In this article, a supplementary yet original contribution is made to the ongoing attempts at refining ways of comparative-philosophical conceptual clarification of Qohelet’s claim that כל הבל in 1:2 (and 12:8). Adopting and adapting the latest analytic metaphysical concerns and categories for descriptive purposes only, a distinction is made between כל הבל as property of כל הבל and the properties of כל הבל in relation to כל הבל. Involving both correlation and contrast, the second-order language framework is hereby extended to a level of advanced nuance and specificity for restating the meaning of the book’s first-order language on its own terms, even if not in them.

Contribution: By considering logical, ontological, mereological and typological aspects of property theory in dialogue with appearances of כל הבל in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8 and in-between, a new way is presented in the quest to explain why things in the world of the text are the way they are, or why they are at all.

Keywords: Ecclesiastes; כל הבל, vanity; Comparative philosophy; properties (philosophy).

Introduction

One of the fundamental associated comparative-philosophical foci in research on כל הבל in Qohelet is its appearance as כל הבל to form and inclusion to the book as a whole (1:2 and 12:8) with the traditional archaic English rendering as most readers have come to know it:

Most of the research concerned with these verses is primarily focussed on the word כל הבל as first-order term of art and second-order essentially contested concept (Fox 2019:559–563; Sneed 2017:879–894; Weeks 2020:48–260; cf. Mokoena 2019 and classically Fox 1986:409–427). The word כל הבל takes second place and might have been ignored, were it not quantifying כל הבל in 1:2 and 12:8 and therefore part of what has been variously called the book’s ‘motto’, ‘thesis’, ‘challenge’, ‘theme’, amongst others (cf. Crenshaw 2009:497 and recently Weeks 2020:248 for an overview; Anderson 1998:289–300 for a neglected voice of reason). The major concern here is how Qohelet related כל הבל in 1:2, a problem was succinctly formulated by Lohfink (1989:201–216) in a highly influential related publication entitled: Koh 1, 2 ‘alles ist Windhauch’ – universale oder anthropologische Aussage?:


Note: Special Collection: Historical Thought and Source Interpretation, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).
Lohfink (1989) followed the tradition of calling 1:2 a ‘Motto’ (amongst other things) and also used terms such as ‘predicate’ and ‘subject’, mostly in their linguistic, that is, grammatical senses, implying that for Qohelet, היה was somehow an attribute of כל.

Doch was meint hakkol genau? Das ist hier keineswegs klar, denn es handelt sich um den ersten Satz des Buches. Die Windhauchaussage ist bei Kohelet geradezu das Leitmotiv des Buches. Das muß nicht lange nachgewiesen werden. Was aber hakkol, das Subjekt, angeht, so wird aus den deutschen Übersetzungen ein entscheidendes Faktum kaum ersichtlich: kol ist im Hebräischen determiniert. (p. 201)

The reference to the presence of the definite article in the Hebrew and the relevance of the choice of words (‘determiniert’) for the present study will become readily apparent here. But first it is necessary to note what Lohfink (1989) wrote next, as it set the stage for how היה was understood or for which interpretation of its meaning and relation to כל had to be mentioned and opposed:


The way Lohfink sought to make sense of how היה was understood in relation to כל includes not only linguistic considerations but restatement of what Qohelet was up to in descriptive metaphysical terms. This was part of the reason for this article’s interest, namely the comparative-philosophical nuance it was able to add to the ongoing discussion of how Qohelethe’s words היה כל might be correlated or contradicted to an old pre-Socratic quest in new post-Aristotelian form (cf. Müller 2003:67–80; cf. von Loewenclau 1986:327–338 and earlier through influential studies like those of Braun 1973, Ranston [1925] and Palm [1885] amongst others). To be sure, in contemporary discussions of the doxography of ancient Greek philosophy and in research on ‘pre-Socratic’ philosophers, Lohfink’s historically uncritical link with anecdotal secondary sources’ references to the saying of the Cynic Monimos (and the presumption of verbal equivalence entailing semantic sources’ references to the saying of the Cynic Monimos) was somehow an attribute of Schönheit, Fülle und Herrlichkeit sein kann. (p. 216)

This classic reading and its formulation of the problem of what Qohelet meant by היה in relation to כל in 1:2 and 12:8 (and elsewhere) is still the accepted frame of reference for the related research problems (see Weeks 2020:248–260; cf. Bartholomew 2009; Crenshaw 1987; Fox 1989, 1999; Köhlmoo 2015; Krüger 2001:184–195; Krüger 2000; Idem 2000; Lohfink 2003, 2009; Longman 1998; Murphy 1992, 1995; Schellenberg 2013; Schoors 2013; Schwienhorst-Schönberger 2004; Seow 1997 et al.). As for the mode of description in the literature as to how Qohelet is thought to relate יהלכל to כל, the philosophical flavour of the book of Ecclesiastes as it is known in English and the popular dating of the text to the Persian or Hellenistic periods have made comparative-philosophical perspectives on the text comparably less controversial than they would be when applied to other biblical modes of discourse. Not surprisingly then, existing comparative-philosophical readings include correlating and contrasting Qohelet with not only Western but also Eastern counterparts (see, e.g. Heard 1996:65–93; Lorgunpai 1994:155–162; Sekine 1991:3–54; for a more extensive overview of the associated research, see Gericke 2015a:1–7) for a more complete list of related research).

The present study’s original contribution to the related comparative-philosophical research is motivated by Lohfink’s seminal findings. A supplement to existing perspectives will be offered in light of new comparative-philosophical concepts, concerns and categories that have been doing the rounds (cf. Littlejohn 2021:n.p.) More specifically, the discussion to follow will investigate the pros and cons of a new way of restating what is involved when Qohelet used the words יהלכל instead of a way of an experimental adoption and adaptation of the language of ‘properties’ in analytic metaphysics (cf. Allen 2021:n.p.). This choice of the particular domain of second-order discourse is motivated, on the one hand, by the already accepted use of certain second-order terms indicated here (e.g. the relatively unproblematic tendency to refer to יהלכל and יהלכל as ‘concepts’ in a more or less technical sense in conjunction with linguistic cum philosophical jargon that include speaking of the concepts in connection with their relation to other theoretical entities, for example, יהלכל as ‘predicate’, ‘attribute’, ‘feature’, ‘quality’, ‘characteristic’ of יהלכל). On the other hand, the metaphysical assumptions, as opposed to epistemological and ethical ones in Qohelet, remain under-represented in the research (see Gericke 2015b:n.p.).

The theoretical argument of the study states that a fruitful distinction can be made between יהלכל as property (of יהלכל) and the properties of יהלכל (in relation to יהלכל). The discussion to follow will operate mostly on the level of illustrated theory. Given the limited application value of opting for any particular interpretation of יהלכל and יהלכל, these terms will be left untranslated. When a specific interpretation is nevertheless presupposed or implied, it is used only
as part of the hypothetical examples and as such does not imply committing to or being dependent on the associated meanings of הבל and הכל therein.

It is, however, not assumed that all perspectives in the related research and all possible translations of הבל and הכל are equally valid. In addition, the involvement of property theory as it has taken shape within analytic philosophy is motivated by comparative-philosophical interests and not by an assumption that the associated presuppositions, problems and perspectives represent a perennial philosophical idiom. Although not usually treated in the same idiom in ‘Continental’ and other thinkers, as one recent commentator observed:

[The nature and existence of properties as such have always been central in terms of predicates. The latter linguistic terminology has a history in philosophy and overlaps with philosophical senses of the term ‘property’. Of course, some philosophers would argue that as a predicate should contrast with simple nouns such as כל. Following Frege, nominalised predicates such as כל came to stand for a ‘concept’, whilst observing that the associated ontological distinction is motivated by the fact that Qohelet’s Hebrew does not, aside from its quasi-appearance as such in 1:2a as הבל, allow for the use of the predicate כל in a subject position (for a more in-depth discussion and one to which this study is indebted, see Allen 2021) Second-order nominalisation of the predicate in descriptions of Qohelet as saying that is then taken as implying that as is somehow also assumed to be something approximating what in philosophical terms is called a property (of כל). This inference is further corroborated by the generally accepted use of singular terms in the literature, for example, ‘being всё’ or ‘vanity’ and in Qohelet’s use of demonstratives, for example, ‘this too is всё’ (cf. Heal 1997).

Once всё is seen as (also) a property (of всё) and as such distinguished from the properties of כל (in relation to הכל), in comparative-philosophical terms it follows that in the world of the text certain objects (in the broad metaphysical sense) can be said to instantiate or exemplify всё as a property of הכל. In different related terminology, всё is assumed to possess, bear or have everything as a property so that, inversely, всё characters or inheres in כל. In this sense, всё is assumed to be a property (of הכל) and there are assumed to be properties of всё (in relation to הכל) in the ontological assumptions in the world of the text to investigate, irrespective of our choice of associated vocabulary or whether всё was in fact assumed to be part of one or more than one kind of instantiation or exemplification (see, e.g. Lowe 2006:77).

There appears to be a general agreement in the literature that всё-exemplifying states of affairs obtaining within relations in the world of the text involve just one kind of exemplification, applying indifferently to different categories of всё-bearing entities in всё. This monist view may indeed be considered the default one as condition of possibility for the meaningfulness of the generalisation in Qohelet in 1:2 and 12:8. Even so, different theories of conceptual structure already in place can be supplemented with additional nuance and specificity by distinguishing всё as a property (of всё) as particular from it as a relation or state of affairs exemplified. Alternatively, a pluralist ontology in our categorial distinctions means the instantiation of всё as property (of всё) and the properties of всё (in relation to всё) in Qohelet can be treated as different sorts of objects, namely kinds (substantial universals), attributes and modes (tropes) (see Lowe 2006).

In comparative-philosophical counterpart terms, всё as a property of всё is often located in ‘all thingness’. This is further evidenced in the different number of ways in which the word всё is grammatically and semantically used and configured in relation to всё elsewhere in Qohelet:

Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun. (2:11)

So I hated life; because was grievous unto me; the work that is wrought under the sun for all is vanity and a striving after wind. (2:17)

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity. (3:19)
As has already been noted in the research but not restated in these terms, the use of the word כל in Qohelet is not limited to the sense and reference it has in 1:2 and 12:8 in relation to הבל. Interestingly, appearing only in 8 out of 222 instances, after 1:2 and 12:8 have been excluded, כל appears at least twice in four of the six verses (2:11; 3:19; 9:1 [3x]; 11:9). It only features once in 2:17 and 8:9. In 10 of these 13 appearances in the book’s total of 15, only 4 instances connect it directly to הבל as property in ways related to 1:2 and 12:8 (2:11; 2:17; 3:19 and 11:9). In only three of these does it appear as כל (11:9 only has כל). Of these four, two have הבל as property, not of any metaphysical particular but of Qohelet’s ‘agency’ (and that related to him). An alternative philosophical term for what is present in the particular states of affairs would be ‘events’ (شيخי:שוי לעיה) 2:11, 17). The other two simply refer to הבל as property, once undefined as כל in the context of the mortality of living things (3:19) and the other as exemplified undefined in what is to come (11:9).

In the four texts observed, the property is lost in translation in the sense of being temporally located as being exemplified specifically (also) in the present twice (2:11 and 3:19), in the past (2:17) and in the future (11:9). Spatially all are either explicitly or implicitlyشيخי:שוי לעיה ‘under the sun’ (3:19; 9:1; 11:9 lacking the phrase in the verse but featuring it in the surrounding pericope). The other uses of כל with or without prepositions are as indicative of both every particular subject and object in the domain of discourse (2:11 x 1; 8:9 x1; 9:1 x2) and is extended in use to refer to all being of one ‘air, breath’ (3:19) and all of the ‘days’ and ‘all this’ (יהו:יהו תוא:תוא 8:9 x 2 and 9:1 x 1) that Qohelet has seen, thought of and sought (thus links to as property of כל and the properties of הבל only implicitly).

In the light of these observations, it would seem that interpreting כל as a property of כל and the properties of הבל in relation to הבל in 1:2 and 12:8 and in explicit references to כל or הבל quantified over one state of affairs or another is both unified and diverse. Although Qohelet is of course focussed on the human condition, the anthropological domain is supervened on by cosmological spatio-temporal mereological part–whole relations for הבל. Here a problem arises for an analytic metaphysical or ontological restatement operating in tandem with the comparative-philosophical counterpart for הבל as property of כל and the properties of הבל, that is, the predication of כל as property of הבל and the properties of הבל are not univocal. This makes formal-logical specificity in analysis seeking to clarify the identity and existence conditions and mereological nuances in the nature of the relation between כל and the properties of זה impossible. That being granted, as Qohelet uses זה in a metaphorical sense and זה rarely quantifies over a universal state of affairs, analogical predication and a fictional ontology, perhaps a neo-Meinongian framework able to operate with two modes of predication (‘external’ and ‘internal’) is better suited to comparative philosophical restatement (cf. Allen 2021:n.p.).

The above-mentioned alternative approach combined with an exemplar (as opposed to classical or prototype) theory of conceptual structure when considering extensions in texts explicitly mentioning זה and with reference to which it can be restated property of זה in terms of its constituent parts, for example, ‘… This is also זה’ (2:1 [of enjoying life in pleasure]; 2:15 [of being wise yet suffering the same fate as the fool in the end]; 2:19 [of the possibility of wise bequeathing success to fools]; 2:21 [of those who toiled leaving the fruits of their labours to those who did nothing to obtain it]; 2:23 [of vexed and restless prosperity]; 2:26 [the gift of wisdom and happiness from favour and the material benefits therefrom obtained from those without it]; 3:4 [excellence in work as made possible by envy]; 3:7–8 [hard work and self-sacrifice and deprivation without joy, satisfaction or beneficiaries]; 3:16 [the eventual loss of however great one’s fame, power and role]; 5:10 [the loving of prosperity as unsatisfactory and insatiable]; 6:1 [lacking nothing through divine blessing unable to enjoy it whilst others will]; 6:9 [seeing better than desiring]; 7:6 [hearing the laughter of fools]; 8:10 [the burial and forlornness of the pious wicked]; 8:14 [when the good suffers the fate of the bad and vice versa]). Atypical contexts without the conclusion that ‘This is also זה’ include 6:4 [as the state of the stillborn]; 6:11 [as something that is increased the more words one uses]; and 11:10 [of youth and early life].

Restated in comparative-philosophical terms, כל and זה are clearly fuzzy concepts as their boundaries of application in the world of the text and in their relations to each other vary considerably according to Qohelet’s foci. The associated vagueness gives the impression that both terms lack fixed meaning in spite of obviously and most certainly not lacking in specificity. This relativises the value of even a formal fuzzy concept analysis, which usually seeks to link זה and כל by making the former the point of departure. In the given table, this relation is inverted according to extensional and intensional aspects of זה in relation to כל in 1:2 showing the problematic, somewhat arbitrary and generally unsatisfying outcome of attempting precise descriptions of the relation to the respective זה-instantiating states of affairs in conjunction with dispositional attitudes, agency and events in their metaphysical senses.

What is apparent from the intensionally and extensionally inadequate representation of זה as a property of כל and the properties of כל instantiated in all undergraduate יִשְׂמָח כִּי אִם-שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה לִפְנֵיהֶם. Therefore, for all this I laid to my heart, even to make clear all this: that the righteous and the wise and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them. (9:1)
The inference just made is further corroborated by the observation that in the world of the text the property of כֶּלֶֹּת (merological) relations between them there is always more than one part of כֶּלֶֹת instantiating the property of being כֶּלֶֹת and more than one property of כֶּלֶֹּת included in the state of affairs comprising a contextually sensitive exemplification link in כֶּלֶֹּת.

Of course, an alternative and roughly contemporaneous comparative-philosophical counterpart for correlation and contrast would be Aristotle’s moderate realism whereby כֶּלֶֹּת as general term is also a kind of universal existing and exemplified only in particulars instantiating the properties of כֶּלֶֹּת (universalia in rebus). It seems hard to affirm or deny this with reference to the world of the text, which is basically silent about this matter even when using כֶּלֶֹּת as a general term in relation to and quantified by כֶּלֶֹּת. And thought as the second-order language of the real reader today may assume a form of conceptualism or nominalism in discussing these terms as part of describing a world of the text by default operating on a fictionalist ontological status, attributing this to Qohelet would be conceptually historically anachronistic. It would therefore fail to be descriptively apt in classifying the mereology involved in the one-over-many problem, adapted to the discussion about כֶּלֶֹּת as a property of כֶּלֶֹּת and the properties of כֶּלֶֹּת in relation to כֶּלֶֹּת.

The same applies to literary-critical approaches where כֶּלֶֹּת as a property of כֶּלֶֹּת and the properties of כֶּלֶֹּת in relation to כֶּלֶֹּת are deemed to function in a figurative sense, for example, metaphorical and constructed as tropes. The latter term in the domain of discourse as it appears in biblical scholarship should, however, not be confused with the metaphysical sense of being aligned to nominalism, despite some form of nominalism being the default literary-critical ontology as well. Since trope-theory is often discussed separately from property theory in metaphysics, futher related remarks are beyond the scope of the remainder of the discussion about כֶּלֶֹּת as property of כֶּלֶֹּת and the properties of כֶּלֶֹּת in relation to כֶּלֶֹּת.

To close the discussion, the interest now turns to the type of property that כֶּלֶֹּת as property of כֶּלֶֹּת was assumed to be. Not because Qohelet had such an interest but because the text contains related assumptions allowing for conceptual clarification of the properties involved along these lines and irrespective of one’s ontological commitment to a specific type (or the lack thereof). Although not exhaustive in typological terms, the following will suffice to illustrate the ways in which this element of property theory can be comparative-philosophical correlation and contrasting can be part of conceptual clarification.

Based on their distinction in Aristotle, כֶּלֶֹּת was assumed to be an accidental property of כֶּלֶֹּת in the context of all כֶּלֶֹּת despite it being permanently instantiated. In other words, it was conceivable for Qohelet that in at least one possible world, the one in which the conditions of possibility for the discontent are found, כֶּלֶֹּת as a whole of sorts with reference to the related mereological parts would not lose its identity is כֶּלֶֹּת was not exemplified as

**TABLE 1:** כֶּלֶֹּת as property of כֶּלֶֹּת and the properties of כֶּלֶֹּת in relation to כֶּלֶֹּת

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Although not usually approached from this angle, it therefore appears relevant to ask how כֶּלֶֹּת as property of כֶּלֶֹּת is conceived in Qohelet in relation to the universal—particular debate since Plato. When commentators refer to כֶּלֶֹּת or כֶּלֶֹּת by using words such as idea or form they usually do not use these terms with the original metaphysical import of indicating Platonic realism as universalia ante res—fulness as coming before particulars in כֶּלֶֹּת. Yet this does not do away with the question of how Qohelet assumed the variety of כֶּלֶֹּת-instantiating things as all capable, (in typical cases) of having the same properties that makes כֶּלֶֹּת and allow for the superlative relation within the broader mereology as condition of possibility to claim: כֶּלֶֹּת. Despite the vagueness in Qohelet’s language, what is obvious is that כֶּלֶֹּת in relation to כֶּלֶֹּת and כֶּלֶֹּת as being כֶּלֶֹּת in Qohelet is nevertheless implied as themselves not identical to ontological particulars, or individuals.
Another type of property that נאצוות as property of כל hội was not
assumed to be is a sortal property. Although prima facie the
particulars in the world of the text instantiating it can be
counted, the vagueness and generalisations in places imply
otherwise. The complication involved here partly arises
because of נאצוות being assumed to be an extrinsic rather
than intrinsic property of כל Hội as it is with reference to any instance
of נאצוות; it is only exemplified within this relation. And this is,
mutatis mutandis, also applicable to the properties of כל Hội in
relation to כל. This in turn suggests that נאצוות was a tertiary
property of כל Hội in the sense of being able to alter its primary
properties such as number, motion, shape, solidity and
form of particulars (and not a secondary property as those
connected to the senses or its literal meaning’s relation to
Conversely, כל can now be seen as a multigrade or variably
polyadic property in relation to כל in the sense that being
assumed to instantiate נאצוות was assumed to be true of various numbers of things not
limited to כל as mereological scope.

Further types can be distinguished and identified, for
example, assumed to instantiate כל as structured
property, given the presence of compound properties in their
relations, that is, כל’s exemplification of כל meant having other properties as well as a result of this relation (see the given
table). Accordingly, one can describe כל as a property of כל in
the world of the text as supervening through changes
the set of properties of כל necessarily implying a changing
set of properties for כל. This did not, interestingly enough,
manifest in ways that precluded the same properties of
both from being emergent, that is, not all present in initial
conditions but being exemplified over time. From this follows
that as property of כל and the properties of כל in relation
to could get more specific and in both cases involve
determinable properties, whatever these are understood to
be. Last but not least, all along it has been observed that כל
not only has כל as property but that the latter has additional
sets of properties instantiated in relation to the former, thus
implying the presence of higher-order properties in the way
as property of כל and the properties of כל in relation to
are implied to be present in the world of the text.

Conclusion
In this study it was argued that the concepts of כל and
might have meant by these words, it does help to describe
the way כל is instantiated in relation to כל and its own
properties thereby exemplified. Although the language was
philosophical and the distinctions second-order, it is clear
how the concepts under consideration can be correlated and
contrasted in order to restate the associated metaphysical
and ontological assumptions in Qohelet’s language on their
own terms, even if not in them. Thus, constructing כל as a
property of כל and distinguishing it from the properties
in relation to כל, irrespective of the merits of the
philosophical views utilised in philosophy itself, is in the
ways illustrated helpful to describe dimensions of the
conditions of possibility that must be postulated to account
for why things in the world of the text are the way they are,
or why they are at all.

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