"Did Not He Who Made Me in the Belly Make Him, and the Same One Fashion Us in the Womb?" (Job 31:15): Violence, Slavery, and the Book of Job

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Abstract

Drawing on Slavoj Žižek's book *Violence*, I apply the concepts of subjective, systemic, and symbolic violence to an analysis of the imagery and ideology of slavery in the book of Job. Much of the rhetoric of the book of Job paints Job as the innocent victim of subjective violence. As part of this, Job deploys the imagery of slavery to portray both his suffering and his righteousness. Within the world of the story, however, Job is the principal beneficiary of the systemic violence of the institution of slavery. His rhetoric renders invisible the systemic violence of slavery, and displaces his own slaves from consideration as victims of violence. With regard to systemic violence, Job is revealed to be a perpetrator more than he is a victim.

> Did not he who made me in the belly make him, and the same one fashion us in the womb?
> — Job 31:15

> All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.
> — George Orwell[1]

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[1] George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (Penguin Modern Classics; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 114.

Violence

Images of violence shape significant portions of the rhetoric of the book of Job. The opening chapters narrate events of extreme violence, and the poetic dialogues are permeated with language of hostility and cruelty, much of it attributed to God. In order to explore how violence is presented and employed in the book, I adapt a framework for discussing violence from the work of Slavoj Žižek, in which he distinguishes among three kinds of violence: subjective, systemic, and symbolic.[2]

Subjective (or direct) violence is generally what comes to mind on hearing the word "violence"; it denotes the acts of aggression and terror that upset the "normal," peaceful status quo.[3] Such violence may include killing, or causing physical or psychological injury. However, there are two kinds of objective violence which are less overt. Systemic violence refers to the oppressive and destructive workings of economic, social, and political systems.[4] Symbolic violence describes the fundamental violence inherent in language as it enforces specific ways of constructing and interpreting reality, "its imposition of a certain universe of meaning."[5]

Central to Žižek's book is the idea that the eruptions of subjective violence that so alarm contemporary society are a way of making violence into an ever-present threat from the outside, a constant parade of crises about which "something must be done." Focussing purely on

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[2] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (Big Ideas; London: Profile Books, 2008).

[3] Žižek cites several instances of outbursts of violence in his analysis. Some, such as the French riots of Autumn 2005, seem initially inexplicable, having no apparent programme or purpose (*Violence*, pp. 63-66). Other examples highlight how the impact of subjective violence is mediated by cultural and ideological considerations. Thus the deaths of millions in the Congo merited barely a murmur in the media, whereas the looting and disorder after Hurricane Katrina received enormous attention, even though much of the reported violence was unverified rumours of events that did not occur (*Violence*, pp. 2-3, 79-84).

[4] The concept of systemic violence is similar to the notion of structural violence, a term attributed to Johan Galtung ("Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6 [1969], pp. 167-91; "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27 [1990], pp. 292-94).

[5] Žižek, *Violence*, p. 1.

subjective violence becomes a distraction from considering the deeper issues of systemic and symbolic violence woven throughout and within the fabric of human social existence.[6] Symbolic violence, at work almost invisibly in language and culture, feeds the patterns of domination and exploitation played out in the processes of systemic violence. The patterns and processes of symbolic and systemic violence become the "normal" state of things. While it appears on the surface that the subjective violence of human cruelty and destruction invade human communities without reason, on closer investigation subjective violence is intimately linked with these two less obvious, but perhaps more relentless, forms of violence.[7] Without romanticizing the very real and human costs of violence, Žižek attempts a dispassionate assessment of what violence can tell us. He suggests that there can be a liberating aspect to an experience of violence, in that it disrupts the sense that one's culture, social position, and worldview are essential and stable.[8] Instead of rushing into unexamined action, he urges reflection, attempting to discern what the experience may reveal about the systemic and symbolic violence of which it is a symptom.[9]

Some might disagree with Žižek's naming as "violence" the use and misuse of words or the oppressions of global capitalism, and might ques-

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[6] Ibid., pp. 1-7.

[7] Ibid., pp. 1-2, 174-80.

[8] Ibid., p. 124.

[9] Towards the conclusion of his reflections, Žižek discusses the notion of "divine violence," particularly with reference to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay ("Zur Kritik der Gewalt," in R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser [eds.], *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999], pp. 179-204; "Critique of Violence," in Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim [eds.], *On Violence: A Reader* [Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007], pp. 268-85). Žižek turns to the book of Job as the paradigmatic expression of the enigma of divine violence. In his analysis, he proposes that divine violence is not to do with the intervention of an omnipotent God but is rather *"a sign of God's (the Big Other's) own impotence"* (*Violence*, p. 170, italics original). He suggests that the key contribution of the book of Job is Job's assertion of the meaninglessness of his situation against theological justifications. Žižek's treatment of the book of Job is beyond the scope of the present article, which is concerned with slavery and systemic violence. My assessment of the connection Žižek makes between the book of Job and Benjaminian divine violence forms part of another piece of work, yet to be published.

tion whether such mechanisms should be discussed in the same terms as a bomb or a bullet. It is a powerful rhetorical move to name both the power of global capital and the mayhem of disempowered rioters equally as violence. However, this move appears to be the most effective way to uncover the connections among potent symbol, oppressive system, and brutal act. The alternative is to continue to maintain the illusion that symbols and systems do not have anything to do with the concrete actions which they promote and proscribe. In bringing Žižek's definitions of subjective, systemic, and symbolic violence into dialogue with a literary text, I am not attempting a definition of violence that would satisfy a court of law; rather, it is a heuristic device, aimed at developing a reading of the text that may make better sense of the violence in it.[10]

Discussing violence, even in literary works, demands a sensitivity to real human experience and feeling; violence is never a purely abstract problem. In fact Žižek chooses to look at the problem of violence with several "sideways glances" quite deliberately, precisely because of its mystifying power. Looking directly at violence, as it is presented, immediately generates (understandable) sympathy for victims, but this instantaneous response can also pre-empt critical discussion. In a similar manner, the presentation of Job as a sufferer can generate sympathy for Job at the expense of deeper critique. Looking at the different levels of subjective and objective (systemic and symbolic) violence in the book of Job does require a certain distance from the voice of the victim as it is presented, which may be uncomfortable. "A *dispassionate* conceptual development of the typology of violence must by definition ignore its traumatic impact. Yet there is a sense in which a cold analysis of violence somehow reproduces and participates in its horror."[11] This critical distance is not intended to discount the experience of subjective violence that is articulated but to discern and include the other invisible and unheard victims of violence in the text. In this article I focus on one facet of systemic violence in the text of Job—slavery.

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[10] As Mieke Bal says of her own definitions, "They are not meant to hold the truth of their object; rather to make it accessible" (*Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 3rd edn, 2009], p. 3).

[11] Žižek, *Violence*, p. 3; emphasis original.

One of the central difficulties in discussing what Žižek terms objective (systemic and symbolic) violence is a deep-seated resistance to the notion that a "good" person, without doing anything "bad," can perpetrate appalling violence.[12] When responding to subjective violence, people are frequently fascinated by the evil individual or group, focussing on the violent agent that carries out the appalling act. However, objective violence cannot be attributed to an evil individual or plan so easily. Žižek gives the example of Nikolai Lossky, one of the comfortably bourgeois intellectuals expelled from Russia in 1922, who simply could not comprehend how anyone could possibly object to his gentle way of life—a way of life propped up by systemic oppression and exploitation.[13] Objective violence is not the result of a wicked individual or class making a conscious choice to force another individual or class into poverty and suffering (such deliberate abuse is the domain of subjective violence). Rather, objective violence is found in the consequences of the economic and political systems that enable the acquisition of wealth and power at the expense of the wellbeing of others.[14]

Although Žižek's analysis is particularly interested in the structures of modern globalized capitalism rather than the ancient world, his analysis of different layers of violence has much to offer in a discussion of the book of Job. Admittedly, the global reach of capitalism in the industrialized world, with its high degree of technological mastery, mass communication, and rapid social change, is very different from the local, limited technologies and communications of an ancient agrarian society; the sheer distance between these contexts can hardly be underestimated. Yet the sharp edge of economic exploitation and the blindness of privilege are themes that recur across the centuries. Žižek's account of the "sincere and benevolent" Lossky, baffled at the revolutionary overthrow of his peaceful lifestyle, is reminiscent of Job's utter bewilderment at being rejected by his "inferiors" (19:15-18) to a surprising degree. Job's

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[12] Ibid., pp. 8-32.

[13] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[14] Ibid., p. 1. Similarly, "The same philanthropists who give millions for AIDS or education in tolerance have ruined the lives of thousands through financial speculation and thus created the conditions for the rise of the very intolerance that is being fought" (*Violence*, p. 31).

subjective experience is presented to the reader in powerful terms, particularly in the lament which sets the agenda for the dialogue in Job 3, and so readers of the book are invited into identification with Job and his suffering.[15] The horror and empathy aroused in the reader make it easy to overlook the others who are lost in the text, such as slaves, women, and the poor. Attending to systemic violence requires reading against the grain of the text; rather than wholeheartedly accepting Job's uncritical presentation of himself, the reader must be prepared to set aside Job's portrayal of his pain and think critically about Job as a powerful figure in an oppressive system.[16]

The book of Job is overwhelmingly focused on the suffering experienced by Job. He is presented to us as the ultimate victim. In terms of the rhetoric of the book, Job's pain is given the central place. However, in terms of the narrated events, it is Job's children, slaves, and animals that are annihilated. Job certainly experiences loss and a horrible disease, but it is his servants who feel the edge of the sword, and his animals who are burnt in human and supernatural fires. The book presents us with a barrage of imagery portraying the experience of subjective violence to which Job falls prey. Part of the work's enduring appeal is surely in its ability to move readers, to connect many people with the painful dimensions of human experience. However, just as the media bombard modern readers and viewers with the emotive power of stories of subjective violence, and too often thereby distract their audience from attending to deeper issues of justice and peace,[17] so also the overwhelming emo-

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[15] In this first extended speech of Job, Job focalizes his own experience; since Job's lament revolves around his own loss and pain exclusively, the reader is steered to interpret the events of the narrative as a catastrophe for Job alone. Not every victim is permitted to give voice to their experience; only the powerful patriarch is portrayed as having a subjectivity and capacity for reflection that is expressed. Further on character focalization, see Bal, *Narratology*, pp. 149-52.

[16] Walter Brueggemann and David Clines have both argued that while religious and theological ideas in the book of Job are frequently the focus of discussion, the often-overlooked areas of social justice, class, and power are crucial for critical readings of the text (Walter Brueggemann, "Theodicy in a Social Dimension," *JSOT* 33 [1985], pp. 3-25; David J.A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* [JSOTSup, 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], pp. 122-44).

[17] Žižek, *Violence*, pp. 2-7.

tional power of Job's suffering can mask deeper problems of systemic and symbolic violence in the text.

Wealth, class, and social position are central preoccupations of the text. Chapter 29 reveals Job's self-understanding to be bound up with class, status, and power (and not dead children). It is telling that Job's portrayal of himself as the victim draws on battle motifs and is bound up with honour and status, whereas Job's narrated illness and bereavement largely recede into the background throughout the dialogue. This is possibly evidence of the complex composition of the book—but in the text as it stands, it suggests that what is at stake for Job is bound up with the social system he inhabits.[18] The near-complete invisibility of the other victims of violence in the book of Job is not an irrelevant consequence of the artistic focus on a single character; my reading will not treat Job's wife, children, and slaves as merely extras in Job's drama.[19] Rather, I argue that the book reveals a complex relationship among subjective, systemic, and symbolic aspects of violence. Job is not simply a victim of subjective violence; he is also enmeshed in the structures of objective (systemic and symbolic) violence as a beneficiary, and even a perpetrator. Job's slaves are not only the victims of raiders, fire, and

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[18] The complex arguments about and reconstructions of the composition history of the book of Job, especially the tension between the prose narrative and the poetic dialogue, are well known. While it is entirely plausible that the text developed in multiple layers over time, the details of such reconstructions remain speculative. For all its difficulties, the present form of the text is, as Edwin Good argues, the artefact available for study (Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990], pp. 5-9, 177-88). In the present article, I approach the text in its final form. At the same time, I hope to avoid flattening my interpretation into a single perspective. With regard to the depiction of slavery, the tension between prose and poetry is not the main divide I see. Both prose prologue and Job's speeches use the image of the slave for Job's rhetorical advantage, to further the depiction of Job's wealth, Job's loss, and Job's righteousness. It is the divine speeches (and possibly the epilogue) that seem to offer a distinct corrective and critique to the rest of the book.

[19] James Crenshaw notes how both Job's slaves and Job's children are presented like extras in a movie, without individual identities, and with very little sense of the injustice done to them (*A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence* [Overtures to Biblical Theology, 12; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], pp. 57-58).

whirlwind; they are also victims of a society that enslaves them, and an ideological perspective that renders them invisible. Attending to the multiple dimensions of violence in the text will open up some complex and ambivalent relationships among its characters.

Slavery

One of the most explicit points at which systemic violence is evident in the book of Job is in its mention (and apparent acceptance) of the institution of slavery. The God-fearing Job is presented as the owner of very many slaves (1:3). Writing in the twenty-first century, the term "slavery" carries great emotional weight, pointing to a range of practices that are almost universally condemned as a great evil (although still a reality for many human beings).[20] While one might expect debate over whether, for example, poverty can or should be understood as a form of systemic violence, since the widespread abolition of legal chattel slavery in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,[21] today it is hard to imagine a serious claim that slavery is not a profound abuse of a human being.

Yet of course the book of Job is not a document of the twenty-first century. Throughout much of the ancient Near East (just as in very many diverse cultures throughout history and around the world), slavery

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[20] Having a legal claim to ownership of another human being as property—chattel slavery—is now a thing of the past in all jurisdictions. However, slavery, understood as "the total control of one person by another for the purpose of economic exploitation" is still a reality for millions of people around the world (Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* [Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999], pp. 5-6; see also Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2009]; Beate Andrees and Patrick Belser, *Forced Labor: Coercion and Exploitation in the Private Economy* [Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009]).

[21] Chattel slavery was not outlawed worldwide until the late twentieth century, when in 1981 Mauritania became the last country to abolish it, although the practise persists there, as elsewhere (Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* [Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1997], vol. 1, pp. 1-10; Bales, Trodd, and Williamson, *Modern Slavery*, pp. 194-98). For a more detailed history of the ending of legal slavery in the modern world see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

was considered a normal part of social structures. Is it fair to judge the book of Job according to the values of a very different society?[22] In critiquing the ancient institution of slavery as it is depicted in the book of Job, I do not mean simply to judge the social structures of ancient societies against modern standards, or intend to imply that my own culture is in every respect morally superior to the cultures of the ancient world. Contemporary technologically advanced societies have proved themselves every bit as capable of many forms of violence and oppression as any cultures of the past. That said, Hector Avalos rightly cautions against the tendency, all too common in biblical studies, to mitigate the frequent appearance of slavery in biblical texts, which goes all the way from simply assuming it as a social reality (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:12-15) to endorsing physical violence against slaves (e.g. Gen. 17:12-13; Exod. 21:20-21).[23] It is a challenge to remain sensitive to the very different cultural context of the text while at the same time looking clearly and critically at the systemic violence of slavery in which a supposedly תם וישר ("blameless and upright") man plays a leading role.

In my analysis I am investigating how the book of Job itself betrays an uneasy relationship to slavery, using the motif of the slave in both positive and negative ways. In the following discussion I take the posi-

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[22] Scholarly analysis of ancient slavery has frequently been shaped by modern ideological interests, whether, for example, to present an apology for slavery in cultures that supposedly valued freedom and justice (as in some classics scholarship), or to view ancient slavery within an overarching schema of historical development (as in some Marxist analysis). For further discussion of the issues, with particular reference to the study of Greek and Roman slave systems, see M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp. 11-66; Niall McKeown, *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* (Duckworth Classical Essays; London: Duckworth, 2007); also, relating these issues to New Testament studies, Richard A. Horsley, "The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity and their Reluctant Recognition by Modern Scholars," *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), pp. 19-66.

[23] Hector Avalos, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship* (The Bible in the Modern World, 38; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), pp. 23-95. Avalos' book is directed towards refuting the claim that the Bible and biblical ethics were a central impetus to the abolition of slavery in the modern West (*Slavery*, p. 1); I make no such claim for the book of Job. Nevertheless, some of his criticisms of the ways in which scholars have minimized and excused slavery in biblical texts should be kept in mind.

tion that slavery is indeed a form of systemic violence, and that its portrayal in the book of Job reveals some interesting facets of Job's character. Described along with the animal property, the slaves in Job 1:3 are framed as material assets, a position which places the emphasis on the wealth of their owner and conveniently displaces any questions about their social relationship with Job.[24] However, in his insightful analysis, Orlando Patterson has demonstrated that defining slavery in terms of property misses the point that slavery is essentially a violent form of personal relationship: "*slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonoured persons.*"[25] Bales offers a discussion and survey of older forms of legal slavery, and the different forms that the practice has taken in the modern globalized context. While definitions that focus on property rights and economics may get bogged down in the differences among, say, chattel slavery, forced labour, or debt bondage, he maintains that violence is always one of its defining features. "Slavery ... can therefore be defined as a relationship in which one person is controlled by another through violence, the threat of violence, or psychological coercion, has lost free will and free movement, is exploited economically, and is paid nothing beyond subsistence."[26]

Historically, and today, slavery in many contexts is associated with acts of direct violence—beatings, rape, mutilation, killing. Yet while the presence of subjective violence (actual or latent) is a defining characteristic of slavery, as a social practice it is much more than this; it encom-

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[24] It may be noted that slavery is not the only violent method of acquiring wealth. In the ancient world, tribute and plunder were among the means by which the powerful extracted wealth from populations (and indeed slaves themselves often formed part of the spoils of war). Hints of the acquisition of wealth through military victory or political dominance may perhaps be discerned in Job (29:25; 42:11). While the present article focuses on slavery, discussion of wider patterns of economic exploitation and systemic violence will form part of another piece of work, yet to be published.

[25] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 13; emphasis original. Using comparative data from a very broad range of ancient and modern societies, Patterson identifies three constituent elements of slavery: violent coercion, natal alienation (i.e. social death), and complete dishonour (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 1-14).

[26] Bales, Trodd, and Williamson, *Modern Slavery*, p. 31.

passes both systemic and symbolic dimensions. The subjective violence so often experienced by slaves and the systemic and symbolic dimensions of slavery are certainly connected, but they are not the same thing. This is particularly significant when discussing slavery in the book of Job. Since Job is nowhere depicted as abusing or mistreating his slaves, can we say that he is violent towards them? Job might never indulge in *subjective* violence against his slaves, might be the ideal and just slave owner, might ensure that his slaves are entirely free from want or worry—but Job still participates in *systemic* violence against them. He is the chief beneficiary and perpetrator of their enslavement, however comfortable he might make their bondage. It is not the subjective violence they experience that constitutes their oppression; it is their *vulnerability* to it, their position in a society where they are given over to the will of another (cf. Exod. 21:20-21).[27]

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[27] "Nevertheless, when we think of highly privileged slaves—the wealthy farm agent in Babylon, the Greek poet or teacher in Rome, the black silversmith, musician or boat captain in the American South—we must also remember another crucial point. Being slaves, they could at any moment be stripped of their privileges and property. They could be quickly sold, whipped, or sometimes even killed at the whim of an owner. All slave systems shared this radical uncertainty and unpredictability.... . Whatever rights or privileges a slave might have gained could be taken in a flash, leaving an isolated man or woman as naked as a beast at an auction. This vulnerability, this sense of being removed from the increments and coherence of historical time, may be the essence of dehumanization" (David Brion Davis, "Introduction: The Problem of Slavery," in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman [eds.], *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], p. xi). Although her discussion is of violence and politics in the twenty-first-century context, Judith Butler's reflections on violence and vulnerability are pertinent. "Violence is neither a just punishment we suffer nor a just revenge for what we suffer. It delineates a physical vulnerability from which we cannot slip away, which we cannot finally resolve in the name of the subject, but which can provide a way to understand that none of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy. This is a situation we do not choose. It forms the horizon of choice, and it grounds our responsibility. In this sense, we are not responsible for it, but it creates the conditions under which we assume responsibility. We did not create it, and therefore it is what we must heed" (Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2005], p. 101). See also Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," in *Studies in Gender & Sexuality* 4 (2003), pp. 9-37; Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004). Butler

Slavery was, of course, widely known and practised throughout the ancient Near East, including in ancient Israel.[28] Yet it differed in some

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proposes that finding a common human vulnerability is deeply important to ethics. The relationship of slavery, where one person is wholly given into the power of another, where vulnerability is entirely one-sided, is profoundly unethical, regardless of the kindness of an individual slaveholder, even one as righteous as Job.

[28] On slavery in the ancient Near East, see Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine, from the Middle of the Third Millennium to the End of the First Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949); Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Egypte 18; Cairo: L'Organisation Égyptienne générale du livre, 2nd edn, 1978); Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626-331 B.C.)* (trans. Victoria A. Powell; DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, rev edn, 1984); Raymond Westbrook, "Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law (Symposium on Ancient Law, Economics & Society, part 1)," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70 (1995), pp. 1631-76; H.D. Baker, "Degrees of Freedom: Slavery in Mid-first Millennium BC Babylonia," *World Archaeology* 33 (2001), pp. 18-26; Laura Culbertson and Indrani Chatterjee (eds.), *Slaves and Households in the Ancient Near East* (Oriental Institute Seminar Series, 6; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011). On slavery in the Hebrew Bible, see J.P.M. van der Ploeg, "Slavery in the Old Testament," in International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (ed.), *Congress Volume: Uppsala 1971* (Supplements to VT, 22; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 72-87; Niels Peter Lemche, "The 'Hebrew Slave': Comments on the Slave Law, Ex 21:2-11," *VT* 25 (1975), pp. 129-44; Niels Peter Lemche, "Manumission of Slaves - The Fallow year - The Sabbatical Year - The Jobel Year," *VT* 26 (1976), pp. 38-59; Innocenzo Cardellini, *Die biblischen "Sklaven"-Gesetze im Lichte des keilschriftlichen Sklavenrechts: ein Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte* (Königstein/Ts.: Hanstein, 1981); Anthony C.J. Phillips, "The Laws of Slavery: Exodus 21:2-11," *JSOT* 30 (1984), pp. 51-66; Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup, 141; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993); Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Slavery in the Covenant Code," in Bernard M. Levinson (ed.), *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development* (JSOTSup, 181; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 119-35; Matitiahu Tsevat, "The Hebrew Slave According to Deuteronomy 15:12-18: His Lot and the Value of his Work, with Special Attention to the Meaning of מִשְׁנֶה," *JBL* 113 (1994), pp. 587-95; Adrian Schenker, "The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves: The Road from Exodus to Leviticus," *JSOT* (1998), pp. 23-41; Raymond Westbrook, "The Female Slave," in Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (eds.), *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 214-

respects from the types of slavery practised in, say, classical Greece and Rome, or eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. It seems probable that the proportion of slaves in the population was never high in ancient Near Eastern societies, and that it was unusual for a household to own more than a few slaves.[29] The main forms of slavery included corvée service (סמ; e.g. 1 Kgs 9:15-22), debt slavery, and chattel slavery, and people were usually enslaved through capture in war, or through extreme poverty and debt.[30] Mendelsohn maintains that the boundary between freedom and slavery in the ancient Near East was comparatively fluid.[31] However, Dandamaev argues that this is not borne out by the evidence and that the transition from slavery to freedom was usual only in case of debt slavery (where the debtor could work off the obligation), and manumission is otherwise infrequently attested.[32] Without assuming an exact correspondence between life as it was described in ancient texts and social realities, the biblical legislation discussing the proper treatment of Hebrew slaves (usually debt slaves) and foreign slaves (probably chattel slaves), with its injunctions against harsh treatment, makes it clear that slavery in various forms was a familiar and acceptable form of relationship (e.g. Exod. 12:44; 21:1-11, 20-21, 26-27; Lev. 22:11; 25:39-55; Deut. 12:12, 18; 15:12-18; 23:15-16).[33] The legal

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38; Rui de Menezes, "Was There Slavery in Ancient Israel?" *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 63 (1999), pp. 799-811; Calum M. Carmichael, "The Three Laws on the Release of Slaves (Ex 21,2-11; Dtn 15,12-18; Lev 25,39-46)," *ZAW* 112 (2000), pp. 509-525; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); John Van Seters, "Law of the Hebrew Slave: A Continuing Debate," *ZAW* 119 (2007), pp. 169-83; F. Rachel Magdalene, "Slavery between Judah and Babylon: The Exilic Experience," in Laura Culbertson (ed.), *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (Oriental Institute Seminars, 7; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), pp. 113-34.

[29] Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 121-23.

[30] Ibid., pp. 1-33, 93-120; Westbrook, "Slave and Master," pp. 1640-47. Patterson argues that, whether through direct violence (capture in war, kidnapping, punishment) or through desperation (debt, abandonment, self-enslavement), slavery always originated (or was thought of as originating) as a substitute for death (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, pp. 5, 105-131).

[31] Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, p. 122.

[32] Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 648.

[33] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 145-85. See also Lemche, "Hebrew Slave"; Lemche, "Manumission of Slaves"; Tsevat, "The Hebrew

restrictions against harsh treatment of slaves tend to suggest that such abuses were known to happen (or there would be no need for such legislation), and it is important to be wary about making apologetic assumptions that slavery in ancient Israel always conformed to these rules of behaviour.

There is no clear evidence that large-scale chattel slavery was practised in ancient Israel, or that privately owned mass slave labour was an essential factor in production, as it was in classical Greece and Rome,[34] although Mark Sneed argues that the extent of slavery in ancient Israel

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Slave"; Westbrook, "Slave and Master"; Carmichael, "Three Laws"; Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*. On the disparity between biblical materials and historical realities, it should be noted that Magdalene's examination of some recently available (though largely unpublished) documents from exiled Judeans in Babylonia shows that slavery was practised, but provides no evidence of special treatment for Hebrew slaves (Magdalene, "Slavery between Judah and Babylon," pp. 113-34). Her observations suggest that it is tenuous at best to assume that the distinctive characteristics of the biblical slavery laws correspond to actual practises. However, they do reinforce the point that slavery was a familiar part of society throughout the ancient Near Eastern context. With regard to my discussion of the presentation of slavery in the book of Job, I make no assumption that the institution in view in Job conforms to the biblical slavery laws, but rather consider it in the context of the broader common features of ancient slavery.

[34] Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 111-12. There is very little in the way of evidence to help determine the proportion of slaves in the population at different times. There is one set of figures given for the returning exiles, which numbered 42,360 people in the assembly (קהל) returning from exile and 7,337 slaves (Ezra 2:64-65; Neh. 7:67-68). There is a resonance with Job 1:3 in this enumeration of people and property: "Care is taken to make plain that slaves were not included in the assembly; they come more into the category of property, like the animals in the next verse" (H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* [WBC, 16; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985], p. 38). It is not necessary to accept the accuracy of these figures to propose that they indicate that slaves formed a substantial minority in the post-exilic population. Dandamaev suggests that this figure may give some indication about the proportion of slaves in Babylonia at that time (Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 218). As Snell observes, "The irony of a recreated Israel celebrating its freedom with the help of slaves was lost on the exiles" (C. Daniel Snell, "Slavery in the Ancient Near East," in Keith R. Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery; Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], pp. 4-21 [18]).

has been significantly underestimated.[35] However, even if the economy of ancient Israel did not depend on mass slavery to the same extent as the economies of other ancient societies, Heszer points out that it would be a mistake to dismiss it as insignificant.[36] The consistent portrayal of slave-owning across biblical, post-biblical, and Hellenistic literature indicates that slavery was practised for reasons of status as much as economics.[37] In a similar vein, Diakonoff argues that the importance of slavery in the ancient world should not be underestimated because of limited numbers; it is part of a wider pattern of subordination and exploitation, that is, of systemic violence. "The existence of slaves … left an important impact upon legal concepts and the whole ideology of the society. But in its essence, chattel slavery … was just another sub-type of the exploitation of the ancient type, to which a very numerous class of persons was subject."[38] Davis suggests that the ideological impact of the phenomenon of slavery runs deep. "From the earliest times slavery was taken as a model for certain religious, philosophic, and political dualisms, and was thus implicitly connected with some of the greatest problems in the history of human thought."[39] Through most if not all periods of the history of ancient Israel, as throughout the ancient Near East, it is most likely that those in power usually (if not always) owned slaves. As a form of human relationship it may only have had a limited

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[35] He contends that this is likely driven by modern ideological interests: "The extent and significance of slavery in ancient Israel I believe has been greatly underestimated, perhaps because of the moral awkwardness this creates for Christians and Jews of the modern world that consider the Bible sacred literature" (Mark Sneed, "A Middle Class in Ancient Israel?" in Mark Sneed [ed.], *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999], pp. 53-69 [59]).

[36] Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*, p. 285-300.

[37] "The upper classes who held political and economic power always had slaves and employed them for their own purposes, to maintain their status and to increase their wealth" (Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*, p. 300).

[38] I.M. Diakonoff, "The Structure of Near Eastern Society Before the Middle of the Second Millennium B.C.," *Oikumene* 3 (1982), pp. 7-100 (99).

[39] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 63. Dandamaev likewise argues that even though chattel slavery was only one form among the many ways in which labour was economically exploited in Babylonia, as an institution it had a disproportionately great social and ideological influence (Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, pp. 660-61).

impact economically, but slavery surely had a great impact socially and ideologically. The fact that slaves are mentioned in the list of Job's property (1:3), and the repeated references to slavery throughout the book (explored in detail below), reinforce the likelihood that the book comes from a context in which slavery was a norm among the wealthy levels of society. Slave-owning is a crucial detail in rendering a portrait of a man in possession of both material wealth and high social status.

It has been argued that the concept of the slave in the ancient Near East was relative rather than absolute, with everyone being the "slave" of the person above them in the social order—free subjects might have slaves, but also were "slaves" of local rulers or administrators, who in turn were "slaves" of the king, the king perhaps the "slave" of an emperor, and all were "slaves" of the gods.[40] In this usage, the focus appears to have been on the obligation to work for another person, with connotations of dependence and servility, rather than on being a possession.[41] In several biblical texts, the slave metaphor is used as an honorific (e.g. Gen. 26:24; Deut. 34:5; 2 Sam. 7:8; Pss. 18:1; 36:1; Isa. 20:3). In a similar vein, God uses the metaphor of slavery to denote Job as "my slave/servant" (עַבְדִּי, 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8). Of course, this should not be taken to mean that the use of the slave metaphor to describe relationships between members of more powerful social strata carries with it all the ramifications of the institution of slavery. The context of the relationship between deity and patriarch, or between local ruler and king, is rather different from the context of the relationship between patriarch and household servant. Just as in old-fashioned formal English, where calling oneself "your obedient servant" is clearly not the same thing as

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[40] Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, pp. 74-75; I.M. Diakonoff, "Slave-Labour vs. Non-Slave Labour: The Problem of Definition," in Marvin A. Powell (ed.), *Labor in the Ancient Near East* (American Oriental Series, 68; New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1987), pp. 1-3; Westbrook, "Slave and Master," p. 1634. For example, Hammurabi calls the citizens under his rule his slaves (Codex Hammurabi § 129). Similarly in the Behistun inscription, Darius describes several officials, clearly high-ranking citizens who led battles on his behalf, as his slaves (L.W. King and R. Campbell Thompson [eds.], *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistûn in Persia: A New Collation of the Persian, Susian, and Babylonian Texts, with English Translations, etc* [London: British Museum, 1907]).
[41] Van der Ploeg, "Slavery in the Old Testament," p. 85.

actually being someone's household employee, so in Hebrew Job's "ser-vitude" as God's עֶבֶד may not be pointing to the same social reality as Job referring to his own slaves. However, this metaphorical use of the notion of slavery is nonetheless ideologically loaded. As Clines argues, the wealthy social context of the book of Job is evident in the way it portrays wealth and slavery as unproblematic.[42] This is where the sys-temic violence of slavery connects with the symbolic violence of the language of slavery. By appropriating the terminology of the עֶבֶד to mark honourable social status, the person who is actually enslaved is not only robbed of his or her freedom but has the reality of their oppression erased. The ideology that each layer in the social hierarchy is a "slave" to the one above it, with the deity at the top, and that this is the natural order of things functions as an effective mask.[43] It inscribes slavery into "the 'normal' non-violent situation,"[44] concealing the basic dichotomy between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, the masters and slaves. It strikes me as rather Orwellian—everyone's a slave, but some are more slaves than others.

Violence, Slavery, and the Book of Job

Job 1:3

Slavery first appears in the opening of the book, where Job's vast prop-erty is listed (1:3). The collective noun עֲבֻדָּה is not a common one, only appearing here and in the patriarchal narrative of Gen. 26:14. However, its meaning is not obscure, and scholars translate it variously as "slaves," "servants," or "household."[45] There may be a deliberate allusion to the

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[42] Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 128.

[43] Žižek points out that this notion of ideological distortion as a mask does not imply that one can simply remove the mask to uncover "the real state of things"; rather, ideology is written into the essence of social reality (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* [London: Verso, 2nd edn, 2008], p. 25).

[44] Žižek, *Violence*, p. 55.

[45] For example, Robert Gordis uses "household of slaves" (*The Book of Job: Com-mentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* [Moreshet series, 2; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978], p. 4); E. Dhorme translates "servants" (*A Commentary on the Book of Job* [trans. Harold Knight; London: Nelson, 1967],

ancient patriarchs. Where Jacob possessed עבדה רבה ("many slaves," Gen. 26:14), Job owns עבדה רבה מאד ("very many slaves," 1:3), suggesting that Job's greatness may even surpass that of the father of Israel.[46] The slaves are listed along with the animals as chattels as they are in a number of other texts, including the Decalogue (e.g. Gen. 12:16; 30:43; Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). It is noteworthy that several translators and commentators demarcate the human property from the animal in some way, inserting extra words and semicolons, where no such demarcation is evident in the Hebrew—except that, unlike the carefully enumerated animals, the slaves are not counted.[47] The symbolically rich counting of the animals, where the numbers add up to perfect tens (seven plus three, five plus five), underlines the completeness of Job's wealth. By contrast, the use of the unusual collective noun for the slaves, whereby they are not even represented as a plural group of individuals but have become an undifferentiated mass, makes Job's human property recede into the background.

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pp. 3-4); Clines translates "servants," but uses "slaves" in his commentary (*Job 1-20* [WBC, 17; Dallas: Word, 1989], pp. 2-3); and Naphtali Tur-Sinai likewise translates "household" but notes "slaves" (*The Book of Job: A New Commentary* [Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957], pp. 4-6). Georg Fohrer translates the terms as "Gesinde" ("domestics, servants") but also uses the term "slave" while noting that the list of Job's property is so ordered "because the slave is considered not as a legal person [i.e. a subject answerable before the law], but rather as legal property and part of the assets" ("weil der Sklave nicht als Rechtspersönlichkeit, sondern als Rechtsobjekt und Vermögensbestandteil gilt") (*Das Buch Hiob* [KAT, 16; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 2nd edn, 1989], pp. 70, 76). John Gray thinks that in the context of Job's great wealth, slaves rather than servants is probably meant (*The Book of Job* [ed. David J.A. Clines; The Text of the Hebrew Bible, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010], p. 123).

[46] Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 87.

[47] For example, "... and five hundred she-asses; in addition he had many servants" (Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, pp. 3-4); "Und sein Viehbestand erreichte 7000 (Stück) Kleinvieh ... und 500 Eselinnen, und das Gesinde wurde sehr zahlreich" ("And his livestock population reached 7000 [head of] small livestock, ... and 500 female donkeys, and the domestic servants became very numerous," Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*, p. 70); "... and five hundred she-asses; and he had a great multitude of servants" (Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 2); "... and five hundred she-donkeys, together with a large number of slaves" (*REB*).

As mentioned above, in the prose tale of Job, the word עֶבֶד ("slave, servant") is then used by God to describe Job's status in relation to God; God repeatedly refers to Job as "my slave/servant" (2:3 ;1:8 ,עַבְדִּי]). The word "slave" is elsewhere applied to patriarchs, kings, and prophets (e.g. Gen. 26:24; Deut. 34:5; 2 Sam. 7:8; Pss. 18:1; 36:1; Isa. 20:3). God speaks of Job with unalloyed approval, and since Job is evidently surrounded by divine blessings, just as the patriarchs of old, it seems that the term is applied to Job in the honorific sense at this point. Yet, as is often the case in the book of Job, when the term recurs in the dialogue its meaning shifts and develops.[48]

Job's slaves are mentioned in the context of agricultural and household work and except for the four messengers are apparently all slaughtered in chapter 1. The term used for the slaves in the messengers' reports is נַעַר ("boy, servant"), a term frequently used to denote a domestic or agricultural servant (Num. 22:22; Judg. 7:10; 1 Sam. 9:3; 25:8, 14, 19; 2 Kgs 4:12, 22, 38; 5:20; 8:4; Ruth 2:5, 6, 9, 15, 21)[49] rather than עֶבֶד ("slave, servant"). This term acts to include both the slaves and Job's children within the repetitive formula (1:13-19). Rather than looking solely at their serving function, Carolyn Leeb highlights the social location of those termed נַעַר and נַעֲרָה in the Hebrew scriptures, arguing that the most significant factor which they share is that they are placed outside the care and protection of their fathers.[50] She proposes that the term נַעַר reflects risk and vulnerability, a situation shared by both Job's children and his slaves.[51] With regard to the portrayal of subjective violence, the use of this word highlights the precarious situation of Job's

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[48] Habel notes a number of significant terms in the prose narrative that recur as key ideas in the dialogue (*The Book of Job*, p. 83).

[49] Carolyn S. Leeb, *Away from the Father's House: The Social Location of Na'ar and Na'arah in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup, 301; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 42.

[50] Ibid., pp. 91-124.

[51] Ibid., pp. 112-21. I disagree with Leeb's proposition that the simplest and most convincing explanation for the use of the term in 1:19 is that Job's children are not in view and are not harmed at all in the story (*Away from the Father's House*, p. 117). The fact that Job's children are specifically mentioned as being in the house at 1:18, the fact that the messenger "alone" has escaped, and the description of Job's great grief (1:20) all suggest that Job's children have indeed been killed. However, her discussion of the

children, who are as vulnerable as any of the נערים and far from their paternal protection.

However, with regard to systemic violence, the way in which Job's children are subsumed among "the boys" in the final report of disaster (1:18-19) has a double edge. Clines' commentary reveals this edge to the verse clearly.

> Each time it has been the "young men" or "young people" (נערים) who have been slain... . In this scene it is the children of Job who are meant; on looking back over the passage, we realize that it is *for the sake of this announcement* that the term נערים has been used throughout. These are the נערים *that really matter*, though no doubt their attendant servants also have died.[52]

The wealthy and powerful (Job and his children) are positioned as the real victims, and the nameless and numberless slaves are pushed aside, mere foils to the "real" suffering of Job. Job's dead slaves are not overtly dismissed as unworthy of care but are pushed aside when Job's children assume the position of vulnerable victims (the נערים that "really matter"). The slaves simply do not come into consideration. In the choice of a single word this verse exemplifies a recurrent pattern of systemic violence: The victims of subjective violence who belong to more privileged social strata are positioned rhetorically as victims worthy of attention, and others remain outside the view of the text. By assuming the terminology of marginalization and oppression (נערים) in order to highlight their roles as victims, the privileged displace those who are actually permanent members of the more vulnerable strata of society. Attention is directed towards the injustice of the death of Job's children and away from the injustice of the system of slavery.

As the dialogue unfolds, the text does betray an awareness of the hardships and suffering that characterize a state of enslavement. Within the poetic chapters of the book of Job, the institution of slavery is not unequivocally portrayed as a neutral or benign aspect of a harmonious, albeit hierarchical, social structure. There is a strange tension evident

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possibly deliberate ambiguity of the verse and her insight into vulnerability as the defining characteristic of the נער are nonetheless helpful.

[52] Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 33; emphasis added.

between acceptance of slavery as "the way things are" and recognition of its negative impact on the lives of human beings. Yet more often than not, this negative portrayal of the condition of enslavement is used to promote Job's interests as a person of privileged status. Regardless of whether his status has been temporarily diminished, Job remains firmly identified with the privileged (hence slave-owning) strata of his society, and the interests of slaves *qua* slaves are never raised.

Job 3:17-19

In the lament of chapter 3, Job longs for the peace of death (שׁם: "there" standing in for Sheol), where the prisoners (אסירים) are free from the taskmaster (3:18), and where the slave (עבד) is free from his master (3:19). In addition to the common term for a household slave (עבד), a second form of slavery is also in view here. The prisoners of verse 18 are paired with a slave driver (cf. Exod. 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13-14), which indicates that these are prisoners of war, who were commonly used as slaves, often as state slaves for large building projects.[53]

The vision of the ending of conflict across social divisions in these verses is an interesting rhetorical strategy. The ideal of the peaceable utopia in death, where there is no longer any struggle between masters and slaves, comes from the lips of Job, one whose entire identity and existence is defined by his ascendancy over all other humans in both material and moral goods. In the context of the chapter, Job's longing for death suggests that he is identifying himself with the oppressed slave at this point, longing to be free from his suffering. It is also possible to hear in these words the voice of Job as God's slave (1:8; 2:3) longing for liberation from his divine taskmaster.[54] When Job deploys the imagery of slavery and oppression in this way, he repositions himself as a victim and invites identification and empathy from readers. Job is no longer

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[53] Cf. Deut. 20:11; 2 Chron. 28:8-10; Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 1-3, 92-106.

[54] Good remarks that death would be a decisive escape from divine interference: "Indeed, because Israelites thought that the deity never visited the realm of the dead (Ps. 139.8 and Amos 9.2 are startling exceptions), Job's description of death as freedom must include the thought of liberation from the god" (Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 207).

presented as the owner of slaves (cf. 1:3), but even more pointedly, by identifying himself as one of the oppressed, rhetorically he now stands in opposition to the "slave driver" and the "master"—his former social position.

Job 7:1-3

In 7:1-3, Job compares human toil and misery to the exhausting life of a slave (עֶבֶד) or a labourer (שָׂכִיר). Various forms of labour are in view in these verses; although not all refer to chattel slavery, each term refers to a situation of exploitation and appropriation of labour. The word translated "forced labour" (צָבָא; also at 14:14) often refers to military service (Num. 1:3; 31:3-5, 21, 27, 36; Josh. 22:12). However, in the context of these verses it is better understood in a broader sense of having to do unpleasant hard toil (cf. Isa. 40:2).[55] The labourer, while legally free, was economically insecure, much poorer than the landowner upon whom he depended.[56] With regard to the patterns of violence in the text of Job, these verses touch on systemic violence as it manifests both in the institution of slavery and in the entrenched poverty of the landless labourer. The emphasis is on the grinding misery of life for those who must toil for others, and in terms of the experience of oppression there is little differentiation evident between (legally) free and (legally) unfree labour.[57] Whether through chattel slavery, conscription, or hiring out one's work day to day, according to Job, being forced to toil for another is a deeply undesirable state.

Job associates himself with the slave, a figure he uses to represent futility and drudgery. Yet despite his emotional identification with the plight of a slave, there is no hint in the narrative or in Job's own words that he must actually toil for himself or another. As Frank Crüsemann points out, it is rather revealing that Job likens his misery to the *normal*

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[55] Clines, *Job 1-20*, pp. 183-84.

[56] Good suggests that "the labourer was, if anything, less secure than the slave" (*In Turns of Tempest*, p. 64).

[57] Diakonoff makes the point that, broadly speaking, "the only real non-slave labour in the ancient world is the labour of the 'free' peasantry, the 'sons of the town,' on their own land, i.e. community land. All the rest would be some form of slave labour" (Diakonoff, "Slave-Labour vs. Non-Slave Labour," p. 3).

lot of the exploited labourers and slaves: "They lead a life that *he* in no way deserves... . And can one ever make serfdom a sign of human existence, without thereby downplaying concrete oppression?"[58] These verses strongly suggest a perspective that belongs to the privileged classes.

Job 19:15-16

Later in the dialogue, it seems that Job still has some slaves in his household, although they are no longer appropriately deferential. In 19:15-16 Job laments that his slaves now ignore him, and it seems that the tables are turned on him as he pleads with those who used to be obedient to him. Job's bewilderment and dismay at being discounted and despised is accentuated. The fragility of his position at the top of the social hierarchy of systemic violence is exposed. These verses are part of a passage in which Job complains of estrangement and rejection from more distant connections to his most intimate circle (19:13-19). Those who scorn him are first his extended kin and acquaintances (19:13-14), his household slaves (19:15-16), his wife and brothers (19:17), young children (19:18), and trusted friends (19:19). Clines notes the abrupt transition from the savagely violent imagery of the preceding part of the speech (19:7-12) to this passage of utter alienation in which there is no direct violence but emotional and social rejection.[59] This reinforces the notion that Job's deployment of the imagery of subjective violence functions as a rhetorical move to position himself as the victim, obscuring his core concern for regaining his position as the wielder of power at the top of the social hierarchy.

There is perhaps a sexual aspect at play in the "unmanning" of Job in this passage, particularly in verse 15. Slave women (אמה) are elsewhere assumed to be sexually available to their masters, particularly in relation

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[58] "Sie führen ein Leben, das *ihm* keinesfalls zusteht... . Und kann man die Fronarbeit zum Signum menschlicher Existenz überhaupt machen, ohne die konkrete Unterdrückung damit zu verharmlosen?" (Frank Crüsemann, "Hiob und Kohelet," in Rainer Albertz [ed.], *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments:* [Festschrift für Claus Westermann zum 70 Geburtstag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980], pp. 373-93 [388]); emphasis original.

[59] Clines, *Job 1-20*, pp. 445-46.

to reproduction (Gen. 21:10-13; 30:3; Exod. 21:7-11; Judg. 9:18; cf. Codex Hammurabi § 146-47, 170-71).[60] While it is not stated explicitly, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the rejection Job experiences from "his" slave women is a rejection of physical intimacy.[61] Similarly, immediately following the rejection of the slaves (19:15-16), at an even more intimate level Job's wife finds him physically repulsive (19:17). Even if it is conjectural to suggest that Job is rejected sexually by his female slaves or his wife, simply at the level of gender roles, there is surely an extra dimension of humiliation for the patriarch to be unable to command even the women of his household.

Slavery, and slavery as a metaphor for the relentless toil of human existence, very likely also forms part of the backdrop to the poem of Job 28, although it is not stated explicitly. The activity of mining opens the poem (28:1-6, 9-11), and as it progresses the miners become figures for human toil and ingenuity, which can uncover great treasures, but which cannot find true wisdom. Mining was (and is) unusually dangerous and difficult work and was commonly carried out by slaves and prisoners of war in the ancient world.[62] The miners of Job 28 are not identified, and

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[60] See also Alfred Jepsen, "Amah und Schiphchah," *VT* 8 (1958), pp. 293-97; Westbrook, "The Female Slave," pp. 214-38.

[61] Indeed Jepsen argues that Job 19:15 makes the best sense if it is understood that אמהתי refers to concubines, those with whom Job is most intimate ("Amah und Schiphchah," p. 295).

[62] Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB, 15; New York: Doubleday, 3rd edn, 1973), p. 201; David J.A. Clines, *Job 21-37* (WBC, 18A; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2006), pp. 896, 912. There is scant reference to mining and mining technology in the Hebrew scriptures (only Job 28:1-11 speaks of mining directly, a foundry is mentioned in 1 Kgs 7:46, and the other literal and metaphorical references to refining and working metals and gems do not discuss the process of obtaining the raw materials). However, other ancient sources discuss the extremely difficult work of mining, usually carried out by slaves and criminals. For example, Strabo describes a mine worked by hundreds of slaves in desperate conditions, whose number is constantly diminished by accidents and disease from the noxious environment (Strabo, *Geography*, XII 3.40). Lauffer's study of silver mining in Attica details the extreme conditions for thousands of slaves there (Siegfried Lauffer, *Die Bergwerkssklaven von Laureion* [Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 2nd edn, 1979]). Penal slavery in the mines was a feature of Roman criminal law (Joan Burdon, "Slavery as a Punishment in Roman Criminal Law," in Léonie J. Archer [ed.], *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour* [History Workshop Series; London: Routledge, 1988], pp. 68-85). For

28:4 portrays them as shadowy and distant figures, although the verse is admittedly difficult. פרץ נחל מעם־גר הנשכחים מני־רגל דלו מאנוש נעו may be read, "A foreign people opens shafts, forgotten by travellers, far from humans they dangle and sway" (28:4). The phrase מֵעִם־גָּר, literally "from with a sojourner," is especially problematic. While, at a stretch, it can be understood as "far from habitation"[63] or "from near some vagrant exile,"[64] emendation seems warranted. Following Graetz's proposal, accepted by many scholars, if the מ is transferred to the previous word, and changes are made to the vocalization, the line may be read פָּרַץ נְחָלִים עַם גָּר ("a sojourning people opens shafts").[65] This proposal for the first part of the verse involves relatively minor emendation and makes sense in the context of ancient mining practices, and so is adopted here. The proposal that the miners are explicitly termed "a foreign people" lends weight to the notion that foreign slaves or prisoners of war (which in the ancient context amounted to the same thing) are in view in this passage. However, with regard to the portrayal of slave labour in Job, the point that the miners are probably slaves does not stand or fall only on this emendation. The remainder of the verse is translated without emendation. The phrase הנשכחים מני־רגל is literally, and rather awkwardly, "those forgotten from/by foot." Reading עם as "people," "those forgotten" indicates the foreign workers; "from/by foot" may be understood as the feet of travellers, the sense being that the miners are far away from the paths commonly trod by humans. The

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more discussion of the social status of the miner in the ancient world, see R.J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), vol. 7, pp. 223-32. It is not a great leap to suggest that the miners in view in Job would most likely have been enslaved.

[63] Pope, *Job*, 197, p. 200-201. Similarly Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 123.

[64] David Wolfers, *Deep Things Out of Darkness: The Book of Job, Essays and a New English Translation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 350, 496.

[65] Heinrich Graetz, "Lehrinhalt der 'Weisheit' in den biblischen Büchern," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 36 (1887), pp. 289-99, 402-410, 544-49 (410); Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, pp. 401-402; Michael B. Dick, "Job XXVII 4: A New Translation," *VT* 29 (1979), pp. 216-21; Clines, *Job 21-37*, pp. 892, 896-97. There are several other proposed emendations. Gordis renders גר as "crater" based on the Arabic *jawrat* ("deep hole"), thus "cleaves a channel from the crater" (Gordis, *The Book of Job*, pp. 300, 305).

miners "dangle and sway" precariously from ropes as they descend into the earth.

Dick's proposed translation of 28:4 is worth noting, particularly with regard to the depiction of the conditions of slavery in the book of Job.[66] He adopts the widely accepted emendation עַם גָּר ("a foreign people"). He suggests another approach to the awkward second colon הנשכחים מני־רגל ("those forgotten from/by foot"), reading הנשכחים as "stooped, bent over" from a proposed שכח II ("bend, droop"; cf. Ugaritic ṯkḫ ["bend down, droop"])[67] and the cause of the miners' stooping as מִנֵּרְגַל ("from Nergal," a Mesopotamian plague god; cf. 2 Kgs 17:30).[68] In the third line Dick revocalizes מֵאֱנוֹשׁ ("from a human") to read מֵאָנוּשׁ ("from disease"), and as a consequence reads דלו in the usual sense of דלל I ("they are weak") instead of the unusual דלל II ("dangle").[69] Thus he reads the verse: "An excavation is carved out by the foreign work-force, Stooped over by disease/Nergal, Weakened from illness, they stagger about."[70] If Dick's reading were followed, Job 28:4 would show some awareness of the plight of ancient miners. Even so, the overall trajectory of the chapter emphasizes the unimportance of worldly wealth and the futility of the human labour that pursues it, in comparison with the true wisdom of piety; the struggling slaves remain simply a foil for the wise person who seeks divine favour (28:28). While there is insufficient evidence to accept Dick's reading as definitive, it is a plausible alternative that highlights the sharp dissonance between the glittering allure of precious metals and stones, and the profound misery of the human beings who dig them out of the earth.

Despite the difficulties of 28:4, the overall impression of 28:1-11 is that the miners in Job are outsiders, remote from everyday human society, and (whether or not the emendation to read "a foreign people" is accepted) the historical realities of ancient mining make it most likely

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[66] Dick, "Job XXVII 4," pp. 216-21.

[67] Following J.J.M. Roberts, "Niškaḥtî… Millēb, Ps 31:13," VT 25 (1975), pp. 797-801 (800-801).

[68] Dick, "Job XXVII 4," pp. 217-18.

[69] Ibid., 218. דלל II ("dangle") is proposed only here, and conjecturally Prov. 26:7 (HALOT, vol. 1, p. 223).

[70] Dick, "Job XXVII 4," p. 219.

that they are slaves. The goods the miners produce (which, being slaves, they cannot utilize) make a glittering display (28:1-2,6,15-19), and (unless Dick's proposed reading is accepted) the ordeals they endure are largely hidden. The central concern of the passage is to teach the literate and relatively privileged seeker after wisdom where true wisdom is to be found (28:28). It is hard to imagine enslaved miners being afforded the time or resources to engage in such intellectual pursuits. Clines discerns how the importance of wisdom in Job 28, at first glance apparently a noble and unselfish goal, also functions as a mask for a refusal to address injustice.[71] The structures of systemic violence render the interests of the exploited workers invisible.

Job 31:13-15

In Job's long speech of self-justification at the end of the dialogue with his three friends (chs. 29-31), he claims to have responded to the complaints of his male and female slaves (עבד and אמה) with justice, acknowledging that both he and his slave alike are formed as human beings in the womb by God (31:13-15; cf. Prov. 22:2; 29:13; Mal. 2:10). Yet while Job uses the rhetoric of equality before God in order to bolster his portrait of himself as righteous, and claims to have mitigated any direct offence caused to them, there is no hint in his oath that his justice extends to freeing his slaves from their servitude.[72] While he is

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[71] "[Job 28's] concern with the acquisition of wisdom may be viewed as a distraction from a more important concern, the question of justice. Job's complaint is that he is being treated unjustly, and that by God; no amount of good advice about gaining wisdom can address that complaint. In fact, to turn a question of justice, which is a social and political question, into a question of wisdom, which is an intellectual issue and at heart a privatized matter, may itself be an injustice. Some commentators' accounts of the divine speeches have the deity making exactly this move—which is to say, they insist that the essential issue is the question of Job's wisdom (or rather, the lack of it) and ignore the outstanding issue of justice—which is, from Job's point of view, to add insult to the original injury against his person" (Clines, *Job 21-37*, p. 926).

[72] Clines contends that while Job sees himself as a fair master, his "authoritarian manner" (29:7-10, 21-22) would render him less than approachable; the notion that Job would grant a slave freedom is "inconceivable." He also points out how common it is for commentators to read Job's words as enlightened humanitarianism rather than self-interested blindness (*Job 21-37*, pp. 1019-1021, 1038). A prime example is Georg

assuredly not a bad master, Job is nevertheless still a master. The rhetorical question on slavery, "Did not he who made me in the belly make him, and the same one fashion us in the womb?" (31:15) has become an ideological manoeuvre. Job places himself alongside his slave, claiming that since they have been formed alike by God, they are equally deserving of a fair hearing before the law (31:13-14). However, this is not an argument for social equality or the emancipation of his slaves. What Job is holding up for approval is *his own* ethical behaviour and fair-mindedness. There is no hint that Job is interested in giving up his position as the owner of slaves; his claim to be a "good master" is aimed at reinforcing his social position rather than questioning the social system. This is a point at which systemic violence is profoundly connected with symbolic violence.

Among the instances of systemic and symbolic violence in the book of Job, Job's declaration of his justice to his slaves is an especially egregious example. Some commentators accept Job's self-serving rhetoric at face value, and even find in it something akin to a modern concern with human rights. For example, Gordis reads 31:15 as "a ringing affirmation of Job's conviction that all men [*sic*], the lowest and the highest alike, are equal in rights, because they have been created by God in the identical manner."[73] However, although widely held, this exalted view of Job as an enlightened egalitarian does not hold up to close scrutiny. Clines refutes the notion that Job's words imply equal rights; Job only

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Fohrer, "The Righteous Man in Job 31," in James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis (eds.), *Essays in Old Testament Ethics: J. Philip Hyatt, In Memoriam* (New York: Ktav Pub House, 1974), pp. 1-22.

[73] Gordis, *The Book of Job*, p. 348. Similarly, Mendelsohn reads rather a lot into 31:15, seeing Job as an advocate for radical equality: "The first man in the Ancient Near East who raised his voice in a sweeping condemnation of slavery as a cruel and inhuman institution, irrespective of nationality and race, was the philosopher Job. His was a condemnation based on the moral concept of the inherent brotherhood of man" (Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East*, p. 123). Habel's assessment is perhaps more measured, but he too sees a "belief that a common Creator and a common human origin justifies regarding all mortals as equals with common rights before God and the court" (Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 435). Richard Neville cites a number of other similarly exuberant commendations of Job's ethical perfection ("A Reassessment of the Radical Nature of Job's Ethic in Job xxxi 13-15," *VT* 53 [2003], pp. 181-200 [181-82].)

says that common humanity means "some basic human rights" rather than full equality.[74] Neville points out that the idea that Job is proposing a revolutionary ethic of equality does not fit the rest of the oath, which is concerned with Job's adherence to conventional (albeit high) standards of conduct.[75] In Neville's reading, being made alike by God does not necessarily mean that master and slave are alike, but that God cares for them both, and so Job is accountable to God for his treatment of God's creature.[76] While these points are well made, they do not address the significant ideological import of this verse. What *is* said is posited as true—all human beings are created alike by God; what is *not* said, but implied, is that, therefore, human beings merit just treatment before the law and before God. By framing his oath as an affirmation that he and his slave are fundamentally alike in one respect, Job's statement of equality elides the vast differences between master and slave in almost every other respect. For, although they may have been born alike, in the social world they most certainly do not have equal access to power, resources, and freedom. Job still owns his slaves; they are still in a position of radical vulnerability before him.

Job's speech in chapter 31 is extraordinarily potent. As Carol Newsom observes, in constructing an idealized portrait of himself in this way, Job is also constructing a symbolic world in which the deity serves Job's interests.

> The key to the rhetoric is the way in which Job inscribes and reinscribes God in this moral world. At the same time that Job is constructing his own ethos, he is simultaneously constructing the ethos of God. Again and again, Job warrants his own behaviour in relation to the expectations and judgments of God, who is the source and sustainer of this moral world.[77]

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[74] Clines, *Job 21-37*, p. 1021. As he notes, God also creates animals, but that is not generally thought to give them equal rights with humans.

[75] "It makes little sense for him to claim that he is innocent of breaking a standard of ethical conduct that was unknown to his contemporaries, and a standard that none of them would have thought to accuse him of transgressing" (Neville, "A Reassessment," p. 182).

[76] Neville, "A Reassessment," pp. 192-99.

[77] Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 196.

However, the vision of God represented in the speeches from the storm entirely fails to conform to Job's construction of a proper divine ethos. Human figures and human society occupy a peripheral position in the divine speeches. In contrast to Job's carefully ordered human hierarchies, the imagery of ownership and control is applied in the divine speeches to the most unlikely objects, making a mockery of Job's claim to be the sort of fellow who should rightfully be in charge of lesser beings. Job claims to be the right person to command other humans, but can Job command the sea (38:8-11) or the morning (38:12-13)? Can Job bind the stars (38:31-32) or control the weather (38:34-35)?

YHWH does not directly address the issue of slavery, or Job's righteousness in regard to his ungrateful human property. Yet while slavery is not a major component of the speeches of YHWH, it is mentioned. In all three instances, it is as part of a rhetorical question making the point that Job cannot turn free creatures into his "slaves." The passage on the wild ass and the wild ox (39:5-12) revolves around the freedom of these animals from servitude to humans. First it is implied that YHWH set the wild ass free from bondage to human taskmasters (39:5, 7). Next YHWH emphasizes how impossible it would be for puny Job to appropriate the labour of the wild ox (39:9-12). A very similar motif is repeated in the description of Leviathan. The rhetorical questions YHWH hurls at Job in his description of Leviathan specifically refute the notion that Job could make such a creature his slave (40:28 [41:4]). The idea of Job lording it over the powerful monster is nonsensical. In the wild ecology over which YHWH presides, slavery only features as an impossibility.

Is it really by chance that the image of slavery occurs here? While it may be that YHWH's questioning of Job is aimed simply at putting Job back in his place in the same old hierarchy, it seems possible that there is a deeper undermining of the very notion of a stable hierarchy at work in this passage. In contrast to the domestic animals of the prologue, the beasts of the divine speeches are free. Domestication is the core of the socioeconomic system on show in the prose narrative; it is the foundation of Job's enormous wealth (1:3). The depiction of animals in the divine speeches is not simply a form of verbal ornament, painting a word picture of a lush and wild creation. At a systemic level, the refusal to domesticate and enslave is also a refusal to participate in the mechanisms of ownership, trade, and control.

The portrait of God offered in the speeches from the tempest is, from a human perspective, not particularly reassuring. In terms of subjective violence, God appears to be detached from the question of ethical responsibility for human suffering. Force and brutality are built into the fabric of the cosmos. Yet at the same time YHWH's words offer a cosmos that also includes freedom, nurture, and laughter:

> According to the discourse of the whirlwind, it is not a matter of whether God is above the fray of human affairs or involved in it, it is not a matter of whether he [*sic*] embraces human pain and is moved by it, or of whether his [*sic*] dealings with his [*sic*] creatures are just. Such questions, so central to Job's self-understanding and well-being, so influential in the history of theological thought, are not interesting questions at all, according to the character God in the divine speeches. There *is* a universal order, which God upholds ever since he [*sic*] instituted it at creation; but its principles are not balance and equity and retribution and equivalence. Its principles are more strategic than that. It majors on intimacy, on sustenance, on variety.[78]

The radical otherness of the creation portrayed in YHWH's words undermines the basic assumptions on which Job and the friends have based their arguments. God is not responsible for ordering human institutions. At the level of systemic violence, making problems with human-created hierarchy the responsibility of God is fundamentally mistaken:

> God has ordered the world, and this order also seems to comprise chaos. Thus violence seems to be present in nature and destruction to be an indissoluble part of creation. Good and bad, justice and injustice, are both fundamental facts in the world: the sun rises on both sinners and pious, good people and bad people. There is no retribution of the kind that human beings would like. Justice has not been woven as a pattern into the garment of the world, nor is God burdened with its administration. It is an ideal that must be realized by human beings within their society, through them and for them, and it cannot be put to God's account.[79]

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[78] David J.A. Clines, "Quarter Days Gone: Job 24 and the Absence of God," in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 242-58 (256).

[79] Ellen van Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1997), p. 129.

This raises the question of how the radical intrusion of divine freedom into Job's world plays out (or not) in the epilogue. In the opening narrative, Job has been called עַבְדִּי ("my slave") by YHWH (1:8; 2:3); the same title is applied to him again in the conclusion of the book (42:7, 8). There appears to be a fundamental incongruity between the divine contention that Job's piety is indeed disinterested—חִנָּם ("for nothing," 1:9)—and the characterization of Job as God's slave. Even if the term is understood in this context as an honorific that carries with it almost nothing of the realities of ancient chattel slavery, it nonetheless posits a relationship which is not free, and therefore cannot be חִנָּם ("for nothing"). Is Job then less free than the wild ass or the wild hawk, or the ostrich? Perhaps so. His human condition is such that he cannot inhabit a truly free world. His return to the ideological shelter of meaning and order—the safety of the systemic and symbolic violence that comprises the "normal" state of things—means that he will never live in the freedom of the wild creatures.

One of the more interesting details I have noticed in investigating how slavery is presented in the book of Job is a curious omission at the conclusion of the book when Job's property is restored (42:12). Job receives double the number of animals—14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, 1,000 donkeys—carefully listed in exactly the same order as at 1:3, but slaves are not mentioned at all. Edwin Good perceives this absence but notes that he has found no scholarly comment on it.[80] It is difficult to discover what this small but significant break in the pattern might signify for reading systemic violence in the text. On the one hand, it may point towards finding some kind of shift in the book of Job as a whole with regard to systemic violence. Does the absence of slaves suggest that Job gave up the practice, which, for an exceedingly wealthy man, would make him "unique in the ancient—and not only the ancient—world"?[81] If this is the case, the remainder of Job's life is based on a rather different relationship with the workers on whose

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[80] Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, pp. 171, 387, 443 n. 22. I have yet to find any further comment on it either. Clines simply notes that not a word is said about the replacement of Job's lost servants (*Job 38-42* [WBC, 18B; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2011], p. 1237).

[81] Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, p. 387.

labour his vast wealth of animals depends. Although still controlling the lion's share of local economic resources, a Job without slaves would no longer exert absolute control over human beings who have been placed in a position of utter vulnerability. On the other hand, it may be that a multitude of slaves is simply implied, since they would have been necessary to tend all those domesticated creatures. Like Job's wife, whose presence was presumably required to bear another ten children, perhaps the slaves have simply become invisible in the final chapter. If this is the case, the systemic violence evident in the prologue has become even more profoundly entrenched in the epilogue, where the slaves do not even merit a word. The gap in the narrative remains unresolved; interpretation reveals more about the reader than it does about any answers in the text.

Conclusion

The patterns of violence portrayed in the book of Job are almost monotonously repetitive. On the surface, at the level of subjective violence, Job remains firmly entrenched as the ultimate victim of violence throughout the dialogues with his friends. Job, the character who is depicted as the primary victim of subjective violence, occupies a quite different position within the mechanisms of systemic violence. Although, in addition to his physical suffering, Job experiences temporary social exclusion and loss of wealth, his vulnerability is experienced as anomalous when measured against the norms of his life as a whole. Job does not experience the hopeless, ongoing oppression of the largely silenced victims of systemic violence in the text—the slaves for whom vulnerability is a constitutive part of their social identity. Slaves remain marginal figures in relation to Job. Job's identity remains bound up in his position as the superlative figure in the human hierarchy, a self-understanding which is particularly evident in Job 29-31. In his slave-owning (as in his wealth and his position as the preeminent patriarch), Job is consistently on top of the heap, master of his world and its human and non-human resources. While complaining of his victimization, Job benefits from the oppression of others—in terms of systemic violence he is a perpetrator as much as a victim. By assuming the place of the victim he reinscribes

the dualism which places the dominant male over against these disempowered others. Job's horror at being marginalized and disempowered ignores the fact that the fate he so deplores is the very fate he inflicts (even if unwittingly) on others. Throughout the dialogue, Job buys into the system completely, but perhaps the book of Job as a whole does not. The speeches of YHWH offer a different understanding of how the world works. In the non-anthropocentric vision, human systems, and the systemic violence perpetrated within them, are rendered peripheral, partial, and contingent.

From the perspective of subjective violence, Job occupies the position of the victim of an unjustifiable attack, a position which tends to favour interpretations that express sympathy for Job's plight, and that view Job as the most ethically admirable character in the book. However, when the mechanisms of systemic violence are taken into account, Job's position is dramatically altered. Job is the chief beneficiary of a hierarchical system which perpetrates violence on other members of his society. The conflict between these two angles is difficult to reconcile: Job is both victim and perpetrator.