Reasoning
Argumentation
and Persuasion

Aurel Ionica
Reasoning
Argumentation
and Persuasion
Reasoning, Argumentation, and Persuasion

With Special Application to Hebrew Wisdom Literature and Hebrew Wisdom Scholarship

by Aurel Ionica

IBTA

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I dedicate this work to the victims of intellectual murder which, from the time of Socrates, has been done legally and democratically in order to defend the cherished beliefs and privileges of those who have the power.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a resident of a “former” communist country from the “former” Soviet block I dreamt like many other unfortunate fellow citizens to come someday to the still current United States of America. Unlike many who tried to make it to the West behind “the iron curtain” — this time guarded by the West — in order to satisfy their hunger, I was driven by a different kind of hunger: for knowledge and understanding. To make it without any money into the Ph.D. program of a university like Vanderbilt — considered one of the most prestigious and expensive schools of the country — would make a fascinating success story. Unfortunately, mine is not. The hostility, the harassments, and the threats experienced by those who dare to make important discoveries are almost never acknowledged. I will do the same.

It is precisely because this work ended up being a solitary project that the help which I received at some points in my studies becomes the more significant. I specially thank The World Vision International who gave me an initial grant in order to begin studies at Vanderbilt. It is the only institution which supported me unconditionally at any point. I also want to thank my few friends who supported me in many ways, either to come to school, or to proofread manuscripts which I had to write and submit in great haste, or simply to provide encouragement when every effort was made to block or suppress the project.

The first part was developed and written during March and the beginning of April 2000. The second part was developed and written
during September and the middle of October 2000. The last part was developed and written during December 2001 and the first part of January 2002. The dissertation was publicly defended on March 26, 2002. Therefore, I want to acknowledge that this work would not exist or would not be as it is now if friends had not provided precious help at crucial moments: Mark Schoofs, Marilee Unterseher, Marie Margetsco, Daniel Costea, Horst and Lidia Müller, and Betty Yancey.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBQ       The Catholic Biblical Quarterly
GBS       Guides to Biblical Scholarship
JBL       Journal of Biblical Literature
JNSL      Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
LCL       Loeb Classical Library
Part One

REASONING, ARGUMENTATION, AND PERSUASION
INTRODUCTION

The writing of a doctoral dissertation seemed a good opportunity for me to deepen my understanding of two areas of interest that I have nourished for a long time: a better understanding of the Wisdom Literature and a better understanding of the use of reasoning and argumentation in order to achieve persuasion. Therefore the decision to choose a book like Ecclesiastes as the object of the investigation and to choose reasoning and argumentation as the most promising method of interpretation to better grasp the issues and the insights that the sages offer in their challenging writings came quite naturally. In spite of my enthusiasm, my confidence in the resources that logic and rhetoric had developed over their long history and in their applicability to some of the most argumentative parts of the Bible was met with skeptical reaction from the professors.

That both surprised and intrigued me. That biblical scholars had turned to methods and theories developed outside biblical studies in order to interpret texts is a well-established and accepted practice in biblical scholarship. That rhetoric had been baptized or circumcised and accepted in the community of methods for biblical interpretation since Muilenburg argued for a rhetorical approach to the Bible is another well-established fact in the history of biblical scholarship. That scholars like Yehoshua Gittay, David Clines, and Phyllis Trible have applied rhetorical criticism to the Bible with remarkable success is beyond any doubt, and that rhetorical criticism has become a reputable method of
interpretation that is studied both in introductory and advanced courses on biblical interpretation can be proved by the curriculum of every respectable theological school. That the study and the use of argumentation is a basic part of any rhetorical discourse is demonstrated by any textbook on rhetoric beginning with Aristotle. That formal logic has developed sophisticated ways of analyzing arguments and their validity with mathematical precision is also an unquestionable fact. I knew all these.

In spite of what I knew, the professors remained unconvinced. And I was in for some surprises. I discovered that rhetorical criticism as applied to the Bible had almost totally overlooked the study of argumentation. This situation could not be due to the fact that biblical scholars had not realized that argumentation was part of rhetoric or to the fact that it is hard to find arguments in the Bible. Quite the opposite, the Bible is probably one of the most polemic books. The problem was not with the Bible, but with the methods of analyzing arguments themselves: there was not just one method. It was an old problem that can be traced back to the greatest logical thinker, Aristotle. In his Organon he develops his magnificent theory of the syllogism and in The Art of Rhetoric he discusses informal arguments which he labels enthymemes. The syllogism, on the one hand, developed into formal or symbolic logic that has reached a tremendous level of sophistication and precision as a result of applying mathematics to truth functional statements, while the enthymeme, on the other, has remained the subject of rhetorical textbooks which have never been able to develop a satisfactory theory and a method of analyzing arguments. As a result, I found myself in an ambiguous situation: on the one hand, formal logic is able to achieve great precision and accuracy but can be applied only to arguments that are phrased according to its rigid constraints and therefore can hardly be used to analyze arguments that occur in ordinary discourse, while rhetoricians have focused on arguments that occur in ordinary language but have never been able to develop a theory of how such an argumentation works that goes beyond a mere classification of types of informal arguments.

Unfortunately the biblical argumentation is in the same precarious situation that any argumentation is: arguments are formulated in a form
and language that does not comply with the rigid rules of formal logic and for which rhetoricians have never been able to develop a theory and method that goes beyond a mere classification of types of informal arguments. In other words, formal logic has a wonderful theory and method that can rarely be applied, and informal argumentation provides mere classifications that are of virtually no critical value.

The problem is very old and the attempts to bridge the gap between formal arguments and rhetorical argumentation are not few. The hope that such bridging will be possible someday apparently was nourished by Aristotle himself who defined enthymemes or informal arguments as similar to syllogisms. The most remarkable attempts to bridge the gap between formal logic and informal argumentation have been made by Chaim Perelman and Stephen Toulmin. Unfortunately their attempts have failed and other theories have been advanced recently.

In trying to apply all these theories and methods to the book of Ecclesiastes I experienced to the full extent the vexation, the frustration, the vanity, the futility, and the feeling of chasing the wind which the brother loves so much to pontificate from the ivory tower of his un-penetrating wisdom. But what kept me going was my refusal to accept that there are two different kinds of reasoning: one employed in formal logic and one employed in informal argumentation. All previous attempts to bring formal logic and informal argumentation together tried to turn informal logic to behaving formal. This was a natural tendency since the formal logic was clearly the big brother and informal argumentation was the “little brother” that needed to grow and become like the “big brother.” This was the approach of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Toulmin’s approach was to some extent more radical because he shows that the standards of formal logic are too stringent for the informal logic to hope to meet them and therefore he tried to introduce some flexibility in the “big brother” as well.

Fully aware that neither brother will be able to turn into the other, I started to look for a sister. As soon as I started to look in a new direction I began to discern a sister that looked friendlier as I looked closer. I find it hard to make the claim that I have discovered the mechanism by which reasoning and persuasion work because any such claim can only be met with ridicule. One of the greatest myths that humanity has
developed is that the workings of the human mind are a mystery and will always be a mystery, therefore even to contemplate defying such an established myth is presumptuous. I do challenge that myth, though. That our minds should be alien to us is a thought that I find uncomfortable; after all, our minds are our best friends. I do not see any reason why we should not be able to understand how they work. Moreover, I do not see why an explanation of how the mind works should be so difficult that an average person is not able to understand. Whether I have made that discovery needs to be determined, but I do claim that the theory that I advance is easy to understand and to apply. Moreover, I do claim that it does explain not only the enthymemes which Aristotle advanced and was unable to analyze, but other arguments and literary productions such as syllogisms, maxims, similes, metaphors, narratives, humor, and so on. Furthermore, my theory—when applied to the Book of Ecclesiastes—shows that Qoheleth was a very original and bold thinker using a kind of reasoning that is probably unique. I do claim—and the application of this method shows—that Ecclesiastes is not the jumbled book made up of collections of sayings that contradict one another and common sense that traditional interpretations of the book have familiarized us with. Contrary to this long established tradition, Ecclesiastes is a very consistent book with a very carefully worked out theology. As a result of my analysis, I argue that Ecclesiastes is probably the most consistent book of the Bible as far as reasoning is concerned. The constant message that Qoheleth enforces over and over again is enjoyment of life in a stable world and the note of pessimism that is routinely read and gleaned from the book is arrived at because Qoheleth’s thinking is missed.

I do not suggest that Qoheleth’s position is unproblematic. Quite the opposite, he himself is aware of the difficulties that his reasoning raises and he faces some of those difficulties trying to meet them. The value of the method is seen in its ability to explain Qoheleth’s position, the difficulties that that position involves, the options that Qoheleth has in overcoming those difficulties and eventually the success with which Qoheleth is able to meet them. A method cannot do and should not do more than that. Whether in the end we agree with Qoheleth’s view of the world or with the line of his reasoning is not for a method to decide.
In making value judgments on the book, however, it is necessary to understand Qoheleth’s standpoint and his line of reasoning, and I do hope that this study brings that into full focus, possibly for the first time.

Finally, the theory which I call the rational square or Ionica’s square is an important critical tool to analyze the methodology used by scholars to interpret first level literary productions, to evaluate their ability to deal with the meaning of such works, and the argumentation they use in order to produce second level literary productions. I call first level literary productions works which do not claim to explain the meaning of another literary work, and I call second level literary productions works created as a result of the author—usually called interpreter—reflecting upon the meaning of another work. This distinction is possible because the rational square allows for the first time to clearly define meaning—a notoriously elusive notion particularly as postmodernism or poststructuralism has established. By defining meaning as a structure at the concept level, the rational square makes it possible not only to capture and analyze the reasoning, argumentation, and persuasion of first level literary works, but also the reasoning, argumentation, and persuasion of authors who produce works which claim to explain them.
Reasoning plays a very important role in any form of argumentation, and argumentation is an important part of rhetoric defined as “the art of persuasion.” Because reasoning, argumentation, persuasion, and rhetoric are related, they have been studied from ancient times. Old, if not even older, is the history of the biblical text and of its interpretation as well. In spite of that, studies of reasoning and argumentation related to the Bible are few, very recent, and marginal at best. Studies on persuasion in biblical interpretation are just emerging. This surprising lack of interest of the biblical scholarship in argumentation and persuasion is not due to their absence from the Bible. Quite the opposite, at closer examination, reasoning, argumentation, and persuasion—which are marginal in the biblical scholarship—turn out to be central in the Bible itself.

1“Rhetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.” Aristotle, The “Art” of Rhetoric (trans. John Henry Freese; LCL 193; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1926; repr., 1982), 1.2.1355b.
The Bible and Persuasion

Rhetoric is part of the very nature of the biblical text and of the biblically based religious traditions as well. We owe this remarkable insight to George A. Kennedy who points out how prominent is in the Bible the word—both spoken and written—when compared with other religious traditions:

Judaism originated in polytheism and the belief that among the many gods there was one special god of the Israelites. It developed into a monotheism that was centered on the divine word, enunciated in an authoritative sacred text. Judaism and its derivatives, Christianity and Islam, are speech-based religions to a much greater extent than Greco-Roman paganism. The stages of creation as described in the first chapter of Genesis (after the initial creation of heaven and earth) result from God’s speech: “God said, ‘Let there be light. . . .’” Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks directly to patriarchs and prophets, and they in turn convey his message by speech to the people, much as the early Greek bard regarded himself as inspired by, and owing his words to, the muses.2

Another important aspect of the religious traditions related to Judaism that makes rhetoric central to them is the place that interpretations of texts, preaching, and spiritual guidance play in such communities: “By Hellenistic times Jewish worship included reading from the law and the prophets and preaching by a rabbi, who interpreted the sacred texts and applied their message to the life of the congregation.”3

Unlike Judaism and Islam, however, Christianity had an extra reason to be a rhetorical religion: its missionary zeal. In contrast to other religious traditions, Christianity emerged as a messianic religion, assuming that those who did not share it were unavoidably lost. There-


3Ibid., 258.
fore, it was its responsibility to bring everyone within its realm in order for them to be saved. Because of its messianic claims, Christianity developed specialized rhetoric designed not just to nourish the insiders, but to win and convert the outsiders as well. While not all messianic ideologies are religious, all messianic ideologies develop necessarily specialized rhetoric for propagandistic purposes. A contemporary example of messianic ideology is communism, which claims that all other forms of social organization are evil and doomed to disappearance in order to be replaced by communism, the only kind of society that cures all social evils and eventually will conquer the whole world. Specialized rhetoric developed by messianic ideologies may receive different labels—“evangelism,” “proselytism,” “propaganda,” and so on—but the rhetoric is very similar, often using even similar means and language.4

Finally, Kennedy mentions another reason why rhetoric became important especially for Christianity. When religious traditions are met with opposition, hostility, and persecution, they develop another specialized form of rhetoric called apologetics:

Unlike Judaism, Christianity had missionary zeal—one reason it awakened Roman opposition. From the second century we have a considerable number of “apologetic” works in both Greek and Latin, in the form of speeches, letters, or dialogues, which were addressed to audiences educated in rhetoric and sought to explain Christianity and to defend it against slanders heaped upon it by its opponents. Charges included the allegation that Christians met at dawn to kill small children, drink their blood, and eat their flesh.5

Without diminishing the importance of the reasons listed by Kennedy why the Bible is an outstanding rhetorical text, I would like to add one more. Unlike many great books which at some time fell into

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4A striking example is the use of the phrase “new man” both by Jesus and communist propagandists.

5Kennedy, New History, 258.
oblivion and out of use—indeed, some have been completely lost—the Bible never ceased to remain a “live” text even after the languages in which it was written became “dead.” The Bible always spoke, people listened, and found it persuasive. This does not mean that everyone always agreed with everything that the Bible said. But there were always enough people who found in the Bible enough to hold to and to turn to.

Rhetorical Criticism and Biblical Criticism

In spite of the long history of both rhetoric and the biblical text, rhetorical criticism is a latecomer among the array of tools, methods, and approaches available to biblical scholars in their attempt to understand the Bible. The credit for the new approach in interpreting the Bible is usually given to James Muilenburg who made the connection between the Bible and rhetoric in his Presidential Address entitled “Form Criticism and Beyond,” delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature on December 8, 1968. As he explained in his address, by “beyond” he meant rhetorical criticism.

Taking into account how central rhetoric is to the Bible, Muilenburg’s proposal to look at the rhetorical features of the Bible seems odd by its sense of discovery. When he suggested applying rhetoric to the Bible, however, he did not mean rhetoric as it had been understood from ancient times. What prompted him to propose turning to rhetoric was not the discovery of rhetoric and its potential for understanding the Bible, but rather the inadequacy of the biblical interpretation as he viewed it at the time when he made the proposal. As the title of his address makes clear, form criticism—which was the most sophisticated and fruitful historical-critical method used for the interpretation of the Bible at that time—was inadequate. By emphasizing common patterns that oral and literary productions took, form criticism was deficient because: it overlooked the role played by convention and custom in literary compositions, it tended to read all

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7 Ibid., 4.
pericopes in an historical context although some reflected experiences that were unique to individuals and rooted in their psyche,\(^8\) it viewed literary types as fixed although often they were imitated and showed fluidity,\(^9\) and form criticism could not take into account features of style.\(^10\) His own definition of rhetorical criticism is:

> What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.\(^11\)

As he himself explained, rhetorical criticism was interested in the literary composition and the stylistic features of the text, that is, those features of the text that form criticism systematically missed or overlooked because of its rigid methodology.

Although Muilenburg was aware that by proposing to investigate the stylistic features of the Bible as rhetoric he was following a tradition of scholarship that went back to Jerome and many rabbis,\(^12\) he did not seem to be aware that rhetoric itself had a long history and had its own categories and rules of creating and analyzing discourse that went as far back as Aristotle. Although rhetoric had never overlooked style, by defining rhetorical criticism as the study of the stylistic features of the text, Muilenburg reduced rhetoric to only one aspect of it.

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\(^8\)Ibid., 5–6.

\(^9\)Ibid., 7.

\(^10\)Ibid., 7–8.

\(^11\)Ibid., 8.

\(^12\)Ibid.
Muilenburg’s proposal was followed by several scholars\(^\text{13}\) who became interested in identifying different stylistic features of the text, features for which form criticism had no categories and room. The form that some passages took was no longer seen as the product of an anonymous oral tradition that had developed in a typical life setting, but rather as the result of the creativity of the individual(s) who produced the text. Such stylistic features embellished the text and made it pleasing, but not necessarily persuasive.

\textit{Rhetorical Criticism and Persuasion}

The realization that rhetorical criticism needs to study a text and its literary devices from the point of view of its persuasiveness came from Yehoshua Gitay. He recognized the polemical nature of much of the prophetic discourse and its obvious goal to persuade. In order to make persuasion the center of rhetorical analysis he realized that he had to go beyond Muilenburg’s concern with composition and turn to rhetoric as it has been traditionally understood:

My approach follows the classical definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion. . . . It is obvious that Muilenburg’s definition and use of the term rhetoric does not understand rhetoric as the art of persuasion. That is to say, both Muilenburg and his followers are concerned with style as a functional device for determining the literary unit and its structure, but their analysis is not oriented towards rhetoric as the pragmatic art of persuasion.\(^\text{14}\)

By “classical definition of rhetoric” Gitay refers to Aristotle: “The definition of rhetoric offered by Aristotle may still be considered classi-


cal: ‘The faculty [power] of discovering in the particular case what are the available means of persuasion.’”¹⁵ Not only does he accept Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric, but he even follows the framework that Aristotle established: “In order, however, to establish some guiding criteria for the present study of DI’s [Deutero-Isaiah’s] rhetoric, the framework of classical rhetoric will be adopted.”¹⁶ In each passage that he analyzes he looks for the three means of persuasion that Aristotle had identified: “Under this general category, Aristotle spoke about three modes of persuasion: (a) logos, the rational appeal; (b) pathos, the emotional appeal; and (c) ethos, the ethical appeal.”¹⁷ Gitay not only makes persuasion the focus of analysis, but recognizes the role that argumentation plays in achieving persuasion and therefore he tries to identify arguments in every passage he analyzes. Actually identifying arguments is the very first step in his rhetorical analysis.

In spite of Gitay’s interest in persuasion and the prominent role that argumentation plays in achieving persuasion, his analysis of argumentation rarely goes beyond identifying the passage where an argument is used and labeling it as an enthymeme, the term that Aristotle coined to refer to informal arguments. This does not mean that Gitay is not interested in the stylistic features of the text. He regularly points out stylistic devices such as: repetition, anaphora, puns, alliterations, assonance, rhetorical questions, similes, metaphors, hyperboles, satire, meter, chiasms, exaggeration, sarcasm, irony, pleonasm, and so on. Gitay deserves the credit, however, for calling our attention to the role that arguments or logos play in persuasion and bringing persuasion to the center of rhetorical analysis. Moreover, his interest in argumentation as the primary means of persuasion awakened his interest in

¹⁵Ibid., 35.
¹⁶Ibid., 36.
¹⁷Ibid., 37.
Wisdom Literature where argumentation is extensively used due to its polemical nature.¹⁸ This study is based on the same realization.

Gitay is not alone as far as his interest in how argumentation and persuasion are used in the Bible. John D. Moores, for instance, sees Paul’s arguments in Romans both influenced by the Greek tradition and problematic from that perspective:

Paul’s propensity for applying to the data of divine revelation a technique of syllogistic appraisal is clearly part of his Greek inheritance, and if his use of it is such as to give a Greek a headache, his Jewishness can hardly have failed to ensure it meant headaches for him too. But if it did he seems to have thrived on them.¹⁹

With this emphasis on persuasion, rhetorical criticism of the Bible reconnected with classical rhetoric, having Aristotle as its towering figure.

**The Relation Between Argumentation and Persuasion**

Gitay accepts Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion and the primary role that arguments or *logos* play in persuasion, but Aristotle never defines what persuasion itself is. He seems to consider self-evident a notion that is much debated and variously defined today. Richard M. Perloff offers the following summary of the definitions that have been proposed by scholars:

a communication process in which the communicator seeks to elicit a desired response from his receiver (Andersen, 1971, p. 6).

that activity in which speaker and listener are conjoined and in which the speaker consciously attempts to influence the behavior of the

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The Relation Between Argumentation and Persuasion


Then he offers his own definition:

Although there is not one definition of persuasion that all scholars accept, there is a general consensus that persuasion is an activity or process in which a communicator attempts to induce a change in the belief, attitude, or behavior of another person or group of persons through the transmission of a message in a context in which the persuadee has some degree of free choice.21

Although these definitions seem to be divergent, they all see persuasion from the point of view of the persuader: conscious effort, attempt, sending a message, inducing change, and so on. They all seem to miss an important detail, that is, that persuasion is something that happens in the persuadee and from that perspective those descriptions are inadequate. Viewed from the point of view of a persuadee, persuasion need not be a “conscious effort”; indeed, it may not be conscious


21Ibid.
at all. It does not need to be intended or attempted and it is not necessarily perceived as a change. Therefore it seems that a proper definition of persuasion should refer to what happens in the persuadee rather than in the persuader. Viewed from this perspective, persuasion is an acceptance by someone of a message or a course of action that is communicated by someone else.

According to this definition, persuasion may take many forms. It may occur when intended by the persuader, but it may occur when it is not intended. It may occur in the way in which is intended, but it may occur in ways that are not intended. Persuasion may occur when the persuadees are aware that they are a target of persuasion, but it may occur when they are not aware that such an attempt is being made, and arguably the most efficient forms of persuasion take place when the persuadees are either unaware or are only vaguely aware that persuasion is intended.

Although Aristotle did not provide a definition of persuasion, he did offer a list of the means of persuasion. They include the moral character of the speaker, the emotions that are stirred in the listener, and the reasoning that is advanced by means of arguments. The list omits at least two more important means of persuasion: force and art.

Contrary to widespread opinions, probably the most efficient means of persuasion is force. Because coercion is considered unethical in the Western thinking, force is discarded as a means of persuasion because its achievement is considered illegitimate. Some of the definitions of persuasion mentioned earlier specifically required that the persuadee enjoys some freedom. The fact, however, that some means of persuasion may be morally questionable has nothing to do with their ability to cause a required course of action to be accepted. It is undeniable that people do accept what is expected of them more easily and readily when some form of coercion is used, no matter how problematic that may seem ethically. When people are rewarded for their compliance and threatened with punishment for resisting, they tend to comply to do or accept things that otherwise they would not.

The rejection of force as a means of persuasion is based on the assumption that persuasion or acceptance by the persuadee of a message or a course of action should come as something that a persuadee wants
The Relation Between Argumentation and Persuasion

and freely and willingly chooses. But this assumption is unfounded. If people want to do or believe something, they can choose to do or believe it without any need of persuasion. The very need of persuasion presupposes that the persuadee would not choose to believe or follow the course of action desired by the persuader. Therefore, persuasion presupposes some normal resistance from the persuadee, a resistance which is somehow overcome in the process of persuasion so that the persuadee moves from resistance to acceptance. As a result, persuasion is never something that comes from the inside of the persuadee, but rather as something that comes from outside and forces itself upon the persuadee. Therefore persuasion—even when threats and punishments are not involved—has a compelling force to which the persuadee eventually no longer resists and moves to the position of acceptance. The use of force in terms of threats or rewards may be morally wrong, but that has nothing to do with its effectiveness.

Another means of persuasion that Aristotle does not consider is art. To define art is notoriously difficult, therefore I will define it as what is perceived as pleasing and beautiful. The beauty and the pleasure that a text provides consists mainly in its literary artistry and has to do with the compositional skill of the author(s). Rhetorical criticism, as defined by Muilenburg, tried to capture the literary artistry of the biblical text and by doing so, it explained why the text was appealing to the reader and provided gratification.

Even when the stylistic features of a text may have been aimed at providing pleasure and aesthetic gratification to the reader and not to convey persuasion necessarily, pleasure and persuasion are not unrelated. What is pleasing is more easily accepted therefore the way in which something is said has a persuasive dimension. Although Aristotle does not mention art or esthetics as a means of persuasion, he does include in his Rhetoric a section on style. He insists that persuasive discourse should follow literary standards, and he provided practical advice about how language should be used. The employment of literary devices makes what is being said interesting, innovative, surprising, and gratifying to the audience, so that it becomes more easily accepted and therefore persuasive.
In order to illustrate that literary devices do have great persuasive power, let us consider the following statements:

(1) The cross is the dumpster for our sins
(2) Jesus nailed our sins on the cross

Although both statements say the same thing—that is, that the cross is the means by which we are released from our sins—each statement says it differently. The first statement is more direct and its meaning more readily available. The second statement, however, conveys that idea indirectly, by using nailing as a metaphor. Its meaning is more challenging because the persuadee needs to discover in the image of nailing the idea of the destruction of sins and therefore of their remission. But in the process of discovering that meaning, in the same image of nailing, the persuadee discovers a reference to Jesus’ nailing on the cross and understands the cross to be the means for the remissions of the sins as a result of Jesus’ death on it. By discovering that double meaning which is so common in metaphors, the persuadee experiences pleasure and intellectual gratification, and perceives the second statement as nice, pleasant, and acceptable, therefore persuasive. The challenge of discovering the meaning, instead of being an obstacle for the persuadee to accept the message, becomes a means. By contrast, the first statement requires no imagination because its meaning is quite plain, and most likely will be rejected even by those who admit that “there is truth” in what it says. Art may be sought for the pleasure and not the persuasion it provides, but it achieves its goal to persuade more easily precisely because it is not expected or suspected of doing that.

Another means of persuasion—identified by Aristotle himself—is the character of the persuader. Persuasion is achieved both by who speaks and by the manner in which speaking takes place: “The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence.”²² He insists—against rhetoricians that claimed that persuasion did not depend on how the

²²Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1.1.1356a4.
The Relation Between Argumentation and Persuasion

Contrary to the way persuasion is supposed to take place, some things are accepted not on their own merits but based on who says them. Audiences tend to lump together the messenger and the message and when the messenger is already accepted by the audience, what the messenger says is automatically accepted. This kind of persuasion is widely used in commercials. Companies pay exorbitant amounts of money to celebrities to say things in commercials which anyone else could as easily say because people gladly embrace what their admired heroes advocate. When the same celebrities are involved in scandals, however, such commercials are hastily dropped.

According to Aristotle, another important means of persuasion is pathos, or the emotional appeal. Audiences usually accept what mediates positive emotions and reject what induces negative ones. Again, it is the commercials that best illustrate the role of emotions in persuasion. Products are advertised not by providing information about the product, but rather by suggesting positive emotions that one experiences in connection with the product and negative emotions that are associated with the products of the competition. A recent commercial advertising a specific brand of tires showed a baby sitting in the center of a car tire and invited the viewers to buy that brand of tire “because so much is riding on your tires.” The commercial did not provide any information about the safety of those tires, about how many miles they were expected to go, or about the price. The commercial, however, counted on the fact that the protection for their kids is one of the strongest emotions that parents have and therefore those who buy tires motivated by that emotion would buy expensive tires thinking that expensive tires must be necessarily safer. The commercial could not openly claim that expensive tires are necessarily safer because some viewers, challenged to accept that claim as true, would

23Ibid.

24Michelin tires, Michelin, advertisement.
have realized that a nail on the road can penetrate the most expensive tire just as easily as it would penetrate the cheapest one. Moreover, the safety of the tires does not depend exclusively on their quality, but on their wear and condition, on the driving habits, and especially on the alignment of the car. Advertisers know that the informed buyers are not always the best customers. Emotions have a strange way of playing down what we know.

Finally, a major means of persuasion is reasoning which is conveyed by means of arguments. They appeal to the mind. Human beings, due to their rationality, tend to view things that are accepted as being related. Arguments try to capture that relatedness between what has already been accepted and what is going to be accepted next, therefore they typically have two parts: the premises—or the statements that are assumed to be accepted as true by the audience—and the conclusion that needs to be discovered as related to and following from those premises.

The study of reasoning was prominent in Aristotle’s philosophical enterprise and his syllogistic is considered his most outstanding and lasting achievement. The object of this study is to focus on persuasion as accomplished by argumentation and reasoning while admitting that persuasion has many components.

The presentation of the means of persuasion was done from the point of view of their effectiveness and therefore it was done from the point of view of the persuader. From the point of view of the persuadee, however, some of them may be questionable, if not problematic, in spite of their effectiveness, or precisely because of that. As I pointed out when I discussed force, its use may be unacceptable particularly in cultures that claim to value the freedom of the individual. Similarly, some means may try to achieve persuasion in such a way that the persuadees are not aware that they are subject to persuasion, and these means tend to be regarded as illegitimate because persuasion that eludes consciousness is unacceptable and therefore non-existent. Usually art is not perceived as a means of persuasion precisely because it does not make overt claims and those who experience it may not be aware that they are subject to persuasion. The character of an authority can be another questionable means of persuasion. Authority has be-
come eroded in modern cultures and religious communities because of the belief that the value of what is being said should be judged on the basis of its own merits rather than on the basis of who is saying it. Persuasion that is achieved based on the character of the persuader is also questionable because often it escapes consciousness. And finally the emotional appeal is usually regarded as manipulation rather than persuasion because of the belief that decisions which are made under emotions are later reversed when emotions fade away. Emotional impulses are usually seen as contrary to sound judgment and therefore training and education in schools try to discourage them and to develop critical thinking that is expected to resist improper forms of persuasion.

There is no wonder that persuasion—particularly legitimate persuasion—has been viewed as the ability to argue and reason, and the only legitimate persuasion is that which the persuadee arrives at by ways of proper reasoning. Courses and training in rhetoric has been limited in modern times almost exclusively to the study of logic, argumentation, and training in debates. In some schools rhetorical abilities are tested almost exclusively through debates.

Unfortunately this one-sided presentation of persuasion as being logic and argumentation that the academia has created has rendered people more vulnerable to persuasion instead of helping them become more aware of it when it takes place and how it takes place. Contrary to what we decide persuasion should be, the fact is that it takes all the forms mentioned above and persuasion works best when we are not aware of it. The best way to resist it is to develop the ability to recognize it.

**The Means of Persuasion and the Bible**

In the light of what has been said above about the means of persuasion, it is unfortunate that persuasion does not feature more prominently in the biblical scholarship. As we have seen, attention to the relationship between the Bible and persuasion came from the insights of Yehoshua Gitay. Therefore, it is surprising that biblical
scholars have not been interested in persuasion because even a casual look at the means of persuasion explains why the Bible is such a persuasive book.

It may sound strange, but in spite of the modern sensitivities to the use of force as a means of persuasion, the Bible is full of it. One of the attributes of God is “omnipotence,” which means all powerful. God is almost never described as passive but rather as actively using that power to enforce God’s will. The doctrine of rewards and punishments is a prominent doctrine in most parts of the Bible, a doctrine that is credited to the deuteronomist editor, one of the latest and most thorough revisionist who gave the Old Testament/TANAKH its final form. That the deuteronomist editor brought that doctrine to the prominence that it has in the Old Testament/TANAKH is very likely, but that that doctrine originated so late is hardly believable. The same doctrine is prominent in much of the prophetic discourse as well which arguably is older. When bad things happened, prophets rushed to explain them as just punishments for sins that they had denounced but people were slow to heed, and they promised better times on condition of obedience. Whether people liked it or not what they were told in the name of God, they often complied because they felt they had no choice.

Fortunately the God of the Bible is not a god that always thunders. What God does provides pleasure and enjoyment. Significantly, the Bible begins with the creation and every act of creation concludes with God’s esthetical reaction to what had been created. Even the origin of disobedience in the Garden of Eden and the persuasion that the serpent achieved is explained as the result of the pleasure that Eve experienced in looking at the “forbidden tree” and tasting its fruit. Music, the cultic masterpieces, and the literary devices that rhetorical criticism started to discover as a result of Muilenburg’s program are no doubt means of persuasion.

The ethical appeal is also important. Many things the Bible says are accepted because of who says them. Typically the prophets introduce their utterances by the phrase “thus says the Lord,” and the rhetorical power of this formula in terms of persuasiveness can hardly be overes-
The Means of Persuasion and the Bible

God is the central character in the Bible and when God speaks, everyone is expected to listen. But God is not the only character. If something is said by Moses, Jesus, Isaiah, Paul, David, and so on, it makes a difference in how it is received and accepted by believers. It is widely recognized by biblical scholars that we do not know who wrote some books in the Bible although they were attributed to prominent Bible characters in order to facilitate their acceptance.

The Bible uses emotional appeal also. The positive emotions are associated with God and obedience to God, such as: life, freedom, hope, love, peace, and so on, while the negative emotions, such as: fear, death, and hatred are associated with the alienation from God. The concept of paradise or heaven, and that of hell, are primarily emotional entities developed for rhetorical and persuasive purposes.

Finally, the Bible does contain argumentation. It is a polemical book. Isaiah’s arguments of ridiculing idol worshiping are quite famous. The Wisdom Literature is arguably the most polemic. It is the Wisdom Literature that questions the doctrine of rewards and punishments. In Job that doctrine is openly rejected right from the beginning by showing that a righteous person like Job can and does suffer. No wonder that the book turns into extended arguments. In Wisdom Literature God does not talk much. Indeed, God’s silence is precisely what Job challenges over and over again. The same is true in Ecclesiastes. Wisdom comes from understanding the way things are without God’s constant intervention in the order of things. God is not necessarily good and in Job that goodness is seriously and openly questioned. The characters in Wisdom Literature are not prominent. Job is unknown from other sources—possibly a non-Israelite—and the credit that a questionable character like Solomon brought in order to make Proverbs and Ecclesiastes accepted and persuasive is questionable at best. The emotional appeal is not prominent in Wisdom Literature either. The dominant emotions in Wisdom Literature are: suffering, death, futility, alienation from God, and so on. No wonder that Job and Ecclesiastes are not the most “enjoyed” books in the Bible. The only means of persuasion that Wisdom Literature abounds in are
arguments. And those arguments are not easy to dismiss. Books like Job and Ecclesiastes got into the canon because of their persuasiveness, and that persuasiveness came not from the fact that people liked what they said. Quite the opposite, they were persuasive because they could not be refuted. In other words, their persuasiveness rests in the power of their arguments. It is that aspect of persuasion that comes from reasoning and argumentation that has prompted this study.
ARISTOTLE’S METHOD IN DEVELOPING HIS SYLLOGISTIC

Any study of reasoning and argumentation would necessarily have to start with Aristotle, without doubt the greatest logical thinker of all times. He defined rhetorical arguments (which he labeled enthymemes) and developed the theory of syllogisms (which has become the foundation for formal logic). Moreover, he suggested that rhetorical arguments were similar to syllogisms, which has established the belief that good arguments must be similar to the arguments whose validity can be proved by formal logic. As a result, most schools require students who pursue degrees in areas where reasoning and argumentation play a major role to take formal logic as part of their training. Just as Aristotle regarded rhetorical arguments or enthymemes as related to syllogisms, so also reasoning and argumentation are viewed today as related to formal logic. It is that relationship between reasoning on the one hand, and the syllogism and formal logic on the other, that we need to look at in what follows.

Aristotle’s Syllogistic

Aristotle’s syllogistic is considered the greatest achievement in logical thinking because it establishes a pattern for proper form of arguments that is necessary both for scientific reasoning and rhetorical
persuasion as well. When a syllogism is mentioned, the classical example that comes to mind is the following:

All humans are mortal
Socrates is human
Therefore Socrates is mortal

In spite of its popularity, the above syllogism does not quite fit the way Aristotle defined syllogisms. According to him, “a syllogism is a form of words in which, when certain assumptions are made, something other than what has been assumed necessarily [ἀνὴρ ἄνθρωπος ἐστι] follows from the fact that the assumptions are such.”25 As far as the forms that statements must take in order to make up a syllogism is concerned, Aristotle offers the following rules:

A premise is an affirmative or negative statement of something about some subject. This statement may be universal or particular or indefinite. By universal I mean a statement which applies to all, or to none, of the subject; by particular, a statement which applies to some of the subject, or does not apply to some, or does not apply to all.26

According to Aristotle, the only statements that can make a syllogism must take one of the following four forms: “all humans are animals”—which he calls a universal statement; “no humans are animals”—which he calls a universal negative statement; “some humans are animals”—which he calls a particular affirmative statement; and “some humans are not animals”—which he calls a particular negative statement. Statements like “Socrates is human” and “Socrates is mortal” do not take any of those four forms and therefore they would not qualify to be part of a syllogism.

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26Ibid., 24a17–20.
It was Aristotle’s remarkable insight that in order for an argument to be analyzed, all its parts must take some specific form. Aristotle’s choice of only four kinds of statements that could make an argument may seem too rigid and narrow, therefore, modern formal logic has widely increased the kinds of statements that can make an argument, but both syllogisms and formal logic are built on the same idea: the statements that make up an argument must comply with rigid rules as far as their form is concerned.

Another remarkable idea that Aristotle had was to introduce letters as variables to represent different parts of an argument. With this insight, Aristotle was able to represent the four kinds of statements that he chose for syllogisms using letters: “all A are B,” “no A is B,” “some A are B,” and “some A are not B.” For some reason Aristotle does not use the word “to be,” but rather “to belong” or “to be predicated of”: “For if A is predicated of all B, and B of all C, A must necessarily be predicated of all C.”27 By using letters as variables, the relationships that statements convey are no longer viewed in terms of their “content” or what they refer to, but rather in terms of relationships that depend purely on the form of the statements regardless of the words that would replace the variables. For instance, the “Socrates” syllogism would take the following form when A stands for “humans,” B stands for “mortal,” and C stands for Socrates:

All A are B  
C is A  
Therefore C is B

By using statements in which words were replaced with variables, Aristotle defined logical relationships as being conveyed purely by the form that statements take so that an argument form can be “filled” with an indefinite number of “contents” and preserve its validity. Again, modern logic has greatly increased the forms that statements and arguments can take, but formal logic has only expanded Aristotle’s insight

27Ibid., 25b38–39.
that logical relationship in arguments are a matter of the forms that statements take when words are replaced by variables.

**Logical Relationships and the Opposition True/False**

In choosing the four kinds of statements that can make up a syllogism Aristotle seems to have been concerned with another feature that is important in order to make demonstration possible: the opposition between true and false statements. Although when he introduces the four kinds of statements in Prior Analytics Aristotle does not indicate that they are statements that can be true or false, a lengthy discussion of various oppositions—including the true/false ones—is found in The Categories and On Interpretation, the two books that function as an introduction to The Organon. Aristotle is aware that statements cover a wide variety of relationships but he decides that logical relationships can be established only among statements that can have only one of two values: they can be either true or false. He considers various oppositions in language in order to find out which ones express unequivocally the truth value of statements. Oppositions that can be both true and false at the same time do not qualify to convey logical relations. He uses two terms to refer to oppositions—enantipon and antikeimenon—but he is interested in oppositions that are mutually exclusive in the sense that they cannot be both true and false at the same time; and for such a narrowly defined opposition he does not have an appropriate word. In the end he concludes that only indicative affirmative and negative statements capture the truth value of language, and the four statements that he sets apart in the beginning of Prior Analytics must be the result of this choice. Before he reaches the conclusion that only indicative affirmative and negative statements are truth functional, he considers, however, other kinds of oppositions.

The first category of oppositions that Aristotle looks at is that of primary substances—or what we would call individual entities—and secondary substances—or what we would call classes of things. Of both primary and secondary substances Aristotle concludes that they cannot have contraries:
Substances never have contraries \([\text{e}h\text{ant}i\text{on}]\). How could first substances have them—this man, for example, that animal? Nothing is contrary \([\text{e}h\text{ant}i\text{on}]\) to them. And species and genus have none. This particular characteristic belongs not to substance alone. For it holds of a good many things and, among them, for instance, of quantity.\(^{28}\)

Although substances cannot have contraries, they can accept contrary predications or qualifications:

But what is most characteristic of substance appears to be this: that, although it remains, notwithstanding, numerically one and the same, it is capable of being the recipient of contrary qualifications \([\text{e}h\text{ant}i\text{on}]\). Of things that are other than substance we could hardly adduce an example possessed of this characteristic. For instance, a particular color, numerically one and the same, can in no wise be both black and white, and an action, if one and the same, can in no wise be both good and bad. So of everything other than substance. But substance, remaining the same, yet admits of such contrary qualities \([\text{e}h\text{ant}i\text{on}]\). One and the same individual at one time is white, warm or good, at another time black, cold or bad. This is not so with anything else, though it might be maintained that assertions or opinions admitted of contraries. That is to say, the same statement may appear to be both true \([\text{a}l\text{h}qh]\) and false \([y\text{eud}]\).\(^{29}\)

What Aristotle is saying is that statements that predicate opposing qualities do not make such statements necessarily mutually exclusive because they can be both true and false at the same time. And indeed, there is no room in his syllogistic for such statements.

Similarly, Aristotle considers the kind of oppositions obtained by using quantity qualifiers:


\(^{29}\)Ibid., 5.4a10–24.
Quantities never have contraries [ἐναντίον]. This will be perfectly clear in the case of all definite quantities, whereby I mean, for example, “two cubits” or “three cubits long” or a surface or something of that sort. These, it is clear, have no contraries [ἐναντίον]. But possibly someone may say, “great” and “small,” “much” and “little” are contraries [ἐναντίον]. These are, however, more properly regarded as terms of relation: as such, things are not great or small. They are so by comparison only. Thus a hill is called small, a grain large; but we really mean greater or smaller than similar things of the kind, for we look to some external standard. If such terms were used absolutely, we never should call a hill small, as we never should call a grain large. So, again, we may very well say that a village has many inhabitants, a city like Athens but few, though the latter are many times more; or we say that a house contains many, while those in the theater are few, though they greatly outnumber the others. While “two cubits,” “three cubits long” and the like, therefore, signify quantity, “great,” “small” and the like signify not a quantity but rather a relation, implying some external standard or something above and beyond them. The latter, then, plainly are relative.

Quantities, moreover, or not, there is nothing that is contrary to them [ἐναντίον].

Again, what Aristotle argues is that relative terms, like “great” or “small,” can never make mutually exclusive statements since something can be both great and small at the same time. And indeed, quantity qualifiers are not found in syllogistic statements because they do not make mutually exclusive statements from the point of view of their truth value:

Substance, no doubt, is receptive of contrary [ἐναντίον] qualifications, but not in such way that a man at the same time is both sick and healthy, a thing black and white simultaneously. Neither can anything else be at any time thus qualified. Then, if “great,” “small” and so forth were contrary [ἐναντίον], these to themselves would be contrary [ἐναντίον]. Granted for argument’s sake both the “great” is the

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30Ibid., 6.5b12–32.
contrary \(\text{enanti/on}\) of “small” and that one and the same thing can be at the same moment both great and small, “great” or “small” to itself will be contrary \(\text{enanti/on}\). This is, however, impossible: nothing to itself can be contrary. Therefore, we cannot describe “great” and “small,” “much” and “little” as contraries. Neither could such terms have contraries, even though someone should call them terms not of relation but of quantity.\(^31\)

But even when Aristotle has to admit that some qualifying terms—which he calls relatives—do make opposite statements, they are not really mutually exclusive:

Relatives sometimes have contraries. Virtue is contrary to vice, either term itself being a relative; knowledge to ignorance also. By no means all relative terms can, however, be said to have contraries. “Double” and “triple” have none, nor, indeed, any terms of that sort.\(^32\)

Since opposing statements that involve such “relatives” do not lead to mutually exclusive statements as far as their truth value is concerned, they do not qualify to be parts of syllogisms either.

A similar situation is with other quantity qualifiers which Aristotle calls “correlatives”:

Correlatives are commonly held to come into existence together, and this for the most part is true, as, for instance, of double and half. That a half exists means that the double of which it is half must exist. The existence of a master involves the existence also of a slave. If a slave exists, then must a master. And so in all similar cases. Moreover, this holds of them also: to cancel one cancels the other. For instance, no double, no half, and, per contra, no half, then no double: and so with all similar terms. However, the view that correlatives come into being together does not appear true at all times, for it seems that the object of knowledge is prior to, exists before, knowledge \([\text{episthēmē}]\).

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 6.6a1–11.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 7.6b15–19.
We gain knowledge [ἐπίσθαμη/ἐπιστήμη], commonly speaking, of things that already exist, for in very few cases or none can our knowledge have come into being along with its own proper object.  

As the above passage and the discussion that follows it make clear, Aristotle considers various oppositions in order to build an epistemology, or a theory of true knowledge. This purpose will be again specifically stated when he introduces his syllogistic statements in Prior Analytics.  

Continuing his discussion of oppositions such as half and double Aristotle notices that they do not lead to mutually exclusive statements because their truth value is circumstantial. Some qualifying terms—such as just and unjust—may lead to opposing statements, but other qualifications, such as yellow, do not do so, and even when opposing statements do result, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

Qualities admit contrariety [ἐναντιόθεν]—not in all cases, however. Justice and injustice are contraries [ἐναντίον], blackness and whiteness and so on. The things that are called such and such on account of their having these qualities also fall into this class. For the just and the unjust are contraries, the black and the white thing and so on. But this is not so in all cases. Red, yellow and similar colors are qualities that have no contraries [ἐναντίον].  

In the end of The Categories Aristotle summarizes various ways in which things can be paired as opposites:

We have now said enough on the subject of the categories that we proposed, and with opposites [ἀντικείμενα] next we must deal and the various senses of the word. For we call things opposed [ἀντίκεισθαι] in four ways—first of all, as correlatives are, either term of each pair to the other; in the next place, as contraries [ἐναντία] are;

33Ibid., 7.7b15–27.

34Ibid., 8.10b13–17.
in the third place, as privatives [στεφσίς] to positives [εξίς]; lastly, as affirmatives [καταφσίς] to negatives [αποφσίς]. Speaking in outline, I mean that correlative that are opposed [αντικεῖται] are expressions like “double” and “half,” while of contraries [εναντία] that are opposed we may take “good” and “bad” for examples. Of privative [στεφσίς] and positive [εξίς] terms we may here mention “blindness” and “sight,” “he is sitting” and “he is not sitting” in the case of affirmatives [καταφσίς] and negatives [αποφσίς].35

Although all these oppositions may express some kind of relationship, not all of them involve logical necessity. In order to express logical relationships, oppositions need to involve logical necessity so that logical implication becomes possible. If knowing what is the case for one of the opposing terms does not necessarily imply what is the case for the other of the opposing terms, then that opposition cannot be used for logical relations, as Aristotle makes abundantly clear:

Opposites [εναντία] are no way dependent, when contraries, the one upon the other but are contrary [εναντίον] one to the other. The good is not called, for example, the good of the bad but its contrary [εναντίον]. Similarly, white is not known as the white of the black but its contrary [εναντίον]. Thus these two kinds of opposition [αντικείσφεις] are entirely distinct from one another. But contraries [εναντία] such that the subjects in which they are naturally found or of which they can be predicated must needs [ανάγκαιον] contain the one or the other—these never can have intermediates. When there is no such necessity [ανάγκαιον], then the reverse is the case, and they always will have an intermediate. For example, both health and disease may be said to be naturally present in the bodies of all living things, and in consequence one or the other must be present in animal bodies. We predicate both odd and even in similar manner of number; in consequence, one or the other must [ανάγκαιον] always be present in number. Now, health and disease, odd and even, have no intermediate between them. But where there is no such necessity [ανάγκαιον], then the reverse is the case. For example, both blackness

and whiteness are naturally present in body, but neither need be in a body. For not every body existing must either be black or be white. Then we predicate goodness and badness of man, as of many things else. Neither goodness nor badness, however, although they are predicated of them, is present of necessity [a ἅρκαί ὁν] in them. Not all things are good or are bad. Now, such contraries have intermediates. Between black and white, for example, are sallow and gray and so forth, while between good and bad we have that which is neither the one nor the other. And some intermediate qualities have their own recognized names. We may take as examples again gray and sallow and similar colors, intermediate between white and black. In some of the cases, however, to name them were no easy matter. We then must define the intermediate as that which is neither extreme—“neither good nor yet bad,” for example, “neither just nor unjust,” and so forth.36

By making the requirement that, in order to convey logical relationships, oppositions must comply with the principle of necessity—that is, knowing what is the case for one term of the opposition implies knowing what is the case for the other as well—Aristotle rules out oppositions that admit intermediary situations because they make logical implication impossible. The only opposition that leads to necessary mutually exclusive statements is that of affirmation and negation:

It, nevertheless, is the case that the things we affirm and deny are called opposites [ἀντικείσαι] in the same sense. For we have the same sort of antithesis [ἀντικείσῃ ἄν]. Just as the affirmative statement and the negative themselves are opposed [ἀντικείται]—take the two propositions, for instance, “he sits” and “he is not sitting”—so, too, are the facts thus expressed or his sitting, that is, and not sitting.37

What Aristotle discovers in this particular case of opposition—affirmation and negation—is that the contraries are both mutually exclusive

36Ibid., 10.11b35–12a25.

37Ibid., 10.12b10–16.
and one makes the opposite also necessary. In other words, if someone is sitting, then the opposite—that is, not sitting—cannot be the case, and that is necessarily so. Aristotle leaves no doubt that in discovering this kind of opposition he has reached the goal of his investigation:

Affirmations [katafasi] and negations [aprofasi] are opposed [antikeitai], it is patent, in none of those ways upon which we have already touched. It is here, and here only, indeed, that one opposite needs must [anagke] be true [aihqe], while the other must always be false [yeudoj]. In the case of other opposites—contraries, correlatives, positives and privatives—this will in no wise hold good. Thus of health and disease, which are contraries [enantiwn], neither is true, neither false. Take correlatives, “double” and “half.” Again, neither is true, neither false. So also with “positives” and “privatives,” such as are blindness and sight. To sum up, unless words are combined, “true” and “false” can have no application. And all the aforementioned opposites are but mere uncombined words.38

Aristotle realizes that not all affirmations and negations necessarily create mutually exclusive statements from the point of view of their truth value, as the following example illustrates:

However, when words that are contraries [enantiwn] constitute parts of those statements opposed as affirmative and negative, these would especially seem to lay claim to this characteristic. The statement that “Socrates is ill” is the contrary of “Socrates is well.” Yet we cannot maintain even here that one statement must always be true and the other must always be false. For, if Socrates really exists, one is true and the other is false. But if Socrates does not exist, both the one and the other are false. To say “he is ill” will be false, and to say “he is well” will be false, if no Socrates so much as exists.39

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38Ibid., 10.13a38–13b12.

39Ibid., 10.13b13–19.
In conclusion, Aristotle discovers that among all kinds of oppositions only affirmations and negations can lead to mutually exclusive statements, and even those need to be restricted to those that satisfy the principle of necessity, that is, knowing what is the case for one opposition implies knowing the case for the other as well:

To return to affirmation and negation. Of these we may say in all cases that one must be false and one true, be the subject existent or not. For, if Socrates really exists, “he is ill” or “not ill” must be true; “he is ill” or “not ill” must be false. And the same, if he does not exist. For, provided he does not exist, it is false to pronounce “he is ill”; “he is not ill,” however, is true. Thus that one of the two must be true and the other be false in all cases will hold of those opposites only which are in the same sense opposed as affirmative and negative statements.

After deciding that only affirmative and negative statements can express logical relations, Aristotle makes the further requirement that affirmative and negative statements must be indicative sentences:

But while every sentence has meaning, though not as an instrument of nature but, as we observed, by convention, not all can be called propositions. We call propositions those only that have truth or falsity in them. A prayer is, for instance, a sentence but neither has truth nor has falsity.

This further requirement for statements to have “truth or falsity in them” in order to convey logical relationships excludes statements that use modal terms. In considering different oppositions, Aristotle is

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40Ibid., 10.13b28–35.


42Later Aristotle tried to introduce modal terms in his theory of the syllogism and so has tried formal logic, but modal terms are notoriously difficult for all forms of logic that are based on the opposition true/false.
clearly looking for statements that are “truth functional,” to use the current terminology that modern logic has adopted. In On Interpretation he defines the kind of opposition he finds appropriate to express logical relationships:

Thus, it follows, each affirmative statement [katafasi] will have its own opposite negative [apo/fasij], just as each negative statement [apo/fasij] will have its affirmative [katafasi] opposite [h tikeimai]. Every such pair of propositions we, therefore, shall call contradories [h tikeimai], always assuming the predicates and subjects are really the same and the terms used without ambiguity. These and some other provisos are needed in view of the puzzles propounded by importunate sophists.43

The Categories and On Interpretation are the proper introduction to Aristotle’s syllogistic and explain his choice for sentence forms on which his syllogistic is based. In these books Aristotle not only decides what kind of statements he needs in order to build syllogisms, but also makes clear his purpose for developing the whole project: to make it impossible for sophists to argue and win no matter which position their opponents adopted.

Logical Relationship and Proof

By defining logical relationships as depending on the form that statements take, Aristotle not only made it possible to replace words with variables, but he made it possible to demonstrate the relationships that existed between the premises and the conclusion. In order to prove which conclusions of his syllogisms are true and which ones are not, Aristotle uses two techniques: the convertibility of the statements and reduction ad impossibile. He chose the four kinds of statements for his syllogistic in order to make it possible to prove the conclusion and this has remained foundational for formal logic as well. If there are logical

relationships between premises and the conclusion, those relationships must be proved, and if they cannot be proved, then those arguments are not valid.

The most frequent method of proof that Aristotle uses is that of the convertibility of the statements. Convertibility means that the variables within a statement can switch places and the resulting statement will also be of the accepted form, usually with a known equivalent. He explains the convertibility of the four kinds of statements in the following way:

The universal negative converts universally, whereas each of the affirmatives converts as a particular premise. For if A necessarily applies to no B, B also necessarily applies to no A; for if it may apply to some, A might also apply to some B. But if A necessarily applies to all or some of B, B must also apply to some A; for if this is not necessarily so, neither will A necessarily apply to some B. The particular negative statement is not convertible, for the same reason which we have already stated.44

The convertibility of the premises may have been the main reason Aristotle chose the four kinds of statements for his syllogistic. Due to this property, the position of the letters in a statement can be switched and another statement of the accepted form will result. For instance, the statement “all A are B” can be converted into “some B are A.” The statement “no A are B” can be converted into “no B are A.” The statement “some A are B” can be converted into “some B are A.” The only statement that cannot be converted is “some A are not B,” not because the two letters cannot be switched and another statement of the accepted form obtained, but because its truth value can be any of the four accepted forms. For instance “some A are not B” can mean either that “some B are not A,” or “all A are not B,” or “some A are B.” In spite of this limitation, convertibility is the most important property of the statements that Aristotle chose in order to make the demonstration of the conclusion possible.

44Aristotle, Prior Analytics, 1.3.25a28–37.
The convertibility of the premises is important because the truth of some syllogisms cannot be so easily grasped as is the case with a syllogism that is made of universal affirmative sentences:

All animals are mortal
All Greeks are animals
Therefore all Greeks are mortal\(^{45}\)

When the truth of the conclusion is not so readily obvious, the syllogism must be proved and the most frequent method Aristotle uses is to convert statements. For instance, he proves the following syllogism by this method: “Let M be predicated of no N, but of all O. Then since the negative premise is convertible, N will apply to no M. But \textit{ex hypothesi} M applies to all O. Therefore N applies to no O (this has been proved above).\(^{46}\) By converting one of the premises, Aristotle is able to turn a syllogism whose conclusion is not obviously valid into a syllogism that is known to be valid.

Another method that Aristotle occasionally uses to prove the validity of some syllogisms is that of reduction \textit{ad impossibile}. This may have been another reason he looked for statements whose truth value is mutually exclusive. Such statements have an important property: if one statement is known to be either true or false, then its counterpart will be also known to be either false or true, because such statements are selected precisely so that they satisfy this condition at any time: if one is true, then the opposite is false, and vice versa. This property is very important for demonstration.

In those syllogisms in which the conversion of a premise cannot prove whether a syllogism is valid or not, Aristotle turned to another technique in order to prove a syllogism: he turns a premise or the conclusion into its opposite and looks to see whether a contradiction or an

\(^{45}\)According to the syllogistic mnemonics developed during the Middle Ages, this syllogism is called Barbara.

\(^{46}\)Aristotle, \textit{Prior Analytics}, 1.5.27a6–8. This syllogism is known as Cesare and the syllogism it turns into as the result of conversion is called Celarent.
impossibility results in any of the premises. If the opposite of the conclusion renders a syllogism that leads to an impossibility, that proves that the reversed conclusion is false which makes the original conclusion true. This procedure is known under the name reduction \textit{ad impossibile}, and Aristotle uses it on several occasions when no other method is available to demonstrate that a syllogism is true. Here is a typical example:

It is evident also that all imperfect syllogisms are completed by means of the first figure. For all the conclusions are reached either by demonstration or by reduction \textit{ad impossibile}, and in both cases we get the first figure: in the case of those which are completed by demonstration because, as we have seen, all the conclusions are reached by means of conversion, and the conversion produces the first figure; and in the case of those which are demonstrated by reduction \textit{ad impossibile} because if a false premise is assumed we get the syllogism by means of the first figure. \textit{E.g.,} in the last figure, if A and B apply to all C, we get a syllogism to the effect that A applies to some B; for if it applies to no B, and B applies to all C, A applies to no C. But \textit{ex hypothesi} it applies to all C. Similarly too in the other cases.\textsuperscript{47}

By carefully choosing the kind of statements that can make an argument, Aristotle was able to build a logical system in which the truth of the conclusion could be proved. This was a remarkable achievement that had far-reaching implications for the whole history of the development of logic.

The goal of this presentation is not to explain Aristotle’s syllogistic but to point out the process by which Aristotle arrived at his most outstanding achievement and the alternatives he considered in making his choices. In spite of the impression one gets from a casual reading of \textit{Prior Analytics} that Aristotle arbitrarily chose the four statements that he briefly lists as the only ones that can form a syllogism, his choice was the result of a careful process of considerations and elimination of alternatives. As a result, a syllogism is not just an argument defined as

\textsuperscript{47}Aristotle, \textit{Prior Analytics}, 1.7.29a30–40.
a set of premises from which a conclusion follows, but a special kind of argument in which the conclusion can be demonstrated to be true on the basis of the premises. Therefore, the syllogistic is a very ambitious project with a very high and specific goal. In order to achieve this goal, Aristotle had to be very selective and impose severe restrictions upon the statements that can make a syllogism as far as their form was concerned. In order to achieve demonstration Aristotle had to sacrifice flexibility. And syllogisms are very rigid kinds of arguments as far as their form is concerned.

**Logic: Choice or Discovery?**

It seems a well established belief that logic is based on natural operations of the mind which Aristotle discovered as a result of a genial intuition and was not based on some arbitrary choices which Aristotle and the founders of formal logic made. The purpose of this chapter was not to question Aristotle’s judgment in making choices, but to point out the multitude of choices he considered and discarded. I realize that to claim that in *The Categories* and *On Interpretation* Aristotle lays the foundation for his syllogistic and for future logic invites ridicule, but I find the evidence compelling. First, scholars have not been able to agree on Aristotle’s purpose in writing these little books which are placed in the beginning of his *Organon*. Secondly, it is obvious that in them Aristotle considers various oppositions in order to make a choice by narrowing down options. Thirdly, he makes it unmistakably clear that his choice of affirmative and negative statements that are truth functional is the kind of opposition he is interested in. Fourthly, in the beginning of *Prior Analytics* in which Aristotle develops his syllogistic, he simply lists the four kinds of statements that can make up a syllogism without any explanation or justification whatsoever and the four statements do meet the criteria of being truth functional that Aristotle had established in the introductory books. It is hardly imaginable that—taking into account how important the syllogistic was for Aristotle—he would just briefly list the kinds of statements that his theory was based on without any explanation whatsoever, unless he
had already done that in what precedes Prior Analytics—that is, in The Categories and On Interpretation. Therefore I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that he talks about syllogistic statements when he says in On Interpretation:

> When their subject is one and the same but of two proportions the affirmative clearly indicates in its terms that the subject is taken universally, the negative, however, that the subject is not universally taken, I call them contradictorily opposed. Examples are “every man is white,” “not every man is white” and the like, or, again, we have “some men are white,” to which “no man is white” is opposed in the manner of which I am speaking.⁴⁸

Since Aristotle had already defined the kind of oppositions that are appropriate for his logical project in those introductory books, all he needed to do in the beginning of Prior Analytics was to list the four statements that met his choice: “universal affirmative,” “universal negative,” “particular affirmative,” and “particular negative.” The similarity of language used in the above quotation and in the definition of syllogistic statements is striking. Finally, the introductory nature of The Categories and On Interpretation to the syllogistic is suggested by the very placement of them in the beginning of Aristotle’s Organon.

Because Aristotle was extremely selective when choosing statements that could express logical relationships, he ended up with only four kinds of statements that could make arguments. That should have alerted him, however, that syllogisms would have very little practical value because of the limited number of statements that syllogisms could cover. This was a limitation which formal logic was able to expand while preserving the requirement that all statements which make an argument must be truth functional. In other words, formal logic was able to expand the forms that statements could take, but it built on the same foundation which Aristotle laid in The Categories and On Interpretation. The next chapter looks at how Aristotle’s choices are still fundamental for formal logic as well.

Demonstration Versus Persuasion

If my understanding is correct that a syllogism is an argument that can be proved, and as long as the goal of argumentation in rhetorical discourse is to achieve persuasion, then the question between the relationship of logic and rhetoric needs to be addressed. In other words, the following question needs to be raised: Is it true that an argument that can be demonstrated is necessarily persuasive and that an argument that is persuasive is one that necessarily has to be demonstrated? This seems a trivial question but I am not aware that anyone has raised it so far. An affirmative answer to it does not seem obvious to me. Some of the syllogisms that Aristotle considers do not seem to be true until he uses a technique to prove them and then they are accepted as true. That an argument that has been demonstrated is persuasive cannot be doubted, but it is persuasive only after it is demonstrated and not before. Conversely, in rhetorical discourse an argument is always stated but never demonstrated, therefore whatever persuasive value such arguments may have, that value does not depend on demonstration. In other words, an argument can be persuasive although it can never be demonstrated. It may be true that statements that are not truth functional make demonstration impossible, but it does not follow that such statements cannot have any persuasive value. In other words, the oppositions that Aristotle considered in the introductory books to his Organon and discarded as unfit to be used in syllogisms are not necessarily unfit to be used in arguments for persuasive purposes. Unfortunately, the persuasiveness of arguments is still understood in terms of their validity, that is, the ability to prove that the conclusion is true in relation to its premises. Although the possibilities of demonstration have been greatly increased by modern logic, Aristotle’s project has only been expanded by formal logic and not modified as I shall show next.
The logical system that Aristotle established with his syllogistic is not the only system that has ever been conceived. Alternative logical systems have been attempted—such as those developed by the Stoic and the Megarian schools—but none of them has been able to establish themselves. Similar attempts were made as late as the Middle Ages. The reason for their failure is no doubt that Aristotle’s achievement was so remarkable that no other system could compete. No wonder that modern logic—which is referred to as formal logic, symbolic logic, or mathematical logic—built on the foundation that Aristotle laid down in his syllogistic. Most of the defining features that Aristotle developed for his syllogistic are still foundational for formal logic. While keeping the basic concepts, modern logic has been able to expand greatly the kinds of statements that can make up an argument and the possibility of demonstration by using formulas borrowed from mathematics. But Aristotle’s insight that logical relations are dependent upon the form that statements take, that logical relationships are in terms of their truth functional value conveyed by indicative affirmative and negative statements, and that arguments that are valid are those in which the relation between the premises and the conclusion can be demonstrated, have remained foundational.

Formal logic or mathematical logic went beyond Aristotle’s syllogism in several ways: it extended the number of quantifiers, it extended the kinds of statements that could be part of an argument, it introduced
truth functional logical connectives that made it possible to join an unlimited number of statements in an unlimited number of ways, and it made it possible to use calculus in order to process formulas and achieve demonstration.

*Logical Relations and Linguistic Forms*

One of Aristotle’s basic insights was that logic is a matter of the form that statements take and as a result he chose statements that had specific forms. That logical relations are a matter of the forms that statements take has remained a central concept in modern logic, which for that matter is also called “formal.” Modern logic, however, went beyond syllogisms because it has been able to develop rules that would allow arguments to include statements beyond the four kinds of statements that Aristotle chose. This expansion was possible because the forms or shape of statements that can make an argument must be compatible with rules that allow statements to be turned into mathematical formulas. The use of mathematics brought an important improvement to logic analysis:

First, a *calculus*, i.e. a formalist method, is always in evidence, consisting essentially in the fact that the rules of operation refer to the *shape* and not the *sense* of the symbols, just as in mathematics. Of course formalism had already been employed at times on other varieties of logic, in Scholasticism especially, but it is now erected into a general principle of logical method.49

Because logical relations are a matter of the form that statements take, words can be replaced by variables and symbols, but as we may remember, that was Aristotle’s discovery:

The laws are formulated in an artificial language, and consist of symbols which resemble those of mathematics (in the narrower sense). The new feature here is that even the constants are expressed in artificial symbols; variables, as we have seen, have been in use since the time of Aristotle.50

While Aristotle chose only four kinds of statements that could make a syllogism, formal logic extended that limit so that a great variety of statements can be used in arguments. As a result, any statement that is an affirmation or negation can be used in an argument—that is, any statement that is truth functional. This requirement, however, had been developed by Aristotle, as previously noted.

Another important way in which formal logic extended the kinds of statements that can be part of an argument is through sentence connectives. Aristotle did not join the sentences of a syllogism but rather listed them one under the other. Formal logic, however, uses connectives to join together different linguistic entities that are truth functional. There are one-place connectives—such as negations—or two-place connectives—such as conjunctions, disjunctions, conditionals, and biconditionals. Moreover, connectives can join larger formulas that are made by other terms that are joined together by other connectives. Through logical connectives there is practically no limit as to how complex an argument or formula can become.

Another area in which modern logic has been able to go beyond the syllogistic is that of demonstration. As we saw, Aristotle’s tools for demonstration were limited to statement conversion and reduction ad impossibile. By turning linguistic forms into mathematical formulas, modern logic has been able to go far beyond Aristotle as far as proving the validity of the conclusion:

Two essentially distinct methodological ideas seem to underlie mathematical logic. On the one hand it is a logic that uses a calculus. This was developed in connection with mathematics, which at first was considered as the ideal to which logic should approach. On the

50Ibid., 166–7.
other hand mathematical logic is distinguished by the idea of exact proof. In this respect it is no hanger-on of mathematics, and this is not its model; it is rather the aim of logic to investigate the foundations and conduct of mathematics by means of more exact methods than have been customary among "pure" mathematicians, and to offer to mathematics the ideal of strict proof.\textsuperscript{51}

Bochenski is no doubt right when he credits George Boole with the idea of turning to mathematics in order to achieve logical analysis and demonstration:

One who did found a school, and who stands at the beginning of the continuous development of mathematical logic, is George Boole, whose first pioneer work, \textit{The Mathematical Analysis of Logic}, appeared in 1847. In the same year Augustus de Morgan published his \textit{Formal Logic}.\textsuperscript{52}

Boole’s insight was later followed by other prominent figures in the development of formal logic:

Contemporaneous with the last-named are the works of a new group of mathematical logicians whose chief representatives are C. S. Pierce (1867, 1870), Gottlob Frege (1879), and G. Peano (1888). Of these three important thinkers only Peano founded a considerable school; Pierce and Frege went practically unnoticed. It was Bertrand Russell (1903) who discovered the thought of Frege and together with A. N. Whitehead combined it with his own discoveries in \textit{Principia Mathematica} (1910–13), in which the symbolism of Peano was used.\textsuperscript{53}

Before I go further, it is necessary to qualify the relationship between formal or mathematical logic and mathematics. Although it is

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 272.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 267.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid.
true that formal logic does use operations with formulas that are borrowed from mathematics and in that sense logicians like Bochenski are justified in using words like calculus, it would be wrong, however, to conclude that all calculations that are found in mathematics are necessarily employed and found in logic. The kind of “calculus” that formal logic borrowed from mathematics are operations or calculations in base two, which is a very specialized aspect of arithmetic. The rest of the vast area of mathematics has virtually no relationship to logic. In that sense, “mathematical logic” is a misnomer. A more accurate term would be “arithmetic logic in base two.” The reason Boole was able to apply arithmetical calculations in base two to logical formulas was due to Aristotle’s choice, however, as I will explain later.

**The Syllogistic and Formal Logic**

Although Boole’s merits for discovering the potential that mathematics had to demonstrate the validity of logical formulas cannot be denied, his “discovery” needs to be qualified. First, the mathematical calculus that he adopted for logical formulas is not the kind of calculations which are normally used when working with numbers. His brilliant idea was to use arithmetic that uses counting in base two rather than base ten, which is the regular way in which counting is done. As it is known, counting in base two uses only two values represented by the digits “1” and “0.” Boole’s idea was to replace the opposition true/false by the numbers “1” and “0,” which in logical jargon are indicated by the letters “T” and “F.” In this way he was able to apply binary arithmetic to analyzing truth functional syntagms, that is, linguistic units that are either “true” or “false.” It may be interesting to note that counting in base two is the kind of counting that all computers use, and in computer language the equivalence between “1” and “true” and “0” and “false” is maintained although “true” is displayed as “yes” and “false” as “no.” That Boole had a great insight when he realized that counting in base two can be used to deal with logical formulas no one can doubt, but what apparently has remained unnoticed is that it was Aristotle who had carefully chosen the
opposition true and false as basic to conveying logical relations through statements that are truth functional.

Formal logic managed to expand the kinds of statements that could form an argument beyond the four kinds that Aristotle had chosen not only by allowing statements to take any form as long as they remained truth functional, but also by making the sentence connectors truth functional as well. As a result, larger formulas that are obtained by means of connecting smaller formulas with truth functional connectives remain truth functional as well. In order to be truth functional, sentence connectors received an established truth value which can be different from the meaning that those connectors have in ordinary language. For instance, the connective “and” that joins two logical units is true only when both logical elements that are joined are true. This is an important restriction because the conjunction “and” can have various meanings when it occurs in ordinary language. For instance, let us consider the following two statements:

(A) The snow builds up
(B) We go skiing

If the two statements are joined together by the conjunction “and,” we get the following statement: “The snow builds up and we go skiing.” The function of the conjunction in this example is not necessarily to say that the compound statement is true only when both statements are true, but rather to suggest a succession of events. The two statements can be joined by another conjunction that conveys the idea of succession better: “We go skiing after the snow builds up.” In formal logic, however, the connective “and”—represented from now on as “&”—always means that the joint formula is true when both formulas that are joined by “and” are true. Therefore the compound statement “we go skiing and the snow builds up” is true only when both going to skiing and building up of the snow occur. The truth table of the logical connective “and” is:
In a similar way, formal logic has assigned to the grammatical conjunction “or” a fixed truth value which may be different from its meaning when it is used in ordinary language. According to formal logic, the disjunction “or” is true when both or either one of the logical parts that are connected are true, and is false only when both of them are false. Therefore situations in which the disjunction “or” does not comply with this requirement are excluded from being used in formal logic. For instance, if we take the following statements:

(A) You eat the cake
(B) You keep the cake

If the two statements are joined together by the disjunction “or”—represented from now on as “\( \lor \)”—we obtain the following compound statement: “You eat the cake or you keep the cake.” When used in formal logic the particle “or” means that the compound statement is true when both parts are true or when either one is true, and false when both are false. Therefore, the truth table for the disjunction “or” as it is used in formal logic is:

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The truth table for the compound statement above according to its meaning in ordinary language is different from the one that formal logic has established and which is the following:

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<th>A ( \lor ) B</th>
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</table>
in which “∅” stands for an impossible situation and “?” stands for a situation that is ambiguous.\footnote{One who does not eat the cake and does not keep it either—e.g., throws it away—does not do anything inconsistent with anything in the statement, therefore it would not make the statement false.} Some situations can be hilarious. For instance, if we consider the following statements:

(A) The dog is alive
(B) The dog is dead

If we join them with the logical connective “or” we get the following compound statement: “The dog is alive or the dog is dead.” According to the meaning of the particle “or” in common speech, the statement is always true no matter whether the dog is dead or alive and can never be false. According to the meaning the formal logic has assigned to the particle “or,” however, the statement is true when the dog is both alive and dead, or when the dog is alive but not dead, or when the dog is dead but not alive, and is false when the dog is neither dead nor alive.

A conditional statement is also one that must always be truth functional. For instance, the following statements:

(A) You earn money
(B) You buy a car

can be joined by the conditional “if-then”: “If you earn money then you buy a car.” The truth table that formal logic has established for the conditional “if-then” represented as “→” is the following:
According to its meaning in ordinary language, conditional statements are expected to be true only when both the antecedent and the consequent are true, and false in all other situations, but as the truth table established by the formal logic shows, it is false only when the antecedent is true and the consequent is false. For instance, if one loses all the money but still buys a car on credit or earns a lot of money but does not buy a car, in ordinary language such situations would be considered as inconsistent with what that person had decided and therefore would be false, but according to the meaning that formal logic has assigned to conditional statements, such situations would still be “true” to the initial statement.

Negation is another connective that needs to be truth functional when used in formal logic. Aristotle chose affirmation and negation as the opposition that always renders the two statements mutually exclusive so that if one is true, the negated one is automatically false. This usually happens when the negation denies the action of the verb of the negated logical element. For instance, the statement “the sun is going down” is true if the sun is going down, and its negation “the sun is not going down” is false if the sun is going down. As Aristotle noted, just adding a negation to a statement does not render that statement of an opposite truth value as the following example shows:

(A) The policy is good
(B) The policy is not good

The two statements are not necessarily either true or false about any policy, because it is possible for a policy to be both good and not good at the same time, therefore both statements can be true. In order to avoid such situations, formal logic uses phrases that achieve unambiguous negations, phrases that almost never occur in ordinary
language, such as: “it is not true that . . .,” “it is not the case that . . .,” or “it is false that . . .” From this point of view formal logic still follows Aristotle’s rule that a negated statement should be of the opposite truth value than the un-negated one.

Another feature that Aristotle introduced that is still important for formal logic is the convertibility of the connectives. As we remember, Aristotle required that switching variables within a formula should render formulas that are also of accepted form. This holds true for formal logic, too. If two logical units are joined by a connective, then the converted statement should also render a statement that is truth functional. In some cases, the formula is reversible, so that the converted statement has the same truth value—like the conjunction and disjunction. For instance, as far as the truth value of the composite statement is concerned, it is irrelevant in which order the two statements are joined by the conjunction:

A & B; B & A

This property is often referred to as commutability.

Although in formal logic the truth value of the converted statement is equivalent to the unconverted one, in ordinary language switching the position of the statements that are joined by the conjunction “and” does not necessarily preserve the meaning of the original statement. For instance, if we take the following two statements:

(A) The bottle fell down
(B) The bottle broke into pieces

Joining them together as “A and B” would give the following compound statement: “The bottle fell down and the bottle broke into pieces,” but if joined in the reverse order “B and A,” the meaning of the compound statement is quite different: “The bottle broke into pieces and the bottle fell down.” Because formal logic requires the conjunction to be convertible, statements like the ones above would not qualify to be joined by the logical conjunction “and.”
Just like the conjunction, the disjunction “or” also needs to be convertible. According to formal logic, the order in which the two disjuncts are joined should make no difference as far as the truth value of the compound statement is concerned. Therefore, we can join logical units either A ∨ B or B ∨ A. Fortunately the convertibility of the particle “or” holds true in ordinary language as well.

The convertibility of the conditional is also important, although the converted statement is not of the same truth value as the unconverted one. But Aristotle himself had admitted in his syllogistic statements whose truth value after conversion could not be determined in advance as long as the converted statement had an accepted form.

The convertibility of connectives is important for the same reason it was important for Aristotle: to make demonstration of the validity possible. Although formal logic uses arithmetic formulas to achieve demonstration, all arithmetic formulas are convertible and therefore Aristotle’s interest in forms that are convertible holds true for formal logic formulas as well.

Another expansion of the forms which Aristotle had chosen for syllogisms was the introduction of quantifiers that apply to individuals entities as well:

The Boolean calculus expresses the Aristotelian quantifiers “all” and “some” as operations on classes; it can therefore say, for instance, that all A is B, or that A and B intersect. But it does this by means of relations between classes and the universe, without using the concept of the individual. Now, on the other hand, we meet one of the most interesting contributions made by mathematical logic, viz. quantifiers “all” and “some” applied to individuals. In contrast to the Aristotelian tradition, these quantifiers are conceived as separate from the quantified function and its copula, and are so symbolized.55

But probably the most important common feature of syllogisms and formal logic is the definition of validity. According to formal logic, an argument is valid if it is impossible for the conclusion to be false if the

55Bochenski, Formal Logic, 347.
premises are all true. One would expect an argument to be valid if the conclusion “follows” from the premises. The difference between the two definitions of validity is that the first one can be proved while the second cannot. When validity is defined as an impossibility for the conclusion to be false while the premises are true, in order to show that an argument is valid it is enough either to prove that the conclusion is true or that the negated conclusion is false. In other words, the definition of validity is chosen in such a way that it allows for the proof by reduction ad impossibile. For Aristotle this technique was important because the validity of some syllogisms could not be proved except by reduction ad impossibile. Similarly, in order to prove validity in formal logic often it is necessary that a conclusion or an intermediary conclusion be converted into its negation and shown that it leads to an impossibility or a contradiction.

That mathematical logic builds on the same concepts as the syllogistic was conclusively proven by Lukasiewicz, who managed to translate all Aristotle’s syllogisms in the language of formal logic and prove them valid, if that proof was needed any more. Bochenski is no doubt right in his summary of Aristotle’s contribution to the development of formal logic:

1. Aristotle created formal logic. For the first time in history we find in him: (a) a clear idea of universally valid logic law, though he never gave a definition of it, (b) the use of variables, (c) sentential forms which besides variables contain only logical constants.

2. Aristotle constructed the first system of formal logic that we know. This consists exclusively of logical laws, and was developed axiomatically, even in more than one way.

3. Aristotle’s masterpiece in formal logic is his syllogistic. This is a system of term-logic consisting of laws, not rules. In spite of certain weaknesses it constitutes a faultlessly constructed system.

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57 Bochenski, Formal Logic, 98.
The purpose of the previous analysis was not, however, to prove what probably did not need any demonstration: that Aristotle’s syllogistic and formal logic are related. The purpose was to bring out the basic concepts on which both the syllogistic and formal logic are built. If logic—both syllogistic and formal—have relevance for the analysis of argumentation and reasoning, the basic features of logic that have been outlined above must have relevance for persuasion no matter how adequate they may be for demonstration. That this relevance has always been assumed is shown by Aristotle himself who considered all arguments that are persuasive to be in some way syllogisms or related to syllogisms. It is for this reason that formal logic is required as part of training in fields where the use of argumentation is extensive, although both the syllogistic and formal logic cannot be applied to informal arguments. That Aristotle did not realize in the first millennium B.C. that syllogisms would be virtually useless for analyzing informal arguments or enthymemes is understandable, but for highest academic institutions in the third millennium A.D. to require students to undergo training in formal logic that has no value for analyzing informal arguments is hardly understandable. This situation is more puzzling and disturbing as there have been critical voices about formal logic.
The syllogism and modern logic are without doubt remarkable achievements and probably will remain the most sophisticated methods that can be used in order to prove that something is either true or false. In spite of its merits, however, modern logic has come under criticism because of its difficulties in analyzing arguments that occur in ordinary discourse: be it judicial, political, religious, or advertising. Aristotle himself did not see his syllogistic as covering all arguments and therefore he wrote a separate book—The “Art” of Rhetoric—that deals with persuasion. Apparently he did believe, however, that logic and persuasion overlapped.

Proper Reasoning Conforms to Logic

Aristotle knew that some forms of argumentation and reasoning were unacceptable and he took great pains to reject them in his book On Sophistical Refutations.58 He did believe that arguments had a very important role in rhetorical discourse therefore he called that part of the discourse that included arguments “proof” in his Rhetoric. He

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realized that many arguments that occurred in the rhetorical discourse did not fit the rigid form which he chose for syllogisms, and therefore he labeled them enthymemes. He did believe, however, that all acceptable arguments must emulate syllogisms somehow, because he described an enthymeme as “a kind of syllogism.” Unfortunately Aristotle does not explain in what ways an enthymeme resembles a syllogism and in what ways it does not. It seems that Aristotle assumed that they were similar as far as the reasoning involved was concerned, although the enthymemes did not have the proper form. According to him, while other parts of a rhetorical discourse may have various functions—to call attention, to win the good will of the audience, to raise emotions, and so on—the role of arguments is to provide rational “proof” and demonstration for the claims. Since syllogisms were the only kinds of arguments that Aristotle could “prove,” it follows that enthymemes, in order to provide “proof,” needed to resemble syllogisms by providing demonstration:

It is obvious, therefore, that a system arranged according to the rules of art is only concerned with proofs; that proof is a sort of demonstration, since we are most strongly convinced when we suppose anything to have been demonstrated; that rhetorical demonstration is an enthymeme, which, generally speaking, is the strongest of rhetorical proofs; and lastly, that the enthymeme is a kind of syllogism.\(^{59}\)

Although this passage is considered vague by scholars as far as the relationships between syllogisms and enthymemes is concerned, I think that it is quite specific. Aristotle equates persuasion with demonstration when he says: “we are most strongly convinced when we suppose anything to have been demonstrated.” It follows that syllogisms are persuasive since they can be demonstrated. Moreover, an enthymeme or any argument, in order to be persuasive, must resemble a syllogism in being able to be demonstrated. It is possible

that Aristotle believed that in any persuasive argument there is a disguised or embedded syllogism and every enthymeme, in order to be persuasive, must be reducible to an accepted syllogism just as a true syllogism can be reduced to a syllogism of the first figure. The reducibility of the syllogisms must have seemed to Aristotle a feature which needed to be shared by any argument which could rightly claim to provide logical proof such as enthymemes. In other words, an enthymeme was a defective syllogism in which some part of it was left unstated. This traditional understanding is supported by the very etymology of the word “enthymeme,” which is made up of two Greek words: en [εν], which means “in,” and thumos [θυμός], which means “mind,” “spirit,” so that the composite word means “in the mind.” It seems that when Aristotle coined the term, he assumed that in informal speech, one of the three statements that make up a syllogism is left unexpressed because the persuader assumes that the truth of that statement is already accepted by the speaker so that it is already “in the mind” of the listener and does not need to be stated. If this interpretation is correct, then Aristotle believed that an enthymeme is a truncated syllogism, and subsequently, any persuasive argument must be a truncated syllogism. This interpretation of the relationship between enthymeme and syllogism seems to have been quite widely accepted because a classification of enthymemes has been developed based on which part of a syllogism is supposedly missing. According to this classification, enthymemes of the first type are those in which the major premise is missing; the second type is that in which the minor premise is missing; and enthymemes of the third type are those in which the conclusion is not stated and therefore is left to be inferred by the audience.

Although Aristotle never attempts to convert or turn an argument that he labels enthymeme into a standard syllogism, it is quite likely that this is what he had in mind when he defined enthymeme as a kind of syllogism, and it is quite likely that he himself believed that if one tried to discover the reasoning process that is involved in both of them, it would be found that it is the same.
Reasoning Is Reductionistic

It seems that Aristotle believed that not only in syllogisms and enthymemes the reasoning process is the same and can be reduced to a standard syllogism, but also in other forms of reasoning, such as induction and arguing by examples. If this understanding is correct, then Aristotle believed that although reasoning and argumentation may take several forms, all of them are based on a simple basic operation of the mind which is captured best by syllogisms, possible in their perfect form known under the mnemonic term Barbara. He may have been encouraged in this belief by his success in converting “imperfect” syllogisms into “perfect” ones. If an “imperfect” syllogism can be converted into a “perfect one,” why shouldn’t a truncated form of syllogism like an enthymeme be converted into a complete syllogism as well? This may show that Aristotle did believe that the logical operations that are at work in a syllogism are operating and must be operating in all kinds of arguments and if enough effort is put into analyzing arguments, eventually all of them can be reduced to a syllogism and proved to be valid, or fail to be reduced to a syllogism and proved not to be valid. We do not know how much effort he put into trying to reduce other kinds of reasoning to a syllogism, but by defining enthymemes as a kind of syllogism he may have expressed his belief that in syllogisms he discovered the basic logical operations of the mind so that, if reasoning takes the form of a syllogism, then argumentation is error proof. Since syllogisms were proved to be true, anything that could be proved to be in essence a syllogism was already proved to be true.

Reasoning and Modern Logic

Aristotle’s belief that any acceptable form of reasoning and argumentation, in order to be persuasive, must be syllogistic, may no longer be shared today, but the belief that any argument, in order to be persuasive, must have its validity proved through formal logic is an
assumption that probably any respectable school would consider beyond any doubt. As a result, courses in logic are required in all academic areas in which reasoning and argumentation play an important part: science, philosophy, law, humanities, and so on.

In spite of the prestige that modern logic enjoys in schools, it has come under criticism because it does not seem to be of much help in analyzing argumentation that occurs in ordinary language. Aristotle may have hoped that the gap between syllogisms (which he dealt with in his *Analytics*) and enthymemes (which he dealt with in his *Rhetoric*) would eventually be bridged, but as formal logic grew in sophistication, the gap between formal arguments and informal ones has grown wider. This puzzling divorce between formal logic and informal argumentation could not remain unnoticed and was brought into open by two outstanding critics: Chaim Perelman and Stephen Toulmin.

*Perelman and The New Rhetoric*

Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, in their book *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* recognize the failure of formal logic to have any applicability to argumentation as it occurs in ordinary language. They argue that formal logic has lost contact with argumentation as a result of Descartes’ concern with distinguishing true and clear ideas from the false ones. According to them, formal logic is just an offshoot of the modern western philosophy that Descartes initiated:

The publication of a treatise devoted to argumentation and this subject’s connection with the ancient tradition of Greek rhetoric and dialectic constitutes a *break with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes* which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries.61

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61Ibid., 1.
In order to correct this problem, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca wanted to reconnect with the ancient Greek tradition. The tradition that they had in mind was no doubt that of Aristotle, specifically Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, as the title of their book indicates: *The New Rhetoric*. They rightly point out that the concepts of necessity and demonstration are not central in argumentation: “The domain of argumentation is that of the credible, the plausible, the probable, to the degree that the latter eludes the certainty of calculations.”62 They blame Descartes, however, for making demonstration the whole goal of reasoning:

It was this philosopher who made the self-evident the mark of reason, and considered rational only those demonstrations which, starting from clear and distinct ideas, extended, by means of apodictic proofs, the self-evidence of the axioms to the derived theorems.63

That Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are right in claiming that demonstration, proof, and certainty, are not essential for persuasion, can hardly be questioned. They see with absolute clarity a fundamental difference between formal logic and informal argumentation. They make Descartes, however, responsible for the error and turn to Aristotle in order to correct it.

In spite of their revolutionary insight that argumentation is not built on certainty, truth, and proof, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca wrongly attribute the error of modern logic to Rene Descartes and consider Aristotle free from that error. They seem to overlook the fact that the main focus of persuasion in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is arguments that he labels enthymeme and function as “proof,” and that enthymemes are “a kind of syllogisms” which are arguments that can be demonstrated to be true. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do admit, however, that Aristotle himself developed the kind of logic that is concerned with necessity, too:

62Ibid.

63Ibid.
The logician is indeed inspired by the Cartesian ideal and feels at ease only in studying those proofs which Aristotle styled analytic, since all other methods do not manifest the same characteristic of necessity. This tendency has been strongly reinforced during the last century, a period in which, under the influence of mathematical logicians, logic has been limited to formal logic, that is to the study of the methods of proof used in the mathematical sciences. The result is that reasonings extraneous to the domain of the purely formal elude logic altogether, and, as a consequence, they also elude reason. This reason, which Descartes hoped would, at least in principle, solve all problems set to man the solution of which is already possessed by the divine mind, has become more and more limited in its jurisdiction, to the point that whatever eludes reduction to the formal presents it with unsurmountable difficulties.64

That Descartes may have believed that the analytical reasoning that Aristotle developed in his syllogistic eventually would solve all the problems may be true, but that Aristotle himself did not share that belief is questionable at best. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca may be right in being more interested in Aristotle’s rhetoric than in his syllogistic as far as persuasion is concerned, but that does not reflect Aristotle’s perspective necessarily. Modern logic owes to Aristotle far more than it owes to Descartes, and if modern logic is wrong in seeing persuasion in terms of proof and demonstration, that tradition is emphatically stated by Aristotle himself in his Rhetoric when he defines enthymeme as a kind of syllogism, as I pointed out earlier.

Whether Descartes is to be blamed for the problem or not, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do see the problem clearly. If reasoning is limited to formal logic and since its applicability is so narrow, whatever formal logic does not apply to must lack reasoning altogether:

Must we draw from this evolution of logic, and from the very real advances it has made, the conclusion that reason is entirely incompe-

64Ibid., 2–3.
tent in those areas which elude calculation and that, where neither experiment nor logical deduction is in a position to furnish the solution of a problem, we can but abandon ourselves to irrational forces, instincts, suggestion, or even violence?65

In order to solve the problem, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca see the solution in the distinction that Aristotle draws between analytic reasoning (which he deals with in his syllogistic and is based on necessity) and dialectical reasoning (which he deals with in his *Rhetoric* and which is based on probability). This distinction provides them with the justification to study reasoning in informal argumentation:

Whereas already Aristotle had analyzed dialectical proofs together with analytic proofs, those which concern the probable together with those which are necessary, those which are used in deliberation and argumentation together with those which are used in demonstration, the post-Cartesian concept of reason obliges us to make certain irrational elements intervene every time the object of knowledge is not self-evident.66

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca want to re-claim the dialectical reasoning that Aristotle dealt with in his *Topics* and *Rhetoric*:

Dialectical reasoning is considered as running parallel with analytic reasoning, but treating of that which is probable instead of dealing with propositions which are necessary. The very notion that dialectic concerns opinions, i.e., these which are adhered to with variable intensity, is not exploited.67

Having identified two kinds of reasoning that “run parallel” to each other, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca set the goal of investigating the

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65 Ibid., 3.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 5.
kind of reasoning involved in informal argumentation which has mechanisms similar to the ones that occur in formal ones:

The rejection of the first limitation is due to the fact that our interests are much more those of logicians desirous of understanding the mechanism of thought than those of masters of eloquence desirous of making people practice their teaching. It is sufficient to cite the Rhetoric of Aristotle to show that our way of looking at rhetoric can take pride in illustrious examples. Our study, which is mainly concerned with the structure of argumentation, will not therefore insist on the way in which communication with the audience takes place.\(^68\)

In order to develop an understanding of how reasoning functions in informal argumentation, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, strangely enough, instead of rejecting formal logic, set it as a model to be emulated: “Quite the opposite: we will draw our inspiration from the logicians, but only to imitate the methods which they have used so successfully for the last century or so.\(^69\) Their analysis of informal argumentation hopes to broaden formal logic so that it would encompass the whole range of human reasoning:

Logic underwent a brilliant development during the last century when, abandoning the old formulas, it set out to analyze the methods of proof effectively used by mathematicians. Modern formal logic became, in this way, the study of the methods of demonstration used in the mathematical sciences. One result of this development is to limit its domain, since everything ignored by mathematicians is foreign to it. Logicians owe it to themselves to complete the theory of demonstration obtained in this way by a theory of argumentation. We seek here to construct such a theory by analyzing the methods of proof used in the human sciences, law, and philosophy. We shall examine arguments put forward by advertisers in newspapers, politicians in speeches,
lawyers in pleadings, judges in decisions, and philosophers in treatises.\textsuperscript{70}

In order to achieve this goal, just as in formal logic, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca see arguments as being made up of premises and the conclusion. They see premises as agreements between the persuader and the audience and identify the two elements on which these agreements are made as being objective data and subjective data:

We shall begin by considering the question of what sort of agreements can serve as premises. Our treatment of this question will obviously not attempt to draw a complete list of everything capable of constituting an object of belief or adherence: we shall merely inquire into the types of objects of agreement that play different roles in the arguing process. We think it convenient to divide these objects of agreement into two classes: the first concerning the \textit{real}, comprising facts, truths, and presumptions, the other concerning the \textit{preferable}, comprising values, hierarchies, and lines of argument relating to the preferable.\textsuperscript{71}

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca see formal reasoning and argumentation as based on the same reasoning, except formal reasoning is able to be concise and therefore able to provide maximum proof, while argumentation only approximates the process of formal reasoning and derives its persuasiveness from the ability of the mind to formalize the argument. Because of the extra effort that the mind must make in order to restructure the argument, the persuasive power of informal arguments is diminished:

Our technique of analysis may seem to give primacy to formal reasoning over argumentation, which would only be an approximate and imperfect form of it. However this is not our intention. On the contrary, we believe that formal reasoning results from a process of

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 66.
simplification which is possible only under special conditions, within isolated and limited systems. But, since there are formal proofs of recognized validity, quasiLogical arguments derive their persuasive strength from their similarity with these well-established modes of reasoning.

What characterizes quasi-logical argumentation, therefore, is its nonformal character and the effort of thought which is required to formalize it.72

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca—in their attempts to both expose the limitations of formal logic and emulate it at the same time for its remarkable performance—end up in an ambiguous position, as Frans H. van Eemeren points out:

Bearing in mind the far-reaching pretension with regard to nonanalytic thinking that Perelman attaches to the new rhetoric, the manner in which he turns against “modern formal logic” is curious. Logic is to him an illustrious example of a field which has made important progress thanks to well-directed reflection—in this case, reflection on mathematical thought. Logic, he observes, has gone through “brilliant developments” during the past hundred years, but these developments have resulted in a restriction of the field it covers, “since everything ignored by mathematicians is foreign to it” (p. 10). According to Perelman, argumentation theory must investigate the whole (unordered) field disregarded by logicians, thus encompassing the entire area of nonanalytic thought.73

In spite of the insightful criticism of formal logic, by attempting to develop a theory of argumentation that emulates the precision of formal logic, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca initiate a self-defeating project:

72Ibid., 193.

A problem in answering this question is that *The New Rhetoric*—a bulky volume of 566 pages—covers a vast subject, whose treatment calls for the most precise delineation possible, a clear organization, lucid elaboration and, for the benefit of a proper understanding, a well-organized and comprehensive style of discourse, with recognizable examples. In *The New Rhetoric*, these preconditions are not always met. Although the division of the book into three sections makes a systematic impression, much of the system is lost in the elaboration, which gives no clear insight into the relations between the sections and contains a large number of lengthy digressions. Clear definitions are nowhere to be found, and the explanations that are given are not always equally lucid. In some cases, such as quasi-logical argumentation and argumentation based on the structure of reality, the new concepts are explicitly introduced, while in other cases, such as argumentation which structures reality, they receive no introduction at all.\textsuperscript{74}

**Toulmin’s Criticism of Formal Logic**

Stephen Toulmin\textsuperscript{75} is another important critic of formal logic. Unlike Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, however, who recognized the accomplishments of formal logic and took it as a model to be emulated, Toulmin starts from the practical observation that formal logic fails precisely in its practical claims to provide a sound evaluation of informal arguments:

> In fact, as we shall discover, the science of logic has throughout its history tended to develop in a direction leading it away from these issues, away from practical questions about the manner in which we have occasion to handle and criticize arguments in different fields, and towards a condition of complete autonomy, in which logic becomes a

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 121–2.

theoretical study on its own, as free from all immediate practical concerns as is some branch of pure mathematics; and even though at all stages in its history there have been people who were prepared to raise again questions about the application of logic, some of the questions vital for an understanding of this application have scarcely been raised.\textsuperscript{76}

Unlike Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca who turned to Aristotle for inspiration, Toulmin thinks that, if formal logic has ended up being a science in itself without any practical application, it is because Aristotle set out to establish such a science and logicians have followed his lead without questioning the whole project. That is what Toulmin wants to do:

If things have worked out this way, I shall argue, this has been at least partly because of an ambition implicit in Aristotle’s opening words: namely, that logic should become a formal science—an episteme. The propriety of this ambition Aristotle’s successors have rarely questioned, but we can afford to do so here; how far logic can hope to be a formal science, and yet retain the possibility of being applied in the critical assessment of actual arguments, will be a central question for us.\textsuperscript{77}

Again, unlike Perelman who turned to formal logic for providing the model for analyzing informal arguments, Toulmin turns to jurisprudence to develop a model that covers informal reasoning in all its forms:

One last preliminary: to break the power of old models and analogies, we can provide ourselves with a new one. Logic is concerned with the soundness of the claims we make—with the solidity of the grounds we produce to support them, the firmness of the backing we provide for them—or, to change the metaphor, with the sort of case we

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., 2–3.
present in defense of our claims. The legal analogy implied in this last way of putting the point can for once be a real help. So let us forget about psychology, sociology, technology and mathematics, ignore the echoes of structural engineering and collage in the words “grounds” and “backing”, and take as our model the discipline of jurisprudence. Logic (we may say) is generalized jurisprudence. Arguments can be compared with law-suits, and the claims we make and argue for in extra-legal contexts with claims made in the courts, while the cases we present in making good each kind of claim can be compared with each other. A main task of jurisprudence is to characterize the essentials of the legal process: the procedures by which claims-at-law are put forward, disputed and determined, and the categories in terms of which this is done. Our own inquiry is a parallel one: we shall aim, in a similar way, to characterize what may be called “the rational process”, the procedures and categories by using which claims-in-general can be argued for and settled.78

Although Toulmin claims only to raise questions and not to provide answers as to how to deal with informal argumentation, his goals are higher. He classifies arguments according to fields of arguments, and in this respect he resembles Aristotle’s Topics and Perelman’s procedure. He claims that argumentation takes different forms in different fields. Although arguments differ from field to field, they are not completely unrelated, and this observation provides him with his methodological starting point: “The first problem we have set ourselves can be re-stated in the question, ‘What things about the form and merits of our arguments are field-invariant and what things about them are field-dependent?’”79 Consistent with following a judicial model, Toulmin finds that one aspect of all arguments that are field-dependent is the sort of evidence relevant for each field. But as far as the rational process is concerned, there are basic similarities and patterns that are common to all fields of arguments. Toulmin claims that the force of the

78Ibid., 7.

79Ibid., 15.
conclusion is strongest in impossibilities, but the force depends on different fields as well as the criteria or grounds required to justify it:

When one sets out and criticizes arguments and conclusions in different fields, we asked, what features of the procedure we adopt and of the concepts we employ will be field-invariant, and what features will be field-dependent? For impossibilities and improprieties, we saw, the answer was clear enough. The force of the conclusion “It cannot be the case that . . .” or “. . . is impossible” is the same regardless of fields: the criteria or sorts of ground required to justify such a conclusion vary from field to field. In any field, the conclusions that “cannot” be the case are those we are obliged to rule out—whether they are concerned with lifting a ton single-handed, turning one’s son away without a shilling, or operating mathematically with a rational square root of 2; on the other hand, the criteria of physiological incapacity are one thing, standards of moral inadmissibility are another, and those of mathematical impossibility a third.80

Just as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca had done, Toulmin also questions the concept of necessity that formal logic requires for conclusions, and claims that in informal arguments conclusion need not be necessary. Instead, he argues that the conclusion can be just probable.

In spite of his more radical criticism of formal logic and a decided attempt to turn away from it, in his desire to develop a model for informal argumentation Toulmin takes as his starting point Aristotle’s syllogism and notices that what is wrong with it is that it is too simplified:

Ever since Aristotle it has been customary, when analyzing the micro-structure of arguments, to set them out in a very simple manner: they have been presented three propositions at a time, “minor premiss; major premiss; so conclusion”. The question now arises, whether this standard form is sufficiently elaborate or candid. Simplicity is of course a merit, but may it not in this case have been bought too dearly?

80Ibid., 36.
Can we properly classify all the elements in our arguments under the three headings, “major premiss”, “minor premiss” and “conclusion”, or are these categories misleadingly few in number? Is there even enough similarity between major and minor premisses for them usefully to be yoked together by the single name of “premiss”?81

Toulmin develops his own structure for arguments, replacing premises by statements that contain data (D), and statements that provide practical standards, canon or warrant (W), statements which mediate the connection between the data and the conclusion just like the premises do. He proposes the following diagram for an argument structure82:

```
D  |  So C
---|---
Since
W
```

Then Toulmin provides the following example83:

```
Harry was born in Bermuda \}  \}  So \}  \}  Harry is British
Since
A man born in Bermuda will be a British subject
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81Ibid., 95–96.
82Ibid., 99.
83Ibid.
At this point it is worth noting that the argument structure that Toulmin proposes is just another way of representing Aristotle’s syllogism with different terminology. The minor premise has become data and the major premise has become a warrant. It is easy to see how the Barbara syllogism can be represented on this diagram:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Socrates is human} \\
\text{Since} \\
\text{All humans are mortal}
\end{array}
\quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{So} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{Socrates is mortal}
\end{array}
\]

Van Eemeren rightly notices: “Toulmin’s model is, in fact, a rhetorical extension of the syllogism which is comparable to the *epicheirema.*”84

Although Toulmin takes the syllogism as the starting point, in order to cover the complexity and variety that informal argumentation can take he introduces extra elements:

If we are to take account of these features of our argument also, our pattern will become more complex. Modal qualifiers (Q) and conditions of exception or rebuttal (R) are distinct both from data and from warrants, and need to be given separate places in our layout. Just as warrant (W) is itself neither a datum (D) nor a claim (C), since it implies in itself something about both D and C—namely, that the step from the one to the other is legitimate; so, in turn, Q and R are themselves distinct from W, since they comment implicitly on the bearing of W on this step—qualifiers (Q) indicating the strength conferred by the warrant on this step, conditions of rebuttal (R) indicating circumstances in which the general authority of the warrant would have to be set aside. To mark these further distinctions, we may write the qualifier (Q) immediately beside the conclusion which it qualifies (C), and the exceptional conditions which might be capable

of defeating or rebutting the warranted conclusion (R) immediately below the qualifier.\textsuperscript{85}

With these extra refinements, the model for analyzing arguments becomes\textsuperscript{86}:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{D} \quad \text{Since} \quad \text{W} \\
\text{So Q, C} \quad \text{Unless R} \\
\end{array}
\]

Finally, Toulmin introduces a further refinement, a backing (B) for the warrant\textsuperscript{87}:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{D} \quad \text{Since} \quad \text{W} \\
\text{On account of} \quad \text{B} \\
\text{So Q, C} \quad \text{Unless R} \\
\end{array}
\]

In spite of the fact that Toulmin’s model has received a quite favorable reception in the United States, his model has important weaknesses:

One of the major problems is the vagueness, ambiguity, and sometimes even inconsistency in his use of key terms. An example of vagueness is the term \textit{field of argument}, which he defines by reference to another term, \textit{logical type}. From the examples, one gets the impres-

\textsuperscript{85}Toulmin, \textit{Uses of Argument}, 101.

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., 101.

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 104.
sion that factual statements, moral judgments, and predictions belong to different fields of argument. In his explication of the field-dependency of the backing, however, Toulmin gives the impression that the terms field of argument, topic, and discipline are synonymous. A weather forecast would then belong to a different field of argument (meteorology) than an economic forecast (economics).

Although Toulmin is critical of formal logic, he does not reject it nor deny that it does capture the way reasoning operates. As I pointed out, he takes Aristotle’s syllogism as his starting point for his model which he only wants to make more flexible. Moreover, he does not reject the structure of arguments as made up of premises and a conclusion. Finally, he does not reject the concept of validity as such but only wants validity to be more broadly defined. Instead of rejecting logic, Toulmin only wants to make it more user friendly, as van Eemeren rightly points out again:

According to Toulmin, logic has for too long been reluctant to drop its narrow formal conception of validity, which is responsible for the insignificance of logic for the evaluation of arguments as they occur in practice. His chief aim with The Uses of Argument was to bring logic closer to argumentation in everyday life and in the academic disciplines. This can only be achieved by way of a radical change in orientation.

Although with his model Toulmin wants to bring argument analysis closer to the way argumentation occurs in actual discourse, he does not explain how his diagrams can be of any practical use. Even if different parts of an argument can be properly identified with the labels he introduced and placed on one of the diagrams, one wonders how diagrams can help in evaluating arguments. For instance, would an argument which can be placed on the crudest diagram like “Harry was...”

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88 Van Eemeren, Fundamentals of Argumentation, 155.

89 Ibid., 154.
born in Bermuda and since a man born in Bermuda will be a British subject, so Harry is British’ be poorer or less persuasive than one which includes one or more backings, one or more qualifiers, and one or more rebuttals? And if all these embellishments only confuse an argument, why place them on a diagram instead of eliminating them altogether and stick with arguments in their purest form like syllogisms which apparently no argument can beat?

In conclusion, although formal logic has been criticized for its failure to apply to informal argumentation, it has not been rejected even by its strongest critics. Quite the opposite, for Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca formal logic provides the model to be emulated, and for Stephen Toulmin logic becomes the starting point for his model. In spite of the questions raised by its boldest critics, there is one question that no one has asked about logic: as long as the goal of informal argumentation is persuasion and the goal of logical analysis is to achieve demonstration, to what extent the categories that formal logic has developed have proved to be so suitable for demonstration are equally good for persuasion? It is this question that I will try to address next.
DEMONSTRATION, VALIDITY, AND PERSUASION

In spite of a widespread belief that we live in the age of reason, reasoning and argumentation are in a peculiar situation. On the one hand, there is formal logic that has clear concepts and accurate rules to use and achieve its goals but is virtually inapplicable to most reasoning and argumentation as it occurs in human interaction. On the other hand, for the reasoning and argumentation that are involved in almost any human interaction there is no theory to account for how it happens and how it works.

In order to solve this peculiar situation, an option would be to force informal arguments into the mold of formal language. This approach would require rephrasing arguments and supplementing them with elements that would make them fit for formal logic analysis, but such manipulations of arguments would eventually change the argument and call into question whatever is being proved. Even if the rephrased or paraphrased argument turns out to be valid, the relevance of that validity to the original argument is questionable at best. Therefore, the approach that seemed more promising was to try to make formal logic cover informal argumentation as well without the need of rephrasing arguments. This approach was used by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, who tried to develop a theory that resembled formal logic but covered informal argumentation as well, and by Stephen Toulmin, who developed a more complex argument model that would cover both
formal and informal arguments. As we have seen in the previous chapter, both attempts failed.

To summarize, reasoning and argumentation are in a peculiar situation because formal logic has an excellent language which informal argumentation cannot use, while informal reasoning and argumentation—whatever language it may have—no one can explain or understand. All attempts to force informal argumentation into using the language of formal logic have failed to the extent that even those who do learn formal logic find very little use for it in actual argumentation. Similarly, all attempts to develop a common language that is shared by both formal and informal arguments have failed. Both approaches have one thing in common: both assume that formal reasoning and informal reasoning are brothers that must share the same nature. It is therefore time to consider the possibility that the two brothers may not be so closely related as commonly assumed and the reason they refuse to speak the same language is not because they do not want to, but because they cannot. What if the fundamentals of reasoning are not found in formal argumentation but rather in informal argumentation? It is time to look at the fundamental differences between formal logic and informal reasoning.

**Demonstration Versus Persuasion**

One of the most important concepts on which formal logic is built is that of demonstration. As I pointed out when I examined Aristotle’s process in developing his syllogistic, his choices of oppositions were made in order to make the demonstration of the conclusion possible. In some cases the demonstration was itself a syllogism or another argument and sometimes Aristotle himself referred to demonstration as a syllogism. The choice of statements that could make up a syllogism was also the result of a careful selection in order to allow conversion of one statement into another to make demonstration possible. Formal logic turned to mathematics because of its notorious potential to prove that something was either right or wrong. Just as Aristotle devoted most of his efforts to proving that syllogisms were valid, so also most of the
training in formal logic is in learning the rules of derivation to prove that formulas are valid.

Because of the way in which validity is defined, mathematics is not the only procedure that logic can use in order to achieve demonstration. Another method of proving validity or invalidity of arguments is that of counter examples. Instead of applying mathematical operations on formulas to prove validity, one can look for substitutions of the formula that would render a false conclusion when the premises are true, and when one single instance is found, then that formula is proved invalid. The use of counterexamples, however, is not a practical way to demonstrate arguments therefore the primary method of proving validity is using derivations which are based on arithmetical operations.

One fundamental difference between formal logic and ordinary reasoning is immediately apparent in that the goal of formal logic is to achieve demonstration while the goal of informal reasoning is to achieve persuasion. Demonstration and persuasion are no doubt related, but they are not identical and they cannot be achieved necessarily by the same means. To lump them together is probably one of the oldest fallacies that has plagued the study of argumentation beginning with Aristotle. As I pointed out earlier, Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of persuasion, but when he discussed later the role that arguments played in rhetorical discourse, he called arguments “proof” which he labeled enthymemes. When he defined enthymemes, however, he described them as “a form of syllogism” and he explained it by saying that “we are most convinced when something is demonstrated.” Consequently, since the best persuasion is demonstration, rhetoric, as the art of persuasion, ends up being the art of demonstration. According to this reasoning, as long as formal logic has greatly increased the art of demonstration, it must be the art of persuasion as well.

Aristotle may have been right that we are most convinced when something is demonstrated, but he is wrong if he assumes that any time persuasion takes place, some kind of demonstration must have taken place as well. What Aristotle and logicians have overlooked is that persuasion and reasoning do not require proof or demonstration. An
informal argument is never followed by a demonstration that proves the conclusion as most syllogisms are followed by a demonstration that their conclusion is true, or as formal arguments are accompanied by a derivation that proves that they are valid. When lawyers present an argument in a court of law, they do not stop after stating the argument to hand out pieces of paper and pens to the jury and the audience asking them to apply the derivations and see for themselves that the argument is valid and therefore the conclusion follows. Or, alternatively, an arguer does not stop after stating an argument to ask the audience to think of counterexamples in which similar premises are true but the conclusion is false; and if unable to find at least one counterexample that would invalidate the argument, then they should conclude that the argument is valid and the conclusion be accepted as true. Arguments that occur in ordinary speech are never followed by any demonstration, but rather the connection between the premises and the conclusion is grasped instantly, if it is grasped at all. If persuasion does not occur spontaneously after the argument is presented, the whole argument is discarded rather than “saved” and placed in limbo until its validity is proven through formulas at home. Reasoning either grasps the logical connections instantly or it does not grasp them at all. Therefore, persuasion either occurs spontaneously or it does not occur at all.

Validity and Persuasion

Another fundamental concept for formal logic is that of validity. Next, we need to consider to what extent validity—as it is defined by formal logic—means persuasion as well. It is commonly assumed that a valid argument is necessarily persuasive and a persuasive argument must be proved valid somehow. In order to see how validity and persuasion are lumped together it is enough to look at how the concept of validity is typically introduced in a textbook on formal logic:

Some arguments are good; others aren’t. According to the definition of argument given above, any string of sentences counts as an argu-
ment if it’s possible to single out one sentence as the conclusion, purportedly supported by others. What distinguishes good from bad argument? What makes a good argument good? What makes a bad argument unsuccessful?90

One would expect that a good argument is one which is persuasive—that is, its conclusion is accepted by the audience—but that is not the answer that the textbook gives to the questions above: “In a deductively valid argument, the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion.”91 Then the definition of validity follows: “An argument is deductively valid if and only if it’s impossible for its premises all to be true while its conclusion is false.”92 Accordingly, an argument is “good” when “it is impossible for the conclusion to be false while the premises are all true.” Then the textbook goes on:

It’s possible, then, for a deductively valid argument to have true premises and a true conclusion, (at least some) false premises and a false conclusion, or false premises and a true conclusion. But no deductively valid argument has true premises and a false conclusion.93

That good or persuasive arguments are necessarily valid arguments and valid arguments are necessarily good or persuasive arguments is another common fallacy that has plagued the understanding of reasoning and argumentation. For instance, would an argument used in a court of law that has “false premises and a true conclusion” be considered “good” and “successful” just because it is deductively valid? In order to see that this is not a trivial question let us consider some

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91Ibid.

92Ibid., 13.

93Ibid.
examples of syllogisms taken from another textbook on symbolic logic that tries to illustrate the concept of validity:

- All cats are reptiles
  - All reptiles are cold-blooded
  - All cats are cold-blooded

- All cats are dogs
  - All dogs are reptiles
  - All cats are reptiles

- All Martians are reptiles
  - All reptiles are vertebrates
  - All Martians are vertebrates

As the textbook explains, all these are valid arguments, and according to formal logic, necessarily good, but if they occurred in every day speech, who would consider them “good” and “successful” just because the one who dares to use them can claim that they can be proved to be valid? Because of the way validity is defined, even when formal logic achieves validity, it is virtually irrelevant as far as persuasion is concerned, and because informal argumentation aims at persuasion, formal logic is unable to deal with it.

The problem that formal logic has in dealing with argumentation is therefore twofold. On the one hand, formal logic cannot prove validity for informal arguments because they cannot be put into formulas with which formal logic can work. But more importantly, even if eventually formal logic gets to the level of sophistication to analyze all informal arguments and show whether or not they are valid, that achievement would be questionable at best as far as persuasion is concerned. In other words, even if formal logic were able to prove that some informal arguments are as unquestionably valid as the syllogisms

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above, who would be impressed with such arguments just because they can be proved to be “deductively” valid?

The main problem with formal logic is not so much that it is unable to prove the informal arguments, but rather that informal argumentation would not find such help useful even if such help were available. In order for formal logic to be of help in informal argumentation it would require that people—before accepting any argument as convincing—ask themselves whether it is possible for the conclusion to be false while the premises are true, and decide to reject or accept the argument only after a conclusive answer can be given to that question. To expect people to declare themselves persuaded only after they discover the validity in arguments presupposes that people completely change their mind set; and that is quite unrealistic. Therefore, the concept of validity adopted by formal logic is inapplicable to reasoning and persuasion even if validity were attainable for informal arguments.

Persuasion and the Opposition True/False

It is hardly necessary to emphasize how fundamental for logic the opposition true/false is. As I pointed out in an earlier chapter that dealt with Aristotle’s quest for developing his syllogistic, the opposition true/false was the yardstick against which he measured all the options that he considered. Eventually he chose affirmation and negation as being the main features of the statements chosen to build his syllogistic on because they were the only kinds of statements which were truth functional, that is, their truth value could be determined at any time.

Formal logic is built on the same foundation to the extent that whatever elements—including connectives—are allowed to be part of an argument, must be truth functional. Although attempts to apply logic to modal terms have been made since Aristotle himself, logic has remained confined to statements that can be either true or false. The implication is that a lot of linguistic features are not truth functional and therefore they have no logical relevance. When reasoning is defined in terms of formal logic, it follows that reasoning would have to be confined only to those aspects of language that are truth
functional and consequently would be the only ones that have persuasive value. It is therefore time to look at whether affirmations and negations, as they are dealt with in formal logic, have a counterpart in the way in which our minds deal with them in ordinary speech.

As I pointed out earlier, Aristotle chose the affirmative and negative statements as the only ones that can convey logical relationships because they met the requirement that they cannot be both true and false at the same time. Moreover, this opposition is symmetrical in the sense that it does not matter for which statement the truth value is known because the negated statement would have the opposite truth value automatically. As a result of this symmetry, variables can be used instead of actual linguistic entities. Unfortunately, this symmetry between the affirmative and negated statements does not hold in actual language.

In order to illustrate this, let us consider the statement “it is raining.” In sentential logic, this statement can be represented by a variable like “R,” and its negation by the same variable preceded by tilde “~R.” Because of their truth functional symmetry, in formal logic it does not really matter for which of them we know the truth value because the truth value of the other would be readily available. In processing formulas, adding a negation to a variable or a formula introduces no extra difficulty as far as establishing the truth value is concerned. In informal argumentation, however—in which the mind works with meaning of words rather than variables—this symmetry between affirmation and negation does not hold. In other words, the mind does not process negative statements with the same ease as it processes affirmative statements, although in mathematical formulas it does not matter whether a variable is negated or not in order to establish its truth value. The fact that mathematics finds no difference in the ease with which either “R” or “~R” can be processed when used in a formula obscures the fact that in actual reasoning the mind does not find the meaning of negative statements equally easy to grasp. Indeed, negative statements can be quite problematic as far as their meaning is concerned. Let us consider a simple statement like “it is raining.” It is quite easy for the mind to grasp its meaning and establish its truth value: if drops of water are falling from the sky to the ground,
then it is true, but if drops of liquid are not falling from the sky to the ground, then it is false. According to formal logic, the meaning of “¬R” should be as easy and clear as the meaning of “R”; but is that the case? What is the meaning of “it is not the case that it is raining”? Even if we decide that the statement says that drops of water are not falling from the sky to the ground, we still do not have a clear image of “what is the case.” The statement “it is not the case that it is raining” leaves the mind with a great array of meanings: from drizzling, cloudy but dry, snowing, to sunshine. The symmetry between the truth value of “R” and “¬R” does not have a parallel in a symmetry between the meaning of “it is raining” and “it is not the case that it is raining.” The mind cannot manipulate the meaning of the two statements with the same ease with which mathematical logic can manipulate letters and their negated counterparts in formulas.

The dissymmetry between the affirmative and negated statements as far as establishing their meaning is concerned is even more obvious when multiple negations are used. From the point of view of mathematical logic, it does not matter how many negations are piled up on a variable or a formula, because the number of negations that a variable or a formula has introduces no difficulty as far as calculus is concerned. As a result, the truth value of “R,” “¬R,” “¬¬R,” “¬¬¬R,” “¬¬¬¬R,” “¬¬¬¬¬R,” “¬¬¬¬¬¬R,” can be established with the same accuracy and ease, no matter of which of the above formulas the truth value is determined. Therefore, if the truth value of “¬¬¬¬¬¬R” is known to be false, then the truth value of “R” is also known to be false.

Unfortunately, as long as the mind does not work with variables and formulas but rather with meaning of actual statements, adding negations only increases that dissymmetry to the extent that multiple negations become virtually impossible for the human mind to process. In order to illustrate this, let us consider the triple negated simple statement “it is raining”: “It is not the case that [it is not the case that [it is not the case that (it is raining)])].” Let us suppose that drops of water are falling from the sky to the ground. Would a mind just by reading the above statement quickly determine that the truth value of the statement is false just because one can discern at a quick glance that the truth value of “¬¬¬R” is “¬¬R”? As long as persuasion happens in the
mind, what is the value of whatever logic proves as long as it has no parallel to what happens in the mind?

That the mind does not process negations as neatly as formal logic assumes can be shown also by looking at how double negations function in actual speech. In some languages—like English—double negations are not normally used, and if a double negation is used, then the double negated statement turns into an affirmation just as formal logic assumes. But there are languages like Romanian and French in which double negations are standard without turning the double negated statements into an affirmation. But double negations sometimes occur even in languages like English. For instance, in colloquial English one can hear statements like this: “He did not bring us no tapes.” Even the speakers of standard English would not fail to understand that the meaning of the statement is “he brought us no tapes” and not “he did bring us some tapes.” A similar difficulty is encountered when the mind is trying to establish the meaning of two negated statements joined together. A good example is the phrase made famous by the singer Bob Seger in one of his songs: “I wish I didn’t know now what I didn’t know then.” Those who hear the phrase or read it for the first time would probably struggle to figure out its meaning, but who would have any difficulty to grasp instantly the meaning of the phrase when the second negation is dropped: “I don’t like what I know now”? The two statements, however, mean the same thing, but the clarity of the second one is achieved by the use of only one negation. Which proves the point that our minds do not process negations as automatically as formal logic assumes. Actually it can be argued that in ordinary speech the mind can hardly handle more than simple negations—and even that with different degrees of difficulty and ambiguity depending on circumstances—and when double negations do occur, they are rather treated as simple negations, the mind assuming that the second one is redundant rather than intended.

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The affirmation and negation may be the best opposition that conveys unequivocally the true/false opposition, and they may be the best suited categories to achieve demonstration in formal logic, but that does not mean that they are equally useful for persuasion. Actually, it can be argued that the opposition true/false is quite marginal in informal argumentation. A persuasive argument is not necessarily one in which the conclusion is true or false because in informal argumentation, even with the most persuasive arguments, whether the conclusion is true or false may still remain open. The need for persuasion arises precisely in those situations in which it cannot be determined with certainty what the case is, and persuasion is achieved by showing that the conclusion and the premises are consistent, related, or compatible. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca correctly pointed out this main difference between formal logic and informal argumentation when they said that the domain of informal argumentation is the realm of “the probable.” The requirement that formal logic has imposed on argumentation that only truth functional statements can have a logical value and therefore a persuasive value is wrong headed and needs to be abandoned. If informal argumentation eventually develops a theory of its own, it most likely will not be based on the opposition true/false.

The symmetry between affirmation and negation may be critical for demonstration, but in actual reasoning in which persuasion is the goal, negations cannot have the same value and persuasive force as the affirmative counterparts. Since the mind works in the process of reasoning with meaning and not formulas, the ability to attach meaning to statements is essential in order to render connected statements persuasive, and negations are stumbling blocks rather than equal partners, particularly if a statement has more than one negative term.

I started from the simple fact that logic and argumentation have different goals: one is interested in demonstration and the other one is interested in persuasion. Instead of assuming that one is wrong—usually informal argumentation—I started from the premise that both may be right taking into account their divergent goals. And the analysis of the key concepts that formal logic has developed showed that what works so well for formal logic turns out to be quite problematic for persuasion. I looked at the concept of validity and although it is quite
adequate for the purpose of demonstration, it is quite useless when viewed from the point of view of persuasion. Then I looked at the opposition true and false which is so important and works so well for logic in its pursuit of demonstration, but marginal as far as persuasion is concerned. And finally I looked at the symmetry that formal logic assumes between affirmative statements and their negations. That again works well for demonstration, but as far as persuasion is concerned, negations are not necessarily equal friends and partners of the affirmative statements in conveying meaning and persuasion. The conclusion seems unavoidable: demonstration and persuasion are two different things. The question is: How can we persuade the logicians that they do not need persuasion and how can we demonstrate to rhetoricians that they do not need demonstration? If you can demonstrate something, why do you need to persuade? And after you manage to persuade, why do you need to demonstrate? It seems to me that it is time for reasoning and persuasion to be allowed to be understood on their own terms rather than forced to speak the rigid language of logic.
7

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MIND

If the conclusion reached in the previous chapter that the goal of logic (which is to achieve demonstration) is so different from that of rhetoric (which is to achieve persuasion) then the kind of relationships that reasoning and persuasion presuppose are very different from the kind of relationships that logic assumes. Persuasion takes place in the mind while demonstration takes place in the language. To put it differently, the language of persuasion need not be the language of demonstration. That may sound like common sense, but actually it defies established common sense.

According to this established belief, in the process of meaning the mind is just a silent and passive device that connects the outside world with the words that we produce. All that matters is the forms that words take and that is precisely what formal logic tries to capture and is able to demonstrate. If reasoning has to do not with relationships that are found in language but rather with relationships that take place in the mind, then the mind should no longer be viewed as a passive device, but one that has a language of its own, and that defies common sense.

That the mind is just a passive medium seems to be a truth that has been universally accepted and probably no one expressed it more clearly than Aristotle in the beginning of his On Interpretation where he laid the foundation for his syllogistic and future logic:
Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken. As writing, so also is speech not the same for all races of men. But the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for the whole of mankind, as are also the objects of which those affections are presentations or likenesses, images, copies.66

The importance of this passage for understanding how reasoning takes place can hardly be overemphasized. Aristotle notices that reasoning or mental processes are part of a threefold reality. First, there are objects that make up the objective reality and he assumes that such objects are the same for everyone. Then he distinguishes “mental affections” which are impressions of those objects on the soul or mind, impressions that are likenesses of those objects and therefore must be the same for everyone because they are made by the same objects on minds that are similar. Finally, those mental affections must be at the origin of the language we produce and which is made up of words that are signs or copies of the mental impressions or affections. It is only here that Aristotle notices that words and languages are not the same for the whole of humanity. When he says that words are not the same for everyone he does not mean that each individual develops a personal languages, but that words that designate the same object are different in different languages. Reasoning must take place within this threefold reality and in the way in which its parts interrelate.

According to Aristotle, there is an unbroken connection between the objective reality and the words that we use to describe the world. The objects in the world make impressions on the mind and the mind produces the proper words. Aristotle claims that there is a simple and direct connection between the world and the words we produce. His main interest within this threefold reality is not in how words interrelate but rather in how entities in the world interrelate. He is aware, however, that the only part of the threefold reality to which we have direct access is the language. Aristotle intuited what much later Kant forcefully argued that we cannot know “the things in themselves.” A

66 Aristotle, On Interpretation, 1.16a4–8.
similar problem is encountered as far as the mental impressions are concerned. Just as we do not have direct access to the objective reality, we do not have direct access to the mental reality either. Although we may have access to the “contents” of our own minds, we do not know how those contents interrelate and how our own minds operate. As far as someone else’s mind is concerned, we do not have access even to those contents, let alone to how relationships are established in the mind. It was the workings of this strange “organ” that we cannot approach through any of our senses that Aristotle wanted to figure out in his Organon and Kant wanted to strip down to its basic building blocks—time and space—as “pure reason.” But while Kant was optimistic that we can understand the mind or the “reason in itself,” Aristotle was not or may not even have been interested. According to him, the only part of the threefold reality to which we do have direct access is the language, both spoken and written. As a result, language has a tremendous epistemological function, not so much because of its reliability as an instrument of knowledge, but because of its availability.

In order for language, however, to have an epistemological function, Aristotle realizes that there must be an unbroken relationship between objective reality–mind–language, so that the reverse process can take place: language–mind–objective reality. It is this epistemological chain that Aristotle is establishing in On Interpretation and it is on this epistemological model that his syllogistic and formal logic are built. If there is an unbroken relationship between the world and the words, then we can go back from the words to the world. In order for this connection to be reliable, however, it is important for the mind to be passive and not influence the way in which impressions are made upon it. To use a crude illustration, the connection between the objective world and language is the same as that between the letters of a typewriter that make impressions on two sheets of paper with a carbon paper between them. The letters of the typewriter are the objects in the world, the first sheet of paper is the mind, and the second sheet of paper is the words. If the shape of the letters on the carbon copy/language is similar to the shape of the letters of the typewriter, then we can discard the first copy/mind as irrelevant. It is on this
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assumption that the syllogistic and logic are built. The very opening statement of Prior Analytics reads: “Our first duty is to state the scope of our inquiry, and to what science it pertains: that it is concerned with demonstration, and pertains to a demonstrative science [ἐπίστημη ἀποδεικτική, epistēmē apodeiktikē].” The kind of knowledge or science [ἐπίστημη, episteme] Aristotle is interested in is one that can be demonstrated and therefore it must be knowledge that is mind-independent. That Aristotle deserves the credit for having defined for the first time scientific knowledge as knowledge that can be demonstrated I would not question, but what apparently has remained unnoticed is that scientific knowledge is knowledge that is mind-independent. In other words, it is knowledge that is not based on how the mind works, but on how things are when the mind does not interfere. That this epistemological model may be appropriate for scientific investigations I would not dispute, but to what extent this model is adequate to explain how the mind itself works no one seems to have questioned so far. Moreover, when scientific knowledge—that is, knowledge that is mind-independent—has been adopted as the only true knowledge even by humanities, no one seems to have realized the contradiction: by the very nature of the object of their investigation,

97 Frege is usually credited with developing a direct relationship between reality and language that allows for scientific knowledge when Frege’s contribution to logic is described in the following way: “The function of language in the expression of scientific knowledge is to represent an independently existing world. The meanings of linguistic expressions must thus derive from their relation to the world, not from their relation to the minds of language users. Similarly, logic—embodying the principles of reasoning and the standards of rationality—must be concerned not with laws of human thought, but with laws of truth. The principles of correct reasoning must be justified by reference to the function of language in representing the world correctly or incorrectly rather than by reference to human psychology.” Encyclopædia Britannica, www.britannica.com, 1999–2000, s.v. “Philosophical Anthropology.” Frege, however, was only following Aristotle.

98 Aristotle, Prior Analytics, 24a10–11.
The Language of the Mind

Humanities are investigating products of the human mind with the goal of achieving knowledge that is mind-independent. Therefore, scientific knowledge—as defined by Aristotle and by sciences—when applied to humanities is a contradiction of terms.

Aristotle, however, was aware of a problem. Although he could claim that the objects in the world were the same and could assume that their impressions on the mind must be the same for everyone, he noticed that the words which were found in different languages were not the same. In other words, although the letters of the typewriter were the same and probably the first copy/mind impressions was the same, the carbon copy/words was not quite the same for all peoples. Unfortunately Aristotle did not see this as a major problem. Although he does not elaborate, he must have reasoned that, although different languages have different words, eventually for each object there must be a word in every language and since different words for the same object in different languages are equivalent, they do not count as different words. It is possible that he may have chosen to use letters rather than words in his syllogistic not so much because he discovered the concept of variables as it is assumed today, but because he wanted to convey the idea that syllogisms are not language dependent.

Although aware of a difficulty, Aristotle believed that what we find in language must also be found both out there in the world and in our minds when our minds function properly and do not interfere in the process. The brevity with which Aristotle states the epistemological model on which he builds his syllogistic is unfortunate relative to its importance, and the fact that he did not elaborate on it may simply mean that he considered it common sense.

Although Aristotle’s syllogistic and formal logic have been widely studied and accepted, I am not aware that the epistemological model on which they are built is anywhere discussed. According to this model, ideally there is a continuous connection between the objective world and language, with the mind being a passive transit point in this process. Because of this largely direct relationship between the world and words, a reversal is possible, that is, we can start from words and the forms they take and make inferences about objects in the world and their relationships. Consequently, logic is a matter of “form,” that is,
the form which words or language take, the foundational concept of formal logic. Of course, Aristotle would not have claimed that syllogisms are just plays on words, just as formal logicians would not claim that the logical formulas that formal logic uses to demonstrate the validity of arguments are just linguistic relations. The “truth” of a conclusion in a syllogism or a formal argument is not something that refers to words, but is something that must be found “true” out there in the world, provided that the premises are true. This is possible only if the mind does not get into this process in some way or another. Aristotle, of course, would not have denied that the mind can get in the way, but when it does, it only compromises and distorts the process. Ideally the mind should be passive and just receive the impressions, and it is possible that The Organon was meant to discover those kinds of relationships that are not mind-dependent. The truths that both the syllogistic and formal logic try to establish, not only are not language dependant, but they are not mind dependant either. Eventually the syllogisms and formal arguments are linguistic formulas in which words are replaced by variables with the belief that the relationships among those variables have an equivalent in the world. The mind, as an intermediary, should not play any role in the process and therefore should not introduce any transformation. If the mind does play a role—as apparently is the case in informal reasoning—then it introduces alterations and distortions that can only lead to errors. According to the epistemological model adopted by Aristotle and by formal logic, reasoning is at its best when the mind does nothing. Not surprisingly, to learn formal logic is to learn to apply mechanically and blindly rules which have no parallel to what the mind does in normal thinking.

**The Reasoning of a Passive Mind**

Aristotle’s remark that languages are not the same for the whole world should have alerted him that there might be a problem with his epistemological two-way street. Although the world is the same,99

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99I am aware that postmodernism would question even that, but I assume an objective universal reality that Aristotle adopted and modernity—which
languages are not. Even if we assume—as Aristotle did—that no transformation takes place in the way in which the world affects our minds/souls, at some point a transformation must take place since at one end we have the same things for everyone but at the other end we have different words for different peoples. Aristotle could have suspected at least one transformation to take place somewhere in the epistemological chain, but most likely he did not consider that possibility more closely because it would have caused his whole project to collapse.

Although Aristotle did not contemplate the possibility that there may be some transformation that takes place in the epistemological chain, such a possibility must be considered. What if the way in which the world operates is different from the way in which the mind operates, and the way in which the mind operates is different from the way in which languages are structured? Then the relationship between the three sides of the threefold reality is no longer as simple and direct as Aristotle assumed and his epistemological model is quite naive. What if reasoning has reasoning structures just as languages have grammar structures and the world has its own natural laws? To assume that relationships that are found among words (which are covered by grammar) must have a counterpart in the relationships that are found out there in the world (which are covered by science) is to confuse grammar with science. Aristotle’s epistemological model superficially seems like common sense, but upon closer analysis it defies common sense.

Although Aristotle may be right that there must be some relationship between the three aspects of the threefold reality—world, mind, words—there are reasons to believe that their relationship is not as simple and direct as Aristotle assumed. That the world and the mind are different may be self-evident, but speech and mind may not be so similar as commonly assumed. Indeed, most likely they are quite different. One striking difference is that speech is linear and temporal—that is, language is discursive—which does not seem to be
developed formal logic—took for granted.
true of the mind. In other words, language always takes place in time, while thinking does not seem to be so structured. As a result, speech always requires time while the mind does not seem to be time bound. Often the mind is compared with computers, but computers are closer to speech than to mind because they are also time-based devices and therefore discursive so that even the fastest computers take time—sometimes considerable time—to access and process pieces of information, while the mind does not seem to be time structured. For instance, the mind seems to be able to access the most recent pieces of information from memory with the same ease as old pieces of memory. If the mind is not temporal while speech and language are, then that is already a crucial difference which should alert us that to extrapolate the patterns which we discover in language over the mind is problematic.

Aristotle overlooked this problem when he established syllogisms as linguistic devices that supposedly replicated patterns that existed in the real world. And formal logic does the same: it looks for patterns—indeed, mathematical patterns—by analyzing the language and turning it into laws of thinking and indeed, of truths in the world. But if important transformations take place in the epistemological chain, then formal logic creates a strange situation. It is as if we want to measure some random emissions of infra red light waves which we cannot see, and we need to use a measuring device that detects the light waves and turns the signal into a digital one which is made of strings of “1”s and “0”s. Then we play those strings of “1”s” and “0”s” on a digital acoustic player and discover that some sequences of sounds are pleasing. The infrared light represents the objects in the world, the strings of “1”s” and “0”s” are the impressions that those objects make on the mind, and the sounds of the acoustic device are the words that we speak. Let us suppose that our conclusion that the sounds which we hear are “pleasing” is “valid” in the sense that it is impossible for the conclusion to be false as long as the infrared waves are the way they are. The question is: What does the conclusion “pleasing” refer to? Does it mean that the sounds that we hear are pleasing? Or does it mean that some strings of sequences of “1”s” and “0”s” are pleasing? Or does it mean that some patterns of infrared waves are pleasing?
Therefore, when we play premises and conclusions on a syllogistic machine or a symbolic mathematical device, what do we really mean when we say that the conclusion is valid or true? In other words, what does the “truth” of the conclusion mean? In order to see that these are not trivial distinctions let us consider the famous syllogism Barbara:

All humans are mortal  
Socrates is human  
Therefore, Socrates is mortal

According to Aristotle’s terminology, the term “human” is the “middle term,” that is, the word that mediates the truth from the premises to the conclusion. But what “truth” of the conclusion does it mediate? Does it mediate the statement “Socrates is mortal,” in the sense that the two statements that make up the premises, being grammatically accepted, also make the statement “Socrates is mortal” a correct statement grammatically? Or does it mean that having accepted the thought that all humans are mortal, I must also think of Socrates as mortal as well no matter how long he may live? Or does it mean that at some time Socrates must be found dead by self-poisoning or some other cause no matter how unthinkable that may be? I think that Aristotle’s answer is unambiguous: it means all three because they all overlap, but the second one, that I must think of Socrates as mortal, is irrelevant. This is the whole point of demonstration, to know the truth of the conclusion no matter what I think or feel about it. This is the paradox involved in the epistemological model adopted by logic: on the one hand, it wants to prove how proper thinking takes place, and on the other hand, it wants to capture relationships that are mind-independent. In the end, the mind itself gets bracketed. To use Aristotle’s imagery, the mind/soul at its best is a perfect piece of wax capable of receiving the slightest impressions without any resistance. Consequently, reasoning is not something that the mind/soul does, but rather is something that is done to it.
The Relationship Between Language and Mind

I am not suggesting that no one has ever wondered about the connection between language, mind, and the world. Aristotle himself was clearly aware of the distinction, but decided to brush it aside. Logicians during the Middle Ages struggled with this issue, too. Even important figures in the development of formal logic like Boole struggled with the relationship between words and meaning. They all believed, however, that the forms or patterns that we discover in the language replicate not only operations of the mind but relations in the real world as well. As a result, they used different models from the world to explain how reasoning worked. For instance, Boole assumed that the mathematical relationships between words would also replicate operations of the mind and relations in the real world as well. As it was pointed out earlier, Toulmin took jurisprudence as a model that binds the world, the mind, and language together.

The problem that I see with these approaches is that they take one product of the mind—linguistic forms, mathematics, jurisprudence—and assume that it captures the operations of the mind that has produced it. That mathematics is one of the most remarkable accomplishments of the mind can hardly be doubted, but to look for how mathematics operates in order to understand how the mind operates is to commit a big fallacy. It is as if one analyzes how an automobile works and then assumes that that is the way in which a car factory works. Similarly, to assume that law, or music, or any other area of human spirituality would provide the model that explains how the mind operates is equally misguided and futile. It is hard to admit that we do not know how our most wonderful instrument of knowing works.

The Language of the Mind

That the mind and language do not have such a simple and straightforward relationship the syllogistic and formal logic assume is
widely accepted in semiotics. Usually semiotics is defined as the theory of signs, and as Umberto Eco explains, a sign is “something standing for something else.”100 There are many kinds of entities that can function as signs, but the most common are words, both spoken and written. It was Ferdinand de Saussure who first realized that in a sign and in language we encounter two realities: a material entity that can be grasped through one of the senses—like hearing or seeing—and a mental entity that can be grasped with the mind—the mental image that results from what is heard or seen. Therefore he defines a sign as any object—which he calls a sound pattern but not necessarily limited to acoustic productions—which is made of two parts: the material part of the sign and the concept or idea that it generates in the mind. According to Saussure, anything can be a sign on condition that it is always accompanied by a mental counterpart which he referred to as concept. A word, as a linguistic sign, embodies a double reality:

The linguistic sign is, then, a two-sided psychological entity, which may be presented by the following diagram:

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    Concept
   /     \         \     /
  Sound Pattern
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These two elements are intimately linked and each triggers the other.101

Following Saussure’s distinctions, semioticians usually refer to the material entity of a sign as the signifier or referent, and to the mental entity as signification, signified, or referend.

Another important distinction thatSaussure introduced was that between parole and langue. By parole he meant utterances that are used

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to communicate. Utterances are instances of actual uses of signifiers. The most important feature of such utterances as parole is that they are the result of individual choices:

The psychological part of the circuit is not involved in its entirety either. The executive side of it plays no part, for execution is never carried out by the collectivity: it is always individual, and the individual is always master of it. This is what we shall designate by the term speech [i.e., parole].

For instance, if the words “flow,” “water,” and “upstream” occur in a statement it is because an individual chose to use those signifiers or words rather than others. But the most important insight that Saussure had was that signifiers, in order to be meaningful when they are put together in language, need to follow rules or structures that had been developed by a collectivity over a longer period of time. This set of rules or structures that are found in every language and which individual words or signifiers must comply with, he calls langue. Such linguistic structures are no longer decided by individuals but developed by a collectivity:

If we could collect the totality of word patterns stored in all those individuals, we should have the social bond which constitutes their language. It is a fund accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of speech, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly in the brains of a group of individuals; for the language is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity.

To follow the previous example, although individuals may choose the words that are used in an act of speech, they do not have an unlimited number of options to link those words and therefore would have to

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102Ibid., 13.

103Ibid.
follow the rules which a collectivity has developed over a long period of time as far as morphology and syntax is concerned. Therefore, an individual who would want to use the above mentioned words, would not have the option to choose the parole “flow water upstream,” because English morphology requires that a verb in present tense used with a singular subject take the ending “s,” therefore the only form that the word “flow” can take in this utterance/parole would be “flows.” Moreover, English syntax requires that in a statement, the subject usually comes first with the verb following it, therefore one of the few possible structures in which these signifiers can be put together to make a parole is: “water flows upstream.” According to Saussure, every act of speech that individuals perform would have to follow the structure of the language which a collectivity has established over a long period of time. This is not the function of the speaker to decide, as Saussure continues: “The language itself is not a function of the speaker. It is the product passively registered by the individual.”

Saussure’s insight that language has an underlying structured reality is obvious enough, but what he seems to forget is precisely his ground breaking discovery: words as signifiers already involve a double reality, that of material side and that of conceptual side. If that is the case and langue is a structure, then does this structure refer only to how the signifiers relate, or does it refer to how the signifieds relate, or does it refer to both in the sense that the two structures must be the same? As a linguist, Saussure was primarily interested in how the words or signifiers interrelate, and as a result he leaves the relationship between words and concepts quite undecided, as Umberto Eco himself notices:

Saussure did not define the signified any too clearly, leaving it halfway between a mental image, a concept and a psychological reality; but he did clearly stress the fact that the signified is something which has to do with the mental activity of anybody receiving a signifier.

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104Ibid., 14.

The distinction that Saussure made between words and concepts is a tremendous discovery but he did not seem to realize all its implications. He states that a sign is a word that is associated with a concept and that words must follow a language structure in order to have meaning, but he never raises questions about concepts. He seems to have reasoned that, as long as words follow a structure and every word is paired with a concept, it follows that concepts would end up having a structure as well. But to my knowledge no one has asked the question: *Is it the same structure?* In other words, is the grammar of the concepts the same as that of the words? Or to phrase the same question using semiotic terminology, is the *langue* of the signifiers the same as the *langue* of the signifieds? Or to ask the question more boldly: Do concepts have a *langue* of their own just as the words do? That may be a daunting question, but if we want to understand how reasoning takes place, that is precisely the question we need to ask. If reasoning has to do with how our minds make relationships and if concepts are the mental entities of signs that make up any language, then reasoning has to do with how concepts relate.

The only hint that Saussure gives us about the relationship between words and concepts is that of a sheet of paper which always has two inseparable sides just like the two sides of a sheet of paper are inseparable.106 This is an unfortunate image because it not only suggests that concepts automatically mirror the structure which words may take, but that there must be a one to one relationship between words and concepts. If that was Saussure’s understanding, it can be easily proved to be inaccurate. Firstly, a word can suggest several concepts which could be quite divergent and not just one as the image of a sheet of paper would suggest. Let us take the word “love.” As a sign, the word “love” does not bring just one mental image, but several. For instance, it could mean the intimate relationship between two lovers, or the feeling of dependence that a child has for its mother, or the feeling of devotion and care that a mother has for her child. Secondly,

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not only are there several concepts that can be conveyed by the same word, but a concept may be conveyed by several words as well. For example, let us consider the concept or the mental image of a horse that can give birth to colts. The same concept can be conveyed by the word “mare” or by the word “she-horse.” The two words may be two different signs, but they both refer to the same concept. The most important reason, however, to view signifiers/words and signified/concepts as two distinct realities is because they do have different structures. Just as Saussure could prove that signifiers/words follow a structure/\textit{langue}, so also signifieds/concepts must have a structure of their own. For instance, when people learn a foreign language, they not only learn new signifiers/words, but a new grammar/\textit{langue} as well. If signifieds/concepts did not have a structure of their own and would have to follow the linguistic structure, then it would imply that any time people learn a new language, they would have to learn completely new concepts and a new way of thinking. This is obviously not the case. Quite the opposite, most of the time the same thoughts can be conveyed in a different language just by learning the vocabulary and the grammar, which proves that thinking and concept structures are not language dependent.

But probably the easiest way to show that signifieds/concepts do have a structure of their own is to use the example mentioned previously: “flow,” “upstream,” and “water.” Saussure was certainly right when he claimed that for these signifiers/words to make a \textit{parole} and have meaning they would have to be put in a pre-determined structure which is: “water flows upstream.” Saussure rightly claims that grammar places constraints upon the way in which words relate in order to have meaning and at this point Saussure would probably say that the signifiers/words follow the language structure and therefore their meaning is decided. But is it? Can we say that the above utterance is meaningful just because it does not break any grammar rules? Can we say that the concepts that each word suggests can be linked just because the words can be grammatically linked? If Saussure assumed that the grammar of the words was the same as the grammar of the concepts, he was clearly wrong.
The reason why the study and understanding of reasoning and argumentation is in such a precarious situation today is beginning to emerge: there is no academic inquiry that is specifically dedicated to studying this area. Although logic is assumed to focus on how the mind works, by looking for relations in the forms that language takes, it brackets the mind and looks for structures that are mind-independent. Similarly, semiotics, in its pursuit of understanding how languages and other entities are used in the process of communication, does make the distinction between signifiers/words and signifieds/concepts, but as a linguistic discipline, it focuses mainly on the material side of signs and never ventures into raising questions about the conceptual part because that is outside the main area of its interest.\textsuperscript{107} Strange as it may sound, there is no designated area of academic investigation that has the goal of understanding how reasoning and meaning take place. If people wanted to take a course in reasoning, they would have nowhere to turn. The goal of all academics is the pursuit of scientific or mind-independent knowledge, and therefore there is no place in the academia for mind-dependent knowledge. Since persuasion takes place in the mind and is most obviously a mind-dependent accomplishment, it has remained \textit{terra incognita}. Not only do we not have answers to the most basic questions about reasoning, but if one asks such questions, it is not clear in which area of academic investigation the answers are supposed to be found. For instance, who is supposed to answer the question: Do concepts have a structure of their own or not? Or: Does reasoning take place at the level of signifiers/words or at the level of signification/signifieds/concepts? Whom shall we ask: a philosopher, a logician, a mathematician, a scientist, a psychologist, a lawyer, or a linguist? Asking questions is not the same as answering them, but it is an important step. Logicians—by applying mathematical formulas to the forms that words take—focus exclusively on signifiers. Similarly, semioticians—by focusing on how signs are used and interrelate—deal also

\textsuperscript{107}It is significant to note that Saussure entitled his course in semiotics as a course in “general linguistics” and not a course in “general conceptualization,” or better, a course in “general linguistics and conceptualization.”
with signifiers and their structure as a language, leaving relationships that the mind develops virtually untouched.

After asking the above questions, it is not difficult to see why formal logic fails to have any applicability to reasoning and argumentation. Whatever relationships logic may be able to find and prove as far as the form that signifiers/language take, they do not apply to reasoning because reasoning simply does not take place at that level. Consequently, reasoning must take place at the signification or conceptual level and not at the language level. Although semioticians do recognize the conceptual side of signs, how the mind operates with those concepts is either something outside the scope of their inquiry or something that does not interest them. Strange as it may sound, reasoning is no one’s land and therefore has remained largely unmapped territory.

In order to show that the distinction between linguistic and conceptual structures is not a trivial one let us consider again the utterance: “water flows upstream.” From the linguistic point of view, there is no problem with the pattern in which the signifiers/words are linked. It is a pattern that is used with other signifiers/words, such as: “water flows downstream.” But it becomes immediately apparent that, although the linguistic pattern is identical for both utterances, as far as signification or meaning is concerned there is a problem with the first statement. Although words may suggest ideas or concepts when considered individually, when those concepts are linked, they do not always make sense. The concepts that the words in the first statement signify cannot be associated in the way they have been, and if someone chooses to make that statement, it would be perceived as “wrong,” although no one can say that there is any linguistic problem with it. This proves that reasoning has its own rules or structures or patterns in which concepts interrelate just as words or signs have to follow linguistic structures.

The preceding example proves that beyond the restrictions that grammar places upon the use of signifiers/words, reasoning places additional constrains so that utterances that may be linguistically sound may still be rejected by the mind as meaningless or problematic.
The Inadequacy of Formal Logic to Deal with Meaning

If the above inquiry is right, in order for formal logic to explain and analyze reasoning, it should work with signifieds/concepts and not with signifiers/words. But instead of that, formal logic is dependent on language and has developed rules about how to translate language structures into symbolic formulas. Because of its dependence upon language, logic fails to deal with meaning. In order to illustrate that, let us consider the following statements:

(1a) You cannot eat the cake and keep it too
(2a) You cannot eat the cake and not eat it too
(3a) You cannot keep the cake and not keep it too
(4a) You cannot love the cake and keep it too
(5a) You cannot love the cake and not love it too

Although these statements are examples of simple reasonings that can be easily grasped even by the simplest mind, they turn out to be quite challenging for formal logic, even when it is used in its most sophisticated form: predicate logic. A major problem is immediately apparent because these statements are not “truth functional” as a result of the modal verb “can” that occurs in all of them. Therefore, let us get rid of the modal verb “can” and modify the statements so that they become truth functional:

(1b) You eat the cake and keep it too
(2b) You eat the cake and not eat it too
(3b) You keep the cake and not keep it too
(4b) You love the cake and keep it too
(5b) You love the cake and not love it too

Of course, I am not claiming that the above statements “mean” the same thing as the original ones. I modified them only to make life easier for formal logic. Again, since formal logic has no way to
symbolize “you” and since the pronoun can refer to anyone, the word “you” can be replaced by the word “anyone” for which formal logic can use the universal quantifier “∀” to represent, so that the statements become:

(1c) Anyone eats the cake and keeps it too
(2c) Anyone eats the cake and not eat it too
(3c) Anyone keeps the cake and not keep it too
(4c) Anyone loves the cake and keeps it too
(5c) Anyone loves the cake and not love it too

Using predicate logic, these statements can be turned into the following formulas:

(1d) ∀x(E_x & K_x)
(2d) ∀x(E_x & ~E_x)
(3d) ∀x(K_x & ~K_x)
(4d) ∀x(L_x & K_x)
(5d) ∀x(L_x & ~L_x)

In these formulas “∀” stands for “everyone,” “c” stands for “cake,” “E” stands for “eat,” “K” stands for “keep,” “L” stands for “love,” “~” stands for negation, and “&” is the truth functional conjunction “and.” The formulas read:

(1e) For anyone x, x eats the cake and x keeps the cake
(2e) For anyone x, x eats the cake and x does not eat the cake
(3e) For anyone x, x keeps the cake and x does not keep the cake
(4e) For anyone x, x loves the cake and x keeps the cake
(5e) For anyone x, x loves the cake and x does not love the cake

Looking at the formulas (1d), (2d), (3d), (4d), and (5d) we can notice a strange thing as far as their truth value is concerned. The formula (1d) involves an impossibility and therefore it can never be true, but that is
not captured by the formula. According to formal logic, the truth table of the formula (1d) is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>E &amp; K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the truth table shows, the formula is true when one both eats and keeps the cake, and it is false when one either just eats it but does not keep it, or just keeps it but does not eat it, or both does not eat it and does not keep it. Following blindly the words, formal logic misses the meaning altogether.

The formula (2d) has the following truth table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>~E</th>
<th>E &amp; ~E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case the formula is never true because it presupposes a contradiction. The formula (3d) has a very similar truth table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>~K</th>
<th>K &amp; ~K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it is never true because it expresses a contradiction. The formulas (1d), (2d), and (3d) not only express a contradiction and therefore one would expect them to have the same truth table, but they express the same contradiction because they all say the same thing with
different words. Because formal logic follows blindly the linguistic form, ends up with different truth tables for statements that clearly mean the same thing and have the same “logic,” and in the case of formula (1d) it misses the meaning altogether.

Similarly, the formula (4d) would have the following truth table:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>L &amp; K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the truth table, the formula is true when one both loves the cake and keeps it, and is false when one either loves the cakes but eats it, or when one does not love the cake but eats it anyway, or when one does not love the cake and does not keep it either—i.e., throws it away. In this case there is no impossibility involved. Fortunately, the truth table in this case does correspond to the meaning of statement (4c) but the problem is that statement (1c) and the statement (4c) have exactly the same grammatical form and therefore have an identical formula. As a result, they have an identical truth table, but as far as meaning is concerned, the two statements are quite different. As it was pointed out above, statement (1c) involves an impossibility or contradiction while statement (4c) does not. Two statements that have an identical linguistic form and identical formulas end up having different “logic.” Again, formal logic follows the grammatical form and misses the meaning altogether.

Finally, the formula (5d) would have the following truth table:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>~L</td>
<td>E &amp; ~L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this last example, the truth table does correspond to the meaning of the statement. Moreover, the truth table is identical to the formula
(2d) and (3d) and the statements (2c), (3c), and (5c) do have the same grammatical form and have the same symbolic formula with the same truth table that corresponds to the meaning of the statements. It is these happy situations that create the illusion that formal logic captures the meaning of statements when it blindly follows the linguistic form. But even in these happy situations there is a problem. The statements (2c) and (3c) say the same thing as the statement (1c) while (5c) does not say the same thing as the statement (4c), although the statement (4c) has an identical form as (1c). In other words, statements which have an identical form—(2c),(3c), and (5c)—have both identical meaning and different meaning from two statements that have an identical form—(1c) and (4c).

This simple example raises several issues as far as the relationship between language and meaning is concerned. Linguistically, the statements (1c) and (4c) are identical, and so is their truth table after they are translated into symbolic logic, but their meaning is very different. In (1c) “to keep” and “to eat” have mutually exclusive meanings while the meaning of “to love” and “to keep” in (4c) do not exclude each other, although there is no grammatical or linguistic device or marker to capture that difference. The contradiction between verbs like “to keep” and verbs like “to eat,” “to spend,” “to throw away,” “to lose,” and so on, does not take place at the linguistic level and it is not shown in the way in which the sentences are structured. Similarly, the compatibility between the verb “to keep” and verbs like “to love,” “to admire,” “to take care of,” and so on, is not expressed linguistically, but takes place at the conceptual level. Therefore the statements (1c) and (4c), although they have an identical grammatical structure, at the conceptual level one involves an impossibility and the other does not.

Moreover, when we consider the statements (1c), (2c), and (3c) they do say the same thing and the statements (2c) and (3c) are probably the closest paraphrases of the statement (1c) as far as “truth” is concerned. In spite of that, their truth tables are quite different and so are their symbolic formulas. Actually only the formula (2c) and (3c) and their truth tables accurately capture the “logic” of the statement (1c). But the formulas (2c) and (3c) are not accurate translations into symbolic logic
of the statement (1c) because it has substituted the verb “to keep” with the negation of the verb “to eat” and vice versa, for which there is no justification as far as the rules for applying translations of sentences into symbolic logic is concerned. Moreover, in the statement (4c) the verb “to keep” has not been substituted by the negation of the verb “to love,” as was done in the statement (5c). The statement (5c) is not related to statement (4c) in the same way in which the statements (2c) and (3c) are related to the statement (1c), although grammatically they follow identical patterns.  

I am not suggesting that symbolic logic just substitutes variables for words without paying any attention to meaning or that formal logic has not struggled with the issue of developing rules of how to translate sentences into symbolic formulas that would have the same meaning, but what I do claim is that such rules are dependent upon linguistic structures and logic does not have the proper equipment to deal with the meaning. In order to be able to deal with the meaning and disregard the words and the language structure, formal logic would need to have a way of telling us that in a statement like (1a) the word “keep” must be translated with the negation of the verb “eat,” while in the statement (4c) the word “keep” should not be replaced with the negation of the verb “to love,” but rather it should be indicated in the formula by another variable. In other words, in order to properly translate the logical relationships into symbolic logic and not just follow blindly the linguistic form, one needs to understand the logical relationships first and disregard the linguistic form when the meaning of identical

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108I am not suggesting that the truth tables represent the meaning of the original statements (1a)–(5a). Instead of removing the modal verb “can” I could have replaced it with some other equivalent to make the statement truth functional: “It is not true that you eat the cake and keep it too.” But in doing so, since logic is a matter of form, I would have had to replace the word “can” by the same formula in the statements (2a)–(5a) as well. Eventually I would have ended up with the same five formulas except they would have all been negated and the negation would have just replaced every T with an F and every F with a T in the last column of each truth table.
linguistic forms is different. But that implies that in order to properly translate logical relationships into formal logic, one needs to understand the “logic” of those relationships first, which becomes a vicious circle. Moreover, to translate two identical linguistic forms with two different formulas in order to follow the meaning, formal logic would have to disregard the grammatical form; that is, formal logic would have to cease to be formal. If I need to understand that the statement “anyone eats the cake and keeps it too” involves a contradiction which can only be rendered alternatively “anyone eats the cake and not eat it too” in order to translate it properly into symbolic logic, then what do I gain by putting it into a formula whose meaning I need to understand first in order to translate it properly into symbolic logic? In other words, if I need to understand that the proper logical translation of “everyone eats the cake and keeps it too” is not $\forall_x(E_x \& K_x)$ as the current rules of translating into symbolic logic would require, but rather $\forall_x(E_x \& \neg E_x)$ because that is the meaning of the statement, then formal logic is no longer a logic that depends on the form that language takes, but is a logic that depends on the meaning that the language has. If I need to understand the “logic” of the words in order to properly translate them into formal logic, then symbolic logic becomes translating logic into logic.

The purpose of the example above is not to show the inadequacy of formal logic in dealing with such common statements like “you cannot eat the cake and keep it too,” whose “logic” is obvious and can be grasped by anyone, but to point out that the mind has the ability to establish such relationships and that such relationships are not dependent upon language structures. That one does not need formal logic in order to grasp the logic of the statement is obvious; indeed, one may need to use common sense reasoning in order to make even a proper translation of it into formal logic, if the rules of formal logic allowed for it. I am not suggesting that logical relations can never find a counterpart in linguistic relationships, but we are no longer justified in confusing whatever patterns we may discover in language with conceptual relationships.
**Impossibility**

Although Aristotle wanted a direct relationship between the objects in the world and language, that view turns out to be simplistic and therefore the three realities that he referred to—the objective world, the mind, and the linguistic reality—need to be considered as three distinct realities that have their own structures so that any connection between them involves a transformation of one structure into another. In order to see that what is “true” at one level is not necessarily “true” at another level I would like to consider the case of “impossibility.” The reason I choose “impossibility” is because the definition of validity and logical demonstration are built on this concept. When we say that it is impossible for the conclusion to be false as long as the premises are true, what kind of impossibility are we talking about: is it a linguistic impossibility, or is it a mental impossibility, or is it an objective impossibility, that is, something that we cannot ever encounter in the actual world?

First, let us notice that language understood as a combination of signs or referents/signifiers does not involve any impossibility. If we take words—spoken or written—as the basic units of language, there is no combination or relationship in which words can be placed that involves an impossibility. Although it is true that languages have grammar rules for putting words together, it cannot be said that breaking the grammar rules involves an impossibility. A combination of words that makes a statement may break grammar rules and that may render the statement incorrect or meaningless, but not impossible. To state it differently, linguistically anything is possible. The fact that some word combinations may be wrong does not involve an impossibility, because some incorrect utterances may become correct by changing the grammar rules or changing the grammar altogether. For instance, the double negation “she does not do nothing” may be incorrect, but not impossible; indeed, it is not even meaningless.

There are two implications for this conclusion. Language as a reality in itself is unlimited in its potentiality of accepting structures and relations. This infinite potentiality of language understood as relationships of signifiers renders language as a powerful, possibly an ideal
means of communication. But its potential is also its weakness: it cannot be used to draw conclusions about that which it refers to.

Unfortunately using language to draw inferences is precisely what formal logic wants to do. Even philosophers occasionally are not clear as to what they mean when they talk about some “paradoxes” or impossibilities. A well-known example is the famous question: Is a square circle possible? If “possible” means whether we can connect those words from the linguistic point of view, then of course there is no impossibility involved. As long as “a” is the indefinite pronoun in English and is placed before the phrase that it qualifies, the word “square” is an adjective that is placed before the noun that it qualifies, and “circle” is a noun that follows after the indefinite pronoun and its adjective, linguistically there cannot be any impossibility involved. To use Saussure’s terminology, as far as langue is concerned, there is no difference between the parole “a square circle” and the parole “a big house” and therefore there is no impossibility involved.

Similarly, there is no impossibility involved in the phrase “a square circle” as far as objective reality is concerned either. It cannot be said that “a square circle” is impossible because a square circle does not exist or it cannot exist. Actually a square circle is quite possible, indeed, two square circles are possible. Let us consider the following geometrical figures that can be as real as any square or circle:

![Geometrical figures](image)

A square circle could be a circle which has equal and rectangular sides built into it like the one on the left. The impossibility involved in
“a square circle” has nothing to do with the possibility that such a figure is able to exist and it does not involve any conceptual impossibility in the sense that we cannot possibly think of such a figure when we hear or see the phrase “a square circle.” If a group of people decided that such a figure is important enough to enable the language to qualify it and distinguish it from other figures, then it would not be linguistically impossible to use the phrase “a square circle” to designate it and associate a mental image with that phrase. The “impossibility” has to do with our decision not to have any terms or ways to qualify such a figure and it has nothing to do with the impossibility of the language to express it or the geometry to come up with such a figure. After all, who can guarantee that that will never happen? The fact that we find it “unthinkable” is no guarantee that such a notion will not be introduced and become common, just as the notion that the earth is round is common today although some time ago it was unthinkable.

The question can be pursued further, and asked whether there can be “a circle square” as well. The difference from the previous case is that this phrase does break a grammar rule: while “square” can function both as an adjective and a noun, the word “circle” does not. Therefore, when we switch the words “square” and “circle” around, the resulting phrase “circle square” does involve a problem. For some reason the English language developed and used the word “square” both as a noun and as an adjective, while for the noun “circle” it developed the adjective “circular.” Therefore in order not to break the language rules, the phrase should be “a circular square.” But again, the “impossibility” of having “a circular square” has nothing to do with the impossibility of the English language to put the words together, nor with the impossibility of geometry to come up with a figure that has features which are both circular and square. Quite the opposite, the shape on the right on the facing page shows that such a figure is possible and can be as real as any square or circle can be. The “impossibility” has to do again with the decision not to designate that figure by that phrase or
any phrase for that matter.\textsuperscript{109} To go further, the language—any language—has the possibility of using and developing a noun “circle” which can function also as an adjective with the same meaning of “circular,” and then there would no longer be even a linguistic difficulty involved in putting the words “a circle square” together without breaking grammar rules. The language has even the possibility of designating any of the above figures by any of the two phrases. Although languages have their own structures, they have an unlimited flexibility therefore there is virtually no linguistic impossibility.

As far as concepts are concerned, an impossibility would refer to ideas that are mutually exclusive: to be standing and to be lying at the same time. But again, the mind seems to be able to accommodate mutually exclusive concepts as well. An example would be the Christian concept of Trinity which presupposes the existence of one God in three persons that are one. Although Trinity does not involve any linguistic difficulty, it does involve a conceptual problem because it presupposes that our minds can think of something as being both one and three at the same time. The concepts of one and three are never applied to anything in that sense, therefore they are mutually exclusive concepts when applied to the same thing, but most Christian believers—for theological reasons—have combined the two concepts to create that of Trinity, and because the concept of Trinity is accepted, it no longer involves an “impossibility.” By accepting the concept of Trinity, Christians still consider the concepts “one” and “three” as excluding each other when applied to anything else so that Christians would never take a one dollar bill for three dollars or vice versa just because they have accepted the concept of Trinity. This example shows that, although concepts have their own rules of how to relate to one another and that some relationships can be perceived as “impossible,” the mind has the potential to change the rules or break the rules as necessity arises without necessarily running into an impossibility.

\textsuperscript{109}It is interesting that the figure on the right is offered by computer programs as a built in shape which can be created with a click of a button, although it is not designated as a “circular square” but rather as “rounded rectangle.”
Finally, let us consider the relationship between the objective reality and concepts. It seems that concepts not only can “break” their own rules but they can “keep” their own rules even when reality would require them not to. An example is the nature of light. For a long time light was considered to be made of material particles that go in all directions and believed to be corpuscular, but later evidence showed that light is also a wave because it behaves like continuous media such as fluids. Science has proved conclusively that light has both “natures” and in spite of the fact that conceptually the two aspects of light are mutually exclusive, when referring to light they are not exclusive and do not involve an impossibility. Unlike the case of the Trinity however—in which the concept of one has been combined with that of three to create another—in the case of light the two concepts are still mutually exclusive when applied to other things but considered not contradictory when applied to light. There is no linguistic impossibility in creating a word that refers to the double nature of light such as “corpuswave,” but the fact that we have decided not to have one has nothing to do with the impossibility for such a reality to exist, or for us to understand, or for the language to designate. Again, who can guarantee that scientists will not coin a word to designate the double nature of light?

The conclusion that seems unavoidable from the preceding examples is that not only can language combine mutually exclusive words like “square” and “circle,” but the mind can combine separate concepts such as “one” and “three,” and even nature can combine mutually exclusive features such as being corpuscular and a wave. In other words, there is nothing really impossible at any level. But most importantly, what we label “impossible” at one level does not necessarily mean “impossible” at another level. Even if the world, the mind, and the language are not as unrelated as suggested here, there are grounds to suppose that they are not as continuous as Aristotle thought. There are reasons to believe that the three realities that Aristotle lumped together—the objective reality, the conceptual reality, and the linguistic reality—are quite different realities, are structured separately, and a change at one level does not necessarily translate as a change at another level.
This claim, however, is not completely new. After all, it has been recognized that the world has its own laws which have been the object of scientific investigation. Similarly, it is common knowledge that languages have their own life, structures, and rules, in the way in which they both function and develop. Due to Saussure’s brilliant insight, it is admitted that words have concepts as counterparts. What needs to be recognized and addressed is the possibility that the mind may have its own rules of relating concepts and it may be those rules that are designated by the broad term “reasoning.” In order to avoid the confusion between language and concepts that formal logic has taken over from Aristotle, logic will no longer be used from now on to refer to mental relationships, but rather the term “reasoning” will be used. There is another reason for using the word “reasoning” rather than “logic”: “reasoning” is already a common word used to refer to mental processes that are involved in ordinary thinking. As long as persuasion refers primarily to how ordinary thinking takes place, it seems that “reasoning” and not “logic” is the proper word.
The Need for a Language of the Mind

If it is true that reasoning has to do with how concepts relate in the mind, the first question we need to ask is: Why do we need concepts anyway? After all, would it not be nicer and easier if the mind worked just as Aristotle imagined: objects or primary substances make impressions upon our minds and the words just replicate those impressions?

Aristotle does not seem to realize that there is an important problem with this model. The difficulty is that the objects—both real and potential—are infinite, while the language, no matter how rich it may be in words, is limited. If every object made its own impression on the mind and every impression has a corresponding word, since the number of impressions are infinite, no language could provide enough words to cover that variety. Let us suppose that the “impressions” upon the mind are made by trees. It is a fact that no two trees are identical; indeed, not even two leaves for that matter. Since the objects that make those impressions are different, it would follow that the impressions themselves would be different as well. For words to reflect that infinite variety of impressions would involve an impossibility. This is where the need for concepts arises.

Although no one can deny that there are unique entities in the world for which we have one image or concept—like God, universe,
Canada, and so on—we do not have an infinite number of concepts because concepts presuppose a multiplicity of entities that have a number of characteristics similar and therefore they can be viewed as identical no matter how large might be the number of entities that can be found with those characteristics. For instance, the concept of “animal”—of which Aristotle seems to have been so fond and which he uses often as an example in his syllogisms—brings together a wide variety of entities that can be found in the world. This ability of the mind to conceptualize—that is, to treat as identical entities that can be quite different—is of tremendous importance for reasoning and for the ability to express the thinking process linguistically. In this way the mind can handle an infinite variety of entities with quite a limited number of mental entities or concepts and expresses relationships with a limited number of linguistic entities.

Having reached this point, it is necessary to ask the question: What decides the formation of concepts? To put the question differently: Why do we have the number of concepts we have and not more or less? There is no doubt that we could have more and that we could have less. Moreover, ancient people seemed to have had concepts which we no longer find relevant or never use, like that of Cyclops, or “corners” of the earth, centaur, and so on. On the other hand, we have developed concepts of our own whose necessity can hardly be justified: antimatter, time machine, and so on. Is there any rule according to which a group of people decides which are the concepts necessary for that group?

In order to answer this question it is important to refer to another brilliant insight that Saussure had and which unfortunately he did not pursue deeper in its implications. In describing how languages function he stated:

> Everything we have said so far comes down to this. *In the language itself, there are only differences.* Even more important than that is the fact that, although in general a difference presupposes positive terms between which the difference holds, in a language there are only differences, *and no positive terms.* Whether we take the signification or the signal, the language includes neither ideas nor sounds existing
prior to the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences arising out of that system. In a sign, what matters more than any idea or sound associated with it is what other signs surround it.\textsuperscript{110}

Saussure’s insight that in language there are only differences is brilliant not so much because of its accuracy when applied to words, but because of its implication when applied to concepts. Although he does not seem to be aware that there may be a conceptual system just as there is a linguistic system, he does assume that the phonetic and conceptual differences arise from the linguistic system. He oversimplified the relationship between concepts and language as the following illustration shows:

A language might also be compared to a sheet of paper. Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side. Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate sound from thought, or thought from sound. To separate the two for theoretical purposes takes us into either pure psychology or pure phonetics, not linguistics.\textsuperscript{111}

Saussure’s close connection between thought and language is appropriate by what it affirms, but unfortunate by what it denies: that words and concepts cannot be separated in linguistics and that linguistics covers both. It seems that Saussure did not realize that the image of a sheet of paper is inappropriate precisely because concepts and words can be separated. After distinguishing concepts and words within a sign, lumping them together again through the image of a sheet of paper is unfortunate. He does not seem to realize that it is possible to have two words for the same concept and therefore a sheet of paper with two sides on one side and one side on the other. To refer to

\textsuperscript{110}Saussure, \textit{General Linguistics}, 118.

\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Ibid.}, 111.
the example used in the previous chapter: the words “mare” and “she-horse” designate the same concept, which is the female of a horse. As far as the concept is concerned, there is no difference between what a “mare” says and what a “she-horse” says. As far as the words are concerned, however, the two are completely different. Therefore, the question is, when Saussure states that “in the language itself, there are only differences,” to what do those differences refer? Does it mean that in language as a system, one cannot find words that say exactly the same thing, and if one finds two different words, there must be a difference in meaning between them as well; or does it mean that in a language system there are only differences as far as concepts are concerned, so that there are no two concepts that are exactly the same, and if there are two concepts then they necessarily must be different in some respect?

When Saussure talks about “only conceptual and phonetic differences arising out of that system” he fails to realize that there are two systems, one of the words or signifiers, and another one of the signifieds or concepts. Therefore his brilliant insight that “in the language itself, there are only differences” is both false and true. It is false because it refers to words as well, and words express not only differences but also redundancies as the example about “mare” and “she-horse” shows. But the statement is accurate when understood as referring to concepts and the concept system, because it is the concept system in which there are only differences. When Saussure’s insight is understood in this way, then it provides the clue as to why concepts are necessary and how they develop.

As it was pointed out, a concept has the ability to lump together a more or less wide variety of entities in the world under a single mental entity called concept. Therefore, a concept presupposes differences among the entities that enter under its umbrella but such differences are considered irrelevant. The tendency of the mind is to have as few concepts as possible, because the fewer the concepts, the easier the relationships and the reasoning process of relating the concepts is. The mind is economical and aims for maximum complexity with a minimum number of concepts. It aims for maximum economy in order to achieve maximum efficiency. Even concepts that are learned, if not
used, the mind drops and forgets them so that they become non-functional. Forgetting is a healthy phenomenon that enables the mind to make better judgments without getting cluttered with unnecessary relations that are never or almost never used.

But sometimes judgments must be made between objective entities that are covered by the same mental entity. For instance, if all we had were just the concept of “animals” that covers all entities that are able to move and have life, then we would not be able to establish any relationship between animals that have two legs and those that have four, except by using other concepts such as “legs,” “two,” “four,” and so on. Therefore any introduction of a new concept is based upon a difference that is considered significant enough to require an extra concept. As a result, another concept “humans” can be introduced to capture the difference between such entities and the rest of the animals as far as the number of legs is concerned, but at further analysis, humans may be distinguished from birds, which also have two legs, but are different in another respect: they have wings. This process of differentiation can go on indefinitely because—as I pointed out in the beginning—there are no two entities in the world that are absolutely identical, therefore there is no limit as to how many concepts we can develop without creating redundancies.

**Opposition as the Basic Relationship Between Concepts**

Although Saussure’s insight about differences helps to understand why we have the concepts which we have and not more or less, it does not tell us how the mind establishes relationships among concepts and makes judgments. Fortunately Saussure has another brilliant insight when he introduces the notion of “opposition” which he again sees as a feature of language:

The moment we compare one sign with another as positive combinations, the term difference should be dropped. It is no longer appropriate. It is a term which is suitable only for comparisons between sound patterns (i.e. *pere* vs. *mere*), or between ideas (e.g. “father” vs.
“mother”). Two signs, each comprising a signification and a signal, are not different from each other, but only distinct. They are simply in opposition to each other. The entire mechanism of language, which we shall consider below, is based on oppositions of this kind and upon the phonetic and conceptual differences they involve.\textsuperscript{112}

I do not question Saussure’s claim that languages function on oppositions between words such as pere vs. mere, but I find more important his insight that there are oppositions between ideas, such as “father” vs. “mother.” Saussure is no doubt right that the mind relates concepts using the mechanism of opposition. The concepts of “animals” and “humans” are opposite as far as the ability to speak is concerned. Humans and birds are opposite as far as the ability to fly is concerned. But oppositions work not only when two different concepts are related. Even a statement like “a big house” presupposes an opposition, not in the sense that the concept of “house” must be viewed as opposite to some other concept, but as an opposition within the concept of “house.” When the opposition “big” and “small” is applied to the concept “house,” the house that is big is viewed as in opposition with other houses that are viewed as “small,” although “small houses” may not be mentioned when the words “a big house” are used. In other words, the concept of a big house places a particular house in opposition to other houses as far as size is concerned. A similar opposition can be achieved without resorting to existing concepts such as “big” and “small,” but rather by using another concept that singles out big houses from small houses within the larger concept of “house,” such as “palace.”

An opposition is implied in every qualification, even when the opposite of a characteristic cannot be so clearly defined as in the case of “a big house” versus “a small house.” Let us consider the phrase “the blue car.” It may seem that there is nothing that would be opposite to a blue car as “big” is opposite to “small,” but the phrase “the blue car” creates an opposition between cars that have the color blue and cars

\[\textsuperscript{112}\text{Ibid., 119.}\]
that have any other color except blue. The opposite of the color blue is not some specific color, but simply a color different from blue.

This ability of the mind to relate concepts by viewing them as opposite in some aspect enables the mind to make judgments and to reason without multiplying concepts endlessly. Moreover, it enables the mind to use simple patterns in order to express an infinite variety of relationships simply by placing them in opposition because they are different.

Opposition may seem a crude and simple mechanism, but it is very flexible and can cover a wide variety of relationships. For instance, in one context the opposite of “cold water” may be “hot water,” but in another context the opposition may be that between “cold water” and “water that is not cold,” or between “cold water” and “tepid water.” Such oppositions may seem different linguistically—one uses an antonym, another one uses a negation, while another one uses another adjective—but the mental mechanism involved in all of them is the same.

Saussure’s insight that oppositions are important for the way concepts relate is no doubt revolutionary, but it is not completely new. Strangely enough, the concept of oppositions reminds us of Aristotle again. The two books that provide the introduction to his Organon—The Categories and On Interpretation—deal extensively with various kinds of oppositions. It is true that he never uses a notion such as “concept,” but instead he talks about “categories,” “primary substances,” and “secondary substances.” Aristotle’s philosophy is beyond the scope of this study but I cannot help noticing how his categories and “substances” quite accurately describe what we understand by concepts. To use a word like “substance” to refer to concepts may seem far-fetched, but when we remember that the function of the mind is to accurately receive impressions from the objects in the world, his use of “substance” to cover both realities is quite understandable.

The Categories and On Interpretation show that Aristotle did perceive that oppositions were fundamental for the mechanism of reasoning because he considered them carefully and extensively. He decided, however, that the opposition true/false is the only one that proper reasoning employs and indicative affirmative and negative statements are
the only linguistic devices that can properly convey it. This was a methodological decision which Aristotle does not explain and which logical thinkers have followed for millennia without questioning it, but if I am right that Aristotle perceived that somehow reasoning was based on oppositions, then he preceded Saussure by over two millennia.

The Rational Square

Although Saussure states emphatically that language structures are based on oppositions, he does not seem to be interested in how oppositions work and he never considers various kinds of oppositions. Surprisingly enough, it is Aristotle who extensively considers various kinds of oppositions, particularly in On Interpretation. He even considers oppositions that seem strange to us, like the following one:

“Not-man” and the like are not nouns, and I know of no recognized names we can give such expressions as these, which are neither denials [ä̂pofasij] nor sentences [loγo]. Call them (for want of a better) by the name of indefinite nouns [o̊noma åriston], since we use them of all kinds of things, non-existent [me o̊ntoj] as well as existing [o̊ntoj].113

Aristotle is without a doubt right that we look in vain for oppositions such as “not-man” or “not-Socrates,” because there may not be an opposite concept or entity which can be identified as such, but Aristotle seems to realize that there is a sense in which subjects do have oppositions, that is, a subject must have an opponent for the act of speaking to be justified or necessary. Although it may seem ridiculous to think that the opposition of Socrates is some entity “not-Socrates” that we can identify, there is no difficulty in thinking of an opponent when thinking of Socrates. Not only is it not difficult, but it is necessary to think of an opponent. After all, it is hardly possible to think of Socrates as

113 Aristotle, On Interpretation, 2.16a30–16b1.
cooking, making love, washing a car, or doing anything else but cornering an opponent with his questions.

This opposition—which Aristotle discards so lightly—is basic to the reasoning, argumentation, rhetoric, and any act of speech. Thinking and speaking are pointless without an object of persuasion, whether real or imaginary, an object that is projected as opposed either in thought or action from a particular position that the persuader is advocating. If persuaders assumed that their thoughts are already accepted by their audience, then the act of thought, speech, and persuasion are superfluous if not objectionable. If someone attempts to persuade someone to accept or do something which that person has already accepted or is already doing, the attempt would rather upset that person than persuade. For instance, if a parent tells a child to clean up the room while the child is in the process of cleaning up the room, the child would be irritated and confused by the parent rather than persuaded. The very act of speaking presupposes a difference between the speaker and the listener, a difference which is perceived as an opposition from the point of view of what is being said.

The presence of an opposition in every act of speech cannot be overemphasized, and an opposition is present even when the opposition is not mentioned. Let us suppose that a professor enters a classroom full of science major students and makes the following statement with dead seriousness: “It has been proved conclusively that the earth is round.” Most likely such a statement would not be followed by a round of applause by happy students that finally a professor in that school had the courage to say something that is unquestionably true, worth the money they pay for tuition. Rather, the statement would be met with confused looks by students who would look around to see whom in the world the professor is talking to. Although the professor had not made any mention of the belief that the earth is flat, the very act of affirming that the earth is round brings into the mind of the audience the opposite statement which the professor is supposed to argue against. Although the professor only affirms that it has been proved conclusively that the earth is round, the complete thought of
which that statement is just a part of is: “Some in this room still believe that the earth might be flat, but it has been proved conclusively that the earth is round.” And this is an important difference between reasoning and language: reasoning presupposes oppositions and relationships which go beyond what is being said, therefore analyzing the reasoning process by limiting the analysis just to the words—as logic and other theories of argumentation have tried to do—is inadequate. The opposite statement “the earth is flat” is affirmed even though it is not stated because it is part of the reasoning process, and it is necessary in order for the statement “the earth is round” to make sense. In the act of rejection, the statement “the earth is flat” is affirmed in the sense that it is shared by those to whom the persuader is talking, and it is affirmed not by the words of the persuader, but by the act of speech. Indeed, there may not be anyone in that classroom who shares that belief, but the professor, by the very act of rejecting the belief that the earth is flat, makes it real and brings it to the minds of the students as being required by the statement that the professor affirms. And this brings us to another important point in every act of reasoning and argumentation: one cannot reject something that does not exist, and by rejecting something one must at least admit that the thing rejected exists or is real. Therefore an opposition in every act of speech is necessary as being the most fundamental characteristic of rationality, because a thought or utterance empty of any opponent or opposition is pointless and therefore meaningless.

Opponents are opposite not by their nature but by taking opposing stands about something. To put it differently, what makes opponents different is that they affirm opposite things. Someone who affirms that the earth is flat is an opponent to the one who affirms that the earth is round, although the two may have identical points of view on any other imaginable subject. There are many ways in which opponents can find themselves on opposing sides regarding a specific object. They may affirm opposing objects or they may adopt opposing actions towards the same object.
In order to see how various oppositions can take place in language let us consider a simple statement like “God gives life.” Someone becomes an opponent of the one who utters the above statement by affirming either that “God does not give life,” or that “God takes life.” Moreover, one who would affirm “God does not take life” would not be perceived as being in opposition to the one who affirms “God gives life.” This shows that, on the one hand, different statements do convey opposing positions, but just using different words does not necessarily create oppositions.

Among this multitude of possibilities of creating oppositions, not all of them are mutually exclusive. It is only the indicative statements that are affirmations or denials that lead to mutually exclusive positions. Because the two relationships are mutually exclusive, affirmation and negation is the only opposition that can be reduced to the opposition “true” and “false.” It is the kind of opposition for which Aristotle was looking in his search for an opposition that would make demonstration of the conclusion possible and it is the opposition on which formal logic is built. It is the only opposition that involves a contradiction and makes demonstration possible. This opposition may have seemed the only important one to Aristotle and to formal logicians, but for reasoning it is quite marginal. Reasoning is not interested in what is impossible but in what is possible. The mind tries to follow what is possible or likely and stay away from what is impossible just as we try to follow the open streets and avoid the dead ends. Normally reasoning would try to avoid impossibilities, and when arguments do involve impossibilities, logic will probably remain the best theory that has ever been created to spot impossibilities and expose them.\textsuperscript{114} In order to build a theory of reasoning, we need to take into account all the oppositions that our minds accept and work with and not just the one that Aristotle and formal logic have adopted. Moreover, a proper theory or

\textsuperscript{114}At this point we need to remember the definition of validity: it is impossible for the conclusion to be false while all the premises are true.
model would have to be able to show how various kinds of oppositions interrelate.

The statement “God gives life” suggests several possible oppositions. The subject “God” presupposes an opponent “Satan.” What makes Satan an opponent is that Satan acts for the opposite of what God does. The opposite of “life” is “death,” and to be an opponent of God who gives life is to give death instead of life. In other words, the statement “God gives life” calls for the statement “Satan gives death.” Moreover, what a subject affirms, the opponent is expected to deny and what the subject denies, the opponent is expected to affirm. In other words, if “God gives life,” then it is expected that “God does not give life.” Similarly, if “Satan gives death,” then it is expected that “Satan does not give life” either. Finally, a subject, in asserting an action, is not expected to assert the opposite of that action either. Consequently, if “God gives life,” then the statement “God takes away life” is not expected. Similarly, if “Satan gives death,” then “Satan takes away death” is not expected. This implies, however, that opponents do assert opposite actions towards opposite objects. For instance, if “God gives life,” then it is expected that “God takes away death,” and if “Satan gives death” it is expected that “Satan takes away life” as well.

This variety of oppositions that a simple statement like “God gives life” implies are not based on grammar or on the fact that we constantly witness Satan killing people and God resurrecting them, but on the mind. As opponents, both God and Satan are rational. Rationality requires that our thoughts and actions be consistent. Because of our rationality, we can go beyond what is being said and discover other thoughts or actions that an opponent is expected to do and remain consistent to what has been said. This variety of oppositions can be represented graphically on the following square:

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115 The word “Satan” has been adopted not because of its religious connotations but because it means “opponent” or “adversary” in Hebrew.
The graphics of this square are self explanatory. Each color represents one opponent and the actions that support that opponent. Green will be used to represent what is rational for the opponent that the audience is expected to agree with and will be represented on the left side of the square, and red will be used for what is rational for the opponent that the audience is expected to reject and will be represented on the right side of the square. The thick continuous lines are the pri-
mary rational lines and they represent the actions which the opponents are expected to affirm and which establish the antagonism between them. Next are the thin interrupted lines which represent impossible relationships in the sense that they cannot be performed at the same time with the thick continuous lines because they are negations of the primary rational lines. They represent impossible relations because to say that “God gives life” and “God does not give life” at the same time is to place the subject in an impossible situation. These are the famous affirmative and negative indicative sentences that Aristotle and formal logic set aside as the only ones that can convey logical relations. Next there are the thick interrupted lines and they represent secondary rational relations. They indicate negations of actions that are the reverse of the primary rational actions. For instance, if “God gives life” is the primary rational action which is expected from God, then “God does not take life” would be the next rational action which is expected from God.

Finally, there are irrational relations. A rational line for one opponent becomes an irrational line when performed by the other opponent and vice versa. The primary irrational relations are represented by thin continuous lines and they represent the reverse of the action of the primary rational lines. They are irrational lines because an opponent is not expected to act according to these lines in the square and still remain an opponent. A primary irrational line for an opponent represents a primary rational line for the other opponent. By affirming a primary irrational line, an opponent is in reality affirming a primary rational line of the opponent, and by doing that becomes one’s own opponent. For instance, if “God takes life,” and “Satan takes life,” then there is no opposition between the opponents any more. Similarly, another irrational relation would be for an opponent to affirm both oppositions at the same time. In other words, it would be irrational for God to give life—indicated by a thick green continuous line—and to give death as well—indicated by a thin red continuous line. This would be a secondary irrational relationship.
The Rational Square

Irrational relations are not impossible relations, however. For instance, a subject can both push and pull a cart at the same time—e.g., push with one hand and pull with the other.\footnote{Even the “impossibility” involved in the proverb used earlier “you cannot eat the cake and keep it, too” needs to be qualified. The actions of “eating” and “keeping” are reverse actions because one reverses or cancels the other and therefore they are primary irrational relations which is exactly what the proverb states: the one who tries to do both is irrational. They, however, are not impossible actions. For instance, one can eat part of a cake and keep the rest, so it is possible to both eat and keep the cake.} It is possible for God to both give and take life—therefore to act according to primary irrational lines—or to give both life and death—and therefore act according to secondary irrational lines. To affirm primary irrational relations—that is, both the direct and the reverse action—does not involve an impossibility, but it does create a problem for a rational being who would try to carry out those actions. Similarly, to affirm secondary irrational relations—that is, to affirm both sides of the secondary opposition line—does not necessarily involve an impossibility, but it does create a problem for a rational being to carry out those actions.

Irrational relations are very important for rhetorical purposes. The primary rational lines establish the square and establish a rhetorical situation because it identifies the opponents and the issue which sets them against one another which is indicated on the secondary opposition line. As long as each opponent affirms only rational lines in the square, the antagonism between them remains and the rhetorical situation remains open and unresolved. When one of the opponents, however, affirms an irrational line in the square, that opponent ceases to be an opponent and in reality sides with the other opponent. When this happens the primary opposition line changes from an opposition “∼” into equivalence “=” and the rhetorical situation is closed or resolved. Once the opponent has sided with the persuader, the persuasion has reached its goal and the persuasive process stops.
The square just introduced will be called the rational square.\textsuperscript{117} It is called the rational square because it covers all the possible relationships that the mind can establish. Reasoning can take place only when a rational square is established and only within a rational square. In order to establish a rational square, it is enough to affirm one or a maximum of two lines or relationships within the square.

\textit{The Rational Square, Language, and Meaning}

The rational square reveals an important difference between language and reasoning: the language reflects only a tiny part of the multitude of relationships that the mind establishes even for a simple statement like “God gives life.” That statement, in order to have meaning, is placed in a multitude of relationships: some follow, others are expected, others are not expected, and others are impossible. Let us list all the possible statements which the above statement implies. From now on, the rationality or the irrationality of a statement will be indicated by a color: the corresponding color of each opponent for their rational lines and the color of the opponent for irrational lines. With these conventions, the lines in the square are:

- \textbf{God} is opposite to \textbf{Satan}
- \textbf{Life} is opposite to \textbf{death}
- \textbf{God gives life}
- \textbf{God takes death}
- \textbf{God does not take life}
- \textbf{God does not give death}
- \textbf{Satan takes away death}
- \textbf{Satan gives life}

\textsuperscript{117}The name “rational square” is chosen to distinguish it from the “logical square” which uses the contradictory statements that Aristotle adopted for his syllogistic, and the “semiotic square” which is just a re-baptized version of the “logical square.”
Satan does not give death
Satan does not take life
Satan gives death
Satan takes life
Satan does not take away death
Satan does not give life
God takes life
God gives death
God does not give life
God does not take away death

There are no less than eighteen statements that are implied by any of the above statements, possibly with the exception of the first two. If we compare the multitude of relationships that are always present in even a short statement with an iceberg, then what comes out in language is just the tip of it, and a very tiny bit for that matter. If this observation is correct, then the idea that language is a replica of the operations of the mind is probably the greatest naivety that humanity has entertained.

The rational square helps also to clarify another relationship which has proved notoriously difficult to establish: the relationship between language and meaning. According to traditional understanding, meaning is an unequivocal relationship between words and the thoughts that produced them. For instance, the meaning of the statement “God gives life” is that a subject God causes something to be animated. That meaning existed in the mind of the author who produced those words and all those who receive them would discover the same meaning in their minds as a result of those words. Unfortunately, text interpreters from ancient times have noticed that this is not the case. Different readers and interpreters come up with quite divergent meanings of the same text. Critical scholarship has tried to develop a method of interpreting texts so that the same text would have the same meaning for everyone and hopefully the same meaning which was in the mind of the author who produced the text. In order to arrive at that unique meaning of texts, ancient languages like Hebrew and Greek were extensively studied and documented in the hope that by mastering the
language, the unique and original meaning would be unequivocally established. Unfortunately, that unique meaning of texts remained elusive. Later linguistic studies were supplemented by historical studies because it was believed that texts did not preserve all the components of meaning and recovering the history through archaeology and other historical sources would unlock that “original” and universally accepted meaning of texts. In spite of the advances in historical research, however, the uniqueness of the meaning of texts has remained as elusive.

The failure of historical methods to arrive at a single meaning of texts has given rise to literary methods of text interpretation which not only question the possibility of developing a method that allows for just one meaning of a text, but argue that there is always a plurality of meanings in every text. Not only would different methods necessarily result in different meanings, but even the same method, when used by different interpreters, would result in widely divergent meanings. In explaining this multiplicity of meanings, however, there are several theories. According to some theories, texts do not have a unique meaning because texts have gaps and therefore texts are defective. According to other theories, texts do not have a unique meaning because they do not have meaning at all. Meaning is something that occurs in a mind and not in a text, and as long as the only mind that is available at the reading of a text is the mind of the reader, meaning is the product of the reader and not of the text. As long as the minds of the readers are different, the multiplicity of meanings can be easily explained. This theory is usually known as reader-response criticism. Accordingly, it is not only wrong-headed to hope to arrive at the meaning that the author intended when reading a text—a hopeless endeavor—but the meaning, being the product of the reader, is always fluid and should remain fluid.

In presenting the reader as the meaning-producing agent, however, literary theories are deficient in the sense that they fail to explain the relationship between the text and the meaning that the readers produce. Even if it is true that readers are active agents in the production of meaning, it does not follow that texts place no constraints upon readers and that readers have the freedom to come up with any
meaning they like. If that were the case, then the text becomes irrelevant and it would not matter what one reads as long as the reader has all the freedom to produce any meaning. While classical theories cannot explain the plurality of meanings in a text, postmodernist theories fail to explain how an abundance of meanings relate to that text.

One of the immediate accomplishments of the rational square is that it explains why language interpreters have failed to explain the relationship between language and meaning. Just by looking at the square, one can see why a statement like “God gives life” says more than just “the subject God makes something become animated,” and therefore the goal of classical scholarship to develop a theory of interpretation that would render texts with a single universally accepted meaning, is quite simplistic. On the other hand, the rational square shows that even a statement like “God gives life” means a lot of other things as was pointed out previously when the square was introduced. Consequently, literary theories are right in affirming a plurality of meanings, but they are wrong when they assume that this plurality is due to “gaps” in the text. Readers who understand the statement “God gives life” to mean that “God does not cause death” would probably object that they have come up with that “meaning” because there is some “gap” in the text. Moreover, those readers would most likely object to the explanation that that “meaning” was the product of their own mind and not something that the statement “God gives life” brought to their mind. Consequently, all theories of language interpretations work with a faulty definition of meaning. The rational square enables us not only to see the inadequacy of current hermeneutical theories, but also to propose a new definition of meaning: meaning is a structure, and a very complex one for that matter.

Having reached this point we need to look closer at the relationship between language and the rational square as far as meaning is concerned. It may seem obvious by now that a statement should no longer be viewed as having a unique and fixed meaning but rather as having a structure in which a plurality of meanings is built, but is this structure and plurality of meanings fixed itself? In other words, instead of viewing the statement “God gives life” as meaning just “God makes
something animated,” do we need to see it as meaning also “Satan gives death” because of the rational square? If that is the case, then language is still the meaning-producing agent, except that, because of the rational square, language should not be viewed any longer as producing unique and fixed meanings but rather as producing fixed structures of meaning. Or, to put the question differently, does the statement “God gives life” produce always the same structure and the same plurality of meanings? Shall we always understand “God gives life” to mean that “Satan gives death” as well?

In order to answer these questions let us consider the statement “God gives life and not political power.” In this statement “life” is placed in opposition to “political power” rather than to “death.” The rational square for this statement is quite obvious:

![Rational Square](image)

The square is established by affirming a primary rational line (God gives life) and a secondary rational line (God does not give political power). God’s opponent, however, is not mentioned and need not be Satan. If God’s opponent is not identified in the larger context, then it must be mentioned in the statement itself for it to have meaning: “God gives life and governments give political power.” Now the rational square becomes:

![Rational Square](image)
Again, the simple statement “God gives life” has a structure of meanings but the structure is quite different from the previous one in which the primary opposition was between God and Satan. As a result, the conclusion reached above that the meaning of a simple statement is always the same structure needs to be further qualified. Actually the meaning of a simple statement is one particular structure out of a plurality of potential structures which are made of a plurality of meanings themselves. Language does not decide the plurality of simple meanings within this plurality of structures, but only the rational square out of a plurality of possible rational squares, and once the rational square is established, any line in the square is part of the meaning.

The plurality of structures or rational squares that a simple statement can generate are not necessarily un-related. In other words, the opposition between life/death and life/political power, on the one hand, and between God and government and God and Satan on the other, can be linked in the following way:

As the above graphic shows, a rational square can be expanded and linked with another rational square that has equivalences rather than oppositions on the primary and the secondary lines. It can be expanded even further to the left in the following way:
The complexity of the structure is obvious. Based on this composite square, one can argue that a politician is expected to commit murder in order to achieve political power, that government is demonic and therefore any religious action by the government will be detrimental to the church, that God is against political power, that governments are beyond redemption, and that churches should never seek political power but rather resist it, and so on. When some oppositions are established by some other means—such as the opposition between church and state in the United States which is provided in the constitution—then the rational square need not be established by any statements in the argumentation because it is assumed by everyone. Indeed, Americans may assume that the above square must be universal and found in every culture just because it is established by their constitution. In other cultures, however, in which the opposition between religion and government is not assumed, but the two centers of power are lumped together as in fundamentalist societies, the previous complex square may take the following form:
According to this complex rational square, a fundamentalist government can demonize both religious and political dissidents, kill them either for political and religious deviations, exercise their political power in the name of God and use God or religion as a warrant for their political authority, and so on. Meaning—understood as relationships within an established structure—can go far beyond the words used because the structure can be established at a much deeper level of the culture.

**Sentence Connectors**

So far I have considered a single statement, and quite a simple one, but language and argumentation are rarely made up of just three words. In speech or texts sentences are joined through various particles that tell how different sentences relate to one another. In formal logic such particles are called sentence connectives and the relations that they establish between the joined units are univocally determined. A major difference between formal logic and ordinary language is that in ordinary language there are connectors that have no place in the formalized language of logic and that such connectors in ordinary language cover a much wider variety of relationships than formal logic has chosen. The rational square is helpful in understanding the kinds
of relationships that various sentence-connecting particles convey in language.

Probably the most frequent particle in all languages is the conjunction “and.” It is particularly profuse in Hebrew and often sentences are just juxtaposed without any connecting particle so that the particle “and” is left unexpressed. In informal language “and” can convey many kinds of relationships but the standard relationship that it conveys best is the lines in the square that are rational. All the lines that are represented in the square by thick continuous and interrupted lines can be joined by the particle “and.” For instance, one who says “God gives life” can continue “and God takes away death.” “And” can connect also all secondary rational relationships as well as connect the primary rational ones with the secondary rational ones. For instance, one can say “God gives life and Satan does not take away death.” Sometimes other prepositions than “and” are used in Hebrew to convey the meaning of “and.” Here is an example: “For there is no lasting memory of the wise and [עִדּ, with] the fools” (Eccles. 2:16).118

The irrational relationships are those that connect oppositions, both main and secondary ones. The particle “and” can be used to join irrational relations as well. An example would be: “God will judge the righteous and [will judge] the wicked” (Eccl. 3:17). For the same reason one can say “God gives life and God takes it away.” Although “and” can be used to express irrational relations, such relations are best expressed by concessive particles such as: “although,” “but,” “in spite of the fact,” and so on. For instance, if one wants to say that God gives both life and death, it would be better to use particles other than “and”: “Although God gives life, God takes it away, too;” or “God gives life, but takes it away also;” or “in spite of the fact that God gives life, God takes it away also.”

118 All Bible quotations are in my own translation unless otherwise indicated.

119 What is irrational in this statement is not that God would judge—in the sense of holding accountable and eventually punish—the wicked, but that God would do the same with the righteous as well.
Irrational relationships play a very important role in the reasoning that Qoheleth uses in Ecclesiastes and the particle “and” is regularly used to convey these relationships. Most irrational relationships in Ecclesiastes are relationships that result from affirming reversals—that is, both the action and its reverse. It is not possible to cover all the irrational relationships that are found in the book and therefore I will just list a few examples: “a generation goes away and a generation comes back” (1:4), “if the sun rises, then the sun goes down” (1:5), “if the wind blows to the south, then it turns around to the north” (1:6), “if there is a time to be born, then there is a time to die” (3:2), “if there is a time to plant, then there is a time to pluck up what was planted” (3:2), “if there is a time to harm/kill, then there is time to heal” (3:3), “if there is a time to tear down, then there is a time to build up” (3:3), “if there is a time to weep, then there is a time to laugh” (3:4), “if there is a time to mourn, then there is a time to dance” (3:4), “if there is a time to throw away stones, then there is a time to gather stones” (3:5), “if there is a time to seek, then there is a time to lose” (3:6), “if there is a time to take hold, then there is a time to let go” (3:6), “if there is a time to tear, then there is a time to sew” (3:7), “if there is a time to love, then there is a time to hate” (3:8), “if there is a time for war, then there is a time for peace” (3:8).

In spite of Qoheleth’s basic claim that everything in the world must have a reversal, there are reversals which he denies. Such impossible reversals are usually cast in the form of a question, like the following one: “Who can make straight what he/God has made crooked?” (7:13).

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120 Of course, in the context of Ecclesiastes whether “south” or “north” is the positive side is irrelevant, but in actual discourse in which compass points are used in opposition to each other—such as South versus North in The American Civil War or East versus West during The Cold War—the context makes clear which side is positive and which one is negative for the speaker.

121 Although often whether an action or its reverse comes first it does not matter, Qoheleth is careful to list some actions first in order for their reversals to make sense: birth before death, planting before harvesting, harming/killing before healing, and so on, although killing proper cannot be reversed.
Qoheleth is denying some reversals in order to support his claims as I will show later on.

Some of the actions that Qoheleth links by the particle “and” are not actually reversals but he is treating them as reversals. For instance, in the third chapter where he has the long lists of actions and their reversals, he also list the following: “if there is a time to embrace, then there is a time to stay away from embracing” (3:5). The reverse of the action “to embrace” would be “to reject,” “to push away,” and not “to stop embracing,” “to cease to embrace,” or “not to embrace.” In this instance, however, Qoheleth treats the cessation of an action as being a reversal, although properly speaking, to cease to do something amounts to negating the verb, that is, “to cease to embrace” is “not to embrace.” In other words, “to refrain from embracing” is a more cumbersome way of saying “not to embrace.” As far as meaning is concerned, however, the cessation of an action and its reversal are not equivalent. As the rational square shows, to cease to do something amounts for some verbs to negating them, and therefore the two actions are represented on the square by continuous lines—thick and thin respectively—while an action and its negation is represented by a continuous and an interrupted line respectively. A similar example is: “If there is a time to shut up, then there is a time to speak up” (3:7). Although all verbs can be negated or their action can cease, not all verbs have reversals. When people have to cancel what they had said is not enough just to shut up; they would have to “take back” what they had said, which would require that they say something by which they indicate that they no longer agree with what they had said, although there may not be any specific word in the language with which such an action can be labeled. Sometimes Qoheleth treats negations of actions as reversals in order to prove his basic claims in the book that everything under the sun has a reversal, but as the rational square shows, negations of verbs and the reverse of those verbs are two different things.

The only relationships that the particle “and” cannot convey are impossible ones, that is, joining together both affirmations and negations. For instance, one can hardly say: “God gives life and does not give it.”
Another particle for joining statements is “or.” It is a rare particle and in Hebrew is particularly rare. The rational square is also helpful in explaining why that is the case: it conveys impossible or incompatible relationships. For instance, one can say: “God gives life or does not give it.” In ordinary speech such alternatives are self evident and rarely need to be expressed. Usually the particle “or” occurs in the phrase “either . . . or . . .” which in Hebrew is rendered by the particle of choice “ו” usually repeated in front of each alternative (Exod 21:31). In other words, the particle “or” is meant to express the kind of relationships that the particle “and” is unable to cover, and therefore “and” and “or” in common speech should be viewed as complimentary particles.

At this point it is necessary to point out the confusion that formal logic has created as far as the meaning of these particles is concerned. In order to make the particle “and” truth functional, logicians have restricted its meaning so that it is true when both statements joined are true, and the meaning of the particle “or” has been expanded so that it is true when either both are true, or only one of them is true, but not when both are false. As a result, the logical “or” basically means the linguistic “and” to the extent that one can hear even in ordinary language phrases like “we can eat and/or drink,” meaning “we can either eat, or drink, or both.” Because the meaning of the particle “and’ has been restricted and the meaning of the particle “or” has been expanded, the particle “or” is added to expand the meaning of the particle “and” unnecessarily. In doing so, however, the particle “and” becomes “logically” completely superfluous. In other words, the particle “and” in the monster “and/or” adds no alternative that is not already conveyed by the logical “or.” The absurdity of such “logical accuracy” is hilarious: the phrase “either . . . or . . .” supposes alternatives that are incompatible, and by adding “or both” one says that the things that are incompatible are quite compatible. Without formal logic, one could say either “we can eat and drink” (meaning “we can do one of them or both”) or “we can eat or drink” (meaning “we can do one of them but not both”). What was wrong with the meaning of these innocent particles that their meaning had to be so messed up by formal logic escapes my understanding.
Another sentence connective is the conditional “if.” Just like the disjunctive particle, the meaning of the conditional is covered by the particle “and” so that often the particle “and” in Hebrew and in English can be more accurately translated by “if . . . then.” Unlike “and,” however—which can convey both rational and irrational relationships—the conditional only conveys rational relationships. For instance, one can say: “If God gives life, then God does not take it away,” but one can hardly say: “If God gives life, then God gives death, too.” Similar rational relations would be: “If God gives life, then God takes away death, too.

**Arguments and the Rational Square**

The rational square shows that there are relationships between different kinds of statements—both stated or unstated—and that is exactly what reasoning and argumentation implies. Arguments are usually defined as statements connected so that some function as premises and one as the conclusion. That some statements need to function as premises is confirmed by the rational square, but their function is not to establish the conclusion but rather to establish the rational square. Once the rational square has been established, any statement that affirms a line that is part of the square can function as a conclusion. From this point of view, the traditional understanding of what is necessary to make a persuasive argument is inaccurate.

First, it is commonly believed that an argument needs to have at least two premises in order to be able to establish a conclusion. The rational square shows that this is both true and false. The belief is false because in order to establish the square, most of the time one statement is enough, as the statement “God gives life” proves. Because most of the time the rational square can be established by just one statement, an informal argument usually needs just one premise and the conclusion. And this is exactly what is found in most informal arguments. Therefore the idea that an argument must have a multitude of premises, or at least two as syllogisms do, is unfounded.
Arguments and the Rational Square

The belief that an argument must have at least two premises is true in the sense that sometimes just affirming one line in the rational square is not enough to establish the square. For instance, if one only affirms the main opposition in the rational square “God is opposite to Satan,” the rest of the square does not follow because one does not know which opposition to place on the secondary opposition line. This apparent weakness of the rational square, however, turns out to be one of its most productive features, as it will be shown later when I deal with metaphors.

The rational square also reveals why all kinds of argument analyses which are dependent upon an analysis of language—no matter how formalized that analysis becomes—is doomed to failure. Reasoning is dependent on relationships that are in the mind and of which only a tiny part comes out in language. In this respect Aristotle had a brilliant intuition when he labeled informal argument “enthymeme”—that is, “in the mind.” He realized that a large part of the relationships that are involved in argumentation take place in the mind without coming out in language, but instead of pursuing what could have been his greatest discovery, he rather brushed it aside and quickly turned the enthymeme into a footnote to his syllogism. And that may explain what is wrong with the syllogistic and its modern offspring, logic: they are too fascinating.

Finally, the rational square reveals probably the most important difference between language and thinking: while language is discursive, thinking is not. As Saussure remarked, by its very nature language is temporal so that the structures that the language imposes upon words are always sequential. The mind is not discursive and therefore the relationships that the mind establishes are not necessarily discursive or sequential. The mind does not place concepts in a row as languages do with words, but rather works with structures in which there is a multitude of relationships present simultaneously. Just as I suggested in the previous chapter, the relationship between the mind and language presupposes a major transformation: bits of a non-discursive structure are put into a discursive one. This observation has far-reaching hermeneutical implications. If we want to use texts to “recover” the mind or the thought that produced them, that goal will
always remain hopeless as long as the interpretation of texts remains confined to the discursive dimension of the text. Something that is discursive will never be able to replicate the operations of the mind, therefore computers—as long as they remain sequential devices—will never be able even to approximate human thinking. With its simplistic relationship between language and mind, the failure of logic can be turned into good news: the relationship between language and mind is much more complex and therefore much more fascinating.
The Rational Square, Syllogisms, and Enthymemes

If the rational square really reveals how reasoning works, it should be able to show why informal arguments that are perceived as persuasive are indeed persuasive. Moreover, since no one can question that Aristotle’s syllogisms are rational and therefore persuasive, the rational square should also cover the kinds of relationships that syllogisms establish. Because Aristotle has been my starting point and my source of inspiration in developing the rational square, it seems only natural that the first application of the new discovery should be to those informal arguments that Aristotle labeled enthymeme which he offered as persuasive examples of arguments in his Rhetoric and which he defined as a kind of syllogism. If the rational square proves to be able to explain those arguments, then the rational square is the discovery that Aristotle needed in order to explain persuasion. It is a discovery he probably never looked for because he believed too much in something better: the syllogism.

The Rational Square and Syllogisms

Before leaving the syllogism behind and turning to informal arguments that Aristotle provided as examples, it is necessary to deal briefly with the question of the relationship between syllogisms and the rational square. That syllogisms express valid relationships no one
can doubt, and if the rational square also captures relationships that the mind accepts, then there must be a relationship between the square and syllogisms. And indeed, a rational square is involved in every syllogism, but because Aristotle was very selective in his choice of statements that can make up an argument, the rational square is much more simple. The rational square is more simple because some oppositions and therefore some lines in the rational square cannot possibly occur. For instance, syllogisms have equivalence instead of an opposition on the primary opposition line. Moreover, the “verbs” that Aristotle chose and constantly used as predications in his premises are the verbs “to be,” “to belong,” and “to be predicated of.” These verbs are peculiar because they do not admit reversals as do the verbs “to give” and “to take.” There are no verbs such as “to an-be,” or “to un-belong,” or “to be un-predicated of.” Such verbs only admit negations but not reversals. Consequently, the syllogism Barbara:

All humans are mortal
Socrates is human
Therefore Socrates is mortal

can be easily represented on the following rational square:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Socrates} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{eternal} \\
\end{array}
\quad = 
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
\text{all humans} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{mortal} \\
\end{array}
\]

In this square the main premise establishes the right side of the square and the minor premise establishes the equivalence between Socrates and all humans and therefore the primary opposition line. Because the main opposition is that of equivalence, the diagonal is affirmed instead of negated while the left side of the square is negated rather than affirmed. The rational square reveals, however, that there is not just one syllogism “Barbara,” but many:
(1) All humans are mortal
   Socrates is human
   Therefore Socrates is not eternal

(2) Socrates is like all humans
   All humans are not eternal
   Therefore Socrates is not eternal

(3) Socrates is like all humans
   Socrates is not eternal
   Therefore all humans are not eternal

(4) Socrates is like all humans
   Socrates is mortal
   Therefore all humans are mortal

(5) Socrates is like all humans
   Socrates is mortal
   Therefore all humans are not eternal.

(6) All humans are not eternal
   Socrates is not eternal
   Therefore Socrates is like all humans

(7) All humans are mortal
   Socrates is mortal
   Therefore Socrates is like all humans

Had Aristotle considered these equivalent forms of “syllogisms” he would have realized that what makes a syllogism persuasive is not the supposed “middle” term “human” that occurs in both premises. I do not see any reason why any of these “syllogisms” should not be as good as the standard Barbara.

The rational square reveals not only equivalent forms of the same syllogism, but explains why syllogisms are useless for persuasion. Because they have equivalence on the primary opposition line, they do
not allow for opposing points of view and therefore there is no need for persuasion. That was precisely Aristotle’s purpose in developing them: to state “truths” that are universally accepted and no one can disagree on. That does not mean that no one can possibly disagree with the “truth” of Barbara as I will show later.

The fact that Aristotle chose equivalence rather than opposition on the primary opposition line does not mean that syllogisms cannot be created using a standard rational square which has opposition on the primary opposition line as well. Let us consider the opposition between Socrates and all humans as far as wisdom is concerned, opposition that can be expressed by the phrases “unlike/different/contrary/in opposition to.” The rational square would take this form:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Socrates} & \text{all humans} \\
\text{wise} & \text{opposition} & \text{opposition} \\
\text{wise} & \text{ignorant} \\
\text{All humans are ignorant} & \text{Socrates is different/contrary/opposite to all humans} & \text{Therefore Socrates is wise}
\end{array}
\]

Just like the rational square of the standard syllogism Barbara, this rational square can generate a multitude of similar syllogisms:

\begin{itemize}
  \item All humans are ignorant
  \item Socrates is different/contrary/opposite to all humans
  \item Therefore Socrates is wise
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item All humans are ignorant
  \item Socrates is different/contrary/opposite to all humans
  \item Therefore Socrates is not ignorant
\end{itemize}

In order to save space I will not list other syllogisms but rather leave the pleasure of discovering them to the reader.

At this point it is important to notice an important difference between rational squares that are built on an equivalence and rational squares that are built on an opposition. For the rational squares that are built on an equivalence, the opposition true/false is quite adequate to
qualify them. For instance, all the syllogisms similar to Barbara listed previously are “true.” As far as the syllogisms built on an opposition is concerned, however, to qualify them as “true” or “false” is difficult. For instance, the syllogisms mentioned previously about Socrates being wise in opposition to all humans cannot be described either as “true” or “false.” At best, it is likely. That all humans are ignorant and only Socrates be wise can hardly be true. At most it can be likely, but not very likely. That likelihood, however, can be increased by restricting the universe of discourse. For instance, the following rational square is much more likely to be “true” than the previous one:

Again, a syllogism built on this square cannot be qualified as “true,” but only “likely,” although this one is certainly more likely than the previous one. By restricting even further the universe of discourse—e.g., to “most people,” or even further to “some people”—the syllogisms built on oppositions can become so “likely” that they seem almost “true.” No matter how likely the conclusion may seem, such syllogisms built on oppositions can never be proved to be absolutely true.

The rational squares involved in the previous syllogisms built on oppositions use the verb “is”—“Socrates ‘is’ wise”—which is the same as the one used in the standard syllogism Barbara and therefore is more simple because it admits no reversals. If the rational square involves both oppositions and verbs that admit reversals, however, the number of syllogisms that a square can generate increases dramatically. Let us consider the same square like the one above but use the verb “love” instead of the verb “is,” which admits the reversal “hate.” The rational square would take the following form:
The primary irrational lines would be: “all humans hate ignorance,” “all humans do not love ignorance,” “Socrates hates wisdom,” and “Socrates does not love wisdom.” The secondary irrational lines would be: “all humans love wisdom,” “all humans do not hate wisdom,” “Socrates loves ignorance,” and “Socrates does not hate ignorance.” All these lines are not represented on the above square. If these extra lines are taken into account, the number of syllogisms that a complete rational square can generate is impressive. Let us consider just two:

All humans love ignorance
Socrates is different/opposite/unlike all humans
Therefore Socrates loves wisdom

All humans do not love wisdom
Socrates hates ignorance
Therefore Socrates is opposite/unlike all humans

Again, I leave the pleasure of finding out how many syllogisms a complete square can generate to the reader.

I conceded earlier that, because Aristotle chose for syllogistic statements verbs like “to be” and “to belong” which do not admit reversals, the opposition true/false is quite adequate to qualify such arguments so that a syllogism which is “true” can never be “false” as long as it has an identical form, no matter which terms are used to replace the variables. In other words, if we know that an argument is of the following form:
All A is B
C is A
Therefore C is B

and we admit that the first two lines are true, then the third line must necessarily be true no matter which terms we use to substitute the letters with. That was the whole goal of Aristotle’s project which formal logic adopted, to find what is unquestionably true and what is impossible to be false. Consequently, if we know that the conclusion of any argument of the above form is true, we know that it would be impossible for any mind to even consider the possibility that an argument of the following form might be true:

All A is B
C is A
But C is not B

But is that the case? Let us substitute “humans” for A, “mortal” for B, and “Jesus” for C. Let us now consider the following two arguments:

All humans are mortal
Jesus is human
Therefore Jesus is mortal

All humans are mortal
Jesus is human
But Jesus is not mortal

Although both Christian believers as well as non-Christians would agree that the two premises in both arguments are unquestionably true (and are identical), most Christians would reject the conclusion of the first one (that is, of Barbara) as false and believe that the conclusion of the second one is true. And if some are tempted to believe that only Christians can have such confused minds, I invite them to replace Jesus
with Enoch, Elijah, Moses, Mohammad, Pharaoh, Odysseus (Ulysses), Castor, Utnapishtim, Gilgamesh, Buddha, and so on. If we take into account the number of those in all ages who believed in some form of the opposite of Barbara, I am afraid that Aristotle and those who believed in the “truth” of Barbara would be in the minority.

The rational square not only explains why the syllogism Barbara is true and helps discover many others, but it explains why syllogisms are useless for rhetorical purposes. Because the syllogism Barbara is built on an equivalence rather than on an opposition, a rhetorical situation is not possible to establish and therefore no persuasion is needed. Not surprisingly, the syllogisms that are based on a rational square built on oppositions are the ones that have much greater rhetorical and persuasive value, because their “truth” is not so easily grasped; indeed, can even be questioned. Therefore, the problem with Aristotle’s syllogisms is not that what they say is not true. The problem is: Who would doubt what they say in the first place?

**The Rational Square and the Enthymeme**

The passage in which Aristotle introduces the notion of enthymeme is the following:

> It is obvious, therefore, that a system arranged according to the rules of art is only concerned with proofs; that proof is a sort of dem-

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122 According to tradition, although Moses is reported in the Bible to have died, he was resurrected later and some expected him to return as Messiah (Mat 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30).

123 Although Ulysses rejected Calypso’s offer to make him immortal if he gave up his desire to ever go back home, his mortality is not required by the syllogism Barbara but is the result of his choice.

124 Although Gilgamesh failed to attain immortality, his mortality is not required by any logical necessity.
onstration, since we are most strongly convinced when we suppose anything to have been demonstrated; that rhetorical demonstration is an enthymeme, which, generally speaking, is the strongest of rhetorical proofs; and lastly, that the enthymeme is a kind of syllogism.\footnote{Aristotle, \textit{Rhetoric}, 1.1.1355a11.}

Aristotle’s claim that an enthymeme is a form of syllogism has given rise to many interpretations. It is possible that he believed that eventually any enthymeme could be turned into a syllogism, proved to be valid and the conclusion necessary, but others have assumed that the difference between a syllogism and an enthymeme is that an enthymeme has an unstated premise that is supposed to be believed by the audience. This understanding has led to the methodology of trying to turn rhetorical arguments into syllogisms or into arguments that can be analyzed by formal logic by adding premises that are not stated in order to make the conclusion valid. In what follows, some of the examples of enthymemes that Aristotle provides will be analyzed to show that enthymemes do not have anything in common with syllogisms on the one hand, and on the other, there is nothing missing in enthymemes and therefore they are rational and persuasive as they are stated.

Let us take some examples of maxims that Aristotle provides in \textit{The Art of Rhetoric}:

Another example:

There is no man who is happy in everything;
or,

There is no man who is really free.

The latter is a maxim, but taken with the next verse it is an enthymeme:

for he is the slave of either wealth or fortune.\footnote{Ibid., 2.21.1394b2.}

Let us examine the second example first. According to his method, Aristotle classifies enthymemes rather than analyzes them and the
above examples he labels “maxims.” Apparently he takes a maxim to be an argument in which only the conclusion is stated because in the second example, when the maxim is followed by a justificatory statement, the justifying statement is taken as a premise which would turn the maxim into an argument of the enthymeme kind.

The enthymeme “there is no one who is really free for he is the slave of either wealth or fortune,” involves no difficulty in establishing the rational square:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{no one/someone} & & \text{everyone} \\
\downarrow & & \downarrow \\
\text{free} & \leftrightarrow & \text{slave}
\end{array}
\]

The maxim affirms the conclusion “no one is free,” which easily establishes the rational square by affirming the left side of the square, and implies the opposite side of the square which affirms that “everyone is slave.” The problem with maxims is that they both establish the rational square and affirm the conclusion in the same statement, while in typical arguments—made up of premise(s) and conclusion—the rational square is first established through the premise(s) and the conclusion can be any rational line in the rational square. In Aristotle’s enthymeme the rational square is established by the additional statement “for everyone is slave of wealth or fortune.” Once this side of the square is successfully established, the conclusion “no one is free” rationally follows.

With this example I want to make two points. First, the assumption that an enthymeme is some kind of standard argument with two premises and a conclusion like syllogisms is unfounded. There is nothing that is missing in the above argument in order to be accepted as rational by the audience.

Secondly, Aristotle’s claim that an enthymeme is a form of syllogism is also untenable. One of the important features of a syllogism is that, in a valid syllogism, if the conclusion is reversed, then a contradiction follows in one of the premises. If an enthymeme were
some kind of syllogism, the same thing should happen. But that is not the case. Quite the opposite, in the above enthymeme, one can turn the secondary opposition line around and use the conclusion as a premise and the premise as a conclusion. For instance, the following enthymeme is also persuasive:

No one is really slave,  
for everyone is free to think.  

This time the rational square is:

```
\[\begin{array}{cc}
\text{everyone} & \text{no one/someone} \\
\text{free} & \text{slave}
\end{array}\]
```

The difference between this rational square and the previous one is that the primary opposition has been reversed. Again the second statement “everyone is free to think” establishes the square by affirming the left side of the square and the conclusion “no one is slave” that affirms the right side of the square follows. The two arguments or enthymemes are equally rational or persuasive because they use the same relationships within the square, although they are based on different squares. This proves that an enthymeme cannot possibly be a syllogism because in a syllogism it is impossible to arrive at two opposite conclusions using two different syllogisms, and both be valid.

The other maxim “there is no one who is happy in everything” can be easily represented on the following rational square:

```
\[\begin{array}{cc}
\text{happiness} & \text{no one/one} \\
\text{everything} & \text{nothing}
\end{array}\]
```

\[^{127}\text{This is an actual argument used in communist countries by those who defended the totalitarian system against the charges that the restrictions that the government enforced removed freedom.}\]
Again, the maxim affirms just the conclusion of the argument which needs to both establish the rational square and affirm one side. But the affirmation of the left side of the square automatically suggests the right side of the square which should say “for everyone is not happy in something”:

Because the conclusion states the left side of the square, the unstated premise that would support the conclusion and affirm the right side of the rational square needs to be the irrational line—that is, irrational from the point if view of the right side of the square. Of course, the conclusion or the maxim could have stated the right side of the square as being the rational one—everyone is happy in something—and that would have called for an irrational line on the left side of the square. In other words, the square would have been:

As I will show later, such squares presuppose a closed rhetorical situation which is what maxims or proverbs usually assume.
The rational square can explain why maxims are possible—that is, arguments that have no premises but just the conclusion. They affirm relations of a rational square that are so often experienced by people that the rational square can be established just by stating one line in the square.

Let us take another maxim that Aristotle offers: “Health is a most excellent thing for a man, at least in our opinion.” Again the maxim states only one side of the square, but it is enough to build it:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{health} & \text{illness} \\
\text{most excellent thing} & \text{most undesirable thing}
\end{array}
\]

Who would have difficulties in establishing the square and who would argue against the truth that is being stated? Moreover, the side of the square that is completed by the mind—illness is the most undesirable thing—could be the conclusion itself which would provide the mind with the extra pleasure of discovering itself that part of the square.

Let us take another example: “He is no lover who does not love always.” The rational square would look like:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{lover} & \text{no lover} \\
\text{always} & \text{sometimes/never}
\end{array}
\]

---

\(^{128}\text{Ibid., 2.21.1394b5.}\)

\(^{129}\text{Ibid., 2.21.139b5.}\)
The direct statements are: “a lover loves always,” and “a no lover loves sometimes/never.” Although the maxim could have affirmed any of the above sides, it chose to affirm the diagonal—which involves a negation of the verb: “no lover does not love always.” In other words, the line in the square that establishes the square is:

lover ←→ no lover

always ←→ sometimes/never

The other diagonal would have been “a lover does not love just sometimes.” The maxim could have stated any of these relationships and it would have been equally persuasive because it would have followed the rational sides in the square.

Let us take another example: “Being a mortal, do not nourish immortal wrath.” The rational square can easily be established:

mortal subject ←→ immortal subject

mortal wrath ←→ immortal wrath

As this example shows, the rational square is able to handle modal statements that were so problematic for Aristotle’s syllogism and for formal logic. Since the conclusion is stated in the imperative, we can affirm the sides of the square in the same mood: “Mortal do not nourish immortal wrath!” or: “Immortal do not nourish mortal wrath!” Again the enthymeme could have affirmed the sides of the square, but instead it affirmed one of the diagonals: “Mortal do not nourish immortal wrath!” If immortal beings had to coin a maxim of their own based

\[130\text{Ibid., 2.21.1394b6.}\]
on this square, it would be: “Being immortal, do not nourish mortal wrath!,” and of course, they would have represented it in green on the left side of the square and Aristotle’s maxim in red on the right.

Another modal example is the following: “A mortal should have mortal, not immortal thoughts." The rational square is very similar:

This maxim again uses the modal “should,” which creates no difficulty, but it states two lines within the rational square, the left side—“a mortal should have mortal thoughts”—and the equivalent diagonal—“a mortal should not have immortal thoughts”—which is redundant. The maxim can be amplified in the following way: “just as an immortal should have immortal thoughts and should not have mortal thoughts, so also a mortal should have mortal thoughts and should not have immortal thoughts.” This example makes an important point. The less of the rational square is affirmed, the less obvious is the conclusion; and the more of the rational square is affirmed, the more obvious is the conclusion. At the minimum, an argument can be made by just one affirmation, which happens in maxims because they affirm obvious truths that do not pose major problems for the mind to establish the rational square, and at the other end are arguments that affirm more than two lines in the square and to some extent they are redundant, but they are better able to enforce the conclusion.

So far, we have seen mostly arguments or maxims that are built on rational relations which in the rational square are represented with thick lines. The square shows, however, that irrational relationships are possible, which means that sometimes people do things that are contrary to what a consistent mind would do. Exposing irrationality is

131Ibid., 2.21.1394b6.
another important function of argumentation because in argumentation opponents not only want to show that their side in the square is rational and therefore persuasive, but also want to point out that the position of their opponents is irrational and therefore should be abandoned. Aristotle gives another example of enthymeme that exposes irrationality in the opponent: “Foolish is he who, having slain the father, suffers the children to live.” The rational square is:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the wise</th>
<th>the foolish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kill</td>
<td>kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children [innocent]</td>
<td>fathers [guilty]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

The proverb says that the wise kill both the innocent and the guilty, while the foolish kill only the guilty and allow the innocent to live. The proverb suggests that the foolish are inconsistent because they do not kill both the guilty with the innocent, while the wise are consistent because they kill both the guilty and the innocent. But the rational square reveals that the “wise” affirm one line that is rational—“kill the innocent”—and one line that is irrational because they kill the opposite—that is, “kill the guilty”—therefore the wise affirm both a thick line and a thin line in the square of the opposite color, which is inconsistent with rationality. By contrast, the “fools,” by killing only the guilty and not killing the innocent, follow only a primary thick rational line and a secondary rational line that is a diagonal thick interrupted line, both of its own color red. As the rational square shows, in reality the opposite of what the argument claims is the case: the foolish are rational while the supposed wise are irrational. Of course, Aristotle had no clear method and theory to analyze such maxims and it is no surprise that he presented this argument as an example of a persuasive enthymeme, but the rational square shows that the opposite is the case.

132Ibid., 2.21.1395a11.
Another example of enthymeme that Aristotle gives is the following: “If the war is responsible for the present evils, one must repair them with the aid of peace.” Again, the rational square is easy to set up:

The argument does not mention what peace would be in direct relationship to, but it is not difficult to figure out what would be the opposition of evils: prosperity, benefits, blessings, accomplishments, pleasures, spared lives, and so on. The argument could have stated just the direct rational relationships between the two oppositions: “If war causes the present evils, peace causes prosperity,” and in this case there would have been no need to guess what the opposite of “evils” is. But instead of affirming the direct rational relationship between peace and its corresponding part of the opposition on the secondary opposition line, it used the reverse action of the direct relationship. If the direct relationship between “war” and “evils” is “to cause” or “be responsible,” then the reverse action would be “to solve,” “to remove” or “be responsible for the elimination.” The argument therefore affirms the direct relationship between “war” and “evils” (represented by a thick line) and the reverse relationship between “peace” and “evils” (represented by the thick diagonal that connects “peace” and “evil” in the rational square). In other words, the argument states the following lines in the rational square:

133Ibid., 2.22.1397a1.
By using the diagonal “peace removes evils” rather than the direct relationship “peace causes prosperity,” the argument has said the same thing because it has used two rational lines in the square, but it has left unexpressed the opposite of “evils.” By leaving that spot blank, the form of the argument forces the mind of the audience to complete the square and therefore allows for the audience to complete the square with the option or options which are most important for them. Had the speaker made a reference to the opposite of “evils,” then the speaker would have made the choice for the listeners, and that choice may not have been what all listeners would have considered best. And this is a very important feature of informal arguments: because so much of the square usually remains unstated, the mind is stimulated to complete the square and therefore to complete the meaning. The square not only expresses relations, but also stimulates the mind to fill up the meaning itself. In so doing, the mind experiences the pleasure of discovering meaning that is just implied but not stated, and that pleasure of discovering meaning is a very important component of persuasion. This pleasure of discovering what is unstated is most obvious in the use of metaphors and narratives, to which I will turn in the next chapter.
It must be obvious by now that the rational square establishes a multitude of relationships between various elements that make up a square and not all kinds of relationships are of equal importance. The wide variety of relationships that occur in a rhetorical discourse and in arguments is due to the diversity of kinds of relationships that are available in a square and are indicated by the lines that are chosen to be brought out in language. Therefore, it is important to ask the question: Which are the most productive relationships within the rational square?

A complete answer to this question would take me far beyond the scope of this study, but I do want to point out two important features of the rational square. By looking at the square, it easily becomes apparent that there is an important difference between the horizontal lines on the one hand, and the vertical and diagonal lines on the other. The vertical and the diagonal lines are all action lines — involving all kinds of oppositions that presuppose verbs — therefore those lines are very productive in narratives. By contrast, the horizontal lines presuppose no verbs, and that may look like a weakness, but that is probably the most productive feature of the square as far as meaning
is concerned. This claim may seem exaggerated, but the two horizontal lines are involved in any simile and metaphor and it is those lines that make metaphors and similes possible.

The Reasoning Involved in Metaphors and Similes

A simile is a comparison between two things and is easily recognized by its typical linguistic pattern: “A is like B.” Unlike a simile, in a metaphor the comparison between two things is implied rather than stated, therefore the easiest way to distinguish a metaphor from a simile is by noticing the absence of the word “like” or its equivalents. Probably the best definition of a metaphor is given by Sallie McFague:

Most simply, a metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending “this” is “that” because we do not know how to think or talk about “this,” so we use “that” as a way of saying something about it. Thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects, events, or whatever, one of which is better known than the other, and using the better-known one as a way of speaking about the lesser known.

Although a metaphor and a simile are distinguished as far as their linguistic pattern is concerned, they are based on the same reasoning pattern. As Sallie McFague points out, in a metaphor there is both

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134 The horizontal lines presuppose space which is the basic concept involved in establishing an opposition. The vertical and diagonal lines presuppose time which is the basic concept involved in verbs. When Kant wanted to discover the basic concepts that are involved in any thought, he came to the conclusion that space and time are the concepts that are indispensable to thinking and concluded that reason in its pure form can be reduced to these two concepts. It is the rational square, however, that explains why the two concepts are fundamental for any thought process.

similarity and dissimilarity. The way in which the mind can use things that are both similar and dissimilar to create meaning has remained so far a mystery in spite of the abundance of similes and metaphors in all languages and cultures. As literary devices, metaphors and similes are so amazing because they can convey meaning with the greatest economy of words. Usually metaphors take just two words and similes three. This abundance of meaning with such an economy of words is possible because metaphors and similes can establish a rational square with a minimum of linguistic material. As was pointed out when the rational square was introduced, often just affixing one of the vertical or diagonal lines is enough to establish the rational square. Sometimes two lines may be necessary; a vertical or diagonal one and a horizontal one. If, however, only a horizontal line is affirmed, the rational square may not be clearly decided because the other horizontal line may not be clearly defined. In other words, if just the primary opposition line is affirmed, the secondary opposition line does not follow. This apparent wackiness in the rational square turns out to be one of its most productive features because it makes it possible to create similes and metaphors. What all metaphors and similes do is to affirm just the primary opposition line. To claim that the two terms that make up a metaphor or a simile are in opposition goes against traditional thinking which has always viewed the two terms as “similar” rather than in opposition. The opposition, however, on which all metaphors and similes are built is that of greater/smaller, both on the primary and the secondary opposition lines. In other words, metaphors and similes are built on the following rational square:

In a metaphor or a simile only the primary opposition is affirmed, and the secondary opposition is supplied by the mind using the rational square. In order to see how this works, let us consider the following
simile first: “God is like a mother.” In a metaphor or simile the secondary opposition line is never stated because that line is automatically supplied by the mind by completing the rational square. The quality or qualities that are affirmed on the minor opposition line are qualities that are shared in common by the two terms. This is where the similarity between the two terms comes into play. In a simile, however, it is always the second term that establishes that quality or qualities. Once that quality or qualities have been established, then it/they are just extrapolated over the first term amplified or diminished, depending on the hierarchy that is naturally established between the two terms that make the primary opposition line. In our case, God is the term A and corresponds to the greater term on the primary opposition line, while mother is the term B and corresponds to the smaller term on the primary opposition line. Because “mother” occurs on the last position in the simile, it is the one that decides the qualities that establish the secondary opposition(s). Here is one possible meaning of this simile:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{God} \\
\text{greater love} \\
\end{array}
\quad > 
\quad
\begin{array}{c}
\text{mother} \\
\text{smaller love} \\
\end{array}
\]

As the rational square shows, Sallie McFague is right when she says that in a metaphor one term is used to describe another one, but I do not think that for a simile or metaphor to work the descriptive term necessarily has to be more familiar than the described term. What is important is that the two terms that are compared be placed in a clear relationship of opposition as far as importance is concerned. As long as the terms are in such a relationship, it does not really matter which one is more “familiar” and which one is less “familiar.” According to the rational square, we should expect a simile and a metaphor to be reversed and still work, although the meaning most likely would change. And that is exactly what we find to be the case. If we reverse the above simile, we get the following one: “a mother is like God.” This
is still a simile, but with a different meaning because now it is the greater term that is used as the descriptive term for the smaller term and therefore it is the greater term that establishes the line of the secondary opposition. In other words, this simile is based on the following rational square:

```
smaller term A  <  greater term B
   \    /\                /
   v   v   \              \  
smaller quality X  <  greater quality X
```

Because the descriptive term has changed, the quality that establishes the secondary opposition line will be different and therefore we obtain the following possible meaning for the new simile:

```
mother  <  God
   \    /\                  /\ 
   v   v   \                \  
smaller authority  <  greater authority
```

As was pointed out earlier, a metaphor differs from a simile only linguistically, but not rationally, because the word “like” is dropped and therefore the two terms of the comparison are just juxtaposed. This can be done either by using the word “is”: “God is a mother,” or by juxtaposing the two terms one next to the other: “the God mother.”

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136 Unfortunately, because the phrase God-mother has now an established meaning, it is no longer perceived as a metaphor. As Sallie McFague would argue, this is a dead metaphor, that is, a metaphor whose meaning has become established and no longer needs to be discovered by the mind, therefore the mind no longer needs to build a rational square to find the meaning. I am treating it here, however, as a metaphor, that is, the meaning(s) that it may have had when it was coined.
If the metaphor is of the form “God is a mother,” then it is the second term that is the descriptive one, while if the metaphor takes the form “the God mother,” it is the first term that is the descriptive for the second rather than the other way round as it is the case with a simile.

Moreover, just as a simile can be reversed by changing the position of the terms, so also a metaphor can be reversed—with the corresponding change in meaning—unless the meaning becomes unacceptable. Therefore, it is possible to create the metaphor “the mother God” which would have the same meaning as the simile “God is like a mother,” that is, the meaning of “the mother God” would be “the loving God.”

The rational square is helpful not only in explaining how similes and metaphors work, but also to evaluate and properly create them. The first thing that is necessary when building a metaphor is that the two terms are in a relation of opposition as far as their importance is concerned. Terms that are equal cannot possibly produce metaphors. For instance, the similes “a dog is like a cat” or “a cat is like a dog” are meaningless not because dogs and cats do not have traits that are both similar and dissimilar, or that one is not familiar enough in order to be used to describe the other. The same is true if the two terms are placed in a metaphor mold: “the dog cat,” or “the cat dog.” What is missing is the proper hierarchy, that is the “greater-smaller” opposition. In order to see that the reason the words “dog” and “cat” cannot make a metaphor is not that there is anything wrong with either of the words, let us consider the metaphor “a car is like a cat.” In this metaphor the car is the greater\textsuperscript{137} term and the cat is the smaller term. Because a hierarchy can be established, the metaphor is not perceived as meaningless. A car can be viewed as having to a greater extent the ability to spring into action or motion, or the agility to slip through traffic that a cat has to a lesser extent. Moreover, the “metaphor” can be reversed and still have meaning: “a cat is like a car.” Again, the greater term is the car and the smaller term is the cat, but this time a quality of the car

\textsuperscript{137}The term “greater” should not be understood to mean only size, but also importance, value, and so on.
that the car has to a greater extent is used to describe a quality of the cat that the cat has to a lesser extent. The mind is searching for possible options to complete the square and the most likely option is probably “care” or “affection.” The meaning of the metaphor would be: “just as a car is the object of care and affection to a larger extent, so also is a cat the object of care and affection to a smaller extent.”

I do not claim that this is a good metaphor; indeed, I chose it precisely because it is a poor one. Actually the second one can be quite problematic, particularly for a person who loves cats but does not love cars. But even those who love cats and do not love cars would be able to figure out the intended meaning of the “metaphor,” although they would most likely reject it as “untrue.”

In order to further show that the metaphor “a cat is like a dog” is not possible not because there is anything wrong with the words cat and dog, let us consider another simile: “a cat is like a pig.” The meaning is readily available: a cat is to a lesser extent a dirty animal just as a pig is a dirty one to a greater extent. Other optional meanings could be: “a cat is dirty/eats a lot/fat to a lesser extent just as a pig is dirty/eats a lot/fat to a larger extent animal.” Again, this would not be an appreciated metaphor particularly by someone who loves cats, but that only proves the point that the meaning of a metaphor has to do with a proper hierarchy and not necessarily the qualities that the joined terms have.

Sometimes which of the two terms is the descriptive one and which is the described one can be problematic in the Old Testament/TANAKH because of a peculiar pattern that some similes take in Hebrew. Here is a classic example which is usually translated literally just as it is in Hebrew: “And it shall be like people like priest” (Hosea 4:9). The phrase “like people like priest” is a word for word translation of the Hebrew phrase כְּבָשָׁה לֶבַנְיָן, where the particle “like” [כָּ] occurs with both terms of comparison. By preserving the Hebrew structure in translations, the simile becomes ambiguous because it is not clear which term is the descriptive one and which is the described one in spite of the fact that the hierarchy between the two terms is not difficult to established. In other words, the simile could have two possible meanings:
Depending on which is the descriptive term, the simile can say either that the people are to some extent holy just like the priests are holy, or that the priests are in reality more profane than the people. As the context makes clear, Hosea is castigating the priests and therefore the second meaning of the simile is intended. Consequently a proper translation of the Hebrew phrase would be: “the priests are like people.”

A simile or metaphor preserves its meaning even if the descriptive term is spelled out rather than left to be discovered. For instance, the simile “God is like a mother” remains meaningful even if the term of comparison is spelled out: “God is loving like a mother.” When a simile is “spelled out” much of its force is lost because the mind is robbed of the pleasure of discovering the meaning itself; but it remains meaningful.

Another important aspect that the rational square reveals about metaphors is that they convey a complex description in a very compact form. If the above similes are analyzed, there would be actually more than just one line for the secondary opposition. For instance, let us consider again the metaphor “God is like a mother.” The mind would not be limited to come up with just one meaning on the secondary opposition line, but as many as it can find:
As the above example shows, a rich metaphor is one in which the mind is able to build or discover many sides or lines on the secondary opposition line. The greater the number of possible lines, the richer and the more powerful the metaphor is perceived.

Conversely, the rational square explains also the process by which a metaphor becomes dead. With extended use, a metaphor drops some of the possible descriptive options while retaining others until it becomes fixed over one of them that becomes its “standard” meaning. When that happens, the meaning becomes established and is no longer perceived as a metaphor any more. In other words, after the meaning of a metaphor becomes fixed with use, the mind no longer needs to build the rational square in order to discover the meaning(s).

In order to prove that the richness of a metaphor stands on its ability to allow for a multitude of descriptions on the secondary opposition line, let us consider one that is poor. For instance the simile “a man is like a horse” can hardly have more than one line in the descriptive side of the rational square:¹³⁸

¹³⁸In this example “greater” should be understood as importance rather than size.
The poverty of the above metaphor has to do with its lack of ability to allow for a multitude of descriptive terms on the secondary opposition line. But this is not the whole story. A metaphor may still allow for few descriptive terms on the secondary opposition line and still be very powerful. Let us consider a simile that is spelled out in Ecclesiastes 6:12: “humans are like a shadow.” The square would look like:

The “power” of this metaphor resides not in the multitude of descriptive terms that the rational square generates on the secondary opposition line, but in the exaggeration that the rational square creates when it describes humans as “ephemeral.” Because a human being is greater than a shadow, the rational square requires that humans be viewed as more ephemeral than a shadow. This is obviously an exaggeration, but that only enforces the meaning more powerfully. The rational satisfaction that such a metaphor provides to the mind is not in suggesting that human beings are ephemeral but in the unexpected way in which that ephemerality is suggested. We find the same metaphor used again in Ecclesiastes 8:13: “days like a shadow.” The reason this simile is not as powerful as the previous one is that the hierarchy between days and a shadow is not as strong as that between the length of a human life and a shadow and therefore the exaggeration is not as
The Reasoning Involved in Metaphors and Similes

great. In other words, the stronger the hierarchy, the more powerful the simile/metaphor.

A similar powerful simile is found in Ecclesiastes 7:6: “the laughter of fools is like the noise of thorns under a pot.” The hierarchy is between “fools” and “thorns,” in the sense that what thorns are, the fools are to a greater extent. The rational square is:

To complicate the matter further, the multitude of the descriptive terms that the rational square allows on the secondary opposition line does not necessarily render a metaphor/simile powerful. What needs to be taken into account is the possible relationships that are not acceptable and therefore become a block. Let us consider a simile that can be both rich and problematic: “God is like a king.” The rational square takes the following form:

In this case, although the rational square would suggest a great number of descriptive lines, the mind would not find the “discovery” of some of them as satisfactory. Quite the opposite, some would be quite problematic. Unfortunately, that is the case with some of the bib-
lical metaphors which have become more problematic because some descriptive lines that seemed acceptable for the ancient audience are no longer acceptable today. Not that the rational square has changed, but our perception has changed and the rational square only helps identify and point out the reason why some metaphors—which may have been perceived as powerful at some point in time—later became problematic and fell out of use.

**The Rational Square and Narratives**

A narrative is life that goes wrong. If nothing ever went wrong in life we would hardly ever have anything to tell or bother to listen to. The reason life goes wrong is that, when we try to do something, we run into an opponent that is preventing us from accomplishing what we had planned to do. Therefore in every narrative we find a subject or hero who must face an opponent when attempting to do something. The conflict is clarified quite early in the narrative and it establishes the following rational square on which all narratives are built:

![Rational Square Diagram]

Once the rational square is established, the audience is interested in finding out which opponent succeeds. Each opponent can use any kind of line or action in the rational square, but opponents are expected to be rational, that is, to affirm their side of the secondary opposition by affirming only rational lines and avoid irrational or impossible lines that would affirm the opponent’s side of the opposition. The narrative ends when one of the opponents succeeds or when the other fails or both.
From the point of view of how a narrative develops, there are several options. One possibility is for the hero to succeed in accomplishing the task and the opponent to fail. This typically happens in heroic stories and they can be recognized by their happy ending. A heroic story ends when the opponent ceases to be an opponent and that can happen either when the opponents are eliminated physically, or when they give up, or when they assert an irrational line in the rational square and by doing so, affirm the hero’s side of the secondary opposition and deny their own side of the secondary opposition. When that happens, an opponent not only ceases to be an opponent, but turns into an ally. In some stories, the hero’s opponent becomes the best friend.

The persuasive value of a heroic narrative is to win the allegiance of the audience for the hero. The world of a heroic narrative is a world in which heros have control and therefore it is a secure world, on condition that the audience support the heroes and not oppose them. By the outcome of the story, a heroic narrative attempts to persuade the audience to choose to be allies rather than opponents of the heroes and the cause they advocate.

A narrative, however, can end not with the success of the hero, but rather with the success of the opponent. That happens in tragedies in which the hero can fail in the same way in which an opponent in a heroic story fails: the hero may be eliminated physically or ceases to be an opponent either by refusing to resist the opponent or by siding with the opponent. In this instance the hero becomes a traitor. Because a tragedy is a narrative in which the opponent wins, the world of a tragedy is an intolerable world to live in. It is a world in which the hero has been eliminated and the opponent has full control. Because of their unhappy and unacceptable endings, tragedies create a “charged” audience, that is, an audience that takes over the responsibility of the hero to bring the opponent to failure. To some extent, tragedies are

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139 Probably the best illustration of how the death of the hero turns the audience into taking over the mission of the hero is the way in which the death of Jesus on the cross turned his followers into missionaries/heroes. The world in which a hero dies is a world that needs redemption and needs to be changed. Christianity is the only missionary religion in which the salvation of
never closed stories. As opened, tragedies always get completed by the audience in the sense that they call for the audience to take over the mission of the failed hero and to eliminate the opponent in order to complete them.

Another possible way in which a narrative can develop is for the hero and the opponent to remain in opposition but to switch places. In other words, in the end the opponent affirms the side of the opposition that the hero is expected to affirm, and the hero affirms the side of the opposition that the opponent is expected to affirm. This happens in propaganda stories. In other words, a propaganda story begins with the following rational square:

![Rational Square Diagram](image)

and ends with the following one:

![Rational Square Diagram](image)

As the square shows, in a propaganda story only irrational lines are affirmed because both opponents affirm actions that are inconsistent with their role and as a result they switch places. Therefore, the hero in a propaganda story ends up being an opponent and the opponent ends up being a hero. Consequently, the persuasive goal of a propaganda story is often the world is central because it is the only religion in which the god dies because is helping people. It is through the mission of Jesus’ followers that tragedies like the gospels turn into “good news.”
story is to cause the audience to switch allegiances. It begins with an audience which is loyal to the hero and ends up with an audience which is loyal to the opponent.

Because a propaganda story attempts to cause the audience to switch allegiances, it is the kind of story that sets the highest persuasive goals possible. In order to succeed, the story must be told from the position of the hero and the supporters of the hero. In other words, the narrator must pretend to be loyal to the hero as well. It is only in the end that the narrator is identified as an ally of the opponent and the audience is expected to do the same. As a result, the world of a propaganda story is a subversive world. It is a world in which allegiances are questioned and suspicions are nurtured. It is an uncertain world in which anything can happen and often does. It nurtures those who are unsatisfied with the world and hope for a better lot in a disrupted one, and antagonizes those who are satisfied with the status quo. Usually they label the propagandists as trouble makers.

Finally, narratives may take the form of humorous stories. They are peculiar stories because in humor the comedian is both the hero and the opponent. Typically comedians are single characters and their stories are monologues, but even when comedians are more than one—like Stan and Bran or The Three Stooges—they are regularly “buddies” who attempt to do things together but end up being opponents to one another. In their desire to “help” one another or oneself they end up hurting one another or oneself, often physically. Humorous stories are full of irrational relations, both primary irrational relations (affirming both an action and its reversal) and secondary irrational relations (affirming both oppositions on the secondary opposition line at the same time). These irrational relations can take place in many ways: words that have double and opposing meanings or actions that have contrary effects to the ones intended. Humor occurs when the opposite of what is intended happens. Let us consider the following story: “A church member says to the preacher: ‘I enjoy your sermons immensely; they are simply unbelievable.’” What is “funny” about this statement is that a reversal takes place in the second part. A sermon that is enjoyable is a sermon of high quality, but a sermon that is unbelievable is a sermon that is worthless. To assert two opposing
qualities about the same thing is irrational, and for some strange reason that is “funny.” The rational square for a humorous story is:

![Rational Square Diagram]

The world of humorous stories is an irrational world. It is an unpredictable world in which things can go wrong and do go wrong. It is a world in which the opposite of what is intended happens. It is a world in which we do not like to live and therefore we laugh at it. Laughter is an ostentatious form of rejection. It is the opposite of persuasion. If persuasion is acceptance, laughter is rejection. The things we laugh at are the things we reject.

The pleasure of laughter is the same as the pleasure of persuasion, except laughter is the pleasure of rejecting what is irrational and persuasion is the pleasure of accepting what is rational. There is pleasure and joy in discovering the irrational and rejecting it just as there is pleasure and joy in discovering what is rational and accepting it. Therefore the “persuasive” power of humor is not in making us accept what is being said, but in rejecting it. By watching comedians who create a bigger mess as they try to solve it, we feel better about the mess or the irrationality that we experience in our own lives. The comedian who does not give up and accepts the life in the story with a straight face is inviting us to accept and live with our own mess. Therefore for comedians to be “persuasive” it is important not to laugh at their own stories but rather to keep a straight face. When comedians laugh at their own stories prove that they are aware of the irrationality in them and reject it and by doing so they rob the audience of the pleasure of discovering their irrationality themselves and reject it by laughing. By rejecting such an irrational world in which the comedian seems so content and talks about it so naturally, the audience ends up feeling better about their own world that seems less irrational by comparison. Comedians are successful when they are able to persuade us to laugh and reject
what they tell us, so that we accept what we have. Because heroic and humorous stories help the audience to feel good about themselves and their own world, they provide the rational structures of entertainment. Whether the heroes are athletes, or lawyers who always succeed in defending the victims, or police officers who always manage to catch the criminals, or government officials and armies who always win wars, or comedians who make us laugh at their stupidity, they all make us feel better and sleep better when we go to bed. It is when “entertainment” departs from these stereotypes and makes movies about how religious and government officials torture and kill innocent people like Jesus or fail to defend innocent people of terrorist attacks or even take advantage of such tragedies to consolidate their power, that such movies cease to “entertain” and are angrily condemned or even banned for being “political” or subversive.

The opposite of humor is irony. Just like humor, irony is based on irrational relationships, but unlike humor—in which the speaker plays the stupid and the audience laughs and experiences the pleasure of discovering the irrationality of speaker—in ironies the speaker exposes the irrationality in the audience. For instance, let us suppose that someone who attended a church service tells a friend: “I enjoy the sermons of the preacher immensely!” to which the friend replies: “I am sure you do; they are reeeally unbelievable!” This time the irrationality of the person who makes the initial statement is exposed by the one who responds.  

While humor exposes the irrationality of the speaker, irony exposes the irrationality of the audience. While in humor the speaker keeps a straight face and the audience laughs, in irony the speaker laughs and the audience ends up with a straight face. No wonder we do not have a word for the opposite of laughter.

Narratives—heroic, tragic, propaganda, or humorous stories—may not be arguments in the narrow sense of the word, but they are powerful persuasive devices because they all cause changes in the attitude of the audience. The fact that the persuasive goals of a narrative are never

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140 What irony is for a primary audience can become humor when told to a secondary audience.
stated only makes narratives more efficient. Persuasion is always at its best when we are not even aware that it takes place. That is always the case with narratives and it is rarely the case with arguments. Whenever we hear words like “if,” “then,” “therefore,” we look to see whether what is said “holds” or “follows,” but when we hear phrases like “once upon a time” or “let me tell you a weird story,” we let our defenses down because we feel that to persuade us about the “truth” of such stories would be the last thing on the mind of the story teller. The fact that narratives—which are so pervasive in all cultures—are viewed in traditional scholarship as means “to entertain” rather than “to persuade” can only be explained by the lack of an adequate theory of how reasoning and persuasion take place.

Although the analysis of narratives is beyond the scope of this study, because of their importance as persuasive devices I will briefly apply the rational square to two narratives for the purpose of illustration. They are not taken from Ecclesiastes for the simple reason that there are no narratives in that book. The reason Ecclesiastes does not contain any narratives is not because narratives are incompatible with Wisdom Literature. Quite the opposite, the book of Job is in narrative form, therefore the absence of narratives in Ecclesiastes is very significant for the overall structure of the book as I will point out in the following chapters. At this point I can only say that in Ecclesiastes there is no narrative because in that book nothing really happens. That is the whole point of the book.

The two stories that I have chosen are: The Birth of Moses from the Old Testament/TANAKH, and The Good Samaritan from the New Testament. One of the reasons I have chosen them is because they are very well known and richly analyzed in biblical scholarship. The value of a new theory can be seen more easily when applied to something that is well known rather than when applied to something that is obscure in the Bible. The story of The Good Samaritan was chosen because it is considered one of the best examples of what a typical narrative is. With the traditional categories that narrative criticism has developed, the two stories seem to be very similar. Both stories seem to have their own “villains,” the pharaoh and the thieves. Both stories have a helpless victim, one a child on a river and the other a traveler on
the side of a road in the mountains. Both stories have “actors” that do not do much to help: Moses’ mother who cannot keep the child, Moses’ sister who is watching the child, and the priest and the Levite who do nothing to help the victim. Moreover, both stories have an unexpected and unlikely hero: the daughter of Pharaoh who rescues the child, and the Samaritan who rescues the traveler. Finally, both stories have a happy ending. If narratives are means to entertain, probably the above categories are adequate and both stories accomplish their goal beautifully. My purpose, however, is to see whether they are so similar when viewed from the rhetorical point of view.

**The Birth of Moses**

The story of the birth of Moses is told in Exodus 2:1–10. It is a typical heroic story in which the hero is Moses’ mother, a Levite woman, introduced in the very first verse. The opponent is the Pharaoh of Egypt who is introduced earlier in the larger narrative that begins with the first chapter of Exodus. We are told there that the Pharaoh disliked the Israelites and had tried several methods to eliminate the male babies. This information is enough to help the reader establish the following rational square:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moses’ mother</th>
<th>nurse [the child]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pharaoh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kill [the child]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

As was pointed out earlier, in a heroic story the hero is doing only what is consistent with affirming that side of the opposition. In our story, Moses’ mother and his sister, as the mother’s proxy, do just that. Moses’ mother keeps the child for three months, then builds an ark to keep him afloat while on the water, the sister keeps watch on him in order to make sure that nothing happens to him, and then proposes to
the daughter of Pharaoh to provide a nurse to care for the child. All these actions are consistent with the heroic role of protecting the life of the child.

As was mentioned previously, in a heroic story an opponent is expected to do what is consistent with affirming that side of the secondary opposition, and an opponent is eliminated when the opponent affirms an irrational relation in the rational square. This happens when opponents reverse their own actions and affirm the opposite side of the secondary opposition line. The story tells how this actually happens. A daughter of Pharaoh comes to the river and sees the child. Then she reverses several actions of Pharaoh. First, “she had compassion on him” (2:6)—which reverses the action of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who were “harsh” with the Israelites (1:13), “made their lives bitter” and “were harsh” (1:14). Then, she accepted the offer of Moses’ sister to find a nurse for her by asking Moses’ mother: “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay you” (2:9). By offering to provide a nurse for the child rather than kill it, Pharaoh’s daughter, acting as Pharaoh’s proxy, reverses the decree to kill the Hebrew male children and so eliminates Pharaoh as an opponent. The daughter of Pharaoh is aware that she is reversing the actions of Pharaoh because she recognizes the child as being a child of the Hebrews and that proves that she is aware of the decree. Indeed, through his daughter, Pharaoh ends up being a protector of the child and by paying the mother to nurse the child, Pharaoh ends up nursing the child instead of killing him. In the end, Pharaoh not only ceases to be an opponent of the hero but becomes an ally. The story concludes with the following square:

The rhetorical goal of the story is to persuade the audience to pledge allegiance to the mother and the child who becomes the key
hero in the larger Exodus narrative. In other words, this introductory story is preparing the readers to side with the hero in a larger narrative that begins in Exodus and has the following rational square:

```
         God/Moses  Pharaoh/Egyptians
           |             |
liberate|   \            /   enslave
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The birth narrative sets the pattern for the larger narrative in which the same rational plot is used over and over again. Repeatedly God sends plagues through Moses to force Pharaoh to reverse the decree of enslavement and to affirm the “free” side of the secondary opposition, which Pharaoh repeatedly does when a plague strikes, but reverses the reversal after the plague ends and resumes his role as the opponent. The Exodus narrative does not end until Pharaoh is physically eliminated. This is an extreme case of concluding a heroic story. It only tells about the resoluteness of the opponent because an opponent that never gives up is quite irrational. It does tell also much about the hero. In our case, God and God’s proxy, Moses, are perseverant enough to ensure victory. In the end, the audience is expected to pledge allegiance to God and God’s servant Moses.

**The Good Samaritan**

The story of The Good Samaritan is related in Luke 10:30–37. Unfortunately the story does not present too much introductory material to help us establish quickly the rational square. In what precedes we are told that Jesus is in a dispute with a Jewish lawyer (10:25). Other characters in the story are: a Jewish priest, a Jewish Levite, and a Samaritan.\(^{141}\) This is enough to see that the main opposition in the

\(^{141}\)Traditional interpretations of the story view the thieves as necessary characters in a story for which they have chosen the label “villains,” but such characters are not necessary to the structure of the story. Had the traveler fallen off the donkey and hit his head against a rock, he would have been in the same
story is between the Jewish characters and the Samaritan. The secondary opposition line must be established by the only emergency or need in the story: helping or harming the victim. With these observations the rational square becomes quite obvious:

As is the case in most heroic stories, the actions of the hero(s) are reported first. Surprisingly, the expected heroes fail to help the victim and therefore they disqualify themselves as heroes. By failing to act heroically, they in reality act like an opponent, if not in the sense of actively harming the victim, at least consciously condemning him to an imminent death. Even more surprising, when the opponent of the heroes comes—the Samaritan—although offered with an ideal opportunity to show his malignity, he also fails to act according to the expected role: either to deliver a final blow to the victim or just show satisfaction that an enemy is eliminated without his doing anything. Instead of that, the opponent affirms the actions that are expected from the heroes. By helping the victim, the Samaritan not only failed in his role as an opponent, but took over the heroic role which had been skipped by the expected heroes. In other words, the heroes and the opponent switch roles. Therefore, because of how it develops and how it ends, the story of The Good Samaritan is not a typical heroic story as traditional interpretations have familiarized us with, but is a propaganda story which ends with the following rational square:

emergency without any villains and the story would not have changed at all. In order to avoid confusion I decided to avoid using traditional terminology.
The Good Samaritan is not a story likely to be told by Jewish sympathizers to their fellow Jews, but rather by a Samaritan sympathizer to other Jews. The rhetorical goal of propaganda stories is to cause the audience to switch allegiances, and indeed, the story of The Good Samaritan assumes a Jewish audience and encourages the audience to switch their sympathy and allegiance from their national heroes and adopt their “enemies” as heroes. This is a very high persuasive goal, and this is the problem with this story which traditional methods of interpretation miss. Why would Jesus tell such a story to a Jewish lawyer? That Jesus would have welcomed better relationships between his fellow Jews and the Samaritans is easy to understand, but that he hoped to persuade a Jewish leader to look upon his religious leaders as traitors and upon their national enemies as heroes is hardly imaginable.

Before proceeding further, I want to stop in order to underline the importance of raising rhetorical questions about a text. When stories are considered from the point of view of their rhetorical goals and their persuasiveness, their function within a larger context radically changes. I chose this story precisely because it seems to teach common sense, but when viewed from the point of view of its persuasiveness, suddenly it makes no sense whatsoever, unless we look at the larger picture.

The story of The Good Samaritan occurs within a context in which Jesus is asserting his value as a spiritual leader and teacher which even the prophets had anticipated and appreciated (Luke 10:24). It is at this point that the lawyer interrupts Jesus with a question (Luke 10:25). A question addressed to a speaker is in reality an objection which turns a listener into an opponent. A question is a profession of ignorance and implies that, while the speaker assumes that something is clear, a
listener disagrees. That the lawyer—by asking the question—asserted himself as an opponent Luke emphasizes by adding that the lawyer “stood up to test Jesus” (10:25). By asking the question, the lawyer establishes the following rational square:

```
Jesus <-> the lawyer
|

tilde{knowledge} <-> ignorance
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This rhetorical situation can be resolved in several ways. One option for Jesus would be to admit ignorance and deny knowledge on the subject as well. If Jesus had refused to be in opposition to the lawyer, he would have resolved the rhetorical situation and the rational square would have become:

```
Jesus = the lawyer
|

tilde{knowledge} <-> ignorance
```

In this case, the lawyer would have won and Jesus would have become his ally/disciple/supporter. By refusing to confess ignorance, however, Jesus eliminated this option.

Another possibility would have been for Jesus to provide an answer to the question of the opponent that would have been accepted by the opponent as a satisfactory answer. By accepting an answer as satisfactory, an opponent would no longer affirm ignorance but rather knowledge on the subject and would join the speaker on that point. In this case, the rational square would take the following form:
That Jesus occasionally used this strategy is attested by Mark 12:28–31. On this occasion, Jesus’ opponent openly professed satisfaction with the answer and ceased to be an opponent: “Nicely said, Teacher” (Mark 12:32). The elimination of the opposition and the closing of the rhetorical situation was welcomed by Jesus as well: “And when Jesus saw that he responded wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’” (Mark 12:34). The rhetorical difficulty with this option is that it is really hard to bring the opponent to admit satisfaction with the answer, particularly when an opponent is not favorable to the speaker as was the case in Luke. It is always easier to ask questions than to answer them because it is easier to prove ignorance rather than knowledge. Such rhetorical situations are rarely solved by a quick answer, if they are resolved at all.

In order to avoid that situation, Jesus decided to prove that the lawyer—while professing ignorance—in reality was not ignorant. In other words, Jesus decided to cause his opponent to affirm an irrational line in the square through a reversal. An opponent can cause a reversal either by saying something that shows knowledge rather than ignorance, or by answering one’s own question. When opponents establish themselves as opponents by asking a question, the most important reversal that they can make is to answer that question themselves. This is exactly the rhetorical option that Jesus chose in order to solve the rhetorical situation (Luke 10:26). It is a favorite strategy that Jesus employs on other occasions and he uses it here also by asking the lawyer to answer his own question. By providing an answer to his own question, the rhetorical situation is solved and the lawyer should give up his position as an opponent and reasonably become Jesus’ ally and follower on that particular point. Again, the rhetorical situation would have been closed, but this time not as a result of Jesus’ answering the question, but rather as a result of the lawyer answering his own question:
This is the option that Jesus chose and asked the lawyer to answer his own question by using his knowledge as an expert on the law. At this point, the lawyer could have reaffirmed his ignorance by turning the question back to Jesus: “I have no idea what the law says on the subject, therefore you tell me.” Unfortunately the lawyer could not profess such an ignorance on a subject on which he considered himself—and was considered—to be an expert. Therefore, he had to answer his own question, and by doing so, he committed a reversal, ceased to be an opponent, and the rhetorical situation was resolved. Jesus’ approval of his answer was an invitation for the lawyer to consider the rhetorical situation closed.

At this point the lawyer refused to accept Jesus’ invitation to end the rhetorical situation and professed ignorance again, this time about something that was part of his own answer: the meaning of the word “neighbor.” By reasserting his ignorance, the rhetorical situation remains unresolved and at this point Jesus changes the strategy. Instead of asking the lawyer “how does the law define the neighbor?,” Jesus decided to use a story that would prove that the lawyer was not as ignorant as he pretended. It is for this purpose that Jesus used the story of The Good Samaritan. In other words, Jesus did not tell the story to persuade the lawyer that what the story taught was true, but because he wanted to prove to the lawyer that he was able to figure out who the neighbor was in the situation described in the story. Of course, Jesus could have used other kinds of stories, but his choice of a propaganda story is highly significant considering the rhetorical situation. He had evidence that his opponent was quite resolute and would not admit knowledge easily, therefore a propaganda story was the ideal choice. Because of its plot in which the heroes and the opponents switch places, a propaganda story is a confusing story. Its purpose is to
confuse the audience about who is the good guy and who is the bad one in order to cause subversion. If one wants to decide who is the good guy and who is the bad guy, the propaganda stories are notoriously difficult to answer, at least until the end. The fact that the lawyer was able to answer who was the good guy in such a story, proved that his knowledge was abundant enough on the subject to justify his continuing to insist on asserting his ignorance. And indeed, the lawyer gives up and admits his defeat. It is at this point that the rhetorical situation is solved. Because The Good Samaritan story is sandwiched within the larger story, by identifying the Samaritan as the hero in the propaganda story in reality the lawyer’s answer closes two rhetorical situations: the one created by The Good Samaritan story itself and the one which he had created earlier with his question. In other words, the story of the Good Samaritan does not have any rhetorical goals by itself, but it functions within a larger rational square:

In the end, the lawyer admits his defeat and the rhetorical situation is solved:
By giving a correct answer in the rhetorical situation created by The Good Samaritan story and indicated by the smaller rational square, the lawyer affirmed the irrational lines in the larger rational square: the thin interrupted line that connects him with “ignorance” and the thin continuous line which connects him with knowledge. This example shows another way in which rational squares can interconnect: a rational square can function as a line in a larger rational square.

It is now clear that the story of the Good Samaritan is not told by Jesus for its persuasive value or because the Samaritan cause was on his agenda. That he did tell propaganda-type stories is obvious because he was sometimes charged with being a Samaritan (John 8:48). Jesus, however, did not have any propagandistic interests and it is clear that the Samaritans themselves did not look upon him as their mole in the Jewish camp (Luke 9:52–53; Matt 10:5). Jesus told such stories because of their function in the rhetorical situation revealed by the larger square indicated with thicker lines.

As the larger square shows, the story of the Good Samaritan is embedded in a typical heroic story. Jesus is the hero and he manages to eliminate his opponent, who is a prominent Jewish teacher. Like all heroic stories, the rhetorical goal of these stories about Jesus is to strengthen the allegiance of the audience to the hero. The story presupposes followers of Jesus of Jewish origin who may have had allegiance to their former religious leaders. By winning the rhetorical situation, Jesus asserts himself as a better teacher and claims the allegiance of the audience. Whatever allegiance the Christians may still nurture for their former religious leaders like the priests, Levites, or Jewish lawyers, those commitments must be surrendered because they all disqualify themselves as leaders in their confrontation with Jesus.

*Arguments and Argumentation*

This chapter that dealt briefly with the ways in which metaphors and narratives achieve persuasion could be viewed as a deviation from the subject that supposedly should only deal with arguments identified
by their premises and the conclusion. It is established common sense that only arguments argue although it is admitted that almost anything that is being said influences people, and there is no adequate theory to explain how that happens. That argumentation and persuasion should be found in arguments no one would question, but that argumentation can be found even in metaphors and narratives may come as a surprise for many. Because metaphors and narratives involve a rational square, they are quite powerful persuasive devices. Therefore, before turning to Ecclesiastes, it is important to point out some major differences in how persuasion takes place in metaphors and narratives.

It may seem surprising but a metaphor is closer to the accepted structure of an argument—with premises and conclusion—than expected. Metaphors and similes are probably the most concise forms that an argument can take, and metaphors are the most condensed of the two. In a metaphor, the words that make up the metaphor also establish the rational square as the premise while the conclusion is the meaning of the metaphor that the mind builds. In other words, in a metaphor the primary opposition becomes the premise and the secondary opposition or oppositions that the mind builds become(s) the conclusion or conclusions. Because of this structure, a metaphor cannot have more then one premise, but it can have more than one conclusion. From this point of view, a metaphor/simile is actually a very interesting argument, with one premise and a multitude of conclusions. The “persuasiveness” of a metaphor depends on many factors: how strong the relationship in the conclusion is perceived and how many conclusions reinforce each other or conflict with one another. Moreover, the fact that the conclusion is discovered by the mind of the persuadee only makes metaphors and similes the more powerful. Of course, it would be wrong to limit persuasion to the use of metaphors, but probably there is no form of argument that is so simple, so easy to use, so common, and so powerful.

Because arguments are understood to be “good” or “valid” only when everything is spelled out, metaphors/similes—with their economy of language and the abundance of what is left unstated—seem to be very poor arguments, if they are arguments at all. The traditional view that what makes an argument good is what is spelled out, while
elements that are left unstated make an argument poor, needs to be abandoned. To supply the “missing” premises or the conclusion in order to make an argument good is to miss it altogether rather than to make it better. In a syllogism, the mind does not discover anything because everything is spelled out while in a simile/metaphor the mind is free to create as many secondary opposition lines as possible. The mind has a much greater pleasure in discovering the meaning rather than having the meaning spelled out to it. That is the reason a simile like “God is like a mother” provides more intellectual gratification than when the meaning is spelled out in plain language: “God is extremely loving.”

When the meaning of the metaphor—that is, the conclusion of the metaphor—is discovered by the mind of the audience, the conclusion of the argument is the discovery of the mind of the persuadee rather than brought to the mind from outside. That provides pleasure and makes the meaning of the metaphor the product of the mind of the persuadee rather than received as the product of the mind of the persuader. That makes the metaphor/simile difficult to resist. First, we cannot resist something that we discover ourselves. Secondly, we cannot resist something that comes from inside. We easily accept what we experience as enjoyable when is coming from within ourselves. That is the reason the persuasion that is accomplished through metaphors/similes is not even perceived as persuasion.

Considering the richness of the conclusions that a metaphor/simile can create, the reasoning that is involved in narratives seems to be quite repetitive. The main opposition line is always the same (hero-opponent) and the secondary line also seems to be the same (success-failure). Although there are several options in the way in which the two opposition lines are connected, all narratives have only one persuasive goal: to claim the allegiance of the audience to one of the opponents on the primary opposition line. In other words, the argument that all narratives make is of the following form: the narrative is the premise and the allegiance of the audience to whomever manages to affirm the desirable side of the minor opposition is the conclusion.

Because of this lack of flexibility, narratives may seem to make poor arguments. First, stories may not seem to be good premises. Indeed,
some of them may seem so far-fetched that they are obviously false. Secondly, the conclusion is never stated because in the end no hero says: “Because I have done this, you should support me.”

In spite of such weaknesses, narratives can be quite powerful arguments. Their strength is in the great variety of stories that can be used without causing the audience to feel that they are asked the same thing over and over again. Let us consider the story of the plagues in Exodus. Each plague is structured the same, using the same rational square which is typical of a heroic story. In each plague only the details change. Although they are perceived by readers as different stories, as arguments they all say the same thing over and over again: “Do not resist God but rather submit to God.” That “claim” is never stated openly but rather told over and over again with every story. If the claim were made openly, its persuasive value would be minimum at best, and if repeated ten times would most likely become annoying and would antagonize the audience. Narratives have a nice way of saying the same thing over and over again without repeating it.

The theoretical part of this study started with a discussion of the concept of persuasion, and in its conclusion that concept needs to be broadened. As was expected, when persuasion is defined as something that happens in the mind and not necessarily something that happens in the language, then anything that is said can be persuasion and argumentation. Reasoning and argumentation do not take place only in arguments: they take place in everything we say.
Part Two

REASONING, ARGUMENTATION, AND PERSUASION
IN HEBREW WISDOM LITERATURE
Ecclesiastes is a peculiar book in the Bible. It uses arguments that are unique and makes statements that shock or defy common wisdom, indeed, sometimes common sense or established religious beliefs. No wonder that such an unsettling book has been met with resistance by religious thinkers to the point of questioning its place in the Bible. Ecclesiastes is definitely not a book whose presence in the Scripture is due to its appeal and attractiveness. Its strength rests in the difficulty to reject its basic claims. In other words, its inclusions in the Bible is due to the fact that it is hard to knock out. It was accepted not because what it offers is attractive, but because its claims cannot be rejected. Qoheleth may be easy to dislike, but definitely not easy to argue with. As is often the case with things that we cannot argue with or get rid of, the best we can do is to ignore them. Therefore, Ecclesiastes is probably one of the most ignored book in the Bible.

The purpose of this study, however, is not to make an unattractive book more appealing or to prove that an unattractive book deserves the cold shoulder that it gets, but rather to try to understand its reasoning, why it says what it says, and what other alternatives there are to what it says. That was the main reason I chose this book for a doctoral dissertation: I did not and I could not understand it. There was one fact, however, that did not let me ignore it: Ecclesiastes is a very persuasive book, particularly in its overall claims. I approached it with great confidence in the scholarship on argumentation, but my greatest confidence was in formal logic. As my study progressed, however, nothing I had
known or read on formal or informal arguments seemed to apply to the arguments of which Qoheleth is such a master. It took years before I dared ask the scariest question in writing a dissertation: What if something is fundamentally wrong and I have to start from scratch on my own, without relying on the established scholarship; indeed, having it as the greatest obstacle? The strangest way to become a scholar is to turn all of them against you. But I had no choice. My luck was that I knew where to turn: Aristotle. I reasoned that if I could understand how Aristotle developed his syllogistic, what he did and why he did what he did, I not only would be able to see what was wrong, but I would also understand what my options were. As even a casual reading of this study shows, Aristotle remained my main source of inspiration to whom I turned at every point. I did go in a different direction, but not before it was clear to me where he stood. To some extent it is ironic that I owe so much to the very person whose most outstanding accomplishment I demolish. To put it cruelly, I built with what he discarded in *The Categories* and *On Interpretation*. For me, these are the greatest books that Aristotle wrote, and not the *Analytics*. Formal logic was important too, because it helped me question the whole project that Aristotle started in the *Analytics*. Actually it was the failure of formal logic—on which I relied so much—that sent me to Aristotle. If a theory is so void of any applicability as Ecclesiastes proved formal logic to be, then something must be wrong in the way that theory is set up. Saussure also helped me at some critical points. But credit must be given to Qoheleth as well. Had I chosen a text that was not so resilient to traditional methods of interpretation, I may have never ended asking the scariest question. Negatively, Qoheleth deserves credit.

Usually when a new theory is developed, a text is chosen that is most likely to illustrate that method and prove it. This is not the case with Ecclesiastes. I did not choose the book because it best illustrates the theory I developed. The reason I apply the theory to it is because I developed it while being challenged by the book. I do not claim that Ecclesiastes is the best book to illustrate the theory. Indeed, sometimes I had to go outside the book to illustrate important applications of the theory. For instance, the book is poor in metaphors and similes, and has
no narratives. But even more strangely, it does not have many rational squares. That is precisely the purpose of Qoheleth, to show that it is not possible to build rational squares. In other words, Ecclesiastes is not a good book to illustrate how rational squares are established in order to create a rhetorical situation. That is the main point and the originality of the book: that rational squares are not necessary or even possible. Had I attempted to develop a theory of rationality using the kind of argumentation that Qoheleth uses, I would have ended up chasing the wind about which Qoheleth loves so much to pontificate. But that does not mean that the theory does not apply to this book or that the book cannot illustrate the theory. Actually Ecclesiastes is probably the best illustration of one aspect of the rational square: irrational relationships. Ecclesiastes is full of them.

Irrational relationships are important and necessary in every argumentation because it is the irrational relationships that close a rhetorical situation and eventually close the rational square, but in order for the irrational relationships to close, the rhetorical situation must be established first. The peculiarity of Ecclesiastes is that it affirms only irrational relations and therefore its goal is to prove that rational squares cannot be established. His arguments are not designed to use a rational square in order to make choices, but rather to make a rational square impossible and eliminate choices. He wants to make us quit choosing. Therefore, he argues against arguing. He tries to persuade us that persuasion is impossible. Rhetoric normally assumes rationality, but Qoheleth’s whole rhetoric is to reject it. That is the reason Qoheleth’s reasoning seems so strange and so difficult to deal with because in a sense it is anti-rhetoric.

Qoheleth is a very bold thinker and to undertake such a daunting enterprise could only be done having a theological motivation. That is the ultimate goal of this study about reasoning and argumentation: to understand Qoheleth’s theology. A discussion of it will be offered in the final chapter of this part.
IRRATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ECCLESIASTES

The World of Ecclesiastes

Qoheleth’s key “arguments” that establish his overall rhetorical structure are found in the first chapters of the book. I used quotation marks with the word argument because they are very peculiar arguments. Qoheleth argues that all relationships in the world have reversals and therefore are irrational. One of these key “arguments” is placed right in the beginning of the book:

A generation goes, and a generation comes,  
so that the world remains unchanged.  
The sun rises and the sun goes down,  
then it returns to the place where it rises.  
The wind blows to the south, then turns around to the north;  
round and round goes the wind, it goes back and forth.  
All rivers flow to the sea, but the sea is never filled, because  
rivers continually return to the place from where they flow.  
All things get tired to the point that one is not able to speak any more,  
but the eye does not cease seeing, the ear does not quit hearing.  
What has been is what will be,  
and what has been done is what will be done;  
there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:4–9).
The uniqueness of this argument is that it affirms actions that have reversals. As it was pointed out when the rational square was introduced, to affirm the reverse of an action is irrational and by affirming a reverse action one ceases to be an opponent and closes the rhetorical situation. Of course, Qoheleth has not established any rational square yet. That is not his goal. His purpose is to prove that whoever establishes a rhetorical situation and attempts to affirm some rational line in that square, he will prove that eventually that action will have a reversal and therefore the one who has adopted a standpoint is a loser. If he can get his audience to admit that everything under the sun has a reversal, then he can be sure that any arguer will lose no matter what that arguer advocates.

In order to prove that every action in the world has a reversal Qoheleth begins with activities for which the reverse is obvious. First, he pairs the words “go” [הנה] and “come” [לך] which are some of the clearest reverse actions. Then he uses other very clear reverse actions, such as "rising" [⛴] of the sun and "going down" [טום] of the sun. As the examples progress, the reverse actions are less obvious. In the next action—that of the blowing of the wind to the north and to the south—the reversal is implied rather than obvious. The mention of the opposite directions in which the wind blows is intended to emphasize the reverse action of the wind. The meaning of the word “round” [סובב] is not that the wind blows in a circle rather than in a straight line, but that the wind, after blowing in one direction, turns around and blows in the reverse direction. When referring to a circular movement the word סובב does not need to be repeated and when the BHS editors suggest emending the text by dropping one occurrence of the word without any textual evidence, they miss the point that the repetition of the word here is meant to emphasize that a reversal is intended. The meaning here is not that the wind blows in circles but that the wind blows “back and forth.”

A more subtle reversal is implied in the case of rivers that flow into the sea. Rivers may always seem to flow into the sea and never flow back upstream, but even there a reversal must be involved because the sea is never filled no matter how long rivers continue to flow into seas.
Qoheleth does not know of any activity that would be the reverse counterpart of “flowing,” but the existence of such a reverse action must take place as long as the rivers never reach their goal of filling the sea or to cease flowing. Today we know of the phenomenon of evaporation which would be the reverse action of the flowing of streams into the sea, but Qoheleth did not have such notions and therefore could not name an action. He did not need to, however. In the very fact that flowing never reaches its goal of filling the sea, rationally an action that never succeeds no matter how long it is carried on must have a reverse action. We do not know what he speculated that a reverse action must be, but he did not need to speculate; the very fact that water never filled the sea presupposed a reverse action.

Next, Qoheleth considers other activities that require an implied reversal such as speaking, seeing, hearing, and so on. When carried on for an extended period of time, speaking, seeing, and listening do wear down the senses so that such activities must stop, but somehow the reverse of exhaustion must take place because as speaking is resumed so also eyes and ears resume seeing and hearing. Most likely Qoheleth refers to the cycle of activity and sleep, in which the period of activity wears down the senses and exhausts the body after which the period of rest restores those energies. Qoheleth may have referred here not only to humans but to all animals that are endowed with senses and therefore need rest. The Hebrew word translated “all things” in the phrase “all things get tired” [ךל תחפשמ יגנים] which could be translated “all the words”—particularly because of the reference to the ears—but that translation would make difficult the reference to the fact that words wear the eyes, therefore the phrase is usually translated “all things.” The verb יגנים, in qal has the meaning “to grow weary” and in hip’il has the causative meaning “to make weary.” Translators and interpreters, however, take the causative meaning without any justification because the Hebrew form is qal and therefore the meaning is “all things grow weary.” This translation not only does justice to the Hebrew text but fits the line of Qoheleth’s argument. He says that all things grow weary and therefore need periods of rest. By “all things” he probably does not refer to inanimate things. His point is that we may get tired, but we are never satisfied
and therefore start all over again. Exhaustion is only temporary because a reversal takes place through rest.

Finally, Qoheleth considers the reversals in the words “to be” and “to do.” Of course, he knows of no such words as to “an-be” and to “an-do,” but a reversal must be implied even in these verbs because things that have been done in the past will be done in the future as well. In order for things that have been done to be done again in the future, a reversal must have taken place at some point so that they were un-done or ceased to be. One cannot do again things that come into being and never cease to exist. Because all things that are done will be done have been done in the past and a reversal took place meanwhile, there is nothing that is really new under the sun. A really new thing is something that comes into being at some point in time, something that has never experienced reversal, and such a thing has never existed and never will. This is a fundamental claim that Qoheleth wants to establish and on which his whole book stands and tries to prove.

Qoheleth is aware, however, that such a sweeping generalization is not going to be easily accepted by his readers, therefore in what follows he tries to meet a possible objection: there are things about which we know when they came into being and have never ceased to exist. Qoheleth replies: “Is there something of which it is said, ‘Look, this is something new’? It had already been done in the ages before us. Just as the first things are not remembered later on, so also the things which will be in the future will not be remembered afterwards” (Eccl 1:10–11). In order to counter a possible objection Qoheleth resorts to a universal amnesia.

Because reversals are so fundamental for the reasoning used in the book of Ecclesiastes, another argument built on the reversals of actions is found in the third chapter which probably is the best known passage in the whole book:

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142By claiming to know that for everything that seems new a universal amnesia took place, Qoheleth is committing a reversal himself and contradicts himself: as long as he knows that a reversal took place, a universal amnesia does not exist.
if there is a time to be born, then there is a time to die;  
if there is a time to plant, then there is a time to pluck up what was planted;  
if there is a time to harm/kill, then there is time to heal;  
if there is a time to tear down, then there is a time to build up;  
if there is a time to weep, then there is a time to laugh;  
if there is a time to mourn, then there is a time to dance;  
if there is a time to throw away stones, then there is a time to gather stones;  
if there is a time to embrace, then there is a time to stay away from embracing;  
if there is a time to seek, then there is a time to lose;  
if there is a time to take hold, then there is a time to let go;  
if there is a time to tear, then there is a time to sew;  
if there is a time to shut up, then there is a time to speak up;  
if there is a time to love, then there is a time to hate;  
if there is a time for war, then there is a time for peace; (Eccl 3:2–8)

The parallelism between an action and its reverse is too obvious to require much comment. That is the reason Qoheleth does not feel the need to justify any of these reversals.

Although the argument in the first chapter is identical in form with the one above, there are two important differences. First the activities that are mentioned in the first chapter are not done by humans and are not restricted to humans, while the activities that are mentioned in chapter 3:2–8 are all performed by humans. And another important difference: the activities mentioned in the passage above are not necessarily cyclical or repetitive. For instance, people are born only once and die only once. Moreover, while the rising and the setting of the sun or the coming and going of generations are not the result of human choice, the activities in the third chapter all presuppose human choice.143 Therefore, by these two arguments Qoheleth makes a very broad claim: all activities — whether in the realm of the natural world or in the realm of human activity, whether chosen or not by humans — every activity in the world must have a reversal.

143The birth of a child may not be the result of the child’s choice, but is the result of the actions chosen by the parents.
If this claim is admitted as true, the rational square shows that there are important implications. First, the two arguments affirm both the direct action and the reverse action. An immediate implication of Qoheleth’s claim that for every activity there is a reversal is that such a world is irrational and no conclusions are possible. And this is exactly the point that he is emphasizing with his standard formula “vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl 1:2; 12:8). The Hebrew word translated "vanity" is חוסר פנים and means "vapor" or "breath" and is notoriously difficult to translate. The phrase חוסר פנים is "vanity of vanities" is a powerful metaphor to describe the unpredictability and lack of coherence that the world has as a result of the fact that everything has a reversal. To initiate something in such a world would be just as futile as the actions of the Greek figure Sisyphus who keeps pushing a stone up a hill in spite of the fact that after getting close to the top the stone rolls back and he has to start all over again and again. What Qoheleth claims is that the same thing is true about everything that is found in the world. Such an irrational world would be chaotic and life in it would be impossible.

Realizing the implications of his claim, Qoheleth asks the question in the end of his argument: “What difference do humans make through what they do?” (Eccl 3:9). After claiming that everything has a reversal which would imply that the world is chaotic and life is meaningless, Qoheleth provides his own answer which rejects the view that the world is chaotic:

I looked at the activities which God has given to humans to perform. Although everything that humans do is appropriate at any time, they do not understand God’s overall design from beginning to end in spite of the fact that humans have been endowed with minds able to comprehend both the past and the future. According to this understanding, humans do their best when they pursue happiness and the good things

144In order to put a word in the superlative in Hebrew the singular form of it is placed in the construct to its plural form. Depending on the meaning of the word חוסר פנים, the phrase can be translated: "the most vanituous vanity," "the most vaporous vapor," "the most ephemeral ephemeral."
in life such as eating and drinking, activities assigned by God to humans specifically for this purpose as part of everything else that they do. When one understands the way God has created everything, one comes to the conclusion that everything is permanent to the extent that nothing can be added nor anything eliminated so that humans will worship God indeed. What is now is no different from what was in the past and what will be in the future, because God provides continuity to the things that pass away (Eccl 3:10–15).

After claiming that everything in the world has a reversal, Qoheleth wants to make sure that he is not arguing for a chaotic world. Quite the opposite, it is a world which is quite well-structured by God. The world is full of reversals not because the world is chaotic, but because God has structured it so that the reversals are necessary. Those who want to make the world different than it is will find themselves chasing the wind, but those who accept the world as it has been established by God will find it quite suitable for life and indeed, happiness. The reversals take place not as a result of chaotic forces, but as a result of an established plan or design according to which the reverse actions are decided in advance.

When one understands the world as it is, two major outcomes follow. First, people will accept life as it has been designed by God and not the way they would like to design it themselves. Then, by doing so they are able not only to live, but to enjoy life and experience happiness.

Interpreters who take Qoheleth’s arguments to mean that life is meaningless and happiness is an illusion, ascribe to Qoheleth a view which he repeatedly and emphatically rejects. He advances his key arguments not in order to prove that happiness is impossible, but to help his readers to achieve it. Happiness is not something that needs to be discovered or snatched from the world, but it is there readily available to anyone for the taking. Those who do not accept this happiness that is available to everyone but want to gain more, will eventually miss it altogether. Maximum happiness is achieved when you take life as it has been set up by God, with all its reversals. To struggle for more is to miss it. The paradox that Qoheleth is trying to persuade his audience
of is that the more one struggles to attain happiness, the more one misses it. There is nothing wrong with the world as it is; the problem is not with the world, but with the people because they do not take the world as it is. The problem is not that at some times wrong things happen and need to be eliminated, but that people do not understand the overall design “from the beginning to the end” (3:11). Once people understand that everything happen according to God’s plan, they not only can enjoy life better, but will appreciate God so that everyone will worship God better (3:14). Unfortunately, instead of spending their lives enjoying what God has provided in the world for them, humans waste their lives in trying to change a world that is unchangeable because “everything is permanent to the extent that nothing can be added nor anything eliminated” (3:14).

There is no doubt that the view of the world that Qoheleth advocates is unappealing except to the simple people, but his view at least has an important advantage: the world is stable. This may have been one of his major goals in writing the book: to argue for a stable world in a time of great world convulsions. If the book was written in the post-exilic period with the upheavals that the Persian and later the Greek empires brought about when everything seemed so fragile and in constant turmoil, Qoheleth’s proposal of a world that is properly established with all the mechanisms to provide for maximum happiness when people accept the world with whatever it offers, must have seemed to Qoheleth and his audience good news rather than a pessimistic book. According to this view, the trouble makers were those who wanted to wrench more from life, and that ruined them and ruined others as well. A world in which every action has a reversal and in which the time for each reversal is established and cannot be changed, is a stable world because is a balanced world. When the world experienced upheavals it was not because God changed the mind or because there was something wrong with the world, but because there was something wrong with the people. It was humans who did not accept it as it was, and by doing so, they only took their own lives out of balance and not the world. By trying to interfere with the way the world has been set up, humans not only hurt themselves, but forfeit the very good things that God set up for them in the world:
to be happy, to enjoy themselves, to take pleasure in eating, drinking, making love, working, and so on. That is the message of the book. There is a stable world in which there is a place for everyone and happiness for everyone with one condition: to comply with the way God has set everything up and not to strive to get more, or to change the world. It is a reassuring message which is particularly comforting in time of great world upheavals as probably those in which Qoheleth lived.

**A Static World**

Qoheleth’s view of a world that was stable in a time of great upheavals was no doubt good news for many, but it was good news that was bought at a price. He was aware that such a view, in spite of its attractiveness, raises many questions and in the rest of the book Qoheleth is trying to answer those questions.

One of the implications for a world that is stable and well balanced by reversals is that such a world cannot be improved. Qoheleth must have been aware that many of those who tried to get more from the world intended to change things with the belief that they were making the world better. Qoheleth’s positive message comes at a price: a stable world is also a static world. A world that cannot be destroyed is also a world that cannot be improved. A world in which failure is not possible is a world in which progress is not possible. That is a necessary implication of Qoheleth’s position and he is aware of it.

Qoheleth’s claim that every activity in the world has a reverse that does not require opponents and oppositions has placed him in a very difficult position. There are issues that he has to deal with and the rational square will help us see what his options are and understand that some of the most problematic statements that Qoheleth makes in the book, he makes them not because he finds them satisfactory but simply because he does not have better alternatives.

One of the puzzling statements that Qoheleth makes quite early in the book is that “nothing can be added nor anything eliminated” from the world (Eccl 1:14). After insisting that everything that is done under the sun must have a reversal, Qoheleth goes on and mentions two
actions that cannot have a reversal. To make something that is crooked straight is to reverse that condition, and to supply something that is lacking is to reverse that condition. Qoheleth does not elaborate and provides no justification for this claim, but restates it which shows that it is an important one: “Look at the way God made things; no one can repair/make straight what he has made defective/crooked?” (Eccl 7:13). It is not difficult to see why he needs to make such a claim. A world in which that which is deficient could be improved is a world which is no longer static and therefore no longer stable. It is a world in which new things are really new and not just recycling of long forgotten and abandoned ones. He is denying some reversals probably because he realized that those who destabilized the world through their pursuit of achievements justified their actions as an attempt to make a deficient world better. Qoheleth goes to great lengths to prove that those who strive for achievements are wrong in their pursuit and no doubt he would question that they really improve anything. Probably Qoheleth would have argued that any improvements are just temporary and in the end improvements turn out to be damages just as additions to what seemed to be lacking end up in reality being greater loses. The worst thing that we can do to the world is to fix it.

Qoheleth not only rejects the possibility that the world can get better, but also the possibility that the world might get worse: “Do not say ‘where are the good old days?’ for you do not ask such questions out of wisdom” (Eccl 7:10).

A World without Choices

Another important implication that everything in the world has a reversal is that choices are not possible. Actions that have a reversal represent primary irrational lines in the rational square. As we may remember, secondary irrational lines in the square are actions that affirm both sides of the secondary opposition line at the same time. For those who affirm both sides of the secondary opposition line making choices becomes impossible. In such situations, the rational square is again
destroyed because those who act in this way become their own opponents and the need for an opponent is no longer necessary or possible.

Qoheleth affirms secondary irrational relations in order to eliminate rational squares that are already established. By affirming both sides of the secondary opposition line, the rational squares are eliminated and the choices are no longer possible. He uses this approach to deal with well established oppositions, such as: wisdom versus foolishness, riches versus poverty, righteousness versus wickedness, and good things versus bad things.

**Wisdom and Success Versus Foolishness and Failure**

In the second chapter of the book Qoheleth considers a multitude of oppositions which usually guide choices in life: happiness versus unhappiness, wisdom versus foolishness, wealth versus poverty, success versus failure, pleasure versus vexation, fame versus anonymity, and so on. People would have no difficulty making such choices according to the following traditional square:

![Rational Square Diagram]

This is the rational square assumed by all traditional Wisdom Literature, and the role of the sage was precisely to enable students to make the proper choices in life. It is a rational square which everyone would take for granted, but in this chapter Qoheleth argues that this rational square does not hold because there are secondary irrational
relationships. According to these lines, the wise—while affirming the left side of the square (Eccl 2:13)—affirms the right one as well (Eccl 2:15), and the poor—while affirming the right side of the square (Eccl 2:14a)—affirms the left side as well (Eccl 2:19). Therefore, the square becomes:

The rhetorical situation has been solved, the opposition has been eliminated, but in a strange way: not only is one of the opponents irrational, but both. Consequently, they are no longer opponents. When a rhetorical situation is solved by the elimination of one opponent, the audience is left to side with the winning side, but in the way Qoheleth solves rhetorical situations, both sides are losers: “Therefore, I said to myself: Because what happens to the fool will happen to me also, there is no reason to be wise” (Eccl 2:15). As a result, we can no longer make judgments and choices between the wise and the poor and that places Qoheleth in the position of reinforcing his main theme and conclusion: “The best thing in life for humans is to eat, to drink, and find satisfaction in their work, understanding that such things are authorized by God” (Eccl 2:24). And with this master argument Qoheleth has eliminated an important opposition, that between a wise person and a fool; and all humans become simply mortals who no longer have any bases for making choices. Therefore, their only option is to accept what God had chosen for them: to eat and drink and enjoy the pleasures that are available to everyone, regardless of their intellectual performance.
Righteousness Versus Wickedness

Another rational square that is widely assumed is that which has righteousness and wickedness on the secondary opposition line:

This is the rational square Qoheleth has to deal with because it places the righteous in opposition to the wicked. It is the rational square on which all religious instruction is based. In spite of that, Qoheleth sets out to show that even this square involves irrational relations which eliminate the rhetorical situation.

The opposition righteousness versus wickedness is the most problematic for Qoheleth. Therefore, he develops several arguments in order to eliminate it. One line of argumentation is found in Ecclesiastes 3:16–21:

Moreover, everywhere I look I see that in the same place where there is justice, there is also injustice, and in the same place where there is righteousness, there is also wickedness. I can explain this situation to myself taking into account that at some time God will do justice both to the righteous and to the wicked for everything that they do. Moreover, until that happens I can explain to myself that God uses this situation to find out whether humans are willing to raise above animals—over which humans have no other advantage anyway—because, after all, there is no other difference between them to the extent that they have the same fate since their breath is the same, their death is the same, and the place where they go in the dust is just the same. It is for this reason that it would be ridiculous for anyone to claim that the spirit of humans goes upward while the spirit of animals goes downward. This is another example of vanity.
In order to eliminate the opposition between righteousness and wickedness Qoheleth could have argued that they are reversals. Although he admits that somehow wickedness has managed to displace righteousness, he does not say that righteousness has displaced wickedness so that one can find justice where wickedness is expected. He is not willing to argue that justice must be accompanied by wickedness just as the rising of the sun is followed by the sunset. Had he done so, he would have made wickedness necessary for the workings of the world just as justice is, and probably he realizes that that line of argumentation is untenable. Qoheleth may allow for the necessity of righteousness, but he cannot go so far as to affirm the necessity of wickedness and injustice.

Similarly, Qoheleth could have used the same line of argumentation that he uses in his second key argument and say that there is a time for people to do something right and there is a time for the same people to do something wicked, and eventually the world is neither righteous nor wicked. Qoheleth does not take this line for obvious reasons: even if occasionally righteous people may do something wicked and even if occasionally wicked people may do what is right, he could not claim that for every righteous act there must be a time when something wicked must be done, and for every wicked action that a wicked person does there will be and must be a time when the same wicked person will do something right. Qoheleth must admit that there is an overall consistency in what the righteous do and in what the wicked do, a consistency which does not allow for a reversal within the life span of individuals.

Qoheleth, however, does not totally reject this line of argumentation, because he asserts that there is an appointed time for reversal, which takes place at some future judgment (Eccl 3:17). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on how the reversal takes place at the judgment. Here he may concede the traditional belief that in the afterlife or at least at the judgment day the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. He is reluctant to state this opposition which would create the secondary line of opposition in the rational square:
Qoheleth is reluctant to affirm the secondary opposition line because that would establish the rational square and then he would have to argue for righteousness and against wickedness. To take that line of argumentation would imply that as more people become righteous and fewer people become wicked, there is progress and a substantial improvement in the world, that actions of the just do not have a full reversal and that would conflict with his fundamental position that the world is stable and static. Instead, he states that God will do a reversal which will cancel the wickedness done by the wicked. The reversal is not the result of what individuals do, but of what God does.

By taking that line of argumentation, Qoheleth has to deal with the most obvious objection to his position: that wickedness is possible in a world in which everything is established by God in spite of the fact that wickedness is not really necessary. Instead of appointing a time to eliminate it, why would God allow injustice in the world anyway? If God has established a world in which wickedness is possible and had to appoint a time to reverse it in order to keep the world in balance, why not set up a world which is wickedness free?

In order to meet this objection, Qoheleth develops a very interesting argument: “Moreover, until that happens I can explain to myself that God uses this situation to find out whether humans are willing to raise above animals” (Eccl 3:18). He claims that humans are like animals in every respect, even to the point that they have the same spirit and even the same death. The only difference between them is consciousness, therefore wickedness becomes the testing ground for humans to prove that they rise above animals. Had God chosen to create human beings without the possibility of doing evil, they would have had no way to prove themselves better than animals as long as there is no other difference between them anyway. Humans have the choice to do wickedness and therefore to reduce themselves to animals, but this is
their own choice rather than God’s choice. God is testing them by giving them the option to be less than human beings, but is not expecting them to use that choice. If they do choose to do evil, it is not going to bring the world out of balance, however, because God has provided for a time of judgment when the reversal would take place anyway. And having solved the opposition, Qoheleth does not miss his opportunity to reinforce his favorite theme: “Therefore, I come to the conclusion that it is best for humans to find as much satisfaction in the work that they do because they cannot see what comes after them anyway?” (Eccl 3:22). It is important to notice that he endorses “work,” which cannot be classified either as “righteous” or “wicked.”

After having successfully dealt with the problem of wickedness in the world and placed the responsibility for its existence squarely on the shoulders of humans who choose it, Qoheleth is aware that he has not completely solved the problem that the opposition righteous/wickedness creates for his position that everything must have a reversal. After showing how the wickedness gets its reversal in the judgment, he still has to deal with the question of how righteousness gets its reversal. He could argue that righteousness does not need a reversal because it is a good thing so that the world can have as much of it as it can take, but that would conflict with the basic position that overall the world stays as it is and does not become either totally evil or totally evil free. Qoheleth is amazingly consistent and therefore—after treating the opposition of wickedness as undesirable—eventually has to argue that righteousness itself is undesirable. And he does take that position. It is clearly articulated in a notorious argument in the seventh chapter:

Everywhere I look during my vain life I see righteous people who perish while being righteous as well as evil people who enjoy a long life while doing evil. Therefore, if you do not want to ruin yourself, do not be too righteous or too wise; just as if you do not want to die too early, do not be too wicked or fool (Eccl. 7:15–17).

Qoheleth’s bold claim that everything that happens must have a reversal and his determination to be consistent with it and not concede any exception places him in an almost desperate position as far as
dealing with righteousness is concerned. He could not say that righteousness has its reversal in the judgment because he cannot possibly suggest that God may undo in the judgment what the righteous had done just as God may undo in the judgment what the wicked had done. He could not argue that righteousness was offered by God like a bait to see whether humans decide to be mere animals or decide to rise above them. By avoiding wickedness, humans can avoid lowering themselves to the level of animals, but if they choose to be righteous, then a reversal can hardly be possible. Qoheleth’s lack of options is obvious, therefore his dilemma is either to abandon his initial position that everything in the world has a reversal and the world is stable, or argue against righteousness no matter how irrational that may be. And the argument he develops is really thin. He claims that he had seen righteous people who die and wicked people who are able to live a long life. Instead of the traditional rational square:

Qoheleth argues for the following one:

What Qoheleth does not realize is that this is still a rational square in which the primary opposition line has just been reversed so that it is the wicked who pursue the right thing while the righteous pursue the wrong one. In other words the square is:
This is just a standard rational square so that one who wants life would have to be wicked and one who chooses to be righteous would have to bear the dire consequences. This is clearly not what Qoheleth intends, but probably he just wants to create an ambiguity between the two choices as he adds later: “It is good to take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for those who fear God will succeed with both” (Eccl. 7:18). It seems that the only way one can “succeed with both” is by avoiding either of them. To avoid righteousness is not so difficult because absolute righteousness is impossible anyway: “Surely there is not even one single person on earth so righteous to the point of doing only what is good without ever sinning” (Eccl 7:20). And even when righteousness is possible, it is not worth it, or appreciated anyway: “Another example of vanity is that everywhere on earth there are righteous people who are treated as if they were wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated as if they were righteous. This proves again that everything is vanity.” (Eccl 8:14).

To conclude, the opposition of wickedness/righteousness is clearly the most vulnerable point in Qoheleth’s position. He is aware of it, he goes to great length to solve it, but no doubt he himself is not satisfied with the solution. However, Qoheleth chooses to be consistent, and eventually ends up arguing against extreme righteousness no matter how irrational that may be. He may be right that in an evil world the righteous people may suffer evil which they refuse to inflict on others. Qoheleth no doubt is right in affirming that that often happens and he is right that his readers will find his argument persuasive because what he says agrees with their experience. But the evil that righteous people suffer is not and cannot be a reversal of the good things that they do for others.


**Good Versus Evil**

One of the characteristics of the secondary opposition line is that one side of the opposition is positive and is desirable from arguer’s point of view and the other is negative and should be rejected. In a rhetorical situation the audience is expected to accept the positive side and reject the negative side. In other words, a typical rational square for a rhetorical situation is:

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X  Y
+   -
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Much of the sayings that fill the book of Ecclesiastes deal with various oppositions which are somehow reversed. In other words, if commonly one side of the opposition is assumed to be the positive term and the opposite side to be the negative term, Qoheleth is reversing that relationship. He uses several techniques.

According to some sayings, in any positive choice there is also something negative, and in the negative choice there is also something positive. According to other sayings, something that is usually considered better is from some point of view worse, and something that is undesirable is better and therefore should be desired. For instance: the dead are more fortunate than the living (Eccl 4:2); youthfulness can be better than old age (4:13); being quiet can be better than speaking (Eccl 5:1–2); taking a vow can be undesirable (Eccl 5:5); even the dead are, in some respects, in a better position than the unborn (Eccl 6:3) in spite of the fact that to be alive is sometimes better than to be dead (Eccl 9:5); the day of death can be better then the day of birth (Eccl 7:1); a house of mourning better than the house of feasting (Eccl 7:2); sorrow better than laughter (Eccl 7:3); and so on.

Finally, there are sayings which affirm that in something good, something bad is implied, and vice versa. Here are some examples:
skill and hard work is accompanied by envy (Eccl 4:4) and lack of peace (Eccl 4:6); acquiring wealth causes dissatisfaction (Eccl 5:10); wealth brings problems (Eccl 5:11); riches involve many inconveniences (Eccl 5:12, 14; 6:2); digging a hole can involve an accident and repairing a wall may get one hurt by a snake (Eccl 10:8); all kinds of accidents are possible while doing good things (Eccl 10:9).

A world in which both oppositions can happen—sometimes together—is an unpredictable world. Evil cannot be anticipated and therefore it should be accepted as part of the nature of things: “For no one can anticipate a disaster” (Eccl 9:12). Even cursing the people in power after taking all precautions can be dangerous (Eccl 10:20). Not only bad things are unpredictable, but good things can be too: “Throw a piece of bread in water and after sometime you could get it back” (Eccl 11:1). Therefore, the unpredictability of the world should not deter one from engaging in activities that God has assigned for humans (Eccl 11:3–6).

In a world in which the clearest distinctions get blurred and in which everything is qualified, there is one good thing that Qoheleth upholds over and over again without ever qualifying it: “This is what is unquestionably good and the lot given to us by God anywhere in the world and at any time during our short life: to eat, to drink, and to find satisfaction in everything we do” (Eccl 5:18). For this position the conclusion of the book is fitting: “The final conclusion of everything that has been said is to fear God by keeping his commandments because this is the supreme duty of everyone” (Eccl 12:13). The conclusion could not capture better the argumentation of the whole book: choose what God has already chosen for you.
REASONING IN HEBREW WISDOM LITERATURE

Applying the rational square to the book of Ecclesiastes has not changed the perception that Ecclesiastes is a peculiar book. It only explains better, I hope, why: Qoheleth wants to undermine the traditional foundations on which life’s choices are based. Whether he succeeds or not or whether we agree with him or not is less important. The question we need to address in the end is: Why would anyone write such a book? In order to answer that question it is necessary first to clarify the issues that Hebrew Wisdom Literature tries to solve.

Hebrew Wisdom and the Problem of Evil

To define Hebrew Wisdom Literature is notoriously difficult and biblical scholars do not agree on what makes a text Wisdom Literature rather than something else. The tendency has been to distinguish Wisdom Literature by the terminology and language it uses. The problem with that approach is that Hebrew sages hardly use any specialized terminology so that those who have tried to identify wisdom passages by some literary features have ended up seeing Wisdom Literature almost anywhere in the Old Testament/TANAKH.

In defining Wisdom Literature I will start from the definition that the Old Testament/TANAKH itself provides for a sage. According to 1 Kings 10:1 and 2 Chronicles 9:1, a wise person is someone who is able
to answer hard questions. The issue that figures most prominently in Hebrew Wisdom Literature is the problem of evil. Although evil may not seem so central to the book of Ecclesiastes, it is central to the book of Job to which this study has made little reference so far because that book was beyond the scope of this analysis.

The problem of evil is not a problem that the sages created; they only tried to deal with it. The problem of evil is part of the uniqueness of Hebrew religion. This uniqueness was the result of the concept of monotheism which set it apart from any religion in the ancient world. The wisdom books were not rejected from the Old Testament/TANAKH because it was recognized that they did not try to distort a religion that was too smooth, but rather they recognized and tried to solve a legitimate problem in that religion. Orthodox religious thinkers may have disagreed with the answers that the sages gave to the problem, but they could not reject the problem because the problem was theirs as well.

**Monotheism and the Problem of Evil**

Although the Israelite religion may have shared many features in common with ancient religions, it was radically unique in one aspect: its monotheism. In spite of its intellectual attractiveness, a unique God creates a difficult situation for the opposition good and evil. It is again the rational square that points out the problem:

![Diagram](image)

To put it crudely, wherever evil happens, there are not enough candidates to fill up the square. The only candidate to complete the square is a human being:
This square is so fundamental to the Bible that it is established right after creation before humans get the chance to do anything. The very first story after humans are created in the first two chapters of Genesis is about the “fall” in the third chapter. This sets up the most pervasive rational square of the Bible and provides the most comprehensive rhetorical situation on which almost everything that the Bible says is based. Whenever humans do evil, they set themselves in opposition to God and all biblical rhetoric in various forms is attempting to cause humans to reverse their affirmation of evil and eliminate their opposition to God:

This is the ideal situation which was lost right from the beginning and has never been regained. All the rhetoric of the Bible is aimed at closing that rhetorical situation which somehow is never accomplished.

Because humans are the only candidates to complete the rational square and be responsible for evil, it places God in a privileged rhetorical position and places humans in a very vulnerable situation. Indeed, right from the fourth chapter of Genesis—and according to traditional interpretation from the third chapter—God is on the rhetorical offensive and humans are on the rhetorical defensive. Probably in no other parts of the Old Testament/TANAKH is God more on the rhetorical offensive as in prophetic discourse. The rational square allows for no
other option and therefore almost any evil can be used by prophets as a proof that humans have placed themselves in opposition to God and worthy of prophetic diatribes and divine punishment. Probably there is no statement to express God’s rhetorical vantage point as Isaiah’s statement: “Come now, let’s have a dispute, says the Lord” (Isa 1:18). The prophets never question this rhetoric. They have no reason to; they are always rhetorical winners even when they get killed.

Because of the monotheism, the problem of evil places tremendous pressure on humans. They are responsible not only for suffering from the consequences of their own evil, but must face a rightly angry deity as well. Sometimes the ethical pressure that monotheism places on humans as a result of their rationality gets to the point of becoming unbearable.

It is what prophets never question that the sages do. The book of Job brings that problem into the open right from the beginning: “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job who was blameless, upright, feared God, and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). The story emphatically begins with the pre-fall square:

![Diagram of pre-fall square]

Soon, however, evil strikes and the rhetorical situation changes:

![Diagram of post-fall square]

What sets apart Job’s rhetoric from the prophetic rhetoric is not the rational square, but the relationships. He questions that the opposition between him and God was caused by a change in him and he questions
that he was responsible for the evil that he experienced. The only way he could explain the rational square was:

Accordingly, God was irrational, because God affirmed both sides of the secondary opposition line. Although Job is supposed to accept this irrationality, his whole argument in the book is aimed at rejecting it: “But he said to her [his wife]: ‘You speak as only foolish women would speak. Shall we receive from God only what is good and not what is bad as well?’ Job did not say anything wrong” (Job 2:10). Until I have the chance to do a close analysis of the argumentation of the book I do not venture to speculate on the possible reasons why Job is made to contradict himself so flatly in the book.\(^\text{145}\)

In order to point out the tremendous responsibilities that monotheism places on human rationality because of the reality of evil I would like to use another ancient story with a polytheistic theology: The Odyssey. The story of Ulysses is very similar to the story of Job; or to say the same thing differently, Job is the Hebrew Ulysses. Just like Job, Ulysses is a remarkably successful hero in the Trojan war and just as in Job, suddenly on the way home everything goes wrong. Just like in Job, ordeals are not the result of something wrong that he had done, but the result of a decision taken by the gods. To be more specific, Poseidon decides to punish Ulysses for crippling one of his favorites, Polyphemus, a Cyclops. The circumstances need to be mentioned briefly. Ulysses

\(^{145}\)I do want to point out, however, that from the time when Job was in the state of denial of the loss and calmly accepted it immediately after it occurred and the moment when he started to voice his anger at the loss had passed seven days (Job 2:13–3:1). Therefore, his contradictory reactions to the loss may have to do with his emotional reaction rather than his rational response.
and his crew come into the cave of the Cyclops Polyphemus hoping for a friendly reception, but are taken captives by Polyphemus who decides to eat one of them each day. Ulysses is promised to be the last. Asked about his name, Ulysses—instead of telling Polyphemus his real name—says οὐδεὶς [oudeis] which means in Greek “no one,” “nobody,” from which the title Odyssey comes.¹⁴⁶

Unwilling to accept passively his death and the death of his friends, Ulysses gives wine to the Cyclops to get him drunk and then, with a sharpened pole, pierces the only eye of the Cyclops, blinding him. In pain, Polyphemus cries so that the other Cyclopes gather to find out what is the matter. Seeing Polyphemus injured, they asked him who had done that to him, to which Polyphemus answered: “nobody.” Thinking that Polyphemus had injured himself or had been injured by the gods, they left him alone and Ulysses was able to escape as the result of “choosing” to be “nobody.” In other words, he was able to survive and become somebody again by accepting to be nobody. Eventually Ulysses manages to get out of the cave with his friends and escape. After twenty years of wanderings he arrives home to be reunited with his family just like Job in the end gets all his possessions back, indeed, even his children, plus a bonus.

Although there are striking similarities between the two stories, there is an important difference. In spite of his ordeals, Ulysses never raises any moral issue. At no point does Ulysses ask himself whether he had done something wrong to deserve his fate or not. We do not know what drives him home to his rugged Ithaca instead of stopping in one of the many exotic places he goes through to settle and enjoy life rather than carrying on his ordeals. We do not know what makes him leave behind many beautiful women and insist on going back to his

¹⁴⁶The name Polyphemus is also significant in Greek: it means the one most famous. By accepting the name “nobody” in his encounter with Polyphemus or the one “most famous,” the story of Ulysses—one of the most famous heroes at Troy—is the story of how one can rise back to fame by accepting one’s downfall. That is what makes the Greek story so beautiful. But that is precisely Job’s problem: he cannot accept his own downfall. That is what makes the Hebrew story so painful.
aging wife. Nowhere does he ask himself whether it is morally right for him to sleep with every beautiful woman he meets while his wife defends herself desperately against suitors in order to remain faithful to him. Twenty years of ordeals do not cause Ulysses even for a moment to ask himself whether he may have done something wrong for which he deserved what he was going through. For twenty years Ulysses experiences every imaginable trial and frustration and to qualify any of these sufferings as “evil” would have been the last thing on his mind.

But most importantly, what is remarkable about The Odyssey is that Ulysses accepts all his ordeals without the slightest sign of revolt. Although he knows that all his sufferings are due to the fact that he had angered Poseidon by crippling Polyphemus, at no point the super hero Ulysses dares to raise his fist towards heaven or sea and say to Poseidon: “What do you think you are doing? What did you expect me to do? Wait to be roasted alive by that brute and do nothing? Can’t you have better tastes in choosing your friends? Haven’t you learned of self-defense?” In The Odyssey there is no polemic with the gods because the story is built on the following rational square:

Polytheism removes the ethical pressure because what happens is decided by the gods. That is the reason Ulysses never questions the gods. Although The Odyssey is a heroic story, the real heroes are not humans; the real heroes are the gods. In spite of the fact that Ulysses in the end manages to get home, the story makes clear that that happened not because Ulysses did anything remarkable, but because the goddess Athena decided to help him and put an end to his ordeals. Like any heroic story, its persuasive goal is to enforce the allegiance of the audience to trusting the gods and to persist in their dedication because in the end the gods will do the right thing.
Job’s reaction to his ordeals is so different because he did not have the options that Ulysses had. Although the story does mention a character Satan, that Satan is not the super-evil spirit that developed in later Judaism and Christianity, but rather a servant of God. At no point does Job hold Satan responsible for what happened to him and at no point does God attempt to blame Satan for what Job was going through. Fully persuaded of his innocence, Job has no option but to raise his fist from his ashes to God and challenge God to a rhetorical encounter. This situation is completely opposite from the prophetic rhetoric. In Job it is the human who is on the rhetorical offensive and God is silent, suspected of not having an answer. Although in the end of the book God does speak, eventually God has no answer but to cause a reversal, to vindicate Job, and close the rhetorical situation. While in prophetic discourse humans are challenged to turn to God, in Job eventually God is the one who turns to humans. It is a rare situation in biblical rhetoric when, instead of humans causing a reversal, God is the one who causes the reversal.  

In its persuasive goals, however, Job’s story is no different from that of The Odyssey. Just as in The Odyssey, the audience is persuaded to persist in their allegiance to God who—in spite of adverse circumstances and contrary evidence—in the end will do the right thing.

**Reasoning in Ecclesiastes**

Job’s response to the problem of evil does not satisfy Qoheleth. The problem that Qoheleth sees with Job’s solution he exposes in the second chapter of Ecclesiastes. Although the character that Qoheleth chooses is a king in Jerusalem and Job is never referred to as a king, the parallel between Job’s success and that of the successful king in Ecclesiastes is too striking to be mere coincidence. Qoheleth’s response

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147 Although sometimes God is described in the Old Testament/TANAKH as repenting for an evil that God was going to do, that repentance does not presuppose human innocence as is the case with Job.
to Job is: “The fact that you cried like a child when your parent took away your favorite toys from you and now you are happy because you got them back as a result of your crying, does not solve anything. Eventually those toys will be taken away from you anyway.” According to Qoheleth, Job’s accomplishments—including his rhetorical victory over God—are nothing but vanity.

Qoheleth does not side with Job in his dispute with God because he sees another option. He argues for a world which is full of reversals. They are built in the world and God is responsible for them in the sense of setting them up from the beginning. They provide equilibrium to the world.

There is an important accomplishment with Qoheleth’s bold solution. Because everything has a reversal, rational squares are no longer necessary; nor indeed, possible. Instead of choosing one side of the rational square, Qoheleth eliminates the square altogether. Without a rational square, there is no looser and there is no winner. God is no longer directly responsible for whatever happens in the world. That is the reason in Ecclesiastes God cannot possibly get any blame. While in Job God gets all the blame for what happens to Job, in Ecclesiastes God gets none. Qoheleth has managed to build the most impenetrable defense for God. If humans mess up their lives, it is their own choice and they cannot blame it on God anymore.

Qoheleth’s solution, however, is bought at a heavy price. To a large extent he has to redefine good and evil. Indeed, often they are indistinguishable and sometimes inseparable. Being inseparable they become acceptable. To accept both good and evil—that was Job’s problem—in Ecclesiastes becomes a virtue. High goals are discouraged and in the world of Qoheleth there is no room for heroes. A wealthy and successful individual like Job is not a model to be emulated, but a model to be avoided. Success is possible, but it is a success which is available to anyone. It is a success which one does not even need to strive for because no one can miss it. The highest possible goals in life are: to eat, to drink, to make love, and to work. Qoheleth’s highest goals are so low that anyone can reach them on condition that one does not set up anything higher.
The most important problem, however, with Qoheleth’s solution is that the book ends up being an ironic book. As I pointed out when I applied the rational square to narratives, stories that are built on reversals are either humorous or ironic. Qoheleth is not the comic fool we love to laugh at, but the wise sage who is looking down with a smile to us like the Greek sage Diogenes who in broad daylight walked in crowded places with a lighted candle looking for a human being. Qoheleth does not need to have any compassion for someone who is very religious and dies too soon, or someone who digs a hole and falls into it, because he can laugh about it. Did Qoheleth hope to persuade everyone not to engage in life in anything beyond what he suggested? A bold thinker like him could not have been so naive to set up so high rhetorical goals. His goal is not to persuade humans, but to defend God. While Job is a defense of human innocence, Ecclesiastes is a defense of the divine. In other words, while Job is an anthropodicy, Ecclesiastes is a theodicy.

**The Failure of Hebrew Wisdom**

If it is true that the Hebrew sages distinguished themselves by dealing with hard questions, they fully deserve the credit. They saw like no one else the full implications of the most outstanding feature of their religion. Not only did they see the problem, they saw the options. That is the reason they could not be dismissed even by those who did not find their solutions satisfactory. To reject Job or to reject Qoheleth is to reject some options and not to solve the problem. In the end, the Hebrew sages have no satisfactory solution and have no option left. The prophetic rhetoric, Job’s rhetoric, and Qoheleth’s rhetoric; they all fail.

The rational square explains not only why the sages ran out of options, but also what they missed in order to succeed: a Satan. It is true that Job does mention a Satan, but that Satan is not the evil spirit that the rational square needs in order to complete the rational square. Although I cannot substantiate this claim, I think that it was because of the failure of the Wisdom Literature to adequately solve the problem of evil that the concept of a powerful evil spirit developed in later Judaism.
The concept of Satan has profound implications for human rationality. First, the concept of Satan is not a disguised form of polytheism. Although in polytheism there may be gods who do evil, when they do so they do not cease to be gods and therefore they remain worthy of worship. Satan is not an evil god because Satan never acts like God and never takes the side of God in the rational square. Similarly, what makes God god is not the fact that God is one, but the fact that God is consistently on the positive side of the rational square. Christianity has developed the concept of a triune God, but that does not make Christianity polytheistic. The three Christian gods are never in opposition therefore they cannot possibly make a primary opposition line in the rational square. If that were the case, then one would be demonic. The triune Christian God is still monotheism because of the indistinguishability of the divine persons concerning their position in the rational square. Two, three, or fifty persons who can never be placed in any opposition end up being rationally indistinguishable. Christianity, by never allowing for any of the three divine persons to be played against the others, has preserved monotheism in its pure form. Moreover, by never allowing Satan to occupy the positive side of the rational square, Satan cannot ever be God and therefore worthy of worship. Humans may choose Satan to be God and then demonize God—as some apparently do—but that only switches the secondary opposition line around in the rational square and does not remove the square.

The most important implication of the concept of Satan is that it allows for rational evil. When Qoheleth tries to persuade us that evil happens when one falls into the hole that one digs or gets bitten by a snake when trying to repair a wall, he is offering a naive view of evil. That there is irrational evil and that irrational evil is built on reversals probably no one would have denied; not even Job.\footnote{For instance, in order to reject Zophar’s argument about the wisdom of God in the eleventh chapter of the book, Job ironically questions God’s wisdom by exposing God’s irrationality through reversals (Job 12:13–25). Therefore, Job agrees with Qoheleth that God has set up the world on reversals, but uses that as proof of God’s irrationality rather than wisdom.} Probably Job would not have denied that there was a time for his oxen to be stolen
by thieves and their keepers to be killed with the exception of one of them to be the messenger of the bad news; and that there was a time for his sheep to be consumed by fire from heaven including the shepherds with the exception of one of them to be the messenger of the bad news; and that there was a time for his house to collapse and kill all his children (Job 1:13–19). The problem Job had with all these “times” was their timing: a messenger hardly could finish conveying the bad news when another messenger arrived and stood in line.

The evil that is the most difficult to deal with is not the evil that comes from accidents and therefore is irrational, but the evil that is rational: evil that seems to be coherent, consistent, planned, sophisticated, can be anticipated, and often is successful even when resisted. The consistency and coherence that such evil displays presupposes a mastermind. Such evil cannot be blamed on blind chance and therefore it presupposes a super mind that makes it rational. When evil is rational, it becomes persuasive.

This is an important implication of the concept of Satan as far as the rhetorical situation is concerned. When humans are by default the originators of evil, they can only play their evil role or rebel like Job when they feel that they are fully innocent. When Satan fills the rational square, however, humans are no longer evil by originating it, but by participating in it. Because of our rationality, we are vulnerable to rational evil. But because we become evil by persuasion and not by nature, our rationality becomes our hope. Instead of being a burden, it becomes an asset. Instead of being the problem, it can be part of the solution.
Part Three

REASONING, PERSUASION, AND ARGUMENTATION IN HEBREW WISDOM SCHOLARSHIP
If the title of this section seems odd, there are good reasons for it. While reasoning, arguing, and persuading may be a legitimate or even expected intellectual undertaking for scientists, politicians, lawyers, preachers, and so on, it can hardly be the goal of biblical scholars. The declared purpose of classical or modern biblical scholarship was to uncover the thought of the authors of sacred writings or other ancient literary productions which may help in understanding those sacred texts, and not to exercise and present the thinking of the scholars. Probably in no other kind of scholarship the requirement to accurately arrive at and represent the mind of someone else without mixing in personal ideas is greater than for biblical scholars. Whatever scholars may say, they would have to prove that they arrive at those ideas by sound “exegesis,” that is, by bringing the meaning out of the text. The illegitimate interpretation in which the interpreter brought to a text some meaning which had not been there before was labeled “eisegesis” and was viewed as an intellectual fraud. The divergence in interpreting a text was the proof that some or possibly all interpreters had gone wrong. In order to objectively arrive at the universally accepted meaning of a text great emphasis has been placed on “method” or some clearly defined sets of procedures which are applied or followed consistently by everyone and which would guarantee identical results irrespective of who is doing the interpretation. Therefore, any interpreter who dared to advocate a different interpretation had to show
that other interpreters had been unfaithful in following the accepted method and justify the new interpretation as being the results of a better and more consistent application of the method. Criticism of other interpretations was part of the method of interpretation itself.

In postmodern, however, text interpreters have abandoned the concept of a perfect method which would deliver the universally accepted meaning of a text and therefore have abandoned the requirement that biblical scholars prove that their interpretation is the only true one. As a result, the requirement that any new interpretation be accompanied and justified by a criticism of other interpretations, methods, and scholars has fallen in disrepute. Although the requirement of being “critical” has been retained, it has been redefined to mean to be “self-critical,” that is, to indicate the interpretative procedures chosen and show consistency in following and applying them. “Criticism” of other scholars and their interpretations—what used to be the virtue of the classical scholarship—has become almost unethical. Postmodernism has democratized interpretation so that everyone has the right to one’s own interpretation. Not only are all scholarly interpretations which follow self-chosen procedures legitimate, but so are ordinary readings done by people who have no scholarly training and regard for method. As a result, the concept of method itself has been democratized. A method is no longer the consensus of the experts within the academia on endorsed procedures which need to be learned and followed in order to arrive at valid results, but is rather the result of personal choices based on personal interests reflecting gender, social, political, religious, ideological, racial, ethnic, etc., agendas and concerns. Although biblical scholarship still uses the notion of “method” and even classifies methods, the boundaries between them have volatilized so that what each method includes and how it is applied depends very much on who is doing it. Biblical interpretation is no longer a skill developed by studying textbooks, but rather an art which is learned through a kind of apprenticeship by studying the work of the masters. The responsibility of a scholar to discuss and justify the method or the methods used to a large extent has been shifted to the reader who has the responsibility of understanding, judging, and eventually appreciating the value of the interpretation.
Taking into account the nature of both modern and postmodern biblical scholarship, the oddity of this project is twofold. On the one hand, the analysis of reasoning, persuasion, and argumentation of other scholars presupposes that they used something for which—from the perspective of modern scholarship—there was no room. On the other hand, the analysis of the works of other biblical scholars implies some kind of criticism and inadequacy in some of the things that biblical scholars are doing, and from the perspective of postmodern scholarship that is largely unacceptable. Fortunately, this part of the project was not initially planned and I only reluctantly embarked on it at the insistence of the dissertation committee. As the first two parts of this work show, I made few references to the interpretations of Ecclesiastes by other biblical scholars. The reason is not only because I tried to keep footnotes and references to a minimum for the sake of clarity, but primarily because other scholars have not used my approach. Another reason is that much of my interpretation of Ecclesiastes conflicts with quite widespread opinions about this book among biblical scholars. It was the dissertation committee who raised the issue of the relationship between my work and the work of other biblical scholars and demanded that I address the implications of my work. Although the argument analysis of scholarly works is the most challenging project for the approach adopted in this study and for that reason is the most important to prove the value of the approach, because of the post-critical stance adopted by postmodern scholarship, the pursuing of what would have been the common sense implications of the study was done reluctantly.

Although I suggested that other scholars have not used my approach to Wisdom Literature, it is not true that others have never thought about this approach. Actually my interest in the project has been suggested by some of them, whose works for that reason I have decided to choose for this part of the project.

Before I mention the reasons for choosing each scholar, I want to make clear the reason for which I did not pick them: their methodology. This does not mean that the methodology is irrelevant as far as the reasoning, persuasion, and argumentation of a scholar is concerned. Quite the opposite, one of the claims I make is that reasoning is implied
in every scholarly method or approach and therefore each chapter begins with some methodological considerations in which I explain the reasoning which is presupposed by each method. Scholarly methods do not come out of the blue. Methods capture a broader thinking paradigm of those who develop them and unfortunately those who develop new methods never explain their thinking, and those who adopt those methods rarely try to understand the thinking on which they are based. Therefore to explain the “reasoning” of a method may sound odd for some. After all, that is the very reason for using a method: to avoid using individual reasoning and arbitrariness. Therefore, it may come as a surprise to some scholars the claim that by using a method more or less faithfully, they follow the reasoning of a master. The brief descriptions of each method which I provide in each chapter are meant to show the rationale behind a method and is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of it. A brief sketch is the most that can be done in a work like this and familiarity of readers with each method is assumed. But even if I have oversimplified a method and the reasoning involved in it, there still arises the issue of analyzing the reasoning involved in a method which is my main claim. As I show in the following chapters, a method places rational constraints upon a scholar and to some extent limits what a scholar should or can do.

The three scholars whose works I have chosen to analyze—Gerhard von Rad,149 C.L. Seow,150 and James Crenshaw151—have some significance for the subject. I am not suggesting that only their works can be analyzed or that they are the best illustrations to prove my points.


Although I did choose them because they are all outstanding scholars, I am not suggesting that they are the only ones. I have chosen von Rad because of his claim that reasoning is specific to Wisdom Literature. He argues that reasoning was developed for the first time in ancient Israel in Solomon’s time and I found his claim quite plausible when I started the project. It is true that von Rad claims that the sages expressed their reasoning in terms of poetry and not in terms of arguments, I found Aristotle’s syllogisms and formal logic much more fascinating and promising for the study of reasoning than the study of poetry.

The choice of Seow’s work is precisely because commentaries would be the last places where one would expect to be able to see and follow the reasoning, persuasion, and argumentation of the commentator. Typically commentaries are full of technical information about texts chopped down to words and phrases which establish the meaning of a text, meaning for which the commentator claims virtually no credit. Although Seow’s commentary is not the only one available, it is the most recent and by far the most extensive. Moreover, Seow represents a younger generation of scholars who is connected with classical scholarship by being an outstanding linguist and to contemporary scholarship by showing interest in newer approaches.

The reason I chose James Crenshaw is again because of his relationship to the subject. Not only is he probably the most respected scholar on Ecclesiastes, but his interpretation stands out and invites analysis. Moreover, Crenshaw himself saw reasoning as important for the understanding of Wisdom Literature: “The urge to secure human existence through the use of reason is universal.”152 It seems that Crenshaw himself was interested in the study of persuasion in the Israelite wisdom literature. I wish I had his wisdom to realize that such an ambitious project goes far beyond what an aspiring scholar can do in a dissertation.

There is no suggestion that only the works of these three scholars are significant for the understanding of Ecclesiastes or even the subject of argumentation. Indeed, they may not be the best. The choice of three, however, is for rhetorical purposes. In order to prove a case, at least

152Ibid., 12.
three examples are necessary. From the persuasive point of view, one example proves that something is unique or an accident; two examples prove a coincidence; but three examples prove the rule. Whether there are exceptions, however, I leave to others to prove.
The Historical-Critical Paradigm

Gerhard von Rad is an historical-critical scholar and his work Wisdom in Israel\textsuperscript{153} is consistent with the historical-critical paradigm of interpreting intellectual productions. According to this scholarly approach, any phenomenon has defining characteristics which set it apart from anything else. These defining characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation not only set it apart from anything else at its final stage, but they also mark it and set it apart right from its emergence and shape it all along its development. More importantly, it is those defining characteristics that set the process in motion and continue to shape it along the way. Of course, an historical-critical scholar would grant that phenomena do change in the process of their development and take on new characteristics while dropping others, but it is those features which act from the beginning causing it to come into existence and continue to remain present all along that are the defining characteristics and make something what it is. In other words, while admitting

that historical developments do change constantly in a long process, historical-critical scholars claim that what things and phenomena are really is what defined them right from the beginning and has remained unchanged all along.\textsuperscript{154} Since the defining characteristics are the ones that manifest themselves right from the beginning, it is the job of the historical-critical researcher to go back in time to the very origins of a phenomenon to discern its true nature. How far back one can go depends on the sources that are available, and the further back a scholar can go, the better are the claims of having uncovered the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. It is this search for origins that distinguish historical-critical scholars and gives the impression that they are fascinated with origins and dismissive of what happened later, but that is because they believe that what they discover at origins enables them to say what things really are now or at their final stage. In other words, although it may seem that the primary interest of historical-critical scholars is in how things were at their origins, in reality they

\textsuperscript{154}The historical-critical paradigm for understanding historical processes is just an expansion of a broader understanding of reality which had been developed and used by philosophers down to modern times. According to this understanding, all the characteristics which make things what they are belong either to the “essence” or to the “accidents.” The characteristics which belong to the “essence” are the ones that do not change while the “accidents” are the ones that may change without turning that thing into something else. For instance, the color of the hair would belong to “accidents” while the ability to use language would belong to the “essence” of being human. Therefore, in order to understand what something is, it is necessary to identify those characteristics which belong to the “essence” and not to the “accidents.” When this understanding is applied to historical processes, in order to prove which features or characteristics are the essential ones which make a phenomenon what it is, it is necessary to identify those characteristics which had been displayed as far back in time as possible, ideally right from the beginning. It is only those features which can be proved to have been present right from the beginning or at least from the earliest stages that can claim to belong to the “essence” and properly capture the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. It is because of this understanding of reality that historical-critical scholars are perceived as being obsessed with origins.
are interested in explaining why things are the way they are now or at a later stage in their development.

**Von Rad’s Rational Square**

Consistent with the historical-critical paradigm, von Rad makes it clear when he places the emergence of wisdom in Israel, the topic of his investigation: “The period whose literary heritage we shall examine begins with the emergence of school wisdom in the early monarchy.”

He also makes clear which literary productions come from this period according to him and become his main sources for his investigation: “The dating of Prov. 10–29 in the pre-exilic monarchical period is hardly ever contested now.”

Because other wisdom works—such as Job and Ecclesiastes—are later, they do not qualify for being used for investigating the origins of Israelite wisdom: “On the other hand, linguistic evidence compels a late date for such works as the Job dialogue or even Ecclesiastes.”

Although von Rad places the emergence of the Israelite wisdom during the monarchy, he does not deny that wisdom could have started earlier: “The existence of an older clan wisdom need not be contested in principle; its existence is, indeed, even highly probable.”

Von Rad even admits that wisdom is a phenomenon that came into Israel from outside: “What was the relationship of this wisdom, which was partly imported into Israel, to the Yahwistic faith, which was otherwise regarded as entirely exclusive?”

Although he admits that he deals with a phenomenon which may be older than the monarchical

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155 Von Rad, 11.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid., 9–10.
period, he does not extend his investigation beyond that point: “It should be stated here, as a matter of principle, that in this context we do not see it as our task to go behind the didactic poems in the book of Proverbs to enquire whether perhaps here and there forms of a much older wisdom may be discerned.”

According to Von Rad, wisdom is not necessarily an Israelite discovery but a universal human quest for knowledge and understanding: “That wisdom has to do with human understanding, that it is a particular form of human knowledge and behavior, is not disputed.” Unlike other forms of knowledge, however, wisdom knowledge is derived from experience: “This experience teaches him to understand events in his surroundings, to foresee the reactions of his fellow men, to apply his own resources at the right point, to distinguish the normal from the unique and much more besides.” This is pragmatic knowledge “for it renders man an invaluable service in enabling him to function in his sphere of life other than as a complete stranger and puts him in the position of understanding that sphere of life, at least to a certain extent, as an ordered system.” The harmonious system of the world is discovered by the sages little by little as individual experiences are put together and summarized under concise statements which take the form of maxims or proverbs: “Every nation with a culture has devoted itself to the care and the literary cultivation of this experiential knowledge and has carefully gathered its statements, especially in the form of sentence-type proverbs.” In spite of their brevity, such short statements which capture aspects of a larger system are expressions of a long and sophisticated intellectual activity:

160Ibid., 11–12.

161Ibid., 8.

162Ibid., 3.

163Ibid., 4.

164Ibid., 4.
What we have just described as one of the most elementary activities of the human mind is nevertheless a highly complex phenomenon, for the road from an experience which is considered worthy of note to linguistic expression of it—and to this particular linguistic expression—is a long one, one which has by no means been adequately explored. Once an experience has found expression in a proverb, a sentence, a maxim or even in an aphorism, a multi-layered process has come to an end.165

The empirical knowledge that the sages started in Israel in the early monarchy did not develop in vacuum but rather as an opposition to the Yahwistic faith which did not welcome rivalry:

What was the relationship of this wisdom, which was partly imported into Israel, to the Yahwistic faith, which was otherwise regarded as entirely exclusive? Was this perhaps an intellectual activity which was more or less neutral from a religious point of view and which could, therefore, happily settle in the vicinity of quite different cults?166

In its development, this wisdom challenged an understanding of reality which was sacral and ritualistic, as can be discerned in the stories about Saul and the emergence of monarchy:

We are afforded interesting insights by the comprehensive narrative which depicts one stage of Saul’s military involvement with the Philistines (I Sam. 13f.). If one follows the fairly complicated course of events, it becomes immediately clear that the narrator brings every de-

165Ibid. Von Rad is not the only historical-critical scholar who sees the emergence of wisdom in Israel in terms of short proverbial sayings. For instance, Claus Westermann develops the same idea that origins or the “roots” of wisdom are found in proverbs: Claus Westermann, Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other People (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

166Ibid., 9–10.
cisive event, military advantages and setbacks as well as all human conflicts, into association with the world of the sacral and the ritual: the vow of abstention which Saul imposes on the warriors, with the total cursing of any potential transgressor, the obtaining of a sign through Jonathan, the “divine panic” which strikes the Philistine camp, the overhasty eating of ritually unclean meat on the part of the exhausted soldiers, the “redemption” of Jonathan from the death penalty by a substitute, and much more besides. One can see that the military activity takes place in a thoroughly sacral realm of ideas. Without question, we are dealing with a very old-fashioned faith which believed that every event was encompassed by rites and sacral ordinances, and for this reason we can call it a pan-sacral faith.\textsuperscript{167}

This sacral understanding of reality was replaced by a secular one developed by the sages who saw events causally connected by laws to which everything is subjected, including humans:

However, in the understanding of reality, in the whole sphere of comprehension in which men’s lives operated, some decisive change must have taken place, particularly with Solomon. One has only to cast a glance at the so-called Succession Narrative (II Sam. 6–1 Kings 2) which was written only two generations after the archaic military account mentioned above. What a worldly sphere it is in which men play their parts here! Disasters are no longer traced back to sacral offences. Events are determined by the political will of a great king, but equally also by his weaknesses, by ambition, political intrigues and love affairs. They seem to unfold in accordance with a closely forged chain of causality, with a law which lies within the circumstances and within men themselves.\textsuperscript{168}

It was against this background that the Israelite wisdom started a process of secularization and humanization that replaced the spirituality of the pre-monarchical period:

\textsuperscript{167}Ibid., 58–59.

\textsuperscript{168}Ibid., 59.
The intellectual curiosity of old wisdom, its cultural impetus and the zeal with which it studied the corresponding cultural achievements of other nations stands in considerable contrast to the spirituality of the pre-monarchical period, even of the period of Saul. Whether we speak of a process of secularization starting fairly suddenly, of the discovering of man, that is of a humanization, or of the beginning of a rational search for knowledge, at any rate this strong, intellectual movement must have been preceded by an inner decline, the disintegration of an understanding of reality which we can describe, in a felicitous expression of M. Buber’s, as “pan-sacralism.”

As a result, the predominantly religious understanding of reality was followed by a kind of enlightenment during the monarchy in which knowledge was based on reason:

No further arguments are necessary. As a background to this presentation of history there lies an understanding of reality, a conception of the environment, which has fundamentally altered vis-à-vis that of “pan-sacralism”. It is also clear that old wisdom in Israel was influenced by that enlightened intellectuality.

Accordingly, the sages developed a deterministic view of reality so that the world was viewed as an organized whole governed by intrinsic laws:

Nevertheless, the experience of inherent determinism and of intrinsic value is everywhere present in the sentences of old wisdom. Wherever it teaches the recognition of orders—and this it does in abundance—it has already objectified an inner experience of the reality of the world.

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169 Ibid., 58.
170 Ibid., 59.
171 Ibid., 60.
As advocates of a new understanding of reality, the wisdom teachers derived their knowledge from experience and formulated their discoveries and understandings in the form of short sayings, such as maxims and proverbs. By contrast, the religious thinkers—who shared a sacral understanding of reality—derived their teachings from God through inspiration which took the form of elaborate literary compositions. Consequently, von Rad establishes the following rational square for the emergence of wisdom in Israel:

The above rational square can be reduced to the following compact form:

Von Rad does not anticipate any objections to the primary rational line represented by the red thick solid line in the square and apparently assumes that anyone would agree that the religious thinkers produced
elaborate religious accounts.\textsuperscript{172} He does realize, however, that objections could be raised that proverbs—which are pervasive in all cultures and are part of folklore—necessarily originated with wisdom teachers. Such an objection would affirm a thin interrupted line in the square which is an irrational line: \textit{“the wisdom teachers did not produce the short proverbial accounts.”} In order for the rational square to stand and the rhetorical situation not to close, it is necessary that none of the opponents affirm an irrational line such as the one indicated below with thin interrupted line:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}[local bounding box=square, transform shape]
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (0,0) -- (1,0) node[midway, anchor=center] {religious teachers};
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (0,0) -- (0,1) node[midway, anchor=center] {wisdom teachers};
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (0,0) -- (1,1) node[midway, anchor=center] {larger compositions};
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (1,0) -- (1,1) node[midway, anchor=center] {produced};
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (0,1) -- (0,0) node[midway, anchor=center] {did not produce};
\draw[thick,->, draw=black] (1,1) -- (0,1) node[midway, anchor=center] {short saying};
\end{scope}
\draw[dashed, ->, draw=red] (0.5,1) -- (0.5,0) node[midway, anchor=center] {thin interrupted line};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

In order to block that line, von Rad insists that the short sayings which he had attributed to sages do come from them:

This is what we find in the Solomonic book of Proverbs, for the idea which used to be widespread, namely that its sentences are to be traced back to popular proverbs, can no longer be maintained. Thus, in their present form they stem from school instruction, a fact which does not, of course, exclude the possibility that this or that popular proverb has also found its way into the collection.\textsuperscript{173}

Another possible objection which von Rad anticipates is that the proverbial statements are in the poetic form although short sayings do

\textsuperscript{172}For instance, von Rad does not consider the possibility that short sayings—such as proverbs—could have been produced by religious teachers such as priests, based on experience and reasoning and not necessarily received through inspiration.

\textsuperscript{173}Von Rad, 26.
not need to be: “When we approach the teachings of Israel’s wise men, one peculiarity must strike us at once, a peculiarity which unites them above and beyond their great differences in form and content; they are all composed in a poetic form, they are poetry.” The choice by the Hebrew sages of the imaginative language of poetry to express their observations of the world is contrary to modern thinking which sees the terse language of sciences as the appropriate way to accurately describe such observations:

Of course, for the modern communication of knowledge in an educational context, the only possibility is to use the prosaic language of science. For it, the linguistic clothing is basically incidental. If the presentation is not in barbarous prose, then that is felt to be simply an additional attraction, for the value and importance of the concepts presented are not fundamentally affected by this. To this modern form of the communication of knowledge in an educational context, a form initiated by the Greeks, there is nothing corresponding either in the Old Testament or in the ancient Near East.

Since according to modern thinking the language of poetry is the product of imagination rather than of accurate observations of the world, the fact that the sages used poetry would imply that they produced accounts based on their creative imagination rather than on experiences and that would affirm again the same thin red interrupted line which is an irrational line in the square: “the sages did not produce short accounts derived from experience.” Again, in order to block that line, von Rad argues that the poetic form—instead of being an obstacle in describing reality—actually provides a better account of reality than those presented in the prosaic language of sciences which modern academia has inherited from the Greeks. He not only endorses Herder’s romantic view of Hebrew poetry, but claims that it offers more accurate descriptions:

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174 Ibid., 24.

175 Ibid., 25.
Enough has been said, since Herder, in praise of this “thought rhyme”, as it has been aptly described. Unquestionably, it offers the poet virtually inexhaustible possibilities of inflection of poetic thought. But is this parallelism also suitable for expressing ideas which have been assimilated? Would the constant reduplication of what is being stated not lead to a certain blurring and thus to a loss of precision? It would indeed, if the stating of these ideas were concerned with achieving as great a conceptual precision as possible. But this is certainly not the case. What is being aimed at is not precision in the concepts, but precision in the reproduction of the subject-matter, if possible over its whole range. As far as that is concerned, the book of Proverbs is full of incomparably vivid and also very precise statements. Ancient Israel, too, was aware of a duty to make a given statement precise, but she demanded this precision not in the coining of terms but in the reproducing of facts.\footnote{Ibid., 26–27.}

Poetry as art provides accurate accounts of the world because art is an imitation of reality. In spite of the fact that art is not an exact replica of reality and therefore introduces transformations, it only makes possible renditions of a higher level of truth which actually rival the accounts of reality achieved by exact sciences:

All art is, of course, imitation of reality. But in the course of this imitation there always takes place a process of transformation. Actuality is elevated to a dimension of truth, the validity of which can be recognized by all. Anyone who is of the opinion, then, that man’s desire for knowledge can be validly expressed in the last resort only in the language of the so-called exact sciences, can, in view of their poetic form, rate Israel’s perceptions, with which we are here concerned, only as the outcome of a “pre-scientific”, “pre-critical” and still very naive endeavour. There can be no question, however, that even in this poetic form a very discriminating power of intellectual distinction is at work.\footnote{Ibid., 24–25.}
Again, contrary to modern thinking, in spite of their brevity, proverbial statements are able to make higher claims than more elaborate accounts:

The assumption that the smallest units stand at the beginning of a development and that the larger units can only have followed slowly after them has proved to be erroneous in the case of didactic poetry, too. The single line often enough makes higher claims and demands a greater degree of intellectual participation than a developed didactic poem. The single line is, as a rule, much more dense and affords more room for manoeuvre from the point of view of meaning and application than the didactic poem, the content of which is much less ambiguous as to its meaning.\(^\text{178}\)

The poetic form, instead of being an obstacle in describing reality, becomes the identifying mark that sets apart the proverbs which were produced by the wisdom teachers from those of popular origin:

These proverbs are constructed in parallel form, that is, they are, precisely in their pregnant character, products of an explicit literary intention. Popular proverbs do not occur in this form. The examples cited show the simplest form of parallelism, namely synonymous parallelism, where the two parts of the sentence on either side of the caesura say approximately the same thing.\(^\text{179}\)

According to von Rad, the artistic form of proverbs is the identifying mark of being of wisdom origin: “The experiences of reality which confronted her [Israel] could be appropriately presented only in artistic form.”\(^\text{180}\)

\(^{178}\)Ibid., 27.

\(^{179}\)Ibid., 28.

\(^{180}\)Ibid., 25.
After establishing the primary rational lines in the square—represented by thick solid lines—the rational square is well defined. For the square to be strengthened, however, the secondary rational lines need to be affirmed. These lines are represented by thick interrupted diagonal lines which state: “the religious teachers did not produce short secular accounts derived from experience through reasoning,” and “the wisdom teachers did not produce elaborate accounts received from God through inspiration.” Von Rad does not claim that the religious teachers never produced short sayings of the proverb type based on experience, but the rational square implies that he would take that position. Apparently von Rad did not expect his readers to consider that possibility.

Although von Rad may never have expected readers to raise the question as to whether religious teachers ever produced short proverbial sayings based on experience, he was fully aware that readers familiar with the Hebrew Wisdom Literature would know that it includes literary productions which go far beyond short sayings, such as the book of Job and Ecclesiastes. Although these books occasionally may include short sayings of the proverbial type, they do contain extended narratives and dialogues which are much more elaborate than proverbs. Although von Rad does not deny that such books are indeed wisdom productions, he claims that they are late and therefore have no relevance for the rational square established for the emergence of wisdom.

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181 The other two primary rational lines in the square would be the thick solid diagonal lines that represent the reverse action of “to produce”: “to reject/eliminate/destroy.” In other words, the other two primary rational lines in the square would be: “the religious teachers rejected/eliminated/destroyed secular short accounts derived from experience through reasoning,” and “the wisdom teachers rejected/eliminated/destroyed elaborate religious accounts received from God through inspiration.” Although such actions can and do occur when the level of conflict and intolerance between the opponents are very high, such actions are not expected from the religious and wisdom teachers because their conflict did not reach that level and therefore von Rad does not discuss these possibilities. They would be consistent, however, with the rational square.
in Israel: “The dating of Prov. 10–29 in the pre-exilic monarchical period is hardly ever contested now. On the other hand, linguistic evidence compels a late date for such works as the Job dialogue or even Ecclesiastes.”\(^{182}\)

Von Rad admits that wisdom materials are found not just in the books which traditionally have been classified as wisdom books, but in other parts of the Old Testament/TANAKH as well. Such productions are not necessarily short saying and they are not necessarily late. Therefore, he concedes that there are old wisdom texts which go beyond short proverbial sayings. Some of them take the form of numerical sayings.\(^{183}\) Others include long didactic poems\(^{184}\) as well as fables and allegories, which von Rad admits are of early wisdom origin:

> With the fable, too, which was once a “great literary force”, we nowadays no longer have a direct relationship; we have to try to make it our own by the devious route of a historical understanding. But here, too, we are dealing with a primitive form of human intellectual activity.\(^{185}\)

Even when sages produce narratives and not proverbs, they are “didactic” narratives because they contain “didactic” prose.\(^ {186}\) There are even prayers produced by sages in the form of poems which “belong to various psalm-types which they appear to imitate.”\(^ {187}\) What distinguishes them from the cultic psalms or regular prayers is “a certain erudition and didactic quality, of a preponderance of theological

\(^{182}\) Von Rad, 11.

\(^{183}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{185}\) Ibid., 41–42.

\(^{186}\) Ibid., 46.

\(^{187}\) Ibid., 48.
thoughts, etc., which entitles us to separate these psalms from the great body of predominantly cultically orientated psalms.”

Although von Rad admits that the wisdom teachers produced accounts larger than the proverbial sayings, he argues that their literary productions were not similar because they were always “didactic”: “The use of the artistic device of repetition is obvious from the very beginning in the case of didactic speech.” With these further qualifications, von Rad’s rational square becomes:

One would expect von Rad to explain the difference between a text that is “didactic” from one that is not “didactic,” but instead he has to make the concession: “A sharp differentiation of didactic narrative from other types of narrative is naturally impossible. The points of transition are fluid.” What von Rad does not seem to realize, with this concession the secondary opposition line of the rational square turns into an equivalence which removes the opposition between religious and wisdom teachers from the primary opposition line by turning it into equivalence as well. In other words, the rhetorical square becomes a closed one:

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188 Ibid.

189 Ibid., 54.

190 Ibid., 47.
The Closing of the Rhetorical Situation

After establishing the rhetorical situation which the wisdom teachers created in Solomon’s time, von Rad proceeds to show how the rhetorical situation was resolved. The opposition between the religious and wisdom teachers could have been solved with the victory of the religious thinkers who could have managed to impose their dogmatic thinking and suppress the emerging empirical thinking or prevent it from emerging. This was a real possibility which—according to von Rad—occurred in Egypt where reality was viewed as structured by the religious concept of Maat (a comprehensive view of reality which did not allow the Egyptian wisdom to develop an alternative perspective of the world):

But Israel’s teachings are also completely different from the ideas of ancient Egyptian wisdom. The central concept, on the basis of which the teachings of the wise men of Egypt are to be interpreted, is that of Maat, a word with a wide range of meaning. It is variously translated by “truth”, “right”, “justice”, “basic order”, “world order”. Maat guar-
The continuance of the world, of both the cosmic world and the social world of men. Gods and men live by it.\textsuperscript{191}

Unlike the Egyptian Maat which did not tolerate rivalry, Israel’s religion allowed for alternative perspectives: “In the domain of Israel’s teachings there could be completely opposite opinions.”\textsuperscript{192}

Another possibility to close the rhetorical situation would have been for the empirical reasoning initiated by the sages to develop into a comprehensive and exclusive secular understanding of reality similar to the scientific understanding which the Greek philosophy started and eventually made religious thinking obsolete and irrelevant. Von Rad makes it clear again that in Israel the secular wisdom did not develop to undermine the religious faith:

Here, however, we stand, for the first time, face to face with the real problem of the wisdom teachers’ understanding of reality. It will be our task in what follows to enter into that understanding. The process of secularization which definitely began in the early monarchy does not, in the teachings of the wise men, go hand in hand with a disintegration of faith in Yahweh’s power. That would be a simple and, to us, familiar process. Rather, we see the teachers—with what sometimes appears to us as an uncanny confidence—holding together the awareness of inherent determinism on the one hand and faith in Yahweh’s power on the other, indeed even mingling the two. The idea of life completely embedded in sacral ordinances has gone. But this has by no means affected faith in Yahweh. It, rather, has become part of a completely new form of the understanding of reality.\textsuperscript{193}

In other words, the uniqueness of Israel is twofold. On the one hand, Israel’s faith was not intolerant and therefore allowed for the emergence of a secular wisdom based on empirical reasoning. On the

\textsuperscript{191}Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{192}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{193}Ibid., 60.
other hand, the wisdom that Israel developed was not exclusivist either, so that it did not eliminate the need for faith but rather incorporated it and supplemented it. The religious and wisdom teachers joined perspectives so that the primary opposition line turned into an equivalence. Moreover, the experiences of the world—which were the object of the investigation and the source for the wisdom knowledge—were extended to incorporate the religious experiences of God:

Of course, the teachers’ search for knowledge turned towards the vast field of daily, and sometimes for that very reason trivial, experiences, a field in which man never ceases to learn. . . . But—and this is where it becomes difficult for us—the circle of these fixed perceptions was essentially wider still, for to it there belonged also experiences which man had of God, for here, too, the ancients believed they had perceived a specific order and regularity. . . . The fact that, in the great catalogue of perceptions, experiences of God alternate with worldly experiences, at once demands that we rethink one side of the Israelite understanding of reality, a side which is of decisive importance for the correct understanding of our texts. . . . The conclusion has, for example, been drawn that this old proverbial wisdom was still scarcely touched by Yahwism and that it was still only at the very beginning of a process of interpenetration by Yahwism. Against this, it can be categorically stated that for Israel there was only one world of experience and that this was apperceived by means of a perceptive apparatus in which rational perceptions and religious perceptions were not differentiated. 194

As a result of the fact that the wisdom teachers applied reasoning to both worldly and divine experiences, the secondary oppositions line is also replaced by an equivalence and the rational square becomes 195:

194 Von Rad, 60–61.

195 Von Rad credits the wisdom teachers with incorporating religious thinking into their empirical thinking and does not say whether the religious teachers incorporated empirical thinking into their religious thinking as well. The rational square shows that there was nothing that would have prevented
Although the two modes of understanding of reality were different, in Israel they did not become antagonistic but rather complementary:

In anticipation at this point, one should note only this, that the heightened consciousness of inherent, deterministic factors at no point came into open conflict with faith in Yahweh. There is a complete lack of any indication that this awareness whittled away at faith in Yahweh’s overall power, which is what one might have expected.\textsuperscript{196}

Von Rad insists that the two perceptions of reality cannot be separated: “One can, therefore, only warn against trying to see the specific factor in wisdom simply as the manifestation of a rationality which was independent of faith.”\textsuperscript{197} Sayings of both kinds of experiences are placed side by side by the wisdom teachers in order to create an understanding of the world based on both knowledge and faith:

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the religious thinkers from closing the rhetorical situation themselves by incorporating empirical thinking into their religious thinking and therefore affirm the other diagonal of the rational square. Moreover, the rational square shows that the rhetorical situation could have been closed by both religious and wisdom teachers by incorporating both experiences into their epistemology and therefore the square could have had both diagonals affirmed.

\textsuperscript{196}Von Rad, 60.

\textsuperscript{197}Ibid., 61–62.
In this group of sayings, sentences which express an “experience of Yahweh” alternate (certainly unintentionally) with those which express an “experience of the world”. It would be madness to presuppose here some kind of separation, as if in one case the man of objective perception were speaking and in the other the believer in Yahweh. The discovery that, in old proverbial wisdom, sentences expressing secular experience and sentences expressing religious experience are inextricably (and in variable proportions) mixed, certainly argues against the idea of any kind of tension within the perceptive apparatus. Israel knew nothing of the aporia which we read into these proverbs. It was perhaps her greatness that she did not keep faith and knowledge apart. The experiences of the world were for her always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world. It has been rightly said that in all knowledge faith is also at work. Thus here, in proverbial wisdom, there is faith in the stability of the elementary relationships between man and man, faith in the similarity of men and of their reactions, faith in the reliability of the orders which support human life and thus, implicitly or explicitly, faith in God who put these orders into operation. If one understands those sentences which are expressed in wholly secular terms against their total intellectual background, then they, too, are undoubtedly dependent both on knowledge and on faith in God. Indeed, it was precisely because this knowledge of Yahweh was so strong, so unassailable, that Israel was able to speak of the orders of this world in quite secular terms.198

Rhetorical equivalence does not mean identity or indistinguishability. When the entities on the primary or on the secondary opposition lines are equivalent, that means that they are in agreement or compatible from a specific point of view, but not that they are identical from every point of view. When the experiences of God and the experiences of the world are equal as sources of knowledge, it does not presuppose that they are identical from every other point of view or become indistinguishable. Rhetorical equivalence does not mean ontological

198Ibid., 62–63.
identity. It is interesting that, although von Rad is not aware of the rational square, he makes clear that the epistemological equivalence between God and the world—which the rhetorical equivalence presupposes—does not imply ontological identity as well:

But behind our assertion that experiences of Yahweh were, for Israel, experiences of the world, and vice versa, there lurks the question: Were there actually two areas of experience which Israel in the last resort did differentiate, or was there only one? That we can now no longer separate a realm of religious experience from a realm of secular experience is clear. On the other hand, Yahweh and the world were certainly not identical. Yahweh encountered man in the world. But why did there still exist parallel series of statements about “experiences of Yahweh” and “experiences of the world” as we saw above in Prov. 16.7–12 (an example typical of the book of Proverbs as a whole)? We can only answer as follows. Obviously Israel, in her “enlightened” understanding of the world, has stumbled upon a dialectic of experience which could no longer be simply resolved and released. Indeed, if Yahweh and the world had been identical, then everything could have been expressed in simple terms. But Yahweh encountered man in the world always and only in the individual act of experience, and this certainly did not presuppose any identity of God and world. Again, the expressions “experience of Yahweh” and “experience of the world” perhaps did not entirely coincide, otherwise the statements in the sentences could simply have been interchanged. But that was certainly never attempted.199

Because rhetorical equivalence from a specific point of view did not imply ontological identity, God and the world remained in opposition in other ways and therefore they remained in tension. None of them claimed absolute dominance and therefore remained in “dialectic.” As a result of this dialectic in which none of the sources of knowledge claimed supremacy, an ever growing and broader understanding of reality resulted. Because the empirical reasoning did not suppress

199Ibid., 63–64.
dogmatic thinking, eventually the sages developed dialectical thinking, in which the two modes of reasoning were kept in tension:

The teachers vacillated between two possibilities of expression: one adhered quite objectively to the causality of events, while the other was credal and spoke of Yahweh’s direct dealings with men. These two types of expressions ran parallel to one another, so to speak. This appeared astonishing to us; for all that, the two types were never fused in one and the same sentence. One formulated an event in “secular” terms; the other credally. There was never any confrontation of the two causalities in one event.\textsuperscript{200}

As a result of the dialectic of both realities, the sages were able to develop a dialectic of the whole experience:

Given the world in which they found themselves, the teachers considered it appropriate to speak at great length of valid rules and orders, even feeling obliged to include human activity as a factor. On the other hand, they regarded themselves equally justified in drawing attention from time to time to the hand of God intervening directly in human life. Only in this way were they able to do justice to the dialectic of all experience.\textsuperscript{201}

Because “experience . . . teaches that you can never be certain,”\textsuperscript{202} and as a result of the dialectical reasoning, the pupils of the sages themselves raised to an ever higher level of knowledge which superceded what they had known before by leaving behind previous meaning in order to strive for a better one:

They [the sages] were aiming at something much more important: by means of their teachings, derived from experience, they set the pupil in the midst of the constant oscillation between grasp of meaning and

\textsuperscript{200}Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{201}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202}Ibid., 106.
loss of meaning, and in this way they induced him to make his own contribution in this exciting arena of knowledge of life. In this way they probably achieved more than if they had trained their pupils to find a better solution for theological problems. Reduced to its bare essentials, these regulations of theirs for a fruitful life seem determined by a remarkable dialectic.203

Although empirical reasoning managed to discover the order in the world by understanding the laws of causality, this order was not understood to be absolute:

In view of all this, one must therefore be cautious in one’s use of the term “order” which we, too, have felt unable to dispense with in our discussion. Can one really say that the teachers were searching for a world order? Our findings, especially the discussion of the Yahweh-proverbs, suggested, rather, that one can in no sense speak of a world order as really existing between God and man.204

Even later wisdom did not aim at achieving absolute knowledge: “Later wisdom, too, speaks of the limits imposed on human knowledge.”205 No matter how much it grew, the empirical knowledge remained open to God and to mystery:

This whole psalm, indeed, is a paradigm of that intermingling of faith and knowledge. The desire for knowledge is so pressing that, at the limits which are imposed upon it, it becomes itself a witness to God’s inscrutability. The fear of God not only enabled a man to acquire knowledge, but also had a predominantly critical function in that it kept awake in the person acquiring the knowledge the awareness that his intellect was directed towards a world in which mystery predominated.206

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203Ibid.
204Ibid., 106–7.
205Ibid., 107.
206Ibid., 108–9.
Moreover, the concept of revelation—which was central for the religious teachers—has its parallel in the wisdom teachers as well. Just as the religious teachers based their accounts on a God who spoke to them through revelation, so also wisdom teachers—whose accounts were based on examining the world through reasoning—were also based on a self-revelation by which God talked through creation. It was the same God who had talked to the religious teachers directly through inspiration who also talked to the wisdom teachers indirectly through creation:

All this raises the question which a biblical theology must ask. We encounter the idea that the world is not dumb, that it has a message, in the hymn. The world proclaims itself before God as a created thing; the heavens “tell”, the firmament “proclaims” (Ps. 19.2). “All his works praise God” (Ps. 145.10). Within the context of the description of a theophany, it could be said, “The heavens proclaim his (God’s) righteousness” (Ps. 97.6). This speaking by part of creation appears here as an accompaniment to the divine self-revelation. But it is improbable that the heavens were empowered as witnesses only in the context of this occurrence and that they were previously dumb.207

As a result, creation becomes a source of knowledge: “Creation not only exists, it also discharges truth.”208 Therefore, the wisdom teachers could speak in the name of Yahweh through self-revelation just as the religious teachers—the prophets and the priests—had done in their cultic texts:

In the text with which we have been dealing here, however—and to begin with this can only be asserted categorically—it is not Yahweh who is speaking. This is puzzling, for in these texts we find the form of divine self-revelation. Obviously the situation here is considerably different from what it is in the prophets, who never addressed their readers in the first person. Only occasionally does the prophetic “I”

207Ibid., 162.

208Ibid., 165.
appear, more or less on the fringe of those messages which have the style of a divine address. A new phenomenon in our texts is that a bearer of revelation intervenes in the dialogue between Yahweh and Israel, someone who has not hitherto been heard in this role. His speech proceeds in a highly elevated first-person style; but he is much more than the greatest of the prophets, he is, indeed, the mystery inherent in the creation of the world. In the opinion of the teachers, Yahweh had at his service a quite different means, besides priests and prophets, whereby he could reach men, namely the voice of primeval order, a voice which came from creation, and this means of revelation was of particular interest to the wise men.209

The two sources of knowledge — God and the world — although used harmoniously by the sages to create a comprehensive understanding of the world, each one had a different function. The empirical knowledge — derived through reasoning from world experiences — enabled humans to discover the laws of causality and achieve a better understanding of the world as determined by immutable physical laws, to anticipate outcomes, and to relate better to a world which became more and more predictable. The experiences of God, however — which the sages appropriated through faith — were also important for understanding human responsibility and therefore regulate human behavior. In other words, religious thinking was important because it had ethical implications. By developing an understanding of reality in which the world was determined through physical laws and in which humans were ethically accountable to a deity to which humans related through faith, humans became more comfortable in the world which they found friendlier and more secure.

**The Books of Job and Ecclesiastes**

As von Rad had made clear earlier, he considered the book of Job and Ecclesiastes to be of late origin compared to Proverbs 10–29. According to the wisdom paradigm developed by him, these books

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209 Ibid., 163.
should provide evidence about a growing optimism of the sages as a result of a better understanding of the predictability of the world through reasoning and a growing confidence and trust in God. Von Rad summarizes the teachings of these books under the dialectic of “trust and attack.” As a result of discovering that the world was an ordered system, the sages developed trust:

Their didactic sentences demanded commitment and, accordingly, they had, implicitly or explicitly, the character of acknowledgments of orders which were experienced as beneficent because they bestowed life. The basic attitude towards a reality experienced in this way was thus, in the last resort, one of complete trust. In this trust the teachers knew that they were absolutely secure. It is quite impossible to discern in their teachings any feeling of insecurity such as might be experienced in the face of a great risk, or even an uneasiness such as might be experienced when abandoned to some dark unknown.\textsuperscript{210}

This trust in God was not religiously motivated, but rather rooted in the discovered order of the world through reason, an order which Yahweh guaranteed:

In answer to our question about the optimism, the trust on which their teachings are based, the wise men, if we have understood them more or less correctly, would probably have pointed, not in general terms to the advantages of trusting in God, but to something apparently quite different, namely the reality and the evidence of the order which controls the whole of life, much as this appeared in the act-consequence relationship. This order was, indeed, simply there and could, in the last resort, speak for itself. The fact that it quietly but reliably worked towards a balance in the ceaselessly changing state of human relationships ensured that it was experienced over and over again as a beneficent force. In it, however, Yahweh himself was at work in so far as he defended goodness and resisted evil. It was he who was present as an ordering and upholding will in so far as he

\textsuperscript{210}Ibid., 190.
The Books of Job and Ecclesiastes

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gave a beneficent stability to life and kept it open to receive his blessings.211

This knowledge of the laws of the world, however, did not lead to a trust in the world and its operations, but rather to a trust in Yahweh who controlled the world:

In order correctly to grasp the extent of this trust, we must once again recall how Israel understood this experiential reality to which she was incessantly exposed. She knew, as we have seen, only a homogeneous environment which was determined by divine ordinances and decrees. Events in this environment did not follow a rigid system of laws; they were, rather, turned towards man, encouraging and suppressing in a highly active manner; they were, that is, always a part of direct, divine activity towards man. If this experiential reality could only be approached, from the point of view of acquiring knowledge of it, from the direction of knowledge of God, then knowledge of the world could, in turn, also consolidate knowledge of God. The statement that the fear of ‘God is the beginning of wisdom could even be turned round, to the effect that knowledge and experience lead to the fear of God.212

Eventually, trust in God involved also trust in the reliability of the order of the world:

We shall have to accept that a comprehensive and critically examined knowledge was accumulated by the wise men, knowledge which set up many warning signs in the direction of the limits imposed upon it, but which, in accordance with its ultimate intention, nevertheless suggested complete trust in the reliability of the order and, at the same time, trust in God who put that order into operation and who was op-

211Ibid., 191–92.

212Ibid., 193–94.
ervative in it. It is in this way that the question, which we asked above, about the meaning of “trust in God” is to be answered.\textsuperscript{213}

Although confident in the acquired knowledge, the wisdom teachers were also aware of much of the unknown which remained hidden:

At this point, exegetes have taken the easy road and have attributed to the teachers the crudest rationalism, whose short-circuited arguments could not be concealed from even the most unpretentious mind. The situation was precisely the same in Israel, too. Wherever man sets out to know his world, he remains in the last resort in conflict with the objects of his knowledge. His calculations are never ended; he must always express what is known in new terms. Indeed, that which evades calculation, the absolute puzzle, is never one and the same thing; every time, rather, it appears differently. The search for knowledge, which manifests itself in every age, has its specific area of confidence and sees itself forced to capitulate before specific limits.\textsuperscript{214}

One area of the unknown in which the teachers had to extend their inquiry was about sin and suffering:

But beyond this, the question “Why?” had also long since led to insights into specific contexts, especially those of sin and suffering, of guilt and punishment, insights with which we see Israel occupied in the very earliest period. The awareness of the act-consequence relationships was one of the most basic perceptions.\textsuperscript{215}

The wisdom teachers did not need to reject the older religious traditions about guilt and suffering: “They, too, lived within the Yahwistic tradition and shared fully, in their own way, in the freedom and the

\textsuperscript{213}Ibid., 194–95.

\textsuperscript{214}Ibid., 195.

\textsuperscript{215}Ibid., 195–96.
burdens which Yahwism gave to men."\textsuperscript{216} They saw their task, however, to provide answers to the questions that suffering raised:

Their situation was a peculiar one only in so far as they held a teaching office. They stood in relationship to the sufferings of men and to all the adversities of men more as observers, and considered that they were called to mobilize every possible means of reaching understanding.\textsuperscript{217}

Consistent with their method of rationalizing experiences and developing rules and patterns out of seemingly unrelated events, sages developed rules of universal validity which covered suffering as well:

To this end, the counting up of many experiences with individual sufferers and a careful sifting of what had been perceived were necessary until, with reference to the varied nature of the sufferings which afflicted men, specific rules, specific truths of universal validity could be determined. It was their duty to draw up, on the basis of the great number of experiences, definite theories about suffering, its origin and its function with regard to men, and to form them into easily-remembered rules.\textsuperscript{218}

The confidence which the sages had in God and in the success of their pursuit for understanding did not just make them excited about new discoveries, but sustained them when contrary evidence—such as evil—undermined their confidence:

They were neither superficially rationalistic nor doctrinaire, alienated from life and ready with an answer for every question. They stood, as we have said, in that forward line of human experiential knowledge, where it was a question of finding a meaning for life, but where one also risked the loss of meaning. As long as it was merely a question

\textsuperscript{216}Ibid., 197.

\textsuperscript{217}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{218}Ibid.
here of discovering laws which existed, so to speak, within society and which were discernible within the context of community life, this struggle was indeed exciting; but even setbacks, even the discovery of contradictions, did not seriously affect faith in God.219

As a result, suffering and evil could not seriously challenge the faith and the trust of the sages: “Of course, faith is not shaken or even broken by every attack.”220

After presenting his theory that through reasoning the sages developed such a trust in God that experiences of evil could not seriously undermine their faith, one would expect von Rad to show how later books—such as Job and Ecclesiastes—prove his claims. Von Rad has to admit, however, that the book of Job does not quite fit into this pattern:

While otherwise the teachers stand on a broad, traditional basis of understanding, this is by no means the case in this question. In each of these texts an individual, standing outside any teaching tradition and very much on his own, wins through to a specific solution or seeks to help others where they are attacked. This is, of course, very characteristic of the nature of Yahwism, a religion which, precisely in the later period, revealed itself less and less as a firm complex of connected ideas. Yahweh’s will, his purposes for men, were not sufficiently self-evident that a correct understanding of them could easily be differentiated from a false one. In the book of Job—in the prose narrative as well as in the dialogues—we are completely incapable of naming any teaching traditions with which these tremendous thoughts could be connected.221

In spite of its peculiarity and lack of connection with other traditions which must include wisdom, Von Rad admits that Job is still a wisdom product because it is a “didactic narrative” and because of its

219Ibid., 199.

220Ibid.

221Ibid., 207.
artistic features which set it apart from “folk” productions: “This prose narrative, from the point of view of its type, is certainly to be understood as a didactic narrative. It is not a simply-formed ‘folk narrative’ but highly cultivated literary prose.”

Not only is Job wisdom text, but it also complies with von Rad’s pattern because Job—when confronted by the most disturbing experiences—displays a complete trust in God and does not even perceive suffering as an “attack” upon his faith:

This man on the ash-heap, disfigured by illness, “suffers as the glory and pride of God”. Thus the narrative portrays Job as a fitting witness to God. In a moment of the greatest importance, he has clearly taken up a position with regard to something that was of concern to God. To utter anything “unseemly” about God would be something to be detested. It was a duty, in a critical situation, to say the “right” thing about God. Thus, behind this narrative there doubtless stand subtle thoughts about suffering; but one does not have the impression that it already stands within the sphere of that specific attack from which the teachers, as we have seen, had to fight through to a state of faith in Yahweh. There is no trace here of an inner struggle or of theological tension. How ingenuously it expects its readers to accept that a notoriously innocent man—God himself testifies to his innocence—has had to suffer so severely.

Of course, von Rad is aware that the book of Job is larger than the “didactic narrative” of Job 1:1–2:10. As far as Job 2:11–42:17 is concerned, this is what he has to say: “Into this Job-narrative the huge literary block of the dialogues and the great divine speech has been inserted (probably centuries later).” If it is true, however, that the sages developed an ever growing trust in God as they were able to find rational explanations to baffling experiences and that the Job of the

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222 Ibid., 208.

223 Ibid.

224 Ibid., 209.
narrative proves the high level of trust that later sages achieved, von Rad does not explain why even later sages—whom we would expect to reach an even higher level of trust than the Job of the narrative has attained—ended up questioning in the dialogues the very trust which an earlier sage like Job had reached in the “didactic narrative.”

When turning to Ecclesiastes, von Rad recognizes its late origin proved by its complexity with a unitary design and its artistic features which point to its wisdom origin:

There is, to be precise, an inner unity which can find expression otherwise than through a linear development of thought or through a logical progression in the thought process, namely through the unity of style and topic and theme, a unity which can make a work of literature into a whole and which can in fact give it the rank of a self-contained work of art.225

According to von Rad, Qoheleth stands in the wisdom tradition because he uses empirical thinking, but goes beyond it because he tries to achieve a comprehensive understanding of reality:

In the questions that he asks, Koheleth stands firmly in the wisdom tradition. He is concerned to “investigate” events and happenings, and he asks himself what then is “good” for man. One difference from the old wisdom is interesting: he is less concerned with determining and discussing individual experiences than with life as a whole and with passing a definitive judgment on it. In this respect, then, Koheleth has become, from a theological point of view, much more ambitious. Koheleth, for his part, understands his admittedly very negative judgment of the whole as the end-result of many individual experiences.226

Von Rad summarizes Qoheleth’s key ideas thus:

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225Ibid., 227.

226Ibid.
If we first let him speak for himself, there emerge three basic insights round which his thoughts continually circle. 1. A thorough, rational examination of life is unable to find any satisfactory meaning; everything is “vanity”. 2. God determines every event. 3. Man is unable to discern these decrees, the “works of God” in the world.227

In spite of its pessimistic outlook, Qoheleth argues for a overall order in the world which is subjected to determinism:

In spite of all these depressing observations, Koheleth is far from holding that events in the world are simply a haphazard jumble. He is aware of something which mysteriously rules and orders every event; he usually refers to this phenomenon by the neutral word “time” and thereby touches on the fact that every activity and every event is subject to a certain determinism.228

This determinism and order can be seen in the sense that events are set and organized in time:

We recall the great text which we have already discussed in another context and which states that a time and an hour have been set for everything, for every intention under heaven (3.1–8, 17). Koheleth returns to this idea again and again. For everything there is a time and a way (8.6).229

Events are determined by God to the point that they are unalterable:

Here, too, the emphasis is on that which is completely unalterable, on that to which man has to submit. Thus we find ourselves face to face with the strangely paradoxical fact that to Koheleth the world and


228Ibid., 228–29.

229Ibid., 229.
events appear to be completely opaque and that, on the other hand, he is aware that they are completely within the scope of God’s activity. The point at which this divine activity becomes obvious to him as an actual power and reality is precisely the realization that there is a time set for every occurrence. To what extent Koheleth is aware that the world is controlled and encompassed by the free activity of God is made completely clear by the sentences which we can only now adduce in what follows.230

Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that the events in the world are determined in time, that order escapes human understanding: “The trouble is that man cannot ‘find out what God has done’. By this, Koheleth means that man is unable to adjust to this, that he is unable to take into account what has been decreed in any given situation by God.”231

One would expect Qoheleth to prove von Rad’s claim that later sages showed greater confidence and optimism as a result of a growing understanding of the world through reasoning and greater trust in God as God spoke to them through creation, but von Rad has to admit that the reverse has occurred. Qoheleth not only cannot make any sense of the events in the world, but the world itself has become “silent”:

But in this matter—that God exists and rules in the world—he shares completely the point of view of the older teachers. What is new and also alarming is his opinion of the relationship of man to what we have called the continuing divine “activity”, namely that to his way of thinking it is completely beyond man’s perception and comprehension and that man, therefore, is also incapable of adapting himself to it. The consequences of this conviction—measured against the confidence of old wisdom—are catastrophic. The strong urge to master life—a main characteristic of old wisdom—has been broken. Man has lost contact with events in the outside world. Although continually permeated by God, the world has become silent for him. What happens in the world

230Ibid.

231Ibid., 230.
is always in motion, sometimes turned favourably towards man, at others rejecting him, and is now sealed up deep in his inner thoughts.232

Von Rad has to admit that Ecclesiastes is unlike the book of Proverbs: “The difference from the teachings characteristic of the book of Proverbs is so great that at least an attempt at an explanation must be made.”233 He goes on: “That Koheleth turns against the prevailing teachings is beyond doubt, but the reason for his opposition must be made still clearer.”234 Von Rad finds the explanation to this puzzle in his favorite passage Ecclesiastes 3:1–14:

In order to cope with this difficult question, let us, lastly, take up once again that doctrine which was so important for Koheleth, the doctrine of the times which God has decreed, especially the statement that they are completely unrecognizable to man and that he can derive no profit from them for his life.235

Qoheleth—instead of showing greater confidence in a reason which proved more and more that the world was beneficial and nurtured a ever greater trust in God—ends up being a rebel who falls back on the old concept of salvation as he finds himself in a world which he could not rationally comprehend and from which he needed to be rescued:

Not often in ancient Israel has the question of salvation been posed so inescapably to a single individual as was the case with Koheleth. He has answered it (in the way of which we know) mainly on the basis of the experiences which the world around him afforded. Anyone who has listened carefully to Koheleth’s dialogue with the traditional

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232Ibid., 232.

233Ibid., 233.

234Ibid.

235Ibid., 233–4.
doctrines should not find it quite so easy to give one-sided approval to the lonely rebel.236

That world in which earlier sages could not experience any “feeling of insecurity” or “uneasiness such as might be experienced when abandoned to some dark unknown,” Qoheleth failed to discover:

Koheleth, however, was incapable of entering into a dialogue with the world which surrounded him and pressed in on him. It had become for him a silent, unfriendly, outside force which he was able to trust only where it offered him fulfilment of life. The wise men, however, were of the opinion that, through the medium of the world as it addressed man, God himself spoke to man, and that only in this dialogue was man shown his place in life.237

Von Rad and Wisdom Reasoning

Von Rad credits the Israelite sages with the discovery of reasoning by which they were able to see the causal connectedness between experiences in the world and develop an ever growing trust and faith in God to the point that “it is quite impossible to discern in their teachings any feeling of insecurity such as might be experienced in the face of a great risk, or even an uneasiness such as might be experienced when abandoned to some dark unknown.”238 He claims to have arrived at this conclusion by studying the wisdom texts “exegetically,” insisting that we should not impose our modern concepts upon those of the wisdom teachers: “It is demanded of us, however, that we abandon the rigidity of the modern, popular scientific understanding of reality and try to

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236 Ibid., 235.
237 Ibid., 237.
238 Ibid., 190.
enter into that ancient biblical idea of reality."\textsuperscript{239} The question his claim raises is: Does the reasoning von Rad presents in his book accurately represent the kind of reasoning the sages initiated and developed? The obvious answer to the question is: We do not know. So far we only have the reasoning that von Rad claims in his book for ancient sages and the reasoning of Qoheleth which was analyzed earlier in this study. As far as the reasoning used in Proverbs, in Job, or in other “didactic” texts which von Rad occasionally refers to in order to prove his points, no studies have been done to my knowledge.\textsuperscript{240} In order to prove that the reasoning that von Rad presents is the one which the sages used, one would have to show that von Rad’s rational squares are exactly the ones that the sages used consistently in their texts, and that is a daunting task which needs to be undertaken rather than assumed. There are, however, important reasons to seriously question von Rad’s claims before embarking on such a monumental project.

A first objection to von Rad’s claim is immediately apparent from the study of the book of Ecclesiastes. As we have seen, Qoheleth is trying to eliminate all rational squares in order to enforce his teaching that the greatest happiness in life is achieved by living an unassertive life that God had assigned to everyone. To von Rad’s claim that sages through reasoning and faith discovered rules of conduct which enabled them to master the world, Qoheleth would reply: “Show me the greatest rule that the sages advocate for a successful life and I will show you how the opposite is also true so that everything is vanity and chasing of the wind.” No wonder that von Rad dismisses the whole bulk of the book and only retains the passage in chapter 3:1–14 to which he returns again and again in order to support his doctrine about times and the determinism of the world. In order to enforce his claim that events are fixed in time, von Rad consistently renders “time” in

\textsuperscript{239}Ibid., 77.

\textsuperscript{240}I do not deny that there is plethora of interpretations and commentaries of those passages, but confusing the thinking of an interpreter of a text with the thinking or reasoning of the original author of that text I find no longer warranted.
Ecclesiastes by “appointed time.” How alien to Qoheleth’s thought would be a world in which every event is predetermined by God can be seen from one single example. For instance, this is how von Rad would want to read Ecclesiastes 3:2: “There is an ‘appointed’ time to be born, and an ‘appointed’ time to die.” Qoheleth must have known at least this much that birth is the result of human sexual intercourse. Even if Qoheleth would have granted that humans can have intercourse only at the time that God had “appointed,” he would have hardly accepted that the time when an individual dies is necessarily “appointed” by God, otherwise he would not have said: “Do not be too wicked and do not be a fool; why should you die sooner?” (Eccl. 7:17). Regardless of how long one expected to live, Qoheleth did not regard the time of death as something “decreed” by God over which individuals had no control. Whatever order in time God may have assigned to events in the world, Qoheleth insists that humans can mess up that order all the time—sometimes even by trying to be too righteous or too good. Therefore, a world in which events are pre-determined by God and over which humans have no control could not have been further away from Qoheleth’s thought.

As far as Job is concerned, von Rad himself seems to realize that the book can hardly prove his thesis that later sages developed an unshaken trust in God. Therefore, von Rad decides to dismiss the importance of Job and Ecclesiastes for the wisdom tradition altogether using an argument from ignorance and rhetorical questions: “But we know very little about the opportunities for effect open to such works in the ancient Near East. How many copies of Job would have been in circulation?” According to him, the two books could not have had any influence and therefore are irrelevant for the wisdom reasoning:

The book [Job] can surely not have been accepted among the literature used in the schools. From the outset, therefore, one would have to reckon its diffused effect as very slight. And is it at all feasible that two individual works [Job and Ecclesiastes] will have brought about a rethinking of later Israel’s understanding of the world? Could an

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241 Von Rad, 237.
understanding of the world which was not simply the elaboration of a few thinkers be changed in such a way? There is also the fact that these two works did not even represent what was obviously true as opposed to what was obviously false.²⁴²

To answer von Rad’s rhetorical question, although we may not know how many copies of Job and Ecclesiastes were in circulation during the post-exilic period, we can be sure that there must have been many more copies of Job and Ecclesiastes during the post-exilic period than copies of Proverbs 10–29 during Solomon’s time. If the influence of Job and Ecclesiastes was “slight,” then the influence of Proverbs could not have been greater.

In order to make the material fit his paradigm von Rad ends up being very selective with his sources. From the canonical books which traditionally are labeled as wisdom books in the Old Testament/TANAKH, the only texts which von Rad finds useful for his argument are: Proverbs 10–29, Job 1:1–2:10, and Ecclesiastes 3:2–14, 17. Taking into account that eventually he discards Job and Ecclesiastes altogether, in final analysis his theory about the development of the Israelite wisdom reasoning is based on Proverbs 10–29, the text which proves both the emergence of wisdom reasoning and its later development.

The most important objection, however, that von Rad’s reasoning reflects the reasoning of ancient Israelite sages comes not from his handling of biblical texts, but rather from the fact that elements of his reasoning are found in other scholarly works which do not deal with Wisdom Literature. One benefit of the rational square is that it identifies the key elements of the reasoning involved in a work which makes it consistent and therefore persuasive, enabling us to compare the reasoning used by different authors and identify which basic ideas they have in common and where they are different. For instance, von Rad claims that it was the Israelite sages who developed a kind of thinking which combined empirical with religious thought in opposition to the Greek thought which developed into modern scientific thinking without any room for religious thought. Von Rad did not need to study

²⁴²Ibid.
the Hebrew Wisdom Literature to make that discovery; all he needed was to have a minimum familiarity with the works of other biblical scholars in which such a contrast is commonplace. It is true that no other biblical scholar had seen that contrast in Wisdom Literature—and this is the only originality which von Rad can claim—but biblical scholars used to find that opposition almost everywhere else. For instance, Erich Auerbach found a contrast between the Hebrew and the Greek thought when comparing the story about the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:1–19 and a passage from Homer’s Odyssey, and to my knowledge no one has claimed that the story about the sacrifice of Isaac has any “didactic” or wisdom features. But more importantly, the contrast between the Hebrew and the Greek thought which von Rad argues that he discovered as a result of studying Proverbs 10–29 has been seen by other scholars not only in almost any part of the Old Testament/TANAKH, but in the very structure of the Hebrew and Greek languages themselves. For instance, Bomann contrasts the two kinds of thinking using linguistic evidence. It was this pervasive thinking clichés in biblical scholarship that James Barr questioned and tried to correct in his book that made him famous:

In recent years I have come to believe that one of the greatest dangers to such sound and adequate interpretation comes from the prevailing use of procedures which, while claiming to rest upon a knowledge of the Israelite and the Greek ways of thinking, constantly mishandle and distort the linguistic evidence of the Hebrew and Greek languages as they are used in the Bible.

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Therefore, whether ancient Israelite sages used the rational squares which von Rad presents is doubtful. What is less doubtful is that they do reflect von Rad’s thinking and therefore it is time to look at his own argumentation.

_Von Rad’s Argument_

As was pointed out earlier, although the goal of historical-critical scholars is to objectively investigate ancient phenomena, their primary interest is to illuminate later ones, therefore it is necessary to look at the real argument of von Rad’s book. He makes it clear that the reasoning of the Israelite wisdom teachers—whom he placed in Solomon’s time—is similar to the age of reason that the European Enlightenment inaugurated and culminated with Kant’s critical thinking:

We have already mentioned that—certainly instigated by impulses emanating from neighboring cultures—in the early monarchy a kind of enlightenment was arrived at, a new understanding of man and the world, which manifested itself in a comprehensive literary activity which stretched far beyond the realm of the didactic. At least in certain circles one can observe the emergence of a new critical sense which—even if only among an intellectual élite—led to a thorough revision of accepted ideas. If we understand the word enlightenment, along the lines of a well-known definition by Kant, as the coming-of-age of man, then one would have to think of the adulthood thus achieved in Israel, too, as, in the first instance, a critical encounter with the whole world of experience and its inherent laws.  

Therefore, von Rad sees many parallels between the thinking of the sages of the Solomonic time with the thinkers of the European Enlightenment. It is this link that he tries to prove and is the real argument of his book. The similarities between the Israelite sages and the European thinkers of the Enlightenment are indeed striking.

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246Von Rad, 97–98.
Although the European Enlightenment had several dominant features, the most important one was its reliance on reason in its attempt to understand the world and therefore came to be known as “the age of reason.” Significantly, von Rad’s first major section of his book after the introduction is entitled “The liberation of reason.” In other words, the Solomonic enlightenment had anticipated the European Enlightenment by almost three millennia. Just as reason during the modern Enlightenment became the major source of our knowledge of the world, its operations, and its causal relationships, so also the Israelite wisdom teachers discovered empirical thinking which they used for the same purpose. Von Rad argues that, although the European Enlightenment eventually raised the empirical thinking to the rank of absolute truth as a result of the Greek philosophy which developed a scientific thinking devoid of religious thought, the Israelite enlightenment managed to avoid that trap. This was possible for two reasons. First, the wisdom teachers did not reject the religious thought. Instead, it became the basis for ethical thought so that the rules of conduct which the sages developed were religiously motivated. Von Rad agrees that the moral norms which the sages advocated were not necessarily formulated as absolute rules such as Kant’s “Categorical Imperative.”

It is obvious that it is Kant’s ethical thought which he developed as a result of his analysis of reason that inspired von Rad to insist that the Israelite sages were so concerned with moral conduct justified rationally:

This enables us to answer the question about the ethos of didactic wisdom with comparative ease. The good man is the one who knows about the constructive quality of good and the destructive quality of evil and who submits to this pattern which can be discerned in the world.

Unlike the European Enlightenment, the ethical behavior of the sages was rooted in faith as well as in reason: “According to the teach-

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247 Ibid., 75.

248 Ibid., 78.
ings of the wise men, correct behavior is a matter of correct understanding, but it is also a question of faith.”249 The Israelite sages managed to avoid the trap of positivism by realizing that empirical thinking can never lead to a complete knowledge of reality. Although the ancient sages invented empirical thinking, unlike the European Enlightenment, they remained aware of its limitations. Apparently they knew what Kant argued later that empirical thinking cannot claim absolute knowledge because no matter how much we apply our reasoning to the experiences of the world, eventually our knowledge of the world will never be final. Von Rad devoted a whole chapter to the “limits of wisdom.”250 Unlike the European Enlightenment in which empirical thinking led to the demise of religious though, the empirical thinking of the sages did not become a “slogan” that degenerated into a radical secular thought: “But what took place in Israel at that period is very little suited to the modern slogan for the reason that there was linked with what was in fact a radical secularization, an equally radical concept of God’s guidance and of his presence in all parts of creation.”251 Although European Enlightenment did develop the belief that empirical reasoning will eventually achieve absolute knowledge, Kant managed to bring into this Enlightenment maturity by submitting this pure reasoning to his criticism and showing that one can never know “the things in themselves.” The fortunate balance between the theological thought and the empirical thought which Kant managed to bring to the European Enlightenment had been already achieved by the Israelite teachers and it would not have been lost if the Greek philosophy had not misguided the European intellectual development. Moreover, the art which is such a distinctive feature of the reasoning of the wisdom teachers has parallels in Kant’s esthetic. Fourthly, one of the basic concepts which Kant identified for reasoning was time. It is true that von Rad does not claim that the sages understood time to be

249Ibid., 95.

250Ibid., 97–110.

251Ibid., 98.
involved in every thought, but they had come very close by developing a “doctrine of time” according to which all events were organized in time in a world that was temporally pre-determined. Finally, the Israelite sages did not just join the religious and empirical thinking, but also kept them in tension to develop “dialectical” thinking. By that they anticipated Hegel who claimed that any development goes through three states: that of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. As a result of their dialectical thinking, the sages could always reach higher levels of knowledge by constantly questioning the knowledge which they had already achieved. This continuous advance in knowledge and understanding eventually culminated with the European Enlightenment which became the foundation of the Western culture. Von Rad leaves no doubt as to what is the point of his whole argumentation: “By this dialectic of the two points of view, the wise men have influenced the religious thinking of the entire Western World.”

Therefore, von Rad’s argument in his whole book can be succinctly summarized: Some anonymous sages during Solomon’s time initiated a kind of reasoning which laid the foundations for the philosophies of Kant and Hegel on which the whole Western culture is based, both of whom just happened to be German like von Rad himself. Although von Rad often insists that he is doing exegesis and those who take his claims at their face value classify his work as exegetical, in reality his book belongs to biblical and cultural apologetics.

Von Rad’s book is peculiar in two ways: on the one hand, it is a very ambitious project built on a text basically limited to Proverbs 10–29. On the other hand, the book makes very persuasive reading. That persuasiveness does not come from the mass of evidence from the biblical texts, but from the clear rational squares which von Rad had established and follows consistently. Moreover, modern religious readers would find his thinking extremely familiar and therefore difficult to resist. In other words, if all the biblical references were eliminated and he presented that reasoning as being his own, his book would have

\[252\text{Ibid., 106.}\]
remained as persuasive. Further still, if he had admitted that his book is a scholarly fiction, its reading would have remained as persuasive and fascinating for religious students and scholars who try to give meaning to their faith in a secular world.

Being persuasive, however, does not mean to be right. One important benefit of the rational square is that it outlines the structural concepts and ideas of a text on which the whole argumentation depends and allows for a critical examination of them. It is time to look at some of the weaknesses of von Rad’s argument.

One of the key oppositions which von Rad established right from the beginning was that between the Israelite wisdom thinking and the Greek thinking. They are opposite from two points of view. First, the wisdom thinking used artistic expressions while the Greek thinking developed the prosaic language of science. Secondly, the Israelite empirical thinking did not eliminate the religious thought as did the Greek thought by laying the foundation for modern science based only on empirical thought. Von Rad does not offer any references for these ideas on which his whole argument stands or falls. Clearly he considers these ideas common knowledge which no reader would question.

Had von Rad, however, questioned his basic assumptions he would have discovered that there is nothing which he claims for Israelite sages which he could not have claimed for Aristotle to a greater extent. For instance, von Rad credits the wisdom teachers with discovering the empirical thinking, but it is common knowledge that it was Aristotle who turned to the objective world to investigate in order to understand its operations and for which he has been hailed as the founder of modern science. Similarly, Von Rad claims that it was the Israelite sages who employed art as a legitimate imitation or representation of reality, but the concept of art as an imitation of reality was again introduced by the same Greek philosophers. It was Plato who defined art as an imitation of reality, but he did not place important epistemological value on it since in his philosophy the sensible world of which art was an imitation did not have the degree of reality which the world of ideas had. But again, it was Aristotle who considered art as a valid imitation of reality just as von Rad claims for the wisdom teachers. The high value which Aristotle placed on art can be seen from the fact that
he dedicated one of his works to artistic expressions, which he entitled *The Poetics*. Similarly, von Rad credits the sages with having discovered reason as an epistemological tool to investigate the world of experience, but again it was Aristotle who set out to investigate in his *Organon* the operations of reasoning in order to attain valid knowledge. While the sages may have adopted proverbs as the proper form of expressing their conclusions about the world, it was Aristotle who identified for the first time arguments—made up of premises and a conclusion—as the proper forms for sound reasoning which have remained standard until now. While no one has seen Hebrew proverbs as forms of reasoning, Aristotle’s syllogistic has laid the foundations for formal logic which defines valid reasoning even today. Moreover, von Rad credits the sages with developing an empirical thinking which also included religious thinking. Although it is true that Aristotle is credited with the discovery of empirical thought and is hailed as the father of modern science, that oversimplification overlooks Aristotle’s theological thought to the extent that even prominent biblical scholars like von Rad have a one-sided and quite distorted view of Aristotle. During most of the Christian era Aristotle was studied mostly for his metaphysics rather than other areas of his thought. For instance, Aristotle developed the famous arguments for the existence of God which few religious thinkers would reject. Moreover, during the Middle Ages Aristotle was the main source of inspiration for the greatest Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thinkers and theologians. To mention only one, Thomas Aquinas, who fondly referred to Aristotle as “the angelic doctor.” Even the credit which von Rad gives to the wisdom teachers for their interest in ethics has a parallel in Aristotle, who among others, laid the foundations of ethics with another groundbreaking work still studied today. If the Greek philosophers discarded religious thought

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as von Rad argues, then for a long time the greatest Christian theologians were not aware of that.

Although von Rad may be justified in his unhappiness that scientific thinking has become the standard for true knowledge and has placed religious thinking in disrepute, that separation between religious and secular thought cannot be blamed on Greek philosophers because it is of much later origin. Actually the separation between empirical knowledge and religious knowledge was not conceptualized until late modern times. For instance, that opposition cannot be found even in the founder of modern philosophy: Rene Descartes. Not only did he value empirical knowledge and was one of the greatest mathematicians, but he laid the foundations of modern philosophy by introducing philosophical doubt. He was the first philosopher who attempted to purge all human knowledge through philosophical doubt of anything that is questionable and retain only “clear and distinct ideas” which were unquestionably true. In spite of the fact, however, that Descartes was the greatest doubter, he never doubted the existence of God, of his soul, and even of an evil spirit like the devil. This is what the founder of modern philosophy says about the God of the Israelite sages:

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false, and therefore can be from nothing, as I pointed out just now regarding the ideas of heat and cold and the like. On the contrary, because it is the most clear and distinct of all ideas and because it contains more objective reality than any other idea, no idea is truer in its own right, and there is no idea in which less suspicion of falsity is to be found.255

The philosopher who did place the religious and the empirical thought in irreconcilable opposition was the British philosopher David Hume whose statement has become proverbial:

255Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body are Demonstrated (3rd ed.; Classics of Western Philosophy; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1990), 425.
When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion [emphasis his].

When Kant undertook a criticism of empirical knowledge he did not do it as a response to the Greek philosophy but rather to the British positivism which Hume’s skepticism had started. As Kant himself confesses, it was Hume who awoke him from his dogmatic slumbers. As a result, he came to the conclusion that through reasoning one can only experience phenomena or appearances of things, but the things that underlie them or the things-in-themselves escape empirical investigation.

Von Rad’s argument that he found the reasoning of the wisdom teachers so similar to the key ideas of two greatest German philosophers through careful exegesis of Proverbs 10–29 and not as a result of reading Kant and Hegel is hardly believable. The truth is probably the other way around: He would have never “discovered” those parallels and written the book if he had not read those philosophers first and had been persuaded by them.

Although I find von Rad’s book irrelevant for understanding Israelite wisdom and I consider his views on Western intellectual development simplistic and questionable, I am not suggesting that his ideas are worthless, that it was wrong for him to write an apologetic book while claiming to do exegesis, and that he is a hypocrite. As a biblical scholar not only had he the right, but he had the duty to defend his scholarship in an academic setting in which biblical scholarship had become the pariah of the university. Pretending to do exegesis in order to defend the validity of biblical scholarship was not due to his hypocrisy, but to

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the academic constraints placed upon him by the academia itself. As a biblical scholar he had no right to have his own reasoning and thinking; and if he had them, then there was no room in his scholarship for them. The only legitimacy that the academia had given to his scholarship was to do “exegesis,” that is, to reproduce what others had thought without mixing in his own ideas. The originality which biblical scholars at their best can have is to have none. Even his nationalism is part of the parochialism of modern academia which legislates academic excellence in terms of national elitism and citizenship. After all, the German cultural, intellectual, and academic superiority is no different than the American, French, British, Scandinavian, or Jewish.

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257 Postmodern scholarship has implicitly recognized the dishonesty involved in denying scholars any role in handling texts under the concept of “exegesis” and therefore most liberal schools are replacing the notion of “biblical exegesis” by “biblical interpretation” in their curriculum.
Methodological Considerations

Unlike Gerhard von Rad who consistently followed the historical-critical paradigm in his work, Choon-Leong Seow represents a younger generation of biblical scholarship in which the concept of method has eroded so that scholars have become more or less eclectic in their interpretative approaches. As the introduction to his commentary on Ecclesiastes\textsuperscript{258} points out, his approach is primarily philological, but occasionally he also draws from sociological, anthropological, rhetorical, and narrative criticism approaches. His philological interest is seen in his extensive dealing with the language, authorship, integrity, structure, and message of the book. His interest in sociological issues is seen in a section entitled “Socioeconomic context.”\textsuperscript{259} Besides the socioeconomic and the anthropological aspects which he mentions in the introduction, he also draws from other approaches without mentioning them. I will first look briefly at the reasoning and argumentation involved in his main interpretive approaches.

\textsuperscript{258}C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible 18C; Doubleday: The Anchor Bible, 1997).

\textsuperscript{259}Ibid., 21.
Sociological approaches to the Bible have become fashionable in current biblical scholarship as a result of a growing interest in social issues and the demise of the historical-critical method. One of the major criticisms leveled against the historical-critical method is that it sees history as the product of charismatic individuals and overlooks the input of the masses. By contrast, sociological approaches see historical processes driven by social groups which share common interests rather than by outstanding personalities. Even when texts portray heroes, sociological approaches see them as advocates of larger segments of the society with whom they identify and whose interests they articulate.

From the point of view of how societies develop and operate, two models have been developed. According to the model advanced by Weber, societies develop as a result of conflicts between different groups and is therefore sometimes referred to as the conflict model. An example of conflict of interests is seen in the emergence of monarchy in Israel when “economic and political power began to accumulate in the hands of wealthy landowners, who increasingly oppressed the remainder of the population.”

The Israelite classical prophecy is seen as a reaction to these developments: “On religious and ethical grounds the prophets opposed this abuse of power and lamented the disappearance of the equality inherent in Israel’s traditional system.”

An alternative model was developed by Durkheim who claimed that societies develop by cooperation as a result of shared interests and values: “He insisted that the various sociological components of a culture are organically interrelated and have a direct impact on individuals within the culture.” Because this model stresses the cooperation between different segments of the society, it is sometimes referred to as the functional or the organic model.

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261 Ibid.

262 Ibid., 16.
Both models assume that different segments of a society are moved to action by specific reasons and therefore both models assume the rationality of social groups, rationality which is often referred to as “social consciousness.” As a result of their common interests, members of a group can articulate their views and coordinate their actions. Although such views may be advocated by a charismatic hero or leader, they represent the views of a larger group of people. Therefore, the reasoning, argumentation, and rhetoric of an individual is in reality the reasoning, argumentation, and rhetoric of a social group. Confrontations between heroes represent confrontations and conflicts between different social groups and cooperation between heroes represent cooperation between the social groups for whom the heroes stand. The rhetoric, reasoning, and argumentation of individuals are in reality the rhetoric, reasoning, and argumentation of social classes. As a result, it is possible to represent the rhetoric and the rational squares involved in the social interactions within both sociological models.

The conflict model presupposes an opposition between two social groups which have conflicting interests. The primary opposition line identifies the groups in conflict and the secondary opposition line indicates their opposing interests or values. A good illustration of the conflict model in the Old Testament/TANAKH is that of the central or the court prophets as opposed to the peripheral prophets. The two kinds of prophets simply represented different kinds of interests. The central prophets represented the interests of the monarchy and the upper class and the peripheral prophets represented the interests of the poor and the marginalized. The rational square for their interaction is quite easy to establish:
By contrast, the functional model presupposes common interests and values between different social groups and therefore would have equivalence rather than opposition on the primary opposition line. An example would be the confrontation between the prophet Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 12:1–13. In this well-known passage, the prophet Nathan exposes David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. The encounter presupposes the following rational square:

![Rational Square Diagram]

In spite of the supposed opposition between David and Nathan as far as justice and injustice is concerned, in reality David is in agreement with Nathan. For instance, after listening to Nathan’s story, David condemns the injustice: “Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man” (2 Sam. 12:5). But more importantly, after Nathan identifies David as being the culprit, David himself acknowledged his own sin (2 Sam. 12:13). Therefore, as a result of David’s denying his side of the rational square, the rhetorical situation closes and the rational square becomes:

![Rational Square Diagram]

David may have done something wrong, but at no point are David and Nathan in opposition as far as upholding justice is concerned. There is no wonder that David and Nathan are a model of how kings and true prophets can cooperate for the benefit of everyone.
Methodological Considerations

Apparently Seow shows interest in the sociological approach because he provides a section in his introduction entitled “Socioeconomic context.” He characterizes Qoheleth’s society as having a monetary and commercial economy which provides “economic opportunities and risks.” What is new in this economy is the unusual role which the money came to play: “One of the most important features of the economy during the postexilic period is the prominent role of money.” This prominent role of money is determined by the occurrence of the word in contemporary texts:

Yet, the introduction of coinage by the Persians democratized the usage of money and radically transformed the economy of the Levant. Not surprisingly, therefore, the epigraphic materials from this era show a great deal of concern with money. Contemporaneous inscriptions are replete with references to money, most frequently mentioned in connection with taxes, wages, rent, loans, fines, inheritance, and the prices of goods and services.

Another word which provides clues to the economic situation is “gain” or “advantage”:

He repeatedly uses the Hebrew word yitrôn “advantage, surplus,” which is related to Aramaic ytrn, a term found on an accounting document from the late fifth century (TAD III, 3.11.6). Thus, Qohelet is talking about the net gain of labor, as it were. And any merchant would understand his point.

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263 Seow, 21.
264 Ibid., 23.
265 Ibid., 21.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid., 22.
A final feature of the economy is the Persian grant system which is again suggested or “echoed” by the occurrence of certain words: “Several terms in this passage echo the language of the royal grant: nātan “give,” šālat “to have right,” nāšā “to take up,” mattat ēlōhîm “gift/grant of God” . . . Qohelet presents life’s possibilities in terms of such grants.”268

Using Egyptian texts which deal with Persian grants, Seow shows how such grants were both given and declined, explaining the arbitrariness of the royal grant system: “There was a considerable amount of arbitrariness in the Persian system of royal grants.”269 These Egyptian references provide clues to the life as Qoheleth saw it:

Life is like that to Qoheleth: people receive whatever portion the divine sovereign chooses to give them. One does not have a choice in the matter. So Qohelet speaks of those who are favored by God (tōb lēpānāw; tōb lîpînē hā ēlōhîm) and those who are not so fortunate—the hôte “the offender” . . . The former are lucky enough to be favored with the good life; the latter are plain unlucky. The former are given wisdom, knowledge, and joy, but the latter are given the task of collecting and gathering for others to enjoy.270

Although Seow may be right that money did play a major role in Qoheleth’s society and that royal grants and other factors did involve a lot of arbitrariness and uncertainty, he does not clarify Qoheleth’s attitude toward such developments and how other categories of people responded. Seow insists that the society did face difficulties because he has a subsection entitled “Social problems.”271 Unfortunately Seow does not explain how Qoheleth responded to these problems, whether others shared his position, and how he argues for his position. He does not

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268 Ibid., 24.
269 Ibid., 25.
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid., 33.
show which social group(s) Qoheleth identifies with and which social group(s) Qoheleth argues against. Seow does say that Qoheleth argues against the unusual interest that his contemporaries had in money: “Hence, he uses the vocabulary of his day to subvert the preoccupations of his contemporaries.”272 That would imply that Qoheleth himself was not interested in money while everyone else was: “The people whom Qoheleth addressed were preoccupied with the acquisition of money; they believed in its power, thinking that ‘money answers everything.’”273 The list of categories of people whom Qoheleth addressed is quite impressive:

The recipients of Qoheleth’s instructions are commoners—smallholders, homesteaders, and people of the middle classes. They are susceptible to the various occupational hazards that the ordinary workers face: they are perfumers whose precious products could be contaminated by a single dead fly (10:1); they are hunters who dig pits to trap animals, farmers who remove stones from old fences in order to build new ones, wood-cutters and quarry workers (10:8–10). They are ordinary citizens facing the vagaries of a rapidly changing social world. They are people of the middle classes who are trying to scale the socioeconomic pyramid without sliding down into poverty. They are people caught between the impulse to protect and conserve whatever they have (see 5:13–17 [Eng vv 12–16]; 11:1–2) and the desire to get rich (4:4–6). They are people caught between the opportunities and risks of a volatile economy.274

Even if the socioeconomic context which Seow presents is accurate and Qoheleth does address all those categories of people, Seow does not say what Qoheleth is trying to tell them. Does he condemn the situation? Does he blame it on anyone? Does he encourage any group to change it? Does he argue for its acceptance because presumably it may

272Ibid., 22.

273Ibid.

274Ibid., 28.
have been instituted by God? Seow admits that we know virtually nothing about Qoheleth’s social status:

Accordingly, the author was a teacher, concerned with articulating his message felicitously and truthfully (12:10). He was among the ḥākāmîm “sages” whose words were like goads and implanted pricks (12:11).

Beyond that fact, we know practically nothing about the author personally. . . . We do not know if he was an aristocrat (so Gordis, Crüsemann, Whybray) or if he was a middle-class individual (Harrison). Wisdom is not the prerogative of a particular economic or social status. . . . There are sages even among the lower classes, people who are despised (9:13–16).275

Moreover, Qoheleth does not advocate any social program either: “Unlike the prophets, Qoheleth’s ethic does not explicitly call for social transformation and the elimination of injustice.”276 In other words, the socioeconomic context is irrelevant for what Qoheleth is saying. And indeed, Seow does not make any use of sociological categories later on in his commentary except once when he explains Ecclesiastes 10:5–15:

Such were the socioeconomic conditions of Qohelet’s world (see Introduction, pp. 23–36). It was a society in turmoil. The government could not be trusted to rule efficiently, for it was losing control. There was apparently a significant turnover in the bureaucracy, as incompetent “idiots” were promoted to high offices, while members of the ruling elite were brought down. The economy was clearly unstable. Perhaps as a result of excessive speculation and foreclosures in that period, those who were once rich and powerful suddenly found themselves in want, even as their subordinates came unexpectedly into positions of wealth and power. It is true that there are no guarantees that things will turn out as expected (9:11). The world seems to have

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275Ibid., 37.

276Ibid., 58.
gone mad; the normal order of things seems to have been turned upside down.\textsuperscript{277}

That may be so, but one would still wonder whether Qoheleth was troubled that the world has been turned upside down by the extensive use of money or simply smiled because he was smart enough to realize that that is the way the world has always been and always will be. It seems that the inclusion of a section on social conditions in the introduction reflects the popularity of the sociological approaches to the Bible with other scholars and not necessarily Seow’s own interests.

Seow’s use of anthropology is even less clear. He includes a section in the introduction in which he argues that Ecclesiastes is a “theological anthropology.”\textsuperscript{278} According to him, Ecclesiastes is not a “theology” because it speaks little about God: “To some extent the reticence in labeling Ecclesiastes as ‘theology’ is understandable. Certainly the author did not set out to write a treatise about God.”\textsuperscript{279} The reason Ecclesiastes is not mere anthropology is because humans are seen not just in their relationships with the world or cosmos but with God as well: “Indeed, Qohelet seems to be reflecting on the human condition in a world where God is undeniably in control, although the cosmos and God are both still a mystery.”\textsuperscript{280} Consequently, Ecclesiastes is a “theological anthropology” rather than mere “anthropology,” although one may wonder why it is not a “cosmological anthropology,” or better still, a “cosmological-theological anthropology.” Unless Seow intended the association of the two terms to be a play on words, he may want to indicate that he is not using established anthropological approaches, such as “physical anthropology” or “cultural anthropology” to interpret the book, approaches which are popular with some biblical scholars. And

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 325.

\textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{279} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid.
indeed, Seow does not seem to make use of anthropology when he makes comments upon the text.

On rare occasions Seow uses notions developed by rhetorical criticism. For instance, several times he identifies phrases which function as an “inclusio”: “There are sufficient grounds, therefore, to think that 1:13–2:3 forms a distinctive section marked by the phrase ‘under the heavens’ at the beginning (1:13) and the end (2:3): that is, the expression ‘under the heavens’ forms an inclusio for the first section.”281 Moreover, he sometimes identifies chiastic structures in the book.282

Finally, at least on one occasion Seow borrows the concept of “omniscient narrator” from narrative criticism to explain Ecclesiastes 9:15: “The ancient reader, as does the modern, understands Qohelet to be the ‘omniscient narrator’ who knows all the facts of the story and lays them out as he deems appropriate.”283

Seow’s primary interpretative approach is philological. According to this approach, the basic unit of meaning is the word, sometimes a phrase. Commentary writers seem to understand the interpretive task to be that of explaining the smallest units of text which are assembled like building blocks to clarify the larger context. Typically, they break up the text into key words and phrases which need clarification. Because the words are the primary carriers of meaning, once the individual words or phrases are explained, the meaning of the larger passage becomes immediately available by reassembling the text with the words whose meaning has been decided. The theory of meaning which underlines commentaries seems to be: to understand a book is to understand the individual words. Unlike regular commentaries which provide just a translation and detailed discussions of grammatical and linguistic niceties about words and their meaning, Seow provides also a section entitled “comment” in which he offers a prose presentation

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281Ibid., 142–43.
282Ibid., 143.
283Ibid., 310.
of the message of the passage which he had translated first and then discussed the words and phrases in a section entitled “notes.”

Because in philological approaches words are the primary carriers of meaning, what they say is relatively independent of context. Although the meaning of a larger passage is the cumulative meaning of the individual words, the meaning of some words have a greater significance for a larger passage. They are the key words of the passage and they decide the meaning, the message, or the “theme” of the whole passage—indeed, sometimes of the whole book. Since the meaning of words is additive or cumulative, the obvious way to decide which are the key words which decide the meaning of a passage is by counting their frequency. Consequently, the key words are the ones which occur most frequently in that passage. Typically, works which employ philological approaches abound in statistics about the number of occurrences of certain words in a passage so that the most important tool for the interpreter is the concordance.

Consistent with the philological approach, Seow’s commentary is fraught with information like this: “The noun ʻadām occurs forty-nine times in the book, almost always in reference to humanity in general or to any person, regardless of gender.”\(^\text{284}\) Even words which occur only once are significant therefore hapax legomena are always pointed out: “The noun yitrôn occurs only in Ecclesiastes (10 times), along with the related words yôtēr (7 times) and môtār (once).”\(^\text{285}\) It is based on word statistics that Seow decides that Ecclesiastes cannot be a theology:

To some extent the reticence in labeling Ecclesiastes as “theology” is understandable. Certainly the author did not set out to write a treatise about God. The deity is not mentioned in the thematic statements that frame the book (1:2; 12:8), nor does God appear in the preface (1:2–11). Moreover the text has more references to humanity than to God: ʻadām “humanity, human, person” is mentioned 48 times, as opposed to 40 times for ʻĕlōhîm “God.” Immediately after the

\(^{284}\text{Ibid., 104.}\)

\(^{285}\text{Ibid., 103.}\)
superscription and the thematic statement of the book, it is the ādām who is mentioned, not God. So the book is arguably better characterized as an “anthropology,” a discourse about humanity.\textsuperscript{286}

It is again based on the frequency of certain words that Seow concludes that Ecclesiastes is a wisdom book:

Wisdom and knowledge are common motifs in the book. Thus, the noun hokmā “wisdom” is found 28 times, hākām “wise, wise one” appears 21 times, while the verb hākam “to be wise, act wisely” is used thrice. The verb yāda “to know” appears 36 times, while the noun daʾat “knowledge” is attested 7 times. In short, the vocabulary of Qohelet is typical of an Israelite wisdom text.\textsuperscript{287}

Because words as primary carriers of meaning are self-contained and relatively independent of the context, their meaning is quite stable. Therefore, after the meaning is explained when it occurs for the first time, later occurrences are no longer explained but a reference is made to the first occurrence. Entries like the following are quite common: “pleasant. See Notes at 11:7.”\textsuperscript{288} Even words which are different but which share a common root can add up their meaning and are counted together: ”The focus of this section is made obvious by the recurrence of the root ‘ml “toil” — 10 times in 6 verses!”\textsuperscript{289} As a result of the fact that words function as self-contained carriers of meaning, the connection between two passages as far as meaning is concerned is also found

\textsuperscript{286}Ibid., 54. The fact that the word ādām does not occur either in the superscription or in the ending just like the word “God” but only later on does not seem to count against it as long as its occurrences outnumber those of God.

\textsuperscript{287}Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{288}Ibid., 206.

\textsuperscript{289}Ibid., 143. It is surprising that there are still biblical scholars who consider roots as carriers of meaning so long after James Barr showed that such procedures are unjustified. Barr, \textit{Semantics of Biblical Language}. 
at the level of words. Therefore, two passages which have the same meaning must contain the same key words which act like “hinges” that link the two passages together:

This next subunit (2:18–23) is linked to the preceding one in the same manner that the preceding subunit is linked to the one before it. “I hated” in 2:18 picks up on “I hated” in 2:17, even as “I turned” in 2:12 repeats “I turned” in 2:11. It is as if the pivot section (2:12–17) is linked to the other sections by means of these “hinges.”

Also because words are the primary carriers of meaning in philological approaches, they convey the same meaning not only in different texts, but also in different languages. Relating the same words which occur in different texts is known as intertextuality. As a result, a word or a phrase which occurs in one text can be used to explain the meaning of the same word which occurs in a different text.

Seow uses intertextuality extensively. Drawing from his extensive knowledge of ancient Near Eastern languages and texts, he regularly explains words and phrases in Ecclesiastes by referring to their meaning in other texts and languages, such as: Akkadian, Sumerian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, Greek (the Septuagint and the New Testament), and so on. For instance, the occurrence of the word “to see” in Ecclesiastes connects it with the Gilgamesh Epic, an ancient Mesopotamian story written in Akkadian on clay tablets from the third millennium B.C. which Qoheleth probably would not have been able to read even if it had been available to him at the middle of the fifth century B.C. when Seow places the writing of Ecclesiastes:

The verb ḫē (“to see, observe” (meaning also “to experience”) appears 47 times in the book, with Qohelet himself or his heart being the subject no fewer than 26 times. The author uses the verb here, as he often does elsewhere, for purposeful and reflective observation. In the light of the many similarities between Ecclesiastes and the Gilgamesh Epic, it is worth noting that the prologue of the latter (in the late

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290Ibid., 155.
version) asserts that Gilgamesh had seen it all, experienced everything, and received wisdom. Indeed, the epic was known in Mesopotamia by its incipit, ša nagba išmu₇u "he who saw it all.\textsuperscript{291}

Unlike the historical-critical scholars—who are also interested in ancient texts and languages but see literary works and meaning as constantly changing—scholars who use philological approaches tend to see words and meaning as fixed and static in time.

Intertextuality is possible even with later texts. For instance, Seow occasionally uses the New Testament to illustrate the meaning of phrases from Ecclesiastes:

The heart is called upon, as if it were an independent entity, to experience pleasure and enjoy good (literally "see good"). One is reminded of the Parable of the Rich Fool in the NT: “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry’” (Luke 12:19).\textsuperscript{292}

The common words and phrases connect the meaning of the two literary works together: “Indeed, the similarities in language, style, and content between this parable (Luke 12:13–21) and Ecclesiastes are such that one must wonder if the teachings of Qohelet somehow lie in the background of the parable.”\textsuperscript{293} Even tomb inscriptions from later periods are resources for the interpretation of Ecclesiastes: “Likewise, in a late Hellenistic tomb found in Jerusalem, one finds an inscription urging those who are alive to enjoy themselves: ‘You who are living, Enjoy!’”\textsuperscript{294}

Although Ecclesiastes is contemporaneous with many Greek works, intertextuality is not possible with any of them except the New Testa-

\textsuperscript{291}Ibid., 121.

\textsuperscript{292}Ibid., 149.

\textsuperscript{293}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{294}Ibid., 306.
ment and the Septuagint. For instance, the occurrence of the verb “to see” in Ecclesiastes and in the *Gilgamesh Epic* proves a connection and a dependence of Ecclesiastes on *Gilgamesh*, but if the verb “to see” occurs in a Greek work, it could not have any connection with Ecclesiastes. In order to prove connections between Greek works and Ecclesiastes one would have to find in Ecclesiastes Greek loan words or “grecisms”:

> Moreover, scholars who want to date the book to the Hellenistic period commonly speak of Hellenistic influences in Qoheleth’s thought, and some speak of an overwhelming Hellenistic feel about the book. The author is frequently assumed to be conversant with contemporary Greek thought, if he is not directly dependent on it. If all that were true, it is all the more odd that there should be no trace of linguistic grecisms in the book.\(^{295}\)

In other words, if Qoheleth had read some Greek writers and had decided to adopt some of their ideas, he should have introduced some Greek words in his text. As a result of this special standard of intertextuality, Greek influences upon Ecclesiastes cannot even be considered:

> It is often suggested that the idiom is a result of Hellenistic influence, since in Hellenistic Greek there is a similar usage for the verb *poiein* when it is used with words of time (see Whitley, *Koheleth*, p. 61). Similar idioms are found in Egyptian, however, where the verb *iri* (lit. “to do, make”) may mean “to spend (time)” . . . In any case, there is nothing distinctly Hellenistic about the expression. No Hellenistic influence can be established on the basis of this idiom.\(^{296}\)

In other words, the dependence of Ecclesiastes on the *Gilgamesh Epic* can be accepted even when mere similar words occur because making Ecclesiastes a by-product of the Akkadian thought is quite natural, but when there are obvious similarities not only of words but even of ideas

\(^{295}\text{Ibid., 16.}\)

\(^{296}\text{Ibid., 233.}\)
and thought between Ecclesiastes and Greek works, any connection cannot be accepted because that would make Ecclesiastes a by-product of the Greek thought which for some reason is unacceptable:

It is important to highlight this parallel because of a tendency among commentators to associate Qohelet’s thought here with notions of moderation in Greek philosophy, notably Theognis’ *mēden agan* "nothing very much" and Aristotle’s *mesotēs* "median." Certainly Qohelet’s admonition to avoid extremes cannot be termed a mere Hellenistic by-product or a reproduction of Greek thought (so Plumptre).

Although words stand on their own as far as meaning is concerned, they can be part of a larger structure. When structures go beyond the level of words, such structures can be discerned by noticing the occurrences of similar words or phrases:

Two sections are discernible within the unit, the first concerns risks in the political realm (10:16–20); the second is about risks in the economic realm (11:1–6). Across these two sections of the passage, however, are some suggestive links. The fate of the “land” is of concern in the first section (twice in 10:16–17), as it is in the second (twice in 11:2–3). The whole passage begins with the slothfulness of rulers “in the morning” (10:16), and it ends with a summons to diligence “in the morning” (11:6). Likewise, we find a reference to the “slackness of hands” in 10:18, but in 11:6 there is a call not to “let your hand go.” Thus we have two sections that are intended to be read together.

As Seow will show later, eventually the whole message of Ecclesiastes is captured by Qoheleth’s key word *hebel* “vanity.”

Because meaning in philological approaches rests on words, it is the primary task of a commentator to explain in a commentary the meaning of words and it is the task of the reader to assemble in a coherent account all the wealth of information provided in the commentary.

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297Ibid., 254.

298Ibid., 338.
Once the words are explained, assembling the message is no longer viewed as a challenge. In spite of that, Seow goes further and provides—besides a translation and exegetical notes—a section entitled “comment” in which he presents the message of the whole passage commented upon.

**Seow’s Rational Squares**

Before indicating his own approach to uncover the organization of the book, Seow describes the thematic approaches which other scholars had used in the past:

One is inclined to organize the materials around a central theme (e.g., “all is vanity”) and show how that theme is the point of the author. Alternatively, commentators sometimes choose key concepts to discuss: e.g., vanity, toil, joy, wisdom, death, and so forth. This approach avoids the imposition of a theological system on the book. Yet it is not entirely satisfactory, for the author’s message becomes overly fragmented.  

In order to avoid superimposing a theological system upon the book, Seow prefers to allow the text to unveil its own plan itself: “It seems preferable, therefore, first to consider the content of Ecclesiastes more or less as it is presented. That is to say, we give priority to the book’s own order of discussion before we step back to reevaluate its message systematically.” Surprisingly, after rejecting thematic approaches such as “all is vanity” or key concepts such as “vanity,” in the very first line in which Seow discusses the “content” of the book, he chooses the very word “vanity” as the thematic statement, choice based on statistical grounds and on the fact that it frames the whole book:

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299Ibid., 47.

300Ibid.
The obvious starting point in the consideration of Qoheleth’s content is the notion of *hebel*, traditionally translated as “vanity.” The importance of this term is indicated by the fact that it is part of the thematic statements that frame the main body of the book: “absolute vanity . . . everything is vanity” (1:2; 12:8). The word is the first that one encounters after the superscription (1:1). It appears thirty-eight times in the book.\(^{301}\)

Seow concludes that Ecclesiastes is made up of several sections, each one with a specific theme. The first part is entitled “Reflection” and bears the subtitle “Everything is ephemeral and unreliable.”\(^{302}\) The section has a subsection entitled “Nothing is ultimately reliable” which means exactly the same thing as the title of the main section.\(^{303}\) The rational square which Seow assumes for this section is quite obvious:

![Rational Square](image)

Apparently Seow establishes this square based on the meaning of the word *hebel* “vanity,” which occurs several times in the very first

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\(^{301}\) Ibid.

\(^{302}\) Ibid., 100–192.

\(^{303}\) Ibid., 117. One of the strange things about the titles of various sections is that often they say the same thing with slightly different words. It seems that Seow thinks that just because he changes some words, he is necessarily dealing with a different theme. That would be consistent with his understanding that meaning is dependent upon words and would explain why he seems to think that two titles are different although they have exactly the same meaning: “everything is ephemeral and unreliable” = “nothing is permanent and reliable.”
verse of the section after the superscription. He explains: “As elsewhere in the Bible, Qohelet uses hebel to speak of the ephemerality of life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9), and he speaks of hebel as something of little consequence, even empty.”\textsuperscript{304} Seow claims that Qoheleth in this section tries to prove this thesis. He takes the phrase as a thematic statement and a frame for the whole book:

A thematic statement appears in v 2, which is repeated in virtually the same form at the end of the book (12:8). The appearance of the thematic statement at the beginning (immediately after the superscription and before the opening poem) and at the end (after the concluding poem and before the epilogue) suggests that these two verses are intended as the framework of the book. As it stands, this thematic statement also serves as the introduction to the preface (1:2–11).\textsuperscript{305}

Once Seow adopts this rational square which he assumes to be what Qoheleth himself had in mind when writing the passage, it becomes the interpretative paradigm through which Seow interprets the passage.

Rationality has to do with our universal need as humans to be consistent. It binds together speaker and listener, writer and reader, author and interpreter, and persuader and persuadee. Rationality is the foundation of communication. We assume it both for ourselves and for others when we bother to listen to what others say or when we care to talk to them. Although Seow is not aware of any rational squares, the one he has adopted for Qoheleth becomes an interpretive lens through which he explains what Qoheleth says so that it makes sense and is consistent. Statements in the text which clash with the rational square pose special challenges for the interpreter. After adopting the position that everything is ephemeral, Seow is careful to avoid any idea of permanence when dealing with Ecclesiastes 1:2–11. As a result of the rational square, he faces an obvious difficulty in explaining the phrase

\textsuperscript{304}Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{305}Ibid., 111.
“a generation goes and a generation comes” in Ecclesiastes 1:4. He admits that the phrase normally conveys the ideas of continuity and permanence:

The repetition of dôr “generation” and its use together with ‘ōlām ordinarily suggest continuity and permanence. The expressions dôr wādôr “generation and generation” and dôr lēdôr “generation to generation” are frequently associated with ‘ōlām “eternity” or lē ‘ōlām “forever.”

Seow argues, however, that this phrase does not mean continuity in this particular context:

But Qohelet is, in fact, not emphasizing the continuity of generations. As he does often in the book, he uses the root hlk “to go” to speak of death . . . This is particularly true when hlk “to go” is coordinated with bw ‘to come,” which signifies birth . . . The author gives the impression of much activity in speaking of “going” and “coming.” The language suggests that he means to speak of a continuation of the generation, but the point is that the going and coming of the generations amount to nothing.

If Qoheleth does not emphasize the continuity of the generations, then he must argue for their disappearance, but there is nothing in the passage or in the whole book which would support that idea. When commenting on the next phrase “the earth remains as ever,” in order to avoid admitting that it means permanence, Seow attributes that meaning to other commentators implying that he disagrees with them: “Most interpreters take this phrase to refer to the permanence of the earth, which is contrasted with the passing of the generations. But Fox points out that ‘the permanence of the physical earth has no relevance to the individual’. Eventually he admits that the phrase “may” mean

306 Ibid., 106.

307 Ibid.

308 Ibid.
permanence: “The point, rather, is the unchanging nature of the world even as generations come and go . . . Hebrew ימד may mean ‘to remain (unchanged).’”

Apparently Seow would like to suggest that, although the earth may stand, the inhabitants do not. The idea of an earth remaining depopulated is difficult not only because the Hebrew word יָם regularly refers to both land and inhabitants, but an unpopulated world seems to be alien to Qoheleth’s thought. Later on Seow admits that the coming and going of generations do mean that life goes on: “To be sure, all the movements are routine and the point is made that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ (1:9). People come and go, but the world remains as always (לֶֽאֹלָם). Nevertheless, life goes on, and the movements of nature indicate that life goes on.”

Another passage which affirms permanence and unchangeability which clashes with Seow’s rational square is Ecclesiastes 1:15 which states that what is crooked cannot be made straight. Realizing that this statement conflicts with his reasoning, Seow brings in an Egyptian proverb which says exactly the opposite and provides no explanation why Qoheleth would reverse it: “The Egyptian proverb stresses the effectiveness of instructions: even the crooked can be straightened out and the straight can be made to bend. The proverb in Ecclesiastes, however, seems to say the opposite: what is crooked cannot be straightened” [emphasis his].

The obvious meaning of permanence which Qoheleth’s phrase implies is again attributed by Seow to other scholars as if he disagreed with them:

Some modern commentators imagine that the saying originated with the wisdom teachers about their unteachable students (Zimmerli, Michel). The saying was uttered by the teachers of wisdom, according to this view, in disdain of those who would not or could not learn: the

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309Ibid.

310Ibid., 369.

311Ibid., 122.
students were permanently “crooked” and “lacking”—that is, they were recalcitrant and stupid.\textsuperscript{312}

After an extensive discussion of the Egyptian proverb which would support his own rational square and a discussion of the occurrence of the word “crooked” in Job where it is concluded that the word cannot refer to God, Seow has to concede: “In fact, what has been made crooked—presumably by God—cannot be made straight by anyone.”\textsuperscript{313} The difficulty is obvious: In a world in which everything is supposed to be ephemeral, the crooked things are there to stay.

Within the same section entitled “Everything is ephemeral and unreliable” Seow moves to the next subsection that deals with Ecclesiastes 3:1–22 and which is entitled “Everything is in the hand of God.”\textsuperscript{314} This subsection presupposes the following rational square:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}[scale=0.8]

\node (A) at (0,0) {everything};
\node (B) at (2,0) {something};
\node (C) at (0,-1) {in the hand of God};
\node (D) at (2,-1) {in the hand of humans};

\draw[->,thick,red] (A) to (B);
\draw[<-,thick,red] (B) to (A);
\draw[->,thick,green] (C) to (D);
\draw[<-,thick,green] (D) to (C);
\draw[<-,thick,red,dashed] (A) to (D);
\draw[->,thick,red,dashed] (B) to (C);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Taking into account that the subsection entitled “Everything is in the hand of God” is part of the larger section entitled “Everything is ephemeral and unreliable,” one would expect the reasoning in the subsection to be consistent with the overall reasoning in the larger section. In other words, one would expect the reasoning in Ecclesiastes 3:1–22—that everything in the hand of God—to be consistent with the overall reasoning of Ecclesiastes 1:2–4:16—that everything is ephemeral and unreliable—of which Ecclesiastes 3:1–22 is just a part. Consequently, one would expect the rational square for the section “Everything is

\textsuperscript{312}Ibid., 146.

\textsuperscript{313}Ibid., 147.

\textsuperscript{314}Ibid., 158.
ephemeral and unreliable” to cover Ecclesiastes 3:1–22 as well. Instead, Seow introduces a different one. Because the two rational squares have the same primary opposition line, they can be combined in the following compact form:

![Diagram](image)

The idea of permanence—which was so prominent in the first chapter and which Seow resisted so much—should have alerted him that there was something wrong with the rational square which he had so hastily adopted based on the meaning of the word “vanity.” But what is more surprising is that he adopts another square which implies permanence and contradicts the previous one and he does not seem to realize the contradiction.

What is more puzzling is not that Seow adopts two conflicting rational squares, but the way they relate to the text. One would expect the rational square which affirms God’s control over the world and human lack of control over activities in the world to be established for Ecclesiastes 1:2–8. After all, the activities mentioned there—coming and going of generations, rising and setting of the sun, the ceaseless flowing of rivers, the uncontrolled movement of the wind—are clearly activities over which only God can have control and can be properly said to be “in the hand of God.” If there is any section in the whole book which would support the idea that “everything is in God’s hand” there is no better passage than the first part of the first chapter. Similarly, if there is a passage which describes activities over which humans do have control but do not seem to accomplish anything that is permanent, there is no better passage than Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. After all, all the activities mentioned there involve humans and some of them are difficult to be assigned to God—such as hating, fighting, and so on. If
there is a passage which would support the idea and the rational square that “everything is ephemeral and unreliable,” probably there is no better one than Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Although Seow cannot deny that the activities mentioned in this passage involve humans, he argues that in reality it is God who acts:

Next to the thematic statement of the book in 1:2 and 12:8, the poem on times and seasons in 3:1–8 is probably the most well-known and oft-quoted of the words of Qohelet. The poem is popularly understood to mean that there are appropriate moments for the people to act and, at the proper moment, even on ordinarily objectionable situation can be “beautiful in its own way.” There is an appropriate time for everything. Placed properly in its present context, however, it becomes clear that the poem is not about human determination of events or even human discernment of times and seasons. It is about God’s activity and the appropriate human response to it. Although the text refers to the human “worker” (v 9), the principal actor/doer turns out to be God (vv 10–15). Indeed, the activity of God over­whelms and overshadows the activities of humanity in this chapter.315

The “proper context” Seow is referring to is probably Ecclesiastes 3:10–15. It seems that the new rational square which he adopts for the third chapter of Ecclesiastes is built on these verses and then it becomes the interpretive straight-jacket for the whole chapter. The actions in verses 1–8 end up being decided by God, and although eventually the activities are carried out by humans, they become mere “occasions” to which humans still have to respond at the proper time in spite of the fact that those actions do not have any specific order which humans can discern:

He [Qoheleth] does not say that there is any kind of order in these occasions. One can, indeed, find no order in the presentation of the list, despite the temptations to find a deliberate structure. This is the way

315 Ibid., 169.
the world is. People are tempted to discern an order so that they can predict the changes and not have to face surprises. Yet the occasions simply present themselves, and people simply have to respond appropriately in each situation. The mortal is not in control.316

If Qoheleth claims that the order of events is decided by God and humans have the responsibility to respond although they have no way to discern the supposed predetermined order, then there would be no difference between responding to “occasions” offered by God and “occasions” offered by blind chance. If that is what Qoheleth had in mind, then it would be hard to understand how Qoheleth could claim that God “has made everything suitable for its time” (Eccl. 3:11).

The next subsection of the same larger section entitled “Everything is ephemeral and unreliable” is entitled “Relative good is not good enough,”317 and reflects the theme and the reasoning of the fourth chapter. The rationale for the title seems to be based on this passage:

The ṭôb-saying thus points to the irony of human existence: what is really “better” in this regard is not within the grasp of mortals. People, by their very existence, have already been assigned their lot. Life is just so to Qohelet. For him, to be is to see these tragic things that happen in life. What is better, then, is not to somehow be shielded from life’s painful realities but, as he intimates in 3:22, to enjoy oneself whenever it is possible to do so.318

The way in which Seow seems to understand the ṭôb-sayings is: “The good things may not be good enough, but the better ones are not within the grasp of humans and therefore they should enjoy just the good things.” This would reflect the following rational square:

[^316]: Ibid., 171–72.
[^317]: Ibid., 176.
[^318]: Ibid., 187.
To justify this rational square Seow points to Ecclesiastes 4:3 where not to have been born is presented as something “better” and which actually is not an option for humans:

This point is underscored in the ßòb-saying in v 3, which concludes that what is better than being alive or dead is not to have come into existence at all and not to have seen the injustices of the world. But that is, in fact, not an option for the humans, inasmuch as they already are living and have already been witnessing life’s inevitable tragedies. The alternative of not having lived is not an option that people can choose. 319

Seow may be right that the “better” thing of not having been born is not an option for humans and therefore they should just enjoy the “good” thing of being alive, but he does not seem to realize that his rational square is really problematic when applied to other sayings in the fourth chapter. For instance, verse nine says: “Two are better than one because their work is more profitable” (Eccl. 4:9). There is nothing in this saying which would suggest that to cooperate with someone else is not a human option and therefore one would have to learn to enjoy the “good” thing of being alone and never strive for the “better” one of living with a partner. A similar problem is encountered in verse six: “It is better to have just a handful but with quiet rather than two handfuls but with trouble and chasing after wind” (Eccl. 4:6). There is nothing in the passage that would suggest that living with little is not a human option and therefore one would have to be satisfied with the “good” thing of living in abundance and not strive for the “better” thing of

319Ibid.
living in poverty. Seow himself admits that the “better” of verse six—that is, to have little—is recommended by Qoheleth:

The resolution of the dilemma is stated in the תֹּה-saying in v 6. The word translated “repose” does not mean inactivity; it does not refer to the “folding of hands” in v 5. Rather, it refers to a situation of peace and security, one that is free of worry and trouble.\(^{320}\)

Seow’s pattern of establishing rational squares begins to emerge. He chooses a key idea or theme based on a small passage, a verse, or even a single word such as “vanity,” which becomes an interpretive straight-jacket for the whole section. No wonder that often the rational squares conflict with the text and sometimes with one another.

The next section is entitled “Coping with uncertainty”\(^ {321}\) and it is not clear what Seow means by it and therefore what rational square he has in mind. The title is not a complete statement and he does not seem to explain it anywhere else. It could mean that humans are able to deal with uncertainty but it could also mean that humans must learn to live with uncertainty. The comments are similar to the ones in the previous sections encouraging enjoyment of life, and that would suggest that the second meaning is intended.

The commentary on the second part of Ecclesiastes begins again with a “Reflection” and has the subtitle “Everything is elusive.”\(^ {322}\) As Seow explains in his comment section, Qoheleth argues here that things cannot be known: “Now begins the second half of the book, which is marked by a repeated emphasis on what people cannot know, cannot tell, and cannot discover.”\(^ {323}\) Apparently Seow assumes a rational square in which one side states that “everything is elusive”:

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\(^{320}\)Ibid., 188.

\(^{321}\)Ibid., 193.

\(^{322}\)Ibid., 229.

\(^{323}\)Ibid., 240–41.
This claim is surprising taking into account that the very first verse which begins this section not only affirms human knowledge but insists that humans cannot deny having it: “The course of human beings is known, and they cannot dispute with the one who is stronger than they” (Eccl. 6:10, Seow’s translation). Seow argues, however, that Ecclesiastes 6:10–12 provides the introduction which affirms human ignorance and the toh-sayings in the seventh chapter provide the proof:

Read in the context of Qohelet’s denial that anyone can really know what is good (toh) or has advantage, these toh-sayings must be seen as proving precisely the point made in the introduction (6:10–12). Then, in 7:9–12 one finds further advice, together with a reflection on wisdom’s advantage. Again, these verses must be interpreted in the light of the insistence at the beginning of the passage (6:10–12) that no one can predict what is going to happen and that human beings have no advantage.

Apparently Seow himself admits that the section begins by stating that something is known: “The passage begins by affirming that everything that comes to pass has already been designated and that the course of humanity is already known (v 10).” After making the concession that the course of humanity is well known, Seow still argues that it is a mystery: “Destiny lies not within human grasp, but in the

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324Ibid., 229.

325Ibid., 241.

326Ibid.
power of a mysterious Other. As all that happens in the present has already been determined (v 10), so all that will happen in the future is beyond the knowledge of humanity (v 11).327 If Qoheleth really believed that human course is so shrouded in mystery, that would hardly explain his confidence with which he recommends the better things in life.

The section that deals with Ecclesiastes 7:15–29 is entitled “Righteousness and wisdom are elusive.”328 Again, Seow does not explain in what sense righteousness and wisdom are illusive, but the title presupposes the following rational square:

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{wickedness and folly} & \text{righteousness and wisdom} & \text{elusive} \\
\text{are} & \text{are} & \\
\text{attainable/achievable} & & \\
\end{array}
\]

It seems that Seow establishes this square based on Ecclesiastes 7:16–17, which he translates: “Do not be exceedingly righteous and do not show yourself excessively wise, lest you be confounded. Do not be exceedingly wicked and do not be a fool, lest you die before your time.”329

If this is Seow’s rational square, then it involves two problems. First, if Seow sees an opposition between righteousness and wickedness, Qoheleth clearly sees an equivalence because he argues against both. Secondly, it is very unlikely that Qoheleth would have seen the opposition between righteousness/wickedness in terms of elusiveness/attainability. Apparently Qoheleth admits that both extreme righteousness and extreme wickedness are quite attainable. Seow does

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327 Ibid., 242.

328 Ibid., 251.

329 Ibid., 252.
not need to guess, however, what should be the secondary opposition line because Qoheleth makes it very clear: “Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? [emphasis mine]” (Eccl. 7:16–17). Therefore, the equivalence between extreme righteousness and extreme wickedness is based on the fact that both involve death. Consequently, Qoheleth’s rational square must be:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{righteousness and wisdom} & = \text{wickedness and folly} \quad \text{lead to} \\
\text{life/prosperity} & = \text{death/destruction}
\end{align*}
\]

Therefore, the way in which Seow establishes his rational squares is completely arbitrary.

The next section that deals with Ecclesiastes 8:1–17 is entitled “It’s an arbitrary world.” This can be rephrased “Everything is arbitrary,” and presupposes the following square:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{something} & = \text{everything} \\
\text{is} & = \text{is} \\
\text{intended/planned} & = \text{arbitrary}
\end{align*}
\]

Apparently this title is another idea involved in the statement “everything is vanity,” which never occurs as a title anywhere in Seow’s book but summarizes the ideas conveyed by most of the titles.

The last section of the book, which covers chapters 9–12, is entitled “Ethics” and has the subtitle “Coping with risks and death.”\textsuperscript{330} This section seems to be the counterpart of a similar section in the first part.

\textsuperscript{330}Ibid., 296.
which was also entitled “ethics” and had the subtitle “Coping with uncertainty.” Therefore, “coping with risks and deaths” seems to be a paraphrase of “coping with uncertainty” used earlier.331 As was pointed out before, it seems that what Seow has in mind is actually “living with risks and death,” or more explicitly, “living with the risk of death.”

Seow seems to imply that risks and death are the result of a capricious deity, and he supports it with references to Babylonian literature. For instance, he cites a Babylonian wisdom text which argues that it is impossible to determine the attitude of gods and how to please them, which Seow applies to Ecclesiastes:

As in the Babylonian text, the problem in Ecclesiastes is that there seems to be no formula that allows people to determine the consequences of their works. What seems to be good to humans may be regarded as bad in the eyes of the deity, and what seems bad may turn out to be good in divine judgment. Mortals simply do not know what is before them, for everything seems to depend on the whimsical will of the deity. There are no rules that will guarantee one certain desired results. The righteous and wise cannot know for sure that they will be better off. Indeed, as far as human beings can tell, the end is the same for everyone; there is a common fate for all mortals (v 2).332

The subsection on chapters 10:16–11:6 is entitled “Living with risks”333 and is obviously a paraphrase of “coping with risks and death.” This confirms the supposition made earlier that the meaning of “coping” is “living.” This new title suggests the following rational square:

331Ibid., 193.
332Ibid., 303–4.
333Ibid., 328.
Seow does not explain on which verse he bases this rational square, but by now it is apparent that in assigning titles for various sections he chooses different variants of the phrase “everything is vanity” and “coping with vanity”: “everything is ephemeral,” “everything is unreliable,” “nothing is reliable,” “nothing is good enough,” “coping with uncertainty,” “everything is elusive,” “no one knows anything,” “righteousness is elusive,” “wisdom is elusive,” “everything is arbitrary,” “everything is full of risks,” “everything is uncertain,” and so on. In short, “everything is vanity.”

**Seow’s Argumentation**

A Bible commentary is a special kind of writing with very modest rhetorical goals: to help understand the message of another author’s work. Because of its peculiar nature, a commentary raises two questions: (1) to what extent the commentator captures the thinking of the original author?, and (2) to what extent the supposed message is supported with persuasive evidence and arguments? In other words, the first question is: To what extent the reasoning which Seow presents in his commentary reflects Qoheleth’s reasoning? And the second is: To what extent Qoheleth’s supposed message is presented with convincing evidence? Therefore, the argument analysis of a commentary is a quite complex task. The first question can be answered by looking at the reasoning which the commentator claims for the text and to what extent it is in agreement with the text, and the second can be answered by looking at the coherence of the presentation and the kind of evidence the commentators use to support their findings.

In order to answer the question of whether Seow accurately captures Qoheleth’s reasoning it is necessary to see whether the rational
squares assumed by Seow come into conflict with passages from Ecclesiastes or not. The assumption is that an author of a book is rational and therefore the work must have an overall consistency. That does not mean that a work may not have inconsistencies or even contradictions, but a rational author would be aware of them and try to answer them or ignore. Such inconsistencies, however, can only be judged against an overall argumentative goals to which everything that is said needs to relate in a rational way. Even when a work is high-jacked by another author or editor who may significantly divert its rhetorical goals by re-working it, such an author or editor is also assumed to be rational and impose upon the work a different rhetorical structure and consequently modify smaller of larger parts of it in order to properly relate to the new overall argument. In other words, a rational square which establishes the rhetorical situation must be assumed for any original author, later editor(s), and eventually commentator(s). Ideally, the rational square(s) which the commentator(s) uncover should be the same rational square(s) used by the original author or by the latest editor who reworked the text.

Seow agrees that Ecclesiastes is substantially the work of a single author with small later additions. That means that the book must have a rational square which is consistent over the whole work and binds its various parts together. We saw that in the analysis of von Rad’s book.

Although Seow assumes that Ecclesiastes is a unitary work and therefore reflects the reasoning of a single author, at different points he establishes different squares, sometimes conflicting with one another. But what is more important, sometimes the rational squares which he

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334 Alterations—even small ones—of an original work may establish a different rational square by creating an opposition between the original work and the edited one from the point of view of the elements which are modified. For instance, the biblical story about the flood is most likely in opposition rather than in agreement with the Gilgamesh Epic in spite of their substantial linguistic similarities. From the rhetorical point of view, copying means agreement; editing means polemic. If the biblical author liked so much the Mesopotamian story about the flood, why going though the trouble of crating another version when copying is so convenient?
establishes conflict with plain statements of the text. As was pointed out earlier, Seow himself was aware of such difficulties and in spite of his efforts to circumvent them, eventually left them unresolved.

Taking into account the unique character of Ecclesiastes, it would be wrong, however, to conclude that Seow failed to find the right rational squares which Qoheleth himself intended. As was pointed out in the second part of this work, Qoheleth’s purpose was precisely to subvert rational squares which usually guide life’s decisions. Not only Seow, but anyone would fail to find the right rational squares for Ecclesiastes simply because there are not any. Therefore any commentator who establishes some rational square hoping to adequately explain the book, eventually would discover passages in the book which would contradict the square. It is clear that Seow himself is aware of this strange character of this book which subverts whatever seems to be established at some point:

Moreover, Qohelet seems to make the point that any apparent orderliness of the world is only an impression, for upon closer examination one finds evidence to the contrary. So there are certain literary setups throughout the book. He sometimes gives the impression of saying one thing, leads the reader down an expected path, only to show that all is not as one might expect.335

Unfortunately that is true not only about ordinary readers, but about scholars as well. Therefore, anyone who really wants to expose Qoheleth’s reasoning would have to do just that: show how Qoheleth subverts all choices and makes rational choices impossible.

Instead of showing how Qoheleth subverts rational choices, Seow sets out to show that Ecclesiastes has a clear plan and a consistent message. As he makes repeatedly clear, he finds the message of the book in the word “vanity” which acts as a key word which unlocks every part of the book. He thinks that Qoheleth wants to prove that everything is “vanity” and chasing of the wind and he is pursuing that idea everywhere in his book.

335Seow, 42.
In a strange way, the reading of Seow’s commentary seems like chasing a meaning which cannot be found anywhere. If readers do not experience the elusiveness of meaning when reading Ecclesiastes, then they would have a strong feeling of chasing the wind as they try to make sense of an abundance of information without getting anywhere in a book that does not seem to end. If Qoheleth wanted to show that everything is “vanity” and failed, then there is no doubt that the commentary abundantly succeeds. To put it differently: If someone still doubts that everything is vanity after reading Ecclesiastes, probably no one would doubt it any more after reading Seow’s commentary. For what Seow wanted to show, he is quite persuasive.

This brings us to the next question: Is this feeling that everything is vanity the result of the way Qoheleth wrote his book, or is it the result of the way Seow wrote his commentary? In other words, is the feeling of meaningless and chasing of the wind the result of the message of Ecclesiastes, or is it the result of Seow’s reasoning and rhetoric?

In order to understand Seow’s rhetoric, it is necessary to start from his understanding of what meaning is. As was pointed out in the previous section, the basic meaning-unit is the word. The choice of meaning becomes a choice of words. Even deciding the message of a whole book becomes choosing the key word, in our case “vanity.” According to the philological approach, words are such powerful carriers of meaning that they can convey the same idea in different kinds of works, regardless of time, language, culture, religion, and so on. Indeed, some words can even convey a multitude of ideas at the same time, such as *hebel* “vanity.” What qualifies the word *hebel* “vanity” to convey the whole message of the book is precisely its abundance of meanings.

As a result of the fact that words are basic carriers of meaning, even the meaning of a larger passage is still conveyed by certain words which are repeated. By contrast, in an argument the basic carrier of meaning is the statement. Moreover, statements must form a hierar-

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336 In formal logic, however, there is a further restriction that the statement has to be either an affirmation or a negation which must be either true or false.
chy in which premises support a conclusion. Further on, a conclusion at some point can become a premise later on which may support another conclusion in an even larger structure. Therefore, arguments allow for hierarchies of structures of meaning in which the basic unit of meaning is the statement. According to philological approaches in which words are the basic carriers of meaning, the only way in which meaning can be built in larger structures is by the repetition of the same words or by the repetition of the same roots. Consequently, in order to uncover larger structures in texts the interpreter would have to count the occurrences of key words. That is the reason commentaries which use philological approaches like Seow’s are fraught with statistics about the frequency with which words and word-roots occur in the passage examined.

The understanding that repetitiveness is the device which creates larger structures and enforces the meaning in a larger passage is also a rhetorical device which Seow uses consistently to enforce what he says. Even a reader who is completely unfamiliar with the scholarly jargon would be struck by the pervasive repetitiveness in the commentary. Although Seow provides a section entitled “comment” in which he presents in a coherent form the information which he had included in the “notes” where he had discussed linguistic details about words and phases, often this presentation includes repetitions, often verbatim, of passages which had been presented in the notes. Of course, no single word occurs so frequently and receives repeated explanations as the word hebel “vanity.” Here are some of the extensive explanations offered, sometimes in close proximity:

It is hebel “vanity” precisely because of the irreconcilable contradiction; the situation cannot be grasped. . . . In this case hebel (“vanity”) is, again, referring to something that is elusive, something that cannot be grasped. Life is like that to Qohelet: it is full of inconsistencies that mortals cannot resolve. . . . For Qohelet, the realities of the world are not easy to grasp. They are contradictory and incomprehensible. Everything is ephemeral and illusory—like hebel (“vanity”), literally, “a breath, whiff, puff, vapor.” Moreover, Qohelet seems to make the
point that any apparent orderliness of the world is only an impres-
sion.337

The obvious starting point in the consideration of Qohelet’s content is
the notion of *hebel*, traditionally translated as “vanity.” . . . It appears
thirty-eight times in the book. Its literal meaning is “breath, whiff, puff,
steam,” or the like, a meaning that one should certainly keep in mind
as one interprets Ecclesiastes. It refers to anything that is superficial,
ephemeral, insubstantial, incomprehensible, enigmatic, inconsistent,
or contradictory. Something that is *hebel* cannot be grasped or
controlled. It may refer to something that one encounters or experi-
ences for only a moment, but it cannot be grasped—neither physically
nor intellectually.338

This is why Qohelet says that everything is *hebel*. He does not mean
that everything is meaningless or insignificant, but that everything is
beyond human apprehension and comprehension.339

The word *hebel* occurs 73 times in the Hebrew Bible, 38 times in
Ecclesiastes alone. The literal meaning of *hebel* is “air” or “vapor.” . . .
In the Bible, *hebel* is used very often as a metaphor of something
that is ephemeral or insubstantial.340

In Ecclesiastes itself, the meaning of *hebel* is difficult to determine.
A number of important studies have appeared in this century, various-
ly arguing that the word means “incomprehensible,” “unknowable,”
“mysterious,” “ironic,” “enigmatic,” and “absurd.” . . . As elsewhere

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337Ibid., 42.

338Ibid., 47.

339Ibid., 59. I include this quotation although I fail to understand how
something which is beyond “apprehension and comprehension” can be
meaningful and significant.

340Ibid., 101.
in the Bible, Qohelet uses *hebel* to speak of the ephemerality of life... and he speaks of *hebel* as something of little consequence, even empty... Perhaps it was this imagery of a futile pursuit that led the author to use the word *hebel* for matters that are beyond the grasp of mortals—both physically (for the literal meaning of *hebel*) and intellectually (for the figurative use of the word). So the activities in the world and their unpredictable consequences are said to be *hebel*... They are unpredictable, arbitrary, and incomprehensible. They cannot be grasped... This common fate is *hebel* in the sense that it is confoundingly unpredictable and unknowable. It is beyond human ability to grasp... What is *hebel* cannot be grasped—either physically nor intellectually. It cannot be controlled.341

The Hebrew word *hebel*, which is translated here as “vain,” has no single English equivalent. The literal meaning of the word is “vapor,” “breath,” “air,” “steam,” or the like. The word is most commonly used metaphorically for things that are ephemeral, insubstantial, delusive, or unreliable.342

So, too, Qohelet speaks of joy, success, and youth as *hebel* (2:1, 11; 4:4; 11:10). These things are “vain” in the sense that they do not last; people cannot hold on to them forever. The word is also used of things that cannot be grasped intellectually—they may be enigmatic, confusing, contradictory, or plain mysterious... Human attempts to grasp them are said to be “vain” and a “pursuit of wind.”... For Qohelet, human existence and human experiences of earthly realities are all “vain” in the sense that they are transitory and beyond human ability to grasp.343

This is not to count the innumerable repetitions of shorter statements which may occur on the same page: “Everything is ephemeral and nothing is ultimately reliable... Everything is ephemeral and is

341 Ibid., 102.

342 Ibid., 112.

343 Ibid., 112–13.
ultimately unreliable,”344 or: “Indeed, throughout the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, rûah “wind” is frequently a metaphor for things that have no abiding value or are insubstantial.”345 When one adds similar statements which are scattered all over the book, even in titles and sometimes several times on the same page, the repetitiveness becomes quite annoying.346 There is no doubt that Qoheleth does repeat the phrase “vanity” in his book and that may create the impression that Seow’s repetitiveness is the result of his faithfulness to following the text, but the extremes to which he goes creates a tediousness which cannot be blamed on Qoheleth.

Another important interpretive technique of which Seow makes extensive use and creates the impression that the meaning of Ecclesiastes is illusive is intertextuality. Because words are basic carriers of meaning, the occurrence of a word in any other texts gives the commentator the opportunity to jump to other works in order to explain the meaning of that word. Therefore, Seow finds parallels between

344Ibid., 48.

345Ibid., 122.

346The rhetorical device of stating something over and over again is called “the broken record” and is used as a defensive rhetorical technique and not as a persuasive one. See Robert Bolton, People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979; repr., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 197–9. For instance, a store manager can use it in order to refuse to refund a customer who wants to return an item. The manager may say: “I am sorry, but you should have returned the item within thirty days.” “I was in the hospital for three weeks.” “You should have returned it within thirty days.” “I could not use it because it does not work.” “You should have returned it within thirty days.” “You guarantee customer satisfaction and I am not satisfied.” “You should have returned it within thirty days.” “It is not fair for me to pay for an item that I cannot use.” “You should have returned it within thirty days.” . . . The manager may force the customer to give up and accept the loss but would hardly persuade the customer that the store is fair.
Ecclesiastes and basically any ancient text, but his favorite one seems to be the *Gilgamesh Epic*, which is probably the most remote in time and the least available to Qoheleth. Let us look at one example:

Arguably the most compelling of the parallels come from the *Gilgamesh Epic*, an ancient tale that goes back to the Sumerian period in the third millennium B.C.E. and one that survives in many versions. This was apparently a classic of the “fertile crescent,” widely circulated and even translated into different languages. Fragments of the epic have been found in Palestine itself, lending credibility to the suggestion of some scholars that the author of Ecclesiastes might have known at least the broad outline or various aspects of the story. Commentators have pointed to several affinities between the *Gilgamesh Epic* and Ecclesiastes (see Loretz, *Qohelet*, pp. 116–22). First of all, the dominant theme of the *Gilgamesh Epic* is the mortality of human beings, which is also a primary concern of Qoheleth.\(^\text{347}\)

If the discussion of “mortality” in the *Gilgamesh Epic* is enough to offer a “compelling” parallel with Ecclesiastes, one wonders how much more compelling would have been a parallel between Genesis 3:1–19 and Ecclesiastes, taking into account that Genesis was written in a language which Qoheleth would have been able to read easily and understand and with which he no doubt would have been familiar. This pervasive use of intertextuality allows Seow to see a connection between the word “vanity” in Ecclesiastes and the word “wind” in the *Gilgamesh Epic* where apparently the word *hebel* or its Akkadian equivalent does not occur, just because the word “wind” and *hebel* are associated in Ecclesiastes: “Moreover, the usage of “wind” [in the *Gilgamesh Epic*] is quite similar to Qohelet’s usage of *hebel* “vanity”—literally, ‘breath, whiff, puff, wind.’\(^\text{348}\)

Seow’s constant flights and incursions into ancient Near Eastern texts with which the reader rarely has direct familiarity create the feeling of aimlessness and lostness which strangely again, enforces the

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\(^{347}\)Seow, 64.

\(^{348}\)Ibid.
feeling of “vanity and chasing of the wind.” Seow may not realize, but intertextuality is one of the most efficient techniques used to deconstruct the meaning of texts. When reading interpretations of texts which use deconstruction, one has the same feeling of lostness and of getting nowhere as when reading Seow’s commentary. Of course, Seow is not doing deconstruction, or at least that is not his goal. He only wants to prove that the meaning of Ecclesiastes is “vanity.” Deconstructionists, however, would claim that the meaning of any text is “vanity” and they manage to prove it using very similar techniques.

The unity of the whole passage is suggested by the repetition of key expressions, particularly at the beginning and the end of the unit. We may note especially the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6:10–12</th>
<th>7:10–14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>whatever happens (mah-ššehâyá, v 10)</td>
<td>how is it? (meh hāyá, v 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they cannot (lô ’-yûkal, v 10)</td>
<td>who can? (mî yûkal, v 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advantage (yôtēr, v 11)</td>
<td>advantage (yôtēr, v 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like a shadow (kaṣšél, v 12)</td>
<td>as a shadow (bēṣél, v 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afterwards (’aḥārâyw, v 12)</td>
<td>after them (’aḥārâyw, v 14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, Seow does not explain what does it mean that the two passages form a unit nor what happens with the nine verses of the seventh chapter which come in between. Does it mean that the two passages talk about the same thing? And if they do, do they say the same thing? And if it means that they deal with the same subject, which one is it? Is it hāyá “is,” or yûkal “can,” or șēl “shadow,” or ʾḥārâyw “after them”? And if one of them is the subject, does it mean that the two passages are a unit in the sense that both of them say the same thing about that subject? The only explanation which Seow gives about how the
mind understands these relationships between some words which occur in larger passages is by performing some kind of “matching”:

Moreover, the themes of light and darkness link 11:7–8 with the rest of the passage; the mention of light and the sun in 11:7 is matched by the reference to the darkening of the sun and the light in 12:2. One notes, too, the recurrence of certain expressions for time: “year” (11:8a; 12:1c), “days” (11:8b; 11:9; 12:1a, 1b), “before” (12:1b, 2, 6). The mention of “delight” (tswb) to the eyes (11:7) is reinforced by the call in 11:9 to let the heart “delight” (Hiphil of tswb) oneself, and “what the eyes see” in 11:9 recalls the eyes’ seeing of the sun in 11:7. The references to “delight” are matched by the mention of its opposite, rā “unpleasantness,” in 11:10 and 12:1.

Despite several textual and interpretive problems, it is clear that the passage as a whole is a carefully-constructed cohesive unit; there is a certain structural symmetry evident in the whole poem and within its component parts.351

We need to ask the question: What makes it so “clear” that this “passage as a whole is a carefully-constructed cohesive unit”? It would seem that the “cohesiveness” of the passage is given by the themes of “light” and “darkness” which occur later in the passage. The reference to the light of the sun would clearly suggest the light, but can hardly have anything to do with darkness. That there may be a relationship between “light” and “darkness” and expressions of time such as “days” and even “years” seems plausible, but what connection can there be with “before”? The mention of “delight of the eyes” may suggest light but what connection can it have with “darkness” or the “delighting” of the heart? The final proof of cohesiveness is that “delight” is matched by “unpleasantness.” How does the mind do this matching and perceive that this is a “carefully constructed cohesive unit”? It is obvious that Seow understands that the mind just makes connections between individual words in the passage and in this way establishes a theme. The question is: What does the mind do with the other words in the

351Ibid., 368.
passage which do not “match” any of these words or do not “match” anything? Does the mind just discard them and retain only the ones that are matched? What about words which match other words in the passage but do not match the ones which create the cohesiveness?

In order to better understand the assumptions about how the mind reasons and creates meaning according to the philological approaches, it is necessary to look at the whole passage in Seow’s translation:

11 7Light is pleasant, and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun. 8If one should live many years, let one rejoice in them all, and remember that the days of darkness may be many; all that comes is vanity. 9Rejoice, O youth, while you are young, let your heart delight you in the days of your prime. Follow the ways of your heart and what your eyes see; and know that on account of all these, God will bring you into judgment. 10Remove vexation from your heart, and banish unpleasantness from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. 12 1Remember your creator in the days of your prime, before the days of unpleasantness come and years arrive, when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; before the sun darkens, even the light and the moon and the stars, and the clouds return with the rain; and the time when those who watch the house tremble, and valiant men convulse; those who grind stop because they are diminished, and those who look through the windows grow dim; the double-doors in the street-bazaar are shut, while the sound of the mill drops; the sound of the birds rises, and all the daughters of song come down low— even from on high they see terror on the way; the almond becomes revolting, the locust droops, and the caper comes to naught; Yea, the human goes to the grave, and the mourners march in the street-bazaar; before the silver tendril is smashed, and the golden bowl is crushed; the jar is broken at the spring, and the vessel is crushed at the pit.352

In this passage the words which are supposed to match have been printed in different colors according to the supposed matches. The obvious question is: Why would the mind make those “matches” and not others? But even if Seow is right that any mind would see these “clear”

352Ibid., 346–47.
matches which make this passage a “carefully-constructed cohesive unit,” what would be that cohesiveness? For instance, if one changes all the other words in the passage but keeps all the colored words in exactly the same places, would the passage still remain a “very carefully-constructed cohesive unit”? But even if it would, does it mean that it would have the same meaning?

In conclusion, no matter how persuasive and authoritative Seow may be in his commentary, it is not relevant for Qoheleth’s reasoning because Seow’s approach simply is unable to deal with meaning and argumentation. As long as such commentaries are unable to deal with meaning that goes beyond words and phrases, whatever structures they discover by matching words and roots are simply arbitrary and therefore meaningless. Fortunately for Seow, for those who easily accept his claim that for Qoheleth everything is vanity, his commentary looks like an exquisite explanation of what Qoheleth wanted to say. But the elusiveness of meaning which one experiences in reading the commentary is primarily Seow’s accomplishment.
Methodological Considerations

James Crenshaw is also an historical-critical scholar. Although all historical-critical scholars share a common paradigm which was briefly outlined in Chapter 15 when Gerhard von Rad was discussed, within that paradigm there are several approaches to investigating the earliest stages or the origins of a phenomenon. Within the historical-critical paradigm form-criticism has been one of the most popular approaches which Crenshaw himself follows. What distinguishes form-critical scholars is the assumption that the majority of biblical materials originated as oral productions which conformed to established forms which are termed genera or Gattungen. These literary patterns or forms have been substantially preserved when the literary productions were committed to writing and therefore pre-literary forms can be recognized and analyzed in the literature as it has been transmitted to us. According to the form-critical methodology, scholars need to identify the genre or the Gattung to which the text under investigation belongs, the life setting or Sitz-im-Leben in which each form developed, and the purpose which that literary production had within the community which produced and preserved it.

As far as the reasoning presupposed by the method is concerned, form-criticism recognizes an important side of human rationality: its
repetitiveness and its tendency to follow common and established routes, patterns, concepts, and ideas. From this point of view, no human mind is completely original. If that were the case, communication would be virtually impossible. Therefore, meaning is possible because a lot of what is being said by an individual at one time involves concepts, ideas, and linguistic and thought patterns which had been learned and shared in common with others, no matter how original and creative a mind might be.

Although following established linguistic and thought patterns is common in all kinds of human communication including writing, it is most obvious in oral productions. Unlike other kinds of linguistic productions, oral productions rely for their preservation and circulation on human memory whose main ability to retain and reproduce information is based on repetition. At the same time, the repetitiveness of the oral productions enables historical-critical scholars to achieve their goal of capturing the essence of the phenomena under investigation. What is repeated not only survives in time, but is the proof that it belongs to what is permanent and therefore to the very nature of the phenomenon. It is this characteristic of form-criticism which made it one of the most popular approaches with historical-critical scholars.

Unfortunately, the very strengths of the form-critical method became its major limitation: capturing those features of intellectual productions which distinguish a work from other similar ones or make it substantially unique. Typically oral productions are anonymous and can be easily imitated and appropriated. Original works, however, are difficult to memorize and transmit over a longer period, particularly if the ideas and the linguistic expressions of those ideas are unusual or difficult to grasp and accept. It is this inability of the form-critical method to capture those features of linguistic productions which have to do with the unique creativity of individuals that prompted Muilenburg to advocate rhetorical criticism in order to take biblical interpretation “beyond” the constraints of form-criticism.

Consistent with his methodology, Crenshaw classifies Ecclesiastes as a royal testament in which King Solomon leaves his royal legacy to his successors. The origin and the life setting of the linguistic form is
the Egyptian court and Qoheleth’s purpose in writing Ecclesiastes was to pass on King Solomon’s legacy to his descendants:

The essential literary form by which Qoheleth chose to communicate his message owes its origin to ancient Egyptian instructions. Often called royal testament, this device readily lent itself to a literary work that purported to register King Solomon’s understanding of reality. In general the pharaohs or their viziers collected their insights for the benefit of young aspiring rulers, whom they hoped to steer successfully along paths of wisdom. Such advice appeared in autobiographical form, inasmuch as it constituted the king’s legacy for his successors.353

There are several difficulties involved in considering Ecclesiastes a royal testament. First, if Ecclesiastes was meant to be a testament, there is hardly anything in Ecclesiastes that a king would claim and would want to leave to the descendants to treasure. If a king did come to the conclusion that all his accomplishments were nothing but vanity and chasing of the wind, then such a king would hardly need to write a testament in order to ensure that his descendants would treasure something that he himself considered vanity. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that a king would suggest in an actual testament that his descendants might be foolish: “I hated everything I had done under the sun when I realized that I had to leave everything to my descendants who could very well be foolish when they inherit all my work. This is another example of vanity” (Eccl. 2:18–19). It seems, however, that Crenshaw himself does not take testament to mean an actual testament but rather an instruction, therefore by “royal testament” he may mean “royal instruction” because of his reference to imparting wisdom to the successors. But probably the greatest difficulty in using form-criticism to understand Ecclesiastes is its striking uniqueness and originality. Even a casual reading of the book would make it hard to imagine that such a work originated orally by following some established pattern. Although Qoheleth may have included some short sayings of folklore

353Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 144.
origin, that such a work originated as an oral linguistic product is virtually unthinkable. Therefore, such a unique work must be the product of a very original and creative mind which did not need to get inspiration from other works and which apparently has not been imitated by others either. Crenshaw’s need to indicate the literary genre of Ecclesiastes has no relevance to how Ecclesiastes originated. Classifying a text was a necessary step in applying his method and he followed it rigidly without any regard to the nature of his text in order to satisfy established scholarly methodological conventions.

Qoheleth’s Message According to Crenshaw

Crenshaw shares the prevailing opinion that Qoheleth wants to show that everything in life is vanity and he summarizes the main ideas of the book which creates the following grim outlook:

At the end of this search, what discoveries enriched Qoheleth’s knowledge? An attempt will be made to clarify Qoheleth’s thinking by examining five major convictions: (1) death cancels everything; (2) wisdom cannot achieve its goal; (3) God is unknowable; (4) the world is crooked; and (5) pleasure commends itself. All five of these theses flow from a loss of trust in the goodness of God, the presupposition of earlier wisdom.\(^{354}\)

What distinguishes Crenshaw from other scholars is not that he is the first one to articulate such findings—as we saw, Seow has incorporated in his commentary most of these ideas—but the boldness and sometimes the bluntness with which Crenshaw states Qoheleth’s negative message. If Qoheleth did believe that everything in life is vanity, then Crenshaw is probably the only scholar who took his message and its implications seriously. Although other scholars have seen skepticism in the book, no one to my knowledge has seen that skepticism as “complete”: “On the other hand, complete skepticism seems also to

\(^{354}\text{Ibid., 128.}\)
have characterized biblical wisdom.”355 Although other scholars have recognized that the sages saw limits to their wisdom, according to Crenshaw, Qoheleth saw it as bankrupt:

The author of Qoheleth lacked trust in either God or knowledge. For him nothing proved that God looked upon his creation with favor, and the entire wisdom enterprise had become bankrupt. The astonishing thing is that such skepticism did not prevent Qoheleth from asking the question of questions: does life have any meaning at all?356

While other sages may have questioned some of the good things in life, Qoheleth’s denial of life’s goodness is “radical”: “Such reflection thrust Qoheleth forward into radical denial of life’s goodness.”357 While other sages wondered about God’s support of life, with Qoheleth such support has simply “vanished”: “For Qoheleth the divine support of life has entirely vanished. In his view the final word is death’s chilling summons.”358 While other sages tried to find the meaning of life, Qoheleth denies that such a meaning exists: “Because death cancels every human achievement, Qoheleth concludes that life has no meaning.”359 According to Crenshaw, Qoheleth’s skepticism is so radical that it lacks any trust in God or knowledge: “The author of Qoheleth lacked trust in either God or knowledge.”360

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355Ibid., 24.

356Ibid., 126.

357Ibid., 129.

358Ibid., 133.


360Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 126.
Crenshaw agrees with most biblical scholars that one of the major interests of ancient wisdom was in ethics in order to provide moral basis for ethical behavior:

A union of religion and ethics characterized ancient wisdom. The dichotomy between secular and sacred did not exist in the biblical world. Every act bore religious consequences and arose from a religious understanding of reality. Life with people was at the same time existence of God’s presence. Whatever enriched one context enhanced the other; ethical behavior thus assumed ultimate significance.  

The contrast between Qoheleth and the rest of the wisdom tradition from this point of view is again complete: “Qoheleth’s predecessors made two fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality: God was moral, and the world was trustworthy. Neither presupposition survived Qoheleth’s critical scrutiny.” The ethical implications of this position that eventually God becomes responsible for the evil in the world is presented by Crenshaw in unequivocal terms:

With this passage we have arrived at one of the most vexing problems in Qoheleth’s thought. Did he believe God would judge the sinner and punish wickedness? To be sure, a few texts assert the traditional understanding of retribution. On the other hand, the overwhelming impact of the book points in the opposite direction. In a remarkable case Qoheleth argues that every official owes allegiance to another, so that injustice occasions no real anxiety. The inevitable conclusion of such reasoning places the responsibility for abuse of power upon God, the ultimate Ruler. It follows that the deity alone can be blamed for the cruel realities that surround us daily (5:7–9).

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361 Ibid., 24.
362 Ibid., 139–40.
363 Ibid., 138.
God, who in religious thinking used to be the foundation of enforcing ethical behavior, with Qoheleth God endorses everything:

Eating, drinking, and enjoying life constitute God’s gift to those who make the most of their youth. In one surprising text Qoheleth encourages such behavior and justifies it with the claim that God has already approved the action (9:7). Such a defense of festive living seems to presuppose that God endorses whatever happens, since he has ultimate power. Obviously, nothing could happen that did not meet with divine approval.364

While morality had been the strong point of the wisdom writings, in Ecclesiastes it has become “impotence”: “The prophetic conscience is entirely lacking here, and moral impotence reigns. Qoheleth may see the same kind of injustice that Israel’s prophets inveighed against, but he does not seem constrained to do battle against those who perpetrated the villainy [emphasis his].”365 The only basis for ethics that remains in Ecclesiastes is selfishness: “When we examine the things which Qoheleth approves, however half-heartedly, we see how self-interest dominates his thought. The old query, ‘What is good for man and woman?’ is understood in a thoroughly selfish manner.”366

In spite of this unqualified skepticism, Crenshaw is aware that Qoheleth occasionally does have a positive message. He argues, however, that such statements should not be taken literally but rather ironically:

Even when Qoheleth seems to endorse life as intrinsically better than death, he may speak ironically. The crucial text (8:16–9:6) bristles with polemic against the wisdom establishment. In this instance Qoheleth boldly rejects claims that sages can find out what God is doing. Although human deeds, good or evil, reside in God’s mighty

364Ibid., 139.

365Ibid., 143.

366Ibid.
hand, no one can determine whether God’s disposition toward human beings is love or hate. With absolute certainty one thing looms before them: a single fate befalls righteous and unrighteous, clean and unclean, sacrificer and non-sacrificer, good and bad, swearer and the one who disdains oaths. No wonder human hearts are filled with evil and madness, which death alone stills.367

There is an important merit of Crenshaw’s interpretation: it insists that Qoheleth is consistent. If scholars have correctly identified that Qoheleth’s purpose is to show that everything is vanity, then there is no doubt that for the sake of consistency, all the implications which Crenshaw draws are necessary in order to make Qoheleth consistent. Moreover, another merit of Crenshaw is that he is willing to see Qoheleth on his own and against the whole wisdom tradition. If one agrees that Qoheleth’s message is that everything is vanity, then it is hardly possible to spot any weakness in Crenshaw’s interpretation and argumentation.

Consistency in interpretation, however, does not make the interpretation accurate. As was pointed out earlier, although historical-critical scholarship claims to understand a message in its original setting, actually it is interested in a much later phenomenon for which it tries to find an ancient origin. That Qoheleth believed that death cancels everything, that wisdom cannot achieve its goals, that God cannot be known and is not necessarily good, that the world is crooked and pleasure and selfishness are the only grounds for ethics, we do not know, but what we do know is that such beliefs are part of postmodernism in which any form of foundationalism and essentialism are rejected. That Qoheleth’s “beliefs” made perfect sense for Crenshaw and were part of the liberal scholarship he practiced is easy to understand, but that such beliefs had made any sense for Qoheleth and for his contemporaries is questionable at best. That the choice of the biblical text for interpretation is made because it enforces the scholar’s beliefs and not the other way around Crenshaw candidly admits: “For many years I have been fascinated with Qohelet, perhaps because he makes my own

367 Ibid., 131.
skepticism appear solidly biblical.” Is it likely that Qoheleth believed that God was not good and was not knowable and that he not only hoped to persuade his contemporaries about such a message but that he even succeeded? Did he believe himself and persuaded others as well that the world was so crooked and wisdom so useless that all that people could do was just to pursue pleasure because death cancels everything anyway? Had Crenshaw asked such simple rhetorical questions he would have realized that with his interpretation of Ecclesiastes he made Qoheleth talk persuasively to postmodern divinity students rather than to his ancient audience. But if the pessimistic views which Crenshaw claims for Qoheleth were not shared by Qoheleth himself and his contemporaries, then whose views are they? It is odd questions like this that point out to the oddity of analyzing the reasoning of biblical scholars: they are not supposed to have their own thinking or mix it in their works.

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368Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes: A Commentary, 53.
Argument Analysis and Biblical Scholarship

Argument analysis has no place in biblical scholarship because the nature of the intellectual enterprise does not allow for it. Biblical scholars do not argue because they are not supposed to. They have no points of view, no personal interests, no theology, no philosophy, no beliefs, and are not supposed to bring any reasoning of their own into their works. The basis of modern biblical scholarship has been “exegesis,” or the concept of “bringing meaning” out of the biblical text and resisting doing “eisegesis” or bringing any alien meanings to the text. In that respect, biblical scholarship resembles other professions, such as journalism, in which the mind and the thinking of the reporter need to be carefully suppressed and only the words of the sources must be carefully recorded and allowed to speak for themselves. Because they deal with the thoughts of others, biblical scholars hardly need more than basic writing skills, an approved “method” to be followed consistently, and the ability to adequately quote and indicate sources. By contrast, other professions not only require a scholar to have personal and clear thinking, but also have the ability to articulate it and express it convincingly. Politicians, lawyers, philosophers can not only have their own thinking, but are required to. Because logic is supposed to teach good and valid thinking, schools require the study of logic for pursuing degrees in such areas.
Another reason the study of argumentation has no room in biblical scholarship and also in journalism is because understanding the argumentation of the sources is unnecessary. As long as there is a direct relationship between words and meaning, all that a biblical scholar needs to do is to become an expert in all the grammatical niceties of words and texts in order to let them speak for themselves. Just like in journalism, in biblical scholarship sources talk. The wide variety of interpretations of the same text is explained not in terms of the difference in thinking among scholars, but in terms of the “methodology” used. It was hoped in modern scholarship that if a proper method were developed, eventually every scholar would arrive at the same meaning of a text by faithfully applying that methodology. It is true that in postmodern scholarship the original meaning of texts has become an illusion and the goal of interpretation is no longer to arrive at a universally accepted meaning, but the wide variety of meanings which texts are given is still understood in terms of method. Therefore, schools no longer teach the accepted method, but rather a variety of methods which everyone is free to choose, mixing elements of various methods. As a result, teaching methods of dealing with biblical texts is no longer called “biblical exegesis” but rather “biblical interpretation.” Moreover, the role of the interpreter is recognized in the choice of methods in terms of “social location,” “advocacy group,” and so on. Even in such approaches, what scholars say and the way they say it is dependent on their method, and not on their personal reasoning and thinking.

It is when the thinking of biblical authors and biblical scholars is recognized as the basis for both biblical interpretation and theology that the need for argument analysis arises. What makes reasoning and thinking personal and unique is not the individual words, phrases, statements, concepts, and larger formulations which are used, but the coherence and the consistency of everything that is said during a unit of discourse, which can be sometimes a book as large as hundreds or even thousands of pages. It is a fundamental nature of our rationality to aim for consistency and coherence in what is said. The same mind can change topics—indeed, sometimes can change positions on the
same topic—but at any moment in time the same mind would try to relate what is being said to create a coherent and cohesive whole. Different minds or the same mind at different times may achieve a greater or a smaller coherence and consistency and that can explain why some messages seem clear while others may seem confused. Those which are clear have better chances to be perceived as persuasive, while those which are confused have less chance. Moreover, even those which are clear, if some of the things that are said are questionable, the persuasiveness of the whole message is seriously undermined. An understanding of argumentation becomes fundamental for understanding the thinking which generated a message because the only proof that an interpretation is correct is when it is able to relate everything that is said to an overall rational structure. That thinking may not be discovered and different interpreters may argue for quite divergent understandings, but the test that the mind of the author has been discovered is when all parts of the message can be explained and articulated. In this sense, there are no “better” or “poor” interpretations. Either an interpretation properly captures the overall structure of a message and explains every element, or misses it by assuming a different overall reasoning structure which the interpreter claims for the original author. This is the reason I pointed out in the study of the three biblical scholars instances where their assumed meaning and interpretation were at odds with the text of Ecclesiastes, which should have alerted them that Qoheleth’s thinking may not have been what they claimed it to be. In what follows I would like to look briefly at the overall argumentation which each scholar uses in his book to see to what extent their own argumentation and presentation is coherent and consistent and therefore persuasive.

Von Rad’s book *Wisdom in Israel* is not easy reading and probably few readers would have the patience to read it through. As the title makes clear, the stated object of the book is to explain the emergence of wisdom in Israel and von Rad suggests that he has no ax to grind by claiming repeatedly that his conclusions are arrived at through “exegesis” and warns against imposing our modern concepts upon the wisdom texts. Von Rad implies that he has no persuasive goals and
only wants to enable his readers to see for themselves the reasoning of ancient Israelite sages. Whether his readers are able to discern any patterns or similarities of thinking among those ancient sages is not his concern because to create a picture or embellish it would be the last thing on his mind. If the readers do discover a coherence and some consistent pattern in his bulky volume, it can only be attributed to the ancient sages and in no way to von Rad himself. Moreover, if the readers do discover some obvious parallels between the Israelite enlightenment and the European Enlightenment, Kant, and Hegel, that can only be due to the fact that the evidence forced the conclusion on the readers and they were intelligent enough to see what von Rad himself may have never thought about as a result of his effort to pursue exegetically the text and empty his mind of whatever else he knew in order not to enforce his modern views upon ancient authors.

An alert and informed reader, however, would notice some interesting details about how von Rad is coaching his readers. The emergence of wisdom is presented under the title “The liberation of reason” and the development is described as a kind of “enlightenment.” Such unusual qualifications would make the reader think of the Enlightenment in Western Europe which was also known as the age of reason or the liberation of reason. Moreover, this liberation of reason was characterized by a kind of thinking that showed an independence of the religious dogmas and turned to the observation of the world for finding the truth. This would remind the reader again about the Enlightenment which is known for breaking with religious dogmatism and turning to the investigation of nature for new discoveries. As a result of their growing understanding of the laws of nature, the Israelite sages developed a growing confidence and optimism about a world which they could both understand and control. This was also paralleled by the European Enlightenment with its optimism and enthusiasm for new discoveries. Von Rad continues by showing how the Israelite wisdom managed to avoid becoming completely secular as science has done in the European Enlightenment by retaining only secular thinking and rejecting religious thinking under the unfortunate influence of the Greek philosophy. This was indeed a departure from
a widespread understanding of the European Enlightenment, but von Rad makes it clear that the Israelite enlightenment paralleled the European Enlightenment as it was brought back on track by Kant who showed the limits of empirical reasoning and made religious thinking the foundation of morality. And indeed, Israelite wisdom did not absolutize empirical wisdom but rather balanced it with religious thinking which also became the basis for ethics. Moreover, the Israelite sages understood reality as being structured in time and that makes another connection with the concept of time in Kant’s pure reason. Further still, the Israelite sages developed dialectical thinking which helped them reach ever higher levels of understanding as they kept experience and revelation in tension. Although von Rad does not mention Hegel, an informed reader would not need any other clue as to whom von Rad has in mind when he talks about “dialectic.”

Unfortunately, as the confidence and optimism of the sages grew, some later wisdom writings did not quite fit the European development. Job’s questioning of God’s providence does not fit the pattern. Therefore, von Rad argues that those parts in which Job is rebelling against God are later additions and therefore irrelevant for his argument. Similarly, Ecclesiastes, with its skepticism, does not quite fit the model, therefore von Rad takes from it only the first part of the third chapter on which he builds the “doctrine of the proper time,” which does have a vague equivalent in Kant’s philosophy. Finally, von Rad did say candidly that the development which the Israelite sages had started laid the foundation for the whole Western culture, just in case some sloppy readers missed the point. He did not need to say it, however. Indeed, rarely scholars are so candid. Arguments make all parts of a message coherent and consistent whether the conclusion is stated or not. If von Rad had deleted that phrase from his book, it would have made no difference in the way in which the book would have been understood and perceived as persuasive.

The persuasiveness of von Rad’s book is twofold. First, the key claims are likely to be accepted by his readers. Von Rad assumes that his book would be read by religious readers who most likely had accepted the dialectic between the secular and dogmatic thinking. That
ancient sages were able to anticipate it may seem surprising to modern readers, but they most likely would enjoy the discovery rather than resist it. Not only they would not resist, but most likely would be glad to have their belief reinforced. It would seem that von Rad’s exegesis would help readers see for the first time the dialectic between secular and religious thinking and accept it for the first time because it proves to be biblical; rather it is the other way round: the religious readers had already accepted the dialectic and endorsed von Rad’s “exegesis” which claims to discover that dialectic through an objective analysis of the biblical text. Von Rad can count on the fact that his readers have already accepted the dialectic thinking and most likely believed that Western civilization was mediated by the Judeo-Christian tradition and therefore his persuasive goal is just to reinforce a belief which his readers already have. Secondly, persuasiveness presupposes not only accepting the key ideas of the argument, but also discovering that what is being said makes a coherent and consistent whole. As was pointed out when the book was analyzed, von Rad followed consistently his overall argument both by resorting to texts which would support his main ideas and by downplaying texts which conflicted with his argument.

Unlike von Rad’s book in which the text is just a pretext to advance a master argument, Seow’s book is a detailed examination of the biblical text, but in which the overall argument is completely opaque. There is no overall design which explains or justifies, explicitly or implicitly, what Seow says or does in different places of his book. For instance, his section in the introduction about socioeconomic context is irrelevant for his commentary. If that section had been deleted it would have made no difference as far as what he does or says and for the understanding of his commentary. Similarly, his section entitled “Theological anthropology” has no connection to the book. Not only is there nothing in the book that explains that phrase, but there is nothing in the book that that section explains. Again, if it had been deleted, it would have made no difference in the interpretation of Ecclesiastes or in understanding of his commentary. But what is more important, it is the lack of connectedness and coherence between different sections of
his commentary that makes it a disjointed work. The claim that Qoheleth is a self-contradicting book is no excuse; even if a work is disjointed, its presentation does not need to be. This is less excusable as Seow himself assumes the literary integrity of Ecclesiastes and argues that Qoheleth has a coherent message. Seow reflects an understanding of biblical scholars that, as long as they supposedly follow closely the text of an author, the coherence of what they say is not their concern. If what they say turns out to be coherent, that only proves that they have faithfully followed the text; and if it turns out that their presentation is incoherent or even contradictory, it only proves that the original author was inconsistent and that may be a stronger proof that they have faithfully followed the text. This does not mean that there are no scholars who do pay attention to how coherent their interpretations are. For instance, although von Rad makes very little use of the book of Ecclesiastes, he does pursue a clear and consistent argument. Similarly, although Seow and Crenshaw substantially agree upon the central message of Ecclesiastes, Crenshaw does provide a coherent interpretation while Seow does not. In order to see this difference in the coherence of presentations, I would like to look at two key ideas which all three scholars agree upon in spite of the fact that all three make completely different arguments.

Von Rad, Seow, and Crenshaw agree that Qoheleth had an understanding of reality according to which events were decided by God at appointed times based on the first part of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes. All three scholars see Qoheleth there advocating a deterministic understanding of reality. Von Rad called it the doctrine of “appointed time” and argued that events were ordered by God. As a result of the fact that Qoheleth discovered that order, that conformed with his overall claim that later sages came to an understanding of reality as being structured and ordered by God and developed as a result a greater confidence in God. The doctrine of “times” also provided a further point of contact with Kant’s philosophy. Because the rest of Ecclesiastes could hardly fit into von Rad’s master argument, he simply disregarded it. For von Rad’s argument, the doctrine of appointed times provided support and reinforced his argument.
By contrast Seow—following probably Crenshaw—argues that everything is vanity and therefore everything is arbitrary. Surprisingly, he also takes over the doctrine of appointed times when commenting on the same passage from Ecclesiastes:

Continuing the thought of God’s determination of events, the author introduces a catalogue on times and season (3:1–8). The rhythmic character of the catalogue gives the initial impression of a discernible pattern. Yet the pattern, if there ever was one, escapes most interpreters. Indeed, it may be the point of the poem that order in the world is elusive, despite the impressions to the contrary.\footnote{Seow, 49.}

If Seow really believed that Qoheleth’s message was that everything was ephemeral and unreliable, the need for consistency both in Qoheleth’s message and in his presentation would have required that he questioned the doctrine of appointed times. Even if he did find that “doctrine” attractive as a result of his theology, his disregard for the coherence of Qoheleth’s message and for his interpretation is quite disappointing. As was indicated earlier when the rational squares were analyzed, in the same section in which he claimed that everything was ephemeral and unreliable, he also claimed that everything was in the hand of God only later on to argue that actually everything was arbitrary.

What is more surprising is that Crenshaw himself—who argues that Ecclesiastes is a sceptical book and therefore one would expect him to question or dismiss the doctrine of determinism—upholds that “doctrine” too: “On the contrary, the universe was created orderly, since everything was appropriate in its time.”\footnote{Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 134.} The very knowledge about such appointed times undermines Qoheleth’s skepticism which Crenshaw claims is complete. In order to claim both skepticism and
determinism for Ecclesiastes, Crenshaw explains that the determinism about those times has no relevance for humans. Although that doctrine may have made sense for von Rad’s argument, it makes no sense for Qoheleth’s message as it is understood by Seow and Crenshaw.

Another point which all three scholars share is that wisdom was interested in ethics. We saw, however, that von Rad found Job’s dialogues problematic because of the questions they raised about God’s goodness and therefore he dismissed them. Similarly, he did not find much use for Ecclesiastes for the same reasons. Therefore, he built the ethical claims of the sages on Proverbs rather than on Job and Ecclesiastes. Again, von Rad’s concern for the coherence and consistence of his overall argument is obvious.

Following probably von Rad, Crenshaw also sees Israelite wisdom as interested in ethics which are based on rational thought just as von Rad had argued:

That is why the wise refused to reinforce their teachings by appealing to the doctrine of creation. They could easily have said, “Do this because God created you and certain actions naturally follow.” Instead, they appealed to a sense of self-interest and relied upon a capacity to reason things out.\(^\text{371}\)

As we saw, however, Crenshaw claimed that Ecclesiastes was a skeptical book and therefore he openly admitted that Ecclesiastes provided no basis for ethical behavior. Again, that is consistent with his understanding and interpretation of Ecclesiastes. Crenshaw’s interpretation is consistent.

Although Seow shares Crenshaw’s view that Qoheleth wants to prove that everything is vanity, he does not see Ecclesiastes as removing any basis for ethics. Quite the opposite, Seow sees ethics as being one of the main topics in writing Ecclesiastes. This becomes obvious just by looking at the outline which he claims for Ecclesiastes:

\(^\text{371}\)Ibid., 21.
The book of Ecclesiastes may, therefore, be analyzed as follows:

1:1 Superscription

Part I
I.A. Reflection: Everything Is Ephemeral and Unreliable ..............................
I.B. Ethics: Coping with Uncertainty .............................................................

Part II
II.A. Reflection: Everything Is Elusive ............................................................
II.B. Ethics: Coping with Risks and Death ......................................................

12:9–13a Epilogue
12:13b–14 Additional Material \[372\]

What is immediately striking about this outline is its symmetry. There are two parts, each one being made of two sections. Both parts are identically structured, with a first section entitled “Reflection” followed by another section entitled “Ethics.” The only explanation given concerning this structure is about the division between the two parts. The midpoint between the first and the second part is found by—how else?—counting the words:

Furthermore, it is clear that 6:10 is the midpoint of the book, as the Masoretes note in the margins and at the end of the book. Wright and others have observed that there are 222 verses in the book, 111 in 1:1–6:9 and 111 in 6:10–12:14. Whether the ancients had conceived of the verses in the same way is beside the point. The fact is that the book is divided into two halves of more or less the same lengths. D. N. Freedman has pointed out to me that 6:9b may be the precise midpoint or pivot of the entire book, for apart from the five Hebrew words gamzew hebel ūrēē ṭūrūah “this, too, is vanity and pursuit of wind” (an appropriate phrase for a pivot!), we have precisely the same number of words in the first half of the book as in the second: 1,491 words in

\[372\] Seow, 46–47.
the first half (1:1–6:9a) and 1,491 words in the second (6:10–12:14). This is a remarkable coincidence, but only that. I do not believe it was the author’s or the editor’s intention to produce the exact number of words in each half: the twofold structure is deliberate, but the matching numbers that Freedman notices are a coincidence.373

That the exact number of words is a coincidence no one would doubt, but Seow’s amazing symmetry in his outline can hardly be a coincidence. He does not provide any explanation as to why there should be two parts after all and not more or less. There is no discussion as to why each part has to be sub-divided in two other parts and why both halves must have the same structure. Seow does not raise the question as to why anyone would write a four-part work with two reflections and two ethics and not one whole section with reflections and one whole section with ethics. But what is more intriguing is that there is no explanation of the relationships between different sections. For instance, is the “reflection” some kind of basis for the “ethics” section? And if as the result of reflections one discovers that “everything is ephemeral and unreliable,” what kind of ethics can follow from such a reflection? Similarly, if the “reflection” concludes that “everything is elusive,” then what kind of ethics would that reflection inspire? If the “reflection” concludes that “righteousness and wisdom are elusive,” would that imply that the ethics based on such a reflection must be equally elusive? Seow’s complete disregard for a coherent and consistent overall plan for both Ecclesiastes and his commentary can be explained only if it is admitted that the concept of argumentation was not his concern at all. This should not be seen, however, as his personal failure. His outline is typical and can be found in many other scholarly works. An argument analysis both of biblical texts and of scholarly writings is not part of the biblical scholarship enterprise.

373Seow, Commentary, 45.
Qoheleth’s Master Argument

Before concluding I would like to take a brief look at Qoheleth’s argumentation, how his overall argument is structured and what has made this book such a hard nut to crack. One of the obvious features of Ecclesiastes is that it refutes many established beliefs and accepted truths. That provides an important clue that he uses what is sometimes called a rebuttal outline. According to this rhetorical strategy, speakers present their own point of view and then proceed to attack the alternative points of view one by one showing that each one is deficient and therefore needs to be abandoned. In the end only the established point of view remains and is enforced upon the audience as the only alternative that has remained available.

The rebuttal outline is very simple and can be seen clearly in Ecclesiastes. In the very first eleven verses of the first chapter Qoheleth establishes the main thesis of his book that everything in the world is set up in such a way as to ensure continuity, permanence, and stability. Even human activities which involve exhaustion are followed by periods of rest so that such activities are resumed in order to ensure continuity and permanence (Eccl. 1:8). The stability and the permanence of the world is essential for Qoheleth in order to enforce his claims that the purpose in life is to work, to make love, and to enjoy what God has provided for humans. Although people may get tired of work, he could recommend it because God has provided ways in which people can recover and regain their urge for it. Similarly, Qoheleth could recommend making love in spite of the fact that even the most passionate embracing and love-making are followed by periods when embracing and making love cease, because they will be resumed (Eccl. 3:5). As a result of the fact that activities are designed by God to have continuity in a world that is permanent and stable, there is nothing new under the sun and therefore there is no need for humans to look or strive for anything better. What has been established by the creator in

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374 For an interpretation of this verse see pp. 211-12.
the world will always be there and even what seems crooked and defective is meant to be and therefore no one can eliminate it. Consequently, there is nothing in the first part of the first chapter which would qualify as “vanity.” If Qoheleth had to provide a proper superscription for the first eleven verses of the first chapter, probably the most appropriate metaphor would have been: “Rock of rocks, says Qoheleth, rock of rocks! All is solid rock.”

It is from this position that Qoheleth starts his rebuttal which begins in Ecclesiastes 1:12. This is the real turning point of the book when Qoheleth begins to take the most outstanding human achievements and show that they are vanity and chasing of the wind. It is at this point that the theme of vanity is introduced, and he makes clear that he associates vanity with human activities: “I decided to search through wisdom in order to answer why humans are unhappy when they are busy with the things that God has assigned them to do, and I discovered that everything that humans do under the sun is vanity and chasing after wind” (Eccl. 1:13–14). Vanity refers to activities with which humans are unnecessarily busy in a world that “stands forever” (Eccl. 1:4). It is from this position that Qoheleth attacks all rational pursuits and shows that eventually they are all irrational, beginning with those of the most outstanding king, Solomon. As it was pointed out earlier, a rebuttal outline requires that all alternative views be carefully considered and shown defective so that the only alternative left is the point of view which has been established. It is for this reason that Qoheleth insists that he has “searched” everything under the sun and proved that any other human pursuit is defective. Had Qoheleth conceded that there might be something that he had overlooked, his whole argument would have fallen apart. Therefore, the overall rational square of the book is:
Like all rebuttal arguments, Qoheleth’s argumentation goes in two stages. In the first part of the first chapter he establishes the left side of the rational square. Beginning with the end of the first chapter and the rest of the book he develops the main part of his argument which is to persuade humans to deny their side of the rational square and remove the opposition between themselves and God. Qoheleth shows that humans, by asserting the rational lines in the rational square and pursuing vanity, although rhetorically they are rational,375 in reality they are irrational. Therefore he wants to persuade them to become rhetorically irrational, that is, to affirm the irrational lines in the square, and by doing so to become in reality rational and affirm God’s side of the rational square. By asserting irrational lines in the square, humans no longer assert vanity and assert instead what God asserts. By becoming rhetorically irrational, the opposition between them and God disappears, it is replaced by equivalence, and the rhetorical situation closes:

When Qoheleth is viewed from the point of view of the rebuttal outline and the above rational square, there is nothing in the book which looks strenuous and odd any more. The plan is amazingly simple and consistent.

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375 At this point we need to remember that rationality requires that both opponents are consistent so that their actions assert their side of the secondary opposition line. In our case, humans are rhetorically rational when they pursue vanity and would be rhetorically irrational when they pursue permanence.
Before concluding this study, it is necessary to answer the question of why this innocent book has proved to be such a hard nut to crack. Although Qoheleth’s argument is very simple and easy to follow, there are several aspects which work against it.

Probably the most important detail that has made this book so confusing is the catch phrase which is placed right at the beginning of the book: “Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). It is no surprise that Seow and other commentators have quickly concluded that Qoheleth’s purpose is to prove that that catch phrase is absolutely true because it is so tempting to assume that that is the final conclusion of the book and Qoheleth begins to prove its truth right from the next verse. We saw how Seow tried to show that the statement that “everything is vanity” applies to the very verses which follow the superscription and how hard he had to fight against statements that obviously asserted permanence. The presence of that phrase in the beginning does not mean, however, that it applies to everything in the book. That phrase may have been added as a title of the book either by Qoheleth himself or by a later hand before the book got its superscription in the first verse. But even if the phrase and the superscription were original, as long as it captured a major claim of the book, its position was justified, but nothing required that it applied to every verse that followed. What it refers to is not based on its position, but on its relationship to what follows. And indeed, there is nothing in the first eleven verses that that phrase applies to.

In order to illustrate how even scholars who believe that Ecclesiastes is a carefully structured book and attempt to uncover that structure play down the first twelve verses of the book and the conclusion because they do not fit in the “vanity” theme, I would like to sketch briefly the approach of Addison G. Wright. He begins by recognizing the puzzling nature of the book: “Qoheleth is one of the most difficult books in the Bible, and it has long been an enigma and a source of fasci-

nation for its readers and students.”377 Then he states his position that the book does have a structure:

The present writer believes that the principle underlying this maze is not to be sought in multiple authorship, or in an appeal to a “didactic” mode of thought or to Qoheleth’s supposed vacillating attitude toward tradition (now standing with it, now against it), but that the principle is to be sought in the area of structure.378

Just like Seow, Wright thinks that the supposed structure of the book must be found by noticing some repetition of words:

He [the author] believes that the book is in fact structured and that the key to that structure is to be found in three successive patterns of verbal repetition in 1,12–11,6. When these patterns are taken as indicating the framework of the book and when that framework is brought to the material as an overlay as it were, there emerges out of the apparent disorder a straightforward presentation of a very simple theme, albeit somewhat reduced in content from what has previously been seen as the message of the book.379

After presenting his methodological considerations, the very first statement of his analysis of the book is: “Let us remove from consideration for the moment 1,1 (the title of the book) as well as 1,2–11 on the endless round of events, etc.; it is generally acknowledged that the book gets underway in 1,12.”380 His “Summary of the book” which is intended to explain the “structure” begins with 1:12 and ends with

377 Ibid., 313.

378 Ibid.

379 Ibid., 313–4.

380 Ibid., 320.
11:3–6.\textsuperscript{381} With the two passages—from the beginning and the end—he deals in a separate section “The two poems” which opens with the statement: “There remains to discuss the introductory (1,2–11) and concluding (11,7–12,8) poems which stand outside of the structure described above.”\textsuperscript{382} Had biblical scholars considered the possibility that those two “poems” may reflect what Qoheleth advocates and whatever comes in between is precisely what he rejects and wants his readers to reject as well, they would have realized that pursuing “vanity” is what Qoheleth is charging his readers with and not necessarily what he believed himself. Scholars may be right that usually authors go to a much greater length to present what they advocate and provide little or no space for what they reject, but in a rebuttal outline the opposite is the case. When what an author advocates is confused with what the same author rejects, the whole writing ends up making no sense whatsoever, and apparently that is exactly what has happened with Ecclesiastes.

Another aspect which has misled scholars is the belief that different parts of a book must be judged by the amount of text that goes into them so that the turning point of a book must be found somewhere in the middle of the book or even later and not after just a few verses. The chapter division is another proof that there is a long tradition of missing the turning point of the book which has further misled biblical scholars. For instance, the narrative that supposedly begins with the second chapter clearly begins with 1:12. The “I” which begins the second chapter is not explained and it would make no sense if the narrative begins here, but is explained earlier: “I, Qoheleth, while being king over Israel in Jerusalem . . .” (Eccl. 1:12). It is at this point that “vanity” comes into play.

Another factor that has been an obstacle in the understanding of the book is the rebuttal outline itself. Such outlines are unfamiliar and do not carry tremendous persuasive force. They carry weight with those who already share the stated position and the rebuttal only reinforces

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., 326–332.

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., 333.
it, but it would hardly persuade one to adopt that position just as a result of the rebuttal. The persuasiveness of the rebuttal outline is negative: you are forced to accept the required point of view not because you like it or because you find it attractive, but because you are left with no better alternatives. After all the other options are criticized, one is unlikely to be happy about an alternative which does not receive any criticism at all. Human minds tend to accept things because of what can be said positively in their support and not because of the negative things that can be said about the other alternatives. Moreover, the tendency of historical-critical scholars to easily discard as later additions whatever seemed inconsistent in a text such as the ending of Ecclesiastes in which Qoheleth enforces his positive message has further obscured the whole argument of the book. When the only positive option is played down or eliminated from a rebuttal outline, the only thing that is left is just meaningless jumble; which is exactly what scholars have made out of this book.

But probably the most important obstacle in properly understanding Qoheleth’s argument is the modern assumptions about reality. The failure of scholars to grasp Qoheleth’s basic claim that reality and the world are fundamentally stable and invulnerable is due to the fact that modern people would find that view quite untenable, indeed, unthinkable. Scholars have failed to see Qoheleth’s basic claim that the world is permanent and stable not only in his book, but in the world itself. It is easy to miss a point which someone makes and which defies reality. Today the world no longer seems so stable and unchangeable as Qoheleth argued. Therefore, Qoheleth may have considered it a good persuasive strategy to push his contemporaries to give up their highest goals as futile and be satisfied with the world and life as it is because that is the only way the world is and can be. Qoheleth may have been able to push his contemporaries with a rebuttal outline thinking that they had a stable and a well balanced world to fall back on after giving up all their pursuits. That can hardly work with modern readers who no longer find the world so fixed and stable. The dominant feeling today is that the world is quite fragile. Therefore, even when Qoheleth’s argument is properly understood, it may no longer be so persuasive today.
After claiming to attempt to analyze the thinking and argumentation of von Rad, Seow, Crenshaw, and Qoheleth, the obvious question is whether I have succeeded. Of course, we can never recover the mind of someone else, but rationality provides us with quite a reliable test. As long as rationality requires that everything that is said in a discourse would have to be coherent and consistent, the argument analysis that renders everything that is said coherent and consistent can claim to have captured the thinking of the one who wrote the text. Conversely, any inconsistency is the proof that the analysis has failed to capture the reasoning behind the text. In order, however, for an argument analysis to be able to capture the thinking behind a linguistic production and to be proved right or wrong, the argument analysis must be done first. Therefore, the failure of the biblical scholarship—as I see it—consists not so much in the fact that what biblical scholars are doing is wrong and they should abandon whatever they have been doing so far. Their failure is not in what they are doing; the failure is in what they overlook. As long as any literary production starts with a mind which has a more or less clear plan that guides what is being said, any interpretation of what is being said must start also with an analysis and understanding of that overall plan that binds everything that is said together. It is only after the support structure of a building has been established that the abundance of interpretative tools which contemporary scholarship has developed can be used to complete the building or to analyze it. It can be argued that such an analysis might be necessary even when someone wants to properly demolish the structure as some postmodernist scholars would like to do.
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Dr. Aurel Ionica is a Romanian native now living in the United States. He worked for many years as a pastor and also taught various courses at undergraduate and graduate levels in both denominational and non-denominational institutions. His education includes degrees in engineering, theology, and information and communication sciences. His preferred hobbies are photography, gardening, and woodworking. He is married, has a son, and lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Traditionally, it is believed that human thinking is captured and shaped by the so-called logic, and the relationship between language and meaning/thought is based on the notions of “true” and “false” that Aristotle chose and on which the current binary logic is based. The work outlines the process by which Aristotle arrived at these two notions and shows that he chose them through a process of elimination of options; that explains why logic has no applicability to analyzing language, establishing meaning, and capturing the human thinking. Then the work introduces a complex reasoning square that includes not only the notions of “true” and “false,” but also all other oppositions that Aristotle had discarded and are involved in any human discourse, therefore it establishes the true structure that is involved in any thought process. In order to show that this is not just a theoretical model but the actual structure that is involved in any discourse, the rational or reasoning square is applied to various literary forms such as metaphors, similes, syllogisms, informal arguments, narratives, humor, and so on. The second part of the study analyses the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, a notoriously difficult book to understand, and outlines its thinking and what might be the problems with accepting it. In the last part, the dissertation analyses some scholarly works on Ecclesiastes not only to understand how scholars deal with a text, but also the scholarly arguments that are used to support their claims.

The work has profound implications for all academic disciplines that come under the broad umbrella called “humanities” because it defines for the first time what “meaning” in language is, a notion that has proved so far to be illusive as any scholar knows. Since the work proves that the current binary logic is unable to establish meaning in language, all current research on artificial intelligence based on such logic is doomed to failure and instead it should be based on the theory advanced in this work. Once these rational structures are properly understood, not only the meaning of any discourse can be accurately established and analyzed, but it can also be replicated by machines.