



In Approach 1, how do they judge favourably? (continued)

1. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Kohelet 7:3

... אשר תמצא בספר הזה דבר ופעם שנית יראה שיאמר הפך הדבר. גם כי תמצא בספר משלי כמו "אל תען כסיל" "ענה כסיל." גם כן בדברי הנביאים, ובתורת אלקינו שהוא העיקר כמו "אפס כי לא יהיה בך אביון" "כי לא יחדל אביון" וכלם אמת:

...You will find in this book a statement, and on a second occasion you will see that it says the opposite of that statement. You will also find [this] in Mishlei, like "Do not respond to a fool" "Answer a fool." Also in the prophets, and in Gd's Torah, which is the essence, as in, "But there will be no pauper among you," "Paupers will never cease." And all of them are true.

2. Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Sefer Mishlei, Introduction

...נראה לי שאמר בספר הראשון לשון "דברי" ... כי לשון "דברי" יורה על דברים פשוטים מקובלים נאספים מפה ומפה והוא לשון "קהלת", ר"ל מאסף כל הדעות ובורר מהן כל הדעות התוריים והמקובלים, וזהו ענין קהלת, שעקר הכוונה בו אינו רק לקבוע אמונת הדברים התוריים אשר לא יוכרעו מצד ההקש והעיון רק מצד התורה...

...It appears to me that it said in the first book [=Kohelet] the expression, "The statements" ... Because the expression "the statements" indicates simple, accepted statements, gathered from here and there, as in the term "Kohelet," meaning the one who gathered all of the views and selected from them all of the views that are of Torah and are accepted. This is "Kohelet"; its essential intent is only to establish faith in the Torah's statements which cannot be decided by logic and analysis, but only from Torah [revelation]...

3. Prof. Robert Gordis, Koheleth: the man and his world, pg. 96

The term "quotations," as used here refers to *words which do not reflect the present sentiments of the author of the literary composition in which they are found but have been introduced by the author to convey the standpoint of another person or situation*. These quotations include, but are not limited to, citations of previously existing literature, whether written or oral. In sum, the term refers to passages that cite the speech or thought of a subject, actual or hypothetical, past or present, which is distinct from the context in which it is embodied.

4. Prof. Robert Gordis, Koheleth: the man and his world, pg. 97

As a point of departure for this usage, (Ecclesiastes 4:8) may be cited. It is obvious that the words *את עמל ומחסר* ולמי אני עמל ומחסר are not the words of the author, but rather a citation of a hypothetical speech and thought, an idea that *might or should have* occurred to the subject.

5. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Ibn Ezra 3:19

כי מקרה - זה הפסוק על מחשבות בני אדם שלא חכמו והשכילו, כי בראות' שמקרה אחד לאדם ולבהמה בחיים ובמות, חשבו כי רוח אחד לכל ואין לאדם מותר מן הבהמה.

"Because the fate" – This verse is about the thoughts of people who have not become wise and gained insight. When they saw that there was one fate for man and beast in life and death, they thought that there was one spirit for all, man is no greater than animal.

6. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Ibn Ezra 9:4

כי מי - זו מחשבת בני האדם שיאמרו כי כל מי שהוא מחובר אל החיים יש לו בטחון... וכתוב יבחר וענינו כי המת לא יוכל לבחור:
"For who" – This is the thought of people who say that all who are joined with life have faith... And it is written as *yivchar* ["will choose"], meaning that the dead cannot choose.

7. Prof. Mordechai Zer-Kavod, Daat Mikra to Kohelet pg. 34

אמנם, יש לפעמים אשר 'צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך (ימים) ברעתו' (ז:טו)... כל זה לא נעלם מהחכם קהלת, אף על פי כן אין הוא מפקפק בצדקת אלוקים. בדברי קהלת נמצאות שלוש תשובות לשאלה זו:

א. 'כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא' (ז כ), לפיכך גם זה המוחזק צדיק אינו צדיק גמור יש בידו חטאים, ייתכן שהם נעלמים מעושים, אך הוא נענש עליהם. על כל פנים כך מובן מתוך החתימה של ספר קהלת (יב יד);

ב. יש 'אשר חטא עשה רע מאת (פעמים) ומאריך לו (אלוקים)', כי קל ארך אפים הוא (ח יב);

ג. אין שכלו של אדם מסוגל להבין ולתפוס את מעשה האלקים - על כך חוזר קהלת כמה פעמים, ומסקנתו היא: 'כבר נקרא שמו ונודע: אשר הוא אדם - ולא יוכל לדין עם (אלקים) שהתקיף ממנו' (ו י), כלומר: בשל המרחק העצום בין גדולת אלקים לבין האדם החלש, אין טעם לגולל את הדיון בנושא זה, כדוגמת איוב.

But there are times when "the righteous person is ruined in his righteousness, and there is a wicked person who extends (life) in his wickedness (7:15)"... All of this was not lost on the sage Kohelet, and yet he did not challenge the righteousness of Gd. In the words of Kohelet are three answers to this question:

- 1) "For there is no righteous person in the land who will do good and not sin (7:20)", therefore even the one who is assumed to be righteous is not fully righteous, he has sinned; the sins may be hidden from their perpetrator, but he is punished for them. In any case, it is understood, such is understood from the close of Kohelet (12:14).
- 2) There is "one who sins, perpetrating wickedness 100 (times) and (Gd) extends [life] for him (8:12)", for He is a patient Gd.
- 3) A person's mind is not capable of understanding and grasping the deeds of Gd – therefore Kohelet repeats multiple times, and it is his conclusion: "It is already named, and known: that he is a man – and he cannot argue with (Gd) who is stronger than he is. (6:10)" Meaning, because of the great distance between the greatness of Gd and the weak person, there is no reason to debate this topic, as in the case of Iyov.

8. Rabbi Hayyim Angel, *Introduction to Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective*, YU Sukkot To-Go 5770

However, such attempts to escape difficult verses appear arbitrary. Nothing in the text signals a change in speaker (particularly if Kohelet wishes to reject that speaker's views), leaving decisions of attribution entirely in the hands of the commentator.

Approach #2: The internal and external contradictions are the point

9. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb, Foreword, Dayyan Grunfeld translation, pp. clvii-clviii

There will accordingly be two schools of study engaged in the exposition of the Divine law, differing only in the sources from which they draw their knowledge of it. One school will concern itself with the comprehension of the utterances regulating our practical conduct in and for themselves... and its knowledge will be derived almost exclusively from the tradition which transmits the oral and written Divine utterances and the regulations of the Sages. The other school will concern itself with reflecting and pondering on these laws, and its source of knowledge will be the more or less illuminating power of insight which dwells in each individual religious thinker...

Everything belonging to the first school is obligatory, because it emanates from the authority which has power to bind. All that springs from the second school has no power to bind, because it represents only the views of individuals..

The work of the first school, from the very nature of its contents, came to an end with the completion of the Gemara, the collection of the *שמעתי*. The production of *אגדתא* is, however, free and capable of enlargement at all times.

10. Rabbi Hayyim Angel, *Introduction to Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective*, YU Sukkot To-Go 5770

In order to approach Kohelet, we must consider a few of its verifiable features. Kohelet is written about life and religious meaning in this world. The expression *tahat ha-shemesh* (beneath the sun) appears 29 times in Kohelet, and nowhere else in the rest of Tanakh. *Tahat ha-shamayim* (under heaven) appears three additional times, and Rashi and Rashbam maintain that this expression is synonymous with *tahat ha-shemesh*. People are even called *ro'ei hashemesh* (those who beheld the sun) in 7:11. Similarly, the word *ani* (I) appears 29 times, and its appearance is not grammatically necessary.

11. Rabbi Hayyim Angel, *Introduction to Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective*, YU Sukkot To-Go 5770

Since Gd is so infinitely superior, there is no purpose (and much harm) in protesting against Gd (cf. 7:13-14). Contrast this approach with the venerable history of prophetic protests, beginning with Avraham and Moshe and proceeding through the entire Tanakh! Moreover, Kohelet never speaks directly to Gd; he speaks *about* Gd and the human condition in a sustained monologue to his audience...

While Kohelet is the Truth, and nothing but the Truth, it is but one aspect of Truth rather than the whole Truth. For example, Kohelet considers oppression an unchangeable reality (Kohelet 4:1-3)

Kohelet never calls on Gd to stop this oppression, nor does he exhort society to stop it. He simply laments that human history repeats itself in an endless cycle of oppression. Kohelet sets this tone in chapter 1 by analogizing human existence to the cyclical patterns in nature (Ibn Ezra, Zer-Kavod).

In contrast, prophecy is committed to changing society so that it ultimately matches the ideal messianic vision. Prophecy insists that all of human history is a line (and not a cycle) from the Garden of Eden to the messianic era, and we should be doing everything in our power to move that process along. While a human perspective sees only repetitions of errors in history; prophecy persistently reminds us that current reality need not mimic past history.

12. Rabbi Hayyim Angel, *Introduction to Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective*, YU Sukkot To-Go 5770

From a human perspective, life is filled with contradictions. Kohelet's contradictions reflect aspects of the multifaceted human condition. Significantly, Kohelet's inclusion in Tanakh elevates human perception into the realm of the sacred, joining revelation and received wisdom as aspects of religious Truth...

Kohelet maintains both sides of the classical conflict: Gd is just, but there are injustices. While Kohelet cannot solve this dilemma, he discovers a productive response absent a solution. Once we can accept that the world appears unfair, we can realize that everything is a gift from Gd rather than a necessary consequence for our righteousness (Ramban quoted in Zer-Kavod on 9:11; cf. Rashbam on 3:12-13). We ultimately cannot fathom how Gd governs this world, but we can fulfill our religious obligations and grow from all experiences. Wisdom always is preferred to folly, even though wisdom is limited and the wise cannot guarantee themselves a better life than fools, and everyone dies regardless.

Approach #3: Living an anthropocentric life in a non-anthropocentric world

13. Rav Saadia Gaon, *Ha'Emunot v'haDeiot* 4

Customary practice and construction place the most honoured element in the centre of the elements that are not as honoured. We will begin from the smallest things and note that a grain kernel is in the middle of all of the leaves – this is because the kernel is more honoured than they are, for the plant's characteristics stem from it... And the yolk of an egg is in the centre, for the chick comes from there. And the human heart is in the middle of his chest because it is the dwelling of the spirit and of natural warmth... And as we see this apply to most things, and I have seen that the Earth is in the centre of the heavens, with the spheres revolving about it on all sides, this validates for us that the Earth is the goal of Creation. We then look at all of the Earth's elements, and see that the dirt and water are silent, and the animals cannot communicate [abstract thought], and all that remains is Man...

Gd informed us via His prophets that He gave Man an advantage over His other creations, as Genesis 1:28 says, 'And they will reign over the fish of the sea, etc.'... He gave us the ability to serve Him, and He put [the world] before us and gave us control. He placed freedom of choice in our domain and instructed us to choose the good, as Deuteronomy 30:19 says, 'See, I have placed before you today life and good, etc.'... And if one will think that some non-human entity is more significant, let him show us the advantages, or some of them, which another creature possesses, for one could not find such a thing.

14. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:13 (Friedlander translation)

Those who hold this view, namely, that the existence of man is the object of the whole creation, may be asked whether G-d could have created man without those previous creations, or whether man could only have come into existence after the creation of all other things. If they answer in the affirmative, that man could have been created even if, e.g., the heavens did not exist, they will be asked what is the object of all these things, since they do not exist for their own sake but for the sake of something that could exist without them?... We who believe in the Creation must admit that G-d could have created the Universe in a different manner as regards the causes and effects contained in it, and this would lead to the absurd conclusion that everything except man existed without any purpose, as the principal object, man, could have been brought into existence without the rest of the creation. I consider therefore the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible, and best in accordance with the results of philosophy; namely, that the Universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being exists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing.

15. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:14 (Friedlander translation)

The object of the spheres may be the continuance of successive genesis and destruction; and the succession of genesis and destruction serves, as has already been said, to give existence to mankind. This idea is supported by Biblical texts and sayings [of our Sages]. The philosopher replies thus: If the difference between the heavenly bodies and the transient individual members of the species consisted in their different sizes, this opinion could be maintained: but as the difference

consists in their essence, it remains improbable that the superior beings should be the means of giving existence to the lower ones.

16. We are not the centre

- Ephemeral 1:4
- Succession 2:18-21
- Corruption 3:16, 4:13, 10:16
- Sin 7:20 (and see Melachim I 8:46)
- Satisfaction 2:4-10
- Emotional states 9:6, 9:9

17. The contradictions, internal and external

- Incomprehensible 7:23
- Theodicy 7:15
- Distance 5:1

"Hevel"

18. Tanach

- Set 1
 - Devarim 22:21
 - Melachim I 16:13, 16:26, 17:15
 - Yirmiyahu 2:5, 8:19, 10:3, 10:8, 10:15, 14:22, 16:19, 23:16, 51:18
- Set 2
 - Yeshayahu 30:7, 49:4, 57:13
 - Yonah 2:9
 - Zechariah 10:2
 - Tehillim 31:7, 39:6, 39:7, 39:12, 62:10, 62:11, 78:33, 94:11, 144:4
 - Iyov 7:16, 9:29, 21:34, 27:12, 35:16
 - Eichah 4:17
- Set 3
 - Mishlei 13:11, 21:6, 31:30

19. Kohelet

- Overall 1:2, 12:8
- Unclear? 4:7, 5:9, 6:11, 7:6, 11:8
- Nothing, no substance, not enduring 2:1, 3:19, 5:6, 6:4, 6:12, 7:15, 9:9, 11:10
- Upsetting? 1:14, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:16, 6:9, 8:10
- Bad 2:15, 2:19, 2:21, 2:23, 4:8, 6:2, 8:14