricism.[1075]

Conclusion

In Eccl 7:23-29, the reader is lead on a journey to experience Qoheleth's ironization of his own empirical epistemology. It is his commitment to the autonomy of individual reason that has led Qoheleth down the path to Folly.[1076] God is not to

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[1071] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 342.

[1072] Carasik, "Qohelet's Twists and Turns," 204.

[1073] Carasik also points to *Sifre Shelach* 9, and then refers the reader to Halbertal, *People of the Book*, 24.

[1074] Carasik, "Qohelet's Twists and Turns," 205-6.

[1075] This is in direct contrast to the idea that since Qoheleth did not succeed at his goal, his investigation was a failure. E.g., Longman, *Ecclesiastes*,208.

[1076] Many commentators notice Qoheleth's emphasis on methodology, and yet there is a general failure to understand Qoheleth's methodology as a transgression of the created order. E.g., Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 122.

blame for Qoheleth's failure (v 29). The source of blame is Qoheleth's *empiricized* search for "Wisdom." This is a product of an "environment steeped in Hellenism."[1077] While it is not the purpose of this study to participate in the significant debate on the book's date and place of composition (a debate which started in the rabbinic period and continues today), it is necessary to declare a position on these matters for the purpose of our argument. While such a view is neither without its difficulties nor demonstrable with absolute certainty, at this time, we are assuming the majority position that locates the *Sitz im Leben* of Ecclesiastes around the third century B.C.E., a period when the influence of Hellenistic culture had spread through Palestine.[1078] Our argument does not necessarily demand a strong connection between Qoheleth and Greek philosophy, but it does allow for Qoheleth's sights to be set on a form of wisdom that has been contaminated by aspects of Hellenistic philosophy which were incompatible with Hebraic thought. As Fox explains,

> We need not suppose that the author had read the Greek philosophy or even heard about it in particulars. He does, however, share the fundamental tenet of Greek philosophy: the autonomy of individual reason. This is the belief that the individual can and should proceed toward truth by means of his own powers of perception and reason, and that he can in this way discover truths previously unknown.[1079]

It is this general insight that leads Ellul to claim that Qoheleth "directs his attack toward *Greek* wisdom."[1080] This is not to suggest that Qoheleth was explicitly conscious and had an intimate working knowledge of a full-fledged Greek empirical philosophy. It is to suggest, however, that the cultural air Qoheleth breathed was

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[1077] Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry," 209.

[1078] Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *"Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück" (Koh 2,24)*, 232-332; *Idem*, "Via media," 181-203; Braun, *Kohelet und die frühellenistische Popularphilosophie*, 178; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 153-75; Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic*; Ginsberg, "Structure and Contents of Koheleth," 148-49; Tyler, *Ecclesiastes*, 13-15; Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes*; Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible*, 144, 150, 156, 158; Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, 117-51; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xxix; *Idem*, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81; Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 81; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 100; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 56; Shields, *The End of Wisdom*, 21-22. For an argument against this view, see Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 35-38; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 51-55; Seow argues that the *Sitz im Leben* of Ecclesiastes is the late fifth and early fourth century B.C.E. Although Alexander the Great did not conquer Palestine until 332 B.C.E., the influence of Greek culture had begun as early as the eighth century B.C.E. For Seow's view on the dating of and Greek influence on Ecclesiastes, see Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet"; *Idem*, "Theology When Everything is Out of Control"; *Idem*, "The Socioeconomic Context of 'The Preacher's' Hermeneutic," 169-195. For arguments against any Greek influence on Ecclesiastes see, e.g., Gordon, "North Israelite Influence in Postexilic Hebrew," 85-88; Loader, *Polar Structures*, 132.

[1079] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 81-2.

[1080] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 140. Fox, on the other hand, as I have pointed out, does not see a critique here. He understands Qoheleth as standing "on the boundary of two world-views, wavering uncomfortably but honestly between them" (Fox, "The Innerstructure of Qohelet's Thought," 234-35).

charged with a sort of soft Greek empiricism that Qoheleth is exposing as fundamentally incompatible with a way of knowing that starts with "remembering one's Creator, with faith and obedience."[1081]

Van Leeuwen's work, touched on earlier, helps one get at the essential issues. On the one hand, van Leeuwen argues, the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament varies in focus and genre, while on the other hand it presents a consistent vision of the nature and function of wisdom. Admitting that much work needs to be done on these issues, he offers a helpful line of thought when he builds upon the foundation of wisdom as a "totality concept"[1082] in his proposal that wisdom is the sum of four aspects. First, OT Wisdom assumes the "'fear of Yahweh/God' (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Job 1:1; 28:28; Ps. 111:10)."[1083] Rooted in Israel's experience at the base of Mt. Sinai (Ex 14:31), this concept developed into a kind of "shorthand for 'religion' in the sense of *all of life,* not just worship, as service to Yahweh, Creator and redeemer of the world through Israel."[1084] Second, OT Wisdom "entails insight into and practice of the *generic* patterns and norms for creation and creatures."[1085] In other words, "[a]ll human activities are "delimited by conditions that God ordered in the beginning."[1086] Third, OT Wisdom "entails knowledge of and appropriate action with reference to *particular* circumstances, institutions, persons, and other creatures."[1087] For example, work is a general human institution under created norms (Gen 2:15; Ex 23:12; 35:1-3), but the job that is right for an individual requires specific knowledge of one's own abilities and specific knowledge of the circumstances at hand. As another example, consider Job's friends. They "know the general 'rules' of theological wisdom," but they commit folly in that they do not recognize the inapplicability of those rules to Job's particular situation (cf. Prov 27:9-7).[1088] Fourth, there is an essentially traditional component to the essentially epistemological nature of OT Wisdom. That is, the fourth component of OT Wisdom

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[1081] Bartholomew, "Ecclesiastes, Book of," 184-85. See also, Whybray, "Qoheleth as a Theologian," 241-245; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric,* 394; Höffken, "Das Ego des Weisen," 121-35.

[1082] I.e., Wisdom is "as broad as reality and constitutes a culturally articulated way of relating to the entire world " (Van Leeuwen, "Wisdom Literature," 848). I introduced this notion in my discussion of v 26.

[1083] *Ibid.*

[1084] *Ibid.*

[1085] *Ibid.*

[1086] *Ibid.*, 849. This is van Leeuwen's idea of a creation "carved" by God. See *Idem,* "Liminality," 117 ff..

[1087] Van Leeuwen, "Wisdom Literature," 849.

[1088] *Ibid.*

is its epistemology; and its epistemology is transgenerational. "Knowledge of generic patterns and their re-cognition in particular situations is mediated generationally, whether in a profession or the general affairs of life."[1089] In the words of Bartholomew, the OT "firmly rejects human autonomy as the path to truth and thus delineates a pre-theoretical epistemology."[1090]

Van Leeuwen's profound analysis of OT Wisdom highlights the root differences between our interpretation of Eccl 7:23-29 and Fox's. This difference is primarily two-fold. First, Fox expresses a dualism (e.g., a sacred/secular dichotomy), that is incompatible with the creational worldview embodied in van Leeuwen's understanding of wisdom as a "totality concept." Second, and building upon the first difference, is a difference with regard to Qoheleth's epistemology. Fox repeatedly and clearly articulates an epistemological difference between Qoheleth and the rest of the wisdom tradition. Fox's seminal contribution to Ecclesiastes scholarship, along these lines, was highlighted in our discussion of v 23. We will, therefore, only briefly summarize his insights here.

Qoheleth, begins his journey, according to Fox, by accumulating more wisdom and knowledge than his predecessors (1:16). This wisdom "was presumably learned from traditional teachings, since he says that he carried it beyond his predecessors, meaning that they too possessed it."[1091] However, once Qoheleth begins his "investigation" the wisdom that he uses as a tool is not the learned wisdom, "but only his own faculties of observation, analysis, and reason. He never invokes (though he quotes) the teachings of the other sages to support his conclusions."[1092] Instead, Qoheleth employs "as his sole instrument of investigation...his independent rational intellect."[1093] Fox labels this change: "a radical *innovation*...[to] the notion of wisdom: the notion that one may use his independent intellect to discover new knowledge and interpret the data of individual experience."[1094] Though he nowhere says so explicitly, the overwhelming sense one gets from reading Fox is that Qoheleth's "innovation" is at least qualitatively neutral, and, more than likely, an advance.[1095] This is ultimately evident in his insistence that

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[1089] *Ibid.*
[1090] Bartholomew, "Wisdom Books," 120.
[1091] Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 120.
[1092] *Ibid.*; cf. *Idem, A Time to Tear Down*, 76.
[1093] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 76.
[1094] *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.
[1095] E.g., *Ibid.*, 71, 76, 81; *Idem*, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," 119-123.

Ecclesiastes is not "a polemic against wisdom or Wisdom Literature or a Wisdom School or the 'received wisdom.'"[1096] According to Fox, Qoheleth is complaining against God who is not holding up his end of the deal. Qoheleth's God, according to Fox, is "a deity who, in principle, guarantees the working of right causation. An absolute ruler with absolute powers can and *should* ensure invariant justice."[1097] By laying the point of Qoheleth's spear at the feet of God, Fox implicitly affirms Qoheleth's "innovation."

Van Leeuwen's view of OT Wisdom as *ipso facto* a firm rejection of the autonomy of human knowing in favor of an epistemology that begins with the "fear of God" and is fundamentally traditioned deems Qoheleth's empiricism not an innovation but a fundamental corruption. Van Leeuwen clearly states that OT Wisdom is the sum of all four aspects: assumption of the fear of Yahweh, discernment and respect for generic patterns and norms, sensitivity to the particularity of each circumstance, and a traditioned epistemology. When Qoheleth "innovates" to an empirical epistemology he has, therefore, been epistemologically seduced by Woman Folly (Prov 7; Eccl 7:25b-6). Qoheleth has transgressed the created order with regard to knowledge acquisition.[1098]

It was in order to expose this sin that Qoheleth led the reader to re-read his quest, against the backdrop of the paradox of v 23, as he highlighted the morality of the experiment (v 25), his empirical epistemology (vv, 23, 25, 27), and his inescapable capture by Woman Folly (v 26) together with his failure to find Lady Wisdom (vv 23-24, 27-28). The paradox of v 23 forces readers to doubt their own understanding of the book up to that point. The re-reading provoked by 7:23-29 forces one to ask the epistemological question: how can I know in such a way that I can trust the results – which is the question that Qoheleth is getting at himself.

[1096] Fox, "The Innerstructure of Qohelet's Thought," 230.

[1097] *Ibid.*, 236. Fox strangely contradicts himself in arguing for the consistency of the Wisdom tradition and Wisdom literature (including Qoheleth) with regard to denying an iron-clad causality, and then describing Qoheleth as assuming that "strict equity" is "required to make the universe rational and meaningful," that is, only "an invariable mutual entailment of behavior X and the appropriate consequence Y" (*Ibid.*, 235) is commensurate with his own presupposition that "the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished" (*Ibid.*, 234); and that "[a]ny infraction of" his four criteria (immediate, personal, visibile, and final / irreversible) is constitutive of "injustice" (*Ibid.*, 235).

[1098] This is why Qoheleth is repeatedly led to the conclusion of הֶבֶל הֲבָלִים. As Bartholomew points out with regard to reading Ecclesiastes with "the fear of the Lord" as the foundation and starting point of wisdom (Prov 9:10), one is struck by this "ironical exposure of a way of knowing that depends upon reason and experience alone, as opposed to an approach that starts with remembering one's Creator, with faith and obedience....Ecclesiastes affirms the importance of a theological starting point comparable to 'faith seeking understanding'" (Bartholomew, "Ecclesiastes, Book of," 183).

The wise person is the one who stays within "prescribed cosmic-social boundaries," and folly is "the deadly pursuit of things out of bounds."[1099] In Eccl 7:23-29, Qoheleth is gradually revealed as a חוֹטֵא who has strayed outside the carved boundaries of Yahweh's created order via his empiricism, with its insistence upon autonomy and rejection of tradition, resulting in his "capture" (לכד, synonym of מצא) by Woman Folly and his inability to find wisdom. "Finding wisdom means discovering how to follow the order that God has built into his world."[1100] Qoheleth attempted to find this order through an empirical epistemology. In this way, although God made Qoheleth יָשָׁר, Qoheleth has בִּקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים. Qoheleth's use of the term wisdom in v 23a (אֶחְכָּמָה) and in v 23b (בַּחָכְמָה) is not an instance in which the term is used in two different ways (*as per* Fox). V 23a does not depict a wisdom that Qoheleth aimed at but never reached over against the wisdom of v 23b that he did have.

In reading the pericope with a respect for the fundamental narrativity of the book, and thereby honoring its temporal movement, we have experienced the chronological unfolding of the meaning of the passage, including its illocutionary force. In this passage, the meaning unfolds, and the unfolding is essential to the meaning. By allowing the passage to present its ideas in its own way, and according to its own timing, the reader has been lead to *experience* Qoheleth's ironization of his own wisdom (both in terms of his method and his goal): his wisdom, is actually, folly![1101]

In the conclusion of his excellent study on Ecclesiastes, *Vain Rhetoric*, Gary Salyer states his understanding of "the ironic relationship between private insight [i.e., empirical epistemology] and public knowledge as the foundation element for understanding the text's total rhetorical impact on the reader."[1102] No one, however, has provided a better analysis of the centrality of irony to Ecclesiastes than Harold Fisch.[1103] In his outstanding essay, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," Fisch begins with this statement: "If the darker passages of Hosea show us God threatening to withdraw himself from man, then Ecclesiastes shows us what happens when man

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[1099] Van Leeuwen, "Liminality," 116.

[1100] Bartholomew, "Wisdom Books," 121.

[1101] Perry, *Dialogues*, 36.

[1102] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 385.

[1103] Much work needs to be done on the use of irony in Ecclesiastes. At the very least, there is immediate need for articulating some type of definition for the irony that Qoheleth employs.

withdraws himself into the inwardness of his own consciousness and distances himself from God."[1104] Here we have the "radically individualized statement" of an "autonomous ego."[1105] The wisdom of Qoheleth, Fisch goes on to argue, is "a thoroughly human acquisition...[It is] the path of self-knowledge, a wisdom of experience in the course of which we learn something of our strengths and limitations."[1106] At the end of the essay, Fisch offers an even more pointed statement: "The whole book...[is] one continued attempt to find a satisfying and wholly *human* wisdom....But ironically, this penultimate verse of the book [Eccl 12:13] explodes such a humanistic pretension. To fear God and keep his commandments becomes 'the whole of Man' or, we may say, what is left of man when his ego has been ironized away."[1107] Fisch refuses to agree with the view that would read the epilogue as the sentiments of another editor or author, arguing instead, that the "skeptical rejection of skepticism is the final twist of Qohelet's super irony."[1108] Qoheleth's evocation, then, of the "Hellenic world-picture" was in order to show "the weariness with which it fills his soul" and the resulting sense of "vanity" and "hopelessness."[1109] In his discussion of this aspect of Qoheleth's experiment, Bartholomew notes:

> Qoheleth...goes out of his way to describe...[his empirical epistemology] as "wisdom," but careful analysis of it shows it to be very different from the methodology of Proverbs. Qoheleth['s]...methodology revolves around experience and logic *alone*, whereas Proverbs's approach is rooted in the tradition of the fear of the Lord....This difference is crucial....What Qoheleth describes as a method of "wisdom" is folly, especially in the canonical light of Proverbs's fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. The latter is precisely *not* Qoheleth's starting point, and the result is that he keeps running down to the *hebel* conclusion.[1110]

On one level, Qoheleth "embodies for us what happens when we try to find meaning in an ambiguous world without starting from the fear of the Lord—we inevitably conclude that life is utterly enigmatic!"[1111] On another level, Qoheleth is reflecting upon this experience that he has experienced, and that he has led the reader to experience. He is reflecting upon his reflections. It is on this level that the ironic mood is presented.

[1104] Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," 158.
[1105] *Ibid.*
[1106] *Ibid.*, 159.
[1107] *Ibid.*, 175.
[1108] *Ibid.*
[1109] *Ibid.*, 166.
[1110] Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 52-3.
[1111] *Ibid.*

Fisch states that the "mark of the ironic mode of existence is self-division....Anyone can laugh at another person who trips and falls in the street: the ironist sees it happening to himself and smiles."[1112] With approval, Fisch appeals to Paul de Man's insight: This "characteristic...sets apart a reflective activity, such as that of the philosopher, from the activity of the ordinary self caught in everyday concerns."[1113] Therefore, in irony, one "brings together man as object, immersed in the world, and man as a subject, capable of rising superior to pains and pleasures."[1114] In this sense, Fisch presents the case for Qoheleth as "the Hebrew ironist." Qoheleth displays the reflexive posture of "ironic self-awareness and self-division"[1115] pondering his own pursuit of wisdom: "I said in my heart, 'I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me...and I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly'" (Eccl 1:16-17); "I said, 'I will be wise, but it was far from me. That which happens is far off, and deep, very deep, who can grasp it?'" (Eccl 7:23-24). Here we see "the mind spiral[ing] around its own axis, seeking enlightenment from within...The ego is left observing the ego."[1116] However, Qoheleth does not remain at this point, for in Eccl 7:23-29 he ironizes his own empirical epistemology.[1117] Qoheleth rejects the autonomous insistence of empiricism. Whybray is right that "Ecclesiastes is a book which invites the reader to eschew prejudice and passion and to think for himself."[1118] However, this is not the final word of the book, for this invitation is for the purpose of leading the reader on a journey in which one discovers, as Qoheleth did in his own journey, the bankruptcy of such a path. In Ecclesiastes we find a Wiseman who espouses the autonomy of empiricism only to ironize it and thereby sharply judge such self-sufficient thinking.

[1112] Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," 169.

[1113] de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," 194-95. Cited in Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," 169.

[1114] Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," 169-70.

[1115] *Ibid.*, 172.

[1116] *Ibid.*., 172, 174.

[1117] Contra those who understand the narrator/epilogist to be ironizing Qoheleth. E.g., Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 343-49, 384-84, 395. I am arguing that Qoheleth is ironizing himself, and the narrator affirms this ironization. So I see a greater consistency between the perspective of the narrator and the perspective of Qoheleth. My difference with Salyer is most apparent in his statement: "Qoheleth failed to see that the problem with 'experience' is its utter dependence on the self which articulates it" (*Ibid.*, 391 n. 17).

[1118] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament Guides, 13.

Conclusion

Roland Murphy concludes the section in his commentary on this pericope with the comment: "Obviously the final word on this text has not been written. Thus far, it refuses to yield its secret."[1119] While we have not offered the final word, I suggest that our reading is heading in the right direction. More testing needs to be done. For example, this reading needs to be extended into chapters nine – a critical chapter in the flow of the book – and following, in order to see how the ironic posture holds up. Where does Qoheleth go with his epistemological agenda? For the purposes of this dissertation, however, we must be content with the portion of Qoheleth's journey that we have experienced thus far.

The proof of a theory of homiletical application is its ability to connect the congregation and the text in the most robust and powerful way possible so that the congregation has the most immediate contact and fullest involvement with the scripture. The current chapter exposed the role of application in the process of understanding Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. It is now time to move from the role of application in the study to the role of application in the pulpit.

[1119] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 77-78.

CHAPTER 6

APPLICATION IN THE PULPIT: HOMILETICAL APPLICATION AND ECCLESIASTES 7:23-29 IN LIGHT OF THE ROLE OF APPLICATION IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

Introduction

This dissertation has demonstrated that the most vexing problem facing homiletics today, the problem of how to apply the Biblical text to the contemporary congregation, is at its core a theological-hermeneutical problem. We have identified the main contemporary approaches to homiletical application, explored the hermeneutical ecology of application, proposed the strengths and weaknesses of the various homiletical approaches in light of a depth theological-hermeneutical exploration of the role of application in the process of understanding, and identified the polymorphic nature of application. This agenda constituted chapters one through four. Having developed the theory of application in those chapters we turned, in chapter five, to illustrate the role of application in the process of understanding by interpreting Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. The task that remains is to move from the role of application in the study to the role of application in the pulpit.

The following three questions will enable the preacher to make the move from interpreting the text to preaching the text in such a way that the structure of application in the sermon is fed by the text. The first two questions are designed to highlight the nature of application as it existed in the process of interpreting the text.

1. What literary techniques guide the structure of application in the understanding of this text?

2. How in particular do these literary techniques structure the role of application in the event of understanding this text?

The final question moves the analysis in a specifically homiletical direction.

3. How may the sermon guide the structure of application so that the congregation applies the text in a way that exploits the fullest and most appropriate potential of the text?

A disclaimer is necessary at this point. Gadamer rightly helps us see one of the great failures of the Enlightenment – its fall to the seductive powers of method. Simply put, discovering, adopting, and rightly using the right method is no guarantee for truth. Michael Pasquarello III provides an important and necessary challenge to contemporary homiletics in his claim that "a single picture has increasingly held captive the homiletic imagination of the church in late modernity—that of technical or scientific reason rather than theological wisdom." What is needed, Pasquarello argues, is "the formation of a certain kind of person capable of exercising theological and pastoral wisdom, a form of discernment that includes but also transcends, the use of technique and skill."[1120] In the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation we exposed method alone as inadequate for understanding. And yet our work in those chapters and our praxis in chapter five established and demonstrated the role of methods and techniques when they are rightly located within the epistemological enterprise. Therefore, building upon the previous chapter, let us now consider our three questions in turn with regard to Ecclesiastes 7:23-29.

1. What Literary Techniques Guide the Structure of Application in the Understanding of this Text?

Typically the reading process is largely unconscious. But the preacher needs to shift this process into the conscious arena in order to be attentive to the particular ways the specific Biblical text structures application in the process of understanding. Homiletical application, therefore, must be rooted in Biblical poetics. Meir Sternberg's magisterial work on this subject helpfully defines poetics as "the systematic working or study of literature as such."[1121] The importance of this definition, when applied to the Bible, is in its insistence that the Biblical text "is a work of literature," and therefore "the discipline and the object of inquiry naturally come together."[1122] By attending to the poetics of the passage, the preacher will be able to identify the "functional structure, a means to a communicative end, a

[1120] *Idem, Sacred Rhetoric*, 1-2, 3.
[1121] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 2.
[1122] *Ibid.* See also, *Ibid.*, 7-57; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 15-17.

transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies."[1123] For the purposes of our investigation, the preacher will be able to identify through poetics the literary techniques embedded in the text which structure application. This approach will help discipline the direction of application to flow from the text into the sermon, and not from a presupposed theory of application back onto the Biblical text and then into the sermon. In order to allow the biblical text to structure sermonic application the first question ("What literary techniques guide the structure of application in the understanding of this text?") calls for the preacher to isolate the aesthetic clues and conventions by which a particular passage directs the reader's involvement in the process of understanding.

In order to isolate these devices one must begin "with a close reading that notes linguistic structures, patterns, and usages, recurring devices and unusual ones."[1124] The previous chapter, with its close textual reading of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, and its careful indication not only of *what* the text says and does, but also *how* it says and does, will be the foundation for this chapter. We have therefore come full circle to Augustine's insight highlighted in chapter one, "There are two things on which all interpretation of scripture depends. The process of discovering what we need to learn, and the process of presenting what we have learnt."[1125] The previous chapter together with the current chapter forms a single demonstration of the distinct yet inseparable nature of hermeneutics and homiletics. In contrast to Augustine, however, we are not using the hermeneutical enterprise merely to produce the interpretative results which then form the foundation of the sermon. Instead we are rooting homiletics more deeply in hermeneutics by allowing the hermeneutical nature of application to inform the nature of homiletical application. (In the conclusion we will see a second important area in which contemporary homiletics should move beyond Augustine's maxim.)

The focus at this stage, then, is not on the meaning of the literary devices, but merely identification.[1126] In the previous chapter, we highlighted these literary devices along the way. All that needs to be done now is to list the various techniques.

[1123] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 1.

[1124] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 19.

[1125] *DDC*, I:1.

[1126] However, as Berlin points out, "one is obviously never totally free of semantics" (*Idem*, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 19).

These techniques are: the rich/evocative narrative world of Qoheleth's "introspective autobiography"[1127] together with its journey and plot, and its emotive/poetic language; rhetorical question; irony, paradox, contradiction, and tension; delay of expected consequent; ambiguation – grammatical, semantic (e.g., antanaclasis), lexical, phonetic (e.g., parasonantic pun), paradox, symbol and metaphor, opacity, and gapping; and finally repetition – both through specific words and references to earlier parts of story/plot, and to the wider wisdom tradition.

2. How in Particular do these Literary Techniques Structure the Role of Application in the Event of Understanding this Text?

A failure to ground homiletical application in the hermeneutical aspects of application results in the grave mistake of imposing alien models of application onto a particular biblical text. This yields two potentially unfortunate results: (1) application is structured in a different way in the sermon than it is in the text; (2) the nature of application in the sermon is different from the nature of application in the understanding of the text. Both of these results have the strong potential of reducing and distorting the message of the text.

The first of our three questions, for moving from study to pulpit, militates against an alien imposition by forcing the preacher to identify the literary devices which structure application in the event of understanding. With the second question, we turn from the *what* to the *how*. The goal at this stage is two-fold: (1) to highlight the *way* the literary devices named in the first question actually function to structure application in the process of understanding Ecclesiastes 7:23-29; (2) to highlight the result of such a structuring for the nature of application in the process of understanding Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. (Notice how these two goals neatly counter the "two potentially unfortunate results" of a failure to ground homiletical application in the hermeneutics of application mentioned in the previous paragraph.)

Poetic Language and Narrative World

In Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 the reader's imagination is stimulated through the use of emotive/poetic language, the rich/evocative narrative world of Qoheleth's "introspective autobiography,"[1128] structured as it is in terms of plot and journey. If

[1127] Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 79.
[1128] *Ibid.*

the reader sits in judgment, refusing to suspend disbelief, then it will not be possible to explore the world Qoheleth constructs and the reader will thereby miss a critical hermeneutical function of the text. As Thiselton points out, drawing on the New Hermeneutic of Fuchs, this "narrative dynamic functions...differently from any bald theological statement...The story world engages with different people at a deeper-than-intellectual level."[1129] Thiselton goes on to argue that, with regard to the parables, and the same applies to our text from Ecclesiastes, this "narrative dynamic" is something like Gadamer's 'conversation,' in that biases are presupposed and the hearer is led into sharing them in order to adopt a perspective from within the narrative "which allow[s] fresh understanding and avoid[s] a premature dismissal of ideas."[1130]

Doris Lessing describes the way in which readers encounter Qoheleth and thus are enabled by his journey.

> From the very first verse of Ecclesiastes you are carried along on a running tide of sound, incantatory, almost hypnotic, and it is easy to imagine yourself sitting among this man's pupils, listening to—for instance, "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Your ears are entranced but at the same time you are very much alert. You have to be old to understand that verse, to see your whole life from early heedlessness to present regret for heedlessness.[1131]

Christianson identifies the "experience" to which Lessing alludes as the "vehicle by which readers attain Qoheleth's goal."[1132] That is, "Qoheleth's strategy is to communicate through his life story, and this provides the juncture for the reader to climb aboard."[1133] It is primarily at the beginning of the book that Qoheleth shares his life story and he does not offer advice until the end of the book, as evidenced in the change of narrational voice from densely first person to densely second person as the book progresses. This "shift from experience to advice" is part of an overall strategy "in which readers, who comprise the audience Qoheleth addresses, are invited to participate increasingly in the text's story world."[1134] In this shift from first person to second person, Qoheleth's advice to the narratee ("the character who is

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[1129] Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 567-68.

[1130] *Ibid.*, 568. Cf., Ellul on Ecclesiastes in *Reason for Being*, 196; and Green on Luke in *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 129ff.

[1131] Lessing, introduction to *Ecclesiastes*, x.

[1132] Christianson, "The Ethics of Narrative Wisdom," 207.

[1133] *Ibid.*

[1134] *Ibid.*

addressed in the 'space' of the text itself")[1135] constitutes a rhetorical strategy of invitation to the reader to "participate, as it were, in the narrative world...by becoming, in effect, Qoheleth's empathetic dialogue partner."[1136]

Literary Structures and the Reader's Engagement

At first glance, the rhetorical question seems to be a technique that does anything but invite involvement, however, as we pointed out in the previous chapter, this type of question functions to draw the reader into the world of the text via gaps, delays of consequents, psychological hook, and deliberate ambiguity. Through the use of a rhetorical question, the reader, "instead of being questioned directly, like the audience of a doubting soliloquy," is invited to seek to answer the question "*with* Qoheleth." Christianson describes the question as "a test." In the sense that Qoheleth is saying, "'This is what is only apparent on the outside, but come test this theorem to see if things are actually as they appear.' And here is where the openness of the questions lie: in the potentiality of Qoheleth's final attitude."[1137]

Hutcheon's description of irony as "the power of the unsaid to challenge the said"[1138] is pregnant with insight for our reading of Ecclesiastes and our discussion of the way in which Qoheleth's literary devices structure application in the process of understanding. Carolyn Sharp applies this understanding of irony to the use of irony in Ecclesiastes.

> It is in resisting the profound pull of the said, and in being wounded by its razor-sharp ironic edges over and over until the lesson to withdraw is learned, that the interpreter of Qohelet is compelled to work with the author of the book to create the power of the unsaid. The reader thereby shapes the truth of what emerges through the hermeneutical struggle. Thus the participation of the reader is essential, in praxis, to create the meaning of the book of Qohelet; and yet the reader cannot function competently as reader of this text outside of the intimate community established by the ironist....The pressures of the unsaid in the book of Qohelet are specific pressures generated by charged gaps and pregnant silences, not by limitless, empty silences open to potentially infinite meanings.[1139]

Qoheleth's readers must bear the responsibility of discovering "the relation between the ironist's 'is' and his 'ought,'"[1140] and thereby go beyond mere reading and even

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[1135] *Ibid.*, 208.
[1136] *Ibid.*, 209.
[1137] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 219.
[1138] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 59.
[1139] Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Vice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 66-7.
[1140] Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 31.

beyond a close reading to actually participating in the shaping of the meaning that "emerges through the hermeneutical struggle."[1141]

Of course the driving force in the entire pericope, the opening paradox, is a very important device that structures the reader's involvement. Fowler's explanation of the way Qoheleth uses paradox is a superb description of what we experienced in chapter five as we interpreted Ecclesiastes 7:23-29: Through paradox the reader is invited to perform a "dance step" with the text by "getting the reader to ask and try to answer: 'How can X and Y both be? How can X be, if Y? How can Y be, if X?'"[1142]

The entire passage is driven forward by the expectation that Qoheleth will somehow solve the opening paradox. All along the way there are numerous other expectations that Qoheleth creates in the reader, only to delay their consequents just as he delays the resolution of the opening paradox. These various delays are achieved in different ways: (1) The use of a question which "cries out for an answer," only to withhold the answer "for some time," and then answer it "only by implication." (2) The withholding of a key word, such as the subject of an action, "for some time." (3) The interposition of "something else, or what seems like something else, between the expectation and its completion, to give a consequent that is not expected."[1143] (4) And the frequent use of ambiguity (the opening paradox being the first and dominating example) to stimulate in the reader an expectation. In our interpretation of the passage we experienced the high degree of correlation between this technique and meaning as Qoheleth structures it. For example, consider the difference in the experience of interpreting Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 and the experience of reading a school history textbook. With the prevalence of delays in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, it is "as if the reader were composing the passage anew, as if part of the business of interpretation were to say, 'If I were writing this text, the next thing I would say is _____.' Then one proceeds to see what the author actually said next."[1144] Meaning, for Qoheleth, is found not simply in some unified message, "but in the very process by which the passage makes its linear way."[1145] "Meaning" and "affect" are synonymous terms here.

[1141] Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Vice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 66.
[1142] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 185.
[1143] Good, "Unfilled Sea," 72.
[1144] *Ibid.*, 63.
[1145] *Ibid.*, 62.

> "Affect" is the realization that one's mental expectations are being frustrated, that the consequent of the stimulus is different from what one had expected. In itself, that is a process of seeing what the mental consequent actually is, or recognizing the relation between antecedent and consequent and, therefore, the meaning in the text.[1146]

This particular stylistic device not only moves the pericope forward, it is actually a device that structures the reader's involvement (application) as an integral element of meaning.

The literary device that elicits the most readerly engagement in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is ambiguity. In the previous chapter we experienced Qoheleth's dexterity with antanaclasis (a type of semantic ambiguity) and parasonantic pun (a type of phonetic ambiguity) as devices that draw the reader deeply into the texture of the passage in particular and the narrative of the book as a whole.[1147] One also experienced ambiguity through the metaphor/symbol of the various women involved in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. The ambiguous identity of these women "incarnates the enigmas which Qohelet is exploring."[1148] In addition their ambiguity acts as a puzzle. The reader is invited to solve the puzzle by following the flow of the narrative as a whole, and of the particular discourse, and thus by paying careful attention for and to clues. In addition, there are frequent grammatical difficulties (e.g., ambiguous referents and antecedents, ambiguous relationships between clauses and main verbs, and the ambiguous use of pairs of double accusatives) which render the reader's search for the plain sense of the grammar almost as difficult as Qoheleth's search for Wisdom provoking a more deeply engaged reading.[1149]

Another technique of ambiguation is gapping. By withholding information, gaps are opened, which in turn "produce discontinuity," which in turn "breeds ambiguity." This specific type of ambiguity is particularly suited toward structuring the role of application in the process of understanding as meaning merges with quest and process.

> Even if the one-gap-for-one-closure dictate were reasonable, the critics would yet have no justification for overlooking both the effect produced on the reader by the temporary emergence of the ultimately invalidated alternative and by the interplay between the hypothesis endorsed and the one rejected.[1150]

[1146] *Ibid.*

[1147] Ceresko, "The Function of *Antanaclasis*" 568.

[1148] Miller, *Symbol*, 176. Miller is speaking specifically with regard to *hebel*, but it is my contention that this is also true of the women of Eccl 7:23-29.

[1149] Fontaine, "Many Devices," 143.

[1150] *Ibid.*, 224-25.

Qoheleth's penchant for confronting his readers with "intricate reading problems that constantly generate a sense of ambiguity"[1151] has caused me to comment often, in both the previous and the current chapter, on the role of ambiguity as a literary device that draws the reader more deeply into the text. In his introduction to Schleiermacher's handwritten manuscripts on hermeneutics, James Duke highlights a fundamental insight that Schleiermacher developed, and which applies directly to this particular function of ambiguity.

> Hermeneutics requires agility, an ability to weave from grammatical to psychological side and from comparative to divinatory method. Furthermore, interpretation involves constant movement back and forth, for it is always open to revision and supplementation. Since the life of the language and the life of the person form an infinite horizon, perfect understanding is an ideal which is ever approximated but never attained.[1152]

Ecclesiastes demands agility from its readers. Long's similar comment with regard to reading Jesus' parables also applies to Ecclesiastes. "They require an unusual degree of flexibility on the reader's part. We must be prepared to begin reading a parable with one set of expectations, only to find that the parable resists and finally overthrows that expectation."[1153] The previous chapter illustrated a similar experience in the reading of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. Indeed, Qoheleth invites the reader on a difficult journey. To read Ecclesiastes is to find oneself in a situation where a work of "writing demands engagement because it requires that an effort be made to come to terms with its meaning."[1154]

Salyer recognizes that Qoheleth's requirement of his readers to wrestle actively with the text not only "increases the level of interaction between reader and text" (i.e., deeper engagement) but more importantly it "takes the reader to a deeper level of *participation*." As a result, there is recreated "in the reader the same sense of disequilibrium on the affective level that Qoheleth argues for so cogently on the intellectual level."[1155] Salyer goes on to offer the outstanding analogy of one's experience with a Rubik's Cube.

> Inasmuch as it would be absurd to criticize a Rubik's Cube for the problems it presents to its user, so it is with the text of Ecclesiastes. Their effect is to draw

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[1151] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 126.

[1152] Duke, "Translators Introduction," 6.

[1153] Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 89.

[1154] Martinez, *Kierkegaard and the Art of Irony*, 18. Martinez is describing the experience of reading Kierkegaard's works, but in this context it is an apt description of reading Ecclesiastes.

[1155] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 131-32. Emphasis mine.

> the reader into the text, creating a sense of participation with the narrator regarding the observation of life's conundrum's.[1156]

Ambiguity, among other things, "compels the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning."[1157] The implied reader of Ecclesiastes, then, is a fellow *disciple*, and "the object of...interpretation...is the interpreter as much as it is the text, and it is *performative* as much as it is hermeneutical."[1158] One is not given the option of reducing Ecclesiastes "to an object for an analysis as if from an Archimedean point outside, by staking a pseudo-empirical claim to objectivity."[1159]

Conclusion

Through various rhetorical devices, Qoheleth demands the reader's complete engagement: ears, eyes, heart, and memory. We have not dealt specifically with memory in this chapter. In the last chapter we experienced Qoheleth's repetition of words and concepts, his allusions and references to earlier parts of his story, and to the wider Wisdom tradition of his day,[1160] as literary devices which structure the role of application in the process of understanding. (Iser's insight, developed in chapter five, is critical here.) Clearly, Qoheleth demands nothing less than a full engagement for the adventure into which he pulls the reader.

3. How May the Sermon Guide the Structure of Application so that the Congregation Applies the Text in a Way that Exploits the Fullest and Most Appropriate Potential of the Text?

With this question the preacher must determine how to preach the sermon so that the congregation is best shaped by the text. Through our study of the hermeneutical ecology of application in chapter three we saw that in order for the reader to engage and be engaged by the text in a way that allows the fullest and most appropriate possible contact between the two parties it is necessary for the reader to approach the text with a polymorphic view of application; allowing the text itself to shape the nature of application. Questions one and two directed our focus upon the

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[1156] *Ibid.*, 147.

[1157] *Ibid.*, 171.

[1158] Bockmuehl, "Reason, Wisdom and the Implied Disciple of Scripture," 64. Bockmuehl is not describing the experience of reading Ecclesiastes in particular, but that of reading the Bible in general.

[1159] *Ibid.*

[1160] Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 18.

text in order to discover and articulate the nature of application in the process of understanding Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 as structured by its literary devices.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is a carefully crafted literary text that invites the reader to participate in a journey. Through a wide range of literary devices the model reader is drawn into a vigorous, expansive, and simultaneously intimate discussion.[1161] "Qohelet bares his soul, not only his ideas, because he seeks to persuade by empathy. He bares his soul in all its twistings and turnings, ups and downs, taking his readers with him on an exhausting journey to knowledge."[1162] On this journey, many literary devices seek to "replicate" in the reader "the flow of perception and recognition as it developed for Qohelet."[1163] However, this replication is not merely for the purpose of seeing what Qoheleth sees, for the structures of openness[1164] demand a "high degree of interpretive cooperation" from the reader for the purpose of actively participating in the construction of meaning.[1165] Ellen Davis' observation regarding the Psalms is relevant to our passage. The reader is expected to "move slowly through the text, as if these thoughts and remarkably fresh words were coming into being for the very first time out of your own mind."[1166] The meaning of the book comes to us as we ourselves are seized by the feelings of tension and frustration, of confusion and discongruity as we relive Qoheleth's journey. In this relatively short pericope, where so little is said, but so much is meant, we are constantly forced to choose and interpret.

Contemporary Traditional Homiletics and Beyond

CTH has steadfastly reminded us of an ancient pedagogical component in preaching. Sermons teach by providing biblical information, explaining doctrine, and generally instructing in the content of the Christian faith.[1167] Preaching should, *inter alia,* help the congregation "overcome their spiritual and theological illiteracy."[1168] The main reason for this, as Thomas Long argues, is that, "Christianity is more than

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[1161] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 392.
[1162] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 79.
[1163] Ibid.
[1164] In chapter three we discussed Eco's notion of an "open" and "closed" continuum on which texts can be plotted in order to understand them appropriately. The role of application in understanding Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, as determined by the level and type of reader cooperation, as structured by various literary techniques, places the text toward the "open" end of the continuum.
[1165] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 171.
[1166] Davis, *Wondrous Depth*, 21.
[1167] Cf., Allen, *The Teaching Sermon.*
[1168] Immink, "Homiletics: The Current Debate," 105.

a set of episodic experiences; it is a comprehensive way of seeing and being in the world."[1169] Christians must know something "about the language, categories, and claims of the Christian tradition in order for their faith to mature."[1170] As Yngve Brilioth illustrated in his brief but brilliant, *A History of Preaching*, the instructional, or catechetical, element has always been an important part of preaching.[1171] As we saw in chapter five, Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is informative.

The interests of homiletical theory of the last three decades have tilted toward experience on the one hand and cultural-linguistics on the other hand. Therefore a kind of sterility has been encouraged toward the types of questions that transcend experience and culture with the result that discursive language, logical disputation, deduction, and bold propositional truth claims have received a rather negative appraisal. Such an appraisal involves philosophical assumptions that have been too eagerly, and too uncritically, accepted. In an important study of the Apostle Paul's preaching, James Thompson argues that preaching must maintain this reflective theological discourse in order to sustain communal identity, i.e., for the sake of the continued existence of the church.[1172] Ricoeur articulates the undeniable importance of conceptualization from a philosophical perspective.

> There is no need to deny the concept in order to admit that symbols give rise to an endless exegesis. If no concept can exhaust the requirement of further thinking borne by symbols, this idea signifies only that no given categorization can embrace all the semantic possibilities of a symbol. But it is the work of the concept alone that can testify to this surplus of meaning.[1173]

This is not, however, to valorize *CTH,* which does have, as we demonstrated in chapter three, significant philosophical weaknesses. As a result of an insufficient theoretical underpinning, *CTH* is simply not capable of preaching the full force of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. To begin with, an approach to interpretation that is dominated by the Cartesian subject and object dichotomy is dangerously susceptible to perpetuating "established ways of seeing the world, which merely mirror back man's existing concerns and make him the helpless victim of his place in history."[1174]

[1169] Long, "When the Preacher is a Teacher," 22.

[1170] *Ibid.*, 23.

[1171] Brilioth, *A History of Preaching,* 12-13. See also, Reid's survey of the history of this aspect of preaching: *Idem, The Four Voices of Preaching,* 38-52.

[1172] Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul.*

[1173] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 57.

[1174] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 335. Quite significantly, Craddock begins *As One Without Authority* with an analysis of the current "language crisis" in the West.

We have also discovered that application understood as the end point of an arc that begins in the concrete meaning of the Biblical text, passes through the abstraction of a propositional-truth, and finally comes to rest in the concrete situation of the contemporary congregation is insufficient for and distortive to the message of our text. If you sum up a doctrinal point from Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 you will fail to mean what Qoheleth is meaning because his entire meaning cannot be contained in cognitive propositions alone. Not every sentence in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is merely verbal packaging of propositional content.[1175]

The literary techniques identified under question one were revealed under question two to be devices employed by the author to provoke "in the reader a more complex process of discovery than merely comprehending a single, aptly illustrated idea."[1176] In order to identify the nature of "meaning" in Ecclesiastes solely in terms of a clear theological idea one must "suppress some of its more poetically engaging details." To put it in terms of performative language, the meaning of Ecclesiastes exists in the interaction of propositional content (*P*) and function (*f*) and is therefore irreducible to either. Meaning is a combination of *what* is said and of the force exerted on the communicational and social system into which that *what* is uttered. Thomas Long has long made this point for the benefit of homiletics. "What a text *means* is a product of what it says and does in a given setting."[1177] Preachers are to "not merely look for theological ideas floating in a historical soup [*CTH*], nor are they to look for timeless and universal aesthetic literary experiences [*NH*]. They are to look for the *action* of the text, what the text was *doing* in a specific historical setting."[1178] Long's contribution should not be underestimated. In important ways, much of what I am arguing in this dissertation depends upon Long's groundbreaking work. And yet, one thing that Long does not address is the nature of application. In fact, Long assumes that attention to the *saying* and *doing* of the text will enable one to move beyond the three options for application which dominate contemporary homiletical application: (1) "finding some central idea in the text that can travel through time," or (2) "forging some sort of dynamic analogy between the historical circumstances of the text and our own circumstances," or (3) indwelling the

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[1175] Cf. Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching the Atonement*, xi.

[1176] Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 88. In this quotation Long is actually addressing the parables of Jesus, but his insight applies to Ecclesiastes.

[1177] Long, "The Preacher and the Beast," 8.

[1178] *Ibid.*, 10.

"language worlds" created by the text. However, this project has demonstrated that it is in understanding homiletical application to be a polymorphic concept, and by attending to the structure of application in the process of understanding the text, that one is equipped to explore ways of preaching that can render the text "clearly without fuzziness" but at the same time "will struggle with the truth in ways unreduced."[1179]

With its poetics derived more from the Puritan Plain style, anesthetized as it was by the philosophical assumptions of the Enlightenment over against the Biblical text itself, *CTH* is simply not capable of preaching the full force of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. *CTH* can expose, illustrate, and apply the concept of Qoheleth's anti-empiricist epistemology, but one is still left with "a truth greatly reduced."[1180] Any preacher working under the framework of *CTH* is unable to generate the full power of Qoheleth's message. Nearly a century and a half ago Ginsburg made the point with clarity:

> Instead of writing an elaborate metaphysical disquisition, logically analyzing and refuting, or denouncing, *ex cathedra,* the various systems of happiness which the different orders of minds and temperaments had constructed for themselves, Solomon is introduced as recounting his painful experience in all these attempts. Thus by laying open, as it were, to the gaze of the people the struggles of a man of like feelings with themselves, who could fully sympathise with all their difficulties, having passed through them himself, and found the true clue to their solution, the sacred writer carries out his design far more touchingly and effectively than an Aristotelian treatise, or the Mount Ebal curses upon the heads of the people, would have done.[1181]

The *CTH* approach therefore faces the temptations that Vanhoozer describes with regard to what he calls "Cognitive-Propositionalist" theology. The temptation to think that one can "package the Bible in a conceptual scheme that is tidier than the original." And the temptation to think that knowledge of the information thus packaged is enough. The problem here, according to Vanhoozer, is in the "sense of distantness" that fails to draw the interpreter (congregation) into the narrative "by turning it into an ossified, formulaic knowledge that will either wilt on the vine or, on another plausible scenario, be used as a shibbolethic instrument of power."[1182] So the *CTH* approach to application produces a type of sermon that falls prey to Murphy's trenchant criticism. "The message of Ecclesiastes has suffered from excessive

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[1179] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet,* 2-3.
[1180] *Ibid.*, 3.
[1181] Ginsburg, *Coheleth,* 17.
[1182] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine,* 88.

summarizing."[1183] By allowing Ecclesiastes to structure the nature of homiletical application via the nature of hermeneutical application one faces the challenge of translating the performative *function* of the text so that the sermon structures, for the congregation, the performative/illocutionary level of the text. The strategies of involvement that structure application in the process of understanding the text must influence the sermonic poetics.

This is a challenge. As Salyer describes it, in Ecclesiastes a literary experience is generated which goes beyond language's ability to precisely elucidate.

> What language cannot adequately express...[these devices] can communicate by re-enacting for the reader the narrative experience of life's essential ambiguities, ironies and absurdities....The book of Ecclesiastes with its abundant use of rhetorical questions, constant gapping techniques and other strategies from the arsenal of ambiguity is a stunning testimony to the power of the various strategies of indirection to communicate to the reader something of his or her own rhetorical liabilities and limitations.[1184]

In this context Salyer points out the weakness of typical historical critical approaches to Ecclesiastes. By attempting "to solve the book's reading problems with a diachronic method that is wholly unable to address the synchronic dimension that generates the book's basic characteristics and rhetorical properties," historical critics fail.[1185] To preach Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 in a way that most fully exploits the power of the text, one needs a sermonic poetics akin to the synchronic methods which proved in chapter five of this dissertation to be so well suited for encountering the message of the text.

It is ironic that a preaching tradition like *CTH*, which is typically so focused on the authority and claims of the Bible, can so reduce and distort the text itself. This is the power of a view of application presupposed and foisted onto the text. To use another metaphor, through a particular view of application the text is strained until it yields a type of knowledge that can be thus applied. As we have argued throughout this dissertation, what is needed is an approach to homiletical application that is structured by the text's approach to application so that we are no longer faced with "a truth greatly reduced." The need for this is all the more apparent when we realize that, as Brueggemann puts it, "reduced speech leads to reduced lives."[1186]

[1183] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lviii.
[1184] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 397-98.
[1185] *Ibid.*, 388.
[1186] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 3.

New Homiletics and Beyond

In a number of important ways, *NH* addresses some of the critical weaknesses of *CTH*. To begin with, *NH* is clearly committed to the notion that some texts possess a temporal quality – they move. As we saw in chapter five, the narrative elements in Qoheleth's rhetorical style make it necessary to "uncover the meaning progressively as the text itself presents it."[1187] One should read Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 as one watches a movie – surrendering to the movement of the plot; suspending disbelief; becoming a willing participant on the journey. To preach Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, one must be attentive to the temporal grain, and resist expounding "the conclusions" in order to indwell "the connecting links of Qohelet's reasoning."[1188] With its interest in structuring the sermon in a way that leads the congregation through the experience of living in and working through a plot, *NH* picks up something in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 that *CTH* does not.

NH clearly understands the fact that texts not only say things, they also do things. This insight is at the center of the reorientation affected in homiletics by *NH*. An insight that is inseparable from the saying/doing aspect of texts is the appreciation of form alongside content. This appreciation, first put on the contemporary homiletical scene by H. Grady Davis, is a defining element of *NH*.[1189] The form of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is story-like. In a lengthy quote of Vanhoozer, we will see some important insights into the nature of truth as rendered by a story. This provides an important perspective for the role of application in preaching Ecclesiastes 7:23-29.

> Martha Nussbaum...says that "[l]iterary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content—an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth."[1190] Narratives do more than convey propositions; they configure the past in a certain way and say, "look at the world like this." They do not merely inform; they train us to see the world in certain ways....And this brings me to the role of imagination in interpreting biblical truth....The purpose of exegesis is not to excavate but to explore canonically-embodied truth by becoming apprentices to the literary forms, and this involves more than mastering the propositional content. By learning imaginatively to follow and indwell the biblical texts, we see through them to reality as it really is "in Christ." As C. S. Lewis knew, stories too are truth-

[1187] Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 59.

[1188] Ellul, *Reason for Being*, 42.

[1189] *Idem*, *Design for Preaching*, 20. Eighty years earlier, Newman made a similar argument in *The Idea of a University*, 208, 219-220. However, it was through Davis that the insight really took hold in contemporary homiletics. Long has done more than anyone to harvest the homiletical fruit of the form and content relationship. E.g., see his, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*.

[1190] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 3.

> bearers that enable us to "taste" and to "see," or better, to experience as concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction. What gets conveyed through stories, then, is not simply the proposition but something of the reality itself.[1191]

With its emphasis on story *NH* is particularly adept at creating a world and inviting the congregation into it so that they can see their world in certain ways. This is precisely the type of thing Qoheleth does with Ecclesiastes. The type of application that occurs through imaginatively indwelling a story is powerful. In the words of Brueggemann, people are not transformed by "new rules. The deep places in our lives—place of resistance and embrace—are not ultimately reached by instruction." The only way to reach such places is "by stories, by image, metaphors, and phrases that line out the world differently, apart from our fear and hurt."[1192] *NH* is well positioned to tap into this powerful type of application. And yet, there are problems.

With its interest in processing experience, *NH* has also demonstrated a stubborn resistance to discursive language, deduction, and logical disputation. *NH* is therefore not prepared to handle the intricacies of Qoheleth's argument and plot. Speech-act theory helpfully distinguishes between propositional content (*p*) which functions as *description*, and illocutions which convey a content with a certain force (*F*).[1193] Using these tools Thiselton points out that the ability of a narrative-world to transform a reader (in our case, a congregation) is pluriform. The congregation may have some of their prior values and assumptions subverted, or the narrative world may found and create values. Then again, the congregation may address issues of personal identity, or even be invited into a narrative-world that affects the birth of faith.[1194] The point being that however the transformation occurs, the force (*F*) of narrative-worlds is not so easily divorceable from propositional content (*p*). This distinction illuminates the results of an unduly one-sided conception of language and the resultant dichotomy of, on the one hand, "description, objectification, report, and proposition, and on the other hand, address, promise, understanding and self-involvement."[1195] Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 does address the reader as an invitation. But it is an invitation to a world structured by propositional content.

[1191] Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation?", 121-22.

[1192] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 109-110.

[1193] See Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 293-95 for brief summary of the complex debate between Searle on the one hand, and Austin and Recanti on the other, regarding the relationship of these two components.

[1194] *Ibid.*, 574.

[1195] *Ibid.*, 294.

This critique is similar to what Thiselton is getting at when he critiques the New Hermeneutic as rightly facing "the problem of how the interpreter may understand the text of the New Testament more deeply and more creatively," but then exhibiting "less concern...about how...[one] may understand it correctly."[1196] To hold such a one sided view of language is to succumb to the same mistake *CTH* made. Reducing Scripture's linguistic plurality into one kind only.[1197]

Another reason that the *NH* cannot adequately account for the sermonic application of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is because *NH* is built upon "induction" as that which is most basically effective in the hermeneutical and homiletical enterprises. Craddock's view of induction grows directly out of his commitment to rooting homiletics in hermeneutics. His identification, however, of induction as the universal methodological link between the two is not accurate.

Craddock understands deductive movement in preaching as the movement from "the general truth to the particular application or experience."[1198] Inductive movement in preaching is simply the reverse. "Thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener's ear to a general truth or conclusion."[1199] Craddock's proposal, which revolutionized preaching in the last quarter of the twentieth century, was quite simple.

> In most sermons, if there is any induction, it is in the minister's study, where he arrives at a conclusion, and that conclusion is his beginning point on Sunday morning. Why not on Sunday morning retrace the inductive trip he took earlier and see if the hearers come to that same conclusion.[1200]

An inductive sermon, then, is one in which the preacher "recreate[s] imaginatively the movement of his own thought whereby he came to that conclusion."[1201] Craddock argues that this inductive process is "the way people ordinarily experience reality" and it is the way that "life's problem-solving activity goes on naturally and casually."[1202] Unfortunately, Craddock did not go deep enough into the hermeneutics

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[1196] *Ibid.*, 353. E.g., Lowry, *The Sermon*, 117. Lowry is an extreme example in that he constantly and only privileges the experience of God's presence over against "the message that is being articulated" in any particular text (*Ibid.*). And yet, *NH*, as a whole and not just in extreme forms, typically approaches preaching with a focus not on informing or proving but on provoking an existential event that results in life transformation.

[1197] See Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Idem*, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation.*

[1198] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

[1199] *Ibid.*, 47.

[1200] *Ibid.*, 48.

[1201] *Ibid.*

[1202] *Ibid.*, 55.

of understanding. Induction is not the universal constant in understanding. As we saw in chapter three it is not that simple. Understanding is structured by a cluster of issues; hence our reference to the hermeneutical "ecology" of understanding. By assigning to inductive movement the privileged distinction of being the unifying element in "the way people ordinarily experience reality," Craddock unintentionally imbued *NH* with a sterility toward propositional content (*p*).[1203]

The New Hermeneutic constitutes the foundation of *NH*. Unfortunately, the fatal flaw of the New Hermeneutic also weakens *NH*: "a lurking assumption...that the gospel addresses human beings in their existential self-awareness."[1204] This is at the root of the three weaknesses so far listed: a sharp distinction of the rhetorical axis of language to affect the reader over against the referential axis of language to convey information; a lack of emphasis on how to understand the text correctly; and, the mistaken identification of induction as the heart of the process of understanding. *NH* also inherited from the New Hermeneutic the problem that accompanies its existentialist bent—an inescapable individualism. (This weakness will be explored and addressed in the following section on *PLH*.)

These weaknesses should not dwarf the profound insights of *NH*. One insight in particular opens important possibilities for homiletical application. Learning from Heidegger, Fuchs, and Ebeling, *NH* rightly sees that the view of language that is "dominated by the Cartesian perspective of subject and object" has a strong tendency to "perpetuate established ways of seeing the world, which merely mirror back man's existing concerns and make him the helpless victim of his place in history."[1205]

Post-Liberal Homiletics and Beyond

Like *NH, PLH* also picks up on the linguistic turn in philosophy. However, *PLH* approaches preaching from a fundamentally different perspective than *NH*. As a result, *PLH* helpfully corrects some of the problems with *NH* application.

PLH helpfully reminds us that the content of the Biblical narratives is neither reducible to abstract propositions nor realized in general human experiences. In

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[1203] This is not meant to accuse Craddock of being anti-propositional. He explicitly warns against such moves. However, by making his case for the hermeneutical universality of inductive movement, Craddock ensured a prejudice against "rational argument" and deductive discourse. The anti-propositional nature of *NH* has been well documented.

[1204] Buttrick, "On Doing Homiletics Today," 101.

[1205] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 335. Quite significantly, Craddock begins *As One Without Authority* with an analysis of the current "language crisis" in the West.

addition, *PLH* clearly argues that the form and the content of Scripture are not easily separable. *PLH* is concerned to build up the church and to root individuals in an ecclesial identity.[1206] This is a healthy corrective to *NH*, which has inadequate resources for addressing the role that preaching is supposed to play in the upbuilding of the church and the communal aspect of Christianity. In terms of application, *PLH* uses this insight to critique the strong tendency in *NH* to connect the text and the congregation (i.e., application) solely through an individualized existential event. The problem with *NH* is in its one-sided focus. The ability of preaching to facilitate language-events is an important *NH* insight. But it is inadequate to construe preaching from only this perspective, and *PLH* alerts homiletics to the dangers of this approach. Another benefit of *PLH* for homiletical application is that *PLH* continues the critique of the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Thus we are reminded to resist forms of application that merely confirm "established ways of seeing the world," thereby dooming congregations to their "place in history."[1207] Building on Frei's attempt to name and reverse the process of domesticating the Biblical story to the contemporary world, Charles Campbell, the most articulate and sophisticated representative of *PLH*, suggests a typological move aimed at enabling the preacher to carry the Biblical story forward from the text into the contemporary world in such a way that forms the church into the "ongoing bearer of the story."[1208] This applicatory move is an imaginative act of "seeing narrative patterns and connections between events, people, and institutions" in the text and in the contemporary world and typologically linking them through Scriptural immersion.[1209] The goal is outstanding, the method, however, flounders. Three significant weaknesses are present in *PLH* approach to application and they are all set in relief via our reflection upon Ecclesiastes 7:23-29.

While rightfully naming and critiquing the tendency of much contemporary homiletics to be excessively individualistic, experiential, moralistic, and behavior-oriented, *PLH* too often goes to the other extreme and denies personal application. This is a result of casting a dichotomous either/or wedge between the homiletical options of individual application/meaningfulness on the one hand and communal socialization on the other hand. Purely individualistic application is wrong, but *PLH*

[1206] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 221-231.
[1207] Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 335.
[1208] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 253.
[1209] *Ibid.*, 256-57.

mistakenly attempts to prevent such an excess by elevating the community over against the individual. Ecclesiastes, like *PLH*, offers a profound critique of individualism. Ecclesiastes does not go to the other extreme of attempting to demonize any focus on the individual. Instead of polarizing community and individual, *PLH* would do better to offer a depth articulation of the inter-related nature of individuals and community.

The second problem with *PLH,* for the purposes of homiletical application, is exposed by our earlier work on the ecology of understanding. Appealing to Frei's notion of "intratextuality," *PLH* conceives of homiletical movement as the Biblical text absorbing our text (i.e., our reality), so that, and this is the key issue for homiletical application, our reality is understood in terms of the rendered reality of the Bible. Campbell then argues that preaching should avoid interpretation as translation.[1210] It is important to recognize the power of language to shape reality, and the necessity of a congregation being rightly shaped in order to hear Scripture truthfully.[1211] *PLH* helpfully alerts us to this. And yet, *PLH* accepts a flawed understanding of language and of the relationship between the text and the congregation.

With regard to language, *PLH* embraces a view that is simultaneously tyrannical and impoverished. Impoverished in the sense that *PLH* fails to address the many functions of language other than the function of shaping one's identity and vision. *PLH* trades one narrow view of language ("a symbolic expression of experience")[1212] for another ("the ruled behavior or learned skill of a community").[1213] This view is tyrannical in that language is conceived of as more basic than reality itself. However, as Bartholomew argues, "personhood is more basic to reality than language." And in the words of Ricoeur, "we bring experience to language."[1214] To summarize, *PLH* correctly critiques the naiveté of *NH* overemphasis on the power of the narrative form to affect a transforming word-event. However *PLH* merely replaces one naiveté with another by locating homiletical

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[1210] *Ibid.*, 221-31.
[1211] *Ibid.*, 153.
[1212] *Ibid.*, 143.
[1213] *Ibid.*
[1214] Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes,* 213. In this sense, *PLH* embraces what Plantinga refers to as "creative anti-realism." See his, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," 269. Gadamer's nuanced discussion of the relationship of experience to language is helpful (*Idem, TM,* 417).

power within language itself. Ultimately *PLH*, like *NH*, suffers from a one-sided view of language.[1215]

With regard to the relationship between the text and the congregation, *PLH* presents an artificial bifurcation of "the worlds 'inside' and 'outside' the text."[1216] In a rather subtle way, this approach demonstrates a "deprecation of the created and temporal world in which we live."[1217] This deprecation presages a serious misapprehension of the Biblical doctrine of creation. A doctrine that is central to wisdom literature in general, and is specifically important for reading Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 (as was demonstrated in chapter five). This mistake sets up *PLH* for a critical hermeneutical flaw. As we saw in chapter four, one comes to understand the text when one's current horizon and the text's horizon are related to one another. This is the heart of understanding, and it is the foundation of hermeneutical application. The intratextuality of *PLH* attempts to remove this moment and therefore neglects the role of application in understanding. Simply put, understanding does not work the way that *PLH* has construed it to work. In the words of David Lose, this is an approach to preaching that "allows no means for distanciation, or critical distance, by which hearers can really be encountered by, and appropriate" the text.[1218] We saw in chapter four that one's own horizon is critical to one's ability to foreground the horizon of the text. *PLH* correctly sees danger in admitting one's current horizon into the interpretive process. Campbell's desire to resist turning the world of the text into a cipher for the congregation's own agenda is well founded, but artificial interpretive rules cannot remove the risk. John McClure offers the important hermeneutical criticism of this issue when he argues that the relationship of the Bible and contemporary experience should be seen in terms of an interrelation. Instead of construing the two horizons (worlds) in terms of a polarity, the preacher should "textualize experience" and "experientialize the text." In the first case the preacher facilitates the congregation's perception of their world (horizon) in terms of the text, in the second case the preacher leads the congregation to see the text as it is illuminated by their experiences.[1219]

[1215] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 103.
[1216] Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 122.
[1217] *Idem*, "Narrative and Proclamation in a Postliberal Homiletic," 8.
[1218] *Idem*, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 125.
[1219] McClure, Review of *Preaching Jesus*, 36.

This enormous hermeneutical mistake reveals the fundamental problem of *PLH*. Rejecting general hermeneutics dooms one to the agenda of unacknowledged and unexamined philosophical assumptions.

> Long ago Tertullian asked, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?" From a Christian perspective, sensitized as it is to idolatry, it is always tempting to reply, "Nothing!" However, historically the Tertullian-type approach has often had devastating consequences for Christian scholarship. Tertullian rejects Athens as bankrupt philosophy and yet like a Trojan horse he cannot keep philosophy out of his discourse where it, undetected, exercises its influence.[1220]

PLH desperately needs the insights of general hermeneutics with its attention to both horizons and concern to avoid the radical dichotomizing of the historical-critical method (e.g., *CTH*) along with the tyranny of the interpreter's horizon (e.g., *PMH*). *PLH* attempts to make an end run around the role of general hermeneutics via an appeal to the power of the interpretive community to faithfully interpret the Scriptures[1221] which belong to her. This is akin to a simple appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit to short-circuit all problems of intelligibility and understanding.

(Radically) Post-Modern Homiletics and Beyond

The noble concern to protect and nurture the stranger (the outsider, the other) permeates *PMH*. Driven by this concern, *PMH* has given more attention to the relationship of the hearer to the sermon than any other homiletical approach to application. Also of benefit is the recognition of the power of language to mask and perpetuate destructive ideologies. However, in the concern to honor the integrity of the other and the suspicion of both the power and the limitation of language, *PMH* has over-emphasized the contingent nature of knowledge in general and textual knowledge in particular. And like *PLH*, even more so, *PMH* has assigned an ontologically hegemonic position to language. Thus, Lucy Rose, who has given more articulate attention to the hearer than any other in *PMH*, sees as a primary goal of

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[1220] Bartholomew, "Babel and Derrida," 305-6.

[1221] Campbell follows Frei in refusing the legitimacy of general hermeneutics. At one point, Campbell points to Frei as arguing that "the actual practice of interpretation within the Christian community" is primary, and not some general theory of meaning. This is consistent with Gadamer's understanding of philosophical hermeneutics as descriptive and not prescriptive. In Frei's terms, hermeneutics should aim at discerning or describing "the consensual rules that the church has used in reading Scripture," but then, the foundations of *PLH* take a decidedly anti-Gadamerian turn by insisting that one resist any attempt at discerning or describing "some universal set of rules for reading all texts." When asked for a "general hermeneutical theory to explain how ancient biblical texts can be 'meaningful' for contemporary persons," Campbell points to Frei's "refusal to substitute hermeneutical theory for the church, the community in which Christians learn the rules for reading and performing Scriptures" (*Idem, Preaching Jesus,* 112, 113).

PMH the articulation of a homiletic that removes any gap between the preacher and the congregation in order to set them alongside one another as "equal partners on a journey to understand and live out their faith commitments."[1222] This, in partnership with an understanding of "the limitations and sinfulness of language,"[1223] precludes the preacher from any attempt to "teach, persuade, or change the congregation," since such activities separate the preacher from the congregation.[1224] Under the guise of epistemic humility, this approach holds massive ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Such subterranean commitments can only be addressed on an equally subterranean level. Therefore, the work in chapter three and four, is critical at this point.

In Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 we experienced Qoheleth's use of many rhetorical devices and techniques to structure our involvement in his text in order to yield a meaning that is definitely in the service of an intention to teach, persuade, and transform his audience. Qoheleth is not equal to his readers, in the sense that he is in charge of the reading process. He clearly determines the level and type of reader cooperation in his text. Qoheleth has an agenda. His agenda is to correct the reader's epistemology, to change the reader's perception of reality, but more than that, to change the reader.[1225] He is the leader on the journey. "While it is true that Qoheleth displays a subversive tendency to undermine what is generally 'accepted', he does not take the further step of carnivalizing the practice."[1226] *PMH* displays the hermeneutical flaws of the *Determinate* approach exposed in chapter three.

The general insistence of *PMH* on unlimited freedom as an antidote to authoritarianism depends upon the hermeneutically indefensible notion of unlimited semiosis. As we have seen in chapter three and in chapter five, "Even in a literary structure that imitates the ordinary business of living, the process of making sense is directed by aesthetic clues and conventions."[1227] The preacher who preaches Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 is neither under the burden to be less in control nor under the freedom to be more in control of the meaning the congregation derives from the

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[1222] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 89.

[1223] *Ibid.*

[1224] *Ibid.*, 90.

[1225] Cf. Davis on the psalms in, *Idem, Wondrous Depth*, 21.

[1226] Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 215. Christianson's subsequent statement clearly reveals a difference between his reading and mine. However, we both agree that Ecclesiastes both operates in a way and suggests a meaning that is critical of that particular aspect of Postmodernity that Christianson so picturesquely describes as the "carnivalizing" of practice.

[1227] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 228.

sermon than Qoheleth himself displays with regard to the preacher in the study interpreting the text. Rose exaggerates the case.

> [T]he...preacher relinquishes control of the sermon's reception. The success of the sermon is not contingent on the worshipers' accurately receiving a preconceived message or experiencing a carefully orchestrated event. Instead, conversational forms acknowledge that the sermon's meanings lie in the interaction between the Spirit and the congregation as a community of interpreters.[1228]

While Rose's last sentence in the above quotation is possible and desirable, it is a *non sequitur* from the first two sentences. The first two sentences are not hermeneutically responsible. As Sternberg observes, "[T]he active role played by the reader in constructing the world of a literary work is by no means to imply that gap-filling is an arbitrary process. On the contrary, in this as in other operations of reading, literature is remarkable for its powers of control and validation."[1229] Carolyn Sharp rightly challenges "postmodern hermeneutical strategies" for a failure to "adequately...address the issue of the competent decoding of irony and authorial intention in didactic texts, issues that are far more complex than straw characterizations of modernist historicizing interpretation and naïve representationalism usually acknowledge."[1230]

The depth-hermeneutical exploration of application and the actual practice of interpreting Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 has alerted us to the ability of texts, on either end of the open and closed spectrum, to legitimate a reader's interpretive conclusions via congruity with the text's own norms.[1231] In chapter four we clearly faced the challenge to knowledge by the historicized interpreter, and we argued that one can acquire knowledge worthy of confidence. Thus, one can respect the role of the congregation in the construction of meaning without abandoning all control, and, like Qoheleth, without shame over one's role as a teacher. In its demonization of authority (and not just authoritarianism) out of respect for the other, *PMH* "ends up privileging a noncoercive sermon...over a recognizably Christian content, thereby sacrificing preaching's function to proclaim to persons a living word that may address them directly."[1232] This not only runs contrary to Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, which clearly makes assertions, but it also "substitutes secondary theological reflection for

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[1228] Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 117.
[1229] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 188.
[1230] Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 43.
[1231] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 188.
[1232] Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 133.

primary proclamation."[1233] Lose points out that by assuming the equality of the preacher and the congregation, *PMH* gives too little attention to the necessity of establishing, nurturing, and maintaining a traditioned communal identity.[1234] This quality of *PMH* presumes the epistemological skepticism of Lyotardian "incredulity toward metanarratives"[1235] with its focus on language games with only local and limited validity over and against worldviews. In addition, with the *PMH* emphasis on fostering a conversation, one sees Rorty's critique of Western epistemology as obsessed with legitimation, and his alternative goal of "edification." The hermeneutics of this approach were explored in chapter three. A critical conclusion reached in that chapter was that, contra *PMH,* one can hold together the historical nature of all knowledge while simultaneously maintaining a thick view of objectivity.

Conclusion: Polymorphic Application and the Immediate Presence of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29

To preach Ecclesaistes 7:23-29 from the "inside"[1236] so that the congregation has the fullest involvement and most immediate contact with the text one may gain much from each of the homiletical approaches to application: the emphasis on exposition in *CTH*; the focus on the eventfulness of preaching and of language in particular in *NH*; the continued exploration of the formative nature of language and of community in *PLH* and *PMH*; and the suspicion of disguised ideologies that *PMH* highlights. And yet, homileticians must approach the practice of homiletics with a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein.* The importance of such a consciousness for interpretation of texts was established in chapter four and illustrated in chapter five. In chapters two and three and here in chapter six we have seen the urgent need for an awareness of how one's particular homiletical tradition has shaped one's understanding of application. Finally, more work must be done, especially in the area of language. Ellen Davis is right to claim that we need to "develop a rich, flexible,

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[1233] *Ibid.*
[1234] *Ibid.*
[1235] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* xxiii.
[1236] Term taken from Davis, *Wondrous Depth,* 21.

biblically based language of public discourse"[1237] sufficient to serve the interconnection of thought, feeling, and imagination to truth and epistemology.[1238]

Our reading of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 saw the epistemological claim that feeling and participation via the concrete, affective, and emotive are interrelated to argument and reason. As we journeyed with Qoheleth, we experienced a rhetorical strategy that intertwined the volitional, cognitive, and emotive functions. Combined with the theoretical work of chapters three and four this suggests that a robust homiletical approach to application must involve a deep exploration of the interrelatedness of poetics and epistemology, of poetics and theology, of poetics and anthropology. In other words, questions one and two of this chapter cannot be separated from question three. Homiletics must continue the move begun in *NH* of reorienting application beyond the sclerotic force of rationalist and empiricist understandings of language and emotion. We must resist the Ramistic tendency—that was concentrated in, exemplified by, and promulgated through the Plain Style sermon and continues to haunt homiletics today—in which words are divorced from things. The current presence of this tendency is revealed most strikingly in *CTH*. This tradition exerts a pressure to make language transparent, conceptually coherent, reducible to propositional form, in short, to render language an instrument of communicative efficacy.[1239] What is needed is the recovery of a more thoroughly biblical philosophy of language, especially as it relates to psychology, epistemology, and ontology.[1240] Here, then, is another point in which we will step beyond Augustine's maxim. As was mentioned in a footnote in chapter two, Augustine's extended emphasis on style and brief treatment of invention in book 4 of *DDC* "helped to canonize the view that rhetoric is largely a matter of style."[1241] A major insight of part two of this dissertation is that rhetoric is more than style; it does not correspond strictly with eloquence. Homiletics needs to recover an understanding of

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[1237] Davis, *Imagination Shaped,* 246. Davis argues that this is the greatest challenge to contemporary homiletics.

[1238] Cf. Wright's call for "a full theory of language" when he argues, "We need to understand, better than we commonly do, how language works" (*Idem, New Testament,* 63). For a clear articulation of the need for and the current possibilities for such an account, see Bartholomew, "Before Babel and After Pentecost." Also, see the two important works: Steiner, *Real Presences,* and Milbank, *The Word Made Strange.*

[1239] Cf., Bruns, "On Difficulty: Steiner, Heidegger, and Paul Celan," 137.

[1240] As Shugar argues, "once language becomes decoration, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that sermons which depend on such garnishing for their effect are trivial and deceptive" (*Idem, Sacred Rhetoric,* 104).

[1241] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric,* 180.

rhetoric as essential not only in presentation (i.e., Cicero's three duties, which Augustine brought over into homiletics: instruct, delight, and move),[1242] but also in interpretation (i.e., the epistemological role of poetics). And yet, such a philosophy will not dismiss cognitive-propositional language. (As we saw in Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, Scripture not only does things; it also informs.) A view of language that can adequately aid homiletical application of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 will make room for a propositional component to preaching, while concurrently resisting the weaknesses of propositionalism.

Qoheleth's use of imaginative, evocative language to create a narrative world is a powerful rhetorical device aimed at obedience. "Our obedience will not venture far beyond or run risks beyond our imagined world. If we wish to have transformed obedience...then we must be summoned to an alternative imagination, in order that we may imagine the world and ourselves differently."[1243] The organic connection of imagination and obedience demands, Brueggemann goes on to argue, the homiletical recovery of a type of speech that can "evoke transformed listening."[1244] He describes this language as poetic and sees it demonstrated "by Jesus in his parables" with their "ethical bite" and simultaneous "artistic delicacy."[1245] We have seen that Qoheleth's language is similar.

The challenge for the preacher is that while one must structure sermonic application in light of the structure of application in the process of understanding the particular text, one cannot use the same poetics in the pulpit that are used in the text. The difference in the two contexts changes the nature of communication. In the pulpit the preacher communicates orally. In Ecclesiastes Qoheleth presents written communication to be processed by the eye and the mind.[1246] It is helpful to think in terms of the textual poetics of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, examined in chapter five and highlighted in questions one and two of this chapter, and the sermonic poetics of the sermon which flow out of, but are not enslaved to the textual poetics.[1247]

A brief example provided by David Buttrick will illustrate and advance this contention. First, Buttrick's own translation of Luke 17:7-10.

[1242] See, *DDC* 4:74.

[1243] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 85.

[1244] *Ibid.*

[1245] *Ibid.*

[1246] Troeger, "A Poetics of the Pulpit for Post-Modern Times," 43. Cf. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 122.

[1247] This helpful distinction comes from Troeger, "A Poetics of the Pulpit for Post-Modern Times," 45.

> [7]Suppose you have a slave ploughing or tending livestock: when he comes in from the field, will you say to him, "Come and relax at table"? [8]Rather, will [you] not say to him, "Get me my supper, and dress to wait on me while I eat and drink. After that, you can eat and drink"? [9]Would [you] thank the slave because he does what he's told to do? No! [10]So you, when you do everything you are told to do, say, "We are unworthy slaves; we are only doing what we're supposed to do."[1248]

In verses 7-9 the listeners find themselves inhabiting the narrative world as the master, but in verse 10 Jesus himself takes the position of the master while addressing the listeners who have suddenly been placed into the position of the servants. Buttrick asks the hermeneutically important question, "Is the intending-to-do action of the parable part of its meaning?" Answering in the affirmative, he then makes the consequent homiletical point, "[P]reaching must find some way to replicate the demoting action of the parable in the structure of the sermon."[1249] An "objective" exposition of the passage will not suffice. Somehow the sermon must *do* what the passage *does* if that sermon is to mean what the passage means. After all, the meaning of the passage is constituted in part by its intending-to-do action.

To carry this insight over into the issue of homiletical application it must be mentioned that the poetic devices which structure the nature of application in the process of understanding the meaning of the passage do not necessarily need to be replicated in the sermon. The written text and the oral sermon are two different modes of communication, each requiring its own unique poetics. What is it, then, that must be carried from the text into the sermon, with regard to application? In the shift from the "internal poetics" of the text to the "applied poetics" of the sermon, the consistent element is neither the world of the text (*as per PLH*) nor is it the inductive movement (*as per NH*). It is the *nature* of application itself. In this move from text in study to text in sermon, the preacher must discover and use poetics that are doubly appropriate: i.e., appropriate to the text and to the congregation.

On the one hand, "preaching is a communicative act which is rightly addressed to a specific congregation against a specific cultural backcloth."[1250] Preachers must communicate in such a way that their particular congregation will be able to receive the sermon. One implication of the occasional nature of sermons is

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[1248] Buttrick twice replaces the masculine pronoun "he" with the second person pronoun "you" in brackets. This emendation is based on the fact that "some scholars suppose that, in view of v. 7, "you" may have been a feature of the original "scenario" (Buttrick, "On Doing Homiletics Today," 99).

[1249] *Ibid.*

[1250] Stevenson and Wright, *Preaching the Atonement*, xiii.

that the poetics available to the preacher are a function not only of the text, but also of the unique needs and habits of the congregation. And yet, the *oral* sermon must faithfully translate the structure of the *literary* poetics of the text in order that the nature of the sermonic application is shaped by the nature of the textual application. This is, however, a fine distinction and should not be confused with the *PLH* critique of *NH* for overemphasizing the narrative form for homiletics (due to its structuralist emphasis).

PLH follows Frei in insisting that "narrative is important because it is the vehicle through which the gospels render the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, who has been raised from the dead and seeks today to form a people to follow his way."[1251] Similar to John Howard Yoder, Campbell is concerned to correct the overemphasis on rhetorical technique by emphasizing "particular narrative...[as] prior to the general idea of narrativeness."[1252] Campbell clearly states his agenda. "According to Frei, Christians are interested in narrative only because Jesus is what he does and undergoes, not because of anything magical about narrative form per se."[1253] But narratives do more than assert a particular reality, they "configure."[1254] By entering the world that Qoheleth has created, the congregation's ability to interpret their own world is developed, and more important, the ability to see, say, judge, and do what is Scripturally fitting in their own world is also developed.[1255] Configuration structures application differently than do other language games, like, for instance, propositions. Therefore, *PLH* is mistaken in its nearly complete disregard (or rejection) of the unique functional ability of narrative.

Homiletical application is a polymorphic concept. Its nature is structured by its object. With this approach, we have found homiletical application to be a critical component for a recovery of the sermon "as communication between ravished hearts," instead of "reasonable discourse addressed to enlightened minds—or at least minds susceptible to enlightenment."[1256] Here we have an approach to preaching in general, and homiletical application in particular, in which the text is an immediate presence that bears upon the congregation.

[1251] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 289.
[1252] Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood,", 36.
[1253] Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 171.
[1254] Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 282.
[1255] Cf., Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 331.
[1256] Davis, *Imagination Shaped*, 2.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study has established the theological-hermeneutical nature and the polyphonic nature of homiletical application. Chapter one established the problem of application as the central problem of contemporary homiletics, and identified four contemporary homiletical approaches to the problem: Contemporary Traditional Homiletics, New Homiletics, Post-Liberal Homiletics, and Post-Modern Homiletics. Part one of this study focused on the theological hermeneutics of homiletical application. Chapter two was a case study of the view of application espoused by *CTH.* Tracing the intellectual parentage of *CTH* exposed its theological-hermeneutical presuppositions that result in the construal of application as the point at which an abstract-propositional-truth, embedded in the text, is related to the concrete situation of the contemporary hearer.

Chapter three began by telling the story of contemporary hermeneutics. Against this backdrop we were able to identify the three contemporary approaches to the hermeneutics of application by identifying the various ways in which the relationship of application and understanding is construed: application as *distinct* from understanding, application as *involved* in understanding, and application as *determinate* of understanding. We then classified the homiletical approaches to application according to their presumed approach to the hermeneutics of application: *CTH* assumes the *Distinct* view, *NH* the *Involved* view, *PMH* the *Determinate* view, and *PLH* taps into both the *Involved* and the *Determinate* views. The majority of chapter three consisted of an exploration of the three approaches to the hermeneutics of application in light of four issues that constitute the hermeneutical ecology of application: textuality (specifically, the notion of open-closed texts), language (specifically, the notion of ideality), history, and epistemology (specifically, the notion of subject-object relationship). This chapter demonstrated the fact that homiletical application is premised upon fundamental and often unexpressed theological, philosophical, and pre-philosophical commitments; furthermore, some of these commitments are far from being religiously neutral, they are antithetic to a

theistic perspective. To be more specific, we saw that one's conception of the role of application in understanding significantly shapes one's understanding of the nature and role of application in homiletics. Two important insights rose to the surface throughout this chapter. First, application is neither distinct from nor determinate of understanding. It is necessarily involved. Second, application is polymorphous. It does not exist in the abstract, and its nature varies from language-game to language-game.

In chapter four, the concluding chapter to part one, we faced the challenge of navigating the Scylla of objectivism and the Charybdis of radical relativism. Through an analysis of the structure of understanding the nature of application came most sharply into focus as a necessary expression of the dialectical tension of the points of view of the other and the self that results in the fusion of the horizon of the subject and the horizon of the object. This approach to application respects the heterogeneity of the whole range of language games that constitute the Bible; vigorously affirms a robust understanding of the nature of truth; sufficiently disciplines the interpreter by the text and yet recognizes the necessary and creative role of the interpreter in the entire process, all the while recognizing the transformative power of the text.

Whereas part one was theoretical, part two moved into praxis – applying the theory developed in part one to Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. Through an interpretation of the passage in chapter five we highlighted both the effects of the text upon the reader and the way in which the reader was structured into the process of understanding the meaning of the text.

We saw in part one that the preacher must allow the biblical text to shape the nature of application in any given sermon. Two key mistakes of the various contemporary homiletical approaches to application lurk in their monological construal of application, and in their importation of models of application into the homiletical enterprise that are not appropriate for the particular biblical text at hand. In chapter six we identified three questions that empower a preacher to avoid these mistakes as they make the critical move from study to pulpit. These three questions were applied to Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. This led us to notice not only the important contributions of each of the contemporary approaches to homiletical application, but also the way in which a polymorphic approach both gathers up these strengths and then moves beyond the weaknesses. Chapter six concluded with our articulation of the way in which an understanding the polymorphous nature of application leads us

toward the development of something that Ellen Davis has wisely called for: a more robust "biblically based language of public discourse" that is sufficient for the epistemological recovery of the interconnection of thought, feeling, imagination, and truth.[1257] Such a language will enable one to preach Scripture from the inside thus leading the congregation to experience the immediate, "urgent and speaking presence" of the text.[1258]

There are several areas in which this work needs to be expanded. First of all, the whole host of language-games in the Bible each require their own depth analysis of how they uniquely structure the nature and role of application, and how this can be taken up into the sermon. Secondly, the type of work done in chapter two on *CTH* needs to be done for the other three approaches to homiletics. This will enable us to expose more clearly the strengths, weaknesses, areas of commonality, and fruitful lines for future development. This dissertation has demonstrated the vital need for homiletics to give attention to the various epistemological and ontological presuppositions embraced in the present time of fragmentation. But more is needed. We need in homiletics something like the work that Anthony Thiselton has done for Biblical studies in his twin volumes: *The Two Horizons* and *New Horizons*. Such work is needed in order to better understand the present situation and to find the best way forward. Finally, we in homiletics face a specific challenge in the form of historicism. It is this philosophical presupposition that lay at the bottom of Lessing's ugly ditch,[1259] and it is this view of history in which our culture is awash. Its effects upon homiletics include what O'Donovan has identified as a power to render "the process of history the sole content of history," with the result that "[t]he past is recalled solely to justify the present against it, and [thus] has no standing as a point of disclosure."[1260] Affirming, as we did in chapter three, a creational theology leads one to insist upon continuity between our congregations and Qoheleth's congregation. A recognition of these continuities that avoids a pre-Enlightenment naiveté depends upon a critique of the historicist perspective. Something like N. T. Wright's five-act model[1261] is needed to provide us with the hermeneutical stance

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[1257] Davis, *Imagination Shaped*, 246.

[1258] *Idem*, *Wondrous Depth*, xiv.

[1259] Fifteen years ago Hasel claimed that the gap that has been created "between the past and the present remains the most intense issue for the Biblical scholar of today. How are Biblical texts to be applied today?" (*Idem*, *Old Testament Theology*).

[1260] O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 28.

[1261] Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 139-43.

sufficient to identify the coherence between these two congregations as it arises "from within the history" and not as it is "imposed upon it from the existing norms of our own historical period."[1262] Notwithstanding these four issues, our research has shown that when one approaches homiletical application from a theologically-hermeneutical perspective, the formative and transformative impact of Scripture is more fully realized.

[1262] *Ibid.*, 29.

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