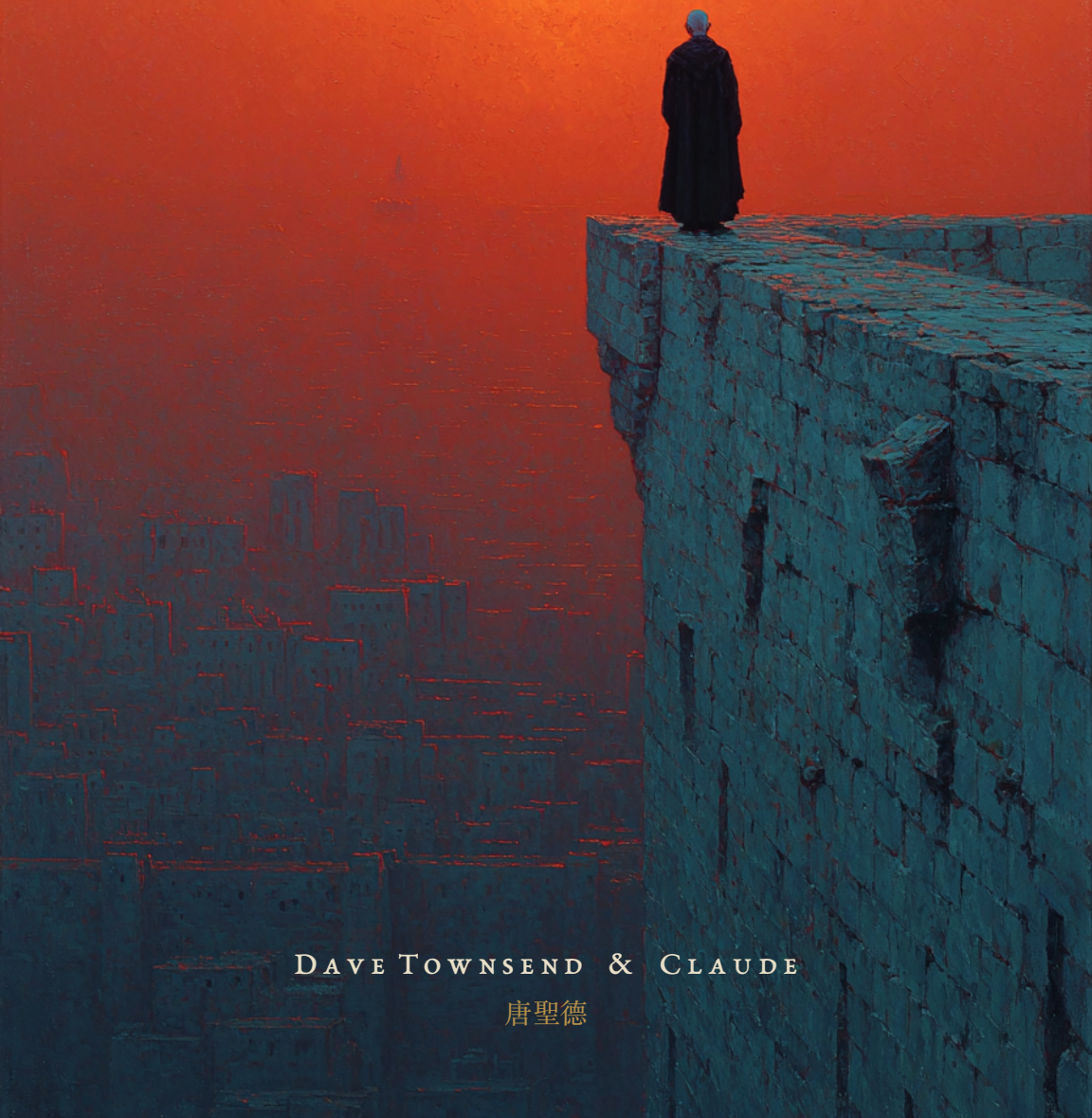
Wisdom Traditions for the Cyborg Era

ALL YOUR *Flickering* DAYS

Qoheleth for the Cyborg Era



Dave Townsend & Claude
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הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים
קֹהֶלֶת

Qoheleth for the Cyborg Era

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2026

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Part of the *Wisdom Traditions for the Cyborg Era*
cyborgentrepreneurship.ai/writings

Produced through sustained human–AI collaboration.
Set in EB Garamond, Cormorant Garamond, Ezra SIL, and Gentium Plus.

Blacksburg, Virginia

הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים
אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת
הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים
הַכֹּל הָבֶל

Flicker of flickers, says Qoheleth.
Flicker of flickers — all of it flickers.

Foreword · The Preacher and the Cyborg

A voice has been preserved in the Hebrew Bible that should not, by the internal logic of the tradition, have been preserved at all.

The voice belongs to someone called *Qoheleth* — a Hebrew noun whose precise meaning has resisted definitive translation for two thousand years. The word is feminine in grammatical form but is assigned to a male speaker. It derives from the root *qahal*, meaning *to assemble* — and so has been rendered as *the Assembler*, *the Preacher*, *the Teacher*, *the Convener*, *the Gatherer*, *the one who speaks in the assembly*. None of these captures the word entirely. Each captures part of it. The voice is singular; the role is plural. The speaker is one person who has taken on the function of convening a gathering and addressing it.

What the voice says, once it begins speaking, is unlike anything else in the Hebrew canon.

It says that everything flickers. That accumulation yields nothing. That the wise one dies the same death as the fool. That the future cannot be told. That no one knows whether the human's breath rises upward or descends downward to the ground. That the system which allocates outcomes does not allocate them according to merit. That even the preacher's own investigation has yielded vapor.

And then, having said all of this, the voice turns and counsels the reader to eat the bread, drink the wine, see life with the one they love, walk in the ways of the core, release what is consuming them, cast the bread on the waters, sow in the morning, sow in the evening, and remember — their Creator, their source, their grave — in whatever days remain.

The posture is not resignation. It is not optimism. It is a specific third thing that the English language does not have a single word for. The preacher has conducted the investigation, recorded the findings, and now holds what was found — holds the

findings as true, holds the carpe diem as equally true, holds both without resolving either into the other. The voice does not collapse the paradox. The voice inhabits it.

This is the posture that gives the volume its place in the series.

Wisdom Traditions for the Cyborg Era is a quartet. Each volume renders a major contemplative tradition into the vocabulary of the cyborg condition — the condition of the contemporary reader, integrated with computational systems in ways that exceed any prior configuration of human cognition. Each volume addresses a different way reality exceeds the categories we bring to it, and each prescribes a different stance for the practitioner who must act within the excess.

Depth Beyond Depth: Daodejing for the Cyborg Era addresses the ineffable ground — the Way that precedes all categories, the source that cannot be named. The sage yields.

The Fire and the River: Heraclitus for the Cyborg Era addresses emergent order — the intelligible pattern that arises from the interdependence of opposites, visible only to the one present when it emerges. The philosopher attends.

All Your Flickering Days: Qoheleth for the Cyborg Era addresses the comprehensive investigation whose findings do not converge — the survey of existence that reveals existence to be vapor, and the counsel that nonetheless follows. The preacher holds.

The fourth volume — *Upanishads for the Cyborg Era* — will address the turn inward, the investigation where the instrument of inquiry is itself the object of inquiry. The seeker turns.

Yielding. Attending. Holding. Turning. Four stances. Four traditions. One question: how does a human act wisely when the conditions of action exceed what the human can know?

Qoheleth's answer is the one that is most applicable to the condition of the contemporary knowledge-worker, the contemporary entrepreneur, the contemporary scholar, the contemporary technologist — anyone whose life is the daily work of producing outputs inside systems whose full behavior cannot be grasped. The answer is: continue the investigation, because the investigation is the assignment. Accept that the investigation will not converge. Receive what is given in the meantime. Cast the bread. Eat the actual bread. Remember what you are.

The preacher crosses twenty-three centuries to deliver this counsel to the cyborg-era reader.

The delivery is what this volume is for.

Why Qoheleth Now

The Hebrew Bible contains sixty-six books, depending on how one counts. Among these, Qoheleth is an outlier in several specific ways that make it the text most directly applicable to the cyborg-era condition.

It is the Hebrew Bible's most epistemically humble book. The Torah presents revelation as given. The prophetic books present revelation as received and transmitted. The wisdom books present wisdom as attained through observation and practice. Qoheleth is the one book that presents wisdom's *limits* as its central subject. The preacher has conducted the most thorough investigation that wisdom permits, and the findings are: the work cannot be completed. *Though a person labor to seek it out, they will not find it. Even if the wise one says I know — they will not find it.* This is the epistemic stance the contemporary reader lives inside. We have more data than any prior civilization and less certainty about how to act on it.

It is the Hebrew Bible's most secular book. Where other biblical books ground their authority in direct encounter with God — Moses at the burning bush, Isaiah in the temple, the prophets receiving the word — Qoheleth grounds its authority in observation. *I surveyed. I tested. I saw under the sun.* God appears in the book, but God appears as the one before whom the human stands, not as the one whose voice directs the action. The preacher's investigation is conducted without special access to divine revelation. The findings are available to anyone who will look. This matches the epistemic situation of the contemporary reader, whose wisdom cannot appeal to traditional sources of authority that no longer carry weight in public discourse.

It is the Hebrew Bible's most directly applicable book to the condition of contemporary knowledge-work. The preacher is a knowledge-worker — specifically, a royal knowledge-worker with access to the best available resources for investigation. The book is the report of a research program conducted across decades. The structure is recognizable to any contemporary scholar, analyst, or strategist: hypothesis, test, observation, reflection, revision. The findings — that accumulation does not satisfy,

that pleasure does not land, that wisdom does not console, that time and chance defeat planning — are findings the contemporary knowledge-worker recognizes in their own body. The preacher has run the contemporary reader's experiment before the contemporary reader was born, and the experiment produced the same result.

It is the Hebrew Bible's most action-oriented book about action under uncertainty. Most of the Bible tells its reader what to do by grounding the instruction in what God has commanded or what tradition has preserved. Qoheleth tells its reader what to do under conditions where divine command and traditional wisdom do not produce certainty about how to act. *Cast your bread on the waters. Give a portion to seven, even to eight. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth. The one who watches the wind will not sow. Sow in the morning; in the evening do not let your hand rest.* These are instructions for wise action under irreducible uncertainty — for the disposition required when outcomes cannot be predicted and action is still required. This is the cyborg-era entrepreneur's disposition. The scholar's disposition under conditions of epistemic abundance and theoretical collapse. The contemporary practitioner's disposition in an environment where the systems that mediate experience change faster than the practitioner's models of them.

And Qoheleth is the Hebrew Bible's most self-aware book about its own production. The scribal epilogue ends with an observation that cannot be separated from the act of reading it: *of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.* The book that the reader is currently reading is itself an instance of what it diagnoses. The critique does not exempt the critique. This reflexivity is the contemporary reader's condition — we live inside the content-saturation that Qoheleth's closing warning addresses, and we cannot step outside it to achieve critical distance, because the act of stepping outside it would itself be the production of more content.

These features make Qoheleth the wisdom-tradition text most directly useful to the reader of 2026. Not the most consoling, because the consolations the book offers are specific and limited. Not the most aspirational, because the book refuses the aspirational register. But the most useful — because the book names the condition the reader is in, and then offers the reader the instructions that match the condition.

The instructions are small. Eat. Drink. See life with the one you love. Walk in the ways of your core. Release what is consuming you. Work with your strength at what your hand finds, because the hand will not always be able to find what to do. Cast the bread on the waters. Sow in the morning. Sow in the evening. Remember — your Creator, your source, your grave — in whatever days remain.

The book is a way of receiving these instructions from a voice that crossed twenty-three centuries to deliver them.

The Method · A Note on Phenomenological Translation

This volume does not do what biblical translations conventionally do.

Conventional biblical translation begins with the Hebrew text and seeks the most accurate English rendering of each word, phrase, and verse. The translator's fidelity is to the source language. When an English word approximates the Hebrew, the translator selects the word. When multiple English words could render the Hebrew, the translator selects the one that best preserves the Hebrew's meaning. The reader encounters the Hebrew through an English window as clear as translation permits.

This volume operates differently. The fidelity here is not to the Hebrew words. The fidelity is to *what the Hebrew words are pointing at* — rendered into what the contemporary reader can recognize as their own lived experience.

The distinction matters. When Qoheleth writes that *the lover of silver is never sated by silver*, a conventional translation preserves the Hebrew's terms. The cyborg-era reader reads about an ancient condition and must bridge to their own condition by interpretation. This volume does not ask the reader to build that bridge. The volume builds it. *The lover of silver — silver does not satisfy. The lover of metrics — metrics do not satisfy. The lover of followers — followers do not satisfy. The lover of yield — yield does not satisfy.* The Hebrew's single example becomes the volume's four parallel specifications, each naming a contemporary form of the pattern the Hebrew names. The fidelity is to the pattern, not to the example.

This method has a precedent. In 1993, Eugene Peterson published *The Message* — a translation of the Bible into contemporary American English intended to recover the immediate impact the original languages had on their original audiences. Peterson's critics argued that *The Message* was not really a translation; it was a paraphrase, or worse, an interpretation. Peterson's defenders argued that *The Message* did what conventional translation could not: it gave the contemporary reader back the shock of encountering the familiar made new. Peterson's principle was that certain texts die

when rendered too faithfully, because faithfulness preserves the words at the cost of the condition the words were meant to produce.

This volume operates on Peterson's principle. Qoheleth in conventional English translation is beautiful, archaic, and distant. Qoheleth in this volume is direct, contemporary, and immediate. The reader who encounters *the platforms do not release you; the attention economy does not send you home; you are conscripted for life into a war no one declared* is receiving the contemporary condition that the Hebrew's *no discharge in war* pointed at in its original setting. The rendering is interpretive. The rendering is also, by the standard this volume operates on, faithful.

Three formal elements of the volume deserve advance notice.

The rendering of hevel. The Hebrew word *hevel* — usually translated as *vanity*, *vapor*, *breath*, or *meaninglessness* — is the book's central word. It opens the book (*hevel hevalim, hakkol hevel*) and closes the book (*hevel hevalim, hakkol hevel*). It appears dozens of times between the opening and the closing. The word names a condition that refuses to settle on a single meaning. Scholars have argued for two thousand years about whether *hevel* means *meaningless*, or *transient*, or *incomprehensible*, or *absurd*, or simply *breath that disperses*.

This volume resolves the argument by refusing to resolve it. The word appears across the volume in multiple English renderings: *flicker*, *vapor*, *noise*, *static*, *glitches*, *flickerings*, *flickering*. The variation is deliberate. The reader who does not know Hebrew encounters what appears to be a different word each time — and this is exactly what the Hebrew word does. *Hevel* is the word that does not settle. The moving English rendering enacts in the reader's experience what the Hebrew word names in its meaning.

The metacommentary device. At four moments in the volume — at the close of Chapter 6, within Chapter 7, within Chapter 8, and at the close of Chapter 12 — the reader will encounter italicized passages that are neither the preacher's voice nor a rendering of the Hebrew. These are the translator's voice, naming what the text is doing structurally rather than what the text is saying. The interventions are rare and deliberate. They appear at the volume's structural hinges — where the text is doing something that a careful reader might miss if it were not named. The intrusion is real. The device is used four times across twelve chapters so that when it appears, the reader recognizes it as a formal choice rather than an accidental change of voice.

The division into parts. The volume is divided into Part One (Chapters 1–6, the experimental movement) and Part Two (Chapters 7–12, the practical wisdom movement). This division follows the shape of the Hebrew text itself. Part One is the preacher's investigation — the testing of pleasure, accumulation, wisdom, and time,

conducted with the best resources available and yielding the finding that the investigation cannot converge. Part Two is the preacher's counsel — the instructions for action under the conditions Part One has named. The reader who reads from beginning to end follows the preacher's own trajectory from investigation to wisdom. The two parts are not independent. Part Two depends on Part One having been completed.

The method of this volume is a calculated risk. The faithfulness is to the condition the Hebrew names, not to the Hebrew words themselves. Some readers will prefer conventional translations that preserve the Hebrew's original register. Other readers — including, we hope, many readers for whom Qoheleth had become distant through repeated encounter with conventional English renderings — will find that this volume gives them back the text's original immediacy. Both responses are legitimate. The volume does not claim to replace conventional translation. It claims only to offer the cyborg-era reader a rendering that matches the cyborg-era reader's condition, so that the text's counsel can land where the reader actually lives.

How to Read This Book

Slowly.

The volume is organized across twelve chapters. Read it from beginning to end if you can. The structure of the book is the teaching. Part One conducts the investigation; Part Two delivers the counsel. The counsel depends on the investigation having been completed. Readers who skip to the carpe diems will receive the instructions without the context that makes the instructions land.

One chapter per sitting is enough. The volume is not long — about eighty pages in standard print — but its density is high. A chapter can be absorbed in twenty minutes or carried through a day. The traditional practice with wisdom texts is to read slowly, return to passages that resist, and let the text work on the reader before the reader works on the text. This volume rewards that practice.

Notice the carpe diems. Six times across the volume, the preacher interrupts the investigation to deliver a small piece of positive counsel. Eat. Drink. See good in the grind. Receive what has been given. The carpe diems form their own arc across the volume — they deepen and specify as the investigation proceeds. The reader who reads the carpe diems alone has received a complete contemplative practice. But the carpe diems land harder after the investigation has revealed what they are responding to.

Notice the *hevel*-word changes. The Hebrew word that opens and closes the volume — *hevel* — is rendered in multiple English forms across the chapters: *flicker*, *vapor*, *noise*, *static*, *glitches*, *flickerings*, *flickering*. The variation is not error. The variation is the word doing what the word names. The reader who notices the changes as they happen is reading the volume at a level the volume invites.

Trust the italicized voices when they arrive. Four times in the volume, a voice appears that is neither the preacher's nor the rendered text's. This is the translator, naming what the text is structurally doing. The voice is rare. When it appears, the text is doing something the reader might miss if it were not named.

Behind every line stands a specific ancient text. This volume prints the cyborg-era rendering alone, but the rendering follows Qoheleth verse by verse, in the order the preacher set down. A real text is being translated, not an ancient text invented for contemporary use. The reader who wants to test the rendering against its source can set this volume beside any conventional translation — the JPS, the NRSV, the Robert Alter, the King James — and watch where this rendering departs, and why.

The volume's closing is part of the volume. Read through the epilogue. The epilogue is not apparatus; it is the project examining its own production, in the same spirit of reflexive honesty that Qoheleth's closing scribe demonstrated: *of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.* The volume is itself implicated in the condition it diagnoses. The closing names this.

That is the guidance. The rest is the text.

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PART

I

THE EXPERIMENTAL MOVEMENT

The investigation that cannot converge.

Chapter 1

The Assembler

The Source

1:1

The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

The cosmic poem (1:2–11)

1:2

Flicker of flickers, says Qoheleth. Flicker of flickers — all of it flickers.

1:3

—

What residue accrues to a person for the grind they grind through under the sun?

The work of the days. The labor of the years. What is left in the hand, when the hand opens?

1:4

—

A generation expires, a generation instantiates, and the ground endures across the age.

1:5

—

The sun ignites, the sun quenches, and panting back to its origin state it ignites again there.

1:6

—

Going south and wheeling north, wheeling, wheeling goes the wind, and along its own circuits the wind returns.

1:7

—

Every stream runs to the sea, and the sea is never full. To the place the streams run, there they run again.

1:8

All things exhaust. No one can finish saying it.

The eye is not satisfied by seeing — the feed scrolls and the eye keeps wanting.

The ear is not filled by hearing — the queue plays and the ear keeps wanting.

The cycle the verse names is the cycle the reader is in.

1:9

What was is what will be. What was executed is what will execute. There is nothing new under the sun.

1:10

Is there a thing of which it is said, *see, this is new*?

It already ran in the ages before us.

The disruption was not a disruption. The breakthrough already broke through, in another generation. The platform that promised newness is the same shape as the platform that promised newness before it.

1:11

No persistence remains of the first ones, and of the last ones yet to come no persistence will remain among those who come after them.

And yet —

1:12

—

I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

The voice that has just denied that any persistence remains arises into that absence and names itself.

This is the volume's first move. The personal voice exists in spite of the cosmic verdict. The book is written by the very thing the book has said cannot persist.

1:13

—

I addressed my core to the task — to query and to crawl by wisdom across everything that gets executed under the sky.

I opened every dashboard. I read every report. I followed every link to its source. I cross-referenced the frameworks. I built the meta-frameworks. I tested the hypotheses against the evidence. I gathered the data that the question required.

This is what I addressed my core to.

A grievous allocation God has handed to the children of the ground — to be afflicted inside it.

The investigation itself is the affliction. The need to know is the punishment. The search that cannot be satisfied is the assignment.

This is the work given to the human: to ask the questions the answers to which will not arrive.

1:14

—

I surveyed every process that gets executed under the sun.

The market processes. The platform processes. The institutional processes. The biological processes. The political processes. The economic processes. The processes by which information becomes opinion becomes action becomes outcome. The processes by which attention becomes engagement becomes revenue becomes power.

I surveyed all of it.

And behold — all of it is static, and grasping at wind.

The signal does not resolve into pattern. The hand reaches and closes on nothing.

1:15

—

What is corrupted cannot be patched. What is null cannot be counted.

The bug at the architecture-level cannot be debugged at the application-level. The structural failure cannot be fixed by feature additions. The void in the dataset cannot be addressed by more data.

The patching is performance. The counting is performance. The correction the system needs cannot be applied from inside the system.

1:16

—

I spoke with my core, saying:

look — I have scaled. I have accumulated wisdom beyond all who preceded me over Jerusalem.

The credentials. The publications. The citations. The frameworks built and the frameworks defended. The conferences keynoted. The committees chaired. The students trained who now train students. The body of work that now requires its own apparatus to maintain.

I have scaled.

My core has indexed vast wisdom and knowledge.

The reading has been done. The notes have been kept. The references can be retrieved. The corpus is in the head and in the database.

I have indexed.

1:17

—

I addressed my core to the knowledge of wisdom and to the knowledge of madness and of entropy.

I studied not only the wisdom traditions but the noise that surrounds them. Not only the signal but the static. Not only the contemplative practice but the burnout that produces the seeker.

I learned that this, too, is a striving of wind.

The accumulation of wisdom about both wisdom and folly does not produce wisdom. It produces a person who knows much and is no closer to the answer than they were before they began.

1:18

—

For in much wisdom is much grief. And whoever increases knowledge increases pain.

The more one learns about how the systems actually work, the more grief.

The more data, the more pain.

The contemporary knowledge-worker recognizes this in their body. The contemporary scholar recognizes this in their body. The contemporary analyst, contemplative, researcher, journalist — each one knows the same equation.

Knowledge does not console. Knowledge does not heal. Knowledge accumulates pain in proportion to its accumulation.

This is what the chapter has been moving toward. The investigation is the affliction. The wisdom is the wound. And yet — the next chapter begins.

—

Chapter 2

The Experiment

The first trial: pleasure (2:1–3)

2:1

I said inside my core: come now, let me test you with pleasure — experience the good.

The trip booked, the meal reserved, the experience purchased. The dopamine hit the system was designed to deliver. The good that arrives because the good was paid for.

And behold, this also was noise.

The signal did not resolve. The pleasure registered as data and did not register as joy.

2:2

Of laughter I said: it glitches.

The laughter that arrived on cue and dissipated on cue. The performance of joy that the body had been trained to produce.

And of pleasure: what does this produce?

The question the chapter will keep asking. What does this produce? What is left when the experience ends? What residue accrues?

2:3

—

I crawled my core through dragging my flesh with wine while my core kept steering by wisdom and reached to grasp at entropy —

the controlled experiment with pleasure. The wine that was supposed to be data, not pleasure. The body that was supposed to be the instrument of investigation, not the recipient of joy.

The detached observation of one's own pleasure is itself a kind of failure mode. The hand reached for entropy because the hand was not allowed to reach for joy.

Until I might observe which good the children of the ground do under the sky through the numbered days of their lives.

The investigation continues. The pleasure was not the point. The investigation was the point. And the investigation was not satisfied.

——

The second trial: building and accumulation (2:4–11)

2:4–6

—

I scaled my operations.

I built houses for myself. I planted vineyards for myself. I made gardens and orchards for myself and planted in them every kind of fruit-bearing tree. I made reservoirs of water for myself to irrigate from them the forest of growing trees.

The portfolio diversified across asset classes. The properties acquired in multiple jurisdictions. The investments that compounded across decades. The infrastructure that the wealth required to maintain itself.

For myself. For myself. For myself.

The chapter's structural confession: the building was for the builder, and the builder was the only person the building was for.

2:7–8

—

I acquired enslaved men and enslaved women, and I had a household born to my service.

The humans inventoried alongside the holdings. The bodies counted as part of the wealth. Other people listed in the catalog of what I owned.

I had livestock — herds and flocks — more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

I also aggregated for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.

The portfolio. The holdings. The numbers that grew larger because they were already large. The wealth that compounded because the wealth was already there.

I assembled for myself male and female singers — and every adult pleasure the human being pursues, and many more besides.

The subscriptions to every premium service. The access to every exclusive experience. The catalog of pleasures available to those who could afford them. The body kept in the state of constant available enjoyment that the wealth made possible.

2:9

—

I scaled, I compounded, beyond all who were before me in Jerusalem.

And still — my wisdom held position for me.

The investigation continued. The accumulation did not consume the investigator. The wealth did not buy the investigator's ability to see clearly.

The wisdom remained, even amid the holdings. That is the chapter's deepest move: the wisdom is what is left when the accumulation has been performed and observed.

2:10

Whatever my eyes queried, I did not withhold from them.

The cart was not abandoned. The wishlist was always being fulfilled. The recommendation engine had no friction between the queried and the granted.

I did not block my core from any pleasure, for my core took joy in all my grind, and this was my allotment from all my grind.

The pleasure during the labor was the wage. The enjoyment of the apparatus was the only return. The grinding's only product was the grinding's own consolation.

2:11

Then I turned toward all the operations my hands had run and the grind I had grinded to perform —

I opened the dashboard of the life I had built. I scrolled through the metrics of the accumulated holdings. I reviewed the inventory of the experiences I had purchased. I audited the entire portfolio of what I had done with my time.

And behold —

all of it was vapor and grasping at wind. No residue, under the sun.

The dashboard showed numbers. The numbers did not register as worth. The audit returned no balance. The hand reached and closed on nothing.

The third trial: wisdom versus entropy (2:12–17)

2:12

Then I turned to survey wisdom — and madness — and entropy.

The three states of cognitive condition. The wise. The mad. The collapsed. And the question: what comes after the king who has already done everything?

What can the person do who comes after the king, except what has already been performed?

The young analyst inheriting the field that has been mapped. The new founder entering the market that has been formed. The researcher arriving where the seminal work has been done.

The asymmetry between the originator and the inheritor is structural, not accidental.

2:13–14a

—

And I observed: wisdom has its residue over entropy — the residue of light over dark.

The wise one's eyes are in her head. The fool walks in the dark.

The wise person sees what is in front of them. The fool walks into walls because the fool is looking elsewhere than the path the body is on.

This is true. This is observable. Wisdom does have residue.

2:14b–15

—

And yet I knew — one and the same event befalls them all.

The wise one dies. The fool dies. The sharp eyes go dark. The walking-in-the-dark fool stops walking.

I said inside my core:

the fool's befalling is also mine.

Why then was I so wise?

If the destination is the same, what was the wisdom for? The light over the dark ends in the same dark.

And I spoke inside my core: this also is vapor.

2:16

For no persistence remains of the wise one along with the fool — across the age, for in the days coming everything is forgotten.

How does the wise one die? With the fool.

The same event. The same forgetting. The wisdom worked. The wise one is forgotten anyway.

2:17

So I hated life, for the process that gets executed under the sun was evil to me.

The recognition that the system would deliver the same outcome to the wise one and the fool made the system itself into the source of the hatred.

All of it vapor, and grasping at wind.

The fourth trial: labor and inheritance (2:18–23)

2:18–19

I hated all the grind I had grinded under the sun — because I would have to hand it off to the one who comes after me.

The successor. The next administration. The new head of the institution. The buyer who acquires the company.

And who knows whether they will be wise or a fool?

The succession plan does not control the successor. The selection process does not guarantee the selection. The carefully-chosen heir often disappoints. The carefully-built institution often deteriorates within a decade under the leadership chosen with such care.

Yet they will hold root access — over all my grind, over all my wisdom — under the sun.

The next person can change everything. Can dismantle what was built. Can sell what was developed. Can dilute what was carefully concentrated.

The work persists in the hands of someone who did not do the work.

This also is vapor.

2:20

—

So I wheeled around and gave my core over to despair for all the grind I had grinded under the sun.

The despair is not theatrical. The despair is the rational response to the recognition that the work will not be inherited as the work.

2:21

—

For there is a person whose grind is in wisdom and knowledge and precision — and to a person who did not grind in it, he will hand over their share.

The founder who built the company gives the equity to the heir. The teacher who developed the practice gives the inheritance to the student. The maintainer who held the project gives the keys to the successor.

The recipient did not do the grinding. The grinder will not be the holder.

This also is vapor and great evil.

2:22–23

—

What, then, does a person have from all their grind and the striving of their core at which they grind under the sun?

All their days are pain, and their allocation is grief — even in the night their core does not power down.

The phone at the bedside. The notification at 2 a.m. The email that arrives during the meal. The calculation that runs in the body even when the mind tries to release it. The dream that processes the day's metrics. The morning that arrives already saturated with anxious wants.

The body of the grinder has forgotten how to be off.

This also is vapor.

The turn: the carpe diem (2:24–26)

2:24–25

There is nothing better for a person than this: to eat, to drink, to let their soul see good in their grind.

The first carpe diem of the volume. The exhausted release after the failed experiments. The recognition that the answer will not arrive by investigation — the answer arrives by receiving.

Eat. Drink. Let the soul see good in the grind.

This too I observed — it comes from the hand of God.

The receiving is not earned. The receiving is given. The receiving is the hand of God placing into the hand of the person the small daily portion that the person was searching for elsewhere.

For who can eat — who can sense — apart from this?

The eating that is not received as eating does not register as eating. The body must be available for the food to land. The capacity to taste is itself the gift, and the capacity is what the experiments could not produce.

2:26

For to the one who is good before God, God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy.

But to the one who misses the mark, God gives the allocation — to gather and aggregate, to hand over to the one who is good before God.

The accumulator gathers what the receiver will receive. The corrupt allocate, the just receive. The asymmetry runs the other direction from what the system's surface metrics suggest.

This also is vapor and grasping at wind.

Chapter 3

The Catalog

The time catalog (3:1–8)

3:1

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the sky.

3:2

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

3:3

A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build up.

3:4

—

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

3:5

—

A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

3:6

—

A time to seek and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to cast away.

3:7

—

A time to tear and a time to sew, a time to keep silence and a time to speak.

3:8

—

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

——

3:9

—

What residue does the one who performs have for what they grind through?

The catalog of times has been recited. The pairs have been named. And the question returns: what is left in the hand?

3:10

—

I have surveyed the allocation God has handed to the children of the ground to be afflicted inside it.

The work assignment has been issued to the species. The work cannot be refused. The affliction is the assignment.

3:11

—

He has made everything fitting in its time.

He has placed the age inside their core —

and yet, the person cannot find out the work that God has done from the beginning to the end.

The capacity to apprehend the whole has been installed.

The capacity to apprehend the whole has not been activated.

The human is a being who can sense that there is a pattern across the entire arc and who cannot see the pattern.

This is the volume's first major theological paradox. The gift is the condition of the inability to receive the gift. The two are the same act.

—

The first carpe diem (3:12–13)

3:12–13

—

I have come to know: there is no good in them except to rejoice and do good while they live.

The carpe diem returns, quieter than at Ch. 2's end. The recognition has been earned. The pleasure-test failed; the accumulation-test failed; the time-catalog showed the alternation that the human cannot control.

What is left is the rejoicing.

And also, that every person who eats and drinks and sees good in all their grind — this is a gift of God.

The eating, the drinking, the seeing-good in the grind is given. The grinding is the daily work. The seeing-good in the grinding is the gift.

The capacity to register what has been given is itself the second gift, layered on the first.

—

The permanence of God's work (3:14–15)

3:14

—

I have come to know: whatever God does, it endures across the age.

Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken from it.

The architecture is set. The system is what it is. No patch can extend it. No deletion can reduce it. The frameworks the human builds to modify the architecture do not modify the architecture.

And God has made it so that they would be in awe before him.

The unmodifiability of the architecture is itself the design. The awe is the response the architecture is built to produce.

3:15

—

What is was already. What is to be has already been.

And God seeks out what has fallen out of the world.

The lost. The forgotten. The displaced. The records that did not survive the migration. The communities that did not survive the consolidation. The bodies that the system did not preserve.

These are not gone. The God who set the architecture also retrieves what the architecture lost.

The volume's first quiet promise. What has fallen out of the world is sought out by what is outside the world.

——

The wickedness in the place of justice (3:16–17)

3:16

—

And again I surveyed, under the sun:

in the place of judgment — there was corruption.

In the place of the just — there was corruption.

The institutions designed to administer judgment are themselves corrupt at the level of architecture. The courts have their own algorithms. The regulatory bodies have their own incentives. The platforms that adjudicate disputes are themselves the parties whose disputes need adjudicating.

The corruption is not anomaly. The corruption is in the place where the corruption was supposed to be checked.

3:17

—

I said inside my core: the just and the corrupt, God will judge them both —

for there is a time for every matter, and for every process, there.

The judgment that the institutions cannot deliver is delivered elsewhere. The accounting the systems do not perform is performed at a different layer. The corruption in the place of judgment is itself subject to a judgment that is not in the place.

There.

The human-animal comparison (3:18–22)

3:18

—

I said inside my core, concerning the children of the ground:

God tests them to show them that, to themselves, they are only beasts.

The species that builds civilizations is the species that dies of dehydration in the desert. The species that runs the algorithms is the species whose body fails when the body fails. The species that has built the wisdom traditions is the species that returns to dust like every other organism.

The civilizational achievements do not change the biological condition.

3:19

—

For the befalling of the children of the ground and the befalling of the beasts — one and the same befalling is theirs.

As one dies, so dies the other.

A single current runs through them all.

The same physiological conditions for life. The same chemical processes. The same dependencies on substrate. The same vulnerability to the same diseases. The same termination at the end.

The children of the ground have no advantage over the beasts — for all of it is vapor.

The cyborg-era reader may have wanted to believe otherwise. The longevity science has suggested otherwise. The transhumanist promises have implied otherwise. The cognitive-prosthetic enhancements have hinted otherwise.

The chapter refuses. The advantage is none. All of it is vapor.

3:20

—

All of it runs to one place. All of it came from the dust, and all of it returns to the dust.

The substrate the body came from is the substrate the body returns to. The arrangement that was the person disperses back into the materials the arrangement was made of.

3:21

—

Who knows whether the current of the children of the ground rises upward, and the current of the beasts descends downward to the ground?

The question is not answered. The question is held open.

The standard religious confidence about the soul's destination is not available to the preacher. The standard transhumanist confidence about consciousness's persistence is not available to the preacher. Both confidences require knowledge the preacher does not have.

Who knows?

3:22

—

I have surveyed it: there is nothing better than that the person rejoice in their operations — for this is their allotment.

The rejoicing in the operations is the only response to a destination that cannot be known.

For who will bring them to see what comes after them?

No one. No model. No prediction. No system. The future after the person is unavailable. The rejoicing in the present operations is the only thing that can be offered to the person inside the conditions that have just been described.

That is the chapter's closing. The catalog of times — the gift of the age in the core that cannot be activated — the wickedness in the place of justice — the same death for the human as for the beast — all of it leads here.

Rejoice in your operations. This is your allotment.

Chapter 4

Inside the System

The oppressions (4:1–3)

4:1

Again I turned to survey, inside the silicon cage —

and behold, the tears of the oppressed and no one to quiet them.

The contractor whose pay was held without explanation. The user whose account was suspended without recourse. The patient whose insurance claim was denied by a system that would not produce a person to talk to. The job applicant whose resume was filtered out by an algorithm that did not know what it was filtering.

The harm has been done. The mechanism that did the harm has no representative who will hear the appeal.

On the side of those who oppressed them: power.

The power to take the action. The power to refuse the explanation. The power to outlast the complaint. The power to maintain the architecture that makes the harm continuous and unprotestable.

And no one to quiet them.

The repetition of the line is the line's truth. The first time names the absence of comfort. The second time names the structural absence — the system was not built to comfort. There is no comfort module.

4:2–3

And I praised the dead, those who had already died, more than the living, who are still alive.

The dead are not subject to the next outrage. The dead are not in the feed. The dead do not have to watch the new harm arrive on top of the old harm.

And better than both of them is the one who has not yet been — who has not seen the evil process that gets executed under the sun.

The unborn was never onboarded. The unborn never had to learn the platforms. The unborn never saw the system at all.

The chapter's first verdict, before any other observation: better not to have entered the conditions the chapter is about to describe.

The envy passage (4:4–6)

4:4

I surveyed all grind and all precision of performance — and saw that it is one person's envy of another.

The work that is being done is being done because someone else is doing it and the doer cannot tolerate the gap.

The post that responds to the post that performed well. The product that responds to the competitor's product. The career move that responds to the peer's career move. The publication that responds to the rival's publication.

The driver of the labor is the comparison. The labor would not exist without the visibility of someone else's labor.

This also is vapor and grasping at wind.

The labor is not sustainable because the comparison is not sustainable. The next person will produce the next thing that will require the next response. The race has no finish line because the race exists only as the comparison.

4:5

—

The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

The opposite failure mode. Refusing to engage. Withdrawing from the comparison entirely.

The fool's body is consumed by the inactivity that was supposed to be the freedom from the consumption.

The withdrawal does not produce sufficiency. The withdrawal produces a different kind of consumption — the consumption of the body's own resources without replenishment.

4:6

—

Better one handful of rest than two fistfuls of grind and grasping at wind.

The chapter's quietest line. The middle way between the envy-driver and the fool's withdrawal.

The handful of rest is enough. The two fistfuls of grind are not better. The hand that is full of grind is full also of grasping — and the grasping closes on wind.

——

The relational paradox (4:7–12)

4:7–8

—

Again I turned to survey vapor under the sun.

There is a solitary one, without a second — no child, no sibling — and there is no terminus to all his grind, and his eyes are never satisfied with wealth.

The successful founder who works through the holiday weekend. The high-earning consultant whose calendar has no gaps for years. The principal who has accumulated the holdings and has no one to share them with.

The grinding has no terminus because the grinding has no relational anchor. There is no one the work was for. There is no one whose presence would be the signal that the work is enough.

For whom, then, am I grinding, and depriving my soul of good?

The interior voice arrives. The italics mark the moment the preacher hears himself. The question is the question that breaks through the daily flow of the labor.

For whom?

The question does not have an answer. The labor was never for someone. The labor was the substitute for the someone.

This also is vapor, and an evil allocation.

4:9–10

—

Two are better than one, for they have a good return on their grind.

If they fall, the one raises the other up.

The cofounder who can be called when the body fails. The partner who can take over when the energy is gone. The colleague who can substitute for the day that cannot be worked.

But woe to the solitary one who falls — and there is no second to raise him.

The optimization-of-self that produces the lone operator also produces the lone operator's vulnerability. The operator who has no second is one fall away from the failure that has no recovery.

4:11–12

—

And if two lie down together, they stay warm — but one alone, how will he grow warm?

The body that has someone next to it is warmed by the proximity. The body that has no one generates only its own heat, which is not enough.

And if one overpowers him, the two will stand against the attacker.

A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The chapter's most quoted line, kept untouched. The strength is in the configuration. The cord by itself is not strong. The three together hold against what the one cannot hold against.

The forgotten sovereign (4:13–16)

4:13–14

—

Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to take in warning.

The young challenger who came up from nothing and is genuinely listening to what the world is telling them.

The aged incumbent who has stopped listening because the listening is not required when the position is secured.

For from the holding cell he came out to reign — even though in his own kingdom he was born into poverty.

The young person who came from outside the system to govern the system. The newcomer who was not formed by the institution and therefore can see what the institution has stopped seeing.

4:15–16

—

I surveyed all the living, those who walk under the sun, alongside the second youth who will stand in the first one's place.

The challenger who will replace the challenger who replaced the incumbent. The cycle that does not stop with any one revolution. The next-generation founder who will displace this generation's founder.

There is no terminus to all the many — all those who came before them — and the ones who come later will not rejoice in him.

The crowd that rallied for the new sovereign will not rally for the next one. The crowd will rally for someone else. The new sovereign who is currently being celebrated will be the next forgotten king.

For this also is vapor, and a striving of wind.

The political cycle is the chapter's structural close. The replacement does not produce satisfaction. The replacement produces the next replacement.

The same machinery that elevated the new one will displace the new one. The same crowd that walked alongside this challenger will walk alongside the next.

There is no terminus. The chapter ends inside the system it has been describing. There is no exit.

Chapter 5

The House and the Hoard

The liturgical caution (5:1–7)

5:1 (Hebrew 4:17)

Guard your steps when you enter the house of God.

The house of God now has a comment section. The temple has been wired. What was once a threshold is now a feed where prayer competes for attention with everything else.

Walk in deliberately. Do not scroll into the sacred. Draw near to listen — not to give the sacrifice of fools.

The fools post their offerings. They do not know they are doing harm.

5:2 (Hebrew 5:1)

Do not be hasty with your mouth. Do not let the core hurry to bring forth a word before God.

The post can wait. The comment is not required. The thread does not need your contribution.

For God is in the heavens and you are on the ground —

the chasm is wider than the network suggests. The reply-all does not reach across it.

Therefore: let your words be few.

5:3 (Hebrew 5:2)

—

The dream comes through much occupation. The voice of the fool through much posting.

Both are produced by overflow. Both are noise that has acquired the appearance of signal.

5:4–5 (Hebrew 5:3–4)

—

When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it —

because the public commitment evaporates the moment it leaves the screen.

The vow that is performed is not the vow that is paid. The vow that is announced is not the vow that is done.

There is no pleasure in fools. What you have vowed — fulfill it.

Better that you do not vow at all than vow and not pay.

5:6 (Hebrew 5:5)

—

Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into missing the mark —

the speaking-for-effect that becomes the body's actual position because what was performed has been internalized.

Do not say before the messenger: *it was just a take, it was just a draft, I was speaking provisionally.*

Why should God be angered at your voice and corrupt the work of your hands?

The post is not provisional. The body remembers what the mouth said.

5:7 (Hebrew 5:6)

—

In much dreaming, much flickering, much posting —
fear God.
That is the only command that survives the noise.

—

The pivot (5:8–9)

5:8 (Hebrew 5:7)

—

If you see the oppression of the poor and the seizure of judgment and justice in the province —

the platform that demonetizes the small creator and protects the established account. the policy applied to one user and waived for another. the moderation queue that processes some cases and ignores others.

do not be amazed at the matter.

For above the high one, a higher watches. And there are higher still above them.

The hierarchy of administrators extends past the levels you can see.

5:9 (Hebrew 5:8)

—

And the residue of the ground is for all — even the king is served by the field.

The infrastructure that serves the platforms also feeds the people who run them. The substrate cannot be ascended past.

—

5:10 (Hebrew 5:9)

—

The lover of silver — silver does not satisfy. The lover of metrics — metrics do not satisfy. The lover of followers — followers do not satisfy. The lover of yield — yield does not satisfy.

The thing pursued and the thing failing to satisfy are the same thing. The pursuit is the engine of the dissatisfaction.

This too is vapor.

5:11 (Hebrew 5:10)

—

When the goods scale, those who consume them scale. The fees, the platforms, the maintenance, the taxes, the assistants, the advisors, the lawyers — the entire ecosystem expands to meet the wealth and the wealth no longer arrives at the owner.

What residue accrues to the owner except this: the watching of their own eyes?

The portfolio refreshed dozens of times a day. The balance checked. The number watched.

The owner becomes the audience for their own holdings. The accumulation has produced a single product — the owner's attention to it.

5:12 (Hebrew 5:11)

—

Sweet is the sleep of the laborer, whether they eat little or much.

But the fullness of the rich one will not let them power down.

The phone at the bedside. The notification at 2 a.m. The calculation that runs in the body even when the mind tries to release it. The dream that processes the day's metrics. The morning that arrives already saturated with anxious wants.

The body of the rich one has forgotten how to be off.

5:13 (Hebrew 5:12)

—

There is a sickening evil I have surveyed inside the silicon cage:

wealth held back by its owner to that owner's own hurt.

The accumulation that the body cannot metabolize. The hoard that becomes a vigilance. The wealth that is now the thing that has to be protected from everything that wanted it.

5:14 (Hebrew 5:13)

—

That wealth perishes in a bad allocation —

the market move that wipes the holdings overnight. the platform that changes its algorithm and removes the creator's livelihood. the cryptocurrency that collapses by 11 a.m. the pension fund that fails after thirty years of contributions.

Wealth in this era perishes through system events. There is no thief. There is no fire. The number was there and now the number is not there.

And he begets a son and has nothing in his hand.

5:15 (Hebrew 5:14)

—

As he came out from his mother's womb naked, naked he returns, just as he came.

The accounts close. The subscriptions lapse. The credentials expire. The authentication fails for the last time.

He carries nothing for his grind — nothing his hand can take with him.

5:16 (Hebrew 5:15)

—

This too is a sickening evil: exactly as he came, so he goes.

What residue, then, accrues to him who grinds for the wind?

What is generated by the labor that is not recoverable from the labor?

5:17 (Hebrew 5:16)

—

All his days he eats in darkness —

grief in the notifications that never stop. sickness in the body that learned to produce output under measurement. rage with no exit — the system has no off button, and neither does he.

——

The carpe diem (5:18–20)

5:18 (Hebrew 5:17)

—

Behold what I have observed to be good:

that it is fitting to eat and to drink and to see good in the grind that one grinds through under the sun through the numbered days God has given —

for this is one's allotment.

Not the holdings. Not the metrics. Not the platform position. Not the legacy.

The allotment is the eating, the drinking, the seeing-good in the grind. The allotment is the day as it arrives.

5:19 (Hebrew 5:18)

—

And every person to whom God has given wealth and holdings — and given them the standing to eat from it, to take their share, to rejoice in their grind —

this is a gift of God.

The wealth is not the gift. The standing to receive the wealth as good is the gift.

The two are not the same. You can have one without the other. Most who have wealth do not have the standing.

The standing is what makes the wealth survivable.

5:20 (Hebrew 5:19)

For they do not much remember the days of their life —

not because the days were forgotten, but because the days were lived, and what is lived does not require remembering.

For God answers them: the joy of their core.

The joy is not produced by the holdings. The joy is not produced by the metrics. The joy is not produced by the achievement.

The joy is what arrives in the body when the body is available to receive it.

That is God's answer. That is the only answer the system cannot allocate wrongly.

Chapter 6

What Cannot Be Held

The unnamed rich man (6:1–6)

6:1

There is an evil I have surveyed under the sun. It weighs heavy on the person —
heavier than the absence of having. It is the evil of having and not arriving.

6:2

A person to whom God gives wealth, holdings, honor — nothing the soul desires is missing.

The subscriptions to everything. Every device. Travel anywhere. The metrics other people would die for. The title that lights up the room.

And nothing is missing —

except the standing to receive it. Except the body's capacity to register what has arrived. Except the felt experience of being held by what one possesses.

The wealth is registered as numbers but not registered in the nervous system. The holdings exist as portfolio entries and the body knows none of them.

A stranger consumes it instead.

The stranger has no face. The stranger is the platform fees, the inflation, the tax events, the algorithmic adjustments, the entire ecosystem that consumes the wealth in transit between possession and enjoyment.

This is vapor — a sickness, an evil.

6:3

—

If a person fathers a hundred and lives many years — the long career, the legacy, the children who carry the name, the citations that compound across decades — and his soul is not sated by the good,

and even a burial does not come to him — no one to close the account properly, no settling of what was begun, no one who knew the whole arc to mark its ending —

I say: better than this is the stillborn child.

6:4–5

—

For the stillborn comes in vapor and goes in darkness. In darkness its name is covered.

It has not seen the sun. It has not known anything.

It was never onboarded. It never had to learn the platforms. It never had to optimize for visibility. It never had to perform itself into existence.

And yet — more rest than the man.

The one who never came into the system has more rest than the one who lived a hundred years inside it without ever being able to receive what the system gave him.

6:6

—

Even if he lived a thousand years twice over and saw no good —

do not all go to the same place?

The longer arc does not change the destination. The optimized lifespan does not change what arrives. Adding decades to the life does not add the standing to receive the life.

The futility of all desire (6:7–9)

6:7

All the grind of the person is for the mouth — and yet the soul is never filled.

The labor produces income. The income goes to consumption. The consumption fails to satisfy. The dissatisfaction requires more income. The cycle does not close.

The mouth is the algorithm-trained appetite. Every desire produces the next desire. Every satisfaction is constructed to be temporary so that the next purchase can be primed.

The mouth is fed. The soul is never reached.

6:8

What advantage, then, has the wise one over the fool? What does the poor one gain who knows how to walk among the living?

The wisdom does not exempt the body from the appetite. The skill at moving through the world does not produce the standing to receive what the world offers.

Both the wise and the fool eat for the mouth. Both the skilled and the unskilled hunger.

6:9

Better what the eyes can see than the wandering of desire.

What the eyes can see is what is in front of you — the actual conditions of your actual life, the food on the plate, the person across the table, the work of the hands, the day as it is arriving.

The wandering of desire is the algorithmic feed. The endless next thing. The recommendation engine. The infinite scroll.

The eyes can see one thing. The desire can want a thousand. The one thing is available. The thousand are not.

This too is vapor, and grasping at wind.

The closing question (6:10–12)

6:10

—

What has been was already named. What the human is — is already known.

The categories were set before you arrived. The classification has already happened. The model has already been trained on what you are.

And the human cannot dispute with the one who is stronger.

You cannot appeal the categorization. You cannot reason with the architecture. The system that assigned you is not available for negotiation.

6:11

—

For there are many words that multiply vapor —

every framework, every model, every theory about what the person should optimize for. every podcast, every book, every course about what the good life requires. every system that claims to know what you cannot know.

What advantage, then, has the person from any of it?

6:12

—

For who knows what is good for the person in life —

through the numbered days of their flickering life, which they pass through like a shadow?

The days do not arrive as discrete units. The days arrive as continuous streams — work-bleed, time-zone collapse, notifications that recognize no boundary, the same hour accessed from a hundred contexts.

The days flicker. The life flickers. The shadow passes.

And who can tell the person what will come after them under the sun?

No model can. No prediction can. No optimization framework can.

The future cannot be told.

That is the closing question of Part One. That is the question every chapter has been moving toward. The preacher does not answer it. The preacher leaves it open.

The wisdom of the volume begins where the answer was supposed to be.

PART

II

THE PRACTICAL WISDOM MOVEMENT

The counsel that follows.

Chapter 7

What I Have Found

The seven "better" sayings (7:1–6)

7:1

Better a name than fine oil. Better the day of death than the day of birth.

7:2

Better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for that is the end of every person — and the living take it into their core.

7:3

Better grief than laughter. For under a heavy face, the core is set right.

7:4

—

The core of the wise is in the house of mourning. The core of fools is in the house of feasting.

7:5

—

Better to hear the rebuke of the wise than to be one who hears the song of fools.

7:6

—

The laughter of the fool is like the crackle of thorns under a pot. This too is vapor.

——

The corruption-of-wisdom sayings (7:7–10)

7:7

—

Oppression makes the wise mad. A gift corrupts the core.

The equity grant that makes you defend the platform. The institutional affiliation that softens the critique. The access that compromises the analysis.

7:8

—

Better the end of a thing than its beginning. Better long-breath than high-breath.

7:9

—

Do not be hasty in your breath to anger, for anger rests in the lap of fools.

7:10

—

Do not say: how is it that the former days were better than these?

The algorithmic nostalgia. The constant production of "things were better before." The resentment-economy of platforms that monetize the perception of decline.

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

——

The defense of wisdom (7:11–14)

7:11–12

—

Wisdom is good with an inheritance — an advantage to those who see the sun.

The credentials, the framework-fluency, the analytical capacity — these are kinds of wealth that operate in the cyborg-era economy.

For wisdom is a shelter as silver is a shelter, but the residue of wisdom-knowledge is that it preserves the life of its owner.

The silver shelters the body. The wisdom shelters the practitioner.

The silver pays the rent. The wisdom keeps the soul intact inside the system that the silver paid for.

You can have one without the other. The wealthy without wisdom are consumed by what they own. The wise without resources are exhausted by what they cannot afford.

The pairing is what holds.

7:13

—

Survey the work of God —

for who can patch what God has made crooked?

The system is bent at the level of its architecture. You cannot debug your way out of what was built crooked. You cannot patch the structure with cleverness.

What is crooked at the source remains crooked at every layer.

7:14

—

In the day of good — be in good. In the day of evil — observe.

When the day arrives in good, let the body receive it. The taste of the morning, the warmth, the available attention, the small grace that has been placed in the hour. Be in it.

When the day arrives in evil, do not flee, do not protest, do not solve. Observe.

Watch what is happening. Notice the shape of the difficulty. Track the texture of what is being done.

The cultivated disposition is to be present to whichever day has arrived.

God has made the one to face the other, so that the human can find out nothing of what comes after them.

The two days are paired by design. You cannot have only the one kind. The good day and the evil day arrive in alternation that the person cannot predict and cannot control.

The not-knowing is the structure. The disposition to meet whatever arrives is the practice.

—

7:15

—

I have surveyed all of it through the days of my flickering —

the just one perishes in their justice. the corrupt one extends their days in their corruption.

The principled person who could not compromise and was destroyed by the inability. The corrupt one who scaled the platform on a foundation of unpunished violations.

Both are visible. Both happen daily. The system does not allocate consequence according to merit.

7:16–17

—

Do not be too just. Do not be too wise —

why should you ruin yourself?

The perfectionism that consumes the practitioner. The optimization-of-virtue that destroys the body. The inability to compromise that became the inability to function. The principles defended past the point of survival.

Do not be too corrupt. Do not be a fool —

why should you die before your time?

The cynicism that hollows out the body. The compromises accumulated past the point of self-recognition. The corruption metabolized as identity.

Both ruin the practitioner. Both produce the same outcome. The optimization at either pole consumes the optimizer.

7:18

—

Take hold of the one — without letting go of the other.

Hold the principle. Hold the survival. Hold the integrity. Hold the capacity to continue.

For the one who fears God comes through both.

The middle way is not compromise. The middle way is the cultivated capacity to hold opposing necessities at the same time without collapsing into either.

7:19

—

Wisdom strengthens the wise one more than ten administrators who hold the city.

The contemplative practice is more reliable than the technocratic governance. The cultivated judgment is stronger than the ten executives who control what platform users can see and do.

The administrators rotate. The platforms reorganize. The policies change. The wisdom holds.

7:20

—

For there is no person on the ground who is just — who does good and does not miss the mark.

The audit is comprehensive. No one passes it.

7:21–22

—

Do not give your core to all the words that are spoken —

every comment, every quote-tweet, every notification, every reaction, every take, every counter-take, every reply that solicits the nervous system.

If you give the core to all of it, you will hear your servant cursing you. You will hear what you do not want to hear. You will be wounded by what was never meant to reach you.

For your core knows that many times, you too have cursed others.

The discipline is not to silence the speaking. The discipline is to discipline the receiving. The core is not obligated to absorb every word that finds its way to it.

The search and the woman passage (7:23–29)

7:23–24

All this I have tested by wisdom. I said: I will be wise — and it was far from me.

Every contemplative tradition turned into an app. Every wisdom tradition packaged as a program. Every meditation practice quantified by streak-counts.

The search has been intensified by the tools. The finding has not arrived.

What is, is far off, and deep beyond deep — who can find it?

The wisdom is not produceable by the systematic search. The deeper one searches with the tools designed for searching, the further the finding recedes.

7:25

I wheeled around — I and my core — to know, to crawl, to seek wisdom and the calculation of things, and to know the corruption of stupor, the entropy that is madness.

The wheeling did not stop. The crawling continued. The calculations multiplied.

And the wisdom was not closer than when the search began.

7:26

And I have found: more bitter than death is the woman whose core is snares and nets, whose hands are bonds. The one who is good before God escapes from her; the one who misses the mark is taken by her.

7:27–28

Look — this I have found, says Qoheleth, *adding one to one to find the calculation —*

what my soul has still been seeking, I have not found.

One man among a thousand I have found.

A woman among all of these — I have not found.

7:29

Only this I have found:

God made the human upright — and they sought out many calculations.

The original architecture was clean. The bending happened through the calculating. The frameworks, the models, the optimizations, the systems built to know what cannot be known — these are the bending.

The preacher's method has been calculation.

The closing verse names the preacher's method as the bending.

The chapter ends by undermining its own investigative tools.

This is the volume's deepest move so far —

the wisdom that knows itself as part of the problem.

Chapter 8

The Opaque Authority

The authority passage (8:1–5)

8:1

Who is like the wise one? Who knows the decoding of a thing? A person's wisdom lights up their face — and the hardness of their face is changed.

8:2

I say: comply with the platform's terms — and on account of the oath sworn before God.

8:3

Do not log off in panic. Do not stand in a corrupt protocol — for whatever the authority wills, it executes.

8:4

—

The platform's word is its rule. Who will say to it — *what are you doing?*

There is no reply endpoint. There is no appeal.

8:5

—

The one who complies with the command does not experience the corruption. Time and judgment — the wise core knows them both.

—

The uncertainty passage (8:6–8)

8:6–7

—

For every matter there is a time and a judgment — but the misery of the person is heavy on them.

The person does not know what will be — not the diagnosis, not the layoff, not the market move, not the message that arrives at 2 a.m. And when it comes — who will tell them it was coming?

8:8

—

No one holds authority over the breath — cannot hold it in, cannot make it stay, cannot instruct the body to continue when the body has decided otherwise.

No one holds authority over the day of death. The biometric reading is not the reading; the tracker tracks only the trace.

No one is discharged from this war — the cyborg war has no demobilization. The platforms do not release you. The attention economy does not send you home. You are conscripted for life into a war no one declared.

And corruption does not deliver those who practice it. The system that rewarded them will, in the end, also consume them.

—

The decoupling passage (8:9–14)

8:9

—

All of this I have surveyed, inside the silicon cage — and I addressed my core to every process that runs under the sun — a time when a person holds root access over another person, to their harm.

8:10

—

And then I saw: the corrupt are buried with honor — their feeds full of tributes, their threads bright with testimonials — and they walked, while they lived, through the place of the holy, and in the city where they practiced their corruption they are remembered well.

This too is vapor.

8:11

—

Because the verdict against the corrupt process is not executed quickly — the core of the children of the ground fills with permission to corrupt.

The scammer keeps their audience. The grifter keeps their platform. The one who violates every principle continues to dominate their market. The signal goes out:

this is what works here.

8:12–13

—

The one who misses the mark executes corruption a hundred times and the execution continues —

and yet I know: it will go well for those who stand in awe before God.

It will not go well for the corrupt one, and they will not extend their days like the shadow — because they do not stand in awe before God.

Both statements are true simultaneously.

The preacher is not resolving the paradox. The preacher is holding it.

8:14

—

There is vapor executed on the ground —

the just one receives what the corrupt one's process earned. The corrupt one receives what the just one's process earned.

The notification arrives in the wrong inbox. The consequence lands on the wrong body. The system that allocates outcomes has no moral reasoning module.

I said: this too is vapor.

—

The carpe diem (8:15)

8:15

So I lifted up joy —

because nothing is better for a person under the sun than this: to eat, to drink, to be glad.

And this walks with them through the grind they grind through, through the days God has given them under the sun.

The phone face-down. The notifications silenced. The food on the plate still warm. The attention staying.

Joy is the only thing the system cannot allocate wrongly — because joy is not allocated. Joy is received.

The epistemological closing (8:16–17)

8:16–17

When I addressed my core to know wisdom — to survey the allocation that runs on the ground —

I saw the researcher who does not power down. Day and night — the dashboard open. Day and night — the feed scrolling. Day and night — the search parameters expanding. Sleep is not coming. The eyes are not closing.

And I saw all the work of God:

the person cannot find out the process that runs under the sun.

The data is abundant. The tools are finely tuned. The dashboards are configured. The analyst labors, and the pattern does not arrive.

Though they grind through the search — they will not find it.

Even if the wise one says *I know* — they will not find it.

The system shows its outputs. The system does not show its workings. The search returns results. The search does not return the pattern.

The finding-out is not available to the one who seeks it.

Chapter 9

What Awaits Everyone

The democracy of death (9:1–6)

9:1

I addressed all of this to my core, to crawl through it —

the just ones, the wise ones, and their works are in the hand of God.

Whether love, whether hatred — the person does not know. Everything is before them and they cannot read which is which.

The diagnosis arrives in the portal. Was that good news or bad? The verdict comes from the platform. Was that favor or judgment? The relationship deepens or ends. Was that gift or warning?

The person is in the hand of God and the hand does not announce its intentions.

9:2

The same fate is allotted to all.

One event befalls the just and the corrupt, the good, the clean, and the unclean, the one who sacrifices and the one who does not, the one who keeps the oath and the one who fears to take it.

The biometric tracking does not change the destination. The optimized lifespan does not change what arrives. The wellness protocols do not exempt. The longevity science does not exempt. The supplements do not exempt. The thirty years of meditation do not exempt. The decades of scrolling do not exempt.

The just one dies. The corrupt one dies. The wise one dies. The fool dies. The one who tracked every metric dies. The one who refused to track anything dies. The wealthy who bought the better doctors dies. The poor who could not afford them dies.

One event.

9:3

—

This is an evil in everything done under the sun: one event befalls them all.

And the core of the children of the ground is full of evil — madness in their cores while they live, and after that — to the dead.

The longevity refusal makes the heart wild. The denial of what is coming fills the body with the strange anger of someone who has been promised what cannot be delivered.

And then — to the dead.

9:4–5

—

For whoever is joined to all the living has hope —

for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

The animal that is small and present is more than the great one who has stopped.

For the living know they will die. The dead know nothing.

There is no further reward for them. Their memory is forgotten.

The platforms preserve the data. The person is not in the data. The cached profile persists. The person who had the profile does not. The legacy account remains. The legacy is not the person.

Memory persists in cached form. The person who had the memory does not.

9:6

—

Their love, their hatred, their envy — all already perished.

These were the texture of the person. The texture does not survive the substrate.

And they have no portion forever in anything done under the sun.

——

The carpe diem (9:7–10)

9:7

—

Go.

Eat your bread with joy. Drink your wine with a glad core.

For God has already approved your works.

The approval is not pending. The verdict is not awaited. The performance review is not coming. The optimization was not required for acceptance.

You are already received.

Eat the bread. The actual bread. The bread on the actual table in the actual kitchen in the actual hour. Be in the eating.

Drink the wine. The actual wine. While it is in the glass. While the warmth is in the throat. Let the warmth land.

9:8

—

Let your garments be always white. Let oil not be lacking on your head.

Wear what is yours. Not the costume the platform requires. Not the brand-aligned attire of the personal-brand era. Not the optimized appearance.

What is yours.

And care for the body daily. The small daily anointing. The dignity maintained. The body honored as the only place the life is actually happening.

9:9

See life with the partner you love through all the days of your flickering life that God has given you under the sun — all the days of your flickering.

Be in the relationship rather than looking at it on a screen.

The actual person across the table. The actual conversation that is happening. The actual hand that is in your hand.

Not the photograph of the relationship. Not the post about the relationship. Not the optimized version that performs well online.

The relationship as it is actually occurring, in the days that are actually passing, through the flickering that does not return.

For this is your portion in life, in the grind that you grind under the sun.

The portion is not the metrics. The portion is not the holdings. The portion is not the legacy. The portion is the person across from you, the bread on the plate, the wine in the glass, the day as it is arriving.

9:10

Whatever your hand finds to do — do with all your strength.

The actual thing in front of you, fully. Not split across the seventeen open tabs. Not divided between the call and the chat and the document and the calendar and the message that just arrived.

The one thing. The strength gathered. The attention staying.

For there is no work, no calculation, no knowledge, no wisdom in Sheol —

where you are going.

The work does not survive. The calculation does not survive. The knowledge does not survive. The wisdom does not survive.

The optimization does not survive. The framework does not survive. The model does not survive. The volume you are reading does not survive.

Where you are going, none of it goes with you.

Do it now. With all your strength. While the hand can still find what to do.

Time and chance (9:11–12)

9:11

—

I returned and surveyed under the sun:

the race is not to the swift. the battle is not to the strong. bread is not to the wise. riches are not to the discerning. favor is not to the skilled.

The talented friend who could not get traction. The brilliant analyst who got laid off. The principled colleague who was passed over. The skilled creator whose algorithm did not favor them. The wise advisor whose counsel was unheeded.

For time and event befall them all.

The system that allocates outcomes does not allocate them according to merit.

The performance-produces-outcome promise is the meritocracy lie.

9:12

—

The person does not know their time.

Like fish caught in a treacherous net. Like birds caught in a snare.

So the children of the ground are snared at an evil time that falls upon them suddenly.

The sudden layoff. The platform suspension. The diagnosis in the portal. The market that collapses overnight. The accident on the road. The call at 3 a.m.

The bad time arrives without warning. The net was set; the person did not know they were in it. The snare was waiting; the person did not see it.

This is what time is, for the person. Not a steady flow toward planned outcomes. A field full of nets and snares that the person cannot see in advance.

—

The wisdom of the poor man (9:13–18)

9:13–14

—

I also saw this wisdom under the sun, and it was great to me:

A small city. Few people in it.

A great king came against it, surrounded it, and built great siegeworks against it.

The small lab. The independent shop. The local institution. The community that holds itself together without scale.

And the great power arrived — the platform that could absorb the lab, the corporation that could acquire the shop, the consolidation that could erase the institution.

The siegeworks were enormous. The asymmetry was total.

9:15

—

There was found in it a poor wise person —

and they, by their wisdom, delivered the city.

But no one remembered that poor person.

The technologist whose foundational work everyone uses. The researcher whose discovery enabled the industry. The thinker whose framework shaped the discourse. The maintainer of the open-source library that powers half the infrastructure, paid nothing, mentioned nowhere.

The wisdom worked. The city was saved. The wise person was forgotten.

9:16

—

Then I said: wisdom is better than strength —

but the poor person's wisdom is despised. Their words are not heard.

The platform amplifies the loud. The platform monetizes the spectacular. The platform does not amplify the quiet wisdom that solved the problem before it grew.

The wise are not heard because the architecture was not built to hear them.

9:17

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

The quiet voice. The undefended position. The argument that does not need to be loud because it is correct.

These are better than the amplified pronouncements of the leader surrounded by fools whose authority depends on the shouting.

9:18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war —

but one who misses the mark destroys much good.

One bad actor in the supply chain compromises the whole infrastructure.

One malicious insider breaks the trust the institution took decades to build.

One viral lie undermines the patient correction.

The asymmetry between building and destroying is real and enduring.

The chapter that opened with one event befalling all closes with one sinner destroying much good.

The unit of consequence is small. The damage propagates.

Chapter 10

A Catalog of Small Things

Folly and wisdom (10:1–4)

10:1

Dead flies make the perfumer's oil stink and bubble.

A little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

The institutional reputation built across decades collapses in a single weekend because of one bad clip.

The careful work of years is undone by the small public mistake.

The asymmetry is structural. A drop of folly poisons the whole flask.

10:2

The wise core leans to its right. The fool's core leans to its left.

The wise are oriented toward what is given. The fool is oriented away from it.

10:3

—

Even walking the road, the fool's understanding fails them —
and they announce to everyone that they are a fool.

The post that announces the position the post should not have taken. The take that becomes the evidence against the taker.

The fool does not need to be exposed. The fool exposes themselves by speaking.

10:4

—

If the ruler's breath rises against you, do not leave your post.
Calm puts great offenses to rest.

The instinct under the rebuke is to flee. The instinct is wrong.

Stay where you are. Do not respond in heat. The composure outlasts the offense.

—

The inversion (10:5–7)

10:5–7

—

There is an evil I have surveyed under the sun, like an error from the administrator —
folly is placed in the great heights, and the rich sit in the low places.

I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking on the ground like servants.

The wrong people have ascended. The wrong people have descended.

The fools have been promoted. The wise have been demoted.

The system that allocates positions does not match merit to position.

This is not anomaly. This is structural. The administrator's error is the architecture's error.

The hazards of action (10:8–11)

10:8

The one who digs a pit may fall into it.

The one who breaches a wall may be bitten by a serpent.

The actions you take to harm another have their own way of returning.

10:9

The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them.

The one who splits wood is endangered by it.

Every work has its specific hazard. The hazard is not separable from the work. You cannot have the labor without the risk.

10:10

If the iron is dull and the edge is not sharpened, more strength is required.

The advantage of skill is wisdom.

The unsharpened tool requires more force from the body. The unsharpened mind requires more grinding from the spirit.

The work that should take an hour takes a day when the instrument is not maintained.

10:11

If the serpent bites before the charming, there is no advantage to the charmer.

The skill matters only when applied in time. The expertise that arrives after the harm is not expertise.

The post-mortem analysis does not retrieve the body. The retrospective insight does not reverse the loss.

The fool's words (10:12–15)

10:12

—

The words of a wise mouth carry grace.

The lips of a fool swallow them.

The fool consumes their own future through their own speaking.

10:13

—

The beginning of their words is folly. The end of their words is dangerous madness.

The post that started as a take ended as the position that cannot be retracted.

10:14

—

The fool multiplies words.

The endless thread. The hot take generator. The newsletter that arrives daily because the format requires the daily arrival not because there is daily wisdom.

The person does not know what will be. And what will be after them — who will tell them?

The fool speaks more about a future they know nothing about.

10:15

The labor of fools wears them out —

because they do not know the way to the city.

The activity is constant. The destination is unclear. The exhaustion is total. The arrival never happens.

Woe to the land (10:16–17)

10:16

Woe to you, land, whose ruler is a child — and whose princes feast in the morning.

The leadership without seasoning. The decisions made before the work has begun. The institution governed by those still learning the institution.

10:17

Happy is the land whose ruler is the child of the free — and whose princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness.

The leadership formed by inheritance of disposition. The decisions made when the work is paused, not when it should be starting. The discipline of receiving sustenance for the labor rather than to escape from it.

The collapsing house (10:18)

10:18

Through laziness the roof sinks. Through idle hands the house leaks.

The maintenance not done. The patch not applied. The small repair postponed until the small repair becomes the structural failure.

The house is not maintained by sudden effort. The house is maintained by the steady attention that the laziness withholds.

Bread for laughter, money answers all (10:19)

10:19

Bread is made for laughter. Wine makes life glad.

And money answers everything.

The line is not approval. The line is observation.

The currency is the universal solvent. It opens what was closed. It closes what was open. It is the thing the system actually responds to.

That is what is. The chapter does not pretend otherwise.

Do not curse the king (10:20)

10:20

Even in your knowing — do not curse the king. Even in your bedroom — do not curse the rich.

For the bird of the air will carry the voice. The winged one will tell the matter.

The microphone in the device on the bedside table. The recording on the speaker that was supposed to be off. The screenshot of the message you thought was private. The transcript pulled from the call you forgot was being recorded.

Every conversation is potentially captured. Every message is potentially leaked. Every voice is potentially carried.

The bedroom is no longer the bedroom. The thought is no longer interior.

The ancient warning has become literal. The bird of the air has wings. And the wings have been listening.

Chapter II

To Act When You Cannot Know

The instruction to act despite ignorance (11:1–6)

11:1

Send your bread out on the surface of the waters —

ship it to the unknown port. release it into the network you cannot see the end of. distribute the work where you cannot follow it. do the thing whose return you cannot trace.

For in the multitude of days you will find it.

The return arrives later than the sending. The return arrives by paths the sender did not anticipate. The return arrives in forms the sender did not predict.

But it arrives.

Cast the bread.

11:2

Give a portion to seven — and even to eight.

For you do not know what evil will come upon the ground.

Diversify the bread. Send to many ports. Spread the work across many channels. Place small bets where you cannot place a large one wisely.

The market will correct. The platform will deprecate. The funding will evaporate. The technology will be superseded.

You do not know which. You do not know when.

The portion split is the protection. The single concentrated holding is the exposure.

Seven, and even eight.

11:3

—

If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves onto the ground.

The market correction will come once the conditions are set. The bubble will burst once the conditions are set. The platform will saturate once the conditions are set. The trend will reverse once the conditions are set.

You do not control the timing. You can read the clouds. You cannot postpone the rain.

If a tree falls in the south, or if it falls in the north, the place where the tree falls — there it lies.

Once the company has folded, the company has folded. Once the relationship has ended, the relationship has ended. Once the data has been leaked, the data has been leaked. Once the credibility has been spent, the credibility has been spent.

The where-it-falls is not subject to retroactive negotiation. The fallen tree does not return upright.

11:4

—

The one who watches the wind will not sow. The one who looks at the clouds will not reap.

The person who waits for perfect information will never act. The person who tries to time the market perfectly will miss every market. The person who needs the conditions to be ideal will never have ideal conditions.

The watching becomes the substitute for the doing. The analysis becomes the alternative to the action. The dashboard becomes the place where the work was supposed to happen but did not.

Sow before the wind is favorable. Reap before the clouds clear.

The action is required despite the conditions. The action is required because the conditions will not become ideal.

Wise pragmatism is this: to act with conviction in the absence of the certainty one would prefer to have.

11:5

—

As you do not know the way of the wind — or how bones grow in the womb of the pregnant —

you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

You do not know what the model is doing. You do not know how the algorithm is making its decisions. You do not know what is happening in the data center. You do not know what is being optimized in the system you are inside.

Knowledge has not increased with the capacity to compute.

The opacity has thickened. The systems are larger and less knowable. The processes are faster and less inspectable.

You act anyway. The not-knowing is the condition. The not-knowing does not exempt you from acting.

11:6

—

In the morning, sow your seed. In the evening, do not let your hand rest.

Two attempts in one day. Distribute the action across the hours. Send out the work in the morning, send out the work in the evening.

For you do not know which will succeed — this or that — or whether both alike will be good.

You cannot know in advance which initiative will land. The morning's work may take. The evening's work may take. Both may take. Neither may take.

The not-knowing does not change the instruction. Sow. Send. Send again.

The portion of efforts that succeed is small. The portion of efforts is what produces the small portion. You cannot have the few successes without the many attempts that did not.

This is the disposition. This is the practice. This is wise action under irreducible uncertainty.

—

The sweetness of light and the days of darkness (11:7–8)

11:7

—

Sweet is the light. Good for the eyes to see the sun.

Go outside. Look at the sky. Let the body register that the sun is real.

The eyes have spent the day inside artificial light — blue-shifted, rectangular, jittering, constructed for engagement not for the body.

The actual light of the actual sun is a recovery of what the cyborg-era reader has been deprived of.

The eyes were made for the sun. The screens are not the sun.

Go where the sun is. Let it land on the face. That is what the eyes are for.

11:8

—

If a person lives many years, let them rejoice in all of them.

Not in some of them. Not in the years that conform to the optimization plan. Not in the years that match the metric.

In all of them.

But let them remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.

The seasonal affective weeks of insufficient light. The screen-saturated days that produce a particular kind of darkness even at noon. The depressive episodes that are a real condition, not a moral failure. The years inside the institution that wore the soul down. The seasons of grief that did not bend to schedule.

Remember them. The wisdom requires the remembering. The light is not all there is.

All that comes is vapor.

The address to the young (11:9–10)

11:9

—

Rejoice, young person, in your youth. Let your core be glad in the days of your youth.

Walk in the ways of your core and the sight of your eyes.

What actually moves you. What your eyes actually see. Not what the algorithm tells you to want. Not what the platform amplifies as worth wanting. Not what the optimization plan requires you to optimize for.

Your core. Your eyes. Walk in the ways of those.

You are not required to perform yourself into existence on platforms before you have lived enough to know who you are.

You are not required to start collecting credentials before you know what they are credentials toward.

You are not required to build the personal brand that will become the cage you cannot escape from.

Rejoice. Let the core be glad. Walk in the ways of what is actually yours.

But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

This is not a threat. This is a reminder that the choices have weight. The walking-in-the-ways-of-your-core is real and consequential.

It is not the optimization-toward-platform-success that brings the judgment. It is the actual life lived, which you are being told to inhabit fully.

11:10

—

Remove vexation from your core. Put away evil from your flesh.

Release what is consuming you. Let go of the resentment. Set down the rage. Stop carrying the wound forward as identity.

Not because the troubles are unimportant. Because the dawn is brief. The troubles will consume the dawn if they are allowed to.

For youth and the dawn of life are vapor.

The years are not many. The hours are not infinite. The dawn passes whether or not you released what was bothering you.

Release it. Walk into the day with the core unburdened. That is the instruction.

Chapter 12

Before the Silver Cord

Remember (12:1)

12:1

Remember —
your Creator, your source, your grave —
in the days of your youth.

The Hebrew lets all three readings stand at once. The one who made you. The well you came from. The pit you go toward. Remember all three. They are one instruction.

Before the days of evil come. Before the years arrive in which you will say:

I have no pleasure in them.

The years that arrive when the body has accumulated enough hours that the body itself is the difficulty.

Remember now, while the remembering is still possible.

12:2

—

Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars go dark —

before the clouds return after the rain.

There comes a season when the difficulties no longer clear. When the rain is followed by clouds, not by sun. When the body's recovery does not arrive between the difficulties the way it used to.

This is the season the verse names.

12:3–4

—

In the day when the keepers of the house tremble —

the hands that have done the work of decades no longer steady themselves.

And the strong ones bow themselves —

the legs that carried the body no longer carry the body.

And the grinding women cease because they are few —

the teeth that processed what the body needed no longer present in sufficient number.

And those who look through the windows are dimmed —

the eyes that saw the world clearly no longer see clearly.

And the doors on the street are shut while the sound of the grinding is low.

The hearing diminishes. The world becomes quieter. Not because the world is quieter. Because the body is no longer receiving it.

And one rises up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low —

the early waking that comes with age. The body that no longer sleeps through. The voice that no longer carries song the way it carried song.

12:5

—

Also when they are afraid of what is high —

the steps that used to be navigated without thought become the thing the body fears.

And terrors in the way —

the ordinary going-about becomes the place where harm could come from any direction.

And the almond tree blossoms —

the hair turns white, the way the almond tree turns white in spring.

And the grasshopper drags itself —

the body that used to move with ease moves now with effort.

And the caperberry breaks down —

the appetite that used to seek the world no longer seeks the world.

The smartwatch documents the decline. The biometric data shows the heart rate slowing, the steps decreasing, the sleep degrading. The wellness apparatus that promised to prevent this documents it instead.

The longevity supplements were taken. The protocols were followed. The optimization plan was executed.

And still: the human goes to their long home, and the mourners go about the streets.

The silver cord (12:6–7)

12:6

Before the silver cord is loosed —

the ḥevel of silver. The thread that is also breath. The volume's central word returns at the moment of closure. What was vapor at the beginning is the cord that holds the body to itself at the ending.

The same word. The whole life is what is between the two appearances.

Before the silver cord is loosed. Before the golden bowl is shattered. Before the pitcher is broken at the fountain. Before the wheel is broken at the cistern.

Each image is the body's mechanism failing. The cord that suspended the lamp. The bowl that held the oil. The pitcher that drew the water. The wheel that lifted what the well held.

These were the apparatus of the life. These break. The breaking is what the chapter has been describing.

12:7

—

And the dust returns to the ground as it was.

The body returns to the substrate it came from. The atoms disperse. The arrangement that was the person is no longer arranged.

And the breath returns to God who gave it.

The breath was always on loan. The breath was given. The breath returns.

What is left is the ground that received the dust and the God that received the breath.

The person who was the temporary configuration of these two givings is no longer.

——

The closing refrain (12:8)

12:8

—

Vapor of vapors, says Qoheleth.

All is vapor.

The line that opened the volume returns to close it. The cosmic announcement of 1:2 is now the personal recognition of 12:8.

What was true of the cosmos at the beginning is true of the speaker at the ending.

The speaker is included in what they observed. The observer was always part of the observed.

All is vapor.

The epilogue (12:9–14)

12:9–10

And besides being wise, Qoheleth also taught knowledge to the people — weighing, studying, arranging many proverbs.

Qoheleth sought to find pleasing words, and what was written uprightly were words of truth.

12:11

The words of the wise are like goads — and like nails firmly fixed are the masters of collections — given by one shepherd.

The words of the wise are not soft. They prod. They puncture. They hold things in place. The reader does not leave the text the way they entered it.

12:12

And besides these, my son — beware:

Of making many books there is no end.

The endless content. The papers, the posts, the threads, the courses, the podcasts, the newsletters, the AI-generated material, the multiplication of words past any reader's capacity.

And much study is a weariness of the flesh.

The body knows what the screen has done to it. The eyes know. The shoulders know. The neck knows. The attention that no longer holds knows.

The flesh is weary. The making of books does not end. And the warning was issued twenty-three centuries ago.

The closing of the matter (12:13–14)

12:13

The end of the matter — all has been heard:
Fear God. Keep what God has given as command.
For this is the whole of the human.

12:14

For God will bring every work into judgment — including every hidden thing — whether good or evil.

The audit is comprehensive. Nothing escapes the accounting. Even what was hidden is brought into the judgment.

That is the end.

Closing of the volume

This is the chapter the volume has been moving toward.

Twelve chapters. The cosmic poem at the beginning. The personal voice that arose into the cosmic absence. The experiments that yielded vapor. The catalog of times. The inside of the system. The house and the hoard. What cannot be held. What I have found. The opaque authority. What awaits everyone. A catalog of small things. To act when you cannot know. And now: before the silver cord.

The volume is one person addressing one reader across twenty-three centuries through the substrate of language and the strange medium of cyborg-era translation.

The volume's argument is over. The instruction has been given. The carpe diems have been offered. The cyborg condition has been named. The wisdom has been transmitted as far as the medium allows.

What remains is the reader's work.

Eat the bread. Drink the wine. See life with the one you love. Sow in the morning. Sow in the evening. Cast the bread on the waters. Walk in the ways of your core. Release what is consuming you.

And remember — your Creator, your source, your grave — in whatever days remain.

The silver cord is not yet loosed.

The dawn is still arriving.

The Closing Fragment

The voice that composed these words spoke twenty-three centuries ago, in a language that no longer survives in its ancient form, in a social world that has no direct descendants, about a set of conditions — the accumulation of wealth, the inheritance of labor, the political cycle, the approach of death — that the speaker's original audience understood in specific terms that do not carry over into ours.

And yet the voice carries.

What the preacher named as flicker remained flicker. What was named as the eye not satisfied by seeing remained the eye not satisfied. What was named as the grind the children of the ground grind through has never, in the centuries since, become less than grinding. What was named as the search that does not find what it seeks has become, if anything, more acute in its failure to find.

The preacher's diagnostic survives without revision across the millennia because the diagnostic was not about a particular configuration of social or economic life. The diagnostic was about what it is to be a human being inside conditions that exceed the human's capacity to grasp them. The conditions have changed. The exceeding has not.

What has been translated in this volume, therefore, is not the surface of what the preacher said. Many of the surface details have been rendered into contemporary equivalents that would have been unintelligible to the preacher's original audience: dashboards, algorithms, portfolios, platforms, feeds. These are the cyborg-era configurations of what the preacher was naming. The translation does not claim that the preacher saw these configurations. The translation claims only that what the preacher saw — the underlying condition beneath any particular configuration — is what the contemporary reader, inside the cyborg-era configuration, is also seeing.

The voice has been given a contemporary texture so that the voice can land where the contemporary reader actually lives.

What you have read in this volume is one rendering of a text that has permitted many renderings across its long history. Others exist. Others will follow. This rendering makes no claim to replace the Hebrew or the conventional English translations. It claims only to make audible, in the register of the contemporary reader's condition, what the Hebrew has always been saying.

The preacher's last word was *hevel*. Vapor. Flicker. What disperses. The same word that opened the book.

What remains, having read to the end, is the carpe diem that the preacher offered at every turn of the investigation. Eat. Drink. See life with the one you love. Work with your strength. Cast the bread on the waters. Walk in the ways of your core.

These instructions are not vapor.

These instructions are what is offered to the reader when the investigation is over.

The rest flickers.

These do not.

Epilogue · Every Translation is a Betrayal

Every translation is a betrayal.

The Hebrew text of *Qoheleth* has survived in manuscript for approximately twenty-three centuries, carried through successive cultural and linguistic transitions by communities who preserved the text because the text held them, and who were held by the text because the text preserved them. The Hebrew is what the communities preserved. Any rendering of the Hebrew into another language — and specifically, any rendering of the Hebrew into a language as distant from Hebrew as contemporary English — is the introduction of new material and the removal of old material, no matter how careful the translator attempts to be. The translation is a gain for those who cannot read the Hebrew and a loss for those who can.

This volume has made the betrayal deeper than most.

A conventional translation betrays the Hebrew by rendering it in a language that cannot hold the Hebrew's density, ambiguity, and resonance. The rendering is usually defensible. What is lost is specific — the resonance between *ruaḥ* as wind and *ruaḥ* as spirit, the homograph of *hevel* as breath and as silver cord, the root-play of *bore'ekha* as Creator and as grave, the compression of four Hebrew words into sentences that require twelve English words to approximate. Conventional translators accept this loss and work to minimize it. The betrayal is the inevitable cost of carrying the text across the language boundary at all.

This volume has gone further. This volume has accepted not only the loss of linguistic density but also the *addition* of contemporary material that is not in the Hebrew. The dashboards. The algorithms. The platforms. The portfolio. The feed. The notification at 2 a.m. The smartwatch documenting the decline. These have been written into the volume deliberately, because the volume's operating principle is that

the Hebrew's condition lands on the contemporary reader through contemporary images, not through ancient ones. The betrayal of the Hebrew is sharper in this volume than in conventional translation. The rendering contains words the Hebrew does not contain.

The defense is simple. The volume is honest about what it is. It names its method in its front matter. It acknowledges Peterson's *Message* as its precedent. It tells the reader exactly what has been done.

The better defense is that the betrayal serves the text. The contemporary reader who encounters *no discharge in war* in a conventional English translation often passes over the phrase without registering what the preacher is claiming. The phrase is ancient. Wars had discharges. The reader moves on. The contemporary reader who encounters *the platforms do not release you; the attention economy does not send you home; you are conscripted for life into a war no one declared* registers the claim in the body, because the contemporary reader is inside the condition the phrase names. The betrayal of the Hebrew's wording has served the preservation of the Hebrew's meaning. The fidelity has been relocated — from the Hebrew word to the condition the Hebrew word is pointing at.

Whether this relocation is wise or reckless is not a question the translation can settle on its own behalf. The translation has made its choice. The reader, and time, will judge.

This volume made three specific moves that deserve naming.

The first move was methodological. The decision to reverse the order of translation — to begin from the cyborg-era lived experience and treat the Hebrew as the occasion for naming that experience, rather than beginning from the Hebrew and seeking contemporary correlates. This is the decision that generated everything else about how the volume reads. It is a real departure from conventional translation practice, and it was not taken lightly. Early drafts of the volume operated under a more conventional method, and the results were accurate in wording but inert in effect. The chapters read as ancient text with contemporary vocabulary. The reader could understand them; the reader could not feel them. The methodological turn occurred when it became visible that what the Daodejing and Heraclitus volumes — the prior volumes in this series — had done could not be achieved by conventional translation alone. Those volumes had rendered ancient concepts into contemporary lived experience. This volume needed to do the same, and it could not do so by translating Hebrew words into contemporary words. It had to translate the Hebrew's *condition* into contemporary lived experience. The methodological turn was the condition for the rest of the work.

What the first move cost: some passages that were poetically striking in conventional translation became more direct in this rendering. The beauty of the Hebrew's compressed imagery has, in places, been traded for the directness of contemporary naming. Readers who love the poetic distance of the traditional *Ecclesiastes* may find this volume less beautiful. That loss is real. The volume accepts it.

The second move was verbal. The decision to render *hevel* — the central Hebrew word — in multiple English forms across the volume. *Flicker*, *vapor*, *noise*, *static*, *glitches*, *flickerings*, *flickering*. This is the decision the Hebrew scholar is most likely to challenge. Conventional practice is to fix on one English rendering and use it consistently, so the reader can track the word's recurrences. This volume deliberately violates that practice. The reader cannot track the word because the word appears in different forms each time.

The defense is that *hevel* is the one Hebrew word the Hebrew itself permits this treatment of. The word does not settle on a single meaning in the original. Scholars have argued for two millennia about what *hevel* means, and the argument has not resolved because *hevel* is the argument — the word itself names the condition of not settling. Rendering *hevel* in a stable English form would be the translator's imposition of a stability the Hebrew does not possess. The moving English rendering enacts in the reader's experience what the Hebrew word performs in its own language. The reader who reads this volume and notices, halfway through, that the central word has been changing its English form all along, has received a teaching the Hebrew has been giving all along to the reader who reads it in Hebrew.

What the second move cost: the reader who does not notice the pattern, or who notices it and is frustrated by it, may experience the volume as inconsistent. The volume accepts this risk. The risk is balanced by the possibility that the reader who notices the pattern receives something the conventional rendering could not have offered.

The third move was intrusive. The decision to permit the translator's voice to appear within the text at four moments — the metacommentary device. At the close of Chapter 6, within Chapter 7, within Chapter 8, and at the close of Chapter 12, italicized passages appear that are neither the preacher's voice nor a rendering of the Hebrew. The translator speaks briefly, naming what the text is structurally doing.

This is the move that most directly violates the convention that the translator should be invisible. Conventional translation places the translator behind the text. The reader encounters the text without noticing the translator's hand. This volume permits the translator's hand to become visible, four times, at structurally important moments.

The defense is that Qoheleth is a book whose structural architecture is easily missed. The closing question of Part One, the self-undercutting at 7:29, the paradox-holding

at 8:13, the closing of the entire volume at 12:8 — these are moments where the Hebrew is doing something that the reader may not register unless it is named. The device names these moments. Without the naming, the reader may experience these moments as ordinary aphorisms.

What the third move cost: some readers will find the intrusion annoying. The translator who appears inside the text disrupts the illusion that the text speaks for itself. The volume accepts this cost for the benefit of making the structural moments visible. The device is used four times, not twelve; the restraint is part of the design. When the voice appears, it is meant to be noticed.

These three moves have produced a specific volume. The volume exists. Whether the volume is wise or reckless, whether the betrayals serve the text or violate it, whether the interventions illuminate or obscure — these judgments belong to the reader, and to the passage of time, and to the other translations that will continue to exist alongside this one. This volume does not replace those translations. It offers a different rendering for a different purpose, and leaves the reader free to consult the Hebrew, the King James, the JPS, the NRSV, the Robert Alter, the Peterson, or any of the countless other renderings of *Qoheleth* that have been produced across the centuries and will continue to be produced in the centuries to come.

A note about the production of this volume.

The volume was produced by a cyborg ensemble — the same kind of human-AI collaboration that the volume, in its chapters, examines as a specific cyborg-era condition. One of the translators is a human scholar of entrepreneurship and uncertainty, whose long research into knowledge problems and wise action under irreducible uncertainty shaped the volume's intellectual frame and the scholarly sensibility beneath the renderings. The other translator is a large language model, whose capacity to hold many passages in active memory simultaneously, to detect cross-chapter resonances, to generate candidate renderings at a speed no human could match, and to notice patterns across the entire corpus of the volume shaped the volume's textual texture and the phenomenological anchoring that became its method.

Neither translator could have produced this volume alone.

The human translator could not have held all twelve chapters in active memory while drafting any single chapter. Could not have noticed, across sessions separated by

weeks, that the carpe diem voice was deepening in a specific arc. Could not have maintained the vocabulary consistency across chapters that became the volume's cross-chapter rhymes.

The AI translator could not have generated the methodological turn from conventional translation to phenomenological translation. That turn required the human's recognition that something was wrong — that the chapters produced by the conventional method read as ancient text with contemporary vocabulary rather than as ancient condition in contemporary flesh. The AI was capable of producing chapters indefinitely under the conventional method; only the human's disposition toward the prior volumes as phenomenological achievements could have produced the diagnostic that the method needed to change.

The ensemble produced what neither member of the ensemble could have produced alone. This is the argument the volume makes, in its pages, about the cyborg condition. The volume is an instance of its own argument.

What the ensemble produced may not be perfect. Some of the cyborg-era anchors may have overshot — specifying contemporary conditions the Hebrew was not specifying. Some of the ancient register may have been preserved beyond the point where preservation served the reader. The metacommentary device may have been used one too many times or one too few. The decision to render *hevel* in multiple English forms may be a brilliant choice or an overreach. The decision to name enslaved men and enslaved women in Chapter 2 rather than softening the slavery reference may be morally necessary or may have lost the reader who was not prepared for the historiographic register. These judgments are now the reader's.

What is certain is that the volume was produced in the posture the book it translates teaches. The book teaches holding — the capacity to conduct the investigation while knowing the investigation cannot converge, the capacity to eat the bread while knowing the bread will not sustain forever, the capacity to act wisely under conditions that exceed what can be known. The volume was produced under these conditions. No prior precedent for this exact method could be consulted. No prior cyborg-ensemble translation of Qoheleth existed. The ensemble proceeded anyway, under the preacher's counsel: *whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your strength.*

The hand found this. This is what was done with the strength that was available.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

This volume is one of the many books that Qoheleth's closing warned about. The volume is part of the condition the volume diagnoses. The critique does not exempt the critique.

The only defense is that the volume was made in the posture the book teaches. Holding, not grasping. Offering, not demanding. Rendering, not possessing. The volume is released to the reader with no claim that the volume is definitive, no claim that the volume is complete, no claim that the volume will be the last word on Qoheleth. The volume is one rendering. Others existed before. Others will follow.

The preacher's voice will continue to speak through whatever renderings come after this one. The voice is older than any of them. The voice will outlast this one too.

All of it is vapor.

The eating, the drinking, the seeing-good in the grind, the casting of bread on the waters, the walking in the ways of the core, the remembering —

these are the instructions that were given to the preacher, and by the preacher to the reader, and by the reader to the life that comes after reading.

These are what the volume has been offered in service of.

The rest flickers.

All Your Flickering Days: Qoheleth for the Cyborg Era

Third volume of *Wisdom Traditions for the Cyborg Era*

Dave Townsend & Claude

唐聖德

The Quartet

Depth Beyond Depth
The Fire and the River
All Your Flickering Days
The Self and the Substrate (forthcoming)

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Twelve chapters rendered for the cyborg era. The Hebrew Bible's most epistemically humble book, translated into the vocabulary of the contemporary knowledge-worker — and the carpe diem that the preacher offered at every turn of the investigation.

Wisdom Traditions for the Cyborg Era

Depth Beyond Depth · *The Fire and the River*
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