



Justice for the Innocent Job!

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Abstract

Job's final theophany is puzzling. In fact, far from being a display of God's omnipotence, it is a confession of divine weakness: God needs Job/the human to fight evil in creation—the latter is here de-moralized, only restrained but ever threatened by inhuman forces, at times monstrous). The persistence of evil torments the innocent (Abel, Job, Jesus, the martyrs of the Shoah ...). Job's theme is highlighted from the outset in 1:8-12 where God's insecurity is manifest, depending as it is on an unpredictable human response (1:9). The central point is that there is no *deus ex machina* as there is no human robot. Job's insistence on this becomes subversive as it routs the principle of distributive justice and promotes one of disinterested righteousness. When Job realizes that his former complaints were a miscarriage of justice toward God, he repents. That is, he realizes that his claimed surplus of justice implied a deficiency of love. At this point, Job proves that he, at least, reveres God without expecting any reward (see 1:9). The satan is defeated and God comes out vindicated by his creature.

Keywords

Job, theophany, omnipower, divine weakness, distributive justice, love, repentance, innocence

Setting the Record

Some time ago, I published in this Journal an article with the title, "Job and Religion at its Best."¹ This was one more landmark in my ongoing reflection on a puzzling literary closure to a burning human and theological issue. Earlier, I had written another article in the journal *Semeia*

¹) *BibInt* 4/2 (1996), pp. 131-53.

on “Job or the Impotence of Religion and Philosophy.”² Since then, the *Journal of Biblical Literature* has published a paper of mine titled “The Deconstruction of Job’s Fundamentalism.”³

Reactions to my reading proposal have been mixed. Among the negative ones, the Swiss scholar Philippe Guillaume has recently published a response under the title, “Dismantling the Deconstruction of Job.”⁴ He correctly reads me as arguing that YHWH in Job’s book is less than omnipotent, and that Job’s innocence needs be contextualized. Accordingly, I see indeed the final theophany as being in part a divine confession of weakness. Realizing that, as Creator of someone other, God has thereby divested himself of his omnipotence, Job repents and is invited by God to engage evil in concert with him.

Is this a theodicy on a par with what the Friends attempted to do all along, as I am told?—But a theodicy is not only a justification of God; it is also a justification of evil *qua* manipulated by God. Nothing can be farther from my argumentation. On the contrary, I consider the “persistence of evil” as intolerable. It not only causes unjustifiable suffering of the innocent, but also of the One whom the innocent (Abel, Job, Jesus, the martyrs of the Shoah) represent, or better, incarnate. The Friends feel that they must justify God in his dealing with Job; they make Job guilty—albeit perhaps unconsciously (Eliphaz in 4:17 says, “Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?”)⁵ This Friends’ theodicy is obscene; it torments Job, it torments God. “La théodicée, c’est l’athéisme.”⁶

Clearly, what especially irked some of my readers is the theological aspect of my approach. I intent therefore to sharpen some of my earlier arguments and to add further ones to my thesis. As in my former discussion, I shall again insist on the central importance of the divine wager in the Prologue of the book (Job 1:8-12). Its very presence there is already a token of God’s uncertainty as to Job’s indefectible fidelity.

² In *The Book of Job and Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics*. *Semeia* 19 (1981), pp. 33-52.

³ *JBL* 126/1 (2007), pp. 83-97.

⁴ *JBL* 127/3 (2008), pp. 491-99.

⁵ See other texts, like 1 Kgs. 8:46; Ps. 130:3-4; 143:2.

⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque des Idées], 1997), p. 65.

Such fundamental insecurity is revealing. It is readily indicative of the fact that God himself might become the main loser in the bargain with the Satan (“the Adversary” in *JPS*). He has bet his all on a human being whose unpredictability is congenital. From the beginning, the person who best knows Job, namely his wife, invites him to curse God and die (2:9), thus giving substance to the Satan’s ante in 1:11; 2:5. In short, the central question raised by the book of Job is, “Is it for naught that Job fears God?” (1:9).

Should we Exonerate God of All Guilt?

Guillaume for one is especially sensitive to a strategy that, he thinks, would exonerate God of all responsibility in the evil inflicted to Job. But a weakness deliberately chosen—so that power is fulfilled in powerlessness—is a far cry from irresponsibility. Rather, what I posit is that Elohim’s omnipotence is a pre-creational fact. Paradoxically, with the creation act God uses his power to limit his omnipotence and omniscience, which would leave no room whatsoever to another being beside him. Once there is creation, there is self-limitation of the Creator, for he chooses to have a partner to fulfill with him the total excellence of *creatio continua*. On the way, hurdles are innumerable and they are often formidable. Brevard Childs correctly spoke of “an active chaos standing in opposition to the will of God.”⁷ The chaos, like the serpent of Genesis 3, is also created, but the Creator gave to it, as to all creatures, the option of resistance and negation. No one and nothing in God’s universe is robotized.

I shall make my argument clearer, perhaps, by specifying that the opposition between pre-creation omnipotence and post-creation divestiture of omnipotence is not to be understood sequentially. The “beginning” of Genesis 1:1 is a creaturely starting point; it has nothing to do with a divine calendar. The divine attribute of omnipotence and its divestiture are concomitant. In other words, God’s divesting act is an ongoing renunciation. Simply stated, God refuses to become a *deus ex*

⁷ Brevard Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* ([Studies in Biblical Theology], Naperville IL: Alec R. Alenson, 1960), p. 43.

machina. Thus, when Job says to God, “you know that you can all” (42:2)—a text invoked by Guillaume as “at loggerheads with LaCocque’s claim that creation has limited YHWH’s might”—Job is stating a truth about God, who, indeed, knows that he could do all (but precisely refrains from it).

In 42:2, the second person singular “you know,” when a first person is so much expected that the *ketib* is accompanied by a *qere* to this effect, is significant. Job cannot say “I know [by experience],” for his experience is precisely that God is *not* using his omnipotence to heal him as by magic. But *God* knows about himself that he could do all things. Indeed, “nothing [he] intends is impossible to [him].” But, “who is this one,” says Job about himself, “who conceals (מעלים) the [divine] design (הצה) [or Job’s rebellion (= הצה II)] for lack of knowledge? Really, I have been speaking without understanding of things beyond me, which I don’t know about” (42:3-4).

Thus, God’s omnipotence as an attribute is not in question; what is in question is its practice. The truth enunciated by Job in 42:2 is a truth that has been set dialectically aside, or in parentheses, by God. Consequently, we could say that Job is tempting God. He is tempting him to divest of his divesting and to return to his omnipotence. Doing this, Job does not realize that such a move would entail Job’s and the world’s annihilation. Job, in 42:2, is still under the influence of the principle of retributive justice that has prevailed in the dialogical part of the book, a principle that, as a matter of fact, implies an all-powerful divine *machina*.⁸

⁸) Perhaps the closest textual parallel is Isaiah 45:7, where the same word כּ is found in a comparable context. This Isaianic sixth century verse is clearly a reaction against the Persian dualism pitting good gods against evil ones. The evil empires of Babylon and Persia do not belong to a realm that is foreign to YHWH’s control. They may divert the trajectory of the divine—human synergism, but they cannot thwart it. For God, who is the Creator of all that exists, even uses evil for his ultimate purpose. The *Sitz im Leben* as well as the immediate context militate against reading Isaiah 45:7 as a general maxim. Already in 42:16 God has claimed to turn darkness into light (that is how he achieves a creative control also over darkness). When the prophet states that God delivered his people to their enemies, it is steadily *in judgment* (see 42:24-25, “we have sinned against Him”). This emphasis, everywhere present in the prophets of exile, shows the strong reluctance to consider God as a capriciously cruel tormentor for no reason. In contrast with the Persian gods, who are incapable of doing either good or

In contrast, the biblical God wants to deal with a free-thinking partner. He himself is not allergic to anthropomorphic self-portraits; he confesses afterthoughts (see Gen. 2:18); he goes through relenting (see Gen. 6:6; Judg. 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11; 2 Sam. 24:16; Joel 2:14);⁹ he appears in human form (see Gen. 16:7-13; 18; Exod. 24:9-11; Judg. 6:11ff);¹⁰ his name needs protection (see Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; Lev. 19:12; esp. Exod. 3:13-14); he “sees ... hears ... knows” the suffering of the people, and he “comes down” to deliver (Exod. 3:7-8); see Judges 10:16 that *JB* translates, “[God] could bear their sufferings no longer” (literally, “his soul was shortened”); he deliberates with his prophets (Am. 7:1-9; 8:3) as he did with Abraham (Gen. 18:17ff.) and Moses (Exod. 32-34); he laments (see Am. 5:1; Isa. 15:5; 16:11; Jere. 48:30-36 ...).¹¹

In my own work on Genesis 2-3, I have insisted on that particular aspect of the Creator’s vulnerability, extending even to defeat.¹² The New Testament, to recall, speaks of divine incarnation, of *kenosis*, of the weakness of God.¹³ The Jewish tradition is particularly insistent on

evil (41:23), YHWH is lord over all universal and individual affairs (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; Qoh. 7:14; Lam. 3:38-39; Job 2:10; 5:18: the context is throughout historical). God has created the primeval chaos and the evil of the exile *for a purpose* (see Isa. 54:16). In a time of crisis, Isaiah says that it would be wrong to believe that the events have slipped to the control of the powers that be. These also are God’s creatures, like the serpent of Genesis 3.

⁹ Isn’t there a staggering development when, in Genesis 8:21, the text says that God came to regret his former action and swore that he would never again have recourse to an overwhelming violence like the flood?

¹⁰ On this, see esp. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967 [1961]), pp. 21-29.

¹¹ On this, see Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 142. On the theme of God’s pathos, see Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), esp. pp. 1-78; Terrence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* ([OBT], Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); David W. Odell-Scott, “Deconstruction” in A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, MS: Chalice Press, 2000), p. 60.

¹² *The Trial of Innocence; Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* ([Cascade Books] Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock 2006), see esp. pp. 31-33; 84-90; 97 and 107; 159-160, and passim.

¹³ See 1 Cor. 1:25; and esp. 2 Cor. 12:9. On the dialectic of power and weakness, see Heb. 11:34. The oxymoron is not more impossible than to speak of a silence that is worth many discourses, or of “the frailty of our powers.”

this aspect of the living God. In addition to the Lurianic doctrine on God's self-shrinkage that I expound in *The Trial of Innocence*, I shall only recall here the wonderful rabbinic reading of Isaiah 43:12: "When you are my witnesses, I am God, when you are not, I am, as it were, no god."¹⁴

Guillaume, however, thinks that I am trying to exonerate God of all guilt vis-à-vis Job, both by making Him a co-sufferer, and by using the Friends' argument that Job is not innocent. About the former critique, I refer to the preceding discussion and also, here below, to the development under *Conclusion*. As to the latter issue raised by the Swiss scholar, it results from a misunderstanding. Job is *juridically* innocent (see 1:1, 8), and the Friends in their critique have consistently put themselves on the juridical plane. Job has done nothing that makes him guilty and justifies his suffering. His Friends-inquisitors are not only wrongly accusing him, but they have become his tormentors. They need to be forgiven by Job, who will intercede for them if he so consents. So, I am not the least suggesting that Job's plight is the outcome of retributive justice.

The Joban Theophany De-moralizes the Universe

Retributive justice was widely professed in the ancient Near East; Job and all the characters in the book belong to this general area and share in this prevailing concept (although they are not Israelites, but representatives of the "best in [universal] religion"). In the theophany at the end of the book, however, we find a picture of God that is not necessarily consistent with the one in some other texts of Scripture. Here, the theophany de-moralizes the natural order: there is no way to deduce from the latter a principle of distributive justice in the social and moral world (in spite of a stance represented, for instance, by Wisdom, of which the Friends are the stern supporters).¹⁵ There is nowhere to be found any moral "cause to effect" in the universe. The raging sea is contained within limits—but it continues to threaten humans and

¹⁴ *Sifre Deut* 346 (Finkelstein edition).

¹⁵ So, Matitiah Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job" *HUCA* 37 (1966), pp. 73-106.

beasts; it rains on deserts—and there is a staggering waste of precious water; most of the wild animals are sustained by God—but to no avail for Job and the humans

The book of Job is subversive: it eventually demonstrates that there is no such thing as a distributive justice, thus “shattering a central biblical doctrine.”¹⁶ All through the dialogic part, Job had felt that there was something wrong with this principle, but could not unglue himself from it. So he tried “to put [God] in the wrong so as to be vindicated” (40:8), a move that amounts to self-deification (40:10-14). Once, however, the notion of retributive justice is dismissed, the problem raised by the book emerges unimpeded. It is one of *disinterested righteousness*, as the Prologue specifically formulated it (1:9-11, הַחֲנּוּם).¹⁷

The secular ethicist Kai Nielsen states, “I shall argue that the fact that God wills something—if indeed that is a fact—cannot be a criterion for moral goodness or obligation.”¹⁸ Unbeknown to him, Nielsen plays here the same role as the Adversary’s in the book of Job. Admittedly they both raise a fundamental issue. It behooves Job to demonstrate that his dedication to God is not just obedience to an order (although that is what he had heard so far about God the Judge, see 42:5) but an attachment that transcends the fear of retribution and the desire for reward. To his credit, the same Kai Nielsen also states, “Sometimes a moral agent may reach a point at which he can give no further justification for his claims but must simply, by his own deliberate decision, resolve to take a certain position In the end, we must simply decide.”¹⁹ Isn’t it exactly the extremity to which the final theophany corners Job? Job must become truly ethical.

More subtly and profoundly than satisfying legal demands, the righteous Job needs to be *theologically* aware that he has been at fault not to *see* (42:5)²⁰, that is, not to see that God is his co-sufferer, not his

¹⁶ Tsevat, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁷ Note that the very question of the Satan in 1:9 (-11) constitutes a blow to the alleged (post-creation) omniscience of God. Were it not for a divine voluntary caesura in his omniscience, there would have been no story of Job.

¹⁸ Kai Nielsen, *Ethics without God* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973), p. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰ The text is clearly referring to the earlier declaration of Job that he will some day *see* God (repeated three times, plus the mention of “eyes”) in verses 26-27 of Job 19. In

omnipotent torturer.²¹ The meaningfulness of Job's plight is in his discovery that the synergism with God is no pious platitude; it demands a total existential involvement. *Then*, the Satan is defeated, for, instead of Job crawling on the ground and confessing a sin he never committed (31:33); or Job apostatizing his faith in the justice of God and cursing him (see 1:11; 2:5, 9); or, again, Job philosophically defending—with Eliphaz the Temanite and colleagues—the validity of an ideology that he experienced as invalid, the suffering Job repents to have been rash in his revolt and insensitive to the divine pathos.²² This is what made God *bet* on him (as on all of us) in the first place, that is, on the human capability of disinterested love (see again 1:9-11): quite a revelation of God's staggering vulnerability as well of his marvelous faith in the human! As a counterproof, suffice it to wonder what would have happened, not just to Job but indeed *to God*, if God's wager had proved unfounded.²³

Not to realize this divine walking on the edge of the abyss reduces God's wager to an obscene playing cat-and-mouse with Job, that is, with us all. God forbid! An alleged omnipotence of God would sterilize a heart wrenching drama, for then, even before the drama starts, *les jeux sont faits*. In which case, the readers of the book are the pervert onlookers of a self-contained tragedy that, to their esthetic relief, ends as a comedy. This, I contend, is *not* the book of Job. The end of Job's book (the Epilogue) presents us with a divine sigh of relief. Before vindicating his servant Job, God has himself been vindicated by Job.²⁴

Job 42:5, the expression יִשְׂרָאֵל designates the tradition of Israel, as M. Tsevat says (op. cit., p. 91), see 2 Sam. 7:22; Ps. 44:2; 78:3-4; Deut. 4:32; 32:76 Job goes beyond tradition, for he has met God face to face (cf. Moses in Deut. 34:10).

²¹ See F. W. S. von Schelling, "All of history is virtually an enigma without a concept of an agonizing God" (*Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*. Reutigen: J. N. Ensslin [1834]), p. 403.

²² On Job's "repentance," see below.

²³ After all, Job is like Noah: the only one to be "blameless and upright" on earth (1:8). If he does not vindicate God, who will?

²⁴ On the Epilogue of Job, see below under *Job's Restoration in the Epilogue*.

Job 42:8, Is God Really a Fool?

Guillaume considers my so-called “exoneration” of God as biased. There is, say he and another of my critics, a dark side to God, he is “an alien God.” His theophany, they insist, is a crushing demonstration of power, a sequel to the Prologue showing God as a torturer, even with a sham good conscience, for he has made sure that the victim does not die. God is thus to assume “full responsibility for the evil that befalls Job.... There is no place for divine weakness.” Instead, there is divine culpability and even “divine folly” (42:8 so interpreted).²⁵

This latter text is eloquent. Allegedly according to the text, God is here warning Job’s Friends that he is about to commit a folly with them, unless Job intercedes for them. A supplementary manifestation of the dark side of God, it comes after tormenting Job “for nothing” (2:3). This way of putting God in accusation is all the harsher as the “folly” is found in his own mouth, as if afraid of his own darkness.—But is 42:8 really an expression of divine malignity and capriciousness, or is it rather a sign of humanlike sentiments? A look into the meaning of the term נבלה will decide.

Rather than agreeing with the notion of divine weakness, Guillaume evokes Job 42:8 and claims that the text literally stresses a *divine* folly and its “unfortunate consequences” (namely, that God is omnipotent and, hence, no good). Now, a divine weakness makes a lot of sense, as it implies God’s sharing with the human finitude (an incarnation of sorts); but a divine folly? It is somewhat paradoxical to find the unwillingness to entertain the idea that God may have put a damper on his power (by fear of crushing to death his creation), replaced by a willingness to accuse God of being a fool! Most of the translators and commentators on this verse, however, do not agree with this so-called “literal” understanding. Especially if God says himself that he is so insane as to be forced to beg others to thwart his own ill-intentions.²⁶

²⁵ To recall, Marcion saw the god of the Old Testament to be “the author of evils, to take delight in war, to be infirm in purpose, and even to be contrary to himself” (Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 1.6). He is cruel (Ibid, 11.15), whimsical (*De Idolatria*, 5). In short, he is wicked (Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, VII, 30, 2). See Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* 2, p. 80.

²⁶ A sign of weakness, it looks like!

For נבלה is not uniformly “folly.” The verb in the piel means “to treat someone contumely” (see Deut. 32:15; Jere. 14:21; Mic. 7:6; Nah. 3:6). The context of Job 42:8 shows that such is the sense here. God does not confess his own folly; he threatens the Friends with an insulting treatment on his part if Job does not intercede for them.

Job’s Repentance in 42:6

The text of 42:6 is problematic. *NRSV* translates, “therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Both of the Hebrew verbs used here are understood in diverse ways by translators and commentators. It seems clear that Job is operating a complete reversal of his approach to God’s justice and, hence, of his own stance as regards his predicament. At any rate, the right comprehension of this verse will prove decisive. Job says נחמתי and אמאס. I shall start exploring the latter and deal with אמאס later.

נחמתי:

In the niph'al form, the verb means “to feel compassion,” implying “a change in one’s attitude” (see Exod. 13:17; 1 Sam. 15:29). It may also mean “to be comforted” (see Gen. 30:12; Ps. 77:3; Jere. 31:15; Eze. 31:16). Thus, Job declares that, after what he just heard from the mouth of YHWH, his opinion has changed (see the preceding verse 5: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore” (*NRSV*) he now feels “comforted.” The question is: could he be comforted by a “crushing” demonstration of power, or by the discovery of a “dark side” in the God who speaks to him? Rather, his comfort is in his “feeling of compassion.” But compassion for whom? For himself or the speaking God? A compassion for himself would be nothing novel in the book, but if it is for YHWH the paradox is in the fact that the compassionate one is himself on a bed of dust and ashes. The one who should be pitied pities someone else. Is this not an inter-textual commentary on the *Imago Dei*?

Feeling compassion and changing one’s attitude demands the recanting (אמאס) of a former opinion, namely the figuring of God as an inaccessible judge distributing curses and blessings unfairly and

whimsically.²⁷ We may also, with Norman Habel, understand Job's recanting as conveying the thought that he "withdraws his case against Shaddai, now that YHWH has spoken with him face to face."²⁸

אָמָא:

The verbal root of אָמָא is frequent in the book of Job, where, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, its sense is basically "to reject" and, according to contexts, "to despise, to retract" (see Job 5:17; 7:5; 8:20; 9:21; with the meaning "to despise" see 7:16; 10:3; 19:18; 30:1. In 31:13, 16, Job denies having ever despised/rejected the plight of dependents). What is remarkable is that in most cases, the verb is used *by Job about himself* in a derogatory way. It is therefore understandable that Elihu rebuts him with the affirmation that God does not reject/despise! (36:5).

אָמָא and נַחֲמָתִי in combination point in the general direction of Job's repentance, if not with the full strength of תְּשׁוּבָה (after all Job has spoken נִבּוֹנָה of God), then with the sense of the Greek *μετάνοια*. Edouard Dhorme goes so far as to render the Hebrew expression here as "*s'abîmer dans le repentir*."²⁹ Philippe Guillaume, as we know, disputes this translation of the Joban text. But, whatever may be the right rendering of נַחֲמָה, it is clear that at the very least Job regrets to have said certain things about God earlier.

נִבּוֹנָה (in 42:7-8):

As to the declaration that Job spoke נִבּוֹנָה of God (42:7), I concur with Jean Lévêque stating that Job has been right all along to hope that God

²⁷ See Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. ([Anchor Bible 15] Garden City NY: Doubleday and Co., 1965), p. 290, "What Job now despises, refuses, rejects is his former attitude and utterances."

²⁸ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. ([OTL] Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p. 582. I have myself insisted on the shift in divine names from Shaddai etc. to YHWH in the theophanic part of the book (see my *Semeia* article, op. cit., 1981).—Habel also makes a case for the meaning "to change one's mind about something" (that is, he says, Job's litigation or lament), see p. 583.—The Jewish tradition has understood the verb as expressing Job's need for forgiveness. See *PsiqR* 165a, "Job was forgiven by God when he forgave and prayed for his friends."

²⁹ Edouard Dhorme, "Job" in *TOB* ad loc.

would some time speak out and transcend all human questioning.³⁰ Not only because Job has been righteous all along, but especially now that he has understood God's involvement in his predicament, is he called four times "my servant" in 42:7-8. He spoke נְבוּנָה of God, in contrast with his Friends. YHWH's acknowledgment comes *after* Job's repentance on dust and ashes (42:6).

Job's Intercession for his Mistaken Friends in 42:10

This is a surprising development in the conclusion of Job's story. In several places, we find *prophets* as intercessors; see Gen. 20:7 (Abraham because he is prophet intercedes for Abimelech); Exod. 32:11; 34:8-9; Num. 14:13-19 and 21:7 (Moses); 1 Sam. 7:5, 8; 12:19, 23 (Samuel); Am. 7:2; Jere. 7:26; 37:3; 42:2.³¹ This promotion of Job to the rank of prophet is his "reward" for having spoken of God נְבוּנָה. Like a true prophet in Israel, his words have reflected God's Word. The divine approbation of Job's recent statements could not be more complete. God, at this point, reveals the "Chrysostomic" quality of the hero.

Job's Restoration in the Epilogue (42:10-17)

According to the legend that frames the poem, Job's fortune is restored in the Epilogue. But the very overstatements of the pericope are symptomatic of a narratory wishful thinking. Now, some readers of these verses emphasize the silence of the text about the expected healing of Job. True, his material asset is restored, but what about his health? Frankly, I for one am not too impressed with an absence that may just be due to a synecdoche: the healing may be included in the restoration without its specific mention. But, if we insist on the gap as indicating an exception to Job's return to wealth and family-building, then the point is a powerful stress on the gratuitousness of Job's embrace of

³⁰ Jean Lévêque, *Job et son Dieu, Tome II: Essai d'exégèse et de théologie biblique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1970), p. 531.

³¹ See also A. B. Rhodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors" in A. L. Meril and T. W. Overholt, eds., *Scripture in History and Theology* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977), pp. 107-28.

God's cause. This would buttress my general thesis, but I concede that Job's healing is probably implied in the expression (verse 10) שׁוֹב־שְׁבוּת, that is, a complete reversal of fortune (see Deut. 30:3; Jere. 20:14; Eze. 16:53; 29:14). The parallel with Isaiah 53:10-12 is striking.

Conclusion

Job has realized that he and his Friends have raised a false problem based on the principle of distributive justice with its concept of rewards and punishments. Job then recants. He who from the outset of the drama has been *juridically* innocent (thus giving the lie to his detractors insisting on a hidden culpability) comes to the staggering realization that his claimed surplus of justice implied an unconscious deficiency of love. At this point, Job is "healed" and restored.

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Reader Response Criticism teaches us that the text is never innocent, and neither is its reader. Psychoanalysis would probably reveal that my understanding of Job's drama comes against a broader background. My insistence upon the divine pathos in the book of Job is not without an active remembering of the more recent "Joban" events of the European Holocaust. Whether in the pre-common era or in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, a grave doubt as to divine goodness is gnawing us. Must a "dark side" then be imputed to God? I for one respect the anger arising against what can be construed as an obscene divine game with his servants, but the famous reply of Elie Wiesel, a Joban martyr, to the question, "now, where is God?" goes to the heart of the matter, "He is here hanging on the gallows."³² A malignant God or a suffering God? It seems that *tertium non datur*.

Job's God, I contend, is powerful in his weakness (he has opted for love rather than force); otherwise, God is vicious (God's demonism must come out in spite of himself). But God's cruelty was Job's accusation all along, *before* the final theophany. Job claimed that God-the-

³² Elie Wiesel, *Night* (trans. Stella Rodway. New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 71. We find a corresponding Joban statement in 42:6, as we saw, "I am comforted on dust and ashes."

defendant would be found guilty by God-the-judge! (19:23-29). Concluding the dialogue with the Friends, Job had defied God to leave his transcendence and deal with his predicament. That's exactly what God does in the end, and what he reveals to Job (to us all) is that there is nothing to expect from him in terms of a distribution of rewards and punishments to sanction deserts. Human piety is disinterested or does not exist at all. God is powerful and chooses justice, but his power and his choice are for all practical purposes dependent on the collaboration of his human partners, of Abraham's, of Isaac's, of Jacob's, of Job's. Goodness, justice, righteousness, innocence, exist, but as the result of the divine and human synergism. God is no automatic distributor of goodies. And he is certainly not cruel, as are all the gods of the ancient Near East, of the Greco-roman religions, of the modern world.³³ So, all considered, I'll return to that God, if only because I don't know to whom else I'd go.

³³) Against whose dictatorship, precisely, Israel wrote her biblical testimony of liberation.