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Honors 401

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## **Exploring Parallels in the Bible, *The Analects*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh***

### **Abstract**

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore parallels in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Analects*, and the Bible. By tracking and describing seven different areas of resemblance, the research illustrates philosophical and narrative overlap. More importantly, an examination of the psychological and social forces behind such literature suggests that correspondence in wisdom literature reveals universal concerns and desires that transcend cultural boundary.

### **Background**

Across time and tradition, human beings have grappled with a series of fundamental, perhaps even intrinsic, questions: Why do human beings exist? Do they serve a higher purpose? How should they behave? Which human behaviors are worth imitating? As an extension of human expression, literature is often hinged upon these sorts of convoluted, ambiguous, seemingly unanswerable questions. Moreover, some of the most influential, universal, and enduring works of literature are those that address these issues explicitly, what might be called wisdom literature.

Wisdom literature, or sapiential literature, is defined as “The body of religious or philosophical writings that communicate wisdom by means of proverbs or parables” (*The*

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). However, this definition is perhaps too restrictive, or at the very least, not comprehensive regarding the wide-ranging formats of wisdom literature. *Gilgamesh* might be interpreted as an extended parable, but many texts widely acknowledged as wisdom literature do not contain proverbs or parables. The book of Ecclesiastes, for instance, is often identified as a prime example of wisdom literature, but it does not address topics of wisdom or virtue through parable. Hence, this paper will approach the more commonly accepted, broad, and perhaps more implicit definition of wisdom literature: wisdom literature is a text—usually religious or philosophical in nature—that attempts to offer some insight regarding the nature of virtue, wisdom, and purpose.

Perhaps the most prominent example of wisdom literature in Western culture is the Hebrew Bible. Written by numerous authors in various languages from 1300 BCE to 100 BCE, the Bible broaches some of the most complicated questions regarding human existence and catalogues the history of the Hebrew people. Its influence on music, literature, and art resonates through even the most cursory examination of European culture. As a sacred tome, its books remain valued, quoted, and repeatedly analyzed by thousands of religious sects across the world. As David Lyle Jeffrey shrewdly points out in *King James Bible and the World It Made*, “The very notion that words can make a world has its obvious roots in the Hebrew of the first book of the Bible” (1).

However, to refer to and analyze the Bible as a cohesive and single text of wisdom literature would be grossly inaccurate. The Bible is not a book so much as a collection of books, which can be appropriately divided into categories, the most obvious of which are the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, consists of thirty-nine books, among which Ecclesiastes, Job, and Proverbs are most extensively regarded as wisdom literature. Other

books—Genesis and Kings—function historically, but contain didactic messages that correspond with the previously mentioned definition of wisdom literature. The New Testament serves a similar historical function, at least in terms of the life of Jesus. However, several morals—expressed either through parables or direct commentary—are not concerned with cataloguing the life of Christ or the apostles, but rather are aimed at the variety of questions associated with wisdom literature and, by the working definition, qualify as wisdom literature.

However, wisdom literature does not exist solely in a Western context. *The Analects*, or sayings of Confucius, are perhaps the most resonating instance of wisdom literature in Eastern philosophy. Composed during the end of the bloody, chaotic Spring and Autumn Era of Chinese history, it is not surprising that *The Analects* are preoccupied with issues of human conduct. Ethical government, respectful hierarchy, and social obligation are central themes throughout the text. Like Jesus of the New Testament, Confucius never personally transcribed any of his attributed maxims; rather, they were compiled by his followers after his death. Correspondingly, the title means “that which is collected.” Nevertheless, *The Analects* were philosophically momentous: the Han dynasty eventually adopted the Confucius principles of *The Analects* as its State philosophy. Even when *The Analects* no longer retained such official and political support, their lasting significance echoed into contemporary scholarship and culture (Van Norden 3-16). As Bryan Van Norden affirms in *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*: “Imagine a person who has an influence on his native tradition comparable to the *combined* influence of Jesus and Socrates on the Western tradition. Such a person was Confucius” (3).

However, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is distinct from the Bible as well as *The Analects* in two key aspects. First, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* predates both; it is the oldest extant literary work, with the earliest surviving tablets dating back to around 2100 BCE. Second, its position as wisdom

literature is somewhat less blatant. Although it certainly contains commentary regarding the purpose of human existence and correct human conduct, its content is predominantly in narrative form. Its moral or philosophical point is rarely, if ever, stated explicitly. While the Bible also contains narrative, it is not composed exclusively of stories, and its parables usually conclude with an explicit summary of the moral or virtue illustrated. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, however, is concerned with a strictly cohesive, albeit not entirely linear, sequence of events regarding primary characters. Excavated in 1844 in what is currently Iraq, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is thought to be inspired by the historical Gilgamesh who reigned in Mesopotamia around 2750 BCE. Hence, although *Gilgamesh* is the most ancient surviving instance of wisdom literature, it is also the most remote, the most alien, and perhaps the most ambiguous in terms of its message concerning virtue and human purpose.

### **Intertextuality**

Intertextuality is defined as “the interrelationship between texts, especially works of literature; the way that similar or related texts influence, reflect, or differ from each other” (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Although the Bible, *The Analects*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* differ drastically in their historical, political, and cultural contexts, there are clear and demonstrated parallels among these works of wisdom literature. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, for instance, contains a flood narrative not unlike the flood described in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, commonalities are not limited to plot devices but to thematic concerns: some of the moral positions of Confucius in *The Analects* are remarkably akin to those attributed to Jesus in the Bible. Hence, the relationship between wisdom works is not as remote as an initial impression might suggest. There is a sort of universal need and applicability to themes, narrative devices, and central notions of wisdom literature. On the subject of

intertextuality, in “Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17” Allen

Wright notes:

Julia Kristeva, the philosopher and literary critic who advanced the concept of intertextuality and coined the term, once opined that “any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” Hyperbolic though it may be, the statement is fundamentally true: even the compositions that impart a predominantly novel message do not emerge in a vacuum; they draw upon existing conceptual and artistic frameworks, if only to transcend them in favor of fresh paradigms. In this sense, any text is a part of a cultural continuum that extends to the very beginnings of humankind. (1)

Although Wright’s statement certainly validates the overlapping of certain characteristics across wisdom literature, it leaves little in the way of specifics and says almost nothing as to why. Were the authors of these works somehow predisposed to their ethical and philosophical similarities? Was there some prior exposure of one philosophical position that simply manifested in different cultural contexts? Or are the nature of the questions being answered—questions regarding the purpose of human existence and the goals of human behavior—simply so universal and fundamental that they are observable across culture, time, and political disposition?

Although parallels among works of wisdom literature are clearly established, the cause for their existence is still unknown. By examining scholarly analysis of these commonalities, as well as the primary sources (the Bible, *The Analects*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*) themselves, I will demonstrate the primary cause (or causes) for parallels amongst wisdom literature by answering the following three questions:

1. What are the parallels?
2. Why do such parallels exist?

## **Question 1: Establishing Parallels**

The existence of similarities across wisdom literature seems unlikely and even miraculous when one considers the disparate time periods, cultures, and political climates from which they originated. A warring, and politically unstable China, seems unlikely to produce anything that might resemble the literature of religiously-aligned and fiercely nationalistic Israel, and yet the Bible, *The Analects*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* all present common themes that manage to transcend cultural and historical differences.

### **Death, *Gilgamesh*, and the Bible**

An evident, but perhaps easily overlooked point of metaphysical comparison is the issue of mortality in both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Bible. The significance of death in *Gilgamesh* and its surrounding cultural context is blatant: for the Babylonians, Sumerians, and Akkadians, death affected not only plants, animals, and humankind, but even the gods. Although basically immortal in terms of disease and age, the gods could die from an act of violence (Heidel 136-138). As Heidel elaborates, “Apsu and Mummu were killed by Ea; Tiamat lost her life in combat with Marduk; Kingu and the Lamga dieties were slaughtered for the purpose of creating mankind” (137-38). Since even gods could die in Assyrian and Babylonian theology, it should come as no surprise that human beings were subject to die: mortality was inextricably related to human existence, or really any existence. Death was present even prior to the creation of the universe, intrinsically linked to creative purpose (Heidel 136-38). From a Judeo-Christian perspective, death is not a necessary prerequisite for the creation of the universe. However, it is worth noting that the New Testament aligns death with regeneration and renewal. It is only

through death that Jesus confirms divinity and broadens the opportunity of salvation (Matt. 27:50-54).

Although the Hebrew Bible ultimately differs in its scope of death (God cannot die, but is eternal) and makes the clear distinction that death is the result of man's fall, rather than some preexisting condition, both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible espouse similar concepts regarding the realm, or location, of death. As Heidel points out, "The dwelling-place of the departed was localized by the Babylonians and the Assyrians within the earth. It was the place into which Gilgamesh's pukku and mikku fell and to which Enkidu subsequently descended" (Heidel 170). Similarly, the Hebrew association with the realm of the dead—Sheol—is understood to be the "subterranean spirit world" (Heidel 173). In both instances, the location of death was a place of silence or rest. The afterlife in Gilgamesh consisted of silence and respite, as demonstrated in Gilgamesh's lament at the death of Enkidu: "What is this sleep which holds you now? You are lost in the dark and cannot hear me" (Heidel 184). Correspondingly, the Hebrew Bible describes the dead as resting or sleeping (Job 3:11-13). The inevitability of death, as well as the location of the afterlife share subtle, but significant consistencies in the Hebrew Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

However, to characterize the location or realm of death as wholly similar would be imprecise. The Hebrew Bible's portrayal of Sheol is not simply a direct counterpart for *Gilgamesh's* afterlife. The Babylonian underworld was where everyone ended up, whereas Sheol was reserved for the wicked (Heidel 184). Granted, religious and scholarly sources are divided on the degree of judgment surrounding admittance to Sheol. Some interpret passages concerning Sheol as devoid of moral judgment and argue that this shadowy underworld was, in fact, exactly like the underworld of *Gilgamesh* in the respect that all people—good and evil alike—would



eventually arrive there. For the purposes of this paper, the more discriminating version of Sheol will be accepted as the most accurate. The more discriminating interpretation of Sheol would justify afterlife references in the New Testament.

Perhaps this fundamental difference in the Hebrew Sheol and the Assyrian underworld accounts for discrepancies in each culture's respective flood narrative. The Hebrew Bible is more selective in terms of the afterlife and more justified in terms of the flood. *Gilgamesh*, on the other hand, is less discriminating in both cases. While *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible contain obvious points of contrast in Hebrew and Assyrian religious thought, these works also demonstrate parallels regarding the prevalence and setting of death, which are underscored in common plot features such as those found in the flood narrative.

### **Flood Narrative**

Of all the similarities that exist between *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, the flood (or deluge) is perhaps the most recognizable and easily explained. Some scholars have speculated that there was, in fact, a deluge at some point in history, one so pervasive and devastating that it endured in the memory of humans across cultures (Danver 57-59). There might have been an actual flood, and the Hebrew Bible and *Gilgamesh* are simply reflecting a common reality. While the probability of a shared natural disaster is certainly a possibility, it doesn't entirely explain the overlap in details and themes. The flood narratives of Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* share critically significant elements that seem to suggest more than the mere occurrence of a deluge.

First, both instances—the flood as presented in the Hebrew Bible and *Gilgamesh* — make a clear distinction that the deluge is not a natural disaster in the modern sense, but divinely ordained. In the case of *Gilgamesh*, this ordination is not unanimously agreed upon by the

pantheon of gods; some are more supportive than others. In the case of Genesis, the monotheistic context leaves no room for dissension. Although the extent and depth of divine compliance varies with each narrative, in both cases the gods order the flood (Heidel 224).

Furthermore, in both cases, humankind's sinfulness is cited as the reason for the flood (Heidel 225). Genesis even suggests that man's wickedness and debauchery were so excessive that God regretted the very creation of human beings:

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." (Gen. 6:5-7)

Although the *Gilgamesh* epic is less explicit regarding the great gods' motivation for the flood, close examination reveals that human offenses are ultimately culpable: "Lay upon the sinner his sin, / Lay upon the transgressor his transgression" (Mitchell 31). Even as Ea admonishes Enlil for his inconsiderate and unjustifiable destruction, "Ea acknowledges that the flood was sent because of the sin of man" (Heidel 225). Clearly, the degree of justification differs in each case. The Hebrew Bible makes the distinction that humanity was beyond reprieve. However, the disagreement among deities in *Gilgamesh* might suggest a case of "caprice over justice." (Heidel 226). Regardless, both Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* attribute the deluge to divine action.

Similarly, both *Gilgamesh* and Genesis recognize that the wicked deserve to die and the righteous deserve to live, at least as far as the flood is concerned: "In the book of Genesis the deluge is a righteous retribution for the sins of the ungodly, while pious Noah and his family are spared, with the full knowledge and the express purpose of Him who sent the flood" (Heidel 226). In the story of *Gilgamesh*, the flood was intended for the virtuous and the wicked alike.

While this might seem like a complete deviation from the version of Genesis, this lack of distinction is precisely what prompts the fury and intervention of other gods: had it not been for Ea's involvement, Enlil would have obliterated all life—human and animal—without discrimination, defeating the very reason for which mankind and the animals had been created. Ultimately, both flood narratives recognize the need for the destruction of the wicked, while allowing mercy for a select moral few (Heidel 226-227).

Correspondingly, it is morality, piety, and virtue that seem to be the saving characteristics of both hero figures in the flood narratives of Genesis and *Gilgamesh*. Both Noah and Utnapishtim are saved because of their great moral fiber. Noah avoids annihilation due to his virtue and decency in the eyes of God: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). More importantly, Noah's obedience to the will of God facilitates his own rescue: "when, therefore, he was ordered to build the ark, he showed no signs of doubt or unwillingness but obeyed and carried out the command" (Heidel 228). For Noah, adherence to the will of God is synonymous with moral worthiness. Hence, he responds faithfully to God's instructions for mercy. Likewise, Sumerian accounts of the *Gilgamesh* deluge hero, Utnapishtim, also emphasize piousness and potential for moral salvage. As Heidel explains, "he is called the administrator of the temple provisions, and there it is stated that he prostrated himself in reverence and humility and that he daily and perseveringly stood in attendance at the shrine" (Heidel 228). Utnapishtim's prostration is telling: it suggests a kind of strict devotion that is not unlike Noah's absolute adherence to the will of God. Furthermore, Utnapishtim, like Noah, offers sacrifice to his divine savior, demonstrating reverence, respect, and gratitude to Ea after being forewarned of the upcoming disaster (Heidel 229). Interestingly, both hero figures are not merely the lucky recipients of their respective godhead's favor. Rather, individual moral merit is

a deciding factor. Noah and Utnapishtim are worthy to be saved, not simply saved. Ultimately, both Noah and Utnapishtim align with the will and pleasure of the deity and are redeemed by their own righteousness.

Furthermore, both deluge stories involve divine intervention and revelation as a means of saving human life. For example, Ea provides specific instructions to Utnapishtim in order to preserve his life: “Tear down your house and build a boat, abandon possessions and look for life, despise worldly goods and save your soul alive. Tear down your house, I say, and build a boat” (Mitchell 21). Although this warning certainly contradicts the resolve of Enlil, the facilitator and author of the flood, the fact remains that divine revelation saves the life of the deluge hero (Heidel 229-30). Similarly, Noah is given explicit instructions from God: “So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms inside and out.’” (Gen. 6:13-14). For both Utnapishtim and Noah, divine warning and instruction is crucial to their survival, and in both instances the directions are clear: build a boat.

Yet the moral worthiness of the hero figures, the divine warnings, and instructions to build a boat are not the only points of comparison: the boats themselves share common characteristics in both Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Both arks, although differing in dimension, had at least one opening for light. Both were coated with pitch to make the vessel waterproof. Moreover, both ships were designed by gods (Heidel 237-38). When explaining the intervention of Ea, Heidel emphasizes, “the god who disclosed the imminent calamity even drew a plan of the boat. The detailed instruction which Noah received amounted to about the same thing” (237). Even the details surrounding the design and construction of the arks suggest a clear parallel between the flood narratives of Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Another distinguishing feature common to both narratives is the universality of the flood. Both authors specify that the flood was not limited to one location. Rather, the flood was so pervasive that the entire earth was altered, to the point that special measures were needed to ensure the survival of animal species (Heidel 249). This is certainly the case in Genesis, which claims, “The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth...The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished.” (Gen. 7:20-21). Although the universality of the flood is not stated quite so explicitly in *Gilgamesh*, the effect is presumed to be the same as the deluge in Genesis. As Heidel explains, “The impression which this story is intended to make is obvious that the flood was universal and that all the land animals and all mankind perished, except the occupants of the ark” (249). In both Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the effect of the flood is worldwide, an event that transcends tribe and boundary.

Perhaps the global nature of the flood explains the appearance of another common feature—birds. Both *Gilgamesh* and Genesis incorporate birds within the development of the deluge story: “A comparison of these stories reveals that they are in agreement on the main points with regard to the bird episode. All agree that the hero of the flood, after the storm subsided, sent out a number of birds to secure information concerning the conditions of the outside world” (Heidel 252). Still, the tales differ on the finer points. The types of birds, as well as the sequence in which they are employed, differ somewhat between the two narratives (Heidel 252). However, the fact that both flood narratives incorporate birds as practical tools of information-gathering as well as symbols of hope suggests a clear parallel, if not a case of influence.

Finally, both flood heroes, Noah and Utnapishtim, sanctify and honor their rescuers subsequent to the flood. Both men offer sacrifices to their respective gods after leaving the boat, and both offerings inspire mercy of the divine beings involved. In Utnapishtim's case, this divine mercy is not without advocacy. Ea criticizes Enlil's undiscerning devastation of humankind and chastises him for not pursuing less extreme measures. Utnapishtim's piety serves as tangible support of Ea's argument (Heidel 224-250). In response, Enlil is rendered silent, eventually blessing and bestowing immortality on Utnapishtim and his wife, with the unspoken resolution that the earth would never again be ravaged by such devastation: "'In time past Utnapishtim was a mortal man; henceforth he and his wife shall live in the distance at the mouth of the rivers'" (Mitchell 123). Similarly, Noah's offering to God precedes a similar blessing: "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man'" (Gen 8:20-21). In both instances, it is the humility and devotion of the flood hero that prompts the divine blessing. In his analysis of *Gilgamesh* and the flood narrative, Heidel notes, "Enlil's presumed resolution that there should be no recurrence of such a catastrophe comes close to the biblical story of the covenant" (259). For both *Gilgamesh* and Genesis, the flood narrative is punctuated by a humble display of gratitude and a corresponding blessing.

### **Wrestling with the Divine**

Although the flood narrative (or deluge story) is often cited as the most pointed area of overlap between *Gilgamesh* and the Bible, it is certainly not the only similarity. Jacob's "wrestling" match with God in Genesis reveals a stark likeness to Gilgamesh's fight with Enkidu. Although the overarching stories of Jacob and Gilgamesh have little in common, each

narrative incorporates a crucial wrestling scene that significantly alters the destiny of each hero figure. Ultimately, the resemblance in situation, purpose, and outcome of the fights demonstrates a clear parallel between *Gilgamesh* and the Book of Genesis in the Bible (Hamori 626).

Perhaps the most obvious point of similarity is the general situation surrounding the two conflicts. Both men are initially unfamiliar with their attackers; both are sought out and provoked for reasons unknown to them. Even the time of day and physical position of the hero figures seems to be consistent in both instances (Hamori 627-29). As Esther Hamori explains in her article, “Echoes of Gilgamesh in the Jacob Story,” “In both cases it is the hero who is attacked while he goes on his way one night: Jacob on his way back to Canaan across the Jabbok, and Gilgamesh on his way into a wedding celebration. It is just on the threshold that each man is accosted by an unknown assailant” (627). In addition, both hero figures learn the identity of their respective opponents only after the fight is concluded—a fight that in both cases involves wrestling and no apparent lethal intent (Hamori 629). The likeness in the conditions surrounding the fights suggests a clear overlap between *Gilgamesh* and the Book of Genesis.

Even more telling, the purposes of the two fights share a sense of divine relevance. The antagonist in Jacob’s fight is God himself, who is testing Jacob in the most visceral way possible. Jacob’s wrestling is the physical manifestation of his desire and striving for spiritual blessing (Hamori 628). For Gilgamesh, the attacker is a character double, but also an agent of the divine: “In the Gilgamesh story, Enkidu has been created by the gods expressly for the purpose of fighting this round with the hero. Anu responds to ... the people of Uruk by summoning Aruru to create a match for Gilgamesh, one equal in strength, in order to contend with him.” (Hamori 627). Even though Enkidu is not a god, he is divinely created to balance Gilgamesh and curb his excess (Hamori 627). While the cultural context and godheads are certainly different, it is worth

noting that each conflict serves a heavenly resolution. In both *Gilgamesh* and the Book of Genesis, the fight between the hero figure and the heavenly agent is spiritually significant—an overlap of purpose that further exemplifies the parallels between these two culturally separated texts.

More importantly, the outcomes of the fights of both Jacob and Gilgamesh suggest a clear correspondence between the Book of Genesis in the Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. For both heroes, the conflicts represent a significant personal change that is represented in a blessing from the aggressor (Hamori 631). Hamori notes that “the two blessings are similar in both form and content” (631). In Jacob’s case, God decrees: “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with human beings, and have prevailed” (Gen 32:28). In this blessing as well as the blessing of Gilgamesh, there are two key features. First, the godly adversary effectively alters and acknowledges the identity and legacy of the hero figure. In Jacob’s case, God renames Jacob to mark the change in his spiritual identity and symbolize his unique relationship with God. Furthermore, God acknowledges Jacob’s victory and moral preeminence over others. Likewise, Enkidu’s blessing of the triumphant Gilgamesh parallels God’s blessing of Jacob: “As one unique your mother bore you, the wild cow of the sheep-folds, Ninsunna! Your head is extolled above men; kingship of the people Enlil has decreed for you” (Mitchell 34–39). Like Jacob’s blessing, the first statement acknowledges the uniqueness and legacy of Gilgamesh in relation to the divine—namely, his mother, the goddess. Furthermore, the second declaration of the blessing maintains that Gilgamesh conquers all others. In both outcomes, the implication of the blessing is that the hero figure will endure and succeed as the divinely selected leader of his community (Hamori 631-32). The fact that both outcomes involve



blessings that acknowledge identity, divine relationship, and legitimacy of rule suggests a clear connection between *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Bible.

### **Knowledge and Sexual Differentiation**

Another understated but significant parallel of *Gilgamesh* and the Old Testament is the association of women and knowledge. In both ancient texts, sexual differentiation or sexual knowledge is connected to awareness or a heightened sense of consciousness. Enkidu is not civilized or otherwise estranged from the animals until he experiences sexual relations with Shamhat (Mitchell 19-24). Similarly, it is the first instance of sexual differentiation from man in the Bible, Eve, which incites knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3). Both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Book of Genesis associate women with the advent of knowledge or elevated awareness.

In *Gilgamesh*, Enkidu's encounter with the temple prostitute, Shamhat, marks the beginning of his heightened consciousness and separation from the animal kingdom (Habib 75). Prior to sexual knowledge, Enkidu is feral, completely at ease in his separation from humanity. Stephen Mitchell's translation of *Gilgamesh* describes Enkidu's life as simple and visceral: "He roamed all over the wilderness naked, far from the cities of men, ate grass with gazelles, and when he was thirsty he drank clear water from the water holes, kneeling beside the antelope and deer" (74-75). Enkidu is so far removed from human society and relationships that he seems almost unaware of his own humanity. His companionship derives completely from animals, and he is content in primitive, but blissful existence (Habib 75). However, Enkidu's erotic experience, his first experience with the sexual other, leaves him irrevocably altered. After seven days with Shamhat, he no longer takes satisfaction in instinctive life, craving instead the deeper intimacy of human friendship (Habib 74-75). After awareness and experience of sexual

differentiation, Enkidu's "mind had somehow grown larger, / He knew things now that an animal cannot know." (Mitchell 79). Even though Shamhat is hardly a central figure, her impact on Enkidu is at once pivotal and inextricably linked to her sexuality and sexual otherness. Shamhat is not significant because she talks to or bonds with Enkidu, but because she is his sexual complement. Hence, Enkidu's heightened awareness is facilitated through the firsthand experience of sexual differentiation. Ultimately, Gilgamesh directly links Enkidu's civilization and elevated consciousness with the sexual other.

In comparison, Genesis and the Hebrew Bible also connect the female with the initiation of knowledge, albeit with less than positive connotations. Sexual differentiation in the Bible is followed immediately by the fall of man, which is characterized by an awareness of good and evil. The fact that the creation of sexual otherness—a woman—is promptly shadowed with the desire for knowledge, even at the price of disobedience, suggests that the female is intrinsically linked to the acquisition of knowledge (Bal 30-35). The very proximity implies that the existence of a sexually distinct creature (sexually distinct from man) creates the need for new awareness. As Mieke Bal qualifies in her article "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character":

The woman paradoxically fulfills the creation of humanity to God's likeness, and, by the same token, the creation of literary character in which God is created to man's likeness. It was the likeness to God which the serpent presented to her as the main charm of the tree....The woman promotes her status in the narrative. Her disobedience is the first independent act, which makes her powerful as a character. (35)

Hence, the defiance of Eve is the first clear case of human volition, which initiates the "likeness to God," that is, for human purposes, an awareness of good and evil (Bal 35). Eve's role in the fall of man suggests that the Hebrew Bible links the sexual other with the acquisition of knowledge, even if that knowledge is ultimately tragic.

Ultimately, both *Gilgamesh* and Genesis connect the attainment of knowledge with the presence of the sexual other. Enkidu's inability to return to the animals is not unlike Adam and Eve's inability to remain in Eden. Still, it is not a perfectly analogous comparison. Eve's desire for knowledge and upward mobility is much more devastating than Shamhat's sexual education of Enkidu. However, it is critically significant that both works, in addition to shared issues of narrative and plot, associate sexual differentiation with the elevation of consciousness, increased awareness, or knowledge. This parallel indicates, if not intertextuality, at least the possibility of a mutual paradigm.

### **The Bible and *The Analects***

In addition, the possibility of a mutual paradigm might explain commonalities of the Bible and *The Analects*. Granted, a cursory impression might suggest that the two have little philosophical or thematic resemblance. *The Analects* are characterized by an emphasis on filial piety, social obligation, and proper government. In contrast, the Bible approaches all of these topics only through the wider lens of God's greater glory and divine purpose. However, to dismiss these two works as totally dissimilar would ignore their contextual functions. Despite a difference of cultural perspective, both the Bible and *The Analects* reflect a concern for law and reciprocity that further demonstrates a degree of unity among examples of wisdom literature.

### **Law and *Li***

*Li* can be defined literally as "rite" or "ritual," but these English approximations do not fully encompass the social obligation associated with the term. David Hinton describes *li* as

a religious concept associated with the worship of gods and spirits...reconfigured by Confucius to mean the web of social responsibilities that bind a society together. These include the proprieties in virtually all social interactions, and are

determined by the individual's position within the structure of society.... This Ritual structure of society is part of a vast cosmological weave: the Ritual structure of natural process as the ten thousand things emerge from the primal emptiness. (247)

For Confucius, *li* is a concept that transcends ceremony. It is an integral part of personal cultivation, as well as unifying force between the individual and community; *li* is both a symbol and a means of uplifting the human. Although Jewish law is not a perfect counterpart to Confucian *li*, it does, like *li*, serve to uphold the desired social norms and solidarity of its respective culture. As Yeo points out in *Li and Law in the Analects and Galatians*, "we can call both the Torah and *li* holy" (321). For Jews, the Torah was a means of asserting a relationship with the divine and maintaining cultural identity. However, for Paul and the Galatians, rite and ritual in the law were altered to accommodate the diverse nature of the sect. Although Messianic Jews and Gentiles were both Christians in the most basic sense, the burgeoning church (and Paul himself) had a practical need for rites that would foster community and continuity in two socially separated groups. Hence, baptism, rather than circumcision, is emphasized as a new and necessary, almost *li*-type sacred law because it does not show preference for one group over the other. However, baptism is not *li* in the Confucian sense; the personal benefits of baptism proceed, at least according to Paul, from the Spirit, with baptism acting only as an outward symbol of inward transformation. The social and communal benefits are only a further manifestation of the Spirit, the necessary working conditions for evangelization. Confucius is not concerned with the Spirit in the Hebrew sense, and Confucian *li* is more of an ongoing affirmation of social duty and uplifted humanity. In *The Analects*, *li* is a method of actively and effectively participating in community. Still, New Testament perspectives of the law and *The Analects* reiteration of *li* both serve to strengthen social ties. Hence, Galatians and *The Analects* advocate ritual as a means of solidarity (Yeo 320-26).

## Asymmetrical Ethics

However, not all parallels between *The Analects* and the Bible are quite so pragmatic. In fact, some instances of philosophical similarity seem counter-intuitive. The Hebrew Bible, for instance, details over six hundred commandments, whereas Confucius claims, “The noble-minded are all-encompassing, not stuck in doctrines. Little people are stuck in doctrines” (Hinton 31). However, the New Testament embodies a pointed philosophical shift from the Old Testament, one that aligns with many defining features of *The Analects*.

Both *The Analects* and the New Testament embody some degree of asymmetrical ethics (Nelson 292). Asymmetrical ethics are, as the name might imply, morals that are not based on mutual benefit. Simply put, asymmetrical ethics are codes of behavior that are not centered on reciprocation. For instance, *Analects* 4:18 states, “The Master said: ‘In serving your mother and father, admonish them gently. If they understand, and yet choose not to follow your advice, deepen your reverence without losing faith. And however exhausting this may be, avoid resentment.’” (Hinton 48). Confucius does not claim that such reverence and respect will inspire the same behavior in the parents: he does not claim, “Admonish your parents gently and eventually they will follow your advice,” or even “Admonish your parents gently and they will extend you the same courtesy.” Clearly, the point of such respect and humility is not necessarily reciprocation. In fact, the allusion to how “exhausting” this practice might become suggests that it is likely that parents will not show the same manner of grace displayed by the child. This could be attributed to established hierarchy: parents outrank children in the family, so asymmetrical ethics are socially unavoidable. Still, family across cultures is often a microcosm of larger social relationships, and this approbation of asymmetrical ethics is echoed throughout *The Analects* (Nelson 292-93). Granted, Confucius also emphasizes the importance of parental sacrifice for the

sake of the child, so reciprocal respect is, in a broader sense, implicit. However, the distinction that connects the New Testament and *The Analects* is that reciprocation is never guaranteed and, most importantly, never the reason for the prescribed behavior. Hence, *The Analects* establish and advocate the validity of asymmetrical ethics.

However, the notion of asymmetrical ethics is not exclusively Eastern. In the New Testament, Jesus' maxims on morality reflect a similar quality of asymmetrical ethics. For instance, the Book of Matthew presents Jesus as saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (5:43-45). Clearly, the point of loving one's enemies is not simply to be better treated by those enemies (although that might be a hopeful by-product). The love and prayers is almost certain not to be reciprocated, so there is nothing to be gained. Just as the Confucian child of *The Analects* has no reason to expect the same level of forbearance from their parents, the person in this case has no viable reason to expect that an enemy will be converted simply by love and prayers (Nelson 292). In both instances, the underlying assumption is that truly noble behavior is not interested in guaranteed reciprocation. More importantly, truly ethical or moral conduct should include consistency in the absence of reciprocation.

### **The Issue of Effort**

Another parallel between the Bible and *The Analects* revolves around the significance of human effort. Initial supposition might find this similarity unlikely. After all, isn't Christian doctrine contingent upon sola fide, or faith alone? While theologians such as Martin Luther have certainly made the case for faith as the sole catalyst for grace, human participation in that faith is

not without importance and is even emphasized in Christian sects outside of Lutheranism.

Although Confucius was not interested in grace in the Biblical sense, he reiterated the importance of benevolence and the humane, directly and repeatedly linking personal effort to the pursuit of *jen*, or humanity. A noble person becomes a noble person through consistent efforts to be noble, even if those efforts revolve around the absence of expectations. Although the Bible and *The Analects* operate within very different cultural frameworks (and perhaps have very different aims), both works reiterate the importance of human effort in the quest for magnanimity.

*The Analects* openly and consistently associate the search for *jen* with personal effort. On the topic of human volition and striving towards the humane, Confucius is reported as saying, “Can people devote their full strength to Humanity for even a single day? I’ve never seen anyone who isn’t strong enough. There may be such people, but I’ve never seen them” (Hinton 24). Clearly, this statement advocates the will and struggle of the individual and suggests a universal potential in the human condition. Confucius is not deferring to some hypothetical grace, but pointing out that every person has the capacity and, by implication, the duty to strive for the humane (Nelson 290). Similarly, Confucius considers such exertion a fundamental aspect of worthy discipleship: “I never enlighten those who aren’t struggling to explain themselves. If I show you one corner and you can’t show me the other three, I’ll say nothing more.” (Hinton 50). According to Confucius, personal effort was an essential component of spiritual and social transformation; human desire and struggle was not merely an inciting catalyst, but crucially necessary for seeking out and exemplifying the humane. Confucius’s emphasis on effort and self-cultivation is reiterated in modern scholarship: “The vitality and motivation of moral life arises from the self being concerned for itself and its ethical character in its relations with and

concern for others...It is ... mundane motives that shape and encourage becoming a ... responsive participant” (Nelson 293). Hence, human effort is intrinsic to the pursuit of the humane. The underlying assumptions of a “self being concerned for itself” are twofold. First, self-cultivation is a worthwhile use of time. If concern for the self helps to facilitate *jen*, or as Nelson puts it, “a responsive participant,” then self-concern is a valuable Confucian tool (Nelson 293). Second and more importantly, self-cultivation and, by extension, human effort, matters. If human efforts were superfluous, or at least outside the aims of Confucian thought, then the issue of self-cultivation would be moot. If one cannot become humane through some degree of trying, then there would be an overarching need for resignation, not personal effort. However, Confucius prizes self-cultivation: “Study as if you’ll never know enough, as if you’re afraid of losing it all” (Hinton 15). Clearly, human effort is central to the aims of *The Analects*.

Although post-biblical theology and Protestant Christian tradition might suggest otherwise, the Bible also acknowledges the importance of human effort to achieve salvation. Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are replete with requirements of the law. Circumcision, Sabbath law, and the commandments are all central to the unique relationship between God and the Jewish people. Since the fulfillment of the law is dependent upon individual adherence to that law, the fundamental premise is that personal effort is not just desired, but necessary. The Jewish people were being directed to try to fulfill the law in practice and spirit. Even Jesus, who is often associated with dispelling legalistic interpretations of religious tradition and Jewish law, never dismissed the role of personal exertion in relation to God, going so far as to condemn private thoughts that contradict the spirit of the law (Matt. 5:27-30). Later followers of Jesus are even more explicit, as exemplified in the Letter of James:



What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe there is one god. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (Jam. 2:14-20)

Although "deeds" is not perfectly analogous to Confucian self-cultivation, it's significant that both require some extent of personal effort and participation. Good deeds, like self-cultivation, are not just an outward symbol of inward change, but a process by which the self is further developed for the better.

### ***Gilgamesh and The Analects***

Although there are certainly parallels in theme, narrative, and moral which connect Gilgamesh to the Hebrew Bible, and *The Analects* to the Bible (particularly the New Testament), there is a pointed lack of parallels between *Gilgamesh* and *The Analects*. This does not necessarily discount the possibility of an underlying cause for the established parallels in wisdom literature, but it does suggest a pointed shift in wisdom literature over the course of time.

The only conceivable similarity that might exist between *Gilgamesh* and *The Analects* is the emphasis on responsible leadership. However, this connection is tenuous at best. Gilgamesh becomes a tolerable leader only after he has been challenged by Enkidu, who somehow curbs his excesses (Mitchell 35). Leadership in *The Analects* orients almost entirely around good example, generosity, and integrity. Gilgamesh's concern for personal glory and eventual self-actualization

is a form of leadership that is, if not diametrically opposed to Confucian leadership, at least devoid of the pervading sense of duty that characterizes *The Analects*.

Ultimately, *The Analects* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are different in theme, narrative style, and overarching moral. Gilgamesh's eventual acceptance of his own mortality is distinct from Confucius' call to duty, reciprocity, and filial piety. Gilgamesh is essentially an extended narrative, while *The Analects* is a collection of concise sayings. Both texts are concerned with wisdom, both offer answers to the kinds of questions that are most pressing to humankind. However, their respective approaches and conclusions are all but completely dissimilar.

### **Question 2: Possible Explanations**

The previously mentioned parallels are certainly not exhaustive, but they will be the focal point of all subsequent discussion. More importantly, and more pressing for the purposes of this paper, is why such parallels exist at all. Some commonalities might be readily attributed to historic, scientific reasons; the deluge narratives, for example, might be owed to the occurrence of the same actual flood. Others parallels—the wrestling scenes, the association between sexual differentiation and knowledge—might have sociological roots. Perhaps when considering the potential explanations for the parallels, it is appropriate to consider Freud's comments on overdetermination in *Interpretation of Dreams*: “there are no limits to the determinants that may be present...the dream-elements have been formed out of the whole mass of the dream-thoughts, and that every one of them appear, in relation to the dream-thoughts, to have a multiple determination” (Freud 95). Granted, Freud was applying the concept of overdetermination to dreams, not wisdom literature. Still, the premise that an event rarely has a single cause seems likely to extend to the potential causes for the previously established parallels.

## Death in *Gilgamesh* and the Old Testament

Similar portrayals of death and the afterlife in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible might be owed to basic psychological concepts of death. Freud posits that while death is broadly accepted as a physical reality, human beings are compelled to distance death from their daily lives:

We were of course prepared to maintain that death was the necessary outcome of life, that everyone owes nature a death and must expect to pay the debt... In reality, however we were accustomed to behave as it were otherwise. We showed an unmistakable tendency to put death on one side, to eliminate it from life. (Freud 3081)

Hence, the tendency to assign death a place, a specific area away from the affairs of day-to-day life, represents a basic psychological urge. Sheol and the underworld of *Gilgamesh* are manifestations of the human position on death; they are functionally an attempt to “put death on one side” (Freud 3081). That side, in the instance of *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, is below the ground or subterranean. This is psychologically convenient because human beings cannot see, at least not without some effort, what occurs beneath the ground. Only the sky and surface of the earth are visible. Hence, by associating death with a physical place that is not easily observable, the authors of *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible are able to distance themselves from death as a reality. Death is effectively compartmentalized, assigned a place with no direct corollary to everyday life.

Furthermore, the construction of a death place reflects a human inability to understand death as it actually happens. As Freud explains, “It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death [because] whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators” (3544). Correspondingly, both Sheol and the hereafter of *Gilgamesh* imply a spectator who is, if not actually dead, at least able to observe and detail the spiritual sphere. For instance, when Job considers what he believes to be his impending death, he describes a

surprisingly sensory impression of Sheol: “before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness” (Job. 10:21-22). Terms like gloom and shadow are physical and imply both sight and melancholy, which would suggest that Job will experience the afterlife in terms similar to life. Job can imagine his death only in those expressions and contexts with which he is already familiar. Similarly, Enkidu’s dream of the afterlife reveals that he is not only a spectator to his future, but also a visitor to Irkalla, the Queen of Darkness: “There is the house whose people sit in darkness; dust in their food and clay their meat. They are clothed like birds...they see no light, they sit in darkness. I entered the house of dust and I saw the kings of the earth, their crowns put away forever” (Sandars 14). Enkidu, like Job, views the afterlife through the unavoidable lens of sensory experience; death is a place with darkness and decay, visceral reminders of life’s end. Hence, both *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible reflect Freud’s statement regarding human attitude towards death. Job and Enkidu describe the place of death as if they were spectators to their own demise, as if they will be able to evaluate death in the same way that they are able to interpret their lives.

### **The Flood Narrative**

Psychological perspectives on death are also pertinent to the flood narrative parallels which are, in both instances, implicitly concerned with wide-spread devastation and death and, more explicitly, the avoidance of death. Freud argues that myth is essentially the human mind’s projection of itself onto the physical world: “For both Freud and Jung, myth is neither to explain nor to manipulate the unconscious but to help encounter it” (Main *et. al.* 107). Hence, the flood narrative, whether based in reality or not, exists as a manifestation of the unconscious; people ascribe meaning to natural phenomena as a way of releasing some hidden urge or impulse, which

is otherwise revealed through dreams and literature (Main *et. al.* 107-110). From a Freudian perspective, the flood narrative is an expression of human ambivalence regarding death, which might explain why the narrative has been preserved across multiple cultures.

On the one hand, the flood narrative might be appropriately interpreted as an expression of an unconscious death wish, *thanatos*. For instance, Freud posits that the re-creation of traumatic events by trauma patients represents a repressed desire to die, what might be called a death wish: “If we are not to be shaken in our belief in the wish-fulfilling tenor of dreams by the dreams of traumatic neurotics...we may be driven to reflect on the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego” (Freud 1113-1114). Hence, re-creation of near-death experiences is essentially an expression of death instinct. Granted, literature is not dream, but given Freud’s estimation of myth as an extension of the unconscious, it seems likely that a death drive, if such a drive exists in the human psyche, would manifest in other outlets of the unconscious—namely, literature. On the issue of Freudian death instinct, Calvin Hall comments, “The ultimate goal of the death instincts is to return to the constancy of inorganic matter...the derivatives of the death instincts, of which destructiveness and aggression are among the more important, are far from inconspicuous.” (58-59). If Hall’s comments are applied to literature and myth, then literature, while not an act of aggression, still expresses the aggression and destructive energy that is the necessary byproduct of the death instinct. In this sense, the worldwide death represented in the *Gilgamesh* and Genesis flood narratives is a vivid representation of *thanatos* (Hall 59). The flood narrative is the ultimate retelling of a near-death experience. Furthermore, deluge myth in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible is owed to its relevance to human instinct. Correspondingly, the flood parallels, even if owed to a common source, intertextuality, or sheer happenstance, exist because the flood narrative appeals to the death drive (Main *et. al.* 107-110).

However, to characterize the flood narrative strictly as a portrayal of the desire to die would be grossly inaccurate; the presence of a survivor in both the *Gilgamesh* and Genesis versions reveals what Freud might call *eros*, the instinct or drive that is concerned with survival and the proliferation of the human species (Main *et. al.* 110-111). Life instincts, according to Hall, “are mental representatives of all of the bodily needs whose satisfaction is necessary for survival and for propagation...the form of energy which is used by the life instincts is called libido” (59). Hence, even the exploration of death in the flood narratives in both the *Gilgamesh* and Genesis accounts incorporate some representation of life instincts or libido. The ark and flood hero are not simply literary devices, but an expression of the psychological energy dedicated to preserving life (Hall 59). In this respect, the flood narrative is unique because it reflects and appeals to the two most visceral drives of the human psyche.

Freud’s position on the uncanny also provides insight regarding the parallel flood narratives in *Gilgamesh* and Genesis. The uncanny as a psychological experience might best be described as weirdly familiar or even a sense of *déjà vu*. This sense of familiarity is actually owed to the uncanny experience’s correspondence to repressed desires or drives (Freud 4-15). Life encounters of the uncanny are often upsetting and even mysterious, sometimes associated with the religious, spiritual, or otherworldly (Freud 11-13). In “The ‘Uncanny’” Freud argues:

The uncanny as it is depicted in literature...is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the latter and something more besides. The distinction between what has been repressed and what has been surmounted cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without profound modification...a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life...there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life. (Freud 18)

Put simply, the uncanny in literature is deliberate, a tool by the author to achieve a certain effect, but still a powerful force in literary themes. Events that might be uncanny in real life do not have

an especially peculiar or uncanny effect in literature because they are common elements of fiction (Freud 18). As a result, literature addresses repressed drives like the life and death instincts in a way that does not create an unpleasant, uncanny experience for the reader/listener. In this way, the flood narrative encapsulates repressed human impulses without creating the sensation of the uncanny. In other words, literature such as the flood narrative of *Gilgamesh* and Genesis addresses repressed impulses without the unnerving sensation of the uncanny, thereby ensuring the survival of a circulating oral tradition. The lack of the uncanny, or at least the lack of the uncanny experience in literature, might account for the repetition of flood narratives in two culturally distinct works such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis.

Ultimately, the existence of parallel flood narratives might be owed as much to psychological impulses as to historic intertextuality or even an actual flood event. Even if the Genesis account of the flood is an absorption and retelling of the Gilgamesh deluge, the fact remains that such absorption is a conscious volition, an act of preference for a story with particular relevance. This relevance is ultimately the relevance of the unconscious mind, the repressed desires and drives that prompt human behavior. Hence, in a Sumerian or Hebrew context, the flood narrative exists because it addresses the death and life instincts that are embedded in human psychology and exist regardless of cultural condition.

However, psychological explanations for parallel flood narratives in *Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis are not limited to Freudian hypothesis. Another psychologist, the more controversial Carl Jung, also provides possible clarification for repeated, highly similar accounts of a great deluge. Specifically, Jungian perspectives on collective unconscious and primordial images might account for similar flood narratives in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis.

First, and perhaps most obviously, Jung's theory regarding the collective unconscious might account for, if not completely explain, the duplication of flood narrative in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible. For Jung, the collective unconscious is the "portion of the psyche which can be differentiated from the personal unconscious by the fact that its existence is not dependent upon personal experiences" (Hall 39). Jung argues that the human mind inherits psychological makeup in the same way that the body inherits genetic codes for height, weight, and disease. These inherited psychological characteristics act as a lens for how the individual experiences life. Moreover, the inherited psyche is directly connected to the prior experiences of an individual's ancestors and even species: "the individual is linked with his past, not only with the past of his infancy but more importantly with the past of the species and before that with the long stretch of organic evolution" (Hall 39). Hence, any flood event might have been absorbed into the collective experiences of the human psyche, stored in the reserve of human racial memory (Hall 38-39). The flood narrative is a manifestation of the collective unconscious, with *Gilgamesh* and Genesis essentially being tapped into the same narrative source. From a Jungian perspective, it wouldn't matter if Sumerian or Hebrew authors had no historic or first-hand basis for the deluge story because both would have access to any actual deluge experience through the collective unconscious.

Similarly, Jung's notion of "primordial images" would further explain the similarity of flood narrative in *Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis. Related to the collective unconscious, primordial images are "the earliest development of the psyche" (Hall 39). Hall surmises that these images are, like the collective unconscious, an inheritance independent of actual experience: "Man inherits these images from his ancestral past, a past that includes all of his human ancestors as well as his prehuman or animal ancestors...He does not have to learn...fears



through experiences with snakes or the dark...We inherit predispositions to fear snakes” (Hall 39). If Jung’s suggestion is correct, then the flood image and perhaps even the ark might actually be a primordial image inherited from the shared ancestry of Hebrew and Sumerian authors. A flood water image would certainly seem a likely primordial image given its lethal potential for those who live in flood areas. If flood images are a collective tool ensuring the proliferation of the species, then it would seem that warning images like floods would enable decedents to identify and avoid dangerous conditions. In this sense, the flood narratives are a recurring expression of an innate image. The deluge stories in both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis are primordial images drawn from shared inheritance which, by extension, would explain their multiple similarities.

Ultimately, Jung’s concepts regarding collective unconscious and primordial images support parallel flood narratives in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible. If the flood narrative can be viewed as an extension of the collective unconscious, then it is not surprising –and perhaps even to be expected –that so many similarities exist. Similarly, primordial images would account for parallel descriptions in both narratives, specifically flood and ark images. If the collective unconscious and primordial images can be appropriately viewed as the shared inheritance of Sumerian and Hebrew authors, then overlap in the two flood narratives is inevitable.

Perhaps a more obvious explanation for the flood parallel between the Hebrew Bible and Gilgamesh is a scientific one. An actual flood event might indicate a common source for the deluge myths, a real experience that served as fodder for allegory. As Steven Danver points out when discussing the deluge in *Popular Controversies in World History*, “there is growing scientific evidence that such natural catastrophes have happened in various parts of the world at

different times...in the core of a flood myth may be encapsulated the cultural memory of a real geological event” (51,56). Granted, science does not strictly support either the Biblical or *Gilgamesh* account of the deluge: there is no evidence to suggest a single massive flood that pervaded for multiple days across the entire surface of the Earth. However, scientists speculate that prehistoric flooding might have been prompted by volcanic eruptions or earthquakes, which, in turn, triggered landslides and tsunamis that created massive destruction across multiple areas. The flood that seems most likely to have produced such wide-spread disruption and, by extension, the flood parallel is the Black Sea Flood (Danver 51-52).

Archaeological study of the Black Sea Flood has revealed two key flood events. The first inundation occurred between 15,000-13,000 BCE as suggested by “the remainders of freshwater fauna in the sediments on the shallow shelf of the Black Sea” (Danver 57). The second (and more controversial) inundation took place around 6700 BCE. Both events incurred long-term repercussions in the ecosystem neighboring the Black Sea, with subsequent ecological changes impacting the populations that resided in and near the affected flood areas (Danver 54-57). One geologist in particular, William Ryan, has pointed to sonar mapping of old shore lines and analysis of freshwater and saltwater marine shells as evidence of rapid submergence and drastic flooding (Ananthaswamy 1). Some scientists and theorists posit that such flooding left a lasting psychological impact on affected populations: “the narrative impact of the ancient flood myths can readily be associated with the long-lasting after-effects of a traumatic experience that shaped the cultural memory of people” (Danver 54). Hence, the Black Sea Flood events, particularly the second inundation, might have prompted the narrative, with the flood narrative being a means of psychologically contending with a devastating environmental catastrophe.

Furthermore, the migration incited by the Black Sea Flood could have insured the preservation of the flood narrative: “In view of the migratory thrusts into different directions away from the inundated shores of the former freshwater lake, myths relating to the Great Flood emerged spontaneously among the local migrants, and the oral narratives were conveyed to their offspring” (Danver 54). Hence, it is not exactly surprising that flood myths persisted in Mesopotamia, the Near East, and southeastern Europe. The occurrence of the Black Sea Flood served as catalyst for the original deluge story and facilitated the survival of that story by prompting the migration of affected populations (Danver 54-55).

However, researchers disagree on the severity of the Black Sea Flood and its correspondence to the deluge myth. It is generally agreed that a warming event prompted flooding that resulted in a surge of Mediterranean saltwater. Furthermore, most researchers concede that this surge forged a connection with the Black Sea, a freshwater lake at the time, and effectively turned that freshwater lake into a rapidly swelling sea (Dorminey 1-2). However, studies spearheaded by Liviu Giosan argue that the ensuing flood was hardly epic. In fact, analysis of carbon-dated mollusk fossils suggests that the Black Sea flood rose only fifteen to thirty feet (Dorminey 1). Giosan argues that pre-flood water levels were significantly higher than previous research suggests and that, by extension, the impact of the flood was comparatively mild (Dorminey 2). A localized flood would seem less likely to serve as the inspiration for such a pervading flood myth, particularly if such a flood did not provoke massive migration.

Hence, even if the Black Sea flood event did inspire a proto-myth for the deluge narrative of the Hebrew Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, it does not wholly account for the existence of parallels within those narratives. The prevalence of floods in general might explain the pervasiveness of flood myths, but it is ultimately an incomplete explanation. As Mark Lewis

aply explains in *The Flood Myths of Early China*, “Not all wide-spread phenomena become the subject of stories, much less of fundamental myths. Furthermore, it provides no insight into the wide ranges of meanings attributed to the flood in different versions.” (5). While geological evidence of actual flood events suggests the disputed possibility regarding a common source for Biblical and *Gilgamesh* versions of the flood narrative, it does not completely explain parallel interpretations.

The social context and purpose of the flood narrative might better explain parallels between *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis in the Bible. Specifically, a deluge story could serve as an allegory for preserving social order. In both instances, the flood hero is preserved based on his appeal and obedience to the deity figure. Hence, the flood waters are a symbol for social upheaval and ensuing chaos: “the mythic account of a primal flood is invoked as the prototype for the periodic collapses of social order that had recurred through ancient history” (Lewis 51). Correspondingly, obedience and adherence to hierarchy are rewarded and distinguished by a new relationship with the divine.

### **Wrestling with the Divine**

A cursory impression of *Gilgamesh* and Hebrew Bible similarities might indicate a clear instance of influence. The previously mentioned deluge parallel, for example, suggests some degree of intertextuality, even if that intertextuality is impossible to track or date with much accuracy. However, to characterize all parallels between *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible as a case of obvious influence or intertextuality would be an oversimplification. Even if the *Gilgamesh* epic was told and retold amongst Hebrew Bible authors, there is still an appeal of the epic to those authors that remains unexplained. If these authors were simply revising a

circulating oral tradition, the question remains as to why certain narratives were selected as a cultural paradigm.

The wrestling scene in particular seems a significant (and perhaps seemingly unlikely) candidate for emulation. With its unique situation, purpose, and lack of lethal intent, the wrestling parallel contains oddly specific criteria that suggest a particular collective relevance. Hence, the similar wrestling scenes in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible are not simply an instance of intertextuality, but a microcosm of a larger social condition. The attraction to *Gilgamesh* for Hebrew Bible authors is not simply owed to the appeal of an epic, but the universal applicability of a shared truth. Ultimately, the corresponding wrestling scenes in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis reflect the significance of conflict in human history, convention, and identity.

First, the parallel wrestling scenes echo the extensive approval of warrior values in human history. The pervasiveness of warrior epics since *Gilgamesh* suggests a global interest in, if not adherence to, warrior values. As Sanimir Resic comments in “The Warrior as Masculine Ideal,” “Looking back on human history and civilization, it is literally filled with warrior-epics...epics have made an impact on ideal warriorhood which has been hard to challenge...returning to warrior values, it is hard to exaggerate their long term popularity” (423). Hence, the values deemed warrior values have permeated literature, from *Gilgamesh* to the *Illiad*, the *Odyssey*, and even *Le Morte d’Arthur* (Raskid 424). While each social context has refined warrior values to adhere to a specific time and situation, a pattern of recognized ideals has persisted. Across various cultures and disparate time periods, universal warrior values have emerged, which elevate characteristics like “honor, loyalty, duty, obedience, endurance, strength, sexual potency, courage, and camaraderie” and equate such virtues to masculinity or manliness

(Rasik 424). Granted, the popularity of warrior values in times and cultures prior to *Gilgamesh* must be left to conjecture, but if the endurance of the St. Crispin Day speech in Shakespeare's King Henry V, or public interest in figures like General Patton is any indication, it seems likely that warrior values persisted before the writing (chiseling) of *Gilgamesh* (Rasik 424-426). Human preoccupation with warrior values clarifies the parallel wrestling scenes in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible. The wrestling conflict reiterates each character's masculinity and, by extension, their rightful role as the hero figure. Wrestling in both instances showcases qualities like "endurance," "strength," and "courage" which makes the subsequent positive outcome all the more befitting and appropriate (Rasik 424). For example, Jacob is said to have "wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day"—a feat that would have taken hours of physical exertion and endurance (Gen. 32: 24). Gilgamesh's wrestling match with Enkidu is described in animalistic, almost other-worldly terms: "they grappled, holding each other like bulls. They broke the doorposts and the walls shook, they snorted like bulls locked together" (Mitchell 18). For both Jacob and Gilgamesh, warrior values, particularly strength and endurance, are revealed through conflict. If warrior values are the ideal masculine behavior, then it is only to be expected that Gilgamesh would gain a worthy friend, and that Jacob would be blessed with a unique relationship with God. The parallel wrestling scenes in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Genesis are indicative—and perhaps explained by the broad acceptance and endorsement—of warrior values.

Furthermore, parallel wrestling scenes in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible reflect the critical significance of conflict in social conventions. Violence, such as the wrestling scenes in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, is essentially a necessary tool for promoting social conventions (Otto et al 32). Although *Warfare and Society* by Ton Otto *et. al.* is not concerned

with *Gilgamesh* or the book of Genesis explicitly, its commentary on the relationship between violence and social structure is applicable:

Most cultural anthropologists, however...conceive of society as a cultural and normative order, not primarily a biological one. Accordingly, they interpret warfare and violence as predominantly cultural phenomena, following collective rules and values, or rationally responding to historical or environmental circumstances such as resources scarcity, rather than issuing from individual basic drives. (32)

The notion of violence being driven largely by social impetus seems especially plausible in *Gilgamesh*. Indeed, the entire scuffle between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is socially sanctioned, at least if appeals to divine agents and the subsequent intervention of those divine agents can be appropriately labeled socially sanctioned. Gilgamesh and Enkidu do not quarrel because of rational imperative; there is certainly nothing to be gained for Enkidu, at least not in terms of resource, which would require force for the sake of acquisition. Rather, conflict is facilitated by Gilgamesh's abuse of social order: "Gilgamesh sounds the tocsin for his amusement, his arrogance has no bounds by day or night... yet the king should be a shepherd to his people. His lust leaves no virgin to her lover, neither the warrior's daughter nor the wife of the noble" (Mitchell 12). While Gilgamesh's right to every bride is collectively acknowledged by his people, they resent his exacting misuse of privilege. Hence, Enkidu's fight with Gilgamesh is a reiteration of unspoken social convention. Gilgamesh's subjects share an implicit –but essential – value that even kingly entitlements should not come at the suffering of his people. Hence, Gilgamesh's confrontation with Enkidu functions as a reiteration of social convention.

Furthermore, the relationship between violence and social convention also extends to Jacob's fight with God. In Jacob's case, the conflict is less concerned with preserving previously established social convention, and more interested in validating current conventions, specifically Hebrew conventions that acknowledge Jacob as the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. The

relationship between Jacob's encounter with God and Jewish convention is significant. As Karen Armstrong explains in her book, *In the Beginning*, "the editors who put together the final text of Genesis in about the fifth century BCE felt able to include the tale because it so eloquently described the religious experience of Israel" (4). Jacob's wrestling with God not only marks the beginning of a new, unique relationship with God, but also justifies Jacob's position as the patriarch of the Hebrew people. It is after this particular fight that Jacob becomes Israel: "thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). Jacob's confrontation with God is a "predominantly cultural phenomena" in the sense that social and conventional values are upheld through the conflict (Otto *et. al.* 32 ). Jacob's theft of Esau's birthright, as well as later Israeli struggles with the Edomites, are implicitly ameliorated through Jacob's conflict with God. Furthermore, the proximity of Jacob's skirmish with God to his reconciliation with Esau suggests that it is conflict, albeit not conflict with Esau, which reestablishes Jacob's security (Gen. 33). Moreover, it is only after Jacob's struggle with God that legacy is ensured: "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it and to thy seed after thee will I give the land." (Gen. 35:10-12). Granted, Jacob, like Gilgamesh, is not without trials following his inciting moment of conflict. Still, it is critically significant to Hebrew religious and cultural conventions that the patriarch—Jacob—is able to withstand a fight with God. Jacob's violence with God reflects the relationship between conflict and social convention.

Ironically, and perhaps appropriately, conflict is also an impetus and result of social change, which might further explain parallels of purpose in *Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis. As Otto *et. al.* qualifies in *Warfare and Society*, "From the view of archaeology, war seems to



occur most frequently in certain periods with radical shifts in the systems of domination... Warfare can certainly be attributed some kind of role in... major macro-regional horizons of social transformation” (108). Granted, individual wrestling matches are not perfectly analogous to warfare; the multiple factors that prompt and discourage warfare are likely more convoluted and ambiguous than a brawl between two people. Still, if individual conflicts can be acknowledged, even tenuously, as a representative microcosm of larger struggle, then both *Gilgamesh* and Genesis wrestling scenes encapsulate conflict as a necessary motivation for social change (Otto *et. al.* 109-111).

For *Gilgamesh*, the relationship between violence and social change is explicit. Enkidu’s announcement of his intention to fight *Gilgamesh* reveals that there is nothing at stake but a potential adjustment in social norms: “I will go to the place where *Gilgamesh* lords it over the people, I will challenge him boldly, and I will cry aloud in Uruk, ‘I have come to change the old order, for I am the strongest here’” (Mitchell 18). Enkidu’s challenge, since it is directed at a king, essentially disrupts social convention. More importantly, his claim to “change the old order” is clearly a rallying cry for social change (Mitchell 18). Violence for both *Gilgamesh* and Enkidu functions as an exertion of power. Correspondingly, it is only through combat that the pair arrives at an unspoken, but agreed-upon change. Through conflict, *Gilgamesh*’s excesses are curbed, which equates to (happily anticipated) social change for his subjects.

For Jacob, social change through conflict is ambiguous, but still evident in posterity and collective identity. At first, Jacob’s fight with God does not seem to prompt any significant change. Jacob continues to wander with his possessions, wives, and children, lying to his brother to avoid future calamity and eventually losing his favored son. Jacob’s conflict does not seem to facilitate social change; his wrestling with the divine agent does not correlate to “radical shifts in

the systems of domination” or “social transformation,” at least not immediately (Otto *et. al.* 108). However, it is worth noting that Jacob’s identity shift to Israel following his struggle with God is essentially a social change. Through Jacob’s renaming, God converts Jacob’s family and descendants, loosely bound nomads that they are, into a cohesive collective identity—Israelites. Jacob’s divine conflict is social change in the sense that it establishes, however tenuously, the shared identity of a nation.

Similarly, warfare and, by extension, conflict has a capacity to mold concepts of identity, which might explain the wrestling scene parallel of Genesis and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. On the topic of warfare and identity, Ton Otto comments, “Warfare creates a context of acute contest for power that affects people’s subjectivities and identities while coping with the situation...lack of difference between existing groups threatens their identity and thus, in a way, their existence” (385-86). While the brawls of Genesis and *Gilgamesh* do not involve a group, they do involve identity, particularly as it pertains to warrior values. Hence, both texts incorporate a version of a non-lethal fight because conflict is crucial to the construction of identity in both cultures (and, if Otto is correct, all cultures).

Conflict is certainly crucial to identity in the wrestling scene of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In challenging Gilgamesh, Enkidu challenges Gilgamesh’s identity, his kingly authority and his right to pillage. Granted, Enkidu’s challenge is not strictly an “acute contest for power,” at least not in the respect of challenging Gilgamesh for political clout or the throne. However, Enkidu’s confrontation with Gilgamesh is still an affront to Gilgamesh’s self-concept. For example, Enkidu’s blessing of Gilgamesh suggests that the issue of identity is a subtle, but significant factor of the conflict: “When Enkidu was thrown he said to Gilgamesh, ‘There is not another like you in the world Ninsun, who is as strong as a wild ox in the byre, she was the mother who bore

...you are raised above all men, and Enlil has given you the kingship, for your strength surpasses the strength of men” (Mitchell 19) . Enkidu’s acknowledgement of Gilgamesh’s partially divine ancestry and rightful superiority is ultimately an acknowledgement of the most crucial components of Gilgamesh’s identity. Correspondingly, Gilgamesh’s excesses are sated by acknowledgement, by the reiteration of his own sense of self by a man who is very nearly his equal. While this self-concept is not bolstered by us-versus-them conflict that Otto describes, it seems significant that Gilgamesh’s self-actualization begins in conflict.

In a much more apparent way, Jacob’s wrestling match with God reflects Otto’s suggestion that conflict is crucial to identity. In fact, the wrestling scene in Genesis marks the acquisition of identity for Jacob: “thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen. 32:28) Again, it is unclear to what extent Jacob’s new-found identity is dependent upon struggle. There is no suggestion that absence of conflict would threaten Jacob’s identity (at least not his identity as Jacob). However, the fact that Jacob’s renaming occurs only after his wrestling with God suggests that conflict is the inciting moment for realized identity. Furthermore, Jacob’s insistence on being blessed by the anonymous assailant suggests that Jacob is vaguely aware that something crucial—something not physical—is at stake in the brawl: “Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me’ The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’” (Gen. 32:26-27). Jacob’s insistence on blessing, followed immediately by a question that pertains directly to personal identity is clear indication of the relationship between conflict and identity. Jacob’s wrestling with God is a prime example of how conflict can form identity.

The wrestling scenes in both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and the book of Genesis reveal the implication of conflict in human history, convention, and identity. Across time and tradition, warrior values such as strength and bravery have been endorsed as masculine or desirable, which would explain the illustration of warrior values in two culturally disparate works (Rasik 424-426). If the prevalence of warrior values in contemporary culture are any indication of their endurance, then it seems likely that warrior values existed and were upheld long before the transcription of *Gilgamesh*. Hence, both wrestling scenes reflect a pervasive set of ideals and characteristics. More importantly, the relationship between conflict and social convention suggests that both wrestling scenes are connected with social convention, both in how it is maintained and how it is changed. Enkidu clearly seeks to change social convention, and Jacob's wrestling scene is written retrospectively, with the preservation of posterity and convention in mind (Otto *et. al.* 32,118). Perhaps most importantly, both wrestling scenes reflect some aspect of identity. For *Gilgamesh*, the fight concludes with Enkidu's acknowledgement of *Gilgamesh*'s preeminence and demigod status. For Jacob, identity is altered through renaming and the assurance of legacy. Both wrestling scenes, as acts of violence, encapsulate the universal significance of conflict.

Even if the wrestling parallels are owed to influence, it is clear that such influence was not blind adaptation. Rather, the wrestling scenes appear in both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Genesis because they are connected to issues of history, convention, and identity. Such issues have a broad scope of applicability and interest, even to cultures as dissimilar as Sumerian and Hebrew.

## Knowledge and Sexual Differentiation

While a mutual paradigm might explain connections between sexual differentiation and the acquisition of knowledge as they appear in *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, a psychological explanation is perhaps more comprehensive and, for the purposes of this thesis, more applicable. Although sexuality, gender roles, and male-female relationships are expressed differently depending on cultural context, certain tensions surrounding such issues and the psychological forces behind those tensions are universally relevant. Correspondingly, Freud's observations about the redirection of sexual energy might explain why sexual difference is associated with the advent of knowledge or heightened consciousness in both *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible.

A question central to any study of human sexuality as well as many of Freud's psychological theories is why—with its physical pleasure and biological imperative—is sex so frequently and consistently restricted or otherwise repressed by social norms? According to Freud, this repression was crucial to the expansion and progress of civilization. As Richard Boothby explains in *Sex on the Couch*, “To accomplish the myriad tasks called for by civilized life, enormous quantities of energy must be marshaled. But from what source is it to be drawn? Freud's answer is sexuality” (67). According to Freud, sexual energy is essentially exploited for the sake of civil development. The diversion of such energy is an unavoidable reality of limited resources and competing aims. In “Civilization and its Discontents” Freud clarifies the necessity of such diversion:

...civilization is obeying the laws of economic necessity, since a large amount of psychical energy which it uses for its own purposes has to be withdrawn from sexuality. In this respect civilization behaves towards sexuality as a people or a stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation. (Freud 606)

This redirection of sexual energy, which Freud calls “sublimation” could and would often become the substance of creativity (Boothby 68). The relationship between sublimation and creative pursuits makes Freud’s theories all the more applicable to *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible since both works are, in effect, creative endeavors. Whatever historical or ethical truths the authors of *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible may have hoped to convey, the act of transcribing events and articulating a moral message involves some degree of creativity, even if the author believes his message absolutely. As creative works, *Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible are the result of redirected psychical and sexual energy, at least if Freud’s theories are valid.

Freud’s commentary regarding the redirection of sexual energy seems particularly applicable to *Gilgamesh*, which presents sexual energy and sexual differentiation as ultimately civilizing forces. Enkidu’s awareness of the sexual other is immediately trailed by the satisfaction of his sexual desires, yet he is not totally content with carnal fulfillment: “his mind had somehow grown larger, He knew things now that an animal cannot know” (Mitchell 27). More importantly, Enkidu’s awareness of the sexual other and his acknowledgement of his own sexual impulses serve as catalysts for his aspiration to join society. From a Freudian perspective, Enkidu’s rapid progression from sexual gratification to social participant is the result of economic necessity. Enkidu does not suggest that Shamhat live with him in the wilderness to serve as his sexual companion, but rather is almost instantly filled with a longing to join the larger social mechanism. In this sense, Enkidu seems to be aware (subconsciously, if not consciously) that sexual energy might serve as a reservoir for social mobility.

Similarly, Freud’s observations about the redirection of sexual energy might also explain why Eve is associated with the acquisition of knowledge in the Hebrew Bible. With the creation of Adam’s biological complement comes the undescribed but insinuated first sexual relationship.

Eve's disobedience of God represents the tension between individual sexual urges and social obligation. Granted, Eve's disobedience is not sexual disobedience, but it is only through her existence—and the creation of a sexual relationship—that a social contract becomes a point of discord. If Eve's sexual differentiation from Adam ushers in the first reservoir of sexual energy, then it comes as little surprise that Adam blames Eve for his failure to honor a social and divine contract: "the woman that you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it" (Gen 3.12).

### **Law and *Li*, Asymmetrical Ethics, and the Issue of Effort**

Similarly, Freud's comments on religion and the ego's helplessness might explain parallels in the purpose and portrayal of law and *li* in the New Testament and *The Analects*. Religion, according to Freud, is an infantile means of contending with the ego's experience of helplessness. God becomes the agent of adult helplessness in the same way that children differ to seemingly all-powerful parents. Similarly, law, particularly religious law, is the ego's effort to promote solidarity against the pervading reality of helplessness (LaMothe 672-679).

However, Freud's comments on religion and helplessness contain what LaMothe appropriately identifies as paradoxical: "Human beings are helpless, yet we act together over and against nature...Our individual and collective actions, then obviously suggest that we are not completely helpless, though we are inevitably helpless in the face of the reality of death...our collective experiences of helplessness...serve as the very motivation to act together against the forces of nature...helplessness in agency and agency in helplessness" (676). Hence, Hebrew law and Confucian *li* are social tools that promote solidarity, even if that solidarity is ultimately ineffectual against human helplessness in the face of death (LaMothe 672-679).

Freud's observations on the relationship between the individual, society, and religion might also apply to asymmetrical ethics in the New Testament and *The Analects*. For Freud, religion and religious law were tools for promoting the solidarity of civilization:

Is there not a danger here that the hostility of these masses to civilization will throw itself against the weak spot that they have found in their task-mistress? If the sole reason why you must not kill your neighbor is because God has forbidden it and will severely punish you for it in this or the next life—then, when you learn that there is no God and that you need not fear His punishment, you will certainly kill your neighbor without hesitation, and you can only be prevented from doing so by mundane force. Thus either these dangerous masses must be held down most severely and kept most carefully away from any chance of intellectual awakening, or else the relationship between civilization and religion must undergo a fundamental revision. (Freud 1039)

Granted, Freud's attitude towards religion is somewhat pessimistic; he essentially regarded religion as an infantile means of coping with the ego's helplessness. Still, if Hebrew law and Confucian *li* are tools for ensuring social cohesiveness, then it follows that asymmetrical ethics exist as an extension of social order (King 17).

Freud's commentary on the role of religion and civilization might also explain why geographically separated societies reiterate the importance of effort in the quest for moral piety. Emphasizing the significance of individual effort is, in essence, an attempt to elevate the individual above his or her fragile existence, an extension of the wish fulfillment that motivates religious thought. The importance of effort marginalizes the lack of control that human beings have over their own lives (Clack 200-214). As Beverly Clack qualifies in *Freud on the Couch*, "Freud is specific in his diagnosis. Religion is a form of obsessional neurosis through which the individual seeks to control the world, in much the same way as the neurotic who constructs a series of repetitive actions or rituals to keep themselves safe" (214). Hence, emphasis of personal effort in the New Testament and *The Analects* is wish fulfillment in cultural equivalents.



## **Conclusion**

This thesis has demonstrated parallels in three major examples of wisdom literature—the Bible, *The Analects*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. The seven parallels discussed are not exhaustive, but they represent narrative and thematic similarities between geographically and culturally distinct works of wisdom literature. This thesis has discussed the cultural context of each work and detailed similarities in representations of death, the flood narrative, wrestling scenes, associations between sexual differentiation and knowledge, as well as sacred law, asymmetrical ethics, and personal effort. While there is a pointed lack of overlap between *The Analects* and *Gilgamesh*, parallel thematic concerns have been described and analyzed between all other works.

With the exception of a possible flood event, all of the parallels can be attributed to psychological and social forces. Fear of death, desire for life, sexual repression, and a developmental state of helplessness are catalysts for similarity because they are universally relevant. Parallels in wisdom literature represent the human experience of existence that transcends cultural context.

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