

Ecclesiastes (Part 2)

Heart of Wisdom Series

Coast School of Theology; Pastor Earl Miles; 2-24-19

Sources: *The Bible Project* and the *ESV Study Bible*

Anti-Natalism and Ecclesiastes

A 27-year-old Indian man plans to sue his parents for giving birth to him without his consent. Raphael Samuel, whose claim is based on anti-natalism, told the BBC that it's wrong to bring children into the world, because they then have to put up with lifelong suffering. "There's no point to humanity. So many people are suffering," Samuel said. "If humanity is extinct, Earth and animals would be happier. They'll certainly be better off. Also no human will then suffer. Human existence is totally pointless."

What is Anti-Natalism?

Anti-natalism (sometimes spelled antinatalism) is the view that it is immoral to bring new people into existence because doing so would be a harm to them. Anti-natalists assign a negative value to birth. (The term is the opposite of natalism, the view that childbearing and parenthood are desirable for social reasons and should therefore be promoted.)

What are the types of anti-natalism?

There are two general categories of anti-natalism: misanthropic and philanthropic.

Misanthropic anti-natalism is the position that humans have a presumptive duty to desist from bringing into existence new members of our species because they cause harm. Ecological anti-natalism (sometimes called "environmental anti-natalism") is a subset of misanthropic anti-natalism that believes procreation is wrong because of the inherent environmental damage caused by human beings and the suffering we inflict on other sentient organisms. In the 2018 film *First Reformed*, the character of Michael Mensana is an ecological anti-natalist. The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement is also representative of this type of anti-natalism.

Philanthropic anti-natalism is the position that humans should not have children for the good of the (unborn) children because, in bringing children in the world, the parents are subjecting them to pain, suffering, illness, and—eventually—death. In Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, the character of Septimus Warren Smith expresses a philanthropic anti-natalist view when he says, "One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that." - Joe Carter, TGC

If we believe that life is meaningless simply because it appears that way, we will not live the 'good life' and we will not live well in God's world!

Video: The Bible Project – Ecclesiastes Drawn

Outline of the Book

1. Introduction and Theme ([Eccles. 1:1–3](#))

2. First Catalog of “Vanities” (Eccles. 1:4–2:26)
 1. The “vanity” of the natural world (Eccles. 1:4–11)
 2. The “vanity” of wisdom and knowledge (Eccles. 1:12–18)
 3. The “vanity” of pleasures, possessions, and accomplishments (Eccles. 2:1–11)
 4. More on the “vanity” of wisdom (Eccles. 2:12–17)
 5. The “vanity” of labor (Eccles. 2:18–26)
3. Poem: A Time for Everything (Eccles. 3:1–8)
4. Fear God, the Sovereign One (Eccles. 3:9–15)
5. Second Catalog of “Vanities” (Eccles. 3:16–4:16)
 1. The “vanity” of mortal life (Eccles. 3:16–4:3)
 2. More on the “vanity” of labor (Eccles. 4:4–12)
 3. More on the “vanity” of wisdom (Eccles. 4:13–16)
6. Fear God, the Holy and Righteous One (Eccles. 5:1–7)
7. Life “Under the Sun” (Eccles. 5:8–7:24)
 1. Injustice (Eccles. 5:8–9)
 2. Greed vs. contentment (Eccles. 5:10–6:9)
 3. Wisdom for living “under the sun” (Eccles. 6:10–7:24)
8. The Heart of the Problem: Sin (Eccles. 7:25–29)
9. More on Life “Under the Sun” (Eccles. 8:1–12:7)
 1. Wisdom in dealing with foolish authorities (Eccles. 8:1–9)
 2. The importance of fearing God (Eccles. 8:10–13)
 3. The limits of human knowledge (Eccles. 8:14–17)
 4. The unpredictability of life and certainty of death (Eccles. 9:1–6)
 5. Finding enjoyment as circumstances allow (Eccles. 9:7–10)
 6. More on the unpredictability of life (Eccles. 9:11–12)
 7. The paths of wisdom and foolishness (Eccles. 9:13–11:6)
 1. The power of wisdom (Eccles. 9:13–18)
 2. Proverbs concerning wisdom and foolishness (Eccles. 10:1–20)
 3. Wise practices in light of the unpredictability of life (Eccles. 11:1–6)
8. Aging and the “vanity” of mortal life (Eccles. 11:7–12:7)
10. Final Conclusion and Epilogue (Eccles. 12:8–14)

Taken from the ESV® Study Bible

The Solution to Living with Mystery (12:11-14)

How do we live life in the midst of 'hevel' (the enigma of life)?

- Embrace the puzzle.
- Leave the outcome to God.
- Follow the Shepherd.
- Enjoy the ride.

1. Embrace the puzzle.

Accept the reality that life in a fallen world is confusing and frustrating and beyond your control, yet in God's control.

Accept ('hevel' or the enigma) that everything in your life is out of your control.

The word 'vanity' emphasizes that life in a fallen world is 'elusive, frustrating and incomprehensible or unable to be grasped (like smoke) though we try to figure it out! (1:12-18)

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." (1:2)

I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. (1:14)

Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity." (2:15)

And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. (2:19)

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. (3:19)

I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is *the result of rivalry* between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. (4:4)

There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never*

asked, “And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?” This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. (4:8)

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity. (5:10)

Accept that your expectations about what life should be are ‘hevel’ – an enigma or mystery or puzzle that can’t be controlled.

‘Futility’ (Greek word) in Romans 8:20 is the translation in the LXX in Ecclesiastes of ‘vanity’ (Hebrew word)!

The joy and frustration of work. (2:10, 24; 2:18-23)

Accept that even the fear of the Lord and practice of wisdom cannot guarantee that you will get what you want in this life.

Work on your attitude toward life instead of working to control things.

Hold all things with an open hand and stop trying to control what happens.

2. Leave the outcome to God.

Recognize the principle of reaping and sowing and trust God to settle all accounts, if not in this world, then in the end.

Trust God completely, including that He will bring justice and right all wrongs, and stop trying to solve the mysteries of the universe.

We can’t ‘find out’ (3:11) or understand all the ways of God but we can trust Him!

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (3:11)

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (ESV)
God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time, but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives. (NET)

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (NIV)

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. (NLT)

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but man cannot discover the work God has done from beginning to end. (HCSB)

Because 'God will bring every act to judgment,' we should expect to reap what we sow (message of Proverbs) although sometimes we do not reap what we sow in this life but rather in the life to come (message of Ecclesiastes). (12:14) (see Galatians 6:6-10)

Rules and Exceptions

Proverbs: 'You reap what you sow.' (Galatians 6:7-9)

Ecclesiastes: 'You reap what you sow, but not necessarily in this fallen world.' (2 Timothy 4:14)

- How can I be rescued from reaping death (hell) from the sin I've sown? Cross!
- What should I do when I'm not getting the harvest I expected from good sown? Trust and wait.
- Should I be concerned about sowing and reaping as a Christian? Yes! There are consequences for sin, even for forgiven sin!

¹³ The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (12:13-14)

But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the Lord, And My reward with My God." – Isaiah 49:4

3. Follow the Shepherd.

Put your hope in God and trust the wisdom of the Good and Great Shepherd of our souls.

Learn wisdom and the fear of the Lord by living to do what God says is right (obeying His commands/ doing His will), depending on His mercy, even while feeling puzzled by life's mysteries. (12:13-14)

The book is about fearing God in a fallen world which is frequently confusing and frustrating. – ESV

The emphasis is on the ‘fear of the Lord’ as in Proverbs. (3:14; 5:7; 12:13; 7:18; 8:12-13)

I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has *so* worked that men should fear Him. (3:14)

For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God. (5:7)

It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them. (7:18)

¹² Although a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may lengthen his *life*, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. ¹³ But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God. (8:12-13)

The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. (12:13)

Beware of the false hope of trying to control life and put your hope in God.

Depend on the Shepherd of our souls by entrusting yourself to His wisdom in a world that is unpredictable and confusing. (12:11)

The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of *these* collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. (12:11)

God in Jesus is the ‘Someone greater than Solomon’ (Luke 11:31) and the ‘One Shepherd’ of our souls. (12:11; John 10:11; 10:16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4; Revelation 7:17)

4. Enjoy the ride.

Rest in God’s sovereign goodness and enjoy all the good things that God does give you in this life.

Enjoy the simple moments of life (like friendship, family, good meals, sunny days) as gifts from God that cannot be controlled or guaranteed. (2:24)

We are to gratefully enjoy God’s good gifts. (2:24-25; 3:12-13; 5:18-19; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7, 9)

²⁴ There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? (2:24-25)

¹² I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; ¹³ moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. (3:12-13)

¹⁸ Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun *during* the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. ¹⁹ Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. (5:18-19)

In the day of prosperity be happy,
But in the day of adversity consider—
God has made the one as well as the other
So that man will not discover anything *that will be* after him. (7:14)

So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils *throughout* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun. (8:15)

⁷ Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. ⁸ Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun. (9:7-9)

Enjoy life as you experience it, not as you think it should be.