

University of Groningen

Taken from the Soil, Gifted with the Breath of Life

Noort, Edward

Published in:

Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life (Gen. 2:7)

DOI:

[10.1163/9789004334762_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004334762_002)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Noort, E. (2016). Taken from the Soil, Gifted with the Breath of Life: The Anthropology of Gen 2:7 in Context. In J. T. A. G. M. Ruiten, & G. van Kooten (Eds.), *Dust of the Ground and Breath of Life (Gen. 2:7): The Problem of a Dualistic Anthropology in Early Judaism and Christianity* (pp. 1-15). (Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian traditions; Vol. 20). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004334762_002

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Taken from the Soil, Gifted with the Breath of Life: The Anthropology of Gen 2:7 in Context*

Ed Noort

1 Introduction

In Western culture, most people are familiar with the words from Christian liturgy spoken at the graveside: “We commit his/her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”¹ The quotation from Genesis “until you return to the soil (אדמה), for out of it you were taken; you are dust (עפר), and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19), with Gen 2:7 in the background, has always been understood in a dualistic way. The dark words “earth,” “ashes,” and “dust” are surrounded by a statement of eternal life, “in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life,” inspired by the confidence that the One who breathed life into man will also renew that life.²

Jewish liturgy uses the magnificent poem of death at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes in the same way, stating “and the dust (עפר) returns to the earth (הארץ) as it was, and the breath/spirit (רוח) returns to God” (Eccl 12:7). In the memorial prayer, a florilegium of psalm words prepares the stage for the quote from Ecclesiastes.³ After Ps 49:16 (“Surely God will free me from the grave, he will receive me indeed”), follows Ps 73:26 (“My flesh and my heart fail, yet God is my strength forever”). Without doubt the quote in the Siddur in this context, preceded by both psalms, serves a dualistic view: the dust to the earth, man’s self, his spirit, to God. Thus, we may start with the observation that in the history of interpretation, and especially in a confessional context, Gen 2:7 was interpreted in a dualistic way. On the one hand, man is totally earthbound,

* A German version of this article was published in *Viele Wege zu dem Einen: Historische Bibelkritik – Die Vitalität der Glaubensüberlieferung in der Moderne* (eds. S. Beyerle, A. Graupner, U. Rütterswörden; BibTS 121; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2012), 1–22.

1 T.W. Mundahl, “From Dust to Dust: An Exploration of Elemental Integrity,” *ww* 6 (1986): 86–96, esp. 86; *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis 1978), 213; *Dienstboek: Een Proeve II, Leven, zegen, gemeenschap* (PvdE 5; Zoetermeer 2004), Orde 1, 915; Orde 11, 922.

2 Mundahl, “Dust,” 86.

3 See P. Birnbaum, ed., *הסדרור השלם* (New York 1969), 665, for a memorial service on Yom Kippur and other occasions. For both Psalms, see H. Delkurt, “*Der Mensch ist dem Vieh gleich, das vertilgt wird*: Tod und Hoffnung gegen den Tod in Ps 49 und bei Kohelet (BibTS 50; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005), 14–75.

a mortal being, dust to dust. On the other hand, the communities of faith understood the gift of the breath of life as the God-given additional element that enabled man to survive death.

This volume encompasses the theme of a dualistic anthropology and its development. The central question for this paper will be whether Gen 2:7 and other important texts from the Hebrew Bible can be qualified as “dualistic.” Without doubt later times used them in such a way. Often they were read in the light of the Paulinic asynthetic wordpair *σάρξ* and *πνευμα*. Nevertheless, the question remains: Does the qualification “dualistic” fit the texts from the Hebrew Bible in their own setting? It is not necessary to restart the whole discussion of “dualism” and its use in theology and exegesis, for it is a long way from its first use by Thomas Hyde (1636–1703) in his characterization of Zoroastrianism to its widespread reception in philosophy and systematic theology.⁴ In this paper, it is used to refer to two fundamentally different, in some way conflicting, principles determining the existence of human beings. That may be true for the later developments, but for the basic principles of Old Testament anthropology, the question of *complementary* rather than *conflicting* elements comes first. I start this paper with death, because in the world of the Old Testament (and not only there) death defines the condition and the borders of life. A dead body is missing something, but what? What is the difference between a corpse and a living being?

The answers in the Hebrew Bible vary. In violent situations and in the cultic context of the slaughter of animals, the criterion is without doubt “blood.”⁵ In the archetypical murder in Gen 4:10, the voice of the blood of Abel cries out to Yhwh *מִן הָאֲדָמָה* (“from the ground/earth”), which is a link to the creation of man from the soil (*מִן הָאֲדָמָה*) in Gen 2:7. In Gen 4:10, the plural of *דָּם* (“blood”) is used. It always means “spilt blood.”⁶ This image appears again with the cry of Job in Job 16:18 (“O, earth cover not my blood and let my cry find no resting place”). With this background, the Holiness Code in Lev 17:11 reflects the empirical, cultic, and mythological importance of blood with the crucial statement: “The life of the flesh is in the blood” (*כִּי נֶפֶשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם*). We translated *נֶפֶשׁ* here with “life”, which is the *Leitwort* of Gen 2:7.

4 T. Hyde, *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum religionis historia* (Oxford 1700 [1st ed.], 1760 [2nd ed.]).

5 S. Anthonioz, “Le sang est la vie: Réflexion sur la création humaine (Gn 2,7),” *RB* 116 (2009): 5–14.

6 L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J.J. Stamm, “דָּם,” *HALOT* 1:215b; H. Seebass, *Genesis I, Urgeschichte* (1,1–11,26) (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1996), 155.

A second and more general answer, however, is “breath.” “Breath” marks the difference between the dead body and the living being. Breath is needed for life. While this is a simple remark, it means that in the creation stories an added element plays a fundamental role. It is a complementary but necessary element, not a conflicting one. In the healing narrative of Elijah (1 Kgs 17), the son of the widow dies (?)⁷ because “his illness grew worse until he had no breath (נשמה) left in him” (17:17). Elijah stretches his body over the child and prays for the return of the נפש of the boy, which happens (17:22). In the parallel narrative in 2 Kgs 4, Elisha does the same, “putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes to his eyes and his hands on his hands” (2 Kgs 4:34). These stories of revival from death reflect popular beliefs honouring the magical powers of a “man of God.” Nevertheless, the anthropological view is clear: without breath there is no life. With “breath” (נשמה) we have our second keyword in Gen 2:7.

In the creation hymn, Ps 104:27, 29–30, the breath of life is exclusively connected with Yhwh:

- 27 They all wait upon you
That you may give [them] their food in due time ...
- 29 You turn your face away, they suffer,
you take away their breath (רוח), they die
and return to their dust (עפר)
- 30 You send your breath (רוח), they are created (ברא)
And you [i.e., Yhwh] renew the face of the earth (אדמה)

Rather than נשמה we now have רוח, but the function is the same: where the divine breath is lacking, creatures die. Though רוח and נשמה have different roots, they can be used as synonyms. In a *parallelismus membrorum* Isa 42:5 states:

- 5 Thus says God, Yhwh, ...
Who gives breath (נשמה) to the people upon it [i.e., the earth]
And breath/spirit (רוח) to those who walk in it ...

7 On the one hand, מות does not appear here, and on the other hand Dan 10:17 and 1 Kgs 10:5 demonstrate that the phrase does not always mean death. In a balanced overview, Thiel (W. Thiel, *Könige II.1*, (1Kön 17,1–24) [BKAT 9.2.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000], 70–71) concludes: “geht dem Menschen der Atem aus ... oder kehrt dieser zurück zu Gott ... oder zieht Gott ihn wieder an sich ... dann stirbt der Mensch. Daß in 1 Kön 17,17 nichts anderes gemeint ist, bestätigen der Kontext und die spätere Interpretation in Sir 48,5.” The last argument is conclusive.

Job 34:14–15 is even clearer:

- 14 If he [i.e., God] should take back his spirit (רוח) to himself
And gather to himself his breath (נשמה)
15 All flesh (בשר) would perish together
And all man (אדם) return to dust (עפר)

In the story of the flood, the reversal of creation, many phrases refer to that creation. In Gen 7:22 a remarkable combination appears, coming from a redactional hand. The verse reads “All, in whose nostrils was *the breath of the spirit of life* ... died.” At the beginning of v. 22, כל refers to כל האדם in v. 21. The “breath of life” (נשמת חיים), however, stems from Gen 2:7. It returns here together with the רוח חיים of all the animals entering the ark in Gen 7:15, normally understood as a part of the priestly version of the flood story. The result is the accumulation of three nouns: נשמת רוח חיים. The redactional hand that inserted רוח could connect the רוח and the נשמה because they were synonyms for him.

The רוח appears next to נשמה. Both expressions have a history of their own. In exilic and post-exilic literature they can be used as synonyms. Several texts connect them almost exclusively with Elohim or Yhwh. “Breath” is *a conditio sine qua non* for human beings.⁸ With these two nouns we are already in the neighbourhood of the third concept used in Old Testament anthropology: נפש.⁹ Despite the long debate on נפש under pressure from the Greek concept of “soul,” the root originally means “throat,” the part of the body related to

8 H.W. Wolff, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (München 1973), 96–101.

9 A.R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (2nd ed.; Cardiff 1964); B. Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: Eine Anthropologie der Psalmen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 2003), 44, 204–214; B. Janowski, “Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Versuch einer Grundlegung,” in *Anthropologische Aufbrüche: Alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie* (ed. A. Wagner; FRLANT 232; Göttingen 2009), 13–41 (literature); D. Michel, “*nəpəʕ* als Leichnam?,” *ZAH* 7 (1994): 81–84; M. Rösel, “Die Geburt der Seele in der Übersetzung: Von der hebräischen *nəfəš* über die *psyche* der LXX zur deutschen Seele,” in *Anthropologische Aufbrüche: Alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie* (ed. A. Wagner; FRLANT 232; Göttingen 2009), 151–170; O. Sander, “Leib-Seele-Dualismus im Alten Testament?,” *ZAW* 77 (1965): 329–332; H. Seebass, “*נֶפֶשׁ* *nəpəʕ*,” *ThWAT* 5:531–555 (literature); A. Wagner, “Wider die Reduktion des Lebendigen: Über das Verhältnis der sogenannten anthropologischen Grundbegriffe und die Unmöglichkeit mit ihnen die alttestamentliche Menschenvorstellung zu fassen,” in *Anthropologische Aufbrüche: Alttestamentliche und interdisziplinäre Zugänge zur historischen Anthropologie* (ed. A. Wagner; FRLANT 232; Göttingen 2009), 183–199; Wolff, *Anthropologie*, 25–48.

“breath,” and the weakest part. Though there is a wide variety in meaning, the most accurate description is still Johnson’s “vitality,” supported by Seebass and Janowski.¹⁰

2 Genesis 2:7

Genesis 2:7 is among the most quoted passages from the Hebrew Bible. Travelling through time it has changed function, meanings, and contexts.¹¹ It had different audiences and was part of the belief systems of different groups. The starting point, however, is the Hebrew Bible and the Near Eastern context. Within the canonical corpus, I focus on roughly three stages in the history of tradition: the non-priestly pre-exilic text of Gen 2:7; the exilic text of Ezek 37; and the reflections of Eccl 3:19–21; 12:7 in Hellenistic times. Both texts, Ezek 37 and Eccl 3 and 12, refer to Gen 2:7. Besides I refer to texts from the Ancient Near East as background for Gen 2:7.

The spotlight in Gen 2–3 is on the אַדְמָה. Gen 2:7 is the first main clause of the so-called second creation story in Gen 2:5–3:24. There man is formed out of clay מִן הָאֲדָמָה in the same way as every animal (Gen 2:19) and becomes a נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה through the נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים (Gen 2:7). Together with his partner he is placed in the garden of Eden, which is full of trees מִן־הָאֲדָמָה that provide them with food (Gen 2:9), but the first human beings end up “east of Eden” with the cherubim “guarding the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). The אַדְמָה is cursed because of Adam (Gen 3:17), and man will return to the אַדְמָה from which he was taken (Gen 3:19 [כִּי עָפָר אַתָּה וְאֵל עָפָר תִּשׁוּב]), and during his life he will till the אַדְמָה from which he was taken (Gen 3:23).

Genesis 2:7 reads¹²

-
- 10 Seebass, *ThWAT* 5:544: “Mit Johnson handelt es sich um die Vitalität, die sprudelnde Lebensenergie, die Leidenschaftlichkeit, die die *naepæš* auszeichnet”; Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche*, 205. For the problem of the נֶפֶשׁ and a “corpse,” see Michel, “Leichnam,” 81–84.
- 11 J. Fossum, “Gen 1:26 and 2:7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism,” *JSJ* 16 (1985): 202–239; L. Nasrallah, “The Earthen Human, the Breathing Statue: The Sculptor God, Greco-Roman Statuary, and Clement of Alexandria,” in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and Its Reception History* (ed. K. Schmid and C. Riedweg; FAT 2/34; Tübingen 2008), 110–140.
- 12 On the interesting readings of the LXX, see the article by Michael N. van der Meer in this volume, pp. 36–57.

7aa	Then Yhwh Elohim ¹³ formed man	ויצר יהוה אלהים את־האדם	7aa
7ab	[(of) dust] from the soil,	עפר מן האדמה	7ab
7ac	He blew into his nostrils the breath of life	ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים	7ac
7b	and man became a living being	ויהי האדם לנפש חיה	7b

Contextually, the circumstantial clauses of v. 5–6, with the non-existence of “plants,” “herbs,” “rain,” and “man,” start the biblical narrative in the classical manner of a creation story in the Mesopotamian tradition. It is well known that the same type of opening occurs in *Enuma Elish*:¹⁴

Enuma Elish 1:¹⁵

- 1 When on high no name was given to heaven,
- 2 nor earth below was called by name ...
- 6 no cane brake was intertwined nor thicket matted close,
- 7 when no gods at all had been brought forth,
- 8 none called by names, none destinies ordained,
- 9 then the gods were formed within them ...

13 LXX: ὁ θεὸς in 2:5, 7, 9, 19, 21; κύριος ὁ θεὸς in 2:8, 15, 16, 18, 22; 3:1, 9, 13, 14, 21, 23; 4:6, 15 (bis); 5:29; 6:3.

14 In the older literature, *Enuma Elish* is often called “The Epic of Creation.” Hallo suggests correctly that “The Exaltation of Marduk” would be a better name because while the epic starts with creation, its real focus is the kingship of Marduk over the gods after his battle against Tiamat and the celebration of Marduk’s temple Esagila in Babylon (W.W. Hallo, introduction to “Epic of Creation (1.111): (*Enūma Elish*),” by B.R. Foster, in *The Context of Scripture 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* [ed. W.W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Leiden 1997], 390–391). On the other hand, there is proof that *Enuma Elish* was meant to be recited on the fourth day of the New Year Festival in Babylon. In other words, *Enuma Elish* was part of the ritual. Dalley (S. Dalley, trans., introd., and notes, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* [OxfPap; WorldClass; 2nd ed.; Oxford 1991], 232) refers to the propaganda purposes of the ritual: “To the ceremony came governors, plenipotentiaries, courtiers, top officials, and army officers to renew their oaths of loyalty to the king and royal family, just as the gods swore an oath to Marduk (or) ... When the King’s subjects kiss his feet, they are doing no less than the great gods of heaven and earth did for Marduk. There is no question of rivalry; loyal support is absolute.”

15 Cf. B.R. Foster, “Epic of Creation (1.111): (*Enūma Elish*),” in *The Context of Scripture 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W.W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Leiden 1997), 391.

The negations, both in the Hebrew Bible (no plant, no herb, no one to till) and in the Ancient Near East (no name, no earth, no gods), prepare the stage for the creative act of the deity in the main clause. Before Gen 2:7 does so, there is, however, a remarkable first act. Between the missing rain of Gen 2:5 and the moulding of man in Gen 2:7, Gen 2:6 confronts us with the **אד**, often translated as “mist” or “stream,” rising up from the earth. The poetic word **אד** appears elsewhere only in Job 36:27, where it refers to water falling from the clouds, a meaning that does not fit the verb **עלה** (“to rise”) from the **אדמה** in Gen 2:7.¹⁶ The image probably aims at a spring, as the versiones¹⁷ understand it, fed by the freshwater ocean *apsû*¹⁸ and moistening the earth.

With a reference to Rashi, Benno Jacob has suggested that the uncommon, poetic noun **אד** was chosen for a wordplay with **אדם** and **אדמה** which seems a real possibility.¹⁹ Whether Jacob’s midrashic statement, “it looks like half a **אדמה** and an incomplete **אדם**” is also right, I am not so sure. Rashi and others took up the midrash that says that the water moistened the dust, preparing the clay for the divine potter. Now the moistened **אדמה** was ready for the next step: the moulding of man. Nevertheless several scholars want to separate Gen 2:5 and Gen 2:7 from Gen 2:6, arguing that Gen 2:6 differs from the “when ... not” or “als ... noch nicht” construction in Gen 2:5 through a positive act of creation. Westermann and others understand the watering of the earth as the first creation act.²⁰ The better solution, however, is to explain Gen 2:6 as the first step for Gen 2:7. The potter-artist of Gen 2:7 needs moistened material for the moulding of man. Therefore, Gen 2:6 and Gen 2:7 belong together as Rashi and Jacob proposed.

The verb **יצר** in Gen 2:7 refers, though not exclusively, to the work of the potter. Two-thirds of the references have God as a subject, for example, Isa 64:7 (“Yet, Yhwh, you are our Father, we are the clay [**חמר**] and you are our potter”).²¹ God forms people, animals, the dry land, and the mountains, but also the light and the seasons. The counter-argument that the normal expression for clay (**חמר**) is not used in Gen 2:7 is not that important. The moistened **אדמה** as material fits with the image of the potter-artist.

16 C. Westermann, *Genesis 1, Genesis 1–11* (BKAT 1.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1974), 273.

17 LXX: **πηγή**; Vg.: *fons*.

18 U. Rütterswörden, *Dominium terrae: Studien zur Genese einer alttestamentlichen Vorstellung* (BZAW 215; Berlin 1993), 11–13, 17–22 (Iconography of Enki and the *apsû*), 23–26 (Transfer of the images on El).

19 B. Jacob, trans. and comm., *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin 1934), 82–83.

20 Westermann, *Genesis 1, Genesis 1–11*, 274.

21 Cf. Isa 29:16; 45:9.

There is yet another problem with Gen 2:7a to resolve. The syntactical construction of the verb יצר with its first object אֶת־הָאָדָם followed by a second object עפר is a strange one. Many scholars refer to GKB §117hh,²² for the possibility of such a second, material object and, indeed, the possibility exists. In the direct context, however, God makes trees מן האדמה (Gen 2:9), animals מן האדמה (Gen 2:19), and man returns אֶל האדמה (3:19a) without mention of עפר. The crucial qualification only appears in Gen 3:19b (“Dust are you, and to dust you will return”). It is this essential qualification of human existence that returns in all later stages of the reception history. Man is dust. However, if man is “dust,” he must have been made out of dust. Therefore a later hand corrected Gen 2:7—that man was made only מן האדמה—adding עפר.

After the forming of man, it is said that Yhwh blew into his nostrils the “breath of life” (נשמת חיים). We have already seen that נשמה and רוח sometimes occur in parallel. In fact, נשמה (“breath”) is a narrower and rarer term than רוח (“wind, spirit”).²³ In this case, the breath of life is the ability to breathe. It starts at man’s creation or birth and ends with his death. Indeed a definition of death could be non-breathing.

Koch has proposed a more specific meaning of נשמת חיים.²⁴ His first observation is that the same expressions are used for the creation of animals and human beings. Yhwh Elohim forms (יצר) the animals מן האדמה (Gen 2:19). At the end of Gen 2:19 they are נפש חיה (living creatures). Thus, the beginning—being moulded out of the soil and the results of becoming a living creature—are the same for man and animal. The second step for man is the blowing of the breath of life into man’s nostrils by Yhwh. However, this particular step seems not to be necessary for the animals. The “breath of life” for animals is missing here, yet animals also need to breathe. Mitchell demonstrated in 1961 that נשמה always has to do with human life and/or with divine actions. It never refers to animals.²⁵ Therefore Koch concluded that a general meaning such as breath for all creatures cannot be sustained. What do humans have that animals do not? A first clue could be the verbal use of the stem נשם in Isa 42:14 (“Now I will cry out like a woman in labor”). Here the verb has to do with speech, and indeed

22 E. Kautzsch, ed., *Wilhelm Gesenius’ Hebräischer Grammatik* (ed. G. Bergsträsser; 28th ed.; Hildesheim 1962 [repr. of Leipzig 1909]), § 117hh (p. 386).

23 G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, Tex., 1987), 60.

24 K. Koch, “Der Güter Gefährlichstes, die Sprache, dem Menschen gegeben Überlegungen zu Gen 2,7,” *BN* 48 (1988): 50–60; repr. in *Spuren des hebräischen Denkens: Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (K. Koch; ed. B. Janowski and M. Krause; GA 1; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1991), 238–247.

25 T.C. Mitchell, “The Old Testament Usage of *nēšama*,” *VT* 11 (1961): 177–187.

the Targumim interpret the נשמת היים as the ability to speak. Therefore Koch proposes reading נשמת היים as the gift of speech. Focusing on Gen 2, his proposal would work. Adam *understands* the words of Yhwh in Gen 2:16, 17. He is in need of speech during the act of giving names to all the animals (Gen 2:19), and he exclaims that his real partner is a אשה (Gen 2:23). In this sense it is an attractive proposal. Nevertheless, it seems too limited for the later use of נשמה. For instance, Job 32:8 reads “But truly it is the spirit (רוח) in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty (נשמת שדי), that makes for understanding.” This “understanding” is much more than mere speech. Moreover, Yhwh Elohim blows the נשמת היים into the nostrils of his creature. If “the breath of life” indeed meant the ability to speak one would expect that not the nostrils but the mouth would be the object of the divine act. In biblical language the mouth is connected to speech, the nostrils with breath. Clearly, there is a difference between the animals and human beings in the story of creation. However, the focus is on the question of whether animals could really be the “helper” of Gen 2:18, the solution to the problem “that it is not good that man should be alone.” The same can be asked of the woman created by Yhwh (Gen 2:22). Here the “breath of life” is also absent. The “breath of life” is specifically bound to the first moment of Yhwh’s moulding of man from the soil. Therefore I understand נשמת היים in the classical way as the intangible life force which animates the body. Nothing more and nothing less.

3 Texts from the Ancient Near East

The narrative of Gen 2 does not have a direct parallel in the Ancient Near East, in contrast to the flood narratives where there is a direct relationship or dependence. Nevertheless, there is a general pattern of how man came into being, how he stands in the world and toward his god(s), how he deals with mortality, and how the world at the beginning is related to the world experienced by the reader of the texts. The strongest links are with Mesopotamia. Sometimes there are common motifs, sometimes the biblical authors choose different paths and different answers.

Dietrich has revealed some of the most important parallels.²⁶ From the E-abzu temple of the creator-god Enki in Eridu stems the Sumerian *Enki and*

26 M. Dietrich, “Die Menschenschöpfung im Garten Eden: Ein mesopotamischer Mythos im Alten Testament,” in *Mythen der Anderen: Mythopoetik und Interkulturalität* (ed. M. Dietrich; MAR 16; Münster 2004), 21–33.

Ninmach Myth. As in some other myths, man is created to relieve the gods from their hard labour.²⁷ Asked by his mother Nammu, “Enki, the creator, who forms all things,” makes the *sig₇-en-sig₇-šár*, a model of man to which he adds arms, forms his breast, and introduces his *wisdom*. However, it is the mother-goddess herself who must give birth to the model, and thus it happens: man is formed by the creator-god Enki but brought to life by the mother-goddess.²⁸

In the Akkadian *Enuma Elish*, the gods need humans to enjoy their status as gods, to be relieved from their toil. Thus, Marduk plans to create *Lullú*-man, the primordial man, “*amelu*-‘man’ will be his name.”²⁹ Something of the divine should be in man and therefore the god Kingu, who conspired with Tiamat, is slaughtered. With the help of his blood the god Ea/Enki creates man: “After Ea, the wise, had created mankind, he imposed upon it the service of the gods.”³⁰ Berossos, the Marduk priest in Babylon at the beginning of the third century BCE, knows the tradition that the blood of the slaughtered god was mixed with clay. Man is not only formed from divine (criminal) blood, but also from earthly material. The divine blood, however, gave man some divine qualities.

The *Atrahasis* Epic starts with a long prehistory. In the very beginning the gods themselves did the heavy work of digging the canals and maintaining irrigation. After an uprising of the Igigu gods a new category of workers was needed to take over the toil of the lower gods. The wise god Enki then proposes slaughtering a god and mixing his flesh and blood with clay.³¹ In this case, it is the God Awīlu (^dPI=(GEŠTU).E) who is the victim of the proposal in the council of the gods. He is a god who has organizational skills³² which humans will need to take over the workload of the gods. After the slaughtering of the god, blood, flesh, and clay are mixed and the gods spit on the clay. The gender problem is solved by the creation of seven males and seven females. This all belongs to the preparation, the first steps of creation. The next step, coming to life, again relies on the mother-goddess, who gives birth to man.

The Epic of Gilgamesh describes the creation of Enkidu, the companion of Gilgamesh. He is created by Aruru: “Aruru washed her hands, pinched off

27 *Enki and Ninmach Myth* 1.9–10a: “The senior gods did oversee the work, while the minor gods were bearing the toil. The gods were digging the canals ...”

28 M. Dietrich, “Die Tötung einer Gottheit in der Eridu-Babylon-Mythologie,” in *Ernten, was man sät: Festschrift für Klaus Koch zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. D.R. Daniels, U. Glessmer, and M. Rösel; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1991), 49–73.

29 *Enuma Elish* 6.6–7.

30 *Enuma Elish* 6.35–36.

31 Dietrich, “Tötung,” 63; *Atrahasis* Epic 1.204–212, 223–233.

32 German: *Planungsfähigkeit*.

a piece of clay, cast it out into open country. She created a [primitive man], Enkidu the Warrior.”³³ Enkidu lives with the animals, as one of them. Here sexuality and sexual contact make him wise; making him a “real” man.³⁴

In the KAR 4 Myth, which survives in both Sumerian and Akkadian versions, two (or more) gods are slaughtered.³⁵ “Let us slay both Alla gods, with their blood let us create mankind. The service of the gods be their portion for all times.”³⁶ The motif is the same. Humans are needed to take over the work of the gods and to serve the gods. The slaughtered gods are craftsmen. In this case, the first humans have names: Ullegarra and Annegarra. They are probably the first pair, male and female.

Looking back at this short overview it is remarkable that the Genesis tradition has many motifs in common with the literary tradition of the Ancient Near East. There is the common thought that man is earthbound, formed or modelled in clay. There is the common motif that a second step is required to move from the model in clay to the living being: birth by the mother-goddess in Mesopotamia, by the breath of life in Gen 2. The motif of the slaughtered god stresses the fact that man has some divine qualities. Sometimes the slaughter is a punishment for revolt, sometimes the deity is chosen for his capacities and characteristics.

Genesis 2, however, does not suggest this kind of mixture of divine and human essentials. If we still suppose that the non-priestly version of Gen 2 belongs to the older narrative, the priestly account of the creation story of Gen 1 could be a correction of or a supplement to the anthropology of Gen 2. The enigmatic formula of the creation of man in the image of God (1:27), male and female, could be an expansion and/or correction of Gen 2:7.

In Mesopotamia, man is created to take over the toil of the gods, a motif that does not return in Gen 2. Man is taken by Yhwh Elohim “and put in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (2:15). This is also work, but not in the sense of the Mesopotamian tradition of taking over the toil of the gods and the heavy work of digging and maintaining the canals.

The Mesopotamian and the biblical myths ask the same questions about the relationship between man, god(s), and world and they use the same elements in describing the situation occurring in the beginning. Nevertheless, the answers differ because of their narrative context, their social and cultural embeddedness, and the plot of the narratives. There is common ground, there

33 Epic of Gilgamesh 1.34–41.

34 Epic of Gilgamesh 1.4.6–34.

35 See the discussion in Dietrich, “Tötung,” 68n49.

36 KAR 4 Myth 24–26.

are common motifs, but there is no direct dependence. Here the creation narratives differ from the stories of the flood.

4 Ezekiel 37:1–10

During the long, colourful history of the reception of the dramatic vision in Ezek 37 most attention has been paid to the problem of resurrection. My focus is on the *process* of revival in Ezek 37:1–10. The exceptional situation is described with a twofold הנה in Ezek 37:2.

The prophet sees a plain full of scattered bones and exclaims: “see, they were very dry!” This is the most radical image of death. More death is not possible. The crucial question and answer appear in Ezek 37:3. Here Yhwh addresses the prophet as בן אדם (*sic!*) and asks: “Son of man, can these bones come to life again?” Here, on the edge of life and death the prophet returns the question to the hands of God: “(Only), you, [Lord] Yhwh know!”

In his speaking to the bones (Ezek 37:5), the ultimate concern of the prophecy is visible: “See, I will put the spirit (רוח)³⁷ in you, so that you come to life!” The text refers to two stages of revivification: “a rustling of bones moving together” (Ezek 37:7) and afterwards the appearance of sinews, flesh, and skin, but there is still no life, no רוח (Ezek 37:8). No wonder that Ezek 37:9 describes them as הריוגים (“slain,” “corpses”).

The difference is made by Ezek 37:9 and Ezek 37:10. The different semantic fields of רוח allow the wordplay in Ezek 37:9: “Come from the four winds (רוחות), o spirit (רוח), and breathe on these slain,” and thus it happens. Nevertheless, it is not only a wordplay. Here the רוח comes from all directions of the compass. By this mighty spirit even the very dead can be revived.

A remarkable step is made in the second part of the vision. In the explanation of Ezek 37:14, the רוח is explicitly called the “spirit of Yhwh,” cq. “my spirit” (רוחי). Here the intertextual link with Ezek 36:26–27 cannot be overlooked: “And I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you ... I will put my spirit (רוחי) within you.” The revivification of Ezek 37 is the recreation of Ezek 36.

In the vision of the priest-prophet Ezekiel, anatomy plays a more important role than in the myth of Gen 2. Genesis wanted to state that man is earthbound and nevertheless comes to life. Breath is the difference between life and death. Ezekiel starts with the ugliest and most radical face of death: dry shattered

37 LXX adds ζωής (“b. of life”), without doubt a reference to Gen 2:7.

bones. The image is probably that of a battlefield, the result of a violent event. After all, the narrow corridor of Palestine is the battleground *par excellence* for the states in the Near East.

The dichotomy that Gen 2:7, Ezek 37, and Ecclesiastes have in common is a dichotomous picture: “It is not to be confused with Idealism’s dualistic concept of man, insofar as it does not contrast a creaturely body which is from below with an immortal soul which is from above. Rather it distinguishes between the body, which can be seen with the eyes and felt with the hands, and the life force, which animates the body, is intangible but no less effective and can be discerned in the breath,”³⁸ the spirit or, in another context, in the blood.

5 Ecclesiastes 3:19–21; 12:7

The first passage related to the anthropology under discussion is Eccl 3:19–21. Verse 19aa reads “For the fate³⁹ of the humans (בני האדם) and the fate of animals (בהמה), for them there is one [and the same] fate.” Verse 19ab–ac continues “As one dies, so does the other,” “they all have one breath (רוח).” Verse 19ba follows with “and the distinction of האדם over the animal, there is none, for everything is הבל.” Verse 20 confirms the harsh sayings of v. 19 with a reference to Gen 2:7 in its final version and Gen 3:19 (“All go to one place, all come from the dust [עפר] and all return to the dust [עפר]”). The message of these verses is clear. Earlier in his book Ecclesiastes concluded that there is a common fate for all creatures. He touches upon the question of the wise and the foolish (Eccl 2:14–16) and their common death. In the case of the comparison of humans and animals, Ecclesiastes emphasizes “that the levelling effect of death is made more poignant than before. Human beings have one breath, just like animals, and they die just like animals. As the wise die like fools, so people die like animals. As far as mortality is concerned, there is no difference between the wise and the foolish, or people and animals.”⁴⁰ If this message is so clear, how should we deal with Eccl 3:21? The MT, with the vocalization of the full *qamets* in העלה and the *patakh-dagesh* in הִירֵדַת together with the article, must be translated as “Who knows the רוח of the בני האדם, *that goes upward* on high and the רוח of animals *that goes down* to the earth?” Here it is already clear

38 W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel II, Chapters 25–48* (trans. J.D. Martin; ed. P.D. Hanson and L.J. Greenspoon; Hermeneia; Philadelphia 1983), 261.

39 For מִקְרָה (“fate”), the construct noun מִקְרָה (the “fate of”) should be read.

40 C.L. Seow, trans., introd., and comm., *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18C; New York, N.Y., 1997), 175.

that the breath/spirit of humans goes upward and the breath/spirit of animals goes down. Probably, the best view is that this vocalization is a masoretic, dogmatic correction.⁴¹ In line with the statement of Eccl 3:19–20, 21 presents a rhetorical question, opposing the view that there is a different fate for humans. The question “who knows that the רוח of man goes upward on high and that the רוח of animals goes down to the earth?” should be answered “nobody knows!”

I argue that there is no contradiction with the saying of the magnificent poem on death and dying in Eccl 12, especially Eccl 12:7, the last words of Ecclesiastes before one or two epilogists take up the difficult task of bringing Ecclesiastes in line with the traditional focus on death and old age. This last part starts with a hymn to the sunlight and youth in Eccl 11:7, while Eccl 12:1 starts with an unexpected formulation: “Remember your בוראִיךְ in the days of your youth.” Several solutions have been discussed: בְּאֵר (“the well”), בּוֹר (“the pit,” “the grave”), or, parallel to Prov 5:15–18, “your wife.” None of the alternatives is really convincing. Therefore, the best solution is to stay with the participle of ברא > בְּרָא and read the singular form as the versions do: “Remember your Creator.” The text functions as a bridge between the call to rejoice over youth and life of Eccl 11:9 and the awaiting of old age and death of Eccl 12:1b–7. The poem in Eccl 12:1b–7 has several layers of meaning according to Fox.⁴² It may describe a funeral in a literal way, but there is an interaction between the literal and symbolic meanings.⁴³ “The poem’s purpose ... is to create an attitude toward aging and, more importantly, death.”⁴⁴

Whether we read the poem literally, symbolically, or partly allegorically, two verses (12:5, 7) are important for the theme of this paper. Ecclesiastes 12:5ba reads כי הלך האדם אל בית עולמו (“For man goes to his eternal home”). According to Seow and most commentators, בית עולם (“eternal home”) is the semantic equivalent of the Egyptian house of eternity, meaning the grave, בית עולם as “grave” is even confirmed by Deir Alla, by Punic texts, texts from Palmyra, and

41 A. Lauha, *Kohelet* (BKAT 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978), 77: “Die Textform von M verkehrt aber den ursprünglichen Gedanken in sein Gegenteil”; T. Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)* (BKAT 19 [Sonderband]; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2000), 168 on 3:21a: “MT liest aus dogmatischen Gründen den Artikel: Wer kennt den Lebensgeist des Menschen, der nach oben aufsteigt und den Lebensgeist der Tiere, der hinabsteigt, zur Erde hinunter? Die Aussage des Textes wird damit auf den Kopf gestellt.” Seow (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 168) is more careful but insists on the message, “People and animals have the same fate” (176).

42 M.V. Fox, “Aging and Death in Qohelet 12,” *JOT* 42 (1988): 55–77.

43 Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)*, 352.

44 Fox, “Aging and Death,” 71.

even by contracts from Muraba'at.⁴⁵ The lamp and the fountain in v. 6 picture the advent of death. Finally, 12:7 describes the death of man with the image of the final form of Gen 2:7: "And the dust (עפר) returns to the earth (הארץ) as it was, and the breath/spirit (רוח) returns to God who gave it."

In the later reception history of Ecclesiastes, the question arose concerning whether Ecclesiastes offers an escape here: the body goes to the earth, but the spirit goes to God, thus supposing that creatures possess some significant element that remains after death and returns to God. However, with respect to the message of Ecclesiastes this does not make sense.

In line with all his other statements about death, the totality, the bitterness of death, death making life a problem (9:5, 10), Ecclesiastes describes death here as the *undoing of creation*. God formed man from the dust, breathed into him the breath of life, at his death the עפר goes back to the earth and God takes *back the breath he gave*. There is not the slightest indication in the entire book that Ecclesiastes reflected on something other than the undoing of creation.

5 Conclusion

This paper surveyed three different textual units, a narrative (Gen 2), a prophetic vision (Ezek 37) and a wisdom reflexion (Eccl 3:19–21; 12:5, 7). They cover a pre-exilic, an exilic and a Hellenistic stage. We may assume that the latter two were familiar with the Genesis text. The three texts mark the difference between life and death. In all three cases "breath" (רוח, נשמה) is the distinction between a moulded form, a corpse and a living human being. The active agent is God, the context is (re)creation and death. The breath is a complementary, but necessary element. It is never a conflicting one. Neither in Gen 2:7, nor in Ezek 37 and Eccl 12 breath and body are conflicting principles. Neither the breath, nor the body are the "better" parts of a human being, they need each other. For the Hebrew Bible, from Genesis via Ezekiel to Ecclesiastes, the use of "dualism" is not suitable.

45 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 364.